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Feminist Anthologizing:
Women and Words: The Anthology!
Les femmes et les mots: Une anthologie

ANDREA BEVERLEY

MARIAN ENGEL'S "BANANA FLIES," the final text in *Women and Words: The Anthology*, tells the story of a gathering of women, a dinner party that makes something happen. The opening lines of the narrative emphasize the impact of the gathering in different verb tenses: "something's happening," "something did happen," and "something happened" (262). The writer-narrator, with the pseudonym Apple, summarizes the evening's conversations. She is "happy" (262). She imagines the annoying banana peel on her coffee table, mentioned at the beginning of the story, transformed into an object that can fly fearlessly "with elegance and eloquence" by the text's conclusion (264). In community around the table, the women talk of their varied life experiences. The narrator proclaims that "we . . . did it. O'erleapt mothers' neuroses, grandmothers' proprieties, fears, madnnesses, the strictures of the men in our lives, judges, doctors, mountebanks" (263). The banana peel is a metaphor for their feelings of pride, accomplishment, and potential. It fits with the fruit conceit of the story (all of the women have fruit-related pseudonyms) and defies the clichéd associations of bananas with the phallus. The idea that the peel could grow wings that "flip and soar" connects it to an art performance that the narrator recalls (264) and to birds, as in "I am a bird in the shape of a banana peel, going far" (262). As food waste, it suggests domesticity, long associated with women, and sustenance, echoing the inner nourishment that the narrator receives from the evening. The incongruity between the metaphor's light-hearted vehicle and its far-reaching tenor matches a potential perceived incongruity between the narrator's repeated assertions that something happened at the gathering and "the facts: we talked and talked" (262). The story is playful and very short, but remarkably it portrays women's empowerment and the influence of the

second-wave feminist movement on a group of women. It also depicts the moods and impacts of different women in community together.

In this essay, I focus on the editorial processes behind the *Women and Words* anthology and incorporate short readings of some of its texts, such as Engel's story, as they connect with my observations on collaborative anthological editing. In the case of "Banana Flies," the dinner party is anthological. An anthology is a genre that assembles a whole from various parts; the dinner party involves a setting that assembles different entities in a particular configuration in relation to one another.¹ In its 1980s feminist context, Engel's story conjures up Judy Chicago's epic art installation *The Dinner Party*,² remembered as "the most monumental work of the 1970s feminist art movement" (Gerhard 1). The installation involves large tables set for a dinner party, with place settings commemorating thirty-nine women of historical significance and porcelain tiles underneath evoking the names of 999 other influential women (Chicago 52, 98). Although they differ in scope and type of creative expression, *The Dinner Party* and *Women and Words* are both works made by groups of women that also represent groups of women. In other words, their processes of artmaking are collective, and their creations are collective, composed of multiple voices. The collaboratively edited anthology eschews the idea of sole authorship, just as *The Dinner Party* brought Chicago away from "the modernist narrative of the solo artist" and toward intensely collaborative artistic processes (Gerhard 84; see also Gerhard 2, 78, 106; Chicago 19, 248). When the editors of the anthology close the volume with Engel's "Banana Flies," they implicitly evoke their own gendered collective work. By analyzing archival documents of its editing, I elucidate the work that produced the book. In the first section, I contextualize this relatively little-known anthology, describing the context out of which it arose and its placement vis-à-vis other women's anthologies in Canada. Next, I discuss the editorial intentions for the book, including the choice to declare it an "anthology," which the editors envisioned as pan-Canadian, bilingual, and diverse. Then, I examine the behind-the-scenes labour of this editorial collective, pointing out how the editors understood their work in relation to publishers, rejected writers, and the final shape of the anthology. Overall, I explore issues of methodology: editorial methodologies, anthological methodologies, and reading methodologies for anthologies. My own research methodology here includes the use of archival documents, which I do

not assume to be unmediated or comprehensive but which nonetheless provide invaluable information on often invisible editing processes. I draw on archival documents held in the Women and Words fonds at Simon Fraser University's Special Collections and Rare Books Library. The fonds contain material from the West Coast Women and Words Society from the early 1980s to the mid-1990s. Documents pertaining to the anthology make up only a small percentage of the deposit. They include minutes from Anthology Committee meetings, minutes from West Coast Women and Words Society meetings in which a representative from the Anthology Committee reported on its work, correspondence related to the anthology, and print advertisements calling for contributions or publicizing the anthology for sale.

As the title of the anthology suggests, the book was a project of the West Coast Women and Words Society, the organization that also planned the groundbreaking Women and Words conference in 1983. The Vancouver conference brought together approximately nine hundred women involved in literary activity in Canada: writers, journalists, publishers, booksellers, and scholars (Dybkowski et al. 9). The conference proceedings, published in 1985, demonstrate the breadth of topics addressed by panelists, among whom were dozens of specially invited writers such as Nicole Brossard, Maria Campbell, Marian Engel, Dorothy Livesay, and Carol Shields. The anthology is not to be confused with the proceedings, entitled *In the Feminine: Women and Words/Les femmes et les mots: Conference Proceedings 1983*, though some editors, such as Barbara Pulling and Victoria Freeman, participated in both publications. The anthology was actually in the works in tandem with the conference organizing. Minutes from a May 1982 meeting of the West Coast Women and Words Society record the formation of a committee to work on the anthology.³ By the time of the conference over a year later, the submission deadline for the anthology had passed, and, according to the preface, the committee had received literary texts from three hundred writers (West Coast Editorial Collective n. pag.).⁴ Although the anthology is sometimes erroneously described as having emerged from the conference (Moulton-Barrett; von Flotow 11-12), it was actually part of the West Coast Women and Words Society's output strategy from the beginning.⁵ Rather than being the output of an event, the anthology was one of many actions meant to showcase and galvanize women's writing in Canada.

During the opening night event of the Women and Words conference in 1983, organizers updated attendees on the anthology and described it as “the first really comprehensive bilingual anthology of women writers in Canada.”⁶ The adjectives “comprehensive bilingual” are important because *Women and Words* was not the first anthology of contemporary women’s literature in Canada. In 1971, Dorothy Livesay edited *Forty Women Poets of Canada*, a project that she saw as “a necessary step, a challenge,” despite being “opposed to the whole idea of anthologies” (“Women” 78).⁷ In addition to another collection by Livesay, *Woman’s Eye: Twelve B.C. Poets*, the early 1970s saw the publication of *Mountain Moving Day: Poems by Women*, which includes five Canadian writers out of seventeen (Gill), and *Sisyphus Was a Woman: A Collection of Prose and Poetry by Women*, a chapbook-style publication out of the University of British Columbia (Mitchell et al.). In short, there were some women-only literary anthologies published more than a decade before *Women and Words*, but these early anthologies were shorter and more tightly defined by genre or geography. In the time between Livesay’s *Forty Women Poets of Canada* in 1971 and *Women and Words* in 1984, other anthologies of Canadian women writers focused on poetry (e.g., Barbour and Stanley), short stories (e.g., Berge et al.; Sullivan), or a particular region (e.g., Klassen; Wachtel). Of particular note for its focus on region, gender, and race is Liz Cromwell’s 1975 *One out of Many: A Collection of Writings by Twenty-One Black Women in Ontario* (Kamboureli 155-56).

Although *Women and Words* cannot claim to be the first women’s anthology in Canada, it was unprecedented in its breadth of content, which is bilingual, multi-generic, previously unpublished, and national in scope. In terms of genre, fifty-three of the eighty texts in *Women and Words* are poems, whereas the rest are mainly prose fiction, with a couple of pieces that read as memoir or journal entries, essays, or dramas. Seventeen texts are in French, two are bilingual, and the rest are in English. The fact that the anthology contains previously unpublished material sets it apart from many anthologies; indeed, it might make us wonder to what extent this collection is usefully understood as an “anthology” at all. That label conjures up volumes that collect and reproduce previously published material, perhaps from centuries of literature, as in the well-known anthological series produced by Oxford University Press, W.W. Norton, and Broadview Press on specific

themes, genres, or national literatures. As defined by Jeffrey Di Leo in *On Anthologies: Politics and Pedagogy*, “anthology” is a category large enough to accommodate any “collection of connected or interrelated writings that center around a topic” (3). Yet, *Women and Words* could more specifically be referred to as a “collection,” a term for “a gathering of new or mostly new writing” (Germano 118; see also Di Leo 3-4; Gerson 57-58).

What does it mean, then, for *Women and Words* to be subtitled *The Anthology* and *Une anthologie*? Even before we consider those words, we notice the grammatical articles in which there is slippage in the translation: rather than *l’anthologie*, which is closer to “the anthology,” we have *une anthologie*, which is more like “an anthology.” Generally speaking, the definite article *the* suggests the definitiveness of a noun against the less obtrusive *an*: consider the difference between “the book” and “a book.” The suggestiveness of these grammatical articles, as well as the tension between them, mirrors the question of the identity of *Women and Words* as an anthology versus a collection. The word *anthology* implies a certain weight, like the definitiveness of *the*, perhaps intimating the editors’ desire to position the book as de facto momentous. In other words, claiming the well-established connotations of *anthology* suggests that the book’s contents are, or should be, canonical, comprising a body of writing already developed and valid. This drive to mobilize the authoritative resonances of *anthology* makes sense in the context of a body of literature that has been marginalized. As George Elliott Clarke has argued in relation to the establishment of African Canadian literary studies, “the purpose of an anthology (or bibliography) is to marshal evidence — proof — of the existence of a canon that *has always been*, but, at the same time, *has always been overlooked*” (55). *Women and Words* includes many writers already well established by the early 1980s, evidence that contemporary Canadian women’s writing was under way and important. More than half of the writers had published one or more sole-authored books at this time, including Louky Bersianik, Nicole Brossard, Lorna Crozier, Daphne Marlatt, Helen Potrebenko, Jane Rule, and Phyllis Webb. The inclusion of these established writers works with the appellation *anthology* to claim a certain weight, as in Clarke’s point about marshalling proof. Circling back to the grammatical articles, the *une* can corroborate rather than contradict this proof by suggesting the past, present, and future texts that are also *une anthologie* of this

abundant field of writing. However, *une* also counterbalances *the*, just as *collection* does work different from that of *anthology*, and that which is established is set against that which is new. As much as the volume is sublabelled *The Anthology* and leans on recognizable names, it also initiates previously unpublished writers. Biographical notes inform us that contributors such as Melodie Corrigan, Nicole Gagné, Melanie Higgs, Candis Graham, and Nelia Tierney count their contributions to *Women and Words* as their first publications. Furthermore, the volume is made up of only previously unpublished texts, whether by novices or professionals. Thus, the editorial desire to marshal proof is accompanied by the desire to offer newness, attracting readers to texts not yet available elsewhere.

From the inception of the project, the editors intended to create a volume of previously unpublished French and English texts in various genres by women from different geographic locations and racialized subject positions. If their call for unpublished work suggests a desire to showcase newness and to provide a venue for new writers, the commitment to author diversity suggests a desire to represent adequately their constituency, Canadian women writers. Questions of coverage and representation signal quintessential anthological concerns. The stakes are high when deciding which authors and texts to include because, as Robert Lecker observes, anthologies are perceived as synecdoches: they are parts representing a whole (6). The *Women and Words* editors conceptualize their community as being bound within the Canadian nation-state and aligned with characteristics commonly associated with contemporary Canadian national identity, namely bilingualism, federated regionalism, and multiculturalism. Their pan-Canadian vision is evident in the minutes from the first Anthology Committee meeting: "GEOGRAPHIC REPRESENTATION: As the conference is countrywide, so should the anthology [be]."⁸ This premise echoes the larger national vision of the West Coast Women and Words Society, which aimed to create a pan-Canadian organization with Women and Words chapters across the country and subsequent national conferences in different venues (Beverly 282-83).

Women and Words came a dozen years after Canada's Official Languages Act (1969) and at a time when there was significant exchange across linguistic lines between feminist writers in Quebec and those elsewhere in Canada. Bilingualism was an important feature of the 1983

Women and Words conference, at which some simultaneous translation services were available though not entirely satisfactory.⁹ In planning the anthology, the editors began with the initial idea that “there should be French speaking women on the Anthology committee.”¹⁰ By September 1982, however, a parallel “Francophone Committee” was born: minutes record that “a large committee has been formed to work as the counterpart to the anthology committee. They are keen and have lots of energy.”¹¹ In “Feminism in Translation: The Canadian Factor,” Luise von Flotow reads Penn Kemp’s bilingual contribution to the anthology, “Simultaneous Translation,” as it “reflects and activates, mirrors and encourages a bilingual, translingual component in women’s writing in Canada” (12). Von Flotow notes that there were at least three important anthologies of literary criticism that came out around the same time as *Women and Words* and that dealt with both English Canadian and Quebec women’s writing (15): she names *Féminité, subversion, écriture: Textes* (Lamy et al.), *A Mazing Space: Writing Canadian Women Writing* (Kamboureli and Neuman), and *Gynocritics: Feminist Approaches to Canadian and Quebec Women’s Writing/Gynocritiques: Démarches féministes à l’écriture des canadiennes et québécoises* (Godard). Von Flotow points out that women who helped to produce the *Women and Words* anthology were key contributors to these edited collections as authors, translators, or editors. Kathy Mezei, one of the editors of *Women and Words*, has also produced scholarly work on the historical and institutional factors that led to English Canadian interest in literature in Quebec in the 1970s and 1980s (180-85). Of particular relevance to *Women and Words*, she mentions the “emerging dialogue [in the 1980s] between experimental feminist writers in Quebec with their counterparts in English Canada” (175). This is a reference to interactions and collaborations between Québécoise women writers and women writers outside Quebec in relation to feminist language theory, as in the “*écriture au féminin*” and “writing in the feminine” movements (Carrière 18-28). The bilingual feminist literary journal *Tessera* is one of the important sites of this dialogue. In fact, it was at the Women and Words conference that *Tessera*’s original editorial collective solidified their plans for *Tessera* (Marlatt 9). This group (Barbara Godard, Daphne Marlatt, Kathy Mezei, and Gail Scott) had first hatched the idea for *Tessera* at the 1981 Dialogue conference, itself remembered as “one of

the most successful literary and theoretical dialogues between the two cultures” of French and English Canada (Carrière 11).

Given these examples of sites and texts in which women writers were connecting and collaborating across linguistic lines in the early 1980s, it makes sense that the editors of *Women and Words* would aim for a bilingual anthology. However, the specific influence of *écriture au féminin* and writing in the feminine is minimal in the anthology, though it is prominent in the Women and Words conference proceedings. This seems to be because of a temporal lag: whereas all submissions to the anthology had come in before the 1983 conference, the proceedings necessarily emerged from the conference, itself a site of encounter between *écriture au féminin* theory and many English-speaking writers. The editors’ introduction to the conference proceedings, *In the Feminine*, makes this clear. Commenting on their selection criteria, the editors address the inclusion of many texts dealing with language theory. They write that such texts “bring the news from Quebec, where women writers and critics have been performing a detailed feminist analysis of language, in the process uncovering new forms for the expression of women’s experiences. . . . [W]e leapt at the opportunity to continue the dialogue begun at the conference by making the work of Québécoise writers available to an English-speaking audience” (Dybikowski et al. 10). In the case of the anthology, the members of the French Anthology Committee (whom I list below) might not have brought this “news from Quebec” since the majority of them were academics based in British Columbia. However, the Women and Words archive does not contain minutes from the French Anthology Committee meetings, making it difficult to ascertain the committee’s perspective on the bilingualism of the project.

In addition to the bilingual factor, archival documents show that the editors were intent on soliciting manuscripts from Indigenous women writers and writers from other racialized and ethnic communities. Early on in the process, they discussed “a press release to solicit material specific to certain groups . . . such as Native women.”¹² The Women and Words fonds contain two specific examples of these outreach efforts. One is a communiqué on Women and Words letterhead with the title “Native Women.” A paragraph focusing on the anthology states that “we welcome submissions from native women; we’d like the anthology to reflect the cultural and regional diversity of Canada.”¹³ This phrase appears again in a more general call for submissions to the conference

and anthology: “Women and Words would like to address the concerns of women of various ethnic backgrounds. . . . We welcome submissions from women of all ethnic backgrounds.”¹⁴ The second archival document of interest is a page from a February 1983 issue of *Native Beat*.¹⁵ It shows a detailed call for contributions to the Women and Words conference and anthology alongside an article entitled “Writers Call for Native Input.” The article uses some of the wording of the communiqué discussed above. It indicates that conference organizers sought “as much native input as possible” and that the conference would provide opportunities for Indigenous women to meet together and with others. The article quotes Deanna Nyce, described as “the Tsimshian NITEP [Northern Indigenous Teacher Education Program] student who is [the] native contact person for the conference,” who said that the response was larger than anticipated. Apart from Nyce, whose name does not surface elsewhere in the archival documents, the anthology editors do not seem to have had meaningful collaboration with Indigenous writers while soliciting and vetting manuscripts. In the end, the editors included a few contributions by Indigenous women, such as Jeannette Armstrong’s poem “World Renewal Song,” Beth Cuthand’s story “Grandmothers Laugh Too,” Dawn Star Fire’s poem “Letting Go,” and Valerie Dudoward’s untitled poem.

The editors intended to create an anthology defined by linguistic, cultural, and racial diversity. This was difficult to achieve on a tight timeline without such diversity among the editors themselves and without working these intentions into the core conception of the project. When discussing their plan to “solicit material specific to certain groups,” the editors mentioned that they could “include such special groups to serve on committee if interest [is] shown.”¹⁶ Although they did establish a French Anthology Committee and advertised their call in targeted venues, the corpus that they amassed might not have been as wide ranging as they had hoped. Even in terms of genre, their plan to publish “women from ALL fields of writing” such as “fiction/non-fiction; prose/poetry; criticism/original material” was not entirely realized.¹⁷ Although I did not find archival copies of rejected submissions or details of the manuscript selection process, it would be interesting to know whether the desire for a diverse anthology ever conflicted with their estimation of the literary quality of a text. Smaro Kamboureli has explored this question in her work on anthologies in relation to the

“literariness and thematics of diasporic discourse,” wondering “whose aesthetic values determine the publication of ethnic writing” (150, 151). At one meeting, the *Women and Words* editorial team did discuss what they called “more general issues: what constitutes literary excellence; what are our goals for the anthology; on what grounds will we make final choices of work to be included.”¹⁸ Although they were already in the process of reviewing manuscripts at the time of this meeting, “it was suggested that the committee [could] begin to discuss these issues as they arise at future meetings.”¹⁹

Speculating on the intersections between the editors’ selection criteria and their stance on diversity vaguely conjures up imagined rejected submissions, but we can consider a poem that is in the anthology and that complicates some of the categories of diversity evoked above. In Ayanna Black’s poignant poem “A Pretty Baby Girl in a da Nursery,” the first-person speaker is about to leave the hospital after giving birth. She has a six-pound, two-ounce baby girl but no money, nowhere to go, and no co-parent because the baby’s father has abruptly left her. The subsequent page in the anthology is the poet’s own reiteration of the poem, entitled “A Pretty Baby Girl in the Nursery (English Translation).” In this second version, the Jamaican Creole voice of the first poem is rendered in “standard” English so that the lines “Mi nuh ’ave no place to go / And only a dolla’ to mi name” become “And I have no place to go / And only a dollar to my name” (9, 10). Every line is translated in this way. The structure and diction of Black’s text(s) conjure up the racialized politics of language and translation through which one of these poems might be considered more legitimate than the other. In the context of thinking about the *Women and Words* anthology, the poem speaks loudly and clearly to the limitations of thinking of bilingualism only in the French-English framework provided by the nation-state. It also points to racialized subject positions, such as that of Jamaican Canadian or black Canadians more generally, that might go unnamed in discussions of the “inclusion” of diversity and ethnicity.

Beyond the editorial intentions undergirding the anthology, the archival documents invite us to consider the editorial team and to expand our understanding of their behind-the-scenes labour. Archival documents that testify to the work of the *Women and Words* editors demonstrate that they had a strong sense of their own “editing as cultural practice,” to quote the title of Dean Irvine and Smaro Kamboureli’s

recent edited collection on editorial praxis. That is, archived minutes display their understanding of the importance of their task as editors. Over and over, the minutes record that they were wary of having their editorial control eroded by potential publishers. “Presently exploring co-publishing, want to keep editorial control,” they noted in August 1982.²⁰ They hoped to find a publisher that would allow them to submit a “finished manuscript.”²¹ In a discussion about whether they might publish with Women’s Press, they spoke of wanting “the optimum amount of editorial control,” noting that in-house editors could “alter the scope and vision of the Anthology.”²² Curiously, the publisher that eventually put out the anthology, Harbour Publishing in British Columbia, was not among the publishers’ names that surfaced in the minutes, which included NeWest Press, Talonbooks, Press Gang Publishers, Pulp Press, and Women’s Press. Did the editors go with Harbour because it allowed them to submit a “finished manuscript”? Whether or not that was the deciding factor, their concern about editorial integrity reveals the collective’s understanding of the importance of editing in contrast to a general devaluation of editorial work. Citing Helen Tartar, Irvine and Kamboureli note that editors’ “historical invisibility has long been viewed in conventional feminized terms” (5-6). Given the patriarchal underpinnings of that invisibility, it becomes even more significant to witness a feminist understanding of the high stakes of editorial work.

Despite the collective’s sense of the importance of the editorial role, the editorial presence in the published volume is rather slight. The back cover, spine, and front cover contain neither the editors’ names nor a reference to an editorial team. The book does not include biographical notes on the editors as it does on the contributors, nor does it include a substantial editorial introduction framing the project in relation to Canadian literary studies. Perhaps the editors decided to minimize their editorial presence in the publication, allowing the anthologized texts to speak on their own as much as possible. Certainly this is implied in the brief preface, in which they comment on the ordering of the texts: “We decided not to present the work in thematic sections, preferring to devise an order which emphasized the impressive range of theme and voice” (West Coast Editorial Collective n. pag.).²³ It is also possible that they were rushed near the end of the publication process and chose not to spend time crafting a lengthier introduction. Considering the point above about the gendered invisibility of editorial work, it is striking to

note the relative invisibility of the editors' own work within their published volume. This is especially striking when we notice texts in the anthology that render visible gendered labour in various domains. For instance, Helen Potrebenko's poem "Hey, Waitress" explicitly denounces the economic exploitation of women's labour. Her poetic speaker uses the imperative verb tense to command an imagined woman worker through various undervalued, gendered jobs. In a stanza on moving from waitressing to working as a "stewardess" to underpaid secretarial work, Potrebenko writes

and probably you will be expected to relieve on the switchboard
and, naturally, all women know about filing.
So, it will take you about five or ten years
to acquire enough skills for an "unskilled" job
at the same low pay you are now getting. (250)

Marie-Louise Sorensen's "Mabel Dons a Diving Suit" also takes on women's undervalued labour, this time through a particular historical instance. Sorensen imagines the contributions of Mabel Gardiner Hubbard to the inventions of her much more famous husband, Alexander Graham Bell (231-33).

Although their presence is minimal in the published volume, there is no doubt that the anthology team undertook the hard work of editing, even while many were also busy with other West Coast Women and Words Society initiatives, in addition to full-time employment elsewhere. In the context of the larger society, the Anthology Committee was one of numerous committees, mostly working on the conference for 1983. The multiplication of these committees is striking in the documentation from the time, which includes references to the Anthology Committee, Project Committee, Program Committee, Fundraising Committee, Production Committee, Publicity Committee, Billeting Committee, Theatre Committee, and Childcare Committee, not to mention all of the administrative work done by those in the Women and Words office.²⁴ Clearly the endeavours of this society required a lot of work and a lot of collaboration. The list of editors in the preface to the anthology offers a glimpse of just how many people were involved in the collaborative editing. The English preface lists eight names: Victoria Freeman, Penny Goldsmith, Barbara Herringer, Alison Hopwood, Naomi Mitchell, Barbara Pulling, Ellen Tallman, and Audrey Thomas.

Below the French “Préface” are the names of seven other editors: Silvia Bergersen, Olga Kempo, Kathy Mezei, Grazia Merler, Christianne Richards, Thuong Vuong-Riddick, and Jennifer Waelti-Walters. The original Anthology and Handbook Committee struck in May 1982 had thirteen members at its inception even before the Francophone Committee emerged four months later.²⁵ Only five of the thirteen committee members listed in May 1982 are among the editors named in the published anthology. Committee membership seems to have fluctuated over the two years that it took to produce the book. Although archived minutes are not an accurate gauge of individual contributions to the editorial team, they do suggest that some of the editors listed in the preface were more present throughout the process than others. But there is no hint that the editing risked becoming a one-person task or that one individual was the manager or director. A strong commitment to collaborative work runs through the *Women and Words* materials. It seems to have been a given that members would work in groups, nodes, and collectives on the conference, anthology, and other endeavours over the years. Judging by the examples of periodicals such as *Tessera* and *Fireweed*, and collections such as *Telling It: Women and Language across Cultures* (Telling It Book Collective) and *A Mazing Space* (Kamboureli and Neuman), collaborative editing seems to have been a prominent methodology of feminist writers of the period of *Women and Words* (Eichhorn and Milne, Introduction 11, 15; Moyes; von Flotow 15). For many of these editors, collaborative work was integral to their feminist praxis. As Godard explained in her reflections on *Tessera*, “What was political about this project was the ‘We,’ the determination to work collectively, collaboratively, to establish a network of women speaking, writing, thinking” (“Women” 266).

In the context of feminist editing of feminist writing, Kate Eichhorn and Heather Milne propose Sara Ahmed’s concept of “affective economies” to describe the labour of collaborative editing (“Labours” 189). They explore the affective labour involved in different aspects of editing as it relates to relationships, collaborations, and networks, from Godard’s community-building work on editorial collectives, to affective responses to their own co-edited anthology, to affective states associated with editing and canon formation. From the *Women and Words* minutes, it is easy to imagine the tasks that constituted the editors’ labour: their work on budgets, communications with publishers, press releases, and

calls for submissions; the organizational logistics of receiving, vetting, and responding to manuscripts; and more. Looking through the archive with Eichhorn and Milne's framework in mind, we can also identify some of the less visible affective labour of the editorial committee. One example is their communications strategy for rejected manuscripts. The minutes hint at the energy that accompanied debate on this issue. At the same time, deciding on a strategy involved anticipating future work and its inevitable interpersonal labour. The following is from the minutes of a meeting on 6 January 1983:

Penny [Goldsmith] suggested that readers make lengthier comments on the manuscripts they have read. Since the committee has agreed to write decent rejection letters, having comments to work from will make this task easier. There was some discussion about this idea: some women felt that detailed rejection letters were time-consuming and difficult to write, and that giving reasons for rejection to the writer could open up a continuing, unwanted dialogue. Helene [Rosenthal] in particular felt strongly that it was not desirable to send rejection letters which criticized individual manuscripts.²⁶

This debate recurred at a subsequent meeting. A conviction that they had "a responsibility to react and respond to mss . . . especially if the woman is going somewhere with her writing" bumped up against the "time limit" of the work and a concern that editorial suggestions might not be welcome.²⁷

The discussion on how to respond to rejected manuscripts is further proof that the editors recognized the stakes of their editorial work. They recognized that their editorial responses to submissions constituted interpersonal communications that had to be handled with time and care given the potential impacts on writers. In their exploration of the affective economies of anthological editing, Eichhorn and Milne discuss the labour of corresponding with a writer who was not included in their collection, *Prismatic Publics: Innovative Canadian Women's Poetry and Poetics* ("Labours" 194-95). The *Women and Words* archive offers a similar example, demonstrating that the editors were right to anticipate extra interpersonal work on the issue of rejected submissions. In a letter dated 28 December 1983, a writer who had presented at the Women and Words conference wrote that

The material over which I had labored long and lovingly, and which I chose as thoughtfully as I could and submitted to the anthology, was eventually returned to me with as curt and unfeeling a rejection slip as I have ever received. *Women and Words* is important to me. The editors of the anthology didn't have to like my stuff, but they could have been a helluva lot more diplomatic about saying so. I'm still bruised. . . . Whatever your response to this, please understand my present need for gentleness.²⁸

The reply to this letter was apologetic and explained that “the committee itself is a group of dedicated women . . . [who] would certainly have preferred a much more individual approach to advising women on non-inclusion.”²⁹ The writer responded in a follow-up letter with “thank you for your kind and thoughtful letter. It does help.”³⁰ Beyond her gratitude, the rejected writer did not acknowledge that she chastised the editors for the tone and skimpiness of their rejection and called on them to offer more labour to help her process that rejection. Further nuancing the exchange is the fact that her interlocuter was Gloria Greenfield, a West Coast Women and Words Society employee and not a member of the Anthology Committee. When Greenfield responded, graciously and at length, she implied that the editors certainly wanted to give the writer the detailed, kind rejection letter that she wanted, but “time constraints on their own busy schedules did not permit this.”³¹

This epistolary exchange suggests a gendered assumption that *Women and Words* rejection letters should be nurturing, individualized, perhaps maternal, or at least gentle. To a certain extent, the exchange assumed that feminist affective labour of this sort should be careful and care-filled, even as that assumption risked enforcing the long-standing gendered stereotype of women as caregivers (and therefore not allowed to issue form rejection letters). In part, this assumption came from the fact that the rejected writer felt that she was already in a relationship with the women of *Women and Words*. Indeed, their letters were friendly and discussed other topics of mutual interest. The correspondence on hurt feelings happened amid a conversation that assumed the shared backdrop of the women's literary community. In the letter of apology, the *Women and Words* representative thanked the writer for her contribution to the conference and her other work. She noted that “it's true that we don't always remember to acknowledge the positive aspects as much as deserved, and we certainly all do need that reinforcement, no matter how much recognition and status we seem to have achieved ‘out

there.’”³² The public “out there” was implicitly contrasted with a private “in here,” which I read as the feminist space of women’s literary networks. This is the imagined, communal space to which another correspondent hoped to gain access. In a letter dated 24 August 1985, a writer asked, much too late, for information on submitting a manuscript to the anthology. She described herself and her writing and then expressed her desire for a feminist writing community: “I like to think of myself as in complete agreement with the feminist cause. . . . I want and need more relationships with middle-aged women writers. . . . I’m not going to say I don’t know any other writers [sic], . . . but none is young, or radical, or really into the sort of writing I do. I’m open for changes in my life. I am waiting.”³³ I cite this letter as another example of affect in the archive. Like the correspondence on rejection, it affirms Eichhorn and Milne’s point that “understanding editing not as work that first and foremost leads to the production of texts but rather as work that produces social networks and forms of community is one way to further an analysis of the value, effects, and, of course, affects generated” (“Labours” 193).

Bringing prepublication archival documentation into conversation with a published volume is a further way to elucidate the particular “social networks and forms of community” of an editing project. It expands not only what we understand about editing but also what we might say about anthologies. Conversations about anthologies often concentrate — for good reason — on evaluating the tables of contents, critiquing who is included or who was excluded. The archival documentation on *Women and Words* illuminates some parts of the selection process, but it also reveals the particularities of many other aspects of the creation of the anthology. The archives provide invaluable insights into the editors’ original conception of the volume, their commitment to collaborative work, and the place of this anthology within a larger matrix of conferences, publications, and connections happening in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The networks of people connected to the project were compounded from the outset because of the collaborative approach, but the archival documentation reminds us that those networks also included the larger West Coast Women and Words Society, erstwhile committee members whose names are not on the final publication, and writers whose works were rejected, among others. Contextualizing the editing process, particularly to counterbalance the lack of editorial apparatus provided in the volume itself, highlights the historical specificity of the

project. It also clarifies the extensive, multifaceted labour involved in the book, as well as the editors' understanding of that labour as it unfolded. *Women and Words* is an ambitious publication in its conception and breadth. The work that produced it was bold and fraught, collaborative and limited. My aim in this essay has been to increase the scholarly visibility of this particular anthology while focusing on the editorial processes that shaped it. Like Engel's dinner party of diverse women, the anthology and its editorial collectives gathered voices together in a particular configuration. With Engel, we can assert that creating such communities and venues does indeed "make something happen."

NOTES

¹ Reading the dinner party as anthological is an idea that emerged partly from thinking about Robert Lecker's comment that "we live in an anthological universe" (15) and from noticing how Holly Pester discusses method and relationality in her archival work (120-22).

² I am grateful to both of the reviewers for pointing out this connection — and for so many other helpful suggestions. Thank you! For additional information on Chicago's installation, see Chicago; Gerhard.

³ "West Coast Women and Words Society," 5 May 1982, Simon Fraser University Special Collections and Rare Books Library, Burnaby, BC, Women and Words fonds, box 1, folder 1. (Hereafter the fonds are cited as Women and Words fonds.)

⁴ "Women and Words/Les femmes et les mots — General Meeting," 28 Apr. 1983, Women and Words fonds, box 1, folder 1.

⁵ Confusion about this timeline is evident even in the anthology itself: the back-cover blurb states that the anthology is "one of the ideas generated by" ("l'un des résultats de") the conference (West Coast Editorial Collective). There is a similar slippage in the French preface.

⁶ "Opening Nite," 30 June 1983, Women and Words fonds, box 1, folder 8.

⁷ There might be an earlier anthology of women's writing from this period of which I am unaware. I relied on *English-Canadian Literary Anthologies: An Enumerative Bibliography* (Lecker et al.) to locate women's anthologies.

⁸ "Anthology Committee Meeting," 28 June 1982, Women and Words fonds, box 1, folder 2. Note that such minutes are from the English Anthology Committee. The fonds do not contain minutes from the French Anthology Committee meetings.

⁹ Jane Rule noted that only one panel per time slot was translated and that others had to rely on sometimes inaccurate summaries. Conference organizers were aware of these shortfalls and promised to seek more funding to ensure bilingualism at a follow-up conference.

¹⁰ "Minutes of Anthology Committee," 22 Aug. 1982, Women and Words fonds, box 1, folder 2.

¹¹ "West Coast Women and Words Society," 5 May 1982 and 29 Sept. 1982, Women and Words fonds, box 1, folder 1.

¹² "Minutes of Anthology Committee Meeting," 22 Aug. 1982, Women and Words fonds, box 1, folder 2. At this meeting, they also discussed sending their call to unions and

to women in prisons. Interestingly, an anthology of women's writing from prisons came out a few years before *Women and Words* (Lever and Richvale Writers Club).

¹³ "Native Women," Women and Words fonds, box 2, folder 23.

¹⁴ "Women and Words/Les femmes et les mots," Women and Words fonds, box 2, folder 24.

¹⁵ "February, 1983 *Native Beat* Page 9," Women and Words fonds, box 3, folder 19.

¹⁶ "Minutes of Anthology Committee Meeting," 22 Aug. 1982, Women and Words fonds, box 1, folder 2.

¹⁷ "Anthology Committee Meeting," 28 June 1982, Women and Words fonds, box 1, folder 2.

¹⁸ "Anthology Committee Meeting," 6 Jan. 1983, Women and Words fonds, box 1, folder 2.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ "West Coast Women and Words Society," 4 Aug. 1982, Women and Words fonds, box 1, folder 1.

²¹ "Anthology Committee Meeting," 6 Jan. 1983, Women and Words fonds, box 1, folder 2.

²² "Minutes of the Joint Meeting of French and English Anthology Committees," 22 Jan. 1983, Women and Words fonds, box 1, folder 2.

²³ In French, it reads "Les texts ont été ordonnés non pas pour mettre en relief la variété de thèmes mais pour faire ressortir l'étendue impressionante de ces voix de femmes" (West Coast Editorial Collective n. pag.).

²⁴ Throughout the archive and in the anthology's short preface, the editorial team is consistently referred to as a committee or *comité*, which makes sense in relation to this whole network of committees. However, the anthology's title page and acknowledgements use the term "editorial collective." I did not find archived information on the decision to use this term, just as I did not find archived information on the decision to go with Harbour Publishing. This suggests a gap in the archived material at the moment closer to publication.

²⁵ "West Coast Women and Words Society," 5 May 1982 and 29 Sept. 1982, Women and Words fonds, box 1, folder 1.

²⁶ "Anthology Committee Meeting," 6 Jan. 1983, Women and Words fonds, box 1, folder 2.

²⁷ "Anthology Committee Meeting," 2 Feb. 1983, Women and Words fonds, box 1, folder 2.

²⁸ Letter, 28 Dec. 1983, Women and Words fonds, box 5, folder 1. I have decided not to identify the authors of these letters, but to simply indicate "Letters" with the specific dates. The content of their letters is quite personal, and as "third party" contributors to this fonds, they did not give permission for their correspondence to be archived.

²⁹ Letter, 19 Jan. 1984, Women and Words fonds, box 5, folder 1.

³⁰ Letter, 29 Jan. 1984, Women and Words fonds, box 5, folder 1.

³¹ Letter, 19 Jan. 1984, Women and Words fonds, box 5, folder 1.

³² Letter, 19 Jan. 1984, Women and Words fonds, box 5, folder 1.

³³ Letter, 24 Aug. 1985, Women and Words fonds, box 5, folder "Correspondence 85-86."

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