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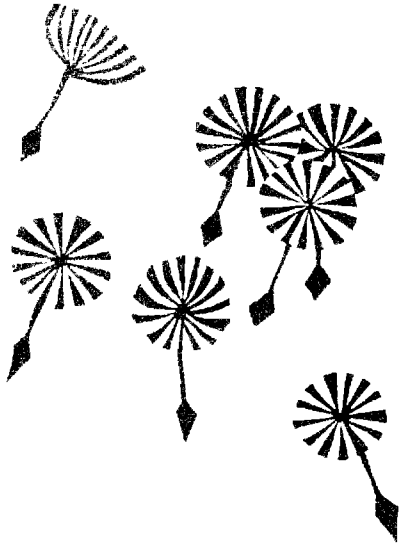

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE AND THE CREATIVE WRITER

A QUARTERLY OF CRITICISM AND REVIEW

ARIEL

A Review of International English Literature

EDITOR: IAN ADAM

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UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA MEDAL FOR CANADIAN BIOGRAPHY

1983

In recent years, serious writers of biography have moved into increasingly diverse fields in their accounts of particular individuals. Political figures still attract attention and, this year, W. A. C. Bennett was soundly and fairly scrutinized by David Mitchell. This year also, three very different musicians — Healey Willan, Miles Davis, and Gene Vincent — were given thoughtful and knowledgeable treatment by F. R. C. Clarke, Jack Chambers, and Britt Hagarty, respectively. Ken Dryden, in his well received *The Game*, provided readers with a finely written examination of the nature of hockey and its players, especially the Canadiens; and Mary Meigs explored the nature of lesbian love in her artistic work, *The Medusa Head*. Anthony Barrett and Rhodri Liscombe gave us a richly illustrated account of architectural history in their work, *Francis Rattenbury and British Columbia*. And Charles Ritchie, in *Storm Signals*, proved again that he is Canada's liveliest, sharpest, and most engaging diarist. These works, with others that were considered, stand as firm evidence of the diversity of interests held by today's biographers and autobiographers; and each of the above deserves an honourable mention.

The work judged to be deserving of the medal this year was Jeffery Williams' *Byng of Vimy*. This volume presents a first-rate account of Byng's life, with a lucid picture of the pressures which beset the man in war and peace. It could be characterized as restorative biography because it clearly advances the case for Byng in his disputes with Mackenzie King; and described as resting on sound research by an author who thoroughly enjoys his subject.

C.H.

editorial

HARD TIMES

IN A RECENT ENGLISH PLACEMENT EXAMINATION in B.C., one of the essay questions was the following: "If the view is taken that it is as important for man to provide for his soul as well as his body during difficult economic times, discuss the role that poets, musicians, or painters can play in today's world." Few students chose to write on this topic; a cynical explanation might be that most knew little, and cared less, about the arts. Some, however, might have been deterred by a more serious consideration: *do* the arts have a role in times of economic distress? Can poetry or music or painting really provide sustenance and consolation to people suffering from poverty or hunger? Such questions involve concepts dealing with the relationship of art to life that have challenged philosophers and aestheticians from the time of Plato onwards, and demand a depth of understanding and a sophistication hardly to be expected from an eighteen-year-old struggling under examination conditions. Yet the difficulty and complexity of the issues should not deter us from asking young people to think about them, or from attempting to formulate our own answers, even at the risk of running into platitudinous generalities. Yes, we might say to the invisible examiner, the arts *are* important, whatever the prevailing economic conditions; yes, they *do* provide sustenance for the human spirit, not merely by providing us with some relief from harsh realities but by showing us that suffering can be transcended, that others have endured terrible hardships and come through, that even amidst misery the clear vision of the artist can find meaning and beauty and hope.

This is certainly a difficult time for those of us who teach the humanities. On the one hand we are assailed by clichés about living in a technological age, and by demands that we prepare our students to cope with a new kind of world dominated by the sciences. On the other hand we are threatened by massive cutbacks in the public sector, lay-offs of teachers and support staff, even the

closure of schools and colleges. Education in the fine arts is the area most vulnerable to these pressures, primarily because it is "unproductive" in any sense understood by economics: it does not turn out trained hands for the work-force, it does not advance the interests of trade or industry, it does not contribute in any measurable way to the nation's economic recovery. This was undoubtedly the reasoning behind the recent decision by the British Columbia provincial government to close the David Thompson University Centre in Nelson, B.C., at the same time as the government was agreeing to fund a new engineering department at the University of Victoria. D.T.U.C., a small college dedicated to the study of literature and the performing arts, was simply not cost-effective. The arts, after all, are a luxury that the individual can enjoy in moments of leisure, a source of entertainment like football or hockey, but without the financial spin-offs generated by professional sports. If people want to read novels or poems, runs the argument, let them use public libraries; why subsidize such activities from the public purse, when there are so many other, more pressing claims on government support?

Writers and artists have long been familiar with such arguments. There has always been a tension between the claims of utility or practicality and those of imagination or the ideal. Of late, however, there has been a noticeable increase in the intensity of that debate, accompanied by a tightening of official purse-strings and a growing insistence on greater rigour in the educational system. The "back-to-basics" movement of the mid-seventies has changed its direction; the cry is no longer for a return to the three R's, but for numeracy and computer literacy. In this context, the fine arts are seen as expendable, since they are not conventionally "academic"; English is still regarded as an important subject, but primarily because of its importance as a medium of factual communication, not because of the cultural history or aesthetic values embodied in its literature. No government, of course, would make the Wilde claim that all art is quite useless; but the trend in educational policy across North America is away from concepts of schooling as a means of personal fulfilment, in which the arts play a major role, and towards the acquisition of marketable skills.

In the face of such changes, what should our reaction be? Retreat into the ivory tower is no longer an option, since someone has been busily removing the bricks from its foundation. Nor can we hope to sway public opinion by shrill denunciations of the policy-makers; biting the hand that feeds us is hardly likely to arouse much sympathy or support. In some respects, indeed, we have been fortunate in this country in the degree of official recognition and financial aid that has been accorded to scholarship and the arts through such agencies as the SSHRCC and the Canada Council, and it would be folly now to insist that the arts be exempted from the painful cutbacks experienced in every sector of our society. But we can, and must, continue to work at every level — local, regional,

and national — towards a broader public understanding of the importance of the arts and the life of the mind as a means of strengthening our awareness of community and our sense of social purpose. The Science Council of Canada recently issued a report lamenting the quality of scientific training across the country, and recommending an increase in the time allotted to science teaching in the schools. Lobby-groups for the arts, such as the Canadian Conference on the Arts, or the Canadian Authors Association, should respond to that report by urging on educators the equal need to develop a sense of cultural values alongside greater scientific skills. Improvements in the training of our scientists should not be made at the expense of arts subjects (though there is evidence that this is already happening); the arts should not be sacrificed in the name of some imagined goal of economic recovery through technological development. We must show that art enriches our society by vitalizing the imagination — and that without imagination, a society will soon become hidebound by its search for material achievement.

Dickens recognized the dangers of elevating fact over feeling, of suppressing fancy in the name of "truth," and in *Hard Times* he paints a grim picture of a world dedicated to the principles of utility:

> Fact, fact, fact, everywhere in the material aspect of the town; fact, fact, fact, everywhere in the immaterial. The M'Choakumchild school was all fact, and the school of design was all fact, and the relations between master and man were all fact, and everything was fact between the lying-in hospital and the cemetery, and what you couldn't state in figures, or show to be purchaseable in the cheapest market and saleable in the dearest, was not, and never should be, world without end, Amen.

If, as they constantly proclaim, the politicians of our own day seek to provide our children with a "better future," they should ask themselves what kind of a future it would be that denied those children the excitement and pleasure offered by works of imagination; that restricted the avenues of intellectual growth and the free interplay of new ideas; that measured the worth of every action in terms of its utility to the state and its contribution to the gross national product. We should not oppose efforts to improve the teaching of science or to match students' curricula to changing economic needs; but we must resist the temptation to return to a Gradgrindian system of education, to any approach that would compartmentalize experience and give priority to "factual" learning. Education itself is benefiting in many ways from research in informational technology, which promises to offer exciting and effective alternatives to traditional methods of teaching. But we must not be seduced by the revolution in communications and the electronic media into thinking that technology is the be-all and end-all, or else we shall rapidly become slaves of the machine, like the downtrodden workers of Dickens's Coketown. Machines may have become necessary to our material progress and physical well-being, but they can't tell us the differences between

good and evil, they can't express joy or pain, they can't convey what it means to be a sentient being: these are matters of the mind and spirit, for which we shall always need the writer, the artist, and the musician.

H.J.R.

SURVIVAL

Elizabeth Gourlay

There are no dinosaurs today
eons ago they ruled the earth
some had machete teeth
but most, like brontosaurus, merely chewed the lush green leaves
and lolled about the pleasant marsh
when cataclysm struck the earth's moist envelope
they perished

there is one dragon left
the tuatara wears
a wing about his back
a third eye in his head

what if we grew
a most discerning
understanding
eye?

WAITING FOR THE MESSIAH

Irving Layton

IF I HAD TO ATTRIBUTE to any one event in my life the further unfolding of that life, I would have to point to the circumstances of my birth.

I must have been six or seven when my mother told me that I had been born circumcised: the messianic sign. Rabbis, she said, had come from many hamlets, some had journeyed from as far as Poland and Russia to our Roumanian village to see for themselves my miraculously foreshortened member and afterwards, their reverent gaze still fixed on it, to break into psalm-singing and prayer. Jews have always been on the lookout for a messiah. Picture a history of ghettos and persecution, a people served up by a malign fate to disasters, discrimination, the nightmare of pogroms; is it that unnatural for them to engender out of their misery a messiah to lead them to the promised land or, at least, out of their unending tribulations? Moses had been the only Jew before me born circumcised and that was because the Pharoah had ordered all Hebrew boys to be killed at birth. Since Yahweh had some mission for Moses and because under the circumstances it was impossible to perform the rite of circumcision it was by divine will that the child was born foreskinless. Born circumcised and destined to lead.

You can understand how this would make a tremendous impression on an imaginative child who, because he is Jewish, has been studying the Talmud in Hebrew which he takes to be the original language of his forebears. Of Moses. Of God Himself. The identification with the great Jewish leader is swift and unthwarted. Despite my poverty-stricken surroundings, I was one of the favoured. Like Moses I have a mission to perform. Great things are in store for me. My mind parts the bathwater in the tiny washbasin as if it were the Red Sea. I throw my stick on the floor; it turns into a hissing viper. Of course I continue to lead the normal vigorous life of a Jewish kid on St. Elizabeth Street, to play tippie and baseball, to wrestle and fight barefisted anyone who threatens to take away the title of Jack Dempsey from me. But the intelligence that I have been favoured with the messianic sign is lodged in my mind and suddenly in the midst of the

roughest and most boisterous of games I would suddenly find myself standing quite apart, a solitary brooding figure surrounded by shouting companions, their mouths opening and closing as in a slowed-down film.

The second circumstance connected with my birth had, I think, an even more powerful effect. When my mother was carrying me in her womb she took dangerously ill with double pneumonia. The doctor despaired of her life. There was no way, no way, that she would recover. I remember my mother telling me this. I was seven or eight. The doctor had told my grandmother, "When hair will grow on my palm, that's when your daughter will recover from this illness." I can still see the scene. We are in the kitchen, beside the kitchen stove; it's winter, it's cold outside, bitter cold, the snow is piled up against the windows, the stove giving off the only heat in the house, and my mother holding out her hairless, deeply furrowed palm to me.

And here's what happened. My grandmother, sturdy as a peasant, and blessed with perfect health, went into the sick room where my mother was lying on her bed. She stretched herself on top of my mother's fevered body and spoke these words: "Whatever death is intended for you, may it come to me. Because you are filled with fruit and I am barren. Not even by a miracle can I give birth to another child. Let your death come upon me." One week later my grandmother who had never even complained of a headache took sick and died. My mother recovered and gave birth to me.

I can't overstress the importance of my surroundings, my Jewish environment, and its decisive influence on the development of my imagination and feelings. The poet-to-be was born with the smell of baked *chalah* in his nostrils. Other smells have come and gone; this smell has remained, dictating rage and tenderness, an epistemology unique as himself and tougher than nosehairs, a metaphysics far removed from that engendered by sticks of incense. For I was born into a world of fable, a world of stories charged with significant meanings, the world of the Jews, a people like no other people on this planet. The stories I heard from my mother and corroborated by my older sisters made me feel — I am alluding here to the strange circumstantiality of my birth — that there was something mysterious and awesome about my life. That feeling never left me. More than any other fact sociologists and psychologists may one day unearth about me, it accounts for the glories and disasters I have known, my almost daily commuting between heaven and hell. For the feeling grew stronger as I grew older, to be reinforced by my reading, stories about heroes and saviours, and always the mysterious circumstances attending on their birth: Moses, Buddha, Alexander the Great. Didn't the story of my own birth fall neatly into this packet of legends, myths, or miracles? Conceit or an imagination hungering for the miraculous, whatever, tempted me to believe I also was marked for something special, something out-of-the-ordinary. My life had been set on rails with a different gauge.

My father: black beard, dark eyes, a body frail and unexercised, more silent than a shadow, shutting himself off in the small, unaccommodating bedroom, his tabernacle and sanctuary, and there entertaining God's messengers. Now for me all this was very real. I was quite sure, when my father closed the bedroom door behind him, that he was about to communicate with God himself, or receive a message from Him through His angels. It now occurs to me that I was always invaded by the feeling that I was living in two worlds, the world of St. Elizabeth Street, where there were French-Canadian antisemites, where I played tippie or baseball with my streetmates or swung from the boughs of the few remaining trees: that was the actual world of rough-and-tumble encounters, of rivalrous brawls, of quiet Sunday mornings and the sound of the distant church bells. But inside the domicile inhabited by my father and mother, by my siblings and the stray cat I had brought home and was determined to keep despite my mother's protesting curses, was the world of miracle, legend, myth, heroic suffering in the face of persecution, the sense of imminent danger where saviours and messiahs were not an impossibility and the stories of a destiny-laden member pointing to a unique future mortised comfortably into my mother blessing the Sabbath candles each Friday night and putting her hands together in prayer next to the Quebec stove, the candles themselves sending a warm glow through our small kitchen. I can still see the candles flickering. I've described them in one of my poems as joyful old men dancing in ecstasy, throwing their shadows on the white spotless tablecloth, and it always impressed me that the shadows would come together in a wonderful dark unity. Behind her: the sink, a cockroach roaming leisurely from one end of the wallpaper to another, the toilet painted an ugly verminous green. It was a narrow cabinet reaching from the floor to the ceiling that you knew was always there; and I remember thinking how odd, what a contradiction the toilet was to the candles and the spotless tablecloth. The one dark green like the grave-covering grass, the other white — neither the flag of my disposition. But there they were, side by side, the sacred and the profane, their propinquity forever fixed in my mind and indisseverable, so fused or bonded that neither priest nor rabbi, theologian nor philosopher would ever be able to split them asunder or for long keep them apart. Then my mother would remove the prayershawl from her head and reveal her very serene face, the benediction over, her amber beads and small light brown eyes shining as brightly as the Sabbath candles flickering above the tablecloth.

IT BEGINS WITH SENSATIONS. A smear of red paint on your left thumb. The white vapour from the kettle disintegrating before your eyes. The cold wetness of pee in your underpants on a frosty morning. Later on there are feelings. Much, much later comes thought.

I must have been four years old. The house was illuminated by oil lamps. We didn't have electricity. We were too poor. I remember I had to go to the toilet. I was wearing a nightgown and found a candle, a lighted candle. It couldn't have been a Friday night, because I wouldn't have been allowed to touch a Sabbath candle, and yet I think it was and I did.

It was summer. My mother was entertaining guests in the bedroom; it would have been too cold for her to play hostess there in the winter. The kitchen was the only room in the house that was warmed by a stove. I went to the toilet with this candle in my hand and, as I was seating myself, out of pure curiosity I tipped the flame towards my nightgown, just to see what would happen. Of course before long I became a sheet of fire. I remember seeing the flame rising higher and higher and hearing shouts of alarm, screams, then somebody banging on the latched toilet door. My mother and her guests were hysterical, but they pried the door open and took me out covered in flames. I had by now lost consciousness.

The doctor thought it looked very bleak for me, but he went ahead with the prescribed brutal treatment of the time. For weeks and months the blackened burnt skin was ripped off my neck and chest. Firstly, Dr. Budyck would swathe me in vaselined cloths and then the torture of the skin being torn off would begin. My sisters tell me that I lived through this very painful period — I still bear the scars — only because of my superlative constitution. I was also very lucky that Dr. Budyck was both patient and conscientious. As you can imagine, it must not have been very easy doing that to a four-year-old boy. That is my first memory; it was so traumatic that it has blocked out all others anterior to it.

I am now six. I have fully recovered and it is time for the spring cleaning. Every year just before Passover began my family would wage war against the cockroaches that had made love and proliferated during the year. It is a very vivid memory. Huge pails of water would be set on the kitchen stove for scalding, four or five of them; then they would be taken down and my mother, my sister Dora, my cousin Fanny who was living with us, my brother Hyman, and myself all got ready for the great attack against the crockroaches. The kitchen wallpaper was ripped from the walls, exposing millions of the vermin, a heaving mass, almost like a small tidal wave, a reddish-brown agitated movement: it was as if the wall itself was beginning to move. As a child, you are not filled with revulsion; curiosity, yes, fascination at seeing these syrupy masses of brown, yellow, black, short, long, fat, thin cockroaches racing with comic dignity along the wall, foolishly exposed and vulnerable now that their cover was gone. They did not know death was waiting for them. Then my mother, sister, cousin Fanny, and Hyman would fling the scalding water, pailful after pailful, against the walls. The insects fell to the floor in violent little struggles, moving around with decreasing conviction and fervour because they were badly scalded, their senses benumbed by the relentless

downpour of water over their paper-thin bodies. But some of them still displayed remarkable vitality and I remember thinking my god, you know, what strength, *where did they get it from?* There they were: the lowliest kind of life protesting its extinction, demanding its rights, saying I too have my place in this cosmos and you have destroyed me.

My job was to stamp on them as they tried to scurry into some corner or floor-crack or maybe, if possible, under the linoleum. I could use a book or folded newspaper, whatever was needed to kill them, but my heels were always the fastest, the most effective. I recall the crunch they made under my heel, like when you step on a large June bug, and the smell — like that of a bedbug — of formic acid. And then the smear: what all valiant life reduces itself to ultimately. Before long I would find myself standing triumphant over hundreds of these mutilated corpses, and I remember very well the feeling of power and elation that swept through me when I looked down on the now silent battlefield with its armies of slain cockroaches. Napoleon could not have felt more victorious after one of his successful engagements than I did in my kitchen surveying the vermin I had destroyed. Those that had survived the scalding water and stamping feet by clinging to the walls were finished off with kerosene; the walls would reek of it for many days after.

Do I sound like a young monster, cruel? But what is cruelty if not the self-enjoyment that comes with the feeling of power? You must remember the significance of the coming Passover. I had read nothing about Napoleon or Alexander the Great or about any other successful mass murderer in history. On the one hand I was just a killer of cockroaches. I felt no spasms of guilt or shame. I regarded them as mortal enemies, vermin; they had to be exterminated. But on the other hand, for me anyway, it was a very thrilling way to bring in the Passover. A marvellous prelude to my favourite holiday. In my mind these were Egyptians whom I had slain, tyrannous slave-drivers. I was studying Exodus in Hebrew. How else would I see them, being an imaginative child? They were an army to be destroyed by the righteous Israelites, to be swallowed up forever — or at least for a year — by the Red Sea. These were Pharoah's minions that were being slaughtered, and it was God's will. And I, yes . . . I was Moses.

ABOVE OUR HOUSE was a semi-brothel. The lady of the house, with her husband's approval, played fast and loose with her morals. It was one way of supplementing their meagre income. Every Saturday night we knew there would be a party going on upstairs. Wild drinking, drunken obscenities, shouts, and cries. The clatter of an overturned table, of falling chairs. A whole orchestra under the baton of a demented conductor. Impossible to get any

sleep. My poor parents would groan aloud but my father was too timorous to do anything about it. Even my mother, usually intrepid and vociferous, was cowed. Since I was the youngest, already a dreamy rhymer, it fell to me to leave the snug warmth of the bed, find the broomstick, and pound the ceiling. Silence seemed to flow from its wooden handle. It didn't last long. Ten minutes later bedlam was again loosed over our heads. We thought of calling the police but they were never very friendly. At least to immigrant Jews.

It was as though we lived in different worlds. The police were mostly French-Canadians, part of the hostile world that surrounded us. The sense of being picked on, the sense of injustice, the sense that a Jew cannot expect protection or human decency, was very strong. A Jew would hesitate to go to the police and ask for help. The police were not there to protect Jews. They were there to harry streetwalkers or to see that my mother kept her small grocery store closed on Sundays. So you didn't go to the police. You didn't go anywhere. You just stood your ground and suffered. And called down Pharoah's ten plagues on the brutes.

By the time I was five or six I'd already begun to sense the difference. The close-knit family life, the intimacy and warmth, and then slowly the feeling of apartness, my first awareness that somehow we were different. *We were different.* And I remember not being able to understand what the difference was; just that we were not accepted, that we were hated. That strange spiky flower that held in its cup the venom of antisemitism. A child lives almost entirely in his sensations; he doesn't have many thoughts. He hasn't developed the capacity to generalize. He hasn't had many experiences and so is left with his raw percepts. Sex, death, antisemitism: they're all concepts. If you had said antisemitism to me I wouldn't have known what you were talking about. But it was in the streets and alleyways. It blanketed us like a fog. *Maudits Juifs!*

It's winter. I see my father walking towards the house. He is coming back from the synagogue. I'm watching through the window the way only a child can watch waiting for his father to come home. A gang appears as if from nowhere and someone throws a snowball. It hits his fur hat squarely and knocks it to the ground. I see my father bending down to pick it up. The hat is made of black fur and on the snow it looks like a stunned animal. My father has straightened himself up, his dignity restored. On his face there is pain and contempt. Cold contempt. But also something like serene indifference. The badge of suffering borne with pride.

You'd also see the same look when the French-Canadian kids followed him down the street mimicking his gait and launching into what they thought was Yiddish, jabbering, laughing out loud. He would not retaliate. Jews had been trained for centuries to passive resistance. To resist overtly was to invite further trouble. You did as my father did. You ignored the abuse. With patience and contempt you ignored the tormentors or took to your heels. You never gave

them the satisfaction of showing anger. At worst, you cursed under your breath. The Holocaust and the Israeli Air Force have changed all that.

Every Easter young barbarians descended on our street armed with bricks, bottles, stones, and knives. We had spies stationed to give early warning. The alarm given, the older Jewish boys came running out of their houses prepared to give battle. Soon the street was covered with groups of adolescents clawing and tearing at one another. The snarls and screams were terrifying. Everyone fought with a savagery an Iroquois might envy. You could lose an eye, have a leg broken, or get your face cut up badly. If you weren't lucky you might even get killed.

The older boys fought like Maccabeans. Gallant and tough, heroes everyone of them. My sixteen-year-old brother, Larry, was in the fray. So was cross-eyed George — a heavy, clumsy fellow but enormously strong. And Hymie Lindover and Max Cherry and Benny the Beanpole. Everyone was on the street, taking or giving blows. I remember Hymie Lindover getting a stone thrown at him. It barely missed his eye and hit his forehead. I can still hear the yell of pain. I can still see the blood running down his nose.

There wouldn't be any French-Canadian kids my age to fight with, so our job, the job of the younger Jewish kids, was to act as auxiliaries. We'd grab cans, bottles, and stones for the older boys to hurl. As a rule we beat back our adversaries because we had to. If they really got you down you could get worse than a beating, your bones might be broken. After all, we were Christ killers. We had killed their god. The only way they could avenge this terrible deed was to beat the daylights out of his kin. George was eventually blinded in one eye. You knew it could happen to you also. They weren't fooling around. They took their religion seriously. In their eyes we were evil incarnate. So we knew we had to win. If we did, it would postpone their coming back until Jesus was resurrected the following year.

The first break in the neighbourhood's antisemitism came when our neighbour died. The Labelles lived two or three doors away. The two sons, Henri and Gaston, were an especially nasty pair. The older one, Henri, was the same age as my brother Hyman. Gaston was slightly older than myself. They were always throwing snowballs at my mother or father and took an especial delight in picking up horsebuns — frosted and hard in winter; moist, round, and soft in the summer — and throwing them into the passageway when my mother was serving a customer. My mother would run to scoop up the mess but half-an-hour later they'd be back with more horsebuns. The supply seemed endless. I wondered whether they were foraging for them in other streets than St. Elizabeth.

And then something like a miracle happened. My father had died in early December. About one month later our neighbour died, the father of Henri and Gaston. Shortly after his funeral his widow came into my mother's grocery. I

forget what item she bought but I remember my mother's excitement as she came running into the kitchen and crying: "It's a miracle! God be thanked! God be praised!" From now on all show of dislike or hostility ceased. The two boys who had been so vicious, the same Henri and Gaston whom my family would joyously have torn limb from limb and had cursed to end their lives as lepers now displayed a touching friendliness. They no longer called me a dirty Jew, they no longer pelted my father with snowballs, they no longer hurled horsebuns into the passageway. They always waved at me or my brothers whenever we passed them on the street. This friendliness endured until we moved away.

That episode has given me a feeling about death that persists until today and has inspired several poems of mine. In them I hail death as the great Reconciler, as mankind's greatest benefactor, as the Messiah.

> Death washes the face of the world
> as the light-filled water
> purling over the beachstones at my feet.

HER CATS

Liliane Welch

Early mornings the cats
rise silent as Antaeus
from the embrace of night

a fabulous mound of
leaps dreamed, the
wilderness' memory

these rituals children
improvise in a wrestle's clasp

THE CANADIAN WRITER & THE IOWA EXPERIENCE

Anthony Bukoski

THE PURPOSE OF THIS PAPER IS TWO-FOLD: to try to piece together from interviews and correspondence I have had with a number of Canadian authors — twenty-seven to be exact — a sort of general history, a chronological overview of their involvement in the Iowa Writers' Workshop, and to try to assess the significance of that involvement not only to the writers themselves but to Canadian literature in general. I intend hedging a bit by including some writers who became Canadians only after leaving Iowa.[1]

Could so many writers have studied at the same institution in the United States without its having left some mark? What attitudes about teaching creative writing or the commitment to the writer's life and craft did they form? Given the method of Workshop investigation, the fragile egos of most young writers, and the fact that the Workshop is in another country, not all of them profited from the experience of studying at Iowa. Speaking of her experiences there in the late 1950's, for instance, Carol Johnson, who teaches at the University of Victoria, noted, "Writers on the whole seem notorious for their unhappiness. Legends of particularly unhappy types prevailed [though not necessarily Canadians]. Since writers are apparently predisposed to neurosis, it would be safe to assume that most of them would be unhappy anywhere."[2]

Those who were satisfied found the programme valuable, the atmosphere conducive to work — though perhaps neither so attractive nor congenial as the main character finds Iowa in W. P. Kinsella's *Shoeless Joe* (1982). Hands buried deep in the rich soil, he "knew [he] loved Iowa as much as a man could love a piece of earth."[3]

The State University of Iowa or S.U.I. (later the University of Iowa) in this town which Kinsella's character describes as a place of "shady streets, very old white frame houses, porch swings, lilacs, one-pump gas stations and good neighbors"[4] first permitted "substitution of a poem, play, or other work of art for the more usual type of (Ph.D.) dissertation" in autumn 1931. Eight years later the University *Catalogue* used the term "Writers' Workshop" for courses in imagina-

tive writing taught through "Group conferences and individual conferences."[5] Despite its detractors and the increasing number of such programmes in Canada and the United States, the Iowa Workshop over the years has remained the most prestigious of its kind. Such American authors as Gail Godwin, Flannery O'Connor, Robert Bly, Donald Justice, John Irving, W. D. Snodgrass, James Tate, and William Stafford are graduates. Both Hortense Calisher and Walter Van Tilburg Clark have taught there; among others Vance Bourjaily, Andrew Lytle, Kurt Vonnegut, John Cheever, Wallace Stegner, Nelson Algren, Stanley Elkin, R. V. Cassill, and Richard Hugo. Workshop alumni the last several decades have won virtually every major American literary prize including the Pulitzer Prize and National Book Award.

Equally impressive is the list of Canadians who have studied there (and with whom I shall concern myself), among them W. P. Kinsella, Dave Godfrey, W. D. Valgardson, and Robert Kroetsch; or of Workshop alumni from other countries who would eventually settle in Canada, Christopher Wiseman, Bharati Mukherjee, and Kent Thompson to name a few. Some of the country's most respected writers and teachers, I think it is fair to say that they have influenced the course of Canadian letters. Just how many, I wonder, from a kind of Iowa perspective or Iowa frame of mind? How far does the Iowa influence go?

THE HISTORY OF CANADIAN INVOLVEMENT there begins in 1948. Seven years after the State University granted its first Master of Fine Arts degree in Creative Writing,[6] Paul Engle, the Workshop's director — and himself an alumnus and poet of some renown — invited Robert Harlow to enroll. Harlow, in turn, persuaded two other graduates of the University of British Columbia, James Jackson and Paul Wright, to come with him from Vancouver, the three joining sixty-seven other students, many of them veterans, meeting once a week to read and criticize manuscripts in quonset huts along the Iowa River. (The Workshop has since moved to its present home in the English-Philosophy Building on this campus of 24,000 students.) As it was then and remains today, the responsibility to produce was entirely one's own; "... not," according to Harlow, "the best way to encourage writing. Young writers ... need attention, sometimes undivided attention, and a lot of applause. Three or four instructors and the odd visitor for a weekend party were not enough. People with less than 100% dedication often failed."

One he recalls spent "five years on five stories, beautifully polished, and nothing more." Another had "an imagination no one, in my experience, has equalled ... [but] died the romantic writer's death without, so far as I know, completing a manuscript. There were dozens of others as unproductive. Young men and women

with romantic notions and not the skill or the drive or the independence of mind to take the kind of workshop Paul was running there at the time." Some succeeded: R. V. Cassill, "probably as good a writer as the place gave help to"; Oakley Hall, whose first novel was published and second — 1,300 pages long — completed during his two years there; Robie MacCauley; and W. D. Snodgrass, who in 1960 won the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry with *Heart's Needle.*

While at Iowa, Harlow both wrote and revised a novel, which proved instructive. "In a prodigious burst of energy [completing] the first draft . . . in twenty-nine days, I then rewrote it four times — all 400 plus pages of it." When his instructors liked it, Paul Engle sent the manuscript to Random House, which returned it with regrets that recently another, similar book had been published. The structure of the rejected novel, part of which he would reconstitute and use in *Scann* (1972), was the structure of Huxley's *Antic Hay,* and one which Harlow found useful in his two published novels, so the "book wasn't wasted."

> I learned a lot at Iowa. The good energy I had was released there, and I was able to teach myself what I then needed to know about being a writer. One has to teach oneself in the end . . . that is where the old saw about not being able to teach writing comes from. However, one can manufacture a climate in which young writers can teach themselves . . . a mentor can share his experience with a young writer and thus prevent him from having to re-invent the whole world simply to find out the technical basis for the novella he's working on at the moment, or the reason why point-of-view in another story of his is the most important thing about it.

The potential of such a system has made him a student of how to conduct a workshop — of how to "manufacture the climate" — so that its participants can better guide themselves, by no means an easy task for a teacher. If Harlow himself did not learn a great deal from his Iowa teachers, he had the support of one in particular, Ray B. West, Jr.:

> He was not only a good human being, but . . . a serious critic and a kindly mentor . . . I will always remember him as a man who encouraged me and liked my writing, even if sometimes he didn't much appreciate the content. He was a technician — believed a lot in technique, I think — and that was something I needed to know. There is too much talk about content . . . I remember vividly listening to Robert Penn Warren . . . appreciate a story of George Robertson, a little beauty called "The Rains That Fall on Gentle Oregon" about his bus trip down to Iowa from Vancouver to join us [Robertson, a Canadian, arrived during Harlow's third year at Iowa], and it was the first time I'd ever heard a real writer say with an understanding of the craft, the technique, what was right with a piece of writing. A real writer *likes* writing. The writing instructor is a flaw-finder. Warren was drunk, or half-drunk, as usual but he talked technique, not content, and he knew how to love and for those few minutes the trip to Iowa was worthwhile.

Harlow's other instructors "talked content." Hansford "Mike" Martin he recalls as a "content man." "And Paul, marvellous buffoon that he was, had two stan-

dard questions about any story, 'How old is this protagonist?' and, 'Don't you think we need to know more about this character?'"

Mostly as a result of Engle's constant, tireless promoting — "marvellous buffoon" or not — the Writers' Workshop, "Large in the American tradition, and . . . ramshackled, as much of American know-how often is," says Harlow, "was becoming increasingly noticeable." During the time he, Jackson, Wright, and Robertson were there, September 1948 to June 1951, several national magazines made pilgrimages to Iowa City, *Life* magazine twice. In the years to come, others arrived — *Esquire*, *Saturday Review of Literature*, *Time*, *Mademoiselle*, *Newsweek* — publishing articles with such titles as "Eggheads in the Tall Corn," "Poets on the Farms," "The Trail of the Hawk-Eye, Literature Where the Tall Corn Grows," and "The Muses Meet in Squaresville."[7] Their amusement at a school in the middle of the corn belt turning out writers is itself amusing, for by that time, the city and the university already had a relatively long and solid literary tradition, partly a result of the writers' clubs that had flourished at the university and partly a result of the spirit of regionalism that arose early in the century and which found voice in *The Midland* magazine.

Nor is it any wonder the media finally investigated this place when in the three years of Harlow's stay such luminaries as Dylan Thomas, W. H. Auden, Stephen Spender, John Crowe Ransom, James T. Farrell, and Warren taught in or visited the Workshop and the English Department twenty-four miles from Cedar Rapids, Iowa, thirty from Muscatine, sixty from Davenport-Rock Island, and ninety from such points as Waterloo and Dubuque.

> What else is there to say [Harlow wrote to me] but God bless Paul. He was a literary Babbitt but, as he was rushing along toward the ultimate in hype and glory, he did create, somehow, that incredible industry known as the Creative Writing Programme. There has to be that moment of superabundance, of plethora, that ensures survival and growth, and he provided it, inefficient and ineffective as it was in many ways. I'm glad I was there near the beginning, and I'm happy I was able to learn from it all.[8]

ONE OF THOSE WHO ACCOMPANIED Harlow, James Jackson, who before his retirement was Assistant Dean and Registrar of the Faculties of Arts and Social Sciences and a Professor of English at Carleton in Ottawa, came because he knew he "didn't want to teach high school," had "a couple of years more veteran's educational allowance" and "liked to write, being aware at the same time that writing held no future in Canada." Though like Harlow the Workshop's tutorial influence was not great on him, he managed to complete a novel which narrowly missed being serialized in *The Saturday Evening Post*, was accepted by McClelland & Stewart in Toronto and Michael Joseph in Eng-

land under the condition that he produce a more marketable second novel, and finally published by Baxter in Toronto "as their first attempt to enter the trade market."

Another Canadian at Iowa then was David Dooley, a Ph.D. candidate whose article on Jackson's novel appeared in *Canadian Literature* some years later:

> Paul and David and Liz [Jackson's wife] and I saw a great deal of each other and were certainly conscious of the national bond. We were very conscious of being different. Liz and I used to crouch over the radio at night to hear, very faintly, the CBC evening news from Winnipeg. Clandestine stuff. I remember Bob and Paul and I staggering . . . home one night . . . singing the *Marseillaise* at the tops of our voices, but it wasn't really informed by any consciousness of the "French fact." I think it was . . . important to have other Canadians there. It helped delineate and keep us aware of the cultural differences, and it was friendly.

As a Canadian, James Jackson remembers being well-treated by Engle who, it appeared, "wanted a foreign component in the workshop" and offered him a teaching assistantship when in fact his "undergraduate record didn't merit it."

In addition to the teaching assistantship, something else helped Jackson in his years at Iowa: coming into contact with major literary figures. Once in the Old Capitol building on campus, he remembers seeing

> a small rumpled man with the face of a guilty cherub finding his way uncertainly to the lectern, gazing around apologetically so that his audience shuffled and coughed resignedly at the predictable prelude to yet another ritual evening of incompetent reading, then suddenly erupting majestically like a full choir; Dylan Thomas on what I guess was his first American tour, an experience of the real thing which I don't think can be replaced by VTR . . . and which reinforced the teaching so importantly . . . Robert Frost's appearance touched on other themes I've mentioned [in an earlier letter Jackson told me how "in 1948 the Canadian academies were focussed exclusively on English literature"[9]] because here was a name we'd thought of from our Canadian university background as being too trendy . . . to deserve recognition, and by God — and I can still remember the shock — he was white-haired and doddering.[10]

To Jackson, a veteran of military service which had taken him to India, Ceylon, Nassau, and all across Canada where he saw "quite a bit of the 'mid-west' thing in Calgary, Saskatoon and McLeod," Iowa City's "socio-academic environment" still came as something of a shock.

> It left us . . . thoroughly conscious of being from the back woods. . . . The . . . enduring impression was of living in a kind of forced intimacy with a group of people (the workshop group and ancillary male and female groupies) who were obsessed with exhibiting their psychic wounds as a matter of normal day to day discourse. We weren't used to confessions of incest, or to seeing people writhing on the floor of our living room in the pain of having left the church of their parents. We had read Freud, but here he was routinely dramatized . . . at that time the Canadian middle-class western bourgeoisie were naive to an extraordinary degree,

> and what Liz and I were experiencing was I think an immersion in what was then a subculture but which later . . . became the milieu. . . . Quite apart from the intellectual component, Iowa at that time provided for some Canadians a social maturation that wasn't to be found at home.

In this respect, Jackson found that the community in which it is located may be as important as the writing school itself in helping the writer discover his "personal and cultural identity and uniqueness"; something else he learned at Iowa, the "exploration of technique at a respectable intellectual level"; further still, that "the Canadian writer would be best served in a Canadian setting" where he would not have to transfer (or attempt to transfer) to his country's literature and culture what he had learned of the traditions and "impulse" of another's. The American student in the American university — close as he is to the setting of and to the force which drives his nation's literature and perhaps his own writing — is spared the necessity of this transfer. ". . . the Canadian was still left with a job of transposition, of carrying over what he or she had learned to the Canadian context of experience and literature, in the latter aspect of which we are still trying to get the basic bibliographies together . . . the study of creative writing in a properly furnished Canadian setting would save the writer that job of transposition."[11]

Paul Wright, a colleague of Harlow and Jackson and currently Executive Producer of TV Current Affairs for CBC in Toronto, also came to Iowa in 1948. Because his Workshop experience was significantly different from theirs, I should like to include most of his letter — a fairly brief one:

> I went to Iowa partly because I had had some notions of writing and partly because it was there and I had some DVA (veterans') credits left. I left at the end of a year, without completing the degree, by mutual agreement with Paul Engle. . . . During the year I did very little writing and that had something to do with a strong antipathy to the locale and its climate and to Americans in the mass (as opposed to singly, when many of them became friends). It had to do, too, with my inability to resolve my own attitudes to writing fiction. . . .
>
> The curious thing is that despite the generally unfavourable atmosphere of my memorial, the place had a strong influence. This was in the area of writing analysis which at that time was the basis of the teaching method.

Engle, Wright noted, would conduct sessions during which "the elements of a piece of work would be isolated" and discussed before the class.

> Often a new sequence would be suggested or a different point of view. I was unused to thinking of writing in such a cold way and the experience was useful. . . . And yet then and now I have the feeling that such an approach had about it something of a steamroller, smoothing but also flattening idiosyncrasies which might have proven interesting.
>
> Engle I admired though I didn't like him. He was, as I saw him, a burned-out or failed poet, who struggled manfully and did well with something which he must

> have regarded as secondary, I mean the school. The rest of the instructors I thought more or less negligible . . . Iowa I found insular and heavy; Iowa City provincial and claustrophobic; SUI a less interesting place than UBC had been; fiction writers less attractive than the journalists with whom I was associated before and after. I was glad to leave.[12]

On the recommendation of Earle Birney, George Robertson, another Canadian (Robertson is now a documentary producer for the CBC) left Vancouver two years after Harlow, Jackson, and Wright, wrote a story which was "a great success" in the Workshop about his encounter with "a former Rose Queen at Pasadena" — the story Harlow refers to, "The Rains That Fall on Gentle Oregon" — then failed to produce another as good the rest of the semester. "I like to think . . . I had been warped by the highly self-conscious approach to writing that the school engendered in its students, but that may be unfair." Impatient to "get out into the real world" — the university having become "a very inward sort of place" — and bothered by the political conservatism of most Iowans, he left after one year rather than complete the extra year's requirement. "I was learning nothing about writing," though Engle and other Workshop teachers looked after him, he recalls. "What Iowa revealed to me was that I was probably not a writer *at any cost*."

As a Canadian, Robertson felt the "foreignness" of his teachers,

> something I didn't want to admit at the time. They made writing seem less a joy than I thought it should be. . . . In Canada, we fledgling writers had the happy amateur's approach to writing. At Iowa, it was a serious business, and writing obviously revealed not only the darker reaches of one's soul but of the whole culture that had created the writers.

When Robertson arrived Robert Harlow had already been there for some time.

> . . . he and his wife were very good to me . . . undoubtedly made me feel much more at home than I would otherwise have been . . . we implicitly recognized that Canada was the country to which we would return, and that Iowa was a challenging and useful experience.

It was Harlow who heard Robert Penn Warren "appreciating" Robertson's "The Rains That Fall . . ." And Robertson remembers Warren, a Kentuckian, saying "That's a mighty fine story you wrote, son." It would appear in *Tomorrow* magazine along with work by Christopher Isherwood, by no means an inauspicious beginning, but, as Robertson said, "thirty years ago."

> Would I recommend Iowa to other Canadians? Possibly not. . . . It may be an even better school now than it was then. But my ideas about writing have probably changed. To a would-be writer, I would say: write. And read. And remain independent of influences. By all means, absorb influences when you are young, but grow through them. A place like Iowa is probably good for social indoctrination into the company of writers and would-be writers. But perhaps a few weeks or a

few months are sufficient for that. . . . On the other hand, I am glad I was there. I was twenty-one, and that is a good age to leave home, meet new friends, be subjected to a new kind of discipline, and begin to see a direction ahead. In short, to begin to learn what you want to do in life. Iowa was the end of my growing up.[13]

By the early 1950's, the Workshop's reputation was expanding. In his history of that institution, *The Iowa Writers' Workshop: Origins, Emergence, & Growth* (1980), Stephen Wilbers notes that in February 1952 *Poetry* magazine "devoted half of a special issue to poetry" of Workshop writers. In 1953, six novels by Workshop students were published, among them Flannery O'Connor's *Wise Blood*. And in 1956-57, when Robert Kroetsch, Dave Godfrey, and Kent Thompson were there and a year which Marguerite Young, a Workshop instructor, described as "the most successful . . . to date for fiction writers," stories by Tom Williams, John Gardner, and others appeared in such magazines as *Esquire*, *Harper's Bazaar*, and *Botteghe Oscure* and poetry by Knute Skinner, Philip Levine, Henri Coulette, and others in the *New Yorker*, *Paris Review*, *Poetry*, *Kenyon Review*, *Accent*, and elsewhere.[14] The decade of the fifties also saw the beginning of separate workshops for poetry and fiction "to accommodate the expanding enrollment of the postwar period," and in 1957 Engle began "Form and Theory of Fiction" classes in an attempt to increase the literary background of his students.[15]

Robert Kroetsch recalls how poets and fiction writers were divided in another way. "Maybe my . . . central connection with the workshop was the softball games. The fiction writers against the poets. We fiction writers tended to beat them. Some of the poets, already then, were making reputations — Everwine, Levine, Mezey." Two things had led to Kroetsch's discovery of the University of Iowa: research he had done on Raymond Knister, who had been in Iowa in the 1920's with *The Midland*, and his (Kroetsch's) work for the United States Air Force in Goose Bay, Labrador in the early 1950's, where he advised "airmen about what to do when they got out" of the military and where he came to know "a lot about American universities."

I was what — 29 years old — when I drove into town with my wife . . . I suspect that I was more at home in Iowa than she, because I'd grown up on a farm in Alberta. I dearly liked the summer heat of Iowa, the smell of pig---- wafting across the little university town, the variety of the bars, the big old houses (and I chanced to live in a few), the corn fields . . . the trips down to the Mississippi to knock around along the river, in those river towns. I liked the few weekends I spent in Chicago. . . .

I had published before I went to Iowa and Engle sent me a telegram saying I was accepted and offering me a teaching assistantship. Just like that (it was

> already July, I lived sort of by the moment those days) I was in the workshop. We drove into town more or less broke . . . all of a sudden we were living in an old Iowa house that was crammed with books. Lived in by this incredible man [a retired Iowa professor] who could no longer read.

His first year as a graduate assistant Kroetsch made nine hundred dollars, while his wife worked as a nurse. Eventually he would earn a Ph.D., leaving in 1961 for a teaching position at SUNY-Binghamton. "I was innocent enough those days to set out to read English literature from *Beowulf* to Faulkner. I was in no great hurry. I liked Midwestern beer. I discovered that I liked teaching. And I wanted to write a novel. . . ."

During his Workshop years, 1956-58, he studied with George P. Elliott and Harvey Swados of whom he wrote: "Both . . . influenced me immensely not so much by the way they wrote as by the models they provided: both were totally committed to the craft and art of fiction. I think that what I learned first of all at Iowa was a sense of the high seriousness of fiction writing." The friends Kroetsch made were mostly "scholarly, not creative. We drank at Irene's," Mort Ross, a scholar now teaching at the University of Alberta and one of the few people Kroetsch met who was actually from Iowa, being "the prime mover in our group." David Godfrey was there at the time as well, though Kroetsch and Godfrey rarely met; "I know that on the Iowa campus he was thought of as a promising and gifted writer." For those five years, Kroetsch wrote, "I feel nothing but gratitude. Somehow I've never gone back . . . I hear the place has changed. I keep meeting the friends from there. I read their books. Time and place came together in just the right measure for me, there in Iowa City. I was lucky."[16]

Several Workshop alumni — citizens of other countries — would reside in Canada some time after their studies were completed at Iowa: Kent Thompson, who was at Iowa from 1957-58; Carol Johnson, 1958; Christopher Wiseman, 1959-62; Bharati Mukherjee, 1961-63. Perhaps most supportive of the Iowa Workshop method and its influence on Canadian literature was Thompson, who had come there from Hanover College in Indiana and who some years later would take Canadian citizenship.

> The workshop was very important to me, and I think it's very important to Canada . . . look at the people now teaching creative writing or in charge of creative writing programs . . . who have gone to Iowa: Godfrey, Valgardson, Harlow, Wiebe. . . . We all share a common attitude about literature and about the teaching of creative writing . . . the student's soul is his own; all we care about is good writing of whatever kind the student wishes to do. We believe in craft above all. So we are not likely to get on hobby-horses about what ought to be written.[17]

Carol Johnson, who studied at the College of St. Catherine in St. Paul, Minnesota, and at Marquette University before coming to Iowa and who was a friend

of Flannery O'Connor, remembers Engle's being good "at getting money for his writers from the pig and corn producers of Iowa" and how she appreciated "the freedom purchased in those courses involving no supervision" though she decided to leave after one year, emigrating to Canada in 1968.[18]

Christopher Wiseman came to Iowa in 1959 from Cambridge, England, where David Daiches put him on the plane, and to Canada in 1969. "It was my first time in Iowa — in North America for that matter." Accepting Paul Engle's offer of a teaching assistantship in the English Department, Wiseman in his three years recalls seeing a "knife fight between two poets about who was the 'best poet in Iowa City,'" remembers the Iowa landscape, "especially that lovely light in the evenings," and remembers Donald Justice from whom, Wiseman said, "I learned more about poetry in three years than from anyone else I've ever known." About the value of the Writers' Workshop:

> I have started Creative Writing here [the University of Calgary] using methods and techniques I learned from him. My poetry developed and matured in Iowa and I started serious publishing during, and straight after, my time there. I would strongly recommend [the Workshop], as I remember it, to any young writer. I know of nowhere better for coming into contact with so many talented writers and teachers.

Philip Roth, Vance Bourjaily, George P. Elliott, Hortense Calisher, and others were there, and Wiseman recalls among the students at the time Mark Strand, Michael Harper, Vern Rutsala, and Marvin Bell going "on to make a name for themselves."[19]

Interested in writing and having heard of the Iowa Writing Programme from members of UCLA Project India one night in Calcutta, Bharati Mukherjee sent a letter of inquiry to Paul Engle, but addressed it "Ames, Iowa" — actually the home of Iowa State University 150 miles distant. The letter forwarded, Engle replied, and she, like Wiseman a few years earlier, was on her way to the United States for the first time. "It was good to talk about writing. People were interested in inaccessible worlds such as India." She would later enjoy the distinction of teaching at Iowa — to her "the leading workshop on the continent" — where questions of whether she is an American, Indian, or Canadian writer were unimportant. "Nationalism insists," she believes, "on excluding anyone who is not dealing with nationalistic materials." With that she has had experience, being denied acceptance into the Writers' Union of Canada when it was first forming because "her name," as she said, "was too difficult to spell."[20]

With the Canadian artist Alan Weinstein as best man, she married Clark Blaise in Iowa City in 1963, Blaise having begun the Workshop in January 1962, when he realized — "living [as he was] in Boston . . . working at a Harvard Square bookstore, and taking the writing course with Bernard Malamud at Harvard" — that he "couldn't hold a job and still write." A friend of his from

his undergraduate college in North Carolina also suggested he go to Iowa. In the Writers' Workshop, Blaise studied with Philip Roth, José Donoso, and others. He began to publish stories in *Shenandoah*, *Carolina Quarterly*, and *Prism international* and remembers it "as a time of intense activity around the post office," mailing out stories the minute he finished them. "I also remember the activity down at the periodical room of the library, reading everything the moment it arrived, then going to Kenny's Bar to discuss it." (In 1966, Bharati Mukherjee would receive an Honourable Mention in Martha Foley's *The Best American Short Stories* for "Debate on a Rainy Afternoon," which appeared in *The Massachusetts Review*, and in 1967, Clark Blaise would win the President's Medal of the Canadian Authors' Association for the best short story published in Canada, "The Mayor," which appeared in *Tamarack Review*.)

Blaise, who had lived in such diverse places as Boston, Chicago, and Winnipeg, found Iowa "neither beautiful nor bleak, but a good place to work," a good place to further, one might say, a "North American education." He wrote one explicitly "Iowa" story, entitled "Early to Marry," which was never published:

> The *experience* of Iowa, however, was crucial to my writing: the intensity of the reading, the devotion to the work of one's friends, the pains one takes to meet all possible objections (long before you'd turn it in to your "teacher." The true teachers were the friends you respected — in fact, the only friends you could have were those whose work you respected. This has persisted).
>
> It was most helpful — essential — that I went to Iowa. By knowing that my work was good at Harvard, and good at Iowa, I knew, in that long apprenticeship, that I would "succeed . . ."

Having grown up mainly in the deep South, his early stories were often set in that locale:

> [the Workshop] was a time in which I was changing from being an exclusively "Southern" writer into incorporating material from my family, and Canada. The first workshop story I did was the most vehemently "Canadian" one I've ever written, from the point-of-view of my senile grandfather, remembering the prairie blizzards of the 1900's. . . . Dave Godfrey and I were quite close as Canadians . . . [he] ran interference for me in that class.
>
> My relationship to Canada evolved fully after Iowa, though I was showing stronger and stronger kinship during my years there (my mother moved back to Winnipeg in '63, and I started spending my summers in Quebec City from '62. I would always advise Canadians to study anywhere else; the same with Americans. I've taught Americans in Canada as well). My Canadian material wasn't as well received as my Southern material, because of the inevitable culture-gap; but the same problem applied to Southern writers who were trapped in dominantly urban Jewish sections [of Workshop classes] — and vice versa. I think it's inevitable that people of the same regional background will cluster; Lowell Uda of Hawaiian-Japanese origin had problems being understood; so did Frank Chin (Chinese-San Francisco), and Doug Hall (Utah Mormon) . . . 1962-63 was a long

time ago in the evolution of the various sub-and-ethno- and counter-cultures. We can all write from intensely narrow backgrounds now without feeling defensive or expository (witness Valgardson, Godfrey, etc.).

Clark Blaise would teach in the Iowa Workshop during the 1981-82 school year, returning in the fall term of 1982 to his position at Skidmore College in Saratoga Springs, New York, while his wife replaced him on the Iowa Workshop's faculty. The "great sexual imbalance in the Workshop" which he noticed in the early sixties — "Bharati was there, but a forbidding presence, Joy Williams . . . intensely shy, Bette Howland and Linda Kailish; Ann Mendel, and that's about it" — has changed since then. Something else has changed too, what Blaise calls "the big successes" having come — Charles Gaines, Tom McHale, John Irving (*The World According to Garp*), Nicholas Meyer (*The Seven Per Cent Solution*), and others. "I'm just glad I missed the big commercialization. We still treasured the literary quarterlies and Honourable Mentions in Martha Foley."[21]

In autumn 1964, Blaise and his wife took teaching positions in Milwaukee, then returned to Iowa, leaving again in July 1966, this time for Montreal. Dave Godfrey, the author Margaret Laurence once described as "undoubtedly the most talented young prose writer in Anglophone Canada and one of the most interesting anywhere"[22] and the man who "ran interference" for Blaise, continued at Iowa. (Godfrey took his B.A. there in 1960, his M.F.A. in 1963 and his Ph.D. in 1966.) But his memories of the place are not particularly good ones. "Iowa does not interest me [he wrote to me]. I learned a good deal there about other writers from other countries, much of which I had to relearn and sift in Africa and France and Canada afterwards."[23]

DURING THE PERIOD 1964-66, the effectiveness of the Iowa Writers' Workshop as an educational institution would be seriously questioned. In his history of the Workshop, Wilbers writes, "the dispute was called 'The Battle between the Hut and the Hill' in reference to the English Department's location in the more imposing buildings up on the Pentacrest."[24] Part of the dispute involved promotion of Robert Williams to the rank of associate professor when in the opinion of some R. V. Cassill was better qualified, and part involved Iowa's continued financial support of the *Western Review* magazine, which Ray West had brought with him when he returned to the university — support which Engle sought to terminate, using the money to attract more promising writers to the Workshop.

Once the controversy died down, Engle and Donald Justice had resigned (Engle remaining in the university though not as director of the Writers' Work-

shop, Justice returning in 1971), Cassill had left for Brown University and Williams for California State University at Hayward. Eugene Garber then took over as the Workshop's temporary director.

> ... as in the past [Wilbers writes] the conflict created factions among faculty members and strained relations between the Workshop and the English Department ... the upheaval's effects on the Workshop included a general decline in morale and a pervasive feeling that the program was without direction.

Other, longer-lasting effects would occur in the way the programme was financed and administered. Outside donations, for which Engle fought so tirelessly during his years as director, today "have all but disappeared, with the notable exception of a gift from the James A. Michener Fund in 1980." (The gift of $500,000 provides annual grants to young American prose writers and is intended to help them in publishing their work.) The Workshop is now financed with money from the English Department and the Graduate College.

> The basic relationship between the Writers' Workshop and the rest of the Department of English has not changed appreciably. As before, the Workshop is a program within the English Department, which means the faculty of the English Department continues to pass on promotions in the Workshop.

New teaching appointments, furthermore, must be "approved officially by the chairman of the English Department but in practice ... are handled by the permanent faculty of the Workshop."

> In spite of periods of conflict between individuals on the Workshop staff and some members of the department, during most of the Workshop's history cordiality has prevailed. Most members of the English Department have been happy to have young writers in their classes. They realize that the Workshop has been responsible for bringing some of their best students to Iowa. To be sure, a minority has disapproved of the whole idea of combining imaginative writing with traditional graduate study in preparation for a Ph.D., but the department as a whole has supported and continues to support the Workshop as an activity and as an institution.[25]

Rudy Wiebe was hardly there long enough, the summer and part of the fall of 1964, to have been affected by the academic infighting that took place between 1964-66, and W. D. Valgardson, who arrived in September 1967, "wasn't aware of any enmity."[26] But change had occurred. George Starbuck as the Workshop's third director — and not Engle — for example, passed on Valgardson's admission manuscript.

About the Workshop itself? The place, says Wiebe, "did absolutely nothing for my writing," whereas on Valgardson it "made a tremendous impression" — Wiebe staying two weeks, Valgardson four semesters and completing the degree. What Wiebe learned was that "F. M. Salter of the University of Alberta at Edmonton had given me more in one course, one year, than I could expect in

such a massive place [as Iowa]. (Salter had four students, one of whom did not write much) . . . writing schools are of no benefit unless they are small and personal . . . individual attention . . . is everything after a certain level of competence is gained." Valgardson, on the other hand, found it "tremendously helpful" studying there. "For the first time in my life I had a chance to meet other writers and to find out that my obsessions were not mine alone . . . working on an MFA gave me two years to concentrate on my writing. . . . On the whole, I found the . . . technical comments of the instructors . . . helpful."

Both men dealt with Vance Bourjaily, Wiebe after two weeks discussing matters with him, then leaving for northern Ontario to research *First and Vital Candle* (1966), which was to have been his Ph.D. thesis.

> I never finished that doctoral program; there was no point in it. I agreed with Bourjaily: why stay for weekly seminars that discussed stupid prose (generally speaking) when I could be researching, writing stuff of real importance to me. I was not impressed with either students, or teachers generally, or the program. So I didn't stay. . . . Iowa could have helped me . . . but it didn't. Perhaps I was already too far down the writing trail to be helped there; whatever it was, I'm convinced that Canadians don't have to go there to get the kind of instruction they need. They can get it, now for certain, in Canada; without the massive American business that goes on there.[27]

Valgardson viewed the Workshop and Bourjaily, who was one of the instructors present at his first Workshop class, in a different light. "He, Bourjaily, chose to discuss a story I had turned in. In five minutes, he showed me how to identify where the story really began. Until then I'd been leaving in too much material. That lesson alone was worth the trip south." During his first year, Valgardson wrote an article for a feature writing class and sold it to *TV Guide*; during the second year, "Bloodflowers," which would eventually win The President's Medal and publication in *The Best American Short Stories 1971*.

> What I *didn't* find helpful were the . . . theoretical statements made by some of the students. Most of them didn't know enough to say anything intelligent or helpful. The visits by writers who came to read or who just dropped into classes were, I felt, exciting.
>
> I'd recommend the workshop to Canadians. I advised Bill Kinsella to attend and I have two other students who will graduate next year and the year after. If it sounds like the faculty in the workshop is still as good as it was when I was there, I'll recommend that these students go there for MFA's.[28]

One of the most outspoken critics of the Iowa Workshop would eventually turn out to be Kinsella, Valgardson's student. Despite his antipathy to the Workshop, Kinsella pays homage to Iowa and Iowa City in *Shoeless Joe Jackson Comes to Iowa* (Oberon, 1980) and *Shoeless Joe*, winner of the 1982 Houghton Mifflin Literary Fellowship Award. "I have fallen in love with Iowa City. The

air, the architecture of houses. In Calgary there are virtually none. White houses with front porch swings, houses square as biscuit boxes, attract me. I would like to spend a good part of my life here."

In the Workshop, he studied with Bourjaily and with the playwright and novelist Robert Anderson (*Tea and Sympathy*), and other writers, but he found a Freelance Writing Workshop sponsored by the Journalism Department of more help than Writers' Workshop classes:

> I was incredibly disappointed with the quality of students in the Writers' Workshop. Both as critics and as writers. I thought at first that my disappointment with the place might have been because I had just come from such an outstanding undergraduate school as the University of Victoria. I expected to work with students who had a great interest in writing and with teachers who demanded a great deal.... Unfortunately, I found a situation where a majority of students had little or no writing talent and where instructors demanded absolutely nothing.

"With no help from the workshop staff," he wrote a novel and collection of stories.

> My first experience was with a catatonic instructor and pontificating moron of a student who talked one-half of each class to hear the reverberations of his own nasal voice. So inarticulate was the instructor that she had *us* critique each story, critiques which she then read back. We got nothing from her. Things got so bad that she sang songs to us once. I think perhaps she had been a vocalist and she sang all the old standards.... She wasn't totally untalented.

The final insult occurred when he gave her an 8,000-word story, which she held the entire semester, returning it unmarked and with the comment, "I liked your story. It had so many ideas in it."

> At that point, I threw up my hands and wondered why have I come 2,000 miles for a course less demanding than a high school English class? ... No instructor ... was willing to give serious criticism, only add a comma or two here and there. The students didn't work at a graduate level.

Kinsella has "terribly ambivalent" feelings about whether to recommend the Workshop. He would if he thought a student mature enough to work on his own. "It is a nice place to get an MFA degree without doing much work. What cheapens the degree ... is that some people do not turn in so much as one story a semester. There are no such requirements. All in all, Iowa could be so wonderful if somebody cared."[29]

In a more recent testament to his love for Iowa, Kinsella wrote to me:

> I was hired directly from Iowa to teach fiction writing at the University of Calgary. I will leave next June ('83) after five years. I was given my papers to apply for tenure but sent them back, which I assume is a first in the history of Canadian academia. I plan to return to Iowa City — I married an Iowa City woman — and write full time for a few years.[30]

Though there for part of the same time, W. P. Kinsella and Hugh Cook, another Canadian, never met, Kinsella taking his degree in May 1978, Cook a year later. Hugh Cook did study with Bharati Mukherjee, however, whom he found to be "rigorous in her demands that a writer's prose style be efficient and provocative. . . . She always made me question my characters; were they fully rounded, motivated enough?"

As a high school teacher in London, Ontario, Cook had published poetry in *Canadian Forum*, *Quarry*, and the *University of Windsor Review*. But upon moving to Sioux Center, Iowa, to teach, he stopped writing until one day discovering the work of another Iowa graduate. Flannery O'Connor "opened up whole new avenues. She awoke something in me, showed me possibilities that I could transform to my own country." He then enrolled in the Writers' Workshop because of its reputation. At Dordt College, where he had been teaching, and at the University of Iowa, Cook spent more than a decade (he now teaches at Redeemer College in Hamilton, Ontario). During the years in Iowa, he still found himself dealing with Canadian landscapes and people. "I haven't felt that need with Iowa. . . . It hasn't evoked something in me, though it may."

Concerning his feelings about the Workshop form of instruction: "workshops *can* work," he said. "A sympathetic yet opinionated audience teaches you to use what you can and to toss the rest aside." Would he direct a student to Iowa?

> At Dordt College [in Sioux Center], twenty-five per cent of the students are from Canada — mostly British Columbia, Alberta and Ontario — a sort of Canadian subculture. I have sent a student to Rudy Wiebe. I would send a student to UBC or to Victoria as well as to Iowa, depending upon that student's personal situation. Would the work he was doing be better served in Canada?

Cook, along with Kent Thompson and others, agrees that "what is important is the student not the writing programme."[31]

THREE CANADIANS MORE RECENTLY involved with the Writers' Workshop are Douglas Glover, whose article on the Workshop, "Catcher in the Corn," appears in *Books in Canada* (September 1982), Mark Jarman, who at the University of Victoria studied with Valgardson and Matt Cohen, and Rick Hillis, who studied at the University of Saskatchewan after growing up in Moose Jaw. At Iowa Glover, who has sold his novel *Precious* to Seal Books and whose collection of stories *The Mad River* (1981) was published by Black Moss Press, "learned a good deal about writing," especially from Robert Day, "a cowboy from Kansas" and author of *The Last Cattle Drive.* But Glover's stay in Iowa was not without disappointment. As he told me in a telephone interview: "In January 1981, John Leggett [the Workshop's fourth director, appointed in

1971] said I was at the top of the list for a James A. Michener Fund grant. At graduation in May and after months of anticipation, he told me I was no longer eligible. I was not an American citizen."[32] Whereas Valgardson could not get "a bucket of water if [he'd] been on fire"[33] from the Canadian government but qualified as a foreign student for tuition aid from the University of Iowa, Glover could not get the Michener grant *because* he was a foreign student.

Mark Jarman applied when he "was ignored for the most part by Canadian schools." He learned of Iowa's offer of a teaching assistantship while in Ireland, where he had been touring on money saved from a winter of driving trucks.

> . . . it's been a great experience, good contacts, markets, friends. I've found out about a lot of good writers and books that I wouldn't have otherwise, wide spheres of influence. Good range of teachers too, Southern madmen to Ivy League denizens, very diverse. I like American bars too. Competition is important also; when people around are selling to *Playboy* and *Esquire* or just writing hard and well, it makes me aim higher and try a bit harder. It's healthy. I finish up this spring ('83) and wouldn't mind staying on but likely will return to Canada.[34]

Rick Hillis — most recent representative in the long line that goes back thirty-five years — is enrolled at the time of this writing. Being accepted at Iowa boosted his confidence in his ability to write. "Like Bill [Kinsella], I have doubts as to whether the workshop fulfils its potential, but on the other hand it is clear to me I have written my best work here. It's a nice place to come for two years and pretend you're Chekhov, and it beats the hell out of working construction which was what I was doing before." Saskatchewan was a good place to write too, he says. "There is no doubt the Saskatchewan Writers' Guild and Saskatchewan Arts Board have been central to my development as a writer. Arts Colonies, workshops in rural communities, etc. have given me a big boost. These organizations, services, whatever you want to call them really back the arts. I have had a few minor publications which I am embarrassed to mention when I think of what other Canadians in the workshop have done."[35]

It is reasonable to assume, finally, that other Canadians will follow Hillis to Iowa, that its mystique is still great enough to draw students from the north. Regardless of the number of writing schools in Canada and the United States, Iowa, I think, still holds that allure: the paradox of a writing school on the American prairies, a place with a reputation. Jackson and Wright came in 1948 to help build that reputation, Robertson in '50, Wiseman in '59 from England, Blaise in '62, Kinsella in 1976 from Edmonton, Cook from Windsor (by way of Sioux Center), Glover from Brantford, Ontario, Jarman from Victoria, Hillis from Regina and Moose Jaw. One comes to this place "immortalized by Meredith Wilson in *The Music Man*," this place of "shady streets and white frame houses," as Kinsella describes it, to study and write where Flannery O'Connor wrote, and

Donald Justice and John Irving, and where Dave Godfrey and Robert Harlow studied and wrote, and W. D. Valgardson and Robert Kroetsch and Rudy Wiebe.

Some of them, in tribute to the place, modelled university programmes after the Iowa method. Others were influenced by particular teachers or colleagues. Others still by the town itself, or the state. Some Canadians came away with the lesson in craft, the lesson in "technique, not content," which Harlow speaks of. Some, on the other hand, were dissatisfied. It is tenuous business ascribing literary influences. But for many the place wrought magic.

NOTES

[1] My correspondence with these authors is in the library archives of the University of British Columbia.

[2] Carol Johnson, letter to the author, April 25, 1979. Iowa alumni, who are either Canadians or associated with the country but not mentioned in this essay, include: Robert Casto (Iowa 1966), whose M.F.A. thesis was entitled *The Tin Flute and Other Poems*; David Margoshes (Iowa 1969), who lives in Bragg Creek, Alberta, and one-third of whose work comprises *Third Impressions* (Oberon 1982); Valerie Kent (Iowa 1972), whose M.F.A. thesis was *Shoplifting Broccoli*; Sandra Storm (Iowa 1974), who lives in Brandon, Manitoba; H. Earl Harrison, who at the time of our correspondence was teaching in Winnipeg; Deborah Eibel and Christopher Levensen. Another Iowa alumnus, Mark Strand, was born on Prince Edward Island.

[3] W. P. Kinsella, *Shoeless Joe* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1982), p. 16.

[4] Kinsella, p. 172.

[5] Stephen Wilbers, *The Iowa Writers' Workshop: Origins, Emergence & Growth* (Iowa City: The University of Iowa Press, 1980), p. 17.

[6] Wilbers, p. 51. During the 1930's and 1940's, Wilbers writes, recipients of what was then the creative M.A. numbered Wallace Stegner, whose *Remembering Laughter* (1937) won the Little Brown Novelette Prize; Paul Engle, who won the Yale Series of Younger Poets Award for *Worn Earth* (1932); Margaret Alexander, *For My People* (1940), a collection of verse submitted as her M.A. thesis; and others. "In a four-year period (1947-51)," notes Wilbers, "seven books written by students in the Workshop were issued by leading American publishers, and this is to say nothing of the numerous poems, stories, and essays that were appearing regularly in magazines."

[7] Wilbers, pp. 141-44.

[8] Robert Harlow, letter to the author, May 25, 1979.

[9] James Jackson, letter to the author, September 19, 1979. Upon his retirement in April 1982, Professor Jackson moved to Vancouver.

[10] James Jackson, letter to the author, January 12, 1980. D. J. Dooley's article on Jackson's *To the Edge of Morning* appeared in *Canadian Literature* 36 (Spring 1968), pp. 34-39.

[11] James Jackson, letter to the author, September 19, 1979.

[12] Paul Wright, letter to the author, June 13, 1979.

[13] George Robertson, letter to the author, January 7, 1980.

[14] Wilbers, p. 94.

[15] Wilbers, p. 97.

[16] Robert Kroetsch, letter to the author, May 27, 1979.

[17] Kent Thompson, letter to the author, May 8, 1979. Of his time in Iowa, Thompson wrote: "The workshop was then full of veterans. That meant we had a large number of older people among us — which was a very good thing, because they had some experience against which to measure things, and even some who had already published novels . . . (The pride of the place was Tom Williams). And one of the things which resulted from having all those veterans was an informal rule: no foreign words were to be used in stories. All those guys who had served in Germany were incapable of saying "street." Every thoroughfare was "strasse." So the ban went on: no littering of stories with foreign words just because one happened to know them. There had to be a damned good reason for using a foreign word. . . . But there, you see, was the basic premise of the workshop: one had to understand the craft. . . . I had come through a literature program at a pretty good little college (and I'd spent a year at a British redbrick university in the bargain), but I still had the idea that literature was sugar-coated philosophy. When I arrived at Iowa I *couldn't read*. I mean, I couldn't read as a writer reads — word for word, with attention to everything which contributes to the effect. All I could do was read for ideas. Again I was astonished. It was lovely."

[18] Carol Johnson, letter to the author, April 25, 1979.

[19] Christopher Wiseman, letter to the author, May 9, 1979.

[20] Bharati Mukherjee, interview with the author, Iowa City, April 15, 1979.

[21] Clark Blaise, letter to the author, May 10, 1979.

[22] Margaret Laurence, "Dave Godfrey," in *Contemporary Novelists*, ed. James Vinson (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982), p. 255.

[23] Dave Godfrey, letter to the author, November 3, 1982.

[24] Wilbers, p. 112.

[25] Wilbers, pp. 119-20.

[26] W. D. Valgardson, telephone conversation with the author, August 30, 1982.

[27] Rudy Wiebe, letter to the author, June 1, 1979.

[28] W. D. Valgardson, letter to the author, April 24, 1979. Valgardson's letter reads in part: "I had never heard of the workshop at Iowa. I had been living up at Snow Lake, Manitoba which is way and hell and gone up north. While I was there I'd sent out a couple of stories and had them accepted. Then, suffering from scurvy and a bad case of being bushed, I moved to an island in the Whiteshell Forest Reserve. There, in Pinawa, the town for the workers of the Pinawa nuclear facility, I taught high school. I kept writing and did a lot of journalism and poetry. One day I was ordering books for the library, and I came across a blurb about author Paul Engle who was the head of the Writers' Workshop at the University of Iowa. After a great deal of agonizing, I sent a batch of poetry to him. I never really expected to hear from him. I wasn't at all certain that he or the University of Iowa existed. In seven or eight weeks, I got a reply from George Starbuck saying that he had made arrangements for me to come to Iowa to take the MFA program, and, as well, he'd gotten me a half-time teaching position. I quit my job the same day."

[29] W. P. Kinsella, interview with the author, Iowa City, April 19, 1979.

[30] W. P. Kinsella, letter to the author, March 28, 1982.

[31] Hugh Cook, interview with the author, Iowa City, May 5, 1982.

[32] Douglas Glover, telephone conversation with the author, September 14, 1982.
[33] W. D. Valgardson, letter to the author, April 24, 1979.
[34] Mark Jarman, letter to the author, September 9, 1982.
[35] Rick Hillis, letter to the author, July 10, 1983.

A CRACK IN THE CEILING—

R. F. G. Harding

that crack there over
there just a crack in the ceiling
over shadows of broken moulding
and peeling plaster, to a cobweb
in the corniced corner
a spider
on a single thread, trapezing
no should I
or shouldn't I
with the drop beneath

a cry
Over wrinkled sheets
through shadows
out of sight
into the cornered darkness
my back pressing
hard against the solid
wall outside the wandering
circle of an eye

with the snap of a Light
getting up
that familiar
in the mirror, the face
put out for the world
and seeing a hair
insidious in the lamplight.
Shall I be a witch?

MENTORS

Clark Blaise

I BEGAN TO WRITE FROM A DESIRE to impress my experiences on the obvious blank understanding of my fellow undergraduates at Denison University. I had known a time and place in America — the deep South in the late 1940's — that was already history. I had been let out of school to watch Klan floggings, cross-burnings, and lynchings. I had attended segregated schools, and I had seen alligators, manatees, mountain lions, chain gangs, gar fish, mudfish, sharecroppers, and I had attended schools with morons and half-wits, been doused with delousing powders, had my feet swabbed with carbolic acid for hookworms and my hair shaved for ring worm. I'd run away from encampments of Seminole Indians who were not out to sell blankets or wrestle gators, and I'd seen my father, beaten to a pulp by three town marshalls under the direction of a court order, as our little factory was stolen from us.

In the beginning, then, I thought of myself purely as a Southern writer on the basis of five potent years in my life — ages six through ten — spent in the swamplands and hamlets of north-central Florida. Faulkner was my guide; his language, his evocation of doom, of age, of the implacable determinants of race, class, and history. My small world fit perfectly in the Yoknapatawpha legend; I had seen all the same types, gone to schools with them, seen the towns with their statues to the Confederate dead, been dismissed from school for Confederate Memorial Day and Jefferson Davis' Birthday, and listened to my teachers' rapturous litanies on the sins, lineage, and unspeakable practices of the archvillain, Abraham Lincoln. We'd been given little Confederate flags at school so we could line the streets of Leesburg at night, cheering the unmasked parade of the Klan, and the motorcade they led, as it proceeded to Venetian Gardens, a doubleheader, and the crowning of the Watermelon Queen. Where are you now, Dollise Beard, Watermelon Queen of 1948, Senior at Leesburg High?

And like a child out of Faulkner, or Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, or Willie Morris, I had roamed woods, fished, played, and slumbered in the midst of a tropical torpor that was also a tropical maelstrom. I remember years, it seems now, of retiring to a screened-in porch with nothing but a Coke and the radio

playing "The Game of the Day" from somewhere up north, but I also recall the furies of Florida: hurricanes, the scream of a mountain-lion, the thrashing of a gator just under a rotten pier, the braiding of water moccasins in my path. I remember trailing an enormous woodpecker so deep into cypress swamps that I was knee-deep in warm water with no path out, and the bird — maybe a classifiably extinct Ivory-Billed, or maybe only a Pilated — was tapping above me while gators whistled nearby and deer could be heard plunging into deeper water that seemed to surround me.

I understood those favourite words of Faulkner, and I used them myself: *deep, beyond, further.* It was Faulkner, to his glory, Faulkner the divine and sometimes tangled rhetorician, who had the extraordinary faith to title a story simply and forever, "Was."

Those were a few of the realities I wanted to convey to my suburban-bred mid-western classmates at Denison University. That I might look like them, sound like them, behave imperfectly like them, but that I shared nothing of their experience, outlook, values, or ambitions. For the first three or four years that I wrote, I considered myself nothing more than a Southerner, and if the truth dare be told, nothing less than Faulkner's heir.

"Write what you know," the instructors teach, but the better instructors know that the process is far more devious than that. If we *know* it, chances are it's too boring to write. Grace Paley has amended the truism somewhat: "write what you don't know about what you know," and that comes closer, for it takes us back into Faulkner's dark caverns of *beyond, deeper,* and *ago.* If we wrote only what we knew, and showed and never told, our writing would be crippled of authority (emphasis on the first two syllables). What I *knew,* at the age of twenty, was suburban life in Pittsburgh in the mid-fifties; I knew it cold. I knew the retail trade in furniture, paper routes, baseball, the charms and terrors of women, astronomy, archaeology, and gobs of facts in geography. (It would take five years before I composed those elements in a story, "Grids and Doglegs"; if I had tried it as an undergraduate — and probably I did — it would have come out like warm, flat soda water.)

We are talking of alchemy. Taking the facts, the common language, the world and characters we know, and transforming them into something never before seen, hitherto unknown, and forever fresh. (Do you know what's wrong with that sentence, the Faulknerite in me asks? It's that last word, "fresh." Not wrong because of meaning, but wrong because of rhythm. "Never before seen" is a phrase of five syllables, as is "hitherto unknown" and I must find a two-syllable synonym for "fresh" to balance the scales of "forever." But I also like the alliteration. "Fragrant?" Or a good Faulknerian "fecund"?) Forever fertile.

Denison has a professor of English, a poet, and a great teacher of poets and fiction writers by the name of Paul Bennett. He gave me a "B" in my senior

year advanced fiction class, so he's no push-over. He also gave me an "A—" in my first writing course in my sophomore year, when I was a struggling Geology major, otherwise doing poorly. He has in common with all great handlers of young talent (I'm thinking specifically of certain baseball coaches, movie directors, and finally, any teacher, any parent) the qualities of faith and patience. Yes, he taught us to write what we knew about, and to write clearly and to show, not tell, but he also emphasized trusting ourselves, trusting our story, pushing beyond what we knew into the realms of discovery. His patience rewarded me with a career: I wrote bad poems, bad character sketches (pure *Readers' Digest* stuff), bad stories about men-in-liferafts, and Western shoot-outs, and then one last story at the end of the course, a story called "Broward Dowdy" which excited him. It was the reason he taught: to see the emergence of talent, to be there when it started to happen. But I was still a Geology student, and I thought I was going to transfer to Pitt — my parents had just started their divorce, and the money for an expensive school like Denison had dried up. But the divorce dragged on and my father was solvent for one more year and I returned to Denison for a third year, bottoming out at the end of the first semester, dropping out for a semester and returning for a senior year, after a summer in Chicago, as an English major and as a writing student. In the two years remaining to me at Denison, I vowed to read a book every day and did so; I started a book-reviewing column for the weekly paper, co-edited the two literary magazines on campus, and published my stories and poems in them. Three years later, when I was married and living as a graduate student in Iowa, "Broward Dowdy" became my first story accepted by a national magazine, and I put it at the head of my second book of stories, fifteen years after writing it.

WHEN I GRADUATED IN 1961, after winning the various campus writing prizes which I also judged (this was in a politically innocent era), with stories so swampy they should have been sprayed, I went on to the summer writing class of Bernard Malamud, at Harvard. I needed validation — Denison was fine and Paul Bennett is a great man — *so far as they went* — the question was, how far did they go? There was only one way to find out, perilous as that way might be. There were hundreds of Denisons out there, and thousands of campus hotshots; but there was only one Malamud, one Harvard, and only ten places in his class.

The luckiest move in my writing-life was the acceptance to Malamud's class. Pure luck — I've had some good breaks since, but I like to think my credentials at least softened the odds — this first one was luck. Malamud was coming to Harvard from Oregon; the ten slots in his class were already chosen by readers

in the Harvard English Department. Who knows what criteria — but Harvard and Harvard Square is never lacking for dozens of young Updikes and hundreds of young Thomas Wolfes, talents and egos abounding. Fortunately, I hadn't known the course was closed weeks before I'd even sent in my deposit, and my story. Fortunately, it was Bernard Malamud teaching and not some other (at the time) reasonably obscure immortal looking for a well-paid summer vacation in the heart of genteel academia. I went to the English office in Warren House, after hitch-hiking in from Pittsburgh. "Oh, that course was closed weeks ago," the secretary told me. "Is there a waiting list?" I asked, "I sent in my manuscript as soon as I heard Malamud was teaching —" I must have thought that even having heard of Malamud, let alone having read him from the heart of Baptist America, was evidence of sufficient grace to insure admission. To the two of us at Denison who had read Malamud and engaged in a frantic search to uncover the elusive first novel after having devoured *The Assistant* and *The Magic Barrel*, he was the greatest writer in America. I had never seen, let alone met, a "real" writer.

"You can go up and ask him," she suggested.

He's there? I can ask him? It was, I should stress, a different era. Those of us from the provinces had never seen an author we truly admired. I was terrified and I walked around Warren House so many times I was afraid he'd sneak out before I could rehearse my presentation. Finally I confronted myself: you borrowed a hundred dollars for the course. You hitched here. You have a friend in Belmont Hill who's putting you up. You've told yourself you're going to be a writer. Face him, you idiot. Your life is over, here and now, if you can't take his course.

This is your moment of truth, Blaise.

He was seated at the end of a long room. The bookcases were empty but for shoeboxes and stacks of manuscripts, thick bundles bitten by rubber bands. (*That's* a nice little phrase.) There were more stacks on his desk. He was not particularly smiling or welcoming. He said, "I asked them to send me the manuscripts in Oregon, but instead they made the selections. That's not fair to the people who submitted in good faith. Find yours up there and give it to me."

"It's just this story," I said — I'd brought a second copy, razored from our Denison campus magazine. The catalogue hadn't mentioned thousand-page novels as a minimum consideration. "Come to the first class tomorrow, Blaise. I can't promise you're in, only that I'll read it."

I wrote two more very Southern stories for that class. All that Malamud had seen of my work, in fact, were stories with such heavy southern dialogue that I felt absurd reading them aloud in class. There was something of an imposture about me; feeling myself Canadian more than American (the divorce had opened up the floodgates of an urgent nostalgia; I was hitchhiking on all long

weekends up to Quebec City from Belmont Hill), and obviously sounding like any other college-bred Easterner. I was writing scenes that Erskine Caldwell would shun. And the class was as expected: bright, ambitious, and accomplished (at least four others that I'm aware of have gone on to establish writing careers). I was a little embarrassed by my material in that Ivy League, half high-WASP, half-Jewish setting, and I felt the disapproval of my classmates, if not of the teacher. It's so easy to appear the buffoon when you follow your illiterate young characters down a swamp on a gar-hunt, or when idiot brother rapes nympho sister while out gigging frogs. My classmates were writing *European*-set stories, love-affair stories, abortion stories, even Africa stories, and they were submitting *chapters*, not stories. Or they were turning out high-powered intellectual farces and fantasies that echoed Barth and pre-figured Pynchon, Heller, and Vonnegut. The big book of those in the know was Gaddis' *The Recognitions*. Harvard was the big time, all right; the overflow of the next-ten rejectees from Malamud's course was being taught by John Hawkes, just down the hall. At Malamud's prompting, I read *The Lime Twig*, and everything earlier. So: it was possible to keep the rhythms of Faulkner, the rhetoric and incantations of voice, and get rid of that inauthentic Southern material. I rejoiced.

That was the terror I faced. I wanted to write, and life itself had given me a boost by smearing me in the paste of a memorable Southern childhood. But it was an accident. Those memories were a shopping list, and I was quickly exhausting the menu of available experience. Then what? Be a Pittsburgh suburbanite? And so I wrote one very strange story for Malamud that summer; a typically over-ambitious piece of incomprehensible (also Faulknerian) monologue of a senile Canadian doctor, remembering and living (in his hospital bed) his heroic service during the Influenza Epidemic of 1919, while (in searing irony!) he is really an 85-year-old whimpering husk soiling his sheets in a Winnipeg hospital. My grandfather, obviously. At the very least, it was a change of material, though of course (as Malamud pointed out), I had scrambled a good story and a strong character for the dubious pleasures of sophomoric experimentation. Of all the things to lift from Faulkner, I had to choose the Benjy monologue.

Malamud's instructions are as simple as the universal reader demands and as complicated as the most ambitious author expects: focus on character, make every act, every detail, dramatic. Fiction dramatizes the multifarious adventures of the human heart — advice that we young Barthists (we'd all read *The Sot-Weed Factor* and *The End of the Road*) and Gaddisites probably associated with the death of literature. That was Dickensian! We wanted the clean lines and sharp edges of Modernism, we'd been raised on irony, juxtaposition, and every conceivable complication of structure. On days when we didn't provide stories of our own, Malamud introduced us to Isaac Babel, Flannery O'Connor, Hemingway, James, Moravia. He read us stories — well-received ones by name-

less contemporaries — and asked us to think twice before admiring such clever tricks, such facile manipulations. If a name was mentioned in class, by teacher or student, that I hadn't read — a simple enough event in those days, despite the two years of book-a-day reading — I'd have it read twice before the next class.

THE MENTORS THAT LAST in our lives are those who do not press a case, do not try to shape, or inflate; do not lust for miniatures of themselves, or even try to leave much of an impression at all. They are anything but charismatic (I have known many inspirational writing-teachers in my day); they teach by their tolerance and their conviction. They are calm, even serene, in that reconciliation of tolerance and authority, and, I think, they have one other great quality. Malamud, as a reader, as a teacher, and as a writer, takes *delight*; there is no other way of putting it. It was possible to *delight* this man, to see his eyes, mouth, brow suddenly dance over a sentence, a word, an idea. Oh, it is possible to enrage a teacher, to infuriate or to embitter him or her, and many teachers make their point by great shows of anger and fury, or of scathing wit and sustained comedy; only the rarest, I think, instruct by an almost private show of delight.

When the summer school ended and Malamud went on to begin his career at Bennington (odd to think he was forty-seven that summer, so old and powerful and socketed in eternity to me at the time, and how quickly I'm closing on that age now), I stayed back in Boston, getting a job in a bookstore and taking an apartment with one of the wilder members of the summer class. I stayed with the job all winter, thinking I could remain out of university and somehow in the flow of that thing called "life" (we were in the American butt end of existentialism, after all), working just enough hours to finance my writing. As for living, I'd leave that to my apartment-mate. I hitched up to Bennington to visit Malamud one weekend; he came down to Harvard one afternoon while I was working, found the stack of his recently issued novel, *A New Life*, signed them, and as the manager came running over, he pointed to the books and said, "A deposit on Blaise's freedom for the afternoon. Let's beat it." And there I was, on a cool fall day in Harvard Square, walking with the writer I most admired (and still do), answering as best I could *his* questions about me: what did I intend to do with my life? Was I working? Was I happy? What could he do to help?

I do remember, one evening after work in the bookstore, slipping into the Lamont Library, taking out a new notebook and writing a story, "How I Became a Jew" that was literally a transitional story between South and North, as well as a tribute to Malamud. In one sitting; shades of Thomas Wolfe! I had started a novel, "The French and Jewish War," about my parents and I suppose

about myself and twisted loyalties, and most of it was set in Canada. I would be writing it a year later, in Iowa, after the most momentous year in my life. I vomited the night on Dubuque Street in Iowa City when I read through those two hundred typed yellow pages with the big inked number at the top of every page (my God, *me*, at one hundred! At two hundred!!) and then unclipped the pages from the binder I had bought on the first day of Malamud's class at the Harvard Coop, marched outside in the cold, lifted the lid of my garbage can, and ripped it into shreds.

GREEN VIOLENCE

Mary di Michele

For a beautiful evening alone on an avenue
bordered with nothing but trees
standing sentinel,
all grass, each gutter, mined
with the essence of horsechestnut,
a smooth brown nut, warm as cognac,
encased in its green violence.

Some brave squirrels have been at them,
not deterred by this hedgehog
of seeds. Scattered everywhere,
hollowed prickly pods
and random pieces, apparently sliced,
wedges of lime rind,
the fruit gone where? into belly of coon
or rodent, into shit at the roots.

I've known wind to play
one leaf more than another,
a left handed melody
not composed by nuns,
that mossy stone of the pubis,
its music stand.

Horsechestnuts bombard their green
comets against concrete.
I want their vegetable sex,
in capsules, mapped, but arcane
as illustrations for subatomic particles,
the meiotic explosion for which the world
is loved.

A monarch, an autumn leaf,
garnered by flight,
glides higher than all branches,
that life, like an aspen leaf,
can play itself
without the urgings of air,
is true.

A sinking sun soft-pedals a last
cool but colourful kiss,
horsechestnuts in the hand
darkly ringed as mature trees.

"GENERAL LUDD":

A Satire on Decadence

Keith Garebian

IN THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER OF *General Ludd*, a satire on a writer's solitary, somewhat crazy battle against the forces of cultural destruction, Metcalf's protagonist turns increasingly vehement. Jim Wells, a middle-aged poet who is writer-in-residence at St. Xavier's, a Jesuit university in Montreal, upbraids one of his creative writing students, Itzic Zemermann, a paraplegic Holocaust survivor who has exploited his Jewishness with nauseatingly bad taste. Zemermann has used liberal guilt expertly in the cause of his own sanctification as a Holocaust poet, but his dactylic doggerel, replete with outmoded diction and bathetic imagery, finally acts as a detonator to Wells' angry irony. After quoting Wordsworth and Yeats on the character of poetry as "the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge," and "the chief voice of the conscience,"[1] Wells recites two quatrains from Auden's elegy for Yeats, in which time is bestowed with a godly power to forgive every human weakness except one — bad literary style:

> Time that is intolerant
> Of the brave and innocent
> And indifferent in a week
> To a beautiful physique
>
> Worships language and forgives
> Everyone by whom it lives;
> Pardons cowardice, conceit,
> Lays its honours at their feet.

George Steiner has found "something strangely disturbing, even distasteful in the fact" that Time worships language and while not caring about the poet's content, pays great care to the manner in which this content is expressed.[2] But Auden's broad concern was with weapons against frustrating and passionately stupid destructiveness of human seriousness, and it is this concern that so enflames Wells with radical fervour that he goes on to discourse on the terrible incongruity between matter and form that is at the heart of bad writing. Wells

particularizes his argument by citing the fraudulence of Zemermann's poetry, which in betraying language to gibberish, also betrays the honourable subjects of poetry. So vehement is Wells' vituperative criticism that Zemermann, who had previously merely feigned a heart attack in Chapter 11, is eventually killed by the passionate attack.

It is a climactic moment of black comedy for several reasons. Coming as it does in the second half of an ever-deepening and darkening fiction, it has the cumulative effect of a volcanic eruption although it is set in a banal environment in which degrees of reality are continually at odds with one another, and in which the mundane indecorously penetrates even the most solemn of events, as in the case Wells later calls to mind of the Queen's horse staling at the Trooping of the Colour. As Wells and Zemermann are engaged in their struggle-to-the-death in Wells' office next to a frequently flushing urinal, "a gross chorus-line" of "puffing professors in their coloured suits" perform clumsy exercises in the field below. This conjunction of the vulgarly profane and the artistically rarefied points up the refreshingly irreverent nature of Metcalf's humour, which sharpens itself at the expense of existential confusion about the real. The two ideological battlers are relatively cocooned in the office, where they indulge in their duel of words as the external world continues to unfold with cheap, sleazy, or banal indifference to their intense clash. Moreover, the intersection of the absurd fringes of Wells' consciousness with his core of passionate but rational rhetoric heightens the credibility of Wells as a character in Metcalf's fiction. But the greatest comedy of the moment is also its bleakest, because in projecting himself as a latter-day Ned Ludd, the prankster-quipster Wells kills with words and becomes an ironic fulfilment of his own desire to be like his anarchic hero, vehemently against the currents of the modern technological age.

As this scene makes eminently clear, Metcalf deploys parody to great effect, provoking us into a recognition of literary codes, destroying his *bêtes noires* by ridicule or abuse, and forcing his way to a new accommodation with reality. That this reality is, in truth, a parody of the real is itself a wonderful final comic irony, and Metcalf uses fiction's mirrors like an expert, showing an age its own grimaces, japes, and follies with witty grace. As satire, *General Ludd* flourishes with a self-conscious moral impulse, and battens itself on an ultimately cheerful pessimism that Céline might have envied.

Once again using a teacher as his protagonist — as he had done in his first novel, *Going Down Slow* (1972) — Metcalf aims his barbs against a general cultural movement or condition of life that has deteriorated into middle-class vulgarity, smugness, fraudulence, and corruption. Metcalf is not aiming only at behemoths of technological progress — his analogues for Ned Ludd's forces of industrialization — but at an entire tainted and paralyzed aspect of civilization. His work is a satire on decadence — not in the hieratic sense that came into

fashion with Baudelaire, Gautier, and Huysmans, and was later turned into a dandified style by Wilde and Pater — but in the sense of a falling down, or a falling into an inferior condition, which would be the root Latin denotation of the word (decadere). The modern world, against which Wells often tilts like a drunken Don Quixote, is not a victim of an inexorable process of decay (if it were, nothing would make any difference — not even parody or irony), but an agent of its own calamity. "Decadence" here is a suitable word to describe a malady that has several manifestations: a gross insensitivity to the spirit of language; the pursuit of technological advancement at the cost of taste; the exploitation of facile sentiment at the price of truth and sincerity; a capitulation to the mass will of dunces; the democratization and, hence, the dilution of culture. It is a decadence that Voltaire had in mind in the eighteenth century when he lamented the erosion of good taste, and it is the type Proudhon spoke of a hundred years later when he marked its accelerated pace: "Conscience, intelligence, character, all perish within it."[3] But it is not a decadence posited in the light of an ideal fiction — say, that of classical culture in an image of purity or pristine vigour — for although Wells alludes to eminent writers, musicians, and painters from the past, he does not sanctify time, except in its capacity to ennoble the living present.

THE MYTH OF PROGRESS is what fuels Wells' pessimistic fury, because he equates this progress with a cultural decline. The very first chapter strikes the keynote of cultural criticism for its opening sentence is a clichéd motto, the scene of a reception in Wells' honour is a social and cultural set-piece, and the setting and characters in this induction establish Wells as an outsider being patronized unwillingly by those who appear to be a parody of a cultural élite. The theme of decadence is established from the narrator's opening words in the Faculty Club: "They are, I thought sadly, what they eat." A cliché from an age of rock poetry, health food, and consciousness-raising by drugs. Yet note the fare: "sullen coleslaw," "the usual unripe Brie and Camembert and goaty stuff past its prime and stuff wrapped in withered leaves and stuff tainted with nasty herbs." The plates are paper, the knives and forks plastic. The wine is Canadian — all of it — and all of it has reached room temperature: "Warm duck." The punch-line appears as a separate two-word paragraph — an instance of Metcalf's strategic use of paragraphing for comic effect. But jokes aside, the didactic intent is serious: nothing in this induction ceremony shows a concern for integrity. The very setting has fallen into a low standard. A once small Catholic liberal arts college (obviously a version of the Loyola campus of Concordia University) has grown big, and on its once gracious grounds now squat

"the concrete bunkers of new disciplines." The miscellaneous characters are all academics of diverse eccentricities and failings. The Reverend Father who makes the welcoming speech in honour of Wells obviously has not read any of the guest's poetry. The Chairman can't find a desk for Wells' office. There is a "zoo aspect" to the entire proceedings, but while Wells feels that he is the one on view, he has his satiric revenge by caricaturing his audience with pornographic relish, especially as he directs his piercing gaze at Julia Hetherington, who wears a Chrysler hub-cap as a pin for her shawl, or at Dr. Gamahuche, the Renaissance man, whose name is an obscure sexual joke, or at the feminist Mary Merton, and the pederastic Professor Malcolm. The atmosphere is slightly raw as Frederick Lindseer, assistant professor, becomes "pissed to the gills" and decries the prospect of "thirty-fucking-eight" more years talking about "Thomas fucking Wolfe." The collection of characters is a motley of manners, generally devoid of dignity, often petty or malicious, fluctuating according to the feelings and notions of each individual. The teaching faculty have nothing much in common, except, perhaps, a sour attitude towards one another. Caught in this mixed collection and disgusted at having to be patronized by people who barely tolerate him, Wells becomes increasingly vulgar in diction and thought, parodying his hosts, ridiculing them by clichés and vacuous platitudes, and nipping slyly at the hands that feed him. He relishes the joke on the initials of the Communication Arts Complex — utter CAC in his eyes! — and Fred Lindseer's befuddled parody of scholastic syllogistic argument, and when he is told of the dynamics of the system — marking procedures, the Women's Drop-In Centre, Cosimo O'Gorman's gospel of Communication Arts — he subtly implies the Luddite motif, for the question that formulates itself by the end of this chapter is how to have standards of excellence and integrity in an age of machines that turn us all into cogs of one great combine. All machinery affects Wells with "glazed boredom," and when people explain machinery to him, the boredom changes to hysteria and physical pain.

The Luddite motif grows explicit in the next chapter, set a week after the opening scene, where Wells takes us into his private life and his seedy living-quarters near old buildings in the process of being demolished in preparation for high-rises. Wells has to share a "leprous bathroom" and his wardrobe reminds him of "an upended coffin or sarcophagus." The associations of decay, demolition, and death are all united to the Luddite theme, for it is machines, after all, that smash down old buildings and reduce the landscape to a diseased spectacle. It isn't long before Wells begins to read a history of the Luddite movement, and although he expresses a faint disappointment with the Luddites for their interest in higher wages, he admires the general tenor and thrust of General Ludd, who becomes his model of rebellion.

Yet Metcalf does not give us a grimly serious cacotopian satire. His penchant for parody pushes him into absurd comedy where his narrator jokes about his own decadent writing. At work on a thriller set in Ottawa, he dreams up a ridiculous plot and set of characters, wierdly mixing Proust with Canadian writers such as Purdy and Hood, the KGB and the Bolshoi Ballet, the RCMP and the Canada Council. The central character is an Englishman, Commander Swann, who runs the Canada Council as a front for Canadian Counter-Intelligence. He is the Third Man in the Burgess and Maclean Affair — not Kim Philby, as many believe — and is actually a top Soviet Agent, a ferocious homosexual, and drinks after-shave lotion. In a stirring dénouement, Swann is trampled to death during the RCMP Musical Ride at the Calgary Stampede.

THOSE WHO WOULD OBJECT to the apparently nonchalant way in which Wells concocts this absurd story while at the same time mocking the thinness of Canadian culture, lose sight of an important point. Wells is a struggling writer, at the sour end of a failed marriage, and his financial problems spur him into a venture that, if successful, would guarantee his literary and economic survival. Besides, Wells' irony is often turned in on himself, and Wells becomes disgusted at his own failures and his dependence on the patronage of society. At the public reading in Chapter 3, where he is exposed to the gadgetry, gimmickry, and tomfoolery of the Communication Arts students, he shows us not only his disgust at his audience, but also a mordant self-disgust. Sick at having had to become a media personality, he is carried to a pitch of angry frustration which culminates in his impatient insulting of the female "Hardy of the Remedial Team" whose awful jargon ("Mod Coms in Listening Skills"; "a *natural* interpersonal interchange") causes him to lose his temper. The decadence of language here is especially ironic because it works within the university, supposedly the bastion and guardian of cultural standards.

Although possessed of gaiety, impudence, wit, and spirit, Wells suffers as much from his own conscience as he does from the impurities of Canadian society. At first he certainly appears to protest the world too much. Nothing he sees in Canadian culture generates his praise. Everything is deprecated as rubbish or paralysis — right from souvenirs (toy mounties, toy seals, key-rings, vibrators, and dildoes embossed with scarlet maple leaves) to the habits of the general populace: "I wasn't ready to admit once more that I lived in a country in which there was not one good book store, a country in which every half hour millions of radios informed the inhabitants whether it was hot or raining, a country where the unconscious desire of most citizens is to see from coast to shining coast one uninterrupted shopping mall." He is that typical paradox — a middle-class per-

son who is hostile to the middle-class, for although he says, "I love the middle class," the phrase is offered as an ironic counterpoint to his true feeling. We infer that this aversion accounted in large measure for the failure of his marriage to Marjorie, a former art student who had succumbed to "some atavistic demand for chintz furniture and life-insurance." Indeed, his Luddism first erupted during this marriage when he once smashed the television because she refused to turn it off while he was reading Robert Graves. As Kathy, his present girlfriend, remarks to him later, although his writing can be sensitive, he himself sometimes isn't.

Wells has an underlying sadness to his anger and recrimination. The memory of his deceased friend, the suicidal poet John Caverly, whose business papers, credit cards, and final handwritten poem he carries around as relics, turns his thoughts to decline and death. As his mood dips and he broods on "mutability, the infinite variety of life's rich pageant, the sadness of the young in one another's arms," he checks his own "mawkish maundering," and steps out into "startling sunshine." This controlled modulation maintains a psychological balance in his character and deepens his credibility, for Wells is evidently aware of his own foibles and failings, although he is sometimes too drunk to help himself. Yet his "Floating World" of drunkenness gives him images, settings, and characters he would never experience when sober, and when drunk, he's not maudlin but bitterly disgusted and parodic. As a writer he has a tough problem: how to obtain a genuine literary identity when his country has no cultural identity. A meditation on this problem yields a series of jokes and a parody of Canadianness:

> We're invisible to ourselves and to the larger world because we have no stereotypes. Even Australians have the distinction of being universally deplored.
>
> The whole world knows what happens when a beautiful woman is shipwrecked on a desert island with an Englishman, a Frenchman, and an American. The only activity credible for a Canadian in their company would be standing on guard as a one-man peace-keeping force.

There is, of course, intense cynicism at the heart of his humour, as indicated by his later explanation to two visiting Russian writers of the dynamics of Canadian literary culture.

Even within the broad comic terms of the first half of the book, which is much lighter than the second half, Wells is a fully fleshed character. We are informed of his history of pranks, the physical scar left as a relic of his heavy drinking, and the ever-present threat of writer's block. Although he has acquired a literary reputation for "ironic grace," he suffers from real pain and nausea, and though he is a man of ingeniously witty similes, limericks, and quips by which he is able to juxtapose his critical sense against the object of his scorn and condemnation, he is a slightly mad Jeremiah, full of biblical analogies, who, in his quasi-madness is suitably aligned with Ned Ludd, in Chapter 8 with Sir Edwin Landseer (who

was deranged for the last four years of his life), and in Chapter 9 with Christopher Smart (who was incarcerated in the bin for two years). The big lump of quartz glittering with iron pyrites in Kathy's apartment is his emblem of delusion. It is "fool's gold" that only a fool would put trust in. The significance is not lost on him. The three consuming passions of his life appear to be writing, drinking, and loving — though not necessarily in that order. Each of the three gets in the way of the others, and while Kathy is confused by his behaviour and upset by his tendency towards violence, he is confused about her. The irony is that the "Department Bicycle," as she is snidely called by Fred Lindseer, is the one responsible for his positive change in attitude toward women in general.

Wells changes in love as he grows in wisdom, and so he is hardly a stereotypical neo-Luddite. In fact, he stands in direct opposition to people such as Hans Gruber who sneers at the past (represented by the nineteenth-century Landseer steel engraving, "Stag at Bay"); Wells likes the engraving which Gruber dismisses as the sign of a dead century. Wells' sympathy is with the Robinsons of the world — the librarians who struggle to preserve books. Yet he is not like Henry Benson, a diehard traditionalist, for whom culture and teaching end with the previous century. Rather, he is calibrated to time and is distanced from his public and society by his special vocation.

Wells' flourishing consciousness of his culture is a serious act, but it is given a diverting mode of parody which, in addition to being hugely entertaining in its games with diction and caricature, is a narrative strategy aimed at providing a sense of life and contingency. The parody touches a wide range of subjects — pop rock (the Blue Men at The Show Bar), nightclub cabaret (Ora Felony and Kingo), academic jargon (the Communication Arts curriculum guide), and semi-aphasic journalistic utterance (the Montreal *Herald*'s Entertainments man) — and it demonstrates the energetic, mimetic power of Wells, whose very daydreams often fabricate fanciful allegorical parodies of aspects of reality. Such is the case with his daydream of *The Slaughter of the Prepuce*, an imagined painting in "a stiff, neo-classical style like the worst of David," where a larger-than-life Centurion is poised to slice the end of the Naked Babe's "winkie" to the great distress of Weeping Mother and beseeching Father. Such is also the case with his parody of private life in a Jesuit residence, where his animosity bubbles.

THE CORNERSTONE OF METCALF'S PARODY, however, lies in the representations of Cosimo O'Gorman and Itzic Zemermann, two exemplars of cultural debasement. I have already discussed Zemermann's case, but what remains to be said is that his visits to Wells harden into a ritual that is unsettling for the protagonist but uproarious to the reader. Zemermann, who comes out

of an overwhelming Jewish background, writes excruciating rhymes that sentimentalize his suffering as a Holocaust survivor, and no matter what patient or diplomatic criticism Wells offers, he always manages to make his instructor feel like "a latter-day member of an *Einsatzgruppe*." He arouses in Wells "exasperation and rampant guilt." Wells' sympathy and shame struggle with anger and reason, and the genuine horror of Zemermann's life makes Wells feel more and more dishonoured by weakness. Metcalf takes pains to establish his satirical sincerity about the subject. He does not make inordinately cruel fun of Zemermann, but satirizes and isolates the facile trick this injustice-collector plays on weak-kneed, guilt-ridden liberals. Wells' ultimate justification for rage at Zemermann's expense is, of course, both literary and moral, for as he declares to Zemermann prior to the latter's feigned heart attack: "I care about what happened too. I care very much. And because I care, I care about the way people write about it. . . . these horrors *demand* the best writing possible. Not 'songs.' Not 'shepherds.' Anything less than your best betrays the truth of what happened. You can't approach mass murder carried out by the state with the language of Palgrave's Golden Treasury." Metcalf never takes Wells too seriously not to laugh at his occasional fumbling, stumbling inability to engage in lucid logical arguments, but he invests his conviction about the worst aspects of the modern world in Wells' character and allows his hero to develop the view of Zemermann's unreal photo world or paraworld.

However, Zemermann is not the only great target. Cosimo O'Gorman, the Vidigoth, also exemplifies the forces of cultural barbarism because his gospel of progress dishonours tradition and the past, anticipates a paradisal future, and makes of the present a tangible expression of bourgeois smugness and complacency. For the Luddites, progress in its most fundamental or material sense was the legatee of the industrial revolution. For O'Gorman, progress is synonymous with sophisticated innovations in audio-visual equipment. His Dome has the name, mass, and splendour that put us in mind of an ultra-modern Xanadu, and Control Centre is "something of a Holy of Holies," to which students are permitted only in their final year of study. O'Gorman, whose names suggest two ethnic mafias (Irish and Italian), propagandizes an aesthetic that sounds like a blatant parody of McLuhan:

> 'TV and video are, of course, the offspring of the film but the parent form has nothing now to teach us. One might, quite properly I think, describe the offspring less as offspring than as *mutants*. The editing techniques of film are not applicable to the video world. We edit in camera. We live in the spontaneous moment. What *is* and our apprehension of it are a single and simultaneous act. . . . The overriding virtue of video is that it has *no aesthetic value whatsoever*.'

Yet, he also sounds at times like a mixture of Eliot and the Bible:

'The progress of the medium is irreversible, unimaginable. We are at a new birth! A cold coming we had of it, umm? umm? Cable!'

. . . . . .

'Everything in this building, everything you've so far seen,' he said, his voice fallen almost to a whisper, 'is an irrelevance. A political expedience. Chaff which the wind driveth away. An expedience necessary to attain that vision. Only here. Only here within the Dome . . .'

His voice trailed away.

He sat in silence for a few moments.

I heard him sigh.

Suddenly he said in a strong voice,

'O sing unto the Lord a new song.'

Although O'Gorman is sometimes as tedious as Shakespeare's Polonius in his enthusiastic catalogue of delights ("We're equipped to record studio-live, off-air, film sync, cassette-to-cassette, cassette-to-reel, reel-to-cassette, reel-to-reel, video-cassette-to-cassette, video-reel-to-video-cassette, video-reel-to-video-reel, reel-to-video-to-video"), he is more dangerously a Vidigoth with scorn for the "high arts" and the past:

'What are the "high arts,"' he said quietly, 'what are literature, opera, painting, orchestras, ballet — what are they but the vestigial traces of another world? Rituals still performed whose significance has been long forgotten. There is a gulf between us and that world, and a grief between that world and what we *shall* become, a gulf as wide as that which now separates us from prehistoric man.'

In his visionary fervour that breeds a utopian world "in instant communication each part with another, a world of linguistic barriers overturned, a visual world accessible to all men, a world wired to God's Eternal Will," O'Gorman recognizes his Dome as a second apocalyptic tower — a "Babel rebuilt." However, he is totally blind to the ironic implications of his own symbolism. In *Genesis*: 11, Babel is the catalytic cause of human confusion and dispersion, for when Yahweh punishes its builders, He sends linguistic confusion into their lives, which causes them to split up and be scattered widely about the earth. Yet O'Gorman believes that his Dome/Babel will produce a unified language, race, and will. He obviously does not recognize the extent to which his narcissistic technical jargon has already divided him from others who are outside a comprehension of modern technology.

O'Gorman tries to build a new world with machines and heavy words, and he is parodied in the process. But Wells is himself a semanticist who uses language in its sophisticated and vulgar modes in order to control his attack on the forces that destroy culture. Yet his word-play is not narcissistic, for it is directed outwardly with a moral impulsion towards a new way of life and language, just as serious and valid a synthesis as the forms it mockingly attempts to surpass. His mixture of diction, colloquialism, and special sophistication ("pissed to the gills"

and "grunge" mixing with "alembic," "steatopygic," and "faience") shows his involvement in an impure world of which he is a perennial cultural critic. When he is offended by pompousness or circumlocution (as in the case of the tortuously polite Hetherington or the jargon-clogged Vidigoths), Wells resorts to direct bluntness. But even when he indulges in spurts of locker-room humour or well-timed quips, he is never far from a serious meditation on the valid and invalid assumptions of language. In the bygone company of John Caverly, he had mused on the deterioration of meaning in words such as "royalties" and "free-lance" but only as a melancholy counterpoint to the mundane facts of his existence as a writer:

> 'Royalties.'
> 'Free-lance.'
> Wonderful words. A knight riding out on a white steed gaily caparisoned. A May morning. An illumination from a Book of Hours. But the hours and years don't work out that way. There's little of nobility in hack editing, newspaper work, reviewing, ghostwriting the autobiography of an insane Alberta meat-packer as I did. That illuminated pathway of red and white roses intertwined leads inexorably to Grub Street.

Wells' lively literary sensibility always makes us aware of his power to use varied textures, but these are not self-indulgent displays of empty virtuosity; they are immanent and functional within the text, and come close to equating language with active life. He captures perfectly the muted tone and coarse texture of rural life with Kathy in a stone-house (Chapter 12), and his sketch of an average Canadian town (restaurants, cinema, main street, and beyond that the bush) is devastatingly accurate. But all this detail is neither a pastoral interlude, nor a satiric diversion; it is Wells' apologia for his self-righteous fury, irony, and inebriation, which often bewilder and embarrass Kathy in public. Aware of his image as a poet who observes "a bleak and desolate landscape" with "ironic grace," he parodies this image for Kathy, yet exercises an intensely poetic self while humouring her with gentle self-mockery. His sense of parody is then given full play at the Show Bar and the orgasmic act of Kingo the black drummer, Miss Ora Felony, and her snake. His mind hums with rational associations and even so banal a thing as frozen french fries generates a fanciful symbolic elaboration because they are McCain's or "the Mark of Cain. And I think fig trees being blasted down came into it somewhere."

The Pleasure Dome scene with Cosimo O'Gorman creates a symphony of sly disapproval by strategic grunts and sighs. Wells' allusions to writers from Shakespeare, Faulkner, and Firbank to Auden, Yeats, Milton, and Cervantes, make a strong, if oblique, case for what we have lost in "dignity, clarity, cadences." His senses of parody and satire, which sometimes break out violently, are, as Kathy realizes, not just ideas or intellectual positions; they are things he really

feels. Like de Tocqueville, whom he invokes for having been the first reputable critic of the North American blunting of discriminating mind, his verbal and non-verbal violences are a dangerous feeling or conviction about real and imagined threats to his society in particular and to civilization in general. So when he engages in a lampoon of Cosimo the Vidigoth or of Canada as "a spiritual K-Mart," it is because he senses the Second Coming in Yeats' portentous vision and hears with hypersensitive antennae the vague beast slouching towards Bethlehem.

THE SECOND HALF OF THE NOVEL has two intertwined spirals — one moving downward for Wells, as the other carries the plot to its upshot. Amid the minor comedy of eccentricity — Professor Malcolm and his catamites, Professor Niddling's talks to his filing cabinets — the small irritants still remain and grow worse: an old hymn degenerated into vulgar commercial lyrics; an unintelligible traffic signal; Hetherington's spastic politeness; the hauntingly bland presence of *Reader's Digest*. But the inner tensions build for him. In a trough of disillusionment over O'Gorman's Babel and the New Jerusalem, which are really Valhalla to Wells, his thoughts turn to death and destructive madness. Kathy's inability to understand the deep-seated reasons for his rage combines with his self-disgust at having to play a public Court Jester for the university and an incredulous host to two visiting Russian writers. Wells experiences the abyss of despair. He determines to smash the Dome, but first steals an IBM Selectric from the English department as his memorial to Caverly, proving in the bargain that his anarchy is never purposeless or irrational. His "madness" is anticipated by delirium tremens in Chapter 10. Lamenting the historical and cultural poverty of Canada, and aware that he is irremediably aging just as time is catching up with his creativity, Wells becomes the very incarnation of Ned Ludd, especially when his hysteria mounts at Alexis Nihon Plaza, where he fantasizes how joyous it would be "to see grim men in fatigues advancing down the walks smashing in the glass, herding out the dazed consumers, tossing grenades into the boutiques of embroidered jeans, into the Krazy Kitchen Korner with its electric knives, gas-powered-wine-cork-removers, microwave hot-dog-warmers, and digital-egg-timers, how joyous the raging of molotov cocktails amongst the Gucci and Pucci." This fantasy is converted into a different reality when, after his ritualistic homage to Caverly via the purchase of all the remaindered copies of *Collected Poems*, a communion rite with wine, and a pyre for his dead friend's final poem, he decides that General Ludd will launch Operation Plumbicon, by an infiltration of the Communication Arts Centre, in order to "smash the buggery out of all of Cosimo's little toys."

As the beast slouches nearer, in a shape that is no longer difficult to guess,

Wells reiterates, tongue-in-cheek, the melancholy of decadence: "What a falling off there's been! When Byron published *Childe Harold*, Lady Caroline Lamb sent him a letter with clippings of her pubic hair. What do *I* get? Letters from Mr. Archambault of the Taxation Data Centre. That's what I get. And threats from his bully-boy — a Ms. Thing of the Civil Litigation Section of the Department of Justice."

Worse than this pessimism, however, is a nagging doubt about the ultimate value of his devotion to language and literature. The lines he had once quoted from Auden's elegy for Yeats resurface during his funereal ritual for Caverly, and he wonders why Auden cut some verses out in his revised Collected Shorter Poems in 1965. Did Auden think they were a bit doggerel, or that the syntax was scrambled, or that there was an awkward near-rhyme in one stanza? Or, more achingly, that by 1965 did he no longer believe in what he'd written about time's forgiveness of everything except bad style? The same agonizing doubt lives at the end of Wells' story. He never achieves his violent goal of destroying the Dome, for Kathy, after informing on him to the authorities, hits him on the head with the lump of quartz. The resulting blackout, his straitjacketed convalescence in hospital, and Kathy's tearful confession convince him that he's suffering from "a head full of fool's gold."

The ending is subtly comic. There are broad touches, of course, in the doctors' recklessly technical language — decadence again! — and in the medical and psychological tests, magazines with graffitti, and his backfiring frivolity. But there are dark notes as well, when Wells discovers to his chagrin that he is in a no-win situation. The mood seems to repeat Ken Kesey's paranoid frustration from *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest*, but Metcalf does not deliver anything as supremely melodramatic as Chief Bromden's Herculean escape feat. Instead he uncovers Wells' deliberate delusiveness, showing that his hero fears a cure, preferring to remain somewhat deluded in order to better fight his chivalrous battle against civilization's real or imagined enemies. This ending, which significantly comes shortly before a new spring, is, perhaps, a twist of our assumptions about madness and sanity. In some ways, Metcalf implies as Wells had done in an earlier chapter, that "Don Quixote was not only a nobler character than Sancho Panza but, in the ways that matter, saner." Although there is much that is impure about Wells' reactionism, there is also an irreproachable core in his soul, and it is a core that he allows us to see repeatedly in the book, especially when he thinks of Faulkner's remark about the "Ode on a Grecian Urn" being worth any number of old ladies. The quotation is also his opportunity to declare: "I'm sorry if I sound pompous to you, Kathy, but language matters more than most things. And poetry just happens to matter one hell of a lot to me." It matters enough to turn him into a killer of Zemermann, a fantastic Luddite, a drunken Don Quixote tilting at the whole world wired to decadence.

NOTES

[1] John Metcalf, *General Ludd* (Downsview, Ontario: ECW Press, 1980), p. 236. All subsequent references are to this edition.

[2] George Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 451.

[3] Richard Gilman, *Decadence: The Strange Life of an Epithet* (New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 1979), p. 75.

UNCHOSEN

Phil Hall

The back townships acquiesce in the rain,

Verulam, Somerville, Blythe,

Devitt's Settlement, Lamb's School,
Burys Green,

the stone-piles obscured in nets of downpour,

each rock in a net-hole the water defines
as it filters around it to the ground,

each rock hand-picked,
called a dead star.

In one farmhouse a child screams
at the rain because it will not stop
distinguishing his family from Noah's,

screams, unchosen, at the chosen stones
no one will get through.

Halted —
the net-strands muddle
sure dust,

the child listens to himself breathe.

He will never come back here,
no matter what.

THE ARTIST AS HISTORIAN

George Amabile

for George Morrissette

Dust. A street, nearly
white in the sun. The sky
burns, blue and sullen.

If you can see
this, where are you?
What are you doing?
How can you feel?

Even the wind that lifts
a hot curl
of powder and wallops the board
advertising
BEER 15¢
even this wind has lost
its mind in your own.

Tumbleweed. The river
brown as a burned
god goes on
as it did before
they gave it a name
or a history. The air
tide pulls up
and sighs. The mind
of the wind sweats
through your hatband.

If you belonged
here, could you
sing? You stand
on the silvered boards, hands
in your jeans, your eyes
tight against
the merciless light.

To stay here, to begin
again, to own
these wide streets
for the price
of a late model car . . .

You step down
into the unused
thoroughfare, the screech
of the cracked saloon
sign fading
as it comes
to rest in your head:
it's a find, forty miles
from the city, a hell
of a buy. You sit
on the board
sidewalk. *Mine*
you think, *my own*
rules. They'll pay me
to live in their dangerous
past and restore
it room by room.

You hear the click
of scaly feet on the dead
wood behind you.

A burnished rooster
struts across your road.

IN HALIBURTON'S NOVA SCOTIA:

"The Old Judge or Life in a Colony"

Katherine Morrison

THOMAS CHANDLER HALIBURTON was the most famous writer in nineteenth-century British North America. In spite of his renown the book that many modern scholars consider Haliburton's finest, *The Old Judge or Life in a Colony* (1849), is almost unknown, neglected in its day because of the absence of the author's popular comic character, the Yankee pedlar Sam Slick. Twentieth-century lack of interest in Haliburton's works rests upon three assumptions: Sam Slick is no longer very amusing; Haliburton's right-wing Tory views are offensive to modern readers; and Haliburton's writings are not in the mainstream of Canada's literary tradition. Few would disagree with the first of these, but the second and third need to be examined in light of *The Old Judge*. This book shows aspects of Haliburton and his art which are not present in his other works.

Most of the stories in *The Old Judge* are told by Judge Sandford, Haliburton's serious and thoughtful persona. An English visitor, as narrator, and Lawyer Barclay, an additional story teller, maintain and extend the Judge's point-of-view during their travels through Nova Scotia. The Judge's reminiscences integrate the past with the observations of the travellers in a unified colonial setting. The three are educated, astute, and share their author's Tory sympathies.

The famous Sam Slick of the Clockmaker series was used by Haliburton to satirize the Yankees and to reprove the Nova Scotians for laziness and presumption. The strength of Sam as a caricature of an American obscured his relevance to the colony and its people. Such a memorable statement as, "the free and enlightened citizens [of the United States] . . . fairly take the shine off creation; they are actilly equal to cash,"[1] tells us something of Haliburton's attitude toward the Americans, nothing about Nova Scotia. Sam could not articulate the author's social ideals nor provide deep insights into colonial life or history. There are a number of comic characters in *The Old Judge*, but none has a multiplicity of functions like the overburdened Sam Slick.

The Old Judge was not published in Canada until 1968 and then only in an abridged edition.[2] In his Introduction, R. E. Watters took issue with Robert L. McDougall, who argued that Canadian humour is "mild" and did not take form until the end of the nineteenth century. Because of the slashing satire of Sam Slick, he said, "Haliburton is not conspicuously related to the mainstream of our [Canadian] literary traditions."[3] Watters found "a needed corrective" in *The Old Judge*, where the three narrators reveal "a complex, ironic subjectivity of which Sam Slick was quite incapable," but which foreshadows characters of Stephen Leacock and Robertson Davies.[4] Professor Watters is not entirely convincing, because the "humorist" he sees in the author of *The Old Judge* appears incongruous with the ever-present Tory polemicist. Unfortunately, this abridged edition of the book cut out two important authorial roles. At last an unabridged edition arrived in late 1978, bringing its many-sided author into full view.[5] The humorist and Tory polemicist are augmented by a compassionate paternalist and a patriot eager to preserve the Nova Scotian past. In addition, Fred Cogswell found "an unsuspected facet of romantic feeling and talents of a high order for serious fiction."[6] In *The Old Judge* Haliburton used all of his skills as an author in the service of a central message: the Loyalist ideals should not be rejected and forgotten in favour of a more "American" and democratic society.

Haliburton was familiar with the prevailing ideals of the United States and wanted no part of them in Nova Scotia. Jefferson's famous words to Madison, "'*that the earth belongs in usufruct to the living*': that the dead have neither powers nor rights over it," was never "self-evident" to Haliburton or his compatriots.[7] The concept of a new and morally superior nation, which was free of a feudal past, had wide popularity in the United States of the early nineteenth century. R. W. B. Lewis' study, *The American Adam*, describes its great appeal and profound effect on American writing from 1820 to 1860: "the image contrived to embody the most fruitful contemporary ideas was that of the authentic American as a figure of heroic innocence and vast potentialities, poised at the start of a new history."[8]

Jefferson's statement means that the institutions of the past are escapable. Haliburton's American contemporary, Ralph Waldo Emerson, went much further, arguing that all human institutions are suspect. Emerson's dislike of society stemmed from a pantheistic philosophy which saw nature as the connection between man and the transcendent, while institutions were a barrier. He called society a "joint-stock company," which "everywhere is in conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members," while "we rest [in] . . . that great nature . . . as the earth lies in the soft arms of the atmosphere." In nature "no history, or church, or state, is interpolated on the divine sky and the immortal year."[9] Henry David Thoreau was practising Emerson's ideal at Walden Pond about the same time that Haliburton was writing *The Old Judge*. To be alone with nature

was to the American Transcendentalists the ultimate security, while danger and corruption lurked in the institutions of man. Nature in *The Old Judge*, though often beautiful, can suddenly metamorphose into a killer. Northrop Frye has recognized "a tone of deep terror in regard to nature" as recurrent in Canadian literature.[10]

Haliburton must have found these Americans naïve. We can imagine his answering Jefferson on the past and Emerson on society with Burke's words that the social contract is "a partnership not only between those who are living, but between those who are living, those who are dead and those who are to be born."[11] In *The Old Judge* he stressed the often disastrous consequences of attempts to shed the past or to live in isolation, both stemming from a disdain for communalism and glorification of the individual: "alas," he said, "man in America is made for himself."[12]

Haliburton, while he admired American efficiency and inventiveness, wanted a community-based and hierarchically structured society, firmly in that eighteenth-century tradition which rested upon centuries of faith in a Great Chain of Being. He was a latter-day Augustan, spiritually akin to Samuel Johnson. Haliburton expressed a Burkean faith in a sense of tradition as the basis for keeping those in authority wise and responsible. His satiric barbs, directed at irresponsibility in the upper-classes and insubordination among the lower, suggest that *noblesse oblige*, a valued part of those Loyalist ideals, must be kept alive and healthy.

The stories in *The Old Judge* derive from the tales, legends, and fragments of history collected by Haliburton during his many years of riding circuit as lawyer or judge. The first is a ribald tale and the last a supernatural, both set in the past and told by the Judge. In between lies a broad range of comic, tragic, and mysterious stories — plus brief reports on history, government, and local custom — all dealing with life in Nova Scotia from the first European settlement to the 1840's. The intracolonial setting and the author's politics are overshadowed by his sense of a noble, though turbulent, past. The present, Haliburton told his readers with a mixture of anger and sadness, was moving inexorably toward "democracy" and "social equality."

By the time he wrote *The Old Judge* Haliburton probably realized that his desired social structure would never prove acceptable in a land where the poorest immigrant had reason to hope that he might soon become a landowner. Judge Sandford claims membership in "the good old Tory party, the best, the truest, the most attached and loyal subjects her Majesty ever had. . . . There are only a few of them now surviving, and they are old and infirm men, with shattered constitutions and broken hearts . . . doomed to inevitable martyrdom." The elegiac note merges with the author's still undiminished powers as a humorist.

In spite of his commitment to the British Empire, Haliburton was not an unquestioning Anglophile. In *The Old Judge* he spoke with bitterness of a British

tendency to denigrate colonials. Both an effete aristocracy and the levelling and socially fragmenting tendencies of the United States were to be resisted. The very act of writing *The Old Judge* indicates how eager Haliburton was to defend, extol, and preserve the traditions and history of his native Nova Scotia. It was an outpost of Empire, which he wished to see governed with the accumulated wisdom of British history.

THREE TALES NEAR THE BEGINNING OF *The Old Judge* present Judge Sandford as a Johnsonian social critic. "Asking a Governor to Dine," "A Ball at Government House," and "The Old Admiral and the Old General" make such extensive use of the dinner party and ball as a setting for situational irony and didactic humour that they evoke Jane Austen's writings. In addition, there is the common theme of wise-versus-foolish governing and the presence in all of Governor Hercules Sampson. This good-natured man's effectiveness is weakened by the requirement that he treat everyone as an equal. He is the "Old General" of the last of the three stories, whose frustrating position is contrasted to that of the "Old Admiral" where naval traditions permit no such nonsense. Haliburton, probably contemplating that favourite eighteenth-century concept, "the ship of state," made the case that the colony would be better off if viewed as a ship and "governed" by a "captain" than by its present inefficient, semi-democratic machinery.

The situation is presented in microcosm in "Asking a Governor to Dine." Captain Jones, the only navy man at a dinner party given by a wealthy merchant for Governor Sampson, arrives late. "He was dressed in an old shabby frock-coat with a pair of tarnished epaulettes, his hands bore testimony to their familiarity with the rigging, and he had not submitted himself to a barber for two days, at least." Governor Sampson's arrogant young aide-de-camp, the Honourable Mr. Trotz, makes an audible comment on the strange-looking guest:

> "Pray," said Trotz . . . to his neighbour, but loud enough to be distinctly heard, "who is that old quiz? Is he a colonist?"
>
> "Captain Jones, of H.M. ship Thunderer, sir; very much at your service!" said the sailor with a very unmistakable air and tone.
>
> Trotz quailed. It was evident that, though a good shot, he preferred a target to an antagonist, and wanted bottom. True courage is too noble a quality to be associated with swaggering and insolent airs.

Trotz, who appears again in "A Ball at Government House," represents the decadent aspects of aristocracy, where irresponsible behaviour weakens the traditional hierarchy and encourages the trend toward social and political equality. Captain Jones' rough exterior counters a widespread belief that persons of authority in hierarchical societies do not work, but live on the energies of their

underlings. Haliburton, by showing the inability of someone like Trotz to stand up to a man like Captain Jones, is saying that those who are courageous, hard-working, responsible, and intelligent do, in fact, rise to the top. Trotz is a travesty of *noblesse oblige*; Captain Jones its fulfilment.

In "The Old Admiral and the Old General," Governor Sampson envies the Admiral for having "'no turbulent House of Assembly to plague him.'" The Admiral "is not altogether able to understand [the legislature] . . . whose remonstrances look very like mutiny to him, and always suggest the idea of arrest and court-martial." These two highest officials in the colony have "each their little empire to rule. The one is a despotic and the other a constitutional monarch."

> "The Admiral is a plain, unaffected man, with a frank and cordial manner, somewhat positive in his language. . . . He is always popular, for he converses so freely and affably with everyone. . . .
>
> "The old General is erect and formal, and is compelled to be ceremonious. . . . He is . . . afraid to commit himself by promises or opinions, and . . . shelters himself behind generalities. . . . The one, therefore, naturally and unconsciously wins the good-will of people and the other labours to conciliate it."

The Admiral, a larger edition of Captain Jones, "converses . . . freely," while the General, "compelled to be ceremonious," is unable to perform effectively as Governor of Nova Scotia.

By describing their entertainments, Haliburton strengthens his position with dramatic irony. A typical party of the General's, "A Ball at Government House," is a huge and heterogeneous assemblage of people. "Sir Hercules, with great good humour" attempts a conversation:

> "'Do you play?'
>
> "'I never touch cards, sir. . . .'
>
> "'Perhaps you would like to hear some music? If so, Lady Sampson will have great pleasure in playing for you.'
>
> "'For *me*! Oh, dear, no — not for the world. I couldn't think of it for *me*, sir.'
>
> "'What a pity it is there is no theatre at Halifax.'
>
> "'Yes, sir — very, sir — for them as sees no harm in 'em, sir — yes, sir.'

At the other end of the social scale we have the female counterpart of the Honourable Mr. Trotz. A social climber instructs a young girl:

> "'I will introduce [Captain Beech and Lieutenant Birch] to you; they are both well connected and have capital interest. Take my arm, but don't look at those country members, dear, and then you won't have to cut them, for Sir Hercules don't like that. . . . Keep close to me, now, and I'll take you among the right set. . . .'"

The Admiral never has such entertainments; his training and experience forbid toadying and self-serving. He chooses his guests without regard to local politics:

> People are expected to speak above a whisper, or they cannot be heard, and to be at home, or they cannot be agreeable. The dinner itself has . . . a higher seasoning, . . . while the forbidden onion lurks stealthily concealed under the gravy. . . . The conversation, also, is unlike that at the palace. . . . You hear nothing of the Merrygomish Bridge, the election at Port Medway, or the alteration of the road at Aspatangon, to which the Governor is compelled to listen, and, at each repetition, appear as much interested as ever.

The Governor is now "compelled to listen." Presumably he is also compelled to retain the services of Mr. Trotz, whom the Admiral, like Captain Jones, would dispose of summarily.

There is a sharp contrast between the petty materialism and parochial "pork-barrelling" of the General's guests and the wide-ranging interests of the Admiral's. The intensity of the social irony in these three stories shows an author deeply concerned with the source and wielding of political power.

TWO STORIES WHICH SHOW HALIBURTON in a more overtly serious vein, concerned with the human need for a sense of community, are "The Lone House" and the two-part "Horse-Shoe Cove; or, Hufeisen Bucht." Both highlight Haliburton's preoccupation with the effect of the past on the living; both reveal his "anti-Emersonian" attitude toward nature.

The introduction to "Horse-Shoe Cove" is a succinct expression of Haliburton's moral outrage at the individualistic trend in North America:

> There are no hamlets, no little rural villages. . . . No system of landlord and tenant, or farmer and cotter, and, consequently, no motive or duty to protect and encourage on the one hand, or to conciliate and sustain on the other. No material difference in rank or fortune . . . and hence no means to direct or even to influence opinion; and, above all, no unity in religious belief; and, therefore, no one temple in which they can all worship together, and offer up their united prayers and thanksgivings as members of one great family to their common Father in Heaven.

The Judge's "good-old" Toryism is spelled out in this quotation, stressing the religious basis he believed to be necessary to a viable community. His disapproval of these tendencies to leave home and dwell in isolation does not, however, include the spearheading of a new settlement:

> Follow any new road into the wilderness, and you will find a family settled there, miles and miles from any house. But imagination soon fills up the intervening space with a dense population, and you see them in the midst of a well-cultivated country, and enjoying all the blessings of a civilized community. They are merely pioneers.[13]

The events at Horse-Shoe Cove illustrate the dangers inherent in real isolation. This is layered history, where successive occupants — Indian, French, German,

and British — of a beautiful cove are haunted by "ghosts" of former inhabitants. These ghosts succeed in evicting the trespassers, suggesting that the dead have not only rights but also power over the living. The American concept of a "virgin land" without predecessors is implicitly, but strongly, denied.[14]

A German named Nicholas Spohr, exploring south of Lunenberg, finds a cove, "concealed by two hooded promontories, that gave to the Cove a striking resemblance to a horse-shoe." "Hooded" sounds an ominous note countering the good-luck implied by the horse-shoe. There were forty cleared acres, buildings of hewn timbers, a large bell, a neglected orchard and garden, a spring, and a rustic table with "Pierre and Madeline, 1740" and two clasped hands carved into the corner. These clasped hands are an extended ironic symbol in this tale of banishment.

Nicholas lays a claim and moves his family to this beautiful estate, where he begins to fancy himself a landed gentleman and ceases to do much work. Indians arrive to bury a deceased chief in their ancient burial-ground. They look upon him as an intruder and temporarily mar his joy. The stress on Nicholas' "happiness" in his unearned wealth suggests that Haliburton may have been implicitly critical of Jefferson's "pursuit of happiness" as a human right. Later, Nicholas returns from Halifax to find his wife and children slaughtered and scalped. He had cut trees in the Indian burial-ground to sell for cord-wood and to open his estate to the admiring gaze of travellers. In "prostrating these ancient trees, he had unintentionally committed sacrilege, and violated the repose of the dead — an offence that, in all countries and in all ages, has ever been regarded with pious horror or implacable resentment."

Nature provides an illusion of happiness to the ill-fated Nicholas Spohr, who thinks of Horse-Shoe Cove as "a world of wonders." He returns in the full splendour of autumn to discover his slaughtered family:

> He had never beheld anything like this in his own country.... [H]ere death was cruel as well as impatient, and, like a consumptive fever, beautified its victim with hectic colour before it destroyed it.... When he entered the little placid Cove, which lay glittering like a lake of molten silver beneath the gaze of the declining sun, he was startled at beholding his house reversed and suspended far and deep in its pellucid bosom, and the trees growing downwards with their umbrageous branches or pointed tops, and all so clear, so distinct, and perfect, as to appear to be capable of corporeal touch. And yet, strange to say, far below the house, and the trees, and other earthly objects, was the clear, blue sky with its light, fleecy clouds that floated slowly through its transparent atmosphere, while the eagle was distinctly visible soaring in unrestrained liberty in the subterranean heavens.

Haliburton intended close links between this scene of magnificence and the grisly spectacle awaiting.

Losing his reason, Nicholas dies on the graves of his wife and children, becoming a ghost to the local inhabitants. The Cove is now a terrifyingly haunted place, where Indians bury their dead with strange incantations and rotting timbers

expose the bell which tolls on windy nights. The first alien inhabitants to be evicted from the Cove were the French; Nicholas and his family become the next.

The second part of the story occurs a generation later. A Captain John Smith arrives with the Loyalists, buys and renovates Horse-Shoe Cove, but finds himself isolated for the local German inhabitants fear and resent him as an intruder and magician. When a young indentured servant runs to the nearest town and charges Smith with the murder of a pedlar, the jury convicts him in spite of a lack of evidence. Smith escapes and hides until the remains of the pedlar and a bear are found. Though he is now exonerated, joy in Horse-Shoe Cove is gone and the Smiths depart for England; the third to be driven forth.

The Indians and Germans of this story appear to be an extension of nature: human society in prescriptively controlled communities. An intruder is never welcomed by such a society, but is usually tolerated until perceived to do violence to the group's customs or beliefs. Neither Nicholas nor Captain Smith was guilty of any wrongdoing according to those who look upon man as an individual free to discard his past and inherited institutions. According to Haliburton, however, by leaving the protection and moral support of his own community, each wanderer brought his troubles on himself.

The conclusion stresses Haliburton's strong sense of the past:

> The land comprised within the grant of poor Nicholas Spohr . . . remained derelict for many years; but as it was covered with valuable timber, cupidity in time proved stronger than superstition. . . . The story of Nicholas and Captain Smith is only known to a few old men like myself, and will soon be lost altogether, in a country where there is no one likely to found a romance on the inmates and incidents of the "Hufeisen Bucht."

Judge Sandford is once more the martyred old Tory dying of a broken heart, but he makes a valid point by suggesting that the land has again been violated. The cupidity that disdained respect for the Indians' sacred ground is paralleled by a shortsightedness which fails to preserve the community's history. It cannot see beyond possession of the land by the living.

THE LENT FAMILY of "The Lone House" provides a different illustration of the sad consequences of human isolation, for here there are no former inhabitants. The family dwells upon a desolate spot near the Atlantic coast, surrounded by "enormous bogs . . . in an undulating country of granite formation." There is enough soil to sustain only one family and the government and nearest neighbours provide a small subsidy for maintaining a way-station and possible haven on a barren stretch of the coastal road. There was a benevolent motive in the Lents' decision to settle here and provide a much-needed

service, but man "was not made to live alone; . . . natural wants, individual weakness, and common protection require that, though we live in families, our families must dwell in communities."

John Lent, the husband and father, is caught in a blizzard, frozen in a sitting position, returned to his family by the mailman, and left unburied with his widow and little girls. Again Haliburton casts nature as a seductive yet dangerous beauty, for the Judge is reminded of this grim story as the narrators admire an ice storm:

> There had been . . . a slight thaw accompanied by a cold fine rain that froze . . . into ice of the purest crystal. Every deciduous tree was covered with this glittering coating, and looked in the distance like an enormous though graceful bunch of feathers; while on a nearer approach, it resembled . . . a dazzling chandelier. The open fields . . . glistened in the sun as if thickly strewed with the largest diamonds; and every rail of the wooden fences . . . was decorated with a delicate fringe of pendant ice, that radiated like burnished silver. . . . The . . . rays of the sun . . . invested them with all the hues of the prism. It was a scene as impossible to describe as to forget, . . . and its effects are as well appreciated as its beauty. The farmer foresees . . . serious injury to his orchard, the woodsman a pitiless pelting of ice, . . . the huntsman a barrier to his sport, and the traveller an omen of hard and severe weather; and yet such was the glory of the landscape, that every heart felt its magic.

There is no pantheism here. This Burkean concept of the Sublime is one more aspect of *The Old Judge* which identifies Haliburton with Canada's literary tradition.

The bereaved widow of John Lent temporarily loses her reason but the outcome of "The Lone House" is a contrast to that of "Horse-Shoe Cove," for here the survivors are not driven away. God, plus the spirit of her dead husband, provide the widow with a mystical community to hold her to her lonely outpost. She is possessed, not rejected, by the land:

> God had never failed them. . . . She . . . and her children had been fed in the wilderness, like the chosen people of the Lord. . . . It would be ungrateful and distrustful in her to leave a place He had selected for her. . . . And, besides, she said, there is my old man; his visits now are dearer to me than ever; he was once my companion — he is now my guardian angel. I cannot and will not forsake him while I live; and when it is God's will that I depart hence, I hope to be laid beside him, who, alive or dead, has never suffered this poor dwelling to be to me a "Lone House."

The widow, a responsible member of the Family of Man, continues her husband's work of succouring the traveller and providing a haven for the shipwrecked mariner. Haliburton paid a moving tribute to the strength of woman, who "successfully resists afflictions that overpower the vigour and appal the courage of man." He is all patriotism and compassion in this story; no humorist or outraged Tory is in evidence.

The Old Judge is like an ancient treasure chest into which a few have glanced, but whose gems have not been carefully examined. Among these are comic characters comparable to Leacock's best and enough tales of the supernatural to suggest that the Canadian literary tradition has a plentiful supply of ghosts. It is said that Haliburton left us only one book of such high quality, for there are indications near the end of *The Old Judge* that he planned to continue writing stories about life in a colony. Professor Watters believes that he would have done so had he received any encouragement from his readers. He did not. Haliburton bowed to his public and returned to Sam Slick: an overworked parody of an American, who successfully turned *The Old Judge* into "a *forgotten* masterpiece."[15]

NOTES

[1] Thomas Chandler Haliburton, *The Clockmaker* (First Series) (1871 rpt.; Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1958), p. 71.

[2] Thomas Chandler Haliburton, *The Old Judge or Life in a Colony*, ed. R. E. Watters (Toronto, Vancouver: Clarke, Irwin, 1968).

[3] Robert L. McDougall, "Thomas Chandler Haliburton," *Our Living Tradition*, Second and Third Series, published in association with Carleton University by University of Toronto Press, 1959, pp. 3-30; reprinted in *On Thomas Chandler Haliburton*, ed. R. A. Davies (Ottawa: Tecumseh, 1979), pp. 200-01.

[4] Watters, p. xi-xviii.

[5] Thomas Chandler Haliburton, *The Old Judge or Life in a Colony* (1860 rpt., Ottawa: Tecumseh, 1978); further references to this work are to this edition.

[6] Fred Cogswell, "Haliburton," *Literary History of Canada*, ed. C. F. Klinck (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965), p. 100.

[7] Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, September 6, 1789; reprinted in *The Portable Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Merril D. Peterson (New York: Penguin, 1977), p. 445.

[8] R. W. B. Lewis, *The American Adam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), p. 1. The most obvious exception to Lewis' generalization is Nathaniel Hawthorne, who treated the past as evil and oppressive to the present. In *The Marble Faun* (1860), he spoke of Italy as a place where "the weary and dreary Past [is] . . . piled upon the back of the Present," and compared it to his own "fortunate land, [where] each generation has only its own sins and sorrows to bear."

[9] *Essays by Ralph Waldo Emerson*, First and Second Series (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1951), pp. 35, 189, 381.

[10] Northrop Frye, "Conclusion," *Literary History*, p. 830.

[11] Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France and Other Writings* (1907; rpt., London: Oxford Unversity Press, 1958), p. 106.

[12] The best treatment of the individualist theme in American literature can be found in Quentin Anderson, *The Imperial Self* (New York: Vintage Books, 1971).

[13] Haliburton was not disparaging the pioneers, for he was undoubtedly using the word "merely" in the now uncommon meaning of "pure" or "unmixed."

[14] Henry Nash Smith, in his classic study of American frontier literature, *Virgin Land* (New York: Vintage Books, 1957), said that "one of the most persistent generalizations concerning American life and character is the notion that our society has been shaped by the pull of a *vacant* continent" (p. 3, emphasis added).

[15] Watters, p. vii (emphasis added).

THERE ARE LIMITS

L. Crozier

He has a present for me,
something he caught
this morning in Echo Lake.
I think of the lure,
the dead eyes.
A fish? I ask.
Better than that, he replies,
pulling from his pocket
a piece of glass
shaped like a fish.

It is a dream
the glass had.
He presses it into my palm,
tells me he'll stop
thinking of me now.
He has reeled in
his line, the fish
is made of glass.
Life is not what we thought,
there are limits
to loving.

I hang the glass
by a thread in my window.
It turns and turns
tangling the sunlight,
echoes of fish
flicker on the walls.

This is better than a word,
better than a promise.
There are limits to giving.

"CANADA MADE ME" AND CANADIAN AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Ira Bruce Nadel

EVER SINCE ITS PUBLICATION in England nearly twenty-five years ago, *Canada Made Me* by Norman Levine has been excluded from the mainstream of Canadian letters. Underrated as a literary work and misrepresented as a travel book, *Canada Made Me* has not been understood for what it is: a striking Canadian autobiography sharing similar themes, literary motifs, and structural features with several other major Canadian autobiographies. Common to all these works are the theme of exile, the motif of the journey, and the structural exploration of time. Two additional features, however, highlight *Canada Made Me* as a significant work: it is the pivotal text in the progress of Norman Levine as a writer and, at the same time, extends a pattern of twentieth-century autobiographical writing — expressed most clearly in the work of George Orwell and Henry Miller — to Canadian literature.

But is there a modern tradition of Canadian autobiographical writing? The *Literary History of Canada* refers implicitly to one when it describes various autobiographies as characterized by "a practical grasp of outward reality rather than any inward illumination" which offer "more of historical or social than literary interest."[1] Examples include Susanna Moodie's *Roughing It in the Bush*, Nellie McClung's *Clearing in the West* or Stephen Leacock's *The Boy I Left Behind Me*. Three autobiographies that contradict this tradition, however, and form an evolving pattern of critical, anti-conventional lives are John Glassco's *Memoirs of Montparnasse*, Frederick Philip Grove's *In Search of Myself* and Norman Levine's *Canada Made Me*.[2] Collectively, they share parallel themes, styles, and images that establish important literary and psychological features. What cannot be overlooked in the reading of Canadian autobiography, as these three books make clear, is that regardless of the focus, setting, or career of the subject, every text is an "inquiry of the self into its own origin and history."[3]

Essentially, what links the autobiographies of Glassco, Grove, and Levine is their sense of exile. Glassco feels it as a budding writer in Canada and promptly leaves for France in 1927. Grove experiences a double exile his entire life in the country, first as an immigrant and then as a writer. As a Jew, Levine encounters exile from the age of five, but believes he can escape it living in a "pleasantly anonymous" fashion in England where he emigrates in 1949. Yet, it is this very sense of alienation that is responsible for the autobiographical impulse and the energy of the writing in the three works. Indeed, the idea of exile transforms the texts into narratives of revelation and prevents them from becoming mere chronicles of events.

Only by leaving Montreal in the late twenties could John Glassco find the freedom to be creative, uninhibited by the implied and experienced limitations of Canadian life. In France he had no need to defend his artistic interests. Glassco conveys this exuberant freedom in the novelistic style of his autobiography which emphasizes in a fictional form the experience, not the record, of his life in Paris. The frequent use of dialogue and dramatized scenes intensify his testament to art and youth. The continual *joie de vivre*, however, is possible only because of his disaffection from Canada; in France he can identify with a bohemian, artistic, unconventional life. Attachment to the unorthodox and to the role of the outsider is a persistent theme in the autobiographies of Glassco, Grove, and Levine, although a certain paradox emerges: the desire by all three writers to be accepted and recognized by the very society they reject. The idea of rebellion, however, infuses *Memoirs of Montparnasse* with a special energy and zest.

Accompanying the idea of rebellion is a dream of artistic freedom, a dream shared by all three autobiographers. In the last chapter of *Memoirs*, written in 1933, Glassco says to his travelling companion and friend Graeme Taylor, "I should have come back to Canada with you as another distressed Canadian." But as Glassco knows, he could not because he was "in love with a dream of excellence and beauty, one that does not exist anywhere in real life" but at least had some form in Paris.[5] Love, freedom, friendship, and informality — these are the elements of Glassco's dream that shape his account.

In Paris where a careless freedom directed his life, Glassco could realize his dreams. In Canada where a lack of readership and recognition imprisoned him, Frederick Philip Grove could not. For Grove, his dream became a nightmare of indifference and alienation transforming the artist from a gay creator to an "impotent rebel."[6] *In Search of Myself* narrates the emasculation of the artist, disillusioned by the inability to survive as a writer, a theme Levine will later adopt. The failure of the artist becomes the single theme of Grove's autobiography, a work he calls "the story of MY LIFE AS A WRITER IN CANADA." In contrast to Glassco who is the autobiographer as hero, Grove is the autobiographer as victim. Levine will be the autobiographer as survivor.

In Grove's autobiography the nemesis is poverty. He resents the country that does not allow him the leisure to write and he anticipates Levine in criticizing Canada for failing to fulfil its promise of a future. "The mere mechanics of making a livelihood, by a conspiracy of circumstance" prevent him from creating. Consequently, his autobiography is "the record of a failure; and its explanation: a double failure, an economic and a spiritual one, for ultimately, the one involved the other." This focus on money and the debilitating features of poverty were transposed by Glassco into a kind of bonus — in sybaritic Paris no one thought too much about it — but for Grove it shackled his every move. For Levine poverty provides a curious new identity with the immigrant and working class he encounters and confirms what he believes: being poor is the condition of the Canadian artist and symbolizes the larger rejection of the imaginative and artistic by Canadian society.

The fight to survive as an artist for Grove nearly destroys him as he nobly rejects "the eternal average" in pursuit of his art. Because of this condition, even the landscape of the country becomes harsh and unsympathetic as he often records in the text, again anticipating what Levine will also describe. And elaborating the theme of failure, which is crucially shared by the three writers, Grove makes it into the virtual cause of his autobiographical effort: "If I could explain to someone, why I had failed, the explanation might more than compensate for the failure to have made myself heard so far." Whereas Glassco avoided failure by enacting a romance in France and Levine adjusted failure to an ironic vision of Canada, Grove fought to escape it but could not. Accepting his failure, he then had to make it the central feature of his autobiography combining catharsis with example. Exile and alienation is common to all three autobiographies, but the new tone of disillusionment and bitterness introduced by Grove will be developed by Levine who returned to Canada from war service and began to study literature at McGill the year *In Search of Myself* appeared.

SAFELY BUT INCORRECTLY CATEGORIZED as a travel book by the *Literary History of Canada*, *Canada Made Me* is referred to as both "a nightmare" and "a memorable book."[7] This paradox, however, may in part explain the nature of the work and its importance for Canadian autobiography. In 1956 Norman Levine, then living in St. Ives, Cornwall — he emigrated to England in 1949 — had the idea of writing a book on Canada but when no money was available he began to do it imaginatively, creating itineraries, characters, and incidents. But there was, as he wrote, "a need for making the physical journey, I felt the need to make a reconciliation. I didn't want to run away from the country as I had originally. . . ."[8] This desire is not so much for a

reunion but for a re-departure. However, the reconciliation he seeks is within himself and, as the "Author's Note" implies, the work is one of self-engagement in order to eliminate self-estrangement.

The epigraphs to the autobiography, one by Dante and the other by Camus, emphasize the sense of division within the self derived from a separation from place.[9] The Dante reference is especially important because the passage from the *Purgatorio*, Canto 5, is the source of Levine's title and suggests his longing to identify with the world of his past as does the speaker in the poem, the murdered Pia de Tolomei. The choice of *Purgatorio* is also significant in that it represents a middle existence where there is an intense realization of the doubleness of man's life, of identity and division, welcome and rejection. This is precisely the condition of Levine. And as one's knowledge and understanding increases in this state, so, too, does one's solitude, as Levine demonstrates throughout his autobiography. The full title of Dante's poem, a semi-autobiographical journey composed by an exile, also defines more fully the condition of the narrator in *Canada Made Me*. It is "The Comedy of Dante Alighieri, a Florentine by birth but not in character." Transposed, the appositional phrase applies equally well to Levine and his work.

Beginning his journey with a sense of alienation and of exile (as Glassco did and Grove was to discover in his journeys across Canada) provides Levine with the distance and objectivity to make accurate observations while experiencing them internally. Employing the traditional autobiographical structure of retrospection, revisiting and recreating a world he consciously left, Levine gives an account that is objectively valid and subjectively meaningful. The quest of *Canada Made Me* is to discover the meaning of Levine's departure and continued separation while understanding his perplexing attachment to the country. Levine is both the rootless Wandering Jew and the Defender of the Faith. It is not surprising, then, that his first destination when he returns is his home which is also the mythical centre of the country: Ottawa.

From his search to recapture the past, precisely the motive of Glassco in writing his *Memoirs*, Levine attempts to rediscover himself. "To be a writer I had to be an exile" he stated in 1980 but in 1970 he admitted that he went to England to run away from Canada.[10] His 1956 return is not to find the country but himself. Only through writing *Canada Made Me* could Levine begin to accept his past and adjust it to his sense of the present. What he is able to do is unite memory, what he recreates of the past in the various fictional sections, with repetition, what he actually experiences when he revisits the country. As a consequence, his writing after *Canada Made Me* achieved a new directness and impact because he no longer interpreted his Canadian experiences as English and was able to perceive his history and origins more ethnically.

Initially, *Canada Made Me* was to be a travelogue but it quickly became a record of personal self-discovery. Instead of merely recording his responses to the people and places he sees as he travels from Halifax to Ucluelet, he confronts his past through associations forced on him by the immediacy of the surroundings. Whether it is his parents' life in Ottawa, the mining town of Ile-aux-Noix where he worked in the summer of 1948, or Montreal where he had been a student, Levine blends the realism of the immediate with the truth of the past. Flashbacks, superimpositions, and biographies of figures from the past and the present disrupt the linear narrative to create an absorbing text. But when he candidly describes the unhappiness, boredom, desolation, and materialism in the country, he presents an unflattering portrait. No photographs, he remarks, could possibly illustrate the book because the poetry of the country consists entirely "in the advertisements and statistics."

Analyzing his own dislocation and departure from the country, Levine remarks that he left for the sake of change, the lack of any patriotic feeling, the unpleasant reminders of his childhood and the absence of any distinctive culture; "ours is still a mixture of other cultures which hasn't fused into anything separate," he writes. Attracted to the poorer areas of the cities because "they represent failure, and for me failure here has a strong appeal," Levine focuses on the decay of the country and its dismalness as seen in flophouses, mining towns, and bars. Dominating the work is his feeling that he does not belong anywhere and that his natural condition is rootlessness. But the cause of this condition and that of the general decay is the failure of Canada to realize the dream of a golden future and provide a new beginning for its immigrants. For Levine the dream evaporates into a sordid reality, the romance quickly becoming irony. A controversial work because of its critical view, *Canada Made Me* remained unpublished in Canada until 1979, although 500 copies of the English imprint were reluctantly distributed by a Canadian publisher in 1958. The few reviews of the book were hostile. "There is something suspect about, even, the title of this book" begins the notice in the *Tamarack Review*, while the *Times Literary Supplement* titled its review "The Seamy Side," noting the author's desire to satisfy "an appetite for violent sensations."[11]

BUT "CANADA MADE ME" HAS NOT ONLY Canadian predecessors but also international ones. Three influential models are George Orwell's *Down and Out in Paris and London* and *The Road to Wigan Pier*, and Henry Miller's *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare*. In tone, subject matter and theme, these works parallel Levine's book. With their focus on poverty, the hardships of immigrants, and the power of materialism to destroy the imaginative life of a

country, the works of Orwell and Miller are similar to Levine's. Blending Orwell's details and clarity of style with Miller's vision of a modern society gone amuck, Levine provides a Canadian equivalent to English and American examples. But while Orwell narrates the adventures of eccentrics, thieves, and vagabonds in his dismal descent into the life of the poor in *Down and Out*, he simultaneously conveys a sense of the human spirit and its strength which the narrator admires. Levine displays a similar admiration and understanding of the poor and underprivileged in Canada; he feels a rapport with them because they, like himself, have been rejected and experienced "failure." Canadian readers in the fifties, however, could not identify nor understand the negativism of Levine. They rejected the book and its criticisms in favour of such celebratory works as Bruce Hutchinson's *Canada, Tomorrow's Giant* published in the previous year.

More precisely, the parallels between *Down and Out* and *Canada Made Me* begin with the sceptical tone and questioning nature of both works. The experiences of a *plongeur* (dishwasher) in Paris hotels becomes a philosophical as well as physical exercise for Orwell. Through his encounters and adventures, he speculates on physical suffering, economic hardship, and social injustice. As Levine is to do, Orwell discourses on the meaning of work and the need for luxury. The *plongeur*, he writes,

> is the slave of a hotel or restaurant, and his slavery is more or less useless. For, after all, where is the real need of big hotels and smart restaurants? . . . Essentially, a 'smart' hotel is a place where a hundred people toil like devils in order that two hundred may pay through the nose for things they do not really want.[12]

The perpetuation of useless work creates impotency for the mob, a group the middle class fears out of ignorance and mistrust. Anticipating the reaction to Levine's account of the poor, Orwell characterizes the response of the intelligent and cultivated as imagining that "any liberty conceded to the poor is a threat to their own liberty." Consequently, they prefer to keep things as they are. Avoiding the poor maintains the ignorance of the educated while sustaining their fear of the mob.

In *Canada Made Me* Levine extends this theme of mutual ignorance by painting both sides in the class war: his successful friend "L." who at 32 lives in the prestigious Sandy Hill section of Ottawa as a wealthy meat packer and complains about his tiring affair with his family's *au pair*, as well as the dislocated "D.P.s" who work in the mines in northern Ontario, cut off from their cultural and intellectual life. Professors, film directors, and architects spend endless hours at mindless jobs. But whether rich or poor, native or immigrant, "emptiness, dullness and the boredom of their own lives" summarizes life in Canada. The theme which Levine and Orwell emphasize, which readers found difficult to comprehend, is that, in Orwell's words, "there is no difference between the mass of rich and poor."

As social moralists, Levine and Orwell are attracted to the failures in society rather than the successes. Both writers identify with the cult of failure, an idea Orwell developed in Gordon Comstock, the hero of his 1936 novel, *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*. Orwell enacted the idea of failure through his own lack of literary success while living in Paris for eighteen months which, on the other hand, allowed him to experience and share the life of the destitute and poor. However, his suspicion of success, interpreted as selling out oneself and others, buttressed his immersion in the life of the poor. As late as 1946 in his essay "Why I Write," Orwell noted the link between personal poverty and failure:

> I underwent poverty and the sense of failure. This increased my natural hatred of authority and made me for the first time fully aware of the existence of the working classes. . . .[13]

In *Canada Made Me*, Levine displays a similar concern with failure, finding in the country a nation of unhappy and discontented individuals. Failure appeals to him because it enforces honesty and removes pretense. People must live simply under its rigorous conditions. As a theme, failure pervades *Canada Made Me* and orchestrates, in particular, the conclusion of the work. For example, on the voyage returning to England in the final chapter, Levine meets a woman who can only say of herself, "I am a Zero," existentially expressing her emptiness. He shares a cabin with a Hungarian acrobat whose life is a sad travelogue from performance to performance. And in Canada House in London, nearly the final scene in the book, Levine has a conversation with a Canadian diplomat who repeats the view that the country is made up only of failures. Weakly, Levine explains that "failure in Canada is something that appeals to me" although his entire text has been an explanation why. In the final paragraphs of the book Levine discovers that his bitterness is because he realistically perceives Canada as a failure, a country that failed to secure the happiness of its inhabitants and in turn rejected its immigrants. The inability of the country to reassert its grip on him as his home, the unconscious desire that motivated his 1956 return, confirms the absence of power and vitality in the country. *Down and Out* anticipates the attraction to, and understanding of, failure as well as its use as a literary theme by Levine.

Another work by Orwell analogous to *Canada Made Me* is *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937). Unlike the semi-fictional autobiography, *Down and Out*, *The Road to Wigan Pier* is a factual account of the unemployed and working classes in northern England based on a two-month visit by Orwell in 1936. It is a work that conveys indignation and displeasure at the poverty and social oppression. The structure of the book is unique and indicates something of the shape Levine's work will adopt. Part I is an account of the working-class population of Wigan and other towns, providing a record of unpleasant housing, poor

pay, unemployment, and illness in vivid but always accurate language. Orwell investigated the conditions as a journalist and took meticulous notes reflected in his details. Part II is autobiographical as Orwell explains his own class prejudices, attempting to understand himself and the reasons for his support of socialism. In its melding of description and self-revelation, as well as realistic style and authentic detail, *The Road to Wigan Pier* clearly suggests the method of *Canada Made Me.*

Several details make the association of the two books clear. In Orwell, descriptive passages such as the filthy, over-crowded lodging-house of the Brookers, or the memorable narrative of his trip into a mine where he had to stoop or crawl for hundreds of yards, provide graphic and literary portraits of human life under nearly intolerable conditions. Levine has comparable passages written in an equally clear, realistic style: a night touring seedy drinking spots in Winnipeg; a decrepit Hastings Street hotel in Vancouver; the Jewish ghetto of Montreal. Orwell, as Levine will do, particularizes experience, never abstracting it. And both continually understand and emphasize the integration of the inanimate and the human: "a belching chimney or a stinking slum," writes Orwell, "is repulsive chiefly because it implies warped lives and ailing children."[14]

Levine adopts a similar style and point of view. Making a journey to the more unpleasant but equally real and always authentic areas of the country, Levine, like Orwell, paradoxically feels more comfortable there than with the middle-class, a psychological identity originating in his early sense of exile. Like Orwell, Levine is a social critic and expresses an impatient attitude toward complacency, moral indifference, and class abuse, especially when directed at new Canadians. Irony often masks many of these feelings in *Canada Made Me* but the attitude is similar to that of Orwell in *Wigan Pier.*

Part of Levine's discovery on his return to Canada — Orwell in *Down and Out* returned to Europe from five years in Burma — is the unpleasant confirmation, suggested to him in childhood, that "every middle-class person has a dormant class-prejudice which needs only a small thing to arouse it" as Orwell states in *Wigan Pier.* Levine encounters this repeatedly, from his early days in school when English was a new language for him, to his postwar experiences at McGill and, again, during his 1956 return. Conversations with workers, immigrants, businessmen, and friends confirm the negativism and xenophobia he sought to disprove.

Guilt over the imperialist domination and class privileges in Burma prompted Orwell to submerge himself in the world of the English oppressed and experience their discomfort. Guilt over his own self-imposed exile and unfair estimate of Canada stimulated Levine's return and desire to understand the country. In his effort to discover the reasons for his earlier departure, Levine re-encounters the Canadian dislike and distrust of immigrants that led to his original alienation. Impressions from youth have become realities in middle-age. In varying and

unexpected places, he confronts the irony that if one is a foreigner one can never be a Canadian — or as an Irishman tells him in a small Ontario town, "'this place isn't Canada. It's full of goddam foreigners.'" In Orwell one experiences the alienation of people within their own country and the painful existence that accompanies the absence of improvement or prosperity. Levine's account of contemporary Canada duplicates the experiences in the ordinary language of Orwell but reveals how a country fails to allow its immigrants to become countrymen. But what Orwell found through investigation, Levine discovered through self-revelation. Nonetheless, the parallels between the two writers include their subject matter, style and theme of social division and economic disparity.

THE MAJOR INFLUENCE on *Canada Made Me*, however, is *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare* by Henry Miller, a two-volume prose account of his journey across America in 1941-42. In style, structure, and purpose, it directly fashions Levine's work. Concentrating on people and places, *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare* provides a blazing rhetorical portrait of the country from Hanover, New Hampshire, to Hollywood. In the preface, Miller, like Levine, states that his idea for writing a book about America occurred while in Europe and, in language Levine borrowed for his "Author's Note," Miller writes "not having the means to undertake the trip, the next best thing was to live it imaginatively, which I proceeded to do at odd moments."[15] As Levine was to do, Miller wrote down place names he sought to visit and included a statement Levine took as his theme. Miller: "There was a reason, however, for making the physical journey, fruitless though it proved to be. I felt the need to effect a reconciliation with my native land." Levine: "There was . . . a need for making the physical journey. I felt the need to make a reconciliation." The parallels proceed from this close rewording of purpose in the two books.

The first reaction of Miller upon returning to America sets the tone for his and Levine's work: "When I came up on deck to catch my first glimpse of the shoreline I was immediately disappointed. Not only disappointed, I might say, but actually saddened. The American coast looked bleak and uninviting to me." Although he shifts the images, Levine maintains a similar tone. At his first glimpse of the shore, he says that the land approaches "silently and monotonously like the funeral of someone you don't know." His frequent complaint of the cold and bleak Canadian landscape echoes the winter's day of Miller's arrival with its "frigid, moral aspect." "Topographically the country is magnificent — *and* terrifying" writes Miller, terrifying "because nowhere else in the world is the divorce between man and nature so complete." Levine expresses this idea when he remarks that Canada possesses "a sense of space that continually reduced the im-

portance of the human being." Words like "indifference," "hostility," and "boredom" reappear in both books. America to Miller and Canada to Levine are both changed, lacking, in Miller's words, "resilience[;] the feeling of hopelessness, the resignation, the skepticism, the defeatism" is everywhere.

The use of a biographical structure is another link between the two books. Acting as the foundation for the autobiographical/travel narrative is a series of biographical sketches that interrupt the journey to provide depth in the form of characterizations which supplement the attitudes and reactions of the private self. Biographies of individuals met by chance become the structural means to sustain the general narrative line, maintaining unity as well as interest. People not place establish meaning in both books. For Miller it is individuals like Dr. Marion Suchon, a surgeon who began to paint at sixty, the Springer children of Alburquerque, New Mexico, Alfred Stieglizt on the seventeenth floor of a New York office building, or Jean Varda, the artist, in Monterey, California, who sustain the vitality and interest in America. Chance encounters become the source of literary energy in the work, whether they are with eccentrics, like the bootblack who types his novels on the sidewalk in front of a barbershop or the most well-adjusted American Miller meets, Lawrence Clark Powell, librarian at UCLA.

Levine adopts this same technique in *Canada Made Me* with almost every chapter including a special section headed "Biography." The figure might be Max, the polish miner, or the French-Canadian girl he meets in Saskatoon, an editor of *Le Devoir* or an Englishman in Quebec City, a Hungarian acrobat or the sexually active Greek, born in Burma, seeking riches in Canada. Counterbalancing his remembrances of his past in Canada and reminiscences of life in England, are the biographical portraits of those unhappy and unsuccessful Canadians, immigrants and natives, who lack purpose and fullfilment.

The conclusion both Miller and Levine reach is that Canadians and Americans are both physically and psychologically lost:

> America is full of places. Empty places. And all these empty places are crowded. Just jammed with empty souls. All at loose ends, all seeking diversion. As though the chief object of existence were to forget.
>
> [Canadians] have to reconcile what they are told is the envy of the world with the emptiness, dullness, and the boredom of their own lives. And they preferred pretence: the continued inflation of claims; the sentimentality of the advertisements. It left them passive, pliable. And gave them a veneer of optimism, of confidence that was so thin of real experience and yet led them to believe that their resources were deep.

Associated with these criticisms of countries that no longer maintain the dream of a future or the reality of the present is the idea of home. Miller and Levine, as expatriates, chose to re-examine their status. To Herbert West at Dartmouth College Miller wrote "I want to fall in love with the country if possible. . . . If

it's not too 'air-conditioned,'" but after he wrote the book and articulated his dissatisfaction with America he found little comfort in the idea of a return.[16] Miller, in fact, decided not to publish his book and, fearful of its anti-American spirit at a time of high patriotism (he completed the manuscript 18 days after Pearl Harbor), he wrote to his agent with alternate plans to repay his $750 advance. Criticizing American values and Americans — "we are a vulgar, pushing mob whose passions are easily mobilized by demagogues, newspaper men . . . and such like" — Miller was understandably worried. Levine, who was similarly harsh on Canada, made no effort to cancel publication, although he was chagrined by a Canadian publisher's refusal to print the book. Like Miller, Levine also realized the elimination of a sense of home: "I had called the place home; but it had no real hold" he laments in the book.

What unites *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare* and *Canada Made Me* beyond the form of biographical portraits, recollections of the past, personal tone, and lucid style is the knowledge that "America [or Canada] is no place for an artist: to be an artist is to be a moral leper, an economic misfit, a social liability" as Miller states. "Our ablest writers have but little influence upon the country at large" he adds. America and Canada also failed to make a new, fresh world of possibilities. America for Miller is the "land par excellence of expatriates and escapists, *renegades*, to use a strong word," whose lack of courage meant the failure "to turn our backs on the old, to build afresh." Similarly, Canada has become for Levine "part of a dream, an experiment that could not come off. It was foolish to believe that you can take the throwouts, the rejects, the human kickabouts from Europe and tell them: Here you have a second chance. Here you can start a new life." The tone and language of Levine (note "kickabouts") is very close to Miller, while his bitterness is the realistic view of the defeated dream he and Miller share.

Following *Canada Made Me* Levine could accept a paradox he previously did not understand. He realized he could not go home again, yet he could never imaginatively or mythically ever leave it. His new stories of Ottawa, northern Ontario, or immigrant Canada, often fictionalizing experiences from his autobiography, show an unexpected vitality and conviction in his writing. "A Small Piece of Blue," from *One Way Ticket*, his first collection of stories after *Canada Made Me*, illustrates this new ease with his past as he uses the experiences of his summer working in a northern Ontario mine to reassert his love of nature. "A Memory of Ottawa," from the same collection and one of his most successful stories, re-establishes his Jewishness and identity with the immigrant past of Ottawa in a natural and convincing way. Written in 1958, the year *Canada Made Me* was published, "A Memory of Ottawa" is the fictional celebration of the self-discovery achieved from his autobiography. An elegiac story, it captures with humour a past Levine had been avoiding.

From A Seaside Town, his second novel, published in 1970, also demonstrates Levine's more ready acceptance of the condition of ambiguous exile. His Canadian hero, who lives in Cornwall as a travel writer, revisits Canada only to return to England to write fiction, freed to write imaginatively, no longer literally, about his past. The dilemma which *Canada Made Me* made clear and allowed Levine to accept is summarized in the novel by Joseph Grand in this comment on his early travel essays on Canada written while in England: "I wrote about the violence, the mediocrity of the people, the provincialism, the dullness. . . . And all the time I wanted to be there."[17] Levine's more recent collection, *Thin Ice* (1979), continues the renewal with a Canadian past in stories like "In Lower Town" about his father and life in Ottawa or "By A Frozen River," dealing with Jewish life in a tiny northern Ontario town.

Like Glassco, Grove, and Miller, Levine in his autobiography portrays an outsider who does not fit into society but no longer accepts the conditions that have made him. Yet, the sense of separation and exile that conditions so much of these autobiographies does not isolate so much as re-establish attachments and identities of the writers with their countries. For these writers, their autobiographies are passports of re-entry through which they find the limitations and possibilities of the self. This can occur, however, only through a self psychologically and physically distanced from itself. The pattern, then, of contemporary Canadian autobiography is ironic, for it is only when the autobiographer recognizes and accepts his disillusionment with his country that he can locate himself and his home.

NOTES

[1] Jay Macpherson, "Autobiography," *Literary History of Canada*, ed. Carl F. Klinck, 2nd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976), pp. 132, 126.

[2] I place Glassco's work first because it was composed earliest. Chapters 1-3 were written in 1928; Chapters 4-26 in 1932-33; a two-paragraph postscript was added in 1967. *In Search of Myself* appeared in 1946 and *Canada Made Me* in 1958.

[3] Michael Sprinkler, "Fictions of the Self: The End of Autobiography," *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, ed. James Olney (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 342.

[4] Norman Levine, *Canada Made Me* (London: Putnam, 1958), p. 275. All further references are to this edition.

[5] John Glassco, *Memoirs of Montparnasse* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 237-38.

[6] Frederick Philip Grove, *In Search of Myself* (1946; Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1974), p. 433. All further references are to this edition. For a contrasting view of the life of a writer in contemporary Canada see Thomas H. Raddall, *In My Time* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1976).

[7] Elizabeth Waterston, "Travel Books on Canada," *Literary History of Canada*, p. 118. At another point Levine is referred to as a "parasite." See p. 127.

[8] Levine, "Author's Note," *Canada Made Me*, [p. 9].

[9] "Siena made me. Maremma undid me" (Dante); "It is well known that one's native land is always recognized at the moment of losing it" (Camus).

[10] Levine in Michael Smith, "An Exile Comes Home," *Today*, 11 October 1980, p. 12; Levine in John D. Cox, "Norman Levine: An Interview," *Canadian Literature*, 45 (Summer 1970), p. 63.

[11] Patricia Owen, "Canada Made Me," *Tamarack Review*, 10 (1958), 107; "The Seamy Side," *Times Literary Supplement*, 12 December 1958, p. 724.

[12] George Orwell, *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933; New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1961), p. 118. All further references are to this edition. The title of Levine's work, *Canada Made Me*, also parallels Graham Greene's novel of this period, *England Made Me* (1935), which similarly deals with exile, isolation, and estrangement.

[13] George Orwell, "Why I Write," *The Collected Essays*, ed. Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (London: Secker and Warburg, 1968), I:4-5.

[14] George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937; New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1958), p. 141. All further references are to this edition.

[15] Henry Miller, *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare*, Volume I (New York: New Directions, 1945), p. 9. All further references are to this edition.

[16] Henry Miller in Jay Martin, *Always Merry and Bright, The Life of Henry Miller* (Santa Barbara: Capra Press, 1978), p. 374. The war in Europe and the notion that California was the only "vital spot" in America prompted Miller's move to the West Coast in June 1942, eventually settling in Big Sur. However, a notebook entry during his *Nightmare* journey expresses his fundamental attitude: "I'd rather eat horse shit in Mallorca than Charlotte Russe in Cleveland!" (in Martin, p. 380).

[17] Norman Levine, *From A Seaside Town* (Toronto and London: Macmillan, 1970), p. 150.

books in review

DCB-11

Dictionary of Canadian Biography Volume XI 1881-1890, General Editor, Francess G. Halpenny; Directeur général adjoint, Jean Hamelin. Univ. of Toronto Press, $35.00.

VOLUME XI OF THE *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* (the seventh to be published), presents nearly 600 biographies of Canadians who died between 1881 and 1890. The death dates mean that most of the subjects were active during the middle decades of the century: Patriotes, the Canada First movement, pro- and anti-Confederationists figure largely. In Eastern Canada, William McMaster promotes his drygoods firm into a financial empire and founds the Canadian Bank of Commerce and the Toronto Baptist College (later McMaster University); in the West, John Palliser, having parlayed his love of travel into a Royal Geographical Society expedition, explores and maps the prairies and several passes through the Rockies.

The climax of the North-West Rebellion dominates the *immediate present* of this decade of the DCB, and the Riel entry is emblematic of the volume's judicious scholarship. It carefully weighs conflicting reports of events and distinguishes between the *un*concerted Indian (Frog Lake) and Métis (Batoche) actions; it documents jury-stacking, falsification of evidence, and incompetent defence at Riel's trial; it distinguishes between Eastern Canada's view of Riel as a villain, his view of himself as "an advocate of justice for the Métis," and the twentieth-century view of him as "pioneer of western protest movements directed against the political and economic power of Central Canada." Entries are not only judiciously written but intelligently selected. Thus, keeping company with Riel, Big Bear, and Wandering Spirit, are others whose biographies record the tragedy of native nations being destroyed in the interests of the new Canada's imperial and economic expansion: Beardy's policy of neutrality fails his tribe and cannot be maintained; One Arrow, "destroyed by forces over which he had no control and which he could not understand," his health deterioriating, sits in prison while the Department of Indian Affairs tries to starve his band off their reserve. French's Scouts fight effectively while the arrogance and stupidity of Inspector Dickens (son of Charles) contributes to "the serious deterioration in relations between the NWMP and the Blackfoot."

The scholarship of these entries is supplemented by a *useful* and *usable* textual apparatus. As in previous volumes, each entry is completed by a bibliography of archival sources, published writings and secondary sources. These are particularly helpful as basic research for other scholars but they also intimate subjects and texts which need further work. That Amelia Ryerse, for example, wrote a diary which is "striking" in its "resemblance to the work of Jane Austen" and which remains unpublished demands the efforts of scholars and publishers. The textual apparatus includes lists of the Subjects of Biographies and of Contributors; Identification, Geographical and Nominal Indexes; and a General Bibliography of relevant archival and published primary sources, reference works, and scholarly studies.

The Index of Identification gives rise to the only infelicity of the volume: the Introduction tells us that the Index "directs readers to biographies by the occupation of their subjects": since the Identifications include (the undeniably useful categories) *Blacks*, *Native Peoples*, and *Women*, the unfortunate implication of

the editorial statement is that to be oppressed or simply denied opportunity as a race or a sex (and therefore to have become of interest in the twentieth century) constitutes an occupation. But this is the volume's only infelicity and the Index itself leads to fascinating browsing. A paucity of entries both under *Arts* and *Artisans* and under *Surveyors* and *Explorers* chronicles a transitional period in much of Canada between pioneering and cultural definition. Clearly too, the surest way to find oneself in the DCB one hundred years later was to become an *Office-holder* or a *Politician* (494 entries); failing that, *Business* (236 entries) was most likely to gain one a place.

Then as now, writers found that, in Achintre's words, it was "impossible to earn in Canada" a livelihood by literary work; most of the 85 authors were lawyers or politicians, educators or religious figures. They produced tracts and treatises on religion, law, politics, and Parliamentary government, on trade, education, agriculture, transportation, and temperance; biographies, a political appointments handbook; histories in several disciplines; sermons and Sunday school stories; studies in philosophy, classicism, grammar, prosody, mathematics, meteorology, ornithology, and geology; textbooks on physiology, chemistry, and arithmetic. Among those who shaped our literary tradition, we find Susanna Moodie and Isabella Valancy Crawford; Eliza Foster wrote two forerunners of Harlequin Romances, established the first children's magazine (*Snow Drop*), and edited the *Literary Garland* before her publisher dislodged her to make way for grander schemes; Pierre Chauveau began a long tradition of using the novel to articulate social and political concerns in French Canada; Blain de Saint-Aubin arrived in Canada by boarding the wrong boat but succeeded in drawing the attention of Sainte-Beuve favourably to French-Canadian literature; Alexander de Sola worked to have the government alter copyright laws to the profit of authors. The contributors note frequent literary shortcomings, assess genuine contributions, and alert us to neglected figures such as Ryerse and the versifier and fabulist Paul Stevens.

Beyond their undisputed reference value, these entries tell us something, however glancingly, about the social milieu of their subjects, about their appearance and their characters, about their minds and motivations. If we see the "typical public servant" in some, we also follow Napoléon Aubin's struggle to introduce liberal and satirical journalism in the 1830's in an intellectual climate that judged his plays "subversive." Alexander Somerville ends his life in a woodshed, writing memoirs and living on cold porridge flavoured with onions; Josiah Henson, after self-martyring loyalty to his owners, escapes to Canada and literary immortality as "Uncle Tom"; Letitia Munson uses her house to "board pregnant women seeking privacy" and, one of these women found dead, is arraigned in one of Canada's first abortion trials; Antoine Falardeau begins life a sign painter and ends up in Florence, a wealthy and expert portraitist and copier, married to the daughter of the Marquis Franceso Mannucci-Benincasa Capponi, only to have his horse throw him into the Arno where he drowns. Dramatically and psychologically engaging, these accounts turn up much of the richness of interest, endeavour, and personality of nineteenth-century Canada. Through them, the DCB admirably fulfils its reference function while transcending the terse dullness usual to the "dictionary" genre.

SHIRLEY NEUMAN

GUMBO

TIM MERRILL, *In Bare Apple Boughs*. Fiddlehead, $5.50.

JOHN NOLD, *Awe*. Longspoon, $7.50.

A. F. MORITZ, *Between the Root and the Flower*. Blackfish, $6.95.

CHRISTOPHER WISEMAN, *An Ocean of Whispers*. Sono Nis, $5.95.

C. H. GERVAIS, *Into a Blue Morning*. Hounslow, $7.95.

THE FIVE BOOKS UNDER REVIEW here, varying significantly as they do in style and sensibility, together constitute a gumbo of the several poetic modes available to readers of contemporary Canadian writing.

In Bare Apple Boughs is a first collectiton of poems by Tim Merrill. For the most part, the poems are modest epiphanies with an oriental obliquity suggestive at times of the poetry of Robert Bly. The title comes from an essay in haiku entitled "Fall Sunlight": "in bare apple boughs / robin flutters and alights / sunlight in its breath." The book contains stronger poems, but this, I think, is representative of Merrill's sensibility. Typical of his better poems is "Early Fall," in which the fall of the human world into cruel transgression is played against the benign innocence of nature:

> This tiny creek,
> runoff of the mountains,
> is filled with dying salmon
> and lined with those
> already dead.
>
> Laughing and intent
> on their mission,
> young boys thud stones
> off the backs
> of the living.
>
> The salmon die
> without sin
> without absolution.

This poem, in its accessibility, shows Merrill at his best, despite the fact that its plain language bears no lyric distinction, and its serious perception is, in the end, too-stated. Several of the poems, however, are inscrutable, and the effect of their plain language is vitiated by quirky punctuation (the invariable misuse of semicolons), faulty spelling ("transcient," "characitures," "Budda's," "butterflys," "lizzard") and confused grammar (the two dangling modifiers in the final stanza of "This In Time," for instance, lead to potentially ludicrous readings: "Writing this / in the dark / so not to wake you, / you suddenly stir / and sensing that you are awake, / the vision deserts me"). While some of the poems in the book border on banality and lie limp on the page, many contain convincing associative leaps leading to satisfying new perceptions.

John Nold represents a radically different poetic tradition than Merrill, although he has a similar regard for nature. *Awe*, his second book, apparently is intended as a long poem rather than as a collection; few of the individual units have the integrity to stand alone. Although each page is a new poem — according to the table of contents which lists all the first lines as titles — *Awe*'s effect depends primarily on the interactions of the units with each other and with the whole. The locus of the work is the natural world, and its inhabitants a pair/pairs of lovers. Announcing his structural principle in the first poem, Nold says: "We follow a path through the woods unaware / that it's a circle route and are surprised / to be suddenly back at the beginning." The "watery blue / and black crows / [that] sprout atop bare tree branches" in the first poem appear in the final poem as the constellation "Corvus, The Crow," as if to remind the reader that words, those making up this book for example, may do no more than "Rattle / like the mechanics of a cawing machine." *Awe* contains subtle and not-so-subtle repetitions of words,

phrases, images, and structural patterns. There is an assortment of circles — growth rings in trees, widening ripples on a pond, the cochlea of ears, the circling path through the woods — all analogous to the turning of the year into spring and to language turning round on itself like an ouroboros. To illustrate further the problematic of language, Nold includes bold vertical margins on each page "creating an atmosphere of confinement" within which the poems exist; a series of blank pages, the first appearing near the heart of the book; and two pages of notes at the end. Although the intricate repetition of images and ideas, and the occasionally evocative interplay between language and visual elements create a forcefield of possible meanings and relationships at times stimulating, *Awe* is, nevertheless, primarily a notional work. The derivative strategies of employing notes, following with blank pages poems about the difficulties of communion, playing with typography, and fusing sentences work against any deep current of feeling. Ironically, in light of this book's "experimental" aspirations, the strongest elements are the most traditional: careful perceptions, an informed regard for the natural world, and the occasional grace note in the language. *Awe* is an interesting book, but whimsical and lacking in depth and resonance.

Of all the books under review here, A. F. Moritz's *Between the Root and the Flower* is the most difficult to assess. Moritz writes in a variety of modes: poems in which he appears to speak in his own voice; others in which he adopts a persona; realistic poems firmly situated in reality; and, occasionally, poems that shade off into surrealism. In "Bell," for example, the phenomenal world is figured as a "transparent bell of ice" of which the poet/speaker is the tongue. In the second stanza, the speaker declaims:

> O lift its heavy toll
> from imperial absences that stalk among
> the driven snow of green wings and tatters,
> the ghost light that tries to eat
> but the food falls through its hollow body
> into the stream.

The near-inscrutability of these lines, the fused sentence they constitute, and the conceptual awkwardness of "absences that stalk" invite dismissal. At other times, however, Moritz's poetry is both figurative and lucid. In the "The Peasant's Soil," for example, a peasant meditates:

> We are unreal in each other, I and this land.
> For in what I say, this land only appears
> faintly at the edges, under the feet of my words,
> as in a sketch where the man is so detailed
> he is ready to live, but the earth and sky
> are only a bare stroke or two to remind us.

Moritz's major theme is the incarnation of spiritual realities in nature and language; some of his better poems are complex, lyrical evocations of the interplay between words and the world. Religiously derived figures connoting presence and absence — the "guest," the "grave," the "flesh," the "word" — recur. The intellectual elements in these poems sometime lead to abstruseness and affective thinness, but Moritz has an uncanny vision that often succeeds in asserting its serious claims.

Christopher Wiseman's *An Ocean of Whispers*, his fourth volume of poems, is characterized by sincerity of statement and clarity of diction, and the poems, more often than not, are moving. Frequently Wiseman writes about his personal experience, although his better poems are those in which he writes about things he has observed from a distance ("The Three of Them," "After Watching T.V. Epilogue") rather than those in which he addresses himself to central episodes of his life. When he writes of his past, his language sometimes rigidifies

into rhetoric. In the final stanza of "Manchester Revisited," about a disenchanting return to a youthful haunt, the speaker laments:

> Why have they done all this? How could people
> Sit unprotesting and let it happen to them?
> Perhaps they like it, or don't care, and after
> All it was I who left while they stayed on,
> But haven't they, too, invested in the place
> Good years, long years, the feeling it was home?

Wiseman's serious, often elegiac, sensibility can sometimes lead him into sentimentality, and his predilection for unadorned, at times prosaic statement can result in a slackness of form that is exacerbated by his tendency to extend poems a line or a stanza beyond where they ought to have ended. When his imagination is relieved of the burden of his past, however, Wiseman's wit and formal control are admirable, as in "To A Lady Cellist," which I quote in full as an illustration:

> You're quite impeccable above the waist.
> Slender fingers moving, body encased
> In a formal black dress, high-necked, demure, chaste.
> Remarkable the difference down below —
> Skirt up, silk knees straining wide. Oh lucky fellow
> He who lies there, stroked and plucked, your human cello!

A serious poet with a humane vision, Wiseman is worth reading. But this is an unusually long collection. Wiseman's talent would have been displayed to better effect if weaker poems had been culled and the volume shortened by half.

Into A Blue Morning by C. H. Gervais differs from the other volumes in that, in addition to new work, it consists of poems selected from six collections published over the past thirteen years. Assuming that the poems are arranged chronologically, one can make some generalizations about Gervais' development as a poet. Many of his early poems, constituting the first third of the volume, incline for the most part toward a callow humour. The early poems that show the most promise are imagistic renderings of personal experience filtered through memory, poems such as "In the Image Rolled Back," "Swimmer," and "Taking The Night Train Through Cobalt." In the second third of the volume, the impulse toward humour is still evident but has been transmuted into the pursuit of rueful ironies and, to my taste, is more successful. But it is in the third section that Gervais appears to have found his authentic voice. Of the excellent poems in this section I will quote one, "Voices," to illustrate what Gervais can do at his best:

> You always read about it. Phones
> ringing in empty houses. Or
> in dreams. Last night it was
> like that. I was alseep. The
> phone persisted at some
> far corner of the bed. Or
> maybe deep within the woodwork,
> the floors, the paintings. It
> was there. Somewhere. I couldn't
> get to it. I called to you
> till I believed I was
> beside the phone. Squatting
> naked, shivering. Unable to
> answer. Then I woke to
> your silence. The soft ridge
> of an ear in shadows. Your
> face. A bare shoulder. *That*
> something about you crying out.

In this poem, as in others such as "The White Cabin," "Into A Blue Morning," "Blackberry," and "Winter Again," Gervais movingly evokes the magic of memory and dream to illuminate the waking present. *Into A Blue Morning* suggests Gervais has grown into a poet capable of writing, more and more consistently, strong resonant poems.

ERIC TRETHEWEY

CASH AND CULTURE

PAUL AUDLEY, *Canada's Cultural Industries.* James Lorimer, $19.95; pa. $12.95.

THIS IS THE KIND OF BOOK that makes my blood run cold, and not merely be-

cause it is written in such a dense pattern of jargon, figures, and charts that it has to be accompanied by a separate summarizing pamphlet in case the reader should lose himself in the Gobi desert of the text. I have read too many earnest non-books intended for consulting rather than reading to flinch merely at the sight of prose like a window blind. What does alarm me is (a) the cluster of assumptions implied in its title which suggest the desirability of industrializing culture, and (b) the kind of enemies of the arts in Canada it reveals under the suggestion that they are friends.

The word "cultural" is of course fraught with such ambiguities that I sometimes remember with appreciation Herbert Read shouting, "To Hell with Culture!" To me, and many others, culture has always meant that part of life which the ancients assigned to the muses: basically, the artistic and intellectual activities of society in which, paradoxically, individual vision reflects in infinitely plural forms the collective experience. To anthropologists, of course, culture means something different — the whole mass of custom and practice, language and myth, that makes a society distinct. And now, in a world where capitalist values maintain a surprising tenacity, we find culture seen in financial-commercial terms as — to quote the flyer for Paul Audley's book — "a multi-million dollars industry."

There is no doubt that a vast exploitative series of industries has grown up. Audley mentions "Broadcasting, Publishing, Records and Films," bue he leaves out the art-dealing racket with all its ramifications. His facts and figures leave no doubt that there are plenty of people battening on the efforts of the relatively small group of creative people in Canada, but he says very little about the creators themselves. This "industrial" approach to the arts has been creeping in for a long time; it is evident when one looks at the Applebaum-Hébert Report, comparing it with the Massey Report, and notes how deeply its authors became involved in discussions of private-versus-public-sector ownership and of the whole superstructure that has been constructed to help politicians use the various arts and media in the service of power and businessmen to use them in the service of profit.

What such reports — and books like Audley's — tell us is how far we have gone in a totalitarian direction so far as the arts and related areas are concerned without as yet having an openly totalitarian control of them. The way the CBC over recent years has become an industrial plant churning out featureless "popular" programmes and has turned away from its old policy of fostering writers and artists of every kind is one obvious example, but with every advance in communications technology newer waves of entrepreneurs enter the field who have no knowledge of the arts, no sympathy for artists, and who are moved merely by a desire to make money or to gain power.

Read as a warning, *Canada's Cultural Industries* is salutary; it tells us that we are faced with the rise of an exploitative *native* complex of cultural corporations that is far more dangerous to the independence of artists and the arts than any American complex could possibly be, because it is going to be *here*, right among us, supported by Canadian regulatory bodies, and adapting itself to "Canadian needs" which — whatever the illusions of our nationalists — will always be the needs of those who profit financially or politically; nobody — independent capitalist or state agency — invests without the hope of some kind of profit.

Certainly it is time artists of all kinds began considering what they can do to preserve their freedom in this highly perilous transition period. The trade union route is useless; one's experience of

unions in broadcasting shows that they become part of the structure, ceasing to care about quality so long as they win better conditions, and even developing a hostility towards the freelancing independent artist. It has to be some *alternative* way of proceeding that will enable artists still to publish and exhibit and perform, and yet to remain as far as possible outside the industrial organization of culture, which in its own way is as hostile to artistic freedom as state domination of the arts. This is not the place to discuss such matters in detail. But I would like to see someone writing a counter book to Paul Audley's — in more accessible prose and perhaps entitled *Alternative Cultural Structures*, or words to that effect.

GEORGE WOODCOCK

LE POUVOIR DES MOTS

JACQUELINE BARRETTE, *Oh! Gerry Oh!* Leméac, $7.95.

GEORGES DOR, *Les Moineau chez les Pinson.* Leméac, $7.95.

JEAN-PIERRE RONFARD, *La Mandragore.* Leméac, $9.95; $7.95.

CES COMEDIES PUBLIEES aux éditions Leméac en 1982, bien que traitant toutes trois le problème des relations humaines et sexuelles, ainsi que la question du pouvoir du langage, sont cependant fort différentes l'une de l'autre, ceci étant dû principalement au lieu d'où l'auteur parle et au public à qui il s'adresse.

Dans *Les Moineau chez les Pinson*, deuxième pièce de Georges Dor, ce chansonnier — poète auteur de "La Manic," nous retrouvons un thème familier de la comédie de boulevard: le mariage d'une jeune fille d'un milieu populaire, Caroline Moineau avec Pierre-Paul II Pinson, le fils avocat d'un ménage de bourgeois parvenus. Dans un dialogue vif et rapide, en deux actes de cinq scènes chacun, les Moineau porte-parole idéologique de l'auteur démasquent par leur modestie, leur sens de l'humour et leur bon sens la prétention et le snobisme de Maître Pinson et de sa femme. Comme dans sa première pièce, *Du sang bleu dans les veines*, Georges Dor, visant un auditoire populaire utilise les ficelles et procédés comiques caractéristiques du vaudeville. Outre un comique de situations: une scène de reconnaissance, l'évanouissement du ménage Pinson, plusieurs gags au téléphone, des quiproquos (Madame Moineau prise pour une vendeuse de produits Avon) un coup de théâtre (la fausse annonce par la fille du juge Portneuf qu'elle aussi est enceinte de Pierre-Paul II), l'auteur a recours systématiquement au jeu de mot: calembour, équivoque, isolexisme.

La lecture du texte est par moments gênée, par le cumul de plaisanteries parfois légèrement forcées, par l'ambiguité créée par la similarité des noms des deux protagonistes féminines: Marie-Hélène et Marie-Madeleine, il faut toutefois reconnaître que cette comédie "de grange," divertissement sans prétention pour "québécois en vacances" passe bien la rampe.

Si la pièce de Georges Dor se place dans l'intertexte du vaudeville, *La Mandragore*, "renouvelée de Machiavel, de quelques conteurs turcs, du grand William et des très saintes écritures" est une adaptation au goût du jour avec force allusions parodiques de *La Mandragola* de Niccolo Machiavelli, jouée pour la première fois en 1520. De la comédie de Machiavel Jean-Pierre Ronfard a repris presque tous les personnages, quelquefois rebaptisés, des cinq actes du texte original il a fait une comédie en deux parties de huit scènes chacune, comédie proche de la farce et placée sous le signe de la fertilité, de la séduction sexuelle et de la fête carnavalesque.

Jean-Pierre Ronfard a conservé le prétexte et l'intrigue principale de *La Mandragola*: le jeune libertin Callimaco qui

désire la belle Lucrezia, femme sans enfant du vieux savant Nicia, accumule les impostures pour arriver à ses fins. Se faisant passer pour docteur, il administre à Lucrezia une portion de mandragore, ce remède contre la stérilité, et prenant la place du mendiant qui doit coucher avec elle et ensuite mourir des effets nocifs attribués à la plante, il passe, avec la complicité inconsciente du malheureux Nicia, une folle nuit d'amour dans le lit de la jeune femme.

Si l'on peut cependant parler de *La Mandragore* de Jean-Pierre Ronfard, c'est que par les techniques de construction et d'écriture techniques déjà utilisées dans sa pièce *Vie et mort du Roi Boiteux*, il a réellement renouvelé cette comédie florentine du 16ème siècle. Dans une pièce de facture encore classique, il a réuni dans une juxtaposition diachronique et synchronique, des fragments d'histoire, de culture, créant, par touches surréalistes, un divertissement burlesque avec décor florentin à la québécoise et nobles italiens joualisant.

La Mandragore n'est pas, contrairement à ce que laisse entendre l'introduction, une étude sérieuse des "rapports entre l'amour et le désir, l'acte d'amour et la procréation, la recherche du plaisir absolu et la présence exigeante de la mort." Les personnages conventionnels et stéréotypés ne nous présentent en effet qu'une réflexion superficielle sur la société et "sur les rapports entre les hommes et les femmes." L'Important dans cette pièce est le travail fait par l'auteur sur les structures langagières, sur les niveaux de langue (du langage relevé à l'argot et au joual, en passant par les citations latines, italiennes et anglaises, toutes sources de comique par leur verdeur ou leur incongruité). En dernière analyse *La Mandragore* n'est qu'une vaste parodie carnavalesque où est désacralisée la tradition religieuse et culturelle (cf. les pastiches de la poésie amoureuse des seizième et dix-septième siècles, les allusions parodiques au répertoire classique: *Le Cid*, *Phèdre*, etc.) elle n'est qu'un "risus paschalis" pour fin de carême.

Si *La Mandragore* nous présente une facétieuse manipulation des niveaux de langue, nous assistons à une manipulation langagière autrement dangereuse dans la pièce de Jacqueline Barrette *Oh! Gerry Oh!*

Avec cette pièce créée en 1972 mais considérablement remaniée pour la publication, l'auteur, qui n'a cessé de produire pour le théâtre, la radio et la télévision depuis le succès de sa revue théâtrale: *ça dit quessa dire*, aborde un thème assez original, celui du misogyne, "pimp romantique, mythomane," et dont le mépris pour les femmes s'exerce par une séduction tendre, au cours d'exercises de thérapie de groupe auxquels elles ont été conviées par une annonce dans le journal. Dans le jeu des "rapports de force créé par le contact entre trois femmes" d'âges, de conditions et de personnalités différentes et le "don Juan macho" Gerry Lafleur, "thérapeute-chef d'orchestre" qui les manipule en les ravalant au rang de la bête et de l'enfant, Jacqueline Barrette, en accord avec une certaine idéologie féministe, remet en question l'utilisation des mots par le pouvoir sexiste. C'est à la fois par la parole, par la manipulation de clichés, de métaphores poétiques usées que Gerry subjugue les trois femmes, mais c'est aussi par la parole qu'il se dénonce à leurs yeux, en les attaquant dans ce qu'elles ont de plus vulnérables, ou de plus cher: Réjeanne, dans ses poèmes, substituts de l'enfant qu'elle n'a pas eu, Gertrude, dans son enfant mongolien, Violette dans sa compassion pour les autres. A la fin de la pièce chaque femme, à sa façon prend la parole, Réjeanne en lisant son poème de haine écrit sur du papier de toilette, Gertrude, en récupérant avec l'aide de son mari le prix du cours, et Violette en revendiquant son

nom avant de fuir l'antre de "Tarzan-Gerry." Si en dépit du sujet, Jacqueline Barrette a réussi à faire de sa pièce une comédie pleine d'allant, ceci est dû au rythme vif, à la dynamique des répliques mais surtout au comique né de la confrontation de différents niveaux de langage (entre autres le joual franc et coloré de Gertrude qui démasque les prétentions de Réjeanne à un beau français châtié et l'interprétation souvent littérale donnée aux répliques des personnages).

A notre époque où l'on insiste sur le problème de la communication et de la réception du message, il est intéressant de voir que les trois auteurs considérés ont, chacun à sa façon, mis en relief le pouvoir de la parole. Ils ont étudié les interactions langagières, la manipulation de leurs destinataires par les locuteurs-protagonistes, manipulation exercée par l'utilisation de langues différentes (*La Mandragore*) ou par le recours à différents registres d'une même langue.

EVELYNE VOLDENG

MORAL TALES

ANNETTE SAINTE-PIERRE, *La Fille bègue*. Les Editions des Plaines, n.p.

PAULINE HARVEY, *La Ville aux gueux*. Les Editions de la pleine lune, $9.95.

THE AUTHORS OFFER the reader two moral tales that are similar in their optimistic presentation of the lot of the female characters but which differ from each other in all other respects. Annette Sainte-Pierre's book is a fairytale disguised as a realistic novel. The story is well told and the characters believable at first but the "message" is a little too clear. Everything is wrong in the bad home and everything is good in the others. Racism, victimized children, problem teen-agers, and down-and-out kids are all dealt with; there is a successful *métisse*, a rapist who turns into a model father, and a surrogate father to help our heroine through her troubles. The poor girl who was ridiculed and raped because she stammered and had no self-esteem is transformed into a princess in time-honoured style, though not without punishment for her fall from grace. As she is transformed, she exchanges a handicap in verbal communication (stammer) for a handicap in sexual communication (no ovaries); but as in the best tales all obstacles are overcome. The novel is sensitively written and not as straightforward as my comments may lead one to imagine but it is too predictable and its resolutely moral stance mars a potentially delightful parable of female development.

Pauline Harvey's novel errs rather by over-complexity. My feeling was that although it held my attention to the end it would have profitted from being shorter and its end could have been achieved more concisely with no loss of power. This is a clever novel; set in an imaginary city in Europe at the end of the Renaissance, it depicts the struggle between three specific groups with specific kinds of power. The central group is that formed by Enguerrand, the King's Fool, and three grotesque itinerant actor-tumblers, Lyly, Cécil, and Rozie, who wander into town at the beginning of the novel. They occupy the main theatre in Varthal and represent the element of unreason that surfaced in the Middle Ages in the carnivals of the Festivals of Fools and that was overcome in the Renaissance by the transformation of carnival from the celebration of folly, un-reason, anti-law, and the reversal of power structures into state-controlled processions in celebration of the governing body. The novel is based on this shift. Above the fools is the king with his court and below them are the beggars and witches and at the centre of the book there is an attempt by the king's councillor to take the responsibility for arranging festivities out of the hands of Enguerrand. This attempt

to shift the control is overthrown by the Fool's ability to turn the very spirit of carnival back against the Councillor, for he, Enguerrand, is able to transform the King and Princess into "fools" in such a way that the force of order falls on them as it does normally on their subjects. The result is a revision of the forces of order and a new life for the Princess. During the Carnival she has been forced to live with the third important group in this book, the witches who live under the bridges, and she returns to them of her own free will to be recognized as a force in her own right. Thes women hold the real power. In times of stress Enguerrand and his group turn to them for help; they prepare the potential insurrection and they stop it as soon as they get what they want. After showing the extent of their strength they choose not to move into the theatres and thus exercise their power visibly but remain the real force underlying and permitting the apparent powers above them in the social structure.

The central image of the novel is that of a "boomerang" — a system of intelligent exchange that turns back on itself and in so doing brings enlightenment while being impossible to direct and control. This "boomerang" effect is the key to the structure of the novel as experiences and events turn back on those who set them into motion, and it is through this mechanism that the Princess is transformed from a bored and fractious puppet in the social order into an independent being who takes her life into her own hands. Pauline Harvey makes a couple of passing references to feminism but never states that such might be the aim of her novel. However, whether it be her intention or not, the liberation of Smirne, the entire symbolic thrust of the "festival of fools" and the boomerang structure of the novel make it impossible to escape the implications of the story. At the end of the novel, Enguerrand bows to his own image and skips away; Pauline Harvey pirouettes in front of her readers in much the same way; it is a pity that the effect is not a little lighter, for the presentation of coercive power and subversive power and of the attitudes of men and women within society are first-rate.

JENNIFER R. WAELTI-WALTERS

CHECKING THE BAGGAGE

ALF SILVER, *Thimblerig*. Turnstone Press, n.p.

REX DEVERELL, *Black Powder: Estevan 1931*. Coteau Books, $5.00.

CAROL BOLT, *Escape Entertainment*. Playwrights Canada. $3.50.

AVIVA RAVEL, *Second Chance*. Playwrights Canada, $3.50.

WARREN GRAVES, *Alice*. Playwrights Canada, $3.50.

Canada on Stage: Canadian Theatre Review Yearbook, 1980-81. CTR Publications, $21.95.

ONE OF THE MANY PLEASURES of Canadian drama in the 1980's is the increasingly rich context in which new plays may be viewed. Of the more than seven hundred professional productions document in the 1980-81 edition of the invaluable *Canada on Stage*, approximately half were Canadian plays. That statistic by itself is somewhat misleading; and as Ray Conlogue points out in his introduction to the year's theatre in Ontario, quantity does not necessarily mean quality or even vitality. Still, the sheer volume of Canadian drama produced and published over the past decade and a half has filled the vacuum in which new Canadian plays used to appear. A growing number of writers have accumulated a substantial body of work against which their own new plays may be measured. Even first-time playwrights now enter a *Canadian* tradition that has begun to develop along distinctive thematic, stylistic, and generic lines.

Alf Silver's first play, *Thimblerig*, is a fine example of the urban realism which continues to be a mainstay of our contemporary drama. Anger and alienation, sex, drugs, and the threat of violence provide the familiar naturalistic backdrop. But unlike most earlier Canadian social drama, *Thimblerig* is less concerned with analyzing the evils of The System than with examining the self-defeated. As in the latest plays of David Fennario and Tom Walmsley, Silver's characters are their own worst enemies. They are thirty-year-olds who still don't know how to grow up, marginal survivors of a cultural revolution that never was. Blackjack, the con-man and hip capitalist who turns out to be the play's reluctant hero, despises his peers who managed to avoid the straight working world but then didn't know what to do with their supposed freedom: "They didn't have to punch a clock anymore, but all they could think of to do instead was drink and smoke and shoot up and fuck and read comic books. Some revolution." His own alternative has been no less feeble: the cynical amorality of "use or be used."

Silver's people use each other in many ways, mostly sexual. And in certain respects *Thimblerig* resembles a popular kind of recent stage comedy — Walmsley's *White Boys*, Erika Ritter's *Automatic Pilot*, Sherman Snukal's *Talking Dirty* — in which sexual irresponsibility is seen as the primary symptom of a more general, chronic and debilitating personal irresponsibility. But Silver also carves out his own dramatic territory between the worlds of paralyzed proletariat and seriocomic middle class. Through a well-crafted if not always credible revenge melodrama plot, he shows us characters emerging out of lower depths of their own making, learning restraint and maturity though with some hefty prices paid along the way. This is a strong play and highly recommended.

Rex Deverell's *Black Powder: Estevan 1931* is the third in a series of documentary plays about Saskatchewan history that Deverell has written for Regina's Globe Theatre. The Canadian docudrama is of course well established, with such plays as *Buffalo Jump, 1837: The Farmers' Revolt*, and *Paper Wheat* providing both a formula and a standard. The formula involves an overtly political presentation of oppressed workers or farmers who organize themselves into cooperative action against their oppressors with the help of a charismatic leader. The government/owners/bosses are always generalized or stereotyped, whereas audience empathy is solicited by dramatic focus upon particularized individuals from among the workers. *Black Powder* follows the formula very closely as it chronicles the terrible conditions in the coalfields, the unionization of the mines, and the ensuing Estevan demonstration in which three striking miners were shot to death by the RCMP. The play's earnestness is beyond question, but it lacks the dramatic virtues that raise *1837* and *Paper Wheat* to the level of art. Those plays make their political points through imaginative theatrical metaphors; *Black Powder*'s presentation is oppressively literal. Those plays paint their stories in a blend of comic and serious tones; *Black Powder* appears in agitprop black-and-white only. The play broke a variety of box-office records in Regina but it does not travel well as a dramatic text.

Carol Bolt has travelled a long way since her first forays into political theatre: from *Buffalo Jump* and *Red Emma* in the early 1970's, to the commercially successful thriller *One Night Stand* in 1976, and now to the showbiz comedy of *Escape Entertainment*. The distance, though, is not as great as it seems. Bolt is still interested in politics, only in this case the cultural politics of Canadian filmmaking. To satisfy his American backers, the Ca-

nadian director of *Man with a Gun* changes his original script about separatists and a PQ Member of Parliament set in Montreal to a tale of Cuban refugees and a CIA agent in Miami. Meanwhile the American expatriate journalist who hates Canadian complacency and mediocrity, and claims to get her standards from New York, trashes the director and his star actor (her ex-husband) in an article called "How to Make Schlock Movies in Toronto." Finally, in despair, the director recaptures his movie and his integrity, restoring the Canadian setting, removing the car crashes, and changing the title to *Man without a Gun* — "because it's Canada, where heroes can be harmless."

There is more to this play than its wry look at cultural nationalism and imperialism. Bolt's comic writing is surprisingly sure-handed and she plays some clever Pirandellian games with the stage set/movie set. Yet the play doesn't really work because its three characters are not sufficiently real to carry it by themselves. *Escape Entertainment* is closer, in this regard, to Robertson Davies' rather flat dramatic parables about the plight of the artist in Canada than to *Jitters*, our best backstage comedy to date. David French embodies the cultural issues in an array of characters whom he makes us know and care about as well as laugh at. Bolt's play feels premature, as if it should have seen another draft or two, or perhaps have had three workshops before its first production as *Thimblerig* did. In its present form it is a play with rich potential not quite realized.

Two of the hottest growth areas in the steady expansion of Canadian theatre have been young people's theatre and summer stock. *Canada on Stage* lists forty such companies for 1980-81, and inevitably they have created a demand for more Canadian scripts of a special kind. Blyth, Charlottetown, and Lennoxville had all-Canadian summer seasons in 1980 (though sadly, the Lennoxville Festival has since shut down), and both the Muskoka and Kawartha Summer Theatres showed a strong predilection for Canadian material.

The cliché about summer theatre audiences is that they want fluff, and two-thirds of Aviva Ravel's *Second Chance*, which premiered at Kawartha, seems to have been written on that premise. It is delightful fluff in fact, à la Neil Simon, starring a menopausal Jewish mother who runs away from home and an unappreciative husband to kick up her heels a little. But the play attempts an excruciating turn towards the serious near the end when she returns home a changed woman and changes the lives of her husband and best friend as well. The clumsy fantasy ending unfortunately does justice to neither Ravel's sincere feminism nor her obvious desire to write good commercial theatre.

Warren Graves has recently been shaping his work to the needs of the burgeoning young people's theatre market. His *Alice* is actually an example of the very specialized sub-sub-genre at which he has become adept: the re-created children's classic as family Christmas show. Like his earlier Scrooge, Beauty and the Beast, and Dracula scripts, *Alice* is a free adaptation of the original, in this case drawing heavily on Lewis Carroll's two Alice books with wonderful results. Graves' *Alice* is funny, silly, and charming like the original, skilfully written, and embellished with Graves' own Dodgsonian wit: "Children," his Duchess tells Alice, "should be obscene but not absurd." As the Canadian theatrical mansion undergoes further renovation and expansion, there should continue to be room for plays like this where we can check our critical baggage at the door and be just as comfortably absurd as we like.

JERRY WASSERMAN

SIMCOE COUNTRY

MARY BYERS & MARGARET MCBURNEY, *The Governor's Road: Early Buildings and Families From Mississauga to London.* Univ. of Toronto Press, $19.95.

JEAN COCHRANE, *The One-Room School in Canada.* Fitzhenry & Whiteside, $19.95.

The Governor's Road is the third volume on pre-Confederation architecture in Ontario by Mary Byers and Margaret McBurney since their involvement in the province-wide inventory initiated by the late Professor Goulding of the University of Toronto in the 1960's. This volume is an engaging and lively account of some of the more noteworthy surviving structures between Mississauga and London, roughly along the road commissioned by Lieutenant-Governor Simcoe to serve as a military link between the lower Great Lakes and London, the proposed site of a relocated provincial capital. In their Introduction, the authors are emphatic in stating that their book is not intended as an history of each community along the 1793 trail, now Highways 2 and 99 (Dundas Street whenever it passes through a settlement), that the buildings discussed were chosen for their architectural merit, and that they are merely representative of the styles to be found in each community. In this regard I think they have been generally fair-minded, selecting equally from among the vernacular houses of tradesmen, those in the Regency manner favoured by military families, and the Neo-Gothic, Italianate, classical revival, and Georgian mansions erected to proclaim the dynasties of more prosperous colonists. Public institutions, such as schools, churches, town halls, and jails, are included only when there are compelling historical or architectural arguments for their inclusion. The Brant County Courthouse, inspired by the Palazzo de Medici in Florence, and the Dundas Town Hall which, in addition to council chambers, included farmer's stalls, a ballroom, a tavern, and a jail across the hall, are indicative of the sweep from the sublime to the pragmatic in structures of this sort.

The families referred to in the book's subtitle are those who built or were otherwise conspicuously associated with the buildings surveyed; selection of families for discussion was dictated by the architectural merit of the buildings they occupied rather than by the social prominence of the family, at least in theory. In some instances the authors abandon this principle of selection, justifying the inclusion of a house by the achievements of those associated with it. In this category I would place the family home of Alexander Graham Bell which, while interesting, is not in the same class as Chiefswood, the family home of Pauline Johnson, or Benares, the magnificent mansion which served as the model for de la Roche's Jalna. There is nothing wrong with this, since it still serves the authors' intent of providing the general reader with a glimpse into the rich heritage of Upper Canada. The desire to capture the flavour and atmosphere of the period also prompts the authors to include anecdotal material about events and people not directly connected to local landmarks but part of the local history. The War of 1812, William Lyon Mackenzie's flight from York to Niagara, and the Prince of Wales tour in 1860 are but three examples of events that "ran like a common thread through the fabric of life" in nineteenth-century Ontario.

For the insights which they provide into the families who figure prominently in this book, Byers and McBurney have relied to some degree on previously published local histories which are acknowledged in a selected bibliography. These sources have been augmented by information from wills, land titles, newspaper accounts and other material including

local legend which, in the view of the authors, constitutes "a type of mythology." All this makes very enjoyable reading and provides a human dimension to what in other hands might have been a dry academic treatise. Two diary entries particularly caught my eye. The first comes from the journal of a distraught passenger on the stage coach to Queenston in 1835: "Violent dispute the whole way to St. Catharines between a tailor-looking beast and a Methodist preacher about the universalism etc. Wished them both up to their necks in a horse pond." Then this, from the diary of Amelia Harris of London: "October 11[, 1871]: The smoke from the burning city of Chicago is like a thick fog here and painful to the eyes."

In keeping with their intent to provide an architectural survey for the general reader, the authors employ esoteric terms, e.g., English bond, Flemish bond, very sparingly, and provide explanations when they are required. More commonly, however, they can rely on Hugh Robertson's excellent photographs (about 140 of them) to clarify the text. Of particular interest, to me at least, are the authors' extensive observations on architectural preferences and fads among the early colonists. Yankee emigres, for example, brought with them "a respect for the classical mode of architecture, a style which was felt to embody the federalist principles of their native country." The unique and ubiquitous cobblestone-work in Paris, Ontario, is the legacy of Levi Boughton, an American mason who emigrated sometime before mid-century, just before the philosophy of his eccentric countryman, Orson Squire Fowler, "inspired the construction of a multitude of octagonal structures throughout Ontario."

The One-Room School in Canada is a labour of love by author and journalist Jean Cochrane, who discovered the singular importance of the one-room school in the life of the community when she and her husband bought the Argyle School in southwestern Ontario in the early 1970's. What the Cochranes found out in Aldborough Township was true of these schools before consolidation made them redundant — that everyone in the community had had some contact with them, as students, as trustees, or as eager participants in the box socials, dances, and Christmas concerts held in them. This book does not attempt a thorough history of this early Canadian institution and, in fact, the author's text is restricted to a few pages at the beginning of each chapter, after which the numerous photographs and copious documentary material tell the story. Cochrane's patient research into the archives of historical societies and teachers' federations is supplemented by extensive use of photographs, journals, readers, and diaries from private sources, and the result is what I would call an attractive coffee-table book for small coffee tables.

The book's eleven chapters deal with all aspects of the one-room school, from the campaigns for free and universal education in the early nineteenth century, to school design, school readers, the role of the trustee, and the teacher's place in the community. One chapter, for instance, includes illustrations from the 1917-18 T. Eaton catalogue, advertising blueprints and construction material for a complete rural school for the princely sum of $829.09. Another contains extracts from teachers' manuals on all aspects of the educational process, particularly as these apply to the socialization of frequently reluctant and unresponsive charges. According to the Ontario Teacher's Manual for 1915, for example, "Dermal pain is far from being the pitiful evil the sentimental and neurasthenic adults regard it, and to flog wisely should not become a lost art." The most delightful

features of the book, however, are the recollections of former teachers and students, most but not all of them coloured by nostalgia for a rapidly vanishing feature of our national life. As might be expected, students remember most fondly the incidents that altered the daily routine, such as turning animals loose in the classroom, dislodging stove pipes, or putting gunpowder or .22 shells into the heater to liven up a dreary day. Teachers recall, in addition to the desperate loneliness that was particularly evident in prairie or bush settings, the families with whom they boarded, big oafs who threatened them with violence, their encounters with miserly trustees, the strict rules of conduct by which they were expected to live, and the difficulties of meeting professional obligations. As one teacher remembers, "I taught arithmetic, I taught grammar, I taught spelling, and history, and geography, and science, and if I taught Johnny and Mary and Peter, it was purely coincidental. My job depended on how well my pupils could recite upon the occasion of the inspector's visit and how well they did on their high school entrance examinations at the end of June."

Books like these are good to have around. The first appeals to our concern for preserving and appreciating our architectural history, the visible past; the second reminds us of the debt we owe to a now largely invisible institution, but one which more than any other has given shape to our national life.

J. M. ZEZULKA

THE GOSPEL OF BARENESS

GWENDOLYN MACEWEN, *The T. E. Lawrence Poems.* Mosaic/Valley, $6.95.

GWENDOLYN MACEWEN'S concern with T. E. Lawrence is neither sudden nor surprising; she took a poetic interest in the Mideast with her first collection, *Selah* (1961), and has continued to draw images from its various cultures. Egyptian themes figure in "Arcanum One" (1966), "Inside the Great Pyramid," and "Poems in Braille" (1974). Two lyrics in *The Shadow-Maker* now seem premonitory: "The Discovery," for its fascination with the mystery of the desert, and "One Arab Flute," dated "Israel 1962." The Foreword to the present volume describes an old photograph of Lawrence that MacEwen saw in Tiberias that year as the genesis of these poems. And "The Child Dancing" (1974) has an early vision of the Turkish massacre (*Seven Pillars*, CXVII) that is retold here in "Tafas." MacEwen has not chanced upon her subject.

The *Poems* are divided into three groups, corresponding to phases of Lawrence's career. "The Dreamers of the Day" establishes the bases of his character in childhood and early archeological work; "Solar Wind" is devoted to the Revolt against the Turks in Arabia; and "Necessary Evils" deals with his mostly unsuccessful attempts to find a niche — and himself — in the post-war world. I found the later poems of the first and third sections the most interesting, with their emphasis on psyche; the war years demand action, and do not produce the best poetry. The volume is based on a fairly close knowledge of T.E.L. — MacEwen has read not only *Seven Pillars of Wisdom,* but also *The Mint* and the letters with some care — and readers not conversant with the Lawrence of Arabia lore may be puzzled by some of the references, though most are soon clarified by the context.

A kind of asceticism, comprising both love of hardship, and a yearning for purity, chastity, bareness, characterizes these poems, as it did Lawrence. "Lord, / Teach me to be lean, and wise," he prays

in "Animal Spirits." In "Furthermore" he lists his favourite dish as bread and water, his favourite character in history as nobody, and his greatest pleasure as sleep. MacEwen seems unsympathetic to the negating side of Lawrence, whose later negations are perhaps being read back into his youth too much here; but the poet who once wrote that the purpose of her work is (partly) to communicate "that joy which arises out of and conquers pain" is well qualified to present the masochist who liked to challenge sandstorms. She transcribes from *Seven Pillars* scenes such as "The Absolute Room" in the scented Roman ruins on the Syrian desert: the one in which

> all
> We breathed was pure desert air.
> *We call*
> *this room the sweetest of them all,*
> You said.
> And I thought: *Because there is*
> *nothing here.*

But the "inviolable" Lawrence of "Deraa," who "could never bear to be touched by anybody," leaves MacEwen cold. Of course sexual chastity, which comes up repeatedly here, needs to be understood in the context of the larger abstemiousness espoused in his letter to V. W. Richards of 15 July 1918:

> The gospel of bareness in materials is a good one, and it involves apparently a sort of moral bareness too. . . . these years of detachment have cured me of any desire ever to do anything for myself. . . . I think abstention, the leaving everything alone and watching the others still going past, is what I would choose today. . . .

This affinity for the sparse and passive (confirmed by many passages in *Seven Pillars*) is best seen in "The Desert" and "Apologies."

Behind the ascetic, the disillusioned dreamer, Lawrence was an overweening idealist. MacEwen's lines do not go far beyond some of his own formulations:

> I dreamed of having
> Millions of people expressing themselves
> through me,
> Of being the saviour to a whole race, of
> rescuing
> A whole people from tyranny.
> ("It Was Only a Game")

But "A Farewell to Carchemish" acknowledges that "He is only dangerous who dreams by day," and by "Solutions," well into the rebellion, Lawrence is simply muddling through, "Knowing it was all a pack of lies; / there were no real / Solutions, anywhere, for anything." The lies came to light at Versailles, and MacEwen's "Peace Conference" quotes or paraphrases major portions of a passage written for the introduction to *Seven Pillars* that remains one of Lawrence's most moving and self-revealing expressions of purpose.

> Old men crawled out from the woodwork
> and seized upon
> our victory, to reshape it at their will.
> We stammered that we had worked for a
> new heaven and
> a new earth. They thanked us kindly,
> and
> made their peace.

In the long post-war evening, Lawrence found neither a comparable rôle nor the inner resources to help him outlive greatness; he found only "The Void":

> What
> have I done, what am I doing, what
> am I going to do?
> . . . .
> Have you ever been a leaf, and fallen from
> your tree
> in Autumn? It's like that.
> . . .
> Where are my noble brothers, my
> bodyguards, my friends,
> Those slender camelmen who rode with me
> to the ends
> Of the desert? When does the great dream
> end?

Lawrence put it succinctly in a 1928 letter: "I'm all smash, inside." He died in 1935, *on* a motorcycle, but *of* lingering, psychic war wounds.

The verse is sometimes very good: flexible, subtle, and strikingly imaged. The dominant image is, properly, water, from the opening lyric — "water is everything" — to "Hot Baths" near the end: "All I want now is to boil the Hell out of myself. . . ." In between, water is firmamental and intrauterine, a place to swim or drown, the name both of a beloved and of the great deep (Dahoum-Tehom), tears, and the lifegiving rain, preferred drink of nomad and ascetic. "A pity," wrote Lawrence, "that men strive to surpass water, that cheap, easy, affectionate and subtle drink." The other images — whiteness, space, light, wind, silence — also arise naturally from the ascetic character and desert terrain of the subject.

"The Desert" brings out the underlying religiosity of the place and the man, whose interaction calls to mind St. Anthony, yet I am not sure that MacEwen does justice to the importance of the desert to Lawrence's imagination, to the way it formed, probed, and expressed him. A good example is *Seven Pillars* LXII, where Wadi Rumm, a canyon-like "processional way greater than imagination," is seen as an archetype.

Landscapes, in childhood's dream, were so vast and silent. We

> looked backward through our memory for the prototype up which all men had walked between such walls toward such an open square as that in front where this road seemed to end . . . that glowing square which my timid anticipation never let me reach.

Lawrence also wrote, "The abstraction of the desert landscape cleansed me, and rendered my mind vacant with its superflous greatness." Such lyrical and self-conscious passages leave little for the poet to do; in that respect, *Roughing It in the Bush* gave Margaret Atwood better opportunities to exercise her craft.

The final poem, "Departures," is an admirable summary of the themes and images of *The T. E. Lawrence Poems.* To quote this requiem out of context is thus unfair, but here is a bit of it anyway: "Ghostly riders on blonde and dreaming camels / drift / Out of the east side of my sight, / harbingers of morning. / . . . / The air / Is silk with locusts; / then the drawn sword breaks the silk / And the sky heaves / open. / Night comes and the stars are out. *Salaam.*" Some may react to this (and the whole collection) as they did to the film: romantic desert *shtik.* In context I found it serious, evocative, and occasionally beautiful. *Wa aleikum as-salaam.*

RICHARD BEVIS

UN/SPEAKING

LOLA LEMIRE TOSTEVIN, *Color of Her Speech.* Coach House, $6.50.

LESLEY CHOYCE, *Fast Living.* Fiddlehead, $6.00.

BRIDGET PORTER OLDALE, *On the Beautiful Trail.* Intermedia, n.p.

LOLA LEMIRE TOSTEVIN'S first book, *Color of Her Speech,* is both polished and intellectual: that is, if it is intellectual to introduce readers to the contents of the poet's mind rather than to those of her kitchen cupboards. Tostevin has reduced milieu to a minimum: to the body and to language. In fact, true to the post-structuralist theory that informs her work, she sees the body as much as a text to be read as an organism for producing speech. One of her epigraphs is Adrienne Rich's comment that "the body has been made so problematic for women that it has often seemed easier to shrug it off and travel as a disembodied spirit." For Tostevin, the body is not problematic in itself; it is subject, however, to the vagaries of problematic languages. Her first concern is that the umbilical cord of her mother tongue, French, has been cut; she is bilingual. In another epigraph Martin Buber writes that when we abstract from others the colour of their speech, we re-

duce them, and Tostevin speaks as one reduced: "I unspeak." In one of power's paradoxes, when English-Canadians learn French, they gain; French speakers learn English and lose:

> and one
> becomes one
> half.

Although Tostevin uses bilingual puns in an attempt to bridge the gap, no one can speak two languages at once. The only alternative seems to be silence: a "found" poem describes the surgical removal of the tongue. The mother tongue has been cut out; the father tongue provides no asylum:

> 300 convent girls mouthing
> Credos
> Pater Nosters
> to an Invisible
> Omnipotent Peeping Tom.

Flight from this leads only to "tongueless fucking in the dark." Men label women's language, as the English once labelled Quebec French, *argot*, a minority jargon: "femspeak." The only escapes from a male majority language are, at least at first glance, "femspeak," what Tostevin ironically refers to as "fuckiness," and silence. But a fish doesn't know much about water: one has to be out of one's linguistic element in order to see it. And to see something that once has previously simply looked through is at first to feel fogged in, blinded, or, to use oral metaphor, muffled, suffocated, silenced. Once language can be seen through as well as seen, it is again possible to speak; what had seemed a deformity becomes a gift:

> withdrawal of a sense
> they say
> sharpens all others,

and the "grafted tongue / is the seeing eye." The poetry that results is terse and pared down. Tostevin has resisted saturation by easy conventions, and instead struggles to articulate a language of her own that takes nothing for granted, and liberates, rather than imprisons.

When Tostevin's son looms in her kitchen doorway, he seems to intrude, if not into the kitchen, at least into the poetry; Lesley Choyce's joyous daughter is essential to his poetry:

> The government classifies me as an
> unemployed poet
> The truth is I can't write poetry
> But in the clear still morning
> When I run to the sea with my daughter
> The world explodes for us with tenderness
> and light.

Of the three writers under discussion, Choyce is the most easily classified as "poet": he is writing in a familiar way about familiar themes — the family, daily life, landscape, love. He is almost too much in his element. His many good lines, clear images, and sensitive insights made me wish that Fiddlehead had provided him with an editor. Many poems have weak beginnings and fine endings; others should have been worked on just a little more. Worse, the reader is constantly derailed by horrible typos: I liked *blashphemers* best. Choyce cannot be blamed for this, nor for the missing end of one poem and the misplaced end of another, but I suspect he cannot spell *fiery, temperament, dissonant, camouflage*, or *squeaking*. Even the pickiest-reader is frequently rewarded, however: for example, by his description of his grandmother "retrofitting old dresses / and saving jar-lids like they were ingots." At thirty-one, Choyce has published seven books, edited several anthologies and the *Pottersfield Portfolio* (an annual collection of Atlantic writing), and he does what he does well. I think he is still too young to be writing "Advice to the Young"; he shouldn't settle down now.

Bridget Porter Oldale's lines convey the cheerful and melodious voice of a non-stop talker in a wide, warm kitchen where children, half-listening, play be-

neath the table, surfacing to lick the spoon and hear another story about what it was like when Mummy was little. These are the family archives: anecdotes, jokes, snapshots, letters, first cries, last words. The book hangs in the mind more like a novel than a poem, with its heavy and loved weight of the concrete (right down to the family jakes). In Oxford, in 1949, the four-year-old Bridget planted chestnuts "in the coffintight garden" planning to "grow a forest upon / the unsullied ugliness of the iffley road." *On the Beautiful Trail* is filled with the same energetic impulse.

All three books left me wanting more: just more from Tostevin; something more challenging from Choyce; and from Oldale — well, mothers of four have no time to write novels, but perhaps she could tell me a story or two?

MARGERY FEE

RINGWOOD RECOLLECTED

The Collected Plays of Gwen Pharis Ringwood, ed. Enid Delgatty Rutland, with biographical note by Marion Wilson, and prefaces by Margaret Laurence and George Ryga. Borealis, $23.95.

THE LONG-AWAITED PUBLICATION of Gwen Ringwood's *Collected Plays* is an important Canadian literary event on two accounts. Ringwood's proper place in the spectrum of western Canadian letters can now be established and her pioneer contributions to modern Canadian letters can now better be understood. Perhaps with these recognitions in mind, editor Enid Rutland invited novelist Margaret Laurence and playwright George Ryga to contribute prefatory material to the book. In several respects Gwen Ringwood is the predecessor of them both, but because of dilatory attitudes towards play publication in this country, Canadian readers and writers alike have often been deprived of the full knowledge of their own literary tradition. Rutland's edition of 25 Ringwood titles therefore fills a major gap in Canadian literary history. We can now recognize that Ringwood has hitherto been a missing link in the chain of western Canadian literary development that extends from Grove through Sinclair Ross, W. O. Mitchell, Laurence, Ryga to a number of younger playwrights.

Gwen Ringwood, née Pharis, began to write plays of western Canadian life in the middle 1930's and has continued to do so right up until the present time. The titles in the collection, variously performed between 1937 and 1981, range from brief theatrical sketches to the one-act plays for which she is best known — for example "Still Stands the House," "Lament for Harmonica," "The Courting of Marie Jenvrin" — to the full-length dramas, such as the early *Dark Harvest* and the recent *Mirage*. What they reveal as a whole is a considerable range of style, tone, and dramatic mode: folk comedy, rural tragedy, expressionistic lyricism, historical epic, and social commentary. Ringwood's dramaturgy is not *avant garde*; like her precursor the Merrill Denison of the 1920's and a later successor, David French, her originality lies in the assimilation and development of modern dramatic styles to Canadian subjects filtered through her own particular human sympathies and interests. Unlike the aforesaid writers, she has written for the stage over several decades and her work offers a much greater range of theatrical expression.

Margaret Laurence, in her Foreword to the volume, helps to forge Ringwood's literary links with other western writers, including herself, when she recalls attending George Brodersen's University of Manitoba production of *Dark Harvest* in 1945:

> It was the first Canadian play I had ever seen, and furthermore, it was set in the prairies during the drought and depression, my own land and the time of my own growing up. It made a deep and lasting impression on me.

She also concurs with Brodersen's remarks in the introduction to the publication of the play the same year (a rare event for its time), that Ringwood was a writer helping "to shape" the modern renaissance of Canadian literature. In retrospect Laurence notes the general similarities of theme to the then contemporary prairie fiction writers: the stern character of the would-be prairie patriarch with his compulsive dedication to the inhospitable land represented in the figure of Ringwood's Gerth Hansen. To me the early one-act plays bring the short stories of Sinclair Ross to mind, particularly "Still Stands the House" and "Pasque Flower," the latter the precursor of *Dark Harvest*. The first-named play, in its tight naturalistic structure, presents the destructive conflicts of familial relations bred from the harsh experience of prairie isolation comparable, for example, to Ross' "Painted Door." Yet in "Still Stands the House" there is also an obsessive psychological violence that echoes Eugene O'Neill, reminding us that Ringwood's literary training has been primarily in the theatre.

In 1937 she was awarded a Rockefeller Foundation Fellowship to the Carolina Playmakers School at the University of North Carolina; here, under the supervision of Frederick Koch, she wrote her early, primarily tragic, plays with their strong emphasis on the regional "folk" flavour which, in the tradition of the Irish literary revival, that School encouraged. For Gwen Ringwood this was the right kind of direction for the writing of plays that expressed the qualities of the life she observed in rural Alberta, leading her to become the most serious of the early modern regionalists of the budding Canadian drama.

Perhaps not surprisingly, Margaret Laurence expresses preference for the tragic plays of the prairie and the later stark one-act studies of Indian reservation life of the British Columbia interior ("Lament for Harmonica," "The Stranger," "The Furies"). Yet it is arguable that the dramatic craft of Ringwood's folk comedies is more than merely "workable" for the stage; such plays as "The Courting of Marie Jenvrin," "The Jack and the Joker," and "A Fine Coloured Easter Egg," for example, bring a much-needed sense of humour to prairie letters, in this respect linking her to W. O. Mitchell and the prairie tradition of the tall-tale. In "Easter Egg," the intransigent Wasyl Nemitchuk pretends he has drowned in order to frighten his wife from her determination to move to the city should the drillers find riches on their Alberta pig farm; the irascible Bob Edwards of "The Jack and the Joker" gets the last word on Leacockian small town hypocrisy and corruption; the impulsive Marie Jenvrin comes to regret her foolish insistence that the price of her hand must be the importation of a milch cow to the remote reaches of Yellowknife. The comic plays that work the best in Ringwood's *oeuvre* are the ones that combine grassroots particularity with the well-timed combinations of the secrets, reversals, and misunderstandings of skilful farce.

Commissions from the Alberta Folklore Project under Robert Gard at the University of Alberta of the early 1940's encouraged Ringwood to search out the actual stories of her region; in this respect she is a pioneer of the approach to regional material taken by later playwrights such as Ken Mitchell, Paddy Campbell, and Rex Deverell, for example, as well as the collective creators such as Theatre Network and 25th Street Theatre. In ad-

dition to the Bob Edwards play, Ringwood's works of this category include *The Rainmaker*, about Hatfield's miraculous rain-making in the drought-stricken Lethbridge area of the early 1920's, a short play that successfully conveys a representative sense of the community itself; also *Stampede*, a full-length drama that combines comedy, melodrama, and a touch of social irony for a somewhat sentimental attempt at evoking the great ranching days of southern Alberta. Much later, in the now currently familiar idiom of epic-documentary, Ringwood combined history and private lives in *Mirage*, an episodic chronicle of Saskatchewan people.

One of the striking features of this book as a whole is in the way it reveals Gwen Ringwood's continuing alertness to contemporary themes and styles over the years. "The Deep Has Many Voices," an experiment in expressionistic lyricism, shows her exploring the potentials of open staging with music and projections to convey poetically and dramatically the perceptions of two young people about to begin their adults lives. *The Lodge* is a romantic comedy that examines current concerns about preserving wilderness environments and associated Indian traditions; its comic characterizations may also be seen as a direct development from Ringwood's earlier folk style. *A Remembrance of Miracles* is a topical examination of the bigotry of high school textbook censorship. "Garage Sale" offers the bemused observations and misunderstandings of an elderly couple as they eavesdrop on their younger neighbours.

Gwen Ringwood has devoted her long writing life to the drama; she began writing for the theatre in the hey-day of the Little Theatre movement and the Dominion Drama Festival. Her work was often performed by amateur organizations and theatre schools (particularly the universities of western Canada and the Banff School of Fine Arts) and over the years she has won many prizes and play competitions. The most valuable point that George Ryga makes in his playwright's Preface to this collection is polemical: without condescension to his subject, he rightly deplores that "a major talent" in the Canadian theatre should still be neglected by the "illiterate theatrical apparatchicks" of our contemporary Canadian theatre establishment. Perhaps the publication of this *Collected Plays* will lead to the correction of this oversight.

DIANE BESSAI

DU VIEUX, NOUVEAU

GILLES ARCHAMBAULT et al., *Fuites et poursuites*. Quinze, $12.95.

YVES THERIAULT, *Valère et le grand canot*. VLB Editeur, $14.95.

DIX ECRIVAINS québécois se réunissent sous la tutelle de Louis-Philippe Hébert. L'ordre du jour: écrire une nouvelle policière d'environ vingt pages. Résultat: *Fuites et poursuites*; dix récits divertissants qui frappent tant par leur dissimilitude que par leur fidélité à l'idée maîtresse. On voit d'une part l'histoire détective classique avec meurtre, enquêtes des détectives, raisonnements par déduction aussi brillants que compliqués, le meurtrier dévoilé et un dénouement plein d'action et de suspense. Tel est le récit d'Yves Beauchemin, "Sueurs."

D'autre part, on peut lire l'histoire plus noire, plus psychologique de Jean-Marie Poupart, "J'aimerais faire des photos de votre grange." Grâce à son style "journal intime," on pénètre dans l'esprit détraqué d'une jeune fille de treize ans qui prémédite le meurtre de son père.

Le problème qui se pose à la lecture d'un tel recueil est de savoir si les écrivains ont pu éviter de faire un simple

exercise de style. Il ne s'agit pas de pasticher Agatha Christie ou Simenon, mais de faire original tout en restant dans les contraintes du genre. Nos écrivains — les uns mieux que les autres — ont pleinement atteint ce but. Chacun, à sa manière, a su incorporer dans son récit des tours nouveaux qui en augmentent le suspense et ajoutent au plaisir du lecteur.

Prenons à titre d'exemple la nouvelle déjà mentionnée de Beauchemin. Ce qui fait l'intérêt de ce récit — le plus long du recueil — est le portrait des détectives Brunelle et Brouillette. Les deux sont des caricatures, des véritables Holmes et Watson modernes. Brunelle, le patron, est le détective perspicace, doué de raison et ultra-poli. Son lieutenant, Brouillette, est le portrait même de l'assistant fidèle et respectueux, prêt à tout faire pour son patron. Malgré leur apparence plutôt loufoque — Brunelle a des maux de tête, un ulcère brûlant et du vertigo tandis que son adjoint souffre d'un lumbago — ils parviennent à dénicher le coupable.

L'une des nouvelles les plus réussies est la première, "L'Américain et la Jarretière" de Madeleine Monette. C'est une parodie merveilleuse du récit policier et surtout du film policier. Les noms sont d'abord révélateurs; les deux victimes, Henry O. James et Agatha Krstulovic, rappellent l'écrivain américain de contes et nouvelles O. Henry et la très célèbre Agatha Christie. Mais le plus drôle est le vieux détective. Il s'appelle Marleau et on n'est pas obligé d'aller chercher loin pour établir un lien entre ce personnage et celui qu'a joué Humphrey Bogart dans plusieurs films détectives — Philip Marlowe. Mais la carrière glorieuse du célèbre enquêteur est chose du passé. Le voici maintenant à Montréal, vieux clochard, alcoolique, à la mémoire incertaine, ramassant des mégots et dormant dans la rue. La parodie est amusante mais il y a tout de même un certain pathétique dans la présentation du vieux détective qui sort de la retraite une dernière fois. Le rapprochement avec le cinéma est maintenu dans le style visuel de Monette. On a l'impression d'assister à une version filmée de son récit, avec changements de scène subits et prises de vue différentes.

Toutes le nouvelles du recueil se lisent vite et avec allégresse. Mais attention! Le lecteur aura parfois à se creuser la tête devant quelques péripéties bizarres, des raisonnements compliqués et inattendus ou des dénouements incertains. Tout cela ne fait pourtant que témoigner de l'art de l'écrivain et démontre que ce genre, parfois méprisé par les puristes, ne devrait pas avoir honte de relever la tête devant ses cousins littéraires plus célèbres.

D'un travail collectif, nous passons au travail individuel d'un maître conteur — Yves Thériault. Entre la publication de son premier recueil de récits, *Contes pour un homme seul* et celle du plus récent, *Valère et le grand canot*, se sont écoulés presque quarante ans. L'intervalle se fait sentir: absents sont le noir pessimisme et l'extrême violence qui ont caractérisé le premier recueil. Avec *Valère*, Thériault semble avoir adouci, voire abandonné son attitude négative. La plupart de ces nouveaux récits sont décidément optimistes. Nous sommes toujours dans le village, mais cette fois-ci dans un autre but.

L'auteur s'efforce de nous faire comprendre l'importance énorme de la tradition dans la vie de chacun d'entre nous. Au fond, nous sommes tous tributaires du passé amérindien, un passé qui, selon Thériault, donne un sens plus précis à notre existence. La vie moderne, avec tous les soucis qu'elle comporte, serait dénuée de signification sans cet héritage. La réalité qui véhicule ce dernier est celle du village. C'est pourquoi la plupart de ces contes s'y situent car c'est là où les racines sont les plus faciles à redécouvrir. C'est dans le village d'antan où le mythe québécois prend naissance, se cultive et, en fait, reste dans l'âme de chacun.

Le premier conte, "Valère et le grand canot," illustre à merveille la reconnaissance de soi. Valère, le héros, s'identifie de plus en plus avec un ancêtre coureur de bois qui pourrait être l'ancêtre de tout Québécois. Les deux identités s'embrouillent et se fondent l'une dans l'autre au point où Valère épouse une sauvagesse qui aurait pu être la femme de son aïeul, retrouvant ainsi les traditions dont il est issu.

Tous les contes ne sont pas aussi mythologiques. Ils s'en tiennent pour la plupart à la réalité pure et aux petits riens du quotidien. Une robe de laine, un vieux disque, une fille taciturne dans un hôtel fournissent à Thériault tout le prétexte nécessaire à la narration d'un récit avant tout humaniste. Il y a du tout: contes pathétiques ("Valéda"), contes humoristiques ("David et Goliath") et grivois ("La fille Eva"), contes allégoriques ("Le fils de Yaweh"), contes optimistes ("La tour," "Le Portugais") et même un conte détective ("L'Ile déserte"). Plusieurs visent à enseigner une morale ou à donner une leçon de bonne conduite, à l'instar du conte du XIXe siècle. Dans "La forge," par exemple, les imprécations d'un blasphémateur entraînent des conséquences indésirables, alors que "Le puits sans fond" nous met en garde contre l'ambition. Le récit qui clôt le recueil ("Noël d'antan") résume en quelque sorte la philosophie de Thériault. Il déplore la fausseté et le manque de naturel qui entourent le Noël moderne tout en en prônant les anciennes coutumes et traditions. Notre salut se trouverait dans un retour aux sources, dans notre héritage commun.

Pour renforcer ce thème important, Thériault fait preuve d'un style nettement oral. L'entrée en matière directe ("Vous avez remarqué ça?" "Le notaire du village était un snob"), des formules classiques comme "Voici quelque chose qui mérite d'être rapporté" et "Il y avait une fois, à Montréal, un petit homme chétif," les phrases elliptiques et la brièveté des contes nous donnent l'impression d'être en présence d'un conteur qui narre ses récits devant un auditoire attentif. La cérémonie du conte nous facilite la tâche de recréer ce passé dont l'héritage, si nécessaire à la reconnaissance de notre identité moderne, ne doit pas être oublié. Pour tous les amateurs lu conte!

MARK BENSON

UNDER GERMAN EYES

WALTER PACHE, *Einführung in die Kanadistik*. Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft Darmstadt, DM 29,50.

GERMAN SCHOLARS have studied Canadian literature, under various aspects and in connection with other literatures in English, since the 1920's. Under the shadow of the Third Reich, Canadian culture was seen as a special product of another Nordic race. Thus, in an article published in 1937, F. P. Grove was described as a Swede, and his gloomy and bitter realism was seen in connection with his Nordic blood. After the Second World War, Canadian studies in Germany came under the influence of the American occupation and the active American cultural imperialism that followed in its wake. The "American Myth" supported the rapid rise of American studies in German universities. In the 1960's, however, Canadian literature began to be investigated from a new, more emancipated aspect, with scholars like Paul Goetsch leading the way.

Today, Canadian literature is taught at several German universities. Ever since 1977, scholars from various European countries as well as Canadian writers and academics have been meeting regularly for a yearly symposium on Canadian studies, first held at Gummersbach, then

at Grainau. Although Canadian literature is a growing field of study at the English departments of European universities, the German-speaking countries have certain difficulties in accommodating it within the context of English studies. The most promising development is leading towards establishing it together with other literatures in English (e.g., Australian), under the label "Commonwealth Literature," as a third section (British literature coming first, American second). This development is not unquestioned, and it involves a number of problems. One problem is the position granted to French-Canadian literature, another one is the proper assessment of Canada's socio-cultural background. The German Society for Canadian Studies, among other worthy enterprises, tries to solve those problems.

In this context, the new book by Walter Pache, *Einführung in die Kanadistik* (Introduction to the Study of Canadian Literature), represents an important milestone. The book is intended for students of English and established scholars of English literature in the German-speaking countries. The author is Professor of English at the University of Trier. The publishers are recognized specialists for prestigious scholarly works. Thus, this milestone has been set up in the right place.

The book serves a twin purpose. On one hand, since the subject itself is still rather unknown in Europe, it presents the main body of works and authors that constitute Canadian literature (with themes and influences). On the other, it attempts to describe the methods and adequate study aids of Canadian studies in Germany. Pache thus proceeds in an exemplary fashion, choosing relevant chapters from Canada's literary development and assessing them under several different aspects.

The first chapter deals with the problem of a national literature in Canada. What criteria determine the canon? Pache tends towards an open interpretation of the term "national literature." This, he admits, involves the development of new methods for the study and criticism of Canadian literature.

Another chapter introduces the language problem. Pache explains the linguistic situation in its socio-cultural context, throwing some light on the specific historical development of this bilingual nation. The book very briefly tries to characterize Canadian English and Canadian French, with a special paragraph on "joual."

Chapter three looks at themes and forms in colonial Canadian literature. Goldsmith's "The Rising Village" represents early settler poetry. Richardson's *Wacousta* is presented as an important exponent of the historical novel. Haliburton's *The Clockmaker* is used to show the growth of local colour in colonial literature. Catharine Parr Traill's *The Backwoods of Canada* and Susanna Moodie's *Roughing It in the Bush* are seen as good examples of pioneer literature. Pache explains how colonial literature can create models and prototypes.

Chapter four assesses the periods of Québec literature. It shows the different position of French-Canadian literature, and also the different attitudes taken by its critics. Pache makes it quite clear that he is writing as a scholar of English, not of French, admitting that his book is primarily concerned with English-Canadian literature. Nevertheless it is a healthy and rewarding idea to include some information on Québec literature, the whole book purporting to be an introduction to the study of Canadian literature.

The fifth chapter introduces modern English-Canadian literature, stressing the innovations in or around 1959. The new impulses of the Diefenbaker era, growing criticism of U.S. influence in Canada,

the rise of various cultural institutions (among others the appearance of the journal *Canadian Literature*), the rise of a literary nationalism, the growing concern for a Canadian identity, and the importance of "myth criticism" are all discussed in proper proportion. Pache presents the development of the Canadian novel after 1960 as an emancipation from what Northrop Frye called "formula writing." He adds a few pages on the modern Canadian drama.

Chapters six and seven are more specifically about literary criticism. Pache duly assesses the most relevant literary theories in connection with the Canadian situation. He sees Canadian literature as a post-modernist literature because of its emancipation from European and U.S. dominance, and also because of its preference for myths. He points out the most important task of the immediate future: the editing of reliable texts. Comparative studies are possible between Canadian literature and other post-colonial literatures, also with U.S. literature. They promise even a great deal when undertaken within Canada, between the English and the French spheres of the country.

The eighth chapter deals with literary connections between Germany and Canada. "Ethnic Studies," German-Canadian literature, and the study of Canadian literature in Germany are introduced.

The most valuable practical help for the beginner in Canadian literature is given in the very extensive bibliographical section of Pache's book. There is even a chronological table of Canada's political and literary history, and an accurate index. On the whole, a thorough, scholarly piece of work.

Einführung in die Kanadistik by Walter Pache is a milestone in several respects. It sums up German scholarly endeavours in the field from the past twenty years at least; it serves as a sort of position-finding; its merits as a carefully planned and competently written book make it a starting point for future research. It is to be hoped that this book helps to make Canadian books more easily accessible in German-speaking countries.

RUDOLF BADER

INCOGNITO

Incognito, a Collection by David Young with Photographs by Jim Lang. Coach House, $9.95.

INCOGNITO is one of the most companionable books of recent years — companionable in the sense of agreeable, but also as a kind of meditation on companionability, collaboration, indeterminacy, synchronicity, luck, repetition, and randomness. It is an autobiography of sorts; a record of a life deliberately underplayed and outwardly inconsequential, and it is a picture gallery of Jim Lang's self-portraits, from the frozen captive moments of undifferentiated childhood, to the bizarre projections of multiple selves. David Young's text and Jim Lang's photos appear on facing pages, and after a few such exposures, a rough correspondence inevitably asserts itself. And as photographer and author grow more self-conscious, the correspondence becomes truly *semblable*: the text-as-caption, the photo-as-illustration. By the end, it comes as a shock that Jim Lang isn't David Young. The lone picture of the author, printed on the back jacket, is absolutely inappropriate. He *can't* be David Young.

Incognito is termed, in a subtitle, "a collection" and that word, too, functions in several ways. The text, broken into numerous arbitrary small memory-breaks, evokes a vanished Toronto of the 1950's with the oppressive subjectivity of a photo album — inconsequential memories of high school, of dating, of cars and

boats and failed athletics, mixed with a few poignant memories of high adventure, guilt, and embarrassment. A "collection," then, of vignettes, or an album of candid self-portraits. A collage, in fact, of stick-ons and hollow boxes that function like picture-frames for damaged, unfinished, and even absent canvases. It's a museum with its masterworks temporarily out on loan; we can see from the slight discolouration on the walls and the hook-holes and paraphernalia of high seriousness that an artist had indeed worked the premises. But he left.

Incognito anticipates nearly anything of a "critical" nature that can be said about it (without pushing it too hard, I could easily call this an "anti-book," a collection of amorphous posturings given "shape" and "clarity" by the clever manipulation of the "trained" reader's demand for order and hierarchy), and generally encourages a series of imitative images (like mine, in the preceding paragraph) that attempt to evoke it, without raising disturbing evaluative questions. It is a difficult book to invade (in the critical-surgical sense) — though an easy one to "enter." While projecting itself as a shy, defenceless assortment of baffling and random incidents — from high school hockey, sailing on Georgian Bay, portrait photography in the Poconos, script rewriting in the Hollywood canyons, or a wasted week in Bali — *Incognito* trades heavily on its sly reticence, its duplicitous ability to hide behind the grave (some might say smug) amusement it finds in other people's messiness, suffering, or pomposity. I find it mixing a genial and forgiving nature with something decidedly nasty — an admiration for certain forms of excess, while reserving the right to remain immaculately clean and finally superior. It belongs on the shelf of other "treacherous," masked, and duplicitous books of Canadian poetry, stories and novels as recently expounded by Eli Mandel. The projected innocence of Young's voice becomes, after long exposure, a kind of weary knowingness.

Enough of my own generalizations. On the credit side of *Incognito* are Jim Lang's photographs, which grow in complication and achieve an independent, if enigmatic honesty. Lang seems to be, simultaneously, a failed dandy, a 1960's relic, an aging innocent and restless self-experimenter, a Jack Nicholson of the still shot. Young's prose, by contrast, remains "undeveloped," a contact-sheet of possible responses. He chooses not to round off his scenes or push them to conclusion. The strategy works best when his essentially passive self is set off against an exuberant energy-source, such as his self-destructive "god-father" David Phipps, who drowns himself in Georgian Bay, or the American huckster-terrorist submarine lieutenant David Phipps who expiates on life aboard an atomic sub. (Forty-two days submerged on the recycled ass-gas of seventy sweating, womenless fighting machines. What are they doing down there? They're tailgating Russian subs, going "incognito," in the right-stuff vocabulary of Lt. Phipps.) Slyly, the author tries to imagine how Robertson Davies would handle the data he was receiving. We laugh at that; I laughed. It's a funny, off-the-wall comparison. If you push it a little further, however, you see it as unearned and even insufferable; a safe sort of put-down that demolishes Phipps without a reflexive payment-in-kind. It lets us know that Young is a refined sort of reader, an appreciative ironist, without having bogged us down in the thickets of his thought. I take back my laughter. I feel coerced into chumminess. A second reading of the book left me uneasy on many levels: dissatisfied but entertained, grateful for many small favours, many lovely images and a few metaphors that

knocked my socks off, amused but undernourished.

Wait, hold on — two David Phippses? (Actually there's a third.) Yes, and a great many Sarah Dukes — the eternal sexual-interest, and Emiles and D'Arcys. The effect of collapsing the many into the one, of turning characters into manifestations, is in keeping with the deliberate sketchiness of the self-portrait. At its best, *Incognito* is a collection of poses, frozen gestures, strobe-lit and two-dimensional. Conventional fleshing-out, the attempts at providing motivation and the rendering of emotion, are in fact embarrassingly empty of flesh or feeling:

> Like all lovers nearing the end we were full of accusations. Neither of us wanted to take responsibility for the habits that held our safe but boring anchorage, the patterns that no longer connected us to the people we had become. The attacks and counter attacks were hideously thorough, we knew everything about each other and nothing was out of bounds. Periodically these psychologically slug-fests culminated in brief episodes of real physical violence which, if the pain threshold was properly situated, connected us in turn to the last vestiges of our sexuality. . . .

When Young confines himself to surfaces, when he cocks his ear for jangling speech, when he gives a sense of what he knows without stopping to spell it out, he's more than just good — he captures the regret and the self-recrimination that is part of the autobiographical impulse. Looking at the Australian sun-bathers on Bali, he thinks:

> Watching them settle on their little territories of sand I'd feel the entire visible world come to a menacing standstill, all possible choices of risk and fulfillment diminished to this one last, best choice, which was to wait on a skillet of sand while the roasting star climbed the sky overhead, the featureless day trailing behind like an empty banner.
>
> When I passed close by the perimeter of their little groupings the young men lolled onto their elbows and eyed me briefly with solemn faces that neither asked nor offered anything. Then, slow as iguanas, they turned their attention elsewhere across the panorama of sea and sky, as if receiving some private communication on the solar wind. Here and there young women — deeply tanned and beautiful like everyone else on the beach — came down in twos and threes to choose basking sites a little apart from the pods of males. Slipping demurely out of their bikini tops they massaged glistening oil into their bare breasts with almost medical seriousness, then lay down on their backs, faces hidden under floppy straw hats. No man-made sound interrupted the linear uniformity of this *tableau vivant* except, here and there, the tinkle and drone of toybox melodies from a cassette deck — frail music that flitted above the rumble of surf and somehow fittingly completed the mood of cheerless resignation I attributed to each group of sunbathers I passed.

And this rather long scene on the island of Bali, coming near the end of the book, leads to a comic riff on the generalized pollution of the island by young people much like himself — a vision of universalized, if benign, brutalization. "All we wanted to do was pass through without leaving any footprints. Eat the local food. Don't spoil the people with big tips. Only staying a couple of days, actually — how much did you say you wanted for that monkey pelt?"

In other words, in their own sweet time and off-beat ways, Young and Lang have told a familiar story: we start anonymously, as alike as any children at a hockey rink or lined up on the front-porch steps, nothing terribly odd or exciting happens to us for twenty years, and then, somehow — we don't know why — we are lured out of our shells. We shed skins, we meet dragons, we lie and cheat and somewhere out there, in the farthest reaches of our dismal, white, Canadian and American souls (Lang is from Cleveland), we recover that transformed self, that shadow we'd been trying to escape — we know, suddenly, that the enemy out there is *us*, the heroes who intimated

us *are* us, too — and we set the discovery down on paper. Uniquely, if we're both lucky and good. Provocatively, if we fall just a little short.

CLARK BLAISE

FURNISHINGS

BARRY DEMPSTER, *Fables for Isolated Men*. Guernica, n.p.

DANIEL SLOATE, *Dead Shadows*. Guernica, n.p.

ANTONIO D'ALFONSO, *Black Tongue*. Guernica, n.p.

THIS IS A PARTICULARLY important time to buy, read, and review books published by Guernica Editions. After its inception in 1979, Guernica (through its editor Antonio D'Alfonso) became very quickly a respected publishing house both within the Montreal literary community and across the country. D'Alfonso was determined to publish titles gleaned from that largest element of the Canadian poetry community, the young poets whose work is continually shoved aside by what used to be called and used to be respected as major Canadian publishers. So far, this sounds like the typical birth of a small press. But the poetry in Guernica's lists was and is not poetry of the mainstream, that powerful element that prefers chopped-up prose to images, anecdotes to a melding of feeling, language, intellect, and form, and that in many cases prefers evocation — no matter how thin — of a particular region. Instead, Guernica nourished poets with obvious international influences, mainly *symboliste* in style — descendents of Rimbaud and his contemporaries — and therefore immediately set itself up against widely held notions of what *Canadian* poetry should be. Guernica offered an alternative, another room — in fact, a neglected one as far as Canadian poetry is concerned — in the mansion poetry may be. All this may sound like an elegy, and it may well be; because of various financial difficulties, the press is in trouble.

The three books under review here are three more good reasons to respect and encourage Guernica. Barry Dempster's *Fables for Isolated Men* is a book that took several years to find a publisher; its Governor General's nomination is therefore all the more exciting — and ironic. Dempster is a rising star: he has stories in *Third Impressions* (Oberon, 1982) and a collection now under consideration at Oberon. The stories show an eye for life beneath the surface, but remain rooted in accepted, external reality. His poems do the same. In the first of *Fables*' three sections, Dempster joins the growing number of young Canadian poets who are concerned with heritage both personally and historically (two of many others are Mary di Michele and, in recent work, Roo Borson). The section, "Memoir," subtly presents and simultaneously undermines an idealism associated with remembering one's childhood, especially in "Links," "Sister World," and "Housework." "The Birth of My Father" and "The Sun House" are two strong, evocative portraits only a thoughtful, sensitive man could create. In the latter, "the house is as clean as the sun — / mother with her light-ray brooms," and it is here that the parents are "playing heaven, playing home, / / asking angels to leave their blessings / on coat hooks, saints to forsake their / trials on the porch, God to wipe his feet / free of mortals." Later, in "Three Women," Dempster retells the mother's death in context of the small ward where she watched two other women die; after that unneeded trial and her own agony, she and hed bed are "one quiet ache of white." Throughout the section, the impression is of a loving son who realizes he has lost something — people, place, time — irretrievably, but keeps them alive with vivid memory and, more importantly here, with a poetry that

refuses to be sentimental and that even in its language protects and enhances the past.

The second section, "Useless Boys," seems more discursive. Its title poem is a link to "Memoir" and it and the following poems contain an opposition of idealism and actuality, dream and life: "We make ourselves smaller / to fit the dreams" ("Dreams of Love and Marriage"). Generally, the section is a portrait gallery of "Couples," a "Piano Player," "Taxi Driver," even of Giorgio Di Cicco in "Giorgio's Roses." The poems refuse to be the nondescript kind of portrait one reads and forgets quickly. Dempster's professional training as both a writer of stories and in psychology — he still works in a hospital — is evident in these portraits: Dempster has a keen eye for detail, nuance, gesture, and an ear for intonation, rhythm. He believes in the value of even the vaguest emotion or gesture, even of Giorgio's "cigarette punctuating / nervousness."

In the third section, "Isolated Men," Dempster begins with the poem from which the book takes its title. It is an eleven-part piece composed of short stanzas in which Dempster sketches the habits and psychology of isolation: "What happens to man / when he is dashed against / rock, happens to rock / against rock as well." The poem and those that follow it seem to rely more consistently on stringing together appropriate images, e.g., in "Soundings," "Nightmare after Almost Drowning," and, a most striking poem, "Half-Dead Birds the Cats Bring Home": "Their wings are still beating / in the center of me. . . ."

The book is an impressive debut, richly textured by intellect and a determination to be true to the process involved in the minutest action.

Dead Shadows, Daniel Sloate's second Guernica book, is also divided into three sections; but the first two were written in 1954-55 and 1962 respectively, the last in 1980. I can't say that these three sequences show a development in Sloate's style because he seems to have settled on a style and been content with it. And it is not the style of acceptable Canadian poetry these days. Sloate wrote his doctoral thesis at the Sorbonne on Rimbaud and the Symbolists, and his own poetic style consists of tough, symbolic slices of feeling and intellect which do not compromise themselves into a straightforward summary of events. The resulting effect is surreal, as in the second section, "Words from a Castle": "Against a balustrade of mist / I leaned my heaviness last night: / I looked into the sunken garden / Where dismembered statutes lay / Groping for their soul." These few lines are more immediately accessible than others, but Sloate's poetry, again like Rimbaud's, is not the kind one reads once and puts away knowing everything about it. Close attention to patterns of images and individual image clusters is necessary, as well as to the various voices Sloate allows to speak in these sequences. The language seems to come from the unconscious and, therefore, we are often presented with images that have immediately recognizable (and complex and resonant) associations. Much is made of castle, garden, sun, heart, wing, eye, crescent, fish, circle, etc. Thus, Sloate creates a rich poetic based on a surreal linking of romantic archetypes. And he pulls it off: he wisely casts the sequences here in short stanzas averaging about eight lines — just enough for the reader to deal effectively with a particular closely knit group of images. Certain gems stand out: "A leaf growing / As intense as the sun"; "As I lose you / There is a yearning the statue knows / As the hand of the passer-by / Touches its face / And loves its stone / / A desire to step into blood / And feel the flood through the skin"; "Variations on

the moon / Poured from all the towers / And turned the violins to light."

Many poets try to read Rimbaud, but most give up after university, if not sooner, and wander through other styles. Sloate found and studied his mentor early on, and continues to bring gifts to his memory. The result is unique in contemporary Canadian poetry.

It cannot be coincidental that many of the poems in D'Alfonso's own book, *Black Tongue*, contain elements of the poetics of Dempster and Sloate. It is D'Alfonso's particular determination not to cruise merrily down the main highway of contemporary Canadian poetry that makes Guernica an important press. *Black Tongue* is often richly symbolic and examines cross-currents of intellect and feeling. The texture is created by deliberate word-play, a variety of rhythms, and insistence on speaking out even within a complex image pattern. The poems conjure "electric worlds" ("The Room") with mythical and romantic archetypes, in short a world where passion — often erotic passion, but also energy — is the prime mover. What he puts into the voice of a dog in "Canuto: Blind Black Dog" is true of himself and should be true of more young poets: "they / who know eyes' true value, are aware / of daily visions."

One of the stronger poems here is "Life of Cross." It concerns Mexican peasants and their traditional religion and seems to summarize some of what is contained in other Mexican poems here — passion, spirit of place, self-pity, eroticism, and the careful and educated use of mythologies (but certainly not to the boring, oratorical heights of *The Plumed Serpent*). It is a rare political poem inserted among D'Alfonso's highly personal vision, and delineates the peasants' dependence on religion: "There's no such thing as country pride / when a nation's like a grit plain, / empty ruins, / / unused history." For the most part he, like Sloate, seems to draw on a background of international influences to create a very personal world in which the change from one moment to another is often what is remembered and must be examined carefully.

Three more titles, then, from Guernica Editions. Possibly three of the last. All are reasons Guernica should survive. Each, in its way, stubbornly resists fashion. No green and grey, rock and lake, wheat and big sky in sight. Three more small steps toward a truly tolerant and international literary culture.

ROBERT BILLINGS

HIGHWAY — LONG

DENNIS COOLEY, ed., *RePlacing*. ECW Press, n.p.

ONE OF THE REGIONAL WRITER'S greatest triumphs is an ability to avoid three major shortcomings. The first and most obvious is a lack of talent. The second is parochialism. And the third is provincialism, the bane of so much immature post-colonial art. Theoretically he or she can do this by maintaining an all-important perspective, by concentrating on the particular contours of the local without ever denying its more universal implications. "Here and Now" is valued neither solely for itself nor for how it can measure up to "Then and There," but for how it can reveal truths about ourselves as villagers, both regional and global. This is one reason among others (mostly notably talent) that *Dubliners* is not just another dreary collection about the oppresiveness of being Catholic, sensitive, and Irish. The best kind of regional writing, in other words, can extrapolate outwards without losing its inward glance; it can appropriate without idealizing; above all, it can scrutinize critically: the local is never prized merely because of geography or accent.

As an editor Dennis Cooley has at-

tempted this difficult balancing act in *RePlacing*, a compilation of miscellaneous writings on Canada's Prairie poetry. Although a significant, perhaps even heroic act, the book unfortunately pleases more by its sense of commitment than by its actual performance. Many of the essays make molehills out of prairie; some allow fervour to displace prudence; and in a few devotion leads inexorably into jingoism; for example: "Any civilization which has lost its numinous connection . . . with its particular region will produce an art that is predominantly ironic. That art, by its very sophistication and urbanity, will reflect a profound despair" (Arthur Adamson). Cooley himself indirectly acknowledges the partisan pull: "This issue lays out a lumpy, eccentric combination of . . . reviews, rambling musings, special pleadings, bizarre inventions, scholarly reassessments, personal impressions, particular complaints and enthusiasms." The question arises immediately: is this good enough? Do we have to be satisfied with lumpy, eccentric, and bizarre enthusiasms?

At its best the anthology publicizes the wide range of poetic innovations occurring throughout the Prairie provinces. Established writers (with the exception of Gary Geddes) are given their due attention: interviews and essays dealing with Kroetsch and Mandel; Doug Barbour has a shrewd appreciation of John Newlove; and Stephen Scobie's essay on Wilfred Watson is a fine example of how to write an intelligent and subtle analysis. Thankfully women writers are discussed not merely as token "ladies" in a male domain, but critically and rightly as good poets. Lesser-established people like Currie, Barbour, Uher, Suknaski, Brewster, and Szumigalski are likewise covered in thoughtful, albeit general reviews. Cooley and Alexandre Amprimoz have also tacked on useful checklists of publications by selected Western poets.

But overall *RePlacing* strikes me very much as an unfinished manuscript needing one more editorial purge. Many of the dispensable essays (about one-third) are poorly written exercises that should have had a stiff editorial prod long before reaching the galley stage. Witness: "Kroetsch's novels and poems disclose the parody of Narcissus behind the Orphic mask and in the interplay of these symbolisms the poetics of silence is inescapable and central" (Peter Thomas). The book, moreover, is padded out with a surfeit of shortish reviews, littered with ragged surveys that would be better off if pruned. The oddest inclusions are Suknaski's "The Prairie Graveyard" and E. F. Dyck's "The Post-Phenostructurachism of Place," poetical prose statements that belong in the companion poetry anthology mentioned by Cooley in his introduction. Two helpful items which are conspicuously absent in an anthology of this kind are notes on individual contributors and an additional checklist of critical essays.

For all this, *RePlacing* is not an unintelligent anthology. It articulates a number of intriguing problems facing the regional writer, especially the imperative to evolve a new, more pertinent idiom. If the truth be told, the regional speaker must therefore be something of a linguistic subversive: he or she must formulate a new poetic language that accommodates and conveys the universal meaning of a particular regional experience. The poets represented herein almost unanimously agree: theirs is not an unthinking choice of colloquial idiom, but the development of a language that is politically and culturally aware of the existence and threat of intellectual imperialism. (As Wilfred Watson so acutely remarks, "Hanoi is Here.")

It is on this last point that *RePlacing* unintentionally betrays itself: what the poets heed, the critics ignore. With only

a few exceptions the materials discussed are by far superior in quality of ideas and forms of expression than the critical discussions themselves. Paraphrase, lifeless survey, the old "emerging voice" routine — these, sadly enough, are the order of the day in too many of these essays. There's only the occasional lucky strike.

GARY BOIRE

FRYE TALKING

NORTHROP FRYE, *Divisions on a Ground: Essays on Canadian Culture*, ed. James Polk. Anansi, $19.95.

THE EDITOR OF *Divisions on a Ground*, James Polk, might have better subtitled this book "Occasional Addresses on Canadian Culture," rather than "Essays on Canadian Culture," since all thirteen of the pieces gathered together here are in fact occasional and since all but two are addresses, given by Frye at various times from the late 1950's to the early 1980's. Despite Polk's blue-pencilling of some repetitions from item to item, remarked on in the Preface, it is the occasional nature of these compositions that no doubt accounts for much of the repetition that remains. For example, the association of the centrifugal growth of culture with regionalism in antithesis to the centripetal force of political and economic movements, the mercantilist argument explaining why Canada has not produced any truly great writers, the notion of the natural world's intruding into the imagination of Canadian writers as an object of involuntary contemplation, and the idea of Canada not as British America but as a country that grew out of a Tory opposition to the Whig victory in the American revolution are conceptual motifs that occur often throughout the book. Frye, in a sense, justifies such repetitions by saying that all his work is a reformulation of "the same central questions, trying to put them into a form to which some reader or student will respond: 'Yes, now I get it.'" Yet such repetitions within the confines of a single book seem to me to be a rhetorical weakness — less Frye's fault, however, than the editor's.

Polk divides the essays into three groups putatively organized around the general topics of Writing, Teaching, and The Social Order; but the division seems useless to me: there is much overlapping, and some of the essays could just as easily have been in either of the other categories. In one way or the other, all the essays revolve around the relation between culture — specifically the creative arts — and the social conditions under which it is produced, and several of the essays also deal with the ways in which those social conditions are generated by geographical and political realities. Frye's penetrating aphoristic style and analogizing habit are everywhere evident, but such an abundance of generalizations can be tedious or ineffectual.

"Culture as Interpenetration" describes the three phases in the evolution of Canadian culture, while "Across the River and Out of the Trees" is a capsule cultural history from 1931, the year in which the *University of Toronto Quarterly* was founded, to the present. "National Consciousness in Canadian Culture" and "Sharing the Continent" both attempt to define the areas of likeness and "conditioning differences" between Canada and the United States. "Teaching the Humanities Today" focuses on the idea of a university and a liberal education, and "Humanities in a New World," which echoes many ideas Frye has developed elsewhere in *The Educated Imagination* and *The Stubborn Structure*, is concerned with showing comparatively the central importance of language and literature to the humanities and of mathematics to the natural sciences. "Conclusion to *Literary History of Canada*"

focuses on the sense of professionalism now apparent in Canadian writing, while "The Writer and the University," though written in 1957, is an important essay for the early 1980's because of its intelligent discussion of the relationship between the university and culture.

In "The Teacher's Source of Authority," a genuinely interesting essay, Frye argues that the teacher's personal authority in the classroom is acquired by default, and in "The Definition of a University," he argues that the ultimate authority in the classroom is the subject and that education sought to make one to some extent maladjusted to society. This last point is picked up and reformulated in "The Ethics of Change" when Frye argues that the university is committed to being aware of its social context and, at the same time, to examining the assumptions of its society. The final two pieces, "Canada: New World without Revolution" and "The Rear-View Mirror: Notes Toward a Future," revolve around the notion of Canada's tendency to move continuously rather than discontinuously through time and the idea of "the Canadian consciousness as one peculiarly adapted to preserving its own heritage."

How important is Frye to the study of Canadian literature? In his Preface, Polk writes that "even the most ungrateful critic could not deny his role in the development of Canadian writing or his influence on writers." However, at the risk of sounding ungrateful, I think Frye's role has really been only a minor one and his influence on writers, creative and critical, overestimated. It is true that Doug Jones is indebted to Frye's view to Canadian literature in his thematic-imagistic study, *Butterfly on Rock*, and so too is Margaret Atwood in her influential book, *Survival*, a work whose thematic taxonomical thrust obviously owes something to both Frye's thematic commentary on Canadian literature and to his anatomizing tendency. But I think that the effects of both these studies on the practice of criticism have been more negative than positive and that, during the last ten years or so, such critics as Eli Mandel, Frank Davey, and especially Robert Kroetsch have been far more inspirational and influential in the area of critical theory in Canadian literature than has Frye.

In the area of practical criticism, moreover, so far as I can see, Frye has had no direct effect at all, though perhaps he has served as an implicit standard. The only substantial instance of Frye's direct influence that springs immediately to mind is Patricia Morley's bizarre application of Frygian theories of comedy to Hood and Wiebe in *The Comedians*. Most of the important new critics on the CanLit scene are practising, consciously or unconsciously, a rough version of Murray Krieger's last Romantic New Criticism or, in spite of Frye's affinities with Structuralism, some species of European or American Structuralism. In this endeavour, they appear to owe little or nothing to Frye. For although Frye's general theory of literature, as distinct from his theory of Canadian literature, is profound and, for the most part, attractive, his generalizations about Canadian literature do not always jibe with the particulars of the literature itself. Countless critic-scholars of Canadian literature sense this disparity and feel sceptical about many of Frye's pronouncements on Canadian literature but never make their feelings known. Frye's reputation, after all, is intimidating, especially because it is an "international" one — that is, the Americans like him. In other words, despite the organizational and rhetorical problems I have mentioned, *Divisions on a Ground* is intersting reading for the student of Canadian literature, but it is not vital reading.

BARRY CAMERON

FORM & EMPATHY

ROBERT LECKER, *On the Line: Readings in the Short Fiction of Clark Blaise, John Metcalf and Hugh Hood.* ECW Press, $8.95.

GUY VANDERHAEGHE, *Man Descending.* Macmillan, n.p.

IN ROBERT LECKER'S *On the Line* we have three essays on the short fiction of "the most accomplished short story writers in Canada today." His claim for their greatness is, he admits, a personal evaluation, the book in one sense an "attempt to explain that personal evaluation." Clark Blaise, John Metcalf, and Hugh Hood may be "widely recognized as three of Canada's best writers," but there is little evidence and almost no argument in his book to assist Lecker in making this value judgment. Indeed the book's overall coherence is weakened by Lecker's insistence upon his "freedom to respond idiosyncratically and subjectively to these three authors." Significantly, the book has no conclusion.

Coherence's loss seems to be apprehension's gain, however. The long essays on Blaise and Metcalf contend with an impressively wide range of material. The shorter essay on Hood is a close reading of one of his better stories, "Looking Down From Above." (The entire story is appended.) All three essays are incisive and workmanlike. Lecker's own claim is, I think, a fair one:

> I have consciously avoided confining myself to a single methodology. My commitment here is to the belief that the critic should not generalize, that what we need in Canada is not classification, but identification based on the distinguishing features of an individual author's work. My attempt has not been to reduce the texts to an exegetical formula, but to suggest how their profound, and very different use of metaphor, imagery, pattern, and language affects me. I want to "*truly apprehend*" the stories. . . .

Why Lecker has excluded short story writers like Mavis Gallant, Margaret Laurence, Alice Munro, and Margaret Atwood from his crème de la crème selection, one can only speculate. His trinity of writers is in my opinion a serious and talented group of men. But oddly (or significantly) they all belonged to the same writers' group, The Montreal Storytellers. They seem to share a similar approach to writing. This undoubtedly has something to do with their use of "self-conscious narrators who confront their need to define and redefine the nature of perception." And according to Lecker, they all prove capable of engaging popular audiences.

I have great difficulty in believing that their audiences are as wide or as international as those of the four women I mentioned earlier, or that their stories are more compellingly written. One wonders if Lecker would not do better to leave value judgments out of his study altogether and concentrate on descriptive criticism and the analysis of aesthetic stance, which he does with care.

One might also wonder what Lecker, with his stress upon formal attitudes and craftsmanship, might say about Guy Vanderhaeghe's first collection of stories, *Man Descending.* My guess is that he would approve. I cannot brush aside the conviction that Vanderhaeghe's book is a major achievement. His stories have little of the compellingly rank sensuality of some of Blaise's stories; there is little evidence of ecstatic communion with God, the kind one associates with the best and worst of Hood's stories; and although the comedy of manners that unravels so carefully in a number of Metcalf stories is certainly a visible element in those of Vanderhaeghe (the English connection being essential in both writers), the manners themselves are worlds apart. Hood and Blaise, in respectively genteel and profane ways, are poets with words; Metcalf a dazzling technician. Vanderhaeghe, by comparison, may (at least initially) seem stolidly

old-fashioned. Compare this first collection to the erudite anarchy of fellow Saskatonian Ken Decker's *Backyard Gene Pool* (Quadrant Books) and his stories seem almost medieval.

And what he offers us sounds dubious at the outset, a descent into the squalor and pain of the world's losers: children at play who learn almost nothing about recreation, much about joyless endurance; people losing their jobs, their sanity, their lives; marriages in which genuine affection breeds little more than futility. Our descent into these lives involves a remarkable process of discovery, one made possible by Vanderhaeghe's thorough grasp of his prairie people, radar ears for dialogue, and thorny, elegant prose. One breathes in the squalor, seizes at best a guarded hope which is close to despair and returns, perhaps to the relative comfort of home. One comes to know his people so well that one participates vicariously but powerfully in their agonies. Of course what I'm getting at is empathy; reading a Vanderhaeghe story at its most significant level becomes an act of empathy.

His plucky women, tough kids, cage dwellers, farmers, and invalids never kill themselves. A bit like the characters of Sinclair Ross, they endure until the end of their story. The best of them learn how to accept their limited habitat. This seems to be the biggest step toward perceiving the human possibilities of this bleak terrain. It might be a dusty farmyard with a few scraggly chickens and a rooster tethered to a stake to play with ("The Watcher"). It might be a terminal ward ("A Taste for Perfection"), an elevator car in a mineshaft ("Cages"), a room in a mental hospital ("Going to Russia"). The worst of them sacrifice others. Big Paul of "How the Story Ends," a monster of insensitivity, suppresses human instincts in anyone he comes near. Gene Simpson's violence smoulders in one story ("Drummer"), and breaks out of control in the other ("Cages"). Robert Thompson preys upon the weak once too often and is finally broken by the biggest hen in the barnyard ("The Watcher").

It's the squalor of this world that hits you first, but it's the small glow in the best of these people — the thing that makes them human — that you remember, that hopeless hope of one leper comforting another. In "A Taste for Perfection," for example, the dying protagonist Tom Ogle finally looks his mortality in the eye, accepts it, and learns to comfort an old woman who keeps mistaking him for her dead husband. Almost all of these stories, in one way or another, are about love.

Even when love is not victorious (in this book it rarely is), a scurvy but nevertheless very witty comedy may unfold. Here, for instance, is Caragan's commentary on the joys of his one and only adultery ("Going to Russia"):

> Simply put, one thing lead [*sic*] to another. We became lovers. Regularly, on school-days between three-thirty and four-thirty, p.m., she screwed me with clinical detachment. If I close my eyes I can see her hard little jockey-body rocking above me, muscles strained and taut (I could pluck the cords on her neck) as she mutely galloped me hither and thither, while I snorted away under her like old Dobbin.
>
> That it was nothing more than a little equestrian exercise I lacked the courage to see.

And here is Charlie Bradley's retrospective look at his father: "For roughly a month, until the school year ended, my father took charge of me and the house. He was a desolate drooping weed of a man who had married late in life but nevertheless had been easily domesticated. I didn't like him much" ("The Watcher").

Typical also is the desolate beauty of the following prairie sketch. Again, Sin-

clair Ross comes to mind: "April was not a month to hang washing. April was a month of cruel rains. The eaves on the house choked on ice water; the poplars behind the cow sheds glistened in an agony of chilling sweats; and sparrows shrank to black clots of damp feathers which rode telephone wires that vibrated dolefully in the wind."

The weakest story in the collection, I felt, was "The Expatriates' Party." It seemed a bit crowded: too much detail and too many partially realized characters for twenty-two pages. Joe's story is a compelling one but it takes on the dishevelled quality of his mind as he gropes for his identity in his retirement years. I thought it might have been better as a novella.

I'm quibbling. The critic can do little else with a book of stories as deftly plotted and penned as these — except rave, applaud, pray there are more to come.

DAVID CARPENTER

THINGS LIKE THAT

GAETAN POULIN, *Abel.* Leméac, $7.95.

YVES THERIAULT, *Le Partage de minuit.* Editions Québécos, $8.95.

FRANCOIS HEBERT, *Le Rendez-vous.* Quinze, $12.95.

GAETAN POULIN'S *Abel* is his own story, the story of a young, intelligent victim of cerebral palsy and of his struggle with himself and his milieu. He wastes few words discussing his handicap, just gives us the details of his birth accident and then proceeds to describe an over-sheltered childhood in a devout Catholic family in a small Québec village. All his mother can offer him are her prayers:

> N'oublie pas Dieu mon fils, n'oublie pas sa bonté; dis-toi que tu as réussi beaucoup de choses en vingt-deux ans . . . tu es intelligent! Il y a pire que toi dans le monde; crois au bonheur, crois à la chance, crois, Abel!

Without saying so directly, he allows us to feel that this is cold comfort in a society which cannot see him as quite human. When he finds a girlfriend, people in the village openly ask her, "Comment tu fais Geneviève? Une belle fille comme toi avec une affaire de même?" Yes, says Poulin, they meant me, "a thing like that," the village idiot. He has and offers no illusions. He is terrifyingly objective about his suicide attempts, and one believes him when he tells us that his first thought upon realizing that a girl could be attracted to him was a desire to kill himself quickly, while the joy lasted. He has the courage to resist, however, and even to survive her subsequent rejection. One follows his progress through the normal educational system, out of the village and ultimately to the city of Québec. He paints for us most eloquently his horror of institutions (he remembers one where he was given a tranquillizing injection every time he was "caught" weeping), and his despair at the anxious piety of his mother, or the stale religiosity pervading many of the services for the handicapped. One shares his disappointment with the communal experiment, with the gurus and miracle workers who would rather not be confronted with a real problem. Coolly, he gives them their due, but no more. At the end of the book we find him celebrating his twenty-second birthday alone, a little drunk, in a basement apartment on a grey and rainy day. His last words are ambivalent, raising again the spectre of suicide; only the existence of the book reminds us that he must have resisted that temptation. Does Abel realize that he has chosen his solitude, that in rejecting the bingo-game atmosphere of group homes and special services he has set himself apart like any other lonely writer? He is isolated not only because of his handicap, but also because of his intellectual energy and refusal to play a rôle. Silent observation and self-com-

munion have made him frighteningly objective. He is just not ordinary enough.

In *Le Partage de minuit* Yves Thériault attempts to chart a clean-cut middle-aged lawyer's gradual awakening to his homosexuality, then his flowering, decline, and fall; and parts of the book are excellent. The hero's descriptions of his early experiences with women, his rather empty marriage, his disappointment and feeling of unexplained disgust move slowly, almost ploddingly. In the rhythm of his prose, Thériault manages to convey the sterility of a life lived through gestures, with no underlying conviction. One experiences literally the boredom of his character, Roger Véran. When, at the age of thirty-five, Véran discovers his homosexuality, the mood changes dramatically, for Thériault manages to evoke just the right tone of liberation and secret excitement as the character's true self is revealed to him. Thériault, however, is not able to maintain this level of involvement; quite clearly, he does not know what should happen next. Presumably he would like to show his character going down to destruction because of some irremediable internal flaw — but how can Véran's homosexuality constitute such a flaw when it has just been revealed as the salvation of his personality? Does such a man's final dissolution come from within or without? Thériault settles for a *deus ex machina* (in this case in the form of a helicopter) to bring his tale to a rather unconvincing close. When Thériault loses the thread of his inspiration, the character loses his autonomy and his life. Thériault's remarkable artistry goes only so far in this novel, then his incommensurable synicism takes over.

François Hébert's *Le Rendez-vous* is funny, ironic, and sensitive. It is both literary and mocking of literature. It opens with Eugène Maloin, the main character, winding up his UQAM class on *Finnegan's Wake*. It is noon, and he feels his stomach preparing to rumble, so he adds a few concluding remarks to cover the noise; these the students assiduously note down. Does *Finnegan's Wake* deserve better? Later in the novel a particularly diligent student is eager to discuss with him just those concluding points. The story is strung together in a loose episodic structure that allows the reader access to the minds of several very different people; much of its irony arises from our privileged view into different interpretations of the same situation. There is compassion in this book, and a non-condemnatory attitude towards human folly and misunderstanding. In one of the most charming scenes Maloin, who has been suffering from insomnia, decides to sit up all night and think. His wife, who loves him, volunteers to keep him company. She makes herself a sandwich but forgets to eat it as he leads her deeper and deeper into philosophical speculations:

> Dans l'assiette, sur la table de chevet, à côté du cendrier plein de mégots, le sandwich au jambon de Nathalie, intact, séchait lentement. Assis tout près, le chat le fixait, sans broncher. Patience.

As they discuss his ideas, the cat waits, watching the sandwich. Nathalie, not following the argument, suggests they go to Martinique at Christmas. The cat inches closer. Eugène continues to elaborate his ideas. Finally he arrives at this:

> — S'il fait chaud en un point A de la planète, il fait froid en un point B. En un même point de la planète, dans un temps A', il faut chaud et dans un temps B', il fera froid. Or A et A' sont analogues, de même que B et B'... Le secret du monde gît dans la différence entre A et A', entre B et B'!!! Tu entends, Nath? Je tiens le secret! Nath!

He has discovered the "secret of the world," but Nathalie has gone to sleep. "Zut," he says, turns out the light, and lies down himself. Then a few minutes later he hears something fall, and munching noises: "Le chat, le jambon. La pa-

tience trouvait sa récompense." So much for human logic and middle-of-the-night inspirations. Others have more pragmatic ambitions.

With the same wry and dispassionate humanism, Hébert examines the respective worlds of a weary and disenchanted psychoanalyst, an old renegade poet who has rather brilliantly and deliberately electrocuted himself with an electric baseboard heater in an abandoned car during a rainstorm, a pair of consumerist cohabiting lovers who are no longer interested in each other, a charming and clever *tapette* living in a world of linguistic jokes, a brave little Bell Telephone employee who brings up her lover's child without telling the father, and a romantic and desperate fat girl who wishes to immolate herself somehow. There is even a mild and oblique poke at Québec nationalist symbolism in literature as the Bell girl's rediscovered lover repeatedly wonders why she spells her name "Lyse," with a "y" instead of the more usual "i." In a different sort of novel she would be intended to represent motherhood and "la patrie," but here François Hébert is just playing with us. His book is good entertainment, clever, funny, and sensitive. He even laughs at literature. And the ending? Just wait, the butler did it.

JUDITH COWAN

POETRY & PIETY

RINA LASNIER, *Entendre l'ombre*, Vol. I. *Poèmes*. Hurtubise HMH, $6.95.

RINA LASNIER, *Voir la nuit*, Vol. II. *Proses*. Hurtubise HMH, $8.95.

IN 1926, IN PARIS, Henri Brémond published two essays on poetry which had an effect on the critical scene out of all proportion to their length. For Brémond was one of those scholarly, literary-minded abbés who have graced the world of French literature since the seventeenth century, and his thesis, coming as it did shortly after the Surrealist manifesto, aroused a spirited discussion among an establishment which was strongly marked by agnosticism. The subsequent debate went on for years in the periodicals, providing one of the most enjoyable and fruitful literary *querelles* since the Ancients and Moderns joined forces.

For Brémond had forced French critics, who are only rarely poets, to consider the actual nature of the poetic experience itself, and since neither his considerable erudition nor his catholic tastes (he liked both Keats and Valéry) could be seriously faulted, they had to limit themselves to the substance of his arguments. He suggested that the mystic experience and the poetic experience are closely allied, are in fact identical at the highest level of human perception. But the true mystic has no need to express himself in words, being content with the feeling of unity with the Absolute. The poet, on the other hand, is inevitably drawn to the impurity of words, and in being thus drawn, allows the intervention of mind, or intellect, into an experience which was originally one of non-verbal communication with the ineffable. Brémond associated this hypothesis with praise for the poetry of Mallarmé, Valéry, and some English writers, which confused the issue considerably, but provided a wide variety of targets. Everyone, including Valéry (that "mystique sans Dieu"), had a glorious time, for although the association of the sacred and the poetic is hardly new in the history of human society, Brémond's application of it provided the occasion for a new round in the struggle between rationalism and religion in France.

Rina Lasnier, in a curious way, is doubly the inheritor of the complexities inherent in the climate of opinion which saw the development of this French literary quarrel about the nature of pure

poetry in the late twenties. Her works are marked by a strong consciousness of the presence of God, although she would be the last person to lay claim to the title of mystic. Moments of intense perception, so often associated with the beauty of the natural scene, ally her to the pantheism of the Romantics. Yet her interpretation of those moments puts her firmly into a framework of traditional Christianity. She is on the side of Maritain's angels, not Valéry's infinitely human, infinitely sad *l'Ange*.

Her understanding of what poetry can be, or should be — her own practice in other words — stems from the ideals prevalent at the Symbolist period and later. A deep concern for craft, a respect for language, a refusal to take the easy way out by padding lines, a total seriousness in approaching the poem, a desire to make each syllable count — there are worse ideals for the poet, for they do not necessarily have to be tied to the metaphysical premises of Symbolism. Rina Lasnier also accepted fairly early in her career Mallarmé's advice "Suggérer, voilà le rêve." Like his, her personal reticence is total, so the poetic universe she creates has in it nothing of the long, self-indulgent, autobiographical ramblings which clutter the pages of so many literary magazines. Profoundly felt emotions are there — love, pain, joy, loneliness, longing, grief — but they are associated with the phenomena of the natural world, birds and trees and hills rather than cigarette butts, noise of the television, or steam from the kitchen sink. And the actual events provoking memory, or emotion, have vanished. The poems in *Entendre l'ombre,* both in matter and style, seem simply a prolongation of *Matin d'oiseaux* (1978), with perhaps more emphasis placed on religious experiences and motifs. They are most successful when the natural lyrical impulse of the poet is given full play, "Quelle brume me saisit fantôme / pour les bras déroutés du vent?" or when the exact edge of her personal style defines a mood, "Ma peine précise ton absence / l'ombre de falaise te repense." There are striking phrases, "levain du silence durci de larmes" for example. The rich vocabulary is occasionally salted with dialect words (explained in notes) but avoids the colloquial and slang expressions, the broken syntax which younger poets have been experimenting with.

Of course the snare for the poet who successfully manages a style is that he risks eventually becoming a prisoner to the very forms which offered him, in the first place, his freedom. Rina Lasnier does not escape this trap, but I think it may be more a manner of perception than an actual stylistic matter. Her delicately apprehended moments of spiritual or emotional insight tend to vanish under the weight of concentrated, sometimes overly abstract language. To take merely one example, the lines "ouvre-toi aux ailleurs de la foi / à l'échéance vivipare du Perdurable" seem lacking in the very quality which Brémond noted in "la poésie pure," a magnetic current of excitement running through the text.

The latter section of this first volume is entirely devoted to poems on biblical themes which again read like an extension of "Paliers de Paroles" (1978). One can fault neither the author's intentions, her theology, nor her syntax. But it takes more than correctness, more even than sincerity of belief, to infuse new life into a system of imagery whose main symbols have become icons, so stylized as to have lost their original impact, their verbal impact that is, for the icon itself as a visual experience can still affect the spectator. Of course there have been renewals of the language of faith; the literary history of Western Europe is studied with examples from the time the vernaculars emerged from Latin down to the present

century — Dante to Edith Sitwell. Both burning intensity of vision or spiritual struggle may melt down the shapes of ordinary language into fresh forms. But between Villon's prayer in his mother's words to the Virgin, and Paul Claudel, there lie also deserts of vast boredom, expanses of bland religiosity or sentiment which have never been transmuted into poetry. Rina Lasnier's poems on the Trinity, the Holy Family, biblical incidents, become pious embroideries on familiar themes, rather than intimations that it may be a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Voir la nuit, prose essays, meditations, devotions, starts out in a promising way with a commentary on a verse from Isaiah. The rhythmic vitality which is lacking in the poems is fully realized here and in several other passages, including a delightful rendering of the Creation myth and a moving account of an Indian child's Christian funeral. One is reminded from time to time of the style of St-John Perse, with its effective use of varying sentence lengths and abrupt pauses. But the real and immediate influences are the Bible, and Pascal — the first for the rhythmic prose, the second for the incisive comparisons and balanced thought:

> L'artiste va et vient dans la double paroi de la beauté et de la mort toujours répondantes, car l'homme naît ignorant de la vie respirante et meurt ignorant de l'immortalité aspirante.

But the high spots are few and far between in this miscellaneous collection of, mostly, biblical commentaries. François Mauriac once remarked (before Graham Greene) that he preferred to be known not as a Catholic novelist, but a Catholic who wrote novels. The overwhelming preponderance of specifically religious material in Rina Lasnier's last four books, taken as a unit, leads one to believe that she would be happy to be known as a Catholic poet in a province which is rapidly becoming, in the cities, secularized, and where the casual obscenities of the street have become part of government-sponsored literature — the federal government, naturally.

G. V. DOWNES

COLOURS OF MAN & GOD

DAVID J. BOND, *The Temptation of Despair: A Study of the Quebec Novelist André Langevin*. York Press, n.p.

NICOLE DURAND-LUTZY, *Saint-Denys Garneau: La couleur de Dieu*. Fides, n.p.

MONIQUE GENUIST, *Languirand et l'absurde*. Pierre Tisseyre, n.p.

QUEBEC'S PERIOD OF TRANSITION, from shortly before World War II until the Quiet Revolution, was characterized by a fluctuation between literary works principally concerned with maintaining traditional, national values and those exploring more universal questions. One part of this transition consisted in moving away from the domination of the Catholic Church and adapting the contemporary metaphysical writings of France to the Québec milieu. Three very different writers, Garneau, Langevin, and Languirand, illustrate this transition, and recent studies of their works emphasize the international influences on and universal nature of their writing.

Hector de Saint-Denys Garneau preceded this transitional period, but his interests were not restricted to his immediate environment. Nicole Durand-Lutzy, herself a theologian, focuses her study on the spiritual aspect of Garneau's poetry, which was influenced by a number of artists with whom he strongly identified: Baudelaire, Dostoïevski, and Mozart are among the many influences on his philosophical and aesthetic evolution. Garneau's chronic heart problems and delicate emotional stability resulted in a

sense of the imminence of death, which alienated him from his earthly existence and from those around him. Much of his life was spent attempting to overcome this distance, but more important to Durand-Lutzy's study are his efforts to attain a higher spiritual level.

Early in his life, Garneau's experience of suffering led him to an identification with Christ that would last until his death. He summarized his vocation as that of "the authentic translator of man, of his aspirations, of his fears, a sort of painter of human destiny." He himself recognized this as a religious act: "Every poet is a lamp of the projected light, he is responsible before God. A questioning being, he will always call himself into doubt, participating in the obscurity of creation." At the heart of his poetry lies a tension between his faith in God and in his work as roads leading both to joy and meaning, and to a constant awareness of the inevitability of suffering and death.

Although she recognizes that he was always obsessed with the idea of death, Durand-Lutzy refuses to see a fundamental pessimism in Garneau's work: "Pessimism? Perhaps, but more likely an expression of human pain in search of hope." Such a statement would seem to connect Garneau's philosophy with the existentialist school, but such a comparison lies outside the interests of Durand-Lutzy's study. She also rejects the theory that his death was a suicide, feeling that in his life and work Garneau moved away from pain, the colour of man, towards joy, the colour of God. While her examination of the religious aspect of Garneau's work confirms her ideas, it is impossible for me to ignore the sense of despair which permeates much of Garneau's later poetry and to be thoroughly convinced by her personal opinion that he ultimately came to terms with life and death.

In the writing of André Langevin, despair also seems to predominate. At his most optimistic, his heroes remain cautious, recognizing the accidents of fate to which they may have to adjust. Langevin's novels, according to David Bond, "mirror the crisis" of the "change from a predominantly agricultural society to one in which the city assumed a more important role," and to "a world that has no absolutes and no established values." While Bond sees him, correctly, as the pioneer of existentialism in the Québec novel, adapting the themes of Sartre, Camus, Malraux, and others to a Québec setting, I would say that his importance goes far beyond this. Not only were the themes he imported from French literature original to the Canadian literary tradition, but his treatment of them has continued to be unparalleled. The first urban novels were examples of social realism, and this genre has remained strong in Québec and even more so in English Canada. The naturalistic and "nouveau roman" forms reflect what might be considered the primary existentialist concern: how does an individual survive and find meaning in a world in which God, the Church, and traditional values are no longer meaningful? It is Langevin, however, who most resembles the French school which was established during World War II. His writing demonstrates that the situation of Québec during this transitional period was anything but incompatible with the international one; the search for identity and meaning that marked the existentialists has always been important for the Québécois. Bond's study clearly shows these connections.

Langevin's characters *do* find meaning, although they do not find absolute values. Although Bond finds no proof that Langevin considered Sartre and Camus as important influences, readers familiar with the French existential novel will recognize close similarities. His characters

undertake the existentialist search for meaning: they sense the absurdity of life and feel anxiety, desire to act and find a raison d'être, although this leads only to greater loneliness. In *Poussière sur la ville*, Alain Dubois, uncertain and uncomfortable in his work as a doctor and in his marriage with Madeleine, loses any idealism he once possessed. He struggles to understand what people expect of him, what he is capable of accomplishing, and through his suffering discovers pity as a significant human quality. Pity, as it appears in this novel, is untinged by arrogance or disdain; it is the desire to save others, to help them survive and even find happiness, and is paradoxically related to Garneau's conception of religious faith. Whether Alain succeeds in saving Madeleine, however (and this is, to say the least, questionable), is finally insignificant. Because of the fundamental absurdity of life such doubt is inevitable. The essential act is the struggle against "le néant"; in this way pity becomes an example of Sartrean "engagement."

As Langevin was the pioneer of the existentialist novel, Languirand was the pioneer of absurdism in Québec. Monique Genuist's extensive research is limited to this phase of his career, although she recognizes that his activities have since moved in a very different direction. Languirand's early theatre has strong connections with the work of Alfred Jarry, Genet, Beckett, Ionesco, and others, and Genuist focuses her study on these influences, making interesting comparisons of the themes, characters and language. This last point of comparison is sometimes a very difficult one, since the linguistic question has had unique repercussions in Québec. Moreover, Languirand makes clear in his interview with Genuist that his avoidance of the popular speech of Québec was both intentional and normal; he was assimilated into the culture of France. While such an attitude was not unusual among French-Canadian intellectuals of his generation, it was rapidly becoming much less so; Languirand's sense of failure in his theatrical career was in part a recognition, even an encouragement, of the efforts of younger playwrights to write about the Québec milieu in an appropriate language.

As a result, Genuist's efforts to find particularly French-Canadian elements in Languirand's work often seem to reflect the bias of the playwright and are noticeably limited. Nonetheless, her research is extremely comprehensive and should be considered the definitive work on this period of his career. Her determination to remain as objective as possible distinguishes her study from Durand-Lutzy's rather subjective analysis of Garneau. Furthermore, unlike the latter's concentration on the religious interest of Garneau's work, Genuist's study is an effective overview of the many aspects of Languirand's career: the texts themselves, performances, critical reception, influences, and his own opinions of his work. Bond's work also provides a fairly comprehensive analysis of Langevin's work, although it is clearly intended as an introduction of this writer to English Canadians with little knowledge of Québec literature. While there is no lack of criticism on the subject, no complete volume had been published in English previous to Bond's study; as such, it should be an incentive to anglophones to read at least his translated novels.

Genuist's work is perhaps all the more interesting because it is deliberately limited to a time in Languirand's life in which he himself felt as lost and hopeless as a character in one of his absurdist plays. Since then, according to his interview and his later work, he has found a certain peace through his commitment to his inner life and to humanity. In other words, he has moved in the direction of Langevin's Dubois, towards a meaningful

existence, and discovered in this a joy not unlike that pursued by Saint-Denys Garneau.

JO-ANNE ELDER

VENTURING OUT & IN

JAN ANDREWS, ed., *The Dancing Sun: A Celebration of Canadian Children,* illustrated by Renée Mansfield. Porcépic, $5.95.

MURIEL WHITAKER, ed., *The Princess, the Hockey Player, Magic and Ghosts,* illustrated by Vlasta van Kampen. Hurtig, $12.95.

The Dancing Sun, an impressive multicultural anthology of short stories and poems for children 8 to 12 years old, borrows its title from a poem by Inuk, Alootook Ipellie. There the Arctic winter sun, dancing but not setting all night long, beckons the Inuit to dance in joy as the sun does, "in the Inuit way / in the Inuit land." Even so, each story and poem of this anthology invites the reader to celebrate its ethnic uniqueness, a uniqueness which nonetheless forms a part of our common and abiding Canadian heritage. The various authors write from and/or explore different ethnic backgrounds: Susan Hiebert (Mennonite), Sharon Drache (Jewish), and Cyril Dabydeen (Guyanese), for example. The locus for their explorations is also geographically Canadian, and regionally diverse. So Ann Rivkin's "Awards Day" tells of Steve Nesrallah, of Lebanese background, and his successful navigation of the local schoolboat through fog on the B.C. coast; Joyce C. Barkhouse's story of the courageous Sylvia, a young Negro slave, is set in Nova Scotia during the Yankee raids of 1782. While intriguing plots abound in the stories, many of them also possess an arresting emotional resonance: in Marjorie Holland's "Kodomono-Hi," Tim is awed at the emotional restraint and forgiving decorum of his friend Yoji's family, when Tim accidentally (and only temporarily) injures Yoji's little brother on a Japanese festival-day, for example; and in Irma V. Sanderson's "The Muslin Curtains," Merna is ashamed when her poor immigrant parents realize that she is too embarrassed (again, only temporarily) to have them at her school concert, even after they have spent lavishly on her concert dress. In the stories' varied treatment of love, courage, and good humour in and across different ethnic heritages — a treatment vividly enhanced by (as a publisher's blurb puts it) "the care, humanity, humour and delicacy" of Renée Mansfield's illustrations — the anthology is a literary embodiment of the diversity-and-yet-unity its stories affirm. The "dancing" is not meant to stop when we have closed the book.

Written for children 8 to 14 years old, *The Princess, the Hockey Player, Magic and Ghosts* is the fourth in a series of anthologies by Whitaker and van Kampen, including *Great Canadian Animal Stories* (1978), *Great Canadian Adventure Stories* (1979), and *Stories from the Canadian North* (1980). This latest anthology includes a wide variety of stories by both modern and less recent authors, and about different regions in Canada. George Clutesi's "Ko-ishin-mit Goes Fishing" is a West Coast Indian fable about a gullible native fisherman who comes to temporary (and comic) grief. In Julia L. Sauer's haunting fantasy, "Fog Magic," Greta's walk through a Nova Scotian fog on the old Post Road takes her back in time to the hospitable villagers of Blue Cove, who disappear without a trace when the weather clears. Leslie McFarlane's "Series Jitters" suspensefully tells of how hockey player Bud, called up from the farm team for the finals with a team coached by his father, finally "shakes" his crippling anxiety on the ice, saving his team and his father's job. The anthology ends with Leacock's "Buggam Grange: A Good Old Ghost

Story," complete with deaf-mute butler (captured macabrely in one of van Kampen's striking illustrations), a haunted tower-room, and a sceptical but ultimately terrified hero who attempts to sleep there overnight on the fiftieth anniversary of a murder commited on the premises.

As anthologies, the two books have, broadly speaking, somewhat different flavours. Many of the stories in *The Princess* are similar in kind to *Treasure Island*, which hinges mainly, although not exclusively, on sudden adventure and the pleasure of exciting event. In many of the pieces of *The Dancing Sun*, to borrow C. S. Lewis' words on stories, the "real theme may be, and perhaps usually is, something that has no sequence in it, something other than a process and much more like a state or quality." As in *The Wind in the Willows*, with its tonal exploration of the sense of Home in the exploits of its characters, *The Dancing Sun* often explores the "insides" of its plots, however adventurous: the moral-emotional colouring of outward event as it has to do with joy in, and sharing across ethnic diversities. The somewhat different thrusts of these two anthologies, then, as well as the variety of their contents, ensure a doubly rich feast for their readers.

MURRAY J. EVANS

ABOUT THE EDGES

LEON ROOKE, *The Birth Control King of the Upper Volta*. ECW Press, $8.95.

LIKE THE FINEST THINGS in life, Leon Rooke's fiction is an acquired taste. Although nothing very important seems to be taking place in most of his stories, everything is. The author of *Death Suite*, *Fat Woman*, and *Last One Sleeps in the Yellow Bed* has added yet another brilliant volume to an extraordinary body of work, a body of work which, marred only by the technicolour fiasco of *The Magician in Love*, points to one of the world's true fiction masters.

In his most recent collection, the prolific Rooke is on solid ground and stellar footing; here are eight stories that place him at the centre of art as perfected paradox. *The Birth Control King of the Upper Volta* is a flawless presentation of life on the edge, over the edge, and occasionally, right down the slimy underside of the edge into the very pits of existence. It fulfils every promise it extends with clear-sighted generosity enveloped in a compassionate conviction that even though things are all wrong, they're eventually going to be all righted. Rooke reaches all the way over to the damned and dominated, the ludicrous and lamentable, and blesses the small lot of the perilous everyday. His poignant and tough illuminations redeem the fallen men and women who most often inhabit these stories; they eclipse degradation and celebrate it in the same perfectly rendered style that has become Rooke's distinguished trade mark. He builds stories in such a way that their occupants thrive in structures with ample room to stretch their legs, to move from level to level, to exercise their wills or, if need be, to completely collapse.

It would be exceedingly difficult to point to one story in this collection that outshines the rest, for each of these capsules from chaos contains a wonderful clarity and an equally convincing cast of characters worth their weight in whim and wit. These stories, although independent of one another in terms of content and characterization, do possess a unifying feature that threads and weaves throughout them all: They are written from a stance of passionate commitment to fictional justice. Slightly off-centre,

dead-on in a surreal sort of way, Rooke directs a parade of pained and paralyzed human beings through the bizarre and beautiful, the magnificent and the insignificant, and he does so with grace and sensitivity to spare.

In "The Birth Control King of the Upper Volta," for example, the protagonist, a more-than-middle-aged man named Adlai, gets caught up in a web of myths about his father that only a Mam could manufacture. Adlai mumbles, stumbles, and eventually crumbles under the dominant weight of guilt and a complex that aims to please. The narrative line is further complicated by the fact that his calendar, a mysterious spitting image of the one and only *Greta*, reproaches him minute by literal minute, while a voice from downstairs periodically punctures the sanctity of his upstairs thoughts:

> I could hear Mergontoire at the foot of the stairs, shouting up at me. Get off the pot! Quit slacking! Get a move on! Saying she wasn't holding breakfast all day. Not for the likes of me. Then growling at her son Hedgepolt. Telling him too to shake a leg.

Adlai's identification with the silent Hedgepolt is ultimately what saves him; they communicate with each other above the screams and guilt-instilling admonitions and beyond the domination of these abominable women. The hen-pecked and heart-worn anti-hero who must come to terms with losing an entire day in his life is haunted by the inevitable question, the question that all of us have formulated in the deepest depths of despair: Where *did* the day go? It has vanished. Gone up in smoke. The answer, on the other hand, is stated eloquently by Adlai when he breaks out of a perfect imitation of the Pavlovian response syndrome and transmits thoughts to Hedgepolt: "*Dream the dreams, Hedgepolt. Dare to be God!*" And somewhere along the narrative line, that is exactly what Adlai himself realizes. He too affirms that *dreaming a dream* can eradicate forty-seven years of mean-spirited domination in a single stroke of daring. Adlai is put out of his misery and back in touch with his fundamental faith in creation. Along the way, readers are invited to share in a story that drips with delirium and delightful digressions.

Yet it is not only in championing the causes of the unfortunate and undermined among us that Rooke's strengths as a writer can be located. Although this fact alone is worthy of recognition, it is made all the more remarkable by the way he goes about doing so. Instead of politely pussy-footing around, Rooke goes for the lion's share of perception and his characters have a rip-roaring time getting his points across. The remaining seven stories in this collection deal with individuals and situations not unlike Adlai's, for all of Rooke's characters have more or less the same problems when it comes to dealing with The Real World. In "Shoe Fly Pie," for example, Poor Little Mummy, whose daughter catches the idea of walking herself to death, can't cope with a simple machine like a vacuum cleaner. The daughter, not yet outfitted in her high and fine Italian leather boots meant for walking, decides that her mother does indeed have quite the little problem; she even goes further and suggests that Poor Little Mummy's life might have been easier had she attended J. Fitzgerald Business College or studied home engineering.

Ultimately, however, it is not solely through his use of irony and hyperbole that Rooke reveals his intentions. Devices such as these certainly enrich the fabric of his fictions, but it is his unique way of handling that incredibly fine line between what appears to be in this world and what actually exists in this world, that Rooke's greatest gifts can be discovered. Stories like "Hitting the Charts" and

"Hat Pandowdy," for example, astutely demonstrate that reality is one crazy place to be stuck in. The former involves a hilarious character who speaks and thinks along the lines of song titles and only song titles; he's an over-the-hill disco-hopper who's been stuck behind a television set for a good too many years. Stuck in the same groove at The Ruptured Duck, he hits bottom and short-circuits to the timely beat of a Top Forty Tune. In the latter story, *hats* are strictly forbidden; no man, woman, or child is to be caught dead wearing a hat, and no man, woman, or child dares to defy this random law, until. . . . *The Birth Control King of the Upper Volta* is a collection of stories that delights and instructs in the ways of a world gone awry; and, contrary to popular belief, Rooke proves that despair is not the answer. These stories, brash and brilliant as they are, give fresh meaning to the phrase "state of the art."

JUDITH FITZGERALD

SOURCES & RESOURCES

CLAUDE POTVIN, *Le Canada français et sa littérature de jeunesse*. Editions CRP, $16.50.

LOUISE WARREN, *Répertoire des ressources en littérature de jeunesse*. Le marché de l'écriture, n.p.

MADELEINE GAUDREAULT-LABRECQUE, *Le mystère du grenier*. Hurtubise, n.p.

BOTH SEPARATELY AND as a pair, Louise Warren's *Répertoire des ressources en littérature de jeunesse* and Claude Potvin's bibliographical checklist, *Le Canada français et sa littérature de jeunesse*, add welcome reference materials to the sparsely researched field of Canadian children's literature. The quotation by Cécile Gagnon printed on the back cover of Potvin's book applies equally to Warren's: "Le grand mérite de ce travail est . . . de réunir une foule de renseignements précis et précieux que le lecteur doit souvent glaner à plusieurs sources." The focus of Potvin's study is previously published books and their history; the focus of Warren's is the people currently engaged in activities relating to French-Canadian children's literature, as writers, illustrators, animators, critics, teachers, publishers, and so forth. Whether by accident or by design, Warren's 1982 book (the outcome of a project supported by the Francophone Research Committee of l'Association des Littératures Canadiennes et Québécoises) felicitously complements Potvin's 1981 publication, the ensemble giving to students, teachers, and researchers of French-Canadian children's literature a body of well-organized and attractively presented information bound to excite the envy of their English-Canadian counterparts.

Claude Potvin, a professional librarian working in Moncton (as we learn from his entry in Warren), has chosen to organize his material from an historical perspective. Juvenile publications from 1840 to 1919 are listed together. Potvin then proceeds decade by decade, beginning with 1920, the year of the founding of l'*Oiseau Bleu*, the periodical generally viewed as both catalyst and inaugurator in the subsequent development of modern French-Canadian children's literature. The researcher is thus given a quick overview of changes in orientation and quantity over the past sixty years, while the possible inconvenience of this structure is obviated by indexes of titles, authors, and pseudonyms. In this book — actually an expansion and revision of his 1972 publication, *La Littérature de jeunesse au Canada français* — Potvin does not claim to have produced a definitive bibliography. Rather, he has sought to compile "une list aussi complète que possible," excluding "les oeuvres ou traductions d'auteurs étrangers publiées par des éditeurs canadiens-français" and "le maté-

riel didactique comme tel et les réimpressions ou nouvelles éditions d'ouvrages canadiens-français." He provides a brief historical introduction in which he carefully summarizes the main events of each decade (publications, periodicals, prizes), drawing evaluative and descriptive comments from previously published sources. Potvin reveals that the history of children's literature in French Canada has, at times, been significantly affected by juvenile periodicals, yet he does not seem to have thought it appropriate to include a list of these magazines in his otherwise comprehensive survey.

Potvin's 65-page inventory of poetry, novels, plays, and non-fictional French-Canadian books for children is preceded by a usefully annotated selected bibliography of some 160 critical, historical, and bibliographical source publications, including many written in English. The relevant contents of key French periodicals (*Des livres et des jeunes*, *Livres et auteurs québécoises*, *Lurelu*) have been noted issue by issue. Potvin gives *Canadian Children's Literature* courteous, if briefer, attention; Warren, however, omits *CCL* entirely from her list of "revues spécialisées." She likewise restricts her section on professional organizations to those based in Quebec and operating in French, and limits her catalogue of bookstores to Quebec — although her list of publishers includes one in Nova Scotia and two in Ontario.

With the exception of these minor oversights, this *Répertoire* will serve its purpose well. The main text almost reads like a Who's Who of French-Canadian children's literature — and like a Who's Who, it relies in part on informants' replies to a questionnaire. For nearly two hundred individuals, we are given personal and work addresses, academic qualifications, memberships in professional associations, research and books in preparation, and up to five publications (for the more prolific we then turn to Potvin). As well, beside each name appears an indication of that person's major fields of activity (teaching, creative writing, criticism, etc.); these areas are then indexed separately at the end of the book. In addition to the previously mentioned lists of professional organizations, periodicals, publishing houses, and bookstores, there is a section on currently available literary prizes which includes the names and titles of previous winners.

Like Potvin, Warren does not lay claim to completeness. In his preface to the *Répertoire*, André Vanasse apologizes to those who have inadvertently been left out, and excuses those who "soit par paresse, soit par exès d'humilité, n'ont pas daigné répondre à notre questionnaire malgré nos rappels pressants." One such omission is Madeleine Gaudreault-Labreque, author of the third book covered by this review, which happens to be her third novel for children (according to Potvin). *Le Mystère du grenier* opens promisingly when eleven-year-old Marianne, on a summer visit to her grandmother, is awakened in the middle of the night by mysterious music. The atmosphere of suspense is bolstered by a ghostly "dame blanche,' 'a locked attic, and hints of unmentionable secrets, as Marianne gradually gains insight into her grandmother's personality as she strives to untangle the threads of the old woman's past. In the growth of their relationship lies the book's major strength. Adults will probably be impressed by the way Gaudreault-Labreque offers her young readers an empathetic vision of the fantasy world of a defeated artist, and fashions a bridge between youth and old age; but I suspect that most ten-year-olds would prefer a faster-paced narrative with a richer mystery at its core.

CAROLE GERSON

FINDING WORDS

MARTIN KEVAN, *Racing Tides*. Stoddart, $16.95.

SAROS COWASJEE, *Suffer Little Children*. Allied Publishers (NeWest Press), $8.95.

MARTIN KEVAN AND Saros Cowasjee are novelists born in disparate parts of the Commonwealth (Kenya and India respectively), who spent some period of their lives in England before settling in Canada. In 1982 they published novels in which the central characters suffer the mental stress of the cultural displacement involved in coming to live in an alien Canada, and those characters are radically altered by what they experience in the New World. Here all significant similarities between the two books end.

Taking the form of a journal, Kevan's *Racing Tides* tells the story of the founding and dissolution of the French colony first established on Holy Cross Island (Dochet's Island, Maine) and then moved to Port Royal. What makes the book compelling is the combination of authenticity of voice with the mystery and intrigue that drive the plot-line.

The historical authenticity of the book is a function of style as well as of closely observed detail. In his preface, Kevan creates the fiction that *Racing Tides* is merely his transcription of a runic manuscript of the journals of Sodric du Gaelle. The novelist claims he has verified the authenticity of the manuscript by comparing it to the memories of two other men who figure in the book, Marc Lescarbot (the man credited with having written the first Canadian drama, "The Theatre of Neptune," part of which appears in the novel) and Samuel de Champlain. In fact Kevan appropriates not only masses of fact about New World history, geography, flora, fauna, and peoples, but also, on occasion, whole passages from Lescarbot's *Histoire de la Nouvelle-France* (1617) and Champlain's *Des Sauvages* (1603) and *Les Voyages du* Sieur de Champlain Xaintongeois (1613). While these appropriations help Kevan create an accurate picture of colonial life, most remarkable are his imaginative expansions on or departures from the histories, indetectably interwoven with the historical material. Sodric du Gaelle appears to be his most significant creation, although some of his views and experiences are based on those of Champlain, Lescarbot, or persons mentioned in their books. As an uninitiated but lively observer of life in the New World, du Gaelle is most convincing. Sodric's account of chickadees, woodpeckers, and bluejays, for example, gives enough information for the reader to be able to identify the birds, but does not give names that a newcomer could not know: "The birds chirped joyously from the branches which overhang the river. One, in particular, sang clearly above the rest. 'Tick a-dee-dee-dee-dee-dee-dee.' They flew about us, as if curious to see who we were. The sound of great woodpeckers hammered in the forest and the wild squawk of a large blue bird accompanied us."

Stylistic enhancement of the sense of *Racing Tides*' authenticity comes from matters of orthography, such as using the spelling "weig-woam" instead of the anglicized "wigwam," and from figures of speech, such as du Gaelle's Renaissance personification of springtime: "As spring came, Father Time left off his coat and dressed himself in embroidery under the shining sun."

The anthropological details of life in the New World, while fascinating in their own right, serve as a background for the unravelling of du Gaelle's personal history, and an intriguing history it is. Seeking to escape gambling debts, he poses as a seminarian in order to be taken on as a colonist in the company of M. du Monts, thus establishing a pattern of in-

sinuating himself into a group through deceit that will characterize his activities in the New World, as it had in the Old.

The violently contentious religious division of Europe into Reformist and Catholic camps is also carried to Acadia, both in the persons of the feuding colonists Rohan and Aubry, and in the history of prominent colonist M. du Poutrincourt, who had earlier fought against Henry IV of France, before the King's politically motivated abjuration of Calvinism. Building on various hints and clues, Sodric discovers that his parents, too, have been deeply involved in Jesuitically-inspired Catholic League plots to overthrow Protestant leaders in Europe, and by the novel's end is himself drawn into the spy ring in which his parents had participated.

The gradual nature of Kevan's revelation of the political facts of the story and his use of such devices as giving a coded message and later a cipher to render it intelligible allow the reader to participate in the dispelling of Sodric's confusion as he discovers the truth about his background and learns that his future is to be tied up with the politically powerful and circumspect leader of the Catholic League, Cardinal Bellarmine.

In addition to its linking of New World destinies to Old World situations, *Racing Tides* serves as a vehicle for considerations about civilization and barbarity, in the context of comparisons of Indian and European cultures. It explores the familiar myth of the New World as Promised Land, and makes many astute observations about the mixed motivations of colonial activity and about ethnocentric behaviour. Sodric's analysis of the difficulties of two cultures attempting to live together is both cogent and typical. He argues that the Indians are "an honourable people who only appear treacherous because they live by different rules. 'They do not believe in ownership and so we think that they are thieves. They do not go to war for possession of territory or for the defence of their religion, and so we think them vengeful.'" Eminently readable and teachable, *Racing Tides* contributes markedly to the stature of the historical novel in Canada.

In *Suffer Little Children* Saros Cowasjee rediscovers the central character of his 1974 novel *Goodbye to Elsa,* Tristan Elliott, still struggling to survive emotionally in the city of Erigon. The slightly modified anagram of Regina, which recalls Samuel Butler's Erewhon, suggests Elliott perceives his location to be a nowhere rather than a utopia. The novel examines the psychological strain that arises from trying to cope with a radically different culture than the one in which a person had been raised, using the particularly troublesome area of sexual behaviour as its focus.

Suffer Little Children has pretensions to both comedy and satire, but rarely hits either target. The reader may smile a little at Cowasjee's caricature of the psychologist in charge of the nude marathon, who speaks a kind of psychobbable — "take off your social masks, stop playing games, and start interacting authentically and transparently" — but Julian Wolfe is silly rather than dangerous. He is, therefore, a poor vehicle for a satirical attack on research councils that grant large sums of money to individuals for activities of dubious merit.

In fact the novel seems confused in its motives, at times creating a portrait of an individual — Tristan — whose racial paranoia and cultural disorientation are genuinely touching, but it is impossible to maintain a sense of empathy with this character as Cowasjee makes him repeatedly ridiculous. Nor do Cowasjee's problems end with Tristan, for his ear for Canadian dialogue is not yet acute. He has Maura ask in a most stilted syntax, "Need you always kiss someone or an-

other?" and her carpenter husband mixes Canadian and British idiom when he says to Tristan, "Clare is a lovely kid. You like her — I've seen you give her suck." Such flaws as these in the book's style point up one of the major difficulties of a writer's being transplanted from one culture and idiom to another, the problem of finding an authentic voice. Alone, these faults might not altogether sink a book, but *Suffer Little Children* is not well-enough constructed in other ways for it to stay afloat.

SUSAN GINGELL

ON COMPETENCE

CARL HORTIE, *Strike at Eldorado.* Borealis, $12.95.

MARTIN ROBIN, *The Saga of Red Ryan and Other Tales of Violence From Canada's Past.* Western Producer Prairie Books, $13.95.

GEORGE WOODCOCK, *The Benefactor.* Oolichan, $6.95.

A NOVEL, a collection of vignettes, and a play, these books represent the work of a new novelist who came to the craft in retirement, the populist sideline of an academic, and one of the minor genres of the canon of a major and prolific author. And yet the same question might be asked of each: why was it published?

This is not to suggest that they are bad books. All three are competent, and in places rise above competence. But what do they have to say that hasn't been better said before?

The Hortie novel provides a case in point. Ardently good-natured, it describes the heroic travails of Michael Rennett, brilliant young mining engineer. As collective bargaining begins to rise in the early forties in a mine in northern Ontario, he must deal with his boss, a nefarious American named Hewitt Dorfman; Conan Doyle, a feisty Irish union organizer who is in fact a disbarred lawyer, and old Tom, a miner whose heart is in the right place but whose mind has been turned by the silicosis in his lung. His rapidly approaching death gives him no choice but to sell out the union in order to get the money he needs for his daughter, Julia.

Various sub-plots surface periodically, such as the one involving Hungarian labourer, Johnny, and his pregnant wife who has eyes for Johnny's brother Frank. As if Rennett didn't have enough troubles, he is torn between his beautiful but unfaithful Australian wife, Roberta, and Julia, whose rugged hockey-loving Canadianness is enjoined by her ability as artist and poet. Not to mention the old Scottish mining inspector, the gold thieves, the cave-in, the strike, and then the conclusion in which Doyle recalls his experiences with the Fenians in '16 and sings Danny Boy as he leads the union to victory over the strike-breakers. All in one hundred and fifty-one pages.

It would be easy to make fun of this, especially of flagrant elements like the Irishman or the leader of the strike-breakers, an "expressionless" albino who is best known for his "foul stench." The opening of the novel reads like an entry in the Edward Bulwer-Lytton Worst First Lines contest: "During the night the polar air swept down like a cavalry charge, gripping the northern half of the Canadian Shield in a great pincer movement." Still, this is followed by a series of careful explanations of how a mine works, which are quite intriguing. And the novel in general isn't that bad.

Neither is it good. The same story of the rise of the humble workers has been told a thousand times, often with more spark. The style of the book seems to be something like social realism, but it is far from a socialist tract. Rather than worker control, it promotes the handing of power to heroic individuals, the ex-lawyer and

the engineer, both resolutely bourgeois in origins and aspirations. And Borealis is hardly a Marxist press. So why publish *Strike at Eldorado*?

And why *The Saga of Red Ryan*? I expected from Western Producer an assemblage of regional history but then I realized that Red Ryan is *the* Red Ryan, a true Ontario boy, the inspiration for Kip Caley in Morley Callaghan's *More Joy in Heaven*. Another subject, Albert Johnson, is more western but similarly familiar. Thus two of Canada's best-known desperadoes are brought out for instant replays, encores which add nothing to their previous performances.

The other stories in the collection are not themselves famous but they fit well-worn patterns. The first is the British confidence man, passing himself off as an aristocrat to fleece the colonials. The second is ye old Indian massacre. After Red Ryan, Robin recounts one aspect of the infamous Komagata Maru incident, in which a boatload of Sikh immigrants was refused entry to Canada. This is followed by the mad trapper.

The conclusion to *Red Ryan* suggests what the book might have seen. The Scottish maid of a wealthy family dies in mysterious circumstances. Suspicion falls on a Chinese houseboy. When no grounds for conviction appear it is decided to try abduction and intimidation instead. Eventually the houseboy is freed and allowed to return to China. At least one official suggested that the abduction represented an attempt to bring the "Spanish Inquisition" to Canada but the press and the general populace seemed to agree that it was not an inappropriate way to treat an Oriental. The Scottish community and the powers of suburbia who arranged the kidnapping remained unabashed.

This material could lead to an interesting account of crime, racism, wealth, and scandal-sheet journalism in Vancouver in the 1920's. And there are a number of moments in which Robin shows a sardonic wit which could do much to enliven things. A lawyer's attempt to ascertain the trajectory of the bullet which killed the maid led him to shoot round after round into a body which he acquired from the local insane asylum: "the dead lunatic lay flat on his back, oblivious to the purpose of science." Such phrases are never, however, appropriate ornaments to a revealing interpretation; they are simply quick smiles in an at times tedious and even confusing rehearsal of the facts.

George Woodcock's creation is not meant to be historical but it is rooted in the past no less than the works of Hortie and Robin. The preface to *The Benefactor* refers to its first presentation as a radio play, "in those lost good days of broadcasting during the mid-1960's." One soon senses, however, that the nostalgic premise goes beyond broadcasting to a statement of philosophy.

The preface states that the evil tycoon of the title, Simon Mercator, who contributes of his wealth only when it will do him some good, reflects both a businessman who refused to support a charity which Woodcock favoured and also Woodcock's own dark soul. One suspects that the latter comment is rather forced humility.

Another phrase from the preface seems more to the point, when Woodcock links himself to the extremely individualist artist, Irving Falbridge, who eventually kills Mercator. Another character says to Falbridge:

> You saw the world in the same black and white, but when he called on good you called on beauty. Cain was Abel's brother.

Woodcock doesn't identify him explicitly as such but the play implies that there is another authorial stand-in, David, the doctor, whose one failure haunts his life and yet whose moral virtue makes it im-

possible for him to succumb to those who would use that failure to control him. It seems that Woodcock desires the work to be a morality play, sort of a cut-down *Enemy of the People*, in which both David and Falbridge show how the powers of society exclude virtue and force it into distorted actions.

But the script never approaches this. Rather than become a play about morality, it remains moralistic. And simplistic. The artist and the surgeon may be material or even personal failures but their calling leaves them far above the capitalist Mercator. Mercator's friend, Jack Johnson, seems better, but only because he has no illusions that he is other than foul. As their names suggest, he is simply moneybags Johnson rather than the elevated Simon Mercator who would project his wealth over the world.

The Benefactor has some nice light verse, particularly in the couplets from Mercator at the beginning, but like Robin's wit, the rhymes promise more than they give. The end result of *The Benefactor* is a superficial assertion of pure art over filthy capital. The primary impression it leaves is of a self-satisfied author, assured that the easy solutions of the sixties were right.

TERRY GOLDIE

ECCE LECTOR

L'oreille de l'autre: otobiographies, transferts, traductions: Textes et débats avec Jacques Derrida. Sous la direction de Claude Lévesque et Christie V. McDonald. VLB Editeur, $19.95.

On 15 October 1888, the day when, as he put it, he "buried his forty-fourth year," Nietzsche also finished his autobiography, *Ecce Homo*. Ahead of him, as it turned out, were less than three months of sanity before his mental breakdown on 3 January 1889, and because of this the text acquires the status of a retrospective summation of his career. It is a moment of some pride in his achievement, not only for the abundant writing of the previous year, but also for the whole body of his work, accomplished in the face of severe and recurring illness. Looking back, he dates the low point of his vitality in 1879, when he was forced by ill health to resign the Chair of Classical Philology at the University of Basel, which he had held since 1869. He was 36 when he resigned, the same age as his father had been when he died in 1849. Nietzsche dwells on this coincidence, suggesting that his years as an itinerant invalid after his resignation had the quality of shadow existence, as if he too should have died at 36, if not at 3. There are some striking numerological patterns in the life, in particular the turning points in 1849 (father's death), 1869 (professorship), 1879 (resignation), 1889 (insanity), as well as the fact that Nietzsche, born in 1844, was writing in 1888, at the end of his 44th year.

The pattern of Nietzsche's life as seen at this moment when he was, perhaps knowingly, on the verge "of insanity," forms the focus of Derrida's lecture "Otobiographie de Nietzsche," given at the University of Montreal on 22 October 1979 as the start of the three-day symposium on autobiography and translation. Through an exemplary close reading of the opening pages of *Ecce Homo*, Derrida breaks the notion of "auto-biography" into its three component parts — self, life, writing — and goes on to explore the whole relationship of identity and textuality. One line of thought follows the notion of "auto-graph," or signature, as a guarantor of textual identity. Another pursues Nietzsche's concern to make himself known to his posthumous audience, to "make a name for himself" after death, through his announced purpose in *Ecce Homo* "to say who I am."

The second part of Derrida's lecture introduces a contrasting image of Nietzsche: instead of the isolated, invalid writer of 1888, the young professor of 1872. A new set of themes accompanies this shift: instead of writer-reader-text, Derrida's themes are speaker and listener, mouth and ear, as related within an institutional framework. The Nietzsche text is the fifth of a series of lectures on "The Future of our Educational Institutions." As Derrida points out, this topic is itself a kind of breach of academic convention, in that the university does not normally provide courses of instruction about its own future. In the lecture, Nietzsche challenges the hypocrisy of "academic freedom," and asserts that a true education should be founded on obedience, submission, discipline, and service. Derrida dissociates himself from the alarmingly authoritarian implications of this recommendation, but develops the critique of academic freedom. At the university there is one speaker for every swarm of listening students, who are related passively to the institution. They write as they listen, but their pens are tied, tied to the institution by an umbilical cord, a kind of lasso, in Derrida's conceit, connecting them to the stomach of the dead body of the father, the institution, the State. Nor is the lecturer's mouth ultimately any less passive than the student's ear: just as they are ears that transcribe, he is a mouth that reads, since even if he is not reading his lecture, his discourse is still tied by another umbilical cord to an existing text or texts which he cites and explicates. Thus neither teacher nor student is free.

Five years later, in 1879, Nietzsche himself gave up lecturing and concentrated exclusively on writing for the next decade. But in 1888 he wonders if the present outcast prophet will be drawn back into future institutions: "perhaps even chairs for the interpretation of Zarathustra will be established," Nietzsche speculates in *Ecce Homo*. And certainly he was pleased at the acknowledgement when Georg Brandes lectured on him at Copenhagen in 1888. But how can a philosophy as radical as Nietzsche's be drawn back into an academic context? How can the "freedom" of his thought survive what he sees as the travesty of "academic" freedom? In short, how can one lecture on Nietzsche, without either diluting his thought or subverting the institutional framework of one's discourse? This calls into question not only the current "academic" vogue for Nietzsche, but specifically Derrida's relation to Nietzsche and the academy. For this lecture Derrida chose two of Nietzsche's most self-subverting texts: *Ecce Homo*, where chapter headings like "Why I Am So Clever" and "Why I Write Such Excellent Books" make one sceptical about the writer's veracity or sanity; and the lecture attacking academic freedom (while exemplifying it? making use of it?) which must have been a rather disconcerting experience for the Basel students in 1872. With these choices of text Derrida redoubles the self-subversion of Nietzsche, to produce a lecturer lecturing on a lecture, simultaneously affirming and denying the institutional framework. How well was Derrida listened to? His own skills as a lecturer are more in evidence in the rest of the conference proceedings than those of the other participants. Repeatedly he had to respond to long, complex contributions containing several different questions, often referring back to previous works of his on Hagel or Freud. He unfailingly "heard" the question well and responded generously, and one is astonished at the consistency of his patience and courtesy and mental agility in these circumstances. He does not always receive the kind of close attention he gives, and yet only the mildest of rebukes is ever administered.

To give an idea of the flavour of the discussion, let me choose two moments towards the end of the second day. The first concerns one of the participants quoting Derrida as having "repudiated" deconstruction. This, Derrida says, is a slightly violent translation of what he said. He never repudiates anything. He is surprised at the importance that has been given to the word — he himself would never give it such importance. Here we have in a nutshell the whole problem of Derrida and the Derrideans — the same problem as Nietzsche and the Nietzscheans or Freud and the Freudians: what does one do about one's disciples? What is "deconstruction" packaged as a critical approach (no less than five "introductions" to it have been published in 1982) without the gifts, most of all the patience, of the master? Perhaps we should think of the words of Zarathustra, quoted by Nietzsche himself in *Ecce Homo* and requoted by Derrida: "How I bid you lose me and find yourselves: and only when you have all denied me will I return to you."

The second moment follows shortly afterwards when Claude Lévesque points out, as the only Québécois present, the relevance of the linguistic situation of the Symposium, where French is under constant pressure from English. Derrida's reply is, after giving his impressions of the languages mixing and alternating on the streets of Montréal, to show that of the eight panelists (including himself) only three have French as a mother tongue. Of these, Lévesque is from Quebec and Derrida himself from Algeria, which gives him a different relation to metropolitan French than that of a Frenchman. But before this possible comparison between Algeria and Québec can develop, another topic intervenes. It's a pity, because the discussion promised to be interesting and possibly revealing about Derrida, who, for all his fame, remains a curiously mysterious figure. Perhaps it was a sense of this which led Lévesque to end the Symposium with a surprising but apposite question: "Who is Jacques Derrida?"

GRAHAM GOOD

IMAGE-MAKERS

BARRY CALLAGHAN, *As Close as We Came.* Exile, $7.95.

PATRICK WHITE, *Seventeen Odes.* Fiddlehead, $3.50.

TOBY MACLENNAN, *Singing the Stars.* Coach House, $6.50.

KIM MALTMAN, *The Sicknesses of Hats.* Fiddlehead, $6.00.

WHEN BARRY CALLAGHAN listens to his heart, he hears "not the beating / but the silence in between." *As Close as We Came* is a collection of brooding, often difficult, poems. It is about terror, death, and repression, but it is also about the triumph, however temporary, of love, poetry, and vision over these dark forces.

The mental and physical landscapes across which the poet moves are the stuff of nightmares: "it's so cold / and sunless / here / the dead / steal their own bones / for firewood." Indeed, in poems such as "Amputated Love" and "A Cold Child," the darkness is unrelieved. In many more, however, love is celebrated as an act of bravery, and the images that stick are the vibrant, life-affirming ones. In "Since All Light Seeds the Dark," the persona implores: "O woman / candle the night / with your burning hair" and in "A Mute Chord," he finds freedom only in the act of love "from the pain of acrobats / impaled on splinters of light."

Callaghan's style blends prosaic statement with unusual, well-sculpted images. These are poems which appeal strongly to the senses and emotions. There are, however, occasional lapses into cryptic abstraction. "A lacquered nest / of lives / smiling / in the dark" is pretty difficult

to envision, as are "cowled / crouching men / on their carousel / of polar light." In many poems, disembodied voices speak, and it is sometimes unclear whether the voices belong to the narrator, to another person in the poem, or are simply voices in the poet's head. This is annoying at times, even when the voices have something compelling to say. "Tear," for example, is an entire poem encased in quotation marks, with no apparent speaker. The collection does contain enough strong, tightly written poetry to outweigh these minor problems.

The poems of Patrick White also celebrate love and art, but in a more traditional, romantic vein. *Seventeen Odes* is a slim volume of gentle, scholarly verse, much of it inspired by some suggestive feature of nature — an October thunderstorm or the last rose of autumn.

White's musings are enclosed in a disciplined rhyme scheme and expressed in elaborate metaphor. His lines are studied with references to astronomy and mythology. Yet he moves freely within a framework that would be a cage to some poets. He does much more than turn a pretty phrase; he reveals some exquisite, everyday insights using the eyes, heart, and mind of a very human, very vulnerable persona.

"In Pursuit of Earthly Excellence" describes eloquently how one often feels let down after overcoming an ordeal:

> Satisfied? Content? What song can come of that?
> I do not think a robin sings to please:
> He sings because he's twice escaped the cat.

In "The End of Labouring" the labours of the heart are compared to the patient tending of crops, while in "Below the Salt," White bemoans the poor material rewards of a life dedicated to ideals:

> To hell with love, integrity, and art! —
> Who'd go tuxedo to a pauper's board
> And dine upon his own ungarnished heart?

The opening lines of the odes are often the best, or at least the prettiest, as these in "From a Photograph of My Wife": "This is for you whose hair is bronzed by dusk / Beneath a plum-tree's dusty summer leaf." *Seventeen Odes* basically accepts, at times embraces, the existing order. After all, one cannot rearrange the seasons or the stars.

Or can one? In *Singing the Stars*, Toby MacLennan questions our way of looking at everything: our bodies, the laws of nature, and even inanimate objects. Strictly speaking, this volume cannot be called poetry at all; rather, it consists of prose pieces infused with a poetic intensity. These are divided into three sections, the first of which, "The Periodic Stranger's Hand," is the most lucid and humorous.

MacLennan's playfulness with words and concepts permits the reader to consider commonplace objects and ideas in a new light: "And where are all the leaves before they appear embedded in summer? As if summer were a thing that suddenly grew birds and stems, yellow jackets and a sky, and trees were just an outer fence to keep it all from falling over." In another piece, she ponders: "Why is it that every time you wake up, you wake up yourself and not something else?"

The second section, "The Book of the Architects," has a parable quality and tells of a leader whose dream it was to erect a new kind of city in which everyone would be a "builder." In these pieces, MacLennan builds a series of novel concepts. For example, the people of the city attempt to prevent rain by huddling outside, clothed in the appearance of a clear sky.

The final section, "Cave of the Mother of the Moon," examines not only things but also the empty spaces between things:

> Why don't we hear the enormous sounds of rubbing

and bumping and pushing when night
rushes in
between the buildings and suitcases and
trumpets
and falls into the spaces of the day?

The repetition of names of unrelated objects, the run-on sentences, and the pursuit of novelty for its own sake, all become tedious at times in this book. *Singing the Stars* is enjoyable, though, as a kind of literary magician's act. One keeps reading to see what MacLennan will pull out of the hat next. *The Sicknesses of Hats* does not attempt to turn commonplace reality upside down, but it *does* seek unique ways to express that reality.

Many of the subjects, or objects, of Kim Maltman's poems are ordinary, but his perceptions of them are not. "Discount Food Terminal" evokes the garish circus atmosphere of the no-frills supermarket. "Waiting to Use the Phone I Think of an Ancient Chinese Governor" is a meditation on the symbolic aspects of a massive communications system that has become commonplace. "Tennis," perhaps the most carefully crafted poem in the book, is a witty discourse on the humble cockroach:

Consider the cockroach,
aesthete,
paragon of breeding among beasts,
the general of disarray
whose leather epaulettes
salute our startled recognition,
piloting his unconcern across the floor.

Some of the poems are wholly engaged in setting a scene or describing a mood or feeling. "Water" is a poem as cool and smooth as water itself. "The First Day of Winter" contains this delightful simile: "Like an orange cork / the cat on the ledge / bobs in the sunlight."

"The Man Who Drove Through the Prairies in His Green Car was Not a Vegetarian" and "East of Calgary West of Medicine Hat The Only Tree on the TransCanada" are long, descriptive poems reminiscent of good landscape painting. There are also short, powerful, sardonic poems such as "Death by Bombing": "On the remnants of the first floor / someone's leg danced. / I believe it was a waltz." This volume, then, is a smorgasbord of the poet's work, though not every item is a treat. Some of the poems are unnecessarily enigmatic; it is as if Maltman has left something out which would provide a vital link. "A Sourcebook of Chronology," for example, consists of apparently unrelated statements:

It was nothing.
In the mountains the clouds flowered.
Elsewhere
all the birds were dead
and putting facts together.
I said I remembered nothing
of importance.

Maltman has no need to cram a poem with intangibles. Not when he can create imagery with the tactile appeal of "head stuffed with gestures like a ripened seed pod" or this, describing a crocodile's smile: "the smile of ducks / vanishing from ponds / into their red grins." Compare these to the shapelessness of a phrase such as "a tangibility extending past / our perfect definition of it." *The Sicknesses of Hats* is an extremely uneven collection, but when it's good, it's very good.

G. P. GREENWOOD

MORAL ADVENTURE

HUGH HOOD, *Blood and White Keys*. ECW, $17.95; pa. $8.95.

FROM A *Saturday Night* editorial:

> There are a very large number of Canadians of Hebrew origin, well educated and belonging to the class which is generally regarded as most likely to produce competent officers in a modern, scientific army, who are seeking to obtain commissions in the overseas forces of Canada by all the various procedures which are employed by other Canadians to that end.

> It is quite evident that they are not getting these commissions in anything like the same proportions as the other elements of the population. It is generally admitted in military circles that they are not likely to get them, no matter what procedures they may employ. The attitude of the high military authorities, while not officially stated, is understood to be that members of the Canadian Forces will not accept discipline at the hands of Jewish officers, and that it is no use trying to compel them to do so. . . .
>
> The only point we want to make in this connection is that if this is a fact and is to be treated as such — and that is for the high military authorities to determine — the treatment applied should be such as will make the best possible use of all the available manpower for the Canadian army. (13 December 1941, p. 3)

Reading these words, one realizes what is the purpose of the stance of naïveté Canadians now sometimes assume towards racism, the stance that means "the Holocaust happened over there, in Europe: terrible, but nothing to do with *us*." It is to allow racism to regroup and find a new rhetoric, protected by the façade of innocence and tolerance. There are really only two honest ways of reacting to genocide: with total pessimism, guilt, nihilism (even these words sound too reassuring here, a romantic option, discussed cleverly at lectures and late parties), or with humility, awe, and the commitment to change that façade we call human nature. Of course we cannot suppose any conceivable change will "make up" for the torture, the deaths. It is simply that there is no other way to live. To shrug and say that human nature will never change that much, or to call such documents as the U.N. Charter "idealistic" or "impractical," is to say, in effect, we cannot be bothered to prevent the next Holocaust. This is the meaning of the question put to Andrew Goderich, Hood's protagonist: "Do you want to accept life in the century of genocide?"

In this, the fourth part of Hood's *The New Age* sequence, Andrew Goderich, pacifist, student of ethics, compelled to resign from a university post in 1938 for his socialist views, is called on to be one of the first Canadian witnesses to the Nazi death camps, and make the transition from utter disbelief, to horror, to (at last) new commitment. Andrew Goderich's rebirth will probably be dismissed by some readers as unconvincing precisely because after witnessing the horrors of Dachau the man does not kill himself, or become a nihilist, or go insane. The point is, however, that without Goderich's "witness," and without what will surely be called, disparagingly, his "idealism," there is little hope for the survival of the human race.

Let no one assume, either, that Goderich's choice is represented as being easy, or a "natural" choice for one trained in ethical philosophy. A motif that is heard twice in the book — once from Goderich himself as he crosses the Atlantic in a twin-engined Lockheed Hudson, once from the pathetically small group of escapees he helps to smuggle out of Germany — is the cry "Why me?" Conceptual thought and ethical judgment, the subjects of Goderich's first book (the writing of which was chronicled in *Reservoir Ravine*), seemed in 1941 to have been shattered by the machine guns of the Nazis. If not lost for ever, they would have to be built up again piece by difficult piece and without ever ceasing to confront the old evil. Ethics has to be completely reconstructed in order to recognize and define the previously unimaginable crime of genocide. The black keys as well as the white keys on the human scale have to be mastered.

Though it encompasses extreme horror, then, *Black and White Keys* is not a "Good Friday" narrative but an "Easter" narrative, and it tells those who doubt the Resurrection "resurrection *happens*:

look." There is a crucial scene in which Andrew Goderich, naked, lies in conjugal embrace like St. Julien with the shrivelled and bleeding body of a dying man rescued from Dachau. The smell of piss, fir planks, rotting straw, and hay; chaff in the eyes; the mingled breaths. Divine love, grace, resurrection. These things are not incompatible or incongruous but part of the same vision, "super-realism," the same intense awareness of the physical and the erotic and their participation in the divine order that is present in the work of visionary artists such as Stanley Spencer. Despite the horrors the narrative describes, the dominant emotion in this novel as in the three previous parts of the sequence is that of sheer wonder at a world where grace abounds still.

Early in the novel there is a description of Goderich's visit to the Oratory of All Souls, Burghclere, in the south of England, for which Stanley Spencer painted a series of immense canvases completed in 1932. Anyone who has seen these pictures, or Spencer's "The Resurrection, Cookham" (1924-1926), or his "Women Going for a Walk in Heaven" (1938), can remember the initial feeling of acute embarrassment. This is heaven? This is resurrection? Sweaty thighs, print dresses, curious and erotic gestures, gravestones heaved aside, jumbled wooden crosses, dandelions, Easter lilies. A woman dressed in a patterned coat with fur trimming hides a doorkey under the mat. The embarrassment, the everyday gesture — the absence of heroism, of grandeur — is the point, of course: this is how we are. "Concepts of good or bad or ugly or beautiful are just obstacles in the way of revelation," Spencer wrote. The resurrection of the body must mean just that. Nothing human is alien to such an artist.

Later, in a quiet church on an island in the Untersee at the start of his last desperate mission, Goderich sees with sudden recognition a painting of his New Testament namesake, in the fishing boat on the Sea of Galilee, as Jesus calms the waves. The boat Jesus' disciple is standing in is the same kind of boat — since the artist knew the Untersee and its fishermen well — as that in which Goderich has just crossed from Switzerland. Heaven lies about us not only in our infancy but always. "The Holy Land *is* in Manitoba and Quebec, and it is the other way around too." Hood's art like all true visionary art is typological in its method.

The opening pages of the novel expertly parody the false heroics of the war movie, opening with scenes we all fondly recognize from such films as *Desperate Journey*. Hero in aircraft high over the moonlit sea; hero in troubled secret consultation in noisy smoke-filled bar; hero meets cheery no-nonsense RAF officer; hero has trouble getting into his parachute . . . the play-acting of war. These celluloid images dissolve, however, when Andrew meets a man of genuine courage: Samuel Aaronsohn, philosopher, a colleague of Goderich's when they both taught at the University of Toronto, and now a survivor of Dachau. Not a conventional Hollywood hero, certainly. Such heroism can exist only on the margins, in "Absurdity — the state of the totally lost cause."

Intercut with the story of Goderich's and Aaronsohn's unheroic heroism, set mainly in Europe, is the first-person narrative of Andrew's son, set in Canada. Studying Business Practice in his last years of high school, delivering stationery to Toronto's law firms, dating a haughty cheerleader, and ambitious to become a crooner in the style of Perry Como, Matt is the forties adolescent, fed on the tinsel heroism of Errol Flynn and Ronald Reagan. He hears nothing of his father's exploits except in vague and frightening rumour. But at the end of the book, while Andrew's world is held together, if only by a near-superhuman act of faith, Matt's

falls apart. Inevitably an air of flimsiness is thrown over Matt's narrative by what we know of contemporary events in Europe, to say nothing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. At times, given the appalling intensity of the rest of the novel, Matt's story seems fragile and innocent as a sweater girl poster. But Hood's vision is large, and given the profoundly typological method of his narrative everything that lives there lives not alone, not for itself. The closing pages of the novel reaffirms in a surprising way the words of Samuel Aaronsohn in *Reservoir Ravine* (1979):

> The political conception of Canada is essentially religious, and Jewish or at the least Judaeo-Christian. . . . It is the difference between Canada and the United States. The political idea of America was from its beginnings secular; the Whig notion of liberty as obtaining between contracting parties, the Lockeian idea of property and contract lies beneath the American union and American liberty. But the Canadian union is animated — if at all — by religious morality, by the notion that the great differences which separate peoples, in fact the greatest — language, religion, race — can be mitigated or overcome by virtue under law. To be a Canadian in act is a guarantee of a good conscience.

In *Black and White Keys*, perhaps for the first time, the full scale of Hood's project is apparent, the extent to which naming his novel sequence *The New Age* is itself an act of faith. In return he asks for a large act of faith on the part of his readers. *The New Age* does not offer a Proustian remembrance of things past, but orients itself wholly towards *l'avenir, adventus*, that which is to come. For that promise, and the outstanding achievement of the first four parts of the sequence, Hugh Hood is to be honoured.

ANTHONY JOHN HARDING

SLICE OF LANGUAGE

JOAN CLARK, *From a High Thin Wire*. NeWest, $14.95/$6.95.

DAVID ARNASON, *50 Stories and a Piece of Advice*. Turnstone, n.p.

JOHN METCALF & LEON ROOKE, eds., *82 Best Canadian Stories*. Oberon, $8.95.

From a High Thin Wire, Joan Clark's first collection of short fiction, is a series of finely written short stories on the theme of feminine self-discovery. Possessing a strong basis in realism, the stories offer revisionist accounts of a woman's education in the 1950's, 1960's, and 1970's. A natural story-teller, Clark gives us fast-paced, highly tuned narrative as well as fully rounded scenes of dialogue. Having already published three volumes of children's stories, Clark has honed her prose to a fine edge.

Clark is particularly adept at evoking setting, with the early stories concentrating on the coal-mining areas of the Maritimes where Clark herself grew up, and the later stories having the west, the prairies, as their setting. Throughout, the main characters are searching for a self left behind in youth, for a spring of joy to give creative energy to a life of discipline. The opening story, "God's Country," describes Emily Prentice's return to her home town where she decides to take a tour into one of the now-disused coal mines. The descent into self to discover a past from which she once ran is clear enough as is the desire to find a way to use language and body freely, an idea that is given comic representation in a later story where a woman is relearning how to "pee" after a bladder operation.

While the escape from *homo faber* into *homo ludens* is hardly a new theme for Canadian fiction, Clark twists it anew in her exploration of the daughter-father relationship. Indeed, the opening three or four stories form something of a linked sequence, promising a development in

Emily Prentice's emotional life through her early contacts with males. "Her Father's Daughter," the second story, portrays the young girl's sexual desires for her father, and her sense of rejection when these feelings are not returned. For all the sexual openness, however, the situations are never fully explored, so that in the end one feels that the author and her protagonist both flee the situation.

Some of the later stories offer intriguing insights into the experiences awaiting the modern woman when she leaves the protective family walls to become an individual in the outside world, a process that involves learning to live with one's own personal violence. The final story, the title story, takes us back once again to what appears to be the crux of Clark's fiction — the daughter's relation to her parents. For the first time we see Clark open the subject of the relationship with her mother with all its unacknowledged aggression. The daughter-mother relation is a topic that has led many contemporary women writers — Doris Lessing comes most readily to mind — into completely new territory of the subconscious.

In turning to David Arnason's newest work of fiction *50 Stories and a Piece of Advice*, one leaves behind definitively the fictional mode of realism for the whimsical world of post-modernism where each story develops its own form, usually with the author participating as a commentator on the process of creation. The title story is a series of fifty brief anecdotes, some no longer than a line or two, told by a simple, straightforward village type who is amazed at the way he and his acquaintances have so often drawn false conclusions from situations. The narrator's wide-eyed stare is so ingenuous, so open, that one is forced to forego all one's sophistication, to see the world through primitive yet far-seeing eyes. One is reminded also that for most English speakers a story told in casual conversation tends to be a series of anecdotes circling a central point. In case anyone should miss the point, Arnason begins the volume with a quotation from Donald Barthelme: "As your gaze is fixed upon something immediately in front of you — the object of your anger, for example — history makes a slight, almost imperceptible slither, or shudder, in a direction of its own choice." Clearly Arnason has given up on realism's premise that everything can be explained by tracing back the psychological and sociological causes to a crucial beginning point. Standing before a universe of chaotic indifference, Arnason manages to avoid the solemn role of the existential prophet by indulging in reflexive humour, an irony that delights in the fact that all systems of explanation are more or less arbitrary. Arnason relishes tall tales, talking sunfish, stories of metamorphosis, and numerous spoofs. In "The Last Story in the Book" he even parodies the glut of historical fiction being written in the country where the authors pretend to be able to uncover all the secret springs that set history in motion.

Yet Arnason can also create a darker atmosphere as in the two stories "The Body" and "They Went Berry Picking," where he shows individuals being moved to change their entire disposition towards those they love when thrown into new gestalt patterns. In "The Body," for example, Arnason begins with a corpse moving slowly in time with the waves on a small lake, and then moves out slowly to describe the reactions of those associated with the dead man — those who find the body and the boy who shot his father. It is a remarkable story, all the more so for the way in which we have a sense of the individuals as part of a larger rhythm of life of which they are only partially aware.

Although neither Arnason nor Clark has stories represented in *82 Best Canadian Stories* edited by John Metcalf and Leon Rooke, it would not be difficult to imagine such a selection. Which is not to argue against the present choice of authors — Keath Fraser, Hugh Hood, Norman Levine, Alice Munro, Gloria Sawai, Elizabeth Spencer, F. W. Watt, and a translation by Paul Wilson of one of Josef Skvorecky's Czech stories — but merely to state the obvious: 1982 produced so much fine writing that a selection of "bests" will necessarily say as much about the editors' taste as about the quality of the stories chosen.

One notices, for instance, that a common feature of all the stories is that they work through indirection; while seeming to project a realistic base, or at least to be describing the surface of the well-known objective world, in fact they are usually hinting at the presence of an unseen dimension. Consequently many of the stories do not have the usual sort of climax-denouement structure in which the reader is struck with illumination. For example, Norman Levine's "Because of the War" begins in his usual documentary style, but soon becomes a documentary with even less of a structure than usual. Only gradually does it become apparent that this lack of a driving narrative line is exactly Levine's impression of Canada with its various immigrant populations cut off from one another and their homelands. Similarly, Alice Munro's "Prue" is a vignette of a woman who, on the surface at least, seems to follow Samuel Johnson's advice: "Sir, it is the duty of a wise man to be happy." Even sex, for Prue, seems to be a "wholesome, slightly silly indulgence, like dancing and nice dinners — something that really shouldn't interfere with people's being kind and cheerful to each other." But as the story proceeds, one becomes aware of another side of Prue, a shadowy world of stolen keepsakes, moments that she hides, almost successfully, even from herself.

Perhaps the subtlest of all these stories in its use of indirection is Josef Skvorecky's "A Family Hotel." The surface is bright sunshine, the story of two adolescents both of whom are determined to fall in love and lose their virginity. The portrayal of adolescent sexuality with its powerful desire for fulfilment and its utter confusion about means-ends solutions is both outrageously funny and deeply touching, and would make a fine story in its own right. But Skvorecky gives us in addition brief glimpses of the larger frame of aldermen-fathers, duplicitous hotelkeepers, and, further in the background, SS officers of the Reich. The world of rationality and power with all its Latin tags is juxtaposed to the children's eroticism. And what is the relation between the two worlds? What should it be? Skvorecky never says: he leaves it for us to puzzle out as the human dilemma.

In most of the stories, then, one finds that the writers use a basically realist foreground, but refuse the usual realist route of clinical dissection, of offering a slice of life under the microscope. Instead they create alternative perceptions in the background, often suggesting the multiplicity of overlapping closed systems of explanation. The balance between fore- and background is of course difficult to maintain; one runs the danger of introducing elements that are too heavy for the story to carry. F. W. Watt's "Desolation" perhaps tips a bit in this direction when he balances the pleasures and security of family relations with the sharp perceptions of the isolated individual. Hugh Hood runs a similar danger in "The Small Birds" with his secular/religious dichotomy, as does Keath Fraser in "Le Mal de l'Air," where language stretches far and wide to attempt non-verbal connections. Still, the collection as a whole with its stories offering a syn-

thesis of modernist and post-modernist techniques is very fine, and if it does not contain all the bests from 1982, it certainly contains some of them.

RONALD HATCH

SECOND DIMENSION

BARRY CALLAGHAN, *The Black Queen Stories.* Lester & Orpen Dennys, $15.95.

The Black Queen Stories suggest the diversity of social, sexual, occupational, and cultural groups within the city of Toronto even as their characters quarrel, make love, try to bury the past, or just feel alone, confused, or mean like people everywhere. Barry Callaghan possesses a gleeful wit that is sometimes aimed playfully at the reader, and nowhere is this more evident than when he animates the garden variety domestic conflicts of the heterosexual world and transports them into another dimension. In the title story, a couple's precious, long-standing relationship begins to turn as brittle as their aging bodies, and time-worn habits no longer endear, but irritate. In "Prowlers" a man's often scantily clad lover is wilfully careless about closing the curtains, inviting peeping-toms, a libidinous note in the mailbox, and his jealous partner's frustration. The lovers are Charlie and Slaverne, transvestites who met at a firing range and share a macho love of high-powered pistols. In "The Black Queen," the stamp-collecting couple who deplore decline, decay, and the "rootless olive-skinned children" who've come to inhabit the neighbourhood could easily be someone's cocooned and aging parents if they weren't homosexual.

In stories like these, comic overtones could have easily sunk their characters into depressingly familiar stereotypes, but Callaghan makes their selfish, often banal concerns cut too close to the heart of Western culture to allow unkind laughter from the reader. Callaghan also flirts with dangerous humour in "The Cohen in Cowan" by making comic allusions to the Holocaust. Incredibly, the comedy works, quickening our empathy for Adrian Cowan as his dormant Cohen self erupts like prickly hives, revealing a man torn between the self-compromise he's made for success in a snickering dominant culture and the nagging integrity of his own heritage.

Adrian Cowan is not singular in his identity crisis. Confusion, disillusionment, and emotional poverty haunt almost all of the central characters in this collection, and with one exception they represent people conceived in a society with more rigid and quantifiable values than the one they now face, their parents often dead, crippled, or, significantly, just missing. As they try to deal with an amorphous present and a future that lacks emotional security, it's not surprising that they're both tormented and comforted by the past.

Games, hobbies, art objects, and collectors' items appear obsessively in these tales — often forming neutral ground where people meet or take refuge, build tenuous relationships, or fill the emptiness inside. Even the remnants of traditional Judaeo-Christian doctrine take on the transitory qualities of a hobby, a nostalgic memory or a wisecrack. Abel's name in "Dark Laughter" is the result of a feeble joke by his father, Adam. Adrian Cowan is a non-practising Jew. The retired priest in "Spring Water" reads detective novels, "and though he had a special devotion to the Blessed Virgin, he didn't talk much about faith." Aimee Semple McPherson's garter belt crops up as an accoutrement to a woman's lush sexual encounters in "All the Lonely People," a story which combines the exigencies of something like a properly executed dinner-party with the pursuit of eroticism.

Callaghan's cool, airy prose suits the lonely, self-centred lives many of his characters lead. He has a deft touch with the small details that build setting. In "A Terrible Discontent," bits of candy wrapper and an old nylon stocking that were blown up against the wire fence" speak paragraphs about Collette's childhood landscape and mindscape as she returns home. The houses here are near the railroad tracks, and a rutted dirt lane runs behind slat and wire-fenced backyards. It's a setting that not only suggests the 1940's, but seems frozen in that decade, and it's a credit to Barry Callaghan's skill that he can convince his readers that this meanly respectable place still exists in Toronto.

It's in their form that the stories in this collection are weak. Many are short, giving them a vignette-like quality that is most successful when Callaghan twists them with his ironic sense of humour, as in "Poodles John," "The Black Queen," or "Prowlers." Where the tone becomes serious, the theme is sometimes laid bare or the ending becomes pat. Both are certainly the case in "The Muscle," a thinly veiled parable about the new Canadian tormented by a condescending representative of the established order — his history teacher. At the end we learn that the teacher was simply insecure, and Livio's gift — a talisman from the old world — puts things right between them.

In "Spring Water" the denouement is also pat, but Callaghan hasn't made it clear how the reader is supposed to view the character of the old priest. He *is* kindly and meditative, loquacious and (on the surface) self-effacing. But, beneath the small truths the priest offers the listener, there's a strong undercurrent of prideful didacticism that's irritating, as if he secretly considers a statement like "Funny . . . the way we've made a virtue of turning everything inside out" more significant than it really is. Callaghan frames the priest in one of his own didactic anecdotes about paying homage to what is authentic, so that we are left confusingly at odds with the character instead of with the bedevilling forces of modern-day life that undercut our ability to express meaning and significance, or to connect with the past.

Callaghan possesses a restless talent. His longest, most ambitious stories break with the conventional short story form. In "Silent Music" people, objects, memory, and his own movements swirl about Ansel Mohr's tormented inner voice in the aftermath of his mother's death. Like others, this story concerns itself with identity and emotional estrangement, and although its imagery is often vivid, in form the story is ultimately jarring and confusing. "Anybody Home?" also fails to convince as a unified whole; but Callaghan has an acute ear for the particular music of the human voice, and even as Dr. Cholet and the female hairdresser stand apart from its shaky and transparent structure, their voices convey a singular authenticity.

The best story in this collection is not its most ambitious. The prose of "Crow Jane's Blues" wraps itself around its subject like a winding, variegated song, delighting with its resonance and small, deceptively easy shifts in perspective. The middle-aged black blues singer may be the most appealing character in this collection simply because she's had to fight not just to maintain an identity, but to obtain one. As she watches the black woman now on stage where she once appeared ten years before, the bittersweet past crowds her ironical mind:

> an' black weren't beautiful then, baby, nigger heaven was nowhere, there was just my old daddy sitting on his rusty dusty listening to the Salt Pork Blues on the old 78's, his hair straight with lye under the stocking cap. . . .

The handling of Crow Jane's world is

skilful and complex. Past and present mingle here briefly and sweetly, but never cloyingly, and when the singer is finished and the spotlight goes out, reality quickly asserts itself.

> people rose and straggled out and Crow Jane suddenly had the feeling that all her past was emptying out of her head, leaving her alone at her table in the corner. . . .

"Crow Jane's Blues" is a fine story, and one wishes this collection were consistently so. Callaghan has his finger firmly on the pulse of contemporary Toronto, and perhaps on his audience, too, for as a collection *The Black Queen Stories* forms a travelogue about a city that has doffed its puritanical façade but now looks anxiously for evidence of its newfound cosmopolitanism. In this respect, certainly, these stories will comfort.

ANNE HICKS

WRITING POETRY

CATHY FORD, *The Womb Rattles Its Pod Poems*. Véhicule, $4.95.

DOUGLAS BARBOUR and STEPHEN SCOBIE, *The Pirates of Pen's Chance*. Coach House, $5.50.

MARTIN REYTO, *The Cloned Mammoth*. Quadrant, n.p.

SPIROS, *Midnight Magic*. Accent Canada, $8.95.

OF THE FOUR BOOKS under review the most consistently satisfactory collection is Cathy Ford's *The Womb Rattles Its Pod Poems* (a somewhat awkward title, albeit a line from Sylvia Plath). The poems are written from an entirely feminist perspective and divided into cyclical seasonal sections. *Seed scatter: spring tales*, the opening section, concentrates on fairy tales, the mythic elements which both inform and distort reality. These poems imply that while myth may reveal reality it may also impose stereotypes on experience — particularly in the lives of women. The truth frequently lies in the interpretation: the angle of vision. To arrive at truth it is necessary to break out of the constricting and restrictive phantasy/fallacy of the fairy tale stereotype. Thus the Red Queen's jealousy of the peasant girl results in drought, sterility for both:

> jealous queen
> walked along the river
> water
> in the Red Queen's eyes
> stone
> in the peasant girl's heart
> drought
> seed dies dried in the ploughed field.

Ford writes in a sparse, spare, minimalist style, with an eye for the accurate image and the larger resonance of history, literature, and myth; there are references to Sappho, and poems on George Sand, Cleopatra, Mary Queen of Scots, and Elizabeth I.

The third section, *pollen bearing: fall portraiture*, contains a series of portraits, poetic biographies of women of either historical or literary significance. As the portrait-poem of Cleopatra succinctly puts it, "These women Are All Out of Books, She Said." The series, however, aspires to more than portraiture; it serves as a commentary, on the historical/literary character and on the common universal link with all women:

> for all these women who can never be known
> yet sea green barge magnificent into power
> the song grown green even sunburnt
> yet there is song.

Cleopatra, the historical personage, the woman with power in her own right as Queen, the seductive mysterious enigma of the "infinite variety" which is both the particular and the universal woman, is evoked for us not on a "burnished throne" which "Burn'd on the water," but as "sea-green and singing." The poem celebrates "the song grown green," life, the vitality of the imagination, natural power and natural command. Attributes frequently denied to women.

Cathy Ford's poetry is essentially meditative. *The Womb Rattles Its Pod Poems* repays patient reading. The meditations move from the contemplation of the lives of women, ordinary or extraordinary, to a contemplation of the vitality and variety of life itself. Occasionally, the style falters, strains against the subject matter. While one might urge at times a less spare, more sensuous use of rhythm and syntax, less of the irritating mannerisms of minimalism, this very restraint helps focus the attention of the reader on the substance of the poem whose individual images create vivid meaning.

The poems of the final section, *winter wind: birth dances*, explore human loss and human gains, the inevitabilities of death, the renewal of birth, "I knew death / before / I knew wings." The elegaic note is repeated in "Black Eyes," "where are you now / all the names forgotten / and dreaming."

Perhaps the definitive poetic statement emerges from "Princesses of the Blood," where the themes of the opening section, the relation of truth to fairy tales and legend, are recapitulated:

> the women of your country
> my own country
> are not delegates to the library
> of experience
> but larger than life real.

To be real is to be larger than life, to escape stereotype, to see past fairy tale into the truth of experience; for as the poet warns us, "a woman is not a flower" and "a victim is never a poem."

Douglas Barbour and Stephen Scobie are professors of English Literature — to which *The Pirates of Pen's Chance* portentously testifies. They are also poets. Each has written a not negligible body of verse. Scobie has distinguished himself by winning the 1980 Governor General's Award for poetry. It would, therefore, be very agreeable to write that the Barbour and Scobie self-styled Homolinguistic Translations, *The Pirates of Pen's Chance*, is a witty and erudite *jeu d'esprit* replete with *jeu de mots*, a successful attempt to play with structural modes of literary analysis and by applying these to literature transmute the original texts into something new and strange and, of course, eminently readable and entertaining.

While unquestionably clever, the collection fails for this reader to rise to the level of genuine wit, or to achieve either lightness of spirit or even insouciant irreverence. Rather, the work suffers from literary self-consciousness and unevenness of tone, falling for the most part into pretentious pastiche.

Scattered throughout the volume are a number of genuine lyrics which give aesthetic pleasure, but these tend to get lost amongst the general aridity of the attempts at solemn improvisation. The reader's attention is thus fractured and misdirected, one moment asked to respond to an original lyric voice, the next to self-conscious amputation of Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Lampman, or Layton. Wordsworth is reduced to

> Earth, dull sight
> wear silent ship

and Shakespeare to

> shame lust
> blame time.

Indeed an expense of spirit in a waste of shame. One is inclined to mutter, "Terence, this is wretched stuff"! Nor is the reader compensated by the infelicitous abstractions of

> i realize burning time
> melodic glossolalia
> negate stasis.

One wonders about the audience for such writing. Messrs. Barbour and Scobie thoughtfully provide notes which identify the original literary source text. It all reads like an elaborate game which would

fail to amuse the average well-read undergraduate in English.

Perhaps the limitations of this volume are best suggested by the obvious punning in its title: pirates, pens, chance. Gilbert and Sullivan without sparkle, verve, sets, or music. The puzzling question remains: what impulse drives two contemporary practitioners of the art of poetry to reduce the great and familiar poetry of the past to sterile wordplay?

If *The Pirates of Pen's Chance* strays in the direction of intellectual vaudeville, Martin Reyto's *The Cloned Mammoth* (as one might deduce from the title) succumbs to the baroque allure of surrealism. The collection is for the most part dark in tone. Many of the poems suggest minds lost "in the morbid sequence of their nightmares." This is not to say that the poems are without promise. The themes explore man's monumental inhumanity to man, with a particular focus on the holocaust horror of twentieth-century experience.

One of the dangers of writing poetry which repeatedly presents the landscape of nightmare in surreal image and detail is that detail and image, unless invested with the genuine feel and imaginative projection of horror, will not render experience vivid but rather mute and dull the reader's response. Reyto's verse sometimes falls into this trap. Nor does the use of grotesque and strained imagery help establish the viability and vitality of the poetic statement. Many lines — "and we devoid of lifelessness, disgorge lives / and flower briefly into meat" — are clumsy, distracting, and unclear.

Included among the poems which depict a nightmare world of despair where the poet/narrator is "a Goliath of dead meat" are a number of less despairing, more compassionate statements. "The Night Mare," "Chapter One," and "Two Heads" are poems which capture the reality of isolation, the true feel of loneliness and fragmentation. Above all they record the cruel psychosis which mars twentieth-century humanity and history alike, where experience is the "pleasant crab" who "walks in the shores of / soldiers torn across the / rusty blades of war."

A lyric and more affirmative impulse informs "Schubert and the White Fields of January":

> the music-bearing wind
> leaves no footprints only
> small bent flowers.

"Soldiers" captures a larger compassion, the universal cadence of war and disaster reminiscent of Brechtian themes:

> deep in the night when fortune
> swells our sleep like new bread
> at dawn where the still light
> quickens with our children
>
> they sit on the ground
> they bow to the wind
> of unspeakable memory
> dogs bark the year round.

These stanzas, with their fusion of the lyric impulse with precise pictorial detail, remind us that Martin Reyto is capable of writing succinct and moving verse. The volume as a whole suggests that the poet would have been well served by a judicious and intelligent editor and editing. As it stands the work frequently touches the reader "with words / with a whispered fugue."

Midnight Magic is a collection of verse which reads as if it were best read in bars, cafés, and coffee houses. As such it is a pleasant unassuming volume whose short lyrics have the direct sentimental appeal and easy accessibility of popular sentimental ballads which in essence is what *Midnight Magic* consists of. Typical of Spiros' lines are these:

> We could be pygmies in the jungle
> Instead of whatever we happen to be
> but a smile would remain a smile
> and a tear would drop as always
> sadly.

A line here and there rises above the obvious and the sentimental but this seems more by accident than design.

It is all disarming and unpretentious and even in its way less uncomfortable reading than is bad serious writing. If the writer is, however, seriously intent on writing poetry, he should be reminded gently that sincere or strongly felt emotions do not of themselves a poem make. Something more is required in the way of freshness of language, attention to form, and originality of concept.

MARYA FIAMENGO

PAST & PRETTY

HARRY BRUCE and CHIC HARRIS, *A Basket of Apples: Recollections of Nova Scotia.* Oxford, n.p.

GERMAIN LEMIEUX, *La Vie paysanne 1860-1900.* Editions Prise Parole, n.p.

ERIC ARTHUR and THOMAS RITCHIE, *Iron: Cast and Wrought Iron in Canada from the Seventeenth Century to the Present.* Univ. of Toronto Press, n.p.

ALL THREE OF THE BOOKS under review deal with aspects of Canadian history. Harry Bruce and Chic Harris' *A Basket of Apples: Recollections of Nova Scotia* asserts that, even more than Quebec, Nova Scotia has "inherited an epic past"; Germain Lemieux's *La Vie paysanne 1860-1900*, based upon lectures given at the University of Sudbury to students of folklore, presents agricultural tools and customs from Quebec and Ontario; and Eric Arthur and Thomas Ritchie's *Iron: Cast and Wrought Iron in Canada from the Seventeenth Century to the Present* discusses the many uses and shapes of a particularly important material in Canada's industry, agriculture, and architecture. Of the three volumes, *A Basket of Apples* is the prettiest, but probably also the most easily forgotten. Harris' photographs include pictures of natural scenery, historical buildings, flowers, tools, a sea-gull, and "Granny's loving hands." Most of the photographs are reproduced in a small format at the top of the page and ornately framed. Subject-matter and presentation suggest nostalgia, sometimes the gleam and *Lemon-Pledge* scent of a meticulously dusted antique shop. In his introduction, Harry Bruce speaks of Nova Scotia's "Age of Sail, preserved in amber haze," a golden age which Nova Scotians believe to have been annihilated by technology, Upper Canada's economic predominance, and the failures of Confederation. To me, *A Basket of Apples* presents a disturbingly museum-like society in which humans only appear in historical costume or in synecdoche, and in which villages "boast" gravestones or "a story so breathtaking as the expulsion of the Acadians."

Lemieux's *La Vie paysanne 1860-1900* also speaks of the past, but its author makes a special plea to young French-Canadians to familiarize themselves better with the vestiges of their heritage, to take pride in their ancestors' inventiveness and achievement. He even suggests that novelists return to the soil for their settings, instead of depicting "un quartier miséreux d'une ville surpeuplée, dans un pâté de taudis d'une zone défavorisée." Although — especially after reading Monique Jeannotte's *Le Vent n'a pas d'écho* — I am not convinced that a comeback of the *roman du terroir* with its trappings of footnotes and italics would be a welcome development (I rather suspect that, in keeping with Hubert Aquin's "The Cultural Fatigue of French Canada," it would suggest the initiation of another static, conservative phase), Lemieux's book is interesting, as well as being useful in the proper understanding of novels like *Jean Rivard le défricheur, Menaud maître-draveur, Trente arpents,* and *Un Homme et son péché.* Most of the illustrations in Lemieux's book are adequate

sketches, interspersed with occasional photographs.

The pictures in *Iron*, however, are, for the most part, spectacular, especially so since they often present close-ups of objects we have become all too familiar with and therefore fail to appreciate any longer. There are, for instance, the iron gates and fence of Ottawa's Parliament Buildings, printed together with blueprints and specifications, and close-ups of bolts, hinges, rimlocks, door-handles, etc. Although many of the nineteenth-century objects are extravagantly ornate, others reveal a marriage of "beauty and utility" in which, as Eric Arthur points out in his excellent commentary, ornament complements, rather than interferes with, the use of the object. Increasing sophistication in the manufacture and use of iron is intimately associated with Canada's growth as a nation, a development Arthur traces through church ornaments and crosses, household implements (including such fascinating items as trivets, apple corers, sugar tongs, and crimping irons), and stoves, but also through house-façades, Crystal Palaces (i.e., exhibition halls), and the railroad. Eminently useful, solid, and ostentatious, iron seems to have been an ideal material for Victorian Canada. A last note on all three of these books: all of them — although in varying degrees — make claims to scholarly presentation, and include glossaries, indices, and bibliographies. Two, however, occasionally adopt quirky formats in citing their sources, e.g., "Stanfield, Robert. Quote used as filler in *Atlantic Insight*, Nov. 1979" in Bruce/Harris, or a quotation from Frances Brooke's *The History of Emily Montague*, taken from Klinck and Watters' *Canadian Anthology* rather than from the original, in Arthur/Ritchie. Greater care would have made these books, especially the latter, even more reputable than they already are.

EVA-MARIE KROLLER

FREE SUBJECT

BILL BISSETT, *Northern Birds in Color*. Talonbooks, n.p.

MAXINE GADD, *Lost Language*. Coach House, $6.95.

TOM KONYVES, *Poetry in Performance*. The Muses' Company, $9.95.

FRED WAH, *Breathin' My Name with a Sigh*. Talonbooks, n.p.

BEFORE I'D READ these four books, I thought, well, three of them naturally group together. Their authors, Gadd, Wah, bissett, come out of the Vancouver literary scene of the 1960's — Tish, the Downtown Poets — they're all about the same age, know each other, and whatever interest in experimentation each of them has, all write words on the page. But the fourth, Tom Konyves? *Poetry in Performance* documents his career as a video and performance poet, he's Montreal, Véhicule, 1970's — the anomaly here.

But not really. Though these are four distinct and original writers, they share certain concerns: tribal dream and tribal loss haunt their poems; there's an active democracy of vision at work, along with strong resistance to imposed or rationalizing orders, whether political, social, aesthetic, or linguistic; and performance matters to all of them, the presence of a person in the poems, not as autobiography or ego, but as a physical body with energy, rhythms, voice, and breath.

Bill bissett's blewointmentpress published two of Maxine Gadd's early books, and in an interview included in *Lost Language*, Gadd speaks of the sense she had, in the 1960's, of using language to speak "for 'the tribe,'" which included bissett. At the Advance Mattress coffeehouse, she recalls,

> bill bissett would do chants and Judith Copithorne would read and Pat Lowther read there and Roy Lowther read there and the tribe was formed, right there. . . .

Now, in the 1980's, the blurbs on the backs of *Northern Birds in Color* and *Lost Language* indicate affinities still: they are, in many ways, interchangeable descriptions:

> northern migratoree xperiences dreems . . .
> th bridge to life art is songs chants
> meditating politikul being flites nd
> settulment solitaree seeking painful
> distancing nd yunyun. . . .

> lost language found in the cloud of
> unknowing. contacts with old time
> divinities . . . loves, suicides, politics,
> horror, rage, song and the tribal dream. . . .

But if it's Gadd who speaks more often of "solitaree seeking" and "painful distancing," it's bissett who is certainly Canada's poet of "the tribal dream." *Northern Birds*, his forty-seventh book of poetry, is a continuation of his constant prayer for the world to be a home for everyone, a vision to be realized by "th heeling vibraysyun uv th trust," a tribal caring of one for another. His poems articulate the grace of acknowledging and yielding to cycles of nature, rage against political and nuclear madness, wittily criticize the pope, dentists, ecological destruction (he has a wonderful plan for cleaning up English Bay involving diving cows), and his own eccentric inconsistencies. Like a rare northern bird, his imagination ranges from vast constellations and cataclysmic visions to minute worlds in grains of sand where

> ther ar cities whol undr th sand
> uv a diffrent molecular ordr
> yu b cum th wish uv hevn to go to.

Bissett's remarkable ability to keep his vision moving and fresh over the years comes largely from a linguistic energy which creates visible sound and aural shapes. We can see and hear him like the birds in his poems

> xplooring th colors uv auras
> n secret treez singing
> spinning letting out brite
> cones uv sound thru
> th air. . . .

Between the migratory poles of his winged vision, there's an essentially domestic area, a place of friendships and gentle humour. In my favourite poem in the book, "we live in a hundrid yeer old house," the house is both the reality of and metaphor for what the world can and could be:

> ths house is groundid in
> all th original
> ways uv love n hurt . . .
>
> an opn being
> uv what is possibul . . .
>
> no building is old enuff to house
> us aftr
> wev livd heer
>
> partees that wer
> whol lives changes that stop analysis
> so many desires realizd
>
> generasyuns
> heer previous
>
> ther lives permit ours.

In a poem called "th evolusyun uv angels," bissett speaks of the contemporary rejection of revolution and anger in favour of trying "to adopt or / sidestep / th increasing repressyun." Maxine Gadd, whose poems are full of angels, writes, similarly, "everyone agrees to be less than they dream." The distance between dream and reality, desire and fact, between the gods with their grace and our mundane lives of quiet desperation, is the major concern of *Lost Language*, an important and substantial selection of Gadd's poems, for the most part previously uncollected, from 1958 to 1980. Her angels are more absent than present, but longed for to bridge the gap between the world as it occurs and the world of inspiration and divinity. That world and its language has been lost, and the questions for Gadd are whether it is possible "to bear / being / without / a dream," and how, caught "in the closed valley" of existence, we can accept the fallen world as a place to love and live in.

The answer to the first question is clearly "no," though there is every recognition of the powerful forces which defeat dream: the "social ocean," loneliness, self-destructive longings, individual failures of cowardice and conciliation, the contemporary cheapening of old gods, the knowledge that evil can come from beauty, and just plain laziness. Yet without vision, dark fissures in the earth which once were numinous become only wells of depression, black holes in the mind. Cities cannot be Utopias. Energy becomes indifference, "not enough" becomes "enough," magic possibilities become mathematical problems, not more but less.

Faced with a secular rationalized world, a poet may make his or her subject this unlovely place and write of loss, as John Newlove does. Or he may, like bissett, become a shaman and try to lead us back to magic. Or, like Chris Dewdney, move into the interior magic of the unmapped brain. Or, like Margaret Atwood in recent poems, see the vulnerability of untranscendent life as the source for love and courage as well as for evil. None of these is Gadd's response. Rather, she uses the processes of writing, of seeing and talking, as ways of playing out possible or impossible lives. It's as if by trying on the histories of people, wearing the wings of angels, assuming the masks of goddesses and daemons, she can go beyond finite definition, language limits. A poem

> transcends/ through the spoken image
> from
> the sensual to
> the unsayable —
> and returns.

Hers is an anti-rational rage backwards to original power, a journey in which the poet must

> go down into
> the mountains of emotions and dreams and
> wide-eyed confront the
> distortions without being devoured by them.

Gadd's poems are tough, funny, dramatic, with musical rhythms jazzy and jagged, classical and colloquial. They perform on the page like improvising actresses, like some free-wheeling monologist who incorporates *your* reactions into her act and who listens at the same time for the silent entrance of the gods into her words.

In the interview in *Lost Language*, Gadd discusses the live performances she was involved in during the 1960's, and the affinities she feels with the French surrealists. Tom Konyves acknowledges both the surrealists and the dadaists as major influences on his performance poetry. *Poetry in Performance* is a collection of the scripts of his video and performance poems, along with introductory essays and footnotes to each of them, accounts of his collaborations with The Véhicule Poets, Konyves' concrete poems, and some short essays on poetry. The introductions serve to document the extraordinarily energetic literary activity in Montreal over the past decade, and specifically Konyves' movement towards video poetry, that is, poetry conceived of as visual art.

I found it hard to become really involved in the scripts on the page, even with the accompanying still photos, but they show the influence not only of surrealism and dada, but also of absurdist theatre and romantic poetry from Blake to Ginsberg. Reflecting political as well as aesthetic interests, the scripts are witty and lively, and two of them, "Sympathies of War" and "No Parking," moved me especially. Like the essays, they raise questions about the nature and function of poetry and poets. If "the tribe" for Gadd was originally other poets, Konyves' first "tribe" was the other Véhicule poets. But beyond this kind of collaboration, he is after larger collaborations: between sight and sound, form and content, environment and art, poetry and technology, conception and performance, the

audience and the poet. Removing words from a linear context is part of the poet's war of imagination against rationalism: war against any hard line, political or artistic, which is exclusive or divisive.

"Video allows poets to see their roles more clearly," writes Konyves. That role as he and, I believe, the other three poets see it is to open the field of the poem and to catch the process of poetry as it happens.

> Konyves: In my poems, I can't forget what a myriad of wondrous shapes surround the little poem, so words begin to search out different associations from the ones necessitated by their syntax. The poem, as vehicle, becomes jet-propelled. . . .
>
> Gadd: When I want to find the god, I'll do it deliberately, try to destroy rationally, so then I must destroy logic, every grammatical structure . . . it's a *breakdown*.

Breakdown is also breakout, from imposed notions of what can come into the poem, can be a poem. The aspects of performance and theatre in these writers serve the ritual purposes of welcome and "yunyun" (as bissett spells it). Writing of his performance of "Marie the Poem," Konyves says the audience "realized that the form of the performance is the witnessing of the work being done." The quality of witnessing, in their work, to all the work of living, seems as necessary and natural to these poets as breathing. As breath.

Fred Wah sees *his* wintery breath "as jewels in front of himself." This precious breath carries the language sounds his body makes — wails (wah) and sighs (w-ahh) for our daily dying — and the musical sounds he blows on his horn. Breath is the river (wah-ter) that flows from life to life, generation to generation, the cold evidence of our lives transpiring, the transaction, getting and expending, we make with the world. His name breathes the common sound of English, ə, *schwa*, but fortunately for readers, the poet has not taken this (shh-wah) as a sign for silence.

Breathin' My Name with a Sigh, Wah's seventh book of poetry, has an elegaic structure, grief for the death of his father and for the dead world left without him gradually yielding to the consolations of cyclical nature, poetry, and music. His father's death leaves Wah facing his own death and a life in which sureties have disappeared.

> I lie here and wait for life again
> no one told me this happens
> not death but a consequence of it
> the physical isn't a world
> at least it wasn't this morning
> when I ran up the road out of breath
> yet that is what I most desire.
> Information. What leads up to death,
> is only information.

Still, he breathes his father's name as his own, bears his father's genes. Breathing is being: alive, he continues as part of a natural cycle which includes his father, dead. What he wants is to enter and leave the river flow of nature and of language as easily as a good jazz musician enters and leaves his music: taking a breath, giving back music; taking sounds, giving back poems; using a body, giving it back.

> I
> jazz
>
> I sing
> I do
> just what
> feels good
>
> I play
> the notes
> of *it*
> I swing
>
> and talk back
> sound that's right
>
> I take the breath
> through throat
> and hold it
> in the stomach
> hit the fingers
> on the horn
>
> blow the jazz
> that's where it goes

next spring
I'll go out to the garden
and with a stick
plant myself
and eat me in the fall

Unified with nature, he is one with his father, his family, and memory. External nature joins interior mind in the poet's body via the breath which moves as a wind between worlds. His body performs the role of mediator; it is the instrument on which we all compose and improvise our lives.

All four poets are, in a sense, romantic poets, descendants of Blake, Coleridge, Keats, who believe there are a myriad images of truth and who see themselves as places where poems are enacted, as embodiments of language. They willingly become the sparrow, raven, owl, whatever is necessary to fly the poem out of cages to new, larger spaces where, as Konyves puts it, "the poem becomes a 'free subject,'" to the home of lost language.

ANN MANDEL

GOADING

JOHN METCALF, *Kicking Against the Pricks.* ECW Press, $8.95.

JOHN METCALF EXPLAINS that "kicking against the pricks" refers to "an ox kicking when goaded." The reference suggests the beleaguered and embattled tone of some of these essays. They are a mixture of autobiography and polemic, written in what Metcalf terms "loving opposition" to Canadian literary life. Opposed Metcalf certainly is; his "love" must be inferred from his commitment to criticism and correction.

Of the nine essays collected here, three are not overtly polemical. Metcalf describes his English education with precise and evocative lists of books and impressions collected. His account of the Montreal Story Tellers in "Telling Tales" is an affectionate piece of literary history which shows him able to be objective about the literary shortcomings of even his closest associates and able to admit some of his own failures. In "Punctuation as Score" he writes about his own experiments with punctuation and typography. Alert readers of Metcalf will find this essay sometimes explains the obvious and won't appreciate receiving the lecture twice, once here, and once read to Geoff Hancock in the interview which opens the book; however, that larger audience which Metcalf wishes to create will find the essay lucid and uncondescending in its detailing of the care with which Metcalf crafts his stories. Although not overtly polemical, each of these essays is implicitly hortatory; Metcalf's English education is a lesson to us in how to create an audience for literature, and in how we fail to create such an audience in Canada; the Montreal Story Tellers respond to this crucial question of the absence of an audience for Canadian literature; "Punctuation as Score" examines how carefully crafted writing is written. These are also the concerns of the more explicitly polemical essays.

The other six pieces aim at goading the reader to kick against the pricks. Since polemic provokes controversy more often than agreement, few readers will find themselves concurring with everything Metcalf says. The corrosive quips with which he names and skewers writers and critics will provoke responses ranging from laughing approbation to unprintable refutations. Metcalf admires Powell, Waugh, Wodehouse, Bainbridge, and Amis. With these essentially conservative preferences, his Canadian praise is for Hood, Blaise, Munro, Laurence, Gallant, and several of the younger writers he has published in *Best Canadian Stories*; he has no use for writers like Bowering; his

descriptions of CanLit make no mention of writers like Marlatt, Kroetsch, Nichol, the Watsons. Indeed, he strongly hints that literary Modernism began in Canada in 1962 with the publication of *Flying a Red Kite* and with his own immigration; this overlooks, for example, *The Double Hook* and Sheila Watson's short stories which were published in the 1950's and which are acknowledged by many Canadian writers as their introduction to Modernism here.

Charm is not one of Metcalf's literary poses and this is one of his chief strengths; he is a critic readier than most to speak his convictions about literature without special consideration of friends or of the likelihood that the party criticized will be reviewing him next year. The real value of *Kicking Against the Pricks* lies in its uncharming insistence on the reasons there is no audience for Canadian writing. The failure of schools to create an educated audience for our literature is nowhere so unflinchingly and directly addressed as it is in "The Yellow School Bus." That the absence of a sufficiently large and literate audience leads us to tolerate shoddy writing, the irresponsible and illiterate reviewing of our daily papers and *Books in Canada*, and the plot summaries which masquerade as academic criticism need saying.

Metcalf's essays generally avoid the temptation of self-justification; he trips only with the title essay which makes its points by quotation from reviews of his own work alone. Examples of illiterate, malicious reviews of more prominent and skilled Canadian writers than Metcalf are depressingly numerous; his case would be strengthened by reference to them. A second pitfall of polemic is its emphasis on attack over praise. Metcalf treats generously those writers he admires. But calling to arms a nation in which the Canada Council has failed to create an audience for literature, he slights the real and extensive support of the Canada Council for writing, including his own. Criticizing the universities' conduct to writers-in-residence, he fails to note that, in the absence of students eager for his instruction, he might still have done something more useful than prop up the faculty club bar.

Stylistically, Metcalf claims for himself Waugh's tradition of elegance which, he says, Canadians don't recognize, let alone appreciate. These essays are usually satiric, always hortatory, sporadically elegant. A few one-liners value the quick thrust over strict accuracy; others are memorable ("Let them eat Harlequins" does say a good deal about "mass" readership). Metcalf has a good ear for dialogue and heightens and exaggerates scenes to fine satirical effect: his account of being a writer-in-residence, however much heightened, captures that sense of embarrassment and being hindered about their business, which manifests itself as indifference and condescension, which some explainers of literature feel in the presence of the real thing, the writer; his accounts of life at UNB with Cogswell and at Loyola with Purdy are simultaneously savage and richly comic. At times, Metcalf affects a punchy colloquialism that is responsible for his worst writing; a "typical type of experience" and a fondness for "this kind of stuff" to describe his own and others' work is not the stuff of elegance.

Metcalf's presentation of himself as a literary guerilla determined to save the Canadian literary establishment from itself, the fact that he has more criticisms than solutions to offer, his occasional injudiciousness: these will not enchant many of his readers. But they should not prevent his being read. Much of his criticism is searching and blunt about the problems of writing in Canada. It should be talked about and acted on.

SHIRLEY NEUMAN

PLAYS IN PRINT

CAROL BOLT, *Escape Entertainment*. Playwrights Canada, n.p.

TOM CONE, *Servant of Two Masters*. Playwrights Canada, n.p.

MARGARET HOLLINGSWORTH, Ever Loving. Playwrights Canada, n.p.

MARGARET HOLLINGSWORTH, *Operators* and *Bushed*. Playwrights Canada, n.p.

GREG LIGHT, *Black to Black*. Playwrights Canada, n.p.

ELINORE SIMINOVITCH, *There Are No Dragons*. Playwrights Canada, n.p.

ALLAN STRATTON, *Nurse Jane Goes to Hawaii*. Playwrights Canada, n.p.

GEOFFREY URSELL, *The Running of the Deer*. Playwrights Canada, n.p.

A FULL TEN YEARS PASSED between the founding of Playwrights Canada during the early 1970's theatre explosion and 1981, when these plays appeared in print. The nine scripts reviewed here are a fair indication of the publishing Playwrights Canada has been doing in the intervening years, and a revealing cross-section of Canadian drama near the end of the decade.

One of the features of the group is its generic variety which, in turn, attests to the variety of Canadian drama in general. One need hardly point out that the present range of competent scripts was not in evidence in the sixties. Included among the nine plays are satire, prose history, commercial farce, and a one-person "theatre piece," to use the playwright, Greg Light's term, which would have been *avant garde* a little more than a decade ago. In this latter play, entitled *Black to Black*, a different section from a forty-six line stream of consciousness reflection by a man whose lover has gone (probably died), is presented in each of the scenes. The circumstances and manner of performance, e.g., lines given "in the serious manner of a newscaster on television," repeated as if he were "selling a commercial product," then as "political exaggeration," dislocate the words from their expected meaning. Purportedly an exploration of how "language and its logical verbal structure" shape our perceptions, the play traces "supremely rational man" — "the flaw" — in his attempts to deal with reactions to an occurrence he cannot comprehend. The development in the play's fourteen scenes is from a superficial orderliness which hides inner chaos to a state of "beginning to understand"; that is, by the end the man has gained a degree of control over what has happened. The reader will sense that the ground between profundity and pretentiousness in as introverted a play as this is very slippery with *Black to Black* occasionally sliding across to the latter. As well, the reader would notice the text pale alongside the works of playwrights like Peter Handke who have explored the limitations of language in a more satisfying depth. Nonetheless, *Black to Black* won a "Fringe First Award" in the 1978 Edinburgh Festival and represents the kind of experimental work that has pushed back the boundaries of conventional drama in Canada over the past decade. Playwrights Canada is one of the very few publishers who have given these adventurous playwrights deserved attention.

If our so-called experimental dramatists have been ignored at large in Canada, the Stratford Festival, many people feel, has treated all Canadian playwrights as experimental. This group of nine plays contains in Tom Cone's version of Goldoni's *Servant of Two Masters* an example of the compromise many expect at Stratford: Canadian but not really Canadian. From another point of view, one might observe that if Stratford is set on adapting a classic, commissioning a Canadian playwright to prepare the script makes sense. Whatever one's stand, this version — it is not a translation in the true sense — which was produced at

Stratford in 1980 and subsequently at the Vancouver Playhouse, offers a performable text in a contemporary idiom; otherwise it does not differ significantly from texts already available.

Carol Bolt was one of the founders of Playwrights Canada and a notable figure among emerging Canadian playwrights during the early seventies. Her initial works, *Buffalo Jump*, *Red Emma*, and *Gabe*, for instance, received considerable praise and offered promise of even better things to come. However, after the success of her melodramatic thriller *One Night Stand* (1977), *Desperadoes*, also in 1977, and *Escape Entertainment* in 1981 have both met unfavourable responses. *Desperadoes* is still unpublished, but the printed script of *Escape Entertainment* confirms the audience reaction in that case. It is a shallow, broad-ranging satire with thin characterization, thin plot, and facile dialogue in which Bolt attacks as many targets as she can — from Canadian-made movies, Scotch, and cars to critics. The effect is largely sophomoric. The play's diffuseness in focus may stem from Bolt's inability to discipline her talent. One notes a betraying vagueness in her comments about *Escape Entertainment*: "My definition of comedy is really broad. . . . I'm all for connection with the audience and laughter is usually the best way. *Desperadoes* was angry, too angry. Who cares? I think you have to get people to identify with warm, funny characters, and you only get good theatre when you start with that connection." The level of her perceptions may be indicated in her superficial reference to Canadian drama: "all the characters [in *Escape Entertainment*] are now quite likeable and we've even figured out a happy ending . . . and that's a real accomplishment, you know, a real break with our Canadian playwriting tradition" (Toronto *Globe and Mail*, 3 Jan. 1981, E7). Such a view of our playwriting tradition, whether expressed facetiously or in seriousness, may gain some followers, but more thorough reading in Canadian drama will correct its inaccuracy.

One wonders at a play as weak as *Escape Entertainment* appearing in print. Yet, it has had a professional production which qualifies it for publication by Playwrights Canada. This single evaluative criterion has allowed for the printing of many scripts that would normally not have been published, and given needed encouragement to numerous authors, one of the reasons Playwrights Canada was founded in the first place. Geoffrey Ursell is an example of the many lesser-known authors for whom a Playwrights Canada publication must surely be encouraging. His *The Running of the Deer* which won the Clifford E. Lee award in 1977, is a competent, conventional prose history set in St. John's in 1768. Ursell shows skill in balancing the development of several plot lines thereby composing a multifaceted picture of Newfoundland life at the time. The action includes the murder of two Beothuk Indians; conflict among Irish fishermen, English merchants, and English authorities under General Palliser; attempts by the Irish to practise their outlawed Roman Catholicism and to sell their fish to the French; and the love story of a British officer and a merchant's daughter, opposed by her father's horrid secretary. We can see that St. John's life was a volatile mixture of intrigue, injustice, subjection, and danger, but the portrait's credibility is undercut by an unsatisfactory resolution of the strands of action.

Elinore Siminovitch is even less well-known than Ursell. Her unheralded two-act *There Are No Dragons* received only a workshop staging by the Smile Theatre Company — which may be all the script warrants. It could be subtitled the "old people's revenge" since the second act allows two elderly hospitalized women to

turn the tables on an unsympathetic daughter and a nurse when they are admitted to hospital for treatment. Although the idea behind the play seems tenable and the characters might be engaging if more fully developed, *There Are No Dragons* suffers from mechanical plotting and the single-mindedness of the psychological connections between character motivation and action.

The fact that Playwrights Canada allows its authors to retain control over their scripts, enabling them to grant rights to larger houses, should demand encourage commercial publication, has meant that Playwrights Canada regularly lists, at least temporarily, some very popular plays: David French's *Leaving Home* and David Freeman's *Battering Ram* have been examples in the past. Allan Stratton's *Nurse Jane Goes to Hawaii* is a current example. Widely and successfully produced throughout Canada since its premiere in 1980, *Nurse Jane* is an outrageous comedy that begins with Doris Chisholm, an Ann Landers-like newspaper columnist, staying home when her eccentric, geology-teacher husband thought she was going out of town. His plan of consummating an affair with the virginal Virginia Bliss, a Harlequin romance writer, is thus exposed when they arrive at the Chisholm apartment. But that is merely the start of the fun. In the manner of boulevard farce, the plot is full of twists and turns, too many to outline here; suffice it to say that they include a collection of mistaken identities, hiding in closets and similar antics. Combined with generally witty dialogue and humorous characters, these carryings-on allow *Nurse Jane* to do what commercially viable farce must: make its audiences laugh. Certainly *Nurse Jane* is a better piece of work than, say, Ben Travers' *Rookery Nook*, and numerous others in the same mould. Little wonder, then, that Stratton's play has found a home in Canadian theatres trying to balance their books in these economically austere times.

Margaret Hollingsworth is moving into the forefront of Canadian playwriting. As a result three of her plays add depth and credibility to the Playwrights Canada catalogue. *Operators*, a one-act set in a gardener's shed at a northern Ontario factory, explores what happens when a newly hired young woman takes her lunch-break with a pair of women who have been together on the night shift for a long time. The play is reminiscent of Pinter's *The Caretaker*, not only because of the shed setting and the intruder, but because of the sense of fear that underlies the women's relationships. The indirect manner in which these fears are revealed also rings a familiar bell. But the play is not derivative. Each character is an original creation, meaningful and complex, with a surface identity that hides layers of self underneath. Both the shed setting and the night shift/factory atmosphere resonate with contradictory auras of security and vulnerability, freedom and entrapment. The insights we gain reach far beyond the immediate situation and characters into behavioural patterns, fears, and prejudices held by all of us. *Bushed*, also a one-act set in northern Ontario, has two old men, ironically in a laundromat, reminiscing about their days in the bush. Unlike *Operators* where the style is realistic, *Bushed* plays the old men's tales of adventure — and one's current lust for the laundromat lady — against a chorus of three women folding washing in the background. The effect is lightly surrealistic and makes the old men a sardonic joke.

The dramaturgical skills Hollingsworth displays in the one-acts are given greater range in *Ever Loving*, a full-length play consisting of thirty-eight short scenes which trace the lives of three war brides who come to live in Canada. Again we meet lively, human characters, situations

permeated with humour and tension, and settings whose selected details evoke important emotional and intellectual responses from the audience. We see Hollingsworth's command of a dramatic structure in which she fits the vignettes together by jumping back and forth in time and place, occasionally even putting two or more different actions, times, or places on stage simultaneously. Rather than confusion, what emerges is a complex and authentic recreation of what it was like for those people to live through those experiences. The result is a subtle proliferation of insights about human relationships, being suppressed, trapped, uncompromising, about being alone in difficult circumstances, and about Canada and Canadian attitudes; they illuminate our own existence as well as the characters'.

At the beginning of the review I spoke of the representative variety of genres in this randomly selected group of plays. We could do the same of quality. If there are important forms of Canadian drama missing, they are scripts resulting from a collective creation approach and those that have an overall documentary intention. Otherwise, the range from short to full-length, from large to small cast, serious to frivolous, commercial to experimental, and by known as well as unknown authors is suitably broad. But these aspects are immediately evident. What are not are the high performance standards and the nature of the theatre community the scripts imply. Almost all of the scripts offer a challenge to a skilled director. Stratton's *Nurse Jane* demands actors skilled in farce; *Black to Black* depends on a virtuoso actor and a sophisticated audience; Hollingsworth's multi-layered dramatic structure requires an apt audience and technical expertise both backstage and from the actors. Generally in the plays, the breadth of leading roles, from young to elderly, men and women, indicates that the playwrights consciously or unconsciously expect there are actors and actresses to fill them. Even the weaker plays, like *There Are No Dragons*, have characters whose potential can be developed by the performers. And, in fact, we have seen a number of Canadian plays over the past few years saved, sometimes even raised to a level of national prominence that the scripts themselves did not warrant, by superior performances or staging. In short, these plays are directly and indirectly a mirror of the sophistication that has arrived in our theatrical resources over the past decade or so. Where twenty years ago a serious artist would likely still have turned to poetry or fiction, that author can now write for a lively theatre with hopes of seeing the script performed professionally, and assurance of publication by Playwrights Canada if the play is staged.

RICHARD PLANT

FREE WORDS

GEORGE BOWERING, *Smoking Mirror*. Longspoon Press, $7.50.

COLIN MORTON, *Printed Matter*. Sidereal Press, n.p.

ELIZABETH WOODS, *Men*. Fiddlehead Poetry Books, $5.00.

ROBERT ZEND, *Beyond Labels*. Hounslow Press, $8.95.

ELIZABETH WOODS' *Men* is the most apparently accessible book here. Her "poems" are a free verse, journal-like record of her life and, as the title suggests, the various men she has met and loved. Often coy, Woods parades these escapades, asserting too stridently and too frequently that she is a poet. There is an almost beguiling lack of awareness here: the words flow and drip, Wood writes, according to her emotions and the nostalgia she is able to arouse. The poems cloy, however: too much space is used in re-

counting adventures and proclaiming a delusory freedom. Woods uses whimsical metaphors that are clichés from the psychedelic era, "that acid summer I saw Woodstock." Her imagery is sentimental, her landscapes the innocent backdrop for a chronicle of exploits which palls before the book is finished. As the record of a generation still dreaming of alternative lifestyles and personal freedoms, *Men* is at least sociologically interesting. Linguistically and poetically, the book is tedious. Woods' insights into male behaviour are hackneyed; and her continual return to the act of lovemaking in language that does not match the experiences she attempts to describe is aggravating. In her own words, Woods describes herself as poet in the "self-written role / of benign white witch weaving a carpet . . . cobwebs of wishes, half-truths and dreams." Like this hippie dream itself, Woods emerges from this book always subordinate to the men who, by often simply existing beside her, loose her magic and muse. This attitude of the poet as lover-enchantress is seen for the frail, non-poetic structure it is by the obvious comparison with Atwood's Circe poems.

George Bowering's *Smoking Mirror* also uses the diary form; but even when Bowering's insights are minimal or, as is the case, objectionable, the craft of this poetry is evident. The "Smoking Mirror" sequence juxtaposes linguistic ambiguities and discoveries with images drawn from indigenous American legends, European and American politics, and the Third Worlds of Mexico and Asia. Here, Bowering admits an ignorance of underdeveloped cultures and declares his knowledge rather of various U.S. consulates. This leads to an assumption of complicity and the awareness of European guilt in the presence of a Blood Indian in Calgary. The strength of this reflective sequence is trivialized, however, when the reader is confronted by "My 6-Pound Dog" who

> shit under the American flag
> at Mt. Rushmore, his own
> epic sculpture, & later pissed
> on a gravestone at the Little Big Horn.
>
> His politics are similar to my own,
> his appetite for travel as ennobled.

Here, Bowering betrays the superficial involvement with his poetry which is evident throughout this collection. There is a section entitled "From a Fake Journal," and indeed, the book reads in its entirety like that: snippets of travelogue, meditations on now dead poets that contribute nothing to an understanding of their own or Bowering's works, overt parodies of Yeats and Leonard Cohen, and too many mannerisms of a post-modernist, American anecdotalism. Although the Yeats parody is amusing ("Running & running / on the narrowing road / the puppet cannot feel / the puppeteer"), the strongest poem here is "I Dream of Pepsi." A fondness verging on obsession for the American beverage impales the poet in the death-culture of napalm flames and imperialistic navies. Again, whim overrides any political lessons at which Bowering may hint:

> French Canadians love Pepsi, this is true.
> Is that American or a gesture against
> Ontario Coke?
> Or just plain bad taste?

The book contains musings, jottings, and the occasional game of concrete punning; but *Smoking Mirror* is, at best, a minor transitional work in which Bowering's tricks and strategies are highly visible.

In Colin Morton's *Printed Matter*, by contrast, the reader discovers a rich talent, working in contemporary modes. Concrete poems ("a tomato," "l'arrivee," and "i read a shadow on the stream") reveal inner words and new definitions. Morton's humility and self-effacement in these poems lend a power not found in any of the other collections here reviewed. His poetry is a revelation: it is impossible to read these poems without

sensing that Morton, too, is discovering the truths and perceptions which remain after the book is closed. There are non-traditional poems in which the words are first stated, then re-ordered and restated: minimal authorial intrusion and maximum expression are achieved. In "testimony of a james bay cree," for example, Morton captures the very strength which Bowering mocked:

> when you talk about the land you talk about me and my family
> you talk the land when you talk about me and about my family
> the land you talk about me about my family when you talk and
> when the land about me and my family about you talk you talk
>
> what part you destroy of the land you also destroy of me
> you also what part you destroy of the land destroy of me
> of me the land what part destroy of you you destroy also
> what part you destroy of me the land also of you destroy.

This inventiveness is carried through poems such as "old alex," wherein Morton exploits cliché and care-worn idiom to recapture their meanings anew. Emmett Williams' experiments come to mind, but Morton has more in his repertoire than mere imitation. In "days in the library" and "symphonies," Morton uses a basic syntactic pattern to introduce metaphorical and linguistic inventions that are both challenging and humorous. His "inventory (after jacques prevert)" beguilingly catalogues a series of objects, people and events with mythic overtones. The separately entered, final inclusion of "one beaver," "another beaver," "five or six beavers," and finally "some more dam beavers" (with that unasked-for discovery in the pun) reveals the humour and depth of Morton's seemingly casual methods. His "empty bottles" is a homage to method and masters, cataloguing as it does various bottles and instructing the reader to

> line up the bottle that killed Malcolm Lowry with the bottle
> that killed Dylan Thomas and the bottles that killed all the
> drunken poets nobody's heard of and the poets who spoke all their lines into their bottles.

The final sections of this poem resonate with the sense that Morton's poems almost always capture:

> line up the empty bottles sent back by hospitals for refills
>
> line up all the empty bottles
>
> the party's over.

Simple, seemingly casual, the poems in *Printed Matter* touch the reader and remain in the mind long after the book is closed. Morton's strength is to play in areas which others might abandon because of the dangers of cliché and obvious methodologies: his achievement is to reveal new worlds of meaning through his careful scrutiny of repetition and dissection. Morton's work is the most scrupulous in its language and attitude.

Robert Zend's *Beyond Labels* is an encylopaedic selection of this Hungarian-Canadian's work from 1962 to 1982, some of which is a collaboration with John Colombo. The introductory essay, "Labels," is an ironic history of Euromodernist aesthetics, and the dilemma of the emigré writer is told in a manner reminiscent of Nabokov and Borges. The paradoxes and absurdities chronicled here lead into a poetry that is at once whimsical and multi-layered. In the Section entitled "Old Poems," Zend declares his ideal poetry:

> It has to be something new
> that won't grow old the day after tomorrow,
> so super-new
> that it won't grow old-fashioned,
> won't be repeated, won't be understood,
> ever.

Rather unfortunately, his poems in this section are not so new-fangled as to be incomprehensible. "Eleven Years in Eleven Lines" is characteristic in its humour and simplicity:

> "I must have dialed the wrong number,"
> she said, apologizing,
> but he surprised her by replying: "How do you know?"
> and carried the conversation for a while,
>
> he took a fancy to her voice,
> made a date,
> met her once,
> then once more,
>
> and, after a few months, he married her
> only to realize after a few years,
> how right she was in the beginning.

Most often, ambiguities and concepts are fully explained, allowing the reader an effortless entry into Zend's world of paradox and bilingual, bicultural difficulties. "The Golden Rules" is Kafkaesque in its instructions for normal life and its upturning of conventional wisdom:

> Killing is forbidden. That's a basic rule.
> Sometimes you must. If there is a war. And there often is.
> If you do kill (or don't), you can be sent to prison.
> Your principle about killing should be: avoid prison.

Toronto is seen as a "City of Two Kinds":

> There are two kinds of cities:
>
> where you can live
> but you can't make a living;
>
> where you can make a living
> but you can't live;
>
> Toronto is almost both of them.

The most appealing of the poems here are the collaborative translations with Colombo of medieval Hungarian fables and Christian legends. Zend also includes samples of his "Drop" and "Ditto" poems wherein names of people and places, mainly from Eastern Canada and in politics, are exploited for the various names and slogans which can be found by dropping letters out of the names to make new words which, it is hoped, reveal the truths of the original person or place. Hardly great poetry, nor even as essential to literature as Zend elsewhere claims his work to be, these games have been used by *Books in Canada* for monthly competitions. *Beyond Labels* looks important: its binding and meticulate composition are matched by back-cover praises so extreme and catholic in their range as to suggest that the entire book is intended to display a curious, cultured mind playing with words rather than exploring the possibilities suggested in Zend's foreword.

CRAIG TAPPING

LES ENFANTS A LA PAGE

CELINE ET PIERRE LAROSE, *Macail*. Leméac, $6.95.

JOSETTE MICHAUD, *La Perdriole*. Leméac, $6.95.

LOUISE POMMINVILLE, *Pitatou et le bon manger*. Leméac, n.p.

GINETTE ANFOUSSE, *Fabien 1* et *Fabien 2*. Leméac, $8.95 ea.

GEORGES-HEBERT GERMAIN, *Un Minou fait comme un rat*. Leméac, $9.95.

GUY MIGNAULT, *Bonjour, Monsieur de La Fontaine*. Leméac, $9.95.

RAYMOND PLANTE, *La Machine à beauté*. Québec/Amérique, $4.95.

JEAN-MARIE POUPART & YVAN LAFONTAINE, *Rétroviseurs*. Leméac, $9.95.

LA LITTERATURE pour la jeunesse a mis fort longtemps à acquérir ses lettres de noblesse. Même dans les pays qui ont une longue tradition littéraire, il a fallu attendre la deuxième moitié du 19e siècle pour assister à un véritable essor.

Le florissement actuel de la production québécoise paraîtra d'autant plus remar-

quable si l'on se souvient que de 1960 à 1970 il n'y eut que 180 livres publiés. Ce chiffre comparé à une production annuelle de 2,000 titres en Angleterre semble fort bas, et pourtant il représentait déjà un énorme progrès puisque c'était plus que ce qui avait paru pendant les trois siècles précédents.

C'est au cours des années 70-80 que l'on assiste à un grand déblocage dû entre autre à l'effort acharné d'associations regroupant auteurs, illustrateurs, bibliothécaires, professeurs, etc., lesquels ont lutté d'arrache-pieds pour promouvoir le livre d'enfant au Québec. Si l'on se souvient du contenu ultra didactique et de l'illustration peu attrayante qui défavorisaient les anciens textes face à la concurrence étrangère, on se rendra compte du chemin parcouru en consultant les textes que nous mentionnons ci-dessous. Si tout n'est pas parfait, tout va cependant pour le mieux au rayon des jeunes!

L'album a pris un élan tout particulier avec Henriette Major en 1970, et les quelques titres que nous présentent les éditions Leméac s'ajoutent à une abondante collection dans le domaine. Dans le livre pour enfants, chez les tout-petits, c'est l'image qui est porteuse de sens; les mots et les images se répondent et sans l'image le texte aurait une toute autre signification. *Macail* de Céline et Pierre Larose offre un spectacle rassurant avec un petit message sur l'amitié puisque l'épouvantail, malgré sa fonction traditionnelle, offre sa protection à l'oiseau. Les illustrations réduites à des formes géométriques simples évoquent différents moments de la journée grâce à un éventail de couleurs, et l'image suit de façon fort cohérente le texte.

La Perdriole, texte-chanson de Josette Michaud, apprend à compter: on commence avec un aminal, la perdriole, et on finit avec dix cochons. Chaque jour est représenté par un nombre approprié d'animaux et les nombreuses répétitions plairont aux tout-petits à qui ce livre est destiné. L'image très nette colle au texte et ajoute aussi une dimension humoristique bienvenue.

Avec *Pitatou et le bon manger* de Louise Pomminville on s'adresse à la fois aux enfants et aux parents puisqu'il s'agit d'un livre de recettes. C'est donc plutôt une activité dirigée qu'un texte en tant que tel. Chaque menu évoque une saison. On vous propose une "salade folle de Pitatou-la-coquette" au printemps, une "crème-soleil" en été ou un "punch boréal" en hiver. Si l'image suite le texte pour ce qui est des saisons évoquées, elle aporte aussi autre chose: tout se déroule dans un paysage luxuriant, riche, naturel, où l'oiseau est doté d'un comportement humain. Bref ce livre du "bon manger" propose une vision épurée de l'homme.

Ginette Anfousse qu'on avait l'habitude de voir publier à la Courte Echelle pour les tout-petits s'adresse cette fois-ci à des lecteurs un peu plus âgés en leur présentant, dans de magnifiques albums, Fabien, ce personnage de rêve sensible et bienveillant qui vit dans un coin de terre "ni trop haut ni trop bas, pour recevoir ce qui vient du ciel et tout ce qui vient de la terre" et qui raconte de fabuleuses histoires. Fabien, inspiré du Petit Prince, incorpore la quête du héros parti à la recherche du loup pour sa délicate Rose qui a le malheur d'être un raton laveur albinos. Poétique et imaginatif ce texte est un éloge à l'amitié et à l'amour et met en relief, non sans humour, quelques folies humaines. *Fabien 2* semble inspiré d'*Alice au pays des merveilles* et met en scène deux jumelles, Aline et Alice, qui, en compagnie d'un étrange chapelier, font chaque fois surgir des situations différentes. Quoique ce texte soit empli de fantaisie tant au niveau de l'action que du dialogue, il aurait certainement gagné à être raccourci. Une illustration du crû de l'auteur présente chaque chapitre. Les dessins à la fois burlesques et empreints

de sensibilité éclatent en couleurs et sont très bien servis par une mise en page grand format.

Avec *Un Minou fait comme un rat* de Georges-Hébert Germain nous sortons du domaine de l'album. C'est un conte philosophico-poétique qui pourrait faire la joie des éducateurs à la recherche d'une littérature audacieuse. Un chat raisonneur et raisonnant se pose des questions sur sa propre existence, passe la plupart de son temps à croquer les autres bêtes et à le regretter, bref à donner la mort et à craindre la sienne. Il s'agit là d'un texte hors de l'ordinaire, quasi surréaliste, égrenant des mots pleins de finesse mais qui requiert une connaissance qu'on ne saurait attendre d'un enfant d'une dizaine d'années. Des termes tels que "paranoia" et "schizophrénie" demanderaient aussi à être explicités. Bien que l'auteur utilise les procédés classiques de personnification, métaphores, etc., le délire infernal de ce chat en proie à toutes sortes d'hallucinations est un invitation frappante au voyage de la condition humaine.

Le texte l'emportant ici sur l'image, l'illustration est devenue épisodique mais demeure très soignée. Serge Chapleau ne se contente pas de choisir un moment du texte et de le visualiser. Il ne s'agit pas d'un simple dessin d'observation. Le cadrage en particulier affiche une grande délicatesse.

Bonjour Monsieur de La Fontaine de Guy Mignault nous entraîne dans le théâtre. Cette pièce qui a connu un franc succès au Centre National des Arts d'Ottawa où elle a été créée en janvier 1980 tente de revivifier les fables en y introduisant tout un jeu d'animation et en mélangeant les éléments de divers textes. A la lecture, sans comique de scène, sans costume et sans musique, le tout tombe quelque peu à plat bien que le livre soit agrémenté de photos et que les dernières pages reproduisent les chansons, paroles de Guy Mignault, musique de Claude Naubert. Définitivement un texte qui demande à être joué, ou du moins lu, en groupe.

La Machine à beauté de Raymond Plante est le premier titre de la nouvelle collection jeunesse-romans dirigés par l'auteur. Visant un public de 10-13 ans, ce texte à la fantaisie exubérante a reçu le prix de l'Association Canadienne d'Education de langue française 1982. L'invention du jeune savant Arsène Clou permet à tous les habitants d'une ville de devenir beau, ce qui n'est pas sans inconvénients cependant puisqu'ils deviennent tous sosies. L'arrière fond philosophique est amené avec beaucoup d'humour à l'aide d'un langage désopilant. L'intérêt du récit tient aussi au fait qu'il n'y a pas possibilité de retour à l'apparence originelle pour les adultes et seuls les enfants avec leurs variétés physiques deviennent les symboles de la norme désirable. L'illustration occupe ici une place beaucoup moins importante et la fantaisie de l'écrivain. Il est par ailleurs dommage que l'image soit desservie par la mise en page et le manque de tonalité de la reproduction. Les tons de grisaille affadissent l'originalité de la composition.

Rétroviseurs vise un public d'adolescents et l'on sait la carence de textes pour les lecteurs de cet âge. La formule de présentation sort du commun; il s'agit d'un texte dialogue avec des images; la jaquette est amovible et s'ouvre par l'arrière où le récit commence. Texte à deux voix, elle et lui, chacun dans sa voiture se dirige vers le lieux de leur rendez-vous. Le rétroviseur sert d'écran et complète aussi une narration où l'introspection est toute puissante. La relation entre les deux jeunes est explorée avec sensibilité et humour, le tout se situant dans un contexte éminemment québécois. L'illustration apporte une dimension supplémentaire en créant un paysage presque totalement absent de la narration. Au contraire quand le texte glisse vers l'irréel, l'image se con-

tente d'assumer une fonction illustrative. Il s'agit donc d'une forme littéraire qui renvoie sans cesse du texte à l'image mais qui n'a rien de commun avec la bande dessinée. Il faudra attendre d'autres textes de ce genre pour voir si les adolescents "mordent."

DANIELLE THALER

MULTICULTURAL FRENCH

Francophone Literatures of the New World, ed., with an introduction by James P. Gilroy. Occasional Papers, no. 2, Dept. of Foreign Languages and Literatures, Univ. of Denver, $3.00.

IT IS AN UNFORTUNATE FACT that, with the exception of Quebec literature, the literary achievements of the French-speaking areas of the Western Hemisphere are generally unrecognized. The diverse essays in this volume are intended as a contribution to the body of scholarship on these Francophone literatures.

Three of the essays are survey articles. The best and most comprehensive is Mathé Allain's article on "The French Literature of Louisiana," which traces the development of French Louisiana literature from the eighteenth-century travel accounts, memoirs, and histories which are generally of limited literary merit, to the nineteenth-century plays, novels, and essays which generally imitate the metropolitan French models in vogue, and to the decline of Louisiana French writing in the early 1920's. Allain shows how the new writers of the current French renaissance in Louisiana seek their inspiration not in metropolitan French models and styles but in the local oral traditions and in the Louisiana experience.

The second survey article, Hans Runte's "Acadia as Literary Topos," affirms the existence of "Acadianité" with its rich oral heritage and more recently a written literature, the most famous expression of which is to be found in the works of Antonine Maillet. Runte provides the reader with a list of modern texts, an attempt to catalogue the works into three groups (dramatic and narrative memoirs of basically local or autobiographical interest, re-examination of the two historical traumas of the past, and the proclamation of a "prise de conscience" of a real and renewable nation) as well as his own prescription of the paths to be followed as Acadian literature reaches greater maturity and universality.

The third survey article, "The Franco-American Presence: a New England French Literature," sets itself the very restricted goal of providing information to assist in the development of a basic high school or college course. The corpus presented is quite slim and no critical commentary is offered.

The other four articles deal with specific themes. The most thorough is Karolyn Waterson's "The Mythical Dimension of *Pélagie-la-Charrette*," an analysis of the way Antonine Maillet "endows the novel with a mythical dimension designed to create, ex nihilo, a corpus of neo-Acadian myths, capable of fixing and preserving in the collective consciousness threatened values, traditions, and history." This mythology draws on biblical, Graeco-Roman, medieval, and modern European sources. Waterson raises one serious criticism of this work, namely the gratuitous racial stereotyping of the black slave denied the same sense of pride in his heritage which the novel attempts to create for Acadia, a flaw which prevents the novel from becoming "the odyssey of all oppressed exiles."

Paulette Collet's article, "De la passion du sacrifice au complexe du martyre," traces the evolution of the theme of the sacrifice of the woman mainly in the

works of three dissimilar writers, Laure Conan (the first French-Canadian woman novelist), Gabrielle Roy, and Michel Tremblay. She shows how Conan's heroines actively seek out self-sacrifice and martyrdom, Roy's heroines endure it as their socially imposed duty, and Tremblay's heroines bitterly rail against it. More recent women writers such as Louise Maheux-Forcier, Helene Ouvrard, and Louky Bersianik are shown to go further in making their heroines completely reject the social role of child-bearer, work-horse, and sacrificial victim.

The final two essays deal with French Caribbean (mainly Haitian) writers. One would have liked to see more variety in the choice of works studied. Julien Lafontant in "The Dynamic Message of *Diacoute* and *Gouverneurs de la Rosée*" uses a loosely defined Negritude as the central element in his analysis. More specific references to Indigenism and more precise evocation of Price-Mars' *Ainsi Parla l'Oncle* might have been expected. But the most serious failing of this article is that in affirming that the militant character of these works results from the fact that the three important elements of Negritude are fully developed, Lafontant misrepresents the thrust of *Diacoute* and *Gouverneurs de la Rosée*, which raise the question of both race and class and which espouse the cause of the oppressed classes of Blacks.

The final essay, James Gilroy's "The Theme of Christ in Francophone Caribbean Literature: Roumain's *Gouverneurs de la Rosée*," takes a mythological approach. Sartre's evocation of the Black "Passion" in his essay, "Black Orpheus," and illustrations of the theme of Christ's Passion drawn from a number of French Caribbean writers serve as the backdrop for this analysis of *Gouverneurs de la Rosée*, which is accurate, even if it breaks no new ground.

The essays in this volume are of unequal quality but overall do succeed in drawing attention not only to the revitalization of Francophone culture in the New World but also to the growing role of French as a multicultural medium of expression.

GARY WARNER

VICTORIAN SKETCHES

The Prose of Life: Sketches from Victorian Canada, ed. and with introduction by Carole Gerson and Kathy Mezei. ECW, $8.95.

IN INTRODUCING THIS COLLECTION of Canadian prose pieces from Victorian magazines, the editors offer an intriguing thesis. These sketches, intense, intimate, colloquial, discrete, focusing on details of place and character, are the precursors of the "serial writing" which has proliferated in Canadian fiction, from Leacock to Munro, Hood, and Hodgins. Gerson and Mezei add, citing Wiebe, Ondaatje, and others, "the sketch can be regarded as a transitional genre that points towards the modern tradition of documentary writing."

Setting aside the thesis for the moment, we can enjoy this well-produced book in its own right. The sketches in *Prose of Life* have the freshness of quick field drawings — lacking formal control, but sharp in perception, and generally light in touch. The twenty-three selections present some predictable scenes: hunting adventures, encounters with Indians, comic bush ceremonies (as when W. W. Campbell describes a drunken old Orangeman, marrying an ominously husky young woman). There are surprises too, like Sara Jeannette Duncan's sketch of a dingy city office, where she ventures in search of an insurance policy, or like Allan A'Dale's rueful report of freshman hazing at a Canadian university, circa 1872.

The editors note that many of the sketches are structured by a journey, a small-range movement clarifying a particular locale. "Here is Us" — the subtitle of a recent article in *Canadian Poetry* — might be fitly applied also to this collection of topocentric essays. Canoeing northward in July (to avoid June, the mating season for bears), marching west toward Frog Lake with the Manitoba Light Infantry, forcing a way through snowy terrain above Quebec City on the track of a "first cariboo," the authors journey also to a sudden shift of perception. The writing of the sketch "is itself a voyage of discovery in the course of which they learned about the new land and brought it under control."

For such accounts, Victorian magazines offered a pittance and a public. The sequence of journals from which the sketches are selected include the *Nova Scotia New Monthly* in the 1840's, the *Anglo-American* in the 1850's, the *British-American* in the 1860's, the *Maritime Monthly* in the 1870's, *Rose Belford's* and *Forest and Stream* in the 1880's, and others, ending with the *Canadian Magazine* in 1898. I wish the editors had added notes on these journals, their venue, reach, life-span, and major writers. Surprising to note how often articles come from the first year of publication by each journal, e.g., the *Provincial and Halifax Monthly*, founded 1852, the *Canadian Monthly and National Review*, founded 1872, and *The Dominion Illustrated Monthly* founded 1892. Perhaps the excitement of a newly founded journal pulled excellence into the first catch of contributors. The editors don't explain why they selected from this particular group, omitting, for instance, the *Nation*, or the *Dominion Review*. Why the *Globe*, and not the *Montreal Star*? I also wonder why they included *Sharpe's London Magazine* to illustrate British buying of Canadian material, while omitting *Blackwood's* and other major journals, not to mention the American magazines which so favoured Canadian post-Confederation sketches. Let's hope Carole Gerson and Kathy Mezei are working on a fuller study of this rich lode of periodical materials. We badly need something to match Beaulieu et Hamelin, *La Presse québécoise.*

Some of the writing is less than good. Lampman, for instance, in a dreadful sketch, takes us on a fishing trip where muskellunge appear as "lounging fellows who are generally loafing lazily," and a lake is "a little patch of dreamland dropped into the midst of the woody hills that gird it round." Hardly a "precise and lyrical evocation"; but such gooey writing reminds us of how much arch and pretentious work appeared in the Victorian journals, and makes us grateful for our editors' selections. The best sketches offer sharp and shapely phrasing. The urgent cry of Newfoundland castaways reported by Moses Harvey or the vigorous technical detail on ice-cutting by Morgan Coldwell leaven the Lampman lump.

In *Canadian Literature*, No. 94, Carl Berger says "episodes and anecdotes do not . . . convey an adequate sense of the distinctive atmosphere of the place." But the editorial in the same issue seems to counter that view. It speaks, as Gerson and Mezei do, of "the fragmentary Canadian sketch form," of Scott, Leacock, Callaghan, Hood, as distinct from the "plotted American tale," and in that very distinction indicative of Canadian social relations, manners, and politics. The prose of Canadian life, as presented in this valuable anthology, teases us into important speculations about places and tastes, manners and media in Victorian Canada.

ELIZABETH WATERSTON

opinions and notes

MALCOLM LOWRY'S COMIC VISION: "ELEPHANT AND COLOSSEUM"

THOSE WHO KNOW MALCOLM LOWRY only through *Under the Volcano* are often surprised to discover that much of his later work rejects that novel's dark and terrible vision in favour of a far more positive, even comic, outlook. *Volcano* seems such a devastating apocalyptic novel that one marvels that its author would, or could, arrive at any comic resolution whatsoever.

Actually, though, I think it is just these readers' misreading of *Volcano* that keeps them from appreciating the later work. *Volcano*, after all, is not so much a tragic novel as a novel about the possibility of tragedy. The Consul's wasted life, his terrible death, is meant to serve as a warning, just as the final words of the novel serve as a warning: "¿LE GUSTA ESTE JARDIN QUE ES SUYO? ¡EVITE QUE SUS HIJOS LO DESTRUYAN!" What this coda implies, I think, is that the Consul has in some sense *chosen* his tragic end, and that we have the power, if we have the courage, to choose otherwise for ourselves. Correspondingly, many of Lowry's later stories are not so much comedies themselves as stories about the possibility of a comic vision, in the Dantean sense of that term. A case in point is the much-neglected story "Elephant and Colosseum," written in 1951 and published after Lowry's death as part of the volume entitled *Hear Us O Lord From Heaven Thy Dwelling Place*. In this story, which Lowry himself regarded as a "comic classic,"[1] the central character learns what *Volcano*'s Consul steadfastly refused to see, what Malcolm Lowry desperately tried (who knows how successfully?) to believe: namely, that man has more options in life than absurdist drama or high tragedy; if he wants, he *can* direct his life toward meaning and fulfilment — but only if he is willing to relinquish his teleological compass and learn to steer by "dead reckoning."

To summarize briefly, "Elephant" is the story of Kennish Drumgold Cosnahan, a Manx-American novelist vacationing in Rome. Having recently completed a successful first novel, Cosnahan now finds himself unable to write, and the story concerns his attempts to understand and come to terms with his problem. The plot of the story is simple, if improbable. Wandering about the city after an unsuccessful attempt to locate the offices of his Italian publishers, Cosnahan stumbles upon the zoo in the Borghese Gardens. There he encounters an old acquaintance — Rosemary, the elephant he had tended on board ship when she was transported from Bangkok to Rome many years before. Thoughts of Rosemary and of his magical Manx heritage commingle to bring Cosnahan back in touch with his own "magical" (i.e., creative) powers, and the end of the story finds him relaxed, happy, and apparently ready to begin work once more.

On the surface, the story certainly does seem as "insubstantial" as Douglas Day has alleged,[2] but in fact it is not — it's just that its substance depends on an unexpressed metaphor, a metaphor whose terms are revealed more openly elsewhere in Lowry. One place where that metaphor is made explicit is in "The Forest Path to the Spring," the story Lowry originally planned as "Elephant"'s companion piece. At one point, toward the end of that longish story, the anonymous jazz musician narrator muses about the

composing process: "Yet it is queer that I had to try and put all this into *words*, to see it, to try and see the thoughts even as I heard the music. But there is a sense in which everybody on this earth is a writer, the sense in which Ortega . . . means it. Ortega has it that a man's life is like a fiction that he makes up as he goes along. He becomes an engineer and converts it into reality — becomes an engineer for the sake of doing that."[3] This allusion to the Ortega notion of man as novelist of his own existence is only one of many in Lowry's work. Although explicitly identified with Ortega in only one other fictional context (the unfinished story "Ghostkeeper"), the metaphor itself virtually permeates both *Dark As the Grave* and "Through the Panama." In the letters the notion is even more prominent. In one, to his friend Downie Kirk, Lowry quotes the original Ortega passage, which he has recently read. In another, written three years later, he discusses it again with his editor, Albert Erskine.[4]

Despite the frequency of these allusions, however, few commentators on Lowry's work have seen their significance. While several have noticed a general "artist theme" running through *Hear Us O Lord*, only William New seems to see its importance *as metaphor*. In a brief but cogent comment on the story, he remarks: "The reason for Cosnahan's trip to Italy and the gift of wizardry from his Manx mother are comparably metaphoric. The translation of the novel is a way of talking about the translation of the novelist and so (circularly returning to the basic metaphor from Ortega once again) about the translation of man that takes place when he enters into a new understanding of the relationship between himself and the world."[5] In seeing the Ortega metaphor that informs the story, New is able to successfully get to its very heart. For Kennish Drumgold Cosnahan, the problems of the writer are inextricably bound up with the problems of man, and in overcoming his writer's block and rediscovering his work, he is overcoming the kind of debilitating stasis that can isolate man from the process of life itself and (as in the case of *Volcano*'s Consul) destroy him.

While New is right to see the translation metaphor as connected to the Ortega theme, there is another theme operating in "Elephant and Colosseum" which complicates and enriches the issue even more. For Cosnahan is not just a writer/man, he is a writer/magician/man, and it is to his "magical" powers that he attributes the success of his "translation" in the end.

The equation of writer with magician is one that Lowry suggests elsewhere as well — in *Volcano*, of course, but also in a passage from "Strange Comfort Afforded by the Profession," the piece that immediately precedes "Elephant" in the *Hear Us O Lord* volume. In that story at one point the central character speaks of the poet's "magical monopoly, his possession of words," implying that the writer's ability to transmute experience into art is akin to the alchemist's ability to transform base metals into gold.[7] In "Elephant and Colosseum," the parallel is continued. Though Cosnahan's magical powers enable him to perform such tasks as halting poltergeist phenomena, solving difficult geometrical problems, and divining for water, their main application seems to be to his writing: when he hits a dry spell after his first book's publication he feels as if "albeit he wouldn't put it to himself quite like this — 'his powers had been falling off,'" and when he realizes he can write again he feels "as happy as some old magician who had just recovered his powers and brought off a masterstroke!"

It is easy to see how the magician metaphor reinforces the writer theme and

hence the whole Ortega notion of man making up his life as he goes along. The power to create one's life is in many ways a magical power with potentialities for good and bad (white magic and black) which are frightening to the person who possesses the powers. He who fears his powers to such an extent that he will not use them in both cases denies an essential and vital part of himself. This, I think, is the situation Cosnahan finds himself in at the beginning of his story — a situation he overcomes, with the help of Rosemary the elephant, by the end.

Cosnahan's writer's block, as I have previously mentioned, is brought on by the completion and success of his first novel (a phenomenon not uncommon among writers, it seems). He is like the magician who, having discovered his "unlawful" powers, tests them and is frightened by the results — like the man whose life has reached some important plateau where he pauses and then is somehow afraid to go on.

The plateau in Cosnahan's life is a natural one, created by the death of his mother, his last surviving parent. Such an event in anyone's life is reason for pause: a moment when it is natural to stop and look back at the past, with all its accompanying sense of guilt and loss, and forward to the future, with its fears and uncertainties. Such pauses, as Lowry well knew, could be the occasion for asking unanswerable questions, and it is thus that Cosnahan finds himself wondering: "What on earth *was* he after?" "Yet what did he, Cosnahan, know of himself? Was he a writer? What *was* a writer?" "How did you go, how did you begin to go?"

Ostensibly, what Cosnahan is after is success: new translations, increased sales, publicity blurbs, recognition, fame. But is this what he really wants? Actually, it is not. It is his *work* that he wants, as this passage near the end of the story makes clear:

> It was success itself, oh, he'd known it, something about its effect he couldn't handle, and the futile search for which he must abandon. . . .
>
> And abandon for what? What but his work! Yes, his precious, ridiculous, second-rate, and yet to him, and to his wife too if they must live, all-important work: it was this he had been missing all along, seeking some stimulus, somewhere, anywhere, to begin again, and in the act of seeking, the excuse to postpone that beginning.

This passage fairly rings with significance. In his search for success, the writer resembles man in his equally teleological (and thus equally misdirected) search for "meaning." What the search comes down to, in either case, is an excuse to postpone one's real work — an excuse to postpone the living of life itself. Realizing this, Cosnahan has made the first step toward that new beginning which is, or should be, the real object of his search.

The question of how to begin, how to go, is somewhat more difficult, and yet if we look back at the context of that question we find its answer implied. "How did you go, how did you begin to go?" Cosnahan asks as he stands before the "titanic thunder and confusion of traffic" on Rome's streets. And lest we should not realize the dimensions of the question, he goes on, "Yet this momentous traffic was scarcely a symptom of the age in which he lived." The question of how to go, i.e., how to live, is answered implicitly, I think, in the way Cosnahan makes his way around the city — "steering as by dead reckoning." Cosnahan's fear of traffic, like his fear of writing, his fear of using his "magical powers" and his very fear of *being*, can be countered only by plunging into and going with the flow. (We may be reminded here, as so often in Lowry, of the Conradian injunction, "to the destructive element submit.") "Cosnahan," we are told, "was not exactly a man who walked without thinking where he was going. On the contrary, he often

thought so intensely about it that every time he approached what, to another, would have seemed a logical crossing, his direction was modified by the same decision at all costs, if possible, to avoid that crossing." Once Cosnahan submits to the chaos of the traffic, however, and like the water-diviner follows the "familiar twinge of pull at his being," he is able to make some headway. Once again, the implications for the Ortega metaphor are obvious — as they are in regard to the third question, "what is a writer?"

This is a question that Lowry answers negatively, using Cosnahan's old shipmate Quattras as a perfect example of what a writer is *not*. In "Strange Comfort," Lowry had gotten in some jabs at his contemporaries, poets who "dressed like, and as often as not were bank clerks" and whose work his protagonist regards as "hieroglyphics, masterly compressions, obscurities to be deciphered by experts."[8] Now, in this story, he strikes out again at those artists, like Quattras, whose distorting aesthetic vision sacrifices life to the "higher truth" of art. For Quattras, the simple story of a rescue at sea is not romantic enough. He changes all the circumstances until the actual episode is unrecognizable: "Not from modesty, nor any aversion to the subjective, or even because he had some sage notion the truth wouldn't sell. On the contrary, he felt that what he had written *was* the truth, that it *would* sell, but only to a 'high class audience.' And if it did not, he was artist enough to admit, that would be only because it was *too* truthful, *too* realistic, too 'art for art's sake,' and in short, too much like that Sagami Sea of Japan that had all but engulfed them all, 'over their heads.'" Here, surely, is an attack not only on the "romantic" Quattras but on all those writers whose aesthetic vision results in what Lowry sees as "inauthentic" art — art which has strayed so far from lived experience that it is no longer available to the ordinary reader.

It is also an implicit critique of the "aesthetic" view of life. If the artist's role, in relation to his material, is to take it and reshape it into a preconceived form — in Quattras' case, the form of a dashing romantic novel — then man's role, by extension, is to take and reshape his experience toward a similar preconceived end (life as tragedy, for instance). The only problem, in both cases, is that in this process the material itself — lived life — is not just transmuted but destroyed. This, of course, is the real danger of the magician's art — that he will destroy more than he creates — and it is the danger of the Ortega fellow as well: how to make up his life, not according to the restrictive and life-denying forms of the past, but *as he goes along*, discovering his own form.

This Cosnahan finally does, not as an act of will or through rational decision, but simply by letting go and steering by dead reckoning. Frustrated and disappointed by his failure to find his Italian publishers (and hence to "find himself translated") he wanders into the Borghese Gardens and there accidentally discovers the zoo — the very zoo in which his old friend and character Rosemary resides. Rosemary had been part of a cargo of animals that Cosnahan had responsibility for when he worked on a steamer once in his youth. In the course of the journey he had become quite fond of her and had made her the central character, so to speak, in his comic novel, *Ark from Singapore*. His meeting with Rosemary now, several years later, is a significant one, not because of what happens (in fact, nothing actually *happens*) but simply because of the way it comes about. Earlier in the story, Cosnahan had marvelled at the number of tourists who seemed to be meeting people they knew from back home here in the faraway cit-

ies of Europe: "Yet it didn't seem that even that more romantic encounter with somebody already fallen in with in Europe was in store for him, nothing for example . . . like that felicitous meeting in Rome by the hero of a book he'd been reading with a girl named Rosemary. . . ." This comment, seen in retrospect, is of course ironic, for Cosnahan does have just such an encounter with a very different Rosemary. But he cannot have it, so it seems, until he has failed in his intended quest for his Italian publishers. If Cosnahan had been searching for Rosemary, chances are he wouldn't have found her, wouldn't have experienced the same recognition. It is the very accidental nature of the discovery "testifying to the existence of almighty God, and His wide wild humor," which releases Cosnahan from his frustration and stasis into a "passionate desire" to write and to proceed with life.

Before encountering Rosemary, Cosnahan tells us, he had congratulated himself on his "tragic sense," but now he realizes "that life, all life, must have a happy ending, that it was our tragic sense that was the more frivolous, having been given us for aesthetic reasons alone, that beyond tragedy, beyond the world, if not altogether beyond art — naturally one hoped not too soon — was reconciliation beyond our wildest dreams of optimism. . . ." Some readers have found this "happy ending" of Lowry's forced and almost cloying. Isn't Lowry's comic vision, it seems natural to ask, as "aesthetic" in its insistence on unity and preconceived form as the tragic? I think it is not. When Cosnahan discovers a unity greater than fictional unity, when he achieves a recognition more complete than any "preposterous recognition in literature," he is really seeing "beyond the world" into the realm of pure possibility. The comic vision he arrives at here is, like Dante's, not a human vision at all but the context for a human vision — a context that is religious in the broadest sense of the word. So when Lowry asserts that "all life must have a happy ending," he is asserting no more than what is *possible*. It is still up to Cosnahan, after all, to pick up his work and go on writing — something that Lowry, like his alter ego the Consul, ultimately failed to do.

NOTES

1 *Selected Letters of Malcolm Lowry*, ed. Harvey Breit and Margerie Bonner Lowry (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1965), p. 266.

2 Douglas Day, *Malcolm Lowry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 413.

3 Malcolm Lowry, "The Forest Path to the Spring," in *Hear Us O Lord From Heaven Thy Dwelling Place* (1961; rpt. New York: Capricorn, 1969), p. 268.

4 *Selected Letters*, pp. 209-11, 331.

5 William H. New, *Malcolm Lowry* (Toronto: New Canadian Library, 1971), p. 18.

6 Malcolm Lowry, "Elephant and Colosseum," in *Hear Us O Lord*, p. 136.

7 Malcolm Lowry, "Strange Comfort Afforded By the Profession," in *Hear Us O Lord*, p. 108.

8 Lowry, "Strange Comfort," p. 109.

ELIZABETH D. RANKIN

WORK POEMS

MARGARET ATWOOD'S recent *New Oxford Book of Canadian Verse*, like John Newlove's 1977 *Canadian Poetry: The Modern Era*, offers a picture of a national literature with an enormous hole in it. Anthologies like these present a literary portrait of a Canada in which nobody works. Yet contemporary Canadian poetry is rich in new writing which details from the inside how Canada is experienced by that overwhelming majority of us who are employed for a living.

Two recent first poetry collections are superb examples of the high quality of that Canadian writing which concerns itself with the daily life of most Canadians. Jim McLean's *The Secret Life of Railroaders* (Moose Jaw: Coteau Books, 1982) presents poems from the life of a railway carman. McLean apprenticed in this trade after high school, and still works in Moose Jaw for the CPR.

With faultless poetic skill, McLean uses his fine insider's eye for detail to offer a spectrum of responses to the railroading life: from anecdotes about fellow employees to appreciations of the events and visual aspects of his job to an account of the depths of esoteric knowledge everyone acquires at a skilled trade.

Among the more memorable of McLean's portraits of those who work beside him is "the apprentice from Winnipeg" who can't stand Klik, the luncheon meat his boarding house landlady packs for him each day. This apprentice is too shy to complain, except to those who work with him. And with the rough humour characteristic of many jobs, these men manage to hide in the apprentice's emptied lunch pail each afternoon a note home for the landlady:

more klik!
love that klik!

Also here is the man singing rock and roll to himself under the noise of a machine which cleans oil-soaked lubricating waste:

secure beside the hammering machine
he belts out entire scores
doing all the parts himself
instrumental sections too
uses whatever's handy
tongue teeth fingers
even eyelids
remembering a loose pulley belt
keeping perfect time
to *Peggy Sue*

The way a job completely dominates some people's off-work life is documented by McLean in his poem "summer vacation." He describes a railroader en route to Disneyland on holidays who passes some rail yards and

pointed out to his wife
freight cars
stencilled with the yellow dot
explained
they had been examined
for 70-ton Southern wheels
8.14 per
Rule 80
job code 4628

In "watching wheels," the "I" of the poem is at work on a rainy night while a crane is lifting derailed rolling stock back onto the tracks. His particular task is to stretch out

on the roadbed
watching for a crack of light
between the rail
and the crane's back wheel

not that it isn't important
if the crane tips over
we'll all be down the road
those of us who are still alive

Yet the poet is aware that such close observation, so necessary to an insider, appears rather bizarre to anyone passing by. And indeed, out of the darkness arrives the voice of the perennial bystander who shows up at every accident and disaster. The poem's protagonist comments:

Christ, it isn't bad enough
lying here on the ground
at two in the morning
soaking wet
I really need this inevitable asshole
rubbernecking in the rain
asking me what I'm doing

Watching wheels I say
not taking my eyes off the rail

And McLean's precise eye for the work he does is perhaps best illustrated in his poem "by moonlight" (reprinted here in its entirety) about clearing up a wrecked train in the dead of a winter night:

the tank cars lie in snow
a school of killer whales
beached on white sand

dressed like eskimos
we've come to land them
with a 200-ton test line

McLean throughout this volume is careful both to show the extent of knowledge his tough job demands, and also to explain that knowledge where a reader needs to understand it. This is the same problem B.C.'s logger poets have wrestled with. But McLean adds an extra dimension in solving the difficulty of reference to terms which are unfamiliar to the general reader, by making poetry out of lists of these terms. In "to run the trains," which McLean says should be "read in the style of a steam locomotive," as the poem gains speed it sounds like this:

car knocker
track walker
bad order load
dinger
first man
foreign road
master mechanic
rush waybill
Wabco brakes
& a fish-belly sill

For sheer delight, try it aloud! And as well, where needed in this book, McLean introduces a poem with a prose commentary which helpfully explains esoteric terms or which explicates a situation. Hence we learn in the introduction to "I don't write poems for railroaders" that the italicized verses McLean works into the poem are ones he has "seen . . . over and over again, scrawled on the sides of box cars":

up hill slow
down hill fast
tonnage first
safety last

they have learned
about the unions
the lies of government
and how the company
will spend five hundred dollars
to avoid paying
a dollar-forty meal ticket . . .

broken strikes
and broken tools
dirt and death
and books of rules

Following in the tradition of these anonymous poets, Jim McLean's *The Secret Life of Railroaders* reveals for the first time something of the life of the contemporary rail employees. And in so doing, McLean's powerful and concise poems make clearer to all of us what actually lies behind the corporate image and slick advertising which are the railroads' face to the outside world.

Howard White's long-awaited first book of poems, *The Men There Were Then* (Vancouver, B.C.: Arsenal Pulp, 1982), also brilliantly and entertainingly illuminates lives and attitudes of that majority of Canadians not previously very visible in our literature. In his introduction to the volume, White makes clear his viewpoint with regard to the anecdotal form that comprises the bulk of the writing by him, McLean, and most of the new industrial authors:

> The makers of the great primitive legends, the authors of the great epics, the troubadors, the Elizabethan playwrights, didn't consider it beneath them to tell a story, but modern poetry does and this has made it the preserve of an incidental minority while the mass of people are abandoned to Warner Bros.
>
> It doesn't have to be that way.

Before the appearance of *The Men There Were Then*, White was best known on the West Coast literary scene as the remarkable and innovative founder of Harbour Publishing, and editor of that press's most famous product, the regional history magazine *Raincoast Chronicles*. White's qualities as a poet were known only to friends who saw manuscript versions of his poems, or to a slightly wider audience who enjoyed his poems' infrequent appearances in magazines and anthologies. Around the poet's home town of Pender Harbour, B.C., White also is

known as a bulldozer driver for, and part owner of, a heavy construction company.

All these differing interests, abilities, and talents blend perfectly in *The Men There Were Then*. The first half of the collection, "Accidents," is concerned with the poet's fascination with the history of the working life in the West, here revealed through that common source of work yarns: stories about industrial accidents. As White explains in his introduction, he sees these tales

> as an authentic legendary tradition flourishing right in the midst of modern industry, a species of oral literature that rivals the written variety in its refinement of effect.

On-the-job accidents are one aspect of the working life well known to most participants. If we look to the U.S.A., where the prevailing conditions of the North American work force are writ large, we have the U.S. government estimating that in an average year 14,000 people are killed at work, while another 100,000 (or twice the *entire* U.S. losses in Vietnam) die from occupational diseases. Five *million* job injuries and illnesses occur annually, leaving 200,000 employees permanently disabled. These are staggering numbers, ones that White's poems try to translate into human terms.

Many of the speakers in White's "Accidents" series talk simply and starkly of the horrors they have witnessed or experienced: a man who falls into a vat of molten caustic soda at the Crofton pulp mill on Vancouver Island and dissolves ("The Tooth"), or a "kid" who unscrews a grease nipple on a Cat ("Cat Tracks") and

> nipple let fly like a shotgun slug
> straight for the eye
> he was watching with
> grease poked out like an iron rod
> followed the nipple
> a quart of grease is
> just what the skull would hold
> when we found him
> looked perfectly alright
> except for the one eye gone
> and his mouth kinda propped open

Here also is a faller who catches fire from gasoline leaking out of his chainsaw, who becomes "just black goo from is ribs to is knees" in the language of the persona relating this tale. The speaker is in awe because all that the faller

> seemed to be worried about was
> he had to take a pee, passin out
> and comin to all the way down
> lemmee down keeps sayin
>
> don't wanna piss on this new stretcher
> sez to me I got a kid like you
> do me a favour kid
> stick my pecker over the side
>
> thing was it was his works that was
> burnt worst of all —
> his knob was just a
> black twist of ash . . .
>
> what could you say
> I was still trying to think
> when I realized
> he was dead

The second half of *The Men There Were Then*, "Bulldozer Joke," deals mainly with a range of other events and people encountered by the poet during his varied employment experiences, including driving truck, catskinning, distributing cigarettes to vending machines, and even serving as a literary editor. As in the "Accidents" section, these poems display White's consummate skill in capturing perfectly the many nuances of contemporary speech: diction, imagery and (by means of careful use of line breaks), rhythms.

"First Job" is one of those poems which describe an initiation into the work world. Here a "smart college boy" driving Euclid trucks for the summer imagines that when his truck slips part way off the grade, blocking the road, the situation is extremely serious.

> as the other trucks roar up one by one
> stop in a line drivers gather
> get out their thermos jugs ask nothing
> mentally calculates lost earnings in the

thousands someone mutters looks up
foreman charging toward them
grimace under an orange hardhat
guts swimming around thinking
what a relief it would be to only be fired.

But as the young man learns, what has happened is standard practice. That which occurs the following day is what marks him as a novice:

next day shovel cable breaks
trucks line up again coffee comes out
any excuse to take one away from the boss
the kid gets out his greasegun and rag
"Hey you, it's coffee time!"
"Aw, my truck needs greasing . . ."
keeps working
and that mistake
he must live much longer
to live down

The speaker in "Truckdriver" allows White to meditate on the changes in the work force during the last 50 years. The logging truck driver of the title dramatically underlines the differences between the equipment available and the knowledge necessary for the job in the 1930's, and "these big new Pacific and Kenworths we have now." The speaker describes a time when any driver had to completely understand his vehicle:

You'd had the goddamn thing apart
so many times you were aware
of every goddamn bearing and how it was turning.

Such awareness had to extend to the truck's operation, too.

Even a little thing like a mud puddle. You'll see the one guy
go half off the road to miss a
little puddle the size of a dinner plate
then your cowboy comes ploughing straight through it,
the cold splash breaks the red-hot drums, the truck runs away
and they tell his widow, 'oh, the brakes failed.'

More recently, such knowledge isn't needed.

Today of course, with the miracle alloys they have, you never
have to think about anything like that.
These young fellows
wouldn't live to see lunchtime on one of our old jobs,
but try to tell them.
It's not that they're made out of such inferior stuff it's just
that in today's world the worker is given so much less to do. . . .
It was possible to achieve a sort of greatness in that work.
Now the genius has all been put into the machines
and all that's required of the worker is a kind of dumb obedience.

In "The Fisherman and the Logger," White, with an insider's understanding of both occupations, compares and contrasts these two major B.C. resource industry jobs.

The logger's work is fast and
dangerous;
he must keep his eyes wide open.

The fisherman works blind, feeling
his familiar but never-known world
with the sightless, superstitious part of the mind.

The logger is strong, like the land
but the fisherman is stronger

like the sea.

And in a change of milieu, in "Poetry Editor" the speaker in the poem is trying frantically to read through a manuscript before the arrival of its author, who is coming to learn what the speaker has to say about it. But with the confidence born of experience, the "I" of the poem isn't worried. Even if he doesn't finish reading the manuscript, he knows the manuscript's author will be content with even a small amount of praise:

one connection
and they will be
satisfied, two
and they will die for you.

In relating such truths — however brutally or humorously presented — about the jobs most Canadians spend their lives at, poets such as White and McLean not

only blaze a fresh trail in our literature but simultaneously are producing what to me are the best and most original of the new writing Canada has to show. To paraphrase White: the poetry we have had up to now is strong, like a book. But the new poetry of writers like McLean and White is stronger, like human beings.

TOM WAYMAN

CALLAGHAN'S "THAT SUMMER IN PARIS": A PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST AS A YOUNG MAN

MORLEY CALLAGHAN'S *That Summer in Paris*, recalling his acquaintance with Hemingway, Fitzgerald, and Joyce, among others, in the summer of 1929, may be enjoyed and profitably approached as *Bildungsroman*, spiritual odyssey, memoir, or even as an anecdotal history of the rise and fall of the American expatriate movement in the twenties.[1] Regardless of one's approach to the work, its initial attraction comes from the narrator's exciting struggle to become a critically esteemed, successful author. Part way through *That Summer*, however, our attention is artistically shifted from this struggle to a more compelling one: the conflict in Callaghan's mind between Hemingway's high priestly conception of art as religion and the younger man's emerging view of art as ancillary or contributory to other human values, such as friendship, compassion, social justice, and love.

As Callaghan indicates, Hemingway paved the road to his artistic success with broken friendships, e.g., with Sherwood Anderson, Gertrude Stein, his first publisher Bob McAlmon, and, "that summer" in 1929, Scott Fitzgerald. In Fitzgerald, whom Callaghan regarded as a much truer friend to Hemingway than Hemingway was to Fitzgerald, Callaghan foresaw his own eventual rejection by Hemingway. Hemingway was clever at blaming the "other party" for the collapse of one literary friendship after another. Indeed, Callaghan discovered that his falling idol was incapable of admitting a sustained literary debt to anyone. Having learned what he could from a master or rival, Hemingway found cause to "destroy" that person with his invective, thereby creating the illusion of the autochthonous artist and preserving his own image as "champ." His ultimate defence of this shoddy behaviour, Callaghan implies, was his high priestly view of art;[2] people, even close friends, were appropriate sacrifices to the god of artistic achievement, or, less reverently, to the artist's overweening ambition. Callaghan could not easily tolerate such exploitation of human beings.

By the end of the work, Callaghan's artistic conflict is resolved. Partly instrumental in resolving it was his adoption of James Joyce, whom he had long admired, as a literary model more acceptable than Hemingway because Joyce was more concerned with other people and more generous in spirit.[3] Unlike Joyce, however, Callaghan elected to return home "to forge [his] own vision in secret spiritual isolation in [his] native city" (Toronto), as Joyce had done by *leaving* his native Dublin. In Callaghan's words, "Joyce in exile had gone deeply, too deeply into himself. But what if he had stayed in Dublin?"[4] For Callaghan, evidently, Joyce was not primarily a figure of exile but of heroic, visionary isolation, whether at home or abroad. Along with his youthful dreams of Hemingway as his true friend, Callaghan had to abandon the notion of Paris as a geographical entity

uniquely suited to artistic achievement. "And those dreams I had of Paris — as a place — the lighted place — I had learned it had to be always in my own head, wherever I was."[5] Thus the narration that seemed to begin with the voyage of Telemachus, like Joyce's *Portrait*, ended with the homecoming of Odysseus, like Joyce's *Ulysses*. Callaghan paid his literary debts to Joyce in a variety of ways, not least of which was the eclectic form of *That Summer*, combining elements of autobiography, biography, and history, at the same time focusing insistently on initiation and odyssey.

In attempting to follow the development and resolution of the conflict in *That Summer* between the art of the twenties and the thirties, between an esthetic and a socially oriented approach to art, between Hemingway and Joyce viewed as models of the artist, and between Paris as a place on the map and Paris as a state of mind, one can isolate the following significant events:

1. In 1923 Hemingway, associated in Callaghan's mind with Paris the geographical entity as well as a magical new mode of writing, invades the Toronto *Star*, where Callaghan is employed while still in college. The older man charms and inspires the impressionable youth, who mistakenly believes he has found a life-long friend. Hemingway hates Canada, "that dreadful country." And Harry Hindmarsh's editorial office in the *Star*, with its hierarchy and strict observance of journalistic conventions, comes to represent to the immature Callaghan as well as to Hemingway the antithesis of freedom and poetic inspiration. But the *Star* office is not deficient in journalistic camaraderie, and perhaps not even in friendship. Moreover, Callaghan himself has good friends in Toronto, as illustrated by the young newspaperman Art Kent, with whom he had opened a lending library.[6] Callaghan's family is also shown as warm and loving; the same is true of Loretto, his wife to be.

2. In Paris, six years later, Callaghan discovers that Hemingway is less than a true friend to several literary people who befriended him before he became a celebrity, and who helped him along in his literary career. Moreover, the younger man comes to suspect that Hemingway values him chiefly as a punching bag in their weekly boxing matches.

3. Callaghan meets Joyce, an exhilarating experience. Though the evening is marred by McAlmon's maunderings, Callaghan is immensely impressed by Joyce the tender, loving husband and quiet humorist. But he sees little of the flashing wit or profundity he had expected. His meeting with Joyce is an important turning point in the story, all the same.

4. Callaghan, on the occasion of Fitzgerald's serving as time-keper for the now famous Callaghan-Hemingway boxing match, discovers the depths of Hemingway's long-disguised animosity for Fitzgerald. He feels that Fitzgerald's friendship for Hemingway never recovered from the blow it received this day.

5. Callaghan decides to return to Canada. Certain well-known historical and economic factors, especially those bearing on the end of the *après-guerre* era, may be cited to explain this decision. More importantly, however, his return home signifies his rejection of the ideal of the detached artist in exile, whether represented by Hemingway or Joyce, in favour of the ideal of the artist as involved in and engaged with the problems of society.

Samuel Putnam and Malcolm Cowley have documented the historical and economic factors in the expatriate movement of the 1920's, and in its inevitable collapse by the end of that flamboyant decade. Among the factors leading to this mass movement were a "rebellion against

a smug Americanism which saw America as the best of all conceivable lands," a postwar, devalued franc worth only two to four cents, and an unparalleled boom in the American stock market. By 1925 the "exiles" were coming over in boatloads propelled by one-way excursion fares, and Montparnasse was becoming "gloatingly commercial."[7] Whereas Putnam saw the expatriates as belonging to a single group that came over in ever-increasing numbers, Cowley differentiated between the "true exiles" in the first years of the decade, who were searching for something missing from American life, and the droves of "refugees" who came over after the mid-twenties merely seeking an escape.[8] Both commentators agreed, however, that the collapse of the stock market on October 23, 1929, and the December 10 suicide that year of wealthy expatriate publisher Harry Crosby signalled the end of the last, crazy, self-destructive phase of the movement. It was natural that Callaghan, like Sinclair Lewis, James T. Farrell earlier, and like Scott Fitzgerald in the following quotation, would feel the winds of change and respond to them with varying degrees of disapproval, disillusionment, or disgust: "By 1928 Paris had grown suffocating. With each new shipment of Americans spewed up by the boom the quality fell off, until towards the end there was something sinister about the boatloads."[9]

Callaghan's decision to return home, as well as showing his awareness of the end of an era, signified his rejection of the rootlessness, emptiness, and cynicism that Hemingway had so brilliantly portrayed in *The Sun Also Rises*, and the lack of social conscience that Hemingway himself came in Callaghan's mind to exemplify:

> But all that month I didn't hear any arguments about economics or politics. No one stood up and shouted about the necessity of a social conscience. I remember that Hemingway had talked about Mussolini, and the Social Democrats in Germany, but he would talk as a shrewd observer; a man who had the political facts right out of the horse's mouth; he would be letting you in on what was going on.... At the cafes the writers and hangers-on — my God, now they seem to have been nearly all hangers-on — were more interested in the revolution of the word than the world.[10]

Callaghan initially admired Hemingway, as he came to admire Joyce, for his dedication to the values of the artist. Yet in Callaghan's view, Hemingway pursued the "romantic enlargement of himself"[11] to the point of becoming rootless and homeless, to the point of destroying his friendships and eventually the integrity of his art. Callaghan's response was to reject the older man as artistic mentor, and finally as friend. Joyce, though an exile like Hemingway and perhaps deficient in social conscience, could nevertheless serve as a partial model for the younger man by virtue of his broader and deeper humanity and his more encompassing vision of the artist and the world.

In recalling, as a mature writer, his early recognition of the need for a shift of some portion of the early twentieth-century artist's attention from the individual to the concerns of society, Callaghan accomplishes two things: he insists on his long, honourable alignment with such social realists as Sherwood Anderson, Sinclair Lewis, James T. Farrell, Sinclair Ross, and Margaret Laurence, who have dominated twentieth-century North American fiction at least since the 1930's and who perhaps continue to do so; at the same time, he offers a skilful, persuasive *apologia* for the realistic, socially engaged fiction he has written since "that summer in Paris."

NOTES

[1] *That Summer in Paris* (Dallas, Pennsylvania: Penguin, 1979 [1963]).

[2] Illustrating this high priestly approach to

art is Callaghan's account of his early Toronto conversations with Hemingway: "My life was taking a new turn in those encounters, for at least I had found a dedicated artist to talk to. He would say such things as, 'A writer is like a priest. He has to have the same feeling about his work... Even if your father is dying and you are there at his side and heartbroken you have to be noting every little thing going on, no matter how much it hurts'" (p. 30). Six years later, in 1929, Callaghan was to see Hemingway's "dedication" in a much less favourable light.

[3] Though Hemingway had selfishly refused to introduce Callaghan to Joyce on the specious grounds that "he's so shy with strangers" (*That Summer*, p. 108), Callaghan obtained an introduction to Joyce from another friend, the publisher Robert McAlmon; dinner at a famous Paris restaurant and an evening at the Joyces' apartment followed, as described in one of the most delightful and memorable chapters of *That Summer* (Chapter XVII). The effect of this meeting, not surprisingly, was to heighten Callaghan's enthusiasm for and admiration of Joyce.

[4] *That Summer*, p. 230.

[5] *That Summer*, p. 254.

[6] *That Summer*, p. 56.

[7] Samuel Putnam, *Paris Was Our Mistress* (New York: Viking, 1947), pp. 34, 54, 67.

[8] Malcolm Cowley, *Exile's Return* (New York: Viking, 1951), p. 240.

[9] Quoted by Howard Greenfield, *They Came to Paris* (New York: Crown, 1975), p. 159.

[10] *That Summer*, p. 222.

[11] *That Summer*, pp. 225-26.

PAUL W. MILLER

*** GLYNN BARRATT, *Russian Shadows*. UBC Press, $26.00. Three years ago Glynn Barratt published a valuable pioneer study of the rise and fall of Russian naval activity in the North Pacific. Now he has looked at the situation not from the Russian point of view, but from that of British Columbia, a territory sandwiched between potentially hostile Russians and Americans and indifferently supported by the Dominion government far away in the Canadian hinterland. Indeed, the record of Dominion failure even to understand the justified fears of British Columbians is a remarkable instance of political blindness or perhaps of political paralysis, as Barratt suggests when he remarks that "nationalism came of age in the Dominion without militaristic fervour, thanks essentially to a Canadian awareness of U.S. military superiority so deep and lasting that it numbed the national will to render Canada secure even against the slighter threat that tsarist Russia represented. That consideration has strategic and political significance today." The reasons for western disaffection in Canada are manifold and not easily forgotten.

G.W.

**** CHARLES RITCHIE, *Storm Signals*. Macmillan, $17.95. Some countries deliberately employ writers as diplomats. The French have done it from Stendhal down to the present, and I encountered the great Mexican poet Octavio Paz when he was his country's ambassador in Delhi. Canada, I suspect, employs writer diplomats only by accident, and certainly it engaged a carefully concealed one in Charles Ritchie, whose wry yet elegant diaries have been coming out every three or four years for a decade. *Storm Signals* — covering the period from 1962 to 1971 — is the most recent, and like its predecessors it immediately captivates one with its slightly archaic charm. But will the captivation last? My experience with Ritchie's earlier volumes was that the impression they made was poignant but evanescent; one does not, a year after reading them, feel they are *necessary* books, books one positively has to keep for later reading. They do not impose the lasting impression that a book like John Glassco's *Memoirs of Montparnasse* or even Callaghan's *That Summer in Paris* leaves on the mind. And yet — what astonishingly good and sensitive writing to come from the hand of a Canadian public servant!

G.W.

** WILLIAM KURELEK & JOAN MURRAY, *Kurelek's Vision of Canada*. Hurtig, $19.95. Kurelek's Christian primitivism speaks, says the publisher, "to Canadians at a basic level." I'm not sure where that is, but he *was* popular, even though — as critic Joan Murray forthrightly proclaims — some of his work was mechanical, even trite. Nonetheless, she finds strengths, too, particularly in his handling of landscape. Among the forty-eight plates here, there is support for both assessments.

W.N.

ALDEN NOWLAN 1933-1983

> He has tried over the years to find the meaning of various incidents in his life and to give form to them.... But though the plot may be fixed the pattern is constantly changing.... Certain persons and places have grown in importance, while others have dissolved into insignificance and are almost forgotten. The protagonist changes too.... The matter is complicated further by the fact that none of these former selves will die until the final Kevin O'Brien is dead.

ON MARCH 26, 1983, just before his death, Alden Nowlan was reading in Vancouver. He came for dinner on a Saturday night and we stayed up late gossiping a little — about poetry, about growing up poor in the Maritimes, about Nowlan himself and his latest book, *I might not tell everybody this.* At some point in the evening, when the discussion had moved to Canadian poetry, we turned on the tape recorder. Whose poetry was significant and whose wasn't? Who had the best line breaks in the country? Alden liked both Atwood and Newlove but he thought that perhaps his own were better. I wonder if he wasn't right? There is something magical about the conversational ripple, the carry-over, of his best lines. His titles are good too. I told him how much I liked *various people named kevin o'brien.* No, he corrected me, the title was "various persons": much more appropriate, too. Persons was from the Latin. It implied "persona" or "mask."

In retrospect I see that there were various persons called Alden Nowlan. The poet, whom we know best, took his place with the newspaper reporter, the speechwriter, the playwright, and even the country music specialist. All were aspects of a highly complex personality, and each had a distinctive persona. The idea of the mask, the playing of a dramatic role, was important to Nowlan. He found most Canadian poets a great disappointment in this area. Only Irving Layton looked, sounded, and acted like a poet. "And he still does!" Nowlan ruminated. Only Layton gave you the sense that at any moment he would "fling back his cape and waft or rescue Elizabeth Barrett from her sick room."

Where did this preoccupation with the persona begin? With the boy of twelve perhaps, reading all of Dostoevsky and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* under the bed covers. This is the imaginative boy described in *various persons named kevin o'brien: a fictional memoir* (1973), the child day-dreaming life dramas in which he is the principal actor. Nowlan did not choose to become a poet, that simply happened, he says, in "Growing up in Katpesa Creek." "I couldn't help it." But he did choose to become a newspaper reporter. At grade five he quit school and worked at various jobs. Later, as a young man, he wrote to a newspaper editor in Hartland, New Brunswick, applying for a job and inventing another Alden Nowlan to get it. This Nowlan was a year older, had a high school certificate, and vast experience. Here began one of his major personas, the trenchant commentator whose shrewd analyses of contemporary events made him a popular columnist and newspaper editor; some of these articles like "Ladies and Gentleman, Stompin' Tom Connors!" "Drinking Gin with Bobaks," and "Needed: New Models for Atlantic Canada," are collected in *Double Exposure* (1978).

The small boy growing up in rural New Brunswick tried on for size the roles of soldier, prince, monster, and God. So did the poet, the fiction writer of *Miracle at Indian River* (1968), its sequel *various persons* and later the playwright and speechwriter. The persona of the poet changed radically through the years. Like the early Fred Cogswell, Nowlan was at

first content to speak through his characters in the manner of Edward Arlington Robinson. Parables of small town life and morality recur in poems like "Marian at the Pentecostal Meeting" in *The Rose and the Puritan* (1958) and *Wind in a Rocky Country* (1960). Nowlan was also absorbing Dylan Thomas, Theodore Roethke, and the three-beat line of William Carlos Williams. With *Under the Ice* (1961) he shows a new mastery of the craft in poems like "Warren Pryor" where the taut, spare lines of the poem effectively convey their subject — a young farm boy caged by his parents' mistaken concepts of gentility.

A new darker side of Nowlan is revealed in *The Things Which Are* (1962), in poems like "The Terror or Thinking Myself No Longer a Poet," "The Drunken Poet," and "The Mark." The mark, some mysterious stigmata, is recognized immediately by the winos at the Liquor Store who come up demanding a handout. "'You know what it's like,' they say."

> the stones softening, the flutes,
> the incorruptible body
> Marsyas challenging Apollo —
>
> Yes, brothers,
> I know what it's like.
> I know.

After 1967 and the book *Bread Wine and Salt*, in moving poems like "I, Icarus" and "A Mug's Game" he began, increasingly, to identify the principal persona of the poems with the poet himself. And he was not above poking fun at conventional views.

> At the party that followed the poetry reading,
> one girl kept telling me how thrilled she was to meet
> someone who hadn't gone to university, and another said
> I reminded her so much of whoever it was who played
> in *Bus Stop* she kept expecting Marilyn to walk in, and the hostess
> extending three bit-size salami sandwiches
> and a glass of warm whiskey and ginger ale
> smiled at me like Li'l Abner's Aunt Bessie
> welcoming her nephew to Toronto.

The purpose of such gatherings, a man from the CBC is made to say, "is to give writers / from unlikely places like Hartland, New Brunswick, / the chance to communicate / with others / of their own kind." One of the most powerful poems in *Playing the Jesus Game* (1970) is "The Execution." Through a terrifying Kafka-esque change of persona a newspaperman attending a hanging ("'Press,' I said") is perceived, and therefore metamorphosed, into padre, coroner, and victim:

> "Look!" I cried. "Look at my face!
> Doesn't anybody know me?"
>
> Then a hood covered my head.
> "Don't make it harder for us," the hangman whispered.

The poet persona of the last book of poetry, *I might not tell everybody this* (1982), is a much more relaxed Nowlan than we find in the earlier books, less angry and more comfortable with the world: perhaps because, as he tells us in "My beard, once Lionheart red," the old lion has mellowed, "Happier, I suppose because I expect less and less / of everybody; where once I wanted all of creation to love me." More and more frequently he refers to himself in the third person as "he." This seems to relate to a new psychological distancing, a distancing described in an early poem where he says he has learned to look upon himself with a degree of detachment. What emerges from this book is the warmth of sensibility; the unexpected and far from commonplace love aroused by the commonplace incident of his wife stepping from a taxi with an armload of packages; his sudden awareness when visiting a school for the retarded of the eternal need to be held. "Hold me," a woman-child whis-

pers and the poet, putting aside his embarrassment, does so. "A momentary glimpse," one of the best poems in the book, describes the poet persona sitting alone in a city in Cuba making friendly faces at a two-year-old boy. The mother, encouraging the child to take his thumb out of his mouth — "maybe the Gringo / will want a picture" — is promptly kicked in the ankle by the child. Her expression, as she dances on one foot, is not at all what one would have expected:

> Aie!
> isn't he the funny
> fellow, this
> little rooster
> of mine, of mine,
> look at how high
> he carries his wings.

With Walter Learning, Nowlan wrote a series of extraordinarily successful plays: *Frankenstein: The Man Who Became God, The Dollar Woman, The Incredible Murder of Cardinal Tosca,* and *A Gift to Last,* recently performed at the Vancouver Playhouse. Nowlan said that the plays should not have been published under two names but rather as plays written by a joint character, a third called Nowlan Learning. From this combination of two persons was created something new, a catalytic reaction which produced a third person who made discoveries, intellectually and stylistically, that neither would have made alone. Not surprisingly several of these plays are narratives of the artist and the process of creation. *Frankenstein* is centrally concerned with God's obligation to his creation; at one point the monster says to his creator, "I should have been thine Adam." When the plays were in production Nowlan made a habit of locking into one of the roles. During *Frankenstein* he liked to play that climactic scene where the creature, in revenge, kills Elizabeth on her wedding night, poignantly recognizing her beauty even as he places his arm around her neck, breaking it. Nowlan liked to come up behind his wife Claudine, one foot dragging behind the other, his arm shooting out: "It will be over very quickly. There will be almost no pain." Another of the Nowlan-Learning joint productions was *Svengali,* a significant variation on the cruel stereotypes of George du Maurier's novel *Trilby.* This Svengali is basically a good man with an overwhelmingly beautiful tune in his head which he is unable to play; Trilby, a beautiful young woman, is the instrument which makes this music manifest. Svengali is faced with a bitter choice, a kind of a parable of the artist which, perhaps, Nowlan had become. If the instrument continues to make music it can only destroy itself.

The poet that was Nowlan wrote in solitude and hoped that somewhere, someone else, also reading the poem in solitude, would like it and perhaps even say so. But there was no guarantee. The playwright, on the other hand, had the pleasure of writing in collaboration and performing with a group. Listening from the back of the hall, he could enjoy the applause at the moment of performance. The political speechwriter enjoyed a similar pleasure. He delighted in the fact that in July of 1976, when the Queen visited the Maritimes, Alden Nowlan took on the characters of the four principal actors. It seems that Premier Hatfield of New Brunswick had commissioned Nowlan to write his speech of welcome to the Queen. It was a good speech and Hatfield liked it so well that he read it aloud to the Premiers of Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island at a get-together in Charlottetown. The other premiers liked it too. They wondered if perhaps Nowlan would write their speeches? He would and he did. As protocol demands, the three addresses were sent to Buckingham Palace. The Queen's representatives were also appreciative. Would Mr. Nowlan care to write Her Majesty's reply to

each of the provincial premiers? It was one of the trickiest pieces of sustained writing that he had ever undertaken. Nowlan, split into four, welcomed Her Majesty to the Maritimes in appropriately varying regional accents and replied to each with appropriately regal ease.

Alden Nowlan died in Fredericton in the spring of 1983 from a failure of the respiratory system. He will be missed, not only in the Atlantic provinces but throughout Canada. A fiercely honest man, he was acutely conscious of the various roles and masks we adopt to meet changing situations — all aspects of the self. Exploring these other selves through his poems and dramas he was also exploring the variousness of man. And he did not shrink from giving us a sense of our darker, more irrational self. Ultimately, as Father Ong reminds us in *The Barbarian Within* (1962), it is the role-playing instinct which distinguishes self from others, making us uniquely human. "Actors are real persons, but they perform not as the persons they are, but as persons they are not. They have at times worn masks, to show that they are not themselves. . . . Thus acting a role, realizing in a special way one's identity (in a sense) the someone who (in another sense) one is not, remains one of the most human things a man can do. No brute animal can act a role. Unable to recognize himself, he finds it impossible to recognize what by contrast with self is other."

SANDRA DJWA

GABRIELLE ROY 1909-1983 SOME REMINISCENCES

MUCH HAS BEEN WRITTEN, and will continue to be written, about Gabrielle Roy's contribution to our literature. But as I was her friend for more than twenty years, as well as the translator of three of her books, this brief note will take a more personal approach. As a person she combined great warmth and charm with reticence (and a consequent dislike of publicity and large gatherings) and though there were often considerable gaps between our meetings — in her later years she seldom left Quebec City where she lived — her delightful, sensitive, often very funny letters kept our friendship alive and growing. As her translator I learned a great deal about her integrity as a writer, the uncompromising perfectionism she brought to her work.

Few writers, I imagine, involve themselves so deeply in the translation of their books. Few writers are able to do so; Gabrielle Roy's Manitoba background had made her so nearly bilingual that when she was young she briefly considered writing in English. (I said "nearly." Her mind was very French and it was this that made our work together so challenging and, for me, so stretching.) She'd been given only a few hours to check the manuscript of *The Tin Flute* and some gross errors had slipped through, most famously the New York translator's rendering of "poudrerie" by its primary sense of "powderworks" instead of by its Quebec secondary meaning of "snow flurry," with comical results. She was determined that this shouldn't happen again, and she and I used to spend two or three days going over my translations again and again, word by word, often (it seemed to me) syllable by syllable. One of the banes

of the translator of French into English is the tendency of French words to have what seem to us Anglos wide, rather loose meanings; Gabrielle Roy could hone in on the fraction of this meaning she'd had in mind. Also her ear for the rhythm and sound of language was very strict. It was, of course, a French ear. When the sound of an English phrase or word displeased this ear, it would have to be changed. Finding alternatives kept me nimble and when on occasion I felt obliged to defend my original phrase or word, I would have to go right down to their roots, thus learning things about the genius, the limitations, and the fullness of my own language I might not otherwise have learned. She was never unreasonable and if I sometimes felt that she was being rather hard on her translator, I knew that as writer she was even harder on herself.

As a friend she was gentle and considerate — and a joy to be with. Though never robust physically, she possessed great emotional and intellectual energy. She was a gifted story-teller and found stories everywhere she went. Her accounts of people she'd met or seen, which she presented vividly, often acting out the various parts, could be wildly comic but they were never bitter or malicious. She felt, as her writing shows, that human beings were essentially pathetic, their lives tragic; she could laugh at little foibles and inconsistencies but there was never malice in her laughter. Surprise often. The artist has been described as one who "never gets used to it." Gabrielle Roy was open always to life, her attitude and responses as fresh almost as those of a child; she couldn't be in a room, or listen to a single human being speak and remain untouched or neutral.

She loved this country and believed that her upbringing as a member of a minority in Manitoba and her maturity spent as one of the majority in Quebec gave her a particular insight into what being a Canadian is and ought to mean. She and I used to collect the sort of bilingual names that are found so frequently in Quebec — Malcolm Boisvert, Gonzague Blackburn, Clifford Dubois. Thanking me for one of my "trouvailles," she suggested that we would all be better Canadians if we adopted similarly bilingual names and that she and I might strike an immediate blow for Canadian unity by calling ourselves henceforth Eglantine Marshall and Shirley Roy.

Though I knew her health was poor — she'd already suffered one heart attack three or four years before her death last summer — still the news of her going from us was a shock. It came to me in a rather peculiar way and as it is her humour, her delight in small human absurdities that remain with me so strongly, I'll tell the story. I'd switched on the CBC news in time to hear part of the headlines. To my sleepy ears the announcer's first words came as ". . . one of Canada's most famous wrestlers has died." Even after the report had corrected my mishearing and I was trying to get used to the idea that all of us, friends and readers alike, would be henceforth without her, I kept imagining how much my mistake, and its utter incongruity, would have amused her. How she would have laughed! What a wonderful story she would have made of it.

JOYCE MARSHALL

BELOVED ENEMY

THE LEWIS CULT, which emerged almost immediately after Wyndham Lewis' death in 1957, has turned out to be much more than the passing fad it then seemed. Not only is Lewis now being considered seriously by the academic scholars he despised, but writers are gaining renewed sustenance from his work, so that it seems as though the fourth of the great modernist sages is at last moving into his proper place in literary history beside his fellows, Eliot, Pound, and Joyce.

One of the symptoms is the handsome new edition of his works now being issued by Black Sparrow Press of Santa Barbara and distributed in Canada by the Paget Press (P.O. Box 488, Sutton West, Ont., LOE 1RO). Two of the volumes are facsimile reprints of *Blast 1* and *Blast 2* ($22.50 each), the magazine that set out the doctrines of Vorticism and has long been regarded as one of the key documents of the modernist revolution.

Two of the other volumes so far at hand are edited by Canadian Lewisians — *Self Condemned* ($19.00; Lewis' astringent satire on World War II Canada) by Rowland Smith of Dalhousie, and *Journey into Barbary* ($19.50) by C. J. Fox, who has written in *Canadian Literature* on aspects of Lewis' work. These are much more than reprints. Both are illustrated with Lewis drawings, in the case of *Self Condemned* belonging to the period of the novel if not directly linked to it, and in the case of *Journey into Barbary* emanating from the same travels as the book. *Journey into Barbary* is actually a compilation of almost all of Lewis' *Filibusters in Barbary*, published in 1932, and of his unpublished second book on North Africa, *Kasbahs and Souks*, some of it in the form of articles which Lewis plucked out of the text for periodical publication and the rest taken from the original manuscript. In the case of *Self Condemned* the appendix includes a facsimile reproduction of Lewis' original notes for a Canadian novel, together with a discarded ending.

Of the remaining volumes, *The Apes of God* ($14.95), that monumental satire on the Bloomsbury Group, now edited by Paul Edwards, remains unchanged from the originally published text. But *The Complete Wild Body* ($18.50) is another valuable compilation, beginning with the full 1927 published version of *The Wild Body* itself, and continuing with "The Archaeology of the Wild Body," which the editor, Bernard Lafourcade, explains thus:

> Lewis rewrote his stories for the 1927 book (in many cases this was not the first rewriting they had undergone). We reprint here the first published version of each piece, with notes calling attention to significant variations in versions intermediate between this earliest text and the final 1927 publication. Included also are early texts of associated material that did not finally get included in the book, and also a story and diary which, though unpublished during the author's lifetime, are clearly connected with the Wild Body material. Further, all the 'Tyronic' writings have been included because of their close and revealing association with the second version of 'Bestre,' published in *The Tyro*. Last of all, two post-1927 extracts discussing the inception of the Wild Body conclude this archaeology.

The added material makes most of these books indispensable for Lewis *aficionados*. The introductions to all of them — except *Blast 2* which curiously goes unintroduced — are perceptive and informative, and the design of the books, giving room for so many of the author's drawings, gives proper acknowledgement to Lewis' double pre-eminence as writer and visual artist.

GEORGE WOODCOCK

ON THE VERGE

*** BILL MCKEE & GEORGEEN KLASSEN, *Trail of Iron: the CPR and the Birth of the West*. Douglas & McIntyre, $29.95. This is mainly a visual book, with a slender, though engagingly written text talking about the way the CPR came into being and about the practical problems encountered and solved. It is worth acquiring for anyone interested in the history of the Canadian West, for the excellent series of black-and-white photographs and of paintings (reproduced in colour) from the vast collection of the Glenbow-Alberta Institute, which richly chronicle the building of the railway and its effect on the West.

G.W.

*** GERALD FINLEY, *George Heriot: Postmaster-Painter of the Canadas*. Univ. of Toronto Press, $37.50. Among the trained topographical artists who came to Canada in the decade after the British conquest, George Heriot was perhaps the least interesting as an artist, lacking in James Cockborn's sense of a locality's true inscape, lacking the manifest originality of vision that makes the paintings of Thomas Davies still so freshly appealing. Heriot moved from accurate topographer's delineation to a formal lyricism that had considerable charm, but if it were not for his classic narrative, *Travels Through the Canadas* (published in 1807 and reprinted by Hurtig in 1970), it is doubtful if he would be so well remembered; certainly his role as postmaster for the Canadas was hardly interesting enough to justify more attention than a brief entry in the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*. Gerald Finley has done well by Heriot in a biography telling all — not very much — that is known about him; he provides a sensitive, sympathetic discussion of his paintings, many of which are reproduced (but, alas, only in black-and-white, which virtually defeats Finley's earnest efforts to convince us that Heriot was a sensitive colourist). If only the Oxford University Press, which charges a hefty $37.50 for the book, had spent a little extra, and given us an 8-page — even a 4-page — colour section, it might have gone a long way towards convincing us that Heriot was a painter worth a book. As it stands now, *George Heriot* presents a good argument largely wasted for lack of conclusive evidence.

G.W.

*** JOHN DE VISSER, *City Light: A Portrait of Toronto*. Oxford, $24.95. There are a half dozen conventional photos in this coffee-table book: conventional freeways and conventional byways, *nicely* framed and Casa Loma nearby. But de Visser is too good an observer to let these be characteristic. The strength of this book comes from its glimpses of Toronto as a city of real *people*: people playing with statuary, fashion, pigeons, and each other. The character of the book comes from yet another element, however — from the way de Visser's angle of sight blocks these people with steel and concrete. Repeatedly de Visser focuses down from above, and for all their playing, the people are made to seem bound by the city around them, contained.

W.N.

**** NICHOLAS MANSERGH, *The Commonwealth Experience*. Univ. of Toronto Press. Vols. 1 and 2, $50.00; pa. $25.00. In *The Commonwealth Experience*, which appeared in Britain in 1969, Nicholas Mansergh presented what has since been accepted as the classic account of the metamorphosis of the British Empire into the Commonwealth of Nations. Now the University of Toronto Press is publishing the book for the first time in North America, in a revised and undated edition. It retains, on re-reading, its impact as a major and memorable book, still the best account of the long gestation of the Commonwealth. Mansergh has a rather woodenly serviceable style, but it is brought alive from time to time by flashes of real wit, and by shrewd character sketches of the participants in the drama, who range in their individualities from the insufferable Australian, Alfred Deakin, through the austerely eccentric Balfour, to the secretive pragmatist Mackenzie King. Since Canada's role was crucial in so many stages of the development of the Commonwealth, from the Durham Report onwards, *The Commonwealth Experience* serves, among other things, as a valuable background book for students of Canada's part in Empire and Commonwealth, and of the evolution of a Canadian role in world affairs.

G.W.

* MARY JAVORSKI, *The Canadian West Discovered*. Glenbow Museum, $14.95. This collection of early maps was no doubt more effective as a museum catalogue than it is as a "book." Though the written material is detailed and instructive, and though occasional prints are in full colour, most are in a difficult-to-read sepia, as is the text itself. The print on the map, moreover, is throughout reproduced too small to read at all.

W.N.

*** LUCY BOOTH MARTYN, *The Face of Early Toronto*. Paget Press, $35.00. This book is a must for history buffs. It develops from a simple idea — to match old city maps with photo watercolours and pencil sketches of old city buildings. But the idea works; out of the connection comes a glimpse of a people's past, a glimpse of a people expanding to take on the space they occupy. Full descriptive notes complement the handsomely produced black-and-white pictures.

W.N.

**** J. MURRAY BECK, *Joseph Howe*, Vol. I: Conservative Reformer 1804-1848. McGill-Queen's, $35.00 A sound, unromantic, well-researched biography of Joseph Howe has long been needed, and it looks as though we have the first half of one here. Dr. J. Murray Beck has wisely set aside the myths that have clustered around Howe's career, and by stressing the essential conservatism of his earlier years, has effectively prepared the way for the reasonable discussion of those later vagaries of Howe's public life that seem so inconsistent if one accepts the legend of Howe as the rebel of seagreen incorruptibility. It may be from inclination, since he is a political scientist, that Dr. Beck has downplayed Howe's much vaunted role as a great Canadian writer, but whatever the reason, the result is salutary. We are reminded that Howe was at best a purveyor of fustian eloquence, that his poetry was not only derivative but also dull, and that all his significance in history lies in his powerful political instincts and the use he made of them. One looks forward to the next volume and what may well be the definitive assessment of this strange man who refused to become a Father of Confederation (and for very good reasons) and yet was more important in the development of the Canada we know than most of those who did.

G.W.

**** JEANNE MINHINNICK, *At Home in Upper Canada*. Clarke Irwin, $19.95. This book is a treasure-trove for historical buffs, antique collectors, and students of nineteenth-century literature. The author has ransacked the Ontario Archives for photographs and illustrations to compose a visual history of domesticity. There is everything here from a piggin to a pigeon roaster: chairs, feather pictures, posters, commodes, and wallpaper — all with a lucid, descriptive text. Best of all is the illustrated section on changes in domestic gardening during the century: we are allowed to watch as clearing gave rise to rose arbours and tea on the lawn.

W.N.

*** WILLIAM BENZIE, *Dr. F. J. Furnivall: Victorian Scholar Adventurer*. Pilgrim Books, n.p. Frederick James Furnivall was not only a richly entertaining English eccentric, he also exemplified two of the more striking features of the Victorian literary scene: the importance and the vitality of amateur scholarship and the equal importance of free associations for scholarly ventures. Without Arts Council or any other support, men like Furnivall (a lawyer who neglected his briefs), through groups such as the Early English Text Society, the Chaucer Society, and the Ballad Society, not only brought to light and published in scholarly editions the riches of pre-Elizabethan English literature but also gave a splendid exemplification of the voluntary co-operation that Furnivall's contemporary Peter Kropotkin was then advocating in *Mutual Aid*. Furnivall was not only the most flamboyant and the most industrious member of these societies; as a leading light in the Philological Society he was more responsible than anyone else for initiating the scheme for the *New English Dictionary* which eventually appeared, in the hands of James Murray, as the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Furnivall left no books that are memorable, and perhaps that is why William Benzie's thorough though rather plodding book is the first full study of him. But our debt to Furnivall — as men of the word, writers, or literary scholars — is immense.

G.W.

** SHIRLEY E. WOODS, *The Molson Saga, 1763-1983*. Doubleday, $24.95. As financiers, transport magnates, brewers, benefactors, political grey eminences, the Molson family has had a vast influence in Canada; in many ways its record is better than that of most capitalist dynasties. Shirley Woods claims to give the story, "warts and all," but the title is more significant than this avowed intent. For the kind of doggedness and enterprise the Molsons showed is hardly the mythic heroism that justifies talking of a *Saga*, and Woods plays a sly game of balancing inflation with candour so that in the end we have something as near a collective hagiography as makes no matter. The facts are interesting and often useful; the frank revelations are too good-natured to count; the prose is that of good corporation history.

G.W.

AMONG RECENT BOOKS are several with peripheral interest to Canadianists. Trevor Royle's *Companion to Scottish Literature* (Gale, $60.00) is a mini-encyclopedia which picks up occasional Scots-Canadians — Frederick Niven and John Galt, for example — but the entries are brief and rudimentary. The *Multilingual Lexicon for Universiade Sports* (Univ. of Alberta, $9.95) was produced for a particular competition, but is a handy specialist dictionary (a wealth of terms in basketball, cycling,

swimming, gymnastics, etc.) in English, French, German, Spanish, and Russian. *Acadiana 1980-1982*, by Claude Potvin (Editions CRP, $21.00) is a substantially annotated guide to Acadian books and periodicals. Reingard Nischik has edited an anthology of 22 *Short Short Stories* for German students (Schöningh, n.p.) which implicitly probes the lyric potential of brevity in prose; six examples (by Levine, Nowlan, Reaney, Bowering, and Fraser Sutherland) are from Canada, and others come from the U.S.A., England, and New Zealand. Ron Redfern's *The Making of a Continent* (Fitzhenry & Whiteside, $34.95) is a handsome, clear account (for the layman) of such forces as glaciation and continental drift, which have shaped North America, and TV-watchers may recognize the series based upon it; Tuzo Wilson aside, most of the examples (and the continent in question, therefore) appear to the author to be U.S.-American. *Arts of the Indian Americas* (Harper & Row, $40.50), by Jamake Highwater, also gives occasional reference to Inuit and Indian culture of Canada; a survey of history, aesthetics, myth, art, dance, ritual, and more besides, it reaches for large truths and grasps generalizations. Patricia Demers' *A Garland from the Golden Age* (Oxford, $13.50) collects samples of Victorian children's literature; examples from Seton, Saunders, Roberts, N. Duncan, and De Mille thus find their way back into the context of sentimental and cautionary tale, penny dreadful and evangelical adventure.

New reference books include the revised *Gage Canadian Dictionary* ($29.95), which I still don't like ("correction line" is missing, for one instance of a limitation of vocabulary). Prentice-Hall's *Universal Atlas* ($36.00) is splendidly clear in what it does, which isn't enough: "universal" in this case means "Eurocentric." There's a good map of Switzerland, and another of England's counties, but not one of Ontario's, and places like Grenada remain pinpoints beyond illumination by the cartographer's scale. Other reference books include *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, vol. 25 (Gale, $78.00), with entries on Atwood, Davies, Lane, Mitchell, and Rooke; and *Contemporary Authors*, n.rev.s. 10 (Gale, $76.00), with a two-page biocritical entry on Josef Skvorecky. *Who's Who in Canadian Literature 1983-1984* (Reference Press, $32.00), comp. Gord Ripley and Anne Mercer, provides brief facts on the life and publications of several hundred living writers.

Recent special issues include *The Literary Half-Yearly*'s Canadian number (24, no. 2, July 1983), with excerpts from contemporary writers and excellent commentary on Munro and Dewdney.

Recent reprints include Marjorie Wilkins Campbell's *The North West Company* (Douglas & McIntyre, n.p.), with an enthusiastic foreword by Hugh MacLennan; W. P. Kinsella's *The Moccasin Telegraph* (Penguin, $5.95), a selection of Ermineskin stories; Dennis Lee's romping poems for children, *Alligator Pie* (Macmillan, $9.95); Virgil Burnett's *Towers at the Edge of a World* (Porcupine's Quill, $9.95); and in Macmillan's Laurentian Library ($6.95 each), two works by both Morley Callaghan (*A Fine and Private Place* and *The Loved and the Lost*) and Mavis Gallant (*Green Water, Green Sky* and *A Fairly Good Time*). Donna Bennett & Russell Brown's *An Anthology of Canadian Literature in English*, vol. II (Oxford, $14.95), brings up to the present their introductory survey text.

The handsomest of reprints have come from Paget Press, dually located in Sutton West, Ontario, and California's Santa Barbara. *Comfort of the Fields* ($9.50), for example, is Raymond Souster's 1979 choice of "the best-known poems" of Archibald Lampman, lovingly arranged and introduced by Souster's open declaration of indebtedness to Canada's Victorian craftsman. And *Vapour and Blue* ($15.00) is a parallel 1978 volume in which Souster, with less apparent enthusiasm, selects lyric works by W. W. Campbell. Perhaps surprisingly, Campbell bears rereading; despite his awkwardness, he chooses to remind us of a golden age he seems to believe in, a world of melody and beauty "when the heart of the world was young." But among other Paget Press books are a series of new works — Peter Taylor's *Trainer* (n.p.), an evocative sequence of prose and poetry that recounts the experience of a young World War II flier — and three books by Al Purdy. Taylor's book comes with an introductory (and elegiac) poetic tribute from Raymond Souster to Taylor's father, a fellow-airman; Taylor's poems constitute another kind of tribute entirely ("What kept us apart? / Thirty years and the world's agony. / What's left? / Photographs, notes, hard needs & poems / made of flesh / and torn aluminum.") — a combination of fragments that moodily animates the grittiness, the fear, the boyish bravado and playfulness of another time, a time of war.

Purdy's three books are *Moths in the Iron Curtain* (1979, $8.95), photographs by Eurithe Purdy; *At Marsport Drugstore* (1977, $8.95), with drawings by Hugh Leroy and a

(brief) appreciation by Charles Bukowski; and *Birdwatching at the Equator* (1982, $100.00), with illustrations by Eurithe Purdy. Despite the extraordinary number of misprints that disrupt one's reading, Purdy steps out of all three of these books as an engagingly gruff romantic, somewhat disingenuously hiding affection and uncertainty behind strong words and bluff camaraderie. *Drugstore* takes him into a set of love poems, a set that declares in a parodic earthiness a quest for connection and endurance; *Moths* recounts a literary trip (with Ralph Gustafson) to Moscow and Samarcand, in search of kinship and a romantic history; *Equator* takes him to the Galapogos Islands on another search, this time for a place in time itself. Repeatedly he locates himself in time. But Russia dispels more dreams than it confirms for him; instead of the trade routes, he finds the GUM department store and an intolerance of infidel tourists, and instead of Tolstoyan imagination ("we parked only long / enough to buy a rainbow") he finds military guards, regulations, and a Cyrillic wall. If *Drugstore* finds him comparing human relationships with geologic time ("Five years — and the age of the great dinosaurs / lasted a full hundred million / ... / Five years / an unlived fraction"), *Equator* takes him among the iguanas, pelicans, seals, and tortoises that transform place into time, into a record of endurance as a species, in a world that might seem hostile but to which life clings.

Purdy himself draws contemporary political resonance out of his experience. The seven poems themselves "are both slightly funny and serious," as Purdy claims, and as open about feelings (and therefore vulnerable to personal attack) as any he has written. "What can I be but humble," he asks honestly, after hiding in irony; then, more direct still: "the impulse to touch God / is as close as I'll ever come." In Darwinian mode, the irony returning as he meets a tortoise: "It is chastening / it is downright chastening / to have your forefather / barely acknowledge you / when you scratch his neck / ... / his pleasantly ugly / face a road map / to your own past" — but then there follows one of those tonal shifts that keeps the poet ahead of the whalers: "Therefore go back there / following your footprints / a lost time-traveller." And again: "I know I Know / my speech is grunts / squeaks clicks stammers / let go let go / follow the sunken ships / and deep sea creatures / follow the *protozoa* / into that far darkness / another kind of light / leave off this flesh / this voice these bones / sink down." The irony does not deceive: the romantic continues his quest, for the naturalness of love. All else is shell, by which we live.

W.N.

*** JOHN MCDOUGALL, *In the Days of the Red River Rebellion.* Univ. of Alberta Press, $9.95. This handsomely produced little paperback is the second in the University of Alberta Press's new Western Canada Reprint Series. It is the fourth and perhaps the most vivid volume of the memoirs of the western missionary John McDougall, and offers a striking if braggardly picture of life on the prairies in those last epic years before the decline of the buffalo assumed drastic proportions. The prairie tribes were still at the height of their pride and the great hunts of Indians and Métis were still dramatic examples of how free men can co-operate efficiently without regulation. The point is perhaps no longer germane; we live in another world. But McDougall, in the very naiveté of his boastfulness, brings us a clear, fresh glimpse of that more pristine time. It is all good fodder for nostalgia.

G.W.

*** THEODORE J. KARAMANSKI, *Fur Trade and Exploration: Opening the Far Northwest 1821-1852.* Univ. of British Columbia Press, $27.95. The great journeys of fur traders like Alexander Mackenzie, Simon Fraser, and David Thompson are well known, and their accounts are among the travel classics of North America. But little has been written about the exploration of the extremely difficult terrain which Theodore Karamanski called "the far Northwest," meaning essentially northern British Columbia and the southern parts of the Yukon territory. Now, drawing on the journals of men like Samuel Black, Robert Campbell, John Bell, and John McLeod, all Hudson's Bay Company's officers, Karamanski has put together a fascinating narrative of little-known and very arduous journeys of discovery. He has the kind of clear, fluent narrative manner that is excellent for such an account, and general readers will find his book as readable as students of western Canadian history will find it useful.

G.W.

**** CLARISSA M. LORENZ, *Lorelei Two: My Life with Conrad Aiken.* Univ. of Georgia Press, $15.95. Clarissa Lorenz, second of Aiken's three wives, draws on diaries and memory

to portray the activities and pressures of life with a difficult artist. The tone is equable (fondness laced with irritation), the method conversational and anecdotal. Famous people roam in and out of these pages, with T. S. Eliot, Aiken's friend, and Malcolm Lowry, his protégé, everywhere. Lowry's "presence complicated life at a time when I had to simplify it somehow," Lorenz understates. Malcolm was a gourmand, Conrad a gourmet, and Clarissa cast in the role of cook. She grappled with destiny, and rebelled. "I associated Malcolm with catastrophe"; "he looked like a rumpled popover"; he "outstayed his welcome for reasons all too apparent." We hear of quarreling and drunkenness, of laborious writing and ecstatic adulation, of travel and books, of liveliness, blue funks, and attempted suicide. The struggle to be ordinary in the midst of such commotion took its toll. The stories that emerge here, however, bring to life those late years of the 1920's and the subsequent decade, full as they were of a rather wistful fear and a feverish desperation.

W.N.

CORRECTION: In *Canadian Literature* no. 99 (Winter 1983), there was a misprint in the second stanza of Eva Tihanyi's poem, "Blind Man," for which we apologize to the contributor. The stanza should read:

Light,
both particle and wave
falling and flowing
is for him a sound,
a white melody
scored on the dark sheets
of his eyelids

LAST PAGE

From Fact to Legend (Univ. of Western Australia, n.p.) is a talk by Leonie Kramer that raises two interesting issues: the relation between fact and fiction in literature and the historical force of literature presented as television documentary. "Its central theme," Kramer writes about her own work, "is a kind of paradox; namely that much Australian prose writing is characterized by a desire to record the facts of experience, present and past; and at the same time by an effort to escape the evident randomness of those facts by finding forms to accommodate them, an effort which itself transforms the facts into fiction and sometimes into legend." The same might be said for literature in other nations as well, Canada included. But the connections have ramifications beyond the modes of discourse themselves, for the forms in use lead readers to make logical assumptions about the nature of reality which are not necessarily sustained by "fact" at all.

But that may just create a new set of "facts": assumptions and beliefs and the distortions induced by propaganda affect people's perceptions of their lives and the institutional structures in their lives perhaps even more than "truths" do, with palpable effects within a society. And the "fact" is that a lot of people now learn their history from film, from television documentary drama, and from picture book rather than from the printed word: which may simply say that we rely curiously unquestioningly on our capacity for visual understanding. "Seeing is believing," we say, and for some reason believe it.

Several recent books bear upon such connections in various ways. Elsa V. Goveia, for example, in her able *A Study on the Historiography of the British West Indies* (Howard Univ. Press, $8.95), charts the changing notion of what constituted the "facts" about the Caribbean *in the minds of the generalizing beholders*. The changes in historical interpretation, she notes, "occurred in time, and therefore can be defined in terms of chronological periods," but "were not chronological, but social changes. For in history, time supplies the continuum but not the principle of change." But isolating principles requires skills at analysis, a willingness to challenge assumptions and doctrinaire interpretations, not just to record sequences passively. G. A. Wilkes' *The Stockyard and the Croquet Lawn* (Edward Arnold, £9.95), takes up precisely this challenge, successfully analyzing literary texts in Australia for the social attitudes they demonstrate. What he shows is the persistence of mythologies in his society — "fables of identity," he familiarly calls them — which persistently enclose its character; but he gives the last word to the poet David Malouf: "I am wary of attempts to define too clearly what our tradition is and proclaim too loudly what is essential to it. Australia is still revealing itself to us. We oughtn't to close off possibiilties by declaring too early what we have already become."

That phrase "revealing itself" implies sev-

eral processes: through time, by word, in image. Jocelyn Murray's handsome *Cultural Atlas of Africa* (Facts on File Publications, $35.00) uses all three techniques; the result is a resource atlas of African nations, a mini-history of cultural trends, and an encyclopedic guidebook, illustrated with art objects and splendid photographs of scenes and people. Among them, there is a heat-drenched overhead photograph of a desert oasis — animals and people mere pinpoints on the landscape, but the shadows stretching in the shape of camels across the sand, in a horizontal caravan. All of which goes to say that it is a stimulus to understanding — but not the understanding itself, which awaits the reader's judgments, the observer's analysis. As a stimulus, it is clear, instructive, and splendidly evocative: which takes it far beyond the scope of the travel film and the coffee table volume. And it is a welcome innovation in atlas preparation, giving culture to space and visual dimension to culture.

One of the distinctions I am trying to draw is represented by that between the man Gandhi and the film *Gandhi*. The one is a chequered reality, the other a visually magnificent evocation of a political attitude and a reverential frame of mind. Something of the difference is apparent if one reads among the various biographies of the man; but even then, the book makes one aware of the presence of the biographer. The recent reissue of Ved Mehta's *Mahatma Gandhi and His Apostles* (Penguin, $4.95), one of the most readable of such books, in fact clearly draws attention as much to its own process of enquiry as to its putative subject. Certainly Gandhi is present in the book, present in anecdote and in excerpt from journal — but it is the process of retrieving him from myth and history that Mehta is centrally interested in. The book is foremost a personal discovery — an attempt to search for a Gandhi who might reasonably relate to the author's own life, own India. And as Mehta is an elegant, engaging stylist, the quest is one in which readers willingly participate. This sense of the personal recovery/discovery is central to Mehta's own work, however, as is evident in his most recent work, an autobiographical account of his boyhood years in a school for the blind, *Vedi* (Oxford, $23.95). All the stylistic graces one associates with Mehta are present in the new book: wit, pathos, the pleasures of anecdote, and quick, forceful sketch of character and scene. But again the centre lies in the process of enquiry, which reveals its reasons only as the book draws to a close. Blinded when a child, Mehta could have faced the standard lot of the blind in the India of his day: illiteracy, beggary, poverty — but his father's determination to ensure that that didn't happen led the boy early away from his home and into an ill-equipped but patient school. What seems like a memoir of those years of training — years of stumbling and boyhood pleasure, the stuff of adult memoirs — slowly, however, turns into something else: an exposition of fear. Seeking in later life his acquaintances of his school years, he discovers them dead, gone away, or descended despite their school into the beggary he escaped. He flees that presence, still fleeing something in himself that his literary success will not deny. And thus the "truth" of his history lies as much in the suppressed memory of isolation that motivates him as it does in the facts he so consciously and so articulately assembles.

Three other personal accounts, all eloquent reminders of the drama of actual experience, follow similarly indirect courses. The South African writer Laurens van der Post's account of his long love affair with the sea, *Yet Being Someone Other* (Hogarth, £8.95) — the title drawn from T. S. Eliot, on the duality of identity and memory — is, for example, a testament to optimism ("good hope," as topographical symbol) in the face of history. The sea is both fact and more: "There seemed far more to it than physical sensation," he notes of his first encounter — it is a tangible expression of the possibility of making connections, by travel, by word, by sympathetic imagination. A long section describes his trip to Japan with fellow-writer William Plomer, and the efforts of his captain to teach him judo: "He was, he declared, first of all going to teach me how to fall. . . . as in life, one had first to learn how to fall . . . ; first master the how of losing properly before one could be worthy of winning. So I was to be engaged in a sporting contest that was also the acting-out of a Japanese parable. . . ." But in its way, so is the autobiography a parable. We misread it by accepting its factual basis as its reason for being: it is the *form* we need to read, the willingness to resist convention enough to seek the "other" we know (sometimes also) to be true.

Wole Soyinka's moving memoir *Aké* (Rex Collings, £7.50) is a recollection of childhood, but also a testament to the changes that have taken place in Nigeria during his own lifetime — changes represented by the shift in diet from *gari* and *guguru* to McDonald's and coca-cola; but again we mistake the book if we read it as a simple critique of the Americanization of Africa. It is, rather, a commentary on

the process of defamiliarization that is represented by his own generation's training in Christianity and a written language. In one particularly resonant scene, an old man tries to catch a tree snake for lunch, and the mission-educated child Wole protests fearfully: "Suppose it jumps down?" To which the man replies: "Speak English to it," and leaves him alone. Alone with language, however, Soyinka constructs his own world, animating his written book with an oral memory. As though in complementary fashion, the Australian poet Judith Wright has in *The Cry for the Dead* (Oxford, $45.50) also attempted to reconstruct the past. Again it is an oral past. As the title allusion suggests, the world of the aborigines has changed, and Wright seeks to reawaken a sense of the culture they held in the nineteenth century, and of the process of change that pastoral expansion caused in their lives. But for Wright, the process is not, as with Soyinka, one of tale-telling; it is one of history. It is history that wrought inroads among the aborigines; it is history Wright draws upon — the diaries of her forebears, and other documents — and history she recounts: history that is as personal as story-telling, as fraught with cultural implications, and invested with the drama of real life.

"The drama of real life": it is what proves so fascinating about Thomas Keneally's extraordinary book *Schindler's List* (Simon & Schuster, n.p.) as well. I say "book" rather than "novel" — though it has won a major fiction prize — because it is dramatic documentary as much as story. It tells of the man Oskar Schindler, a Catholic industrialist who ran a concentration camp during World War II, and who is now celebrated in Israel; these are facts and the book is in its way history: of a man with conscience in a time when a government was taking away people's civil rights, who used his wealth and his talent for barter to save the lives of Jews. In his camp, people did not die. His is the story of a man who used the system to allow a choice for good, at a time when the system itself had apparently silenced humanity and the force of loyal opposition. That Schindler died in obscurity is also history: he suffered the penalty after the war was over, of being a reminder of what was done and what could have been done, at a time when people chose to block history from their minds. Keneally brings the novelist's craft to history; on his pages Schindler lives again, as animate as character as he ever must have been as person, in a striking parable for our own day.

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W.N.

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