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WOMEN AND LITERATURE

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A QUARTERLY OF CRITICISM AND REVIEW

editorial

BEGINNING AGAIN

EIGHTEEN YEARS AGO, George Woodcock accepted the editorship of a new magazine to be called *Canadian Literature*. To many, a journal devoted solely to the study of Canadian writers and writing seemed an unlikely venture. But in the intervening years Canadian writing has flourished; the study of Canadian writing has grown from an almost secret pursuit into a public venture and a respectable academic enterprise; and George Woodcock has built *Canadian Literature* into the independent journal of opinion and analysis which in the first editorial he promised it would be. On July 1st of this year he retired from the editorship. Readers will be pleased to know that he will continue to write for the magazine, and so to share the insight and the fine literary judgment which characterize his work. But the daily organization of the magazine he leaves behind. He also leaves more than one editorial legacy. There are several issues' worth of excellent essays awaiting publication; there is his reputation, which, as the incoming editor, I find not just a little daunting; there is the journal's independence, which he established and which I reaffirm now as an editorial policy to be preserved and still further pursued.

At the same time as George Woodcock is retiring, there are other changes taking place in editorial guidance, for Donald Stephens and Ronald Sutherland are also leaving their posts. They have contributed greatly to the journal's development and in very particular ways to the shape it has taken from issue to issue. Their work has been much appreciated. Fortunately they, too, will continue to write for *Canadian Literature*, so readers will have the continuing benefits of their perspectives. As they leave, I welcome the assistance of a new Associate Editor, Herbert Rosengarten, who will already be familiar to readers, for his reviews and comments have been appearing regularly here for nine years.

The articles that have been published in *Canadian Literature* over the past years have varied greatly in approach and intent. Textual analyses have appeared alongside autobiographical and polemical commentaries; large thematic surveys have alternated with close examinations of symbol, structure, and metric form. Many of these articles were generated, moreover, by the particular needs of the time they were written. Eighteen years ago few Canadian works were in print (the New Canadian Library, for example, had only just started), booksellers were inclined to hide what Canadian books they stocked, and few readers could be relied upon to be familiar with titles, names or plots. Writers had to be identified, plots to be explained. Much of the critical process was devoted to gathering information and, under various guises, listing it. Now, though this process has by no means been completed, the work that has been done has made us aware of the complexities of the literature we are studying and suspicious of the generalizations that have often been accepted as axioms. On a personal level, neither Frederick Philip Grove nor Malcolm Lowry turned out to have lived quite the lives they publicly declared to have been theirs. At a more general level there is that perennial tension about identity. Generations worried themselves because they couldn't find it in Canada. The more we have come to know about intellectual history and cultural expression, however, the more we have realized that it was not a matter of a missing identity, but a matter of looking for it with eyes, ears, and minds attuned to societies other than our own.

We need further explorations now of the many connections between cultural and intellectual history: of the impact of ideas and social experience upon literature in Canada. We need sound studies of the interrelationships between literature, the other arts, and science. We need further illumination of writers and writings that are too little known; interviews, reminiscences, and biographical accounts; perspectives on the publishing industry and political involvement in literature. We need comparative studies which will not merely list parallels or differences but will use the process of comparison to elucidate their subject and to guard against easy assertions of distinctiveness. We need reflections on newspapers and other kinds of journal, on television, radio, and film, and on the literary connections or the literary potential each medium possesses. And we need sophisticated considerations of and by our major writers. There is much to do. This journal has never been bound by its academic connection. It seeks readers and writers both inside and outside university circles. Beginning again after eighteen years, it still takes as its subject, as its first editorial announced, "Canadian writers and their work and setting, without further limitations."

W. H. NEW

FINIS — AN ACROSTIC

George Woodcock

Going away is a kind of returning,
Entering again a mirror of oneself,
Or perhaps plunging into a sea cavern to
Recover what the years had hidden away.
Given that the task has been good, we all still
End in the longing for liberation.

Would I have started, I now ask, if
Others had not shown a mad confiding,
Or continued if my voice out of the unknown
Darkness had not roused others, an eventual
Chorus of critics? As Roethke would have it,
One learns by going where one has to go.
Criticism may be creation's left-handed
Kin, but is, too, offspring of the cruel muse.

Hell take such memories! Bell tolls, clock chatters,
And now's a time to march, like Flecker's pilgrims,
Never attaining the receding goal, perhaps, but
Daring what comes and yet not lacking
Sadness for all inevitably must end.

One says goodbye to what one has been making, not in
Valediction, for it is mind out of one's mind,
Ever to be there like the departed child, yet
Rendered free to receive a different

Turning, to accept a new guide and a new
Orchestration of themes, tunes and soundings.

Bill New in fact takes over; Woodcock goes.
If names have meaning, or if puns have point,
Let's have no doubt the future is renewal.
Let's also skip false modesty, self-deprecation.

No journal lives on hot air eighteen years.
Even so, urge declines as other urges rise, and
We (editorial form) depart, remain, and so we say,
(skipping beyond line, scansion, and acrostic
form): Le Rédacteur est parti: Vive le Rédacteur!

THE POETRY OF MARGARET ATWOOD

John Wilson Foster

MARGARET ATWOOD's current popularity stems in part from the fact that her poetry explores certain fashionable minority psychologies. With its cultivation of barely controlled hysteria, for instance, her verse is that of a psychic individual at sea in a materialist society. This hysteria, however, assumes specifically feminine forms and lends Atwood's work certain affinities (of which current popularity is the least important) with that of Virginia Woolf and Sylvia Plath. For like these two predecessors, Atwood confronts her own sexuality and the contemporary roles laid down by men for her to play. A minority psychology similar to that which informs her identity as a woman informs her national identity, for Atwood is a contemporary Canadian aware of belonging to a minority culture on the North American continent and in reaction recollecting and re-enacting her pioneer ancestors' encounter with the wilderness and with the native people. Appropriately, the Canadian ancestral experience — repository of the spiritual identity of a people — happens to be best commemorated in the journals and memoirs of some remarkable women, including Catharine Parr Traill, Susanna Moodie and Anna Jameson.

Charges of opportunism could easily be levelled against a poet so deeply involved with the minority psyche. But they are answerable by our exhibiting, as I hope to do here, the essential coherence of Atwood's poetic themes. Her poetry succeeds not by masterly technique or style but by a peculiar force of content, by exciting transformations of experience that appear only to the superficial reader as mere opportunities. Among the experiences of being an individual, a woman and a Canadian, Atwood intuits an underlying connection deeper than minority membership. These experiences flesh out in multiple guise the root formula of her poetry. Like a mathematical expression, that formula sustains a wealth of individual existences — of image, motif, subject and dramatic situation. Stated briefly, Atwood's poetry in the six volumes to date[1] concerns itself with the self's inhabitation of spaces and forms and the metamorphoses entailed therein. All that is thematically important derives from this: invasion, displacement, evolu-

tion and reversion, as well as those notions significant enough to warrant book titles — survival, ingestion (cf. *The Edible Woman*, a novel), and surfacing. The message of Atwood's poetry is that extinction and obsolescence are illusory, that life is a constant process of re-formation. The self is eternally divided in its attitude to the forms and spaces it inhabits, simultaneously needing, fearing, desiring and despising them.

Because the scenario of inhabitation takes place through space and time (spaces in time become forms and forms become spaces), we can see its pertinence to the contemporary Canadian's encounter not only with the landscape and its inhabitants but also with the past preserved in part by that landscape — that is, with his pioneer ancestors (whose journey itself enacted the scenario), with the native people and with his own primordiality. Also, since roles are spaces and forms, we can see its pertinence to the current re-definition of femininity. And behind the feminine and Canadian, the individual. If the self's identity as woman and as Canadian is threatened by the variety of the Canadian past and present, its identity as human being is threatened by the fact that self apparently cannot exist *outside* forms and spaces. At best, self is merely reflected off the surfaces of others' forms of self. This is the frightening phenomenology of Atwood's world superimposed, skin-like, upon the illusory solidity of its rocks, animals, artifacts and people.

ATWOOD'S SPACES are rooms, houses and even the human body, but in the beginning they are the spaces fashioned by her pioneer ancestors — the cabin and the clearing. How these spaces were created, inhabited, defended and sometimes abandoned is recorded in the journals and letters of the pioneers and early visitors themselves, which thus provide an illuminating background to the poetry. Always they concern a journey: the journal and guide are the archetypal Canadian literary forms which function in the Canadian literary imagination as does the novel in the English, something Atwood has recognized in subtitling her critical work *A Thematic* Guide *to Canadian Literature* and in "re-writing" the *journals* of Susanna Moodie. There was to begin with the ocean voyage and after, more important, the journey across the land. Ireland, Seamus Heaney has noted, has "no prairies/To slice a big sun at evening," and he adds:

> Our pioneers keep striking
> Inwards and downwards.

New world pioneers on the other hand encountered such prairies and much else that Ireland lacks: towering mountains and awesome gorges, deserts, icefields and inland seas. The long journey from landfall to backwoods is an overland move-

ment ("surfacing," one might call it) that even today the Canadian can re-enact, as Atwood does in "Migration: C.P.R." which chronicles a journey from "the misty east" through "the inner lakes," prairies, mountains and "faulted gorges" to the forest by the western ocean.

The pioneer's "long day's journey in the woods," as Mrs. Traill describes it in *The Backwoods of Canada* (1836), ended not with welcome but with the hostility of wilderness, wild animal and settler. In "Paths and Thingscape," Atwood's Mrs. Moodie complains:

> I am watched like an invader
> who knows hostility but
> not where

All are begrudging and "unforgivingly previous" to her. Rarely in *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* or in *Roughing It in the Bush* (1852), or in the journals of Mrs. Jameson and Mrs. Traill is the red man anything but benign towards the white man, but behind the annoyance of the Indian asked in "First Neighbours" about the toad-like object on the stick lies the real hostility between the races.[2] In fact, the white man desired the removal of the red man "back from the extending limits of civilisation," as Mrs. Jameson noted, "even like these forests, which fall before us, and vanish from the earth, leaving for a while some decaying stumps and roots over which the plough goes in time, and no vestige remains to say that here they *have been*."[3] It is upon the "malignant face" of the forest, that most formidable prior occupant of the clearing, that Atwood's Mrs. Moodie, like all pioneers, vents her greatest wrath. "A Canadian settler *hates* a tree," adds Mrs. Jameson, "regards it as his natural enemy, as something to be destroyed, eradicated, annihilated by all and any means" (I, p. 96). Settlement could not take place but by the penetration and destruction of the forest. The old was obliterated by the new.

But the new is at first mere negation. Disembarking at Quebec, Atwood's Mrs. Moodie is "a word/in a foreign language," but later in the bush her husband is not even that, but is merely "an X, a concept/defined against a blank" ("The Wereman"). The clearing represents the settler's negative and unintelligible signature upon the wilderness, the displacement of its prior occupants. But soon it signifies a new phase in the scenario of inhabitation: the *immigrant* upon landing who became a *pioneer* upon striking for the backwoods has upon clearing become a *settler*. The pioneer has become a new person as the clearing is a new feature of the landscape. A new flora appears which the settler begins to name as though it had just been created.[4] The landscape is culturally virgin with no associations.[5] It is also, and in this notably different from Mrs. Jameson's native Ireland, too new for ghosts.[6] For forest and pioneer, settlement is obliteration and a fresh beginning.

The cabin, erected immediately after the first minimally necessary felling, is a space within a space. Like the clearing it is at first blank, a mere negation of the bush. Soon both cabin and clearing are havens (concentric areas of withdrawal) against the forces of the old that return to deny the new. In "Dream 3: Night Bear Which Frightened Cattle," the "lighted cabin" is the last refuge from the bear which invades the clearing like "an echo" of the previous inhabitants. The settler's life is a nightly siege, terrified as he is of being ambushed outside by nightfall. Indeed, cabin and clearing create for the first time in the wilderness the vital dialectic of inside and outside.[7] "Survival" means the successful maintenance of the inside against the outside constituted by annoying settlers, "trespassing" Indians, wolves and bears, the oppressive summer and "relentless iron winter" (Jameson), the bush and the darkness. The clearing, inside relative to the bush, is outside relative to the cabin, a dialectic Atwood exploits in "Two Fires" when the clearing is mercifully inside the burning forest, but mercifully outside the burning Moodie cabin.

> (each refuge fails
> us; each danger
> becomes a haven)

Here, as in other poems, Atwood represents the enclosed spaces of her locales by parentheses.

Even when positive, the cabin and clearing remain precarious. Mrs. Jameson sees the clearing as a man-made island resisting "a boundless sea of forest." In *The Circle Game*, in such poems as "After the Flood, We," "Descent Through the Carpet" and "Winter Sleepers," Atwood also sees the landscape paradoxically as aquatic. The image of a re-forming sea conveys the idea that the forces displaced by the cabin and the clearing are not really obliterated after all but are, by an Archimedean principle, merely re-located. Nothing is destroyed in Atwood's universe: it simply assumes another space, another form. The forces of the wilderness, *outside* the clearing, shift, when the clearings link up to create villages, towns and finally the suburbs of "The City Planners," *downwards*. The suburban homes, Atwood prophesies,

> capsized, will slide
> obliquely into the clay seas, gradual as glaciers
> that right now nobody notices.

The clearing reverts; the wilderness resumes. Because in "Progressive Insanities of a Pioneer," from *The Animals in That Country*, she sees the wilderness, by being an "unstructured space," as "a deluge," Atwood likens the cabin to an ark, a motif recurring in her poetry and suggesting that the settler and his descendants at best merely float on top of the unseen forces of the wilderness.

"In exile," writes Atwood, "survival/is the first necessity." The physical toll in survival is obvious, but in *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* Atwood has, as it were, read between the lines of *Roughing It in the Bush* in order to re-create the assault upon the pioneer psyche. The scenarios of journey and settlement are scenarios of profound personality change. European civilized self-assurance quickly gives way, as it does in the first few poems in *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*, to feelings of worthlessness and self-negation when the settler is confronted by the unstructured space of the bush. In consequence, the clearing is as much psychic as physical, head-space for the embattled personality. But it is also by virtue of precisely that a prison which excludes the distant civilized world as well as giving the illusion of preserving it.[8] When Atwood's pioneer stands, the centre of a space unenclosed by any walls or buildings, paradoxically he cries "Let me out!" ("Progressive Insanities of a Pioneer"). Comparably, one old woman in *Roughing It in the Bush* speaks of the settler as "a bird in a cage," a view Susanna Moodie came to share when she described the purpose of her book as "revealing the secrets of the prison-house." Climate did not help: Anna Jameson writes of being "imprisoned by this relentless climate" and of being "completely blockaded by ice and mud."

The feeling of imprisonment frequently led to lethargy and to "inaction, apathy, and, at last, despondency. . . ."[9] That it is a short step from this to the feelings of persecution suffered by Atwood's Mrs. Moodie is evidenced by Mrs. Jameson's fearful resolve to "try all mechanical means to maintain the balance of my mind, and the unimpaired use of my faculties, for they will be needed" (I, p. 172). Though Atwood's Mrs. Moodie imagines persecution, her fears are grounded in the reality of frequent deaths at the hands of fire, fever, drowning and wild animals. But paranoid delusions are the outgrowth of a schizophrenia rooted in exile itself. In "Thoughts from Underground," Mrs. Moodie posthumously recalls the agonizing dilemma of wanting to love Canada and actually hating it:

> I said I loved it
> and my mind saw double.

At first it is a case of the settler physically inhabiting Canada and psychically inhabiting the homeland (a body-mind dislocation common in Atwood's poetry), but later it is a case of the self torn between occupying the present inside the clearing and the displaced past outside the clearing. The latter wins. *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*, like Atwood's other volumes, records how the settlers who dared invade the primal and aboriginal wilderness are in turn invaded and repossessed. John Howison wrote of how the settlers' "habits of thought at length become assimilated to those of the Indians, and they conceive that they have

wandered out of their sphere, whenever they mentally or sensibly lose sight of the wilderness" (p. 165). Atwood's Susanna Moodie reverts not only to Indian but also to animal form, reflecting the role animals played in the physical and psychical world of the Canadian settlers. In "The Wereman," Mrs. Moodie is a fox, an owl and a spider, for it is as if there is one continuous spirit of the wilderness that assimilates the settler's European self and that merely incarnates itself in various forms. His wife is not even sure she herself has not been transformed:

> I can't think
> what he will see
> when he opens the door

This wilderness spirit is indestructible, which is why Atwood's Mrs. Moodie can speak posthumously and why Atwood, as a poet and as the writer of *The Journals,* is Mrs. Moodie "re-incarnated."

Mrs. Moodie is not merely native and animal, but in the end she is the landscape itself. Ironically, she who inhabited the clearing, displacing prior occupants, is in psychic reality inhabited like the land by the animals. Only when she rounds the first hill when leaving ("Departure from the Bush") is she "unlived in." This total loss of the old self is indistinguishable from acute schizophrenia (it is as though the posthumous poems are not just Atwood's fancy but also the living Mrs. Moodie's fantasies) when at the end of the volume she becomes one with the landscape:

> at the last
> judgement we will all be trees[10]

She lies beneath Toronto, herself one of the displaced wilderness forces driven beneath the settlers' brittle surface arrogance.

THE PIONEER'S physical journey was also a psychic journey during which the haughty Old World assumption that the self — humane, civilized, superior to the rest of Creation — existed splendidly independent of its chosen habitats was gradually broken down. For Atwood, the pioneer journey is in addition an extended metaphor for her own journey through the emotional landscape of everyday life. Indeed, the journey can no longer be literal because although Canadians still traverse a vast terrain, they cannot recapture the settlers' imperious feeling that they had discovered the land. That Indians had pre-empted the settlers did not diminish that feeling (the Indians were not really people and when deceased could not qualify even as ghosts), whereas in "Migration: C.P.R." Atwood's characters feel themselves everywhere pre-empted, if not by pioneer ancestors, then by the natives; prairie objects, for example, are

(like an inscribed shard, broken bowl
dug at a desert level
where they thought
no man had been,
or a burned bone)

The pioneer journey in the metaphoric sense is most graphically presented in "Journey to the Interior" from *The Circle Game*. The similarities Atwood notices at the opening of the poem are not between coastal and interior topography but between the real Canadian landscape and that psychic landscape Atwood inhabits. The coast and interior are in fact radically different (a luxury of Canada's vast landmass) and offer a variation on the distinction between outside and inside we have already noted. But there is an inversion. The wilderness outside the clearing represented danger and unfamiliarity and the clearing safety, whereas the coast in "Journey to the Interior" represents the security of everyday life and the interior the unknown where there is a "lack of reliable charts." The interior is the metaphoric wilderness, that Atwoodesque landscape of lines broken by a curious metrical whim, familiar objects ("lucent/white mushrooms and a paring knife/on the kitchen table") suddenly highlighted and menacing, odd repetitions that are evidence not so much of a poet's laziness as of a journey become a circling in an undecipherable forest.

Atwood's poetry is a journey into this interior landscape between insight and hysteria. Her poetic voice, slightly paranoid — it is difficult to know whether the "we" of so many of her poems actually signifies another person, or whether the poet is using a schizophrenic version of the royal "we" — suits her theme of the metamorphosing and divided self. Like the historical Susanna Moodie, she is a civilized city dweller confronted by what is primitive and irrational in the land around her. And like her, too, she is conscious of being inadequately equipped for the journey. "Provisions" is the contemporary and psychic equivalent of "Looking in a Mirror" from *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* in which Mrs. Moodie's china plate and shawl from India become casualties of the forest. "Provisions" has us confronting the wilderness

in thin
raincoats and rubber boots
on the disastrous ice, the wind rising,

with the environmental and intellectual paraphernalia of the irrelevant city, and is placed appropriately at the beginning of *The Animals in That Country* as though to warn us of the dangers ahead. But the journey is completed, for many of Atwood's poems concern the psychic hazards of "settlement"; that is, of making sense of our lives and the world around us, and of creating fulfilling relationships.

In "The Planters," Mrs. Moodie's husband is seen moving "between the jagged edge/of the forest and the jagged river." Edges — transitional slivers of doubt between hazard and security, the known and the unknown — were naturally important to settlers. Atwood is preoccupied by edges ("There is no center," she proclaims in "A Place: Fragments"), and in "Evening Trainstation Before Departure" asserts:

> I live
> on all the edges there are.

And there are many: mountain road-sides (in "Highest Altitude"), ends of forests, deserts and glaciers ("Habitation"), beaches ("Notes from Various Pasts"), a roof's edge and the edge of a mirror (both "Head Against White"). Even Atwood's poetic lines, broken off at conjunctions, prepositions and other weak joints, have jagged edges. All of these are metaphors for mind and emotion pressing against the outer limits of those forms they are forced to inhabit, and simultaneously hugging those boundaries in exquisite fear of the chaos beyond them. The choice is between safe imprisonment and dreadful freedom.

Images and situations of entrapment abound. The city is a prison in "The End of the World: Weekend, Near Toronto" from which the drivers are "intent on getting out." Rooms are recurring and menacing enclosures in Atwood's poetry: in "Frame," she occupies a room whose window she fashioned herself (and showing everyday but typically distorted Atwood images) and from which "I dream/always of getting outside." These spaces become forms containing the self which in turn expands to fill and threaten them. In corollary, the body is a space to be worn, explored or even abandoned. In "Fortification" it is "a metal spacesuit"; in "First Prayer," the speaker thinks of her body as a chrysalis-cast or a flayed skin. This notion is taken even farther in "Astral Traveller" when the speaker leaves her body but finds it difficult, no doubt because of her ambivalence, to return.

It is skin, that membraneous edge between inside and outside, by which Atwood is especially fascinated, though it sometimes takes the forms of outlines, margins or surfaces. The fighting bull in "Bull Song" thinks it a mistake "to have shut myself/in this cask skin," and in "Corpse Song" the decomposed body, addressing the living, exclaims: "I resent your skin, I resent/your lungs, your glib assumptions." There is a sexual aspect of Atwood's dermophobia (or is it dermophilia?); it is as though a diffuse, vaginal sexual urge resents the forms nature has decreed for sexual expression and gratification. In "More and More" the speaker wishes to assimilate the world and, apparently, sexually absorb her partner, "if possible through the skin," but unfortunately instead of leaves she has "eyes/and teeth and other non-green/things which rule out osmosis."

In the light of this, it is small wonder that Atwood is drawn to all the orifices

leading from the inside to the outside — highways, doorways, eye-sockets, gills and mouths. Of these, the mouth is the most important. The pioneer's concern with provisioning is transformed by Atwood into a sexual preoccupation. Her belief is that eating is a brute fact opposed to love which, the speaker in "Is/Not" reminds her lover, is not a case of merely filling cavities. It is difficult not to see Atwood's ambivalence towards mouths and eating as a metaphor for her ambivalence towards the phagic receptivity of the female form, with its vaginal mouth, and the male's active delivery of the seminal "food." Not surprisingly, the killers of the hen in "Song of the Hen's Head" who desire its edible treasures are "scavengers/intent on rape."

Like Susanna Moodie, then, Atwood both desires and fears escape from the imprisonment of form. Tantalizing images of unstructured space attend her poetry. In "Migration: C.P.R." the travellers after jettisoning on their way west their "eastern suitcases" emerge with faces scraped blank; however, the rider is attached:

> (but needing new
> houses, new
> dishes, new
> husks)

The pioneers were compelled to provide themselves with these new husks, but the husks these contemporary travellers assume are new only in the sense of being novel; actually they are secondhand: primordial, aboriginal, ancestral. Yet if on this level we can no longer find unstructured space, we can still dream of doing so, still entertain the Canadian fantasy of trail-blazing, as Atwood does when she resurrects Captain Cook and has him ill at ease in a fully-mapped world and at length re-entering "a new land cleaned of geographies" ("The Reincarnation of Captain Cook").

On other levels, the uncharted is a genuine threat and seduction. In commending the unstructured space of the wilderness to her lover in "Attitudes Towards the Mainland," the speaker tries to convince him of its solidity. But he will not believe in its solidity; for him it is a place in which one can drown. Both are right, but the solidity of the speaker's wilderness is not the solidity of depth but the solidity of brittle surface off which the self is merely reflected. Atwood's poetry is filled with reflective surfaces — mirrors, eyes, glass, photographs. They suggest how we merely "surface" — float, skate or cast reflections — through life, rarely penetrating behind or below. In "Tricks with Mirrors," for example, the loved one is forever trapped behind the narcissistic reflection of the lover. Fancifully, the subjects in "This Is a Photograph of Me" and "Girl and Horse, 1928" are similarly trapped behind the photograph which is in each case a mere surface

representation of an instant. They are part of a solid world only in the sense of being dead and no longer selves. The solidity of unstructured space, which is fatally incompatible with self, is usually represented in Atwood's poetry, befitting the Canadian landscape, as green. Susanna Moodie is "crept in/upon by green" in "Departure from the Bush"; water is a "green violence" in "River"; a "green vision" invades the progressively insane pioneer; (the Boston strangler is the subject of "The Green Man"); and those charting the land in "The Surveyors" find themselves "changed/by the gradual pressures of endless/green on the eyes." We cannot inhabit this green unstructured space even if we discover it; the most we can do, and the most Atwood and other pioneers do, is to wrest a living-space *from* the wilderness. Otherwise we become an indistinguishable part of the landscape, retreat to the animal and primitive recesses of our being. What this means emotionally and sexually is that we cannot gratify our desires fully, truly inhabit the other person, this side of *becoming* that person. Atwood in "A Pursuit" follows the other

> Through the wilderness of the flesh
> across the mind's ice,

wanting the other to be a place she can inhabit. Success would be a kind of death. Self and the spaces and forms it occupies are synonymous.

IN THE MATTER of confronting his primordial and aboriginal past, the contemporary Canadian can be more truly a pioneer than the early settlers. The latter, pre-Darwinian, would not have acknowledged their own animal origins, neither did they acknowledge that the native people were their ancestors in Canada. Atwood on the other hand realizes that mutual inhabitation of the land binds native and settler as surely as racial genetics. These acknowledgements entail their own kind of journey. Archetypally, it is a Heaneyesque journey "inwards and downwards" rather than outwards and across as was the pioneer journey, a journey "underland," as Atwood describes it in "Procedures for Underground," rather than overland. For evidence of the predecessors lies beneath us and, in one more sense of the word, the poet "surfaces" with this evidence after her subterranean exploration. It is also a journey *back* instead of forward ("We must move back," writes Atwood in "A Place: Fragments," "there are too many foregrounds"), in recognition of the fact that metamorphosis is not just spatial — that inhabitation of successive forms and spaces we have already noted — but temporal, that is to say, evolutionary. But because these metamorphoses can be replayed — by vestigiality, by re-enactment, by dream,

by the racial memory that is imagination — we can be one with the past. The traumatic feeling of being cut off from the past is assuaged by this but above all by the life-forms and culture-forms that have been long since vacated by their temporal substance but can be inhabited once more by a protean poetic imagination.

Because the Canadian landscape is so various and primitive, and not cultivated to a European degree, it facilitates man's awareness of the primordial. Vast and depthless lakes seem to commemorate the aquatic origin of life. Atwood exposes the nerve of our fascination with and fear of making the descent. For it is a kind of drowning, daydreams and nightmares of which haunt her poetry. "Descent through the Carpet" begins with a real sea outside a window, but it is a mere surface that reflects the mountains and sailboats. Paradoxically it is inside, through a carpet depicting plants, that the poet begins her descent, drifting down to a darkness populated by "the voracious eater" and "the voracious eaten." When her daydream is shattered, she ascends, breaking the skin of the water; her own skin "holds/remnants of ancestors/fossil bones and fangs." Here and elsewhere, "surfacing," in yet another sense of the word, refers to this decisive evolutionary breakthrough: the appearance of the terrestrial air-breathers.

Human embryonic gills testify to our aquatic origins. In "For Archeologists," Atwood asserts that our terrestrial progenitors too — in this case early cave-painters — "survive" in us not as vestige but as an imprinted and as yet undecoded part of our structure. Less dubitably, the blue jay's reptilian ancestor survives in the bird's "lizard eye." The entire panorama of our evolution is attempted in "A Night in the Royal Ontario Museum" in which the museum becomes a labyrinth down which the poet is forced to view the increasingly ancient relics and remnants of our ancestors. Past Greek and Roman marble, past Chinese bronze and Amerindian wood, the poet reaches — as though at the labyrinth's centre — mastodons, fossil shells and finally "thundering/tusks dwindling to pin-/points in the stellar/fluorescent-lighted/wastes of geology."

If fossils are casts, hollow forms which life has vacated, so too are the skins of animals preserved in museums. In "Elegy for the Giant Tortoises," Atwood imagines the huge reptiles, outdated in their ill-fitting and useless armour, ascending the steps of a museum towards "the square glass altars"

> where the brittle gods are kept,
> the relics of what we have destroyed,
> our holy and obsolete symbols.

Gods in animal forms are represented by the Indian masks Atwood sees in the Royal Ontario Museum. These too are casts, of a cultural rather than animal kind. Even when no longer worn they remain for the poet potent and menacing, as do totem-poles no longer in use.

> Why then is my mind
> crowded with hollow totems?
> Why do I see in darkness
> the cast skins, poised
> faces without motion?

she asks in "The Totems." The totem-animals once inhabited her but one night crept out through her eyes, leaving their totems behind. This explanation identifies the poet with Susanna Moodie (cf. "Departure from the Bush") but also with the native people whose totems are the preserved records of the people's having been inhabited by the animal spirits. But in fact the animal gods "with metal feathers and hooked/oracular beaks and human bodies" still exist but merely, in the titular line of another poem, "avoid revealing themselves." There are still ways of reaching them. In "Fishing for Eel Totems," Atwood turns her preoccupation with eating to magical effect, catching a tongue-shaped eel, eating it, thereby ingesting knowledge of the earlier language: "After that I could see/ for a time in the green country." The oral origins of myth are suggested too in "A Messenger."

It is clear that Atwood has been profoundly influenced by Indian mythology, especially from British Columbia where she lived for a time. Many of the poems in *You Are Happy,* and certain poems elsewhere (for example, "The Totems"), resemble Indian tales of origination. Moreover, Atwood's animal imagery is not naturalistic but heraldic and emblematic, and this heraldic stylism she shares with totem-carvers. Consider, for instance, the animals in "Buffalo in Compound: Alberta" which walk in profile "one by one, their/firelit outlines fixed as carvings" and enter "the shade of the gold-edged trees." Even more telling are the metamorphoses which operate within Atwood's sexual and pioneer contexts but which are also the transformations that inspire totemism and involve, as they do in Atwood, men, animals and the landscape. "A carver," wrote Viola E. Garfield, "may include a figure representing the dwelling place of a story character, a camp site or place of refuge, or any phenomenon he desires. He always depicts it as animate. Features of the landscape are usually illustrated as land animals, while those of the sea are given the anatomical characteristics of ocean dwelling creatures. Sometimes they are carved with human, rather than animal, attributes."[11] The relationship between man and animal is paramount. "In the beginning people and animals were not distinct and separate, but animals were people, and many retain the ability to think and act as people in the present world . . . Down through the generations men have been known who assumed animal form. . . ."[12] Anthropomorphism and zoomorphism animate *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* and indeed much of Atwood's poetry, and are aspects of the primordial unity to which her characters and personae revert. The section of poems in *You Are Happy* entitled "Songs of the Transformed" seems especially

indebted to Indian cosmology, concerning as they do human spirits in animal shapes. It is no coincidence that "Owl Song," in which the owl is the heart of a murdered woman, bears a resemblance to the Tlingit and Haida tale of the unkind woman turned to an owl and depicted on totem poles (Garfield, pp. 26-27). We could even argue that the stylistic metamorphoses with which we are familiar in poetry — metaphor, simile and personification — are in Atwood's poetry derived as much from a totemic awareness as from poetic convention.

As MUCH AS the journey overland, the journey underland is a journey inwards, an exploration of the self and its relationships. Atwood has discovered on this journey that one price of evolution has been our loss of an ancient language of signal and skin. The words we use are really vestiges of more potent words that now, as the poet tells us in "Notes from Various Pasts,"

> lie washed ashore
> on the margins, mangled
> by the journey upwards to the bluegrey
> surface, the transition

The act of love is one way back to that submarine reality. In "Pre-Amphibian" the lovers are released from the lucid solidity of day into an aquatic primordial night where their ancestors, in a suggestively sexual image, are "warm fish moving." When the act is completed, the lovers are "stranded, astounded/in a drying world" with the air "ungainly" in their new lungs. In such a poem as this, Atwood betrays a horror of fixed form, which is associated with daylight, solidity, dry land, coldness, mind and racial orphanhood. The lover in "Eventual Proteus" has, as the relationship developed, re-enacted the evolutionary scenario — he has been rock, fish, mammal and bird — but now that he has reached the condition of man (that is, the relationship has peaked) and evolutionary forms have given way to dull social spaces ("vacant spaces/of peeling rooms/and rented minutes"), love is no longer possible. The lover cannot resume the legends of his disguises: his emotional shape is brittle and final.

Yet the alternative to fixed forms and spaces is the emptiness they enclose, and of hollowness and vacuity Atwood has a morbid dread. Equally feared is the water from which ancestral forms must be dredged. Her pervasive fear of drowning seems to be a fear of the poetic imagination, and her relative indifference to poetic form I read as a studied and negative concern with it, a determination not to succumb to its hollow and dermal illusions of solidity. Fear of drowning and the recurring images of surfacing seem in addition to indicate a thinly-veiled queasiness about birth: the phylogenetic ocean might equally be the

amniotic fluid and her references to skin references to the amnion. But it is hard, too, not to read fear of drowning, after Virginia Woolf, as a disguised repudiation of a sexuality that leads to merely banal coupling. Better, it would seem, to return directly, at least in imagination, to the presexual unity of being to which coupling seems a clumsy attempt to revert. Either way, the price paid is the unique integrity of the self, and this Atwood is loath to surrender. Drowning images the loss of self; "going under," which is a necessary operation to recover the past, is also the process of succumbing to anonymizing forces hostile to the self; "surfacing" is to come through with both a knowledge of the past and an intact self.

Not that old forms are acceptable simply because they represent a kind of dry land. Feelings of being marooned, beached and stranded pervade Atwood's poetry; wreckage and relics of relationships are strewn on her shores. Often these feelings derive from Atwood's sense of being a woman in a man's world. It is as if women have suddenly surfaced, been cast precipitately among the air-breathers and are uncertain what roles to inhabit. The poems in *Power Politics* and the "Circe/Mud Poems" sequence in *You Are Happy* are re-examinations of women's inherited roles, the former psychological and the latter mythological.

The Circe episode in *The Odyssey* is, like other myths Atwood has borrowed (of Proteus, the phoenix, Frankenstein and Amerindian totemism), a myth of metamorphosis, pressed by Atwood into curious service of her two overriding themes. First of all, Circe is contemporary woman addressing contemporary man. When Circe disclaims all responsibility for her actions in *The Odyssey* (itself a male fantasy), she is contemporary woman renouncing the roles men have created for her. It was not she who turned the men into swine, she asserts, but their own masculine nature no longer at one with the female sea on whose rim they have been spilled. She did not desire Ulysses, either his presence ("One day you simply appeared in your stupid boat") or his putative charms. Indeed, she is tired of masculine mythic heroes, of male heraldry and hollow heroics:

> Men with the heads of eagles
> no longer interest me

She searches instead for those who have escaped mythologies (as she wants to escape *The Odyssey*) and if they desire a metamorphosis, "they would rather be trees."

This echo of Susanna Moodie ("at the last/judgement we will all be trees") connects these Circe poems with Atwood's pioneer theme. Homer's sea, in the two italicized poems framing the Circe sequence, is transformed into a forest: his epic has become a Canadian odyssey. Circe is the voice and spirit of the wilderness — now female — resenting the penetrations of the male pioneers. As though addressing a pioneer, Circe asks petulantly of Ulysses: "Don't you get tired of

saying Onward?" Yet Atwood is not being anti-pioneer. Circe at length comes to accept Ulysses, and is even apprehensive about his departure which is inevitable because "you leave in the story and the story is ruthless." Beginning in rebellion against her role in the epic, she at last defers to its narrative ineluctability. Likewise, the woman must accept the man, and the bush the pioneer.

Forms, spaces and roles are inescapable. Besides, "form," as Gaston Bachelard tells us, "is the habitat of life." And also, we might add, of identity. In reflecting this, Atwood's poetry is emphatically prepositional, even though the poet identifies prepositions, because they "pre-position" substance, with the enemy. The inescapable must constantly be resisted. In her first volume of poems, Atwood repudiates all prepositions except one: "with." The closing lines of "A Place: Fragments" express the enigma and dilemma of Margaret Atwood's highly personal relationship to the confusion that is womanhood and Canada:

> not above or behind
> or within it, but one
> with it: an
>
> identity:
> something too huge and simple
> for us to see.

NOTES

[1] *The Circle Game* (Toronto: Anansi, 1967; first published by Contact Press, 1966), *The Animals in That Country* (Toronto: Oxford, 1968), *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* (Toronto: Oxford, 1970), *Procedures for Underground* (Toronto: Oxford, 1970), *Power Politics* (Toronto: Anansi, 1972), and *You Are Happy* (Toronto: Oxford, 1974).

[2] "First Neighbours" is a good example of how Atwood adapts incidents from Mrs. Moodie's book: it was not Mrs. Moodie who asked the Indian about the deer liver, but a young friend, and the Indian laughed when replying. *Roughing It in the Bush* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1923), p. 483.

[3] *Winter Studies and Summer Rambles in Canada*, II (London: Saunders and Otley, 1838), pp. 249-50.

[4] "It is a remarkable fact . . . that when one growth of timber is cleared from the land, another of quite a different species springs up spontaneously in its place," observes Mrs. Jameson, I, p. 95; see also Mrs. Traill, *The Backwoods of Canada* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1966), p. 78. Of her habit of naming whichever plant was new to her, Mrs. Traill allowed: "I suppose our scientific botanists in Britain would consider me very impertinent in bestowing names on the flowers and plants I meet with in these wild woods," p. 61. We might call this an Adamic motif in pioneer literature. Compare Mrs. Moodie: "Every object was new to us. We felt as if we were the first discoverers of every beautiful flower and stately tree that attracted our attention, and we gave names to fantastic rocks and fairy isles, and raised imaginary houses and bridges on every picturesque spot which we floated past during our aquatic excursions," p. 263. If the pioneer's self-comparison with Adam was not conscious, comparison with Robinson Crusoe was: see Traill,

p. 53, Moodie, p. 342, and *Early Days in Upper Canada: The Letters of John Langton* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1926), p. 113.

[5] "In Canada the traveller can enjoy little of the interest derived from association, either historical or poetical," Jameson, II, p. 104.

[6] Mrs. Moodie records a conversation she had on this topic with a friend, and adds: "The unpeopled wastes of Canada must present the same aspect to the new settler that the world did to our first parents after their expulsion from the Garden of Eden; all the sin which could defile the spot, or haunt it with the association of departed evil, is concentrated in their own persons," Moodie, p. 251.

[7] This phrase I borrow from Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969).

[8] "The sympathies which once bound the settlers to the world, and made them feel a common interest with the rest of mankind, are in the course of time broken and annihilated, and they listen to details of recent battles, murders, earthquakes, and conflagrations, with as much *nonchalance* as if the events had happened in a planet that had long since ceased to exist." John Howison, *Sketches of Upper Canada* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1821), p. 164.

[9] Moodie, p. 448. Both Howison, p. 164, and Jameson, I, p. 171 speak of lethargy as a hazard of settler life.

[10] This notion of Mrs. Moodie's is not very different from the notions of the paranoid schizophrenic Septimus Smith in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*.

[11] *Meet the Totem* (Sitka: Sitka Printing Company, 1951), pp. 43-44. For a further account of Northwest totems, see Viola E. Garfield and Linn A. Forrest, *The Wolf and the Raven* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1948).

[12] Garfield, p. 7. The important role of animal and bird skins in Indian tales of transformation (see Garfield and Forrest) might illuminate Atwood's pre-occupation with skin.

from OUT THERE: EMILY CARR

Tom Marshall

silent fire green apocalypse
still and full fire gathering
around the fierce

old woman of the forest at
her easel her dis-ease her
ecstasy:

leaf and bough interlocked in
carved nebulae cloud-trees
leaf-

galaxies that surge out of
void space leaving off
on air

FLORENCE McNEIL AND PAT LOWTHER

Sean Ryan

A GREAT DEAL of what passes for literary criticism or assessment of who the important writers of any period are is simply accidental, the result of whim, conceit, puffery, self-aggrandizement, greed, private malice, in-group games, and sometimes simply stupidity.

Roy MacSkimming in a recent review in *Books in Canada* (November 1974) compared the rating game to championship boxing, said "sometimes in Canada it seems as if we *do* rank our poets with all those symbols of recognition in the form of junior and senior grants, writer-in-residence-ships and invitations to represent the country abroad — ."

Despite the playfulness of MacSkimming's metaphor, there is an element of truth in his observations. One reviewer recently referred to Susan Musgrave as "perhaps our next major poet." The situation of hankering for novelty, new faces, new voices is oddly reminiscent of the ballyhoos surrounding press agentry and rock stars or new models of automobiles.

The situation needs no further comment. Literary history of the past with all its mistakes, its constant revisionism, its incessant reassessing should give us hope. Always, beneath the ballyhoo there is a striving, a work going on, poets working to create the cultural nexus, the imaginative web which connects us to our country's invisible life: to the rich past and the promising future.

Possibly you have in mind right now poets who would, you think, qualify for this role. The poets you wish I would have talked about. I speak here only of two poets who have produced a substantial body of work, work of an impressive maturity.

When I wrote the following pages I meant to do only a work in progress report. Since then, Pat Lowther's tragic death has made my hopeful anticipations seem banal and grotesque. But what I perceived in her work, as well as in McNeil's, was a sharp scalpel-like probing, a daring to go into the depths of personal perceptions, and a corresponding ability to render those perceptions in hard honest unflinching terms. Her work endures.

And so I would like to begin with the poetry of Pat Lowther, only because I encountered it first. Her first book was *This Difficult Flowring*, published by

Very Stone House in 1968. In a review of it in *Canadian Forum,* Len Gasparini said: "Christ! I've never read poetry like this by a woman! Her poetry offers no easy exits for tailor made sensibilities."

One can see in this first book all the major themes and preoccupations which were to be constant in her work: an existential sense of the human condition which is expressed in personal lyrics about love and childbirth, and poems with a larger context, i.e., politics, as in her poems to Pablo Neruda, himself a poet, a socialist, a politician, and a humanitarian. One finds in her work also a pervasive sense of the timeless world of geology, the world which existed before the intrusion of human consciousness, and the worlds outside our limited perceptions, the reaches of intergalactic space. Most recently, this interest found expression in a multi-media creation commissioned by the MacMillan Planetarium in Vancouver: *Infinite Mirror Trip*, poems, slides and music presented in conjunction with the Planetarium's star show in August of 1974.

On the subject of the new consciousness of the woman revolution, she said in the anthology *Mountain Moving Day* (edited by Elaine Gill, The Crossing Press, 1973):

> (it is) part of a new outreach of consciousness . . . at one time I believed we humans were coming to the end of our evolutionary cycle — devolving like dandelions. Now I see the half-breeds of the future passing like migrating birds, and I begin to have a kind of hope. Maybe they'll find some clear space for consciousness, for going on. Not that I wholly trust them to be right. It is too easy to be wrong when you've grown in a culture that functions basically by mind manipulation. Maybe we have to go through the whole trial and error thing again. After all, thats how we got here in the first place.

Thus we see how all her concerns intermesh, the evolutionary process in time, human intervention into this process with the innovation of self reflection, of frontal lobe manipulation, the biological traps, an inevitable moving into a corner and yet the rising out of those traps or roles through the very instrument of imprisonment: consciousness. In "Doing it Over" a poem in Dorothy Livesay's anthology *Womans Eye* (Air Press, Vancouver, 1974) Lowther says:

> Once we've had babies
> we cant stop
> all our lives swelling and germinating
> in our dreams we may
> be more like plants
> than we thought
> apple trees cant
> forget the seasons
> nor can we ever be done with newness
> but make beginnings
> over and over again

in the roots of ourselves
in the dark
between our days

For her, politics is not, as it is for Atwood, a metaphor for individual power game strategies; politics is the real world of the possible, where human concerns larger than the interpersonal might be acted out. In her most quoted line, from *The Age of the Bird* (a poem sequence to Pablo Neruda, done in broadside format in a limited edition by Blackfish Press in 1972), she says:

Often now I forget
how to make love
but I think I am ready
to learn politics

In this series of poems, *The Age of The Bird* the image of the bird is emblematic of what stage in the evolutionary process immediately after the reptilian age, just on the brink of the time of mammals and the coming of man, in her poem "Woman" she says, "I think I wanted to be wings, the essence of wings." Neruda is a magician, performing the function of shaman, making the dreams of the people, and even in death, a continuing source of unity.

Always on earth was your substance
grain, ores and bones
elements folded in power
humans patient in time, and weather
now you too live with skeletons
heaped about you
our small perfect hands
touch you for comfort

The poems employ a religious, chant-like rhythm, creating a tone of responsorial ritual:

They have killed you with bullets
for that you were not
gold and silver
they have even given away your life, for that you
came in hair
and mud and giant flesh
they have cut off your fingers
for that you took
no attitude of prayer
before the male and female mountains

In *Milk Stone* (Borealis Press, 1974) ("Milk" is a verb in this title, according to the author), the long ambitious poem "In the Continent Behind my Eyes" creates an interior cinemascope of the whole evolutionary process beginning with

a present urban scene and spiraling back into prehistory. It merges the archetypal and the personal in a blend of reality, hallucination and dress which approximates the form of a speeded-up film. The theme is the intrusion of human consciousness into blind time, the interruption of eons of indifference by the coming of the human race.

There is a constant process of interrelating the self living in a here and now world with past selves, with birds again, so we are right back there at the moment on the evolutionary scale just after the death of the reptiles, and the cave bears whose claw marks on the walls of their caves may have taught our ancestors the rudiments of painting. The cave bears passed from the evolutionary process before we came. Yet we may have picked up where they left off — we may have learned from them. They are still in us.

In this poem Lowther creates a sense of being one with the landscape, of being in simultaneous time, as in James Dickey's work there is a constant awareness of a primitive self within, dormant, but alive. She celebrates the essentially human, but constantly places it in the context of the elemental. Art, the making of poems, as in Dickey's poem "The Eyebeaters," is a crying out, an attempt to posit meaning in a dark painfilled world.

"In the continent behind my eyes," she begins, "voices are pretending to be birds." Then the "City like an open brain zaps messages" and she is plunged into a vortex of accelerating images of stalagmites and leaf mouths and silver fur hands the postures of hunters and the city is a concrete flower we grew. Into this sudden merging of the self into geologic time, she questions when it was and what it was that "invited us out of our bodies to make a world web in time to build on the rock Death."

This ultimate pain of consciousness, of a sense of loss, yet a feeling of communion with the archetypal memories of past selves finds final expression in "the sea I had forgotten to account for the first metaphor, its endless business even now the sea is inventing sex and death." And then

> in the spring water seemed
> full of voices
> whose words we had forgotten
> we gave each other names
> we found the cave he died in
> water ran down the wall. . . .
> I create every possible existence
> while behind me might
> erases beginnings
> my fingers trace
> his gouges on the wall
> soon I will take a sharp stick
> and begin

As Peter Stevens said in a review of *Milk Stone* (*Globe and Mail*, March 1, 1975) "What *Milk Stone* offers is a considered reaching out towards untold possibilities for man and woman once both recognize the potentialities within themselves in their relation to an expanding universe. What shines through in this volume is the clear direct sight of a singing woman, working out her own responsibilities beyond the limits set by society. It is a clear eyed and firm poetry full of singing."

A Stone Diary (Oxford, 1977), prepared for press before her death and published posthumously, is a coalescing and consolidation of these recurring strategies and concerns. The central shaping image is still stone:

> By the turn of the week
> I was madly in love
> with stone . . .
>
> . . . the stones shine
> with their own light,
> they grow smoother
> and smoother

There are more letters to Pablo Neruda, more poems about the agony of human existence, evanescent and fragile as it is compared to the "silence between" separate human lives lived in isolation — from self, from others, from the eternal galactic universe, which is known only from contact with the surviving stones. How will we survive?

Some reviewers have read this final work as ironic and prophetic of her death. A more judicious reading will see the poems as statements of affirmation, quietly spelling out her resilient will, saying words to scatter the dark.

FLORENCE MCNEIL also has a strong sense of the presence of time in our existence. However, unlike Lowther, whose chief concerns are with prehistoric time, the timeless world of galaxies and silent stones, McNeil exhibits wonder over the artifacts of human history. In "Indian Artifacts" she says:

> It was peaceful on the beach trail
> their persian cat cleaning the pearl ruff
> till the motorcycle and the cat collided
> and fur and bones invited by
> hypnotic chrome
> and when the motorcycle apologized
> and left
> and the fur stopped moving
> we walked to the Indian banks
> and spent the day digging

without luck
for evidence of another civilization

In poems like "1915 Fighting Plane" and "Art Nouveau" as well as "1902 Talking Machine" she places old photographs and advertisements next to our own position; for instance in "1915 Fighting Plane" she speaks of the fear

that this pilot buried at first
in elite silence
has come to share his not so private graveyard
with innocent thousands who never looked up
to applaud
his comic heroics

and "Art Nouveau" contrasts the old ads for cigarettes where a soldier home on leave

contemplates with delight
the arabesque of smoke
refined from his cigarette

and stands by "patriotic pianos" while his loved one reveals an ankle in iridescent moonlight and tends curling roses

which point
imprecisely
down the long long trail

and elsewhere in the

last half of the magazine
there are photographs
blurred and unreal, and stiff geometric legs of dead horses
the abstract confusion of ordinary arms
and barbed wire
are reproduced poorly
and clarify nothing

She exhibits the same strong sense of place and time in *Walhachin* (Fiddlehead, 1971) a series of poems which are, in the style of her Emily Carr poems, the thoughts of someone from the past. In *Walhachin* it is the imagined monologue of an Englishwoman who came, in 1907, with a group of settlers from England to colonize the area of Walhachin, near the Thompson River in British Columbia's dry belt. Irrigation flutes were built and a town began to grow. Trees began to grow. By 1914, things were looking promising. But then the First World War intruded and most of the men were called out, a heavy rainstorm wiped out most of the flutes, most of the men did not return and the project was abandoned. The sage grew again, and it is again a desert, but there are some dead trees still to be seen there.

"this landscape is incomprehensible" the woman thinks

have lost time
in the canyon a jackrabbit runs away
from my unhappiness
the whistling sage sends out messages
I cannot follow

and finally:

1914
Wandering in August
through the trees
confirming to patterns
we set out

I can hear already
the troop train exploding
through the dry plateau
whose moon has followed me
and blown itself up against a whole sky
there are banners in the country
whose decisions
uproot out our own
because we have nudged uneasy canyons
into compromise
because the long days of killing sage
have ended in this temporary outburst
we are no less British
the small grass bayonets my shoes
there are dreadnoughts at anchor in the Thompson.

Her third book, *The Rim of the Park* (Sono Nis, 1971) is a collection of artifacts, snapshots, tableaus, documents, vigils, nightwatches, things looked at so closely and with so cool and detached an eye that the reader does not notice that the friendly guide, chatting amiably, is taking him further into the park, far from the safe rim, the civilized outside, and closer to that "dark zoo" in the centre. This is no mere collection, it is a collision.

McNeil is obviously fascinated by the art of photography, and many of her poems use it as a metaphor. Moreover, her own art, her working with words strives to the same end; fixing in a final light the transitory moment in flight, fixing things in a past space, freezing the last gestures of dead men. In "Posing for a Picture": she protests the staginess of role playing and posing:

I would like you to move me off the moutains love
out of the sky

and in "Silents" she pays tribute to the "popcorn sunset" of a film past, as well as photography itself in "Photography":

Fuzzed into
Quadruple exposure

It is this same sense of wonder for time's erosive force that one senses in the "tourist" poems: "Unchartered Canada" which catalogues "scenic values," and "Arrival and Departure" which is the best poem I have yet seen about those monuments to the age of steam and iron, the railway stations, where one

hears from the vaulted dome standard time
in roman numerals;

poems like "The Hotel, Frank Alberta," "Banff," "A tavern in Sunburst, Montana," "The Old Indian Church," "Seaside Restaurant" and epiphanies in the old Joycean sense, an instant widening of sensibility, an opening and bright disclosure.

Again the world of lost childhood cartoons and the funnies

I was away a long time
the balloon over my head said
("Homecoming")

the scratchy, faint voices of the past ("1902 Talking Machine") and childhood toys ("the dead tin soldiers" and "biplane royalty" in Chivalry) and art ("In Courbets paintings the arresting quiet/ of the mid-Victorians" ["Burial at Armans"] and "Roualt's black figures/ are outsides" ["Miserere"]) are attempts to fix the fleeting moment to lose, to incorporate, absorb, assimilate, pin down.

But paradoxically, when we are led through the world of these poems, a kind of sinister museum, where the eyes of the stuffed birds glitter with ambiguous intent, we cannot stay in the moving immediate world on its edges. McNeil forces the family album onto our laps and open to see the grinning skulls behind the placid faces of that long ago picnic.

For all her machinery of a world of perceived things, photographic evidence, vistas noted and catalogued, her deepest concern is with the living, the sad inheritors of this blandly smiling, impervious, obdurate presence of the past. The inheritors are surrounded by dead men and women; when they speak, their ancestors chorus. They are never alone. Out for a Sunday stroll, they are destined to be mugged by long dead cousins. The dark zoo waits at the chill end of a Sunday afternoon. It is always four in the afternoon and almost closing time.

I do not mean to suggest that these poems are morbid, down or depressing. Quite the contrary, Florence McNeil suffuses this world with a tender light, touching the awkward past with a gentle wonder, without flinching, as she is no sentimentalist.

In poems like "Elegy" and "Cemetery Visit," she breaks into a frozen inward sea, facing it with brave words. Louis Zukofsy once said of poetry that "the words must live, not merely seem to glance at a watch." Florence McNeil's words bleed.

McNeil's strong sense of the presence of the past in the present is further explored in *Ghost Towns* (McClelland and Stewart, 1975). The same sense of synchronistic existence in a world which isn't exactly ours, peopled as it is with ghosts, is entrenched in these latest poems.

She moves from early pioneers of the air (Montgolfier, Lilienthal, Bleriot) to movies and photographs ("reruns on the return of tom mix," "newsreel", "art nouveau") childhood memories ("first dive," "domestic alice," "west coast christmas"), to a tangible present ("Skating," "having said love").

There can, of course, be no final word on the work of these two writers. I hoped to avoid falling into the same trap I began with, touting the "next major poet" or the next champion. Their work is here and available. Perhaps one day we can catch up with it.

QUESTION

Elizabeth Gourlay

"Who are you, Elizabeth?
I ask myself
encased in this steel cabin
drinking white rum and soda
at an altitude
32,000 feet . . .
beneath me
a mattress of white clouds
very soft they look
but I am continually cognisant
they would not hold me
up
every so often the clouds part and
I peer down into a frozen
landscape
brittle ice covering
curlecued lakes
small trees a haze
indecipherable
existence is incredible I think
looking at
these effervescent bubbles
exploding steadily
in the bottom of this crystal
cup.

ANNE HEBERT

Les Invités au procès

D. W. Russell

LES INVITÉS AU PROCÈS, a "poème dramatique et radiophonique" by Anne Hébert, was broadcast July 20, 1952 by Radio-Canada, but remained unpublished until 1967, when it appeared in a volume along with *Le Temps sauvage* and *La Mercière assassinée*.[1] The broadcast date, and presumably the period of composition, of *Les Invités au procès* is roughly that of *Le Torrent* (1945) and *Le Tombeau des rois* (published in 1953).[2] But while these latter two works have justifiably received considerable critical attention, and while the two other plays published in the same volume in 1967 have attracted much comment, *Les Invités* has evoked only brief remarks.[3] Allusions to *Les Invités* are found fairly frequently, however, in critical studies of the work of Anne Hébert. Passing references, for example, are made to *Les Invités* in two separate articles by Albert LeGrand and Grazia Merler dealing mainly with *Kamouraska*. René Lacôte also mentions *Les Invités* in his brief remarks on the theatrical works, included in his excellent introduction to the poetry of Anne Hébert. Sometimes the critical remarks on *Les Invités* are not just slight, they are also slighting. Laurent Mailhot dismisses the play in one short paragraph in *Le Théâtre québécois*, saying,

> *Les Invités au procès* est une sorte de forêt vierge, dense, riche, mais touffue, aussi fantasque que fantastique, plus romantique que surréaliste, plus symboliste que symbolique.[4]

And finally, Pierre Pagé, in his work on Anne Hébert published in 1965, two years before *Les Invités* appeared in print, devotes two pages to it, beginning his analysis with a negative judgment:

> si nous l'avons retenue ici, ce n'est pas pour sa valeur formelle. Elle est en effet assez compliqué et son unité dramatique est très difficile à percevoir. Les personnages sont un peu trop nombreux, les lieux multiples, l'action dispersée.[5]

He continues, however, to give some small praise to the work, using the image of the forest (later repeated by Mailhot, cited above):

> c'est une forêt très dense où l'on trouve l'annonce de tous les thèmes poétiques qui

seront ultérieurement développés: l'amour, la mort, le mal, la culpabilité, la sincérité.

Such a lack of critical enthusiasm for one of her works is not new, of course, to Anne Hébert. We are reminded, for example, that the original publication of the volume of stories, *Le Torrent*, had to be undertaken at the author's expense, and that the title story, now widely acclaimed, was not always so well received.[6] Similarly, critical views of *Le Temps sauvage* and *La Mercière assassinée* have not always been favourable.[7] Now, however, with a greater distance in time from the earlier works, and with additional insights afforded by later works of Mlle Hébert, a more balanced critical view is surely possible. This analysis of *Les Invités au procès* attempts to show at least one possible path of meaning running through the dark forest, visible some twenty-two years after the work was first presented to the public.

Part of the difficulty that *Les Invités* presents to the reader is its form. Both Pagé and Mailhot refer to the lack of a clearly unified structure, while Pagé comments that the work shares the same dream-like liberty of action, character, and place as some of the stories of *Le Torrent*. Although he here seems to be using the reference to the dream-like quality as a negative criticism, Pagé sees this quality as a positive value in his analysis of *Les Chambres de bois* and *Le Torrent*. Referring to these two works, he states that the characters exist to fulfill a poetic necessity, not the dictates of traditional literary realism:

ce sont les acteurs d'un monde onirique et leur nécessité est celle du rêve. Comme Perceval ou la bohémienne Amica, ils surgissent lorsque l'âme poétique a besoin de styliser dans un masque, un des multiples états de sa relation au monde.

This statement could apply with even more force to *Les Invités au procès*, where the form of the work, which is addressed to listeners only, not to readers or spectators, is strikingly similar to a dream sequence. The formal unity of a dream sequence is not, obviously, that of a stage play, but is formulated according to a different kind of "logic."[8] As Gilles Houde reminds us in the introduction to his study of the mythic structure of *Le Torrent*, the symbolic language of the dream, although at first it may seem incoherent, intensely personal, or even absurd, does in fact have a very strict interior logic.[9] *Les Invités au procès* is also structured according to this "nécessité du rêve," and its own interior psychological and poetic ordering make it a powerful expression of certain basic human truths.

The last verse of the title poem of *Mystère de la Parole* offers a very significant definition of the role of the poet:

> Que celui qui a reçu fonction de la parole vous
> prenne en charge comme un coeur ténébreux de surcroît,
> et n'ait de cesse que soient justifiés les vivants et
> les morts en un seul chant parmi l'aube et les herbes.[10]

The need to establish the harmonious existence of opposites ("que soient justifiés les vivants et les morts en un seul chant") is a major one in this collection of poems, and is repeated, for example, in the poems "Je suis la terre et l'eau", "Eve," and "Des Dieux Captifs." As expressed in these poems, the role of the poet is to help man reconcile the existence of opposites, for such a reconciliation is necessary for real life, for the confrontation of reality "avec toutes ses contradictions existentielles."[11] In *Les Invités au procès* Anne Hébert has presented us with a parable of a society which has not yet learned to accept this dialectic nature of reality. The examination of the lack of a balance between the opposed qualities of all of life is central to the work. At the end of the play this lack of balance is expressed by Le Voyageur, who explains that the society ("le village") has attempted to hide or deny the dark side of its nature:

> C'est le village qui réclamait depuis longtemps cette nappe verte et profonde pour y couler quelques péchés. C'est fou la confiance aveugle qu'ont les hommes dans les chambres de débarras, les prisons, l'enfer et toutes les histoires de même acabit. Un seul petit placard réservé pour son linge sale et l'homme se croit à l'abri de la crasse pour le restant de ses jours.

The folly of this attempt to gain a false purity by hiding part of man's nature has been well shown by the story just related. Père Salin has been the most persistent in this attempt. A major part of his imbalance stems from his denial of the aspects of life usually associated with women, such as beauty, love, passion, tenderness, etc. This denial is shown by the fact that he has killed his wife, Saule, and he declares to his two daughters at the beginning of the play that they are nothing. Replying to the beautiful Aude who has laughed irrepressibly, he says: "Tu es pareille aux autres, ni belle ni laide, stupide, nulle, tout simplement." He refuses to acknowledge the feminine qualities of either beauty or ugliness:

> Un jour, j'ai reçu en garde deux petites bonnes femmes d'âge égal. J'ai tiré leurs cheveux derrière leurs oreilles en nattes dures comme des anses de panier. Je leur ai donné des robes épaisses, été comme hiver, des jupes raides, larges comme des cerceaux et longues pour la vie. J'ai appris le travail et le silence à l'une et l'autre. Où est la différence?

The sterility of his refusal to accept even the existence of feminity is symbolized by the landscape of his Inn. It is in the middle of a deserted plain, the roads leading to it are "effacés" and bramble covered, the courtyard is "embroussaillée" and has a "maigre potager." This sterility and isolation came only after the death of Salin's wife, after he has denied the existence of the female principle. Before this time all was the opposite, as Aude recalls:

> Autrefois, l'auberge était pleine de monde. Maman souriait dans le soleil. Le jardin éclatait de fruits et de fleurs.

Behind Salin's rejection of the female qualities lies his religious pursuit. His ambitions are twofold: to find his salvation through a faithfulness to the land — literally to uncover a buried treasure in the earth (the relics of a saint); and to find salvation by making his son into the image of a sacrificial offering for the sins of the world (a *bouc émissaire* or a new Christ who must in fact give up his own physical existence completely for the sake of others). Both these ambitions are thwarted, however; Salin is betrayed by the land, in terms which are evocative of the betrayal of the land in *Trente Arpents*:[12]

> J'apprends aujourd'hui que je suis un vieil homme que la terre a trompé. J'ai creusé la terre. Je me suis penché sur la terre. J'ai défait ses plus petites mottes avec mes doigts, avec mes dents. Je l'ai priée, conjurée . . . Elle me n'a rendu aucun fruit, que son effluve fade au visage. J'ai épousé tous mes champs, l'un après l'autre en une étreinte profonde et rien, rien . . . Dix années de labeur et de foi vaincues.

His son, Isman, whom he has trained to accept the role of sacrificial offering ("Tu n'échapperas pas à la grandeur et au sacrifice que je t'ai assignées"), is too weak to accept this role. When falsely accused, he commits suicide, and his death cannot exculpate the others. Rather, his suicide leads to the investigation which uncovers the murder and the murderer of Saule. The investigation is begun by the Gendarme (a symbol of society's attempt to explain logically the existence of evil, a representative of imposed order) who says, in reaction to the suicide,

> Pardon, pardon, tout ceci me semble irrégulier. Vidons l'étang. Touchons du doigt l'origine du malheur, découvrons les racines de la fleur noir.

Defeated in his attempt to gain salvation by denying part of reality, Salin is won by the very force which he tried to deny. Le Voyageur, the incarnation of dark and hidden desires, becomes the new directing force of Salin and his Inn. As Le Voyageur informs Salin, he has in fact been part of his character in the past:

> Tu fus juste, si juste et content de l'être que dès le commencement j'étais en toi.

The new orientation of Salin's life and Inn is symbolized by the colours given the Inn by Le Voyageur: red and black (passion and death) are now the attractions instead of the sterile and isolating atmosphere of the misguided search for spiritual salvation through physical denial. The landscape of the Inn is transformed into a lush garden, with red and black animals and birds, all of it dominated by a strange massive flower in the pond: "une seule fleur immense, noire et lisse avec au centre un stigmate de sang." As well, there are new roads from all parts of the world leading to this garden.

THE TRANSFORMATION of the Inn and garden opens the second movement in the play. Now that Salin's family has accepted, even espoused, the existence of all that is symbolized by the heavy enchanting perfume and the colours of the strange flower, there is still the problem of recognizing the existence of opposites, the dialectic nature of reality. The female or physical side of life has now come into its own, but with attendant difficulties. The female qualities are symbolically divided into opposites, Aude representing beauty and physical pleasure, love, joy, etc., Ba representing ugliness, work, self-denial, and suffering. Both girls *dream* of the prince charming, who takes the form of Renaud, and Aude claims him as her own right, while trying to banish the thought of her sister Ba's existence. This single-minded pursuit of perfect physical happiness is as misguided as her father's quest for spiritual treasures, and the recognition of the existence of the opposite qualities is needed for a psychological balance. Thus the hunchback Le Bossu comes out of nowhere to unhorse Renaud and seize Aude (thereby fulfilling the psychic need).

The appearance of Le Bossu, as was that of Renaud, Le Voyageur, and later the Gendarme, is directly related to the psychological needs of Salin and his family — they are present in the play because of the "nécessité du rêve," for it is in dreams that one's unconscious psychological needs are embodied.

Salin, Ba and Isman are all powerless to prevent the rape of Aude, Salin now being only able to help the powers of evil, Ba remaining prisoner to her work ("je ne puis délier mes mains de cette tapisserie"), Isman being constrained to silence and resignation ("Père, vous m'avez voué à ce rôle de silence et d'acceptation. Sans révolte, sans même changer ma douceur, je reçois le mal et la honte"). But Aude (Beauty) refuses to accept the role that must be played psychologically by Le Bossu (the Beast), and finally succeeds in destroying him (as her father had destroyed Saule). This brings a result opposite to what she had expected; the distance between herself and her ideal (Renaud) becomes greater and she becomes prey to the desires and charms of venal love in the person of Le Marchand. She appears eventually in the play as a skeleton, reciting the lines (later found in *Le Tombeau des rois*):

> Je suis une fille maigre
> Et j'ai de beaux os.
> Je les polis sans cesse
> Comme de vieux métaux.
> J'ai pour eux des soins attentifs
> Et d'étranges pitiés.

Ba questions this destruction of physical beauty:

Tout ce qui fut doux, périssable et cher est défait comme le sable. . . . Ce moment

où je fus sous l'étang, transformée et pétrie à nouveau par l'amour, était-il donc suffisant pour que la mort de notre soeur s'accomplit aux mains des hommes, ses amants?

Under the new rule of the Inn, all levels of society are attracted to come and express their hidden dark desires, to rid themselves of their secret evil wishes and to express the reverse of their public selves. For example, the aristocratic mother of Renaud, no doubt wanting the best for her son, wishes that he will never know love or suffering:

UN ENFANT — Qui donc s'est juré d'empêcher le Chevalier de toucher à l'amour?
UNE FEMME — J'ai vu la mère du Chevalier faire un voeu au bord de l'étang!

and

L'ENFANT — Qui donc s'est juré d'empêcher le Chevalier de toucher à la douleur?
LA FEMME — La mère du Chevalier a fait un voeu.

In effect, Renaud, like Aude, initially persists in ignoring the existence of ugliness and suffering, since he refuses to even consider Ba as he tries to find Aude. He only pays attention to her when she is transformed physically, but he still cannot bear to see her hands "marquées de travail et de malheur". When Ba does show him her hands, he flees:

Ba! Folle! Tu as enlevé tes gants! Je vois la douleur et le mystère à toi liés. Je vois le fantôme d'Aude qui passe dans un manteau bleu! Je ne puis supporter cela. Je fuis! Adieu, douce, belle petite fille, tendre petit visage, ô prunelles violentes. Ba!

Later, when he sees her hands again (this time they are wounded):

RENAUD — Que les mains de Ba soient enfouies dans la nuit! Effacez les lignes des ses paumes! Que nul n'y puisse lire quelque sombre destin. Cachez la vérité qui jure sur la robe claire.
BA — Renaud, comme tu me rejettes.
RENAUD — Que la nuit te reprenne ainsi que si tu n'avais jamais existé. Pour moi, je serai tranquille. O la douce chambre d'enfant! Ma mère veille à la porte et chasse la vie indiscrète et sournoise.
AUDE — Et moi, Renaud, me chassera-t-elle aussi? Je suis détruite et si calme. Le vent me balance à ta porte comme un arbre sans racines. Un jour, tu me verras, face à face, et tu mourras comme le Bossu.
RENAUD — Non! Non! Ma mère, renforcez ma prison, étouffez-moi que je ne découvre pas le visage rongé sous le manteau bleu.

Renaud's refusal to countenance either ravaged physical beauty (death) or suffering (in life) is a flight from reality and an attempt to retreat to the security of childhood. His mother is only too ready to help him in his attempt to avoid reality.

Ba alone succeeds in reconciling the existence of the opposites of suffering and love. She, like Aude, has dreamed of the perfect lover, Renaud, but when rejected by him she throws herself into the strange pool dominated by the giant flower. By doing so she has accepted the existence of suffering and death as part of love and life, and she emerges from the water transformed physically, except for her hands. She recounts her experience:

> C'est un pauvre amour qui m'a toute lissée, du fond de l'étang. Comme j'allais m'enfoncer en cette tendresse, j'ai joint mes mains pour prier, cela a fait surgir une force terrible dans mes poignets et je suis remontée à la surface, guidée par mes anciennes mains qui refusaient de mourir.

Now she is accepted by Renaud for her beauty, but she is still conscious of suffering and death:

> BA — Je vois le fond de l'eau et la douleur qui est dans la mort!
> RENAUD — Tais-toi. Dès que je me penche sur toi, tu me parles du mal qui habite le monde.
> BA — Le mal est grand, Renaud.

In the end, when the body of Saule, her mother, is discovered at the bottom of the pool, the transformation of Ba is seen by herself as follows:

> En une seconde naissance plus glorieuse que la première, voici que j'émerge de la profondeur de cette femme ténébreuse possédée du désir insatiable de fleurir au soleil.

Ba is the only one ready to fully accept life, to take possession of the contradictions of existence, and to "blossom in the sun." No other member of her society is equal to this arduous task of grasping life in all its complexity. Instead, the people around her at the Inn plunge on towards their own destruction as they try to exorcise the source of evil by condemning first Salin, then Jasmin. Le Voyageur returns in response to their desire to deal justly, that is, to condemn, classify, and forget the criminals, and he helps them to perform this rite. Le Voyageur reminds them, however, that in doing this act of judgment they are also affecting themselves:

> Et pour Salin, qu'avez-vous décidé? Comment le marquerez-vous pour l'Eternité? Et quels fins stigmates prendrez-vous sur vous en retour, bonnes gens? Car il y a le signe de celui qui est marqué et le signe de celui qui marque.

In fact, all these people share some degree of guilt, since they have all been attracted to the Inn by their own inner dark desires which they had hidden until they succumbed to the strange perfume of the black flower. They refuse to accept this guilt, however, preferring to believe that if they can condemn someone else as the source of the evil they will be freed of having to accept their own darker instincts.

Le Voyageur, who functions only to fulfil the people's own desires, hastens to finish his task, and it seems all will be destroyed, including Ba. But in the end it is revealed that Le Voyageur has made a pact with his opposite, Le Bedeau, and the Innocents are rescued:

> Le sacristain s'impatiente dans sa voiture neuve. Il n'aime pas l'atmosphère de ces lieux, cet homme. Bon, rendons-lui les Innocents, comme il en a été décidé. Drôle d'idée! Enfin, moi, ça ne me regarde pas. (*Commandant*) Que les Innocents rejoignent le Bedeau! Il les ramènera au village. Repatrié, le petit pendu! La terre bénite sera creusée, proprement derrière l'église pour lui faire fête. Et la fille au manteau bleu, dans la nuit, lui parlera d'égal à égal. Allons, en route bel équipage! Voici Ba et Renaud et cet autre enfant qui est sans nom. Recollez-moi tout cela à la vie quotidienne! Ah! singulier voyage! En voiture, triste enfance! Le voeux des Morts vous accompagnent, sans rompre aucun silence.

The younger generation is spared to continue life, but their future appears rather ambiguous. Isman and Aude will still be "le petit pendu" and "la fille au manteau bleu," although their deaths will be consecrated by the Church. Renaud, one suspects, will still remain a child at heart. Ba may be faced with a life that is a "singulier voyage," a "triste enfance," despite her insatiable desire to "fleurir au soleil." It is only later, in *Mystère de la Parole*, that Anne Hébert presents a persona who is able to seize existence fully, as we see expressed triumphantly in the final stanza of the collection:

> Incarnation, nos dieux tremblent avec nous! La terre se fonde à nouveau, voici l'image habitable comme une ville et l'honneur du poète lui faisant face, sans aucune magie: dure passion.

When *Les Invités au procès* is seen as a dream parable which examines the need for the establishment of an equilibrium between the opposites which constitute reality, the underlying dramatic unity becomes evident. That the listener should attempt to interpret the work as a parable, or modern myth, is also, it seems, to be expected, given the unrealistic nature of the play. The title suggests that the listener is one of those summoned or invited to a trial. The very names of the persons on trial suggest their psychological symbolism. Two names seem to be deliberate French-English puns: Saule — soul and Isman — is man. Salin, by killing Saule, has attempted to destroy the soul, or the *anima* in Jungian terms, and he is trying to make his son into a vehicle for the sins of all Man; he wishes his son to be Man. On a descriptive level, the names of Salin and Jasmin are equivalent to their psychological roles: Salin brings the sterility of salinity (such as found in the Dead Sea, for example), while Jasmin brings the odour of sanctity (the holy relics are his property, here associated with the strong perfume of the white flowers of jasmine; Saule was murdered because she was thought to be the lover of Jasmin). The names of Aude and Renaud bring with them the

appropriate idealized physical qualities of their medieval counterparts: Aude, or Alde, the sister of Olivier and the beloved of Roland, and Renaud, the knight valiant of *Renaut de Montauban*.[13] That it is impossible for such idealized abstractions of feminity and masculinity to exist in real life becomes obvious in the course of the narrative. Finally, Ba, who initially is low ("bas") in the estimation of her family and society, regains the qualities of Saule (and soul) in her rebirth in the water.

While the listener to *Les Invités* participates as a spectator at the trial, he becomes aware that it is also himself and his own society which are on trial. On one level *Les Invités* can be recognized as a condemnation of Jansenism, as exemplified by Salin (a similar condemnation of Jansenism has been found by critics elsewhere in Anne Hébert's works),[14] and on a more general level *Les Invités au procés* condemns all psychic imbalance, every attempt to deny or ignore the dialectic nature of all reality, both in individuals and in societies.

NOTES

[1] Anne Hébert, *Le Temps sauvage, La Mercière assassinée, Les Invités au procès*, Collection L'Arbre G-2, Montreal: HMH, 1967.

[2] Anne Hébert, *Le Torrent, Contes*, Montreal: Beauchemin, 1950, new edition, Montreal: HMH, 1963 (*Le Torrent* is dated 1945 in the text); *Le Tombeau des rois*, Québec, 1953, and, in *Poèmes*, Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1960 (the title poem was first published the same year as *Les Invités* was broadcast, in *Esprit* 20 [October 1952], 443-46).

[3] See, for example, Pierre Pagé, *Anne Hébert*, Ecrivains canadiens d'aujourd'hui, Montreal: Fides, 1965; René Lacôte, *Anne Hébert*, Poètes d'aujourd'hui, Paris: Seghers, 1969; Laurent Mailhot, "Anne Hébert ou le temps dépaysé," in Jean-Cléo Godin et Laurent Mailhot, *Le Théâtre québécois*, Montreal: HMH, 1970, pp. 123-50. Both Pagé and Mailhot give brief bibliographies of studies of the work of Anne Hébert, and a more recent bibliography is found in Grazia Merler, "La Réalité dans la prose d'Anne Hébert," *Ecrits du Canada français*, 33 (1971), p. 82, note 1. In addition to the articles listed by Dr. Merler, we add Albert LeGrand, " 'Kamouraska' ou l'Ange et la Bête," *Etudes françaises* VII, ii (1971), 119-43, and F. M. Macri, "Anne Hébert: Story and Poem," *Canadian Literature*, 58 (Autumn 1973), 9-18.

[4] Mailhot, *op cit.*, p. 126.

[5] Pagé, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

[6] For example, see Bertrand Lombard's review in *Revue de l'Université Laval*, January 1951 (cited by Albert LeGrand in "Anne Hébert: de l'exil au royaume," *Etudes française*, IV, 1 (1968), p. 21), and Pagé, *op. cit.*, pp. 30-33, who comments on Gilles Marcotte's revised opinion, expressed in his review of the second edition of *Le Torrent* (*La Presse*, 18 January 1964, as opposed to *Le Devoir*, 25 March 1950).

[7] See Mailhot, *op. cit.*, p. 145; he contrasts the negative views of Guy Beaulne and Clément Locquell with the mixed view of Gilles Marcotte and the positive view of

G. A. Vachon. Mailhot himself gives a sympathetic treatment of the plays, except for *Les Invités*.

[8] Although occasionally, for the sake of brevity, *Les Invités* will be referred to as a "play" in this analysis, the distinction between a stage play and a "poème dramatique et radiophone" will always be understood.

[9] See Gilles Houde, "Les Symboles et la structure mythique du Torrent," *La Barre du jour*, 16 (October-December 1968), p. 27.

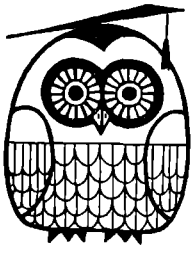
[10] Anne Hébert, *Poèmes*, Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1960, p. 75.

[11] Anne Hébert, "Quand il est question de nommer la vie tout court, nous ne pouvons que la balbutier," *Le Devoir*, 22 October 1960. In this short prose text Mlle Hébert elaborates on the necessity of coming to grips with reality that has "contradictions existentielles." (Also printed in *Québec: Hier et aujourd'hui*, ed. Laurier Lapierre, *et al.*, Toronto: Macmillan 1967, pp. 278-81.)

[12] In Ringuet's *Trente Arpents* (1938), Montreal: Fides, 1971, Euchariste is shown caressing the earth with his hand when he is at the height of his fortune as a farmer (pp. 183-84), then later, when the notary has stolen his savings, Euchariste slips in the mud and falls to the earth (p. 261). His uncle Ephrem's death had also been seen as an unwanted divorce from a beloved woman — his land (p. 58).

[13] The latter is edited by F. Castets (Montpellier, 1909); trans. H. Berthaut, as *Les Quatre fils Aymon* (Paris, 1952).

[14] See, for example, Georges Amyot, "Anne Hébert et la renaissance," *Ecrits du Canada français*, 20 (1965), p. 246:
"... la renaissance de notre poète est à la mesure même de cette révolte. Je pense que je n'ai pas besoin d'expliquer contre quoi le poète s'est révolté. La 'vieille femme envieuse' c'est le jansénisme, et tout ce qu'il traîne avec lui d'hypocrisie ascétique, de dépouillement dans la crainte, de macération et de masochisme. Oui, Garneau a permis la libération, mais c'est Anne Hébert qui l'a réalisée. Et voici qui pour nous, Canadiens français, est particulièrement émouvant."
Explicit reference to the condemnation of Jansenism is also found in Albert LeGrand, "Anne Hébert: de l'exil au royaume," and in Pagé, *op. cit.*, pp. 22-36, 83-84 (analysing *Le Torrent* and *Le Temps sauvage*), and Lacôte, passim.



RIVER OF NOW AND THEN

Margaret Laurence's Narratives

Barbara Hehner

THE DIVINERS, Margaret Laurence's most recent novel, is overflowing with ideas about life, about life in Canada, and about life in Canada as experienced by a woman. Laurence has been quoted as saying, "Now the wheel seems to have come full circle — these five books [the Manawaka fiction] all interweave and fit together."[1] The extent to which *The Diviners* is made to interweave with the earlier books is, in fact, almost irritating. The Tonnerre family, members of which have appeared in *The Stone Angel, The Fire Dwellers*, and *A Bird in the House*, play a major, and thematically defensible, role in the present book. But why include Julie Kaslik (sister of Nick, Rachel's lover in *A Jest of God*) and her husband Buckle Fennick (Mac's tormented friend in *The Fire-Dwellers*), when our interest in them is derived from the earlier books, and not from anything they do in *The Diviners*? And it is a jolt to read that Stacey Cameron and Vanessa MacLeod, Morag's contemporaries, play together, since they have not previously seemed to exist on the same imaginative plane: Stacey of *The Fire-Dwellers* is a fully realized fictional creation, while Vanessa, of the short story collection, *A Bird in the House*, is more an effective narrative device than a memorable character.

Not only characters, but obsessive images familiar to Laurence's readers recur in *The Diviners*: the disemboweled gopher, which Stacey of *The Fire-Dwellers*, like Morag, saw as a child; the grotesquely fat woman imprisoned by her bulk (Hagar, of course, Buckle's mother in *The Fire-Dwellers*, and now Prin); the burning shack that trapped Piquette Tonnerre and her children, which Laurence has described twice before; and the greatest catastrophe Manawaka ever experienced, the departure of the Cameron Highlanders for Dieppe, mentioned in all Laurence's Canadian fiction.

Laurence has been quoted as saying that she will probably never write another novel, and one can almost feel, while reading *The Diviners*, the pressure on its author to make a final important statement about Life and Art. It seems to have

been Laurence's ambition in this novel, dense with themes and symbols, complex in structure, but meandering in plot, not only to clarify the ideas expressed in her earlier books, but to express all those ideas for which she never previously found a suitable fictional embodiment.

In the earlier Manawaka books, Laurence explored such themes as the difficulty of achieving genuine communication between individuals, and the limits placed on personal freedom by family and ethnic background, in ways that critics have come to identify as distinctively "Canadian". Her female protagonists merely survive rather than triumphing, and they grow up in a community which displays the "garrison mentality" in its need for rigid conformity and its fear of spontaneity and sensuality. But in *The Diviners*, Laurence has overturned the negativism of these Canadian literary themes. Morag is no Philip Bentley: she has published five novels. She is in touch with the needs of her body as well as her mind, and has striven to satisfy both. She has freely chosen a loving relationship with the Métis, Jules Tonnerre, and borne a child by him who seems to symbolize the healing of the division between culture and nature in the Canadian psyche.

At times *The Diviners* seems almost too self-conscious in its reworking of Canadian literary clichés. As just one example, Margaret Atwood has defined the "Rapunzel Syndrome" in Canadian literature: imprisoned by the repressive attitudes of the society around her, the woman passively awaits rescue by the prince.[2] Atwood points to Rachel in *A Jest of God* as a typical victim of this malaise. In *The Diviners*, Morag, caught in a stifling marriage, sees *herself* as Rapunzel: "Maybe tower would be a better word for the apartment. . . . The lonely tower. Rapunzel, Rapunzel, let down your hair." To Morag, however, "letting down her hair" does not mean waiting helplessly for the prince to save her; it means taking a first step towards freeing herself, by defying current standards of chic and letting her straight black hair grow out.

Cultural nationalism and women's liberation dovetail nicely here. Morag's marriage to the Englishman Brooke, whose taste and intellect she considers superior to her own, can be seen both as the outcome of the "colonial mentality," which considers indigenous culture inferior to that of the mother country, and as the result of growing up in a society that assigns housework to women and intellectual achievement to men. *The Diviners* comes to grips with currently-debated issues much more explicitly than Laurence's previous fiction: the search for a Canadian identity, the discrimination encountered by women, the unjust treatment of native people, and even ecology, find a place in the novel.

The Diviners also uses the most sophisticated narrative technique Laurence has yet attempted, and an examination of this technique provides a suitable introduction to the novel, since both its virtuosity, and the unfortunate outcome of this virtuosity, its obtrusiveness, exemplify the strengths and failings of the novel

as a whole. In *The Diviners*, Laurence not only attempted to refine the narrative devices she had used before, but, as with other aspects of this novel, to stretch her story-telling abilities in new directions.

THE RECURRING narrative device used in *The Stone Angel*, *A Jest of God*, and *The Fire-Dwellers* is the first-person, present-tense narrator who is also the central character of the book. This technique would seem to be a psychological necessity for Laurence:

> I . . . have the sense of a whole world going on inside each skull and I can hardly bear it that this should be so, because I think I want a greater sort of contact with other people than in fact may be possible. I'm sure this is one reason why I do identify so much with the main character in my books . . . one has this kind of perfect identification or communication. . . . [3]

Paradoxically, the first-person technique provides Laurence as a writer with the feeling that she is sharing another person's mind while, by strictly limiting the point of view of each novel, it conveys to the reader Laurence's conviction that human beings are hopelessly isolated from each other.

The Stone Angel presents the reminiscences of ninety-year-old Hagar Shipley. The novel's present, revealed to us by Hagar speaking in the present tense, covers only a few days, as she "rages against the dying of the light." But Hagar's memories, in the past tense, range over her whole life. Laurence exercised great care in providing both the time and the motivation for these memories in the novel's present:

> Being alone in a strange place, the nurse's unseeing stare, the receding heat of the day — all bring to mind the time I was first in hospital, when Marvin was born.[4]

Laurence wrote in "Ten Years' Sentences," a 1969 article, of her pride in being able to recapture the idiom of her grandmother's day:

> Yet Doris never cared a snap about that pitcher, I'm bound to admit. Well there's no explaining tastes, and ugliness is pretty nowadays. Myself, I favour flowers . . .

but she also allowed Hagar some unlikely flights of rhetoric, whose equivalent is not to be found in her next two novels:

> I now think she must have been carved in that distant sun by stone masons who were the cynical descendants of Bernini, gouging out her like by the score, gauging with admirable accuracy the needs of fledgling pharaohs in an uncouth land.

Hagar's memories are presented in the order they occurred, which Laurence afterward viewed as an artistic mistake: "The flashback method is, I think, a

little overworked in it, and I am not at all sure that flashbacks ought to be in chronological order, as I placed them to make it easier for the reader to follow Hagar's life."[5]

In *A Jest of God* and *The Fire-Dwellers*, which portray much younger women, memories play a much smaller part than in *The Stone Angel.* Thus Laurence was able to present these memories out of chronological order without fear of confusing her readers. And she continued to take great care that these reminiscences seem to be called up naturally by events in the novels' present:

> The Flamingo Dancehall is shut tight and locked, blinds drawn, but tonight it will be all mauve and green shifting lights, and blare, and couples. In the summer there are dances every night here now. It used to be only once a week, Saturdays, when I was about seventeen. Sometimes I'd go with three or four other girls, scarcely wanting to . . . (*A Jest of God*)

> Stacey smokes and waits.
> —— I couldn't have gone in. Yes I could have. No I couldn't. And yet I'm curious as well. How do they stash them away? In grey-metal drawers like outsize filing cabinets, chilled for preservation? I don't want to know . . .
> Cameron's Funeral Home was never entered into by children. Stacey and her sister were forbidden . . . (*The Fire-Dwellers*)

A Jest of God marks Laurence's most sustained use of the first-person, present-tense narrative, and the technique produces a *tour de force* recreation of a troubled and often divided mind:

> And Mother nods and says yes it certainly is marvellous and Rachel is a born teacher.
> *My God. How can I stand —*
> Stop. Stop it, Rachel . . . Get a grip on yourself now.

and

> *Crack!*
> What is it? What's happened?
> The ruler. From his nose, the thin blood river. . . .
> I can't have done it.

These dramatic effects are, however, offset by the equally striking limitations of Laurence's chosen technique. As Robert Harlow wrote of *A Jest of God,* shortly after it was published, "What is lacking is . . . objectivity, distance, irony. . . . One yearns for the third person point of view and the omniscient author — old-fashioned techniques for an old-fashioned story."[6] Harlow complained particularly about the presentation of the other major characters in the novel, which, apart from Rachel's impressions of their appearance and manner, relies on what they reveal about themselves in conversation with her. "Both Nick and Calla suffer from having to explain themselves . . . dialogue cannot be successfully used

in place of narration."[7] While it is true that we are never provided with the depth of characterization which would unify for us Calla's flamboyant untidiness, her devotion to the tabernacle, and her lesbianism, she is warm-blooded enough for the size of her role in the novel. The surface details: her use of "child," her pet phrases such as "the pause that refreshes," her messy and gaudily decorated apartment, are enough to sustain our general impression that she is good-hearted and down-to-earth.

But the characterization of Nick Kaslik is indeed a problem, since it is Laurence's plan to make him a major character in *A Jest of God*. Although his roots are in Manawaka, and many of his growing-up experiences parallel Rachel's, he is a stranger to her. Thus Nick has to tell Rachel (and us) everything Laurence wants us to know about him, during those few evenings he and Rachel spend together. Despite all Laurence's efforts to give verisimilitude to these briefing sessions (Rachel is rigid with shyness and someone must do the talking), the novel falters whenever Nick begins to reminisce. Although Laurence stoutly defended the narrative method of *A Jest of God* in "Ten Years' Sentences," she abandoned the strict first-person point of view in her next novel, *The Fire-Dwellers*.

The Fire-Dwellers is a type-setter's nightmare. Stacey's story is told in blocks of third-person present-tense narrative, flush right and left; paragraphs of first-person present-tense thinking by Stacey, indented with a dash; passages of dialogue, without quotation marks, indented about an inch from the left margin; memories of Stacey's childhood, in third-person past tense, with smatterings of present participles (conversation within these memories is indicated by italics); and the interruption of radio and television broadcasts in block letters. Although this complexity can be confusing, it is well-suited to the portrayal of a harrassed middle-aged housewife with little time for reflection and little gift for articulating her feelings:

> You missed your calling, Mother. You should've been in the army....
> Nuts to you. So long, Katie. 'Bye, kids.
> 'Bye.
> Slam....
> — Quick, coffee or I faint.
> EIGHT-THIRTY NEWS BOMBERS LAST NIGHT CLAIMED A DECISIVE VICTORY....
> Stacey . . . switches off the radio.
> — I can't listen.... Listen, God, I know it's a worthwhile job to bring up four kids.... But how is it that I can feel as well that I'm spending my life in one unbroken series of trivialities?

Apart from the news broadcasts and the staccato bursts of conversation, however, the novel stays as close to Stacey's mind as the entirely first-person narrative of *A Jest of God*. As Allan Bevan points out in his introduction to the New Cana-

dian Library edition of *The Fire-Dwellers*, this limited point of view conveys the "terrifying isolation" of the characters. Stacey's conversations with her husband, as we know from sharing her mind, communicate a little of what she feels for him:

> — Can't we ever say anything to one another to make up for the lies, the trivialities, the tiredness we never knew about until it had taken up permanent residence in our arteries?
> Hi. You're late, Mac.
> My God. Is that my fault?

And her uncommunicative husband's thoughts are as great a mystery to her as they are to the reader:

> Stacey kisses him and he holds her unexpectedly close for an instant. She feels his tremor. . . .
> — Mac, what is it? Are you nervous about the new job? You're only forty-three, for heaven's sake. Or what is it? Why don't you say?

On the other hand, the scenes involving the most relaxed figure in the book, the young, happy, self-reliant Luke Venturi, have the same jarring falseness as Nick Kaslik's monologues in *A Jest of God*. This is meant to be a twenty-five-year-old member of the counter-culture speaking:

> Yeh? What did you plan to do with it? [Stacey has been speaking of her father's revolver.] Or rather, whom? Yourself, when the Goth's chariots and the final bill came in, or when some evangelist corporal decided this is the way the world ends, not with a whimper but a bang?

Before turning to the narrative problems Laurence faced in her most ambitious novel, *The Diviners*, it is interesting to look briefly at the almost perfect narrative form of her most modest Manawaka book, *A Bird in the House*. As Laurence sees it, the motivation for a short story is quite different from that for a novel:

> With a novel the main characters come first, they grow slowly in the imagination until I seem to know them well. . . . Most short stories I've written seem to be triggered off by some event, either in my own life, or something I've observed or read about.[8]

Perhaps because Laurence did not have such a desperate need to portray a single dominant character in all her complexity (although often at the expense of complexity in the other characters), her narrator, Vanessa, is perfectly and delicately poised between retrospective omniscience and her role as a child participant in the events she describes. In the early stories, particularly, Vanessa is an almost transparent recorder of the difficult inter-relationships of her parents, Aunt Edna, and her grandparents. Only an occasional passage, such as the one describing Vanessa's dissatisfaction with a clothespeg doll she is dressing while eavesdropping on an adult conversation, characterizes the narrator as a little girl.

There is some humorous exploitation of the gap between Vanessa the character's limited understanding, and Vanessa the narrator's adult awareness:

> My grandmother was a Mitigated Baptist. I knew this because I had heard my father say, "At least she's not an unmitigated Baptist . . . "

but such "cuteness" is used sparingly.

In *The Diviners* Laurence brought to bear all that she had learned in her earlier fiction about the advantages and drawbacks of various narrative devices. Again she was faced with a problem she had encountered when writing *The Stone Angel.* She had decided that Morag's life story, like Hagar's, would benefit from being told in a series of extended flashbacks. A novel that maintains a continuing tension between past time and present, the past moving rapidly and the present moving slowly, until the past catches up with the present, may appear to the reader to be more "manipulated" by the author than an equally craftsmanlike beginning-to-end narrative. Laurence had been aware of this in her analysis of the flaws in *The Stone Angel.* On the other hand, if *The Diviners* began with Morag's childhood and worked its way through her life to the present, it would lose the heightened contrast and modest suspense achieved by the flashbacks.

In Chapter Four, the hostile reception Pique receives in a small Manitoba town, set upon by drunken men of the community, is played off ironically against Morag's attempt, years before, to be accepted in just such a community, by dressing in "Good Taste" and using correct grammar. In Chapter Three, Morag receives a phone call from Pique's father, but we do not learn the circumstances of Pique's begetting until Chapter Seven. Similarly, at the beginning of Chapter Eight, Morag writes a nostalgic letter to Dan McRaith; we are left wondering who this man is until the middle of Chapter Nine.

In *The Diviners* Laurence made extensive use of a technique that she introduced in *The Fire-Dwellers*: a third-person narrative which is so intimately connected to the protagonist that, on first reading, one is left with the impression that the story has been told in the first person. But the third-person narrative form of *The Diviners*, although it reveals only Morag's point of view, is far more flexible than the first-person narration of *A Jest of God.* At times it approximates a train of private thought:

> The postcard from Pique yesterday. No address. Mustn't think of it. . . . But a somewhat more newsy letter would be appreciated. Idiotic. How many newsy letters had Morag written to Prin and Christie, after she left Manawaka? That was different. Oh really?

But at other times the third-person narrative is free to use flowing sentences and elegant turns of phrase which, while recording Morag's perceptions, do not masquerade as transcriptions of her thought:

> The willows along the river had been changed by the alchemy of autumn from greensilver to greengold.

A few first person passages, in italic type, indicate Morag's thoughts, but there are far fewer of these than in *The Fire-Dwellers*. This is partly a result of the character being portrayed. Stacey is afraid to express herself honestly, either because what she really thinks is too vulgar or sarcastic for the social situation she finds herself in (the Polyglam party), or because, within her own family, her efforts at genuine communication are rebuffed (Mac's arrival home in Chapter 1). Thus Stacey's thoughts, in the first person, are a rebellious and often anguished protest against the falseness of her wife-and-mother façade. The mature Morag, however, usually says what she means. Sometimes she spares the feelings of people she considers pathetic:

> "Anything you write *now*, I mean, will automatically get published — "
> *Oh sure. Just bash out any old crap and rake in the millions. I get my thoughts from the telephone directory.*

But more often she attempts to be honest, even if the truth offends others, or hurts her own pride:

> . . . I am forty-seven years old, and it seems fairly likely that I will be alone for the rest of my life, and in most ways this is really okay with me, and yet I am sometimes so goddam jealous of their youth and happiness and sex that I can't see straight.

Usually the italicized passages are used to highlight a particularly significant realization on Morag's part, and if these are to have their proper impact, they must be used sparingly:

> Would Pique's life be better or worse than Morag's? *Mine hasn't been so bad. Been? Time running out. Is that what is really going on, with me, now, with her? Pique, harbinger of my death, continuer of life.*

Laurence's choice of tense for the narration of *The Diviners* was apparently just as carefully considered as her choice of person. *The Stone Angel* made what seems to be the obvious grammatical distinction between Hagar's present situation and her memories: the former are related in the present tense, and the latter in the past tense. But in the later books Laurence explored for herself the effects that can be created by different tenses. The present tense puts us *in media res* is both *A Jest of God* and *The Fire-Dwellers*. Both Rachel and Stacey are women with severe problems in their present lives, and we feel that we are sharing their struggles with them.

In *The Fire-Dwellers*, Laurence experimented with the present participle in place of the verb in some of Stacey's memories:

> Stacey, swimming back to shore, coming up for air intermittently . . . thinking already of the dance she would go to that evening, thinking already of the pressure on her lake-covered thighs of the boys

Although this innovation was not followed through consistently, the passages in which the participle was used suggest that these memories are still an active part of Stacey's image of herself: she has not yet come to terms with the fact that she is no longer a carefree young girl.

In Chapter Eleven of *A Jest of God*, which is basically a present-tense narrative, Rachel describes her decision to take control of her own life in the retrospective tranquility of the past tense. Similarly, the aura of serenity in *A Bird in the House* seems to result from its consistent use of the past tense: all the hurts felt by Vanessa have been healed by the passage of time, and her insight into, for example, her father's ("A Bird in the House") and her grandfather's ("The Mask of the Bear") true natures has already been achieved. Although Laurence has said that the writing of *A Bird in the House* was a process of self-discovery for her,[9] we do not share the process, only the achievement. The fact that the adult Vanessa is an unknown quantity, the most faceless of Laurence's narrators, adds to the effect of calm detachment.

In *The Diviners*, Laurence's protagonist is, for the first time, a woman who has already found a measure of fulfillment, whose present life is busy and, by and large, satisfying. Thus Laurence's seemingly perverse decision to write of Morag's past in the present tense, and of Morag's present in the past tense, is the right one. The past tense narrative, in much of Laurence's work, suggests an achieved personal equilibrium, and this Morag possesses. On the other hand, Morag has experienced a difficult journey to her present autonomy, and she vividly recalls her earlier struggles; indeed, she feels that she is constantly reworking her past, even embellishing the events, in order to link her past life to her present life in a meaningful way:

> What happened to me wasn't what anyone else thought was happening, and maybe not what I thought was happening at the time. A popular misconception is that we can't change the past — everyone is constantly changing their own past, recalling it, revising it. What really happened? A meaningless question. But one I keep trying to answer, knowing there is no answer.

LAURENCE'S CANADIAN novels, whether narrated in the present tense or the past, in the first person or the third, have always been constructed so that we share the consciousness of a single dominant female character. In each

novel Laurence has seemed to move closer to her own experience, and in *The Diviners* she has carried the parallels between herself and her protagonist farther than ever. Morag is, like Laurence, a divorced writer, author of a number of successful novels, who, having once made a romantic pilgrimage to England, settles down to work in a cabin by a quiet river in Ontario. Even Morag's smaller quirks are shared by her creator, as the many profiles of and interviews with Laurence have made known to her readers: for example, Morag chain smokes and refuses to learn to drive.

One is tempted to think, while reading *The Diviners*, that Laurence resorted to the numerous irritating ways in which the narrative, as Robert Fulford put it, "untactfully draws attention to itself,"[10] in an attempt to distance herself from her material. Perhaps these devices are the evidence of her struggle to create a fictional past for a character who, in the novel's present, bears such a close resemblance to herself. Morag's reminiscences are presented as a series of "Memory-bank Movies," which break into the narrative flow, and whose often satirical titles undercut the emotions portrayed in them. For example, the account of Morag's newspaper assignment, covering the horror of the fire at the Tonnerre shack, is entitled, "Down in the Valley, Part III." The section in which Brooke, whom Morag has considered impervious to pain, describes the unhappy childhood that still haunts him, is called "Raj Mataj." This is witty, but to what end? Laurence's damaged heroines have often used mordant wit to deal with their pain. However, the premeditated appearance of the Memorybank Movies makes such humour distancing and unpleasant.

This obtrusive technique is particularly jarring in the early sections of *The Diviners*, when Morag is recalling her early childhood. Laurence's three earlier Canadian novels showed increasing skill in simulating the stream of consciousness. Hagar's reminiscences, although capturing the idiom of her generation convincingly, are expressed in well-formed sentences, suggesting written memoirs rather than thoughts. By the time she produced Stacey, Laurence was attempting to recreate the free associations and near-incoherence of the inner voice. But in *The Diviners*, for the first time, Laurence sought to reproduce the thoughts and speech patterns of a very young child.

Mercifully, she did not follow Joyce in returning her protagonist to the crib. Morag's earliest memories are expressed in adult vocabulary, as Morag examines a number of faded photographs. Successive Memorybank Movies portray Morag at five, six, seven, nine, twelve and fourteen, her development at each age distinguished not only by her opinions and her degree of awareness but, with great care on Laurence's part, by her vocabulary and syntax. Six-year-old Morag's first day at school is described this way:

> Girls here. Some bigger, some smaller than
> Morag. Skipping with skipping ropes singing. . . .

> And oh
>
> Their dresses are very short, away above their knees.
> Some very bright blue yellow green and new cloth,
> new right out of the store. You can see the pattern
> very clear, polka dots flowers and that
>
> Well oh

This is almost concrete poetry, suggesting an immature mind bombarded with new sights and sounds, while making it quite plain to the reader that this is Morag's first experience of her low social status. Morag at twelve is a vulgar little tough:

> The girls yell at her, but Morag doesn't care a fuck. They can't hurt her. The teachers hate her. Ha ha. She isn't a little flower, is why.

but at fourteen she tries to be ladylike, while fuming at the social ostracism she now fully recognizes:

> . . . no one will say *Good Morning* to Morag and Prin. Not on your life. Might soil their precious mouths. . . . They're a bunch of — well a bunch of so and so's. Morag doesn't swear. If you swear at fourteen it only makes you look cheap.

This writing, at its strongest, becomes almost transparent, as the reader experiences the illusion that he is sharing Morag-the-child's thoughts. Then a wry Memorybank Movie title pulls him back to the surface of the page. As was noted earlier, in *A Bird in the House*, where we are constantly aware that the adult Vanessa is giving form to her childhood perceptions, a little cuteness goes a long way. In the early sections of *The Diviners* there are long passages of childlike thought which, when we are suddenly reminded of the author guiding our responses to Morag, become forced and un-heartwarming:

> At four o'clock Morag can go home. She still does not know how to read. . . . But knows one thing for sure.
>
> Hang onto your shit and never let them know you are ascared.

MEMORYBANK MOVIE: MORAG, MUCH OLDER

As Morag matures, the narrative reaches one further stage of complexity in the Innerfilms: Morag's fantasies in the past. These tend to be extended self-mockeries:

> *Innerfilm:* Outside the blizzard rages. . . . Inside the little house, all is warmth, all is cheer. Morag, having put in an excellent day's work on her nearly completed novel (which will prove to be the best thus far) is reading in her comfortable chair. . . . The basement contains shelves and shelves of bottled preserved plums, applesauce, pears, blueberries, chili sauce, crabapple jelly . . . all the work of **Morag's hands**. . . . The friendly neighbourhood farmer is a bachelor (widower?

> yes). Although by no means an intellectual, he is a well-read man. Also handsome. And and

But Morag is portrayed as a strong-willed woman who has made a decent life for herself against heavy odds, and thus we become impatient with a negativism not supported by the novel's plot. Laurence has always given her protagonists a portion of self-deprecating humour, but in *The Diviners* this humour is beginning to seem more like the undisciplined voice of Laurence's own "Black Celt."

To be fair, some aspects of Morag's personality and development are deftly and convincingly portrayed, particularly her sensitivity to the power of language, both in its inhibiting aspect, as a social indicator, and its liberating aspect, as an exquisite medium through which an artist can communicate. Even at the age of seven, Morag notices the grammatical lapses of her guardian, Prin:

> She was the only child and wasn't none too bright (you were supposed to say wasn't *any* too bright, but Prin didn't know that)

She relishes vivid colour and rich texture, even though they are found in bizarre forms in Christie's hovel, and puzzles over the proper way to describe them:

> When she peers close [to the flies], she can see their wings are shining, both blue and green. Can they be beautiful and filthy?
>
> . . . a blue plush (pl-uush — rich-sounding, but really it is like velvet only cheaper and not so smo-ooth on the fingers) cushion

Both aspects of language continue to play an important part in Morag's life. Her concern for "proper usage" epitomizes her feelings of inferiority in her relationship to Brooke:

> "Shall we have some sherry?"
> "Please," Morag says, having recently learned to say, simply, *Please,* instead of *Oh yes thanks I'd just love some,* or worse, *Okay that'd be fine.*

while her convictions about the beauty of the poetic *mot juste* are strong enough to allow her to combat Brooke's patronizing influence:

> " . . . almost always if you get inside the lines, you find he's saying what he means with absolute precision. 'Sheer plod makes plough down sillion shine' — I'm not sure it really does, but it couldn't be expressed more concisely and accurately."

The mature Morag of the novel's present is no longer concerned with the social niceties. She has also come to doubt her earlier belief that language can accurately convey sensual experiences, although she remains convinced of the value of the effort:

> How could that colour be caught in words? A sort of rosy peach colour, but that sounded corny and was also inaccurate.

I used to think that words could do anything. Magic. Sorcery. Even miracle. But no, only occasionally.

Laurence has been quoted as saying, " . . . it's one of the most difficult things to do, writing about a writer. But I had to. At first I made her a painter, but what the hell do I know about painting?"[11] However, her believable portrait of the artist as a harassed Canadian woman is one of the most successful aspects of *The Diviners*. Morag experiences many of the barriers that can stand between a woman and creativity, including a husband's ego, morning sickness, and sleeping children.

But in her presentation of the internal doubts that beset Morag as a writer (and which surely afflict Laurence as well), Laurence comes perilously close to sinking her novel under the weight of its self-consciousness. Morag agonizes, in true Calvinist fashion, about whether spinning tales may not simply be a form of telling lies:

A daft profession. Wordsmith. Liar, more likely. Weaving fabrications.

Elsewhere, Morag wonders whether, as a writer, she most resembles Christie Logan the scavenger or Royland the diviner. Does she simply "tell the garbage," by fictionalizing other people's pain, or is she, like Royland, the possessor of a special gift, which allows her to reveal to others basic truths that they could not see without her help? She comes to the tentative conclusion that fiction *is* her truth:

Yet, with typical ambiguity, [Morag was] convinced that fiction was more true than fact. Or that fact was in fact fiction.

Laurence shares Morag's concern about telling the truth in fiction:

There's not only the talent in writing well. . . . The greatest problem of all is to try and tell enough of your own truth, from your own viewpoint, from your own eyes, to be able to go deeply enough. . . . It sounds easy just to tell the truth. There is isn't anything more difficult.[12]

And she seems to have concluded that this truth-telling is impeded by some of the ordinary conventions of novel-writing. Although this realization does not make Laurence's "distancing" narrative devices any more successful, it helps us to understand why she chose them. Hagar's and Rachel's first-person narrative is abandoned for the third person in *The Diviners* because, after all, Morag is not *really* telling us her own story. Similarly, Memorybank Movies are substituted for a smooth transition into reverie, because no one has memories so detailed and complete, with all past conversations intact. Here, as with Morag's difficulty in describing colours, the novel seems to comment on its own technique. Laurence has Morag draw attention to the "fictional" quality of her reminiscences:

> Now I am crying, for God's sake, and I don't even know how much of that memory really happened and how much of it I embroidered later on. I seem to remember it just like that, and yet, each time I think of it, are there new or different details? I recall it with embellishments which don't seem likely for a five-year-old.

Later Morag muses that "everyone is constantly changing their own past." Apparently Laurence's Memorybank Movies are not simply, or even predominantly, the result of her effort to distance herself from her material, but are meant to illustrate her belief that every person, writer and non-writer alike, makes a fiction of his past truth, and by doing so, transmutes it into new truth. And the new truth is myth.

A MAJOR THEME in *The Diviners* is the process of myth-making, and in particular, the application of this process to the needs of the Canadian imagination. In discussing this theme, we must consider the other characters in the novel. The presentation of the supporting players has always caused Laurence considerable difficulty. Because of her determination to limit herself to the point of view of her protagonist, these characters either succeed or fail on the believability of what they say. Laurence has had particular difficulty in devising realistic dialogue for male characters, and for characters considerably younger than herself: the two problems came together disastrously in her characterization of Luke Venturi in *The Fire-Dwellers*. Her most believable male characters, such as Bram and Mac, have been relatively taciturn, the motivation for their action largely supplied by the woman protagonist, who explains in her own idiom why they may have behaved as they did.

As we might expect from this most self-aware of novels, *The Diviners* deals with the problem of stilted dialogue for romantic leads and ingénues by incorporating the unbelievability into the characterizations, of Brooke:

> "Why, Morag? Why are you so determined to destroy me?"
>
> This is all the more terrible because she knows the pain is real and yet there is something melodramatic, to her ears, in what he is saying. . . .
>
> "Have I ever?" he says. "Have I ever wanted to damage you? Never. Never. Never."
>
> Add two more *nevers* and it might be Lear at the death of Cordelia.

and of Pique:

> ". . . anyway, I stopped at a house, and asked if I could please wash, as I'd had a slight accident, and they called the cops."
>
> *She tries to speak my idiom to me. She never says Pigs, cognizant of my rural background.*

In the past Laurence has given mythic dimensions to otherwise rather sketchy characters by suggesting that their relationships to the protagonist re-enact a biblical situation. Thus *The Stone Angel*'s Hagar (like the biblical Hagar) lives in exile from her husband Bram (Abram), and her son John, like Ishmael, is also an outcast. In *A Jest of God* Laurence developed the parallels between Nick Kaslik and the biblical Jacob, not only in his relationship to Rachel (who, like her biblical namesake, demands of him, "Give me my children"), but also in his relationship to his twin brother Steve, the brother who (like Esau), was disinherited.

In *The Diviners*, Laurence takes the essential elements in these myths: exile and dispossession, and reworks them in Canadian terms. These experiences are not limited to Canadians: Brooke has lost his boyhood India forever, and Dan McRaith, the Scotsman, knows no Gaelic. But Brooke retains his language; he still has an identity as an Englishman, and McRaith retains the land, journeying back to Crombruach to renew his creative powers. The Canadian characters have lost both their language:

> [Gaelic was] just a lot of garbled sounds to her. Yet she played the record often, as though if she listened to it enough, she would finally pierce the barrier of that ancient speech. . . .
>
> Jules, with two languages lost, retaining only the broken fragments of both French and Cree, and yet speaking English as though forever it must be a foreign tongue to him.

and their land:

> I'd like at some point to go to Scotland [writes Morag to her friend Ella] where my people come from. . . . it haunts me, I guess.
>
> The Métis, once lords of the prairies. Now refused burial space in their own land.

Morag's life is an illustration of what will and will not heal the pain of these losses. Morag loves, in turn, three men: the Englishman, Brooke Skelton; the Scot, Dan McRaith,[13] and the Métis, Jules Tonnerre. Only the relationship with Jules bears fruit, a child who carries the blood of the two people who possessed the land before them. Brooke represents the cultural inheritance that attracts many Canadians to England ("I guess there's something about London, as a kind of centre of writing," says Morag), but makes them feel that their own country is inferior. Dan McRaith represents the country from which Morag's ancestors, too long ago for her to know their names, set out for Canada. But the value of these cultures for her, Morag comes to realize, is mystic and not literal.

In *A Jest of God*, particularly, the demands of the myth with which Laurence was working made the realistic level of the novel less effective. All Nick's Jacob-like revelations are made to Rachel in the course of normal conversation, and, as

has been pointed out, these monologues are not only boring but unconvincing. Laurence avoided this failing in *The Diviners* by striving less for a continuous narrative flow. Christie Logan, Morag's guardian, is the first spinner of tales in the novel, and his stories of Piper Gunn, Morag's mythic ancestor, are set off both typographically and stylistically from the rest of the text. Although Christie is always a colourful speaker, the language in the tales has an archaic sonority:

Christie's First Tale of Piper Gunn

> It was in the old days, a long time ago, after the clans was broken and scattered at the battle on the moors, and dead men thrown into the long graves there, and no heather grew on those places, never again, for it was dark places they had become and places of mourning.

Although, as Morag enters adolescence, she begins to correct Christie's story-telling from her history books, she later gives up the chance to enter Sutherland, the home of her ancestors, saying to Dan:

> "It has to do with Christie. The myths are my reality. . . . And also, I don't need to go there because I know now what I had to learn there. . . . I always thought it was the land of my ancestors, but it is not."
> "What is then?"
> "Christie's real country. Where I was born."

That is, Christie's tales were valuable to Morag as myth, and not as history.

Jules Tonnerre, Morag's lover, is also a teller of tales, about his Métis ancestors, Rider Tonnerre and Old Jules. As with Christie's tales, the point is made that their value does not lie in historical accuracy:

> Rider was called Prince of the Braves, Skinner said [writes Morag to Ella], and his rifle was named La Petite. Infactuality (if that isn't a word it should be), those names pertained to Gabriel Dumont, Riel's lieutenant in Saskatchewan, much later on. That's okay — Skinner's grandad had a right to borrow them. I like the thought of history and fiction interweaving.

Jules' stories stand even farther apart from the text than Christie's. After Morag first goes to bed with Jules, they have a brief conversation about his family as he walks her home. Although we are invited to assume that Jules told Morag his stories then, they are grouped together, each with a title, several pages later.

When Morag incorporates these tales as well as Christie's into her mythology, she has come to terms with what Margaret Atwood calls the "ambiguity" of Canadian history, for in Christie's tales Riel is a villain, and in Jules' he is a hero. "Canadians," writes Atwood, "don't know which side they're on."[14] So, the proper response is Morag's when, in relating these stories to her small daughter Pique, she takes neither side.

The gift of myth-making, like the gift of divining, is "finally withdrawn to be

given to someone else." There comes a day when the adult Morag requests a story about Piper Gunn and Christie is unable to remember one; when Jules, whose myths had reached a further stage of refinement when he recast them as folk songs, develops throat cancer and sings no more. But Pique is also a folk singer and will continue the myth:

> Would Pique create a fiction out of Jules, something both more and less true than himself, when she finally made a song for him, as she would one day, the song he had never brought himself to make for himself?

At the end of the novel, Pique, whose restless search for identity has, as the time scheme of the novel allows us to see, paralleled Morag's own, is making a journey back to her father's people, with her grandfather's knife as a talisman. But she also wants to carry a Scottish plaid pin of her mother's, and Morag assures her that, when she is "gathered to her ancestors," Pique may have it as well. And then, symbolically, Pique will recover the birthright that Lazarus Tonnerre and John Shipley, the original possessors of the knife and the pin, and both exiles in their own land, had traded away.

Laurence's *The Diviners* is a noble work with obvious flaws. In it, Laurence probably touches on most of the ideas she wants to express, most of the values she wants to affirm before she falls silent, but at a cost. The novel contains far too many characters, some of them, like McRaith, important to the theme of the book, but dull as individuals. It has far too many obtrusive narrative devices, and while they were no doubt carefully considered, they produce a book much less impressive than the novel Laurence now considers naive in narrative form, *The Stone Angel.* But Laurence will probably not be surprised if the critical response to *The Diviners* mixes respect for the scope of her effort with disappointment at its flaws:

> Sure I'm ambitious . . . *extremely* ambitious, because — Heavens, let's not deceive ourselves — to try and get down some of the paradoxes of the human individual with everything that has gone to influence their life — their parents, the whole bit about history, religion, the myth of the ancestors, the social environment, their relationship with other people and so on — even to *attempt* it means attempting the impossible.

and she concludes, quoting Graham Greene:

> For the serious writer, as for the priest, there is no such thing as success.[15]

NOTES

[1] Quoted in Marci McDonald, "The Author: All the Hoopla Gets her Frazzled," interview with Margaret Laurence in *The Toronto Star*, 18 May 1974, p. H5.

[2] Margaret Atwood, *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (Toronto: Anansi, 1972), p. 209.

[3] Donald Cameron, ed., "Margaret Laurence: The Black Celt Speaks of Freedom," *Conversations with Canadian Novelists* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1973), p. 105.

[4] Except for *The Diviners* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974), all quotations from Laurence's books are taken from the New Canadian Library (McClelland and Stewart) editions.

[5] Margaret Laurence, "Ten Years' Sentences," *Canadian Literature*, 41 (Summer 1969), p. 14.

[6] Robert Harlow, "Lack of Distance," *Canadian Literature*, 31 (Winter 1967), p. 74.

[7] *Ibid.*

[8] Margaret Laurence, "Author's Commentary," *Sixteen by Twelve: Short Stories by Canadian Writers*, ed. John Metcalfe (Toronto: Ryerson, 1970), p. 71.

[9] Cameron, p. 99.

[10] Robert Fulford, "The Book: It's Fascinating Despite the Flaws," *The Toronto Star*, 18 May 1974, p. H5.

[11] Margaret Atwood, "Face to Face," an interview with Margaret Laurence in *Maclean's* (May 1974), p. 44.

[12] Graeme Gibson, ed., "Margaret Laurence," in *Eleven Canadian Novelists* (Toronto: Anansi, 1973), p. 189.

[13] Did Laurence intend the suggestion of insubstantiality in these names? Skelton, apart from its literary overtones, sounds a little like "skeleton": Morag is getting the bare bones of a culture without the substance. And McRaith suggests "wraith."

[14] Atwood, *Survival*, p. 170.

[15] Cameron, p. 114.

HOWELLS' CANADIAN SISTER

James Doyle

In March of 1873, William Dean Howells wrote to his younger sister Annie to discourage her from making a short story out of a trivial experience she had had while travelling in Canada. The main reason for his disapproval, as appears from his letter, is that Howells had already written up the experience himself. "I acknowledge," he writes, "that it was rather selfish of me to employ that little adventure of yours, but you know your sketch had lain unfinished for nearly two years."[1] While Annie thus dabbled laconically at a literary career, her brother published *Their Wedding Journey* (1871) and *A Chance Acquaintance* (1872), two novels largely set in Canada and involving (among other American tourists) Kitty Ellison, who in the modestly exotic settings of Niagara Falls, Montreal, and Quebec, emerges as one of the many resourceful and independent international heroines who pervade the fiction of Howells and his friend Henry James. As Howells insisted in another letter, his sister provided only the suggestion for his American heroine in Canada, and there is no justification for making a detailed identification between Kitty Ellison and Annie Howells.[2] But Annie did not need the glamour of such an identification, for she had already embarked on a real-life Canadian adventure of her own. If her semi-autobiographical sketch lay unfinished while her brother wrote two novels, there was some reason for her idleness. In the 1870's Annie was busy creating a new life for herself north of the border; perhaps after she settled down as wife, mother, and Canadian, she would be able to give more attention to her incipient literary career.

In 1877, at Quebec City — where her father William Cooper Howells was American consul — Annie Howells married the French-Canadian journalist and civil servant Achille Fréchette, the younger brother of Louis Fréchette, who was ultimately to become known as unofficial poet laureate of French Canada. Various psychological inferences might be made about this marriage of the younger siblings of the leading American and French-Canadian men of letters in

the late nineteenth century; and it is undoubtedly true that Annie and Achille were to some extent drawn together by the similarities in their respective family situations. The basic facts of Achille's career, however, suggest that he was not intimidated by the achievements of his brilliant and popular brother. Initially, he hoped to follow Louis' footsteps as a poet (his narrative poem "Les Martyrs de la foi au Canada" won honourable mention in the Laval *concours de poésie* of 1868, and was published in the *Revue canadienne*), but his ambitions soon turned towards journalism. Shortly after graduating from Laval in 1868, Achille emigrated to Chicago to establish (subsequently with the help of his brother Louis) a newspaper for the small francophone community of Illinois. There he met Annie Howells, recently of Hamilton, Ohio, the young and clever literary editor of the Chicago *Inter-Ocean*. When the Fréchette brothers' enterprise was wiped out by the Chicago fire of 1871 and they decided to return to Canada, Annie was able to follow them, with the excuse of visiting her father in Quebec City and her brother who was established as a writer and editor in Boston. By the time Achille felt prepared to take on the responsibilities of marriage, he had abandoned full-time journalism to become chief translator of the Canadian House of Commons. He and Annie settled in Ottawa, where they remained until Achille's retirement in 1910.[3]

From the 1870's until around the turn of the century, after which she wrote for publication only very occasionally, Annie regularly contributed to various American magazines. For the most part she inclined toward the so-called "domestic sentimentalist" school of popular fiction which exalted romantic love, the virtues of home and fireside, and the domination of resourceful women over well meaning but less capable men. At the same time, she absorbed some of the realist principles expounded by her brother, particularly the emphasis on the ordinary and commonplace experiences of middle-class Americans. Unfortunately, she did not follow William's precepts about the importance of writing from personal experience, and thus she left completely undeveloped the one aspect of her own life which might have provided the most fruitful literary material. Her one attempt at a story based on her Canadian experiences was abandoned after William wrote of the American girl in Canada in *A Chance Acquaintance*. But in spite of its very clear limitations, Annie's fiction is by no means devoid of interest.

Her first significant publication, a short novel entitled "Reuben Dale," appeared serially in the *Galaxy* during the winter of 1874-75. As a first work it is quite promising, especially in its reflection of the new realist trends in fiction. The central situation involves a woman in her late twenties who has been disappointed in love and who marries a much older man to avoid spinsterhood. Shortly afterward, she meets Reuben Dale, a young and handsome army officer recently returned from the western frontier. The conflict and psychological

interest of the story arises, however, not from a conventional representation of illicit love in the manner of nineteenth-century melodrama, but rather from the tension between the heroine's awareness of her sexual attraction to Dale and her recognition of the relative comfort and security she has found with her unromantic but dutiful husband. The best scenes in the novel trace in detail the heroine's growing devotion to the placid course of domestic and social routine, and her acceptance of both the virtues and defects of her husband's personality. But the ultimate direction of the story is towards an emphatic assertion of traditional morality: the would-be lovers are punished by a gratuitously violent catastrophe, even though they have committed adultery only in thought.

The conclusion of "Reuben Dale" also involves a false report of death by train wreck, a plot development which William Dean Howells was to use in *The Quality of Mercy* (1892). Like the American girl in Canada motif of *A Chance Acquaintance*, the train wreck episode is one of several examples of the fruitful exchange of ideas between William and Annie throughout their respective writing careers. This exchange is probably reflected, although indirectly, in Annie's next published work of fiction, a short story entitled "Le Coureur des Bois" which appeared in the May 1876 *Scribner's Monthly*. The immediate inspiration for the story was the latest volume in Francis Parkman's narrative history *France and England in North America*, for Annie took as an epigraph a quotation from *The Old Regime in Canada* (1874) describing the colourful renegade fur traders of New France. But she undoubtedly found her way to Parkman through William, for her attitude towards Parkman's version of Canadian history is similar to that which William expressed in a tribute to the historian in *Their Wedding Journey*. Although Howells had great admiration for Parkman's narrative skill and found in the histories many clues to an understanding of the differences between the United States and Canada of his own time, he rejected Parkman's exaltation of the epic struggle between France and England. For Howells, the most positive aspect of New World history was the fact that the primitive world of the French and Indian wars had been replaced by a peaceful, progressive, unheroic, and essentially democratic way of life. Much the same point, although expressed in a very different way, is made in Annie's "Le Coureur des Bois."

In this story, a young French-Canadian girl leaves her father's farm on the St. Lawrence to marry a renegade fur trader and try to adapt to his nomadic life in the wilderness. The brutishly masculine world of the *coureurs* almost destroys her, and she finally attempts to make her way through the winter wilderness back to her father's house. The possible victory of primitivism over civilization is thwarted by a last-minute rescue from a freezing death after the repentant husband has set out in pursuit of her. The conclusion, with the triumph of what the nineteenth century would regard as female values, is as domestic and sentimental as some of the early scenes of "Reuben Dale," or (to compare great things

with small) the conclusion of *Jane Eyre*. But the story is also a celebration of progress and civilization over primitivism and wildness: a rejection of Parkman's *ancien Canada* in favour of William Dean Howells' America.

AFTER THE LIMITED but promising beginning of "Reuben Dale" and "Le Coureur des Bois," Annie's literary career followed, somewhat like her brother's but on a much smaller scale, a rather eclectic course. In the 1880's she published in *Harper's* a couple of articles on Canada designed to inform Americans about certain unique facets of life in the northern Dominion, and to advertise the attractions of the country as a tourist resort. "Life at Rideau Hall" (July 1881) is a gossipy description of the English governor-general's residence in Ottawa and the brilliant social life associated with it. "Summer Resorts on the St. Lawrence" (July 1884) is a rather snobbish account of the various spas in the Thousand Islands region which attracted the fashionable tourists every summer. Her short stories, with such titles as "A Visit to a Country House and What Came of It" (*Harper's*, Sept. 1877), "Isabel, Elsie, and I" (*New England Magazine*, Oct. 1890), "How Cassie Saved the Spoons" (*McClures*, Sept. 1893), are mostly slight and semi-comic domestic adventures, vaguely resembling in theme and tone the many dramatic farces which William was turning out at about the same time for quick profit from periodical publication and amateur production. In addition, Annie published two collections of short stories for children, *On Grandfather's farm* and *The Farm's Little People* (both 1897).

In other words, Annie developed into an efficient but unremarkable magazine writer, most of whose efforts have justifiably remained buried in the periodicals or limited editions where they first appeared. Only two of her later stories are worth further brief mention. "The Chances of War and How One Was Missed" (*Harper's*, Sept. 1881) is a civil war story which explores defeated illusions and the destruction of a society in dream-like retrospective episodes, and avoids the sentimental ending inherent in the rather trite romantic situation involving a wounded Union officer and a southern belle. Of greater interest, however, and perhaps Annie's best work of fiction, is the brief "Widow in the Wilderness" (*Harper's*, Dec. 1899). Here, the subject is an Indian woman who has been abandoned with her children near a trading post somewhere in the northern wilderness. The story consists of the vaguely sympathetic but uncomprehending comments on the woman made by a group of white men. In the end, they leave a small supply of food near her, which she neither accepts nor acknowledges; and the white men pass on, uncertain of but eventually indifferent to her fate.

The concise and entirely objective representation of the Indian woman recalls

the poems of Duncan Campbell Scott, another Ottawa resident and civil servant with whom the Fréchettes were possibly acquainted. If, as is quite likely, Annie had been reading such poems as "The Forsaken" or "The Onondaga Madonna," she found a literary model which might have provided fruitful compensation for the excessive sentimentality, the simplistic characterization and other faults which derived partly from the influence of her brother's writing, and from her own limitations. But Annie not only failed to develop this line of fiction; after 1900 she published only one short story, and a tribute to her brother on his death in 1920. Her rather abortive literary career reflects two facts: she was essentially an amateur without the all-absorbing commitment which is surely one of the distinguishing features of the true artist, and she was an unoriginal writer who in her best work merely shows a talent for reproducing certain techniques and themes developed by others. Whatever interest her work may have belongs to the obscure corners of literary history where one finds the curious and occasionally interesting stories of the relatives of important authors.

NOTES

[1] Manuscript letter, quoted in Jonathan Thomas and David J. Nordloh, "Introduction," *A Chance Acquaintance*, by W. D. Howells (Bloomington, 1971), p. xxv.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. xxiv.

[3] A brief account of the career and family life of Achille Fréchette is given in Lucien Serre, *Louis Fréchette: Notes pour servir à la biographie du poète* (Montréal, 1928), pp. 173-76.

ONE BOUND, ONE FREE

James Harrison

Struggled and felt the bonds tighten that manacled
Wrists behind the mast at his back; shouted
And watched his words break like waves over barnacled
Heads of rowers he never knew he hated
Till then, sealed in their petty to-fro rocking
Preoccupation with being somewhere tomorrow
Other than where they were today, and blocking
Out the unendurable joy and sorrow
All around them.
Safe from success, allowed
Himself to understand, as a dying
Body poised between being and unbeing
Since birth understands what it has swallowed,
The burden of that song that only he
And Orpheus heard unscathed, one bound, one free.

LIVESAY'S TWO SEASONS OF LOVE

Debbie Foulks

THE CREATIVE INDIVIDUAL often is torn by internal emotional strife. Perhaps such conflict is an indispensable ingredient for sustaining the creative urge. Certainly Dorothy Livesay's *Collected Poems — The Two Seasons* reveals a repeated sense of conflict; one of her major themes involves the contradiction inherent in romantic love. In her poems she vacillates between her desire to be independent, to remain in control of her personal destiny, and her willingness to submit passively to male domination. Her romantic feelings are further complicated by their interplay with her intense interest and involvement in the major social issues and political movements of her time. These two sources of personal conflict repeatedly furnish themes for the poetry Dorothy Livesay wrote over a fifty year span of literary productivity.

Prior to her most concentrated period of political activity in the 1930's, Livesay's poetry exhibited a steady romantic emphasis. The intimate verses which Livesay wrote in her late teens and early twenties display a precocious poetic talent and a fervent emotional intensity. They also reflect her obsessive reliance on the conventional sex roles which were taken for granted in the society in which she lived. They reveal her personal vulnerability to the destructive effects of these stereotyped patterns of love relationships. Yet, even in this youthful period, the poet occasionally shows a resentful reaction against these constricting influences.

Livesay's early poetry indicates that she prides herself on such typically feminine characteristics as a spontaneous and instinctual reaction to love rather than the objective, abstract or intellectual approach which she considers to be typically masculine. This attitude is exemplified by "Interrogation," where the poet challenges her lover to unreservedly reciprocate the honesty of her advances, to accept the reversal of sanctioned male-female proprieties. "If I come unasked," she queries, "Will you mind?/Will you be there/Ready?" If she is the aggressor, the initiator of a sexual encounter, will her lover accordingly respond without equivocation — "forget what . . . [he] ever learned of etiquette?" She

berates the lack of impulsive spontaneity in her lover when he rationally puts off the hour of their meeting from early morning until noon, a deliberateness which she attributes somewhat sarcastically to the alleged differences beween men and women. "Certainly: well/I've known/Men need to be alone — (Why Am I not the same?/Is love a single game?)"

"The Difference" also displays her irritation with her lover's slow, premeditated approach to love. She is exasperated with his failure to respond quickly and intuitively to emotions. She feels that his attitude betrays hesitation and a lack of intensity of feeling towards her. She is indignant at the insecurity which his lack of passion engenders. She compares his love-making to a scientist's study of the seasonal cycle of a tree's foliage. "As if," she declares, "The beauty of the thing could be/Made lovelier or marred by any mood/Of wind . . . as if/All beauty had not sprung up with the seed." She is incensed that he is slower to embrace their love than she; that he wants to know all her qualities before making a commitment, afraid that their relationship could be marred by changing moods. Such hesitant love she asserts is self-defeating and deprives the act of love of its most intense enjoyment. "With such slow ways you find no time to love/A falling flame, a flower's brevity." Similar feelings are delineated in "Sea-flowers . . . that sway in water/Beyond the arm of light . . . are cold and waxen and remote,/ Drifting downward out of sight." She concedes that his contemplations may be more complex, theoretical and thus immutable, but she feels that they are inferior to the tanglible beauty of the concrete joys of life. "Thus though they be eternal/ Unheeding suns or snows/I choose the trembling flower of earth/That breathes before it goes."

Woman viewed as the passive recipient of the masculine energy force is a theme displayed in an early poem, "The Forsaken." The poet's identification of herself with a stone, "grey with water's passion," invokes the self-image of a passive, lifeless victim of powerful natural forces which assume masculine form. She and her feelings often are personified in the form of inanimate objects. The erosion of stone by wind and by the sweep of water might be taken to represent the general social forces and antagonisms which batter our lives, but the use of the word "kiss" in conjunction with the wind seems to connote a male image.

An embryonic awareness of the situation of women in her society is evident in her early poems, if sometimes indirectly. "Song of the Multitudes" contains many allusions to the boredom, monotony and dissatisfaction inherent in housework. The woman in this poem rationalizes her dreary domestic chores which would become bearable if only her longing for a communion with nature were satisfied. "Then I could turn within, turn to my work/in the house and learn these other ways," she reasons. Meanwhile, her husband's work traps her in the city where she depends solely upon him for consolation and companionship. His return home becomes the highlight of her day. Because she wishes to live with her

husband, she must comply with the lifestyle which his job dictates. But her resignation to her situation is fraught with resentment. The love which she shares with her husband becomes a painful prison. Alone with her torment, she addresses her invective to the mental effigy of her oppressor. "Therefore I say in all the beggar prayers/You do not hear," she silently addresses him, "love is a prisoned place,/Love is a darkness with one blinding lamp/To lighten it, where ever our tired eyes/Must gaze unswervingly or else we lose/All sense, all sight. Therefore I cry alone,/Let me go, let me fly away, let me find peace/Untroubled by the warring of two selves." She feels her nature as a woman repressed, as she is beset with these contradictory emotions. "So . . . /By little things you hold me from the door/," she states; "Bid me to sing within when some far voice/Integrally my own is hushed, is dumb." Today thoughts such as these have become commonplace in the quest for release from sexually stereotyped roles.

The Lawrencian image of the male as the embodiment of darkness and power, the female as passivity and light recurs throughout her poetry. "Bartok and the Geranium" provides a colourful example of this symbolism. She, the geranium, "preens herself in the light," which is sufficient for her natural growth, but the genius of "Bartok" requires a more expansive area. "He whirls/Explodes in space/ . . . Not even can he be/confined to the sky/But must speed high/and higher still/From galaxy to galaxy . . . She's Daylight/He is dark." She remains serene, calm and benevolent, in contrast to his wild intensity. When his madness is spent, her patience triumphs. Thus, the two spectral opposites of male-female interaction, one dynamic and aggressive, the other resilient and yielding are depicted as compatible, complementary, and mutually sustaining forces.

Enduring love for the poet often is presented as an elusive and unattainable goal. "If It were Easy" conveys her wish that she could secure strength and "succour" from love as easily as she can gain warmth from a fire. If only she could "creep close up to love," then she would be shielded from "Cold heavy evenings/Storm-bound, outside the door." "Alienation" expresses her chagrin at being excluded from the "radiance" of the male domain. She implies that she would be content merely to hover around her lover as a moth around a candle! A poem in the "Garden of Love" conveys a yearning for her lover to "Shape her" to his "will," since she has "failed" and "hated" loving him. She pleads with him to "Forget the hurt [she] had not meant to do." Similar displays of passivity and self-effacement recur throughout her poetry.

Livesay's dependence on self-definition through earning male esteem emerges in poems such as "Chained," "Dusty" and "Time," where the poet is unable to reconcile herself to the end of a relationship. Despite physical separation she yearns to retain a spiritual tie with her former lover, a "bond," that still defies " . . . angry scrutiny." She continues to sense her lover's intangible presence even after his departure from her immediate life. "I think you buried — /Turn and

see/Along my path/Your shadow dart." The memory of her lover is compared to an old glove that continues to fit despite its age and disuse. In imploring her lover to "not seek/The letting-go," she seems to dread the time when she will no longer please him, when he will regard her as a "couch, a chair/You've grown too used to, and admire no more/Its modern flair." When he is gone, Livesay is still haunted by her lingering attachment to her absent love: "I turn to run through fields alone/Or seek companions in a wood — /I find your feet before me gone/I am made captive where you stood." Even in her bereavement love is tenacious, and in her distress she empathizes with whatever similar feelings her former lover may be experiencing "because," she admits, "pain has the face of love, even while it strikes." She laments her inability to dispense with the persisting sentimental remnants of a lost love. She bemoans the fact that she has not "learned . . . after this terrible, beautiful loving/The way of love/When it goes."

Her anxiety that love will lead to a shattering psychological crisis also is evident in "Climax." Here she finds herself an instrument of her lover's will. Her heart is "stretched on wires,/tight, tight . . . even the smallest wind . . . /Can set it quivering — /And simply a word of yours,/However slight,/Could make it snap," — a catastrophe which seems inevitable. Afterwards, love's warm illusions are replaced by an attitude of cold detachment. "Consideration" outlines the ensuing bitterness: "A biting analysis/of one another . . . " followed by the sort of stilted conversation which displaces intimacy during a time of emotional severance — "A placing of words/On little shelves/As one touches delicate china." When separation becomes necessary, she leaves his arms, — "to break/ Joy's fearful snare."

The positive attributes which she sees in love relationships often are counterpoised with their paralyzing negative aspects. Livesay realizes that her idealization of the male is a demeaning force that compels her against her will. Love is a cage in which she becomes a powerless captive. Yet her painful addiction is compensated by the immense joy she feels while safely under the male aegis. The poet's fears of conspiracies within the night, of the darker, malevolent elements of nature are allayed by the soothing presence of her lover: "My safety is with you, who lie asleep." The "guardian angel" which Livesay had imagined as a child is replaced by her lover and she is at the mercy of harsh realities only when he is absent. "Song for Departure" describes a temporary separation from her lover as making her "common again/To have common care." Love is the passion that transforms all banalities, all mundane objects and events into a meaningful whole. Yet like a "fever," its external flush of excitement conceals an inner core of potentially debilitating disease, of insecurity and dependency. "Weapons" details her efforts to protect herself from the enervating effects and uncertainties of this consuming dependency by her creative efforts and by more reliable and impersonal intellectual satisfactions. Here Livesay refers to her

persistent efforts to remain creative despite her adverse personal circumstances and frustrated loves. The tools of her craft — pen, desk and reading lamp — are the weapons that sustain her fight to comprehend and define "A dark [she] never learns to know."

On the other hand, Livesay also is obsessed with the struggle to figuratively penetrate and possess her male lovers. She displays constant frustration at what seems to her to be the implacable, inviolable nature of the male. "Symbols" portrays male affection as a house in which the poet dwells. The poet views the man as a base of security, a self-contained unit which remains intact in spite of her attempts at occupation. She feels that she is "importunate without." She is indignant at being barred entry from the man's essential centre of being. When she finally manages to realize her intention, either by manipulation of some weakness in the male, or by intense insistence and pressure, she discovers that her object has eluded her. Once "inside" the "house core," she finds either that her lover is a "bare, dusty room," or that he has "fled." By being overly eager and intense, she has transgressed the subtle laws of male-female interaction. She has destroyed the relationship by plunging too quickly. Once again she is barred from the sanctuary in which she longs to take refuge.

DURING THE ECONOMIC upheavals of the 1930's, Livesay's preoccupation with love no longer dominated her poetry. She concentrates instead on the crucial social issues of the time, giving a diverse and comprehensive picture of the dreary conditions arising from the depressing and the marginal existence of the majority of people during this decade. Nevertheless, the tone of her poems remains assertive. The poems are defiant of the political forces responsible for this historical disaster, strong in their advocacy of socialism, and rousing in their aspiration for revolution. The occasional references to personal love in her poems are now put into a more general social perspective, or at least tempered by an awareness of their relative insignificance. Personal tribulation is dwarfed by overwhelming catastrophes of a universal implication.

"Comrade" reflects upon the pleasant memory of one night Livesay spent with a man, an isolated episode which brought her great fulfillment "love more sweet than I/Have ever known; without an aftertaste." This single incident of consummation was devoid of egotistical concern. Years later, upon meeting the man, she sees him as he now appears — changed from the vivid youth of her memory into a "Grey man/Without dreams,/Without a living or an overcoat." The image is not a physically attractive one, having shed its romantic illusions. Nevertheless, because they are both committed to a similar political goal, and are united in a humanistic love for people, their shared objectives draw them together more

firmly than a physical embrace. "Sealed in struggle now," they are closer than if their "bodies were sealed in love." Although romantic symbolism still finds frequent use, as in "I Never Hear," the poet seems more relaxed. She has become reconciled to realities which include more than one aspect of the human condition. Her social commitments seem to have displaced those of a more personal sort.

The political climate of the forties and fifties appears to have shaped some of the poet's strength. Her dismay at the social situation tempers her personal relationships. The course of political developments did not evolve along the lines which the poet had envisioned. The first years of this phase are those of the second World War, a period that is distinguished from all others not only because it provided an unremitting malevolent enemy who perpetrated atrocities, but also because it ushered in the atomic bomb. With the deployment of this bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, one of the most horrific chapters in human history was begun — one which through McCarthyism, the advent of the "cold war," and numerous colonial wars, particularly in Vietnam, continues into the present. The love portrayed by Livesay in this period is more than a compensation for personal mishaps and minor hardships. Now love serves to assuage the anxiety and agony occasioned by more terrible tragedies and imminent dangers. "Day and Night" illustrates her use of love as an antidote and refuge against the harsh and pervasive social realities which arise amidst the chaos of war. The poet calls "to love/Deep in dream/ . . . Be with me in the pounding/In the knives against my back/Set your voice resounding/Above the steel's whip crack." This poem also shows her anguish at the prevalence of death on such a massive scale. She views love as a numbing anodyne while her own personal life absurdly continues: "It seemed a poor thing to do, to wed . . . /When Spain cast a ballot and was outraged, raped/In an olive grove, by a monastery wall. It seemed no time for love." Yet in the last of her "Seven Poems for Duncan," she accepts somewhat reluctantly the fact that "Life goes on . . . No hazard here, for we/Like sleepers plunging deep/Into recurring waves of dream/Cannot awake from that connected bliss./ We are asleep on the long limb of time." Thus love is the dream that counteracts a nightmarish reality. "Lullaby" depicts the poet as hungry for love's sedative: "drug me and dope me,/dress me with love's fine hand/Till the end of our time."

Throughout the fifties, Livesay's insight into the social position of the female is becoming more concrete and definite, and provides a leitmotif which counteracts her reliance on love as a distraction from social reality. Despite the social forces, pressures and conditionings of her society, and her role as wife and mother, she is attempting to define her identity as an independent woman. The joys of child-bearing (as in "Carnival" and "Serenade of Spring,") and the security of the family structure, were rewarding, but also involved time-consuming responsibilities. Her new focus of personal concerns tended to displace her outside

political interests. However, she displays a growing awareness of the inherent limitations of the maternal role. She begins "The Three Emily's" (referring to Brontë, Dickinson and Carr), with the assertion that she pities their lack of fulfillment through male-female union and motherhood. The three are "crying" in her head, and walk alone. In the second verse she acknowledges their unencumbered freedom. Their liberty was intellectual, natural and spiritual, and the world which they had interpreted so beautifully became their love. "Their kingdom was the sky/ . . . From wandering lonely they could catch/The inner magic of a heath — /A lake their palette, any tree/Their brush could be." In the third verse she still insists that each one, "separate man in woman's form," is jealous of the poet's fulfillment as a mother. She imagines them reproachful of her gift for creating human life. However, she realizes that because of her familial commitment some of her artistic freedom is denied her, and "only for a brief span/Am I an Emily on mountain snows . . . / And so the whole that I possess/ Is still much less." In the final analysis, the whole that she possesses — the combination of motherhood and creativity — seems inferior to their perfect concentration on and integration into the realm of artistic creation. Because they are liberated from the conventions and demands to which Livesay is subject, they "move triumphant" through her head and she is the one uncomforted. The "Other" provides a stronger reiteration of this theme, but now it is transposed to a realization of man's constricting effect on women and some of the attitudes responsible for perpetuating this relation. Most men do not see beyond the feminine stereotype, one which defines a woman in terms of her capacity and willingness to meet their needs and desires. They fail to recognize her inherent human potential. To do so might threaten the sanctity of their "property." Men, Livesay declares, "prefer an island/With its beginning ended . . . /A road/circling, shell-like/Convex and fossiled/Forever winding inward . . . A woman/Held as a shell/ On a sheltering island." Livesay states that she can no longer comply with these limitations and be an introverted refuge, symbiotically dependent on her male companion. She, the poet asserts, is "a mainland" ranging from "Upper country to the inner core." She challenges anyone to show her some facet of life she has not experienced in the expansive travels of her thoughts and the comprehensive range of her emotions. Her final affirmation of her integrity is that she no longer needs to prove her capacities to others. The experiences she has had are totally beyond their comprehension. She consists of components that "none shall trespass:/None possess." The kind of "mainland" she embodies defies definition because of "its inaccess." A woman whose thoughts and interests are so expansive is too much for the majority of men to handle. Livesay's independence and her growing disillusionment with her original vision frequently find expression in these later poems. "Wedlock" proclaims her existential awareness of the soul's ultimate isolation, even in love and her longing to overcome this separation.

Despite the unity of their flesh, "two lovers must remain/ . . . in each alone . . . prisoned yet/As soul alone must thresh/in body's net;/And our two souls weep inwardly." "On Looking into Henry Moore" forcefully expresses this theme. Here the poet portrays the conflicting characteristics of maleness and femaleness as embodied in their opposing socially prescribed symbols. "When I have found/ Passivity in fire/and fire in stone . . . " the synthesis of the two will yield a complete self-contained person. "Female and male/I'll rise alone . . . /self-extending and self-known." Like the legendary Phoenix, she will be resurrected and stand "anew, alone . . . /Devoid of flesh . . . this hasty dress." She would then be "one unit/As a tree or a stone/Woman in man, and man in womb." A being uniting the features of both sexes, she then would be self-sufficient and truly independent. While this extreme and dramatic device for release from the constraints of "human bondage" seems a rather alienating solution, it sharply defines the poet's yearning to be a "whole self," to attain a kind of completion she usually finds only incompletely in sexual intercourse.

Livesay's later poetry also reveals her increasing social cynicism, an attitude engendered by her disillusionment with the Russian Revolution and its repressive policies under Stalin's rule, and by the ensuing hostilities rampant in the atmosphere of the cold war. Her poems express a more general and diffuse humanitarian philosophy. She prophesies a bleak future for contemporary youth in "Generation 1955." In her view, they are living hedonistic lives, oblivious to social issues. In the economic upsurge and material affluence which followed the war, she charges that they parasitically "lapped it to their lips." They are ignorant of the empathetic bonds which united participants in the earlier social struggles in which the poet was involved. "They never learned;" she mourns, "They see us, but are blind."

"After Hiroshima" is an admission of defeat. The visions and revelations have vanished. "The beating rain bears no message for man; . . . No hearts dare listen while fear stirs the womb. What the right hand doeth, stirring the pot of evil/ The hydrogen brew; the left hand knows not, is sleeping." The effusive lyricism which once characterized Livesay's imagery is being replaced with apocalyptic visions that are more compatible with the times. The poet finds but a vestige of hope for the future in the vigilance of the succeeding generation; "Only a child's belief, rocked in a cradle of doubt,/Can prophesy our safety; illuminate our hope." However, lacking confidence in the form which future political solutions may take, she seems to retreat from the vanguard of the social struggle. Her despair is evident in her pain at foreseeing the future of her grandchild's world: "It's going to take a hundred years to annihilate a people/to bitter the ricefields with blood/dry Delta's water into salt — / a hundred years/so our grandchildren growing up/and their children/Will be humans who feel no pity/for the green earth/ and who look upon procreation/with indifference . . . /When I see my

grandchild running/in a game of football/his helmet is empty/in his right arms/ he carries his head." Thus pessimism pervades her vision of mankind's potential for survival. Though still militant, her writing subsides from the revolutionary invective in which she had once been so eloquent. Perhaps these social factors contributed to the re-emphasis on love which appears in Livesay's later poetry. The intensity of her response to love seems to vary with the fluctuations in her personal and social outlook.

The images of her later poems remain couched in idealized terms and her evocation of love and nature are sometimes lofty. However, she displays a new maturity in assessing love, and seems reconciled to certain immutable discrepancies between her ideal visions and expectations and the limitations and frailties of human beings. She leaves her vision of perfectible love to her dreams, where " . . . no faltering/Grew between your tree and mine." She becomes more objective, even in her personal relations, and can examine her own emotions and put them into a perspective that helps somewhat to alleviate her former compulsion to possess her lover, and her reluctance to relinquish him. "Letter at Midnight" and "The Morning After" show her growing recogntion of the seeds of her restlessness with a provocative bravado that has hitherto been absent, at least in such bold form. She is not begging, but rather demanding that her lover "Behave to [her] with love," for she is a "country field/ untamed/Restless for rider." The terrain of her mental and physical nature is complex and full of traps that need careful exploration and contemplation. Her former self-effacement is replaced with pride. She is a challenge that "Only a thorough-bred could hurdle . . . Only a bold surefooted beast/would venture." She is inured to the pain of desertion by a lover. She has become hardened, even cynical. She now lives a life "On the fringe of feeling — . . . Hard sense builds me a door/Where I survey the morning." She can now see beyond immediate personal pain to the persistent continuity of life. She recognizes that "Tears will not build again the house long planned/Nor man the bastion."

LIVESAY'S RENEWED dependence on love, in her more recent poems, is accompanied by expressions of greater physical need, although her tone becomes more cynical, and she is wary of emotional pitfalls. Her awareness of the implications of the ageing process heightens her concern with her mortality. An alerted sense of the imminence of a vague but malevolent fate prompts a regression to her former image of a passive compliance in love. These later love poems are preoccupied with physical description, and convey a tone of pathetic eagerness. However, they deal honestly with a period of the poet's psychic

development which is characteristic of many women in our society who are past middle age.

"Notations of Love" describes Livesay's struggle to surmount the signs of ageing. In spite of the "crow's feet" around her eyes, the "skeleton of leaves," her lips stay fresh, "allowing the tongue to unsheathe its secret skin and bolt the lightning in." Clearly the ageing process has not quenched her sensual requirements. Her descriptions of her own body are highly critical when she is not subject to the admiration and appreciation of a lover. This self-deprecation is exemplified by "Sorcery," a poem in which she depicts her features as witch-like; her breasts "withered gourds," when they are not the objects of a lover's caresses. "Not to be touched and swept by your arm's force," she tells her lover, "gives me the ague/ turns me into a witch." She implores the "engineer of spring" to restore her vitality, to "magic me/out of insanity/from scarecrow into girl again." "Journey East" longingly laments that " . . . you cannot hold what vanishes . . . the essence is . . . to catch the bird in season/hold, hold a snowdrop/ . . . then let it go."

"The Touching" typifies Livesay's renewed but somewhat demeaning and self-conscious approach to love in her later poetry. She gains release from her disquieting realizations only in the dissolution of her identity into that of another. She requests her lover to shelter her "from the shiver of dawn." She urges him to physically penetrate her "Again gently/so the penis completing me . . . is my second heart beating . . . /I drown in your identity." "Four Songs" reveals the poet's perceptive self-awareness of the forces that motivate her sexual relationships. "Give me the will you said/and in return/take from my fill of passion . . . You did it from design/I from compulsion." "Eve" finds her jubilant that her powers of attraction are not yet extinguished: "In fifty seconds, fifty summers sweep and shake me — / am alive!/I can stand/up still/hoarding this apple/in my hand." "The Skin of Time" gives voice to her vigorous resistance to the constrictions which society imposes on ageing women. "How can I cry, when I/Fell timeless, ageless, high/As heaven's hemisphere/How can I cease to live/Borne by your breath my dear?" In a sense these passionate proclamations from a woman in her sixties are a spirited and defiant rebellion against social convention. They reveal a sensitive vulnerability which renders the poet all the more human.

In the final analysis Livesay's opposing visions of love are never fully resolved. She fails to achieve the self-containment she so envies in a man. She is dependent upon love as a panacea, for escape from her despair over social and personal realities. The void within her is most substantially filled when occupied by male love both physically and emotionally. It is most deeply satisfied when she feels that the male has responded with equal intensity to her feelings. This reveals the vicious cycle which love can become for her. The male also is subjugated to a degree of dependency and unhappiness, because the woman can only compensate for her feelings of enslavement by her desire to consume him. "I've swallowed

you/through all my orifices/you are jonah'd now/fast within me." Although she will grant the male the satisfaction of pretending she believes that he makes love to her solely for "self-seeking ease," able to "take me or leave me there/Just as you please," she is jubilant and sings that his need for her is deeper than physical satiation. She compensates for her bondage to his "will and mind" by assuring herself that he is equally dependent. This is contrary to her earlier strivings for a liberating love.

The persistent dichotomy of Livesay's romantic attitude is most explicit within the framework of a very recent poem, "The Operation," where love is depicted first as a healing process and her lover as the doctor "appraising how to create from bone and flesh/a new woman." However once his mission is accomplished, the "intimate flashing bond" dissolves and she is released from his "care." The love which revitalized her is now portrayed as a disease. "Love was indulged in as excuse/for going to bed/we transmitted kisses/and I caught between my thighs/the antibody." From her convalescent window she visualizes her lover as a "well man/free of opposites," free of the burden of retrospective emotion. In her desire to free herself from these malingering symptoms of a finished love affair she invents images of self-destruction. "I decided to complete the operation/ tear myself into four quarters." She finishes on a desperate note of yearning for freedom from the malady of love: " . . . for now you are . . . gone/and I must measure me/O let me grow/ . . . to reach a dazzled strangeness/sun-pierced sky." Despite the evidence that she was continually frustrated by her failure to attain this aim, and that in many instances she remained divided, her poems are a forceful and accurate record of both the inner and outer conflicts of "women in love."

The difficulty of these struggles for a woman with such an abundance of intelligence, perceptivity and insight, a woman who achieved an enviable creative output, accentuates the tenacious grip of enculturation, the pervasive conditioning of our social structure. If what Livesay defines as "the pull between community and private identity that is characteristic of being a woman" wrought such havoc in her own psychological existence, one can imagine the effect it has on those women who remain unenlightened victims of a "locked-in role."

HANGING

Elizabeth Gourlay

On the bare blackened tree one apple alone.
All her golden companions withered and gone.

ETHEL WILSON'S NOVELS

David Stouck

ETHEL WILSON'S FICTION is remarkable for a mannered simplicity which hides both artful invention and philosophical complexities. The characteristic grain of Ethel Wilson's imagination and a clue to her thematic concerns are revealed by her style. In a letter to Desmond Pacey she says that what she likes best is "the English sentence, clear, unlush, and unloaded . . . the formal and simple sentence."[1] Yet, while the "simple" style forms the matrix of her prose, her writing is at the same time full of stylistic quirks — curious repetitions, illogical statements, ellipses, lacunae — which arrest our attention, direct us to something unspoken, covert. The failure of men to communicate with each other is one of the obvious thematic corollaries to such a style, the gaps in the writing constituting palpable forms of arrest and discontinuity in the flow of human relationships. Indeed Mrs. Wilson gauges in her fiction the many ways by which human contact is broken — through guilt, shyness, fear, jealousy, will to power, hate. The recurrent drama in her novels and stories is the withdrawal from familiar surroundings of the central character who sets out on a lonely quest of self-discovery. This character is usually a woman who has no mother and who, deprived of this intimate bond of family, must establish on her own a link with the larger human community. The pattern is mythic and familiar, but what, I think, involves and disturbs us as we read Ethel Wilson's fiction is a certain *froideur* in the narrative voice, an implied emotional preference for retreat, evasion, and distance, which is always in tension with the author's vision of unity and her theme of human responsibility.[2] In the following examination of Ethel Wilson's novels I want to indicate the range of the author's imagination (she writes family epic, pastoral, satire, romance) and the actual complexity of her prose which, in a deceptively simple style, grapples with the most difficult of problems — human relations.

In Ethel Wilson's first novel, *Hetty Dorval* (1947),[3] the theme of human community is struck at once in the epigraph from Donne, the familiar "No man is an Iland, intire of it selfe." The heroine of the title is a spoiled, attractive

woman whose life illustrates the very reverse of Donne's counsel: Hetty Dorval islands herself in a world of selfish comforts and amusements and leaves behind her a long string of broken commitments. Her story is narrated by Frankie Burnaby, a young school girl who is initially infatuated with Hetty, but who eventually comes to see her without romantic illusions. At the outset of this pastoral novel Frankie is going to school in Lytton, a pioneer ranching community in British Columbia, when the mysterious Hetty Dorval takes a bungalow near the town. In a few brief scenes (much in the manner of Willa Cather's "novel démeublé") the author defines the relationship of the young girl and the older woman. In the eyes of young Frankie the various images of Hetty (on horseback, watching a flight of wild geese, in the cottage surrounded by her elegant furnishings and library of "yellow" books) fall together to create a forbidden, romantic picture of sophistication and freedom. This is enhanced by Hetty's unwillingness to become involved in the mundane affairs of the small town.

But Hetty's romantic image gradually tarnishes with time. After a period of school in Vancouver, Frankie goes to live in England and on the ship crossing the Atlantic she and her mother encounter Hetty Dorval deep in intrigue to marry a wealthy old gentleman. Previously Mrs. Burnaby had confided to her daughter that an ugly story had followed Hetty from Shanghai to Vancouver. Frankie thinks of Hetty's refusal in Lytton to become involved in the community and at the same time she thinks about Donne's admonition. What was once for Frankie a romantic manifesto — " 'I will *not* have my life complicated' " — now becomes a complex problem for the girl: " 'No man is an Iland, intire of it selfe;' " said Mother's poet three hundred years ago, and Hetty could not island herself, because we impinge on each other, we touch, we glance, we press, we touch again, we cannot escape. "No man is an Iland. Who touched me?" Hetty appears again in Frankie's life, this time smashing up the friendships Frankie had made for herself in England. Hetty's selfish and thoughtless ways are this time thoroughly exposed; the final revelation is that her chaperon, Mrs. Broom, whom she has always treated with impatience and indifference, is really her mother. When Hetty finally leaves London for yet another marriage, Frankie finds that after what she has been through with Hetty she cannot bear to have her life complicated either.

The "complications" and community theme dominates the book, but in Ethel Wilson's fiction the evasion of human contact ("Who touched me?") forms a persistent counter theme. The style of *Hetty Dorval*, typically, conceals much of the experience it describes. Notice in this excerpt from the first paragraph the number of words and phrases repeated:

> Mr. Miles, the station agent, was in his shirt-sleeves; the station dog lay and panted, got up, moved away, lay down and panted again; and the usual Indians

> stood leaning against the corners of the wooden station (we called it "the deepo") in their usual curious incurious fashion, not looking as though they felt the heat or anything else. The Indians always looked as though they had nothing to do, and perhaps they had nothing to do. Ernestine and I had nothing much to do, but school was out and supper wasn't ready and so we drifted over to the station.

The repetitions of course crystallize the feeling of monotony in a small town on a hot summer afternoon, but they also create, here and elsewhere, an opaque surface in the style, as if the author were to say, "this is all I am about to show you." (This technique of limited disclosure is the principle of style in Mrs. Wilson's first published piece of fiction, "I just love dogs."[4] The repetition of events and dialogue gives this brief sketch the innocent charm of a children's story which contrasts sharply with the deliberate ambiguity of the story's title.) In *Hetty Dorval* the repetitive style and the surface allegory of involvement and responsibility veil an emotional drama of initiation involving the relationship of mothers and daughters, older women and young girls.

Hetty initiates Frankie into life's disillusionments (a process symbolized perhaps by the Fraser River that muddies the Thompson), but why, we must ask, does Frankie come to dislike Hetty so intensely. Possibly it is because her relationship with Hetty is the first in a series of guilty involvements. Frankie's early affection for Hetty is guilty because it is secretive. Frankie's mother forbids her to keep company with a woman of dubious reputation and the girl is forced to play "peeping Tom" in order to keep sight of her heroine. Hetty in fact supplants Mrs. Burnaby in Frankie's affections: their rivalry is reflected in their parallel affinity for the secluded bungalow which Mrs. Burnaby eventually owns. Frankie for a time deserts her mother's love and this is perhaps why the emotional climax of the novel is a scene in which a rejected mother's love is revealed. Hetty's heartlessness towards her mother thus has guilty implications for Frankie. There is also another reason, I think, why Frankie becomes embittered towards Hetty and that is because she eventually becomes her rival for a young girl's admiration. When Frankie goes to England she becomes protectress to a girl named Molly Tretheway. Frankie dreams of some day marrying Molly's brother Richard, but in the meantime it is Molly's innocent and gentle charms that attract and sustain her. Hetty, however, threatens to take Molly away from Frankie by marrying Richard, and to her chagrin Frankie discovers that Molly feels exactly the same way about Hetty as Frankie once did herself. The final showdown between Hetty and Frankie comes after the revelation by Mrs. Broom. Hetty leaves her mother and shares Frankie's bed for a night. This scene fulfills the emotional logic of those earlier scenes set in Lytton in which Frankie feels such a strong attraction for Hetty, no small part of which was her singular physical beauty. But Frankie's emotions are poisoned with guilt and jealousy, and when she gives Hetty a smack on her "round silken bottom" she renounces the life of desires and involvement

altogether. The author makes us aware of Frankie's negative action in the final prophetic glimpse of war approaching. Hetty has gone to live in Vienna with another man, but around that city in 1914 there has grown up a wall of silence — the negation of man's humanity writ large.

ETHEL WILSON's second novel, *The Innocent Traveller* (1949),[5] is very different from *Hetty Dorval*; it celebrates in loving fashion the life of a woman who lives to be one hundred years old, but who learns less about living in that time than does Frances Burnaby in one night with Hetty Dorval. The subject of this novel is the author's personal family history. It is a memory book and as the first fifty years of Topaz Edgeworth's life set in Victorian England are being narrated, we are continuously reminded, by means of interpolated speech from later years, that these are family stories being remembered. *The Innocent Traveller* is probably Ethel Wilson's most artful novel; certainly it affords the greatest pleasure of her books. The character of Topaz Edgeworth, effervescent, irrepressible, superficial, is one of the most delightful and authentic creations in Canadian literature. The book is a pastoral of innocence celebrating the domestic joys of family and old age rather than youth and erotic love.[6] There are unforgettable comic episodes such as great-grandfather Edgeworth's courting at the age of ninety and later Topaz, also in her nineties, thinking she has had a stroke when her bloomers drop around her ankles on the street. The whole world, as seen through the eyes of Topaz and the older members of the family, is providentially ordered and secure. Great-grandfather Edgeworth, drowsing in the sunshine of his garden, is content because "his world was a good world. His Queen was a good Queen. His country was a good country . . . His family was a good family and God was good." For Topaz's saintly sister, Annie Hastings, the world is a reflection of the divine order of the next world, while for Topaz herself it is completely defined by the existence of her father, Queen Victoria and Mr. Gladstone. Even the Canadian wilderness in this book has the childish and animate aspect of a pastoral landscape — with mountains that "skip like rams" and "the innumerable laughter" of the sea. But above all it is the sense of Family which gives the world its unity.

The escapist pleasures of celebrating an innocent and uncomplicated past, however, are undercut by the narrator's preoccupation with Time and Meaning. We are told, in a particularly effective metaphor, that gradually the members of the family "slipped one by one with acceptance or amazement through the strangely moving curtain of Time into another place." Death is softened through the various strategies of pastoral style (the death of Topaz's mother becomes a comical ritual of dress and decorum; Topaz's father and sister die of ripe old age;

the tragic death of Topaz's niece, Rachel, is simply not described), yet its inexorable presence is an important part of the family history: *Et in Arcadia ego*. But more disturbing than the passage of time with all its attendant anxieties of change, illness and death is the difficult question of life's meaning. The author describes bubbly Topaz with such evident pleasure, but there is always the nagging problem of the significance of her life — of what "use" was she? Mrs. Wilson writes: "Aunty's long life . . . inscribes no significant design. Just small bright dots of colour, sparkling dots of life." In the course of the narrative she is described as a "warbling unimportant bird," a creature as ephemeral as "the dimpling of the water caused by the wind" and, most memorably, as a water glider who skims along the surface of life "unaware of the dreadful deeps below." When she has died she is but "a memory, a gossamer." Seen with something like a cosmic eye, Topaz looks foolish and pathetic in all her commotion of living.

As an innocent, Topaz has within the reference of her family a kind of comic sanctity. But outside that framework she is a creature of little worth — without resources, without imagination or character. In a finely crafted chapter titled "The Innumerable Laughter" the author exposes that innocence by taking Topaz (one of Mrs. Wilson's motherless orphans) on a brief journey into isolation. The chapter opens with a splendid comic sequence: Topaz, who is holidaying with the family at their summer cottage, discovers nine young men swimming naked in the ocean. She dashes off to tell Rachel and says she wishes she could identify them: " 'If they would only turn right side up I might be able to see'." (Mrs. Wilson is capable of delightful bawdy humour: when Topaz's father decides to re-marry, we are told in a series of *double entendre* that there is "Something Up," that he is going to Switzerland, which on the map is "pink," and that he is going to bring back a "piece.") Topaz's experience at the beach is followed by the threat of Yow, the devilish Chinese cook, to put a snake in the supper stew. That night Topaz decides to sleep outside on the porch alone. She takes all the accoutrements of her civilization with her — shawl, walking stick, umbrellas, biscuits — but gradually the sounds of the night begin to frighten her. She thinks of the bearded decorum of her Victorian father and relations and then of the nude men swimming. She imagines she hears a flute and "panics," and as the etymology of that word implies, she fears a revelation that will turn her mad. One can hardly miss the sexual implications of this experience. The images from the day (the nude men bathing, the invincible Yow with the snake) culminate in a metaphor of sexual terror: "Inside the white satin body of Topaz . . . there opened a dark unknown flower of fear . . . Her whole body dissolved listening into fear which flowed into the terrible enclosing night." She rushes inside the cabin and Rachel, to quiet and comfort her, massages her body gently; gradually her innocent world of family is restored. In this chapter we see that Topaz's innocence is not the Blakean kind that perceives order and harmony in all things,

but is pathetically dependent on a social order which is evasive and artificial. Topaz is not exposed in this manner again; she remains a water glider who never probes beneath the surface of appearances. But her innocence has been discredited and in the images of Topaz being absorbed at death like a drop of water in an endless cycle or like one of the gulls going out to sea, there is something just a little sad, for we are made aware not only of her insignificance but that as a human being she never experienced the fullness or unity of being alive.

Ethel Wilson's next book opens with the image of a golden dawn yielding to "mere flat day" and that image defines the change in mode from *The Innocent Traveller* to *The Equations of Love* (1952).[7] The two novellas which comprise *The Equations of Love*, "Tuesday and Wednesday" and "Lilly's Story," are both works of the satirical or critical imagination; they take their direction not from memory and nostalgia but from a cold eye cast on contemporary reality. "What is the Common sort of Terewth" is the question Mrs. Wilson poses in the epigraph from Dickens and the answer in the first story, "Tuesday and Wednesday," seems to be that man is vain, sentimental and pretentious and that it is his egocentricity ironically which saves him from recognizing the meaningless, destructive void that surrounds him. The story describes two days in the life of several lower-class characters in Vancouver. For Myrtle and Mort Johnson it is the last two days of their life together, for Mort is about to die in an accident. Around these two central figures are grouped several others: Myrtle's aunt, the radiant Mrs. Emblem; Myrtle's cousin, the neurotically withdrawn Vicky Tritt, Mort's friend, Eddie Hansen, and others whose names — Pork, Flask, Mottle, Uren — imply character type in the manner of Dickensian satire. The narrator is superior and constantly exposes the empty and pretentious nature of her characters. She says, for example, that Mort spoke "with a simple-sounding nobility which had no basis in fact." Indeed characters like Myrt and Mort are minimal in their humanity and the motiveless conduct of their lives is reflected in flat, throwaway statements like "because he had to get up some time or other, he got up" — an example of Mrs. Wilson's simple style with its calculated intention.

The lives of Myrt and Mort, structured by only a very basic routine, are almost without pattern or purpose, and yet, as if to emphasize this by contrast, Mrs. Wilson creates an intricate literary design around Mort's death. Mort (his name — the French word for *dead* — is prophetic) plays with the idea of death the day before his fatal accident. He accompanies his friend Pork (his name suggests flesh and mortality) to the funeral parlour where the latter works, and there he has a sentimental vision of Myrtle lying in her coffin. That night he takes her some flowers left over from a funeral. Again, the next day, he implies to Mr. Mottle at the greenhouse where he is looking for work that his wife is suffering from a fatal malady. Mort's own death is precipitated by his trying to save a drunken friend from drowning. That final struggle is witnessed in preview, as it

were, through the eyes of Vicky Tritt who, on her way to church, sees Mort struggling to keep Eddie upright as they make their way along the street. Mort dies while Vicky is at the service and the description of him with outstretched arms over the water trying to save his friend invites a comparison with Christ.[8] Mort's death as a hero becomes formally ritualized when Vicky several times tells her story if how Mort valiantly dove into the water, hands pressed together, to save Eddie's life. For Vicky, Mort's heroism is more Hollywood than Christian (the common sort of truth?) and when she arrives back at her boarding-house, another of the tenants, taking in the wash, asks appropriately if she has seen a good show.

Vicky Tritt holds a special place in Ethel Wilson's fiction for the extended description of her lonely, cheerless existence is paradigmatic of countless lives depicted or suggested in the course of Mrs. Wilson's writing. Vicky lives alone in a boarding-house; her room is lit by one bare bulb hanging from the ceiling. She has a job in a notions shop, but except for church services and an occasional visit with her cousin, Myrt, she has no other human contacts. Her one pleasure in life, carefully meted out, is to read a movie magazine each week — an image of life lived vicariously and at a complete remove from other people. The shyness and pathetic anonymity of this girl-woman are contrasted sharply with the "golden effulgence" of Mrs. Emblem, whose "geniality and human success emphasized to Victoria May her own inadequacy . . . her lack of the gorgeous possession — popularity." The description of Mrs. Emblem's room with its fussy, ornate furnishings and softly glowing lamps is a kinky vision of something grotesquely pink and maternal. Yet even for the personable Mrs. Emblem the best part of the day is when she is alone, tucked up in bed, reading "the Personal Column" of the newspaper. Mrs. Wilson is fascinated with people whose lives are completely anonymous and depersonalized, people who live in lonely retreats with only the barest essentials of existence. In this novella, as well as Vicky Tritt, there is Maybelle Slazenger whose flat is filled with a family of dolls, and there is "old Wolfenden," a recluse who lives in the hollow tree in Stanley Park. In the short stories there are lonely characters like Mrs. Bylow, the old woman in "Fog" whose monotonous existence is relieved by reading the ads in the newspaper, and the blind man in "Beware the Jabberwock, my son . . . Beware the Jubjub bird" who, after losing his sight, lives in a little cabin by himself rather than return to a life of dependence on his wife and friends.

The central figure in "Lilly's Story" can be grouped with the above; her life too is minimal in terms of human relationships. Lilly is another of Ethel Wilson's orphans (her mother abandons her when she is still a girl) whose life becomes a lonely journey. Mrs. Wilson tells us that the story began with a chance phrase about Yow's girl friend in *The Innocent Traveller*: "she made other connections."[9] The phrase teased the author's imagination, perhaps because "connec-

tions" between people in her fictional world are so tangential and tenuous at best. The emotion which prevents Lilly from establishing lasting relationships with others is fear, an animal instinct which keeps her "on the run" all her life.[10] The different phases of her life are marked by experiences of terror. When she is a small child living with her mother in a wretched cabin in Vancouver, she is stopped and questioned by the police about her part in delivering stolen goods. Afterwards she has nightmares and whimpers " 'The police! The police!' " in her sleep. Her first lover is Yow, the Chinese cook, who brings her gifts stolen from the Hastings family and starts her running in earnest from the police. On Vancouver Island Lilly lives temporarily with a Welsh miner named Rannie who fathers her child. When her daughter Eleanor is born Lilly resolves to bring up the child respectably and moves to another part of the Island where she will not be known. She fabricates a story about her past and her husband's death; her constant fear now is that she will be recognized by someone and exposed.

Her life at Comox, where she is housekeeper for Major Butler and his wife, is almost a pastoral retreat for Lilly; despite Butler's amorous advances, which Lilly quickly rebuffs, there is peace and security in this life where order and good taste prevail. The Chinese pottery figures of a horse and a hound on the mantelpiece (hunters in still life) reflect something of the aesthetic harmony that can be achieved in life. At the same time Lilly is not allowed to forget that life consists of real hunters and of the hunted — she watches Eleanor's kitten stalking a robin who is trying to kill a snake while overhead flies an eagle ready to pounce on the kitten. For Lilly it is the nexus that spells fear. Later, when she hears her daughter described casually as "the maid's child," she decides to move, this time to the Fraser Valley where again she hopes to live unknown. Lilly is like a frightened animal seeking a secure hiding place in which to raise her child. Her protean existence, shaped by her fears and by her desire for conventional respectability, is recorded in her many names: born Lilly Waller, she calls herself May Bates when she runs from the police; then to create a father for Eleanor she becomes Mrs. Walter Hughes; then finally and legitimately she becomes Mrs. J. B. Sprockett. From the Fraser Valley Lilly is forced to run once again; after twenty years, Yow turns up at the hospital where Lilly works, and so she flees on a train for Toronto. Yow's reappearance is one of those many coincidences in Mrs. Wilson's fiction which point up the gaps rather than the "connections" in human relationships. In Toronto Lilly, working as a chamber-maid, meets a widower, J. B. Sprockett, and we are told that eventually they will marry. Lilly appraises her new situation in a characteristic way: "She would be without fear; nothing, surely, could touch her now. There would be security and a life of her very own in the house of Mr. and Mrs. Sprockett." Lilly does not change fundamentally, for when she decides to tell Mr. Sprockett about her past, her sole confession is that she is wearing a wig. There is almost an element of self-parody

at the end of the story when the author tells us sentimentally that the couple will be married in the "United" church.

Fear estranges Lilly from other people, as it does the women in "Hurry, hurry" and "Mr. Sleepwalker." For another group of women, including Hilda Severance in *Swamp Angel*, social relations are anxiety-ridden because of shyness and lack of self-confidence. Mrs. Wilson has never written an artist's story, but we glimpse something like a self-portrait in the heroine of the short story "Mrs. Golightly and the First Convention." In a transparently simple, almost confessional style ("Mrs. Golightly was a shy woman. She lived in Vancouver. Her husband, Tommy Golightly, was not shy. He was personable and easy to like") the story describes the plight of a Canadian woman attending a convention with her husband in California. Her husband who has "the gorgeous possession" of social ease, leaves his wife to get on as best she can with the other wives. In spite of her desperate desire to conform and please, situations become awkward, speech faltering. At one point during a car ride arranged for the wives, Mrs. Golightly escapes her situation temporarily by glorying in the sportive freedom of the seals in the ocean. (Animals are frequently an index to intense emotional experiences in Ethel Wilson's fiction.) The story comes to a climax when, to her grief, Mrs. Golightly insults a woman twice, only to discover later that the woman is not aware she has been injured. The supposed victim says to the apologetic and fumbling Mrs. Golightly " 'You are too earnest, my child'." Mrs. Golightly then recognizes the necessary superficiality of society and its operations, which gives her confidence but which ironically disappoints her just a little as well.

In *Swamp Angel* (1954),[11] a quest romance, Ethel Wilson develops her theme of running from human responsibility into a complex and subtle piece of symbolic fiction. Here, to catch the ebb and flow of experience, to create a surface texture in the prose that mirrors the formless and chaotic aspect of reality, the style is strikingly elliptical and fragmented. Chapters do not always appear to follow one from another; scenes are juxtaposed beside each other without linear connectives in the narrative. The failure of human beings to connect with each other is reflected in tiresome monologues, in speeches tortured with slang and in chapters which consists of only one clipped statement or an advertisement from the newspaper. But beneath this jarring, rough-textured surface there is a pattern of interconnected symbolic incidents which, carefully considered, have much to say about human relations, especially the dilemma of modern woman.

The plot itself reveals little. A woman named Maggie Vardoe, living in Vancouver, leaves her husband and starts life over as a cook at a fishing lodge in

the Interior of British Columbia. Her success and satisfaction with her new life is marred by the jealousy of the lodge owner's wife. In the meantime Maggie's husband is rejected by a series of women and her friends, the Severances, continue their lives in the city — Hilda Severance marries and her mother Nell, after a little accident, dies. A more rewarding approach to the novel is through its title, which is also the book's central symbol. As Pacey has pointed out, the two images yoked together suggest the range of human experience — from the primal and inchoate emerges the human form divine.[12] Even more suggestive is the title's historical origin explained in the novel's epigraph: " 'Swamp Angel. An 8-inch, 200 pound . . . gun, mounted in a swamp by the Federals, at the siege (1863) of Charleston, S.C.' " The gun had its origin in a battle fought to prevent the abolition of slavery and this is the direct clue. The Swamp Angel is an image of power, and its possession and relinquishment symbolically describe a drama of will and power in the novel.

The Swamp Angel belongs to Nell Severance, "a powerful and wilful old woman" who was once a brilliant circus juggler. The gun symbolizes her past triumphs, but it is still a potent weapon in the present for it represents Mrs. Severance's power over her daughter Hilda. For Hilda the gun is an emblem of her unhappy childhood, a childhood filled with shame at the fact that her mother was a vagabond circus performer. In the elliptical, non-sequitur style of the novel we are given a vivid glimpse of Hilda's confused relationship with her mother: "She loved her mother dearly and hated her a little. People should not be so powerful. People should not always succeed, and so she made tea." The gun also carries the traditional phallic association of male authority. In her interviews with the rejected Eddie Vardoe Mrs. Severance twirls the gun absent-mindedly but menacingly; in bed she keeps it pressed against her thigh. The gun enters directly into the symbolic action of the novel when Mrs. Severance falls and sprains her ankle on the street. The gun slips out of the old woman's grasp and a small scandal ensues involving the police. Mrs. Severance feels she is no longer strong enough to control its destiny and so she sends the Swamp Angel to Maggie for safe-keeping.

The transfer of the gun opens up the significance of Maggie's story. Maggie is Nell's spiritual heir for, like Nell, she is a strong woman who wants to be free and to have control over her own life. (Maggie's type is anticipated by Rachel in *The Innocent Traveller* who feels such a release of the spirit when she reaches the open spaces of Western Canada. Rachel imagines herself running a farm "with everything dependent upon her and upon her industry." She would have no husband or lover. Maggie is also one of the author's motherless women who, we are told, was "brought up from childhood by a man, with men" and "had never learned the peculiarly but not wholly feminine joys of communication, the déshabille of conversation. . . . ") Our first impressions of Maggie are wholly posi-

tive. She is calm, intelligent, resourceful, and when we meet her husband Vardoe, a truly unsavory individual, we admire her courage in breaking away. Her strong, creative instincts are such that she can build up the fishing resort in one season, forget her tragic past in New Brunswick (her husband, child and father have all died), and before the first season is over at Three Loon Lake, save from death a wealthy businessman, Mr. Cunningham, who offers her an attractive position in the East as a reward. But we must ask whether Maggie's actions are entirely admirable; remembering that Mrs. Wilson is fascinated with the meshing of contraries we can expect a negative side to the heroine's character as well. Why, we should ask, does Maggie break her marriage vows and leave Vardoe? Certainly he is an unpleasant man and the two- and three-sentence chapters about his life after Maggie leaves (chapters 28-35, 37-38) encapsule brilliantly the emptiness of his character. But from Maggie's point of view the one reason given and dwelled on is the "nightly humiliation" she endured while she lived with Vardoe. She thinks of her marriage as a period of "slavery." When she is preparing to leave Vardoe she thinks only of freeing herself from the outrage of "the night's hateful assaults." But if Maggie does not enjoy the marriage bed, then why did she marry Vardoe in the first place? The implied answer is that she was attracted to his weakness. Vardoe, the poor boy with "spaniel eyes" working in her father's store, physically unfit for the army, seems to have attracted Maggie by those very qualities which elicited pity in others. Perhaps Maggie subconsciously felt she could dominate this man and that marriage would not mean any loss to her freedom. We are told nothing about Maggie's first marriage to Tom Lloyd, but the one time she thinks of him her thought is cold and almost comic in its impersonal stylized nature: "Dear Tom, casting, perhaps, with a crystal fly for a quick jade fish in some sweet stream of heaven." Vardoe, however, turned out to have very conventional ideas about marriage (male supremacy, female subjugation) and so Maggie leaves him.

Swamp Angel is peopled largely by strong, forceful women and weak men. In the world Maggie creates for herself at Three Loon Lake, her contact, Henry Corder, is old, the proprietor, Haldar Gunnarson, is crippled and Alan Gunnarson is still a boy; in her service are the biddable Chinese brothers, Angus and Joey Quong. Only the jealousy of Gunnar's wife spoils Maggie's haven, for it curbs her freedom (she must constantly watch herself so that Vera's suspicions are not roused). The irony is that Maggie does not want Vera's husband or her son; she prefers no social obligations or responsibilities. Yet Vera's jealousy creates them. "Human relations . . . how they defeat us," thinks Maggie.

Mr. Cunningham's offer of a position in the East is the turning point in the novel. Will Maggie "run away" again from a difficult situation (she has run from New Brunswick and from Vancouver) or will she stay with the Gunnarsons and try to make their relationship work? Mrs. Severance's visit with Maggie at Kam-

loops is decisive. The old woman accuses Maggie of escaping to the woods from the reality of human relationships: " 'Everything of any importance happens indoors' " she insists. Then she urges Maggie to recognize that all things are interconnected in " 'the everlasting web' " of creation and the Donne theme "No Man is an Iland" is sounded again in Ethel Wilson's fiction. Earlier in the novel Maggie had an intimation of this herself when she considered how many people were involved in designing and creating the English crockery Mr. Cunningham had sent her as a gift. In this conversation Mrs. Severance admits that, preoccupied with her juggling and her mate Philip, she had lived on an island herself and had made Hilda suffer — binding her to an unhappy childhood and a quest for maternal love. Only after the old woman has given up the gun (symbol of selfhood and power) does Hilda begin to live a "normal" life. The latter marries Albert Cousins, another of the novel's gentle men, and though Mrs. Severance describes Albert as a "lamb" she also tells Maggie that "he rules [Hilda] with a rod of silk" — perhaps Ethel Wilson's ideal vision of the marriage relationship.

The final scene in the novel shows Maggie, after Nell's death, throwing the Swamp Angel into the lake; the act is coincident with her decision to stay at the lodge and strive for a workable relationship with the Gunnarsons. The reminder of Excalibur in this gesture and of the grail in Maggie's yellow Chinese bowl (her "household god") suggest a specifically Christian dimension to Maggie's quest, as does her instinctive act of compassion in kneeling and rubbing the feet of both Mr. Cunningham and Vera Gunnarson when they come out of the cold waters of the lake. But the larger significance of Maggie's throwing away the gun is her relinquishment of power and freedom in order to become part of the web of creation, part of the human community. As the gun settles to the bottom we are told in a repetitive style that now knits things together that "the fish, who had fled, returned, flickering, weaving curiously over the Swamp Angel. Then flickering, weaving, they resumed their way."

DEATH IS THE AGENT of separation and loneliness in Ethel Wilson's last published novel *Love and Salt Water* (1956).[13] This novel is a "romance" in the sense of Shakespeare's last plays where characters are tested through a series of misfortunes and misunderstandings before being fully integrated into society. As in every one of Mrs. Wilson's major pieces of fiction the journey motif is the central element of structure. Here it is coupled with a symmetrical narrative design that takes the heroine, Ellen Cuppy, from the unity of a happy family life to almost total isolation and then back again into the larger fabric of the human family. The novel begins with an idealized picture of family life (only

Ellen's brother-in-law, Morgan Peake, nearly twenty years older than his wife Nora, is a little out of place). On their walks through Stanley Park the members of the Cuppy family make plans for the future, talk about the ocean voyage they will take some day together. Then, suddenly, Mrs. Cuppy dies. When she finds her mother's body, Ellen's first instinct is not to tell anyone (as if this would prevent it becoming true) and this impulse marks Ellen's gradual withdrawal from the confidences of other people. Her nickname is "Gypsy" and she becomes a wanderer. Ellen and her father, to distract themselves from grief, take a long Christmas voyage on a freighter from Vancouver through the Panama to Europe. Death again brushes Ellen and hardens her toward life. On the boat there is a beautiful boy-sailor ("A Botticelli angel in bathing trunks") whom the other sailors tease mercilessly. Ellen feels much pity and affection for him, but in a heavy storm on Christmas Day the boy is swept overboard and lost at sea. Also on the voyage Ellen becomes alienated from her father, who meets and eventually marries one of their fellow-passengers.

Love and Salt Water is divided into three parts. In the second part several years in Ellen's life are compressed into a series of brief chapters in which we watch her grow more isolated from other people. During the war she serves as a Wren in England, almost losing touch with her sister and friends in Vancouver. When she eventually comes back she meets and becomes engaged to Morgan Peake's temperamental half-brother, Huw. But Ellen lives the carefully-examined life; she recognizes Huw's bad temper and fears loss of self-possession for herself, so she breaks off the engagement and goes to live in Saskatoon. There she works for Mr. Platt, an old man who also lives without friends or family, who boasts he has " 'neether chick nor child' " and even depersonalizes Ellen by calling her "Miss Um." He represents the furthest point reached by Ellen in her withdrawal from human concourse. But while she is working for Platt, she meets George Gordon which marks a significant turning point in her life. Gordon, who has withdrawn from society because of the failure of his marriage, is at first only interested in Ellen as a tennis or skating partner — they share the detached camaraderie of sportsmen. But his respect and affection for Ellen gradually changes to love and he slowly warms Ellen back to a personal and intimate involvement in life again.

Ellen's reintegration into the human community is effected appropriately in Part III by means of events in the life of her family (just as, earlier, family events had caused her withdrawal). After Mr. Platt's death — in this light symbolic — Ellen goes back to Vancouver for a long visit with her sister, Nora. At first she is highly critical of Nora's smothering affection for her son Johnny, but when she rediscovers that Nora's first son died, that her second son is mongoloid, and that little Johnny is going deaf, she learns to be sympathetic towards her sister's family, especially to Morgan who regularly visits the retarded son. The death of Morgan's cousin Maud Sneddon (a pathetic little figure like an aged Vicky Tritt) also

makes Ellen think about the human condition and the need for companionship among men in the face of death. On a visit to happily married friends living in the Okanagan Valley, Ellen becomes convinced that it will be right for her to marry George. But in the nature of "romance" Ellen and George are to be tested before that marriage can take place. In a sequence with parallels to the first part of the novel (we are reminded of mothers and of tragic death in the sunset that suggest Rossini's "Stabat Mater" and Johnny is referred to as a cherub which recalls the boy-sailor described as a Botticelli angel) Ellen is responsible for a boating accident in which Johnny is nearly drowned. The brutal contraries of love and salt water — the frailness of human life plunged into the destructive element in which we live — are permanently impressed on Ellen by an ugly scar on one side of her face. Ellen's "sea change" becomes the test of love for George Gordon. Ellen goes to the train station to meet him, accompanied by Morgan who is now possibly the most loved member of the family; George's love for Ellen proves genuine, for we are told that her disfigured cheek was repellent to him, but that he kissed her "out of love and pity and delight." The novel comes full circle as Ellen becomes part of the human family, and she and George begin their "happy chequered life together."

As epigraph for *Mrs. Golightly and Other Stories* Ethel Wilson quotes from Edwin Muir: "Life '. . . is a difficult country, and our home.' " The line reflects the creative tension in Mrs. Wilson's art: feelings of estrangement circumscribed by reasonable and philosophical acceptance. Human relations, their complexity, their fragility, is Ethel Wilson's intimate theme and an oblique, elliptical style is the special signature of her prose. But to say this does not invalidate or detract from the philosophical vision of her novels. Rather Ethel Wilson's "modern" sense of the universe as an ungoverned void carries conviction because it is approached by characters who, for complex, sometimes aberrant reasons, have lived for a time in isolation and without motive. Similarly her insistence on the humanistic values of love and faith and her almost mystical preoccupation with unity, "the everlasting web," assert as antidote the powerful human need of community.

NOTES

[1] See Desmond Pacey, *Ethel Wilson* (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1967), p. 179. The letter is dated July 12, 1953.

[2] In his book (*op. cit.*) Desmond Pacey has made a study of the large themes in Ethel Wilson's fiction focusing particularly on her humanist's concern for love and friendship in a universe that frequently reveals itself to be destructive and without purpose. H. W. Sonthoff's article, "The Novels of Ethel Wilson," *Canadian Literature*, 26 (Autumn 1965), pp. 33-42, is more concerned, on the other hand, with the unique qualities of tone in Ethel Wilson's writing.

[3] *Hetty Dorval* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1947). All quotations are from this edition.

[4] Most of Ethel Wilson's stories are collected in *Mrs. Golightly and Other Stories* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1961). All quotations are from this edition.

[5] *The Innocent Traveller* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1949). All quotations are from this edition. W. H. New has a fine discussion of irony in this novel in *Articulating West: Essays on Purpose and Form in Modern Canadian Literature* (Toronto: New Press, 1972), pp. 83-92.

[6] For a description of this literary mode see Renato Poggioli, "The Oaten Flute," *Harvard Library Bulletin*, 11 (May 1957), pp. 147-84.

[7] *The Equations of Love* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1952). All quotations are from this edition.

[8] Pacey also notes this parallel. See *Ethel Wilson*, p. 116.

[9] See Ethel Wilson, "The Bridge or the Stokehold?" in *Canadian Literature*, 5 (Spring 1960), p. 46.

[10] Pacey lists the animal images used to describe Lilly. See *Ethel Wilson*, pp. 121-22.

[11] *Swamp Angel* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1962). All quotations are from this edition. For a study of the journey into isolation in *Swamp Angel* see John Moss, *Patterns of Isolation* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974), pp. 129-49.

[12] Pacey, "Introduction" to New Canadian Library edition of *Swamp Angel*, p. 10.

[13] *Love and Salt Water* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1956). All quotations are from this edition. Frank Birbalsingh in "Ethel Wilson: Innocent Traveller," *Canadian Literature*, 49 (Summer 1971), pp. 35-46, sees this novel as central to Mrs. Wilson's vision of chaos lurking beneath the smooth surface of events, of man living "on a brink."

WINTER

Peter Gellatly

Mount Rainier is burning
An ember-heap
On this frosty morning
Vivid over the city
A doomed Pompeii
Or portent
Of coming rain
Far in some
Satellite's eye.
Slowly the colour
Diffuses (harms
Delayed, defused)
The sky is golden-grey
Grey alone, then
Black and ordinary.
The city starts its day.

from OUT THERE: EMILY CARR

Tom Marshall

Emily vanished
into forest

Perhaps she found
her way to
the lost island
where Indian
power is stored

Perhaps the island
is in us
all of us who are

at home here

The shaman left
his power
like a mist
on the island

white on green

the island that
grows in each
of us now

the same but
different an
archipelago called

Canada: our green
rain-forest
cliff and
prairie wind-fall

water's
foam:

white nada our
nothing that is
also everything

review articles

IN THE NAME OF DRAMA

Ann P. Messenger

A Bibliography of Canadian Theatre History 1583-1975, compilers John Ball and Richard Plant. Playwrights Co-op.
CAROL BOLT, *Playwrights in Profile: Carol Bolt*, intro. Sandra Souchotte. Playwrights Co-op.
CAROL BOLT, *Maurice*. Playwrights Co-op.
CAROL BOLT, *Shelter*. Playwrights Co-op.
DAVID FRENCH, *One Crack Out*. New Press, $5.95.
PETER MADDEN, *The Night No One Yelled*. Playwrights Co-op.
LEN PETERSON, *Burlap Bags*. Playwrights Co-op.
GWEN PHARIS RINGWOOD, *The Rainmaker*. Playwrights Co-op.
J. MICHAEL YATES, *Quarks*. Playwrights Co-op.

IF CANADA ever produces a Shakespeare (or even a Neil Simon), the Playwrights Co-op will have had a hand in it. Great playwrights do not appear in isolation. They emerge from crowds — standing head and shoulders above their lesser fellows, it is true, but surrounded and supported by the multitude. The multitude in turn is supported by a vital theatre life — actors, directors, stages, audiences — to the health of which publishers make an essential contribution. If plays are not available, they cannot be read and performed, and the whole structure breaks down. Publication mattered less in Shakespeare's little London, but only publication can cross the miles of Canada — and the rest of the world.

Since its founding in 1972, the Playwrights Co-op has become the most prolific publisher of Canadian plays. Any citizen or landed immigrant has the right to send in his script to be read; if it is accepted for publication, he becomes a member of the Co-op with all the rights and privileges and services appertaining thereto. Currently, slightly over one hundred playwrights belong. Together with the Dramaturge and his staff, they seem to be an extremely active group. They gather at membership meetings and conferences and seminars; they read each other's work at a series of Reading Rooms established from Vancouver to Halifax; they organize to protect and proclaim their rights as artists. The centre of all this activity is the Co-op publishing house itself in Toronto. Not only playscripts emanate from its offices but also a catalogue with supplements, a newsletter to members (with emphasis on opportunities for marketing plays), lists of plays suitable for children or high schools or community theatres, a quarterly *National Playlist* which summarizes and evaluates published and unpublished new work, and all sorts of announcements and flyers designed to sell scripts and books. The Co-op is taking over the arrangements for playwrights on tour to speak in colleges

and universities; it acts as an agent for playwrights who want its services; it sponsored a competition for plays by and about women; it co-ordinates the advertising and information about children's plays nation-wide; it helps to promote the purchase of Canadian plays by libraries and school districts. All these activities (and there are more) are supported by funds from various sources, including the Ontario Arts Council, the Metropolitan Toronto Council, and the Canada Council. Like all co-ops, the organization is non-profit. It exists to serve Canadian playwrights and the cause of Canadian drama. The need for such service is real, and the Co-op is fulfilling its multifarious tasks with great energy.

Publishing plays is its main business. The books will remain when all the bustle of other activities has faded away. And there are many books, mostly large, paper-covered typescript volumes, some with pictures on the cover, produced with only a few typographical errors or other mistakes. Each contains information about the playwright; most give information about dates of first performance, the cast, and so forth. Somewhat more of this more systematically done would be welcome. And some of the plays are good — which raises the question of quantity versus quality. Obviously, the Co-op does not publish every script it receives; judgments about quality are made. But one could argue that, in its zeal to give Canadian playwrights as much exposure as possible, the Co-op may be doing them a disservice by publishing too much that is mediocre and thus lowering the over-all standard for the entire body of work. The Co-op's own *National Playlist* is amazingly honest about the new plays it evaluates. Some recent ones are called "strained," "rambling," "somewhat dated"; they sometimes "lack central purpose" and suffer from "trite writing." But most of them have been published. The other side of the argument is that as much as possible should be made available to readers and audiences in order to expand and encourage the Canadian theatre in all its many aspects. Out of this quantity, quality, though not guaranteed, will have a chance to emerge. This seems to be the philosophy of the Co-op, and I think that, at this time, it is the right one. When the recently reborn Canadian drama reaches adolescence, it will be time enough for it to shed some of its baby fat.

A step in that more critical direction has already been taken with the publication of *Playwrights in Profile: Carol Bolt*, with an introduction by Sandra Souchotte, the first of a projected series of anthologies. This volume contains three plays: *Buffalo Jump*, *Gabe*, and *Red Emma*. The tone of the introduction is analytical and rather carefully neutral, but Souchotte puts her finger precisely on Bolt's strongest and weakest spots. The strengths include her use of interesting historical material, her comic playfulness, and her sense of the possibilities of fluid, Theatre-Passe-Muraille-style staging. Herein also lies the greatest weakness: the plays tend to be loose collections of lively scenes strung together with songs and mime, with characters ranging from the occasional sensitive portrait (Gabe has some interesting dimensions) to the more frequent trivial and one-dimensional figures. It is a rare delight to find a sense of humour in a playwright who has some considerable degree of political commitment; perhaps Carol Bolt will eventually learn how to make those two qualities mature together into a strong and clear vision. At the end of her introduction, Souchotte looks forward hopefully to "mature new works," gently indicating the state of Bolt's development at the present time.

Bolt's *Maurice* has the same faults as the plays in the anthology. Designed as a semi-musical for a young audience, its

political message is crude, evading the real issues of the Roncarelli affair in favour of broad, scatter-shot attacks on Maurice Duplessis. Historico-political children's musicals can be first-rate drama; John Arden's *The Royal Pardon* and *The Business of Good Government*, which belong to that curious genre, deal with profound issues of human freedom and responsibility. Bolt shows no such depth, though the opportunities are there in her material. *Shelter*, too, making a mixture of political and feminist points, has no real seriousness or depth of thought beneath the sometimes amusing nuttiness of its surface. The useful biographical notes in the anthology show that Bolt was born in 1941. It's time she grew up.

Gwen Pharis Ringwood, on the other hand, grew up some time ago. For some forty years she has been writing, teaching, and directing, but her name is not a household word today because she lives and works in the depths of British Columbia and because very few of her plays exist in print. *CTR* has reprinted *Dark Harvest*, written in 1939, and now the Co-op reprints *The Rainmaker* (also known as *Hatfield, the Rainmaker*), which was first produced in 1945. While most of the Co-op's scripts are contemporary, a number of older plays appear on its lists because Canadian theatre does have a past, a past which is worth preserving and studying as dramatists today search for their own roots. The roots go deep in this play; its prologue and epilogue are set in 1945, but the body of the play chronicles one day in May 1921, when the Rainmaker came to Medicine Hat and set up his 30-foot towers to draw down water from the heavens for the parched farms. There is a kind of carnival, there is a marriage nearly breaking, and finally there is rain, which saves the crops and the marriage. It all adds up to a play well worth preserving.

Len Peterson's *Burlap Bags* is another older play (first copyright 1945), again worth preserving, and again making use of a frame story. But there the similarity ends. The frame scenes show a pair of roominghouse rubbies discussing the funeral and worldly effects (some of which they have stolen) of a strange man who lived down the hall. They begin to read through his papers and the lights go down. The body of the play takes place in the strange man's mind, as various characters, shapes, and voices move through his disturbed consciousness. He has refused to wear a burlap bag over his head as most other people do, so gradually his clear perception of reality drives him mad; when he finally requests a bag, there are none left, so he cries, "All right, no burlap bag! I'll go on seeing. (More subdued.) Go on watching the absurd world, that looks quite sensible through a burlap bag." But shortly after that, he turns on the gas. The message is perhaps too clear, but the use of the stage as a psychological place was daring in 1945 and is still interesting.

The stage becomes a pool-hall in David French's *One Crack Out*, with only minimal interest in the psychology of the central character. French has his admirers, who find this play a powerful drama and a brilliant evocation of pool-hall atmosphere. That atmosphere, aided by a lot of rough language, is about all there is to this play. If it weren't for the four-letter words, one would almost expect commercials to appear between the scenes. French has broken out of the Displaced Newfie pattern, but not into anything better. However, New Press has picked up this play and offers an attractive edition for $5.95. The Co-op encourages other publishers to take on its scripts, which then cease to be printed in the Co-op format. The principle of involving as many other publishers as possible in getting Canadian plays into print

is a good one, but, in this case at least, it appears to put somewhat of a strain on the reader's wallet.

Four-letter words appear frequently in Peter Madden's *The Night No One Yelled*, where they are used with care to create character and feeling as well as atmosphere. Less familiar words or words used in less familiar ways are glossed at the beginning of the play: "screw" is a prison guard, "duster" is a western novel, and "fissnorkis" is "need you ask?" It all comes clear as the prisoners, each separately caged, reveal their sexual frustrations and fears, their different feelings about the outside world, the tensions within and among them. Until the end, nothing happens, but as in David Storey's *The Contractor*, the shifting cross-talk is fascinating. Janis Rapoport, writing in *Books in Canada*, compares this play unfavourably to John Herbert's *Fortune and Men's Eyes*; I think it's better—unpretentious, linguistically right, and genuinely gripping.

Most of the Co-op's scripts have been written for and produced on the stage. J. Michael Yates' *Quarks* is an exception: *The Net* and *Search for the Tse Tse Fly* were commissioned by the CBC for television; *The Calling* is a radio play. As the author says, all his plays are "irrealistic," which makes their appearance in print especially welcome. One wants to linger over the layers of significance in dialogue that sometimes appears quite straightforward but never is. All these plays want re-reading — and one can't repeat a TV or radio show at will. Yates has much to say about the nature of consciousness, about power, and about communication, among other things. It is stimulating to join him in his search for quarks, those elusive sub-atomic particles

of the human mind that just might exist.

Generally speaking, the Co-op is to be congratulated for its publication of this batch of plays, especially for the format of the Bolt anthology. But the *Bibliography of Canadian Theatre History 1583-1975* is a great disappointment. No one will ever be completely satisfied with a bibliographer's decisions — what to include or exclude, how much to annotate, what basic principles of organization to use. In this instance, the problems are compounded: exactly where is the dividing line between "theatre history" and "drama"? between French and English theatre? The real strengths and weaknesses of a bibliography will appear conclusively only after it has been used in the field, so to speak, for some time. But even a superficial glance at this one reveals serious weaknesses.

The *Bibliography* is divided into sections, and within most sections the items are listed chronologically by date of publication and then alphabetically by author within each year's group. This makes sense in the section on the Stratford Festival, which one might very well wish to study by reading each year's crop of comments. Otherwise, this kind of chronological listing is pointless. In Section B, "History to 1900," subsection "Early Theatre to 1700," an essay on the 1694 *Tartuffe* affair (one of several) precedes an essay on a "first night" in 1606 simply by virtue of its date of publication. Surely the date when an event occurred is more important than the various subsequent dates when it was written up. Some of the sections are so brief that the problem of finding things, created by this system, is minimal; in the larger sections, it is serious. Another strange result of chronological listing is the double entry of reprints; for example, all of the essays in W. H. New's *Dramatists in Canada* (1972) which are reprints appear twice. Why? Macready's diaries and reminiscences appear four times (plus one wrong entry in the Index) because four different editions are mentioned, which appeared at four different dates. These items are in Section B, "History to 1900: Tours and Visits"; Irving's tour appears in Section J, "Biography and Criticism: Actors, Actresses and Playwrights." Why? This section is perhaps the greatest mish-mash in the book. Essays which are clearly lit crit are listed cheek by jowl with biography, interviews, and a variety of other kinds of material. It includes an item about David Freeman, "Determination never to go back," from *Time* (Canada). Another item from the same page of that edition of *Time*, about *You're Gonna Be Alright, Jamie Boy*, is listed in Section C, "Twentieth Century English Canada," under the name of Geoffrey James; there is no note or cross-reference in the Index to indicate that Freeman wrote that play. Section C, like J, is a great catch-all, which makes the absence of annotation especially infuriating. What, for instance, is the topic of item C53? — "Phelps, Arthur L. Canadian drama. *University of Toronto Quarterly* 9:82-94, October 1939." Section A, "General Surveys," has its peculiarities as well. It lists inclusive page numbers for articles in periodicals but varies its practice for sections of books. *The Oxford Companion to the Theatre* is listed simply as having 1088 pages (and is listed again at a later date 18 items down the page for the Concise edition), while Elizabeth Waterston's *Survey: A Short History of Canadian Literature* is shown to have two pages (155-156) on theatre. This "general" section includes Christopher Dafoe's article on Winnipeg theatre from *CTR* 4; other items in that issue of *CTR*, which is largely devoted to the Manitoba Theatre Centre, appear in Section C, "Twentieth Century English Canada," subsection "Manitoba," where they belong. The British Columbia subsection of

Section C is surprisingly brief, surprising until one realizes that most of the sources used are published in eastern Canada and the creators of the *Bibliography* have chosen to omit all newspaper material, where most of B.C.'s theatre history is to be found. The *Financial Post* is the only newspaper included in the *Bibliography*, perhaps because it seems a bizarre place to find theatre material. Other coverage of standard periodicals has oddities. The Introduction announces, "We have not fully indexed the invaluable *Saturday Night* or *Canadian Forum*, although a significant number of items from each is included." Why not? Which items have been left out? On what principles of selection? Section L on Periodicals has its uses, a simple alphabetical list of 114 items with enough annotation to indicate the scope of each. Section K on Theses is an alphabetical list by author, not the best system for authors necessarily unknown at the time of writing; their subjects are the main interest, not their names. Section M, "Bibliography of Theatre Bibliographies," adheres to the basic principle of organization: chronological by date of publication and alphabetical within each year. It makes even less sense here than elsewhere. So it goes. The *Bibliography* will be used by students of Canadian theatre because it is the only tool of its kind. It will, however, be regularly cursed for being a chaotic mess. The Playwrights Co-op, for all its wisdom, still has much to learn, including, I would suggest, how to use an apostrophe in its own name.

MISCELLANIES, METAMORPHOSIS, & MYTH

Michael Brian Oliver

MIRIAM WADDINGTON, *The Price of Gold*. Oxford University Press.
BRENDA FLEET, *Some Wild Gypsy*. Borealis Press.
JOAN FINNIGAN, *Living Together*. Fiddlehead Poetry Books.

EVERYONE'S LIFE is miscellaneous. But that is no excuse for every book of poems being a miscellany. Imaginative poets have always been able to organize their perceptions of themselves and their surroundings into coherent patterns of insight. Etymologically the poet is a *maker*. But in practice he or she has always been more of a *changer*. Craft applied to vision results in metamorphosis. The miscellaneous becomes mythical. Miriam Waddington, Brenda Fleet, and Joan Finnigan have attempted metamorphosis in these books, but, much too often, they have failed to transform the miscellaneous happenings of their own lives into more than momentary meaning.

In *The Price of Gold* Miriam Waddington speaks in the cultured and clever tones of a middle-aged woman who teaches and writes and now lives alone, having married and raised a family and separated in the past. These facts constitute her personal miscellany. And these poems represent her attempt to transmute her autobiography into the substance of truth.

There are three phases to her labour: "Rivers," "Living Canadian," and "The Cave." Presumably Waddington means

something by these divisions. The trouble is, it is difficult to decide what. This is especially true of the first part. Clearly the poet works with symbols most of the time, and obviously she associates rivers with lovers, but the equation is arbitrary rather than archetypal and the title symbol of rivers actually appears in only two of the poems. A more apt thematic title would have been "Dreams," because in both the first poem and the central poem of the section she alludes to the difference between Caedmon's dream (an angel tells him to *sing*) and her own (an angel tells her to *love*). I mention all this simply to point out a basic problem in her myth-making process. If her naming is not confused, it is at least confusing.

But, granted that her theme is love, the next question is how does Waddington view her miscellaneous erotic experiences? One thing is certain, she definitely recalls or describes her men with style. Besides relying on symbols, she generally employs an imaginatively precise diction and a wittiness of tone that suggests everything from insight to impatience to bitchiness (very little of this, to be fair). All told, she seems to regard love very humanely, even sanely enough to create such a delightful lyric as "Beau-Belle":

> I'm in love with a clerk
> from Trois Rivières
> who trills his r's
> and slicks his hair;
>
> He's smooth as a seal
> his smile is jolly,
> though my name is Miriam
> he calls me Polly

Still, most of the poems in this first section attempt to summon the seriousness — especially the loneliness — of love. The feeling is there all right, but the words, the definitive words, seem to be unfound in the spaces between the clever and at times banal words that do appear. For example, she asks, "Can you imagine what it is/ like to live in a world where/ there is no-one . . . ?" ("Someone Who Used to Have Someone"), but she doesn't bother to tell us what it is like. The same evasiveness pervades most of the poems in this section. In short, Waddington gives the reader many well-wrought phrases, but little deep truth. We hear of "all the sorrow/ that being a woman/ asleep/ beside a man/ can bring," only to have this real but undefined feeling re-surfaced with a metaphor: the emotion becomes "cruel knots/ and ragged torn/strings" ("London Night"). A myth is an image that explains life. It is not just an image, however metaphorical. The point is, if Waddington had not arranged her poems in such a systematic fashion, we would not expect a mythical reconstruction of her life. But she has — only to entertain us with word tricks, images instead of explanations.

Waddington's dream — often the core of myth — is this:

> I stood and sang
> into an empty
> city and there
> was no one to
> remember, no
> mythic heroine,
> no legendary
> king
>
> ("London Night")

Here is the central theme of the whole book, especially of the second section, embarrassingly entitled "Living Canadian." And here we find the Myth of No Myth: existentialism, if you will. It is certainly not accidental that throughout this second section, where the theme is twentieth-century life, Waddington insistently sees herself as an exile. Time and again she recounts the general modern malaise of absurd injustices and meretricious motives. For her Canada is only colder than America, newer than Europe: everywhere is the Waste Land, or as she

calls it, the Land of Utmost: "violence, buggery,/ non-standard spelling &/ whatever Utmost they haven't/ invented yet; what land ($)." But all this is commonplace. What interests the reader is the poet's responses to cruelty and sterility. And here is where Waddington most startles and disappoints. She exhibits a kind of 1910-ish surprise at the way things are, summed up in her trite and telling phrase, "I ask myself/ where will it/ all end?" ("How I spent the year listening to the ten o'clock news"). Like a Victorian humanist she doesn't seem to realize one of the axioms of the modern world: *maybe there is no end*, maybe reality is discontinuous. Like most sensitive and thoughtful people she wants to cry over "the disorder of/ everything human" ("Back at York University"). But some thinkers — including existentialists — have been able to affirm the disorder. It becomes obvious that Waddington is really a Romantic Outsider, in Colin Wilson's sense of the term: she doesn't see the Order or Myth, but believes that there must be one, ideally.

Nevertheless, Waddington does not find her myth in these poems. Like love, politics remains miscellaneous for her, changed only into a verbal juggling act. She concludes her poem about human disorder by saying, "it's high time for me to be/ feeling so low." The joke is appalling. Her only solution is, predictably, symbolism. "The Wheel" — referring to the cyclic myth of both seasonal and psychic change — speaks lyrically but cryptically of "the seed" and "the wheel" and concludes, dogmatically, by stating that "*the wheel/ is in the seed.*" Reading these social poems is like reading *The Diary of Anne Frank*; there is a wrenching irony about them, not of innocence, but of middle-aged humanist naiveté.

The few poems in Waddington's last section, called "The Cave," display her attempt to solve things symbolically, largely love and death. "The Bower" does it; "The Cave" doesn't. The latter is a rhyming game with archetypal symbols, but "The Bower" says everything Waddington has been trying to say in the whole book. This one poem is a perfect lyric and does metamorphose her world. She begins by asking her lover for a bower, a nest, a tower, and a flower. He refuses, then replies:

> The autumn wind
> will build your bower,
> Algonquin lakes
> make you a nest,
> sorrow itself
> will raise you a tower,
> and death, death, will be
> your flower.

The question is, does this one poem redeem a 100-page miscellany arranged as a mythical mosaic?

Younger, around 30, Brenda Fleet is blatantly romantic in her attempt to mythologize herself. *Some Wild Gypsy* comes complete with a Heathcliff-and-Catherine, mauve and lemon green and purple cover (the colours of decadent adolescence), an extravagantly self-conscious preface in which Ms Fleet claims to be, among other things, an Earth Mother, an exaggerated introduction by a friend, a long prose explanation of the legend of the poet's life (which is in many ways the best thing in the book), and, of course, a photograph of the poet in a bandana and a gold earring, looking green-eyed into the mystery of life.

Excuse my cynicism, but such melodramatic trappings really are burdensome. I am not anti-romantic. Imagination, recklessness, and, above all, individuality are qualities I admire and aspire to experience. But all too often those claiming imagination display only fancy, those advocating recklessness go on living — more secure than lucky, and those regarding themselves as special are only egoists. Brenda Fleet has put together

this collection of poems with the same eye for effects that Cinderella would have indulged if she had been allowed to dress herself for the ball.

Sharon Rusu in her introduction claims that, "The structure of *Some Wild Gypsy* is in four select sections each illustrative of part of an evolutionary process toward self-completion." She also claims that by the end of the book, "Fleet has discarded the psychic and social encrustations of a hostile universe in order to free, at last, the final voice of the gypsy." All this sounds like something it took Yeats — an infinitely better poet — a lifetime to come somewhere near doing. If we can believe Ms Rusu, Fleet must be up to wonderful things as she reveals herself in four stages.

The trouble is, she isn't. The poems are divided into "The Romantic Voice," "The Ironic Voice," "The Voice of the Lover," and "The Voice of the Absurd." But it is very difficult to distinguish between these voices. When it comes right down to it, Fleet's only authentic role is that of the Lover. Her sallies into religion, sociology, and philosophy are strictly schoolgirlish. From beginning to end any insight she displays is into what she calls "the old cock and balls story" ("Michael II: For The Time Being"). And this insight, through sometimes nice and clear, doesn't really telescope.

Fleet is the lonely, sensitive gypsy girl in a world of stupid men. (In fact, her males seem to have sprung from the same academic waste land as Atwood's weedy, seedy collection of losers.) As Fleet herself is quite ready to say:

> I'm sorry I'm not beautiful:
> I'm a witch, they say, with silver teeth
> crazily shuffling her deck of Tarot
> and turning up the thirteenth card
> I'm some wild gypsy playing
> havoc in bed, sliding needles
> into my sleeping men, a sort of
> soft intrusion in their lives.
>
> ("Gypsy's Apology")

Later she admits, "Love has no power except love./ I'm no gypsy" ("Gypsy's Reappraisal"). If this is what Rusu means by "the final voice of the gypsy," the words are disappointingly common-sensical — hardly a fugitive glimpse of the Inner Nature of Reality. Still, I suppose some gypsies never wake up.

Nevertheless, Fleet's concern for self-image does work well for her in one way: it gives her the presence of mind to see passion and, especially, relationships with the cold, incisive eye of the artist. For example, several of her poems deal with the feelings of "the other woman" in a triangular situation, and these poems exhibit genuine control, mainly in that she enhances bitterness with wit and irony, instead of wallowing in sarcasm. And she has written the best appraisal of Irving Layton I have ever read, certainly worth quoting:

> Irving Layton, I have always
> wanted to get past
> my make-up your cynicism
> my teens your senility
> my crotch your restlessness
>
> long enough to say
> your writing has soul
> and so do you, big toughie
>
> ("To The Pole Vaulter")

A woman of metaphors and free (sometimes lost) verse, Fleet certainly displays a flamboyant yearning throughout this collection, but it doesn't lead anywhere special, certainly not through spiritual long nights and brilliant dawnings. True, the last and best poem does show Fleet aware of her — and everyone's — existential predicament, but it does not *follow* from the first 90 poems. Typically, she sees herself as a detached fruit:

> no part of what I see
> but separate in consciousness
> so too my mind swings
> reels in a void

having understood nothing
neither world nor time
through self's separateness
my white agony

let me, as dim branches
desire the darker source,
return the futile self
to become Becoming

("Longing")

Granted, all endings are beginnings, and granted, this poem does suggest — however fuzzily — a kind of end, still, coming as it does after a lot of aimless and miscellaneous self-consciousness, it hardly gives the collection the impact of myth (as, remember, the pretentious paraphernalia of the book so solemnly promises). Perhaps this will come in Fleet's next book.

Living Together by Joan Finnigan presents the reader with another mixed bag of poems, the kind of pot-pourri favoured by the CBC in its programming policy. In fact, Ms Finnigan is a CBC poet if there ever was one. Let me extend the analogy. If we listen to this book, as we should, we hear a variety of voices: first the dramatic tones of actresses and actors, then the soliloquizing of a middle-aged literary widow, and finally the reportage of a sensitive and ironic urbanite travelling in the Canadian North, the final frontier as *Star Trek* would say. From beginning to end these poems broadcast well: they are genuinely interesting, but they achieve at best a state of anthology. Only in isolated instances do they transform the poet's miscellaneous life and the reader's equally miscellaneous understanding.

First the facts: Joan Finnigan is the daughter of Frank Finnigan, an NHL hockey star in the '30s. She grew up and received her education in Ottawa. She married Dr. Charles Grant Mackenzie, a psychiatrist, and they had children. In 1965 her husband died. Since then she has been trying to cope, mainly through her writing, with being left alone in a world teeming with haphazard natural beauty, sophisticated friends, a tawdry middle class, pitiful rural poverty, and lonely menopausing men. The material for myth is there, and she often tries to find an elemental meaning for it all, but she only catches glimpses of the personal yet universal truth of her life.

The first half of the book consists of three long sequential poems suitable for radio reading. The eight parts of the first poem, "Ottawa and the Valley," recall the poet's childhood, and, predictably, the world appears eccentric to the little girl in this bit of Dickensian nostalgia. Even more predictably, the child herself is a precocious and poetic creature, probably plain and bespectacled, certainly a visitor of libraries and an attender of Sunday School. (So many children in literature are so damned literary! — they are doomed to be so of course, since non-literary adults do not write memoirs.) Anyway, this period piece does little for anyone's childhood.

The next sequence, called "Songs for the Bible Belt," is a tiresome and contrived dramatic dialogue intended to display the "dream of life/ as neat as death" in bourgeois Kitchener-Waterloo. Unfortunately this poem doesn't live up to its title, mainly because it is too heavy-handed with its irony and too self-conscious in its message. As an indictment of middle class dullness and dread it is about as subtle as *Peyton Place*.

The third long poem, "May Day Rounds: Renfrew County," is a dense description of three welfare case histories, told from the point of view of a sensitive, and obviously new, government official visiting several hopeless rural households for the first time. Finnigan's style here is Contemporary Canadian Consciousness: a rough blend of Local Colour and Naturalism. The trouble is, the tone of the

poem is, like the tone of the first two sequences, piously liberal. A line of Irving Layton's comes to mind here: "The man wept because pity was useless." This woman pities; she does not weep in *identification* with the death of the spirit.

Only in a few of the "Orser Farm Poems" does Finnigan approach metamorphosis of the facts within and around her. "A Bird And Fish Story" states the central tension. Alternating between the self-images of bird and fish the poet tries to resolve the problem of having survived her husband. Halfway through she decides that she will stay in "the safe cave/ and write on the sand"; in other words, she attempts to affirm her femininity by becoming a Woman Artist. But by the end of the poem she sees herself as a "winter bird" hovering *alone* around Noah's ark, denied entry, but wishing to live "beyond the flood," to be a Woman Alive. She does not manage in this poem to overcome the personal disaster of her life by finding a universal truth, but she definitely moves in the right direction with the aid of authentic symbolism.

Fortunately in two other poems in this group Finnigan does achieve identity with eternal things so convincingly that the facts of her life become the truth of all life — in other words, she realizes the mythical quality of her own experience. In all the Orser Farm poems it is winter she feels — and the possibility of spring. Simple, the oldest myth, but it is always stirring when a poet shows us why it is true. Mythmaking is an act of faith, and even when we cannot share the poet's faith, we must be shown his or her faith and as much of the personal vision as can be transmitted, if we are to grant the value of the work. In "Removal of the Bees" Finnigan relates first to the winter sleep of bees in her cellar and then to their first April flight "upwards to a yellow-bellied sun!" But "In the Night the Little Cataraqui Died" is where we see Finnigan arrive at a tense yet balanced dialectic in her personal and miscellaneous struggle. Here in the conclusion is the graceful triumph of the Woman over the Artist, achieved through art:

> The cold this morning
> is a brilliant impasse being beats against;
> in the orchard
> the apple trees claw
> the merciless and frozen blueness
> of a sky
> the sun shines in, hopelessly,
> like an unrequited lover.
>
> Every weed is stark against
> the white desert of the fields/
> summer's seeds shaken down,
> no birds to search
> in barren husks.
>
> All that stirs
> is a miniscule, miraculous defiance,
> gadfly at gargantuan —
>
> The world is lost, love, lost
> in a winter that overwhelms
> the planet of the mind
>
> The Little Cataraqui is my dumb orator
> and this is how the heart continues
> in separation
>
> It beats slowly somewhere two thousand
> feet down its river bed
> of eloquence
>
> And waits to flow again in rapture.

The rest of the poems in this book are both inconsequential and anti-climactic. The only exception is "A Tenth Anniversary" which reiterates in rhetoric what she has already achieved through symbol and myth: namely, "that nothing is ever/ finished." The City poems are at best charming; the Northern poems are mostly clever. Finnigan does make sense of her life, exquisitely, in a few of these poems, but her real theme — *Living Together* — is almost lost in the medley of her program.

Three poets, three masquerades.

books in review

STAGES OF POETRY

MARYA FIAMENGO, *In Praise of Old Women.* Valley Editions.
BRIAN BRETT, *Fossil Ground at Phantom Creek.* Blackfish Press. $4.95.
BRIAN JOHNSON, *Marzipan Lies.* The Porcupine's Quill.

READING THREE POETS at such different stages as Fiamengo, Johnson and Brett in conjunction with each other, makes one very aware of the process by which a poet develops. Though Fiamengo tends to be imagistic, Brett Snideresque and Johnson is overwhelmed with surrealism, the real difference between them is of poetic maturity.

Brett and Johnson are concerned with proving the significance of everything. They reach out to the world of universalities, invoking myths and elements for the sense of meaning behind all things. When this is successful it results in poems of power, as in Brian Brett's "Brujo, Witches in Mexico" where he invokes

death, the weaver
spinning & spinning
a thread of red water
from her terrible mouth.

In the context of the poem, which ties this refrain to a specific incident, it works. Where this approach fails is where the poet assumes that by putting two things together a symbolically significant relationship is formed, as where Brett says

a black bear shuffled through
the surrounding underbrush while
I listened to the inevitable silence
of the shifting constellations.

Fiamengo would not let that pass. In fact, it is her nearly unerring sense for finding valid relationships between events or symbols or people that illustrates her maturity as a poet.

Both Brett and Johnson rely on serendipity to take the place of craft, though with Brett it seems only to occur in the first section of his book (perhaps the poems are chronologically arranged?). Many of his poems call up a violent elemental world using a strong and often beautiful voice. It is all the more disappointing then to come across a flat ending like "I tucked away my gear/shouldered the pack/and walked into morning". As Brett says "the vision of solitude becomes repetitious as the milkman."

The other disappointment in what is on the whole an interesting and strong book, is the "logging" genre poems. Though they are quite well done, the material seems stock and there doesn't appear to be much more to say about the "Bullshit Boys" or "Rock-Drill". Maybe it's part of a Western poet's apprenticeship, as writing sonnets used to be, but Brett clearly has better to do than imitate Snyder or, even, Wayman.

Brian Johnson's work is more difficult to talk about. The organization behind his use of imagery is so private as to be almost inaccessible, and the energy needed to penetrate his world in *Marzipan Lies* is out of proportion to what there is to find.

He seems trapped by his form —

thanks to a mother's treason
and a crazed tray
we started before the storm
before the sea gave way
to the moth
and the flat white shells of june —

but when he fights off its stranglehold and allows structure and syntax to support the load of imagery, as in "Summertime Momma", "Blood in the Tea", and "Nile End", he has control and a voice though what its quality is remains obscure.

In "Butcher's Dawn" where

dawn is drawn
and quartered
before the sun is even up
making it official

it is possible to find the poem's thread (though feeling tenuous about it as Theseus might) and experience the poem without feeling blocked out.

I suppose the raison d'être of bizarre juxtaposition of images is to shock them into meaning something, but unless there is a deal of awareness behind this kind of writing, it is more obstructionist than revelatory. It is also, in Johnson's case, hostile to the reader who has a right, I think, to expect some effort at communication on the part of the poet. Otherwise, why publish?

Marya Fiamengo begins with the assumption that meaning is implicit in existence, that it does not need to be chased after, and that the poet's task (using the resources of the craft) is to move things about to make the meanings clear. She has quite a different sense of proportion and orientation than Brett or Johnson. She does not try to seize large abstracts, such as Death, but points and personalizes it in "the limbs of murdered Partisan children". Landscape, cultures, and individuals are parts of the abstracts she refers to and as parts are of almost equal weight — though not value — as illustratives of the abstracts.

In *In Praise of Old Women* Fiamengo is concerned with women: women as history, politics, society and women as women. It is a book of warnings where old women like history are ignored at one's peril and loss, for they are what we have by way of reality and continuity.

In "Overheard at the Pornographer's" there is a reminder to men who strive to escape their own age and death that "Mortality . . . is not confined to women over forty,/ much as you might wish it" and the chilling conclusion

You will not be beggared yet
who cannot love
except increase a self
in some pubescent child's face.

North American women with "blue hair/ which gleams like the steel/ of jets" are exempla of a society which has turned its back on age and wisdom at the same time; they do not stand up well against Hecate, Medea, Artemis, or Hagia Sophia.

History and women come together in another warning poem, "British Columbia Gothic".

In the Kootenay country
at Nelson
where cold water
gives asylum to hot hills
an Ukrainian woman
serves me coffee.

I look into her
water pale blue eyes
bleached by time
weather dim like my mother's
sea-stained Adriatic eyes
and I hear Mayakovsky shout,

"Mother the Germans have murdered
evening in the street."

And it does not comfort
nor amuse me
to read in the Nelson Daily News
of July 13th
that the mountain town of Kimberley
has gone Bavarian
for the summer tourist trade.

There is no room for tolerance in a vision which keeps in its sights the historical past, and in "Once at Aleppo, 1974" with the "malignant Turk,/ Europe's old cancer/ diseased to the bone" and "German at West Bay" where "the jaws of even the women/ look wolfish and skeletal,/ deaths heads in the sun," Fiamengo continues what has always been the old woman's task, of remembering and lamenting the dead, and reminding so that evil is not repeated out of ignorance.

In Praise of Old Women is not a flawless book. There are places where the

short line form is overloaded and there are poems like "Lake Light" and "Red on Black" — nice imagist poems — but which appear neatly self-indulgent in the context of the book.

Fiamengo shows her abilities as a poet best, perhaps, in "A Tale of Roses" where the themes of women, history and politics coalesce in a form at once inevitable and belonging wholly to Fiamengo.

Ah, Roses!
Roses living, roses historical
roses red and roses dead
and pink lipped, Mrs. Rose of stone
but most of all
Rosa Luxembourg, Warsaw's Proletariat
Rose.
How Das Kapital disposes
of women, manners and especially roses!

She has found freedom in her poetry to be intolerant or humorous or whatever she wishes. This is enviable; and she has made that difficult transition from mythologizing (where Brett is and Johnson too, perhaps) to writing about "real" things, without ending — as do so many poets who fail to survive that change — by writing about the price of gas —

5 cts less
in Toronto/
thn Vancouver.

MARILYN BOWERING

ST. JOHN'S

PAUL O'NEILL, *The Oldest City: The Story of St. John's, Newfoundland*, Volume I. Press Porcépic. $17.95.

PAUL O'NEILL's *The Oldest City* is a history of St. John's from its earliest days to almost yesterday, from Cabot and Cartier to Joey Smallwood and Howie Meeker. Mr. O'Neill has worked for at least ten years in libraries and archives all over Europe and North America to assemble a vast array of material about St. John's, and Newfoundland's history and people. In fact the book might more properly be called "biography" than "history," for O'Neill's sense of the city's corporate personality is so strong and he is so obviously drawn himself to individual lives that his work transmits the continuous vitality of the people who swarm through its pages.

The story of St. John's begins with Cabot's Landfall in 1497. For almost two centuries it is a terrible story of exploitation and bare subsistence for those who tried to live there. To the great fishing fleets of west England, the whole of Newfoundland was merely a summer fishery station, and decade after decade those who tried to settle and stay on the island were uprooted, burned out and driven away. The harrying and destruction of the Beothuk Indians, natives of the island, was all part of the same pattern. In 1675, when St. John's had already been a precarious settlement since the beginning of the century, the west country fishing fleets succeeded in having Sir John Berry sent out from England to remove the settlers from Newfoundland. Many petitions to Charles II for their removal had boldly and brutally stated the case for the fishing industry: "The inhabitants of St. John's build houses and make gardens and orchards in places fitt for cureing and drying fish, which is a great hindrance and not to be suffered." Sir John Berry, however, was converted to the cause of the colonists. His census of 1675 showed 185 persons in the community, and two years later his second census showed 523 settlers living in 28 communities scattered about the island of Newfoundland.

In the sixteenth century, Newfoundland was one of the bases for English and Spanish rivalry for the dominion of the Atlantic, and in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries for French and English attacks and reprisals. Four times, in 1696, 1705, 1708 and 1762, St. John's was invaded and occupied by the enemy. Moreover, it is evident that in Paul

O'Neill's opinion its long colonial history was not ended, but extended, by Newfoundland's joining of the Canadian Confederation in 1949.

> Newfoundlanders became possibly the only people in history to vote their nation out of existence. The Latvians of the U.S.S.R., the Moslems of Bangladesh, or even the Dervishes of the Sudan, might find this difficult to understand. No such problem exists for the average Newfoundlander who, blind to nearly five hundred years of neglect and maltreatment by Britain, is so saturated with the colonial mentality that he can still rally "round the imperialist flag" as the sun sets on a vanishing empire.

Many years ago I was in a group of students one evening when E. J. Pratt spoke of his boyhood, in particular of being present on Signal Hill when Marconi received the first trans-Atlantic wireless message. Pratt had never forgotten the excitement, the awe and the mystery of that time; talking sixty or more years later, he transmitted his wonder to us, together with a strong visual sense of the occasion which I know now was totally authentic to Newfoundland. I was delighted to find the same story of Marconi that Pratt told treated in some detail by O'Neill — but without the boyhood presence of E. J. Pratt. There are dozens of stories and cameo-biographies in this book. There are scores and hundreds of facts and equal numbers of colourful opinions. The seeker for formal, decorous historical writing and interpretation will not find that in *The Oldest City* — but the seeker for a decorous historical tradition will not find that in St. John's either.

> St. John's has been sneered at and held in deep affection. It engenders hostility and love. Few who ever become involved in the life of the place remain indifferent. It has a brazen charm that overflows in the boundless hospitality for which it has become world famous. The city does not hide the scars of its centuries of neglect and hostility any more than it hides its haphazard streets quietly poked away from the rush and roar of a commercialized world. St. John's is flesh and blood, obstinate in security, warm humour, small, brave, untidy, and undereducated. It has survived four and one-half centuries of handicaps that have challenged its existence. Often naive, frequently cheeky, it is among the few truly interesting cities on the North American continent.

Paul O'Neill has compiled a work that matches his city. For the enthusiast his book is like the exploration of an old house of many rooms, never finished, always surprising, full of mystery, full of objects of importance and equally stuffed with trifles. It is the repository of centuries of history, brought together through years of work, with infinite regard and total enthusiasm for every detail, and, fittingly, edited by Claire Pratt, E. J. Pratt's daughter. For enthusiasts, for tourists, for self-adopted sons and daughters — and for all Newfoundlanders — Paul O'Neill's book is a monument and a mine of resource material.

CLARA THOMAS

NOT THE WHOLE STORY

MOLLIE GILLEN, *The Wheel of Things: A Biography of L. M. Montgomery, Author of Anne of Green Gables.* Fitzhenry & Whiteside. $9.95.

> I wonder if it's absolutely necessary to houseclean? I wonder if nine-tenths of the things we think so necessary really are so! But I shall go on housecleaning and wondering! I may have given up belief in foreordination and election and the Virgin Birth; *but* I have not and never shall be guilty of the heresy of asserting that it is not vital to existence that the house should be torn up once a year and scrubbed! Perish the thought.

THE WRITER was L. M. Montgomery in a letter to her pen-friend Ephraim Weber, the same letter that announced the forthcoming publication of her first novel.

Anne of Green Gables. The passage reveals at least three of Montgomery's salient characteristics: her quiet rebellion against the orthodox Presbyterianism in which she had been raised by her maternal grandparents, her instinctive loyalty to the mundane features of a demanding Puritan code, and her wry recognition of the logical contradiction.

All her life Maud Montgomery was to remain true to her sense of duty. She stayed with her widowed postmistress grandmother until the latter died when Maud was thirty-six and her engagement to the Reverend Ewan MacDonald was five years old. Thereafter she was an exemplary minister's wife and a conscientious mother to her two sons as well as a dutiful, realistic protegee of her publishers, continuing to write to order about her most popular character, Anne Shirley, even though Anne weighed upon her "like an incubus when she ceased to be an inspiration."

Mollie Gillen's biography of this rigorously self-controlled woman takes its title from a passage of Kipling's *Kim* paraphrased by Maud Montgomery in a moment of weary revulsion from taxing trivialities that, she said, kept her from "savouring life at all". Social and domestic duties, publishers' demands, and the stresses engendered by her husband's ever-darkening melancholia and her own attacks of nervous disability and depression composed the "wheel of things" in which she felt herself caught. But her simmering resentment seldom surfaced in her utterances and never in her public behaviour. Superficially at least, hers was not a life tailor-made for a best-selling biography. Apart from the runaway success of *Anne of Green Gables*, it had no particular drama or glamour. Its colour and excitements belonged to Montgomery's inner life, an inner life that becomes increasingly difficult to discern as this biography progresses.

Much of the trouble undoubtedly stems from the fact that Gillen was not at liberty to quote freely from Montgomery's diaries, which repose in the protective custody of the author's son, Dr. Stuart MacDonald. Until these are published, wholly or in substantial part, much will remain mysterious about Montgomery's later and evidently sadder years. Then too, perhaps Montgomery was as complicated as she sometimes rather complacently claimed to be. In a 1905 letter to Weber she announced:

> ... as to [there] being only "two of me" as you ask — bless the man, there's a hundred of me.... Some of the "me's" are good, some *not*. It's better than being just two or three, I think — more exciting, more interesting. There are some people who are only *one*. They must find life as insufferable a bore as other people find them.

Finally, some of the reader's sense of incoherence and incompleteness in the portrait may be due to biographer's bias. Clearly Gillen likes Maud Montgomery and prefers to dwell upon her merits — her love of beauty, her humour, her energetic, responsible conduct. Failings are not overlooked, but they are usually identified in brief subordinate clauses, as in this sentence: "Everything she wrote rings with a deep inner truth, a hope that decency, morality, beauty will prevail, a revulsion from the limited vision of pettiness, though she knew her own frailties, and sometimes could not cleanse her own soul of pettiness." And the partisanship produces some perverse conclusions. Having just quoted Montgomery —

> If I snubbed as they deserve nine out of ten of the people who plague and drain me with their inanities and ineptitudes, I would have a reputation for snobbishness.... As I have learned to suffer fools gladly I escape this imputation: but I sometimes think the cost is too high....

the biographer decides, "She had no use for snobs."

On the other hand, Gillen scrupulously quotes some adverse comments, like Ken Macneill's rather chilling childhood recollection of his grown-up cousin Maud: "... not an outgoing woman. She had a small and narrow facial appearance and a somewhat small tight-lipped mouth. Instinctively at first I did not particularly like her...." — and the grudging degrees by which he warmed to her: "... I did not find her quite so hateful when I attended her Sunday School class later on...." But in a general context of liking and approval they are startlingly incongruous rather than complementary.

Gillen is also scrupulous about distinguishing between her own educated guesses and "facts" asserted by authoritative testimony. Like Hilda M. Ridley before her (in *L. M. Montgomery*, 1956), she is heavily indebted to Montgomery's own account of her childhood and writing apprenticeship, *The Alpine Path* (1917). But whereas Ridley strove for immediacy by fabricating speech "quotations" (unfortunately, very flat ones) from Montgomery's narrative passages, Gillen goes overboard in the other direction with conscientiously overt speculation: "Did that all-too-vivid imagination picture ...?"; "And it is possible that awareness of her father's seeming desertion grew...."; "Perhaps it was now ... that she may have re-read...."; "Perhaps ... Maud thought of her stepmother as a usurper." Oddly, Gillen is sometimes merely suggestive where she might have been definite. In *The Years Before "Anne"* (1974), Francis W. P. Bolger succinctly conveys the vigour of teen-aged Maud's resentment of her stepmother by quoting her declaration, after a year's visit with her father and his new family in Saskatchewan, that she did not "wish to see Mrs. Montgomery again."

Gillen does make some notable additions to our knowledge of L. M. Montgomery by quoting extensively from Montgomery's hitherto unpublished correspondence with George Boyd MacMillan, a Scottish pen-friend. Gillen tracked down these letters and has used them to good effect. Montgomery springs to life in a long 1929 letter, liberally quoted here, in which she recounts her nine-year legal battle with her first publisher. But in the main *The Wheel of Things* is a pleasantly written over-view of Montgomery's life, scanting the mordantly humorous, astringent facet of her character and sometimes lapsing into its subject's own least felicitous style: "... she should have been floating on airy clouds of joy."

Maud Montgomery once called biography "a *screaming farce*." This quiet, honest book certainly does not scream, nor is it a farce, but it isn't the whole story either.

FRANCES FRAZER

ICE AND FIRE

DERK WYNAND, *snowscapes*, Sono Nis Press.
RONA MURRAY, *Selected Poems*, Sono Nis Press.

DERK WYNAND's snowscapes are largely psychic phenomena. His book, to oversimplify, mixes poetry with prose. It consists of wry observation, acid little lyrics that melt like cold flakes, and vanish the moment they are touched. These are combined with snatches of conversation, vignettes from the ennui of contemporary life, and an occasional glimpse into the rigorous austerity of our past. Snow serves Wynand as an all-inclusive metaphor for a muzzled, muffled, fearfully hibernating and/or migrating, and finally frozen sensibility. The perpetual snowscape seems to constrain original thought and extinguish the fires of imagination, just as our pioneering ancestry was often physically immobilized.

The problem is one of approach. In his genuine attempt to convey apathy and

boredom, the poet writes a boring book. The snow analogy works well, when used sparingly or variously, but not so consistently and at length. There is no real transformation for the reader to experience, rather a kind of smug recognition that only affirms the blandness of life. Blake, while he erred on the side of extravagance, at least produced the dramatically interesting symbols of Orc and Urizen to fight the old battle between creativity and its methodical stifling. Wynand's point, no doubt, is that we have nothing left to oppose emptiness and futility.

Many pieces do resonate metaphysically, when, for example, there is a tension drawn between scientific assertion and poetic association. One poem in the book draws meaningful suggestion from the otherwise ordinary observation that fresh, infinitely yielding snow is soon trampled into gleaming unresilient ice. The image in its context reminded me of Hopkins' sorrowful line: "Generations have trod, have trod, have trod." In terms of *snowscapes*, one can easily extrapolate a warning against fixity and set direction, against the abstracting of life into facile theory or lazy habit. There is a menace about the hard clarity of the path laid down.

Only intermittently does the book live up to its strong beginnings. The initial metaphor is stretched to breaking point, and by the end of *snowscapes*, the poet is indulging in self-parody. Aesthetic uniformity is too slavishly maintained. According to this writer, our snow-filled lives are devoid of intention. We exist in an external vacuum between the idea and the act. Hamlet, however, *shares* this problem with us, and even those pioneers Eliot and Joyce create a "central consciousness". Wynand makes his appraisal of enervated mentality far too cool and too general. He as much as says this in *snowscapes*. Even our artists are frost-bitten, poets of "crystalline" precision, who are short on real substance, abstract painters, musicians barely able to catch our thin music. Wynand is in this book a "snow-artist".

His people are half-alive. We should be shocked, but are barely ruffled by their desultory conversation. Its featureless landscape produces a state of trance. Images achieve a kind of slow rhythm that might far better be suited to film. *snowscapes* does in fact end with a script, for sound, which as I read it, seemed quite appropriate for live presentation. It bristles with an energy missing in the poems. Monotony is given dramatic force. The voice of mounting hysteria leading to violence can be heard as incantations accrue. The annihilating dreamscape, the confusion of geometric whites, carrot-nosed snowmen, blood, and the poignancy of birds hunting for grain "in the steaming path of our horses" might be conveyed and contrasted forcefully in theatrical terms. There is even humour!

I think *snowscapes* makes intellectual and ironical sense; it is clever and apt. Its basic concept is intriguing, but misfires in trying, as the jacket announces, "to mirror the human experiences which colour a world as white and neutral as the void." The job of imitation is too thoroughly, too literally done. Finally, *snowscapes* leaves the impression of being contrived, and too frequently lacks the impact of real poetry.

My initial reactions to Rona Murray's books were all positive. Close examinations perhaps modified and qualified certain responses, but generally supported a mounting conviction that she is a sensitive, moving and skilful poet. Her work is full of specifics; her poems are not vague, but create actualities. There is a sense of discovery and excitement in the reading. She can be visionary, ironic, elegaic, celebratory. Like Wynand, she has a highly developed aesthetic sense,

taking special pains over the visual and musical arrangements of her work. But there is variation.

The first section of *Selected Poems*, "The Enchanted Adder," based on the separate volume of the same title, is like a book of spells, mystifying and haunting. Poetic talent is a touch precocious here; the ultimate feeling is one of evasiveness. Yet even as early as 1965 when this collection was published, strengths were developing. Murray works from genuine rather than trumped-up impulses. The endings of her poems almost always provide that sudden, gratifying insight that makes marvellous sense of the whole.

She is capable of metaphysical conceit, exact, complex, yet altogether natural. For instance, the "waxed hexagonal cells" of an abandoned honeycomb, "a dead city", are compared to the lifeless yet structurally coherent cells of a discarded lover. The hand that lifts the "weathered board" is thus provided with a "curious consolation". Images are met several times in one poem, slightly, subtly altered, deepening and changing our own awareness. In one piece, anemones move from a still but "unequivocal" brilliance to a "whirling" motion, and finally "each particle of matter", which the poem has carefully catalogued, "transforms, shifts, intersects with fire". The pattern of her language is unfaltering; lines flow and hold exactly as they should. Assonance, internal rhyme, and a sort of staggered alliteration are used with expertise.

Images can be startling. The bleeding heart of a tiger is connected in one poem with love; in one Blakean sounding fable of simple, strong rhythm, children suffer a spiritual mutilation at the hands of crass adults. An angel-mating is reminiscent of Yeats; Murray's winged guides generally are as sinister as Lorca's or Rilke's, beckoning the poet to a fearful destiny. The comparison is not gratuitous, for this poet's "angels" identify something of her true anguish in knowing decay to be at the heart of all beauties and comforts. Death in many guises stalks "The Power of the Dog", the volume's second book; and while poetic ability does not flag, it may have been a mistake to make this particular grouping of thematically and artistically similar pieces.

A healthy contrast to the poet's compelling but stifling death-halls of an inner world may be found in the more relaxed, even spritely "Let it be a tender summer", or the bizarre but intensely real image of a bisected reptile defying death in "The Lizard". She can produce a Chagall-like exuberance, "Reaction to a Cathedral Town", or social comment laced with surrealism, "Cattle Market". A deceptively delicate sequence called "The Beach", sad and gay at once, and a poem called "Doppelgänger" seriously, disturbingly, masterfully consider the elemental, the unconscious or other life, elsewhere expressed semi-symbolically as animals and earth. In a lighter, but nonetheless meaningful vein, "Rings, Wings and Circles" provides a persuasive meditation on spheres — good ones and bad ones. Finally, she can be corrosively self-critical. "And now this morning" equates a woman attempting to consume away her past life with the devouring sea.

The last book, "Ootischenie", is a fine and multi-faceted achievement. These poems are an "attempt to interpret [the] Doukhobor experience" of that area and partly a personal account of the place. For these inhabitants of a harsh land

> No Siberia could be bleaker
> snow flows like fine sand over shacks
> no light glows from windows
> no sound through cold
> except the thud of a distant ax

Unlike Wynand's, Murray's winterscapes remain tangible and do not evaporate into tedious messages: "a Sahara of snow", "salt-dunes", and "Yesterday / half-eaten a frozen deer / on a logging

road". Even when she is soothed and mesmerized by snow, its seduction is recreated, and we participate. Her poems are not merely ideas, but shareable modes of being. One of the best poems in the book delineates the approach of a monster horse into the sleeping town of Ootischenie. The creature is hugely lugubrious only by contrast to human triviality: "night clothes turning", "hands' anxious manoeuvering". His presence is enormous: "thighs slow pistons", eyes staring, breath vaporizing. He pauses, listens, "and then / moves back down the lath and plaster street / into rock again."

Rona Murray builds, in her art, a strong and graceful edifice to offset the deterioration she feels so keenly, the incessant, irreversible gnawing beneath all pretense of certainty, all the momentary marvels of existence. *Selected Poems* leaves one finally with a sense of joyous life, bravely won. "I celebrate ... the making," says the poet; like Yeats, she would have the dance the constant frenzy of life's contradictions (especially the elusiveness of language), aesthetically transformed. Her final words are subdued but positive.

PATRICIA KEENEY SMITH

CANADIAN MILLS

CAROL PRIAMO, *Mills of Canada.* McGraw-Hill Ryerson. $27.50

IN THE LAST FEW YEARS, Canadian publishers have been offering us some remarkably beautiful and expensive large books. *Mills of Canada* is among the loveliest, and, at $27.50, it is not all that expensive.

Carol Priamo, its author and photographer, is a romantic, at least about mills. She writes in her preface that she spent four years finding and photographing hundreds of sawmills and flour mills driven by wind and water in often remote parts of eastern and middle Canada and it is obvious that she is in love with her subject.

Her photographs, which are in Andrew Wyeth moods, and in colour as well as black and white, are sometimes misty, sometimes sharp, nearly always tranquil. They issue up a strong sense of the past — "as if you found/ Time all alone and talking to himself". Miss Priamo took those lines from Richard Wilbur's poem, "The Mill", and aptly ran them across her book's final full-page photograph — a millstone abandoned against a stone wall.

Like any honest lover, Carol Priamo not only visually presents her subject in as lovely a light as possible; she also explains the intricacies and pleasing peculiarities of her love and, to help you understand, discusses the past. Neither the Greeks nor the Romans had windmills, she says. Our Canadian windmills are descendants of the seventh century windmills of Islam and were brought here in the seventeenth century by English and Dutch settlers. Nova Scotia had the first water-powered gristmill on this continent. It was raised by Champlain's men in 1607 on the banks of the LeQuille River and its great stones were brought across the sea from France which, she tells us, produced the finest stones in the world, the bahr-stones.

Carol Priamo is diligent in her research and does not stay with history's generalities. She enters into the complexities of machinery — for example, she explains that a hopper boy is a rotating rake which spreads the miller's flour so that it can cool and dry. And she has found some lovely old engravings, lithographs and drawings from old millers' catalogues which not only complement her photographs but help the reader connect the rushing water with the water wheel and the cog face gear and the vertical shaft

and eventually the spindle which drives the millstone.

She tells us that millstones had their furrows dressed every two weeks and she explains how these stones, weighing nearly two tons, were raised and lowered to the precise level where they could grind finely and yet not touch each other.

In fact, Miss Priamo seems to cover the entire field of mills in Canada from their architectural triumphs (with one bizarre exception) down to the life and worth of the miller himself. That "worthy man" had many enemies among neighbouring farmers, whose fields he flooded, and fishermen, who objected to the salmon fighting the waterwheel on their way up-river to spawn.

Finally, like the lover she is, she makes an impassioned plea for these lovely old mills to be restored and treasured for all time. *Mills Of Canada* is something of a treasure in itself.

MARY MCALPINE

AMERICANADIANS

H. A. HARGREAVES, *North by 2000*. Peter Martin, $8.95 cloth, $3.95 paper.

North by 2000 by H. A. Hargreaves is subtitled "a collection of Canadian science fiction." The novelty is appealing; Canadians are not used to sf stories exploring the computerized complexities of Americanada in the twenty-first century. One of the six stories appeared in the experimental British *New Worlds*, four in the prestigious British *New Writings in Science Fiction* anthologies; quality seems guaranteed. Even the package is promising, with attractive layout and graphics. Finally, a dedication "to my children, whose evolving struggles with ethical problems keep me optimistic" hints at a concern with human life, not just gadgetry in this future North American conglomerate.

Unfortunately, Hargreaves evades the human concerns he raises. The first story, "Dead to the World," restates the sf cliché of a lone man triumphing over The Computer in thirteen slick pages. Hargreaves writes competent if not memorable prose. Yet his concentration on the mechanics of plot and problem destroys his ethical point, since his human being really doesn't matter.

Later stories, while more complex in plot and theme, all reveal this flaw. In "TeeVee Man," an injured engineer races against time to fix an orbiting television transmitter; in "Tangled Web," a "spiritual advisor" outwits another machine, the bureaucracy of "Tundra City," to affirm religious values by cremating a dead Sikh. The second presentation, despite its potential, remains as banal as the first; neither the repairman's view of his job nor, more important, the troubled pastor's spiritual rebirth is convincingly developed.

Similarly "Cain^n," potentially Hargreaves' strongest story, ignores the hero's "vulnerable humanity." A disturbed young criminal rejects attempts to reintegrate him into productive society, until he gets lost in a blizzard near Red Deer. Suddenly, we are told but not shown, he becomes a "new Jason," finding "freedom in submission." The conclusion, which should have emotional power, becomes merely predictable, as a cipher repays his debt to a half-glimpsed, seemingly authoritarian society.

Even "More Things in Heaven and Earth," the longest and most satisfying story, depends for its impact on Hargreaves' initial ideas, not their presentation through character. In a transmission studio, linked to 6,000 students, Alan Hamilton lectures on Shakespeare. A devoted team of actors aids him by acting out different interpretations of complex

passages, infusing text and scholarship with life. Hargreaves creates a teacher's dream. Then he throws "The Unit" an interesting problem in telepathy, a melodramatic case of sabotage, and lets them scramble for unconvincing happy endings: all instead of developing the human concerns which could arise from characters interacting in his situation. Even the hero's enthusiasm for the course, and his abilities as a teacher, take second place to his cleverness in solving the problems dictated by the plot.

Canadian? Hargreaves does tend to glorify the group, men (women are absent, or mere names) working together, using technology to promote the common good: the process, or so we like to believe, of Canadian history. Yet he focuses on the single competent man, the problem-solving faceless Hero of American pulp science fiction. "Protected Environment" could be an illustration for *Survival*, yet it only adds a helpless supervisor sitting at a radar screen to the basic situation and insights of "To Build a Fire."

In *North by 2000,* Hargreaves approaches, then refuses to deal with, the quality and nature of human life for his plastic-ID-carded Americanadians. (Why "Americanadians"? It appears to have been a purely bureaucratic amalgamation; didn't anyone notice?) Scattered references to Lambeth, Ontario, and Saskatoon, digs at the University of Toronto, don't make the slick filler of a contemporary sf anthology "Canadian." Nor does the glib use of futuristic terms — "autoteria," "Extended Living Unit," "pedway" — in a world of few jobs, synthetic coffee and, strangely, automatic delivery of real shrimp cocktail, make the stories memorable science fiction. Hargreaves provides (even if he does not develop) stimulating ideas. He diverts a reader looking for escape reading. These are the rewards of pulp fiction. He promises and denies what genuine "Canadian science fiction" could give: a sense of how we may live in our north in 2000.

SUSAN WOOD

ON THE VERGE

*** ALISTAIR SWEENY. *George-Etienne Cartier.* McClelland & Stewart. $16.95. Considering his importance as a political figure in pre-Confederation Canada, his part in bringing about Confederation, and his equally important if more ambivalent role as a railway promoter, George-Etienne Cartier has received surprisingly little attention from English-Canadian historians and biographers. Indeed, more than a century had passed since his death before the appearance of the first full biography in English, which is Alastair Sweeny's Life, *George-Etienne Cartier.* It is a thorough and strongly written book, and if at times it seems somewhat over-favourable to its subject, that is perhaps a proper readjustment of the scales in view of the past neglect of Cartier, who was no angel but a very interesting man.

*** MARY BYERS, JAN KENNEDY, MARGARET MCBURNEY and THE JUNIOR LEAGUE OF TORONTO. *Rural Roots: Pre-Confederation Buildings of the York Region of Ontario.* University of Toronto Press. $15.00. It is amazing how relentlessly, despite our paraded interest in the historic past of Canada, the visible relics of that past are being allowed to fall into the hands of speculators and under the destructive machines of the demolishers. The number of pre-Confederation buildings is steadily shrinking, from neglect or destruction, and this makes valuable the efforts of those who have preserved such buildings where they could and of groups like the Junior League of Toronto who have recorded in words and photographs the surviving pre-Confederation buildings in the Municipal Region of York — the area of small villages and towns that surrounded Toronto in the days before the great urban sprawl began. They have found some amazingly fine examples of early Canadian building, and one hopes the publicity provided by this visually pleasing book will help to preserve such of these beautiful houses are now threatened with destruction.