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THE MORAL NOVEL

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BY CATHERINE SHELDRICK ROSS, JUDITH KENDLE, MICHAEL GREENSTEIN, GAIL BOWEN, THEO QUAYLE DOMBROWSKI, ROSMARIN HEIDENREICH

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editorial

ART MARKETEERS

I WANT TO APPLAUD MORDECAI RICHLER. Not for his fiction, which wins plenty of critical praise; nor for his acid essays, which are praiseworthy even if they are often off the mark: Canada is too short of shrewd political satirists these days to be altogether unhappy about its one effective cultural satirist being sometimes irritating. (Aren't satirists *supposed* to irritate?) I want to applaud the way he has championed openness in the shuttered houses of Art Awards. Two years ago, as head of the jury recommending the winners for the Governor-General's Prize, he released the names of the finalists: he tried to stir up a little enthusiasm; he tried to make the award a Public Event that would have some impact on authors' sales and reputations. For he knows, as Jack McClelland knows, and as other publicity-minded people know, that with no Hoopla there is no Coverage. And no Coverage means no impact: despite the fact that the Governor-General's Prize remains the most prestigious literary award this country has to offer.

We all acknowledge this "prestige" (some with a certain disparagement that doesn't conceal their recognition of it), yet somehow we don't pay attention to the award as it happens. We look back at the historical event, and tut-tut over why the committee of year X couldn't recognize the talent of writer Y. And with justification. But why don't we demand the openness? Why is it that the Vancouver *Sun*, for example, despite Mordecai Richler, didn't ever report the 1976 Governor-General's winners, reported only some of those for 1977, and spent most of its column inch announcing that one Quebec writer refused one award? Why? Because *that's what it thought newsworthy*. The award itself was not news; art was not news; the flamboyant gesture was news. The hoopla got the coverage, and a cultural confrontation was what the notice of the award communicated to the public at large. The art of the writers, and the perspicacity of the judges, and the cultural contributions of creativity were all ignored, and were thereby made to seem irrelevant. Without the attention that literary debate in a public forum attracts, art will still survive. But the importance that people could be attaching to literary endeavour in their culture won't be realized.

Unfortunately other things may be happening. When a hoopla machine gets going, it sometimes claims that publicity gimmicks *are* "public debate." A great many authors — opening themselves in their books but unwilling to sacrifice their daily privacy, too — are wary of publicity, and this wariness may be one of the reasons that Governor-General's and other prizes are kept subdued. The dignity of State ceremony is another value many would be unhappy to see pass. And a third argument runs something like this: aspiring young writers are delighted by reaching the finals of an awards competition, but mature and established writers are somehow diminished if they come out looking second-best. This interpretation undoubtedly relates to the anti-publicity argument; it particularly applies in a second-rate competition; and it derives both from a humane reaction to the indeterminables of personality and from an understandable abhorrence of notions of "competitiveness" in art. How does one, after all, "compare" Cohen with Kroetsch, or a historical treatise with a popular autobiography? But if as a literary community we actually do value the Governor-General's Award, then being a "finalist" is surely an honour in itself, to be repeatedly, perhaps, enjoyed. And repeatedly recognized *as an achievement*, both by the literary community and by the public at large.

Such openness does not have to mean empty rhetoric or scandalmongering. Some magazines, in an endeavour I suppose to be "newsworthy," choose deliberately to embark on anonymous gossip columns, or on a heavily slanted — contrived, postured — mixture of vendettas and vitriol. Such enterprises have neither objectivity nor satiric wit to give them merit. They begin by being corporate gimmicks; they end by being personally hurtful. And they serve neither "openness" nor art, for they justify instead only those who find art peripheral and petty.

Moreover, if openness need not live on rumour, nor need it suffer under a false democracy. It was openness, for example, that Malcolm Ross praiseworthily sought at the ill-fated but loudly-touted Calgary Novel Conference of a year ago. A year's distance has not made his enterprise any the less praiseworthy, nor the hoopla of the conference Vote for the Best Canadian Novels any the less indefensible. Academy Awards that do not require voters to know all the works they vote on, or to share their understanding of the criteria they bring to bear in their judgment, or to ascertain whether dates of publication alter cases, or whether the shape of any voter's own training or own course might alter cases, or whether they are affected by biases of region, sex, and subject, or whether the quality of translation might affect the judgment of any of the few French-language works that *did* manage to get on the list: awards like these are the same in Calgary as in Hollywood. Because good intentions are sometimes subverted by other kinds of interest is no reason to condemn the initial aspiration, but it is reason to resist accepting whatever accidental decisions result as either serious judgments or binding truths.

In fact we can go on from what that conference "decided," and it is here that the false vote serves openness after all. If we reject the limiting, hierarchical order that the Calgary list of Greatest Books contrived, and examine instead the reasons why a particular hierarchy resulted from that particular vote, we might be closer to understanding more about the uneasy connection between reader and writer, between society and art. Why is it, for example, that so few Quebec writers *were* on the list? Why is it that contemporary Quebec writers are so ill-known outside Quebec, and Anglophone writers so little understood in it? Why has there been no concerted effort to produce better translations of badly translated works? To what extent is the General Reader in Canada still lodged in 1950's realism and 1950's expectations? To what extent does this state of affairs result from critics' inadequacy, reviewers' insufficiency, publishers' delinquency? or from causes less theatrically breast-beating and more mundane? Open answers to questions like these might help further the causes of Canadian art, and get literary criticism beyond the stage where it thought defining works as classics was a way of making them so. F. R. Scott, in one of the essays of his Governor-General's Award-winning volume *Essays on the Constitution*, writes that a "good play or novel may do more to free men's minds from prejudice than new legislation. The expansion of the arts in Canada is a freeing of the imagination and the achieving of a sense of community not only within Canada but between Canada and the world." There is a certain noble idealism about this aspiration. But it is such openness, such freedom, towards which art and those interested in art ought nonetheless incessantly to strive.

W.H.N.

VACATION

Cyril Dabydeen

A prawn memory by the seined sea
water rising; we furl along
roll with the waves —
our clothes on

trade winds lashing
shrimp our eyes skin crab
we are one with the sea

breathing salt —
our tongues raging scales of love.

HUGH MACLENNAN'S TWO WORLDS

Catherine Sheldrick Ross

THE SIX NOVELS THAT FORM the MacLennan canon explore for us, in specifically Canadian terms, a familiar pattern of the humanist's quest for an ideal society, consequent disillusionment and despair, and finally spiritual transcendence. There are striking parallels between the narrator's sense, by the end of *Barometer Rising*, that he is witnessing "a great country move into its destiny" and the Renaissance humanist's feeling of historic participation in rebirth from Gothic darkness. In their desire to provide an ideal literary model for Canada's development, MacLennan's early novels resemble the numerous mirrors for Christian Princes and the literary models for ideal societies written during the Renaissance. The increasingly sombre tone of the later novels is an acknowledgement that the gap between the ideal model and the actual Canada is as unbridgeable as the gap between Erasmus' "Philosophy of Christ" and the statecraft of Henry VIII.

The ideal prince, according to *The Praise of Folly*, "should manage the Publick, not his Private Interest; study nothing but the common good." The ideal role for Canada in *Barometer Rising* is to be the "central arch which unite[s] the new order." In contrast with the ideal model, however, actual experience is of religious and civil wars, the Protestant Reformation and Quebec Separatism, the sixteenth-century break-up of Christendom and the twentieth-century collapse referred to variously by MacLennan as standing on "yawning edge of the precipice" (*The Precipice*), "the disintegration of the world itself" (*The Watch That Ends the Night*), and the sense of living in the eye of an apocalyptic hurricane (*Return of the Sphinx*). MacLennan, in *The Watch That Ends The Night*, refers to this gap between the ideal and the actual as the "conflict . . . between spirit and the human condition." In *Return of the Sphinx*, it is the conflict between human ideals and human nature: "All the ideas that had guided and inspired Ainslie's life — socialism, education, the faith that science and prosperity would improve man's life . . . — the best he could say now of any of these hopes was that they had foundered in the ancient ocean of human nature." When the tension between the ideal and the actual finally becomes intolerable, a possible response to the resulting despair

is repudiation of this foundering world in favour of some transcendental reality: the quest for the ideal, frustrated in this world by sin and the perversity of human nature, is transferred to the spiritual world.

MacLennan's six novels, from *Barometer Rising* to *Return of the Sphinx*, develop according to this pattern. The national odyssey of the early novels to find an ideal Canada becomes a quest for the otherworldly Celestial City. The change occurs midway in *The Watch That Ends the Night* and accounts for that novel's noticeable shift in tone from the detailed, realistic account of the Thirties experience at the beginning to the spiritualized conclusion in which the everyday world of Canadian life is "becoming a shadow" and politics "seemed the most unreal of all." Erasmus' comment on the need to move "through the labyrinth of this world into the pure light of the spiritual life" (*Enchiridion*, ii) forms an apt summary of the thematic movement of *The Watch That Ends the Night* and explains the abstractness, the detachment from action in this world, and the apocalyptic intimations that characterize *Return of the Sphinx*.

MacLennan's own re-enactment of the failure of the humanist synthesis is consistent with his perception of recurring patterns in human history. The humanist tradition records an awesome history of losses that include the collapse of the classical Greek cities, St. Augustine at the fall of Rome, Erasmus, Luther, and Calvin at the break-up of Christendom, and onward to the Victorian sense of collapse. MacLennan witnesses yet another disintegration, this time specifically in terms of the Canadian experience. He seems to be speaking through his own fictional character, Alan Ainslie, who says in *Return of the Sphinx*:

> I've talked history to Daniel by the hour. . . . I don't know why it is, but all these things keep happening again and again. Mice and men. Men and mice. Can't anyone ever learn from anything?

Significantly, Ainslie has written a book called *Death of a Victorian* and, like MacLennan himself, is painfully conscious of being one of the last upholders of a humanist code of values that the rest of the world considers obsolete. MacLennan's essay in *Scotchman's Return*, "The Classical Tradition and Education," discusses elegiacally the break-up of humanism and contrasts the older humanist education with the present system that is bound to the "producer-consumer cycle." But, he goes on to say, "even when I was a boy there were vestiges of the [classical humanist] tradition left in daily life. My father was one of them." MacLennan's father "read Latin and Greek for pleasure" and was consequently "one of the least provincially minded men I ever knew, even though he was full of Scotch and Calvinist quirks." It is specifically Calvin's brand of humanism, inherited from MacLennan's father, that provides a broad context for MacLennan's novels.

The persistence of the Calvinist mentality, even among those who consciously try to resist it, is the theme of both *The Precipice* and *Each Man's Son*. Mac-

Lennan's preface to *Each Man's Son* explains the negative aspects of the Calvinist inheritance:

> To Cape Breton the Highlanders brought . . . with them an ancient curse, intensified by John Calvin and branded upon their souls by John Knox and his successors — the belief that man has inherited from Adam a nature so sinful there is no hope for him and that, furthermore, he lives and dies under the wrath of an arbitrary God who will forgive only a handful of His elect on the Day of Judgment.

In the course of *Each Man's Son*, MacKenzie confronts Daniel Ainslie with an ironic echo of Calvin:

> Man, having through Adam's fall lost communion with God, abideth evermore under His wrath and curse except such as He hath, out of His infinite loving-kindness and tender mercy, elected to eternal life through Jesus Christ.

Calvin's dualist assumptions about the nature of man are evident enough in these two quotations. According to Calvin, "there be in man as it were two worlds."[1] The natural world fell with Adam and is now dominated by sin; therefore one should focus on the spiritual world and the Day of Judgment.

Calvin's two worlds can betraced to the more familiar Augustinian account of the "two kinds of human society which we may call two cities. . . . The one consists of those who wish to live after the flesh, the other of those who wish to live after the spirit" (*City of God*, XIV, i). Erasmus reproduces this conflict in the *Enchiridion*:

> Let us suppose that there are two worlds, . . . the one intelligible, the other visible. . . . In the visible world . . . we are, as it were, mere sojourners. . . . I feel that the entire spiritual life consists in this: That we gradually turn from those things whose appearance is deceptive to those things that are real . . . from the pleasures of the flesh, the honors of the world that are so transitory, to those things that are immutable and everlasting." (III, 5)

NOT SURPRISINGLY, IN VIEW of MacLennan's own Calvinist inheritance and his consequent familiarity with the doctrine of the two worlds, guilt and transcendence are the twin dynamic forces of a MacLennan novel. Awareness of guilt — what MacLennan calls in *The Watch* "the Great Fear" that eddies up from the subconscious and in *Return* the "beasts [that] were kept hidden in the darkness" behind the unlocked door — this awareness becomes intolerable and drives its possessor forth on a quest for transcendence. As MacLennan puts it in his preface to *Each Man's Son*:

> no normal human being can exist in constant awareness that he is sinful and doomed through no fault of his own. . . . the curse remained alive . . . like a sombre

> beast growling behind an unlocked door. It was felt even when they were least conscious of it. To escape its cold breath some turned to drink and others to the pursuit of knowledge.

The novelist, needless to say, must cope somehow with the dark domain that belongs to the beasts of experience. MacLennan tends to cope in two ways with the necessity of finding his materials in the fallen world. He writes satire and, secondly, he idealizes, turning the physical world into a symbol of the spiritual world. The satiric strain, consistently an important element in the novels, expresses MacLennan's sense of the betrayal of humanist values in the world as he finds it. He satirizes the corrupt colonial mentality of Geoffrey Wain in *Barometer Rising*; the ruthless business world of Huntley McQueen in *Two Solitudes*; the New York advertising world that Stephen Lassiter joins in *The Precipice*; the life-destroying influence, even upon those who intellectually deny it, of the "ancient curse" of Calvinism in *Each Man's Son*; the neo-religious fervour of the political movements of the Thirties in *The Watch That Ends the Night*; and finally over-indulged rebellious youth, and the American consumer society that has produced them, in *Return of the Sphinx*. Usually, whenever MacLennan is at his most realistic and convincing in his handling of specific detail, his tone is satiric.

Not contrary but complementary to the satire is MacLennan's idealism. This is expressed in his favouring of heroines of spectacular virtue and purity, in his development of symbolic characters and allegorical central episodes, and in his consistent use of the quest pattern. Since, within the Calvinist scheme of things, the disintegrating physical world is fitter as an object of satire than as a source of values, the characters in MacLennan's novels are constantly in search of something that proves to lie outside the world of experience. The novels are all shaped in the form of a quest, and the characters yearn, like Jerome Martell and George Stewart in *The Watch*, "to belong to something larger than themselves." In the first three novels, the quest is for an ideal national identity for Canada. Canada, having purged herself of her colonial past in *Barometer Rising*, moves to assume her role as "the keystone to hold the world together." She must bridge the two solitudes and manage, at the same time, to avoid falling over the precipice of go-getter American materialism. The pattern is somewhat varied in *Each Man's Son* where Daniel Ainslie's search for a son is really the search for an ideal. As MacKenzie tells Ainslie, "You aren't looking for a son, Dan. You're looking for a God." We find out in *Return of the Sphinx* that the adopted son, Alan, is reproducing Daniel's Calvinist quest for a route out of this world. Chantal says, "That old father of his — he gave Dad the idea that his life ought to be some kind of Pilgrim's Progress to some kind of City of God and what did Dad turn that into? His City of God is this greedy country." *The Watch That Ends the Night* (which MacLennan has described as depending "not . . . on character-in-action, but on spirit-in-action") is also concerned with a pilgrim's progress in search of spiritual

reality, the "something larger than oneself." Consistently in the novels the characters become symbols and the quest ends with some ideal that transcends the literal.

Characteristics of MacLennan's fiction that have troubled readers — the "unnovelistic" endings that jettison characters and transcend the human situation, the didacticism — these are likely products of a two-world theory. The novel's subject is the world of change: "A novel's chief value lies in its capacity to entertain and in its characters," says MacLennan.[2] But MacLennan also desires to instruct, and truth belongs to the spiritual world. In the long run, the characters are expendable vehicles for the message. By the end of *The Watch That Ends the Night*, for example, the characters lose their human identities. George Stewart becomes Everyman and Jerome and Catherine are "half-translated" to the spiritual world:

> Like Jerome's only much more so, [Catherine's face] had become so transparent one almost felt one looked at a spirit. Light was in it. . . . [Catherine] seemed . . . to be somewhere else most of the time, somewhere beyond from which she came back to visit.

It is in *The Watch That Ends the Night* that the various tensions between the visible world and the ideal world, the characters and the spiritual meaning, the actual country of Canada and the ideal model finally become irreconcilable and the two worlds split apart. The early novels support the belief that the barometer is rising. They depict journeys that end in lovers meeting and show a model new society forming itself around the united young couple. The last two novels emphasize the isolation of their now middle-aged protagonists, who end up sojourners and exiles in a disintegrating world. As MacLennan becomes increasingly disillusioned with the effectiveness of action, he turns from romance and comedy to irony and tragedy. We can observe the change occurring in *The Watch That Ends the Night*. In "Reflections on Two Decades," MacLennan himself reports that while writing this novel he was "like a snake shedding its old skin" — "the intellectual skin most men of my generation had been wearing since the beginning of the Thirties": "So long as I wore it myself, my novels had been essentially optimistic."[3]

The narrator, George Stewart, is Everyman whose personal history represents the experience of his generation in trying to cope with the final collapse of humanist values. The first part of the novel examines various inadequate attempts to discover sustaining values in this world: George's search for a father-figure; Jerome's conversion to socialism as a "neo-religious faith"; and George's idea that in Canada he "had found the thing larger than [himself] to which [he] could belong." When socialism and communism and active political resistance against Franco and Hitler all prove incapable of reforming the fallen world, the immediate reaction is despair and cynicism:

> But the trouble is that none of these substitutes abides.... Then, though we may deny it, comes the Great Fear.... There lay ahead only the fearful tunnel with nothing at the end.... My subconscious rose. The subconscious — the greedy lustful infantile subconscious....

George encounters, eddying up from his "underself," repressed sexual desire for his step-daughter Sally as well as jealousy and intense resentment for Jerome and Catherine: "I hated them both — Catherine no less than Jerome. I hated myself and I hated life."

George resolves this intolerable conflict along the dualistic lines already examined. In the novel's climactic scene of the meeting in the hospital room "with Catherine's small silent body between [them]," disciple George achieves mystical unity with his Saint Jerome whom he has for so long both loved and hated. "He was actually myself," George says. George has earlier described his story "not as one conditioned by character as the dramatists understand it, but by the spirit." The conflict is resolved when the characters turn themselves into pure spirit and transcend the human condition. As George describes Catherine, "her character almost disappeared into her spirit"; "her beauty ... was suddenly that of an angel." The characters now prepare to enter into the "city on top of a hill" that Jerome used to dream as a child "was white and ... beautiful, and ... a great privilege to enter." This city is not, as he once thought, the classical city of Athens, but Montreal transformed into the Celestial City of light.

The last few pages re-focus a whole configuration of images that have been already used in connection with the Spanish Crusade and the novel's political quest for a reformed society in this world: for example, the long journey of the canoe to reach the ocean; martyrdom; death and rebirth; dark and light; references to *Pilgrim's Progress*, Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*, and the light on the road to Damascus. The political quest, energized by "neo-religious faith," is only a parody of the true quest, which is achieved in an ecstatic *grande finale* of light and music — Bach's music and Catherine's light-filled painting. In this way, MacLennan does not have to abandon any of the imagery he has developed in the course of the novel. He simply transforms it from its secular to its spiritual application. Just as classical Athens becomes the New Jerusalem, Catherine is transformed from a neo-Platonized love goddess into a portion of the Holy Spirit. George has first perceived her in terms of courtly love, Renaissance sonnet sequences, and Arcadian pastoralism:

> with the sunlit green of the garden around her ... green was her color at that supreme moment of my youth;

and

> all these sensual images were so sacred that I blushed lest my knowledge of them would seem a profanity;

and

> So that summer I entered Arcadia and the pipes played and the glory of the Lord shone round about.

By the end, however, he is confident that "the loves she had known and inspired . . . would be translated into the mysterious directions of the spirit which breathed upon the void."

The Watch That Ends the Night is less tragic and more energetic than *Return of the Sphinx*. Although it presents the complete pattern of earthly quest, disillusionment, and transcendence, *The Watch* deals mainly with the optimistic period of belief in political reform and then later with the ecstasy of the spiritual consolation. Moreover, before the novel shifts the sphere of the quest from this world to the spiritual world, there is time for vivid observations of experience in the Dickensian sketches of Bigbee at Waterloo School, the formidable Aunt Agnes, and the loser Harry Blackwell, and for realistic descriptions of the New Brunswick lumber camp and of St. Catherine Street on a Friday night in the Depression. *Return of the Sphinx* begins where *The Watch That Ends the Night* concludes, with an assumption that the world, as George puts it, is "a shadow in which politics . . . [seemed] the most unreal of all." The tone of *Return* is ironic because the only thing at issue is how long it will take Alan Ainslie to realize that he is living in the shadows of Plato's cave. The novel focusses almost exclusively, therefore, upon the process of disillusionment, despair, and repudiation. By the end, "the walls of his life and meaning dissolved around him." Gabriel is left to provide the epitaph: "When a man tries to do something positive in the world, he's safe so long as he can believe the shadows are real. Until this year I always thought that Alan could."

Hugh MacLennan's novels, taken together, form the record of a process which, one suspects, has been completed, with the gap between the two worlds now too wide for a novel to span. In conclusion, we can say that MacLennan's Calvinist brand of humanism has shaped this dualistic pattern and goes far to account for many characterisic features of the novels: their tendency to be didactic and rhetorical rather than representational and mimetic; the use of symbolic characters and incidents; the vividness of the satirical sketches of minor characters in contrast with the often unconvincing and abstract major characters; the use of apocalyptic imagery; the turning away in the later novels from romance and comedy to irony and tragedy; the persistence of the quest motif; and the shifting of the geography of the quest from this fallen world of shadows to the spiritual world. To us MacLennan is important because his national odyssey puts the recurrent humanist dilemma into a Canadian context. In his six published novels, we see the completed process of the political quest for an ideal model of Canada, despair

and the repudiation of the "labyrinth of this world," and finally the movement into "the pure light of the spiritual life."

NOTES

[1] *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, III, 19.

[2] "The Future of the Novel as an Art Form," *Scotchman's Return*, p. 145.

[3] In *The Sixties: Canadian Writers and Writing of the Decade*, ed. George Woodcock (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1969), p. 31.

THE FINAL FALL

Alexandre L. Amprimoz

There are things
you could have said
in calmer countries.

Autumn came from the woods,
invaded the garden. Look,
it falls now on the patio
as it did last year
when this wine was grape.

The sun sets clouds on fire,
the wind blows the ashes away
and trees move their tired arms
— old dancers outplayed by the tempo.

That was the fall you knew,
snowless as a dream-world should be;
these lines file it for a while.

CALLAGHAN AND THE CHURCH

Judith Kendle

MORLEY CALLAGHAN'S DEBT TO CHRISTIANITY has been over-estimated and his distance from that tradition never fully explored. Content with the assumption that the author is a Roman Catholic novelist, most criticism simply ignores the seriousness of his quarrel with the Church, and to date there has been no acknowledgment of the aesthetic nature of his views. It is possible, at least, given the importance Callaghan attaches to his vocation as an artist, that his moral philosophy owes as much to aesthetic considerations as it does to Roman Catholic doctrine. Such, indeed, has proved the case. Whether or not Callaghan's criticism of Christianity arises out of his youthful determination as an artist to look at the world freshly for himself, it is clear that he plumps for individual insight and imagination in preference to doctrinal approaches to truth. He tends, in fact, to equate superior insight with artistic talent or appreciation and to delegate to the Artist the moral grandeur and the sympathy more commonly reserved for the Priest. Confidence in art, moreover, virtually replaces his faith in orthodox dogma or creed; wherever traditional belief survives it has undergone significant change. Thus, while his belief in the transcendent power of love and concern for the spiritual life of the individual are derived from the Christian tradition, Callaghan means something very different from *caritas* by love and is, for the most part, resolutely critical of orthodox, doctrinal, and institutional forms of Christianity. Not enough attention has been paid to the author's own disclaimer: "The last thing that's in my mind is to write religious books."[1]

Many other of his comments put his position forthrightly enough. In spite of his Catholic childhood, Callaghan is suspicious of metaphysical speculation, as impatient as his hero, Sam Raymond, with pretense about "things that could never be known," and contemptuous of Catholic conversions. It is his rejection of orthodoxy" and "authority" in *That Summer in Paris* (1963) which is chiefly important here, for this, coupled with his inherent distrust of purely rational approaches to life, makes the claim of his supposed indebtedness to the French Roman Catholic philosopher, Jacques Maritain, unlikely.

External evidence in support of the influence is scant and the novels themselves do not support it. Callaghan alludes briefly to the "personalist" approach of Mari-

tain in a review of Aldous Huxley[2] and witnesses to the personal appeal of the philosopher in an article called "It was news in Paris — not in Toronto."[3] But the article is more a piece of Canadian flagwaving than serious philosophical appreciation and finds him, at its end, wryly suspicious of intellectual conversion by sheer force of personality. In view of their friendship in the early 1930's, it has been assumed that the dedication of *Such is My Beloved* (1934), "To those times with M. in the winter of 1933," refers to Jacques Maritain, but the fact goes unverified by Callaghan, and its confirmation would serve only to strengthen the irony of the novel's depiction of the decline and fall of a priest. Moreover, Callaghan explicitly denies such a debt, and in a letter written to the author in March 1976 compares the idea of tracing such an influence to "barking up the wrong tree." It is just possible that Maritain's analysis of the inadequacies of "bourgeois individualism"[4] defined Callaghan's arguments in *They Shall Inherit the Earth* (1934), but the insights were his own prior to 1933 (as evidenced by works such as *Strange Fugitive*, *It's Never Over*, and *A Broken Journey*), and the novel contains, in addition, a damning caricature of a Catholic convert, in the person of Nathaniel Benjamin. While Callaghan would agree with the philosopher that changes in the social structure must be accompanied by profound changes within the individual heart, his own approach to that conversion is by way of neither blind faith nor doctrinal disputation. He admits in his memoirs only to an interest in the "neo-Thomism of Jacques Maritain" and maintains that even the philosophers themselves would agree that "the artist kind of knowing" could yield "a different kind of knowledge beyond rational speculation."

The hard fact is, of course, that Callaghan often finds himself in violent disagreement with major tenets of the Christian faith. He is particularly distressed by Christian pessimism about human nature and theological conceptions about the nature of love and inveighs loudly against their survival in the works of Roman Catholic and secular writers alike.

He disagrees, for example, with the dualism he discerns at the heart of Western Christianity. Indeed, he identifies it in *That Summer in Paris* with "that fantasy running through modern letters and thought that man is alien in this universe" and regards writers as various as Pascal and Henry Miller to be equally heir to that tradition, all "the children of St. Paul." In the same work, he is distressed by Christian fears of human sexuality and attacks an otherwise "beautiful writer" like Mauriac's evident "disgust with the flesh." Callaghan feels positively "pagan" in comparison and even views the "correct copulations" of D. H. Lawrence as an Anglo-Saxon over-reaction.

Hierarchical conceptions of love are thus mocked in *Such is My Beloved*, and the entire Christian vision of life as sorrowful rejected in *A Passion in Rome* (1961). Orthodox theological opinion which considers man's spiritual love for his fellow man to be but a pale imitation of Divine *caritas*, and where sexual pas-

sion does not rate at all, accords ill with Father Dowling's own experience in the first novel as evidenced by his reading of the "Song of Songs," while Sam Raymond contends in the second that "any fool could see" for himself that, far from being a miserable existence compounded of sex, sin and suffering wherein the only escape from "desire" was death, the human condition is frequently enjoyed by men and women, whose only sin, if any, is their obvious delight in sensual pleasure.

Callaghan is also critical of Christian conceptions of human nature as fallen and of Redemption only through Grace, regarding them as destructive of human dignity, responsibility, and free will. The idea of "original sin" does not appeal to him, nor to *Strange Fugitive*'s hero, Harry Trotter; speculation about innate depravity bores and irritates Callaghan; and he regards Christianity's "awareness of evil" as "a hopeless spiritual trap."[5] Thus, while Callaghan admits that Graham Greene's acceptance of "man and his relationship with God as something revealed with finality within the Catholic Church" gave him "a whole dramatic apparatus" as a writer, he bemoans the "dank and dismal Catholicism that came out of it." He confesses himself "completely bemused" by the reappearance of this "ancient view" of man in contemporary literature, in the works say of William Golding and Harold Pinter, since he regards conceptions of man as "naturally good, or naturally evil" as "old nonsense" himself. Convinced that "A man's nature is a very tangled web, shot through with gleams of heavenly light, no doubt, and the darkness of what we call evil forces,"[6] Callaghan admires, instead, the work of Albert Camus, who arrived at the "conviction that man, just being what he was, had the possibilities for dignity and responsibility."

In truth, the whole burden of Callaghan's moral philosophy, with its emphasis upon the fullest self-realization possible and upon life as it is lived upon this earth, is often inimical to the other worldly and self-sacrificial Christian tradition of Redemption through Grace and out of Time. Regarding mortality as "a gloomy inevitable experience," Callaghan explains in his memoirs how he himself avoided morbid preoccupation with death (as well as futile speculation about the meaning of life) by immersing himself as fully as possible in the day to day business of living in order to realize, as he points out elsewhere, all his "potentialities" and "possibilities" as a man.[7] Both Ross Hillquist, interested only in "life on the earth," and Anna Prychoda, who "inherit[s] the earth," as ideal characters in *They Shall Inherit the Earth*, achieve Callaghan's moral goal as it is indicated in the novel's title, while Father Dowling's sacrifice of his manhood, through his original vows of celibacy and his capitulation to religious authority, is clearly regarded as madness. Not only is chastity regarded as an impossible ideal of self-denial, but the concept of self-sacrificial spiritual love is considered a delusion and a monstrous form of egotism.

DOCTRINAL DIFFERENCES SUCH AS THESE make attempts to interpret Callaghan as a specifically Roman Catholic novelist open to question at least, and, indeed, such efforts eventually run into anomalies. Malcolm Ross' introduction to the New Canadian Library edition of *Such is My Beloved*, for example, while recognizing the irony of the work, argues that "Callaghan's assumptions are thoroughly Catholic," insists that "He never doubts the divine nature and mission of the Church," and then experiences difficulty before the fact of Father Dowling's madness:

> Now this sacrifice of the mind, this offering up of the priest's sickness, is not a pleasant symbol. Does Callaghan mean by it a rejection of the intellectual life as irrelevant (or even dangerous) to salvation?

Ross thinks not and is forced to argue that the priest's sacrifice of "prideful self-sufficient intelligence at work in the vacuum of the abstract" restores love. The truth of the novel is exactly the reverse. Father Dowling's self-sacrifice in the name of love is a capitulation to pride and to obedience and restores not love in the human sense, which is all that Callaghan sees as either possible or necessary for man, but as presented in the novel, futile, and essentially mindless, theological "commentary on the Song of Songs." The ironic implications are clear: instead of self and human sexuality in this life, Father Dowling should renounce the idea of sacrifice itself, idle speculation about the nature of Divine love, and the vain hope of redemption out of time.

Despite quarrels with authority and Christian doctrine, Callaghan retains affectionate respect for Mother Church. A variety of churches file across his pages as inescapable physical facts and spiritual signs of man's loftiest aspirations; priests do, upon occasion, tender perfectly good advice, and many of his characters, notably his women, draw strength and comfort still from their faith and from traditional ritual and dogma. There is, on the other hand, neither hesitation to expose imperfections, nor compunction to mute condemnation of the Church's palpable failures. The work witnesses, in fact, to the demise of Church influence in society, and to the disaffection of contemporary man.

It would seem that Callaghan hopes to fill the gap. Readily admitting "there is no doubt I'm hopelessly corrupt theologically,"[8] while aiming, nevertheless, as he explains in *That Summer in Paris*, to "relate a Christian enlightenment to some timeless process of becoming," Callaghan proceeds by way of intuition to a set of personal convictions which owes more to his own aesthetic philosophy and the creative process than to orthodox Christian belief, and whose expression in terms of religious symbol or jargon betrays ironic distance as much as their source. There is no doubt of his indebtedness to the tradition, but just as Priest is supplanted by

Artist, faith is transformed by aesthetic philosophy and traditional religious symbolism put to literary, as opposed to devotional, use.

It seems to Sam Raymond, Callaghan's spokesman in *A Passion in Rome*, for example, that "all the doctrinal ideologies of his day had been fading into myth and literature, as the fixed opinions of the Greeks and Romans had become simply literature." Certainly Callaghan's own approach to religious symbol and the use of Biblical parallel in his work is more in the tradition of artistic licence than of affirmation of literal belief. Parallels with the life of Christ inform *Such is My Beloved* and *More Joy in Heaven* (1937), but the heroes are neither modern exempla of the holy passion, nor saintly sinners whose tragic suffering and inevitable failure can only be redeemed by means of Grace. Far from a feast of suffering in order to achieve mystical release, or pious contemplation of man's fallen nature in aid of Christian resignation, the object of each novel is irony, and the discrepancy between the ideal and the actual hero is explored in order to expose an unfortunate waste of human potential.

It is clearly madness on Father Dowling's part, so mesmerized is he by the spectacle of the Cross, to attempt to emulate self-sacrificial Divine love in hopes of salvation out of time. His only real moral alternatives, Callaghan implies, lie this side of Heaven. On the other hand, Kip's crucifixion is probably preventable. As much his own as society's fault, Caley's temporal failure is the result of naiveté and fantasies of social acceptance, as well as a lack of responsibility on the part of society, and it is ultimately more regrettable than tragic. Obviously an ironic Saviour — society gets "the kind of hero [its] time deserves" — the question of whether there is "more joy in heaven" becomes irrelevant, as the novel demonstrates how mankind is cut off in some mean or desperate way from self-fulfillment this side of the grave.

Biblical myth and pattern inform *They Shall Inherit the Earth* as well. But Michael Aikenhead's movement as prodigal son, from sin through repentance and absolution to forgiveness, provides more in the way of irony and dramatic structure than pious illustration of Biblical story. It is his moral development, after all, which provides the model for his father's, and he regains an earthly, as opposed to spiritual, Paradise.

It is his use of "The Beatitudes" and the "Song of Songs" which reveals the uniqueness of Callaghan's approach most clearly. On the one hand, a Biblical text is used in *They Shall Inherit the Earth* to refute Christian otherworldliness with irony, while on the other "the bold sensual phrases" of religious poetry stand in direct opposition to theological commentary. Far from religious exhortation to transcend the sensual self through spiritual striving, Callaghan interprets "The Beatitudes" as a call for self-realization and whole-hearted commitment to the world. Similarly his reading of the "Song of Songs" in *Such is My Beloved* contradicts orthodox opinion. While Father Dowling's speculations about the nature of

love are finally rejected by Bishop Foley as heretical, Callaghan clearly prefers them to passive acceptance of Holy Writ:

> Father Dowling in the beginning may have loved the prostitutes in a general way and, of course, that was good. His love for them became too concrete. How could it become too concrete? From the general to the particular, the conception expressed in the image. . . . *From the word to the flesh, the word made flesh, from the general to the particular, the word made flesh,* no, no, nonsense . . . then the general made concrete . . . no, no. (Italics mine.)

It is the good father's experience of the Bible as imaginative literature that has led him to his perception of its human truth. Instead of finally revealed truth or Roman Catholic dogma, the poetry of the Bible is approached as metaphorical sign, and the most appropriate attitude towards it is one of awareness not reverential awe.

One could argue, of course, that Callaghan's sense of metaphor, particularly his attempt as he explains it in his memoirs to reunite the "flesh" and the "word" in his work, is Catholic in a fundamental way. Malcolm Ross has suggested, for example, in *Poetry and Dogma* (1954), that just such a sense of metaphor, what Ross refers to as the "analogical" sense, is central to the Christian experience, at once natural to the sensibility attuned to the mystery of the Eucharist and inevitable in a truly Christian writer. Whether or not Callaghan achieves reconciliation in his work, it is likely that he has some such theory in mind in view of his distaste for separations and duality. It is possible, in fact, that what he is arguing for in novels like *Such is My Beloved* is a renewed sense of the sacredness of ordinary human experience, which the Church, in his view, has forgotten. One misses, however, in Callaghan "that sense of commitment and obligation, which," it has been suggested, "is the essence of religion."[9] Callaghan's allegiance is all to himself:

> A real writer, that very rare thing — a man who looks at the world out of his own eyes . . . his loyalty is all to this humanity in himself. . . . If such a man has any wisdom, any philosophy, it is imbued in him, it is never consulted, never dwelt on. . . . If he tried [sic] to see things as others see them he becomes a liar and hack, and above all he betrays himself. Thinking in this way, it seemed to me that all great writers by their very nature must be heretical.[10]

We are close here to the heart of Callaghan's aesthetic. Resisting the authority of Christian dogma by treating the Bible as a piece of literature, Callaghan effects a transformation of belief. Traditional religious concepts are reinterpreted in the light of his experience as an artist, and the Christian faith is ultimately replaced with what amounts to a theology of the creative imagination. Resurrection in terms of metaphysics is dismissed; innocence born of ignorance is a sin; and salvation is achieved through awareness.

It is, after all, his painter's eye for "form and colour" which permits Sam Ray-

mond to discern "The ages creeping back to us" in the Papal funeral, and as Callaghan's spokesman in *A Passion in Rome*, he continues to exercise his imagination. Thus he defines his faith in opposition to traditional belief: Michelangelo's "Last Judgment" is rejected as an "old old lie"; "that burden-of-guilt nonsense" is dismissed; and "fear of life," in opposition to innate depravity, is advanced as the cause of evil and human suffering. Sam's explanation of the true meaning of the Resurrection is perhaps most typical of his self-confidence. Explaining what the Resurrection means to a Roman Catholic, Sam equates it at once with the unquenchable spark of the human spirit and the eternal promise of spring, and replaces pious hope in Life Everlasting with a "fiercely exultant" faith in human potential and the possibilities of life on this earth. An amalgamation of personal observation and an intuitive feeling for pattern, Sam's conviction escapes metaphysical speculation and is surely what Callaghan means by his attempt to relate a Christian enlightenment to some timeless process of becoming. Sam's beliefs are described by Anna Connel, for example, as "very big stuff . . . some line of love or truth or something [all the way from Egypt] right up to the events at St. Peter's."

THE EMPHASIS ALREADY NOTED IN THE NOVELS, upon self-realization and sexual love in opposition to religious ideals of self-sacrifice and spiritual passion, is also accompanied by special efforts to combat Christian conceptions of the fatal fall to knowledge. Ultimately such efforts end in complementary myth, in a kind of redemptive quest for awareness and the approach of the Artist to God. Callaghan makes, for example, an unusual connection in his work between innocence and evil. He suggests, moreover, that innocence that is not knowing is a sin. Three of his novels in particular, *Such is My Beloved*, *More Joy in Heaven*, and *The Many Colored Coat*, illuminate the relationship between the two.

The complementary careers of Father Dowling and Kip Caley demonstrate clearly that pride born of ignorance goes before a fall. Both are saintly sinners and innocents abroad whose palpable naiveté about themselves and the world around them betrays egotism, profound disillusionment, and despair. Whereas self-knowledge and faithfulness to his original dream of obscure anonymity and the ordinary life of the common man could have saved Kip from his fantasies of social acceptance and prevented his untimely end, Father Dowling's manhood might have been redeemed if he had followed his natural instincts and intuition instead of accepting the Christian vision as his own. Social and religious conformity are equally unsatisfactory alternatives: every man must seek his own truth, and innocence compounded of naiveté is a sin.

Harry Lane reaches similar conclusions in *The Many Colored Coat* (1960). Forced to ponder the ambiguity of human motivation, including his own, and the difficulty of determining absolute truth, he abandons the idea of innocence as a dangerous form of pride. "Innocence" is described as a murderous weapon, a "Two-edged sword without a handle" which wounds both the person who wields it and its intended victim. Later he equates "the greatest of sins" with "unawareness" and embarks for "a new world of new relationships with people," armed with sensitivity and awareness.

Of particular significance is the distinction Harry draws between a fall "into some awareness that could give width and depth to a man's whole life" and the primal Christian tragedy. Far from a fall "into corruption," Harry's abandonment of "innocence" paradoxically saves his life. On the other hand, Kip Caley's conversion to Christianity, also described as a redemptive fall, ultimately proves illusory. Supposedly making him "innocent" in a new kind of way, Father Butler's good influence upon him in prison quickly gives way to cynical aggressiveness again, as impossible Christian idealism proves unequal to the realities of the world. It is clear that the theme is a conscious one, and Callaghan explains it himself:

> Well, if what I'm talking about is *prized*, innocence, I mean innocence as a *prized* thing, I guess innocence is not knowing. The whole Jewish-Christian thing about man in the Garden of Eden, the symbolic story of man losing his innocence, this never convinced me. I just never could quite understand this as a symbolic story. Man knew nothing about good and evil. I don't even know what that means, unless it means there *was* no good and evil. According to this Christian-Jewish myth, man must have had no awareness before the fall. But what makes man interesting *is* in his awareness of right action: what he does, what he doesn't do. We know this from our experience in this world. The most insensitive person in this world is a man who is unaware; he's frightening always.[11]

As sensitivity and awareness usurp innocence as virtues in Callaghan's eyes, salvation through imaginative consciousness, which is what Callaghan means by awareness, replaces redemption by means of Grace. Similarly the Artist himself assumes greater significance in his work. Indeed, as the Bible fades more and more into literature, the Artist ultimately emulates God as Seer of Divine Truth.

A tendency towards moral superiority is apparent in most of the novels.[12] What has been called "compassionate irony,"[13] the prevailing tone of Callaghan's work, often disguises paternalism and a kind of rueful contempt on the part of Callaghan for his characters. Never more apparent than in *Such is My Beloved* where priest and prostitutes are children, the temptation to take unfair advantage is rarely resisted elsewhere. He delights, for example, in the fumbling incomprehension of Harry Trotter in *Strange Fugitive* and that of Scotty Bowman in *The Many Colored Coat*. On the other hand, most of his successful heroes adopt poses like the author's own: Harry Lane and Sam Raymond, his surrogate, both become

seekers after truth, and Sam in particular resolves like Callaghan to "see the ends of the earth and judge them." Indeed, describing himself in his memoirs as an observer par excellence, Callaghan comes perilously close to identification of the Artist with a merciful God:

> We are born, we live a while, and we die, and along the way the artist keeps looking at the appearance of things, call it concrete reality, the stuff of experience, or simply 'what is out there.'

Certainly he sees the Artist and God as eternally vigilant and the ultimate judges of the human condition. "The great fiction writer," he explains, "must not only have a view of man as he is, but of man as he ought to be,"[14] and God, like the author, waits patiently for recognition of His truth. "God sees the truth," a priest in *The Many Colored Coat* explains to one of Callaghan's characters, "but He sometimes waits. . . . He is waiting and watching" for "Recognition of His truth." God, the Artist, and the idea of perfection are also associated in Callaghan's mind. Musing, for example, about the poet Ezra Pound's interest in St. Anselme's proof of the existence of God, Callaghan goes on to speculate that if God is equated with perfection, then the Artist must surely approach Him in his longing for the ideal.[15] Elsewhere, as we have noted, he equates the end of separations between "words" and "the thing or person being described" with the "word made flesh" in his work, which leads one reluctantly to the conclusion that as long as the Artist is in his heaven everything is right with the world. The Artist evidently emulates God as Divine Seer and Judge of truth, but as Word-maker, he reigns supreme.

Which is not to say that Callaghan ends by making a religion of art, far from it in fact. Sam Raymond, after all, is a failure as an artist, and the point seems to be that he must put his personal life before his career. Callaghan still seems to prefer the artist's life. Responding with some amusement to the suggestion that he might have been a priest himself, he paints a harsh portrait of the religious life, and although he evinces sympathy for the calling, it is clear that "the ecclesiastical life would have been a horror for [him]."[16] The preference is reflected in the novels. Whereas Father Dowling and Sam Raymond are equally failures in terms of their professions, the artist is permitted "success of the heart." Sam restores to life and to reality not only himself, but Anna Connel as well.

It is tempting to read Callaghan's work as an exercise in rationalization. If the sudden finality of revealed truth is rejected, then the artist is obviously free to choose his own. Certainly he insists upon his own insights. Whether or not, or how serious the author is in his equation of the Artist with an All-seeing God, it is clear that he usurps "the old authoritarian priest."[17] Indeed, Callaghan's treatment of the Roman Catholic Church is related to an essentially aesthetic philosophy of life, and the effect of this upon the work is crucial. Not only are efforts

made in the novels to combat traditional concepts of innocence and the fatal fall to knowledge with complementary myth, with a kind of redemptive quest for awareness and the approach of the Artist to God, but orthodox ritual and symbol are put to literary as opposed to devotional use. The religious impulse itself is seen in *A Passion in Rome* to be an inevitable response to mortality, pointing to nothing beyond itself but the indomitable courage of man:

> [St. Peter's] had long been the place of the dead. Rapt as [Sam] was, he could believe that behind the figures in the aisle, conducting their burial rite on this Vatican Hill, he saw the shadowy figures of others in antique processions, precursors of those he saw now, who were perhaps saying as the others had said, that man was a unique creature on earth because he was aware of the mystery of existence and death, and now was facing it. . . .

If God has not quite disappeared from Callaghan's pages, His Church has become historical fact, and as the Bible fades more and more into myth and literature, it is clear that it is imaginative approaches that are redemptive, and that everyone ought to pursue.

NOTES

[1] From an interview by Robert Weaver, "A Talk with Morley Callaghan," *The First Five Years: a selection from The Tamarack Review*, ed. Robert Weaver (Toronto: Oxford Univ. Press, 1962), p. 138.

[2] Morley Callaghan, " 'Ends and Means' and Aldous Huxley," *Canadian Forum*, 17 (March 1938), 422-23.

[3] Morley Callaghan, "It was news in Paris — not in Toronto," *Saturday Night* (5 June 1951), pp. 8, 17-18.

[4] Jacques Maritain, *Scholasticism and Politics*, 2nd. ed. (1940; rpt. London: Geoffrey Bles, 1945), p. 62.

[5] Morley Callaghan, "An Ocean Away," *TLS* (4 June 1964), p. 493.

[6] "A Talk with Morley Callaghan," p. 136.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid., pp. 135-36.

[9] Helen Gardner, *Religion and Literature* (London: Faber and Faber, 1971), p. 134.

[10] Morley Callaghan, "Solzhenitsyn," *Tamarack Review*, No. 55 (1970), p. 72.

[11] From an interview by Donald Cameron, "Defending the Inner Light: An Interview with Morley Callaghan," *Saturday Night* (July 1972), p. 20.

[12] Callaghan appears to have noticed this tendency recently himself. In *A Fine and Private Place* (1975), the author, Eugene Shore, is accused of being "[his] own church."

[13] Frank R. Scott, "Lorne Pierce Medal: Morley Callaghan," *Royal Society of Canada Transactions*, 3rd series, 54 (Proceedings, 1960), 57.

[14] Morley Callaghan, "Novelist," in *Writing in Canada*, ed. George Whalley (Toronto: Macmillan, 1956), p. 32.

[15] "Anthology," a CBC radio broadcast, 14 November 1972.

[16] "Defending the Inner Light . . . ," pp. 18, 20.

[17] Ibid., p. 18.

MOVEMENT AND VISION IN *The Sacrifice*

Michael Greenstein

THOUGH WIDELY ACCLAIMED ever since its reception of the Governor-General's Award for Fiction two decades ago, Adele Wiseman's *The Sacrifice* has been subjected to relatively little critical analysis. Beneath the salient theme of the Wandering Jew, the nature of the sacrifices, and the Old Testament names lies a complex tension between thought and action, or more specifically, between vision and movement, which incorporates mountain, plant, and animal symbolism.

The dichotomy between motion and perception appears in the opening sentence: "The train was beginning to slow down again, and Abraham noticed lights in the distance." The "familiar pattern of throbbing aches inflicted by the wheels below" is a reminder of the circular journey to a new land from the old country where the pain of pogroms has been inflicted on Abraham's family. Fighting the rolling motion of the train, the seemingly endless journey, Abraham "tried to close his eyes and lose himself in the thick, dream-crowded stillness, but his eyelids, prickly with weariness, sprang open again." This opposition between vision and motion recurs cyclically until the final scene where Abraham's grandson, Moses, returns from Mad Mountain "in the bus that rattled its way down toward the city, with his hand shielding his swollen eyes from the possibly curious glances of the other passengers," but at the depot he lifts his hand away from his face. Isaac, the link between the generations, "shifted his bundle uncomfortably under curious stares and raised his eyes upward and ahead in imitation of the oblivious purposefulness of his father." The oxymoron indicates the conflict within the immigrant family — a conflict based upon the need to act as opposed to the imperatives of perceiving. In mind and body Abraham must build: "They would not be idle in the world. In spite of his fatigue, his legs moved more quickly to the rhythm of his thoughts."

On impulse Abraham decides to challenge this perpetual motion by settling in a city where he can "send down a few roots — those roots, pre-numbed and shallow, of the often uprooted. . . . No matter what is done to the plant, when it falls, again it will send out the tentative roots to the earth and rise upward again to the sky." In place of the promised generations numerous as stars or grains of

sand, Abraham envisions the past and future organically in the plant metaphor, the natural cycle reflecting the human. His God "could pluck the fruit of a man's desire when it was scarcely ripe and strangle such seed" yet replace through Moses "new grapes on the vines." Like life, death is a seed that is sown as Abraham explains to Chaim, comparing it to a weed or fungus:

> We think it's a sudden thing, and it is, in a way, in its moment of triumph, when it has drawn the last bit of life into itself and flowers into its own world of stillness. And yet, try though he may, a man can't choke it off. I think that death is sown in all of us when we are conceived, and grows within the womb of life, feeding on it, until one day it bursts out. We say then that life is dead. But really death is born.

Wiseman repeats the image of growth (plant movement) and identical phrasing when Abraham considers how people have forgotten his son's heroic deed: "The weeds of everyday life sprout up quickly around the rare flower and seem to choke it off and hide it away. But push aside the weeds and the flower is there." This "choking" forms part of the larger pattern of binding and constricting actions in the novel: "The gap where Isaac had been was still there. But the ragged underbrush was beginning to creep up, to cover the wounded earth, to try to hide the spot where something fine had stood." The passage echoes Abraham's earlier reference to his other sons, "Death cuts a gap in life." Thus, Abraham must destroy Laiah, that "great overripe fruit without seed."

Like life and death, birth is analogous to the organic tree which Abraham invokes in expectation of a grandson. The presence of Isaac and Ruth "is as when a man has a cherry tree in his garden."

> There had been such a cherry tree in Abraham's childhood. It was a pity that cherry trees didn't grow in this climate.... Weren't Ruth and Isaac like a cherry tree that a man could sit and watch in the springtime? The young buds swell and strain and puff themselves out in the sunshine. A man wakes up in the morning, and suddenly the blossoms leap into his eyes, waving their new-released petals so that the whole tree sways with happiness and freedom. So the two of them in their excitement, they too broke forth in his eyes as the cherry tree that blew its blossoms in the sun. And where the blossom is, the fruit will follow.

The extended metaphor is accompanied by the characteristic interweaving of vision and action. Though the image decays for Sarah ("Perhaps she had withered and twisted about a little, as a delicate tree will when its branches have been torn off"), the metaphor is developed in the procreation of the masculine wind and feminine flower. "Did the wind consult the weather bureau before it picked up the seeds or blew the pollen to the waiting flowers?" In Abraham's theory the animus is visually active whereas the anima remains passive: "A man could be compared to the wind, which must riffle through life, turning over the leaves of time with a restlessness, trying to see everything at once, always seeking. A woman waits, rooted in the earth, like a tree, like a flower. Patiently she lifts her face to

receive the gift of the wind. Suddenly he sweeps across the earth and stoops to blow the dust." Abraham imagines Isaac's reaction to this speculation: "He was never content to examine merely the beauty of the flower. He had to find its very roots." Once again the deracinated must go beneath the surface to find deeper meanings.

Wind and tree, male and female are both interconnected with the characters' movement. Icarus-Isaac, after "the wind blew him forward, and he flapped his arms as though in flight, as though he were about to take off from the ground," stops against a tree, just as Abraham had stopped in front of a tree, but Abraham cannot fly: "Wings? My arms are like lead weights. I can scarcely raise them." Realizing that his mother is moribund, Isaac leaves this female, arboreal shelter and starts home, "placing one foot uncertainly in front of another." His action parallels Abraham's earlier return home "over ground that met his strides firmly, as though he had just learned to walk," and the return to Isaac's death: "Now Abraham's feet seemed to take a long time to reach the ground." After his argument with Ruth, Abraham pauses to lean his head against a fencepost as Isaac had rested against the tree. "The warm wind of a summer night, tugging persistently at Abraham's beard, pulled him gradually out of his stupor. . . . Only the wind, threading the hair on his face, whispered teasingly of life." The supernatural power of the wind appears in Abraham's simile about Isaac, "Like the wind, you would shake down the stars," and in his question about his two dead sons, "Why did I weep, then, when I saw them hanging, swaying at the will of the wind?" Though not as important as W. O. Mitchell's and Sinclair Ross' use of the symbol, Adele Wiseman's prairie wind is one of the activating forces in the novel, plunging father and son toward catastrophe.

Just as the plant imagery suggests rootedness, a sense of belonging or fulfillment, so the "mountain" is developed as a psychological as well as physical landmark involved in the dialectic of vision and movement. Isaac surveys the city with its "double-crested hill that dominated the eastern landscape. To Isaac the land seemed like a great arrested movement, petrified in time, like his memories, and the city crawled about its surface in a counterpoint of life." The double crest is possibly an allusion to the sacrificial Mount Moriah and Moses' Sinai or may be taken physically as the female breasts, for later Abraham mentions the gentle swellings of the earth's breasts while Laiah fingers her low-cut housecoat. Furthermore, Mrs. Plopler's two daughters who explain the meaning of Mad Mountain to Isaac are themselves "like twin mountains." In contrast to the pulse of the city and the opulent residential "heights," the mountain is frozen, like Isaac's past, in the eastern direction. "He was aware of the hill to the east as he walked. When he didn't look at it, it seemed to crowd up closer, as though it were watching, absorbing every gesture in its static moment. He looked sideways and back toward it, and the mountain assumed its proper proportion, the sweeping double hump

carelessly mantled in splotches of autumn color." The interplay between vision and motion is transferred to the mountain which witnesses the activities of the city's inhabitants; the distinction between observer and the observed disappears. Ironically, through observation and static force, Mad Mountain regulates what is below it: "a strange name to call a mountain that looked so intimately on all the affairs of the city. Strange to think of the people that it had gathered up to live with itself." But this double-breasted shield cannot always protect: "Although, with a certain fondness for their native landscape, the citizens claimed that Mad Mountain sheltered them from many a violent wind, the winds had apparently learned to circumvent this hazard and blew most persistently from the undefended north." Masculine wind contends with feminine mountain and tree.

Whereas the wind manages to avoid the mountain, Isaac remains magnetized to its centripetal force at the end of the first chapter when he and his parents sit in the little park by the river:

> Isaac watched the double-crested mountain, towering in front of them, and was aware of it even as his mind jumped from thought to thought. It was strange that, no matter where his mind went, the hill remained there, solid in his vision, every time he looked up. It was a comfort that it didn't change, like the people he had known and the other things that had once stood rooted, it had seemed forever. It was like the sight of his father's face when he had opened his eyes for the first time after the fever, towering over him, claiming him.

The perceiving mind wanders while the stable mountain stays permanent and is identified not with mother earth but with the father figure. The mountain accompanies Isaac through the hardships of winter. "The wind that blew down from the northeast past Mad Mountain and whipped across his shoulder blades seemed, in its way, to be trying to help him along," and "The mountain, too, seemed to jog along with him." Vision and movement vie during this trudge: "Things creep up from behind while you keep your eyes ahead of you, trying to edge your way safely through life. . . . As though to prove this, he turned quickly and caught the mountain in the act of creeping forward in the dusk." The hypnotic power of the mountain also affects Ruth's vision: "She was looking at Mad Mountain. The hill, rising above the houses across the way, had already thrown off its day cloak and was wrapping itself in evening blue. Just such a dress Ruth wanted to sew for herself. . . . Contemplating it, she lost track for a moment of what Isaac was saying."

Moses seeks visual refuge from Dmitri's gang in the mountain: "He made a face again, then looked past them with pretended indifference toward Mad Mountain in the distance." And in the final chapter Moses inherits his father's visual affinity for the lofty beacon as he prepares for his ascent to visit his grandfather. "Moses laid down the novel as in the distance a cluster of yellow lights popped open and peered from behind the Mad Mountain's hump. Once that had

been the signal for him to close his eyes and rush quickly into his disappearing act." But he cannot escape into invisibility like the giant Iloig, for his mother places a heavy burden of responsibility on his shoulders. "It was a mountainous weight that dropped on him when she talked like that, of death and the evil of man, like an old mountain of his grandfather's stories, settling, crushing the giants of his childhood over again, breaking them into splinters that tore him apart inside." The description reverses the iconoclasm of the Biblical Abraham towards Terah's idols, while the allusion to Sisyphus is also evident. In preparation for his revelation on the mountain Moses keeps his eyes focussed on it during his meeting with Aaron: "Moses glanced back at the mountain with narrowed eyes" and "He nodded toward the mountain. . . . eyes still on the mountain." One of Moses' childhood daydreams is about a journey to the mountain where he confronts a shadowy old man; in reality, however, he overcomes through communion the "height of the mountain [that] might still be separating them." Facing eastward, intoning to the eastern air, Abraham is once again identified with Mad Mountain. Thus, Mad Mountain, a symbol of mental instability yet ironically a stabilizing force for the city at large and for Abraham's family specifically, plays its role in the movement-vision axis.

In addition to the mountain and the vegetable world, the animal world's relationship to man is of some importance in the novel, for man's progress may be measured in the substitution of animal sacrifice instead of human sacrifice. The civilized advance to animal sacrifice is an ironic contrast to the debate between Abraham and Isaac on evolution, the former denying any Darwinian notions. On the lowest level animals provide some of the lighter moments in the novel from the reduction of Mrs. Plopler as a rabbit to Polsky's pregnant cat, but a more serious dimension is usually involved. Though Abraham first alludes comically to Laiah in a bovine metaphor ("They say that a cow will stand in a green field and wave its tail and show its rear to every passing bull"), he soon regrets his pronouncement: "What could she have to do with them, with her body . . . and her hoarse, low voice with its persistent animal call? . . . It was not for him to laugh at her because he had chosen to live another life — not, especially, while he could still understand the animal call." Abraham's identification of the slaughtered cow and Laiah rests on the vision of the slaughterer and the slaughter preceding the act: "the sky crowded into my eyes piercingly, blindingly. . . . In front of me the cow was looking downward in a sort of modesty, with her eyelids covering her eyebulbs, which seemed so fine and large under their veil." Abraham also brings Nikolai a large slab of cow as a "thank offering." Abraham and Chaim depend on the butchering of animals for a living; yet they gain a great awareness of life and death in their relationship to animals. Moses, too, comprehends his grandmother's death when the landlord's shaggy dog dies.

Running counter to the primitive world of sacrifice is the evolutionary theory upheld by Isaac but rejected by his father during their debates on the subject. "Avrom had afterward had an interesting conversation with Chaim Knopp on the subject of man's relationship to animals. And together they had discovered many similarities not only between man and the apes, but between man and many other creatures of God's world." Isaac distorts social Darwinism, the "survival of the fleetest," to attack the mechanistic capitalism in the factory, but the phrase also comments on the speed of escape from persecution. Descended from lower forms of life, man is compared to various animals to imply the baser instincts in the chain of being: Hymie Polsky claws Laiah with the "animal uncontrol of his strong young paws"; Abraham is like "some four-footed creature" scuttling from one coffin to another in his surrealistic dream; Abraham and Ruth argue, "tearing like beasts at the raw entrails and the naked heart," while he paces "like some animal pent up" as the "long, twisted reptile sounds snaked around him." Conversely Abraham confronts the beast within himself, the darker, deeper side of life, when he prepares to sacrifice the animal before him. Thus, plants, the mountain, and animal imagery all form part of the larger motif of vision and action.

No sooner is abraham settled at Mrs. Plopler's than movement recommences in a variety of forms, not the least of which is the visual. Sarah is hypnotized by the Dickensian landlady's "hyperactive nose" and equally active mouth (her name is derived from the Yiddish "chatter") and eyes: "she swept her eyes over their pale adolescent son" and "Her eyes took in their portable belongings." Like her characters, Wiseman progresses experimentally in the first chapter from a brief stream-of-consciousness passage flashing back to earlier stages in the family's history as Isaac tries to fall asleep, to a temporal overlapping similar to Stephen's and Bloom's wanderings in *Ulysses*. This contrapuntal discovering begins with Abraham's rehearsal of his son's English instructions, followed by Isaac's walk to school, Sarah's ordeal with Mrs. Plopler, Abraham's return home, and finally the family outing in the park. Through movement and empirical absorption, each episode demonstrates the family's initiation into the new milieu.

In the first section Abraham repeats the English names for tree, sky, cloud, house, and mountain — each a vertical marker for the aspirations of the newcomers. He stops in front of a tree, frowning at it demandingly, "and his eyes traveled up the trunk in search of a clue." Isaac's peregrinations through the autumnal city parallel his father's: "Isaac walked to school, studying signs and faces, learning the contours of the city, wondering what was to come for him." Under the questionable tutoring of Mrs. Plopler, the cicerone of the ghetto who telegraphs "significant looks" with "expressive movements of the nose, eyes, and

lips," Sarah is introduced to the city, as though the nibbling face of her landlady were pursuing her. Headed for the reunion in the final section, "Abraham paced home over ground that met his strides firmly, as though he had just learned to walk." The student-walker becomes one with what he sees as he remembers the name for "tree": "It came to him suddenly, out loud. Tree. . . . Now they looked at the furrows about his eyes as though he were the trunk of some tree."[1] By the end of the chapter father, mother, and son sit together in the park while "each one made his own silent voyage into the past and future" in contrast to Mrs. Plopler's garrulousness and their own testing of the new language. In order to establish firm roots Abraham decides to buy permanent seats at the neighbouring synagogue.

The tragic events of the past cause the mental and physical restlessness while the exigencies of Canada compel the immigrants to develop an empirical mode of perception. Pausing only to watch the snow drifts, the external counterpart of the huddled family, "Abraham paced restlessly as his past years in their fullness forced themselves over him." Sarah's distant and dream-haunted eyes "grated together when she blinked them, and ached so" as a reminder of the painful events witnessed. For once, the landlady catches one of her tenant's visual habits: "Mrs. Plopler's eyes had taken on a slightly vacant look of reverie." When memory focusses on the past, the present becomes blurred, unrecognizable: thus, Isaac, recalling his brothers, rushes into his classroom "without even seeing" his friend; thus, Abraham, recounting those years to Chaim, "leaned forward and scrutinized the ground in front of the bench, without seeing it." Abraham's chronicle of the emergence from the cellar after the pogrom shows the pain of sight: "even the light seems hostile to us. For a while we are nearly blind. It hurts us to see. Perhaps, after all, now that I think of it, the light was our friend and wanted to shield us." Past vision mixes with present haphazard motion: "For a few moments he moved about aimlessly, quickly, back and forth. . . . His arms moved as though he had no longer any control over them." This split in Abraham between thought and action foreshadows his loss of control in the murder of Laiah. "I saw all and felt nothing. . . . All I wanted was to move, to run run run. My body screamed to wear out all its movements in violence and to drop down in a heap, unfeeling, somewhere, anywhere."

Isaac's recollection of the same events immediately follows Abraham's. In the cellar's darkness fear and laughter "ran out of his eyes" until danger passes and Nikolai releases them: "Isaac strained past him to see if there were really stars left, to catch a glimpse of something — any shapeless thing in the yard to try to focus his eyes on. . . . How his eyes ached — unbearable shooting pains from the sudden light. . . . As he walked along the lane . . . he had to keep pressing his fists in his eyes to ease the hurt." When they return to Nikolai's to thank the peasants, they recognize their own samovar stolen during the attack: "His father's eyes,

now perfectly blank, moved past his own. . . . His mother was not looking at anything but sat still, her swollen eyes on nothingness. Isaac didn't want to look toward the kitchen again. But in spite of himself his eyes kept slithering toward the kitchen door." The revelation leads to the urge "to get up and go — quickly, to run if necessary," for vision results in action.

Following these two remembrances, the narrator contrasts father's and son's modes of perception: "Why couldn't he be like his father, keeping his eyes fixed somewhere, at a point, so that everything he saw had to mold itself to his perspective? Instead his eyes wavered from point to point, and nothing remained fixed under his stare but, moving, changed and revealed itself as something new. Even when he looked into himself, his own motives, the things he thought and the things he professed, he could see a thousand hidden sins." Isaac asks Ruth, "Do I really see things he doesn't see, or does he just see them in a different perspective?" and later he poses the question to Abraham: "And if we can't seem to see the same thing in the same way at different times, how can we tell what is the true way of seeing it?" Isaac's skepticism and Abraham's certainty lead to frequent debates with tragic results; the reconciliation between relativism and absolutism occurs in the third generation when Moses discovers the truth about his grandfather. Yet despite his firm belief in God, Abraham loses his faith, a loss expressed visually through flight: "I lost my mind, my eyes that could see ahead of me. . . . We fled blindly." At the same time when Isaac contracts typhus his father sees him "as though for the first time."

Slaughter or sacrifice is associated with vision or lack of it. "The abattoir was out of sight. It was part of the dark underside of life. Abraham knew something of this side." Abraham narrates the sacrifice in *Genesis* to Moses who "doesn't take his eyes" from his grandfather's face: "the glint of the knife and the glare of the sun and the terror of the moment burning into his eyes so that when the time comes many years later when he must in turn bless his sons he is too blind to see that Jacob has again stolen the march on Esau." Wiseman juxtaposes insight and blindness in Abraham's slaughter of the cow: "Not only did I see in that moment the depths of baseness in a man," but he blinks at the creature and searches the sky which "crowded into my eyes piercingly, blindingly." The same emphasis on the visual reappears when Abraham murders Laiah: "She felt a thrill of relief as his eyes moved with awareness over her. . . . She let her eyes flutter closed under the ardency of his gaze," and "Looking at her then, he was lifted out of time and place. . . . he saw her as though for the first time, and yet as though he had always seen her thus, saw her as something holy." The blinding vision of the three participants in the sacrifice correlates with the circle that encloses eternity in a split second. Abraham had also seen his son "as though for the first time" during his typhoid fever, for the old man is never too old to re-learn

the lessons transmitted mystically and empirically through the windows of his soul.

Abraham's despair after Isaac's death resembles the blinding purification of sacrificial revelation: "Again and again he broke the surface, staring about him with salt-washed eyes, caught sight of some fragment, and because it was only a fragment and the salt had burned his eyes clean saw it with a ruthless, useless clarity before he sank to the massed confusion below." The distintegration which ensues manifests itself mainly in Abraham's actions but also in his perceptual abilities: "Unnoticed, the dusk of an early spring evening had crept in through the kitchen window, muting the clear distinctions between one object and another. . . . There was a fuzzy blueness about Ruth, close though she was to him. He did not even know what he himself really looked like any more."

With the introduction of Moses at the structural centre of the novel followed soon by the deaths of his grandmother and his father, Wiseman presents a different mode of perception. The young boy sees his dying grandmother through a narrow crack in the door, while Mrs. Plopler's application of the glass cups becomes grotesque when seen through Moses' eyes: "the glasses with their great gobs of discolored flesh stared at him from her back." Mrs. Plopler's therapy is one of the first impressions on his *tabula rasa*; it "helped to imprint on his memory as the first indelible recollection of his childhood the strange, yellow-shadowed scene at his grandmother's bedside." At Sarah's death Moses wanders about, detached, viewing the world from the narrow vantage point of the green box. "He managed to pry the lid up and, after climbing in, crouched, peering out through a slit in the lid that he could make larger or smaller by pressing back or ducking down his head." This adjustment of focus on a narrow slice of life prepares for Moses' need for spectacles.

Also leading to the time for glasses is the scene in the park where father and son watch the movement of the clouds. "The child, stretched out in the same attitude as his father, one hand firmly clenched in the larger one, squinted up at the sky." The scene combines vision with the motion of the cloud; it also demonstrates Isaac's scientific relativism seen earlier in his discussion of evolution, and contrasts with the final scene in the novel between grandfather and grandson who join hands. Moses braves the Copernican carousel: "The whole earth was speeding quickly past the clouds. Moses felt a little dizzy. They were rushing along, and he couldn't stop. With a sudden little scream he wrenched his eyes away from the cloud and twisted his body around so that he toppled right on top of his father. 'I jumped off!' He adjusted his eyes to his father, blinking a little. His father, close and solid in his vision, laughed too." As Isaac seeks the shifting

cloud or shifting mountain, he thinks, "Strange how a child will skip from a thought into an action, afraid neither that he will lose the thought nor spoil the action." Isaac is about to experience the difference between the *vita contemplativa* and the *vita activa* when he rushes spontaneously into the synagogue, for Isaac, like his Biblical namesake, is aligned with vision and thought, whereas Ishmael "was a man of the fields, more used to action than to speech." Proud of his son, Isaac closes his eyes filled with the kaleidoscopic cloud of vision and action: "In the confusion of pre-sleep it seemed to him that his son had committed an act of courage, jumping off that way, and as he fell asleep he was pointing this out with a swell of pride to the figures that crossed his eyelids."

The scene shifts to Moses' handicapped eyesight. Like Stephen Daedalus, "Moses looked around him experimentally. The outlines of things sprang sharply into his eyes. He blinked once or twice. On his nose perched the spectacles, round, black-rimmed. They seemed to be all over his face. He swiveled his eyes round and round, trying to see the entire circuit of the rims. Experimentally he took a step or two forward to find out if the world would remain steady about him." With these new spectacles Moses must face the derision of Dmitri, his father's heroic act and consequent death, and his grandfather's crime. As a result of the murder, Moses and his mother leave the neighbourhood, carrying on the tradition of the uprooted Wandering Jew, combining wary vision and action. "They were moving. Moses helped to uproot the furniture. . . . he nevertheless moved with a feeling of furtiveness, of haste, glancing about him every time he came out on the porch with another bundle, to see whether there was any movement in the neighbouring houses." The mode of perception during the departure resembles the mode when Moses is first presented at the crack in the door and the slit in the box; "seeing but not being seen," he crouches among the furniture: "With narrowed eyes he peered after the bent figure. Slowly, deliberately, he raised his finger and took aim." Though unlike the hunters Ishmael and Esau, Moses Jacob, the musician, demonstrates a streak of action or violence; similarly his violin bow becomes a sexual object, and the key to his house is a literal symbol of his *rite de passage* like his grandfather's key to Laiah's apartment.

The two major sacrifices in the novel are connected with each other by the interaction of vision and motion. Wiseman transfers from the scene between Abraham and Laiah (whose master's "movements had traced themselves in fire"), in which they discover that they "had been scarred by much the same fires" to the scene where Isaac rushes into the burning synagogue. He notices "two enveloping arms of flame" which seem to be "in supplication," a parallel to Abraham's pain-filled arms which are purged in the slaughter of Laiah. Just as Isaac's action is preceded by the sight of the glow within the synagogue windows, so Abraham sees Laiah's shadow, the shadowy underside of his life, cross the kitchen window. Like Isaac, Abraham "was tired in every part of him": "every

separate movement seemed to require his complete concentration. He labored upward under a growing heaviness, as though he were carrying his whole life on his back up an endless flight of stairs." This Sisyphus ascends as his life's burden becomes heavier with each step. Instead of Isaac "Leaping out of the inferno, like a revelation bursting from the flaming heavens," Abraham's "thought leaped" before "his arm leaped, as though expressing its own exasperation, its own ambition, its own despair, the Word leaped too, illuminating her living face." The spontaneous sacrifices of father and son lead to revelation, death, and ostracism.

While much of the action and vision move in the direction of growth and integration, a movement in the opposite direction of division and disintegration develops, particularly in the second half of the novel where one character is excluded from a social group or where a character is divided within himself. Though Ruth is included in the family, she is excluded from the past tragedies which bind her husband and his parents: "it seemed to her as though they were suddenly suspended, the three of them, in a thought from which she was excluded. She would look from Abraham and Sarah to Isaac, her husband, and he would be sitting quietly, not looking at anything." As Moses grows, Sarah begins "to fade away" from Abraham: "It was as though the strings of his spirit that bound him to Sarah twanged suddenly, spreading through him vibration upon vibration of a feeling that was a confused mixture of fear and sadness and certainty." With each of the several deaths a new gap is cut in Abraham's life, and even young Moses wanders about, "detached," trying to find a place for himself in the midst of Sarah's death.

The two major sacrifices result in isolation — Isaac's and Abraham's movement away from society. After saving the Scroll, Isaac "was imprisoned in a transparent bubble. It pressed inward with a constant contracting pressure. . . . If he relaxed slightly it shrank in on him, so that it was the action of his own body that determined the size of his prison." Captured in his relativistic microcosm, inexorably bound to his sacrifice in an act which has separated him from mankind, Isaac tries to escape through vision and "superhuman movement," but ultimately fails. "Sometimes, in a burst of energy and desire, he pushed out and outward, expanding his sphere, stretching his limbs beyond any length that they had ever achieved, so that the tips of his toes and fingers alone touched its surface, and he poised in the ecstasy of effort, certain that one final burst of strength and will would stretch the bubble to its limits and he would break through." Wiseman collocates Isaac's "ecstasy" with his son's "vast ecstasy" at the end of the preceding chapter; she also repeats Isaac's "bursting out of the synagogue" in the final incarcerated "burst." The literal sense of "ecstasy" indicates that Isaac and Moses stand outside of the social mainstream while being divided within themselves. The mirror vision which follows the futile movement further emphasizes the segregated ego: "Gradually, as he strained his eyes to see what lay beyond

his sphere, he began to realize that although it was transparent, he could make out only his own face grimacing at him in reflection." Isaac's ambiguous sphere resembles the *fenêtre symboliste* of Baudelaire and Mallarmé as dream and reality become blurred for the "horizontal hero" whose vision had always followed the verticality of Mad Mountain: "If I broke through I'd no longer have the sphere as my boundary, but I'd lose its protection too. The bubble bursts, and I burst with it, into the unknown. On the other hand, if I give way I collapse, I am crushed, again into the unknown. Aren't the two things in the end the same, my victory and my defeat both illusory?"

Isaac's "breakdown" leads to a similar split in his father — a division within himself and a retreat from his fellow man, witnessed climactically in the slaying. Ever since Isaac's heroism "there have been two voices" in Abraham: "all the time while one voice rejoices the other is whispering. What is wrong, then?" Abraham's dissolution appears in his walking: "Now Abraham's feet seemed to take a long time to reach the ground. Instead of air he walked through some heavily resistant material to which the ground was not very firmly anchored." The movement contrasts with Isaac's ideas "so grimly anchored to the ground." The separation also manifests itself in long silences, a wandering mind "as the English phrases skipped by," and in vision: "He did not even know what he himself really looked like any more. He had only a feeling of face. Here his arm lay in front of him loosely on the table, his fingers drumming, a thing apart from him. He had only a feeling of arm, a throbbing feeling of two aching arms. The threaded violin pierced in and out, tied him to the table, bound him to Ruth, looped through the room. . . . Where was the whole man, Abraham?" The physical dissection at once prepares for Laiah's sacrifice and recalls Isaac's imprisonment in the sphere as Abraham attempts to retrieve and reintegrate the severed parts of his ego: "It was with an effort, with the deliberate movement of all his body, that he restored the feeling of the whole outline of his physical self." Isaac's reflecting sphere reappears during Abraham's argument with Ruth which accelerates the schizoid propensities: "He had come, begging to know, to understand, and suddenly a mirror had been flipped up in his face and he himself stood revealed as he was to another — a stranger, an enemy, an egoist." Through this looking-glass Ruth's words cut additional gaps in the old man's life: "It was as though another vital part had been slashed away from him, and he was all contorted, trying to hold his wounded members in place and at the same time trying to fend off with his own fury the fury that threatened to dismember him entirely."

Abraham emerges from the violence of this argument, no longer in control of his actions, thoughts, and words. "As though invisibly propelled, he headed through the hot summer air, unaware of direction, scarcely aware even of the piston movement of his legs, and totally unaware that he was speaking his thoughts aloud to the night air around him." In this state he reaches Laiah's

apartment where his thoughts, words, and actions are completely divorced from the present reality; he is conscious of a special awareness, "of a reaching out of his senses. Sensations impinged on him sharply and separately." Laiah is apart from him just as his actions and parts of his body are removed from him. All the nerves of his body are drawn to his hand. "But this seemed to be taking place apart from him." The systolic and diastolic rhythm that locked Isaac in his sphere overtakes Abraham: "It was as though he were seized up by something within himself, by a strong hand that gripped his insides tightly, then released them, gripped and released and gripped them again." Leah's whisper, "like one," and the "other part" of Abraham recall his two voices and contrast with the ultimate unification of hands between him and Moses. Abraham's mind "zigzags" back and forth from past to present while he is glued to the breadcrumbs and to Laiah's body heat. The contradictory, fragmenting forces within Abraham are symptomatic of his need to be both creator and destroyer.

After all this disintegration, Avrom and Moses are united in a reconciliation of vision and action that invokes the Shakespearean identification of lover, fool, poet, and madman: "one hand, the hand of a murderer, hero, artist, the hand of a man." Their hands, symbols of action, unite with the vision. "His eyes, fascinated, saw that the hands were not really different. . . . It was as though he stood suddenly within the threshold of a different kind of understanding, no longer crouching behind locked doors, but standing upright." Moses' narrow mode of perception will henceforth be widened to encompass his future as an adult.

To answer the questions of Abraham's culpability and who controls the movements and visions of the characters in *The Sacrifice*, one must examine the problem of free will and determinism. Abraham's spontaneous decision to stop at the unknown city demonstrates the strength of his will. "The thought took hold in his mind like a command. . . . He must act now." He is "fixed in his determination" as he "wills" the cramp out of his body; he feels "excited at making a positive gesture in the ordering of his fate." Though he retains the strength of a young man, deterministic forces work against him: "What did it matter to destiny, the age of a man? A God who could pluck the fruit of a man's desire when it was scarcely ripe and strangle such seed as could have uplifted the human race did not think in terms of days and years." And when Abraham finds employment at Polsky's, Mrs. Plopler exclaims, "As though it were fated!" Yet if the first chapter begins with a declaration of Abraham's free will, it ends on a deterministic note: "After all these sorrows, God had chosen to set him and his family down in this strange city to await what further He had in store for them," and on the train "It was as though the wheels below had taken control of our lives." In place of the earlier "Enough!" the chapter closes with the more resigned "Very well," the same words of acquiescence uttered by the Biblical Abraham when asked by God to sacrifice Isaac.

The lives and deaths of Abraham's sons appear predestined, for Moses was a singer and Jacob a thinker almost from birth; as for their premature deaths, "In the end I told myself that God knew best whom to take and whom to leave. It was not for me to argue His decisions. . . . It was meant to be." Contrasting with his Job-like acceptance of suffering is his joy for life and birth, his celebration of Ruth's "miraculous" pregnancy — "he felt at home with miracles." Determinism at birth heightens with the parallel anouncement of the birth of Chaim's grandson: "It was strange, and he and Chaim often discussed it, how all had happened almost as though they had planned it. It was meant to be, there was no doubt about it. Looking at the child, Abraham could not recall a time when his grandson had not been there, implicit in his life." And just as Abraham sought to determine the future of his sons through signs, so he attempts to augur his grandson's life; ultimately, however, God controls the fate of his dying wife and newly-born grandson: "Did she not deserve a few more years at least to see the child grow up, to see whatever it was that He, the Lord — and Abraham did not presume to prognosticate — at least to catch a glimpse of what He had in store for their house?" Abraham's fatalism and God's will are at work in Isaac's death: "It was as though he were walking into a picture that had hung on his wall all his life, waiting for him." Even Laiah's presence in her doorway prior to her death is "as though this had been promised or foreseen." Finally Abraham understands that he must subserve God's will instead of deifying himself: "I was not content to be, as He willed it," and he almost accuses himself of deicide. Moses visits him on Yom Kippur "when our fates are sealed" and inherits his grandfather's religious determinism: "He felt as though all along he had known it would have to be."

NOTE

[1] From the examples which I have chosen it is evident that Wiseman overdoes the "as though" construction. The only possible defence of this repeated simile is that she tries to portray the heuristic immigrant experience by constantly comparing it to another set of experiences to suggest the experimental, unsettled life of the newly arrived.

THE FICTION OF SINCLAIR ROSS

Gail Bowen

AT THE END OF SINCLAIR ROSS' latest novel, *Sawbones Memorial* (1974), Doc Hunter, the sawbones of the novel's title, and the Reverend Grimble, in this instance at least a decidedly by-the-Book Christian, engage in an easy but earnest discussion of metaphysics. Doc, forty-five years a general practitioner in a prairie town, speculates that perhaps man is a kind of error, the product of a young "still learning" God who when "He realized we weren't working out, that something had gone wrong, [might have] gone off somewhere to try again" and "just left us to run down, tire out, blow ourselves up."

Predictably, Grimble is shocked at Doc's heresy, but he is also baffled, baffled that a doctor who is himself so intimately concerned with life, could see man's history as being without progress, without point. He tries to catch Doc out by reducing his argument to its lowest common denominator: "Like the ants, you mean, no progress, the same repetition — oh no." But Doc is adamant: "Like the ants and the flies and the crows — doctors trying to heal bodies, priests and preachers trying to heal souls — all miracles, all going nowhere. Creation one day, destruction the next — a sort of game — like turning out jugs and bowls just to be able to have the fun of smashing them."

When we look at the fiction of Sinclair Ross, it seems that Doc's vision is the reality and that the Reverend Grimble's God, the "Supreme Intelligence . . . Perfect and Eternal," is the child's fairy tale. Ross' first writing, his short stories, collected as *The Lamp at Noon and Other Stories*, grows out of the hailed-out, droughted-out, rusted-out Saskatchewan of the depression, a world in which it must indeed have seemed that if there was a God, He was at best indifferent to His creation and at worst active in His desire to destroy it. The prairie of the short stories is seemingly, to use Doc Hunter's image, the world of "the Great Sow that eats her own farrow. . . . The Great Mother and the Evil Mother, maybe one and the same, creating life only to turn and destroy it."

With his novels, Ross moves from the farms of the depression to "civilization," but his concern is still with the problem that absorbed him in the short stories:

how can man, an imperfect being, live in a universe which is seemingly without ordering principles or a caring God? The characters of Ross' novels are not devilled by the malignant prairie, but they are devilled nonetheless. Spared the farmer's agonized confrontation with the unknowable land, the men and women of Ross' novels must confront instead the agonized demands of their unknowable selves. Spared the physical isolation of the prairie farm family, the men and women of Ross' novels must face the final terror that comes when man realizes that, even in community, he is alone.

Thus in *As For Me and My House* (1941), Mrs. Bentley, safe in her parsonage, spinning out her tin of meat with lettuce and hard-boiled eggs, can, upon hearing her husband's infidelity, know the knife-plunge-into-flesh agony that Martha experiences in "A Field of Wheat" when the hail batters her home and leaves her family without "so much as an onion or potato" for winter. And the gifted Philip Bentley, dully subsumed in saving souls for a God in whom he does not believe, can know the spiritual numbness that the farmer, Will, in "Not By Rain Alone," knows when every spring he must once again gather up all the rocks heaved out by "the bitch-like earth" before he can plant the crop that, in all likelihood, will produce a flawed harvest. With Ross' novels, we see, then, that there is nothing in "civilization" which increases man's capability of dealing with a life in which we live, as Doc Hunter says, "strictly on our own — sink or swim in our infested, mud-bottomed, little Here and Now."

There seems little to rejoice about in Ross' world, but for all the hopelessness of their condition, Ross' men and women are rarely without hope for long. In a universe which is indifferent to their fate, Ross' characters are remarkable for the energy and courage which they bring to their attempts to make their lives make sense.

Simply put, Ross' people have backbone. Confronted with a hail-battered field, a broken marriage, a pair of purebred horses that balk, or a love affair that was doomed before it began, the men and women of Ross' fiction most often simply pick up the pieces and begin again. There is something heroic in their efforts to give their lives value and importance, and it is because of their heroism that we come from Ross, not with a sense of defeat, but with a feeling of pride in what man is and with a modified hope for what he may become.

In *The Lamp at Noon and Other Stories*, Ross sets up the tension which will inform much of his fiction: the tension between a world which is inhospitable to illusion and the need for illusion in an inhospitable world. The prairie farm of the dirty thirties offered little place for illusion; the dust was too real, the bills too large, the drought too long. Yet when we look at the men, women and children of Ross' stories we see that illusion, the belief in something better, offered the only way out of the back-breaking, spirit-numbing reality of depression Saskatchewan.

We can best approach an understanding of what Ross is saying about the need for illusion in men's lives by looking at the role illusion plays in "The Lamp at Noon." Its protagonists, Paul and Ellen, have spent their short married life pitted against the same enemy, the "betraying prairie." Yet Paul has survived and somehow been strengthened by his struggle, and Ellen has been beaten. At the core of the story is the question of why confrontation with the same destructive force fulfils "the inmost and essential nature" of one person and drives another person into "a nervous dread of what [is] still to come." As Paul comes to realize, the answer to this question of survival lies in man's ability to dream:

> There was so much he planned. And so vivid was the future of his planning, so real and constant, that often the actual present was but half-felt, but half-endured. Its difficulties were lessened by a confidence in what lay beyond them . . . She looked forward to no future. She had no faith or dream with which to make the dust and poverty less real. He understood suddenly.

In Ross' fiction, then, illusion is first a weapon against being defeated by reality, but as Paul describes his dream of the future, we see that illusion offers the Ross hero more than a mere buffer against pitiless truth:

> He would plant clover and alfalfa, breed cattle, acre by acre and year by year restore to his land its fibre and fertility. That was something to work for, a way to prove himself. It was ruthless wind, blackening the sky with his earth, but it was not his master. Out of his land it had made a wilderness. He now, out of the wilderness, would make a farm and home again.

IN A WORLD IN WHICH MAN IS DENIED his Christian identity as a child of God and must instead accept himself as a kind of aborted experiment, it is critical that man, himself, make some sense of his existence. As Paul realizes, his belief that "out of the wilderness he would make a farm and home again" gives him a way of proving himself. Paul's dream is his assertion to an indifferent universe that as a man he has value. That is why, when confronted with proof absolute that his dream is folly, he refuses to abandon it. When, after three days of windstorm, Paul sees his land, the reality of his situation is apparent:

> before the utter waste confronting him, he sickened and stood cold. Suddenly, like the fields he was naked. Everything that had sheathed him a little from the realities of existence; vision and purpose, faith in the land, in the future, in himself — it was all rent now, stripped away.

But Paul knows that to accept as irreversible the "utter waste" his lands have become is to accept the fact that henceforth there will be nothing for him but the "realities of existence." As he must, he refuses to give in.

Repeatedly in Ross' fiction, we see characters who, like Paul, are confronted with the folly of their dreams, but who, again like Paul, refuse to accept the fact that their dreams have betrayed them. Because in Ross' world, the dream is, most often, not an exit from reality for the weak, but a statement of faith in the meaning of life by the strong, the Ross hero must hold fast to his dream. The dream is his only assurance of existence.

For the adults of the stories, the dream is pitifully grounded in reality. The men dream the simple dream of "one good year"; the women long for a better future for their children and a few nice things for the house. The dreams are small, but it is not the content of the dream that is important; it is the fact of being able to dream. It is towards this knowledge that Martha, the farm wife of "A Field of Wheat" moves.

When the new wheat, the "freshening promise" of Martha's life, is beaten down by "an act of God," she is furious, and her fury is fanned by knowledge of her own impotence, "how rebel against a summer storm, how find the throat of a cloud?" But as Martha sees her husband sobbing against his horse, she perceives what it means when a man accepts the fact that he has been bested by a malevolent universe. In her determination that she will not *let* John be defeated, Martha finds a partial answer for the question, "how rebel against a summer storm":

> Martha hurried inside. She started the fire again, then nailed a blanket over the broken window and lit the big brass parlour lamp — the only one the storm had spared . . . John would need a good supper tonight. The biscuits were water-soaked, but she still had the peas. He liked peas. Lucky that they had picked them when they did. This winter they wouldn't have so much as an onion or potato.

"How stand up to an all-powerful universe?" By refusing to be beaten. By picking up the dream. In the simple act of getting the dinner ready, Martha makes her statement of faith in man's ability to exist with dignity in a meaningless universe.

If the dreams of the adults in *The Lamp At Noon and Other Stories* are all statements of faith in a better future, the dreams of the children are statements of faith in a better world. Faced with a world which is harsh in its demands on energy and spirit, these children tenaciously cling to any scrap of evidence that somewhere there is a world, not of crops, but of beauty, not of practicality, but of magic.

In "Circus in Town," eleven-year-old Jenny is given a piece of a poster advertising a circus. In Jenny's joy at this mutilated proof that somewhere there is a life quite different from that of the depression farm, we see again how deep the need for "something other" is in Ross' world:

> The bit of poster had spun a new world before her, excited her, given wild, soaring impetus to her imagination; and now, without in the least understanding herself, she wanted the excitement and the soaring, even though it might stab and rack her, rather than the barren satisfaction of believing that in life there was nothing better, nothing more vivid or dramatic, than her own stableyard.

Jenny's family respond to her dream with anger, with sorrow and with pity, but Jenny is stubborn in her refusal to give up that "sudden dilation of life within her" that her circus poster has brought. In her instinctive knowledge that she must guard her dream from the practical world, we see that awareness of the perishability of the dream which we will see in much of Ross' fiction. It is this awareness that makes *Whir of Gold*'s Sonny McAlpine see in Mad, his loving emissary from a practical world, an enemy who can destroy his dream of self. And it is this awareness that makes Jenny see in her practical and loving mother a force which can destroy a self Jenny does not yet know.

> she was afraid of her mother tonight. Afraid because all at once she felt defenceless, perishable. This sudden dilation of life was like a bubble blown vast and fragile. In time it might subside, slowly, safely, or it might even remain full-blown, gradually strengthening itself, gradually building up the filmy tissues to make its vastness durable, but tonight she was afraid. Afraid that before the hack of her mother's voice it might burst and crumple.

Despite her brother's warnings that she will "catch it" if she goes to the hayloft to cherish her scrap of poster, Jenny honours her dream. In Ross' account of the "dilation of life" Jenny experiences because she has refused to compromise her need for illusion, we have a key which helps us to understand the behaviour of other dreamers in Ross' fiction who risk "catching it" from a practical world in order to know a larger world and a better self.

> Catch it she did, but for once the threats of what would happen next time failed to touch her. The circus went on. All night long she wore purple tights and went riding Billie round and round the pasture in them. A young, fleet-footed Billie. Caparisoned in blue and gold and scarlet, silver bells on reins and bridle — neck arched proudly to the music of the band.

The demands of practicality and the need for beauty again clash head on when in "Cornet at Night" young Tom Dickson is sent to town to choose a farmhand and is drawn to Philip, a young man whose slender hands are obviously unsuited to farm work.

In Philip, the part of Tom which hungers for something more than crops and Sunday musicales in his mother's plushy parlour finds sustenance. Philip is a traveller from a larger world, and he brings with him a cornet, a symbol of that larger world. When Philip plays a march, Tom experiences the "dilation of life" that Jenny felt through her poster: "this was another march that did march. It

marched us miles. It made the feet eager and the heart brave. It said that life was worth the living and bright as morning shone ahead to show the way."

For the assurance that "life [is] worth the living," the Ross hero will sacrifice much. To ignore the cornet which "bright as morning" shines ahead to show the way to a life worth living is to be forever a prisoner of the "Here and Now." Tom's father senses this when he hears the cornet. To Tom's excited "Didn't I tell you he could play?", Mr. Dickson responds with anger. Tom, however, sees his father's response for what it is:

> It was helplessness, though, not anger. Helplessness to escape his wheat when wheat was not enough, when something more than wheat had just revealed itself.

Tom cannot decipher his mother's response to the cornet, but in his attempts to guess what she felt when she heard its "piercing, golden" notes, Tom comes close to explaining the force which makes the Ross hero, against all odds, follow his dream: "A harvest, however lean, is certain every year; but a cornet at night is golden only once."

If in *The Lamp at Noon and Other Stories*, Ross speaks of the need for the dream in man's life, in *As For Me and My House*, he begins to examine the relationship man should establish between his dreams and the reality of his life. In *As For Me and My House*, we see that Philip Bentley distintegrates because his commitment to his dream has been niggardly and that Mrs. Bentley disintegrates because her commitment to her dream has been overly-prodigal.

In the child Jenny's hoarding of her illusion against "the hack of her mother's voice," we see the knowledge that dreams must be nurtured and kept faith with if they are to flourish. Philip Bentley seems never to have been granted this knowledge. He has been miserly in meting out faith to his dream; his dream, half-nurtured, is slowly dying, and Philip is dying with it.

The life of one Ross hero is often an implicit comment on the life of another, and there is an incident in the life of *Whir of Gold*'s Sonny McAlpine which brings to light the malignancy at the core of Philip Bentley's life. Young Sonny, drawn by the beauty and promise of a flicker, "flashing like a whir of gold, a gust of feathered light," is seized by the desire to capture the flicker. In his words, he wants "to possess and delight in, not to maim." To capture his flicker he uses a gopher trap because "the trap was all I had, all I could think of." But in Sonny's practical application of the means at hand to come to know the illusory beauty of the flicker, the flicker and its beauty are destroyed:

> half an hour later there it was. Head down, suspended by the chain, its legs mangled, its wings flapping feebly, ruffled and bruised. And the eye, just about level with mine, an unsparing, snake-hard little drill of hate.

In *Whir of Gold*, Sonny McAlpine comes to realize that to pursue a shining dream with less than shining means sullies both dream and dreamer so that neither

can ever shine again. Philip Bentley's life bears witness to the truth of Sonny's perception. In his decision to enter the ministry to make his dream of an artist's life a reality, Philip has used a gopher trap to snare a flicker. His dream, like Sonny's, has been "mangled, ruffled and bruised" because he has not kept faith with it. Philip has betrayed his dream, and his dream has repaid him for this betrayal by sapping the life out of his art and by making of Philip, himself, a hollow man.

In the short stories, we saw how a man's dream becomes his one stand against accepting his nothingness in an indifferent universe. Philip in ceding his dream has also ceded his claim to be master of his own life. Mrs. Bentley says of her husband:

> And now, withdrawn, he seems to feel that the responsibility for what's ahead is no longer his. He's finished. This one, the next one, it's only Main Street anyway. And there's the strange part — he tries to be so sane and rational, yet all the time keeps on believing that there's a will stronger than his own deliberately pitted against him.

In Ross' fiction, the fate of the betrayer of the dream is fixed: nothing can ever be right for him again. Philip experiences a brief resurgence of life when he sees in the boy, Steve, a Pegasus who will lift him above reality, but as Mrs. Bentley comes to discover, you cannot make a Pegasus of a boy or of a husband. Steve leaves, and Philip becomes apathetic and accepting, a spouter of false wisdoms about the folly of keeping yourself "keyed up for something beyond yourself all the time" and about the virtue of "being just as casual with life as life is with you."

But the "unflaring leaden" look in Philip's eyes reveals what his betrayal of his dreams has cost him. At the novel's end, the Bentleys adopt Philip's illegitimate child, and Mrs. Bentley hopes that "for his son's sake he will be worthy of himself." The reader finds it difficult to share her hope; he is left with a very real question about whether for Philip, betrayer of his self, the miracle of a child will be, to use Doc's phrase, "another miracle going nowhere."

> To have him notice me, speak to me as if I really mattered in his life, after twelve years with him that's all I want or need. It arranges my world for me, strengthens and quickens it, makes it immune to all other worlds.

This is Mrs. Bentley's dream. But in Ross' world, a world without ordering principles, peopled by imperfect beings, it is the cruelest kind of folly to premise your existence upon the existence of another person. To her dream, Mrs. Bentley has sacrificed music, the dream of her young womanhood. Most damagingly, Mrs. Bentley has yielded the very essence of her self to her struggle to "possess" Philip, to "absorb his life into hers." She has made her dream of Philip her only refuge against acceptance of the fact that "my day is finished . . . the rest has but

little meaning." After twelve years, Mrs. Bentley knows her dream of Philip can never be realized, but like Paul in "The Lamp at Noon," Mrs. Bentley senses that to accept the devastation of her dream is to accept the end of her life. She persists:

> In the darkness, perhaps I see clearly, but I don't admit it. Don't dare admit it. I must still keep on reaching out, trying to possess him, trying to make myself matter. I must, for I've left myself nothing else. I haven't been like him. I've reserved no retreat, no world of my own. I've whittled myself hollow that I might enclose and hold him, and when he shakes me off I'm just a shell.

Driven by her dream of possessing Philip, Mrs. Bentley, like Philip himself, uses a gopher trap to snare a whir of gold. She desperately attempts to bind Philip to her with the cozy bonds of domesticity, but like other Ross characters, Mrs. Bentley comes to the realization that illusion cannot be trapped and that a cruel attempt to capture a dream can forever alter both dream and dreamer. When Steve leaves, it seems finally that Mrs. Bentley has trapped her "whir of gold." Philip, beaten, seems at last ready to take his place in her world. But in the "leaden look of resignation" in Philip's eyes, Mrs. Bentley sees the truth: captured, her quarry seems not to have been worth the hunt. She has triumphed, but to what end? Her whir of gold is an embittered shell, and she, herself, is "a fungus or parasite whose life depends upon his."

We leave Mrs. Bentley as we leave Philip, unconvinced that there has been enough change. In her clinging to Judith's baby, whom she also names Philip, we wonder if Mrs. Bentley is starting afresh to make sense of her life through the life of another person. Like the old dream of Philip, the new dream of the child seems too fragile to withstand the malevolent cycle of "creation one day, destruction the next."

In *The Well* (1958), Ross examines the paradox of illusion: although illusion is necessary for existence in a hostile world, illusion can, in cutting you off from your own humanity and from the humanity of others, separate you from the only forces that make the world less hostile.

Chris Rowe, the hero of *The Well*, comes out of a world which, like depression Saskatchewan, seems to have been created to destroy the human spirit. Chris is the product of Boyle Street, Montreal. He is young. He is tough. He is, in his own mind at least, without illusion about the world, but for all his pride in himself as a realist, Chris is a prisoner of his illusion of himself.

To survive in the Boyle Street gang, Chris has crafted himself an illusory Chris Rowe, whose credo is "to take and never be taken" and to trust no one. In Chris' relentless efforts to maintain his idea of himself, we see the same drive to make sense of his existence that we have seen in other Ross heroes. All of Ross' pro-

tagonists are vulnerable, but even among the vulnerable Ross heroes, Chris Rowe is peculiarly fragile. Ross says of him:

> His needs were urgent: to stand out and shine, to be liked, looked up to — and because his sense of validity and purpose was involved, it was as necessary to satisfy them, as much a duty to himself as to satisfy his hunger.

Like Narcissus, Chris finds his only assurance of existence in the reflected image of himself. He constantly seeks out mirrors to make certain that his beauty, and hence his self-esteem, are intact. His treatment of people is marked by his need to find reflected in them an image of his own worth. But as Ross notes, narcissism carries its own peril: "Because he existed only in the reflections [the gang] gave back, he was at their mercy, even while he went among them, assured and slickly superior." Moreover, Chris' narcissism has sapped his will. He has killed (or perhaps killed) a man because he found insupportable the image of an un-armed Chris Rowe staging a hold-up. Remote from the Boyle Street gang, Chris is still at the mercy of his self-crafted image as a man without decency or humanity.

This is Chris Rowe as he comes, on the run from the law, to live on the prosperous farm of Larson, an old farmer who is himself a prisoner of his dream of a happier time, and of Sylvia, Larson's young wife, who has married Larson because, after a childhood of fantasies about the "slicked up and smooth" men in the Eaton's catalogue, she has known too many slicked up and smooth men.

The Well is a seriously flawed novel. It is, by turns, trite and melodramatic, but despite its flaws, *The Well* is important to the student of Ross because in it Ross sets forth some concrete ways in which men can give value and importance to their lives.

In his stay with the Larsons, marked as it is by lust and violence, Chris discovers the falseness of his old dream of self, and he finds a self he can live with. As if often the case in Ross' fiction, Chris finds his better self through his relationship with horses. The old work-horse, Ned, teaches Chris "a kind of respect" for those who have worked hard in adversity and who, against all odds, have survived. Fanny, the matronly mare, always bloated with foal, always friendly, has "a serenity and fulfilment" that disturbs Chris.

In his reluctant admiration for the "old values" of Larson's stable, Chris discovers that there is a better world than Boyle Street; most significantly, he begins to perceive that there is a part of himself that is better than anything in the Boyle Street Chris Rowe. When Fanny has her colt, Chris, the fastidious boy trapped in his mirror image, is re-born into Chris, a man who is no longer afraid to sully himself in the cause of another. "Repelled," "outraged" by the birth process, Chris helps Fanny deliver because "his sense of responsibility pressed on him." Slavish subservience to his idea of himself has made Chris a prisoner; acceptance of responsibility makes him a free man.

The death blow is dealt to the Boyle Street Chris Rowe when Sylvia Larson thrusts a gun into his hand and demands that he shoot her husband. The old Chris would have pulled the trigger, not because he wished Larson's death, but because his idea of self could not have survived the thought he had acted with "cowardice." But the new Chris does not shoot, and with his "cowardice" comes release; "He was free — there was room for nothing else. He had been living under a spell — of what he was, always had been, always must be, a doom of Boyle Street cheapness and frustration — and now the spell was broken."

With *Whir of Gold* (1970), Ross returns to a study of the need for the dream in man's life and of the need for integrity in pursuing that dream. Its protagonists, Sonny, the hero of Ross' short story "The Outlaw," now twenty-four years old, and Mad, a thirtyish Maritimes blonde who has too often loved not wisely but well, are dreamers. Sonny wants the world of music, "a clean, brave, honest world, where men and clarinets receive their due." Mad wants "a right one," a man who will give her again that feeling about the rightness of life that she felt when, at sixteen, she fell in love with a man who was everything she dreamed a man would be.

Like other Ross protagonists, Sonny and Mad are committed body and soul to recapturing that "dilation of life" they sensed once when they touched the better world of their dreams. The tension of the novel grows out of the fact that the dreams of Sonny and Mad are mutually exclusive. Sonny wants music: Mad wants Sonny. Their situation is, in short, much like the situation Philip Bentley and his wife faced twelve years before they came to Horizon.

No two women could be more dissimilar than Mrs. Bentley and the slightly blowsy, cheerful, "take it on the chin" Mad. Yet these two women are driven by the same force: the need to absorb another person into their lives to make sense of their own existence. In Sonny, we have a character much like Philip before the fall, unswerving in his commitment to his dream and capable of displaying a degree of emotional ruthlessness towards those who stand in the way of his dream.

I have suggested that the life of one Ross character can often shed light on the life of another. The flaw of *Whir of Gold* lies in the fact that we really cannot make much sense of its hero's behaviour unless we have read much of Ross' fiction. We know that Sonny is committed to his dream of playing the clarinet, and we know that he feels his life will be soured and diminished if he compromises with his dream, but we *know* rather than *feel* this. Our sympathies are not with Sonny's dream of having his own band; they are with Mad's small dream of a clean well-lighted place and "a right one."

For the reader who comes to *Whir of Gold* with the memory of the Bentleys fresh, Sonny's refusal to crawl into Mad's safe and loving world is both clean and courageous. Knowing what compromise has cost Philip Bentley and the woman who wanted the compromise, this reader judges Sonny's repeated rebuffs of Mad

necessary and humane. But Sonny's instinct for survival strikes a different chord in the heart of the reader who is less concerned with metaphysical ends than with humanitarian means. *Whir of Gold* fails, I think, because it leaves us with a very real question about the price of survival in the mud-bottomed Here and Now.

There is a good feeling about *Sawbones Memorial.* To this point, Ross' fiction is characterized by a certain tension. His heroes, young, introspective, unsure, are engaged in what, for them, is a life and death struggle to bring some meaning to their own existence. They must operate in a world which they see at best as indifferent, at worst as hostile, to their efforts. The very nature of their search demands that they be loners. They are all, as Philip Bentley would say, "keyed up for something else." They are all, to paraphrase Sonny's piano teacher, Miss Whittle, engaged in the fishes' struggle to walk on land.

In nature and in tone, *Sawbones* is quite different from Ross' questing fiction. It is entirely dialogue; hence there is no place for the brooding introspection which marks Ross' other works. And the nominal hero of *Sawbones* is a seventy-five-year-old man who, after years of general practice in a small town, is saying good-bye to life as he has known it. The novel is not concerned with the search for self-realization which is so much a part of Ross' other fiction. Doc Hunter's dreams have been dreamed long before *Sawbones* opens. If ever he found that "dilation of life" which is the reason for being for so many of Ross' characters, we do not know it. If ever he lusted for a whir of gold, the lust has long since turned to ashes. Alone of Ross' protagonists, Doc Hunter has found his place in the mud-bottomed Here and Now and accepted it. It is his acceptance, I think, which gives the novel its sense of peace.

I believe the change in form, in hero and in tone argues that, in *Sawbones*, Ross is doing something quite different from what he has done in his other fiction. I think that in *Sawbones Memorial*, Ross has stopped fighting life and come to terms with it.

To this point, the outstanding characteristic of Ross' people is their inability or refusal to accept half-measure from life; in *Sawbones*, we see men and women who have had to accept half-measure and who, while they have not triumphed, have not disintegrated. In the townspeople of Upward, there are those who have made a success of life and there are those who have failed, but in contradistinction to Ross' other fiction, the dividing line between success and failure is not that between those who have been faithful to their dream and those who have compromised with it. The heroes of *Sawbones* are people who have worked at bringing their existence into line with what they believe life should be, but who have also come to accept the fact that their work will have limited results. They are heroes, not because they survive, but because they survive with grace.

Ida Robinson, pioneer farm wife, is one of these heroes. Doc Hunter says of Ida: "she stood out because she had her own standards, her own laws. She didn't

just survive, she came through with her head up, telling a joke on herself." Appalled at the treelessness of the prairie when she arrives as a bride from Ontario, Ida plants hundreds of Manitoba maples. When they die, Ida plans caraganas, a sure thing in Saskatchewan.

This cheerful acceptance of "the way it is" also characterizes Ida's granddaughter-in-law. Caroline Gillespie, an English war-bride, wastes no time in languishing for the old country. She becomes an Upward "booster," standing up and criticizing because "I want this to be a better town." As with Ida, Caroline's openness to life is reflected in her openness to the botanical possibilities of her adopted home. At Doc's farewell party, someone remarks upon the beauty of the ivy in the picture of Caroline at home in England. Caroline says: "yes, the ivy is at least a hundred years old, but there's something too to be said for growing geraniums and begonias in pots."

When we look at the people of *Sawbones*, we see that those who have brought value and importance to their lives are those who, like Caroline, have seen the worth of "growing geraniums and begonias in pots." The heroes of Upward are the people like Sara and Dunc Gillespie who have not only accepted but also welcomed life as it has come to them.

Pre-eminently, of course, the hero of *Sawbones Memorial* is the Sawbones himself, Doc Hunter, "a salt and aspirin man" who, by his own account, has "never done anything but deliver babies and set a few broken bones." But if Ross has a message in his latest novel, it can be found in what this deliverer of babies and setter of broken bones finally has to say to the Reverend Grimble about the business of being alive. Grimble tries to dismiss what he sees as the Doc's dark vision about man's existence:

> "If you were so convinced the prospect was so bleak, that we were all just so many discards, doomed, you couldn't have carried on, couldn't have cared."
>
> "Bleak? Well, yes and no. Discards, perhaps — nobody up there even aware of us, much less concerned about our fate, nothing working for us but a few traces of intelligence, maybe a little dust and sweat rubbed off from the original contact. But just supposing in spite of everything we could hang on a while, learn to use the intelligence, spread it round — "

" . . . just supposing in spite of everything . . . " — not a bad epigraph for the fiction of Sinclair Ross, a man who seems at last to have come to terms with the mud-bottomed Here and Now.

IN THE GARDEN

J. D. Carpenter

Water from the hose
fills my sons pool
He stands by, belly distended

From the driveway issue
elderly ladies who ask in brogue
if I question Gods purpose,
if my future is secure
They refuse lawnchairs
preferring to stand, to discomfit,
and answer my questions
in dogma
with whatever is next on their woolly tapes

I would like to turn
the garden hose on their ankles, turn
them a nutty brown

In the kitchen
my wife resumes smoking,
once again mistakes soda for tonic,
will someday chop her fingers
for carrots, notice no
difference in pain

As the ladies retreat,
a mediterranean gentleman
advances, offers two years
free furnace insurance
if I will use his fuel
His eyebrows meet, he is too familiar

Behind the garage I hide in tomatoes
My son, naked as onions,
hides by my leg

WORD AND FACT

Laurence and the Problem of Language

Theo Quayle Dombrowski

"THEN, MERCIFULLY, THE WORD WAS REVEALED TO HER." After the momentary loss of her normally astonishing ability to speak — volubly, fluently, intoxicatingly — the market woman of "A Gourdful of Glory" (in *The Tomorrow Tamer*) regains her powers. Morag, novelist, protagonist of Margaret Laurence's last book, *The Diviners*, is not so lucky: "The gift, or portion of grace, or whatever it was, was finally withdrawn to be given to someone else." This utterance from the conclusion of this work clearly suggests that the Word has been withdrawn, as indeed, Laurence herself has claimed about her own writing career. Mammii Ama, the protagonist of the African short story, embodies a facility in many ways like that of Morag: in fact, Morag's direct and detailed examination of her gift and her final recognition of its loss is merely the fullest treatment of a concern central to much of Laurence's fiction.

In many associated ways, Laurence repeatedly questions the nature of the word. Without revealing a consistent philosophy of speech as it formalizes or, indeed, affects reality, she nevertheless reveals an often impressive power to scrutinize the nature of language and communication — and usually without the sententiousness of clichéd thinking that this somewhat fashionable topic often attracts.[1] Essentially the matter has two aspects, the words of human interchange and the words of imaginative vision, but, as Laurence makes clear in *The Diviners*, the two aspects are often closely allied. In terms of human relationships — for she fulfils the traditional role of the female novelist in making that her chief concern — Laurence repeatedly concerns herself with characters frantic to explain, often frustrated because they cannot find adequate words, because some acts transcend words, or because words themselves are untrustworthy. Always conscious of the tenuous and tricky relationship between words and fact, she presents protagonists for whom speech is beyond conscious control, either because they lose the ability to articulate or because their own inner voices take over, overwhelming their intentions. In terms of the creative property of words themselves, Laurence shows words to achieve almost talismanic significance; names, phrases, songs, legends achieve potent imaginative force in shaping reality for the Laurence protagonist.

"Mac — let me explain," Stacey MacAindra of *The Fire-Dwellers* thinks frequently. "Nick? *Listen* —," her sister, Rachel Cameron, of *A Jest of God*, thinks with equal frequency. It is more than family relationship that makes the two women similar: Laurence's characters are often desperate with the burden to "explain," to be what Stacey ironically calls "Explainer of the Year." "[I]f you would allow me to explain," implores Nathaniel Amegbe of *This Side Jordan*; "I had to tell him, make him see," recalls the narrator of *A Bird in the House*; "*Bram, listen* —," thinks Hagar in *The Stone Angel*; "I've got to tell someone," echoes Morag of *The Diviners*; "I felt . . . the old need to explain," says Violet Nedden of "The Rain Child" in *The Tomorrow Tamer*. The basis of the need is often obvious enough: "Do you good to tell it," says Murray Lees of *The Stone Angel*, thereby prompting Hagar's grimly wry observation that he is treating the need to speak "As though it were worms, to be purged." No doubt there is much truth in such a statement. Many characters simply require a confidant: "I have to speak aloud to someone. I have to," says Rachel, searching for a break in her silent isolation in order to extend the tentative freedom she has gained through her love affair. "And if [Mac] doesn't speak of [his problems] to some extent, one of these days he'll crack up," Stacey likewise says. But Violet Nedden offers an explanation more important to Laurence's general treatment of characters needing to explain: "We are all so anxious that people should not think us different. See, we say, I am not peculiar — wait until I tell you how it was with me." This character's analysis is partly accurate: to explain, Laurence suggests, is to be able to accept oneself. More important, it is to be accepted. Confronted by the complexity of existence, confused and guilt-ridden by their own behaviour, many of Laurence's characters (especially Stacey, Hagar, and Rachel) remain convinced that if they can but explain themselves — that is, make themselves known, not necessarily justify themselves — the terrible spectres of solitude and confusion will be exorcised. "I'd had many things to say to him, so many things to put to rights," recalls Hagar of her husband's unexpected death. Rachel, likewise, feels an urgent need to tell Nick everything about herself, particularly because his understanding will transcend the inherent difficulties of words: "There isn't much to say about myself, nothing that can be spoken. And yet . . . I feel as though I might talk to him and he would know what I mean."

One cause of urgency which Rachel feels arises from the manner in which words can become for her, as for so many of Laurence's characters, empty, devoid of meaning. Herself evidently fascinated ambivalently by jargon and cliché, especially in her delineation of the secondary characters of *The Fire-Dwellers* — Tess Fogler, Thor Thorlakson, Dolores Appleton, The Polyglam lady — Laurence also presents protagonists typically sensitive to the clichéd word, the empty automatic phrase, what Rachel calls "set patterns of response." Stacey herself acts as a kind of authorial sensibility at many points, wryly observing the clichés of advertising

(she terms some of these "pieces of folk literature"). It is Richel's sensitivity in this matter which is especially significant because hers is a struggle to break free from such "patterns," especially because she feels their strength so acutely. Thus, for example, she fears the growth in herself of the typical grade one teacher's "simper," reminding herself that "Children have built in radar to detect falseness." More important, she reacts against such set patterns in those closest to her — in Calla, whose speech is marred by "favourite sayings," in her mother, whose use of the "pattern" is both more unconscious, and, for Rachel, more oppressive. For Hagar, such sensitivity to the automatic, empty phrase is directly related to her core of integrity, her distaste for anything spurious. Characteristically, she reacts against the newspaper style that clouds the fact, against the manifestly "false" term, "my dear," and, similarly, against the false automatic apology. Interestingly, this automatic "I'm sorry" is singled out for considerably more extensive attack in *The Diviners*, where Christie's disapproval of that "useless christly awful word" becomes a recurrent motif in Morag's memory. And when Morag protests Maudie's use of "Right On," she merely articulates more clearly what many of Laurence's protagonists feel, that the same words that can be so essential to both knowing and defining, can be equally debased, meaningless: "Right On. Dear little Lord Jesus, what did that mean? Like saying Great, Stupendous. No meaning at all."

What further emphasizes the need for explanations in Laurence's characters is the frequent difficulty they have in finding words, their realization that words often cannot possibly contain what they must. Hagar's recollection, "I could find no words that would reach deeply enough," an essentially trite and unremarkable assertion, resonates as it does because it epitomizes a central problem in Laurence's novels. The problem here is further distinguished and made relevant to the underlying problem of words and fact by those instances where Laurence manages to suggest the primary processes both of comprehension and speech. This she frequently does in Nathaniel's struggles to explain in *This Side Jordan*, and, in "The Tomorrow Tamer" from the volume of that title, she describes the protagonist's father struggling for words, "trying to weave into some pattern the vast and spreading spider-web of his anxieties." This struggle of the mind both to know and to make known is especially important in those narratives which focus, as so many of Laurence's do, on the developing psyche. In such cases, the very failure to find words is directly related to the confusion of the inchoate consciousness. Thus, for example, in the title story of *A Bird in the House*, Vanessa MacLeod, the narrator, recalls her loathing of a hymn: "all at once the words themselves seemed too dreadful to be sung." When her father asks why she so hates the hymn she is unable to speak of her loathing — even to herself she is unable to articulate her emotions. In this volume, the protagonist suffers many such frustrated attempts to verbalize, at one point even insisting upon the inadequacy of language

itself. Of the desolating view of one of Manitoba's great lakes stretching "out and out, beyond sight," she feels "No human word could be applied." Yet the distancing irony here between the awe-struck adolescent and the mature authoress again reinforces the sense of a developing consciousness struggling simultaneously for understanding and articulation.

However, the irony does little to mitigate Laurence's reiterated suggestion elsewhere that language is as inherently limited as Eliot's *Four Quartets* argues it to be. Even in an early short story, "A Mask of Beaten Gold,"[2] one character feels his inability to find words to contain accurately the reality of his wife: "The words only pursued her limpingly, unable to catch the reality of her, like dragonflies in the sun." Indeed, it is perhaps significant as a parallel to the whole movement towards silence suggested by the conclusion of *The Diviners* that the novel presents a protagonist who, in spite of her professional skill with words, increasingly feels their inadequacy. When during Morag's harassing last argument with Brooke, she complains, with so many of Laurence's characters, her inability to "explain" (in this case, her reasons for separating from him), her failure reflects not only the enormous emotional complexity of the moment, but also the weakness of language itself: "Words have lost meaning." And it seems that this conviction is no passing thought for Morag. From the very beginning of the novel she is shown grappling unsuccessfully for words to describe the quasi-symbolic river outside her Shallot. She is unsuccessful not because of her own failure but because of the limitations of words: "no one could catch the river's colour even with paints, much less words." Indeed, as an adolescent, she is thrown into a panic by the possibility that "Maybe there are not" words sufficient to the multiplicity of experience. Yet, though the matter is never explicit, Laurence simultaneously suggests that Morag's difficulty with words, more than just being a comment on their inadequacy, is related both to the departure of her genius and to her almost too acute sensitivity to words: "I find words more difficult to define than I used to," she confesses near the end of her writing career.

Yet elsewhere Laurence suggests that part of Morag's difficulty arises from the fact that some experience transcends any possibility of speech, that many kinds of communication demand a medium other than words: her very relationship with the largely non-verbal "halfbreed," Jules Tonnere, reflects her deep attraction towards an area of experience where language is less inadequate than irrelevant. Most obviously, such experience is sexual, "someplace beyond language." However, her whole relationship with Jules clearly embodies this level of experience "beyond language." As school children they share a grin of complicity; as adolescents they agree without words to meet for their first sexual adventure; as adults they share entire evenings while Jules "does not speak at all." Even shortly before Jules' death, Morag decides that, to him, there is "No way of saying everything she would like to say," and adds, significantly, "Maybe none of it really needed

saying, after all." While it is Morag's relationship with Jules that does most to stress this experience beyond speech, her two other affairs reveal much the same thing. At one point, for example, Morag remembers making love with Brooke, at first recalling (somewhat awkwardly) the broken cries of love-making and then deciding that there were "no words at all, and after all there are no words, none." As Morag sentimentally declares, "there are no words." Similarly, as she recalls making love with Dan McRaith, her third lover, she reflects that their love-making is "the continuation of their talking, the same thing in a different form."

If Morag (and, presumably, Laurence) goes farther than most earlier protagonists in discovering experience where words are irrelevant she merely extends a trait well established in the Laurence protagonist. Mr. Archipelago and Doree, for example, of "The Perfume Sea," discover after their first confessions of mutual affection that that affection goes beyond speech, that, as Doree says, "we don't need to talk about it any more." Rachel is most nearly like Morag, however. With an irony subtler than most of hers, Laurence shows the abandoned Rachel longing for the return of contact with Nick, at first bargaining with some vague transcendent power (as Laurence's heroines are wont to do) to relinquish her ability to touch Nick if only she might speak with him, but later reversing her claims: "Nick — if I couldn't speak with you, all right. I would accept that. If only I could be with you and hold you." The reversal is intensified when yet later she repeats her willingness to give up speech if only she might touch, thus not merely commenting unintentionally on her own priorities in the affair, but also showing the predisposition of Laurence's heroines (Stacey MacAindra is the other most notable instance) to abandon words only in the face of sex.

YET EVEN WHEN THEY EMBRACE TOTALLY the need for words and their integrity, Laurence's characters must often come to terms with their own inner failure, the loss of their verbal facility. If *The Diviners* moves towards an acceptance of silence, that silence is variously explored, fought, and analyzed throughout her fiction. Nevertheless, most often the loss of the ability to find words is largely temporary and does not involve the faculty itself. In fact, Morag's loss of the power to "divine" at the end of *The Diviners* reflects a much more profound loss than that of most, though of course Morag's creative faculty is certainly more than a purely verbal one. With little obvious design, but entirely consistent with her treatment of the faculty of "word magic" in *The Diviners*, Laurence tends in all of her works to polarize characters, presenting both those with great verbal powers and those with very little, thereby emphasizing the inborn nature of the verbal faculty. Thus, for example, Godman, the wizened "oracle" of "Godman's Master" babbles garrulously when allowed the opportunity, his very

role as "oracle" serving as a hazy symbol of his verbal gift. In contrast, the servant girl Love, in "A Fetish for Love," remains nearly silent, her speech a mere "parroting." In "A Gourdful of Glory" the polarity is explicit: on the one hand is Mammii Ama, intoxicated with the "golden lightning" of the word, capable of intoxicating others with her impromptu speeches and songs. On the other hand is her antithesis, "T'reepenny," who is capable of no words except her cry of "t'reepenny," who "only said one word, ever." The T'reepenny's, those of stunted speech, recur through Laurence's works — Phillip, a character of the "Mask of Beaten Gold," admits "I'm not especially articulate"; Clara, Brampton Shipley's first wife, is "inarticulate as a stabled beast" (or so Hagar claims, concerned as she is with the social status of correct speech); Jan, Stacey's youngest child, is almost pathologically late in speaking her first words; Mac and Ian, Stacey's husband and son, both choose to communicate with as few words as possible; Prin of *The Diviners* is always "simple," and becomes increasingly silent; indeed, Lilac, Morag's first fictional heroine, is, in Brooke's terms, "non-verbal." Yet Laurence is evidently fascinated more by Mammii Ama than by T'reepenny: those with the gift of speech, especially those with oratorical power, are one of Laurence's main types. Even the ironically presented proselytizers, Brother Lemon of "The Merchant of Heaven," clearly a study for Thor Thorlakson, the prophet of vitamin pills in *The Fire-Dwellers*, and, too, the "spell-binder" Tollemache Lees of *The Stone Angel*, vividly embody that power of speech that seems to fascinate Laurence. The rather absurd questers of "glossalalia," the "gift of tongues," in *A Jest of God*, likewise attempt to achieve a faculty whose pursuit is rendered futile, as Calla comes to suspect, largely because it is not a "gift of tongues" at all, but is the antithesis of a verbal gift. It is the real verbalizers like Mammii Ama, like Christie in *The Diviners* with his "legends" and his declamations on the "Nuisance Grounds," or, in another form, like Morag herself, that do most to contrast the inarticulate, at least until they lose their gifts or die.

Yet if Christie ends his life only after his power is gone, his speech "pretty garbled" by a stroke, if Prin sinks deeper and deeper into silence, and if Jules Tonnere likewise is silenced, no more able to sing, it is only after silence has achieved, through the course of Laurence's fiction, some small degree of grace. In *A Bird in the House*, the two nearly saint-like figures, grandmother Connor and the Chris of "Horses of the Night," both confer on silence their own kinds of strength, and even Calla of *A Jest of God*, realizing her friend's distress after her operation, is able to give Rachel an enormous "gift" of silence. As Stacey comes to realize, after her frantic efforts to speak openly with her husband, her failure is equivocal: "The silences aren't all bad."

What makes the passage to silence further equivocal is the fact that the power of the word is often seen as a potential burden, sometimes merely inconvenient, other times even dangerous. Repeatedly Laurence presents characters for whom

the gap between the fact and the word is all too narrow. Like the sorcerer's apprentice they become the victims of the very power they otherwise prize. And the important psychological implication — important because it closely parallels the implication that Morag/Laurence's gift of "divining" is beyond any conscious control — is that the faculty of speech is closely linked to the subconscious. Despite their earnest efforts to control their speech, Laurence's characters again and again speak in a manner that defies their own intentions. When a character in an African short story claims, "I did not mean to say that," he is merely putting in conventional language a trait common to Laurence's characters: "I was not aware that I was going to speak until the words came out," claims the narrator of *A Bird in the House*; "I didn't mean to say that," Morag echoes, and adds, significantly, "I didn't even mean it." When Laurence writes similarly of Stacey that she "hears the vehemence in someone's voice that is coming from her mouth," she is not merely suggesting that such characters slip and allow themselves to be harshly frank. On the contrary, she is making it clear that they consistently utter that of which they have no conscious notion. This is especially true of Hagar and Rachel. "How is it my mouth speaks by itself . . . ?" complains the distraught Hagar. That her frequent lapses into unintentional asperity are not mere senility is made clear both by her own claim that she "never could" keep her "mouth shut" and by the fact that her weakness is frequently shared by the far from senile (though self-confessedly neurotic) Rachel. "I suppose it must be my voice, although God only knows what it is saying," she thinks, for example, when she finds her innate maidenly reticence taking over from her sexual desires in much the same manner that Hagar's innate bitterness takes over from her goodwill. Indeed, both characters undergo the similar terror of feeling utter divorce from the voice that speaks within them. At the prayer meeting as those around her attempt to gain the "gift of tongues," Rachel finds herself listening with fascinated horror to a "crying, ululating" voice only to discover it is "Mine. Oh my God. Mine. The voice of Rachel." Similarly, in the hospital, Hagar lies awake listening to the voices of her fellow patients, until she hears that "One voice has almost screeched. Some time elapses before I realize the voice was mine." The facts that Hagar's cry has been "Bram!" the name of her dead husband, and Rachel's been, as she observes, "the forbidden transformed cryptically to nonsense" confirms, not surprisingly, that the uncontrolled cry is indeed intimately bound to innermost personality.

And again, the nature of these inner voices seems significant simply because they are so like the voices that allow Morag to write, from a source within, beyond conscious control. Even as a girl Morag discovers that when she writes, "She does not know where it came from. It comes into your head, and when you write it down, it surprises you, because you never knew what was going to happen until you put it down." The rather cathartic nature of this verbal ability, like that of

the subconsciously based speech of many of Laurence's other characters, is made more explicit at several other points in Morag's revelation of her essentially Longinian view of her own creativity: at one point, for example, she says of her current work in progress, "I guess I'll have to go on with it" in spite of her discontent with it, and at another claims that writing creatively is like "Someone else dictating the words. Untrue of course, but that was how it felt, the characters speaking. Where was the character, and who? Never mind. Not Morag's concern. Possession or self-hypnosis — it made no difference. Just let it keep on coming." Admittedly, this smacks a little of melodramatics. But such a view of the relation between the ability to use the word and what the word signifies is intimately related to Laurence's continuing view of the word itself, the verbal faculty, and its subconscious basis.

WHAT GIVES MORAG'S PREOCCUPATION with the facility with words special urgency is the attitude, evident not only in *The Diviners* but also in most of Laurence's other works, that words have almost talismanic significance. More than being merely the ciphers of communication, a transparent medium of expression, they are for both Laurence and her characters of special portent in themselves. This is particularly the case with names. It is clear that both Laurence and her characters are acutely sensitive to names — to the correspondence between a complex and often unknowable identity and the word which acts as a symbol of that identity. Laurence's own sensitivity in this regard is obvious in even the most cursory review of her characters. The Biblical names, of course, are most obviously portentous — Rachel, Hagar, Christie, Matthew, Ruth, Moses, Adamo, Joshua, and so on. Fortunately, while Laurence tends to emphasize the Biblical associations, she usually avoids coyness, both because she makes emphasis on the names fairly unobtrusive (e.g., Hagar is merely called "the Egyptian") and because she keeps the Biblical parallels subtle. The ways in which Hagar is like her Biblical counterpart, for example, are not contrivedly obvious. The portentous Biblical names are matched by others equally portentous, names such as Calla, Jason, Lees, Mercy, Godman, Miranda, Love, or, perhaps too obviously, Mr. Archipelago.

Often as sensitive as Laurence to names are the characters of her books, especially when they are concerned with the suitability of the name. Violet Nedden, for example, is as humiliated by the inappropriateness of her name to her bulky stature as is, for identical reasons, Calla. Calla is hardly lily-like as her name suggests, but, Rachel feels, is instead like "a sunflower, if anything, brash, strong, plain." Of the many characters in *The Tomorrow Tamer* who likewise feel the significance of names, one of the most prominent is Constance of "A Fetish for

Love," intrigued alike by the names of the "Mammy lorries" — "Tiger Boy, King Kong, One-Time Boy" — and by the name of a servant — Love. It is in fact the unknown source of this girl's name — possibly drawn from Biblical teaching, or, Constance's husband more feasibly suggests, from a company of ironmongers — which she somehow feels provides a clue to the enigmatic character of the girl. Yet more typical of the Laurence outlook are those characters for whom the name itself becomes a kind of clue to reality, the name acquiring great symbolic significance. Typical of this attitude is the narrator of "The Drummer of All the World," who is so overwhelmed by the potency of the names of the native gods that he "learned some of the other names of Nyame" and "for a whole year . . . called God by the name of Nyame" and at another point "invoked Nyankopon's strong name, Obommubuwafre." Similarly, Stacey is able to weave an elaborate fantasy about the northern wilds of British Columbia, using as key referents, "names like silkenly flowing water, Similkameen, Tulameen, Coquihalla, the names on maps." In *This Side Jordan*, Laurence goes so far as to make Johnnie Kestoe identify and analyse the relationship between the powerful name and the self: "Magic symbols — a rune, a spell, a charm — the thing that made him different from any other man on earth. His name John Kestoe. What proved identity more than a name? If you had a name, you must exist. I am identified; therefore, I am." In Johnnie's case, his semi-conscious musing upon his own name is made consistent with his general concern with names and reflects his desire to reassure himself of his own significance. However, as a rather obtrusive element in the flow of his thoughts, even though afforded a distancing irony, it seems to reflect even more Laurence's own interest in the significance of names.

Where names are thus so powerful, the act of naming becomes critical because that act establishes the name's ability both to reduce an identity to essence and, equally important it seems, to influence that identity. Mr. Archipelago's adopted name is an obvious instance. Both Johnnie Kestoe's naming his new daughter after his mother and Nathaniel Amegbe's naming his new son Joshua are likewise given enormous emotional and symbolic weight, in the latter instance reflecting Nathaniel's immense burden of hope and ambition: "Cross Jordan, Joshua." Even simple and relatively unstressed acts like Vanessa's instinctive, assured naming of the half-Husky (in the story of that title) as "Nanuk," is an act both of recognition and of creation. This is particularly true of Vanessa's private name for her grandfather, "The Great Bear," a name which because of its highly evocative nature (what Vanessa calls its "many associations") goes beyond the obvious appropriateness Vanessa consciously recognizes to attain an enormous imaginative influence on her assessment of her grandfather.

Again, however, *The Diviners* develops much more fully than any previous books all such matters concerning words: as Morag herself thinks, "I don't know why names seem so important to me." At this point, as an adult, she adds, "Yes,

I guess I do know. My own name, and feeling I'd come from nowhere." Such is certainly the case in her fruitless attempts to penetrate the enigma of her Scottish lover's Gaelic name for her, "Morag Dhu." Nevertheless, this is only part of the truth. After all, as a creative artist, distantly echoing God's creative act by making the Word flesh, she is especially attuned to the indefinable power of names. At one point, for example, she becomes intoxicated with a list of wildflower names and, at another, fantasizes enviously of the Adam-like power that belongs to whoever is first able to give such wildflowers their names: "Imagine naming flowers which have never been named before. Like the Garden of Eden. Power! Ecstasy!" It is perhaps significant that she somewhat facetiously adds, "I christen thee Butter-and-Eggs," for such a name for such a flower (like Vanessa's name for her grandfather) is clearly an act both of recognition and creation. Again, the word and the fact are reciprocally influential. This is especially true of Morag's reactions to peoples' names. Her uneasiness that her daughter Pique should have a friend with the same name as her own former lover, and that Pique should be given a name like that of her aunt (Piquette) but distinct from that tragedy-laden name, evince her implicit belief in the power of the name.

Not surprisingly, most of Laurence's chief characters are equally fascinated and puzzled by words and phrases, feeling somehow that those words are prior to the fact, that they create their own reality. In many instances puzzlement directly reflects a child's struggles to understand the baffling adult world. Such, for example, is the case with Vanessa MacLeod's deification of the mysterious words, "Depression" and "drought," and Morag's considerably more frantic attempts to penetrate the mysteries of Prin's use of the word "cord": "What? What cord? What means *Cord*?" In fact, in this latter novel Morag's desperate "What means . . . ?" acts as a kind of leitmotif, later in her life being echoed by her own daughter. More closely related to Laurence's intensely personal attitude towards words, though, is the manner in which she presents characters for whom ordinary words, like names, are highly evocative, capable of creating their own reality. Even Hagar recalls as a girl staring at the words and pictures in her little reader, hoping "they'd swell into something different, something rare." And for Mammii Ama, the very nature of political freedom becomes somehow secondary to the powerful word itself: "He be strong, dis Free-Dom, he be power word." This fascination with words is particularly felt by the two characters who are also writers (and who, of course, in some ways are Laurence herself), Vanessa and Morag: for Vanessa, "Great Bear Lake," "Rest beyond the river," and "Slowly, slowly horses of the night," achieve particular significance. Of this last instance, for example, she dismisses the intended meaning of the line, insisting that "to me it had another, a different relevance." Morag is even more drawn by words: "Words words words. Words haunt her." As a child, she is especially fascinated by Prin's word, "mooner," and, like Vanessa, she dismisses conventional meaning in favour of her

own: "to her it means something else." As an adult, she is likewise fascinated with the shifting meanings of words, as though their very uncertainty not merely reflects, but actually constitutes her own: "Fan . . . is . . . in a very good bargaining position? *Bargaining position.* One of the sexual postures not mentioned in the Kama Sutra. *Postures.* The ways in which one lies." So strong is this attraction to words in themselves that she will even play a Gaelic record over and over again, listening to what is in fact "Just a lot of garbled sounds."

Yet for Morag the greatest power of words is achieved not by their effect in isolation or in phrases, but in the stylized forms of songs or fiction. Indeed, the talismanic power of words is especially felt by those who are able to go far beyond mere fact so that more than merely using words or names like "mooner" or "Great Bear Lake" to define a personal reality, they use whole configurations of words to establish an existence that is at once fictional and real. Implicit in her early works, this view of the fictional word becomes explicit in *The Diviners.* In an early story such as "The Perfume Sea," for example, we encounter Mr. Archipelago who "enjoyed talking about himself" simply because "no one could ever be sure where truth ended and the tinted unreality began." Clearly, this kind of character, disposed to create a fictional reality, intrigues Laurence. Nick Kazlick's father in *A Jest of God,* for instance, is hardly integral to the action. To the whole notion of subjective and objective reality, a key theme in that book, however, he is integral. Thus Nick makes repeated reference to the unselfconscious fabrications of his father, and Rachel herself is impressed by the power his mind seems to have over external reality: "He walks as though the rest of the world were an interesting but unlikely story he had once told himself." Chris, the subject of "Horses of the Night," is another such figure, creating his own (almost pathological) reality. Yet, when Vanessa says of Chris' two fictional horses, "I had known for some years, without realizing it, that the pair had only ever existed in some other dimension," she is merely saying in other words what becomes explicitly repeated and emphasized in *The Diviners.* As Morag thinks, looking back on her life as a "Wordsmith," she has often, ambiguously, felt that "fiction was more true than fact. Or that fact was in fact fiction" (thus directly echoing Laurence's much quoted view that "fiction is more true than fact").[3] She has even felt, in the past, that "words could do anything. Magic. Sorcery. Even miracles." The reality of Morag's own "magic" use of words, her novels, is evident at several points: while writing her novels she finds it tormenting to leave her fictional world for the objective one. As she says of one character's fictional plight, "The blood is no less real for being invisible to the external eye."

It is not solely Morag, however, who is a "Wordsmith." Christie and Jules, as they both re-make the past in legends and songs, are equally the creators of a fiction truer than fact. Throughout her own career Laurence has been much interested in legends and songs. She has in fact collected and translated Somali

legends and poems in *A Tree for Poverty*, but, more important here, she has, in her fiction, included many fragments of poems, songs, legends for verisimilitude, local colour, or, of course, thematic relevance. The "Ladybird" rhyme of *The Fire-Dwellers* is an obvious instance of this last use, but the influence, for example, of the African proverbs and parables on the protagonist of "The Drummer of All the World," of "The Song of Solomon" and hymns on Vanessa, of songs and poems on Hagar, are profound and pervasive. Indeed, in this last book, Reverend Troy's singing of a hymn transforms both himself and Hagar, providing her, "shatteringly," with the knowledge of her own deepest values. For Morag, however, such examples of extended creativity are important not only for their personal symbolic meanings or their relations with the past. They are, in additon, significantly related, first, to her own sense of Gaelic heritage and, more importantly, to her view of the creative word. Of Jules' stories and songs, she insists, "It doesn't matter a damn" whether or not they are objectively true; of Christie's fictitious hero, Piper Gunn, she likewise insists (rather melodramatically) that he "probably never lived in so-called real life but . . . lives forever. Christie knew things about inner truths that I am only just beginning to understand." So important is this kind of "inner truth" for Morag that she eventually realizes that the Gaelic heritage she had long believed to exist in Scotland exists, in fact, in the fictitious — but, of course, "true" — words of Christie. As a pattern of acceptance, relevant to Margaret Laurence herself, *The Diviners* thus embodies both the acceptance of silence and the acceptance of Canada.

Though rarely does she directly or fully consider the nature of language and its relation to what it symbolizes, the characters whose responses she shapes repeatedly reflect a closely connected series of attitudes towards the nature of words and speech. Admittedly, few would claim that Laurence's position in Canadian letters is due to her stature as a "thinker." Yet it is evident that her presuppositions (in this case, about the use of words) whether conscious, unconscious, or more likely, in the vague area between, are both pervasive and tellingly indicative of an impressively thoughtful sensibility. What makes the examination of Laurence's treatment of the issues dealt with here of peculiar interest is the somewhat ironic fact that *The Diviners* serves in general as the most fully articulated account of ideas suggested in earlier fictions at precisely the same time that in this last book Laurence suggests the loss of her ability to articulate in fiction.

NOTES

[1] Indeed, she satirizes in passing the fashionable jargon-laden approach to the problem through Jake Fogler of *The Fire-Dwellers*. She writes of him that he is "fond of talking about the breakdown of verbal communications and the problems of semantics in mass media."

[2] *Tamarack Review*, 29 (Autumn 1962), pp. 3-21.

[3] See Clara Thomas, *Margaret Laurence* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1969), p. 14.

BREAKING AND ENTERING

Richard Hornsey

Someone was watching
as he drowned among lilacs
in the privacy of his own back yard

Someone listened
when he whispered
that chestnut trees
are candelabras
which burn all night

And someone watched him
walk with his lady
warm palms gently locked
feet feeling textures
of concrete and grass

Someone listened
when he had gone
somehow slipped the bolt
and entered the world
of his rooms

And all was changed
violated, penetrated, opened,
drawers eviscerated
the toilet bowl broken
letters stolen
the mattress split and gutted

So now
behind screwed-down windows
deadlocked doors
the sound of a radio ever playing
he too
watches and listens and waits

THE SEARCH FOR FPG

Rosmarin Heidenreich

D. O. SPETTIGUE'S DISCOVERY of the true identity of the late Canadian novelist who called himself Frederick Philip Grove will probably not greatly affect the criticism of the Grove novels.[1] However, the semi-autobiographical *A Search For America* and the allegedly autobiographical *In Search of Myself* demand a new critical investigation in the light of this discovery, not so much for biographical reasons as for aesthetic ones. For if Spettigue's claims are valid, we are dealing with works of fiction rather than with works of biography. Consequently, the reader's response is determined not by the story of the life of Frederick Philip Grove, but by a number of textual features of which the narrator's position (which can no longer be identified with that of the author) is only one.

The prologue to *In Search of Myself*, first published as an essay under the same title in 1940, offers the most dramatic juxtaposition of biographical and fictional readings. In its anecdotal framework and by virtue of its function as a quasi-preface to the "autobiography," it seems verifiably and tantalizingly biographical. At the same time the double-stranded narrative structure, the recurring flashbacks, the polarity represented by the position of the narrator and that of the "young Frenchman" constitute literary features which invite interpretation. The reader's knowledge of Grove's true identity is, of course, a factor which lies outside the text. His recognition of the irony expressed in the title *In Search of Myself* is, however, a consequence of this knowledge and may therefore be regarded as a point of departure for an interpretation.

Such an interpedendence between author's biography and "autonomous" text is in any case problematical in terms of critical theory and methodology. It is especially problematical in *In Search of Myself* where it becomes, in a way, the subject of the text itself. The essay seems to describe an episode in the life of the author: it pretends to be autobiographical. But the accessibility of the "truth" (i.e., the real biography of the author) has textual relevance since it constitutes the indeterminacy of the text for the knowing reader. We are dealing not with a mixture of truth and falsehood, fiction and fact, but with their ironic displacement within an aesthetic form.

The main narrative, which describes a journey through the Ontario wilderness, is interrupted by flashbacks and philosophical reflections, resulting in an alternat-

ing pattern which presents a past ideality (the narrator's European youth) contrasted with a present reality (the North American experience), the one marked by wealth, social standing and promise for a brilliant literary career, the other by poverty, failure and disillusionment. In the course of the essay this past ideality becomes more and more identified with "art" as opposed to "life," or the immediate demands of the present reality out of which the narrator speaks. His allusion to his friend, the "young Frenchman," now a world-famous writer, is the point of departure for his personal and literary reflections. He cannot help comparing their situations, and muses over the fact that the exclusive and innovative circle to which he once belonged, today (i.e., 1940) can be said to virtually define modern literature, whereas he, isolated in a pioneer country, is struggling to maintain his material existence as a country schoolteacher, whose literary voice has awakened no echo, has, in fact, scarcely been heard. With this realization of failure comes a sense of the necessity to explain it. But as with his other work, the question of his readership, or lack of it, arises. With whom is he to seek communication, to whom explain? It occurs to him that there is no more appropriate listener for him to address himself to than the "young Frenchman," by whose success he has measured the extent of his own failure and acknowledged his own defeat.

The opening of the essay presents a landscape which in its barrenness and desolation suggests a vision of a primordial world, or an entropic one.

> It was a dismal November day, with a raw wind blowing from the northwest and cold, iron-grey clouds flying low — one of those Ontario days which, on the lakeshore or in a country of rock and swamp, seem to bring visions of an ageless time after the emergence of the earth from chaos, or a foreboding of the end of a world about to die from entropy.

In the best romantic tradition, this landscape reflects the mood and the situation of the figure perceiving it. With his reference to the lateness of the season and the cyclical movement of creation and destruction, the narrator, who later portrays himself as an aging writer, may be seen to allude to the uncertainty of his own future life and creativity.

This vision of an ageless and uninhabited world recedes with the appearance of the narrator, who in one sentence focuses it into spatial and temporal familiarity.

> It was into such a country of rock and swamp, a few miles north of Lake Erie, that my business took me that day.

The landscape becomes a physical obstacle to be overcome on the way to a destination. He is driving to a farm where he is to pick up a girl as household help. The road on which he is travelling grows progressively worse until finally he is forced to stop: it has been completely washed away. This forced pause in his drive leads him to reflect, to withdraw from immediate reality which demands that he act.

There follows a reminiscence of his youth, as promising as that of his friend, the "young Frenchman," whose biography has been brought him by a visitor the night before. His feeling of misery stems not from his momentary situation, but from the contrast between the Frenchman's success and his own failure.

> Like a flash of lightning it had struck me that, to earn the distinction of seeing his biography published within his lifetime, he must have achieved things which had focused on him the eyes of a world, a living world as full of fire and enthusiasm as any world that had ever been — whereas I, only slightly his junior, in spite of often titanic endeavor, had lived and worked in obscurity, giving expression, at the best, to a few, a very few, mirrorings of life in the raw such as it had been my lot to witness.

But his situation forces him out of his reminiscences. He must decide on a course of action.

> There were three possibilities. I might abandon my task and try to retrace my way by backing out. I might alight and, leaving the car where it was, leap the washout, to cover the remaining distance afoot. I might try to attract the attention of the people on the farm or in the house — they were expecting me — by blowing my horn.

Thinking once more of the Frenchman and the brilliant prospects of his youth, he chooses the last of these alternatives.

> For ten minutes or so, at intervals of perhaps fifteen seconds, I made the horn of my machine ring dismally out over the fens whose very existence seemed a calamity of defeat . . .

As he again falls into his musings he suddenly sees movement on the farm. He has been heard. But the figure coming towards him is not the young girl he is expecting; it is an old man, her grandfather. The dialogue which ensues culminates in a grotesque scene: between bursts of senile laughter the old man tells how a salesman, trying to collect a payment from his son-in-law, struck the washout and somersaulted into the swamp. When the car was pulled out, the salesman was found dead with a broken neck.

The essay concludes with the narrator heading home, the girl by his side, and a resolve forming in his mind: to explain his literary failure by writing, "with an avowedly autobiographical purpose," the story of his " . . . LIFE AS A WRITER IN CANADA."

IT IS NOT SURPRISING that *In Search of Myself* has been consistently read as an expression of the artist's dilemma in a pioneer environment. It was, for a long time, seen as a sort of document, sociological, since it exposed the role of the artist in a pioneer society, and literary, since it revealed the effect of isolation, of the break with the past, on the artist's creativity. A. J. M. Smith,

introducing the essay in his anthology, sums up this view: "This pathetic and heroic piece of self-revelation written in a matter-of-fact and homely style throws a clear beam of light on the problem of the artist's isolation in a new and thoroughly bourgeois country."[2]

Little attention has been paid to the suggestive narrative structure and the equally suggestive descriptive passages — in other words to the essay as an artistic work. Yet the narrator's journey through the wilderness clearly has an allegorical function, and an ambiguous one at that. The difficulties met with on the journey may be seen to metaphorically describe not only individual features of the speaker's present life in Canada, but in fact his entire past, the decisive moments of which seem to be alluded to in the journey's description as well.

One need not dwell on the parallel between the journey, through the wilderness of rock and swamp, and Grove's life, which was determined by an ever-thickening bog of personal, professional and financial problems. The "complete stop" necessitated by the road which has been washed away finds its biographical counterpart in the fact that Grove's desperate situation led him to fake a suicide and flee to America, breaking all ties with the past.

The point of crisis, signalled by the washout in the road in the narrative, necessitates a decision. The three alternatives listed by the narrator, and the significance of the one chosen, are perhaps the most explicit references given the reader as to the intention of the essay. For in choosing to make himself heard (by blowing his horn) he seems to be referring directly to the essay itself, and even to its narrative structure. The sounding of his horn, "for ten minutes or so, at intervals of perhaps fifteen seconds," may seen as representing the alternating pattern of description and reflection we find in the essay, a pattern which, in turn, corresponds to the duality of life and art which the essay seeks to demonstrate.

Read in this light, the horn-blowing episode may be seen as a hidden signal to the reader, around whose response one of the most moving passages of the essay turns.

> ... I had never had an audience; for no matter what one may say, he says it to somebody; and if there is nobody to hear, it remains as though it had never been said; the tree falling in a forest where there is none to hear, produces no sound. A book arises as much in the mind of the reader as in that of the writer, and the writer's art consists above all in creating response; the effect of a book is the result of a collaboration between writer and audience. That collaboration I had failed to enforce ...

The passage quoted above separates the sounding of the horn from the unexpected response to it, ironically confirming the validity of the narrator's statements. Yet the response to the dismal echoing of the horn, expressing an acknowledgement of the narrator's defeat as much as the will to make himself heard, is also ambiguous in its implications. The old man's appearance in answer to the signal

ironically anticipates the close of the essay, where the narrator announces his intention to address the explanation of his failure (in the form of his autobiography) to the "young Frenchman," now a man of over seventy. The old man's appearance is, however, only one consequence of the narrator's signal. The young girl's subsequent arrival represents the successful achievement of the journey while it also suggests a new impulse for both "life" and "art": the narrator announces his decision to write his autobiography.[3]

Like the metaphor of the journey, the allegorical function of the figures, landscape and events is not difficult to identify. The polarity suggested by the opening of the essay (in the vision of a world which is primordial or entropic) is echoed in the contrasts and oppositions represented throughout by the "young Frenchman" and the aging narrator. The one inhabits "... a living world ... full of fire and enthusiasm," in fact constitutes its centre (the "eyes" of this world are "focused" on his achievements) while the other is banished to an inhuman wilderness which diminishes man and his deeds to insignificance. Thus the two figures come to represent the contrasting "worlds" they inhabit, as well as the opposite extremes of success and failure, youth and old age, life and art, reality and dream.

The Frenchman, always referred to as young, incarnates the memory of a past which is lost, inaccessible to the narrator. This youth is, in fact, an illusion, for the "young Frenchman," like the narrator, is no longer young. But youth also manifests itself, in the narrator's present reality, in the form of the young girl he is on his way to fetch. These two figures, one a shadow from the past, the other an immediate reality, may be seen as two manifestations of the narrator's quest. He is seeking, through the Frenchman, to recover his past, his lost youth, but it is the girl he is going to fetch who represents the new beginning, in a new context, of an artistic life. He cannot recapture his youth in the reality which surrounds him: he can only re-create it, so to speak, in a new form, in the form of a "story," i.e., through art. Although it is the "young Frenchman" who, through the memories he evokes of his youth, inspires him, it is the immediate experience of that journey through the wilderness and the encounter at the farm that motivates him to act, that is to write.

The problem of old age also involves a two-way contrast, namely between the "young Frenchman," now a venerable old coryphaeus who has fulfilled the promise youth held for him, and the old farmer, that spectre of a senile old age, a vision of the narrator's potential decay. The story of the salesman, told by the old man, illustrates the dread vision of a fate narrowly escaped: like the senility of the old man, it is the potential fate of the narrator.

In addressing the explanation of his failure to the "young Frenchman," the narrator is addressing a figure into whom he seems to have distilled all the significant relationships, encounters and experiences from his past. The Frenchman's phenomenal success dramatically points up the narrator's failure, and so serves as

a strong point of contrast. But as a sort of *alter ego* to the narrator, he also reveals the man the narrator might have been. He represents not only the intended "audience," the listener to the story of the "life of a writer in Canada," but also, simultaneously, both its object and its subject — the dimensions of the self the narrator is in search of.

As an external contrast figure to the narrator, the identity or even existence of the Frenchman has remained more or less irrelevant for the reader. As is now obvious, Grove must have intended it to be so, since identification of the "young Frenchman" would, presumably, have led to his own identification as well. However, the function of the Frenchman in the narrative may also be seen against the biographical background indicated earlier. In prefacing his "autobiography" with this essay, Grove may have meant, as Spettigue suggests, to address an explicit signal to André Gide. Spettigue has identified the "young Frenchman" as Gide, who recorded an encounter with Grove — his real name was Felix Paul Greve — under the title "Conversation avec un Allemand quelques années avant la guerre." If, as Spettigue contends, we have all reason to believe that Grove had access to Gide's *Oeuvres Complètes*, we can imagine how the publication of this intimate dialogue would have affected him. The antithesis of life and art implied in *In Search of Myself*, in which the narrator represents one side and the Frenchman the other, may indeed be a response to the conversation in which Grove affirms his preference for "life" as opposed to "art." Gide introduces the subject with his comment on FPG's essay on Wilde.

> — C'est par là que m'a tant intéressé votre première plaquette (sur Oscar Wilde). Je crois très juste l'antagonisme où vous placiez la vie et l'art . . .
> Il m'interrompt.
> — Eh bien! moi je ne trouve cela juste du tout. Ou plutôt . . . si vous voulez . . . oui, il est dangereux pour l'artiste de chercher à vivre; mais c'est précisément parce que, moi, je prétends vivre, que je dis que je ne suis pas un artiste. C'est le besoin d'argent qui maintenant me fait écrire. L'oeuvre d'art n'est pour moi qu'un pis-aller. Je préfère la vie.[4]

At the same time he warns Gide of his "lies," which seem to consist in consciously creating an appearance which coincides with reality or "truth," representing an ironic identicality between the created, or the "lie," and the real. Significantly enough, the example he chooses to demonstrate his "lying" is the self.

> Il faut que je vous avertisse, Monsieur Gide, que je mens constamment . . . ce n'est pas ce que vous croyez . . . J'éprouve le même besoin de mentir et la même satisfaction à mentir qu'un autre à montrer la vérité . . . Non, ce n'est pas ce que vous croyez . . . Tenez par exemple: quand quelqu'un entend un bruit subit à son côté,

il tourne la tête (...) : moi pas! ou quand je la tourne, c'est volontairement: je mens.[5]

Thus *In Search of Myself*, anecdotal and episodic, apparently relating a lived-through situation and crisis, sums up and demonstrates, structurally and thematically, the essence of the "autobiography" itself. It also illustrates the hiatus between *vérité* and *mensonge*, *vie* and *art* manifested in the "Conversation avec un Allemand." In purporting to address the young Frenchman in an autobiography yet to be written, the essay or prologue acts as a signal which, as it turns out, itself contains the message it announces. In its thematic structure, it reflects the phases of life "lived through" by the author in terms which refer with the same validity to the artistic problem mentioned in the dialogue with Gide: the *mensonge* is in the text presented to the reader, while the *vérité* is to be discovered, by the reader, in his recognition of the irony contained in the text.

One may say that in *In Search of Myself* the problem of the artist in a pioneer environment is only the most superficial one; the musings of the narrator lead to the statement of antithesis between life and art already mentioned, while the essay, itself an art-form, is the medium used to represent life, and thus, in a way, ironically resolves the opposition it expresses. Furthermore the entire essay may be seen as a "coded" revelation of FPG's identity, and finally, as an explicit signal to André Gide, not only that FPG is alive, but that, in fact, the dialogue noted down in the "Conversation avec un Allemand" is to be continued. Whether the signal is heard or recognized is not the important thing.

> Whether he [the young Frenchman] ever read the explanation [of his failure], what did it matter? There would be others, if not today, then ten decades from now. And if there were none, at no time, did it matter? The only thing that did matter, as far as I was concerned, was the fact that the attempt had been made. The rest I must leave to the gods . . .

But in its attempt to communicate with the Frenchman, the essay affirms, through its very literary form of existence, the presence still of the common denominator, "a great enthusiasm for life and art," which seems at first to be negated as the narrator describes his own situation.

The landscape image at the beginning of the essay suggests itself quite naturally to the aging narrator, and leaves open, or seems to do so, the alternative whether the beginning of old age will represent the end of life or the beginning of a new phase of it. The determining factor is the act of will performed by the author in creating a literary work, in which he re-creates his entire life. The "beginning" suggested by the landscape is an image of birth and represents, in the artistic context, the birth of the work of art, which, in turn, represents the life of the narrator. Through this work of art, then, the author makes possible his own re-birth: he is re-creating himself, he is, as FPG said to Gide, "lying." The work of art, an act

of will of the author, defies the inevitability of the conditions of his life. The synchronism of the beginning of the essay and an undefined condition of the "world," the description of which marks this beginning, in fact defines the world as one "emerging from chaos" rather than one about to die from entropy. This act of definition marks the beginning of creation, and makes of the author, as the "creator" of the world of the work of art, an *alter deus*, creator of an *altera natura*. It is the artist's will which determines, symbolically, existence or non-existence, birth or death. The essay itself marks the affirmation of life and art, and a negation that the landscape surrounding the narrator represents, literally or metaphorically, the end of a world about to die from entropy. Just as in the essay the life-art, truth-fiction opposition is overcome by the form of the essay itself, the work also suggests the writer's surmounting that desperate phase of his life, or that mood, designated by the landscape.

NOTES

[1] Douglas O. Spettigue, *FPG: The European Years* (Toronto: Oberon, 1963).

[2] A. J. M. Smith (ed.), *Masks of Fiction* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1961), p. 14.

[3] There is a further irony in the apparition of the old man. At seventy-four, he is six years older than the narrator, and thus represents a warning as to what his mental state might be six years hence. The old man thus indirectly stimulates the resolve forming in his mind, to write his autobiography. The longish passage dealing with the farmer's age and that of the narrator may again contain a reference to Grove's real identity. In assuming his new identity in Canada it was by six years that he aged himself.

[4] André Gide, "Conversation avec un Allemand quelques années avant la guerre," in *Incidences* (Paris: NRF, Librairie Gallimard, 1924), pp. 143-44.

[5] Ibid., p. 141.

books in review

PERSONAL OBSESSION

VICTOR-LEVY BEAULIEU, *Jack Kerouac: a chicken-essay.* Translated by Sheila Fischman. Coach House Press.

JACK KEROUAC still awaits the sound critical assessment he deserves, while the ranks of his thoughtless emulators swell. The chicken-essay is chicken criticism for a number of reasons.

Firstly, Beaulieu panders to the odd persistence of the revolutionary spirit of the sixties in popular Quebec culture. He zealously tries to appropriate Kerouac, the grand-daddy of the hippies, as a Quebecois. According to Beaulieu, Kerouac's frenzied rapturous "beatific" ultra-romantic American Dream was only a failed escape from the gloom of his French-Canadian childhood.

Published in French in 1972, the chicken-essay became a minor cause-célèbre for the Quebec counter-culture. Three years later Coach House Press, known for its outdated counter-cultural sympathies, seized upon the book. Sheila Fischman, the translator of Roch Carrier and Marie-Claire Blais, apparently chose topicality over excellence in Beaulieu's case.

The book proves that counter-culture snobbism can be as blindly effete as any other kind. After quoting an intense passage from *Satori in Paris*, Beaulieu bullies the reader with this innuendo:

> If you haven't begun to understand why I liked Jack from that minute, take this book and tear it up.... This hommage to Jack has nothing to do with you — Understand: you aren't needed.

This is good advice, for the critical intelligence will not feel comfortable in this stifling atmosphere of adulation. Note this embarrassing bit of cheerleading about the opening lines of Doctor Sax: "Now that's what you call starting a book."

Like most disciples, Beaulieu suffers from the misconception that emotional responses are more honest than reasoned appraisal: "and there's the fatigue of my weeping eyes from reading Jack's books too many times." He protests too much, and then has a nightmare about jumping off a building with Jack, causing heart palpitations and nervous exhaustion. Would this sort of nihilistic goupie-ism have pleased Jack?

Jack Kerouac tried to write spontaneously, preventing recollected thought or verbal artifice from impeding the rush of idea-words. In his autobiographical works he tried to fuse the subject matter and the final product in the moment of creation. Missing this essential point, Beaulieu trots out the trite conclusion that he cannot believe in autobiography because the word is a lie.

Rather than explicating Kerouac's attempt to deal with the artificiality of language, Beaulieu emulates it by making the story of the chicken-essay's creation a part of the text. The chicken-essay's neck must be wrung by his impatience, says Beaulieu; indeed, the book is more the chronicle of a personal obsession than a systematic inquiry.

At most, Beaulieu's thesis is a biographer's chestnut, capable of illuminating Kerouac's works, but not of contributing to an evaluation of them. Yet it is an obvious question, which must be answered before a comprehensive view of Kerouac can be had: what is the extent and nature of the French-Canadian influence upon Kerouac's writing?

Certain facts are undeniable. Born to French-Canadian immigrants in Lowell, Massachusetts, in 1922, Kerouac couldn't speak English until the age of six. (Beaulieu gets much mileage out of the fact

that Jack's parents were poor rural Quebecois, forced to leave their homeland to "make a few dollars" in American factories.) The home-influence was long-lasting for Kerouac. He lived at home after a brief stint at Columbia University and some abortive voyages as a merchant seaman, nursing his father until his death in 1946. Even during his Beat years from 1947-61, Kerouac generally reserved the summer for his adventures and returned home to "mémère" each winter to write them up.

Unfortunately, Beaulieu does not explain this influence fully or clearly. Mémère's tenderness and resignation, and her Ti-Jean's devotion to her, are described as peculiarly French-Canadian. Much more acute and relevant is Ann Charters' observation, in her biography of Kerouac, that Kerouac's confessional works were written to mémère in the spirit of penitent to priest.

Ann Charters' biography of Kerouac is a valuable piece of scholarship, for it is a plainly but clearly written correlation of Kerouac's works with his life. In contrast, Beaulieu pretends to be interpretative, and fails. Yet ultimately both books are pedestrian: one might say that Charters is a "middle-of-the-road" pedestrian whereas Beaulieu is a rebel-pedestrian (if either were possible).

Beaulieu fails to consider alternative interpretations; for example, he attributes Kerouac's three failed marriages and his moody aloofness at parties to a typically French-Canadian fear of women. Beaulieu does not consider the possibility that it was not women but domesticity that Kerouac feared, as the numerous affairs depicted in his novels suggest.

As for Kerouac's novels, they were envisaged as a Proustian series, relating the life-story of Jack Duluoz. There is no need to doubt the French-Canadian influence in the childhood portion of the Duluoz legend: *Visions of Gérard* is a Catholic elegy to Jack's brother, and *Doctor Sax* is haunted by parochial religious gloom. However, Beaulieu's insistence upon this Catholic strain in the later novels is questionable: for example, is *Desolation Angels* a tale of mixed anguish and "Franciscan tenderness", or is this just a handy metaphor for Kerouac's Romantic idealism, which was more influenced in later years by Buddhism than Catholicism? Beaulieu does not ask the question.

Beaulieu perverts his material to fit his ptolemaic system, a weakness which has saturated Canadian criticism in the works of Atwood, Jones, Moss, Ricou, and other "small-Fryes." Unfortunately, Beaulieu replaces traditional criticism with an approach that is simply shoddy.

JOHN W. ROBINSON

THE SPACE OF MEMORY

HENRY BEISSEL, *The Salt I Taste*. DC Books, $2.50.
LEONA GOM, *The Singletree*. Sono Nis, $4.95.
JOHN BAGLOW, *Emergency Measures*. Sono Nis, $4.95.

HENRY BEISSEL is not only the excellent translator of Walter Bauer's poetry: *The Price of Morning* (1968) and *A Different Sun* (1975). *The Salt I Taste* is in fact Beissel's third collection of poems, a very good one, certainly superior to Bauer's work that Beissel has so patiently translated.

A professor of English at Concordia University, Beissel is inspired by his own space in "Midwinter Moon Over Montreal," a poem far less naïve than the usual English "Toronto poems" and not as pompous as the abstract glorification of the land that is found in French Canadian poetry. Beissel's method is an ironic

one, sometimes cleverly half-veiled by the metaphorical world he creates:

Icicles hang from eaves
like rows of tapered candles
each with a star on its wick.

What the poet implies here is that nature is still seen, in spite of all our "progress," through a religiously trained eye; that words create images still using our mind while "in the canyons of Notre Dame de Grâce" echoes the voice of a "police siren." The structure of this long poem reveals the ability of Beissel the playwright, and the text reads like a dramatic dialogue in which the second voice points, with fine recurrent metaphors, to man's dream and desire to "spin out the same old tales" until "the moon is trapped."

But in the main part of *The Salt I Taste* Beissel tries himself to reach for the impossible "celestial cocoon". "Configurations of Sea and Sand" is in fact a long poem divided into seventeen parts. In it we see the poet struggling against the outside world with military metaphors. They stress the paradox that love and therefore life, on one hand and hate and therefore death on the other are all based on nature's rhythm:

Drumbeat of waves.
Slow march of the surf
against the coast.

And the poem continues almost with Homeric harmony. The seascape taught the poet "the fury of passions." The earth resists the endless attacks of the water as the poet looks at the cruel liquid washing his feet. The sea "holding sunken secrets" contains "other voices from other shores" and teaches humans that "only the strongest survive." Finally the sea which is both a cradle and a tomb will not reveal to the poet the secret of his origin. Beissel associates our Canadian space to the universal evolution in which we are transformed. These are not extremely original ideas but they are poetically felt and poetically expressed:

Bitter ballads of the sea
on the cold lips of this conch
The wind blows a tune
on the cracked flutes
of salt-crusted cliffs.

Beissel is a fine poet with a great sense of craftsmanship and we should all pay more attention to his works. Shorter texts like "Triptych of Woodcuts" are really carved on the surface of words as even "The Deaf mute" uses "his hands" like "a pair of wrestlers." It is high time for one of our large houses of publication to come out with Henry Beissel's collected poems.

Had she stuck with Alberta's "dictatorships of ice" Leona Gom could have become a poet, but now her "metaphors labour stiffly on the page" and confessions like "had affairs" or "become a scholar" give away a laughable imitation of the already ridiculous Erica Jong.

On the other hand John Baglow is a half-generous optimist: half of his royalties are going to "CARAL for the defence of Dr. Henry Morgantaler." But if we seriously considered the importance and the quality of *Emergency Measures* we would urge abortionists to raise money by selling chocolate bars. Yes, Baglow, as you say: "those Vietnam kids," what "poetry" will "put skin back" on them? But then for logic's sake let me ask the pendant question: What "poetry" will "put skin back" on "unborn" children? Well, contradictions don't seem to bother Baglow. Here is another one. The book is dedicated to the late Pablo Neruda, the great Chilean communist poet, who, if he were still alive, would probably sue Baglow for impersonating both a Leftist and a man of letters.

Leona Gom's experience is simple: growing up on a farm, discovering the world and settling down. There is at least

coherence and unity in the general organization of her book. Her childhood memories have inspired her best poetry. The poems echoing the death of her father are sharp-edged and the emotions they reveal are contained with remarkable stoicism. Their directness and impact culminate in "Widow" where "the clothes" of the dead man are "the hardest to face" for the poet's mother. As for the children:

> They thought of the day
> they would be taking down her clothes,
> piling his and hers together,
> as perhaps it should be.

Only the first third of her book, however, has real human and poetic impact.

ALEXANDRE AMPRIMOZ

THE VINDICATION OF BEN HECHT

DOUG FETHERLING, *The Five Lives of Ben Hecht*. Lester & Orpen, $11.95.

DOUG FETHERLING, whose own creative life tends to straddle the gap between literature and newspaper journalism, has always been fascinated with writers who in their lives and work have spanned a number of worlds. Up to now we know Fetherling mostly for his poems and for his criticism in such papers and journals as the Toronto *Star*, the *Globe and Mail* and *Saturday Night*, but he has been working for some time on American writers of the between-wars years, and particularly on those who emerged out of the Chicago Renaissance, which had begun even before the outbreak of World War I. He is, one hears, in the process of gathering material for a biography of the poet Maxwell Bodenheim, and in some ways his most recent book, *The Five Lives of Ben Hecht*, can be regarded as its prelude, for Hecht and Bodenheim represented varying aspects of the same movement.

It — the Chicago Renaissance — was a movement of extraordinary vitality and, as Fetherling points out, included some of the most significant figures in modern American literature, with Hecht as "the star of a cast that included Maxwell Bodenheim, Floyd Dell, Burton Rascoe, Kenneth Rexroth and Vincent Starrett. . . ." It might be argued that Hecht was more a catalyst than a star at that particular time and place, but his centrality to the Chicago movement is evident, and also his loyalty to it, so that to the end he never quite realized that the bizarrely violent and corrupt Chicago he knew represented the end of an old America rather than the beginning of a new one.

Hecht's reputation has slumped in recent decades, and the impression has spread that he was a potentially good writer who deserted the pursuit of true literature for the moneypots of Hollywood. Money Hecht indeed earned and enjoyed, but he was willing to endanger his sources of income when he felt a cause was important, and did so in publicly supporting the Jewish terrorists in pre-1948 Israel.

Fetherling also argues, and well supports his argument, that Hecht was in fact a writer of great versatility, and that his screen-writing, sometimes brilliantly original and sometimes mere hackwork, did not permanently harm his literary powers, so that to the end he retained a great deal of the skill and imagination which in early days had won the admiration of the avant garde. After all, in the beginning Hecht combined the role of a somewhat sensational newspaper man with that of fiction-writer and dramatist, so that the change into a screenwriter doubling as a literary writer was not a

fundamental one, and Fetherling argues that Hecht's dexterity in so many fields

> was based in an admirable adaptability and dedication to purpose. The fact that one man could write, near the start of his career, for *Mother Earth*, Emma Goldman's anarchist magazine, and later for the Marx Brothers, indicates a strength and not a weakness.

And he concludes:

> He was a general practitioner in an age of specialists. He did not by any means debase esthetic experiences, and he infused intelligence into the popular culture, making it more inventive, meaningful and important than it was before he arrived.

It is a case well put, and though I am not wholly convinced that Hecht was either so good or so central a writer in his age as Fetherling contends, I am moved to read him again and am already convinced that in Hecht's career we see mirrored, perhaps more clearly than anywhere else, that rending struggle in the heart of North American culture — Canadian as much as American — between the populist trends of the society and the inevitable elitism of art.

ANTHONY APPENZELL

DEEP EXPERIMENT

ELDON GARNET, *Brebeuf, A Martyrdom of Jean De.* Press Porcepic, $4.95.

ELDON GARNET HAS WRITTEN a largely blank-versed narrative employing religious and erotic metaphor in the ripe imagery of *fin de siècle* decadence. Formal structures are, for the most part, absent, and there is lively emphasis upon the ikonistic element of the printed page. The author uses a minimal vocabulary and makes a valiant, if vain, attempt to explore this late in the twentieth century, the frontiers of form.

In a loose, spasmodic way, there is persistent reference to Catholic historic encounters of a missionary nature, with the indigenous peoples of seventeenth-century eastern Canada. But it seldom rises to even silhouette, and for the pleasure of reading, the subject matter is not worth pondering. In fact, *Brebeuf*, to be enjoyed at all, should not be subject to much by the way of intellectual deliberation. It is best read aloud as this treatment partially atones for the poverty of language, and inflection can enrich the simple sounds of the narrative and impart value to the multiple repetitions.

But what is it all worth and should *Brebeuf* have seen the light of subsidized published day?

I would say yes on both counts. Some form of experimentation, surely, is a *sine qua non* of a living literature, and there is an innate artistic worth to the volume too. Though unimportant at the level of intellectuality, semantic coherence, or history, it still leaves us with something vital, however elusive.

Although Garnet seems wholly unfamiliar with comparable experimentation to his own, over the past sixty years, something of the energy of his anger with syntactical orthodoxy enlightens many passages of the work. And where that links up with the erotic pulsation we benefit from a true literary voice. For example, within the context of an historical account of the martyrdom of two Jesuit priests of New France in the year 1649, we get the following fragment of verse which demonstrates both verbal strength in homespun language and a poetic precision which, in conjunction with kindred pieces scattered throughout the 144 pages of *Brebeuf*, makes Eldon Garnet's volume a worthwhile publication:

> Exterminas is a playful fellow
> once in the dark pit
> my ground
> you become my toy
> with the tips of my teeth
> I tease

prick your soul
hold you under despair
& just as you're about to choke give up
I lift you
give you a breath
& plunge you back into the pit
forever repeating the cycle
hold hope before your starving eyes
just as your fingers almost touch
hear my hissing
as you reach empty air....

That particular section continues for a further ten lines without losing control of mood or quality of expression. And there are passages of savage obscenity and the sexually explicit which appeal to more than the merely prurient in us.

Something of the same quality, or at least the same energetic drive, pulses the anti-God and anti-Catholic narratives. Only the trouble is that blasphemy today tends to appear quaint and the persistence of a wildly simplistic credo which avers that the European conquest of North America was a moral affront to the native peoples in their Rousseauian paradise can easily distract from the poem.

At this level, of course, Garnet is hardly being original in uttering the clichéd mish-mash of liberal sentiment so modish in Canada today. Behind this poem is the patronizing attitude of the guilt-ridden Anglo-Saxon towards the noble savage, and all the ridiculous anachronism of which twentieth-century liberal fundamentalists are capable. So that we have here the wicked Jesuits, the cruel and rapacious French explorers, the saintly Indians who were incapable of moral transgressions in their *cosmos* of un-fallen man.

But the fact remains that even such kindergarten concepts are not necessarily impediments to poetry. Indeed, if Eldon Garnet was some kind of apollonian spirit whose work was intinct with cerebrality, he probably never could have written the luminous dyonisian matter that does grace *Brebeuf*. The thoughts animating this book may be immature, demonstrating a pathetic historical obscurantism, but the fire and flame of its moral ardor compel our attention and admiration.

It is not my intention to patronise Garnet, because while finding myself so strongly at variance with his assertions, I admire the more disciplined and thus more effective aspects of his creativity. When his words rise up and sing, the hesitations over his historical myopia, criticisms of his emaciated vocabulary, the cute typographical inventions, all die away. And, paradoxically, it is in the central core of his artistic statement that he is most truly experimental.

The *obvious* nonconformity is the variant uses of type sizes, the arbitrary lineal spaces and the employment of minimal photographic ikons: but these are not really the effective constituents of a proper restlessness with received literary norms. It is when the poet forgets the tools of his chic rhetoric and allows his deepest artistic instincts to surface, that he is able to still our misgivings and carry us off in the orbit of his undoubted imagination. And it is then that the self-conscious attitudinizing is forgotten and the true poetic voice is clearly heard.

DAVID WATMOUGH

ACADIAN TRIBUTE

ANTONINE MAILLET, *Les Cordes-de-bois*. Leméac.

WITH HER LATEST NOVEL, *Les Cordes-de-bois*, which recently came within one vote of winning France's coveted Prix Goncourt, Antonine Maillet has joined the company of Canada's two pre-eminent women novelists, Gabrielle Roy and Margaret Laurence. Until this book, her seventh work of fiction, Maillet was primarily known for the play *La Sagouine*,

which has had remarkable success both here and abroad.

All of Antonine Maillet's works explore one of Canada's richest regional cultures, the Acadian. All more or less exploit the distinctive dialect possibilities of *l'Acadie*, making them difficult reading for the uninitiated already operating in a second language and accounting, perhaps, for some of the fascination her works have generated in France. For the French, I imagine, she is a kind of Acadian Mark Twain.

Maillet's first attempt at a novel, *Pointe-aux-Coques*, was hesitant and derivative. It is a combination of *Evangeline* and *Maria Chapdelaine*, telling the story of a young school teacher who finds her way back from the United States to the land of her immediate forebears, where she finally chooses to marry a local lad and remain in a small fishing village. Some Acadian vocabulary is used in the book, but nothing which would impede the average reader unfamiliar with the dialect.

Compared with *Pointe-aux-Coques*, *Les Cordes-de-bois* is audacious and triumphant, both in its handling of language and in local colour. Despite the fact that the book contains a number of ideas and themes in common with other successful Canadian novels in English and French, it stands as a unique achievement, a celebration of the qualities of the indomitable Acadians. The heroine, *La Bessoune* (from *bessonne* — twin — although indications are that she was a single birth), is a striking example of the new type of protagonist who has emerged in Canadian fiction. She reminds one particularly of Hoda in Adele Wiseman's *Crackpot*. A *"fille des matelots"* — sailors' girl — descended from a runaway seaman, probably fathered by another, and given to accommodating a new generation of lusty, seafaring men whose ships are in port, she is proud, defiant and self-reliant. She makes no excuses and asks no pardon of God or man. The community she lives in is called *Les Cordes-de-bois*, a shanty town on a knoll above the town, housing a whole conglomeration of bootleggers, smugglers, misfits and outcasts from conventional society, the latter symbolized by *Ma-Tante-la-Veuve* — the double of W. O. Mitchell's Mrs. Abercrombie — and her nieces *"les sept filles de barbier."*

Although *La Bessoune* fits the pattern of the new Canadian hero, *Les Cordes-de-bois* also provides an excellent example of the familiar, traditional *prêtre-manqué* character. Like Father Dowling in *Such is My Beloved*, Abbé Savoie in Gilles Marcotte's *A Poids de Dieu* and Philip Bentley in *As For Me and My House*, Maillet's *"petit prêtre"* is idealistic and earnest. And like the other fictional clergymen, he is eventually overwhelmed by the "respectable" citizens, amid innuendoes that his dealings with the seductive and majestic *Bessoune*, as well as with her "godless" cohorts, are not restricted to the saving of souls.

The novel abounds in gripping episodes from a somewhat bizarre past, such as *"la vente des pauvres"* — sale of the poor — an auctioning off of the community's indigent cripples, orphans and chronically ill to the *lowest* bidder. The auction, held in the name of Christian charity, takes place after market on the steps of the church, and the idea, as in any auction, is to get a bargain — perhaps as much as $200 for the keep of a bedridden old lady who will die within a week or two. The auctioneer, for his part, tries to dispose of all items at as low a cost to the church as possible. The only comparable episode I know of in Canadian literature is the procession of the 21 wheelbarrows containing the grotesquely deformed vegetable-children of the Laliberté family in Roch Carrier's *Il est par là, le soleil*, in tribute to God for

his wisdom in assigning the difficult tasks to his most faithful servants.

The auction in *Les Cordes*, however, does not run according to plan. First, the "*petit prêtre*," to the dismay of his superior, *M. le Curé*, disrupts the proceedings when visions of slave markets come into his mind. Finally the disgusted *Bessoune* and her friends from *Les Cordes-de-bois* take all of the auctioned unfortunates for nothing — a bid which cannot be undercut. And although the church saves money, the good "Christian" households lose both the chance for a profit and the opportunity to practise charity.

That is why they are pleased by God's justice when the winter turns unbearably cold and the shanty-town dwellers have already burned all their furniture and floor boards before the end of February. All that is left is a carved sea-chest — history taught the Acadians to keep their most-valued belongings in something transportable. The chest provides enough fuel to get through the night, and by morning the weather has turned mild.

Maillet's novel presents a gallery of colourful characters, including the Scottish-born wood-merchant MacFarlane and a diminutive, yarn-spinning Irish seaman called Tom Thumb, who befriends the "*petit prêtre*" and is sheltered by *la Bessoune* when he jumps ship. In the final analysis, however, it is *la Bessoune* who remains imprinted on the reader's mind. While the seven daughters of the barber rock on their front porch and *Ma-Tante-la Veuve* busies herself guarding the public morality, the girl on the hill does the real work of the world. Tough, resourceful, indomitable, she embodies the qualities of the dispossessed Acadians who managed to endure and prevail against all odds. Antonine Maillet has written a fitting tribute to her people.

RONALD SUTHERLAND

TRIAL AND TEDIUM

JOHN SANDMAN, *Declining Gracefully*. Coach House Press.
DAVE MCFADDEN, *The Great Canadian Sonnet*. Coach House Press.
DAVID YOUNG, *Agent Provocateur*. Coach House Press.

TORONTO'S COACH HOUSE PRESS has a reputation for encouraging experimental work — to the point of sometimes publishing books which other presses would consider unpublishable. *Agent Provocateur* and *The Great Canadian Sonnet* might be classified as such experiments with literary form, but their deliberate obfuscation of trivial content will probably fatigue most readers. On the other hand, John Sandman's *Declining Gracefully* is all-too-simplistic while mercifully brief in its treatment of its frivolous subject.

The cover of Sandman's book promises that this is "the story of uninhibited romance, uninhibited sex, and uninhibited unhappiness set against the background of Toronto's nightlife." The only accurate claim in this *précis*, however, is that this is a story. The book is certainly not a novel — at least in the traditional sense of a novel as an extended piece of prose fiction in which characters are *explored* and *developed*. The main protagonist, Sylvia, is a nurse with a personality and observations on life which are so shallow that she is not really worth exploring. For all of her own life, she has done virtually nothing and gone almost nowhere, so her night spent wandering around Toronto might seem eventful to her, but the few small sexual adventures which she arranges to relieve her petty unhappiness do not constitute a particularly romantic odyssey. The private sorrows of the people she meets along the way do not add up to *Weltschmerz* either, and none of them are especially interesting apart from

their determination to stay up late in a city which closes down early.

The entertaining story-lines of well-crafted picaresque fiction can compensate for weak characterization, but the vacuousness of Sylvia and her fellow night-crawlers is not offset by an engaging story. The books begins with Sylvia's vain efforts to seduce her best friend's husband (rendered impotent by alcohol); frustrated, she wanders the streets until she lands at the apartment of a homosexual friend where she is again thwarted in a seduction attempt; finally, she picks up a middle-aged black musician, brings him home and then throws him out before he becomes too amorous.

It would be unfair to denigrate the book simply because it has such a weak plot; after all, not much seems to happen in *Waiting for Godot* either. Similarly, Sandman's lack of characterization is not in itself grounds for disliking the book — unless we are also prepared to completely dismiss *Don Quixote* or *The American Dream* for the same reason. But enduring literary works which lack characterization and/or plot are sustained by metaphors which have meaning in a broad context; and these works may also assume some importance because they experiment in some way with the limitations of the form. Unfortunately, Sandman's conventional, extended short story generally locks characters into situations which neither reflect nor illumine life beyond the immediate pale of these events.

At best, he may be using Sylvia's shallowness and thwarted plans in the same way that Luis Bunuel's surreal film *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie* employs a repeatedly interrupted dinner party to satirize the hollowness of middle-class preoccupations and social rituals. Sylvia and the bourgeoisie both remain unsated because they try to feed a moral and spiritual hunger with sex or food.

The title *Declining Gracefully* may be intended to suggest that this process is enervating, but the phrase takes on another meaning when Sylvia is offered marijuana by a man whom she is about to attempt to seduce. When he expresses surprise at her declaration that the use of the drug is a "filthy habit," she apologizes for her apparent vehemence and explains, "I just meant to decline gracefully." This refusal may be connected thematically to other instances in which Sylvia declines to make genuinely human contact. At the end of the book, this penchant is underscored when she declines to answer her telephone and contemplates stabbing it with a pair of scissors. Angry and frustrated though she may be at her failures, she does not bother to actually carry out even this obviously symbolic expression of rage against a means of communication.

Unlike *Declining Gracefully*, Dave McFadden's *The Great Canadian Sonnet* does not pretend to be a novel. This thick, oddly-shaped book (roughly four-inches square), seems to be a compendium of free-associations of ideas and images. McFadden usually strings out this material in the diction of contemporary poetry, but the book is set up in chapters and prose paragraphs. Adding to the confusion, Greg Curnoe has illustrated this text with almost two hundred line drawings, each of which is a bizarre concretization of a phrase on the opposite page.

To some extent, this particular coordination of phrases and drawings is similar to the marriage of William Blake's illustrations to individual metaphors in facing pages of an edition of Edward Young's *Night Thoughts*. But while Blake's work is startling for its vividness and reinforcement of eschatological overtones, Curnoe's drawings imitate the scratchy simplicity of graffiti as they add the artist's private associations to those already worked out in the text. For the

most part, Curnoe juxtaposes icons of contemporary popular culture around themes suggested by phrases which would at first seem impossible to concretize (e.g. "Why I Am Not An Anarchist," and "Science Will Find Its Niche").

But while Curnoe's surreal combinations are sometimes striking and clever, they accompany a tedious text. The book is gruelling partly because of its parochial attention to details of life peculiar to Hamilton, Ontario, and partly because its trail of images, parodies and self-conscious references to art seems to lead nowhere. Of course, such self-indulgence might be expected after McFadden's introductory explanation that he is still as depressed as he was when he wrote this book. Appropriately, then, the last illustration to the text is entitled "It Wasn't as if I'd Come to Any Destination."

David Young's *Agent Provocateur* does not seem to get anywhere either, but at least we can identify the tradition from which it springs. Young appropriately dedicates the book to Marcel Duchamp — a very secretive man who, as an agent of the surrealist cause, deliberately courted public outrage. Young's experiment also owes something to pop art insofar as the book draws on the styles of popular fiction so boldly that the end result is as controversial as Andy Warhol's Brillo boxes.

Motivation, characterization and timeframes in this surreal story are so vague and confusing that it is not surprising that one reviewer of this book simply stopped reading it half-way through. The narrative begins in an extreme imitation of the first-person argot of 1940's detective fiction. In the course of investigating a plot loosely connected with the zipper industry, the agent-narrator suddenly blacks out (indicated by a blank chapter): the story back-tracks, switches to third-person narration, and then stutters forward in fairly conventional prose lapsing into the style of cheap science-fiction. On the last two pages, the voice returns to the first-person, using almost the same words which opened the book — except that the hero now indicates that he is about to embark on an investigation connected with the hockey equipment industry. While all of this is at least as tedious as the other two books reviewed here, Young does show a genuine interest in expanding the limits of the form and might well go on to write prose which is both innovative and reasonably engaging.

BRUCE BAILEY

BOX INTO GARDEN

CONSTANCE BERESFORD-HOWE, *A Population of One*. Macmillan, $9.95.
CAROL SHIELDS, *The Box Garden*. McGraw-Hill Ryerson, $9.95.

NOVELS BY WOMEN featuring female protagonists with a sense of humour and a talent for survival under adverse conditions are almost a new sub-genre in modern literature. One could be cynical and suppose them written to fill the need established by burgeoning Women's Studies Programmes across the North American continent. Or simply acknowledge that there are currently a tremendous number of women of indeterminate ages who are living and working alone, or as single parents, and their experiences and perceptions form very valid material for fiction. Shields' heroine speaks of "a scuttling metaphysic of survival." Not a bad phrase.

Constance Beresford-Howe is known as the author of a warm and witty novel, *The Book of Eve* (1973), which relates the adventures of a sixty-five-year-old woman in Montreal whose first pension cheque precipitates an escape from a middle-class suburb and a boring husband. The cover of *A Population of One*

describes it as the second in a trilogy begun with *The Book of Eve*. The second novel features a thirty-year-old woman, and a projected third will deal with a much younger woman, to balance a series entitled "The Voices of Eve."

A Population of One, while amusing, is less successful than *The Book of Eve*. The new novel is marred by trite dialogue and superficial situations. The heroine's naivety is not always credible, but the novel has some fine comic moments and its final statement rings true.

Carol Shields is a poet, critic, and the author of one earlier novel, *Small Ceremonies* (1976), winner of the Canadian Authors' Association Literary Award for fiction. Its protagonist, a biographer, is fascinated and puzzled by the mysterious reality of other people's lives, private worlds where she is forbidden to enter. The heroine of *The Box Garden* feels equally fascinated by different personalities and equally incapable of comprehending them. Actually, Shields does manage to create one living personality, Charleen Forrest, whose complexities we may share. The comparison with a writer like Margaret Laurence — made by some critics on the basis of *Small Ceremonies* —cannot be taken seriously. Nevertheless, *The Box Garden* establishes this Ottawa writer as a promising novelist, a storyteller with a sense of the human comedy and a poet's command of language.

A Population of One begins in 1969 with Wilhelmina Doyle, better known as Willy, en route to Montreal to be interviewed for a teaching job in the English Department of a university not unlike Sir George Williams. She has two objectives. The first is to get the job: the recent death of her invalid mother has freed Willy for a belated career. The second is to get married, "or at the very least to have an affair." The latter plan is new and Willy thinks of it as The Project.

As you will have guessed, Willy gets the job. This gives Beresford-Howe a clear field for a satiric portrait of a modern university department beset with student demands, petty feuds, private neuroses and public crises. The characters tend to be comic types and include a lecherous apartment superintendent, a handsome colleague whose devotion to his mother plays havoc with his lovelife, and a crotchety old chairman, still lusty as he nears retirement.

Events are seen from Willy's viewpoint and are related in her voice. Like Shields' heroine Charleen, Willy is in flight from her earlier life (an alcoholic father and a neurotic, prudish mother). Again like Charleen, Willy has an ambivalent relationship with a sister who has somehow escaped from the traumas which continue to shape Willy's nineteenth-century reactions to twentieth-century situations. Beresford-Howe has a talent for comedy laced with pathos, as illustrated by her heroine's romantic trip to the States with Bill Trueblood, where Willy's fumbling precautions against parenthood turn out to be completely unnecessary.

Willy herself is more than a type. By the novel's end, she has attained a fair measure of maturity and the realization that perhaps The Project was misconceived. She is likely to remain alone, and decides to face this prospect with dignity: "Loneliness is just a condition, like arthritis or claustrophobia. Incurable. And far from enviable. But it's my condition, and I'm at last prepared to face it; even accept it. . . . There is a modest satisfaction, even a sort of art, in island-dwelling."

The novel is a comic put-down of romantic illusions, an honest attempt at portraying a kind of loneliness which is experienced by many individuals of both sexes in our modern society. It points out that there are worse things than loneliness; and that all of us constitute, at one stage or another, a population of one.

Shields' title symbol is apt, and clever. It appears initially as a literal box of fine grass seed and sifted earth, gift of a mysterious Brother Adam with whom Charleen is corresponding. Gradually we realize that the real box is the small Scarborough bungalow where Charleen grew up and in which her mother still lives; its postage-stamp garden, and the stifling mentality of Mrs. McNinn. The box garden's ultimate analogue is the deceptive exterior and complex core of a human being, full of possibilities, ripe for growth, adaptable. Charleen's journey from the suburbs of Toronto to Vancouver and back to Toronto for, of all things, her mother's wedding, is a journey towards freedom. Both Charleen and Willy Doyle are cautious optimists with a strong belief in future possibilities.

Shields' heroine is a thirty-eight-year-old divorcée who lives in Vancouver with her teenage son Seth. Through Charleen's ex-husband, a belated Flower Child, and her trendy friends Doug and Greta Savage, Shields satirizes the fads and neuroses of the sixties and seventies. Seth, and Charleen's orthodontist lover Eugene, are pillars of normalcy in a slightly mad world.

Charleen's forbidding mother represents the dregs of what Hugh MacLennan would call "puritanism." Her household is a place of anxiety and meagreness, dominated by negative proverbs such as "A penny saved . . . ," a place knowing neither kindness or courage: "And from her weakness flows not gentleness but a tidal wave of judgment." Mrs. McNinn is a vivid caricature, a type known to us all.

When Charleen goes to Toronto for her mother's wedding, the unbalanced Greta Savage disappears with Seth. The novel tumbles into a chaotic climax where Seth is recovered safely and the seventy-year-old Mrs. McNinn is married in her own living room to an ex-priest who is dying of cancer. If this sounds like a pennydreadful, let me assure you that Shields pulls it off quite neatly. The novel concludes with Charleen and Eugene flying west into the sunset, almost keeping up with the sunset, "chasing it down to its final, almost comic, drowning." Another apt metaphor for life, like the title one. Charleen is suspicious of metaphors, property of the Pome People, but Shields knows a good symbol when she sees one.

PATRICIA MORLEY

LIFE IN A SAND GRAIN

OONAH MCFEE, *Sandbars*. Macmillan, $11.95.

SANDBARS, first novel by Oonah McFee and first in a cycle of four witnessing with an astonishing accumulation of sensory detail the innocence and experience of Hannah Watson, an ordinary girl growing up in Ottawa and the Gatineau Hills during the twenties and thirties, is a life in a grain of sand. And that life, at the mercy of the moon and the constant yet changing tides, thrown random, sparkling, drenched, just one in the heap catches the light as it sifts through time and tells us something of the nature of the world our sandbars, fed, cleansed, joined and still divided by the sea.

It is strange that living several hundred pages of the youth and adolescence of Hannah gets us no closer to knowing her, recognizing her as that special glint on the beach, than we did in the first paragraph where we thought we might "see what the transistor might pull out of the atmosphere, even if it is garbled." Perhaps the sense of a life in this time of war, uncertain peace and social change is the garble, the shards of experience, hard-edged, touching but somehow never joining, like Hannah's dancing parents who stop and fall apart when the music is over.

Hannah is the medium for sensory impressions, the smell of new mown hay, the peculiar saltless sound of lake water slapping the hull of a boat at night, the rustle of a new dress in tissue paper. McFee has pasted up a good scrapbook of the era. Turn the pages quickly and you have a good silent movie with music, but no coherent human voices.

We are told that "instincts, feeding their revelations [are] measured, like light through a lattice fence." There is no measuring in *Sandbars* but the quality of the refracted light is aesthetically right. The colours are down on paper side by side as in an impressionist painting, never delineated or transformed by the imagination. These impressions sift through the consciousness of a girl moving, almost involuntarily, through her sandscape.

Apart from the chronological development of Hannah's early life, and the natural building of events like deaths and weddings, particularly the bizarre almost comic climax in the first chapter, where she has successfully prepared us for tragedy and gives us the anticlimactic spectacle of cows electrocuted in a storm, there is no skeleton of ideas or substance to the layering of impressions. Things live and fade away, it seems, without contributing to the vast compost of human ideas and expectations.

Sandbars may be missing the epiphanies, the catharses that purge human tragedies, because the characters have a symbolic reality, but, in spite of a myriad of empirical details, no flesh. We know Hannah and her friends and family best though the compulsive but unrealized quality of her love for them. This love is impotent because it lacks the power to create or to make time stop. The father leaves, the brother dies senselessly in war, the mother, fine in her youthful eccentricity, surely descends the Alice tunnel to madness. There is no glue, just something undefined out there that keeps the tides rolling in and out.

> "Same old moon looking at you," my father said. It was the first time I ever thought of the moon being in so many places, all the places I had been.

Disembodied voices stutter over the ham radio at night, the needle caught in the groove renders the record incoherent, the piano stops when the father leaves. Yet, in spite of the failure to communicate, there appears to be a vast machinery operating.

> "I never thought of it that way," she said. "A transcendence?" I asked myself. What did that mean?

Sandbars is the record of a life forming, an amorphous shape absorbing sounds and colours and the inevitable progression of sand through the timepiece. Maybe we should not expect to see the father of the man here, the germination of a transcendence, as Hannah is still a child soaking up notes on this discordant planet.

The sandbar sponge has absorbed all the lunar offerings of the tide. It will be interesting to see what comes out when it is squeezed.

LINDA ROGERS

** JAMES CARLEY, ed. *Book Forum*, 4, no. 1 (1978), $3.00. A special issue devoted to reviews of a number of recent Canadian books. Ranging from snobbish and insensitive put-downs to intelligent reflections (by David Jeffrey, Ian Montagnes, David Staines and others) on such subjects as Hodgins, publishing, and Mandel, the reviews give a warped overview of the world of Canadian letters. But the editor usefully reminds us that Canadian publishing has succeeded not by stifling the competition but by producing a better product.

W.N.

MS. WYATT'S NEIGHBOURHOOD

RACHEL WYATT, *The Rosedale Hoax.* Anansi.

WHAT DYLAN THOMAS DID for the inhabitants of Llareggub in *Under Milky Wood* Rachel Wyatt has done to the residents of Rosedale's exclusive Chellow Street. The "plot," which doesn't really matter any more here than it does in *Under Milk Wood*, centres in the adultery and disintegrating marriage of Robert Ferrand, the son of peach farmers who marries "old money" Martha Murray and takes up life in a cul de sac of posh Chellow Street. The appeal of the book is in its glimpses of the neighbourhood's eccentrics: Ferrand himself, guilt-ridden nuclear engineer, who has paranoid fears of the Paper Boy's blackmailing him; Marianne Quinn, the would-be poet who sees life from the perspective of Tennyson's heroines and prosaically propositions Ferrand, because her psychiatrist tells her her poems need more life experience behind them; the Reverend Cline, travel agent, smuggler and Ambrose Bierce's kind of Christian — "one who follows the teachings of Christ, insofar as they are not inconsistent with a life of sin" — and others.

Because we get only glimpses and shifting perspectives, from Ferrand's paranoia, to Marianne's flights of nuttiness, to a narrator's view which is as bewildered by modern life as the characters are, there is a continuously comic and satiric doubleness in which people are seen thinking their solitary thoughts in their solitary rooms, then meeting to play at coping. Along the way, there are some nice touches at the expense of journalistic meddling and gossip-mongering, the phenomenon of experts planning cities, people and environments to death, and the cabin at the lake which is no Eden either.

The satire has a lightness of touch that keeps it at the genial rather than the scourging end of the satiric spectrum. The book is, in fact, a kind of mock-romance, in which the carryings on of the classy suburbanites are represented in chivalric language, values, trappings. In spite of some things that don't quite ring true (the twenty-year-old Marianne Quinn may fantasize about the attractiveness of middle-aged men who have "the beginnings of a fear of death," but she is not apt to be able to put a name to the quality as she does — a confusion of writer and character?) this a readable book with some effective comic writing.

DAVID EVANS

COUNTRY CUTENESS

ERNEST BUCKLER, *Whirligig — Selected Prose and Verse.* McClelland & Stewart, $7.95.

IN HIS INTRODUCTION to Buckler's collection of occasional pieces ("wit, whimsy and wisdom" as the blurb has it), Claude Bissell writes that "*Whirligig* is a book that Ernest Buckler had to write. It is a more direct expression of what and how he thinks" than are Buckler's five "serious" books. Some readers may wonder, if that is the case, why Buckler — and McClelland & Stewart — saw fit to publish the collection.

In his conclusion to "Muse in Overalls," one of the short prose pieces on the subject of Nova Scotia farm life in the volume, Buckler writes of his wish never to leave his farm despite all the misadventures which such a life entails. "If one is looking for laughs, it may not be the home where the boffolas [*sic*] roam, but — the elaborate cuteness which seems to be the occupational disease of writers-in-the-country notwithstanding — I'll 'schtich' [*sic*] with it." Buckler's schtick,

however, transcends "elaborate cuteness" and achieves heights of vulgarity and naiveté, especially in his verse, at which his serious fiction only hints. Examples range from the simple-minded —

> No man is 'equal' to a woman; no woman's 'equal' to a man.
> The only time they're even's when they function as a span,
> With each supplying qualities the other's are other than.
> Thus, paradox as it may sound, their only parity
> Is when they mesh together their *dis*similarity
> And to make them simply *parallel*, which now seems the drum to beat,
> Is to have no more than two railway tracks which never, never meet.
>
> (Buckler's italics)

to reactionary graffiti —

> Who would have thought that Adam's rib
> Would engender a thing like Women's Lib?
> And does Miss Greer need at this juncture
> A Germaine course of acupuncture?

to chauvinist absurdity: "Cock treatments were effective long before shock treatments," a suggested "cure" for Emily Dickinson.

Buckler's contempt for women (of which there are many more examples in the book) is equalled only by his contempt for modernist literature and painting. In "Bestsellers Make Strange Bedfellows," he surveys his years as a reviewer for *The New York Times* and muses over the curious characteristics of many bestsellers. In a list of works which combine popularity with "virtuosity," Buckler includes the following:

> *The Bull from the Sea*, by Mary Renault, [which] lifts the historical novel to the category of literature. Faulkner's *The Reivers*, Aldous Huxley's *Island*, and the works of those glittering stylists John Updike (*Pigeon Feathers*) and Vladimir Nabokov (*Pale Fire*) are far from conventional chaff.

One understands Nabokov's status as runner-up more clearly when Buckler reveals not only that his ultimate judge is "Joe Reader" but also that the likes of Joyce and Picasso are to be found among the "ultimate bores." In an uncharacteristically aphoristic outburst, in fact, Buckler declares that "Joyce is the only sleeping pill that's not habit-forming."

Closer to Buckler's usual level of country cuteness is his statement that during his days studying philosophy at the University of Toronto, he found "even Lotze [*sic*] lotsa fun." Undergraduate humour, perhaps, but hardly the calibre of wit one expects to see between hard covers, much less from a respected novelist, author of at least one "classic" work. But perhaps it is time for a review of that as well, for surely Buckler's style has never been his strong point. He has achieved recognition almost in spite of himself. *Whirligig* reveals all too clearly the nature of Buckler's weakness.

LORRAINE WEIR

A VOICE SPEAKING

ROBERTSON DAVIES, *One Half of Robertson Davies: Provocative Pronouncements on a Wide Range of Topics*. Macmillan, $10.95.

IT SEEMS AT FIRST a monstrous vanity, this business of gathering up and publishing old speeches, addresses and lectures. Granted, some are not all that old; they range from 1960 to last year. But why should Davies want to publish them — can he be so taken with the sound of his own voice? Or does he consider them such models of their kind that they cry out for wider advertisement?

Well no, but also a little of yes. In fact this is a deeply serious work, as well as incidentally amusing. In it Robertson Davies treats of at least two themes of considerable importance to him, and the various speeches have been chosen and

carefully arranged to lead us towards his main concerns. The chronology of the sponsoring occasions is largely irrelevant, though of course each address was tailored to its own particular venue, identified for us by an amusing little headnote. That allows for a variety of tone throughout the whole collection, much as one would hope for such a variation within a public speech. And indeed it is possible to read the volume as itself a sustained oration, beginning with the speaker "trying out his voice" in the Preface, skirmishing through a few winning anecdotes, gradually settling into his theme (but with lighter intervals) and so coming to the whole weight of his conclusion.

I do not know if I have ever heard Robertson Davies speak, though I have a niggling suspicion that if I have, it might have been in a CBC programme about Ontario newspapers. I don't have a particularly clear remembrance of it, evidently. But what I do have, and I imagine most readers of Davies share this, is a very strong sense of a speaking voice, a voice speaking, in whatever he has written. So that it comes as a bit of a surprise when, in the Preface to *One Half of Robertson Davies* he directs our attention to what we are about to read, and how he would prefer us to read it: "when you read this book, will you please try to *hear* it, and to think of it as something *said* to you." Of course. How else can you read Robertson Davies?

The very directness of Davies' address is a persistent feature, whether it is the Marchbanksian affront, or Ramsay's letter to the Headmaster, or whatever. Here, it is evident from the tone, the idiom, the asides and personal intrusions, that he has a design upon us, a design both kaleidoscopic and minatory (to take up a word

he uses on several occasions). He wants us, in short, to pay attention.

Equally it is his habitual manner, a deliberately cultivated manner which has a number of antecedents. For all his individuality, Davies works in a tradition of direct speech that has not been much remarked, but is nevertheless characteristically (which is not to say uniquely) Canadian. It is a practice which both assumes and abandons the conventions of public speaking; in which the speaker as it were steps down from the rostrum and talks from the floor. Davies clearly learned this technique from Leacock (see the tribute to Edward Johnson: "He had that air of splendid confidence that marks the man who is sure of his welcome. He knew how glad we were to see him . . ."), but you can discover it everywhere — in, for example, such an apparently dissimilar writer and public speaker as W. O. Mitchell. It is a mode by which the speaker not only disguises his authority, but by adopting what in his more Jungian moments Davies calls the dreams of the tribe, affirms them (either seriously or humorously, or both) as the authority. The "I" becomes "we." When, however, Davies is speaking initially to a group of experts, whether architects, psychiatrists, accountants or welfare officers, the tactic is to admit inadequacy, and to present himself as merely a man of good feeling and good sense — so that as we read the book, it is again a case of "us," distinct from "them." (And it happens frequently. Davies' favourite opening gambit is to acknowledge having bitten off more than he can chew. One senses why he resists a Freudian reading of literature. . . .)

One of the pleasures in reading these addresses, then, is in discovering aspects of the communal "dream," half-forgotten but immediately recognized details that go toward defining a society. We delight in Davies' sporadic recollections of political rallies, concert-going, free milk at school or insanity in the village. We recognize the deliberate imitations of figures from literary history, whether in a sustained spoof of the Frankenstein story, or a mock-ghoulish story about Dickens; or in precise references to writers of the past as a reconfirmation of our cultural traditions; or more closely, in the passing adaptations of Leacock ("How many Muses were there after you had finished your aperitif — nine, or thirteen? I don't know. I wasn't there. I'm only asking for information" or "The Government of Ontario must realize that if it wants drunken professors, it must stop pricing drunkenness out of the professorial market. — But I have not come here to talk economics").

These things begin to locate a particular heritage, but so does the slight edge of quaintness, the paraded and unabashedly idiosyncratic in values, language and range of information. There is in these addresses a mixture of the pompous and ceremonial, with precise plain-speaking. The old-fashioned tone (which arises from the precise usage of vocabulary rarely dusted off), the careful sense of cadence and importantly the aural determination of paragraph structure, even the tendency to the exhortatory — all these things identify a particular presence speaking, one which I associate with Ontario in the first place, and also with professors emeritus. It's a prose that is measured; it might pass for dignified but it is not really so, because its tone frequently descends to a quasi-folksy confiding. More important than any of these things, however, is that it is a speech invested with the wisdom of *unremarkable* experience.

No doubt these speeches will be read mainly by students seeking reassurance as they write essays on *Fifth Business, etc.* That will be unfortunate, unless they happen to understand that the novels are

not an end in themselves, but are the means of dramatizing large issues which surface explicitly in this book, and which have become central to Davies' thinking at this stage in his life. He has taken up Jung's insistence on a particular type of development in man at middle age, when the early aims, which are personal and social, shift to more spiritual and intellectual concerns. And he seems to have undergone some such experience himself, for all his lectures are concerned with completion, fulfilment, balance. The individual must not sacrifice his private self to his professional self; learning's use is to save the soul and enlarge the mind; we must accomplish intellectual and spiritual growth through contemplating and pondering the self, and so come to understand feeling.... It is the theme of *The Manticore,* but set out more successfully because here it is explored and elaborated rather than boldly asserted as in that novel.

As with the individual, so with the nation. It too must come to maturity, must learn to identify itself through its dreams. (As recently as 1972, however, he was complaining that "Canada, in the national sense, does not dream. Our condition is stuporous; dully contented and stuporous.") Much of what Davies says is about the proper education of the individual, but just as much is about the education of public taste — hardly new territory for Davies to strike out into. Canada must cease to be parochial, it needs a world-view of itself. Perhaps what is new is the vision he offers (in the final and most recent of the speeches), of the Canadian as the new hero, a hero of conscience and spirit, and in one sense the whole series has been directed towards urging Canadians to trust their feelings, and their heart, as he himself has done in publishing these speeches, bringing tongue and heart into an equal partnership.

The other major theme is concentrated in a section called "Masks of Satan," a series of four lectures in which he wrestles with the problem of evil, discussing the images of evil in nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature but moving, as always, from literature to what it can reveal to us about life. The explanation that he comes to is again based on a concept of wholeness. He is not really asserting a necessary dualism, but argues that we may discover wholeness of character (Davies, for all his admission to being a kind of moralist, is much more interested in character than morality) in the difficult attempt to comprehend as best we can glimpse it, that larger, cosmic concept of wholeness. "It is a benign concept, though many terrors are in the path of those who seek it. But because we recognize evil, and confront it as wisely as we may, we do not necessarily succumb to it."

That is as far as Davies takes us towards an understanding of something of the dark side of the self, another of the many halves that make up man. As we read these transcripts of public occasions, they more and more establish their affinity with the Drama, for which Davies claims the same cultural antiquity as Prophecy and Epic. And increasingly, as he takes up "the battle with troll-folk / In the crypts of heart and head," we detect in him what he has esteemed in men like Sir Ernest MacMillan: "To say they teach us is a poor description of what they do, for in reality they reveal to us things that we are eager to know, but which we cannot understand unaided. Their work is not education, but revelation, and there is always about it something of prophetic splendour." We are glad to think of ourselves as belonging to the audience addressed by Robertson Davies.

ADRIAN MITCHELL

LAYTON'S QUARREL

IRVING LAYTON, *The Covenant*. McClelland & Stewart, $4.95.

REVIEWING A NEW BOOK OF POETRY by Irving Layton is a challenge of a certain kind. Reviewers have so often fallen into scolding the man that someone who knows him only from what has been written of him in the last decade might not recognize his stature as poet and as the creator of some of the most striking lyrics that we have. Indeed, the same sort of reproofs have been directed at him with such regularity that Layton now anticipates his critics and subverts them by providing his own review in one of the closing poems of *The Covenant*, the review we even sense he somehow longs for:

> In this book Layton has stripped away
> all the trappings of restraint and decency
> and has revealed himself to be
> the uninhibited megalomaniac
> we always suspected he was.
> . . . this rowdy silly tortured tender
> feisty outrageous posturing egotistical
> and somewhat pathetic excuse for a poet.

If we do sometimes feel that Layton's poetry is, if not precisely all of these things, often dominated by the postures of its creator, the question we must ask ourselves is why then we read each new book that he offers us, their appearances coming at a frequency which at times seems to bespeak a genuine ferocity. The answer, of course, is that, since the very first published volumes, we have been accustomed to approach his steadily-appearing collections as sites in a poetic quarry: a great deal of rock lying about, some shale to be mined, perhaps, but always the promise of precious stone that makes the endeavour worthwhile. E. K. Brown said it for us long ago: "Mr. Layton, it is clear, has been one of those poets who has to write too much in order to be able to write at all." Although he has not included it in his self-review, probably Layton would himself give assent to such a statement. Unfortunately, however, it is difficult not to feel that in *The Covenant*, as with the companion volume that preceded it (*For My Brother Jesus*), we have come to a particularly rocky part of Layton's quarry, one where the rewards for our labours are much rarer.

It is easy to suggest that it is the argumentative nature of both books that makes so much of their content less than successful as poetry: that Layton's eagerness to display his iconoclastic and at times willfully sacrilegious arguments against Christianity, to show it implicated for the blood spilt in its name, to remind us that it spawned the attitudes that led to the German atrocities against the Jews — that all this seems to outweigh the poetic structures invoked to give these arguments voice. And it is hard not to quote Yeats against Layton, reminding him that "we make out of the quarrel with others, rhetoric, but of the quarrel with ourselves, poetry." However, even *as* poetic rhetoric, much of *The Covenant* does not work; the field of its language is so entirely that of common speech that even the most elemental of *oratorical* devices, much less poetic, would be welcomed. Instead Layton seems often to have given away his whole bag of tricks, willingly writing like this instead:

> Every unbelieving Jew
> puts another nail in our Lord's cross;
> you're all guilty for his death
> each one of you, now and always
>
> So the young Anglican priest told me,
> fresh out of the seminary
> his features clean-cut but severe
> and his frank Anglo-Saxon eyes loving and clear.

It does not seem to be merely that Layton has deliberately chosen to deny himself

the traditional range of his craft, either. Instead his mind seems, at times, simply to be elsewhere than on his poetry. Here, for example, is the conclusion of one of the more lyric poems in the volume:

> a leafed twig
> taps on the windowpane
> and when I turn my head
> the world moves into it
> on panes of green light.

The repetition in "windowpane... panes" is not effective, but still the language has some of the old attraction. The vision is familiar, perhaps a little too much so. But what is most troubling is the vague way that "it" in the next-to-last line functions. Is *it* twig, windowpane, or head? The ambiguity is bothersome, not poetic — in fact, surely not intentional. A poem created out of reflex, the poet's attention wandering.

Ultimately there is such a sparsity of poetic language in *The Covenant*, that we are in danger of overvaluing the few vivid or picturesque moments that Layton gives us, as in lines about "yellow butterflies/ weaving invisible mends/ between hedge and hedge." Although there is here a kind of reappearance of what might be called the "insect vitality" of certain earlier poems, there is lacking still that magnificent language that we know Layton capable of, the kind of powerful imagery he gave us long ago in "Portrait of Aileen" where,

> Though an incredible wound in the air
> the bowl of apples on the garden table
> sustained itself with simple being.

Still there *are* some successful poems in *The Covenant*, poems that repay rereading, like "Sylvia," or "The Tamed

Puma," or perhaps "The Bald Tartar." And there is, besides, an energy under all the posturing, perhaps derived from it: an obvious enjoyment of the gestures made that may speak well for the time when Layton resumes his arguments with himself.

In "The Bald Tartar" Layton pauses to threaten us:

> I'll roll the sights I see
> into a hard pellet
> and with it knock out your eye
> you must see what I see
> or not at all
> you have one more chance
> and one more eye.

But in the last lines of *The Covenant* Layton makes a less coercive promise, one we should like to hold him to. He has turned his poems into weapons, he acknowledges, but,

> When I have a large enough arsenal
> to protect me from the murderous goons
> springing up everywhere around me
> I shall start over again
> and write a simple joyous lyric
> extolling my love's black eyebrows.

It is not necessarily that we would wish to limit Layton only to poems about his love's black eyebrows, but clearly there has been a loss of an earlier vision that seems to have left these latest poems deflated and unmusical; in consequence we *are* ready to see Layton "start over again." His real quarrel in *The Covenant* is, after all, not simply with Christianity, but with the God of both Christians and Jews, and with the created order that *He* must take responsibility for: this is the quarrel that Layton has always engaged in, but what is missing now is his old defiant challenge to this life-consuming universe — that absurd but wonderful affirmation that the poet will therefore *be* "the worm/ who sang for an hour in the throat of a robin."

RUSSELL BROWN

NOTHING BUT THE BEST

POEMS SELECTED BY NINETY-ONE POETS, *This Is My Best*. Coach House Press, $4.75.

GREG GATENBY, ed., *Whale Sound: An Anthology of Poems about Whales and Dolphins*. J. J. Douglas, $6.95.

CANADIAN AUTHORS ASSOCIATION, *Spirit of Canada*. A Jonathan-James Book.

THIS IS MY BEST would have been a better book if it had presented nine poems each by the best ten of the ninety-one poets to whom it allows instead a single poem apiece. The selected method was simply undiscriminating house cleaning, a getting of ninety-one aspirants off Coach House Press' back by giving them each a solitary go. It seems generous, but, in fact, it isn't. Nor is it much use. It would have been much better to have looked harder at those ninety-one manuscripts, picked the best ten and given those ten poets a real chance to present their nine best pieces. Of the ninety-one poets my choice based on a single poem would have been Lynne Alvarez, David Andrus, Eric Ivan Berg, Pier Giorgio Di-Cicco, Judith Mccombs, J. McLeod, Mary M. Oliver, John Sullivan, David S. West and Ian Young. The best two poems in the book are by Eric Ivan Berg and Judith Mccombs. Both are able to get beyond self-indulgence and present the world outside the self. In "Harbour Lights," Eric Ivan Berg writes:

> An iron drummer is this dizzle (*sic*)
> rattling on the hulls of morning
> anchored here in our raincoast harbour
> full of tramps and grain freighters
> all riding at anchor in the early morning
> rain
> of a wet Vancouver winter awakening to
> mist sweeping
> in and ghostly foghorns unable to blow it
> out again.

while in "The Habit of Fire," Judith Mccombs gives us:

Smell of horses
from somewhere, then gone; no horses out here,
anything that big is probably bear.
New prints today on the logging road,
in the place where I backtracked for water, bear crossing
over the prints of my Vibram soles,
full-grown.

Both poets have a sense of language, rhythm, and precise, dramatic detail that takes them past the navel-gazing that is the besetting vice fully and unfortunately evident in many of the solitary pieces by the ninety-one. Through lack of critical discrimination Coach House Press missed the chance to introduce ten new poets and create what might have been an interesting group anthology.

Whale Sound is better than *This Is My Best.* The quality of the verse is generally higher and the presentation and some of the illustrations are excellent. Of course, there's nothing there to equal *Moby Dick* and not much to rival D. H. Lawrence's "Whales Weep Not." E. J. Pratt's "The Cachalot" is dull compared to Melville and "The Cachalot" is the volume's centre piece. P. K. Page's "Leviathan in a Pool" is the best poem in the book and Robert Finch's "Dolphins" shows well how we have reduced the creature that once stood for Christ, the human soul, and has even been known to save drowning men:

The show is non-stop, all but in the morning
When the stage-doors that hide on Soho Square
Vomit the rock-and-rollful rancid air.
Look, in the greenish tank, at rest from earning,

Still forms that for an hour need jump no hoop
Nor shake a fin with sirens of the troupe.

Two pieces by lesser known poets are equally interesting. Tom Howe's "The Whale Killers," though reminiscent of Newlove's *The Pride* and Purdy's "Lament for the Dorsets" nevertheless gives us this:

Nootka men who killed the whales
were lucky to get five in their life-times
some killed none for all their
careful preparations in sacred long-houses

unscientific men
the Nootkas believed
whale allowed his death
to spare people from hunger
so they had to be worthy.

And Jan Kemp in "Great Fish at Muriwai Beach, New Zealand" asks

What requiem
did you sing, mighty herd,
what whale-talk, what music
sang in your minds
as you followed maps
forged more ancient in you
than the land you struck
instead of water.

In both cases there is a real sense of the speech rhythm of good verse. I wondered whether any of the profit from the book was going to help the whales?

Problems arise when we come to *Spirit of Canada,* the Canadian Authors Association's publication. This is the most ambitious undertaking of the three. Unfortunately, *Spirit of Canada* reads more like propaganda than art. What it attempts is specious reassurance. All's right with the world (or at least Canada) if we quote the Prime Minister, spin stories about people being nice to immigrants and listen to Robert Choquette tell us about "Edmonton au milieu des blés." Yet we suspect, indeed we know, that there are large areas of Canadian experience excluded from this book, the inclusion of which might not have made *Spirit of Canada* reassuring, but would certainly have made it more real. Canada won't overcome her present difficulties because the C.A.A. tells us there's nothing to worry about. We'd do better to face the facts.

The best story in the book called

"Gaelic Gospel" is provided by Joyce C. Barkhouse who writes:

> Many legends survive about Dr. McGregor; a favourite concerns a woman and a sick cow. She insisted that the minister could cure the beast if only he would lay his hand upon her. Finally, he went into the barn, slapped the cow upon the flank and said,
>
> "If you live, you live; if you die, you die!"
>
> The cow recovered.
>
> Sometime afterward Dr. McGregor lay seriously ill with diptheria. Deeply concerned, the old lady came and forced her way into the sick room. She gave the doctor a resounding smack and shouted, "If you live you live; if you die you die!"
>
> Ill as he was, Dr. McGregor burst out laughing — and broke the abscess in his throat.
>
> He, too, recovered.

Perhaps, the Canadian cow needs a good slap on the side. It would certainly be reassuring if our present academic, literary and national ills could be cured as simply as that. As it is our cultural doctors are lying abed with blocked throats. There is now no absence of Canadian poets, as these three anthologies amply testify. What is missing is vital criticism that will set real standards for Canadian literature.

JOHN FERNS

PIKE'S PEAK

J. MICHAEL YATES, *Esox Nobilior*. Fiddlehead, $4.50.

IN A RESTAURANT IN VANCOUVER, a waitress once tonelessly offered me this caution about a Greek wine I had asked about: "It's not for everyone." So too with J. Michael Yates' *Esox Nobilior*, the latest volume of poetry from this productive Can-American poet. The book contains some fine poems, but it also exhibits a baroque complexity which might appear forbidding to some. Although Yates has consistently nodded respectfully in the direction of his reader, there are moments in *Esox* when he may be asking too much. The following excursion into synesthesia may serve as an example:

> Who cannot taste the bells of light will
> never hear
> the ochre organ of inland tide.

The meeting place, surely, of ingeniousness and absurdity.

Nevertheless, there is much that is remarkable in *Esox*, beginning with its elaborate structure, something worth mentioning in the case of a poet who is thought to hold up only for short distances. The title, *Esox Nobilior*, is the zoological name for the muskelunge or great northern pike, an epic symbol of northern experience for Yates and not to be confused with your ordinary pike. Flanked by other northern appendages like the loon, the cougar, and the polar ice, the muskie becomes both the subject of and catalyst for a fundamental exploration of matter and spirit, somewhat in the way in which Wallace Stevens operates in "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird."

Variant spellings of "muskelunge," drawn from different languages and dialects, including those of the native peoples of North America, form the titles of individual poems. Moreover, different sounds in the variant spellings give rise to variant views of the muskie and the particular phase of being which the fish generates a view of in each of the poems. Parts of the muskie, the snout, scales, and fins, for instance, serve as points of departure for Yates' endless and absorbing studies of analogies in the shapes and essences of things, all of this being in turn one poet's analogy for the philosopher's conception of the one and the many.

Motifs for the drama of the one and the many include the mirror, the incision,

the bone, and the finger. On even a purely visual level, their use in Yates' cumulative pattern of analogies is often strikingly beautiful: "the bones of fish against a sky, broken. Black lightning." The mirror is the most insistent of these motifs, and is charged with the book's most important meanings. As various creatures begin to mirror each other, they coalesce into a satisfying unity in the mind. Sometimes the mind resourcefully discovers resemblances by being inventive, by taking evolutionary time into account, for example, in order to see "elephants not yet suspected fish."

The role of consciousness, Yates' most passionate interest, is central to an understanding of *Esox*. As prodigious and lithe as the muskie, consciousness is also and analogously predatory — as indeed is its instrument, language, which seeks to conquer with "each territorial trope." The thrusting of consciousness is given vividness in one poem through the witty juxtaposition of the pupil of the eye of consciousness and the vulva, with consciousness lustfully "dilating to inhale more light." *Esox* is poised between a celebration of consciousness and a distrust of its abstractionist ingestion of the world around it, not to mention its cannibalistic devouring of itself.

Opposed to the domination of consciousness is the anti-world, a mysterious "nowhen" of obverse forms and energies which recedes steadily before the grasping of consciousness: "Winter again and again not yet." Yates' own consciousness, having been disciplined no doubt, explores the membranous regions between light and darkness and movement and stillness, a perimetric world which lies between the known and the unknowable. Indeed, the border regions become a paradigm for successful life, an ever-moving balance of forces which resists the temptation to rest against the strength of absolutes:

> I have travelled an indigo distance to elude
> what
> the fugue of syllabic bubbles becomes.

Consciousness in fact is asked to adjust to the humbling but not despairing recognition that its careful measurements and divisions are of the "exactity of dream."

It is in his analysis of perception with its fine refractions that Yates is strongest and most convincing. His weakness derives from his strength, his cleverness and his somewhat self-indulgent dabbling with words, even at the cost of some awkward puns ("poison/Poisson"). In addition, some of the poems tend to fragment under the weight of their diverse materials, as in "masquinongé." Yates obviously works for the line, and although the overall structure of *Esox* is impressive, particular poems are not always as unified as one would like them to be.

These are incidental blemishes, however, and the writing is generally incisive and evocative, as in the delicate opening lines of "masquelinge": "Wind chips litter the water. Silencing light." Then there are these lines from "mickinonger":

> Digits of ice test the texture of pectorals
> as combs
> of wind catch the velvet of antler.

In such lines one gets a memorable whiff of that northern universe of mind and matter which has become Yates', for lack of a better word, home.

ROSS LABRIE

BRAVADO & WIT

SEYMOUR MAYNE, *Diasporas*. Mosaic Press/ Valley Editions, $10.00, $4.95 paper.

IN SOME WAYS, READING THROUGH *Diasporas* is like turning the pages of a photo-album of the deceased: here is the promising young student-poet, dead at twenty-four; the eccentric John Richmond,

Montreal's "*shiker* laureate"; Melech Ravitch, the uncompromising Yiddish poet; Mayne's motherly Aunt Jennie, Queen of the Kishka stuffers, skilled glazer of honey cake. In one remarkable poem, "Zeydeh," Mayne tells of the time his grandfather took him as a young child to witness a mortician preparing a body for burial:

> and remember who took
> me by the hand thirty years ago
> explaining how Yarushevsky's
> wide corpse was to be washed
> then clothed again and watched over.

The incident must have been what a Freudian would term "a primal scene," one that has the power to determine significantly the future poet's psychic concern; for most who read this volume, or his previous one, *Name*, will note that Mayne at his best is the poet of lamentations — conjuring up verse to beat back the Angel of Death.

The elegy is a difficult poetic form to work with and let me say here that Mayne displays no small degree of courage (madness?) in attempting it as often as he does. One might think that since death is a grandiose subject, the poet has the advantage of carrying heavy duty emotional ware to unload on the reader. But *because* the subject is grandiose, the poet is obliged to build up a goodly power and speed to set the whole work flying.

Largely it is Mayne's bravado that helps him succeed. The most common trap for an aspiring Jeremiah is to fall into the sticky sentimental. Mayne leaps over that hazard by being defiantly elegiac; by cursing (as in "For J-C. Robichaud"), by his humour (as in "Begging"), and by his talent for portraiture. Mayne has the uncanny ability to capture the essential, singular qualities of the departed and to render that humanness in vivid and sympathetic terms, making the reader forcefully aware of the loss.

The most effective elegy in the volume is "Lamb." In it, Mayne relates the death, not of a person, but of the lamb which belonged to his mother when she was a little girl. What makes this piece work so well is the fact that the true subject of the poem, the mortality of Mayne's mother, is conveyed subtly via the death of the creature she once cherished as a child.

I do not wish to leave the impression that Mayne can write only elegies. About the commonplace he can be comical and sensuous, as in the poem, "Fantasy Of The Chickpea." Mayne displays an erudite playfulness with words, unseen (and unfortunately, largely unattempted) since the late A. M. Klein.

Laughter and wailing are Mayne's forte. When he attempts to be purely imagistic — as in many of the poems stemming from his travels in Israel — he often ends up with a sort of wishy-washy surrealism lacking the wit and passion he is capable of.

In a large collection like this (124 poems) one can expect a few weaker pieces. Mayne however, has the reputation of being a good editor and it is ironic that the main criticism one could level against *Diasporas* is that it lacks a strong editing job. But that is certainly a minor criticism when faced with the powerful effect so many of the poems achieve.

KENNETH SHERMAN

L'AME ET L'ABSOLU

GUY LAFOND, *Les cloches d'autres mondes.* Illustrations de Gilles L'Heureux. Collection sur parole. Hurtubise, HMH.
GUY DESILETS, *O que la vie est ronde.* Collection sur parole. Hurtubise, HMH.
J. E. RACINE, *Poèmes posthumes.* Collection sur parole. Hurtubise, HMH.

EN LISANT *Les cloches d'autres mondes* de Guy Lafond, j'ai eu l'impression de pénétrer dans un univers à la fois surréaliste et idéal où le poète n'écrit plus pour être compris ou aimé mais par besoin de se connaître et de s'affirmer.

En effet, il ne s'agit pas d'une poésie traditionnelle mais d'une poésie ininterrompue qui cherche à exprimer le tréfonds de l'être par l'intermédiaire d'un langage libre. Par delà le temps, la vie, l'amour, la mort, cette poésie reproduit les sensations du poète. Nous y retrouvons une influence mallarméenne où l'écrivain tente d'appréhender les rapports cachés de l'harmonie universelle.

Ce recueil, qui est divisé en quatre parties "Entre lire et Orphée," "L'aube livrée," "Les cloches d'autres mondes," "Dunes," se lit un peu comme une partition improvisée et incantatoire. Les noces de l'homme avec la nature se traduisent par un alliage d'images et de mots empruntés au domaine végétal. "Tout est aérien," libre et l'homme voyage dans ces beautés accompagné d'une "musique sans fond" et doté d'un "amour sans parois." La nuit s'avère un élément important. Apaisante, sereine, fertile, elle permet la création et se présente parfois comme un refuge pour le poète. L'enfance, la lumière, l'amour, la mort s'incrustent aussi dans le poème qui s'efface

dans la signature de l'oeil
fugace comme l'eau
pli instantané.

En effet, tout est fugitif, sans cesse recommencé et porté à la perfection.

Au point de vue stylistique, on trouve une recherche de langage bien que parfois on peut s'interroger sur la relation des mots entre eux; leur signification n'est pas toujours très claire. Cependant, les illustrations de Gilles L'Heureux sont intéressantes, symboliques et traduisent assez bien l'esprit du poète dont la "voix s'ancre dans le clair soupir des eaux."

Tout comme *Les cloches d'autres mondes, O que la vie est ronde* de Guy Désilets est une oeuvre avant tout formelle et stylistique. Il s'agit ici encore d'un langage libre. L'accent est mis sur la place visuelle, sur l'architecture des poèmes. Le monde est réduit à la simplicité du poète en quête de "mots ouverts" qui pourraient tout dire et donc briser la solitude. Ce recueil nous donne une impression de liberté et de joie où les mots de sang et de chair se transforment en "mots qui agitent des aîles." Le poète lui-même est cet "oiseau-lyre," ce "Tremble/ Aux mille mains de feuilles en lumière," animé de "pulsations profondes."

Cependant, le lecteur éprouve une certaine lassitude devant des images exagérées. Il existe une obscurité bien réelle au niveau de l'écriture et parfois on a l'impression d'être devant une poésie énigmatique.

Néanmoins, ces deux recueils nous présentent une poésie esthétique et incantatoire qui tente de traduire le langage intime de l'être par l'intermédiaire de symboles, de mots et d'images. Cette poésie, bien que paraissant parfois artificielle et confuse, exprime l'âme du Poète en quête d'identité et d'absolu.

Lorsque je lus *Poèmes Posthumes,* j'y découvris l'âme souffrante d'un homme et à travers celle-ci, le malaise de toute une génération nourrie d'interdictions qui ne sut ni se révolter ni se libérer.

Bien que ces poèmes s'étalent sur une période de 11 ans, de 1958 à 1969, ils recèlent tous le même drame: celui de l'être refusé. "Cette absence de la main

tendue est une constante dans ma vie psychologique," écrivait J. E. Racine, dans son recueil précédent (*Souvenirs en lignes brisées–écrits intimes*). En effet, ce refus, cette indifférence, ce mépris qu'il a sentis autour de lui, l'ont meurtri. Ce cri déchirant qui s'insinue dans tous ses poèmes, a sa source dans l'enfance même du poète qui, loin d'avoir été aimé authentiquement, s'est vu accablé de "mots sans chair/ paroles dans l'air/ vent dans le sable" par ceux qui disaient l'aimer. En parallèle à cette amertume d'être ignoré, répugné, J. E. Racine souffre de ne pas s'aimer. Ne s'aimant pas lui-même, il cherche à combler ce vide en lui par la présence d'autrui: "j'ai besoin de vous"; "Où êtes-vous,/ Vous dont j'ai un tel besoin?" répète-t-il. L'amour se présente alors, pour le poète, comme une conquête où il faut prendre et posséder: "je vous prendrai/ je posséderai." Pourtant, lorsque parfois J. E. Racine se découvre et devient pleinement lui-même, déposant sa peur, il reconnaît le visage de l'autre et l'amour devient invitation, partage, communion, un courant reçu et donné, audience dans le silence: "j'invite celui qui passe," et il ajoute que ces élans

qui nous poussent
les uns vers les autres
. . . [nous donnent] envie de prendre
toute la terre et toute la vie
dans nos bras comme une amante

Mais la solitude l'accable de nouveau et le martyrise. Toutes ces tentatives d'approcher les autres sont vaines car ceux-là lui paraissent des "Labyrinthes impénétrables," des "figures de bronze, marbres froids et/ Déliquescents" qui n'ont pas le courage d'être eux-mêmes, portant sans cesse des masques. Le poète heurte à la solitude "où chacun chemine sans compagnons" étouffant de ne pouvoir communiquer:

Oui! — forcer cette porte close de la vie
Libérer . . .
Apaiser cette soif. . . .

Ne trouvant pas d'écho à son appel déchirant, il se réfugie dans le passé en quête de ce paradis perdu dont il a la nostalgie et qu'il ne cesse de vouloir retrouver. Cette terre n'étant pour lui qu'un cauchemar, un "monde hostile et refusé" il va tenter de le fuir dans l'espoir de trouver "une terre moins obscure," d'autres "rives plus sereines qui l'accueilleront avec plus d'amitié." Cette soif d'être ailleurs exprime ce refus du monde où il vit en même temps que cette nostalgie du paradis perdu. Ce désir de fuir est exprimé par les nombreux verbes de mouvement. Parfois, le désarroi du poète se change en exaltation lorsqu'il entrevoit un monde idéal où règnent l'innocence, l'amour, la joie, la paix, l'éternité. On y découvre

Des frères de rêve,
des soeurs aimantes

. . . des coquillages merveilleux
. . . les trésors de (l') enfance.

Mais J. E. Racine, malgré ses velléités de fuite, ne réussit pas à partir. Le revoilà "dans les fers," n'ayant "plus d'espoir que dans le sommeil." Le poète se retrouve alors dans le silence (mot repris 30 fois) sourd et pesant et dans la nuit (repris 48 fois) qui est sa compagne la plus proche car il peut s'y cacher et y être lui-même. D'autre part, si elle révèle l'état de torture dans lequel J. E. Racine est prisonnier, elle est aussi représentatrice d'un certain échec. La mort, (25 fois répétée) semble ainsi clore cette vie déchirante qui emporte inévitablement chaque être. Tout ce qui naît, ce qui vit, doit mourir. Cette amertume est traduite d'une façon poignante dans ce poème révélateur de la résignation du poète mis à l'écart:

Au nom de tout ce qui nous lie,
Au nom de tout ce qui nous sépare
Il nous faudra abandonner,
. . .
Déchirer tous les liens

...
Rentrer en silence,
Rentrer en solitude
Quitter les hommes au seuil des coeurs,
Aller, partir
Là où seuls nous devons aller.

Cette solitude devant ces chemins qui "s'allongent," "s'éloignent" "ne mènent nulle part," "contraignent" lui est d'autant plus tragique qu'il n'a pu trouver le mot essentiel qui aurait pu tout dire. Ce verbe est d'ailleurs dominant dans toute son oeuvre (33 fois repris) révélateur de cette soif de communiquer et de trouver son identité: "Reconnaître/ Ce qui est/ Qui nous sommes!" La fréquence des points de suspension souligne cette impossibilité de trouver le MOT et permet aussi de saisir l'insaisissable indéfinissable.

Cependant, J. E. Racine a en lui ce "dur désir de durer" qui lui donne la force de ne pas céder, être piétiné, se laisser car, pense-t-il, il y a trop d'étincelles en chaque être pour que ces éclairs d'amour ne soient qu' "un tourbillon de feuilles mortes." C'est ce désir et cet amour que l'auteur a pour la vie, "Je vous aime pourtant/ terre vie," qui le sauvent et le conduisent vers cet Amour Ultime qu'il n'a cessé de chercher depuis ses premiers poèmes. Mais J. E. Racine sent que l'amour vrai est exigeant et il est pris de peur devant cet engagement total. Pourtant, cet exilé se livre à Dieu tel qu'il est et connaît enfin cette paix et cette joie d'aimer et de se sentir aimé: "Vin de vie/ . . . / C'était l'ivresse/ C'était la joie" car enfin, il est reconnu, accueilli par cet Etre qu'il désirait depuis si longtemps. La couleur "bleu" qui revient le plus souvent dans cette oeuvre montre l'importance du divin, symbolisant aussi cette soif d'éternité.

La terre demeure un élément important dans l'oeuvre de J. E. Racine, comme elle le fut pour toute cette génération d'une part, enracinée au terroir et d'autre part, frustrée de ne pouvoir s'en délivrer. Le vent, qui emporte tout sur son passage, est un élément également courant, symbolisant ce temps rongeur de la vie. De même, ces nombreuses vagues vers les rives, les rivages, concrétisent le flux et le reflux des existences.

Au niveau de la forme, ces poèmes en vers libres, ne présentent aucune originalité. Peu d'images, peu de musicalité, aucune audace dans la création. Ses plus beaux poèmes sont sans doute les derniers. On y sent aussi l'influence de deux grands poètes: Baudelaire et Eluard.

Poèmes Posthumes demeure pourtant une oeuvre intéressante car il ne s'agit pas d'une poésie cloitrée mais ouverte, reflet d'une génération d'individus écrasés, exilés, se débattant dans un combat solitaire. Elle est le miroir de ces êtres dont le drame fut d'être mal aimés, confinés en eux-mêmes, incapables de s'exprimer. La révolte qui anime ces poèmes est cette volonté de se libérer et même si le poète ne parvient pas à trouver le mot qui permettrait de tout dire, il a le pouvoir de rejoindre l'humanité, de se révéler à lui-même et aux autres grâce à un alliage de mots. Ces poèmes nous révèlent aussi une quête de l'absolu à travers les vertiges et les chutes de l'auteur. Son mérite est d'avoir su exprimer le tréfonds de l'être en même temps que le sens mystérieux de l'existence qui a son fondement dans l'Amour.

MYRIAM RECURT

WHERE POETRY IS

ANDRE FARKAS and KEN NORRIS, ed., *Montreal English Poetry of the Seventies.* Véhicule Press, $9.95, paper $3.95.

THUNDER CREEK CO-OP, *Number One Northern, Poetry From Saskatchewan.* Coteau Books.

EXPO YEAR WAS A GOOD YEAR for odysseys. 1967 was the year George Bowering went east from Vancouver and Robert Kroetsch went west from New York. To these two odysseys the above regional anthologies owe a great deal. As writer-in-residence at Montreal's Sir George Williams University, Bowering brought with him the liberating spirit of Black Mountain and his own innovative, energizing presence. Kroetsch's year in Alberta was one of many subsequent returns to his native prairie. To the writer's school at Qu'Appelle, Saskatchewan, he has brought the prosodic innovations of W. C. Williams and a new prosaic, anecdotal, and colloquial poetry which Kroetsch ascribes mostly to Al Purdy and his followers.

Two schools of poetry were born, and from them, two interesting anthologies. The editors of the Montreal anthology, Andre Farkas and Ken Norris, begin their introductory essay with a quotation from Louis Dudek: "It is the destiny of Montreal to show the country from time to time what poetry is." They go on to sketch a brief historical background to Montreal poetry (unfortunately omitting any mention of A. M. Klein) claiming that "Montreal is . . . once again, after the lull of the sixties, beginning to assert itself." These grand claims are only partially confirmed. Their book is the more urbane collection of the two. And the range of forms and techniques is impressive, a testament to the editors' eclectic taste. The range from traditional to free verse forms is most obvious and most rewarding in the versatile work of Peter Van Toorn. His sonnets resonate with lyric sound, his free verse odes, eclogues and ironic pastorals are exuberant with word and sound play, his "Love Song" is as fine a panegyric as one will find since Cohen's *Spice Box* love poems. Still, Van Toorn's left hand margins, in all cases, remain resolutely straight and inviolate.

Less versatile but every bit as rewarding are some of the poems of Richard Sommer. He often chooses potentially morose subjects like suicide, death or tragic violence which have a dangerous capacity for pathos. But the poems are carefully crafted in two or three line stanzas in which the sounds, instead of rhyming, echo hauntingly. The emotions are beautifully controlled and orchestrated. "24 october" is one of the finest poems in the anthology.

Rewarding, too, is the wit, polish and prosodic deftness of David Solway. "New England Poets" is worthy of the best of F. R. Scott, though one is not convinced Solway is entirely free of the kind of disciplined primness he lampoons so well. "Trolls" and "Surface" are more disturbing, "Stickhandler" more fun. All of his poems in this anthology demonstrate Solway's healthy perspective on his subject matter and on himself.

I found other things of interest in this collection: Bob McGee's rural landscapes, Fraser Sutherland's memorable "Madwomen," Claudia Lapp's short erotic pieces. And there is some interesting poetry beyond what I have described, but much more that is pretentious, self-indulgent, obscure, clichéd or excessively egocentric. In the "Black Maria" of Ken Norris or the long poems of Stephen Morrissey (his concrete poem an impressive exception) we have a kind of surrealism *réchauffé.* Guy Birchard's long poem "Some Notes on the Colors of the Cosmos" is a drab cliché in an avant-garde costume. Artie Gold, when he

stoops to coherence (as in the impressive closing lines of "Five for Bruce"), shows promise. But usually he offers us merely an obscure, self-indulgent and subjective code of resignation of dubious conviction and a quasi-surreal bombardment of random verbosity to go with it.

Saskatchewan's poets seem, by contrast to their colleagues in Montreal, more elegiac (in spirit, not in technique), chaste (almost acutely so), rural, colloquial, anecdotal and prosaic. I say elegiac in spirit because about half the poems in *Number One Northern* look back with affection and humility to the settlement days or the thirties. The poets' subjects are often old people (many of these, immigrants), or the poets' vanished childhood, or a retrospective look at farm and village life. Perhaps the editors have consciously gone about paying an emotional debt to the generations of buzzard-tough survivors of both sexes who suffered Saskatchewan into existence. There are no tourist poems about this region by outsiders who attempted to impose picturesque notions on it, no poems by writers who lived there once and fled its agorophobic spaces because they could not come to terms with them. And among these many backward-glancing anecdotes, the Wood Mountain sketches of Andy Suknaski, in spite of awkward endings and gangling, rangey stanzas, are as powerful as any poems in the book.

Prosaic poetry is no more an offense against poetry, necessarily, than poetic prose is an offense against fiction. But one does bring different expectations to it than one would to poetry that is richer allusively, metaphorically, linguistically. In this volume there is, for instance, a very graphic sense of place. This has several interesting manifestations. The first is the overwhelming sense of infinite space but sparsely finite growth. Terry Heath's untitled winter garden poem and Ed Dyck's "Fall Days" are beautifully crafted examples. A second manifestation of place is the mindscape, a more complex response to this same sparse and spacey terrain. John Hicks' "By Night, Looking Down" offers one map of the psychic space of a prairie watcher. Lorna Uher's "Inner Space" offers another. But the most important manifestation of place in this collection is the preponderance of colloquially told local anecdotes. There are some good ones: some local colour sketches by Denis Gruending, a touching conversation after a funeral ("Fred, It's Still All Right") by Don Kerr, a Mennonite mother's lament over her son's new world profligacy ("Tante Tina's Lament") by David Waltner-Toews, some boyhood memories by Robert Currie, Gary Hyland and Ken Mitchell, and some marvellous monologues by Anne Szumigalski, as great a force in Saskatchewan poetry over the last decade as Kroetsch himself. And this list of arresting anecdotes could be extended.

I favour the Saskatchewan book for layout. It is the more attractive of the two. Richard Gustin's photographs do much to set off the poems in a pleasingly folksy context as do the preliminary notes on grain grading and Marquis wheat. And although there are lots of "damaged kernels" in this collection, the claims made by the editors are ironic and less grandiose than those of the Montreal editors. The editors of *Number One Northern* have failed, however, to limit the number of contributors to a manageable size. There are forty-one poets represented here. By contrast, in the Montreal anthology there are half as many poets and twice the number of pages allotted to each contributor.

Both volumes are to be recommended, but for different reasons. Among the 63 poets represented in these two collections, there is only one established poet, Elizabeth Brewster, whose representation in

Number One Northern is disappointingly small. But there are several emerging poets in each collection who bear watching: Peter Van Toorn, Lorna Uher, Richard Sommer, Andy Suknaski, Terry Heath, David Solway and Anne Szumigalski to name the most obvious. It is reassuring to witness the continuous poetic activity going on among the English writers of Montreal. It is remarkable, however, to see such a collection of devotees of equal talent in Saskatchewan, a province which could scarcely have produced anything more than wheat, hockey players and a handful of novelists a few short years ago.

DAVID CARPENTER

MOVE OVER, MUSGRAVE

FRED COGSWELL, *Against Perspective*. Fiddlehead, $3.00.

MICHAEL BULLOCK, *Black Wings White Dead*. Fiddlehead, $4.00.

KATHLEEN MCCRACKEN, *Reflections*. Fiddlehead, $4.00.

ROBYN SARAH, *Shadowplay*. Fiddlehead, $3.50.

ANN J. WEST, *The Water Book*. Fiddlehead. $4.00.

ROBERT HAWKES, *Spring That Never Freezes*. New Brunswick Chapbooks.

TIME AND SPACE ARE the "false compasses" against which Fred Cogswell inveighs in *Against Perspective*; "Art is the true pole" which "lies within." In finely crafted, rhymed and unrhymed verse the poet elaborates on this theme, with paradoxical evocations of lost youth and love expressed in terms of natural imagery. Cogswell's continuing technical resourcefulness reinforces social criticism addressing itself to the human condition with now Blake-like, now existential overtones: "we are caught between/ monitor and madness." For me, the most successful poem in this volume is "Miracle":

> that a love like ours
> so late begun
> should fly above age and fear
>
> be a mating of eagles
> that quiver with sun
> high in the stainless air.

Michael Bullock's *Black Wings White Dead* is surrealistic, employing vivid colour imagery and ironic juxtapositions. A dream-like atmosphere pervades this book. Sometimes one is reminded of Browning's "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came":

> The mouths in the wall whisper as I pass
> words to which I do my best to close my ears
> evil messages enticing me to crime . . .

and again, of the later Goya:

> A giant
> empty-headed and gauche
> devours me with lava jaws

and, inevitably, of Salvador Dali:

> At the eastern window
> the sun grows big
> gives birth to a ball
> of worm-eaten light.

Bullock's is a poetic world of nightmare and nameless menace: "I sense the aura of some suburban Cain."

Kathleen McCracken is as much of a sixteen-year-old prodigy as the Ontario school system is likely to produce. (I write from experience.) *Reflections* is her first book of poetry. The poems are in fact, reflective, dealing with "recollections" and "silent retrospects" ("The Attic"). Digging in the garden and turning up an Indian arrowhead evokes poignant feelings about the fragility of human relationships. Seeing her reflection in a mirror becomes for the poet a symbol of the search for identity:

in spring
she wears dandelions
milk running
in her hair,
believes she's Yeats'
Kathleen
fragments of Ireland
in need of shape.

McCracken can evoke a myth unobtrusively, as in "Gull":

he ascends on ivory-waxen wings
the path to purged perfection.

"Dog" deals with the experience of cutting away the rope from a howling dog's "raw and torn neck," then enduring the thankless sequel:

the remembrance is always
red amber eyes glowing
white bone fangs glinting
my gesture of friendship
drowned in a lake of blood.

"Of Deer" deals with the poet's ecological awareness. Her wider perspective is also seen in a love poem portraying herself as "a nation apart" and in a poem about the death of the sun.

Several of the poems deal with the motif of masking and unmasking, dovetailed with the poignancy of love. Still, the poet comes to the realization that "only the sun / is a perfect lover." Perhaps one can interpret the change from the modish "i" to the honest egotism of "I" in the last poem as a sign of McCracken's nascent poetic maturity.

Robyn Sarah's *Shadowplay*, as the title suggests, makes effective use of chiaroscuro in its portrayal of trees and twilight. Evanescence is the essence of Sarah's verse, which employs long lines interspersed with shorter ones, building up rhythmical counterpoint. The imagery is unerringly accurate:

As water trickles out through
cupped hands
so words cannot hope to hold
Marion.

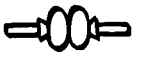
The wind becomes a primary metaphor for mutability, and the motif of flowers or leaves trapped under ice, or a face seen through glass, a leading symbol of existential apartness. Sarah writes about seeing puddles as sky-holes in a way that reminds one of Traherne, and she coins a new word, "treelove," for one of her primary preoccupations. One of her most successful poems, "Broom at Twilight (Another Way of Drowning)," deals with the Nature-as-Monster theme.

The Water Book, by Ann J. West, is thematically integrated, as the title suggests, most of the poems having to do with the sea. Complete with illustrations, the booklet presents a poetry of limpid surfaces and fluid reflections. There is a poem about Grendel's mother and one entitled "Bouillabaisse." West writes of "the / Wailing of whales" and of "the rusted scent of sea." Most of the poems are quite short, but they linger in the mind, like the sound of waves breaking.

Robert Hawkes' *Spring That Never Freezes* deals with such matters as kite-flying and Columbus, metronomes and madness. The poetry is written in free verse with short lines of usually not more than three or four words to the line. There is little imagery, and much inverted rhetoric of understatement constantly bordering on prose. The most effective poem is probably "Vonetta Chouinard Ufologist," a quasi documentary:

They told me to
convince mankind
to stop pollution
and testing bombs
and to repent to
Almighty God.

WARREN STEVENSON



LINGUISTIC TRENDS

A. SEGUINOT, ed., *Emphatic Stress*. Studia Phonetica 12, Didier.

HENRIETTE WALTER, ed., *Phonologie et Société*. Studia Phonetica 13, Didier.

THESE TWO VOLUMES are a welcome addition to the series "Studia Phonetica," directed by Pierre Léon of the University of Toronto. Although written primarily for phoneticians, linguists and sociolinguists, most of the articles provide enough background information to constitute interesting reading even for the non-specialist. The volume on emphatic stress contains four articles. The first, André Séguinot's "L'accent d'insistance en français standard," updates well the literature dealing with stress in French, and shares the author's perceptual and acoustic studies. In the light of these results, one cannot any more maintain that French is strictly a language à "accent fixe." The prosodic features of the French language are in the process of considerable change, to the extent that "emphatic stress" cannot be considered only as a marginal system to "l'accent tonique." In the case of radio announcers, for instance, "emphatic stress" constitutes the rhythmic pattern itself of a style of speech. It is not impossible that the extension of this phenomenon might confer more mobility to the accentual pattern of the French language.

Most of the articles of the second volume, *Phonologie et Société*, have agreed to a common theoretical viewpoint: the phonological aspects of language must be envisaged and studied in the setting itself of communication. Phonological differences and uses are often conditioned by the nature of the community and the social group where communication is taking place. The first article, "Communautés de langue baynuk et enquêtes phonologiques," exemplifies the difficulty of phonological investigation in linguistic communities which do not always correspond to ethnic groups, as it is the case for the baynuk communities in Senegal. Two articles deal with certain features of French as spoken in Canada, "La diphtongaison en Estrie" by Normand Beauchemin (Université de Sherbrooke) and "Harmonie et conditionnement consonantique dans le système vocalique du français parlé à Montréal" by M. Yaeger, H. J. Cedergren, and D. Sankoff.

The French of France is the subject of the next three articles; included are an investigation of the vocalic system of modern French which questions the notions of "français régional" and "français standard," a socio-linguistic survey of the phonological systems of twenty women from Parisien parents, and a very interesting study which outlines several phonological trends in the pronunciation of loan words from various languages by French speakers. Three further articles deal with phonological diversity in English, Italian, and German.

BERNARD SAINT-JACQUES

PRAIRIE IMAGES

HELEN HAWLEY, *Gathering Fire*. Thistledown Press, $9.50, paper $4.00.

PETER CHRISTENSEN, *Hail Storm*. Thistledown Press, $7.50, paper $3.00.

LIVING ON THE WEST COAST and reading these poems, I am struck by the way in which the climate and geography of the prairies dominate the imagination.

Hawley describes the landscape. Indeed, she itemizes its features; like a literary train conductor, she whisks us across the plains, singing out Saskatchewan's train stops — Kenaston, Lanigan, Mozart, Netherhill, Outlook, Piapot. Christensen, too, wants us to know exactly where we are in Alberta: in "Atop the

Prairie," we are at the junction of the St. Mary and Oldman rivers near Fort Whoop-up, with all its fur and whiskey trading history. A quick glance at a map confirms all this. (And I admit to being hooked by the gazeteer. Dog Pound, Alberta? And Saskatchewan, not content with Mozart, has a Handel too. But I digress.)

What is "sparseness" in this landscape for Hawley is "starkness" for Christensen, who observes that "it is dangerous/living too close to the earth/ And standing up/ one sees too much/ of the distance." The hostile climate glares out of *Hail Storm.* Winter cold stops the lungs, pains the skin; frost pushes winter into the house, breaks the latch; hail wastes the crops; winds scar. In one poem, Christensen barely holds himself together against the wind and in another, "the wind [tears]/ a relationship with a woman to bits." (But he is indirect here. Is he writing obliquely of his own experience or chronicling a friend's? The force is clear, but the indirection cuts the poem's impact.) Wind is only one of several motifs in his poetry: the derelict house, loneliness, isolation, the rural to urban shift, the farmer tied to the values of life on the land, and man's hopes pitted against nature's seeming hostility are here too.

Gathering Fire clings more closely to landscape itself.

> Fact: I am. Prairie. The wind has
> hammered my flesh,
> it has not stopped shaking me.

And Hawley glories in that shaking. In "Winds of My Country," she even apostrophizes the wind "that roars rumours of life" to turn her about "like a leaf in its currents." But if Hawley is a debtor in this respect, it is more likely to Anne Marriott, Sinclair Ross and other prairie writers than to Shelley. I'm not suggesting that the wind poems are heavily derivative. For the most part, they are as far from Baiae's Bay as London from Swift Current. I come away from this collection believing that Hawley has a feeling, if not a totally coherent, answer to the question "Who has seen the wind?"

Hawley works the prairie elements (wind, sun, earth, grass, roses, and metallic sky) into two major themes: the passing of time and the quest for self. The seasons, migrations, a consciousness of historical change (particularly for the Plains Indian although her allusions are obscure), and of personal change — specifically her own move to London where she now lives — illustrate. Sometimes her concern with time's passing is coupled with a diction vaguely echoing Eliot's as she moves from "the thing itself" to a kind of philosophical musing couched in prosaic phrasing. But her concerns with time are tied to the prairies as surely as her concerns with identity. While she may say that she "revels in sparseness," it's clear that locating the self in this sparseness is a problem.

Gathering Fire shows a poet trying out the tools of the trade, verse's technicalities. Hawley tries for a balance through measured lines and recurring rhythms ("Walking") and uses strong repetition, usually as a unifying device. The repetitions may be in stanza forms ("Fences"), in the stanzas themselves ("Prairie Song"), in repeated phrases ("Spring Thoughts," "Migration"), in refrains ("Cycle"), or in images. In "Migration," for instance, the first stanza begins with the generalizations of a family's moving to a land of promises; the second moves to personal statement about crossing borders; and the third to the migration of birds. Then the pattern is repeated: family, poet, bird — with the images of birds migrating as a counterpoint to the human movement throughout. Here, the careful structure and the varieties of repetition succeed. This isn't always the case. Sometimes Hawley uses these tech-

niques to conceal a lack of resolution or coherence; sometimes the structure is merely a mechanical solution to the problems of the undeveloped or disconnected poem, as in "Cycle," "Six Suns," and "Prairie Song" which seem little more than formulaic. Further, Hawley has the knack of writing endings that sound convincing, final. They may bring the poem full circle by tying opening and closing lines ("Time and the Roses," "Concerto"), or tying motifs ("Migration"). Yet while many concluding lines are wonderfully resonant and interesting in themselves, I feel uneasy, practised upon by a verbal sleight of hand, for these lines aren't always firmly connected to the rest of the poem.

Christensen's *Hail Storm* shares with *Gathering Fire* the prairie setting, but he has other uses for it. While she is looking at inner weather, he is looking at outer. Christensen casts a sharp eye on prairie life — the everyday events, encounters real and imagined, and natural happenings. His stuff of life is the hail storm of the title, a boyhood hunt for pigeon eggs, shooting tin cans in the dump, and the curious pastime of drowning ants. In "Homecoming," he makes us feel the polite but blunt exclusion he must suffer as a local boy become an alien from "the world out there" — a world of city, education, and mountains which holds no interest for the sons of the farm. In "Dam Site" he creates the poignant plaint of a farmer whose land is to be flooded: "I lived here all my life/ Where will I go?/ I promised my children this land/ This is all I have to give." The simple monologue is eloquent, forceful.

But to say merely *what* the poems record and not *how* doesn't give a good enough idea of the range of subject, tone and stance. Love and politics find their way in too. (Even renting. But he doesn't quite do for the basement suite what Atwood and Page have done for landladies.)

Frequently, he is conversational. He confidently assumes a ready listener and rewards with a fine narrative. Also, he ably delivers the impression of direct speech, but pares it. Generally, his style is lean. Not overly concerned with the formal features of verse, he moves easily from loose stanza forms to free verse, from straight rhymes to subtle assonance.

An undercurrent of violence and anger imparts a peculiar energy throughout ("Deserted Houses," "Ants," "Coutts Border Crossing"). Often, an image crystallizes this violence but on occasion he pushes the image at the cost of the poem, as in "Deserted Houses." Here he gives a quick background to get us to the closing image of himself holding young birds by their wrung necks — "like a ceiling holding a barren light socket/ at the end of a twisted wire."

Fine images abound and Christensen doesn't belabour them although I feel he could work out extraneous material — all the "like's" and "as if's" that deaden images, rob them of the power in simple juxtaposition. Consider:

> Crow on a fence post
> hangs like a black rag
> in the wind.

I admire the image, think loosely of Pound's petals on a wet black bough, and hope that Christensen might take to heart the imagist dictum of no word that does not contribute. Certainly, he's working in that direction in "Osprey." Unfortunately he doesn't always rely on the image to communicate but resorts to social or moral comment. And he has the irritating habit of summing things up in a one or two line closing which reduces instead of expands ("Fall Ends," "Stone Voice").

Christensen's language is usually clear, vigorous and unaffected. He is bold

enough to take convention and give it a new lease: his "Hail prancing/ like horses' hooves" gives, at one stroke, the action and the sound. The play of words isn't always felicitous, however. He affectedly says, "Sun wind has dried the tiers/ of earth," playing with enjambment. In the sombre "Three Winter Songs" he writes, presumably not punningly, that "the flatness is beyond relief" and tries for a noun-verb effect that doesn't come off here — "new grass blades the air" — although he does better with the same technique in "Fences." But these are minor objections to an otherwise lively and enjoyable work. I look forward to Christensen's next collection.

JANE FLICK

OLD WINE, BROKEN BOTTLES, CUT GLASS

EARLE BIRNEY, *Ghost in the Wheels: Selected Poems*. McClelland & Stewart, $4.95.

JOHN OWER, *Legendary Acts*. University of Georgia Press, $7.50.

RALPH GUSTAFSON, *Corners in the Glass*. McClelland & Stewart, $4.95.

AFTER EARLE BIRNEY'S *Collected Poems* and the slim offering of selected poems in the NCL edition, there is at last a more substantial selection. *Ghost in the Wheels* contains eighty-four of Birney's best poems. *Near False Creek Mouth* is substantially represented, and other poems cover the years between 1930 and 1976. Thus, the new poems, while including only one from *The Rugging and Moving Times* (1976), are represented, as is the more traditional Birney of the early years. As a pleasant surprise, Birney has included only a few of his concrete poems, and the collection is strengthened by this decision. One finds more of what one wants, a wide range of Birney's best and most poetic work. Also of interest is the Preface, where Birney shares several anecdotes about the incidents that inspired such poems as "Meeting of Strangers," "Twenty-third Flight," and "Epidaurus." But there is also a hint that the series of collections and selections is not over: "Anything missing here and not in the Collected Poems is either sunk without trace or floating about waiting for a boat." Whatever follows, this collection has been long needed.

It is harder to recommend *Legendary Acts*, a first book of poems by critic John Ower. As implied by the title, Ower is concerned with myth and mythmaking. Classical and Biblical allusions insinuate themselves like snakes into the matter of his poems, and like an adder bite, the result is often fatal. Ower is interested in psychology, witty satire, and religious meditations. This mixture invites immediate comparison with W. H. Auden, master of urbane wit and sophisticated thought, but unfortunately Ower suffers by the comparison. Like Auden, Ower uses traditional forms, and one of his best efforts is a villanelle. But if the effect of many of his poems is to create in the reader a desire to read Auden instead of Ower, there are also poems where thought, wit, and poetry fuse successfully. And in these poems, when they do occur, are flashes of inspiration and technical skill.

The problem with the weaker poems is illustrated by the too occasional, too ordinary, and too humdrum "Phoenix in July"; one suspects the poet never stepped off the airplane, so superficial is his response to desert heat, where "People grill their toast/ In the morning sun." Naturally one encounters references to mad dogs and Englishmen. Although technically competent, this poem never rises above the mundane.

Quite often Ower's wit and humour, touted on the dust-jacket, trail off into

irksome jokes or annoying puns. In "Ant in September," Ower finds a verse form to match the content — both approach doggerel:

> It's true that our beloved queen
> Will positively wax obscene,
>
> Moaning on the lost delight
> Of some silly "nuptial flight";
>
> O, she will prattle endlessly
> Of fresh horizons she could see,
> And penetrating ecstasy.

By contrast, Ower's good poems are very good indeed. His best poems deal with graphic memories and incidents, or are based on concrete objects. Ower is a traveller, having lived in New Zealand, Canada, and the U.S. But often his poetry suffers from his travels. His sense of place, as in the poem about Phoenix, seldom achieves strong expression. Even his view of Canada is that of a traveller, of a temporary visitor, and "From Canada to New Zealand" is unsatisfactorily superficial:

> Twenty years after my fall, I sometimes
> remember the garden,
> Though an angel once tilted my world, and
> now I live in winter

The metaphor is strong, but the insight is shallow. At his best, Ower is capable of flashes of brilliant imagery. But seldom can he sustain the effort.

One poem where the combination of Ower's interests actually works is "The Suicides" where he creates a working myth for psychiatry. Beginning with a tension of opposites, the poem develops its initial metaphors into a sustained analog of the analytic process:

> In the cold Humboldt current of my dreams,
> Night after night, I fish for three suicides
> That angle for me also.
> . . . .
> Glittering with sweat from head to toe,
> One by one, I haul my horrors home.

There are other poems worthy of attention, all of them serious but not overly-ambitious; one such is "A Bowl of Ripe Fruit" where the gloom of an expected death is contrasted with the life-and-light symbolism of a bowl of fruit. The poem is well controlled, the serious tone is sustained, and there is plenty of room for Ower to exercise his nearly metaphysical imagination.

Corners in the Glass is an apt title for Ralph Gustafson's latest book of poems. There is a sense of crystalline structure. Like glass, the poems suggest the artifice of man's handicraft, the essential relationship between man and nature with which Gustafson, in this volume, is concerned. Further, as with the fragile beauty of glass, the poems are different from each other in shape and texture — they range from the personal revelation, through landscapes and domestic interiors, to the thoughtful, where twisted syntax creates an intriguing obscurity. The distinguishing feature of this book is its intensely reflective tone. The majority of poems are introspective, concerned with seeing the individual as representative of the race, and placing him within the context of astronomic space, time, and nature.

The sense that emerges is curiously Canadian. For built as they are out of fragments of Gustafson's experience, the poems explore the delights and mysteries of existing *here* and experiencing *now*. The first poem, "Wednesday at North Hatley," serves to set the scene and outline the concerns of what follows:

> The heart endures, the house
> Achieves its warmth and where
> He needs to, man in woolen
> Mitts, in muffler, without
> A deathwish, northern, walks.

Here, in the space of a few lines, is that blend of thought and poetic immediacy which John Ower so often approaches

but never sustains. Gustafson carries it off well, and maintains the dignified tone throughout.

The poems are thematically linked, and a strong sense of Gustafson's warm human presence adds to the impression of structure. There is a feeling created by the conversational intimacy between poet and reader that both are in agreement about the problems of life. A simple heart-felt domesticity is the key to these poems. They centre around the hearth, around the writer's study, then spread out from the quiet centre to explore the world's tangled web. In the course of the book, Gustafson weaves together several major motifs which include religion, love, art, and being; he explores these through images of flowers, gardening, stars, and graphically described incidents. There are poems about love (conceived domestically), about travel, about music, and about poetry.

The only poems that do not maintain the high poetic standard are those about music. It is difficult to make the names of composers or the terminology of music carry the weight of metaphor; they simply are not images, and Gustafson cannot make them so no matter how hard he tries:

> Pound pitched
> In a loony bin and Liszt betrayed —
> The Saturday sundry of this world,
> Schumann mad, hearing *A*,
> Schubert turned to the wall to die.
>
> ("Diabelli Variations")

But at least not all the poems about music are like this. Gustafson has the sense to vary his pitch, thus one finds such delightful poems as "Of Cordwood and Carmen" where music enters the picture, but is not the only image. The poem concentrates on an incident and an action, the music is in the background, but the poem could not function without it:

> Arranging wood,
> She hums offkey with Bizet
> . . . .
> Up through the floor I listen
> To clunking cutwood birch stained with
> snow.

The travel poems are also rather weak, but they are not many and fit well with Gustafson's concerns, for they clarify what he is attempting in this book:

> The globe is where I study.
> Guerillas prevent my seeing
> Angkor Wat. I have been down
> The Chao Phya River, though,
> Where the poor are happy — or seem
> happy —
> Pounding laundry on the bank stones,
> And jumping in the river, the kids.
> . . . .
> I'm drifting
> Down the river on a sugar boat.
> I travel this way, my own
> Sweet way. I don't like
> Guided tours. . . .
>
> ("Mothy Monologue")

Gustafson, at home, is aware of the world. He is both detached and involved. In many ways, he is Matthew Arnold's ideal critic, for he is cultured, he is aware of the best things in life, of music and flowers, and he makes use of the entire spectrum of thought and culture available to him in interpreting his experience.

The love poems are simple and assertive. They combine the best elements of Auden's lyrics, and even acknowledge the debt, for Gustafson quotes "we/ Must love one another or die" in "Partial Argument." And as one might expect from such a blend of thought and poetry, there are a number of memorable aphoristic phrases: "Love means dying. Who's aware/ Of the anonymous flaw who's not in love?" ("Improvisation on Lines of Somebody Else"), and "Forever's now to those who love" ("The Two Categories"). Nor is wit lacking. But in contrast to Ower's, Gustafson's is at once

striking and subtle, as demonstrated by this line from "Ladies Lovely": "London bridge as well as ladies," a pun on falling made explicit in context. And on contemplating Nefertiti, he again rises to the high poetical, and states the place of beauty among his themes:

> I watch elegance, all else
> Vulgar time.
> She smiles or seems to smile.
> Inscrutable as grace.
>
> ("Ägyptisches Museum")

Also related to the themes of this volume is "Poetic Poem," a defence of this kind of poetry. Gustafson explores his world, inner and outer, for it is full of material for poetry; in it sensation and thought are inextricably mixed: "A hankering after the feel of peeled hickory/ Or the feel of a sudden axiomatic thought." And the final discovery of poetry is treated in images characteristic of these poems: "Coming across real poetry, owls hoot,/ Potatoes break ground, and coffee smells."

Corners in the Glass is a significant work. It presents a unique blend of the personal and the philosophical. It is a great pleasure to read. It seems unlikely that it will be long overlooked, for it is a strong personal rendering of thoughts and responses that have been left mostly as abstract themes in the works of other poets who have not Gustafson's voice, his gift for conversational elegance.

DAVID S. WEST

opinions and notes

THE MASCULINE IMAGE IN *Lives of Girls and Women*

"... MEN WERE SUPPOSED TO BE ABLE to go out and take on all kinds of experiences and shuck off what they didn't want and come back proud. Without even thinking about it, I had decided to do the same." Del Jordan's brave words at the end of the title chapter form one of the ironic cores central to both theme and technique in Alice Munro's *Lives of Girls and Women*. Though the males in the novel do not correspond to Del's description, and though Munro's male characters are often criticized for being vague and remote, the masculine image is of crucial significance in understanding Del's development as a woman and as an artist, a process which culminates in the last chapter, entitled "Epilogue: The Photographer." This curious chapter, in which Munro says she "was trying to deal with something fairly complex,"[1] is the only one that breaks the chronological structure of the novel and is the one in which Del's imaginary and real worlds suddenly coalesce, not through the Photographer, her fictive creation, but through Bobby Sherriff, the insane son of the Jubilee family around whom Del is writing her first novel. Del's final "yes" marks her (even if still unconscious) acceptance of a complex concept of the self which has many implications for the artist. Munro's view of the self and its relation to others shows remarkable similarities to Carl Jung's theory of individuation. Both Munro and Jung conceive of the self in such a way as to make Virginia Woolf's conclusions, in *A Room of One's Own*, about the nature of the truly creative mind pertinent. Woolf argues that the "great mind is androgynous" and thus women must achieve this "token of the fully developed mind" if they are to become first rate writers. In *Lives of Girls and Women*, Munro demonstrates that the masculine image as understood by Jung is as much a part of the growth of Del's creative identity as it is of her physical and sexual nature.

One of the ironies of *Lives* is that throughout the stories the male portrait is at variance with the assumption of male superiority and freedom held by Del and her Jubilee society. Only at the level of the persona (the mask which according to Jung the ego assumes to meet the world) do positive male characteristics appear. From this level of perception Del sees in her father, her brother, and in Uncles Benny, Craig and Bill a contentment that contrasts to the striving which characterizes her sense of the female. Furthermore, the men appear to be happily independent of women, in contrast to the females who, like the elderly Aunts or increasingly even Naomi, are totally dependent upon the other sex for their own definition, while ironically, as Del notes, they view the male as childlike, weak, to be tolerated, used, or protected. The freedom of place and action demonstrated by the males is another point in their favour for Del who, without admitting it, shares her mother's frustration at the physical limitations on the lives of girls and women. As a child Del recognizes that what makes Uncle Craig "so restful to be with" is "masculine self-centredness." Years later, Jerry Storey, the male of the future, impresses her with the same quality and she admits that she "whose natural boundaries were so much more ambiguous, who soaked up protective coloration wherever it might be found, be-

gan to see that it might be restful to be like Jerry." That the ostensible control over their own lives exhibited by the males in her acquaintance includes violence, aggression, and a will to power is something that Del also observes and apparently approves. While Garnet, jailed for the assault on a man who consequently lost an eye, is the obvious example of this trait, Jerry Storey's conversation dwells on war: "Cheerful, implacable behind his brainy boy's glasses, he looked ahead to prodigious catastrophe." Mr. Jordan and Mr. Chamberlain discuss war whenever they are together, and Del notes that "even Uncle Benny so skinny and narrow-chested, with his damaged bronchial tubes, had some look or way of moving that predicted chance or intended violence, something that would make disorder; my father had this too, though he was so moderate in his ways."

While Del accepts the masculine world thus projected as "the real world," Munro manipulates the different levels of perception in the book so that the reader is aware, as Del at the time is not, of the shadow side of the strong male persona. From this angle of vision we see examples of males characterized by suppression of spontaneity (as Uncles Craig and Bill, and Garnet), by passive resignation (as in Uncle Benny and Mr. Jordan), by rigidity and sterility of thought (Craig, Naomi's father), by deceit (Mr. Chamberlain), by incompetence as fathers (Uncle Benny, Mr. Jordan, Garnet's and Naomi's fathers), and in every case by unfulfilled lives. Regarded from the level of social realism in the novel, the male characters present a bleak outlook for society and social change.

In addition, however, to functioning on the realistic level of the novel, the masculine image projects in its duality Del's own unresolved dichotomy between the physical and intellectual spheres of being which correspond closely to the Jungian dichotomy between masculine and feminine powers. Jung considered that the healthy individual of either sex must unite within the self the masculine powers (which he termed the Logos ones) of cognition, action, and distinctiveness with the feminine ones (termed Eros) of relatedness, sensation and intuition.[2] In *Lives of Girls and Women*, Munro demonstrates what happens when the gulf between the sexes is such that each is isolated into its own chauvinism inwardly as well as socially.

In the males who lack, or have repressed, the feminine qualities, the Logos ones are perverted from initiative, courage, objectivity and wisdom[3] into their opposites: sterility, violence, egotism and death. The childless Uncle Craig with his incomplete geneology, Jerry who thinks he can attain the Nobel Prize before the world is destroyed and Uncle Bill dying of cancer and consumed by nostalgia for his lost mother despite the lush presence of his young wife, Nile, all demonstrate the consequence of the imbalance demanded by society of the successful male. The males with the most developed feminine qualities are Uncle Benny and Mr. Jordan, but they have lost the masculine power of purposeful action and self-determinism and are failures in society's eyes and indeed, perhaps, even in their own.

In none of the males does Munro portray the balance of masculine and feminine powers necessary to achieve a change in society equivalent to that which Mrs. Jordan envisages for women. The female characters also, however, reveal a similar imbalance and a consequent lack of creativity. Their masculine powers are stunted by a society that makes an ideal of not doing things. The Aunts are childish and sterile in their dependence on Uncle Craig and Naomi's femininity becomes a purely physical and predatory one locked in the material tomb of her "hope-

chests." On the other hand, Mrs. Jordan in espousing her masculine qualities faces ridicule by her society, while in repressing her feminine powers she becomes as Del sees her, brittle, eccentric, "in no way content" and no longer "the priestess" of the Flats Road days. Fern Dogherty with a more highly developed sensuality than Mrs. Jordan achieves a partial inner balance greater than that of Del's mother but she must leave Jubilee and remain unfulfilled as an artist. Fern becomes a pathetic, lonely, though courageous, woman, at the mercy not only of her own nature but also of males like Mr. Chamberlain and women like Del herself who betrays her by spying on her at Mr. Chamberlain's request and Naomi who dismisses her as "a joke." In contrast to Fern, Munro shows in Del a development, occurring in the last two chapters of the novel, which offers hope that in her case an individual creative balance and union between masculine Logos and feminine Eros may be reached. Del's desire for such a union is comically presented in her dismay over the psychologist's statement that when looking at the full moon boys think of the universe, girls of washing their hair. "Frantically upset" that she "was not thinking as a girl," Del feels "trapped" because she "wanted men to love [her] *and* she wanted to think of the universe when she looked at the moon."

Although her mother's "virginal brusqueness, her innocence" is one of the reasons Del rejects her as a model, throughout the novel Del is clearly motivated by the masculine powers with which she identifies and which are best exemplified in her mother. Like her mother she is fearful of the feminine ones of relatedness. But she also struggles against her mother who, along with Naomi, often appears in relation to Del to correspond to Jung's concept of the shadow in which the ego projects its own unaccepted traits. The shadow with whom the self must come to terms before individuation can occur appears in dreams as a figure of the same sex as the ego.[4] The first stage of Del's development, the first two-thirds of the novel, is dominated by women. It is, however, especially her mother against whom Del struggles even as Mrs. Jordan did against hers. From this often painful struggle Del profits in a manner like that suggested by Jung when he noted that:

> The woman who fights against her father still has the possibility of leading an instinctive, feminine existence, because she rejects only what is alien to her. But when she fights against the mother she may, at the risk of injury to her instincts, attain to greater consciousness because in repudiating the mother she repudiates all that is obscure, instinctive, ambiguous, and unconscious in her own nature.[5]

As the dependence of Del's developing consciousness upon her mother begins to wane, Mrs. Jordan's strength deteriorates. Just before this development, however, Del is startled and uncomprehending when to her speech about the changing lives of girls and women (which occurs at the apex of Mrs. Jordan's strength) her mother adds the apparent non-sequitur "you will want to have children though." Del's vehement rejection of this idea is a part of her mistaken assumption that physical being and persona is equivalent to identity. She is not yet in a position to understand that what her mother means by a woman having a life of her own and self-respect is the fulfillment rather than the denial of feminine Eros-relatedness that occurs only when it is linked in an inner marriage with the Logos powers.

In the next story, "Baptizing," however, Del's struggle against Garnet French is occasioned in part by the lie that "was not a lie" that she would like a baby — the dream symbol, according to Jung, of the soul's re-birth.[6] Del's struggle against

Garnet's insistence that she must submit to baptism before she can be a wife or mother is a symbolic struggle against male dominance and loss of self. Yet after she has broken away from Garnet, her dream of real life is again of the purely masculine quest for re-birth without feminine relatedness. She dreams of herself as "at last without fantasies or self-deception, cut off from the mistakes and confusions of the past, grave and simple, carrying a small suitcase getting on a bus." Munro, however, undercuts this vision as a vision of real life by adding "like girls in the movies" and juxtaposing this illusionary image with the italicized words that end the story, "Garnet French, Garnet French, Garnet French. Real Life."

The final chapter which centres on Del's initial attempt to write a novel, precedes "Baptizing" in temporal sequence: Del is still awaiting the results of her exams — which we know from the earlier story she passes, though without the distinction necessary for a scholarship to university. The over-lapping chronology suggests that it was the activation of the deeper levels of her unconscious through her attempt at writing fiction which allowed Del to free herself from what her mother would have called her "distraction" over Garnet, and to see beyond his physical presence into herself. Del admits she has "re-arranged" Garnet to fulfil her own need. She says "I loved the dark side, the strange side of him, which I did not know, not the regenerate Baptist; or rather, I saw the Baptist, of which he was proud as a mask he was playing with that he could easily discard." She does not know this side because as she admits "words were our enemies." Yet as she fights with Garnet in the water she feels amazed that "he should not understand that all the powers I granted him were in play, that he himself was — in play, that I meant to keep him sewed up." Del's great danger lies in her power to deny reality and instead to create and live in imaginative worlds whose mystery she can control. The water in which the struggle takes place, however, is an apt symbol for the depths of the unconscious where truths cannot be avoided by conscious control of the will. At this point for the first time in the novel the male appears as a projection of the animus — the third and most creative level of the psyche where especially for the artist "real life" begins.

Jung used the term animus to describe the contra-sexual "soul image" of the woman in whom she meets her other self — the image of maleness created in part by her environment and in part by her own nature. As Del struggles with Garnet her real impression of masculinity surfaces as a violent, aggressive demand for submission of her identity and the renunciation of her Logos powers. In the Epilogue, the Photographer, her invented character, represents the same dark, hidden and sinister aspect of masculinity which does not allow for a true representation of life. There was a "wicked, fluid energy about him, a bright unpitying smile." His "unusual, even frightening pictures" age people or transform them. "Middle-aged people saw in their own features the terrible growing, inescapable likeness of their dead parents ... brides looked pregnant." Instead of sharing the general fear of the Photographer however, Del's heroine gives herself to him, is impregnated by him and commits suicide the day after he leaves town.

Garnet and the Photographer closely resemble the way that the Jungian psychologist von Franz describes the first two stages of animus development in which the male "appears as a person of more physical power," and then as possessing "initiative and capacity for planned action."[7] Both figures seem to represent what von Franz terms psychologically

negative figures who "lure women away from all human relationships" and like the robbers, murderers and Bluebeards of myth and fairy tale "personify all those subconscious cold, destructive reflections that invade a woman in the small hours, especially when she has failed to realize some obligation of feeling." Bobby Sherriff, the real brother of Del's heroine, represents the other distinct aspect of the masculine — the weakness which has characterized so many of the males in Del's experience. He is another animus projection but unlike the Photographer or any other male in the novel unites Del's imaginative and real worlds.

In Bobby Sherriff one of the most powerful of the archetypes of the female consciousness appears, that of the Wise Man or the fourth stage of animus development which according to von Franz "sometimes connects the woman's mind with the spiritual evolution of her age and can thereby make her even more receptive than a man to new creative ideas." In true archetypal fashion Bobby Sherriff contains both negative and positive possibilities. His insanity may, on the social realism level of the novel, be that of the masculine world, but in his insanity, he may be the Wise Fool. Confronted by Bobby at a point where she "had lost faith" in her novel, Del wonders:

> What happened to Bobby Sherriff when he had to stop baking cakes and go back to the asylum? Such questions persist, in spite of novels. It is a shock, when you have dealt so cunningly, powerfully, with reality, to come back and find it there. Would Bobby Sherriff give me a clue now, to madness?

The clue Bobby gives Del is to remember that the brain needs to be nourished. Addressing her as the clever girl "who's going to university, on scholarships" he warns her that he was destroyed in his years at College by undernourishment. He talks on while Del eats the cake he baked for her and muses that "people's lives in Jubilee, as elsewhere, were dull, simple, amazing and unfathomable — deep caves paved in kitchen linoleum." Previously Del says she "did not pay much attention to the real Sherriffs, once [she] had transformed them for fictional purposes." Through Bobby she makes the connection to reality that characterizes Munro's art. Furthermore she remembers that as she left:

> he did the only special thing he ever did for me. With those things in his hands, he rose on his toes like a dancer, like a plump ballerina. This action, accompanied by his delicate smile, appeared to be a joke not shared with me so much as displayed for me, and it seemed also, to have a concise meaning, a stylized meaning — to be a letter, or a whole word, in an alphabet I did not know.

The feminine metaphors of baking and pirouetting, incongruous though they make Bobby's actions, imply that the inner nourishment must be that of the feminine powers — a physical and spiritual relatedness essential to offset the sterile Logos orientation characterizing society. Instead of the passive feminine "Thank-you" implying connection and obligation, Del's response to Bobby is the "Yes" characteristic of her strong masculine powers. Nevertheless the response signifies recognition and acceptance, even if still an unconscious one, of the obligation of the artist to speak for the Bobby Sherriffs — and for all the males and females in Jubilee and elsewhere who are prevented from achieving an integrated harmony within the self and thereby with society. The androgyny suggested in the portrait of Bobby Sherriff has been created by disharmony and insanity. Yet in its positive state within the psyche, androgyny represents the ultimate balance and union between the two great contrasts, masculine and feminine. If Del can achieve such a state and learn the new alphabet she may be able to trans-

late her novel from the "pictures" in her head (its present state) into a work of art for others to experience. The evidence of the novel suggests that she does reach the state of being able to write as Virginia Woolf recommended, "as a woman, but as a woman who has forgotten that she is a woman, so that her pages [will be] full of that curious sexual quality which comes only when sex is unconscious of itself." Paradoxically of course this is the state in which the woman artist can most fully convey the feminine experience. Woolf argues that "some collaboration has to take place in the mind between the woman and the man before the art of creation can be accomplished. Some marriage of opposites has to be consummated."

In the similarity of name and the suggestion of androgyny Bobby appears as a double of Uncle Benny whose misadventures form the basis of the first chapter of the novel which Munro told John Metcalf was written after the others. However, whereas Uncle Benny represents a real though eccentric part of Jubilee life, Bobby Sherriff is closer to a symbolic representation of the deeper levels of the unconscious from whence characters like Uncle Benny are created. One of the characteristic effects of Munro's fiction (like that of writers she calls influences such as Welty, O'Connor and McCullers) is the sharp twist her endings take into what is often termed the Gothic. The explanation for this effect may lie in the pattern which appears in *Lives of Girls and Women* where we begin with characters who actually have been created after the narrative voice has taken and returned from its inner journey of discovery. The perils of this journey are many, as Jung pointed out, and the characters and effects (the truths) of the endings are those emanating most directly from the unconscious where artistic control is least possible. This may be the reason Munro remains dissatisfied with the Epilogue yet says:

> You realize where the cracks are but you can't do much about them. I'd like to change the last section which I did over and over again. It doesn't satisfy me at all. It doesn't express what I wanted it to and yet maybe because I was tired and it was the end of the book, it was the best I could do, but maybe it just *is* the best I can do with the material.

The source of this material may also be the reason Munro feels that the "middle and later parts of the book ... are the best parts" while the ones she wrote after the sweep of composition which carried her from "Princess Ida" to "Baptizing" have "less vitality."

Despite the vitality of the works closest to the unconscious, to remain in the innermost world exclusively would be madness. Though not necessarily untrue, the photograph would be distorted because it would not include the conscious level of the persona where ego contacts its world. Jung suggested that a minimum accommodation between the persona and the world was necessary before the inner journey to individuation could be undertaken, and that without such a connection the psyche was prone to neurosis. Munro's art is like a documentary photograph of the external world that shows why accommodation to it is difficult, which then enlarges to reveal simultaneously and suddenly an inner image of reality. This image, like a photographic negative, is often in reverse and dominated by black, but the final picture is impossible without the negative. Yet unlike many modern writers who seem content to slip into a subjective solipsism, Munro continues to affirm the ancient role of the artist to connect. She answered affirmatively when John Metcalf questioned her as to whether, though in her writing she gloried in surfaces and textures, she felt "surfaces not to be surfaces." Similarly

during the stage of her career when Del wants merely "to write things down" she refers to herself as "voracious and misguided as Uncle Craig ... writing his history." The security of surface reporting is not enough. The danger to the artist as a person lies in the necessity for him to pursue his own inner nature. The challenge lies in integrating the subjective inner level to the objective and external world of experience and persona in order to communicate what Munro calls "the magic," the "feeling about the intensity of what is *there*."

When the novel begins, Del as a child observes the "troubling distorted reflection" of Uncle Benny's world but she can still regard it as "the same but never the same at all." It was not in *her* world that "people could go down in quicksand, be vanquished by ghosts or terrible ordinary cities." At the end of the novel in Bobby Sherriff she faces the distortion of Uncle Benny's world as now that of her own, the real world, in which the self must seek to right the inward balance in order to be able to view the world and act creatively in it. At this point the irony provided by the discrepancy between Del's vision as a child and as a narrator subsides. In the new narrative voice there appears a signal of a change coming in the life of Del Jordan which will free her from her unquestioning admiration and adulation of the masculine persona and her initial physical and sexual animus image. The painful and continuing struggle toward consciousness and individuation on which she is now embarked contrasts sharply to her dream of boarding the bus "like girls in the movies." But it is the inner journey that will enable Del to record the surface truths of Jubilee in such a way as to communicate their inner reality and thereby to realize her desire for "every last thing, every layer of speech and thought, stroke of light on bark or walls, every smell, pothole, pain, crack, delusion, held still and held together — radiant and everlasting." This, in effect, is what she has done for us in the preceding chapters.

While, according to Munro, "not very many writers [except] the great ones can create characters of both sexes," the masculine portraits in *Lives of Girls and Women* are sound demonstrations of the way the female consciousness interacts with the male at different levels of being. If properly understood by the reader, the masculine image enlarges one's perception of Del Jordan and one's admiration for the art of her creator.

NOTES

[1] John Metcalf, "A Conversation With Alice Munro," *Journal of Canadian Fiction*, 1, no. 4 (Fall 1972), 60.

[2] Carl Jung, "Woman in Europe," in *Collected Works 10: Civilization in Transition*, pp. 254 ff.

[3] M. L. von Franz, "The Process of Individuation," in *Man and his Symbols* (New York: Dell, 1968), p. 206.

[4] *Ibid.* p. 175.

[5] Carl Jung, "Psychological Aspects of the Mother Archetype," in *Collected Works 9*, Part I: *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, p. 186.

[6] C. Jung, "Psychological Types," *Collected Works 6*, pp. 561 ff.

[7] Von Franz, p. 206.

NANCY I. BAILEY

CARRIER'S FICTION

ROCH CARRIER IS A BORN STORY-TELLER, a *raconteur* whose verve immediately grips the reader. As critics have been quick to point out, he uses all the techniques of the *raconteur*: grotesque exaggeration, caricature and a wild imagination which still leaves room for a kind of fantastic realism.[1] Some critics have compared his work to Brueghel's, while others

have commented on its epic and folklore qualities.[2] Add to this a variety of dream-like sequences mingled with a great deal of violence and cruelty, and it can be seen that Carrier's work is a rich mixture of techniques designed to seize the reader's attention.

Carrier himself would seem to agree with those who emphasize the grotesque and exaggerated side of his work, for he has said: "Mes romans aiment l'invraisemblance; j'aime la démesure, j'aime la force, j'aime l'épopée."[3] But another statement of Carrier's should warn us against seeing his work as *just* one of imagination and entertainment. Imagination, he says, is not opposed to real life and real life problems: "Quand je dis imaginaire, je n'oppose pas ce monde à celui que l'on nomme le monde réel; par imaginaire, je veux dire le monde réel perçu plus globalement avec toutes ses possibilités et ses significations par le roman."[4] Carrier's techniques are, of course, used with the intention of entertaining, but they are also used as a means of conveying a view of the world, and of commenting on it. He says that, in *La Guerre, yes sir!* "J'ai essayé de trouver une certaine vérité de vie."[5] The same is true of his other fiction.[6]

Beneath the grotesque adventures of Carrier's characters is another "truth." This is supported by his statement that his interest in literature, and, in a sense, his career as a writer, date from the time when he first read *Candide*.[7] Voltaire's novel recounts the fantastic adventures of grotesque characters, but through the incredible events described, through the parody of the adventure novel and the caricature of human types, Voltaire was attacking certain explanations of reality current at his time, and commenting on a human situation he found intolerable. Like *Candide*, Carrier's novels exist on more than one level. They exist on three distinct yet closely integrated levels behind the literal one, for his fiction is a commentary on the situation of Quebec, on the problems of living in modern capitalist society, and on what Malraux calls "la condition humaine."

On the first of these levels, Carrier's novels correspond closely to *Candide*. He writes that, when he read *Candide*, "je découvrais avec Voltaire tout ce qui empoisonnait la vie au Québec. Mon pays m'apparaissait comme un pays du XVIII^e^ siècle et Voltaire était le grand frère m'indiquant la voie à suivre."[8] Carrier's novels are a protest against all the forces that have enslaved Quebec and prevented her from freely fulfilling her destiny. It is in the context of this protest that one must understand his attack on a particular type of religion once practised in Quebec. It is not so much the Church itself which Carrier attacks as a symbolic representation of all the forces of darkness, superstition and fear which would hamper the development of a people. It is all "official" explanations and justifications of Quebec's misfortunes which Carrier pillories, just as, in *Candide*, Voltaire attacked an over-optimistic and almost "official" explanation of reality.

In Carrier's fiction, the Church presents a view of man which denies his full humanity. He is seen as a plaything of his appetites, almost an animal, and in *Floralie, où es-tu?* his appetites are symbolized by Anthyme's horse. Riding off with his bride, Anthyme whips his horse into a frenzied gallop, while Floralie, frightened by the speed of the horse and apprehensive of Anthyme's sexual passions, thinks of the times horses have run wild in her village, causing havoc. The beat of Anthyme's heart is compared to a galloping horse, and Anthyme brutally consummates the marriage as the horse drags the buggy through the forest. These passions are seen by the Church as a potential cause of damnation, and are directly linked to Hell. Hence Floralie's

fear of them, and hence the reaction of Bérubé in *La Guerre, yes sir!* when he contemplates the naked Molly and suddenly seems to hear a clock from Hell ticking and saying "Toujours, jamais." The act he was about to perform seems to him a prelude to damnation, and he trembles in terror. Molly herself, who represents sex and the enjoyment of sex, appears in the midst of the villagers "comme une autre incarnation du diable."

The religion of Carrier's characters represents the world as the battleground of God and the Devil. This view is neatly summed up in *Floralie, où es-tu?* by the mediaeval-style scenery used by the travelling actors, which depicts, on one side, smiling angels, and on the other, demons stoking the flames of Hell. According to the Church, man is only too inclined to gravitate towards the demons' side of the scene. The priest informs Anthyme: "Tu es un homme, et tout homme est un pécheur," and tells Floralie that "l'homme corrompt tout ce qu'il touche." The priest in *La Guerre, yes sir!* tells the villagers that many of them are on the road to Hell, and talks of "ces flammes auxquelles vous serez soumis à cause de votre nature pécheresse et voluptueuse." But the priest struggles against the Devil for the souls of men and this struggle is represented symbolically in *Floralie, où es-tu?* when Père Nombrillet chases away the actors playing the Seven Deadly Sins, and drives off Néron, the travelling seller of medicines which cure by the help of the Devil.

Any view of life which inhibits the individual's (and a people's) expression of life and strength is bound to have disastrous effects. It produces a childhood like Philibert's, full of images of death. Philibert, as a child, spends much of his time helping his father dig graves (symbols of death), and playing in the graveyard, where he imagines he is sounding the trumpet of the Last Judgment, and expecting the dead to rise from their graves. It makes him lie awake at night imagining the ducks caught in the ice of the river, their heads severed by a hunter. It produces in Floralie all kinds of nightmares as she runs through the forest looking for Anthyme, convinced she is a "fille damnée" and imagining Hell gaping beneath her feet. It produces in Anthyme similar fears as he wanders through the night, thinking his horse has been stolen by the Devil and imagining it riding across the sky. Significantly, it is while making love (i.e., expressing these life forces) that Carrier's characters often find themselves thinking of death. When Arthur is about to make love to Amélie in *La Guerre, yes sir!*, he finds the thought of the dead Corriveau obsessing him. Bérubé, as we have seen, is assailed by thoughts of Hell in the same situation.

This religion also stifles the life forces by its attitude to marriage. Sexual relations are allowed only when sanctified by the Church, which is why Bérubé asks Molly the prostitute to marry him before he has relations with her.[9] It is also why Anthyme is filled with dismay and anger when he discovers his bride is not a virgin. He condemns her as "fille damnée," and symbolically loses his virility, for it is at this point that his horse disappears and passes (together with Floralie) into the hands of Néron. "Un homme qui ne sait pas se faire aimer d'un cheval n'est pas un homme," he concludes when he thinks his horse has bolted, implying at the same time that a man who has not received a pure wife is no man either. But if Anthyme's attitude to his own virility is distorted, his attitude to his wife is worse. He has been taught to see women as temptresses, except after marriage, when they are to be taken brutally. The wife's task, he believes (as does Floralie herself) is to obey, for "marier un homme, c'était le suivre pour lui obéir."

Such a relationship between men and women stifles love, and Floralie finds herself unable to tell Anthyme she loves him. Instead, all she can say is: "J'ai peur, Anthyme." It is through this forest of misunderstandings, misconceptions and superstition, represented by the real forest in which they wander, that Anthyme and Floralie have to find one another.

The forces which separate Anthyme and Floralie divide the whole community.[10] Religion comes between the men, who barely accept its restrictions, and the women, who seek their consolation in it. It comes between father and son, causing Arsène to beat and kick Philibert because he has blasphemed. It comes between parents and daughter, preventing Esmalda from entering her parents' house because it is against the rules of the religious order to which she belongs. It divides men within themselves, causing them to deny their own instincts. It separates English from French, causing the latter to marvel that the English can even pray before Corriveau's coffin, but never allowing them to doubt that the English God is a false one, and that "Eux, les Anglais protestants sont damnés."

The constant strife within the French-Canadian community is symbolized by war, which lurks in the background of *Il est par là, le soleil,* still lives in the memories of Dorval in *Le Deux-millième étage,* and is the very subject of *La Guerre, yes sir!*. Even before the war comes to the villagers in *La Guerre, yes sir!*, they are at war with themselves. As Carrier puts it: "Mes personnages ne se sentent pas concernés par cette guerre, au tout début, ils vivent en marge, mais ils sont en état de guerre permanente en eux-mêmes, contre les autres, ils vivent au niveau de l'instinct."[11]

But if war represents the strife within the French-Canadian community, it even more obviously represents strife between French Canadians and English. The English are depicted as another force oppressing the French Canadian, and the war they foist on French Canadians is exploitation at its most cruel. The characters in the novels make it clear that for them, the war is waged by "les gros," and, although one of them condemns Germans, English, French, Russians, Chinese and Japanese as all being "gros," it is obvious that they hold the English mainly responsible. They cannot understand why their sons are sent to fight for a land which, one of them says, is "au bout du monde." They know nothing of that country, and Corriveau's mother does not even realise that the Union Jack on her son's coffin is also "her" flag. Even those who seem to go to war willingly have no choice, since, for the likes of Corriveau and Philibert, the army is their only means of escape from a community which stifles and inhibits them.

The war clearly demonstrates a relationship already established between the two communities: that of master and servant. The attitude of the French Canadians to their "masters" seems at first one of servility, represented by the villager who welcomes the English soldiers bringing back Corriveau's body by saying: "I understand English, boys. You may speak English, I learned it when I was in the Navy ... Royal Navy." But the real feelings of this man are revealed when he curses the soldiers (albeit when they are out of hearing) for leaving the door open. He assumes that the English must use French-Canadians in the Army to close their doors, and, of course, he is right. Even in the Army, the French Canadian is used to perform menial tasks. His position is summed up by Bérubé's task, which is to clean the Air Force latrines at Gander (together with a motley crowd of Polish, Italians, Hungarians and Greeks). As for Corriveau, when his body arrives at the station, it is treated as

part of the English soldiers' baggage. This does not mean, of course, that the Army is not willing to make a national hero out of Corriveau for the encouragement of the French Canadians. In reality, Corriveau's death was not so glorious: he was blown to pieces while relieving himself behind a bush.

The effect of war is often to dehumanize, and this is seen in the soldiers in *La Guerre, yes sir!*, who are depicted as robots. As one character puts it, "Un soldat ne fait rien, ne pète même pas sans un ordre." The English soldiers are disciplined to the point where they are expressionless, and only able to give vent to their feelings when ordered to do so. As for the villagers, they are all mutilated in some way by the war, mutilated mentally and spiritually. Joseph, who cuts off his hand to escape being drafted, is symbolic of them all. The war can even turn men against themselves, as is the case of Henri, who hates himself for fearing the war. It turns them against one another, as when Bérubé, unable to turn on the sergeant who issues orders to him, vents his hatred by humiliating Arsène. It is, in fact, Bérubé who best represents the mutilation and humiliation of the French Canadian. As a soldier, he obeys the sergeant's orders and fights beside the English soldiers in the brawl with the villagers. When he later attempts to pray beside Corriveau's coffin, the villagers naturally reject him, but when he turns to pray beside the English soldier killed in the brawl, the English reject him too. This scene sums up succinctly the situation of the French Canadian fighting for the English: he has no place in either community.

Carrier depicts French Canadians as outsiders in their own land. This is conveyed in the scene where the English soldiers, tired of the unseemly conduct of the villagers at the "veillée du corps," eject them from the Corriveau house. It is also suggested in *Il est par là, le soleil* when Philibert, newly arrived in Montreal, finds himself in an English-speaking district where nobody understands him, but where everybody assumes (presumably because he speaks French) that he is a beggar. When one lady does take pity on him, she decides he must be an Italian, and is shocked that Italians are arriving in Canada without even bothering to learn the language of the country.

French-Canadians in Carrier's works are villagers, farmers or proletarians. They are the exploited section of the population, and the exploiters are English. "Elle parle quelle langue, la voix du capitalisme," asks Dorval, and answers: "It speaks English." It is because he is French Canadian that Philibert is reduced to a series of degrading ways of earning a living, and it is also why he cannot understand the financial pages of the newspaper, even when they are in French. Carrier protests against this state of affairs, but at the same time he is protesting against the exploitation of masses of people in any modern industrial society, and against the fate of all individuals in modern cities. The "little man" in modern society is represented by Boris Rataploffsky, who allows himself to have blows rained upon him by anybody who will pay him. Boris is an ironic embodiment of the "little man," for he is, in fact, a giant with great strength, but it is a purely passive strength, which allows him to endure ill-treatment rather than impelling him to rebel.

Carrier protests against a system in which heartless employers, like the one in "L'Ouvrier modèle," wear out a man in their service, then dismiss him. More often, the exploiters are distant and anonymous, like the ones who use the immigrant worker in "Le Pair." The cities where these workers live are also anonymous and inhuman, and a man can waste his life away in them, like the character

in "Le Métro," who grows old as he travels to work. In these cities, despite the teeming masses around him, the individual is condemned to solitude. Dorval meditates on the absurdity of men who build cities in order not to be alone, but who then surround themselves with walls. The machine dominates these cities, and the ease with which men can become its slaves is demonstrated in "Le Réveille-matin," where a man's life is taken over by an over-zealous alarm clock which will not let him do anything of which it disapproves, or in "L'Invention," where a man builds a machine which, once started, cannot be stopped. The best symbol of the machine's power is the brute, senseless and inhuman bulldozer which comes to demolish Dorval's house, "cette masse de fer sans intelligence qui, au commandement, chargerait et saccagerait sans jamais savoir pourquoi." Dorval's purely human solution of pouring beer into its fuel tank has no effect, for the machine is not susceptible to human solutions.

The life of individuals in modern cities is the subject of *Le Deux-millième étage*, which tells how a remote city authority decides to destroy Dorval's home to make way for "progress" — an immense block of apartments. As one minor official puts it: "L'avenir est dans la déconstruction." The authorities, unable to appreciate the vitality of life in districts such as Dorval's, only bother to send delegates to explain their actions, and these delegates meet with delegates of the unions, delegates of the police, delegates of the bank, delegates of the political parties, delegates of the American Consulate, and so on.

There are, in this novel, various reactions to the threat of demolition, and to the problem of life in the city. Marchessault, for example, is the man of peasant origins who accepts the need for progress and repeats parrot-fashion all the mindless clichés about scientific and technological advancement. He even says, and here he hits on the truth: "Un homme à notre époque c'est pas un homme, mais un esclave s'il sait pas dominer la machine." So he sets to work and tries to learn, by correspondence course, how to handle machines. Unfortunately, when he tries to drive a bulldozer, he has no idea of how to make it work. He is beaten by the machine, and it is as though his very manhood is destroyed, for his wife turns on him, taunting him as "impuissant."

Marchessault tries to come to terms with progress; Dupont La France rejects it. His is the utopian dream of destroying the city, returning to nature, and living off apples (an ironic response from a character from France, presented as the representative of a sophisticated and highly developed civilization). His answer is no more effective than Marchessault's, for when Dorval and his tenants decide to cultivate the land, the best they can do is scratch around the demolished buildings with knives, forks, nails, screwdrives and broom handles, and then to urinate on the seeds they plant.

Mignonne Fleury's response is to seek an outlet in sex, but it is just commercialized sex, for she is nothing but a prostitute, and, at one point, turns Dorval's house into a brothel for the construction workers. It is presumably because of her commercial view of sex that she refuses the advances of Dorval, who sees sex in an entirely different light. Cowboy looks for an answer in song, but songs too are commercialized, even songs of protest. The Old Woman spends her time thinking of death, while the Negro gets by through simply ignoring all around him.

Dorval's response is the most active one, as befits a Communist. His communism is, however, of a rather simplistic variety, and it never seems to occur to him that it is incongrous for a Communist to be a property-owner and a

landlord. It is clear that, in any case, the Revolution he preaches will change nothing, and, as one character says: "Après la Révolution, mes maudites pommes vont encore pourrir!" Yet Dorval does at least fight the authorities, and at first, he even has some success. He chases away those who come to evict him, but, unfortunately, these are only the humblest representatives of the system, and the real heads are too distant for him to reach. He has to admit: "Mais les gros Boss, les Big Boss, on dirait qu'i'ont pas de face. On les a jamais vus." His fight begins to flag, and he can only revive it by such grotesque schemes of caricatural vengeance as sending out his tenants on a "chasse aux Anglais," promising a reward for every pair of English ears brought back. He relies more and more on beer to keep up his spirits and to encourage his tenants. He drifts frequently into memories of the past, when he fought with the French Resistance, a real resistance movement which makes his own seem puny.

Destruction continues to advance on Dorval's house, senseless, absurd, seemingly impelled by a momentum of its own. He meditates: "Ça marche parce que ça marche, ça marche pour marcher. Ça pète de certitude tandis que notre vie d'homme boite, piétine, hésite, avec les jours, les nuits, les maladies, les nuits blanches, les colères, la fatigue, le rêve, les rêves." But the worst blow comes when Dorval has to recognize how easily the capitalist system recuperates the exploited and uses them against one another. The construction workers go on strike, not against the absurd conditions of work, but for more pay. They are about to smash up the building they have been making when the union tells them they have won a victory, and sends them back to the same senseless jobs. Dorval's lodgers desert him one by one, Mignonne Fleury even moving into the new apartment block. Then Marchessault reappears, having passed his examinations at last, driving a bulldozer he is going to use to demolish Dorval's house. Even Dupont La France is glimpsed cleaning the plastic flowers outside the new apartments. Dorval sums up the situation: "Dans chaque culotte de maudit pauvre ... y a un cul de capitaliste qui se cache."

The Laterreur Brothers and Mignonne Fleury are the best examples of how the system uses people. The Laterreur Brothers canalize the discontent of the exploited (and especially of French Canadians) into harmless demonstrations of anger when they lose their wrestling matches to English and foreign opponents. They have prostituted themselves and earn a fortune by regularly allowing themselves to be beaten.[12] Mignonne Fleury even more obviously prostitutes herself. It is significant that, when at last she does offer herself to Dorval in the gaudy luxury of her new apartment, he refuses to take off his dirty shoes, refuses to compromise with her surroundings, and refuses her.

Yet, for all his defiance, Dorval's struggle is hopeless, and it seems that he will finally capitulate, for the novel ends as he walks out of his house, which Marchessault's bulldozer is about to demolish, trying to remember the words of Cowboy's last song. The words, which indicate the need to capitulate and accept, are:

Dans les airs
Sur la terre
Il faut se taire
Et l'on se terre
Dessous la terre.

Philibert's plight is just as hopeless as Dorval's. He is doomed to failure by his education, which has, as he himself points out, taught him how to get to Heaven, but not how to get to the bank. In one important scene, he reads a news-

paper article which explains how young men from certain social backgrounds seem to be fascinated by failure, and spend their lives preparing for it. Philibert is, of course, one of these. He is forced to take the sort of employment nobody else wants, and spends much of his time working in pits: digging holes in the road, working in the grease pit of a garage, peeling potatoes in a dark basement. He is here repeating his early training, which was done helping his father dig graves. These pits are, of course, symbolic of the hopeless, absurd situation in which he finds himself, and Carrier comments: "Philibert creuse sa propre fosse."

At one point, Philibert works in a factory making boots, and he has a dream which sums up the absurdity of his life. He has become so dehumanized by work in the factory that, in his dream, he turns into a boot. One day, he rebels and kicks the foreman. At that moment, he says, he felt that, "J'étais plus une bottine, mais un homme." Clearly, only by rebelling against an absurd situation can he become a man again, so he abandons his employment in the factory.

There are two symbols of hope in Philibert's life: the sun and girls. He soon learns that attractive young girls are not for him. The bank clerk he assumes will fall into his arms drives off in a beautiful new car, while Philibert gives chase in a taxi, until he has to give up through lack of money for the fare. The only type of woman available to him is the restaurant owner's wife, whom he pays for a cold and joyless coupling. As for the sun, although he glimpses it, he rarely sees it from the pits where he works. As he lies dying, he imagines he sees the sun, but: "Il est par là, le soleil . . . ," in other words, out of reach.

Philibert has no hope of changing things, and feels so politically powerless that he does not bother to vote. When he inherits some money, he dreams of going into politics, but death cuts short that dream. Death is, in fact, the only way out. A Portuguese worker on Philibert's construction site deliberately blows himself up. Philibert approves this act, saying it is the only form of protest the man has left, and it is less ridiculous than digging holes in the road.

The absurdity of life in the modern city, and the fate of men like Philibert, are also an image of the absurdity of life in general, for Carrier's work also exists on a third level, where, like *Candide*, it is a commentary on and a protest against the incomprehensible absurdity and cruelty of man's lot. Sometimes this metaphysical level is intimately connected with the commentary on life in the modern city, and Philibert's dream of being a boot, for example, can be seen both as an image of his life in the factory, or as an image of man ground underfoot by powers over which he has no control. Other times, only the metaphysical level seems appropriate. The strange things which happen to characters in Carrier's short stories, where apples spill out peculiar destructive forces ("Les Pommes," *Jolis deuils*), characters suddenly grow old ("Le Métro")[13] and men are faced with inexplicable changes in their life ("Les Cartes postales" and "La Chambre," *Contes pour mille oreilles*), are probably best seen on a metaphysical level as allegories of man in a world where he is subject to inhuman and cruel forces, such as death and the passing of time.

Carrier rejects as cruel and despotic, not only the God foisted on his characters by a particular type of religion, but any God who would impose such forces on man. It is no coincidence that, having watched the procession of twenty-one little monsters in their wheel-barrows, followed by an assortment of lame and halt, Philibert starts pulling the legs off grasshoppers: he is merely imitating a

God who allows, or practises, the mutilation of men. Such a God would never listen to man, and never helped Anthyme when, as a child, he lay awake at night, terrified of the dark. Now that he wanders alone in the forest, Anthyme realizes that it is no use seeking God's help, for: "Dieu n'aurait jamais allumé le soleil pour un homme comme Anthyme."

Since he permits the existence of the social system which crushes Philibert, God must presumably be responsible for that too. As one character tells Philibert: "Le responsable ... c'est le bon Dieu, qui a fait le monde comme il l'a voulu avec des riches et des pauvres, des petits comme nous et des gros." By the same logic, God must be responsible for the war and, if war and the social system are forced on men by "les gros," God must be, as one character says, "plus gros que les gros." Philibert says: "Le bon Dieu, il est comme le patron, on le voit pas souvent. Il fréquente pas notre genre de monde, le bon Dieu." It is significant that, in *Floralie, où es-tu?*, God's representative, the priest, is depicted as fat, that is, literally "gros." God and his priests oppress mankind, and it is no wonder that Philibert says, when praying, in a truly Freudian slip of the tongue: "Au fond, tu m'abîmes, Seigneur, Seigneur."

The veritable litanies of blasphemy which flow from the lips of Carrier's characters can be seen as a revolt both against the kind of God their religion forces on them, and against any God. The women tend to accept injustice, and Corriveau's mother, standing before his coffin, seeks consolation in prayer. The men usually rebel, which is why Corriveau's father prefers to retire to the barn and blaspheme. In Carrier's work it is a sign that a boy has grown up when he blasphemes. Philibert, as a child, sits before the severed head of the pig his father has slaughtered, imagines it is blaspheming, and longs for the time when he is old enough to do the same. In *La Guerre, yes sir!* that time arrives, and his father tells him: "Maintenant tu es un homme. Tu sais parler comme un homme."

Philibert learns later that this is not so. Blasphemy implies belief in God, or else it is meaningless; revolt implies revolt against something or someone whose existence one does not doubt. Men only become men in all senses of the word when they reject the very idea of God, as Anthyme does when he climbs a tree, challenges God to come down and settle matters like a man, and, when nothing happens, realizes God is afraid of men who do not fear him. Philibert himself says: "Un jour, je me suis aperçu qu'il y avait pas plus de bon Dieu dans le ciel que de serpent à sonnette électrique au Québec." He concludes that, since God does not exist, he, Philibert, does. Rejection of God is seen, then, as the step which liberates man, and makes him assume his own freedom and identity. The frequent blaspheming by Carrier's characters is only the first step towards this freedom, and it is in this sense that one must understand Carrier's statement that blasphemy is "la première affirmation d'une conscience individuelle."[14]

Yet, even free from the burden of belief in God, Carrier's characters still inhabit a cruel, oppressive world where they have no power over their fate. The short stories, for example, frequently have unpleasant endings, and *Jolis deuils* is subtitled "Petites Tragédies pour adultes." From the very beginning of *Floralie, où es-tu?* we are made aware that trouble is in store for the main characters: Floralie is made to wear a black dress; she is warned: "La route sera dure"; and she is terrified by a grass snake, which she thinks is really the Devil. But nowhere is the dark fatality hanging over men conveyed so well as in "La Main,"

where Carrier describes a giant hand descending from the sky, hanging over a city, pressing down on it, and then dying.

Carrier's characters are very conscious of the futility of life, and are nearly all, at one time or another, sickened by the thought of it. "La vie d'un homme ne vaut pas un pet," says Dorval; Philibert's grandmother asks: "A quoi ça sert de vivre?" while Philibert himself complains: "On m'a donné la vie sans que je la demande, comme un coup de pied au derrière."

But, if life is absurd, death is even more so. Henri in *La Guerre, yes sir!* has a dream in which he sees the whole village, followed by many other people, the sea, and troops of marching men, all enter Bérubé's coffin. The message is obvious: death is the fate of all men. What is the point, Corriveau's parents wonder, in rearing children, caring for them and bringing them to adulthood, if they end up, like their son, in a coffin? Death is ever-present in Carrier's novels: in the violent end of Philibert and Corriveau, or in the symbolic form of the graves Philibert digs, the pits he works in, and the huge holes excavated around Dorval's house. Yet, mingled with images of death, are symbols of hope and life.[15] The sun is one such symbol, and, although it shines mainly on others, Philibert does at least glimpse it. Then there are the girls in the short stories: the one who walks naked through the streets, so that everyone drops what he or she is doing to follow her in a joyous procession ("La Jeune fille"), and the one whose footsteps a man follows in the snow ("Les Pas"). In both these stories, the girl flies away, symbolizing hope, and, although one of them is shot down by a policeman, hope is kept alive, symbolized this time by the bird which flies from the policeman's severed head and perches on the guillotine.

There is hope for the individual if he will affirm himself and the life forces within him, just as there is hope for the community which will not let its life be smothered by forces representing death. Carrier's characters instinctively affirm life in the face of death, as, for example, in the famous "fête sauvage" around Corriveau's coffin. As the villagers pray, then slip off to eat, drink, blaspheme, eye the women and tell salacious stories, they are affirming life. Even their prayers are a kind of rejoicing that it is not they in the coffin. The English soldiers, with their silent, straight faces, their refusal of food and drink, and their contempt for the villagers, represent death. They are death because they wage war, but also the threat of death to the community because, as well as being soldiers, they are *English* soldiers. It is against these men too that the villagers affirm themselves, and when they are ejected by the soldiers from the Corriveau house, the old man still insists: "Nous savons vivre."

It is in the act of love, however, that Carrier's characters most obviously affirm the forces of life. It is true that the thought of death sometimes interrupts their love-making, but at other times the love-making is presented as a revolt against death. As Molly and Bérubé make love, "C'est la mort qu'ils poignardèrent violemment." Molly herself represents the forces of life as she suddenly appears half-naked amidst the villagers, a kind of antidote to Esmalda's dramatic appearance at the window and her morbid talk of death and damnation. In the midst of the ruins and destruction Dorval discovers a young couple making love, and the boy informs him: "Nous, on cherche un sens à la vie." Even the Old Woman in *Le Deux-millième étage* finds consolation in sex, and is working in Mignonne Fleury's brothel when she dies. Dorval, although he dismisses romantic love as "du vent," cannot deny the forces

of life which push him towards Mignonne Fleury. Indeed, his very communism is the result of his love for a woman Communist he knew in France.

Carrier's message is that men must cling to the earth and to life. Both Floralie and Anthyme learn during their nightmare experiences in the forest that they must turn their back on visions of death and Hell, and must cling to life. Floralie, when she regrets not having been "martyred" in the fire which destroys Père Nombrillet's chapel, is told by an old man: "Crois-moi, petite jeunesse, il vaut mieux être une fille en chair et en os qu'un saint en cendre et fumée." Anthyme, assailed by visions of Hell, grasps the earth and pulls up a handful of grass, which tastes sweet in his mouth. He realizes that "Le salut ne viendrait pas du ciel, et il posa les yeux sur la terre." When Floralie and Anthyme finally find each other, they fall asleep on the ground, to be discovered next morning by the delighted villagers, who pour beer on them, a libation to the earth and a baptism into a new life. In *La Guerre, yes sir!* the earth is represented by old Corriveau's cider, which fills the villagers with joy, and which contains the "forces merveilleuses de la terre." Dorval too loves the earth, cries out: "Moi, j'aime la terre," and symbolically revolts against death by urinating in the pit dug by the demolishers.

Characters such as these are individuals finding their own destiny, but they are also representatives of a community. Just as the individual must cling to life, must throw off the forces of death and affirm himself, so, Carrier implies, must Quebec. He says that, when he became a writer, he had to reject the influence of the culture of France, although he greatly admired it, and cling to his own culture. He had to affirm himself as a representative of that culture, and affirm his culture as a living thing. Writing of *La Guerre, yes sir!*, he says: "Écrivant mon roman, je ne me situe pas dans un univers de culture romanesque, je prends place parmi un Québec qui a été dépossédé de sa culture et qui, petit à petit, avec acharnement s'applique à se donner une âme."[16]

By his own example, and by the example of his characters, Carrier urges the need for Quebec to accept itself, to free itself from its fears, and to live. His is a literature of liberation. Yet, while his novels have a message for Quebec, and an unmistakably Quebec setting, his message applies to all men. It is Carrier's genius to have combined successfully a meditation on the destiny of a community, on the role of the individual in modern society, and on the fate of man in general.

NOTES

[1] See, for example, Ronald Sutherland, "Uses of the Grotesque," *Canadian Literature*, No. 50 (Autumn 1971), pp. 87-88, where the author refers to Carrier's use of the grotesque and to his "fantastical realism"; André Major, "Le parti-pris du réalisme caricatural," *Le Devoir* (23 mars 1968), p. 15, where Carrier's work is described as "une oeuvre de caricature"; and René Dionne, "*Jolis deuils*," *Relations*, 25 (1965), 323-24, where Dionne writes of Carrier's use of "une poésie de l'intelligence et de l'imagination."

[2] See René Dionne, "*Il est par là, le soleil*, de Roch Carrier," *Livres et Auteurs Québécois 1970* (Montréal: Editions Jumonville, 1971), pp. 54-55; P.C., "Roch Carrier, *Floralie, où es-tu?* et *Contes pour mille oreilles*," *Etudes Françaises*, 5 (1969), 492-94; Cecile Cloutier-Wojciechowska, "*Floralie, où es-tu?* de Roch Carrier," *Livres et Auteurs Québécois 1969* (Montréal: Editions Jumonville, 1970), p. 22.

[3] Roch Carrier, "Comment suis-je devenu romancier?" in *Le Roman contemporain d'expression française*, ed. Antoine Naaman et Louis Painchaud (Sherbrooke: Université de Sherbrooke, 1971), p. 268.

[4] Ibid., p. 266.

[5] Quoted by André Major, "Roch Carrier nouvelle manière: *La Guerre, yes sir!*" *Le Devoir* (2 mars 1968), p. 12.

[6] Although Carrier has written plays based on *La Guerre, yes sir!* and *Floralie, où es-tu?*, they differ little from the novels, so I have examined only his fiction in this article. The following are the works of fiction used: *Jolis deuils* (1964), *La Guerre, yes sir!* (1968), *Floralie, où es-tu?* (1969), *Il est par là, le soleil* (1970), *Le Deux-millième étage* (1973). All these are published by Editions du Jour (Montréal). I have also referred to *Contes pour mille oreilles*, in *Ecrits du Canada Français*, No. 25 (1969), pp. 135-60.

[7] "Comment suis-je devenu romancier?" p. 269.

[8] Ibid., pp. 269-70.

[9] And the goal of marriage is, of course, to produce children, a view cruelly satirized in the scene in *Il est par là, le soleil* where Carrier depicts a religious procession headed by twenty-one wheel-barrows carrying twenty-one grossly deformed children. The mother and father of these children walk behind, thanking God for "blessing" them with so many little "angels."

[10] On this point see Renald Bérubé, *"La Guerre, yes sir!* de Roch Carrier: humour noir et langage vert," in *Voix et Images du Pays III* (Québec: L'Université du Québec, 1970), pp. 145-64.

[11] Quoted by André Major, "Roch Carrier nouvelle manière: *La Guerre, yes sir!*" *Le Devoir* (2 mars 1968), p. 12.

[12] That they are meant to be viewed as prostitutes is perhaps also indicated by the fact that, despite their strength and muscular build, they are depicted as very effeminate.

[13] See also "La Chambre nuptiale," *Le Devoir* (8 avril 1965), p. 20.

[14] Quoted by Renald Bérubé, p. 146.

[15] On the intermingling of life and death and on images of life and death in Carrier's work, see Jean-Cléo Godin, "Roch Carrier: Une terre entre deux (ou trois?) soleils," *Livres et Auteurs Québécois 1971* (Montréal: Editions Jumonville, 1972), pp. 305-10.

[16] "Comment suis-je devenu romancier?" p. 272.

DAVID J. BOND

FEMALE ARCHETYPES IN *Fifth Business*

DUNSTAN RAMSAY'S DESIRE to authenticate Mrs. Dempster's three "miracles" disturbs Padre Blazon because he realizes that it says more about Ramsay than it does about Mrs. Dempster. "What good would it do you if I told you she is indeed a saint?" he asks Ramsay. "Turn your mind to the real problem: who is she. . . . What figure is she in your personal mythology? . . . That is what you must discover, Ramezay, and you must find your answer in psychological truth, not in objective truth." At this point in the novel any reader who is familiar with the implicit Jungian principles on which *Fifth Business* is based, realizes (even though Ramsay does not) that Mary Dempster is an important figure in Ramsay's personal mythology because she is a projection of some aspect of Ramsay's unconscious world — but what aspect?

Jung suggests that the process of individuation (the movement towards psychic wholeness) is complicated by the fact that modern man tends to deny the existence of the unconscious: that vast realm that keeps the Ego (the conscious part of the psyche) separate from the Self (the psyche's true and inmost centre). Before the Ego can become aware of the existence of the Self, it must begin to assimilate the personal and archetypal figures that inhabit the unconscious. As long as the Ego denies or represses these figures its freedom is in jeopardy. Jung repeatedly reminds his readers not "to underestimate [the Ego's] dependence on the unconscious" because at any moment the unconscious may erupt and assert its authority. When David unexpectedly bursts out with the question: "Who killed Boy Staunton?" during a magic show at the

Royal Alexandra Theatre, he realizes that there are forces inside him over which he has little or no control. "I was no longer in command of my actions. Something had to be done."

Those figures in the unconscious that have the most frequent influence on the Ego are what Jung calls the "shadow" (the negative side of the personality) and the "anima" (the female or "feeling" principle in a man's psyche). To become conscious of the shadow is to become aware of the unpleasant side of the personality and to acknowledge that thing of darkness as one's own. But recognizing the shadow, the personal side of the unconscious, is only part of what Blazon calls the "Great Battle." The most influential figure in the unconscious, and the one most difficult to apprehend, is the anima. The anima is not simply a composite symbolic figure that emerges in a man's unconscious as a result of early relationships with women (although it may, of course, be influenced by these women), but an innate archetypal figure "which is incarnated anew in every male child."[2] The anima has many forms ranging from the divine to the demonic: when properly assimilated it acts as a mediator between the Ego and the inner reality of the Self; but if its existence is repressed it becomes a vengeful power feeding on the very psyche which houses it. When the Brazen Head answers David's question with the words: "[Boy Staunton] was killed by the usual cabal: by himself, first of all; by the woman he knew; by the woman he did not know; by the man who granted his inmost wish; and by the inevitable fifth, who was keeper of his conscience and keeper of the stone," there is considerable speculation among the characters concerning the identity of the "woman he did not know." David thinks she is his stepmother, Ramsay thinks she is Leola, and Paul thinks she is his mother, Mary Dempster; Liesl, who speaks for the Brazen Head, admits later that she did not have any specific person in mind at the time. But the exact identity of "the woman he did not know" is not important because, whoever she may be, she could not have influenced Boy as profoundly as she did without the assistance of the other woman Boy did not know — his own anima. When Paul hypnotizes Boy, he simply gives Boy's anima (grown demonic after so many years of repression) the opportunity to express its deepest wishes: and what Boy's anima wants is Boy's destruction. Boy comes very close to bringing these wishes to a conscious level when he confides to Ramsay that he sometimes wishes he could just "get into a car and drive away from the whole damned thing." The stone that is found in Boy's mouth after his death is the stone that was hidden in the snowball that Boy threw at Ramsay when he was ten years old: the stone that missed Ramsay and struck Mrs. Dempster. Working with an ancient tradition, Jung identifies the stone as a symbol of the Self[3] and it is this idea that Davies seems to have in mind when Boy dies with the stone in his mouth. The fact that Boy has repressed his memory of throwing the stone in the snowball is symbolic of the fact that Boy has repressed an important part of his Self — a Self which he is unable to swallow even *in extremis*.

When the anima is denied, it is often unconsciously projected onto females in the man's environment: mothers, sisters, friends, and wives are forced to "become the carrier and embodiment of this omnipresent and ageless image, which corresponds to the deepest reality in a man."[4] We know a lot about the state of Ramsay's anima by the ways in which he interacts with various women in his environment. His relationship with Mrs. Dempster, for instance, owes much of its intensity and longevity to the fact that she

is (in part) a projection of some aspect of Ramsay's anima which he is unable to understand or assimilate. In his studies Jung discovered that many figures in the psyche tend to express themselves in some sort of four-fold structure. The anima is no exception. Jung suggests that the first stage in the anima's normal development emerges as a result of man's need for instinctual, biological relations and is represented by Eve; the second stage emerges from his need for a romantic, sexual relationship and is represented by Helen; the third stage emerges from his yearning for spiritual growth and is represented by the Virgin Mary; the fourth stage emerges from his thirst for wisdom and self-knowledge and is represented by Sapientia.[5] Because Ramsay's childhood was not exactly normal (his relations with his mother were, to say the least, disturbing), the four stages of his anima do not emerge in the order that Jung suggests, but they are, nevertheless, clearly manifested in his relations with the four most important women in his environment: Diana Marfleet (the Eve figure), Faustina (Helen), Mary Dempster (the Virgin Mary), and Liesl Vitzlipützli (Sapientia).

When Ramsay's mother dies, his only feeling is one of relief: "I knew she had eaten my father, and I was glad I did not have to fight any longer to keep her from eating me." At the very moment that Ramsay is having these thoughts, however, his life is being shaped by another devouring female: Diana Marfleet. But Diana is all the things his own mother should have been and was not — and Ramsay finds her very appealing. Just as his own mother (whose charity was usually directed outside the home) spent six months nursing the premature Paul Dempster towards a stable physical existence, so Diana nurses Ramsay through the six-month period of convalescence (during which he is unconscious) that follows his horrendous experience on the fields of Passchendaele. Throughout this interval Diana attends to his physical needs as a mother might attend to the needs of her infant: she bathes him, feeds him liquids, and keeps him warm and dry. In a sense Ramsay is reborn and this time the nourishing, life-sustaining female is Diana Marfleet (Diana's name is derived from the maternal deity, Diana of Ephesus,[6] not from the chaste, Roman, goddess of the hunt). Diana's function is to attend to *all* of Ramsay's biological needs — not just the ones he holds in common with infants — and it is not long after he leaves the hospital that Ramsay and Diana become lovers. As one might expect, Diana is the more experienced of the two: "Diana was not a novice . . . and she initiated me most tenderly, for which I shall always be grateful." Recalling this sexual awakening years later Ramsay speaks of it as "an important step toward the completion of [his] manhood." In one short year Diana guides Ramsay's biological development from "womb" to maturity. But maturity brings with it certain unexpected insights: "I could not be blind to the fact that she regarded me as her own creation . . . what was wrong between Diana and me was that she was too much a mother to me." Although Ramsay has projected the Eve figure in his anima onto Diana, no harm is done because he soon becomes aware of his error and realizes that he can never achieve psychic wholeness if he marries his "mother." Before Ramsay and Diana part, however, she decides to re-name him. Symbolically giving up his mother's maiden name (Dunstable), Ramsay is re-christened with the name of a saint — Dunstan.

But Diana is not the only one who shapes Ramsay's life during this crucial year. While he is unconscious for the six-month period, he is visited by the "little Madonna" who has become associated in

his mind with Mary Dempster. Seconds after the flare lands on Ramsay in the battlefield he catches a glimpse of a statue of the Virgin and Child in a niche in the nearby wall: "But what hit me worse than the blow of the shrapnel was that the face was Mrs. Dempster's face." When he finally regains consciousness six months later, he realizes that his mind has been on a "paradisal holiday" and that spiritually he was "wonderfully at ease and healingly at peace." Although all "was strange nothing was evil," and from time to time "the little Madonna appeared and looked at [him] with friendly concern." While Diana (Eve) is attending to his physical needs, Mary Dempster (the Virgin Mary) is attending to his spiritual needs. Davies seems to be basing this close association of the two figures on the Jungian suggestion that the spiritual motherhood of the Virgin Mary figure is closely related to the biological motherhood of the Eve figure.

From the beginning of their relationship Ramsay seems attracted to those qualities in Mary Dempster which his mother most conspicuously lacks: Mary laughs a lot, his mother has no sense of humour; Mary has soft, gentle features, and waving tendrils of hair, his mother has "strong features and [stands] for no nonsense from her hair"; Mary remains totally uninterested in housework despite the fact that Mrs. Ramsay, whose "privy set the sanitary tone of the village," tries to "teach her the ropes." But most significantly, Mary is the only person whom Ramsay can trust. Willing to admit that some of her actions are a little unusual, Ramsay nevertheless feels that Mary has a "breadth of outlook and a clarity of vision" that are strange and wonderful: "She knew she was in disgrace with the world, but did not feel disgraced; she knew she was jeered at, but felt no humiliation. She lived by a light that arose from within. . . . It was as though she were an exile from a world that saw things her way."

Looking back on his early adolescence, Ramsay realizes that Mrs. Dempster was "the taproot that fed [his] life," but he never seems to understand why he needed someone to fill that role. When he has a vision of her at Passchendaele (significantly in the guise of the little Madonna) he is convinced that she has performed a miracle; but Padre Blazon is skeptical: "If she appeared to save you on the battlefield, as you say, it has just as much to do with you as it has with her — more probably. Lots of men have visions of their mothers in time of danger. Why not you?" Blazon seems to realize that Mary is Ramsay's spiritual mother and that she is, to a certain extent, a manifestation of some part of his own inner reality, but Ramsay never accepts this fact. Fully aware of the way in which he encouraged Diana to play the role of biological mother, he does not realize that in his personal mythology he has cast Mary Dempster in the role of spiritual mother. Able to admit that Mary is "a part of [his] own soul," he is never able to understand the full implications of this admission. Locating the statue of the little Madonna shortly after Mary's death, Ramsay finally realizes that she does not, after all, look like Mary Dempster, but the expression, he argues, was still "undeniably hers — an expression of mercy and love, tempered with perception and penetration."

Just as the Eve and Virgin Mary figures are closely associated in Jung's analysis of the anima, so are the Helen and Sapientia figures. As one would expect, these figures are also closely associated in *Fifth Business*: Faustina (Helen) and Liesl (Sapientia) both work with Eisengrim, they are introduced to Ramsay during the same week, and it is the discovery of their sexual union (a union of mind and body perhaps?) that throws

Ramsay into the worst "collapse of the spirit" he has ever known. By drawing secrets out of Ramsay that he has never revealed to anyone else, Liesl makes the first chink in Ramsay's carefully controlled Ego ("I was an historian, a hagiographer, a bachelor of unstained character . . . a man whose course in life was set and the bounds of whose success were defined" — a chink that rapidly widens into a large fissure when he finds himself falling in love with the beautiful Faustina. Bewitched not so much by Faustina as by his own long-repressed romantic fantasies, Ramsay worships the ground on which the lady treads: "There were whole nights when I lay awake from one o'clock till morning, calling up her image before my imagination. . . . I plagued myself with fruitless questions: would the promise of a life's servitude be enough to make her stoop for me?" Ramsay finds himself attributing "subtleties to Faustina that were certainly absurd but that [he] could not fight down". Having repressed his anima for so many years, Ramsay is now forced to suffer the consequences. In Eisengrim's "Soirée of Illusions," Faustina bewitches the audience with her portrayal of three of the characters from Goethe's *Faust*: Gretchen, Helen, and the Eternal Feminine; in Ramsay's personal mythology, however, she is cast in the role of Helen, the bewitchingly beautiful maiden whose radiance has the power to turn "men's hearts and heads so that they spare neither themselves nor anything else worth sparing."[7]

Ramsay's passion for Faustina would probably never have risen to a conscious level, however, if his secret life had not already been invaded by Liesl's skillful questioning. Having always prided himself on his ability to keep secrets ("Almost from the earliest days of my childhood I had been close-mouthed,") Ramsay is dismayed to find himself babbling to Liesl about Deptford, Mary Dempster, Boy Staunton, and even the Little Madonna. Looking on all this chatter as a betrayal of his inner worth, he begs Liesl to protect his confidences; but Liesl refuses: "It has done you good to tell all you know," she says, "You look much more human already." Liesl's questions not only prod the youthful, secret-sharing side of Ramsay's personality, they also uncover some rather adolescent passions — passions he would have preferred to repress. His involvement with Faustina would have been quite acceptable at fifteen, but at fifty it is somewhat disconcerting. It is, as Liesl tells him, "the revenge of the unlived life. Suddenly it makes a fool of you." And as usual, Liesl is right.

But who is Liesl? If she is the devil, as many reviewers suggest, she is the kind of devil that Padre Blazon has in mind when he describes the devil as one who "knows corners of us all of which Christ Himself is ignorant." Certainly Liesl seems to be able to uncover corners of Ramsay's psyche that have been hidden since childhood. But Liesl's function in the novel is somewhat more complex. When Ramsay is recalling certain lacklustre love affairs that he had after his relationship with Diana Marfleet, he concludes that they were really rather insignificant compared to one very special relationship that he had several years later: "It was many years before I discovered love, and then . . . I drank the reviving drop from the Cauldron of Ceridwen." This is Ramsay's first reference to his relationship with Liesl and should not be ignored because it suggests something about Liesl's function in Ramsay's personal mythology. According to the legend, Ceridwen was a Welsh nature goddess who had an ugly, dull-witted son. Perceiving that her child was "the most ill-favoured man in the world,"[8] she mixed a number of secret herbs together which, when boiled in a large pot for a year and

a day, would yield three drops that would make her son the wisest man in the country. The drops never reached their intended destination, however, for they were accidentally swallowed by Gwion Bach, the boy who was guarding the cauldron. Pursued by the angry Ceridwen. Gwion kept changing his shape in order to escape her wrath. Ceridwen, however, was too fast for him: when he took the form of a grain of wheat, she changed herself into a hen and devoured him. But this was not the end of Gwion Bach — nine months later he was reborn and eventually became Taliesin, the wisest of poets. Since that time the Cauldron of Ceridwen has been associated with the kind of intuitive wisdom that transcends the merely corporeal. And it is this kind of wisdom that Liesl possesses — the kind of wisdom that makes her the Sapientia figure in Ramsay's personal mythology. The reviving drop that Ramsay speaks of drinking from the Cauldron is the good counsel that he receives from Liesl during their three-hour talk, a talk that does much to dissolve the illusions Ramsay has held about his own life.

Fulfilling her role as the wise woman in Ramsay's psychic world, Liesl has plenty of advice to give him. About his early homelife she says: "That horrid village and your hateful Scots family made you a moral monster"; about his religious background: "I know Calvinism as well as you do. It is a cruel way of life"; about Mary Dempster: "You despise almost everybody except Paul's mother. No wonder she seems like a saint to you; you have made her carry the affection you should have spread among fifty people"; and about Faustina: "She is of the earth, and her body is her shop and her temple, and whatever her body tells her is all the law and the prophets." She also tells Ramsay about himself and her advice is very similar to Padre Blazon's. In an attempt to make him realize that he is human she says: "Why don't you shake hands with your devil, Ramsay, and change this foolish life of yours? Why don't you, just for once, do something inexplicable, irrational, at the devil's bidding, and just for the hell of it? You would be a different man." And of course he does — he goes to bed with Liesl!

Like many Sapientia figures, Liesl has hermaphroditic characteristics. Not only is she sexually ambidextrous, but when Ramsay first sees her he is struck by her unusual appearance: "The person who was speaking to me ... was probably a woman but she wore man's dress, had short hair, and was certainly the ugliest human creature I had ever seen ... she was tall, straight, and obviously very strong, but she had big hands and feet, [and] a huge jutting jaw." Later he mentions that her voice was "impossible to identify as man's or woman's." One of Liesl's most outstanding features is her war-like nature. Huitzilopchtli,[9] the Aztec god from whom Liesl's surname seems to be derived, was noted for his aggressive, war-like nature, and certainly Liesl is one of the most aggressive females that Ramsay has ever encountered. "She was much stronger than I would have supposed," Ramsay observes, "And she had no silly notions about fighting fair." But Ramsay certainly seems to be equal to the occasion: "I hopped towards Liesl, waggling the leg with such angry menace that she made the mistake of retreating and I had her in a corner. I dropped the leg and punched her with a ferocity that I should be ashamed to recall; still, as she was punching back and had enormous fists, it was a fair enough fight." After Liesl leaves, Ramsay surveys the "battlefield" with considerable relish, admitting later that he feels better than he has felt "in a very long time." In a sense Ramsay's fight with Liesl is his fight against the intuitive, feeling side of his own psyche (note that Liesl comes closest to win-

ning the battle when she hits Ramsay with a part of his own body, his wooden leg) — a fight that he appears to have won when Liesl leaves the room in pain and frustration. When she returns a short time later, however, Ramsay dresses her wounds and it isn't long before he finds himself making peace with his enemy on her own terms: "With such a gargoyle! And yet never have I known such deep delight or such an aftermath of healing tenderness." Ramsay has finally accepted not only Liesl, but also his own inner reality.

I do not wish to reduce Davies' female characters to psychological types, nor to suggest that *Fifth Business* is some kind of psychomachia in which all of the characters are allegorical representations of some part of Ramsay's soul — the novel is far too complex for that to be true — but I think we come closer to understanding Ramsay's relationships with Diana, Mrs. Dempster, Faustina, and Liesl if we realize that in Ramsay's personal mythology they sometimes function as the Jungian archetypes.

NOTES

[1] C. G. Jung, *The Collected Works* (London: Kegan Paul, 1959), vol. IX, ii, pp. 6-7.

[2] *Ibid.* p. 14.

[3] *Man and His Symbols*, pp. 217-27. See also Jung's *Works*, vol. XII, pp. 280-300.

[4] Jung, *Works*. Vol. IX, ii, p. 12.

[5] *Ibid.* Vol. XVI, p. 174.

[6] For a more detailed description see Erich Neumann's *The Great Mother* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), p. 126.

[7] Goethe, *Faust*, translated by Barker Fairley (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970), p. 158.

[8] *The Mabinogion*, translated by Charlotte Guest (London: J. M. Dent, 1906), p. 263.

[9] In *World of Wonders* Liesl attempts to explain her relationship to Magnus Eisengrim (Paul Dempster) in their famous "Soirée of Illusions" magic show by saying that because she was entirely dependent on him for the success of the show, she chose the name "Vitzliputzli" because that was the name of one of the least of the demons that served Faust in the original, German version of the play. The name, she says, was intended as a "delicate compliment to Magnus." While this explanation may account for her dependency on Magnus, it does not allow for the somewhat paradoxical fact that she was also "Theatre Autocrat" or, to use her words, "the boss" of the entire enterprise. But since the name she chose also associates her with the god, Huitzilopchtli, a very autocratic and egotistical deity, the appelation seems appropriate. Heinrich Heine Germanized Huitzilopchtli to Vitzliputzli in his poem by the same name. For more information see Nigel Davies' *The Aztecs* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1973), pp. 14-18.

MARILYN CHAPMAN

OATES' *The Poisoned Kiss*

ANYTHING JOYCE CAROL OATES WRITES about the meaning and form of her own fiction merits attention. Her collection of short fiction, *The Poisoned Kiss and Other Short Stories from the Portuguese* (1975), contains an especially intriguing "Afterword," in which she describes the intrusion of a foreign "life, or vision, or personality" upon her own aesthetic consciousness. She began to feel intense psychic pressure from Fernandes de Briao, an "imaginary [Portuguese] author," while working on her novel *Wonderland*. Ultimately, Oates was "beseiged" to "translate" Fernandes' visions into the twenty-three "'parables" contained in *The Poisoned Kiss*: "I was never able to designate myself as the author of the stories; they were all published under the name 'Fernandes,' and I was listed as having translated them 'from the Portuguese.' " It is not my concern to speculate upon this experience of

"real or imagined 'possession' " in itself. There is no reason to doubt Oates' statement that whatever she felt was intense enough to result in extensive investigation into "parapsychology, mysticism, the occult and related subjects."

Still, the most valuable aspect of this "Afterword" is what it implies about, not only the "parables" of *The Poisoned Kiss*, but all of Oates' fiction. She writes that "the Fernandes stories come out of nowhere: not out of an interest in Portugal (which I have never visited)," or any need to penetrate in parable form the "existential" problems about which she ordinarily writes. In fact, the one-dimensional nature of the parable form does not represent the kind of fiction she prefers: "I believe that writing should recreate a world, sanctifying the real world by honoring its complexities."

Oates' view of literature as a process of sanctification is basic to her complex books of criticism, *The Edge of Impossibility* (1972) and *New Heaven, New Earth* (1974). In an essay on *A Full Moon in March* in *The Edge of Impossibility*, she praises Yeats' "obsessive commitment to a transposing of daimonic knowledge into human language." She writes that it is "Yeats' sacred duty as a poet to translate the ineffable into a fable strong enough to bear the burden of this forbidden language," and that such a duty can only be met with the aid of "magic." All great art is a form of magic, in part because "the accidental, temporal form of a human being may be a disguise of his true substance, even from himself" and this arbitrary "temporality" can only be purified or purged by the supernatural power of creative genius. The great artist, then, is the true redeemer — he understands that he must wed his consciousness with the raw materials of the world to produce something that transcends both. That final product must incorporate both the "holy" and the "daimonic" because, in man's "self" *as* in the external universe, the saint and the criminal, God and the Devil, are so inextricably interwoven that any aesthetic attempt to deny either would be incomplete and, thus, false. The redemptive mission of the artist has become increasingly difficult as established, coherent world orders have given way to accelerating chaos, resulting in human fragmentation and anonymity so severe as to border on spiritual annihilation. However, the creation of new "sanctifying" aesthetic visions in such a chaotic universe is as essential as it is difficult.

It would be an understatement to say that Oates does not share the view of many intellectual skeptics that literature cannot change anything. In *New Heaven, New Earth*, she asserts that "poetry, or the poetic imagination, has made everything happen." Thus, she is inevitably made uneasy by many contemporary American writers whom she calls "minimal" artists (she names Burroughs, Pynchon, Barthelme, Purdy, and the John Barth who wrote *Lost in the Funhouse*). The term needs clarification. Burroughs, Pynchon, Barthelme, *et al.* are, in her mind, the end product of a decaying romanticism which, confronting the chaos of twentieth-century America, retreats into an irrational longing for "entropy." Their works are the "verbalized screams and shudders" of confused egos so terrified at alienation that they express a willingness to suspend faith not only in their own personalities and external reality, but in language itself as a mode of meaningful communication. The unifying theme of Tony Tanner's study of contemporary American fiction, *City of Words*, is the prevalence of a sense of imminent entropy among many contemporary writers and their varying reactions to this external disorder and alienation. Tanner labels one reaction, that of James Purdy in *Cabot Wright Begins*, as "aesthetic skepticism." The term has specific refer-

ence to Purdy's questioning of "the ability of art to establish any contact with reality," which, of necessity, leads to "the artists' foredoomed inability to produce anything but veils, silhouettes, outlines, a schematized unreality unable to hold the drowsy prince to the promise of life." It is not Tanner's contention that all the writers he treats express an "aesthetic skepticism" as deep as that found in *Cabot Wright Begins* (he does not even feel that Purdy at his best veers so completely into a denial of *any* meaningful reality). Still, a pervasive awareness of the dissolution of external and internal meaning is shared by the writers emphasized in *City of Words*, and a concern for what Tanner calls "foreground" is a long-standing tradition in American letters. To Tanner, extreme dedication to "foreground" implies an obsessive experimentation with language precisely when distrust in the viability of language as meaningful communication is most extreme: "there is detectable an element of radical distrust of language among many American writers, even while paradoxically they must perforce continue to work with it to preserve the extended range of possibilities it makes available." Tanner's analysis calls to mind such ironic manipulation of language as found in Barthelme's *Snow White* (the elaborate invention of words like "horsewife" and "vatricide"). In regard to *The Poisoned Kiss*, three final comments concerning Tanner's work are relevant: Oates refers to it with respect in *New Heaven, New Earth*; *City of Words* contains an introductory discussion emphasizing Borges and Nabokov as the two major foreign inspirations for the intense dedication to "foreground" among contemporary American writers; and both these points are relevant to a key story in *The Poisoned Kiss*, "Plagiarized Material."

Neither Tanner nor I believes that the ironic pushing of language to its extremes which is so pervasive in the Burroughs-Pynchon-Barthelme-Purdy school leads inexorably to "aesthetic skepticism."[1] However, that is not really the point here. Oates would, of course, feel that writers who have lost faith in their own "personalities," the validity of external reality, and language itself, cannot fulfill the "sacred duty" of the redemptive artist. In fact, preoccupation with the manipulation of language for "absurdist" effect, when the inherent power of language itself is questioned, must seem to her an extreme form of cynicism. In *New Heaven, New Earth*, she writes: "since so refined an art willfully excludes the emotional context of its own creation, personality is minimal; art is all." "Minimal art" is "all," but not nearly enough. Oates' discussion of "minimal art" is finally a variation on the old argument concerning the validity of art for art's sake. She sees the Burroughs-Barthelme kind of writer as both too serious and not serious enough. Innovation in form and technique is not adequate in itself to compensate for a discarded faith in literature as the expression of "communal tragedy." Oates can respond to Norman Mailer and James Dickey, even though annoyed by the adolescent preoccupation with "masculinity" in *Why Are We in Vietnam?* and *Deliverance*, because Mailer and Dickey have a very "serious" regard for the role of their own personalities in transmitting "communal" experience.

There is a particularly teasing sentence in the "Afterword" to *The Poisoned Kiss*: "the only way I could accept these stories [Fernandes' "parables"] was to think of them as a literary adventure, or a cerebral/ Gothic commentary on my own writing, or as the expression of a part of my personality that had been stifled." All three descriptions are applicable. Beginning with the story, "Letters to Fernandes from a Young American Poet," much of

the last third of the volume can be seen as "a cerebral/Gothic commentary" not only on her own art, but upon the contrast between "minimal art" and "sanctifying art." Because of her faith in total "personality," Oates has always been concerned with all forms of human passion. A number of the *Poisoned Kiss* "parables" focus upon aspects of passion which are certainly not unprecedented in her work, but which she has not previously treated in quite so bold a manner. There are a number of homosexuality stories in the volume. The statement that her " 'possession' " by Fernandes began during the writing of *Wonderland* is especially interesting in this regard since homosexuality is an extremely understated aspect of the Jesse Harte Pedersen Vogel-Trick Monk relationship in that novel. Still Oates must feel the heterosexual's restraint in dealing with this theme, and approaching it boldly and directly as she does in *The Poisoned Kiss* is an "adventure."

Other variations on the theme of passion are central to the Fernandes "parables": the crippling nature of religious "adoration" in contrast to secular "love," the fascination which the criminal and the "abnormal" hold for the "average man," and the forces (parental, governmental, and scientific) which seek to control and limit the total development of "personality." These themes are inherent in all her fiction. Thematically, then, *The Poisoned Kiss* does not represent a radical departure for Oates. Technically, it does because the surrealistic settings of her previous fiction are replaced by something more closely approximating allegory than Portugal.

In two stories, Oates directly contrasts "sanctifying art" and "minimal art." "Letters to Fernandes from a Young American Poet" tells of a great Portuguese writer named António who has been taken captive by the government of "S." (Salazar) and abandoned by most of his friends, including Fernandes. The letters are the plea of an American disciple of António that Fernandes not irrevocably desert the imprisoned genius. What is crucial in the story is the young American's description of the writing and life of his master. The American had been carried out of the prison of his "self" by the totality of the Portuguese poet's "vision:" "love in all its Shapes, serpentine and ponderous Shapes, the denial of nothing, no landscape too ugly for him." He has even come to see that the "landscape" of his home, Youngstown, Ohio, described in detail as a frightening, polluted, anonymous sprawl, must not simply be repudiated. Throughout her work, Oates has sought to confront "love in all its Shapes" and to deny nothing, including the suffocating landscape of urban America.

António is correctly perceived by the government as a dangerous figure because he, in fact, preaches "revolution": "nothing blown up or thrown into the air & raining down but a Spiritual change so much more violent — how all the countries of the world could be transformed, even the United States." One hardly needs to point to the concentration upon violence in Oates' work or to say that a prayer for "spiritual" transformation underlies all that she has written. D. H. Lawrence, Yeats, António, Joyce Carol Oates, all "visionary artists" are the ultimate revolutionaries, advocating not political or economic change, but spiritual rebirth. Thus, it is inevitable that forces seek to destroy António's work. His language itself is the enemy and it must be erased: "when the language is erased we will all be erased." Language is the means of redemption, not something with which one plays elaborate games. The young American poet is "proud" of having resisted "the North American consciousness-slop, where so many poets,

some of them older than myself, are permanently stuck." The trap of "minimal art" has been escaped because of the redemptive power of António.

The central themes of "Letters to Fernandes" are foreshadowed in the story, "The Sacred Marriage," contained in *Marriages and Infidelities*. In this earlier story, a passive, emotionless scholar is initiated into passion by his admiration for a dead poet, named Connell Pearce, and his love for the poet's widow. Working with the Pearce papers in the dead genius' West Virginia home, the scholar falls in love with Pearce's very beautiful widow. Just as he becomes certain that he will marry the woman (she has controlled the initial seduction and even suggested that she become pregnant), she begins to retreat from the relationship. He then discovers among the Pearce papers some notes for " 'religious parables and riddles' ": X, "the famous Spanish novelist, nobleman.... Many adventures, prison," approaching death, finds a young woman who is "worthy" of him and marries her; after his death she becomes the lover of X's disciples, "a multitude of lovers come to her, lovers of X, and she blesses them without exception, in her constant virginity." Realizing that his relationship with Connell Pearce's widow has paralleled the dead poet's outline of the legacy of X, the scholar is plunged into momentary despair. Ultimately, however, he feels renewed dedication to his task of editing the poet's posthumous work. Like António of "Letters to Fernandes," Connell Pearce is a "sanctifying" artist; and he creates intense passion in a disciple. That the story of X is described as one of a series of proposed " 'religious parables and riddles' " illustrates how closely *The Poisoned Kiss* is tied to Oates' earlier work.

"Plagiarized Material," the longest story in the volume, is an elaborate satire of "minimal" artists. Cabral, the central character, is a European nobleman who devotes himself to the writing of fiction which is based solely upon gamesmanship with words and which attracts young admirers throughout the world, particularly in France and the United States. Oates goes to great lengths to establish Cabral's aristocratic credentials, to the point of emphasizing that much of the family wealth is derived from both American copper and tin mines. Obviously, her satire is specifically aimed at Borges and Nabokov; but what is more crucial is her attack on the veneration of Cabral's kind of art. In a book entitled, *In the Mind of the Brain of Cabral* the master outlines his aesthetics:

> "All my writing, as it is written, cancels out the tradition in which it is written. It is not magic, but anti-magic. It has no meaning. It *is*.... The words *are* only themselves; they have no purpose outside themselves.... The world releases a stench; the world is not equal to any subjective, specific, anti-magical assault upon it. That is why my writing reduces the world to words and, ultimately, words to silence."

Unable to love anything, even the exercises of his own elaborate imagination, contemptuous of passion, love, "the world," and even language, Cabral finally retreats into the ultimate "silence" of suicide. Whether the satire here is fair or not, it pinpoints Oates' objections to the writers of anti-stories and anti-novels. "Anti-magic" is to her an accurate description of the results of "aesthetic skepticism," and a term of ultimate literary blasphemy. The repudiation of "magic" implies a necessary abdication of the "sacred duty" of the great artist to "sanctify" the world. When emotion, tradition, reality, and the sanctity of language are erased, aesthetic suicide is the inevitable result.

In two other stories, Oates seems to be reflecting on her own career. The concluding "parable," "Journey," describes

a trip in which the narrator starts out on a broad, well-travelled highway (at this point, she is "a lover of maps"), turns onto increasingly less travelled roads, and ultimately ends her journey on foot in a dense forest. In an almost defiant tone of affirmation, the ending asserts that the traveller is not lost and would make her trip in the same manner had she to do it again. There is something curiously elegiac about "Journey." Perhaps Oates wrote it, as well as "Plagiarized Material," partially in a despairing attempt to teach critics who see only morbidity and doom in her fiction. It is easy to outline the symbolic overtones of "Journey" — the initial broad highway represents the existential, realistic tradition on which her work is based, and the movement to the final dense forest corresponds to the abandonment of realism in *The Poisoned Kiss.*

The volume's "title story" recounts the narrator's efforts to cross an obstacle-filled "pathway to you." Various "strangers" attempt to stop him and must be subdued. Finally, a soothsayer detains him with "idle questions" and is hurled into an "open tomb." At least two complementary readings are possible for "The Poisoned Kiss": it is an allegory of the difficulty of realizing passion in a world that must rationalize everything; or it, like "Journey," is a "parable" of the struggles of Oates' own career. Passion, even to the point of violence, is, after all, a critical ingredient in her fiction.

"Journey" and "The Poisoned Kiss" are two of the least successful stories in this complex volume because they do read so much like the efforts of Oates to explain and defend herself. In them, the allegorical landscape is too dominant and too contrived. Seen as advance signals of a coming new stage in her writing, they become more meaningful, but perhaps even more troubling.

Five "parables" focus directly upon the theme of homosexuality. In three of them, the pattern is the same: a prominent young man becomes entangled in an alliance with a type of "hustler" and is torn between the conflicting needs to save his reputation and to preserve the passion of the relationship. Oates is really attempting to cover difficult ground in her "sacred" obligation to study "love in all its Shapes." Since this group of "parables" deals exclusively with male homosexual love, she has embarked upon the most foreign of possible territories. As a heterosexual woman, Oates has left herself open to much potential attack in even approaching this theme. Still, the three "hustler stories" do communicate the main characters' love for the "hustlers," as well as the purgatorial hell of such socially forbidden relationships. A fourth "parable," "The Secret Mirror," is perhaps the most daring of all in its description of a transvestite dressing before a mirror. Because of her commitment to the redemptive nature of passion in and of itself, one does not want to say that Oates is passing negative judgment here; still she ordinarily utilizes mirrors, as contrasted to windows, as symbols of a crippling narcissism. That is perhaps the point: the transvestite, because of his terror of the crowd outside, cannot possibly find anyone who might share his passion.

The homosexuality stories lead naturally into a discussion of two related themes of *The Poisoned Kiss*: other "dark" aspects of passion, and the varying societal restraints upon emotional fulfillment. The bond between criminal and saint, the normal and the abnormal, is central to "Parricide," "Distance," "In a Public Place," "The Cruel Master," "The Murderer," and "Maimed." In "Parricide" and "The Murderer," the "normal," "innocent" narrators are irresistibly compelled by the power of young killers. "In

a Public Place" describes the strangulation of an elderly, sleeping man by the narrator in an ancient hotel filled with half-alive guests. After the killing, the narrator sits "contented" aware that "the utter safety of such a place is a kind of oblivion; in such reservoirs of civilization you understand that you are immortal." This particular "parable" illustrates a side of Oates' work that is puzzling, even threatening, to many critics. The half-alive, the spiritually crippled trappings of our civilization must be discarded violently if there is no other way. Her work becomes "disturbing" when she uses the metaphor of the killing of a human being to emphasize her call for a spiritual revolution necessarily preceded by destruction of all that is obsolete and stifling (e.g., Jules Wendall's momentary rejuvenation after shooting the policeman in *them*).

In "The Cruel Master," a doctor begins to retreat into a hypnotic vision of a young boy being trampled by a horse: "for all his adult life he had cared for the sick and the injured, wrestling with them, but now, with a beating heart that seemed concentrated on the roof of his parched mouth, he was free to simply contemplate the fact of their suffering." Oates has, of course, analyzed such essential, but crippling, scientific restraint before — most memorably in *Wonderland*. In "Maimed," Oates turns almost completely to allegory in her analysis of the wedding of the saintly and the diabolic in human personality. Rather than spiritual demonism, she uses physical disfigurement, and focuses upon the necessity of the abnormal being defining himself by the concepts of the norm. However, the landscape here is so divorced from realism that one begins to wonder if the disfigurement may, indeed, be emotional or spiritual.

"Distance" is the best of this group of "parables." In it, a respectable young Portuguese diplomat is sent to London where he destroys his career because of his fascination with a group of vagrants who "live" in a public park near his hotel. Initially repulsed by them, he cannot get the vagrants out of his mind until he is finally compelled to transverse the "distance" between them and himself. The story works well largely due to Oates' use of a shadowy, half-seen member of the hobo group who symbolically represents the narrator's unconscious need to join it. The respectable American's hatred/fascination response to the young "freaks" of our counterculture is central not only to *Wonderland*, but to such short stories as "Stray Children" from *Marriages and Infidelities*.

However fascinated, respectable society does attempt to repress everything it deems "unnatural." In *The Poisoned Kiss*, Oates examines four specific variations of such repression: scientific, parental, governmental, and religious. "The Brain of Dr. Vicente" is a "parable" of the dehumanization which results when the scientific rationalist attempts to deny his emotions and the needs of his body. In contrast to her complex characterization of Jesse Harte Pedersen Vogel, Oates exhibits no sympathy for Dr. Vincente, the one-dimensional rationalist. Parental pressure for "respectable" achievement and against "the dark passions" is the central focus of "The Enchanted Piano," as well as constituting a subordinate theme in several other "parables" (The Cruel Master," "Sunlight/Twilight," and "Plagiarized Materials"). Throughout Oates' fiction, one finds children psychologically crippled by respectable, "emotionless" parents (e.g., the narrator of *Expensive People*, Shelley in *Wonderland*). Since such passionless adults are especially dominant among her middle- and upper-class characters, it is not surprising that she treats political systems as emotionally repressive. In democratic

states, governments are, after all, primarily instruments of the middle and upper classes. The Portuguese setting allows Oates to use overt fascism as a metaphor for corrupted American democracy. Since the middle and upper classes most fear "spiritual revolution," it is inevitable that the Salazar government will retaliate against António, the "sanctifying" artist, but not against an aristocratic, "minimal" writer such as Cabral.

Portugal as setting also allows Oates to overtly connect political and religious repression. One hardly needs to be told that, in a fascist country, the church functions as an arm of the state. However, the repressive nature of organized religion is every bit as real, if more subtle, in a democracy. Inevitably the same one-dimensional middle- and upper-class adults who "own" political parties control the churches through economic power. Thus, organized religions in fascist *and democratic* states correctly see passion, the essential inspiration for any spiritual revolution, as a dangerous force.

In "The Son of God and His Sorrow," Oates describes the central dilemma of all Christ figures — since the human pain of this world and the needs of the body are ultimately not "real," the Christ figure becomes a traitor to God in exactly the degree to which he responds to altruistic emotion and physical passion. Writing about *The Brothers Karamazov* in *The Edge of Impossibility*, Oates contrasts the "existential" and the "Christian" visions:

> The existentialist accepts all responsibility for his actions and does not beg forgiveness, but he accepts absolutely no responsibility for actions that are not his own. The essentialist (in this context, the ideal Christian) accepts all guilt for all actions, is morally ubiquitous, has no singular identity, can be forgiven for any sin, no matter how terrible, because he ultimately has no freedom and no responsibility, not simply for his own sins but for the sins of mankind; he is a "creature."

The Christ figure in "The Son of God and His Sorrow" is finally unable to deny the "singular identity" of his human, existential self and orders his mother to crucify him. "I am unable to purify myself. God shrieks at me: *Always this happens! Always my sons disobey me!*" To the degree that they are unescapably human, saviours must indeed disobey *this* God. Besides its strictly religious context, this "parable" has several possible implications: "god" here is the inhuman savior of Christian theology, as well as the cumulative societal pressures which war against man's "unnatural" passions.

In her "Afterword," Oates writes that "Our Lady of the Easy Death of Alferce" represents her initial "possession" by Fernandes; and this "parable" does certainly tie together several major themes of *The Poisoned Kiss*. The central figure is a statue of the madonna. Carrying the Christ child in her arms, she is imprisoned, turned "to stone," by the adoration of her worshippers. However, when a young man in the congregation gazes at her with human, passionate love, she is terrified; and later the man's mother attacks her and pulls the Christ child from her arms, screaming: *"You are not Mary! You are a thief, a murderer! ... My son was poisoned by you — they have taken him away — ."* Although the woman is subdued, she "steals" Christ from the madonna, who is replaced on her pedestal with a "wooden doll in His place." The story graphically outlines Oates' formula for meaningful "spiritual" change — "Christ" must be made human through the birth of a new veneration of man's passionate existential "totality." Only recognition and acceptance of man as "thief" and "murderer," as well as "innocent" child, can bring salvation. Not simply institutions such as the church, but the modern psyche itself,

must cease to fear the "demonic," the "unnatural." Such a fundamental change in human morality will not come easily — "they" will attempt to repress it. Even the human mother in this "parable" does not really understand her son's passion. Modern man will be tempted always to prefer the "easy death" of inhuman adoration to the spiritual challenge inherent in human passion.

Joyce Carol Oates is essentially a writer of contemporary spiritual history. In her "Preface" to the collection of stories about "Young America," *Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?*, Oates directly confronts what she feels is a basic misunderstanding of her writing. While older critics find only "morbidity" and "absurdity" in her work, younger readers "intuitively" understand that her central theme is a redemptive one — "human beings struggling heroically to define personal identity in the face of incredible opposition, even in the face of death itself." Man has always had great difficulty in accepting his own mortality; moreover, we twentieth-century Americans live in an age and a culture of deep-seated pessimism. Our culture is one "in which the concept of 'divinity' was snatched up by a political/economic order, and the democratic essence of divinity denied."

Still, she feels that a rebirth of faith in man's inherent divinity is inevitable: "though it has been denied, this essence of divinity has not been destroyed, and we are witnessing in our time its re-emergence, its evolution back into consciousness." Even the despair resulting from mortality is being transcended: "And I believe a new, healthier, saner concept of the experience of death is also evolving in our time." We are, in fact, in the midst of a critically important redemptive hour in the long struggle that is man's spiritual history: "a new morality is emerging in America, in fact on the North American continent generally, which may appear to be opposed to the old but which is in fact a higher form of the old — the democratization of the spirit, the experiencing of life as meaningful in itself, without divisions into 'good' or 'bad,' 'beautiful' or 'ugly,' 'moral' or 'immoral.'" Oates has often seemed an essentially pessimistic writer because her novels focus so intensely upon diagnosing the symptoms of our diseased culture. Even the characters who struggle for a transcendent vision in her novels seem ultimately to fall short of attaining a truly permanent spiritual rebirth. However, the sheer difficulty of their struggle conveys a degree of redemption.

The "parables" in *The Poisoned Kiss* are not a thematic departure for Oates. They document the essential causes of contemporary spiritual alienation (fear of man's "totality," of the "demonic" side of his personality, and a fundamental distrust of the self and the world which has resulted in the phenomena of "minimal" artists skeptical of the power of language and devoted to "anti-magic") and they outline the formula requisite for salvation ("sanctifying" artists describing all possible "Shapes of love"). What is different, and disturbing, about these "parables" is their form. In the "Preface" to *Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?*, Oates says that the "mode" in which she ordinarily writes is that of "psychological realism." One accepts this term as descriptive of most of her work. Indeed, the "psychological realism," or surrealism, of her novels is crucial to their importance. No contemporary writer has managed to document so thoroughly as Oates the surface reality and underlying moral and spiritual "unreality" of American life.

It is possible that the total "unreality" of landscape in *The Poisoned Kiss* repre-

sents the beginning of a new, but not entirely unanticipated, phase of Oates' career. In such stories as "Stalking" (in *Marriages and Infidelities*), Oates has utilized the allegorical mode before; and allegory can never be totally foreign to the "mystic" or "visionary" consciousness. Indeed, such a mode must have its obvious attractions for a "sanctifying" artist who foresees the birth of "a new morality" in the American "wonderland." Still, a writer of historical fiction, even contemporary spiritual history, is best served by a realistic prose foreground. The struggles of Clara Walpole, Jules Wendall, and Jesse Harte Pedersen Vogel to attain transcendent visions become truly meaningful only through Oates' depiction of the spiritual wastelands in which they live (migrant worker camps, the urban decay of Detroit, the "inhuman landscapes" of New York and Michigan and the medical profession itself). In contrast, the allegorical mode inevitably leads to a completely "unreal" setting which cannot be reconciled with a precise documentation of our contemporary spiritual decay. Throughout her career up to "the Fernandes parables," Oates has consistently attempted "to re-create" and "to sanctify" "a world" by "honoring the complexities" of "the real world"; and the resulting wedding of "mysticism" and "realism" has been a vital ingredient in her artistic power.

NOTE

[1] Tanner is quite correct in observing, for instance, that for all his surface playfulness, Donald Barthelme is "distinctly not at home in the trash age." One could argue that the desperate tone of a Burroughs comes from a last-ditch protest against the dissolution of all values, rather than from the surrender of a locked-in ego to entropy.

JAMES R. GILES

ON THE VERGE

*** JEREMY ADAMSON, *Lawren S. Harris.* Art Gallery of Ontario. Exhibition catalogues — conscious of their role as guides to the actual paintings, seldom reproduce paintings in colour; they are more valuable as texts (and sometimes just as memorabilia) than as coffee table ornaments. Adamson's catalogue contains several colour prints, and a fine text, which explores theosophy and poetry as well as travel and composition. It will particularly aid those who seek connections between literature and painting and glimpses of painting's role in Canadian intellectual history.

W.N.

** CAROLE HARMON, ed. *Great Days in the Rockies: The Photographs of Byron Harmon 1906-1934.* Oxford, $14.95. Canada and the art of photography came of age at about the same time, though perhaps not the same rate. Harmon's skill both with the mountains and the camera is lovingly recorded here. What also emerges from the pictures is a sense of the cameraderie and the warm humour of the mountain expeditions. There is a degree to which loneliness is a later fabrication of authors and critics.

W.N.

** KENNETH MACKINNON, ed. *The Marco Polo Papers I: Atlantic Provinces Literature Colloquium Papers.* Atlantic Canada Institute, $4.75. Readers who found *Canadian Literature*'s Maritime issue (No. 68-69) appealing will find further commentary in this collection. In part it is a call to literary arms (Douglas Lochhead's outline of projects in need of executors), and in part a critical anthology. Particularly striking are Gwendolyn Davies' article on women in early periodical literature and four exploratory papers on Acadian writing.

W.N.

** ROBERT H. HANDY, *A History of the Churches in the United States and Canada.* Oxford, $22.95. There is much straight information in this book: names, dates, boundary lines, and disputes, more on the U.S.A. than on Canada. What Handy tells is a political story of Christian institutional expansion and multiplication; but it is political without the cultural politics. If anything it underestimates the importance of Catholicism in early Quebec and it neglects to make clear the subtleties of distinctions among the various orders; the cultural weight of the Ryerson-Strachan disputes

is comparably reduced to an acknowledgement of dispute; and the book stops with Christianity: scarce mention of Judaism, and no mention at all of the Sikh temples and Muslim mosques that more recently have become part of the landscape. But within its limits, it is an authoritative document of one strand of empire.

W.N.

*** CLAUDE LEVI-STRAUSS, *Myth and Meaning*. Univ. of Toronto Press, $7.50; paper $2.95. These five radio talks — the 1977 Massey lectures — derive from questions about our perceptions of mythology: rejecting the simple dichotomy that distinguishes it from "science," rejecting the habit of dismissing the "primitive," and positing connections between myth and music as habits of sound, and between closed mythological and open historical systems of sense. Readers of Frye's *Spiritus Mundi* and of West Coast Trickster fables will alike be illuminated by this articulate thinker.

W.N.

*** PIERRE SAVARD, *Mélanges d'histoire du Canada français offerts au professeur Marcel Trudel*. L'Université d'Ottawa, n.p. The festschrift is an opportunity both for honouring a distinguished person and for contributing further to that person's field of inquiry. Savard, himself a distinguished historian, has brought together a fine set of glimpses of colonial French Canada: glimpses of economic structure, the military establishment, the Church's role in finance, the history of the word "north," and other special subjects. A bibliography of Trudel's work and essays on historiography are further meritorious features.

W.N.

*** S. W. JACKMAN, ed. and intro., *The Journal of William Sturgis*. Sono Nis, n.p. Sturgis was one of the Boston captains whose fortunes lay in the coats of the sea otter herds off British Columbia. This logbook narrative of the early nineteenth century valuably records the graphic — and unusually particular — observations of one voyage. Relations with the Indians were by no means consistent. Jackman's commentary supplies a context for interpreting them, and Sturgis' own glossary of Indian vocabulary shows a more than casual contact with a civilization not his own.

W.N.

** JANICE L. MURRAY, ed. *Canadian Cultural Nationalism*. Proceedings of the 4th Lester B. Pearson Conference on the Canada-United States Relationship. New York University Press and Macmillan of Canada, $4.95. Conference proceedings sometimes communicate on the page all that was important about a gathering of minds; sometimes they miss it altogether, for they do not come to terms with the kinds of exchanges and reflections that matter most. This compilation attempts to perform both tasks, printing some informational background papers (Cook, Rolland, and Swanson) aimed at an American audience, and some later impressions of participants. No cultural nationalist should be unaware of the historical data Cook provides, or of his cautionary comments. Nor should he be unaware of the implications of Denis Smith's magnificent title: "Choosing Our Distance."

W.N.