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CONTEMPORARY DRAMATISTS & THE ART OF THE THEATRE

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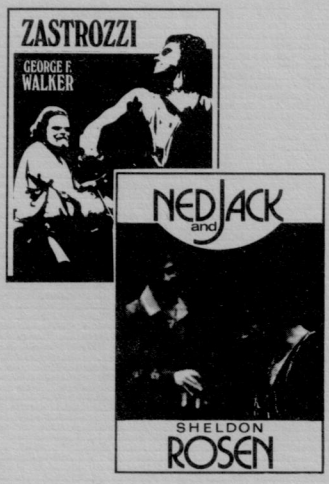

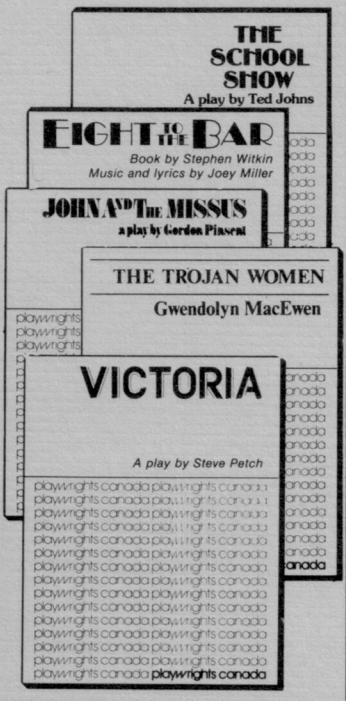

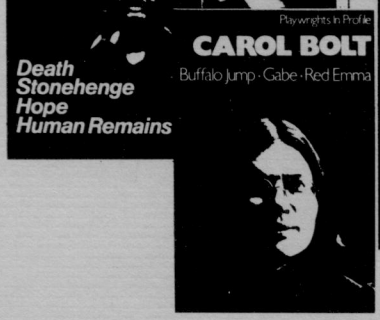

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editorial

CURRENT TRENDS

THERE IS A HABIT OF MIND most of us fall into now and then: which is to predict the future on the basis of the present. Statisticians tell us so often that "if current trends continue" such-and-so will follow that unless we pick up quickly on the supposition involved we are likely to believe what they say. It strikes me that "current trends" seldom continue. People, being human, have such a persistent knack for changing their minds and acting as individuals and making separate choices that they confound those who would classify and categorize their behaviour. But even a statement like this one is built on certain assumptions: one of them being a hope that there will continue to be options among which people will be able to choose. That might be equally as blinkered a belief as the statisticians' set of axioms.

Consider what has happened in the publishing industry in the past few years. During the 1960's there was such an explosion of print that we all began to accept such a *quantity* of books and information as the norm we lived with. The Canadian literary scene thrived; scores of books of fiction and poetry (and more lately, drama) appeared, not all of it good by any means, but all contributing to the general seriousness with which people (academics, governments, industry, the public at large) began to treat Canadian writers and writing. Last year and this, there have been quite extraordinary cutbacks in the quantity of Canadian books published. Tundra has cancelled its excellent children's literature programme (and coincidentally *Canadian Children's Literature* and *Contemporary Literature in Translation* have folded); Talon briefly suspended publication (and as the major drama publisher in the country, this had serious ramifications regarding the availability of play-texts); Macmillan has cut back both on publication and on distribution, its future under Gage unknown; McGill-Queen's announced its demise; McClelland & Stewart has removed all items from its backlist that have been selling fewer than 1000 copies per year (including items in the New Canadian Library), and refuses now to consider manuscripts that have not come to the company via literary agents; the University of Toronto Press has indicated it will publish more "high-scale" academic works (specifically meaning biography and

social science, and by implication meaning fewer works in literature and criticism). Companies across the country have been raising prices of books in backlist; and all face the future in a certain tension. Unfortunately neither the tension nor the cut in quantity guarantees any increase, even on average, in quality. The industry's reflexes are not aesthetically or altruistically motivated, but responses to inflation, to government policy, and to development in retail sales. The effects of these actions may well in the short run be to minimize financial losses; but in the long run they will also curtail the development of a richly varied Canadian literature, and reduce, for school students and public alike, both the availability of books and the opportunities for choice.

One cannot blame the publishers for these actions. As responses to inflation — even if inflation doesn't make sense — the actions make sense. As responses to government policy — over two governments — they are, moreover, protective stances. One would like to attribute tiredness, for example, during the recent election campaign, as the sole motivation for the then Minister of Cultural Affairs to assert that the number of copies sold was an accurate measure of a book's quality (such a statement came as a defence of a policy that supported publication *in a ratio based upon number of copies each publisher sells*: i.e., best-sellerism); but that does not necessarily explain the policy. Mentioning Shakespeare in such a context does not clarify matters: the current policy applies over single publishing seasons — which is why the retail sales policies of the big chains (now taking over so large a part of the retail book market) also have their effect. By choosing mainly to stock mass sale volumes — and by not keeping backlist items in stock — the centrally controlled chains compound the impression given the public that best-sellers are the only current works of quality, and they closely restrict the choice from among which people may select books to read. By not stocking all works that publishers do produce, they create problems both for author and publisher; but by controlling the market, they also come dangerously close to controlling the availability of art and information.

Textbooks constitute a distinct subset of this problem. Enough of us went through Canadian schools with American textbooks to remember that the cultural bias of texts designed outside the country will often interfere with education rather than aid it. To take an easy example: think of that question that always appeared as a writing assignment — "Discuss the role of our President." The fact that he wasn't "ours" was only mildly intrusive; and the weak teacher's simple substitution "Discuss the role of our Prime Minister instead" was only mildly irritating. Deep at the heart of the question (and the substitution) was a far more disconcerting problem of attitude: whatever role the President has in the United States, it is neither the same as the Prime Minister's in Canada, *nor do the two functions occupy the same position in each nation's set of cultural priorities.* To effect a simple substitution implies that they do, and that the societies in structure and values

merely mirror each other. Surrendering to the assumptions of the misleading texts (whether American, British, French, or whatever) meant in some degree surrendering the viability of one's own culture. It doesn't always happen, but we cannot afford to ignore that it sometimes does, and that cultural bias and education are related in more than obvious ways.

In the last ten years, one of the efforts of Canadian publishers has been to make a lot of Canadian textbooks available. Again we are concerned both with quality and with availability: with *choice*, and with preserving for new generations of students an availability of resources which will individually and variously aid them. Now, with the general paring away of national publishers' backlists, a lot of textbooks — and consequently the opportunity to choose to use them — have disappeared along with remaindered volumes of poetry, fiction, and drama. Once again we have to match the reality of financial exigencies against the more general threat of cultural loss. One must applaud the efforts of many cost-conscious school boards not to waste public funds — provided, of course, that they have a sensible definition of "waste": even when a generation of students is small, as now, the individual students have the right to expect from their society a quality education. It has to be funded adequately; it has to make advantageous use of all current resources, including teachers first of all, and space, and mechanical and other equipment, and books; and it has to cultivate individual talents and encourage a breadth of cultural expectations. This is something that the Lévesque government has understood about the youth of Quebec: the government is acutely concerned to invest in the young, and in a particular belief about the future. By contrast, Anglophone Canada seems intent lately on sacrificing a generation to the economy and to have rooted its educational imagination in the managerial world of Frederick Philip Grove: the watchwords are *Cut Back* and *Control* rather than *Encourage* or *Choose*. The difference has implications for publishing as well as politics.

I have been considering lately a variety of Canadian texts concerning the teaching of French to elementary school children: in part because they reveal some of the differences between Quebec publishing and publishing elsewhere in the country, and in part because they focus on a political/educational dilemma. Clearly having a command of both English and French is an advantage for anyone, facilitating a flexibility of movement and expression; yet for political and economic reasons (stubbornly ignoring the commonsense attitude that says it behooves us to insist that the next generation be as skilled in all the skills it possibly can be), we all too often in Canada have dismissed second language training as unimportant or improper. Texts have been unavailable. And the market has been susceptible to the Package Deal promotions of American textbook-tape-&-machinery companies. To find Canadian materials now coming available at this time of burgeoning bestsellerism is therefore both a remarkable and a welcome event. Two particular series are worth careful notice. The first, from Copp Clark-Pitman, is

called *Invitation à la lecture*, and comes as a set of seven small simply-illustrated books (at level 2; there are other levels as well), by Claudine Courtel and Marie-Antoinette Mantione; though one balks, in one of the volumes, at the comicbook biases used to portray Indians, the mini-stories appeal to children and at the same time show a pedagogical sensibility at work. The writers are aware of the importance of *sound*, and the stories are written to develop a sense of *cadence*, which second-language teaching so often ignores. (Indeed, Copp Clark-Pitman's *En français, s'il vous plaît*, intended for early teens, is far less successful in part because it fails to transform grammar into a flow of speech. It tries to. It nicely balances cartoons and photographs and tries to emphasize the linguistic function of the mélange of points each chapter asserts; but the situations it offers as bait — "this chapter will enable you to do . . . " — are not coherent enough for a student on his own to be able to sort out what he is learning, or interesting enough for most teenagers to want to bother.) From Quebec, however, comes another quantity of material designed for second-language learning. Two records, designed to supplement printed material, are quite simply marvellous kindergarten songs to listen to: Guy Auger's *Chansons dans le vent* (Les Editions projets) celebrates seasons and festivals, city and country, and so on; while *C'est la recréation*, by Edith Butler, Angèle Arsenault, and Jacqueline Lemay, is a game and nonsense record that just plays vigorously with sound and takes great joy in the patterns of speech. Again the stress is on cadence, on the mastery of *voice*; and several levels of text (books like *Du soleil pour toi*, *Fantaisies*, and *Farandoles*) entertain as well as instruct, while addressing themselves to aural mastery. In an age when print seems such a foreign medium to so many people, this assertion of the connection between voice and the printed word reaffirms the fact that language can at once be functional and give pleasure.

A number of children's books from Leméac, boldly coloured and in large type, reinforce the delight in language that can come from an elementary "educational" book; in particular I admire Céline Larose's *Petit soulier* and *Une Tomate inquiète*, the latter a witty story, despite a lame ending, of a tomato's quest to discover its place in the vegetable kingdom. These are richly coloured texts, and one must be impressed by the quality of print as well as of text (and by the amount of financial support that must have been given these Quebec publications). Though also handsome, Rita Scalabrini's *La Famille Citrouillard aux poissons des chenaux* seems illustrated more for the adult than the child, not geared exactly to the level of its informational story about a St. Lawrence fish. This is a flaw in much English-language children's publishing as well — such as Elizabeth Cleaver's collages in *The Fire Stealers* (Oxford), aesthetically interesting but debilitated by a colour sense all wrong for the subject. The story, moreover, lacks in this version the punch that the Ojibway tales have in Doubleday's fine collection *The Adventures of Nanabush*, told by Sam Snake, Chief Elijah Yellowhead, and other elders of

the Rama Ojibway band; but the Doubleday tales — moral and marvellous — of the great but imperfect magician Nanabush, are illustrated only mechanically. Finding a balance seems difficult in other ways as well. Christie Harris's *Mouse Woman and the Muddleheads* (McClelland & Stewart) is disappointing; Haida stories are transformed by a European set of conventions into fairytale fantasy of no particular distinction. Joe Rosenblatt's *Tommy Fry and The Ant Colony* (Black Moss) is an unfulfilled and under-financed production about a boy's affinity with ants and his ability to lead charges upon his unsavoury and unsurprisingly insect-like neighbours. And Tibor Kovalik's edition *From Tale to Tale* (Mosaic Press/Valley Editions), a simply worded but arbitrary collection of tales from various places, seems like one of those books that adults give to children because they think they ought to be interested in it, without much justification.

One might wish a lot of books written expressly for children to be better written and better produced. But one does not wish for *fewer* resources to be available. To follow up the pedagogical suggestions in Alice K. Hale's *An Introduction to Teaching Canadian Literature* (Atlantic Institute of Education) or Peter Birdsall's *Antitoenailimagery* (Canlit, P.O. Box 155, Peterborough) — despite occasional lapses: a raspberry to Birdsall's "The Madawaska World of Margaret Laurence"! — would in fact require teachers to make inventive use of a wide variety of resources as they encourage their students to recognize the vitality of their literature in the vitality of the culture at large. Among recent books that an able teacher could use imaginatively are André Bernier's *Le Vieux-Silléry* (Québec Ministère des Affaires culturelles), Theo Dimson's *Great Canadian Posters* (Oxford) and Pierre Des Ruisseaux's *Le Livre des expression québécoises* (Hurtubise HMH). Bernier's book is a collection of maps, drawings, photographs and commentaries that provides an integrated history of a French village becoming an English establishment becoming a city suburb; from it one derives a way of comprehending not only place but also visual design: of perceiving the relation between home and place, and the process of transformation in time that converts place into literary setting. One might hope for more direct social history from Dimson, but he concentrates more on design than society — despite which, his book offers a visual way into the past that scores of textbook dates could never match. And from Des Ruisseaux one discovers a language in use and in flux: on peut avoir une mémoire de chien, it seems (remarkable; cf. elephant); ou être malade comme un chien (from the English); or be obscure (noir comme chez le chien); or abandon hope (son chien est mort); and much much more.

At least, one can if the books are available. In 1980, Canadian literature is still being written; Canadian voices are still there to be heard; I would hope that it is not yet time to abandon hope about Canadian publishing. There is no question but that we face dramatic times, but there does exist the posibility that current trends may not continue.

W.H.N.

THE REGIONALISM OF CANADIAN DRAMA

Diane Bessai

NEITHER MODERN CANADIAN THEATRE nor modern Canadian dramatic literature is so well established that one can pronounce on them absolutely at this stage of development. However, for the present the term *regional* is the most descriptively useful: in the past decade, the period which has seen the definite rise of a native Canadian theatre at last, regional activity has made the most identifiable and creative contribution to the movement. Of recent playwrights, Reaney, Cook, Tremblay, Murrell and Glass are among those who write from specifically regional observation and experience. Among theatres and theatre companies such names come to mind as Alberta Theatre Projects, Theatre Passe Muraille, Open Circle, Mermaid, the Globe, the St. John's Mummers as examples of the varied regional voices in the Canadian theatre scene.

As a term, *regional* creates bad vibrations in the collective aesthetic psyche — perhaps second only to the term *provincial.* Certainly I do not use the words synonymously, in as much as the latter suggests subjugation to some central cultural influence or control. Nor need regionalism be regarded, as it often is, as narrow, limited, parochial, backward, out-dated or isolationist. In its positive sense regionalism means rooted, indigenous, shaped by a specific social, cultural and physical milieu. It reflects the past as well as the present and at its best absorbs innumerable influences from beyond its borders, particularly as these have bearing on the informing regional perspective.

Thus no denigration need be implied in the suggestion that the late-developing arts of the modern theatre in Canada have little dependence for their vitality on influences radiating from a particular centre. Canadian theatre in the present day exists in pockets, and while some pockets bulge more than others, there is still no *national* theatre movement per se — at least not one to which we can point as our own special equivalent to Broadway, the West End, or other such models of artistic or commercial success. We do have a National Arts Centre in Ottawa, but from the national point of view this functions only as a theatrical cross-roads, insofar as it hosts successful productions mounted in Canadian theatres elsewhere. While the N.A.C.'s recently inaugurated policy of country-wide tours of its own permanent companies has been heralded by some as the long overdue beginning of a genuine national theatre, this is to ignore the real dynamic of theatre growth in this country. Another form of irrelevance to the essential reality of Canadian theatre activity is

the equally spurious ambition for instant internationalism. This is a peculiarly inverted form of provincialism observable in theatre circles with an ambition to develop exportable productions; ironically the process as observed most recently involves preliminary importation. This happened most conspicuously in Edmonton in 1978 with the controversial hiring of Britisher Peter Coe as artistic director of the Citadel. Coe's avowed internationalism in his choice of programme and players in his first season is a simple sign of that theatre's archaic view of the Canadian scene. In one way this recalls that until the late 1940's professionals usually came from outside the country and that Canada's theatres were touring houses to accommodate them. By now, however, with the notable exceptions of Toronto's O'Keefe Centre and the Royal Alexandra, theatres are no longer committed to road-house policies. Touring comes from regions within the country rather than from outside, and normally the mandate of the regional theatres is not the international market (coming or going in either direction).

The tradition of regionalism in Canadian theatre of course originates in the peculiar geographical and cultural conditions of the colonial and post-colonial era. In the days of the predominance of foreign professionals, such native development of theatre as there was depended on the many dedicated groups of amateurs who developed their own community theatres — which they did virtually in every region of the country. Inevitably provincialism predominated in its most parochial terms. This became evident when the Earl Grey Musical and Dramatic Competitions (held between 1907 and 1911) attempted to provide the community groups with a sense of participation in a national theatrical adventure. Clearly from the participator's point of view such an enterprise appealed to regional rather than national pride, whatever the intentions of the organizers. For example, when the Edmonton Amateur Drama Club won the trophy in 1911 with *The Tyranny of Tears*, there was obvious local satisfaction in the triumph over companies from Toronto, Ottawa and London, because Ontario was then the colonial centre for Western Canada. Further, when Albert E. Nash, the lead in the play, also won the best acting award, there was relish in the adjudicator's comment that the part was played with "such intellectual distinction" that he almost suspected Mr. Nash a professional. From Edmonton's point of view this was no mean praise from Hector Charlesworth, a Toronto drama critic of distinction. The most dazzling compliment of all (quoted admiringly by A. B. Watt in a 1949 series of articles "Old Edmonton Theatre Days" in the Edmonton *Journal*) was that this production "coming from a town as far away as Edmonton [the location for the festival that year was Winnipeg's Walker Theatre], where opportunities for studying the best theatrical models are almost non-existent, came as a genuine surprise."

The question of when local boosterism in a given area turns into genuine and self-confident pride in local achievement would be difficult to answer, but as the community theatre movement grew stronger, particularly in the decade following

World War I, the problem of non-existent theatrical models certainly became considerably less acute. Betty Lee, in *Love and Whiskey*, identifies the completion of Hart House at the University of Toronto in 1919 as "the first real sign of the coming amateur boom": its theatre offered over 100 plays between 1921 and 1925 alone. The Winnipeg Community Players, the Vancouver Little Theatre, the Ottawa Drama League, the Edmonton Little Theatre Association were among the many community groups founded in the 1920's. The organization of provincial festivals marked the next phase of development; thus the time was ripe for Lord Bessborough's 1932 invitation of country-wide representatives from the regional amateur groups to meet in Ottawa for discussion of the foundation of the Dominion Drama Festival.

The debate over this development as a positive detriment to the rise of a native Canadian professional theatre still goes on, but certainly, with the decline of the syndicated touring companies in the depression years, a theatre vacuum was filled. Nevertheless in 1933 B. K. Sandwell expressed telling reservations about the organization of a nation-wide amateur movement. He thought that the "impelling motive" of "self-conscious patriotism" was a bad start for the serious development of the dramatic arts in Canada. He also feared that amateurism would not provide proper direction for either writers or performers; this "must be competent, original, experienced, creative," he wrote in *Saturday Night*. "It must also be continuous over a considerable period of time."[1] Hindsight makes it easy to second-guess the specific problems he had in mind: the "pointless socializing" which so disgusted Dora Mavor Moore even back at the time of the Earl Grey competitions, or perhaps the limited aspirations inevitably imposed by the boosterism inherent in competition which in theatre leads to safe choice of play. The failure of the Festival to accommodate itself to experimental theatre was early noted by Laurence Mason in the Toronto *Globe*: there was simply no marking system provided for the proper evaluation of a play such as Herman Voaden's *Rocks*, for example. Years later, in "Ten Years at Play" (*Canadian Literature*, 1969), James Reaney was to note to his dismay and astonishment that for amateur groups he worked with in London, Ontario, the most important rehearsal was the theatrical one — surely a carry-over from the competition era.

On the positive side, E. G. Sterndale Bennett, who was a regional adjudicator for the first festival, postulated at the end of the first season that the Dominion Drama Festival could serve as the foundation stone from "which we might erect a glorious edifice of drama, a National Theatre." But this, he added, need not mean "a centralized plant with its difficulties of maintenance and management but, rather, a brotherhood of effort assisted, guided and encouraged by some parent body."[2] Indeed, the D.D.F. can take a portion of the credit for its part in laying the foundation of certain professional companies within regions where the participating community theatres flourished. In Quebec, Father LeGault's Les

Compagnons de St. Laurent was the seedbed of Jean Gascon's Théâtre du Nouveau Monde established in 1952; in the late 1960's two francophone professional groups unabashedly entered and won most of the D.D.F. awards (Gurik's Le Théâtre de la Mandragore and Pierre Voyer's Les Enfants de Voiture).

In English-speaking Canada, the most significant development of a professional theatre company from amateur roots was the Manitoba Theatre Centre; technically this was an amalgamation of the long-established Winnipeg Little Theatre and a new professional company of one season called Theatre 77 founded by John Hirsch and Tom Hendry. The latter were both Winnipeggers who had served their theatrical apprenticeship in the W.L.T. In his retrospective comments for *Canadian Theatre Review* (Fall 1974), Hirsch spoke of "the excitement that can come from a theatre that grows out of a community" and Tom Hendry paid strong tribute to the role of the W.L.T. in the new theatre centre development. The whole conception was summed up in Hirsch's account of an interview he had given to Ann Henry of the *Winnipeg Tribune* some four years previously:

> I outlined what I wanted to see happen, not only in Winnipeg but in Canada. I said that Winnipeg needs a theatre centre, a regional theatre with a children's theatre attached and a school which would tour regularly. I said that this Centre would be the first in a series of theatres across the country that would eventually be linked.

Interestingly, this is a professional version of Sterndale Bennett's conception of a de-centralized national theatre among the amateur groups. It is extremely important also to note that at the outset M.T.C. was linked to its specific community in several vital ways. As Christopher Dafoe points out in the same *C.T.R.* issue, while production was expanded to make room for first class professionals from outside, the theatre school also expanded to take touring productions to local schools. Also Hirsch recalls how "we constantly went to the community to get extras and good young people for small parts." For several years there was a policy of bringing original material to the stage as well.[3]

Hirsch had a philosophy of community theatre as creating "an organic connection between the audience and what went on stage":

> Even the plays which were not about Winnipeg responded to something close to our audience. Repertoire was always chosen with the community in mind. I didn't mind doing *Arsenic and Old Lace* because I knew the next show would be *Mother Courage*. I knew *The Dybbuk* was not a Canadian play but I also knew that 60 percent of our audience were Jewish and that a lot of Ukrainians in the city would understand this play about peasants, the kind of background from which many of them came.

Unfortunately by the time of this 1974 interview Hirsch had to admit that many of these important connections between the M.T.C. and its audience had begun to fade. He himself left the organization in 1966, although in subsequent years he

was a frequent guest director. After the building of the new large theatre on Market Avenue in 1970, the school did not flourish, and it was closed in 1972; nor did regional touring and theatre workshop develop according to the initial hopes of the founders. In recent years the centre has concentrated more and more on traditional repertoire. Nor have smaller, alternative groups developed out of the M.T.C.'s initial creative energy as had been the hope in earlier days. Nevertheless, the foundation and the development of the whole idea of a regional centre here is of great importance in modern Canadian theatre history and in its initial conception could well stand as a model for newer regional developments elsewhere.[4] Nevertheless the example of M.T.C. is instructive on the negative as well as the positive side: pride of space seems to encourage conservative tastes among many of the now established Canadian regional theatres, and perhaps, too, the ghosts of the old D.D.F. regional boosterism still enforce conventional rather than experimental standards of theatre excellence. Fortunately, however, there are other forms of regional expression in the theatre, offering healthy signs of truly indigenous contemporary development in Canadian drama.

FOR A THEATRE MOVEMENT TO STAY ALIVE and develop, it is necessary to go beyond mere conformity, to initiate rather than to imitate. Therefore it is important to consider the process whereby provincial dependency develops into a genuine regional cultural maturity. Recently even Northrop Frye has given his consent to theories about regionalism: in his Henry Marshall Tory lecture at the University of Alberta, "Reflections of a Canadian Humanist" (October 1978), he spoke of a mature Canadian cultural direction as "a decentralizing movement," finding genuine unity the opposite of conformity, and he emphasized that the more specific the literary material, the more universal its application. The negative term for Frye, however, is "localism," for which he rather curiously chooses the contemporary cultural crisis in Quebec as his prime example. Certainly in the colonial phase of the Canadian theatre movement — the Earl Grey Competition phase, for example — the last thing a group wanted to be accused of was localism. But in modern times the term does have a certain positive thrust, Frye notwithstanding. Indeed one might argue that localism in its contemporary theatrical forms is a demonstrably important phase in the establishment of a mature, decentralized culture.

For example, it is not by accident that in the drama localism is often firmly rooted in various forms of documentary. In many ways Canada is still, as Catharine Parr Traill termed it in 1836, "a matter of fact country." Carl Ballstadt, in his introduction to a collection of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century critical essays, *The Search for English-Canadian Literature*, notes that many of the early literary commentators saw great virtue in work which recognized the need to estab-

lish and clarify fact and immediate experience as the basis for literary development in a new country (where the temptation to borrow inappropriately from established traditions from elsewhere was all too strong). In the second half of the twentieth century, in a country with practically no native dramatic tradition of relevance to the modern day, one type of borrowing from European, British and American sources has lent itself both to assimilation and further inventiveness more than any other: European forms of political, epic, and documentary drama — in combination with the American "living newspaper" of the 1930's — have found fruitful soil in several Canadian regions in recent years. In fact, the need to develop such a type of drama in Canada has arisen from the similar cultural conditions which have made documentary theatre popular in regional theatres in Britain. In his book *Post-War British Theatre*, John Elsom has recently noted that

> For the growing regional repertory theatre movement in the 1960's, the local documentaries provided a means of establishing a theatre's identity as part of a town or region, without losing its function as a theatre.[5]

His prime example is Peter Cheeseman's Victoria Theatre at Stoke-on-Trent, where local documentaries have been developed through the careful research of the actors and writers in an effort to focus on working-class themes of this particular community. In regional Britain, local creativity in the theatre has been overshadowed because the transfer and touring systems to and from the West End are the inhibiting factors. The aim of Peter Cheeseman (and those who subsequently took their lead from him, as in Hull, Newcastle and Leeds) was to establish new local theatrical material for new local audiences who otherwise would seldom venture into a theatre at all. In this, of course, he had the model of Joan Littlewood, both in her pre-war Manchester days and the post-war establishment of Theatre Workshop in London's East End.

In Canada, the problem of establishing a theatre's local identity is also a key factor in its success, if, in part, for different reasons. The task is further complicated by the need to establish the identity of the locality itself in dramatic terms. James Reaney pointed to the problem succinctly in his article "Ten Years at Play" when he wrote:

> The tendency in the society in which I lived was to see drama as, first, something somebody else wrote thousands of miles away, and as something that you could evolve physically, as out of a can.[6]

Paul Thompson returned to Canada in 1967 after working with Planchon in France (eventually to become artistic director of Theatre Passe Muraille) with the conviction that imported Broadway and West End plays (or Canadian imitations thereof) were bad business in the typical community theatres which

> try to over-reach themselves with something like *There's a Girl in My Soup* or *The Entertainer* where they're trying to deal with people and problems (not to

> mention accents) that they've only encountered in other plays or movies, when there is such rich and satisfying and much more immediate material in the living community around them.[7]

To make the living community yield its own material and to proffer a theatrical interpretation and analysis of this material has been the intent of a number of small theatre groups which came into existence in various regions during the 1970's.

Most groups of this type begin as localist and may choose to stay that way: this is particularly true of those that concentrate primarily on collective creations. The Mummers' Troupe of St. John's is a prime example of a company formed with the explicit intention of creating new audiences for theatre, to be drawn through mutual interest in original material of local appeal. In critical comments about the Mummers it has become almost a commonplace to point out the flawed qualities of their plays and the inexperience of their actors. Certainly they eschew any obvious ideals of slick professionalism, are very much a company in process, and play for the audience they please most and in a manner they believe reaches that particular audience most effectively. In a July 9, 1975, Toronto *Star* interview, the artistic director Chris Brookes said:

> Theatre in Newfoundland is moving away from art-as-art to specific social usefulness. We're very community-development oriented. It's living in Newfoundland, where you're always engaged in a social-cultural emergence. You have to be. You've got to show people themselves before they forget who they are.

The activist bias of the company first emerged in a public way in 1973 when they were soundly condemned on the front page of the Cornerbrook *Western Star* for their show *Gros Mourn*. In this they intruded both on provincial and federal governments during the inauguration of Gros Morne National Park by focussing attention (albeit too late) on the plight of the residents of Sally's Cove, one of the several small coastal communities sacrificed to the project. Break-down or threats to community traditions have been strong motifs in the Mummers' repertory ever since. (This has been a characteristic form of Newfoundland *angst* since the resettlement projects of the late 1950's.) In 1974 the troupe was invited by the workers of the company town of Buchans to create a play which examined the continuing uncertainty of the community's very existence because of the depleting resources of the mines which are its life-line. In Toronto, *Star* critic Urjo Kareda found the play theatrically "unadventurous" in comparison to the socially-oriented collective creations of Passe Muraille. However, Brookes had already forestalled such an attitude (in the 1975 interview) with his remark that

> The people in Buchans thought it important to do . . . because Buchans is symptomatic of a bigger system. At the same time, however, the show is made for Buchans: I'm not interested in saving anyone's soul in Toronto.

From the beginning tours through both the outports and the interior of Newfoundland have been essential to the Mummers' mandate. Eventually they even managed to compete with perennial Newfoundland bingo fervour and are welcomed wherever they go as a voice of the people. In April 1976 Sandra Gwyn wrote in *Saturday Night* of the response in the logging town of Badger to the *I.W.A. Show*, a production which dealt with an important strike there in 1959:

> In the Town Hall, plastered with pink crêpe-paper rosettes left over from the Kinsmen's Dance, I sit down by a pair of loggers and their wives. They're big, impressive people in their fifties, and for quite a while it's hard to tell how they're reacting. When the play gets to the sequences Donna [Butt] worked out, where she plays a striker's wife who changes gradually from a shy homebody to a fiery militant who takes her husband's place on the picket line when he goes to jail, the two women sit bolt upright. Almost before the scene ends, they jump to their feet and start clapping. Then they turn and put their arms around each other.

Still adhering to the philosophy that "Newfoundland frames and motivates us," the Mummers toured *They Club Seals Don't They?* across Canada in 1978; this was a show designed as much for the road as the home audience, presenting as it did the controversial sealing question to the rest of the country from the Newfoundlander's point of view. But even here they refused to compromise their home-based production techniques: even the three-ringed circus they made of the Greenpeace mission, while a rather amateurish, farcical line of attack to those who have more sophisticated views of satire, could be seen as the proper reflection of the situation for the audiences for whom the production was initially intended. When the Mummers travel, they are simply inviting others to be an extended Newfoundland audience for an evening.

The Theatre Passe Muraille conception of touring shows is quite different and with this difference can be seen the possibilities of the wider interest of grass roots or "localist" theatres. This is to say that the collective creations this company began to develop under the artistic directorship of Paul Thompson (appointed in 1971) are intended for varieties of audiences from varieties of locations and walks of life. Their strongest breakthrough in this direction was in September 1972 with their first version of *The Farm Show*. That summer the company had been living and working in the farm community of Clinton, Ontario, with the deliberate intention of creating a play from their experience. The next year they tried a similar project, although of urban orientation, in the decaying mining town of Cobalt; *Under the Greywacke* was the result. In a *Performing Arts Magazine* interview (Winter 1973), Thompson said of these productions:

> we went right to the people in Clinton and Cobalt and made our play out of those people, out of the texture of those people. I keep talking to the actors about texture work because one of the things that is missing in Canadian Theatre in general is an identifiable base for characters. Instead, there's a kind of general base and you

> see too much of what I call movie-acting where, for example, if you want to do a small town character, everybody's trying to be Paul Newman in *Hud* instead of going out to a small town and sitting around in the corner drugstore, finding out how people are there, catching their rhythms and building off that. Part of the problem is we're still . . . well, I guess "culturally imperialized" is the phrase the nationalists use.

The attempt "to bring back a kind of living community portrait or photograph" in these various "essays" of dramatic journalism has stood this company in good stead on the several occasions when they have gone outside their own region; for example, they spent the summer of 1975 working in Saskatchewan to create *The West Show*, consisting of another series of portraits, sketches, historical vignettes through which they made a highly successful attempt to interpret Saskatchewan rural life. They caught its radical spirit in politics and the sturdy independence of mind of its farm people in the face of Saskatchewan's well publicized environmental obstacles. Their work with Rudy Wiebe — specifically for their dramatic adaptation of Sam Reimer's Vietnam call from *The Blue Mountains of China*, led to plans for a full scale play in co-operation with that writer. In April 1977, they presented *Far As the Eye Can See* at Theatre 3 in Edmonton: here they were able to combine their interpretive talents with Wiebe's special knowledge of the Alberta political and social scene. The result was a script which examined specific energy issues of the time from both a localist and regional point of view.

During that first summer in Saskatchewan, Passe Muraille also established a fruitful contact with Andy Tahn's 25th St. House Theatre in Saskatoon. This company, too, was anxious to develop local material for performance. *If You're So Good Why are You in Saskatoon?* was the piquant title of their apprenticeship collective, a work which, with the help of Thompson's troupe, provided them with the essential experience for this kind of theatre — leading in 1977 to their more ambitious and widely toured *Paper Wheat*, a play about the formation of the wheat co-operatives in the West.

Since 1976 Theatre Network, based in Edmonton, has been developing similar collectives and touring them on a smaller scale; its first was *Two Miles Off*, based on the experience of living in Elnora, a small decaying community in the Red Deer area. Network's most successful and most widely toured show is drawn from observation of life in the burgeoning Tar Sands community of Fort McMurray. *Hard Hats and Broken Hearts* attempts to combine the techniques of the collective vignette format with a specific plot line dealing with some of the social problems brought about by the uprooting of people in a changing environment.

The collective has become increasingly popular in the West. In the fall of 1978, Regina's Globe Theatre toured *Number One Hard* in Saskatchewan, a play developed by the company in collaboration with playwright Rex Deverell. In

some ways a challenge to *Paper Wheat*, this work subtitles itself "an investigative documentary on the grain industry" and is a satirical attack against the mismanagement of grain resources. The Globe's experience with this form, however, is of longer standing than that of the other Western companies referred to thus far, and more closely parallels Theatre Passe Muraille's development of the collective documentary play. In the spring of 1971 each theatre presented productions of this type: the Globe opened March 1 in Regina with *Next Year Country* (having first performed it in Prince Albert as a "homecoming" production), a collective compiled by the company in collaboration with writer Carol Bolt, while in April of that year Passe Muraille presented its company-researched play *Doukhobors* in Toronto.

The subsequent history of the Bolt-Globe *Next Year Country* makes an instructive comment on the way in which initial local and regional definitions can prompt broader dramatic patterns. In 1972 Bolt and Theatre Passe Muraille collaborated in a reworking of the script to create *Buffalo Jump* for Toronto performance. A large portion of the revised play deals with the inception of the work camp strike, the organization of the working men in Vancouver and the counter movement of the prime minister's Ottawa office. It also focusses on the human interest of the mass boxcar ride in its various stages before Regina — in the process offering a variety of comic and satiric views of several locales through which the unemployed passed. Caricatures, particularly of R. B. Bennett and Bible Bill Aberhart, are also prominent.

What the play lost in its specifically prairie flavour and historical detail, the new *Buffalo Jump* gained in dramatic shape, particularly through its form of cross-country coverage and its borrowings from agitprop tradition. At the time of the play's publication Carol Bolt said that she was more interested in "myth" than history in any case — here the romantic celebration of the heroic failure of those brought low by the machinations of an autocratic government. In this manner the play also gained something of the energy of the post-October Crisis era, particularly in the guerilla theatre technique of its last scene, as performed in Toronto: instead of staging a full-scale version of the Regina riot of the strikers and the R.C.M.P., a brief scene of violence was quickly terminated by actor policemen who promptly began to hustle an astonished audience out of the theatre door. In 1977 Bolt worked with the Great Canadian Theatre Company in Ottawa to add additional Ottawa material to the script, providing for this audience a specifically local perspective by adding scenes which dealt with the large convergence on Ottawa at the time by eastern workers who planned to join the Westerners in their assault on the Bennett government. The expanded localism of the play during its successive performances was an interesting exercise in the dramatic analysis of an historic national issue from a variety of regional points of view.

CLEARLY THEN, LOCALISM AND VARIOUS FORMS of collective creativity are important in themselves to the initiation of indigenous theatre, exemplifying a dynamic relationship integrating actor, director, writer and audience. Yet inasmuch as this type of work energizes new and special interests in the theatre, so does it also provide a proper environment for a new dramatic literature whose chief strength also lies in its regional origins. The point may be illustrated well by reference to certain of the Western regional theatres which have done much to promote the writing of new plays. For example, in the first four years of its existence, Alberta Theatre Projects in Calgary, founded by Douglas Riske and Lucille Wagner in 1972, produced only Canadian plays, most of these commissioned from local writers.[8] The practice of engaging a playwright-in-residence has also been fruitful at A.T.P. For two years John Murrell worked in Calgary in this capacity, leading to the production of his *A Great Noise, A Great Light* in 1976, a fictional play of the Aberhart era, and *Waiting for the Parade*, 1977, a nostalgic recollection of the Calgary World War II home front.

Rex Deverell's similar association with the Globe has not only led to his development as one of the best writers of young peoples' plays in Canada (for example, *Next Town Nine Miles*, 1976, and *Superwheels*, 1977); he has also achieved some success with his adult play *Boiler Room Suite*, 1977. That the setting for this semi-Absurd work is the basement of an abandoned Regina hotel is certainly not the play's chief point, yet this does nevertheless indicate that regional roots provide the basis for dramatic exploration of contemporary human conditions in the urban world.[9]

There are also several Western playwrights who have responded more individually to the demands generated by regional theatres. Ken Mitchell, for example, combined his talents with Humphrey and the Dumptrucks for the 1975 premiere of *Cruel Tears* at Persephone Theatre, Saskatoon. This prairie folk opera version of the Othello story was performed the following year at the Habitat Festival in Vancouver and the Olympic festival in Montreal, later to be revived by the Vancouver Arts Club for a cross-Canada tour. Mitchell has also worked at the Globe: in 1972 he adapted Arnold Wesker's *Roots* to a Saskatchewan setting, and in 1978 his play *Davin: The Politician* was premiered there. This last is a lively chronicle of Nicholas Flood Davin, founder of the Regina *Leader* and volatile federal M.P. for the Northwest Territories in the post-Riel era.

Sharon Pollock's *Walsh*, a version of the Sitting Bull-in-Canada incident, was first developed at Theatre Calgary in 1973 under the direction of Harold Baldridge and performed at Stratford in revised form the following summer. Pollock has also worked considerably in Vancouver, there too responding to contemporary regional interests in her plays: *Out Goes You*, 1975, is a satire on B.C. provincial politics, performed at the Vancouver Playhouse. The following season saw the Play-

house production of *The Komagata Maru Incident*, a semi-documentary handling of an ugly World War I racist incident in Vancouver harbour concerning the admission of Sikh immigrants; the general as well as the regional appeal of the work has been demonstrated by subsequent productions elsewhere.

The important point to be made here is that the impetus for the writing of new plays has had to come from the theatres, and where the record for the prairies on the whole is not spectacular, there has been a steady flow of original work in the past ten years or so. M.T.C. has made two important commissions, ten years apart. In Centennial Year Ann Henry was asked for *Lulu Street*; and for M.T.C.'s twentieth anniversary in the 1977-78 season, Joanna Glass was requested to write *The Last Chalice*. These two cases are interesting in different ways. During the formative years of M.T.C., Henry (as theatre critic for the Winnipeg *Tribune*) was a sympathetic observer of the theatre's development. John Hirsch wanted a play about the 1919 Winnipeg general strike and turned to Henry because, in her words:

> My father was one of the platform people, one of the speakers, so I had grown up with stories about it; met people like Woodsworth and others. . . . I had many of my father's speeches. I think it's absolutely essential to know the truth about our history, and you can say things in a play that you can't say otherwise. I was fascinated by the effects on people, the stresses and the strike. It was a marvellous opportunity to write a play.[10]

The result was a happy example of the way local subject matter of deeply embedded interest can attract audiences. The report on the attendance at this play makes its own point about the value of the material: people came who had never been to a theatre before because they were deeply interested in how the strike would be handled. Thus a new playwright emerged out of specific local interest.

The instance of the Joanna Glass play is instructive from an opposite perspective. Glass is an expatriate Canadian (born in Saskatoon) who now lives in Connecticut.[11] Her initial recognition as a playwright has come from the United States: the now well-known pair of one act plays *Canadian Gothic* and *American Modern* were presented first in workshop at the Manhattan Theater Club in 1972. The premiere of *Artichoke* was at the Long Wharf Theater in New Haven, 1975. Between these years and since, however, these plays have been given several performances in Canada. Their specific appeal (with the obvious exception of *American Modern*) is in their sensitive rendering of prairie experience. Yet the M.T.C. invitation was the first time Glass was approached to write a play for a major staging in a Canadian theatre.

Clearly the regional theatres are not always as sensitive to the potential for new plays as they should be, nor are they always responsive to already established work. The instance of Herschel Hardin is illustrative in the West, with specific reference

to his play *The Great Wave of Civilization*. Written in 1962, this quite powerful Epic theatre analysis of the winning of the West through the heartless abuse of the Indian peoples won a Centennial prize in Alberta five years later, but waited another nine years for its premiere performance at the Lennoxville Festival. It has never had a prairie performance, although Hardin's later play *Esker Mike and His Wife Agiluk*, premiered at Factory Lab Theatre, Toronto, in 1971, was mounted at M.T.C. in the 1973-74 season. In the past two or three years some theatres are making concerted efforts to locate more plays and playwrights. In Edmonton, for example, The Playwrights Unit, jointly sponsored by Theatre 3 and Northern Light, provides a playreading service and offers professional workshops of half a dozen plays a year. Their efforts have led to several full scale productions in prairie theatres.[12]

It will be observed that much of the regional drama referred to in this discussion has either historical, political, or sociological bias. There is a view that such interests merely serve a playwright in his apprenticeship (and perhaps Canadian drama in *its* apprenticeship) rather than in his maturity. This would be to say that the inexperienced dramatist lacks the confidence to write out of the fullness of his personal experience and therefore must, at first, take refuge behind issues and fact. It is certainly true that a playwright's work in collectives (and these frequently fall into the category of documentary) can serve as an excellent training in writing for the theatre — although equally well an experienced playwright can help the actors and director better realize their intentions on the stage. But the truly important considerations about contemporary Canadian regional drama are that, first, regional drama establishes the validity of a specific milieu as the subject for dramatic interpretation; second that it draws its strength from the audience interest it thereby generates; and third and equally important, that it feels free to experiment in styles and stagings in order to communicate its particular vision in its own particular way. Indeed there is a positive advantage in the very lateness of the development of a Canadian dramatic literature. No Canadian playwright need feel the constraints of the well-made tradition and its modern sit-com variations.

Further, while the evolutionary theory of cultural development (that we move *from* history to individuality, for example, or *from* either nationalistic or regionalist self-consciousness to a more cosmopolitan artistic realization) may have its attractions, its desirability and even its validity are open to question. James Reaney, the best of the Canadian regional playwrights, and therefore quite possibly the best of all English-speaking playwrights in Canada up to now, has demonstrated in his Donnelly trilogy that regional historical detail can be animated by a gifted dramatic imagination. The universals of personality or individuality are surely best contained within the fabric of a specifically realized time and place. The imagination must soar if that is its gift, but the best chance for its success lies in its continuing reinforcement of that rootedness which makes flight possible.

NOTES

[1] Quoted by Lee in *Love and Whiskey* (Toronto, 1973), p. 113.

[2] Ibid., p. 120.

[3] Hendry lists *Desperate Journey*, by Mort Forer; *Look Ahead and All About Us* by Len Petersen; *A Very Close Family*, Bernard Slade; *Names and Nicknames*, James Reaney; and two Canadian adaptations by Betty Jane Wylie: *An Enemy of the People* and *Georges Dandin*.

[4] While the country does now have theatres in almost every major centre, this does not constitute a true network which the term "decentralized national theatre" implies. Among such organizations as the Neptune, Theatre New Brunswick, Toronto Arts Productions or Vancouver Playhouse, one may see one or two of the early aims of M.T.C. taking root, but none exemplifies all of them.

[5] (London, 1976), p. 102.

[6] Rpt. in *Dramatists in Canada*, ed. W. H. New (Vancouver: Univ. of B.C. Press, 1972), p. 72.

[7] *Performing Arts Magazine* (Winter 1973), p. 31.

[8] Playwright Paddy Campbell and composer William Skolnik have collaborated in several musical plays: *Hoarse Muse*, 1974; *Under the Arch*, 1975 (which evolved from the company's first production, *The History Show*); *Passengers*, 1978. Other playwrights who have provided regional material for this stage include Bonnie Le May, *Roundhouse*, 1975; Jan Truss, *A Very Small Rebellion*, 1974; and Claudia Gibson, *We Don't Need Another Widow McEachren*, 1973.

[9] Rod Langley also worked as a writer with the Globe: *Tales of a Prairie Drifter*, 1973; *Bethune*, 1974, a joint commission with the Centaur, Montreal. The choice of subject as well as the co-sponsorship can be seen as another way in which regional interests work in Canada: Saskatchewan's political radicalism and Montreal's belated local pride in Bethune combined suitably to create a play of general interest but from a specifically regional impetus.

[10] Sarah Yates, *The First Twenty Years* (Winnipeg, 1978), p. 15.

[11] She studied acting with Betty Mitchell in Calgary in 1955 and obtained an Alberta Arts Council scholarship to work further at the Pasadena Playhouse.

[12] These include Frank Moher's *Stage Falls*, Mary Baldridge's *The Mary Shelley Play*, and Gordon Pengilly's *Songs for Believers*, all in the 1978 season.

MUNICIPAL SWIMMING POOL

Kim Maltman

The sky
is like paper,
flawless,

from the blur of white,
the blue heat shimmering
against the hills,
a kind of static
presses down into the earth.
You wander off a bit,
the pressure underfoot,
the damp trunks almost dry,
a thin shirt,
dust so fine the touch
is like a soft cloth
drawn across your feet,

you navigate between the details,
clumps of thorn grass, thistle,
all in clusters,

and the jolt of cool
that hits as water
burns off
comes back,

then you turn,
the bodies,
almost motionless the
bodies scattered on the grass
are breathing
quietly
against the sunlight.

ON THE EDGE

Michael Cook's Newfoundland Trilogy

Brian Parker

MICHAEL COOK HAS WEAKNESSES AS A DRAMATIST that have drawn down upon him the obloquy of critics, and it is perhaps as well to consider these first. He thinks of himself basically as a poet, and has explained that plays occur to him not in the form of Aristotelian "action" but poetically as "a series of images, dramatic scenes, and circumstances."[1] The obvious difficulty he has in organizing his work, perhaps his most serious defect as a dramatist, reflects this centrifugal habit of imagination. None of his plays has much conventional plot and all tend to be wordy and overwritten. At one extreme, he uses overlong "realistic" monologues, as in *Quiller* and *Thérèse's Creed*, which reveal the effect of his apprenticeship to radio drama; at the other, he throws heterogeneous materials loosely together in quasi-historical Brechtian[2] structures with huge casts, like *Colour the Flesh the Colour of Dust*, *The Gaydon Chronicles*, and *On the Rim of the Curve*, where social caricature, historical or regional realism, and poetical philosophizing all clash. He compensates for his plays' verbosity with rather obvious stage effects: either by the detailed recreations of everyday routines — cooking, washing, net making — or by vaudevillean songs, dances, and allegorical tableaux, according to whether the bias of a particular play is realistic or presentational. His work can be thematically confusing because it combines an almost reflex sympathy for any underdog with a more existentialist concern with the strain isolation imposes on human relationships. And these imprecisions are reflected in unevennesses of rhetoric. Cook is capable of genuine poetic intensity, but too frequently he falls into philosophical overexplicitness or poetical overwriting, both of which can strain characterization.

Nevertheless, Michael Cook remains an important dramatist, because beneath the technical crudities, at the poetic heart of his work, lies an intensely imagined experience of Newfoundland life, presented with such integrity that at its best it rises to comment on the human condition.

Paradoxically, Cook is helped in this because he is not a Newfoundlander by birth, but a Briton of Anglo-Irish descent who arrived in Canada as recently as 1965.[3] Thus he brings to Newfoundland an outsider's eye like that of the original settlers. What he sees is the "survival" experience which critics such as Northrop

Frye and Margaret Atwood have argued is the central Canadian literary theme: confrontation with a relentlessly hostile environment which undermines all confidence in human institutions and even in identity itself. By its very nature drama finds it more difficult to represent this experience than poetry or the novel because it can only represent reactions to the experience, not the confrontation itself, and Cook is perhaps the most successful dramatist so far in conveying the experience in stage terms. He says specifically that our drama needs

> to try and come to terms with the landscape, the environment, and the people like any stranger walking new in the land. Like any immigrant, either now or four hundred years ago.... we have never developed a theatre of character in conflict with environment. Which also implies, the environment being what it is, a theatre inhabited by Gods and Heroes.[4]

Hence one of his attractions to historical drama, to which he says he returns in order to reactivate his own original experiences.[5]

Newfoundland seems to Cook "the last human frontier,"[6] and it has given his work "focal identity" because he found surviving there a tragic and heroic individualism: "a way of life in which individuals struggle with timeless questions of worth and identity against an environment which would kill them if it could."[7] Newfoundland experience strikes him as "essentially Greek, profoundly tragic,"[8] with

> a kind of mythic quality, a kind of elemental quality, very primitive, very brutal, and yet with immense community and tribal strength which we have just about lost everywhere else.[9]

"The experience of such a people," he says in his 1974 *C.T.R.* interview,

> teeters between primitive suffering and defiant joy. Their expression is essentially artistic, a Satanic struggle to impose order upon experience rendered frequently chaotic by a blind and savage nature.

This "essentially artistic" mode of life takes several forms. It can be manifest in the rituals of work and celebration of *The Head, Guts and Sound-bone Dance*, or in the very houses themselves, as climactically in *Jacob's Wake*:

> Their craft is manifest in the work of their hands, the boats made from wood, cut and hauled laboriously during the dark winter months; the houses whose simple design often deceives visitors, for they are built with absolute economy ... in addition to acting as the prow of the ship in the teeth of Atlantic gales.

But pre-eminently for Cook, artistry is to be found in the Newfoundlanders' retention of "a language colourful, new, musical, scatalogical ... full of the power of ancient metaphors."[10]

Experience on this primitive, existential plane appeals, Cook thinks, to men who have come to realize that "somewhere in the transition between rural and industrial man they left behind a portion of their souls."[11] His main purpose as a play-

wright is thus twofold: to reaffirm the validity of the traditional Newfoundland way of life, while also exploring the tragic cost of such "Satanic" assertions of order, and, at the same time, to record its demise beneath the pressures of a shallow, regimented, urbanized civilization with which Cook has little patience. He has explored these themes in some forty plays,[12] but his strengths and weaknesses and the range of his technique can be discovered by looking in some detail at his so-called "Newfoundland Trilogy"—*Colour the Flesh the Colour of Dust* (1972), *The Head, Guts, and Sound-bone Dance* (1973), and *Jacob's Wake* (1975)—recognizing, however, that they are not strictly a trilogy at all, since there is no continuity of action or characters between them and they are written in wholly different modes. (Indeed, Cook seems originally to have envisaged *Colour* as the second play of the trilogy, to be preceded by a play on Sir Humphrey Gilbert which eventually became *On the Rim of the Curve*.[13]) What binds the plays together is their common concern with unmediated experience "on the edge of the world."[14]

COLOUR THE FLESH THE COLOUR OF DUST was Cook's first stage play and is something of a mess. Ostensibly it is a Brechtian "epic" about the surrender of St. John's to the French in 1762 and its subsequent recapture by the English. However, as the "Spokesman" character in the plays points out, "Historically, this has been a pretty inaccurate play." Its interest lies in Cook's reactions to Newfoundland, but the overall effect is incoherent because he has tried to cram too much into it without a clear sense of priorities.

Perhaps the simplest element — the one that the reviewers seized on with relief — is the broad satire directed against a hypocritical merchant called Tupper and his ally, magistrate Neal, who manipulate the political situation for their own advantage ("Wars may come and wars may go, Tupper . . . but trade . . ."). This concentrates in two main scenes. In Act I Tupper adulterates his flour with sawdust only to discover that he must now purify it again in order not to antagonize the French, and in Act II he tries to learn French in order to trade with the new garrison and insists on teaching his shopboy what he does not know himself. But the comedy of these situations is complicated by other elements. In the first act a more savage level of satire comes into play when Tupper cheats the pathetic Mrs. McDonald whose family is starving, and justifies himself with selfconsciously villainous irony:

> It wouldn't be right now, for me to give you something and you worrying about whether you'd ever pay it back. . . . it's a terrible thing in these times to have a working conscience, Mrs. McDonald; and I'm afraid yours will drive you to the grave.

Later we hear that Mrs. McDonald is dead. Morevoer, in each scene there is an

episode with the shopboy in which the action overlaps with another, more complicated concern of the play. In a dumbshow at the end of the flour scene the Boy encourages starving urchins to loot his master's stores, and during the French lesson in Act II he reveals an unexpected (and implausible) command of idiomatic French and menaces his master with a knife. Both incidents remain comic within the context of the scenes, but their suggestion of hidden violence relates also to a more complex aspect of the play — its presentation of the populace of St. John's, towards whom Cook's attitude seems ambiguous.

Basically, *Colour the Flesh* conveys a sympathetic awareness that history does not interest or affect ordinary people except for the worse. Their concern is always for survival: whichever side governs, the drudgery of work must go on; social inequalities will continue; at most, war provides a break in bleak monotony and perhaps the chance of a cathartic outburst of violence. This attitude is made explicit in speeches by the Spokesman. He refuses the Lieutenant's challenge to personal combat in Act I (and encourages the mob to overwhelm him) with the explanation,

> You need time and money to uphold honour. And you need to think of yourself as being someone with a place in life, as having a situation, you see. But us now . . . we're scum. . . .

And in Act II he elaborates on this directly to the audience in a speech which seems to have been influenced by the Common Man of Bolt's *A Man for All Seasons*, claiming that concern for survival represents the natural truth of humanity: "We are the nature you try to subvert, divert, convert; and in general screw up in a lot of ways."

This basic attitude is complicated and confused by several factors. Reminders of the Irish antecedents of the populace, for example, while serving to emphasize the gap between them and their governors, tend to shortcircuit their more basic position by popular jokes against the English, or to suggest that ambiguities in their attitude are typically and exclusively Irish. Thus, the Woman criticizes their adulation of her lover Sean, who has already been hanged at the opening of the play for distributing stolen bread, by complaining that

> you made a hero of a fool and you didn't lift a finger. . . . Jesus Christ, isn't that Ireland all over . . . To make heroes of fools and every fool a hero.

In fact, the crowd shows no tendency at all to foolish heroics, so her generalization is confusing.

The crowd's actual behaviour also has its contradictions. The idea that ordinary people have no stake in war is challenged by a scene in which a deputation of loyal fishermen try to persuade the demoralized Captain to defend St. John's. Yet Cook also recognizes a viciously destructive side to the populace, an appetite for senseless violence. The Woman tells how her trapper husband gratuitously killed an inoffen-

sive Indian ("and it seemed as if nothing had happened");[15] and the play presents in sadistic detail what Cook's stage direction calls the "communal orgasm" of the mob's killing of an English soldier, the nihilism of which is later directed at the audience itself when the Spokesman threatens that "one day, we'll kill you all. Because there'll be nothing else left to do."

The murder is explained (a little too glibly) by one of the soldier's comrades: "In a funny way, Willie, you've saved us all . . . I mean . . . it was like you were a bleeding sacrifice . . . ," and its specifically sexual nature — impalement through the groin with a hook — seems intended to reflect relationships between potency and survival, imperialism and sexual exploitation that Cook has not really managed to make clear. Respect for a vitality that is destructive yet at the same time necessary for survival is an important motif in Cook's tragic vision, but in *Colour the Flesh* he is not sufficiently in command of its contradictory implications.

A result of this is that the play's imaginative force is concentrated on the negative aspect of Newfoundland experience — the spiritual defeat created by life on a barren rock hemmed in by the sea, where, as the Captain explains, nothing human seems able to endure:

> People build. Then fire. Or drowning. Or famine. Or disease. Or just . . . failure of the spirit. The thin scrub marches back across the cleared land . . . The flake rots into the sea . . . I tell you nothing will be remembered here . . . That people will be born and live and die and their passage will go unnoticed. That their buildings will fall and rot back to the land. That their history will die in their children. . . . It belongs to the bottom of the sea . . . to secrecy and silence.

The play shows this spiritual demoralization in various ways. At its simplest it is seen in the British soldiers of the opening scene, who have lost all hope for the future and all pride in their profession, yet at the same time hate the pointless brutality they have fallen into. More thoroughly, this state of mind is explored in the characterization of Captain Gross, the garrison commander. Gross tells Lieutenant Mannon that he was just as keen for "law" and "honour" as the Lieutenant once, "But this rock now . . . something in it defeats the spirit." Squalor, insubordination, separation from his family, sexual infidelity, a growing sense of isolation, the harshness of the land, and the drink with which he has tried to dull his sensibility, have eaten away his self-respect.

At first the remnants of the man he was are reflected in a rather dandyish, epigrammatic turn of speech, reminiscent of Shaw's General Burgoyne: "Honour is an expensive luxury, reserved for naval battles and campaigns mounted for Imperial gain"; but when a whore breaks in to shame him with her scolding, this brittle elegance snaps and Gross drops abruptly into a more symbolic mode of speech: "I see icebergs in my sleep. All the time." The switch of rhetorical levels is shocking but quite deliberate: it reflects Gross's surrender to a different plane of experience; and this poetic style becomes his norm for the rest of the play. At

times it seems a bit selfconscious, as when he answers Tupper, who has said he tries to avoid the sea:

> But we are at sea, Tupper. At this moment . . . Can't you hear it? We're adrift, man. Helpless. The whales and ice thrash about us. Without a rudder, what can a man do? Drifts, Tupper. Only his head above the wave. Limbs, loins . . . ice cold . . .

— where poetry and dandyism seem to mix. But this, too, may be deliberate, since there is always a certain posing quality in Gross, a need to have his situation appreciable by others.

Gross's speeches play a large part in establishing the special Newfoundland *angst* of *Colour the Flesh*, as in the lines already quoted where he describes his pain at human impermanence, evoking despair in terms of the environment that caused it; and in that particular scene, which is a key one, the setting strengthens the link, because Gross speaks the lines to the Lieutenant when the two meet in a fog. Like the tattered uniform that he insists on wearing even after St. John's has been recaptured, the fog becomes a conscious symbol for the Captain. It represents his sense of isolation and spiritual drift, but at the same time, as he recognizes, it provides comfort by insulating him from reality ("The fog, I find, always makes life more bearable"); moreover, it also leads to greater self-knowledge ("a man learns things walking alone in the fog"), since it is in the fog that he recognizes that the seed of his collapse was already in him before he came to Newfoundland: "[My spirit] was defeated before I got here."

What that seed was is illustrated by his reasons for not defending St. John's. His initial explanation, that the garrison is outnumbered, is immediately (and a little too patly) contradicted by the arrival of the contingent of loyal fishermen. This drives him back to the real reason, his inability to take moral responsibility for the loss of life that a battle will entail. Our reaction to this is meant to be ambivalent. Gross's reluctance to take life agrees with the play's conclusion that just being alive, mere existence, is man's basic value; but it also relates to the idea, recurrent in Cook's drama, that feelings of humanity may be weakness in a savage environment — a point the Lieutenant's Woman later states explicitly. The play returns to a similar ambivalence at the end, when Gross tries to comfort the Woman for the Lieutenant's death by emphasizing the fact that she and the child she carries are still alive. This is very close to the Woman's own position, yet she rejects the Captain's support because from it he extrapolates a sentimental justification for his own collapse, appealing to authorities the Woman does not recognize: "I will tell them that you live here. . . . That I did what I did because you live here." As in his pathetic consolation that the official report of the debacle will secure for him some measure of remembrance, Gross shies away from the isolation of his position. He cannot dispense with an external source of notice and justification, even if it condemns him.

The Captain's breakdown is interestingly complex but not quite clearly worked out, and as he is not the play's protagonist, he is slightly offcentre in our interest anyway. Potentially more interesting than Gross, though even less developed, is the character of Lieutenant Mannon. He, too, feels the isolation of their position:

> We are stranded on some island at the edge of time. There's the sea. And the fog.... We can't gentle it in any way ... impose order or a universal design upon it.... Ultimately we respond to the ferocity of the sea. And the impermanence of life.

His hobnobbing with the common soldiers in scene one suggests that this experience has already begun to corrupt the Lieutenant's concern for "spit and polish," but the challenge of the French invasion apparently revitalizes his sense of "duty" and "honour." During the action, however, he discovers that he does not believe in these values for their own sake but because, without them, he, too, would face a moral collapse: "It's all I've got, see. Certain loyalties. Certain obligations and contracts." The strained nature of such ideals forces him into unnecessary rashness and falsifies his relationship with the Woman. Significantly, at the end he is shot in the back by one of his own men. A major flaw in the dramaturgy is that the reason for this killing is never made explicit, but there are sufficient hints for us to assume that it must be because of the pressure that the Lieutenant's idealism puts on others, a certain selfserving quality in his "honour" that Cook would later develop more fully in the monomaniacal skippers of *The Head, Guts, and Soundbone Dance* and *Jacob's Wake.*

Cook explores the nature of the Lieutenant's failure through his love for the Woman, who began the play mourning for the hanged Sean, another "fool" killed for resisting things as they are. The affair has been condemned as a misleading cliché,[16] but it seems to me quite central to Cook's purpose. At one level, it can be seen as a further stage in the Lieutenant's corruption, since, like Captain Gross and the common soldier, he is betraying the wife he left behind. Certainly, the Captain associates the Lieutenant's idealism with sexual guilt: "It's your conscience then and not our impossible position that's exciting you ..."; and the Lieutenant himself admits he is tempted to settle down as a Newfoundlander, but recoils from the "rot" he thinks this will involve. More complex than this suggestion of corruption is the confrontation the love affair establishes between rival alternatives to the Captain's surrender to despair, nicely emblematized in a tableau where the Woman, having rescued the Lieutenant from the mob, holds him prisoner by a noose around the neck.

The Woman says she is attracted to the Lieutenant by two factors: by "the life that runs in my loins" (in contrast to Gross's image of frozen loins, cited earlier), but also by an element she sees in him that she calls "dignity," which he shares with her previous lover, Sean: "You have been gifted with a sense of yourself that nothing can break ... Sean had that."

It turns out that she is wrong: the Lieutenant relies on the external order of "honour," not the internal strength of "dignity." After she finds she is pregnant, this leads the Woman to retreat to the other, more basic need to "be." She now condemns her previous "humanity" because "It's not possible to live very long once you accept that" — a sentiment adopted more cynically in the Magistrate's advice about controlling the populace: "No matter how much they hate you — at the moment of violence, weaken . . . be generous . . . it destroys the flame of their spirit." The Woman pleads for the value of mere existence ("You want to begin and end things . . . we exist"). In contrast to Gross's reliance on his written report, she insists that her unborn child will be "the only testament we can scribble on"; and her position is summed up with the simple, almost banal comment: "the bravest people I know are the ones who endure."

This is the stoic note on which the play concludes, though not without some further nuances. *Colour the Flesh* ends as it began with the Woman mourning a dead lover, but whereas the first death was emblematized by a tableau in which she cradled Sean's body like a *pietà*, at the conclusion of the play the stage direction tells us she hugs her pregnant belly: an image of life has replaced the opening image of death. She comments to the dead Lieutenant:

> You were nothing to anyone, but me; and your sense of honour, your King and Country. Now you're dead. And the honour of the King and Country lie dead with you. And there's only me left . . . me and him . . . me and her . . . what's it matter?

This is an affirmation, if a very bare one; but "What's it matter?" is ambiguous, meaning either "What does it matter whether the child be a boy or a girl?" or, more bleakly, "What does it matter that the child and I survive?" This shadowing even of stoicism is also reflected in her repudiation of the Captain's attempts to console her because "there's life in you yet"; and is expressed in the "Woman's Song" that gives the play its title and is returned to at the end:

> But to you I gave
> as give I must
> to colour the flesh
> the colour of dust
> But it's a fool
> who doesn't trust
> to give himself
> because he must.

Dust colours the flesh; love ends in death. Nevertheless, it is foolish to deny them.

As a work of art *Colour the Flesh* is exasperating yet memorable. There are striking scenes, passages of vividly evocative poetry, and some shrewd insights into behaviour; but the overall structure is incoherent, as Cook himself recognizes ("*Colour the Flesh* is a lousily structured play"[17]). The presentational elements — the Spokesman's address to the crowd and a voice-over reading of the official

report of the surrender (which was cut in production) — are not adequate to establish a truly "epic" mode; the songs can be tangible (as in the ballad of "Old Noll Cromwell") and sink sometimes to pretentious doggerel; the rhetoric is uncertain, with no attempt at the Newfoundland dialect used so effectively in the other two plays of the trilogy; and the symbols of the hanged man, the fog, and the *pietà* (made more explicit in the original draft by comparisons to Christ, the Romans, and Mary) are all rather too obvious.

Nevertheless, for all its faults, *Colour the Flesh* stays stubbornly in the mind because it does manage to convey Cook's intuition of a double-edged vitality in existence itself, destructive yet enduring, and his sense that this may be our last defence against spiritual collapse. These intuitions are developed further in *The Head, Guts, and Sound-bone Dance*, which is his most powerful stage play to date.

WHEREAS *Colour the Dust* is very loosely organized, *Dance* has a form that is almost perfectly suited to its theme. At its core is the same harsh Newfoundland experience, but confrontation with it is now more active and heroic. Moreover, the focus has been shifted to the tragic price exacted for such heroism, and the main threat is no longer nature itself but the modern world that renders heroism obsolete. Cook summarizes the plot as "Two old men trying to keep the past alive to the exclusion of the rest of the world."[18]

The action centres on a Newfoundland fisherman, Skipper Pete, an "Ancient leader of a savage pack with the instincts still there but the ability in pitiful repair,"[19] who in his "splitting room" on a fishing stage jutting into the Atlantic tries to keep tradition alive by remembering past glories and ritualistically making preparations for "one more trip." Pete stands uncompromisingly for

> The old way. The only way. The proper way to do things. Greet the day at cock-crow. The sea, no matter what the weather. Stack the gear. Mend the nets. Make the killick [a stone anchor]. Keep the store in order. There's nothing without it.

His son-in-law, Uncle John, once the cook on the Skipper's fishing boat, aids him, and so does his simple-minded son, Absalom, a sixty-year-old who is the only one of the three still physically able to go fishing. For most of the play, John's wife tries unavailingly to free her husband from the Skipper's domination, until a fatal accident convinces him she is right.

Our attitude to the Skipper is contradictory. He is admirable in his intransigent insistence on natural truths that lie beneath the surface of contemporary society; but, at the same time, he is a monomaniac like Melville's Ahab,[20] who refuses to recognize change or alternative styles of life and is prepared to sacrifice everyone to his own stark vision. Though in the past he was famous for never losing a man, Uncle John accuses him of tyrannizing over his crews for self-aggrandizement:

> You saved 'em alright. But not to stand up. Not to walk the world. Crawl! Ye made 'em crawl. Ye made me crawl.... We escaped the rule of others. And exchanged it for the rule of our own kind ...

and he reminds the Skipper that (like the Magistrate in *Colour the Flesh*) he never showed humanity except to disarm men on the brink of mutiny. This same brutal imposition of personality continues into the present with the Skipper's vendetta against seagulls; his sneer that, if John had gone to the war, "You'd never have survived. Unless I was with you"; and, more comically, with his insistence that his son-in-law must urinate decently, as though he were still on board his ship. Most strikingly, it is shown in the elaborate work rituals — preparing equipment, cleaning, salting, and cooking the fish, and careful cleaning up afterwards — that he enforces before he will allow his companions to celebrate, also ritualistically, his son Absalom's "end of voyage" and miserably small catch.

The Skipper sees these rigid codes as necessary to impose order upon chaos:

> I 'low the sea's a big place. Now a man's a small place. You've got to have order. Decency. There 'as to be a way of doing things. A man's way. That's why we're here, isn't it? They's only we left.

And according to the opening stage direction, this tension should be reflected in the play's set. The "splitting room" is crammed with

> an immense variety of gear representing man, and fish and sea in a tottering, near derelict place, and yet also [revealing], as we become accustomed to it, an almost fanatical sense of order.

The egotism of the Skipper's need to impose order is qualified, however, by a strain of mysticism in him. He holds that it is useless to demand meaning, as Uncle John does at one point; life can only be accepted: "It doesn't matter what it means. It's enough that it's there." Fishermen in the past knew their proper place in nature: "We understood each other — the sea, the cold, and the dogfish, and the sculpin and the shark and the whale. They knew us and we knew they...."

And in spite of the fish's disappearance, Skipper Pete believes — or wishes to believe — that this state of things will return, ousting the modern world of relief, welfare, and education, for which he has total contempt: "We waits.... And one day, they'll come back in their t'ousands.... They's waiting for the old days like we is."

These two sides to his attitude — the "Satanic" compulsion to an order based on egotism and his mystique of man's relation to nature — are given religious overtones, which are handled much more skilfully than the hanged man and *pietà* devices of *Colour the Flesh*. On the surface, the Skipper is an intolerantly conservative Catholic who will not attend his sister-in-law's funeral because it is to be held in a Pentecostal church, nor welcome the visiting bishop because he has come by car instead of boat and the traditional floral arches have not been built

to welcome him. The Skipper's orthodoxy is wholly superficial, however. He warns Uncle John that "God is not merciful. Don't ye ever forgit that," and seems to substitute his own authority for the bishop's when he defends the sternness of his regime by claiming "I made an arch for ye." When the Skipper boasts of never changing a habit or opinion, Uncle John replies with irony: "You and the Pope 'as got something in common after all then, Skipper . . . ," and John's wife pushes the implications of this a stage further when she says her father is "Only one breath away from God or the Devil himself." On the other hand, the Skipper's reaction to the news of young Jimmy Fogarty's death is wholly pagan and fatalistic, deifying not himself but the sea: "The sea wanted him. Old Molly. She took him in her good time. . . . "

The set reflects this pantheism. The left wall of the "splitting room" has "a ragged window — once a church window, saved from an abandoned church somewhere and put to use by a crude insertion into the room . . . ," and it is through this window that the Skipper gazes as he rhapsodizes about the past and envisions its return. At the end, when he is left alone, the setting sun dies through it to conclude the play.

For a while, with memories, work rituals, drink, and snatches of song, the Skipper and his two companions manage to create their own reality within the shack, culminating in the drunken dance of triumph that gives the play its title. A stage direction tells us that during this dance "For a moment they are all one. All free"; and one implication of the title is, of course, the celebration of a sense of life in the raw, a dance of fundamentals. But as the title also implies, it is a dance of discarded remnants as well, the pieces of the fish that are thrown away: the dance is ultimately a dance of death. All along, the emphasis on heroic individualism has been balanced by a recognition of the sterility of the Skipper's way of life. His is a world with no place for women or children. Though his sister-in-law, we hear, was good to the family, Skipper Pete has no intention of attending her funeral; and he despises his daughter, Uncle John's wife, partly because he wanted to father only sons, but also because he realizes she is a bitter rival for John's loyalty, without which he cannot keep his vision alive: "Memories ain't no good unless you can see someone else working out the same ones."

Uncle John and his wife have only daughters themselves, their son having been stillborn; and John blames this on the Skipper, who, he claims, killed their sex-life by his expectations of a grandson. We hear that when the Skipper's own son, Absalom, was young, his father sent him back into a fifteen-below blizzard to gather five more sticks of firewood and, when the boy's horse returned alone, refused to go to look for him because "Ye know ye had to bring 'em up hard or else they wouldn't survive."

Absalom is now retarded, a sixty-year-old with the face of a child, still unable to look his father in the face. When he asks the Skipper to sing, his uncle under-

lines the significance of his name by repeating the psalmist's cry for the son he has destroyed, "Oh Absalom, my son. Absalom. Absalom."

This destructiveness focusses in the action round the death of Jimmy Fogarty, which alters the relationships within the play. When at the end of Act I another child comes to the shed to beg aid for Jimmy, who has fallen off a wharf and cannot swim, the Skipper and Uncle John ignore him, continuing drunkenly to gaze through the church window, discussing a drowning that happened in the past. This callousness looms behind the subsequent celebration of Absalom's catch, as the noise of the search party is heard increasingly outside; and at the end it is Absalom who finds the body and brings it to his father: "Look what I caught by the side of the boat . . . I nivir caught a boy before. What shall I do with him, Father? . . . Can I have him?"

Up to this point Skipper Pete has been insisting that the death must have been fated, that "Old Molly," the sea, touched the boy the day he was born and has taken him in her own good time — "passionately believing what he wants to believe," as the stage direction explains — but confronted by the body in his own son's arms, the tragedy finally touches him:

> Absalom is facing Skipper Pete, the dead boy in his arms. The grandson he might have had! Skipper Pete puts out his hand slowly, traces the blind, wet face with his horny hands. Then, he turns, the hand that touched the dead child's face to his throat, as if it is a weight that will choke him.

Uncle John had genuinely not noticed the child's plea, in fact, because the Skipper's arm had kept him turned towards the church window, but now he realizes that Skipper Pete had heard and had deliberately ignored the cry for help. The doubts and rebellions that have worried John throughout the play come to a head, and he breaks at last from his father-in-law's dominion, taking Absalom with him ("he don't know nothing about boys. Only fish"). The play ends with Skipper Pete alone, stubbornly returning to the ritual of his evening chores by lamplight, as the sun dies out in the shack's church window.

Except for the rather forced situation where the child's plea is ignored, *Dance* is remarkably economical and successful in fusing realism and symbolism. Cook admits that the Skipper's disregard of the child's request is "unrealistic," but says "The scene was intended to drive home the Skipper's character";[21] and the advertisement for a CBC production of the play expands this by explaining that in the Skipper "fatalism reflects an acceptance of tragedy that seems like inhumanity."[22] Yet it is less the situation itself that is at fault than the fact that so little of its significance gets into the dialogue. The Skipper's remarks about "Old Molly" emphasize his fatalism retroactively, but his deliberate *willing* of the disaster at the time of the child's plea is left wholly to the actor; the closest the dialogue comes to it is that, at that time, the Skipper and John are discussing the drowning of a young man whose father was restrained from trying to rescue him. Similarly, the

Skipper's *anagnorisis*, when the tragedy of Jimmy Fogarty's death at last strikes home to him, is all in dumbshow; Pete does not speak again after he has seen the body in Absalom's arms.

Apart from this particular incident the ingredients of the play are admirably coherent. The characterization of the four main personages — Skipper Pete, Uncle John, Absalom, and John's wife — is sharply individualized; the set, while realistic, has rich symbolic suggestiveness; sounds-off — the sea itself, the mocking cry of seagulls, the bells for Aunt Alice's funeral, and the encroaching noise of the searchers for Jimmy Fogarty's body — all acquire thematic significance; and the elaborate rituals of preparing equipment, feeding the stove, making tea, cleaning and cooking fish, and preparing a celebratory drink, do not substitute for action, mere visual filler, but reflect the old men's attempt to use routines to recreate the past. This culminates in the grotesque dance, which, like the shanties sung by Pete, absorbs "presentational" techniques into the play's realism yet also carries a level of symbolism. The use of a modified Newfoundland dialect which is sparse, proverbial, coarsely comic, and repetitive, gives a sense of authenticity which can rise effortlessly to poetry — as, to give one brief example, Uncle John's comment that Absalom dreams "Of the mackerel thicker'n on the water than moonlight, whispering together." And the result is a powerful, credible picture of the end of an heroic tradition.

The Head, Guts, and Sound-bone Dance is bracketed by two of Cook's shorter plays, each centring on a character like Skipper Pete, which were written originally for radio but subsequently staged: *Tiln* (1971) a very successful piece which takes the symbolism of *Dance* a step further, and *Quiller* (1975), a less interesting, mainly realistic monologue. A brief comment on these pieces is pertinent before turning to the final play in the trilogy, *Jacob's Wake*.

The setting of *Tiln* is a lighthouse — "a platform on the very edge of space and time" — inhabited by the keeper Tiln, " a crazy old man . . . living on the exposed edge of his soul," who has come to believe that he is God, and by Fern, the dying survivor of a bombed ship from the south (the direction of dangerous civilization where Tiln has refused to go), who with his bible, phonograph, and single record of "Eternal Father, strong to save," has tried for ten years to keep alive some human feeling in Tiln's monomaniacal world. The language of the play is wholly poetic, combining Beckett's stripped down repetitions with lusher passages that show a debt to Dylan Thomas:

> I, Tiln. God of Light. Of the tilting universe.
> Lord of the bladderwrack and the black sea moss.
> Keeper of the pearled and fishy parables of the sea.
> Master of sailing barns.
> Executioner. Jonah's hangman.

Tiln's rituals to impose order and their eventual undermining by a sense of lost

humanity constitute what action there is. Like Skipper Pete, Tiln wages war against the mocking sea gulls; he ascends and descends his ladder ceremoniously, counting the rungs and pausing on every third step; he decides to light the lamp in a fixed position to blind the gulls, instead of letting it revolve to warn off shipping ("There are no travellers. There are none to save or destroy"); and climactically he refuses Fern's request to have the burial service read over him, repudiating his appeal "we have been good to each other" (as Pete repudiated his debt to Aunt Alice), tearing his bible and breaking his record of "Eternal Father," and finally "burying" him still dying in a barrel of salt brine: "You are no martyr but my sacrifice. Me. God Tiln. . . . Tiln giveth. Tiln taketh away. That's your service." Once alone again, Tiln finds his isolation unbearable, and the play ends with a tableau like the *pietà* with which *Colour the Flesh* began: Tiln cradling Fern's head in his arms and sobbing "You've cheated me."

Quiller goes to the opposite, realistic extreme. Apart from very brief incursions from some children and two passing women, it takes the form of an old sea captain's rambling monologue and hallucinations about the past, lusting after a neighbour woman, waging war against the mocking children (like Pete and Tiln against the gulls), and conducting folksy conversations with God ("Mornin', Lord. Dis is your servant, Quiller") and his long-dead wife, Sophie. Its mixture of reminiscence, gossip, simplistic philosophizing, and attempts at earthy humour show a good ear for Newfoundland speech and a compassionate understanding of character, but the piece is too long and too static for the stage, without any of the symbolic excitement of *Tiln*. It does show a new aspect of Cook's technique, however, which is important in *Jacob's Wake*.

WHEREAS *Colour the Flesh* is in presentational "epic" form and *Dance*, for all its realistic elements, operates symbolically, in *Jacob's Wake* Cook relies mainly on contemporary realism. He has said, in fact, that "Of all the plays I've written, it's the one that is most closely based upon the people I know."[23] Yet this concern for realism is combined with a variant of the Newfoundland experience that is difficult to present realistically. Cook's object now is apocalyptic. He wishes to convey the destruction of a humanity that has tried to turn its back on nature, evoking

> an environment no longer responsive to the timeless bonding between itself and man which makes communion on this earth possible, an environment with the will for destruction to match our own . . . an environment which bred E. J. Pratt's Titanic sinking iceberg, a vast neolithic structure created for such a time when man's hubris had made him blind to nature.

An absolutely crucial aspect of the staging, therefore, which Cook emphasizes in

his "Production Notes," is a sense of the steadily increasing storm outside the outport house which is the setting for the play: "It is essential . . . that the storm becomes a living thing, a character, whose presence is always felt, if not actually heard, on the stage."

For most of the play, however, this storm is strictly background for the human failings displayed within the house, where the celebration of Good Friday has brought together three generations of the Blackburn family, who represent successive stages of alienation from nature. The traditional heroic fatalism of Newfoundland is represented by Elijah Blackburn, an old sealing skipper very like Skipper Pete of *Dance*, who lies bedridden upstairs, confusedly mingling past and present as he has his log books read aloud and barks out orders as though he were afloat. Elijah shares the Newfoundland attitude which holds that "A house is a ship. Lights agin the night . . . Some adrift . . . Some foundered, some rotting old hulks full of the memories of men . . . They's no difference."

Like Skipper Pete, he also has a mystic belief that the vanished seals will return and that somehow he will be able to hunt them again: "They'll come back. The swiles'll come back in their t'ousands and when they do, I'll go greet 'em just like in the old days." But his attitude to nature is "Satanic" ("Swiles is bred and killed in Hell, boy"). He defies the storm like Lear in his madness — and his attraction to sealing lies not in the value of the catch but in the excitement of the hunt itself, the risking of one's own life to have the primitive pleasure of killing.

Like Skipper Pete, he scorns his daughter, Mary, an old-maid schoolteacher whom he wishes he had never begotten, and considers her a "poor substitute" for his second son, Jacob, who was lost while hunting. But Elijah is more complex and sensitive than his predecessor. Offsetting his dislike of Mary is his comfortable rapport with his daughter-in-law Rosie; and he is still remorseful over his dead wife's grief for their son, and distressed by her refusal to believe that he did all he could to save him. Indeed, as the title indicates, Elijah's overriding sorrow is the abandonment of Jacob to the ice, a sacrifice that ended the family's capacity to face nature with traditional defiance.

The Skipper's other son, Winston, and Rosie, his wife, are utterly non-heroic but have a capacity for love which provides an alternative to Elijah's pride. This centres on Rosie, whom Cook presents as an almost too perfect Irish-Catholic mother, loving, undemanding, and self-sacrificing.[24] Rosie lacks grandchildren, however, and like Elijah mourns the death of a child, a daughter Sarah, who might have carried on her kind of values.

Sarah was also Winston's favourite ("Everytime I gits afflicted with me family I thinks of the one that might have been different"), and her birth galvanized him for once to a courage in defying the elements that reminded Rosie of Elijah: "I never see ye like it. Ye were like a wild man. Like yer fader almost. . . . I believe ye'd 'ave faced the Divil dat night and gone on."

For Winston, life collapsed after his daughter's death ("It was never the same after she died. I doesn't know why . . ."), and he has since been left believing in nothing: "They's nothin', Rosie. Nothin'. They's madness and they's death and they's some who work at it and some who wait for it."

Winston, in fact, is the most complex character in the play, to whom our attitude changes radically. At first he seems merely idle, vulgar, and malicious, drinking heavily, hazing his returned sons, and teasing his spinster sister with indecencies. There is a sense of violence in the man, moreover, which culminates in his ineffectual firing of a shotgun after he hears that his son Alonzo has forged his name. His cry on hearing of this — "My name! 'Tis all I've got left" — reveals the damaged self-respect beneath this coarseness. Winston is an Esau figure, an elder son who is aware he has not satisfied his father's expectations ("I wish sometimes that I could have been the son he wanted"); and his self-contempt emerges movingly in a conversation with his wife late in the second act:

> What else could I ha' been, Rosie? What else could I ha' done? . . . It weren't good enough . . . Everything changed afore I knew what to do. The old ones so damned sure . . . Though what about, the Lord knows. And us, Rosie, us . . . Like rats in a trap, with the Welfare as bait. I didn't know what to do, so I didn't try. There didn't seem any p'int.

He drinks and curses to cover this sense of worthlessness: "I drinks because it helps me to forgit where I am and I swears because I like it. It sounds good and it protects me from your [Mary's] kind of literacy." As Cook's note on the use of dialect points out, "Winston is a man of considerable experience and education, both of which he seeks to suppress."

Our sympathy for him grows as we realize this sensitivity and note his tenderness not only for Rosie and the dead Sarah but also for the tragic Mildred Tobin, who froze to death with her illegitimate child when her father turned her out into a storm. Moreover, though he knew the culprit was really his own son Brad, Winston loyally kept this quiet even when gossip fathered the child on himself. Though he has proved a disappointment, the Skipper has a liking for him ("But y'are human. Ye talk to me"), and Winston in return is imaginative enough to appreciate his father despite his feeling of rejection: "I encourage him because beneath that wrinkled old skull and those mad eyes I kin sometimes see a truth about meself that might make some sense o' dying." He therefore resists the move to commit the old man to a mental home, and by the time his sister rejects his offer of reconciliation, throwing beer in his face, our sympathies for the two have switched completely.

In the Blackburns' degeneration Mary has a position between that of Rosie and Winston and that of their children, and our attitude towards her balances exactly our attitude to Winston. Initially, we are sympathetic to her pride in teaching standards, her contempt for her coarse brother and the nephew Alonzo, her opposi-

tion to her father's tyranny and to all the men's exploitation of Rosie's good nature, and the pride she shows in her favourite nephew, Wayne. But gradually the narrowness and lack of generosity in her nature emerge. Laudable independence shades into closefistedness, distaste for sexual coarseness becomes a chilling condemnation of the pathetic Mildred Tobin, and pride in Wayne shows itself possessive and even snobbish, as she exults in the impression they will make riding in his car to church. It is she who is ultimately behind the move to put the Skipper in an asylum — a move that denies the values of both Elijah and Winston — though it is Wayne who is her willing instrument in this treachery, just as he has been responsible for the final breakdown of his brother Brad by getting him dismissed from his parish.

The third generation of Blackburns has degenerated completely from the heroism of the Skipper, in fact: the "time of the seal" has given place to "the day of the dogfish." Winston describes their attitudes to Elijah without illusion: "One of 'em pretends ye don't exist and the other wants to save yer black soul. And the third waits fer yer will."

The eldest, Alonzo, is perhaps slightly less unsympathetic than his brothers. He is mainly what Winston pretends to be: drunken, vulgar, and brutal, forever daring his brothers to fight. He has no intention of accepting the responsibility of marriage but is promiscuous himself and the purveyor of lust to others — the proprietor of a roadhouse where he hires prostitutes as strippers — and the original inciter of Brad's affair with Mary Tobin. With his politician brother Wayne he trades business deals for votes, and to get a motel contract is prepared to commit his grandfather to an asylum by forging his father's signature — a cheat he claims to have performed frequently before. Yet just as 'Lonz is the only brother to retain his Newfoundland accent, so too he has some qualms about committing the Skipper and shows at least a vestige of sympathy for both Elijah and Winston. The second brother, Wayne, has no such traces of humanity. His affection for his Aunt Mary is unhealthily self-centred, and he has used the culture she strove to acquire for him merely to become a dishonest politician. Wayne is the furthest removed from nature of them all. Though he expects to become the Minister of the Environment, he has sold the island's last 50,000 acres of standing timber to the Japanese, and his personality collapses when the government he depends on for his power resigns ("Christ. He's turned to stone"). Most ruined of the three is the youngest son Brad, who is also the first to be destroyed. His guilt for Mildred Tobin has turned him into a religious fanatic, projecting his self-disgust onto others, and harrowed by fiery visions of an imminent last judgment. This collapse began when, as a child, he was maliciously abandoned to raw nature by his brothers — an incident which not only foreshadows his final destruction, when he goes out into the storm to die like Mildred Tobin, but also shows the brothers' complete lack of sympathy for or trust in one another. As 'Lonz states, perhaps

too badly, "There was never any love here, sure . . . We was too busy survivin' to put up with any o' that old foolishness." This lovelessness is reflected in a savage humour that finds its outlet in cheating, hazing and constant malicious joking, like the laughter of the ice which the Skipper swears he heard when Jacob died.

The realism of these family relationships (which have more than a whiff of O'Neill about them) is deepened by religious symbolism. Placing the action on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday not only provides a realistic excuse for the family's reunion but is also meant to relate to Elijah's sacrifice of Jacob on an April 5th many years before. Thus the mourning for Christ is also Jacob's Wake, and their parallelism is driven home by the crucifixion image, borrowed from David Blackwood's striking series of Newfoundland etchings "The Lost Party," in which the Skipper recalls his last sight of his son: "The way dey was, so far away, dey seemed to form a t'in black cross on the ice. Den the ground drift swallowed dem up. . . . " This image is recapitulated later as a premonition of disaster: " 'Tis the shape of death, boy. I kin see'n jest like that first time, rising out of the drift, moving across the ice widout a sound, a man like a cross growing up into the sky."

The key names are also significant. The Old Testament Jacob was, of course, the favoured son who wrestled with the angel and who, by fathering twelve sons, established the tribes of Israel; thus Jacob's death is clearly the loss of Elijah's hopes for the future. Similarly, Elijah himself was the Old Testament prophet of doom to Ahab's false gods, and his ascent to heaven in a chariot of fire is probably meant to relate to the Skipper's curious apotheosis at the end of the play. A level of religious awareness is also maintained by the Easter hymns coming over the radio, which the Blackburns occasionally join in. Not only do these incorporate Cook's usual device of song realistically into the play, their sentimental rendering makes a point about the religious shallowness of contemporary society, while the particular relevance of several of them to the sea — "Eternal Father," for example, and John Newton's "Amazing Grace" — deepens the symbolic significance of the action, though that significance is far from being Christian.

As usual in Cook, there is also an attempt to use the set to suggest several levels of response. Wayne's type of society is represented by the blandness of the radio's music and its stilted weather forecasts, which gradually give place to the real thing as the storm increases in violence, screaming round the house and finally overwhelming the radio and the lights. Within the house itself a distinction is established between the ground floor and the bedrooms. On the ground floor the ordinary aspects of outport life are conveyed by realistic conversation and methodical processes of quilting, cooking, drying firewood, playing cards, and even preparing drinks — "a traditional part of the family ritual." The bedroom level, by contrast, is appropriately the realm of vision — Brad's nightmares of the last judgment and the Skipper's reliving of his sons' death and premonitions that the house is a ship drifting to disaster.

At the end these levels are suddenly reversed. While the apparent corpse of the Skipper is visible on his bed above, his "ghost" enters below to take charge of the house like a ship, impressing his son and grandsons as part of the crew, and heading, he says, defiantly into the truth of the storm: "Comes a time. . . . When ye has to steer into the storm and face up to what ye are." There is also the sound of seals, and Elijah exults, "The swales is back. Newfoundland is alive and well and roaring down the ice-pack. . . ."

But then the play ends with nature triumphing in "a blackout and the sound of a cosmic disaster . . . the final release of the insensate fury of nature that has been building throughout the play." When the lights go up, the fragile house is empty save for the death mask of Elijah, and "All fades into the lone quiet crying of a bitter wind."

This conclusion is certainly not "one of the most ludicrous cop-outs in the annals of Canadian theatre," as one reviewer complained.[25] Its significance is clear in the context of Cook's other work; he has mingled realism and symbolism in all his plays; and *Jacob's Wake* itself has a persistent symbolic level, with the identification of house and ship repeated many times before the transformation. Nevertheless, the experiment fails: the reversal of levels is too extreme, and the significance of the end remains unclear. Cook himself tacitly admits this when he suggests that, instead of a realistic set, an "acceptable alternative" might be

> a stark skeletonized set. . . . as white as bone, stripped of formality, the house equivalent of a stranded hulk of a schooner, only the ribs poking towards an empty sky . . .

thus freeing the director for "an existential interpretation of the play."

The failure is an instructive one, however, because of its very boldness. The dilemma Cook faces as a playwright is that the experience he wishes to convey arises from an only too actual reality — the awesome environment of Newfoundland — which he cannot present on stage. He is forced to convey its significance poetically, through heightened language and stage symbolism, but this has an allegorical effect, removing the experience from the actuality that is its very essence. Only in *The Head, Guts and Sound-bone Dance* has he found a form to fuse these levels, and even there it is at some cost to the realism. *Jacob's Wake* switches between the levels too abruptly; while the "epic" looseness of *Colour the Flesh* allows realism and symbolism to coexist without a proper fusion. Perhaps the problem is insoluble in stage terms; but unless it is solved, Michael Cook's imagination itself remains "on the edge," its undeniable power denied an adequate dramatic form.[26]

NOTES

[1] *Stage Voices*, ed. Sister Geraldine Anthony (Toronto: Doubleday, 1978), p. 215; see also pp. 211, 222.

[2] John Arden and Robert Bolt are other influences in this direction.

[3] For an account of Cook's career, see *Canadian Theatre Review*, 16 (Fall 1977), pp. 26-28.

[4] Interview, *Canadian Theatre Review*, 1 (Winter 1974), p. 76.

[5] See Rota Lister, "An Interview with Michael Cook," *Canadian Drama*, 2 (Fall 1976), p. 179.

[6] *Toronto Star*, 9 February 1974.

[7] *Guide to Special Collections, University of Calgary*, 1978, p. 24.

[8] *C.T.R.*, 1, p. 74.

[9] Interview, *York Theatre Journal*, 5 (Spring 1973), p. 52.

[10] *Univ. Calgary Guide*, p. 24.

[11] Ibid.

[12] For a full list of Cook's work, see *C.T.R.*, 16, pp. 28-31.

[13] *Ottawa Citizen*, 14 October 1972.

[14] *C.T.R.*, 1, p. 74.

[15] This concern with the savage murder of Indians who had a proper link with nature is the central theme of *On the Rim of the Curve*.

[16] By Urjo Kareda, *Toronto Star*, 17 October 1972.

[17] *Can. D.*, 2, p. 179.

[18] *Saskatoon Leader-Post*, 5 December 1977.

[19] Playscript of *The Head, Guts, and Sound-bone Dance* (1973), p. 11; a revised text was published in *C.T.R.*, 1 (1974). The "Sound-bone" is the backbone of a fish.

[20] Cook makes this comparison himself: *Calgary Herald*, 26 October 1974.

[21] Ibid.

[22] CBC-TV, *First Choice*, 472 (4 October 1974), p. 2.

[23] *Stage Voices*, p. 227.

[24] A fuller portrayal of this type can be found in another of Cook's monologue plays, *Thérèse's Creed*, published in *"Tiln" and Other Plays* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1976).

[25] Audrey M. Ashley in the *Ottawa Citizen*, 23 July 1975.

[26] I should like to acknowledge the help of Heather MacCallum and Ronald Bryden in getting the data on which this essay is based.

DÉRACINE

Alexandre L. Amprimoz

this is not your landscape

you knocked
on a wrinkled door
to find time
with a cut wrist

and you sat under the wilted
lamp
        and you stared at the rug
        — eroded memory

look at the rain
how it slaps the window
leaving your heart
almost uprooted with fear
like a child's first tooth

this is not your landscape
no one talks to you
about venetian tunics
or tunisian venus
and it is alone that you dream
of holbein's hands
drawing erasmus' hands

THE MAN WHO PAINTED WITH HIS FINGERS

Alexandre L. Amprimoz

The brush was always
a poor translator:
I let nothing stand
between the light
and the canvas.

Call the dead moth
and weep on the cricket's grave;
tomorrow we will go
with dead leaves
to the funeral of the snail.

I turn the open field
from green to grey
and, bankrupt in the lungs,
I am tickled by tall chimneys
and the poison of smoke stacks.

I paint with my naked fingers
the madness of your "Starry Night"
and I squeeze the coloured paste
to see like rare sunflowers in a dark field
the stars turn their heads
towards an invisible sun.

THE CITADEL

for David Arnason

Alexandre L. Amprimoz

the citadel
contained its own provence
and could surprise you with a dream or
a silkworm
caught in a lavender field
once it even locked the murmur
of africa
with girls fearless of garlic
biting into a crisp sun

in the citadel
the wind coughed
like a congested tower
but paris was at least an echo
and winter was a louvre

in the citadel
i could still read symbols
and be french
and dream of mills
as if i were lowell
in the citadel
where ladies longed
for lacy castles
i was a lean promeneur
fond of liquid language

but here the sky is a still turtle
and under it
a golden boy denies
an aching man

FROM ALIENATION TO TRANSCENDENCE

The Quest for Selfhood in Michel Tremblay's Plays

John Ripley

IN SLIGHTLY MORE THAN A DECADE of sustained productivity, Michel Tremblay created no less than eleven plays set in the working-class environment of east-end Montreal. With the advent of *Damnée Manon, sacrée Sandra,* he announced that the collection was in fact "un premier cycle" and now complete.[1] The series comprises *Les Belles-Soeurs* (1968), *En pièces détachées* (1969), *La Duchesse de Langeais* (1969), *Trois Petits Tours* (1969), *Demain matin, Montréal m'attend* (1970), *A toi, pour toujours, ta Marie-Lou* (1971), *Hosanna* (1973), *Bonjour, là, bonjour* (1974), *Surprise! Surprise!* (1975), *Sainte Carmen de la Main* (1976), and *Damnée Manon, sacrée Sandra* (1977).[2] Tremblay's failure to clarify his intentions at the outset has led critics to treat the scripts in piecemeal fashion; and no comprehensive analysis of the cycle has appeared since the playwright underscored its coherence. As a modest and preliminary step in this direction, it may be useful to identify one of Tremblay's major themes and to examine systematically, if somewhat superficially, its theatrical metamorphoses from the first play to the last.

Fairly early in his career, Tremblay declared his commitment to a theatre dedicated to social inquiry and, implicitly, social animation. His plays, he told Fernand Doré in 1969, were designed as an antidote to "une paresse d'esprit" and "une carence dans le sang" which he found endemic in working-class québécois society. "Le théâtre que j'écris présentement," he continued, "en est un de 'claque sur la gueule,' qui vise à provoquer une prise de conscience chez le spectateur. Voyons nous, une bonne fois, tels que nous sommes, pour un jour, peut-être, dépasser tout cela."[3] A year later he informed Marc-F. Gélinas more succinctly, "Je fais de la sociologie avec un instrument, le théâtre."[4] Like Ibsen, Chekhov, and Sherwood Anderson, he places a relatively small and self-contained society under an artistic microscope. In the grey shabbiness of life on the rue Fabre, strait-jacketed by religious and social sanctions, and the garish glitter of the Main's (St. Lawrence Boulevard's) Clubland, with its siren-song of freedom, he discerns

local truths with universal validity. His findings, although uniquely stated and especially germane to Quebec, are reflected and magnified in international Humanities and Social Sciences literature since World War II.

Tremblay's sociological orientation, like that of contemporary sociology itself, evinces a keen awareness of the inter-relatedness of psychological and social processes.[5] Specific areas of his psycho-social concerns may be usefully illuminated by the work of Freud, Erikson, Adorno, Goffman, and others; but the theories of social psychologist Erich Fromm permit a more comprehensive overview of the cycle, and a remarkably coherent interpretation of the diverse, enigmatic, and unorthodox components of the constituent parts. Indeed, the plays may be read almost as theatrical explorations of the dilemma of the alienated self, both individual and societal, classically mapped by Fromm in his *Escape from Freedom* (1941) and *The Sane Society* (1955).

As imperative a part of man's nature as his physiological drives, Fromm argues, is "the need to be related to the world outside oneself, the need to avoid aloneness."[6] During the months of foetal development the child's primary ties are to the mother; however, with the moment of birth, an inexorable process of individuation comes into play. "The more the child grows and to the extent to which primary ties are cut off, the more it develops a quest for freedom and independence."[7] This positive side of individuation is matched by a corresponding and potentially negative aspect — a "growing aloneness." Ideally the forward thrust of individuation should be accompanied by an equivalent development of self-strength; but this, unfortunately, is not always the case.

> While the process of individuation takes place automatically, the growth of the self is hampered for a number of individual and social reasons. The lag between these two trends results in an unbearable feeling of isolation and powerlessness.[8]

Faced with the irreversible process of individuation, man has two choices available to him. He may, if he can find sufficient inner resources, resolve the crisis through an "active solidarity with all men and his spontaneous activity, love and work, which unite him again with the world, not by primary ties but as a free and independent individual."[9] If he cannot do so, the misery of independence without self-strength may oblige him to resort to some form of escape mechanism. Fromm identifies three major types: *authoritarianism*, a strategy which leads the individual to seek "new 'secondary bonds' as a substitute for the primary bonds which have been lost";[10] *automaton conformity*, a state in which he assumes so completely the cultural patterns of his society that he believes them to be of his own choosing; and, as a last resort, *destructiveness*, which has as its end the elimination of the threat or the annihilation of the individual himself.

Tremblay's cycle, begun in the early years of Quebec's Quiet Revolution and completed shortly after the accession to power of the Parti Québécois, may be

read literally as a series of case studies of alienated individuals, most of whom, when faced with the challenge of self-realization, opt to escape from it. At the level of allegory or parable, the cycle depicts and indicts a society (or nation) which rejects its birthright rather than confront the perils inherent in self-responsibility. Tremblay's vision, if bleak, is nevertheless not entirely pessimistic. Among a host of commonplace prisoners of their own fears, he highlights a few bizarre marginals who, through an act of will, break their defeatist patterns and learn to respect themselves and to love others. Their feats of self-conquest, however trivial and grotesque, signpost the route to be taken by a more conventional populace in search of personal and national liberty.

Each of the eight major plays in the cycle contributes uniquely to Tremblay's analysis. *Trois Petits Tours*, three sketches; *Demain matin, Montréal m'attend*, a musical; and *Surprise! Surprise!*, a lunchtime-theatre piece, may be left out of account since they merely confirm the playwright's overall thesis and offer little that is not better expressed elsewhere.

Les Belles-Soeurs, the first play and the cycle's cornerstone, is a horrifying group-portrait of the rue Fabre's alienated females. To the kitchen of Germaine Lauzon, at some time during the 1950's, Tremblay brings fifteen married and single women, ranging in age from adolescence to advanced senility. Throughout an evening spent pasting into books the million trading stamps won by Germaine in a contest, the women bemoan their bondage and powerlessness; yet they remain, in Fromm's phrase, "quite incapable of experiencing the feeling of 'I want' or 'I am.' "[11] The seven married women consider themselves victims of sexually-insatiable husbands and demanding families. But the spinsters are hardly more liberated. Des-Neiges Verrette, demoralized by aloneness, orders her life about the monthly visits of a brush-salesman. The ghoulish crones, Rhéauna and Angéline, bondslaves to a death-wish, forge a cannibalistic attachment to each other. Pierrette, although she defies neighbourhood conventions and finds work in a Main nightclub, wins at best a Pyrrhic victory. Intimidated by the prospect of freedom, she becomes the mistress of her employer, only to find herself rejected at the appearance of the first wrinkles. The teenagers, Linda, Lise, and Ginette, are doomed, for want of positive models, to repeat the negative patterns of their elders.

To assuage the anxieties of individuation without self-strength, the women compulsively seek refuge in what amounts to an authoritarian sisterhood: and their individual and collective practice of masochism and sadism, the two major types of authoritarian behaviour noted by Fromm, give the play its heartbeat. The expressionistic soliloquies and choruses are exercises in masochistic release, while the realistic dialogued sequences reveal the sadistic impulse rampant.

The goal of masochism is, according to Fromm, "*to get rid of the individual self, to lose oneself*; in other words, *to get rid of the burden of freedom*. . . . To

feel utterly small and helpless is one way toward this aim; to be overwhelmed by pain and agony another; to be overcome by the effects of intoxication still another."[12] The masochistic resources of the rue Fabre women are virtually limitless. Marie-Ange Brouillette, in a speech marked by excremental association, shrinks her significance to wellnigh the vanishing point:

> C'est pas moé qui aurais eu c'te chance-là! Pas de danger! Moé, j'mange d'la marde, pis j'vas en manger toute ma vie! ... Ma vie est plate! Plate! Pis par-dessous le marche, chus pauvre comme la gale! Chus tannée de vivre une maudite vie plate![13]

Rhéauna Bibeau wallows in ill-health to excuse her lack of fulfilment. "J'ai souffert ben plus que toé, Angéline!", she brags in an orgy of self-pity. "J'ai pus rien qu'un poumon, un rein, un sein." Pierrette, unable to reconstruct the fragments of her shattered existence, passively concludes, "Tout ce qui me reste à faire, c'est de me soûler." Similar instances could be multiplied.

Sadism, defined by Fromm as "pleasure in the complete domination over another," allows the powerless individual the illusion of strength, a second means of escape from inner weakness. Sadistic behaviour, according to Fromm, may take three major forms: the desire "to make others dependent on oneself and to have absolute and unrestricted power over them"; "the wish to make others suffer or to see them suffer"; and "the impulse ... to exploit [others], to use them, to steal from them."[14]

Fromm could hardly wish better clinical examples of all three types of sadistic strivings than those offered by Tremblay's females. Thérèse's physical domination of the senile, wheelchair-ridden Olivine Dubuc and Rhéauna's moral subjugation of Angéline are clearly of the first sort. The merciless beatings about the head to which Thérèse periodically subjects her mother-in-law, the abject humiliation forced by the group upon Angéline, and the heartless ostracization of Pierrette belong as patently to the second type. The exploitative form of sadism — the theft of Germaine's stamps — constitutes the play's central action. The social structure of the rue Fabre is founded upon a universal commitment to chronic despair. Germaine's good fortune offers her hope, and thus threatens to destabilize the neighbourhood. The systematic sack of Germaine's dreams, concluded by her despairing cry, "Y me reste pus rien! Rien! Rien!", simultaneously restores her to the masochistic fellowship and vanquishes the menace of change.

In ninety minutes of black comedy, Tremblay explodes two centuries of popular belief, ecclesiastical teaching, and literary myth about Québécois women. Far from being the traditional guardians of religious and moral values, happy progenitors of large families, and good-humoured housekeepers, they stand revealed as malevolent misfits, consumed with hatred of life and of themselves. The corrupt wellspring of female neuroticism, Tremblay argues, infects the whole of Québécois society; and its malign effects are traced in detail in the plays which follow.

Although *Les Belles-Soeurs* may be viewed simply as a psycho-social case study, it yields additional resonance when considered as a political parable. The 1950's era seems to represent for Tremblay the nadir of Québécois self-esteem; and the stifling despair of Germaine Lauzon's kitchen mirrors allegorically Quebec's cultural alienation during the Duplessis regime's final years. The traditional male traits — independence, adventurousness, and strength — are absent. Creativity, nurture, and love — customarily associated with the female — have degenerated into sterile authoritarianism. The ills of Québécois society, like those of the rue Fabre women, derived, Tremblay seems to suggest, less from external forces than a subjective inability to assert its identity, to accept self-responsibility, and to risk moral aloneness. Inexplicably, self-strength failed. The maintenance of Canadian ties offered escape from the fear of freedom; yet the sense of powerlessness evoked by such a choice drove the Francophone community to cannibalize itself in frustration. Tremblay's allegorical intent is transparent in the concluding moments of the play as Germaine's predators triumphantly warble "O Canada." It is devastatingly appropriate that the song which celebrates the demise of Germaine's aspirations to self-respect should be the anthem which symbolizes for Quebec nationalists the victory of hostile dependency over cultural integrity. When Germaine, in a fit of masochistic abandon, dries her tears and lifts her voice with the authoritarian sisterhood, Tremblay's bitterness is almost palpable.

In *En pièces détachées* Tremblay again returns to the Duplessis era, and now places a rue Fabre family under his psycho-social microscope. Alienated from their individual selves, each other, and the community, the aging Robertine, her daughter, Hélène,[15] and her son-in-law, Henri, vent their frustrations behind closed venetian blinds. Meanwhile, like a Greek tragic chorus, the neighbourhood women, in apartment windows opposite, deride their aloofness and mouth the virtues of conformity.

Robertine, victim of an unhappy marriage and neurotic guilt at the birth of a retarded child, long since sentenced herself to a life of masochistic isolation. Hélène, determined to escape her mother's passive negativism, scandalized the neighbourhood with a brief bout of unconventional behaviour during adolescence; but her quest for freedom was promptly betrayed by her want of self-strength. In a gown of midnight blue, and her hair dyed fire-engine red, she entered a shotgun marriage with the handsome gigolo, Henri, and eclipsed all hope of fulfilment. Her bridegroom, unable to accept the role of family-provider, conveniently suffered an accident and opted for a career of invalidism and fantasy. Over the next fifteen years, tranquillized by self-pity and television cartoons, he revels in the growth of Popeye's muscles while his own virility ebbs away. Meanwhile, Francine,

the child of the unfortunate union, evolves into an adolescent nonentity. Half-heartedly training to become a hairdresser, she is predestined to failure by her total want of self-esteem.

Hélène, the play's protagonist, assumed with her marriage the role of family breadwinner. From humble beginnings as a Kresge's salesgirl, she attains the coveted eminence of waitress at the Main's Coconut Inn; but her reliance on alcohol as a substitute for inner security inevitably occasions her dismissal. Employed in a smoked-meat joint on Papineau Street as the play opens, she smarts at the loss of both status and income. Like the alienated sorority of the previous piece, she seeks release from her pain in a succession of sado-masochistic exercises; and her exertions, as desperate as they are futile, constitute the play's central interest.

In the drama's final episode, Hélène's retarded brother, Claude, now insane and institutionalized, escapes custody and returns home. At curtain-fall, as the household wail, "Chus pus capable de rien faire!", Claude, in a travesty of Frommian self-strength, proclaims his omnipotence. When he wears sunglasses and speaks English, he asserts, "Moé, j'peux toute faire! J'ai toutes les pouvoirs!" Claude's illusions of power, albeit the fruit of insanity, leave the impotent Henri with his mouth a-water.

The authoritarian females of *En pièces détachées* differ little from their counterparts in *Les Belles-Soeurs*, and warrant no detailed comment. It should be noted, however, that the women of both plays, despite their insecurities, maintain their role-functions. Henri and Claude, precursors of a succession of alienated males, do not.

En pièces détachées, a morality play populated exclusively by vices, finds Tremblay's confidence in Quebec's cultural future wellnigh non-existent. Where, he demands allegorically, are the robust male virtues to be discovered? If Henri's sloth perpetuates static despair, Claude's self-delusion invites outright disaster. To seek selfhood through invisibility (which Claude believes is conferred by the wearing of sunglasses) and foreign speech is the counsel of manifest lunacy; yet the madman's formula was consistently adopted by hosts of Québécois, male and female, as a survival strategy from Montcalm's defeat onwards. And the outcome, Quebec nationalists argued, could only be cultural annihilation.

In *La Duchesse de Langeais*, a monologue spoken by a sixty-year-old transsexual, Tremblay depicts another mode of escape from male impotence — the resort to what Erikson terms a "negative identity." This psychological mechanism, close to the ultimate form of masochism, involves the adoption of a role precisely the opposite of the one normally expected. "The history of such a choice," Erikson maintains, "reveals a set of conditions in which it is easier for a patient to derive a sense of identity out of a total identification with that which he is least supposed to be than to struggle for a feeling of reality in acceptable roles which are unattain-

able with his inner means."[16] Tremblay makes little effort to explain the origins of the Duchesse's identity shift. Her femininity is simply there, absolute and irrevocable. Sexually active with males since the age of six, and a prostitute since twelve, the Duchesse can scarcely conceive of a time when she was not female.

The role-models adopted by the Duchesse were not those offered by the drab submissive rue Fabre sisterhood; rather she chose as her exemplars the show-business queens — women like Tallulah Bankhead, Esther Williams, and Mae West — who dedicated their lives to the pursuit of glamour, and used it to buy power. Materialistic prosperity, social status, and international travel, the lodestars of the Duchesse's existence, were readily to be found within the homosexual subculture; and a forty-year career as a prostitute and female impersonator brought her a fair measure of all three. But her success did not come cheaply. Her sadistic exploitation of wealthy admirers ("Je suis une mante religieuse, une mangeuse de mâles!") necessitated the systematic dehumanization of both herself and the objects of her conquest. Now drunkenly sunning herself at a southern resort, with only memories of her erstwhile triumphs to solace a desolate old age, she endures the consequences of a loveless past.

Tremblay's account of one man's flight into negative identity as an antidote to weakness is shrewdly observed and poignant. But its parabolic import is infinitely more telling; for the plight of the Duchesse mirrors in microcosm the fate of a society which forgoes its identity in favour of an alien mask. Quebec's virility crisis, Tremblay graphically argues, cannot be solved by an effeminate surrender to North American materialism and its meretricious cultural trappings. Such a course amounts to prostitution and evokes an even greater alienation. Tremblay is not yet prepared to suggest a viable alternative; but his rejection of the ludicrous, and ultimately pathetic, strategy adopted by the Duchesse, and thousands of his Quebec compatriots, is virulent and total.

A toi, pour toujours, ta Marie-Lou sees Tremblay return to domestic life on the rue Fabre, where he now explores with sustained precision themes only outlined previously. In a complex dramatic structure composed of two intermeshed time planes, the sisters, Manon and Carmen, visit together at their childhood home, while their parents, Léopold and Marie-Louise, simultaneously relive the marital hell which culminated in their murder-suicide ten years earlier. The daughters alternately participate in the past action, analyze it in the present, and attempt to assess its influence on their future. Tremblay's intricate and sensitive analysis of the conflict-ridden union of Léopold and Marie-Louise at once clarifies the source and nature of the male-female hostility evident in earlier dramas, and charts its effect on the next generation.

Rue Fabre inhabitants, male and female, are, Tremblay suggests, victims of a societal structure which places a higher value on role-identity than on personal identity. Women are categorized as mothers and housekeepers, and men as fathers

and providers. Words like individuality, will, and self-realization have no place in the local vocabulary. Marie-Louise, pregnant at eighteen, married simply because it was expected of her. She brought to her marriage, in lieu of a sense of selfhood, only her mother's authoritarian complex and an implacable aversion to sex. For her, as for Rose in *Les Belles-Soeurs*, physical lovemaking was an act of violence perpetrated upon a helpless female by a bestial male. "Pour moé, faire ça, c'est cochon!", she insists. "C'est bon pour les animaux." Léopold, equally susceptible to community pressures, accepted the role of family-man, and with it a life of automaton conformity in a factory. Futile rage at his servitude was his only reward. His frustrations might have been somewhat ameliorated by conjugal happiness; but Marie-Louise's neuroticism denied him even this release. To forget his isolation and impotence he retreats to the tavern where he weaves intoxicated daydreams of freedom and choice. His return home, to a renewed sense of despair, invariably prompts an attempt to claim his marital privileges by force.

For both partners, marriage is a sado-masochistic battle with no prospect of victory for either side. Systematically Marie-Louise undermines Léopold's frail self-image, frustrates his sexual urges, and turns his family against him. And he retaliates with renewed brutality. As Léopold's alcoholism lures him ever closer to insanity, Marie-Louise takes refuge in a life-denying religiosity.

And what of the children of the ill-starred union? The relationship of both parents to their young son, Roger, is particularly significant; for it throws valuable light on the identity crisis of the Duchesse and the dilemmas of the protagonists of the next two plays. Not the least of Léopold's miseries is his shame at the inadequate role-model he offers his son; and in a pathetic effort to affirm his virility and confirm his authority, he physically abuses the boy on the slightest excuse. Marie-Louise in turn capitalizes upon Roger's terror of Léopold to forge an unhealthy identity bond with him. Léopold's refusal to allow Roger to share her bed evinces a justifiable fear of the sexual consequences for his son; yet he fails to recognize that the primal source of the threat to Roger's male sexuality, and that of other rue Fabre men, is not maternal domination but paternal alienation. Léopold's daughters pose no threat to his ego and are largely ignored by him. While he looks on with ironic tolerance, Marie-Louise indoctrinates them with her sterile authoritarianism and warped notions of male sexual degeneracy.

The sado-masochistic struggles of Léopold and Marie-Louise inevitably culminate in disaster. If all else fails, Fromm tells us, "I can escape the feeling of my own powerlessness in comparison with the world outside myself by destroying it."[17] And Léopold, in a perverse final act of self-assertion, does just that, and more. While driving with his wife and son on the Boulevard Metropolitan, he crashes the car into a concrete wall. At one stroke he annihilates Marie-Louise, the source of his anguish, himself, the sufferer, and Roger, the heir to his alienation.

Manon and Carmen, who fortunately escape the death-trip, are left, at the ages of fifteen and sixteen, to cope with life as best they can. And their modes of adaptation are very different. Manon passes the next decade in her parents' house, perpetuating the pattern of sexual frigidity and religious fanaticism espoused by her mother. Her authoritarian devotion to God at once mitigates her need for human contact and relieves her of all responsibility for her own fulfilment. Carmen, happily, discovers some vestiges of self-strength; and by a positive act of volition puts the past and its destructiveness behind her. "Chus v'nue au monde dans'marde, pareille comme toé, Manon," she declares, "mais au moins j'essaye de m'en sortir!" Her escape is not a sensational one. She is just a cowboy singer at the Rodeo bar, disguised as an American cultural hero and celebrating an alien mythology. But she has at least taken a first step toward freedom and happiness.

A TOI, POUR TOUJOURS is not only a devastating psychosocial analysis of the traditional working-class Québécois family, but an eloquent allegorical appeal for national emancipation from a destructive authoritarian past. The achievement of self-determination, for Quebec as for Carmen, demands as a first step, Tremblay insists, an exercise of the will. Quebec's initial essays in self-reliance may seem to outsiders puny and even absurd. As Carmen puts it, "Y'en a qui trouvent ça niaiseux, une chanteuse de chansons de cow-boy." "Mais," she continues, "quand c'est ça que tu voulais faire, pis que t'as réussi à le faire t'es ben moins niaiseuse que ben du monde." With Carmen's ingenuous, yet trenchant, declaration, Tremblay permits the first rays of hope to penetrate the hitherto unrelieved darkness of the cycle.

Carmen's assertion of the right to shape her own destiny marks but the beginning of her quest for Fromm's desiderata — love and productive work. Tremblay will report on her progress later. Meanwhile, in *Hosanna*, he undertakes another study of the male identity crisis, a bizarre account of the stresses within a homosexual union. Out of a relationship fragmented by individual alienation, the play's protagonists create a harmony unknown to heterosexual couples in previous dramas.

Claude Lemieux, a rural youth dominated by a mother who preferred to have him homosexual rather than attached to another woman, migrates to Montreal where he assumes the negative identity of Hosanna; and, like the Duchesse, adopts the trappings of American movie heroines to lend glamour and status to an otherwise sordid existence. Her lover, Raymond Bolduc alias Cuirette, has equally thorny identity problems. His sense of maleness is present, if precariously so; but he is unable to accept his homosexuality. Compulsively bolstering his masculine image with leather suits and a motorcycle, he seeks sexual release with transvestites

or the half-invisible males who haunt the unilluminated toilets of Lafontaine Park. Four years of sado-masochistic cohabitation bring Hosanna and Cuirette close to the desperation of Marie-Louise and Léopold. Promiscuous sexual contacts outside their relationship yield no satisfying alternative liaison; yet their life together has become intolerable.

In the course of the play, the illusions upon which both predicate their survival are shattered. Hosanna enters a transvestite masquerade contest dressed as Elizabeth Taylor in the role of Cleopatra. When she discovers that, in collusion with Cuirette, the entire community has donned the same garb, her humiliation is complete. Cuirette suffers a comparable trauma when the city erects lights in Lafontaine Park and robs him of a major source of sexual satisfaction.

Out of the shattered fantasies of both, however, comes a rebirth. Hosanna refuses, despite her shame, to be cowed by her enemies. In an unwonted act of self-strength, she takes the stage in her turn and endures the unavoidable ridicule. Simultaneously she comes to recognize her escapist fancies for what they are. "J'me sus dit," she tells Cuirette later,

> "Cléopâtre est un gros tas de marde! Elisabeth Taylor est un gros tas de marde! . . . Ecoute ben ça, Cuirette: j'étais pus Cléopâtre, cibole, j'étais Samson! Oui, Samson! Pis j'ai toute démoli mes décors en papier mâché! . . . Chus t'un homme, Cuirette! . . . Va falloir que tu habitues à ça, aussi."

Cuirette also makes discoveries. At the moment of Hosanna's inner triumph, he realizes that he loves her — not as Hosanna, but as Claude. And her female disguise is no longer essential to their relationship. Claude acknowledges that he is a man; and Raymond accepts the fact that he loves a man. For the first time in the cycle, one human being admits to love for another.

Claude and Raymond are social deviants and will always be so; but marginality, they come to realize, need not imply alienation. Their recipe for relatedness requires as its key ingredient acceptance of, and respect for, one's own individuality. "My own self," contends Fromm, "is as much an object of my love as another person."[18] A sense of self-worth in turn creates for the protagonists the freedom to love others, to engage in what Fromm describes as "an experience of sharing, of communion, which permits the full unfolding of one's own inner activity."[19] The nationalistic moral of Tremblay's fable is transparent. Québécois society may be a North American minority and comparatively powerless, but it need not be alienated. Its salvation lies not in a submissive retreat into negative identity or aggressive displays of mock-virility, but in an acceptance of its uniqueness, and the cultivation of love and respect for itself. Only through confidence in its own integrity can it achieve ties of solidarity with the world outside.

"What matters," Fromm maintains, "is the *quality* of loving, not the object."[20] In *Bonjour, la, bonjour,* as if to test the implications of Fromm's assertion, Tremblay explores the plight of a man who discovers that the object of his love is his

sister. So compelling, however, is his need for love, the ultimate remedy for alienation, that he defies society's strictest taboo in order to attain it.

The mother of the play's hero, Serge, died when he was barely out of infancy, leaving him to the mercies of a father (Gabriel) who, like Léopold, sought in the tavern escape from family duties and the tedium of factory labour. Three older sisters — Lucienne, Denise, and Monique — became surrogate mothers to Serge and his youngest sister, Nicole. From early childhood the senior sisters encouraged an excessive intimacy between their youngest siblings; and, with adulthood, the relationship ripened into incest. Serge, at twenty-five, and Nicole, at thirty, finally confront the long-term implications of their involvement, and decide to separate to contemplate their options. After a three-month European vacation, Serge returns with his mind made up.

In a series of encounters during Serge's first evening at home, Tremblay juxtaposes the socially-accepted authoritarian destructiveness of the rest of the family with the socially-reprehensible happiness of the illicit lovers. Gabriel, Serge's father, withdraws into deafness. The aging aunts, Albertine and Charlotte, measure out their days in illness, self-pity, and mutual hate. Serge's elder sisters are equally maladjusted: Lucienne seeks solace for an unhappy marriage in a succession of young lovers; Denise eats incessantly to compensate for spiritual hollowness; and Monique downs tranquillizers with abandon to dull the pain of loneliness. If this be normality, Tremblay demands implicitly, what is deviance?

Fortunately Serge eludes the authoritarian toils which enmesh the rest of the family, and stoutly resists any attempt to entrap him. He doubts neither his male identity nor his heterosexuality. Such anxieties as he has are prompted less by the unorthodox object of his love than by his concern for the quality of his feeling. His attachment to Nicole was initially, indeed, predetermined; but as an individual possessed of reason and freewill he refuses to be the creature of blind authoritarianism. "C'est vrai que j'ai pas eu ben ben le choix," he tells Lucienne. "C'est vrai que toute la famille m'a jeté dans les bras de Nicole . . . mais c'est-tu ça que j'veux vraiment?" After long and careful thought, he concludes that he loves Nicole not out of compulsion but volition; and to reject his chance for happiness would be foolhardy. By the deliberate exercise of reason and will, the brother and sister assert their right to choose their destiny and their readiness to accept the consequences of their decisions. Inevitably a high price must be paid for flouting social convention; but their happiness justifies it. "J'me sacre de ce que le reste du monde peut penser," Serge insists, "nous autres on est heureux pis c'qu'on ressent l'un pour l'autre, si c'est une maladie, c'est une maudite belle maladie!"

"Productive love," according to Fromm, "always implies a syndrome of attitudes; that of *care, responsibility, respect* and *knowledge*."[21] The productive love of Serge and Nicole animates not only their own relationship, but extends beyond it to the ailing Gabriel. Out of Serge's own struggles for fulfilment comes the

capacity to empathize with his father's alienation, to forgive his past blunders, and to accept responsibility for his future. Serge's cry, "Popa, j't'aime" (according to Tremblay, "la première fois dans le théâtre québécois qu'un fils dit à son père qu'il l'aime")[22] marks a felicitous resolution of the male identity crisis which haunted earlier plays.

The nationalistic import of Tremblay's incest metaphor needs little explication. His impatience with the alienated destructiveness which passes among Québécois for normalcy is self-evident. The play is a clarion call to renounce negativism, and, through the deliberate employment of reason and will, to seek love — if only within the cultural family. Such a love, far from being aberrant, is positive and productive. It allows not only fulfilment today, but reconciliation with yesterday. To say "Popa, j't'aime" to the past is to understand it, to forgive its errors, and to accept responsibility for the future. It is, in short, to discover a sense of historical identity. Tremblay's use in the play's title of the salutation, "Bonjour," a word spoken in Quebec both at meeting and parting, signals at once the birth of love and the death of alienation.

In *Sainte Carmen de la Main* Tremblay resumes the tale of Carmen, who achieves at last Frommian freedom only to be martyred by the social forces which thrive on human bondage. This, the penultimate play of the cycle, simultaneously celebrates Tremblay's belief in man's potential for self-realization and betrays his fearful conviction that in modern society the odds are heavily against its fulfilment.

Over the years since *A toi, pour toujours* Carmen's career on the Main has prospered; and in recent months she has journeyed to Nashville to improve her vocal technique at the expense of her lover, Maurice, proprietor of the Rodeo nightclub and underworld kingpin. As the play opens, she is about to make her second début at the Rodeo, an event eagerly awaited by local transvestites, prostitutes, and other denizens of the area. She begins her performance with translations of Western "hits"; but toward the end switches to songs she has written herself about the lives of Main-dwellers. Her lyrics are hymns to the value and beauty of the human spirit, and the redemptive power of self-strength. As Sandra, the transvestite, and Rose Beef, the prostitute, put it, "Carmen a dit qu'au fond de moé j'étais forte!" Overnight Carmen becomes a heroine to her public, and a material threat to Maurice, whose lifestyle is supported by the very weaknesses Carmen decries. When she refuses to heed either her lover-employer's pleas or warnings, her career as social animator is cut short by two shotgun blasts; and her place is filled by her rival, Gloria, a purveyor of Latin American schmaltz.

Arguably Carmen is not perfect. She is naive, over-confident, and impulsive; worse still, her alliance with a brutal hood makes her the indirect author of her own destruction. Yet the splendour of her love redeems all faults. It now goes beyond the love of self or a particular individual and embraces an entire society. "If I love," writes Fromm, "I care — that is, I am actively concerned with the

other person's growth and happiness. . . . I respond to his needs, to those he can express and more so to those he cannot or does not express."[23] Carmen cares profoundly; and her art (Fromm considers art a "prototype" of productive work) is the inevitable and happy effect of her altruism. "Avec ma voix j'ai décidé d'essayer d'aider la Main à sortir de son trou," she announces to Maurice.

> Si y faut y montrer à respirer, j'y montrerai à respirer . . . si y faut toute y montrer j'y montrerai tout c'que je sais, même si c'est pas ben gros . . . Y m'écoutent, moé! Y m'aiment, moé! Pis moé aussi j'les aime!

This consummate synthesis of love and productive work, in an environment implacably hostile to both, at once precipitates Carmen's ruin and vindicates her claim to sainthood.

As an object lesson in humanism, *Sainte Carmen* functions admirably; but at the level of allegory it disappoints. According to Tremblay, the piece was designed as a parable dealing with "la place de l'artiste dans la société";[24] and when read thus, it smacks more of self-conscious posturing than passionate conviction. Can the playwright be seriously suggesting that the socially-committed artist inevitably suffers destruction at the hands of hostile authority? Such has not been his lot at any rate. Nor can one give much more weight to his simplistic conclusion that escapist art (represented by Gloria) must prevail over higher forms (epitomized by Carmen). Does Tremblay believe in art as an instrument of social reform at all? His decision to kill Carmen before her work comes to fruition conveniently evades the question altoegther.

Sainte Carmen completes Tremblay's exploration of man's need for Frommian "rootedness" and "relatedness"; and, in the final play of the cycle, he turns to a third human drive noted by Fromm — the impulse towards transcendence. *Damnée Manon, sacrée Sandra*, a deeply-moving personal statement, voices the playwright's recognition that for him, as for Sandra, "La survie tout court, ça se peut pas. Y faut que ça soye accompagné par quequ'chose, la survie . . . Quequ'-chose d'enveloppant pis de chaud!"

The protagonists are familiar figures from previous plays. Manon, the God-ridden recluse of *A toi, pour toujours*, and Sandra, a transvestite who is mentioned in *Hosanna* and appears in *Sainte Carmen*, occupy houses facing each other on rue Fabre. Both lived in the area during the period of *En pièces détachées* when Sandra was the small boy, called Michel. Exactly the same age, they developed a close childhood friendship, the nearest thing to love either was to know. Now about thirty, living in physical proximity but long estranged, each pursues in isolation her own mode of transcendence. Sandra views herself as gross flesh, the passive instrument of an omnipotent sexual drive, and seeks transcendence through erotic fantasy in the play's early sequences. Manon considers herself pure spirit, the yielding plaything of God, and pursues a metaphysical union with the Deity through

faith and unrelenting self-abnegation. In the course of the drama each protagonist is increasingly reminded of past links with the other; and both come to recognize themselves as alter egos. Simultaneously their transcendental obsessions begin to intermingle. Manon's spiritual devotion is tainted and hindered by sensual distractions, while Sandra's mirages take on religious overtones. In an orgy of narcissistic spirituality, Manon attempts to repress her memories and the call of the flesh; but she meets with indifferent success. Meanwhile Sandra, having dismissed her exotic reveries, enters imaginatively into Manon's consciousness. It becomes apparent that Sandra has it in her power to give or withhold from Manon the spiritual ecstasy she craves. In an act of love, born of childhood memories and a recognition of her own imperfect efforts at transcendence, Sandra gratifies Manon's desire.

"Closely connected with the need for relatedness," writes Fromm, "is man's situation as a *creature*. . . . Being endowed with reason and imagination, he cannot be content . . . with the role of dice cast out of a cup. He is driven by the urge to transcend the role of the creature, the accidentalness and passivity of his existence, by becoming a 'creator.' " And to create "presupposes love for that which one creates."[25] If one cannot love and create, one may seek transcendence by less desirable means. "To destroy life," Fromm reminds us, "makes me also transcend it."[26] Manon's inability to love and create leads her to withdraw from productive human contact into an authoritarian and ultimately self-destructive kind of transcendence. Sandra, although a victim of negative identity, is saved from Manon's fate by her power to empathize and love her fellow creatures. In boyhood Sandra sensed the want of colour in the lives of her playmates, and created Batman fantasies to cheer them. Today, in empathetic conversations in the street, she shares the misery of the same children now grown older. Sandra's decision to allow Manon her religious rapture, a similar act of love and creation, renders her "sacrée"; while Manon, bent solely on narcissistic fulfilment, is damned in her solipsist heaven.

Considered as allegory, *Damnée Manon, sacrée Sandra* is a sensitive and open-hearted account of the playwright's own passion for transcendence. Sandra is clearly Tremblay himself; indeed, prior to her adoption of a negative identity, she bore his name. His plays, like Sandra's Batman fantasies, are not only efforts to animate a society mired in despair, but also attempts to transcend through creativity the sense of having been created. Manon's awareness of her origins in the will of the author ("Croyez donc en moé! Même . . . si . . . j'ai été . . . inventée . . . par . . . Michel") echoes Tremblay's recognition of his own plight; and in her successful flight into transcendence he vicariously realizes his own aspirations. "Monte! Monte! Monte!," he cries. "Pis tire-moé avec toé! . . . Moé aussi j'ai été inventée!" Manon's mode of transcendence cannot, of course, be his, however attractive it may seem at times. His lot is to attempt through art to transcend his

existential pain in a gift of hope to his society. Sandra's imaginary speech to the rue Fabre housewives metaphorically reveals Tremblay's own frailty, his oneness with the alienated products of his creation, and the impulse that gave them life.

> Aie, c'est moé, regardez, vous rappelez-vous de moé? . . . C'est moé qui organisais les pique-niques au parc Lafontaine ou ben donc au parc Laurier. C'est moé qui hantais . . . les ruelles, le soir, pour vous faire peur! Si vous saviez! Si vous saviez comme c'est moé qui avais peur! . . . J'vous ai toujours possédés à contretemps mais si vous saviez . . . si vous saviez comme j'vous aime!

It is upon the transcendent vitality of his love that Tremblay predicates any hope he may have of moral or artistic salvation.

When compared with the best of contemporary plays dealing with human alienation, it must be admitted that the *Les Belles-Soeurs* cycle pales alongside the work of Miller, Albee, Beckett, Pinter, or Genet. Tremblay's commitment to nationalistic allegory inevitably obliges him to sacrifice breadth of social observation, complexity of psychology, and catholicity of appeal. His weakness as a world-class dramatist, however, is precisely the source of his power as a Quebec playwright. His dramas were not designed as universal theatrical statements, but as works of social animation for a specific place and time — Quebec during the Quiet Revolution. And no one understood better, or articulated more poignantly, the national psychology of the period. His recreations of particular segments of Quebec life were authentic and revealing; and his allegorical message was apt, comprehensible, and effective. The impact of his theatre upon Quebec's cultural evolution over the past decade defies measurement.

But Quebec is forever changing. Already his social analysis is being criticized as outdated.[27] Yesterday's revelations have become today's clichés. In another decade, one suspects, most of the plays in the cycle will have been consigned to Quebec's cultural history cupboard. Their potential relevance to the rest of Canada, however, remains to be explored. If as a nation we are to understand Quebec's present, we must comprehend its past. And its recent past, characterized by a desperate struggle to replace authoritarianism, negative identity, and destructiveness with self-respect, love, and transcendence, is nowhere better encapsulated than in the *Les Belles-Soeurs* cycle.

NOTES

[1] Adrien Gruslin, "Michel Tremblay achève un premier cycle," *Le Devoir*, Feb. 26, 1977.

[2] Dates are those of first productions. For further details see "Biographical Checklist: Michel Tremblay," *Canadian Theatre Review* (Fall 1979), pp. 47-51.

[3] Fernand Doré, "Michel Tremblay, le gars à barbe sympathique," *Le Magazine Maclean* (June 1969), p. 10.

[4] Marc-F. Gélinas, "Je pense en joual," *Le Magazine Maclean* (September 1970), p. 46.

[5] See Introduction to *Mental Illness and Social Processes*, ed. Thomas J. Scheff (New York: Harper & Row, 1967).

[6] Erich Fromm, *Escape from Freedom* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1964), p. 19.

[7] Ibid., p. 28.

[8] Ibid., p. 31.

[9] Ibid., p. 36.

[10] Ibid., p. 141.

[11] Ibid., p. 142.

[12] Ibid., pp. 152-53.

[13] References are to the following editions of the plays: *Les Belles-Soeurs*, Leméac, 1972; *En pièces détachées*, Leméac, 1972; *Hosanna suivi de La Duchesse de Langeais*, Leméac, 1973; *A toi, pour toujours, ta Marie-Lou*, Leméac, 1971; *Bonjour, là, bonjour*, Leméac, 1974; *Sainte Carmen de la Main*, Leméac, 1976; *Damnée Manon, sacrée Sandra*, Leméac, 1977.

[14] Fromm, op. cit., p. 144.

[15] Although this character is given the name Thérèse in the edition from which I quote, she is designated Hélène in other editions. She is also referred to as Hélène in *Damnée Manon.*

[16] Erik H. Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis* (New York: Norton, 1968), p. 176.

[17] Fromm, op. cit., p. 179.

[18] Ibid., p. 115.

[19] Erich Fromm, *The Sane Society* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1964), p. 31.

[20] Ibid., p. 32.

[21] Ibid., p. 33.

[22] Martial Dassylva, "Tremblay: une pièce plus froide et plus subtile," *La Presse*, Sept. 21, 1974.

[23] *The Sane Society*, p. 33.

[24] Martial Dassylva, "Une pièce inspirée de la tragédie grecque," *La Presse*, May 13, 1978.

[25] *The Sane Society*, pp. 36, 37.

[26] Ibid., p. 37.

[27] *Les Belles-Soeurs* was considered to some degree out of date as early as 1973. See Albert Brie, "*Les Belles Soeurs* — subissent-elles l'outrage des ans?", *Le Devoir*, Oct. 13, 1973.

THREE POEMS

S. Mayne

NOAH

The snow finds no cease
falling and sloping
till dunes reach up
high as the Rockies

Under the papery slips
you and I lie
buried like the hulks
of two sunken ships

No one calls the beasts
to file in pairs and fours
so as to preserve them
for later feasts

We sleep bones sky-blue
as ice beneath the sun
and from the frozen seas
a trickle rises from the glow

and flows like blood
until the thaw
releases us from the hold
urging us upon the flood

Two arks upon the waves
we swim towards
the raft of Ararat
anchored to Asia and safe

The waters fall back and above
a rainbow arches
around to the ground
hatching the solitary dove

ABEL

It falls from my hand,
flint for the creature's throat.
With flesh and fat
the altar sizzles.
The Lord is hungry.
I give the best
but there's sullen Cain
threshing grain and reproaching
me for the tenth time
with his self-righteous
bloodless mouth. His hand
is as tense as a claw.

CAIN

No one dared
offer the fire flesh
of ripe berries and fruit.
He knelt there
altogether too pleased —
smoke crying out
from the stinking sheep.
Ravenously flames rose
up and roasted.
Who would offend the Lord?
Why should I
bow before spilt blood?
Brother, you are so silent
there at the uprooted vines —
how can you sleep?

TOWARDS A POPULAR THEATRE IN ENGLISH CANADA

Neil Carson

One of the features of the Quebec theatre that seems to the outsider to be a sign of its healthy development is the broadly based popularity of so much of its drama. Works such as *Tit Coq* (1948) and *Bousille et les justes* (1959) established attendance records which have never been matched in other parts of Canada. These works of Gratien Gélinas, and plays by other Quebec dramatists such as Marcel Dubé and Michel Tremblay have presented French-speaking Canadians with easily recognized dramatic reflections of their lives in a language that closely resembles their own. A particularly striking characteristic of much of this drama is the obvious affection the playwrights have for their characters and (by logical extension) for the audiences for whom they write.

This affection is particularly evident in Gratien Gélinas. Gélinas' work (in his own plays and as Artistic Director of La Commédie canadienne) has always been animated by a strong populist bias. "The ideal dramatic form," he believes, "is the one which will interest the audience in its totality, the one which will reach not only the most numerous, but also the most diversified public."[1] The way to reach such an audience is to be relevant and entertaining. "What is wrong with modern theatre is its detachment from the central facts of our society and from the concerns of the ordinary man. Theatre has become an art in isolation, unlike television and cinema which create a world directly related to the pattern of our daily lives."[2] For Gélinas, the theatre is not a forum for debate or propaganda; it is primarily a place of entertainment. "If there is a message . . . so much the better. But you can do without the message, and you cannot do without moving the audience or entertaining the audience."[3] Furthermore, Gélinas ranks the importance of communication with the audience above the achievement of purely literary or even dramatic excellence. "I maintain that, given not only an equal, but even a vastly inferior dramatic quality in comparison with the great masterpieces of the foreign theatre, past or present, a play of Canadian inspiration and expression will always appeal more to our public."[4] Not everyone in Quebec agrees with Gélinas, of course. He has been attacked by the critics as being too popular and by the radicals as insufficiently ideological. But because of his own personal popu-

larity and the phenomenal success of his plays, Gélinas has not only been able to create a popular drama in Quebec, he has also inspired younger playwrights to cater to the audience he discovered.

How different is the situation in English Canada! It is hardly an exaggeration to say that a truly indigenous popular drama in English does not exist. Playgoers in Halifax, Winnipeg, Edmonton, or Vancouver seldom see their own lives mirrored on stage, and when works of Canadian inspiration are produced they rarely get transferred to other theatres. There are many reasons for the neglect of popular drama in English Canada, but prominent among these is the strong élitist feeling in the critical and theatrical establishments. The conviction (most succinctly expressed by Ronald Bryden) that the purpose of the theatre is to produce masterpieces[5] is one that has seriously hampered the development of a robust Canadian drama. The pursuit of "excellence" to the exclusion of almost all else has resulted in a national broadcasting system which produces superior programmes that are ignored by the vast majority of listeners and viewers; it has forced the Artistic Directors of many of our theatres to "justify" the production of popular plays by promising the concerned funding agencies to "educate" their audiences to appreciate the historical or modern "classics" of Ibsen, Shaw, Brecht, or Beckett; it has made the sane assessment of Canadian drama all but impossible by implying that every new play written in this country must be compared, not with the average product of the commercial theatre elsewhere, but with the best dozen or so plays from the last one hundred years. But the most deplorable aspect of the "masterpiece syndrome" is the fact that it is all too often a rationalization for a thinly veiled (or possibly unconscious) contempt for the mass audience.

It is scarcely surprising, therefore, that the history of genuinely popular drama in English Canada is a short and melancholy one. If we exclude such paradramatic successes as the Dumbells, *Spring Thaw*, or *My Fur Lady*, then one of the earliest plays to attract national attention was Eric Nicol's *Like Father Like Fun*, first produced at the Vancouver Playhouse in 1966. The play is an innocuous commercial comedy about the sexually inhibited son of a B.C. timber baron who is "educated" by an attractive female artist on the instructions of a concerned father. Vancouver audiences were amused by what they imagined to be references to a certain prominent local family, and the play enjoyed an unexpected success during its limited run. Influenced, perhaps, by the hilarity around him, a Vancouver stringer for the *Globe and Mail* called the play a "masterpiece," and on the strength of such reports, Ed Mirvish decided to bring the production to Toronto and then send it to New York. Three weeks before the Toronto opening, *Like Father Like Fun* had sold more tickets than many major U.S. imports, and it looked as though Mirvish had found a hit.

The Toronto reception proved a shock for promoter and playwright alike. The critics were divided about the play. McKenzie Porter called it "an outstanding

Canadian farce with subtle and serious overtones."[6] Herbert Whittaker allowed that it had "a lot of promise in a disarmingly modest way."[7] But Nathan Cohen, probably the most influential of the Toronto critics, was withering in his scorn. *Like Father Like Fun*, he grumbled, was "the worst play to be performed in the Royal Alex since the end of World War II."[8] When ticket sales slowed, Mirvish began to revise his plans. The New York opening was quietly cancelled and the Toronto run extended. A two-week engagement in Montreal followed, after which the show was closed for the winter. Hoping that the enterprise might somehow be salvaged, Mirvish hired a new director and cast, got Nicol to rewrite the play to eliminate an expensive scene change, and proceeded with his planned invasion of Broadway. The play went into rehearsal in New York and Nicol continued to revise it to meet the objections of the American company. When it finally opened at the Brooks Atkinson Theatre, it met cool reviews and closed after one day.

In retrospect it seems that the New York fate of *LFLF* was inevitable. The popularity of the play in Vancouver depended rather too much on its local allusions. Both the play and its initial production suffered from a kind of provincial innocence that became evident as soon as the work was moved East. The cast (which even McKenzie Porter called "one of inexplicable and excruciating mediocrity")[9] could be changed. But the basic situation was essentially foreign to the more sophisticated Eastern audiences. Mirvish might have been warned by the somewhat baffled response of the French Canadian critics, one of whom found the sexual hangups of the young man incomprehensible. "It is good to see English humour of the 'put down' variety. Being French Canadian, however, I found the portrait of the artist and the problem of the young man completely unrealistic."[10]

A SECOND PLAY TO ACHIEVE WIDESPREAD popularity across Canada was George Ryga's *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* (1967), a compelling study of the destruction of an Indian girl by an uncomprehending white society. After its initial production at the Vancouver Playhouse, *Rita Joe* became one of the most widely produced English Canadian plays of the late sixties. It was chosen to open the Studio Theatre at the National Arts Centre (1968); it was broadcast on CBC television (1969), and made into a ballet (1971). It was also produced abroad in Washington, Edinburgh, and London.

Rita Joe was a seminal work in modern English Canadian drama. To begin with, it showed that there was an audience for Canadian plays which attempted to deal seriously with important social issues. The original Vancouver production provoked editorials in the local press and was the subject of an extended open-line radio programme. Secondly, it demonstrated the effectiveness of Canadian (as opposed to mid-Atlantic) speech in Canadian drama. Although there were excep-

tions such as the doughty Nathan Cohen, most critics felt that Ryga had succeeded in transforming the speech of uneducated Indians into a moving, even poetic, dramatic language. Finally, *Rita Joe* was a triumphant vindication of the close collaboration between writer and actors. Ryga, who had written for radio and television, had practically no experience of the stage. During the creation of the play he worked closely with director Malcolm Black and the actors. The result was a fertile interaction in which Ryga's rather amorphous poetic vision was given exciting theatrical form and reinforced by moments of psychological truth contributed by performers such as Dan George. More than any other single work, perhaps, *Rita Joe* combined the new dramatic and theatrical ideas current in the mid-sixties into a relatively accessible dramatic experience. The seventies were to see a rapid proliferation of dramatic activity in English Canada in which the happy balance of *Rita Joe* was rarely recaptured.

The development of Canadian drama in the last decade has been marked by a rather uneasy relation between the playwrights and the theatres. The apparent reluctance of several of the large regional theatres to stage Canadian works led to open hostility on the part of many of the dramatists and the commentators who took it upon themselves to speak on their behalf. Related to hostility (either as cause or effect) was a seeming indifference on the part of many playwrights to the kinds of audiences the regional theatres had, of necessity, to cater to. In their efforts to write "the great Canadian play," to explore the more recherché byways of theatrical experimentation, or to transform the drama into an instrument of social criticism, many of the dramatists seemed to turn their back on the large mass audiences. It is significant, perhaps, that neither Eric Nicol nor George Ryga has repeated his early popular success. Both have continued to write plays, but they have failed to create the kind of dramatic form that would guarantee the communication of their ideas to a large audience.

The reluctance or inability of playwrights to produce the kinds of scripts that the companies felt they needed led some of the troupes to turn to their own resources. Companies such as Toronto Workshop Productions and Theatre Passe Muraille began as long ago as the early sixties to experiment with a process of collective creation. Typically, this method involves the improvisation of a number of sketches on theatrically-related subjects, strung together in chronological sequence. The sketches are frequently the work of the actors themselves who rely on their own research for background. If a writer is involved in these creations, his role is often subordinate, and consists of a tightening or ordering of materials that have emerged in rehearsals.

One of the most interesting (certainly the best documented) experiment in collective creation is Theatre Passe Muraille's influential piece, *The Farm Show*. In earlier productions of this kind, the "research" of the actors often consisted of reading documentary material such as transcripts of court proceedings, newspaper

accounts, or official reports of the events to be dramatized. Inspired, perhaps, by Peter Cheeseman's work in Stoke-on-Trent where the company recorded interviews with local residents, Paul Thompson decided to attempt a more literal dramatic transcription of Canadian life. Accordingly, in the summer of 1972, he and his actors moved to Clinton, a small agricultural community in Southern Ontario, where they mingled with the residents, and learned as much as they could about local history and conditions. At the end of the summer they presented their impressions of the region to their hosts and subjects in a performance in a local barn. The result, an affectionate look at the problems and pleasures of farm life in general and at the lives of certain Clinton residents in particular, was a great success and has become a staple of the company's repertoire.

If collective creations have succeeded in mirroring life in certain regions of the country, they have been less successful in affecting the mainstream of Canadian drama. Most of the plays of Toronto Workshop Productions or Theatre Passe Muraille, for example, have never been produced elsewhere. In part this is a result of the fact that a large part of any single production consists of elaborate pantomime that has been worked out in rehearsal and is difficult to describe in a text. What is true of the actors' "business" is equally true of other aspects of production. There is usually a heavy reliance on music, spectacle, and other essentially theatrical devices and a correspondingly lighter emphasis on text. A number of writers, including Jack Winter, Rick Salutin, Carol Bolt, and Rudy Wiebe, have worked on collective creations. It is my impression, however, that only James Reaney — in the extraordinary Donnelly trilogy — has been able to incorporate the creative contributions of the actors into an organic whole and to impose a coherent vision on the finished work.

A more traditional method of collaboration between theatre and playwright is practised by Bill Glassco at the Tarragon Theatre in Toronto. Glassco is interested in ensuring that the production of Canadian plays will be of the highest standard and to this end he works closely with new playwrights during the period of rehearsals. By far the most successful dramatist to emerge from Tarragon so far is David French who seems in some ways to bridge the gap between the alternative and regional theatres in Canada. It is ironic that his very success has made French suspect among many of the very proponents of Canadian drama whom one would expect to champion him.

FRENCH'S FIRST PLAY FOR THE STAGE (he had previously written only for television) was *Leaving Home*, produced by the Tarragon in 1972. The play became one of the most popular ever written in English Canada and earned French in excess of $20,000 a year for the next three years. *Leaving*

Home is a "Family play" which deals with the conflict between a father and his sons. As the title suggests, the crisis is precipitated by the younger son's marriage and the decision of the elder one to move in with his brother. This threat of family division triggers long-standing resentments and misunderstandings between Jacob Mercer and his first-born, Ben. The play ends with physical violence and the creation of a final gulf between the two men.

This is familiar ground, and French covers it in a rather faltering way. The causes of the difference between father and son are not brought out as clearly as they might be, and Ben's decision to leave home seems hardly sufficient provocation for Jacob's almost hysterical reaction. The strength of the play lies less in the narrative structure than in French's skillful mixing of comedy and tragedy, and in his reproduction of regional speech. Although obviously related to such plays as *Death of a Salesman* and *Long Day's Journey into Night*, *Leaving Home* is lighter in tone and more easily accessible than its predecessors. The humour and sentiment in French's work provide a contrast with the tension and violence which is reminiscent of the early plays of Sean O'Casey in which the tragic is counterbalanced by a rollicking sense of the ridiculous.

French's ability to mix comedy and pathos is even more evident in his second Mercer family play, *Of the Fields Lately* (1973). In this work, French continues the story of the father-son relationship a few years after the incidents of *Leaving Home*. Ben arrives to attend the funeral of his aunt only to discover that his father has had a heart attack about which he had not been told. Somewhat against his wishes, Ben allows himself to be persuaded to stay home so that he can support the family while his father recuperates. Jacob is temperamentally incapable of remaining inactive, however, and makes life intolerable for those trying to save him. In the end, Ben realizes that his father cannot be helped, and he returns to Saskatchewan where he has been living. A short time later Jacob dies on the job. Once again, the structure of the play is derivative (French uses a flashback technique which recalls *The Glass Menagerie*), and the characters are presented with a sentimentality that would be mawkish were it not for the humour. But the play reveals a profound love of life on the part of the author, and an affection for his characters that sets French apart from many of the dramatists writing in English Canada.

In his third play, *One Crack Out* (1975), French turns to an entirely new milieu — the world of the Toronto sub-culture — for his subject. On one level, the play tells the rather sordid story of the decline and rise of Charlie Evans, an aging pool hustler. The action opens with the main character both impotent and in a professional slump as a result of (or occurring at the same time as) his wife's infidelity. When Charlie fails to place a bet for a friend he finds himself owing $3,000 with very little prospect of raising the money. As one after another of his possible sources of funds are exhausted or shut off, he faces the prospect of having his hands or legs broken by an implacable loan collector. Just as he is about to go into hiding,

he discovers that his wife has begged for an extension of the loan period. Both moved by her loyalty and humiliated by his inability to protect her, he challenges the debt collector to play pool for the money owing. The play ends leaving the audience with the conviction that Charlie's problems (both business and domestic) are over.

One Crack Out was not as popular with the critics as French's earlier plays. Some reviewers complained that the action and the milieu were rather too specialized. It should have been obvious, however, that the play is much more than a study in local colour. Indeed it deals with many of French's familiar concerns. Charlie, like Jacob Mercer, is a man who defines himself by a professional code which leads him to behave in ways that seem irrational to an outsider. The Toronto pool shark, like the Newfoundland carpenter, is an example of a man caught in changing circumstances and facing a loss of professional confidence.

French's latest play, *Jitters* (1979), was Tarragon's most successful hit in three years, playing for several weeks in the company's regular season before being transferred elsewhere for an extended run. The work deals with a group of actors opening a new play in a small Toronto theatre, and is based in part on French's experience with Glassco at the Tarragon. The story concerns Jessica Logan, a Canadian actress who has returned home after a modest success on Broadway. The last play she had appeared in, however, had been badly reviewed and she is hoping that the present work will be the vehicle in which she will make her triumphant return to New York. She has invited a Broadway producer to the Toronto opening and the imminent arrival of this outside observer provides a focus for the hopes and self-doubts of the playwright and the other actors. When the producer fails to show up, the company is compelled to exercise its own critical judgment. The author turns to the director for reassurance that his play is really "good enough" for New York; one actor exclaims "He was my last chance, he was an American." The end of the play is ambiguous. The actors finally resolve their personal differences and get on with the show. But it is not at all clear that they have achieved the kind of professional self-confidence that Charlie, for example, regained at the end of *One Crack Out*.

Jitters is essentially a light comedy and it would be foolish to probe it too deeply (especially in view of French's acid comments about "academics looking for meaning"). But it would be equally wrong to dismiss *Jitters* as pure farce. Like his earlier plays, *Jitters* is concerned with the problem of integrity — of living one's life according to one's inner convictions in spite of the pressures exerted by family obligations, self-doubts, or the opinions of others. In the Mercer plays, the problem is seen in rather conventional terms, first from the point of view of the son then from that of the father. *One Crack Out* is a new departure in that the "family" in that play is an entire sub-culture in which the conflicts and codes are somewhat broader. *Jitters*, too, deals with a closely-knit group made unstable by tension and

personal rivalries. But the theatrical world of *Jitters* is a metaphor for the world of Canadian culture as a whole. It is not only actors and playwrights who are reduced to a state of forelock-tugging diffidence by the prospect of international recognition.

The rather schizophrenic attitude that condemns the commercialism of Broadway while at the same time envying its success has done much to confuse theatrical policy in Canada. Underlying many of the arguments about Canadian drama is an unspoken assumption that audiences in this country are somehow different from their counterparts abroad. It is the apparently sincere conviction of many people in the arts in Canada that it is possible to create a high culture while at the same time neglecting popular culture. But the hope that Canadian plays in the tradition of the European avant-garde can ever win a large audience here (any more than they have won such an audience elsewhere) is a pious illusion. The only thing that will win spectators away from Broadway and West End commercial comedies are Canadian commercial comedies. If Canadian drama and theatre are to come of age, then it is necessary that we overcome our élitist prejudice against "showbusiness." Artistic Directors, funding agencies, critics, and academics must face the fact that drama is a living but ephemeral art, and that the "masterpieces" that are so earnestly hoped for from our playwrights (when they come) will form a very small percentage of the total dramatic output. It is time to assert the importance of popular, simple-minded, unpretentious, easily-accessible dramatic entertainment. What we need are not more Brechts, Pinters, Becketts or Tennessee Williamses in this country, but a Canadian Simon, Ayckbourn, Rattigan or Inge. We need more dramatists like David French who can be serious without at the same time having to be solemn.

NOTES

[1] "A National and Popular Theatre," rpt. in Renate Usmiani, *Gratien Gélinas* (Toronto: Gage, 1977), p. 83.

[2] Gélinas, quoted by Michael Richard in "Gelinas," *The Stage in Canada*, 4, No. 3 (May 1968), p. 9.

[3] Gélinas in a CBC interview on "Report on the Arts," January 3, 1962.

[4] Usmiani, p. 81.

[5] Ronald Bryden, "Toronto Theatre: *Mademoiselle est partie*," *Canadian Forum* (August 1978), p. 11.

[6] McKenzie Porter, *The Toronto Telegram*, July 18, 1966.

[7] Herbert Whittaker, *The Globe and Mail*, July 15, 1966.

[8] Nathan Cohen, *The Toronto Daily Star*, July 15, 1966.

[9] *Telegram*, July 18, 1966.

[10] Yves Robillard, *La Presse*, August 24, 1966.

THE ANGEL OF MY TONGUE

Peter Christensen

I will lie
like dry sticks
in the sun
and befriend
the mouth of fire

I will be judged
by earth and wind
There will be serpent tongues

In the dry season
I will be afraid

The savanna must burn
Deer run
in the hot blast
Mice cower
in their tunnels
like brains

Hawk will follow the fireline

A snake will coil
strike my heart

Earth and wind
will consume the ash

my logic will begin
and the angel of my tongue speak

my hands will be the wind
and I will kiss
the mouth of fire
again and again

GROWING PAINS

Toronto Theatre in the 1970's

Robert Wallace

(for Brenda Donohue)

"The geography of the situation becomes so dense, so rich with possible paths, that the instinctive sense of direction fails; and questions of destination are rapidly replaced by the concerns of survival." — MARTIN KINCH

"In this country there's an appetite to put buildings up, to equate culture with cupolas and glass palaces." — PAUL BETTIS

IN AN ARTICLE PUBLISHED in *Canadian Theatre Review*, no. 21, in 1979, Ken Gass, founder of Toronto's Factory Theatre Lab, concludes:

> Toronto may be a bustling, chic metropolis with abundant resources and an active theatre industry, but it is also thoroughly conservative and not the most conducive environment for serious theatre work.

Gass's opinion of Toronto theatre at the end of the seventies is not as important as the fact he takes for granted: in just ten years, an "active theatre industry" has emerged where little was before. The 1979/80 edition of the *Canadian Theatre Checklist* contains over fifty listings of theatre buildings and companies in the Toronto area, few of which existed in 1969.[1] *City Nights*, a weekly entertainment guide circulated throughout the city, offers a constantly changing roster of theatrical events. At least one review of a new play, cabaret act, or theatre piece can be found in the entertainment sections of Toronto's daily newspapers. Commercial ticket agencies with offices in the suburbs are thriving while pre-curtain box-office queues are customary at many downtown theatres. Dinner theatres, cabarets and revue houses flourish across the city, not to mention the taverns, bars and pubs featuring a wide variety of acts and complementing the legitimate theatres. For better or for worse, theatre has become business in Toronto, the inevitable result of an artistic evolution in which success is equated with an ever-widening audience.

Toronto theatre has also become real estate. Theatre Passe Muraille, Tarragon Theatre, The Factory Theatre Lab, and Toronto Free Theatre — the cornerstones of new theatre in the city over the last decade — have all acquired build-

ings, mortgages and renovation bills. Modest beginnings such as Theatre Passe Muraille's basement workshop in Rochdale College in 1969 have grown to two- and three-stage enterprises — the theatre "complex" replete with bar, restaurant, and office space, projected if not already built. The "two-stage" season of the regional theatre is now an accepted feature of many Toronto theatres, as are subscription series, preview performances, press kits and, in the case of Adelaide Court, the highly successful home of Open Circle Theatre, Theatre du p'tit Bonheur and New Theatre, dinner packages and twelve-dollar seats. That a dissatisfaction with the regional theatre's "balanced" seasons of proven plays was a major impetus to the rise of theatres such as these seems to have been forgotten. And the premise that "theatre is event, not architecture,"[2] an attitude which united artists as diverse as Passe Muraille's Paul Thompson and Tarragon's Bill Glassco in the early seventies, appears to have been definitely revised.

The changes — some would say compromises — that have accompanied the phenomenal growth of Toronto theatre during the Seventies have elicited considerable criticism from outside the theatre community as well as substantial self-analysis from within.[3] Central to most of the criticism is a disillusionment with the various theatres' acknowledged shift from "alternate" to "establishment" status. The reasons for this shift are both artistic and financial, and worth considering as many Toronto theatres begin to pursue commercial independence. The results of the shift are less clear, being part of the transition which is still going on. That the shift is well developed needs little debate. Gass in his article in *CTR* (no. 21) suggests that the term "alternate" is already archaic and can only be appreciated in its historical context. A legitimate discussion of Toronto theatre demands "removing the label of Alternate from what is now the mainstream." Gass's idea echoes a statement by Martin Kinch who, as Artistic Director of Toronto Free Theatre, said two years earlier, "There's a need for us to become an institution. At least then people will get out of the habit of calling us a small theatre or alternate theatre or any of those condescending terms."[4] Bill Glassco, a pioneer of Toronto's "all-Canadian" theatrical stance, presumably agrees: an article in the Toronto *Star*, March 1979, begins with his statement, "We're trying to create a Broadway," and concludes with "I know down to my toes that I want to do a Rogers and Hart Musical, but I don't know when the time is right."[5]

Clearly, the time is fast approaching. January 1980 saw six musicals premiere in Toronto's "new" theatres. Although two of these — George F. Walker's *Rumours of Our Death* at the Factory Theatre Lab and Michael Ondaatje's *Coming through Slaughter* at Theatre Passe Muraille — continue the "serious theatre work" traditional to their respective theatres, the others amount to entertaining diversions of little challenge or consequence. Their emergence and, more importantly, their success, suggests that a major cause of the shift from an "alternate" aesthetic that typified Toronto theatre during the late Seventies will con-

tinue to affect it during the Eighties. Discussion of this cause is best begun by considering Bill Glassco, who as early as 1974 recognized the need to re-evaluate his theatre's artistic policy in light of financial pressure and audience response. After four short seasons, Tarragon Theatre had been acclaimed "the most alert and influential in Canada,"[6] "the brightest and most professional showcase for new Canadian plays."[7] Such acceptance had its negative effects, however, as Glassco explained when he decided to close the theatre temporarily in 1975:

> Suddenly, you see, we had four box-office winners: French, Freeman, Reaney and Tremblay. We had won this special reputation for delivering a first-rate show and the more we used our increasingly successful playwright, the more intolerant we all — the audience and the theatre — became of experiment and failure.[8]

The freedom to experiment and to fail had been central to the development of new Canadian plays and to the search for Canadian themes and talents that contributed to the alternate aesthetic. Gass, in fact, cites "the development of new theatrical experiences, particularly in terms of new Canadian plays, which the regional theatre system had markedly discouraged" as the prime artistic aim of the alternate movement.[9] That "new experiences" should become intolerable so quickly says less about the power of the new plays than the immensity of the need that they filled. David French's *Leaving Home* was hailed as a minor masterpiece not because of its theatrical daring, which is all but non-existent, but because of the identification it allowed the audience with its characters. It, like David Freeman's *Creeps*, Michel Tremblay's *Forever Yours, Marie-Lou*, and James Reaney's trilogy about the Donnellys, more than fulfilled Tarragon's original intention "to produce new plays of our own culture as well as possible, to nurture Canadian playwriting talent, to act as a testing ground and as a source of new plays from which other Canadian theatres could draw";[10] but that it should be viewed as the prototype for new Canadian drama was more than unfortunate — it was debilitating, given the demand it created in the audience. The problem, quickly labelled "the hit syndrome," would have long-lasting effects, the nature of which Jane Glassco, Tarragon's publicist, suggested in December 1974:

> We've been programmed into becoming an institution. You don't gamble anymore when you're programmed. . . . If a new David Freeman came along with a play that called for a cast of eight or nine, we couldn't do it. We couldn't take the risk on a new play, but we'd have to wait until his second or third. . . .[11]

As Glassco was to acknowledge in 1977, this problem didn't go away:

> In season one I did Canadian plays, because we had to do Canadian; and I wasn't thinking of a big audience then because there wasn't any audience at all; and when I didn't have that many dollars, I wasn't risking losing many dollars. It all made sense then, but it would be folly now.[12]

Tarragon's 1977 season suggested the sobering effects of Glassco's new prag-

matism and marked a significant change in the theatre's artistic direction. Stating "we're at a stage where it's important that we test ourselves against established work from the rest of the world,"[13] Glassco included in his line-up three adaptations of world classics, Chekhov's *The Seagull*, Frank Wedekind's *Lulu*, and Strindberg's *A Dream Play*. This trend continued the next year with productions of Lillian Hellman's *Toys in the Attic* and Racine's *Bajazet*. The 1978/79 season also introduced another departure from Tarragon's original artistic policy: the inclusion of plays, productions, and directors from other Canadian theatres — in this case, John Gray's *18 Wheels*, which had premiered at Passe Muraille the previous year.[14] Explaining this development, Glassco might have been summarizing what appears to be his present attitude: "I realize now the object is to fill your season with the best possible shows."[15] These, of course, are not necessarily Canadian nor are they likely to be untried scripts by unknown authors — at least not very often. Although both the 1978/79 and the current seasons contain new works by Canadian playwrights, these "risks" are balanced by shows that have proven themselves elsewhere. In short, the Tarragon season now resembles that of Toronto Arts Productions, the regional theatre whose consistently formulaic offerings at the St. Lawrence Centre invariably include a modern classic, a contemporary British or American play, a period drama in modern dress and a Canadian play, rarely new.

CHARTING THE CHANGES THAT TARRAGON has made during its rise to national acclaim is useful only insofar as it establishes a historical context from which to view the current situation of Toronto theatre. Although Bill Glassco is no longer fostering new Canadian plays and developing new playwrights to the degree he once did, his commitment to Canadian drama, like his contributions, remains integral to his work. "What's at stake now is how can our theatre remain unique and grow at the same time."[16] His question is crucial and indicates the very real dilemma of Toronto theatres much more vulnerable than Tarragon to the vagaries of commercial expediency. Discussing Tarragon's problems with success does little to explain the financial crisis that all these theatres must continue to face; indeed, a full understanding of Tarragon's policy changes demands the recognition that its funding structure has also altered drastically during the last decade. Mallory Gilbert, Tarragon's administrator in 1977, explained that "cost-per-production is two or three times higher now than it was when we began six years ago."[17] Ironically, this is partly a result of Tarragon's success as well. In October 1974, for example, Actors Equity found it necessary to reclassify the theatre from a studio operation because it had grossed more than $3,200 a week. This reclassification required the theatre to raise actors' salaries to $130 a week; this, in turn, broke the projected budget and necessitated corporate fund-raising

when the Canada Council refused to enlarge its grant to compensate for the unexpected deficit. The scaling of Equity rates to the size and solvency of a theatre is now common practice and has resulted in higher costs for Toronto theatres above and beyond ordinary inflation. Government grants, on the other hand, have not risen comparatively; rather, the theatres have been pressured by subsidizing bodies to increase their box-office and pursue private grants. Although the arts councils correctly maintain that this allows them to adjudicate theatres according to their community support, it also makes the theatres dependent on their community appeal. Marketing a theatrical product that attracts the widest possible audience is more appropriate to television than indigenous theatre; yet this is what the councils demand. In such a situation, the freedom to experiment and develop new talent becomes increasingly restricted.

Given such a climate, the increased commercialization of Toronto theatre is hardly as surprising as the fact that experimentation continues to exist to a fairly healthy degree. And that most theatre being produced in Toronto at the beginning of the eighties continues to be Canadian, albeit "safe," suggests the inestimable impact of the alternate movement. Although Ken Gass feels he must plan his future theatre work elsewhere,[18] many other artists are now able to plan their careers at home. As Glassco says: "There's so much work for the better actors in this country. You can't hold on to them even for a tour. . . . They're already in the situation of picking and choosing what they want to do. And it is on them that the new Canadian theatre is focusing. . . . When I talk of making our theatre strong, I mean making actors survive and grow."[19] Although Glassco's remarks are overly optimistic — many young actors still move south in search of more regular work — they reflect a real increase in opportunities for actors, directors, playwrights, and designers who have developed reputations within the city. Actors such as R. H. Thompson, Fiona Reid, Clare Coulter, and Brent Carver now receive "star billing" in production publicity. Plays by local playwrights as diverse as Larry Fineberg, Erika Ritter and George F. Walker do healthy business regardless of reviews. Innovative directors the like of Paul Bettis, Pam Brighton, and Eric Steiner often attract more publicity than their productions. And designers such as Michael Eagen and Mary Kerr need to travel less to win contracts and recognition. What has yet to emerge is a transfer house that will allow popular productions by such artists to move from their original theatres for a longer run. The emergence of commercial producers like Marlene Smith and David Pacquet, however, suggests that one might soon be found; Smith's successful run of Tarragon's production of David French's *Jitters* at Toronto Workshop Productions in 1979 augurs well for the future. And as extensions of popular plays such as Pam Gems' *Dusa, Fish, Stas and Vi* or the Miller/Witkin musical *Eight to the Bar* become more common, Glassco's pursuit of "Broadway North" proves more feasible.

Given the current situation, Glassco's switch in focus from the playwright to the actor is also understandable: traditionally, the theatre audience is most interested in the performer. Ironically, this switch is consistent with one of the avowed principles of the alternate aesthetic, at least as it was defined by Theatre Passe Muraille, the other Toronto theatre that has captured the most national interest besides Tarragon. Jim Garrard, founder of Passe Muraille, outlined this principle in one of the theatre's first manifestos in 1969:

> The renaissance of the theatre as experience, as event, demands that contact be made (i) among the actors, who must work together as a continuing ensemble; (ii) between the actors and those individuals termed 'the audience'; and (iii), because theatre is a human event, between people and people.[20]

The most appropriate name for such a theatre, Garrard explained, would be "theatre without walls" — hence Theatre Passe Muraille. Although Passe Muraille acquired its own theatre in 1976, its interest in "a theatre free of distinctions between actor and spectator, between 'inside' and 'outside,' between drama as one art form, music as another and dancing as yet another," survived the move; indeed, Garrard's demand for a theatre without walls should be regarded as a figurative, not a literal, direction. A theatre "whose main reason for being is the link between it and its audience" can exist anywhere, as Passe Muraille's utilization of playing spaces as unconventional as haylofts, auction rings, church basements and union halls makes clear. What is important is that the theatre "find new ways to reach people and use people . . . that every project must be approached freshly and that the methods must be rediscovered." Passe Muraille's constant search for the "authentic" and "alive" experience for both audience and performers is responsible for its unique position in Toronto theatre today; of all the Canadian theatre groups that participated in the Festival of Underground Theatre in August 1970 — an event which is often cited as the beginning of the Toronto alternate theatre[21] — only Passe Muraille has been able to integrate its alternate aesthetic with a viable commercial policy. Although this has not been achieved without compromise, the theatre still maintains many of its original aims; doing so, it persists as a nucleus for much of the city's experimental theatre.

Most of the credit for this must go to Paul Thompson who, as Artistic Director, assumed Garrard's position in 1971 after it had fallen briefly to Martin Kinch. Although Thompson has allowed the theatre to develop in the multi-directional ways appropriate to its compass-like logo, he has persistently influenced his co-workers with an anti-establishment approach to both the making and marketing of theatre that is still remarkably consistent with Garrard's original intentions. In an interview with the now-defunct *Toronto Telegram* in 1969, Garrard made these abundantly clear: he is worth quoting at length both to recognize the manner in which Toronto theatre has altered in ten years and to realize the ways in which Theatre Passe Muraille has not:

> Theatre must be indigenous. It must be organic.... The professional artist is ruining theatre. They think theatre takes place in glass cages. They think theatre is real estate so they build big amphitheatres but they have no one to fill them. We don't need a St. Lawrence Centre. Not if George Luscombe [of Toronto Workshop Productions] can't pay his mortgage. It's important to get out of the theatre. Out into the streets, into schools and parks, into prisons, and apartment buildings. ... We need a guerilla theatre front, to involve people in real warm confrontations. Theatre in the subways, get a truck and do theatre in small towns, real circusy, grab people in the streets.... I'd like to make theatre as popular as bowling. People say theatre is dead but in Nathan Phillips Square we had an audience of 300 standing around on those ramps watching while we did exercises. If we could build fourteen to fifteen people who work well together, who have a dialogue, we could probably turn a lot of people on to theatre. The ensemble becomes the resource.[22]

Although Garrard's "living theatre" rhetoric now may seem embarrassing to some, its relevance to Theatre Passe Muraille's success can't be ignored. The basis of Passe Muraille's reputation is its use and refinement of "collective creation," the process by which a group of people — usually the cast — collaborates to develop a play through research and improvisation. The development of an ensemble that could "dialogue" about their experience of an event, place, or person was central to such early Passe Muraille hits as *Doukhobors, The Farm Show, 1837: The Farmer's Revolt*, and *I Love You, Baby Blue*; here, actors such as Miles Potter, Janet Amos, David Fox, and Anne Anglin were allowed (required?) to transform personal experience into scenes that were then juxtaposed to become an episodic play. In an interview with *Open Letter* in 1973, Thompson explained his use of the actor as resource in such productions:

> Part of the concept of doing 'collective' plays is saying that the actor has more to give than often is required or demanded of him in traditional plays. I think, you know, he should be more than a puppet. He's got a head, he's got his observations and he's quite as capable as anybody else of making a statement or passing on observations. In the kind of work we're doing, we like the actor to really put some of himself in the play. We also work through the skills an actor has. If an actor could yodel, for example, then I'd really like to put his yodel into a play.[23]

The discovery and utilization of the actor's skills within the creative process continues to result in some of Passe Muraille's best productions and to make Paul Thompson a magnet for actors from all across the country. That some of these, like Ted Johns or Linda Griffiths, unearth a genuine talent for writing while working with him, is an added dividend. Although Thompson dismisses his function in the collective process as that of "gluepot," both his critics and collaborators are quick to proclaim his centrality. Reviewing Griffiths' *Maggie and Pierre*, for example, one Toronto critic wrote, "Much of the show's charm comes from the stagecraft [Linda Griffiths] has developed with director Paul Thompson, her long-time mentor."[24] That Thompson's contribution has been prolific as well as consistent

can be recognized by glancing at the *Members Catalogue* of the Canadian Guild of Playwrights: twenty-two collective creations are attributed to Passe Muraille up to 1979 and, as the editor states, "Paul Thompson, as scenarist and director, centralized the shaping of the Collective Creation into a staged play production, by himself where no playwright or other name is mentioned, and as a shared function where a name is mentioned other than the collective."[25]

ALTHOUGH IT WOULD BE PRESUMPTUOUS to trace the national interest in collective creation[26] to Passe Muraille, the theatre's popularizing of the form within Ontario can't be denied. In all fairness, George Luscombe at Toronto Workshop Productions had been preparing Toronto audiences for the revue form most typical of the collective product throughout the Sixties: but Luscombe's development of productions like *Hey Rube!* and *Chicago Seventy*, heavily influenced by his apprenticeship at Joan Littlewood's Theatre Workshop in England, always bore the imprint of Luscombe's own particular vision and style. Thompson's work is more varied, marked more by its eclecticism than by any consistent visual or presentational form. This is partly due to the fact that he, more than Luscombe, allows his actors free reign and that he works with writers the strength of Carol Bolt, Rudy Wiebe, Rick Salutin, and Betty Jane Wylie. The Passe Muraille collective creation, rather than becoming predictably stylized, changes according to the interests and energies of its various creators. As a result, the shows continue to attract both old and new patrons, assisted by Thompson's aggressive attempts to reach people for whom theatre is a new experience. Passe Muraille's decision to decline an offer to take *The Farm Show* to New York in 1974 in favour of touring Ontario farm communities suggests the degree to which Thompson was adhering to one of Garrard's original demands, namely that the theatre "get a truck and do theatre in small towns." Thompson's subsequent use of various spaces throughout the city for the staging of plays — most notable in *The Immigrants*, a play devised for Italian, Greek, and Portuguese community clubs — although not always successful, reveals another, namely that "the theatre find new ways to reach people." As Thompson said in 1973, "I'm interested in discovering the audience. I think the really interesting people are the ones who don't go to theatres."[27]

Thompson's fear of becoming "locked in" or creatively restricted by any one dramatic form or theatrical style was well developed as early as 1972. A statement he made that year, as well as being prophetic of the current situation, reveals his awareness of "the hit syndrome" and suggests that an adherence to social and artistic integrity is still commercially viable:

> Once you have one show that works you start looking for another. The Factory has had three light comedies in a row. Within a year four or five *Brussels Sprouts* will

> be offered to it. Canada's answer to Neil Simon! Tarragon Theatre and Factory are going to have to turn somewhere. If you become dependent on a box office you become dependent on the success of your shows. Or dependent on subsidization. That's not the point of Passe Muraille.... If you're going to work that way, you work towards acceptance. The Passe Muraille is like an art gallery — it changes with each exhibition.[28]

Although Passe Muraille's production history is not without shows that pander to commercial tastes and expectations (as, for example, *I Love You, Baby Blue 2* — a blatantly empty attempt to exploit the name and publicity of their earlier success), it demonstrates a consistent avoidance of revivals and extensions that suggests the theatre's adherence to more than commercial aims. Money, of course, has always been as much a problem in Toronto as anywhere else. Indeed, *I Love You, Baby Blue* was allowed to run for months to capitalize on its attempted closure by the Toronto morality squad and the interest that ensued. The show was accused of "sexploitation" and, because of its extended run, is sometimes used to argue that Passe Muraille would "go commercial" if it only could. Such arguments usually fail to recall that *Futz*, Passe Muraille's very first production in 1969, also was invaded by the Toronto Morality Squad: "daring" and "controversial" are consistently applicable to this theatre even as "obscene" is not. And, as Thompson explained in an interview with the *Canadian Theatre Review*, *Baby Blue* was quite in keeping with the theatre's policy:

> Much of the work at Passe Muraille is built upon a kind of idealism. What ties people together is the exploration of a theme and the challenge of exploring that theme in a theatrical way. For *I Love You, Baby Blue* we took the techniques of *The Farm Show* and tried to apply them to the sexual fascination of a big city. We had a feeling that if it worked it would be a hit and a lot of people would come and see it — but *our* definition of a hit did not remotely anticipate the potential of *Baby Blue*. As an intense theatrical experience *1837: The Farmer's Revolt* was just as important, perhaps more important in political terms. But in *Baby Blue*, because of the taboos and the unavoidable personal nature of one's own sexuality, the doors were really opened. I don't think there was any attempt to see what we could do with the morality squad....[29]

That the proceeds from *I Love You, Baby Blue* were used for the down payment on Passe Muraille's permanent home might seem less than idealistic if it were not for what the theatre has been able to accomplish because of the acquisition of a permanent space. Thompson's organization of Passe Muraille's warehouse into different types and sizes of performing areas has allowed him to expand experimentation and pay for it at the same time. Playing commercial successes like *Les Maudit Anglais* and *Billy Bishop Goes to War* on the main stage has financed an ambitious programme of new works on the two smaller stages that facilitates Passe Muraille's support of new talent and maintains its interest in "theatre as experience."

In a time typified by the depletion of investment funds, Theatre Passe Muraille's research and development function becomes increasingly important. The theatre's original seed programme, by which unknown artists were given minimal budgets and rehearsal space with which to develop a show, resulted in a series of readings, workshops and showcases throughout the city, twenty-one of which are described under Theatre Passe Muraille in the 1977 and 1978 editions of *Canada on Stage*; at least three of these went on to main-stage productions. More importantly, they provided a focus for what might be termed Toronto's "new alternative," a community of artists and spaces still available to experimentation and failure who attract an audience interested in less mainstream work. That some of these artists, notably Cheryl Cashman, Michael Hollingsworth and Margaret Dragu, have already gained more "establishment" reputations is an inevitable progression; that others such as Marien Lewis and David Type fight such mainstream co-option is just as worthwhile. The success of the seed programme has resulted in its expansion into Passe Muraille's New Works programme which, under the directorship of Clark Rogers, has seen workshops of twenty to thirty productions over the last year; the arts councils' enthusiasm for the project is evident in their increased subsidization, with funds specifically ear-marked for new works. Clearly, they recognize that Passe Muraille's discovery of such innovative artists as John Palmer and Hrant Alianak in the early Seventies and its introduction of groups like Newfoundland's Codco and Saskatoon's Twenty-fifth Street House to Toronto audiences throughout the decade is a tradition that must be supported if the city's theatre is to creatively continue.

Passe Muraille's ability to simultaneously finance experimentation and attract a popular audience is its major accomplishment and what distinguishes it from the Factory Theatre Lab, the other Toronto theatre actively involved in the development of new plays and playwrights. The Factory's reputation as "the home of the Canadian playwright" has declined in recent years from its ascendancy during the early Seventies when it staged such highly-acclaimed productions as Herschel Hardin's *Esker Mike and His Wife, Agiluk* and Larry Kardish's *Brussels Sprouts* to the point where recent productions like Ken Gass's *Winter Offensive* and George F. Walker's *Rumours of Our Death* have been reviewed as "trash." Such irresponsible "criticism" fails to suggest, let alone support, the valuable contribution of this theatre's artistic policy which, by nurturing new work regardless of audience expectations and critical response, continues to challenge and enrich Toronto theatre. The Factory's refusal to bow to commercial expediency following its early string of hits is well maintained by its current workshop programme which, under the industrious guidance of Bob White, remains adamantly "fringe." The ideal that the Factory should "pursue unconventional programming and [a] restless search for something indigenous and unique"[30] has plagued the theatre since Ken Gass founded it in May 1970. Rather than change his intentions when

the going became rough, Gass insisted that the Factory "remain eclectic and not settle into formula programming."[31] Writing in 1975 about his difficulties with this approach, Gass could be summarizing what is still the Factory's predicament:

> there has always been a discrepancy between what the public (including the critics and funding agencies) recognized about the Factory and what we considered our most important accomplishments. The public has wanted recognizable products, more hits, and a clearly defined policy. They can't pin us down. The Factory has been preoccupied with the search itself, with the process, with experimentation, yet with an outward energy that often borders on proselytism. Somehow in the midst of financial turmoils, bureaucratic battles with government councils, the unions, city inspectors, the powerful pigeon-hole mentality of critics, we have tried not to compromise our ideals.

The Factory Theatre Lab's inability to find "the Canadian middle road [between] meaningful experimentation on one hand [and] public acceptability on the other"[32] has resulted in its loss of profile in the daily press but not its status in the theatre community. Nor has it disappointed a consistently loyal audience eager to participate in the theatre's experiments despite negative reviews. One of the most positive signs that Toronto theatre is surviving commercialization in early 1980 is that *Rumours of Our Death* has been so popular.[33] Although it relies on music and a popular rock performer for its appeal, the play is by no means "safe"; publishing the script as a "work-in-progress," the *Canadian Theatre Review* terms it "a Jarry-esque allegory of man's incoherence towards man, of a mythical country's incoherence towards its mythical people, of a not-so-exotic world's incoherence towards itself. An allegory of national diseases. . . ."[34] That such a play could develop a following attests to the Factory's continued viability and suggests that "pioneering" principles are never obsolete.

THAT THEY ARE DEMANDING, HOWEVER, is a fact that even such a brief look at Toronto theatres in the Seventies makes clear. By 1975 most of the theatres that had emerged during the first half of the decade were suffering not only financial problems but also artistic uncertainty and creative fatigue. As Martin Kinch, co-founder with John Palmer and Tom Hendry of the Toronto Free Theatre in 1972, put it: "There seemed to be creative exhaustion everywhere. We had filled the first promise and many of us simply didn't know where to go. . . . There were other attendant problems too. The arrival of CBC drama attracted a lot of actors and scripts away from the live theatre and for the first time we were having to scrounge."[35] This latter problem was particularly detrimental to Toronto Free Theatre, which saw as its mandate the development of a permanent company of actors who could work with a small core of writers and directors "to build a repertoire of representative Canadian work."[36]

In 1972, Kinch suggested, "These days, almost any given Canadian play can get a production. But there is no process of development. The Factory Theatre Lab develops playwrights, the Theatre Passe Muraille develops directors and we wanted to develop a relationship between actor, director and playwright in a residence sense."[37] Within three years, Free Theatre had achieved its goal, gathering a marvellous pool of actors — including Saul Rubinek, Chapelle Jaffe, Brenda Donohue, Booth Savage, Nick Mancuso, David Bolt, and R. H. Thompson — who contributed to a succession of hits such as John Palmer's *The End*, Kinch's *Me?*, Carol Bolt's *Gabe* and *Red Emma*, and Michael Ondaatje's *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*. But by 1975, these actors and, to a lesser degree, Palmer and Kinch, were receiving attractive offers elsewhere. Recognizing how the new theatres were affecting the mainstream, Kinch began a re-evaluation of Free Theatre's aims, concurrent with Glassco's sabbatical at Tarragon, Thompson's move to a permanent home, and Gass's period of redefinition. His conclusion made as much sense then as it does now; it also foreshadowed the creative conundrum which continues to inhibit Free Theatre's realization of its potential:

> What should be happening now, and is to a small extent, is that the people — the writers and actors and directors — who have worked their way up in the Toronto theatres, be allowed into the major theatrical institutions of the country. That will make room for the new ideas coming up here, which is what will keep our particular perspective alive and help renew the larger institutions. If this process doesn't happen, I don't really like to think of what will become of places like the Free Theatre. . . .[38]

Within two years, many of Kinch's actors were working elsewhere. Palmer had moved to New York. Kinch, in his own evaluation of the Toronto theatre climate published in *This Magazine*, revealed his growing despair about the situation. Although his words address the plight of many Toronto theatres in the late Seventies, they are most applicable to his own experience at Free Theatre:

> Theatres allowed themselves to announce entire seasons long before the announced plays were actually in existence. Panic-decisions were made to fill the holes when the promised works failed to appear. In the rush, and the acceptance of rigid opening-night dates, supposedly dictated by audience needs, many plays opened in the second draft which should have opened in the fifth. For the playwrights, on whose output the growth of the theatres depended, the pressures resulted in quick debilitation. Some developed blocks. Some moved rapidly towards formulaic repetition. Very few were able to develop and mature in this atmosphere. Fewer could produce the deep and resonant images needed for the creation of strong dramatic experience.[39]

Although Free Theatre offered some exciting fare during the second half of the Seventies — notably the collective creation *The Fits* and George F. Walker's *Zastrozzi* — its focus became increasingly diffuse. In 1978, artistic direction fell to William Lane, whose productions of new British and American playwrights

such as William Hauptman and Sam Shepard caused more interest than those of new Canadian writers like Tom Walmsley or curiosities such as Brecht's *Baal* and Somerset Maugham's *Rain*. Guest productions such as Centaur Theatre's *Nothing to Lose* by David Fennario and touring shows like *Paper Wheat* or the Newfoundland Mummers' *Some Slick* were used to round out subscription seasons. 1980 began with a transfer from Adelaide Court of Erika Ritter's hit comedy, *Automatic Pilot*, in a production directed by Lane for New Theatre. Not only has the creation of "a repertoire of representative Canadian work" apparently been abandoned, but the development of a "small flexible group of artists and other theatre workers who are united by a sense of mutual respect, faith and belief"[40] seems, temporarily at least, to have been dropped. Although there is considerable validity to Kinch's notion that "the Canadian play and a commitment to its production will mean increasingly less if its mere presence is considered a success," its mere absence does not insure the theatre's return to "its initially serious purposes."[41] Free Theatre's current situation, in fact, hints at the opposite effect: that the theatre, "in its desire for a short term hit, abnegates its more serious function — the imaginative exploration of our life and our reality." As Free Theatre's actors, directors and writers become interchangeable with companies as expert as New Theatre, Open Circle Theatre, The Phoenix Theatre, Young People's Theatre, and Theatre Plus, as well as Toronto Workshop Productions, Toronto Arts Productions and the other once "alternate" theatres with which it has shared the limelight, it loses the unique approach and perspective that was its *raison d'etre*. That Toronto's burgeoning theatre market may support such a change is probably true; that it should require it would mean an unfortunate loss for Canadian drama.

It is just such a loss that makes the shift from an alternate aesthetic problematic. With financial considerations increasingly controlling the size, nature and appearance of new plays, enthusiasm for the possibility that Toronto theatres may achieve commercial independence in the Eighties is half-hearted. Kinch's fear in 1976 that "the audience has stopped growing and is diminishing"[42] appears to have been unwarranted; its corollary, that the audience is expanding, can be seen as equally disturbing. Although Bill Glassco is probably correct when he asserts that "the days of the production company are passing,"[43] the possibility that Free Theatre might become merely a transfer house for productions such as Tarragon's is disturbing. Certainly such a space would contribute to the greater solvency of some Toronto theatres; but that it "would also clear the already available spaces for a wider range of new works,"[44] as Kinch hoped in 1976, is unlikely. What is a surety, however, is the increased co-operation amongst all the Toronto theatres. A grouping of various theatres to protest the *Toronto Star*'s hiring of Gina Mallet as Drama Critic in 1976 achieved self-recognition of communal strength, if nothing else. The cost sharing of co-productions has now become a reality that may

mean survival for Toronto's smallest theatres. Unless they cynically pursue commercial status in the manner of the phenomenally successful Toronto Truck Theatre by mounting plays like Agatha Christie's *The Mousetrap*, or attach themselves to a sponsoring "institution" like Passe Muraille for the duration of a production, there are few alternatives to amalgamation. The possibility that a new, small, and experimental theatre could now emerge and survive becomes increasingly slight. Paul Bettis, Artistic Director of Theatre Second Floor, one of the most original theatres to develop in Toronto during the Seventies, closed his theatre in 1979, explaining "I don't want to get bigger and I don't want to charge more at the door."[45] As Bettis's attitude becomes a rarity, the complexion of Toronto theatre in 1990 grows indeterminable. That it will survive is indisputable; how is another matter.

NOTES

[1] Ed., Don Rubin and Mimi Mekler (Toronto: CTR Publications, 1979), 11-24.

[2] Press release, Theatre Passe Muraille, dated 1969. Available through the Theatre Department, Metro Toronto Public Library, whose "vertical files" of press clippings and information on Canadian theatre history and criticism are an invaluable resource for the student of Canadian theatre.

[3] For an example of the former, see Don Rubin, "Sleepy Tunes in Toronto," *CTR*, 20 (Fall 1978), 93-95; of the latter, see Martin Kinch, "Canadian Theatre: In for the Long Haul," *This Magazine*, 10, Nos. 5-6 (November-December 1976), 3-8.

[4] Quoted in Ray Conlogue, "Little theatres try to get out of the wilderness," *The Globe and Mail*, 15 August 1977. Newspaper references without page numbers can be found in the "vertical files" of the Theatre Department of the Metro Toronto Public Library.

[5] Gina Mallet, "Tarragon Theatre boss rolls up string of hits," *Toronto Star*, 17 March 1979.

[6] Urjo Kareda, "Tarragon's short history buoyant with success," *Toronto Star*, 8 September 1973.

[7] "Tarragon will take time off," *Toronto Sun*, 13 March 1975.

[8] Quoted in John Fraser, "Tarragon, Glassco back in business," *The Globe and Mail*, 3 June 1976.

[9] Ken Gass, "Toronto's Alternates: Changing Realities," *CTR*, 21 (Winter 1979), p. 127.

[10] Press release, Tarragon Theatre, 1972.

[11] Quoted in Sid Adelman, "Eye on Entertainment," *Toronto Star*, 12 August 1974.

[12] Quoted in Conlogue.

[13] Quoted in "Toronto's Tarragon Theatre faces challenging dilemma," *London Free Press*, 12 February 1977.

[14] This trend has also been continued with, for example, Jack Blum's production of Joe Wiesenfeld's *Spratt* (April 1978) and Guy Sprung's productions of Tom Walmsley's *Something Red* (February 1980).

[15] Quoted in Bryan Johnson, "Glassco's mission a matter of trust," *The Globe and Mail*, 16 September 1978.

[16] Quoted in Mallet.

[17] Quoted in Conlogue.

[18] Gass, p. 134.

[19] Quoted in Mallet.

[20] Press release, Theatre Passe Muraille, 1969.

[21] E.g., John Bentley Mays, "Taking it on the road," *Maclean's*, 92 (4 June 1979), p. 60.

[22] Quoted in Merle Shain, "Pursuing the need for a guerilla theatre," *Toronto Telegram*, 1 March 1969.

[23] Bob Wallace, "Paul Thompson at Theatre Passe Muraille: Bits and Pieces," *Open Letter*, 2, No. 7 (Winter 1974), p. 54.

[24] Ray Conlogue, "Maggie and Pierre shows power, finesse and insight," *The Globe and Mail*, 15 February 1980, p. 17.

[25] Chris Mallgren, ed., *Members Catalogue: Canadian Guild of Playwrights*, 1 (1979), 38-39. Available from the Guild, 24 Ryerson Ave., Toronto M5T 2P3.

[26] This is now so developed that two festivals by Canadian theatre groups involved with collective creation have been held. See Jerry Zientara, "Theatre Synergy: a collective festival," *CTR*, 24 (Fall 1979), 114-21.

[27] Wallace, p. 64.

[28] Quoted in Herbert Whittaker, "Artist's sets give play unique look," *The Globe and Mail*, 22 May 1977.

[29] "The Trial of Baby Blue," *CTR*, 13 (Winter 1977), p. 8.

[30] Ken Gass, "Perspective," *Theatre Notebook*, 1, No. 1 (October 1975), p. 3. To my knowledge, only one issue of this newspaper was published; it is on file in the Theatre Department, Metro Toronto Public Library.

[31] Ibid., p. 3.

[32] Gass, "Toronto's Alternates," p. 132.

[33] This was accomplished by the ten-member company taking over co-operative responsibility for the extension, working without pay and sharing the profits. See "People," *Maclean's*, 93 (25 February 1980), p. 27, for a report.

[34] Don Rubin, epigraph preceding *Rumours of Our Death*, *CTR*, 25 (Winter 1980), p. 43.

[35] Quoted in John Fraser, "The revolution's over in underground theatre," *The Globe and Mail*, 27 August 1975.

[36] Quoted in Tom Hendry, "The Stage," *Toronto Citizen*, 27 January 1972.

[37] Quoted in Urjo Kareda, "Alternative theatre offers hope for the future," *Toronto Star*, 16 September 1972.

[38] Quoted in Fraser.

[39] "Canadian Theatre: In for the Long Haul," *This Magazine*, 10, Nos. 5-6 (November-December 1976), p. 6.

[40] Quoted in Hendry.

[41] Kinch, p. 8.

[42] Kinch, p. 3.

[43] Quoted in Mallet.

[44] Kinch, p. 8.

[45] Quoted in Conlogue.

THE DEALING

for Theodore Roethke

Tony Cosier

Twenty-three cents of stamp, my envelope,
My handful of paper and ink stayed here.
In all the magazines and catalogues
There were not many I could send my verse.
I did not care too much. But now I care.

I stand beside the bookcase, take in hand
Your handful of paper and ink, alone,
So very much alone. I want to send
My book of songs to you. But where are you,
For life's sake where are you, old windspinner?

How can I trade my book back for your own?
Can I really fling its white wings on the air,
Shovel its black impressions under sod,
Murmur its mysteries in the ear of the cat,
Shake it to call you like a chapel bell?

When you crossed over that mild thin pale line
You did us out of dealing. All one way
The dealing with us now. I read you.
I stand beside my bookshelf and read you.
All one way.
The finger I scraped on a rock heals silently.
My hair grows silently. My hushed veins go with the moon
without a sound.

GEORGE F. WALKER

B-Movies Beyond the Absurd

Chris Johnson

IT IS NOW TEN YEARS SINCE THE Factory Theatre Lab opened its first season in a makeshift theatre above an auto-body shop on Dupont Street in Toronto. Theatre Passe Muraille had been in operation for two years, and Tarragon Theatre and Toronto Free Theatre were to join the new Toronto "alternative theatre scene" shortly. Together, the four theatres played a major role in encouraging the upsurge in interest in Canadian drama whose impetus we are still feeling. The renewed burst of theatrical activity in Toronto, this time with a distinct Canadian accent, encouraged increased interest in Canadian drama, and a number of Canadian writers who had been exerting their productive energy in a theatrical direction for several years, among them Robertson Davies, John Herbert, George Ryga, and James Reaney, acquired an increased importance in the eyes of those interested in the development of Canadian culture. Encouraged to investigate, scholarly inquiry revealed that there have been in the Canadian literary past a number of playwrights whose work is of more than passing interest. As Northrop Frye notes in his conclusion to the first edition of the *Literary History of Canada,* the deficiency of many individual Canadian literary works has been balanced by the significance of their contribution to the "entire enterprise" of Canadian literature. With the added efforts of Passe Muraille, Factory Lab, Tarragon, Toronto Free Theatre, and the writers associated with these companies, Canadian drama was seen for the first time as an "entire enterprise," a suddenly more impressive whole whose parts deserved more attention.

The new movement also created a new cohesion, a sense of drama in the fullest meaning of the word, not the isolated work of individual playwrights but a body of work linked by emulation, rivalry, and a shared audience. It is little wonder, then, that the similarities and differences between these companies and the theatrical styles they have espoused have had a profound influence on the generation of Canadian playwrights who have achieved maturity in the decade just drawn to a close. It must be understood that any schematic analysis of what was a fairly complex cultural phenomenon cannot hope to explain satisfactorily the full range of activity, and that this brief summary of the aesthetic preoccupations of 1970's alternative theatre in Toronto necessarily omits mention of excep-

tions to the general rules, the numerous examples of crossovers and idiosyncratic experiments: none of the theatres under discussion adheres to the rules of a clearly defined "school." Hrant Alianak's whimsical experiments first saw light of day as "seed shows" sponsored by Theatre Passe Muraille, a company with a much clearer sense of social purpose than Alianak has. David Freeman, a playwright whose work is neo-realistic in the manner predominantly favoured by the Tarragon, had his first production at the Factory Lab, whose bias has frequently been anti-naturalistic. George Walker, closely associated with the Factory Lab during most of that theatre's history, has seen three of his last four plays premiered at the Toronto Free. Still, generalizations have their value as rough guides, and some attempt to sort the trees into woods is in order.

Tarragon Theatre, with a standard of finished production generally higher than that of its rivals, had the greatest appeal to a general audience. The neo-realistic, well-made plays which constituted the bulk of the fare offered were easily accessible, and with the familiar conventions, David French and the other Tarragon playwrights showed audiences the previously unfamiliar, Canadians themselves, or at least facsimiles of themselves that audiences were willing, even eager, to accept. "That's us! That's us!", Greg Leach has summarized audience reaction to French's *Leaving Home*.[1] The Tarragon plays have been Canadian by virtue of their content; this, and their accessibility, recommended them to the literary critics, and the Tarragon playwrights were among the first of the new wave to receive widespread critical reaction. By and large the plays were treated as extensions of Canadian literature rather than as dramatic entities, and comment was usually devoted to incorporating the new Canadian drama within thematic patterns applicable to Canadian literature as a whole.

Passe Muraille's approach has been much more theatrical and much more theatricalist. The docu-drama, the form for which the theatre has become best known, goes a step beyond the "Canadianness" of the Tarragon plays in that the depicted reality almost invariably influences the form of the work itself; if the subject is Canadian, the form will be Canadian too. Passe Muraille's distinctly Canadian and highly theatrical style, its influence on writers who have worked with the company, and its influence on theatre groups elsewhere in the country made the organization a favourite subject of theatre critics, and Passe Muraille followed Tarragon into the general critical consciousness.

The Factory Theatre Lab and Toronto Free Theatre, perhaps the most eclectic of the four, were less concerned with Canadian content, and the plays produced by these companies fitted less neatly into the established thematic patterns of Canlitcrit; at the same time, the internationalist theatre style of the plays did not deviate sufficiently from the European avant-garde model to attract the attention of critics of a more theatricalist bent. Here, in short, was the TISH group of Canadian drama, insisting on cosmopolitan values but at the same time asserting

the right of Canadians to pursue those values and to be heard while doing so. While Tarragon and Passe Muraille realized their objectives earlier and more fully than did the Factory Lab, the Factory Lab's objectives were more elusive and were pursued through policies designed to produce results over a longer period of time. With its aggressively nationalistic decision not to produce non-Canadian plays, its trading off of production polish for larger numbers of plays staged in a year, its comparative indifference to immediate popular success, and its focus on writing, the Factory Lab and its founding Artistic Director, Ken Gass, provided a trade school for Canadian playwrights entirely unprecedented in Canadian theatre history. The energetic creative atmosphere, the opportunities to put works to the test, and perhaps above all, the new freedom to fail from time to time, have all produced over the long run the valuable results Gass and his co-workers originally envisaged; the Factory Lab has fostered some of the most intensely personal, formally innovative, and accomplished dramatic writing in the country. It is the purpose of this essay to examine the work of George F. Walker, one of the best of the Factory Lab playwrights, as a first step toward rectifying critical neglect of the company and its writers, and toward assessing the place in recent Canadian drama occupied by Walker and the theatrical movement he represents.

As well as being one of the most accomplished writers to emerge from Ken Gass's laboratory process, Walker is a writer with a long and close connection with the theatre: his first play was produced in 1971 in the company's second season, he was for a number of years the Factory Lab's resident playwright, and he served for a brief period as the theatre's Artistic Director. He wrote his first play, "Prince of Naples," in response to the Factory Lab's ubiquitous posters calling for new scripts; until then, he had only dabbled in verse and short fiction. The one-act piece, and the full-length play which followed shortly after, *Ambush at Tether's End*, are both clearly the work of a writer new to theatre, of a writer of urban and cosmopolitan sensibility looking to established writers for models in the form new to him.

"Not many prairie landscapes in George Walker's plays," Ken Gass remarks in his introduction to a collection of Walker's plays.[2] Indeed not. Or as Walker himself puts it:

> It would be very dishonest of me to attempt to write any sort of rural play. I had been surrounded by things like movies, television — you know The World at Six, that sort of thing — theatre and literature of all kinds all my life. What did I know about the farmer and his wife? And yet I was criticized. Everyone kept telling me I should go to the grass roots and that Canadian plays should be naturalistic or historical. Naturalism was very big in Toronto for a long time. I couldn't help thinking that was one kind of theatre, but there were other types of theatre as well.[3]

"Prince of Naples" concerns a relationship familiar to every North American, that of student and teacher, and draws extensively on the perspectives of a con-

temporary urban world, simultaneously literate and electronic. The work shows its literary ancestry through its form: in its use of language, transforming pat phrases into extended and volcanic passages of nonsense, in its heavy dependence on a central theatrical image, and in its concerted effort to include the audience within the emotional event the characters are experiencing, the play models itself after the Theatre of the Absurd in general and after Ionesco's *The Lesson* in particular. Walker reverses the usual power structure in the educational process, making the young the instructor of the old, to examine a social phenomenon, the cult of the young and the supposedly liberated, associated with the sixties, and in the process questions the new credo of relativity:

> Now the word insane has been reapproached by the wide-eyed armies of time and given a new meaning. The word has been dragged out of the dampness of our mental basement and placed high on the clouds of our consciousness.[4]

The method of employing a form to question ironically the ideas underlying the form became characteristic of Walker's work.

Ambush at Tether's End was Walker's second exercise in the theatrical techniques of the Absurd: this time, the most important model appears to be Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. The central character in the play is a corpse (an echo of Ionesco's *Amédée, or How to Get Rid of It?*), a poet-philosopher who has hanged himself and who has left a series of notes attacking the values of his friends, challenging them to confront "reality" as he has with a "definitive act" equal to his. While there are similarities linking the friends to Beckett's tramps (Mullaly correctly identifies rhythmic similarities in their speech),[5] Walker has localized the situation, and has made from the dichotomy depicted by Vladimir and Estragon a more North American opposition of obsessions, those of the ambitious businessman and the sexual athlete. If those who wait are diminished, so too is that for which they wait. Max, the moralizing corpse, endangers his own authenticity through his posthumous showmanship, and the philosophical life is discredited by the dead man's petty rivalry with a colleague. While Galt and Bush are, predictably, destroyed by the dilemma in which they find themselves, there is little to recommend an alternative to their views if Max is the representative of that alternative. Walker sees both the society he satirizes and the modish and pseudo-romantic challenge to that society as inadequate, and in the play constructs a theatrical model of the intellectual quandary in which many of his generation found themselves.

THE INFLUENCE OF THE Theatre of the Absurd can be seen in many of the plays produced in the Factory Lab's first few seasons, and several critics were quick to identify their derivative nature. In his review of *The Factory*

Lab Anthology, in which *Ambush at Tether's End* appeared, Edward Mullaly writes:

> Twenty-five years ago the enunciation of man's absurd situation might have constituted a positive statement. But a similar inability to discover or point out shapes and structures today no longer constitutes experimental, or even interesting, drama regardless of the country in which it is written.[6]

Of Walker's play itself he asks "why Walker has spent his time on a script Beckett had already written with much greater discipline, intelligence, and skill."[7] While Walker's early efforts are in many respects undergraduate exercises, few saw at the time that they are superior undergraduate exercises, and that in turning the form against its content, Walker avoided slavish imitation.

The Theatre of the Absurd has remained largely a European phenomenon: American playwrights have had as much difficulty transplanting its insights and techniques to a North American *milieu* and audience as have had the Canadians Mullaly criticizes. Martin Esslin attributes the difficulty to history:

> the convention of the Absurd springs from a feeling of deep disillusionment, the draining away of the sense of meaning and purpose in life, which has been characteristic of countries like France and Britain in the years after the Second World War. In the United States there has been no corresponding loss of meaning and purpose.[8]

While the statement is undoubtedly less true than it was when it was first written, it is significant that most of the American playwrights whose work had close affinities to the European avant-garde of the fifties and early sixties have subsequently developed in different directions. Thomas Porter advances a more commercial explanation in *Myth and Modern American Drama*. While mainstream American drama consistently portrays the failure of the American Dream, that which has maintained the illusion of "meaning and purpose," the American theatre-going public has an aversion to the next step, a dramatic form which not only discusses but reflects the disintegration of the Dream. In consequence, American attempts to transfer the technique as well as the message have been stillborn.[9] The American playwrights who have most successfully communicated to an American audience those insights usually associated with the Theatre of the Absurd have been those, like Jean-Claude van Itallie or Sam Shepard, who have taken particular care to couch these insights in an American idiom, who have employed the disjointed nature of American popular culture to display a fragmented theatrical vision of lost "meaning and purpose." Shepard, whose work is most clearly relevant to a consideration of Walker's, has proven particularly adept at employing the trivia of American society as a means of both celebrating the vulgar vitality of that society and suggesting an emptiness beyond.

In Walker's third play, *Sacktown Rag*, he draws on North American pop culture in a manner somewhat similar to Shepard's, and in turning to more auto-

biographical subject matter, discards some of the literary self-consciousness which intrudes in the earlier plays. The structural technique is that of the cartoon: the schoolboy protagonist experiences the traumas of growing up in a world sometimes realistic and sometimes drawn in the lurid colours of the comic strip. While the caricatures of parents and teachers sometimes have the gleeful and scatological energy of schoolboy graffiti, Walker does not entirely trust his conventions and chooses to explain them away with an unconvincing memory frame: the play subsequently loses the impact of the cartoon without gaining enough in psychological insight to compensate. It is probably the least satisfying of Walker's published work.

In *Bagdad Saloon*, first produced in 1973 and subtitled "a cartoon," Walker does not dilute his pop art conventions: the result is a bawdy, sprawling collage of short scenes, music, and *coups de théâtre*. The cartoon figures are less personal than the graffiti of *Sacktown Rag*; characters drawn from American high and low culture, Gertrude Stein, Henry Miller, Doc Halliday, have greater resonance, and extend the implications of the piece beyond itself.

The incident which precipitates the action of the play is the kidnapping of the American legends by a pair of improbable Arabs who want to learn the secret of mythic immortality. The attempt, of course, is futile: Halliday and Miller are frauds, and Stein, while she has visions, proves incapable of communicating what she sees. The American saloon is grafted onto fabled Bagdad, and Aladdin decks himself out as a dime store cowboy in pursuit of a new and neon mythology, even while the efficacy of any myth in staving off the chaos is put in question:

AHRUN: Fame is a fickle commodity. Not bad, mind you. Just fickle.
DOC: So what?
STEIN: Exactly.
AHRUN: It needs to be guided, so to speak. And if it's guided in the right direction, it can create things. Purpose. Glamour. Mystique. (*Pause*) Artists. Or folk heroes. All things which we find very scarce around here.
STEIN: What happens then?
AHRUN: Folk-lore.
STEIN: And then?
AHRUN: More folk-lore.
STEIN: And then?
AHRUN: And then . . . and you can — and then there's always . . .
STEIN: Yes?
DOC: What?
(Ahrun shakes his head violently. Turns. Leaves. . . .)

So much for identity, Arab, Canadian, or otherwise.

As Gass points out in his introduction, the first movement of the play constructs the saloon and decorates it in all its crass glory, while the second movement destroys and discredits the structure. Unfortunately, the process is unduly pro-

tracted and Walker is often distracted by his fascination with the decoration; the piece is theatrically inefficient. Still, in *Bagdad Saloon* Walker shows increased control of his new medium, and develops further the talent for stage metaphor revealed in the earlier plays: the image of the all-American hero, sportsman, and pop singer as pathetic, speechless grotesque is an image that lingers long after memories of the irritating meanderings have faded.

IT IS A COMMONPLACE THAT, particularly in matters of structural convention, theatre has been drawing for the last two or three decades on popular electronic forms, especially film, reclaiming the debt that art form owes theatre in general and August Strindberg in particular. Walker has not been the first Canadian playwright to borrow from cinema: Ryga's "liquid dramaturgy" owes as much to film as it does to the folk song,[10] and James Reaney cites Walt Disney as an important influence. The older playwrights, however, use cinematic devices to shape the presentation of their vision of the world whereas for playwrights of Walker's generation, the vision itself is frequently filmic.

> Like so many of my generation, my mind is sort of a media garbage bag sometimes. We're all so heavily influenced by television and movies and you don't have to be very perceptive to see it coming out in new plays. The dilemma for me was not to rebel against the problem — it is, after all, a fairly central reality — but to assimilate it and make something of it.[11]

As Walker suggests, the influence is to a certain extent involuntary, the result of a lifetime's exposure for the generation which grew up with television and whose dreams are, in effect, movies. The process of "making something of it" has involved becoming aware of this mode of thought as just that, an artificial construct rather than part of the natural order (Esslin identifies the post-war generation's frequent inability to make that distinction in the postscript to the revised *The Theatre of the Absurd*); it has also meant exploiting the dramatic possibilities of a contemporary pool of shared understanding, which becomes the basis of a coherent (if not necessarily logical) set of social assumptions to which the social act of theatre can be addressed.

Obviously film is a richer source of theatrical convention than is the cartoon, and provides fuller access to the popular pool of understanding. It also provides, especially through the so-called B-movies, a rich source of images, plot models, and a set of stock characters not unlike those used in melodrama or Commedia dell'Arte, an iconography available to the contemporary playwright to be employed as he sees fit. While Walker uses a number of cinematic structural devices in *Bagdad Saloon*, he makes comparatively little use of filmic iconography; *Beyond Mozambique* (1974) marks the beginning of extensive recourse to the raw material of the B-movie, material characteristic of all his subsequent work. In

employing stock characters and situations as the vehicles for insights and ideas beyond the capacity of the popular form from which they were drawn, Shepard in *Mad Dog Blues* or *Angel City* and Walker in *Beyond Mozambique* and *Ramona and the White Slaves* follow well-established theatrical practice: Beckett and Ionesco draw from music hall and film comedy; Pirandello, Chekhov, and Ibsen drew from melodrama; and, of course, Molière made use of the characters and conventions of Commedia dell'Arte.

The B-movie also provides an ironic mode, an element acquired through the almost accidental manner in which the older B-movies were reintroduced into the mainstream of popular art through late-night movies on television and hence into the imaginations of the generation shaped by television. In this way, trivial work which would otherwise have perished, as do novels unworthy of reprinting or plays not worth reviving, lead an extended life; the extension, the survival of artifacts meant to be disposable, frequently leads to levels of meaning not intended by their creators. The B-movies of the forties and fifties present a vision of life so simple and naive that the effect is comic, while the rapidity of shifts in popular taste gives the films a quaintness which emphasizes the naiveté and heightens the comic effect.

In adapting the world of the B-movie for the stage there are two dangers. The first is that an audience might accept that world at face value, despite the integral irony of a topical perspective out of context. The second pitfall is the temptation to revel in the exuberant awfulness of it all: the result, here, is usually described as "camp." Tom Cone's "Shot Glass" and Hrant Alianak's *The Blues* are examples of plays which duplicate the mood and rhythms of old B-movies very accurately indeed, but which offer almost no perspective from outside the worlds they depict, which remain satisfied with accidental irony, and which therefore succeed as anachronistic replicas, camp artifacts, rather than as original works of art. In *Beyond Mozambique* and subsequent plays, Walker circumvents the perils through the addition of elements from other modes, hyperbole, and explicit comment on the theatrical context.

Beyond Mozambique is a jungle movie, but contrary to the opinions of several first-night critics, it is not just a jungle movie. Set on the porch of a decaying colonial mansion in the jungle, the play throws together six disparate characters, in the best "ship of fools" tradition, and allows these figures, or "masks" as Richard Horenblas describes them,[12] to enact for us the decline and disintegration of western civilization; while its mode is that of the B-movie, its content is not: technology does not triumph over nature, white heroines are not pure, white horses are not all-powerful, and while the embattled whites are not overwhelmed by the forces of "savagery" drumming in the bush, they do succumb to the chaos within, and it is the drumming of that threat which provides the play's rhythm and central theatrical metaphor.

The play's central character, played by Donald Davies in the original production in 1974, is that most twentieth-century of archetypes, the mad scientist. Rocca combines the familiar B-movie archetype and hints of concentration camp "medical experiments," sadism disguised as a quest for knowledge, or, perhaps, the quest for knowledge undisguised; he is both the historical nightmare and the popular rendition of the obsessions in part responsible for those nightmares: in the face of impending disintegration, he can think only of pressing on with his experiments and of acquiring the necessary subjects. While he is horrifying, Rocco is, in Walker's wry view, the most positive character in the play; he has a Kurtz-like integrity which compels him to define, to defy chaos even if in a perverse way, a drive often expressed in gloriously B-movie lines: "There's something about committing crimes against humanity that puts you in touch with the purpose of the universe." Parody makes the line funny; history, and the terrifying possibility that Rocco may be right, given an Absurdist vision of the universe, make it not funny.

Rocco is accompanied by the requisite hunch-backed assistant, Tomas, who is primarily responsible for acquiring the experimental subjects and initiating a one-man crime wave. Tomas says very little, and much of that in Greek (a sardonic combination of classical heritage and bestiality personified), but his presence brings onstage a manifestation of the savagery by which the central characters feel themselves threatened, and makes explicit the erotic and racist implications of all those glistening dark bodies in B jungle movies. As the whites decline, non-white Tomas ascends, expropriating for himself the style and trappings of power. Later in the play, we encounter a third B-movie personage, the failed priest; again the element of parody is present, as Liduc does not go to the ends of the earth to redeem himself, but has been sent by a Church which sincerely hopes he will never be heard from again. His presence makes possible the introduction of the pseudo-philosophical observations so characteristic of the B-movie as a form, and which Walker gleefully deflates and redirects: "Jesus doesn't mind losers but he has no patience for idiots."

To these refugees from a jungle movie, Walker adds figures from other worlds, but worlds no less threatened by the surrounding chaos. Olga, Rocco's wife, is obsessed with the world of Chekhov's plays to the point where she believes that she is the character of the same name from *The Three Sisters*, complete with a sentimental attachment to the artistic traditions of the *ancien régime* (represented in the play by a treasured Renoir which she employs as a talisman against the forces of the jungle), a determination to preserve social form at all costs, and the obligatory yearning for Moscow. In the original production, the part was played by Francis Hyland, further heightening the effect created by introducing high culture into flamboyant pop. The introduction of a Chekhovian character points the pattern of non-communication and obsession in the piece, gives an added

significance to the manner in which characters are isolated from each other, and adds a dream-like memory of bitter-sweet against which Walker can contrast his more garish effects.

Corporal Lance, formerly of the R.C.M.P., brings a distinctly Canadian contribution to the model apocalypse; we, too, get a share in the fall of the West. The Corporal is the only explicitly Canadian character in Walker's work (although the unpublished plays, "Gossip" and "Filthy Rich," are nominally set in Toronto) and it is a reflection of Walker's views on what Canadian theatre ought to be that the character is a very crafty parody: the Corporal is inept (natives have dismantled his motorcycle and he can't put it together again), naive, apparently clean-living, and very Canadian — in the grip of malarial hallucinations, he sees wheat. The character is a good example of Walker's growing ability to manipulate audience expectations. The Corporal is at first merely a comic mountie, who, as we would expect, fails to understand what is happening in the sophisticated world of decadent allusion, worries about not having anything formal to wear but his scarlets ("Am I over-dressed?"), and gives his wholesome all to the battle against subversion. But this quintessentially Canadian joke, which makes possible the uniquely Canadian pleasure of being self-deprecatory and self-congratulatory simultaneously and which therefore neatly disarms a Canadian audience's defence mechanisms, acquires an uglier, more sinister quality as the play progresses: he is so distressed by misery that he puts to death all who suffer, hence making his Canadian wholesomeness an agent of the final destruction. The acute but unkind comment about our national personality is administered while we are still distracted by the reassuring cartoon.

The last of this stranded crew of expatriate whites is both of the world of B-movies and not of that world, thus providing a bridging device and a means of comment. Rita is a porn-movie star engaged in jungle smuggling operations in an attempt to raise the money to finance a legitimate movie and realize her dreams of respectable stardom: "This one is going to be a classic. It'll have sex. But it'll be sex with class." A classic definition of the romantic B-movie, or, for that matter, B jungle movies. Rita is the character most fully aware of the theatrical and cinematic elements of their plight, and the one most given to consciously dramatizing the situation; through her, Walker adds to the devices of hyperbole and film the technique of explicit comment which makes *Beyond Mozambique* more than an exercise in nostalgia and parody:

> Sometimes I just pour myself a stiff gin and lean against that big tree outside my tent and just let that sun sink slowly down into the ground while I shake the ice cubes around in the glass. And when I do that I get so deeply into Rita Hayworth I could just about die.

We all play our roles to the death. Rita also prepares the way for the final moments of the play in which the characters become aware of the audience, either making

us the drummers or including us within the circle surrounded by the drummers, and so involving us in this last moving picture show just before the final darkness descends.

BEYOND MOZAMBIQUE is a much more disciplined play than is *Bagdad Saloon*, evidence that Factory Lab's policies were paying off; some of the original writers were dropping away while others, like Walker, pushed doggedly on, learning the language of the theatre. The comparatively poor showing of much of Canada's earlier drama can be attributed to the extremely high proportion of first plays: the early 1970s was one of the few times and the Factory Lab one of the few places allowing a playwright progression from production to production. *Beyond Mozambique* has tighter focus, and a clearer sense of direction, in part created by Walker's continued progress in the creation of the single, unifying stage image, the device which gives Theatre of the Absurd much of its trenchant force. The split between Walker's manic sense of humour and his more serious concerns is effectively healed; *Beyond Mozambique* is splendid black comedy, combining the comic and the grotesque to produce Jonsonesque social comment. And Walker completed, in this play, an important step toward developing an efficient personal style. In his perceptive discussion of James Reaney's plays, Ross Woodman notes that in order to progress from the early pastoral comedies, Reaney needed to develop a "lens" through which his personal vision could be viewed by an audience;[13] in Reaney's case, the necessary "lens" was provided by childhood games, rituals, and rhymes. Walker, too, needed a "lens," and in *Beyond Mozambique* he discovered that his lens was the B-movie. When watching a Walker play, we, like Leonard Cohen's Nancy, see "the late late show / through a semi-precious stone."[14] The world revealed is eerie, often beautiful, the ordinary made extraordinary by the unnatural hues and the lateness of the hour.

Having used this lens to bring social comment into focus in *Beyond Mozambique*, in *Ramona and the White Slaves* (1976) Walker directs his new instrument on the problems of characterization, an area of dramatic endeavour notoriously weak in much Canadian drama. Set in what is apparently a brothel in a turn of the century, impossibly decadent and chaotic Hong Kong, the play shows us the Madam/Mother, Ramona, and her convoluted relationships with her daughters, their lovers, her crippled son, and a man who may be her pimp, her missing husband, or both. Two frameworks are provided: the piece begins with Ramona's opium dream in which she is raped by a lizard — and there is a strong possibility that the entire play is an opium dream (a drug induced state of mind is another "lens" to which Walker sometimes resorts) — while commentary is provided by a detective ostensibly attempting to solve a murder, one of many, which occurred in the street outside the brothel. The detective (a device Walker also

employs in "Gossip," 1977, and "Filthy Rich," 1979) has a long history as a useful dramatic device, and in addition provides the B-movie lens. Cook's inquiries do not produce the answers he sets out to find, nor do they reveal much biographical information about Ramona, for most spectators guess early in the play the bizarre secret of the ex-nun's history. The search, however, takes us through a tour of Ramona's psyche, the obsessions which compel her to devour her children and which make her, simultaneously, a powerful and compelling figure, a B-movie Medea. Her character provides one of the most rewarding roles for an actress in Canadian drama, a striking presentation of the mother/whore dichotomy so central to Western erotic fantasy, and the play makes an extraordinarily effective use of eroticism.

Walker's growing skills as a social satirist and his developing expertise in portraiture are both brought to bear on *Zastrozzi* (1977). After a period of personal crisis and discouragement, which Ken Gass documents in his introduction to *Three Plays by George F. Walker*, Walker had begun with the preceding play, "Gossip," to alter his tactics somewhat, to make his plays "more generous."[15] *Zastrozzi* is certainly more accessible than all but his earliest plays, and this, in combination with Walker's continued growth as a playwright, has made *Zastrozzi* his most popular work. The play is, unabashedly, a melodrama, and is subtitled as such. It pits good against evil in a plot taken from Shelley's novel, but a note in the Playwrights Co-op edition of the play informs the reader that Walker worked from a description of the novel: therefore the play is not really an adaptation of the original work. In the context of this discussion, it is important to note that there is certainly as much Errol Flynn as there is Percy Bysshe Shelley in Walker's play, and that Walker is continuing to make use of his B-movie lens.

As William Lane, the director of the original production, implies in his introduction, *Zastrozzi* is, in addition to being a melodrama, a contemporary (and tongue-in-cheek) morality play; Walker evidently believes that morality plays are rare in contemporary theatre and ought to be supplied, but is also aware that a contemporary audience is unlikely to accept a naked statement of central propositions: our defensive objectivity or superficiality or materialist disbelief must be circumvented through giving us the opportunity to laugh. "The moral centre of the play is Zastrozzi himself — the very one who never has a moral crisis."[16] Zastrozzi, in fact, constitutes the moral centre through his implacable desire to follow the dictates of a kind of morality to that point where morality annihilates itself. "Mankind is weak. The world is ugly. The only way to save them from each other is to destroy them both."[17] This is a logical extension of the thinking of both fundamentalist Protestantism and the playwrights of the Absurd. In the plot, Zastrozzi is the play's villain, the master criminal of Europe, and the adamant pursuer of his mother's murderer, a man turned saint or fool by the magnitude of the act. Within the play's metaphorical structure, Zastrozzi is the prin-

ciple of order, standing as the last bastion against the coming of a new, liberal, "pleasantly vague" world being born at the turn of the century, the time of the play's events and the beginning of our own era. As William Lane observes:

> Zastrozzi is already a figure out of his time. He comes on like some medieval nightmare, wielding his sword and dagger as though they were still the most lethal weapons on earth. . . . Zastrozzi's attitude is mercilessly aristocratic. His foe is the new middle class with its shiny new liberal education and its fancy for art.

He is, in short, "the master of discipline," the one who takes it upon himself to supply an absolute, a means of assuring that everyone is answerable.

Evil has great stage presence, and given the theatrical advantages ever afforded the villain, it is inevitable that the eponym seizes and holds the attention, and in some ways, the sympathy of the audience (after all, the murder of a mother is difficult to forgive, even allowing for extenuating circumstances and the fact that the lady herself may have been a killer). Walker himself has expressed some concern over the implications of the attraction a figure such as Zastrozzi commands, compared to the evidently pallid alternative, Verezzi the guilty saint:

> There's been a tendency to think of him [Verezzi] as moronic. I think that's just a reflection of our own age. We cannot accept God, obsession or goodliness, when in fact, a Verezzi has his own power. . . . It's a sign of our times that we tend to think of Verezzi as a fool, and Zastrozzi as a charming evil villain who's more in touch with reality. Well, maybe he is, but I still think there's room in this world for people like Verezzi. At least I hope so.[18]

Walker is surely leading his interviewer down a garden path. He deliberately presents the B-movie hero-in-white in such a way that contemporary cynicism cannot fail to judge the character a fool. The man whom Zastrozzi has pursued for three years cannot recognize the danger he is in, choosing instead to fantasize that he is a sort of messiah, complete with invisible followers; most telling stroke of all, he is a sexual flop, and we certainly don't want to identify with that. At the same time, Walker puts into the mind and mouth of a character we are sometimes invited to despise sentiments with which we know we ought to agree. At first glance, *Zastrozzi* seems to run contrary to Walker's usual practice of using a form to undermine the mode of thought behind the form: for the play, like melodrama and melodramatic B-movies, makes a clear distinction between good and evil, and gives each side the formalized statements of faith or anti-faith. However, by giving to the villain a passion for order and definition in some respects attractive to the inhabitants of chaotic times, as well as many of the best lines, and by giving to the putative hero qualities which we know cannot stand up to current events or intellectual trends, Walker encourages the wry and condescending smile with which we customarily respond to melodrama (unless it has been updated with the contemporary trappings of T.V. social drama) and with which we reject the melodramatic world of good and evil revealed. Walker's skilled evocation of the

double response leads us into an old fashioned examination of the nature of good and evil; again, the theatrical hand is quicker than the eye of the audience, who thought they were just watching swashbuckling melodrama and parody of swashbuckling melodrama.

Melodramatic simplicities are further complicated by Victor. In some ways, Zastrozzi and Verezzi are opposites: Zastrozzi is a realist and Verezzi is an idealist. In other ways, they are similar; both shape their lives with absolutes. In this respect, and others, both find their opposite in Victor, servant to Verezzi and failed priest, who, in order to keep a promise does his utmost to protect the victim from the destroyer. Realistic, materialistic, pragmatic, Victor commands respect for his decency, resourcefulness, and courage. It is here that Walker's growing powers of characterization are most impressive, for despite all his decencies (and decency is notoriously boring on stage), Victor is an interesting character; he is the one who, as Lane points out, has the moral dilemma, and he responds to it in a manner with which most members of the audience would agree. He calls a madman a madman, acts instead of hypothesizing, and, alone among the characters, is possessed himself of a sense of humour. We identify with him; he is like us. And like us, he is wrong, and the error results in his death. His secular faith also has its limitations, and his balance, his moderation, is ultimately his undoing.

We therefore agree intellectually with one character, feel we ought to respond spiritually to a second, and identify most closely with a third. While B-movie conventions would lead us to expect an either/or proposition, we are given three poles, and ambivalent poles at that. Walker uses the rest of the cast of stock characters to extend the central issue, and to comment upon it. An assistant villain is present not only to facilitate the plot in the usual manner, but to demonstrate the difference between ideological evil and mere thuggery. The presence of a villainess and a purer-than-white heroine gives a sexual shape to the contest, reducing the cosmic struggle to "naughty" *vs.* "nice," and at the same time adding a strong strain of eroticism to help bring the point home, to bed. Zastrozzi's imaginary seduction of Julia is a very compelling scene indeed.

THE VALUES WHICH EMERGE from Walker's work seem to be those of a small-"c" conservative, the technical trappings of the *avant-garde*. *Zastrozzi* ultimately asserts that evil does exist, is not the product of environment, and must be confronted. In "Prince of Naples," the easy assumptions based on a facile acceptance of relative values are pilloried, and *Bagdad Saloon* dismantles a system of value based on the publicizing of subjective fantasy. Walker is a champion of language and definition, a concern that has increased as his career progressed, and he rejects naturalism, in part, because it has forgotten how to reach

areas of human experience accessible to older dramatic forms. In this, he resembles Eugene Ionesco, who claims not to be of the *avant-garde* at all; Ionesco dismisses much recent drama, finding "Ibsen heavy, Strindberg clumsy, Pirandello outmoded," and wants in his own work to return to the theatre of the Greeks and the Elizabethans, a large than life theatre "concerned with the human condition in all its brutal absurdity."[19] That is what we are left with at the end of *Zastrozzi* as the villain surveys a positively Jacobean heap of corpses, enjoying his impersonal Greek blood revenge. The form is contemporary but the clash of forces therein depicted is an old and vital one.

While *Zastrozzi* is a continuation of Walker's earlier thematic explorations (there are, for instance, striking similarities between the obsessions of Rocco and those of Zastrozzi) and of the playwright's technical development (the manner in which Victor is employed to manipulate audience expectations differs from the way in which the Corporal was used only in that the technique is elaborated in the later play), it is at the same time a meticulously constructed and highly successful piece of entertaining theatre: to be truly successful, parody must be as skilfully constructed as that which it parodies, and in this respect *Zastrozzi* is a literary in-joke — poker-faced, Walker demonstrates that he is perfectly capable of writing a well-made play, and does so without sacrificing his personal, non-documentary vision.

This new concern with "generosity" is evident in Walker's other recent plays. "Gossip" and "Filthy Rich" appear to be detective B-movies, and can be enjoyed at that level, but they are really contemporary comedies of manners, high comedy revived. *Rumours of Our Death*, first produced in 1980 and published in the *Canadian Theatre Review*, No. 25, is, on the surface, a Ruritanian romance-*cum*-spy movie, and was given punk rock treatment in the original Factory Lab production, but it introduces politics through a tantalizing political fable which at times seems to apply to Canada, and at others (no doubt as a result of the playwright's intention) snatches the easy and national answer away by interrupting the pattern. Walker is using popular forms, primarily B-movies, as a means of exploring old dramatic verities, rather as John Gray does in *Billy Bishop Goes to War*, as Maynard Collins does in "Hank Williams: The Show He Never Gave," and as the Hummer Sisters do in their video-theatre-rock-and-roll extravaganzas.

The man who appears to be among Canada's most abstruse and esoteric playwrights has, in fact, a thorough grasp of populist techniques, and can use the forms of popular theatre as both popular vehicle and as a means of sharing with a broader audience a more demanding dramatic view. In this ability to speak to a more general audience, Walker resembles the populist docu-dramatists of Passe Muraille or the Tarragon playwrights, who address a popular, middle-class audience within the conventions it knows best, and in the process, he gives them some penetrating analysis of themselves. The tendency to commercialism in recent

Canadian drama and commercialism in the artistic policies of many Canadian theatres has been decried, as it should be, but commercialization should not be confused with a movement underway in Canada for some time, a movement whose aim has been to take theatre to a larger audience, abandoning the coterie audiences of the regionals and attempting to reach instead an audience previously unaccustomed to attending formal, legitimate theatre. The venture, should it prove successful, could help to change the status of theatre as mere social status symbol, to which it has unfortunately so often been relegated in twentieth-century North America, and to restore to the theatre the power of broad appeal which has traditionally given drama an edge over other literary forms. This increased ability to reach out to an audience is one of the directions which theatre has taken in response to Esslin's question, "After the Absurd, what?" And it is a direction to which Canadian drama has been a major contributor. Seen in the context of these larger movements, Walker and the Factory Lab are not mavericks at all, but the source of one of the most theatrically potent streams within the new Canadian drama.

NOTES

[1] "Tarragon's Trademark was Script Development," *That's Showbusiness*, 4, No. 24 (January 1976), p. 1.

[2] *Three Plays by George F. Walker: Bagdad Saloon, Beyond Mozambique, Ramona and the White Slaves* (Toronto: Coach House, 1978), p. 9.

[3] Myron Galloway, "George Walker — Resolving the World's Chaos," *Montreal Star*, 3 March 1979, p. 18.

[4] George F. Walker, "Prince of Naples," in *Now in Paperback: Canadian Playwrights of the 1970's*, ed. Connie Brissenden (Toronto: Fineglow Plays, 1973), p. 76.

[5] Edward Mullaly, "Waiting for Lefty, Godot, and Canadian Theatre," *The Fiddlehead*, No. 104 (1975), p. 53.

[6] Mullaly, p. 51.

[7] Mullaly, p. 53.

[8] *The Theatre of the Absurd* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1969), p. 266.

[9] *Myth and Modern American Drama* (Detroit: Wayne State Univ. Press, 1969), p. 255.

[10] Peter Hay, Introd., *Sunrise on Sarah*, by George Ryga (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1972), p. 6.

[11] John Fraser, "Walker Turns to Murder With Comedy," *Globe and Mail*, 19 April 1977, p. 23.

[12] Richard Horenblas, "Playnotes," *Scene Changes*, 3, No. 10 (October 1975), p. 8.

[13] *James Reaney* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1972), pp. 48-49.

[14] "Nancy," *Leonard Cohen: Live Songs*, Columbia Broadcasting System, 65224, 1973.

[15] Fraser, p. 23.

[16] William Lane, Introd., *Zastrozzi: The Master of Discipline* (Toronto: Playwrights Co-op, 1979), p. 5.

[17] *Zastrozzi: The Master of Discipline* (Toronto: Playwrights Co-op, 1979), p. 12.

[18] Chris Hallgren, "George Walker, The Serious and the Comic," *Scene Changes*, 7, No. 2 (March/April 1979), p. 24.

[19] Esslin, pp. 164-65.

WILD HORSES

Roo Borson

There are horses of sorrow that
never change their expressions,
their faces hang like shadows, as if
suspended from something bright,
bright horses whose shadows
these faces are, horses
that rammed like an ocean wave across the plains
and left them bare, and the sky tells nothing
of where they went, the sky is too bare.

The horses (the dark ones) stand now in a stable,
no one comes to release them,
each face framed in its stall
of beaten wood, wood marred by weather
and the flanks of these horses
that have been here too long, restless,
with nowhere to go.

Now and then riders come to ride them
over the plains, but their expressions do not change,
fixed in the fixed wind, though they are roving
over territory those others owned
when they lived here, they are saddled with riders
and their shadows, they are shadows.

books in review

INTEGRAL/ FRACTIONAL

TIMOTHY FINDLEY, *Can You See Me Yet?* Talonbooks, $4.95.

JAMES REANEY, *The Dismissal.* Press Porcépic, $3.95.

GEORGE RYGA, *Ploughmen of the Glacier*; *Seven Hours to Sundown.* Talonbooks, $4.95 each.

DAVID LEWIS STEIN, *The Hearing.* Playwrights Co-op, $3.50.

HERE ARE TWO PLAYS about contemporary political realities, and one — more immediate and more telling — about *Realpolitik* in the last century; a moving exploration of personal responses to realities too oppressive, and a play which is itself merely oppressive and never quite real. Within this interesting mixed-bag of recent Canadian drama there are some notable common denominators of style and theme. Perhaps most immediately evident is what these five plays are not — that is, even vaguely naturalistic or structurally "well-made." Without generalizing too much from such a small, if fairly random, sampling, we might still note an apparent movement away from certain stylistic tendencies of five or ten years ago. What is surely beyond argument is the manifest and welcome theatricality of all these plays. They share a fluidity which comes from incorporating scene changes within the action rather than offering static, stop-action staging. Canadian playwrights — or at least these playwrights — seem in the process of developing their own idioms and theatrical conventions to help get their plays off the page and onto the stage.

There is a broad range of subjects and presentational techniques here, from campus rebellion in the form of a musical revue to a documentary-styled investigation of municipal rezoning practices. Yet the thematic focus of each of these plays is remarkably similar. Their structural attempts at stylistic integration and organic unity seem reflected in the central concern of each play for the ideas of personal integrity and social reform. "The integral versus the fractional life" is a chant taken up by the student chorus in James Reaney's *The Dismissal*, protesting the firing of Professor William Dale for maintaining his integrity in the face of the college's fractional and factious policies. It could just as easily serve as an anthem for any one of these plays.

George Ryga's *Ploughmen of the Glacier* is the least successful of the lot. According to the publishers, "conversations between an aged prospector and a retired newspaperman permit George Ryga to examine the myth of the men who made the West." Unfortunately, Ryga's characters are neither human nor mythic but rather vaguely drawn cartoons masking as portentous symbols. As the opening stage direction tells us, "The setting is possibly surrealistic to suggest a mountainside, up and down which POOR BOY struggles in his eternal, groping quest." The whole play is as tentative and woolly as that first sentence. In spite of scattered references to real communities in the interior of British Columbia, there is never any firm sense of place or time. And as for characters . . . well, there's Volcanic, the grizzled and ornery old prospector who'll never stop wrestling with them mountains until they yield him up enough gold to found his New Jerusalem, Volcanic City, where "there's not gonna be no schools, banks or churches." His antagonist is Lowery, the hardboiled city newsman whose cynicism helps keep Volcanic's romanticism in check. And between them, serving as choral commentator and blowing his harmonica every time Ryga wants to mark a

transition, is Poor Boy, eternal and groping. Here is a brief scene from the play:

> [POOR BOY] *plays a harmonica interlude as he peers about for a good government or meaning to his life.*
>
> LOWERY: If there is a God ... I'd say he was a laughin' God ... tough as boot leather and laughing a lot of the time. He must have laughed when he made me short an' gave me tall wants ...
>
> VOLCANIC *groans and writhes with pain.*

At the end both Lowery and Volcanic literally drop dead on stage for no particular reason, accompanied, as one might expect, by Poor Boy's pathetic harmonica. Ryga's attempts to define and have his characters live "the integral life" are ploughed under by his own heavy-handedness.

Ryga is in much firmer control of his material with *Seven Hours to Sundown*, a "problem play" with debts to Ibsen and Arthur Miller, and the result is a brooding and often compelling drama. At first it looks like a relatively simplistic conflict about power politics. On one side is the small town's establishment, represented by the redneck mayor and his developer-alderman ally. On the other are the progressives: a young investigative reporter, the mayor's idealistic daughter, and her boyfriend, a hand-craftsman with liberal politics and long hair. But a number of characters as well as the issues themselves manage to transcend the ostensible formulae.

Sid Kiosk, the mayor, is a small-town combination of Archie Bunker and Willy Loman. Power in his case does not so much corrupt as simply allow him to act out some of the corruption that has been seething inside him since his youth. He has come to such power as he has, paradoxically, through a series of severe personal failures. And while there are weaknesses in Ryga's development of him — some rather unconvincing pop-psychology and excessive (if inevitable) melodrama — his situation still moves us. Every attempt on his part at the integral leaves his life further in fragments.

Similarly, Jerry Goyda turns out to be much more complex than the aging hippy he initially appears to be. He had tried to maintain his political integrity against threats from the right, and as a result lost his teaching job. He has lost his wife and child to a kind of Jonestown; and now he tries to maintain the integrity of his small business against threats from both right and left, and will probably lose it too. In his beleaguered condition we see most clearly Ryga's skepticism about reconciling individual aspirations with community values when a community is merely a collection of self-serving individuals. Goyda and Kiosk come together in the powerful ending, revealed as doubles, mutually victimized and betrayed by those who should have been their allies. This is a dark view, not just of politics but also of human fate. The most successfully "integral" character in the play, who has the last words, is both blind and crippled.

David Lewis Stein's *The Hearing* suffers from some of the same problems as Ryga's plays. Stein can't seem to decide whether the issues comprising his drama of urban redevelopment are somehow greater than the sum of the individuals involved in it, or whether the issues are merely functions of private human needs and desires. In the event, his attempts to give each character some depth and background are fairly half-hearted and sometimes simply inept. The soap-opera quality of his forays into character-development, with one major exception, tends to mar rather than reinforce the play's vision of how community issues are actually resolved. Stein's dramatic sensibility rests somewhere between Brecht and Fennario, but never quite comes into focus in this instance.

The play is structured around a hearing to decide the fate of a proposed 50-

storey apartment building in downtown Toronto. This is an effective frame: the hearing itself, with its documentary style, presents the public conflict clearly and straightforwardly, while the private conflicts fade in and out of the main action. The developers proposing the building squabble among themselves; so do the members of the uneasy coalition opposing it — bourgeois homeowners, would-be radical organizers, and "working class" interests. Insofar as Stein tries to avoid suggesting monolithic forces at work here, he succeeds. Beyond that, however, the stereotypes take over.

As in Ryga's case, Stein is most successful with a character to whom he might naturally seem to be least sympathetic. Joe Markowitz, the ruthless Jewish businessman, clichéd cigar and all, suddenly becomes in the second act the play's one man of genuine integrity, refusing to sell out to the American conglomerate. (What is there that seems to guarantee the dramatic success of an old man taking a desperate, last-ditch stand against present-day realities?) The play features a woman of integrity, too, in Jeannie, the uncompromising revolutionary. The fantasy of her grim revolutionary justice with which the play ends is dramatically unsuccessful because we are never given to know *whose* fantasy it is, and hence the sudden, radical shift in style seems unjustified. But the final image of her alliance with Neal, the young developer — a union of right and left, clipboard and gun, technocratic efficiency and Stalinist "justice" — is provocative and chilling. For Stein the price of political or economic success may be just such marriages of convenience as this and the multinational corporation. Better, perhaps, the fractional life.

The third and by far the best of these overtly political plays is Reaney's *The Dismissal, or Twisted Beards & Tangled Whiskers.* As its subtitle suggests, Reaney does not approach his subject with much solemnity. Nevertheless, this good-natured, colourful, and very funny musical satire is able to tell us a great deal about the politics of everyday life. And it does so through the brilliant virtuosity of styles that we have come to expect from Reaney's work in the theatre.

Written to mark the 150th birthday of the University of Toronto, *The Dismissal* chronicles the Class of 1895 and specifically its short-lived rebellion against administrative arrogance and hypocrisy. When a professor is fired and a student editor expelled for telling the truth (mainly about nepotistic hiring practices that discriminate against native Canadians), the students strike. But young William Lyon Mackenzie King sells out his best friend and his fellow protesters in the course of practising his first lesson in the fine art of political doublethink: "If I speak out — how will I get the power I need to make people listen to my outspokenness?" Revisionist history at its best, and done to the accompaniment of period music and songs from the University Songbook, a College Council debate in the form of a lacrosse match which modulates into a hockey game, a Jehovah who responds to prayers by descending from the flies as a set of giant-sized white whiskers. Reaney operates here with great theatrical élan and always manages to make the elaborate transitions within his baroque structure look easy.

Who else but Reaney could get away with things like having a student chorus (as a group of cattle!) protest the disparity in faculty salaries by chanting: "The average salary of a Canadian is $1700. The average salary of a foreigner is $2700. This is intolerable and humiliating"? Here and elsewhere, the play's serious issues shine out amid the general silliness as do the dignity and integrity of its heroes, Professor Dale and Jim Tucker. While both are publically defeated, and

cynical pragmatism is shown to be the path to political success, the play quietly celebrates their virtues. That the integral life is worth trying to live, even against all odds, cannot finally be dismissed as easily as its practitioners.

In all these plays integrity of one sort or another struggles to survive in a hostile environment. The protagonists are essentially outsiders for whom the system of things-as-they-are (or are-becoming) looms as a constant and identifiable threat to their personal wholeness. None is so fundamentally threatened, however, as Cassandra Wakelin in Timothy Findley's *Can You See Me Yet?* To survive, to remain whole, is for her simply to remain sane; yet when the entire world is a madhouse, where is one to seek asylum?

Findley's rich and sensitive play about survival takes its epigraph, appropriately, from Margaret Atwood, and has clear affinities of mood with her work (as it does with the novels of Margaret Laurence, who contributes an introduction). But it is most evocative of Ingmar Bergman: the deceptively pastoral isolation of its characters, the lyrical excursions into memory, the deep sense of loss, and the not-so-quiet desperation of the quest for personal salvation. There are echoes of Bergman, too, and of Faulkner, in Findley's revelations of family life and its devastating possibilities. Cassandra's fall out of grace with her family is what has brought her to the particular asylum where she tries to re-enact, and hence reverse, her drama of disintegration.

The play's primary images, although blatant, are in no way glib. The setting is a garden in the insane asylum which Cassandra inhabits in the late, hot summer of 1938. It also serves as the garden of her family home to which she returns in memory to search for her lost innocence. (These transitions are beautifully done, with Cassandra's fellow inmates assuming the other family roles.) With the world perched on the edge of chaos, and masses gratefully accepting the false sanctuaries of politics and religion, Cassandra nevertheless refuses to embrace the safety of easy answers.

> The world is ending all around us, and we need each other now. And yet there is no sanctuary. Nowhere. None. In all the world. In all the width and depth and breadth of the human heart — where there is room for sanctuary — there is none. I know, because there is none in mine. I'm sorry. Sorry.

Findley's triumph is in maintaining a hard edge to speeches like this, never allowing lapses into pathos or cliché. Cassandra's self-discoveries are functions of hard-earned truth.

The truths that these plays unveil are rarely pleasant ones — which is not to say that they are revealed in unpleasant ways. *Can You See Me Yet?* is no *Cuckoo's Nest*, but its mad men and women can be charming and funny even while trying desperately to shore up fragments against their ruin. In spite of defeats there are victories, however minor. Reaney's Professor Dale retires to his father's farm and writes a history of Rome; Cassandra, in a roundabout way, finds her way "home" again. The cry that rings through the play is one of both despair and triumph. "Listen to me," she cries, "no one can kill who you are."

JERRY WASSERMAN

CHILD'S PLAY

JAMES REANEY, *Apple Butter*; *Names and Nicknames*; *Geography Match*; *Ignoramus*. Talonbooks, $3.95 each.

JANE HOWARD BAKER, *A Teacher's Guide to Theatre for the Young*. Talonbooks, $4.95.

JAMES REANEY's four plays for children, written in the 1960's and recently published by Talonbooks, all display delightfully his enchantment with language and

his sense of humour. The simplest and most charming is a play for marionettes, *Apple Butter*, which features a bright and cocky young orphan. His kind-hearted rescues of a tree and a cow in trouble are rewarded by a tree fairy and a bone fairy whose magical assistance helps him win his struggle against three mean adults. Though little direct audience participation is called for, children can easily identify with the central character and so share in his jokes and triumphs.

The earliest of the other plays, *Names and Nicknames*, suffers most from the techniques Reaney employs to replace stage sets. "The setting," he explains in the introduction, "can be accomplished with words, pantomime, the human body, music from rhythm band instruments and the audience themselves." True, and the mime may be great fun for child actors, but the effect for the audience is likely to be bewilderment and boredom with all the multitudinous peripheral details. Though Reaney asserts quite rightly that "nothing should stand in the way of a flowing story line that proceeds without a break until the very last chorus," he devotes five and a half pages of directions for mimed action and choral chant to establishing the farm setting — milking cows, separating cream, slopping pigs, harnessing horses — before the story line is introduced at all, and other long sequences are necessary later for every shift in scene. Even the stars on a winter night are "acted." These are fine exercises for children, and the choruses are excellent, but the story line about a wicked old man who hates children and spoils babies' christenings by thinking up horrid nicknames for them is too weak to make a play out of this experiment in words and gestures.

Geography Match and *Ignoramus* are shamelessly didactic plays for older children. *Geography Match* was conceived as a Centennial Play. The list of characters is long, but Reaney has provided for a good deal of doubling, so the cast can be cut to twelve. Two groups of students, "Academy Kids" and "Continuation School Kids," enter a contest designed to test the stamina of Canadian youngsters by challenging them to cross Canada in thirty days on a minimal budget. As they cross the country, they are helped or hindered by characters from Canadian history and legend, such as Tecumseh, who turns into a tortoise when he dies, and the bear and coyote who represent night and day in Indian legend; they re-enact bits of Canadian history such as the story of Madeleine de Verchères and the Battle of Moraviantown; they experience such features of contemporary Canada as the wood products industries in Ontario and the shops, stock exchange and heavy traffic of downtown Toronto. Often the brief episodes develop little dramatic interest, and the rapid changes of place, time, and episode tend to promote a sense of chaos. However, the main plot of the contest between the cheats and the heroes sustains interest more successfully than does the plot of *Names and Nicknames*.

Ignoramus pits Dr. History's pupils against Dr. Progressaurus' pupils in a contest between progressive education and traditional education. The content and methods of the lessons are wonderfully varied to maintain dramatic interest. That Reaney's sympathies are with Dr. History from the first is never in doubt; the interesting result is that Dr. Progressaurus' lessons are more successful dramatically and his students, whose idiosyncrasies are given full rein, are more interesting individually. The tie declared between the contestants at the end is a considerable surprise: the conclusion is ill-prepared for, but Reaney is qualifying his preference for traditional education with the acknowledgement that the occasional exceptional child may flourish in a per-

missive atmosphere. Despite its large cast, *Ignoramus* is the most coherent of the three stage plays, and it is also the most fun.

Study guides for Reaney's four plays are included in Jane Howard Baker's *A Teacher's Guide to Theatre for the Young*. Also included are guides to three children's plays by Dennis Foon: *Heracles*, *Raft Baby*, and *The Windigo*, and one by Irene N. Watts: *A Chain of Words*. The book contains some attractive suggestions for Foon's plays and for rhythm study in connection with *Names and Nicknames*. Otherwise it is unfortunately not likely to do much to persuade teachers that the plays might be worth teaching to their classes. Even in the introduction Baker does not say how elementary school children might benefit from reading and discussing or performing a play except to note that this is "good practice to produce co-operative work habits in the classroom." Reaney has a right to hope for greater benefits to children who experience his plays.

SUSAN STONE-BLACKBURN

DEFENSIVE ROLES

JOYCE DOOLITTLE and ZINA BARNIEH, *A Mirror of Our Dreams: Children and the Theatre in Canada* (with a chapter on Theatre in Quebec by Hélène Beauchamp). Talonbooks, $6.95.

DENNIS FOON, *Heracles*; *The Windigo*; *Raft Baby*. Talonbooks, $3.95 each.

IRENE N. WATTS, *A Chain of Words*. Talonbooks, $3.95.

A Mirror of Our Dreams is not the "detailed history of the development of children's theatre in Canada" its publisher claims. Its authors say that such a history already exists (as an unpublished dissertation): "what we have tried to do instead is to give an overview, and present the main challenges facing theatre for young audiences as we enter the 1980's."

The overview consists of descriptions of specific companies which are, theoretically, representative enough to stand as models; but each description acknowledges the company's uniqueness, and seems rather pointless. And the presentation of challenges facing children's theatre is actually a defence of what the authors stridently call "an unappreciated, unnoticed, undervalued, underwritten, under-rehearsed underdog" — a defence

whose pomposity is unlikely to persuade anyone not already committed.

But Doolittle and Barnieh's defence of children's theatre does suggest the confusion with which grownups typically approach arts for children. On the one hand, they *like* children's theatre. But they seem to feel silly about doing so, because they try to justify it. They make gloriously profound (and profoundly out-of-context) quotations from writers as diverse as Edward Bond and Bruno Bettelheim, in order to prove that children's theatre is just as important as other kinds of theatre. They ask, "How widespread is the attitude that theatre for young audiences is somehow different from legitimate theatre? If it is, we must work to correct it." In other words, Doolittle and Barnieh defend the importance of a special theatre for children by implying that such a theatre ought not to exist — that good children's theatre is just like good theatre for grownups.

Furthermore, their confusion about children's theatre makes them confused about children. They speak of "the false and condescending notion that children are naive and that their innocence must be protected." But they insist that we should "nurture the qualities of innocence and imagination, so widely praised but poorly served in our society." They want children to be both innocent and not innocent, different enough from grownups to need their own theatre but similar enough for that theatre to be taken seriously.

The same ambivalence plagues discussions of children's literature, which frequently demand special consideration for children's books for the curious and unconvincing reason that good children's books are just like other good books. They are not, of course, and good children's theatre is not like other good theatre. I suspect we will have no worthwhile criticism of arts for children until we recognize that they are profoundly unlike their grownup equivalents.

That is not to say they are more limited. But unsatisfying art for children usually *is* limited, as these plays by Dennis Foon and Irene N. Watts show. They are quite different from plays for grownups. Unlike recent plays for grownup Canadians, they are "Canadian" only by virtue of their willingness to borrow everybody else's culture. Watts' play tells Japanese folktales, while Foon dramatizes a Greek myth, an Algonquin belief, and a Peace River legend. None has any discernible connection to the lives of their intended audience — unless we blithely assume that children are unsophisticated, and so are myths and legends, and therefore children ought to like myths and legends. But despite their diverse origins, all four plays have the same strange effect; whatever these stories might have meant to those who originally heard them, Watts and Foon dissipate their energy.

They do that by using the techniques of storytelling rather than the techniques of drama. Actors announce the names of the characters they are playing; characters step out of their roles to narrate events. We are not allowed to become involved with the characters as people to whom something is happening; we must stand back and observe the stories as interesting events that have already happened. This is different from most theatre for grownups, and much less interesting.

Foon and Watts may use these techniques simply because they are cheaper to produce than more dramatic ones. Or they may simply have adopted the overworked conventions of "story theatre" without giving it much thought. But I suspect there is more to it than that. All four of these plays imply a common assumption about children — that their art must be diluted because they are themselves weakminded, and incapable of understanding or tolerating anything of real

importance. The result is unexciting theatre.

P. NODELMAN

TABLE OR SHELF?

ROLF KALMAN, et al., eds., *A Collection of Canadian Plays*. Simon & Pierre. Vol. 1, $17.75; Vol. 2, $17.75; Vol. 3, $17.75; Vol. 4, $19.75; Vol. 5, $19.75.

THEATRE IS AN EPHEMERAL ART. Drama need not be, if plays are published, and published in durable format. The format that Rolf Kalman and his associates have chosen for *A Collection of Canadian Plays* is both durable and beautiful. This series of handsome books began to appear in 1972 and the end is not yet in sight. The texts of the plays are set out in handsome type with generous and artistic use of empty space. Each volume is profusely illustrated with original drawings, photographs of productions, historical prints, and other appropriate decoration. The books are big and attractively bound. They would look well on the coffee table and will endure on library shelves. Libraries, in Canada and a number of foreign countries, are among the chief buyers of the hard-back series, while students and actors can pick up the individual plays in paperbacks, which are issued simultaneously with the hard-backs. A sensible publishing scheme — though the relatively low prices of the hard-backs make them a better bargain.

The range of the contents is impressive. Volume Four is devoted to children's plays, Volume Five to previously untranslated Quebec plays. Most are general, with their contents partly selected on the principle of what won't fit in Simon & Pierre's *Canplay* series, which is devoted exclusively to plays that are proved commercial successes. The editors of the *Collection* also make a point of presenting plays representing different genres, plays from different regions of Canada, plays written in various styles and dealing with various subjects. The authors range from names to conjure with (Mavor Moore, W. O. Mitchell, Merrill Denison) to relative newcomers to Canadian theatre.

Predictably, this emphasis on variety results in variable quality. Volume One contains a fairly convincing historical drama (Michael Cook's *Colour the Flesh the Colour of Dust*), a stiff, unconvincing one (Stewart Boston's *Counsellor Extraordinary*), and a cleverly allegorical quasi-historical play (Munroe Scott's *Wu-feng*); there are also two promising one-acters (Sheldon Rosen's *Love Mouse* and *Meyer's Room*) and a thoroughly professional farce-comedy (Donald Jack's *Exit Muttering*). Volume Two contains William Fruet's *Wedding in White*, the stage version of the movie about a sordid, pathetic forced marriage; three one-act plays by Hugh Garner, two of which are about commonplace middle-aged women and their commonplace problems, and the third, a charming piece, about a courageous and imaginative old lady; W. O. Mitchell's *The Devil's Instrument*, full of local colour, in which a Hutterite boy breaks away from his community; three short plays by Mavor Moore, which he describes in the introduction as "idea plays" concerned with theatrical ambiguity; and Brock Shoveller's Pinteresque *Westbound 12:01*, in which the master of a more-or-less disused railway station is psychologically dismantled. Volume Three enshrines Merrill Denison's unperformed *Marsh Hay* (1923); it reveals a daffy triangle of urban sophisticates at play in the comic *Unreasonable Act of Julian Waterman* by Ron Taylor; it shows Aviva Ravel's command of the Jewish family scene in *The Twisted Loaf* and of the complex consequences of women's liberation in *Soft Voices;* it dares to tell the case history of a mother who

murdered her two children, in Grahame Woods' *Vicky*; and it offers an unusual angle on the Québécois corporation executive in Joseph Schull's *The Vice-President*.

Volume Five performs a particular service for Anglophone Canada by introducing previously untranslated playwrights, considerably enlarging our sense of the kinds of drama being created in Quebec. Michel Garneau provides a good vehicle for four actresses in *Four to Four*, which orchestrates the joys, sorrows, conflicts, and confusions of four generations of women, with emphasis on the youngest, who bears the burdens of her heritage. Renald Tremblay's *Greta, The Divine* is a fast-paced burlesque history of Quebec's first 230 years, a hilarious romp that leaves nobody's dignity intact. André Simard's *Waiting for Gaudreault* has little to recommend it beyond the wit of the title and the upbeat conclusion of solidarity among the workers. (Perhaps the humour which the critics found in the play got lost in the translation?) Serge Mercier's *A Little Bit Left*, "a play in three meals," records the banalities of an old couple's conversation, poignant on the page, reportedly funny in performance. Serge Sirois's *Dodo* is kitchen-sink drama in which the usual squalor produces consequences disturbing in their nature and intensity. Claude Rossin's *Looking for a Job*, a deftly staged piece, deals with the kitchen sink and all the rest of the contemporary Quebec scene in manic and mature comic fashion. *Are You Afraid of Thieves?* by Louis-Dominique Lavigne is an interesting if rather long-drawn-out experiment using six actors to play what seems to be two characters; it makes a statement about the difficulties and the fragmented nature of communication.

The plays in these five volumes are uneven, perhaps unavoidably. The volume of children's plays seems to be uneven for a purpose. A hotly debated issue in children's theatre is the degree to which the children in the audience are to be involved in the play itself. Sensibly, the editors give us in Volume Four the full range of possibilities, from plays which allow the children to watch and listen, to plays which turn the actors into little more than playground directors who put the children through a variety of exercises. Some of these plays are oppressively educational, while others are genuinely imaginative. Some condescend to the level of a child's vocabulary, others do not. Some expound a heavy moral, others let actions speak for themselves. The bag is very much mixed.

Variable quality is no great shortcoming in such a collection. The weaker plays are not without interest and do serve to illuminate the superior qualities of the stronger plays. The serious shortcomings of the *Collection* are in the apparatus that accompanies each play. Rolf Kalman and his fellow editors began as theatre people, not as publishers, but they would have been well advised to hire a professional copy editor from the very beginning of the series to correct their spelling, grammar, typos, and other mechanical and stylistic errors. Beautiful books deserve better English than is to be found here in the introductory sections. More serious yet, and more surprising because the editors are theatre people, is the lack of theatrical information about these plays. It is not always possible to deduce from the apparatus whether a play has been performed; it is almost never possible to tell where and when it was performed, even when the fact of performance is clearly mentioned. The director of a play may appear in a photograph accompanied by a biography, but the date of his production is not given. Photographs of performances do not identify the actors in the pictures or the characters they are portraying. A histori-

cal play for children, Carol Bolt's *Cyclone Jack*, has no notes about the factual events it embodies; a slightly discursive stage direction at the very end is the only clue, for the uninitiated, that it is historical. Volume Five tells which plays have been published in French, but there are no indications in the first four volumes that some plays have been published before, in *Canadian Theatre Review* or by the Playwrights Co-op. Some have no dates of composition given beyond the copyright date of the volume of the *Collection* in which they appear, yet they are often clearly of another year or even another decade. One play is said to have been "produced recently," which causes the reader to hunt up the date of the volume in which it appears and to wonder what "recently" means. Yet for a very few plays, month, year, theatre, director, and designer (but never cast) are neatly listed. It is incredibly sloppy work. At a time when theatre historians are organizing to begin the job of discovering and preserving (among other things) data about performances, it is especially depressing to find such data omitted from its most appropriate home — durable and handsome volumes that, because of these oversights, may after all be better suited to the coffee table than to the library shelf. One can only hope that the volumes yet to come will be made genuinely worthy of both locations.

ANN MESSENGER

PLAYS THAT TIE

ANDRE RICARD, *Le Casino Voleur*. Théâtre/Leméac, n.p.

PIERRE GOULET, *Les Lois de la Pesanteur*. Théâtre/Leméac, n.p.

DAVID FENNARIO, *Nothing to Lose*. Talonbooks, $4.95.

RICK SALUTIN with KEN DRYDEN, *Les Canadiens*. Talonbooks, n.p.

JOHN COULTER, *François Bigot*. Hounslow Press, $4.95.

PIERRE MORENCY, *Tournebire et le Malin Frigo* and *Les Écoles de Bon Bazou*. Leméac, n.p.

ONE OF THE MOST POTENT barriers to national unity is the tendency of both major language groups to generalize about each other. Biased school history texts, the media, and political interests conspire daily to invest the notion of Two Solitudes with the status of immutable and divine truth. Meanwhile geographical and linguistic isolation fosters mutual stereotypes of the most dangerous and baseless sort. Prejudice feeds upon the stereotype, which in turn is premised upon a denial of individual difference. "I hate and detest that animal called man," remarked Swift in an oft-quoted letter to Pope, "but I heartily love John, Peter, Thomas, and so forth." Half a dozen contemporary Anglophone and Francophone playwrights dealing in one way or another with Quebec sidestep Swift's emotional ambivalence by a rejection of generalizations of any sort — Man, the Québécois, the WASPS, or whatever. They focus strictly upon limited geographical areas, individuals or small groups, single institutions, and particular moments in time. The reader or theatregoer is left to extrapolate as he sees fit. Taken together, their plays offer a fascinating series of insights into the complexities of the Quebec consciousness. Those who encounter them may not be seized with instant love for the other language group; but they will, I think, emerge less comfortable

with their prejudices. And that, after all, is a start.

André Ricard's *Le Casino Voleur (Crooked Casino)* recognizes the centrality of politics at all social levels in Quebec, but highlights the evanescent meaning it gives to the lives of those who participate actively, and the devastation wreaked on the ego when power is lost and old age beckons. Fleurimond Bluteau, a former Union Nationale organizer and ex-mayor of a small town in the rural Beauce region, receives a morning visit from his longtime political henchman, Gaudiose Giguère, now retired and living on Old Age Security in a nearby village. Fleurimond, bankrupt and disgraced, finds himself saddled with a decrepit service station, separated by a ditch and mountains of landfill from a new autoroute which "inside information" promised would funnel traffic by his door. The fact that the highway passes behind the building renders his frustration complete. He applies for government compensation for damages; and while he awaits the appraiser, his wife, Aurélienne, struggles vainly to convert an adjoining dumping-ground into a campsite for rich American tourists. An infusion of capital for the project is imperative; and Gaudiose's fortuitous call turns into a psychological poker game, with his meagre income the stake needed to give the Bluteaus a last crack at prosperity.

Ricard, despite his gently satirical treatment of the Bluteaus, never denigrates the still vital conservative values of rural Quebec, a phenomenon too often ignored by the media in their obsession with Montreal and Quebec City. Fleurimond and Aurélienne may blame the PQ for their plight; but at the root of their woes is their warped view of politics as a casino to be fiddled for personal advantage, and their betrayal of the traditional principles which make country society work. In the Beauce, and regions like it, the homestead, the family, the church, and personal loyalties still matter. The politician or student of Quebec society who neglects that axiom does so at his peril.

This play, Ricard's third and best, catapults him into the first rank of Quebec dramatists. The literary quality of the piece is high. His treatment of human frailty is sensitive, warm-hearted, and forever enriched by a keen eye for the absurd and the comic. His feel for structure, style, and dialogue is sure. Years of stage experience, a number of them as Artistic Director of Théâtre de L'Estoc, have given him a consummate command of his medium. His characters are finely-drawn and eminently playable. The actor's movement is broadly indicated, but not minutely dictated, by the rhythm of the script, and is enhanced by calculated suggestive business which grows easily and powerfully out of everyday paraphernalia — paint cans, brushes, ladders, and the like. The Bluteau's symbolic redecoration of the garage façade is a neat case in point. Few Canadian playwrights can match his delicate orchestration of sound and silence: the roar of cars on the autoroute and the unembarrassed conversational pauses of the old are as crucial to the dramatic texture as the dialogue itself. A work of this stature deserves national exposure, preferably in the original but, if need be, in translation.

Pierre Goulet's *Les Lois de la Pesanteur (The Laws of Gravity)*, a less subtle piece of social satire, employs rollicking farce to probe another unfamiliar segment of the Quebec scene. Set in Outremont, Montreal's French equivalent of Westmount, the play pillories upper-class nationalists who invoke Quebec's cultural uniqueness with one side of their mouths while gobbling the benefits of North American capitalism with the other. National identity and human decency alike fall prey to Mammon.

Marcel Renaud, an employee of Armand St.-Onge, a wealthy manufacturer of soles for shoes, invents a pair of anti-gravity boots. St.-Onge invites François de Montauban, a Parisian industrialist, to pay him a visit to discuss the manufacture and marketing of the footwear as a Franco-Quebec economic project; but de Montauban, soon after his arrival, scotches the idea. The commercial future of the product will be determined, he argues, not in France or Quebec, but in the United States. Aided and abetted by St.-Onge's son, Gerry, a Management student at McGill, he rushes to New York to arrange a promotion campaign for the "Bionic Boots," leaving St.-Onge culturally disappointed, but consoled by visions of economic splendour. The pressures of American capitalism inevitably lead both men to neglect their wives. De Montauban's Gina falls in love with Marcel, and St.-Onge's Maggie, bored with the role of social ornament, takes up Real Estate sales, prompted by the feminist theories of her daughter Linda, a student at the University of Quebec.

In a hilarious climactic sequence, St.-Onge, de Montauban, and Gerry gather in front of the television set to watch their product launched. As eight New York firemen climb the Empire State Building, wearing the Bionic Boots and bearing a Quebec flag, Maggie departs with Linda for a tour of China, and Marcel and Gina elope to Italy. With Marcel goes the patent for the boots, a contingency St.-Onge and de Montauban failed to provide for in their economic grand design.

To outline the bare bones of the plot is to do the play scant justice. Its strength lies in its social comment, implicit and explicit; and Goulet's observations on the contradictions within bourgeois Quebec nationalism are some of the shrewdest to date. St.-Onge pays lip-service to France as his spiritual homeland, but his real loyalties are to the bowling alley in his basement and the mechanical wonders of his American car. Is the superiority of French culture merely chimerical in any case? Although the de Montaubans snigger at the St.-Onges' homespun accents and unrefined tastes, their anglicized idiom and obsession with "Babyfoot" (a table football game) are hardly a compelling alternative. The tension and suspicion which often characterize French-Quebec social contacts, a fact rarely noted by English commentators, is treated with frankness and wit.

Ultimately, in Goulet's view, cultural and economic nationalism must always bow to the profit motive. St.-Onge, who disdains English aggressiveness, sends his son to McGill to learn Anglo business methods. De Montauban, who laments American cultural decadence, happily recruits Burt Reynolds and the Bionic Woman to boost his sales. Canadian nationalists may derive some comfort from the fact that North American materialism

will in the long term prevent Quebec from going its own way; but it's a chilling thought that greed rather than human concern may be the tie that binds.

Goulet, an able journalist and television playwright, essays the theatre format with originality and zest. His flair for physical comedy (how often do we see characters pace the ceiling?) and contagious mirth keep the action riotously alive and untainted by bitterness. Ironically, though, the piece is marred to some degree by the dramatist's exceptional imaginative and intellectual fertility: he draws a bead on sundry targets simultaneously with an unfortunate scattershot effect. And the fault is compounded by a tendency to warp and stint characterization, particularly the portraits of Linda and Marcel, in the interests of polemic. Nevertheless, the theatricality of the play is patent, and Goulet's promise undeniable.

Point St. Charles, the site of David Fennario's *Nothing to Lose*, is only a few miles from Goulet's Outremont, but its working-class English, French, and ethnic minorities in their decaying tenements are socially continents away. Here the daily battle for rent money and a few groceries leaves no time to ponder culture, language, and politics. The unity issue is hardly pressing either: even the most disparate backgrounds meet and mingle in a common struggle to survive with some degree of dignity. It is a couple of hours of this life, an amalgam of violence, human concern, and raucous laughter, which Fennario re-creates.

Two young men who grew up together in "The Point" are reunited in a seedy local tavern. Both are disillusioned survivors of the idealism of the 'sixties. Jerry, a successful writer and confirmed armchair Marxist, has rejected the self-indulgent values of the Toronto artistic establishment and returned to Montreal in a huff. The arts as practised, he contends, have betrayed their social trust. Jackie, now a warehouse truck-driver trapped by bread-and-butter realities, is beyond caring. Incipient alcoholism has already taken its toll. In the course of a monumental booze-up, both men re-examine their values and make a fresh start.

Jackie, angered by a tyrannical foreman, leaves his truck parked at the loading dock, blocking all movement while he downs beer at leisure. His act of rebellion prompts a ninety-minute interaction with as sharply-etched a group of working-class characters as we have yet met in Canadian theatre: Gros Gas, a militant French-Canadian unionist; Fred, a timid Anglophone traditionalist; Frank, Jackie's slow-witted Italian partner; and Murray, a Jewish ex-warehouse hand turned union representative. Claude, the waiter, hovers in the background, pleading bilingually for order and decorum. "It's the law!" he insists amid table-hopping, brawling, and drunkenness; but the appeal to law is lost on men whose self-respect has reached the vanishing-point. Chabougamou, resident tavern-drunk and scrounger, meanwhile functions as pathetic chorus and visual symbol of those the law has failed.

Fennario's dramatic power flows from his honesty. A thoroughgoing stage naturalist, he eschews sensationalism, and adamantly refuses to fiddle time or human behaviour for mere theatrical effect. Like Katherine Mansfield, he finds his drama in the scarcely-noticed flutters of sensibility which alter the shape of individual destiny; and gives it a physical context at once ordinary, authentic, and evocative. Empty and full glasses, wiped-up spills, cut-offs, Mini-Loto tickets, and frequent urination punctuate and underline the psychological narrative. The dialogue is bare and repetitive, like the lives of the people who speak it; but it is never dull. Fennario's vision, raw, uncompromising, and cumulatively telling, is tempered

throughout by laughter — sometimes offensive, sometimes defensive — but an omnipotent weapon against despair.

It's a pity, though, that Fennario cannot laugh more easily at himself. His grave sympathy for Jerry's Marxist rhetoric blunts the play's edge at times, and lends it more than a hint of propaganda. But the author's political bias need not materially mar our theatrical enjoyment or cloud the sensitive insights the play contains. Happily, his more recent *Balconville* is less doctrinaire.

Sport in Quebec transcends all barriers — cultural, linguistic, and class; and at the Montreal Forum devotion to the city's hockey team temporarily harmonizes all discords. Rick Salutin's two-act drama, *Les Canadiens*, examines the history and significance of the team as a unique Quebec institution. Anglophones prize it as the epitome of athletic expertise, but Francophones have made it an almost mystical symbol of cultural puissance. "Ever since the Plains of Abraham," to quote Red Fisher, "the French people have been number two, but on the ice they're number one." The accession of the Parti Québécois to power changed all that, Ken Dryden argues in an engaging preface. "It is people and institutions from other parts of Quebec society — politics, the arts, literature — that are now at the focus." The first half of Salutin's drama, a series of real and imagined vignettes from the team's history, traces the making of the myth; and the second half, a fictionalized day in the life of Dave Kirk (November 15, 1976), details the breaking of it.

Cast in drama-documentary form, the play is implacably a thesis-piece, with characters and action the servants of a social hypothesis. Like Goulet, Salutin tries to cover too much ground in too brief a time span; and the result is neither good history nor riveting drama. People and events flash by us with the speed of light, leaving no lasting impression. Documentary materials and fiction cohabit uneasily, one diluting the force of the other. Despite such shortcomings, *Les Canadiens*' sheer energy, nostalgic charm, and intriguing social point should guarantee it an active, if ephemeral, stage life.

The same, unhappily, cannot be said for John Coulter's *François Bigot*, although it is a considerable achievement for a writer past ninety. To a brief courtroom inquisition, he summons a number of Bigot's contemporaries to testify to the moral, political, and military circumstances surrounding the fall of Quebec in 1759. Their sorry tales of greed, lust, and violence wither the laurels of traditional heroes on both sides of the conflict. The débâcle, Coulter contends, was the direct result of Louis XV's neglect of the colony and Bigot's abuse of authority. Wolfe's victory, far from the glorious conquest of song and story, was a vicious rape of the city by morally bankrupt ruffians to whom Bigot may have virtually sold the keys to the citadel. The latter point is never substantiated, however; Wolfe, when asked, replies only, "You must wait for answer — till the Day of Judgement." And so, one suspects, must Coulter and the rest of us. Again, as in *Les Canadiens*, the indiscriminate wedding of fact and fiction bewilders our responses and vitiates the dramatic effect. The play, while readable, is non-theatrical. Stiffly-structured and devoid of action or other stage interest, it recommends itself mainly to devotees of closet-drama.

While adults wrestle with Quebec's social realities, children continue to play and dream. And Pierre Morency's Theatre for Children fantasies, *Tournebire et le Malin Frigo (Tournebire and Frigo-the-Evil)* and *Les Ecoles de Bon Bazou (Bazou's Schools)* wonderfully utilize youthful freedom from fixed notions of time, place, and circumstance to create

alternative worlds which enrich and enlighten. In the first, Mirliflore, her short-sighted friend, Zipertatou, and the deft robot, Tournebire, confront and defeat the North Pole villain, Frigo, who aims to freeze the planet. The second records Bazou's miraculous bathtub-voyages in which imagination teaches a small boy truths undreamt of in the schoolroom. Child-play, far from being irrelevant to our political and cultural dilemmas, may even offer a flickering hope of solution. National rediscovery of our long-lost drive to dream, the impulse to defy accepted notions of what is in favour of what might be, could mark a giant step in our pursuit of adult togetherness.

JOHN RIPLEY

THEATRE HISTORY IN QUEBEC

PIERRE PAGE, *Répertoire des dramatiques Québécoises à la télévision, 1952-1977*. Fides, n.p.

ETIENNE-F. DUVAL, *Anthologie thématique du théâtre Québécois au XIXe siècle*. Leméac, n.p.

RENEE LEGRIS, *Robert Choquette, romancier et dramaturge de la radio-télévision*. Fides, n.p.

THE RECENT COMING OF AGE of Canadian theatre in both English and French has been accompanied by increasing scholarly interest in the history of theatre in both national languages. Quebec theatre historians were first in the field, the Centre de documentation of the Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières having been in operation for more than a decade. The 1977 annual meeting of the Association canadienne-française pour l'avancement des sciences was held in the Centre and was devoted to theatre in Quebec; its transactions, edited by Etienne-F. Duval of the Centre, appeared under the title *Aspects du théâtre québécois* in 1978. That same year Professor Duval published his *Anthologie thématique du théâtre québécois au XIX^e siècle*, the first of three works under review here.

The Duval anthology accepts the fact that no great or enduring plays were written in nineteenth-century Quebec. Its compiler argues nevertheless that a number of dramatic texts of considerable historical and ideological interest were composed and performed during the century, and that at least the more typical passages of these deserve to be preserved. Of some 150 plays written between 1801 and 1900, Duval has included fifty, which are represented by excerpts from five to fifteen pages in length. Each of the thirty-one authors is introduced by a short biographical note provided by Duval's colleague at the Centre, Rémi Tourangeau. The volume opens with an introduction sketching the ideological context of the plays and closes with indexes of playwrights and play titles. No important play of the period is omitted, and the selections provided are suitably long and sufficiently representative to give an adequate impression of the content and style of the plays. Four nineteenth-century plays by Louis Fréchette are already in print in Leméac editions with short introductions by Duval, Tourangeau, and others; the plays of Pierre Petitclair and Félix-Gabriel Marchand are being edited as part of a major programme of critical editions being sponsored by the Association for Canadian and Quebec Literatures. Thus within the next few years the essential dramatic works of Quebec's nineteenth century will be available to students; Professor Duval's useful anthology is an important step towards this goal.

The other two books under consideration belong to a different period — our own — and are concerned with a different category of writing — what is now

called *paraliterature*. They are the most recent publications of the very productive research team composed of Renée Legris of the Université du Québec à Montréal, and Pierre Pagé of Trois-Rivières. Specializing in the dramatic literature of Quebec radio and television, Legris and Pagé have already given us a monumental *Répertoire des oeuvres de la littérature radiophonique québécoise, 1930-1970* (Montréal: Fides, 1975) and *Le Comique et l'humour à la radio québécoise: aperçus historiques et textes choisis, 1930-1970* (Montréal: La Presse, 1976). The latest addition to the series is their *Répertoire des dramatiques québécoises à la télévision, 1952-1977*.

Television broadcasting began officially in Quebec on September 6, 1952, and television drama appeared simultaneously: indeed, the first *téléthéâtres* listed by Pagé and Legris had been transmitted experimentally during the preceding month. Three categories of original televised theatre are included here: there are 335 television dramas (*téléthéâtres*), 48 television serials and series (*feuilletons*), and 97 examples of televised children's theatre (*dramatiques pour enfants*), but translations and adaptations of English or American television drama are excluded. The tremendous volume of material thus inventoried can be imagined if one remembers that an hour of televised drama represents between eighty and one hundred pages of script. Each drama is listed by author and by date, with cast lists for every performance, followed by indexes of titles and producers. This exhaustive listing of television dramas, like the earlier repertory of radio scripts, provides the only systematic access to the archives and history of the French service of the CBC, that body having apparently made little effort either to organize its archives or to record its history.

The final title in this group, *Robert Choquette, romancier et dramaturge de la radio-télévision*, appears under the sole name of Professor Legris, it being a revised version of her 1972 doctoral thesis presented at the Université de Sherbrooke. Robert Choquette's literary reputation in Quebec has until now rested almost exclusively on his poetry, republished in a two-volume collected edition in 1967, but including verse collections that appeared from 1925 until 1953. Legris demonstrates convincingly, however, that Choquette's role as a radio and television writer has also been a major one. Having made extensive use of the author's papers, she here studies 155 radio sketches, six radio-series (of which the three most important covered a period of twenty years), fifteen television dramas and a four-year television serial: a total of some 56,000 pages of radio and television scripts composed over nearly half a century. Choquette's *Le Curé de village*, first broadcast in January 1935, was the earliest example of a radio serial in Quebec. It ran for three and a half years: his *Métropole* (1943) was to continue for thirteen, and Claude-Henri Grignon's *Un Homme et son péché* would run for twenty-three, convincing testimony to the public's affection for the genre Choquette had first introduced.

Generously illustrated, the Legris study is a voluminous compilation of historical and thematic information about Choquette's radio and television writing. Its first section describes the *corpus* of texts; the second places each script or series in its chronological setting, giving a full account of its genesis, production, themes and reception; the third part, methodologically the most debatable, analyses the scripts as a sociological commentary on Quebec society from the 1920's to the 1960's. Thirty pages of bibliography and a detailed chronology of Choquette's career complete the volume, which will undoubtedly remain the single all-inclusive work of reference on Choquette's con-

tribution to radio and television in Quebec; in fact, this study provides much more information than the average reader will ever wish to have on the subject.

Anthologies of inaccessible dramatic texts, bibliographies of theatrical subgenres, and studies of the dramatic production of a single author: these are but three of the many types of scholarly investigation currently being undertaken with respect to theatre in Quebec. The substantial contributions made at Trois-Rivières and elsewhere during the past decade have laid the foundation for a new branch of literary-historical study in Quebec.

DAVID M. HAYNE

LOST — AND FOUND

ANTON WAGNER and RICHARD PLANT, eds., *Canada's Lost Plays. Volume One — The Nineteenth Century. Volume Two — Women Pioneers.* CTR Publications, $11.95; pa. $6.95.

LITERATURE SCHOLARS with a taste for archeology can find some satisfaction by engaging in the recovery of Canada's lost cultural history. Premising that we cannot know ourselves until we know our heritage, they search dusty periodicals, crumbling newspapers, government archives and university libraries for long-forgotten literary artifacts. Their findings may not be great literature, but they are worth republishing if they dispel some of the shadows looming over our past and shed a few bright rays on the present.

This certainly appears to be the outlook of Anton Wagner and Richard Plant, the editors of *Canada's Lost Plays.* In two volumes, they now make accessible a dozen previously unrecognized works, ten of them from the nineteenth century. Five of the six plays in the first volume, covering the period 1856-1895, are comedies. If representative, this proportion should modify the current view that our Scots-Irish ancestors frowned on frivolity — although we can also see that their theatre reinforced their conservative social values, anti-American nationalism, and *Rule Britannia* imperialism. Volume One reveals that during the second half of the nineteenth century the citizens of central Canada enjoyed lively performances of indigenous theatrical entertainments whose authors — if they were ever known — have since been consigned to oblivion.

While the plays in Volume One have been selected to represent a particular chronological era, those in Volume Two — spanning more than a century, from 1840 to 1956 — have been chosen to represent the work of a particular sex. This division leaves me somewhat uneasy, since it sets up a rather artificial separation between male and female cultural domains which is not borne out by the plays themselves. Gwen Pharis Ringwood's Depression drama, *Pasque Flower* (1939), and Patricia Joudry's *Teach Me How to Cry* (1955), two realistic plays designed for and successfully mounted on the stage, are more similar in form and sensibility to the work of their male contemporaries than to the heroic closet dramas of their nineteenth-century predecessors. The work of the latter, in turn, is better appreciated within the context supplied by the first volume of the series.

Taken as a group, the ten nineteenth-century plays in the two volumes indicate that early Canadian playwrights catered to a wide range of taste. The only area in which the editors allow the women exclusive representation is the patriotic historical drama, given an exuberantly feminist cast in Sarah Anne Curzon's poetic *Laura Secord, The Heroine of 1812* (1876), and a more conventional anti-American bias in *When George the Third was King* (1897), by Catharine Nina Merritt (U.E.L.) [*sic*]. The sort of ponderous, neo-Shakespearean heroic

closet drama usually associated with the name of Charles Heavysege is represented in this series by two plays, Thomas Bush's extravagant *Santiago* (1866) and Eliza Lanesford Cushing's more subdued pseudo-historical tragedy, *The Fatal Ring* (1840). Thoroughly un-Canadian in subject, both works illustrate the colonial assumption that great moral and dramatic issues can be worked out only in sufficiently exotic and distant locales. Bush's play is set in the Andes, where robbers' dens, unscaleable peaks, and ominous crevasses provide a suitable backdrop for an almost mythical encounter between the forces of good and the emissaries of evil; Cushing's play, featuring "the first tragic hero in English-Canadian drama," exploits the exotic decadence of early sixteenth-century France to present the moral corruption and unenviable fate of a pure young lady who is lured from her rustic castle to the licentious court of King Francis.

Closer to home, but still colonial in form, is William Henry Fuller's *H.M.S. Parliament* (1880). Produced by E. A. McDowell, this delightful parody of Gilbert and Sullivan's *Pinafore* entertained large audiences when it toured western Quebec and central Ontario, poking fun at Macdonald's National Policy and burlesquing a number of prominent public figures. Political matters also inspired the other comic pieces: a power struggle within a local church in *The Female Consistory of Brockville* (1856); general political corruption in Nicholas Flood Davin's *The Fair Grit* (1876); the efforts of women to gain entrance to the universities in Sarah Anne Curzon's delightful farce, *The Sweet Girl Graduate* (1882); rejection of the United States in J. N. McIlwraith's *Ptarmigan* (1895); and national unity in *Dolorsolatio* (1865). The cast of the latter is especially engaging: it includes Mr. Abe North and Mr. Jefferson South, "two noisy neighbours"; Toronto, "a young lady with a very good opinion of herself"; and Ottawa, "a young lady scarcely 'out.' " These comedies reveal a consistent interest in translating Canadian political issues to the stage, for amusement, but also to ask serious questions and suggest sometimes obvious answers.

However, I feel that the very topicality of these plays raises a few questions. All five comedies in the first volume comment on local social and political events in a fashion that is almost allegorical, featuring characters like Madame Noheart, Grandpapa Canada, and Maple Leaf, "an athletic Canadienne in love with her country." One begins to wonder if topicality and historical relevance, rather than dramatic and literary value, inadvertently became the editors' governing criteria. Some of the comments in the introduction to the first volume support my suspicion that Wagner and Plant do not always distinguish work that is interesting for the insight it provides into cultural history from work that can stand on its

own aesthetic merits. This becomes especially clear when they link pieces from the past to issues which are relevant today. For example, of *The Female Consistory of Brockville* the editors claim: "The play stands apart from the often crude, polemical satires and farces that precede it by presenting both sides of its dramatic conflict, at least indirectly airing the case for women's rights." True, the play does look at both sides of the problem of women's rights. However, the spokeswomen for female government are such stereotyped shrews and gossips that one very soon realizes that the case for women's rights is being faultily constructed to allow the audience to enjoy its quick and brutal demolition by the forthright spokesmen of decency and natural order. The play is certainly important — not for its modernity, as the editors imply, but for its exposition of the conservative attitudes which are a significant element of our social history.

In the introduction to the second volume, the plays are justified by their historical significance rather than their more questionable individual merits. My own reservations notwithstanding, Anton Wagner argues persuasively in favour of discussing plays by women separately from those by men, by tracing the relation between women's writing and dominant cultural attitudes, showing how some writers, like Eliza Lanesford Cushing, conformed, while others, notably Sarah Anne Curzon, rebelled. He packs a wealth of well researched detail into a concise and comprehensive survey of Canadian women playwrights, their work and their milieu; this essay alone is an invaluable contribution to Canadian literary history. Indeed, both volumes are graced by impressive examples of the peculiar genre of the introductory essay. The introduction to the first volume approaches the plays from the point of view of theatre history, taking into consideration performance history, theatrical conventions and the mechanics of production. The editors' inclusion of illustrations and reprinted title pages enhances the historical orientation of both books, which admirably fulfil their declared purpose of helping us to recover Canada's lost cultural past.

CAROLE GERSON

CHAOS & COMIC BOOKS

Five Plays by Larry Fineberg. Playwrights Co-op, n.p.

Five Canadian Plays, Intro. by Ken Gass. Playwrights Co-op, n.p.

IT'S A GOOD THING I DON'T have to generalize about the state of Canadian drama from the two collections before me. Larry Fineberg, who has become a grand young man of Canadian drama largely on the undeserved success of *Eve*, a most unsubtle adaptation of Constance Beresford-Howe's novel, has much that is to his advantage as a playwright but nothing that would stamp him as a major force. The other five playwrights — Ken Mitchell, John Lazarus, Brian Shein, Ken Gass, and Cam Hubert — provide confirmation of the proclivity of Canadian drama towards burlesque, parody, and literal realism generally without any significance of thought or sensibility. I except Brian Shein in this instance because his play, *Cowboy Island*, struck me as being the single innovative piece that had the daring to take a legend and ritualize it surrealistically.

Fineberg's merits are not negligible. He has an eye for grotesque comedy — perhaps derived (contrary to what Michael Feingold believes in his introduction) from Jewish literary tradition rather than from Edward Gorey or Edward Bond —

and his satiric dialogue can be sparsely effective, setting up small bitter explosions of truth within their comic frames. He can startle us by the violence of his imagery — a man's severed hand lands in the mousse at a garden party; a woman is deliberately pinioned against a tree by her suicidal father in a wheelchair — and in his sombre tone-piece, *Death*, he shows he has obviously learned the value of impacted terseness and threatened cruelty from Pinter and Beckett. But he doesn't amount to much.

Death is perhaps his most intriguing drama with its three characters whose inward tensions are held in check by tight language and a refusal to elaborate the emotions in brief scenes:

MAX: The wasp, dying. The spider in putting off its death. Winter's coming.

JOHNNY: That's what they always do. It's instinct. How did they suffer? They're bugs.

MAX: (soft) I could feel their pain inside me. (Pause) Just like humans.

JOHNNY: It's instinct.

OONA: (Entering) What's all the shouting? What's all the trouble here? Father?

Blackout

Fineberg's comedy, on the other hand, is subject to excess. It is really black humour with flashes of light breaking in, but the dark is murky and turgid, as if nothing succeeded like excess. *Hope* is a case in point as it bloats itself up out of all proportion to its eventual revelations of human covetousness, irrationality, and guile. The trite is made a measure of the true with bad puns, banal clichés, and crude parodies chasing one another with Marx Brothers zaniness in a mad plot

where characters keep trying to find a rich family will. The farcical anarchy, however, hardly makes an effective metaphor for the chaos around us.

One sometimes feels that Fineberg likes the sound of his own humour too much for a play's good. Thus, how to explain the thinness and amateurishness of *Stonehenge* except to account it a juvenescent exercise in black comedy? Two Jewish sisters have shared the same lover who is suddenly found dead under mysterious circumstances. The subject of death and secrecy as an endless repetition is sandwiched between largely flaccid and gratuitous dialogue in a synagogue hall and mad farce in a funeral parlour. There is one fanatically funny character — old Etta Wittgenstein, blind in one eye, false-limbed, loose-bladdered, and mentally unhinged — and a hint of seriousness to all the broad comedy of manners and situation, but the stretched fabric wears thin at the end.

To Fineberg's credit, there is never any tone of righteousness or remorse. At their best, his dark comedies are clean, spare, and crisp. They don't whine for sympathy or play cute. *Human Remains* sketches several feelings with some weight without losing its bantering tone or overdoing its homosexual ripeness. Life's squalor is very evident in the triangular situation where a man discovers his two ex-lovers (one male, the other female) are living together. It has an ugly, brutal, raw underside, and pessimism continually competes against cynicism, but the startling theatricality surmounts the tawdriness and frequent banality.

Fineberg, however, doesn't give us anything much for the mind, and this deficiency is especially noticeable in those plays where he tries to achieve a witty texture. *Eve*, for instance, coarsens the title-character and loses the quickness of her mind that so pervades Beresford-Howe's novel. What Fineberg does achieve are images of the world's chaos and absurdity — the "round about" of Ibsen's Great Boyg (alluded to by Michael Feingold in the introduction), though, of course, he has none of Ibsen's schematic didacticism or philosophic density. His humour is frequently outrageous, even cartoonish, without being quite the benign silliness of several of the plays in the second collection, *Five Canadian Plays*, a coalescence of drama around the theme of heroes.

The problem with *Five Canadian Plays* is that, with the exception of Brian Shein's *Cowboy Island*, all the plays seem to be oriented towards teenagers rather than towards adults. There is something much too banal and demotic about their textures and fantasy. Their ideas are generally trite, their modes of satire and parody crude, and their energy is obtained in a comic-book milieu.

This is not a new trend in Canadian drama. *Les Canadiens*, *Paper Wheat*, and *Les Maudits Anglais* used comic-strip treatments of their subjects, whether these themes were politics, sociology, history, or sport. But each of those plays entertained for an hour and a half or more, whereas most of the plays in Gass's volume don't have the same sure-fire theatricality.

Ken Mitchell's *Heroes*, based on Superman and the Lone Ranger comics, is a debunking of heroes. Each of the larger-than-life characters suffers from culture-shock (if such a thing is possible in a comic-strip world), and we see how the real world "has aged them, changed them, and now forgotten them." *Heroes* tries to have it both ways: it offers us fantasy in the guise of reality, and tries to be "good light-hearted entertainment" on a childish level, while suggesting real emotions and pain. It thrives on incongruity: the Lone Ranger chases dope-peddlers rather than train-robbers; Superman is a mean cynic who's convinced that "everybody's out to

screw the other guy." Their respective foils are experts in manipulation: Tonto owns a couple of resort hotels in the Canaries and quotes French proverbs to advantage; and Lois Lane has a twisted view of reality and bristling sexual innuendo. It's these "supporting" figures who survive best because they aren't trapped by glorified legend.

At the opposite end of the literal scale is Ken Gass's *Hurray For Johnny Canuck*, the longest play in the collection and probably the most tedious in its relentlessly breathless silliness. It heartily enjoys "the comic-book milieu, in which 'men can be men' and heroes accomplish great deeds single-handedly." Much of its fun comes from a satirization of the mechanics of theatrical production: we are shown a false proscenium arch, cartoon panels that change from scene to scene, a trap-door, a gaudy curtain, prop cupboards, costume racks, actors caught virtually in undress, and stage-crew rushing around to set up a scene. But the substance of the play never really transcends the pop comic-strip style. The R.C.M.P. and Nelson Eddy, the *patate-frite* French Canadian, grotesquely evil Nazis (Hitler, Goebbels, Bormann), the Queen, Churchill, Canadian ruralism and puritanism, Italian fascism, are all sent up in Sock! Wham! Ugh! Guffaw! fashion. But by simply revelling in its own silliness, the play doesn't acquire charm or point, and will appeal only to those children reared on *Mad* magazine or Bell Comics. Incongruity runs riot: a Nazi drug ring operates in Canada's north, Canadian saboteurs dress as Austrian tourists at Frankfurt, a Major Domo bangs his head against a wall every time he wants to think or express emotion; Hitler reads Superman comics; and Goebbels wants Johnny Canuck's autograph.

Cam Hubert's "The Twin Sinks Of Allan Sammy" gives us life without comic-strip exaggeration, though it is no less glaringly simplistic at the end than the plays already mentioned. Allan Sammy, a West Coast Indian, has to choose between the bureaucracy, commercialism, and cultural corruption of the city and his freer, simpler life on a reservation. Locked out of work because of a union dispute, he is left without unemployment insurance. His wife, Mary, suggests they go home to the tribe, but Sammy is adamantly against this. A crone counsels Mary to leave Sammy and return home herself. A whore tempts her to stay and take to the streets. Sammy is himself counselled, though the advice he gets from Nanis, the ghost of his grandfather, isn't altogether wise. It is a staunch defence of old ways that brooks no compromise with a changing world, and it promotes — as the ending does — a falsely paradisal resolution of an identity crisis.

The play is really a parable with a central metaphor for native identity and tradition. Sammy keeps his tribal coppers and returns to his people, but the naive symbolic polarities of tribe and white society reduce the play's credibility. A pity that the dynamic structure, colloquial muscularity, and parabolic simplicity are all forced to serve wish-fulfillment propaganda. This is not to suggest that Sammy makes the wrong decision or that the Indian's way of life has no advantages; it's simply that the tough reality of the play is eventually displaced by a soft sentimentality.

Naive metaphor also shows in John Lazarus' *Babel Rap* whose title-pun is the best wit of the piece. This is a modern version of the Tower of Babel story from the viewpoint of two ordinary workmen. In building the tower, they discuss the philosophy and nature of this work in counterpoint. But the level of argument is too low, and the reversal of roles at the end too glib. Yet there are effective comic moments — as when the two men com-

pete with hymns to God, and at the end dissolve into a babble of tongues.

The most sophisticated and innovative play is Brian Shein's *Cowboy Island*, whose imagery and ritual derive from Robert Graves' *The White Goddess*. I don't know if the play adds up to much beyond a striking juxtaposition of American legend and pagan mythology, but the re-enactment of the slaying of the king ritual has a pristine beauty, suspended in time and space. The deliberate anachronisms and incongruities (Pat Garrett recites a Robert Graves poem; Paulita Maxwell chants Greek like a priestess) stress artifice and primal drama. There is a lovely lyricism in the slow dance of Billy and Pat, and the theatricality of the piece transcends any objection one might have to the deliberate yoking together of disparate mythologies.

KEITH GAREBIAN

COMMUNITIES

MICHAEL COOK, *Three Plays*. Breakwater. n.p.

CLYDE ROSE, ed., *The Blasty Bough*. Breakwater. n.p.

RUDY WIEBE and THEATRE PASSE MURAILLE, *Far As The Eye Can See*. NeWest Press, $4.95.

REGIONAL LITERATURE WHICH strategically restricts itself to the local and temporary possesses a limited scope for attaining general significance. By pretending to detach itself from a full literary context and from the meaning of established forms and motifs, it risks either banality or experimental thoughtlessness. But regional writing which deals intelligently with the paradoxes of time can accommodate itself meaningfully to restrictions imposed by setting.

Although his plays have specific settings, Michael Cook's treatment of time resists the regional mode. In *On the Rim of the Curve* he celebrates the extinction of the Beothuk Indians of Newfoundland. He assigns to the generations of colonists a materialistic sense of the future which heightens their hypocrisies about civilization and religion. But while their vicariousness reflects their contempt for the moment and while they debase their literary culture by giving it merely social functions, the Indians speak in a biblical and poetic idiom which manifests the harmony of their spiritual and communal ideas. Cook's pagans seize the future religiously. Their extinction is not an historical accident nor is it really effected by the colonists. Rather the Indians' mythic awareness of spiritual timelessness permits them to achieve the inviolability of death. Curiously, this play transcends the regional because in challenging our notion of history with myth Cook also makes his Indians exemplars of our cultural history.

In *The Head, Guts and Soundbone Dance* Cook depicts bleak "outport" culture, but his emphasis on time conveys more than that Newfoundland's future is uncertain. His central characters are pathetically decrepit fishermen who feel superior to everything modern. Nostalgically they recall days of heroic endeavour and commitment to community. But conflicts prove their nostalgia to conceal economic greed, arrogance, and spiritual hollowness. Their actual contempt for family and community demonstrates that they are isolated from the present. The cruel irrelevance of the local idiom in which they describe the "good old days" is signalled by their enraptured obliviousness when a child pleads with them to save his drowning friend. Their imaginative kinship with the sea is fantastic; it is no model for the present, nor, because it resists the process of history, can it provide a hope for the future.

In *Theresa's Creed* Cook's interest in time's relation to culture underlies his

creation of a lonely, middle-aged widow of a fisherman. She is drawn equally by the determinate social structure of her past and by the indefiniteness of modern society. But she belongs to neither. Her memories of community cannot serve as an imaginative ending or beginning. Because she lives in transition she can have no real creed. She cannot believe in anything beyond the flux of impressions. The old folk ways were as deficient as modern society is in educating her to a sense of time.

A journalistic lament begins Rose's regional Newfoundland anthology *The Blasty Bough*. Anecdotal and full of wisecracks, it sentimentally records the benefits that accrue to the local culture from the outmoded transportation system. Yet, in a clichéd way, it views this system as a token of the island's second-class status. An over-abundantly colourful idiom together with the lack of a sustained attitude towards the past and future characterizes this and other pieces in the anthology. Particularly disturbing is the writer's claim for the vitality of oral culture when set against his inability to produce creative liveliness in the dialogue.

By contrast, Anne Hart's "Help Me, Hepplewhite" is perhaps the most compelling piece in the anthology because it is a first person narrative which avoids anecdotes and whimsy in its employment of verbal and situational irony to comment on the relation of time and culture. The story concerns a volunteer social worker with an obsession for antiques. She discovers a fine chair in the apartment of a psychiatric patient who is soon to return home from the hospital. The volunteer's charity and sense of community dissolve as she rationalizes her inevitable appropriation of the chair. Her gross appreciation of art evidences moral turpitude and madness: her encyclopae-

dic knowledge of furniture abstractly celebrates the past for values which, because she so severely objectifies art and imaginatively evades the reality of the chair's owner, she actually subverts.

Harold Horwood's *Look Man, I Love You* is disturbing because it neither controls irony nor implies its author. This first-person narrative is that of a teacher who, while alert to the failings of traditional pedagogy, cherishes the social structure which supported it. The vicarious sexuality which the former system allowed him seems mostly responsible for his single-minded contempt for modern education and contemporary sex roles. His conservatism is excessive, and his clichéd language proves that his humanism is illusory. His satire on the present is rendered worthless because of his (and perhaps the author's) hypocritical use of time.

Patrick O'Flaherty's *Looking Backwards: the milieu of the old Newfoundland outports* tries to avoid nostalgia and propaganda. But the central assertion that preconfederation fishermen lived in a separate universe which was dominated by primitive technology and uninterested in cultural identity is a simplistic way of expressing gratitude for confederation. The writer's refusal to equate folk-tales with popular culture is salutary, but his argument for the complete difference of past and present together with his regret that old communal values are being lost to the enervating habits of Canadian introspection reveals a merely propagandistic notion of time and culture. O'Flaherty's essay begs important questions; it erects its point of view on slogans, and, despite intentions, it does not escape nostalgia.

Uncertain ideas about time and culture are also evident in two essays by G. M. Story. He maintains that Canadian literary history should recognize Newfoundland ballads since their colourful idiom and imagery reflect local consciousness. These reasons are insufficient. He postulates that Newfoundland society was preliterate and never self-consciously historical; and he complains that Confederation has made the people despise their culture and history. The dangerous simplicity of this disjointed sense of time is further apparent in his claim that the regional culture is more the subject of anthropology than of literary scholarship. Having begun by stressing the relevance of ballads, Story ends by emphasizing their esoteric and inaccessible nature.

Far As The Eye Can See is an amusing but inconsequential play. It may have topical interest because its situation involves a rural community's resistance to a strip-mining proposal and it may have an historical element because the action seems to be supervised by three *deus ex machina* figures from the past: Crowfoot, Princess Louise, and Aberhart. But, as an announced attempt to capture the spirit of the people of Alberta, it fails because it does not try. The play is actually a farce. In review fashion it pokes fun at its characters; it generates humour by typing them in a dismissive way. There is little undercurrent of important emotional or political conflict. The local ironies which expose banality, vicariousness, and corruptibility do not imply an informing irony. This means that moments of pathos have a merely local and therefore absurd effect. For comic reasons the characters' language is limited and this prevents them from embodying a sense of community. What makes the play more disturbing is that it toys with the characters; it exposes them but does not measure their inadequacies. Its negative implications about politics and corporate spirit seem cynical because there are no positive implications about the relation of time and collective understanding.

ROBERT JAMES MERRETT

LEMÉAC'S VARIETY

MARCEL DUBE, *Octobre*. Leméac, n.p.

MICHELE LALONDE, *Dernier recours de Baptiste à Catherine*. Leméac/L'Hexagone, n.p.

BERTRAND B. LEBLANC, *Joseph-Philémon Sanschagrin, ministre*. Leméac, n.p.

ANTONINE MAILLET, *La Veuve enragée*. Leméac, n.p.

THE INCREASE IN THEATRICAL activity in Quebec over the past two decades can be gauged from a comparison of publication figures. In 1961, only three new plays were published; by 1971, the annual figure had passed a dozen; it is now close to two dozen titles yearly, yet these represent only half the new plays performed each season.

A sampling of four texts published in 1977 will illustrate the variety of current production, while incidentally attesting to the dominant role now played in francophone theatrical publication by a single Montreal publishing house.

Marcel Dubé's *Octobre*, originally produced as a radio play in 1954 and printed in *Ecrits du Canada français* ten years later, belongs to the category of "retro-publications," early and almost forgotten works by a subsequently famous author, that appear on the market once their author's celebrity guarantees their sale. As the first of Dubé's "middle-class dramas," however, *Octobre* does have a certain historical interest, which is enhanced by the fact that the participants in its lovers' triangle are anticipations of characters in some of Dubé's later and better-known plays.

A second group is that of dramatizations of works of fiction, and it is here that Antonine Maillet's *La Veuve enragée* can be placed. Encouraged by the remarkable and deserved success of *La Sagouine* (1971), Mme Maillet has since blended a similar mixture of earthy humour and picturesque Acadian speech in a series of novels of which *Les Cordes-de-bois* is the source of *La Veuve enragée*. The widow of the title is a humourless representative of property rights and public morality, constantly mocked and thwarted by three generations of joyous female squatters who haunt the wood-loading dock. These unlettered enchantresses offer their gypsy hospitality to passing seamen, one of whom, the Irishman Tom Thumb, is finally persuaded to jump ship and join them. Very little else happens in these eleven scenes, but they are saved by the quality of the dialogue, which is racy, colourful and frequently amusing, typical of the Acadian folkloric tradition of which Antonine Maillet has become the principal exponent.

Social and political satire is another well-established tradition in modern Quebec theatre, dating back to the Fridolin reviews of Gratien Gélinas in pre-Second-World-War Montreal. Outside the metropolis, Quebec writing moves at a slower and more popular pace, and Bertrand B. Leblanc's *Joseph-Philémon Sanschagrin, ministre* employs the unpretentious realistic techniques of Quebec fiction of the 1940's and 1950's; Yves Thériault's novel *Les Vendeurs du temple* mined the same vein in 1951. Leblanc, a businessman and local booster in the Lac-Saint-Jean area, has a lighter touch than the novelists of the later Duplessis era: his depiction of rural life and political corruption in high places is amusing rather than depressing, a reflection of the changed political climate in Quebec over the last quarter-century.

Politics of a more intense and self-conscious kind is very close to the surface in the final category, that of "committed" or "engaged" theatre. Michèle Lalonde's *Dernier recours de Baptiste à Catherine*, inspired by the impending demolition in 1972 of a nineteenth-century church in a working-class district of Montreal, is a series of tableaux drawn from the history

of Quebec. The five episodes, dated 1760, 1776, 1837, 1850 and 1875, all take place in a church, and similar characters reappear, symbolizing the continuity of tradition that forms the essence of national existence. The author of "Speak White" shows here again her gift for impassioned commentary on political topics, and gives an original and moving defence of current nationalist ideology.

The four categories illustrated here do not by any means exhaust the resources of contemporary Quebec dramaturgy. They take no account of several trends of recent years: the *théâtre joualisant* of Michel Tremblay and Jean Barbeau, the audience-participation spectacles of Françoise Loranger, or the controversial feminist theatre of Denise Boucher. Nor are these 1977 contributions outstanding or durable works; their interest lies in their variety and vitality, not in their literary quality. They do serve to demonstrate, however, that despite recurrent complaints of a "crisis" in Quebec theatre, the dramatists themselves are by no means discouraged, and their rate of production continues to increase from year to year.

DAVID M. HAYNE

PARADIGMS OF FOLLY

PIERRE GOBIN, *Le Fou et ses doubles: figures de la dramaturgie québécoise*. Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, "Lignes québécoises," $13.75.

PROFESSOR GOBIN's study of the fool and the theatrical representation of madness in Quebec theatre is a densely written work which covers a great deal of material in a relatively short space. In his introductory chapter Professor Gobin outlines in detail the difficulties of defining his topic and limiting the scope of his study: although ideally one should study all original plays performed or read in Quebec from the beginning of the colony up to the present, for practical reasons the study has been limited to all published works (occasionally including exceptional unpublished works). The definition of the fool and madness, which is particularly difficult, has been solved by adopting as a paradigm for the study the Jean Barbeau play *Le Chant du sink*, which Gobin sees as presenting six characters who are eminently representative of the major types of madness, or alienation, in Quebec. His analysis of Quebec drama is organized, consequently, into six chapters, each one concentrating on a particular form of folly.

The first deals with the adepts of religion, the "Fous de Dieu," and includes mystics obsessed by the land. The type character from *Le Chant du sink* is Bernadette who has a cross on her back and wears ice skates, but is "not too swift." The second chapter deals with political alienation, championed by Verchères, the character in Barbeau's play who is *disguised* as a guerilla but who remains paralyzed by all her revolutionary paraphernalia.

Cultural alienation is represented in the paradigm by Esther ("La rousse"), who is dressed like a tragic heroine, complete with dagger in the back, and who speaks like a dictionary and suffers most when she hears joual spoken in her presence. The enormous Barbie doll character in Barbeau's play is the symbol for the debasement engendered by economic domination. The cat/psychiatrist/plumber of Barbeau's play who frees up the sink by discovering the dead rat is seen by Professor Gobin as representative of the attempt to combat madness by therapy. And finally, Gisèle the realistic wife who introduces the liberating laugh into her husband's psychosis is a paradigm for the liberation attained by willingly assumed buffoonery.

The attractive neatness of the Barbeau paradigm has to be expanded and modified, of course, when it is applied to the corpus under study. Thus in the first chapter three main groups emerge: plays which show instances of divine or diabolic possession, in either the active or passive mode; plays in which the spiritual power is "immanent" or "laicised" into a mystic relationship with the landscape; and plays in which the spiritual dimension is problematic (where, for example, the innocent is also victim of his own naïveté). In the chapter dealing with political alienation three main thematic zones are delineated, with subdivisions within the zones. For example, when the political system transforms the "patrie" into a prison (the first thematic zone), the protagonist can go truly mad, or become a wanderer in search of a "pays incertain" or retreat into a self-imposed ghetto, be it kitchen or tavern, or escape from the prison by a disguise, or suicide, or finally, he can retreat into impotence. This sort of modification of the original paradigm, made necessary by the variety and complexity of the texts studied, serves at times to suggest that the paradigm proposed for the synchronic study is not a completely adequate device to circumscribe the corpus. The use of the paradigm also tends to prevent the discussion of any one play under several headings, because to do so would mean cumbersome repetition. As a result, many plays (for example, those of Michel Tremblay) which could fit equally well under several rubrics are discussed in detail in only one of the chapters.

But although one may have some reservations about the organization of the study, one can rarely disagree with the analyses of the plays presented by Professor Gobin. Of all the plays studied, those of Michel Tremblay, Jacques Languirand, and Jacques Ferron and Jean-Claude Germain surface most frequently in his analysis, and in his conclusion he places these dramatists in the front ranks of Quebec drama. The emphasis of the study is by no means only on these dramatists, however, and the real strength of the work lies finally in the number of perceptions provided on a wide variety of plays. It is impossible here to comment on all the worthy examples, which range from the treatment of L. H. Fréchette's *Félix Poutré* to the discussion of Gaureau and Savaugeau.

Professor Gobin has broken new ground in his analysis of Quebec drama, and we shall remain indebted to him both for his new insights and for the questions which this study raises. The wider context of Quebec society and history which Professor Gobin alludes to in his introduction and his conclusion draw attention to the need for a study of radio and television drama from this viewpoint, and to the examination of the chronological development of the subject, neither of which is touched in the present study.

D. W. RUSSELL

THEATRICAL SCRAPBOOK

THEATRE PASSE MURAILLE, *The Farm Show*. Coach House Press, n.p.

IN HIS INTRODUCTION TO the Coach House edition of *The Farm Show*, Paul Thompson of Theatre Passe Muraille cautions, "There is no 'story' or 'plot' as such. The form of the play is more like a Canadian Sunday School or Christmas Concert where one person does a recitation, another sings a song, a third acts out a skit." In 1972, members of the Passe Muraille company spent a summer in the farming community of Clinton, Ontario, living with farm people, doing farm work, learning through observation and imitation to talk and move as Clinton

men and women do, and, in the process, collecting material for their modern Canadian concert, a collage of vignettes, songs, and scenes depicting life in the community. The collectively created piece was first performed in Ray Bird's hay barn in Clinton, and subsequently in auction barns throughout rural Ontario, as well as in more conventional theatres in Toronto, Stratford, Ottawa, and Winnipeg. *The Farm Show* has also been broadcast and televised, and is the subject of Michael Ondaatje's film, "The Clinton Special." In one form or another, performances of *The Farm Show* have reached a very large audience, and now the creators have attempted to present the work as a book, although Thompson, at the conclusion of his introduction, expresses some doubt as to "how much of this will come through the printed word." Both the attempt and the doubt are valid.

In the tradition within which Passe Muraille works, performance is a means of achieving aesthetic unity rather than a means of transmitting a unity already present. Their "concerts" resist translation into print: the reader is not able to predict the development of the concert's shape, and he experiences no delight in theatrical surprise to compensate for his confusion, problems which do not arise in the reading of a play whose conventions both guide the reader's expectations and supply consistent illusions to project in the theatre of the mind. *The Farm Show* not only avoids plot, but also abjures the conventions of illusion to which, still, most of us are accustomed. Passe Muraille's work resembles Brecht's in its dissociation of actor and mask, Peter Cheeseman's in its juxtaposition of the authentic documentary detail and the flamboyantly theatrical gesture, and Megan Terry's and Joan Littlewood's in its efforts to break the one-to-one relationship between actor and role, assigning each actor many roles and using the movement between roles as well as the movement between theatrical and depicted realities as a vehicle for theatrical statement. None of these innovations are as effective on the page as they are on the stage: the actors merge into their characters, the jazz-like flow from role to role is broken into blocks of dialogue lacking the cohesion provided by the single player, and the interplay between real stage object and mime is lost, for the on-stage bale of hay and the elaborately mimed hay-baler are equally feats of the imagination to the reader.

While elements of performance assume structural and image-making tasks more often assigned to language in the conventional drama, language is not without its function and value in Passe Muraille works such as *The Farm Show*. In large part, language in this set of conventions is documentary data, lifted out of its everyday context by a highly theatrical performance style and heightened by artful editing and calculated juxtaposition of speeches or of speech and stage image. The approach produces powerful moments when the presentational technique records and transmits a subject's discussion of something which means a good deal to him; the spare declarations have been honed further still in the rehearsal process, leaving and thereby highlighting the stronger features of Clinton's speech in the reading of a hermit's letters, an account of a farm accident, a man's description of the thoughts he thinks when he works in the fields, Bruce Pallett's analysis of the economics of Canadian farming. Through the accumulation of such heightened moments, the audience receives an impression of Clinton's opinions, values, and, most effectively, Clinton's fears; in this way, *The Farm Show* succeeds in reaching beyond the boundaries of the Canadian farming community.

Field thoughts and memories of accidents show us that in Clinton, death frequently takes the form of a tractor. When we know what a tractor engine's stopping may mean, silence between carefully chosen words acquires new depths of meaning. Later, the effect of the preceding silences adds a new dimension to the essentially comic treatment of the tractor tug at a local fall fair. Indeed, one is struck by the relationship between men and machinery, both by the frequency with which it is a factor in the lives of the characters and by the presence which the perception of the farmers and the clarity of Passe Muraille's reporting give the relationship. There are references to the old, natural antagonists, drought, crop failure, flood, fire, and storm, so familiar to readers of earlier Canadian plays with farm settings, but in *The Farm Show*, the ambivalent machine is a much stronger theatrical presence. An audience of city-dwellers not only gains a new perspective on a universal fear, but finds in death's twentieth-century shape on the farm further comment on their own way of life.

Paul Thompson has rejected the label "regionalism," preferring what he calls "particularism," a fidelity to the facts observed. This fidelity, not mythic or fictional pattern, is the object of presentational arrangement, although if enough details are presented clearly, faithfully, and theatrically, larger insights, such as that into death by machinery, will emerge. Passe Muraille's "particularism" is evident in its approach to dialogue, and also in the physical staging of its shows (Passe Muraille performers themselves make a careful distinction between "doing a show" and "doing a play"). In performance, particularism is often taken to the extreme of using on stage objects belonging to the person being impersonated. To illustrate particularism, Thompson cites the company's use of a hat, hand-made tools, and letters (not just the words of the letters but the letters themselves, as stage objects) belonging to Charlie Wilson, the recluse featured in one sequence of *The Farm Show*. The intrusion of reality has a startling effect when the authenticity of the object is clear to the audience; on a smaller scale, the sensation must resemble that experienced by audiences at the height of naturalistic staging when David Belasco moved real settings onto his New York, turn of the century stages, reconstructing tenement interiors brick by brick to achieve sensational effects, appeals to voyeurism, inaccessible to conventional stage carpentry. Passe Muraille's physical particularism could hardly be described as sensationalist, although it can be admired for the wrong reasons. Because it is selective, whereas Belasco's methods obviously were not, Passe Muraille's introduction of touching, personal exhibits stylizes the life from which the objects are drawn, as the company's editing stylizes real words spoken by real people. In discussing the actions of steelmen at work, Peter Cheeseman, in his introduction to *Fight for Shelton Bar*, employs the concept of dance to explain his company's stylized use of documentary material: when the real movements of work are isolated from the purpose they are intended to serve, the result can be a dance, forceful gesture often of extraordinary beauty. In performance, *The Farm Show* displays several moments of such gesture, for the principle Cheeseman describes applies to the movements of Clinton farmers as well as to those of British industrial workers.

While *The Farm Show* resembles *Fight for Shelton Bar*, which the Canadian show predates, in matters of perspective and presentational theory, the works are entirely different because of the structural influence of that which is shown, the influence which the documentary conventions invite from the subject mat-

ter. Passe Muraille frequently rejects the suggestion that their work is nationalistic, but the work is very much of its place; when Clinton (or Canada) provides not only subject matter and setting but also contributes to the style and structure of presentation, the result is of Clinton or of Canada as a matter of course. Being so in such an unselfconscious manner is an admirable characteristic.

Thompson has described work on shows like *The Farm Show* or "Under Greywacke" as attempts to produce "a living community portrait or photograph." In this respect, *The Farm Show* resembles the sort of older Canadian concert or pageant described by W. H. New in his introduction to *Dramatists in Canada*; there is little continuing sense of individual characters and hence no character development, for these are forgone in favour of the collective character, Clinton. Passe Muraille's presentational techniques thus conform to the preference for collective heroes over individual heroes which several critics have informed us is typically Canadian, but which is also typical of the left-wing perspectives of the European companies which first used many of the conventions Passe Muraille employs, and which is, probably most significantly, characteristic of the work of Roger Planchon, the French director under whom Thompson served a two year apprenticeship. While there is little dramatic movement toward conflict in a conventional sense, dramatic conflict does occur at the level of the collective, as the audience becomes aware, through an accumulation of individual scenes pointing in the same direction, that the way of life Clinton represents is in danger of dying. This menace achieves a stage presence chiefly in the second act, and makes *The Farm Show* more than the mere celebration of a community which many of the pageants and concerts of earlier Canadian drama were. Chamber of commerce optimism is not allowed to gloss over what Thompson calls the "texture" of small town reality.

Additional tensions, serving to replace dramatic conflict between individuals, arise from the separation of performer and depicted reality, a separation which is frequently clearly revealed: recited stage directions establish setting with the precision of imagist poems, the audience is called upon to applaud the sheer virtuosity of almost acrobatic acting (the council meeting sequence seems to serve little other purpose), and in story-telling sequences, we are aware that the act of story-telling occurs on two levels. The Canadian playwright frequently has his characters tell stories; in older plays, the stories too often interrupt the play, as the playwrights seem incapable of resisting rhetorical temptations, stopping their plays in order to allow characters to tell stories. In more recent plays, the story still makes frequent appearances, but the act of story-telling itself has been made dramatically functional; in Cook, Tremblay, Ryga, story-telling is a dramatic action which the character employs to achieve a dramatic objective. In the exploitation of this device, Passe Muraille excels. Les Jervis's story about his deer, the Jesus bus story, and others are not included for their own sake only, nor is their primary purpose merely to add local colour. They are actions, means by which Clinton expresses its values in opposition to those forces which the community sees as threats, and in so doing resists the threat. Because the theatrical reality is clearly before us, the story-telling is also the means by which Passe Muraille can establish dramatic conflict between stage and auditorium: while an urban performance of *The Farm Show* loses the communal celebration present in an auction barn performance, the city production compensates through dramatic strengths created by the company's cast-

ing the audience, from time to time, in the role of the antagonist, a collective antagonist balancing the collective protagonist. The intention is certainly political, but because their style provides a model of the political conflict, incorporating that conflict within working dramatic actions, Passe Muraille usually succeeds in avoiding the animated pamphlet, so often the bane of overtly political theatre.

Often, adverse criticism of Passe Muraille's work fails to take into consideration those conventions within which the company works: the result is a consideration of what a Passe Muraille show is not rather than of what it is. All this is not to say that the conventions of the collectively created show do not admit of failure. One of the primary requirements of the form — and of "particularism" — is honesty, an honesty which Passe Muraille often proclaims, frequently with a bit too much self-congratulation. In the company's community portraits there is, accompanying the stylization, some idealization; this idealization is usually excused by the romanticism of Passe Muraille's perspective, for the romanticism is usually a vital one which attempts to inject the dramatic into the reality of Canadian life, deliberately choosing this approach over an ordering of that life and a bringing of its elements into formal harmony. Nonetheless, the temptation to show Clinton what it wants rather than what it needs must be enormous. (The distinction is difficult to make and even more difficult to heed within Passe Muraille's theoretically egalitarian philosophy.) The consequence of yielding to the temptation to flatter is dishonesty, and precisely because Passe Muraille's conventions are what they are, such slips from grace are jarring, and damaging to the tone of the show as a whole. Such a stumble is "Miles Meets Mr. Merrill," the second scene in the show. A Passe Muraille actor represents himself meeting for the first time one of the Clinton farmers whose lives he wants to observe and interpret. Since this scene purports to show the audience the beginning of the process which led to *The Farm Show* (the proverbial box containing the sound of its own making), we expect some clues as to the validity of what we are seeing. Passe Muraille is at great pains to be honest about the subject, but in this scene especially, the showmakers do not take such care to be honest about themselves. Miles' city yokel self-parody is too crude a picture of naïveté: "Boy, it sure must be great being a farmer. . . . I mean you get up in the morning and get your hands down into that good honest dirt." Sometimes the Passe Muraille actors' eagerness to deprecate themselves becomes a form of condescension: the farmers are implicitly flattered and patronized by the false contrast. These tactics, fortunately rare in *The Farm Show*, clearly diminish the credibility of the Clinton portrait, working directly against the show's central objective.

The faults of the second scene are particularly clear in contrast to the success of the justly celebrated bale scene. Again, a Passe Muraille actor is playing himself, helping with the haying in the mow in the heat and the dust, scrambling and heaving and scrambling some more to keep up with the loader. Here, the self-mockery is not at all obsequious, and can, therefore, achieve some satiric bite; comparisons are not forced, and the qualities of the farmers emerge as a matter of course. The juxtaposition of reflective anecdote and the immediate conflicts between man and hay, man and machinery, city man and country life, give substance to the concluding rhetorical question about farming as a way of life. This time, the "sound of the making" is truly part of the portrait.

Does all this "come through the printed word"? Coach House and the "assembler," Ted Johns, have done their best to help the script through the design of the book, which is excellent. The cover, a wrap-around, panoramic portrait of the original audience, is a striking image of the unusual relationship between subject and audience which is at the core of the show. The text is well illustrated with photographs of Clinton farmers, Orange Day parades, and scenes from the show (a scrapbook of sorts). Here, too, one is struck by the relationship between subject and representation, and the production photographs do help the reader to visualize the acting style, particularly posture as metaphor. Pictures of the set are also helpful, demonstrating how the large map of the district, providing both backdrop and floor-cloth, served the company as yet another stage metaphor for the relationship between map and territory which the company set out to explore. Typography attempts to convey the effects of simultaneity and ensemble work, with varying degrees of success. Ultimately, a show is a show, and cannot be fully translated to the page or even to the theatre of the mind; but this edition of *The Farm Show* is a valuable and frequently evocative record of an important theatrical event.

CHRIS JOHNSON

HIT AND MISS

JOHN THOMPSON, *At the Edge of the Chopping there are no Secrets*. Anansi, $6.00 cloth, $2.95 paper.

JOHN THOMPSON, *Stilt Jack*. Anansi, $5.95.

RALPH GUSTAFSON, *Soviet Poems*. Turnstone Press, n.p.

MIRIAM WADDINGTON, *Mister Never*. Turnstone Press, n.p.

THE POETRY OF JOHN THOMPSON is sincere, serious, and ironic. An Englishman, residing in New Brunswick since 1966, Thompson writes poems that are imaginatively restricted to that world. They seem born of a self-imposed and perhaps privileged exile in rough country. Especially in *At the Edge of the Chopping there are no Secrets*, existence is measured by its fidelity to the sort of bread, fire and kitchen garden survival one finds sentimentalized in folk museums and by the possibility of individual articulated response. To be fair, all is not wood and leather; there are the more modern and generally available staples of Italian wine and television!

Thompson believes in the significance of the physical, but too often he cannot make a completed art — pictorial or mythic — of it. Frequently enough, poetic craft fails to render, fittingly, this driven sensibility. Form and tone are not sufficiently varied. Too many poems betray the over-extending of experience, the desire to write more effectively, in a rather preconceived direction, than facility will allow. Thompson does not permit his writing to explore the real dilemma of living deliberately in austere surroundings; he strains too obviously to connect love, nature and the purified life; he cannot really confront what has been called the indifference of nature to human values. The book suffers from an awkward tension between the author's expectation and his unwillingness to confront its very interesting disappointment.

The world of essences that Thompson creates has appeal, and his good lines capture it sensually: a lamp lighting "dainty ships" on the horizon; the sun hungrily "sniffing the earth" in a massive horse; the Great Bear constellation looking on our shining green world, as at "an apple deep / under ice"; "huge milky potatoes bursting / from the moist earth"; the act of shooting at a tin barn roof so that it "shouts and sinks." The poet is particularly convincing when suggesting the re-

UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA MEDAL FOR CANADIAN BIOGRAPHY

1979

The several fine biographies of 1979 — of Riel, Donald Gordon, D. H. Lawrence, Emily Carr, and Chief Factor Archibald McDonald — have little in common except one thing: a fascination with biographical method perhaps as much as with their subject. They draw attention to the fact that biographies can be written in different ways, some answering the question *what?* and some answering the question *why?* Some, in other words, choose to emphasize the "life's story" — making a linear narrative out of a personality — and others emphasize the fragments and the amorphousness of human experience, which nonetheless cohere into individual character. Jean Murray Cole's *Exile in the Wilderness*, a life of McDonald, is a book of the first kind, detailing all the daily events, the doses of jalop and the dinners of ptarmigan, that connect the factor's world. So is Maria Tippett's account in *Emily Carr* of the facts of a painter's "unpaintability" of Canada's "farthest edge." Paul Delany's *D. H. Lawrence's Nightmare* is a work of a different kind, magnificently exploring the four "war years" of passionate and difficult relationships in the life of a passionate and difficult man. Joseph Schull's *The Great Scot* also seeks the motives behind a subject, and its candid and anecdotal accounts of the animosities, the hungers, and the bearishness of Donald Gordon declare the importance of a public man's private life as a revelation of his public actions.

This year the medal goes to a fifth volume in this impressive group: Thomas Flanagan's provocative, persuasive, and compellingly readable enquiry into Riel's religious enthusiasm, *Louis 'David' Riel: 'Prophet of the New World'*. In some ways it is alive with the question *why*, and it is a work with which all future Riel studies must somehow engage. Flanagan has taken seriously that side of Riel's character which earlier commentators — and earlier biographical approaches — dismissed as madness or fraud. The religious beliefs, however unconventional they might seem, here become evidence of Riel's deep conviction that he had a divine mission. Taking account of them must inevitably alter one's assessment of the man. In seriously exploring the psychological undercurrents of Riel's public life, Flanagan illuminates a singular personality; he also places himself at the cutting edge of contemporary biographical writing. W.N.

luctance and richness of alternate, ever-present states: darkness, winter and death. The best pieces trust image and word, allow ideas to find themselves through those means, repay exact observation of self and surroundings with a clear original expression for "elemental" living modified, as it must be now, by the contemporary mind.

Effective poems also manage to contain rather than distortingly over-emphasize one of the book's preoccupations — that language is inadequate to express "possession or abandonment by a god." This concern often worries Thompson's art into one or a combination of several faults: evasiveness, long-windedness, uncertain structure, vague endings. The poet can also sound derivative (bread bakes in the oven the way "a moon gleams / and fattens") and contrived.

Nevertheless, when works are allowed to breathe, we get a fine chiselling together of sight, sense and sound. There is a wonderful circularity in the poem "Fish," for example, where "a hammer perfectly steel, perfectly / struck" strikes to become the victim of the fisherman's hammer striking. There are perhaps fifteen other poems in a book of over forty that achieve, in varying degrees, unity and impact.

Thompson's second book, *Stilt Jack*, is based on the ghazal, a classical form of Urdu poetry originating in Persia. The writer who ranges so widely for form takes great risks. He needs to be a synthesizer of the subtlest kind, able to translate cultural assumptions and perceptions often foreign to the Western mind. The ghazal is composed of couplets, five to a poem; they are not necessarily connected by theme, logic or narrative. Rather, says Thompson, tone or nuance provide the links. As Adrienne Rich (another practitioner) puts it, the unity of the ghazal emerges from underneath.

Rich's use of the form is cryptic and intellectually challenging. For Thompson, it is technically liberating. He is right in announcing the freedom found artistically, but wrong in denying that his ghazals are free-association poems. Most are, and often quite successfully so. Mood and emotion flow freely. One is fascinated to follow these mindtracks through basically the same source material as *Chopping*, but without such forced writing. Finally, though, the vision runs thin. Generating moments in *Stilt Jack* seem much more real, but the range remains narrow. There are too many of these poems for the quality to be uniform. One wonders how this poet, given time, might have fared *out* of the woods.

The spell cast by Ralph Gustafson's *Soviet Poems* may be a deceptive one. Our great glittering ignorance of Russia today, our perhaps exaggerated reaction to place names — Novgorod, Tashkent, Samarkand — predispose our interest. However, such likely curiosity and excitement is not justified by most of the poems on their own merit.

Too many fall victim to the arbitrary linestop, the rhetorical phrase, an unhelpful use of capital letters and a lot of listing which occasionally produces a sort of suspect music or meaning. In "Winged Flight," names have wonderful sounds (Shakhi-Zinda), whereas "The Kobzar" is mainly name-dropping. Yet, some memorable images emerge from the book: "We flew with the sun into the sun / Lying low on the wide horizon / Like a disk of copper metal / Thrown by luck." Each piece is accompanied by a prose travelogue which shouldn't be necessary, and is at times condescending in its information.

The most difficult problem is that of tone. The writing seems to suffer from an obligation to make philosophical statements, take a moral stand. Any authentic personal voice becomes muted by the conscientious ambassadorial voice. An effec-

tive lack of resolve between the two creates some ambiguity, and this in poems where specifics could speak for themselves. "The Old Moscow Woman" (about a street sweeper) might tellingly have ended with the line: "The street will always be dirty," a simple and partial answer to the question, "What is this happiness?" Yet Gustafson must go on about man's imperfection, the littered streets of other cities: "New York, Moscow, Montreal / It is the same." It is not, so easily, the same, not at any level of implication. This is a kind of intellectual whitewash, or at least thwarted thinking.

By contrast, an ironic point is scored more naturally in "Tashkent," where the atmosphere of "fabled caravans from the East" is simply juxtaposed with the "transistors, card and tin" found in G. U. M., the State Department Store. Never is a statement so poignantly made about Russia, as when one compares some functional, commonly available Soviet product and a sumptuous monument or modus from the splendid, if tyrannical past. Again, "On the Road to Novgorod" identifies our shared humanity, with concrete images and no false conclusions. The most convincing poem in the book is "By Way of Postlude." It meets many dilemmas squarely, makes admissions: "One gets weary of official virtue." Troubling questions are asked: Where is "the unstatistical labour," or "laughter, / The natural factory"; could liberty cure all? Yet the poet is well aware of paradox, of "freedom's own failures," existing now for him beside the generosity, friendship and "honourably glorious dead" he *has* found, beside "strictures" born of love.

Western poems observing modern Russia are few enough. One expects a resilient art, equal to the challenge of a rich and recalcitrant subject. Unless we infer an unrealistically simplified humanity, it is not enough to say, as Gustafson does in an early statement and as we would all like to say, that "Unpolitical humanity is the same."

Miriam Waddington's *Mr. Never* might be called a fantasy of desire and disappointment. Thematically, it treats of "absence ... unreturned love ... a one-sided projection of the self." The voice is consistently lyrical, expressing itself in imagery alternately superb and strained. Artistically rendered states of mind give us this:

> the mosaic
> roofs of Dijon preened
> themselves like peacocks
> in the sun of a mustard
> summer

but also expose us to this:

> You ...
> make
> designs like the mosaic
> of cut logs floating
> downriver from Ottawa to
> the Chaudiere where the
> match company saws them
> into matches.

Physically, Waddington's book maintains a sort of decorated elegance due to small fine print and the wispy tapering shape of most poems. Linestops, however, remain a mystery. There are lapses in taste, even sense, as in "spaced wides" and "tallnessess / of air." Confusion results, too, from some sloppy syntax and verbal coupling ("warmsun," "skyspeeds"), a lazy practice which is likely to clog and cloud response.

Yet the poet can sing. "Journey" is truly a song of praise, nullifying in its joyful sweep the effect of any possible awkwardness. "Dreaming of Mr. Never" is a ruefully clear lament. Nevertheless, the trouble with lyric is that it can lead Waddington into facile rhyme. She often succumbs to the lure and trance of song, so that meaning gives way to sound. The use of whimsy is also problematic. "Mister Never In Winnipeg" makes it work:

> Your shoulders
> are wooden pillars

of the veranda half-
filled with the
snows of Winnipeg.

"Mr. Never Playing" does not fare so well.

So, the book is uneven. Concepts, informing metaphors, myth-making of a colourful but somewhat fragmented and fussy patchwork-quilt variety, aesthetic patterns of every kind can be attractive and original. However, this manner of control risks superficiality, is anyway rarely complete in a poem or guaranteed over the whole. One is left with an unfortunate sense of hit and miss.

PATRICIA KEENEY SMITH

GIVEN THE WORKS

PHYLLIS GOTLIEB, *The Works: Collected Poems*. Calliope Press, $10.50.

AFTER TWO HUNDRED and fifty-four pages of Phyllis Gotlieb's poems — a gathering of three earlier books and some new verse — the urge to pun is irresistible. Gotlieb does, again and again. Examples are found in the titles of the book and of many individual poems, such as an autobiographical piece called "This One's on Me"; and bald punning establishes itself as a major technique in so many of the lines she has decided to collect. The puns can be seen as simply a symptom. Because the disease of wordplay for its own sake takes many forms, *The Works* is mostly play. Childlike (or childish) games with gratuitous sound undermine whatever seriousness surfaces from time to time. That in itself may be part of Gotlieb's thematic purpose, but the resulting coyness is often frustrating. Although her approach recalls Reaney's, comparison greatly favours him.

Putting aside the inclination to see *The Works* as play, but retaining the pejorative slant of that metaphor, one is almost obliged to suggest that many of the poems are mere exercises, rather than substantial work. Gotlieb often seems to have asked herself what she could say about this or that feature of her everyday life, and then to have published her answer. As a result, most of the poems lack urgency, seem forced. This effect is not relieved by her tendency to over-explain the strong images that do appear: "the clenched fist in the heart / (called poignancy)"; nor is it overcome by superficial music and ineffective line breaks. The poems are sometimes so weak that one prefers her italicized introductions and transitional passages. The latter are relatively naked — free of the crowded craftiness of the main poems — and much more natural. By themselves, the italicized entries lack sufficient impact, but they make one wish for a middle ground between simplicity and contrivance.

Even the highly contrived can have pleasing aspects, and the usual delights of poetry are present in *The Works*. "Ordinary, Moving" is twenty-one pages of interesting doggerel, for example — intended doggerel; many of Gotlieb's insights into her milieu (in this case, Jewish and urban) are entertaining; her fascination with the evocative power of small details, such as telephone numbers which recall characters and events, is intriguing; and her endings are often very satisfying. It may be that her weaknesses result from an emphasis on last lines, resounding conclusions that came first and required the fabrication of verses to precede them. Perhaps her poems should have come *from*, rather than *because of*, those last lines, should have pushed further. Then *The Works* would have contained more.

Maybe, too, *The Works* should have contained less. The verse dramas, which admittedly cannot be judged justly on the page, are nevertheless dull in print. Many of the other poems cry out for a selector

rather than a collector. A "collected works" should enhance a writer's reputation, but the best works of Gotlieb — such as "First Person Demonstrative" — have been anthologized already. Her reputation, for the moment, should rest in them.

RON MILES

SHAGGY RAG OF BOREDOM

DAVID S. WEST, *Poems and Elegies 1972-1977.* Fiddlehead, $4.50.

D. H. SULLIVAN, *Wind Sun Stone and Ice.* Fiddlehead, $3.50.

KEVIN ROBERTS, *Deep Line.* Harbour Publishing, $3.95.

LAZAR SARNA, *Letters of State.* Porcupine's Quill, $10.95; pa. $4.95.

AS LONG AGO AS 1957, Louis Dudek posed the question in *Delta*, "Are we being fiddleheaded to death?" It is a point worth reconsidering. The books of poetry continue to pour out of Fredericton at an alarming rate (the two under review are numbers 238 and 241), all with the express and laudable intention of giving the virtually unknown poet an opportunity to get into print. All very fine; and indeed over the years Cogswell has published work by some fine writers (Livesay, Yates, Nowlan, Gutteridge). At the same time he has managed to flood the country with drivel that, at best, ought to have progressed in the public domain no further than the pages of the poetry magazines. It is perhaps not a reviewer's place to dwell too philosophically on such a phenomenon; he ought, rather, to talk about the books. But the most outstanding thing about the two Fiddlehead books considered here is that they do give rise to just such speculation, over and above any thought or pleasure that the texts themselves might be expected to occasion.

David West has a disarming habit of ending many of his poems with an ellipsis, as though the mechanical muse having run down, the poem must somehow be brought to a close, and the devil take any logic of image or form. He shares with D. H. Sullivan a repertory of images drawn from the natural world, but in the case of both poets this amounts to little more than impression unilluminated by a keen eye or intelligence. In the first of a number of poems entitled "Waiting," Sullivan writes:

> watching
> from an
> old rock
> waiting
> for words
>
> to assert
> nothing
> greater
> than now
> and here
>
> nor make it
> worse with
> any purpose
>
> (to enjoin
> my self
> is enough)

Well, this pseudo-modernist aesthetic won't do, at least not in the case of a poet who, despite the disclaimer of this poem, uses language in a determinately referential way to get matters important to him off his chest. Theoretically this is fine, but in neither case do the poets come up with language powerful enough to convince us that these matters *are* important. West's best poem is perhaps his elegy for Eric Ivan Berg, the young poet who was killed years ago in a logging accident, but even it is marred by unconvincing tropes ("to face trees and rivers / manhandle them into shape / revise them like poems"). Sullivan's poetry fails by and large to rise above similar infelicities, and is too often confounded by such descriptions as that of the poet, who is said to

be "the fearless / circumnavigator / of the word."

Olson once advised that a poet choose some concern and dig into it until the subject was exhausted and he knew more about it than anyone else. Kevin Roberts' book *Deep Line* (and it does, incidentally, include a poem entitled "For Charles Olson") shows the advantage of writing out of just such a saturation. He may not know more than anyone else about fishing off the coast of B.C., but the poems at least testify to a real life lived among things other than books and university classrooms. His poems are generally short and spare, but flexible enough to include both the brute idiom of the fisherman ("shit no never / use the bar / if the fucker backfires / it'll ream a hole / clear through the hull") and the more florid, though still direct language of the love poet ("when I take it / out of you it / glistens / like a white tulip / after rain"). The poems are by turns meditative, tender, and gutsy in their head-on approach to the inhuman or threatening aspects of the poet-fisherman's experience. *Deep Line* is a small book and its compass of concerns too is small; but within that circumscribed world Roberts has many successes, and these "carved reliefs of a humble art" (to borrow from the Seferis passage that serves as epigraph to the book) offer a good deal of pleasure.

Lazar Sarna's *Letters of State* is a curious book. A first reading left me feeling that I had been through a volume of translations from the French. Perhaps I'm influenced by knowing Sarna's *The Man Who Lived Near Nelligan*, but many lines sound like an average translation from some not quite specifiable French poet. Sarna's situation (he is a Montreal lawyer) perhaps explains this. His poems sound very un-English, and indeed often overreach themselves in a manner more common in certain types of Spanish or French verse (e.g., his description of an intersection as "conflicting urgencies / in the / universal history / of tar").

The subjects of these poems are at the opposite end of the scale from the other three books discussed here: the two longest poems ("Memoirs of an Elder Statesman" and "Camilien Houde and the Convict") are public and political works dealing with W. L. M. King and the former mayor of Montreal who was put in jail in 1940 for advising citizens to ignore the National Registration Act. Not exactly what one would term the ripe stuff of poesy, but Sarna goes a long way toward making this refractory material into verse. Unfortunately he doesn't go quite far enough, and the final impression one is left with is of a book with some fine lines, but dry rhythmically and rife with unconnected and strange images.

The small presses continue to be our lifeline, and perhaps it is more than one can expect that twenty-five per cent of what they publish as a whole should be fresh and interesting. These days, even amidst the receding flood, that is something to hang on to.

BRUCE WHITEMAN

NICHOL'S PROSE

BP NICHOL, *Journal*. Coach House Press, $4.00.

BP NICHOL, Craft Dinner. Aya Press, $5.95.

IN BOOK V OF *The Martyrology*, bp Nichol muses, "thinking constantly of friends / lives we've lived together / what is it makes up the poem / journeyal / a longing work."

There is the chiefest image in Nichol's dozens of books and chapbooks, in verse, prose, and drama. It is of motion and emotion, coterminous functions of the book-making. *The Martyrology*, twelve years and six hundred pages long now, tells us continuously that it is being penned on the road, between the home-

sites of friends, from feeling to feeling. *Journal* is a prose book that Nichol carried with him on trips around the country in the seventies.

The author carried for a few years a small ledger full of lines, filling it with words during his travels, then it was typed and printed, and as a book travelled out to his friends, more of them now. It suggests a pleasant relationship between lone life and publishing.

It is also a scarifying new novel derived of dreams and fears. The first chapter begins: "as these things are they are only dreams as i have told foretold the wish it seems to be made whole as words are extensions of our fears & longings." As in dreams, all the characters are manifestations of the dreamer, here a man in a cloak, a boy digging in the sand, a woman in a red dress, and a few other versions less often seen. Their mythic solitudes and meetings are the coming and going author, his functions as grown man, child, and female.

The Freudian displacement and synthesis are enforced by the shifting pronouns (the approach of the Concrete poet) as well as interchanged clothing (the dramatist) and the more radical shuffling of characters (post-Beckett novelist). As the characters un-name one another, hit each other, couple, they change inevitably it appears from the novelistic I, he, she, to the "we" one finds at the centre of the author's desire in *The Martyrology.*

That is why one naturally comes to say that in its confessional language of therapy, the incantatory father-hate passage, the repetitive rhythm, the fantasies fed by comic books, dreams, and the coagulated alphabet, *Journal* is the subconscious of the waking *Martyrology.*

The main theme of the book is loneliness, or perhaps more accurately "aloneness," and the hope that it can be ended or at least alleviated:

> such a funny lot we's such a funny thing we is we are & how far does that take us far enough to see the form of this history far enough to see we all of us are born & die not knowing each other this is a story of four of us this is a story of four of us not knowing each other & how that affected our living & dying

Nichol does convert incantation to narrative, but the intent is not so much to illuminate the world seen and remembered from the eyes (*à la* Munro), as to tell outward what's behind the eyes during composition. Where plot isn't happening, and language isn't action, where feeling is primary.

Journal is a successful derivation from Stein (Part II, 1 is an imitation of *The Making of Americans*), but the book's form is more like Beckett's, wherein the "writer" only sometimes mentions that he is writing. We receive it as a recitative exploring the relationship between creative fiction and happening life.

> we will say that that is what happened because it is & it did we will say these things & they are true & that is why we say them yes i will say these things & i will repeat them because i say them because they are true yes they are true & i am saying them & that is enough

But do not imagine that there is a lack of story here. *Journal* tells one of the few stories worth worrying about. At the very end the author says that "to speak to anyone you just put your book down look them in the eye & tell them what it is exactly that youre feeling." Those pronouns are not bad grammar. If a fiction is supposed to tell us how people feel together and apart, this is a successful fiction.

Craft Dinner is not a cheap meal but it collects most of Nichol's short fictions since 1966. As in the novel, he first makes himself busy destroying "distance," that shibboleth of the realists. At times he rather belabours the point. bp Nichol is never really witty, something that seems a

deficiency at times, but is often a strength, because he demands feeling more than any other response.

In this collection, nicely printed and bound by Tim and Elke Inkster, we'll find all kinds of extreme handlings of the page, the declaration that prose is first a spatial experience. The story might be simply "about" a man diddling a young woman on a B.C. ferry, but the setting is really the opened book. Canadian writers, unlike those in other civilized parts, are not given much to what Raymond Federman calls "surfiction." Kroetsch knows what it is, and goes after it with one of his eyes. Hugh Hood in his recent stories has been attacking his reputation as a realist. David Young's work will be recognized as a harbinger when it is better known. Ondaatje's *Coming Through Slaughter* is a fine post-modernist novel. bp Nichol, famous and dedicated, is doing our most serious anti-realistic work for us.

These pieces, thirteen in all, are all short. Their author, in a pre-realist tradition, wants them to operate "both ways a middle beginning ending." Here a text is called "ketchs," a kind of sketch which suggests that it will start when the reader gets his "s" in gear. "The Book of Days" is made of ruminations about contemplations about composing meditations. With Nichol one ceases wondering whether he is coming at one as poet or fiction writer. He just produces bp writing, and we read it, and they can worry about how to catalogue or reward it. The reader is not permitted passivity. It is no wonder that sometimes he will hanker for somebody comfortable to read, like a Margaret.

William H. Gass wrote that "for most people, fiction is history; fiction is history without tables, graphs, dates, imports, edicts, evidence, laws; history without hiatus — intelligible, simple, smooth. Fiction is sociology freed of statistics." Certainly that predilection is most popular in Canada, and it is re-enforced by our main literary critics. When Nichol's "The True Eventual Story of Billy the Kid" helped him to win his astonishing Governor-General's Award, it was argued into Hansard, and the decreation of history was at last begun here.

That story, and its two brothers, "The Long Weekend of Louis Riel," and "Two Heroes" (Billy & Louis) are, with their humour and their serious attack upon fiction as easy history, the best stuff in this book. Collected as "Three Western Tales," they argue events *versus* history, argue Riel *versus* the Canadian literary Riel industry, make a case for the reality of a Billy or a Louis, the actuality of writing, as opposed to the notion that we can make a thousand novels, plays, operas, epic poems about our past and thus produce a national consciousness or a "Canadian Tradition."

For that work bp Nichol deserves the gratitude of all future devotees of the art of fiction in this country.

E. E. GREENGRASS

HIGHJINKS & POWER

ANN COPELAND, *At Peace*. Oberon, $15.00; pa. $6.95.

ROBERT GIBBS, *I've Always Felt Sorry for Decimals*. Oberon, $12.95; pa. $5.95.

W. P. KINSELLA, *Scars*. Oberon, $12.95; pa. $5.95.

DAVID LEWIS STEIN, *City Boys*. Oberon, $12.95; pa. $5.95.

THE LAST TIME I ENCOUNTERED a collection of short stories that brought me right out of my seat was in 1976. Somebody gave me a copy of D. M. Fraser's *Class Warfare* just as I was setting off on the 50-mile trip home from Vancouver to Mission City, and I threw a glance into it at the next intersection because the light was slow. The recognition was immediate. Half a dozen stoplights and

repeated choruses of impatient honkings later I finally stopped trying to do two things at once, pulled over to the curb, shut off the engine and read the book cover to cover. It was a real treat.

Ann Copeland's short-fiction collection *At Peace* falls into the same category. It's a grouping of seven stories about a nunnery — Copeland reportedly spent much of her youth in one — and they're written with a degree of precision, insight and lightness of touch which is delightful to encounter and altogether gratifying to read. A good deal of the reason for this appears to lie in the qualities of Copeland's recollections themselves: vivid, sure, yet with a pleasing water-colour lack of ostentation; kindly, yet somehow utterly uncompromising. Copeland is one of those rare writers who seems able to describe people quite ruthlessly without appearing to be ruthless at all.

That last point warrants some examination because a hasty reading of *At Peace* might mislead the inattentive reader to decide that Copeland is too *nice* to her stories' principals. The conspicuous absence of hurled stone tablets and so on. In fact these projectiles are outlined quite distinctly, but not front stage centre, because for Copeland (I get the distinct impression) the simple separation into Sheep and Goats is a judge's, not a writer's function. As a result, while many of her characters might well register as perfect villains or angels on some people's moral scoreboard, Copeland somehow manages to make such judgments both unmistakable yet (ultimately) irrelevant. By the time she takes her pen off the page we have come to understand Sister Paula, Mother Clarence, Sister Gertrude or the Reverend Mother so well from the inside out, that we couldn't possibly expect them to be better or worse than they are. And that's not necessarily to be expected from an autobiographical account of life in a nunnery (or any closed or inward-looking community such as a monastery, prison, religious sect, etc.): the compression of a closed community's daily life into its regulation straitjacket normally affords such an unnaturally magnified view of human folly or charity that the temptation to melodramatize or take sides is almost irresistible. Few writers seem to manage it. Copeland manages it very well.

Much of my delight in the book came from the quality of its attention to the everyday details of convent life (I was reminded of the suppers of fresh rye bread, butter and a bottle of red wine we used to eat when tramping across France: simple and compelling). That there is, for example, a notable absence of maleness in a convent is as obvious to me as the fact that little children are short, but it took a film-maker's sensible decision to shoot a film about kids from a two-foot high tripod to fully drive the point about children home. Suddenly I realized the extent to which a young child's universe is composed of the undersides of things, the sides we really never intended anyone to see. Copeland's book is full of the same kind of touches. When a young nun is permitted to attend an educational conference in a nearby (secular) university after a lengthy submersion in the convent, her identification of maleness begins back at a beginning so fundamental, most of us probably don't remember (or at least pay attention to) it anymore:

> Still — the smells. Even now, when pipes and cigars had been extinguished as requested, there lingered an unmistakably male smell in the room. Ladies were sprinkled here and there, most in suits, several looking like trim grandmothers, but somehow they made little dent. Acrid, pungent smells she identified as male invaded her senses, seemed to float into her head and inflate it. And textures — like the arm of the jacket on the table beside her, lovely soft blue and grey (*herringbone* — from some buried jar of memory she extracted the term), a slight nap that invited the

> fingers, hidden now in the extra fold of long black sleeve designed to render nuns armless, handless in public ... She studied the shapes of legs in the first row, stocking colours — deep brown, navy blue, grey, one black even. She felt herself growing giddy, light-headed. The man opposite her had a marvellous beard, exquisitely trimmed. How does he do it, she wondered? His wife? Are there special beard trimmers now? What does it feel like?

If "simple and compelling" describes the book's spirit, it's a label largely applicable to its style as well. Copeland uses no fancy stylistic devices or techniques. Strictly by virtue of sharp and diligent observation, a roughly chronological development and by shifting the point of view from character to character as the stories progress, she succeeds in giving the reader an almost holistically photographic insight into the many-sided intricacies of sectarian life. In addition to having been privy to the most personal feelings and attitudes of the convent's various residents, I had the distinct sense of having been through the whole experience quite independently as well, as if I had been able to observe much more than simply that which the writer had provided on the page. In short, my only serious quibble with this book is with its binding. It fell apart after the second read.

Being read back to back with the likes of *At Peace* would put almost anyone's book at a disadvantage, and for the first few pages Robert Gibbs' *I've Always Felt Sorry for Decimals* seemed no exception. After Copeland's clarity and precision Gibbs' style seemed curiously cluttered and momentarily confusing, but after I'd become acclimatized I decided this was probably due largely to the way the dialogue was braided into the first-person narration, without being set off by indented, separate lines. The result is page after page of only occasionally paragraphed run-on monologue, giving the narration a faintly monotonous overdrone, which takes a bit of getting used to. But it's quickly worth it. The stories are immensely entertaining, all written from the point of view of an eight-year-old boy named Hutchison Killam, who, in close consultation with his mischievous little scamp of a six-year-old brother Pompman (the name alone is worth the price of the book) observes with bemused wonder the carryings-on of his pentecostal, holy-rolling, revivalist uncles and aunts. Who in turn, it can be testified, disappoint no one. I must confess I had no idea that so many of the more extravagant outcroppings of the Pentecostal and Baptist movements had found footing in the Maritimes. I've never even *heard* of half of the denominations Gibbs lists: The Latter Rain Free Fellowship, The Double Portion, The Nothingarians, The New Light, The Reformed Baptists, The Russelites, The Holy Rollers, The British Israelites. It seems clear that we can finally stop using Yoknapatawpha County as the standard conjuring device for the image of revivalist fervour.

The book is primarily about the boys, the adult shenanigans being used mainly as backdrop, but the backdrop proves so detailed and colourful and some of the incidents so telling (not to mention outrageous) that *Decimals* virtually doubles as a de facto folk-history of Maritime rural and small-town life, somewhat reminiscent in vitality and imagination of Roch Carrier's crazy tales of early twentieth-century rural Quebec. At the end of the book I was indeed left with the memory of two thoroughly loveable little rascals who had charmed my pants off for 147 pages, but I found I'd also developed a whole new sense of the Maritimes, its heritage and its real (as opposed to political) history. That proved an unexpected, and much appreciated, extra. Thus, *I've Always Felt Sorry for Decimals* does for small-town Atlantic Cana-

da what Alistair MacLeod's stories are doing for its outports and coastal villages. Slowly but surely the pieces are being fitted together.

In *Scars*, W. P. Kinsella creates a story-writing Indian named Silas Ermineskin who narrates sixteen tales about life on the Hobbema Reserve, where he lives with his friends Frank Fence-Post, Louis Coyote, Sadie One-Wound, Mad Etta, et al. The stories are for the most part hilarious, zany burlesques; clever, inventive, missing nary a cliché or stereotype but profiting briskly from that residue of truth found at the bottom of all platitudes. Quite frankly, I have a lot of misgivings about this book, but I feel like a prude admitting to them. What Kinsella has done, in effect, is create something like a Canadian Amos 'n Andy about Indians, and one could spend many column inches complaining about the stereotyped characters, the appropriateness (or lack of same) of a white man writing "autobiographical" fiction from an Indian's point of view (especially when his half-dozen Indian voices all sound exactly the same — like Anthony Quinn pretending to talk Inuit, Indian, or Arabic), the sometimes appalling sentimentality, the Muzak-ed renditions of white-Indian relations which coat such often tragic collisions with just enough humour to make them seem innocuous, harmless — in short, exactly the sort of arguments levelled time and time again against *Amos 'n Andy*, a show which portrayed black America as comfortably amusing, almost childlike, harmless — and because of its enormous popularity set back America's whites' understanding of America's blacks about 50 years. On the other hand, those stories were, as Kinsella's are, an extremely entertaining collection of highjinks which make for the most part very amusing reading, and at least one part of me resists the notion that every Newfie joke coming down the pike has to carry a full load of social responsibility on its shoulders. So you'll just have to make up your own mind whether your social conscience or your funny bone comes first. My decision seems to change every time I look at the book.

Which leaves, last but definitely not least, *City Boys*, a sort of David Stein "reader" containing new stories and old, an excerpt from an upcoming novel entitled *Taking Power*, and selections from various journalistic writings about New Left activities in Chicago, New York, Toronto, etc., which Stein filed from 1965 to 1970. This is a book which represents, grab-bag appearances to the contrary, a fairly thoughtfully organized assessment of the social/political implications of the sixties, written by a man who lived them hook line sinker yet kept at least one of himself always on the sidelines, writing it all down. The result is some extremely fine fiction which derives much of its urgency and forcefulness directly from that (Stein's) participant/observer combination; Stein is one of the very few writers I've encountered who is able to use his fiction to puzzle out the intricacies of politics and political morality without sounding tiresomely didactic or dogmatic. His stories live those questions just as much as he does.

Much of *City Boys* looks back. Both "The Avenue" and "Marvin, Marvin," two extraordinarily powerful stories about growing up Jewish in Toronto at a time when Torontonians still went to Buffalo for their kicks (as opposed to today when, ironically, it's the other way around), are the slightly sorrowful stock-takings of protagonists who have reached that (mid)point in their lives when the first mad dash is over, and when the fear of an anticlimactic future is greatest. Through them Stein touches base with his own origins, his own ideals and prejudices, his receipts and losses of grace, his revolutions and reactions. He also

manages to weave in a very sensibly handled perusal of what it meant to be a Canadian nationalist then and what it means today, the differences between the Canadian and the American approach to life, and what it means to be a Canadian writer in view of the above — all questions which have been flogged to death by theorizing public debaters but which are just beginning to come to real life in our poetry and fiction (which is probably where they really belong). The writing is brisk, clear and never self-indulgent, proving once again that a good fiction writer who commits journalism for a living always stands to gain a little extra from the cross-pollination of his two occupations. And at least three of the stories (comprising well over half the book) are so effective, so evocative and so utterly ruthlessly frank, that by the end of them I just ached — not only for the protagonist, but also for the writer, and for me.

ANDREAS SCHROEDER

GENTLE THEMATICS

JOHN MOSS, ed. *The Canadian Novel: Here and Now.* NC Press.

WHAT FORM SHOULD literary analysis take? Such speculation is spawned by a reading of John Moss's "Critical Anthology," *The Canadian Novel: Here and Now.* Only four of the fourteen pieces in it have not been published elsewhere. Of the others, six were originally published in *Journal of Canadian Fiction.* There is, of course, nothing wrong with this, although Moss seems to want to hide it. The real problem is with the choice of material. If these are the best articles Moss could find, I'm afraid we haven't been doing much. The introduction suggests that the only editorial limitation was to choose analyses which deal specifically with one of the six "most significant" contemporary Canadian novelists, Atwood, Davies, Laurence, Munro, Richler, and Wiebe. Even if one agrees with these "most significant," the works Moss chooses to "reveal and celebrate" them need some justification.

Almost all of the articles present gentle thematic treatments. Each goes through a series of interpretations and, in some cases, evaluations. The type of observation is well represented by the following statement from Allan Dueck's article about Rudy Wiebe:

> That the Indians in *Big Bear* share with the best Christians in Wiebe's other fiction an intense awareness of transcendent reality and a strong sense of peoplehood and equality suggests not that they are thinly disguised Mennonites but that Wiebe recognizes the validity of other varieties of religious experience than his own.

A nice statement. One that few, if any, would reject or even argue with. But what does it really say? Is there anything more to this than what every sensitive reader of Wiebe has thought? And this is one of the better pieces in the book. Is it worthwhile to publish a collection of what are really classroom interpretations of a series of novels?

One hesitates to damn thematic criticism in general and fall into the gaping trap of the formalists who seem waiting to grab us all. As one of my students once said, "Don't you think the novelist is more interested that we know what he is saying than that we dissect how he says it?" But because the writer's statement is usually reasonably clear to us, thematic studies must be something more.

One way to break new ground is to reappraise a work and to reroute critical interpretation. Another is to study someone who is not usually considered. A third opportunity is presented by unusual comparisons.

But the essays in this collection are mainly rather tired rehearsals of quite

familiar ideas. Even those that are exceptions have obvious faults. Frank Pesando provides some interesting perceptions about Margaret Laurence but it is the type of essay which requires an overview and there is no mention of *The Diviners*. The argument thus seems to be left hanging. The excuse, of course, is that Pesando's article appeared in *JCF* in 1973, a year before *The Diviners*. But Moss provides no dates for the original publication so one must become a detective to place essays like that of Pesando in historical perspective.

Tim Struther's insightful connections between Alice Munro and other writers of "photographs in print" is damaged by the imbalance between the introductory emphasis on the fact that these others are from the Southern United States and the failure to develop the American-Canadian comparison. If there is an "American influence" Struther doesn't show it. And Gordon Roper's very useful introduction to Jungian ideas does not become a well-integrated study of Davies. He misses the minutiae, although in many ways the minor and very specific points of Davies' use of Jung are the most revealing.

So why the book? I don't know. Most of the critics anthologized have written better pieces elsewhere, often on the same writers.

TERRY GOLDIE

MICROSCOPE

IVON OWEN and MORRIS WOLFE, eds., *The Best Modern Canadian Short Stories*. Hurtig, $12.95.

ROBERT WEAVER, ed., *Canadian Short Stories: Third Series*. Oxford, $5.95.

DOUGLAS BARBOUR, ed., *The Story So Far 5*. Coach House, $4.95.

JOHN METCALF and CLARK BLAISE, eds., *78: Best Canadian Stories*. Oberon, $15.00; pa. $6.95.

LET ME BEGIN WITH the microscope. Consider this passage:

> In the summer time the mountains were soft, deceptive in their innocency, full of crags and crevasses and arêtes and danger. In the winter they lay magnificent, white and much higher, it seemed, than in the summer time. They tossed, static, in almost visible motion against the sky, inhabited only by eagles and — so a man had told Mr. Willy, but he didn't believe the man —by mountain sheep and some cougars, bears, wild cats and, certainly, on the lower slopes, deer, and now a ski camp far out of sight.

These three sentences are not notable for economy or precision. The phrase "in the summer time" is needlessly repeated in the second sentence, and so is the word "man" in the third. It is not apparent why the archaic form "innocency" is used; nor is it clear whether the third sentence refers to winter, to summer, or to both seasons. The phrase "inhabited only by eagles" seems on first reading to apply to the nearest noun — "sky" — but when the other fauna are introduced, after a rather long qualifier, the reader is forced to detach the whole list from "sky" and apply it instead to the pronoun "they." Presumably the man whom Mr. Willy didn't believe told him about the deer and the ski camp, as well as about the sheep, cougars, wild cats and bears, but if so it isn't clear why the existence of the deer and the "out of sight" ski camp should be more certain than the existence

of the other things. And can a ski camp, strictly speaking, *inhabit* the mountains, in the way bears do?

Now this:

> Now in the early evening the sun is flashing everything in gold. It bathes the blunt grey rocks that loom yearningly out toward Europe and it touches upon the stunted spruce and the low-lying lichens and the delicate hardy ferns and the ganglia-rooted moss and the tiny tough rock cranberries. The grey and slanting rain squalls have swept in from the sea and then departed with all the suddenness of surprise marauders.

The tautness of these three sentences is at once apparent. Words do double and triple duty: "blunt" means not only "rounded, worn," but also "stubborn"; "slanting" refers to both the angle at which the rain has been falling and the rapid movement of the squalls across the land. An impression of resourceful life, persevering under difficult conditions, is economically conveyed in the oxymoronic phrases "delicate hardy ferns" and "tiny tough rock cranberries." "Ganglia-rooted moss" suggests both the lumpy appearance of the moss roots and their sinewy strength. We have already a fairly precise idea of the scene's location (Newfoundland) and the time of year (late spring).

I make no large claims for this exercise in stylistic analysis, and am certainly not suggesting that Ethel Wilson, the author of the first extract, is incapable of precision, nor that Alistair MacLeod (from whose "The Lost Salt Gift of Blood" the second extract comes) has a monopoly, among Canadian writers, over descriptive power. (The syntactical confusion of the Wilson passage can be defended, perhaps, as reflecting the superficiality of Mr. Willy's own attitude towards the scene outside his window.) My substantive point is this: the new generation of Canadian writers, particularly Blaise, Hood, Levine, MacLeod, Metcalf, Munro, Thompson and Wiebe, is setting a new high standard in short fiction for economy and "particularity" (Metcalf's term). In the twenty years since Robert Weaver edited *Canadian Short Stories* for Oxford's World's Classics series, Canadian writing has diversified out of all recognition, and criticism has some catching up to do.

Owen and Wolfe's *The Best Modern Canadian Short Stories* is intended as a landmark by which these changes might be measured — the editors call it a "stock-taking." Despite the claim implicit in its title, the reader who really wants to keep up with modern Canadian writing will find it out-of-date quite soon. (In the introduction, however, the editors are quite frank about the "conservative" tendency of their taste.) Morley Callaghan, Anne Hébert, Hugh Hood, Margaret Laurence, Alice Munro, Sinclair Ross, Gabrielle Roy, Rudy Wiebe and Ethel Wilson are represented, with fifteen others: among those omitted are Shirley Faessler, Mavis Gallant, Hugh Garner, John Metcalf, Joyce Carol Oates, Jane Rule, and Kent Thompson.

More than half the stories have "urban settings," as the introduction helpfully tells us; but this obscures the fact that a Canadian "urban setting" is very unlike New York or Paris. In Margaret Atwood's "Polarities," set in Edmonton, Louise, a graduate teaching assistant who adores Blake, tells her sceptical American friend "*The city has no right to be here.* I mean, why is it? No city should be here, this far north." The wilderness has receded, but it's lying low, biding its time, and every so often, like the Minotaur, it claims another victim: another mind is violated by that great white space. Its annual tribute is psychological, not carnal. Atwood's Louise, Rudy Wiebe's Mr. Tudor, Ethel Wilson's Mr. Willy, Hugh Hood's Ellie Haskell, all experience a peculiarly Canadian *anomie*, and yield up their minds to a monomania that will

somehow fill the interior space. A wilderness doesn't have to be geographical, as Thoreau realized in *Walden*. The transformation of geographical into mental space is most skilfully achieved by Hugh Hood, in "Three Halves of a House"; Ellie has tried apocalyptic religion to fill up that interior vacuum, but at the end she lies on her deathbed listening to the sirens of the ships passing by on the St. Lawrence, and she flows with the river (in a black parody of Anna Livia Plurabelle and the Liffey?) "down east past the Plains of Abraham, farther . . . to the darkness, the sleety impassible impassable Gulf." Hood's luminous sense of place and firmly voiced dialogue are outstanding features of this story.

Upholding or resuscitating an ancient culture is usually, in these stories, a pathetic or absurd gesture. Dave Godfrey's protagonist in "On the River" says of his family, "The only thing that held them together was the queen, I used to think, and of course that's absurd now." All the same, he buys his wife challah, "so your traditions don't die out in a new land." Small, even consciously trivial gestures replace the grandiose, exhausted faiths.

Escape is impossible, or is bought at a dear price. Norman Levine's Alexander Marsden escapes from the Jewish sector of Montreal, its "strong family and religious ties," to seek a "wider view of life" in England, but he finds nothing there for him but intellectual numbness. The land is strong, indeed; if you stay it may destroy you anyway, but if you go its vastness will pursue, haunt and emasculate you.

Robert Weaver's *Third Series* of stories, unlike the first two, has to share the field with other anthologies of high quality. It will hold its own. Three of the best stories in Owen-Wolfe ("Polarities," Alice Munro's "Material," and W. D. Valgardson's "Bloodflowers") also appear in Weaver's collection; the contributions of Clark Blaise, Norman Levine, Alistair MacLeod, Joyce Marshall, Audrey Thomas and Rudy Wiebe are better than their contributions to Owen-Wolfe, in my view. Weaver describes the anthology simply as "a collection of short fiction first published in the late 1960's and the 1970's," avoiding with wise modesty the claim that he is "taking stock." Childhood, continuity, ritual, the 1970's search for simplicity, the questioning of borderlines and barriers — these themes give the anthology a unity (not uniformity) which is more satisfying than the rather specious modernity of Owen and Wolfe. Children and old people, in the stories by Mavis Gallant, Alistair MacLeod, Joyce Marshall and Jane Rule, shake their heads wonderingly over the mid-life crises of the citified and prosperous middle-aged. Since Hagar Shipley we have listened to the very old and the very young again; they may not be seers blest, but at least their senses are not blunted by years of electronic hype and Ph.D. comprehensives.

Jane Rule's children ("My Father's House") have the awful lucidity that is caught so well by Danish writers like Karen Blixen ("The Dreaming Child") and Martin Andersen Nexø ("Adrift"), devoutly believing what they hear adults say, and applying it with disconcertingly unambiguous logic to what they see around them. Irina, in the story by Mavis Gallant, is the widow of a militant Swiss atheist, whose will patronizingly instructs their children to cherish Irina, "his flower," now he is gone. Tired of being cherished after a few Christmases Irina decides to stay at home and start living; her sons and daughters, worried, arrange for a grandchild to be sent to her, thinking she needs "a symbol of innocent, continuing life," but it is the child who will most profit from the visit. A complex, resonant story. In Alistair MacLeod's "The Lost Salt Gift of Blood," like

"Irina" a mysterious, understated tale, a middle-aged folklorist ("I have collected many things I did not understand") comes to Newfoundland where his child is being cared for by its grandparents. "The old and the young singing now their songs of loss in different comprehensions. Stranded here, alien of my middle generation, I tap my leather foot self-consciously. . . ." Reality, now, is something that happens to you before you are fifteen and after you are fifty, when the senses are alive and precious. John Metcalf's exiled English academic, recalling with Nabokovian vividness his childhood in southern England, is hard on Wordsworth — "no philosophical cast of mind can do justice to particularity" — but the story works only because Metcalf *can* do justice to particularity. He remembers the feel of Hampshire turf under his feet, and the fishermen's name for the bludgeon they use to stun fish.

Particularity in characterization is Alice Munro's strong suit. "Material," already reprinted from *Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You* (1974) by Rudy Wiebe in *Double Vision* (1976) and in Owen and Wolfe, reappears in this collection, but I would not have it left out. With Hugo Johnson — bearded, wildhaired, born in the bush, claiming experience as a lumberjack and beer-slinger (you need at least a slight acquaintance with the wilderness to make it as a male writer in Canada), playing Mellors to his wife's Lady Chatterley, adored by wives of doctors and engineers — Munro has half the writers-in-residence of Canada pinned and wriggling on the slab.

The sheer quality of the writing in the Weaver anthology — in the stories I have mentioned, but also in some vigorous work by Clark Blaise, Hugh Garner, Jack Hodgins, Audrey Thomas, Kent Thompson and Rudy Wiebe — makes it essential for any library of Canadian literature.

The "experimentalism" that is excluded from Weaver, and all but excluded from Owen-Wolfe (the exception being Jacques Ferron's "Mélie and the Bull"), is in full flower in Barbour's *The Story So Far 5*, which includes bp Nichol's graphic "Scraptures," Wayne Clifford's neo-Joycean, syncretistic "An Interruption," John Shirley's surreal and frankly rather tedious "Modern Transmutations of the Alchemist," Daphne Marlatt's story-about-a-story, "In the Beginning," and David Arnason's polymath "Binary Lovers." To my mind only the last two of these work, and Arnason's, though numerate and funny (yes, Virginia, there is humour in Canada), is so at the expense of (yes) another wenching, beer-swilling Hugo Johnson, and another culture-starved, man-hungry doctor's wife. (And Arnason's closing Fibonacci series is unfortunately made nonsense of by a silly misprint.) Dalphne Marlatt does what Ethel Wilson tried to do in "Crossing the Frontier," the story as journey, as bridge between real and imagined worlds; Marlatt has more economy and sophistication in narrative technique.

Steve McCaffery's "Sunday Funnies" aren't, as far as this reader is concerned, but his other contribution, "The Murder of Agatha Christie," includes a nineteen-line tour de force that turns article-plus-noun-plus-verb into a veritable, *véritable* nightmare. Brenda Riches ("Styx," a short short story of bizarre sexuality) and Stephen Scobie ("Gunfight") are more sure of themselves than most of the other experimenters: less is more. Wade Bell ("An Animal Tale") could take lessons in economy from either of them.

The remaining eight stories in *The Story So Far 5* are less innovative in form, but carry on the series' favourite role of opening up new territory. A summary of Jack Hodgins' "The Leper's Squint" (Canadian writer goes to Ireland to try and overleap the five generations divid-

ing him from his Irish ancestors) makes it sound unoriginal: it isn't. Philip Desmond is the most believable writer-protagonist in any of these anthologies, and though he is not beery, egotistical or anxious about impotence he holds the reader's attention completely. Bill Kinsella creates a wholly believable Indian community, waging a nasty but appropriate kind of biological warfare against the representatives of "Culture Canada" (who are none of them Canadians, of course): another lesson for anyone who thinks Canadian writing has to be humourless, and also one of the very few stories in these collections with a political edge. Tom Marshall deserves some kind of prize for the most tongue-in-cheek line of dialogue: "God, this is a boring town. I'm going to Toronto."

78: Best Canadian Stories, though not quite the *Michelin* of Canadian fiction as its blurb proclaims, is a good route map. Its ten stories (nine fewer than Barbour, eight fewer than Weaver) are of more consistent quality than Barbour's collection, yet sufficiently varied to suggest that the editors have avoided any kind of apriorism. It is (surprisingly) the only anthology of the four to print anything by Joyce Carol Oates — a skilful tale of nineteenth-century spiritualism, "Night-Side." Alice Munro heads the collection with an incisive, unsentimental story about love at graduate school, "The Beggar Maid." The Great Canadian Vacuum has its victims here, too: in Peter Behrens' "In Montreal" the recently tenured young archeologist, living in St. Henri for its cheapness and proletarian cosiness, watches his wife, a promising artist, pack away her pigments and give herself up to the insidious power of an incense-laden, ascetic religion. As with the MacLeod and Thomas stories in Weaver, many protagonists look for the simpler realities, but find they have been cheated of them: in Kent Thompson's "The Pilot," the air is heavy with a sexuality that fails to become quite tactile, just as the stunt pilot who is to entertain the Dominion Day crowds disappears into the fog, and fails even to amuse them by crashing. Not even baseball is immune from the joyless technocrats of the 70's. Hood's "Ghosts at Jarry" is as modern a story as any in *The Story So Far 5*, but it indicts neo-capitalistic megalomania much more effectively, placing the Olympic Stadium where it belongs. The hot-dogs at old Jarry Park may have been wet and turd-like, but they were real, they shared something with the earth itself ("without form and void"); at the Olympic Stadium the outfielders bounce around on an emerald-green easycare plastic surface out of a laboratory, the human smell of the game banished by 1984-ish architecture.

All four of these anthologies deserve to be read; three of them deserve to be reread, studied and *criticized*, for reasons given by a character named David Arnason in David Arnason's "Binary Lovers," who tells his students — in all seriousness, I hope — "the greatest art is that which gets the most and the best criticism.... that's why Canadian art is not superior. We haven't taken it seriously enough." We haven't: but we can start now.

ANTHONY JOHN HARDING

THE ART OF HAUNTING GHOSTS

MAVIS GALLANT, *From the Fifteenth District*. Macmillan, $12.95.

THE TITLE STORY IN *From the Fifteenth District* is an odd piece. In three anecdotal sketches, it tells three separate stories of haunting: but in the turnabout world of Mavis Gallant it is the ghosts who are haunted. People who remain alive pur-

sue, perceive them, and so perpetuate the images they have created of them, which are always external, and therefore always inaccurate. Major Emery Travella wishes to be rid of "the entire congregation of St. Michael and All Angels on Bartholomew Street," who pursue him with tape recorders and "burn incense under the pews"; Mrs. Ibrahim, mother of twelve, wishes to be rid of the doctor and social worker who refuse to agree on the truth of the treatment they have accorded her; and Mrs. Carlotte Essling wishes to be rid of a husband who keeps insisting she is an angel (whereas angels, she says, are either "messengers" or "paramilitary," and always "stupid"). Such sketches amply display Gallant's sardonic asperity and the precision of her social conscience. Yet what, as fiction, do they signify? One answer to this question might well be that they don't have to signify anything; they just have to exist, as artistically-turned objects for us to marvel at and pass by. But that won't do. Insistently the stories call attention to themselves, and then to something else; the nature of human relationship, perhaps — but that is too bland; more closely, our human compulsion to visit ourselves upon the past, in order to secure a significance we fear we might otherwise be unable to possess.

By chance, I read this book at the same time as I read Margaret Atwood's *Life Before Man*, a brittle elegy for the 1970's in which egocentricity triumphs over affection, demonstration over ceremony, and distance over relationship. Much about the old traditions ridiculed and rejected in Atwood's book is shown clearly to be ridiculous and rejectable, yet the empty generation of the story — despite sex and intellect: despite either Reason or Passion — can find no way to escape its own emptiness. Even the narratorial voice is aloof, cautious, caustic at critical moments as though insecure. About what? Presumably about what it all signifies. For ultimately the characters don't matter; they are *would-be* urban sophisticates, chocolate rabbits without centres. Readers are invited to watch them, but there is no life with which to engage; and all that does seem finally to matter in the book is the texture of the language itself, an inwardly-spiralling evocation of an attitude that in turn epitomizes an elusive decade.

In Gallant's world characters *do* matter, despite the fact that their lives seem often as bone-barren as any in Atwood's case studies. I think this is so because, however insignificant the lives, in each of them something of *consequence* happens. The textures of Gallant's stories — all as third-person as Atwood's — work to expose the fabric of consequence rather than the tissue of appearance. And the fictionality of "From the Fifteenth District" points to the process whereby such revelations happen.

The stories are set in Europe. French, Italian, Swiss, German, the characters are variously survivors, exiles, émigrés, border-crossers, visitors, and prisoners-of-war. But most of all, if we can trust the title story, ghosts. In "The Moslem Wife," for example, a woman named Netta Asher inherits a hotel and a world in the south of France, marries her cousin Jack Ross, and sets out to live an ordinary life. When World War II intervenes, catching her there and Jack in America, each develops separately, and when later she writes to him she wants to send the truth of her own experience:

> 'I suppose that you already have the fiction of all this. The fiction must be different, oh very different, from Italians sobbing with home-sickness in the night. The Germans were not real, they were specially got up for the events of the time.... Only in retreat did they develop faces and I noticed then that some were terrified and many were old....'
>
> This true story sounded so implausible that she decided never to send it. She wrote a sensible letter asking for sugar and rice

and for new books; nothing must be older than 1940.

But she cannot pass into new territory; his memory will not let her. He sends food but forgets about books, and then returns, asserting that a walk with her *before the War* was "the happiest event of his life." Despite all her intentions, all her experience, all the changes in her tangible self, she is haunted by this foreign presence that lays claim to the reality of a previous existence. Gallant then closes the story with one of those magnificent, moodily detached sentences which characterize her writing. In the face of Jack's flat declaration, no matter how unconvincing it is, Netta surrenders: "Having no reliable counter-event to put in its place, she let the memory stand."

One questions, of course, the satisfactoriness of such a relationship. But what the story does is make us aware of the inadequacy of any relationship, the nature of its genesis, and its undeniable reality. As with the finest of the other stories in the book — "The Remission," for example, in which a sick Englishman takes longer than expected to die on the Riviera, with an impact of an unexpected kind on his family; or "The Latehomecomer," in which a German prisoner-of-war is held longer than normal in France because his papers have been lost, and finally returns home unfulfillingly, wanting a prewar mother, who herself wants a postwar son — "The Moslem Wife" takes the present, twists it sharply with the past, and watches the exchange of ghosts. The picture that emerges is not a jolly one, though it is not without wry amusement, but it is intensely compassionate. To be human in Gallant's world is to be touched almost always by durations of distress, but it is not as a consequence to be out of reach of love. As a result, the book is an enormously satisfying one. Neither flamboyant nor slick nor particularly easy to read, it is a splendidly written work, full of nuance and personality and compellingly evocative detail. It draws us slowly into the vortices of human behaviour, and asks us to observe more faithfully than we might have thought possible the intricate simplicities of our fellows and ourselves.

W. H. NEW

NOW IN PAPER

Inexpensive paper editions of a number of Quebec texts are now available from Fides. The "Bibliothèque québécoise" series (complete with working bibliographies, chronologies, and critical comments) now includes Saint Denys-Garneau's *Poèmes choisis*; Alfred Desrochers's *A l'ombre de l'Orford*; and several novels, *histoires*, and story collections from the past (Rodolphe Girard's *Marie Calumet*), from mid-century (André Giroux's *Au delà des visages* and Alain Grandbois's *Les Voyages de Marco Polo*), and from the near-present (Honoré Beaugrand's *La Chasse-galerie*, Félix Leclerc's *Dialogues d'hommes et de bêtes*, and Robert de Roquebrune's *Testament de mon enfance*). All welcome back, in a helpful format for school use. Also available is a 3rd edition of Adrienne Choquette's *La Nuit ne dort pas*, with the addition of two unpublished tales (les presses Laurentiennes); and a French translation, by Eric Diacon, of Timothy Findley's *The Wars* (*Guerres*, L'arbre HMH).

W.H.N.

**** MICHAEL ONDAATJE, ed., *A Book of Beasts*, drawings by Tony Urquhart. Oberon, pa. $9.95. It is rare that anthologies of any kind are things of beauty, but this is a handsome book, a (relatively) inexpensive edition of a work that first appeared in 1971. Ondaatje has collected various "animal poems" — by Newlove, Coleman, Birney, Webb, Acorn, Atwood, Lane, and others. In themselves they are a pleasing collection, and an interesting commentary upon Canadians' fascination with animal tales; but with Urquhart's drawings as well, the book becomes an art object, to read and to admire.

W.N.

opinions and notes

WRITER AT PLAY

IN CONCLUDING HIS "Conclusion" to the most recent edition of the *Literary History of Canada* Northrop Frye enjoins us, rather soberly, to play for posterity. One Canadian writer to have taken this injunction fully to heart, but long before Frye's prompting, is George Woodcock. I mean no disrespect. Woodcock's play would stagger the average worker. He has written 50 books in the past 40 years and continues unabated. He has made a life of the game of letters and while very serious in his widespread interests has, one feels, always enjoyed playing at literature in Frye's elevated sense.

The more one looks at his professional play, the more one is struck by its variety. We knew him as critic, traveller, journalist, biographer, historian, poet, polemicist, political essayist and editor, not necessarily in that order. Who would have guessed that he is a playwright and translator as well? On the other hand, why not? In his preface to a verse translation of Racine's *Phèdre* he tells us that in the mid-1960's he translated several plays for Gerald Newman of Vancouver CBC, Molière's *Tartuffe* and *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* among them. His *Phaedra* is published in the Spring 1978 issue of *Contemporary Literature in Translation* and, as another example of his dramatic play, two other texts, originals this time, "The Island of Demons" and "Six Dry Cakes for the Hunted," appear in a volume entitled *Two Plays* published by Talonbooks.

Phèdre is a great bugbear to the English genius. Racine is the geometrician of the passions, measuring, bisecting, elaborating exquisitely precise and complex formulae of feeling. The tight structures of the French language, the niceties of its (to us) abstract vocabulary, the pellucid flow of the alexandrines, all are emphatically right for Racine; all are devilishly difficult to put into loose-structured, concrete-worded, (to them) thumping iambic pentameter. How does Woodcock make out?

His translation is trustworthy and regular. If one wishes to thread the labyrinth of Phèdre's passion, his decasyllabic line is a good guide. But perhaps he has been too faithful. The only liberty he takes is to allow a few archaisms. The effect to the English ear is a strict and somewhat stilted version as monotonous, in the long run, as those hypnotic French alexandrines.

In his preface Woodcock notes that he consulted no other translation. One understands this policy but, prompted by an invidious comparative urge, I read one other, a worthy competitor, Robert Lowell's *Phaedra* (1960). Lowell notes in *his* preface that Racine "has few verbally inspired lines" and, apologizing for "the fraudulence of my own heavy touch," allows that he introduced some "unRacinian humour and bombast." Although his translation is in rhyming couplets, compared to Woodcock's it is idiomatic and exciting. Perhaps the real test, the one to make the game more challenging, would have been to read some other translations, noting their excellence and shortcomings, and then to have tried to steer a still original course among them.

Alternatively, the translation might have been tested by being rehearsed by actors, and reworked several times by the author before it reached its final version. I do not know whether Woodcock's *Phaedra* had benefit of production. At any rate it cannot have received the long and close attention that David French's recent translation of Chekhov's *The Sea-*

gull did (General Publishing, 1978). French is able, because he worked intimately with the Tarragon Theatre production of the play, to give a version that (like Lowell's *Phaedra*) is modern but ageless, idiomatic without being idiosyncratic; one that is striking in its cleanness, naturalness and economy when compared to other Chekhov translations. In dramatic translation, as in everything to do with the theatre, nothing can replace experience gained by collective play.

What of Woodcock's original dramas? Although no mention is made of the fact, they are patently radio plays, or at least plays for voice principally; there is little action and stage effects are more audio than visual. The first, "The Island of Demons," is based on the legend of Marguerite, niece of Sieur de Roberval, who in 1541 was stranded for a winter on an island in the St. Lawrence. In Woodcock's play she is stranded there with her lover, her maidservant, and three demons "dressed in the style of modern public relations men," the demons of Doubt, Discord and Regret. Flaunting her uncle's disapproval of her love for a commoner, Marguerite hopes to live an Edenic life with him in the New World. But Canadian nature, as in Frye's dictum, proves to be primeval, pagan, terrifying and hostile. Her lover is killed by a bear, her maidservant by wolves, and Marguerite, haunted by demons, though rescued, is a broken woman.

In his critical writing Woodcock is sceptical of the simplicity of Margaret Atwood's *Survival* thesis, but his play is a dead ringer for it. The lover is a Position 1 victim, one who does not realize he is a victim: an aggressive imperialist European male romantic, he wants to dominate nature with his gun. The maidservant knows she is a victim but is religiously resigned to her fate: Position 2. Margaret struggles with her victimhood and her demons but, despite a last minute intervention by the Virgin Mary, she barely reaches Position 3. The moral of the play, for it is a morality, as in Atwood's "Progressive Insanities of a Pioneer," is that one cannot impose Old World patterns on the wilderness.

Apart from the fact that the action is thin and the animal executioners too obvious, the play might have more bite if it were not for the language. The human characters speak antiquated English, the PR demons bureaucratese. This kind of "poetic" diction lulls and dulls the senses when it should sharpen and assault them.

"Six Dry Cakes for the Hunted" is about the Northwest Rebellion and its hero is Gabriel Dumont. In his article on Atwood, Woodcock notes how typical it is of the Canadian martyr-complex to have chosen Brébeuf as subject for an epic instead of Dollard, and to have preferred Riel as folk-hero over Dumont. Does this play correct the imbalance? Perhaps in part. Dumont is an interesting character, shrewd and practical, but with the poetry of the prairies in him and the wisdom of the buffalo hunter. He is contrasted well with the visionary, theocratic Riel. He is a survivor. The play opens with his safe arrival at Fort Assiniboine in Montana after the battle of Batoche and consists of 15 flashback scenes recounting the failure of the rebellion.

Because there is more background to research in this "Canadian myth" than in the "Canadian legend" of Demon Island (Woodcock has written a book about Dumont), plot and character are stronger. Prose is also a better medium for the drama than the poetry of the previous play. Despite the documentary flavour, we do gain insight, dramatically, into the plight and heroism of the rebels and the justice of their cause. In the end, of course, it is another history of failure and Riel the victim steals the limelight from Dumont the survivor for all his courage, wiliness and stoicism. Had Dumont the

hunted hunter stood larger by some dramatic contrivance or other, he might have taken on stature as a truly mythic hero.

But here we are talking more about the nature of tragedy in general than of any Canadian victor/victim syndrome. Which is a good place to leave this wide-ranging discussion of Woodcock's work as it returns again to the larger context of creative play.

PHILIP STRATFORD

VOICES SET FREE

I WRITE ABOUT RADIO DRAMA and fairly recent developments that have made it a distinctive mode of dramatic writing; I shall propose that various liberating circumstances have enabled radio drama to proceed more boldly in certain experimental directions than either of the other main forms of Canadian drama — plays for the stage and plays for television.

This is not the first time radio has played a crucial role in Canadian dramatic writing and production. During the decades before theatre began to revive in Canada at the end of the 1950's, playwrights and actors spent far more time working for CBC radio than for the stage. They learnt their arts mainly in radio studios — for most of them there was nowhere else to learn. And they worked outside the CBC so rarely that in the 1940's and even later one would encounter dramatists with perhaps fifty radio plays to their credit who had not seen one of their plays on stage.

In the absence of live theatres producing Canadian plays, radio in that early period had to cater for all dramatic tastes. A title from the early days that has survived, *CBC Stage*, almost literally described what producers like Andrew Allan from the so-called Golden Age of Radio were attempting. Within the limits of their technical facilities, they tried to evolve a kind of play that, by closing one's eyes, one might imagine going on in a theatre. How to create the illusion of a visual dimension was a problem that in those days haunted both writers and producers; dialogue was written and sound effects were manipulated to stimulate the mind's eye. But in fact it is the mind's ear that radio most effectively stimulates — that region of perception where we hover between feeling and thought, in states of mind that do not require close anchoring to the visible world. In a Canada where the professional theatre survived only in a few large cities, radio was diverted from this natural course by the fact that it had to substitute, to offer the illusion of a theatre. It was conditioned by the demands and examples of both stage and cinema.

There were exceptions, indeed, even in those early days — allusive poetic plays that occasionally found their forlorn way into the pattern of visualizing realism. But in general it was less radio drama than radio documentary that began to explore the special possibilities of the audial medium. Unlike drama, documentary had no tradition before radio. It emerged during the socially conscious 1930's, when prose reportage, in the hands of writers like George Orwell and James Agee, gained recognition as a literary form. Documentary appeared, roughly simultaneously, in radio and film. At its best, in films like Flaherty's *Man of Aran*, the early film documentary used visual actuality in a poetic way to project a manner of life, a human plight, and so to evoke feeling that could not actually be represented on the screen. The radio documentary — of which the best early examples were produced by the BBC under Louis MacNeice and Rayner Heppenstall — attempted a similar task by audial means, and thus went beyond the static conventions of the stage that dominated

early radio drama and from which television drama has hardly even yet escaped. Radio documentary could range over time and acquire a historic scope which conventional early radio drama evaded. It was able to dispense with elaborate substitutes for visuality when it explored mental states that disembodied voices could project with no attempt to evoke a physical setting. And in ways resembling those of the classic Greek playwrights, it learnt how to deal with action, when that seemed dramatic, by remote allusion rather than direct description. The documentary from the beginning was in a very special sense a radio genre, at least in its sound form. It could not be adapted to the stage, where its lack of invention and visuality were obvious disadvantages; it did not work well in print for the very reason that made it an ideal radio form, its dependence on the special authenticity of the spoken word and on sound dramatically used.

If radio documentary differed from radio drama in not being *invented* in the sense of having a fictional plot, it was often more genuinely *imaginative* in the sense of creating a new and autonomous world in the mind's eye. As time went on, the two genres began to draw close. Documentaries began to contain invented scenes acted out within the body of the script, which established a sense of closeness, of emotional involvement, in a kind of programme that otherwise tended towards the middle distance of objectivity. And radio drama began to take over some of the narrational and other technical devices of documentary, though in the beginning these were used to enhance the visualizing theatricality of the sound play rather than to explore its audial possibilities.

The late fifties and early sixties were the period when radio drama began to undergo the radical changes that led to the kind of plays representative of contemporary radio drama, of which I shall discuss later the following examples produced by the CBC in Vancouver in recent years: *Hope: The Colours of Time* and *The Top of the World*, both by Michael Mercer; *The Assassination of Christopher Marlowe* by Eric Green; *A Love Song for Chile* by Santo Cervello; *Grasshopper Hill* by Betty Lambert; *The Apple in the Eye* by Margaret Hollingsworth; and *The Antique Bandit* by Laurence Gough.

These are plays of imagination rather than invention, of history merging into myth; plays that seem to surge from dreams and memories and to operate in that inner territory of the mind which lies between the subliminal and the conscious. At times they are almost parapsychological in linking minds by means other than conventional dialogue, and even when written in prose they advance in the direction of a new kind of poetic drama where the tones of words are as important as their denotations and where statements are more important for what they imply than for what they say. They speak above all to the mind's ear, and so they achieve what radio can best do.

Before I discuss these plays in detail, it is appropriate to enlarge on the changes in radio that made them possible. Negatively, television was a liberating influence by providing a directly visual substitute for stage drama, so that imitating the theatre was no longer necessary for radio which — with a thinned-down audience — began to explore sound itself as a stimulus to the imagination.

On the positive side, even before television decimated radio's audience, new kinds of radio drama were being heard. A key event was the BBC production of Dylan Thomas's *Under Milk Wood* in 1954. Literary critics have been inclined to dismiss this as one of Thomas's lesser works, since it reads loosely on the page in comparison with the concise intensity of his shorter poems. Theatre people find it vir-

tually impossible to project on the stage; it cannot *look* convincing. Thomas called it a "play for voices," and it was in fact a pattern of thoughts, spoken and unspoken, in the day of a Welsh village, a pattern dependent on echo rather than dialogue. When *Under Milk Wood* comes to an end, nothing much has happened in the ordinary theatrical sense, but our understanding of the way people's minds link beneath the surface of speech has been greatly enhanced. We have lived for a while in an autonomous poetic continuum, and it is we rather than the people in the play who emerge with our minds somewhat changed.

This is something quite different from ordinary theatrical drama or even the early visualizing kind of radio play. In a theatre our minds project onto the stage, where in Elizabethan times the privileged part of the audience actually sat. In the kind of radio drama developed since *Under Milk Wood* we open our minds to the voices, and the recent developments in dimensional sound technique through stereoscopic transmission mean that the voices no longer project forward from a speaker as they would from the pictorial space of a stage; they are all around us, impinging on other levels of listening consciousness as well as the thinking mind. One is, as it were, among speakers in a landscape of sound.

From the early 1960's onward CBC producers like John Reeves in Toronto, and a whole group in Vancouver — including Gerald Newman, Norman Newton, Robert Chesterman, and Don Mowatt — have been experimenting with plays which show that types of drama difficult on the stage can be very effective on radio. The temporary revival of verse plays on the stage which in the 1950's centred on the rocket-like career of Christopher Fry in Britain, proved that there was not much of a place for poetic drama, so dependent on the quality of sound, in the modern theatre. But verse plays and plays in lyrical prose, unnaturalistic in approach and very stylized in structure, have been notably successful on radio. Even plays once shelved as closet dramas because they seemed too literary for the stage have been produced effectively in sound. One example was Gerald Newman's production of Shelley's *The Cenci*, immensely powerful when one merely heard it. Another was Norman Newton's production of Peter Haworth's condensation of that neglected Canadian classic from pre-Confederation days, Charles Heavysege's neo-Jacobean *Count Filippo*. A third, produced by Gerald Newman, was my own verse translation of Racine's *Phèdre*, a play so stylized in the French neo-classical manner that English-speaking theatres have consistently avoided it. Like the other examples I have given, it worked on radio precisely because of its stylization, which gave an unvisual pattern for the mind to grasp, and also because its poetic character required so much emphasis on the sound of the language. To translate resonant neo-classical French into equally resonant modern English had been my problem, and that was an advantage in writing a play for radio, whereas it would have given a quite inappropriate emphasis on verbal form in a play for television or even the stage.

I think what I have said places the plays by Mercer, Green and others in the context of a kind of drama for voice and sound that for two decades now has been drawing away as a separate genre from stage and television drama, largely abandoning the stimulation of the visual yet not losing in dramatic impact; indeed, if anything, increasing that impact through the multiplication of levels of awareness.

The first four plays I mentioned — all produced by Don Mowatt — are historical in the sense that even when they are not concerned with historic personages

they are evoking states of mind in which significant events took place in another time. All, even in prose, verge on the poetic, using language connotatively and leading us by suggestion rather than facing us with statement. All make use of dramatic indirection in ways not unlike those of the classic Greek tragedians; they are not plays about events as such, but plays about the states of mind that lead to events and lead out of them. Thus in Eric Green's *The Assassination of Christopher Marlowe* we do not hear Marlowe being killed, but we enter deeply into his mind and the minds of those whose motives made his death inevitable. In Michael Mercer's *The Top of the World* we do not hear the slaughter of the Icelanders by the Greenlanders at the bidding of the half-mad Freydis, but we do become wholly involved in the world of memory and guilt through which the killers sail back from Vinland to Greenland.

Hope: The Colours of Time is a play that at first sight seems in the lineage of *Under Milk Wood*, and the resemblance is not accidental, since Mercer intended it in part as tribute to Thomas. Like *Under Milk Wood*, it evokes a day from prewaking to sleeping in the lives of a small community, and just as Thomas called *Under Milk Wood* a "play for voices," Mercer called *Hope: The Colours of Time* "a drama for voices," using disembodied speech and sound as thoroughly as Thomas so that the play becomes a pointilliste mosaic of voices reflecting various stages of awareness and creating a mood vision of place and time that stands in the mind like a translucent structure of memory.

But there the resemblance between Thomas and Mercer ends, and a more ironic and less vatic mind takes over. The title — *Hope: The Colours of Time* — conveys something of the layers of intent. The place where the play takes place is the mountainfoot village of Hope at the start of the long hard gold-miners' road to the Cariboo. The "time" of the title is 1911 when "hope" in the form of mining prospects fills the village. Here the word *colours* plays its ambiguous role, for in mining terminology "colours" means the yellow glitter in a pan that tells a prospector he may have struck pay dirt. The strike at Hope (we learn from a historic voice at the end) is a hoax, but on the day of the play's action nobody knows the future and the atmosphere is hopeful. As for "time," it digs down through the play to the bedrock of the past, of daft deaf Daddy Yates's senile and tumbled memories of the Fraser Valley rush of 1858 when the colours spoke true.

Daddy Yates tells nothing, but others enter his dreams through their own, for *Hope: The Colours of Time* makes great use of a kind of telepathic consciousness in which people's thoughts and dreams interact. It begins with two narrational voices that alternate through the play. One, Mercer remarks, "delivers chiefly concrete information"; it is the voice of the past — what would be history if it were important enough. The speaking characters exist in what that first voice calls "a promising present that lies between an unknown future and an undistinguished past." It is a 1911 present of hope streaked with loss, for even if gold is found the deer will never come down again from the mountain and the fish have almost gone from the river. The second narrational voice, a lyrical one, embraces all in a kind of external poetic present, symbolized in the dew-bearing chill that moves into Hope before the dawn:

> In this river-born chill, the dreams of a river-born town germinate under the warmth of feather comforters and counterpanes: they grow in a head, in a bed, in a room in a building in a town; and take root finally in the friendly soil of an inward world far from the shriek of the lumber-

mill cat, that now cries on the steps of the Coquihalla Hotel.

Only five characters speak, their voices first emerging to tell in broken pattern of the dream of Daddy Yates, remembering the virgin river and the ten thousand men with uncombed beards: "And in the midst of it all, Daddy Yates, a man barely boy dancing a jig with a jug in a ring of teethwhite goldcapped faces that stop up the spaces between the trees." The voices of Hope are those of a precise and patronizing hotel keeper, a grumpy and constipated real estateman, a braggart hardrock miner, a naive Irish hotel maid in love with the local bounder, and a spiteful puritanical widow who "sees herself as Queen Victoria without the error of children."

Sometimes they meet in street or hotel and their talk is direct; sometimes their thoughts converse as discontinuously as a Chekhov dialogue; at one point their waking voices ordering medicines in daytime penetrate through memory into druggist Duckering's dreams of walking through a pharmacopia transformed into landscape. Duckering never speaks; he remains in the background like a shaman with magical secrets. Daddy Yates never speaks; he has opted into the everlasting present of senility. The speaking voices trace a day in the town's life when Daddy almost shoots the puritanical widow, taking her for a magpie, when the hotel maid's lover receives a suspended sentence for robbery but does not return, when the gold miner's futile hopes are boosted and boasted, when people leave for Vancouver and galled packhorses for the mines, when meals are eaten and malice is exchanged, when poker is played and constipation endures. All is enclosed in a tense membrane of speech and sound, ironic, punning and parodic. The play ends in the deliberate anti-climax of the prosaic first voice telling us how all the hope of Hope failed. The colours we are left with are not those of gold; they are the mutable colours of time, ghosts of a hopeful day, and the drama lies in the contrast between the hard precision of history as we record it and the nebulous discontinuum of human consciousness that is any ordinary day in any place in time.

The Top of the World complements the ahistoric way *Hope: The Colours of Time* treats history with the sharp edge of episodic drama. This is not a play about any day in any place. It is about a stark, bloody event that marked the dawn of known Canadian history: the tale told in *The Greenlanders' Saga* of how Freydis, Leif Ericsson's half-sister, caused the slaughter of Helge the Icelander, his men and their women, on a voyage to Newfoundland.

Mercer precipitates us into the soundridden world of the north, where birds cry and water speaks, ice creaks and whales call to celebrate a cold world whose land is meagre and whose deep waters are full of life. The murders have taken place; the murderers are returning in the great ship the Icelanders once owned. The mists close in, full of ghostly guilts and as the ship's course sets for Greenland and a due reckoning, the tale of the murders is revealed in the memories of Freydis and her companions.

It is the treacherous age of Macbeth, yet the hearts of the voyagers are harrowed by recollection, and they think and whisper about what they have bound themselves by blood oath not to tell. The ancient violence of the sagas is evoked, in a setting where animals are moved by the same stark fatalities as seem to have moved Freydis to the madness in which she led her husband and his men to slay the Icelanders. Going beyond the Greenlanders' Saga, which suggests that Freydis acted out of mere greed, Mercer etches in an affair between her and Helge, the Icelandic leader, which Helge for politic rea-

sons ends, stirring a fury of mortification in Freydis and lifting what might easily be mere historical melodrama into an authentic revenger's tragedy.

The death of Christopher Marlowe has long fascinated historians, and the original official explanation — that he was killed in self-defence during a tavern brawl by a political spy named Ingram Frizer — has long been discounted in view of evidence suggesting that Marlowe was killed because his freethinking statements embarrassed notable people who had patronized him.

In *The Assassination of Christopher Marlowe* Eric Green takes the tangle of facts and suppositions and weaves them into a tragedy which is not a mere murder play — for, as I have said, we are not made witnesses of Marlowe's death — but a dramatic clash of motives and views of life. Marlowe is shown as a Promethean rather than a Faustian — one who seeks to offer men the truth even when it seems a dangerous gift. He is a paradoxical figure, zesting for life in all its animal and intellectual amplitude, yet aware that in the age he inhabits such zest can be self-destructive; one can find death in seeking too hard for life. Against him are ranged all those who, though some of them are touched by the questing intellectualism of the Renaissance, are tainted even more by those calculations which made a later dramatist, John Webster, declare in *The Duchess of Malfi* that "a politician is the devil's quilted anvil." As the play goes on we see Marlowe attacked by bigots and perjurers, betrayed by fearful friends like Thomas Kyd, cast off by his patron Walsingham who dreads contamination by association, and finally abandoned by the Queen who for a time defended him on the grounds of poetic liberty. Left to paid killers, Marlowe dies a victim of the state that dare not openly condemn him.

Eric Green, too, manipulates telepathic states, so that when Kyd is tortured in the Tower his cries alternate with the thoughts of Marlowe in the London streets, and as Marlowe's death draws near it is not the assassination we hear but the concatenation of his betrayers' voices justifying themselves. To my mind the real strength of the play is in the powerful use of language in dialogue. Marlowe does not speak in the pentameters of his plays, but in a rich and muscular prose that sounds authentically like the speech of the man who would have written *Dr. Faustus.* Perhaps the most dramatic confrontation during the play, the meeting between the poet and Elizabeth, gains its effect from the contrast between the natural vigour of Marlowe's speech and the baroque elaboration with which the Queen talks of the perils attending monarchy and the duties of poets in an intricate eloquence that disguises how she is enslaved by her own power. It is a fine play about the moral dangers of politics and perhaps, ironically, it gains some of its authenticity from the fact that Green has himself dabbled in the political arts.

We all know Wordsworth's poetic recipe of "emotion recollected in tranquillity," and I think something similar applies in historic drama. It only works well — on radio as on stage — if there is a distance in time and if the dramatist can look on his subject with a measure of compassionate detachment. *A Love Song for Chile* is not as good as the three plays I have just discussed because the author, Santo Cervello, is still so passionately involved and therefore so partisan. The tragedy of Chile is a poignant one and may well become the subject of great historical drama, but not yet.

A Love Song for Chile is the story of three boys brought up in a Chilean village who become adult at the time Allende's government topples towards crisis. One becomes a folk singer; one a trade union leader; and the third a political spy

for the right. The action goes backward and forward in time to show the links between manhood and childhood, and this is well done. But there is a baroque excess about many aspects of the play that comes from the burning desire to vindicate a cause. The language is florid, the symbolism of dying birds and wounded stallions and predatory eagles is heavily obvious, and there is a partial regression to old-style radio drama in the desire to create dazzling visual tableaux in the mind: in the unwillingness to trust in speech and sometimes let the speech drop near to silence. *A Love Song for Chile* is a play that attempts to use current directions in radio drama, but gets tangled up in unrestrained sincerity and remains too much on the level of unassimilated argument to achieve the haunting mixture of distance and intimacy, of myth and dream, which characterizes the most appealing of modern radio drama.

The expansion of history into myth, as in Michael Mercer's plays, and the reconstruction of history in terms of psychologically plausible alternatives, as in Eric Green's Marlowe play, are two of the functions the new radio drama will fulfill. But the liberation of relationships-in-time and of subliminal speech, which figure in such plays, can be, and are, used for different purposes by other contemporary radio dramatists who are concerned with those ambiguities of human relationships that can be seen outside the context of time — the relationships that are not amenable to logical arrangement because they emerge from the irrational sub-strata of behaviour and consciousness.

There is, indeed, a superficial historical element to Betty Lambert's oddly titled *Grasshopper Hill*, since at one end of its twisted funnel of human relationships lies that arch-realm of the irrational and atrocious in behaviour, the Hitlerian Third Reich. But *Grasshopper Hill*, we are told very clearly, is a "memory drama," not a historical play, and there are two levels of memory involved.

The play begins at a railway station where pseudo-lovers part, Gustav leaving Vancouver, Susan seeing him go; one knows from the immediately following snatch of dialogue between Susan and a woman friend that this is the end of the relationship. And from this point the different levels of memory react on each other. First there are the more probably exact memories of Susan — a not-so-young university teacher, thinking over the relationship from the moment when she first encountered this young German whom she thought an unregenerate Nazi, down through the tortuous pattern of their encounters in which we perceive, by means of what he tells her (again transmuted through her memory), the bizarre reality (or pseudo-reality) of his life before he reached Canada.

It is a tangle of betrayals and self-transformations. For Gustav, whose behaviour is so much that of the authoritarian German, presents himself as the Jew who saved his own skin in the concentration camps until the point when he could escape and become a partisan, killing Germans, and eventually betraying the camp guard who had more than once saved his life and whom, in his misogynist homosexuality, he seems to have loved. But are we ever sure that the story is true? Is it not perhaps a tale invented to establish power over the women he meets in Canada — not only the narrator Susan, but also her student, whom he seduces, and the others who are not named? Is the elaborate play within the play, in which Gustav tries to make Susan imagine herself a mother in an ingenious Nazi exercise testing the strength of human affections by involving the mother's child as an alternative victim — is this no more than a charade that is really only part of his victimization of Susan? I know of one real-life Vancouver story of

a victimizing victim which may or may not be the origin of *Grasshopper Hill*, but which does suggest to me that the true centre of the play is not actually Gustav's past, not whether he was a Nazi or a collaborating Jew, but rather the way in which the past, made real in the mind, can dominate and shape the present. This, as I have said, is presented as a "memory drama," and memory — as Proust showed us — is not necessarily what happened; it is the myth in the mind that controls our perception of now as well as then, and it is history's opposite.

Betty Lambert has been writing radio plays for well over a decade, and this is one of her best, against which the remaining two plays, interesting as they are, seem slighter stuff, using the mental recessions, the complex mnemonic echoes that radio techniques now make possible, with less complex effect.

Laurence Gough's *The Antique Bandit*, which Robert Chesterman also produced, is modern radio drama's equivalent of the well-made play. The plot is a traditional one: the villainous hosts — in this case a landlady and her lover — who plot to murder their guests for the sake of their money. Lillian and Seymour have already done in one old man when Howard, a wanderer with few possessions, arrives and looks like being an ideal victim. But Howard is in fact a clever bank robber who operates under the guise of an enfeebled blind dotard, and Lillian and Seymour are undone when they take it on themselves to open his mysterious wooden chest just as the police arrive on an anonymous tip, given in fact by Howard (who had just carried out his biggest coup and who intends to escape after he has seen his enemies arrested). But there is a last ironic twist, grimly worthy of Maupassant, as Howard and the police captain sit down to eat the little poisoned feast which Lillian and Seymour have prepared for Howard.

The point of *The Antique Bandit* in terms of the new radio drama is that it is constructed in speech situations which do not need visualization for us to know what has been going on and to admire the play of rival cunnings that is in operation. Indeed, there are so many dim rooms and dark stairways in Lillian's house and also in the minds of the characters that one can describe *The Antique Bandit* as a very anti-visual play.

Which is not quite the case with Margaret Hollingsworth's *The Apple in the Eye*, produced by Tom Kerr, where drama shifts on to a stream-of-consciousness level that one rarely encounters outside experimental fiction. There are only two characters (if one discounts the voice of a football commentator), Gemma and her academic husband Martin. Martin's is always a "present voice," a man speaking in his household with the authority that Sunday leisure allows him. Gemma speaks in a "present" voice as she responds to Martin, and also in a "thought" voice that partly constructs the background to their relationship — what actually happens in physical terms on their Sunday, and in part cultivates Gemma's unending Molly-Bloomish fantasies. The current fantasy transforms Martin into Marat about to be dragged out of his bath by Gemma's alter ego, Saskis, but this is later superseded by a vision of an elusive apple, first seen speared on Gemma's toe and finally being drunk down by Martin as she drops it into his late afternoon sherry. It is surrealist drama, extreme and amusing, and especially interesting because it brings back the visual into radio playwriting, but in quite a different way from the illusionist visualization of early radio, which was intended to add verisimilitude to scenes the listener created in his mind's eye. Here, in *The Apple in the Eye*, a singularly appropriate title for such a play, the visual image is liberated into a different kind of plausi-

bility, that of the daydreaming mind searching out new symbolic patterns of existence in startling concatenations of objects that take on an active life of their own within the fiction — not unlike that of things in the *choseiste* novels of the French *nouvelle vague* a decade or more ago.

GEORGE WOODCOCK

BETTY LAMBERT'S "SQRIEUX-DE-DIEU"

SCRATCH THE SURFACE of a popular sex comedy and what do you find? romantic sentimentalism? tragic satire? a Message? the Void? or, simply, nothing at all? We have not often had the chance to make such an experiment on a Canadian play. Before the recent flowering of Canadian drama, the comic voice was faint at best. It babbled virtuously of romance, it tried to echo Shaw and the wit of British drawing rooms, it said a few smart things about history and politics. But not much. Recently, the comic voice has gained strength — in both languages. Yet there has been precious little that fits the rubric "popular sex comedy." Theatre Passe Muraille's *I Love You, Baby Blue* is about sex, but it is not a comedy; Ken Gass's *Hurray for Johnny Canuck* is a comedy but it deliberately excludes sex; Eric Nicol's *Free at Last* is not very popular. And Bernard Slade got away.

But Betty Lambert's *Sqrieux-de-Dieu* fills the bill admirably. Welcomed in Vancouver in 1975, lavishly praised in Lennoxville in 1976 and 1977, anticipated rather nervously by some of the smaller provinces when it toured in 1977, it is a first-rate sex comedy. The success of its surface has been attested to by newspaper reviewers from coast to coast. Most of them liked it because, in typical phrases, it "dares to be nothing more than honestly commercial" and has "no pretensions to being more than very good entertainment." One or two disliked it for the same reasons. This "zany sex farce," this "smash hit," this "marvellous piece of nonsense" caused, single-handedly, the Lennoxville festival and Canadian drama to "come of age." Audiences blushed and laughed. Actresses became nationally known stars. Artistic directors queued up to inquire if they might produce it.

The plot gives some new twists to tried and true comic formulas. In the eternal triangle, the mistress, Gracie, though a corporation lawyer with three degrees, is a frustrated homebody, while the wife, Brenda, conducts amateur group therapy sessions and tries, with black leather and the usual appurtenances thereof, to fulfill her promise that her husband's sex life will never be boring. The husband enjoys beer, television, and domesticity with his mistress. Being a macaroni - and - cheese man — Velveeta, at that — he does not enjoy his wife's surprises. When, near the end of the play, the two women change places, he is quite relieved. Yet as the triangle loses one corner, it acquires another; a new mistress, his former student, Susan, moves over to occupy that corner, or bed. There is a touch of "Captain's Paradise" about it, but the variation on the old theme is still fresh and funny.

Susan is literally the centrepiece of the group therapy session in Scene Two. Naked except for lashings of ketchup and imitation whipped cream, she lies on a wooden chest, surrounded by Brenda's group, who are supposed to raise their consciousnesses of their own sensuality by licking the red and white guck from her body. Only Nelson, a "beautiful late-hippie,"[1] refuses to participate. Fearing for the ozone layer because the cream came from a spray can, he has retreated into the lotus position in search of inner peace. Gramma, Brenda's mother, a fascinated and sardonic observer of these

goings-on, says Nelson is concentrating on his "manta ray." Here and elsewhere the satiric barbs bristle on the very surface of the play. No need to scratch deeper for them. Trendy psychologizing, upper-middle-class stodginess, fashionable kinkiness, clichés of the counter-culture and the self-expression set: all are neatly skewered and held up to be laughed at.

But the satire goes deeper than that. One or two reviewers followed it down to the second layer, discovering there a play about relationships between people, about communication and role-playing. It is also a play about the difficulties, in our permissive age, of knowing oneself, knowing which role is the right one, especially if one is a woman. Brenda, with her whip and ankle chain, serving her husband raw oysters for breakfast, is as pathetic as she is comic. Wife and mother, she wants to be the perpetually exciting mistress. She attempts to achieve this ideal with her paraphernalia from the love shop, her oysters and macramé, her half-baked group therapy, carefully planned strategies as inappropriate as boning up on Masters and Johnson would be for a Maenad attempting to achieve Dionysian ecstasy. At the end of the play she switches to another set of paraphernalia—Gracie's high-rise apartment, complete with swimming pool, sauna, and intercom — confident that these new toys will deliver the happiness she expects. As she turns to the single life, Brenda may be beginning to understand that relationships to others are founded on relationship to oneself, but she does not yet understand that relationship to oneself cannot be created from outer forms.

Gracie does understand. As the play opens, her need to be wife and mother is growing within her after years of lying to her "lining" with the pill. The outer forms of home, husband, and children (ready-made) are bestowed upon her when she changes places with Brenda, but the depth of her need, which is established in the first scene, brings real meaning to the outer forms of the role. And Gracie understands roles. In the first scene, which consists of a dialogue between George and Gracie in her apartment, she plays his wife, referring to the Gracie he is having an affair with as a third person. The audience does not know her identity until the scene ends as George exits: "'Night, George"; "'Night, Gracie."[2] There are roles within roles. George and Gracie are watching a movie on TV and discuss the actors and actresses; George imitates W. C. Fields and Groucho Marx; they echo lines from "Brief Encounter" and play with accents; finally, Gracie brings a ketchup-covered knife from the kitchen, claiming that she has murdered the children, à la Albee only more so. It is all very clever and vastly amusing; at the same time, it points to Gracie's consciousness of role, an intelligent consciousness that is still functioning when she accepts Brenda's place "for the moment." She understands more about relationships to self and to others than Brenda does.

Gracie and Brenda are wife, mother, and mistress. Susan, the whipped-cream girl, completes the spectrum of female roles because she is a virgin. As such, she is profoundly attractive to George, who still resents the fact that Brenda was pregnant when they married, even though he was her first lover and the father of her child. The cycle is about to begin again when, at the end of the play, George kisses Gracie good-bye and accepts Susan's offer of a ride to work. His final line resonates with suggestions: "We who are about to die salute you!" The old sexual meaning of "die" is obvious, as is George's mock fear of the Porsche 914 Susan is driving. And George is indeed going forth to do battle with Susan, a fact which makes connections with deeper layers of the play. As a student, she at-

tended only one of George's lectures. She left the course because he was "reading from old notes," including an old joke in the margin about a book he meant to write; his performance was not boring but showed, according to Susan, that George was bored. "I knew I was going to have to save you," she states calmly. George is aware of the danger when a woman is "after his soul" and calls Susan "the priestess of an ancient fertility cult" who will "regenerate" him after she tears him to pieces with her bare hands. The extravagant statement is funny, especially when Gramma comments, "That'll be nice." It also forges a link between this "sex farce" and Euripides' *Bacchae*, in which the Maenads dismember Pentheus in that very manner. Clearly, the new triangle will not be exactly like the triangle which has gone before.

But *Sqrieux-de-Dieu* is not the *Bacchae*; it is a comedy, solidly located within the conventions of that genre, which adds another layer to its meaning. Traditionally, comedy moves from sorrow to joy, from situations and relationships that are painful, frustrating, or otherwise unsatisfactory, to situations and relationships in which life is renewed, repressions liberated, desires fulfilled. There is no one "blocking" character to be overcome here, to use Frye's term; Brenda and George "block" each other, themselves, and Gracie, until, under the influence of Dionysus in the form of a pitcher of martinis, George confesses to Brenda that he has been having an affair for five years. Although she doesn't believe him, this confession is the turning point that makes possible the rearrangement of everybody's life — that is, the comic renewal.

Paradoxically, while its liberating sometimes goes so far as to be revolutionary, comedy is also profoundly conservative, conservative of the on-going social order.[3] The renewal for the individual is also the renewal for society. Gracie will have a baby; Susan will lose her virginity; George may write his book; Brenda, having scrapped her therapy group, will look for a job. All of this will be accomplished with no upheaval of the existing family; George's four children still have home, father, and mother — albeit a different mother and probably a better one. The social order has been both conserved and regenerated: the traditional paradoxical accomplishment of comedy. This time it has been done rather in the manner of a Cabinet shuffle, and, like such shuffles, brings no real guarantee of permanent improvement. But the possibility is there. The principals are alive and moving, perhaps even moving forward. There are no traditional weddings or dances to conclude this comedy; its final statement is not that unequivocal. But Brenda goes off to what she feels will be freedom, Gracie goes off to her longed-for kitchen, and George goes off with Susan. Nelson, the beautiful late-hippie, wanders in from the garden at the last minute, playing his flute. Gramma recognizes the tune "and stretches up her arms to embrace the morning" as the music comes up and the curtain comes down. It is the "Ode to Joy."

Gramma brings us down to yet another layer. After the barbed farce, the thoughtful satire, and the traditional comedy, we arrive at myth. This is not to say that the play is disunified. All the layers interpenetrate: Susan, for example, is the new mistress of comedy and the gorgeous nude of farce — and more; Brenda is the obvious butt of farcical laughter and the less obvious object of thoughtful satire. But we need myth to understand Gramma.

Gramma killed her husband. The subject of death is nearly taboo in most comedy.[4] People may be presumed dead, if they are made to reappear. Very occasionally, a remote death may be reported, like that of the Princess's father in *Love's*

Labour's Lost. When a character in the play dies, like the little boy in *The Winter's Tale*, we are uneasy about "comedy" and reclassify the play as "drama" or "romance" or perhaps "problem comedy." And surely murderers are rare in comedy. Yet Gramma killed her husband.

Act Two opens with Gramma tidying up after the night of whip, chain, and martinis, singing "All things bright and beautiful" — a nice bit of irony — and announcing that she has decided to be the reincarnation of the Great Earth Mother. In her long soliloquy, she speaks of her aging, of her husband who was "a fine big man" but who grew long in the tooth, of her efforts to renew their life together. Nothing worked, not even rejuvenation pills from a handsome travelling salesman, the Watkins' Man. On a morning that a Chinook had fooled into thinking it was spring, Gramma mixed Paris Green with the Saskatoon berry jam and killed her husband. The Year God must die when his powers fail. This Pentheus was not resurrected like a true Year God, but better death than sterile life. Gramma's husband understands: "just before the end, he saw my logic." She had meant to die too, but the sunrise, the crocuses, and a meadowlark changed her mind: the priestess does not follow the sacrifice to the underworld. She survives to become the Earth Mother, the Chorus of the play, the senior citizen misunderstood by the younger generation (except for George) but understanding them. When the taxi comes to take Brenda away, Brenda feels a pang about her mother: "I know you're never going to understand." But she does: "Just go, Brenda. Maybe it's better than Paris Green." The old priestess recognizes the ritual of renewal, no matter what its guise. Even her funny "That'll be nice" when George fantasizes about Susan sacrificing him on her altar can be understood as the utterance of the priestess as well as the farcical one-liner of the supposedly daffy oldster. This time the sacrifice may be resurrected. Comedy is life-enhancing; George is getting Susan instead of Paris Green. His final exit line ("We who are about to die salute you!") does contain the possibility of death, physical or psychic, but it also contains the possibility of victory, a feeling supported by the "Ode to Joy."

In addition to Gramma, other characters and elements in the play help to create the mythic, even specifically classical, layer. Gracie's knife dripping with ketchup suggests Medea's murder of her children for revenge against Jason. The next scene shows Susan, wearing both whipped cream and ketchup, naked on what looks rather like an altar and surrounded by the therapy group devotees. And, of course, Susan is the young priestess who will sacrifice and regenerate George. George needs regeneration; his "vital fluids are ... on vacation.... In Hawaii." Not even Gracie's vibrator can bring them back. Susan may, unless George is too far gone in hubris. He seems to think he is in control; it is both funny and frightening when, after Gracie and Brenda have arranged their switch, George preens himself: "it would seem to appear that I've worked things out rather well." The gods, in the person of Susan, who "just ... appeared. Out of the Blue," may have something to say about that. There is even a direct mention of Greece. George, groaning at the thought of the sexual surprises Brenda has in store for him that night, contemplates killing her, but Gramma doesn't think much of the idea. "Don't be silly, George," she says. "It would take enormous energy to kill Brenda. Have you ever thought of sending her on one of those educational tours of Greece?" Perhaps contact with her cultural roots would help this strong but misguided bacchante to reach her ecstasy.

Myth pervades the play — the farce, the satire, the comedy — and myth lies deeper than farce, satire, or comedy. Perhaps this is where the genres blend, for myth also lies beneath tragedy. Perhaps this is why Plato has Socrates point out in the *Symposium* that the genius of comedy is the same as that of tragedy, and that the true artist in tragedy is also an artist in comedy — a passage that Betty Lambert likes to append to the reading list when she teaches a course in drama.[5] The passage stands as a warning to those who would mistake the Reddi-Wip surface of this play for the Cordon Bleu cake inside.

NOTES

[1] Betty Lambert, *Sqrieux-de-Dieu* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1976).

[2] Despite the echo here of the Burns and Allen radio show, Betty Lambert disclaims any intentional reference.

[3] A frequent notion among theorists of comedy. See, e.g., Wylie Sypher, "The Meanings of Comedy" (1956), in *Comedy: Meaning and Form*, ed. Robert W. Corrigan (San Francisco: Chandler, 1965), pp. 18-60, especially p. 51.

[4] Murder and war comedies are an obvious exception; Hitchcock thrillers are often comic and *Johnny Canuck* is full of corpses, slain with two-dimensional cardboard guns.

[5] "SFU English Department Course Offerings," Fall 1979, p. 37; her list for a different course (p. 26) includes Euripides' *Bacchae*. I am grateful to Betty Lambert for lending me her files of newspaper reviews and correspondence about her play. I do not think my reading of the play has been unduly influenced by the author's intentions revealed in her letters to W. B. Davis, the Artistic Director at Lennoxville; for instance, when she calls Susan an "assassin" and says that Gramma went to bed with the Watkins' Man the night before she killed her husband, I do not find these "hard facts" in the text of the play, however real they may be to the author. But I need the author's notes for an explanation of the title. It was her own private "childhood curse": "when I got myself into another mess (thinking I could control life), I always said, 'Oh scroodidoo.'" The term has come to mean "the Screw of God. If I have to be literal"; and the gods do not tolerate hubris. There are further overtones: people think the play says "Screw the middle-class god . . . and in a way it does say that." The suggestions in the title reverberate throughout the layers of the play. (Quotations from a letter to W. B. Davis, 13 February 1976.)

ANN MESSENGER

ALIEN VISION IN CANADIAN DRAMA

FROM THE BRILLIANT FIGURE OF OEDIPUS, who is in turn outsider, redeemer and outcast, drama appears to have cast up a series of misfits who could not be ignored by their respective societies. In this country of newcomers and ethnic diversity, it is not surprising to see Canada's first major dramatist build his dramatic *magnum opus, Saul*, around two great outsider figures. Charles Heavysege, an English immigrant who arrived in Montreal in 1853, gained sufficient stimulation from the Old Testament story of Israel's first two kings, Saul and David, to transmute I *Samuel*: 8-31 into three five-act plays. As in the biblical source, Saul and David are outsider kings, called to their high office from obscurity through God's personal choice and the agency of the prophet Samuel. The first of these poetic dramas shows us Saul's rise from anonymity to ruler of a nation and vanquisher of her external enemies; it also shows Saul's moment of disobedience to God when he spares the life of Aga, king of the massacred Amalekites. This moment is merely a crystallization of Saul's growing pride. From then on, until the catastrophe in Act VI of the third part of this trilogy, we see Saul increasingly in the grip of Malzah, a demon sent by God to plague Saul. He is incapacitated for his appointed task of leader and redeemer of Israel, and the need for a new redeemer

— another outsider, the boy David — is clearly shown. David, however, unlike Saul, gives full credit to God as the source of his extraordinary abilities.

A different kind of figure is the Redeemer. Charles Mair, a native Canadian, sets his epic drama of national deliverance, *Tecumseh*, in Upper Canada, 1812. His redeemer figures, General Brock and the Indian leader Tecumseh, are both destroyed in their courageous resistance of the American invaders. But Canada is saved. The titular hero of this poetic drama is clearly represented as the good leader who gives his life in order to protect his people:

> Oh, I have loved my life,
> Not for my own but for my people's cause.
> Who now will knit them? who will lead them on?
> .....
> O Mighty Spirit, shelter — save — my people!

And it is a Judas figure, Brock's successor Proctor, who is to blame for Tecumseh's death on the battlefield. Writing their plays without the support of an indigenous dramatic tradition, that is, Canada's two dramatic pioneers, Heavysege and Mair, found matter and manner enough in the Bible and the Christian vision of life. These sources, moreover, provided them with figures of a kind that later Canadian drama also made use of in a kind of alien vision.

As *The Oxford English Dictionary* shows, there is no necessary connection between the nature and status of an outsider and that of a redeemer or of an outcast. The outsider is "one who is outside of or does not belong to a specified company, set, or party, a non-member . . . one whose position is on the outside of some group or series." No moral values attach themselves to this definition, which refers to social position only. If the use of this term in the context of horse-trading is added, another dimension of the outsider may become clearer: an outsider is "a horse not included among the 'favourites,' and against which in betting long odds are laid; one not 'in the running.' " The difficulties created for David by Saul during the greater part of Heavysege's tragedy, and those heaped upon Tecumseh by his own brother, the Prophet, as well as by Proctor, greatly reduce respective chances of success and, indeed, of survival. We may, then, accept as a limited definition of the outsider in Canadian drama that he is a character who does not belong to the dominant social group of the play and whose struggles to prove himself to that group are rendered more difficult either by indifference of the majority or active opposition from one or more insiders or competing outsiders. From the point of view of the insiders, the outsider may be a nuisance, a mystery, or as in the case of David and Tecumseh, a saviour in times of crisis, an infuser of new ideas for those who have run out of ideas.

Some Canadian dramatists appear to be fascinated by the kind of person who is not a complete outsider to a particular group but who, because he feels himself somehow undervalued by the majority, acts against the best interests of the group and who, when recognized for what he is, is made an outcast for his misdeeds. One such destructive man apart, who is excluded from the circle of fortune's favourites, is Desjardins, a scheming notary in Wilfred Campbell's poetical tragedy *Daulac*. He manipulates the society of aristocrats and their servants (which forms the microcosm of this play about France and New France) to create advantages for himself at the expense, in particular, of the gallant titular hero whom he cheats out of his inheritance and whose uncle he murders. Under the guise of friendship, he makes every effort to ruin the love between the hero and his fiancée, the beautiful and gentle

Hélène, largely because he himself desires the love of this socially and morally superior woman. His unmasking as an enemy is accomplished at the battle of the Long Sault of 1660, where he has assumed the outward appearance of Daulac's Huron enemy:

> DAULAC: What mean you, Desjardins? why this sinister mask?
> DESJARDINS: Are you a dauntless spirit?
> DAULAC: Whatever Daulac's faults, and he hath many,
> No mortal ever turned him where he faced!
> . . . . . .
> DESJARDINS: Then know the truth: this is the true Desjardins;
> The other was the mask. . . .
> Desjardins' vengeance hath not burned in vain.
> . . . . . .
> You think you are a hero, you who are
> A poor tricked creature, taken in my cunning.
> You ask how you have sinned. In your whole being!
> You crossed my nature since your earliest years.
> All that you had I lacked, I speak it plain,
> And hated you with an instinctive hate.
> You little knew the hell that walked your side,
> The enemy that crept into your life,
> That probed your very weakness, searched your follies,
> To take you in this final trap at last.

This passage reminds us of Milton's ascription of motive (envy of the Son of God) to the rebel angels, led by Lucifer/Satan. Iago's envy of his betters and his jealous suspicion which combine to motivate his hideous "revenge" upon them likewise come to mind. As Bernard Spivack has demonstrated in *Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil*, the fatal scheming conducted under the mask of friendship to the victim links Iago with the Vice figure of medieval drama. This Vice character was the leader of the Seven Deadly Sins in their assault upon Mankind; he was the chief tempter of the fallible human hero at the centre of the morality play. The motive of envy as well as the method of temptation combined with deceit derives from the arch-tempter and eternal outcast, Satan, whose war of guile against God and His creation took the line of least resistance: the seduction of weak and credulous mankind.

A recent example of this type of outsider behaviour provides the action of Robertson Davies' *At My Heart's Core*. The three spirited pioneer women (Frances Stewart, Catherine Parr Traill, and Susanna Moodie) who share the function of protagonist in this ironic comedy, are deliberately tempted and then shown to have succumbed to temptation by Edmund Cantwell, an Irish immigrant who has decided to give up on Upper Canada. The recognition scene reveals his character and motives:

> MRS. MOODIE: Do you mean that you did what you did in revenge upon us?
> CANTWELL: Do you recall your boast to me, this morning, that there was no temptation in the forest? It was you, Mrs. Traill, who said that there was nothing here which might lead ladies of gentle birth and good education astray. You were mistaken.
> . . . . . .
> I have observed that there is one temptation which only the strongest spirits can resist. It is the temptation of discontent. . . . It is only the crude seducer who takes a woman's honour, and in order to do that he must have some liking for her. It is a more lasting and serious injury to rob her of her peace of mind. These ladies will never, I think, know perfect content again. They will say to themselves that my temptation was beneath contempt, but they will never be free from it. It will always linger at the heart's core. And yet a little humility this morning, and a little charity toward Mrs. Cantwell a few months ago, might have spared them this distress.

The features of perfect obedience to God, and self-sacrifice for the common good which is associated with Christ and Old Testament types of Christ, were discerned in the dramatic figures of David and Tecumseh. One of them was an outsider of lowly status who was chosen to achieve

greatness, imitating the typical story of the male Cinderella folk-tale hero; the other, an ethnic outsider to Anglo-Saxon Upper Canadian society, belongs to the epic tradition: he makes a heroic last stand for a doomed nation, the North American Indians, and at the same time, like Roland at Roncesvalles, stems the invading tide for the sake of his friends and allies. The two Satanic outsiders are imposters and tricksters, character types frequently found in folklore. These characters always enjoy fooling and cheating their victims, their behaviour is a kind of sport or game for them. They like to boast about their exploits, particularly to their victims. Desjardins, the professional man, belongs to the folk-tale category of helper, but he is a false helper; Cantwell, the Irishman, is another ethnic outsider and, through his particular culture, may be related to the mischief-makers of Celtic mythology.

Whether a particular outsider reveals himself or herself as redeemer or as outcast, as bringer of joy or misery, depends partly upon the character and motive of the outsiders; it depends as much upon the community into which this outsider is introduced by the dramatist. To what tasks does the community put him or her? What identities does it project upon the outsider? What missing element does it obtain from the outsider? Munroe Scott emphasizes this protean indefiniteness of the outsider very well in *Wu-feng*. The outsider in this play, quite appropriately, is nameless; among the *dramatis personae* he appears merely as "Stranger: A Chinese wanderer." He is perceived by the inhabitants of the play's Formosan mountain village according to their individual attitudes towards outsiders: Piong-shih, Head Chief of the Mount Ali Tribe, casts him in the role of wandering beggar, and the Stranger does not refuse this role. Margama, Piong-shih's disinherited son, and his friends, who wish to restore the ancient tribal scapegoat harvest ritual, perceive other possibilities in the Stranger:

> POOLEE: We are planning a festival. A stranger will be useful.
>
> MARGAMA: Forgive our clumsy use of the High Tongue. Poolee means that a stranger, travelling alone and with no powerful friends, will be "welcome".
>
> LI-YU: It is a folk festival.
>
> POOLEE: There will be music, dancing, and a beautiful, beautiful ceremony. It will touch you deeply.
>
> LI-YU: You can participate.

In the play's recognition scene, the Stranger explains his personal philosophy:

> STRANGER: I am whatever people wish me to be. (*Indicating Piong-shih*) He said I was a beggar. I became a beggar. (*To Wu*) You said I was a scholar. I became a scholar. (*To Serenity*) She said I was her lover. I became her lover.
>
> WU-FENG: What madness is this?
>
> STRANGER: Madness? Is it madness to serve others? I abdicate my desires, my emotions, my needs, myself — all — everything — to the service of others.

What an outsider is allowed to contribute to a particular dramatic microcosm also depends very much upon the structure of the play. Is it a comedy? a tragedy? an absurd play? From what initial condition is the community to be moved? to what final condition? Merrill Denison's *Marsh Hay*, an ironic comedy, exhibits a depressed backwoods community in which the women are drudges and the men bullies. When it appears that the younger daughter of the Serang family has become pregnant as the result of a rape, the characteristic squalor of the Serang household changes for a short time to tidiness and an atmosphere of mutual caring. This change is the consequence of the chance appearance of a stranger:

> PETE: I wonder what changed maw, anyways?
>
> JO: I aint sure but they was a city woman that went through to Pembroke in a car

> and she had a puncture outside our gate and she come in. It was just after maw learned about Sarilin. She talked to her.
>
> PETE: ... What did she say to maw?
>
> JO: ... after she went maw stayed out there by the gate for an hour, lookin down the road. 'N she went round in a kind of a daze and wouldn't speak to no one.

Lena Serang explains her changed outlook to her neighbour, Mrs. Clantch, by contrasting the stranger's ideas ("She says now that the baby was comin the only thing to do was to give it the best chancet as we could....") with the local minister's conventional condemnation of "illegitimacy." But the play's ironic structure demands that this enlightened doctrine of true charity be shelved: when the pregnancy of Sarilin is discovered to have been a hoax, everything returns to "normal" and the society of the backwoods is spared the effort of self-examination and regeneration.

When the gospel of Christian love and forgiveness is brought to an isolated Inuit community living by its traditional morality of blood-revenge, tragedy is the result of this culture clash in Leonard Peterson's *The Great Hunger*. The tragic resolution is by no means inevitable; though the traditional view has very powerful supporters, especially in the person of the shamaness Saodlu, the Christian message brought by Pitsoolak, a stranger to the band but also an Inuit, appears for a time to triumph over the old religion. It is again the discovery that a fraud is involved in this new and supposedly better way of life which results in the triumph of the "unregenerate" way of life. The fraud, in this case, is the outsider himself: though Pitsoolak counsels forgiveness of an old murder to Noona, the tragic hero and revenger-designate, Pitsoolak does not practice what he preaches. He murders Saodlu because she has defeated him in a contest of religious and priestly powers. Though he escapes, an outcast once more, Noona loses his life in the ensuing revenge-confrontation with his stepfather, the murderer of his natural father.

The alien vision is not always defeated by the conservatism of the community. In two of Robertson Davies' comedies it is fairly successful in breaking down old attitudes and creating readiness for change. Franz Szabo, the "Fifth Business" character of *Fortune, My Foe*, is a Czech refugee who entertains a sampling of Kingston's "establishment" with his art of puppetry. His puppeteer's version of Don Quixote and his philosophy of art serve as a kind of touchstone for a variety of Kingston tempers. Mrs. Philpott and Mr. Tapscott of the Recreation Committee respond with the narrowness of the mental health faddist:

> MATTIE [Philpott]: ... we have psychology today, you know. We can't show a play to children which has a maladjusted person as the chief character.
>
> NICHOLAS: But Don Quixote is one of the great characters of the world's literature.
>
> TAPSCOTT: No, Mrs. Philpott is right. You teach kids to make fun of a lunatic and first thing you know they'll all be delinquents.
>
> MATTIE: ... We've got to protect the child against such brutal stories as this! ... We can't throw overboard thirty years of child psychology!

Ursula Simonds, the token Communist among the characters, reminds Szabo of reactions he tried to leave behind the Iron Curtain:

> URSULA: You're all wrong, the whole pack of you! The play is no good because it has no message! Give it meaning! Make Sancho the proletariat; make Don Quixote class government; make the windmills capitalism and private profit! Then you will have a play that makes sense!
>
> NICHOLAS: Then you'll have a chunk of propaganda!

The most intelligent response is assigned to James "Chilly" Steele, the proprietor of the private club at which this puppet performance is staged:

> CHILLY: I never expected to see anything like that in this joint. It gives me a feeling I haven't had since I was a kid — a religious feeling.... You know how religion is: you've always suspected that something existed, and you've wished and prayed that it did exist, and in your dreams you've seen little bits of it, but to save your life you couldn't describe it or put a name to it. Then, all of a sudden, there it is, and you feel grateful, and humble, and wonder how you ever doubted it. That little stage makes me feel like that —

Nicholas Hayward, the play's comic hero, is a junior instructor in English at Queen's University and is capable of a fairly sophisticated response to art:

> NICHOLAS: ... I see exactly what Chilly means. I feel much the same myself. It fills a need in the heart. Why not call the feeling it arouses religious? Look at it: brilliant colour, warmth and gaiety — qualities men once sought in the churches, and seek in vain, now....

What is, however, most significant about the alien vision in this play is the outsider who brings it to the Kingstonians: because of Franz Szabo's determination to "stick it out" in Canada, Nicholas Hayward, who had intended to make his academic fortune in the U.S.A., decides to stay in Canada as well:

> NICHOLAS: ... If you can stay in Canada, I can, too. Everybody says Canada is a hard country to govern, but nobody mentions that for some people it is also a hard country to live in. Still, if we all run away it will never be any better. So let the geniuses of easy virtue go southward; I know what they feel too well to blame them. But for some of us there is no choice; let Canada do what she will with us, we must stay.

The other Davies comedy in which personal regeneration and social transformation grow out of the efforts of a foreigner, *Hunting Stuart*, relies upon the infusion of glorious family history to raise the oppressed hero above his oppressors. The outsider, again a "Fifth Business" character, with the exotic name of Dr. Maria Clementina Sobieska, enters the stuffy society of Ottawa civil servants as a "distinguished figure in the world of ethnopsychology . . . deeply concerned with the problems of heredity." She brings to the Stuart household the message that its despised "head," Henry Benedict Stuart, unsuccessful in the Ottawa establishment because of his supposed German origin, is in actuality "the oldest living direct descendant of the Royal House of Stuart." By means of recall of the ancestral past under hypnosis, Henry Benedict Stuart proves the truth of her claim. He enacts, unknown to himself, the character of Bonnie Prince Charlie, his glamorous forebear. Return to his former drab, wife-dominated existence holds no appeal for him after his trance is over:

> *He moves downstage in the moonlight, finds a number in the telephone directory, and dials it.*
>
> British Airways? I want a passage on your next flight to Scotland ... Tonight, if possible.... Yes, it is urgent — Government business — oh yes, on the highest level.
>
> *He smiles as the* CURTAIN *falls.*

Intellectual, moral or aesthetic superiority does not constitute a necessary part of the outsider's equipment. Some outsiders represent the underprivileged, the true outcasts of our society. Rita Joe, West Coast Indian heroine of George Ryga's *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*, cannot comprehend the reasons for white society's legal and social buffettings of herself and her associates. Mona, the gentle homosexual among the "toughs" of John Herbert's prison society in *Fortune and Men's Eyes*, cannot match the superior survival skills of his fellow homosexuals. Tit-Coq, illegitimate titular hero of Gélinas' sardonic comedy about the triumph of conventional respectability over love, ends where he began: an outcast from the society of the legitimates. These outsiders, like their more fortunate counterparts in the plays already examined, hear a different drummer than the members of the

group from which they are excluded. Unlike them, they lack the social prestige which would incline the insiders to listen to their version of reality. In each of these plays, the outsider character suffers harassment because, like the Stranger in *Wu-feng*, he or she is perceived by more than one of the insiders to be poor, alone, and without powerful friends. These characters are society's victims; they are too weak to turn their outsider status into an asset; they are too different from the insiders to allow assimilation; they are too noticeable to be ignored. The insiders, therefore, turn on them. They may drive them out into a social wilderness, they may punish and imprison them, they may maim and kill these outsiders. As Frazer pointed out many years ago in his *Golden Bough*, the treatment of the scapegoat has nothing to do with the chosen individual's personal merit or lack of it; the scapegoat is simply a convenient vehicle to convey the accumulated evils out of the community.

While there may be little resemblance between the successful transformers of society, such as Heavysege's David or Davies' Franz Szabo, and these poor and helpless victims of its intolerance, it is possible to detect in both types of outsider phases of the mythological hero-redeemer. Jung and Kerényi, in their *Essays on a Science of Mythology*, explored certain aspects of the universal archetype of the child-god and the child-hero, and agreed substantially with Otto Rank's earlier findings, published as *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero*. Common features of child-god and child-hero are unusual circumstances of birth, adversities of early childhood, including abandonment and danger through persecution. According to Jung and Kerényi, these universal tendencies in hero-legends and myths symbolize the potentialities present in the newly born and the difficulties and dangers which must be endured and overcome if these potentialities are to be actualized. Joseph Campbell's study, *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, traces these typical hero experiences as phases of the universal pattern of the adventure of the hero, whether the hero be warrior, lover, or redeemer. He or she who would fulfil the difficult task of the hero must first become an outsider, must separate himself or herself from the community, must undergo a series of ordeals as well as a kind of ritual death; the reborn hero, who has become a spouse of the gods, returns to the community with a special gift from the gods. But some do not return. These are the victims of the ordeals, who collapse under the burdens imposed upon them. Others are strong enough to win their way back. They live to transform their societies. George Ryga's *Ecstasy of Rita Joe* concentrates on the tragic phase of the hero's adventure, Robertson Davies' *Fortune, My Foe* on the phase of the triumph over adversity and infusion of the wisdom gained into a community which stands in need of such redemption.

The overall tendency in Canadian plays is to present outsiders as pathetic, that is, as victims, or as benign, as redeemers. But the large number of ethnic and cultural outsiders in Canadian drama, whether new immigrants like Franz Szabo or original inhabitants like Rita Joe, also appears to mirror truthfully the particular social fabric of our country. Our strangers in drama are often mysterious not because they are evil but because they are alien.

ROTA LISTER

CANADA ON THE ENGLISH STAGE, 1704

Liberty Asserted (1704), a tragedy by John Dennis, has the uncertain distinction of being the first representation on

the English stage of the North American Indian. It is an inauspicious debut, a dubious honour for both the drama and the Indian. The play is very much a product of limiting and peculiar theatrical and political circumstances. The popular tradition of the Noble Savage, to which the play contributes, is a tradition more savage than noble, reflecting the essentially egocentric involvement of the Europeans with the natives of the New World. Nevertheless, the play is interesting as a record of a Canadian presence in the English literary consciousness, as an instance of the literary exploration, if not exploitation, of the discovery in North America of real counterparts to the ancient concept of a pre-civilized man, and as an example of neoclassical tragic theory in practice. John Dennis (1657-1734) is of course best known as a critic; this was his most successful play, first produced at the Lincoln's Inn Fields Theatre on 24th February 1704, and performed eleven times in that year.[1]

The play is set in Canada, taking as its starting point the French-Iroquois wars which came to a tentative close in the summer of 1696, when the Governor of New France, Louis de Buade, Comte de Frontenac, led a desultory final campaign against the decimated and war-weary Indians. The *dramatis personae* include a heavily fictionalized Governor Frontenac, an idealized English general named Beaufort who is the ally of the Iroquois, and a young Indian warrior named Ulamar, who bears the ethical, political, and romantic burdens of the play on his broadly heroic back. Ulamar and his mournful, histrionic mother Sakia are "wretched slaves," Hurons by birth, who were captured by the Iroquois twelve years prior to the time of the play and deceived into slavery. Ulamar has grown to manhood under the tutelage of the "generous Beaufort," and has renounced his Huron birth and become a triumphant leader of the Five Nations of the Iroquois in war against the French and Hurons. Both Beaufort and Ulamar love Irene, daughter of Zephario, an Iroquois chief; Beaufort is awarded her hand in marriage, but graciously deeds her to the younger Ulamar; "O noble Friendship! Unexampl'd Rivalship!"

Sakia, however, deplores her son's betrothal and his history in war; her "dread Secret" is that Ulamar "No Huron is, nor of Canadian kind, but descended of a Christian Sire," the French nobleman, Miramont. When she learns that Ulamar has narrowly missed killing a commander named Miramont on the battlefield, she insists that her son negotiate a peace treaty with the French. Ulamar at first refuses to betray the Iroquois and "God-like Liberty," but he is clearly moved by his mother's plea. Ulamar's *hamartia* is unfortunately the play's structural flaw; after establishing at great length that a peace treaty with the perfidious French is the most foolish course of action for the Indians, Ulamar is then moved to propose such a treaty upon hearing that his mother is poised for suicide. Beaufort, horrified but sympathetic, intones the moral of the play:

> This is what has captivated Europe
> Where their domestic Interest most prefer
> Before the Weal and Honour of their Country
> Though private Good on public Weal depends. . . . (III,vi)

Within moments, the French have broken the treaty and killed most of the Iroquois. Governor Frontenac and his kinsman Miramont shamefacedly appear, apologizing for the treason that they as commanders are helpless to prevent because "from Europe the severe Command arrived." Dennis is satirical throughout the play in his treatment of "those pests of human race the French." Louis XIV is *in absentia* the real villain of the piece; Frontenac and Miramont are seen as

"prostituted to thy Monarch's Pride." Happily, Ulamar detects in Frontenac "the seeds of every noble virtue, but by Custom / And vain Opinion choak'd"; Frontenac is in fact Ulamar's father the long lost Miramont, who had adopted the family name of Frontenac upon the death of his older brother. Frontenac is moved, ironically, by the same love of family which was almost the downfall of Ulamar; not only is Ulamar saved from execution, but, in a triumph of rhetoric over logic, Frontenac renounces his French command and agrees to become "king of all Canadian France." In the final scene, French, English, Huron, and Iroquois embrace, "And Peace and Joy in all their Looks appear."

In the Preface to *Liberty Asserted,* Dennis discusses the play's Canadian elements:

> The Scene of this Tragedy lies at Agnie in Canada; which, for the sake of the better sound, I call Angie. Canada is a vast Tract of Land in Northern America, on the back of New England and New York. As New England and New York ... belong to the English, a considerable part of Canada is possessed by the French; and as the English and the French divide the country, they divide the Natives. The most considerable Nation of Canada, next to the Iroquois are the Hurons, who are Friends to the French. But the five Warlike Nations of the Iroquois are our Confederates; of those five Nations, Agnies or Angies is one; and the chief place of the Nation is Agnie or Angie, and thus much I thought fit to premise for the sake of those who have never read Hennepin or La Hontan.

Agnie is the French word for the Mohawk, and the locale described by Dennis is south and west of Lake Ontario in what is now upper New York State. It is interesting that Dennis assumes familiarity in his audience with the names at least of Hennepin and Lahontan, both of whom have scarcely lustrous reputations as historians, yet whose journals are important contributions to our knowledge of early Canada, and to the literary tradition of the Noble Savage. Louis Hennepin (1640-1705) was a mendicant friar, best known for the first European drawing of Niagara Falls, and for his appropriation after La Salle's death of that explorer's achievements. Baron de Lahontan (1666-1715) served under Frontenac, travelled extensively with the Indians, was ultimately banished from France and thus published in England his *New Voyages to America* (1703), of which the clearly fictitious "Dialogues between the Author and Adario, a Noted Man Among the Savages" form a considerable part.[2] These dialogues, in which the merits of civilization are found wanting beside the virtues of the natural life, are unfamiliar precursors of Rousseau's *Discourse on Inequality* (1754), and, especially in their criticism of the French, can be seen to contain the central idea of *Liberty Asserted.*

Dennis markets the feelings of the disillusioned Lahontan as English patriotism; his play was intended as a warning to the English not to follow the example of tyranny set by the French. Although his savages are improbable, the play is not unrealistic in an historical and political sense; Dennis was clearly familiar with the absurdities of French policy in New France, whereby local officials were no more than puppets abroad. Dennis would have the English avoid similar folly. In the Preface to *Liberty Asserted,* he declares that " 'Tis the want of publick Spirit that ruins us, and the design of this tragedy is to inculcate that...." He defends his baldly chauvinistic purpose with reference to ancient precedent; "the Instructions which we receive from the Stage ought to be for the benefit of the lawful established Government. That this was the case among the Athenians appears plain to me...." Tragedy is serious drama, the proper vehicle for patriotic expression; its heroes are role models for

loyal Englishmen; its audience may "gently sigh with sorrow not your own."

In the popular tradition, the origins, values and intrinsic qualities of the savage are immaterial; his function is to provide glamorous contrast to and ingenuous criticism of civilized man. In works such as Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* (1688), Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), and George Colman's *Inkle and Yarico* (1787), the characteristics of the Noble Savage literature can be seen. The savage has little inherent significance, is highly romanticized, and, in appearance or by birth, is carefully whitewashed, Europeanized. Ulamar, in *Liberty Asserted*, is half-French, a Christian, and has been educated by an Englishman. Like Lahontan's Adario, he is little more than a mouthpiece for political sentiments.

Whatever the illusions perpetuated by Dennis concerning the natives of Canada, he is at least not lacking in understanding and some sympathy for the problems of the French colonists. At least one exchange in the play has not lost its ironic edge:

FRONTENAC: Always a male-content.
MIRAMONT: Am I alone?
Are there not thousands here in Canada?

NOTES

[1] A copy of the first edition of *Liberty Asserted* is in the Public Archives of Canada collection of pamphlets 1497-1877. All references to the play are to this pamphlet. The Preface is included in *The Critical Works of John Dennis*, 2 vols., ed. Edward N. Hooker (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1939-43).

[2] Louis Hennepin, *A Discovery of Louisiana* (Paris, 1683), and *A New Discovery of a Vast Country in America* (London, 1698). *Lahontan's Voyages*, ed. Stephen Leacock (Ottawa: Graphic, 1932).

MARIAN FRASER

ON THE VERGE

***** MARKETA GOETZ-STANKIEWICZ, *The Silenced Theatre: Czech Playwrights without a Stage*. Univ. of Toronto Press, $25.00. This is an excellent and timely book, telling of the struggle of Czech and Slovak playwrights to sustain their art in a changing political atmosphere that is only intermittently hospitable to free expression in writing or in speech. As in Tsarist Russia, drama and other forms of literature have become in Czechoslovakia a covert mean of expressing forbidden political and social truths, and even when the playwrights have no stage available to them, they write for surreptitious reading and sometimes are produced abroad, though at great peril to themselves, as the case of the recently imprisoned Václav Havel shows. *The Silenced Theatre* is a thorough book, discussing Czech theatrical traditions and how they have been adapted to present circumstances, comparing western views of Czech theatre with Czech views of western theatre, showing the different meanings the concept of absurdism acquired in different political circumstances, and very lucidly analyzing the work of the principal Czech and Slovak dramatists. Depressing as many passages are, it is basically an inspiring book in its demonstration of the ever-renewed vitality of the literary imagination, that stubborn seed beneath the snow of oppression. It should give courage to those Canadian critics who lament our own cultural colonization. If we have, as Canadians, a creativity of our own, it will sustain itself in darkness and in light as surely as that of the Czechs and the Slovaks has done. G.W.

**** L. F. S. UPTON, *Micmacs and Colonists: Indian-White Relations in the Maritimes, 1713-1867*. Univ. of British Columbia Press, $22.00. The Micmacs have probably been in sustained contact with Europeans longer than any other group of Canadian Indians; perhaps because the period of acculturation has been so long, lasting from the founding of Port Royal in 1604, far less has been written on this group than on others, like the Indians of the plains and the Pacific coast, whose cultures remained relatively unchanged well into the nineteenth century, and whose lives were in any case more dramatic in a way that appealed to European romanticism. Professor Upton's book is a welcome addition to our knowledge of the Micmacs, and one can only regret that, apart from a brief introduction on the Micmac culture and on seventeenth-cen-

tury contacts, the book is in fact, as its title suggests, confined to "Indian-White Relations in the Maritimes, 1713-1867," and not all such relations, since there is very little about the Micmacs' neighbours in the Maritimes, the Malecites. Nevertheless, in an area scantily served by historians or by anthropologists, this is a welcome book, and particularly so since it is written with an unassuming lucidity and with an awareness that history, for all its scientific aspects, is first of all a literary art.

G.W.

**** DOUG FETHERLING, *Gold Diggers of 1929*. Macmillan, $14.95. Historians are rarely quick off the mark. Perspective, which they regard as a necessary virtue, can prevent them from recognizing the long-term importance of events too near to them. Yet the erosion of information does not operate only with regard to distant episodes; recent history can quickly become obscure, and one of the least understood events of modern times is the great stock market crash in 1929, a shade over fifty years ago. The epicentre of the crash was New York, but Canada was closely involved and some of the more enigmatic participants were Canadians. Until now what happened in Canada has never been thoroughly investigated and brought into a single volume, but Doug Fetherling has now done it in *Gold Diggers of 1929*. Fetherling is a good poet and a good newspaperman, and these two virtues, which so often seem incompatible, work well together to produce a story that is vivid, concise, highly informative, and in an oblique way chillingly minatory. We have been conditioned to believe, over the past forty years, that the Crash — and the Depression so elusively linked with it — could never happen again. What Fetherling shows is how fragile are such structures of confidence.

G.W.

*** RICHARD CHIPPINGDALE, *Laurier: His Life and World*. McGraw-Hill Ryerson, $17.95. This book is part of a series on Canadian prime ministers and their times, in which different authors have varied the proportions between the times and the men. Richard Chippingdale tends to give us a great deal about the times and not enough about the man, so that we see a lightly drawn Laurier against a heavily detailed background, and the result does not make for good portraiture. It is true that Chippingdale is more critical in his presentation of Laurier's personality than earlier biographers like Skelton and Schull, but we still have to go back to them for the detail that gives meaning to our view of a man's life. At best this is an interesting first glimpse of Laurier.

G.W.

*** JEAN MURRAY COLE, *Exile in the Wilderness: The Life of Chief Factor Archibald McDonald, 1790-1853*. Burns & MacEachern, $15.95. Its subject makes this a minor biography. Archibald McDonald had an interesting life, coming to Red River under Lord Selkirk's auspices, entering the Hudson's Bay Company's service, taking part in the first actual descent by canoe of the Fraser Canyon, and running various fur-trading posts in the Columbia Department, but he was no nation-maker, great explorer or remarkable intellect, and his life has to be regarded as exemplary of a way of living rather than extraordinary. Given these limitations of the subject, Jean Murray Cole has produced a well-made biography which makes the most of its material and projects McDonald's personality sympathetically as well as telling his adventures and achievements in a nicely restrained and balanced prose.

G.W.

*** GEORGE WOODCOCK, *The Canadians*. Fitzhenry & Whiteside, $19.95. Handsomely illustrated with prints and photographs that do much to animate the stories of Canadian history, Woodcock's account of the Canadian people is a literate, accessible, and visually attractive book. Unfortunately, it is also badly marred by misquotation and misprint. In his own words a "collective biography" rather than a political history, the book is a tribute to regional individualism and to a collectivity of regions that somehow makes a nation. Perhaps for this reason it is most alive in its chapters on B.C., Quebec, and the Maritimes; there seems litle sympathy for centralist political argument. But it is also largely an account of the artistic accomplishments of the people — essentially as a demonstration of a particular kind of geographical determinism. Sports and business, too, enter the picture Woodcock draws; but oddly, for a social history of this persuasion, there is little account of Canadian science in relation to climate and landscape: nothing on aerial photography, standard time, ecological management, or enough on communications theory to demonstrate its national political significance. Hence — though there is much to learn from this work — one remains at the end aware that the collectivity is larger still.

W.N.

John Metcalf

&

Hugh Hood

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