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THE STRUCTURE OF FICTION

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A QUARTERLY OF CRITICISM AND REVIEW

editorial

MAKING REPRESENTATIONS

I HAVE BELATEDLY BEEN READING a 1977 book from Indiana University Press, *Towards a Poetics of Fiction*, edited by Mark Spilka. The book collects a number of essays from the journal *Novel*: essays on fictional theory, literary history, and language and style, among which are three by Canadian critics Graham Good, R. P. Bilan, and Jerry Wasserman, on Lukács, Leavis, and Rabelais respectively. Despite their quality, it was not these essays that caught my attention, but rather the seven opening papers which gave the book its title and which explore the possibility that it might be possible to chart a poetics of the novel by means of structure, language, history, narrative, genre, or time. The word "or" is the most important here. For the essays take such exclusive stances as to end up being positively irritating, and it is refreshing to get to the seventh, by Walter Reed, on the problems raised by the assumption that a single methodology will open all novels to a reader. Indeed, the problem with a lot of writing (and a lot of reviewing) is that it seems to stem from a single preconception about method or value. How to write a book is a much more complex challenge than such a stance implies; how to read one is equally complex, dependent upon experience and sensitivity and intelligence and talent for associative understanding and scores of other attributes, in unequal measure. Neither process can be reduced to a set of exercises without producing a mechanical literary work. Repetition does not constitute ritual, and criticism is not just an act of rhetorical ceremony.

Hence it is frustrating to encounter simplistic dogma shaped as criticism, as in this passage from Eleanor Hutchens' contribution to *Novel*'s "poetics debate":

> The assumption of poetry is that we can beat our way to truth: that by setting up rhythms of sound and imagery we can conjure up the archetypes of meaning. The assumption of drama is that we can mime our way to truth: that by acting out our beliefs we can make the god appear. The assumption of the short story is that we can see eternity in a grain of sand: that a single human situation, properly contemplated, will crystallize into a replica of an ultimate truth. The assumption of the novel is that truth is the daughter of time.

At once the passage seems to assume a unitary truth and a variety of universals, a generic restriction on sound, a visceral restriction on space, and a linear restriction

on time. How does one respond? Even if one objects to the minimalizing, there remains the rhetoric: an implicit declaration of faith in the shaping of meaning, in the human capacity to use language to give shape to ideas. And language *does* code, enact, re-present. Given that, how does one enfranchise it from system?

The other essayists in the debate follow their own rhetorical paths. Robert Scholes, celebrating "the precise discriminations of genre study," asserts that "generic theory provides a rigorous intellectual discipline, which can hold its head high as an area of academic study, without compromising the essentially personal and imaginative qualities of individual response to literary texts." It is significant that the principal clause celebrates discipline; the imagination gets hidden in a subordinate phrase. Frank Kermode claims that the novel ought to be seen in connection with sociology and "even" mathematics, in part because "The fact remains that a degree of 'historical' fidelity is something most people still ask of novels" — a phrase that is worth balancing with Barbara Hardy's "The best fantasists, as we know from introspection or from *Emma*, work in starkly realistic terms." Hardy herself holds that "narrative, like lyric or dance, is not to be regarded as an aesthetic invention used by artists to control, manipulate, and order experience, but as a primary act of mind transferred to art from life." Which in turn assumes a universality of human "consciousness," whereas this is precisely what twentieth century fiction — particularly that from the Third World, perhaps including Canada — has been at pains to reject.

But in the primary dispute, David Lodge objects to the notion of a single poetics of fiction, sensibly observing that writers use language and readers must read what they have actually written, while Malcolm Bradbury rejects the critical approach that presumes language is more important than structure. Bradbury's distinction is more basic than this implies; discovering image patterns, he finally says, is not intrinsically more important — or a clearer demonstration of the "real being" of a book — than demonstrating its connections with society, with moral attitudes, responses, characters, and social relationships. "My case is," he says of the novel, that "its main structural characteristic lies in a developing action about characters and events conducted in a closed — that is to say, an authorially conditioned — world containing principles, values and attitudes by which we may evaluate those events." Readers must ask "questions about cause and effect" and "answer them from cruxes within the work," by elevating "into prominence those conscious or intuitive choices which every writer must perpetually make, and to regard not only the discourse but the structure . . . as part of the matter to be persuaded." Lodge's reply is down-to-earth: "whatever novelists 'feel,' it is axiomatic that it is only through language that they are communicating, since there are no other means of communication at their disposal." Those who celebrate space and silence might quarrel with his last clause, but it is a nonetheless telling assertion. A literary structure is a linguistic structure. The ideas that literature shares, the ideas with

which we associate values, the ideas that embody relationships between characters are all shaped by words. It is to the words that we respond.

And of course there is great joy in language; it has an enormous capacity to play, a quality Wasserman delights in as he writes about Rabelais. And it is capable of intense lyric expression — even, as Graham Good makes clear, from a critic as politically committed as Lukács. As Bradbury reminds us, if all that we respond to in fiction are words — that is, if we reduce human experience to words — then this constitutes at the same time a reduction in our capacity to appreciate the world and a reduction to the kind of world that we allow art to represent. But responding to words need not be reductive. Failing to take account of their flexibility and richness can be far more debilitating, for it robs us of the subtleties of argument and wit, it permits distinctions between fashion and style to fade, it exchanges articulateness (however laconic) for rhetorical monotone, mistaking utterance for speech. Seeking the structures by which literature communicates, by contrast, can be to elucidate more than just patterns of words; for through them, one can meet the patterns of mind that shape events as well as art, and engage in a genuine process of literary discovery. W.H.N.

* * *

CORRECTION: An error that accidentally crept into the editorial of *Canadian Literature* No. 85 may have caused both disquiet and some confusion, for which we apologize. We want to assure our readers that the critical journal *Canadian Children's Literature* is alive and well, flourishing under Mary Rubio's guidance, and that it is available from Box 335, Guelph, Ontario, N1H 6K5.

What the editorial *intended* to say was that Evelyn Samuel's Victoria-based children's journal, *Canadian Children's Magazine*, had to fold some months ago; it was a spirited enterprise, and its disappearance is something which we, and other members of the literary community, deeply regret. W.H.N.

WALLY

J. D. Carpenter

In among the frozen elms
in parkland
below the schoolhouse hill
Wally sat in the shed
fed wood to the potbelly stove

In blue tobacco air
skaters laced their skates
rubbed cold toes

Among woodsmoke, raw pine
wet reek of wool
Wally showed his biceps
ivory in stoveglow
let us stare at the blue girl on his arm
But the older boys would laugh
as he knelt to loosen a knot
or bent to feed the fire

Wally turned out the lights at eleven
the skaters drifted home
Then he stood with the moon
and an indolent hose
feeding the oval of ice
stood in the night like an old star man
at watch on a ship on the sea

THE WEEKEND GOD

Alden Nowlan

There ought to be a name for the Weekend God
of the working class; call it an angel
or a saint if you prefer, still it ought to have a name.
A face would follow in no time; it would be a smiling face,
of course, but since this is a real god that men and women worship,
there would be times when its smile was enough
to make one weep: the gods are like that.

I've worshipped him, climbed each week like a ladder,
thinking how every rung was bringing me closer;
and if, when I got there, it was never so good
as I had hoped, it always seemed to have been better
— like home in the memory of the homeless.

Yes, there ought to be a name for the Weekend God.
There ought to be shrines raised to him
in places like Sudbury, in cities where at dusk
the sun dissolves in acid, creating a sky
of purple, scarlet and brass, like a blind man's
last remembered thunderous moment of sight.

THE POET AS NOVELIST

Linda Hutcheon

In 1965 NORTHROP FRYE WROTE: "A striking fact about Canadian poetry is the number of poets who have turned to narrative forms (including closet drama) rather than lyrical ones."[1] It is indeed true that we possess a rather rich tradition of narrative poetry in this country, and, as Frye has also pointed out,[2] much of our poetry that is lyrical in form is not at all lyrical in spirit. Yet it is also a fact that at least two of our decidedly lyric poets have turned to narrative, but narrative in prose: Leonard Cohen and Margaret Atwood. They have not totally rejected what Frye calls "the more manipulated comic and romantic formulas of prose fiction" but they do seem to have used narrative for its natural affinities with ironic tones and themes.[3] Unlike Pratt's tragic and impersonal narrative poems, the novels of Cohen and Atwood in particular are both ironic and personal — that is, lyrical and not autobiographical.

These novels are lyrical or poetic in yet another way, one that seems to set them apart from the creations of Canadian novelists proper. This difference would seem to lie in the particular *structural* use made of imagery and symbolism within the novels. It is not that the poet/novelists use *more* of these devices, but that they use them in a different manner: they appear to be willing to trust the reader with the image. Poets, after all, have no choice; in their poetry, they have to. Novelists, on the other hand, have a different set of rhetorical tools at their command: among these, plot and character exposition and narrative explanation.

Margaret Laurence — through her heroine — *tells* the reader quite explicitly that Hagar is the stone angel of the title of her novel. Robertson Davies thrice explains what the "fifth business" means. On the other hand, despite the title, *The Edible Woman*, Atwood refrains from explicating the theme of her novel — the threatened consuming of Marion — to the reader. Instead she implicitly structures her novel around the title image: most scene locations, jobs, and personal problems are oriented around food. Here the narrative structure seems to be hung on the scaffolding of imagery, rather than vice versa. In Cohen's *Beautiful Losers*, this structure hangs there tenuously, actually slipping off completely at times, leaving the reader with only the scaffold. He is then asked to relate directly to the image — without the explanatory intervention of character or narrator. The question is: does this matter of trust arise at all from the fact that Cohen and Atwood are poets as well?

It is not at all surprising that they would manifest similar themes in their verse and in their fiction. This has always been the case: one thinks of Emily Brontë, Meredith, D. H. Lawrence. It is also not odd that there are similar poetic images or even similar poetic structures in their prose as in their verse. Very few writers seem to switch definitively from one form to another, as did Hardy, and certainly Cohen and Atwood seem to be continuing to write both poetry and prose fiction. But poets who write novels do perhaps have a different "hermeneutic" relationship to both their readers and their narrative structures than do novelists. This phenomenon would not be peculiarly Canadian — witness Dickey and Plath — although the irony that dominates the narrative of the two Canadians' works (but not that of the two Americans) might tend to support a version of Frye's notion that there is something in our cultural heritage that is attracted to the ironic mode within the narrative genre — be it in verse or in "poetically" patterned prose.

TWO CANADIAN NOVELS SUGGEST THEMSELVES for consideration in this light, since they share, not one, but two thematic patterns: a tracing of the relationship between the mysteries of magic and those of religion, and an attempt to convince the reader of the need to reconcile the human dualities, to unite the opposites of flesh and spirit in order to achieve some human ideal of wholeness and identity. These two novels are *Beautiful Losers*, by the poet, Leonard Cohen, and *Fifth Business*, by the satirist-dramatist, Robertson Davies. On the surface, despite thematic similarities, two novels could not appear more diverse. The bizarre experimental form of the one is juxtaposed with the more traditionally realistic form (fictional autobiography) of the other. Cohen's often wildly obscene, rhapsodic prose ("I paddle versions of Word"), whose verbal structures often tend toward disintegration, contrasts sharply with the elegantly controlled style of Davies' narrative. Yet, though in different fashions, the narrators of each are equally articulate and it is what they choose to *tell* rather than *show* the reader, that should prove interesting from our point of view.

Although the two novels indeed do share the dual thematic structure outlined above, the variants within the form are potentially revealing. In *Fifth Business*, Dunstan Ramsay comes to realize that religion and magic share the same appeal: they both present mysterious worlds of wonders which all men find a psychological necessity. The hero's sense of satisfaction in the magic of Magnus Eisengrim follows — in plot chronology — his realization of the psychological reality of faith, through those worshipping at the shrine of the Virgin of Guadaloupe. He asks himself: "Why do people all over the world, and at all times, want marvels that defy all verifiable fact?" Of course, he himself had always intuitively sensed the inter-relationships between magic and religion; as a boy his two favourite discoveries amid the library's rejected volumes were a book of magic tricks and one

of the lives of the saints. He reads both to Paul (later the magician), son of Mary (later Dunstan's fool-saint).

Cohen, too, perceives the similarities in these wonder-working identities, but rejects that of the magician, the *controller* of wonders. His character F. writes: "I believed that I had conceived the vastest dream of my generation: I wanted to be a magician. That was my idea of glory. Here is a plea based on my whole experience: do not be a magician, be magic." One must not try to control as a magician, but rather one must seek "balance in the chaos of existence," and one who does so fulfils Cohen's definition of the real, if unorthodox, saint. The other wonder-working magicians and orthodox saints — F. and Catherine Tekakwitha — are revealed as defeated victims of their particular beliefs. Cohen does not spell this out for his reader, but rather leaves him, as we shall see, to connect image clusters, to make meaning on his own, *if he so chooses.*

This same difference is seen in the treatment of the second shared theme in the two novels: the need to unite flesh and spirit, body and soul.[4] These are two of the elements that the narrator seeks to balance in *Beautiful Losers.* Either, on its own, develops into a tyrannical and victimizing system. In *Fifth Business,* Dunstan, too, learns to balance the devil of the flesh and the saint of the spirit in his own life. Alone, the devil and the saint are equally self destructive. Davies, however, seems to employ a Jungian foundation on which to build his imagery: in particular, the dualism of ego and anima (the bisexual Liesl is, we recall, the devil figure). This psychological core suggests that Dunstan's balancing is a private one, albeit one for which all men might strive. In *Beautiful Losers,* on the other hand, the narrator's every utterance turns out to be doubly resonant: he is condemned to speak on a private and public level at once, much to his chagrin: "O Tongue of the Nation! Why don't you speak for yourself?"

One might argue that the title metaphor of Davies' novel points to a public role Dunstan is to play in the lives of others. Yet the weight of the novel is on the hero's personal and private development and not at all on the public dimension which presumably Davies intends to have (but, as we shall see, does not succeed in having) dovetail with the private one at the end of the novel. The key to this difference in resonance in the treatment of the same themes in these two novels may well stem from the different uses of imagery *and* from the differing degrees of trust in the reader displayed by the two writers.

In lieu of traditional narrative structures, Cohen relies on mythic and imagistic patterns to balance out the chaos of *Beautiful Losers.* Frye[5] pointed out twenty years ago that Cohen's interests have been mythopoeic from the start. His usual Jewish, Christian, and Hellenic paradigms are supplemented here, by the folklorist narrator, with Amerindian and Egyptian ones, and with a modern *mythos* gleaned from movies, radio, and comics. The narrator addresses the pop singer, Gavin Gate: "You are the king of some slum block and you have handed down

Laws." Cohen's reasons for this wide mythic range are mainly structural, for his novel is both private and public in its scope.

In this double dimension, it is most like one particular work — the Bible. Both are epics of a man and a people, but Cohen's demonic parody replaces the moral framework of good and evil with an existential one of identity and alienation. Faith is in turn replaced by magic. Both works have a recognizable historical skeleton, yet their unity is an organic and not a linear one: instead of the biblical story of the growth of Israel's freedom from bondage, we have an ironic tale of increasing bondage and victimization at the hands of public and private conquerors. The Top Ten are elevated to the "Lost Tribes."

In the Bible, both the public hero, Moses, and the private one, Jesus, are saved from slaughter in their early years. Similarly, Catherine Tekakwitha is saved from the Jesuits by the narrator's lust and love, and the old man of the epilogue is in turn rescued from the "Catholic posse" by the half-naked, moccasin-wearing blonde. Just as Moses crossed the Red Sea, and Jesus was baptized in the Jordan, Catherine (and later F. and Edith, too) is refreshed by the waters of Tekakwitha's spring, and the narrator is baptized by "fire, shit, history, love and loss." As Moses strives for the Promised Land, and Jesus enters Heaven after death, so in our novel, Catherine enters "the eternal machinery of the sky," and the old man becomes a Ray Charles movie projected against the sky.

In the Bible, we find certain spiritual textual authorities — Moses' Ten Commandments and Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. In Cohen's ironic version, the reader might note that we find Jesuit sermons and reports, and F.'s cryptic sayings that are handed down through time, across the barrier of death. The Serpent of Brass is visually echoed by Christ on the cross, just as the image of Brébeuf at the stake is structurally repeated in that of Cohen's old man tormented in the treehouse. Edith puts semen, rainwater, tears, and urine in her navel in a parody, perhaps, of the Song of Songs: "Your navel is a rounded bowl that never lacks mixed wine." There are also extended image patterns throughout *Beautiful Losers* of the biblical symbols connected with the eucharist, the leviathan, and the apocalypse,[6] but at no time does Cohen explain, underline, or explicate. It is up to the reader to make order — or balance.

Perhaps with Isaiah 59:15 in mind ("He that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey"), Cohen has partly based both the historical and personal plot structures on the pattern of victimizer turning victim. Just as F. tormented the narrator, he too is tormented, a victim of an English plot — and of his own system of belief. Each successive conquering race of Canada's history has become the prey both of its own victims and of the next historical conqueror. Brébeuf is tortured by the Indians, just as the Indians' culture fell to that of the French explorers and missionaries, who in turn faced defeat at the hands of the English. Today, Cohen suggests, these same English are threatened by both French terrorist bombs and

America's overwhelming technology and culture. No character or narrator explicitly states this in the novel; the reader must look for patterns to find meaning — as he does in reading a poem, of course.

The other related structure that Cohen seems to employ centres on two opposite systems of unity, both "arrogant and warlike" because they pretend to put the world in order: the system of the flesh, with its victim and magician controller, F.; and the system of the spirit, with its victim and saint, Catherine. To unify is to control and to do so is to exert the power "to change" and "to hurt," and, as the hero of Cohen's first novel (*The Favorite Game*) suggests, to leave one's brand. Both unifying systems demand a loss of personal identity, in favour of a symbolic sainthood that the mechanical imagery attached to it in the novel suggests is destructive.

The narrator loves the victims of both systems and in merging their identities (Edith's and Catherine's; F.'s and the uncle's), he becomes a "balancing monster of love." Or so the reader might choose to interpret that constantly confusing blurring of edges that are usually so carefully delineated in fiction: those of characters' personalities and identities. Cohen is never even as explicit in the novel as he is in, for instance, the poem "The priest says goodbye," in which "Abelard proved how bright could be / the bed between the hermitage and nunnery." Abelard, too, is a beautiful loser, precariously balancing the flesh and spirit. The true balancing saint does not control like the magician; he himself is the act of magic: "*mind* itself is Magic coursing through *flesh*" (italics mine).

In the light of the ambiguity of the final image of a Ray Charles movie and the failure of the revolution of the second chancers, the possibility arises that balance is merely another word for ambivalence. The reader is not allowed to order, to create his own victimizing system of interpretation; instead, like the other beautiful losers, he must find and then balance the dualities which the imagery and symbolism of the novel suggest on both the private and public levels of the narrative — which is, after all, about a set of very Canadian orphans, Indian, French, and English.

IN CONTRAST TO COHEN'S STRUCTURING METHOD of patterns of allusion, symbolism, and image that — as in verse — leaves the actual hermeneutic work up to the reader (the lazy one will not bother finishing the novel), Robertson Davies uses more traditional novelistic techniques both to structure his novel and to expose its themes. The plot consists of an impressively balanced series of events and set of characters. Each of the six sections is carefully linked by parallel incident with its neighbours and with its counterpart (1 and 4; 2 and 5; 3 and 6).[7] Each character has his opposite number: Leola/Denyse, Blazon/

Leadbeater, Mrs. Ramsay/Mrs. Dempster, and so on. Perhaps there is not a little of the satirist's classical order in Davies' formal balance.

Often characters are asked to be carriers of specific thematic weight, in the way that images are in Cohen's novel. For Boy Staunton "the reality of life lay in external things," while Mary Dempster explicitly lives "by a light that arose from within." Of course, the reader's perceptions of these characters and what they stand for is conditioned by the roles they play in the private life of the narrator, Dunstan Ramsay, whose autobiographical narrative he is reading. This is not completely true, of course, since it is the author, not the narrator, who chooses to give his three "twice-born" their symbolic names: Magnus Eisengrim, Boy Staunton, and Dunstan Ramsay. One is made to choose a superlative and a wolf's name; another is revealingly left a boy forever; the third is made to reject Dunstable, his mother's maiden name, and take on that of a saint who is described as having been "mad about learning, terribly stiff and stern and scowly, and an absolute wizard at withstanding temptation."

Yet it is Dunstan, the narrator, to whom the various thematic messages of unity are directly addressed by other characters. Father Blazon preaches to him that when Christ comes again, "it will be to declare the unity of the life of the flesh and the life of the spirit. And then perhaps we shall make some sense of this life of marvels, cruel circumstances, obscenities, and commonplaces." He warns Dunstan to forgive himself for being human and to accept that the wisdom of the spirit must be linked to that of the body. Enter Magnus Eisengrim with his sacred and profane "Vision of Dr. Faustus," and more importantly, Liesl, the devil herself, who accuses him — explicitly and at length — of trying to be a saint at the expense of the repressed devil in himself. These overt statements of theme are, of course, directed at the reader as well, since it is to him (and the Headmaster) that Davies (and Dunstan) choose to relate the tale. Declaration replaces the allusion of Cohen's text.

This is not to say that Davies does not use imagery to structure his narrative. As mentioned earlier, the Jungian ego-anima duality appears in an image chain that begins in Dunstan's academic interest in Wilgefortis, a hermaphroditic saint, whose legend grew from the image at Lucca of a long-haired, bearded figure hanging from a cross. This saviour symbolism is recalled in the saving role in Dunstan's life played by the bisexual, very masculine woman, Liesl, who Dunstan meets through Paul. Not surprisingly, he had previously met Paul once before while indulging his academic interests in viewing a bearded lady in a small European circus. This hermaphroditic union of male and female does suggest the ego-anima division of "that fantastical duke of dark corners," as Dunstan explicitly calls Jung. Indeed the novel's plot seems structured on Dunstan's private, psychological, personal coming to terms with himself. If this is so, the novel's title — which might be pointing the reader to its major image — is problematic.

The idea of the fifth business, carefully defined by Davies in the epigraph, and by Liesl within the novel, relates to a public role which Dunstan is to play in the lives of Paul and, especially, Boy. While this novel does not have the historical or national scope of Cohen's, it would appear to lay claim to a more public dimension; it is presumably meant to be more than a chronicle of Dunstan's personal maturation. But, is it? It has been suggested that the public role of the fifth business corresponds to that of the Jungian shadow,[8] and that when Dunstan has his coronary at the words of Liesl's Brazen Head, he is accepting his public responsibility, in an analogous act to his earlier acceptance of his private one, again at Liesl's hands. But is it not true that Dunstan's narrative has used Paul, Boy, and Mrs. Dempster (those directly and indirectly involved in his public role as the fifth) as functions and indices of the hero's *personal* development, and not vice versa? It is a novel about the private growth of Dunstan, not about the peripheral role he plays in the lives of public figures such as Boy and Paul.

More recently David Monaghan has suggested that, although Davies seems to want the public and private themes to intertwine, they do not do so.[9] The fifth business then becomes a misused metaphor, a subsidiary and not controlling image in the novel. He offers an alternative controlling metaphor — that of the concept of the "boy" (as literal youth; as false adult; and as authentic man), and his argument is convincing, although this is mainly so because, once again, the narrator is so very explicit about it himself. Early in the novel, he tells us that a boy "is a man in miniature, and though he may sometimes exhibit notable virtue . . . he is also schemer, self-seeker, traitor, Judas, crook, and villain — in short, a man." Later, as a schoolteacher, he tells his reader: "I have been a boy myself, and I know what a boy is, which is to say, either a fool or an imprisoned man striving to get out." Dunstan, as a young man, rejects being anyone's "wee laddie" and in doing so rejects, too, all involving human relations, remaining the cold and detached intellectual, until Liesl confronts him with the knowledge that in emotional terms, he is still a boy. As a result of his battle with his devil and with the truth, Dunstan is able to break down his protective walls and grows emotionally and humanly. Boy Staunton, as his name suggests, reaches no such maturity and dies a boy, punished for a boy's crime. Dunstan himself makes this very clear: "As a boy he had been something of a bully, a boaster, and certainly a bad loser. . . . But now Boy Staunton had reached a point in life where he no longer tried to conceal his naked wish to dominate everybody and was angry and ugly when things went against him." Boy later tries to absolve himself of responsibility in Mrs. Dempster's fate: "you know what boys are. Brutes, because they don't know any better." His next words are ironic: "But they grow up to be men." Boy dies a boy, but at the hands — in moral if not physical terms — of a man who is supposed to have advanced beyond the machinations of a detached and moralistic saint.

Is Dunstan's role as fifth business as false to the primary theme of the novel as this would suggest? In his attempt to use imagery as a structuring device, Davies appears to have been working at cross purposes: the plot and character development present a private theme, but the central images — the fifth and the boy — would seem to cancel each other out, were not the latter more frequent and no less explicitly explained by the narrator, so as in effect to dominate the imagery of the work. There is none of the broad scope (Biblical, Canadian, as well as personal) or deeper thematic resonance of Cohen's structural use of metaphor here. Davies uses traditional novelistic devices of plot and character, as well as overt declaration to expose his themes. The reader can note the satisfying parallel structures — but rarely before the narrator points them out to him. It is, of course, central to Davies' theme as well as form, that the reader perceive the balancing and reconciling (of flesh and spirit, of magic and faith). Perhaps for this reason he leads him by the hand.

Cohen allows his reader considerably more freedom — including that of misreading, or rather of interpreting the novel in his own manner, or even of refusing interpretation completely. The responsibility is always the reader's. Davies, as controller magician, takes this upon himself and, not unlike the satirical writers of the eighteenth century, guides his reader step by step to his, the author's, interpretation of the text. This is, of course, probably why Davies' novel is both easier to read and more of a popular success than Cohen's could ever be. It is also why the second reading of each is such a very different experience.

In *Beautiful Losers* the narrative's irony is a function as much of the act of reading as that of writing. While this cannot really be claimed for *Fifth Business*, Davies' novel also combines irony with the narrative mode in what is, if Frye is right, a particularly Canadian fashion. Perhaps it is in the different structural uses of imagery, however, that lie the distinguishing formal characteristics of the (lyric) poet and the (satiric) novelist within this national tradition. The poet does appear to have a greater degree of hermeneutic trust in his reader — even when he is writing prose fiction.

NOTES

[1] "Conclusion," *Literary History of Canada*, ed. Carl F. Klinck (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1965), pp. 842-43.

[2] "The Narrative Tradition in English-Canadian Poetry," in *The Bush Garden* (Toronto: Anansi, 1971), p. 149.

[3] See Frye's "Conclusion," p. 843.

[4] Perhaps this duality is, as Davies suggests, a typically Canadian one. He claimed in a *Maclean's* interview in 1972 that his novels actually said a lot about Canada: "I see Canada as a country torn between a very northern, rather extraordinary, mystical spirit which it fears and its desire to present itself to the world as a Scotch banker." (Quoted by William H. New in Chapter 14, "Fiction" in Carl F. Klinck,

ed., *Literary History of Canada*, 2nd ed., vol. III [Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1976], p. 255.)

[5] 1956 "Letters in Canada," reprinted in *The Bush Garden*, p. 67.

[6] See, for a full discussion, the author's "*Beautiful Losers:* All the Polarities," *Canadian Literature*, No. 59 (Winter 1974), especially pp. 43-44.

[7] See Ellen D. Warwick, "The Transformation of Robertson Davies," *Journal of Canadian Fiction*, 3, No. 3 (1974), 46-51.

[8] Gordon Roper, "Robertson Davies' *Fifth Business* and 'that fantastical duke of dark corners, C. G. Jung,' " *Journal of Canadian Fiction*, 1, No. 1 (Winter 1972), 33-39.

[9] "Metaphors and Confusions," *Canadian Literature*, No. 67 (Winter 1976), 64-73.

THE INCREDIBLE BLUE AND LOVELY SUICIDES

Pier Giorgio Di Cicco

The incredible blue and lovely suicides
are coming to visit me. The friend, he was such a friend,
tied his neck to the ceiling, and swung for a couple of hours,
and care, something like a crutch of bones, discovered him.

How shall I name the toothpicks around the heart, and the
improbable sunlight trying out gloves. He was nothing like
his face, hanging there, and his eyes blackened beyond the
light that had been leaving them for ten years.

The bed, in the night, did not turn me over; and there were no
voices. And my 28 years did not run around the room looking
for articles of clothing.

He went, snugly, he went like a poke in the eye, he went mildly,
he went like a cloth tearing, like my insides.

And he remembered mamma? No. He heard nothing, and nothing
will I
forgive him.

I see my fingers running across the far side of the room; as they
might go
through hair. When it grows dark they will go mad and white,
and from the other corner of the room I will laugh to myself,

and remember the idiot flowers.

ENGLISH-CANADIAN FICTION & THE PASTORAL TRADITION

Walter Pache

WHEN DANIEL WILSON REVIEWED the cultural situation of Canada in 1858, the country seemed to hover halfway between wilderness and civilization:

> We are past the first poetic birth-time, which pertains to the vigorous infancy of races; we have yet to attain the era of refinement from which a high civilization educes new phases of poetic inspiration.

This peculiar state, Wilson then argues, calls for practical efforts rather than for pastoral poetry. Referring to Longfellow's popular epic poem *Hiawatha* which had recently been published, he continues:

> We cannot yet respond amid these charred stumps and straggling snake-fences of our rough clearings, to Hiawatha's appeal to those
>
> Who love the haunts of nature,
> Love the sunshine of the meadow,
> Love the shadow of the forest,
> Love the wind among the branches,
> And the rain-shower and the snow-storm,
> And the rushings of great rivers,
> Through their palisades of pine-trees.
>
> We want our pine-trees for lumber, and so long as they spare us a surplus for kindling wood, we ask no kindling inspiration from them. The rushing of our great rivers we estimate rejoicingly — for their water-privileges. The sunshine of the meadow is very welcome to us — in the hay-harvest; and the poetry of the snow-storm full of the music — of our sleigh-bells. As to our love for the shadow of the forest, that pertains to the romantic simplicity of our squatter stage of infancy, from whence we emerge as fast as possible into the clearing we hew out of it, rejoicing at the crash of falling pines, and keeping time with the music of the axe to the crackling of the logging-pile.[1]

Wilson's essay represents a remarkable early example of the Canadian search for identity. Wilson's contemporaries, however, were far from taking his advice about the poetical beauty of the pioneer's life. Instead, they set out to write the very kind of pastoral poetry which Wilson had considered premature. Pastoral forms and pastoral topoi were drawn primarily from English sources, and superficially adapted to the new surroundings. Until well into the second half of the nineteenth century, Canadian writers modelled their often melancholy idylls after

examples taken from the English romantic poets or from those of the Victorian period. Charles Sangster's "Sonnets written in the Orillia Woods" (1860) could be quoted as an example:

> I've almost grown a portion of this place;
> I seem familiar with each mossy stone;
> Even the nimble chipmunk passes on,
> And looks, but never scolds me. Birds have flown
> And almost touched my hand; and I can trace
> The wild bees to their hives. I've never known
> So sweet a pause from labour.

The pastoral mood is not only a pervading element of Canadian poetry, it also shapes prose fiction. It is the "regional idyll" that, in *Creative Writing in Canada*, Desmond Pacey identified as the most important pattern of the novel at the turn of the century. The regional idyll, like the "historical romance" which preceded it, tried to recreate values and lifestyles of an idealized rural eighteenth century — at a time when the modern novel elsewhere attempted to come to terms with the perplexities of contemporary life. But though the pastoral was originally a set of conventions about rural setting, characters, and diction, it soon developed into an anti-realistic way of looking at life.

To explain this dichotomy, Northrop Frye suggested that there might be a specifically Canadian affinity to a pastoral myth manifesting itself either in a nostalgic look back to an idyllic past or in the imaginative vision of a mythical unity.[2] But Frye's categories are not always easy to apply. If we take a passage from Leacock's *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* it would seem to illustrate Frye's first nostalgic type of pastoral. In "Ministrations," the narrator introduces the reader to the Rev. Dean Drone as he sits at his rural table enjoying "the chequered light of the plum tree that is neither sun nor shadow." Dean Drone, we subsequently learn, is reading:

> and when I tell you that at the end of the grass plot where the hedge is highest there is a yellow beehive with seven bees that belong to Dean Drone, you will realize that it is only fitting that the Dean is reading in the Greek. For what better could a man be reading beneath the blossom of the plum trees, within the very sound of the bees, than the Pastorals of Theocritus? The light trash of modern romance might put a man to sleep in such a spot, but with such food for reflection as Theocritus, a man may safely close his eyes and muse on what he reads without fear of dropping into slumber.

The passage testifies both to Leacock's learning and his sense of irony. In a modern world, he seems to imply, the status of the pastoral tradition is doubtful. The tone and the themes of the passage are reminiscent of eighteenth-century novelists such as Fielding or Goldsmith. The classical pastoral is not only explicitly referred to but also provides the topoi of the *locus amoenus*: trees and bees are the standard

attributes of the shady grove where time seems to stand still and the conflicts of real life lose their relevance.

But even if Dean Drone seems to personify the innocent country parson — a late successor to Goldsmith's Dr. Primrose — his idyllic peace is threatened. Not only does Drone eventually turn out to be involved in dubious business transactions which are beyond his control, but the narrator also exposes the limitations of the idyllic sphere.

There is, in other words, a contradiction between the closed world of the garden and the lofty literary tradition which it claims to represent: Dean Drone, nodding off over his Theocritus, really prefers not to translate the original Greek — for reasons the narrator tactfully hints at when he remarks that "when Dean Drone said that he simply couldn't translate it, I believe he was perfectly sincere." The ironic commentary uncovers the Dean's comic inadequacy but at the same time reveals the unrealistic character of the pastoral convention.

Leacock's works contains a number of similar scenes. It can be said to mark a new stage in what Empson called the pastoral process of putting the complex into the simple: pastoral motifs and themes are no longer used "literally" but quoted as conventions. Leacock and his followers consciously recapitulate typical features of an historical genre. Below the seemingly unruffled surface of the idyllic scene there emerges a tension between reality and ideal.

From a comparative point of view, Leacock's ironic idyll is a fairly late example of the re-interpretation of the pastoral observable everywhere during the second half of the nineteenth century. The realistic novel, in particular, employs the idyllic scene as an emblem of a pastoral ideal of harmony and bliss which cannot last in reality. Thus, the conflict between an idyllic world-picture and the non-idyllic "real" world (which remains outside the scope of Theocritus' pastorals, Virgil's eclogues, Sidney's *Arcadia*, or Mazo de la Roche's *Jalna* novels, for that matter) becomes a central theme of fiction.[3]

An early form of the problematical attempt to recapture the innocence of Acadia is the pastoral tableau at the end of the narrative, a favourite device of eighteenth-century writers which survived until well into the nineteenth century, as a number of Dickens' novels demonstrate: idyllic elements intensify and confirm the happy ending. The interpolated idyllic scene is a different matter: it no longer anticipates a happy ending but usually stands for a temporary vision of harmony, for an idyllic moment overshadowed by an approaching catastrophe. Victorian novelists such as Robert Louis Stevenson and Thomas Hardy, Joseph Conrad and Henry James use the idyllic episode to explore fundamental tensions between town and country, individual and society, utopian hope and melancholy resignation. The *locus amoenus* is no longer autonomous but now vulnerable. It appears idyllic only from a certain point of view, for certain people, for a limited span of time. It may be no more than a dream or a fleeting glimpse of the past. The pastoral

may become a criticism of real life, but may also be shown as an escape into a simpler world of illusions. It seems essential, in discussing the form and function of the "pastoral relief" in modern Canadian fiction, to keep these developments in mind before forming theories about an indigenous "pastoral myth."

THE RISE OF THE CANADIAN NOVEL in the 1950s can be described as a quantitative and a qualitative phenomenon: more and better novels were published. Two of the most influential novels which appeared in 1959, in their different ways, take up the pastoral tradition: Hugh MacLennan's *The Watch That Ends the Night* and Mordecai Richler's *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz.*

MacLennan's contribution to a definition and interpretation of the "Canadian experience" is obvious: the precarious co-existence of two languages and cultures, the country's difficult choice between political neutrality and commitment, but also the perennial struggle with hostile nature are among the recurrent themes of his novels. While these themes are undoubtedly relevant for a study of *Watch,* which is set in Montreal during the uneasy peace of the late 1930's, the role of pastoral conventions has frequently gone unnoticed.

Both male protagonists are associated with nature. Nature, however, is a thoroughly ambiguous concept. Jerome Martell throughout the novel represents the tough and primitive wilderness-relationship, which is most dramatically underlined in his escape from the logging camp. Martell's *unio mystica* with nature as a school for survival is carefully set against the much more conventional nature imagery which the narrator George Stewart uses when he characterizes his relationship with Catherine Carey. The beginning, climax and imminent end of this relationship is indicated in a series of idyllic scenes conjuring up a deceptive world of private happiness.

George's account of the past sets in at the very moment when this privacy is about to collapse with Jerome's unexpected return. The pastoral tradition clearly informs George's first encounter with Catherine which takes place in the Careys' garden:

> Under our lone apple tree Catherine Carey stood with a basket of phlox and late delphiniums on her arm.... The actual colour of Catherine's dress that morning I do not know — it might have been white or red or blue — but with the sunlit green of the garden around her, with the dappled green of the shadowed grass under her feet, green was her colour at that supreme moment of my youth.... So that summer I entered Arcadia and the pipes played and the glory of the Lord shone round about....

Catherine appears static and isolated like a statue, transferred into an ideal sphere outside reality. The prototype of this kind of picturesque idyll — regarding both

the imagery and the position in the plot — may be found in nineteenth-century novels. In Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, for example, Tess and her lover Angel Clare meet initially in the "vale of the dairies" which has a function similar to the sheltered bourgeois garden. Here and there, pastoral nature reflects an optimistic hope for a life free from external pressures. The tragic failure of the utopian pastoral and the corresponding idyllic scene which precedes it appear in both novels.

In Hardy's *Tess*, the lovers spend a few days together in the lonely country house, before Tess (having murdered her husband) gives herself up to the police. The second idyll in MacLennan's novel coincides with Martell's return, and concludes the narrator's chronicle of past events. George Stewart's memories of the country retreat in the Laurentians which he shared with Catherine culminate in the following reflections:

> Happiness is one of the hardest things to write about, and the difficulty of doing so makes me long to be a musician or a painter, for painters and musicians are at ease with the supreme emotion, which is not grief but joy abounding. To be able to make a joyful noise to the Lord or a praise of colours and forms would seem to me to equate any man with gods or little children. Happiness annihilates time. We measure history by its catastrophes, we recall the weather by its storms, but the periods of peace and joy — who can describe them?
>
> "Many a green isle needs must be. . . ." But is it not also true that years later it is the green isles of happiness that we remember best, even if we cannot tell about them?

The didactic tone of this direct address to the reader shows that not only the narrator but also the author himself is fully conscious of the pastoral traditions he draws upon. The vision of a classical Arcadia and of an earthly paradise serves to intensify the effect of the melancholy idyll, as does the allusion to the romantic topos. "Many a green isle" is a line from Shelley's "Lines written among the Eugenean hills" (1818). In looking back to and reflecting on the past, George Stewart nostalgically refers to an island of pastoral bliss whose timeless harmony is encroached upon by the gathering tragedy. Nature — which may prove a source of mystical strength for the strong — provides the scenery where the conflict between the individual desire for privacy and the forces of a destructive fate are most poignantly felt.

The rationale of the pastoral — "Happiness annihilates time" — is explicitly stated rather than metaphorically suggested. This directness jeopardizes the evocative force of the imagery. By making explicit the contrast between ever-changing history and the utopian ideal of timelessness and harmonious balance, the narrator appears to waver between a politico-historical parable of love and a well-motivated plot. The characters are partly individuals, partly personifications of abstract concepts. It is this ambiguity that has often been called one of the most serious

flaws in MacLennan's fiction. It becomes apparent in the idyllic scenes as a clash of melodramatic tone, poetic atmosphere and intended "meaning."

THE WATCH THAT ENDS THE NIGHT, in the author's own view, marks a point of transition from an optimistic to a pessimistic view of history. "Requiem" was the title MacLennan had originally chosen for the book, because he saw the novel as a "requiem for these idealists of the Thirties who had meant so well, tried so hard and gone so wrong."[4] The threatened idyll and its eventual collapse symbolize not just the lost paradise of youth, but at the same time Canada's loss of national innocence and its failure to stay free from history, even though it tried to remain static in times of violent change.

Mordecai Richler's *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*, also published in 1959, is obviously the work of a younger author who is much less concerned with the problems of national identity and the pastoral tradition. But still Richler, in his own way, apart from sharing to a certain extent MacLennan's pessimism, uses similar conventions of the tragic pastoral.

The fact that the title of the novel parodies Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* should not prevent us from realizing that in plot and structure Richler's *Entwicklungsroman* primarily draws on the novels of the "angry young men" in Britain during the 1950s. It is known that Richler wrote the film script for John Braine's *Life at the Top*, which appeared in 1962. Here, as in other novels such as John Wain's *Hurry on Down* (1953), Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim* (1954), or Braine's *Room at the Top* (1957), the protagonist is a social climber seeking to shake off the obsessive limitations of his class and milieu. He usually succeeds but subsequently finds himself in a social and moral vacuum. Sometimes this loss of traditional standards becomes evident in a focal scene where the hero experiences a conflict in choosing between personal loyalty and professional career. Joe Lampton, for instance, in Braine's *Room at the Top*, spends his last sentimental days with his mistress Alice Aisgill in a solitary cottage in Wales before he callously sacrifices her to his far-reaching ambitions.

Lampton's younger brother, Duddy Kravitz, follows this example, although he is rather more indifferent to the temptations of pastoral love. He wants to turn Lac St. Pierre into a holiday colony. To raise the necessary money, he systematically betrays his family and his friends, in particular the pastoral ideal epitomized in his grandfather's dictum "A man without land is nobody." In the plot of the novel, the corruption of Duddy's integrity is narrated in terms of the vanishing of a *locus amoenus*.

When Yvette for the first time takes Duddy to the lake, the couple crosses from the real into a pastoral world:

> They came down on the other side of the mountain and walked through a field of corn and a wide, hilly cow pasture. They crossed some disused tracks, hopped from rock to rock over a swirling creek, and entered a wood.

Nature is shown as untouched by man. A sense of loneliness and timelessness prevails:

> Before them spread a still blue lake and on the other side a forest of pine trees. There was not one house on the lake. Some cows grazed on the meadow near the shore and over the next hill there was a cornfield and a silo. There was no other sign of life or ownership or construction.

The ironic twist of the plot is foreshadowed in the last sentence. True, the ideal place of idyllic fulfillment actually exists but neither Yvette nor Duddy is capable or willing to play the archetypal pastoral role assigned to them. Yvette merely wants to have Duddy for herself; Duddy in his turn is instantly fascinated by the prospects of a commercial venture. This discrepancy becomes obvious when he casts off his clothes and dives into the crystal clear water: not, as we might be led to expect, to experience a mystical union with nature, but to test the quality of the rock.

In his ironic approach, Richler rejects the emotional potential of the pastoral scene, eliminating almost all traces of sentimental romance. It is part of this pervading irony that only the reader is fully aware of Duddy's business transactions as a gradual destruction not simply of the idyllic landscape but at the same time of the pastoral way of life. In each of the novel's four parts, Duddy secretly visits the lake to make sure that his grand scheme has remained undetected. He succeeds, but not quite: for while the seasons change, nature turns more and more hostile. When Duddy inspects his lake in winter (Pt. 2, Ch. 13), he almost freezes to death before reaching his car. At his next visit in autumn (Pt. 3, Ch. 7), Duddy sees the site already through the eyes of the entrepreneur. When he finally and proudly presents his newly acquired property to his family (Pt. 4, Ch. 2), the pastoral scenery has disappeared with a vengeance: Duddy is a man with land now — but his grandfather turns away in disgust.

The disappearance of the *locus amoenus*, like the gradual decay of the beautiful portrait in Wilde's *Picture of Dorian Gray*, symbolizes the loss of innocence as the price of experience and success. Although Richler interprets this loss by no means as entirely negative, the victory of human activity over pastoral contemplation, the delight in hearing the "crash of falling pines" — to use Wilson's image — appears as a thoroughly ambiguous achievement.

Richler's ironic allusions to the pastoral tradition distinguish *Duddy Kravitz* from MacLennan's novel. It is perhaps not by chance that Duddy's epileptic friend who becomes a paraplegic after a car accident indirectly caused by Duddy, is called Virgil Roseboro. The pastoral ideal, first unfolded in Virgil's eclogues, is

severely damaged. Richler's novel no longer aims at setting the scene for a bucolic dream world but analyzes the reason behind its diminished value.

The lonely Lac St. Pierre and the transformation it has to undergo are complex symbols. Their connotations are carefully controlled by a narrator who makes sure that the fundamental gap between ideal and real is never bridged. Under the prevailing circumstances, he suggests, the price man has to pay for making his vision come true is the distortion of the vision itself.

"FORMULA WRITING," which in Northrop Frye's view formed the bulk of nineteenth-century literature in Canada, was characterized by the imitation or adaptation of existing narrative patterns, and by their application to domestic characters, domestic themes and domestic scenery. The formal independence which Canadian writers have been gaining since the 1950's, by contrast, is quite often accompanied by a greater freedom in the choice of setting. This, in turn, means a wider scope in the handling of pastoral themes.

The work of Margaret Laurence offers numerous examples of both the "local colour" pastoral and the pastoral as a narrative device for exploring the "fantastic" aspects of reality. A well known example of the first kind is the cannery episode in *The Stone Angel* (1964), in which the biblical meeting between Hagar and Joseph (one of the archetypal pastoral encounters in world literature) serves as background for Hagar Shipley's Arcadian vision in a starkly realistic setting.

The second type emerges most strikingly in Margaret Laurence's collection of short stories, *The Tomorrow-Tamer*, published in 1963. In "The Perfume Sea" the threatened idyll is located halfway between reality and fantasy, between public life and private sphere, between geographical points and political factions. Set in West Africa during the turbulent period of transition from colonialism to independence, the story centres on two European expatriates of dubious extraction: the hair-dresser Mr. Archipelago — a sadder but a wiser man than his famous colleague Jefferson Thorpe in Leacock's story — and the girl Doree, his shop assistant. In the rapidly changing situation where power is shifting from white to black, both are outsiders and are forced to manoeuvre rather carefully.

Both seek refuge in Archipelago's house and garden. Within the house, the inhabitants are sheltered from the real world and from the confusing problems which a change of clientele poses for a fashionable ladies' hairdresser. The house and its exuberantly growing garden are shown as a secular Eden, as a spatial equivalent of man's desire for peace in the face of dangerous upheavals which he cannot hope to prevent. Although Archipelago's very name suggests green isles in the sea of misery, he is far from acting as an isolated hero in the romantic tradition. Instead, Archipelago represents the classical tradition of retirement to the country. Probably without being aware of it, he follows Horace's advice, and reviews the world from

a safe distance without getting involved. The rural ideal of the quiet country life had been revived by eighteenth-century novelists such as Henry Fielding. In what might well be an allusion to Mr. Wilson's "little garden," where Joseph Andrews and Parson Adams are invited to rest, Archipelago's garden is described as a *hortus conclusus*:

> A large green house by the shore sheltered Mr. Archipelago. . . . It was off by itself, on a jut of land overlooking a small bay. The sprawling overgrown garden was surrounded by a high green wall which enabled Mr. Archipelago in the late afternoons to work outside clad only in his underwear and a round white linen hat.

The pastoral sphere is limited in more than one way. While in the eighteenth-century novel the *locus amoenus* was allowed to exist side by side with reality, in modern narrative the fantastical and allegorical overtones must be carefully controlled so as not to interfere with the reader's demand for a plausibly motivated plot. Thus, Archipelago's escapist private world, even if it is credible enough, is a comic pastoral. The hairdresser in his hat and underwear, who lets a fascinated Doree sniff at his countless scent bottles, which carry her away to the "perfume sea" of exotic smells and illusions, is a grotesque figure with tragic elements.

The tragic undertone derives from the vulnerability of the precarious idyll. Both protagonists are aware that their happiness is poised at the edge of destruction because they want to keep it stable but "outside the green wall . . . events occurred." Eventually they will have to give up the garden, not only because the world outside might find out about it but also because their privacy lacks vitality: it is sterile, if dignified; just like the sensitive flower in the garden which closes at the slightest touch, "it was not to be bribed or cajoled; it had dignity."

Margaret Laurence's version of the threatened idyll is by no means restricted to the description of the secluded garden, and to the characterization of the central figures who cultivate it. The dominant theme — a fundamental antagonism between the real and the ideal, between the world as it is and as it should be — is borne out by the structure of the plot. The idyllic garden scene is placed exactly in the middle between "events": the introductory episode dealing with the end of the colonial era, and the closing one describing the beginning of the new age, and Archipelago's brilliant survival under the new sign "African Ladies a Specialty." Just as his house occupies a central position, being situated halfway between the African and the European quarters, the realm of imagination is wedged in between stretches of inexorable historical developments.

In "The Perfume Sea," the paradox of pastoral conventions in a modern narrative context is deliberately faced rather than explained away. Unlike Leacock, Margaret Laurence doesn't camouflage the utopian element of the idyll by an anachronistic, if subtly ironic adherence to the style and values of the eighteenth century, or by using traditional topoi to intensify an emotional impression, as

MacLennan does in his novels. Instead, she keeps the pastoral scene in full view of the reader as a middle ground between the extremes. At the same time, she marks it as a possible way of experiencing reality. Archipelago's pastoral world picture is rendered with sympathy, but held at a critical distance: while it may triumph for a moment or two over "progress," it cannot stop it.

IN RECENT YEARS, THE INFLUENCE of the pastoral tradition on Canadian fiction in English seems to have increased rather than dwindled. A new generation of writers employs the tension between the harmony and self-sufficiency of the idyllic scene, and its utopian quality, in order to explore new areas of reality. Margaret Laurence's technique of using the pastoral as a metaphor of psychological states is further developed in the work of Hugh Hood. In his short stories, the protagonists are frequently confronted with idyllic "epiphanies": for a fleeting moment all the problems of their non-descript or solitary existence apear to be solved (e.g., in "A Solitary Ewe" and "The Tolstoy Pitch").

Pastoral patterns are particularly obvious in "Getting to Williamstown" where a dying narrator reviews his past life.[5] Various stages of his career drift by, evoked in a stream-of-consciousness technique, while he lies in a hospital bed. What at first appears as an extremely successful business career is gradually revealed as the failure to put into practice the essentially pastoral dream of a retired life in the country.

Again the idyll is located exactly: in retrospect, a peaceful country town in southern Ontario emerges as the quintessential place of an earthly paradise — paradoxically within easy reach all his life but yet strangely inaccessible; the banal events of life intervene, his wife objects to a dull life outside Montreal, the children quarrel, his own career demands priority.

Hood manages to turn this fairly conventional dilemma into a complex image of man's inescapable but forever unsatisfactory task of balancing ideal and reality. On the face of it, the *locus amoenus* is presented in full detail: the family leaving the motorway and crossing the river, with a sunny sky over the peaceful countryside, the desirable white house next to the church just visible through the trees, the old-fashioned village itself. The narrator remembers all that, but it belongs to a past which can never be recovered.

The elusive idyll, apart from contributing to the nostalgic atmosphere, is an emblem of the narrator's mind. It is recreated in a sequence of disjointed fragments by the dying man who confuses past and present. The rapid shift of narrative tenses reflects the frequent transition from factual account to dream vision. About the house he says at one point:

We made up stories about it; it was a little house or an enchanted castle ... Now

> we are coming to Williamstown; the trees are growing plentiful and the children need, they say, a stop. Deep, deep in the countryside.

The stream-of-consciousness emphasizes the unreal yet intense quality of the pastoral vision, while the continuous form adds a sense of timelessness. The desperate look back to an idealized past which is extinct merges with a vision of a promised land of hope just coming into view. The full significance of the idyllic village as "heavenly place" (as it is once called) is never explicitly stated, but metaphorically suggested. The sequence of memoirs stops abruptly with the narrator's arrival at the longed-for place — which at the realistic level indicates his death:

> Being carried along the top of the hill and we swoop downwards as trees thicken, a green island, around us, and here at the edge of town I see the white building [i.e., the church] gleaming in the sun under the soft sheen of the tower, one narrow field from town.

This closing image remains ambiguous: is it the crowning illusion or does it point to eventual redemption? No rational explanation is offered; reality and fantasy are balanced. Although the pastoral topos is fully unfolded it is left to speak for itself.

Hood's "Getting to Williamstown" is remarkable for the skillful handling of point of view as well as for the subtle references to romantic motifs. The phrase "a green island" which had slipped into the passage just quoted takes the reader back to the story's Shelleyan motto:

> Many a green isle needs must be
> In the deep blue sea of misery.

In MacLennan's *Watch*, Shelley's lines were merely part of the sentimental mood. Here, the reference is less obvious but more to the point. The author actually takes up Shelley's central idea that man's muddled and guilty existence may be redeemed by occasional glimpses of innocence and happiness. It is this hope, Shelley argues, which beyond any reasonable expectations gives man the strength to carry on:

> Or the mariner, worn and wan,
> Never thus could voyage on.

As in Shelley's elegy, the sea and island symbolism has very specific connotations in Hood's narrative: it might be called a prose elegy on the meaning of the pastoral dream in a tragic world. From the way this vision is presented in the text, the green island of idyllic bliss is a fleeting moment, equivalent to the uncertainty of any personal belief, but still existing.

The author himself has this impact in mind when he says, about his protagonists in general,

> I am interested in the hero as a model of virtue because he is like a redeemer — not

> necessarily a Christian redeemer, but a person who unites the godlike and the human and acts perfectly as a God, of course, and also acts perfectly as a man.[6]

The pastoral thus functions at yet another, allegorical level. The pastoral hero is an emblem of moral perfection for the very reason that he sticks to his absurd dream — although (or even because) this dream seems to have failed during his lifetime.

Hood's fiction is sometimes praised as descriptive, and classified as "traditional."[7] Such assessments overlook the pervasive importance of the allegorical level. About it, Hood says with characteristic exaggeration:

> Everything I write is an allegory, there's no question about that. I figure that I've been teaching more and more the last few years that *The Fairie Queen* is in the centre of literature in English, I think that literature in English is all dream vision, allegory, pastoral, romantic epic.[8]

In "Getting to Williamstown," the tension between reality and pastoral dream works at three superimposed levels: those of actual events, of psychological background, and of moral parable. Hood's idyllic episode links scepticism and hope. The pastoral mode functions as a criticism of reality, just as reality modifies the pastoral dimension.

IN CONSIDERING A FEW VARIATIONS of the use of pastoral conventions in modern Canadian fiction, we have moved far away from the Reverend Drone reading Theocritus in the pleasant shadow of his plum tree — away indeed from the pastoral as a separate genre but also away from an analysis of Canadian fiction predominantly in terms of the "Canadian experience."

Judging from the examples, it appears that Canadian fiction, over the past twenty years, has both adopted but added to the pastoral tradition at large; a set of conventional themes has gradually become a non-realistic narrative mode suitable for exploring mythical, psychological, even ideological layers below the empirical surface. This creative process of re-interpretation involves thematic modifications but also structural innovations. It is difficult to explain these changes solely in terms of a national tradition without taking into account comparative aspects.

From this point of view, Frye's attractive hypothesis assuming an *a priori* affinity between Canadian literary experience and the pastoral "myth" would have to be modified — all the more so since Frye's authority has paved the way for the thematic approach which today is favoured in Canadian literature studies. The neglect of formal, structural and comparative aspects has to be seen against the background of literary nationalism and the dawning of a new "Elizabethan age" where works of art are mainly assessed on the basis of what they contribute to the national or cultural "identity."

From a purely literary perspective, however, thematic critcism suffers from a severe drawback in that it seeks, in Frank Davey's words, "above all to define a national culture but chooses to work with materials — literary themes — that are, because of their limited number, international in nature."[9] Davey further points out that in their efforts to single out "typical" themes — man as victim, hostile nature, the reluctant immigrant — critics have occasionally tended to overlook the fact that such themes frequently originate in an experience common to emerging national literatures in general rather than to one particular national tradition.

In trying to show how the pastoral episode in modern Canadian fiction develops older patterns, we have approached the problem of independence and interdependence from a different angle. In a dialectic process of reproduction and innovation, Canadian authors "reconstruct" literary developments: the reduction of the pastoral genre to the pastoral scene, the integration of pastoral topoi into realistic narrative in a more and more complex fashion.

The time lag involved in this process of assimilation is continually decreasing. This becomes evident if one tentatively applies the "telescoping" hypothesis to the periodization of modern Canadian fiction as suggested in the *Literary History of Canada*.[10] Here, William New characterizes the 1950's as the decade of MacLennan, concentrating on the "mimetic representation of ordinary lives." The doomed idyll in *The Watch that Ends the Night* and, to a certain extent, the rejection of pastoral perfection in *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* would seem to fit this formula. On an international scale, it refers to a type of the novel which emerged in the second half of the nineteenth century. In the 1960's, New continues, Canadian fiction shifts to a novel concept of individual experience most powerfully reflected in the psychological realism of Margaret Laurence (and, of course, the increasing influence of Malcolm Lowry's work). We might relate this to the rise of the psychological novel in the 1920's, with the stream-of-consciousness techniques in the novels of James Joyce and Virginia Woolf as the most prominent examples.

As one approaches the 1970's, relationships become less palpable. New claims that in contemporary Canadian fiction "linear narrative [is] giving way to complex artifice; realism [is] losing ground to improvisational modes, to science fiction, to the surreal, the absurd, and the consciously contrived mythic and fabular." Even though the tendency towards "fabulation" is perhaps less marked in Canadian literature than in the literature of the United States, Hugh Hood's short story shows a renewed interest in myth and allegory; it returns also to a straightforward plot and a simple psychology — characteristics of "post-modern" fiction at large.

NOTES

[1] Daniel Wilson, "Canadian Poetry" (1858); rpt. in *The Search for English-Canadian Literature*, ed. C. Ballstadt (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1975), pp. 16 ff.

[2] "Conclusion" to the *Literary History of Canada*, ed. C. F. Klinck (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1976), p. 239.

[3] A useful introduction to the history of pastoral is Renate Boeschenstein's *Idylle* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1967).

[4] "Reflections on Two Decades," *Canadian Literature*, No. 41 (Summer 1969), p. 31.

[5] In *The Fruitman, the Meatman, and the Manager* (Ottawa: Oberon, 1971).

[6] Victoria C. Hale, "An Interview with Hugh Hood," *WLWE*, 11, No. 1 (1972), 37.

[7] See Dennis Duffy, "Grace: The Novels of Hugh Hood," *Canadian Literature*, No. 47 (Winter 1971), 10-25.

[8] Hale, "Interview," p. 37.

[9] Frank Davey, "Surviving the Paraphrase," *Canadian Literature*, No. 70 (Autumn 1976), 8.

[10] William H. New, "Fiction," *Literary History of Canada*, Vol. 3, pp. 233 ff.

TWO POEMS

Dale Zieroth

FEAR OF FAILURE

Her first time on skis,
and the first real snow this winter,
she is unhappy with the spotlight, the snow, the very
air in her lungs: can't bend her knees
perfectly
right away — this is Five Years Old and I try to help
but the snow seems to be too much for us:
she whacks me on the knee
ski pole on cold bone
and I grab her and she cries
and I'm mad now cause I've done that wrong
and my record for being the kind of father I want to be
is still too few days.
And later I try to
explain but I must hold too tightly cause she
spins away and it's finished for her anyway, she
decides to take up skating while I
go over the words again: Look
Nobody's Good Right Away
At Anything
printing or putting on clothes or even
breathing: it's gotta be shaken out of you.

And I can't believe a man can stumble so much
with his child and just because she's alive
sure I believe in miracles
but what about when my blood goes numb
when the world rumbles and pains in the press
or the everyday lives make no headlines and die
choked on the pain all the way
or the endless complaints of money and sweat and
kids spitting at each other on the way to school
the taste of gas like death in the air.
I sit and listen to the future.
Do you know who it feels yet?
Do you sometimes feel it, little kid, little kid,
red coat against the snow, a
toboggan full of smiles, shake me
shake me loose, join me to the day:
I lack the drive
I slide down past the handholds of home
and I manage and scarcely care today
where the melting snow goes or takes me or ends.

WOODING

We found the larches changing coats, turning gold,
we found them burning on their
high September hillsides ten miles from the town
that turned toward more sleep on its
Sunday morning bed, we were
past the clearing where the portable mill had stood and
left the hump of old sawdust full of
the only young lodgepole around, the truck
going slow, lugging and looking for
the perfect tree, one in
twenty acres while the nutcrackers bobbed in their flight
past the meadow where the elk had grazed and eaten
and already bedded down.

And we found it on the last skid trail
that went up through the trees like a rollercoaster ride,
we found it standing,
dead and clean and dry as a dollar bill.

So Gordon undercut and planned the pivot,
he looked to the top and he knew in his eye
which way it would go.
There were instructions, the last
uncertain laugh before the chainsaw came on, coughing
coughing, catching at last,
consuming us all while Gordon cut and looked
wedged it over centre
and dropped it down on the ground with a bounce.

Coming back from the fall, thirty rounds of
firewood stacked around the saw,
sometimes the clouds circled in like birds.
We talked about fuel bills and devastation,
we covered the future and
we dwelt like hungry dogs in the promises
we found. We noticed where we were at last
when we saw the lake and white banks of Windermere.
There was snow on Chisel again.
And we knew then something about coming down,
coming back into town where the people
stopped and watched our load of wood look easy going by:
we knew we had carried off a giant and this winter
our sleep would be warm with the forest.

FRANCES BROOKE'S EARLY FICTION

Lorraine McMullen

FINDING HERSELF AT QUEBEC in 1763, Frances Brooke (1723-1789) made the most of the opportunity to transmute some of her experiences and observations into fiction. The result, *The History of Emily Montague* (1769), is well known in Canada. Yet criticism of this work has rarely, and then only briefly, alluded to Brooke's earlier writing which prepared her to make such effective use of her Canadian experiences.[1] Her earlier novel, *The History of Lady Julia Mandeville* (1763) was, in fact, more popular in its day than *Emily Montague* and deserves consideration in its own right.[2] Also ignored has been a consideration of influences on Mrs. Brooke's writing, with the one exception of Samuel Richardson, father of all eighteenth-century epistolary novelists. A study of Mrs. Brooke's translation of Madame Marie Jeanne Riccoboni's *Lettres de Milady Juliette Catesby à Milady Henriette Campley, son Amie* (1759) provides us with an indication of another influence at least as important as that of Richardson, that of Madame Riccoboni and the French novel of sensibility. *Emily Montague* then can be seen as a natural development in style, attitude, tone, and characterization, from Frances Brooke's earlier work, her own novel, and her translation from the French.

Sensibility was not English in origin. The main stream of sensibility novelists who influenced writers throughout Europe were French. As Maurice Lévy has noted, "France before England devoted itself to the problems of the heart and the passions."[3] Madame de la Fayette's *La Princesse de Clèves* (1678), with its portrayal of love as an overwhelming passion which brings suffering and joy, despair and ecstasy, had provided the early impetus, and Pierre Marivaux with *La Vie de Marianne* (1731-1736) is considered the founder of the French school of sensibility. Abbé Prévost's *Mémoires et aventures d'un homme de qualité qui s'est retiré du monde* (1728-1733), especially the last volume, *Manon Lescaut* (1733), which appeared in many editions in both French and English, influenced writers of both countries. E. A. Baker quotes from *Manon Lescaut*: "If tears and sighs are not to be described as pleasures, it is true nevertheless that they have infinite sweetness for a person in mortal affliction. The moments that I devoted to my grief were so dear to me that to prolong them I abstained from sleep."[4] These lines could have appeared in any one of a number of subsequent eighteenth-century novels of sensibility, English or French.

At the time of Mrs. Brooke's translation of her novels, Madame Marie Jeanne Riccoboni (1714-1792) was becoming well known in both France and England for her novels of sensibility. Appearing only one year after the original French novel, with a second edition the same year and six editions by 1780, Mrs. Brooke's translation furthered Madame Riccoboni's popularity and was an impetus to the developing cult of sensibility in England. Madame Riccoboni explored especially the intense feelings evoked by love. Sorrow was always a necessary element, and her plots were constructed around heroines either betrayed or believing themselves betrayed. Although the way of life she described was generally realistic she tended to avoid reference to the more mundane aspects of reality, and to unhappiness and tragedy except for that "sweet melancholy," in which the sentimental reader took pleasure and which demonstrated the excessive sensibility of her hero and heroine. As Francis Wright remarks, "In constructing a plot to develop sorrow, either transient or permanent, she sketched the prototype of the sentimental love story."[5]

WHEN FRANCES BROOKE TRANSLATED Madame Riccoboni's *Lettres de Milady Juliette Catesby à Milady Henriette Campley, son Amie* in 1760, she selected one of the best novels[6] of a woman already widely known, and presumably a novel which she, herself, found congenial. The *Letters of Juliet Lady Catesby to her Friend, Lady Henrietta Campley*[7] is typical of Madame Riccoboni's works. The tone of the novel is highly emotional, voicing the increasingly distraught state of mind of the central character, Juliet Catesby, and her lover, Lord Ossory. As is usual with Madame Riccoboni, the plot revolves around the various complications which must be resolved before the two lovers are finally united. The novel is composed of thirty-nine letters from Juliet Catesby to her friend, Henrietta. At the onset the reader learns of Lady Catesby's hasty departure from the house she had been visiting to avoid encountering her former lover, Lord Ossory. She gives a lengthy and highly emotional account of her meeting several years earlier with Ossory, their love and decision to marry, his abrupt departure after a highly emotional but inexplicable scene, and his hasty marriage to another. His wife has died and now he is besieging Juliet with letters. After much emotional wavering, she finally consents to read Ossory's lengthy explanation of his earlier conduct. He confesses that, in a state of drunkenness following a party, he had seduced the young sister of a close friend and, learning later of her pregnancy and threatened suicide, felt obliged to marry her. Now, two years later, she is dead and he is free to reveal the story to Juliet. Satisfied with Ossory's explanation Juliet agrees to marry him.

From this novel Mrs. Brooke learned how to construct a tightly knit novel of sensibility. Her *History of Lady Julia Mandeville*,[8] which appeared three years

after this translation, is composed of seventy-seven letters, the great majority of which are written by two central characters: Harry Mandeville, the lover of Julia, and Lady Anne Wilmot, a spritely, coquettish young widow, friend of the two lovers. Anne's letters to her own lover Colonel Bellville recount activities on the country estate of Julia Mandeville's father, Lord Belmont, where she and Harry are guests. Harry's letter to a friend, George Mordaunt, are occupied primarily with his description of his growing love for Julia. When he realizes the intensity of his love, Harry resolves to leave the Belmont estate in the hope of increasing his fortune sufficiently to marry her. Before he leaves, Harry and Julia vow to remain true to their love, but they acquaint neither Julia's parents nor Harry's father with the situation. Not long after, through a complicated set of circumstances, Harry is led to believe that Julia will marry Lord Melvin, son of a wealthy aristocratic friend of her family. He rushes to Belmont where he is critically injured by Melvin whom he has forced into a duel. Harry lives long enough to learn that the wedding plans of which he heard were intended for his own marriage to Julia and that he was to inherit the Belmont title and estate. Through chance Harry had never received the letter acquainting him with this happy resolution. Shortly after his death Julia dies of a broken heart.

The theme of noble and sentimental lovers exhibiting the utmost sensibility as they seek to resolve their difficulties is common to both novels and given full expression in both. Madame Riccoboni's lovers are finally happily united, although this is not the case in all of her novels.[9] Mrs. Brooke's Julia and Harry Mandeville die for love; however, there are two central pairs or lovers whose situations are happily resolved after various impediments are overcome: Anne Wilmot and Bellville; Anne's niece, Bell Hastings, and Lord Melvin. Bell's dilemma resembles that of Juliet Catesby; it is the result of an apparent betrayal, but as with Lady Catesby all is eventually explained satisfactorily.

In both novels the sensibility of the lovers is frequently demonstrated and as frequently referred to. Juliet Catesby gives an indication of the acute sensibility of herself and her lover as she recounts the moment when she and Ossory first revealed their love to each other: "One day, reading an affective Story of two tender Lovers who had been cruelly torn from each other, the Book fell from our Hands, our Tears began to flow . . ." (Letter XV). This scene not only demonstrates their tenderness in weeping for fictional lovers, but also foreshadows their own separation and provides an indication of the intensity of their emotions when such would occur. The emotional stress resulting from leaving Juliet to marry the woman he seduced does, in fact, cause Ossory to become seriously ill. Juliet Catesby's present suitor, Lord Harry, also shows his sensibility by collapsing when rejected. This in turn leads Juliet to exclaim, despite her dislike for him, that her heart is "too full of sensibility not to compassionate his Love, though too much prepossessed to return it" (Letter XXIII). In Mrs. Brooke's novel, Harry Mande-

ville, too, is beseiged by an unwanted suitor, a Miss Westbrook, daughter of a *nouveau riche* neighbour, and as he journeys forth to inform her that he cannot respond to her overtures his reaction to the situation is much like that of Juliet: "These trials are too great for a heart like mine, tender, sympathetic, compassionate, and softened by the sense of its own sufferings; I shall expire with regret and confusion at her sight." Harry's excessive sensibility is the major theme of his letters. He is the male counterpart of Riccoboni's Juliet Catesby. It is Harry who writes of the ennobling quality of love: "Why do closeted moralists, strangers to the human heart, rail indiscriminately at love? When inspired by a worthy object, it leads to everything that is great and noble; warmed by the desire of being approved by her, there is nothing I would not attempt"; and later, "The love of such a woman is the love of virtue itself: it raises, it refines, it ennobles every sentiment of the heart." Julia, too, in the Brooke novel, writes to her friend Emily Howard of her own sensibility, "Born with a too tender heart, which never before found an object worthy of its attachment, the excess of my affection is unspeakable. Delicate in my choice, even in friends, it was not easy to find a lover equal to that idea of perfection my imagination had formed."

Throughout Madame Riccoboni's novel we are immersed in the sufferings, the "exquisite pangs," of the separated lovers. It is only in the last section of Mrs. Brooke's novel, however, that we are plunged into the grief of the dying lovers and the anguish of their afflicted parents and friends. After the death of the two young lovers, Anne Wilmot writes: "Pleased with the tender sorrow which possessed my soul, I determined to indulge it to the utmost," words reminiscent of those of Prévost's *Man of Quality* quoted earlier: "If tears and sighs are not to be described as pleasures, it is true nevertheless that they have sweetness for a person in mortal affliction. The moments that I devoted to my grief were so dear to me that to prolong them I abstained from sleep." There is a genuine pleasure in sorrow for the individual of sensibility. The previously Edenic setting of the Belmont garden takes on gothic overtones as Anne writes:

> Pleased with the tender sorrow which possessed all my soul, I determined to indulge it to the utmost; and, revolving in my imagination the happy hours of chearful friendship to which that smiling scene had been witness, prolonged my walk till evening had, almost unperceived, spread its gloomy horrors round; till the varied tints of the flowers were lost in the deepening shades of night.
>
> Awaking at once from the reverie in which I had been plunged, I found myself at a distance from the house, just entering the little wood so loved by my charming friend; the every moment increasing darkness gave an awful gloom to the trees; I stopped, I looked round, not a human form was in sight; I listened, and heard not a sound but the trembling of some poplars in the wood; I called, but the echo of my own voice was the only answer I received; a dreary silence reigned around; a terror I never felt before seized me; my heart panted with timid apprehension; I breathed short, I started at every leaf that moved; my limbs were covered with a

> cold dew; I fancied I saw a thousand airy forms flit around me; I seemed to hear the shrieks of the dead and dying; there is no describing my horrors.

It is worth noting that Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* was published the same year as *The History of Lady Julia Mandeville*, 1763. The melodramatic climax, the sudden violence, and the overtones of the final pages of Mrs. Brooke's novel differentiate her from Madame Riccoboni and indicate her awareness of the trend of the novel of sensibility toward the gothic.

EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY READERS apparently objected to the disastrous ending of Mrs. Brooke's novel. According to one report, "It has been often, however, wished that the catastrophe had been less melancholy; and of the propriety of this opinion the Authoress herself is said to have been satisfied, but did not choose to make the alteration."[10] Mrs. Brooke was living in the age that preferred Nahum Tate's *King Lear* (in which the ending had been altered to suit the tender sensibilities of the audience) to Shakespeare's tragedy. Having criticized the influential David Garrick in *The Old Maid* for preferring the "adulterated cup of Tate [Nahum Tate's *Lear*] to the pure genuine draught offered him by the master he avows to serve with such fervency of devotion,"[11] Mrs. Brooke is not the writer to alter the unhappy ending of her novel to placate her readers.[12]

Although the catastrophe has come about abruptly, for the reader a brief reference to *Romeo and Juliet* foreshadows the tragedy. Writing of this play Anne says:

> We have seen them enact Romeo and Juliet.
> Lady Julia seemed to sympathize with the heroine:
> I'll not wed Paris; Romeo is my husband.

Indeed the similarity to *Romeo and Juliet* is not to be overlooked. At nineteen Julia is as innocent and naive a heroine as Juliet. She remains true to her lover from whom she is separated because of anticipated, rather than actual, parental opposition to their marriage. Harry rushes back because of a supposed plan of her father to marry her to another suitor. Like Romeo he dies because he fails to receive the letter which would clarify the situation. The parents who failed to explain their plans to their children ultimately must bear a large share of the responsibility for the tragedy. As in *Romeo and Juliet* each has lost an only child, and, as the novel ends, each plans to erect a memorial monument.

Although a duel provides the climax to the novel, duelling is only one of the aspects of society on which Mrs. Brooke is commenting. It is not intended to have the prominence which Mrs. Laetitia Barbauld in 1810 ascribes to it when she speaks of *The History of Lady Julia Mandeville* as "a forcible appeal to the feelings against the savage practice of duelling."[13] Duelling also appears in Mme. Riccoboni's novel as an aspect of life which contributes to both Juliet's anguish and

Ossory's dilemma. Juliet learns of the death of her only brother in a duel at the moment when she is most distressed by her apparent betrayal, and Ossory's unhappy situation is increased when he realizes that, were he not to marry the woman he seduced, her brother must surely challenge him to a duel; in all likelihood he would then add his friend's death to the woman's disgrace in the list of his culpabilities.

Didacticism and sentimentality characteristic of the novel of sensibility are very much in evidence in both of these novels. Yet the wit and humour which provide much of the attractiveness of the later *History of Emily Montague* are equally a part of Mrs. Brooke's first novel. In this respect she runs counter to the traditional novel of sensibility in which the excessively sentimental characters dominated by their emotions are more prone to tears than to laughter, and to emotional outbursts than to wit. Here certainly she differs radically from Madame Riccoboni, with whose heroine we are inclined to agree when she says about two-thirds through the novel:

> A Reflexion strikes me, my Dear; it is that I certainly must weary you. I tell you my Thoughts as they rise, and Heaven knows they contain nothing amusing —. (Letter XV)

Yet Lady Juliet Catesby, who never oversteps the bounds of propriety but remains a conventional heroine in outward behavior, makes a number of remarks which indicate her antipathy to the restrictions on women at the time and to the double standard governing the conduct of men and women. When her friend Henrietta's fiancé suggests that she should forgive Ossory since he is now repentant, Juliet seizes the opportunity to express her indignation at this male attitude:

> My Lord Castle-Cary pretends, that all Resentment ought to yield to a sincere Repentance. With my Inferiors, I will govern myself by this Maxim; but never with my Friends. But, my Dear, it will not be useless to make a little Remark here. It is, that Man only establish this Principle, in Hopes to take Advantage of it; Accustom yourself to think, with my Lord Castle-Cary, that Repentance effaces all Faults, and depend on it, he will provide himself of sufficient Occasions to repent. — His Letter displeases me, I confess: I renounce his Approbation: It would cost me too dear, if I must buy it by a Weakness, which would degrade me in my own Eyes. (Letter VII)

Later she writes:

> O my dear *Henrietta*, the Men regard us merely as Beings placed in the Universe for their Amusement; to trifle with, in that Species of Infancy, to which they are reduced by those impetuous Passions, which they reserve to themselves the infamous Liberty of arousing with Confidence, and submitting to with Shame. They have left to that Sex they presume to typify as weak and irresolute, the difficult Task of resisting the softer Impulses of the Heart, of conquering Nature herself. Slaves to their Senses alone, when they appear to be so to our Charms; it is for themselves they pursue, for themselves they address us: They consider only the Pleasures we

> are capable of bestowing: They withhold their Esteem from the object of their pretended Adorations; and if they find in us Strength of Mind, and Dignity of Sentiments, we are *inhuman Creatures*: We pass the Limits their Tyranny has prescribed to us, and become unjust without knowing it. (Letter XXII)

Possibly such feminist comments made the novel more congenial to Mrs. Brooke to translate; certainly they would reinforce her own feminist stance.

IN MRS. BROOKE'S NOVEL, Julia Mandeville is, like Juliet Catesby, the conventional eighteenth-century heroine, but she plays a minor role in the novel which bears her name. The more prominent Anne Wilmot is the Brooke spokesman. While Riccoboni's Juliet Catesby rails against the injustices of the woman's situation in society, Brooke's Anne has learned to cope with the situation in which she finds herself in the eighteenth-century battle of the sexes, as these words suggest:

> I am too good a politician in love matters ever to put a man out of doubt till half an hour before the ceremony. The moment a woman is weak enough to promise, she sets the heart of her lover at rest; the chace, and of consequence the pleasure, is at an end; and he has nothing to do but to seek a new object; and begin the pursuit over again.

The feminism which is evident in *The History of Emily Montague* is evident in the earlier Brooke novel through the persona of Anne who provides the humour as well as adding an air of realism to *The History of Lady Julia Mandeville*. One would expect such a lively character as Anne from the pen of Frances Brooke, whose highly successful *Old Maid* was the first periodical initiated by a woman,[14] and who was not afraid to cross swords with the powerful David Garrick, criticizing him in *The Old Maid* and later satirizing him in her novel *The Excursion* (1777).[15] Anne enjoys the new-found freedom of widowhood and, as almost half the letters of the novel are written by her, considerably livens up proceedings, providing an effective contrast to the emotional outpourings of Harry Mandeville. She is both of her age and outside of it. More than anyone else she is guided by right reason as well as elegant manners. As a friend of the young lovers whose own romance remains for the most part in the background she is in role and personality the forerunner of Emily Montague's young friend, Arabella Fermor. Anne is not a sentimentalist to the extent that Harry and Julia are, but rather practical and realistic. At one point, for example, she suggests that Harry should seriously consider marrying Miss Westbrook solely for her money. It is she who realizes the impracticality of Harry's plan to increase his fortune sufficiently in a year to marry Julia. Aware of the world she lives in, she assumes that Belmont would never consider the relatively fortuneless Harry for Julia despite his aristocratic

name, elegant manners and excessive sensibility. In this assumption, however, she is wrong; benevolence wins over practicality with Belmont.

Anne is adroit at manipulating people and situations, a talent charmingly evinced when seemingly chance events at a ball produce happy results for Julia and Harry and unhappy for Miss Westbrook. We learn later that Anne has carefully plotted the whole incident, making full use of her understanding of human nature and her skills as a coquette.[16] Her practical nature is demonstrated by the solution she works out to evade the clause in her husband's will whereby the entire estate passes immediately to his niece, Bell Hastings, if she marries. She wins Bell's agreement to return half the estate to her on her marriage, for if Bell did not agree to this Anne would not marry and the young woman would receive no share of the estate. As Anne points out, the half she herself will receive is in fact the sum of her dowry which, once passed to her husband, is lost to her completely — another comment on woman's status in eighteenth-century society. Perhaps the best example of Anne's flouting of eighteenth-century convention, when it cannot be manipulated or avoided, is her admission to Lady Belmont, after some witty and elusive repartee, that she does, in fact, love Bellville and that, since marriage appears impossible for them, she intends to continue enjoying his company, despite the impropriety of such a relationship in the eyes of society.

Similarities between *The History of Lady Julia Mandeville* and the better known *History of Emily Montague* are immediately evident. Both are epistolary novels structured about three sets of lovers. In both, the majority of letters are written by the man involved in the central romance, a conventional eighteenth-century lover (Harry Mandeville and Ed Rivers) and by the woman participant in a secondary romance (Anne Wilmot and Arabella Fermor). In both novels the woman is the astute observer and commentator on the affairs of the other lovers. In both, this woman spokesman provides the more realistic, perceptive and witty attitude, and through her independent spirit reflects the feminism of the author. The disparity between temperament and outlook of the two central viewpoints, that of the conventional, rather prosaic male and that of the perceptive, articulate female, contributes to the tension of the novels and provides variety of tone and pace, an asset lacking in Riccoboni's novel with its single correspondent. Thematically both of Brooke's novels are concerned with courtship and its complexities, employing the sentimental romantic plot to which Madame Riccoboni had made such a signal contribution. In both novels Mrs. Brooke questions social conventions, arranged marriages, and materialistic values in general. In both, sensibility is the overriding virtue of hero and heroine.

Today we direct our attention more to the Canadian novel with its interpretation of eighteenth-century Canadian setting and its view of life in Quebec immediately after the conquest. Yet a return to the earlier and more popular novel adds to our understanding of Frances Brooke, of her craftsmanship and her thematic

concerns, and helps us to see her in the context of her times. She learned from the French novel of sensibility and especially from Madame Riccoboni whom she translated: and there is no doubt that she took the overall structure and handling of narrative from her own first successful novel and adapted them to her new subject and new setting in *The History of Emily Montague*. Mrs. Brooke's popular translation of *Lady Catesby* and her own first novel contributed to the development of the English novel of sensibility. But Mrs. Brooke is also one of the earliest novelists to attempt a more realistic account of everyday events rather than a focussing on melodramatic incidents. This concern is evident in her portrayal of life on the Belmont estate with its outings, balls, and rural festivities, and later, in *Emily Montague*, of day-to-day events in Quebec, in which regional setting is incorporated more fully into the narrative. Thus she contributed to the newer movement toward realism as well as to the more currently popular cult of sensibility. A stylistic blending of the two modes is achieved largely through the voices of the two dissimilar correspondents in each novel, one a creature of extreme sensibility and the other an ironic observer. The contrasting images of women, the traditional eighteenth-century woman of feeling and the witty, astute commentator, also contribute to the tension between the sensible and the realistic, the romantic and the ironic. Indeed, not the least of Mrs. Brooke's concerns is the role of women in eighteenth-century society; and a major attraction of both novels, one which differentiates her fiction from that of her mentor Madame Riccoboni and others of her time, is her creation of an intelligent and lively spokesman for women.

NOTES

[1] There is one exception. W. H. New's excellent article "*The Old Maid:* Frances Brooke's Apprentice Feminism," *Journal of Canadian Fiction*, 2, No. 3 (Summer 1973), 9-12, shows the significance of Mrs. Brooke's periodical in her thematic and stylistic development.

[2] Three editions were published the first year, 1763, a fourth in 1765, and later editions in 1769, 1773, Dublin 1775, 1782. Also, reference to Mrs. Brooke usually identified her by describing her as the author of *The History of Lady Julia Mandeville*. Fanny Burney, when taken by her mother to meet her, spoke of Mrs. Brooke as "the celebrated authoress of 'Lady Julia Mandeville'" (*The Early Diary of Fanny Burney*, ed. A. R. Ellis, I, 283).

[3] Maurice Lévy, *Le Roman "Gothique" Anglais 1764-1824* (Toulouse: Université de Toulouse, 1968), p. 179.

[4] E. A. Baker, *The History of the English Novel* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1929), V, 126.

[5] Francis Wright, *Sensibility in English Prose Fiction 1760-1814: A Reinterpretation* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1937), 21.

[6] George Saintsbury says that "*Milady Catesby* is well worth comparing with [Fanny Burney's] *Evelina*, which is some twenty years its junior, and the sentimental parts

of which are quite in the same tone with it." *A History of the French Novel,* 2 vols. (New York: Russell and Russell, 1917, rpt. 1964), I, 435.

[7] All quotations from *The Letters of Juliet Lady Catesby to her Friend, Lady Henrietta Campley* are from the fourth edition (London: R. and J. Dodsley, 1764).

[8] All quotations from *The History of Lady Julia Mandeville* are from the seventh edition (London: J. Dodsley, 1782, 2 volumes). In volume 2 of this edition pages 193 to 240 do not exist. Signatures indicate that there are no leaves missing, but rather that pages have been incorrectly numbered. This fact has been confirmed by comparison with the 1763 edition.

[9] In her *Histoire du Marquis de Cressy* (1758), for example, the young girl rejected by the marquis for a more advantageous marriage enters the convent.

[10] John Nichols, *Literary Anecdotes of the Eighteenth Century; comprising biographical memoirs of William Bowyer* ... (London: Nichols, Son and Bentley, 1812-15), II, 346-47.

[11] Mary Singleton (pseud.), *The Old Maid,* A New Edition revised and corrected by the Editor (London: A. Millar, 1764), No. 18, p. 149.

[12] It is worth noting, however, that much later Mrs. Brooke wrote a sequel to *Julia Mandeville, The History of Charles Mandeville* (1790), in which she provides a happier ending. Charles, the supposedly long dead brother of Harry, returns to England a wealthy man and marries Emily Howard, Julia's confidante and her equal in sensibility. Since Emily has become a surrogate daughter to Julia's parents, the marriage provides a happy resolution for the families of both Harry and Julia.

[13] Laetitia Barbauld, ed., *The British Novelists* (London: Rivington, 1810), XXVII, p. i.

[14] As the title of his article indicates, W. H. New looks at the feminism in Brooke's *Old Maid* in his article "*The Old Maid:* Frances Brooke's Apprentice Feminism."

[15] See John Nichols' *Literary Anecdotes* re Mrs. Brooke's reference to Garrick in *The Old Maid.* Mrs. Brooke was criticized severely for this satire by the reviewer of *The Excursion* in *The Monthly Review,* LVII (1777), pp. 141-45, who devotes more space to praise of Mr. Garrick than to criticism of the novel. Garrick's own indignation is noted in the following letter:

> I hope you have seen how much I am abus'd in yr. Friend Mrs. Brooke's new Novel? — she is pleased to insinuate that [I am] an excellent Actor, a so so author, and Execrable Manager and a Worse Man — Thank you good Madame Brookes — If my heart was not better than my head, I would not give a farthing for the Carcass, but let it dangle, as it would deserve with It's brethren at ye End of Oxford Road — She has invented a Tale about a Tragedy, which is all a Lie, from beginning to ye End — she Even says, that I should reject a Play, if it should be a woman's — there's brutal Malignity for You — have not ye Ladies Mesdames *Griffith, Cowley & Cilesia* spoke of me before their Plays with an Over-Enthusiastic Econium? —

[Letter 1109, To Frances Cadogan, in *The Letters of David Garrick,* ed. G. Little and G. M. Kahrl (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1963), III, 1172.]

[16] See volume I, pp. 126-29.

THE COLONIAL HEROINE

The Novels of Sara Jeannette Duncan & Mrs. Campbell Praed

Diana Brydon

ALTHOUGH THE AMERICAN GIRL in James and Howells has attracted extensive critical attention, the portrayal of the colonial heroine in the fiction of Australia and Canada has been relatively neglected. This neglect is understandable — most of the writing at the turn of the century in which Australian and Canadian heroines play prominent roles is of little inherent literary merit — yet the fiction of this period is of great interest to the literary historian. It reveals a society in transition, cautiously seeking self-definition and a distinctive mode of expression, and it provides an oblique commentary on colonial-imperial relations through the romantic interplay between the native-born heroine and the British gentleman. Because the colonial heroine embodies all the complexities of the new nation's developing point of view, her type continues beyond the colonial period into the national period which follows Confederation in Canada and Federation in Australia. The colonial equivalent of the American "heiress of all the ages" is the "cousin Cinderella" of Duncan or the "disguised princess" of Praed.[1] An examination of the novels of Duncan and Praed, two fairly popular writers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, suggests that the colonial habit of mind is less a "cringe"[2] than a habit of high expectations and stern judgment. In *Cousin Cinderella*, Duncan's Canadians come to England to worship and stay to judge. Praed's colonials, dissatisfied with themselves and their Australian environment, find to their surprise that the mother country itself is less than ideal. They are compelled to learn that aspirations toward a higher good must be realised through a spiritual and not a geographical questing. In the work of each novelist, colonial values as well as ambiguities of allegiance are embodied in the figure of the colonial heroine; and the values are always affirmed.

Claude Bissell, R. E. Watters, and R. T. Robertson have made a good case for the comparative study of Canadian and Australian literatures, arguing that although their solutions to the colonial dilemma were often "startlingly different," Canada and Australia share "a common ancestry."[3] Watters suggests that the all-embracing frame of reference of the English class structure, so essential to the form of the English novel,

> simply did not exist [in the colonies], and its absence posed insuperable obstacles to our early novelists who themselves had been culturally conditioned to observe and interpret social environments through the same frame of reference.

It is this absence, and the freedom it allows as well as the disadvantages it causes, with which Duncan and Praed concern themselves.

They were both expatriate writers who published all their books abroad and who wrote for an international audience. Each seems to have felt the need to escape the confines of a provincial society, each married an Englishman and left her native land, yet each returned to that land in at least some of her fiction. In the course of her long career, Praed (1851-1935) wrote almost forty novels, about twenty of them Anglo-Australian romances. Duncan (1861-1922), ten years younger than Praed, wrote several international comedies centring on the many distinctions she perceived among Canadians, Americans, and the English, but only two of her novels focus on Canadian issues, *The Imperialist* (1904) and *Cousin Cinderella* (1908).

DUNCAN AND PRAED RESPONDED to the deficiencies of their own societies by describing and analysing them from the perspective of distance. Praed, the earlier novelist, met the difficulties of setting a novel in a country devoid of English class structures (although Australia was certainly developing its own class system, in which Praed's family represented landed gentry), by adapting the Anglo-Australian romances of Henry Kingsley to suit her own needs. Praed converted Kingsley's legacy of an Anglo-Australian romance which demonstrated the disappointed immigrant's capacity for wish-fulfillment in its reinforcement of British complacency and self-congratulation, into a type of romance which showed British values in conflict with the developing values of the new nation of Australia, and the ideal in opposition to the actual. Within the context of the romance form, she created a distinctively Australian heroine who came to embody the strengths and weaknesses of Australian society on the newly-settled continent.

Duncan's response to the absence in Canadian life of the all-embracing frame of reference of the English class structure was to compose social comedy which depends for its effect on the meetings and misunderstandings of representatives from these two different worlds. Although Praed has written in this vein — *Miss Jacobsen's Chance* is an excellent example of her ability to evoke the humour in such a situation — her characteristic tone is intense and passionate. The humour becomes painful, self-lacerating. Praed's central subject is the provincial heroine who longs for the release and stimulation of the wider life promised by the centres of cosmopolitan culture: she is blind to the value of her native land. The omniscient narrator sympathetically records and judges the moral dilemmas of her

heroines as they are initiated into self-knowledge and an awareness of the vanities of the social world beyond Australia's shores. The action is psychological and much emphasis is placed on the value of dream and the supernatural. Praed's natural inclinations and possibly her experience led her toward the portrayal of pathos, tragedy, and an inner life of fantasy and dream, whereas Duncan's very different temperament favoured the development of irony and a comedy of manners.

Duncan's early work is often superficial and loosely organized, but in her two Canadian novels her characteristic qualities of witty observation and ironic detachment are no longer indulged for their own sakes but utilized as part of a larger design and a deeper purpose. She moves beyond derivative social comedy to explore the psychological roots of Canadian social and political life. Although her stories are usually related in the voice of her heroine, the tone is always coolly dispassionate and amused. Her heroines are observers, even of themselves. Duncan seems to be the polar opposite of Praed. Together they present a composite portrait of the colonial heroine in Australian and Canadian fiction at the turn of the century.

DESPITE THEIR OBVIOUS DIFFERENCES in narrative technique, style and form, the Anglo-Australian romances of Praed and the social comedies of Duncan share certain important themes. Both writers are acutely conscious of the distinctions between their own land and the motherland, and they are anxious to give their nationality a literary definition, by "placing" it against an Old World background and perspective. Each employs the romantic involvement of her New World heroine with an English gentleman to comment, not only on differences in manners, custom and sincerity between Old World and New, but also (perhaps more importantly) on the colonial relationship itself and its psychological effects on both colonial and imperial participants. Duncan and Praed comment obliquely, through the presentation of character and incident, on this relationship, and their stories leave little doubt as to where their sympathies lie. Finally, for each novelist, the question of moral values underlies all social commentary. Praed and Duncan portray their colonial characters as representing most strongly the claims of the spiritual life, while the English function as slaves to material necessity. This contrast is not simply the juxtaposition of Old World corruption and New World innocence or of Europe in decline and the younger nations on the rise: it is also an affirmation of colonial independence of mind.

Praed makes her literary objectives explicit in her introductory note to *Policy and Passion* (1881), undoubtedly her best novel. After deploring the "onesidedness of the intellectual intercourse which at present connects Great Britain with the Antipodes," she goes on to predict a brilliant future for Australian society and

culture but notes as well that "the time for this is hardly yet ripe." In the meantime, the Australian experience must not pass undocumented and the British public must be brought gently to the realization that Australia might have something to say to them. She concludes: "it is to the British public that I, an Australian, address myself, with the hope that I may in some slight degree aid in bridging over the gulf which divides the Old World from the Young."

The heroine of *Policy and Passion* is a strong-willed impetuous young woman. Honoria Longleat is the daughter of the Premier of Leichardt's Land, a thinly disguised Queensland, in the government of which Praed's own father had held a Cabinet post. (It is fascinating to observe how accurate social observation and romantic fantasy intertwine in Praed's books.) Honoria never learns that her father was sent from England as a convict, a victim of the unjust English social system. She has been brought up a lady and is ashamed of her father's crude ways, which she associates with the limited scope of colonial existence. She expresses her dissatisfaction to her English visitor and suitor, Barrington, in a much quoted passage:

> 'Do not call me a *colonial*... When you have lived longer in Australia you will know you could not pay a lady a worse compliment.... To be *colonial* is to talk Australian slang; to be badly dressed, vulgar, everything that is abominable ... at least that is the general opinion.... You will see that it is the fashion out here to be as British as possible.'

She is conscious of the falsity of her position in mimicking the fashions of a country thousands of miles away and controlled by interests different from her own, but she realizes too that the vacuum in Australian life must be filled from somewhere. Just as she believes that novels are "false and unnatural" even as she relies on them to supply the deficiencies of her emotional life, so it is in desperation that she turns to an emulation of English ways to satisfy her own indefinable longings for a wider sphere of experience.

She continues her complaint:

> 'I am always fancying that we Australians are like children playing at being grown-up. It is in Europe that people live ... But, do you not see? — everything with us is borrowed. We cannot be original — we cannot even set up an independent government. We must copy old-world forms, and we have nothing of what makes the charm of the old world. Our range of view is so limited. We are so ignorant of life, and ignorant people cannot put out feelers, either deeply or widely.'

The Englishman Barrington makes the mistake of assuming that the malaise Honoria expresses can be satisfied by a simple change in material circumstances. He tells her: " 'You were not meant to lead a cramped existence in Australia.... Your gifts are wasted here.... You should live in England.' " She herself is wiser. She understands intuitively that her longings are partly the result of her sheltered life as a woman and partly an expression of a deeper spiritual need which cannot

be satisfied by the things of this world. She senses, too, that despite her impatience with Australia it is her homeland and she could never be truly happy abandoning it.

Honoria's discontent is placed in its proper perspective by her father's unbounded faith in the future of the new country he has adopted for his own. Praed clearly endorses Longleat's vision of a "young land where the forest is free to all, and the rich and poor are equal in the sight of God and man" and she intends her readers to feel the full strength of his dream of "founding a new order of things, of being the ancestor of great men — patriots — soldiers — legislators." The reader is told that Honoria's children will fulfil his ambition and that she herself comes to a greater appreciation of Australian values.

After Barrington has betrayed her trust and her honour has been saved by her faithful Australian suitor, Dyson Maddox, Honoria explains to Maddox:

> 'I trusted him to be loyal as you — as Australian men are loyal — it is the English who are false, who have bad thoughts . . . I did not think that there was any more harm in meeting him in the Gardens at night, than in walking with him by the lake at Kooralbyn.'

Just as Henry James's Winterbourne does not know what to make of the behaviour of the young American Daisy Miller, so Barrington is puzzled by the behaviour of Honoria. Praed comments:

> Her frank *abandon* bewildered Barrington's judgment, while it intoxicated his senses. He could not determine whether the absence of that maidenly reserve which he had been accustomed to associate with young ladies of the higher classes was the result of boldness or ignorance.

Barrington's error in misjudging Honoria reflects a failure of sensitivity on his part. He has relied so long on convention and social norms that he is incapable of assessing spontaneity. He cannot see that, in the words of an Australian observer, Honoria is "essentially a New-World product. No European young woman could combine so much boldness with an innocence which one is obliged to take for granted." She herself has come to recognize the truth of this remark by the story's end. When she meets Barrington years later at a London dinner party she is able to assure him that she has "never regretted having married an Australian; and [she wishes] for no better fate than to cast in [her] lot with that of Leichardt's Land."

PRAED'S COLONIAL HEROINE rejects her false British suitor, and chooses the simple but trustworthy values of life in a new land, as embodied in Dyson Maddox. She has been shaken by her encounter with Old World deceit, but she is strong enough to survive. In *Cousin Cinderella*, Duncan's emphasis is

less on virtue in distress than on the element of disguise and, as Clara Thomas has pointed out, on gamesmanship.[4] Like Honoria, Mary Trent is heiress to an immense New World fortune, but Mary's vulnerable appearance conceals a more formidable reality. She writes of Mrs. Jerome Jarvis's attempts to pair her off with her foolish son Billy Milliken:

> I felt like a mouse in the paws of Mrs. Jarvis, her own small Colonial trophy, which she would presently drop at the feet of Society, like rather a fraudulent mouse, perhaps, that really felt no great alarm, and listened with fascination to the purrings of conquest.

In this novel, Mary and her brother Graham have been sent from Canada to England as samples of what the colonies can produce. They are more than willing to fall in love with London — they are fully prepared to be carried away — yet throughout their adventure they stubbornly affirm that they have their own point of view, which emphatically defies the insular prejudices of the English.

Duncan shares Praed's dual awareness of the appalling absences in colonial life and their immense possibilities. Like Praed, she is fascinated by the paradox of the colonial, "free" of social restrictions yet bound by ties of loyalty to an ungrateful mother country, and of the British, "bound" yet somehow made free of the world through the close inter-relationships of their social circles. In *Policy and Passion*, Honoria is a prisoner of her own whims; Barrington of social expectations. Honoria's freedom makes her far too trusting, but she remains a lovely woman; Barrington's social rigidity makes him a monster. In *Cousin Cinderella*, Mary observes the advantages of the British social frame of reference:

> Then I began to wonder whether, for all its appearance of whirl and scramble and superficiality, the whole great organism wasn't very much knit together indeed, by ties of mutual loyalty and obligation — wasn't one fabric, down below, that was thoroughly warranted to wear.

In contrast, she and her brother are single individuals, with nothing behind them but their father's money and their own sense of themselves as Canadians. Sometimes they feel this freedom to be a drawback, but more often they are aware of it as a strength. They may admire the English, but they value their independence, and pity the English who are so hemmed in by restrictions that their personal lives are sacrificed or distorted. Mary remarks of the man she loves, Lord Doleford:

> His case seemed another illustration, amazing and a little absurd, of that curious authority by which the simple social structure and scheme of things in England could interfere with a person born in it. . . .

She agrees with Lord Doleford when he says: " 'I call it great luck to belong to a place like Canada . . . no bother in seeing your way, out there. No impediments.' "

Mary is at once impressed by the elaborate social structures of London society and disdainful of them. When she discovers that the English see her only in terms

of her father's money and the social potential it ensures her, she is delighted to feel herself "realized," but contemptuous of such a "low" way of looking at life. She explains:

> what I drew from it immediately, besides the joy itself, was a point of view. It was a point of view from which one could feel, looking out at the endless luxurious whirl of it, a kind of divine disdain of London, as if one had suddenly got behind the scenes with her, and no longer felt so prodigiously impressed.

Her brother Graham carries this point of view one step further, to argue that only Canadians can perceive the true value of the British moral inheritance, because as involved outsiders they can view it from the necessary sympathetic distance. He says, " 'Now we with our empty country and our simple record, we've got a point of view, if you like. It's inestimable.' "

These two Canadians in London refuse to become totally involved in the social whirl of London society or the ostentation of their American friend Evelyn Dicey. They choose, instead, to install themselves in a modest, unassuming flat, which Mary says "meant the identity we clung to. . . . This is just the size and importance we choose to connect ourselves with, at all events, for the present." This sense of untapped reserves of strength behind a modest exterior is a central aspect of this Canadian heroine's consciousness. Mary stands quietly back from events, allowing the English to think they are successfully manipulating her, but all the while she is secretly judging, quietly laughing at the follies of others, puncturing their pretensions with an irony so subtle it often goes unnoticed by its victims, and finally obtaining her desired end — marriage with the English Lord Doleford.

When Evelyn complains to Mary that she is "dead sick of the American myths they keep over here [in England] to take the place of wit and humour," Mary replies:

> 'Let them laugh at us as much as they can. We can laugh at them a great deal more, because we're made that way, and they aren't, are they?'

"I used 'we' continentally," she adds. The English are too insular, too self-important, too set in their ways, to see the humour in incongruities. But displacement and disparities are the essence of life in a new land and the most effective way of dealing with them is through humour. Canada and the United States share this heritage of exile from the centre to the periphery of their civilization in the nineteenth century, but the points of view they assume from their respective distances are, of course, quite different. In *Cousin Cinderella*, Evelyn is already beginning to exhibit those traits which later in the century will make the United States the new centre of English civilization.

Canada chose to remain a colony, working its way gradually to the full stature of a nation, while the United States chose rebellion and the immediate assertion of its independence from outside interference. Duncan's *Cousin Cinderella* shows

the effects of those decisions. In this novel, Canadians feel they belong to Britain in a way that Americans do not, yet Americans are treated with more respect, precisely because they are foreign and not colonial cousins.

Duncan treats this situation with self-aware irony. Her Canadians are more conscious of and conscientious about the Empire than her Britons. They are idealistic, self-effacing and tenacious. She presents Canada's colonial status as a virtue — she sees it as a symbol of Canadian generosity — but she is also aware that others see this idealism as foolishness. This double awareness constitutes the central irony of her work.

I agree with Thomas Tausky that "there is a feeling of melancholy about *Cousin Cinderella* despite the happy ending." He says: "Its root seems to be the eagerness with which the Trents are willing to sacrifice themselves for England, and the coldness and crudity with which their sacrifices are received."[5] A similar feeling emerges from a number of Praed's novels, particularly *An Australian Heroine* (1880), her first. This undertone of melancholy seems an unavoidable accompaniment to literary explorations of the colonial situation. Yet I would argue that this underlying sadness has its positive counterpart in that colonial independence of mind which is part of the complex characterization of the colonial heroine in all her roles. The heroines of Praed and Duncan reserve to themselves the right to judge; they triumph morally, though at a cost.

NOTES

[1] Mrs. Everard Cotes (Sara Jeannette Duncan), *Cousin Cinderella* (New York: Macmillan, 1908; rpt. Univ. of Toronto Press, 1973); Mrs. Campbell Praed, *An Australian Heroine* (1880; rpt. London: Chapman & Hall, 1883), p. 25.

[2] A. A. Phillips, "The Cultural Cringe," *The Australian Tradition* (1958; 2nd rev. ed., Melbourne: Cheshire-Lansdowne, 1966), p. 113.

[3] Claude Bissell, "A Common Ancestry: Literature in Australia and Canada," *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 25, no. 2 (January 1956), p. 142. See also R. E. Watters, "English Social Patterns in Early Australian and Canadian Fiction," in *National Identity*, ed. K. L. Goodwin (London: Heinemann, 1970), pp. 66-75, and R. T. Robertson, "Another Preface to an Uncollected Anthology: Canadian Criticism in a Commonwealth Context," *Ariel*, 4, No. 3 (July 1973), pp. 70-81.

[4] Clara Thomas, "Cousin Cinderella and the Empire Game," *Studies in Canadian Literature*, 1, no. 2 (Summer 1976), pp. 183-93.

[5] "The American Girls of William Dean Howells and Sara Jeanette Duncan," *Journal of Canadian Fiction*, 4, no. 1 (1975), p. 156.

DANTE & "THE GOLDEN DOG"

Joy Kuropatwa

Discussing *The Golden Dog* in undefined terms will not work; one needs a working definition of "romance." Frye provides one in *The Secular Scripture* when he notes that "the two chief elements of romance [are] love and adventure": otherwise expressed, "sexuality and violence are central to romance."[1] Frye also states that "The central element of romance is a love story, and the exciting adventures are normally a foreplay leading up to a sexual union." While *The Golden Dog* is romantic in the sense that it is "a tale of love and adventure," the adventures recounted are certainly not a "foreplay leading up to a sexual union"; if the six main characters form relationships that make three couples, the three relationships paid most attention to over the course of the novel are terminated by treachery, death, or both. These relationships end, in degrees of agony that range from the exquisite to the soul-wracking, before the novel closes; the adventures described are a prelude to dissolution.

But there is an even more essential way in which *The Golden Dog* eludes the label "romance." Frye notes

> the curious polarized characterization of romance, its tendency to split into heroes and villains. Romance avoids the ambiguities of ordinary life, where everything is a mixture of good and bad, and where it is difficult to take sides or believe that people are consistent patterns of virtue or vice.

Kirby is careful to create characters that are neither exclusively good nor bad. Apart from characterization, ambiguity is present in the form of undermining wit; jabs at underlying assumptions give the first hint that the world of *The Golden Dog* is not a world in which "the curious polarized characterization of romance," and the type of moral vision which this implies, may be found. For example, when bickering between the rival factions of the Grand Company and the Golden Dog threatens to disrupt the proceedings of a meeting intended to clarify New France's military strategy, the Governor of the colony intercedes with the "Dr. Strangelove" line "This is a Council of War, and not a place for recriminations."[2] Another such instance concerns Pierre Philibert and Amélie de Repentigny. As Amélie, who has retreated to an Ursuline convent, quickly slides into the final stage of her romantic decline,

> A feeling of pity and sympathy for these two affianced and unfortunate lovers stole into the hearts of the coldest nuns, while the novices and the romantic convent girls were absolutely wild over the melancholy fate of Pierre and Amélie.

Kirby, apart from undermining the seriousness of Amélie's romantic decline, here associates the romantic sensibility with the young "convent girls," rather than the elder novices or the nuns. The point is this: romantic as *The Golden Dog* is, in the sense that it is a tale of love and adventure, there are all sorts of clues that point to a moral vision more complex than the polarity of romance might admit. The sources of *The Golden Dog* help to confirm the presence of and explain the nature of this moral vision. Kirby explains

> To beguile a leisure hour, it so happened I had purchased a volume styled "Maple Leaves — a budget of historical, legendary and sporting lover, by J. M. Le Moine." I was so captivated by the dramatic interest infused into two out of several sketches it contained, *Chateau Bigot* and the Golden Dog [*sic*], that I vowed to a friend, I would make them the groundwork of a Canadian novel. Thus originated my *Chien d'Or* romance.[3]

Looking at the sketches Kirby refers to enables one to distinguish what in *The Golden Dog* is purely attributable to Kirby and what is derived from the accounts he thought of as his kernel. One of the sketches referred to was reprinted in 1873, under the title "Le Chien D'Or: The History of an Old House."[4] While much of the sketch deals with general historical detail, the events that were to appear in Kirby's novel are rather briefly recounted:

> As appears by the corner stone recently found at the *Chien d'Or*, it was Nicholas Jacquin Philibert who caused this house to be erected, the 20th August, 1735.
>
> ... the 21st January, 1748, Nicholas Jacquin dit Philibert quarrelled with Pierre Legardeur, Sieur de Repentigny, respecting a military order billeting him on Philibert. From words came blows, and de Repentigny wounded his adversary mortally.
>
> In those fighting days of adventures and duels ... the blood of a fellow creature was easily atoned for, especially if the transgressor bore a noble name and stood well at Court.
>
> De Repentigny received the year following a pardon from King Louis XV, and returned from Acadia, whither he had retired. Philibert before dying had forgiven his murderer.[5]

What Le Moine relates is a tale of violence: this is made obvious in the sorts of questions the story raises for him:

> If, on one hand, Philibert is a victim which moves us to pity; on the other, it seems incomprehensible that de Repentigny should have drawn his sword about such an insignificant quarrel. Was it merely an ordinary instance of soldierlike brutality? Was it a deed of personal revenge, or else, was de Repentigny merely the instrument, the sycophant of a mightier man? Whatever we choose to suppose, that drop of blood, lights up with sinister glare, the gloom of years which overshadows the old structure. So much for romance.[6]

This emphasis, to the exclusion of virtually all else, on blood and vengeance is alien to the world of *The Golden Dog*. The transition from the account to the

novel involves much more than the simple diffusion of this single focus. What appears to be at least as germane to Kirby's novel as the actual story of the Golden Dog is a French romance Le Moine mentions, written by Auguste Soulard and based on the same story. Pierre Philibert, one of the major characters in *The Golden Dog*, first appears in Soulard's romance. Presumably Kirby borrowed not only the idea of giving Nicholas Philibert a son called Pierre from Soulard, but as well the ideas of having the East Indies as the locale of de Repentigny's death, and the news of his death to be communicated by letter.

What looking at Le Moine's account reveals is that Kirby made an enormous addition to the tale of the Golden Dog — female characters. Kirby's novel has six main characters, three of whom are female. In neither the English account nor the French romance Kirby used as sources do any women appear, with the single exception of a woman (Madame Philibert) who plays a minor role in Soulard's romance; and certainly neither source presents a women, as Kirby does, who quotes Dante in times of crisis. The addition of significant female characters obviously raises the question of the thematic function of their presence, and the question is complicated by the fact that all three have qualitatively different relationships with the three main male characters in *The Golden Dog*.

HOWEVER *The Golden Dog* HAS NOT BEEN READ in light of Le Moine's account. Sorfleet reads the conclusion to *The Golden Dog* as a recognition of the tragic "mutability of life,"[7] while Northey considers the ending to be a *coup*, possibly a *coup de grâce*:

> And, seemingly to ensure that the reader suffers a concluding stroke of terror, Kirby draws attention to life's incomprehensibility, stating that 'there is neither human nor poetic justice' in it.[8]

In *The Golden Dog* there is "neither human nor poetic justice" for the simple reason that there is, finally, divine justice. Sorfleet and Northey fail to consider Kirby's novel in relation to its sources: between this omission and the failure to acknowledge the structural and thematic use of Dante's *Divine Comedy* in *The Golden Dog*, a key to the moral vision that informs the novel is missed.

Explicit reference to *The Divine Comedy* gives the first indication of the importance of Dante's poem in *The Golden Dog*. In what is arguably the central passage of the novel, thematically and certainly geometrically, there is explicit reference made to *The Divine Comedy*, and lest the point be missed, Dante's words appear both in English translation and Italian:

> Amélie clung to Philibert. She thought of Francesca da Rimini clinging to Paolo amidst the tempest of wind and the moving darkness, and uttered tremblingly the

> words, "Oh, Pierre! what an omen. Shall it be said of us as of them, '*Amor condusse noi ad una morte?*' " ("Love has conducted us into death.")

Other explicit references to Dante are made in the chapter that climaxes with the passage quoted above: the "touching tale of Paolo and Francesca da Rimini" is read, and it is remarked "how truly the *Commedia*, which is justly called Divine, unlocks the secret chambers of the human soul." Elsewhere in *The Golden Dog* a character finds herself in

> A world of guilty thoughts and unresisted temptations, a chaotic world where black, unscalable rocks, like a circle of the *Inferno* hemmed her in on every side, while devils whispered in her ears the words which gave shape and substance to her secret wishes. . . .

Apart from explicit references to Dante, there are a number of implicit references to *The Comedy* in *The Golden Dog*. Some of these are simply isolated allusions, while others form significant patterns.

Isolated allusions are frequent and varied. Kirby applies Dante's vision of Hell, at least in the physiographic sense, to the faction that rivals the Golden Dog: "The rings of corruption in the Grand Company descended, narrower and more black and precipitous, down to the bottom where Bigot sat the Demiurgos of all." Dante refers to Minos, "the judge of Hell,"[9] as "that connoisseur of all transgression" (*Inf.* v. 9): Kirby describes Intendant Bigot as "a connoisseur in female temper; he liked to see the storm of jealous rage . . . followed by the rain of angry tears." And Cerberus, the mythical three-headed dog, is found both in *The Golden Dog* and the Third Circle of Dante's Hell.

But apart from these occasional allusions, there are patterns of imagery, at least strongly reminiscent of *The Comedy*, that thread through the novel. That imagery drawn from *The Comedy* and references to the poem are profuse in *The Golden Dog* might be attributable to a desire, on Kirby's part, to evoke Dante for the sake of heightening mood at given junctures; but the fact that the patterns of images Kirby uses are images that figure significantly in *The Comedy* leads one to suspect that Dante is more than a matter of casual allusion.

In *The Comedy* Dante is guided through Hell, Purgatory and Heaven; in *The Golden Dog* more than one character refers to a similar series of ports of call. Another pattern of imagery in *The Golden Dog* involves the stars; there is, for example, speculation about "the demon star Algol." But perhaps the most revealing instance of this pattern is the title of chapter 21, "*Sic itur ad astra*," for in a sense Dante's journey is a following of the path to the stars, as the final lines of *Il Paradiso* indicate: "My will and desire were turned by love, / The love that moves the sun and the other stars." Finally the crowning image of *The Comedy* is the celestial rose, and not only is *The Golden Dog* filled with rose imagery, but there is repeated suggestion that there is some sort of association, as with Dante, to be made with the rose. In *The Comedy* heaven, purgatory, and hell are literally

found beneath the celestial rose; in *The Golden Dog* it is stated "we are all companions under the rose." But the direct and oblique allusions to *The Comedy* that fill *The Golden Dog* only hint at the assimilation of Dante's cosmic vision into Kirby's novel.

Of Kirby's six main characters, three are male and three are female; the six are, for most of the novel, grouped as three couples, or would-be couples. Textual analysis suggests that for each pair there is involved at least one Beatrice and/or what might be called an anti-Beatrice figure. (If a Beatrice figure leads a lover to redemption, perhaps it does not do too much violence to Dante's vision to claim that an "anti-Beatrice" figure is one who leads a lover to damnation.) In *The Golden Dog*, the respective histories of the relationships of the three couples form three subplots. As in *King Lear*, where there is more than one exploration of the relationship between the parental and filial generations, a certain degree of serial repetition is involved. In *The Golden Dog*, as in *Lear*, serial repetition enables the exploration of variations upon a common theme. In *The Golden Dog* this theme is corrupted or perverted love, and the concept involved is one discussed in *The Comedy*.

THE IDEA OF CORRUPTED OR MISDIRECTED LOVE as the antithesis to rightful or proper love is presented by Dante as a vital recognition: it is not until he has ascended to a sphere but one from Empyrean that he declares that he has been "dredged . . . from the sea of wrongful love" (*Para.* xxvi. 62). Virgil, in the course of guiding Dante through purgatory, adjures

> Bethink thee then how love must be the seed
> In you, not only of each virtuous action,
> But also of each punishable deed. (*Purg.* xvii. 103-5)

It is in response to Dante's request — "please, / Define me love, to which thou dost reduce / All virtuous actions and their contraries" (*Purg.* xviii. 13-15) — that Virgil gives his Second Discourse on Love; Virgil proceeds to explain

> how wholly those are blind
> To truth, who think all love is laudable
> Just in itself, no matter of what kind. (*Purg.* xviii. 34-36)

Dante's Virgil adds that one ought to be "strict to purge right loves from reprobate" (*Purg.* xviii. 66). As Sayers summarizes Virgil's argument, "Man has a natural impulse to love that which pleases him. This impulse, which is the root of all virtue, can be perverted, weakened or misdirected to become the root of all sin" (II, p. 66).

This is precisely why a crucial line from Dante's account of the story of Paolo and Francesca da Rimini appears in the central passage of *The Golden Dog*; the

concept of sin as corrupted love is the heart of the matter. In *The Golden Dog* those who inhabit the sublunary or sub-celestial rose world, by virtue of their very distance from the celestial rose, are bound to corrupt love to some degree, which is, as Kirby expresses it, why "we are all companions under the rose." All six major characters of *The Golden Dog* therefore duly engage in the terrestrial, "under the rose" activity of perverting or corrupting love.

If the relationship between Intendant Bigot and Caroline de St. Castin is clearly a case of improper love, and that between Le Gardeur de Repentigny and Angélique des Meloises overtly one of perverted love, the relationship between Pierre Philibert and Amélie de Repentigny is less obviously one of corrupt love. The Pierre and Amélie that the reader meets are impossibly virtuous. Pierre is introduced to the reader through Amélie's memory of him as the alert and agile boy who saved her brother's life. Apparently Pierre has only improved with age: "Those who caught sight of him saw a man worth seeing — tall, deep-chested, and erect. His Norman features without being perfect were handsome and manly." Amélie, who is "in the bloom of youth, and of surpassing loveliness," is as loyal as she is lovely: let it suffice to say that she has been nicknamed "Ste. Amélie."

Initially Pierre and Amélie appear to be the ideal pair. Pierre "mingled as the fairy prince in the day dreams and bright imaginings of the young poetic girl," and he has "a thousand pictures of her hung up in his mind and secretly worshipped." While Pierre and Amélie appear to be a perfect match, a series of notes are struck that belie this appearance. There is, for example, the suggestion that they both indulge in narcissism:

> "what you do is ever wisest and best in my eyes, except one thing, which I confess now that you are my own, I cannot account for — "
>
> "I had hoped, Pierre, there was no exception to your admiration, you are taking off my angel's wings already, and leaving me a mere woman!" replied she merrily.

Presumably there are more than physiographic reasons for having Amélie, as the pair walk and have the above talk, see Pierre "reflected" in a "still pool." But narcissism is associated with Pierre as much as it is with Amélie, as is made clear when Pierre gazes at

> the portrait of Amélie painted by himself during his last visit to Tilly. The young artist, full of enthusiasm, had put his whole soul into the work until he was himself startled at the vivid likeness which almost unconsciously flowed from his pencil. He had caught the divine upward expression of her eyes, as she turned her head to listen to him, and left upon the canvas the very smile he had seen upon her lips. Those dark eyes of hers had haunted his memory forever after. To his imagination that picture had become almost a living thing. It was as *a voice of his own that returned to his ear as the voice of Amélie.* In the painting of that portrait Pierre had the first revelation of a consciousness of his deep love, which became in the end the master passion of his life. [emphasis mine]

Interestingly enough, possibly the most apt gloss upon this passage one can find is a statement made in a commentary upon Dante's *Il Purgatorio*: " 'If you exalt the objects of your love until your picture is a false one; if you idealize them; *if you project upon them your own ideal self*; then you are loving not a real person but a dream' " (Sayers, II, p. 221).

However where Kirby makes most clear that Pierre and Amélie do not have an ideal relationship is in the chapter that describes their engagement. At first the auspicious is implied, for the setting is idyllic and the season summer. But the voice that affects the lovers issues from hell:

> Philibert let fall upon his knee the book which he had been reading. His voice faltered, he could not continue without emotion the touching tale of Paolo and Francesca da Rimini. Amélie's eyes were suffused with tears of pity, for her heart had beat time to the music of Dante's immortal verse as it dropped in measured cadence from the lips of Philibert.

The "touching tale of Paolo and Francesca da Rimini" is found in *L'Inferno* — not *Il Paradiso*. When one looks at Dante's account beside Kirby's description of the reading of that account, a very odd similarity of situation becomes apparent. In Canto V of *L'Inferno*, in the course of telling her tale to Dante, Francesca da Rimini describes the scenario of the beginning of her affair with Paolo:

> One day we read for pastime how in thrall
> Lord Lancelot lay to love, who loved the Queen;
> We were alone — we thought no harm at all.
>
> As we read on, our eyes met now and then,
> And to our cheeks the changing colour started,
> But just one moment overcame us — when
>
> We read of the smile, desired of lips long-thwarted,
> Such smile, by such a lover kissed away,
> He that may never more from me be parted
>
> Trembling all over, kissed my mouth. I say
> The book was Galleot, Galleot the complying
> Ribald who wrote; we read no more that day.
>
> (*Inf.* v. 127-138)

According to Francesca, she and Paolo first acknowledge their love upon reading "the romance of *Lancelot du Lac*," a tale of illicit love; according to Kirby, Pierre and Amélie first acknowledge their love upon reading Dante's account of Paolo and Francesca da Rimini, another tale of illicit love. Kirby hits upon not an obscure episode but this celebrated tale of adultery which has been called "the most famous episode in the whole *Comedy*." The point is driven further by Amélie's consequent "tears of pity," for Dante is chastised for precisely such behaviour in the course of his journey through hell:

> Truly I wept, leaned on the pinnacles
> Of the hard rock; until my guide said, "Why!
> And art thou too like all the other fools?"
>
> Here pity, or here piety, must die
> If the other lives; who's wickeder than one
> That's agonized by God's high equity? (*Inf.* xx. 25-30)

When Dante weeps for pity in hell, he is told that he must choose between pity and piety; when Amélie listens to Dante's account of his journey through hell, she weeps "tears of pity." The implication is that Pierre and Amélie are far from being ideal lovers. This impression is strengthened by the nature of Amélie's response to the storm that begins after her acceptance of Pierre's proposal:

> The rising wind almost overpowered with its roaring the thunder that pealed momentarily nearer and nearer. The rain came down in broad, heavy splashes, followed by a fierce, pitiless hail, as if Heaven's anger were pursuing them.
>
> Amélie clung to Philibert. She thought of Francesca da Rimini clinging to Paolo amidst the tempest of wind and the moving darkness, and uttered tremblingly the words, "Oh, Pierre! what an omen. Shall it be said of us as of them, '*Amor condusse noi ad una morte?*' " ("Love has conducted us into death.")

Kirby's translation of Dante's line is not quite accurate: variant modern translations have it "Love to a single death brought him and me" (*Inf.* i. 106) and "Love led us to one death." By phrasing his translation "Love has conducted us into death," Kirby shifts nuances: the phrase "conducted us into" is suggestive not of the sort of love that leads to Beatrice and heaven, but rather the type that paves the way to Francesca and hell. And, as it is the virtuous Amélie who quotes Dante's line, the type of love in question bears some scrutiny. Pierre and Amélie are portrayed as being as good as mortals possibly can be; yet the answer to the crucial question Amélie poses ("Shall it be said of us as of them [Paolo and Francesca] '*Amor condusse noi ad una morte?*' ") is, in the context of *The Golden Dog*, yes. After the engagement, Amélie's brother is duped into murdering Pierre's father; as a result, Amélie retreats to an Ursuline convent and has a romantic decline, following which the desolated Pierre eventually finds the death he seeks in battle. In a sense, Amélie literally dies of shame; the element of narcissism is not to be forgotten, and Amélie's brother has murdered her future father-in-law.

Pierre is described as after his death meeting Amélie "joyfully in that land where love is real": in *The Comedy*, it is in heaven that Dante conceives of the "love whereto / Each thing becomes that which it really is" (*Para.* xx. 77-8). Even for a Pierre and an Amélie, uncorrupted love can only be realized in the spheres crowned by — not upon the earth beneath — the celestial rose.

So it is that each of the three relationships explored in depth in *The Golden Dog* is described in terms of idolatry. Pierre worships "the idol of his heart, Amélie de Repentigny," and the heart of Le Gardeur de Repentigny is "wedded to the

idol of his fancy." Finally Caroline de St. Castin sins in loving Bigot "better than she loved God" — Bigot is the god of her idolatry.

Dante provides the concept of sin as corrupted love, and Kirby uses this notion in order to present a vision in which the world is a sinful place. The primary way in which Kirby demonstrates this vision is the serial repetition of relationships which are associated with corrupted or perverted love. But if the ideas of sin as corrupted love and the unavoidability of sin on earth are central to the moral vision found in *The Golden Dog*, these ideas ought to inform other aspects of the novel. Possibly the ripple-effect of these central notions is most clearly seen in the depiction of the relation between Old and New France.

In New France it is said that "matters of love ... are matters of state in France!" because

> the Marquise de Pompadour governed the King and the kingdom. But Louis XV was capricious and unfaithful in his fancies; he had changed his mistresses and his policy with them many times, and might change once more, to the ruin of Bigot and all the dependents of La Pompadour.

Unless one is of Bigot's party, when it is asked in New France " 'Has France come to be governed by courtesans like imperial Rome?' " the succinct reply is " 'Yes!' " As one officer, when informed that the defence budget of New France has been frozen, exclaims,

> "They may as well sell New France at once to the enemy, if we are not to defend Quebec! The treasury wants [ie. lacks] money for the war in Europe forsooth! No doubt it wants money for the war, when so much is lavished upon the pimps, panders and harlots of the Court!"

Thus sin, or corrupt love, is seen as not only the condition of earthly relationships but as well the bane of earthly government. As Dame Rochelle, the wise old woman of the novel remarks, people ought to place "trust in Heaven, not on earth, where all is transitory and uncertain." It is well to remember Dame Rochelle's words when one reads the conclusion of the novel, where it is said "Our tale is now done. ... There is in it neither poetic nor human justice": what there is, in terms of the moral vision presented in the novel, is divine justice.

Certainly *The Golden Dog* has romantic aspects, but scrutiny of the novel suggests that at most it is romantic in framework. The inherent polarization of romance is finally foreign to *The Golden Dog* for the simple reason that Kirby explores not a world of definite distinctions but a morally complex universe. It might be argued that Kirby's answer to complex moral questions is finally quite straightforward if not simple, but this is another matter. Whatever the degree of simplicity to the answer or answers that Kirby does provide, there is ample evidence that he presents moral problems as complex issues. What Kirby's vision finally distils to is a celebration of the sacred accompanied by an underlying contempt for the profane. For the manner in which this view is conveyed, Kirby is

considerably indebted to Dante's *Comedy*. As for the view in itself: perhaps concerning celestial roses there ought to be dispute. Kirby, after all, leaves one earthbound with the reminder that "we are all companions under the rose"; it is Dante that intrigues one to discover the way to ascend from the dark wood of his first canto to the "love that moves the sun and the other stars." To be Kirby's Beatrice is to corrupt even love; to be Dante's Beatrice is to love even the corrupt.

NOTES

[1] Northrop Frye, *The Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1976), p. 26.

[2] William Kirby, *The Golden Dog (Le Chien d'Or): A Romance of Old Quebec* (1877; rpt. Toronto: The Musson Book Company, 1925), p. 125.

[3] William Kirby, "A Biographical Sketch of the Author of 'Maple Leaves,' " in J. M. LeMoine, *Maple Leaves* (Quebec: J. M. Demers and Frère, 1894), p. 7.

[4] J. M. LeMoine, " 'Le Chien D'Or': The History of an Old House," in *Maple Leaves: Canadian History — Literature — Sport*, New Series (1863; rpt. Quebec: Augustin Coté and Company, 1873), p. 89. The unavailability of the second sketch that Kirby refers to, *Château Bigot*, presents a problem. In its absence a lot must remain matter for speculation.

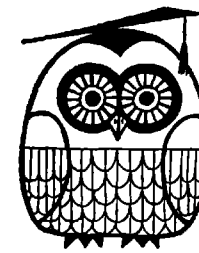
[5] Le Moine, pp. 92-94.

[6] Le Moine, p. 94.

[7] John Robert Sorfleet, "Fiction and the Fall of New France: William Kirby vs. Gilbert Parker," *Journal of Canadian Fiction*, 2, No. 3 (Summer 1973), p. 145.

[8] Margot Northey, *The Haunted Wilderness: The Gothic and Grotesque in Canadian Fiction* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1976), p. 29.

[9] Dorothy L. Sayers, trans., *The Comedy of Dante Alighieri the Florentine*, I (1949; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974), p. 97.



POSSESSION

Derk Wynand

Now that you appear to have it,
what it is you seem to have.

Your denial to yourself,
among others, of the symptoms
long after they have developed.

The others' contention that you have it:
If you don't, who does?

Your futile protest that,
appearance notwithstanding,
it really has you.

The seven or eleven ways
in which you seem to have it,
each with its own number of ways
in which it seems to have you.

Its finite denotations,
its surely infinite connotations,
and how deeply these affect you.

What this means to the others.

What it means to itself,
assuming it is conscious.

Your completely artless insistence
that you do not profit by it,
which the others accept
as further proof of your affliction.

The very specific, but artful ways
in which you try to describe it,
only to protest that it, not you,
is what is making the effort.

How the others want to read this
and how it denies them that satisfaction.

THE ROMANCE OF PENELOPE

Audrey Thomas's Isobel Carpenter Trilogy

Robert Diotte

THE PROBLEM AND THE DANGER of reading an avowedly autobiographical novelist is the tendency to ignore the art, the transformation process mediating between the life of the writer and what we read, the life in the novels. Perhaps there is an assumption that the text can be best understood by documenting the actual biography and then studying the ways the fictional world differs or conforms. The structural relationships integral to the text may be seen as inherently unimportant in themselves.

Audrey Thomas has repeatedly called herself an autobiographical novelist. Yet the fictional world in her Isobel Carpenter trilogy, *Mrs. Blood*, *Songs My Mother Taught Me*, and *Blown Figures*, has more substance to it than the correspondence of the writer's life to the novels would suggest. There is in the narrative progression through the three books a consistency of theme and focus. They tell the story of one woman's attempt to harmonize her dreams and the fascination romance has for her with her actual reality, her life as it has to be lived. We are given a woman character who embodies the romance of adventure but in a context of emotions more familiarly associated with horror than romance.

In the narrative process the trilogy whittles away at contemporary values in the form of the family, love and sexuality, to reveal an emotional and rational vacuum at their core. The values, the thinking, the behaviour of the central character, Isobel Carpenter, a woman whose years span the pre-second world war, war time and post war years continuing into the present, are the focal centre of the fictional world in the books. The meaningful part of the character, though, is her travels because it is her travels which lift her out of the main stream of the fiction of domestic romance and enable Thomas to make other kinds of statements about her romantic heroine.

An examination of the books begins with the strong centre of consciousness or perspective which is characteristic of them. This centre is either Isobel's own voice, the "I" of personal communication and dream-thought intelligence, or the more limited narration used in *Blown Figures* where the narration moves away from the

character infrequently while remaining in the third person. What happens is an erosion of the perimeters; contrary or other points of view simply fade or make their appearance in curt, fragmented tangents to the story. Other characters are reduced to shadows in what becomes a neuro-visceral landscape.

In the character of Isobel Carpenter, Thomas has given us a woman who is both the mother figure (for she has borne children, and the event which brings her into fictional consciousness is a miscarriage) and the wanderer, the questor involved in a journey which carries with it a promise of revelation. Penelope, then, incorporates aspects of Odysseus. She isn't really Odysseus since Isobel Carpenter can't claim directly the kind of involvement with her environment comparable to the warrior-king. She borrows attributes by inference from the heroic tradition and she holds them only in the context of archetypal situations.

But the kinds of technical arrangements Thomas has made deliberately subvert the historical, temporal context of the character. The books are episodic internally. The events, particularly in *Mrs. Blood*, continually move backwards and forwards in time. Hence the dominant structural techniques throughout the trilogy are juxtaposition and discontinuous narrative. The flashback, the dream, the substance of memory predominate in the trilogy, and Thomas' style, allusive and adaptable, tends towards the anecdotal. The character's past thus endures in the form of memory and achieves fantastic proportions from time to time in the mind of the central character. Time, in the trilogy as whole, has neither a narrative nor a logical basis, and the ruling fortune is a fatalism of purpose and event.

Both the character's anecdotal, digressing mind and the types of structural innovations within each of the books operate, moreover, to set up a distance between the reader and the narrative. The mind-talk, the "I" voice, usurps the action. This is particularly true in *Mrs. Blood*. There the Mrs. Blood-Mrs. Thing exchange in the titles draws attention to the psychological split in the character. The distance isolates the character, holding her away from the simple emotions of sympathy or empathy in the reader. In *Mrs. Blood* and *Blown Figures*, for instance, the technical innovations are pronounced and foregrounded on the characterization to remove the reader even more from the narrative action. *Songs My Mother Taught Me* is in that sense a very different book with the clean line of its narrative. But even in *Songs* the linear narrative is divided into two parts and shows the interface between the parts. And *Songs* needs *Mrs. Blood* to define the main character.

It is significant that none of the novels is identical in structure, unusual in an autobiographical writer. Important as well is the realization that the books support each other, fill each other out, refer to one another, each one necessary to complete the others. *Mrs. Blood* is a preface to *Blown Figures*; *Songs My Mother Taught Me* is an interlude between the two dramatically more intense books. In fact, only *Mrs. Blood*, the first of the trilogy to be published,[1] is even remotely capable of standing alone.

AS THE MOST SELF-CONTAINED OF THE NOVELS in the trilogy, *Mrs. Blood* is a tragedy and its structure is literary in those terms. While it isn't mechanical in any way, the tragedy is rigorously structured. Isobel's choices are clearly marked: Jason, her domestic harness, a teacher of art and her provider as well as the man who can't supply the depth of emotion she demands now that she is in labour; and Richard, the poet, the dreamer, a man whose possibilities Isobel never came close to although now she recalls him and wants him. The one represents a substantive reality, a husband and father of her children, while the other is the dramatic tension of the dream world, the source of true romance. We have here, then, the circumstances of the popular romance with the love triangle and the emotionally self-indulgent heroine.

But the narrative action already has the character in the flow of events that will make her a tragic figure. Her fatal flaw can be seen as the inability to control her dreams in the face of the reality around her. They eventually possess her. The dream tension of the Mrs. Blood-Mrs. Thing neural dialogue distorts the relationship Isobel has with Jason and mars the role she plays as mother.

Eating, blood, and sacrifice are important motifs in *Mrs. Blood* as they are in *Songs My Mother Taught Me*. Eating suggests a kind of misplaced sensuality. The blood, female and sacrificial, the blood of the woman having problems with her pregnancy, is associated with the blood of the Christ on the cross through direct reference to Christianity. It is used in some richly exotic imagery involving flowers and cloth. The visual power in the colours which link disparate objects projects the beauty of the grotesque.

The book is set in Africa. What the African landscape contributes is its colours, its heat, feverish to the character who is having problems with her labour, and its cultural exaggerations to the western mind, exaggerations which simultaneously baffle and haunt the character's socialization. The landscape has its peculiar array of characters. The nurses who giggle among themselves and gossip in their own language, shutting out the curious Mrs. Blood, the man-servant Joseph (Isobel wondering if he has killed the family cat to serve it to them), the doctors with their eccentricities: these characters with their skin colour differences and their cultural differences parade in front of Mrs. Blood with the sense of her strangeness obvious in their manner.

The other whites, especially the wives of the other teachers living in the compound, alternately repulse and attract Isobel with her wonderful sense of propriety operating out of the physically defined apartness of her pregnancy. She doesn't want to be an object of their pity. She worries what the other women might be saying about her: if her children are properly dressed for school, for instance. She fantasizes the other women tending her grave, setting up committees and having Isobel become an object of ritualized devotion passed on from hand to hand until

the people looking after her grave no longer even know anything about her. The mind talk, never shut off, characterizes the inactivity of the patient and marks a degree of self-indulgence as unhealthy to the mind as her physical state is to the baby she carries.

Africa, then, a locale Isobel experiences as an exaggeration in terms of the physical environment, the heat and the colours, as well as the behaviour of the people living there, is the background for the kind of mental exaggerations of relationships and emotions that she herself creates. At times turning things grotesque, at times making rationalized trains of thought with a missing premise, her mind isolates Mrs. Blood-Mrs. Thing and creates a "wonderland" composed of memories and the extravagance around her.

The Isobel character comes to stand for self-indulgence, emotionally and physically: the romance of the ego feeding on itself. Sexually concupiscent, she wonders what has happened to the early relationship she had with Jason. She tries to talk about her emotions and tries to explain what happens to passions in a marriage. She relives relationships, always in triangles. The love Isobel has for Jason is frustrated early when they live with Jason's mother. Jason and Richard are two points in the triangle upsetting Isobel. And Thomas has set up a family of three children, a boy and a girl and an unborn third.

Sexuality, a physical dimension which defines being in relation to another being, has associations of interpersonal intimacies, the kind of basic frankness Isobel is looking for. It is her metaphor for the essential innocence in human behaviour. The child she carries was created out of such an innocence as was her love for Richard. Ironically, it was this same Richard, the hero in her romance, who questioned her own sexual innocence when he told her "lots of women wouldn't do what you did. You're very shy about everything but sex."

When we come to look at the nature of the tragedy in *Mrs. Blood*, then, we must consider the dynamics of sexuality and the changes to Isobel's own sexuality in the interval. Lying next to Jason she wants him but feels guilty because she is pregnant. Sexuality has become associated with guilt feelings in her mind. She remembers earlier relationships. But they are clouded with sentiment.

We can't say that the tragedy in the book is the miscarriage, although the sadness and the sympathy belonging to that event climax the novel. The tragic moment occurs after the miscarriage, with Isobel, high on medication, calling out for Richard and then asking Jason's forgiveness. The intense emotionalism of the character, her capacity to conjure up and project romantic involvements, has taken over the character. The medication she is under is the metaphor for the pathetic rationality which has lost the decisiveness in action.

With *Songs My Mother Taught Me*, Thomas retreats from the form of the tragic, even from the implications of Isobel's tragedy, to examine Isobel Carpenter growing up in New York state. The form is the Bildungsroman. Thomas has

nothing new to offer the form in this particular work. *Songs* has the quality of being a narrative bridge between *Mrs. Blood* and *Blown Figures*. Songs is the Bildungsroman that Isobel Carpenter, the aspiring writer, would want to write.

But Isobel wouldn't divide her novel into two parts, "Songs of Innocence" and "Songs of Experience," a direct association with Blakean romanticism. The child forced to come to terms with the adult world of contradiction and repressed anxieties has Blakean overtones. As does the sexuality which was so strong a motif in *Mrs. Blood* and which emerges in the second part of *Songs* in two forms: one perverse, the incident in the asylum with the nurse bringing one of the female patients to orgasm manually; the second, lyric and ribald, occurring when Isobel has her first sexual experience with one of the male nurses. Nor would Isobel likely have the self-distance to include the passage from the Alice-in-Wonderland story as a postscript. The Alice story, the fairytale link to sophisticated innocence cloaked in sexual innuendo and rationalized violence, chews on the limbs of emotionalism in Isobel's "wonderland" where she is trying to rationalize the violence and the sensuality around her.

The characters in *Songs* behave in ways that suggest a kind of madness or disorder in their emotions. There is the mother with her rages inspired by trivial incidents, and the father, member of the Masonic league, a teacher, who sleeps in the back bedroom, an enigmatic person sexually to Isobel. The sexless dog is the symbol of atrophic sexuality between the mother and father.

Isobel, herself, is continually spurned by her classmates for reasons we are never told. She is embarrassed by her mother's intervention in her social life and attentive to the family's money instabilities. Eating is a clan fetish, a celebration of self-indulgence, misplaced sensuality and a reminder of the simple lack of communion in the family. Quarrels are expiated with offerings of food. Both mother and father cook. Food is the foundation of the domestic and social interaction for the individuals in the family setting. It is a symbol of their apartness.

Against the domestic characters, Thomas juxtaposes the mad figures of the asylum where Isobel goes to work: characters such as Eleanor La Duce, Beatrice, the male nurses, and Mrs. Reynolds. Isobel feeds the patients. Beatrice, the mad girl who could have been "seventeen or thirty," eats the roses Isobel brings her from the family garden as a gesture of "unselfish love" and an attempt to leap the inestimable distance between herself and the girl.

The sanity-madness juxtaposition isn't laboured. We have the domestic eccentricities of the family environment and the behavioural exaggerations of the mad people and their keepers in the asylum. One is as real fictionally as the other. Insanity is pictured as the state of ultimate isolation, the metaphor being the compartmentalization in the wards and the system of keys which is a vital part of the asylum structure.

Beatrice, the mad woman of no determined age, is not only incapable of com-

munication with Isobel, she is also hostile to the overtures Isobel makes. Isobel's parents, whatever their psychological quirks, at least haven't reached that level of impossibility. Yet the issue isn't that the parents aren't mad and Beatrice is. Thomas suggests that the parents are merely less mad than Beatrice.

What is missing in the book, absent by reason of an incompleteness, is a fixed centre of some health, the boundary between sanity and insanity. Isobel as a character is simply not capable of giving us the norm or locus to measure the rest of the character's and the writer's intention. Intention, then, is what is lacking.

Presumably the grandfather, Harry Goodenough, was meant to carry the writer's intentions. Extroverted, healthy, and vigorous, he has a catalogue of housekeepers to account for his sexuality. The father, obese, eats more than Harry even though Harry has more physical dynamism. With his sense of humour, his virile and fatherly affection for the two girls, "his girls," Isobel and her sister, his manual competence with the real world, his implied sexuality, Harry is the burgeoning father archetype.

But Isobel's mother sees his sexual behaviour as wrong. And, in the end, Isobel dismisses him when he sells his cottage, leaving him a much reduced figure in the shadow world of the book. He is simply not around in the climax to carry the values he might have embodied.

Moreover, *Songs*, for all its interest as a character study of Isobel as a girl, lacks any dramatic frame. The novel relies on the trilogy to fill it out. Thomas has sketched a character whose centre of balance is lodged deeply in a family she resents despite the fact she has internalized its values, thinking, and way of life. The asylum confuses the character's own grasp of reality. It is significant that she has her first sexual experience with John, one of the male nurses at the asylum.

Songs leaves us with the excerpt from the Alice story which synthesizes the Alice parallels and that sense of "wonderland" which Thomas has woven into the trilogy through the child-naive Isobel Carpenter.

> "But I don't want to go among mad people," Alice remarked.
> "Oh, you can't help that," said the Cat: "we're all mad here. I'm mad. You're mad."
> "How do you know I'm mad?" said Alice.
> "You must be," said the Cat, "or you wouldn't have come here."

The Alice-figure is the archetypal child-adult faced with contradictions and spurious choices, expressed here in a false premise; if you are here, you are already mad. Alice is an extension of a romantic possibility: to step through the looking glass and live inside the world of dreams, a world always tensed against the one that must be lived in its place. Isobel's relationship to Alice is one of emotional kinship.

In *Mrs. Blood* Isobel emanated in her behaviour and her thinking a good sense comparable to Alice's. As mother she satisfied our expectations of what a mother

should be and think. She worried about her children. She worried what the other women in the compound were thinking about her. She was concerned with her public image. These things, a part of her socialization, were important to her, culturally determined and fuel for her mind. In the end it is this good sense and education which makes her mad in the colourful wonderland of sensuality and violence she has created inside the socially conditioned rationality of her upbringing.

IN *Blown Figures* THAT RATIONALITY, which we as readers share, disintegrates in the person who embodies it: Isobel Carpenter. She isn't the carrier of meaning and value we were looking for. She has been an unreliable narrator. In fact, she isn't even allowed to narrate the final chapter in the trilogy.

The book is technically the most ambitious of the trilogy. The devices that Thomas experimented with in *Mrs. Blood* and to a lesser extent in *Songs* — things like parodies of newspaper articles, a Dear Dolly column, cartoons, dramatic fragments — assume a major role in *Blown Figures*. They operate thematically to enhance Isobel's journey into Africa and provide a multiplicity of points of view behind the character.

We have as well the voice of an "I" character taunting or berating Miss Miller from time to time.[2] The character may or may not be the narrator. The "I" seems to have a deeper relationship to the story than the surface connections suggest. But, in the end, the "I" voice becomes merely another unreliable voice in the novel.

The novel centres on the character's ultimate journey. Isobel is returning to Africa, the scene of her miscarriage. Harry Goodenough has died and the money she inherited from him is the means for her to go back. At stake is the character's obsession to return to the place where the circumstances of her life began to weigh her down. There are overtones of guilt over the child she has lost.

There is also the ominous note sounded by Jason when he said: "Isobel doesn't live . . . she exits." The pun is on *exists*. The phrase echoes throughout the journey. Isobel has left her children and her husband, abandoned her family, to travel by herself. Penelope, in a sense, has given up her archetypal role. She is travelling instead of remaining at home. While the form remains constant, a narrative involving the quest-agent and a journey into meaning, the archetype presents new associations.

Sexuality is introduced into the journey in the form of a Dutch boy and later a Delilah character. The Dutch boy, physically "sin," because he lisps the *th*-sound, naive, a boy-lover for Isobel, is a vehicle to heighten her own sensual awareness. His plans for making his fortune suggest a misguided spirit in terms of the

archetypal adventurer. He recedes in Isobel's consciousness after she leaves the boat until the sexual intimacy becomes a kind of onanistic reverie.

Delilah, the woman Isobel meets in Africa and travels with there, is the tail side of the coin. Unlike Isobel, Delilah will bed any man she fancies. Isobel rejects the advances of the African man who has helped her out of a money problem on the train. Delilah is trying to abort a pregnancy; Isobel has returned to Africa to do something about the guilt she has over a pregnancy that aborted itself.

The antithetical elements aren't life and death. They are life and life. Thomas gives us nothing to choose between Delilah's attitude to life and Isobel's. In fact, in the background to the basic conflict in attitudes between Isobel and Delilah is the slow moving, infinitely patient way of life of the Africans. Isobel helps Delilah when the conflict between them climaxes. And, finally, it is Isobel who undergoes the primitive ceremony of expiation in a manner that reveals some planning and some awareness of what is going on.

We have a situation very much similar to the one in *Songs*. There is no single voice or character to establish a stable centre from which the behaviour of the characters can be judged. Thomas is actively erasing the boundaries between health and sickness, sanity and insanity. But she is erasing them without giving us any indication why.

Blown Figures doesn't measure up to the epic vastness it promises in the first few pages. It misses the mark in several ways. The actual story is short to begin with. Inflating the text with the number of inserted pieces and self-contained pieces that Thomas has used is entertaining and thematically appropriate, but these pieces don't fill out the story at all in terms of the basic relationships between the characters. Moreover, they don't carry any of the values necessary to weigh the antitheses.

The problem is one of scope. The epic conventions set up in the early pages are satisfied only in the context of the rest of the trilogy. The narrative action is over too quickly. The climax is too brief. These things add up to a basic incompleteness in the book's conceptual realization.

Yet, as the ending for the trilogy, the novel does bring a conclusion to the story. It climaxes the consciousness that was working in the first two books. This isn't class consciousness in the strictest sense. What it is is a consciousness of a particular class characterized in the figure of Isobel Carpenter, who carries its values of individual consciousness alive in the social context, working out its own problems and basically capable of creating viable solutions.

A housewife who exemplifies the thinking and behaviour patterns of middle-class consciousness, the character finishes the saga of her romance with Africa in a ceremony surrounded with superstition and rites of belief rejected by the class she represents. There is a terror crystallized in the action. The events are charged with a horror because they are related to the negation of individual consciousness

and the freedom of that consciousness. The events are terrible in that they can come true. The ceremony Isobel undergoes to get rid of her guilt anxieties reminds us that we still have a capacity for participation in primitive rites.

Isobel Carpenter has travelled away from the sources of the class consciousness she embodies. She has left the family group; she is a woman travelling alone. She is calling on her resources as an individual and her capacity for decisiveness in action. These are admirable qualities to the culture she represents. She makes her way to Africa and there she gives herself up to the village priests and their rites.

The ending has to be a shock to the reader. Thomas has scraped away the key values of individual consciousness and responsibility of action. She hasn't substituted any values of her own. There is a slight admiration for the patience of the African. But the writer doesn't make much of this point. The shock derives its relevance from its roots in the emotional soil of terror. It becomes a qualified threat to consciousness, qualified by the context of the trilogy and the character of the heroine.

The terror has to be incorporated in the awareness of the reader. We are made aware of the irrational and the primitive as living elements in the minds of contemporary man. But something more important emerges in the overview. The romance of Penelope is a romance of the mind. It doesn't have its roots in action. It is a saga of personal emotions confronted by a reality of insensitive actions. In this context, value simply doesn't exist as an objective entity.

Showing an awareness of archetypal forms and the tradition of these forms, Thomas has given us a trilogy with a relatively unique strategy. The inter-dependence of the three novels ultimately defines a new approach to the epic with a heroine who neither has the stature of an epic hero nor participates in events that are commonly associated with epic consciousness.

Nonetheless, Isobel Carpenter's story becomes epic in proportion. The conventions are all there. It goes without saying that biography has only secondary interest in terms of the work Thomas has given us. The trilogy's relevance lies in its archetypal examination of the author's culture.

NOTES

[1] In a conversation I had with her, Thomas said she had actually written *Songs My Mother Taught Me* prior to *Mrs. Blood. Songs* was later rewritten. The scenes in the asylum date from the rewrite.

[2] According to Thomas, the key to the identity of Miss Miller is in the work of C. G. Jung.

YOU SHOULD ALWAYS CARRY A PEN

Lawrence Hutchman

Looking out of the library
window into the blue city
my reflection sails over
silver buildings
up on the billows of smoke
past radiant rooms
where workers cover machines.

And the words come easily
in the interior of this building;
luminous are the rooms of your mind.
In this library take a book,
any book.

Beside me the woman operates
the amazing xerox, amazing x-ray machine
and turns the sky phosphorescent.
She is the temptress in green
transforming the evening
into the myth of a blue ocean.

You should always carry a pen
especially at twilight
if we are to believe
the chronicles of Coleridge,
his nightly walks by misty lakes.
And the woman is making a book,
slips it into an envelope
and disappears.

And I am framed by evening;
the eyes of students are globes
suspended above their books.
Where is the pen?
There on the table,
a yellow pencil
and I take the *Eagle Mirado*
ride the lines of flight
over the darkening city.

CHRISTMAS

J. D. Carpenter

The rain fell
and fell The snow withdrew
The flattened lawn appeared
green, defeated
Rainwater breached
the new side door
made the carpet bleed

The sky cleared, the sun
threw off its winter wrap
Galoshes were lobbed to the cellar
a mosquito was seen on the stair
In the flowerbed
beside a sodden flyer, a crocus
broke through, bloomed
in blue air Sunlight
hung brilliant

Children pulled bikes
from backs of garages
found beachballs in cedar hedges
Women washed their windows
men made home repair

Out we went
in work shirts
to raise the doorsill with cement
Aubrey looked in, decreed
our mixture thin, Leo
dropped by, pronounced the door
awry, completely
out of plumb

We laid aside our trowel

Looking up through the legs of standing men
we saw the sky turn bone
saw the naked trees
in the garden

THE NOVELIST AS DRAMATIST

Davies' Adaptation of "Leaven of Malice"

Susan Stone-Blackburn

THOUGH ROBERTSON DAVIES' FIRST LOVE WAS THEATRE, and he was a playwright first, he has achieved greater recognition as a novelist.[1] The reasons for this may have little to do with the relative merit of his plays and novels; the literary climate of Canada in the 1950's and 1960's was more favorable to fiction than to drama. Davies made his novelistic mark with his first three novels, particularly *Leaven of Malice*, in the 1950's, and firmly secured his position as a Canadian novelist of the first rank with the next three in the 1970's. The result is that he is now all too frequently considered a novelist who is somehow willfully straying from his proper calling by writing plays. The plays are often vaguely dismissed as "too novelistic," though nobody dismisses the novels as "too dramatic." Davies' experience as a playwright undoubtedly enhances his writing of fiction; that his experience as a novelist would adversely affect his drama is unlikely, because dramatic expression was so much a part of him before he began writing novels.

Asked how he can tell whether an idea should be developed in the form of a play or a novel, Davies replies,

> If you have a playwright's instinct you know without stopping to think. As a general rule a play has a plot that is more simply dealt with than the plot of a novel. The content of a play is not simple, but it should, in its unfolding, follow a simpler line than the plot of most novels, which may have ramifications and by-concerns that would muddle the action of a play. This is why dramatizations of novels such as *Don Quixote* or *David Copperfield* deal only with a few incidents from the whole work, and often leave us unsatisfied. The totality of a play and the totality of a novel are different in kind.[2]

However, Davies did adapt one of his novels for the stage. *Leaven of Malice*, the most successful of his first trilogy of novels, published in 1954, was rewritten as a play which arrived on Broadway in December of 1960. In adapting it, Davies departed from his usual practice and contradicted his statement about the clear distinction between an idea which is the foundation for a novel and one which

will lend itself to dramatic form. Davies says the adaptation was done "only because I was asked to do it by a New York directing company, and I would have been a fool to turn down the chance."[3] In part, I think, he hoped that the recognition his novels had earned him might help to direct attention to his work as a playwright. *Leaven of Malice* is not Davies' best play, but it is particularly interesting as a means for considering the relation between Davies' work as a novelist and his work as a playwright. Moreover, though a close study of the story in both its forms reinforces some of our commonly held suspicions about the limitations on the adaptation of novelistic material for the stage, it also provides some interesting insights into the means of getting such material onto the stage, occasionally even in a way which is an improvement on the original.

Davies adapted the novel for New York's Theatre Guild. The result was called "Love and Libel" so as not to puzzle a New York audience with the Biblical reference of the original title. Tyrone Guthrie directed, taking it on tour for a month, beginning at Toronto's Royal Alexandra Theatre on November 2, 1960, and ending in New York, where it opened on December 7 and ran for only a few days. Reviews were mixed; *Theatre Arts* reported "two tolerably cheerful notices" among the seven daily New York papers.[4] Tyrone Guthrie and Dennis King, the star attraction, got more notice than Davies did. Individual players, particularly King as the madcap organist Humphrey Cobbler, and individual scenes, particularly the one in which Humphrey, his wife Molly, and their friend Solly Bridgetower all climb into bed to keep warm as they converse about Solly's troubles, won praise. But as a whole, the play was not a success. Toronto reviews reflected an awareness that Toronto was the first stop on the tour and there was yet time for repairs. Herbert Whittaker's review ends, "It's all a dazzlement of good and familiar things that needs sorting out a bit more at the moment." Nathan Cohen's concludes: "There are enough good things in it to make me believe that with the right changes, it can be made to work. And the first and most important change is to give the play a more disciplined and less elaborate shape." A Detroit reviewer also found the play "hodge-podge and episodical," "far too long," despite "many ludicrous scenes, many laughable bits of business."[5] Davies calls the play "an extravaganza"; the elaborate and episodical shape was part of his design, and he made no attempt to achieve a streamlined structure. Much rewriting he did during the tour, however, mostly to meet the demands of the show's star, Dennis King, who wanted his part expanded. New bits were generated furiously and tried out during the tour, which no doubt contributed considerably to the "hodge-podge" effect. Davies recalls one night when King walked on stage, forgot the lines for a new scene, and turned around and walked off again, leaving Tony Van Bridge on stage to ad lib his way through the gap in the play.[6] The tour, theoretically an opportunity to improve the play and set the production before it got to New York, seems only to have widened the rift between Davies' perception of

the play and the New York Theatre Guild's notions of what would make a Broadway hit. Davies thinks of it as an ensemble play and believes that trying to put a star into it was the first big mistake.

In the end, Davies was unhappy with the version of his play which was performed in New York, and all the changes which had been insisted upon by management, director, and star did not create a hit. Tyrone Guthrie's official biographer James Forsythe gives him more blame than credit for the production, though he meant well by Davies, who had been a close friend for many years. He was caught in the middle between Davies and the New York management, and he was not strong enough to steer his way through the conflicts successfully. He had suffered a heart attack early in the year. Recovering, he produced Gilbert and Sullivan's *H.M.S. Pinafore*, after which, Forsyth says,

> this distinguished heart patient went straight on to produce the new play of his old friend of Old Vic and Canada, Robertson Davies' *Love and Libel*. That he made a proper botch of it, all agreed. It was an unwise undertaking, to do a new play when the prognostication had been that he would not be fit enough to do one old one. Rob Davies had been of great assistance in all the Stratford ventures and Tony Guthrie probably felt he owed it to him. But the play and the playwright suffered.[7]

While "Love and Libel" fared no worse than a number of other plays which hit Broadway at about the same time, its reception did nothing to ensure Davies' fame as a playwright.

THE PLAY WAS SHELVED FOR A DOZEN YEARS until it was produced as *Leaven of Malice* at Hart House Theatre in 1973 and again at the Niagara-on-the-Lake Shaw Festival in 1975. For these productions Davies' original script was used. The director of the Shaw Festival production, Tony Van Bridge, had acted in Tyrone Guthrie's production, and his decision to revive the play was testimony that Davies' play was better than Guthrie's production suggested. Van Bridge says of the Guthrie show, "All I can remember about it is that it was chaos." Nonetheless, he decided to do the play in 1975, because he thought it was "one of the best Canadian comedies around," "a first-class Canadian play."[8] Still, *Leaven of Malice* in both his production and Martin Hunter's at Hart House, got mixed reviews, with high praise for various scenes and characters, but not for the play as a whole. The reason, I believe, lies at least partly in the difficulty of adaptation from novel to play. The most obvious challenge in adapting a novel for the stage is to condense the material to what can be played in little more than two hours. It is clear that unless a novel is dreadfully diffuse, something of value, such as minor characters, episodes which are not essential for the development of plot

or character, and authorial musings on the inner lives of characters or the abstract implications of speeches or events must be cut out in the process of adaptation.

Davies may have felt equal to the challenge of adapting his novel simply because its plot is not essentially complex. "As a general rule a play has a plot that is more simply dealt with than the plot of a novel," Davies observed. What could be simpler than the plot of *Leaven of Malice*? Someone put a false engagement notice in the local newspaper. Its effects on all concerned are explored; in particular, the two young people linked in the announcement find each other and the strength to stand up to their parents. Finally, the culprit is found and his motives discovered. It would seem that the only necessity for dealing with this plot in the scope of a play would be to limit the implications of the "effects on all concerned." Reduce the number of characters affected by the engagement notice, and the plot is instantly simplified. Those most essentially concerned are few. Gloster Ridley, editor of *The Bellman*, in which the engagement notice appears, is technically responsible for the notice; he is not only embarrassed by the fact that somehow the notice managed to slip by his staff without the signature of the person who submitted it, but he is afraid that the ensuing fuss, including a threatened libel suit, may cost him the honorary doctorate from the local university he has hoped for. Pearl Vambrace and Solly Bridgetower are the two young people named in the engagement notice. In fact, they are only slightly acquainted, and Pearl is quite aware that Solly has long been the unsuccessful suitor of another young lady. Solly's mother, Mrs. Bridgetower, and Pearl's father, Professor Vambrace, are both eccentric and demanding parents. The Professor, nursing an old grudge against Solly's father, now deceased, is outraged to have Solly named as Pearl's fiancé — in fact, he would probably be outraged at the idea of losing his daughter to any young man, and having no idea who has perpetrated the hoax or why — except to annoy and embarrass him — he vents his wrath on Ridley, Pearl and Solly. Mrs. Bridgetower is concerned primarily with keeping a stranglehold on Solly, ridden with anxiety that some young lady may win him away from her. Humphrey Cobbler, a Bohemian musician, is involved as the prime suspect in the minds of a few meddlers who believe him capable of anything because he is unconventional in behaviour, appearance and outlook on life. First thoughts about the novel suggest that only one other character is essential; Bevill Higgin, an Irish newcomer to the town who is attempting to establish himself as a teacher of singing and elocution, proves to be responsible for the engagement notice, motivated by malice because he had been snubbed at one time or another by Gloster Ridley, Solly Bridgetower and someone he mistakenly took for Pearl Vambrace. This is only seven characters, a manageable number for a stage production. At first, then, it is a surprise to find that the play retains a number of minor characters from the novel who do not seem to be central to the plot. George and Kitten Morphew are still scuffling and nuzzling on stage, Norm and Dutchy Yarrow still inflicting

awful party games on their guests and congratulating themselves on how normal they are. Altogether, the play includes sixteen characters plus a number of supernumeraries. This is a larger cast than in any of Davies' earlier plays except for *A Masque of Aesop,* written for Upper Canada College and designed to include as many boys as possible.

There are at least three reasons for this large number of characters and the consequent complexity of the play. The first is that the real subject of the novel and the play is not the couple named in the engagement notice but rather small town mentality. Because this involves ancient disputes, gossip, social pride, and petty malice, the subject could hardly be effectively treated through just a few characters. The Yarrows, for instance, epitomize the well-meaning meddlers who are motivated by good intentions but limited by insensitivity and overconfidence in their own perceptions and values. They appear in three scenes. In the first, Dutchy Yarrow is inspired by the engagement announcement in the paper to force Pearl and Solly into embarrassing intimacy in a party game, and they are unable to explain their predicament in the face of the effusive congratulations and sentimental speeches of their hosts. The second scene expands the characterization of Norm and Dutchy as tiresomely conscious of how well-adjusted and determinedly normal they are; this scene prepares for the third, in which Norm, in his capacity as a guidance counsellor, carries out his campaign to smooth Pearl's path to wedded bliss by having a heart-to-heart talk with her father, a professor of classics, about the Oedipus Complex, which he takes to be at the root of Professor Vambrace's agitation about the engagement announcement. This scene is a comic triumph. In addition, it brings the background of the townspeople's gossip about the Vambraces' affairs into the foreground; Norm exposes the ugly face of Rumour with his reference to the episode in which Vambrace broke his stick over Solly's car: "Now about Pearlie.... They say you were walloping her with a pretty big stick...."[9] Yarrow's interview with Vambrace is also the best opportunity in the play for providing depth to Vambrace's character; his emotional intensity, intellect and eccentricity are shown to good advantage in contrast with ultra-normal Norm's fatuous professionalism. The Yarrows are well-meaning onlookers who add greatly to the discomfiture of the central characters; they may not contribute much to the plot, but without such people, the "leaven of malice" on which the play comments could not work as effectively.

A second reason for the large number of characters becomes evident in a consideration of Davies' purpose for including George and Kitten Morphew in the play. They and Kitten's sister, Edith Little, contribute to the depth of the characterization of the town as a whole. But, more important, they provide a context in which to develop the character of Bevill Higgin, the outsider who struggles to market his limited talents under the pretense that he is bringing "culture" to Canada. Part of the play's point is that such a small thing as a false engagement

notice affects a variety of otherwise unrelated people in the town. Pearl and Solly hardly know each other; Gloster Ridley, the newspaper editor, is unconnected with either the Vambraces or the Bridgetowers; Humphrey Cobbler, though he happens to be a friend of Solly's, is affected primarily because his natural prankishness makes those who fail to distinguish between highjinks and malicious mischief suspect him of authoring the engagement notice. All can be given life only by being given a context to operate in, which means the introduction of additional characters. Higgin, the true culprit in the case, has only very brief scenes with Ridley and Solly and one in the library with Tessie Forgie, whom he mistakes for Pearl Vambrace. He is hardly given a second thought by those chiefly affected by the false notice; it is important that he have little connection with them. For us to understand who and what he is, then, he must be given life in another context: the home shared by the Morphews and Edith Little, where he is a boarder. There his seductive charm, his ambitions, and his mediocrity are shown. There we see the irony of his crowning triumph in bringing culture to Salterton: the ribald songs in which he has coached George Morphew are a hit at George's club.

I BELIEVE THAT IN ADDITION to bringing small-town mentality to life and providing a context for important characters to function in, there is a third reason for the inclusion of so many characters in the play. One of Davies' greatest strengths in writing both novels and plays lies in his talent for characterization. The real interest of *Leaven of Malice* is not in the plot but in the characters. Having peopled his novel with so many successful creations, Davies must have wanted to include as many as possible in the play. Unfortunately, there is a limit to the number of characters which can be fully realized in the scope of a play. Since there are so many in *Leaven of Malice*, one might assume that they would be quite insubstantially characterized in comparison with their novelistic counterpart. Indeed, old Swithin Shillito, whose immense pride in his nineteenth century journalistic style and whose determination to stay on as resident pest at *The Bellman* until he "drops in harness" makes him the bane of Ridley's existence, suffers greatly in the transition from novel to play, and Ridley too is regrettably reduced. Dean Knapp, of the church where Humphrey Cobbler is organist, is a less significant but unmistakeable victim of condensation. The surprise is that all the others come to life as completely in the play as they do in the novel, and at least one, Professor Vambrace, is a marked improvement on his original.

Characterization, accomplished in the novel in part by omniscient narration, must in dramatic presentation rely wholly on action and dialogue. Or almost wholly; Davies introduces a dream scene in which a montage of five characters' dreams accomplishes very economically characterization which in the novel can be

lingered over and gradually introduced through authorial commentary. Enacted when Solly and Molly and Humphrey Cobbler fall asleep after huddling together in bed to keep warm during their late night conversation, the scene spotlights a series of five characters talking in their sleep. Mrs. Bridgetower's dream accounts for the iron grip in which she attempts to hold her son Solly. She dreams of his wedding to Louisa Hanson (her maiden name), sighing happily, "What a lovely bride! / . . . / A mysterious girl, I seem to know her face / Yet I do not know her / . . . / But I can trust *her* / With my dear son's peace." Gloster Ridley dreams of the distinction he will attain with an honorary doctorate, the cherished hope which is threatened by the repercussions of the false engagement notice published in his paper. Higgin's dream of himself in his youth as a choirboy shows us the peak of his lifetime's accomplishment and conveys the fact that all his life since has been a futile struggle to regain the bliss of his childhood success. Professor Vambrace's dream about Pearl in part parallels Mrs. Bridgetower's about Solly, but it also shows his yearning to be above and beyond and secure from the mob of humanity which mocks him while he attempts to keep aloof and maintain his dignity. The final dream is Molly Cobbler's, extolling the love she and her husband share, establishing her real happiness, despite the oddities of life with an eccentric musician. The farcical effect of Molly reaching for Humphrey in her sleep is that Solly is pushed out of bed, which wakens them all and provides a natural ending to the dream sequence.

The dream scene is one of three scenes especially designed to convey economically on stage information which was provided at greater leisure in the novel. Another scene, which contains a rapid succession of six telephone calls, encompasses a number of scenes from the novel; it moves the plot along efficiently and conveys a sense of waves of interaction among the people of Salterton peaking as the climax approaches. The third is a comic choral scene in which Ridley, Shillito, Dean Knapp, and Tessie Forgie provide many of the novel's reflections on small town mentality, focusing on the newspaper and what it means to the townspeople.

Ridley by himself is a choral figure in the play, opening the first and second acts and closing the third with direct addresses to the audience. In the novel Ridley and his newspaper, *The Bellman*, are central, and many pages are devoted to the work of the newspaper staff and the role of the newspaper in the life of Salterton. Ridley's viewpoint comes naturally from Davies' long experience as editor of the *Peterborough Examiner*. Little of this newspaper motif is found in the play, but *The Bellman* is still the medium through which Higgin works his mischief, and Ridley, as its editor, is still one of the victims of Higgin's malice. The general function of the newspaper in the lives of the townspeople and the particular effect of the engagement notice which appears in its pages are developed in the choral scene, with Dean Knapp and Tessie Forgie, a minor character even in the novel, together with Swithin Shillito and Gloster Ridley acting as voices of the towns-

people and the newspapermen. "They speak," Davies directs, "in the stricken tones of a verse-speaking choir." The solemn rhythm and tone of the others' speeches are punctuated by Tessie's lyrical refrain:

> O nosey, nosey under the wood
> O nosey, nosey over the lea;
> But nosey, nosey to nobody's good:
> That's what news means
> To Nosey Me.

The gist of the choral statement, comically couched in poetic lines and elevated diction, is that newspapermen's daily concern is to pry into other people's business, and newspaper readers are more interested in the business of their next-door neighbours than in the news of the Great World. Moreover, who put the notice in the paper is of less interest than the ensuing fuss and the embarrassment of the victims. All conclude together:

> Perhaps it may sometimes be true that the world loves a lover;
> And in moments of crisis mankind may achieve magnanimity;
> But most of the time, beneath our external good-fellowship
> Flows a quiet, deep stream of irony, mingled with malice.

Higgin may be the chief culprit, but the nosiness of others, their great concern about personal embarrassment, and their eagerness to discomfit one another exacerbate what was initially simply an erroneous announcement in the newspaper. Higgin could rely on these aspects of human nature; without them, his "joke" would have had little effect. These ideas are dramatized in characters' speeches and actions, but the choral scene emphasizes them, ensuring that the point will not escape the audience.

This choral scene, the dream sequence, and the telephoning scene, are various inventive means of condensing and dramatizing many pages of the novel. The other scenes are all taken more or less directly from the novel with some changes of locale for convenience, some occasional collapsing of two scenes into one for efficiency, and some transferring of function when characters in the novel do not appear in the play. Mrs. Bridgetower, for instance, absorbs the role of the novel's Miss Pottinger, and Molly Cobbler speaks some lines which originally belonged to Mrs. Fielding. A close comparative examination of parallel scenes from novel and play helps to show how Davies met the challenge of adaptation, and it also points up the highly dramatic quality of the novel. With the exception of a very few passages, such as the opening about the appearance of the engagement announcement and a discussion of the quirks of newspaper readers, the novel is constructed entirely of distinct scenes in specific locales. Of course there are far too many of these to allow a simple transition to the stage, but the difficulty for Davies was primarily the need to condense rather than to dramatize what was not dramatic in

conception. Ideas come to him, he has said, primarily in terms of character and dialogue, rather than as abstractions;[10] this appears to be true of his novels as well as his plays. Large segments of a scene in the novel consist of dialogue, often direct exchanges unbroken by so much as "he said" or "she replied."

The bulk of the scene between Norm Yarrow and Professor Vambrace in the novel, for instance, consists of five pages of dialogue in which are imbedded only six and a half sentences of description. The scene is adapted for the stage almost without alteration. Some of the looks, actions, and feelings reported in the novel would be conveyed directly by the actions and expressions of characters on stage. Some are incorporated into dialogue: the novel's "Norm beamed. As he always said to Dutchie, they were easier to deal with when they had some brains, and didn't weep, or shout at you"[11] in the play becomes Norm's line, "I'm glad you're going to take it like that, Professor. It's always easier in these problems of Relationship Engineering when we have to deal with a man of intelligence." A few changes in the dialogue are introduced in the play to make the presumptuousness and superficiality of Norm's assault on Professor Vambrace more apparent, an impression which is conveyed in the novel in part by a narrative description of the intellectual poverty of Norm's professional training. Another change is the addition of eight speeches to do the work of the next scene in the novel, omitted from the play, in which Professor Vambrace asks Pearl why she talked to Yarrow about family, and she replies, "I must talk to someone occasionally." The Professor's grief at his alienation from his daughter is established in this separate scene in the novel; in the play, Vambrace asks Norm why Pearl discussed her family affairs with him. Norm's "Pearlie couldn't talk very frankly to you, I don't suppose" hits home, and the Professor admits that he and Pearl have not spoken to each other at all for three days. After Norm leaves, the scene closes on Vambrace, with the stage directions: "His rage is spent, and now a terrible unhappiness sweeps over him, and we are conscious of the sudden ebb and flow of emotion that makes him what he is. Before we take leave of him, tears are running down his face, and perhaps, under his breath, we hear him say, 'Pearl.' " With minimal alteration from the novel then, this scene transferred easily to the stage and was noted by reviewers as a particularly successful part of the play.

ANOTHER SCENE REVIEWERS PICKED OUT for its success is the bedroom scene between Solly and Mrs. Bridgetower, in which the comic focus is her change into nightclothes with Solly's assistance. The stage directions read "Under cover of a vast bedgown Mrs. Bridgetower removes various intimate garments which she hands to Solly, who hangs them up or puts them away; it is all extremely decent, but achieved only with much bulging, rucking up, accordion-

like expansion and contraction, and modest fuss." Again, the seven pages of the corresponding scene in the novel consist primarily of dialogue, though there are four paragraphs of description. This scene is more extensively condensed and reordered than the Yarrow-Vambrace scene. One long argument over Higgin is replaced by a brief statement by Solly: "You know, Mother, I'd think a long time, if I were you, before I tried to push Higgin into the Cathedral. He strikes me as rather second-rate." Another long exchange focusing on Puss Pottinger, who is omitted from the play, is eliminated. The central point of that passage and of the entire preceding scene in the novel depicting Mrs. Bridgetower's "At-Home," also omitted from the play, is summarized in one line: "Several people this afternoon thought it was that fool Humphrey Cobbler [who was responsible for the engagement notice]." Other passages are rearranged and bits of dialogue added to effect natural transitions. The only substantial addition to this scene of the play is the concluding set of seven speeches. In response to unexpected resistance from Solly when she brings Pearl into the discussion, Mrs. Bridgetower lapses grotesquely into baby talk: "Has Mummy been a baddy Mummy? Does Tolly want to pank Mummums 'tuz she wants to keep the howwid dirls away and have her Tolly all for her own self?" This revealing speech tells a great deal about Mrs. Bridgetower's desire to keep Solly entirely devoted to her as he was in his childhood; the babytalk is partly to cover her embarrassment at such a direct revelation of herself and partly to recreate that eminently satisfactory past. When Solly announces that he is going out, she tries, none too subtly, and unsuccessfully, to get him to report his destination and then makes one more attempt to keep him tied to her: "You won't be late? You know Mother worries when you are out in your car." This addition firmly establishes the nature of Solly's relationship with his mother. In fact, this scene, together with Mrs. Bridgetower's dream in the dream sequence and a discussion of filial loyalty between Pearl and Solly which is expanded in the play, combine to establish Solly and Mrs. Bridgetower's relationship even more clearly in the play than in the novel.

A type of scene which is rewritten entirely for the stage is the memory scene which is simply interior monologue in the novel but is dramatized in the play. Some scenes are presented directly, in sequence, in the novel but occur in the play as "flashbacks": the Yarrow party, for instance. Others, such as Higgin's encounters with Ridley and Solly, are introduced in the novel simply as memories of Ridley and Solly. In the play, these two episodes are introduced as memories but then acted out directly, like the scenes in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* which are projections of Willy Loman's thoughts. In the novel, Ridley's recollection of his interview with Higgin is immersed in his ruminations on the problem of dealing with Shillito. In a long paragraph, the primary subject of which is Shillito, Ridley's refusal to publish a series of articles that Higgin has designed to advertise his services is presented in eight sentences. Davies deliberately obscures its

significance by presenting it from the point of view of Ridley, who attaches little importance to it. In the play, however, Shillito presents himself to the audience and explains his relationship with Ridley. During this speech, Ridley's office is set onstage, and then Higgin, Shillito and Ridley act out the interview. The dialogue is new, and the scene, witnessed directly and occupying two full pages of script, makes a much greater impression on the play's audience than its counterpart makes on the reader of the novel. In particular, Higgin's closing line directs our attention to the significance of the scene: "I wonder," he says to Shillito after Ridley leaves, "if that man has ever been humiliated as he's humiliated me today!" The other two scenes in which Higgin is snubbed — by Solly in his office and by Tessie Forgie sitting at a desk with Pearl Vambrace's name on it — are also acted out in the play and thus have greater impact on the audience than do corresponding passages in the novel. In fact, in the novel Higgin's motive for making Pearl as well as Solly and Ridley a victim of his malicious joke is revealed only at the very end of the story. The necessity to dramatize the incidents which motivate Higgin to retaliate with the engagement notice meant that Davies would have been hard put to make a success of retaining the "whodunnit" approach of the novel. It is clear that he recognized this and decided to take a different approach in the play, making use of dramatic irony instead of suspense. In the play Davies emphasizes the importance of the snubs to Higgin instead of glossing over them. The first act ends after the scene in which Higgin is curtly refused university library privileges by Tessie Forgie and some concluding dialogue between Higgin and the Morphews in which Kitten comments on Higgin's malice: "We don't want to get on the wrong side of this fella." The second act opens with Ridley's direct address to the audience: "Who did it? You know, I'm sure, but it is still a mystery to us."

The play is memorable for individual characters and individual scenes. Characterization, more than function, accounts for the prominence of such characters as Mrs. Bridgetower and Professor Vambrace and, in particular, Humphrey Cobbler. Cobbler is an extraordinary character in both novel and play, raffish, capricious, warm and exuberant, a sort of eccentric Tom Jones whose rumpled appearance and harmless pranks earn him the disapproval of such upright citizens as Mrs. Bridgetower, who considers him an unsatisfactory church organist, despite his musical distinction, because of his levity. In Tyrone Guthrie's 1960 production, Cobbler's part was played by the star attraction, who expanded the part and won praise for his performance, as any competent actor would, because it is a glorious role. Part of the drawback to allowing Cobbler to steal the show, however, is that he has little to do with the plot; he functions primarily as a red herring in the effort to identify the author of the engagement notice, and inflating his part throws the play out of balance. Davies' intention, surely, was to contrast Cobbler's harmless Halloween escapade in the Cathedral with Higgin's spiteful action, using Cobbler as foil to Higgin to show the difference between spur-of-the-moment highjinks

and maliciousness and the mistake other characters make in equating the two. Cobbler's musical virtuosity contrasts with Higgin's "second rate" pretensions to culture, and his cheerful disregard of propriety contrasts with Higgin's pitiful struggle to break into Salterton society. The size of Cobbler's part exactly balances the size of Higgin's in the 1973 version of the play, which indicates that Davies intended the two to be parallel characters.

ALTHOUGH PLAY AND NOVEL HAVE SOME SIMILAR strengths, the different genres dictate differences. Davies has commented on the difference between the part dialogue plays in a novel and its function in a play:

> In a novel a whole important scene can be confined to a few lines of dialogue by some descriptive writing; in a play the dialogue must do it all. Dialogue in a play should be economical; audiences quickly tire of talk that moves too slowly. On the other hand, too much economy may be a mistake, because your dialogue may become telegraphic, and the audience will miss something important. A great part of the playwright's art lies in establishing the right tone and pace in his dialogue. It is at the farthest extreme from reporting ordinary speech.[12]

Davies' ability to make dialogue in the play do the work of some descriptive passages in the novel is evident, but of course the dialogue does not "do it all," because a play can convey directly information which a novel can only describe. Davies' witty commentary on characters and mores is a very great asset of the novel version of *Leaven of Malice*, and it can be transferred to stage dialogue only when such a comment can appropriately be made by a character, though in the choral scene and the dream scene Davies incorporates a sort of commentary which passes the limitations of verisimilitude. The play version of *Leaven of Malice*, though it lacks the authorial commentary, makes good use of the visual element: sets, props, costumes, lighting and action. In addition, music and the vocal inflections of the actors do some of the work of the novel's descriptive passages. Davies does not employ stage directions as extensively as many modern playwrights do, but those he does include, together with cues in the dialogue, show that he has a firm grasp of the importance of the visual and aural ingredients of drama. His experience as actor and director has given him a command of theatre which is quite distinct from his abilities as a novelist.

The engagement announcement which launches the action would have relatively little effect if it were simply read aloud. To ensure maximum impact, it is presented visually, not once but twice. In the second scene, as Pearl reads the notice in the paper aloud to her father, a large sign bearing the notice is carried on by masked stagehands. At the end of Act I, as Higgin reads the notice, retrieved from the bottom of the Morphews' birdcage, it is projected, complete

with bird droppings, on a screen. We are reminded again of the engagement announcement when, in the dream scene at the end of Act II, Mrs. Bridgetower's dream is accented by a large engraved wedding invitation announcing the marriage of herself and her son Solly, again carried on by masked stagehands. Action which departs completely from verisimilitude is used to convey abstract concepts. Rumour is depicted by a dumbshow in the first scene. Curiosity and the contribution made to it by the local newspaper are indicated by the choral scene in which each of the four characters carries a copy of *The Bellman*. Many pages of the novel are devoted to characterizing Shillito as a bore and a nuisance; in the play this is deftly accomplished by a brief bit of action during which Shillito settles himself for a rambling address to the audience, though other characters are clearly ready to begin the next scene. Finally, the masked stagehands pick Shillito up and carry him offstage in mid-speech.

Costume is a visual ingredient of the play which contributes to characterization. Ridley opens the play in his doctoral gown, but because the "real" Ridley is not an academic, but a newspaperman, he steps forward out of the gown to address the audience, and the gown, supported by masked stagehands, stands independently. In the dream scene the gown, worn by a stagehand, resumes its separate existence to convey that for Ridley it is a trapping which cannot make him a better man though it can make him seem so. Thus, much of the novel's exploration of Ridley's aspirations to an honorary doctorate is concentrated in a visual device in the play.

A combination of sight and sound gives some scenes more impact on stage than they have in the novel. The early scene of Cobbler's Halloween escapade in the Cathedral uses costume, dancing and music to give us at once Cobbler's *joie de vivre*, his irrepressible spirit and musical *panache*. In a later scene between Solly, Pearl and Vambrace, Solly actually drives his little car onstage. The crash of Vambrace's stick on Solly's car is accompanied by the tinkle of broken glass and the sounding of the horn, both to maximize the effect of Vambrace's rage and to show us clearly the truth of the episode so that we recognize as rumour the later allegation that Vambrace has broken his stick on Pearl.

All the visual and aural possibilities of theatre cannot entirely accomplish the necessary condensation in adapting a novel to the stage, however. Davies calls his play "an extravaganza"; it is a structurally complex collage of sixteen scenes in three acts, and one scene may contain many discrete parts. The last scene of the first act is the most complex, opening with Ridley's address to the audience followed by a short exchange between Ridley and Edith Little, then moving to Solly and Pearl in his car after the Yarrows' party. There is then a "flashback" to the party, followed by the altercations between Vambrace, Solly, and Pearl. Shillito enters to give his version of that episode, which leads into the dramatization of the encounter between Ridley, Shillito and Higgin in Ridley's office. The comic bit of action in which Shillito is removed from the stage effects a transition

to the Morphews' living room, where a conversation among the Morphews, Edith and Higgin, with the insertion of the exchange between Higgin and Tessie Forgie in the library, concludes the scene. The extravaganza incorporates fantasy and memory scenes into present action, at times moving rapidly through a succession of short scenes, at other times lingering over a fuller portrayal of interaction between two or three characters. The rapid succession of scenes requires much ingenuity in staging, and Davies' script shows that he has given careful attention to the physical problems involved, though reviewers seem inclined to give to directors and designers the entire credit for the fluidity of productions.

Condensation of the *Leaven of Malice* story for the stage results in some diminution of character development, which is unfortunate but perhaps inevitable. All Ridley's plans to give "the Old Mess," Shillito, "the silken sack" are omitted from the play, as is almost all exploration of that large part of Ridley's character which is absorbed in overcoming his guilt about his insane wife. The result is that in the play Shillito seems to be an extraneous character, useful only mechanically for starting the rumour that Vambrace broke his stick over Pearl and for discovering the incriminating receipt for the engagement announcement in Higgin's scrapbook. The two references to Ridley's wife in the play are simply puzzling. In Ridley's dream scene, his statement that "we must never mention the title 'Doctor' to Mrs. Ridley. It would alarm her to think of me as any sort of Doctor" is bewildering. The only other reference to her in the play illuminates the first statement, but introduces further difficulties. Higgin explains to Edith that Ridley has a wife who is confined to an insane asylum, but how he, a newcomer to the town, should have stumbled onto this information is not explained, and because its relationship to Ridley's yen for the honorary doctorate is never clarified, the opening scene with Ridley in his doctoral gown becomes nothing more than a rather clumsy device for introducing the main action of the play as an incident which "very nearly kept [Ridley] from getting what [he] so much wanted." *Why* he wanted it so much, the play's audience is unlikely to discern without reading the novel.

Pearl is another character whose development is curtailed in the play, but in this case the play's characterization is perfectly adequate. In the novel, we witness a change in Pearl from a helpless, mousy girl, wallowing in self-pity, to a more independent, determined, self-assured young lady. The play does not show us this marked change in Pearl. In this respect the characterization of the novel is richer, but the play considered on its own merits does not suffer, for Pearl is a consistent and credible character whose role is well defined.

The condensation necessary for the play does not necessarily impoverish its characters, however. While the characters of Shillito and Ridley suffer in the play, Pearl emerges whole, Solly's character is actually enriched, and Vambrace becomes more credible. In a new bit of dialogue in the play, Cobbler tells Solly that his trouble lies in his own self-image, that "for everybody who privately regards him-

self as a prince, there is somebody who thinks he is a frog. . . . You think of yourself as a toad under the harrow." Solly picks up this observation in a later scene with Pearl. After their first kiss, he announces, "I don't think I'm quite ready to be a failure; it's always attractive, mind you — a nice, tear-sodden tunnel of failure — but suddenly I don't *feel* like a failure. I'm sick of being a toad under the harrow . . . I'm going to have a try at being the Frog Prince. Not really wretched you know. Just rather unfortunately enchanted." The metaphor of transformation, linked with Solly and Pearl's discovery of each other, marks a clear and quite credible change in Solly's outlook. In the novel the change is manifested in Solly's decision to become a creator of literature rather than "an embalmer" — a critic — but the play's metaphor (of a toad under the harrow becoming a Frog Prince) simply, economically, and convincingly encompasses a change in Solly which affects his whole character. The same scene between Pearl and Solly introduces dialogue which does a good deal to explain and soften Vambrace's character. Solly admits that Vambrace seems a monster to him, as he does, perhaps, to the audience, judging him by his frenzied actions and raging speeches. Pearl replies. "He isn't like that all the time. That's so unjust. He's a great man, really; a wonderful scholar and . . . , well, never mind. But his standards and ideals are so different from those of most people. There isn't a drop of compromising blood in him. And it sometimes makes him seem so odd that — it's terribly unjust . . . When I was younger it was embarrassing that Father was always in rows about things — things that other people didn't understand or care about. But I know him better now, and the more I know him, the better I understand his worth." Pearl's understanding of her father, which the original character of the novel lacks, assists the audience in understanding the eccentric Vambrace as well and makes him a more credible and sympathetic character. While the necessity to condense sometimes has adverse effects on characters, at other times it inspires Davies to extremely effective dialogue, economical yet packed with information and emotion which contribute to character portrayal.

Leaven of Malice is a play in which most of the individual scenes and characters are delightful, but the parts are more memorable than the whole. The play is long, requiring close to three hours of playing time, and complex in structure and dramatic technique, but it is still less successful than the novel in conveying the mentality of Salterton, representative of small-town Canada. Since this was really Davies' larger objective, not just exploring the effects of Higgin's particular malicious act, his material really was better suited to novelistic development, as he recognized in the first place. Asked whether he would attempt another adaptation of one of his novels for the stage, Davies replied without hesitation: "No, I don't think adaptations make any sense at all. . . . I wouldn't want to try it again."[13] Still, the challenge of adapting stretched his ingenuity, resulting in a greater command of staging techniques and effective, economical dialogue. It also resulted in

a freer form than the form of most of his earlier plays, and this is a direction in which Davies has continued to move in his latest plays, *Question Time* and *Pontiac and the Green Man*, both of which also contain large casts of characters. One might expect Davies' recent plays to show the same advance on earlier ones in terms of complexity and sophistication as his novels of the 1970's show in comparison with those of the 50's; the experience of adapting *Leaven of Malice*, though it may not have resulted in a totally successful play, did contribute significantly to his command of the dramatic medium.

NOTES

[1] Research for this article was aided by a grant from The Canada Council.

[2] Preface to *Question Time* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1975), p. vii.

[3] Interview with Robertson Davies (February 1976).

[4] *Theatre Arts* (February 1961), p. 71.

[5] Reviews obtained from The Metropolitan Toronto Library.

[6] Interview with Robertson Davies (August 1977).

[7] James Forsyth, *Tyrone Guthrie* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1976), p. 270.

[8] Interview with Tony Van Bridge (August 1977).

[9] Manuscript of *Leaven of Malice* in the possession of Robertson Davies. All quotations from the play are taken from this manuscript.

[10] Interview with Robertson Davies (February 1976).

[11] *Leaven of Malice* (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin, 1954).

[12] Preface to *Question Time*, pp. xi-xii.

[13] Interview with Robertson Davies (February 1976).

ELVIS DEAD

Christopher Wiseman

In a rented Dodge, driving
down Gorge Road in Victoria,
I heard it on the radio.
Elvis is dead.
I though I had
forgotten you but I was shaken.

You reached me.
Back more than twenty years
you reached me, when the sudden
cruel drive of voice and guitar
scattered the sweetness of violins,
stirred rebellion in the blood.
We had thought it would all
last for ever, I suppose —
Doris Day in long party dresses,
all smile and sweetness, all innocence;
Guy Mitchell and Dinah Shore
telling us over and over
that we were fine, that things
would always stay that way.

You ripped it apart. Ripped it
in a way we couldn't believe.
Ripped it suddenly. Exploded it.
What you stood for
threatened more than comfort.
I imitated your records
with three chords on
an old classical guitar.

Now I find and play your records
worn almost to bits
and feel again the power
of being young, feel the room
expanding, marvel at it.
I still know the words.

Scruffy punk kid.
Fat rich boy.
You changed our rhythms,
shook the walls of the world.

books in review

PLAY-ACTING

CHRISTIAN BRUYERE, *Walls*. Talonbooks, $4.95.

REX DEVERELL, *Boiler Room Suite*. Talonbooks, $4.95.

JOE WIESENFELD, *Spratt*. Talonbooks, $4.95.

WHAT DO A COUPLE of old winos, a trio of desperate convicts, and a flower salesman have in common? In these three plays out of the West they are all human failures, all people in varying degrees of pain engaged in fantasies of escape. They all find a physical space secure — temporarily — against the unsympathetic world outside; and in it they achieve their only moments of genuine human contact. All three plays feature imaginative theatrical effects and excellent dialogue, yet suffer from some awkward writing as well. And they all illustrate the principle that a good subplot is harder to construct than a good main plot.

Of the three, only Rex Deverell's *Boiler Room Suite* could be called a comedy. Deverell, playwright-in-residence at Regina's Globe Theatre, gives us a gentle, sympathetic look at two elderly tramps who have maintained their dignity and humanity — and especially their sense of humour. In the shelter of their hotel boiler room "suite," Aggie and Sprugg deflate the pompous and powerful who have discarded them, acting out with rich irony the roles of haughty lady, welfare officer, Prime Minister, and even God. Deverell skillfully milks the theatrical potential of these scenes, with the paraphernalia of the boiler room providing special effects. There is some fine comic writing here: Aggie as God commanding Hawaii to descend into the middle of the prairies; Aggie as the smug dowager ordering "baked peasant under glass." In the transformations effected by wine and their imaginations, as Sprugg says, "there's not only truth, but truth as it ought to be."

Unfortunately Deverell, like his characters, is better at handling the fantastic than the real; the play's dramatic energy and the quality of its writing wane when the outside world intrudes in the person of Peter, the hotel janitor. His ostensible function is to force Aggie and Sprugg to salvage some kernels of genuine truth from the wreckage of their lives. But he in turn merely becomes caught up in their new fantasy, and the play ends not with an image of conflict but of communion: the two men breaking bread together while Aggie sleeps. "The world has turned kind," Sprugg concludes, as Deverell lets us settle for an easy, sentimental exit, the uncomfortable real held at bay for a little while longer.

The convicts in *Walls* have no such luck. Christian Bruyere has chosen to remain true to the actual events of the hostage-taking at the B.C. Pen in 1975, which resulted in the death of classification officer Mary Steinhauser. It is clear from the start that the prisoners have no real hope of attaining their fantasy, escape to freedom in Argentina. In the interim, they, too, get to play-act some of the roles of authority; and in the little world which they rule for forty-one hours, tenderness and fellowship are at least conceivable. Although Bruyere has some trouble deciding whether to focus on Mary or the prisoners or the repressive conditions of the prison system, and a few of his expositional scenes are glaringly weak, he has given effective dramatic life to his documentary material. And the powerful realism of much of the play's dialogue and action makes Bruyere's theatrical debut a good one.

More impressive is Joe Wiesenfeld's first stage play, *Spratt* (like *Walls*, polished prior to first performance in pro-

fessional workshops at Vancouver's New Play Centre). Wiesenfeld brings to the theatre his strengths as a screenwriter — crisp colloquial dialogue, the rapid juxtaposition of complementary scenes — and cleverly integrates them with an anti-naturalistic staging technique befitting the nightmarish quality of his protagonist's experience.

The triumph of the play, however, is the character of Spratt himself. He is a man so riddled with sexual insecurity that he alienates everyone he meets with his obnoxious attempts to overcompensate. Wiesenfeld beautifully balances sympathy with antipathy as he shows us Spratt's life crumbling around him. He loses his job selling artificial flowers and pathetically tries to cope with his wife's illness ("What's she gotta have cancer for? She's good. She's good! She shouldn't have no cancer"). The central dramatic action involves his afternoon in a hotel room with a retarded young woman, resulting in the charge of "sexual intercourse with the feebleminded." Proving that he is not in fact guilty is of less concern to him than the chance to boast of being the stud he has always claimed to be. And more important, for the first time in his life he has felt needed and trusted. If he can't live his fantasy, he will at least protect it. At the end his alienation is so complete that he actually looks forward to prison: "I wouldn't be alone. I'd be one of the guys. . . ." For this sad little man the final escape must be from himself.

In spite of a sometimes corny and perhaps superfluous subplot involving Spratt's best friend, and one or two psychological details that are not entirely convincing, *Spratt* is clearly the best of this crop of new plays from Talonbooks; and Wiesenfeld is the playwright to be watched most closely.

JERRY WASSERMAN

CANAJUN, EH?

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

SAM SHEPARD, *Angel City & Other Plays.* Talonbooks, $6.95.

GEORGE F. WALKER, *Zastrozzi.* Playwrights Co-op, n.p.

WHAT MAKES A PLAY Canadian? Author, subject, and publisher, in the case of Rudy Wiebe's *Far as the Eye Can See.* Better known as a novelist (and rightly so), Wiebe was inspired by his first collaboration with Theatre Passe Muraille to try again, this time choosing as his topic the controversy over the Dodds-Round Hill Power Development Project which flared up near Edmonton between 1973 and 1976. The result is a curious hybrid, begotten collectively by Art on Document, hence — perhaps inevitably — dreary and shapeless. Packed with genuine issues, most centrally the unresolvable conflict between the growing population's need for more power and the need to preserve agricultural land, the play ought to be gripping. But it isn't. The issues, however real, become clichés; the characters, however passionate, are boring stereotypes; the language, despite odd outcroppings of imagery, is as flat as a cornfield. NeWest of Edmonton, believing in the value of "regional perspectives" plan a "series of plays to be devoted to Canadian drama of the prairies." One hopes they will reach higher elevations than this.

The only thing Canadian about Sam Shepard's *Angel City & Other Plays* is the publisher, Talonbooks of Vancouver. When Talonbooks began to publish drama in 1969, they printed not only current plays but also a number of important texts that, though successfully produced, had languished in manuscript, sometimes for years. Now that backlog has been cleared away and, though still

committed primarily to Canadian playwrights, Talonbooks has been expanding its list of dramatists. The choice of Shepard, an American, was determined by three facts (besides Talonbooks' regular policy of publishing only plays that have been professionally produced): an advantageous arrangement with the New York publisher of the collection, the saleability of Shepard, and the attractiveness (to Talonbooks) of Shepard's political ideas.

Shepard is widely recognized as an important dramatist, important in terms of the quantity and modernity of his work. The quality is variable — and debatable. His plays range from semi-autobiographical near-realism (*Curse of the Starving Class*) through Beckettish monologue (*Killer's Head*) to pop culture trips (*Angel City, Cowboy Mouth, The Mad Dog Blues*). Professing to prefer rock music to plays, loudly anti-intellectual ("Ideas emerge from plays — not the other way around"; "I never liked books"), he is almost never satisfied with productions of his work, nor are the directors who work with him. Yet somehow he seems to be important. I find him "political" only in that he reflects the world around him: the simultaneous attractiveness and destructive banality of the movies, the attempts to find in Mick Jagger what people used to find in God. Perhaps it is not simply Shepard's work that is of questionable quality; perhaps it is the time of which he is the abstract and brief chronicle. If so, it is good to have this cultural phenomenon available in Canada.

George F. Walker is Canadian, but his is the country of the mind, Canadian only insofar as we all live in that country. Although his plays are set, ostensibly, in exotic landscapes — Bagdad, Hong Kong, Mozambique, "probably Italy" for *Zastrozzi* — the places matter only in that they *are* exotic. For the landscape of the mind is a strange place. It is peopled with oneself and with others, with one's own erudition and stupidities — and obsessions of others, or rather of others as one perceives them. It is a country where reality and fantasy meet and mingle, where identities shift and change. It is a country where time may move forward in linear fashion but more often does not. Small wonder that reviewers have found Walker's plays "difficult" and "metaphysical" and that only a fraction of them have achieved success on stage.

Zastrozzi, which Ken Gass calls relatively "popular," is part of that fraction; it was well received in Toronto, London (Ontario and England), Seattle, and Carlton (Australia). It is impossible to say in a few words what it is "about." It *is* a melodramatic image of evil, as Zastrozzi, borrowed from Shelley's juvenile novel of that name, pursues not the simple Gothic revenge of the source story but the fulfillment of his own bizarre and complex nature. As is often the case in Walker's plays, that fulfillment brings about a variety of fatal violences — stabbing, strangling, a sabre through the heart — committed and commented on in a ludicrously matter-of-fact style. At the end, for instance, Zastrozzi looks around at the various corpses and says with a smile, "I like it here." The tone is faintly reminiscent of Monty Python's send-up of Sam Peckinpah's movies, a wild skit in which cheerful young people, very well dressed, play croquet, quite oblivious to the frequent wrenching off of limbs and spouting of blood. But the casual gore of *Zastrozzi* makes more of a point, especially in the final duel between Zastrozzi and Victor, the servant/tutor of Verezzi, who is the object of Zastrozzi's revenge. The duel with sabre accompanies a duel with words in which Victor challenges Zastrozzi's claim that all humanity must be answerable to him. Victor exclaims, "Your time is over," and predicts an im-

proved future for mankind; "You are neutralized. I am the emissary of goodness in the battle between good and evil." Victor's final cry, "I am alive," comes out of his mouth while Zastrozzi's sabre is in his heart. Then Verezzi appears, quite defenceless, relying on God's love for protection, and Zastrozzi lets him go — in order to continue to hunt him. The fuzzy-minded, artistic, religious nut and "the master criminal of all Europe" are, after all, brothers, as Shelley says. However difficult and metaphysical Walker's play may be, it creates a vivid image of the power of evil and the paradoxical survival of good, while suggesting that good (which tends to be stupid) must be made intellectually aware of evil as a condition of survival. And, oddly, it insists on the ordinariness and extraordinariness of both. The country which is Walker's mind is a witty one, in the fullest meaning of that word, morally sensitive, and profoundly ironic.

ANN MESSENGER

HISTOIRE DU TEMPS

MICHEL TREMBLAY, *La grosse femme d'à côté est enceinte*. Leméac, n.p.

BERTRAND B. LEBLANC, *Les Trottoirs de bois*. Leméac, n.p.

JEAN-MARIE POUPART, *Ruches*. Leméac, n.p.

LES NOTICES — REDIGEES par l'éditeur ou l'auteur, peu importe — qui apparaissent à l'endos de ces trois romans nous feront entrer dans le vif du sujet, puisqu'elles parlent du temps.

Sur *Les Trottoirs de bois*, de Bertrand B. Leblanc: "L'histoire se passe à Lac-au-Saumon, dans la vallée de la Matapédia, à la fin des années 30. Mais depuis que cette folle aventure est arrivée, il en a coulé de l'eau dans la rivière Matapédia, et les trottoirs de ciment ont, il y a bien longtemps déjà, remplacé les trottoirs de bois." Nous apprenons ainsi que le roman de Leblanc raconte une histoire du passé; mais également, que le temps de l'écriture doit être dissocié nettement de celui de l'action. Dans un assez long Prologue, le narrateur veillera d'ailleurs à nourrir cette distance pour ainsi dire, à la rendre opaque, de façon que le passé auquel il se réfère ne puisse être contaminé par le présent de l'écriture, qui est tout aussi bien celui du lecteur. Confortablement installés dans l'ère des trottoirs de ciment, nous lirons un roman historique — ou plutôt, dit la notice, une "chronique" — dont les événements n'ont aucune chance de devenir les nôtres. Nous entrerons dans un passé qui ne cessera pas de porter les marques du passé. Les trottoirs de bois, c'est fini, passé, classé; on va les admirer au musée des arts décoratifs.

Dans la présentation du roman de Michel Tremblay, *La grosse femme d'à côté est enceinte*, cette distance est au contraire abolie, bien que l'action soit encore plus précisément datée: "2 mai 1942, première belle journée qui annonce l'été. La rue Fabre, entre Gilford et Mont-Royal, sort tranquillement de son engourdissement. Les balcons se peuplent de chaises berçantes et de voix, le quartier s'emplit de promeneurs et de cris d'enfants, les bourgeons gonflent le bout des branches. Et le parc Lafontaine qui est tout près." Ce "2 mai 1942" est un aujourd'hui; le lecteur est invité à oublier qu'il lit le roman de Tremblay en 1980, et à faire que cette journée soit la sienne, que le temps des personnages soit le sien. Michel Tremblay emploie les mêmes temps verbaux que Bertrand B. Leblanc, l'imparfait et le passé simple — avec des chutes fréquentes dans le présent de narration — mais de toute évidence il les emploie différemment, à d'autres fins. Aussitôt créée, suggérée, par la date du 2 mai 1942 et les nombreux traits d'époque dont l'auteur orne son récit, et que le lecteur averti note au passage avec un sourire de connivence, la distance temporelle

est supprimée par cette connivence même, par la magie d'un mémoire qui soude le présent au passé et fait de l'un et de l'autre les figures équivalentes d'un passage du temps. Parce que les personnages de Tremblay vivent le temps, ils débordent le cadre temporel dans lequel ils sont situés et ils rejoignent le nôtre.

Enfin, dans le roman de Jean-Marie Poupart, *Ruches*, le temps se réduit tout entier au présent. "En ce début d'octobre, dit la notice, dans un collège de province, un professeur, Jérôme Cayer, a été trouvé sans vie, assassiné. Les conjectures vont bon train, chacun mène sa petite enquête, les soupçons se portent tantôt sur l'un, tantôt sur l'autre. Et le récit se bâtit autour d'un narrateur . . ." Ce "début d'octobre" n'est pas une notation temporelle; il n'est pas précédé d'un septembre qui le préparerait, suivi d'un novembre qui le continuerait; il annonce, tout simplement, le début d'un texte, peut-être d'une action. N'importe quel autre mois ferait aussi bien l'affaire. Seul compte ici le présent, un présent en quelque sorte intemporel, dans lequel coïncident l'écriture et l'événement. Peut-on même parler d'événements, dans *Ruches*, au sens où l'on en parlerait pour *Les Trottoirs de bois* et *La grosse femme d'à côté est enceinte?* Les événements, ici, n'existent que d'être racontés; ou mieux, ils ne servent, simples prétextes, qu'à provoquer les événements de l'écriture. La notice le dit bien: "Récit? Sans doute, mais aussi prétexte à autre chose. A quoi? Au jeu de miroirs, par exemple. Dans *Ruches*, l'écriture s'observe, se définit, se critique à mesure qu'elle se fait. Prétexte au jeu des mots surtout, où le langage règne en roi et maître, où l'outil sert à fabriquer de nouveaux outils." Et non, comme chez Leblanc et Tremblay, à fabriquer des chaises, des personnages, des tables, des événements . . . Lire *Ruches*, c'est l'écrire, puisque les seuls événements auxquels le lecteur est appelé à participer sont ceux de l'écriture même. On reconnaît là le programme, fidèle aux théorèmes parisiens les plus récents, d'une lecture-écriture qui déporte tout l'intérêt du roman vers les secrets — parfois trop rapidement éventés — de sa propre fabrication. Plus moderne que *Ruches*, on ne fait pas.

Et pourtant, il me faut bien l'avouer, des trois romans qui font l'objet de cette chronique, c'est de Jean-Marie Poupart qui me donne la plus forte impression de ressassement, d'usure, de répétition. Le présent vieillit mal. Le premier des six romans de Poupart, *Angoisse Play*, avait révélé en 1968 un écrivain brillant, vif, léger, expert en contrepèteries, faisant des ronds de jambe sur une musique dont la tristesse contenue sonnait toujours juste. C'était un livre bref; depuis lors ses romans ont pris du poids, et dans les trois cent cinquante pages de *Ruches* c'est à peine si l'on peut entendre autre chose que le cliquetis de la machine à fabriquer des phrases. Je parle raide, et j'ai presque envie de m'en excuser, ne serait-ce que pour ne pas être rangé parmi ces critiques désagréables, peu compréhensifs, dont Poupart fait le procès dans sa postface; mais tout ce que je puis dire pour atténuer la sévérité de ce qui précède, c'est qu'un livre aussi insupportable que *Ruches* ne peut avoir été écrit que par un écrivain de talent. Il n'est pas donné à tout le monde de noircir un aussi grand nombre de pages à partir de rien, en détruisant systématiquement, à mesure qu'elles se présentent, toutes les amorces d'action, toutes les idées un peu vives qui viennent à l'esprit! Les personnages, n'en parlons pas, puisque Poupart ne leur accorde qu'une attention distraite: Vital le Courailleux, professeur au même Cegep que le narrateur, Irène la voisine du haut, l'écrivain à succès P.-H. Normandin, invité à donner une conférence au Collège, sont des ombres chinoises que le narrateur s'amuse à faire danser sur le mur. Quant à ce dernier, "stakhanoviste du bavardage

délayé," c'est par l'indifférence qu'il se définit: "Ca ne me déprime pas. Ca ne m'attire ni me m'aimante. Je ne suis pas jaloux. Ca m'indiffère, voilà tout. Ca m'alanguit." On pensera au *Libraire* de Bessette; ou encore, en lisant les calembours souvent déplorables qui parsèment le livre, à Réjean Ducharme. Mais Hervé Jodoin a du ton, du caractère, et les jeux de mots de Ducharme trahissent une vie passionnée du langage. Rien de tel, ici; rien que le délayage, à l'infini, d'une prose uniquement occupée d'elle-même, de ses volutes, de ses grâces, de ses moindres caprices, Le roman de Poupart est un malentendu. Il confond le travail de l'écriture, appelé, par son projet même avec un abandon aux "tics, tics et tics" (Lautréamont) de l'écriture. On veut bien croire l'auteur quand, se dissociant de son narrateur qui semble écrire avec la plus grande facilité, il doit avoir rédigé "pour la plupart des chapitres plusieurs versions successives avec des variantes appréciables." Mais quoi, c'est l'effet qui importe, non l'effort qu'un écrivain a fourni pour le produire. Et l'effet, dans *Ruches*, c'est une écriture lâche, incontinente, qui assomme d'ennui le lecteur le mieux disposé.

Il me reste à m'interroger sur les raisons de ce malentendu, qui n'exerce pas ses ravages dans l'oeuvre de Poupart seulement, mais aussi dans un nombre assez élevé de romans parus au Québec depuis une dizaine d'années. "De plus, dit l'auteur de *Ruches*, la fiction ne m'a jamais tellement passionné et tant que créateur." La fiction, c'est-à-dire le récit continu, avec un commencement, un milieu et une fin; le vraisemblable; la construction d'un univers de personnages, d'événements, de sentiments, qui entre en concurrence avec le réel. Ce ne sont pas là, on le sait, les ingrédients qui font l'originalité du roman québécois d'aujourd'hui. Chez Aquin comme chez Marie-Claire Blais, Ducharme, Jacques Poulin, Victor-Lévy Beaulieu, la fiction ne cesse de se dérégler, de s'abîmer dans une écriture qui revendique, par rapport à cela même qu'elle raconte, dont elle rend compte en quelque sorte malgré elle, une très large mesure d'autonomie. Elle ne disparaît pas, toutefois, pour autant; elle joue, dans le texte, le rôle de l'opposant auquel l'écriture doit toujours se mesurer pour ne pas tomber dans l'in-signifiance et devenir le simple compte rendu de ses propres opérations. Or, dans *Ruches*, cette tension disparaît, l'écriture gagne trop vite son combat contre un adversaire qui disparaît sans laisser de traces. L'écriture seule, maintenant, sans motifs, sans résistance, sans feu ni lieu; le présent de la solitude absolue. Ce qu'il y a de vrai, ce qu'il y a d'effrayant, dans *Ruches*, c'est la rire de la fin: "Sans blague!! Sans blague, Hein!! Mon rire s'enfle. Il éclate enfin dans ma poitrine comme une supernova de nuit sans lune. Et je ne suis pas fou ... Sans blague?" Ce rire violent, sans joie, est la conclusion logique d'un roman où l'écriture a soigneusement détruit tout ce qui pouvait lui porter ombrage; le monde, en particulier, le temps du monde.

Il ne suffit évidemment pas de retourner au passé, de multiplier les événements, les personnages, comme le fait Bertrand B. Leblanc dans *Les Trottoirs de bois*, pour que le temps du monde retrouve ses droits, et la fiction sa légitimité. Le temps n'agit pas plus dans ce roman que dans *Ruches*: il ne fait qu'encadrer un tableau de genre dont il garantit l'ancienneté. Et l'effet d'ancien est encore accentué par la forme romanesque utilisée par l'auteur. Le Prologue évoque irrésistiblement ces longues introductions, lourdement descriptives, explicatives, qu'on trouve dans plusieurs tomes de la *Comédie humaine*, et il n'est pas jusqu'au style lui-même qui ne tombe dans ce charabia d'images que le génie balzacien transforme en évidences. On y voit "les blés et

les pâturages attaque(r) audacieusement les flancs de la montagne qu'ils grugent avec obstination"; on est séduit, au passage, par "la blancheur affriolante d'une cuisse fugitive"; on souffre d'un "été torride, insidieux, exacerbant" ... Balzac, donc, au génie près; ou, plus justement, tel roman canadien-français du dix-neuvième siècle ou du vingtième commençant, *Charles Guérin* plus *La Terre paternelle* plus *Marie Calumet*. Ainsi Bertrand B. Leblanc — son nom l'y prédisposait — réussit un étonnant doublé: au village ancien, il ajoute une forme de récit plus ancienne encore. Il y aura des lapsus, assurément, et l'on s'étonnera d'entendre un villageois du Lac-au-Saumon utiliser le très parisien "dégueulasse," mais quoi, personne n'est parfait, et le pari était trop audacieux pour être tenu sans faillir pendant deux cent cinquante pages.

Il est donc possible, aujourd'hui, d'écrire et de faire publier au Québec un roman du dix-neuvième siècle? Mais oui, bien sûr, et plus que jamais, puisque les éditeurs, aiguillonnés par les chercheurs universitaires, nous redonnent les *vrais*, fussent-ils ennuyeux à périr! On ne les lit pas, ce qui s'appelle lire; on les étudie, pieusement, par fidélité nationale et culturelle. Le roman de Bertrand B. Leblanc est imbu de cette piété, mais il compte aussi des ingrédients plus modernes, dont nos anciens romanciers — sauf le Rodolphe Girard de *Marie Calumet* — se gardaient comme de la peste: le comique, et le sexe. On fornique, dans *Les Trottoirs de bois*, avec un enthousiasme digne des plus grandes causes, et les scènes les plus percutantes du roman sont assurément celles où la fornication, et ses conséquences heureuses ou malheureuses, éclatent au grand jour: quand, par exemple, le grand Johny, affolé par la chaleur, se lance tout nu sur la grand route, vêtu de ses seules bottines, pour aller déclarer sa passion à une vieille fille qui travaille au magasin Deschamps; ou lorsque la voiture dans laquelle le même Deschamps fait l'amour avec la femme légère du village, Marie, est tirée par des enfants sur la place publique; cette scène étant suivie d'une autre, plus émoustillante encore, où l'on voit Marie affronter — et déshabiller — la commère bigote Justine Corneau. C'est encore une affaire de sexe qui provoquera l'événement dramatique du roman: un pauvre gars châtré à demi par l'ami qui vient de le surprendre dans le lit de sa femme. Il s'en passe, direz-vous, des choses, dans ce roman traditionnel, et vous aurez raison plus que vous ne pensez, car je ne vous ai pas encore tout raconté. Il faudrait encore parler de la partie de baseball contre l'équipe de Cabano, des élections municipales, des mauvais et bons tours qu'on se joue les uns aux autres, des inventions perverses de la commère Justine, de la procession de la Fête-Dieu, des beuveries d'importance diverse ... Convenons-en, à la fin: Bertrand B. Leblanc a plus de tours dans son sac, plus d'invention, que n'en avaient Rodolphe Girard et Patrice Lacombe. Il écrit de façon plus vivante, plus rapide; et souvent le passé simple fait place au présent de narration qui fait se bousculer les événements dans un assez joyeux tohu-bohu. Ce présent, toutefois, ne réussit pas — qu'on me pardonne le mauvais jeu de mots — à rendre présents ses personnages, et les événements dans lesquels ils sont impliqués. Ce sont des marionnettes qui s'agitent sous nos yeux; des marionnettes d'époque, assez bien dessinées, mais peut-être moins intéressantes, au fond, que les pâles personnages de *Marie Calumet* ou de *La Terre paternelle*, auxquels leur éloignement même nous permet de prêter une plus sympathique humanité.

On trouve de tout, dans *Les Trottoirs de bois*, sauf du style; et j'entends par là, non pas le mouvement plus ou moins gracieux de la phrase, car Bertrand B. Leblanc écrit aussi convenablement que

de très estimables romanciers, mais la création d'une problématique culturelle générale où les personnages prennent sens et vie. Il suffira, pour établir cette carence, de comparer la Justine Corneau des *Trottoirs de bois*, incarnation d'un personnage-type de la comédie villageoise, à la Veuve à Calixte d'Antonine Maillet, autre incarnation du même personnage. La Veuve à Calixte est convaincante parce qu'elle appartient à une tradition vivante qui fait de chacune de ses manigances des actions profondément significatives, nécessaires, ambivalentes comme la vie; elle n'est jamais simplement ridicule, ou méchante; elle est engagée, avec Mariaagélas, dans un grand combat qui est la réalité même du village. Justine Corneau, par contre, n'est qu'une vieille sotte aigrie, et il suffira, à la fin du roman, que son mari lui botte les fesses pour que tout rentre dans l'ordre. Dans l'ordre, c'est-à-dire dans le néant, dans l'insignifiance du quotidien. En fait, Bertrand B. Leblanc, romancier passéiste, n'est remonté assez loin dans le passé pour réinventer les sources d'une tradition. Il s'est arrêté aux pères et aux mères; il fallait aller jusqu'aux grands-pères et aux grands-mères, et au delà, jusqu'au commencement des temps, comme l'ont fait, entre autres, Antonine Maillet, Jacques Ferron, Marie-Claire Blais et Victor-Lévy Beaulieu. Car, aujourd-hui, c'est le plus ancien qui est le plus actuel.

Comment donc Michel Tremblay s'y prend-il pour animer, dans *La grosse femme d'à côté est enceinte*, ce qui est encore si près de nous, cette préhistoire immédiate de notre temps, ce 2 mai 1942 où l'on voit un chat nommé Duplessis livrer le grand combat à un chien appelé Godbout? Il donne la parole au temps, au *temps qui passe*: "Rose, Violette et Mauve tricotaient." Elles tricotaient, comme elles avaient tricoté, comme elles tricoteront. Tous les temps leur appartiennent, mais c'est l'imparfait qui leur convient particulièrement, temps d'une action qui n'est jamais terminée, qui se répète en n'étant jamais tout à fait la même. Pour Rose, Violette et Mauve, variations sur une même couleur, la couleur du temps, il n'y a pas de première fois. "Ouan ... J'pense que c'est la première fois." "Voyons donc, faut pas exagérer! Depuis le temps ..." "C'est vrai, t'as raison ... j'me rappelle, l'année que Victoire a eu Gabriel ..." "C'tait pas l'année de Gabriel, c'tait l'année d'Edouard, son deuxième ..." "Comme tu veux." "C'est pas comme j'veux, c'est de même." Le temps appartient à la nécessité, c'est pourquoi d'une certaine façon il est toujours le même, il se répète, c'est pourquoi Rose et Violette et Mauve, sous la haute surveillance de leur mère Florence, ne cesseront jamais de tricoter; mais aussi, parce qu'il est vécu par des enfants, des femmes, des hommes, il scande une avancée, une progression. "On est là pour que tout aille vers l'avant, dit Florence. Ce qui est tricoté est tricoté même si c'est mal tricoté." Ainsi, le 2 mai 1942 du chat Duplessis et du chien Godbout nous montre-t-il d'où nous venons, ce temps qui est notre passé; et que ce temps reste actuel, puisque nous sommes soumis à la même nécessité, maille après maille.

Si Rose, Violette et Mauve tricotent avec une telle assiduité, c'est également parce que beaucoup d'enfants se préparent à naître, ce printemps-là, rue Fabre, entre Gilford et Mont-Royal. Le roman de Michel Tremblay est l'apothéose des ventres gonflés. Et d'abord celui, énorme, scandaleux à cause de l'âge de celle qui le porte, et l'obligeant à rester assise toute la journée dans son fauteuil, de la "grosse femme d'à côté." Cette grossesse, dirons-nous, comme on parlait de la folie de Menaud à la fin du roman de Félix-Antoine Savard, n'est pas une grossesse comme les autres. Celles qui se produisent dans les autres maisons de

la rue Fabre sont justifiées en quelque sorte par une nécessité qui coïncide avec l'âge des femmes: on est mariée depuis peu de temps, il est normal qu'on ait un enfant, il serait anormal qu'on n'en eût pas. La grossesse de la "grosse femme," par contre, procède d'une décision tout à fait libre, audacieuse, qui met en danger sa vie même. Elle veut l'enfant pour l'enfant; elle est la maternité artiste, par opposition à la maternité industrieuse — on n'oserait dire industrielle — qui est de règle dans la société qui l'entoure. Aussi bien la maternité, pour elle, est-elle associée au rêve impossible qu'elle entretient de voir un jour Acapulco, et à la littérature qui en est l'accompagnement obligé. "Tu lirais *Notre-Dame de Paris* ou ben donc *Eugénie Grandette*, à voix haute, pis quand les vagues seraient pas dans mes oreilles j'écouterais ... J'resterais là, clouée par le soleil pis caressée par l'océan. Pis j'pourrais mettre au monde tous les enfants que j'voudrais!" On voit comment, ici, Michel Tremblay magnifie la traditionnelle fécondité canadienne-française, et du même coup la pervertit. Plus question d'une *revanche des berceaux*; la "grosse dame" procrée par plaisir, pour s'accomplir dans l'abondance. Elle trône, dans l'appartement encombré par trois générations, comme la déesse ou mieux comme l'idée pure de la fécondité.

Cet étonnant renversement du mythe traditionnel fait du roman de Michel Tremblay tout autre chose qu'un tableau de moeurs, malgré la précision naturaliste du détail, le soin infini qu'apporte le romancier à reconstituer le décor et les habitudes de l'époque. Oui, certes, c'est bien le Montréal d'hier que nous donne ce roman, avec les ballades en tramway, les chaises berçantes sur les balcons, le pique-nique des enfants au parc Lafontaine, la glorieuse équipée de la grand-mère Victoire et de son fils Edouard dans les magasins de la rue Mont-Royal, les putains Mercedes, Betty et Ti-lou; et c'est aussi, aux antipodes de la représentation obligée, traditionnelle, *ce qui aurait pu être*, ce qui existait peut-être sous les apparences, à l'écart du discours idéologique, dans le secret des âmes et des corps appelés à autre chose qu'à la simple conservation. Tremblay découvre, isole, dans la grossesse une postulation créatrice; postulation qu'il reconnaît également, à l'autre extrême, paradoxalement, dans la *stérilité* du frère Edouard, homosexuel qui va passer des nuits dans des boîtes spéciales et en rapporte des récits qui nourrissent la vie imaginaire de la "grosse femme"; et dans la mère Victoire qui, après avoir engendré toute cette smala, échappe à la nécessité familiale pour ne vivre, scandaleusement, que sa vie (et sa mort) propre. Entre la "grosse femme," Edouard, Victoire et les enfants, s'établit une complicité profonde qui tient à ce que, tous, ils placent la vie personnelle, l'invention de la vie, au-dessus des impositions du clan, au contraire d'Albertine qui demeure figée dans le rôle de la mère-poule. Ils ne s'abstraient pas de la famille; c'est de l'intérieur qu'ils la font éclater, en changeant le *signe* des forces vives qu'elle produit et reproduit. Seule Ti-lou, la glorieuse putain d'Ottawa qui vit ses derniers jours à Montréal, demeure à l'écart. Comme la "grosse femme" est l'idée pure de la fécondité, Ti-lou représente l'absolu de l'aventure, de la fête, du désordre, de l'amour flamboyant de sa propre stérilité. On imagine que, bien qu'ignorant mutuellement leur existence, elles entretiennent dans le roman un dialogue secret, où elles se racontent que, dans les formes apparemment les plus opposées, la vie vaut d'être vécue et d'être poussée à bout.

Est-ce assez dire que *La grosse femme d'à côté est enceinte* est une oeuvre éminemment singulière, puissante, une des plus riches qui aient été publiées au Québec ces dernières années? Elle brise avec

le canon généralement reçu du roman québécois depuis le début des années soixante, en ce que les pouvoirs du langage n'y reçoivent pas un privilège démesuré par rapport au vraisemblable temporel. Michel Tremblay possède un solide métier de raconteur, dont il use ici avec une maîtrise supérieure à celle qui s'exerçait dans ses livres précédents, peut-être même dans son théâtre. Si j'hésite à parler de grandeur, à propos de son roman, c'est, en premier lieu, à cause de quelques facilités, de quelques broutilles, comme par exemple les passages où l'auteur déblatère contre certains aspects de la mentalité de l'époque, détruisant ainsi, durant quelques minutes, les riches ambiguïtés du récit; mais c'est, surtout, parce que, en le lisant, je n'ai pu m'empêcher de rêver à ce que *La grosse femme d'à côté est enceinte* serait devenu si Michel Tremblay, à la façon de certains romanciers sud-américains, avait donné libre cours à la grande folie de l'imagination. Cette saga des ventres gonflés serait devenue, alors ... Mais assez rêvé. A son niveau, plus modeste — dirons-nous plus provincial? — le roman de Tremblay accomplit parfaitement son dessein.

GILLES MARCOTTE

MAKING THE PRESENT CONTINUOUS

MICHAEL ONDAATJE, ed., *The Long Poem Anthology*. Coach House Press, $7.95.

THE LONG POEM ANTHOLOGY brings together some of the most challenging of what its editor, Michael Ondaatje, calls the "unofficial" voices of the 1970's. Eight long poems are reprinted in full along with Book IV of bp Nichol's *Martyrology*. The poems are accompanied by brief statements on their work by the poets themselves, biographical details, a selective list of criticism about their work and suggestions for further reading. It is clearly designed with a student audience in mind. The price is reasonable and it is an attractively produced volume, with wide margins, good paper and clear print. It makes work which was previously difficult to obtain or inaccessible available to a much wider audience, extending the range of what may be taught in courses on Canadian literature.

Indeed, its very existence may change how we see and talk about Canadian writing. The most interesting aspect of this anthology is the way it has been shaped by its editor, himself a major Canadian poet of the 1970s who has written his own long poems. In his excellent introduction, Ondaatje explains that his choice of poems was determined, not by chronology or history, but by curiosity: "I wanted to explore the poets who surprise me with their *step*, their process." For this reason, one poem from the 1960's, Robin Blaser's *Moth Poem*, is included, but the primary emphasis is on the experimental long poems of the later decade. The better known long poems of the period seem deliberately to have been excluded. They require no further recognition, and perhaps they surprise us less with their step; they are already part of our consciousness. Certainly Atwood's success seems due to her ability to capture in words what has already been felt but not articulated. She doesn't change our ways of seeing; she clarifies.

The key word throughout this anthology is process. When Ondaatje argues that "the most interesting writing being done today can be found within the structure of the long poem" and that it is time to re-examine what we mean when we speak of the "documentary poem in Canada," he is really advocating his own preference for what Jack Spicer (invoked often in this volume) called the serial poem, a long poem in which narra-

tive and a formal didactic voice are replaced by "the movement of the mind and language." Each of the nine long poems reprinted here shares this fascination with process and this distrust of what Stuart McKinnon calls "the temporal narrative of simple cause-effect logic." Of the nine poets, six were connected in some way with *Tish,* which suggests that the impetus from that movement is still being felt. Its emphasis on the immediate and the discontinuous in order to make the present continuous, and its rejection of what it felt to be the narrowly national, are all reflected in this volume. Lee's *Civil Elegies,* Atwood's *Journals of Susanna Moodie* or any of Don Gutteridge's historical narratives would be out of place here. Ondaatje doesn't even mention Gutteridge's traditional documentaries in his long list of what might have been included. One suspects they represent a view of poetry too far removed from that dominant here.

This decision to build the anthology about a fairly unified aesthetics instead of trying to make it representatively Canadian gives the collection a coherence few Canadian anthologies possess. The reading of one poem illuminates our understanding of the others, as preoccupations recur in different configurations. Similarly, the poets' commentaries reflect on one another. They are all concerned with the ways in which the long poem occupies both space and time and the ways in which it may enable us to understand or at least experience these two dimensions. Marlatt speaks of the long poem "taking on time" while McKay stresses its role as imaginative space. Davey writes of discovery, Bowering of meditation, and Nichol of trust in the durational aspect of being alive. But while the emphasis may vary from poet to poet, their concerns are remarkably similar. Each is self-consciously exploratory, seeking openness rather than closure, and fascinated by the possibilities and limitations of language itself.

Given the premises outlined in Ondaatje's Introduction, the selection cannot be faulted. This is a fascinating and valuable anthology. Although my concern here has been to draw attention to the continuity of aesthetic concerns, each poem does indeed surprise with the originality of its own step, and the differences in practice, in realization, are far greater than the similarities in theory might suggest. Ondaatje's decision to include Book IV of Nichol's *Martyrology* seems sensible. All four books would have been too much for an anthology, yet Nichol could not have been omitted from this collection. Book IV suffers least by separation from the rest. But why didn't Ondaatje include the epigraphs translated by W. S. Merwin which preceded the poem as originally published? Nichol refers to them in his commentary; they have inexplicably been omitted, as have some of the graphics. I wonder whether the reference in the section on Further Reading to Galway and Cinnell, *The Book of Nightmares,* is some kind of joke or a mistake. But these are minor quibbles about an anthology which is as much a contribution to the writing of Canadian literary history as to the textbook market.

DIANA BRYDON

ILLUSORY UNITY

MARIO J. VALDES and OWEN J. MILLER, eds., *Interpretation of Narrative.* Univ. of Toronto Press, $15.00.

IF CONTEMPORARY PHILOSOPHERS of the human sciences, such as Paul Ricoeur, Kurt Lewin, and Clifford Geertz, are indeed right in assuming that the abandoning of mutually exclusive theories and the favouring of complementary, partially valid approaches instead are sympto-

matic of a maturing and increasingly knowledgeable discipline, and if the papers read at and selected from the 1976 Toronto Colloquium on the "Interpretation of Narrative" are in fact representative of current trends, then we may optimistically conclude that literary criticism is on a path to maturity and knowledge. For the underlying mode that emerges from the collection of essays, or, more accurately, of assertions of positions, however much it directly reflects the controversy between formalist and hermeneutic stances, nevertheless tries to understand and at the same time go beyond this schism. In order to initiate and pursue such a provocative step as Valdes and Miller dare to undertake, they have had to develop what Ricoeur so vividly calls "second naïveté": literary theories must be able to handle uncertainties, since there is no ultimate, "successful" outcome to be expected from them. In short, neither idealism nor despair is allowed.

They are not allowed to the reader of this volume either, and so a fair amount of second naïveté is indispensable for him as well. There are times and places in the collection where he may feel that he knows exactly where it is moving and understands what precisely relates and separates formalism and hermeneutics; yet there are always other instances where he may see himself drifting through a "non-book" incoherently assembled and where the two clearly distinctive positions merge into a single amorphous mass.

Only to a small extent does the reader's confusion arise from shortcomings on the part of the editors. Indeed, the only serious problem in this respect stems from their attempt to group each paper into one of three clearly separable sections, headed "formalist analysis," "hermeneutic criticism," and "metacriticism" — an endeavour which creates the false impression that the various positions taken are readily and discretely identifiable. However, most of what appears as incoherent and fuzzy arises directly from the subject of the volume — the two theories of narrative — and the various levels which they study and from which they can be studied. Miller, in his epilogue, attempts to summarize the array of levels touched upon in the collection:

> Some papers challenge certain aspects or certain premises of established theories by confronting them with their own critical discourse on theory; others attempt to establish a particular theoretical or critical discourse that works within the assumptions of that literary theory or operates on literary texts: yet others use a combination of these approaches.... Finally, there are the discourses attempted in the introduction and conclusion, themselves establishing a dialectical relationship with those presented by the participants of this volume. To these must be added the comments of the preface and epilogue seeking not to achieve an ultimate and final level but opening the volume to the reader and attempting to engage him in a dialectical response.

It is by accepting this invitation to a dialectical response and by following Ralph Cohen's introductory suggestion to approach the papers themselves as forms (each one engaged in an act of interpretation and itself needing to be interpreted) that the reader will make the activity of reading most valuable and satisfying. For he will discover that the very language of each paper, although it may claim to be strictly formalistic or strictly hermeneutic, inevitably contains features of both, just as it is unavoidable for each of the two theories, given their nature and the nature of the material they deal with, to include elements from the other. Read in this manner, the collection achieves more than its simple title leads one to expect. It reveals as much, if not more, about narrative theories and the interpretation of narrative theories as it does about the interpretation of narrative.

What sort of language do the papers then use, and what does it reveal about the character of the formalist versus hermeneutic controversy? First of all, we will realize that only if they are seen as ideal types, can formalist analyses be contrasted with hermeneutic interpretations. Of course, formalism is much more limited and fixed in its method of procedure and its vocabulary and thus constrains those who use it and severely limits the insights they can make; yet at the same time, it provides a kind of preciseness and intelligibility, and suggests that the critic can capture significant generalizations that hermeneutics, focusing on the singularity of the literary work and stressing the reader's unique experience with the irreversible time of the narrative, has been unable to develop. Moreover, since narrative itself has a dual nature — its purely formal potential deriving from inherently linguistic structures, but its presentation having to take place as an act of living speech — the papers that attempt to interpret it adequately will show signs of this duality as well.

In the light of these considerations, one will quickly abandon the search for direct correlations between the kinds of language and the kinds of theory that they represent and move to a more moderate position which, at the same time, is more phenomenologically true to the material it deals with. This volume shows, through its contributions, that formalist and hermeneutic approaches to narrative are really ends of a continuum, never realizable and realized in their extremes. However much the elements of one of the two may be dominant in an interpretation and in the language it uses, there will inevitably be elements of the other present to some degree. The dynamic of the operation of this continuum is seen in some of the papers as taking the form of stylistic shifts among different levels of analysis (e.g., Michael Riffaterre's paper, which criticizes a formalist search for rules that would regulate narrative structures, and which looks for formulization on the level of their actualization in the text instead). Another approach traces how narrative structures of different times may ask for different mixtures of formalist and hermeneutic features in their interpretation (e.g., Eugene Vance's look at medieval narrative and the particular insights a formalist and a hermeneutic approach to its strategies may provide).

A brief sketch of the content of the papers will give a sense of the variety of this collection. Christie V. McDonald examines Rousseau's *Dialogues* as a work which intends to make language reflect the process of its own shaping. By analyzing the schematic movements within the text, she shows how Rousseau consciously exploited the dialogue form, thereby making explicit certain assumptions about the nature of writing and reading as communicative processes. O. J. Miller examines two texts by Todorov and attempts to reconstruct and compare the view of the relationship between poetics and interpretation they express. Michael Riffaterre, referring to Balzac's *Paix du ménage*, suggests that an abstract narrative typology cannot adequately describe the decoding of a narrative as a unit of significance, because it considers the surface features that narrative takes as merely exterior, decorative devices. Thereby it ignores that it is these same features that the reader reacts to and that determine the temporality and successivity of the narrative. Timothy J. Reiss, similarly critical, questions the traditional assumption that literary language, and therefore literary criticism, are unique, and rather suggests that scientific discourses, particularly in the philosophy of quantum mechanics, be taken as ideal references, as they can give answers to problems like the opposition between text-oriented and reader-oriented analysis. In the final con-

tribution to the Formalism section, Brian T. Fitch demonstrates the shortcomings of Barthes' critique of Bataille's *Histoire de l'oeil*, especially as far as it fails to deal with the integration of the work's ontological message with its formalistic message. These limitations can be remedied, Fitch argues, by the application of two crucial concepts the Geneva School has developed, that of "the generator of the text" and that of "auto-representation."

In the collection's second section, Cyrus Hamlin discusses reversal strategies in narrative as these are treated in modern hermeneutics and in German idealist theory. In a more general vein, Felix Martinez Bonati puts forward the thesis that in literary studies the hermeneutic method has, by necessity, to become a certain kind of formal description, because it intends to handle literature as structured knowledge, not merely as a manifestation of a more or less unconscious life. Wolfgang Iser, approaching narrative from a functionalist angle, proposes that it encapsulates elements drawn from outside systems, most notably historical and social norms; with this proposition in mind, he then studies the specific strategies which particular texts use for the selection and rearrangement of such elements. Concluding the hermeneutic section of the book, Eugene Vance's essay attempts to shed some light on current issues in contemporary poetics from a comparative look at the intellectual scene of the Middle Ages, when the nature of narrative form and the theory of interpretation were as actively debated as they are at the present time.

The title of the third section, "Metacriticism," promises papers with a more holistic outlook. Hans Robert Jauss suggests how to cope with the difficulties that the transition from literary theories which treat the literary text as an autonomous whole, to those which aim at including instances of intertextuality, typically poses. In an investigation of one area of literary terminology, the narrative line, J. Hillis Miller uncovers a universal dilemma of the field: all narrative terminology is a labyrinth whose centre can never be fully reached because it takes a term from another realm to name something which has no proper name, and because, as a result, all terms overlap. The third and last contributor to this section, Paul Hernadi, suggests that just as in literature, form is unthinkable without function, and vice versa, so in literary criticism, formalism and hermeneutics have to be seen as mutually presupposing, rather than opposing, each other.

Preceding Owen J. Miller's Epilogue, Uri Margolin gives some concluding and unifying remarks, showing how the positions taken in the various papers support his thesis that structuralism has been moving steadily toward a rapprochement with hermeneutics. By loosening its grip, structuralism has encouraged a new interest in defining the structure of narrative in ways that are free of both the excesses of classical hermeneutics and the limitations of traditional structuralism.

This short review of the papers contained in the collection may have illustrated the problems concerning coherence within and between the sections — problems that wishful thoughts of a unification soon to be reached can only superficially solve. But given our limited understanding of science, one can hardly blame any editor or literary critic for his attempt to make the discipline of literary criticism appear organized and rational and to use every opportunity to lead the reader to believe that the apparent disunity and contradictions he sees will vanish if seen safely and analytically from without. It is this attempt on the part of the editors and some of the contributors to convince the reader of a future unity, however, which prevents useful questioning and healthy confusion from arising.

For what occurs instead is illusory answering and seeming clarity.

If these criticisms appear unnecessarily harsh, they are called for precisely because of the importance of the book. It represents a moment of taking stock in a rapidly developing, diversifying, and questioning field.

ANNALIESE KRAMER

STUFF WITHOUT LIFE

D. J. DOOLEY, *Moral Vision in the Canadian Novel.* Clarke, Irwin, $9.95.

THERE ARE FIVE MAJOR FLAWS which make *Moral Vision in the Canadian Novel* a failed work of criticism: Dooley's concept of morality is limited and poorly defined; the analysis is clotted with potted plots and empty phrases; the scholarship is not thorough; the chapters produce no syntheses or connections; and the exegesis reveals nothing that we don't already know.

Proceeding from the assumption that "There are no special criteria for Canadian fiction," Dooley tries to examine the special moral criteria which he sees underlying the fiction of eleven novelists who are treated in this order: Leacock, Grove, Duncan, Ross, Buckler, Callaghan, MacLennan, Richler, Davies, Laurence, and Atwood. A brief introduction, which skirts any penetrating discussion of morality, hints at Dooley's understanding of his book's title. If the Canadian novelist "wins our respect," he tells us, "it must be because his characters have the stuff of life about them and because he has created a convincing social and moral context for them." In order for morality to exist, he continues, "The world must be shown as a place in which the choices made do perceptibly affect reality." What Dooley means by "the stuff of life" is as blurred as his vision of what constitutes convincing social-moral contexts or "reality"; and his notion of "a self-sustaining coherency" of "life view" does little to clarify the matter.

The chapters which follow the introduction garble things more. Take the first chapter: "Stephen Leacock and the Mask of Humour." Dooley writes that in *Sunshine Sketches* Leacock "makes us wonder about the moral perspective of the community and the narrator." But wondering is futile because "The book *pretends* to be something other than what it actually *is*." Dooley doesn't say what it *is*, but then maybe it *isn't*, because "We are simply not sure what moral perspective we are being asked to adopt." Unlike Dooley, the narrator of *Arcadian Adventures* "has a clear and consistent attitude to his material. . . . The author has taken the moral measure of his world." In the Mariposa story, on the other hand, the narrator's point of view is ambiguous, hence the author's perspective remains uncertain. Dooley's unconvincing distinctions between author and narrator (obvious here and throughout the book) make us doubt his ability to handle the relation between voice and vision which is so central to his moral "theory."

Fruits of the Earth, we learn in an embarrassingly clichéd series of phrases, depicts "the exercise of heroic virtues" which marks Abe Spalding's Quest for the West. Abe is "larger than life," and he uses "brains as well as brawn" to win "his epic battle against the forces of nature." His victory in a "titanic struggle" shows him to be "the hero triumphant" who is nevertheless "in the grip of forces he cannot understand or control." Dooley cannot deal with the moral paradox implied by Abe's two-sidedness; so he takes the easy way out and claims that "the novel ends in equivocation." It is "a classic example of intellectual and moral confusion." The final pronouncement says more about Dooley's book than it does about Grove's.

Again and again Dooley refuses to take a stand. Morley Callaghan (rightly identified as an eminently moral writer) leaves Dooley "reflecting on questions rather than answers." The chapter on *Duddy Kravitz* (subtitled "A Moral Apprenticeship?") poses another question which is never resolved: "Is *his* [Duddy's] the authentic human response to the conditions of our times?" Characteristically, Dooley maintains that "Richler invites a double response, one which requires us to see Duddy as both victor and victim." *Fifth Business* is "a parable illustrating right and wrong approaches to life" which once more raises (but never becomes engaged with) "questions" about Jung, religion, and the morality of psychic life. Dooley: "Such questions Davies raises, but ultimately leaves unanswered" in what is somehow "his most interesting and provocative novel."

On to *The Stone Angel,* which, through Hagar, presents "two different bases for moral choice": "the heart's truth" as opposed to "a complex of qualities associated with proper appearances." After commenting on how "We see in Hagar the persistence of a Presbyterian moral outlook in the absence of Presbyterian theology," Dooley moves to a deflated conclusion: "*The Stone Angel* is a *tour de force.*" "[T]he clear moral lesson which it apparently sets out to teach is not really clear at all, but full of ambiguities."

Say no more. But Dooley does, in a chapter on *The Edible Woman* in which "we are left wondering whether Marian McAlpin can find self-definition through the adjustment which she has made." We might not have been left that way if Dooley had consulted the considerable range of criticism on Atwood's fiction; the three footnotes to the chapter (one to the edition, two to Evelyn Waugh) suggest that he did not. Perhaps Dooley felt that in Atwood's case there was no commentary worth mentioning. But how to explain the absence of any reference to Douglas Barbour's article on morality and form in *The Mountain and the Valley*? Omissions of this kind make the author's attempt to synthesize major critical perspectives on each novel (a shabby tactic employed at the start of most chapters) seem both superficial and suspect. Lack of synthesis, however, is a feature of *Moral Vision in the Canadian Novel.* Even the conclusion does nothing to draw the chapters together, or to explain the puzzling organization of Dooley's study — a bland collection of unsophisticated critiques which will quickly be forgotten.

ROBERT LECKER

PERSISTING VALUES

LOUIS DUDEK, *Technology and Culture.* Golden Dog, $2.95.

LOUIS DUDEK IS THINKING of poets like Frank Scott, A. J. M. Smith, Layton and himself when, in a sardonic aside, he refers to "that mangy lot from 1925 to 1960" who never deserved "the name of modernist. It took us three quarters of a century to get to poets who would go beyond the Boundary, who would go over the edge into Concrete, smudges, moaning and screeching, measuring their breath, and even silence ... as the ultimate poetry."

Like Frank Davey, Dudek observes that we have indeed come from There to Here. But unlike Davey, he implies that Here is no place for living men — or not for long.

While the new radical modernists of our "high art" are bewitched by (in Davey's words) "process, discontinuity, non-linearity and unpredictability," popular mass culture has been captured (Dudek's words) "by the barbarians as a means of spreading frenzy and hysteria

among teenagers." Dudek describes "the tide of popular mass degradation" as "a great boiling cauldron of variety, noise and orgiastic screaming ... a regression to a form of primitivism." While high art proceeds along "its own esoteric line of ingrown development" (leaving its audience behind), "the general culture of society regresses and deteriorates." At one pole, Stockhausen and Cage. At the other — the Rolling Stones!

Yet Louis Dudek is in no degree the victim — or the exponent — of a "Dies Irae Complex." He knows that in the long track of time man has, again and again, gone from There to Here to There to Here. Dudek knows (and insists) that in the rhythm and stretch of human culture no spot of time can be taken as terminal.

In these six lectures (written between 1969 and 1975) Dudek is, as the title suggests, very much concerned with the effect on the arts and on the human condition of successive technologies. He is far from denying that the invention of the wheel, the telescope, print and the electronic media have had no bearing on the *way* we are or on *how* we make images of ourselves and of our world. Nevertheless he recoils from any notion that the medium is the message ("the platter is the pie") and he repudiates what he believes to be an unrelieved determinism at the root of Marshall McLuhan's technological imperatives. The new tribalism to which, in McLuhan's view, we are being carried willy-nilly by the electronic revolutions, a tribalism in which "points of view" and "the individuals who hold them will not be suppressed because they no longer exist," is an inhuman ant-hill which humanity will resist and reject with an Everlasting No.

Similarly, it is faith in the continuity of the intrinsically human which allows Dudek to envisage a return of the "high art" of radical modernism to the pursuit of purpose and meaning. In his view, having exhausted all the technical possibilities of the tradition, writers, painters and composers had turned to "the analysis of the medium and its deliberate dislocation in novel and experimental forms." Out with perspective. Out with tonality. Out with "cosmic poetry" and "the larger formal unities." Out with the great primary feelings and values of the dead premodern past.

But it is Dudek's contention that primary human needs and values persist, will assert themselves now as before, and that the gates of hell will not prevail against them. Whether he is talking about pop art, the present state of education, or the solipsism of the avant-garde, Dudek invariably proclaims the virtues of right reason, order, decency, charity and hope. These virtues and man's inherent need of them will once more, despite TV, the Rolling Stones, John Cage and Charles Olson, subdue, chasten and consecrate to human ends all the tricks and trash of our latest ingenuities.

The last lecture in this volume was delivered in 1975. One can only hope against hope that Louis Dudek's own ground of hope can hold us up under the monstrous tread of the marching morrows.

MALCOLM ROSS

EN ECOUTANT

PIERRE NEPVEU, *Les mots à l'écoute. Poésie et silence chez Fernand Ouellette, Gaston Miron et Paul-Marie Lapointe.* Université Laval, $10.00.

"LES MOTS A L'ECOUTE," comme Pierre Nepveu le laisse entendre dans l'introduction de son livre (thèse de doctorat soutenue à l'Université de Montréal en 1978), cela veut dire les mots à l'écoute du silence. La dialectique fondamentale de la poésie s'établit selon lui entre le langage et le silence, entre parler et écou-

ter, entre l'autre et le moi, entre l'ailleurs et l'ici. S'appuyant sur un bon nombre d'écrivains et de critiques prestigieux (Rimbaud, Mallarmé, Proust, Joyce, Blanchot, Paz et Barthes entre autres), Nepveu définit le texte poétique d'abord par sa relation spécifique et concrète avec le silence. Le silence entendu bien sûr comme interaction entre les mots et les blancs, entre l'énoncé et le découpage du vers libre, mais aussi le silence représentant l'indéterminé, l'illimité qui conduit au pouvoir érotique du texte, au sens conçu comme excès ou dépassement.

Dans les trois chapitres principaux portant sur les poètes québécois Fernand Ouellette, Gaston Miron et Paul-Marie Lapointe, c'est donc la "relation privilégiée avec le silence" qui intéresse Nepveu. Relation dépistée et étudiée aussi bien au niveau du fonctionnement du texte poétique (dans son déroulement concret, syntaxique et prosodique) que dans son contenu (le poème et ses manques, ses espaces, ce qu'il comporte de non-dit). Ce rapport fondamental avec le silence, Nepveu n'éprouve aucune difficulté à le saisir à travers les pages du *Soleil sous la mort* (1965) ou de *Dans le sombre* (1967): "Chez Ouellette, c'est dans la tension, non désespérée mais angoissée, entre vie et mort que se déroule l'écriture." Que ce soit la tension qui s'établit entre l'intériorité et le social, le politique ou entre la sexualité et la spiritualité ou entre l'érotisme et la métaphysique, la poétique de Ouellette l'amène à une expérience de la limite, à l'utopie du silence, un après-langage qui se veut une tentative de résoudre la tension poétique. Pour Nepveu, la modernité de Ouellette réside tout entière dans ce déchirement et cette ambiguïté: le désir d'une présence absolue du langage, de l'achèvement de la parole d'une part et la destruction de cette parole d'autre part, en somme le conflit irréconciliable entre l'Eros et la Conscience.

Mais cette dialectique qui marque la poésie de Ouellette ne s'applique pas nécessairement à Paul-Marie Lapointe ou à Gaston Miron. Pour mener à bien son entreprise en ce qui concerne *L'Homme rapaillé* (1970), Nepveu doit se livrer à une lecture fort "dépaysante" de Miron. Il renouvelle l'interprétation reçue de l'oeuvre et nous donne une des études les plus stimulantes de son ouvrage. Certaines pages sur le travail de la phrase, la liaison syntaxique, la rhétorique du poème mironien, d'autres sur "le regard, la marche, l'amour" sont brillantes. Mais là où la majorité des critiques et tel parti politique ont toujours tenté de récupérer idéologiquement "Les monologues de l'aliénation délirante" ou "L'amour et le militant," Nepveu se lance dans l'excès contraire. Il faut à tout prix "dépayser" Miron, mettre l'accent sur le pluriel, sur l'illimité, sur les possibilités foisonnantes de son oeuvre. Le "pays" dont parle le poète doit être transcendé, son discours dépolitisé et dé-radicalisé au nom d'un humanisme large et vague. Nul doute que la poésie de Miron est consciente de sa propre impossibilité, du manque et de la dépossession qui la travaillent. Mais trop insister sur "l'immatériel" et "l'intemporel" de cette aventure poétique, la placer "au commencement, avant que le monde ne soit," c'est finalement la situer partout et nulle part, dans une espèce de "no man's land" utopique. C'est surtout oublier que toute oeuvre humaine, toute poésie — y compris celle de Miron —s'inscrit dans l'Histoire, dans telle histoire.

L'étude sur Paul-Marie Lapointe ("L'évidence de la poésie") réunit les qualités et les faiblesses des chapitres précédants. Lorsqu'il est question de la part du jazz et de l'improvisation chez Lapointe, de la parataxe et de l'utilisation de la 3ème personne, de l'instantané des images, les commentaires de Nepveu sont toujours pertinents. L'analyse est particulièrement réussie dans les passages portant

sur la "gravitation" et la "fragmentation," la figuration, la description, le rythme et l'incantation dans *Tableaux de l'amoureuse* (1974). Mais les pages sur *Le vierge incendié* (1948) donnent la nette impression que Nepveu tente d'évacuer la dimension ironique et sarcastique des textes au seul profit de l'humour, d'occulter ou de minimiser la révolte présente dans ce premier recueil. "Arbres" (1960) devient un poème qui "abolit l'avenir, passe à travers le visible, à travers un territoire pour y saisir l'illimité." L'accent est mis dans *Choix de poèmes* (1960) sur la fête, le jeu, la sensualité, sur la constitution d'un monde idéal en dehors de toute référence à l'histoire et à l'idéologie (et pourtant, il faut relire attentivement la section "Quel amour" pour se convaincre du contraire). Au sujet de *Pour les âmes* (1964), Nepveu parle d'"historicité neutre"' qui existerait "à l'écart de l'idéologie." Il se dégage de tout le chapitre une méfiance extrême du critique envers l'idéologie et l'histoire, alors que Lapointe affirme dans ses textes théoriques ("Foi en l'homme," "Poésie sociale et morale") que le poète doit être "l'âme de son époque," c'est-à-dire sa conscience, qu'il doit "vivre son époque, participer au monde."

Qu'on soit d'accord ou non avec la conception de la poésie et les interprétations de Nepveu, *Les mots à l'écoute* est un livre important qui nous offre de nouvelles lectures de trois poètes québécois majeurs. Les études sont denses, ordonnées, ficelées avec méthode; il s'agit en somme d'un ouvrage bien fait, "tricoté serré." Nepveu a choisi de lire "la poésie dans ses marges" comme il le dit en conclusion, et c'est là son droit le plus strict. Ouvrage important donc et qui arrive à point. Dans sa bibliographie, pour chacun des poètes étudiés, Nepveu ne cite que quatre ou cinq textes critiques. Depuis, deux études sont parues sur Lapointe (de Jean Fisette et de Jean-Louis Major) et un récent colloque devrait fournir de nouvelles orientations à la recherche sur les poètes de l'Hexagone. A quand une lecture de Ouellette, Miron et Lapointe dans le texte et dans l'histoire?

RICHARD GIGUERE

THIN POEMS

GWEN HAUSER, *The Ordinary Invisible Woman*. Fiddlehead, $5.00.

MARY HUMPHREY BALDRIDGE, *the loneliness of the poet/housewife*. Fiddlehead, n.p.

KATHY TYLER, *The Ultimate Contact*. Fiddlehead, $4.00.

KAY SMITH, *When A Girl Looks Down*. Fiddlehead, n.p.

THE FOUR WRITERS reviewed here differ in skill and scope. But they share an inability to mesh their inner universe with the outside world. This inability is not an aesthetic and psychological stance. It is a failure of craftsmanship. Their conflicts and emotions are, in varying degrees, vague, confusing, or clichéd. Images, shadows, echoes, flicker and wane; they occasionally illustrate the inner world of these poets but fail to illuminate it. Somehow, their feelings and problems have all been met before. There are no fresh insights nor new ways of seeing.

The rage in Gwen Hauser's *The Ordinary Invisible Woman* is the emotion that binds her poems. Radical feminist lesbianism is her major theme. She waves her shibboleths from poem to poem: "the revolution / is ultimately gay." Her hatred, her oppression, her anger are clichés. Newness is not a virtue in itself, but Hauser gives little beyond the brain-damaged psychology of "pop" feminism; "Big Brother does not allow women space or privacy." The women's movement has gone far beyond the beating of breasts and a rehash of male oppression.

Nevertheless, she is not that easily dismissed. Her emotion is not contrived. Words spit from the page with an authority of feeling that demands attention. Throughout the volume of poetry she experiments with style and rhythm. The form is trying to be content with some success. She does not sneak up to language; she grabs words, molding them to her own poetic needs. She is at her worst in a "poem for a liberal." We move into the old hackneyed world of potshotting a group that is by now a cheap gesture. She is at her best in a "poem for Erica." In this poem we feel the deep quality of her emotion and not simply the endless smart-ass lines that Hauser is so fond of: "this is a poem for Erica / who perhaps one day heard the star sing so loud / she began to feel lonely & went to join the crowd / of stars singing & singing / between the moon & the cloud." We feel the jagged edge of pain, fingered, and touched over and over again.

Mary Humphrey Baldridge in "the loneliness of the poet / housewife" explores the themes of death, solitude and danger. The images are of wolves, devouring cats, wet skeletons, birds that are freedom and flight but death as well. The poems should grip us with their stark and naked terror but they don't. There is a falsification of feeling that emerges more often than not in the form of contrived metaphor, exercises in compression that are at once agile and empty of resonance: "A White Moon lies in my bed / Promising escape from / That row of victimized brownstones / Each an obscene hill of exposed interiors / (Each drop of rain a braggard's tear . . .)."

There is a great dissatisfaction here for the reader. Where is the pain coming from? Why? That it exists is believable enough and perhaps for some this is sufficient. But the poet's cry is crippled by her inability to create a world that inspires either compassion or admiration for her survival. There is an emotional distance that is the result not of intention but of poor writing. Even if poetry is impression, not argument, she does not create a world that is vivid and gripping. She is at her best in the poem "against the wall": "these poems slip out / through the cracks / while the monster / moves forward / grinding and hissing / spastic jerks / the monster stops / and the poems fall out / of my body."

Kathy Tyler's *The Ultimate Contact* is the least worthy of these books of poetry. North American letters have been conspicuously hospitable to the idea of the madman as artist, and the madman as hero, all under the rubric of *breakdown-is-breakthrough*. Breakdown is idealized and madness becomes a form of cultural defiance. Her themes and language are of prison, fragments, dust, funeral dirge, breakdown, despair, suicide, solitude, choking, drowning and death.

She hits all the bases of fashion — Plath, the brutalization of women, Patty Hearst, old age, mother/daughter conflict, religion, psychiatry, soap opera, imperialistic Americans. None of these themes are explored with any depth. Postures abound in this volume: "heartache / is just as / lethal / as cancer." The obligatory poem "To Sylvia Plath" squirms and whines in a way Plath never would: "I HURT I HURT I HURT." Tyler advises the reader that her "convulsions" will either "resonate / or wither. / It all depends on you." She implies that once having placed her pain "under the microscope," the onus is on the reader to be sensitive and understanding, or be unperceptive and boorish. All this is fine but I'm afraid it is the poet's job to create a body of experience worth responding to.

Smith is at her worst in a poem like "Winter Storm": "When winter descends like a whirlwind of prophets / and the city

seems a match in its grasp / then worlds within walls become holy." She strains for images; she is obscure. It is pencil and pen, or shovel and trowel poetry. This is to say it is like an academic exercise. There is no resonance at all sustained by image and vision. She is at her best in a poem like "Portrait of a Husband," a sudden portrait with an ironic twist, "No trinket, plaything, sedative / for a fitful pleasure or comfort, / no symbolic figure on the printed page / but a natural adversary in the deadliest of games."

Women are no longer silent about themselves, like Karl Shapiro's poets, "no belly and no bowels, only consonants and vowels." But the "reach" of these poets is beyond their "grasp." They have written thin poems trying to be fat ones.

DIANA COOPER-CLARK

DEXTROUS

GERALD LAMPERT, *Chestnut/Flower/Eye of Venus*. Coach House, $4.50.

IN CHESTNUT/FLOWER/EYE OF VENUS, the late Gerald Lampert has his non-hero, Steven Martin, expose and analyse his own disintegrating marriage. Mood and tone are established in the brilliant and ironic second paragraph — only part of which need be quoted here.

> I remember Julie and me looking through these doors at the bright yellow and red snapdragons in the brick flowerbox that extends the full frontage of the house and saying we just had to live here even though it was five, six thousand dollars more than we could really afford. What's money when you're preparing for a lifetime of bliss? Eden without the apple tree and no snakes visible. You don't ask for a 5% discount on heaven. . . .

Now, ten years later Steven and Julie — aged forty-five and thirty-four respectively — are sitting "at opposite ends of the sofa."

The roots of their *malaise* go back at least a generation: his mother had been committed to an asylum when he was just six; and Julie's mother was evidently deserving of similar treatment by the time her daughter had reached puberty. The plot thickens when Babe and Arthur Gottman move into the house across the street. Through the Gottmans the Martins meet Kelly, a failed artist whose obscene clichés indicate his imaginative barrenness. Julie, it appears, begins an illicit relationship with Kelly who, in turn, offers himself to Steven. Meanwhile, both Steven and Julie have engaged Gottman as their psychoanalyst. Steven, distrustful of the group therapy practised by Gottman, does, however, accept briefly Gottman's remedy for all psychic disorders: extreme self-indulgence — though Gottman calls it self-assertion. One Wednesday Steven copulates with three women in the space of eight hours!

Monday's horoscope, by Atropho (one of Lampert's many puns), stresses seeing clearly and avoiding excesses. Shortly afterwards Steven admits to himself that his "silly Wednesday proved nothing to [his] soul," but that it may have contributed to his no longer seeing Julie as a Venus image. His subsequent defacing of the painting of Julie leaning towards Kelly's bed symbolizes his self-assertion. Julie then rejects Kelly (who has committed himself to an asylum) : she is "sick of losers," including herself. Self-knowledge and courage to be have come from "small epiphanies" rather than "apocalyptic disclosures."

There are relatively few characters in Lampert's novel, and perhaps only two — Steven Martin and Arthur Gottman — are truly interesting. Steven literally wallows in masochism. "My escutcheon is a naked man in a field of maddened porcupines. Undignified pain waddles towards me from all sides. With a fly swatter ensconced." Then comes the under-

cutting pun: "And I'm using the swatter to attack my own fly." It is precisely the combination of self-pity and spinelessness on the one hand, and incisiveness and self-mockery on the other, which makes Steven an enigma and gives the novel an ambiguity which strengthens what might otherwise have been a hopelessly hackneyed plot.

Gottman, his very name a pun — "Must you always play God?" Babe asks — is the stereotyped psychoanalyst, financially and sexually exploiting his clients. His quackery and sexual ambivalence are symbolized by "the lady's dimple in [his] brutal cheek." His bullying attitude, his egotism, and evasiveness — "a metaphor man," Steven calls him — arouse sparks of defiance in Steven, and for that, perhaps, and for providing some of the more lively dialogue in the novel, Gottman deserves his move to a more affluent life in Mexico.

The world of Lampert's novel is characterized by failing finances, overdue mortgage payments, "sedatives and stimulants," booze and junk foods, exploitation, masochism, and madness. The title images come from a poem by bill bissett, with perhaps some distant ancestry in T. S. Eliot's "Gerontion." The sense of unreality being the reality is intensified by frequent references to squirrels and nuts and a cuckoo clock. Steven's disjointed phrases presumably bear witness to his sexual and other frustrations in this crazy world. On the other hand, his punning jabs at Gottman and Gottman's form of psychoanalysis — "Don't talk fruit salad to me," and "Us analyse, up analyse, down analyse, you me" — and his clever manipulation of literary and other allusions add to his ambiguity of character mentioned earlier. Lampert, in the manner of a black-humorist, is keeping his readers off-balance.

Chestnut/Flower/Eye of Venus is a *tour de force*. But no amount of verbal dexterity can ultimately compensate for a lack of emotional intensity. Lampert may have been his own worst enemy here. After a while his phrases seem too glib; his comedy, too facile. And as satire, his novel lacks real bite and evokes no indignation.

DONALD R. BARTLETT

AN EAR FOR MUSIC

JOHN PETER, *Vallor*. York Publishing, $9.75; pa. $4.50.

WHAT STRIKES ONE as remarkable in *Vallor* is the form John Peter chooses. In "A Programme Note" he admits that in writing out of appreciation for composers such as William Walton he was working "in a direction so unstudied as to be almost outside my control." The result, nevertheless, is an engaging collection of stories accommodated "to some of the rules of music." In this "fictional equivalent of a sonata," the initial piece, "Make a Joyful Noise," in its energetic liveliness is meant to approximate the rondo of classical sonata. The next story, on the other hand, is slower, more ponderous. Seven shorter stories, variations on a theme of knowledge and experience, and a longer, denser one, a "two-subject sonata form," follow the slow movement. Furthermore, because a "sonata's normal sequence, slavishly followed in fiction, would feel unbalanced," Mr. Peter reverses the usual first and last movements, the more sombre acting as the finale.

But why music? Why not fiction for its own sake? Apart from their novelty, one may wonder, what do such arrangements accomplish? The answer, I think, is a good deal, especially in the way of mood and tone. Perhaps the answer also lies in this from Michael Frayn, whose epigraph introduces *Vallor*: "If the physical world ceased to exist, painting and poetry and

prose would become meaningless. But you can't help feeling wistfully ... that the possibilities of harmony and counterpoint would linger on in the silence." In the form of John Peter's stories, there is something carefully shaped and planned, a harmony. Credit the effect to Mr. Peter's ear for music.

Vallor builds to the title story, the last in the collection, a middle-aged headmaster's recollection of student days and his enigmatic schoolmate Vallor, whose dive one morning from a waterfall (out of some misguided code of honour?) ends in death. A half-century later, the antagonists about whom the narrator reminisces — Winkelman, Craig and Crouch, the Human Crabs, Beppy Hethcote from the neighbouring girls' school — have long since departed, one to the war and death at Sidi Rezegh, another to the Rhodesian civil service, still another to marry "a Johannesburg stockbroker." But thoughts of Vallor persist. At times like this, when Mr. Peter appears most comfortable with his subject, his prose is lyrical. "Vallor was a gambler," he writes, "we all are. But death comes prowling and sweeps up the stakes ... Some have the last gesture of defiance unwillingly thrust on them, like Crouch, but Vallor's way is best. To lose when the odds are still with you, and in a flare of audacity that lights up the dark."

"Vallor" is the most pensive of the stories, four of them, incidentally, set in South Africa, the remaining six in Canada. The rondo, a Canadian story, works as a sort of counterpoint to it. "Vallor" and "Make a Joyful Noise" are, I think, probably the most fully developed in the collection. Far lighter in tone than "Vallor," "Make a Joyful Noise," which takes place in one day, recounts Nesta Firkeld's wedding, an occasion on which the eccentric Firkeld family rises in splendour from their Vancouver Island strongholds, among them, great-uncle Nicholas, "a senile Bacchus"; Watson, who saves correspondence for the pleasure of "altering and improving letters ... long since acknowledged or ignored"; and Jack in "immaculate morning clothes" sitting atop an inflated rubber ring. If at times during the ceremony and wedding reception, the multiple points of view are confusing, one suspects that it is a planned confusion, Nesta's own, perhaps, at leaving her family for a husband. After the day's improbable events — her having to hitch a ride to the wedding, for instance — Nesta finds herself alone, if only for the moment. Vulnerable to the past, and to her emotions, she seeks the comfort of her husband in the next room, together to "make a joyful noise."

The second "movement" of Mr. Peter's prose sonata, "From a Death to a View," deals with a hospital patient and his frightening encounter with the masked figure outside the window. Aside from its ending, which I think too abrupt, and an occasional annoying metaphor, "the sky now mellowing to a tint that recalled the innocence of ginger ale," it is an effective, and nightmarish, vision. The stories that follow, the "Seven Variations on a Theme," though some of them are little more than sketches, provide a necessary change of tempo. They, too, are stories of reckoning and discovery, for in the universe of John Peter one comes to knowledge either by re-examining the past as Humphrey does in the splendid "Lots of Room in Hell" or by shaping the future through the present as Brent and Nettie do in "Japonica" — both means of self-discovery.

In the "programme note," finally, John Peter writes that a burgeoning literature such as Canada's needs readers who are vigilant enough to keep their authors "at the stretch" and "making the proper effort" in their work. Mr. Peter, I think, makes the proper effort in *Vallor*.

ANTHONY BUKOSKI

FALLING

EARLE BIRNEY, *Fall By Fury & Other Makings.* McClelland & Stewart, $5.95.

IRVING LAYTON, *The Tightrope Dancer.* McClelland & Stewart, $5.95.

IN THE TITLE POEM OF *The Tightrope Dancer,* Irving Layton introduces a selection of his key images, his main themes of death and sex, and his concepts of the poet as dancer, acrobat, and — inevitably — showman:

> Awareness of death's pull
> into nothingness
> begets tyrant and sadist
> but the prod, the harsh shove of love
> makes the defiant artist
> dance on his tightrope

These notes play throughout the other eighty-nine poems in what, according to the list of Layton's works included in the volume, is his thirty-eighth publication.

Layton's "tightrope" crosses many places. He thanks the Canada Council for a Senior Arts Grant that allowed him "to visit different parts of the world to look over a new stock of metaphors, images, and symbols." He dates his poems in such diverse locations as Myconos, Toronto, and St. Lucia. He describes "petrified putrefaction" in "England 1977" and "Smoke" in Paris' *Père Lachaise* cemetery.

In time Layton's rope crosses mostly the twentieth century. He continues to write about the Holocaust; the first poem in *The Tightrope Dancer* is "For 751-0329," "a distinguished graduate from Auschwitz." He addresses "Watch Out for His Left" to Leonid Brezhnev. He conjures up "Yeats in St. Lucia." References to people like "John Donne, an Englishman, / hoping [death] might be a Christian" ("Sir"), and a series of poems which present death as "Sir Mortimer," however, give the volume an historical dimension.

The conceit of death as a knight allows Layton to distance and render objective both the end of life and those sadists, torturers, terrorists, thugs, and despots he discusses in his "Foreword" who end life in this "age of atrocity." As a result, his "Sir Mortimer" poems — they include "Memo to Sir Mortimer," "Flowers He'll Never Smell," "Sir Mortimer," "The Professional," "Checkmate," and "The Final Memo" — are generally short, sharp, witty, and wise. To make these poems, the poet has danced defiantly and successfully on his tightrope.

Other poems in *The Tightrope Dancer* lack the "concision and intensity" which Layton at his best achieves. "The Malediction" is, to use more of Layton's terms, "rhetoric or journalism." In "The Papal Election," the satire on the people who in *The Covenant* (1977) were more accurately called "Xians" rather than Chris-

tians is neither amusing nor enlightening; it simply offends.

In the first paragraph of his "Foreword," Layton defines his image of poet-on-tightrope: "The poet, either through genes or genius, is poised on a rope stretched tautly between sex and death. The major poet dances on the tightrope; the minor poet walks warily across it. The non-poet or poetaster ... doesn't even make a try at either." There is, however, another aspect to this image. Sometimes even the "major poet" misses a step and falls. There are several such "fallings" among the poems of *The Tightrope Dancer.*

Falling, as the title suggests, is a central image in Earle Birney's *Fall By Fury & Other Makings*, a collection of forty-four poems divided into four sections. Some, notably the visual poems which Birney calls "alphabeings," have been published in earlier volumes of his work. Others of the more orthodox word poems Birney now names "makings" have their origins in experiences drawn from an earlier time in the poet's life. "Prolog without Tales," for example, rather lumpish couplets about the group who gathered around Sir Charles G. D. Roberts in the old King Cole Room at the Park Plaza, comes from "prose notes" Birney made in Toronto in the early 1940's. Still others such as "a day with the toronto day-lies (a daycollage of the real news back in our centennial year)" are "found poems" made from newspapers and other publications.

Most of the "makings," however, date from and are dated in the 1970's. These display Birney's fascination with language and form and his flexibility and fecundity as a poet. "TRAWNA TUH BELVUL BY KNAYJIN PSIFIK" is a wonderful excursion into Canadian/Ontario life as it is seen and experienced, and Canadian/Ontario language as it is heard and spoken on a train between "Trawna" and "BELLL and / BELLVUL." "dear biographer" is a witty letter to future researchers about the limitations of the

> great snow-bank-job
> in the university's MS collection
> kept below melting
> all the pleas boasts i love yous
> snaps clips pix posters IOUs
> sincerely XXXes
> everything insoluble in air
> the world blew up around me.

"the Wind through St. John's," the title poem of the fourth section, is a whirling meditation on time, place, and wind

> saying only that air and earth and sea will
> be one
> and whirl in the Sun
> within the reeling Circle.

Many of the recent "makings" in *Fall By Fury* are love poems for Wai-lan, to whom the book is dedicated. They range from the delicate, short lyric "my love is young" to longer and less successful "bull-frog" poems featuring "Mr Toad our Totem" ("halfperson's day").

Two poems for Wai-lan also include the most important images of falling. "fall in spring" describes the fall "after three days" of "the blossoms" from a potted Easter rosebush. "fall by Fury," the title poem and first "making" in the volume, describes the poet's actual fall from a tree he had been pruning one "cloven hip and thigh / ... a world and two summers ago."

With his references to Hubris and "the Furies," his memories of other climbs over the "mountains of youth ... Temple ... Edith," and his fall, Birney creates a poem which recalls "David." In "David," however, the chief character falls to death; the first-person narrator, into youth-less, mountain-less life. In "fall by Fury," the first-person narrator falls to live and recreate his climb, his fall, and his dream of running again in the finest poem in both *The Tightrope Dancer* and *Fall By Fury.*

MARY JANE EDWARDS

POET, PILGRIM, PAMPHLETEER

CRAIG POWELL, *Rehearsal for Dancers.* Turnstone Press, n.p.

BARRY CALLAGHAN, *The Hogg Poems and Drawings.* General Publishing, n.p.

MARYA FIAMENGO, *North of the Cold Star.* Mosaic Press, n.p.

CRAIG POWELL, an expatriate Australian currently working as psychiatrist in London, Ontario (arrived in 1972), has had five volumes of poetry published, the last two in Canada. *Rehearsal for Dancers* is not only the most elegantly produced of his volumes to date — a striking contrast to the low budget Killaly Press *Selected Poems* (1978) — it contains by far his best work.

The opening stanza of the first poem alerts the reader immediately to the change in his work from traditional modes to organic ones:

> Poems: a child ritual of iambics I
> lisped in numbers for the numbers
> made me forget I was lying Unbeing

It is surely no coincidence that in shaking off the resilient shibboleths of Australian formalism in one breath, he invokes the spirit of Cummings in the next. A little later in the poem, dedicated to fellow Australian poet Bruce Beaver, he says: "I read your poems again which are." Powell, effortlessly, lets the poem discover its own form. A long way from the preoccupation with externals evident in *I Learn By Going* (1968), when he strove to have his song "precise," the "fury" beneath his thumb firmly controlled.

The themes of his earlier books are still there: water, the silences, childhood, mental illness, the tenuous hold humans have on life and language itself. But Powell comes at them rejuvenated. A self confessed "cheerful and / curious exile," he conveys the impact of his new physical

(and poetic) landscape skilfully. Internal and external world are seen anew.

Earlier predictability gives way to surprise and a moving deference to the delicate changes of mind and physical surrounds. Powell's imagination soaks up both the Canadian landscape and the nature of his isolation from home and family circle. Too many good poems result to mention them all, but give time to the richness of "Toward Riding Mountain," where "the slow flakes / fumble like wishes to my lips," and the subtle cadences of "Writing Before Spring," "After Midnight," and "Canada Geese" where

> the fields
> of barley lie with their palms upward
>
> the cool furrows attend so the
> body summoning the body dances
> to its husks.

Most successful are the haunting incantatory title poem, "Rehearsal for Dancers," "The Water Carrier," "Spoken to Women," and "Sekunka Valley." The last stanza of the last —

> I grew with him in the city
> a world leaps under my thighs
> my father tells me my name
> the hills lean down to be silent
> my son and daughter are dancing
> late snow and early light

— works wonderfully, gathering the threads of the poem, as past and present mesh. The poet here is not shaper — as he was in his early books — but, in Robert Duncan's sense, conveyor of news. Powell finally gives vent to what he perceived in one of his earliest poems as his "daemon-self" ("After Great Silence") who

> comes at his own bidding,
> never mine.
> That crackle of words is all he has to bring.

With Barry Callaghan, words don't so much crackle, they sear, as we accompany him on a journey, at once exciting and frightening. Certainly well worth the trip. There is no doubt that for contemporary Canadian poetry this is an important book. Presentation, I know, is becoming an increasingly deceptive guide to quality, but *The Hogg Poems*, visually, *is* a most handsome book, *and* it delivers. It consists of three books, the second of which contains sixteen elegantly produced colour plates; we witness the poet/mariner's long journey, "on the loose," we are told at the book's beginning, "in Jerusalem and Hog town, his home town, Toronto." The scope of the work, intended as a synthesis, is large. Equally so the poet's energy in reenacting the drama.

Timothy Findley's comment on the dust jacket serves as a useful starting point. For him "poets ... survive extraordinary visions to escape 'alone' to tell us what they've seen.... Callaghan has locked our own chaotic present into the wheel of universal myth." That Jerusalem and Toronto are the two cities in the vision alerts the reader to the poet's intention to utilize both local and universal myth. The Hogg of the title, believed to have died in 1839, built a place of worship in early Toronto — and as such is first substance of local myth, progenitor. His spiritual pilgrimage is the poet's, a pilgrimage to locate himself. Past and present, and locations, intertwine.

With the essential question of the Prologue — "how does a man live through an endless winter of endless nights" — fresh throughout Book I, Hogg travels through Palestine searching for the

> one place where the last words
> on the dice were
>
> Holy Holy Holy.
> ("Inside His Wooden Suit")

As in Book III, past and present fuse in a concatenation of biblical and sexual images. The poet's ploys of speech reflect the spirit of the enterprise, combining both oracular language and the patter of the contemporary salesman:

"see the blind stair, that's where
Christ leapt upon his cross;
and close by, Mr. Hogg, the best
coffee in Jerusalem." ("Skull Hill")

Hogg's realization that he is

not of this place, where the sun
strafes everything in sight"
("The Silver Hook")

prepares us for his eventual rejection of Jerusalem.

Book II, the interim part of the journey and a "place beyond words," introduces the bizarre drawings — metamorphosing figures made all the more horrifying because of their warped, narcotic passivity. This is not the "silence beyond words" Hogg has in mind. He noiselessly feels his way back home through this region of evils and distortions. But what he finds, though initially heartened by the words "the God you seek / lives at home," is a Toronto saturated with technology, advertising, and the worst features of North American pop culture: dope, sex, jargon and violence. As Hogg struggles in the "black hole" of his soul, Callaghan treats us to a dazzling collage of Kulchur characters — Dorado, the dwarf disc jockey, Sweet-Meat Manzone, the piano player, Doctor Ded and his woman, Walking, and Bad Blood Jeremiah Stuck. Firmly in the vein of Ed Dorn's *Slinger*, the poem at this point must be read aloud. Book III is the high point, images of the counter culture sizzling off the page in poems like "Hell's Belle" and "Doctor Ded."

Callaghan's *Hogg*, a brave enterprise, grapples with what Frye has called Canada's "famous problem of identity." Hogg, wanderer, searcher for singularity, is a true pioneer, and his quest locates, and ultimately illuminates, the Canadian here and now. The book will no doubt be discussed for years to come.

Fiamengo deals with essentially the same problem, but with an entirely different orientation. For Callaghan, Canada entails a challenging state of mind. For Fiamengo, it's a physical identity asserted through a confused muddle of jingoism and nationalistic bombast. And this is sad — for some of the poems in *North of the Cold Star* reflect a true poet's lyric gift: for example, British Columbia stills such as "Autumn in Osoyoos," "Lake Light," as well as delicate poems like "Spring Sketch," "Nature Notes," the last section of "Lake Margin" and the final stanza of "Last Walk."

But the sour political poems overwhelm these achievements. Fiamengo is against: Germans, Turks, hippies and America. Not necessarily in that order. Ezra Pound, confronted with similar ferocity of sentiment (against usury) was able to indict in his Canto 45 through a certain mannered oracular rhetoric. Fiamengo often slips into sheer diatribe.

DAVID HEADON

ECHO POEMS

MARGARET ATWOOD, *Two-headed Poems and Others*. Oxford Univ. Press, $3.95.

THOUGH NOT THE PERFECTLY BALANCED whole that is *The Journals of Susanna Moodie, Two-headed Poems and Others* represents a significant development in Atwood's use (both stylistic and thematic) of her characteristic material. Typically, the "other" poems are not additions but rather constitute the core of the book with the centred sequence of "two-headed poems" pointing outward in opposite directions toward them. The title poems — an exploration of political violence and duplicity associated with male leaders and executors, focussing on Canadian-American relations (*Surfacing*'s "Americans" are no longer symbolic here) — presents a rationale for the rest. "Sons branch out, but / one woman leads to another": the branching out of territorial expropriation, political oppression, the institutionalization of love and sexuality. Within this frame, woman must operate, but she is — as Atwood stresses, echoing Simone de Beauvoir — always "*other*." In her language, her experience, the topography of her world: always Other. Living in a world not of her own design, she creates her own oral history in bonds with other women, with her children, and becomes perforce bilingual and bicultural in movement between worlds.

In "Marrying the Hangman" these themes are fused as two kinds of history are invoked: the official, written history of a woman who escaped sentence of death by convincing a condemned man to accept the position of hangman and to marry her, and the oral history of a violent encounter, shared among other women: "These things happen and we sit at a table and tell stories about them so we can finally believe." Only through the constant interpretation of destructive bloodshed, of war and violence verbal and military, can sense be made of the world. Similarly, two suites of "Daybooks" contrast the everydayish experiences of unrelenting farm tasks and the frequent banality of rural life with the growth of understanding that comes through the anastomosis of woman's flesh and blood. This interpretation is one which takes place within the context of woman's age-old tasks — the making of food and clothing, the transmission of the mythic lore of birth and death, the holding of the past in jars of apple jelly, not simply food but "the taste of the act, taste / of this day." This process anticipates the transformation of landscape itself, enfolded in its "January world," through the words of acceptance and celebration in "All bread":

> Lift these ashes
> into your mouth, your blood;
> to know what you devour
> is to consecrate it,
> almost. All bread must be broken
> so it can be shared. Together
> we eat this earth.

Beyond language there is "the disappearance / of the skin," the recognition of the "Black Stone Mother God," the consecration and sharing of bread, and finally the transmission of words from mother to daughter:

> The word *hand* anchors
> your hand to this table,
> your hand is a warm stone
> I hold between two words.
>
> This is your hand, these are my hands, this is the world,
> which is round but not flat and has more colours
> than we can see.

This book records a woman's adaptations, her struggles, her failures and finally, evolving across a series of echo poems, her triumphs. Fear of the "duplicitous" heart becomes a wry acceptance of its quirks: "you've shoved me this far, /

old pump, and we're hooked / together like conspirators." Fear of the emptiness of words (as, at the end of the fine "Five Poems for Grandmothers," "I make this charm / from nothing but paper; which is good / for exactly nothing") becomes the assertion of the claim of words upon the world in "You Begin." And the metaphor of twins, doubling, duplicity, finally becomes the metonymy of woman's experience transmitted from mother to daughter ("a long thread of red blood, not yet broken"), and of her kinship with the land.

LORRAINE WEIR

FROM DRAGONS TO DESERTS

JEAN-GUY CARRIER, *A Cage of Bone.* Oberon, $15.00; pa. $6.95.

JACQUES GODBOUT, *Dragon Isle,* trans. by David Ellis. Musson, $8.95.

PAULINE MICHEL, *Mirage.* L'arbre HMH, n.p.

JEANNE VOIDY, *Les contes de la source perdue.* L'arbre HMH, n.p.

THIS IS A POTPOURRI of fictional works about Quebec. Strangely enough, the finest of the four, *A Cage of Bone*, is written in English. Jean-Guy Carrier, caught by the dilemma of being a native French speaker but wishing to write in English, has published a book that reads like a good translation of a good Quebec novel. *A Cage of Bone* is the third in a series of four novels about the village of St.-Camille. It begins, as does Roch Carrier's *La Guerre, Yes Sir*, with a walk down a village street; setting and tone are quickly established:

> There would be a fight. Anytime someone tried to change a comma in a motion there was a fight.
>
> Joseph was in a hurry, but as always, he was careful not to let it show. . . .

Carrier's style is lyrical yet restrained and the narrative technique which varies from third person narrator to the interior monologue of several different voices highlights the structure of the novel. Spanning the years 1966 to 1969, the novel is composed of many short chapters and three main clusters of characters who are intricately though unconsciously entangled: the family of Joseph Moreau, the ambitious mayor; the family of Marie Vallaire, who clings to the old rural traditions; and the troubled, untamed Mackamos, an Indian family.

Throughout, there is a persistent romantic and sentimental colouring to the style, particularly in encounters between characters, which, nevertheless, has a pleasantly cathartic effect:

> Marie collected herself silently. Joseph lay beside her with his face buried in the grass. She could hear him sobbing. She looked down at her fields, her house and buildings. Her body felt infused with power and not a trace of shame, repentance or regret. It was as if, for the first time, she was truly the possessor of her body, as she had earlier come to possess her own mind and spirit.

The title, *A Cage of Bone*, from Saint-Denys-Garneau's famous poem describing the inner presence of absence and death, reflects the slow, sometimes passionate, and haunting disintegration of a rural way of life. However, my enjoyment of this novel was marred by what must be a printer's error in my paperback copy; the chapter "Marie Vallaire" was interrupted by fourteen pages from some other novel and, as a consequence, several crucial pages are missing.

Jacques Godbout's *Dragon Isle*, on the other hand, is a disappointment. Godbout, a cineaste and prolific novelist, tends to keep a pulse on current Quebec moods and movements; his terrorist novel, *Knife on The Table* (1965), caught the troubled and revolutionary tenor of the sixties, both stylistically and thematically, while *Hail Galarneau*

(1969) mimicked Quebec's desire for a language and sense of self, in a burlesque mode. In the same vein, *Dragon Isle*, with its fast-paced patter, is a diatribe against the American multinationals. But its key images — extravagant and eccentric American capitalists and Quebeckers as subjected Pepsis — read more like tired clichés. Roch Carrier ran into the same problem in his *Garden of Delights*, which also describes the invasion of a naive Quebec village by a ruthless American entrepreneur. In both books there is an implicit condemnation of ignorant Quebeckers who welcome the invasion and do not want to realize its dire consequences for their culture and self-determination.

The narrator of *Dragon Isle* is a writer, naturally, and a dragon-hunter. Trained in a special, secret school in Paris, he dedicates his life to defeating the voracious William T. Shaheen, Jr. and to saving Isle Verte from becoming a depository for nuclear wastes. The island is lucky enough to have a resident dragon but unfortunately we meet him only once; too much of the novel is taken up with predictable polemics by the youthful, idealistic narrator. And I'm afraid that the symbolism of dragon-hunters eludes me; are dragon-hunters terrorists? But then why are the dragons portrayed as rather reasonable and loveable? The reference to H. de Heutz (the double agent in Hubert Aquin's *Prochain Episode*) as one of the dragon-hunters adds to the confusion. Who *are* the good guys?

The translation, while snappy and colloquial and a smooth read in English, adds to this problem of the dejà-lu novel. In French *Dragon Isle* has a certain fluidity and lyricism deriving from the interior monologue by the narrator who occasionally reaches poetic heights. But this tone is difficult to recreate in English, a more cumbersome and down-to-earth language. Moreover, the narrator speaks in the present tense in French which creates a sense of immediacy, breathlessness and anticipation. David Ellis has chosen to put the novel in the past which is the more common narratorial tense in English, and while undoubtedly a novel purely in the present in English would have an artificial quality, this translation does give the reader a different kind of experience. Many contemporary Quebec novels are written in the first person present (a literature and a people still in the process of becoming?) while few English-Canadian novels are, thus creating a recurring problem for translators.

Both *Les Contes de la source perdue* and *Mirage* are from the L'arbre collection of HMH, a collection begun in 1963 with Anne Hébert's *Le Torrent* and which publishes new novelists. I confess my reaction to *Mirage* mirrored that of a reviewer in *Le Devoir* who found himself unable for weeks to proceed beyond the first seventy pages. Fortunately the novel only has 168 pages.

Mirage is an indulgent portrait of the artist as a young woman, written, once again, in the first person present: "Je m'appelle Mirage. Je suis née dans le désert de la vie." For narrative movement and psychological depth it relies upon the Bachelardian correspondence of elements to imagination; here, desert, water and fire. The narrator, who has two faces — Marie-Ange and Mirage — is a painter obsessed by the source of light which is the source of life and creativity. She works out her destiny in short, breathless and portentous sentences:

> C'est ici le source. Le début de la conscience et de l'instinct. L'origine est dans la lumière. Pas dans le sang qui coule. L'origine est dans la transparence.

The artist is torn by her two selves: Marie-Ange who almost succumbs to a normal, non-creative, socially acceptable life with Julien, an art critic, in Old Montreal, the land of snow and shadows,

and Mirage, who is initiated into mystery by Issam Désert in the Tunisian desert — a wonderful world of extremes of light, heat, sun, hunger, hallucination and savage sex.

Although the situations and perhaps even the images are as cliché-ridden as the ones Godbout uses, the pain of artistic creation is a crucial if well-worn subject. Similarly, the heroine's struggle to harness the destructive elements of art into a creative and translatable power is a serious one. In her quest for the source of light she unleashes the contagion of fire — out of which rises, once again, a troubled consciousness. While the theme of a woman asserting her artistic freedom and integrity is significant and relevant, why must the author portray her as revelling in masochistic sex (with Issam) and cold dismissive intellectualism (with Julien)?

Les Contes de la source perdue is quite another story. These vignettes about a farm at "la source perdue" are pure rural nostalgia. Light, tender, humorous, they depict an almost idyllic world, generally through the anthropomorphized point of view of an animal, for example, a mischievous cow or melancholy skunk. However, the cruel reality of nature red in tooth and claw in the tradition of C. G. D. Roberts and Ernest Thompson Seton is never absent. Occasionally, too, a tinge of Lafontaine moralizing gently interrupts the narrative:

> Mais c'était la loi: à vouloir s'émanciper trop tôt, on se trouve toujours dans une cage, quelle qu'elle soit.

In the style of Gabrielle Roy's *Enchanted Summer*, but less finely etched and less reflective, these tales are suitable for young readers. As for the older readers, they have the next installment of Carrier's tetralogy to look forward to.

KATHY MEZEI

A QUESTION OF CHARACTER

MATT COHEN, *The Sweet Second Summer of Kitty Malone.* McClelland & Stewart, $12.95.

THE SWEET SECOND SUMMER OF KITTY Malone is one of those frustrating books which is often finely written but not always compelling reading. Individual passages can be read and re-read and each time appreciated for their craftsmanship, but somehow the book as a whole loses momentum. I found myself pushing my way through it, and at the end there was a feeling less of completion than of missing pieces.

Matt Cohen's return to the rural landscape of Eastern Ontario — to the rocky small farm country near Kingston — picks up the story of characters and families mentioned briefly in his earlier masterwork, *The Disinherited.* Kitty Malone and Pat Frank have loved and fought each other for twenty years, and have been able neither to bring themselves to marry nor to give each other up. The awareness that they are growing old, in Kitty's case an awareness thrust upon her by an operation to remove an ovarian cyst she fears is cancerous, causes them to reassess their loves and their lives. Their attempts to come to terms with both are intertwined with memories of the past. Kitty recalls the beginning of her affair with Pat, his rejection of her, her brief marriage in Toronto to Randy Blair and return home with her young son, Randy; Pat returns to the dreams of his boyhood, before his vigour was sapped by age and alcohol. It is a story which combines humour and pathos, violence and tenderness, and a number of memorable minor characters, especially Crazy Ellen, Kitty's cantankerous and strong-willed mother, whom Kitty loves despite her dotty ways, but whose death at last allows daughter-in-law Sadie to rule her own house.

Cohen's prose is both taut and smooth, and more conventional than in some of his earlier work. In his descriptions of nature and its changing seasons, he is amazingly adept at producing a sensuous quality and imagistic brilliance which are nevertheless in keeping with the characters' groping perceptions. Few Canadian writers can equal his evocation of the subtle interplay between inner and outer nature, a relationship often underlined by the recurrent motif of breathing.

With such skilful writing, why is it that the novel falls short? Part of the reason, I think, is the failure to provide a convincing character at the centre. As in *The Disinherited,* Cohen deliberately shifts his focus from character to character, while keeping the narrative in the third person; as he moves the story back and forth through the years, he also moves the focus among Kitty, Pat, Pat's twin brother Mark, Ellen Malone, and even Kitty's young daughter Lynn. Although Kitty and Pat receive the major share of attention, they do not dominate the story the way that Richard Thomas did in *The Disinherited,* where the other characters seemed merely to refract from his central vision or provide another perspective on it. In *The Sweet Second Summer of Kitty Malone,* despite the title, Kitty is not really well enough developed as a character. Often there are gaps between motivation and action; often we are left in the dark about details important to our understanding of her. For example, we are told early in the book that her children did not live with her and that her brother Charlie and his wife looked after them. Was she a bad mother? Could she not afford to keep them? How did she keep herself all those years? We never know. When Pat comes to visit her in the hospital after his vengeful trip to Toronto —a trip which could have caused the

murder of her son and nearly caused the murder of her lover — she merely responds with a matter-of-fact "What happened?" Neither then nor later do we discover any profound response to the incident. On the other hand, for a thirty-nine-year-old woman who has been pregnant three times, who never considers herself an earth-mother type and who lets others raise her children, for such a woman to suddenly despair that she cannot have more children seems an unlikely sentimental contrivance.

A well-developed character would obviously not be necessary if this were a romantic tale of action rather than reflection, or if Kitty were simply one of a number of characterizations circling a central event or particular moment, as we find in some of Faulkner's novels. But Kitty is intended to keep our attention as a woman attempting to gain a new perspective on herself and her future as she faces the transition from youth to middle-age. Although she is an individual rather than a type, with a specific environment and background, we expect certain familiar human responses from her that will produce the pleasure of recognition if not a bond of sympathy.

Cohen is more successful with Pat Frank. Even so, that such a man could suddenly forswear alcohol and drive to Toronto the first time in his life with a knife in his pocket and murder on his mind, stretches credibility. He seems so essentially passive and perpetually fatigued; despite an apparent history of fisticuffs, he repeatedly retreats from Kitty to alcohol and back again. Yet this is a minor point, beside the frequently moving account of his struggle to live and love more fully despite old habits and encroaching old age.

It is unfair to claim, as some women have recently suggested, that a male author cannot fully portray the feminine mind. Sinclair Ross and Brian Moore — to use the closest examples — put the lie to that notion. But it is obviously difficult to cross the gender barrier, and in this book Matt Cohen does not quite do it. The insufficiency of the portrait of Kitty Malone, our inability to really grasp her as a person, leads us to lose interest in her. As a consequence the story lags.

MARGOT NORTHEY

SELF-CONSCIOUS PROSE

TOM MARSHALL, *Rosemary Goal.* Oberon, $15.00; pa. $6.95.

DAVID WATMOUGH, *No More into the Garden: The Chronicles of Davey Bryant.* Doubleday, $8.95.

W. D. VALGARDSON, *Red Dust.* Oberon, $12.95; p.a. $5.95.

THERE ARE THREE KINDS of writing, some cynic once observed: good writing, bad writing, and Creative Writing. And what distinguishes the two latter is that they alone can be taught.

However unfair this quip may seem, the fact remains that much of the work fostered in Creative Writing programmes and their various less formal offshoots unquestionably does fall into a distinctive category of its own. It is generally derivative, and typically characterized by a painfully self-conscious preoccupation with literary technique, often of a supposedly *avant garde* variety. It is usually compulsively subjective, marked by an ingrown and stylish self-dramatizing sensibility which is continually striving for ever more calculated effects. And it tends to be incestuously self-serving, sometimes to the point of coming entirely adrift from the solid shores of ordinary reality.

Rosemary Goal, a first novel by poet Tom Marshall, pushes this dubious genre

well out into the perilous shoals of self-parody. "I want to write a novel within a novel," the narrator, Harold Brunt, announces in the first chapter. "Not the kind that's been done often enough, but two separate novels that interpenetrate one another, fucking each other, so to speak. I'm also toying with the idea of making the hero of one novel the author of the other." And on the last page but one we find Brunt speculating on the ultimate destiny of John Holden, the youthful protagonist of *Journey on the Underground*, his own self-confessedly "pretentious" novel-within-this-novel. "Probably John becomes a university professor," he decides, "grows older, grows somewhat wry in his disillusionment with the world, and eventually writes a comic novel that reflects the absurdity of his early experience — a deliberately grotesque, somewhat surreal cartoon-show of a book called. . . ." At this point the sentence trails coyly off, leaving the reader to supply the inevitable punchline: "*Rosemary Goal.*" What else?

It is impossible to tell just how seriously Marshall intends these involutions to be taken. In all likelihood, one suspects, his attitude towards them is just as grimacingly ambiguous as his protagonist's. ("I'm writing a self-destructing novel!" Brunt exclaims midway down the final page.) They do, in any case, indicate the sort of book he has produced: an agonizingly self-conscious comedy of self-consciousness, a *reductio ad absurdum* of the kind of ingrown trivia that is all too often the staple diet in Creative Writing seminars. Every scene, every sentence almost, seems calculated to achieve some effect — an effect, however, which invariably turns out to be hedged around with evasions. For every conceivable criticism someone might advance, an answer is ready at hand: of course, don't you see, it was intended all along to be humorous. . . .

Marshall's protagonist, a no-longer-youthful English professor, teaches a class in Canadian Literature (what else?) at a nameless university within screaming-distance of Toronto. (Marshall himself, for the record, teaches at Queen's.) He writes in that most excruciatingly self-conscious of all literary modes, the first-person present-tense, and is given to solipsistic philosophizings like "Everything is a simile, nothing is real in itself." At one point, in a moment of characteristically indwelling auto-analysis, he reflects despairingly that "I'm always interpreting. It's possible, I've sometimes thought, that I live in a wholly fictional world of my own devising. But I don't suppose I'll ever know." All in all, it is difficult to avoid the impression that, despite its apparently satirical intentions, this latter-day *Portrait of the Artist as a Middle-aged Academic* is rather less a wry reflection on that endemic disease of academe, intellectual alienation, than a terminal manifestation of it. And a decidedly self-indulgent manifestation, at that.

David Watmough's new book, *No More into the Garden*, is symptomatic of much the same complaint. The tone of this intensely self-absorbed exercise in what might be described as literary masturbation is set in the author's opening apostrophe to the "younger alter ego" who serves him as protagonist: "Oh, Davey Bryant, if the artist in me had not created you, the coward in me would have had to invent you. How grateful I am for the fictional fact of you and your world, for only you allow me to return to that Cornish garden by the sea where innocence lived and where, in the anodyne of my recounting your living and growing, I can also face the future. It was there, Davey, in your Celtic womb, where you learned to love and play the waiting game, that you acquired the identity which still holds the exiled me in good stead. . . ." In subsequent apostro-

phes (there is one at the beginning of each episodic chapter), Davey is variously addressed as "my beloved scapegoat ... my shadow self-love ... my own beloved wound of the imagination and final defence ... oh, infinitely more vulnerable Davey ... you who surface from the murk of my misunderstanding and fear in order to make things clear, who suffer more than I do...." *Et cetera.* As for the intervening narrative, cast once again in the temptingly solipsistic first person, it is equally self-centred, and only marginally less cloying.

This incessant narcissism represents a rather different brand of self-consciousness than the compulsive intellectualizing which afflicts poor Harold Brunt. But the two are by no means as disparate as might superficially appear. For Davey Bryant, Watmough's oh-so-sensitive surrogate self ("Me romantic? You could just as easily call it emotional heart-disease!"), is cut from precisely the same cloth as Brunt's alter ego, John Holden ("my romantic self-image ... the boy poet passionately in love with life"). And Brunt's description of his pretentiously self-dramatizing *Journey on the Underground* — "It's a novel about the danger that seeks out dreamers who bump into 'reality' " — applies equally aptly to *No More into the Garden.*

Watmough's theme, as his title implies, is loss of innocence — of the sexual (specifically homosexual) variety. But the lingering impression left by Davey Bryant's feyly self-serving "chronicles" of love and betrayal is above all one of intensive self-absorption, to the virtual exclusion of anything apart from himself. And so, in the final analysis, both Marshall's book and Watmough's are equally given over to solipsistic self-indulgence; the chief distinction between them is the form it happens to take. Indeed, both narrators fetch up in an identical self-enclosed purgatory. For in the end Davey Bryant, from his self-imposed Vancouver "exile," is driven to cry out, almost as if he were deliberately echoing Harold Brunt: "How do you explain the realities of the unreality which is so much of my west coast life?"

How, indeed?

From these sufferingly claustrophobic confines, it is a distinct relief to turn one's attentions to *Red Dust,* the third collection of short stories by W. D. Valgardson, who teaches Creative Writing at the University of Victoria. Valgardson's prose, unlike Marshall's or Watmough's, is marked by a conscientiously selfless objectivity; few of his characters, if any, are alter-egotistical projections. Indeed, the solitary first-person narrative in this volume, "December Bargaining," fails precisely because the author is unable to handle the intricate technical dictates of the quintessentially self-conscious first-person-retrospective point-of-view — a mode that seems to come as naturally to David Watmough as breathing.

The remaining stories here, despite occasional minor lapses of technique, are for the most part finely crafted and meticulously polished. Best of all is the title story, a starkly powerful study in rural squalor and self-righteously mid-western small-mindedness, which has everything it takes to become a standard anthology-piece. Yet for all its considerable strengths, this story never rises to the heights of enduring literature — partly because, in its single-minded determination to harrow the reader to the utmost, it is somewhat over-calculatingly wrought; but mostly because the author, though possessed of a certain dispassionate insight into his characters and their motives, seems entirely lacking in real compassion towards them.

The same failings, alas, are characteristic of all seven stories in *Red Dust*. For despite their superficial preoccupation with minutely rendered externals, each of them is every bit as much a self-consciously calculated exercise in dramatized subjectivity as *No More into the Garden* and *Rosemary Goal*. Here too, as in Harold Brunt's "wholly fictional world of my own devising," we find ourselves in a place where "everything is simile, nothing is real in itself." Here too, as in Davey Bryant's interminably self-justifying episodic monodramas, there are no free-standing characters who are permitted to emerge as self-sufficient individuals in their own inalienable right. Instead, we are confronted only with schematized lay-figures, mere personified twitches of auctorial sensibility, who are less actors in the imaginative scene than self-effacing elements of it. Instead of actively generating situations, they merely embody them.

Each of these books strives for style and sensibility at the expense of essential humanity. Each, in its own way, is lacking in that intransigent substantiality that is the hallmark of all true creation — in art, in life, and in the world of objective reality. And it is precisely this overriding concern with self-consciously articulated subjectivity, instead of real substance and authentic emotional commitment, which distinguishes mere Creative Writing from the higher varieties of literature.

JULIAN REID

THE SPLENDID SECOND-RATER

PHYLLIS GROSSKURTH, *Havelock Ellis: A Biography*. McClelland & Stewart, $22.50.

HAVELOCK ELLIS COULD EASILY be dismissed as a pretentious charlatan, different from the more orthodox Victorian humbugs because his particular kind of sanctimony hallowed liberty rather than restriction, and because he fastened on sex as his special field of enquiry at a time when it was a forbidden subject. One can imagine what Lytton Strachey might have made of this saintly sexologist who was almost certainly impotent (though he boasted occasionally of producing his sperm for women friends to examine under a microscope) and who reached the height of the emotional tension that characterized his relations with women when he watched the golden stream of their urination.

Yet in a way Ellis and Strachey were alike in more than their squeaky voices. In different guises their ideas and their writings were part of a general shifting of values towards a greater honesty and objectivity in assessing the nature of man, his actions and his motivations. To anyone young — as I was — in the 1920's, they were both among the liberators, members of that army of enlightenment whose generals (it seemed to us then) were Wells and Shaw. They were the products of a peculiarly English kind of intellectual rebellion, resistant to aca-

demic domination, and projecting on a secular level an exalted conception of the power of human reason that derived largely from the dissenting tradition, with its emphasis on the individual illumination, the light within.

Almost without exception, these men were resolute autodidacts, valuing knowledge all the more if they gathered it by their own efforts, and Havelock Ellis, whatever the weaknesses his conclusions regarding human sexuality may eventually have revealed, was one of the most industrious and painstaking enquirers of the lot. He was, like Shaw and Wells, and like the great nineteenth-century naturalists whom he admired, an eloquent prose writer. He was, like the others of his intellectual generation, a pioneer who helped make it possible to speak intelligently and openly on subjects the Victorians had veiled. It would perhaps be wrong to say that Freud built on what Ellis had wrought but Ellis preceded Freud in many ways, and his *Sexual Inversion*, published in 1897, was the first intelligent, unprejudiced and well-documented study of homosexuality to be published in English. Not surprisingly, appearing as it did in the year of Oscar Wilde's release from prison, it was suppressed, and Ellis acquired the repute of a martyr, which was a strange thing, since it was the bookseller George Bedborough who was put on trial, and Ellis throughout his life showed a reluctance to become involved in confrontations that amounted almost to cowardice.

A pretentious man, fond of his self-image; a "silly old man" in many ways in his later years, as Phyllis Grosskurth exasperatedly remarks at one point in her fine Life of him. Yet a man who somehow gained insight through his weaknesses, and used this insight to produce the kind of books — especially the massive and compassionate series, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* — which no-one before him had either dared to write or even thought of writing; a man also who proved by a series of extraordinary relationships with women that there are more ways of being a great lover than Casanova's. As Grosskurth tells us in the final paragraph which can be read as almost the justification of her book: "The people still living who knew him continue to speak of him as a radiance who touched their lives in a way they will never forget."

To trap that radiance is the task Phyllis Grosskurth seems to have set herself: to trap it without being dazzled. And she has succeeded amazingly well in a work that combines a massive scholarly effort (including the locating and reading of 20,000 unpublished letters as well as a vast amount of literature directly and peripherally concerning Ellis and his times) with an understanding that never ceased to be critical and at the same time compassionate. "I have tried," she says, "to show Ellis in his approach to his work, his reaction to the world around him, how and why he loved certain people and why they loved him, and, most difficult of all, how he viewed himself. My attitude towards him has changed many times in the course of writing this book. I hope I have succeeded in being fair."

She has indeed been fair. She never tries to make Ellis *appear* ridiculous; though of course he *was* ridiculous often

Un Colloque International sur la Parodie dans la Littérature et les Arts se tiendra à Queen's University (Kingston, Ontario) les 8-10 Octobre 1981. Pour tout renseignement, s'adresser à Clive Thomson, French Department, Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario K7L 3N6.

enough, which she does not attempt to conceal. She patiently discusses his books, none of which has really stood the test of time. She lets us perceive for ourselves — rather than explicitly stating — how his weaknesses merged into his strengths, how his cowardice was another aspect of his gentleness, how his poor reasoning was related to his considerable intuitive perceptiveness, how his failure to develop a scientific outlook that went beyond painfully accumulating facts and instances was related to his constant inclination to immerse himself compassionately in the predicaments of individuals.

Somerset Maugham once classed himself as belonging in "the first rank of the second-raters," and that is doubtless where Havelock Ellis also belongs. His great flaw was that he lacked the imaginative vision which inspired contemporaries like Shaw and Wells. Once, to Freud's chagrin, he described the great psychoanalyst disparagingly as "an artist" rather than a scientist, yet it was precisely artistry that Ellis could have done with. His books — or the best of them — were innovatory without being creative, and that is why we no longer read him and continue to read so many of his contemporaries.

But — as Wilde once remarked — it is not the first-rate writers who are really interesting biographically; all that is meaningful in them goes into their creations, and so people like Joyce and Eliot and even Freud were pretty dull dogs to meet and to write about as personalities. But the second-raters are the people who have never really been able to sublimate their selves in their works, and so their natures find expression in idiosyncracies, in lived-out fantasies, in the sheer colour of personality their works do not reflect. Such people can and often do become the subjects of fascinating biographies, and in this respect Phyllis Grosskurth has chosen as wisely in picking Ellis as she did in picking John Addington Symonds for her first Life, *The Woeful Victorian*, in which she raised biography in Canada to a level of perception and writing rarely before encountered here.

In *Havelock Ellis* she shows with splendid insight how — contrary to the theory that the artist thrives from his wounds — Ellis's was of a nature whose scars produced more eccentricity than vision and turned him into a figure of great transitional but little lasting importance. It would have been easy to make us despise him, and yet, at the end of it all, we are left with at least a sense of the personal luminosity he clearly projected. But that is the most ephemeral of all the qualities of greatness, and, as Phyllis Grosskurth remarks at the very end, those who experienced it will soon "all be gone."

GEORGE WOODCOCK

WORDS & WINE

PIER GIORGIO DI CICCO, ed., *Roman Candles*. Hounslow Press, $4.95.

ANDREW SUKNASKI, *The Ghosts Call You Poor*. Macmillan, $5.95.

IN PIER GIORGIO DI CICCO'S "The Poem Becomes Canadian," a very human poem feels uneasy, amid the Christmas snows, about its Italian origins:

> The poem is lazy. it was brought up
> under tuscan cypress, it has a heart
> deep as the reach of an olive tree.

The poem becomes Canadian by being a gift which demands to be given in friendship to an indisputably Canadian poet (in this case, Tom Wayman). The poem ambles along pleasantly, poking fun at cultural stereotypes, but at its centre is the serious subject — becoming a Canadian, and becoming a Canadian poet — which is a preoccupation throughout these poems. Di Cicco discusses the problem more sternly in his Preface: "In

searching for contributors, I found isolated gestures by isolated poets, isolated mainly by the condition of nationalism prevalent in Canada in the last ten years. However pluralistic the landscape seemed to be to sociologists, the sheer force of Canadianism had been enough to intimidate all but the older 'unofficial language' writers."

The seventeen Italo-Canadian poets in this anthology, then, are not members of a cohesive group; several of the poets, because they are represented by only one or two poems, will appear to be making isolated gestures. Despite the ludicrously clever title, there are few fireworks in this anthology. Many of the poets are too didactic about their cultural themes: "Be patient, don't rage, / Canadese, in time we'll belong." The theme of adjustment leads repeatedly to prosey pronouncements and flabby diction:

> the Eldorado
> I was searching I didn't discover.
> I discovered instead
> scornful glances, a hostile
> environment, an overwhelming
> emptiness in my soul.
>
> (Filippo Salvatore, "Three Poems for Giovanni Caboto")

Salvatore speaks in another poem of his father "tasting his words / like sips of good wine." Such savouring of words is exactly what's missing from most of this anthology. Only a few of these poets will admire the colour of a word, absorb its bouquet, roll it around on the tongue before swallowing. Len Gasparini's portraits of his uncle and grandfather have the tartness of a good homemade wine; his "Grapes," a vignette of love in the vineyards, leaves a pleasant aftertaste. Mary di Michele's "Enigmatico," about divided loyalties and her role as a woman, is astringent and full-bodied. Alexandre Amprimoz' "The Impact of Repeated Things," a six-part, heavily allusive poem, is a rich blend, well-balanced.

But (to return to the editor's metaphor) most of these Roman candles flicker faintly, don't explode or illuminate, don't light up a world. As a group I found the poems more valuable as cultural statement, than as poetry: there *is* a group of I-can (as they're more punningly called) poets spread across the country; national background is an enormous concern among second-generation immigrants; there are essential connections between the dual homelessness so often encountered in these poems, and the immigrant/tourist perspective so pervasive in the mainstream of Canadian literature; and, especially, that recent Canadian nationalism has been an oppressive force squashing the development of our minority cultures.

Andrew Suknaski's question is not whether the poem could become Canadian, but whether the poet could be at home. The cultures behind him — Indian, Métis, Ukrainian, Chinese, homesteader, farmer, labourer — move as spirits through his landscape, usually prairie. All the people who have died, who are dying, in his place are the ghosts, each with a story to tell. Suknaski listens to the ghosts, guiltily: the ghosts of the people of the plains make our present lives seem spiritually, morally, poor by comparison.

A poem titled "Augusta née Hoffman" gives some clues to the characteristic Suknaski poem. Suknaski has discovered Augusta Hoffman's "family story" written up "for some local history book." He quotes her introduction:

> "This won't be easy for me to write
> and should anyone try to read it later on
> that won't be easy either
> as what reading and writing i do
> i had to figure it out all for myself."

Suknaski cherishes this unpolished, uneasy, open, self-taught approach to storytelling. His poetry is often written in such a self-deprecating tone, echoing the voice

of one of his most obvious models, Al Purdy. As he tells us in another poem, he sometimes feels "uncomfortable in this silent language / of the prairies."

Suknaski lets Augusta Hoffman tell her own story. Two-thirds of the poem is direct quotation from her family history, the rest is close paraphrase. The focus is as much upon the unique storyteller, as upon the representative story (of two girls lost and killed in a sleet storm). Many of Suknaski's poems follow the same approach: the title names a specific person, the poem records his/her voice. This form of narrative monologue is one Andy Suknaski has mastered as well as any Canadian poet.

The effect is documentary: we sense a character recorded, rather than a persona shaped and created. The result is not, as Augusta Hoffman feared, difficult to read, but fluent and relaxed. More difficult to read are the poems in which Suknaski stops listening and starts commenting, as he does when reacting to a newspaper article about a three-year-old boy killed by a pack of stray dogs:

> ghost of small prairie child
> i sadly imagine your playmates
> grown men and women someday
> haunted by the futility of your death
> when they discover the story
> of almighty voice.

I don't doubt the sincerity of this, but I do doubt it as poetry: it's far too engineered an attempt to be meaningful. Similarly, Suknaski is not impressive with tighter lyrics and compressed images. I was disappointed to find the collection ending with such a lyric, weak and clichéd: "the vague meaning of home / you carry within you / moving back and forth / across this vast country." Suknaski is not, yet, a poet who savours his words like wine.

But he tells a story compactly and sensitively, with touches of humour and acres of affection. He builds the legends of the labourer's history of this country, he bubbles with the hyperbole of the barroom extravaganza, he moves us with the stories of inarticulate love. In one summing-up poem Suknaski suggests that "our stories grow fewer / as the need to retell them lessens." At least the way Suknaski tells these stories in *The Ghosts Call You Poor*, they have become part of us, certain to be repeated, but not needing to be re-told.

LAURIE RICOU

A SAVING GRACE

PATRICK LANE, *Poems: New & Selected.* Oxford, $4.95.

DON COLES, *Anniversaries.* Macmillan, $4.95.

> *Why are the McLean Boys in my mind?*
> *Why are they always vicious punks*
> *who murdered out of fear? Why not*
> *heroic like Bill the Kid? Why*
> *was I always them? The dying gods?*
> *Peter's journey to Rome? Fish on stone?*

COMPREHEND THE NAGGING questions from Lane's "The Trace Of Being" — the troubling answers the asking seems to imply — and you possibly arrive at the essence to western Canadian myth. In Lane's words elsewhere, it all begins with "the poet as outlaw." To understand that poet/outlaw/anti-Christ metaphor of those who go against the given order, you have to begin with a clear image of America's Outlaw Trail. It extended from Harlem, Montana all the way to El Paso, Texas. The most haunting of all images at the end of a vast chronicle of tragic gunmen — who sought refuge in the Trail's mountains, canyons, and deserts — is the story of Butch Cassidy (sidekick to The Sundance Kid) who clearly perceived the final folly. Cassidy returned one last time to his father's cabin on the homestead and confessed to his greying sister, Lula Parker Bentenson (now 95): "My life has been wasted."

The bedrock truth of the fabled heroic gunslinger is that he became tragic in his *isolato* way of life. There was simply endurance in a web of total victimization. The mask of rancher failed as a final refuge. Witness *Shane*. The mythic power behind men like Billy the Kid, Jesse James, and their acolytes was that they were the final poignant submission to a lethal energy/entropy dynamic emanating from the malady of a twentieth-century technology making its last assault on the wilderness. America loved this profoundly. And buried us with her pulp and cinematic myth. The simple truth is the gunslinger myth failed to take root here. What did take root was the myth of the stranger who personifies the unknown. And embodies fears. The myth of the cowboy (the best rider) in the Rodeo with all its groupies took root. For us in the Canadian west it was the last chance. And then, of course, there came the pseudo-urban cowboys — the *midnight cowboys* (John Berryman and Delmore Schwartz were art casualties of another vintage — the academy's *ozone cowboys* spending themselves with broadway/times square fillies). The McLean boys were the cowboys, despite their murders "out of fear"; but, they never stood a chance — they gunned for something that didn't exist. To understand how the American outlaw myth impinged on our own fears here, it's best to turn to Lane's "The Witnesses," a graphic portrayal of his father:

To know these things
to climb into the confusions
which are only words, to climb into desire
to ride in the sun, to ride against time

The McLeod Kid raking his spurs on the mare
the cheers from the wagon-backs
where the people sit to watch the local
boy ride against the riders from Calgary

In the cult of the stranger, the unknown, I don't think it was ever a matter of The McLeod Kid riding against the guys from Calgary. They, and the rest, were riding against him (the local unknown and needing fear . . . *will he outride us all this year?*). I think that fear became rooted here — the fear of all fears harboured by the Trail's gunslinger coming to town (he fearing that young local who might just be the fastest gun this time). Remember, Caesar learned a reverence for that mythic cat from Nazareth who made possible the anti-Christ. The Outlaw Trail in the New World Eden betrayed by Bethlehem Steel would have been quite different without the man from Nazareth. Lane's poetry anchored in "word," "sun," "bone," "blood," "knife," and "stone" would have been poorer without that man. Lane's "My Father's Face" would not have contained the same mythic magnitude:

My father's face
with sunshine cracked and razed
hangs above
a fallen twisted pine
he carried
down from the distant hills
. . . . . .
. . . my father
with his axe riding the sky
opens wounds
and pinewood falls away
in mounds of bleeding
yellow at my feet
where the scent of pitch
mixes with the sun

The poem is an awesome icon of a father who doubles for Christ. In this surreal portrayal he mirrors something half-Godly and half-monstrous (the quality of the enigma that lurks at the centre of the labyrinth). Father and son mirror one another; father is the stone where the son's life takes root. "Yellow" standing for intellect, transcendence, spirituality, and life force monitored by the sun becomes a personal emblem for Lane. But of course Lane loves irony and the flux of living things where the entropic often takes rule. There is the "Prospector" pan-

ning for gold. He shares "with the sun / a babble of flowers ..." till finally submitting to the succubi of the bushed who are finally taken by the yellow entropy of decay:

... the wasps
had planted their eggs in you
and flowers were growing
out of your sleeping eyes.

At the end of all yellow things — dry grass, sun, bees, wasps, sunflowers, decay — there is Lane's subtle allusion to the ancient poet Li Po in "Teachers":

Better to buy a bottle
of Teachers Highland Cream
and get drunk with the moon
as it drowns in the sea.

It is Lane sometimes weary of the writer's solitude and retreats into high mountain places. Lane taking a raincheck of the outlaw's deathwish. Lane bedeviled by the succubi (mythic winged female forms that come to haunt the male in nightmares) of "Albino Pheasants" "where no man walks except in wasted time." It is Lane haunted beneath it all by Li Po — fabled wine guzzler who, going by a drunken blissful whim, dove into the reflected image of a full yellow moon, and drowned. A man who thought he could live by dying.

What fascinates me about Lane is he didn't need the imported myths of men like Billy the Kid. Lane never fooled himself for a moment. He knew damn well his father, or any other person, could stand taller than any myth. All the victims are honoured: "For Rita — In Asylum," "Grey John," "For Riel In That Gawdam Prison," "Gerald" — to name a few. These poems are just a few of the finest honed diamonds Lane chose to place in this book spanning a decade and a half of hard work giving him a well-earned Governor General Award.

In the South American cycle of poems Lane expands the mythic mainsprings of his Paleo-Indian dreamtime which has been one of his deepest sources for growth as a poet. With that journey he was further able to articulate with Goya's nightmare graphic clarity man's inhumanity to man and survival in a harsh landscape of bitter realities. There is "Unborn Things" where the whole following sequence of poems reads like one long objective correlative moving through a subtle web of an ancient civilization where Christian and Inca myths flourish side by side:

... the child draws circles in the dust
for bits of glass to occupy
like eyes staring out of earth
and the woman lies on her hammock
dreaming of the lover who will save her
from the need to make bread again
I will go into the field
and be buried with the corn.

As Kazantzakis pointed out, it is highly probable Mary Magdalene shared a similar dream (but that cat from Nazareth was drunk on his own strange visions, and failed as earthly lover — leaving a single casualty which leaves his whole myth in doubt). It's been the same story ever since: Poet/dreamer versus working muzhik; the poet's (artist's) dream at odds with the Protestant work ethic. It buried Schwartz; it took Cooperman, and John Thompson.

Lane's "Macchu Picchu," his finest long poem, proved the local western Canadian poet could stand next to Neruda and become an Inca ghost speaking for the vanished:

Standing on the highest rung of the city
We place our hand on polished stone
That was a hitching-post for the sun.
Now there is nothing but silence.
We watch the sun fall into the Andes.

The first cold shafts of night
Reach into the river far below.
In a gathering mist I feel
We are growing out of
The body of something dead.

The poem owes as much to Eliot as Neruda: Lane, as Inca ghost, moves

among strangers who "walk through ruins ... talk of where they came from, / Where they are going." He is ghost "cursed by dreams." Ghost basked in "Yellow bruise of light"; ghost where

The Virgins have left their tombs
With hands like brown roots,
With their unborn child.
Let the city grow back to jungle.
Let the graves like wounds be closed again.

Unlike Lane, Coles is an academic whose energy in poetry emanates from the European modernists. What he does share with Lane is transience and a keen desire to arrest entropy with art. He is also a master iconographer who sees into the heart of the human condition. Both Lane and Coles have lived in the mountains. Lane still lives in them most of the time; Coles' are now the luminous mountains of memory. Both possess the gift to construct an expanding metaphysics regarding survival in that geography of mind and external phenomena. In "Always the Effort to Gather It All" Coles quotes Rilke:

Also in the mountains
Time glitters

but time is synonymous with entropy in that complex web of living and dying things that forever yield to transformations beneath the life force. Elsewhere in the same poem Coles states:

... you begin to require, and so to adduce,
As the mountains fade,
Substitutes for them, improvements upon them,
Closer, newer

The mountains permitting you to do this
Only because by now
They are fading

And he knows the price of transience making one a victim:

They are fading because of your childhood
Because you have been in love, because of nights
With a woman, or many nights,
Many women
Because you have not stayed put in one place

The passage haunts me. Takes my memory back to the Outlaw Trail. Crowds my mind with haunting images from my recent stay on West 42nd just up from Times Square while I read about the American west in the New York Public Library's microfilm annex near the East River. Remember now being unable to resist finding that *Times*, July 14, 1966 photograph of Delmore Schwartz — that frightening icon of a tormented man who ingested all (books, ideas, places, women — the whole image of America) and fell forever in the Columbia Hotel. One block from where I formed the sign of the cross and said one *Hail Mary* for a man I never knew. And still don't know why I did that. The Coles photograph on the back of *Anniversaries* is awesome. He could double for Delmore's twin. The signature of the times. Icon as portent. What *is* reassuring and redemptive about Coles is his courage in writing about those mothers who gently tyrannized their sons with hopeless dreams. He does what few Canadian poets have scarcely begun to do. Makes his peace in "For a Mother at 75":

We would like to explain our need to gather you
Back with us into places & years that
We will live this time more clearly

Unlike Lane and Coles whose time goes unwasted in poetic refuge, there is Butch Cassidy who only lived and spoke his words — the possible poem becoming lead lodged in flesh and marrow. At the end of the mountain road in *Deer Hunter*, that disturbing classic film, there are the bitter words exchanged — till the leader's right hand raises a bullet. "You're on your own. This, is this! This, is this!" Lane and Coles still believe in metaphor. A saving grace.

ANDREW SUKNASKI

FICTIONAL INDIANS

CAM HUBERT, *Dreamspeaker and Tem Eyos Ki and the Land Claims Question.* Clarke Irwin, $10.95.

FOR THOSE OF US who are middle-aged, our first fictional Indians were probably blood-thirsty scalp-hunters (usually Iroquois) and romantic culture heroes dwelling in wigwams "By the shores of Gitchi Gumee, by the shining Big-Sea-Water." Indians were also the bad guys in the American cowboy movies shown at Saturday matinees. Little effort was made to suggest that the tribes might differ in such fundamentals as language, culture and environment. During the past twenty years, however, an interest in tribal culture as expressed in art and oral literature has led to a more informed appreciation. Folklorists and anthropologists with their tape recorders arrived just in the nick of time, for, thanks to the disapproval of Christian missionaries and government agents in the past and the counter-attractions of movies and television in the present, story-telling had become almost a lost art. When the British Columbia Indian Arts and Welfare Society decided fifteen years ago to conduct a story-telling contest among Indian school-children on Vancouver Island, the first results were disappointing:

> The Indians the children wrote of were those that they had seen on television or in the movies. There was scarcely a mention made of longhouses, dug-out canoes, the sea or whales, seals or salmon, all of which are an integral part of the life of the West Coast Indians.

It was only after the children had been persuaded to consult their elders that they were able to record the traditional stories, customs, and beliefs included in *Tales from the Longhouse.*

Another recent development has been the recognition of the Indian as an individual with a system of values not necessarily inferior to that of the white man. Rudy Wiebe has rewritten Western Canadian history in a fictional form from the Indian's point of view; Margaret Craven has shown that Indians can actually teach whites something of merit beyond mere survival skills.

The two streams — mythology and social "relevance" — come together in Cam Hubert's *Dreamspeaker* and *Tem Eyos Ki and the Land Claims Question. Dreamspeaker* provided the script for a prize-winning CBC film directed by Claude Jutra. It appears here as a novella (but deprived of the splendid backdrop of mountains and sea that brings a surge of nostalgia and envy to the breasts of those who do not live in Lotusland). The central character is an eleven year old white child called Peter. The son of a teen-age drug addict and prostitute, he has been shunted from one foster home to another before coming to roost in what is termed a facility. His response to institutional life is robot-like movement, extreme withdrawal, bed-wetting, and periodic seizures brought on by dancing lights, the twittering of crickets, and the sight of "something long and snake-like, leaving a wet trail on the floor, raising its horned heads, searching, looking both in front and behind." One night he escapes from the facility and, after making his way through the bush, arrives on a beach near Campbell River. Here he encounters an ancient Nootka Indian, the Dreamspeaker, with his mute companion, He Who Would Sing.

The old man's ancestor would have been one of those great potlatch-giving chiefs described in the "Song of a Speaker" that the famous ethnologist Franz Boas recorded some sixty years ago:

> Now, you, great one, busy yourself again, and invite the tribes all around the world to come to a potlatch.... You give presents to them. You give again, double amount,

> the same amount of property on top of the first amount, to those invited from time to time by our chief.

Though he lacks the power, prestige, and possessions of his ancestors, the old man is neither inhospitable nor pathetic. He is still "Dreamspeaker," the repository of tribal myth and ritual, the owner of the great dance capes, the drum, and the rattles; the shamanistic healer. He defines himself in the chanted accompaniment to the dance:

> "One Dreamspeaker is Truth, two Dreamspeakers are Justice, three Dreamspeakers are Eternity and four Dreamspeakers are Rebirth. No evil can overcome the power of a Dreamspeaker, and if the initiation is painful, the rewards are great."

The old man offers the boy food, lodging, clothing, and gifts from the storehouse of tradition. Human guilt may be assuaged by making the spirits responsible for evil. The fearful images which white people dismiss as being "just your imagination" have a real existence in Indian mythology — the dancing lights and noises are Stlalacum, the double-headed snake Sisiutl — and because they exist, they can be defeated. Peter prepares for battle by learning Nootka legends and dances. At the same time, he learns to grow vegetables, to smile, to control his temper, to practise serenity. And thus the family of so-called underprivileged people — "Grandpa," "uncle," and the boy — becomes a successful social unit.

The opening quarter of *Dreamspeaker* is grindingly monotonous with its no doubt deliberate use of colourless language, social science jargon, and paratactic structure. In contrast, the account of Peter's regeneration is credible, moving and constructive; an ancient knowledge is used to cure modern psychosis. It would have been nice if the story could have ended with Peter's dance. Instead, we have the RCMP's apprehension of the boy, a judge's decision that he be returned to the facility, Dreamspeaker's death from old age, and the suicides of Peter and He Who Would Sing.

In his introduction to *Son of Raven, Son of Deer, fables of the Tse-shaht people*, George Clutesi appeals to white society to meet the Indian half-way and to acknowledge the validity of traditions that produced "a happy, singing people" with respect for "all living things, no matter how small and insignificant." It is evident that Cam Hubert shares this view. But surely the point would have been more effectively made if Peter had been allowed to remain with his "family." And is the white man's system really so stupid, inefficient, and perverse? The Victorian-style "happy ending in a heavenly home" that Ms. Hubert provides is a sentimental cop-out that jars, coming in, as it does, on the heels of the suicides:

> The old man moved swiftly on strong legs, racing with the boy toward the hilltop.... And He Who Would Sing, did ... Singing to celebrate something he had heard for the first time after death, the sound of a healthy child, laughing happily.

In *Tem Eyos Ki and the Land Claims Question*, Ms. Hubert again suggests that adherence to Indian ways can solve problems that baffle white authorities. Set near Tahsis on Vancouver Island, this story, too, gets off to an infelicitous start, partly because the reader is confused as to the identity of the narrator and partly because of a long drawn out description of canine sex life. The narrator eventually is revealed to be a garrulous twenty-two-year-old orphan who has been raised by her grandmother, the Nootkas' Old Woman, and who will one day become Old Woman herself. Old Woman is the female equivalent of Dreamspeaker, a storehouse of tribal wisdom often conveyed by story telling and of ritual observances still applicable to physical and social problems.

In the allusive style of small town gossip, Tem Eyos Ki introduces the pieces of a jig-saw that eventually are fitted together to form a complete picture. The characters include Alice, a chronic aborter until Old Woman takes her in hand; her son Peter whose green eyes and fair hair mark him not as a bastard but as a sacred person; Suzy who becomes a paramedic after "being grabbed" to purge her of her delinquent ways; P.A., a gone-to-seed remittance man who farms haphazardly on the edge of the reserve; and Pete's pet, a rabbit with ear mites. It is the government's intention of moving P.A. that precipitates the land claims question. This is an entertaining story if you can stand the style of the monologuist whose voice is not always convincingly native, though the Indian's gift for parody and deflation is effectively conveyed.

Cam Hubert is on to a good thing in suggesting that the experience of the West Coast past, embodied in myth and ritual, may provide solutions for contemporary problems; but if she wants her work to be regarded as literature rather than sociology or folklore, she must learn artistic control. At present, she lacks a sense of propriety and a sense of proportion. There is a danger in setting the worst aspects of white society (drinking, drugs, disease, and bureaucratic stupidity) against the most idealistic aspects of native culture in order to preach the uniform superiority of the latter. After all, natives have accepted technology and used it not only for earning a living but also for entertainment. (I recall with delight that the Inuit of Tuktoyaktuk and Polytuk think nothing of chartering a plane so that they can attend the Friday night bingo games in Inuvik.)

According to Tem Eyos Ki, "Old Woman teaches us that nothing that is truly good is ever lost." There is considerable goodness in Cam Hubert's first book. Her ability to create sympathetic characters and her skill in weaving West Coast legends into the fabric of her story are commendable. If she can get rid of the "ear mites" of partisanship, emotionalism, and reverse prejudice, she may produce first-rate fiction.

MURIEL WHITAKER

VICTOR — OR VICTIM

MARGARET ATWOOD, *Life Before Man.* McClelland & Stewart, $12.95.

MARGARET ATWOOD, that expert on victors and victims, has become the victim of her own fame. No longer is a book by her allowed to slip quietly into the shops and find its own level of acceptance by readers and critics. Like one of those vast and brilliant balloons which are now returning to our skies, anything she writes must be elevated immediately on the heat produced by publishers' manoeuvres, like that which has just introduced her newest novel, *Life Before Man*: a special edition, signed by the publisher (!) as well as the author, and sent to five hundred "opinion-makers" before the regular edition was put on sale. Perhaps such ploys sell books; they do not win critics or affect the book's eventual standing. And sometimes they disturb one's thoughts — as in the case of *Life Before Man* — by the contrast between the flamboyance of marketing methods and the deliberate modesty of what is being marketed.

I finished reading *Life Before Man* with a half-remembered sentence from Oscar Wilde hovering in my consciousness, and I leafed through *Intentions* to find it. There it was, in "The Critic as Artist," and it fitted like a glove my first impressions of Atwood's book. "Mr. Henry James writes fiction as if it were a painful duty, and wastes upon mean motives and imperceptible 'points of view' his neat literary style, his felicitous phrases, his

swift and caustic satire." I am not suggesting that Atwood is a disciple of The Master, or of any master, but I do find in *Life Before Man* a kind of dutiful asceticism, a leanness in the presentation of natures and motives, an inclination to dwell on the dull, the inept, the tedious in human existence, on storms in tepid teacups and mental fogs in basements. I also find such inclinations existing parallel with the simple excellence of the prose, the frequent felicitousness of image as well as phrase, and a satire which — if it is never here as bold as in earlier Atwood novels and certainly not as comic as in *Lady Oracle* — gains in bittersweet irony.

Atwood, of course, has been increasingly reductive in her writing as time and her career have gone on. The finest of her poems are the most gnarled and concise, and her fiction is often best when it attempts least, which is why the more obviously risible incidents in *Lady Oracle* and the more outlandish delusions in *Surfacing* form the least telling passages in their respective novels. And *Life Before Man* carries us farther in the same direction, for the action has been so diminished that the elements of fantasy important in the earlier novels are no longer present except in vague and portentous daydreams, and there are only three characters of major importance, through whose minds the action is seen unwinding in and around the Royal Ontario Museum and its crepuscular dinosaur galleries. The smallness of the cast, the tight unity of place, the comparatively short time span of less than two years in which the main action unfolds, give a sense of classic restraint and proportion, which is enhanced by the fact that the one disaster, the suicide of a lover whose memory haunts the rest of the book, occurs offstage, as it were, in time and place alike.

Moving against the bizarre backdrop of the museum are Elizabeth, her husband Nate, and Lesje, who eventually becomes Nate's unpassionate and only half-willing lover. Elizabeth and Lesje work in the museum, as did Chris, Elizabeth's part-Indian lover who blew off his head with a shotgun. Nate is a lawyer who has given up his profession because he likes to stay at home and make wooden toys. Elizabeth is the dominant personality, a solid and outwardly cultured female spider of a woman, toughened in the hard school of genteel poverty. One senses that her love forced Chris into self-destruction, and certainly she plays a malignly manipulative role in shaping and impoverishing the relationship between Nate and Lesje.

Thus, the "mean motives" that Wilde found in James are abundantly present in *Life Before Man*, and the "points of view," if not quite "imperceptible," are those of mental confusion. There is no character in the novel who thinks without sentimentality or feels without forethought, yet all on a curiously low level, near the instinctual; the drives of territorial imperative and of passionless sexuality seem to compel the actions of Elizabeth and Nate and Lesje much more than the aims and ideas that each of them tries to live by.

Here, of course, one comes to the point

of the title. Life before man — in the sense that she finds the bones of dinosaurs far more compelling than the bodies of men — is the central concern of Lesje's mental existence, and at least her fantasies of the Cretaceous have more life than Elizabeth's conflict-ridden memories and Nate's basement filled with idiotic toys.

> Greenland was barren, icy, devoid of life, whereas the place Lesje intended to discover would be tropical, rich and crawling with wondrous life forms, all of them either archaic and thought extinct, or totally unknown even in fossil records.

The pathetic circumstance that Atwood sets out to record is that the ferocities, the hungers, the imperatives by which we live may not be far apart from those of the dinosaurs, of Life Before Man. Perhaps she is suggesting what many people recently feel they have discovered, that the evils of terrestrial existence are cyclical in their occurrence, and irredeemable. One senses it when jogging Nate, near the end of the novel, "aims again for it, that nonexistent spot where he longs to be. Mid-air"; when, in the final sentence, Elizabeth looks at the exhibition of modern Chinese art she has assembled, with its naive messages and its lovingly painted vegetables, and reflects: "China does not exist. Nevertheless she longs to be there." The paradises are always impossible; the possible is always, in its drab way, hell.

Life Before Man, with all its writing virtues — which are exactly those Wilde once attributed to Henry James — is interesting but essentially anti-novelistic fiction, for it negates the presuppositions on which the novel has been traditionally based, that the lives of men and women necessarily have a value that is worth cherishing. All such presuppositions are thrown in doubt in a book that rejects the illusions of hope with as much quiet rigour as Camus did. I suspect *Life Before Man* does not reject compassion, but Atwood is as reticent about this as she is about other matters of her art. And this merely emphasizes again the contrast between Atwood as public persona and Atwood as private poet; as overt histrionic and as covert ascetic.

GEORGE WOODCOCK

POETICITIES

BILL BISSETT, *pomes for yoshi*. Talonbooks, $4.95.

PIER GIORGIO DI CICCO, *Dancing in the House of Cards*. Three Trees Press, $3.95.

LORNE DANIEL, *Towards a New Compass*. Thistledown Press, $9.50; pa. $4.50.

CATHY FORD, *Tall Trees*. Blewointmentpress, n.p.

MICHAEL ONDAATJE, *Elimination Dance*. Nairn Publishing, n.p.

IN THEIR FRACTIOUS diversity, these five poets illustrate the condition of contemporary poetry. The literary illness endemic to our time is to regard conventions, no matter how multiplicitous and contradictory, as *loci* where poetry is immanent. I mean that the signals of poeticity, the clues that invite us to consider a page of words as poetry, are entirely conventional; but we are writing as though they were not. We are writing as though the signals were the poetry.

Because conventions are only agreed upon they must be employed persuasively, to maintain agreement: to persuade us that when a convention is deployed, when poetry is signalled, there will indeed be a poem before us. Our ways of abandoning persuasion are now as numerous as our conventions of poeticity. Poets whose immanence-laden signals are the formal manipulations of language risk abandoning meaning, and often do. Others abandon — or treat with abandon — language and form, for to them the poem is immanent in the subjects of which they treat, or in experience, or things (conventions all). Still others abandon everything but friends and repu-

tation; they know that their works will be agreed to be poems because they, themselves, are agreed to be poets.

Michael Ondaatje's *Elimination Dance* is poetry by reputation. In the dance of humanity we are "eliminated," group by group, for our human weaknesses — such as not having been born in Canada. Apparently the winner of this game would be Canadian, very cool, feeling no pain. Ondaatje lists only the cuter eliminations: "Those who don't know how to spell zuckini zookeeney zeucckini zuchini."

In Pier Giorgio Di Cicco's *Dancing in the House of Cards*, poeticity is attached firmly to the page. Without knowing the author's name or nationality, without sharing his poetic ideology or even perceiving what he is writing about, one can read his lines and know that they are poetry:

> The light closes its tiny fist.
> The trees put up their old ladders.
> Spring is coming with both its eyes closed,
> stumbling against brick. Suddenly its left hand
> is found on my living room floor.
>
> ("Afternoons in May")

Di Cicco's forte is the bizarre image, the striking juxtaposition, and in a first reading these are effective textual signals of poeticity. At their best, moreover, they result in the "sudden rightnesses" Stevens result of: twangs of correspondence between the real world and the oneiric fiction on the page. Too often, however, Di Cicco's metaphors are all invention without semantic necessity: clever but meaningless phrases following hard on each other's heels without sense or direction, like the blind leading the blind in Breughel's allegory. "Golf balls of nothing," "hallways of a tear." Di Cicco merits our attention, though he requires us to forgive perhaps half of his production.

Cathy Ford's poetic is founded upon things, in particular upon things in the Canadian Rockies. Her mountains, rivers, tall trees, and hikes among them, are presented sensitively and with a visible attempt at objectivity, though not without romanticism. In fact she does not adhere to W.C.W.'s dictum, "No ideas but in things." The jotted, fragmentary quality of her poetry arises not from the multiplicity of objects in the world, but from the fact that she is alluding to the unwritten poem of her responses: the thoughts and emotions things call up. When that poem drifts onto the page — and it does, now and then — her elliptical manner is effective:

> she went back once
> and kicked it off the trail
> then went back
> and burnt it
> and went back again
> and buried it with twelve stones
>
> ("Lonesome Lake")

Lorne Daniel is not so much a western as an Albertan poet. The "new compass" of his title would specifically point away from the "insidious approaches" of eastern Canada, the U.S., and transmontane west. For this poet, poeticity resides neither in words nor in things, but in attitudes: poetic stances, ways of seeing things that make them the merest adjunct of a poem. What we are shown is not "the object slightly turned" (Stevens again) but the object sacrificed to wishful thinking.

Daniel's Albertan nationalism — his ruling attitude — leads him to compare the erosion of southern Alberta's drylands to "vietnamese slaying / vietnamese." It also leads him to seek an image for those less pure and patriotic than he, to find it in the figure of "beef cows," and to conclude of these "fat and complacent / nationless / immigrants":

> these cows deserve their dining-table fate
> and the wind carries their death to me
> as I attempt to define directions
> seek a new boundary
> a new North
>
> ("Killing Floor Resolutions")

What troubles here is not so much the ethical and political wrongness of Daniel's discriminations, nor even the silliness of his trumpeted promise to "go North" (to Edmonton? Tuktoyaktuk? The Pole?), but the absence of aesthetic distance between the attitude and its expression. A subtler song might convince us of anything: perhaps even of the poeticity of slaughter.

bill bissett is especially germane to the present grouping, because of the sheer variety of conventional devices with which he signals poeticity. In his oral poetry this function is served in large part by the voice of the performer; in his concrete poetry, by graphic design; wherever his words are printed, by his idiosyncratic spelling; and throughout his work, by a semantic substrate of counter-cultural ideals and experiences. All four of these devices are present or implied in *pomes for yoshi*; yet this is not one of bissett's more effective collections. Forlorn in content, banal in expression: "yu know i love / yu that shud / b enuff for whn its / happening / with / us." It is enough for lovers, certainly! But not for readers.

The most fruitful overview of bissett's production would focus, I think, on his poeticities more than on his poems. Might not that also be the case with contemporary poetry as a whole? Our enthusiasm for declaring, "This is poetry!" far outruns our craft for making poems.

ROD WILLMOT

REFERENCES

SING PRAISES TO EDITIONS FIDES! Over the last few years, this company has almost singlehandedly provided critical access to writing in Quebec, through a series of substantial indexes and biblographies that no library can afford to be without and no scholar can now afford to ignore. In particular I want to single out the *Dictionnaire des oeuvres littéraires du Québec*, edited by Maurice Lemire and others, the second volume of which (covering the period 1900-1939) has just appeared. A massive and illustrated guide to titles, authors, and general cultural movements and events, this second volume is good value even at $48.00 for 1363 pages; the short critical entries provide solid information, and each volume (vol. I: "des origines à 1900" costs $35.00) contains a useful chronology — which is instructive in point-of-view, even if unappreciative of alternative perspectives, in its classification of "English" Canada with the U.S.A. as "l'Amérique anglo-saxonne." Fides has also published Réginald Hamel's excellent *Dictionnaire pratique des auteurs québécois* ($19.95), a critical and bibliographic guide to some 600 French-language writers in Canada (not Quebec alone); "un compagnon," the editor calls it, for "chercheurs." Biocritical, it lists major studies of these writers as well as reports on them, and if it ignores rather too freely most English-language commentaries on French-language works, it will serve as a guide to essayists in both languages who need to do their homework before they themselves begin to write. Michel Houle & Alain Julien's *Dictionnaire du cinéma québécois* ($14.95) serves a more limited subject, but it, too, sees itself as a companion or guide: with entries on some 2000 films (three quarters of which appeared between 1960 and 1978), on filmmakers, and film boards, with appendices on chronology and terminology. Odette Condemine's *Octave Crémazie* (n.p.) is more restricted still, and more of a celebration than a reference work; it marks the centenary of Crémazie's death with a selection of 457 illustrations (prints and photos) to illustrate his life and the recurrent themes of his work. The result, rather like Lena Newman's *Macdonald*, is a scrapbook of a high order. Unfortunately there is something of the feel of a scrapbook about Fides's *Archives des lettres canadiennes* as well, three volumes of which (II: *L'école littéraire de Montréal*, $15.00; III: *Roman*, $20.00; and V: *Théâtre*, $35.00) are currently available. There are to be found here general essays on themes, including French-language drama in Manitoba, women in Quebec fiction, and the Quiet Revolution; and there are survey articles on major authors — Conan to Hébert and Maillet; Gélinas to Ferron and Tremblay; together with brief biographies, comments on specific works, and excellent bibliographies, mostly primary. Some fine historical research has gone into the preparation of these volumes; but they remain fragmentary, for occasional consultation, most

interesting perhaps for the methodology they bring to bear upon literature.

Beside these practical dictionaries, the first volume of the *Bibliographie du Québec 1821-1967*, from the Bibliothèque nationale du Québec, seems unclear. A descriptive catalogue 138 pp. long, it constitutes the beginning of a catalogue of 150,000 items, in all fields — valuable, no doubt, and ambitious, yet its connection with future volumes is not apparent. The preface does assert that the project is a rebuttal to Lord Durham's declaration that this was a people without history or literature; but one feels it needs a practical as well as an emotional function.

Several other kinds of reference work have also recently become available. Two University of Manitoba manuscript indexes, for example — registers of the Frederick Philip Grove Collection and the John Wesley Dafoe Collection — will prove useful to researchers, as will Gertrude E. N. Tratt's *A Survey and Listing of Nova Scotia Newspapers 1752-1957* (Dalhousie University School of Library Service, $10.00). Tratt's work supplies several kinds of information (dating, size, names, changes) and attempts to describe policies and attitudes; yet a descriptive comment like "radical in tone" is a phrase susceptible to much interpretation. If the book supplies no specific guide to individual contents, it thus draws attention to the kind of work still in need of doing. Thomas B. Vincent's usual meticulous scholarship is revealed in another of his Loyal Colonies Press pamphlets, *Jonathan Odell: An Annotated Chronology of the Poems 1759-1818* ($4.75), which in addition to describing both published and manuscript poems, adds notes on subject, metre, etc. More familiar in format is Gale's *Something About the Author*, a guide to children's writers and to the publishing histories of popular works; vol. 18 ($34.00) includes a lively illustrated section on the life and publications of Ernest Thompson Seton. Fides' seven Jackdaw-like summaries of various aspects of the work of Jasmin, Choquette, Saint-Denys-Garneau, Ringuet, Savard, Nelligan, and Leclerc (two others are promised, on Roy and Guèvremont) are perhaps most useful at the secondary school level; at $5.00 each, they are part of a series entitled *Dossiers de documentation sur la littérature canadienne-française*. Also for schools is Virginia Robeson and Christine Sylvester's *Teaching Canadian Studies: An Evaluation of Print Materials Grades 1-13* (OISE, $18.95); yet the short reviews of classroom usability that the work contains cannot substitute for the innovations of the sensible teacher. Referring only to works in social studies and social issues, the book also causes one to wonder about the compilers' sense of "culture"; literature is left out. J. R. Colombo's *Other Canadas* (McGraw-Hill Ryerson, $15.95) is an anthology of science fiction and fantasy, but is so broad-based in its definition of these terms, and so catholic in taste, as not to help very much; nor does his bibliography, *Canadian SF & F* (Hounslow, n.p.) guide one beyond book titles. It tantalizes with titles like Spider Robinson's *Callahan's Crosstime Saloon*, reclaims Gordon Dickson and A. E. van Vogt as Canadian writers, but leaves Phyllis Gotlieb's science fiction short stories still unindexed. R. Reginald's *Science Fiction and Fantasy Literature: A Checklist, 1700-1974* (Gale, 2 vols. $64.00) also ignores individual stories, and the second volume, a guide to authors, provides such brief notes that it can only be a place to begin looking for information.

By contrast, the latest volume (IV: 1771 to 1800) of the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* (Univ. of Toronto Press, $35.00) offers good value. It begins with three excellent commentaries on Acadians, Quebec to 1774, and Native Peoples, which serve as a background to the period being covered, and warrant reading in their own right by all interested in the cultural attitudes of the time. Studies of individual people follow: Bigot, Vaudreuil, Le Gardeur de Repentigny (the volume is therefore almost a guide to Kirby!); excellent essays by Lorraine McMullen on Frances Brooke and by Douglas Lochhead on Alexander Henry. The figures in this volume provide a guide to the country's placenames: Lévis, Belcher, Ramezay, Vancouver; and factual, neutral accounts. But sometimes these lose sight of the individuals in question. About Samuel Hearne, for example, C. S. Mackinnon justly writes: "As an explorer and writer, he represents an interesting combination of physical endurance and intellectual curiosity." But one longs for some sense of the myth Hearne has become in the culture at large. In the new (i.e., 3rd) edition of the *Oxford Dictionary of Quotations* (Oxford, $33.00), complete with phrases from Nell Gwyn and Mandy Rice-Davies, one also longs for more substantial Canadian allusions. McCrae is there, for "In Flanders Fields," McLuhan for "The medium is the message"; and Leacock is "riding off in all directions." But Haliburton is represented by this inimitable quotation from *The Attaché:* "I want you to see Peel, Stanley, Graham, Shiel, Russell, Macaulay, Old Joe, and so on. These men are all upper crust here." It's not the phrase that leaps to mind. W.H.N.

opinions and notes

ON E. K. BROWN

I FOUND THAT DAVID STAINES' bibliography of E. K. Brown, published in your Number 83 (Winter 1979), contained several items I had not picked up myself. I would like, however, to add seven items:

1927: "Henry James." Rev. of *Henry James: Man and Author* by Pelham Edgar. *CanF*, 7 (March 1927), 181-82.

1929: "A Life of Bierce." Rev. of *Bitter Bierce* by C. Hartley Grattan. *CanF*, 10 (Dec. 1929), 102.

1930: Rev. of *American Short Stories of the Nineteenth Century* ed. John Cournos. *CanF*, 10 (July 1930), 382.

Rev. of *The Golden Grove: Selected Passages from the Sermons and Writings of Jeremy Taylor* ed. Logan Pearsall Smith. *CanF*, 10 (Sept. 1930), 462.

"Dean Swift." Rev. of *Swift* by Carl van Doren. *CanF*, 11 (Dec. 1930), 110-11.

1936: "Canadian Poetry Repudiated." Rev. of *New Provinces* ed. F. R. Scott. *New Frontier*, 1 (July 1936), 31-32.

1951: *Matthew Arnold: Selected Poems*. Ed. with an Intro. by E. K. Brown. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1951. xxviii + 101 pp.

Papers: Many of Brown's papers, including lecture notes, are held at the University of Toronto Archives.

I would also like to remedy two errors. Brown's review of Lavinia Davis' *A Bibliography of the Writings of Edith Wharton* appeared in *American Literature*, volume 5, pp. 288-90, for November 1933, not March 1934. The title of Brown's review of Pound's *Polite Essays*, 1940, is "Mr. Pound's Conservatism."

Brown's review of *New Provinces*, containing poems by Robert Finch, Leo Kennedy, A. M. Klein, A. J. M. Smith, and E. J. Pratt, is an interesting entry in the long series of skirmishes between the modernists, led by Smith and Scott, and the writers and critics who, like Brown, were essentially Romantic in their outlook. The left-wing *New Frontier* had, at one time or another, three of the *New Provinces* poets on its editorial board (Kennedy, Pratt, and Klein), but this did not daunt Brown. Although he praises the poems, which generally reflect the influence of T. S. Eliot, the Metaphysical poets, and the French Symbolists, he is very hard on the brief preface, which, as he notes, almost repudiates the poems which follow. The preface explains that the poets, since writing the poems in the anthology (which waited a long time for a publisher) had turned to writing more socially relevant poetry. Brown quotes almost the whole preface in his review, referring to it as an "amazing document" and wonders why the poets have bothered to publish something no longer in accord with their "new social enthusiasm." If this preface, impatiently described by Smith as "vague aimless *jargon*," aroused Brown's sarcasm, Smith's rejected preface undoubtedly would have enraged him. (Smith's comment, and his preface, are found in Michael Gnarowski's edition of *New Provinces*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976.) That poetry of social comment has absolutely no appeal to him, Brown makes absolutely clear. He is most scathing about Scott's "verses on social themes" which in his opinion are "mere doggerel." He continues, to "utter a vehement warning against the supposition that such verses are really excellent" and to wonder, more in anger than in sorrow, "how can so true a poet as Mr. Scott sink to so low a level?" None of this emotion appears in his "Letters in Canada" review for 1936 in *The University of Toronto Quarterly*, and Gnarowski, in his consideration of this response to *New Provinces*, presents Brown's comments as

extremely positive, which, apart from a reference to the preface as "disconcerting," they are. This should not mislead the reader into thinking that Brown espoused the new style and content of these poets, however. Perhaps his comment on Pratt in the *New Frontier* review makes his position clear. Pratt, of course, did not really fit into this group, either philosophically or poetically, and Brown praises his humanitarianism, which is "that which appears in the nineteenth-century poets and those who in this century continue to enrich the romantic tradition." Brown, a humanist in this "romantic tradition," saw no need to be socially relevant.

MARGERY FEE

ED. NOTE: David Staines writes to correct the title of one 1930 entry: "The Critic as Xenophobe." He also adds that Brown's "papers and notes are in many places, the majority not being in Toronto. Much of his material remains in Chicago, where he last taught. Other notes and correspondence have found their way to the National Archives in Ottawa and to Victoria College Toronto; Calgary is about to receive some, and much still remains in private hands."

ETHEL WILSON AT LAC LE JEUNE

WHEN MAGGIE VARDOE DRIVES up "the winding ascent into the hills behind Kamloops, past the Iron Mask mine" and on to Three Loon Lake, she is enacting a journey that Wallace and Ethel Wilson made many times during the forty-five years of their married life. The identification of "Three Loon Lake," "Nimpish Lake," and "Blue Lake" with Lac Le Jeune does not seem to be known to scholars of Canadian literature. Desmond Pacey speaks only of "the isolation of this remote lake country" and "a remote but beautiful part of the interior of British Columbia."[1] Yet Lac Le Jeune is as important to Ethel Wilson as Orillia was to Stephen Leacock, Prince Edward Island to L. M. Montgomery and Neepawa to Margaret Laurence. Located twenty-two miles from Kamloops at an altitude of forty-two hundred feet, the lake was so famous for its fly-fishing that it attracted fishermen from all over the world, including two Governors-General of Canada, John Buchan and the Earl of Athlone. In "Beware the Jabberwock, my son . . ." Mrs. Wilson describes the lake through the recollections of Mr. Olsen:

> I got a fellow to drive me up to Lac le Jeune and when I got there, I tell you my heart rose up the way it does when you see your favourite lake away up in the hills all shining and saying Come on, Come on, and the sky all blue and the reflections of the forest upside down in the water and everything as innocent as a kitten. That lake is nearly forty-five hundred feet up and even in summer after hot days it can be cold and you can have storms like winter but there's a smell of the pines there and especially when the sun's on them and even when the rain's been on them, and all the way up there's the smell of the sage too. And right away when you see the fish jumping and hear the loons crying on the big lake or Little Lac le Jeune Lake you know — well, it's heart's desire, that's what it is.

As well as describing the lake *in propria persona*, Mrs. Wilson designates it Nimpish Lake, "far to find" at the end of "a narrow winding road through the sage brush along wagon tracks, over the cattle ranges up into the hills through the forest of crowded little pines."[2] But its most important evocation occurs in *Swamp Angel*.

The first lodge at Lac Le Jeune (then called Fish Lake) was built in 1885 by an American cowboy, Dave Lusk. It was a one-room log building with a lean-to cookhouse (complete with Chinese cook) and sleeping accommodation (hammocks) for four guests. The overflow

slept in the barn. Dave Lusk's Hotel still stands, serving as a boathouse where oars, cushions and fishing gear are stored. The next lodge was a two-storey frame building put up by an English couple, the Cowans. It was here that Ethel Wilson stayed in the early 1920's, not long after her marriage, and it was the Cowans' establishment that contributed several details to her conception of Haldar Gunnarsen's resort — the large log cabin with eating place for guests, the plank verandah on the front, the cedar shake roof, supported by lodge poles over the verandah, and the two privies at the back. Mrs. Wilson has told me of an evening when, leaving her husband reading in bed, she made her way in the dark to one of these privies. While she was attending to duty, the wooden latch moved from the vertical position to the horizontal position locking her inside. Being a modest newlywed, inhibited by the mores of a "Victorian" upbringing, she was reluctant to shout for help. Wallace would be sure to notice her absence and come to look for her. As time dragged on, her fear of the darkness, the confinement, and the strange night sounds turned to fury at her negligent husband. When, released by Mrs. Cowan, she finally returned to the bedroom, she found her husband still reading, quite oblivious to the fact of his bride's disappearance.

In 1926 the resort was purchased by my grandfather, T. D. Costley, who, assisted first by my grandmother and then by my aunt, operated the resort and an adjoining cattle ranch for more than twenty years. A new lodge was built together with additional log cabins and the Wilsons continued to enjoy the fishing. After my grandfather's death, my husband and I exchanged dairy-farming in the Okanagan for resort operating at Lac Le Jeune. So my friendship with the Wilsons began about 1950.

They generally came in June, the month when fly-fishing was at its peak. Daily limits of twelve fish per person were common. The boathouse lockers would be filled with three or four hundred fish at a time, the smokehouse would be going day after day, and departing guests would carry away cardboard boxes filled with Kamloops trout packed in freshly picked moss. June was the month of the "regular" guests who came every year unto the third and fourth generation, Vancouver people, mostly, who knew one another in worlds other than the piscatory. Sometimes the Wilsons came in August, when the weather was warmer than in June, or in September when the alders and willows along the lake had turned to bronze and the poplars to gold. Then they would hear the wild geese and sandhill cranes and see the morning mists and northern lights — "the great folding, playing, flapping of these draperies of light in heaven, transient, unrepeated, sliding up and down the sky."

The Wilsons always stayed in a two-room log cabin with a built-on bathroom and a wide screened porch. In front of the cabin was a rocky hill covered with wild rose bushes, a strip of lawn where my children played (closely observed by Ethel), a flower border of Iceland poppies and pansies, the driveways to the lodge and boat landing, and beyond that, the lake. Sitting on their porch, observing but not observed, they viewed the passing scene. The ritual of each day was varied only by changes in the weather. Breakfast from 7:30 to 9:00 in the lodge dining-room. Fishing from 10:00 to 4:00, with a picnic lunch consumed either in the boat (if there was a "rise" on) or on shore at the far end of the lake. Drinks on the porch or beside the air-tight heater. Dinner at the lodge and an exchange of fish-stories with other guests. Evening spent reading and writing. Early to bed (the power plant was turned off at eleven). Their luggage included quite

literally a trunkful of books — classics such as *Phineas Finn*, recent novels, books of history, biography, travel and stacks of *Spectators*, *New Statesmans*, and *John O'Londons* that they passed on to me.

On the last fishing trip before Wallace died, Ethel was so badly crippled by arthritis that she had to be driven to the lodge and the boat landing. It took three men to get her into the clinker-built rowboat. Yet so great was her passion for fishing and her desire to experience again that peculiar intimacy enjoyed by two people confined in a twelve-foot boat that she would sit for hours on the wooden seat in all weathers. Her view of the ideal marital relationship is expressed by her *alter ego* Mrs. Forrester:

> truth is never distorted between your Uncle Mark and me, whether we talk or whether — I assure you — we stay whole days silent like male and female happy Trappists. There is nothing that intervenes.[3]

This kind of silent intimacy, difficult to achieve in Vancouver where the demands of professional and social life intruded, was quite possible in a log cabin or a small boat. Certainly, there is something about the art of fly-fishing that strips away pretension, anxiety, ambition, peevishness, and all such corrupting influences. The Wilsons must have shared the opinion of angling attributed by Izaak Walton to Sir Henry Wotten, who said that it was

> a rest to his mind, a cheerer of his spirits, a diverter of sadness, a calmer of unquiet thoughts, a moderator of passions, a procurer of contentedness; and that it begat habbits of peace and patience in those that professed and practised it.[4]

Wallace Wilson gave the impression of being a patient man!

The Lac Le Jeune experience was particularly relevant to two short stories and one novel. Fidelity of detail Mrs. Wilson achieved by making notes about everything that she saw and heard, human and non-human. She asked countless questions about the flora and fauna, the calls of birds, the methods of building log cabins, the varieties of ducks, the places where the loons nested, the reason why the fish jumped two or three feet in the air. What she felt and observed and learned went into her writing.

"On Nimpish Lake" illustrates Mrs. Wilson's ability to combine a description of observed phenomena with speculation that begins as personification and ends as symbol. The migrating birds — geese and sandhill cranes — fly south, their voices

> raised in harsh and musical clamour. Why do they cry, cry, cry, as they fly. Is it jubilation or argument or part of the business of flying.

They are an element of the particular scene, along with the honey gold aspens, the squirrel and chipmunk, the whiskey-jacks, magpies, osprey, eagles and loons, the leaping trout, the tulé reeds, the beaver house, the companionable brothers and the inept American stirring up the water and expectorating into the lake. But like Yeats' wild swans at Coole or the geese observed by Frankie Burnaby and Hetty Dorval, they are also weighty symbols of timelessness, exaltation, freedom, cooperation, and escape. The apparently simple story is far from simplistic.

"Beware the Jabberwock, my son ... beware the Jubjub Bird" is more complex in structure and characterization though no more numinous in its evocation of scene. I think that it must have been written in 1957 because that summer I lent Mrs. Wilson Sybille Bedford's *A Legacy*, the book that silly chattering Dolly insists on describing to her husband, Thomas Krispin:

> It's an awfully hard book to tell the story of because first the story is here and first it's there and sometimes in a room but you can just hear them talking it's so real and sometimes in a castle or fields.... (Oh God,

> said Thomas and he tightened his lips until they could not be seen.)

Driven to the breaking point by his wife's incessant chattering, Tom takes refuge with a blind stranger who tells him a didactic tale of escape to the wilderness. Mrs. Wilson frequently uses a character's response to nature as an indicator of his or her moral state. In this story, response to nature is also an indicator of a physical condition:

> So I headed for the top end of the lake and as I passed the aspens I saw they looked queer but very good. First they were shivering green the way they really are, and then they were all colours and then they were shivering black.

Mrs. Wilson could not resist providing the onset of blindness with the dramatic accompaniment of a thunderstorm. Again her own experience at Lac Le Jeune was undoubtedly the sources for storms of this kind are rather common in June.

An unusual element in "Beware the Jabberwock, my son . . ." is the long digression (part III) which I shall quote in full:

> (We should all be happy and hardly ever bored, like that family of five beautiful children who live at Blue Lake Mountain in the heart and heights of British Columbia. They are so happy that they do not know they are happy. They say, "Oh do we have to go away? Do we hafto?" They are busy all the year round, and are never bored, these beautiful Renoir children and their young parents. What enviable bliss. Their voices and laughter trill like birds and bells beside the capricious mountain lake. They run hand in hand in the open spaces between the ponderosa pines. They walk entwined and their happiness is unmarred and beautiful to look at. Nothing is planned or arranged for them any more than for birds except when their mother rings a bell for lessons or supper. They run after each other calling and laughing and silent. They do not cry. Was it like this in Arcady? Their childhood should never end but it must — look, it is ending even now! Yet perhaps they will carry it with them; perhaps the green and gold happiness among the pines with the loons uttering their mournful laughter in the silence on the lake will stay with them when they are grown-up people, and the city will not quite quench as cities often do. Among the advantages of cities there lie lurking massive areas of boredom waiting for inexpert dodgers. In cities there are no ponderosa pines with the children running calling between and the place so quiet that the loons' laughing and crying ejaculations sound clearly even from far up the lake. There are no dangers of any kind for these children on that mountain except bears and the occasional cougar which cannot compare with the dangers of cities. There are no traffic jams, no tall or squat buildings staring with nothing but right angles not even an inferred curve, no mass meetings, no mass appeals, no mass advertisement, no mass uglification, perhaps no mass destruction, no mass anything, no . . .)

The passage has personal significance because those five children are my five children who, now grown up, realize that they did, indeed, inhabit paradise. It is equally significant for the general reader since it explains as explicitly as possible the author's Wordsworthian view of a nature that "never did betray the heart that loved her," of childhood innocence, of transient joy, and of cities' din. An occasional tendency to sentimentalism is this author's only fault in the treatment of setting.

In *Swamp Angel*, as in *Hetty Dorval*, the "essence of place" colours the association of characters. Maggie, Haldar, Alan, and Joey are united by their appreciation of Three Loon Lake, "sparkling, shimmering, melting, silent." Vera assimilates her dislike of Maggie into her "strong dislike for Three Loon Lake," and when she decides to do away with herself she chooses not gun or knife or poison but the water. Again, the author has a particular part of Lac Le Jeune in mind for there is along the lakeshore a path where "trees met overhead, and branches, crossing the unfrequented path, struck" and there is, only a few hundred yards from the lodge, a small beach of muddy sand where the shore shelves rapidly.

The lake that for Vera is a trap, for Maggie is a consolation and a relief. Whether on it — casting a line, watching the cruising osprey — or in it — a god, a seal, "forgetting past and future" — she is calmed and exhilarated. Appropriately, however, the ultimate statement of the fisherman's mystique is associated with Mr. Cunningham, for men greatly outnumber women among the initiates:

> All fly-fishermen are bound closely together by the strong desire to be apart, solitary upon the lake, the stream. A fisherman has not proceeded far up the lake, not out of sight of the lodge, before he becomes one with the aqueous world of the lake, of a sky remarkable for change, of wind which (deriving from the changeful sky) rises or falls, disturbing the water, dictating the direction of his cast, and doing something favourable or unfavourable to the fish. . . . There is no past, no future, only the now. Mr. Cunningham has neither wife, mistress, child, rival, profit nor loss. He is casting into his favourite place by the reeds. . . .

It is unnecessary to prove at length that in details of setting — scenery, flora, fauna, weather — Three Loon Lake is a mirror image of Lac Le Jeune. Once the geographical identification has been made, the source of the imagery is obvious. Less obvious is the relationship of fictional incident to actual experience. The struggle between the osprey and the eagle for possession of a fish did take place, observed by several of the June "regulars," including the Wilsons. An elderly fisherman — Scottish, not American — did get into difficulties and the Wilsons had a part in his rescue. Finally, the Excalibur-like disposal of the Swamp Angel may have been suggested by an event that occurred in the 1920's — one of those unique events that becomes part of the local folklore. A rich American let his movie camera fall from the boat into the water. So valuable was it that he hired divers to look for it but it was never found. So the Swamp Angel disappeared

> hitting the surface of the lake, sparkling down into the clear water, vanishing amidst breaking bubbles in the water, sinking down among the affrighted fish, settling in the ooze.

In the late sixties, after we had both lost our husbands, though by different means, and I had moved with my children to Vancouver, I would sometimes have tea with Mrs. Wilson in the Point Grey apartment with the seascape view. Crippled and deaf, she had given up writing but her mind was still alert. I think that she liked to see me because we shared a passion for a place and a set of recollections. We would talk about books (her own and other people's), about common acquaintances, but most of all about Lac Le Jeune. I wish I had written it all down but it didn't occur to me to record conversations with a friend. A few remarks stay in my mind.

About Topaz in *The Innocent Traveller*, she told me, "My aunt was vivacious, sparkling but not brittle. I wanted a name that would catch her glowing quality. So in the book I called her Topaz." On one occasion, I had just finished reading Desmond Pacey's book about her. I asked, "Was he right about your patterns of imagery? Did you tell him what you intended?"

"Oh, no!" she replied with a note of indignation. "He made all that up!"

"But, perhaps," I suggested, "the patterns existed in your subconscious mind."

She brightened as if struck by a new idea. "Yes, perhaps they did."

In Vancouver, she was very *grande dame*, elegantly dressed, her hair beautifully coifed, sitting erect in her wheel chair before her silver tea service. As she dispensed a genteel repast of china tea or Twinings Earl Grey with lemon, paper thin cucumber sandwiches, pound cake, or fruit cake or other delicacies prepared by her excellent housekeeper, she was a world away from the tweedy fisherwoman

with her workman's lunch bucket containing a package of egg sandwiches and a thermos. Whatever role she was playing, there was always an element of the unexpected. One unseasonably hot June day, my youngest daughter, coming to drive me home, appeared at the Wilson door in the briefest of bathing suits. I was embarrassed, feeling sure that Ethel would disapprove. To my surprise, she was delighted.

> "How sensible modern bathing costumes are! So much better than those awful outfits we wore!"

Then I remembered Topaz and the naked swimmers: "Nothing on! Very pleasant I'm sure!"

On March 8, 1969, Ethel Wilson wrote to thank me for a copy of my oldest daughter's wedding picture. "It is one of the most charming wedding pictures I ever saw, and I hope their happiness will be continuous." The letter concluded with these words:

> "My memory is very bad, but I recall many days and hours in that lovely country with my dear husband, at Lac Le Jeune."

NOTES

[1] Desmond Pacey, *Ethel Wilson* (New York: Twayne, 1967), pp. 35 and 31.

[2] "On Nimpish Lake," *Mrs. Golightly and Other Stories* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1961), p. 29.

[3] "Truth and Mrs. Forrester," *Mrs. Golightly*, p. 113.

[4] Walton's *The Compleat Angler*, ed. A. B. Gough and T. Balston (Oxford: Clarendon, 1915), p. 56.

MURIEL WHITAKER

THE STORIES OF WILSON & ENGEL

IN A WAY I CAN'T QUICKLY characterize, I get similar pleasure from the short stories of Ethel Wilson and Marian Engel. The similarity struck me, in fact, when I was rereading Willa Cather. It's a pleasure that is, at first, like one's joy when one sees any feat of skill and delight occurring together. What Willa Cather does with event, Ethel Wilson with tone, Marian Engel with sentence structure and sequence startles me. Something unexpected is accomplished with such skill that I am called to attend. And then the reverberating pleasure is slow and quiet, like profound relief. A shape of experience has been made which seems to me a true one, and the truth of it opens door after door in my own imagination.

There is a connection between my surprise and my relief: the experience shaped for me is not one I have thought much about, perhaps because it seems so ordinary, or petty, a minor weakness or nuisance. Given place, located in a certain way by a story or novel, a trivial experience grows in my consciousness until my own life and the lives of those I see and remember are differently cast.

What I was watching in Willa Cather was her absolutely quiet, firm-handed insertion into the narrative flow of an episode that had nothing to do with "plot" or "characterization." It seems arbitrary, willful, and delights me as Georgia O'Keeffe does, writing of her 1943 canvas "Pelvis with Moon": "A pelvis bone has always been useful to any animal that has it — quite as useful as a head, I suppose. For years in the country the pelvis bones lay about the house indoors and out seen and not seen as such things can be — seen in many different ways." O'Keeffe did see, and painted what she saw. So Willa Cather sees and makes a shape that says, "This episode is part of the fabric whether or not you can explain its relevance in conventional ways." And because of her shaping, my own life expands to include those curiously vivid recollections that have no significance except that something lodged, something was at a

moment registered with freshness and staying power.

The catching delight of Ethel Wilson's work is always, for me, instantly there in the opalescent tone. Mild as milk it can look, and then a sudden shift, like a glint of colour, appears, vanishes in the constant turning, turning of the surface. It has the movement of shifting awareness within oneself — whether one is with others or alone.

> Mrs. Forrester spoke to her husband who did not answer. He looked morose. His dark brows were concentrated in a frown and it was obvious that he did not want to talk to her or to anybody else. Oh dear, she thought. It's the tomb — he's never like that unless it's really something. They sat in silence, waiting for whatever should turn up. The two soldiers smoked at some distance.
>
> This is very uncomfortable, this heat, thought Mrs. Forrester, and the tomb has affected us unpleasantly. She reflected on Lord Carnarvon who had sought with diligence, worked ardently, superintended excavation, urged on discovery, was bitten by an insect — or so they said — and had died. She thought of a co-worker of his who lay ill with some fever in the small clay-built house past which they had driven that morning. Why do they do those things, these men? Why do they do it? They do it because they have to; they come here to be uncomfortable and unlucky and for the greatest fulfilment of their lives; just as men climb mountains; just as Arctic and Antarctic explorers go to the polar regions to be uncomfortable and unlucky and for the greatest fulfilment of their lives. They have to. The thought of the Arctic gave her a pleasant feeling and she determined to lift the pressure that seemed to have settled on all three of them which was partly tomb, no doubt, but chiefly the airlessness to which their lungs were not accustomed, and, of course, this heat.
>
> She said with a sort of imbecile cheerfulness, "How about an ice-cream cone?"

Even when the point of view moves outside a character, the tone is idiosyncratic rather than omniscient. The author's musing on her characters has a resonance that speaks of some other range of experience, as of one who — though companionable with her characters — is habitually in touch with her own continuing concerns.

> Captain Crabbe was small. He had come as an undersized boy to the west coast of Vancouver Island and there he had stayed. He had been fairish and was now bald. His eyes were sad like a little bloodhound's eyes and pink under, but he was not sad. He was a contented man and rejoiced always to be joined again with his wife and his gangling son and daughter. Mrs. Crabbe's name was Effie but she was called Mrs. Crabbe or Mom and her name had come to be used only for *Effie Cee* which was by this time more Effie than Mrs. Crabbe was. "I'm taking home an Indian basket for Mrs. Crabbe," the skipper might say. "Mrs. Crabbe sure is an authority on Indian baskets." Fin Crabbe was his name up and down the coast but at home he was the Captain or Pop, and so Mrs. Crabbe would say, "The Captain plans to be home for Christmas. The Captain's a great family man. I said to him, 'Pop, if you're not home for Christmas, I'll . . . !' " Thus they daily elevated each other in esteem and loved each other with simple mutual gratification. In bed no names were needed by Mrs. Crabbe and the Captain. (When they shall be dead, as they will be, what will avail this happy self-satisfaction. But now they are not dead, and the Captain's wife as often before awaits the Captain who is on his way down the coast from Flores Island, coming home for Christmas.)

The narrator's movement into private reflection, like Mrs. Forrester's contemplation of explorers, mountain climbers, archaeologists, is quick, quiet, as if habitual, suggestive — in fact — of a habit of solitude.

As I reread *Mrs. Golightly and Other Stories*, I notice how many are about women, and how many women are mainly alone. There are loving husbands, but they go off, to work, to war, to confer with other men, to bed with a fever. There are a couple of driven, angry husbands. They go off, too. Mr. Willy, in "The Window," retired "all of a sudden from business and his country," and his

wife. "He did not know, nor would he have cared, that much discussion went on in her world, chiefly in the afternoons, and that he was there alleged to have deserted her. So he had, after providing well for her physical needs which were all the needs of which she was capable. Mrs. Willy went on saying '... and he would come home my dear and never speak a word I can't tell you my dear how *frightful* it was night after night I might say for *years* I simply can't tell you ...' No, she could not tell but she did, by day and night." The women of these stories, whether they are old and lame like Mrs. Bylow or Mrs. Gormley, young like Dolly Krispin or Miriam in "Hurry, Hurry," middle-aged like Mrs. Forrester or Mrs. Golightly, all of them are left — for the day, for the duration, for life.

But not simply to their own devices. Though they must live much in their own heads, their own private observations and memories, their concern for the communal well-being keeps them alert to the conditions and attitudes of husband, relative, neighbour. Theirs is not a line of thought but an interweaving, and its movement is caught so accurately in the parenthetical talk (and style), the constantly interrupted attention, that the effect is often comic. But there's an odd thing in this collection of stories. The moments of strain, and even of terror, stand out more clearly than they do in Ethel Wilson's novels. They come, as do the daily tensions, from threats to the social fabric — or from such violent ruptures as murder (in "Fog," "Hurry, Hurry," "The Window"), drunken beatings (in "Till Death Do Us Part"), hangovers from or intrusions of another order of living (in "Haply the Soul of my Grandmother" or "Mr. Sleepwalker"), fatal accidents (in "From Flores"). The cumulative sense is of a world one is required to attend but cannot control.

The awareness that their essential job, the maintaining of the social fabric, is impossible gives these women a kind of detachment. Sanity resides, not only in them but in the writer's manner of telling, in a habit of standing back as well as moving toward. They cannot concentrate on one idea or attitude or job (to "be uncomfortable and unlucky and for the greatest fulfilment of their lives") but live in their own ludicrousness, in a human condition both more droll and more real than that shown by the men.

Marian Engel's humour, in the short story collection, *Inside the Easter Egg*, is deadpan rather than decorous. In her work, as in Ethel Wilson's, it's the sentences, and the rhythms they set up in a paragraph, that make the surface delight. But Marian Engel's are simply declarative or overwhelmingly compounded, not parenthetical.

Parentheses contain. They let something into sentences or paragraphs without allowing it to take over. They establish a rhythm of co-existence — of terror and boredom, amusement and grief — and so a view of experience that says "These things fit this way."

In Marian Engel's stories, there's no such view. There is, rather, an observer, a recorder, who shows not how things fit but how they happen. The unseemly, the accidental, the inexplicable occur as simply as the ordinary, the expected.

> I was driving down Cobden Street at two o'clock in the afternoon. The daffodils were pushing out of their sheaths, the birds were making a racket in the sky, and I was thinking, was it Cobden's *Rural Rides* I always meant to read or Cobbett's? That is what I have thought on Cobden Street for at least twenty years; and Marshallene came on the CBC to talk about a new novel she had written about us all. "Childhood is not what you think it is," she was saying, and things fell together for me, the way they perhaps did for Saul on the way to Damascus. Proust on a Paris curb. And my mother came shooting out of an alleyway on her bicycle, and I ran over her.

That use of *and* ("and Marshallene came on CBC"; "and things fell together for me"; "and my mother came shooting out of an alleyway"; "and I ran over her") like the laying down, side by side, of simple statements, reports experiences as accumulation. People in these stories may want things, make decisions, try to understand, but their lives are not determined by interests or purposes. Their lives are an accumulation, often accidental, sometimes hilarious, sometimes so tedious as to threaten sanity.

In a short, terrible story, "I See Something, It Sees Me," a detailed recall of the kind of unimportant shopping trip thousands of women must have made thousands of times, the speaker observes, equably, whoever her eyes light on, in the bus, in the street.

> I see a woman with a wide, kind face, high rosy cheekbones, short salt-and-pepper hair, camel hair coat, and, at second glance, rather beautiful golden eyes. Her little boy, plainly dressed in navy blue nylon, sits quietly beside her clutching a new Matchbox toy.
>
> The other woman with the camel hair coat and the little boy got off at Inglewood Drive. She was taller and thinner, less matronly but not younger, and wore brown vinyl boots smeared with metallic patterns: bronze, copper, gilt, silver, like the upholstery in a night club of the sort she would not go to. They were new boots, light weight for spring. Some impulse to cheer herself, perhaps, after the long winter.

The first person, the "I" is used only in phrases like "I see," "I notice," except for one "I think" when she notices, on her return home, a painter's and decorator's truck parked outside her house. It reminds her of an article "in a weekend gossip column" about private detectives.

"By the time I take off my boots and go to the front window the truck is gone. I think of the spy world we live in — social security numbers identical with medicare ones, everything from your income to your liver on file." And so, as if spying on her own shopping trip, she makes a report. "I" becomes "subject," an anonymous creature with no known purpose who moves into and out of stores like a rat in a maze, speaking to no one except, briefly, to clerks. The report, like the instinct to make it, has the very rhythm of boredom, of isolation. After it's made, there's a final paragraph.

> Now the '64 Medoc is in the kitchen cupboard, the Knackers and Mortadella and capers are in the fridge, the marzipan eggs are sitting in an attempt at wit on the table waiting for the children. I notice that we are out of instant coffee. I notice that the sewing machine and the vacuum cleaner need to be put away. I notice that the castrated male domestic short-hair is hungry. I notice that the house is as usual untidy. I notice, because now that the painter and decorator ReAnning is gone, who else will notice?

The story, "Marshallene on Rape," is less stark because it uses material conventionally more dramatic and because it suggests "sufficient motive" for reflections on rape in the linked episodes of a conversation at lunch, a relieving burst of sexual pleasure in the afternoon, a troubling glimpse of possible rape later. But it is not "about" those linked episodes. Its structure is neither dramatic nor conclusive. It is a collection of statements, memories, questions, experiences, each section numbered as if Marshallene were trying to order her impressions, clarify what information she has. Some sections are also given headings, like a school girl's report: "Rapees I have known," "How to avoid rape," "the greatest rape scene in literature," and there are entries devoted entirely to definitions, etymologies. But the analytical attempt gives way, over and over, to a flow or tug which is associative.

> 5. The only rapist I have ever known was my brother Byron . . . [whose only defender was their sister Mona.]
>
> My father repaid her loyalty with many strokes of his belt. Later, she ran away with

> a rather giggly Indian boy named Charlie. She now leads a sensible life on the reserve where sex is not so often a cause of murder as it is among us. I picture her waking early among reedy islands to the call of water birds.

An attempt to consider "Causes of Rape" turns into a musing on the bafflements and accidents of her parents' lives.

Nothing is finally clarified. All that Marshallene has observed or can imagine leaves her simply with an ironic clutch of clichés. "I don't think people who haven't been raped should write about rape; on the other hand, who will? We must make out with what we can find, we must make do, make ends meet, compromise and do unto others as we would have them do unto us."

There's a different handling of the cumulative in the title story. We get the experiences of Mary Abbot both when she's in the hospital and when she gets home again. We get the experiences of her mother who has come to tend the children. We get Emma's sense of her grandmother and her mother, Mary as mother and daughter, as wife to Osborne. Mary's and Mrs. Beatty's thoughts go round and round, into remembering, called back to the moment. The clear plain sentences and clicking juxtapositions show all of them rolling around like marbles in a box, touching, glancing off, knowing there's nothing to say.

Inside the Easter Egg is divided into three sections: "The Married Life," "Ziggy and Company," and "Children and Ancestors." No main character is much over forty. Most are dealing as they can with their thirties, with children and houses, parents and lovers and husbands. The stories show, with a good deal of humour and affection, the inexorable pile-up, the frequent collisions (and disjunctions) of this living. They report too the urgency of the main characters' attempts to understand where they are, how they got there. For most of them, certainly for the women, doing what is expected of them has prevented them from knowing themselves. It blanks them out.

I am reminded of Ethel Wilson's Mrs. Forrester talking with her niece, musing with her on the distortions, the maskings of oneself required by most social encounters. But the difference in attitude is enormous. The women in Ethel Wilson's stories assume their share of responsibility for the social fabric, assume its value. In Marian Engel's stories, society is not a fabric, woven, tearable, repairable, useful — but something more rigid, heavier — a weight on the spirit, a negative force.

The differences between these two writers are many — so many that I was surprised, at first, to find them coming together in my head. But they do both redefine importance: experience is importantly made up of the trivial. They redefine purpose: both show life's characteristic movement as circular, interrupted, shifting, drifting. Like Willa Cather, they change my view of the moment, the bulk of our days.

HELEN SONTHOFF

THE NARRATIVE STRUCTURE OF *Trente Arpents*

THE INVASION OF QUEBEC culture by North American culture, and the destruction of a rural society by an urban one, are issues very much alive today just as they were in the 1930s when Ringuet was writing *Trente arpents*. That novel captures the drama and tension of issues that continue to haunt contemporary life, and a close reading of the text will reveal Ringuet's deft handling of those concerns within the novelistic framework.

A number of critics have alluded to the structure of Ringuet's *Trente arpents*, all making the point that there is some shaping principle at work in the novel but none are specific about the nature of that principle. Jacques Viens,[1] for example, states that "Ringuet ... se contente d'une vague progression, d'abord vers la prospérité de son héros, puis vers sa déchéance." He sees certain contradictions and inconsistencies within this general framework as Part Two, which deals with Euchariste's growing prosperity, includes chapters not related to that theme. (Chapter One, for example, deals with Oguinase's arrival at school.) In addition, Viens charges that there is no real transition between the first and second parts, and between the second and third parts of the novel.

It is the purpose of this paper to demonstrate that, although there does not appear to be a rigid structure to the novel, there is indeed more than a vague progression, and that what Viens perceives to be structural lacunae may in fact not be so when the dynamics of the novel are probed.[2]

The direction in which the novel leads us is quite evident — the small social unit, represented by the individual and the family, is swept along by an irresistible tide of social, political and historical forces. This is demonstrated by the shift in focus as we are drawn from one part of the novel to the next; at first, the reader's attention is held exclusively by a small geographic and social unit but, as the novel progresses, the characters in the novel become increasingly subjected to the pressures and influences of the world beyond their own borders. In Part One, for example, the city is only alluded to through the presence of Willie Daviau in Chapter Eight. In each of Parts Two and Three, there is a single chapter devoted to the city. (The city takes on increasingly menacing and ominous overtones. In Part Two, Euchariste takes Oguinase to the city so that the latter can enroll in the seminary. In Part Three, Euchariste goes there to see his dying son and the lawyer who will later abscond with all his money.) Part Four is the inversion of Part One in that its setting is entirely the city except for references to the country. The setting itself therefore reflects the attraction and growing domination of the city in the lives of the people.

Within this overall shape, each Part can be seen to further the dismemberment or disintegration of one aspect of individual or traditional societal life.

Part One deals with the Moisan family and its restricted rural area. The reader follows Euchariste's decision to marry Alphonsine (Chapter One), the marriage itself (Chapter Four), the births of their children (Chapters Six, Seven and Nine), and a short history of the region (Chapter Five). However, the appearance in Chapter Eight of Willie Daviau, who is in politics and happily working in the city, and the affair concerning the "clôture du bois" discussed in Chapters Seven and Nine, point the way to a troubled future. In addition, the characterization of Euchariste, and explicit and frequent narrative intervention, serve to undermine further the stability and future prospects of the traditional way of life. Euchariste's decision to marry Alphonsine is devoid of thoughts of love and the more we see of him, the more he shows himself to be a plodding, colourless man who is avaricious and petty. A society of such men will surely offer little resistance to the onslaught of modernity which is soon to be upon them. The narrator is very explicit in reinforcing this idea. He points out the peasant's weaknesses directly ("ils ne possédaient point cette richesse parfois si lourde à porter qui est la précision de l'esprit"[3]), their stubborn prejudices when dislike for doctors is expressed, and their limitations when their

total reliance on the soil is stressed. By the end of Part One, the reader has the distinct impression that the family, which was at the centre of this part of the novel, will be very much subject to challenges. The seeds of its demise have been planted.

In the second part of the novel, the traditional way of life is seriously eroded as several characters associated with the established values die (for example, Mélie in Chapter One, and Alphonsine in Chapter Four) and the exodus from the farm begins. Oguinase leaves to become a priest (Chapter Two) and then it is Malvina who decides to seek her fortune elsewhere (Chapter Five). In Chapter Three, there is reference to the fact that many neighbours' children are leaving for the United States. In addition, Ephrem, Eucharistе's son, shows signs of rejecting conventional values when he establishes himself as a bully in the area and resists pressure from his father to return to the fold (Chapter Four). The visit of the Larivière family in Chapter Five serves two purposes: first, it underlines the critical nature and the true meaning of the exodus to the city as the Larivière family shows itself to be completely assimilated to the American culture, thereby surrendering its French-Canadian identity; secondly, it intensifies Ephrem's revolt as he finds himself attracted to one member of the Larivière family and to the life they represent.

The historical backdrop to this part of the novel is the First World War which is mentioned in Chapters Six and Seven. The War precipitates the abandonment of the farm as, for example, Albert, the hired helper from France, returns there to fight (he arrives in Chapter Three and leaves in Chapter Seven).

Part Two brings increasing financial prosperity to Eucharistе because the War proves good for business, but the foundation is being cut from under him as the family unit crumbles. This view of the second segment as complex and paradoxical is a response to Viens' charge, stated earlier, that Part Two deals with Eucharistе's growing wealth but includes unrelated material.

Part Three deals primarily with loss. The loss operates on various levels. There is a continuation of the departure from the farm that we saw in Part Two as Lucinda, Ephrem and Napoléon leave (Chapters One, Two and Seven respectively). There is financial loss as Eucharistе loses his law case (Chapter Four), fire consumes the farm (Chapter Five), and the lawyer absconds with Eucharistе's savings (Chapter Seven). There is profound human loss with the death of Oguinase (Chapters Three and Four). Chapter Four, very concentrated, signals the end of Eucharistе's "reign," for it is in that chapter that Eucharistе loses both his lawsuit and his son.

There is also a loss of cultural identity and cohesion as conscription is imposed on French Canada. The failure of the French Canadians to resist conscription and the effects of the War symbolizes the outside world's ascendancy over their restricted way of life. The conscription issue is raised in the first chapter and by the end of the last chapter, the seventh, the loss of cultural separateness is reinforced as we learn that Ephrem will marry an Irish girl in the United States and as the world of baseball and cars invades the sedate rural setting. The sense of loss is therefore magnified. Eucharistе's personal loss and that of the French-Canadian community as a whole overlap. We are witnessing the last agony of a man's way of life and that of his people. The story of Eucharistе and his family is that of French-Canadian society.

It is in this third segment of the novel that a familiar passage appears. The narrator intervenes here in the sixth chapter, after the death of Oguinase and the ruinous fire and before the finality of the last

chapter. It is at this point that Ringuet feels called upon to explain in some measure the reason for the events he has been chronicling:

> A qui leur eût demandé s'ils aimaient la terre, c'est-à-dire l'ensemble des champs planes où bêtes et gens sont semés de façon éparse par un semeur au geste large, s'ils aimaient ce ciel libre au-dessus de leur tête; et les vents, et la neige, et la pluie qui faisaient leur richesse; et cet horizon distant et plat; à celui-là, ils n'eussent répondu que par un regard étonné. Car ce qu'aimait Euchariste, c'était non *la terre*, mais *sa terre*; ce qu'aimait Etienne, c'était cette même terre qui s'en venait à lui, à laquelle il avait un droit évident, irrécusable. Ils étaient les hommes non de la terre, mais de leur terre.

The narrator is never as lyrical as he is here: note the rhythm of the first sentence and its parallelism. His capacity to appreciate the beauty before him contrasts sharply with the myopia of the greedy and possessive Euchariste and Etienne. Ringuet here seems to be saying that their world is tottering because there are no values which they can apprehend beyond their own self-serving needs. They are losing what was never in any profound sense theirs, for they did not know how to appreciate it.

In Part Four Euchariste, the epitome of all that is rural and agrarian, finds himself totally and irrevocably alienated in an American city. He is disoriented in Montreal and White Falls (Chapter One) and receives a cold reception by Ephrem's family in White Falls where he plans to visit (Chapter Two). Moral decadence is suggested when Euchariste discovers the infidelity of Ephrem's wife in Chapter Four. Financial ruin soon follows as the Depression hits with full force in Chapter Five. Euchariste is reduced to communing with nature in a tiny grove "qui cache maisons et usines" — a pathetic irony when one considers the clear sky and open spaces which were his once and which he was not able to appreciate. The novel ends with another irony as Euchariste who had opposed "progress" and "modernity" becomes a nightwatchman in a garage in White Falls where he is condemned to live out his years protecting the very symbol of contemporaneity.

In addition to the fact that there is a theme developed in each Part which contributes to the unity of the whole, the particular theme grows in intensity within each division. Part Three is a good example. The reader witnesses at first the failure of the French-Canadians to resist conscription, symbolic of the loss of their self-contained way of life and of their being drawn into the affairs of the world. What follows are the various kinds of loss discussed above — financial and personal, cultural and individual. By the end of the third Part, not only is the idea of profound and total loss amply demonstrated, but the threads of the first two Parts are pulled together. The potential threat to the traditional agrarian life explored in the first Part and heightened in the second, is rendered concrete. The only possible outcome is the one which we witness in the fourth and final Part, the death-blow to an entire lifestyle. To illustrate clearly the progression outlined, one might subtitle Part One "The Family," since the establishment of Euchariste's home is its focal point. Part Two might be subtitled "Departure," for it is in that segment that people die or leave the home and thereby begin to undermine its stability. Part Three is a period of "Loss" — financial, personal and cultural. It is at this point that the fate of Euchariste and the way of life he symbolizes — the traditional rural society of Quebec — is sealed. The last part of the book is the logical outcome of all that has preceded. It is a time of "Alienation." Euchariste is cut off from the past and adrift in a future he cannot comprehend.

Each Part of the novel reflects a major theme or central issue. As the focus shifts from the cohesiveness and strength of the family to the loneliness and alienation of the individual, from the countryside to the city, from a past which can be no longer to a present that is formidable, the story of an individual and of the culture he represents is played out.

NOTES

[1] Jacques Viens, *La Terre de Zola et Trente arpents de Ringuet* (Editions Cosmos, 1970), p. 122.

[2] An unpublished M.A. thesis, "La Structure du roman du terroir québécois," by Jacques David (University of Montreal, 1975), treats some of the same topics.

[3] Montreal: Fides, 1973, p. 37.

PAUL SOCKEN

ON THE VERGE

***** *The Pre-Confederation Premiers: Ontario Government Leaders, 1841-1867*, edited by J. M. S. Careless. Univ. of Toronto Press, $15.00. This is one of the most interesting volumes to date of a very important project in regional history, the Ontario Historical Studies Series. It will eventually include an array of volumes on the economic, social, political and cultural development of the province, but the core of the project is a series of political biographies, lives of the Ontario premiers, of which Peter Oliver's account of G. Howard Ferguson, recently published, was the first. Nine individual biographies of premiers from 1867 are planned; the incumbent premier is tactfully left for later. The present volume is a compendium of biographies of the Canada West premiers between Union in 1841 and Confederation in 1867. It is edited by J. M. S. Careless, who has written an excellent biographical introduction, and it includes concise accounts (part biography and part political history) of the five early government leaders who filled the role of premiers in collaboration with Lower Canadian counterparts. One of them, John A. Macdonald, is familiar enough, and J. K. Johnston's account of him does not add a great deal that is new, either in terms of information or of insight. But we have long needed a good account of William Henry Draper, and George Metcalf provides it. The other three leaders, Robert Baldwin, Francis Hincks and John Sandfield Macdonald, have been sufficiently little discussed to make anything new about them worth seeking out, and their present biographers, Careless, William G. Ormsby, and Bruce W. Hodgins respectively, have given them rounded and sensitive portraits that place them firmly in the stream of Canadian history.

G.W.

**** JIM CHRISTY, *Rough Road to the North: Travels Along the Alaska Highway*. Doubleday, $11.95. Jim Christy has written an unusual, romantic travel book, the story of a search not only for a changing country but also for a vanishing vision of liberty. The country he sought was the northland along the Alaska Highway, from Grande Prairie northwest into Yukon and Alaska. He tells the story of the road's construction, but he also tells of the marvellous community of individualists who were drawn to the ultimate Northwest as the last frontier of freedom, and having got there blossomed under the hot sun of the brief summers into eccentrics with curious ageless ambitions that seemed to make almost everyone Christy met into a personality worth recording. Everyone, that is, but those who went in for the quick money and were destroying the fragile fabric of a frontier world. It is Christy's recognition that the free life he describes is doomed, that this "awesome country" will soon be conquered, which gives his book its special threnodic quality as a romantic tribute to a joyous conjunction of time, place and people that, once lost, can never be recreated.

G.W.

**** DAVID WYATT, *Prodigal Sons: A Study in Authorship and Authority*. Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, $12.95. This admirably stylish critical study asserts that we have underestimated writers' lives in our concern for the independence of texts. In seven essays on writers as diverse as James, Agee, and Faulkner, Wyatt explores attitudes to authority and the growth of the powers of creation. The perceptive chapter on Robertson Davies' Deptford Trilogy merits close attention by those interested in the fictional blend of psychology, magic, memory and hope. The critical flavour can be appreciated in such brief quotations as these: "In playing Jung ... against Freud ..., Davies suggests that the shape of any

career may be a function of the interpretive strategies we bring to bear upon it"; "Davies' genius is to deny the claims of neither half of life in his effort to liberate the middle. Even his most prodigal son learns to speak for how he came to be." Out of magic and middle age, there develops in Davies an articulate hope.

W.N.

**** FREEMAN PATTERSON, *Photography & The Art of Seeing.* Van Nostrand Reinhold, $24.95; pa. $12.95. The title of this unassuming work *tells* it all, but the point about seeing (and the art of photography) is to *show* it. Patterson's photographs are splendid. They encourage anyone (not just photographers) to see "laterally" as it were — to break out of habits and rules of procedure that govern how we ordinarily look at the world, and to animate our imaginations instead. The accompanying text encourages us to do so, provides exercises to follow and explanations of Patterson's own camera work. But in a more general way — as "Zen and the Art of Visual Maintenance," perhaps — the book is also an illumination of the exacting arts of perspective and metaphor.

W.N.

*** RICHARD K. CROSS, *Malcolm Lowry: A Preface to His Fiction.* Univ. of Chicago Press, $12.50. The fact that Professor Cross writes very well makes this short book one of the more approachable of introductions to Lowry, but an introduction it remains: an account of theme, character and plot, with some nod in the direction of imagery and style. Yet so impatient is the author with symbolic readings of Lowry that he often fails to give due measure to Lowry's own fascination with symbolic systems. For Cross, Lowry is a modernist, and revealingly he declares that his "own lines of interpretation were firmly drawn . . . before . . . 1969." He acknowledges later critical comment (indeed, he is widely read in Lowry criticism); if much of this other work is more stimulating and original, Professor Cross's book contents itself with critical description and a refreshing readability.

W.N.

* GEORGE RYGA, *Beyond the Crimson Morning: Reflections on a Journey through Contemporary China.* Doubleday, $11.50. This book frustrates one from the beginning. George Ryga went to China on what was obviously the routine tour of communes and factories, tombs and towns, but his account of it is as padded with irrelevancies as a Chinese quilted jacket. In terms of real information about China and the Chinese people there is perhaps enough to fill a *Saturday Night*-length article. The rest consists of associated memories of other journeys, anecdotes about Ryga's ineffably dull travelling companions, and accounts of conversations with well-trained Chinese guides that the circumstances under which they took place render stilted and artificial and which remind one disconcertingly of the encomiums of proletarian achievement and virtue in official publications like *Chinese Literature.*

G.W.