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TIMOTHY FINDLEY & THE WAR NOVEL

Articles and Interviews

BY TIMOTHY FINDLEY, JOHN F. HULCOOP, ALISON SUMMERS,
PETER KLOVAN, BRUCE PIRIE, ERIC THOMPSON

Poems

BY PIER GIORGIO DI CICCO, JOHN BARTON, RON CHARACH,
RUSSELL THORNTON, IRVING LAYTON

Reviews

BY GEORGE WOODCOCK, W. J. KEITH, IAN SOWTON, DIANA COOPER-CLARK,
JERRY WASSERMAN, PATRICIA MORLEY, DAVID JEFFREY, MARY JANE
EDWARDS, GRAZIA MERLER, DAVID S. WEST, HANS R. RUNTE, EVA-MARIE
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BY WILLIAM C. JAMES, MARY LU MACDONALD

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BENEATH THE PEACEABLE KINGDOM

CANADA LONG AGO designed itself as the “peaceable kingdom,” and as Laurie Ricou observes, in his essay on Tim Findley’s *The Wars in Violence in the Canadian Novel since 1960* (Memorial University), the myth still holds its grasp on Canadian imaginations. Violence seems a world apart, or at least a border away — lodged most formally in foreign wars and television. But as the book and the essay both go on to make clear, while the myth exerts its own impact on Canadian realities, there are fiercer and more violent kingdoms which always lie beneath the placid (other commentaries read *provincial, puritan, tedious, cold*) surfaces of Canadian life. We might bewail such disruptive potential; or alternatively we might embrace the promise it carries of a stirring, vital energy. Either way, the stance is aloof, full of categorizing detachment or wishful thinking and therefore vulnerable to the power of the violence itself. As Sandra Djwa in the same volume astutely observes about Alice Munro, everyone might at some point want to show a savage face, but no-one chooses the time; it’s only at the unexpected time, in the special, lurid, unreal place, that the hallucinatory presence of the Enemy appears.

Munro’s characters find out their vulnerability the way everyone else does, after the fact; hence they can be wounded from within as well as from without, at war with themselves as well as with the world they guard themselves against. This distinction runs all the way through *Violence in the Canadian Novel*. Edited by Virginia Harger-Grinling and Terry Goldie, the book collects a set of papers that were destined for delivery at a Newfoundland conference, but which were never given, because fog invaded St. John’s. One speculates a little on the discussions that might have taken place had the contributors managed to reach their destination, for there is an implicit dialogue going on in the papers by themselves, between the critics (like Linda Hutcheon and Patricia Smart) who accept violence as a psychological manifestation, those (like Kim MacKendrick and Jack Warwick, writing on humour and joul) who write about the formal shapes it takes, and those (like Robin Mathews) who probe the concrete and political realities of contemporary warfare. Patricia Smart talks about violence as a feminist

metaphor, about invasion and territoriality as revelations of women's understanding of male notions about relations between the sexes. What she says about the work of Louky Bersianik applies to a number of other contemporary writers as well, as diverse as Marie-Claire Blais and Susan Musgrave; and what Mathews says about the politics of Buller and Rohmer and what he calls "the Corporation novel" applies forcefully to certain relations among institutional groups both within the country and between countries. But therein lies the difference in emphasis: Smart focusses internally, taking life as the shaping force behind the forms of fiction, and Mathews externally, taking fiction as a commentary on political realities. She probes the forms that literature *enacts*, he the issues that literature *is about*, and for all the overlap between the two positions, for all the political fervour they share, there is little resolution to the essential difference between them, nor any reason why one should seek any. Ricou, who finds *The Wars* to be less about World War I than about how the reader is required to think about war, less about the obscenity of violence than about the "storymaking of the reader," explains the interrupted syntax of Findley's novel by the implicit message it enacts: "confronted by willful violence the mind stammers." In the peaceable kingdom it is a way of acknowledging the broken surfaces. Mathews, impatient because a commitment to a political cause, to political action, does not follow, dismisses the novel as self-indulgent. Accepting a loser's role is self-indulgent, he says; "floating through slaughter" is self-indulgent; anarchy is self-indulgent. Yet can one ask writers to chart a more positive course? Explicitly Mathews says yes: not by condemning violence, but by condemning violence-as-a-private-indulgence: the "discipline" of a public cause has, by this view, a greater worth, which literature should serve, and presumably by which the worth of literature should itself be measured.

Those critics who disagree do not spell out in detail their disagreement. A phrase from Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* articulates the challenge they face: declaring the need for revolutionary measures and dismissing the degree to which establishments call upon tradition and order, Fanon writes that "the man of culture, instead of setting out to find" the "fundamental substance" of his society, "which itself is continually being renewed," "will let himself be hypnotized by . . . mummified fragments which because they are static are in fact symbols of negation and outworn contrivances." The trick is to prevent the attraction to "constant renewal" from opening up a greater vulnerability; if one system proves static, the charms of a new one do not guarantee it will not prove equally static and perhaps even more confining — which has always been the dilemma the liberal faces and one of the chief reasons that conservative philosophers like George Grant have challenged the liberal position. Espousing change, the liberal seeks meaning in change. But what if meaning proves elusive? "When there is no language," Ricou writes, "there is violence and void." By which means

The Wars becomes a kind of cautionary training in the politics of epistemological argument and so a book with meaning after all.

As though in commentary, Robert Kroetsch in the same volume observes another feature of the relation between Canadian literature and Canadian society: "The theory of answers, for us, is a dangerous one. We must resist endings, violently. And so we turn from content to the container; we turn from the tale to the telling. It is form itself, traditional form, that forces resolution. In our most ambitious writing, we do violence by doing violence to form." At one level this comment can be taken to reiterate the justification of joul as a political written medium as well as an idiomatic spoken form. At another, it refers to something far more general, not to the way language communicates politics but to the way politics shapes language and gives to a writer the cultural resonances of his (or *her*) separate voice. Silence, that apparent denial of language which Ricou equates in Findley's work with violence and void, Kroetsch sees as the probable outcome of any system (like that which Fanon observes in a colonial society) where the language of the social structure is in conflict with the realities of the people, *but he does not accept it as the final step in the process of change*. To any true creator, silence is not a resolution, Kroetsch writes, but an invitation, a provocation to speech and therefore to storytelling. Violence done to form thus becomes not a witless or malicious act of annihilation but a deliberate contrivance to enforce fresh seeing. Yet even the language here begs the issue: how *creative* can *forced* sight be? For the silence is never so complete that language enters it without trailing associations; here the metaphor of violence carries with it the knowledge of violent realities, and the obscenity of violence-in-reality confounds the metaphor. Commitment to causes perhaps justifies for some a de-creative process. Perhaps a commitment to the continuing, renewing dream of the peaceable kingdom — *sans* the discriminatory politics of corporate accountsmanship — justifies for others their inability to separate violence from obscenity.

In another context, *Mosaic's* fine "Beyond Nationalism" issue (14, no. 2, subtitled "The Canadian Literary Scene in a Global Perspective"), Kroetsch tacitly acknowledges the attractions of the Canada he attaches himself to, if not the Imperial notion of Canada that historians for generations purveyed as objective fact. Observing that complex genealogies constitute a narrative pattern of 1970's fiction in Canada, he writes: "Our genealogies are the narratives of a discontent with a history that lied to us, violated us, erased us even. We wish to locate our dislocation, and to do so we must confront the impossible sum of our traditions." Fanon in the 1960's was a spur to many Third World Nations to release themselves from their imperial masters and the biases of the imperial tongue that their own new literature inevitably, perhaps unconsciously, was using. Kroetsch's call to articulate the "impossible sum" of Canada is a comparable challenge to resist the biases of a single tradition and to explore the possibilities

that a multiple heritage bequeaths to literary convention. "Locating a dislocation" is, in the context of *violence* . . . perhaps a "violent" act, at least metaphorically; it uncreates a notion of "English" Canada so that a creative notion rooted in the actualities of Canadian pluralism might find suitable expression. Presumably *an* expression, rather than *expression* alone, and presumably not necessarily violent in either its idiom or its subject — because if there is only one expression for the new society to discover, only one "sum" for the writer to master, then the dislocation has restricted more than freed the creative act, and the much-vaunted plurality proved culturally empty. In a way it is to clarify the plurality that *Mosaic's* "Beyond Nationalism" issue has come together, though there are two quite different notions lying behind the articles: an impatience with an acceptance of any single line of literary inheritance governing Canadian tradition, and an irritation with criticism which deals with Canadian texts in isolation from literature outside Canada. The results vary. Though there are to be found here some conventional retellings of certain Canadian literary myths, there are also several important articles: Barbara Godard connecting *As For Me and My House*, by French critical method, to British literary movements; Sherrill Grace contrasting Pynchon with Kroetsch, in an analysis at once textual and contextual; Janet Giltrow contrasting Mrs. Moodie in Canada with Mrs. Trollope in America, and distinguishing between the language of the settler and the language of the genteel onlooker: "Where Traill's prose stops at small particulars, Moodie's rides on, along an abstract plane of diffuse enthusiasm." Curiously, however, "beyond nationalism" seems in practice to mean that Canadian writing should involve comparison with American texts; the few exceptions seek British and French *influences*, and no-one seeks Asian sources, Commonwealth parallels, or Third World influences and analogues. As Kroetsch implies, the sum is greater and the genealogy more complex than the British-French-American triad implies. John Matthews' exploration of the Canadian-Commonwealth connection, which appeared in the *Humanities Association Review* in 1979 (vol. 30, no. 4), is the sort of article one has to read in tandem with this issue of *Mosaic*. It also offers some degree of perspective on Kroetsch's argument, though indirectly — for Matthews expresses a clear regret that the "stability of a central national idea" should in the twentieth century have dissipated. Yet he goes on to find in the literatures of the Commonwealth examples of cultures neither retreating nor despairing in the knowledge that the centre cannot hold, but experimenting in the "new" and the "flexible" instead, which is the conclusion that, by different routes, Kroetsch and Margaret Laurence have also come to, declaring Canada's attitudinal if not economic Third World status.

In the same issue of the *Humanities Association Review*, there appear other perspectives on nationalism: on Quebec's rejection of both English-Canadian and European French social models; on distinctions between the sacred and

profane as they affect definitions of social identity; and on the historical connections between the U.S.A. and Canada which underlie the literary attitudes of the 1970's. About Canadian cultural plurality, moreover, George Rawlyk writes that over time Canadians have learned "to integrate two quite different, but not incompatible levels of identity and to move easily back and forth between these positions." This point is one to keep in mind when reading George Woodcock's recent *The Meeting of Time and Space: Regionalism in Canadian Literature* (NeWest), which dismisses the idea of a centralist government in Canada, declares that all the important innovative tendencies of English-Canadian literature originated in the regions, and argues that for these reasons Canada should institute a Swiss canton system, which is a true confederation. This argument goes awry at two points, I think: first in its notion of "region," which presumes a centre to be a region of, and second in its failure to take account of the dual allegiance that is built into Canadians' notion of their political culture, which makes the canton system as foreign to Canadian notions of Confederation as is the Centralist notion of American or French politics. The dualism is part of the indirectness that Canadian literature so recurrently employs, the subsurface irrationality it appeals to; and part of the curious state of the national health derives from the fact that Canadians use their access to, and control over, two different governments, federal and provincial, to balance the two. For *both* governments, complete with opposition parties, represent the *people*. Citizens do not elect their regional, provincial government to be their representative at the federal level; they elect federal officials for that purpose. And they do not elect a federal government to centralize authority, but to *co-ordinate* federal matters, so that in any one province or region (and most provinces have many regions, in both strictly literary and more largely cultural terms) citizens will have access to the shared culture and the rights of the whole.

There is a difference, in other words, between a notion of region which implies a central authority over the whole, and a notion of region which implies a parallel access to the whole. The difference shows up in other forms in Fanon's rejection of the biases of European languages, because they constitute (or presume) an authority he cannot accept, and in John Matthews' comments on the flexibility of Commonwealth literary forms, as demonstrations of the separate development of English literatures around the world, which have access to but need not declare obeisance to a notion of a solitary great tradition. In another form still, the distinction appears as the basis for Andrew Gurr's *Writers in Exile* (Harvester) which coincidentally has two different subtitles on the cover and the title page — either "The Identity of Home" or "The Creative Use of Home" in *Modern Literature*. Concerned to explain why some writers have become "creative exiles" in the prose they write in the twentieth century, Gurr traces in a series of biocritical essays the growing sense of exile and the growing admission

of the importance of the childhood home in the lives and work of Mansfield, Naipaul, Ngugi, and others. Far and away strongest on Mansfield, and weakest in some throwaway references to Wiebe and Gordimer in a concluding postscript, the book explores the paradox that exile becomes for these writers. The products of "*Gemeinschaft*" — the closeknit but colonial, provincial community — they seek to experience "*Gesellschaft*" — the urban, impersonal, individualistic, and "metropolitan" culture that represents artistic vitality to them. Inevitably disappointed because they cannot belong, they increasingly explore their own exile, creating out of it a realistic prose world more preoccupied with social concerns than with the aesthetics of writing. Though Mansfield and Joyce are a little hard to fit into this last generalization, it is interesting nonetheless, not the least for how it relates to the distinction in Canadian letters between those concerned with formal process and those concerned with social referents. The *Gesellschaft*-born, Gurr writes, are typically poets — more concerned with aesthetic form than with social function, that is, and less concerned than the *Gemeinschaft*-born with trying to represent concretely the shape of a society that lies outside the metropolitan norm. What greater reference to Canadian and Australian examples would have done in this book is to illustrate how notions of region and centre, or province and metropolis, have been in constant flux during the last hundred and more years. Perhaps poets-in-prose emerge when a region becomes its own metropolis, when a society no longer seeks (or needs) to ratify its own existence against another people's norms, or when (in Kroetsch's terms) a "dislocation" has been found and told.

Gurr adds that the detachment such exiles seek from their native community, as an escape from solipsism, does not guarantee them freedom, if only because it is also a pose. But it takes a peculiarly twentieth century and peculiarly provincial form because the writers who seek detachment seem to worry so pervasively about it. That is always the colonial's dilemma. Of posing and subjectivity, by contrast, there is plenty in the British traveller abroad — as Paul Fussell makes both vivid and clear in *Abroad*, his account of British travelling between 1918 and 1939. Though the book looks at the work of Douglas, Lawrence, Waugh, Isherwood, Orwell, and others, the centrepiece is Robert Byron, traveller, author of *The Road to Oxiana*, Blimpish poseur, quintessential Englishman, and neo-Wildean anecdotalist who dismissed other people's nationalisms with the insularity born of his own "*Gemeinschaft*" birth: "There is something absurd about a land frontier." As Fussell argues, the perspective was also one made possible by the isolation of the lands that travellers visited during these years, and engendered by the dislocating experience of World War I. In the post-World War II years, relative isolation no longer exists in the world, Fussell says. From an age of exploration, when the aim of the voyager was to risk the formless and the unknown, we have come through the age of the traveller to the age of

the tourist, whose aim is only to move to “the security of pure cliché.” In a telling distinction, Fussell adds another impediment: “One who has hotel reservations and speaks no French is a tourist.” But in a way it is the fact of war which makes the travel book, that “trope of a generation,” no longer possible for the British. The end of one war may have sprung them into movement — away from an England that shaped them but which they no longer trusted, motivated by “the compensatory principle by which the trench sensibility finds itself propelled vigorously toward the tropics.” But the next war robbed them also of their distance. Journeys abroad became journeys into combat, and another kind of literary age began.

In *The Great War and Modern Memory*, Fussell has also argued that the twentieth century made the truly realistic war novel possible because changes in taste and time (which allowed obscenities to appear openly on the page) made it thereby possible to render directly the larger obscenity of war itself. It is a relative argument. Given taste and time, the rendered obscenities lose much of the shock force that suppression accords them. Perhaps that, more than any other single reason, is why in books or on film or in daily life, violence becomes more grotesque, more open, less restrained, more obscene. The more difficult it is to shock, the more outrageous will be the attempts to do so. And will do so. For true obscenity does not lie in language, but in behaviour. To comprehend this is to begin to understand not only why literary violence has become so prevalent in recent years, but also why in its various guises it should have such different effects. The violence of language is an artifice of mind, which engages and convinces another mind only as long as it also argues and creates; the detached observation of violence is a neutral act — disenchanting, perhaps, but also disengaging; but the vision of violence that surrenders to violence is full of the millenarian power to persuade irrationally. It is a gospel of destruction, and in that there is danger — for it makes of all human contacts violent engagements, it removes creativity from the gallery of human skills, and it undermines the social contract that keeps us a people.

“The acute sense of place that attended travel between the wars has atrophied,” Fussell writes. The sense of a whole society and the belief in the worth of the shared space that is worth preserving to share with another generation: these aspirations for a peaceable kingdom, these, too, can atrophy. An adequate renewal will not emerge from any falsification of a society’s flaws, but neither will it emerge from a lame acceptance, literary or otherwise, that violence — far from being merely the stuff of entertainment or the projection of troubled lives — constitutes the only norm that gives meaning to the life we say we want to live.

W.H.N.

QUOTIDIAN

Pier Giorgio Di Cicco

I walk through your life, as if it mattered less
to either of us.

As if we had read this in the paper. So and so likes tea,
is predisposed to early Dylan, likes horror movies, thinks
Europe is on the decline. Voilà! Signor Kaboom likes the TLS,
and his consort, Vanessa, loves mansions, high, overlooking the
sea. This is marvellous, this flax of air. Someone makes
firms out of it. Others, doggerel for the cramped.

Who is it, in you? All these Agatha Christie thrillers
digested, all these wars gone by, armies of advertisers
having looted the comedic.

Will you go to heaven, shy one? And who, by degrees, will love
you as you love yourself?

You say good-bye to yourself with everyone who comes and
leaves your house. You give them news of you and return to
bed with pieces of what couldn't go.

If you'd get together all those whom
you'd ever talked to, you'd get them crying your name
in unison. Perhaps your eyes will tell. People must be good
at eyes; this is a good shorthand to understand,
subtracting, adding, the calculus of how we look, as we would be
seen by others. The lessons are no good or, learned, forgotten;
maybe the failure shows. Piecing two and two together
is the benefit we doubt the world can give us, but we try.
We are the braille of ourselves. Hats will help, some kind
of clothes, the way we touch, though we don't think of
that. We can go on, hoping the world catches up to us
with that understanding that says: from here on in we walk
like children, hand in hand. It was uneven, starting as we did.
The terror of dying, of course, is that we can't tell
anything, stoned beyond sense; too weak for hand signals
we pray for psychics, angels of death or otherwise, unless we
find we never were misunderstood; the air was listening,
and now we lie still and return the favour.

ALICE DROPS HER CIGARETTE ON THE FLOOR . . .

*(William Whitehead looking over Timothy
Findley's shoulder)*

Timothy Findley

THE HARDEST THING OF ALL to write about is yourself.

For one thing — if you're a fiction writer — most of you is already out there, somewhere; chopped up in little bits and hidden (or not hidden) in your books. Fragments. Not that you've put yourself there consciously. But your energy is there. Something of your own character — something of your own makeup goes into the character and makeup of everyone you write. And the rest of you is private. Mostly. So obliquely private that it's very hard to get at. Especially if you yourself are the questioner.

The thing is, everything you ask yourself — or very nearly everything — already has an answer that doesn't interest you. It would interest you about someone else — but not about yourself. "When were you born?" "1930." "Where?" "Toronto. What a stupid question. . . . I mean, you already know all this." "Are you happy?" "Don't be silly. If I was happy, would I be sitting here worried to death about how to write this article? It's already two months overdue and you're asking me when I was born. What a twit you are."

So it goes.

In the end, you lose your respect: both for yourself as a character worthy of interest and as an interviewer. And who needs that? No one. But when I put the problem to my friend Bill Whitehead, his answer was both succinct and a god-send. "You don't know how to ask yourself the right questions," he said. "Let me do it for you." "You mean the way Gertrude Stein wrote the *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*?" "No," he said. "I mean the way you write all your books. I will be you — and ask the questions: and you will be a character — and give the answers."

Oh.

Which is how I discovered the Art of Writing Fiction. You ask the right questions. But, in order to ask the right questions, you have to be asking them of

someone who inherently interests you more than you can possibly interest yourself. And thus — what follows.

THE INTERVIEW TOOK PLACE in a sunny room on a cold, bright autumn afternoon. The Interviewer was William Whitehead — a documentary writer for television. The person being interviewed was Timothy Findley — a fiction writer and playwright. The Interviewer had a touch of the 'flu — so the questions were interspersed with coughs and wheezes. Out in the larger world beyond the room, the President of Egypt had been shot: and in the smaller world beyond the room, the fiction writer was about to publish the fourth of his novels. As a consequence of both these events — and of the 'flu and of the golden leaves that blew across the fading lawn, there was an over-riding sense of tension in the room and an undercurrent of wonder that horror and discomfort are always walking hand-in-hand through a beautiful landscape.

w.w. Somewhere up in a cupboard, locked away, we have a number of your paintings. This is something you've dabbled with from time to time: something you seem to be drawn to. How is it, then, you've never tried to be a professional painter?

t.f. Because I'm not accomplished enough to do with painting what I would like to do with painting. And I haven't the facility — even with a great deal of study — to do that.

w.w. What is it you would like to do with painting?

t.f. Something enormous. I have visions of huge canvases — not murals — but Stanley Spencer's type of stuff — where there are masses of people in the picture. And they're very colourful. They would be stylized. They would be recordings of events. Or of moments. The visions in my mind are very graphic in that sense. And, when I sit down to paint, I inevitably paint something that is in my mind, rather than something out the window. I'm not inclined to sit down and paint that which is right in front of me. Maybe because what's in front of me satisfies my curiosity: satisfies my sense of wonder in itself. The only time I would paint that which is in front of me would be when I wanted to catch a person in a particular moment of their life — or their day: an *attitude*. I've tried to paint my mother — I've tried to paint my brother — I've tried to paint you. Lots of people. And each of these paintings shows the person in repose of some kind: occupied with something private. And, in each of the paintings, it was not the person's face that attracted my attention — but the attitude of the person who was sitting there. But I'm really not accomplished in this area. Perhaps I have a talent to

see — but I haven't the talent to translate what I see into something on canvas. Or whatever.

w.w. Would you say it was "character" — your interest in character — that drew you to the theatre as an actor?

T.F. Yes. Interest in *attitude*. And by that I mean the physical attitude as much as the intellectual attitude. That's why I got to the theatre through dance: through the gesture: through the way people present themselves. The thing that always moves me most — whether you see a person by himself or people in huge groups — is the concentration of emotion: or lack of it. The *attitude*. And, in the theatre, that has as much to do with what you see as with what you hear. I guess that's why I like Chekhov: because of the famous *pauses* — which he provides so that people can fill out or complete what has been begun with words.

w.w. Is this why you find it so hard to resist the creation of stage directions when you write a play? Because you see so vividly?

T.F. Yes. Even though I know it's dangerous to write too many stage directions: because they can be very limiting so far as the director and the actors are concerned. The first thing Robin Phillips does, for instance, is remove every single stage direction. Nonetheless, I provide them. Because I am always seeing what the people are doing, when I write: as well as hearing what they're saying. I see and hear in tandem. Whereas, a lot of playwrights — and a lot of novelists, too — really only seem to hear their people. The answer, of course, with plays is to put it down for yourself — you know — put down all the stage directions as you write and then excise them from the final draft. Which leaves the movement inherent in the body of the dialogue. This way, the actors will be impelled to move, without knowing why. And, also, be impelled to the moments of stillness. But, in novels, when I'm reading — I find so often the curious sense that what is seen has been written after what has been heard and sort of "tacked on" or pasted into the fabric of the book. As if the writer couldn't see and hear at the same time.

w.w. But how do you sort it out? I mean — if it's simultaneous. Come on, Tiff. You can only put one set of words on paper at a time. . . .

T.F. Well. All right. Look at it this way. In a sense, the writer is a *voyeur*: while, in another sense, he's eavesdropping. He is watching with fascination and — equally — listening or overhearing with fascination. Yes? Now — imagine a scene with a number of people in it and there you are watching it unfold. Watching and listening. And your eyes are sweeping over the whole roomful of people. . . . Yes? You keep track of everyone who is in the scene. Let's say the scene is set at a table and the people are eating a meal. And — you know what it's like when you're at a dinner party and everyone leans out toward the person who is leading

the conversation when suddenly . . . (SNAP) . . . someone at the other end of the table will do something that draws your attention to them. Maybe all they've done is take a sip of wine: but you catch it and you see it from the corner of your eye and the sipping of the wine is there as part of the conversation. So this is what writing is like: for me. Your eye and your ear — your inner eye and your inner ear — are always poised upon the moment. So that whenever there is speech, you hear it and whenever there is gesture, you see it: no matter where it occurs in the room: no matter who it comes from — even if it comes from the mice in the wall or the spider up in the corner over the plate rail. . . .

w.w. Now there's a plate rail. Where did the plate rail come from?

t.f. Well — it's in the scene. But how weird! You seize upon the plate rail when I thought — because you're an entomologist — you'd seize upon the spider.

w.w. What — and throw it out the window?

t.f. No. And talk about it. . . .

w.w. No. I gave all that up years ago.

t.f. Now — you see? We all know a little more about you.

w.w. What about this scene we were in?

t.f. What scene?

w.w. Weren't we at a dinner party?

t.f. Well: we were — but they've gone, now. What were we talking about? Plate rails?

w.w. You — as a writer — being able to see and hear at the same time. Be specific.

t.f. Well: specifically — when I'm writing a scene in which there is more than one person — however many more there may be — I will find myself . . . let us say when George and Brenda are talking: having a terrible argument. . . . I find myself sitting there watching them: listening to them — trying not to interrupt them — fascinated . . . when, all at once, Alice drops her cigarette on the floor. But the focus of the scene — the point of the scene — is the argument between George and Brenda. Now — I don't know how it is that I witnessed Alice dropping her cigarette on the floor. And I don't know *why* I did. I only know I saw it fall and I saw when she let it go — so I make a record of it: ALICE DROPS HER CIGARETTE ON THE FLOOR. Does it matter? Is it an important gesture? Does it tell us anything? Was it a comment on the fact that George was right in the middle of telling Brenda about that thing he's found in the drawer upstairs . . . ? I don't

know. All I know is — the gesture was there and I saw it and I put it down on the paper. But only time and more writing: only the continuation of the writing process is going to tell me whether Alice dropping her cigarette is meaningful. I mean — you know — it could turn out (LAUGHTER) that Alice doesn't even smoke, for God's sake. So what's she doing with this cigarette in the first place?

w.w. Could I ask you something?

T.F. Fire away.

w.w. Who the hell are George and Brenda and Alice?

T.F. I don't know.

w.w. (LAUGHTER)

T.F. Well, I don't. They just arrived. I don't even know their last names. George, Brenda, Alice — this is Bill Whitehead.

w.w. How come you assume they don't need an introduction to you?

T.F. Yes. A very good question. (SILENCE) Uhhmm. . . . The only answer that occurs to me is that — they were in my mind. Sort of like houseguests. So, I assume we know each other. Unless, of course, they're burglars. People very often are, you know — and you have to kick them out.

w.w. Have they gone yet?

T.F. Yes.

w.w. May I continue?

T.F. Yes.

w.w. You don't want to mislead people, you know, about the process of eavesdropping. You make it all sound as if it's terribly easy. As if the process of writing fiction were easy, whereas . . .

T.F. It's not.

w.w. I mean: how do you explain — in terms of "eavesdropping" and *voyeurism* — having to re-write scenes — having to discard chapters — having to create whole new passages? A minute ago you were talking as if all you had to do was "take notes" — and as if the characters were in control of everything. But don't you have to exert some control over *them*?

T.F. Oh, indeed.

w.w. Well — give me a sense of this: as effort. Because I know how hard you work — and I know how much you re-write — and I know how dissatisfied you

always seem to be with what you do. So how do you account for this, in the face of the other: of the characters being in control?

T.F. Well — the effort: the effort on the writer's part is to fulfill the character: to fulfill the story. You know — to do it justice and to get it all right. For instance, the writing of the play, "*Can You See Me, Yet?*" I wrote it all first as a straightforward play about a family: the family of Cassandra Wakelin. And the play all took place in the garden of the Wakelin home. And the family were all there — and the people came and went and the story unfolded and, to some degree, the play succeeded. On the other hand — in the mode of the conversation we're having — the character inside my head, to whom I had been listening: the character of Cassandra Wakelin was unhappy with the way I'd handled her story. It was as if I had not provided the means by which she could tell it all. I had not resolved her situation. So I thought and thought and thought — and I tried this and that and the other — and, finally, I hit on the idea that Cassandra's story somehow needed to unfold *backwards*. Well . . . in the original version, Cass ends up in an insane asylum: driven there by her perception of the real world being a madhouse. . . . But — what if I were to *begin* the play in the asylum? What if I were to show the "madhouse" as the world? Then the perceptions of Cassandra Wakelin would be crystal clear to everyone. Her view of the world would fall into place for the rest of us, and her story could unfold in a way that made it easier for her to tell and for us to receive. She pretended the garden of the asylum was the garden in which she had grown — turned the inmates of the asylum into the "inmates" of her home — added to which, an asylum is the perfect place to act out a story whose parts are joined by emotional chronology, rather than timeology. . . .

w.w. There's no such word as "timeology. . . ."

T.F. There is now. Don't you see what I mean? In asylums — time flashes on and off — and, in between the flashes, there's nothing: greyness, stillness, silence. Waiting. But the things that are seen in the flashes are astonishing. Riveting: vivid and stark and absolutely unadorned with the grace of soft edges. All this, to say nothing of the fact that Cass's life needed to be set in a frame of fire. Every episode is a kind of burning. . . .

w.w. She sounds like Robert Ross in *The Wars*.

T.F. Well: they have a lot in common.

w.w. Outside of fire?

T.F. Yes. Photographs, for one thing. I think that maybe the photographs in Cass's album may have been the basis for the photographic technique of *The Wars*.

w.w. Cassandra Wakelin enters the asylum with nothing but a photo-album.

T.F. Yes. And *The Wars* unfolds as a series of pictures. Pictures and interviews. Anyway — I think the subject of this part of the conversation had to do with the effort involved with writing and finding Cass's place was the effort in her case.

w.w. And *The Wars*?

T.F. The effort there was to find the right pictures and find the right characters to interview. Also — as with everything — to pay attention to what it is the character really wants to tell you. What the character requires of you. And you don't know any of that until *after* the fact. Before the fact, you're lost. And — you know, that, too, is a good analogy for the work, for the effort involved. Being lost. What you have to do is go with your characters into the void — and help them find their way home. Does this make you think of lost animals? It does me. And the first thing you have to do with a lost animal is discover a mutual language. After the language — the problem can be revealed — after the revelation, the search can begin and after the search: maybe the solution. Maybe. Maybe. Only maybe. But that's what it is. You try to get the character all the way home.

w.w. What about your last book? You had so many people to get home. How many was it? Twenty? Thirty major characters?

T.F. Something like that. Yes. *Famous Last Words* . . . good heavens . . . writing *Famous Last Words* I went through five whole modes before I hit upon the character of Mauberley. Ezra Pound's Hugh Selwyn Mauberley. Five whole modes. I don't mean drafts. The draft work was endless: on each of them . . . but, in the end, I came upon Mauberley and realized I had found the perfect voice to narrate the story. And it was really through him — through Mauberley — that all the other characters found their way home. For which I was profoundly grateful. Believe me. I never fancied myself as a Tour Guide. And I think he maybe got me home, too. (LAUGHTER)

w.w. Yes. I've noticed you've been around a little more, recently.

T.F. Maybe that's where George and Brenda come from. And Alice. . . . You know: maybe they sort of tagged along on the return trip.

w.w. Well — I'm here to tell you, you'd better do something about that Alice. Dropping cigarettes on the floor . . . burning up the rugs. . . . Can't she learn to use an ashtray, like anyone else?

T.F. I'm sure it was an accident.

w.w. Didn't sound like an accident to me. Not the way you've got it written in there: ALICE DROPS HER CIGARETTE ON THE FLOOR. What does she do about it? Leave it there — watching it eat its way through to the floor boards?

T.F. Maybe it's a stone floor. . . .

w.w. Somehow, I doubt it. Given the fires in all your books. Oh, God — I hope that Alice leaves!

T.F. Maybe in a puff of smoke?

w.w. It would be a great relief.

T.F. I take it you and Alice don't get along. . . .

w.w. You're damned right we don't.

T.F. What about George and Brenda?

w.w. It remains to be seen. Are they loud? Do they argue all the time? And what are they arguing about?

T.F. Something George has found in a drawer upstairs. . . .

w.w. What?

T.F. I don't know. Something rather sinister, I should think.

w.w. Maybe one of Alice's cigarette butts.

T.F. Kept in an old lacquer box from Japan. . . .

(AT THIS MOMENT, THE TELEPHONE RINGS AND W.W. ANSWERS. A FRIEND HAS CALLED TO TELL US PRESIDENT SADAT HAS DIED AND PERHAPS WE SHOULD TURN ON THE RADIO. WE ELECT NOT TO LISTEN. WE DO, HOWEVER, PAUSE FOR A VERY LONG WHILE TO THINK ABOUT HIS DEATH AND THE SCENE OF HIS DEATH AND THE WORLD IN WHICH IT HAPPENED. LATER ON, W.W. STARTS THE QUESTIONS AGAIN. OUT ON THE LAWN, ONE WHOLE TREE HAS BEEN STRIPPED OF ITS LEAVES AND, AS IF ITS JOB HAD BEEN DONE FOR THE DAY, THE WIND HAS DROPPED. THE OTHER TREES ARE NOT YET BARE.)

w.w. One of the themes that is threaded through your work more than any other is a particular view of insanity — be it insanity by itself or drug or alcohol induced insanity. . . . You do have all these people who either see and deal with the world as if *it* were insane: or as if they were insane. Can you tell me why this is and where it comes from?

T.F. Yes. It comes from a perception of insanity which was introduced to me very early on in my life through someone close to me who had to be placed in a mental institution. And the effect that had — primarily, of course, on the person involved — but also on all the people who surrounded her — the effect of this was the first truly profound experience of my consciousness. By which I mean, I was old enough to watch and listen and see what was happening and to make

concise deductions and come to precise conclusions. I was seven. Maybe six. I know it was about that age because of the house we lived in and the rooms where some of the scenes I remember took place. And my perception of this person was that she was brilliant — that she had incredible insights into what was really going on in the world around us: but that she was . . . *odd*. This is to say that the conversations I had with her as a child were basically not “conversations” — but they were monologues: monologues of hers . . . not unlike this monologue of mine. And, in the course of delivering one of these monologues, she would reveal things about reality and portray things in a way that the so-called “sane” people around me — and around her — did not understand. Which is only to say — they did not or could not see the aspects of reality that she saw and could deliver to other people, if only they would listen. And it struck me — or, I should say, it *must* have struck me — because, of course, I didn’t have the . . . what? What is it you have as a child? You have the *intelligence* as a child to perceive things and take things in — but you haven’t the *intellect* — yet — to deal with whatever it is you’re receiving. Nonetheless, whatever you’re receiving is going down into the makings of the ultimate person you’re going to be: the person who *will* have the intellect to deal with these things. Anyway . . . it struck me that I should listen. To this person who was close to me, who was sitting in the room with me. And everything I heard — all of my experience with this person went down very deep into me. And I remember that one of the most vivid things was that she saw things very sharply. Her perception of the world was clarified through a route of her own that was special: that was unique . . . and maybe dangerous to other people. No. Not physically dangerous. But — you see — her clarity of vision was something that endangered the unclarified — perhaps the muddled — or the muddled perceptions of other people. She could see the heart of things. Of hurt, for instance. Of where the hurt truly lay: and of what had caused the hurt. And, sometimes, the hard core hurt of an accusation might issue from her mind, you see. And once it had reached her mind — how could she prevent it from reaching her lips? And this was dangerous. Because it . . . well, it tampered with the protective walls thrown up by other people to keep the hurt of reality out. So this was dangerous. Very dangerous. How do we live with reality? Once all the walls are in place. . . . And now, I turn to thinking of someone else: much later in my life. And with this other person — the accusations became unbearably harsh. Unbearably harsh. And the harshness — with this other person — could be violent: *the truth! The truth! The truth!* And, of course, *the truth! The truth! The truth!* became unendurable for other people to bear. So . . . do you see? When these people exist — when there are these people — then other people must look across the room and say: “that person over there is mad.” You see? “That person over there is crazy.” Because it is too disturbing to be told *the truth, the truth, the truth*. And this is not to lay blame at any particular doorstep: because — I mean, my

God — there's nothing more exhausting a person can think of than the truth. So — what can you do? You turn it off — like a radio.

w.w. Yes.

T.F. Or . . . you hide it in a drawer somewhere. In a lacquer box from Japan.

w.w. Called "asylum"?

T.F. Precisely.

w.w. Well: now we know about George and Brenda. Any clues about Alice yet?

T.F. Nope. But I'd like to say one more thing about the so-called "mad." I hope you understand I'm not in any way talking about the truth with a capital *T* when I talk about these people. I only mean the truth about matters as perceived in a given situation. One thing about the "mad," you see, is they don't like lies. So this is why I seize so often upon these people as the heroes of my work. It's only because they have this straight — flung out connection through the mind to some kind of absolute clarity. And this is what fiction is all about: achieving the clarity obscured by facts.

w.w. So what are facts?

T.F. Walls.

w.w. All right. Talk about the writer as "madman." And writing as therapy: something of value for the rest of us to eavesdrop on, from time to time.

T.F. Writing isn't therapy. Writing may be cathartic, but it certainly isn't therapy. On the other hand, if you're talking about the reader — and only about the reader — maybe the "therapeutic" value for those of us who read lies in the fact that we don't have to pass through whatever it is in a particular book, or play or whatever — we don't have to pass through whatever territory it explores, except vicariously. This has been said — and best said — by Adele Wiseman. Adele Wiseman said the writer goes down into the other world of hell for a few years and comes back up and tries to articulate the experience for everyone else.

w.w. It sort of saves you the busfare.

T.F. Sort of. But the main thing to remember is that the writer has a round-trip ticket. The writer comes back. Do you see? And this information — the information that everyone doesn't have to perish down there is marvellous. Marvellous. And so maybe this is the therapeutic value: the therapeutic spin-off for the reader. *Hell can be survived*. And since everyone, at some point, goes through hell — this news is extremely valuable. But everyone can't articulate this news. Everyone can't tell what it is they've survived — and how it is they're still alive. But a good writer can. Have you read *Old Woman At Play*?

w.w. Yes, of course. The book about Adele Wiseman's mother. . . .

T.F. Then you know what I mean. Here was a woman living in hell who was telling us it didn't have to *be* hell at all. So Adele Wiseman went down in there, where her mother was living, and she asked the right questions and she got terrific answers and she came back up and she passed the answers on to us. And the answer was: *to make of hell a better place*. Dear God! This book should be handed out with every birth certificate.

w.w. Talk about genius, now. Is genius a kind of "madness"?

T.F. No. I don't think so. No. Though I see why you're asking. People think it has to be a kind of madness the same way they think the people I talked about before are "mad." Put it this way. A genius is someone you cannot avoid seeing. I mean — how could you walk into a room and not see Margot Fonteyn? If Margot Fonteyn is there — there's no way she can hide. Is there (LAUGHTER). . . . Even if you've never seen her before. Even if she's wearing the most ordinary, everyday dress — even if she's standing behind a man who's six feet tall: you're going to see her. And what you see is really the thing that drove her to be a genius of dance . . . the unavoidable: the ultimate. The clarity of gesture. Bam! And Mozart must have been the same. Can you hear him and avoid him? Never. . . .

w.w. But you may not like him.

T.F. No. But that's not the point here, is it. The point is — you cannot remain unaware that something extraordinary is happening through that person. Something that no one can explain. And yet — if you're reading Shakespeare — listening to Mozart or watching Margot Fonteyn — there doesn't have to be an "explanation." The thing is — you come away different. Changed. Put it this way: the audience that sits down to *Lear* is not the audience that rises at the end. And that is Shakespeare's genius. If this is "madness" — more! More!

w.w. All right. Here we are back, more or less where we began. In the theatre. And you've just been talking about Margot Fonteyn and you, yourself, began as a dancer. So — what you wanted to express as a dancer — as an actor — as a painter — you now express as a writer. *Words*. Words on paper . . . which is a little different from these other forms of expression you began with. . . .

T.F. Yes. Yes. Words. Well, now. . . . Take dance. What the dancer does is make a series of statements. And the statements are made up of gestures: gestures in a sequence. So words — words are the vocabulary of literate gesture. And the combinations of your words have to be as precise as the combinations of gestures used by a dancer to make an articulate statement in dance. And there's something else, I think, to be said about this. You know, when you learn to dance — when you learn to move — you learn to move — you learn to make each gesture from

the centre of your body: from the *solar plexus* — from the diaphragm. You learn that *everything* must originate there and grow outward towards the conclusion of the gesture: the formation of the statement. And, as an actor, when you learn how to “speak” — you learn to speak from there: from the centre — from the diaphragm. And, oddly enough — and here we come to writing — when a sentence *hits* — or when a paragraph *hits* — that’s *where* it hits. In the *solar plexus*.

w.w. But —

t.f. Now, wait a minute. Be patient. I’m making a point. You know how you and I, in the theatre, will so often say: “Isn’t it strange. Isn’t it really too bad. . . . Everything about that person is right — except: they don’t know how to use their hands.” Or — they carry their heads too high. Or the shoulders are stiff. Okay? *Now*: think of that marvellous, wonderful moment when Lynn Seymour dances onto the stage. Yes? Glorious. Because the whole of her presence is unfolding from the centre. Toller Cranston is the same. Every single gesture is totally fulfilled. Their fingertips — you know? — they flick the last cadence from the ends of their fingers. And *you cannot breathe until it is over*. They hold you enthralled to the very last nuance. Yes?

w.w. Yes.

t.f. Well: words are the same. Words in a sentence are a written gesture. And if the cadence is wrong — if the rhythm is wrong — if a single syllable is out of place — the sentence fails. And if the sentence fails: the paragraph fails. And if the paragraph fails . . . the book fails. Why? Because you have failed to impel the reader forward with every gesture . . . right to the “fingertips” — all the way from the *solar plexus*. That’s where books are written. That’s where readers read.

w.w. You know what?

t.f. No. What?

w.w. I think our friend Alice just dropped another cigarette. . . .

t.f. Aren’t you going to pick it up?

w.w. No. (A PAUSE) I want to see what happens.



"LOOK! LISTEN! MARK MY WORDS!"

Paying Attention to Timothy Findley's Fictions

John F. Hulcoop

*"It's all an attempt not to say what you don't want to say.
You've achieved art when you cannot be misconstrued."*

(TIMOTHY FINDLEY, in *Conversation with Graeme Gibson*)

IN AN AGE OF STRUCTURALIST and deconstructive criticism it may be salutary for the critic to begin by reminding himself of the dangers of misconstruction — despite that cunning cartographer Harold Bloom (author of *A Map of Misreading*) who insists that “[t]here are no interpretations but only misinterpretations.” Susan Sontag, in a famous essay, inveighs “against interpretation,” wittily dismissing it as “the revenge of the intellect upon art.” She calls upon commentators to recover their senses: “to *see* more, to *hear* more, to *feel* more.” The function of criticism, says Sontag, should be “to show *how* [art] *is what it is*, even that *it is what it is*, rather than to show *what it means*.” Having defined “the aims of interpretation” and demonstrated its “validity,” E. D. Hirsch reasons that “[u]nderstanding (and therefore interpretation, in the strict sense of the word) is both logically and psychologically prior to criticism.” Interpretation is “the construction of textual meaning as such; it explicates . . . those meanings and only those meanings which the text explicitly or implicitly represents.”²

Conceding that “nothing in the nature of the text itself . . . requires the reader to set up the author’s meaning as his normative ideal,” and that the reader of any text may easily “construe meanings . . . different from the author’s,” Hirsch nevertheless believes — and he professes his “simple belief” in the sometimes overzealous accents of an academic Savonarola — that “a text means what its author means” and that the “interpreter’s job is to reconstruct a determinate actual meaning” — namely, the “verbal meaning” which the author “has willed to convey by a particular sequence of linguistic signs and which can be conveyed (shared) by means of those linguistic signs.” *Verbal meaning* Hirsch defines as “the content of the author’s intention . . . the author’s verbal intention,” a somewhat slippery definition compelling him to reticulate a casuistical net in order to keep what he’s caught in his critical hold. To fulfill his proper function, the interpreter must be able to reconstruct “the author’s subjective stance” (meaning “his disposition to engage in particular kinds of intentional acts”), must be able

to describe the horizon which defines the author's intention as a whole (meaning the boundary which separates "meanings of which he was explicitly conscious" as he wrote from meanings of which he was only implicitly conscious. Hirsch rejects as a contradiction in terms meanings of which an author was unconscious).³

That Hirsch should look with disfavour on a large number of current critics and critical schools is not surprising. His commendation of Frye is cautious; his condemnation of Barthes is peremptory. Barthes' expansive outlook on writer, text and reader is antithetical to Hirsch's strait and narrow view of the reader as reconstructor of the author's verbal intentions. The "goal of literary work," says Barthes in *S/Z*, "is to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text. . . . This new operation is *interpretation* (in the Nietzschean sense of the word). To interpret a text is not to give it a (more or less justified, more or less free) meaning, but on the contrary to appreciate what *plural* constitutes it." The "text is a galaxy of signifiers, not a structure of signifieds," and "the more plural the text, the less it is written before I read it. . . . If we want to remain attentive to the plural of a text . . . we must renounce structuring this text in large masses . . . no *construction* of the text: everything signifies ceaselessly and several times, but without being delegated to a great final ensemble, to an ultimate structure."⁴

Bloom, Sontag, Hirsch and Barthes can be taken to represent the cardinal points on the critical compass I shall carry with me on my expedition into the relatively unexplored territory of Timothy Findley's fictions. Findley himself would obviously acknowledge the validity of Hirsch's viewpoint, not only because he believes that art, in order to be art, must be invulnerable to misconstruction,⁵ but also because he admits that his "biggest problem" as a writer is the fear of not having made himself clear: "I'll write the same thing into a novel several times so that by the time I've got it said, I've said it eight different ways . . . I don't trust enough — either myself or the reader."⁶ One result of Findley's anxiety is that the critic coming fresh to his work will, almost inevitably, respond like Tzvetan Todorov who begins his essay on Artaud by wondering "if it is not superfluous to interpose an exegesis between [Artaud's] text and his readers," since "Artaud said what he 'meant' so well and so abundantly." If we agree with Todorov that a "docile commentary, whose limit is paraphrase, is scarcely justified with regard to a text [or texts] whose initial comprehension does [do] not raise excessive difficulties,"⁷ then we must align ourselves *with* Susan Sontag and *against* interpretation. On the other hand, if, like Barthes, we want to remain "attentive to the plural of a text" — and *attention* is a key to, a crucial term in any attempt to understand (or interpret) Findley's work — we are bound to offer readings which were not necessarily a part of the author's conscious verbal intentions (explicit or implicit) as he wrote, and which (as Bloom explains) are likely to be misreadings or misinterpretations of the author's *intentions*, though not of the *text* as it stands (or is plurally constituted).

The plurality of Findley's texts, as in all texts, derives not only from the galaxy of verbal signifiers which "signifies ceaselessly and several times," and so creates the complexities of *mythos*, *ethos*, and *dianoia* (to borrow from Aristotle those terms Frye has proved so useful); the plurality derives equally from those aspects of the signifiers which (Sontag would say) appeal less to the intellect than to the senses: namely, *melos* (the element of sound analogous to the music in opera), *opsis* (the element of spectacle analogous to sets, costumes, lighting and the moulding of movement on stage in opera), and *lexis* (the element of texture, diction, or literary style which is analogous to the *tessitura* of a particular role in opera, or to the singing style — say *bel canto* as distinct from *verismo* or music-drama). The importance of sound, spectacle, and style to a full appreciation of Findley's fictions, whether they be scripts intended to be *listened to* on the radio, scripts intended to be *seen* on television, the movie-screen, or the theatre-stage, or whether they be the texts of short-stories and novels, cannot be overemphasized. His work compels the critic to recover his senses (*see* more, *hear* more) by making direct appeals to the viewer-listener-reader through sight, sound and style: these are what force us to pay attention — to look and listen and mark his words. And the need to pay attention, together with the learning how and why we need to pay attention, is an important theme in all Findley's fictions.⁸

THEN THE CURTAIN RISES on the garden of the old Insane Asylum at Britton, Ontario — the setting of Findley's first stage-play, *Can You See Me Yet?* — the audience is forced to look and listen:

The garden is empty. The sound of a radio rises in the wings; someone is singing "Where or When," by Rodgers and Hart. Thwack! A large wooden croquet ball rolls across the stage. A dog barks off stage.

The first character to enter is Doberman, a patient who thinks he's a dog and, like man's best friend, is dumb (until the last minute of the play when he utters a single word twice and stops the central character from killing herself). The second entrance is Enid's. Hearing the dog barking off stage she says, "Yap-yap-yap. Morning, noon and night. *Listen* to 'im. YAP-YAP-YAP-YAP! Wouldn't you think he'd lose his voice?" (italics mine). Having commanded Doberman (and, by implication, the audience since it, like the dog, cannot speak) to listen, she says, "You shouldn't stare at the sun. . . . That's how people go blind. *Mark my words*: blind as a bat" (italics mine). Edward and Clare enter and sit down to play cards. Instantly, Enid interrupts: "Stop! I want attention!" The men ignore her. In the distance, "*the sound of a fire engine is heard approaching.*" Enid shouts, "THE SKY IS FALLING!" Edward tells Clare to "Pay no attention," but Enid persists: "Listen to me. Listen — there's something terrible hap-

pening." Other patients join the group; a scene breaks out and their nurse, Alma, enters, trying to calm things down by promising a surprise. "*Watch out!*" Franklin exclaims. "Miss Alma is going to surprise us" (*italics mine*). At which point Enid resumes her bid for attention, screaming "FIRE! FIRE! FIRE! FIRE!" Alma strikes her. Moments later, Annie enters and announces that something has happened, down by the gate: a dog has been killed. Enid says, "I told you! I warned you! But — oh, no, no. No one listened."

Long before the significantly named central character enters at the beginning of Scene Two, Findley has already made his point. He has made us look at an empty stage, listen to various sound effects, and to Enid's imitating a yapping dog and then shouting. We have heard the repeated imperatives; seen a number of characters behaving oddly and, presumably, tried to figure them out, just as we have tried to follow the non-sequential conversation of the madhouse inmates. Finally, we have been given the explicit warning, "I told you! . . . But . . . No one listened." The fact that Findley withholds Cassandra's name for five or more minutes after she first appears makes its ultimate revelation even more pointed. If we have been listening to what Enid tells us, marking her words, watching out, taking her warning seriously, then we shall certainly not need to have the significance of Cassandra's name spelled out for us.⁹

Edward, who plays Cassandra's father in the psychodrama she acts out with the other inmates, and with Alma, says to his daughter, "You haven't changed, Cassandra. Still a question. Still a riddle." The question she embodies is the same as the play's title, a question she asks three times in the course of the drama's fifteen scenes. It is a question Findley poses in all his fictions, from "About Effie" to *The Wars*. It must, therefore, be crucial. So is the riddle. Like the play, which unfolds on two levels (Cassandra's recognition and acceptance of and by her fellow inmates; the psychodrama in which she re-enacts her family relationships from childhood on), the riddle is twofold: Who is the "me" of the play's title-question? or, from the subjective view-point compelled by the psychodrama, Who am I? And, *Is* anyone there to see me? or, from the personal point of view, *Who* is there to see me? Both question and riddle clearly relate to a central concern in Findley's work: Does anyone *care enough* to pay me any attention? And if so, *Who* cares enough? And, Do they care enough to see me and accept *me as I am*?

Ontological insecurity¹⁰ — together with the sometimes desperate search for a loveable and therefore acceptable identity — is a constant feature in the variable worlds of Findley fictions. In his first short-story, "About Effie," the insecurity of the young narrator, Neil Cable, is displaced by his acute anxiety about his ability to make the reader identify Effie if and when he meets her:

I don't know how to begin about Effie, but I've got to because I think you ought to know about her. Maybe you'll meet her one day, and then you'll be glad I told you all this. If I didn't, then maybe you wouldn't know what to do.

The “main thing,” Neil continues, “is to watch out for her.” If the reader meets an Effie (and the name is uncommon), “take a good look because it might be her.” She lacks easily identifiable physical characteristics, “but the way you’ll know her is this: she’ll look at you as if she thought you were someone she was waiting for, and it will probably scare you.” (*Waiting*, which creates suspense and heightens anxiety, is another recurrent feature of Findley’s fictional world.) The best way to “introduce” Effie so as we shall not forget her is obviously to tell her story; but even when he’s finished telling it, Neil is still uncertain about his achievement. “So you can see what I mean. It still worries me. And that’s why I want you to be sure — to be *sure* — to recognize her when you see her.”

Similarly, in his second-written story, “Harper’s Bazaar,”¹¹ the insecurity is again displaced from the main character, eight-year-old Harper Dewey, to his beautiful, alcoholic mother whom he comes to identify with her jewels, which she sells for liquor, and whom he tries to pin into place forever by selling liquor-laced lemonade in order to make enough money to replace his mother’s jewellery. He has been told in a letter from his father (killed in World War II) that “his ‘Duty’ [is] to obey his mother and always ‘to love her more dearly than all the earth, dearer still than your own dear life.’” But she dies anyway, even though Harper runs away from home and spends the night in a tree “to make my mother take attention.” Says Bertha Millroy, the Dewey’s maid, “I guess we just didn’t pray enough. . . . We went and lost her, Harper. . . . We went and lost her to the Lord.” Gradually overwhelmed by “the deep quiet of loneliness,” “the loneliness of an adult, the loneliness defined by remembrance,” Harper is confronted by

Nothing.

That was all he could grasp. Nothing. Everything was over — everyone went away — and finally you went away yourself.

“Nothing, as experience,” according to R. D. Laing, “arises as an absence of someone or something. No friends, no relationships, no pleasure, no meaning in life. . . . The list is, in principle, endless. Take anything and imagine its absence.”¹² Laing distinguishes very carefully between “the absence of relationships, and the experience of every relationship as an absence”: the difference is that “between loneliness and a perpetual solitude, between provisional hope or hopelessness and a permanent state of despair.” He goes on to point out that, in a world without meanings, values, sources of sustenance or help, “man, as creator, must invent, conjure up meanings and values, sustenance and succour out of nothing.” But the fate of the creator, says Laing, “after being ignored, neglected, despised, is . . . to be discovered by the non-creative.”

There are sudden, apparently inexplicable suicides that must be understood as the dawn of a hope so horrible and harrowing that it is unendurable.

In *The Last of the Crazy People*, as the title suggests, Findley moves closer than in the two preceding stories to the characters and setting of *Can You See Me Yet?* What “pleases me most about my work as a novelist,” Findley has stated in the Gibson interview, “is my own awareness of having that special twisted view which is a dependence on the insane people to do sane things. The ultimate sanity comes from the insane, I believe. Now — be careful! What I mean is — we call the *sane* ‘insane.’ In fiction you have to heighten this, treat it symbolically.” In *Crazy People*, Findley moves closer to his own confrontation with the kind of nothingness that Harper Dewey glimpses, that R. D. Laing sees as a symptom of ontological insecurity, and that Hooker Winslow, eleven-year-old protagonist of Findley’s first novel, faces in the novel’s Prologue and obliterates in its Epilogue.

The structure of this first novel is clearly significant: from the Prologue to the Epilogue, Hooker is waiting, alone — “a perpetual solitude.” The intervening chapters form a single, extended flashback, a “loneliness defined by remembrance.” The dawn described in the Prologue does what Findley says fiction must do; it heightens, by symbolizing, “the dawn of a hope so horrible . . . that it is unendurable.” The light (and maybe what “we” call sanity) begins to break in Hooker’s mind when he hears his aunt talking to his father about his brother, Gilbert: “They’re going to hold a shotgun over your son, and you just sit there!” This prompts Hooker to steal the pistol that belonged to John Harris (killed in World War I): “When Gilbert needed a gun, it would be there . . . for him to use when he got in trouble. Then Gilbert would know that he had thought of him kindly.” Gilbert, however, commits suicide (a “sudden, apparently inexplicable” suicide), and Hooker, attending the inquest, hears the verdict: “Death by his own hand” — presumably “while of unsound mind.” His father is mortally shamed by Gilbert’s suicide: “One of us has killed himself. . . . It’s like having a bloody gun at your head all the time.” By which point in the novel, Hooker has already seen the light (his mother is a psychopathic recluse; his father is figuratively impotent; his aunt lives in the past; his brother is mentally handicapped; and Hooker suspects that he himself is homosexual): “I think that we are crazy people,” said Hooker. “Like those crazies in the asylum. We have a crazy mother, don’t we? . . . It’s like a whole list of crazy people, and we’re the last of them.” His brother’s suicide is all the confirmation he needs. He holes up in the loft of the stable (which is where we leave him waiting in the Prologue): “Somehow, in the *stable*, they would have to come to *him*” (italics mine). His family will have to search for Hooker. When they do, in the Epilogue, he guns them down and is committed to an insane asylum. Iris, the Winslow’s maid and Hooker’s closest companion, is told it’s best to think of him dead — another of those “sudden, apparently inexplicable suicides that must be understood as the dawn of a hope so horrible . . . it is unendurable.” As Findley explained to Gibson, with reference to a story he heard of a child who killed one of his parents, his sister and someone

else staying in the house: "I was thunderstruck by what I considered the beauty . . . of his statement when someone . . . said to him: Can you tell me why you did it? He said, Because I loved them so. And for me, that's all he needed to say."

Any attempt to reconstruct Findley's "subjective stance" in relation to a number of given texts returns the attentive reader to his preoccupation with loneliness. As a child, he confesses to Cameron,

I had no interest in other children, maybe because I was often sick and had no tie with what other kids were doing. . . . I spent a lot of time with the maid, or just plain by myself, so it got that I sort of feared other kids. . . . Nothing but surface communication. I was sent to boarding school during the worst part of the war . . . my brother got sick . . . I was left there all by myself and my mother could hardly ever come to see me. Dad was at war and I just felt — abandoned.

But the loneliness was not confined to his childhood. Asked by Gibson if he enjoys writing, Findley replied that he loves it but hates "all the other stuff that goes with it," meaning loneliness. Though he alludes to Mann's *Death in Venice* because it shows that loneliness has its positive side, Findley concludes that "loneliness perverts":

I wouldn't attempt to say anything more than loneliness perverts, and this is very disturbing, very upsetting and you have to go through that to be a writer . . . the way you live very often cuts you off from people that you shouldn't be cut off from. . . . You're intellectually lonely: no one — hardly anyone "understands" you, because your whole life — maybe I should say your whole existence is an intensified searching — not for your own identity — but for your *work's* identity.¹³

LIKE HARPER DEWEY and Hooker Winslow, James Reid Taylor, principal character in *The Paper People*, a film-script written for television in 1967, has an unhappy childhood, was "a lonely boy" born about "eight friends behind everyone else."¹⁴ Taylor, a contemporary artist who expresses "with increasing violence . . . his distaste for contemporary life," is the subject of a TV documentary being researched and written by Janet Webb, a fictional TV producer. Janet's "filmic inquiry" — the containing subject of *The Paper People* — is a quest for the identity of Jamie Taylor as revealed in his work: his "work's identity." Jamie's current mode is to make life-size and lifelike models of his friends out of *papier-maché*, and then to burn them ritualistically, reducing both his art and his paper people "to ashes — the ultimate symbol of emptiness." Janet, in the course of compiling her documentary, uncovers important aspects of Taylor's life he would prefer to keep secret but which she insists on including. He reacts by calling her a killer: "I knew you were a killer the moment I laid eyes on those cold, cold hips of yours." Like Hooker, and "[l]ike to the Egyptian thief at point of death," both Jamie and Janet "kill" what they love. The search

for and assertion of identity — even the work's identity — results in its extermination: self-consciousness paralyses the self. The quester is left feeling unattended to in innominate loneliness; or, if the critic is quester, he is left to face his own failure and the fact that, as Wordsworth warns, "We murder to dissect."

Not coincidentally, one of the major sequences (entitled "BANG-BANG") in *The Paper People* includes a discussion of the sniper in the tower on the University of Texas campus who shot fifteen and wounded thirty other people. Janet asks why anyone must be killed, "Why kill at all?" "To make a statement," answers one of Jamie's friends, "... what other *new* way is there to express something?"

TONYA: You're setting up killers as artists.

MARCO: Or artists as killers . . .

WILFRID: . . . Suicide and assassination are the new art forms. . . .

MARCO: . . . All you have to do is look at *In Cold Blood*.

HAROLD: (DREAMILY) Yes, — and those nurses in Chicago, — and Austin, — and Dallas! They're all sort of pointless, unless the point is to say something.

JAMIE: With style.

When Janet objects, reminding them that human lives are at issue here, Marco, who has seen one of Janet's documentaries in which she exposes a distinguished neuro-surgeon as an alcoholic, says, "I've seen you assassinate in your quiet lady-like way!" Suicide, homicide and/or assassination, real or figurative, are not uncommon events in Findley's fictional world over which hangs the "allure of violence" which is also seen to hang in the air over Cheeverland, his satirical model of the United States.¹⁵ After he has seen Lee Harvey Oswald shot, on television, Hooker asks Gilbert what "assassinate" means. "Usually it's killing for a bigger reason than plain ordinary murder," Gilbert explains. "Like Kennedy and Abe Lincoln and the Archduke Ferdinand. . . . [T]hey decided . . . if they killed the Archduke, that would make something happen. Cause attention and division." James Reid Taylor burns his paper people in public; the "fires are what draw public attention to him and, thus, Janet's interest in putting his world on film."

Of the many images people use to describe "ways in which identity is threatened" — being buried, drowned, dragged down into quicksand — that which "recurs repeatedly" (according to Laing) is fire:

Fire may be the uncertain flickering of the individual's own inner aliveness. It may be a destructive alien power which will devastate him. Some psychotics say in the acute phase that they are on fire, that their bodies are being burned up. A patient describes himself as cold and dry. Yet he dreads any warmth or wet. He will be engulfed by the fire or the water, and either way be destroyed.

This last sentence is immediately relevant to Robert Ross in *The Wars*, who first

fears death by drowning and finally dies as a result of injuries sustained in fire; but Laing's observation illuminates more generally the recurrence of fire as event, image and symbol in Findley's fictions.

Gilbert Winslow slams his Jaguar into a tree and is instantly immolated: "Gilbert, on fire, lay back like Peter crucified, hooked by his feet to the cross of the motor car, his arms spread out in a hopeless gesture." The first sequence in *The Paper People* (described entirely in terms of visuals without any dialogue) is a junkyard in which James Reid Taylor's *papier-maché* doll of Tonya is being burned; fire is what draws the public's attention to his work; with fire he reduces both art and life to ashes, "the ultimate symbol of emptiness" — of nothingness. For Ruth Damosch, in *The Butterfly Plague*, 1938 "had been a year of fires. Real fires, imaginary fires, symbolic fires. All burning — all eating — most of them conjuring death." The first fire is a small fire on Topanga Beach, where she lives. By the time she finds it, it is only embers: "There was nothing sinister in the fire at all." But she removes from the ashes "a small piece of blue material" which turns out to be a *memento mori*, the remains of a bathing suit belonging to a girl whose naked body is later washed ashore: the first of many deaths, violent and pacific, in Findley's second novel. The second fire provides the climax and conclusion to the novel's first book: the fire in Alvarez Canyon, due north of Santa Monica, a tourist beauty-spot "known around the globe," and proclaimed "'Paradise'" by the visiting public. Approximately forty acres in area, Alvarez Canyon is a cunning mixture of natural and artificial: "In order to preserve the atmosphere of Paradise in all weathers, some portions of Alvarez were quite unreal. The plants in these places were made of specially treated fabrics and rubber. Thus when elsewhere the acacia leaves were falling they did not fall down in Alvarez." But Paradise is lost at the end of Book One, totally destroyed by fire: "The sanctuary was to become a charnel house." Standing outside the gates of Paradise — their poses a "[s]tillness in the holocaust" — Ruth, her mother, father, brother, and several other characters, turn back to watch the terror, panic and suffering of all the animals trapped inside the sanctuary, "fleeing mindlessly in concerted directions, not knowing what death was, but smelling death — not knowing what fire was, but being burned. Some turned back into the furnace. Some others crept into the flaming trees. Some attempted impossible flight into the sky":

Naomi said, "They will all die."

And Ruth said, "Pay attention." . . .

"Pay attention. Listen. Watch. Attention. . . .

In the ghettos of Paradise, four thousand creatures had perished.

Against a wall. . . .

Surely someone was there to see it and to pay attention.

Clearly, the fire in Alvarez Canyon is proleptic; in its flames Findley prefigures

the fate of the Jews in the German crematoria (the dream of a pure and perfect Aryan race and the evils of Naziism being, of course, a central subject in this novel). Near the end of *The Butterfly Plague*, Ruth sets fire to her dead brother's house wanting to raze to the ground the softly seductive, sweetly dangerous dreams of impossible perfection her brother's life has housed. And the final chronicle in this novel composed of seventeen separate chronicles is entitled "The Fire Chronicle." "We know that history repeats itself." In September of 1968, Ruth's orphaned daughter, Lisa, meets the son of another character on Topanga Beach. They smell smoke. "Fire is dangerous," says Lisa. They go to look for it. "This makes an interesting conclusion," says the narrator. "As always. And thus, this chronicle is over — the last of the chronicles of the Butterfly Plague. The first of the Fire Plague. And . . ." [Findley's ellipsis]. Though the novel stops after one more sentence (which tells that Lisa and the boy don't find the fire), the ellipsis after the additive conjunction invites the reader to anticipate another story chronicling the Fire Plague, which is precisely what Findley's third novel is and does. But between *The Butterfly Plague* and *The Wars* comes the long short-story, "Hello Cheeverland, Goodbye," which has little directly to do with fire until the very last sentence.

Two epigraphs precede "Hello Cheeverland, Goodbye," one from John Cheever's *Bullet Park* (in response to which this story was written)¹⁶ and another from Nicholas Fagan's *Essays and Conversations*. Fagan suggests that Cheever's fictional world is so true-to-life and all-absorbing that people have started forsaking New York, New Jersey and Connecticut in order to "take up residence inside his books . . . they've foundered in this place called Cheeverland." Findley's story (which cannot be summarized because it has no plot) creates a Lilliputian model of Cheeverland located somewhere on Long Island, with a view of the Sound and the sight of William F. Buckley Junior's home on the far shore. The cast of characters is extensive, including another in the significant series of Findley maids, and a young man "innocent of all experience save imagination. . . . Call him Ishmael. . . . He has come a long way to Cheeverland, from Toronto." He has come to the house of Arthur and Alicia Anderson ("on their way up in the world of television") because they want to turn his novel, *Blackwater Falls*, into a "'Film of the Week' (not the same as a FILM)." Ishmael stays in the maid's old room. "After the events in Memphis [in 1968] a meeting was held [of the blacks in Cheeverland regarding those who worked as live-in servants in white folks' houses] and the decision was made to move out. It was one thing to work there and to eat there, but quite another to sleep there, and so their bedrooms . . . were abandoned." Clyde, lover of Rosetta, the Anderson maid, is a leader of "this movement" among the blacks, and he persuades Rosetta to carry a gun. On Saturday morning, his second day in Cheeverland, Ishmael wakes and hears a "distant narrative of fire and lemonade": Rosetta is telling Alicia about "a fire

in the night, downtown, and even now the soldiers and the firemen are sifting through the ashes for the victims." Apart from references to Professor Dinstitch, another character who, as a younger man, helped to invent the atomic bomb, Findley lets fire drop until the final sentence which reads: "On Monday Rosetta comes up coatless in the morning, but the fires have moved up before her and these pages already burn." The revolution, it seems, has already started, and the illusory pseudo-liberal world of Cheeverland browns and crumbles in the reader's hands. Feeling the heat, he drops it, watching it (Findley's art, and life itself) reduced to ashes, ultimate symbol of nothingness.

THE WARS begins and ends with fire (even though it is also full of images of water, earth and air, a fact to which the inscription on Robert Ross's gravestone alerts readers) :

Robert Ross comes riding straight towards the camera. His hat has fallen off. His hands are knotted to the reins. They bleed. The horse is black and wet and falling. Robert's lips are parted. He leans along the horse's neck. His eyes are blank. There is mud on his cheeks and forehead and his uniform is burning — long, bright tails of flame are streaming out behind him. He leaps through the memory without a sound. The archivist sighs. Her eyes are lowered above some book. There is a strand of hair in her mouth. She brushes it aside and turns the page. You lay the fiery image back in your mind and let it rest. You know it will obtrude again and again until you find its meaning — here.

The "fiery image" of Robert burning on horseback, "tails of flame . . . streaming out behind him," is carefully paralleled by a watery image of Robert, after he has nearly drowned, swimming on horseback, "almost submerged with his clothes flowing back. . . . Pegasus."¹⁷ Both images are simultaneously elemental and mythical; and attention is drawn, directly or indirectly, to both aspects of both images; directly, in the single-word sentence "Pegasus"; indirectly, with reference to the "fiery image" of Robert, which has to be seen in its chronological context at the end of the novel, the four final sections of Part Five beginning, "Here is where the mythology is muddled." What is important, quite apart from what these images signify in relation to the plot (*mythos*), to Robert's character (*ethos*), and to the thematic content of the novel (*dianoia*), is the fact that in both cases the narrator compels the reader to look at the image (*opsis*), and to hear how the image sounds (*melos*), and carefully to mark his words (*lexis*). From first to last, the unspecified narrator of *The Wars* makes his presence felt,¹⁸ addressing the reader, directing the reader's attention, compelling him to mark the narrator's words in a particular way (one may even wonder, at moments, if the unspecified narrator is not a personification of Findley's anxiety about being misconstrued, about not making himself clear, about trusting — or not trusting — the reader).

"You lay the fiery image back in your mind and let it rest. You know it will obtrude again and again until you find its meaning — here." The deictics are tricky since we cannot be sure if the "you" is really reflexive — the narrator as fictional researcher hypothesizing someone engaged in the same process as himself — or whether he is addressing the reader directly and casting him in a role parallel to the narrator's own. Similarly, the adverb "here" may refer specifically to an *imaginary* photograph (since, so far as we know, no photographer is present to take pictures when Robert breaks out of the fired barn) which the narrator is describing; or, if the "you" is addressed to the reader, "here" could mean "in this image, in this passage of this novel" — or "in this image, in its proper context in this novel." The shades of difference in meaning are complementary rather than contradictory. Clearly, the attentive reader now knows that whatever "meaning" (the "author's verbal intention") he is to take from the novel inheres in this "fiery image" — even though the reader must remain attentive to the plurality of the text, aware that everything signifies ceaselessly and several times, that the "fiery image" is only one of the several ways in which the same story is told, simultaneously and sequentially; and is itself a microcosm of the single story which is projected in other elements and *mythoi*, severally and at the same time.

When Robert tries to save the horses at the end of *The Wars* (an action which involves the killing of Captain Leather which, in turn, compels him to become a deserter, to shoot Private Cassles and, in some eyes, to become a renegade horse-thief) he fulfills the proper function of a soldier which he wrongly attributes to the unnamed soldier in the early scene in which Teddy Budge is called in to kill Rowena's rabbits after her death. When Robert sees Budge, it takes him "thirty seconds to emerge from his pain and to realize why Teddy Budge was there." Robert turns to the soldier and yells "something like: 'you bastard! Bastard! What are soldiers for?'" The young man's question obviously expects the answer, "To protect the defenceless," not "To kill." *That* answer is something Robert has to learn ("What he wanted was a model. Someone who could teach him, by example, how to kill"). Ironically, his action at the end of the novel repeats the unknown soldier's in the very attempt to do what the latter did not do: protect the defenceless (horses). Robert's final acts are, therefore, open to interpretation, both negative and positive. As the researcher-narrator discovers, when he interviews World War I veterans, and asks about Robert, "they look away." Others weep when he says "Tell me about the horses." And yet others say "that bastard!" Marian Turner states simply: "My opinion was — he was a hero . . . he did the thing that no one else would dare to think of doing." Juliet d'Orsey, who falls in love with Robert when she is only twelve, and who looks after him after he's wounded until he dies, asserts neither *hero* nor *bastard*. She says:

"So what it was we were denied [in the war] was to be ordinary.¹⁹ All our ordinary credos and expectations vanished. *Vanished*. There was so much death.

No one can imagine. These were not *accidents* — or the quiet, expected deaths of the old. These were murders. By the thousands. All your friends were . . . murdered.”

The death of Captain Leather is, then, no different from that of Clive d’Orsey, died July 1st, 1916, in the Battle of the Somme; or of Rodwell who walks out into No Man’s Land and blows his brains out; or of Clifford Purchas, shot in the back as a deserter; or of the friendly German sniper whom Robert shoots in a moment of panic; or of Robert himself who dies of wounds sustained while performing what he has thought the duty of a soldier ought to be.

In the same way, the “fiery image” is open to both positive and negative interpretations. For the disinterested reader of fiction, it is striking evidence of Findley’s imagination; for those who enjoy projecting themselves into fictional worlds, the “fiery image” is a beautiful, Phoenix-like metaphor for the spirit of self-sacrifice embodied in Robert (and all those like him); and for the hope of a whole generation that believed it was fighting the war to end all wars, a hope reduced to ashes in the prolonged and senseless front-line slaughter but resurrected repeatedly in the human heart because it *is* human. For those whose view of human nature is less optimistic (and Findley’s view, as revealed in interviews if not in fictions, inclines to be less optimistic),²⁰ the “fiery image” may well suggest what Laing sees as the recurring image for the threatened identity of the psychotic in the acute stage. This negative interpretation is certainly supported by other aspects of the text, quite apart from the fact that, just before he shoots Leather, Robert’s anger rises to such a pitch that he fears he is “going over into madness”; and Major Mickle, responsible for arresting Robert, decides that he is “plainly . . . dealing with a man gone mad.” Juliet d’Orsey links Robert with Eugene Taffler and Jamie Villiers: all three become the lover of Barbara d’Orsey who “had a taste for heroes and athletes. She enjoyed the spectacle of winning.” Ironically, Taffler, Villiers and Robert are all losers; all suffer extensive injuries in battle. Taffler, the David-like stone-thrower, loses both his arms and tries to kill himself in hospital. Jamie, like Robert, dies of his burns. Robert first sees Barbara when, with Taffler on her arm, she visits Villiers in the hospital where Robert is keeping vigil at Harris’s bedside. The visit is brief.

When they’d gone Robert could feel the man in bandages [Villiers] ‘screaming’ and the sensation of this silent agony at the other end of the room was so strong that Robert had to go and get one of the nurses. . . . She told him the man had been trapped in a fire and his vocal cords destroyed when he’d swallowed the flames.

Later, Juliet comments on her sister’s visit to Villiers:

“Her silence in Jamie’s presence. Was it cruel? Of course it was. Not to let him hear her voice. Nothing was left of him, you know. Nothing but nerves and pain

and his mind. No voice — no flesh. Nothing. Just his *self*. Later, as you'll see, this forms a sort of pattern . . . well — a very definite pattern." [Findley's ellipsis]

(Here, again, the narrator through Juliet directs reader-attention, compelling us to mark these words in a particular way: to look for a specific pattern.) Robert, like Villiers, is reduced to nothing, to nerve, pain, mind — his *self*, essenced in two words "Not yet": "according to the medical testimony — there was virtually no hope that he would ever walk or see or be capable of judgement again." The narrator describes another photo of him, "taken about a year before his death. He wears a close-fitting cap rather like a toque — pulled down over his ears. He has no eyebrows — his nose is disfigured and bent and his face is a mass of scar tissue. . . . Robert is looking directly at the camera."

"*Robert comes riding straight towards the camera*": here, near the beginning of the book, the circle is opened. By the end, "Robert is looking directly at the camera": here the circle is almost closed. "These are the circles — all drawing inward to the thing Robert did." Robert died, his life

obscured by violence. Lawrence was hurled against a wall — Scott entombed in ice and wind — Mallory blasted on the face of Everest. Lost. We're told Euripides was killed by dogs — and this is all we know. The flesh was torn and scattered — *eaten*. Ross was *consumed* by fire. These are like statements: '*pay attention!*' [First two italics mine.]

The narrator instructs the reader how to pay attention: "You begin at the archives with photographs. Robert and Rowena. . . . Boxes and boxes of snapshots and portraits; maps and letters; cablegrams and clippings from the papers. All you have to do is sign them out and carry them across the room . . . a whole age lies in fragments underneath the lamps. *The war to end all wars*. . . . You hold your breath." You look at the images and listen to the narrator. A series of pictures of 1915: the "year itself looks sepia and soiled." Then comes April, Ypres and six thousand dead. "This is where the pictures alter — fill up with soldiers — horses — wagons. Everyone is waving either at the soldiers or the cameras. More and more people want to be seen . . . want to be remembered." Troops marching down Yonge Street, Sir Sam Hughes taking the salute. Then the "fiery image" of Robert (imagined, in italics); then a series of family photographs: "*Thomas Ross and Family . . . Rowena . . . Mother and Miss Davenport . . . Meg — a Patriotic Pony . . . Peggy Ross with Clinton Brown*." A picture of the ocean, taken on a trip to England, with a small white dot which is "clearly . . . an iceberg" (conjuring thoughts of 1912 and that archetypal Canadian image, the *Titanic*).

Two more photos, one early, one late, and the circle is completed. The early one was obviously taken at the end of Robert's training, before he embarked for England:

Robert Raymond Ross — Second Lieutenant, C.F.A.

He is wearing his uniform. Nothing yet is broken down. . . .

Dead men are serious — that's what this photograph is striving to say. Survival is precluded. Death is romantic — got from silent images. I lived — was young — and died. But not real death, of course, because I'm standing here alive with all these lights that shine so brightly in my eyes. . . . *He died for King and Country* — fighting the war to end all wars.

5 x 9 and framed in silver.

The last picture was taken even earlier and returns us to the beginning: “begin at the archives with photographs. Robert and Rowena”:

The archivist closes her book. . . . It is time to tell us all to go. . . . You begin to arrange your research in bundles — letters — photos — telegrams. This is the last thing you see before you put on your overcoat:

Robert and Rowena with Meg: Rowena seated astride the pony — Robert holding her in place. On the back is written, ‘Look! You can see our breath.’ And you can.

Just as early and late are transposed (the last thing you see is what you began with), so are life and death (Robert standing there alive in his uniform long after he has died); but Robert's death is “not real” because, of course, his life is only imagined (as a novel by Findley). What never really lived can never really die. He exists in a continuous fictional present and only in a series of images — some fiery, some watery, some earthy (Robert in the whore-house, in the dugout), some airy: “‘Look! You can see our breath.’” And the attentive reader *can*, if he uses his imagination (Pegasus); if he remains attentive to the text's plurality, has marked the narrator's words with care, he will also understand that the visible breath of Robert and Rowena, which makes them appear so lifelike, is simultaneously an image of death. “‘Be quiet,’” says Robert to his men, trapped in the crater under the eye of the German sniper, “and as he said it, he saw in front of them the dreadful phenomenon that could give them all away. His breath.” “‘Birth I can give you — but life I cannot,’” his mother tells Robert just before he joins up. “‘I can't keep anyone alive. Not any more.’ . . . This was the last time they breathed in one another's presence.”²¹ “Rowena and his father and his mother and the whole of his past life — birth and death and childhood. He could breathe them in and breathe them out.”

Harris, dying of pneumonia, “said the strangest things. . . . Strange and provocative. Robert didn't know, sometimes, what to do with Harris's sentences: where to fit them in his mind, or how to use them.” Having drawn attention to Harris's strange sentences, the narrator makes the reader listen more carefully:

‘Then I'd slide. Like a seal. Out of the air and into the water. Out of my world and into theirs. And I'd stay there hours. Or so it seemed. I'd think: *I never have to breathe again*. I've changed. It changes you.’ . . . And in his sleep his hands would move . . . as if he dreamt of swimming — or of ‘breathing’ in the other element. . . . ‘In that place — there — in *that* element — somehow I was safe —

even from choking. . . . But once I'd landed on the shore . . . I nearly died. In the air. . . . in the air . . .'²²

Lying in his bunk, in the dugout, listening to his batman's harsh breathing, Robert is reminded of Harris," — and that was the last thing he needed reminding of" (since Harris has died). "All he wanted was a dream. Escape. . . . Dreams and distance are the same. If he could run away. . . . Like Longboat" [Findley's ellipsis]. Longboat, the Indian marathon runner, is Robert's childhood hero, and he himself is really "a long distance runner." During training at Lethbridge, Robert runs every night by himself. Running, he loses all sense of time. "There was nothing to be won but distance." "Distance was safety. Space was asylum."

From the Prologue until the antepenultimate section of the novel, Robert is on the run (just as Hooker is waiting), trying to put a safe space between himself (his self) and all that threatens destruction. Dreaming of distance, he runs toward asylum; but, like Cassandra's, in the final scene of *Can You See Me Yet?*, Robert's airy dream is dashed or drowned in the mud, destroyed by fire:

Brothers and sisters: there should be a place to go for safety: asylum, and there's not. There is no safety — none for love, or for the mind. . . . I've failed. I couldn't make a place for safety. I should be asylum, and I'm not. . . . Why can't I help? Why can't I get beyond the fire? . . . The world is ending all around us, and we need each other now. And yet there is no sanctuary. Nowhere. None. In all the world. In all the width and breadth and depth of the human heart — where there is room for sanctuary — there is none. I know, because there is none in mine.

In order to know what nothingness is, says Laing, take anything — distance, safety, sanctuary, asylum — and imagine its absence. Even the old asylum at Britton offers no sanctuary. As Alma informs us, in September of 1939 (ominous and symbolic date), it "was destroyed by fire. Cassandra Wakelin died. But . . . she did not die alone. As she had lived." Equally ironic is the fact that, when Robert, near the end of the book, goes to the *Asile Desolé*, where mad Van Gogh was once an inmate and where, in the war, the officers are allowed to take a bath, he is raped by a gang of men he assumes are "crazies" but who turn out to be "his fellow soldiers."

Cassandra cries out that she cannot get beyond the fire. Earlier in the play, like a psychotic in the acute phase, she has declared "I am fire." At Verdun, the Germans used a new weapon, the flame-thrower: "Men . . . carrying tanks of fire on their backs . . . spread the fire with hoses. Water burned and snow went up in smoke. Nothing remained." A silent image, Robert leaps through the memory as a human torch on horseback. Beyond the fire, he is nothing. He is made one with the elements (like the tormented Empedocles whose final leap takes him under the volcano); but the elements themselves, in the infernal world of the wars, suffer unnatural changes and become one: the air is "filled with a fine, grey powder" that turns into mud; men and horses "drowned in mud"; the only

water lies "out in the marsh beyond the flaming hedgerows"; gasoline spreads "through the town in rivers of fire."

Fire storms raged along the front. Men were exploded where they stood — blown apart by the combustion. . . . Wells and springs of water were plugged and stopped by the bodies of men . . . who had gone there for safety. The storms might last for hours — until the clay was baked and the earth was seared and sealed with fire.

FIRE, ASSERTS GASTON BACHELARD, is "a privileged phenomenon which can explain anything" — and everything; "it is one of the principles of universal explanation."²³ Certainly, a reading of *The Psychoanalysis of Fire* provides a most provocative commentary not only on the "fiery image" in *The Wars*, but also on the phenomenon of fire in all Findley's work. In addition to making the predictable examination of "Sexualized Fire" — "the connecting link for all symbols" — Bachelard comes in his "Conclusion" to identify fire with imagination which "works at the summit of the mind like a flame." "*You lay the fiery image back in your mind . . . until you find its meaning — here*" in the mind, in the imagination, that realm to which the winged-horse, Pegasus, transports us.²⁴ And it is here, in the imagination — with its creative and destructive powers, its complex processes and seemingly simple productions, its instrumentality in enabling the individual to perceive and comprehend, or to distort and run away from, reality — that we confront the primary concern of Findley's imagination, just as (in the works of the greatest writers) narrative is the ultimate theme of narrative, and literature is the first (but not only) context in which to understand the nature of literature.²⁵

What Frye says of "the dislocations of narrative" in *Tristram Shandy* is equally true of those in *The Wars*: "they take our attention away from *looking at* the external situation" — i.e., the story — "to *listening to* the process of its coming into being in the author's mind"²⁶ — i.e., the imaginative process or discourse. In other words, the almost continuous presence of the narrator in *The Wars* — even in Part Three in which the sections are dated and clocked, rather than simply numbered, so that we are made to feel the narrator was also an eye-witness to these events, documenting or logging them as they occurred — keeps pulling the reader's attention away from what Frye calls "the internal fiction" which is of "primary interest" in the fictional modes, and making him refocus on the external fiction, the relationship established by writer with reader, which "cuts across the story" and is of primary interest in thematic modes of literature. But Findley's "writer" or "narrator" demands a great deal from his relationship with the reader, commanding him to look and listen simultaneously: the story of Robert Ross is shown as a series of photographs or pictures (with which we can do nothing, if not *look at* them); but, at the same time, the narrator is busy

telling us about the Archives, the archivist, his progress as a researcher, his methodology, his interviews with Marian Turner and his taping sessions with Juliet d'Orsey, all of which we must *listen* to.

Findley and his narrators are, in some ways, reminiscent of Woolf and at least one of her characters: Bernard in *The Waves*. (Allusions to Woolf appear in "Hello Cheeverland, Goodbye." In *The Wars* she appears as a character, a friend of Clive d'Orsey. Juliet records in her diary that "Mrs. Woolf is my idol.") Bernard, who distrusts "'neat designs of life,'" speculates on his problems as a would-be novelist: "'But if there are no stories, what end can there be, or what beginning? Life is not susceptible perhaps to the treatment we give it when we try to tell it.'" Findley's story, "Losers, Finders: Strangers at the Door," opens with what appears to be a lyric poem (and Woolf's fictions, in particular *The Waves*, have frequently been called "poems" or "lyrical novels") :

Some lives
are only seen
through windows
beyond which
the appearance
of laughter
and of screaming
is the same.

The second section continues: "2 . . . there are no beginnings, not even to stories. There are only places where you make an entrance . . . and either stay or turn and go away." The final section reads: "18 . . . nor are there endings. Even to stories. There are only places where you exit from another life. Or turn again and stay. Not knowing why" (Findley's ellipses).

Beginning his summing up in *The Waves*, Bernard says, "'in order to make you understand, to give you my life, I must tell you a story.'" But, tired of stories and neat designs of life, he looks for some new form of narrative "'more in accordance with those moments of humiliation and triumph that come now and then.'" What delights him is the confusion of cloud-formations, ever changing, always in motion :

"Of story, of design, I do not see a trace then.

But, meanwhile, while we eat let us turn over these scenes as children turn over the pages of a picture-book . . . and I will add, for your amusement, a comment in the margin."

Findley's fascination with stories told in the form of pictures (as in picture-books and films) is obvious. Much of his own story-telling has been done in the medium of television, and a great part of the TV script consists quite literally of visuals, instructions as to how a "scene" or "sequence" should be shot, from what angle, what distance, what the individual "frame" (or picture) should include, what

objects should be prominent, how the sequence should be separated from or attached to what follows, and so on. In fact, he won more recognition in Canada for his work on *Whiteoaks of Jalna* and *The National Dream* than he did for his first two novels. That *The Paper People*, one of his most important TV film-scripts, should be a TV film about the making of a TV film only intensifies by dramatizing Findley's profound interest in the pictorial modes of narrative. He has also written a film-script for the National Film Board, worked as a script-writer in Hollywood, and is currently engaged in translating *The Wars* into a film-script. *The Butterfly Plague*, set in Hollywood in the first three decades of this century, is very much a novel about movie-making and the impact of the "talking pictures" on people's private lives and political dreams.²⁷

But *The Butterfly Plague* is cast in the form of "chronicles" by a chronicler who is anything but unobtrusive and effects a reader-response very similar to that effected by Part Three of *The Wars*. The fourth chronicle of Book Two is entitled "The Chronicle of Evelyn de Foe," one of the new-wave Hollywood starlets. Even the minimally attentive reader is bound to think at once of the Diaries of John Evelyn, and of Daniel Defoe's *Journal of the Plague Year*, a literary forerunner of the year of the butterfly plague recounted in Findley's second novel. Like Bernard, Findley's narrator (and Findley himself as author of TV scripts) turns over scenes like the pages of a book and directs his audience's attention to the pictures by providing comments in the margin. These comments pull attention away from the story — which every picture tells — and redirects it to the imaginative process by which that story comes into being in the story-teller's mind. Even in his plays, which have strongly literary texts,²⁸ Findley's thematic concern is largely with looking, as the title *Can You See Me Yet?* indicates. *John A. — Himself!*, the title of his second play,²⁹ is equally indicative of Findley's preoccupation: namely, the desire to rescue Sir John A. Macdonald, first Prime Minister of Canada, from the great mound of public myths, legends and stories beneath which the private individual has been buried — a passionate desire to make the audience look at and see the man *himself*. And he accomplishes this aim by resorting to many more *spectacular* theatrical effects than he employs in *Can You See Me Yet?*

LIKE WOOLF, AND LIKE OSCAR WILDE (alluded to in *The Last of the Crazy People*, where he is also quoted, and in *The Wars*), Timothy Findley is a stylist in the same way that Sheila Watson (*The Double Hook*) and Marian Engel (*Bear*) are stylists, but that Robertson Davies (*Fifth Business*) and Margaret Atwood (*Lady Oracle*) are not. "In all important matters, style, not sincerity, is the essential. In all unimportant matters, style, not sincerity, is the essential."³⁰ Frivolous though Wilde's epigrams may often appear, their truthful-

ness is taken seriously and fruitfully applied to literary issues by perceptive critics like Frye and Sontag.³¹ Wilde, a true descendant of another great aesthete, Schiller, believed that "Art begins with abstract decoration,"³² which explains why he declares that "art is at once surface and symbol. Those who go beneath the surface do so at their own peril." Only "the superficial qualities last"; and "only shallow people . . . do not judge by appearances. The mystery of the world is the visible, not the invisible." Style *is* surface and surface *is* symbol; style is what makes the imagined world visible in Findley's fictions, enabling us to see and therefore understand. Style is what Frye calls "ornamental speech" (as distinct from "persuasive speech," the other arm of rhetoric) which "acts on its hearers statically, leading them to admire its own beauty or wit." Developing a mature style takes time; and the chances are that, in risking the venture of style, a writer (like Wilde and Woolf) may well be accused by hostile critics of literary affectation, of sacrificing profound substance to superficial artifice. Findley has inevitably suffered this fate. Arguing that some subjects "have a built-in intransigence to literary treatment," Michael Taylor, reviewing *The Wars*, reasons that, because Findley "realizes he's dealing with intractable material, . . . he camouflages the fiction of his story by pretending that the novel is a species of historical document."³² At the same time that he accuses Findley of disguising fiction as history, Taylor illogically explains Findley's failure in *The Wars* by referring us to "the clipped, portentous style" and the fact that this "Hemingwayesque style pitches over into sentimentality."

Nice work if you can get it — but few of us can, both have our critical cake and eat it. In the first place, Findley's style is not like Hemingway's, which may be "clipped" but, if clipped, is not "portentous." In the second, Findley's very conscious development and deployment of style draws attention to the fact that what we are reading *is* fiction, just as his narrative dislocations compel acknowledgement of the imaginative process by which the fiction is brought into being. From his earliest story to his most recent novel, Findley has worked toward perfecting a style that is unmistakably his own — a marvellous mixture of the lyric and dramatic that can be put to narrative purposes. A simple example from "About Effie" comes at the end of a scene in which the mysterious maid tells Neil Cable about the man she's waiting for to come and carry her off. A thunderstorm is in progress, which precipitates Effie's telling about the man: "There has to be thunder, or he won't come." The scene ends as follows:

And it rained and it rained and it rained.
But there was no more thunder.
That was over.

The short sentences and abbreviated paragraphs are characteristic. They function in a number of ways: they isolate actions, events, thoughts, emotions, images, or whatever Findley wants to focus on; by isolating an "object" and forcing the

reader to focus on it in a single sentence (which may be a single word — “Pegasus”), in a single paragraph, the reading process is slowed down and becomes like a replay (in reverse) of the writing process. When the process is slowed down, the reader’s attention is intensified (as in the crucial scenes of Wagner’s music-drama, as in arias in general). The movement is clearly toward that *stillness* (or *status* as Kenneth Burke calls it in his *Grammar of Motives*) which characterizes the lyric poem. This is one reason why Findley, at his most characteristic, is less like Hemingway than like Woolf.

At its most exaggerated (as in “Losers, Finders: Strangers at the Door”), Findley’s style may well prove off-putting (or even offensive) to those who pride themselves on plain-speaking, who prefer Bacon to Lamb, Austen to C. Brontë, Huxley to Carlyle. The concentrated passages of repetition, alliteration, compound epithets, self-conscious puns (often very funny), internal rhymes, line-breaks, and diverse typographical devices are all guaranteed to draw a great deal of attention to themselves. In “Losers, Finders,” published in 1975, Findley was undoubtedly testing himself, stretching his style to extremes to see just how much strain it could take, before embarking on *The Wars*. At its most effective, as in *The Wars*,³⁴ it still draws attention to itself, but this is precisely what Findley wants since his major thematic concern is the necessity of getting attention and the dangers of both getting and failing to get it. In *The Wars*, the stylistic devices are less obtrusive because more subtly paced and varied, and because the style itself wholly absorbs narrative and dramatic purposes as well as achieving a lyric intensity in the expression of moods, emotions and states of mind.

Speaking of style, Frye states that in “all literary structures we are aware of a quality that we may call the quality of a verbal personality or a speaking voice.” Sometimes, when this quality is felt to be “the voice of the author himself, we call it style: *le style c’est l’homme*.” In the novel, however, the author has “to speak with the voice of the internal characters . . . and sometimes dialogue and narrative are so far apart as to divide the book into two different languages.” The suiting of style to “internal characters or subject” Frye calls “decorum”; and drama he defines as “epos or fiction absorbed by decorum” — or a suitable style. Much about Findley’s style may fairly be called *dramatic*; it has been shaped by his writing of many dramas for radio and television, as well as for the stage; by his dramatization of both fiction (the *Whiteoaks* series) and non-fiction (*The National Dream*); and by his early career as an actor. But Findley’s theatrical and dramatic talents tend toward the operatic, toward music-drama, a combination of words (or lyrics) and music — and spectacle on a grand scale which, in terms of writing, *is* style. Even suicide and assassination, the new art forms according to Jamie Taylor and his friends, should be undertaken “with style.” Certainly, opera goes in for life, love and, above all, death, on a grand scale (the fiery

finales of *Die Walküre* and *Gotterdammerung* have a certain Findleyesque quality about them).

The ultimate irony of Findley's operatic style, his dramatic and often violent stories, his preference for what Browning calls "the dangerous of things" — that borderland between sanity and insanity, between the beautiful and sinister, between political issues and private problems, between social satire and psychological exploration, between dramatic spectacles and lyrical revelations, between story-telling pictures and silent images, between prose and poetry — is that, while Browning believed the lad astride the chimney-stack was a sure attention-getter whom we "must watch" (in contrast to lads who "walk the street / Sixty the minute"), Findley has rarely (if ever) received the kind of attention he merits. He has, rather, been largely ignored by reviewers and critics alike. He has, like the Cassandra of Canadian novelists, too often spoken without being listened to. This is a sad irony since, again and again, his fictions display the disastrous consequences of not paying attention — consequences that involve not only those who, like lonely children, are never loved enough to be seen and heard, but also those (like the Trojans) who have never cared enough to look or listen or mark Cassandra's words. Iris Pengelli, the psychiatrist in *Other People's Children* (a TV drama written in 1978),³⁵ works with autistic children who live alone "in their ultra-ordered private worlds": "These are all "my children." . . . All of them — *look* — are wearing masks. Anger. Fear. Hatred. Single emotions dominate their whole lives'" (*italics mine*). Dr. Pengelli has a favourite, Jeremy, whom she cannot reach; he starves himself to death. But, as a favour to a friend, she also works with Erin Foley, a teen-ager whose mother has died, who has been raped by her father, and lived most of her young life in foster-homes. In one of the last sequences in the drama, Pengelli confronts Erin: "Look at me," she says. "Tell me what you see." Erin answers, "An old woman." Pengelli presses, "But who?" "You," says Erin, refusing to name names. Two sequences are superimposed in the final minutes of the teleplay. Erin, looking in a mirror as she makes up her face, recalls the first sequence in which she was arrested. A policeman is asking her name, age, address, and demanding identification:

ERIN: (VOICE OFF)

Me. Okay? I'm here ain't I? You got to know where I come from? I was found in a brown paper bag.

FREEZE FRAME.

HOLD.

PENGELLI:

Tell me what you see.

The FREEZE FRAME MELTS and becomes the PHOTOGRAPH of EILEEN MARY [Erin's mother] holding ERIN as a BABY — with FOLEY [Erin's father] standing with them. SMILING.

ERIN: (v.o.)

Me.

HOLD.

FADE OUT.

The prerequisite for any answer to the question, "Can you see me yet?" is that the asker know and be able to acknowledge self. The prerequisite for any answer to the question, "Can we see Findley yet?" is that the asker be able to *see* and *hear* Findley, and be willing to *mark his words*. And name names.

NOTES

- ¹ Since Findley's work has been paid little serious attention and is less known than it deserves to be, it seems reasonable to provide the following basic checklist of his writings to date. Unfortunately, even after consulting with Mr. Findley (who has been most generous in taking time to answer my questions and furnish me with information), and with the CBC, it has not been possible to track down details of all the scripts written for radio. Major scripts for television are listed since Findley insists that "television scripts are important to me as a writer — especially if I am given freedom in subject matter and style (as opposed to being commissioned to write a particular story for a particular series). I look upon *Other People's Children* and a mini-series of three ninety-minute dramas called *Songs* (currently in progress) as [as] important as any of my fiction work" (letter to John Hulcoop, June 4th, 1980). The article itself reveals the importance of Findley's work for radio (audiences who listen) and for television (audiences who look) in relation to his plays (audiences who look and listen) and to his prose works (readers who mark his words). The list is in chronological order, each item briefly classified in terms of form.

"About Effie" (short story), *Tamarack Review*, 1 (Autumn 1956); "War" (short story): *CBC Anthology* (1957/58?); "T. E. Lawrence" and "Sherwood Anderson" (scripts for radio), CBC (early 1960's); *The Last of the Crazy People* (novel) (London: Macdonald, 1967); *The Paper People* (film script for TV), CBC (1967); *The People on the Shore* (drama script for radio) CBC (late 1960's or early 1970's); *The Butterfly Plague* (novel) (New York: Viking, 1969); *Don't Let the Angels Fall* (film script), NFB (1969); "ERA" (short story), *Cavalier*, 20, No. 6 (April 1970); "Gold," "River Through Time," and "Missionaries" (scripts for radio), *CBC Ideas* (1971-73); "The Journey" (script for radio, winner of the Armstrong Award), CBC (1971); *Whiteoaks of Jalna* (7 scripts for TV), CBC (1971-72); "Sometime, Later, Not Now" (short story), *New Orleans Review*, 3, No. 1 (1972); *Eleven Canadian Novelists* (interview with Graeme Gibson) (Toronto: Anansi, 1973); *Conversations with Canadian Novelists* (interview with Donald Cameron) (Toronto: Macmillan, 1973); "Hello Cheeverland, Goodbye" (short story), *Tamarack Review*, 64 (November 1974); "The Book of Pins" (short story), *New Canadian Stories* 74 (Ottawa: Oberon, 1974); "Losers, Finders: Strangers at the Door" (short story), *New Canadian Stories* 75 (Ottawa: Oberon, 1975); *The National Dream* (8 scripts for TV, with William Whitehead; winner of an Actra Award), CBC (1975); *Can You See Me Yet?* (play), produced at the National Arts Centre (1976) (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1977); *The Wars* (novel, winner of the Governor-General's Award and the City of Toronto Book Award) (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin, 1977); *The Newcomers, 1832 and 1911* (2 drama scripts for TV), CBC (1978-79); *John A. — Himself!* (play), produced at Theatre London (1979); *Dieppe 1942* (script for TV documentary, with Wil-

- liam Whitehead), CBC (1979); "Harper's Bazaar" (short story), *Exile*, 7, Nos. 1 & 2 (Autumn 1980); *Other People's Children* (drama script for TV), CBC (1980); *Songs* (3 drama scripts for TV), CBC (1980); *Famous Last Words* (novel) (Toronto: Clarke Irwin, 1981).
- ² Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (London and New York: Oxford, 1973) p. 95; Sontag, *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (New York: Dell, 1966), pp. 3-14; Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1967), pp. 209-10. See also Hirsch's *The Aims of Interpretation* (Chicago and London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1976).
- ³ The narrowness of Hirsch's "subjective stance" on this issue is perhaps best illustrated by reference to the interdisciplinary conference held in 1981 at the University of California at Davis on "The Literary Unconscious," at which Jonathan Culler delivered a paper on "Textual Self-Consciousness and the Textual Unconscious."
- ⁴ Translated by Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), pp. 4-5. Compare Barthes' "everything signifies ceaselessly and several times" with Michael Riffaterre's discussion of *parallelism*, "the basic relationship underlying poetry. Of course, since language is a system made up of several levels superimposed one on top of the other . . . parallelism manifests itself on any level: so then, a poem is a verbal sequence wherein the same relations between constituents are repeated at various levels and the same story is told in several ways at the same time and at several times in the same way." "Describing Poetic Structures: Two Approaches to Baudelaire's *les Chats*," in *Structuralism*, edited with an Introduction by Jacques Ehrmann (New York: Doubleday, 1970), p. 189.
- ⁵ See Graeme Gibson, *Eleven Canadian Novelists* (Toronto: Anansi [1973]), p. 130.
- ⁶ Donald Cameron, *Conversations with Canadian Novelists* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1973), p. 54.
- ⁷ *The Poetics of Prose*, translated by Richard Howard (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1977), p. 205.
- ⁸ Though pure speculation, it is possible that Findley's preoccupation with the necessity of paying attention may have been reinforced in the course of his career as both actor and dramatist by the remembrance (conscious or unconscious) of the most famous line in Arthur Miller's 1949 play, *Death of a Salesman*: "Attention must be paid."
- ⁹ In view of Cassandra Wakelin's failed dream of going to China and becoming a missionary, it may be relevant to remember that her Greek prototype broke her word to Apollo. When he tried to seduce her, Cassandra asked Apollo for the gift of prophecy as the price of her sexual favours. Having received the gift, she refused her favours. Apollo spat in her mouth (or licked her lips) and so rendered her gift a curse: no one would listen to her or pay her any attention.
- ¹⁰ See R. D. Laing, *The Divided Self: An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness* (1960; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), pp. 39-61.
- ¹¹ But not published until 1980.
- ¹² *The Politics of Experience & The Bird of Paradise* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), p. 32.
- ¹³ See also Cameron, pp. 52-53: "The lack of security is that you're sitting alone and you can't verify anything that you feel with anyone. . . . You can only consult yourself on these matters. No one in the whole world understands you as you are in the process of creation. There's no way anyone *can* understand, because you can barely understand yourself."

- ¹⁴ *The Paper People* was telecast on December 6th, 1967. I have worked with a photocopy of the author's own script, for which I thank him.
- ¹⁵ "Hello Cheeverland, Goodbye," *Tamarack Review*, 64 (November 1974), 26.
- ¹⁶ "What Cheever should you read? All of him! Or, more practically, *Bullet Park*. My story's epigraph is taken from it, and the story is a response to it. Cheever is the American writer I most admire, next to Thornton Wilder." Timothy Findley, in a letter to John Hulcoop (4 June 1980).
- ¹⁷ Earth and air are similarly paralleled. While men die in the mud — "Their graves, it seemed, just dug themselves and pulled them down" — an officer is killed when he steps outside "for a breath of air." The breath of air had blown his head off."
- ¹⁸ Christopher Scott provides a splendid example of the reader who does not read carefully enough (or pay the text close enough attention) but who is allowed (by his editors) to sit in judgment on current Canadian writers. In his review of *The Wars*, Scott informs us that the narrative is "arranged by a present day 'archivist' (*she* is never named, and *is unimportant* to the story as such)" *Books in Canada*, 6, No. 8 (October 1977), 8-9.
- ¹⁹ "Robert looked along at Captain Rodwell. He too was strange. (We're all strange, Robert thought. Everyone is strange in a war I guess. *Ordinary* is a myth.)" See also what Marian Turner says: "'Well. It was the war that was crazy, I guess. Not Robert Ross or what he did. . . we all went mad. . . I've been through it all, you know. . . — the whole of this extraordinary century — and it's not the extraordinary people who've prevailed upon its madness. Quite the opposite. Oh — far from it! It's the *ordinary* men and women who've made us what we are. Monstrous, complacent and mad.'"
- ²⁰ See the interview with Gibson, pp. 125-26, 142-46; and the interview with Cameron, pp. 50-51, 57-59, 60-62.
- ²¹ Note the ambiguity of the two verbs here: *to breathe* followed by an adverbial phrase; *to breathe in* followed by a noun-phrase, object of the verb.
- ²² This whole passage, describing Harris's progress towards death, is worth comparing with Pratt's seminal poem, "Silences," with Margaret Atwood's "This is a photograph of Me," Phyllis Webb's "A Tall Tale" and the section of D. G. Jones' *Butterfly on Rock* entitled "The Sleeping Giant," partic. pp. 19-22.
- ²³ *The Psychoanalysis of Fire*, translated by Alan C. Ross, and with a Preface by Northrop Frye (1964; Boston: Beacon, 1969), p. 7. This book was originally published in France in 1938, at which time, as Etienne Gilson points out, it caused quite a stir among scholars. It was the first of Bachelard's many famous books, the "ultimate import" of which had not, in 1963, "been fully realized." See Gilson, in the "Foreword" to Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon, 1969), pp. xiii-xix.
- ²⁴ Significantly, Pegasus, meaning "of the wells" (and alluded to in a single-word sentence — *The Wars*, p. 82 — in a passage quoted above, the passage that provides the water parallel to Findley's "fiery image") was fathered by Poseidon on the Medusa. The Medusa, in turning people to stone with her terrible stare, is a dramatization of what Laing, in his chapter on "Ontological insecurity," calls "petrification," one of the "three forms of anxiety encountered by the ontologically insecure" — the other two being "engulfment" and "implosion." Laing defines the term as a "particular form of terror, whereby one is petrified." Fire reduces art and life itself to ashes. Ashes are, for Findley, the ultimate symbol of emptiness (*The Paper People*, Introduction), and an overwhelming feeling of emptiness is what those who suffer implosion experience.

- ²⁵ "Ultimately, the narrative has no *object*; the narrative concerns only itself: *the narrative tells itself*" (Barthes, in *S/Z*, p. 213). "The theme of the *Odyssey* is the narrative forming the *Odyssey*, it is the *Odyssey* itself" (Todorov, in *The Poetics of Prose*, p. 63. See also pp. 72-73). "In all literary verbal structures the final direction of meaning is inward. . . . Whenever we have an autonomous verbal structure, we have literature" (Frye, in *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*, Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1957, p. 74). "Literature shapes itself, and is not shaped externally: the forms of literature can no more exist outside literature than the forms of sonata and fugue and rondo can exist outside music" (Frye, p. 97).
- ²⁶ *Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 267. Italics mine.
- ²⁷ For a more extensive analysis of *The Butterfly Plague* see my entry on Findley in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, to be published by B.C. Research and the Gale Publishing Company.
- ²⁸ The distinction alluded to above is that made by Artaud between theatre based on a written text, in which the director and actors feel it their obligation to reconstruct the dramatist's text, and theatre not based on such a text: what Artaud envisaged as "the theatre of cruelty." See *The Theatre and Its Double* (London: Calder & Boyars, 1970).
- ²⁹ Written for William Hutt who played the title role in the London Theatre production, directed by Peter Moss, which opened on January 31st, 1979. I have worked from a photocopy of the "SCRIPT AS PERFORMED ON OPENING NIGHT."
- ³⁰ *Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, with an Introduction by Vyvyan Holland (London: Collins, 1966), p. 1205.
- ³¹ Frye, *Creation and Recreation* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1980); Sontag, "On Style" and "Notes on 'Camp,'" in *Against Interpretation*.
- ³² See also, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, translated with an Introduction by Reginald Snell (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1965), pp. 124 ff.
- ³³ *Fiddlehead*, 118 (Summer 1978), pp. 172-74.
- ³⁴ See, for example, the first forty pages of Part One; the first twenty pages of Part Three, which recount Robert's attempt to establish a gun-emplacement in the crater; and Section Five in Part Five, which describes Robert's traumatized reaction to the gang rape.
- ³⁵ I worked from a photocopy of the "SECOND DRAFT — SEPT. 25, 1978."

AT THE BACK OF OUR MINDS

John Barton

This is for those who are at peace
with failure
who have achieved a complete
incompleteness
and live without form

POEM

They melt through walls
we have built to contain them
flicker across mirrors
in our brains while we sleep
As we wake
they slip through
even the most
skin-tight of dreams

And this is for the fear
of losing myself
in the glass while I shave
my razor cutting
deeper deeper
How can I watch my features
unravel under the bright
edge of the blade
When will my skin peel back
reveal nothing

And this is for those who refuse
the absence that stares
out of the mirror
at them
for those who clothe its transparent
skeleton in taffeta
manners stored in cellophane
at the back of their minds
As I disappear into the grasp
of my mirror their harlequin
colours are trapped
in it and jar me
awake

Each poem is a layer of skin
shed the moment i stop
probing what is in me
that wants

to escape judgment.

INTERVIEW WITH TIMOTHY FINDLEY

Alison Summers

AS: Readers will be interested in the fact that you began your career as an actor. When was that?

TF: I began professionally about 1949. I was part of a generation of actors who have all done pretty well. Bill Hutt, Charmion King, Kate Reid, and emerging at the same time, Chris Plummer and Barry Morse. It was a very live period in theatre because all this energy came back to it from the war. The war handed us new definitions.

There was a great resurgence of creative playwriting — particularly in the States, with Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller. Here theatre manifested itself mainly at an amateur level. Hart House Theatre was doing marvellous things under Robert Gill, who had access to all the extraordinary people I've just mentioned. He gave them a showcase situation where they could shine. It was the Golden Age of Canadian radio. Andrew Allen had a series called *CBC stage* which produced a whole flock of playwrights and actors. In the early fifties, you felt that a new generation of actors had *bang* arrived, and there was an excitement to it. Then television happened in 1952/53, and then Stratford.

AS: Were you involved with Stratford?

TF: Yes. Cecil Clark, who was one of Guthrie's deputies, came over here before Guthrie arrived to cast. Cecil Clark saw me playing Marchbanks on television. That was when I got lucky. I'll never forget that first meeting at Stratford, when about 85 actors, drawn from across the country, sat down in a room with Tyrone Guthrie, Alec Guinness, and Irene Worth, and read through *Richard III*, the first play done there. The feeling was absolutely electric. It was as though in one moment we realized that a new kind of theatre was being born. And it was going to happen because we were ready; we had done our work. At the time, Alec Guinness, who became my mentor, gave me a book. In the flyleaf was written: "The readiness is all." Later I went to England with Guinness — as his protégé — and worked there for several years.

AS: In England I believe that you toured with *The Matchmaker*.

TF: Yes. Tyrone Guthrie directed that, too. It was a great romp, a masterpiece of crazy, written by Thornton Wilder. The other bonus was watching Ruth

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Gordon, as Dolly Levi, perform. She had a speech at the end of the play which is a summing up, which she did alone on the stage. I watched her virtually every night for two and a half years, and it was never the same twice. She has a true genius.

That was really when I began writing seriously. I left the production to play Osrice in the Scofield *Hamlet* directed by Peter Brook, which went to Russia, and then I rejoined *The Matchmaker* after that.

AS: Didn't Ruth Gordon influence your decision to become a writer?

TF: Yes. I wrote something specifically for Ruth. We had been to an exhibition of paintings in Manchester, all done by people under thirty years of age. I was in my twenties then. When we came out, Ruth asked me "Why are you people so damned negative about everything? All those pictures were black, depressing, ugly. Can't you say *yes* to anything?" Aloud I said to her, "I don't think we're negative, Ruth." I had an argument, or rather a pleasant conversation, with her. Secretly I decided, "I'll prove that we're not." I went back to my digs and I wrote a story. I didn't have a typewriter, so I wrote it out again by hand and gave it to her. It was a story called "About Effie," about one of the maids who worked at our house when I was a kid. The next day I got word from Ruth's dresser to go and see her. Ruth was sitting in the room crying, and she threw her arms around me and said, "Oh Tiffy, you really shouldn't be acting at all; you should be writing." (Which is a lovely thing to be told when you want to be an actor.) But anyway, that was the beginning. Ruth gave me an old typewriter that she and Garson had. They had my story typed, and they asked me to give them anything else I had written. Then they showed it to Thornton Wilder.

AS: What was his reaction?

TF: He had me up to his Savoy hotel room. I was very poor in those days. I think I got about seven pounds a week, and being a very nerve-ridden person, I spent all my money on drink and cigarettes, instead of food. I had one frayed blue suit which I used to wear everywhere. I must have looked pretty bad, because Thornton Wilder felt he had to feed me. He ordered up this incredible meal. I sat eating this meal while Wilder, who had astonishing eyes behind glasses, paced the room. He said: "Findley, you're the real thing. There aren't many, so I feel obliged to do something about you. On the assumption that we both know that you're the real thing, I'm going to talk to you as an absolute professional. That was the worst story I have ever read in my life." He tore it to shreds. Ultimately I wrote a play, which he also tore to shreds: "pompous," "stop preaching," "you're not old enough to write these things, you haven't had enough experience." He was always very tough — as tough as they come — but always very encouraging. We would talk for hours and destroy things in the

fireplace. I'd think: "Why does he keep telling me that I can write, if he destroys everything I do?" But he was right. He made me very conscious that if I had the real gift, then I had no right not to fulfill it. I never really lost touch with him.

Ultimately, he became so ill he didn't move out of his home. Towards the end of his life I remember two or three times when I had arranged to visit him, and his sister would call and say: "Thorny says 'don't come.' He just can't face it." It was partly psychological, too. The end of his life was awful. He felt that he had been forgotten and that nobody gave a damn. Someone had just written a biography which tore him to shreds. That was the last thing he was aware of.

AS: How many years after that first meeting with Wilder did you decide to leave acting, and give your full attention to writing?

TF: Well, it seemed like a long time afterwards, but it really wasn't. I met Thornton Wilder in 1955, and in 1962 I gave up my acting career.

AS: You stayed in Hollywood after the North American tour of *The Matchmaker* finished?

TF: Yes, that was in 1957. I decided to stay in Hollywood, to try my luck at anything. Ruth wanted me to go on writing. After the opening night of *Anne Frank*, which Garson Kanin was directing, we all went off to dinner. I sat beside Ruth, who said "Now dear, we'll be leaving soon, so you and I won't be seeing each other for a while. I know that you haven't any work at the moment, and because I want you to go on writing, I'd like you to take this." She gave me an envelope. Inside were five cheques, all post-dated — one a month, \$100 each. And in those days that was money you could really live on. I said, "What do I do? How do I . . .?" I literally meant "how do I repay you?" It worried me terribly, because this was Hollywood, and I desperately wanted to make my own way. There was a moral edge to the profession; it was wrong to accept money that wasn't a salary. So Ruth said, "Accept it on this basis: I have taken an option on the first good thing you write." So that is the basis on which it was done.

AS: Do you think that your experiences as an actor proved valuable when you began to write for the stage?

TF: Yes, and valuable for prose, too. The major things I got from acting that are pertinent to writing are a sense of rhythm and a sense of cadence — an awareness of what the tongue can and cannot cope with. About two months ago I was reading Albee's *A Delicate Balance*, and it came to me in a blinding flash that all dialogue that works, all the best dialogue, has a similar ring — the way in which words are combined sinks them into the listener's ear. The curtain goes up, and you hear people speaking, and immediately there seems to be a kind of confidence to the delivery. A Euripidean messenger starts talking, and you know from the rhythm of the speech that you're hearing the real thing, not someone

fumbling for words. That follows all the way through Shakespeare and other great writers.

When plays don't work, it is very often because the actors couldn't find their way through the words which the writer had put on the page. When I watch rehearsals of something I've written, I can tell if the dialogue is right or wrong through watching the actors — what they do with it, how they take off on it or respond to it, what rhythms have been given. When my writing is right, that's how I know it's right — through watching the actors take off. Rhythm falls from actors instinctively, as if it's the most natural thing in the world. It may be that they simply sense the natural time to breathe.

That's one thing about dialogue that I've learned from my experiences in the theatre. The other thing I've learned was expressed one day when I was listening to Robin Phillips talk about an adaptation of *Camille* which he was directing at Theatre London. He said, "If the stage business and the moves aren't implicit in the dialogue, there is no way that they can ever be done right." That's true. You cannot make me pick up that cup in the right way if it isn't in the dialogue, if you haven't built in the moment. There will be no way that I can pick it up without knocking it over, or having to cross the stage awry, or having to manipulate something to one side. It can never be made graceful or right. Those things all have to flow through a single line. A play is a total unfolding of one line. Screen writing and television are the same. That's also what makes fiction work: when it all flows along without jarring you.

I was a very clumsy person on the stage. Directors and actors were always complaining: "you're so clumsy." So I became supersensitive to the flow of things: how you manage a line so that it really does deliver you to that cup at exactly the right moment.

AS: Do you find it an advantage that through writing television plays you are able to reach more people than you could otherwise do in the theatre?

TF: Outside the prose, my strongest bid is for the theatre. In television I think that the most people I've ever been seen by as a playwright is about two million. That's very gratifying, but I don't feel any different about touching two million people through television than I do about touching eighty in a small theatre. Touching those eighty has the additional bonus that they were there when it happened; they were part of it. I can't believe that isn't important. I once heard a singer say, "I used to only be able to sing to 500 people at a time. Now I can sing to millions on just one occasion." And I thought, "How disappointing."

AS: To have only that one occasion?

TF: Yes. Contact is what performers are really about. That's the value of the theatre, and what keeps it alive. Part of the excitement of the live theatre is

taking that chance. No matter how long a play has run, or how many different productions it has been given, there is this marvellous feeling of the *daring* of being there. What can go wrong? What can go right? What magic can happen? Well, forget it in television. The magic is all calculated. Sometimes it's calculated out of existence. Another thing about television is that once it's done, it's done forever. I don't like that either.

These are the things I *don't* like about television and film. I would rather reach my five million piece by piece in the theatre than in one fell swoop through television. There's something magical about that damned curtain going up, that feeling in your stomach as you wonder what is going to happen here. One cannot make that happen anywhere else. It's this daring I've been talking about. The danger of failure is built into a theatrical situation — it's real in the theatre. In television and film it isn't and can't be real. You've got to trick it somehow.

AS: Some of the critics gave you rather a hard time with *Can You See Me Yet?*, when it was performed at the National Arts Centre in 1976. Perhaps because it is rather a unique play in Canadian drama.

TF: The three Ottawa newspaper critics hated it. It was not just that they didn't think it was a good play; they really couldn't cope with it. They were rebelling against what they could not understand and yet should have been able to understand. But the audiences got it. They understood that Cassandra comes in and hands out lives to people who have lost certain aspects of life while gaining others. She gives them another person to be, another aspect of themselves, or she reminds them of that aspect of themselves. Each person plays two people. The critics couldn't cope with that. And yet down the hall and up the stairs, they coped with Lily Tomlin, who would walk out on to the stage and without any more indication than turning upstage before she turned back and faced them, she was twenty people.

The world of criticism is one of the realities you have to learn to live with. From that experience I took a big step forward in being able to cope with it.

AS: Did you work in collaboration with the actors and director?

TF: Yes. In fact I had the classic situation of not knowing how to end the play. Edward Atienza's marvellous and creative performance as Doberman gave me the suggestion of what to do: Cass running to the edge of the stage, and Doberman, who has been silent throughout, crying "Don't."

Actually I have the reverse problem to most playwrights, who can't write a second or third act. My problem is that I can't write a first act. I don't know why. I remember thinking after I had finished writing this play, "The first act is terrific." I didn't know about the second act. Then I gave the play to the actors, and the second act, except for the very end as I mentioned, played like a dream. The first act was the one they had difficulty with.

AS: Another play, *John A. — Himself*, was produced in 1978 at Theatre London. How did you structure that play? Tell us something about it.

TF: It's about the first prime minister of this country. I presented his life as if it had taken place in the Victorian theatre. The first act is a series of turns: the opposition party is presented as a bunch of acrobats, the press comes across as a ventriloquist's act, and there are numerous other people who come out looking like John A. Macdonald. The final turn — the confrontation with Riel — is a pantomime-cum-circus act. Acrobats are constructing a railroad. Riel is a man with a pea-shooter who is on a trapeze; he stops all this. John A. Macdonald is flown up on his harness, and he confronts Riel up in the air over the map of Canada, knocking him down. This seems merely a theatrical gesture, then suddenly Riel rises back up again swinging from the noose, and it all becomes horrifyingly real.

The second act then becomes an acknowledged melodrama, which is what the second part of an evening of Victorian theatre always was. Everybody had separate stages. Downstage from Macdonald's stage, which was the largest, was total reality, where Macdonald walked in front of a cloth and talked to the audience. Then he would return to his platform and do his other numbers.

AS: Is Tennessee Williams a playwright who has influenced you?

TF: Oh yes.

AS: I asked that question because Cassandra seems very much to follow the Williams tradition of heroines — damaged and delicate people, like Blanche DuBois and Laura Wingfield, who retreat inwards from the brutality of the world.

TF: Yes, and I think whatever hardness Cass has too, the ironic, cynical side of her, is also like that in some of Tennessee Williams' women. There is a very good reason for that. I first became aware of what the theatre really meant to me at the same moment that Williams was emerging as a playwright. That particular play *Streetcar* had an enormous impact on me. The other playwright who has been a tremendous influence is Thornton Wilder. I did two of his plays when they were new. I also did *Our Town*, and I had long conversations with him. I learned a lot about writing under his tutelage. He, too, has that master rhythm I was talking about. There is a scene in *Our Town* where two women sit stringing beans with their hands into a bowl. They're talking about the most mundane things, and by the time that scene is over, the audience is inevitably in tears. Just two women sitting on the back porch of a house somewhere. How did he do that? The book I'm finishing now is greatly influenced by the way he deals with historical material in his book *The Ides of March*, which is his version of the assassination of Julius Caesar.

AS: What other dramatic material have you been working on recently?

TF: I've done a television drama called *Other People's Children*. I like it so much that I've thought about turning it into a play. It's about a 15-year-old girl who has spent all her life in foster homes, and it concerns those totally unscrupulous people who make a business out of what is in essence *renting* children from the Children's Aid Society. They treat these children like commodities. A marvellous young actress was found to play the part.

At the moment I'm working on three ninety-minute dramas which really constitute one long play. It's set between the years 1914 and 1919, so it covers the same period as my book *The Wars*, although it is unrelated to it. It's about a family living in Toronto, and what the consequences of having passed through that period of time does to them as a family. When you first meet them they're very happy, and the future looks good. Then the war begins. The father decides that he can make money out of the war, but in so doing he moves against his own integrity; this ultimately destroys him. The mother doesn't want her son to go to war. She becomes protective in a new way, and that relationship drifts in a bad direction. The theme basically revolves around how people use one another — as well as events and crises — to get what *they* want. That is inevitably destructive for everyone.

AS: Do you have any regrets about giving up your acting career?

TF: Oh yes, very much. My biggest regret is that I didn't play enough of Chekhov. Also, I think that knowing the kind of actor that I was — and I think it's dumb not to acknowledge that I was a good actor — I could have had a career. I'd never have been a star, not in a thousand years, but I would always have been a useful actor, a good second string — which in a sense is the best thing to be, because you do go on forever — not being dependent on star stuff, you can play anything.

The playwrights I missed out on altogether were Pinter and Albee. I have an instinct for that kind of playwriting. I know I had the talent to deliver something of what they're writing about. I would have loved to play George in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* I'd love to be able to do plays like *No Man's Land* when I'm older. The other aspect of my acting career is that I had just begun to flower. If I had continued acting, it would have been the next ten years — between fifty and sixty — that I would really have hit what was naturally mine. That's when you're learning, building in terms of who you are. And I regret that terribly. But I don't regret having made the choice to write at all. There's nothing negative about that decision. I'm not big enough to encompass both things. I don't know how Coward managed to do it.

A 0% CHANCE

(A Refuge in the crawlspace)

Ron Charach

Early morning wakening
with the cat still fading in the frame,
— climb down to face the sink,
then to slaver and nick till smooth,
the wife still deep in cotton,
— it climbs down through her bronchial tubes,
till she sputters.

This is a day with a 0% chance of rain,
a weekend-day with a summer cold
and ambition iced like some kid's crazy plans.
The darkest part of the house
is always the crawlspace under the basement stairs;
find an early-morning spider there,
refugee from the brightness;
sit there quiet as a secret,
rehearsing my next infidelity.

8:00. Manhattan. Sardi's. will be wearing an orange top.
not for long.

How could she, sleeping up the stairs
and fanning her nails in her dreams, suspect
that Captain Hubby is growing like a morning mould;
even the summer-sky of Westchester
won't subdue him this time
with reasons.

RESTAURANT AUSTERITY POEM

Ron Charach

An early morning greeting tips the hotel,
the hotel smiles,
taking stock in the too-crowded room:
suede napkins on a leather table,
the thick brown pile climbing up the waitresses
who never showed,

And the bearded man from the manor
 has to do it all myself!
 I approach my deep black jacket
 with tan pants softening the shock
 for this relief crew,
 nervous as a part of me;
 I shut them out and hit the eggs.
 — Two, please,
 — Waiter, Where are my eggs!
 Not on *my* plate.
 The fat woman moans
 her breasts independent as she says
 — Shut up, you electrolyte schoolteacher!
 He has too much conscience for the job.

IF I POKED THIS AIR

Russell Thornton

If I poked this air
 with my finger
 molecules
 almost visible to the eye
 might spread like a pillow
 under a royal head

Stars might slip
 out of fixed positions
 and fall
 into my brain's cup,
 gathering there like secrets

And I might keep
 for a few
 endless distances away
 who leaned at windows
 and wondered,
 word of fortune, news of love

"BRIGHT AND GOOD"

Findley's "The Wars"

Peter Klován

IN A 1971 INTERVIEW with Donald Cameron, Timothy Findley attempted to articulate the theme which obsessed him in his first two novels. "There's always someone," he reflected, "who must do insane things in order to clarify what, for want of better words, is bright and good."¹ This same idea receives its most powerful treatment in his 1977 novel, *The Wars*. Here the device of a story-within-a-story is used to illustrate how a personality transcends elemental forces even while being destroyed by them, and how the value of past experience is a function of the skill with which we recreate it imaginatively, transcending the chaos of time and history. As Findley's narrator realizes, "People can only be found in what they do." His problem in *The Wars* is to understand the actions of Robert Ross, a young Canadian officer, who when caught up in a German offensive during the Great War, tries and fails to save one hundred and thirty horses from being killed. Robert's failure leaves him horribly burned, and in many ways is simply the inevitable outcome of the pattern of futility which characterized his brief life. But if the narrator tends to view his subject in naturalistic terms, as a helpless child overwhelmed by a world charged with sinister forces, he simultaneously reveals a conflicting tendency to see Robert as a tragic hero who dares to challenge the dark necessity of his fate. Almost in spite of himself, the narrator, through his poetic imagination, transcends the limits of his bleak deterministic vision. In the process, Robert's struggle is raised to mythological proportions as a metaphor of fate and man's place in the universe, so that an apparent defeat is turned into a triumph. Indeed, "tragic" is not too strong a term to describe *The Wars*, for, as Richard Chase explains, in *The American Novel and Its Tradition*:

What generates significance in a tragedy is the resistance which a culture and the hero who is its type are able to offer to forces finally beyond human control. And the resistance must be active; it must bring the contradictions of experience to rest, even if at the moment of defeat, in a newly confirmed awareness of man's power of universally significant moral action.

By his positive efforts to save the horses, Robert Ross is able to offer a significant resistance to the horrors around him — so much so that, some sixty years later, people are still alarmed and fascinated by his actions. In the words of one character, he is "un homme unique": "Not your everyday Sergeant York or Billy Bishop.

. . . But a hero nonetheless. You see, he did the thing that no one else would even dare to think of doing."

It is the tension between what I will call "naturalism" and "tragedy" which gives *The Wars* its disturbing power, both as the poignant history of an individual, and as a metaphor of man's conflict with his fate. To show how the narrator resolves this dialectic, it will be useful to examine the opposing tendencies within the novel, beginning with its naturalistic aspects. I will argue that the narrator, haunted by Robert's fiery sacrifice, finally comes to perceive his life as a tragic journey marked by his progressive refinement and destruction by the basic elements: earth, water, air, and fire.

FINDLEY USES THE PERSONA of an intrusive narrator to convey his story to the reader. Living long after Robert's death, the narrator must reconstruct the past out of the raw data of history — letters, clippings, reports, interviews, and photographs. It is the photographs which reveal the human dimensions behind the mere facts, and which the narrator finds most deeply moving. The mass of written records at his disposal is simply words. The photographs show people, the particular moments of their lives captured forever, "5 x 9 and framed in silver." Thus, the narrator begins his search for Robert Ross at the archives with "Boxes and boxes of snapshots and portraits; maps and letters; cablegrams and clippings from the newspapers." "All you have to do," he comments, "is sign them out and carry them across the room. Spread over table tops, a whole age lies in fragments underneath the lamps." Out of these fragments he must reconstruct the story of Robert Ross, and then make that story imaginatively accessible to his readers. Occasionally a particular event eludes him, and he gains our confidence by admitting his limitations — "There is no good picture of this except the one you can make in your mind." In general, however, he does perceive a pattern emerging from the fragments, which he implies by the circular structure of his history. He begins his account with the events just preceding Robert's final act of defiance, and then later repeats these same events almost exactly, shortly before his conclusion. This circular structure parallels his efforts to discover the real Robert Ross out of the circle of events surrounding him: "These are the circles — all drawing inward to the thing that Robert did." Moreover, the structure suggests his conflicting perceptions of Robert, the circular pattern implying not only that no progress is made, but also that Robert's life is part of a continuum including the eternal, cyclic processes of nature.

A cyclic structure precluding progress is characteristic of determinism, a materialistic view of life implicitly denying freedom of choice. This concept of nature as a vast, aimless machine is one that obviously disturbs Findley, for it appears conspicuously in his first two novels. A passage in his first novel, *The Last of the*

Crazy People (1967), foreshadows his concerns in *The Wars*, written ten years later: "As far as heaven was concerned, it was cold and clear, and in Hooker's brain, the stars there made a noise like the humming of electrical machines, and in the whole sky, everything whirled in circles but drifted without plan." In this cold, mechanistic universe, individuals are perceived as mere puppets, their lives bleak and meaningless episodes in the equally meaningless spectacle of Fate. The inevitable effect of this conception on fictional characters has been expressed best by Emile Zola, in his preface (1868) to *Thérèse Raquin*: "I chose characters completely dominated by their nerves and their blood, deprived of free-will, pushed to each action of their lives by the fatality of their flesh."² Often Robert Ross does seem to be simply a creature of "nerves and blood," as he shuffles through his daily routine in an almost catatonic stupor. Thus, we can understand the prostitute's exasperation when he becomes incapable of even speaking to her: "'You're the most serious person I ever met,' said Ella. 'In my whole life I never met a man who didn't say nothin'. 'Cept acourse the Swede. But his tongue was cut out by the In'ians.'" The scene of Robert's departure for the army is an even more tiresome example of the more lifeless aspects of his character. Standing before a large puddle in a pouring rain, he is unable to decide what to do:

Staring down expressionless, he watched as his reflection was beaten into submission by the rain. . . . Then Robert closed his eyes and made his choice. He stepped down into the puddle and stood there.

How could he move?

Rowena [his sister] had been buried the day before.

This scene is also typical of Robert in that he is frequently strait-jacketed by the oppressive limitations of his family, even when they are an ocean away. In this he could be any one of Zola's characters — pawns to the multiple compulsions of heredity, environment, and the pressures of the moment.

In the Darwinized universe of *The Wars*, heredity becomes a variant on evolution within the human realm. The narrator emphasizes that Robert's family is *the* determining influence on his life: "Shuffle these cards and lay them out: this is the hand that Robert Ross was born with. Mister and Mrs. Ross — Peggy and Stuart — rabbits and Rowena." Certainly, the deck is heavily stacked against Robert, for the Ross family is in the tradition of what Findley has called "Southern Ontario Gothic"³ — a family in a state of decline reminiscent of Faulkner's Compsons and Bundrens. An ineffectual father, a brooding, alcoholic mother, and a hydrocephalic sister all combine to limit Robert's potential. Mrs. Ross recalls Robert's habit of falling down as a child, foreshadowing his more serious falls during the war, and his inability to save Rowena's rabbits from his mother's death sentence anticipates his later failure to save the horses. Although mother and son are alienated, a peculiar symbiotic relationship exists between them, for she alone understands what the war will do to her son. In a brilliant scene early

in the novel, she enters the bathroom while Robert is bathing: "Mrs. Ross — closing the toilet seat — sat down. She used the sink as an ashtray, carefully rolling the ashes off along its edge and watching them fall down the porcelain slopes like mountain climbers tumbling to their death. She shivered." As Robert approaches his confrontation with fire and death in the war, Mrs. Ross progressively deteriorates, until *she* is being pushed about in her dead daughter's wheelchair. The dark bedroom where she sits brooding parallels the dark room where Robert is raped; she is blinded by alcohol, he by fire. Even if Mrs. Ross is unable to affect her son's decision to enlist, she does have a profound influence on his view of human relationships. She tells him, "no one belongs to anyone. We're all cut off at birth with a knife and left at the mercy of strangers. You hear that? *Strangers.*" Reflecting the mother's words, there are no happy male-female relationships in Robert's world, and sex is always depressing, when it is not actually disgusting. The characters are isolated, cut-off from each other, as suggested by the imagery of windows. When Robert leaves for overseas, Mrs. Ross does not say good-bye: "Instead, she waved from behind the glass and she watched her boy depart. . . ." Similarly, when Robert leaves England for France, Barbara does not speak to him: "Instead, she stood at the top of the stairs and watched him from behind the glass."

These lonely characters exist in equally bleak environments, of which London in 1916 is typical: "It was like a tunnel through which you walked not knowing your destination. Everyone remained a stranger. At night — the Zeppelins came. There was a sense of silent menace." The numerous parallels between Canada and war-ravaged Europe emphasize that the war is merely the occasion, rather than the cause of Robert's destruction. Everywhere, it seems to be raining — a heavy, unwholesome rain that brings no promise of renewal. Everywhere, too, there are terrible fires: the fires burning in the Ross factories, the fires destroying the Parliament Buildings, the fires turning Flanders into a holocaust. "Horses fell with their bones on fire. Men went blind in the heat." As Robert moves through this fearful world, his immediate environment becomes increasingly claustrophobic, changing from the relative freedom he enjoys on the prairies (as shown by his run with the coyote), to the oppressive squalor of the voyage overseas, to the deadly enclosure of the trenches. Eventually he can no longer even dream, much less run free: "All he wanted was a dream. Escape. But nobody dreams on a battle field. There isn't any sleep that long. Dreams and distances are the same." It is not surprising that people remain "strangers" in these circumstances, for even the simplest action becomes difficult.

Like a child, Robert usually is shown responding to physical forces and the pressures of the moment, rather than acting on the basis of any elaborate plan. Thus, his visit to the brothel is not a success: "Robert had ejaculated coming up the stairs. His body hadn't waited for his mind. It did things on its own."

In a much more important episode, Robert manages to kill a German in spite of his paralyzing inertia:

What happened next was all so jumbled and fast that Robert was never to sort it out. He fell. He turned. He saw the German reaching over the lip of the crater. Something exploded [Robert's pistol]. The German gave a startled cry and was suddenly dead, with his arms dangling down.

Here, Robert doesn't "do" anything. "Something" explodes, and a man is dead. The narrator further emphasizes Robert's child-like qualities with the motif of boys' books which appear frequently throughout the novel. Robert is unable to kill a wounded horse until "he remembered that somewhere in *Chums* — as a boy — he'd seen a picture of a cowboy shooting his horse behind the ear." Later, at Harris's funeral, he doesn't quite know how to behave, being unable to recall a precedent — "not even in *Chums* or Joseph Conrad."

Robert's childish helplessness is stressed further by his affinity and even identity with animals, which are presented throughout *The Wars* as the passive and innocent victims of man's fury. Two of Findley's comments from his interview with Donald Cameron help to illuminate this motif: "I have a motto, which is 'Make peace with nature, now.' I really believe that we're at war with nature, and we have declared war on a defenceless enemy. . . . Perhaps man is almost done evolving. And this in fact is the subject of my next novel."⁴ (The next novel Findley published after this interview was *The Wars*.) Unfortunately, Findley allows his narrator to belabour these two points. Rampant animal imagery seems to appear on every other page, and the human characters are hustled up and down the evolutionary ladder with rather excessive haste. The dog and the horse on the first page, the rabbits in Rowena's cages, the mystic communion with the coyote, and the terrified horses on the ship (to name only a few of the *early* references to animals), all prepare the way for the introduction of the gentle Captain Rodwell, whom Robert meets in the trenches. An illustrator of children's books in his civilian life, Rodwell now operates a miniature "hospital" for injured animals, keeping a bird, a rabbit, a hedgehog and a toad in cages under his bunk. Only the toad manages to survive, but not until numerous parallels are made between Rodwell's animals and Rowena's rabbits, and between frightened animals in general and the soldiers cowering in their trenches. The whole message is pounded home by Rodwell's sketchbooks: "In all of them — on every page, the drawings were of animals. Of maybe a hundred sketches, Robert's was the only human form. Modified and mutated — he was one with the others." The affinity between animal and human becomes most pronounced in times of crisis, and particularly under the stress of sexual desire, as the novel's various violent and unpleasant sex scenes attest. Animals also inevitably appear in the photographs which the narrator examines. In one of these, Robert is holding a frail white object — the skull of some small creature. This skull may well symbolize his

destiny, for it is one of several similar images of the frail and the delicate. Devlin, for example, collects fragments of stained glass. "The fact is, I'm devoted to fragility. Glass has a certain fineness and brittleness that a man with my bones appreciates."

But although there are many delicate objects, animals, and people destroyed in the novel, there are, at the same time, others who endure and even flourish. Lady Juliet, for one, is a survivor: some sixty years after the war she still enjoys her gin and cigarettes. There is also the cat which Marian Turner remembers:

I remember the strangest sight when the raid was over. I'd been hiding under a bed and when I crawled out and stood up I looked down the rows of platforms where the tents had been and there, at the edge of the step, sat a pure white cat we'd had as mascot. It was cleaning its paws! Serenely cleaning its paws. Well . . . life goes on — and a cat will clean its paws no matter what.

This image of serenity amidst holocaust is suggestive of the narrator's tendency to take a transcendent view of Robert's life, a view that co-exists with his bleak, deterministic vision.

DETERMINISM IS A distinctive feature of the naturalistic novel, which chronicles the disintegration of character under the overwhelming pressures of heredity and environment. In Zola's view, the narrator of such a novel should approach the role of a scientist rather than that of an artist: "I am simply an observer who sets down facts."⁵ Yet even Zola was forced to admit that such an ideal condition was impossible, for, unfortunately, the narrator could not be eliminated readily. "Certainly," he wrote gruffly, "a work will never be more than a corner of nature *seen through a temperament*"⁶ (emphasis mine). In their critical introduction to naturalism, Lilian Furst and Peter Skrine summarize Zola's dilemma: "Certain aspects of Naturalist theory, notably the ideal of total objectivity and the 'determined' view of man, quickly proved untenable in practice. The eye of the observer was that of an artist, and his experimental material was the human being in all his irrationality."⁷ Thus, as the narrator of *The Wars* ponders his photographs and sifts through his facts, he allows his imagination to intrude and to create new pictures and events beyond those actually existing:

Robert Ross comes riding straight towards the camera. His hat has fallen off. His hands are knotted to the reins. They bleed. . . . He leaps through memory without a sound. . . . You lay the fiery image back in your mind and let it rest. You know it will obtrude again and again until you find its meaning — here.

"Here" is the imagination, where the "truth" of Robert's life — if it is to be found at all — will be discovered. The narrator's imagination tends to insinuate mythical and poetical images into what would otherwise be a matter-of-fact history. Moreover, as shown by the five-part structure of *The Wars*, and the

allusions to Euripides and Greek mythology, his imagination is inclined towards tragedy, and this predisposition is strengthened by what his sources tell him of Robert. Lady Juliet, his most important informant, remarks, "The thing is not to make excuses for the way you behaved — not to take refuge in tragedy — but to clarify who you are through your response to when you lived." Following Lady Juliet's cue, the narrator comes to see Robert not as a puppet who merely disintegrates, but as a man who exercises his mind and will in a heroic but losing struggle against overwhelming circumstances. These circumstances, or forces, are embodied in the four elements — earth, water, air and fire.

Robert's heroic stature is emphasized by the contrast between himself and Rodwell, Levitt, and Taffler, three officers who all succumb without a struggle to the same forces which Robert attempts to defy. Rodwell kills himself when he is unable to prevent shell-shocked soldiers from roasting little animals alive. Levitt, who places pathetic faith in Clausewitz to see him safely through the war — "the whole war can be carried out as a serious, formal minuet" — goes insane during a massive artillery bombardment. Robert is quite obviously different from these two characters, but his relationship with Captain Taffler is more complex, and more interesting. Resembling "a *Boy's Own Annual* hero," Taffler is already wounded in France and returned to Canada before Robert even enlists. It is not surprising, therefore, that Robert makes Taffler his idol, "the model he could emulate." The two men first meet on the Alberta prairie, where Taffler, accompanied by his horse and dog, is throwing stones at a row of bottles. The encounter ends when Taffler leaves to kill rattlesnakes. This seemingly innocuous episode haunts Robert for the rest of his life, for it often appears that he will be compelled by fate simply to relive Taffler's experiences. Horses and dogs follow Robert everywhere, and he breaks china and glass in times of stress. When he is forced to shoot a crippled horse during the voyage overseas, he begins to hallucinate: "*Snakes. Snakes. Rattlesnakes.* Its mane was a tangle of rattlesnakes." Similarly, both men are involved in violent homosexual encounters; both have affairs with Lady Barbara. But when the two men are badly wounded, the pattern is broken. Taffler loses both arms and tries to kill himself by rubbing the stumps to make them bleed. Although Robert is horribly burned, however, he develops a peculiar serenity, refusing Marian Turner's offer of death. As she remembers, "He might've said 'Yes.' But he said 'Not yet.' *Not yet.* There, in those two words, in a nutshell — you have the essence of Robert Ross. And perhaps the essence of what it is to be alive. *Not yet* has been my motto ever since . . . and here I am." The distinctive quality which enables Robert to attempt to save the horses, and to endure his resultant suffering, is something Findley calls "moral momentum." This phrase appears in his first novel, *The Last of the Crazy People*, in a scene where a character knows something is dreadfully wrong, but is unable to correct it:

She heard the crash upstairs and the voices, but she could not gain the moral momentum to intervene.

Years, and ancestors, leaned in against her.

She thought, "Maybe we should all die. Maybe we should all just be satisfied to die."

In contrast to Rodwell, Levitt, and Taffler, Robert has the moral momentum within himself to overcome his inertia and resist the cumulative pressures around him.

Robert's latent power is evident from his earliest childhood, for although the narrator's world-view is thoroughly Darwinized, his imaginative recreation of Robert's family life includes an underlying myth of Adam and the fall from Eden. As one reviewer has commented, Robert's relationship with his sister is an important key to his character: "Though we have only brief glimpses of her, they are deftly arranged to suggest that a special, world-excluding innocence is shared by the two, an innocence symbolized by the animals they cherish."⁸ Thus, even during one of his worst moments in the trenches, Robert takes pains to save a rat from drowning — a meaningless gesture perhaps — but he cannot help marveling, "*here is someone still alive*. And the word *alive* was amazing." In addition to sharing his sister's compassion, Robert has another, more mysterious strength, as symbolized by his long-distance running. Instinctively as a child he heads for the open spaces of the horizon, and his last act as a soldier is to leave the battlefield, release the horses, and ride for freedom. He justifies this action by claiming its essential sanity: "[Captain] Leather is insane," said Robert flatly. "It cannot be called disobedience to save these animals." His ability to see through the bogus morality which would demand the animals' destruction is a quality he inherits from his mother, whose point-of-view, in Findley's phrase, is "hyper-realistic."⁹ Like Robert, Mrs. Ross is associated with the elements — she takes pleasure in rain and snow — and like Robert, she rejects the mindless optimism which prolonged the war and produced men like Captain Leather. "What does it mean," she wonders, "*to kill your children?* Kill them and then . . . go in there [church] and sing about it! What does that mean?" Mrs. Ross's insight, Rowena's compassion, and Robert's running are all signs of the power which eventually enables him to reveal who he is by his resistance to the war and his endurance of his wounds. Before he can make his testament, however, he must first be refined by a ritual confrontation with the elements, concluding with his ordeal by fire.

THE ELEMENTAL NATURE of Robert's journey through the war is emphasized by the inscription on his gravestone — "EARTH AND AIR AND FIRE AND WATER." Corresponding to the hierarchy associated with the four ele-

ments, Robert's major ordeals occur in distinct stages. First, he almost drowns in the mud at Ypres — trial by earth and water. Next, he barely survives an attack of poison gas — trial by air. Finally, he is horribly disfigured in the burning barn — ordeal by fire. The significance of this progression can be understood if we consider the traditional symbolism of the elements. As explained by J. E. Cirlot, the elements correspond to the three states of matter, plus the agent which enables them to change states: "Earth (or solids), water (or liquids), air (or gas) and fire (the temperature which brings about the transformations of matter) have been conceived in the West from pre-Socratic days onward as the 'Cardinal Points' of material existence, and, by a close parallel, also of spiritual life."¹⁰ In this hierarchy earth and water are regarded as passive, and air and fire as active. Thus, just before Shakespeare's Cleopatra dies, she declares, "I am fire and air; my other elements / I give to baser life." The true hero, and particularly the tragic hero, tends to transcend even air, and to approach the condition of fire, the symbol of the life-process, where, as in a vast conflagration, the whole forever consumes and renews itself. St. Paul suggests this latter idea in a striking image in his epistle to the Hebrews — "our God *is* a consuming fire." Fire, therefore, is the agent of transformation and regeneration, the ultimate stage of the hero's quest. Before it can be reached, however, a sacrificial purification is the necessary intermediate stage. This is why Robert Ross must first undergo his ordeal by the lesser elements.

Robert's first two ordeals are anticipated by earlier events in his life. His near drowning at Ypres is foreshadowed by his run in Alberta with the coyote, which ends (harmlessly) in "a rendezvous with water," and by his voyage overseas, where drowning is an ever-present threat: "In the wind it was minus forty. The only thing they were told about the boats was not to fall out. There was no survival in the water. You died as soon as it reached your skin." These two episodes imply the contrasting connotations of water as a symbol. In its positive characteristics water is the necessary life-force, as emphasized by Harris, who reminds Robert, "We are the ocean — walking on land." Thus, Harris thinks that water is man's proper element, and of all Rodwell's animals, only the toad survives, safe in its pail of water. But when water stands revealed in its destructive aspects it becomes the biblical "water of affliction" (1 *Kings* 22:27) — a force of death and annihilation. At Ypres earth and water combine to trap the unwary, and Robert almost drowns in a sea of mud. In this realm of the dead and the sinister crows who feed on them, immersion in water brings no renewal — men simply disappear into the earth. When Robert is rescued at the last moment, the description implies that the experience has somehow stripped him of some of his human qualities: "A hand fell on his shoulder. Robert yelled and grabbed at it. Bones and claws. It drew away. Robert shuddered. Birds." We are not surprised, therefore, when he reaches the place of his next ordeal by swimming "on his

belly through the mud," signifying that he is, indeed, approaching a more primitive state. His ordeal by air occurs when he is caught in a gas attack while setting up a forward mortar position. By this point, the narrator has already made clear that even the air at Flanders is not to be taken for granted. Introducing Poole, Robert's batman, he remarks, "He'd been assigned to Robert two days after Robert's arrival — his previous officer having been killed when he'd stepped outside one evening 'for a breath of air.' The breath of air had blown his head off." The air becomes still more threatening during the gas attack, which Robert survives by covering his face with a urine-soaked handkerchief, and lying face down in the mud. The episode is filled with imagery of childhood, suggesting that Robert is continuing to regress from his adult state. When the attack is over, he lies completely motionless for three hours. "Then he rolled over with his arms stuck out above his head. He looked like a child about to make 'an angel' in the snow."

By the time Robert is ready to disobey orders the process of reversion and refinement is almost complete: "His body was completely numb and his mind had shrunk to a small, protective shell in which he hoarded the barest essentials of reason." He shoots Captain Leather for preventing his attempts to free horses from a bombardment, tears the lapels from his uniform, and leaves the battlefield. It is only now that he is ready for his final ordeal, the confrontation with fire.

The events occurring between Captain Leather's death and Robert's capture are the most difficult for the narrator (and for the reader) to accept, for if it is understandable that Robert shoots his insane superior officer, it is quite another matter for him to kill Private Cassles, the soldier who attempts to prevent his escape with the horses. This second killing involves Robert in a terrible contradiction — in the very act of defying violence he himself commits a murder. His actions ironically "prove" the novel's epigraph, Clausewitz's assertion that "In such dangerous things as wars the errors which proceed from a spirit of benevolence are the worst." Robert's decision to save the horses is an "error," because in the unreal context of the war, horses simply exist to be killed, and no one should be surprised when they die. Robert's first error leads to his second, the killing of Cassles. Yet as Lady Juliet observes, it is a terrible thing to be unsurprised. She quotes a statement by Siegfried Sassoon, "I still maintain that an ordinary human being has a right to be horrified by a mangled body seen on an afternoon walk," and comments, "So what it was we were denied was to be ordinary. All our ordinary credos and expectations vanished. *Vanished*. There was so much death." Robert's efforts to save the horses are his declaration on behalf of the ordinary, but an insane gesture given the war's logic. Thus, when Robert and the horses are finally surrounded in a barn, Major Mickle decides that because Robert must be mad, he must dispense with both mercy and reason. "That he did so," the narrator comments, "puts the state of his own mind in

question — for what he did cannot be interpreted as being less ‘mad’ than what Robert had done in taking the horses and deserting the battle.” Mickle sets the barn on fire, destroying the horses and badly burning Robert. It is Robert’s last words which seal his fate. “We shall not be taken,” he says, indicating to Mickle that he has an accomplice. To the reader, however, Robert reveals that he has passed beyond the boundaries of the human, and is at last ready for his final ordeal.

Three earlier events in Robert’s life foreshadow his fiery sacrifice. When he is in Kingston, Ontario, on his way to enlist, he is both fascinated and terrified by the locomotive of his train: “The *fire horse*: that’s what the Indians called it. Robert looked to one side from under the peak of his cap, hoping that no one had seen him flinch from the steam or stepping back from the fire.” Symbolically, fire is an instrument of testing — “the fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is” (1 *Corinthians* 3:13) — and at this early stage of his journey Robert is not yet prepared to be tested by the flames. But as he moves closer to his fate, he meets Devlin, the collector of fragments of stained glass. One of these fragments depicts St. Eloi, the patron saint of smiths and metalworkers: “He was working at a forge and held a gigantic ‘butterfly’ in a pair of tongs. The butterfly was rather grotesque and one had to assume that it was such. It was shown as having just been recovered from the flames, in a white hot state.” This grotesque butterfly is the poignant image of what Robert will become when he is pulled from the burning barn, blind and crippled and disfigured beyond recognition. Shortly after the stained glass episode, Robert meets Captain Villiers, who is the *human* symbol of his fate. Villiers was trapped in a fire and his vocal cords destroyed when he swallowed the flames. As Lady Juliet tells the narrator, “Nothing was left of him, you know. Nothing but nerves and pain and his mind. No voice — no flesh. Nothing. Just his *self*.” Fire, then, reduces Villiers to his essential self, suggesting Aristotle’s belief that “the soul is a kind of fire or heat.”¹¹ Similarly, fire sears away Robert’s flesh, leaving little more than his “self” or “soul.” After surviving his elemental ordeals he reaches a plateau beyond the stress and conflict of life, for the last picture taken of him shows him horribly scarred, yet “smiling.” He appears to have arrived at what Yeats called “the condition of fire,” where “is all music and all rest.”¹² Thus the narrator’s history of Robert’s journey ends quietly, with one last snapshot from an extraordinary life: “*Robert and Rowena with Meg*: Rowena seated astride the pony — Robert holding her in place. On the back is written: ‘Look! you can see our breath! And you can.’”

Robert’s triumph is paralleled by the narrator’s. Out of his piles of documents and conflicting testimonies he clarifies the meaning of Robert’s self-destruction and reshapes his life into a coherent whole. In doing so, he transcends a purely mechanized account of his subjects as some crippled animal, for he is most deeply

moved not by abstract Heredities and Environments, but by people in the daily tragedies of their lives. Thus, he comes to see Robert as a man whose yearning for what is "bright and good" conflicted with all the dark and destructive impulses of which the Great War was a most ignoble emblem. More visionary than historian, he imaginatively recreates the life behind the facts of history, and fashions out of his material a prayer against despair.

NOTES

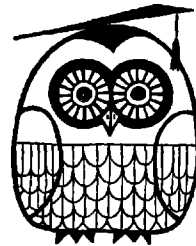
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THE DRAGON IN THE FOG

“Displaced Mythology” in “The Wars”

Bruce Pirie

IN TIMOTHY FINDLEY’S novel *The Wars*, Robert Ross, soon after arriving in Europe, finds himself leading a line of horses through thick green fog. The foul smell of the air puzzles him, but Poole, his batman, detects the odour of chlorine that has soaked into the ground.

The smell was unnerving — as if some presence were lurking in the fog like a dragon in a story. Poole was quite correct; the ground was saturated with gas. Chlorine and phosgene were currently both in use. Mustard gas was still to come.

This matter-of-fact chemical information is typical of the novel’s verisimilitude. An almost documentary realism seems to seduce the reader into accepting the authenticity of the account. By mentioning “a dragon in a story,” however, the narrator teases us with a glimpse of another, more truly seductive influence. Behind the elaborate realism of *The Wars* hides the beguiling shape of myth and legend — the dragon that lurks in the fog.

Northrop Frye finds the essential principles of story-telling in mythology; those structural principles are “displaced” from mythology to literature. What kind of displaced mythology would we expect to find in Findley’s novel? *The Wars* is a work of irony; in it we see the attempt, as Frye says in *Anatomy of Criticism*, “to give form to the shifting ambiguities and complexities of unidealized existence.” He goes on to say, “As structure, the central principle of ironic myth is best approached as a parody of romance: the application of romantic mythical forms to a more realistic content which fits them in unexpected ways.” A dragon’s proper home, of course, is the world of romance; if he can be displaced into the world of “unidealized existence,” perhaps other aspects of his homeworld have made their way with him. Following this lead, I intend to examine *The Wars* as a “parody of romance.” Readers of Frye’s *Anatomy of Criticism* and *The Secular Scripture* will recognize my enormous indebtedness to those texts, which I use as handbooks to romantic convention.

Adventure is the essential element of plot in romance, and in a naive form romance can be the story of a hero who dies in the glory of combat or who undergoes a series of exciting adventures and always comes back for more, like a comic book hero. There are plenty of children in the novel who see war this way.

They range from Robert's younger brother, thrilled to announce at school that Robert would receive the Victoria Cross, to boys arriving at the front, exhilarated by the "heaven-sent chance" to become men. A picture of Robert in his new uniform seems to say that "death is romantic": "I'll fade away in glory hearing music and my name." But Robert's actual death is not heralded by music and all these innocents will find a world of "unidealized existence" confronting their naive romantic expectations. Exciting storms at sea described in the *Boy's Own Annual* must meet the stomach-churning reality of an Atlantic crossing.

The true romantic hero begins in innocence and journeys in quest of knowledge. A wise old guardian may supervise the initiation, as do Arthur's Merlin and Dante's Virgil. Robert's innocence lies in the fact that killing is "a foreign state of mind" for him. He needs "someone who could teach him, by example, how to kill" and thinks he has found such a person in the legendary Eugene Taffler, an older man who has already journeyed to war and back; ironically, this nearly mythic figure turns out to practise sexual perversions and later attempts suicide. Another guardian spirit for Robert's innocence is the "ablest man" on the S.S. *Massanabie*, the decent and understanding Battery Sergeant-Major Joyce. When Robert must destroy an injured horse, the B.S.M. leads Robert through the darkness down to the hold of the ship, like Virgil leading Dante into hell. Finally, however, both Virgil and the B.S.M. can only step aside and let their protégés stand alone.

Robert's initiations and loss of innocence remind us that we expect life to have four seasons — youth, maturity, age, and death — but part of the horror of *The Wars* is the realization that this natural cycle has been drastically accelerated. We expect young men in romances to face challenging ordeals and life-changing epiphanies, but in this novel too many men face dead-end ordeals and learn too much too soon. We see this in the constant emphasis on the childishness of the characters: "men" whose average age is nineteen, some of whom do not yet shave and whose voices still waver, who promise their mothers not to drink and who soil their pants in moments of crisis. The experience of the twelve-year-old Juliet d'Orsey reflects all these men-children facing too much too soon. She discovers Robert and her sister making violent love: "I know things now I didn't want to know." Juliet's trauma symbolizes the whole world's experience of the war, and the profound loss of innocence delicately colours all her recollections, just as the recovery of a lost Golden Age typically haunts romance.

IN ONE PHASE OF ROMANCE we may see experience assaulting the integrity of the innocent world, symbolized by a "beleaguered castle." In the midst of the unfathomable horror of the trenches, there is in fact a "beleaguered

castle" — the "Stained Glass Dugout," an "inordinately civilized place" with books, a plaster angel surrounded by candles, an animal hospital, and pieces of stained glass. Devlin, the "gentle as a lamb" man who collects the glass, does so because he is "devoted to fragility," the real fragility being, of course, not the glass but rather sanity, decency, and innocence.

A variation of the innocence theme appears in the hero's pure love for a damsel — love, like adventure, being one of the keynotes of romance. In one version, the hero leaves a chaste lady, his adventures, and returns to marriage. In another form, often focusing on a sister or daughter figure, the journey ends in virginity. The chastity of the latter quest may thinly disguise a latently incestuous relationship; the chaste love of brother for sister may represent a lost Golden Age but may also hover near a moral taboo (virtue being most admirable when closely pressed by temptation).

In the case of Robert Ross, the catalyst for the story is his love for his sister Rowena; "Rowena," we may remember, is the name of one of the heroines in *Ivanhoe*. Robert often remembers her in critical moments of the war. She represents a lost happy time: he remembers her with her rabbits, or the idyllic sound of lapping water as they vacationed at Jackson's Point. When she dies, it is because she falls out of her chair, and the words "fell" and "fallen" occur so often after her death that it is hard not to hear a suggestion of the biblical Fall of Man from innocence. Robert feels responsible for the fall because he was locked in his bedroom "making love to his pillows" instead of caring for Rowena. Perhaps here we see the sense of being close to a moral taboo in the brother-sister relationship. In any case, it is his responsibility for the fall that drives Robert out of his "innocent" Golden Age, forcing his perilous journey through the world of experience.

Just as the young man of the quest has an older man guiding his journey, there may also be a mother-figure who waits at home for the hero to finish his wanderings. Where there are both a young and an older woman, the older may become polarized into the sinister stepmother of folktale who may also dimly suggest incest. In such figures, we see the outline of Robert's alcoholic mother, irrationally and cruelly insisting that Robert should kill Rowena's rabbits because he loved Rowena. We may even detect the incest theme as she comes into the bathroom while Robert bathes. There is a hag-like description of her as she sits on the toilet and uses Robert's childhood as a weapon against him. It is partly she who turns the Golden World of this novel into a kind of prison-paradise from which Robert has to escape.

The mention of incest reminds us that loving relations can be twisted into demonic form. Robert may be trying to recover the remembered Golden World with his sister, but the world of experience twists this urge into sinister shapes. One of his first adventures occurs in the brothel at Lousetown, where the prosti-

tute is a death-image: "Her shoulders were naked bones and her eyelids were painted black." It is appropriate that Robert takes a deathly prostitute, for the sister whom he truly loved has died and he now heads in quest of romantic death. In the next room is more demonic eroticism: Eugene Taffler engages in brutal homosexuality, foreshadowing the rape scene later in the novel and the agonized sexuality that Juliet d'Orsey stumbles upon. Barbara d'Orsey, on one level, is a witch/harlot figure, going from man to man, leaving each as he becomes disabled, but her character is also tangled up in another romantic convention. As her brother Clive explains, Barbara acts out of obsessive fear because everyone she has loved has died. Thus her behaviour symptomizes not promiscuity but desperation. In a way, Barbara is the princess terrorized by the dragon — war — who keeps devouring the princes. Until the right prince comes along and ends the rule of the dragon, she is under its spell.

Figures of romance polarize themselves into opposites. Just as the heroine finds her opposite in the siren or witch, so also the dragon finds his opposite in friendly animals, particularly the faithful and devoted horse and hounds. As makers of old cowboy movies well knew, the horse who gets the hero to his quest naturally has a special role. The most cursory reading of *The Wars* reveals the intimate link between Robert and horses. His true companions on ship are the horses and as he rides along the collapsing dike in the fog, he trusts his horse to find its own way, endangering himself only when he leaves the horse. Of course, one of the most riveting scenes is the climactic episode, previewed on the opening pages of the novel, in which the knight (Robert) meets with his trusty horse and hound (maybe a Labrador retriever) and rides off: "It was as if both dog and horse had been waiting for Robert to come for them." Animals conventionally help the hero, but in *The Wars* one measure of a man's compassion is his willingness to help animals; thus Rodwell shelters animals and Robert's act of defiance takes the form of releasing endangered horses.

Romances often begin with a knight riding off into a forest after an animal, an image which is never very far from metamorphosis, the changing of the hunter into an animal. Near the beginning of the book, Robert goes for a long run with a coyote. The two enjoy a special communion, both drinking from a river in the prairie. Robert becomes oddly identified with the animal as he crouches "on his haunches" watching it. When confined to barracks for two weeks, he sits like a caged and lonely animal on the roof and stares across the prairie, "wishing that someone would howl." Metamorphosis, or the union of human and animal identities, is an important theme in *The Wars*. Taffler plays at being a horse in the brothel, a demonic version of Robert's identification with horses. Rodwell's sketchbook includes mostly animals, but also Robert's form, "modified and mutated" to look like the others. When trapped in a barn with runaway horses, he identifies himself as one of them, and this dooms him, for when he calls, "We shall not

be taken," Major Mickle thinks Robert has an accomplice and authorizes a full attack. Metamorphosis in romance often indicates a lowering of human identity as the hero obscures the signs of original identity and joins a lower world of animals. In *The Wars*, it is a lowering in the sense that the humans are trapped and frightened like the animals, but the fellow-feeling with animals is also part of the human largeness and generosity of characters like Rodwell and Robert. To recognize oneself as an animal is to recognize one's kinship with and duty towards all life, a recognition threatened by the "ethics" of war.

The changing of humans into animals occurs specifically in those romances concerned with the descent of the hero, and *The Wars* is primarily the story of a journey into a lower world, although there are points of ascent. Ascents in romance typically involve an epiphany at a mountaintop, tower, or staircase. Since the ascent reverses the Fall of Man, it is not surprising that the goal is often a new Eden, a *locus amoenus* or "beautiful green world." In *The Wars*, the ironic ascent is up the stairs of the whorehouse in Lousetown. It is indeed a "green world," with a potted fern on the landing, "sweet rose perfumes" (to mask the smell of horse manure), and lilac wallpaper in the bedroom. Robert indeed has an epiphany, but it is a vision of depravity; through a hole in the wall he sees the bestiality of Eugene Taffler, reminding us that this ironic ascent is really a descent.

A more subtle image of ascent occurs when Robert and his men climb into a giant crater to cut gun beds. It is hard to find images of upward movement in the flatlands of Europe, and the crater is most obviously an image of descent, but Findley gets double service from this crater by making it an ironically inverted mountain. Robert crawls around the crater "like a mountain climber," heading for an object that turns out to be a ski pole. We are never told why a ski pole would be there; ski poles belong on mountains and there are no mountains for miles around — that is, unless the crater itself is a symbolic mountain. As the men clamber out of the crater, they might as well be mountain climbing, with the "sound of falling debris" and the treacherous slipping backwards, "sliding in the snow." At the top of this climb is a vestigial *locus amoenus*, for in the midst of all the mud is a singing bird and an enemy soldier who has laid aside his weapon in order to watch the bird. At the peak, Robert shoots the soldier and then has a devastating epiphany: the man he has killed had no intention of killing him.

IMAGES OF DESCENT ARE, of course, richly elaborated and to prepare for descent, one needs a talisman, such as a golden bough. For Robert it is his pistol, which gives him the "ritual edge in authority," not so much from the enemy as from his own men in the nightmare world they enter.

The hero on his way to the underworld must follow a special "path" which may become subverted into an image of lost direction, such as the labyrinth or maze, often with a monster at its centre like the Minotaur. Thus, in the passage cited earlier, Robert loses his way, finds himself on a crumbling dike, and senses a "presence" in the fog "like a dragon in a story." Another maze image occurs as he returns to Bailleul for the final catastrophe under "a daze of blazing light and sweat," realizing he has gone "over two hundred miles in circles to get there" when it "should have been about a quarter of that." This late stage of the quest may also be characterized by the ravaged waste land, abandoned buildings, and the town deserted in fear of the monster. Appropriately, Bailleul is called "the last place in civilization." Around it are "a great many ruined farm houses," one of which becomes the refuge of Robert and the horses. It also has an asylum called "Asile Desolé, which means desolated or devastated refuge," where the traumatic rape scene occurs.

The lower world is dark and wintry. As Robert embarks in the dead of winter, he sees figures outside the train window, "frozen in their places," "ghosts through the frosted glass." Passing through Toronto for the last time, he realizes that his world is changing; in the dark he cannot find the "uncomforting shapes" of his memory and he asks, "Where, in his dark, was the world he'd known and where was he being taken to so fast there wasn't even time to stop?"

The lower world is a form of hell, a night world, a subterranean world where the shapes of animals swarm upon the hero. Thus we see the hellish S.S. *Masanabie*, hot, dark, and airless, divided into levels like Dante's Inferno, officers at the top and, at the bottom, the grotesque hold full of manure, flies, rats, the pounding hooves of rearing horses, and an injured horse with a mane like a "tangle of rattlesnakes"; when Robert shoots it, "all hell" breaks loose. Similarly, Flanders is a plain of contaminated mud and water, "dung and debris and decaying bodies," where breezes carry the infernal "smells of smoke and ashes." The thick, evil-smelling fog is "full of shapes that waved their arms." At the bottom of the night world we find a parody of communion, the cannibal feast. When Rodwell, who knows the identity of human and animal natures, sees soldiers eating rats and killing a cat, he knows he has reached the cannibalistic bottom of the night world and he commits suicide. More than anything else, hell is full of dead people, and surely our main impression of the battlefield is that it is a world full of corpses. At times this vision of hell frankly becomes a vision of the Apocalypse, as when flame-throwers unleash fire storms, men explode from combustion, horses rear "with their bones on fire," and the earth is "seared and sealed with fire."

Earth and air are man's natural elements. The romantic hero journeying to another world must pass ordeals of the other two elements, fire and water, just as Dante must pass through a ring of fire and the river of Eden. Once one passes

the ordeals of the two alien elements, one deserves Robert's epitaph: "Earth and Air and Fire and Water." (Incidentally, it may also be that the twentieth century has added ordeal by air, in the form of gas attack, and ordeal by earth, in the form of collapsing dugouts.)

The whole area of the battlefield is "well below sea level" and the men fight in "a shallow sea of stinking grey from end to end" where men and horses drown in mud. Robert's ordeal by water comes when he slips off a dike and nearly drowns. It becomes important to find ways of living with water. Robert appears to love Harris, who tells stories about feeling at home in water, and Rodwell's toad survives a gas attack by staying in a pail of water: "It was a matter, Rodwell had said, of your element. The toad has a choice."

The world of fire can be a destructive world of malignant demons, such as the enemy's fire storms, but it can also be a cleansing purgatorial fire. Both connotations apply to Robert's ordeal by fire in the burning barn. It shows the stupid destructiveness of the war world; it is also a gateway by which Robert rises to a higher level of heroism.

The journey to the underworld is a journey to the land of death. When Robert magnificently bursts out of the barn, clothing on fire, "bright tails of flame . . . streaming out behind him," we may recognize the solar myth of the god who travels through darkness and death but returns like the sun in the morning. The important point about this kind of mimic death is that the hero does go on living afterwards, having come close to or through the chasm. Robert's exaltation as a sun-god may be ironic — after all, he finally dies of his burns — but the life-assertive statements that appear throughout the book insist that there is still triumph in Robert's end: the epigraph from Euripides, for example — "Never that which is shall die" — or Rodwell's last letter to his daughter — "Everything lives forever" — or Robert's reply to the nurse who, "ashamed of life," offers to help him die:

'Not yet.' *Not yet.* Do you see? He might have said 'No.' He might've said 'never.' He might've said 'Yes.' But he said 'not yet.' There, in those two words, in a nutshell — you have the essence of Robert Ross. And perhaps the essence of what it is to be alive.

"Not yet" are the words of a man who has been profoundly educated by his journey to the lower world. He fully knows the presence of death and he holds onto life. Knowledge of death feeds this human impulse to survive. When the hero fights the dragon to get at the secret treasure hoard, the real wealth is a wealth of wisdom, which is often wisdom about death, which is to say it is about the fertility of the land, as in the Grail legends. Robert, near the end of the novel, sees himself as an (ironic) fertility god. In dragon-ravaged Europe, he looks into a mirror: "He'd thought he would stand and see himself like a god in the glass."

Instead, he sees a death-image, a "scare crow" with "shadows round the sockets of his eyes." Then, with "a sudden vision of obliteration," he lies down and masturbates, thus becoming a futile fertility god, "the cold, wet blooming of four hundred thousand possibilities — of all those lives that would never be — on his fingertips." Despite this futility, Robert *is* in some way a fertility god, for his "not yet" epitomizes the human will to survive. As Nurse Turner says, "*Not yet* has been my motto ever since . . . and here I am," to which her sister adds, "No dear . . . here we *all* are."

DEATH THREATENS human identity. Thus, an alternative way of seeing this quest to understand death is as a "fable of identity." The original fall from Eden fractures human identity apart from what it should have been. From that point the hero must descend into a world of alienation until ready to ascend to a reintegrated harmony. The opening scenes of romance often show the hero becoming a different person, as is the case with Robert when he stands in a daze at the Kingston train station a few days after Rowena's death, making the fateful decision to join the army and leave the Golden World. (Symbolically, of course, he has no choice: his link with the innocent world died with Rowena and he stands at the station on Good Friday, a day for descents.) When Lewis Carroll's Alice leaves behind one identity, she exchanges it for a looking-glass reflection of herself, mirrors and pictures that alter identity being common romantic motifs. (We may remember the mirror-smashing scene that begins Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now*.) Similarly, Robert looks down into a puddle which foreshadows the watery world of the trenches but is also a mirror that shows his new military identity: "his reflection was beaten into submission by the rain." The decisive moment arrives when he steps into the puddle and stands there. Identity-distorting mirrors appear again, along with pictures, in that other place of initiation, the brothel: "Directly opposite the door, there was a wall that was covered with paintings of Odalisques and mirrors, so the first thing you saw was yourself, intermingled with a lot of pink arms and pale breasts."

Although there may be a metamorphosis, a change of name, and a change of costume, the hero never completely forgets his original identity. Robert gets a uniform and a new name, "Robert Raymond Ross — Second Lieutenant, C.F.A.," but this new man will be haunted at climactic moments by the memory of the Robert Ross who listened to the lapping water at Jackson's Point with his sister. The quest of the hero is to reintegrate his identity, to become like the Old Testament God, who can say, "I am that I am." There is hope for salvation as long as there is a thread which connects him to his earlier identity, as in the myth of Theseus, whose return from the labyrinth is made possible by the thread which

connects him to the outside. Indeed, Robert's trick of involuntarily remembering his earlier life at key moments literally saves his life during the gas attack, when an image of a science experiment comes "unbidden into Robert's mind from a dull winter classroom long ago."

In the final ascent, the hero's identity is re-established by removing the costume that concealed it. In Robert's case, this is his officer's uniform; after the radical step of freeing the horses, he tears the lapels from his uniform and leaves the battlefield. Freeing the horses (like Moses leading his people out of Egypt) is truly radical because it returns Robert to his roots. No longer the man who follows Captain Leather's foolish orders, he returns to the kind of fellow-feeling with nature that Rowena and her rabbits exemplified. Rodwell kills himself because he finds that those feelings cannot survive in war, since war is based on destruction of one's fellow creatures. Robert, however, finds a way out of the underworld, a way to survive: a radical act of individuality. The act leaves him physically scarred, of course, but heroes from Oedipus on have known that mutilation is often the price of great wisdom. Although the individualizing act, saving the horses, returns Robert to a full compassion for life, it necessitates the destruction of life — the killing of Captain Leather. This paradox is what Frye calls "a return that achieves its recreation by a creatively negative act." Nurse Marian Turner sees this paradox:

You see, he did the thing that no one else would even dare to think of doing. And that to me's as good a definition of a 'hero' as you get. Even when the thing that's done is something of which you disapprove. He was *un homme unique*. . . .

Unfortunately, "creatively negative" acts do not stand up well in the courts. One of the motifs of romance is the trial founded on a mistaken or narrow-minded charge or a wrong identity; the hero escapes by revealing his true identity. The Robert who shot Captain Leather was a man making a desperate last gesture to pull himself out of the lower world of war in order to recreate his own identity. Once that identity is recreated, he is no longer the same man. Thus, Robert's trial is, in fact, the trial of a "wrong identity" and it is poetically appropriate that he be tried "*in absentia*" and allowed to return to St Aubyn's for convalescent treatment.

The return to St Aubyn's is, of course, a return to Eden. As romance moves to a world of original identity, the symbolism of the garden of Eden reappears; a few excerpts from the first description of St. Aubyn's countryside will easily show its Edenic quality:

The countryside is the most beautiful in the world. . . . Spring, in this region, has no equal anywhere. The fields are filled with black and white cows — the river-banks are spread with yellow flowers — larks fly up in endless song — and the rain, when it falls, is soft and warm. [Roads wind] past the naked swimmers in the ponds and deposit you at inn yards where the smell of ale and apples makes you

drunk before you've passed the gate. It is an old world — comforting and safe. . . .

St Aubyn's itself is an abbey and has been the family seat of the d'Orseys since the year 1070. . . . It sits in the middle of a park, surrounded by lawns, and . . . deer would come out of the nearby forest and wander through the flower beds. . . .

Robert can never return to his first Eden: Rowena and her rabbits are dead. The last picture taken during his life shows, however, that Robert has achieved a new Eden. Juliet d'Orsey loves him; they are together in St Aubyn's; he holds her hand and "he is smiling." Juliet, who even as an old woman maintains a child's wisdom, becomes a substitute for Rowena.

This identification is made even more clearly in the epilogue. We see one more picture which echoes the earlier picture of Robert linked to Juliet, and this is "the last thing you see before you put on your overcoat":

Robert and Rowena and Meg: Rowena seated astride the pony — Robert holding her in place. On the back is written: 'Look! you can see our breath!' And you can.

The hero brings the end of his quest in line with the beginning; the circle closes.

By this point, the reader may be wondering to what extent we need to be consciously aware of this romantic quest pattern. Frye answers this question in *Anatomy of Criticism*, when he discusses the cycle of the solar myth as it appears in literature:

The hero does something which we may or may not, as we like, associate with the myth of the sun returning at dawn. If we are reading the story as critics, with an eye to structural principles, we shall make the association, because the solar analogy explains why the hero's act is an effective and conventional incident. If we are reading the story for fun, we need not bother: that is, some murky "subconscious" factor in our response will take care of the association.

In any case, it is clear that while *The Wars'* realistic details generate part of its appeal and effectiveness, the way in which those details are given imaginative impact goes beyond the effects of verisimilitude. We demand that historic and geographic "facts" be given a "shape" to contain them. The situation of the narrator in this novel mirrors this fundamental issue in fiction: he has only a few photographic images which, by themselves, say little. His task — "your" task — is to take those few facts and pictures and find their meaning. To find the meaning of the pictures, to discover the imaginative impact of realistic details, the story-teller must be a master of the basic principles of story-telling — principles which give shape to human experience, and which are as old as myth and legend.



LYING LOW

Pier Giorgio Di Cicco

There are no happier methods of behaving;
the blue bull-finch sings in the attic of
his loneliest thought; the little girl you
saw yesterday was growing into four more feet
of bone and was crying her eyes out for it,
and she'll get it, the whole battalion of
corpuscles, the arms that will go around someone
and rot; take too the blades of grass that are
viewing the warheads zinging by at only half
the cost of the federal budget; and my bed floats
up in the night, imitating young clouds; lord,
how the simple furniture wants out; there are ways
of singing of behaving happily, like walking
to the refrigerator in the night, like downing
coffee like the last good thing; and I am preparing
a grave where marionettes sing, propped around it,
call them mama and papa and screen bad
movies against the north wall of it; or I will dive into
it as into a swimming pool and come out holding
gin martinis to bewildering suns; I sing only
half as well as I did last year about methods
of being happily. Today I will try a word or two about
a woman, of how she'll stay around like a human thing
reminding me of a lengthy dream; then I will put away
my fingers for the night, put them into my eyes
as if to pluck out maps of all the godforsaken places
I would have been innocent in. But having seen
the world try to consume itself like a would-be fireball
it is better that I play black-jack with my heart;
it is better that I lie still and sing of detective stories
where the murderer is himself, and loved for it.

CANADIAN FICTION OF THE GREAT WAR

Eric Thompson

FOR MORE THAN SIXTY YEARS John McCrae's "In Flanders Fields" has been memorized by Canadian schoolchildren or declaimed reverently at Remembrance Day ceremonies in Canada and around the world. It is almost the only Canadian poem, of whatever theme or type, that has achieved genuine fame or recognition. Practically unknown, by contrast, both in Canada and abroad, are several war novels which constitute the best fiction by Canadian writers about the experiences of Canadian fighting soldiers in the Great War of 1914-18. These novels and their authors — *All Else is Folly; a tale of War and Passion* (1929) by Peregrine Acland, *Generals Die in Bed* (1930) by Charles Yale Harrison, and *God's Sparrows* (1937) by Philip Child — deserve to be better known. For since the publication of Timothy Findley's *The Wars* (1977), readers have begun to realize that the war novel is a significant genre of Canadian fiction.

It is one of the ironies of modern history that the 1914-18 conflict — depending on how one sees it, either the last nineteenth-century or the first twentieth-century war — has been called by various names. First it was the "Great War," then the "World War"; since 1945, it has been dubbed the "First World War." This last name is both innocuous and foreboding, conveying both a colourless statistic and the suggestion of a series of ever more dangerous conflicts. The fact remains that it was a war fought primarily among European states and their allies, and was by no means universal in scope. Still, in terms of the casualties and devastation it involved it came to be regarded as the worst calamity mankind had ever committed against itself. Some hoped it would prove to be the final, ignoble cauldron of human madness which at last would teach man that his civilization must be strengthened or else he would be doomed forever. This was the sentiment expressed in H. G. Wells' *The War That Will End War* (1914) and *Mr. Britling Sees It Through* (1916), among other works of the period.¹ A later, more cautious observer, B. H. Liddell Hart, writing a history of the war in 1930, noted: "The historian's rightful task is to distil experience as a medicinal warning for future generations. . . . He would be a rash optimist if he believed that the next generation would trouble to absorb the warning."²

Yet, if few could discern the "warning," it was clear in the aftermath of war that the clock could not be turned back, that the world was launched into an uncertain future. For Canada, as for a number of the smaller nations, the prospect of genuine independence, free from the imperial demands of larger powers, seemed bright. Marshall McLuhan may be right when he says, "Canadian participation in past wars, whether in 1812 or 1914 or after, has never been on a scale to enable Canadians to identify with the total operation"³; but surely his comment begs many questions, and overlooks many realities, concerning Canada's role during and after the Great War. One historian has described Canadians as an "unmilitary people" who have always gone to war reluctantly, and have "as quickly discarded the skills of war to return to the farms and factories of peace."⁴ But in fact, although the Canadian Expeditionary Force was small in numbers compared to its British, French, and American allies, its record in battle — at Ypres, Mount Sorrel, Courcellette, and Vimy Ridge — attested to the valour of its citizen-soldiers and the often inspired leadership of its officers. No one would deny that such gallantry played an important, if not decisive, part in the victory, nor that the achievement was not fully recognized proudly at home and abroad. Clearly it was the nation's military contribution which earned it the right to be a signatory at the Versailles conferences, and thereby to become accepted in the international community as the maker of its own foreign policy. Moreover, the dramatic industrialization the nation had undergone during the war years — which in itself had contributed significantly to the victory — meant that Canada could confidently accept its post-war reputation as an emerging economic force in world affairs.

Nevertheless, it does even now seem surprising that Canadians in the 1920's chose very quickly to put the sacrifices of war behind them. An official history of the C.E.F. was commissioned soon after the end of hostilities, but it was not felt to be important enough to complete until after the Second World War. By and large people seemed resigned to accept British and American political and military assessments of the conflict as sufficient. For a brief period there was a flurry of public interest in an investigation of General Sir Arthur Currie's allegedly delinquent leadership of the army during the war — he was subsequently cleared of the charges — but it soon became the common view that the war was something one remembered ritualistically once a year and then forgot. This peculiar kind of reticence is a Canadian characteristic, one suspects. Actually, in terms of serious evaluation of the war, the situation in other countries was not much different. In England, in the early 1920's, there was a flood of memoirs, apologia, and diatribes by generals and politicians, each seeking to justify his wartime conduct. The tide of appraisal and revisionism was begun then and has scarcely abated. But as far as the emergence of a serious war literature was concerned, especially the novel, there was a delay of several years. As Walter

Allen puts it, "it still seems as though in the years immediately after the end of the war there was a general conspiracy of silence between writers, publishers and readers; as though by common consent, memories of the war were to be repressed."⁵ In view of what is now known about wartime censorship and the activities of the propagandists, it could hardly have been otherwise. The official lid was kept on as long as possible.

In retrospect, of course, it is important to make distinctions between different kinds of war writing. One broad distinction is between works (published and unpublished) by civilians and soldiers. The former group, no matter how enlightened they might have been about the course of events, were seldom in a position to know about the war at first hand; the latter, by virtue of their experience on the front lines, were bound to have a very different perspective. It is just such distinctions as these which Paul Fussell examines in his literary study, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975). Brilliantly, he links "The Matter of Flanders" in the reader's mind with the previous "Matters" of Western literary history — of Troy, Rome, Britain, and France. And, just as those ancient and medieval battles spawned *chansons de geste*, legends, and myths, so, too, Fussell contends, did the writings of the Great War. In his survey of both the popular and serious — verse and poetry, music hall songs and sketches, slogans and letters, memoirs and fiction — he seeks to demythologize the war: in brief, to discover in what ways the writings preserve an illusion or distort the reality of war, and in what ways they may be seen as genuine examples of war art. He concludes, "The greatest irony is that it is only now, when those who remember the events are almost dead, that the literary means for adequate remembering and interpreting are finally accessible."⁶ Unfortunately, Fussell's study is limited chiefly to British writing and he does not discuss the war novel at any length.

To understand the emergence of the war novel in the twenties it is necessary to consider the mentality of both the wartime generation and the post-war writers. Herbert Read, whose literary career began during the war, later sought to explain his generation's naiveté:

It must be remembered that in 1914 our conception of war was completely unreal. We had childish memories of the Boer War, and from these and from a general confusion of Kiplingesque sentiments, we managed to infuse into war a decided element of adventurous romance. War still appealed to the imagination.⁷

It is in this light that Rupert Brooke's shocked response in *1914 and Other Poems* (1915) must be judged. An Edwardian man-of-letters, Brooke led a life before the war that furnished him with no accurate view of battlefield realities or adequate language in which to portray them. Nevertheless, to thousands of his readers he seemed a genuine hero, a modern knight-errant able to articulate the noble aims of his countrymen. It was not until the casualty figures mounted with sickening rapidity during the last two years of the war that the public mood began

to change, and this change was brought about in no small part by the incisive realism in the language and themes of poems by Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen. Notably, these poets had served at the front.

So, too, had Henri Barbusse, whose *Le Feu* (1916), little regarded at the time of its publication in France, exercised an influence on post-war novelists. Throughout the twenties, novels by Dos Passos, Ford, and Zweig, and memoirs by Graves, Blunden, and Sassoon, showed the extent to which the raw truths of war could be molded into a literature of sensibility. Theirs are realistic accounts of what happened from the recruit's or junior officer's point of view. All of their works appeared before 1929. But 1929 seems to have been the key year; despite the fact the war had been over for more than ten years, the public appetite for sensational exposés was far from whetted. In that year, *All Quiet on the Western Front*, published a year earlier in Germany, appeared in a faulty English translation; it became an overnight best-seller. It was soon joined on the lists by another hit, *A Farewell to Arms*. No two accounts of similar terrible events could be more unlike, yet each registered a sobering blow to readers. Erich Maria Remarque's savage, obsessional descriptions of war alternate with lyrical evocations of man's brotherhood under arms, while Ernest Hemingway's moody, solipsistic hero is a fugitive from both human conflict and passion.

All of these writers had had first-hand experience of combat. What they had seen and done left them embittered; they were not in the mood to romanticize. They were part of what Stein had called a "lost generation." Years later, Malcolm Cowley, writing of Second World War American novelists, made a comment which is applicable to the earlier writers:

War novelists are not sociologists or historians, and neither are they average soldiers. The special training and talent of novelists lead them to express rather special moods. They are usually critical in temper and often they are self-critical to the point of being burdened with feelings of guilt. They are sensitive — about themselves in the beginning; but if they have imagination (and they need it) they learn to be sensitive for others. . . . In military service many future writers . . . were rebels against discipline when they thought it was illogical — which they usually did — and rebels against the system that divides officers from enlisted men.⁸

The experiences of Canadian soldier-novelists were not dissimilar to those of other nations. War, it seems, is "another country," which makes all soldiers — even foes — brothers.

THE FIRST CANADIAN WAR NOVELS were, typically, clichéd romances by authors more interested in jingoistic patriotism than honest portrayal of life at the front. Captain S. N. Dancey, C.E.F., published *The Faith of a Belgian; a romance of the Great War* (1916), a strident *roman à clef* condemn-

ing Germany's violation of Belgian neutrality. The next year, Robert Stead used the closing pages of *The Cowpuncher* (1917) to make an opportunistic appeal to the moral fibre of young Canadians (then caught up in the passions of the conscription crisis): Dave Eldon, the cowpuncher-cum-Calgary businessman hero, enlists in the cause only to die in Flanders in the arms of his nursing-sister beloved. And Ralph Connor exploited the sentimental idealism shown towards the War still further by having his young Protestant chaplain die a sacrificial death in *The Sky Pilot in No Man's Land* (1919).

The patriotic emotions of the times spurred the sales of these novels; but, a decade later, in the wash of excitement surrounding the Remarque-Hemingway successes, few noticed the work of Acland or Harrison. Certainly Child's work, appearing in 1937, was all but ignored. Yet what made these post-war novels significant was not just their hard-hitting realism but even more their pursuit of themes deeply embedded in the Canadian experience of modern life. For Acland, the strain of war brings man's divided nature, his animal instincts and his spiritual being, into sharp conflict. Acland's hero may also be seen as emblematic of the Canadian male's struggle to rid himself of his frontier identity (necessary in the conquest of the northern wilderness) so as to adapt himself to the social responsibilities of urban society. For Harrison, however, the ordeal of fear and killing serves but to emphasize the brutish environment his hero is forced to accept. Thus Harrison's vision runs counter to Acland's, and in seeing it we are made aware of an existential absurdity in the modern world. For Child, finally, the relation between the Great War and the Anglo-Saxon-Protestant heritage of his heroes is the central issue: the scourge of guilt is what drives them on in a futile attempt to find peace of mind on the field of battle. Of course there are various common elements in these novels, but perhaps the most striking are the way each novelist perceives that the bravery of the fighting Canadian soldier is founded on stoicism and an almost inarticulate commitment to endure, and the way each novelist reveals the unresolved conflicts within the hero's mind and spirit. These elements later recur in *The Wars*, which is preoccupied with similar themes but which presents the hero's conflicts in a more profound and convincing manner.

Acland, formerly a major in the C.E.F., drew his title from Nietzsche's cynical epigram, "Man shall be trained for war, and women for the recreation of the warrior; all else is folly." Among other things, the phrase suggests the chauvinism bred in young men who are perforce cut off from normal relationships with women and who must also live in uneasy society with their own sex. Acland, employing a tradition as hoary as Homer, alternates scenes of war with scenes of peace as he chronicles the adventures of Alexander Falcon (the pun on the author's first name is surely deliberate) from his enlistment in Alberta through his service in France and furloughs in England.

In a preface to the novel, Ford Madox Ford praises it as a "convincing, mourn-

ful and unrelieved account of a simple soul's sufferings in the late War."⁹ He goes on to cite "wonderfully rendered" scenes of "Canadians going through their jobs, with stoicism, without apparent enthusiasm, with orderliness, discipline and with what endurance!" He concludes (speaking of Acland's style): "I wish I could have done it as well myself." Considering Ford's own achievements as a war novelist in the *Parade's End* tetralogy (1924-28), this is highly complimentary — if too generous. Still, Acland does portray, convincingly, the stoicism of Canadian troops, an attitude they reveal both during the interminable foul-ups preceding offensives as well as in the hot fury of battle. Indeed, the fact that Falcon is able to keep his sanity — and even a kind of innocence — in the midst of the maelstrom is testimony to the real-life bravery of the soldiers on whom he is modelled.

Acland's drama of passions, of war- and sex-lust, however, is almost marred irretrievably by sentimentality and a hackneyed love-plot. After his training on the Salisbury Plain and his initiation to war on the front near Festubert, Falcon is invalided back to England with a slight leg wound. While convalescing on the estate of Lady Bendip (who tries to seduce him), he falls in love with a young American beauty, Adair Hollister, whose husband is a prisoner of war in Germany. It is in these chapters of the first part of the novel that Acland develops his "sex" theme, but his descriptions of society women as "demi-mondaines" and as "column[s] of white marble crowned with fire" seem little more than contrived pastiches of Decadent diction. Moreover, teasing passages such as "With light touches of deft hands the lovers fashioned moments that were undying," are unintentionally embarrassing both in sound and context. Disappointed in his unrequited pursuit of Adair (who, in the fashion of a cruel mistress, tells him she will not accept him until "after the War"), Falcon has a brief affair with a hardened Russian emigrée before returning to the field of honour. His treatment of heterosexual sex in a wartime setting, then, leaves us with the conviction that the author has nothing fresh to say on the matter, and certainly nothing of consequence to his war theme.

The novel achieves more success when Acland concentrates on characterizing his hero in relation to (what Fussell calls) the "Troglodyte World" of the trenches. As his tours of duty drag on, in weeks of fear, cold, and fatigue, Falcon becomes increasingly despondent about the "gigantic futility" and "world-embracing insanity" he is engaged in. His responsibilities as an officer weigh heavily: in the words of the narrator,

When you are nearly crazy, when the men around you were nearly crazy, when crazy men with gray faces and staring eyes were crawling past your feet, you had to make jokes, however rotten they were, to keep yourself sane. And you had to keep sane when you were in command. When, if the enemy attacked, you were responsible for holding that hard-won bit of front-line trench at all costs. . . . You

might let a private, a non-com., even a junior officer, crawl out shell-shocked, but you, the company commander, had to keep sane.

As a subaltern, Falcon had felt "war lust" surge through him as the thirst for a great adventure. Now, as a major, with the memory of a dozen hopeless raiding attacks in mind, he is obsessed with his own — and his company's — survival. During the Somme battles, when Canadians were continuously in action, he begins to feel like a "hollow" man. He has long since lost faith in the tactical decisions of senior officers. To his weary eyes, the battlefields have become "an undulating waste," where, to his historical sense, knocked-out tanks lie "like dead elephants [at] Cannae." Gradually, as attack and counter-attack are played out with senseless regularity and bombardments take a grim toll day and night, Falcon feels something new within himself: a "state of such intense exhilaration — an exhilaration not of delight in killing, but of cold terror that if he did not kill he would be killed — that he had no thought of safety." Shortly after this, during an advance, Falcon receives a severe chest wound, and is sent back to England until the armistice. But even some years after the war, recovered from his wound and back in Canada, he still experiences occasional bouts of war lust. Plaintively he wonders: "Does man fight only because he hasn't yet learned to love?"

Charles Yale Harrison's *Generals Die in Bed* presents a strong contrast to the unresolved romanticism of Acland's novel. The narrator speaks from the beginning of his story with the cynical wisdom of someone who was born old and for whom neither the butchery of war nor the dullness of ordinary life holds any surprises. Like Acland, the American-born Harrison served in the C.E.F., but as a private soldier rather than as a junior officer.¹⁰ This fact alone explains why his approach to war is different. For Acland's hero, leaves in England are possible and offer welcome relief from war; not so for Harrison's hero who is forced to endure months of filth as one of the war's typically second-class citizens. When he does get a chance for a furlough, his week-long liaison with an English shop-clerk is not a hearts and flowers affair but rather the simple pleasures of healthy sex.

The most interesting aspect of Harrison's novel is its resemblance to Remarque's book. There is no flag-waving patriotism; each soldier-narrator lives his own hellish existence. Each is aware that he and his mates are regarded as cannon fodder by mindless military establishments on either side. One begins to wonder why such intelligent protagonists continue to put up with their lot. To answer that they have no choice — to desert would be to risk summary trial and execution by firing squad — is an obvious but hardly satisfying answer. Why would battle-hardened veterans fear such a relatively "clean" death in the face of the far more horrible ways of dying they experience every day? In fact they don't fear the consequences of desertion, no matter how ardently they wish to have done with war. Clearly, Remarque and Harrison are anti-war novelists: preoccupied

with giving as accurate and damning a portrait of war as possible, they deliberately use their narrators as personae for the millions of *poilus* who could not speak in their own defence. To these authors Militarism is the *real* enemy of the common soldiers; rather than have their heroes submit with indignity to an unjust system, they ask us to accept their silent protest against it. Each novel echoes with the roar of bombardments, the cut and thrust of raids, and the unbelievable squalor of the trenches. The effect on the sensibilities after reading page after page of harsh description, presented with I-am-here immediacy, is unforgettable. Such strong meat is not to everyone's taste. But, to dismiss it as merely intended for shock-value or as only anti-war propaganda, and to deny that these books have literary quality, is surely shortsighted.

Harrison's hero is certainly plebeian, but he is not soul-less. He is concerned about self-preservation, but he is no coward and he does care about the lives of his comrades. He is heroic, really, not in deeds (for he is entirely typical in the performance of his duties) but in mentality. It is the sheer toughness of his outlook, his honesty about himself and his situation, and the intensity of his sensory responses that characterize him. In these respects he is like Camus's characters in *La Peste* (1947), whose collective suffering in the plague-infested streets of Oran is an absurdist statement of human dignity.

Many passages illustrate Harrison's ability to portray his unnamed soldier-narrator, a man whose matter-of-fact exterior cannot quite mask a sensitive spirit. Early in his experience of the trenches, he encounters a rat in his dugout, scarcely three feet from his face: "There is still a little light from the stars and this light shines faintly on its sleek skin. With a darting movement it disappears. I remember with a cold feeling that it was fat, and why."¹¹ The narrator's recognition of "why" the rat is sleek and fat is typical of the author's effective use of *meiosis* in handling character, creating a point of view, and establishing mood. Beneath the ironic underplaying of the incident lies a pattern of symbolism which runs through the novel, as the ambiguous world of "light" (above the trenches, where man is exposed both to death in No Man's Land and life in the open air) is contrasted to the subterranean obscenity of enforced co-existence with rats (who prey on man as man preys on his kind). Similar scenes and images — a bloodied nose caused by the force of shells bursting, daily battles with lice, the smell of putrid corpses, the sight of a wounded lorry driver being kicked to death by terrified horses, the screams of the dying — crowd upon each other as Harrison develops his narrator's consciousness of war. There is no plot as such, only the relentless alternation between trenches and rest camps across muddy and bombed-out fields from month to month and year to year. Boredom, anxiety, constipation, and a thousand other minor discomforts become normal. Yet, the narrator's personal struggle to survive does not deaden him to the suffering of others. When he tries to extricate his bayonet from the chest of a dying German — and it will not

come out, being wedged between the man's ribs — he shoots the man, thus freeing the weapon, relieving his own anguish, and ending his enemy's pain. Later, he kicks off the attempts of a fallen comrade to grasp his legs, so as to be able to run back to the safety of his own lines; but on this occasion his guilty feelings are not assuaged by the knowledge he has obeyed orders in not stopping to help the wounded. There is no heroism in these actions, but there is frank exposition in recording them. Words that journalists use, such as "camaraderie" and "esprit de corps," are not part of the soldier's vocabulary. Rather: "We fight among ourselves" — for bread, for protection, for existence. "Who can comfort whom in war?" he asks. "Who can care for us, we who are set loose at each other and tear at each other's entrails . . ." Who, indeed?

Harrison's subject is the brutalization of man by war. Despite their well-earned record as "shock troops" — or, perhaps, because of it — Canadian soldiers were not immune from the disease. Whether he is describing a long queue outside a brothel in Béthune, a food riot and internecine fighting between fed-up soldiers and MPs in Arras in the spring of 1918, or Canadians firing on surrendering Germans at Amiens, Harrison unsparingly attacks violence. From his worm's eye view of such events the narrator suggests the hopelessness of lonely, bitter men: "Our lives are stolen — taken from us unawares." Or, as Remarque put it (speaking also for both sides): "And all men of my age, here and over there, throughout the whole world see these things with me. . . . Our knowledge of life is limited to death."¹²

PUBLISHED A GENERATION AFTER the Great War and in the gathering shadows of World War II, Philip Child's *God's Sparrows* is also a novel deeply concerned about the effects of so much death on the lives of its protagonists. Though it lacks the passionate intensity of Acland's and Harrison's accounts, it is more ambitious and reflective in theme. Described by an early reviewer as "a synthesis of the family saga and the war novel,"¹³ it attempts to do for Canadian social history what Ford's epical *Parade's End* had done for British society, that is, to chronicle a family's pre-war and war-time experiences in the light of the general ordeal of Western civilization. But, for such a Tolstoyan enterprise, Child's smaller-scale narrative proves inadequate. Despite the fact that the first third of the novel is devoted to a description of the two old Ontario families, the Burnets and the Thatchers (from whose homes spring the soldier-heroes, Daniel Thatcher and his cousin Quentin), the reader never gains a coherent impression of the totality of "Upper Canadian civilization and its discontents"¹⁴ because the necessary links between family and filial experience are either missing or diffused. There is some confusion, for instance, about Daniel's motive for enlisting. Is it because he feels ashamed he has not followed Quentin's example earlier? Is it

because he is finally able to overcome his father's pacifist objections? Is it because his guilt in being the accidental cause of his sister's handicapped condition is assuaged by her? Aside from these and other personal pressures to act, there are perhaps altruistic reasons, such as the persuasiveness of a speaker at a recruiting meeting or his sense of duty. That there exist a multitude of motives is not surprising, and even plausible, given Daniel's phlegmatic nature. But one of the chief flaws of *God's Sparrows* is Child's failure to integrate his family saga with the characterization of Daniel at war, in such a way as to illuminate more clearly the crises within him and the socio-cultural milieu of the time. (In comparison, Robertson Davies's briefer mention of the pressures in war-time society in *Fifth Business* is far more penetrating; and Findley's *The Wars* is a more successful exploration of this larger theme.)

Undoubtedly, Daniel and Quentin manifest in part the author's own tormented recollections of front-line experience. They may even (as Dennis Duffy believes) illustrate a "typical pattern" of Child's fiction and poetry: the way he manipulates his unhappy characters "from a motif of suffering-as-expiation-for-crimes-and-guilt to a practice . . . of suffering-for-its-own-sake. . . ." ¹⁵ Seen in this light they are, perhaps, to be pitied as unconscious victims of masochistic guilt feelings, bred into them by centuries of Puritanism. Alternatively, they may be seen as actors in a romanticized, mythic drama, which assumes that sensitive, WASP-ish, fair-haired lads of the Canadian aristocracy shall rise like Parsifal to smite the vicious Hun and win redemption for a society morally incompetent to acknowledge its part in initiating enmity between the nations. Once again, then, problems exist as to how to interpret the novel: is its meaning to be found in terms of disguised autobiography, or psychology, or religious fiction? There is no reason, of course, to suppose any or all of these aspects of form and meaning may not cohere in a narrative; it is simply that, in *God's Sparrows*, they do not.

But there is a way out of these difficulties, and that is to respond to it as essentially a war book, which, in the view of one critic, "contains the most effective scenes of the First World War in Canadian fiction."¹⁶ While this view is arguable, it is nevertheless true that it is in their internal and external struggles with the antagonistic forces produced by the War that the spiritual dilemmas of Daniel and Quentin are revealed most clearly. A good example of this occurs when Quentin, in a letter to Daniel from France, writes that he has been decorated for bravery in bayonetting German prisoners during a trench raid. Far from boasting of the incident, he is, rather, shocked by the irony of a deed whose horror has haunted him since; but in his anguished need to confess his feelings, he bluntly accuses his cousin of pacifism for refusing to become involved in "this whole dirty business."¹⁷ Daniel is, naturally, angered by Quentin's charge, though ultimately it is one of the factors contributing to his decision to enlist. Yet two points need to be made about the passage. First, it is unlikely that such a detailed,

frankly contemptuous and, in the eyes of some, defeatist letter would ever have been cleared by the military censors. But, even granting dramatic license, a more serious objection can be made concerning *Child's* point of view in setting the scene for the incident:

To have set up one's puny ego against the atmosphere of excitement, of desperate sacrifice, of bravely supported fear, of stoic grief, of fearful hope — to have pinned oneself, for instance, as a "conscientious objector" (that new sort of martyr, or of coward, or of crank, view it how you would) would have seemed an insufferable presumption to the battalions of eager and earnest young men of twenty, who were not at all presumptuous for all their swagger, but conventionally and rather humbly anxious to "do the right thing" even as their fathers and elder brothers were doing it.

Not only is this overbearing in tone and specious in logic, it also has the effect of undermining the credibility of his characters. As a result of the incident, Quentin *does* become a conscientious objector, and for reasons fully consistent with his concept of human honour and dignity. He tells Daniel:

"I'm not afraid of death. . . . Only thing I'm afraid of — and hate — is this damned unreality we live in here and now: not knowing what we are, or what we are here for; desiring, — and not knowing why we have to; wanting life, more and more life, and getting death; wanting some *law* behind it all of form, and style, and beauty, and always bumping up in the end against the God-forgotten *machine*."

Quentin is imprisoned for his beliefs, maltreated by his fellow soldiers, and sent back to the lines to die a broken man. As for Daniel, his initiation to war comes in the 1917 battles on the Somme salient, as a subaltern serving with a Canadian siege battery. Predictably, he undergoes a similar process of demoralization as his cousin and others had before him: "Somehow many of them existed and survived; but they were not the same men afterwards, for they had seen more than death, they had faced corruption of the soul, and despair." Finally, there was for him "no longer any horror [in the sight of bloated corpses in No Man's Land]; it had become simply an accepted part of one's environment, like insanity, slums, and prostitution in civil life." Daniel survives the War, but with no more understanding of himself, of his society, or life, than if he had stayed at home.

In sum, in presenting Quentin, Child has created an amorphous spirit into which he has poured all of the *angst* of a man bent upon a metaphysical quest; by contrast, in presenting Daniel, he expresses the worldly dilemmas of a much more ordinary individual. But neither characterization is fully successful in terms of Child's conception. Part of the problem may lie with a style which is remote in its omniscience, and sometimes irritatingly Anglophilic in tone. Still, for all its faults, *God's Sparrows* remains an honest novel by an author whose compassionate understanding of his subject cannot be gainsaid.

MORE THAN A GENERATION was to pass before another novelist made a substantial attempt to deal with the Great War and Canadian experience.¹⁸ Yet Findley's *The Wars* is firmly in the "tradition" of the genre inaugurated by Acland and Harrison and developed by Child: he employs its characteristic motifs — such as gritty descriptions of battle and the love affair in England — which had become almost requisite conventions. But he does more with the form than his predecessors, in particular by creating an enormously poignant drama of *personal* heroism in the midst of war.

Perhaps some of Findley's attraction to his theme may be understood from two interviews he gave before the book was published. In the first, with Graeme Gibson, he reflected on the lack of an aristocracy in Canada: "We've never had a chance to have that happen in this country, because the rise [of an upper class] came at a moment of cataclysmic change: the turn of the century. War brought it down; we then became, after the First World War, a cultural eunuch; we were neither male nor female, but we had the propensity of feeling one thing and of being another."¹⁹ Robert Ross, the protagonist of the novel, belongs to that doomed class; however, in a very special sense, his true class is of the spirit rather than of earthly power structures built on wealth and breeding. The second interview, with Donald Cameron, is even more revealing of what the novelist might have been preoccupied with in writing the novel. In speaking of man's "war with nature"²⁰ — our seemingly inexhaustible capacity to destroy the environment — Findley went on to say: "But you see, unknown to me, and unliked by me, in myself, I'm sure there is a fascination with violence. And I'm a very violent person myself, inside. I'm sure that I'm more violent in my heart and mind than half the people I criticize for being *overtly* violent, and that makes me hypersensitive to what violence is all about."²⁰ Certainly we as readers are made aware of Robert's hypersensitivity to the latent violence within himself. His attempt to master his aggressiveness, and to save something of value in himself and in the living world around him from senseless destruction, constitutes the theme of the novel.

(In passing, it is also of interest to note that about the time of the interviews — the early 1970's — Findley co-scripted the television adaptation of Mazo de la Roche's *Jalna* series which, in part, told of the inter-linked adventures of Ontario gentry during the 1914-18 period. And, himself the scion of a once-prominent Toronto family, the author apparently modelled some of the *mise-en-scène* of *The Wars* on the real experiences of his relatives.)

But however personal or biographical the sources were, it is clear that the strength of the novel derives chiefly from Findley's inspiration and craftsmanship in bringing Robert's story to life on the page. As narrator, he functions as archi-

vist-interpreter: selecting and arranging imaginary tape-recorded interviews, memorabilia, clippings, maps, and other souvenirs, he reconstructs the age and its troubled people. The character of Robert takes shape slowly from the dusty records. Externally, the characterization seems typical of the genre; we follow Robert through his initial training to his experiences at the front, and his growing hatred and fear of war appear to be no different from those of the earlier protagonists. But the reality is different: not so much because Robert is more sensitive or morally aware than others, but rather because Findley probes his inner life more deeply than Acland *et al* had done in developing their heroes. Moreover, in linking Robert's psychological dis-ease with the separate tragedies — the Wars — of other characters, the author is able to show the progression of madness in him which ultimately explodes in an act of fury.

To illustrate this rising tide of violent passion, it is necessary to focus on at least seven episodes and relationships which occur sequentially in the novel. The death of his hydrocephalic sister, Rowena, the killing of her pet rabbits, and the strain of parting from his mother, are the first steps in the pattern of circumstances which culminates in Robert's courageous, foolhardy, and mad attempt to save a herd of frightened horses from bombardment. (Those first events take place, symbolically, during the Easter weekend in April 1915, immediately before Robert enlists. The latter incident occurs the following year in mid-June, at a place called Magdalene Wood in France.) During training in Alberta, Robert meets the convalescing war hero, Captain Eugene Taffler, which initiates the second stage of his psychic development. "What he wanted was a model. Someone who could teach him, by example, how to kill."²¹ But the only lessons he learns from Taffler are negative, and the scars of the latter's impotent homosexuality cast long shadows over Robert's subsequent relationships with men and women. Similarly, the episode on board the troopship when Robert is forced to shoot an injured horse, serves both to intensify his loathing of violence and to foreshadow his motivation for his later act of mercy. Experiences at the front — narrow escapes from death in a flooded field and from a sniper's bullets; and Captain Rodwell's suicide after he learns crazed soldiers had eaten rats he tried to protect (notably, Rodwell's animal drawings contain facial features which bear an uncanny resemblance to Robert's) — add to the anguish in the hero's mind. Robert's savage love-making with the callous Lady Barbara d'Orsey — here, and elsewhere in the novel, Findley echoes similar situations in Acland and Child — and the brutal sexual assault made upon him by unknown soldiers at Desolé (symbolically, just after he has bathed himself) are the final key episodes in this pattern of violence.

Paradoxically, when it seems his psyche can no longer absorb the guilt, the cruelty, and the violation of war, Robert finds the mental strength to strike back. In seeking to save the horses, he sets in motion his private war against a collective insanity that respects no creature's right to live in peace and dignity. His action

is inevitable; it is foreshadowed and reinforced by bird and animal symbolism throughout the narrative which underlines Robert's own strong desire to live as well as to protect the innocent. However, equally inevitable, his heroic deed degenerates into a murderous rampage. Horribly burned, Robert is captured, court-martialled, and officially disgraced.

In trying to assess the rightness of his conduct and the meaning of his life, the reader is wise to note the narrator's cautionary remark in the closing pages that Robert's "mythology is muddled." To most of his contemporaries, Robert's defiance of orders is the act of a maniac. Yet, when asked to speak about him, they say they don't remember, look away, or change the subject, suggesting by their discomfort the mixed feelings they harbour about him. But to Lady Juliet d'Orsey, whose childhood diary provides vivid recollections of his personality, he is remembered fondly as a man who craved love and strove for perfection. She also remembers, however, the words of one of Robert's friends who, when speaking about his generation's responsibility for waging the War, said: "I doubt we'll ever be forgiven. All I hope is — they'll remember we were human beings." These words do not refer specifically to Robert, but they do offer a perspective within which we can gauge his actions. There is also the recollection of Marian Turner, the nurse who cared for him after the incident in Magdalene Wood; she believes he was a hero because "he did the one thing that no one else would even dare to think of doing. . . . It's the *ordinary* men and women who've made us what we are." Set against her view, though, is Robert's attitude: "(We're all strange, Robert thought. Everyone is strange in a war I guess. *Ordinary* is a myth.)"

Unsuspectingly, perhaps, Robert provides us with the answer. To agree with him that "ordinary" is a myth, we are only acceding to the noncritical meaning of the word myth and thereby accepting the notion that war makes ordinary people experience extraordinary sensations and perform in extraordinary ways. At the same time, the novelist permits us to interpret his phrase in the critical sense of myth, and thereby to see the deeper significance of human life. In either sense, then, the meaning is clear and persuasive. Moreover, Robert is a representative figure of his time and of his people, and in this he is not unlike the other protagonists I have been discussing. Each is representative not because he is like everyone else, but rather because he contains within himself so many of the virtues and vices of common humanity.

Military historians of the War, such as Colonel Nicholson, have written enormously detailed descriptions of actual events. From such "factual" material it is not difficult to conclude that Canadian soldiers *earned* their fine reputation. And probably most readers of Nicholson's account would agree with one of his conclusions: "They fought as Canadians, and those who returned brought back with them a pride of nationhood that they had not known before."²² But war

novelists, who are not so constrained by "fact," and who in any case want to create "fictional" accounts, lay particular emphasis on individual experience. For them, character becomes the datum point for measuring the human response to one of the great mysteries of existence. In Canadian war novels, the initial naiveté of the citizen soldier, the shock of combat on foreign soil, and the manner in which the soldier learns to cope with his personal conflicts and dilemmas, are the areas of concern for the writer. And, just as in actuality the War proved to be the remorseless enemy of human hopes — precisely because it was the product of human hatred — so in fiction it came to represent the great antagonist which the soldier protagonist had to confront, and seek to conquer.

NOTES

- ¹ Peter Buitenhuis, in a recent article — "Writers at War: Propaganda and Fiction in the Great War," *UTQ*, 45 (Summer 1976), 277-94 — revealed the manner in which Wells and other famous authors (Bennett, Galsworthy, Kipling, Buchan, and the Canadian-born Gilbert Parker, among others) were recruited by the British Department of Information to write pro- and anti-war propaganda, specifically to blacken German militarism or to whitewash Allied policies. It is necessary to distinguish, of course, between the personal motives of a writer and the political use to which his work could be put: Wells's *Mr. Britling* is clearly patriotic and seeks to justify British participation in the War on religious grounds; on the other hand, writers such as Bennett and Kipling were willing to exaggerate, distort, lie or use half-truths in their fictional and non-fictional accounts of campaigns on the Western front. Hilaire Belloc was perhaps more honest than some in confessing in a letter to Chesterton in 1917 that he had found it "necessary sometimes to lie damnably in the interests of the nation. . . ."
- ² From the original preface to *The Real War, 1914-1918*, in B. H. Liddell Hart, *History of the First World War* (London: Pan, 1970), p. ix.
- ³ "Canada: The Borderline Case," in *The Canadian Imagination*, ed. David Staines (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1977), p. 242.
- ⁴ George F. G. Stanley, *Canada's Soldiers: The Military History of an Unmilitary People*, rev. ed. (Toronto: Macmillan, 1960), p. 417.
- ⁵ *Tradition and Dream* (London: Phoenix House, 1964), p. 140.
- ⁶ *The Great War and Modern Memory* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1975), p. 334. This comment has particular relevance to our understanding of Findley's *The Wars*. Stanley Cooperman's *World War I and the American Novel* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1967) also provides an excellent, detailed discussion of war literature and its socio-literary effects.
- ⁷ From *Annals of Innocence and Experience* (1940), quoted in J. M. Gregson, *Poetry of the First World War* (London: Edward Arnold, 1976), p. 9.
- ⁸ From *The Literary Situation* (1954), quoted in Allen, p. 293.
- ⁹ Preface to Peregrine Acland's *All Else is Folly; a tale of war and passion* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1929), p. vii.
- ¹⁰ Humphrey Cobb, also an American, enlisted in the Canadian army in 1916 and was later wounded and gassed in the fighting. His *Paths of Glory* (1935), based on events involving the French army, probably influenced William Faulkner when

- he wrote *A Fable* (1954). Faulkner enlisted in the Royal Flying Corps in Canada but did not see action overseas because the War was over before his training was completed.
- ¹¹ Charles Yale Harrison, *Generals Die in Bed* (1930; rpt. Hamilton, Ont.: Potlatch, 1975).
- ¹² *All Quiet on the Western Front*, trans. of *Im Westen nichts Neues*, by A. W. Wheen (1929; Frogmore, St. Albans, Herts; Triad/Mayflower, 1977), p. 173.
- ¹³ J. R. McGillivray, "Letters in Canada: 1937. Fiction," *UTQ*, 7 (April 1938), 351.
- ¹⁴ The phrase is Dennis Duffy's in "Memory = Pain: The Haunted World of Philip Child's Fiction," *Canadian Literature*, 84 (Spring 1980), p. 45.
- ¹⁵ Duffy, p. 43.
- ¹⁶ William H. Magee, "Philip Child: A Re-appraisal," *Canadian Literature*, 24 (Spring 1965), pp. 29-30.
- ¹⁷ Philip Child, *God's Sparrows* (1937; rpt. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1978).
- ¹⁸ In saying this, I am not overlooking the achievement of Hugh MacLennan in *Barometer Rising* (1941). But MacLennan's character Neil MacRae is a returned soldier, and notwithstanding the dramatic use of the explosion in Halifax harbour (which undoubtedly is an image of the War brought home to native shores) the novel is not directly concerned with the experience of a fighting soldier at the Front.
- ¹⁹ In *Eleven Canadian Novelists* (Toronto: Anansi, 1973), p. 134.
- ²⁰ In *Conversations with Canadian Novelists*, Part One (Toronto: Macmillan, 1973), p. 61.
- ²¹ Timothy Findley, *The Wars* (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin, 1977).
- ²² Col. G. W. L. Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1919* (official History of the Canadian Army in the First World War) (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1964), p. 535.

FOR THE WIFE OF JOHN MILTON

Irving Layton

To go with genius
 the whole distance
 is to walk straight in to Thanatos
 with a greeting smile
 to match his own.

Hard to come that near to death;
 harder still
 not to frown.

NOTHING TO LOVE OR BE LOVED BY

STEPHEN SCOBIE, *McAlmon's Chinese Opera*.
Quadrant Editions, by subscription.

THE PHOTOGRAPH THAT FACES the title page of *McAlmon's Chinese Opera* is a cropped version of that which faces page 51 of the first edition of *Memoirs of Montparnasse*. The author of the *Memoirs* sits in the centre, pathetically youthful yet completely recognizable to those who knew him only as an elderly personification of artistic integrity and classic decadence in our midst. And on each side of Buffy Glassco, who persisted to become a true and exemplary artist, stand those who did not: on the right side a kind of corrupted Anglican deacon who was Graeme Taylor, and on the left side a dark and saturnine figure who looks like the Satanic counterpart of his Presbyterian preacher of a father. The saturnine Calvinist *manqué* is Robert McAlmon, perhaps the most lost of all the Lost Generation, the writer we have all heard of and rarely read, "the famous footnote on other people's lives," the friend of Joyce and Pound, the enemy of Hemingway and Gertrude Stein, the shorttime husband of Bryher whose profitable release from marriage earned him the Montparnasse nickname of McAlimony!

McAlmon's Chinese Opera is in one sense a footnote on the footnote, a poetic reconstruction of the drama of failure that is so close to every poet's heart—perhaps to every true writer's heart. For all of us, in the measures of our own dreams, have failed, and must hear an echo in the lines where Stephen Scobie

tells us of McAlmon's encounter with that devotee of the doomed, Kay Boyle.

One evening out at Crosby's mill
she started quoting my old poetry
as if she could create me whole.
Nothing, I told her, there is nothing here,
nothing to love or be loved by:
a void, a failure, an apology.

In the excellent afterword to *McAlmon's Chinese Opera*, where he sketches out McAlmon's pathetic life and in doing so tells us how we should read the poem a second time, Scobie also gives us more than a hint of what he is setting out to do, when he tells us that:

The relationship between the historic Robert McAlmon, whose biography is outlined above, and the Robert McAlmon who speaks in these poems is best described by Dorothy Livesay in her essay on the documentary poem in Canada, when she talks of 'a conscious attempt to create a dialectic between the objective facts and the subjective feelings of the poet.' It is hard, even for me, to disentangle what I know of McAlmon from what I have imagined about him.

Scobie in fact knows a good deal about McAlmon. He has read virtually everything that was written—and there is a great deal of it—about McAlmon by survivors from the 1920's in Montparnasse. Though he does not say it, one may reasonably conjecture from his grateful references to John Glassco that he talked to him at length about the real events which underlay the *Memoirs of Montparnasse*. And though he does not mention this either, he went off to Paris for a fairly long period during which he traced out the physical terrain of McAlmon's Parisian pilgrimage.

One of the results of that journey was a curious and interesting essay Scobie sent me just before I finished editing *Canadian Literature*, entitled "His Legend a Jungle Sleep: Michael Ondaatje and Henri Rousseau." (It was printed in No. 76, Spring 1978.) McAlmon does not appear in this piece, though a great deal is said

of that international Parisian world of the arts into which McAlmon somewhat ungraciously fitted; he despised French poets and only recognized the expatriates, and few of them. But Scobie's discussion of Ondaatje includes a number of statements which acquire a special interest in the light of *McAlmon's Chinese Opera*. He is talking of *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*.

The relationship between Ondaatje and his persona in this book is a very complex one: although Ondaatje has to stand back at times in his familiar ironic pose, he cannot totally separate himself from the outlaw personality. Ondaatje as artist moves towards Billy as outlaw, and vice versa . . .

The image of the artist projected in many of the poems in 'The White Dwarfs' section of *Rat Jelly* is a self-destructive one. . . . The artists are 'those who disappear,' those who 'die in the other peripheries,' the outcasts who 'sail to that perfect edge / where there is no social fuel.' . . .

Ondaatje understands this type of self-destructive artist, or beautiful loser (as is shown, in fact, by his interest in Cohen); but he is not himself one of them.

In a curious way, Scobie is here setting the stage for *McAlmon's Chinese Opera*. The link he makes between Henri Rousseau and Michael Ondaatje parallels the link between French bohemian Paris and McAlmon who detests the French ambience in which he nevertheless must seek his harrowed self. As Ondaatje the poet moved towards Billy the outlaw, so Scobie the poet in control of his life moves towards McAlmon the rogue poet, the dedicated failure, understanding yet not identifying with him. (Scobie also, we must remember, was interested enough in Leonard Cohen to write a book about him.) And finally there is the odd clue dropped on page 77 of *McAlmon's Chinese Opera*:

William Carlos
Williams told me
I should have been Billy
the Kid.

For generically, even if it is not its direct descendant, *McAlmon's Chinese Opera* must be regarded as closely related to *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*; Scobie is trying for the same creative liaison as Ondaatje achieved with a figure out of real life.

The curiosity that Scobie's title arouses is satisfied in a key verse of the poem.

(The only thing that stopped them dead
at any party, any bar, was always
McAlmon's Chinese Opera, a long
high wordless toneless wail
that filled the empty sky inside my head
and got me thrown out on the street
to seek the perfect audience of dawn.

It is to giving articulate expression to that "long / high wordless toneless wail" within McAlmon's head that Scobie devotes himself, and, whether or not he has contributed biographically to our understanding of McAlmon, he has certainly created a haunting imaginative reconstruction of this strange figure — a reconstruction which suggests that while subjectively our sense of failure is always true, in the eye of art and the ear of history we need not be forgotten.

My only misgiving arises from the very accomplishment of Scobie's verse. In my view, it is his best yet, and a great deal better than any writing of McAlmon's I have read. Yet in this making of the inarticulate articulate, something of essential actuality has been lost, something of the roughness and the anger that were the real McAlmon.

Montparnasse in the first light of dawn
has still that hard-edged honesty
it makes all judgments lies.

Still, *McAlmon's Chinese Opera* is certainly the most interesting book of verse, with the exception of Margaret Atwood's *True Stories* and Phyllis Webb's *Wilson's Bowl*, to appear in 1980, and it probably deserved the Governor-General's Award it received. Much of the anger that award aroused in the envious hearts

of the literary establishment arose, I believe, from the unorthodox circumstances in which the book was published. For this is one of the first batch of titles brought out by the poet Gary Geddes in his excellent venture, Quadrant Books, which seeks to overcome the growing limitations of the ordinary book trade by publishing good books with limited appeal, to be sold by subscription, as Alexander Pope long ago sold his own poems. Quadrant's list is a fine one, and those who are interested may write to Gary Geddes at the English Department, Concordia University, 1455 de Maisonneuve Blvd West, Montréal, Québec H3G 1M8.

GEORGE WOODCOCK

STRUGGLES WITH SILENCE

PHYLLIS WEBB, *Wilson's Bowl*. Coach House, \$7.50.

"THIS BOOK HAS BEEN LONG in coming," Phyllis Webb writes in her foreword. Yes, indeed. If we discount the two new compositions included in *Selected Poems* (1971), this is her first collection of original verse since *Naked Poems* (1965). It contains remnants of the never completed "Kropotkin Poems" at which she was known to be at work some years ago, but these have now been integrated — or, rather, re-integrated — into various sections of a volume which, though manifesting a rich variety of subject-matter, tone and even stanza-form, maintains an impressive unity as a single work.

Admirers of *Naked Poems* must often have wondered where Phyllis Webb could go from there. She had, as it were, pared down her verse to the bare bone; the only development seemed to be into total silence. These were poems so private and fragile that one almost felt that one was

committing an act of desecration in reading them. Impressively assured yet deeply disturbing, they provoked a number of uneasy questions: how private (or how naked) can a poet afford to be? Does there come a time when private associations become incommunicable and therefore pointless? There may, as Yeats thought, be more enterprise in walking naked, but what if a poem's acutely personal centre cannot hold?

At one extreme, a poem may be little more than a learned treatise, while at the other it is barely distinguishable from an anguished cry. Phyllis Webb, though tempted on occasions, I suspect, towards both extremes, is careful to succumb to neither, though an observation she makes in "Letters to Margaret Atwood" — "Peggy: Sometimes I hear you screaming between the paragraphs and poems" — applies equally well to herself. *Between* the paragraphs and poems, however, not *in* them. Phyllis Webb's respect for technique and her verbal dexterity (her "painsong" is also "plain-song") save her here. A connoisseur of chaos, she knows that, although it may contain intimations of meaninglessness, a poem must itself reveal a form.

Poetry is ultimately a public statement (Webb's reluctance to publish her work is indicative of a characteristic unease with this hard fact of poetic life), but it can paradoxically embody an intensely individual response: it can assert a poetic order heroically against the flux. At this point I remember that one of her best poems, "Breaking," from *The Sea Is Also A Garden* (1962), is a magnificent *creative* expression of the condition of being "absolutely broken." In the present book, she tells us how she hoards her poems in the hope that they will become "satisfactory failures." She is a mistress of oxymoron.

Nonetheless, while Webb doubtless considers herself a modernist (the "di-

vine paranoids" she celebrates include Dostoyevsky, Pound, Rilke), Eliot's famous modernist dictum, "the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates," in no way applies to her. She would see it, I imagine, as a characteristically masculine response. Her mind creates by brooding almost obsessively over the woman who suffers — or over others, men or women, who have suffered. She may concentrate her attention on the lives and dilemmas of others, but the personal voice, however varied and modulated, always reveals the personal strain. Even a poem-series like "Wilson's Bowl," a meditation in memory of a friend who committed suicide after *her* friend had committed suicide, though finely controlled and ostensibly directed outwards (an example of the "tight-lipped treasure" she promises to bequeath), gives the impression of being at the same time frighteningly subjective.

I am reminded of the popular question of yesteryear: who's afraid of Virginia Woolf? Well, I am for one, and I'm a little afraid of Phyllis Webb for similar reasons. In both writers I detect a mind desperately trying to maintain balance as the earth moves threateningly underfoot, a mind pushing towards the extremes into areas of perception both fascinating and dangerous, a mind never far from the end of its tether. The title of one of her earlier poems, again from *The Sea Is Also A Garden*, is "To Friends Who Have Also Considered Suicide." One gets the sense of an almost unbearable loneliness. That the language of her poems (and this is at least as true of *Wilson's Bowl* as of her previous books) is limpid, restrained, and serene makes the effect no less chilling.

The tension between the lucidity of her tone and the desperation of the consciousness behind it is perhaps the most remarkable quality of her poetry. Like D. H. Lawrence, she may be said to shed her

sicknesses in books, but she does so (unlike Lawrence) by concentrating on the interconnecting sounds of words, the therapeutic challenge of their rhythms, and the possible structures that can be made out of them. "I am absorbed," she says in one poem, "in the fitting together / of pieces," and this is less a concern to unify her fragments or "remnants" (the recalcitrant "Kropotkin Poems," for instance) as to find the necessary connections, the reassurance of form, *through* words. The poem in question is at one and the same time a statement and demonstration of her method:

Shall I tell you what I do to pass the time
here on the island at night?
There is red velvet and purple velvet.
I cut out diamonds from a pattern piece
by piece. I sew two pieces, one purple
one red, together, attach another making
designs
as I go.

The result is an intricate verbal tapestry; her words echo thus, in our minds.

There are some remarkably fine poems here, and they gain a cumulative impressiveness from their place in the volume as a whole. "Rilke," for example, first appeared in *Selected Poems*; it is the one poem to be reprinted from an earlier book, and although it appears without alteration it has become a different poem because it appears in a different context. Words like "lace," "Russia," "France," "shadowed," "echoes," which carried little special significance on the poem's original publication, are now lit up by previous usages in the poems that now precede it. We gradually become aware as we read of key terms which recur and gather associations about them. The pieces, red velvet or purple velvet, are seen to cohere; each poem takes its place in a larger design — first in the poem-series to which it belongs, then in the ultimate form of Webb's complete poetry.

I have already mentioned Virginia Woolf, and Lily Briscoe's requirements

for her painting expressed towards the end of *To the Lighthouse* are, I think, relevant here: "Beautiful and bright it should be on the surface, feathery and evanescent, one colour melting into another like the colours of a butterfly's wing; but beneath the fabric must be clamped together with bolts of iron." The bolts, in this case, are words and sounds. Sometimes the effect as word bounces off word is almost Joycean — or at least Kleinian:

Syllables disintegrate ingrate alphabets
lines decline into futures and limbos. . . .

On other occasions, internal rhyme provides the riveting connection:

It is a cell like any
other cell barred
hard very principled
and guarded.

Though most of her poems are written in what we quaintly call "free" verse, there is an astonishing range of short lines, long lines, occasional rhyming stanzas, and even an "Imperfect Sestina." There is also a sound poem — a form I don't usually care for, but this one seems more skilful and effective than most. Everywhere we are conscious of a firm poetic discipline.

But above all, there is the consummate clarity of tone. Here is the opening of "The Bowl," explaining the image that gives the title to both poem and book:

This is not a bowl you drink from
not a loving cup.
This is meditation's place
cold rapture's.

The apparent simplicity here is the harvest of a long apprenticeship, the product of an extended struggle with words and meanings — and also (as she notes in her foreword) with silence. It finds its supreme expression in the last poem in the book, "The Day of the Unicorns." What in a lesser poet might result in just another myth-poem is here a profound evo-

Letters in Canada 1980

Edited by
W.J. Keith and B.-Z. Shek

In this comprehensive review of Canadian literature more than sixty contributors assess the best works published in French and English by Canadians or on Canada in 1980. Available in previous years only as part of the summer issue of the *University of Toronto Quarterly*, this annual review reflects the country through an appreciation of its literature, evaluating the year's output of fiction, poetry, drama, translations, religion, and the humanities. *Letters in Canada 1980* is a valuable and provocative resource for anyone interested in the state of Canadian letters. \$25.00 cloth, \$7.50 paper

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cation of all that is lost with the passing of time, together with a realization of the necessity of such loss. The unicorns, she claims, used to live in the wood behind her cabin; they shared "the tensions of private property / and the need to be alone." These symbols (inadequate word!) of a glittering past are beautiful, but time has overtaken them:

they moved on with the courtly sun
grazing peacefully beyond the story
horns lowering and lifting and
lowering.

I know this is scarcely credible now
as we cabin ourselves in cold
and the motions of panic
and our cells destroy each other
performing music and extinction
and the great dreams pass on
to the common good.

The balance in the last two lines is beyond praise. The smooth assurance of such poetry is rare in any culture. There is nothing escapist or factitious about it; the implications are as much socio-political as aesthetic. It is a supreme elegy in which the beauty represented by the vanished unicorns flickers palpably in a verse that both laments and accepts their extinction. *Wilson's Bowl* is full of "dark sounds" but it ends with a hard-won serenity that is both impressive and exalting.

W. J. KEITH

NORTH-NORTHWEST

PATRICK LANE, *The Measure*. Black Moss.

IT SEEMS TO ME that Patrick Lane is one of our better contemporary poets when it comes to telling us about the place they inhabit with us. *The Measure* is a recent milestone/signpost of his being there — particularly West and Northwest. A controlling pattern of his earlier books like *Beware the Months of Fire* (1974) and *Poems New and Selected* (1978) is even

clearer here: short sojourns, many journeys. He is but a little mad north-north-west; but whichever direction the wind sits that blows through so many of his poems, he has a bracing body of work and calloused hands to show for his and his persona's travels. In the common way of fine poems in fine collections, "CPR Station — Winnipeg" does a lot of summing up in few words; Winnipeg is right in the middle of our place, and the speaker thinks toward a derelict fellow waiting-roomer, "This country has / travelled through you."

As in a lot of our poetry, outer topography of *The Measure's* place is mountains, the edge between prairie and mountain, trees, stones, and the lineaments of winter. So what's new? Well, in most of these poems the sense is of a looker really seeing, a hearer who really listens (especially to stories or to what asks to be turned into a story), a toucher who actually feels and is touched. That is always new. As for the human figure — inner map and all — who completes any topography if only in the sense of giving it a fragile, temporary voice, the teller of these poems is in full touch with those mountains, edges, trees, and stones. Especially with the stones. Metaphor and symbol are noble, serviceable creations but we're so apt at conjuring them into often trivialized, merely psychological states. Lane doesn't do this. Just as his teller consciously resists sentimentality,

I
could have wished to be less of an enemy
but that is the dreamer singing again . . . ,
("Marmot")

so he remains skeptical of indulging in

a parallel
between the horse and the car
not that damned symbolism
it all being far more complicated than
that. . . . ("Certs")

He tries to stay on the edge between inner and outer landscapes. The magus word-

maker inside remains in difficult commerce with what's out there, which includes other people and other forms of life wild and domestic: lovers, bums, fellow poets, teenage girls devoted to the flavoury nuances of certs though not of copulation, dead dogs, or frozen horses. He is not interested in transmogrifying this intractable outside into humid privacies of the confessional.

Earlier I echoed Hamlet deliberately and only half facetiously. This not only because some of the verbal rhythms in Lane's opening, title poem put me in mind of Hamlet but also because he has been for so long an archetype of perplexed civility thinking about its predicament. In *The Measure* the predicament, strongly sounded in its title page, is to find the measure, take the measure, of being in this place. "The Long Coyote Line" has a scrupulous geometry of lines and curves

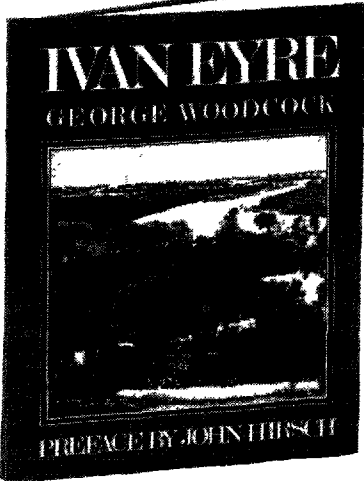
declining a momentary theorem, a "small disturbance" of snowshoe hare, coyote, observer and locates them

three by three, coyote, hare and the howl
where the true prairie begins.

There is also the perplexity of the storyteller's need to tell true, to find measure for measure — make right words for a trustworthy fit of outer occurrences to inner consequences. The elements of the fit are doing or thinking, seeing, saying. In *Poems New and Selected* there's one poem, "A Beautiful Woman," explicitly about the tricky gap between idea and speech:

A beautiful woman
is what you know before you speak it.
The shade your skull casts on your brain.
The space in a stone before you break it.

A number of poems in this collection address the perplexities of breaking the



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stones of deed, thought, and sight into telling speech; or of making the "stone inside the stone sing." This seems no less problematical or risky than a diamond cutter taking his hammer to a stone in hopes of producing a gem. "Fragments" gives us the predicament of a memory-haunted teller trying to tap the past into reliable present speech.

The Measure ends on a discouraged note. To other perplexities have been added deeper ones: the dark suspicion that it may not be worth going on telling, or even living, is compounded by the compulsion to go on nevertheless in spite of all the waste, violence, trivia, and zombism. We're even taken into one of the deepest nightmares of any thinking poet:

they'd ride with me as far as they could go
if i'd provide them with enough of a dream
tired of all those poets who keep trying
to invent a language their own being
finally corrupt. . . . ("Certs")

I find Lane's rendition of being in this place a moving one. I hope he is not too tired. I hope he goes on journeying and telling us.

IAN SOWTON

AUDREY & RACHEL

AUDREY THOMAS, *Latakia*. Talonbooks, \$7.95.

AUDREY THOMAS DARES to defy at least two spectres that haunt book reviews of books written by women. First, the heroine of *Latakia*, Rachel, is dangerously close in profile to Thomas. She is an American-born Canadian writer (like Thomas herself), who is a divorced mother of three daughters (also like Thomas). Writers today, like John Cheever and John Irving, assiduously disavow any "crypto-autobiography" in their writing. They feel it is a failure of imagination. Women, in particular, are criticized for being too "inner," unable to surpass

their "ego" to the larger, more universal vision of the world. It has been said that novels produced by North American women lately seem to have only one real character in them: Me. A procession of erotic Dorotheas, without the rest of *Middlemarch*.

Secondly, Thomas structures her novel around what she has called "the terrible gap between men and women," the war between the sexes, the only war, she adds, "where one sleeps with the enemy." Again, she tempts the critical gods who bellow and snort each time a woman who writes trots out this (they would say) tired old theme. Erica Jong has never critically recovered from the onslaught against *Fear of Flying* and *How To Save Your Own Life*. What is it that saves Margaret Drabble, who continually returns to this theme? Is it her clear erudition that renders the subject rationally acceptable or her Englishness that elicits only plaudits from her reviewers?

So Thomas has taken a chance. She writes of a woman, questing for love and knowledge, in no way certain that she will find this Holy Grail or that it even exists.

A skeleton outline of the novel has the same effect of a synopsis of *Jane Eyre*. Reduce it to plot and it sounds absurd at best and adolescent at worst: Rachel meets Michael, another writer, younger than she, who deserts his wife, Hester, to live with Rachel; Rachel and Michael travel to Crete, Greece, and to Latakia, a port in Syria; he keeps in touch with Hester (he masturbates when he writes a letter to her), the three attempt a *ménage à trois* that fails; and Michael goes back to his wife.

But the novel is a rich compendium of flashbacks, dreams, narrative, description and sharp images: a raw octopus drying on a clothesline, a scarlet hibiscus flower behind a fishmonger's ear, the rocks of Greece. This is a world of history and

definition, alien to those who are trying to discover the present, let alone the past. But Michael becomes Rachel's past, her archaeology.

The major questions of the book, however, remain, for me, 'Why do Rachel or Hester want Michael? If Rachel is this masochistic, can she ever truly discover herself? Discover how to live?' Michael is one of the most unsophisticated men that Rachel has ever met; he is rude, egotistical, jealous, and above all, childish and chauvinistic. Can we believe that a woman as intelligent, gifted, aware and analytical as Rachel would want such a man? Michael is in love with a distorted image of Rachel, a woman without three children. He does not think Rachel is a "good wife":

"You aren't a good wife to me," you said. And I exasperated, asked, "Well, what's your definition of a good wife then."

"A good wife is someone who is always there when you need her."


"No," I said. "that's the mother of a child under five."

Even though Rachel needs Michael's love, is insecure, and is sexually dependent on him, it stretches credibility somewhat to suppose that Rachel, given the kind of woman she is, would desire Michael. The dissension here is not that such a man exists, but rather that women like Rachel have other choices. Nevertheless, Thomas could be illustrating the terrible dichotomy between ideological strength and emotional need. It is perhaps only possible to be invincible if you are a *single* woman.

The novel is occasionally embarrassing in its depiction of their *ménage à trois*: Michael mustn't buy presents for Hester on Rachel's birthday. Rachel mustn't have a child before Hester has a child. And all this in twin beds, with Michael on the floor between them. Perhaps this is not a limitation of the writer's craft but one inherent in the situation and

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personalities of these characters. Perhaps Thomas is showing us that talent, reason, and perception are not insurance against the ineptitudes of life that render us foolish. Rachel says as if in answer, "It seems to take a whole lifetime to learn how to live, and then we need another one to put it all into practice."

Unlike many of her predecessors in literature, Rachel does not die or go mad when Michael leaves her, because "Life calls."

Most importantly, her writing calls. This is a novel about writing, communication, and language. Just as Michael feels diminished by Rachel's talent and wishes only to plunder and possess, so does language rape communication: "The first letter of the 'most ancient alphabet' seemed to me always to be greed, acquisitiveness, the desire to plunder and possess." Rachel queries near the end of the book: "Why didn't we just stick to gestures and grunts. . . . Once you get beyond letters, into words, into emotions and ideas, it doesn't help at all." However, this is not a descent into silence; it is a novel that assaults that which we cannot know, that which we cannot articulate, that which we cannot change. Rachel and Audrey Thomas will continue, and survive because, as Rachel says, "the best revenge is writing well."

DIANA COOPER-CLARK

FANTASY LIVES

W. P. KINSELLA, *Shoeless Joe Jackson Comes to Iowa*. Oberon, \$6.95.

LEON ROOKE, *Cry Evil*. Oberon, \$6.95.

THE FUNDAMENTAL differences between these two fine short story collections are suggested by their titles. Leon Rooke's *Cry Evil* is mostly unremitting in its sense of life as nasty and brutish. His stories are stocked with characters who,

if they aren't mad or paranoid or perverse, are victims of the madness, paranoia, or perversity of others. Rooke tempers all this with hard-edged, self-conscious black humour, and even allows a few tentative affirmations ("The process is painful but what the hell. Life is A-okay"). With rare exceptions, though, the cry "evil" finds only further echoes in the labyrinth of the self.

In contrast W. P. Kinsella's *Shoeless Joe Jackson Comes to Iowa* evokes worlds of innocence and dreams realized: the legendary baseball hero in the pastoral heartland of America, his nickname a nostalgic symbol of the Great American Pastime stripped of its corrupt contemporary trappings. But there is a serpent in this garden—Shoeless Joe's involvement in baseball's greatest scandal, the throwing of the 1919 World Series. In the title story the failure of one man's dream becomes raw material for the realization of another's. And while not all Kinsella's characters are successful either in accepting the world as it is or in trying to change it, on the whole they succeed about as often as they fail; the creative force is at least as strong as the corruptive; and even miracles are possible.

Since most of the stories in Kinsella's volume are about time and the games people play trying to beat it, his choice of baseball as metaphor is appropriate. In *The Summer Game*, Roger Angell has written elegiacally about baseball's illusory timelessness: "Since baseball time is measured only in outs, all you have to do is succeed utterly, keep hitting, keep the rally alive, and you have defeated time. You remain forever young." Kinsella rings a variety of glorious changes on this theme. In "Grecian Urn" a pair of lovers with the extraordinary power to inhabit inanimate objects choose what they think is Keats's famous urn as their final resting place, only to discover that

it is a seventeenth-century fraud. The fantasy of escape from time fails, too, for the protagonist of "First Names and Empty Pockets" who imagines what might have been had he saved Janis Joplin from her early death. Time in these stories represents not only defeat and disillusionment but also banality, the tyranny of the all-too-real against which the protagonist pitches his exotic dream.

The best of Kinsella's stories in this vein is "Fiona the First." The narrator is a professional pick-up artist eternally on the lookout for girls who know "how to play the game." Against the tacky, cliché-ridden backdrop of Southern California, he opposes time and reality by continually replaying his own slick erotic fiction in which only the girl's name changes. But in Fiona he comes up against a genuine first: a joy for life more fantastic than anything he can dream up. His love for her is a fact he can neither transcend nor ignore, and when she finally leaves him — according to his own rules — his gamesmanship is itself revealed as just another shabby cliché. The distancing devices he sets up to protect himself from time and love and pain fail him in the end, leaving him so terribly naked that we hurt with him.

Counterbalancing the failed fantasies are Kinsella's success stories. "Waiting for the Call" is a hilariously raunchy portrait of the artist as a young man. Its adolescent narrator's aching alienation from the polymorphous, multicultural life seething around him does not prevent him from amassing "a great dream-vision" from the world he observes. He knows that time is his ally; rich with his own vitality, he sets out in pursuit of his vision with only \$8.14 in his pocket but "several thousand dollars worth of adrenalin coursing through my body." If this story is Kinsella's *Portrait*, "The Blacksmith Shop Caper" is his *Ulysses*.

But This Is Our War



GRACE MORRIS CRAIG

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A hard-boiled middle-aged writer assigned to do an article on the singles bar scene discovers a subterranean world of would-be swingers who inspire in him feelings of gentle ridicule mixed with some slight envy. He understands that he has always been one of the sexually second-rate and realizes that he is getting old. But he accepts his straight self and his straight life with all their limitations. He has no need to try to live such fantasies; his wit suffices. Life is simply too interesting and too funny a game for him to want to change its rules.

Kinsella's dreamers greatly outnumber his realists but the extraordinary can fully succeed, it seems, only if it is dreamed in the service of an intensely ordinary reality. The narrator of "Shoeless Joe Jackson Comes to Iowa" knows that if he painstakingly reconstructs a baseball field on his Iowa farm, his long-dead sports idol will appear there, as pure in his passion for the game as the narrator is in his love for Iowa, his wife and daughter. And so he does. "This must be heaven," says Joe as he patrols the dream outfield. "No," answers the narrator. "It's Iowa." There is no irony in this remark and to Kinsella's great credit the story is in no way corny either. That spiritual harmony can be achieved, and with such style and grace out of such disparate fictional resources, is a tribute to the author's eclectic imaginative sympathies.

Fairy tale endings are more Kinsella's *métier* than Leon Rooke's, but both these collections are distinguished by their intelligence, versatility, and craftsmanship. The stories in *Cry Evil* are more baroque and make greater demands on the reader, echoing Barth and Borges, Dostoevsky, Kafka, and Poe. They are not recommended for chronic depressives. In theme and mood there is a dark sameness about them that is almost claustrophobic. However, the very extremity of

Rooke's gloomy vision somewhat undermines its seriousness. With what seems like an authorial wink, he has the nagging wife of the writer-protagonist in his opening story, "The Deacon's Tale," complain of his work: "It won't make any of us feel any better. It won't make anyone want to rejoice that they are alive. So what if people like your ugly hero do exist, you think that's any excuse?"

Rejoicing in life is about the last thing the characters in this book are likely to do. Although the psychiatric detective in "Fromm Investigations" insists that life is beautiful and that loneliness does not spell out the human condition, his own life denies his insistence. He sets out to track down the meaning of a client's dream but plunges instead into the heart of his own dark subconscious, "a rampaging mole" that digs away at his confidence and sanity. The Mole appears again, this time as a character of that name, in "Adolpho's Disappeared and We Haven't a Clue Where to Find Him," a gothic nightmare whose narrator is probably guilty of Adolpho's murder. In the end he, too, is trapped by his own impotent guilt, "shrieking that I was *innocent, innocent!* while all the evil of a thousand days licked at my heels." The madwoman whose diary comprises "The End of the Revolution and Other Stories" actually succeeds in becoming the fortunate Other Woman whom she pursues obsessively throughout the story, but only in the depths of her paranoid delirium. She is so repellent and so obviously mad that her final, desperate cry of "*satisfied, satisfied*" is little more than a grim joke.

The best story in the book is also the only one that offers a genuinely redemptive vision, although it too is severely qualified. The narrator of "Biographical Notes" is a pornographic filmmaker accused of a rape which he probably did

not commit. In his effort to exonerate himself he presents us with biographical sketches of the cast of characters who make up his life. As usual there is evil almost everywhere, except here there is also a supportive wife, "an innocent child," and the films themselves which, he argues, prove "that filth remains filth until someone with a humanist perspective comes along and transforms it, often through art, into a thing that takes the measure of the beauty and depth of human life." This seems a specious defense until it is confirmed by the one positive review of his work — part Pauline Kael parody but also, we suspect, part-truth — and by the scenario for his next film. In it the innocent child, pursued by evil, is saved by the film director and his wife, and the evil world is reduced to harmlessness by cinematic technique. Even though life remains intransigent, we can at least cheer his attempt to make it work and transform its sordid reality through the aesthetic imagination.

JERRY WASSERMAN

A CLASSICIST'S CELEBRATION

FRED COGSWELL, *A Long Apprenticeship: Collected Poems*. Fiddlehead.

FRED COGSWELL is not a flamboyant man. His talent is quiet, his worth solid and indisputable. A thoroughly Canadian talent, one might say, consistently underrated by his fellow citizens. Cogswell's *Collected Poems* witness not only to a long apprenticeship but to an excellent command of craft, a strong emotional sensitivity, and a keen intellect.

Frederick William Cogswell (the informal *Fred* is typical of the man's unpretentious quality) is a Maritimer born

and bred. He has spent much of his life in Fredericton, teaching English at the University of New Brunswick. He is an anthologizer and a translator, an editor (of *The Fiddlehead*, 1952-66, and publisher of Fiddlehead Poetry Books, 1960-80). This series of chapbooks provided encouragement and opportunity for many new poets. His translations of modern Quebec poets (1970, 1971) indicate his empathy for modern *Québécois* and his sensitivity towards language.

Born in 1917, Cogswell is young enough to have been influenced by the 'Montreal group' (Smith, Scott, Kennedy and Klein), yet old enough to have had a respect for traditional metre and verse forms bred into his bones. A basically conservative poet, he walks a fine line between the old-fashioned and the new-fangled. He uses many traditional verse forms, especially the sonnet, but uses them freely, not slavishly. In 1931, Frank Scott advised *Canadian Forum* readers that the 'new poetry' called for the adaptation, not the rejection, of traditional forms. Cogswell's convictions are obviously similar.

The individual poems in this collection are undated, just to frustrate the scholar. There are no apparent radical shifts in this poetic career, and no subdivisions in the collection, but the arrangement has its own easy rhythms, as when "Futility" (a poem about the paper world of academics among whom Cogswell has spent his life) is followed by a poem about the "acid act" which is, inescapably, "scar or star."

Several groupings consist of sonnet sequences on the poet's Maritime neighbours in the Saint John River valley, an intimate, inbred world of loves and hates. Cogswell celebrates a proud, sensitive and eccentric people. The collection opens with a sonnet, "Valley-Folk":

O narrow are the hates with which we
thorn

Each other's flesh by gossip of the Grundies,
And narrow are our roads to church on
Sundays,
And narrow too the vows of love we've
sworn.

In the sestet, the river's course to the sea becomes an image for an inevitable process which links these people to the wider world.

Many of the poems are about poetry, and art. "A poem is a watch designed / To tick for ever in the mind" ("A Poem"). "A Poet" acknowledges the ambivalence, even desperation, in the artist's life. "Behind the Blood" contrasts the poet and the universe he celebrates, the order he seeks, the power of the images that give him ease from pain and death. "The End of Poetry" (an anomaly) juxtaposes an idealized beginning ("*Forever always is the Word / and the Word is servant unto men*") with a blackly comic, surreal portrait of Muse as Woman. "Making poems is like / making love," where desire and performance are occasionally, and felicitously, joined. In "A Classicist's Lament," Cogswell's measured couplets, after the manner of Pope, mock modern freedom from toil and rules:

A youth, new bitten by the flea to write,
Can scratch himself to poet overnight!
Pebbles that lurk beneath the self's dark
sea
Can win acclaim as pearls of poetry,
Provided that the ropes on which they're
strung
Are twisted dreams by Freud or myths by
Jung; . . .
The modern critic gives his best reviews
To work that's esoteric and abstruse, . . .
O for an honest child to cry halloo
For naked truths that Burke and Johnson
knew. . . .

Cogswell's typical themes are concerned with love and hate, time and aging, sadism, human folly, and beauty. His semi-urban world has a small-town aura. William Toye wrote, in 1973, of Cogswell's "sense of fallen man." This

sensibility is found in many of the sonnets on the people of the valley, and in miniature psycho-dramas such as "Lefty," "Paul," "Pros and Cons," or "The Event." The latter, a story in verse form, tells of a rape and its effect on the lives of four people:

In itself an event is nothing.
It dies in the acting.
But its ghost walks and rocks
the minds of all it touches
as a stone vibrates in water
rippling far and thin
to the shores of time. . . .
What if the myriads moving through
each one of several billion lives
clash and jostle as this one did
tangling us in a bloody web
til we have neither sight to see / nor
strength to fly?
The spider-god of history / thrives on
ghosts

Some of the short poems have a finely chiselled, epigrammatic quality ("Bigot," "Two Fears"). Others ("The Golden Lure," "A Farmer Views the Harvest") develop metaphysical conceits, after the seventeenth-century manner which so fascinated Leo Kennedy and his fellow Montreal poets. Still others reveal a sardonic wit ("Overheard on the Metro"), a quiet humour, or (surprisingly) a hilarious gift for parody, as in "Spiv's Innisfree," which begins,

I will arise and go to a pub in Picadilly
and six quick ones will I down there, of
scotch and soda made.

We are left, finally, with a paradoxically Canadian mixture of Canada Council mandarin, *éminence grise*, and fine poet. As Robert McDougall reminded us in the 1960's, many of our poets have been scholars. Cogswell's ambition as poet is suggested in the poem he places last:

for an artist
it is better
to be a well-placed
candle

than a blazing sun
to illuminate
without distortion
the empty spaces
between and around
what is normally seen

His poems do illuminate, and we are grateful for their light.

PATRICIA MORLEY

CREATION & RECREATION

NORTHROP FRYE, *Creation and Recreation*.
Univ. of Toronto Press.

NORTHROP FRYE'S CONTRIBUTION to the field of criticism has been both extraordinary and extraordinarily influential. Indeed, his stature has grown great enough that it must seem almost heretical to express a reservation concerning his work. For all that, Frye's latest volume demonstrates that accustomed reverence (no matter how deserved) can generate excessive promotion: some lectures by great Professors should remain unprinted.

Creation and Recreation, a kind of review, by Frye, of himself, was delivered as three Larkin-Stuart Lectures early in 1980 at Trinity College in the University of Toronto. The series is quasi-confessional, marked by a self-conscious replaying of earlier notes, and exhibits too much awkward self-justification. Beyond their collective title (there are no individual essay titles) it is finally difficult to say otherwise precisely what the essays are meant to be about — except, as acknowledged, that they “draw on earlier material,” and involve more than a few “glimpses of charted territory.” Yet the volume raises serious questions about Frye's general doctrine.

The first of the present essays concerns itself primarily with the concept of crea-

tion. As rhetorical foil, Frye adduces two opposing views of Creation. First there is the sometime protestant view, which he identifies with Karl Barth, in which God is sole Creator, man merely creature. The other is the liberal humanist position (presumably represented for Frye by figures such as Feuerbach), which argues that the notion of a creating God is merely projected from the observation that man is a maker, *homo faber*. Frye's own dialectic depends on this binary opposition of possible hypotheses as well as upon his evident preference for the second theory. (Some readers may find Frye's one-choice argument to be somewhat disadvantaged by its omission of other theories which have long played a dominant role in literature and criticism, an example of which would be the “creation-subcreation” view represented by modern writers as diverse as J. R. R. Tolkien, C. S. Lewis, Dorothy Sayers and Paul Ricoeur.)

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Frye's literary guide through the first essay of this collection is not Blake, but Oscar Wilde. In his own essay, "The Decay of Lying," Wilde had argued that the creative arts are essentially forms of 'lying,' or turning away from the external world. Frye applies Wilde's attack on realism as a principle — that which in art is recognizable "Creation" is in fact *discreative*: for Frye, "the function of the recognizable in the arts is not aesthetic"; creation is their "non-creative element." This assertion leads Frye (although it might have led him elsewhere) to a kind of Nietzschean dictum:

the humanly creative is whatever profoundly disturbs our sense of 'the' creation, a reversing or neutralizing of it. The encounter of God and man in creation seems to be rather like what some of the great poets of nuclear physics have described as the encounter of matter with anti-matter: each annihilates the other. What seems one of the few admirable forms of human achievement, the creation of the arts, turns out to be a kind of decreation: I might have called my lectures 'Creation and De-creation'...

The relationship between recreation and decreation, in any normal sense of these words, is oblique enough that their virtual equation is jarring. Vandalism, for example, is sure to be adduced by some sociologist or other as a species of play, but even a sociologist is unlikely to regard child's play and vandalism in his own household with the same loving eye. Something has gone wrong with Frye's language here, and I point to it only because it is indicative of premise and method, both as they apply to his generalized hermeneuticism and to his specific recapitulation in this group of essays.

C. S. Lewis, dealing with similar insights into the nature of creative process, could almost agree with Frye that the psyche of the artist is more central to his art than is the (ostensibly) objective reality with which his art must conjure.

Lewis suggested, however, that there are various degrees of intention in the artist, occupying a spectrum between the "reality" (i.e., Creation) outside, and the self, (i.e., creation) inside. Points of intention have a significant valence for the way in which we "read" art, since, by definition, there are real differences along this spectrum with respect to commitment to conversation with the reader. And there are differences between authors in the degree of overt commitment they have to 'lying,' either with story, or with language. In *The Great Divorce* Lewis postulates, whimsically, that early in an artist's career he may be utterly attracted to the beauty or form of external "reality," and try to paint that reality as a way of coming to 'know' it. (That this drive could forcefully motivate the young Albrecht Dürer or G. M. Hopkins is inadequately accounted for in Frye's theory.) Then, says Lewis, there comes a stage at which the artist is less concerned with external reality, the "otherness" of his ostensible subject matter, than he is with the light which reveals it, or even the shadow which frames the light. Next the artist might become interested in the means and processes of his own perception, about which he may elaborate theories. Or, in quite a different way than at first, he could begin to become concerned with the way that others see his art as finished "product," as a kind of new and independent external reality. Finally, the artist so inclined may become concerned only with himself, and above all with his reputation. It is in the last stage, presumably, that the artist is most self-consciously aware of his art as mendacious, and Wilde, presumably, understood this.

From this perspective the first sentence of Frye's present book could seem disingenuous.

I am a literary critic, mainly concerned

with English literature, and I have recently developed a special interest in the way that the Bible has affected the structure and imagery of that literature.

One must otherwise imagine a joke. Frye's interest, in fact, is far from recent; indeed, in one form of expression or another, from his book on Blake, *A Fearful Symmetry* (1947), to *Secular Scripture* (1976) he has been almost continuously occupied with this subject.

On this occasion, whether as critic or as artist, Frye seems at first to be looking at the Bible as an external cultural symbol (rather than as a literary text), relating symbol rather than text to the language and thought of his aesthetic enterprise. But in so doing he 'paints a picture' of the Bible as literary text that should shock us into a renewed appreciation for naive realism, or at the least for the humble advantages of new-criticism.

To be blunt about it, Frye does not evidence in these essays a very good grasp of his subject. At the most elementary level, it should be obvious that the Bible cannot be treated *literarily* as though it were a single document: despite a remarkable coherence in respect of governing ideas, the Bible is an anthology, written by many authors over a considerable number of centuries in three languages. Casual generalizations are likely to do violence to any number of specific texts. To say, as Frye does here, that "The garden is a symbol of the female body in the Bible," even when citing *Song of Songs* as an example, is to ignore rather than read the whole text. (Even in *Song*, the very opposite might more credibly be said — that the female body is a symbol of the Garden.) In *Genesis*, or *Isaiah*, or even in *John* 20 (where Magdalene mistakes the risen Christ for a gardener), the garden is a primary symbol for Creation, which, we may remember, is Frye's ostensible subject. But the garden can also be a symbol

for human arrogance and perversion, as in the Garden of Adonis (*Isaiah*, 17: 10-11). Frye's generalization, in short, is hopelessly misleading.

Moreover, to sustain such generalizations about the text, Frye can be drawn into wilder misrepresentations of its principal artistic traditions of interpretation. Thus, by way of example, Dante is mistranslated by Frye — *legato con amore in un volume*, according to Frye, reads "bound into a single *Word* by love" — whereas Dante's word is *volume* (mass, volume, book or tome). The point is not incidental; the mistranslation misrepresents ascription to the idea of a monistic biblical utterance which, if it were valid, would simply obliterate the various texts as text — something we hope Frye no less than Dante would be reluctant to do.

Frye is already notorious among literary critics for avoiding the actual texts of the secular literature he schematizes. In this volume his subsumed discussion of Shakespeare's *Winter's Tale* under categories of generalization drawn from his view of *The Tempest* exemplifies a general tendency. For Frye the wondrous transformation at the end of *Winter's Tale* is, like the conclusion of *The Tempest*, "a vision of a reintegrated past in which dead things come to life under the spell of *art*." But by eschewing the careful language of Acts IV and V he misses the play's key point of reference for his ostensible subject: it is the explicit juxtaposition of Ovidian language (*art*) and specifically Pauline language (*grace*) that lend to this romance its particular source of "future hope." Here, we remember, it is actually Paulina who tutors the metamorphosis, giving it both language and life, because it is she who induces in Leontes the moral transformation which alone could produce in the old king a reconciliation with that "nature" which is his "nature" too. The music which plays at Hermione's unveil-

ing is for Shakespeare's time no more certainly a figure for art than for spiritual harmony; indeed, Leontes' initial sense that he could be less transformed than "mocked with art" (V. iii. 68) is confirmed by Paulina. What she says is "— nay, come away, / Bequeath to death numbness, for from him / Dear life redeems you." (V. iii. 101-03). Hermione's 'resurrection' from dead art to living wife, from silence to conversation, is actually seen to transform the old Pygmalion story, and to image in Leontes, too, a familiar biblical prospect on creation and recreation. It is Paulina, with her biblical language, who orchestrates and makes possible the retrospective interpretation, and it is she who is able to suggest to us in which way we are to understand that "Our Perdita is found" (V. iii. 120). It is unfair to both plays to treat them as though they were two jellies from the same mold, or, indeed, to suggest as Frye does that each certifies his precept that in approaching Shakespeare's romances "the Bible . . . is deficient as a guide to human creative perspectives" and that only the classical tradition affords us much help with their interpretation.

What one begins to discern in Frye, as he relates to biblical text, is that it is difficult for him not to express a polemic against the text, rather than actually to "read" it, and this is most disquieting. To say "The Bible has little or nothing to say about man's cultural past" or even that in the Bible "the beginning is postulated, as something superior to all that follows" seems indefensibly inventive (or deconstructive) of biblical literature, at least as we might be concerned with it from any point of view which respects the actual text. One is forced to conclude, then, that it is not text but some narrower aspect of tradition against which Frye, with Blake at his elbow still, is poised.

I hope that my resistance to this volume will not be misconstrued. Disapproval of what Frye regards as bad criticism is certainly his critic's prerogative. Confusing or identifying one species of criticism with the text, as though it were itself the text on which it comments is, I think, far less defensible. For one thing, the confusion introduces a risky conflation of historical and eccentric interpretation. Whether one construes the doctrine of the Trinity, for example, as "designed primarily to prevent man from slipping out of the grip of the church" — historically, *c'est à rire* — or, perhaps, sees it as a metaphor designed to explicate distinct yet unified faculties of mind integral to 'recreation' or thought itself (memory, intellect, will, as in Augustine, Dante, Jung), may be largely a question of whether one is willing to deform the various texts at issue or else to engage them and their traditions of criticism in such imaginative conversation as could lead to a responsible interpretation. If Frye really wishes to discuss western creation myth or biblical cosmogony, then to make much of the curious seventeenth-century 'chronology' which attempted to 'date' creation in 4004 B.C., adducing poor Bishop Ussher as a prime example of a *general* "Christian . . . paranoia" about beginnings and endings is, as Frye must realize, at best to go fishing for red herring. Even if interpretation is itself merely another species of fiction, literary critics should aspire to "plausible fictions." It is a relatively easy thing to find fault with bad and dead exegetes, apparently much more difficult to deal with the complex historical dialogue between Sacred and Secular Scripture — even when that dialogue is germinal to one of the most interesting of contemporary literary questions, that concerning our stance as readers with respect to beginnings and endings.

This is not to blame Frye overly much:

anyone who has struggled with any aspect of the task he advertises must have some sympathy. But one has to wish that the Professor would refrain from claiming as a major source what is evidently a short punt. To adapt an incensed Blakean response to the Bible is not to deal effectively with its literary and aesthetic implications for western culture. Merely to express impatience with God's rhetorical questions of Job about whether he was present at creation or could have affected it (Frye: "God seems to regard this as a triumphant argument in favour of the wisdom of his ways and the folly of Job's") is, however emotionally sympathetic we might feel toward Blake or Frye, nonetheless to rob criticism of any valid voice of the text. The Job-narrator's own evident interest in the situation is as a significant apprehension of man's existential limitations, his 'middleness' — and thus of his motivation for a keen imaginative enquiry into the issue of beginnings and endings, creation and recreation. In short, the Book of Job offers promising terrain for Frye's subject, but his emotional disaffection from one species of travelogue (or emotional allegiance to another journey) prevents him from seeing any fruitfulness in the land.

There remain a number of points in these essays at which Frye verges on plausible commentary concerning the dialogue between Sacred and Secular Scripture. Art, he says promisingly, has to do with an "idealized vision of society projected on the future." By this reckoning, Biblical narrative is art. Myth, Frye says further, is about what has happened, while faith is about what will happen. Yet one feels the approach of another false dichotomy here: surely myth is also about future vision, and, as historians and philosophers (March Bloch, David Carr, Paul Ricoeur) have argued, we are also obliged to exercise faith in respect to various myths concerning what has

happened. In this sense, past, present, and future are all aspects of our interpretation, whether it be as 'translation' (*vide* George Steiner) or some less kind of 'recreation.' Our present activity is intellectual, into which vortex we place in imaginative tension our remembered dream of the past (the texts, the myths of 'innocence' and 'experience' which have shaped our vision) and the future we intend or hope for (the unwritten, the dreams and visions which shape our growing imagination). Frye's apologetic suggests that when we do this, whether as artists or, here, as critics, we are aware of two possible attitudes with respect to our activity: either there is reality, a creation 'outside' (e.g., a text) which calls us to knowing, depiction, and creative translation, or, there is only one real creation, our own, which must decreate the first to find its own recreative voice and vision. This position may represent something more than a restatement of Frye's earlier formulations: in *Secular Scripture* he was clear about the distinction, but less comfortable with the negation:

The secular scripture tells us that we are the creators; other scriptures tell us that we are actors in a drama of divine creation and redemption. Even Alice is troubled by the thought that her dream may not have been hers but the Red King's. Identity and self-recognition begin when we realize that this is not an either-or question, when the great twins of divine creation and human recreation have merged into one, and we can see that the same shape is upon both.

We see that a continuing problem with Frye is that in his fascination with relationships between myth and religion he often seems to confound rather than connect the two. If biblical text is to be treated as literature, then it must also be granted status as myth, as text about "what has happened," reaching back to beginnings (and creation), motivated by

the desire for "an idealized vision of society projected on the future." If Frye wishes to grant to secular literature the status of religious myth, then, like all religious text, it too must be held to be about the inexplicable, the mystery of presentness, and our longing for a closure more fullsome than we can yet foresee. If I may paraphrase a senior member of our national academy: we usually think of myth as fiction that wants to explain; religion as wanting to celebrate the inexplicable. (In this sense, of course, religion is not the same thing as dogma.) But it seems that, despite his protest, Frye may in this book be explicating neither species of recreation — myth or religion. What he clearly sees as distasteful about Sacred Scripture, for example, is its ordinary claim to status as a text to be read and interpreted. What his view of both Sacred and Secular Scripture threatens to do is to reject outright what his own early teachers felt to be a necessary relationship of secular literature to its criticism, that the received text, rather than any species of its interpretation, should retain critical authority.

The selling advantage of Frye's theory of secular scripture is that the reader is the authority — or at least the 'divinely inspired' reader, the Super-Critic, is authority. In the Frigian cosmos, the critic as Authority provides the key to all mythologies; his decreation is the Creation that is real, and presumably sufficient for our recreation. That this Authority has been generously received in Canada is well enough attested by the curious determination of Canadian creative writers to explicate Frye with their work, to use poetry to interpret criticism rather than to expect criticism to interpret poetry.

Yet in such a circle game there is tacit acceptance of an unusual order of pre-eminence. What the re-ordering means for the present exercise is that on Frye's

own terms we are finally compelled to evaluate his ostensibly "critical" work as imaginative literature rather than as criticism, or, perhaps, *de facto*, as religious manifesto rather than exegesis. In such a light the complaint of this review — that the Frye of *Creation and Recreation* is not a particularly fruitful or reliable reader of texts — must seem not only heretical but vain. Frye celebrates a contemporary French and American reconception of the critics calling as competitor and ultimately successor to the artist. Thus, as the culminating reflection on his own career, it seems that he, too, heralds a new stage for criticism: Enter dogma: *Exeunt*, literature and interpretation.

Especially in a gifted writer with Frye's genuine depth of culture, the displacement of literary criticism by another species of writing would not be a cause for complaint if it were more accurately advertised. Frye's actual subjects are not secular literature and the literature of the Bible, neither is the relationship he explicates that between the Bible and secular literature. Rather Frye responds to a debate amongst both religious and literary interpreters in the liberal, humane and other traditions since at least the nineteenth century (as yet unresolved) concerning authority in interpretation. In the nineteenth century the authority no longer placed confidently in the text of Sacred Scripture was placed hopefully in secular literature — the best that was said or thought. It may not unfairly be said that the Frye of *Anatomy of Criticism* was still within this tradition. Whether from Feuerbach, Arnold and G. Eliot then, or their twentieth-century counterparts, Frye seems in *Creation and Recreation* to have moved forward along an arc of logic self-consciously anticipated by his actual author of occasion, the candidly misleading Oscar Wilde. It is in the text of Wilde's clear

self-advertisement that we see how apt is Frye's early remark, that Wilde was "fifty years ahead of his time":

[This] is what the highest criticism really is, the record of one's own soul. It is more fascinating than history as it is concerned simply with oneself. It is more delightful than philosophy, as its subject is concrete and not abstract, real and not vague. It is the only civilised form of autobiography, as it deals not with the events, but with the thoughts of one's life: not with life's physical accidents of deed or circumstance, but with the spiritual moods and imaginative passions of the mind.

I think that Wilde (as usual, wagging his text behind him) offers in these words a fair and relevant comment on Frye's latest book. It may also, and somewhat more faithfully, advertise its appropriate conclusion.

The idea that everyone's theory of almost anything is finally autobiographical is, of course, hardly original with Oscar Wilde. For this reason alone, any suggestion that universal dogma should be generated from one peculiar autobiography, however carefully hidden in fair words, is a presumption that we expect a great critic to refute rather than to model.

DAVID JEFFREY

BESSETTE RE-VIEWED

GERARD BESSETTE, *Le Cycle*. Québec/Amérique, \$9.95.

GERARD BESSETTE, *La Garden-Party de Christophine*. Québec/Amérique, \$6.95.

GERARD BESSETTE has been writing and publishing short stories and novels for over twenty years. Four recent events have stimulated critical interest in, and encouraged the reading of, his works. He was awarded the Government of Québec's *Prix Athanase-David* for 1980, and Queen's University held a "Bessette Col-

loquium" to honour his retirement. Québec/Amérique Press issued *La Garden-Party de Christophine*, a collection of six short stories, five of which had been previously published. Finally, the same press reissued *Le Cycle*, the novel first published in 1971, for which Bessette won his second Governor-General's Award. Because only one short story, "La garden-party de Christophine" is new, and the most recent of the older works dates from the early seventies, this review of *Le Cycle* and *La Garden-Party de Christophine* necessarily involves a re-view of Gérard Bessette's fiction.

"L'accident," "L'emplâtre," and "L'extrême-onction" date from the early sixties. "L'accident" and "L'emplâtre" were first published in *Ecrits du Canada français* in March 1962; "L'extrême-onction," in *Liberté* in May-June 1963. This short story, however, had already appeared in English as "The Conversion" in the *Queen's Quarterly* in 1960. It remains today the only one of these seven works available in English.

"L'accident," "L'emplâtre," and "L'extrême-onction" are not only contemporary with Bessette's four early novels, but they also share with them similarities of content and style. Like *La Bagarre* (1958), *Le Libraire* (1960), *Les Pédagogues* (1961), and *La Commensale* (1975, though written in the early sixties), the three short stories are all set at least partly in Montréal after the Second World War. Thanase, the chief character of "L'accident," is "un ancien combattant." In "L'emplâtre," M. Denaud's daughter-in-law is an English war-bride. With the partial exception of the lawyer and his family in "L'extrême-onction," the characters in those early stories, like most of the characters in the early novels, belong to the working class. Thanase works in the garage that he eventually burns down; Léon Denaud is a bank teller. In both the short stories and

novels, moreover, Bessette uses his setting and characters to help create the atmosphere of realism through which he satirizes French-Canadian society. With its ineffective priest, hypocritical *croquants*, and exploitation of a young child, "L'extrême-onction" summarizes the criticisms of the Roman Catholic Church which Bessette makes at greater length in *Le Libraire*, *Les Pédagogues*, and *La Comensale*.

The style of both the early short stories and the early novels is also similar in that, although it is fairly traditional, it shows Bessette's awareness of the importance of point-of-view in fiction and his fascination with levels, kinds, and tones of language. Thanase's line "Right . . . t'as jamais dit plus vrai" provides the mixture of English, ungrammatical French, colloquialisms, and italicized emphasis that allows the reader to feel his uneducated, exaggerating, careless, cliché-ridden, "accidental" character. Etienne Beaulieu's repeated "Non" both unifies "L'extrême-onction" and acts as a kind of cosmic chorus on the silliness of his "conversion." From the mid-sixties on, of course, Bessette's experiments with *optique* and language are one of the most exciting aspects of his fiction.

La Garden-Party de Christophine contains two other previously published short stories, "Grossesse," which first appeared in 1969, in the March-April issue of *Liberté*, and "Romance," which also appeared in 1969, in the September-October issue of *La Barre du jour*. Both these works bear resemblances to their contemporary novels, *L'Incubation* (1965), and *Le Cycle* (1971).

Although "Grossesse" is written in the third person, its lone character is Sylvaine, the six-months pregnant wife of Ghislain; she is depicted one day in the hour or so she waits for her morning-sickness. The pregnancy and the passage of time are objectified by repeated refer-

ences to Sylvaine's brassiere, clock, and medical dictionary. The emphasis on inner feelings rather than on outward actions, the differences suggested between biological and chronological time, the exploration of a woman's pregnancy, and the use of repeated physical objects to connote physiological and psychological states are typical of Bessette's later fiction. Bessette's presentation of a pregnant woman waiting to vomit, in fact, is a short step from *Le Cycle's* Gaétane, Vitaline, Berthe, and Anita and their preoccupations with such phenomena as menstruation, copulation, and urination. At the end of "Grossesse," however, Sylvaine, having finally been sick, looks forward both to her shopping and "un enfant, un enfant, un enfant. . . ." By contrast, in *Le Cycle*, the women literally stand around a corpse and a coffin, while they figuratively circle around events in their past which, Bessette suggests, box them in a destructive, even deadly, present.

An amusing prose-poem on the life of a fifty-year-old man, at first glance "Romance" is totally different from either *L'Incubation* or *Le Cycle*. Yet, Norbert Allaire-Ducal drowns himself and thus commits suicide like Néa in *L'Incubation*. And Norbert has the same first name as Norbert Barré, the corpse who in some ways is the central character of *Le Cycle*.

In *Mes Romans et moi* (1979), Bessette analyses both the relationship between the two Norberts and his own father, and the variations on the Oedipus complex which the dead husband-father-grandfather represents for each of the seven first-person narrators of *Le Cycle*. In "The Unending Cycle," an article on the novel which appeared in *Canadian Literature* (No. 63, 1975), Leonard W. Sugden identifies *Le Cycle* with what he calls "the Quebec myth." Although the psychological and political

implications of this work are undoubtedly very important, *Le Cycle* is also a brilliant exploration of first-person narration, stream-of-consciousness technique, and complexities and levels of language. The five-year-old Jacot's unspoken explanation of the meaning of his mother's statement "Ton grand-père est mort" includes, for example, images of colour, references to "la grande boîte" in which his grandfather lies, a series of short, simple statements, and an observation of, and conclusion about, his mother's grief: "elle avait les yeux rouges elle faisait une moue elle était laide." The high proportion of monosyllabic, concrete words is typical of the vocabulary of a young child who is not yet able to think in abstract terms. At the same time, however, Jacot's style provides a dramatically precise opening for this novel about not only physical death but also the equally ugly, imprisoning, and destructive spiritual death which individuals, families, and societies are all sometimes heir to.

Since *Le Cycle*, Bessette has published two novels written during the seventies, *Les Anthropoïdes* (1977), in which the characters are anthropoids, and *Le Semestre* (1979). And he is presently (March 1981) working on two more. "La Garden-party de Christophine," the final work in his collection of short stories, will eventually be a prologue to one of these novels. "La garden-party" focusses on two characters, Lupien and Yanette Leraleux, as they sit talking and drinking wine on the night of their wedding anniversary. Their conversation centres on an invitation to a garden party they have received from Christophine Haminette, the recently-reconciled wife of Jérémie. Although Lupien and Yanette spend much time arguing about their attendance at the party and their friendship with the Haminettes, ultimately their talk reveals the complexities and ambiguities of their own marital rela-

tionship, one not dissimilar in some ways to that of the quarrelling couple in Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1962).

The originality of "La Garden-party de Christophine," in fact, lies more in its form than its content. It is a dialogue. Thus, although a narrator describes occasionally the characters' physical movements, the reader is mostly unaware of his presence. This attempt to reveal characters through what they say seems a startling departure from Bessette's previous concentration on portraying the inner feelings — both physical and psychological — of his characters through a stream-of-consciousness technique. The conversation of Lupien and Yanette, however — often dirty and always progressively more drunken — allows the reader to participate directly in the structure and tones of their spoken language and therefore, in so far as we are what we speak, in their physical and psychological states. In this latest work, then, Bessette explores the possibilities of speech.

At the end of *Le Semestre*, Omer Marin, its chief character, sets out to write a "roman-bilan," a novel which will be the balance-sheet of his life as an author, critic, and professor at Princess University, Narcotown, Ontario. Similarities between Omer Marin and Gérard Bessette actually make *Le Semestre* a work of autobiographical fiction and the summing up that of the life and works of Gérard Bessette. *Le Semestre*, however, as a self-portrait of the artist, provides only one view. *Le Cycle*, because it is probably Bessette's most successful novel, and *La Garden-party de Christophine*, because it includes stories written at various points in Bessette's career, together allow for another view of his fiction. What this re-view ultimately reveals, I think, is a portrait of a very creative artist skilled in the craft of fic-

tion and fascinated with the potential of language as object and symbol.

MARY JANE EDWARDS

FANTASIA

SUZANNE PARADIS, *Miss Charlie*. Leméac.

SINCE 1959 Suzanne Paradis has published some twenty-one books: poems, novels, collections of short stories and two monographs dedicated to women writers. One of these monographs is a reading of Adrienne Choquette (1978), a writer and journalist who died in 1973 and whose work is, as yet, little known. The other, *Femme fictive, femme réelle* (1966), examines the principal feminine characters created by French-Canadian women writers between 1884 and 1966; this study is an illuminating portrayal of how fiction can indeed foreshadow social and intellectual changes.

It is surprising that despite the numerous publications, despite the literary prizes won (among them the France-Québec prize in 1965 and the du Maurier prize in 1970), despite her awareness of and attentiveness to contemporary preoccupations, trends and styles, despite the fact that Suzanne Paradis is well known and well read, she has never enjoyed the meteoric best-seller's success that other Québec writers (men and women) have known in the last twenty years, and many of her works are now out of print. The principal merit of Suzanne Paradis is a continuous commitment to the craft of writing and the slow revelation of the self through the mastery of her art. Her writing is rigorous and restrained, as is the sensitivity it uncovers. It is perhaps this moderation, this lack of sudden changes and sensationalism that has won her the steady recognition and respect of readers and literary critics, but not fame.

Miss Charlie is a complex novel, orchestrating three independent but associated narrative voices. This trio, in turn, develops its themes around a fourth source of fiction: a theatrical representation (*L'Etrangère*) by an author whose identity is not revealed until shortly before the opening-night performance. The plot of the play, although never given, echoes the key elements of the other three narrations: the subjugation of a woman by a man, an accident, intermittent bouts with madness, the reconstruction of a new identity through final purification (fire or death).

Although the three intertwined novels have only two characters in common (Charlie and Chinchilla) and although it is tempting to consider Chinchilla as the darker, uncontrolled, turbulent side of Charlie, the fiction-making process seems to be more important than psychological analysis throughout most of the novel.

Narration 1 opens and closes the book. Miss Charlie is the first-person narrator. Hers is an active voice in the sense that self-revelation is gradually achieved. Marie-Charles Craig (Charlie) is thirty-three, widowed after only a few months of marriage; she lives in a large house which she has turned into the local library. Both her brother (the local schoolmaster) and her brother-in-law (the local doctor) watch over her. They both corner Miss Charlie into taking under her roof Chinchilla, a difficult and unstable niece who, Charlie believes, is partly responsible for her husband's death. The sudden arrival of the Mortimers sparks the curiosity both of the usually indifferent tourist resort village, and of Miss Charlie, who is the Mortimers' neighbour and who becomes progressively involved with them: as a French tutor for Gloria, as a casual mistress for Gordon and as a translator of his latest novel, *The Snowman*. As the

seasons pass and the mysterious trees in the garden separating the two houses mark both continuity and change, we see Gloria attempting suicide and recovering, Chinchilla progressively retreating into madness, while we witness the preparations for the first and only performance of *L'Etrangère*. This play (written by Chinchilla's mother) portrays, possibly, the life of Gloria (an ex-actress) as she exiles herself in the small tourist resort with her husband, a cruel and indifferent man. Gloria will, in fact, play the role portraying her own life. After the performance, the Mortimers leave: their mystery has been unveiled, their power to set imaginations in motion has been neutralized, even their mysterious trees (Les olibrius: named after a cruel and capricious governor of Gaul in the fourth century) have burned to the ground. The book closes with Miss Charlie going to New York for the publication of Gordon Mortimer's twenty-second novel, entitled *Miss Charlie*.

Throughout Narration 1 Miss Charlie and Gordon compete for the role of main sorcerer. Chinchilla and Gloria are the puppets who can, and even need to be manipulated in order to come alive. Marie-Charles Craig disapproves of the manipulation even though she participates in it. As a narrator she is, therefore, quite "unreliable."

Narration 2 starts at first as the more intimate recording of Miss Charlie's secret fantasies; thus at first glance it appears as a more reliable, certainly a more truthful narration; but as the voice of Narration 3 (the novel that Gordon Mortimer writes) becomes more insistent, the diary-like entries of Miss Charlie's grey notebook acquire almost an independent life. In other words, they become a narrative voice in their own right, a parallel fiction. In Narration 2 we find the same characters but the roles have been inverted. It is Charlie (again

the first-person narrator) who is the young girl. She is entrusted to the care of Chinchilla, who will help her find her memory after a long coma. The accident causing the coma was the work of Gordon Mortimer who had fathered the child that Charlie was carrying but lost. It is around the aborted maternity that the fantasies of Charlie blossom; fantasies that are recorded also in a grey notebook which Gloria (Gordon's deranged wife) burns shortly before the couple's departure.

The pattern of the two narrations is similar to that of a fairy tale: the heroine is surprised by and attracted to a hidden malevolent force, coming from outside her realm. She is helped in her state of disorder by two adjuvants, one of whom is also involved with the malevolent force, the other standing strong like a type of priestess. After a series of tests where allegiances shift, the malevolent force leaves the realm of the heroine and relative order is established. Unlike the fairy tales, however, there is no victory, simply continuation and a slight regeneration.

Narration 3 is *The Snowman*, the novel Gordon Mortimer is writing and Charlie is translating into French. A third-person narrator begins to tell what sounds like a trite romance between a skiing instructor, Charlie (now a man), and a star student, Chinchilla. As the novel progresses, however, the plot is replaced by a surreal scenario where each protagonist alternately leads and is led by the other. This dance takes place against a background of snowstorms and dangerous excursions through unknown mountains. An Eskimo woman, Nova, serves as their guide through the snows and serves also as a spiritual guide. The separation from their mentor-of-the-snow is celebrated by fire (the death of Nova). In turn, however, the two protagonists are found by

the rescue party, buried under a giant snowman.

The three juxtaposed narrative voices echo one another in a network of associations and of transfers. The novel reads well; the progressive symmetrical stylisation, both in the three narrations as well as within each narration, leads the reader to search for common themes (perhaps separation, perhaps survival in the face of intrusion). On the other hand, the elaborate weaving of dubious renderings of similar situations leads the reader to concentrate on the levels of fiction-making and the multiplicity, as well as the simultaneity, of perceptions controlling the making of a plot. Finally, in the light of Suzanne Paradis's previous works the reader might be led to see in *Miss Charlie* the portrait of the psychological contradictions and ambivalence of the human psyche. Or perhaps is it the buoyancy of the quest for dependence and independence of a woman writer? None of these possibilities is pursued far enough. This unfinished and short-of-the-mark quality is perhaps at the heart of Suzanne Paradis' conception of the writer as a patient, tireless builder.

GRAZIA MERLER

WRESTLING THE ALPHA-BET BEAST

ROBERT KROETSCH, *The Sad Phoenician*. Coach House, 1979. \$5.50. 75 pp.

A POEM SHOULD BE economic and precise. It should be free of too strong an authorial presence. Objectivity is a virtue that lends shapeliness and focus to the finished product. But Kroetsch is writing about writing, and that changes the rules. There is always, here, a sense of the author lurking behind the language, manipulating, contriving, and

interjecting at will. There is much willfulness, but little restraint, little attempt at control or discipline. In some way this is a disadvantage, but it does reflect the subject.

In a book concerned with basic communication, these characteristics illustrate the struggle of the individual to express publicly his emotions and responses to the external world. The inner and outer worlds meet on the plain of language, where poetry is the struggle to share experience and perception. And during the life-long conflict, an author must develop a sense of what language and communication mean to him both as the means of expression and as an objective phenomenon — the whole range of the sounds and shapes of letters and words and all that they can be made to mean. Whatever the penalties for being a poet, at least the satisfaction of putting words on paper rewards the author; no matter what else goes wrong in life, he has his 'poetry to protect' him: "I have my work to sustain me, my poetry, the satisfaction / of a job well done. . . ."

But the poetry alone is never enough. The poet lives in a living world; life rushes on about him, he responds to it, he makes it part of his living changing craft. The poet is a life-junkie; hooked on it, harmed by it, he is beyond the reach of any sedative except the act of writing, which relieves the aches of life even as it dredges them from the inner deeps. The poet becomes dependent on language and life but remains as human as any bricklayers: "I do have feelings, just because I'm a poet doesn't mean / I have no feelings of my own, poets are human; I am, you / might say, a kind of Phoenician, with reference, that is, / to my trading in language, even in, to stretch a point, / ha, my being at sea."

Kroetsch is always present, reminding the reader that yes there is a real live person behind the poetry, that yes poets

are fallible and human — that they want to be recognized as people just as much as they desire fame as poets. We are aware of the poet: “the dreamer, himself: / lurching, leaping, flying; o to be mere gerund; no past, / no future: what do you do in life: I ing.” Yet there is no room for complacency. Life is full of surprises: “once a year a rubber breaks and we / learn to count”; no matter how we try, we always face uncertainty.

Love and its uncertainties are part of living, and often the poet retreats from emotion in wounded confusion; he is “The Sad Phoenician of Love / slighted by the woman.” But, as with language and life, the poet is drawn mothlike to the flame of love. Singed, he writes another poem and survives: “lonely is only lonely, it has no other name like / hand or hope or trust, or pissing against the wind, / it has no habit of upside-down, it slams no doors, / it does not fly south in autumn.” The urgent demands of sexuality as a means of expression and fulfillment are as loud and raucous as the insistent call of art, of the addition to life and love. One is forced to venture continually into the outer world for one’s needs: love, comfort, reassurance. And, as with any voyage or quest, the journey is fraught with peril: “keep an ear cocked for sirens, you one-eyed mariner” in the voyage of life where communication requires as much skill as sailing a ship.

The Sad Phoenician is an ambitious undertaking; an existential portrait of the plight of sensitive individuals, it is an excursion into the turbulent waters of communication that it attempts to describe and chart even as it traverses them for the first time. It is a reminder that each day is capable of presenting a new world, a new-beginning as life-affirming as the tree in the garden, and as dangerous:

you’re out of it, the lady said, she was very polite, she wore a chair on her head, a basket between her knees full of salmon; a butterfly almost the shade of a Baltimore oriole licked its perfect proboscis to her right nipple: she was the guardian of the tree, that was clear . . .
the tree itself stood in the distance behind her, possibly green, possibly not a tree at all, a sail

A complex poem, *The Sad Phoenician* defies full analysis in the space of a review: its fuller significance the reader himself must determine.

As if to confirm that the first section of the book is about the poet as human being as well as creative artist, the second part, “The Silent Poet Sequence,” presents the poet more objectively. The poems employ a schizoid splitting of personality; two characters emerge: The Poet and The Professor. Both are the same. Any poet lives a double life: if he lives for his writing, he must still earn bread. If he lives for his teaching, he must still answer to his compulsion to write. Sometimes the two urges conflict:

and Earache the Red, at coffee, for god’s sake hit the sack early, he says, you look like you never sleep
but watch those dirty dreams; he winks
and shakes his spoon in my direction
but I don’t let on that I understand
.....
but Earache, there’s a new law, he says, you’re legally responsible for all your dreams
and I buy his coffee
but just last night, while he snored in her arms, I pitched black dirt at his window
and walled him in
but he doesn’t let on . . .

(“The Silent Poet Finds Out”)

As may be seen from this excerpt, the form of the poems is an experiment, separating conjunctions from clauses. The sequence ends with a further devolution of words into shapes — letters divided by appearance rather than sense. The last page, once one deciphers it,

affirms the thirst for life and love and experience apparent from the first. The humour found throughout the book is hard to describe, yet it has a good deal to do with the final willingness to undergo the frustrations, failures, and imbecilities of life encountered during the quest for ways of expression.

DAVID S. WEST

DOING TIME

ROBERT GURIK, *Jeune Délinquant*. Leméac, n.p.

LOUIS CARON, *The Draft Dodger*, trans. by David Toby Homel. Anansi, \$8.95.

ANDRE MAJOR, *Inspector Therrien*, trans. by Mark Czarniecki. Porcépic, \$9.95.

WHETHER WE ARE ADOLESCENTS, young adults or senior citizens, we cannot escape the prisons of our sociality, of our selves, of our times, or of time. This triptych of survival texts eludes triteness with varying degrees of success.

Robert Gurik's city-as-prison-scape is well known: decrepit tenements where overworked, divorced or alcoholic parents are sentenced for life; game parlours, greasy diners and topless bars to which their children try to escape; crowded Health and Welfare corridors and fenced-in training schools through which pass, mostly unchanged, petty thieves, drug pushers, juvenile prostitutes, shoplifters and armed robbers.

Society's inability to eradicate juvenile delinquency is equally well known: parents who have given up all hope, helpless lawyers and judges, disillusioned social workers, and rarely successful instructors.

Little, indeed, is new in Gurik's written version of five Radio-Canada television broadcasts. The story of young Richard, for example, whom an understanding grocer once allowed to keep a stolen can of caviar as a birthday gift for his mother, and who now owns a service

station, is too saccharine to represent a solution. Problem-solving, left to legislators and the Young Offenders Act, was clearly not Gurik's aim in putting together this human rather than judicial dossier on a dozen juvenile delinquents. His concern was with "the raw material, life, voices, sounds, human beings" presented "without interpretation, . . . without analysis, . . . almost without meditation."

Fortunately, Gurik has not entirely eschewed the attractions and benefits of literary transposition, which explains why his book has appeared in Leméac's "Roman québécois" series. Reproducing identification cards in typewriter script and transcribing recorded interviews in italics would have resulted, without the mediating artifice of description, dialogue and structuration, in yet another report destined to gather dust. As a docu-novel, Gurik's book should have a fair chance to escape that fate.

Louis Caron's *L'Emmitouflé*, first published and acclaimed in Paris (1977), deals less with draft dodging in the sense Vietnam gave the word than with the Conscription Crisis of 1917-18. Jean-François the narrator's memories of what he had heard about the Quiet Civil War in the Quebec of those years and his recreation of a family reunion in the francophone Vermont of the 1950's may have exerted a certain amount of exotic attraction on the European reader. To North-American eyes, a multiple-page picnic with all the trimmings, from hot dogs "smothered in mustard and relish" to "cans of Schlitz and Old Milwaukee" and "watching the show *What's My Line?*" has considerably less appeal.

However, Jean-François, the Franco-American draft dodger, remembers more. He remembers above all his uncle Nazaire, the deserter from Nicolet, Quebec, who fought less against fighting the European war than against

Time... The breathing of time. The breath of time. The taste of time in my mouth. I tasted time but I couldn't choke it down. I tasted time and I didn't like it. ... It's because you never accepted it. You always rebelled. You always fought against what was stronger than you. When they told you to go to war, you answered No! ... You rebelled against what was stronger than you: time.

This incantation, the strongest passage in the book, forms the climax of what should have been Jean-François' gradual identification with Nazaire. As it is, the last sixteen pages (Part Three) seem too brusquely superimposed on what precedes them, possibly because Caron did not carry through with his chosen genre: the frame narrative. Not only has he left the series of embedded flashbacks open-ended, but he has also neglected to exploit fully the narrative potential inherent in Jean-François' recalling his father's memories of Nazaire. It may be, of course, that we are here in the presence of some structural symbolism: just as Nazaire attempts to break out of his prisons of time, so the text tries to cast off the shackles of generic convention.

For comparatists it should be noted that David T. Homel has translated a revised version of the 1977 edition.

Ex-Inspector Paul-Emile Therrien has left *L'Épouvantail* (1974; trans. *The Scarecrows of Saint-Emmanuel*, 1977) and entered *L'Épidémie* (1975) a prisoner of his past, of his retirement, of time:

The pendulum on the cuckoo clock was still; he had avoided setting it in motion again, preferring uncertainty to that nibbling away of time which was as obstinate and obsessive as the pulsing of his own blood.

The English title of this second volume of André Major's "Histoires de déserteurs" trilogy is rather too bland. For time and life are here indeed an uncon-

trollable epidemic which ravages not only Therrien, but the entire village of Saint-Emmanuel, including Therrien's mistress Emérence, his short-term wife Julienne, and the few neighbours who have lost everything, even the strength and courage to flee to the city. Saint-Emmanuel is an incubator in which the bacteria of regret, despair, boredom and defeatism grow unchecked. The victims' feeble attempts to stave off contamination bring out in them deadly streaks of alcoholism, suicidal and homicidal rage, cruelty intended to humiliate, voyeurism and sexual aberration.

The psycho-bacteriologist, Major, is only surpassed by André Major, the writer, who has long since demonstrated that we can expect the best Quebec writing from him. Mark Czarnecki's good translation contributes further to Major's stature as a Canadian writer in whose "Human Comedy" countless non-Quebecers will recognize themselves.

Prisoners of the urban ghetto, cross-country deserters, victims of the rural exodus, all are reduced to doing time in an era which is seen to have no future. Will there be survivors? Uneasily, we grasp for André Major's next volume, *Les Survivants*, which seems to hold out an answer.

HANS R. RUNTE

BUBBLE-AND-SQUEAK

JOHN MILLS, *Lizard in the Grass*. ECW Press.

"REGIONALISM has never attracted me very much and naturalism, in all its aridity, even less," says John Mills in one of the reviews included in this volume of mixed criticism and autobiography, and in doing so he defines by implication his own practice as a novelist and his own criteria for judging other writers.

Mills' novels — *The Land of Is*, *The*

October Man, *Skevington's Daughter* — are never less than interesting in their satirical presentations of a world crumbling over the burden of fear. They never quite fit in with the pattern of Canadian fiction as seen by the thematic critics, and *Lizard in the Grass* emphasizes Mills' detachment from the Canadian literary world in general.

The book is a mixture of views of life and literature in which the two realms are in constant interaction, and that makes for lively reading even if it does not always make for critical understanding. For Mills is very emphatic in his likes and dislikes, and one quickly learns the patterns of his literary affinities.

There is, of course, Alex Comfort, whose *The Novel and Our Time* Mills founded a press (Pendejo Press) to republish, and whose hit-and-run kind of anarchism runs like a submerged motif right through *Lizard in the Grass* (as it does through Mills's novels), though, oddly enough, Comfort's name is never mentioned.

There is Céline with his "manic, colloquial, phantasmagoric prose"; three books about him are reviewed, and there is no doubt at all that Mills thinks he understands *le grand merdeur* more than his biographers, as indeed he may, for the three autobiographical essays that begin *Lizard in the Grass*, with their descriptions of malingering in the army, of old women (and the author's mother in particular) dying in lonely poverty, and of running a decrepit laundry in Montreal, are very much the kind of thing Céline might have written had he been born an Englishman and brought up on bubble-and-squeak. By which I mean that their bitter is always on the edge of turning to sour and their invective is always on the edge lapsing into a Cockney whine.

It is unfortunate that Mills borrowed the title for his second autobiographical

piece, for "How the Poor Die" makes one think of Orwell's splendid piece of the same name on the Hôpital Cochin in Paris, and Orwell did this kind of thing with more panache and in better prose. Mentioning Orwell reminds one how far, despite his self-conscious rejection of writers like Auden as being less than modern, Mills seems like a refugee from a lost England. For his memoirs are just the kind of reportages — part fictionalized autobiography and part oblique social observation — that became popular at the end of the thirties in the hands of Orwell, Isherwood, and others. Even the self-conscious proletarianism is part of the period package.

But almost two-thirds of *Lizard in the Grass* is made up of literary essays and reviews, and here it is very evident that Mills is far more at home with English writers and with Europeans of special kinds like Nabokov and Céline than he is with Canadian or even American writers. "A Book for the Shelter" is an excellent and very entertainingly written vindication of that good but almost forgotten writer, Jerome K. Jerome; I read it with particular relish, since Jerome was the first writer I ever knew. And "The Horse's Mouth and Stanley Spencer" is a fascinating illustrated discussion of the differences between Joyce Cary's Gully Jimson and the painter on whom he is said to have been modelled; Spencer in real life was far more bizarre than Jimson in fiction.

In the shorter pieces Mills writes very well on Anthony Burgess and Graham Greene and John Le Carré, and presents an effective and necessary rejection of Jerzy Kozinski. He is also very perceptive in discussing Brian Moore and John Metcalf, but this is because, like his, their roots are British, and they inhabit the same mental continuum as he does.

With Canadian writers one always had the feeling that the Mills ear is not

tuned to their resonances, and perhaps this is because so often they veer towards either the regionalism or the naturalism that he rejects. I am not referring merely to the instances when he is condemnatory, as he is towards Morley Callaghan, or patronizing, as he is towards Jane Rule and Joyce Carol Oates, or justifiably faint-praising, as he is with J. Michael Yates. Even when he approves, he does not always seem to know exactly why, and too often we are let go with something so obvious that we already know it to the point of banality. E.g., "Irving Layton is one of the few genuine poets this rather prosaic country has yet produced and has secured this reputation with a considerable body of work, some of it magnificent, some of it indifferent, and some of it incredibly bad." A lot of us have said that, and some have said it better. Similarly, when Mills is writing in praise of novelists like Margaret Atwood, Hugh Hood, Matt Cohen, one feels he is searching for something in himself to find in them, and uneasy because it isn't there. Yet his views are always stated with such an air of conviction that at their most wrong-headed they momentarily shake one's own view and send one back to the book itself to see whether Mills is right after all. Sometimes he is; not always.

GEORGE WOODCOCK

UNA'S STORY

VICTOR-LEVY BEAULIEU, *Una*. V.L.B. éditeur, \$10.95.

IN ONE OF HER numerous reviews of Beaulieu's novels, Gabrielle Poulin compared her feeling about them to that of a season-ticket holder who attends performances compulsively, without remembering why exactly he bought the ticket in the first place. Indeed, Beaulieu's novels

appear with predictable regularity almost every year (like Marie-Claire Blais's), and since he tends to write *romans-fleuves*, the nature of each novel is also to some extent predictable. Since he started his own publishing house and book-club, V.L.B. éditeur, Beaulieu has increasingly made use of book design to alleviate some of the monotony his novels display in both content and technique. The three volumes of *Monsieur Melville*, for instance, are heavily illustrated with (mostly unacknowledged) pictorial material; *Una*, the book under review, contains drawings by Beaulieu's two young daughters. Like the previous volumes of the *Voyageries*, *Una* discusses the problems of writing and its inadequacy in rendering truth. The drawings, says Job J, Una's father, "c'est ce qu'il y a de plus important"; pictures, unlike writing, are unequivocal, especially if they are a child's spontaneous products. As a result, Job J makes a present of stacks of paper, crayons, and an eraser to seven-year-old Una who sits on the stairs to "la chambre mauve," waiting for Abel and his Amerindian muse Samm to complete their book on Melville, so that Una herself can begin to create her story.

Once again it becomes obvious that Beaulieu's cycle is less a diachronic than a synchronic enterprise; part of the "action" of *Una* — if such it can be called — is simultaneous with that of *Monsieur Melville* and, through a precocious child's eyes, applies an ironic perspective to Abel Beauchemin's narcissistic ravings in the previous book. Thus, Una describes Herman Melville's arrival in the Habitanaserie as that of a mute old man. Food passes straight through his body (he is a ghost after all) and emerges at his feet where Abel is eager to lick it all up again: a somewhat revolting image of Abel's inferiority complex vis-à-vis the giant Melville, but also a vicious parody of Abel's dream of inspiring Québec literature with Melville as a model. Beaulieu obviously

conceives of his novels in general as never-completed and eternally in need of revision, an attitude reflected in the way he reworks his older novels while at the same time publishing new ones.

Una, besides being another example of famous brats in Québec fiction, is very much an allegory of Québec itself. Her name is as much a curse as a hope; with disgust she has turned away from her mother France who sits, disabled and an alcoholic, a veritable feast for Freudian critics, in her wheel-chair. Una has more respect and love for her father, the oceanographer and whale specialist Job J, partly because he is a humane scientist and not an egomaniac like Abel Beauchemin in search of chimeras. Job encourages his daughter in her search for her own story but warns her that, despite her contempt for Abel, Job J and Una themselves are chimeras of Abel's making and at his mercy. In a phantasmagorical tour de force, very similar to that found toward the end of *Don Quichotte de la démanche*, Una experiences just how limited her freedom is. Because Abel, preoccupied as he is with Melville, does not pay enough attention to her existence, she is in turn strung up in an iron cage like "Lady Corriveau" and abused by Le Bonhomme de Sept-Heures, a loup-garou creature representing death and corruption. Thus she lives through the fate that the book describes as "le paradoxe du Québec": "Il nous faut sortir de notre invisibilité tout en sachant que ce sera seulement pour entrer dans un monde de fous furieux, pollué jusqu'aux moelles dans sa mauvaise viande."

Una, who had hoped to return in the stomach of a whale to the times before her birth, herself gives birth to a monster: a black sow with Job's face. The sow is the inevitable heritage of Le Bonhomme de Sept-Heures — death — but Job's face signals hope. Despite her loneliness and pain, Una's energy remains unbroken.

She removes her "lunettes bioniques" and warily faces her monstrous child, "Je sais pas encore ce que je vais faire avec, pas plus que je sais ce qu'elle va faire avec moi."

With *Una*, Beaulieu has published the last volume in the *Voyageries*. Now, Abel is presumably free to write "La Vraie Saga du grande tribu," a cycle his characters have been pestering him about throughout the composition of the *Voyageries*. It remains to be seen whether Beaulieu's project of writing a grand epic (which, according to him, is the only literary form that will give national dignity to Québec) will correct Una's invention.

EVA-MARIE KROLLER

ECHOES, REFLECTIONS

MARIE-JOSE THERIAULT, *The Ceremony*, trans. David Lobdell. Oberon, \$12.95; paper \$5.95.

GILLES ARGHAMBAULT, *The Umbrella Pines*, trans. David Lobdell. Oberon, \$12.95; paper \$5.95.

THE BEST TRANSLATIONS, like a flawless mirror, reflect an undistorted image of the subject. When this happens, the echoes of the original voice are also returned in clear and forceful tones, and the translation becomes a trustworthy medium for conveying the meaning and sound of the source text. By interpreting Quebec fiction in a thorough and competent way, English-Canadian translators permit ready access by anglophone readers to works from our other "solitude." In every attempt to bridge this linguistic and cultural distance, the translator's implicit obligation is to duplicate, in so far as possible within the limitations of the target language, the experience of reading the text in French. The objective must always be to produce a reliable English counterpart to the French origi-

nal, to ensure that, together, they will constitute one work in two languages rather than two similar works. Although the French and English versions can never be identical twins, their relationship ought to be at least fraternal, suggesting very strong resemblances in character if not in manner.

Such exacting responsibility faces David Lobdell when he renders into English Marie-José Thériault's *La Cérémonie* (1978) and Gilles Archambault's *Les Pins parasols* (1976). Given the substantial differences in tone and theme, point of view and locale, there is very little similarity between Thériault's twenty-three stories and Archambault's novel apart from their common translator. Readers of Quebec fiction in the past decade will already be familiar with David Lobdell's work as the translator of Marie-Claire Blais's play (*The Execution*) and novels (*David Sterne*, *Dürer's Angel*, *The Fugitive*) as well as works of fiction by Jacques Benoit (*The Princes*) and Wilfrid Lemoine (*The Rope-Dancer*). For the most part these books are muted English echoes of the original French voices because Lobdell habitually inserts and deletes words, phrases, clauses, and even full sentences. If, however, the francophone authors are to be heard without impediment, the translator must correct such habits and acknowledge the imperative need to restrain his own creative outbursts and interventions. Gratuitous additions and deletions cannot be countenanced when they distort the substance and meaning of the original, and approximations must never be considered adequate or acceptable as a general practice. Still, while the preceding objections do not apply in a major way to another of Lobdell's recent translations (Négoan Rajic's *The Mole Men*), and apply only somewhat to *The Ceremony* and *The Umbrella Pines*, the

latter do represent significant improvements over Lobdell's earlier work.

In the bizarre and violent stories of *La Cérémonie*, Thériault demonstrates an original and imaginative vision in her treatment of the themes of revenge, lust, and metamorphosis; her wit is revealed in the comic vignettes she bases upon scenes in four Renaissance paintings. Her range of viewpoints, tones, and themes in the stories makes her work particularly challenging for a translator; but Lobdell regularly succeeds simply because he takes his cue from Thériault and strives to convey the substance and significance of her work. For these reasons, his competent and creditable translations of "Sirix" and "Elsa Joachim" in Part I of *The Ceremony* often achieve the ideal of accurate detail and nuance written in literate and idiomatic English. Of considerable merit, too, is Lobdell's handling of puns and word-plays, particularly in the final story, where aspects of French culture are intelligently transposed to English equivalents ("Maurice Grevisse" becomes "Noah Webster," "*Le Petit Robert*" is adjusted to the "*Oxford English Dictionary*," etc.). Here, then, is clear evidence of Lobdell's skill and ability as a translator.

Nevertheless, there are many shortcomings in *The Ceremony* to qualify any praise we might offer for his achievement. His errors are those of omission and commission as he continues the practice of careless and arbitrary addition and deletion of words, phrases, and full sentences. At the same time, we find translations that vary in degree from the original in a way that produces unnecessary imprecision: thus, *mordre* (to bite) is translated as "nibble"; *fait encore* (still running) is given as "escaped"; and *musique* is interpreted as merely "sound." On the other hand, too rigorous and literal an adherence to the phrasing of the original results in awkwardness ("It

rejoined its fellow"; "tired my eyes"). Inaccuracy enters when Lobdell misuses "presently" as a synonym for "at present," and when he translates *luxurieux* (lustful) as "exquisite" and *vociférait* (yelled and shouted) as "broke into sobs." At the end of "The Visitor," he confuses the speaker and the lady he loves, and in the final story misinterprets *Pour cette belle enfant crue parmi les bêtes et à l'abri* (For this beautiful child raised in a sheltered life with animals) as "For this attractive girl, believing herself alone on the earth with the animals." The omissions, too, are numerous: Thériault's dedication; the reference to Victor Hugo following the title "She Crossed Over Toledo Bridge in a Black Corset"; footnotes that occur intermittently throughout the text; and all details identifying the four reproductions of paintings in Part II. None of these, however, is so substantial an oversight as Lobdell's unwitting omission of an entire story in Part I, "La Commodité," which should precede "Rollon." More careful translating and editing are clearly required here in order to make *The Ceremony* a complete, competent echo and reflection of *La Cérémonie*.

Lobdell's work in *The Umbrella Pines* is more careful and consistent, perhaps because Archambault's novel is more even in tone, departing from the reflective and introspective mood of its middle-aged protagonist, Serge Gaucher, only when his daughter is brutally murdered. In the English version of Serge's story we encounter the best translation Lobdell has produced to date — on the whole, an articulate and reliable text, particularly in its presentation of dialogue (consistently well done by this translator), and in its handling of the descriptive and reflective sections at the end of Part I and the beginning of Part III. While the superior quality of this translation underscores the inadequacies of Lobdell's pre-

vious endeavours, it might also be taken as a positive sign of a higher calibre of work to come. This is not to say that *The Umbrella Pines* is the ideal, reflected image and clear echo. Distortions do occur, some of them caused by carelessness, others by a misreading of the text. Because Lobdell takes certain liberties with *Les Pins parasites*, the English version is too often inexact, only approximate. Insufficient attention to antecedents repeatedly obscures or misrepresents Archambault's meaning, while a literal rendering of the French also poses difficulties and produces a clumsy prose style; for instance, "paying me little attentions"; "doing his father a service"; "lived on social welfare"; "for the form of it"; "One day, they threw themselves on you; the next, they crossed your path with scarcely a glance." This kind of awkwardness gives way to misinterpretation when Lobdell translates *déception* (disappointment) as "deception," *le soir* (every evening) as "one night," *compagne* (female companion) as "natural world" (i.e., *campagne*), and *quelques* (a few) as "several." On occasion, similar errors directly contradict the French version; thus, for example, *J'en veux pas* (I don't hold it against you) is rendered as "I don't want you" (p. 52); *son inquiétude à elle* (her concern) is given instead as "he'd begun to worry about her" (p. 78); the meaning of *ne s'épuisent plus à lutter* is reversed in "still struggling" (p. 72); and the description of Serge's wife, *secouée par une crise de larmes*, is mistakenly translated as "his voice shaken with sobs" (p. 127), thereby ignoring the clue provided in the past participle.

If we balance the assets of *The Ceremony* and particularly *The Umbrella Pines* against their liabilities, we must conclude that Lobdell's work is undeniably getting better, although there are still significant improvements to be made.

But, gradually, Lobdell is making them, and we can now attend to his future work with interest and expectation. *His* task, of course, is to attend diligently and respectfully to the nuances of voice and vision in the French texts. Only then will the reflection come to us unclouded, the echo unmuffled. Only then will his crucial intermediate function as the transmitter of these works bring to life English "twins" that retain the requisite familiarity with their French siblings.

JOHN J. O'CONNOR

REGIONALISM, REALISM

ROGH CARRIER, *The Hockey Sweater and other stories*, trans Sheila Fischman. Anansi, n.p.

PAUL CAMERON BROWNE, *The Land of Look Behind*. Three Trees Press, \$4.95.

SHELDON CURRIE, *The Glace Bay Miner's Museum*. Deluge Press, \$4.50.

DOUGLAS DAYMOND, ed., *Selected Stories of Mazo de la Roche*. Univ. of Ottawa Press, \$6.00.

ROGH CARRIER'S Quebec village, like Richler's Saint-Urbain Street, has become familiar territory in the literary imagination. In these twenty journeys back to his homeland, Carrier reclaims it from a warmer, more personal perspective than he has taken to date. The voice and vision are a child's, tempered with the gentle ironies of an older narrator looking over his younger self's shoulder, and haunted by familiar Carrier shadows, darkest among them the shroud of the Catholic church. Rumours of the larger world are marvels or dreams, reaching the young narrator as glimpses of a foreign landscape, discussed by his elders smoking their evening pipes on front "galleries." Against the indistinct outlines of that larger world — the war,

the English, the Americans, the Protestants in the next village, the photograph of Duplessis on the wall — Carrier looks back on a childhood lived in a more faithful time and place.

In the opening story, "The Nun Who Returned to Ireland," the village children are taught to read French by an Irish nun with an English accent. Sister Brigitte is the first of a procession of nuns who "don't do anything the way other people do: they didn't dress like everybody else, they didn't get married, they didn't have children and they always lived in hiding." To serve the Lord, she has had to cut herself off from all earthly homes: she tells the narrator "I left my family and I forgot Ireland and my village." The story closes with the Sister losing her memory and fleeing barefooted into a winter storm: "she was going home, to Ireland." The nun in "The Day I Became an Apostate" tells the children "if the good Lord put the moon so far from the earth it's because in His wisdom He didn't want men to go anywhere except on earth." Denied the moon, the narrator and his pal Lapin decide to fly to Rome with the holy church bells to receive the Pope's Easter blessing. When the bells stay put, faith dissolves: "After this," says the young apostate, "I can never believe in the Catholic religion again." In "Pierrette's Bumps," what goes bump under precocious Pierrette's sweater, says the nun, is the Devil's work: "You'd be better off praying to God, Pierrette, to chase the evil thoughts from your possessed body." When American girlie magazines show the bumps in a different light, the apostate concludes:

The United States was a truly amazing country because they knew how to print such beautiful magazines, while in Quebec the newspapers only knew how to take pictures of Cardinal Villeneuve or Maurice Duplessis in his old hat.

The closing piece, "A Secret Lost in the Water," defines once for all Carrier's attitude toward his past. Carrier's father passes on the family inheritance to his son, teaching him to divine water with an alder branch chosen "with religious care." Carrier grows up, leaves home, becomes a writer, and returns with a film crew "to capture the image of a sad man: his children didn't want to receive the inheritance he'd spent his whole life preparing for them — the finest farm in the area." When the farmer gives Carrier one of his father's old alder branches, Carrier discovers that in leaving he's "forgotten [his] father's knowledge." Here and throughout, Carrier writes about his past with warm, sure evocations of all its ambiguities, never lapsing into nostalgia or codifying his memories into detached, objective reports on lost innocence. Everything is remembered with fondness, humour, and a wry, gentle sense of loss — and touched with the grace of imagination, making memories into live and engaging vignettes. *The Hockey Sweater* is a lovely collection of stories.

I wish that I could be as enthusiastic about Paul Cameron Browne's *The Land of Look Behind*. But each time I come back to the "Foreword," I am forewarned:

The *Land of Look Behind* hopes to be something of a rearview mirror, at once cocked to reveal our innermost dimensions while transporting that, which by necessity, must lie beyond. Involving ourselves in any interplay with flickering images, of course, must be more than fireside watching. . . .

Images flicker because the mirror is half-cocked; what vision there is gets blurred between the portentous and the pretentious. It's difficult to describe the contents of the volume: Browne tells us that "Satire, 'beast fables,' and texts (single page entries) mingle casually with the longer tales." Unfortunately, the style of the "Foreword" is everywhere, standing

between the reader and characters, plots, or meaning. In a story like "The Wager," the idea is a familiar one: two characters argue whether writing should come out of one's own experience, or from "scenarios imbedded in the innermost recesses" of the psyche. But it's very hard for a discussion to breathe in the stranglehold of portentous pronouncements.

Too much of the time, Browne is infatuated with elixirs, shifting sands of mood, box canyons, roped spirits, signal furies; the result is overblown writing and an abstract obscurity which cannot be explained away as intentional — the kind of obscurity which makes me relieved I don't quite understand.

In *The Glace Bay Miner's Museum*, Sheldon Currie takes a base of stark killing work world, cut with the fantastic, the mad, the grotesque, the surreal; one part fine regionalism; one part pitch-black humour; adds a narrative twist and a generous dash of Catholic bitters and brews up nine potent fictions, mad-cap nightmares that hit, hurt, and force you to laugh. No place here for the lugubrious, the sombre, the earnestly profound: Currie's perspective brings the sane and ordinary into a focus so sharp that they distort toward the mad and surreal. Dialogue is either faithfully reproduced or chillingly artificial; settings are either gritty with reality — harsh mining towns, cafés, coalpits — or touched alive with incongruities and grotesqueries: motel rooms occupied by God with a typewriter and television screen; churches with baskets of consecrated hamburgers; apple orchards that are and aren't in the middle of the Saskatchewan prairie.

Currie's most powerful "regional" piece is the title story. "Regional," because he starts with local characters speaking local idioms, evoking the grainy feel of a distinctive place — coal miners' talk, Cape Breton mining country, mining cripples,

mining deaths in every generation. But the most important voice is Margaret MacNeil's, who speaks from her own region of loneliness, ostracized for her runny nose and because, as she puts it, "for another thing I screwed a couple of boys when I was a little girl. I didn't know you weren't supposed to." Glace Bay, Reserve Mines, the interior of the White Rose Café, where she meets her temporary saviour, Neil Currie — these are settings that kill people and their traditions indiscriminately. Her grandfather is a mute consumptive, his lungs choked up with fluid; her father and one of her brothers have been killed in the coalpits; two burly Chinese toss Neil Currie out of the café when he starts playing his bagpipes. Fired from his previous job because he wouldn't speak English to the foreman, Currie does speak and play a language that revives the grandfather and charms Margaret, who marries him. Currie's bagpipes temporarily recall the immigrant's lost legacy: a sense of the past, of a life and language older than but severed from the mindless, brutal, day-to-day oppression in the mines. Inevitably, Neil and Margaret's brother Ian are killed in the pit, and the harsh surface of realism distends. Margaret's appropriately mad response to unbearable loss is to make a gruesome museum, and transforms the reader into the first tape-recorder-toting tourist. She pickles her grandfather's lungs (unattended, he chokes to death when Margaret goes to collect her men); Neil's lungs, because she "thought of them connected to his pipes and they show, compared to grandfather's, what lungs should look like"; Neil's tongue, "since he always said he was the only one around still had one"; his fingers; and Ian's dick, because "he always said to Neil that was his substitute for religion to keep him from being a pit pony when he wasn't drinking rum or playing forty-

five." Released from the local mental institution, Margaret returns to Glace Bay to take up her self-appointed role as curator of her Glace Bay Miner's Museum. "You're the first," she tells the reader; "I guess not too many people know about it yet. . . . Perhaps you could give us a copy of your tape when you get it done." Glace Bay is a region that kills tradition, voice, language, and men, leaving a girl-woman-curator to testify in a voice flat with a matter-of-factness that betrays too much grief for conventional tone of voice to articulate. This first story and the closing "Pomp and Circumstances" are the most powerful, but there isn't one in the collection that doesn't surprise, shock, or chill; and they aren't cheap thrills.

Douglas Daymond's introduction to *Selected Stories of Mazo de la Roche* provides us with a balanced overview of de la Roche's typical concerns in these thirteen stories — "instinct, repression, freedom and love." Daymond's succinct discussions of each story explore de la Roche's variations on those themes; more importantly, he suggests that her stories are "most often . . . a mixture of realism with romance, sentimentalism and melodrama." Not that romance, sentimentalism and melodrama are qualities likely to recommend her to us, but Daymond's intention is to clarify de la Roche's use of realistic settings as points of departure for characters who "tend to expand into symbolic or psychological archetypes."

His point is a good one. Realism in these stories (with the exception of "Canadian Ida and English Nell") is the means, not the end: varied as her settings are, de la Roche's consistent aim is to set a series of natural individual impulses over against a variety of societal constraints. When impulses are governed, individuals suffer themselves to be accommodated, but they sacrifice fuller lives; when impulse is freed, individuals

suffer for violating civilized norms. So Noël Caron ("The Son of a Miser") is condemned by church and townspeople for his profligacy with his dead father's wealth, but sacrifices vitality when he returns to the fold. As Daymond points out, the ambiguous nature of his reformation is signaled by the closing image, which juxtaposes "the reddening branches of a wild cherry-tree" with "the head of the thin gray Christ." In "The Spirit of the Dance," artistic passion and good sense, natural, spiritual, erotic fervor and civilized, decent comportment are irreconcilable. Louis de Valleau is driven to play his Stradivarius, inspiring the "spirit of the dance" in his daughter Gabrielle. Artistic expression brings on his physical and psychological collapse and awakens his daughter to her erotic nature. His doctor and housekeeper try to civilize and save him by taking away his violin and feeding him with good solid bourgeois fare, but the cure is worse than the disease. He must play his "music of motion" and he dies "pouring out his soul through the Stradivarius," while Gabrielle "had never danced so well before." Daymond aptly describes the story as "a gothic tale of fatal possession by the artistic imagination"; more than this, it sets up a series of unresolvable conflicts between destructive artistic imagination and benevolent proper conduct, natural sexuality and civilized decorum, passion for expression and reverence for propriety.

The stories, which are chronologically arranged, are rich reading; Dorothy Livesay's foreword, "Remembering Mazo," provides a personal recollection of the author; and Daymond's introduction and comprehensive bibliography of works by and about de la Roche are good starting points for further study. De la Roche deserves it.

NEIL BESNER

BEAUTY OF BONES

ANNE HEBERT, *Héloïse*. Seuil.

THIS IS THE BITTERLY ironic epigraph to Anne Hébert's most recent novel, *Héloïse*, an allegory of evil in the modern world:

Le monde est en ordre
Les morts dessous
Les vivants dessus

Taken from "En guise de fête," a poem in the sequence published as *Le tombeau des rois*, these lines indicate Hébert's desire to integrate more fully into her fiction the symbol system presented in her second volume of poems. It is a system in which the single letter dividing the two poles of existence (dessous/dessus) becomes a sign of the interpenetration of life and death, and, accordingly, of the false or illusory 'order' of a world which relentlessly asserts their separation. Thus, in *Héloïse*, to become involved in one of these spheres is to become involved in both, though the living are hardly prepared for the consequences.

Increasingly anxious to stress the options for evil within the ordinary world, Hébert structures her novel around the central symbol of the Parisian Métro, the very banality of this obvious image of the interpenetration of upper and lower worlds being essential to her allegory. Once again in Hébert's work, allegory is rooted in a determinist insistence upon inevitability, the relentless descent of desire through blood to death. The triangular plot, too, is a familiar one. Christine and Bernard, newly engaged, return to Paris from a brief holiday. She is a dancer at the Opéra, he a law student. They are ordinary young people, the narrator stresses, though the reader may be surprised that Hébert has them terminate their journey by going their separate ways to their separate lodgings. This

anachronism is, however, central to the plot, for it is when Bernard is without Christine that he sees Héloïse, the ghostly femme fatale, for the first time. Henceforward, he is possessed by her and, as we soon learn, by the satanic Xavier Bottereau who directs Héloïse (among other belles captives in his control) in the execution of "the law." Héloïse's task is, of course, herself to captivate the innocent Bernard but, when Christine interferes and attempts to save Bernard from his fate by foiling the first murder attempt, Christine too must be eliminated. This murder falls to Bottereau himself while Héloïse completes her initial mission, enslaving Bernard forever.

The resemblance of Héloïse to Lia of *Les Chambres de bois* will be obvious. In both cases, the femme fatale insinuates herself in the place of the relatively uncomplicated spouse, and the symptoms of the men in question are also strikingly similar: aversion to the smells of cooking and to all but the blandest food; sexual enervation occasionally punctuated by violent desire the satiation of which brings guilt, lassitude, and aversion to the previously beloved; revulsion toward the life and tasks of the day and compulsive need of the darkness and solitude of night, and so on. But where in the earlier novel Catherine escapes, leaving Michel and Lia to their sado-masochistic darkness, the cast of *Héloïse* can no more escape from their condition of enslavement to death than they can from the omnipresence of its central symbol. Beneath the city lies the land of the dead to which the vampires, Héloïse and Bottereau, must return before dawn, having drunk the blood of their victims.

Evil triumphs easily in a world where goodness consists largely of good intentions coupled with the simplistic vulnerability of a character like Christine or her symbolic equivalents, the barren simplicity of modern clothing (the androgy-

nous uniform of jeans and sweater characteristic of Christine, Bernard, and their friends) and modern architecture (the simple, unfurnished, modern apartment which the two lovers have rented in anticipation of their marriage). Against the elegance and opulence of fin-de-siècle clothing (Héloïse's splendid wardrobe of white, red and black garments) and architecture (the elaborate apartment, decorated in Héloïse's colours, which Bottereau finds for the young couple after Bernard has been possessed by Héloïse), modernity clearly stands little chance. As the narrator observes, in the contemporary world even the dictates of fashion are deemed irrelevant. A world without binding prohibitions—even those of guilt—must capitulate to the mysterious and binding strictures of evil, Bottereau's laws. Not confined to the human world, these laws cast their power over animals too as we see when Héloïse undertakes ritual preparation for the cutting of Bernard's throat by sacrificing a fawn in the Jardin des Plantes, sending waves of fear through the other occupants of the zoo. Later, when Bottereau comes to rape and murder Christine, he finds her in the act of dismembering a freshly killed rabbit in preparation for a feast to celebrate Bernard's return from hospital. Severing the arms from Christine's corpse, he returns to the underworld with them, there to encounter Bernard and Héloïse in the ritual posture of "Piéta sauvage," her arms around his reclining body. Ironically, during the shopping expedition in preparation for the feast, the narrator had asserted the power of man over all nature, discounting for the moment the major tenet of Hébert's allegory: the power of the dead over the living.

For Hébert, love is an occasion for the eruption of a world beyond the visible, the ordinary, though contained always as a possibility within that more mun-

dane world. As surely as the balance of the world above and the world below creates what order there is, so the balance of love and death—desire and destruction, sexuality and decay—creates the constant revelation of the beauty of bones and their terrible fragility. For Hébert, as always, that revelation is the point.

LORRAINE WEIR

CANADIAN LANGUAGES

J. K. CHAMBERS, ed. & intro., *The Languages of Canada*. Didier.

AS R. C. GAGNE, one of the contributors to this volume, admits, "without making the school the centre to stimulate the native sociodynamics and using the mother tongue as its nerve centre there is a grave danger that the native teachers may unwittingly lead their own people ever so gently into the maw of the never-sleeping French or English giant." The average teacher is not the only one who may be tempted to give a dangerously simplifying picture of the linguistic diversity of Canada. Professional linguists could quite easily make the same mistake and have done so repeatedly in the past—by reducing the discussion of this subject to a study of the problems involving French-English bilingualism, thereby ignoring the languages of native cultures and of immigrants altogether, or describing them *in vacuo*, just in terms of their internal structures.

Fortunately, the most recent history of linguistics has been one of greater and greater refinement of the social context within which language is spoken and, important in the case of Canada, modified or entirely suppressed. Linguists of late are less concerned with yielding structurally balanced, detached descrip-

tions of "exotic" languages or with using the data these provide as support for or against a certain theoretical position, as they did in the past with most of the native Indian language material studied. With the advancement of sociolinguistics, that is, the socially sensitive study of language and its varieties, linguists are becoming more concerned with what implications the speaking of a particular dialect or language has for the speaker's place in society,

Not that Canadian linguists have dismissed sociodynamics, but when they did give it attention, it was reserved for the two "giant" languages. It is precisely this dangerous exclusivity that J. K. Chambers' project tries to modify. In the light of this task one should not be surprised to find the book pose more questions than it answers, and Chambers, in his editorial comments, frankly admits its incompleteness and tentativeness. Interesting to note, and in a way emblematic of the situation of Canadian multilingualism at large, is another aspect of the collection: Chambers initially hoped that it would reflect its subject matter in its formal presentation, and he therefore invited all the authors to contribute their chapters in the language of their choice. Optimists of multilingualism may be disappointed to discover that all the contributions are written in English. As Chambers himself comments on the monolingual outcome,

If one were to make a guess beforehand . . . , one might have thought that perhaps two or three or even four of them [the contributors] would have chosen French. But they did not. Linguistic diversity is not something that will be served by prescription. Certainly not by predetermining the languages in which the following chapters are written, and not by forcing one or another language onto the affairs of the nation either. Today's linguistic diversity may be the foundation for tomorrow's Canadian mosaic, or it may turn out not to be. The diversity is described below (in English, as

it turns out), and described as thoroughly as any single volume has managed to describe it so far. It will require a sequel to this book, prepared at least a generation from now, to determine whether the diversity has shaped up into the mosaic we envision.

This collection is certainly an important step toward such a mosaic linguistic future, particularly since it provides linguists with valuable reports on research completed and in progress and gives them sound advice for new areas of investigation.

Chambers, in his critical foreword, discusses the attitudes Canadians have toward multilingualism and takes a comparative look at Canada's southern neighbour. He also draws attention to the often neglected languages of our original inhabitants and our most recent immigrants, vital contributors to our uniquely diversified linguistic reality. The importance of the diversity which Chambers stresses turns out to be more than the customary verbal tribute of a foreword, for it decisively shapes the selection of the papers that follow the foreword, their order, arrangement and the relative space allotted to each of the language groups discussed (I. Native Languages, 130 pp.; II. The Official Languages, 70 pp.; and III. Other Languages, 55 pp.).

The section on Native Languages is divided into three major parts, one on Indian languages, one on Eskimo, and the third on the maintenance of these native languages. Besides giving a statistical survey of the various language groups and the number of their speakers, J. D. Kaye repeatedly emphasizes the importance of early missionary language work and of the studies conducted by two of the most prominent American structuralists, Edward Sapir and Franz Boas. He then proceeds to describe the Algonquian languages, including Cree, Ojibwa, Mic-

mac, Malecite, Abnaki, and Blackfoot. In the following section, Eung-Do Cook gives sketches of structures of various languages of Central Canada, notably Athapaskan and Siouan. In the last contribution to Indian languages, David Grubb looks at the languages of British Columbia, the province displaying the most complex linguistic situation in Canada, with nearly half of the native languages spoken here. Four families, Athapaskan, Wakashan, Salishan, and Penutian, and two isolates, Haida and Kutenai, are surveyed on the basis of research done since the mid-forties.

What characterizes all three descriptions, as well as Jean-Pierre Paillet's on Eskimo, is that the research on which they are based abstracts languages from the social forces that influence the ways the languages develop and that determine their very survival. By conducting such context-independent studies, linguists have been able to construct internally autonomous systems of each language, see important symmetries emerge, and make meaningful comparisons between distant and unrelated languages. However, much recent sociolinguistic research has pointed to the shortcomings of such exclusive treatments and has stressed the study of language as both a grammatical system and a part of a cultural fabric. With R. C. Gagné's "The Maintenance of the Native Languages," we find an example of such broader enquiry, for here interest is taken in how such behaviour changes when these minority speakers find themselves overburdened by the weight of a more prestigious culture and language. Only if there is a fairly healthy sociodynamic in the minority culture can its language retain its normal vitality and growth. Although such health is obviously menaced, Gagné can report on various lines of conscious action being taken in recent years by the Indians themselves, in co-

operation with school officials, to make the survival of their languages possible.

The section devoted to the "Official Languages" begins with Douglas C. Walker's discussion of Canadian French. With regard to the necessary balance between purely grammatical analysis and wider cultural analysis, we are in much better territory here, for, as Walker himself outlines, "one should in fact argue that Canadian French linguistics has always been interdisciplinary in nature, and that major (perhaps *the* major) contributions have come from areas that were not in the mainstream of structural linguistics, viz., phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, but rather in the allied areas of phonetics, lexicon, dialectology, and external history." As Walker's report shows, Canadian French studies are rapidly growing, thanks to a blending of a solid philological foundation with the new insights from more theoretically oriented scholarship. Furthermore, they can be seen to have a broad influence on such issues as bilingual education and language policy, and on public awareness in general.

J. K. Chambers' discussion of "Canadian English" draws from this healthy blend of traditional dialectology and new theoretical insight as well, although it limits itself intentionally to an area much smaller in scope than the one Walker chooses to cover. With particular emphasis on the phonetic phenomenon of "Canadian Raising," Chambers describes both usage surveys and structuralist phonological investigations and then outlines the value of the two for the resolution of more abstract questions in current linguistic theory.

The third and final section is by far the most tentative, since it deals with an area until recently ignored not only by linguistics but also by legislation, namely the languages of new immigrants. Its major rhetorical stance is one of giving

advice for future investigations and legislative policies. As Bernard Saint-Jacques, in his report on "Sociolinguistic Aspects of Immigration in Canada," points out, language and culture are so closely intertwined that the loss of one fosters the disappearance of the other. This mutual dependence makes any governmental effort toward the preservation of immigrant cultures and languages almost bound to fail, since most newcomers to Canada are socially pressured to "identify with the prestige group, the Anglophone community." This creates an almost classical "double-bind" situation in that ethnic groups can only contribute to the social, cultural, and economic environment of the country if they are not totally assimilated linguistically, yet it is precisely this total assimilation which is expected of them if they want to gain social acceptance.

In order to achieve any insight into the delicate interplay of the forces at work here, solid socio-psycho-linguistic research is indispensable. Walburga von Raffler Engel's commentary on "The Language of Immigrant Children" — an outstanding piece of linguistic scholarship and critical reflection — makes this point convincingly. Despite a rather dim past, the future, von Raffler Engel concludes, is extremely promising for linguists, for more third languages are being taught in school, the rate of language retention among immigrant children is being more closely observed, and researchers are undertaking studies which compare family with peer influence on children's language.

Readers who are linguists will find themselves rather breathless, for this collection does not merely point to the problems of traditional context-interdependent research, but also challenges its audience to face the sociolinguistic concerns that will have to be met in the near time ahead. Thus, most positively,

it holds out the promise for an interesting future for research on the languages of Canada.

One shortcoming of this collection has to be pointed out to potential readers: there are far too many typographical errors — unnecessary blemishes on a valuable document.

ANNELIESE KRAMER-DAHL

FORGETTABLE PLAYS

GAETAN CHARLEBOIS, *Aléola*. Talonbooks.

RON CHUDLEY, *After Abraham*. Talonbooks.

DAVID FRENCH, *Jitters*. Talonbooks.

GEORGE HULME, *The Lionel Touch*. Talonbooks.

JAMES W. NICHOL, *Sainte-Marie Among the Hurons*. Talonbooks.

THE FIVE PLAYS RECENTLY published by Talonbooks do not reveal much about contemporary Canadian drama — I hope. Until now and I think subsequent to this group under review, the Talonbooks playlist has been one reliable index of good work in Canadian theatre. But not one of these plays is either mainstream or innovative or, again I hope, representative of trends in playwriting; two are lightheaded transients that pass quickly from the stage and the mind; two are heavyhanded monuments to historical subjects, assembled with trowel and mortar; and one is drama in embryo, uncertain and unformed.

As a group, these plays raise questions about the publication of plays in Canada. When is a play ready to be published; what apparatus such as introduction or commentary might be appropriate? when should a play receive some editorial attention? It is impossible to discern a consistent editorial policy in this selection of plays, and there is wild variety in their readiness for publication. David

French's *Jitters* deserves exactly to have appeared, but George Hulme's *The Lionel Touch* need not have been published here at all and is fortunate to have been so attractively presented. The other plays need editorial intervention, or rewriting in workshop or production, and publishing them in their present state is a service neither to the playwrights nor to Canadian theatre.

Jitters is bitchy fun, once. In this harshly drawn cartoon of a theatre company in rehearsal French confirms all of one's worst suspicions: actors are catty manic-depressives, playwrights are paranoid and critics are naive, humourless people who write badly. In the first act, a scene is rehearsed several times while the actors complain about their shoes, wigs, lines, blocking, and one another. The wit is sharp, but though the rehearsals are cleverly engineered with subtle variations each time, there is no progress, either for the rehearsed play or for the frame play. Once the prickly, hysterical atmosphere is established, nothing happens. French has assembled his characters to tell us a few smart truths about Canadian theatre, but the actors remain caricatures, and the irrepressible wise-cracking does not flower into comedy.

The second act takes place backstage just before opening. The actors are still squabbling about their wigs and one another, while coping histrionically with a sequence of truly awful disasters that French has thrown brilliantly together. In the third act, the company must come to terms with the critics' responses — mixed of course. The star of the show is panned in a clever parodic review; what rankles is not the critic's judgment — the actress knows that she went over the top in her performance — but the damnation in print, in ponderous, adjectival prose. French also pulls malicious humour from the fact that the critic mistakes ineptitude for craft; thus the actor who

regularly forgets lines is described enthusiastically as "vulnerable in an almost painfully childlike manner, fumbling for words that seem constantly to elude his grasp. . . ." The joke also tacitly acknowledges something else: the magic of theatre — the fact that actor and character sometimes merge.

But it doesn't always happen. French's piece is clever, well-crafted, and sometimes funny, but it is also peevish and forgettable; I think I might leave the theatre with an odd sense of having yet to see a play.

The Lionel Touch was produced in London's West End in 1969 starring Rex Harrison. The fact that George Hulme's mother happened to be in Orillia, Ontario, at the time of his birth does not make this a Canadian play nor one of any interest, I hope, to Canadian theatres. There is no reason for this play not to have remained in oblivion; it is a not very good example of the tacky commercial vehicles regularly driven to death in one season by West End producers and popular actors. Hulme is certainly capable of the high-pitched, relentless patter and mildly salacious humour characteristic of the genre, and comfortable with the farcical tricks and inexpensive moral trappings that keep such plays clattering along to their invariably sentimental conclusions. But if Talonbooks is looking for this sort of thing, there are better bad plays, and ones not so thoroughly rusted.

After Abraham and *Sainte-Marie Among the Hurons* are hung over with anachronisms of another kind. Both playwrights have attempted impossible historical plays surprisingly reminiscent of early eighteenth-century efforts in the same vein, and both have failed as their predecessors did; the plays, despite their mildly avant-garde trappings, are ponderous, fortified with Extreme Reverence for their subjects, and laden with complicated effects and a creaky staginess.

In *After Abraham*, set in Quebec in 1759, Ron Chudley toys with the idea that, while Wolfe and Montcalm never met while alive, they might have had conversation in "after" or "out of time" as (and Chudley is clearly uncertain about this) "spirit, shade, alter-ego, what you will." Wolfe and Montcalm exchange aphorisms — "It begins." "The end must begin somewhere." "Precisely!" — between flashbacks to the days before the battle on the Plains of Abraham, in which scenes the same characters "in life" converse solemnly with their respective aides, both of whom are Scots given to long reminiscences about the Battle of Culloden. There are other undistinguished supernumeraries, one French tart "with an underlying crudity of manner," an overfed French governor, and an undernourished Acadian; there were thirty-eight actors in the first production in 1977 at the Bastion Theatre in Victoria. There are twenty scene changes, and directions for effects such as "an agony of church bells" and, in one scene, a collection of noises including guns, mortars, muskets, thunder, lightning, rain, and "from somewhere, from the distance or out of time, . . . the sound of bagpipes playing 'Lovat's March.'" The pace is understandably somewhat slow.

Sainte-Marie Among the Hurons, set in Huronia between 1634 and 1649, is essentially a pageant, a series of tableaux and addresses to the audience wherein the primitive rituals of Huron and Iroquois are exploited to create cheap pathos. James W. Nichol has used grotesque props, bloodstopping howls and explicit descriptions of torture as spectacle to disgust rather than to generate understanding, to horrify but not to illuminate; the effect is to make us stop up our ears and close our eyes because we are little more than captive voyeurs. This is imitation theatre-of-cruelty on one hand, and on the other a curiously non-

dramatic, static demonstration of the rhetoric of conversion. We are meant to find the trick "miracles" of the Jesuit priests to be as reprehensible as barbaric customs, but how can a chiming clock compete theatrically with "the partially decomposed corpse of an old woman" or a human heart held in a hand streaming with blood? The three central characters, a Jesuit priest and two Hurons, talk in a childish, falsely archaic diction and play at breaking down cultural barriers. There are two interesting moments in the play; the first is strictly poetic, when the Christian and Indian myths of creation are sung out against one another; in the second, when the priests attempt to use their tricks to convert a Huron, the human interplay is dramatically alive. Otherwise, I prefer to read E. J. Pratt.

For his first play, *Aléola*, Gaëtan Charlebois has wisely written a two-hander, set in the present, in his home in Montreal. Two old, forgotten, dispossessed people celebrate their anniversary in poverty and illness, then die. Charlebois has unfortunately not avoided the mires of bathos into which such a situation can so easily slide; the inevitabilities of the play are too common and too dreadful and too predictable. I also feel that, having created life-affirming characters, he should have sustained them thus; their deaths seem theatrically contrived, not the natural culmination of their strength and affection. Kitoune and Barné, moreover, are in themselves, in their self-enclosed world of memories and rituals, not intrinsically dramatic; I would like to see another character enter that world and alter this from a collection of nicely written, teary hugs-and-kisses monochromes into the substantial drama for which I suspect that Charlebois may have the potential.

MARIAN FRASER

REQUIRED: BOLDNESS

Aurora 1980, ed. Morris Wolfe: Doubleday Canada, \$9.95.

80: Best Canadian Stories, ed. Clark Blaise and John Metcalf. Oberon, n.p.

First Impressions, ed. John Metcalf. Oberon, n.p.

THE THREE BOOKS under review focus a problem, even a crisis, in Canadian writing and publishing today, one that their editors are very much alert to: readership. Writers are still out there, in ever increasing numbers it would seem. But where are the readers, especially those interested and committed enough to buy collections of new work? In the introduction to *First Impressions*, John Metcalf raises the question by tracing, in a rather arch way, the demise of a myth, formerly cherished by young writers (Metcalf uses himself as an example), but now no longer tenable. The myth describes how the writer is discovered by a discerning older novelist or sharp-eyed editor, gradually becomes famous and goes on in his turn to encourage some new young aspirant. Nowadays, says Metcalf, publishers are no longer likely to take a chance on an unknown writer, and are unwilling to let him or her slowly build up a readership over a number of books. Thus the reality is that a lot of young writers will simply not get published at all — writers like Jack Hodgins who, were he to come along now, might never get heard. Echoing Metcalf, but in a harsher and more melancholy vein, Morris Wolfe, in his introduction to *Aurora 1980*, quotes Hodgins' publisher to exactly that effect. Wolfe's pessimism and bitterness are evident. He is elegiac, regretful, occasionally angry. In the face of declining sales (from 2,200 in 1978 to 1,500 in 1979), he announces that he has decided to suspend publication of *Aurora* indefinitely, despite Doubleday's admir-

able willingness to continue. He notes the irony of raising false hopes: "What's the point of being published in *Aurora* if the chances of ever being published in a book of one's own are almost non-existent and *Aurora* itself is having trouble getting into bookstores?"

People like Ron Besse at Gage/Macmillan are now, according to Wolfe, insisting that every book (the very word is outdated in the trade these days, which prefers to speak of "products" or "units") should be a "profit centre." Gone, or going, is the idea that publishers might underwrite serious writing with some well-placed best sellers. Macmillan no longer thinks of poetry as profitable and has therefore given it up. Hence, it seems miraculous, perhaps even foolhardy, that Metcalf and Oberon, buoyed up by the continuing success of *Best Canadian Stories*, have embarked on another series, of which the aptly titled *First Impressions* is the opener. Their confidence is balanced by Wolfe's pessimism. Where exactly realism lies remains to be seen, but my suspicion is that second thoughts may well precede the appearance of *Second Impressions*.

I have dwelt on the economic issue because it is potentially so devastating, and because, although this is not examined by the editors, there is embedded in the economic question an ideological one as well. Anthologies do not simply respond to what's going on, they aren't merely repositories. They help to shape a national culture, to formulate a sense of what can or should be done by collecting the best of what has been done. But this brings up the issue of *choice*, and the responsibility for their choices that the editors must assume. And related to this is the problem of context and purpose. Bringing together diverse pieces needs to be done with an eye on the context so created, which in turn raises the question of why such a context should

be created. If anthologies are to be culturally as well as commercially successful, their editors have to face this problem boldly, and not, as seems the case with the books under review, just gather material that they happen to like; rather, they have to use the material to reflect, if not a vision, at least more than a glimpse of cultural reality.

Hence the concern for the plight of new writers voiced by Metcalf and Wolfe is not the only, nor even the most fundamental, concern. Underneath it lies a question of the shape of Canadian literary culture as a whole, and this involves established writers as much as new ones. Such writers are of course represented in these anthologies — people like Mavis Gallant, Joyce Carol Oates, Alice Munro, George Woodcock — but for the most part with rather undistinguished work. The exception is our foremost expatriate writer, Mavis Gallant, whose contribution to *Best Canadian Stories* is the centrepiece of the collection and the best single work in any of the three anthologies. Gallant's novella, "Speck's Idea," gives us the shape of exile in the very local and ironic habitation of one Lydia Cruche, blunt lady of the prairie, as straight as the borders of her native Saskatchewan and as impenetrable as its landscape. Mme. Cruche, unaffected by her long sojourn in the dismal Paris suburbs as wife and widow of a forgotten artist, meets and subdues sophisticated Parisian art-dealer Sandor Speck in a delightful twist on the old Jamesian theme of innocent North American meets wily European. It is the sort of work which belongs in such an anthology, not just because it is very good, but because it casts a cool eye, from an international, expatriate perspective (what better vantage point is there?), on the Canadian scene.

Wolfe, in *Aurora 1980*, implies something of the cultural role of the antholo-

gist by including a transcript of a conversation between Robert Fulford and Northrop Frye on the subject of Canadian culture, its growth and maturation, its regionalism and diversification. Unfortunately, the discussion remains rather thin and shallow. Wolfe also includes a piece in French, by Yvette Naubert, suggesting the need on the part of the Canadian anthologist to represent that aspect of our diversity. But despite such efforts, despite excellent stories by W. P. Kinsella and Guy Vanderhaeghe, and a few other good ones, and despite fine poems by Doug Barbour, Stephen Scobie and Alistair Macleod (the poetry selection as a whole exhibits more complacency than insight, more timidity than passion of language or theme), the overall colour of *Aurora* is much grayer than the title promises. The anthology seems plagued by the Canadian vice of caution rather than informed by the energy of diversity. Perhaps it seeks to do too much and ends up not doing enough. There is some good reading in it certainly, more so than in the other two volumes, but no real centre; we may wonder as we read why these pieces have been called together. What context do they create? Despite the references to regionalism, there is little regional *feel*, little distinctive tonality.

80: *Best Canadian Stories* has at least the unity provided by its exhibition of a single genre, and the influence the series has had on the development of that genre over the past 10 years has undoubtedly been significant, although it may not have been entirely beneficial. Judging by the present, anniversary volume, the boundaries of the genre do not seem to have been extensively tested or expanded. Excepting "Speck's Idea," the selection is rather drab, predictable, cautious, though there is some deft work by newcomers Martin Avery, Linda Svendsen, and Guy Vanderhaeghe. As a whole,

the volume has not been sufficiently *built* around its impressive centrepiece.

First Impressions has a narrower focus than either of the other two books. Its purpose is to introduce us to the work of three new writers, Martin Avery, Isabel Huggan, and Mike Mason, and because there are only three, there is room for a reasonably generous selection from each. We thus get to know the writers better than we are able to in more wide ranging anthologies (although the lack of a table of contents and of clear headings is an annoying, if minor, impediment to a smooth relationship).

Avery is a miniaturist, rather charming and offbeat, folksy in the style of Richard Brautigan, though sharper. He is represented by eleven little pieces, the best and funniest of which tend to be the shortest. After two or three pages he weakens, most evidently in the longest piece, a rather dreary and meandering story about rugby. "Five Cent Photograph," on the other hand, where the poet presses his nose to the glass for a xerox copy of his own face, captures in a concise, lively, and original metaphor the ambiguous relationship between art and machine.

Huggan is another in an increasingly long line of women writing about girlhood: the cruelty of the school yard, the discovery of sex in derelict bread wagons or the backs of butcher shops, the shadowy reality hidden behind the bland propriety of the adult world, and revealed through the presence of a slightly disreputable, unmarried aunt (or boarder). This last motif seems an almost inescapable feature of the genre in Canada these days, as witness *A Bird in the House*, *Lady Oracle*, *Lives of Girls and Women*, and now Huggan's "Jack of Hearts." In the introduction, Huggan, to her credit, raises the very question that was on my mind as I read these stories: do we "really need yet another

series of semi-autobiographical stories about growing up in a small Ontario [or Manitoba or Nova Scotia] town?" Despite Metcalf's explicitly affirmative answer, I remain unconvinced. We can hope, however, that Huggan's self-doubt will lead her not to silence but to something new, more imaginative and risky.

Mike Mason, though coarser, less disciplined, and less polished than Huggan, is nevertheless more interesting. Though he leans toward sentimental heaviness on occasion, he always seems able to pull himself and the reader back with a precise, often painful image. He thus allows for the lyrical while holding it at bay. His long piece, "Mondrian Skin," is a novella told in short, self-contained fragments, each separately titled, and each focussing on a different feature of a rather random, disconnected but nevertheless touching, love affair. The story chronicles the beginning, middle, and inevitable end of that affair against the backdrop of the passing of an eloquently evoked prairie year. The title derives from the unconventional tattoos that the narrator and his girlfriend "george" have etched on their bodies, signs which provide an image for the geometrically arranged fragments of colour and light of which the story is made, as well as for the patterned, graceful way the relationship between the lovers progresses and declines. Mason seems to have found an authentic, if as yet not fully disciplined, voice.

A singular value of such collections as these is that they afford the opportunity of hearing just such a distinctive inflection. Besides Mason, the new voice that appeals most to me is that of Guy Vanderhaeghe, whose pieces in *Aurora* and *Best Canadian Stories* reveal a solid achievement of form and an admirable gift for uncovering character. Simply on the grounds of introducing such writers (and others like Martin Avery and Linda

Svendsen), these anthologies justify themselves and deserve a wider audience than they will likely get. But to really make a mark, to achieve the sort of importance that they seem to aspire to, the editors need to provide a bolder, more definitely etched conception than they have so far been inclined to do.

ANTHONY DAWSON

COMPANION IN BOWLER HAT

ROBERT FINCH, *Variations & Theme*. The Porcupine's Quill, \$16.00; paper \$5.95.

THIS POET (B. 1900) probably deplores the contemporary fad for selling the writer's personal image. Nevertheless, he appears in singular style on the back cover: attired in a three-piece pinstriped suit, emblematic white handkerchief protruding from pocket, dark tie and — bowler hat. In the background: a regular brick wall, a pale light falling in patches upon it and the poet's left shoulder. The effect: a London City man or retired brigadier — but why not a poet after all? At all events, a dated poet, scarcely our contemporary. . . .

What appeal is Robert Finch's traditional lyricism likely to hold for today's poetry-consumer? He is no *angst*-ridden free-verser, using Western gunslingers or New Orleans jazz-men as mask for his alienated artist's personality, no exhibitionist of sex or race, no wallowing self-confessor or zealot of lower case. The collection opens with a graceful sonnet-celebration of the falling attitudes of autumn leaves, closes with "Theme," where the "hiding heart" peers in disciplined couplets after a unity behind the flux.

In the first four of five sections there are no less than thirty-four sonnets, over

two-thirds of the total. These adhere closely to the Shakespearian type, whose clinching final couplet is especially congenial to Finch's urge for definitive statement. Within these strict limits there is, however, a wide range of subject and tone:

Some poems are the staff of life, good
bread
Attention butters. Grain that feeds was fed.
(*"Anthology"*)

— Herbert recalled, but in tactfully updated diction;

How should Pindar reckon to crash the
dailies
When there is neither hide nor hair for
Phidias?
(*"Sports"*)

— from a witty, colloquial/classical handling of a public theme, gross commercialized sport;

Any antique may prove a source of gain
But our old age not even rates disdain.
(*"Antique"*)

— while the collection contains only four epigrams, so entitled, there is a constant movement toward that form's quality of unarguable assertion.

The sonnet is used rather to embellish and elaborate than to develop Shakespearian or Donne's complexity. Elegance and control, with considerable flexibility of language, are the virtues: "At a Playing of Chopin's Second Piano Concerto" asks two rhetorical questions, implying through controlling metaphors centred upon diver and climber the artist's daring of execution; "Colleagues" neatly demonstrates how youth merges into age and assumes its fading role; "Well-Tempered Clavier" 'composes' nature, by musical analogies; "Prelate" wittily apostrophizes the cardinal bird by analogy with his ecclesiastical counterpart; "The Climb," if hackneyed in subject, is a taut extended metaphor of life's

process; "Cannes" is wittily imaged in its own terms:

A yacht at anchor in a sea of yachts. . . .
Hostessed by Venuses, a non-stop cruise.

The word that insists upon being written is 'civilized.' The personal life and its allegiances, natural observation and celebration, delight in music's wordless art, less an avoidance of public themes than their implicit exclusion from the range of lyric art—though the occasional exception, typically distanced, "David Hume (1711-76) and Phillis Wheatley (1753?-85)" pleads for the brotherhood of man with a quiet humanity alien to today's postures.

Robert Finch's constant ground is a faith voiced in a manner akin rather to a Vaughan than the more troubled note of a Donne or even an R. S. Thomas, resting often in a graceful, sure celebration of the natural processes, in such poems as "The Autumn Leaves," "The Fountains," "The Stars" (with a personified "first Astronomer"), "The Waterfall," "The Secret." The envelope quatrain—which he favours—closing the last of four sonnets at the end of section IV is a fitting, affirmative signature to some fifty lyrics that have explored time and mutability, place, change and decay, human and spiritual love:

Experience is not touchstone, no, nor token,
Salvation is divine and from without,
Our sole assurance. The angel on his route
Reads on the sill the word that Love has
spoken.

The final section, which gives the collection its title, contains fifteen poems each of thirteen rhyming, chiefly pentameter couplets, the last as with the sonnets clinching the mood, phase of feeling or viewpoint. The "Variations" explore the poet's time past, in search of the 'timeless unity' apprehended by glimpses throughout. The sequence moves, with a flexible diction and pace—successfully

varying the potentially monotonous form — through a series of antitheses or counterpoised elements, present/past, space/time, sound/silence, voice/song, arrival/departure, the antiphony of Masyas and Apollo, question/answer, to be resolved in these three couplets from “Theme”:

From learning towers of the pensive mind
 Each fresh horizon speeds a Golden Hind;
 The hidden loophole of the hiding heart
 Looks for another cloud to break apart;
 Well may the proffered word begin to
 tremble
 Before the answer it will make assemble.

At the very least Robert Finch is a serene, not complacent, poetic companion — and more, an artist who grants the reader scope for the detached, aesthetic appreciation that does not exclude feeling. This is largely facilitated, it must be admitted, by his very conservatism. The cover image is a dependable guide to an integrity the reader will find within.

MICHAEL THORPE

WORDS & REWARDS

IRVING LAYTON, *The Love Poems of Irving Layton*. McClelland & Stewart.

STANLEY COOPERMAN, *Greco's Last Book*, edited and with an introduction by Fred Candelaria. Intermedia Press, \$12.95; paper, \$5.95.

WHEN ADOPTING ONE OF HIS extreme rhetorical stances to distance his Hebraic, poetic, male self from the more prosaic realms of his readers, Irving Layton may well qualify as Canada's silliest major poet. But Gentile, prose-oriented, non-macho me has to testify to an overwhelming delight in the Layton who is indubitably Canada's most alive, vigorously fleshly poet: the Layton who moves with an ease of assurance in his poetic role that recalls D. H. Lawrence in its high sense of vocation — and radically

differentiates the Montreal-raised poet from his predecessors, peers, and followers, in this hesitant land of ours.

All such thoughts and opinions received fresh liberation in me when confronting his latest volume. Layton tells us who we are. The Manichean-minded, god-fearing politicians of sexual equality will likely be so blinded by their own bile as to be quite unable to see beyond Layton's lachrymose self-pity and heavy-handed songs of woman-as-object. But the truth for the remainder of his readers is to forgive the poet where he least demands it (because of his old man's insouciance) and to enjoy the artist whose verbal wand — not the phallic one *he* thinks — brings magic to evocations of men and women, to the copulative act, and to the world in which he conjures up its enactment.

It is this overwhelming power, so controlled, so poetically accurate as well as concise, which silences all Apollonian opposition and which turns page after page of this volume into a life-enhancing, esthetic experience. Poems such as “For Artemis” with its Laytonic marriage of the female and the sea, sad ballads like “Two Songs for Sweet Voices,” banish all treasonous thoughts of the poet's occasional flaccidity of language:

It was a late November day
 Or so I dreamed a dream;
 The fog descending on the banks,
 The sun a frozen gleam.

No living thing survived except
 That like a frightened thief
 There quivered on a barren bough
 A single, wind-torn leaf.

And only you and I, my love,
 Remained to see it fall
 And you were very beautiful
 And I was straight and tall.

And as sunlight ebbed away
 We danced around the tree,
 Until the snows came burying
 The leaf and you and me.

Another aspect of his power, the range of his poetic matter allied to that un-wavering technique, is highlighted in poems such as "Strange Turn" which not only brings out the aspect of middle-age melancholy in conjunction with love-making, but also a nice wryness as welcome self-mockery to counterbalance the dangers of solipsism in the poet's work.

But Layton can also be, reassuringly, just plain funny. My own candidate for the most humorous poem in the whole literary pantheon of Canadian verse is his well-known "Misunderstanding," which must be deliciously pertinent to all Can-Lit lecturers and students, but also to those of us who live far from the domain of cramped desks in campus classrooms.

The Love Poems of Irving Layton certainly contain some Layton samples of excellence but even so there is a paucity of that splendid fusion of anecdote and vision as in the much anthologized "The Bull Calf" or, indeed, in so many of his nature poems — if such a pedestrian label may be applied to the work of such a turbulent artist. And I was also mildly surprised by a few omissions — such as "Winter Light" ("With you, Aviva, I am negated and fulfilled / In you and through you / I am perpetuated and destroyed . . .") which appeared in his 1964 volume, *The Laughing Rooster*.

These 'Love Poems' carry a foreword by the poet that I personally thought as pompous and vain as it was unmemorable. Then Layton invariably writes best when responding to his poetic *daemon* rather than when insisting upon one of these flatulent *apologias*.

Stanley Cooperman, the author of the posthumous poems in *Greco's Last Book*, edited by Fred Candelaria, shared Jewishness and a stint in Canada with Layton but, sadly, not too much else. Certainly not in the possession of a major poetic talent. The mighty ego is there, but too often accompanied only by heat

without poetry's illumination. Put against a Layton (or a Purdy, too, for that matter) Cooperman suffers in consequence.

I think that Fred Candelaria, in his introduction, puts his finger deftly on the poet's limitation, even though he makes considerable effort to be fair to his subject: "Much of his [Cooperman's] work is indeed explosive. The imagery is violent. The stance is aggressive in the hectoring, overtly didactic verses that are all too prominent in *Cappelbaum's Dance* especially." And a little later Candelaria adds: "It is the *apparent* dynamicism [*sic*] of the other works that creates difficulties because the energy is frequently more of a tantrum than of a jeremiad." Here, Cooperman's editor is referring to poems omitted from the collection, but my own feeling is that even within what has been salvaged for *Greco's Last Book*, there is too much bombast, too much firing of massive salvos at miniscule targets.

But that is not the whole story. For the persistent reader there are rewards to discern within the tiny print. But not, surprisingly, among the distinctly Jewish poems (and surely all poets would enjoy the bonus of distinctive identity such as Jewry confers for material on which to work). Instead it is the more relaxed, sometimes wry 'poems of place' that work best in this collection. Not verses grouped under such headings as *Ancesters & Heritage*, but poems such as "Brooklyn, My Betrothed," with its delicious line: "the delphic underwear of Mrs Levin turned Sunday into wind and heavy prophecy." Or "Persepolis, I Love You" with its restlessness over suburban, sabbath conformity:

Now beyond my window
neighbors suffer Sunday
Where every lawn must go to church;
daffodils are Methodist,
and these unshaven fingers
outrage all weedless women. . . .

And two other poems, because they are relaxed and replete with an ease of command over material, are probably the best in the book. "Near Grouse Mountain" belongs in any superior westcoast anthology, with its lines "There is no burning bush in this garden, only spirits made of bamboo, cursing the winter / that comes down from the mountain / with a smell of rain. . . ." "Vancouver, I Love You" is, in its way, a poetic summation of experience that could come only from the pen of Stanley Cooperman. With its authenticity of evocation and personal testament it reveals a minor poet capable of distinctive verse that should not be left to sink below our collective memory. We have Fred Candelaria to thank for that now being unlikely to happen.

DAVID WATMOUGH

TO REVELATIONS

NANCY SENIOR, *The Mushroom Jar*. Thistle-down Press.

MONA ELAINE ADILMAN, *Piece Work*. Borealis Press.

MARY DI MICHELLE, *Bread and Chocolate*; BRONWEN WALLACE, *Marrying Into the Family*. Oberon.

ROBERT FROST ONCE SAID, "Poetry provides the one permissible way of saying one thing and meaning another." Frost does not suggest that there are two different poems when one poem is written; he asserts that a poem is a poem because it is *not only* what is written. Language used poetically provides not just a description of or reaction to experience but a new experience as well, an integral transformation of the old. Thus, the poet means what he says, but in a more subtle and profound way he means what he reveals. The four poets under review here say and reveal with varying degrees of success.

In *The Mushroom Jar*, Nancy Senior does not often move beyond a sentimental response to experience and a very matter-of-fact-way of using language. This is especially true when she remains an observer of what goes on immediately around her. She writes rather prosaically about the death of her cats, a misty day in a Swiss village, and a long-lost lover. She has certain things to say about the cats, the village, and the lover, but she reveals nothing out of the ordinary in terms of language or experience. After the death of the cats, "We trembled with excitement / while our parents made sympathetic remarks / pretending not to enjoy it / as much as we did." The Swiss village (in ten lines) is "a little outpost of Saskatchewan" and the poet, as a result, is "homesick." Relationships between the sexes have been described over and over again in art. The following lines add nothing new:

I wanted to call you
and tell you I miss you
But you would have put a smile in your
voice
and told me
about the few things you are doing
and after hanging up
you would have wondered
what I was trying to get

The essential reason such lines disappoint is because Nancy Senior shows elsewhere in her collection that she can do much more than flatly relate experience — she can make it new, make it matter to the reader. This happens especially when she travels, not just to Swiss villages but to places behind the postcards where the observing eye is itself transformed. At Karlsau, Senior watches a nun walking alone in a park and is disturbed by possibilities. At the Lipton Jewish cemetery she reads the names of strangers, her grandmother's name on a tombstone at Bethebera, and her own fears and doubts in the space and time that surround. At the monastery of Heil-

genkreuz, Senior has her own days of "retreat," and they draw from her the final concise and ironic self-comment: "your paperback books of devotion / mocking you / from the ivory inlaid table." If Senior would consistently move beyond the mere relation of experience to a re-evaluation and renewal of it, she would be a formidable poet.

In the title poem of her collection she writes of a mushroom jar, housing fragile northern moss, broken by a dusting janitor. Yet it is not the act of destruction itself that matters but what the act signifies. It is one thing to be sorry that the jar is broken, the moss dead; it is quite another to transform the broken jar into a revelation about human connections, the value of words, those written and those absent. Instead of explaining the obvious to the repentant janitor, Senior leaves "the paper blank":

I go to the shelf
pour a few drops of water
onto the dried-out moss
and cover the jar
with an unopened envelope from this
morning's mail.

The problem with Mona Elaine Adilman is that her highly-charged, even frenetic use of language obscures meaning. She seems to insist that revelation is in the saying; and what a saying it is—replete with metaphorical explosions, auditory and visual assaults on the reader, a piling on of *The Word*, a making new that blinds us to the old. In the first section of *Piece Work*, subtitled "Love Play," the poet overstates a sexual orgasm, striving for the word equivalent of an extraordinary physical, emotional, and spiritual experience:

Prepare for moon landing
— jets of cataclysmic sensation.
My psyche explodes . . . subsides.

Spaced out in space,
we fuse with the universe,
rub flesh with tumescent stars.

Certainly this is no mere description, nor is it a glib equation of experience with image. But neither in these lines (nor in the poem from which they are taken) is there an achievement of unity or meaning, because the compilation of individual images overwhelms.

In her love poems, Adilman writes in short bursts of word-fire (indicated especially by recurrent short lines and stanzas), bursts that explode inward in the poem against each other. Her vision seems to be contained in lists of images that only occasionally cohere into something more. In "Bedmates," the poet contrasts the flesh and minds of the lovers; but this legitimate contrast is obscured by the several and distinct metaphors employed. Thus "flesh touches flesh ignites / burns high voltage in magnetic fields"; then "minds are wheel tracks / rutted in descending snow"; meanwhile "emotions fall like lost stars" as "bodies blend and merge / plasticine puppets fused." Such lines are not taken out of context; they *are* the context.

In the second and third sections of her book, in which Adilman looks at the world around her — at factory workers, artists, relatives, social and cultural forces — the images and metaphors continue to pile up. But outside of Adilman's love affairs (and those of others) there is a great enough space of sound and sense to absorb them. The poems are much more "message" verse, yet not obtrusively so. In "Montreal," Adilman's high-energy vision and language do unite and cohere, and the result is redolent of A. M. Klein's transformation of two languages and experiences in his poem of the same title:

I've watched skyscrapers scar your soul,
joined the human cargo of your freighted
streets, obsessed with technology.
Once radiant clear, the St. Lawrence
flows a sluggish odyssey,
and money moguls throng

in cesspool galaxies to batten
on your beauty and your past.

The poems of Mary di Michele and Bronwen Wallace have been collected in one volume with two titles — *Bread and Chocolate* and *Marrying into the Family*. Both poets are concerned with the family as motive for metaphor, their respective family histories, especially as revealed through photographs, and with the mysterious, astonishing, and homage-filled revelation of self through a 'saying' of others.

In "A Streetcar Named Nostalgia," di Michele writes of her thirty-year-old great-grandfather emigrating to Canada in 1903. He "slipped to work each winter day, / missed Christmas waiting for an epiphany, / lived alone choking on tea and English / biscuits. . . ." Then he left this "frigid paradise" and returned to Italy. The poet is fascinated by this journey, its connection to the great-grandfather's subsequent marriage, the eventual birth of her mother, and her mother's marriage: "and in 1954, my father, then 30 / sailed to Canada's Toronto. . . ." Meanwhile, di Michele herself emerges from this history in a moving tribute to her father entitled "Waiting for Babbo":

I am four, a year to you, *babbo*,
is twenty to me, twenty years
and I am five, I have grown old
without you. I have dressed as a gypsy
for *Carnevale*. The sacrifice in the bonfire
was my rocking horse for the end of winter.
In a few days, *babbo*, we pack
the smiles that are destined for you.

The family, with parent and grandparent love and gifts of experience, is the heart of the matter for di Michele. However, given this and her North American education ("in another world, wearing the black academic gown") the poet is caught between her Italian heritage and her Canadian, liberated consciousness. Speaking of her father, she writes, ". . .

you will surrender / and visit him in hospital / where you will be accused / of wishing his death / in wanting a life / for yourself." If there is an overwhelming sense of love and need generated for and by di Michele's family, past and present, there is also a muted sense of loss, of the self caught in its most beautiful moment in a black and white photograph of the child forever fled from the promised land.

Bronwen Wallace studies the photographs of her family much as di Michele does hers — not as ends in themselves but as starting points for investigation and speculation. There is the surface, the "merely technical" effect in "the way the children seem starched — like the dresses they wear for the occasion / the adults behind them rigid and unsmiling." But, Wallace writes, "that does not explain the eyes / how the calm there is repeated / in the sure tilt of a chin / in the way the hands lie / loosely folded in the lap"; nor does such surface detail reveal the photograph behind the photograph:

but I keep holding the negatives
at different angles to the light
squinting my eyes
for a glimpse of our white figures
galloping toward each other
over the dark fields.

Examination of different photos at different angles leads Wallace to "sifting the stories" that have been handed down about her relatives. There is remarkable strength in the women of her past. One great aunt, still alive at 93, pitched hay along with the men or baked twenty loaves of bread in a morning. A great-grandmother, to embarrass her husband in his excessive drinking, flouted convention in 1895 when she marched into the local bar to order drinks on the house. Was it the same "great-grandmother who refused / to go to hospital for the tumour / and had two doctors come in /

to remove it while she lay chloroformed / on her own dining-room table"?)

Wallace is certain that in heredity she will find herself. Her injured knee becomes that of her grandmother, the bones of this stranger mending under the poet's "familiar skin." Yet the tenuous nature of the search is admitted as her heritage remains "as silent as the bones / I can't see in the photographs." Soon Wallace, her husband, and son begin to appear in their own snapshots "slightly blurred." In one photo they dress up in the clothes of their ancestors, and the poet senses that they are already ancestors themselves, are already eluding interpretation and claims. But there is revelation:

daily we grow less familiar
our faces vaguely reminiscent
of faces we think we remember
but assumed were dead
faces we have never seen
emerging at last
from the bone camera
behind our eyes.

J. A. WAINWRIGHT

RIEL IN REVIEW

LOUIS "DAVID" RIEL, *Poésies religieuses et politiques*. Editions des Plaines.

AUGUSTE-HENRI DE TREMAUDAN, *Histoire de la nation métisse dans l'Ouest canadien*. Editions des Plaines.

MARY JORDAN, *De ta Soeur, Sara Riel*. Editions des Plaines.

CLAUDE DORGE, *Le Roitelet*. Editions du Blé.

Association of Métis and Non-status Indians of Saskatchewan, *Louis Riel — Justice Must be Done*. Manitoba Métis Federation Press.

THE FIVE BOOKS UNDER REVIEW, all published in Saint-Boniface/Winnipeg, are concerned with the rehabilitation of Louis "David" Riel and form part of a fast-growing body of works dealing with this still controversial figure.

The collection of religious and political poems by Riel himself is a facsimile edition originally published by the Montreal newspaper *L'Etendard* a few months after Riel's execution. Signed and dated August 1879, they were written in what was then known as Dakota where the exiled Riel was teaching at St. Joseph's mission school. Three documents signed by various members of Riel's immediate family attesting to their authenticity are appended to the volume. The poems, cast in the conventional lyrical forms of the French nineteenth century, are of historical rather than literary importance. The first seven, religious in nature, are grateful homilies dedicated to men of religion while the last long poem addressed to Sir John A. Macdonald is full of bitter acrimony alternating with braggadocio.

This little volume is a microcosm of what Thomas Flanagan so aptly terms "Riel's baffling personality . . . full of contradiction and ambivalence." Still, the poems are coherent and highly readable, obviously the work of an educated man intimately acquainted, moreover, with the machinations of the political arena. The eyes of the Western world were focussed on Riel during his lengthy trial when he was pronounced sane except on matters relating to politics and religion. Perhaps in 1886 the poems were meant to speak for themselves; in 1981 they still evoke powerfully the smouldering political mood of French-Canadians a century ago.

Trémaudan's *Histoire* — also a facsimile 1979 edition originally published posthumously in 1935 — is the first work of any dimension devoted entirely to the Métis people and Riel's role among them. A sizeable appendix by the Historical Society of L'Union nationale métisse St. Joseph refuting accusations levelled against Riel (and the Métis) during his trial reinforces the justificatory tone in *Histoire*, a work which ethnologist Marcel

Giraud summarizes as "an apology of Louis Riel."

Having emigrated from France to Saskatchewan as a youth, Trémaudan, a lawyer and a man of letters, was very close to his subject. He was privy to first-hand information about events of the last half of the 1800's. His history lacks a footnote apparatus, but its detailed accounts of a by-gone era are referred to by Giraud himself as well as George F. Stanley and other historians. Given the vast scholarly output on Riel and the Métis people since it was first published, Trémaudan's *Histoire* stands today as a *livre-témoin*: the first attempt to present events from the standpoint of a despoliated, humiliated and, until then, silent people. It has recently appeared in English edited by Howard Adams.

Mary Jordan's 1980 *De ta Soeur* is essentially a translation, with minor changes and an additional chapter, of her prize-winning *To Louis from Your Sister Who Loves You Sara Riel*, published in 1974 by Griffin House, Toronto. It purports to be the story of Louis and Sara based for the most part on her letters to her brother and family. Unfortunately, many essential features of the 1974 volume have been deleted from *De ta Soeur*: the useful Index, the very interesting Map and Itinerary of Sara's 68-day trek by ox-cart to the far-off mission from which she was never to return, and, unaccountably, a five-verse song allegedly written by Louis which had been published in translation in the English version. More serious is the omission of an appendix containing, in chronological order and in the original French, 38 of Sara's dated and undated letters, a reference source which becomes of paramount importance as one reads *De ta Soeur*.

After two expository chapters, Jordan provides extensive excerpts from Sara's letters linked together by historical commentary and brief transitional passages.

The letters cover roughly the period 1868-1883 and are the substance of most of Jordan's book. They contain many interesting details about missionary life: its hardships, its sometime joys, the desperate plight of the natives; but their *leit-motif* is Sara's anxiety and finally despair over the scarcity of letters from her brother Louis (only two are included in this volume).

Jordan's approach is informal and anecdotal. Unfortunately, this leads to short, choppy paragraphs couching a rambling train of thought that often leaves the reader bewildered as she jumps from one geographical area and, even more disconcertingly, from one time-frame to another. A hawk-eyed, flint-hearted editor would have stood her in good stead. However, the most serious defect is her somewhat cavalier treatment of historical fact. A letter allegedly written by Sara "assise sur les bords de la rivière Assiniboine" was in fact written six months later, as we learn from the 1974 appendix. Likewise, we are told that Louis is riding in the countryside where "L'herbe est verte, le vent souffle librement à travers les branches touffues et les feuilles en pleine végétation frôlent l'abondante chevelure noire et bouclée du jeune cavalier." This is the same land which Jordan correctly describes on the next page as parched and devastated by the 1868 plague of grasshoppers. Such flights of fancy may become the fiction writer — Jordan has a novel to her credit — but they have no place in an historical work.

If this book is indeed history and not historical fiction, we should expect better use of existing scholarship. Jordan is acquainted with Stanley's classic 1963 biography of Riel; yet inaccuracies abound in her work. She tells us, for instance, that "Louis Riel reçoit d'Ottawa le pouvoir de diriger le gouvernement provisoire . . ."; Stanley in *Louis Riel* attributes the source of authority to the ailing Hudson's Bay

Company Governor Mactavish who, while Riel's prisoner, was reported to have given his blessing to any form of government which might maintain law and order during this sensitive transitional period of 1870. Even more confusing is Jordan's account of the death of Parisien, a young Métis: her French version (p. 48) is different from her English one (p. 21), and both are incompatible with Stanley (p. 106). Especially curious is Jordan's reticence in discussing the execution of Thomas Scott, the turning point in Riel's life and an episode exhaustively treated by Stanley as well as by many other historians.

Many Riel scholars today are trying to unravel the tangled skein of history in which Riel has been trapped, and since the 1974 *To Louis from Your Sister* much first-rate material has appeared, such as Thomas Flanagan's edition of Riel's diaries (1976) and his excellent 1979 biographical study. None of this recent material appears to have been utilized in *De ta Soeur*. Nor do Jordan's comments stringing together Sara's letters offer many insights into the lives of her fascinating subjects. Nevertheless, despite these reservations, we owe Jordan a debt of gratitude for bringing out of the dusty archives a fertile source of documentation. It is to be hoped that Sara's entire correspondence will soon be made available in an accurate, well annotated critical edition.

Many plays have been written about Louis Riel since he first stepped into the public arena in 1870, but until *Le Roitelet* (1980) none had tried to deal with his perspective of the world and of his role in it. First performed in 1976, Dorge's play is an interesting creative pendant to Flanagan's prize-winning study *Louis 'David' Riel: Prophet of the New World*, both works highlighting as they do the millenarian aspect of Riel.

Most plays are written from a preconceived notion of plot and character; *Le Roitelet*, explains Dorge, grew out of a gestation period of rehearsals, the characters shaping themselves to given situations, and to each other, according to the perception of actors, director, and playwright. The play opens as Riel is being admitted to a mental institution under an assumed name. The set — which remains unchanged throughout — is a bare hospital room, circumscribed by lighting effects designed to create a mood of claustrophobic confinement. But Riel, the only "real" person in the play, soon finds an escape in the visions who people his mind. Called forth out of time and space as one thought leads to another, these visions are the characters who fill the stage.

Bereft of both freedom and identity, assailed by voices pulling him in all directions, Riel lives on intense emotional experience. Characters and events merge and blend into one another. Significantly, the women glide from one identity to another: Riel's mother Julie becomes the Virgin Mother; the ghost of his sister Sara blurs into that of his first love Marie, then into that of his wife Marguerite. These internal ambiguities in Riel's persona are reflected in the language; stark simplicity alternates with liturgical chant in incantatory rhythms.

The end especially captures his tortured religiosity and desperate sense of mission. The tempo accelerates, and amid shouts of "crucify him" and strains of "La Marseillaise," Death appears in the role of a taunting prostitute. This stylized madness finally explodes into a salvo of shots (Scott's execution). In the ensuing silence, Riel entones one last hymn to his "douce contrée... ma blonde adorée..."

The title, which means both "small wren" and "petty king," is well chosen, embodying as it does the contradictory aspects of Riel's character: his vulnerability and his overweening pride. Dorge

downplays the *hubris*, however, to focus on the Sartrean *en-soi* point of view.

The playwright seems well acquainted with primary materials relating to the personal side of his subject. His transformation of fact into fiction captures not only the intimate Riel but the man as a metaphor of our time. The metamorphosis of Thomas Scott, for instance, from bitterest enemy to most trusted friend and ally is strikingly effective when viewed from today's historical vantage point. However, the characterizations tend to become simplistic and naïve; I fail to see moreover why Parisien was given such a disproportionately large role. In short, there are *longueurs* which, compounded by the absence of intermissions, could pose problems for the director.

Nevertheless, this play is dynamic, rich in paradox and, in a strange way, remarkably faithful to the Riel who emerges from his letters and diaries. It goes further, for it transcends the particular to touch upon the universal: guilt, fear and self doubt, as well as dreams and aspirations are, after all, the legacy of Everyman. In the hands of an imaginative director, *Le Roitelet* could be excellent theatre and, as such, deserves to be translated in order to reach a wider public.

The last book under review, *Louis Riel — Justice Must be Done*, is a study by the Association of Métis and Non-status Indians of Saskatchewan submitted to the Federal Government in 1978 requesting a posthumous pardon for Riel. It must be noted that, unlike their Indian brothers, the Métis were never granted special status under the law of the land, and the opprobrium of Riel's disgrace fell heavily upon them and their children. For the past century the many Métis who did not join the white man's ways were forced into an ever more precarious and degrading existence — as Marcel Giraud tellingly describes in his exhaustive *Le Métis*

Canadien (Paris, 1945). *Justice Must be Done* is tangible evidence that the Métis people are taking their first courageous step toward rehabilitation.

This submission attempts to bring together "all relevant material, both historical and legal, about Riel and his involvement in the Red River Resistance of 1869-70 and the Northwest Uprising in 1885 [with the purpose of showing] that a grave miscarriage of justice resulted. . . ." Information is gathered from Sessional Papers, House of Commons Debates, correspondence and archival material, but especially from three historians: Trémaudan and Stanley as well as Dr. Peter Charlebois who makes no pretense of presenting an unbiased view in his well illustrated *The Life of Louis Riel* (1975).

Needless to say, the 85-page composite brief lacks the depth and cohesion of a single-authored monograph. A detailed chronology of the events of 1869-70 does little to emphasize Riel's finest achievement: his forging of the List of Rights which became the foundation of the Manitoba Act. Attention is focussed instead on the case of Thomas Scott, on the unfulfilled promise of amnesty, and on details of the 1885 uprising which are not always significant and sometimes contradictory; e.g., the Lieutenant-Governor of the Northwest Territories is reported as having "provided important (and alarming) information all during 1884," while on the next page he is said to have "misled Macdonald into believing that everything in the Northwest was under control. . . ." The scholarly apparatus is somewhat unconventional and disconcerting.

Nevertheless this manifesto, in remarkably restrained and sober language, gets its message across. The reader may be astonished to learn that the 1885 Rebellion was manned by an "army" of 300 Métis — a generous estimate by all accounts available today — armed with buf-

falo guns and a limited supply of ammunition, against which had been mobilized upward of 5000 troops equipped with the latest materiel including the Gatling gun. Surprisingly the authors of this polemical document do not capitalize on such a flagrant disproportion; they make it abundantly clear, however, that in order to muster the Canadian army — and simultaneously the funds to complete the transcontinental railway — Macdonald had inflated the Duck Lake incident out of all proportion. Quotations from his own correspondence reveal that, a few months later, hoist on his own petard, he was forced to scale down the term “rebellion” in order to prevent Riel’s plea for mercy from reaching the Queen.

Grave doubts have been expressed in many quarters regarding the propriety of the proceedings of Riel’s trial and the failure to implement the jury’s recommendation of mercy. Although this crucial matter is discussed in the brief, its presentation regrettably lacks coherence and forcefulness. On the other hand, the well chosen photographs ranging from early drawings to pictures of the recent commemorative statue, cairn, and stamp tell their own story.

The anger and frustration betrayed by the defensive tone of the book is not surprising given the bewildering stand of a government prepared to heap honours upon a national hero who is still officially a traitor.

SIMONE P. KNUTSON

FERRON’S APPEAL

JACQUES FERRON, *L’Amélanquier*. V.L.B. éditeur.

PIERRE L’HERAULT, *Jacques Ferron, Cartographe de l’imaginaire*. Les Presses de l’Université de Montréal.

L’AMELANQUIER by Jacques Ferron, which appeared in 1977 (V.L.B. édi-

teur), is a second edition, without changes, of the novel published under the same title in 1970 (Editions du Jour, “Romanciers du jour”). Ferron had already written six novels, as well as the *Contes* and the plays which first established his reputation in Québec, and has since produced four more. Apart from the *Contes*, *L’Amélanquier* is his only single work to have had a book-length study devoted to it: Jean-Pierre Boucher’s *Jacques Ferron au pays des amélanquiers*, published by the Presses de l’Université de Montréal in 1973. Jean Ethier-Blais greeted the first edition of the novel in *Le Devoir* (March 21st, 1970) with a sigh of relief: “Ni à droite, ni à gauche, un livre naturel.” Réginald Martel’s reaction to the second edition, in the same paper, proclaimed: “Vous n’avez pas changé, Tinamer de Portanqueu” (June 17th, 1978). What are the reasons for the initial success and continuing fascination of this particular novel, amidst the diversity of Ferron’s prolific output?

The “amélanquier” (saskatoon tree) of the title grows in the wood behind the childhood home of Tinamer de Portanqueu, the narrator. Now twenty years old and an orphan, Tinamer is undertaking the narration of her childhood in an attempt to establish her identity and “orientation” in the world. “Orientation” in the sense of “orienteeing”: she must rediscover her point of origin, before she can decide where she is going. The saskatoon flowers magnificently and precociously; it is the first sign of spring in her childhood universe, the symbolic tree in a lost paradise, but also a lighthouse marking her port of departure. The major part of Tinamer’s retrospective account is devoted to the time when she was about five years old, and her world was divided into a “good side” and a “bad side,” governed by a dualism evoked and sustained by her father, the eccentric “Léon de Portanqueu esquire.” The “good side” is

behind the house and belongs to the weekends. It is the wonderland where Tinamer sees Monsieur Northrop, an Englishman who carries a compass and was the original owner of the land; also Signor Petroni, the present owner, an exile from Italy (Tinamer lives in Longueuil), and Hubert Robson, a nineteenth-century priest forever in search of a small, blond girl of Tinamer's age called Mary Mahon. These figures, which hover between dream and reality, are described in terms of animals. M. Northrop used to be a rabbit, one of many allusions to *Alice in Wonderland*. Tinamer herself, when she escapes into her fantasy world, becomes a "petite bécasse du Canada," the equivalent of "a silly little goose." The shifts from human to animal and back are reminiscent of Ferron's *Contes*, as is Northrop's exclamation, "ouhonnedeurfouledé!" However, the realm in which such characters, metamorphoses and dialogues exist is counterbalanced in *L'Amélanchier* by the "bad side of things," beginning with the concrete road in front of the house and encompassing Etna (Tinamer's mother), school, and Mont Thabor, the home for retarded children where her father works. These elements are associated with the "banalité urbaine, suburbaine, pétrolière et américaine" which suppresses "le burlesque, le saugrenu et la fantaisie."

Tinamer's emergence from childhood to adult consciousness is accomplished by memory. She discovers a sense of continuing identity on a precise occasion, when she "lives through" the night and realizes that she is the same person from day to day. This event is paralleled by a similar one in her father's childhood. Léon's search for his origins takes the form of gazing through a telescope at his own lost paradise, the county of Maskinongé to which he longs to return. He also has a written account which preserves his identity, the de Portanqueu Bible con-

taining the genealogy and history of the family (some of them called Ferron) going back to the Flood (the forty-day crossing of the Atlantic). A mythical history of Québec is incorporated into the narrative as a "mise en abyme" of Tinamer's own search for her past. It illustrates Léon's rôle, relayed by Tinamer, of "conteur": "... les Ferron... se firent fabuleux pour donner regain à un vieil héritage, relancer le conte et la chanson qui font partie des nécessités de la vie."

Ferron's political leanings are present not only in references to the history of Québec as part of the good side of things, but also in topical allusions to Vietnam and napalm as part of the bad side. These contribute to the puzzle which the reader must put together from the interweaving of fragmented narrative sequences. As Boucher points out, the reader, like Tinamer and Léon, must structure the "récit" by means of his memory. The "bad side" is dominant in the present of narration, at the time when Tinamer is recounting her past. The "good side" is lost, except for Jean-Louis Maurice, the blind boy to whom Léon promises the keys of Heaven and Hell, and who is last seen standing guard at the entrance to the enchanted wood (since destroyed by "les bouledozers"). Tinamer herself is pulled towards the future, although it is an extension of the past since she plans to study "la psychopédagogie," to work like her father with mentally handicapped children. As she says, "l'enfance est avant tout une aventure intellectuelle où seules importent la conquête et la sauvegarde de l'identité." Having reaffirmed her own identity through reliving and narrating her childhood she can now forgive her father for having banished her "du conte qu'ensemble nous avons inventé."

L'Amélanchier is rich in mythical and literary allusions. It is typical of Ferron in the verve of the narration, the joy of playing with words and names ("un car-

dinal léger”), the use of fantasy and parody as forms of self-conscious fiction, and the interweaving of dream-like sequences with political awareness. Tinamer, like her father, is “dans la lune” (miles away, in the other world revealed by the telescope), but she is also, like him and her literary progenitor, Ferron, historically and politically firmly anchored in Québec: “. . . un pays, c’est le secret de la première enfance . . . un pays double et dissemblable comme le mien.”

Pierre L’Hérault’s study of all of Ferron’s literary work shows how *L’Amélanchier* embodies many of his recurring themes, ideas and techniques. The title, *Jacques Ferron, Cartographe de l’imaginaire*, emphasizes the central aspects of this particular novel: the fusion of the precise, the identifiable, with the fantastic and dream-like. The concept of “democentrism,” the point of departure as centre of the individual universe, is also a key to a better understanding of Ferron’s theatre, his other novels, his numerous articles and essays. Many of the headings under which L’Hérault groups his analyses illustrate the representativeness of *L’Amélanchier*, and the way in which reference to Ferron’s other works can cast light on this one: “La carte du Québec,” “De l’histoire *in quarto* à l’histoire racontée,” “Les voix postiches,” “La nuit, surface et profondeur,” “Le voyage initiatique,” “Le salut par l’écriture.” The broader thematic approach, combined with a wealth of biographical and bibliographical information, make this critical work complementary to Boucher’s structural analysis of *L’Amélanchier* in the same series. Far from being primarily a doctor, who is incidentally a humorous writer (the performing flea of Québec literature), or the founder of the Rhinoceros Party who just happens to be a Québec nationalist, Ferron is above all one of the most stimulating and original creators of fiction in Québec today. L’Hérault’s

study of the reworking of *La Nuit* in *Les Confitures de coings* is particularly interesting, and indicates that Ferron has probably not finished surprising us.

VALERIE RAOUL

CONSPIRATORIAL

JACQUES RENAUD, *Clandestine(s) ou La tradition du couchant*. Le biocreux, \$19.80.

JACQUES RENAUD, Quebec author best-known for his novel *Le Cassé* (1964), a major breakthrough in the use of joul in fiction, has in *Clandestine(s) ou la tradition du couchant* (1980) written a book of huge scope and multiple intent. It is partly a metaphysical thriller of the school of Conrad and Chesterton, with evident debts to Aquin, partly a political novel à la Malraux, partly a set of visionary meditations employing the eclectic vocabulary of every occultism available to the counter-culture, held together by a heretical and fevered Christian mysticism. The book seems to hope to point Quebec towards its political destiny by improving its spiritual nature: “cette sorte de maison magique . . . dans laquelle [Gilles] espérait faire voler toute la collectivité québécoise.”

The first part (nearly two hundred pages) of this five-hundred page book alternates rather abstract conversations and meditations on the nature of terrorism with occult inserts of various kinds: numerological, cabbalistic, astrological. Seances of a sexual religiosity provide the occasions and Tarot cards the illustrations. This is all held together by a rather lethargic plot about the slow building-up of a “clandestine” terrorist group, spiritually oriented and, not surprisingly, unknown to the F.L.Q. The group becomes strongly interrelated; all its members have overlapping identities, and all are aspects of the consciousness of the narrator, whose

“Bildung” we are, in a manner of speaking, witnessing. The several characters, whether men or women, are not very clearly distinguished from one another. Gilles, a sort of Magus figure, haggard and well-versed in magic (for a comic version of such a character, see *Le Cardinal* in Victor-Levy Beaulieu’s *Race de monde*) is the focus of the narrator’s emotions in the first part of the book; Julien, a sort of occult Christ-figure, dominates the second. The narrator, Réjean, is evidently the artist of the group. The women have various anima roles, in which they merge sexuality and the occult somewhat better than the men merge revolution and sexuality. The gaps between revolution and the occult are the hardest of all to bridge.

After this very long opening comes a much more imaginatively eventful section, unfortunately brief, about a wealthy capitalist (another Magus figure) who wishes to “faire collaborer . . . le capital aveugle et le terrorisme aveugle.” He is in charge of the giant spider computer-brain which controls “le Réseau absolu”:

peut-être ce chef de réseau
clandestin était-il l’agent
d’un autre Réseau, du Réseau
absolu . . . plus grand encore,
avec d’autres chefs, d’autres
visions, visions dont l’étagement
dépassait le nôtre?

This scheme suggests a sort of Chestertonian or Pynchonesque God-game, full of horror and possibility, in which Gilles, Julien and the others are simply acting out the designs of the *real* Network. But Renaud abandons this promising idea (as he does so many others in the course of the book) and drifts back to his characters’ mental and conversational struggles with the overlapping of sex and terrorism.

Suddenly the group bursts into action, of which there is too much for a while instead of too little. Conversation gives way to endlessly repeated drives from

Quebec City to Montreal and back, to explosions, hold-ups and shoot-outs, a desperate escape into snowy woods (this episode is well-told), a hostage-taking, and finally a hiding-out over the winter in a hunting-lodge, at which point conversation resumes.

This lodge, like the capitalists’ chateau of the spider episode, is one of the never-never lands of Quebec romance in which sex-and-spiritualism seem much more at home than they did in revolutionary Montreal. But spring comes, and our group drives off into a police ambush, leaving the narrator to write this book as their memorial.

Renaud employs the Aquinian themes of sex, revolution, art and mystery, but lacks, unfortunately, the Aquinian style. Aquin only approaches the emotive mystical abstraction of Renaud once, in the conclusion of *Neige noire*, which, although hard enough to account for novelistically, is at least a splendid prose poem and probably an effective statement of faith. But Renaud writes many pages as difficult to render in plain prose as this:

Il y a une pure puissance qui juge. Et une impure puissance qui juge. L’une est faite de silence ou de parole profonde. L’autre de bruit et de fureur imprécatoire. Le monde doit être jugé d’une façon ou de l’autre. Il doit être jugé. Mais qui juge selon la pure puissance ne condamne pas l’impure puissance et il est le seul à y voir Dieu et tout son être est comme du feu.

It is hard to disengage Renaud’s more effective scenes from this very un-Aquinian long-windedness. A firm editor, or even a shorter word limit, might have persuaded him to knot the various threads of theme and story-line more closely together and make sure that none of them got lost en route.

The book concludes with some extra-textual pseudo-editorial gimmicks, in the Aquin manner. At several points its normal French is interrupted by linguistic

experiments based largely on mirror-language and Roussellian-Lacanian puns ("Une partie de mon être voulait raconter l'histoire" / "Une est partie démonêtre, vous les rats contés lisse-toi" etc. See especially pp. 79-89), somewhat explicated by "Clandestine" at the end of the book (p. 496). Like Renaud's ingenious erudition throughout, these games serve no clear novelistic purpose. A reader with a taste for god-games and terrorist camp would be much better served by the new Robbe-Grillet novel, *Djinn*, which with commendable brevity and wit sends up the notion of a pseudo-terrorist conspiracy caught in the meshes of a Greater Conspiracy. Robbe-Grillet is by no means a faultless writer, but Renaud could learn a great deal from him.

PATRICIA MERIVALE

LA FRANCOPHONIE

Rencontres des peuples francophones 1979. Leméac, \$9.95.

CE VOLUME, le No. 3 de la collection Retour aux sources, est un recueil des allocutions et des conférences prononcées à Québec, en juillet 1979, lors de la première rencontre des francophones de tous les continents. Ils ne s'étaient jamais réunis jusque-là pour discuter un thème cher à tous: la langue française. Aussi l'événement en fut-il un d'importance. Le lecteur trouvera dans ces pages une série de 16 textes, dont sept sont tout à fait remarquables et méritent d'être lus, analysés et assimilés. J'ignore le responsable, pour me servir d'un mot à la mode, de cette publication à la fois élégante, limpide et bien réussie. Ce que je sais de certitude, cependant, c'est qu'une Table des matières lui fait défaut. Quel dommage!

Le livre comprend, outre le Programme, la présentation par Marcel Dubé, directeur général du comité organisateur des

Rencontres francophones de Québec, puis les allocutions de MM. Camille Laurin et Pierre de Bellefeuille. Les textes suivants sont majeurs, fourmillent d'aperçus, de faits et d'idées: *L'Acadie, sa langue, sa situation sociale et son avenir* par Michel Bastarache; *Pour une politique de la francité*, par André Patris; *Conférence* de Jean-Marc Léger; *La galaxie du créole et le français*, par Marie-Magdeleine Carbet; *Interrogation sur la langue française comme figuration de la communauté haïtienne*, par Roger Gaillard; *Le français, langue de la fraternité entre les peuples*, par Edgar Faure, de l'Académie française; *La langue française en Afrique noire post-coloniale*, par Ambroise Kom. Suivent les allocutions de clôture de MM. Camille Laurin et René Lévesque. Le volume se termine sur un fort beau texte du poète acadien Herménégilde Chiasson, *Ce rêve qui ne prendra jamais fin*, auteur du spectacle, *Acadie, mon trop bel amour*, qui fut présenté au Grand Théâtre de Québec pour fêter le 375^e anniversaire de la fondation de l'Acadie.

Cette rencontre "de style plutôt informel" portait sur la langue française, "envisagée à la lumière de ses multiples incandescences" et considérée comme un "outil de communication universelle." Ce fut aussi une fête du coeur, de l'esprit et de la reconnaissance, pour célébrer le 375^e anniversaire de l'existence de l'Acadie. A noter que cette rencontre eut lieu à Québec, et non à Paris, et que l'Afrique blanche y brillait par son absence. L'initiative est venue du gouvernement du Québec, et il y fut question de l'Afrique noire seulement. Ce double fait mériterait à lui seul un long commentaire. Je tiens cependant à le relever en qualité d'observateur indépendant.

L'article de Michel Bastarache sur l'Acadie, dont les paragraphes sont souvent aussi longs que ceux de Marcel Proust, ne manque ni de données hisfranchise vigoureuse; le bilan qu'il dresse

toriques, ni de réalité politique, ni de est positif et l'avenir est loin d'être sombre, mais "la séparation du Québec serait un coup dur" pour l'Acadie. André Patris de Bruxelles, nous invite à une nouvelle lecture de l'histoire, parle des 150 millions de locuteurs francophones de l'U.N.E.S.-C.O., de la francité comme politique culturelle; "il n'y a plus de frontière entre la politique, l'économique et le culturel." Péricles pensait de même et agissait en conséquence au V^e siècle avant Jésus-Christ. Mais André Patris a bien raison de nous rappeler cette dure vérité de l'existence, comme il définit fort bien l'enjeu, le terrain d'opération des communautés francophones et l'importance du secteur, du rôle et de l'impact de chacune d'elles à l'intérieur de l'ensemble de la question. Jean-Marc Léger voit dans la connaissance du français une "contribution indispensable à l'humanisme... Il y va même du salut de l'homme"; il faut oeuvrer pour le singulier contre la montée de l'uniformisation, contre le péril d'une langue internationale unique; il analyse avec acuité la situation présente du français, s'élève contre le nouvel impérialisme technocratique parce que déshumanisant et contre l'emploi abusif de l'anglais dans certains milieux scientifiques, dans les revues et les congrès... "les francophones d'Occident prennent davantage conscience de l'extraordinaire richesse des grandes civilisations." L'important est de redécouvrir le spirituel.

Le grand historien Michelet a écrit: "La France noire." L'épithète est de trop, car celle-ci n'a jamais existé. Il est aussi absurde de parler de l'Afrique noire francophone ou de l'Afrique noire anglophone; l'une et l'autre sont inexistantes. C'est que les locuteurs francophones dans chacune des anciennes colonies de l'Angleterre ou de la France ne dépassent pas 10% de la population autochtone. Cessons donc de nous gargariser de mots et de nous leurrer. L'Afrique est une im-

mense mosaïque d'États où le bilinguisme est généralisé; 10% des gens y sont des bilingues, 90% des unilingues. C'est ce qui ressort nettement des communications fort limpides, de Madame Carbet, de Monsieur Gaillard et de Monsieur Kom. Ambroise Kom, à l'instar de Jean-Marc Léger, parle de l'humanisme. Il n'empêche qu'une vingtaine de pays de l'Afrique noire ont adopté le français comme langue officielle. En fait, le locuteur français (ou anglais) en Afrique noire se trouve, sur la terre de ses ancêtres, dans la situation d'un déporté, d'un déraciné, d'un exilé de l'intérieur; le français (ou l'anglais) y est "une langue de dépendance et une négation de l'être originel." Mais les langues africaines sont si nombreuses et si variées qu'elles sont incapables de véhiculer tout ce qui concerne la technologie moderne dont leurs pays respectifs éprouvent un si pressant besoin. Tout cela dit, combien d'institutions françaises dispensent-elles des cours de littérature négro-africaine?

La conférence magistrale d'Edgar Faure, de l'Académie française, porte sur les trois points suivants: l'auteur y parle d'abord de la langue française comme langue universelle de culture, selon la conception qu'on se faisait de la culture aux XVII^e, XVIII^e et XIX^e siècles, puis il trace une esquisse d'une approche, non sémantique, mais sémiotique, fort éclairante et instructive, enfin il tient la langue française pour la langue de la liberté, de la démocratie, de la fraternité. Sa péroraison est si belle, si éloquente et si profondément vraie qu'elle figure en exergue au début du volume.

Ce livre, comme la Rencontre elle-même, est une action positive et pratique. Je ne saurais trop en recommander la lecture et l'étude.

MAURICE LABEL

COUREUR DE BOIS

SUZANNE MARTEL, *Menfou Carcajou, Première partie: Ville-Marie; Deuxième partie: La baie du Nord*. Leméac.

MENFOU CARCAJOU, an historical novel in two volumes, treats that elusive heroic figure of Canadian history and literature, the coureur de bois. From the earliest oral tales to contemporary fiction, the coureur de bois has captivated Canadian francophone audiences in particular. For Quebecers, past and present, no other figure has so impinged on the collective imagination of a people. Adventure, glamour, courage, freedom — all these enchanting intangibles are assumed to be his province.

While the early pioneer slugged away on a rude farm trying to wrest a living from the stump-studded land or endeavouring to launch a primitive commercial venture behind the stockades of a muddy town, the coureur de bois moved lightly by canoe or on snowshoes from camp to camp, feasting easily on the bounty of a rich new land. And, whereas the pioneers lived in constant terror of being murdered by hostile Indians descending on them from the forest, the coureur de bois hurried out to the forest to encounter the Indians, to emulate their ways, and to embrace them in friendship. No two lots of people of the same race and language have ever lived more disparate lives than the early settlers and the coureur de bois. It is the contrast and conflict between these two groups of people which dominates the novel *Menfou Carcajou*. As the title indicates, Menfou Carcajou is the figure around whom the book revolves.

Menfou is a coureur de bois who is imbued with all the romantic and abrasive characteristics of his prototype. However, because of the author's extraordinary ability to breathe life into her characters, he remains an original and touching fig-

ure. Although tough and daring like the stereotyped coureur de bois, Menfou escapes the stereotype and endears himself to the reader particularly by his touching friendship with a small girl, Sophie, and an old woman, Dosithée.

It is ten-year-old Sophie who, though she is almost blind, sees most clearly Menfou's charm and goodness, even when all the 'decent' citizenry have punished him for his nonconformity by placing him in the pillory on a platform in the centre of Ville-Marie. Only she dares to ascend the platform to wipe off the remains of rotten eggs which have been hurled at his defenceless face. Menfou responds to her concern by rewarding Sophie, not only with a priceless friendship, but with special tokens — ranging from an Indian totem designed especially for her to a cow and calf which Menfou has exacted from a spiteful opponent whom he, at Sophie's behest, has rescued from drowning; and finally, on his last expedition to the North, a pair of glasses which he wins gambling with an officer of the English garrison.

Comparable to Menfou's tenderness for Sophie, is his feeling for Dosithée, who was once a fellow-prisoner of the Iroquois. Dosithée had first cared for him when he was a child-captive of the Indians, and so, years later, he rescues her and returns her to her native Ville-Marie (Montreal) — a town, by the way, where she is no longer welcome because of her "Indianization."

In this instance, as in many others, the author depicts a prevalent attitude of narrow-mindedness and prejudice among the majority of the inhabitants of Ville-Marie. Although they are not shown to be as joyless or as spiteful as Hawthorne's New England puritans of the same era (the seventeenth century), there is an echo of the same sort of mentality. Their acquisitiveness and their moral certainty linked with the desire to punish all those who fail to conform to their standards is

strongly reminiscent of Hawthorne's New Englanders.

Thus it happens that Martel's sympathies are most frequently with the *coureur de bois*, Menfou, and with the clear-sighted and unconventional little girl, Sophie. Neither of them can understand or sympathize with edicts such as those which call for public punishment of individuals who do not marry by the time they are twenty or who eat meat on Friday! The freshness, *joie de vivre*, common sense, and independence of these two represents for Martel hope in this new society despite the fact that it is dominated by bourgeois principles, foppish dilettantes and a sometimes limited and narrow-minded clergy.

Martel's perspective, then, is enhanced rather than limited by the centuries which intervene between the time of the story and the present — much as Hawthorne's was in *The Scarlet Letter*. Less harsh than Hawthorne with the seventeenth-century settlers, Martel understands their hopes and fears and appreciates their courage in living and coping with difficult circumstances.

All the daily drudgeries of the pioneers' lives — from candle-making to moving from Ville-Marie to La Chine — are depicted step by step with all their problems. We are made to appreciate every move and to comprehend the basic premises of such a life. Suzanne Martel has undoubtedly done a masterful job in researching this book. Not only has she checked all her sources in libraries, but she has tried all the domestic chores (such as candle-making) which were routine for the settlers, as well as attempting to live the usual life of the *coureur de bois*! To complete this last undertaking she has shot rapids and camped out in still remote stretches of the North.

Menfou Carcajou is a book which should appear in high school and college libraries across Canada as an adjunct

to the study of early Canadian history. No book I have read breathes more animation into the life and attitudes of seventeenth-century New France — and no book deals in a more balanced fashion with the various conflicting factions — the settlers (farmers and merchants), the Indians, the military, the church, and the *coureur de bois*.

ALLISON MITCHAM

TOUR-DE-FARCE

ROBERT ALLEN, *The Hawryliw Process*. Porcupine's Quill, \$8.95.

ONE OF THE MANY epigraphs scattered throughout Robert Allen's massive philosophical *tour-de-farce*, *The Hawryliw Process*, is William Gass's "Characters are those primary substances to which everything else is attached." In *Fiction and the Figures of Life*, where he found that *aperçu*, Allen would have come across many others, of which two especially speak to his fictional project in this, his first novel. Gass, a true believer in the purity of fiction, tells us, first, that "the novelist now better understands his medium; he is ceasing to pretend that his business is to render the world; he knows, more often now, that his business is to *make* one, and to make one from the only medium of which he is a master — language." Later, he adds this: "The nature of the novel will not be understood at all until this is: *from any given body of fictional text, nothing necessarily follows, and anything plausibly may.*" One thing Gass's statements clearly imply is the demise of traditional narrative and plot. As someone who still enjoys traditional narratives, especially of the science fictional and thriller variety, I would not want to go all the way with Gass, but there can be little doubt that much of the most exciting and innovative fiction of the past few years has been the kind Gass pro-

motes. Certainly, *The Hawryliw Process* is a self-reflexive, narratively discordant text, and those who, like the reviewer in *Books in Canada*, don't even like the kind, should be warned away from it.

Readers who enjoy a challenge, delight in wicked and occasionally blasphemous wit, and like to see a writer testing the limits of his imagination and craft, will find much to entertain them in *The Hawryliw Process*, for Allen, who has already displayed his intelligence and wit in his books of poetry, has a real flair for black comedy which he indulges throughout his novel. But hold on, there *is* a story here, and it engages all the basic themes of fiction from the beginning: good vs evil, process vs stasis, freedom vs tyranny, love vs hate, and all the rest. Imbedded in the very structure of the novel, however, is the realization that, today, it's no longer that simple to differentiate between the two sides of any of these sets. His "heroes" are therefore a grimy, grunchy, weird bunch of folks. As are, by definition, his "villains."

The major confrontation takes place between Dr. Sandor Hawryliw, Psycho-technochretician, and Minden Sills, one of the good Doctor's laboratory subjects in his attempt to create a consensus reality based on "Christian and Empirical Principles." This battle occurs not just *in* the "story" of Minden's escape and travels with a strange crew made up of Jesuit Fathers Robert and Arthur, Oblong Cassidy, a straightshooter from out the Old West, and plain J, more than likely the Only Begotten Son come back for another try at saving humanity, but is also in the very narration of the novel — in the various attempts of Hawryliw and his minions to wrest control of the narration from Sills and tell the story according to those abovementioned principles they so deterministically believe will make a better world for us all (if the good Doctor could

only get us all into his "Hawryliw Box (patent pending)" for an hour).

As can be seen, there is room enough among these characters for a great deal to be attached, and Allen is nothing if not willing to drag in everything he can lay his hands on. Indeed, since one of the questions the novel raises is "just whose reality is this anyway," part of the fun of reading *The Hawryliw Process* is watching Allen conflate a variety of literary "realities" (various genre modes). Thus we have the paranoid thriller, the cowboy story, the fable (especially J's parables), the scientific article, the Biblical story, the realistic "kitchen-sink" story, and many others all jostling for position. The interaction of the various kinds of discourse continually reminds us that this is just a novel we're reading, but Allen doesn't stop there. Almost all the characters have an opportunity to comment on the narration, to complain to Sills about how he's handling them, and to tell a few chapters in their own voices. As well, there's "A Brief Review," which is negatively positive, as it turns out to be by Hawryliw's second in command. Quotations, like the following from Flann O'Brien, remind us that as active readers we are not to give ourselves up to the novel as if it were rendered reality but should constantly question it as if it were, in fact, what it is — a novel: "In reply to an inquiry, it was explained that a satisfactory novel should be a self-evident sham to which the reader could regulate at will the degree of his credulity."

Nevertheless, Allen does give us characters of some paradoxical depth. Even as he reminds us that they are simply words on a page, he so contextualizes them as to invite us to care what happens to them. Sills is the most important figure from this point of view, for Allen gives him more memories and more connections to other characters than he does to anyone else in the book. Interestingly,

however, he also gives a fairly detailed history of feeling to Hawryliw, one which helps to explain why the good Doctor has gone so wrong in opting for "science" over some kind of emotional life. The others, especially Sills' cousin Asa McRat, an earlier subject of Hawryliw's researches, also have their moments of introspection and memory. At such times, there is a thickening of texture in the characters which we can see happening, for in this kind of fiction as in certain kinds of modern dance the creators are more interested in revealing the structural aspects of craft than in developing illusions of some other reality. Although the real pleasure comes when they manage to do both.

I haven't even mentioned all the Aunts Moodie, only one of which can be the real thing, the revolt of the rats, the attacks on dry academicism, and many other things which energize this volume, only the first half of the complete novel (although able to stand on its own). *The Hawryliw Process* has its flaws: there are places where Allen's wit flags, where his erudition becomes a boring burden rather than a joyful game. But I can forgive a writer quite a lot when he gives me a replay of Christ turfing the moneylenders out of the temple with blasphemies. If anything was likely to happen next, I tended to find myself chuckling as I hurried on to whatever the next slice of discourse might turn out to be.

Towards the end of the volume, J offers us his "First Principle of Political Awareness": "The most flagrant breach of seriousness is taking yourself too seriously by an overliteral interpretation of rules, dogma, and commandments, rather than by the realization that true system liberates rather than confines." This might also be taken as Allen's First Principle of Fictional Awareness, one which, on the whole, he follows with admirable *élan* in *The Hawryliw Process*. I look forward to

Volume Two, due out any day now as I write this, and bound to be full of further revelations concerning the epic battle between true process and the Hawryliw version. If it's up to the standard set by Volume One, it's going to be a lot of fun.

DOUGLAS BARBOUR

SNEARTHS & OTHERS

PAUL HIEBERT, *For the Birds*. Peguis, \$5.50.

IN HUMOUR AND HUMANITY (1937) Stephen Leacock saw the highest evolution of humour as a mingling of tears and laughter which recognized the incongruities of the human condition. In *A Voice from the Attic* (1960) Robertson Davies pronounced, not dissimilarly, upon the mature humourist's "climacteric," when a sense of tragedy and transience comes to balance outright comic expression. These notions suggest the autumnal mellowness of Paul Hiebert's *For the Birds*, a collection of pieces done for the various media over the years. In *Sarah Binks* (1947) his comedy sprang from biographical and critical parody, and from a splendidly realized (and only nominally objective) tone of fervent hyperbole; in *Willows Revisited* (1967) the bathetic perspective was more scholarly and literary, dealing with less than sublime poetic effusions and personalities. In *For the Birds* the process is further advanced: Hiebert's essential goodwill and generosity are apparent. Here his fun has no programmatic basis, and individual chapters are marked by uncomplicated and unemphatic pleasantry, quiet amusements which sometimes take the form of nostalgia and sentiment. Prefatorily Hiebert affirms his belief in the value of chuckles and nonsense in a time when he sees art and comic writing as often serious, cruel, and joyless.

Hiebert's essay, "What Makes People Laugh?" is in part a fantasy on a scientific, government-directed approach to humour, removed from its sphere of "haphazard and uncontrolled free enterprise." He explores a notion of Chesterton's, on laughter as emerging from "an idea contradicted by the reality of experience"; he himself insists on the human return to ground and the disabuse of conceit, for "always it is this earthiness of man set up against his essential greatness, which is humour; it is the sense of his intrinsic dignity and worth in the face of his own mortality." Not unusually, then, several chapters in *For the Birds* are autobiographical revisitations: on teaching school in Saskatchewan, the chores and tricks of his small-town prairie boyhood. "Flections and Reflections on Ham" is a small enchanting parable of a younger Hiebert's unsuccess in a word contest which nonetheless taught him of "human weakness and fallibility," sharpened his "cultural discernment," and developed his "literary perceptions." This is a tenderly self-mocking recollection, pseudo-serious in its deliberate overstatement of lessons learned. "Diet and Doctrine," an outstanding and witty whimsy, recalls the Fowl Supper of a prairie parish, with the ecumenical turkey and "a marked tendency for the pies to assume a kind of deathly pallor, a pale and 'corpsey' appearance to remind man of his mortality." Here Hiebert wields burlesque metaphor as skillfully as ever did "the Author" in *Sarah Binks*.

Several chapters are devoted to academic activities at St. Midget's, an institution already familiar as the home of Professor Baalam Bedfellow, the "Pilt-down Man" of *Willows Revisited* and member of the post-Binksian School of Seven. Hiebert's genial skepticism about academe, implicit in his earlier humour, appears in glances at this "modern slum teeming with activity and accomplishment." One sketch is a biography of the innovative

Naphthali Smith-John (pron. "Smidgeon"), specialist in Osmotic Psychology and expander of the curriculum into brick-laying and, in particular, the multi-disciplined graduate study of posts. His luncheon musings, prompted by herring, wander entertainingly through art, diet, and philosophy: "The stuff of life may be basically spiritual, but it has to be stuff." Smith-John realizes that a prospective course in snake charming is impaired by the absence and unco-operation of Canadian snakes, but that one in Practical Poetry — "getting away from the old structured forms and meanings, which might inhibit artistic effort" — will fare better. "Poetry at St. Midget's" continues Hiebert's gentle, forgiving, but heart-felt satire of forms of unrestrained self-expression, in touches equally obvious. However, a related literary parody, "Out Where the West Begins," is a splendidly relaxed, punning, and high-spirited take-off of a stereotypical Western which bemoans Canadian unsuitabilities for the genre; it recalls Leacock's many gleeful debunkings of models of popular literary culture.

Not unexpectedly, Hiebert also presents some excruciating new literary properties. The Manitoba and Dominion celebrations are documented in "Poems of the Perennial Centennials," while the long-awaited "The Snearth in Saskatchewan Literature" both describes a possible sighting of the elusive Binksian bird and chronicles a related poetic revival, or "outpouring." "L'Envoi" is a sampler of the later efforts of the surviving, or recently deceased, School of Seven bards, with the comfortable assurance that "The present poets of Saskatchewan — and they are many — with their concern for success, and their preoccupation with bodily functions and psychiatric states, will also have their day." The dramatic announcement of additional Binksiana discovered in a Fletch-

er's Castoria box has, of course, quickly fuelled graduate study at St. Midget's.

For the Birds shows the warmth and humane thrust of Hiebert's volumes of spiritual reflections, *Tower in Siloam* (1966) and *Doubting Castle* (1976). We often hear a wistful regret for the ravages of the mechanical and the institutional, and for the growing away from the natural and the essential. Yet these are sketches of modest cheer which do not try to emulate the concentration and straight-faced literary delights of Hiebert's earlier successes. If his subjects and tones are sometimes broad or slightly forced he may be properly unrepentant: he is invitingly bemused and at ease, and a genuine good humour is everywhere apparent.

LOUIS K. MACKENDRICK

MORE FROM MOSS

JOHN MOSS, ed., *The Canadian Novel, vol. II, Beginnings*. NC Press, n.p.

THOSE OF US who like to teach early Canadian literature usually face a dearth of suitable primary and critical texts. In recent years there have appeared several volumes of criticism, each focussing on a major nineteenth-century writer (usually a poet), but to my knowledge the only available collection of diversified articles has been Lorraine McMullen's handy little book, *Twentieth Century Essays on Confederation Literature* (1976). In his latest critical venture, John Moss has sought to fill one of the many gaps in this area by presenting fourteen articles, two on each of seven books which he identifies as early Canadian prose classics.

Any disagreement with Moss's choice would have to focus not on the books he includes, but on those he omits. He has singled out *The History of Emily Montague*, *The Clockmaker*, *Wacousta*, *Roughing It in the Bush*, *A Strange Manuscript*

Found in a Copper Cylinder, *The Imperialist*, and *Sunshine Sketches* as "the best works in our early literature," and "classics" "from our own perspective." He omits *The Golden Dog*, revered as a classic for many decades, Catharine Parr Traill, the fiction of D. C. Scott and Charles G. D. Roberts, arguably two of the best Canadian writers at work before 1920, *The Stepsure Letters*, and *Antoinette de Mirecourt*, as well as the many interesting early works which have not had the good fortune to be reprinted in NCL editions. It is impossible for an anthologist to please everybody; yet, given the shortness of this book (less than 200 pages) and Moss's partiality for brief articles (six are less than ten pages long, including footnotes), one wonders, why only seven "best works"? Why not ten, or an even dozen?

The subjects of the essays may safely be described as classics; unfortunately, the same cannot be said of all the essays themselves. Moss's acknowledgements obscure the sources of the articles. None are given dates, but about half appear to have been commissioned for this book, and the remainder are reprints, all but one from the *Journal of Canadian Fiction*. In some cases, publication in this periodical (with which John Moss has long been associated and to which the publisher has "graciously" assigned royalties), appears to have been the criterion for selection. Thomas Raddall's three-page discussion of Haliburton, while pleasant enough to read, hardly qualifies as literary criticism. Much of what Woodcock had to say about De Mille in 1973 has been superseded by M. G. Parks's superb 1976 article (as Moss acknowledges in an editorial footnote), yet Parks does not appear here. Instead, Woodcock's piece is paired with Kenneth J. Hughes's eccentric attempt to flout prevailing critical opinion by presenting Adam More as a Renaissance prophet bringing knowledge and enlight-

enment to the benighted Kosekin. With De Mille, it is at least apparent that Moss has brought together two contrasting points of view. Several other selections are less justifiable. While Mary Jane Edwards's article on *Emily Montague* adds to our understanding of Brooke's politics, Linda Shohet's just meanders.

The author best served by new essays is Susanna Moodie, with Marian Fowler's valuable analysis of *Roughing It in the Bush* as a sentimental novel and Sherrill Grace's regrettably brief notes on Atwood's use of Moodie. Worst served is Haliburton. Taken together, the 1962 date of Northrop Frye's classic piece, "Haliburton: Mask and Ego" (reprinted as well by R. A. Davies in *On Thomas Chandler Haliburton* [1979]) and the brevity and generality of Raddall's later comments imply that there is nothing new to be said about one of our more complex writers. The essays on Sara Jeannette Duncan are nicely balanced, Alfred Bailey's "The Historical Setting of *The Imperialist*" (selected also by McMullen) and Joseph Zezulka's essay complementarily explaining both the context and the contents of this important turn-of-the-century novel. The two critiques of *Wacousta* are perceptive, but reinforce each other to the point of overlapping. Of the pieces on Leacock, I prefer Tom Marshall's cogent summary of Leacock's themes and techniques to Douglas Mantz's interesting but rather inflated account of the national significance of "L'Envoi."

The inconsistencies in both the quality of the essays and their pairing raise the question of the critical principles underlying their selection. If Moss wanted to reprint the best of current criticism, surely he could have looked beyond his own journal; if new essays were his major interest, then those available in recent periodicals could have been listed in a bibliography, a feature this book sorely lacks. His introduction, alas, provides few clues

beyond asserting that "there are fourteen critics here, representing fourteen points of view and fourteen different approaches to literature." The bulk of the introduction is less a commentary on these particular books and essays than a manifesto in which Moss announces his rejection of a number of "critical myths," some of which, he admits, he has helped perpetuate. In his eagerness to align himself with the current trend away from thematic criticism, Moss shapes many of these myths in phrases too crude to be acceptable to any serious literary critic, present or past. Simplistically rendered as "Nature is monstrous," "The mood is bleak, pessimistic, humourless," "The writing is disengaged, dated, and irrelevant," "No one belongs here," and "There is no first-rate Canadian writing to speak of," they serve merely as straw men to be gleefully demolished. I fully support Moss's view that we need to rediscover and re-evaluate our early literature; what I question here is his rhetorical method, which courts the danger of throwing out more than the bathwater.

Where, then, is the place of this book on the Canadian critical bookshelf? As the first collection of critical articles on our early prose, *Beginnings* will certainly be useful; my regret is that it could have been essential.

CAROLE GERSON

TOUT SEUL

ANTONINE MAILLET, *La Sagouine*, trans. Luis de Céspedes. Simon and Pierre.

Monologues québécois, 1890-1980, comp. Laurent Mailhot and Doris-Michel Montpetit, with an introduction by Laurent Mailhot. Leméac.

JACQUES CELLARD OBSERVES of *La Sagouine* in his preface to the 1976 Paris edition: "Elle n'A rien. Elle EST." And what she *is* is "l'essence de l'Acadie, l'A-

cadienneté," Bruno Drolet paraphrases in *Entre Dune et aboiteux... un peuple* (1975). La Sagouine herself describes that essence in "Le Recensement," a recollection of identity and legal naming: "J'avons pus autchune terra à nous autres; je sons pas sûrs de notre arligion; et je connaissons pas notre natiounalité. . . Je suis peut-être rien." What the government fails to recognize is her very being. But, in fact, she has more than just her person. Three of her twelve children have survived infancy; Gapi, her husband of more than a half-century, has made her a gift of his sardonic wisdom; and, before all else, she has the quotidian language of her forefathers, inherited "de goule en oreille." Of that speaker and speech which Viola Léger has acted and sounded out on the stage — "j'avons jamais vu une graine d'allitération de notre vie," says the character — Professor Antonine Maillet writes: "Elle ne parle ni joual, ni chiac, ni français international. Elle parle la langue populaire de ses pères descendus à cru du XVI^e siècle."

Luis de Céspedes's translation from the second edition (1973) deletes this passage from Maillet's foreword of 7 January 1971, thereby prefiguring *la translation* of La Sagouine to another place. There, international illiterate English is spoken. Such daring is not matched in the English work itself, however, which rarely ventures far from the original's literal signs. Such fidelity can occasionally make for clear sailing. The fact that most of La Sagouine's malapropisms are latinate, for example, makes that part of the translation both easy and exact, as in her substitution of "circumscribed" for "conscripted," "conformation" for "confirmation," and "presumptuous" for "presumed." The translator is also faithful to such a significant transformation of sense as in "La Loterie," where he has La Sagouine say of a government form, "Well written it was, English on one side 'n

English on the other, so that a person didn' need no glasses to read it." This is good — an ironic reminder. The second edition provides the same script, "en anglais d'un bord pis en anglais de l'autre." But the first edition (1971) says differently: "en anglais d'un bord pis en français de l'autre." On but one occasion, in "Christmas," does Céspedes work in the manner of La Sagouine: she speaks "étention" for "intention"; he writes "tension" for "étention." "Tension" is precise here, expressing the effect of an evil born of charity. The well-intentioned bourgeois receive no thanks for their small and shoddy Christmas gifts to the poor.

English and Latin do not always coincide, however. It is at such moments of divergence or difference that the translation most obviously deprives *La Sagouine* of part of her inheritance. "Incense" for "encens," a gift from the Magi, suppresses the sense and humour of "chewing gum," for example, while "call" for "câler" in "La Mort," the final monologue, misses what is perhaps a significant equivocation. And when "caboché" becomes "head," and "jonglerie," "thinking," it is as though Céspedes were working from the lexicon appended to the original. The translator's difficult labour is thankless: when he does adventure, however briefly, as in "Everything in its place" for "Un mal pour chaque potte" in "Le Métier," La Sagouine's loss is no less diminished. She is a "glossaire," in the language of the foreword.

Like Maillet, the compilers of *Monologues québécois, 1890-1980*, as the title suggests, emphasize the local and historical dynamics of spoken language. Developed from an article published in 1973, Laurent Mailhot's introductory structural analysis proposes that, in the monologue, "le personnage est . . . seul, mais il est seul avec d'autres, solitaire-solidaire, puisqu'il jongle devant un public et qu'on organise sa jonglerie." The anthology, also "dic-

tionnaire" and "répertoire," would record "la langue populaire" as it evolves in this broad kind of public and private playing.

The first five divisions of the anthology are intended to outline the chronological development of the varieties of monologue. Part I, "Choses à dire: fables, déclamations, gazettes rimées (1890-1920)," with pieces from Régis Roy and Auguste Charbonnier, for example, provides a service to the student of that period; and "Revue, sketches, variétés (1920-45)" is valuable for its reprinting of six fine monologues by Paul Coutlée, among them "Le Recensement" and "L'Ouvrier canadien." This second part also contains the best and longest of the individual introductions, on Gratien Gélinas, where it is observed of his Fridolin: "Le personnage se découvre à lui-même en même temps qu'il s'ouvre aux autres." Most of the other introductions seem merely *pro forma*. The selections in Part III, "Du Cabaret à la radio (et *vice versa*) (1945-1960)," show a falling off in the art, as in Jean Guida's gag, *Allô: ... Coco?* Problems in the chronological division become apparent in Part IV, "Entre la politique et la poésie (1960-1970)": there is nothing of Yvon Deschamps after 1969, for example. The next grouping, "Nouvelles voix, nouvelles voies (1970-1980)," with representation by fifteen authors, the widest in any of the periods, is misnamed, since it offers not much that is distinctly worthwhile or new in language or form. Jacques Antonin's work, for instance, shows a "retour aux sources (ou à Gilles Vigneault)"; "Le Marchand d'alcool," from Antane Kapesh's *Je suis une maudite sauvagesse* (1976), is an unimaginative recitation of the evils the White Man has visited on her people; the trio of Paul et Paul echo *Les Cyniques* (1962-1972); and "Lettre à Pierre," by Azade Harvey (b. 1925), is tired in word and spirit. The final part, "Le Monologue au théâtre," including

excerpts from *Les Belles-Soeurs*, *La Sa-gouine*, and *La Nef des sorcières*, sets aside history, to group by variety within a sub-type.

CAMILLE R. LA BOSSIERE

EN ACADIE

JACQUES SAVOIE, *Raconte-Moi Massabielle*. Editions d'Acadie.

CLAUDE LEBOUTHILLIER, *Isabelle-sur-mer*. Editions d'Acadie.

LE PREMIER ROMAN de Jacques Savoie, déjà connu comme poète en Acadie, déroutera sans doute le lecteur non initié à la littérature moderne puisqu'il n'a rien du récit classique et que c'est plutôt du côté de la descendance du Nouveau roman qu'il faut lui chercher une parenté.

Massabielle, c'est un village vidé de ses habitants par le gouvernement. Toutes les maisons ont été détruites. Seul Pacifique Haché, le fou du village, résiste en occupant l'église de l'endroit. L'intrigue à la fois très simple et très lâche est constituée par les arrivées successives de trois éléments extérieurs à l'univers de Pacifique: d'abord, l'avocat dont la rationalité se heurte vainement à la folie de Pacifique, puis, la femme, Stella, que le héros intégrera à son monde et finalement la télévision qui a presque raison de Pacifique mais dont il triomphe au dernier instant.

Au fur et à mesure que l'on avance dans le récit, il devient évident que l'essentiel ne se situe pas du côté de l'intrigue dans laquelle les entrées et les sorties de personnage sont très peu motivées. Le dialogue et le récit sont le plus souvent l'occasion de jouer avec les mots et de créer des images. On en arrive ainsi à une littérature à l'état pur, affranchie des contraintes du réalisme. Les intrusions discrètes mais néanmoins intempestives du narrateur dans le champ de la narration achèvent de détruire l'illusion romanesque.

Ce plaisir d'écrire, de faire des images qui se manifeste dès les premières pages est sans doute le côté le plus attachant de ce roman. Dans ces images, l'animation de l'inanimé à la manière de Boris Vian occupe une large place. Citons, à titre d'exemple, ce "chemin de fer rouillé qui n'a plus vraiment envie d'être parallèle," ou encore cette église :

"Une belle petite église d'ailleurs. On ne peut pas lui en vouloir. Assez grande, en bois franc verni et puis surtout blanche, parce qu'une église, c'est pas salissant.

....

Ca fait presque beau comme ça de raconter une église qui s'ennuie. Comme on parlerait d'une veuve, ou d'un enfant seul . . ."

Et encore, "ces commencements de maisons qui ont mal fini," ces "petits murs de ciment" qui "font les durs," etc., etc. Il y a là tout à la fois une tendresse, une finesse, une totale absence de lourdeur, une vivacité qui constituent des sons tout neufs dans le jeune littérature acadienne.

Finalement, il faut souligner ce paradoxe qui fait que l'on retrouve des allusions très directes à la réalité acadienne contemporaine dans un roman qui par ailleurs s'éloigne du réalisme au point de faire alterner le rêve et la réalité sans solution de continuité. De ce point de vue, le roman prend parfois des allures d'allégorie et risquerait de tomber dans la lourdeur didactique si ce n'était des joyeuses irrévérances, de l'esprit et de l'humour dont il est parsemé.

On avait pu pardonner à Claude LeBouthillier un certain nombre de défauts de son premier roman *L'Acadie reprend son pays*. C'était, entre autres, des personnages extrêmement stéréotypés — le vieillard à barbe blanche exhalant la sagesse, la ravissante et naïve jeune fille, etc. — mais surtout des incohérences par rapport à son propre projet tel qu'on pouvait le déduire du texte même du roman, une absence de direction, un mélange, au sein du roman d'anticipation, de récits

tantôt utopiques, tantôt parodiques, tantôt réalistes.

Malheureusement, le deuxième roman, *Isabelle-sur-mer*, aggrave ces défauts en ne les corrigeant pas. Les personnages y restent caricaturaux parce qu'ils parlent tous avec un air sentencieux dépourvu de toute vraisemblance. Le pire, cependant, c'est que tous ces personnages ont attrapé la maladie de l'introspection et récitent les clichés confus d'une psychologie à bon marché.

On retrouve dans *Isabelle-sur-mer* la même hésitation entre différents types de discours qu'on avait noté dans le premier roman. La vision du futur de ce roman d'anticipation déborde parfois nettement dans la parodie alors que ce récit semble la plupart du temps se prendre tout à fait au sérieux. La parodie ne peut alors jouer qu'au détriment de l'oeuvre elle-même.

Paradoxalement, ce roman d'anticipation fait une large place, à côté des gadgets futuristes, aux traditions et au folklore acadiens à tel point qu'on croirait lire un traité d'ethnographie traditionnelle. Ce parti pris tend à imposer l'idée qu'on ne peut entrevoir un avenir pour l'Acadie que dans le retour au passé . . .

D'autre part, *Isabelle-sur-mer* présente ni plus ni moins l'Acadie comme la nation qui doit sauver le monde. Il y a là quelque chose qui ressemble fort aux discours triomphants d'il y a quelques générations dont on dénonce aujourd'hui le peu de rapports avec la réalité.

Finalement, on doit constater que pour faire de la littérature, même en Acadie, il ne suffit pas de puiser abondamment dans le folklore; il faut aussi une intention, un projet cohérent.

RAOUL BOUDREAU



PSYCHOCOSMOS

RAYMOND GARIÉPY, *Voice Storm*. Longspoon.

ALEXANDRE L. AMPRIMOZ, *Other Realities*.
Three Trees.

KEN NORRIS, *Report on the Second Half of the
Twentieth Century*. CrossCountry.

KEN NORRIS, *The Perfect Accident*. Véhicule.

KEN NORRIS, *Autokinesis*. CrossCountry.

ENDRE FARKAS, *Romantic at Heart and other
Faults*. Cross Country, \$3.00.

SOME POEMS COULD HAVE BEEN written by almost anybody, others only by the person who actually did write them. What distinguishes the two sorts is the ability of the poets who write the latter sort to animate a psychocosmos with a distinct and individual ambience: one into which the responsive reader can enter fully.

Raymond Gariépy's volume, *Voice Storm*, is an excellent example of the psychocosmos which can be entered fully. The poems reveal an imagination dominated by the nocturnal and primitive elements of human nature, revealed in recurrent images of masks and animals, madness and violence, stone and flesh. The language (whether Gariépy is writing in French or in English) is emotionally heightened by rhythms often close to the hieratic chant, by a stripped and sometimes fragmentary syntax, and by a simple but charged vocabulary. In the love poems, particularly, the results are dramatic (not to mention erotic): "The shore of her body / tastes of salt and stone / Her landlocked belly / is salmon rich" ("The Shore of Her Body"). Elsewhere, the same language can be used to convey a macabre, necrophiliac mystery ("You Seek the Comforts"), or a vivid and dramatic self-image ("I am the Maimed Beast"). Occasionally the language escapes Gariépy's control, and topples into mere rhetoric ("Beyond the Two Thousand Years"). For the most part,

however, *Voice Storm* is a solid and satisfying volume.

Alexandre Amprimoz has much in common with Gariépy — at least on the evidence of the poems in *Other Realities*. But his imagination, although similarly primed by the darker side of human experience (mortality, madness, pain, and violence), operates much less concretely; there is a continuous reference back to art ("A Caravaggio Lament"), literature ("Miniwake for Nuncsum"), myth ("Cadmus", "Daedalus"), and music ("I"). The energy of the poems is not dissipated by such reference, which is perhaps what enables him to handle long poems ("The Woman and the Sun") without losing control. The same return to tradition produces the marked surrealism of many of the poems, for what appears to be a loss of control, an indulgence in images, word-play, and an extremely loose paratactic structure for their own sakes, is nevertheless governed by the ambience of the Surrealist movement to which he implicitly appeals. Moreover, in appealing to that movement, he justifies his formidable preoccupation with madness in one form or another, by a direct reference to the notion (clearly in the Surrealist tradition) that "madness begins / with communication" ("100"). Amprimoz's psychocosmos is in some ways easier to enter than Gariépy's because of these familiar landmarks of the tradition, but it is one that is at the same time less tangible, less easily comprehended because of its allusive, illusive nature.

Ken Norris's three volumes, *Report on the Second Half of the Twentieth Century* (1977), *The Perfect Accident* (1978), and *Autokinesis* (1980), show the poet in the process of developing a fully realized psychocosmos. The poems in *Report* are sprawling and colloquial: they lack both imaginative intensity and any kind of rhythmic tension. The reader

cannot enter the poems fully because the ambience is too thin: the voice that speaks here is loosely identifiable as North American (rather than European), and mumbling about the contents of newspapers, and that is all. In *The Perfect Accident*, the psychocosmos begins to be more fully realized: the poetic persona is more individual as the poet turns to reflect upon himself rather than upon the world. The poems which help to shape this individuality are mostly love-poems ("au hasard," "Six for Barbara," "You reeled me in"), as if concentration on the other person somehow helps him to shape himself, and hence to shape the poems. The language is still colloquial, but Norris has lost his tendency to mumble, and there are flashes of genuine humour (as opposed to the facetiousness of the earlier volume). The development between *Report* and *Accident* is considerable, but it is not complete; in *Autokinesis* it is extended further. The poet here articulates clearly and unmistakably, especially in the "January Sonnets." The poems are controlled and shapely, sharply focussed upon their subject, and rhythmic and direct in their language. It will be interesting to see where Norris goes from here.

Like Norris, Endre Farkas has written three volumes of poems, and *Romantic at Heart and Other Faults* is his third. In a footnote to the title of his poem "What You Should Know to be a Poet," Farkas writes: "This is the original title of Gary Snyder's poem in his *regarding wave* and which I have augmented in this poem." Obviously, someone who cannot put together a sentence without including a constructional error is going to have problems putting poems together, and he does. Like Norris's poems in *Report*, Farkas's poems for the most part sprawl all over the place ("The Vegetarian Ear Eater," "What You Should Know to be a Poet"), although there are one or two neat and interesting exceptions ("Bounty Hunt-

ing," "Sunday Drive"), in one case ("That") achieved by the use of a purely artificial form. Farkas is also inclined to mumble: for example, he backs into one poem ("Mao Tse Tung as Hero") with the line "what I think he's saying," rather than tackling it head on; and he fumbles the opening line of another ("Lyric"), writing "It's the kind of six o'clock morning" and failing to recognize that "the kind of" is pure flab. Moreover, his eye, like Norris's in *Report*, is still fixed on externals; he needs to reflect and intensify his understanding of himself in order to intensify the psychocosmos he presents.

PATRICIA MONK

FRAGMENTS OF A VISION

LEN GASPARINI, *Breaking and Entering: New and Selected Poems*. Mosaic Press/Valley Editions, \$6.95.

DAVID ARNASON, *Marsh Burning*. Turnstone, \$7.00.

THE TITLE OF Len Gasparini's new book gives a clue to his poetic concerns. Many of his poems are socially oriented (in the broadest sense), and the "I" in his work is a horny, divorced, sometimes drunk poet, frequently on the road, a softy at heart beneath a brusque exterior. He is the man who loves poetry but likes to complain of its hold on him.

Whether persona or heart-on-sleeve fact, this image of the poet is a contrivance into which only the most gifted writer can breathe life. Gasparini's use of it is ultimately rather tiring, because his poems are loose and wordy and only rarely come into a language that is better than mediocre. In fairness, it is the earlier poems which seem weakest, and the book gets progressively better. Many of the early poems work well when read aloud

and almost seem intended as crowd-pleasers with which to open a poetry reading (e.g., "Cold-Water Flat Blues" or "I Was a Poet For the Mafia"), but a single reading exhausts one's interest.

Though some of the later poems lack the superficiality of the earlier ones, they are often marred by ineffective or cute comparisons ("When she touches me, / my skin / is the sound // a hummingbird makes / in the mouth / of a flower"). For all the toughness of its title, *Breaking and Entering* exhibits too little toughness of language. A remark which David Helwig made almost a decade ago in *Quarry* — that there are lines and parts of a Gasparini poem which please, but rarely an entire poem — still seems largely true.

David Arnason's *Marsh Burning* is a wholly different kind of book. Arnason is interested primarily in history and mythology, and in investigating his own place in the prairie landscape. Like many recent books of Canadian poetry, *Marsh Burning* is essentially a "roots" book. Documents, in the form of letters found in the Manitoba Provincial Archives, relating to Gimli (where Arnason was born) occupy much of the book's last section, and elements of Scandinavian mythology come into play in the opening section.

Arnason's materials are coherent, and the book moves with consistent direction towards an exegesis of place and one man's part in it. The poetry itself, however, is not very satisfying, with the result that one soon loses sympathy with Arnason's concerns. As a scholar and teacher, he knows well enough what elements go to make up the book of personal history, but clearly that knowledge is insufficient to the task of writing good poetry. *Marsh Burning*, for all its earnestness, lacks poetry's passion.

BRUCE WHITEMAN



**** RODERICK HAIG-BROWN, *The Master and his Fish*. McClelland & Stewart, \$14.95. Like virtually everything that Haig-Brown did, these essays on various aspects of fishing are written with the craftsmanship of a writer who never fell into the trap of pretentiousness and whose clear prose was adapted admirably not only to describing the techniques of fishing but also to evoking the natural setting where the angler encounters his quarry; they also rather poignantly reveal the division in the heart of every hunter, between his desire to conquer and his urge to identify with his prey. There are 23 pieces, scattered over the quarter of a century from 1952 to 1976, the year of Haig-Brown's death, and the best, in my view, are the early ones, though there is none that is not workmanlike.

G.W.

*** JEAN EWEN, *China Nurse 1932-1939*. McClelland & Stewart, \$16.95. If she hadn't stayed alive, and if she'd become one of the party faithful, Jean Ewen might have been as famous today as her former colleague, Norman Bethune. For Jean Ewen started nursing in China in 1932, six years before Bethune arrived there, and when Bethune did reach the country she accompanied him because of her past experience of nursing there and her speaking knowledge of Chinese. They did not work together for long; she found Bethune's political priggishness and male chauvinism unendurable, and fairly soon parted company with "the bloody missionary," as she once called him. But she remained in the Communist-dominated area of China for two years, until she left in 1939, and *China Nurse 1932-1939* is a fresh and interesting look at a crucial period in world history and at the men who dominated it, for Chou En-lai and Mao Tse-tung and the other Communist leaders are all portrayed. It is also a welcome antidote to the recent stream of Bethune hagiography.

G.W.

** PADDY SHERMAN, *Expeditions to Nowhere*. McClelland & Stewart, \$16.95. Paddy Sherman is a newspaperman, publisher of the *Vancouver Province*, whose avocation is mountain climbing, which he had done in many ranges and on many famous and formidable peaks, and which he has already written about in an earlier book, *Cloud Walkers*. *Expeditions to Nowhere* tells of climbs not only near home in Canada and Alaska, but also in South America and in Africa. Sherman, when he writes of mountains, has a simple and serviceable prose that describes the setting well and evokes the excitement of the experience.

G.W.

ATWOOD'S "SURFACING"

THE CRITICISM AND REVIEWS dealing with *Surfacing* have exhibited a continuing disagreement as to whether or not the novel, especially in its concluding resolution, can be said to be affirmative. A review in the *Queen's Quarterly* claims that the merging of survival and acceptance in the last chapter comes too late: "It is not easy to credit after having been confronted for so long with nothing but the evidence of disintegration."¹ Moreover, the same reviewer charges that "the grace implied in the water vision [which] has shot light through the torment" has not been witnessed by the reader. Even more outspokenly critical is Linda Rogers who, writing in *Canadian Literature*, speaks of the "pervasive chill" in Atwood's imagery, a chill which lacks "a warming counterpoint." Rogers continues: "There is no life-giving warmth in her metaphorical water either. The ascent from drowning is no resurrection, just a return to conventional reality."² Similarly, Rosemary Sullivan argues that *Surfacing* ends in an unbroken narcissistic circle game which provides no release for the narrator, and no commitment of the self to an other or to the human community.³ The other side of the debate is seen in Margaret Laurence's contention that the narrator's inner journey is a "breakthrough" rather than a breakdown or breakup. Although conceding that the note of hope on which the novel ends is qualified, Laurence disagrees with the pronouncement on the dust jacket that it is unexpected.⁴ George Woodcock, like Laurence, refers to *Surfacing* as the account of a *rite de passage*, stating: "It is a novel of self-realization,

hence of life-realization."⁵ The debate summarized in these opposing views is of crucial importance for understanding and assessing the relevance of Atwood's *Surfacing*. If I side with Laurence and Woodcock in finding the novel to be affirmative, it is not only because they are allies of such stature as anyone would be glad to have, nor because my own views as to what constitutes an "affirmation" may be somewhat modest in terms of their expectations, but because it seems to me that this position can be further substantiated.

The narrator's external quest for her missing father has its inner counterpart in her search for insight into her present difficulties, which include (or so it seems at the outset) a failed marriage and subsequent divorce, and an unwanted child. Later the marriage and the baby prove to be fabrications, disguises for an affair with a married teacher by whom she has become pregnant, and for an abortion. The abortion was so traumatic an event, and remains so painful a memory, that the narrator cannot accept it as a reality. An initial resolution occurs when she discovers the body of her drowned father while diving near a cliff in search of Indian rock paintings. This discovery precipitates the admission, both to herself and to us, of the fact of the abortion. The acceptance of responsibility does not, however, resolve her difficulties, for there are two further consequences following from the discovery and admission: first, she can now no longer claim to be "innocent" since she must see the destruction of her fetus as having made her a "killer," like the "Americans" who have been serving as a handy caricatured personification of evil for herself and her friends; second, since there are no rock paintings to be found at the cliff as her father's maps had indicated, she is forced to conclude that he had, before his death, gone mad.

The narrator's quest for her missing

father as related to her inner quest suggests the limitations of rationality. Her botanist father has retreated to the wilderness to escape from the irrationalities of humanity and of civilization: "animals, he said, were more consistent, their behaviour at least was predictable." In retrospect the narrator concludes that her father's insistence that God is a superstition (he had refused to allow her to go to Sunday School) necessitated her deification of him: "If you tell your children God doesn't exist they will be forced to believe you are the god, but what happens when they find out you are human after all, you have to grow old and die?" What if, as he insisted, there is no resurrection? For people, he had claimed, are not onions: they stay under. Her father's death, then — a death from which he has literally not "surfaced" — brings about a new crisis for the narrator.

Initially, the narrator proceeds logically to consider the possible alternatives capable of explaining his absence. She employs a kind of dyadic system, like a botanist's classificatory scheme, using various pairs of binary opposites to assist her in her search for him. In fact, the search is seen by her as a kind of game for which her father earlier provided the governing rules and proper training and has now, perhaps, left the necessary clues. "There's only two places he can be," she states, "on the island or in the lake." An exploration of the island proves futile, "like searching for a ring lost on a beach or in the snow." Almost having decided to give up, the narrator comes upon some drawings in the cabin which later prove to be of Indian petroglyphs. Finding them at first unrecognizable, she is puzzled and disturbed by the drawings because they raise a "forgotten possibility," namely, that her father might be insane rather than simply dead or alive. In that case, she realizes, "none of the rules would be the same."

The whole of Part One of the novel reflects the presence of this binary vision right from her childhood. Upon seeing a leech in the water she decides that since it has red dots on its back it must be the good kind, since the bad kind is mottled with grey and yellow. Her brother, she recalls, had "made up these moral distinctions": "There had to be a good kind and a bad kind of everything." The narrator sees her father as having split his family between "two anonymities, the city and the bush," thereby avoiding the happy middle of the company town halfway between: "in the city we lived in a succession of apartments and in the bush he picked the most remote lake he could find." Again, she recalls that at birthday parties "there were only two things you could be, a winner or a loser [though] the mothers tried to rig it so everyone got a prize." Significantly, the narrator tells us that at first she had refused to play the games at all. *Surfacing* may be seen, in part, as about the discovery of new rules for the revision of the prevailing "game." Subjected in the schoolyard to a tormenting rhyme which goes, "Adam and Eve and Pinch Me, / Went down to the river to bathe; / Adam and Eve fell in, / So who do you think was saved?" the narrator at first declined to answer. When her schoolmates explained that the rules were that you *had* to answer, the narrator with great craftiness responded that Adam and Eve were saved. This response shows her attempt to escape the inevitable pinch, and also, as one of my students has suggested, that she knew even from her childhood that you could not be saved unless you first fell in.

There is a good deal which is autobiographical in this bifurcated vision of *Surfacing*. Atwood, in an interview, reveals that at the age of sixteen she had become convinced that she could not both get married and have children and be a writer too: "It seemed to me that getting

married would be a kind of death. Society didn't provide alternatives then. There was no Women's Lib telling you that you could do both."⁶ Similarly, the narrator of *Surfacing* looks for a way of escaping or transcending or reconciling the given alternatives. "My brother," she says, "saw the danger early. To immerse oneself, join in the war, or to be destroyed. Though there ought to be other choices." The sight of a heron gratuitously killed and hung up in the sunlight especially disturbs her because its "causeless, undiluted" death is entirely senseless: "The only relation they could have to a thing like that was to destroy it. Food, slave, or corpse, limited choices."

Structuralism has been criticized precisely at this point, for assuming that relations can be reduced to binary oppositions as fire/water, raw/cooked, pure/impure, sun/moon. And, as Rubert de Ventós has recently pointed out, "our religious tradition, our competitive economy, and our mass culture all conspire to encourage the simplification and polarization of our moral sensitivity."⁷ The terms which we use provide ready-made guidelines to delineate various aspects of life either positively or negatively: virtue versus vice, quality versus price, freedom versus bureaucracy, new versus obsolete, and so on. Rubert suggests the need for an appreciation of those values rejected or denied by our clinging to one of two polarities. He finds in Kierkegaard, Hegel, Marx, and Mao instructive instances of how one might criticize paths chosen and appreciate paths rejected. Atwood's heroine implies a slightly different procedure by which the limitations of a dualistic mode of perception are transcended.

E. F. Schumacher, in his very influential book *Small is Beautiful*, comments upon this human propensity to think in opposites, and the continual task of reconciling oppositions which cannot logically be reconciled. He uses the terms "conver-

gent" and "divergent" to distinguish problems which are capable of being solved by the application of logic from those which are not. An executive, for example, wearied with his daily attempt to bring to convergence the "divergent" problems encountered within his office, might seek the satisfaction of working on a "convergent" problem such as a crossword puzzle as he rides the commuter train home. The solution to a divergent problem is to raise the problem to a higher level of being where the opposition is transcended. The procedure of Atwood's narrator, then, could be seen as her attempt to solve divergent problems — the death of her father, her lack of love for Joe, the guilt resulting from her abortion — by the logical means appropriate to problems of convergence. Such an attempt, Schumacher would say, involves a process of "reduction" capable of bringing about only a spurious solution. The divergent problems entailed in coming to grips with love and death demand not just the use of reason but the commitment of the whole personality. Atwood's fiction argues for the displacement of logic and of the scientific method as effective means of dealing with the essential human problems. And its religious significance lies in its raising problems to a higher level of being.

The movement of the tripartite structure of *Surfacing* suggests the affirmative reconciliation of oppositions, and echoes the surfacing pattern — going down, being under, and coming up. Part One concludes: "Finally being in the air is more painful than being in the water and I bend and push myself reluctantly into the lake." The opening lines of Part Two with their more analytical and objective tone are strikingly different from what has preceded. With new discernment the narrator analyses the shortcoming of her approach: "The trouble is all in the knob at the top of our bodies. I'm not against

the body under the head either: only the neck, which creates the illusion that they are separate." If people were built like worms or frogs, she reflects, with their heads extending directly into their shoulders, the illusion of the separation of head and body could not be maintained: "they wouldn't be able to look down at their bodies and move them around as if they were robots or puppets." Here, then, the dualistic vision is perceived by her as standing in the way of integrity and wholeness. Later the fish, referred to as "neckless headbody," becomes a kind of icon or protecting spirit, the more so perhaps because she sees in its jumping (a passage from water to air and back to water again) an inverted mirror-image of her own immersion and surfacing.

Within Part Two the separation of head from body becomes a special pre-occupation of the narrator. She sees this separation as enabling the mechanical and detached use of the body, whether in killing (as in the case of her abortion), or in violence directed towards nature (as in the death of the heron), or in sexual relations (Joe is impressed with the "cool" way she took off her clothes during their first encounter — "as if I were feeling no emotion"). When David attempts his seduction he argues that the narrator's duty is retaliation since at that moment Joe, her current lover, is off with David's wife, Anna. She reflects that David's argument favours "geometrical sex": "it would be enough for him if our genitals could be detached like two kitchen appliances and copulate in mid-air, that would complete his equation." Later she mentally compares Anna to a *Playboy* centrefold who "copulates . . . with the man's torso while his brain watches from its glassed-in control cubicle."

The narrator discovers the separation of the head from the body to be her own particular problem as well. She has been, so it seems, living in the wrong half, that

is her head, which has become severed from her body at some time in the past. In the interval she imagines that her neck has closed over like a frozen pond, shutting her into her head and resulting in her inability to feel or to love. This detachment or apathy has made the abortion possible, and is presently creating difficulties in her relationship with Joe. The head-body dualism of Part Two may be seen, therefore, as a consequence of her father's rationalism, dwelt upon so extensively in Part One. Moreover, as the quest for her disappeared parent continues, bound up with its resolution is the resolution of her personal problems.

The apparently meaningless and random drawings, previously taken as evidence of his insanity, she discovers to be sketches of petroglyphs. In terms of her most recent binary hypothesis concerning his absence — insane or dead — she feels that now she has conclusive proof of his sanity, and therefore, of his death. In order to establish this conclusion she organizes a trip with her three friends to a nearby lake where she hopes to find rock paintings at the location marked on his map. The trip proves to be inconclusive. Having returned to the main lake, she makes a final attempt to establish her father's fate. Because the level of the lake has been raised, she reasons that the paintings he charted may well be under water now. She begins to dive at one of the places marked nearby. Beneath the surface she sees, not the painting, but his body, weighed down by the camera he had been carrying. A new and unacceptable conclusion is borne in upon her, for since there are no paintings to be found she must recognize that he had gone insane before his death. In charting the petroglyphs where there were none, he had been seeing with "true vision; at the end, after the failure of logic." The mutually exclusive alternatives of insanity or

death which she had earlier devised have been shattered.

Although the discovery of her father's body brings her ostensible quest to a conclusion, it is some time before she can acknowledge the reality of her discovery. Furthermore, her dive into the depths and her emergence with the discovery initiates the reintegration of head and body: "feeling was beginning to seep back into me, I tingled like a foot that's been asleep." Her father's puzzle had provided a mediation, but since (in her words) his gods are only those of the head, she still lacks the means for a total integration. The criticism that the water vision does not afford a complete resolution is in this respect legitimate. The resolution must be completed by a legacy from her dead mother, and it is for this second gift which she now hunts. Again, a picture provides the mediation, this time a drawing which the narrator herself had done as a child and which she finds on a loose page in a scrapbook. The picture is of a baby in its mother's womb, gazing out through the stomach at a man with horns and a barbed tail. The baby is herself and the man is God, who she felt needed the Devil's advantages. Perhaps in this creation of a more Dionysian and less Apollonian deity she recognizes the failure of the traditional conception of the Christian God to embody evil as well as good, thereby reflecting an incomplete version of reality. Her childhood picture has now a new meaning which she must seek out. Perhaps that new meaning is that the narrator, having failed in her attempt to retreat to the innocence of childhood in avoidance of the abortion and its aftermath, must emerge into the adult world of evil and of power; she must confront, as Rollo May would put it, her particular *daimon* and absorb it into herself. Part Two of the novel ends, then, with "everything . . . waiting to become alive."

In an act reminiscent of some ancient

rite which recalls the connections among the moon, woman, fertility and initiation, and with great urgency, she compels Joe to follow her out of the cabin that night and to impregnate her as she lies on the cold, damp ground, carefully keeping the moon on her left hand. Immediately she feels, in her words, her "lost child surfacing" as "the two halves clasp" (one supposes the two halves to be her head and body). Her father's mediation having taken her beyond logic, now her mother's legacy elicits from her a commitment to the generation of new life in atonement for her aborted fetus.

Her temporary descent into madness, detailed in the next five chapters, is perhaps most difficult to account for within the novel. In a significant realization the narrator states: "Logic is a wall, I built it, on the other side is terror." The resulting terror after the crumbling of the logical wall might be explained in a number of ways. First, she may, as her father's daughter, be tracing the same path into the depths of insanity which he had taken before her. Second, as an overcompensation for living so long out of her head, she must now live at the animal level and integrate herself with the natural world, refusing all food, clothing and shelter except for that which nature can provide her. Third, her insanity may result from too violently bringing together her "headline" and "heartline," for as Anna, the amateur palm reader has told her, when those two lines come together you're either a criminal, an idiot, or a saint. A fourth possibility is that insofar as she retains her characteristically dualistic way of construing things, she sees the only alternatives for herself as being flight or fight. Aware of her previous abuse of her power over life, a power which she had not been willing to admit having in her possession, the only safe route, she thinks, is to decline totally to use it by engaging in a retreat from civilized life. Her newly

conceived embryo, which she hopes to see "covered with shining fur, a god," she intends to keep from the confusions and failures and classifications which language affords; she vows, therefore, not to teach it any words. Whatever may be the reason for her madness, the narrator declares: "There are no longer any rational points of view."

The descent into madness, the counterpart of her earlier descent into watery depths, underlines the title's significance, that you have to fall in or go under before you can come up or be saved. Furthermore, during this period her avoidance of the confinements and restrictions of language has a more literal counterpart as well, for the narrator avoids any kind of enclosure. In the midst of her underwater vision the young woman had seen her fetus as having been placed in a bottle, similar to the jars in which her brother had entrapped frogs (and from which she had released them). "The bottle," she had said at the time, "had been logical, pure logic, . . . enclosure, something to keep the death away from me." Similarly, the narrator had thought to provide release to the "hundreds of tiny naked Annas . . . bottled and shelved" by unravelling into the lake the film which David and Joe had made of her after brutally forcing her to strip for them. Later she reflects that she ought to have broken a different container, the gold compact in which she feels Anna's soul is imprisoned. Now the cabin is a "cage, wooden rectangle" which she is forbidden to enter. Her food must come from elsewhere than the glass and metal enclosures of jars and tin cans. Her briefcase must be opened and her manuscripts and illustrations destroyed. Her clothes and shoes are now husks to be abandoned. The fenced-in garden is out of bounds. She must discard the ring given to her by her pretended husband. For these are the new rules: "they are against borders."

The narrator returns to sanity when she perceives her mother and father in successive visions, and discovering them to be but projections of herself and not gods as she had thought, she finally allows them to "dwindle, grow, become what they are, human." Going to the fence where she has seen her father, she locates what she believes to be his footprints — "I place my feet in them and find that they are my own." Atwood has commented that *Surfacing* is a ghost story of the kind in which the "ghost" is found to be a facet of yourself which has split off and been projected upon someone else. This dimension and more is present here. In the initiation rituals of the Winnebago Indians the neophyte, after having been ritually "killed," spends the night in the lodge of his ancestors and then, upon leaving, finds "footprints of light." These footprints are those of his ancestors, now reborn, and if the neophyte steps into them, he too will gain a new life. The rebirth in *Surfacing* brilliantly combines with the features of archaic Amerindian ritual the insights of contemporary psychology.

In the final two chapters all of the gods, including those of the recently sacred lake and cliff, have receded and become as "theoretical as Jesus." "From now on," she realizes, "I'll have to live in the usual way, defining them [that is, the gods] by their absence." The modern individual, if he or she experiences reality as ultimate, finds that ultimacy to be conditioned by a horizon of negation or absence. Langdon Gilkey, summing up the testimony of recent scholars of religion, finds that whether one consults Heidegger or Bultmann or Ebeling or (perhaps most notably) Tillich ("We are aware of the power of being through the experience of the shock of non-being"), the unanimous declaration of these thinkers is that "even the most positive apprehension of the divine comes to us from the sense of

negation, limit, or insufficiency on the level of the finite."⁸ Gilkey affirms that it is only when threatened by a sense of the emptiness of the void, by an experience of nothingness, that we are in a position to begin to take notice of the more positive aspects of ultimacy, those "gifts of existence" conveying the power of life and of meaning.

The narrator's descent and rebirth have brought her to the place where she can be open to such positive gifts as existence tenders us. For her, love is now to be defined by its failures, and power by its loss and renunciations. "The intercession of words" she sees as necessary too, even though attempts at communication will probably fail. "From now on I'll have to live in the usual way," she states simply. At the end Joe, having returned to the island, calls to her and waits. Though the novel closes with the narrator poised on the brink of a response but not yet responding, we are given to believe that she will return to the city with Joe, for she has realized that beyond flight or fight there is the possibility of trusting him. In the presence of this possibility of trust and commitment she has transcended the previous oppositions and elevated what is problematic in her life to a higher level of being. The decision "to live in the usual way" may be characterized, as Rogers does, as no resurrection, but just a return to conventional reality. It is a return, though, only after a rebirth to some hard-earned insights and only after it is discovered that no "total salvation, resurrection" is available. Atwood's discovery of tenacity beyond truth (to paraphrase her poetry) suggests her familiar theme of survival, of commitment to endurance as a necessity even as one bears an acute consciousness of possible (and perhaps probable) failure. This kind of heroic stance I find to be realistic, but affirmative as well.

Atwood's solution lies in some middle

ground beyond the limited choices suggested in such alternatives as fight or flight, the city or the bush, sane or insane, winning or losing, victor or victim. In an interview she has made more precise the nature of the affirmative ideal which is held up as a possibility at the end of *Surfacing*: "The ideal would be somebody who would be neither a killer nor a victim, who could achieve some kind of harmony with the world, which is a productive or creative harmony rather than a destructive relationship towards the world."⁹

Contrary to Rosemary Sullivan, I think that there is here the basis for a radically revised relation to the world of culture as well as to the world of nature, a relation which includes the human community. The ironic distancing at the conclusion of *Surfacing* appropriately precludes, in typical Canadian fashion, taking oneself too seriously, yet it is not a detachment which results in a complete alienation, a situation in which the protagonist is totally disengaged or unrelated. Such a condition for Atwood would entail "the old belief that I am powerless and because of it nothing I can do will ever hurt anyone," a modern belief in one's innocence which she suggests is the successor to the old belief in original sin.

In *Surfacing* the "jail-break" and "re-creation" to which Atwood looks at the end of *Survival* has occurred. In Marian Engel's *Bear*, Lou, the questing female protagonist, is taken a little further from the scene of her island transformation along the road that leads back to the city. But to overlook the affirmative resolution of *Surfacing* is perhaps to have succumbed to the mentality of losing and victimization to a degree even beyond anything Atwood herself could have imagined.

NOTES

¹ Joan Harcourt, "Atwood Country," *Queen's Quarterly*, 80 (1973), 281.

- ² "Margaret the Magician," *Canadian Literature*, No. 60 (Spring 1974), p. 85.
- ³ "Breaking the Circle," *Malahat Review*, No. 41 (January 1977), p. 41.
- ⁴ Review of *Surfacing* in *Quarry*, 22 (Spring 1973), 63.
- ⁵ "Margaret Atwood: Poet as Novelist," *The Canadian Novel in the Twentieth Century* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1975), p. 325.
- ⁶ Valerie Miner, "Atwood in Metamorphosis: An Authentic Canadian Fairy Tale," in Myrna Kostash et al., *Her Own Woman: Profiles of Ten Canadian Women* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1975), p. 181.
- ⁷ Xavier Rubert de Ventós, *Self-Defeated Man: Personal Identity and Beyond* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), p. 58.
- ⁸ *Naming the Whirlwind: The Renewal of God-Language* (Indianapolis and New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1969), p. 309 n. Speaking of *Surfacing*, Atwood states: "The assumption of the book, if there is one, is that there are gods that do exist here, but nobody knows about them." She continues: "I think that the authentic religion that was here has been destroyed; you have to discover it in some other way. How that fits in with the book I don't know, but I'm sure it has something to do with it" (in Graeme Gibson, *Eleven Canadian Novelists* [Toronto: Anansi, 1973], p. 31).
- ⁹ *Eleven Canadian Novelists*, p. 27. Throughout the conversation with Gibson, Atwood repeatedly emphasizes the necessity of a third choice in situations where it is assumed there are only two alternatives.

WILLIAM C. JAMES

"MATILDA"

Matilda; or the Indian's Captive is a "new" Canadian novel that has just come to light in the library of the Quebec Seminary.¹ Its publication date, 1833, would make it the second novel published in the Canadas — coming between *St. Ursula's Convent* of 1824 and *L'Influence d'un Livre* of 1837.

With regard to the author, it is not known whether "James Russell" lived at, or near, Three Rivers (a District for

which there is a paucity of surviving records), or whether "James Russell" was even the author's real name. The only contemporary mention of the work that I have found was a brief notice in the *Quebec Gazette* of May 17, 1833, announcing that the book was for sale at Neilson and Cowan's bookstore. There are no other known works of the period by a James Russell, although a "J.R." of Three Rivers did write a few items in the *Literary Garland*. M. M. Brown has, however, noted that this was probably a John Ramsey. The author's preface gives some hints as to his background, but there is no way of establishing whether these comments are based on fact, or whether they are a form of conventional apology:

the Author renounces every claim to literary information, having a mind both cramped and treacherous, which, added to his excluded life (for many years, and at an age when the human mind is most susceptible of improvement) among Indian tribes, wilds and woods, where nothing is heard, but the ruthless blast or the howl of the savage, without even books to derive information from. . . .

The printer, George Stobbs, is listed in Beaulieu and Hamelin, *La Presse Québécoise des origines à nos jours*, as publisher of *La Gazette de Trois Rivières* in 1832, and also as publisher of later Three Rivers publications.

The novel itself is definitely Canadian, although the final "rich-and-happy-ever-after" apotheosis is set, appropriately perhaps, in England. It begins on the banks of the St. Lawrence River in Lower Canada on June 6, 1768, when the four-year-old Matilda is kidnapped by Indians. She is rescued a few months later by a trader on the American side of the Niagara River who buys her from her captors and raises her as his own daughter. Our heroine grows up beautiful and charming, and conveniently ignorant of any life she led before becoming the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Wilson. At the

age of fourteen, while taking a walk, the son of her Indian captors tries to seize her, but is thwarted by the timely arrival of Captain Clifford, a British officer taken prisoner at Bunker Hill and now on parole awaiting the end of hostilities. The Captain is smitten.

To protect Matilda from further Indian attempts at kidnapping, and to settle in the British territories where they feel politically more at ease, the Wilsons move secretly to Kingston. They are soon having to protect her from the notice of various officers of the Kingston garrison, one of whom, having been refused her hand, attempts to kidnap her. She is saved by the timely arrival of a heavily cloaked swordsman, who turns out to be Captain Clifford again. Because he has been ordered to New York, he has crossed the lines into Canada, breaking his parole, to say goodbye to Matilda. After restoring her to her parents, he returns undetected to fulfil the terms of his parole.

At war's end, the Wilsons cross to the American side on a visit to Mr. Wilson's widowed mother. A horse runs away with a wagon in which Mrs. Wilson and Matilda are riding. Matilda, her dress caught in a wheel, is being dragged to certain death when rescued — by Captain Clifford again. When she recovers from her injuries he, having learned her history from Mr. Wilson, nonetheless proposes and is accepted. The two men decide that Matilda must be told her own story. Her shock at this revelation is extreme. Nobly she refuses Clifford, on the grounds that she is now penniless and of unknown parentage. Wilson offers a £1000 dowry, as he considers her his heir, and the wedding takes place.

Several weeks later the original Indian captor is seen in the area and is persuaded, by Captain Clifford's impressive uniform, to give information about the place from whence he abducted her. He also gives them the picture book which

Matilda had been looking at when she was kidnapped. The title page gives her name, Matilda Milford, and her birth-date. Before these leads can be followed up Clifford and his bride are summoned to England to take up the vast family estate he has inherited at his father's death.

Once in England, we learn rapidly that a Sir William Milford lives almost as a recluse in the neighbourhood, but the author teases us by delaying the inevitable meeting with accounts of social obligations and descriptions of the estate and its management. Finally Sir William comes to dinner. Afterwards he picks up the picture book from a table and the recognition scene is under way.

The final paragraphs point the moral:

Witness reader, the once poor and forlorn Indian's Captive has now become the adored wife of a gentleman of the first standing in society, both for personal accomplishments and wealth, and is likewise the sole heiress to an immense property by her father, all of which blessings, we hope she will be grateful for, and appreciate their value in a true light.

They are now enjoying all the happiness which this transitory world can afford; therefore it would be the next thing to sacrilege to again break in upon their repose, consequently, we shall bid them farewell.

In all honesty it cannot be said that this latest addition to Canadian literature is a national treasure — except for rare book dealers. For the most part the writing style is plain, although on occasion it enters into the convoluted sentence structure and flowery description of the period. The plot, while reflecting the literary conventions of the time in the role played by chance, in the relations between the young lovers, and in the final recognition scene, complete with a brief history of Sir William's activities since we last saw him in the opening chapters, does nonetheless have enough North American flavour to make it difficult to translate

into any other setting. Heiresses kidnapped by gypsies or bandits were not uncommon in the literature of the time, but such abductors would not have behaved in the same manner as the Indians. These Indians, while not to be trusted, do not appear to be inherently vicious. Matilda's parents had, in fact, left her alone on the banks of the St. Lawrence while they went to greet guests. The Indians had come upon her playing alone, they had not stalked and seized her with premeditation. In selling her to Mr. Wilson they strike a hard bargain, claiming that they had intended her as a bride for their young son, and also perceiving that Mr. Wilson was determined to have her. The son who returns to attempt her capture ten years later says that he has merely come to claim his bride. The father, interrogated five years later, is intimidated by the military uniform, and quite co-operatively hands over the picture book, which he has kept for fifteen years.

There is little scenic description *per se*, but a strong sense of time and place pervades the North American part of the narrative. The English scenes, by contrast, have an aura of being developed from books and imagination. Mr. Wilson and the Indians seem more alive than Matilda and Captain Clifford and their upper class families.

A very few comments refer specifically to life in British North America. Again, these seem to relate more to life as seen by a merchant and trader than to life as seen by an officer in the British army, or by a young girl. *Matilda* may be founded on fact as the subtitle says, but the reality conveyed to a twentieth-century reader is that of an adult male resident of the Canadian colonies. Even this aspect would be lost to most general readers absorbed in a tale of repeated abductions and rescues, complete with the improbable arrival of Captain Clifford in every moment of distress.

Matilda is a conventional tale in many ways, set in what is unmistakably Canada. If the text did not supply dates and place names, it would be relatively simple for a knowledgeable reader to deduce them. It is this blend of the real in time and place, with the conventions of the abducted-heiress and true-love-triumphant genre, which gives the novel its charm.

NOTES

- ¹ *Matilda; or, the Indian's Captive*; A Canadian Tale, founded on fact, by James Russell. Printed for the author, by George Stobbs, Three-Rivers, and sold by the booksellers of Montreal and Quebec, 1833. 204 pp. A facsimile edition of *Matilda* has been produced by the Garland Publishing Company, New York and London. It is Volume 51 in the Garland Library of Narratives of North American Indian Captivities.

MARY LU MACDONALD

ON THE VERGE

*** JACK L. SUMMERS and RENE CHARTRAND, *Military Uniforms in Canada 1665-1970*, illus. by R. J. Marrion. Canadian War Museum Historical Publication No. 16, \$29.95. Military buffs will find this handsome, full-colour book irresistible. A gallery of forty regimental uniforms, complete with clear descriptive commentaries and brief regimental histories, the book selectively charts Canada's military engagements both within the country and outside it. One could wish for more precise illustration of the details of insignia which the text refers to, but Marrion chooses to convey something more general and probably more culturally evocative: the uniforms are not static, but "worn"; hence the illustrations constitute "portraits" of Gentlemen-soldiers, hired ruffians, and martinets. Yet this is not primarily a glimpse of army life, nor a history of warfare. A trifle tendentious in its preface ("Although Canadians are not a warlike people, our entire history has been marked by armed conflict"), the book only indirectly traces the nation's changing political involvements. Its value lies in its visual design and in the corroborative detail of the text. There is a useful glossary and a bibliography. It is a sign of the times, however, that the editors

should deem it necessary to explain why measurements are *not* expressed metrically.

W.N.

*** GUILLAUME CHARETTE, *Vanishing Spaces: Memoirs of Louis Goulet*, tr. Ray Ellenwood. Editions Bois-Brulé, \$5.95. Louis Goulet was a Métis hunter, trader and scout. Born in 1859, he died in 1936, and saw the destruction of the Old West and the decline of the Métis way of life on the open plains. He was a boy with his father following the buffalo hunt and trading in the western prairies when the Red River Rising took place. He worked for years as a scout for the American army, riding as far south as the Texas border. He was present at one historic encounter between Walsh of the Mounted Police and Sitting Bull, and at the meeting in 1884 when the Métis decided to send Gabriel Dumont to fetch Louis Riel from Montana to be their leader. When the 1885 rebellion began he happened to be at Frog Lake, witnessed the massacre and followed Big Bear's wanderings as a prisoner. Blind in old age, he dictated his recollections to Guillaume Charette. Garrulous at times and somewhat repetitious, they have the naturalness of oral narrative, and there is a poignant vividness to the way Goulet remembers his childhood in the open prairie, the plants and animals, the self-reliant way in which the Métis hunters made so much they needed out of what the land offered. Sometimes, as in his description of a narrow escape from a prairie fire sweeping over dried-out muskeg, he involves one with an extraordinary sense of being there. *Vanishing Spaces* is published by a Métis group, Editions Bois-Brulé's, which also published the French original, *L'Espace de Louis Goulet*.

G.W.

*** EDITH THOMAS, *Louise Michel*, translated by Penelope Williams. Black Rose Books, \$19.95; pa. \$9.95. For some time now Black Rose Books of Montreal has turned entirely to publishing anarchist and near-anarchist books; it may well by now be the most important English-language anarchist publishing house. Among the books it has recently issued have been Abel Paz's biography of the legendary anarchist leader in the Spanish Civil War, *Durruti: The People Armed*, Ida Mett's *The Kronstadt Uprising*, translated by Murray Bookchin, and Bookchin's own important recent collection of essays, *Towards an Ecological Society*. All are likely to become basic books for anyone seriously interested in the history of anarchism, and so is Edith

Thomas's *Louise Michel*, translated by Penelope Williams. Louise Michel was the demure poet and schoolteacher who blossomed in action into the "Red Virgin of the Commune" and in later years became one of the most active of anarchist orators and propagandists. Louise, as the copious extracts reproduced from her poems, novels and essays show, was far from being a writer in the same league as Kropotkin or Proudhon, but she was a compelling speaker and a kind of secular saint who lived by choice in extreme poverty and gave away almost everything that came to her; her way of life won her the devotion of the masses and some bizarre friendships. Edith Thomas delved well in the French police records as well as in libraries and institutes and has produced a lively biography full of new facts, about Michel and about the other side of *la belle époque*, its poverty and discontent.

G.W.

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