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FICTION IN THE SEVENTIES

Articles

BY KEITH MAILLARD, LUCY M. FREIBERT, DONALD S. HAIR, JOAN COLDWELL, ARNOLD E. DAVIDSON & CATHY DAVIDSON

Poems

BY MICHAEL BRIAN OLIVER, GLEN SORESTAD, CHRISTOPHER WISEMAN, RON CHARACH, M. TRAVIS LANE, STEPHEN BETT

Reviews

BY GEORGE JOHNSTON, MARK ABLEY, MARILYN BOWERING, MORTON L. ROSS, ESTELLE DANSEREAU, MURRAY J. EVANS, BRUCE MEYER, LAURIE RICOU, PETER MITCHAM, LISE ROCHETTE, MURIEL WHITAKER, K. P. STICH, MAURICE LEBEL, ANN MESSENGER, RICHARD PLANT, JOHN H. FERRES, SHERRILL GRACE, MONIQUE GENUIST, CAROLE GERSON, WAYNE GRADY, VICTOR HOWARD, ROSS LABRIE, JANE MOSS, SHIRLEY NEUMAN, BARBARA PELL, GERALD THOMAS, AL PURDY, FRANCIS SPARSHOTT, ANDREW SUKNASKI, PETER A. TAYLOR, LOLA LEMIRE-TOSTEVIN, JONATHAN M. WEISS, TERRY GOLDIE, CATHERINE KERR, GEORGE WOODCOCK

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editorial

ANOTHER DECADE

WE ARE SCARCELY TWO YEARS into the 1980's, and already the decade seems to have settled on its character. Compared with the 1960's, that age of protest and plenty, when people accepted the myth of progress and turned it for awhile into a temporary reality, this decade is marked by paucity and plaint. The governing reality — perhaps equally temporary, but not yet mythological — is retrenchment. The reaction to it is instructive: an anger on the part of ordinary people at being cheated out of an equitable share in what is still one of the world's richest societies. But perhaps Canada is richer in resources than in its responsibility for managing them, richer in expectations than in application, richer in wish than in will. The idea of progress in the 1960's was born of the expectations of the numbers of people then entering their maturity, who still had their aspirations and the rumbling energy of youth; but a lot of that fades, and whether there is real paucity or not in the 1980's, there is at the very least a disparity of distribution, born of hunger for power, disappointment in power, plain avarice, and simple greed. How to react? Many people, with nostalgia, are turning now (for confirmation of their strength to persevere, as much as anything) to the desperate unity of spirit and the erratic vices and luxuries of those other socially and economically chequered decades, the 1920's and 1930's. With what result remains yet to be seen. Or felt.

But how can we characterize that amorphous swift decade of the 1970's, which was In-Between? Those large numbers of youths for whom society has never been ready found that society was not ready for them when they turned twenty, either. They went to the land, came back from the land, and suddenly turned thirty; their friends joined the establishment, their children started school, and their several governments sold their land away. They traded in their dream of simplicity, many of them, for a dream of possession, but found that as hard as the other to achieve; and their younger siblings, more conservative all, began to nudge them ruthlessly into middle age. The decade was nationalist, for some of the same reasons that the generation was self-expressive: not out of ego so much

as out of a determination to set one self apart from the pack — with all the enthusiasm, rightful pride, competitive impulse, bias, and talent for distortion of which people in Canada, like people everywhere, are endlessly, repeatedly capable. During the 1970's, years of celebration and public protest turned overnight into years of theatre and public mime. Cults acquired respectability. Superstitions were enshrined. Rock turned into punk, with all the cynicism that comes from using commerce as a means of rebellion against the ordinary, and both rock and punk were overtaken by New Wave, which turned out to be just another old wave coming back, another new-found way of looking backwards into the future.

Canadian literature during the decade gives no clearer picture of its time — nor any less composite a picture. Any gallery of characters has to be able to show a substantial range: Hodgins' caricatures, Munro's sketches, Laurence's mythmakers, Davies' myth-markers, Atwood's partly liberated persons, Cohen's partly liberated parsons, Beaulieu's phantoms, Gallant's ghosts, Ferron, Tremblay, Hébert, Hood, half a dozen split personae, and a bear. Looking carefully at all of them together, we can begin to see the patterns of a transitional period develop: the blush of expectation begin to fade, the lines of a generation's disenchantment (with its country, with itself) set in. In literature, life stops being an open field of possibility and turns into a closed theatre for role-playing and role-breaking. More and more, people in books call attention to themselves as characters in books, re-enacting tales rather than enacting lives. Repeatedly Beauty meets the Beast, draws on, draws back, or draws away. For one writer, men become minotaurs and all the world a maze that defies a woman ever to find her way to freedom; for another, women are hermaphrodites and dragons; for a third, sexuality is a trap for the unwary and the unready, a process that takes the threats and promises of fairytale and springs them alive. *I*-narratives perform desperate quests for meaning and love in a world where love belongs to a lost past, where meaning exists only in magic, where only the self is real and the self seems sometimes mad. Reality is terror, however sublimated, nothing more.

Not that all optimism has disappeared — Davies continues to be unfashionably articulate, Hodgins to be unfashionably positive, Gordon Korman to be unfashionably cheerful: it's just that one has today to use the word "unfashionably" with such epithets. Perhaps it's a question of expectation still. Dour realism has long been a Canadian mode, and trading in the old realism on the magic new kind has not robbed it of all its dourness; in the 1970's it simply takes on a new form. The reflexive stances of so much writing of the time (a pattern continued into the 1980's, clearly) mean that the severity is often directed back into the novel form, back against the process of authorship, back against the *I*. Whether it is punitive, guilefully playful, or merely cautionary, the stance calls attention to itself; as the self-consciousness is often an act of deliberate self-deception, willed illusion against the pressures of insight, roles are in constant flux, both inside the

work and outside in connection with it. Hence at one remove from the actual writing, the author becomes critic and the critic becomes author. For such literature less shares its meaning than requires interpretation, requires the reader's involvement in the act of decoding its signs — perhaps for the pleasure of the puzzle's challenge, but perhaps to discover only that the signs are all that exist for an author, that behind the tower of verbal masks and marks that delineates life, there lies no meaning at all.

I am led to these dour reflections in part by trying to sort out the enthusiasms and disappointments of 1970's literature, and in part by my response to W. O. Mitchell's new novel (and best book since *Who Has Seen the Wind* in 1947), *How I Spent My Summer Holidays* (Macmillan), a tale of childhood and memory which the author has taken some years to write. It is set in 1924 and is an apparently straightforward narrative about the extraordinary summer of a 12-year-old boy named Hugh. But appearance lies. Hugh's happy home, his many friends, his smalltown prairie summer, his religious training, his adult guides: all are illusions, acts of make-believe which his society performs for him — which only memory can sort out, reinterpret, and reject. The book comes out of the stance of the 1970's, that is; not merely is innocence lost, but so is possibility, because a generation of adults promises what it does not provide, acts by rules it ostensibly rejects, suppresses information that would enlighten its children, and thereby warps lives that can never quite be young.

There is much that is funny and satiric in the book — the elaborateness of boys' schemes of adventure and the hypocrisy of religion are the chief wellsprings and targets of Mitchell's laughter — but there is little that is gentle. This is not *Who Has Seen the Wind* a few years later. Behind the upright masks of the townspeople there exists a harder cast of truth, one which Mitchell's plays of the 1970's — *Back to Beulah*, for example — come closer to showing than does *Who Has Seen the Wind* or *The Kite*. Here the rural is not bucolic. In the town's insane asylum, the inmates rage or wander blindly, unattended except by other madmen; liquor sales and prostitution prosper, among the Solid Citizens as well as among the rest; the wife of the town's chief authority figure makes lesbian advances, both welcome and unwelcome, to other characters; and all manner of violence thrives. Though he telegraphs his plot too clearly for the events that follow to be a surprise, Mitchell brings all of these strains together — madness, which 12-year-old Hugh sees as a child's game, until it moves too close to him; alcohol, which he sees as an adult adventure; and sexuality, which is even more a mystery in himself than it is in the world he sees around him — in a climactic scene of murder, revenge, and wrongful blame. The child's game stops, for it has never in fact been a game; his world closes; and the theatre of cruelty in which he has played his part keeps on, leading to further madness and more suppression, all beyond his control.

There are a lot of conventions in the book — secret caves, shallow graves, stereotypical characters and confrontations among them — but Mitchell asks us to see past them all, to see the way they always persist to disguise the truth in life. Even the title is an invitation to this end. "How I Spent My Summer Holidays" — that wretched essay topic of everyone's first day back to school — is a secret subject for Hugh, one he is not allowed to talk about during the fact, and not allowed to admit after; because of his violent summer, all his youth is wasted, spent. And most of his life after, too. For subsequent events do not modify his society. The innocent madmen are killed or left in a state of paralysis; the parents die; the friends, who were never truly friends, turn into their parents, with the same sleazy hypocrisies; war and sex become bitter games of power and role-playing; and Hugh goes away. But the novel is cast as a frame story, inviting readers to notice the form as well as the tale, to read the past methodically, to enter with Hugh into a dialogue with memory, seeking a sanctuary he only thought he once had, a love he can only hope to believe in still. There is no order to be gleaned from history, he finds, no comfort in accurate memory, no salvation in recognition; perhaps all Hugh can salvage from experience is enough understanding to feed the will to hope. That's small, as signs of renewal go. But perhaps it's a message with a little meaning for writers in decades to come.

W.H.N.

NOTICE

While I was writing this editorial, "retrenchment" caught up with *Canadian Literature*. Paper and publishing costs have risen — the inflation in paper prices far outstripping the national average. In April 1982, postage costs for journals take a massive leap. In July 1982, the University of B.C., which has helped support *Canadian Literature* since 1959, is forced to reduce its grant significantly. All of which means that as of June 1982, single copies of *Canadian Literature* will cost $7.50. In January 1983, annual subscription rates will rise. An individual subscription will cost $20.00 a year, an institutional subscription $25.00 a year, plus $5.00 postage outside Canada.

BIRDS

Michael Brian Oliver

Growing up
Beside the sea,
I first watched gulls.
There is something
Feminine
About gulls,
With their swift curves
And their sad cries,
Something beautiful,
And I missed them
When I first left home,
And long afterwards too,
Whenever I lived inland.

Lately
I have taken to watching crows.
Crows
Are philosophers
And cannot be conned.
The raven Noah sent out
Has still not returned.
I sit at my writing desk
And — often —
Instead of writing
I watch the crows
Who, in turn, watch the beach
For whatever death
And sustenance
The tide brings in.

And 34 is not so old.
I know several poets,
Several lovers
Who would kill to be 34 again.
But the age of the heart
Cannot be known,
And on this happy birthday
Mine is stranded.
If it were to be burned,

Like Shelley's,
Several witches would appear
And hover above the blaze
Like gulls.

The day before yesterday
In this fishing village
In a March snow squall
An eagle appeared
With a gull in its talons
And landed on the beach
Where it ravaged the pretty one for breakfast
In a matter of minutes.
And while the feast
Was going on,
Another — solitary — gull
Flew by to see
What had happened to her sister.
She cried, of course,
Then faded away
Into the storm,
Being flighty
But knowing an eagle when she saw one.

Afterwards
I walked down to the beach
To scan the eagle's work.
Had it really been here?
Yes
— Ripped up the middle,
Legs delicately askew,
Wings intact but useless,
The gull was gone,
And snow
Was already covering up
Her red nakedness
Like a sheet.
In the meantime,
Slightly cautious,
The crows were watching me,
Knowing I would leave
As soon
As my curiosity was satisfied.

YELLOW WARBLERS

Glen Sorestad

This summer our backyard has been
enlivened by a pair of yellow warblers whose
pale lemon presence is a first here. They
dart like yellow flashes from tree branch
to leafy shrub. The jaunty male sings
his one-note territorial *chip-chip* as he
moves around from poplar to silver maple to alder.
Clearly they had a nest somewhere near
and my limited knowledge of warblers led me
to suspect our five-foot cotoneaster hedge.
Yesterday I received unwanted confirmation.

I had the clippers out to trim the hedge.
Oblivious, I moved along, shearing and trimming
seeking to impose order on this green world —
an unconscious hang-over from Edwardian England.
I leaned across the hedge, just past mid-way
to lop back some disorder, rule raggedness even
deaf to the uptempo excitement of warbler cry
that should have alerted me to this impending trespass
and then disaster fell. Something in my movement
and my callous pruning dislodged the home in the hedge
and out fell a drab puff of fledgling warbler
a frightened fluff of down that dropped at my feet
and uttered the bird equivalent of a child's wail.
The parents fluttered in agitation around me
the frenzied male berating me non-stop.

I was appalled. Like that Scottish plowman
two and a half centuries before me, remorse seized
me by the throat at this gross despoiling.
In the instant I wanted to set things right, yet
knowing that such matters are often difficult, whether
in the realms of birds or men, I knew I must try.
I bent to pick the youngster up from the ground.

But the little one was now seized with panic
and flapped and hopped across the garden, its confusion
of cries an occasion for more alarm if possible
from the frantic parents. In ungainly pursuit
I nabbed it in a row of onions, cupped it
in my palm while it chittered its fright
to all the world, and I stood there
like a grade eight bully accused of harassing
the little girls in kindergarten. The parents
were telling me and the neighbourhood what they thought.

I took the trembling fledgeling back to the hedge
and deposited it with care back in its sanctuary
then took my clippers and left the hedge unfinished.
I sat down at the patio table with my chagrin
feeling somehow like someone who has been exposed
in public for some heinous act. I wondered
whether the parents would desert the violated nest
whether I'd condemned the young one to starvation
or to the neighbour's ever-prowling black feline.
The parents worried around the hedge while I sat.

But this morning as I sit at the same outdoor table
with my coffee and my notebook, the male warbler
flies over to perch above me in the poplar tree
and greets me with a thorough scolding. It has
somehow a definite familiar tone, and I accept it
like a roustabout husband because I have the feeling
that I am being forgiven, though the lecture must be
given nonetheless, as a matter of propriety.
The female is busy in and out the hedge
and this backyard world is for the moment at least
back to where it was before I took the clippers out.
The untrimmed remnant of hedge may be an affront
to those who put stock in such things
but to hell with them, I say. To hell with them.

Saskatoon, July 1981

"MIDDLEWATCH" AS MAGIC REALISM

Keith Maillard

I READ SUSAN KERSLAKE'S first novel, *Middlewatch*,[1] in the spring of 1977. I found it a book not without minor flaws. Kerslake's fragile style, depending for effect upon juxtaposition of intense lyricism with a simple, folkloric narrative line, was a difficult one to control, and she faltered occasionally. But, after finishing the book, I was ready to forgive her anything. Wisps of *Middlewatch* persisted at the back of my mind for years — the magical shimmer of the writing, the resonance, the sheer importance of what was being said in such a quiet way. For me Kerslake had "that voice," as Michael Ondaatje wrote of Márquez, "whose greatest power is that we trust it."[2]

Shortly after I read *Middlewatch*, I discovered that I had been labelled, for the second time, a "magic realist." My publisher, Dave Godfrey, had done it first in the dust jacket blurb of *Two Strand River*; he had meant it as more than merely a catch phrase to help sell books. My work, he told me, reminded him of the painting of Alex Colville and Ken Danby: the meticulous detailing so realistic it reverses into dream. But then Geoff Hancock, in the *Canadian Fiction Magazine*, was claiming the existence of a full-blown literary genre called "magic realism" with Canadian practitioners who included Robert Kroetsch, Jack Hodgins, and myself. He assigned us precursors in the South American writers — Borges, Cortazar, Llosa, Asturias, and Márquez — and attempted a definition:

> Magic realism is not surrealism or fantasy writing. Surrealist writers . . . use a linear association of ideas which often dispenses with logic and the laws of the physical world. Fantasy writers, by comparison, are often dependent upon the supernatural and the absurd, and very commonly place their stories on Mars or Jupiter. Magic realists place their extraordinary feats and mysterious characters in an ordinary place, and the magic occurs from the sparks generated between the possibilities of language and the limitations of physical nature.[3]

Although pleased to find myself placed in such august company, I was irritated at Hancock's article for raising more questions than it answered; that summer I badly needed answers. I was working on my fifth novel, *Motet*, and having a hard time of it; I felt that in writing this book I needed to *know*, in every sense of the word, what I was doing, and I was driven into the analysis of other people's fiction — and later into literary criticism — as a way of maintaining my

own ability to write. By the time I finished *Motet* two years later, I had also evolved my own definition of magic realism which was both broader than Hancock's and more precise. Most useful was Robert Scholes' notion of "fabulation" which, he said, "means a return to a more verbal kind of fiction. It also means a return to a more fictional kind. By this I mean a less realistic and more artistic kind of narrative: more shapely, more evocative; more concerned with ideas and ideals, less concerned with things."[4] From his analysis of the work of Durrell, Vonnegut, Southern, Hawkes, Murdoch, and Barth, the outline of what he meant by fabulation gradually emerged, something not far off the old "art for art's sake" — fiction as the playing of games with structure. What Hancock said of magic realism could apply equally to fabulation: "Language and formal structure are now part of a story, as important as plot and character. When language and structures are used as an end in themselves, new dimensions are open for the writer of fiction." Could magic realism then be simply a style of fabulation? I didn't believe it; I felt, at the heart of the work, a difference in kind from *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *Giles Goat-Boy.*

It appeared to me essential to distinguish varieties of post-realist fiction, not as an exercise in literary pedantry, but as a way of deepening my understanding of particular works and the connections between them. Scholes discussed the difficulties readers and reviewers were having with the books he called fabulations. "Much of the trouble comes from inadequate understanding of this new literary mode," he wrote.

> The trouble is aggravated by the absence of terminology in which to discuss it. Evaluation and appreciation depend helplessly on recognition of kind, and recognition requires appropriate linguistic categories. As long as we expect a nectarine to taste like either a peach or a plum we are bound to be disappointed. But once we assimilate this new category — nectarine — we begin to know what we are dealing with and how to react to it. We can judge and appreciate.[4]

Here, then, is my attempt to define a new category, that nectarine called magic realism. Throughout the long development of the novel as a form, writers have worked out a set of narrative conventions designed to create the illusion that the story on the page is "real" or "true" and corresponds in some direct and substantial way to the ordinary world of day-to-day life. Any working novelist knows just how arbitrary and artificial these conventions are, but they have been so long and deeply established that they are accepted easily by readers as "realistic." Writing that does nothing more than work inside these conventions is, simply, realism, as in most of the work, for example, of Margaret Laurence or John Updike. Fantasy writing accepts these conventions but shifts the location, not merely (as Hancock says) to Mars or Jupiter, but to Middle Earth or Narnia, and attempts to create what Tolkien calls "a secondary reality": that is, a world different from the ordinary one we see around us but which, nonetheless,

must be perceived as "real." Surrealism, not the specific movement associated with André Breton, but, as Susan Sontag says, "a mode of sensibility which cuts across all the arts in the 20th century," attacks realistic conventions at the root, not merely, as Hancock says, by "a linear association of ideas," but more usually by what Sontag calls radical juxtaposition — the collage principle. "The Surrealist sensibility," she says, "aims to shock,"[5] as in the work, say, of William Burroughs.

Three characteristics appear to me necessary for magic realism. The first is the acceptance of most or all of the realistic conventions of fiction. The second is the introduction of a "something else" which is not realistic — the "magic" of the genre — which may be at the level of plot (the magic carpets and ascensions to heaven of Márquez, the Doppelgängers and resurrections of Hodgins) or at the level of the narrative itself (O'Hagan's direct introduction of myth into the text, Harlow's bomb-like author intrusion in *Scann*, Márquez's complex structure that destroys itself on the last page). The magic element is not juxtaposed with the realistic for shock value, as in surrealism, but woven in seamlessly. The third characteristic is that the impulse for the writing of magic realism arises out of the desire to transcend the form of the realistic novel not *as form* but as expression. This statement obviously requires clarification.

Fabulation, as I understand it, arises from a delight in play with all the accumulated baggage of literature itself, Hancock's "language and structures used as an end in themselves" — Barth's elaborate allegory, Nabokov's self-referring index. The spirit of fabulation is something like this: Nothing important can be said, so why not have fun? The spirit of magic realism, in contrast, is: Something tremendously important *must be* said, something that doesn't fit easily into traditional structures, so how can I find a way to say it? Eli Mandel's comments on the "Child figure" in regional literature are useful here: "the child's vision . . . is of home; and that surely is the essence of what we mean by region, the overpowering feeling of nostalgia associated with the place we know as the *first* place, the *first* vision of things, the *first* clarity of things. Not realism, then, but rather what in painting is called magic realism. . . ."[6] This nostalgia for a lost Eden is nearly identical to "a suffering native to human beings," that Ruth Nichols writes about: "the conviction that we *belong somewhere else*: homesickness."[7] And, as the attempt to say the inexpressible about childhood generates (Mandel tells us) "magical clarity, mistaken for accuracy," so Nichols' homesickness generates a style of fantasy which she has the singular courage to claim is more "realistic" than realism because it is more true to the way things are. I would argue that the impulse for magic realist writing stems from the need to convey a living experience, that the interweaving of realistic convention with magical elements is not done for its own sake but to produce that symptomatic eerie shimmer which must be seen as an attempt to express what is nearly inexpressible.

MIDDLEWATCH now appears to me to be a work of magic realism. That this genre is not yet fully understood would account for much of the difficulty reviewers had with the book. The surface narrative is relatively simple. Eleven chapters alternate between a present time and a past time sequence. In the present time sequence, Morgan, the school teacher in a remote village by the sea, finds a young girl, Sibbi, abandoned in her brother's cabin. Her hair has been cut off; she's been beaten and left tied to the bed. The experience has left her mute and crazy. Morgan takes her home with him and tries to heal her. The past time sequence follows Sibbi from birth to the point she's found by Morgan. After giving birth to her, Sibbi's mother dies. When Sibbi is five, her older brother, Jason, takes her away from her foster parents and leads her out into the wilderness. Jason builds a cabin and carves out an existence as a sheep farmer. He regards Sibbi as a tool to help him in his rigorous pioneer life and disapproves of her desire to go to school. Jason is hurt in an accident and brought back to his cabin by gypsies who live in the hills. Sibbi later goes back to the caravan with a gypsy boy and makes love with him. Jason finds out about it, goes mad, and destroys everything. It is not until the end of the past time sequence that we understand the full implication of the opening chapter: Jason left Sibbi tied to the bed to die.

In the twenty-three reviews of *Middlewatch* I read, an inordinate amount of ink is wasted in speculations on the time and location of the story. The only details that indicate a modern time are the presence of electric lights, trains, and buses; we are told nothing of life in the cities far from the village. Kerslake's setting corresponds to the Maritimes in much the way Sheila Watson's *Double Hook* country corresponds to the Cariboo in British Columbia and for similar reasons: no effort is made to establish an exact locale or time because such specificity would limit the possibilities of mythic resonance. Kerslake does, however, go to great pains to build us a real world, describing the school and the objects in Morgan's teacherage, pointing out such mundane details as Sibbi's chapped lips; she observes all the standard narrative devices of realism, so much so that, given the romantic clichés — a lonely man in a remote village, a hurt young girl, gypsies in the hills, the sea, a storm — a superficial reader could easily label the book a gothic or romance (as, indeed, many of her reviewers did). Beneath the surface narrative, however, are additional levels which Kerslake has taken some pains to conceal — or at least to render as unobtrusive as possible. The tension between the realistic surface narrative and the deeper levels creates the shimmering, multi-dimensional effect symptomatic of magic realism.

Most of the reviewers did, to their credit, notice that "something else" was going on in *Middlewatch*, but few of them had much of an idea what that something else might be beyond noting that it was "mythic." Ironically, both the

highest praise and most vigorous condemnation of the book came from writers who never saw beneath the surface. Much of the difficulty the reviewers had with *Middlewatch* arises from Kerslake's elliptical presentation so necessary for her magic realist effect. She does, however, supply plenty of sign posts pointing in toward the first level beneath the surface narrative, that of archetypes from myth and folklore. Sibbi is a sibyl; indeed Sibyl is her given name. Jason with his sheep is seeking the golden fleece of crude capital accumulation. Morgan, as a young man on a quest, has "come to the ends of the earth"; his name in Welsh means "a dweller by the sea."

"When Sibbi was born under a bush, her mother died in the effort," Kerslake begins the story of Sibbi's origins, and continues in the same matter-of-fact tone, telling us how the children leave their foster parents to go off into the wilderness together. The tone is that of a folk tale. Compare one of Grimm's tales:

> Brother took his little sister by the hand and said, "Since our mother died we have not had one happy hour.... Come, we will go out into the wide world together." All day they walked over meadows, fields, and stony paths. . . .[8]

The motif of a brother-sister pair wandering alone in the wild is an ancient one and occurs in many folk tales. As soon as Kerslake has established the reference, she gradually shifts the tone away from folk narrative into that of realistic convention until we are being given again the careful detailing of day-to-day life which recreates the illusion that we are reading a realistic novel.

An example of Kerslake's elliptical presentation is found in the opening pages of the book. "The crimson geranium," she begins. "Fretted edges casting shadow pools on the softer colour of petals beneath. Dew-fed in the window-box." Ildikó de Papp Carrington objects: "This doesn't seem to have any discernible narrative function. It is an image described for its own sake, as in imagist poetry."[9] In the face of such wrong-headed criticism, I hope I can be forgiven for attempting an elucidation. The crimson geranium is *not* an image like something William Carlos Williams would use; it is a symbolist device and, as such is not by now exactly a novelty. It does require close attention. Sibbi is tied to the bed; the geranium is what she is seeing. Morgan calls her name, and she shuts her eyes. "The name is. The crimson asserts itself under her eyelids . . . as if someone were calling her name, gently, and it turned into colour." Now Sibbi *is* the geranium (just as she is associated with growing plants throughout the book). Then the colour, which is her name, her self, turns to the colour of blood: "She is fleeing the ravages of blood, her blood." Sibbi is the blood sacrifice (like Jason's lambs) who must be slaughtered to be reborn. At the end of the book she returns to Jason's cabin and finds the geranium dead: "She took the dirt and dry roots and crumbled them in her hands. To dust." Only by the full recognition of the death of her old self can she begin to live again.

Nearly all of the crucial turning points of the book are as carefully hidden; indeed the references to "hide and seek" and "lost and found" recur throughout, as when Sibbi and Morgan first meet and he tells her, "It's okay to come here, I came too, just now, and found you." To which Sibbi replies simply: "Found." Eventually, as I followed out thematic connections, I began to feel as though the author herself were playing hide and seek with the reader and to hear at the back of my mind (although it is never mentioned) that grand old chestnut hymn: "For I was lost, but now am found, was blind, but now I see."

Sibbi's name, Sibyl, is given to her by "a cold white woman." When, as a small child, she begins to tan, her brother wants "her winter-white skin, pale, elusive, able to evoke spirits." She sees Morgan "in the grey-white second-hand light of the moon." She seeks "the moon . . . cold and blue." Wounded by his axe, Jason sees Sibbi "pale, as if she belonged back in night." Morgan sees her as "a pale skimpy girl" with "sunless skin." In all cases, Kerslake's emblematic labelling of her characters is as insistent. Sibbi, then, is the moon, associated with women's mysteries and blood. Her mother dies bearing her, in a flow of blood; Sibbi, too, will die and be reborn like the moon. Jason is the sun, associated with gold and with predatory birds — hawks and eagles. Morgan, the nutritive teacher, is associated with water (the sea) and growing things; like Sibbi, he is rooted to the earth. The gypsy boy, as Chaviva Hosek points out, "stands for uncomplicated sexuality. . . . The girl's movement from one male figure to another shows the transformation of the child to an adult and symbolizes the process of coming to wholeness."[10]

ONCE WE'VE BEEN ALERTED to the mythic level, we can begin to understand how, in the interplay between characters as people in a realistic novel and characters as archetypes, Kerslake's magic realist style works. Jason, as David Helwig points out, "is a Canadian archetype . . . and he can attain the discipline he needs to dominate the world only by destroying things in himself."[11] (He is also an archetype older than Canadian, echoing Osiris who would domesticate wild nature and take his sister to wife.) He regards Sibbi as a chattel, a domestic servant to aid him in carving out property from the land; in the first image we're given of him, he is standing in the doorway to the cabin, blocking, with his outstretched arm, Sibbi's way out to the world. As long as she remains confined, tied — the tied image recurs: Sibbi is tied to the bed; Morgan ties her to him when they enter the storm; Jason not only ties Sibbi, he's tied to her — she has no existence; as moon, she shines by reflected light. Like O'Hagan's Tay John at his birth, she doesn't even cast a shadow. Tay John is given a shadow to make him human; similarly, Sibbi, after her sexual

encounter with the gypsy boy, is forced uncomfortably into the human world: "They" (the other school children) "could see her shadow, a betrayal." To Morgan, Sibbi first appears as an elusive wild girl, cousin to Rima in *Green Mansions*. (In this context it is interesting that O'Hagan, perhaps Canada's first magic realist, mentions W. H. Hudson as one of the influences on his work.[12]) After she "dies" in the explosion of Jason's inner fire, Sibbi is reborn as the mute Sibyl, and, as Hosek writes, her "silence is a constant temptation to the reader and to Morgan. It teases us into reading her through our own wishes," which is as good a definition as any of Jung's "Anima." She is also Morgan's muse, his child, and his potential lover. The sexual attraction between Morgan and Sibbi is given in typically elliptical fashion. After her sexual initiation with the gypsy boy, "She considered the teacher who was also a man, now that she knew something concerning men."

By now we have enough information to make clear sense of an elusive but crucial passage near the opening of the book. Morgan has just rescued Sibbi. The black horse mentioned belongs to the gypsy boy.

> He [Morgan] saw her in the snow that winter, in a gypsy shawl of warm wool. He saw her riding a horse, black as pitch in the white hills, but Jason still came down with the old dun pony. When she wandered into school in the rising of the year, he saw in the set of her lips a different kind of knowledge and she seemed to sit more surely in her seat. As if her centre of gravity had shifted; as if her pit was no longer where her quick heart beat, but had sunk to her womb. Her body flowed now, was no longer driven about like the weeds.
>
> Morgan held that body now. It was as if something had to kill her before she could be either captured or saved. He had found her, but only after she had been trapped and tied.

Morgan takes on the project of curing Sibbi both out of hubris — his sense of self as a teacher — and out of his own loneliness which, initially, he can't admit to himself. He returns from the busyness of the village with his head full of plans:

> His instinct was to force her, to shake that covering off, to squeeze some sound out of her. She had cried once; she had touched him once, she could do it again. . . . As he walked home . . ., the wind matched his own energy. . . . The fascination of order, pattern and symmetry. His perseverance, his will to endure fire and survive.

But when he tries to force her back to the world, she smashes the window with her elbows; later he finds her beating her thighs with her fists. Despite his good intentions, he is getting nowhere. And, as Hosek notes, the narrative style matches the story: "The lyricism, the lingering over detail for its own sake, is like Sibyl's holding back in order to be healed in her own time." Morgan's next attempt to break through has an air of desperation about it. A hurricane is approaching;

he feels "the peculiar tension and pressure of calm," and says to the girl: "This is what it's like in your head, isn't it, Sibbi, this deadly grey, the weight of silence . . .?" He ropes Sibbi to him and takes her out to watch the storm come in; it is an act of sympathetic magic. They're nearly blown away but manage to crawl back to the house. Morgan realizes that he's overreached himself; his reflection is one of the few moments of humour in the book: "Morgan was momentarily glad she was still mute; she wouldn't tell tales of his foolishness." And he has learned "a secret" from the storm. For the first time he reaches out to Sibbi, not to help her, but needing her help:

> "Oh, Sibbi, Sibbi," he said sadly.
> "What?"
> "Sibbi?"
> "What is it? What's the matter?" Her voice held real concern. . . .

It's the first time she's spoken since he found her, and, as soon as she does so, she's swept away by a seizure. "Her voice," just as one would expect the sibyl's to be, "had been deeper than he had imagined. It wasn't a child's voice; . . . It was unnerving, the way she spoke; so organized."

Chapter 9 is the emotional heart of the book and contains the most dense, elliptical, compact, and difficult imagery, but also passages of Kerslake's most beautiful writing:

> The uneasy months when the sickly and old were watched closely. . . . The months when the latitudes were surely northern, when the sun appeared now and again, far away, like the pale flag of a foreign country on the horizon. . . .

As Hosek notes: "The watch between midnight and four in the morning is called 'middlewatch'; the novel exploits the suggestion of watchfulness, waking and waiting for light implicit in the title." It is: "The lean lull at the edge of the new year. The time of the year when the Norsemen had rolled the wheel of fire, twined with straw, from hilltop to the winter sea," and, in this frozen darkness, Morgan sinks to his psychic nadir; all he can do is wait and watch. "What happens when one lives so close to the sea . . .?" he wonders — so close to the dark waters of the psyche — "right there, at the edge, you're lulled, stunned." He can't connect with the people in the village; even in the "warm, brown, rowdy" tavern, he's a lone watcher. After learning the secret from the storm, he now knows what he fears most: that, when he reaches down inside himself "there could be emptiness beneath the cold smooth stone." He sleeps and dreams that he hears a voice: "Don't please don't, no, no, please don't, no, no, no, please. . . ." The voice is Sibbi's, re-enacting the terrible moment of Jason's attack on her, but Morgan claims the voice as his own: "And his despair, to which . . . he felt a right. He wasn't one of those who are betrayed from outside. If he was to be destroyed, it would be from within." Sibbi gets up. Morgan sees her "sun-

less skin" and "the two points of her breasts." Here is Morgan's temptation, and, like Saint Anthony's, it comes accompanied by demons. Sibbi, connected to the underground world, is directly aware of them: "They were trying to follow and find Morgan." But his perception is more distanced: "There were voices, or perhaps it was the last whispering of the fire."

> Where had she gone; why couldn't he follow? He was lonely and afraid.
> He took her straw-blond head in his hands, caressed her cheeks with his thumbs. Each time it began as if he were touching a stranger and the stranger in himself.

Morgan's spiritual task is enormous. To save Sibbi, he can no longer keep himself distanced and safe; he must find a way to experience her directly, as in his dream. But he can ask for nothing in return, and he can't allow himself to be dragged down into emptiness with her. "Turning her round, she lay in his arms," Kerslake writes, and, in fracturing the grammar of the sentence, merges the characters as nurse and patient merge in Bergman's *Persona.* And throughout this dark night of the soul, Morgan "held more tightly to the only living thing in his world."

As the present time narrative has been unfolding, so has the past. Morgan resists the temptation of hubris, but Jason does not. He sees the natural world only as something to be exploited. His sister is a tool for him to use quite as much as his sheep dog or pony: "That she should want anything, be separate in any way, was as foreign to him now as it ever had been." His struggle is turning him to ice: "For Jason the shape of everything had become deadly serious. Sibbi watched his hands holding a knife-blade against the grinding stone.... Bears stood in his eyes...." But, as we all know by now, those whom the gods would destroy, they first make mad. Jason accidentally strikes himself on the forehead with his axe ("labrys," the two-headed axe, may be the root of "labyrinth"). While Jason is recovering, confined to the cabin, Sibbi is freed to form her liaison with the gypsy boy and grow into sexual knowledge. She is separating herself from Jason; he can regard such separation only as a betrayal.

> One night in midsummer when all the forces of the earth and sky were pulling against each other, Jason broke apart. The hawk slanted out of the sky and struck its talons through his head and heart. There was no escape; he was almost relieved. He would fight but he would lose. The hawk would carry him off. But he fought, he fought by destroying everything he would have to leave behind.

BUT WE ARE NOT FINISHED. The heart of *Middlewatch* cannot be reached without an exploration of what might be called Kerslake's mediaevalism. Hosek points out that the novel appears to demand treatment as an allegory, that it is possible to read it "in very schematic terms," but her statement

that "It is not clear what point Kerslake is trying to make by putting all these figures at the fringe of the community," is symptomatic of her unwillingness to attempt such a reading. "Story-tellers," Michael Ondaatje says, writing of O'Hagan's *Tay John*, "are separate from the source of power. . . . In the superb scene in which Tay John fights the bear, Jack Denham, who witnesses it, is separated by a raging river he cannot cross but which is only two yards wide. He is unable to cross over into the arena of pure myth."[13] Similarly, Jason and Sibbi must be separated from the mundane, civilized order of the village; they are described as living "on the horizon, in a bank of fog" — that is, at the very edge of consciousness where myth repeats itself forever. Morgan, who is drawn both outward into the mythic story and inward to the life of the village, is a bridge across which myth may pass safely back into ordinary life. In this role, he is a priest who must transfer the numina without being destroyed by it. And the myth retelling itself behind the veil of fog is Kerslake's version of Eden.

The Edenic motif is established early in the book when Morgan remembers Sibbi coming in "a golden Indian summer's day before school was open," that is, in the golden dawn of time before the creation. She writes in a scribbler: "Jason. Dog. Sheep. Tree. Hill," and creates the world, then, "Sibbi. I am Sibbi. Sibbi. Sibbi," and defines herself in the created world. Later the Edenic motif is made fully explicit in the Hopkins poem Morgan reads to Sibbi:

> What is all this juice and joy?
> A strain of the earth's sweet being in the beginning
> In Eden garden. Have, get, before it cloy,
> Before it cloud, Christ, lord, and sour with sinning. . . .

To read Kerslake's Eden myth, we must see a third level beneath those of realism and symbolism, that of allegory. If here I appear driven to an exegesis that is nearly Kabbalistic, I can only argue that it is clearly demanded by the text: allegory is didactic, religious. To understand it, we must treat the characters as personifications.

In Kerslake's version, the fall occurs with the death of Jason's mother, The Great Mother who bears Sibbi on the earth and dies in a wash of blood. From the death of The Great Mother, consciousness arises and the division into male and female, the sun and the moon. Sibbi is the female principle in its tender and undeveloped form, Jason the male principle in its acquisitive, questing form. Separated from the primal union with The Great Mother, The Male Principle strikes out against the natural world (*natura*), which is the body of the Mother, and enslaves The Female Principle (the shift from the goddess religions to patriarchy at the basis of Western civilization). Separated from each other, the Male cannot love, the Female cannot act (shine with her own light). When the Female meets Innocent Delight (the gypsy boy) and learns knowledge, the dominant position of the Male is threatened and he is driven mad. The acquisitive, con-

trolling force in him is turned back on itself, and he must destroy the world because he cannot love it. The Male kills the Female, and when she is reborn again, she is mute and helpless. The only way out of this dead-end is for the Male Principle to appear in another form, as Morgan, the Nutritive Male. He must give up the attempt to conquer or dominate the Female, allow her to grow in her own time; he must be able to stare into the storm (Untamed Nature), risk being destroyed by it, without attempting to own it or use it. He must continue with infinite patience, expecting nothing; in short, he must become a saint — which, in this context, can be read as "feminine." Then the Female can be reborn as a whole person with the possibility that the Male and Female can be reunited and the world redeemed.

As Borges claimed, "the solution to the mystery is always inferior to the mystery."[14] But the book still stands intact. Of all the symbols in *Middlewatch*, only one, the storm, cannot be transformed into anything else. After the storm, Morgan "shared a secret with the earth that he wasn't sure he wanted. He didn't know what to do with this new experience. Almost everything he had learned before had a purpose, practical or intellectual. Here was an immaculate knowledge, an awe that had involved bone, blood and brain. Yet when he consciously called upon his brain, the knowing evaporated into the translucent sky. . . ." And, as Gershom Scholem, writing of the Kabbalists, tells us:

> The thing which becomes a symbol retains its original form and its original content. It does not become, so to speak, an empty shell into which another content is poured; in itself, through its own existence, it makes another reality transparent which cannot appear in any other form. If allegory can be defined as the representation of an expressible something by another expressible something, the mystical symbol is an expressible representation of something which lies beyond the sphere of expression and communication, something which comes from a sphere whose face is, as it were, turned inward and away from us.[15]

Sibbi walks out into the psychic waters of the sea. Morgan follows. "She mustn't drown," he thinks. She's crying. She reaches out to him. He touches her, but she pulls away. Then she takes his hand. "When you're ready," he tells her. But "perhaps he'd been too sure she was looking at him." *Middlewatch* has eleven chapters. In a book so carefully linked to the seasons of the year, we would expect twelve. We put the book away on the shelf but continue to read it. Will the sibyl speak? In the silence left behind is Kerslake's twelfth chapter. Such resonance is the way, at best, that magic realism works.

NOTES

[1] (Ottawa: Oberon, 1976.)

[2] Michael Ondaatje, "Gacía Márquez and the Bus to Aracataca," *Figures in a Ground*, ed. Diane Bessai and David Jackel (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1978), p. 25.

[3] Geoffrey Hancock, "Magic Realism, or, the Future of Fiction," *Canadian Fiction Magazine*, No. 24/25 (Spring/Summer 1977), pp. 4-6.

[4] Robert Scholes, *The Fabulators* (New York: Oxford, 1967), p. 12.

[5] Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation* (New York: Dell, 1969), p. 271.

[6] Eli Mandel, *Another Time* (Erin, Ont.: Press Porcépic, 1977), p. 50.

[7] Ruth Nichols, "Fantasy and Escapism" (*Canadian Children's Literature*, No. 4, 1976), p. 26 and passim.

[8] *The Juniper Tree and Other Tales from Grimm, Vol. 1* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1973), p. 42.

[9] Ildikó de Papp Carrington, "Amor Vincit Omnia," *Essays on Canadian Writing*, No. 6 (Spring 1977), pp. 134-36.

[10] Chaviva Hosek, "Middlewatch," *Fiddlehead* (Summer 1977), pp. 134-36.

[11] "First Impressions," *Books in Canada* (November 1976), p. 38.

[12] Howard O'Hagan mentioned the influence of W. H. Hudson on his work in my interview with him of July 17, 1979.

[13] Michael Ondaatje, "O'Hagan's Rough-Edged Chronicle," *Canadian Literature*, No. 61 (Summer 1974), p. 28.

[14] Quoted in Luis Harss and Barbara Dohmann, *Into the Mainstream* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), p. 121.

[15] *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken, 1961), p. 27.

GRANDMOTHER'S DEATH ROOM

Christopher Wiseman

High summer with its sun and voices
and you withering quickly now,
dissolving in the great tree's shadow,
in the moving shadow of that chestnut
roaring its leaves outside your window.

Never friends, we were forced together
at the end and you had no choice
but to let me care for you.
It was the closest we had ever been
in that room cooled by the tree and the years.

I thought you would admit at last
that you needed me, speak words of gratitude,
confess a long misjudgment.
But I was wrong, should have known you better.
Your body failed before your pride.

The dead don't care.
We're left alone to salvage what we can.
Your death was a convergence
and we met, once, briefly,
and that is all.

OCTOBER ELEGY

(Judith Sloman 1940-1980)

Christopher Wiseman

The sharpness of it.
The sharpness in this warm autumn,

leaves cracking and falling,
the sky mild and enormous.

The sudden sharpness
lays it open like a razor,

like a blade cutting leaves,
shredding the sky,

mocking the ordinary.
We are wide open.

And winter waits for us,
to cover the ground, smother the sky,

bury the consoling gold.
What we will be tests us now.

Leaves swirl. Wind rises.
There is falling all around us

and we feel it in the bone.
Indifferent, the weather moves,

changing its directions.
The worst is here and we are not ready.

We are sliced beyond hope,
pared into small portions of cold.

THE ARTIST AS PICARO

The Revelation of Margaret Atwood's "Lady Oracle"

Lucy M. Freibert

In writing her third novel, *Lady Oracle* (1976), Margaret Atwood earns for herself the title of seer which she applies to her book and to her protagonist. Casting her work in the picaresque mode, she turns on end the myths and fairy tales which have succoured and seduced women for ages. She satirizes the novels, magazines, films, and cultural patterns which have served them as escapes as well as traps, and in doing so, reveals the precarious and enigmatic fate of women in general and of the woman artist in particular. Dealing primarily with those aspects of the culture which affect women most, Atwood shows that, given this chaotic world, its pervasive romantic conditioning, and its traditional sexual arrangements, it is almost inevitable that a creative woman turn into a picaro in order to survive. Atwood's deftness in conveying her vision of the perplexity of woman's existence lies in the thoroughness and originality with which she exploits the conventions of the picaresque mode.

Since the picaresque novel emerged in sixteenth-century Spain, it has been adapted in diverse contexts. Representative works range from *Lazarillo de Tormes* (1554), *The Life of Buscon* (1626), *The Adventurous Simplissimus* (1668), and *Moll Flanders* (1722) to *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), *Invisible Man* (1952), and *The Confessions of Felix Krull: Confidence Man* (1954). The accretions of centuries make a clear definition difficult to formulate.[1] Although opinions differ, scholars do agree on some essentials. The story is told from the first-person point of view[2] by a protagonist usually of uncertain origins. Thrust into society early, and left totally dependent on the whims of Fortune, she or he is cast from one adventure to another, each of which allows freedom, in Guzman de Alfarache's terms, repeatedly "to beginne the world anew."[3] The resulting story is, therefore, episodic in form. The protagonist also passes from one master to another. In order to survive within the master-slave relationship, the character learns to live by her or his wits and gradually develops into a picaro, or rogue — a protean figure who repeatedly changes forms and disguises to suit the occasion.[4] The picaro consorts with rogues of all classes and from them learns the fine points of deception. Moving through various strata

of society, the picaro exposes a panoramic sweep of the culture. The chaotic world thus revealed burgeons with surprises and always threatens death. Despite the precariousness of the picaro's life, indeed because of it, the narrative is riotously comic.

Atwood obviously knows and utilizes not only these characteristics of the picaresque but also numerous variants evidenced in Spanish, German, British, and American works. She organizes *Lady Oracle* in an intricate five-part structure beginning and ending in Terremoto, Italy, with repeated shuttlings to and from Canada, England, and Italy. Atwood interrupts the linear progression with forecasts and flashbacks which pick up the threads of various relationships. Within this framework her protagonist Joan Delacourt Foster meets all the requisites of the picaro: Joan questions her parentage, sees herself as an outsider, becomes a rogue in the midst of rogues — several of whom she serves in master-slave relationships — externalizes her internal instability by assuming multiple roles, sometimes simultaneously, and tells her story so dramatically that the reader is vicariously drawn into her chaotic world. Atwood intersperses the episodic narrative with Joan's dreams, her fantasies, her automatic writing, and a parody of the gothic novel akin to Cervantes' parody of the romance in *Don Quixote*. In addition, she inserts a series of motifs which provide poetic cohesion to the structure and picaresque surprise to the narrative. Within this complex form, the protagonist-narrator appears as lonely, disoriented, and continually fearful of accidents, exposure, punishment, near madness, and even death.

Atwood alters the picaresque form slightly by adding a touch of the *Kuntslerroman*. Her protagonist gains insights through each experience, as does the protagonist of the *Kuntslerroman,* but realizes it only much later. Atwood also strays from the picaresque tradition by ending the narrative in the midst of an unfinished episode rather than in a period of stasis. Through these variations she suggests that while woman is coming to see the roots of her difficulties, her new role is still in the evolutionary process and the oracle's riddle is yet to be completely untangled.

ATWOOD'S MAJOR ACHIEVEMENT in the novel is the creation of her protagonist-narrator. To some extent, Joan is another version of the "divided self" which Atwood developed in Marian McAlpin of *The Edible Woman* (1969), the "I" of *Surfacing* (1972), and the personae of some of her poems.[5] Like her predecessors, Joan sees herself as a victim, an outsider, in a hostile world which threatens to engulf her; she also senses, as they do, that there is within her another, capable self struggling to be born. She works out her struggle in a series of episodes, trans-oceanic in scope and increasingly threatening to her psyche. Yet, in picaresque fashion, she lives to tell the tale.

Atwood portrays Joan as a counterpart of Moll Flanders, a disarmingly honest narrator of a patently dishonest life. Throughout the narration, Joan emphasizes her victimization by repeatedly referring to her failure and her fears, telling the story of her searing pain in an offhand manner that makes for great comedy and wins sympathy for even her wildest schemes.[6] Her absolute honesty in confessing her lies, tricks, and deceptions becomes, in itself, a confidence game which lulls the reader into a misguided trust in Joan's ability to interpret her experiences.

The sense of victimization which Joan endures throughout her life stems from three different but interlocking factors. Family, fortune, and fiction get her off to an uncertain start, and the instability which results is heightened by her imagination. Her parentage and home life are ambiguous. She realizes that she is "an accident," a child her mother does not want, and during her early years she experiences her father only as an "absence."[7] Joan rather suspects that her mother was pregnant before marriage and wonders about her mother's relationship with the young man in white flannels pictured in the family album. Home is a series of increasingly larger houses which correspond to her father's upward mobility. Plastic covers keep the furniture clean for visitors. Bedroom slippers protect the floors. In this changeable, artificial atmosphere, Joan feels isolated and lonely.

Joan's sense of rejection and loneliness is intensified by a second factor: it is her fortune to be fat. Joan realizes that her ballooning figure is a constant affront to her mother; yet she continues to eat voraciously to gain weight which will put an even greater distance between them. Joan's hunger, unlike that of Lazarillo de Tormes, is a hunger for love; eating, therefore, becomes for her a means of psychological survival.[8]

Although Joan sees her obesity as a formidable weapon against her mother, she perceives its two-edge nature. She also realizes that it will keep her from having the romantic life which the myths, fairy tales, novels, magazines, movies, and television promise to those who are pretty and proper. By her own admission Joan is "hooked on plots." Her fictional world includes the Cinderella story and Andersen's mermaid myth, her mother's historical novels and her father's detective fiction, nineteenth-century gothics, good and bad, and countless romantic movies which she sees with Aunt Lou, her father's sister.[9] Joan not only knows the romantic stories, she also understands their basic assumptions and implications. The great irony of her life is that one part of her wants to be beautiful and slim like her mother, wants the glass slipper to fit, wants the glamour of Joan Crawford, for whom her mother named her. The other part longs to achieve something significant. Seeing no possibility of attaining either goal, Joan turns trickster.

Atwood introduces Joan to roguery at an early age. When Joan's mother refuses to hold her daughter on her lap, Joan turns to Aunt Lou for love and

understanding. At intervals she attempts to please her mother, but these occasions always end in disaster. Gradually, Joan begins to associate her mother's image in the triple mirror of the dressing table with the three-headed monster in the museum. When her mother, humiliated by Joan's obesity, suggests to the ballet teacher that Joan can be changed from a butterfly into a mothball for the recital, Joan takes on the role with a vengeance. Having learned the dance to perfection, she is able to cause total confusion among the butterflies and win the "bravos" of the audience. The bittersweet success becomes a turning point in Joan's life. "Joan the exploiter" joins "Joan the victim," putting the world of romantic beauty on the defensive for ever after, even though it continues to maintain outposts in her head.

Power becomes Joan's substitute for the romance which other girls and women seem to have. Joan snoops among her mother's things, not out of curiosity — she already knows everything — but merely for the sense of danger which the ventures afford. She exploits her mother with a sinister glee, cheating her out of a life to manage. She watches as her mother compensates for this deprivation, first, through work, and later, by drinking. Joan plays her last tricks on her mother by beginning to lose weight and by leaving home, but not before she has pushed her mother to the point of physical violence.

Having given Joan this apprenticeship in roguery, Atwood turns her into a Protean picaro, who assumes many roles and guises, either successively or simultaneously, and who eventually becomes an expert escape artist. It is significant that throughout her life, Joan consciously chooses to have other lives and recognizes that she has had many. Even in her youth, she was "hoping for magic transformations." By the end of the novel, she admits that the real romance of her life has been that "between Houdini and his ropes and locked trunk; entering the embrace of bondage, slithering out again."

While shifting shape from fat to thin, Joan Delacourt becomes an international traveller and mistress of Paul, the "Polish Count." She adopts in secret the pseudonym of Louisa K. Delacourt and becomes the author of fifteen costume gothics, published by the Hermes Press, a company named for the god of thieves, tricksters, travellers, and artists, all of which she has become.[10] Joan becomes both Charlotte and Felicia, the heroine and the villainess, the beloved and the wife, in each of the novels of her gothic canon. Subsequently, she marries Arthur and becomes Joan Foster. She fabricates a past that bears little relation to her own and labels the picture of her fat self "Aunt Dierdre." Because she cannot endure any of the jobs which she has had or claims to have had, she continues to pose as a failure. Meanwhile, she adheres to her secret role as the successful author of the costume gothics. Eventually, she becomes famous as the author of *Lady Oracle*, a book of poetry written under the self-hypnosis of automatic writing. Recognizing that Arthur will never meet her expectations any more than she will

meet his, she takes a lover, the Royal Porcupine. When Fraser Buchanan discovers her secret life, she turns blackmailer in self-defence. Finally, to maintain her sanity, she feigns drowning. Like the true picaro, although she lives each of these lives with zest — often with excruciating pain — none of her lives seems real.

The devious world, which prompts or forces Joan to assume these many roles and guises, abounds with characters who themselves play multiple, often antithetical, roles. Her mother is both Beauty and the Beast, the rejector and the ubiquitous astral presence which Joan cannot elude. Her father, an anaesthetist, acts as a killer during the war and a reviver afterward. Joan's companions in scouting are both protectors and torturers. The daffodil man, a pervert who gives her flowers, seems replicated in the person who rescues her when the Brownies tie her to the bridge. Arthur, her prince, is a pauper in the realm of romance. Aunt Lou, Paul, and Leda Sprott also play dual roles. Exposure to these roguish figures convinces Joan that dishonesty is the norm rather than an aberration. In her words, "honesty and expressing your feelings could lead to only one thing. Disaster."

Atwood draws most heavily upon the versatility of the picaresque mode in treating the central experiences of Joan's adult life — those surrounding her marriage to Arthur. According to the romantic tradition, marriage should have become a stabilizing factor. Within the picaresque context, however, it becomes just the opposite. Joan finds herself constantly forced to rebuild her world, her chief resource and means of escape being her literary imagination.

Predictably, Joan meets Arthur by chance, but the circumstances are far from romantic. She walks through Hyde Park, composing *Escape from Love*, by which she hopes to escape from Paul. As her heroine feels "*a hand on her arm*, and a voice, hoarse with passion," breathe her name, Joan feels a hand on her arm and screams. The next thing she knows, she "is lying on top of a skinny, confused-looking young man." This inauspicious introduction and their grotesque wedding portend the hectic state of their life together.

Joan tries to be what Arthur expects, but just as she could not please her mother, neither can she please him. Just as she could not communicate with her father, she now finds it impossible to communicate with Arthur. In the beginning Joan pays the rent with the proceeds of her gothics, under the pretext that the money is coming from odd jobs and an inheritance — a minor dissimulation in relation to her future duplicity. Arthur follows his "paths" of reform one at a time, changing his theories constantly. Eventually, he returns to school and becomes a political science teacher, while Joan seems caught in "thickets, ditches, ponds, labyrinths, and morasses," metaphors for the picaro's trail.

Sometimes, Arthur enjoys Joan's unpredictability, but at others he complains that she has no goals. Like Paul, who tells her that she has no discipline, and the Royal Porcupine, who accuses her of having no motives, Arthur never gives

her any support. The irony is that Joan surpasses all three men in creativity. A further irony is that Joan will not reveal her success with the gothics, because she thinks Arthur would not respect her for them. She is often irked by having to hide her success, but when even the Royal Porcupine tells her that she is a threat to men, she realizes that she must hide the truth from Arthur. She is convinced that the dishonesty of the picaro is the only safe policy for her. Since Arthur will not let her have children, she turns her entire energy to writing. What was at first a means of economic security becomes a secret career, a substitute for marriage, and a springboard to other lives — the taking of a lover and the writing of poetry.

The way in which Atwood intertwines Joan's multiple occupations heightens the tension and speeds up the action. In writing the gothics, Joan lives out the romance which her socialization has promised but which reality has not produced. She creates characters whose appearances and personalities are extensions of her own: both the men and the women have her fiery red hair, her green eyes, and her capacity for deception and intrigue. Charlotte and Felicia, the beloved and the wife respectively in *Stalked by Love*, correspond to the antitheses of her current dilemma. Through struggling with their problems, Joan strives to work out her own. Like herself, both are active characters: Charlotte repairs jewellery in order to be economically independent; Felicia takes lovers to satisfy herself when Redmond is otherwise engaged. In order to complete the novel in the gothic manner, Joan must kill one or the other. She has already saved Charlotte dozens of times. Now, when she is struggling to preserve her own marriage, she wants to save Felicia.

Having reached an impasse, Joan seeks the answer through automatic writing. Although the process does not furnish an immediate solution for the novel, it does produce the poetry which becomes *Lady Oracle*. The poems deal with male-female relations in terms and images which touch her life so closely that Arthur is totally alienated. He is angered that she published the poems without consulting him, and he is chagrined at the fame which they have brought her. Conscious of his frustrations, Joan sees herself as a monster like her mother. Typically, Joan finds a temporary escape. Fame brings the Royal Porcupine into her life.

As the writing helps Joan work out her romantic longings and marital problems, so does her subsequent affair with the Royal Porcupine enable her to sublimate her sexual desires. He is everything that Arthur is not. He dances with her eagerly — she wrapped in a lace tablecloth and he clad in only a top hat. He is an underwear freak, easily aroused by the sight of Joan in her bilingual weekend bikini briefs. He is so like Joan in his romantic notions and appearance that he seems to be one of her fantasies. When he shaves off his beard, scraps his opera cloak, and wants Joan to live with him, she drops him. Faced with her failure as a wife, the end of her affair, the pressures of success, the reappearance

of Paul, who wants to kidnap her, and the appearance of Fraser Buchanan, who threatens to blackmail her, Joan seems cornered at last. She steals Buchanan's notebook to silence him, plans her death by drowning, and escapes to Italy, where in her seaside hermitage, she struggles with the problem anew. But even in that retreat, Joan, like her German counterpart Simplissimus, realizes that her peace may be short-lived.[11]

Still another aspect of the picaresque is brought out in Joan's relations to the men in her life. Paul, Arthur, the Royal Porcupine, and Fraser Buchanan serve successively as Joan's partners in the master-slave relationship. Paul functions as her mentor in the realm of fiction, but as soon as she learns to write the gothics, she escapes his grasp. Arthur acts as her master within their marriage, putting innumerable strictures on her, chiefly that of forbidding her to have a child. Joan eludes his domination at first by continuing to write the gothics and later by taking the Royal Porcupine as a lover. The Royal Porcupine in his turn begins as a benevolent master, but gradually, he, too, becomes so demanding that Joan needs to escape. Buchanan maintains his control over Joan only briefly, for as soon as he discovers her secret, she steals his blackmail notebook and turns him into her victim. The manipulation which Joan learns from each of these masters is subsequently employed in typical picaresque fashion to obtain her freedom.

IN THE FEW BRIEF CHAPTERS of Part Five, Atwood puts the final touches on Joan's struggle for freedom and brings the revelation of *Lady Oracle* into focus. She does not work out the solution in a logical narrative. Rather, she draws together the principal motifs of the novel: the mirror, clothes, apparitions, doors, the maze, and the dance, and filters their implications in episodic segments through Joan's distraught mind. Taunted by fear of discovery and of isolation, Joan reaches a degree of tension which almost completely fuses reality, fantasy, and dream. Like a true picaro, however, she thrives on even this psychic danger, and finally comes to terms with the problem of illusion and reality. In the isolation of her Italian retreat, she sees the images of her life fall into place like the fragments of a kaleidoscope and offer her a real escape.

All her life she has gazed into mirrors of physical and social composition and has been influenced by the images they reflected — her mother, the beauty and the monster; herself, like Alice in Wonderland, fat and thin; herself, in the costume gothics and mirrored in the eyes of Paul, Arthur, and the Royal Porcupine. She realizes that as long as she lived by these illusions, she was uncomfortable, but, in a sense, protected, like the Lady of Shalott weaving in her tower. But once she stepped to the window, looked on reality, allowed *Lady Oracle* to be pub-

lished, risked being a public figure, she was no longer safe. Like the Lady of Shalott, she had to pay for her freedom with death.

Joan's next illumination comes some days later, when Mr. Vitroni returns the escape clothes which she had buried beneath the house. She had always recognized the significance of clothes as reflective of the people who wore them: she treasured Aunt Lou's old fox scarf, shied from her mother's blue serge suit, and resented the disposal of the clothes of the dead. When she began writing the costume gothics, she studied books on clothes, believing that if she got the clothes right, everything else would fit, for clothes were the symbols which kept people in their places. When her heroine's clothes were slashed, burned, and buried, they would always be replaced with more fitting attire, indicative of the better life to come. The return of her old clothes indicates to Joan that she cannot really bury her old self. The picaro does not change character. Joan understands that the Italian people see through her disguise, even though she has dyed her hair, put on dark glasses, and donned a print dress. There is no escape from reality. In her isolation, the mirror begins to crack, the truth underlying the myth begins to emerge.

After a fearful day, Joan has a nightmare in which her mother's astral body appears at the window. Seeing her mother's tears, Joan tries to reach her, to tell her that she loves her. Her mother's spirit has appeared at important points in Joan's life. All this time, Joan thought that her mother was following and watching her disapprovingly. Now she senses that she, not her mother, produces these visions. She recognizes her mother's image as "a vortex, a dark vacuum" which she could never please. She realizes that she must not live to please her mother or anyone else, that she must "dance for herself alone." Joan had begun to sense this when she saw the fountain of Diana of Ephesus in Tivoli, which seemed to symbolize woman's being poured out for others. Now, that earlier inclination is confirmed.

This experience is central to the novel. Once Joan recognizes that the spirit is of her own conjuring, she sees her mother also as a victim, the Lady of Shalott, always looking at life through the mirror. When her mother finally looked on reality, she, too, died, or was killed by her husband, by Joan, by the roles which society expected her to play, but chiefly by the romantic conditioning which made beauty, wealth, and romance supreme. When the beauty and romance disappeared, the wealth did not satisfy. All her managerial gifts were unused, and, therefore, wasted.

Having shed the illusion of her mother's vigilance, Joan understands that she must stop hiding behind closed doors, that she must pursue her own life and develop her talents. She cannot expect Arthur to provide support. As Joan begins to dance, her butterfly wings return, the optimistic caterpillar of the "Road of Life" story comes out of the cocoon. But as she dances, Joan crosses the broken

glass and cuts her feet. She now has the real red shoes of the movie. Like the mermaid, she knows that if she wants to dance, or even to walk, she will have to give up something — the comfort of the traditional role. Joan props up her feet to stop the bleeding and determines to walk despite the pain. She recognizes the mermaid as a female monster and sees herself in a comparable role. She reasons that perhaps her mother named her for Joan of Arc, not Joan Crawford. Joan of Arc heard voices. She was burned at the stake and only her heart survived. In her pain, Joan goes to pick up her mail. She learns that Sam and Marlene have been accused of her murder and realizes that she must somehow save them. She also discovers that her gas tank has been drained, preventing her departure, and that a young reporter is on her trail. She decides not to panic but to complete *Stalked by Love* and to await the next whim of Fortune.

At this point Atwood once more exploits the Protean nature of the picaro to effect Joan's escape. Having realized that she must turn away from the mirror, shed her fear, and enter the maze of life, Joan attempts to write the final chapters of the costume gothic. Boldly, she sends Felicia into the maze. There Felicia finds the astral bodies of Charlotte, Joan's mother, Aunt Lou, and Joan herself as the Fat Lady, complete with butterfly wings and antennae. When all of them claim to be Lady Redmond, Felicia understands that all wives are one. She opens the door at the end of the maze, knowing that she will find the minotaur of the myth. When Redmond appears, he immediately begins a series of transformations: he turns first into Joan's father, then the Daffodil man, Paul, the Royal Porcupine, and Arthur. Joan's suspicions are confirmed: the men behind the doors are all Bluebeard. Having fantasized this incident, Joan is prepared when the reporter knocks at the door. She opens it and hits him with the Cinzano bottle. Surprising even herself, Joan does not take his car and escape. After all, she, like Joan of Arc, has a heart. Steeped in her nurturing role, she gets him to a hospital, stays around to see how he is, and prepares to return to Canada to rescue Sam and Marlene and to tell Arthur the whole truth, even if that means losing him. In a pensive moment, Joan decides that she will write no more gothics but will turn to science fiction, The gothics are somewhat passive and are based on hope. Science fiction, on the contrary, is active. Based on vision and invention, it can make things happen.

Joan does not reason these things out. Like a true picaro, she slips from one episode to another. In the end, she admits that only through striking the newspaper man did she learn that she could defend herself. Moreover, only through fantasizing the courage to open the door of the maze did she get the courage to open her own door.

Through the metaphor of Joan's life then, Atwood suggests that women must begin to imagine themselves capable of doing and being whatever they would like. They must no longer look into the mirrors which society holds up to them as

reality. They must no longer barter reality for a pseudo security, for in the end there will always be death. Rather, they must face life head-on. They must no longer hold to the wife-mother role as it has been interpreted in the past. They must exercise their autonomy, insisting that they, like men, have paths to take, that they no longer wish to be caught like scapegoats in the mazes, thickets, and brambles of life. They must demand that men share the nurturing role. When that arrangement is made, men will no longer be the minotaurs to whom women are sacrificed, women will be free to pursue interesting and challenging careers, and children will see both parents as autonomous beings, equally respected within the social framework. She suggests, too, that women must make paths for themselves; they must dance and try their wings, even if their feet bleed in the process. They must face the responsibility of telling the truth, or — and here Atwood leaves the door open — continue to be picaros.

NOTES

[1] Recent studies of the picaresque include the following: Stuart Miller, *The Picaresque Novel* (Cleveland: Press of Case Western Reserve Univ., 1967); Alexander A. Parker, *Literature and the Delinquent: The Picaresque Novel in Spain and Europe 1599-1753* (Edinburgh Univ. Press, 1967); Ulrich Wicks, "The Nature of the Picaresque Narrative: A Modal Approach," *PMLA*, 89, No. 2 (March 1974), 240-49; and the special issue "The Picaresque Tradition," *College Literature*, 6, No. 3 (Fall 1979). The latter contains an excellent bibliographical article by John P. Kent and J. L. Gaunt.

[2] Claudio Guillen, "Toward a Definition of the Picaresque," *Literature as System: Essays toward the Theory of Literary History* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1971), pp. 71-106. Guillen considers the first-person point of view the *sine qua non* of the picaresque.

[3] *The Rogue, or the Life of Guzman de Alfarache*, trans. James Mabbe, 4 vols. (New York: Knopf, 1924), IV, p. 220.

[4] I have chosen to use the term *picaro* throughout rather than to employ the feminine form *picara* in some instances.

[5] John Wilson Foster, "The Poetry of Margaret Atwood," *Canadian Literature*, 74 (Autumn 1977), 5-20, provides an excellent introduction to Atwood's work. Also see the special Atwood issue of the *Malahat Review*, 41 (1977).

[6] A study of Atwood's generic use of the comic may be found in Frank Davey, "*Lady Oracle*'s Secret: Atwood's Comic Novels," *Studies in Canadian Literature* 5, No. 2 (Fall 1980), 209-21.

[7] Margaret Atwood, *Lady Oracle* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1976).

[8] Wicks, p. 246, identifies hunger as a picaresque theme: "Hunger is what Lazarillo's life is all about."

[9] Dorothy Dinnerstein, *The Mermaid and the Minotaur* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), a study of traditional sexual arrangements and society's reluctance to change them, provides an excellent psychological counterpart to Atwood's novel. It is interesting that these two books drawing on the monster myths were published in the same year.

[10] Throughout the novel, Atwood seems to use names and images from other picaresque novels for parodic effect. For example, the Hermes and Mercury figures form a significant motif in Thomas Mann's *Felix Krull*. In the same novel the protagonist's alter ego is Loulou. Madame Houpfle writes under her maiden name, Diane Philbert. In *Lady Oracle*, Joan refuses to identify any longer with the figure of Diana of Ephesus, the mammalian fountain in Rome. Howard Mancing, "The Picaresque Novel: A Protean Form," *College Literature*, 6, No. 3 (Fall 1979), 196, considers the "consciousness of genre" characteristic of the picaresque.

[11] Miller, pp. 116-17, discusses Simplissimus' recognition of the tentative nature of rest.

ANALYSIS WITH A SWIMMER

Ron Charach

The albums offend with the repetitive goodwill
of other people's families:
look! this one at the summer-house,
that one taken nude, yet smiling —
saying *you were afraid of being framed*
in the white-tiled room

and the painful brain would not let go
without them home;
the sound of their sedan
crushing gravel and lighting the hill
sent him off
till ineffective morning
and the long day with the working others,
. . . children who somehow work

and now in the empty dining-room,
the fireplace too troubled to know the fire,
he dreams of analysis with a swimmer
who can surface what was scuttled. Who
will refuse to let a thing go by,
the child's voice
calling all night into the hall?

MARIAN ENGELS "BEAR"

Donald S. Hair

MARIAN ENGEL'S *Bear* has received a good deal of popular attention, part of it from readers who are attracted to the sort of thing promised by the blurb on the cover of the paperback edition: "The shocking, erotic novel of a woman in love." The promise, one notes, is, for the most part, kept, but the novel is likely to be of interest for a good deal longer than most books of this sort because it is much more than the story of a woman in love with a bear. In fact, the novel can be read on several levels, and there is much in it to delight the academic critic as well as the casual reader.

One starting place for the academic critic is the classification of a work, the attempt to see it in relation to other works. If we start in this way with *Bear*, we must say that it is a romance, and that the conventional action of romance — the quest in search of treasure which is guarded by a monster — lies behind the action of this novel. "I don't suppose you found any buried treasure," Joe King says to Lou, and Lou herself is aware of the pattern when she thinks of the word "Treasure" in going through the trunks in the basement. Here we have a realistic version of that romance action: a journey undertaken by an archivist to catalogue the contents of a house, material which may be valuable for historical or literary reasons; the only inhabitant of the estate is a bear. But this external action is not the novelist's main concern. Indeed, Lou finds little of lasting value in the house, and, contrary to expectations when the chief setting is an old and mysterious house, there are no surprises to be discovered. At the end, the house is "empty" and "enormous": "She had not found its secrets. It was a fine building, but it had no secrets."

More important than outer events is the inner action. The story is an account of the renewal of Lou herself, a rebirth, or (in psychological terms) the achievement of an integrated personality. At the beginning of the novel, Lou is a fragmented individual, with dried-up feelings and a barren intellect; at the end, she is healed and whole, and she feels "strong and pure." We are alerted to this pattern, perhaps too obviously, by Lou's first postcard to the director: "'I have an odd sense . . . of being reborn.'" But if the reference to the nature of the action is obtrusive, the patterns by which it is worked out are satisfyingly subtle and complex.

Some of the patterns are familiar and central to Canadian literature. One

notes, to begin with, that Lou's journey is from south to north, and that its nature can be defined by the baseland-hinterland distinction which, W. L. Morton argues, runs through every Canadian psyche.[1] The south is an urban waste land, associated with winter, decay, fragmentation, and the colours brown, yellow, and gray. The north is a bush garden, associated with spring, a lost childhood, fertility, and the colour green. The specific scene of Lou's renewal is an island in the District of Algoma, and one thinks of similar scenes of rebirth, like the island in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* or in Atwood's *Surfacing*. There is nothing unusual in Engel's use of these patterns and images. It is with the house, rather, that the novel begins to take on a special character.

The fact that the house is central may perhaps be traced back to Engel's first concept of the book. It was, she told an interviewer in the *Toronto Star*, to be a short story for an erotic anthology to be published by the Writers' Union of Canada:

> 'I thought, "All pornography takes place in an isolated palace," so I built my isolated palace — the white octagonal house — then in walked a bear. I don't know where he came from, just from somewhere in my psyche.
>
> 'Well, it was no good as a pornographic story, but the idea was too good to waste, so it became a novel.'[2]

The "isolated palace" in pornography represents the fulfilment of sexual desires, its isolation providing the freedom to act out such desires without the usual social or moral restrictions. The "white octagonal house" retains the character of its pornographic predecessor, but goes considerably beyond it to suggest the fulfilment of desires that are wider in scope and more admirable in character.

The house, Lou tells us, is "a classic Fowler's octagon." Fowler was an American, a phrenologist (a fact of some relevance to this novel, as we shall see), and an amateur architect, who championed the building of octagonal houses. The title of his book on domestic architecture (first published in 1848, revised in 1852, and reprinted several times after that) indicates that his was to be a house for the people: *A Home for All or a New, Cheap, Convenient, and Superior Mode of Building*.[3] And indeed his book became the source of a popular movement in American architecture. There are Canadian examples of octagonal houses and barns in Ontario and Nova Scotia and, probably, in other provinces as well. Fowler argues, largely in practical terms, for the superiority of the octagonal over the square or rectangular house: there is a better and more economical use of space, there is better lighting, and there is a better relationship among the rooms. Clearly, in Fowler's view, the octagon represents a more advanced state of civilization than the square or rectangle. (Hence it is significant, I think, that the bear in Engel's novel occupies the original log house, which is square or rectangular, and hence primitive.) But at the same time Fowler argues that the octagon is more natural than the square, since "Nature's forms are mostly

SPHERICAL," and since "the octagon, by approximating to the circle, incloses more space for its wall than the square. . . ."[4]

Lying behind Fowler's argument — and behind the octagonal house in this book — are the ancient symbols of the square and the circle, and their union or synthesis in the octagon. The square has long been associated with earth, and the circle with heaven, the old alchemical problem of squaring the circle being an attempt to bring about the marriage of these opposites. While the problem could never be solved, its solution could be approximated in the octagon, the intermediary form between the other two. Hence the octagon was a symbol of unity and perfection (though it was not perfection itself), and was thought of as showing the way toward the integration of all things.[5] With these facts in mind, we begin to understand Lou's early response to the "incredible house": "She could hardly believe its perfection."

Its perfection, we gradually realize, is to become hers (since the house represents the wholeness and the regeneration that she is seeking), and again, Fowler gives us the key to this pattern. In the first chapter of *A Home for All,* he sets out, as a basic principle of house-building, the correspondence between the design of the house and the characteristics of its inhabitants: "The better a man's mentality, the better mansion will he construct, and the characteristics of the house will be as those of its builder or occupant."[6] This identification of house and inhabitant is an interesting one, especially for a phrenologist, and Lou's throwaway remark about the octagon, that "its phrenological designer thought it good for the brain," is to be taken more seriously than she realizes. For the structure of the house will come to symbolize the makeup of her character. We note, in passing, that the estate is called Pennarth, and that the name means "bear's head." These two phrenological allusions link the house and bear as the central factors in Lou's experience, and it is her exploration of the two that will bring about her renewal. The transformation is indicated, much later, when she turns around to look at the house, and finds it "no longer a symbol, but an entity."

As Lou explores the house, we begin to realize how closely it corresponds to the makeup of a human being. The first floor is associated with ordinary waking life; here the parlour, the kitchen, and the bedroom are located, and here the basic needs of the body are met: shelter and warmth, food, sleep, and sex. The second floor is associated with the intellect. The library, representing "a sharp and perhaps typical early nineteenth-century mind," takes up most of this floor, and here Lou finds the brass and leather telescope and the celestial and terrestrial globes, symbols of a wide-ranging understanding. The basement has links with the subconscious and memory: it contains trunks with blankets from the First World War, and dresses from the 1920's and 1930's. At the very centre of the house is the staircase; it is the axis of the building and, because its foundations are in the basement and its top under the lantern, it links all the levels. One notes

that ascending and descending this staircase are constant actions in the novel, and one begins to sense that these movements symbolize the movements by which Lou integrates the various parts of her character. The counterpointing of ascents and descents has its focus in two recurring movements, opposite in direction but similar in that they both suggest integration: the bear ascending the staircase from below, and the sunlight flooding down from the lantern above.

In this context, the epigraph, from Kenneth Clark's *Landscape into Art*, begins to make sense: "Facts become art through love, which unifies them and lifts them to a higher plane of reality; and in landscape, this all-embracing love is expressed by light." Facts are scattered and isolated things, and correspond to the fragments of Lou's life. Art unifies, integrates, and raises such facts to the highest human level, which is symbolized by the lantern of the octagonal house. Light pervading the whole structure effects such integration.

The epigraph draws the reader's attention to one main agent of integration in the novel; the title introduces the other, and more obvious, one. For the bear operates at each level represented by the house. Lou must renew her memory, her body, and her mind, and each must be brought into a proper relation with all the others. The bear is central to this process.

Let's start with the intellect or understanding, since this is the faculty that Lou must use in her job. As an archivist, she must catalogue the books, and make an inventory of the contents of the house. Her task is "to card and classify," and her working life is filled with "things to be counted" and "things to be edited." But catalogues and lists have inherent limitations; their order is a mechanical order, and the connections and patterns that are crucial for a full understanding may be scarcely apparent. Lou recognizes the deficiences of her usual activities, and looks forward to insights of a better sort: "As far as books went, she was concerned with their externals only. Here, she would have time to read." But when new feelings, emotions, and insights force themselves upon her, she falls back on her old intellectual habits: "She tried to concentrate on externals, on her cards, on her notes"; "she always attempted to be orderly, to catalogue her thoughts and feelings. . . ." But at last she asks the crucial question:

> What was the use of all these cards and details and orderings? In the beginning they had seemed beautiful, capable of making an order of their own, capable of being in the end filed and sorted so that she could find a structure, plumb a secret. Now, they filled her with guilt; she felt there would never, ever, be anything as revealing and vivid as Homer's story, or as relevant. They were a heresy against the real truth.

I shall return to Homer's story, and try to explain why it is "the real truth," but we must first try to define the part that the bear plays in Lou's growing understanding.

THE RENEWAL OF LOU'S MIND might, one would think, involve the recovery of the animal stories she has read, and the ordering of Colonel Cary's notes on bears. But in fact the renewal is symbolized in more concrete ways, by the bear's ascent of the stairs, by his standing upright like a man, and by his grinning. The upright posture is a popular symbol of intelligence — it is "that posture that leads the bear to be compared to the man" — and so is the bear's sense of humour. After Lou has followed Lucy's advice ("'Shit with the bear'"), she laughs, and "He looked as if he was laughing too." Lou laughs again when they are both battling mosquitoes: "'Oh bear,' she laughed. 'We're a funny pair.' He turned around and quite definitely grinned." If there were to be a Canadian bestiary, the laughing bear, standing or sitting upright, would have a central place in it. One remembers the bear totem, "every bit of him . . . merry," that Emily Carr discovered at Gittex;[7] and one remembers, too, Roberts' repeated assertions that the bear is the most human of all the animals, his intelligence being symbolized by his sense of humour, and by his grinning when he has tricked man whose senses are less keen than his.[8] In the bear, then, body and mind are thoroughly integrated, and he is, therefore, an appropriate creature to preside over Lou's renewal.

If the bear's ascent of the stairs leads to the revitalizing of Lou's intellectual life, his entry into the bedroom leads to the revitalizing of her physical life. Like Lou's carding and classifying, her sex life has no connections with anything else. She has picked up a man on the street; she has had a lover who made her have an abortion; and she has weekly sex — "but no love" — with the director, on a desktop spread with old maps. One notes that Lou wants "human contact," and hence it seems strange that she should fall so deeply in love with the bear, and that the orgasm to which he brings her should be so powerful. But it is precisely this experience which leads to the renewal of her fully human self, a process which can be seen clearly in the breaking and re-establishing of the taboo of bestiality. The breaking of the taboo is crucial since, when a barrier as strong as that is broken, all barriers begin to fall, and a new unity can begin forming itself. But the re-establishing of the taboo is equally crucial. The barrier begins to reappear when Lou becomes aware of the fact that she has broken it. Instinctively she turns to human contact, and tries, unsuccessfully, to find release with Homer. The climactic moment is Lou's attempt to have intercourse with the bear: "He reached out one great paw and ripped the skin on her back." In terms of the realism of the novel, the bear is simply proving to be the wild creature that Homer has regularly warned Lou about. But in symbolic terms, the bear releases Lou into her full human identity by marking the limits of kinship, and finally separating animal from human. The pain and the blood suggest a birth, and certainly Lou feels that she has been reborn: "she was different. She seemed to

have the body of a much younger woman." Lying with the bear beside the fire, "she was a babe, a child, an innocent."

> What had passed to her from him she did not know. Certainly it was not the seed of heroes, or magic, or an astounding virtue, for she continued to be herself. But for one strange, sharp moment she could feel in her pores and the taste of her own mouth that she knew what the world was for. She felt not that she was at last human, but that she was at last clean. Clean and simple and proud.

To know "what the world was for" is to sense the relations of all things, and to understand one's place in that complex pattern. The wound, her birth-mark ("I shall keep that, she thought"), is the emblem of that position: "she remembered the claw that had healed guilt. She felt strong and pure."

This integration of body and mind sometimes suggests an order of being that is more than either. This order is symbolized by the lantern at the top of the house, and manifests itself, in the early stages of Lou's life on the island, in all those things which, to her orderly mind, seem to go beyond reason. Chief among these are Colonel Cary's notes on bears. They are not filed or organized in any way, but are stuck at random in various books, and Lou finds them by chance. Finding slips of paper in this way is exasperating for Lou — "She wanted to pick up each of his books and shake them till the spines fell off" — but she responds, as she always does initially, by being the archivist: "she carefully filed and dated his note, marking its envelope with the name of the book it fell from." One notes that there is no logical connection between the books and the slips of paper, and hence it seems curious that Lou should file the note in this way. "Perhaps when she was very old she would return and make a mystical acrostic out of the dates and titles of these books and believe she had found the elixir of life." The tone suggests that Lou habitually rejects, or makes fun of, anything that goes beyond reason, but she continues to date the notes, and even to record the time when she finds each of them. "She wondered, as she did it, why she was doing it; if she were trying to construct a kind of *I Ching* for herself. No: she did not believe in non-rational processes, she was a bibliographer, she told herself. She simply wanted the record to be accurate."

The "non-rational processes" to which Lou, in spite of her protestations, is instinctively attracted are those of the imagination, particularly as it embodies itself in myth. The materials in Colonel Cary's notes are often drawn from myths, legends, and folk tales, and to each of the notes Lou responds in ways that connect the bears of the human imagination with her bear. This making of connections between the imagination and actual experience is as crucial as the linking of mind and body, and the notes, seemingly so unconnected, do in fact fall into a pattern that Lou gradually comes to realize. That pattern is the circle. To begin with, Lou's recording of the time and date suggests an attempt to link the notes with the cycles of the day and the year. There are twelve such notes (one

is repeated, so that anyone counting the number of passages in italics will find thirteen), and twelve is the number of cosmic order. Like the Zodiac, which divides the circle or wheel of the heavens into twelve subdivisions, these twelve notes suggest a cycle which embodies the whole of human experience, that whole usually imaged as a move away from primal unity, and a return to it. When this movement is embodied in a story, we have the myth of the birth, life, and death of the hero. Colonel Cary's notes give us fragments of this myth, with the bear as hero. There is a miraculous birth: "The offspring of a woman and a bear is a hero"; there is a descent into the ordinary world, where the physical characteristics of bears are listed and classified, where bears are kept as pets or hunted and baited, and where the bone in the bear's penis is used as a coathook; and there is a sacrificial death, and a return to a land of "peace and plenty," "milk and honey."

With this myth in mind, we can now begin to see clearly how the bear operates on all levels in the book. There is the actual bear, who occupies the square or rectangular loghouse, which represents the earth and physical existence. There is the bear of myth, who is associated with the circle, which in turn represents heaven and the imagination. And there is a middle level, when the bear ascends the stairs in the octagonal house, and stands upright. The bear thus connects or unifies all levels, and it is Lou's task to realize that unity herself. One can trace this process by looking at the conjunction of square and circle, and the eventual resolution of these opposing designs into one pattern.

The struggle is particularly acute in chapters *xvii* and *xviii*. When Lou is irritable and out-of-sorts, she is conscious of squares:

> She did not like the parlour. It was full of wrong-angled, unlivable corners, the weakness of the octagon. The furniture was squared and sat ill and off-centred. Every time she went into the room, it imprinted on her the conventional rectangle and nagged.

But when she begins to make connections, circles appear. For instance, she invites Homer to stay for a drink, "Because the wheels were going around in her head, bells were ringing, she was understanding things." On her radio, she picks up music coming from around the globe — another great circle — and the music leads her to dance with the bear. The dance is a conventional symbol of a dynamic unity, but what makes it interesting here is the fact that the music which brings them together is a song about parting. Two movements, coming together and growing apart, are thus contained within a single pattern, and suddenly we realize that Lou is acting out the new wholeness which is hers. Hence the separation at the end of the novel is not the collapse of that wholeness, but the affirmation of it. The emphasis falls on cycles which are being completed, like the turning of the seasons:

> Something was gone between them, though: the high, whistling communion that had bound them during the summer. Where she looked out the window, the birch trees were yellowing, the leaves were already thin.

Moreover, Lou returns to Toronto, "taking the long, overland route," and thus completes a cycle of her own life. The unity is now within her, and it is symbolized by the constellation — the Great Bear and his thirty-seven thousand virgins — that she sees overhead, and that itself views all the cycles below.

I HAVE BEEN DEALING WITH the movement of the novel largely in terms of geometrical patterns, but there are other patterns which encourage us to come at this same movement in different ways. One of these is conventional in romance: the double or Doppelganger. This convention has a basis in psychology, in the individual who is at war with himself. In this novel, Lou becomes aware of an "awful, anarchic inner voice":

> she could not understand why the period of redefinition had to be accompanied by depression, an existential screaming inside herself, and a raucous interior voice that questioned not the project she was working on, but her own self. 'What am I doing here?' she would ask herself, and the interior voice would echo, 'Who the hell do you think you are, having the nerve to be here?'

The two voices suggest that the central character is in fact two characters, and the division of one by two is conventional enough in numerology. One is, of course, the symbol for the unity of all things; two is the symbol of division, of the separation of all things into two opposing forces: light and dark, good and evil, life and death, male and female. The conflict can be hostile and destructive, or it can be the dynamic relation of two complementary forces. Another way of describing Lou's renewal is to say that, in the course of her summer on the island, two opposing forces are brought into a dynamic relationship.

Those two opposing forces, in this romance, are male and female. Again, the bear is central, his role being understood best if we go back to medieval bestiaries.[9] There we discover that the bear is remembered in myth and legend for both his male and female parts, and since the bear in this book plays both roles, he is a symbol of the dynamic union of opposing forces that Lou is trying to achieve. As a symbol of male sexuality, the bear is associated with lust, fornication, and sensual pleasure, and has a reputation as a good lover. Lou reacts strongly to him in this role; sight and smell are acutely conscious of him as masculine: "she got a large whiff of shit and musk. [The bear] was indubitably male, she saw. . . ." She is frightened, and then excited, by his size and his strength, and she has an absorbing interest in the exact characteristics of his genitals. He becomes, for her, the ideal lover, who brings her to orgasm as no

man has been able to. These masculine aspects of the bear are obvious enough. But, as we read through the novel, we note that the bear is, on occasion, described as a woman. Indeed, that is Lou's first impression of him. He has "a scruff like a widow's hump," and he seems "not a creature of the wild, but a middle-aged woman defeated to the point of being daft. . . ." And at the end, when Joe King takes the bear away in his boat, the bear is like "a fat dignified old woman with his nose to the wind in the bow of the boat." These images seem casual enough, but they tip us off to the bear's female role, as described in the bestiaries. There the bear is not just male lust, but the nurturing mother. It is an old idea that bear cubs are blind and formless at birth, and are shaped by the she-bear, who in this way becomes the symbol of the artist or creator. What is crucial to this novel is the way in which the bear shapes her cubs. She does so, according to tradition, by licking them. Hence, all that licking of Lou is not just a near-pornographic description of cunnilingus, but a symbol of the shaping of Lou, of the creation of her new self. It is significant that, in spite of Lou's living "intensely and entirely for the bear," she fails to have intercourse with him. What gives her new life is the bear's tongue — the female aspects of him — and she becomes a child protected by the great mother: "She realized he was watching over her"; "That night, lying clothed and tenderly beside him by the fire, she was a babe, a child, an innocent."

In the bear, then, there is a dynamic union of two forces, male and female, and the bear's wholeness is a wholeness that Lou must realize in herself. It is for this reason that Homer's story of the Cary family has such a profound effect on Lou, and embodies a truth far more comprehensive than any she has been able to obtain through cataloguing and filing. The story is a story of male and female fused at last in a single figure. The first Colonel Cary was a man separated from his wife, who chose to remain behind in Toronto; the last Colonel Cary was a woman who, though unmistakably female, combined the characteristics of man and woman, and thus made up for the division in her grandfather's life. Homer places considerable emphasis, in his narrative, on the union of these opposing forces in Colonel Jocelyn Cary. There is the story of her name: she could not buy a commission in the army, like her father, so she was christened Colonel so she could inherit the estate. "'She was a fine woman,'" Homer assures Lou, but he goes on to tell about her drinking beer like a man, and hunting and trapping like a man: "'She was the first woman to wear pants up here'"; "'She had big hands like a man. . . .'" In uniting the male and female roles, Colonel Jocelyn Cary thus becomes a model for Lou. Lou has already felt herself to be the heir of the Carys, and now she is able to define her inheritance more precisely.

The union of opposing forces in her comes about by a process which is conventional in romance: metamorphosis. The idea appears in the only one of Colonel Cary's notes which is repeated, and the repetition seems to be designed

to draw special attention to it. In this note, we are told that Norwegians describe the bear as "the old man with the fur cloak." The phrase suggests the metamorphosis of bear into man, and of man into bear. We have already seen the bear becoming man when he stands upright and grins; and, in a parallel transformation, man — or, in this case, woman — becomes bear by putting on his "fur cloak." One remembers the number of times that Lou buries her hands or her feet in the bear's fur, "finding it had depths and depths, layers and layers," and once she begs explicitly, "Give me your skin." She does take on his musk: "'You stink of bear,'" Homer tells her. When she looks at herself in the female colonel's pierglass, she sees a creature with brown skin and wild eyes and hair. And when bear and woman lie by the fire, they are "both in their pelts."

Though Lou does, in these ways, begin to seem like a bear, the transformation does not take place in the way she expects. She imagines a magic change, of the sort one would find in fairy tales:

> It struck her when she opened the door to him that she always expected it to be someone else. She wondered if he, like herself, visualized transformations, waking every morning expecting to be a prince, disappointed still to be a bear.

The change which actually takes place is not of this sort; rather, it is the kind of transformation which is conventional in romance, and which involves the pairs or doubles that I have already explored. When two figures who represent opposing forces are reacting to each other, it frequently happens that one grows and develops as the other declines. This rhythm of waxing and waning is clear in the kind of medieval romance where a pair of jousting knights is associated with day and night; it is also clear in vampire stories, where the vampire grows stronger as his victim grows weaker. Here, as Lou is healed and becomes whole, the bear is gradually fragmented, his wholeness being divided into its various parts. At the beginning of the novel, when Lou feels that she has fallen apart, she sees the bear as an entity, and talks about him in a way that suggests that he is the Idea of a bear:

> Everyone has once in his life to decide whether he is a Platonist or not, she thought. I am a woman sitting on a stoop eating bread and bacon. That is a bear. Not a toy bear, not a Pooh bear, not an airlines Koala bear. A real bear.

At the end, the bear is many things: "lover, God or Friend. Dog too, for when she put her hand out he licked and nuzzled it." He is the fat creature sitting solidly in Joe King's boat, and he is the Great Bear with his thirty-seven thousand virgins. But Lou at this point is whole. "Clean and simple and proud" are the adjectives she uses to describe herself, and it is the second in particular which is important in this context. "Simple" has both Greek and Latin roots, the first element in both being (as the *Oxford English Dictionary* tells us) *sem*, meaning *one*.

In myth and ritual, transformations are usually brought about by a sacrificial death and by the ritual eating of the flesh of the slain animal. Colonel Cary's notes make two references to this pattern: one describes the Eskimos' "taboos and propitiatory ceremonies" for the killing of the bear and "the consumption of the flesh"; the other describes a Japanese ceremony, in which a bear is sacrificed and its flesh eaten. Lou vows that this will never happen to her bear, but, nonetheless, eating has an important symbolic role in the novel. The consumption of flesh is, after all, the ultimate metamorphosis, and this act, rather than the putting on of fur, is the best indication of Lou's change. As often happens in this novel, its basis is the eroticism of the earliest idea of the story. Eating is slang for cunnilingus, and Lou's plea to the bear, "'Eat me,'" is the sort of thing one might find in pornography. But here it is part of a far more comprehensive pattern. We remember the number of times Lou eats with the bear, and once, when a spark falls in his fur, she licks it out. The key to this pattern is one of her dreams:

> She fell asleep on the grass, and dreamt that Grinty and Greedy were rolling down the hill in a butter churn towards her.
> 'We'll eat her,' Grinty said. 'We'll eat her breasts off.'
> 'You watch,' said Greedy. 'You watch. She'll eat us first. Let's run.'

I do not know what fairy tale is being referred to here, but the patterns are clear enough. Here we have a pair, perhaps twin imps or dwarfs, and their names are associated with eating and appetite (to grint is to gnash one's teeth). They threaten to eat Lou, but immediately recognize that "'She'll eat us first.'" That is, she will take the two of them and, by consuming them, make them one. Lou's eating with the bear has the same symbolic significance. When one recognizes this pattern, it comes as no surprise to discover that, when Lou becomes whole, she feels it "in her pores and the taste of her own mouth."

Bear is an unusually good novel. The patterns, which I have been making stand out, are woven together in a subtle and complex way. We have no sense that actions are forced or details thrust upon us. Everything is carefully observed and fully realized. If, as Margaret Avison has said, the devil is etc., there is no devil in this book. We live "sweetly and intensely" with Lou and her bear, exploring, like her, the infinite richness of simplicity.

NOTES

My reading of the novel owes a great deal to conversations with two of my colleagues, Catherine Ross and Richard Stingle.

[1] "The Relevance of Canadian History," in *Contexts of Canadian Criticism*, ed. Eli Mandel (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1971), pp. 52-53.

[2] Quoted by Roy MacSkimming, "A writer's gutsy imagination sets up a hard act to follow," *Toronto Star* (15 May 1976), p. H3.

[3] There is a modern reprint of the 1853 edition, entitled *The Octagon House: A Home for All,* with an introduction by Madeline B. Stern (New York: Dover, 1973).

[4] Ibid., p. 82.

[5] In this paragraph I am deeply indebted to J. E. Cirlot's *A Dictionary of Symbols,* trans. Jack Sage (New York: Philosophical Library, 1962), especially to the articles on "Circle," "Numbers," "Square," and "Squaring the Circle."

[6] Fowler, p. 12.

[7] *Klee Wyck* (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin, 1971), p. 53.

[8] See, for instance, *The Heart of the Ancient Wood* (New Canadian Library #110; Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1974), p. 12; or, better still, a passage in "The Trailers" in *Thirteen Bears,* ed. Ethel Hume Bennett (Toronto: Ryerson, 1947), p. 101.

[9] For the information on bestiaries which follows, I am indebted to Beryl Rowland, *Animals with Human Faces: A Guide to Animal Symbolism* (Knoxville: Univ. of Tennessee Press, 1973), pp. 31-35.

ROAD ENDING

M. Travis Lane

At the end of the road a hunter's hut
boarded all summer, the fraying bush
backing against it, a ragged fringe
of beggars' ticks, rust tassels, thorns,
and boulders pushed to the water's edge
where the graders turned.
There was no one home.

And no one in the water. Overhead
the white thread spidered from a jet
drifted across where the evening star
was not yet shining.

What were the words I could not use,
the thoughts I could not think to say?
The white lake shook in the early dusk.

Something was lost we were waiting for,
summer, perhaps, or snow.

MEMORY ORGANIZED:

The Novels of Audrey Thomas

Joan Coldwell

"WRITERS ARE TERRIBLE LIARS," begins one of Audrey Thomas' short stories, where the speaker is herself a writer, tussling with the nature of art's relationship to life.[1] It is worth bearing this caveat in mind as one reads Thomas' novels, for it is tempting to interpret them only as thinly-disguised autobiography, where the narrator, whether unnamed or called Isobel, Miranda, or Rachel, speaks in the author's own voice. The narrators of the different novels are indeed haunted by similar memories and concerns. Isobel's obsessions, and those of the unnamed narrator of *Mrs. Blood*, centre on having been jilted by the first man she really loved, and on a prolonged miscarriage suffered in a Ghanaian hospital. Miranda/Rachel is a writer highly conscious of the complexities of her craft, desperate to communicate with the man she loves but finding neither words nor deeds adequate to break down the traditional attitudes to woman's role. These characters struggle and endure in settings drawn from the author's own environments: the New York State of her childhood, various parts of Europe and Africa where she has lived and travelled, and British Columbia where she now makes her home.

Audrey Thomas has acknowledged that writing about her own suffering is a form of therapy and that this very fact contributes to the strength of her work: "Going back over my own works, I reread my first 'real' story, real because it *had* to be written, it seemed to be the only way I could organize the horror and utter futility of a six-months long, drawn-out miscarriage in a hospital in Africa."[2] This episode forms the basis not only of the early story "If One Green Bottle"[3] but of Thomas' first novel, *Mrs. Blood* (1970) and the later work *Blown Figures* (1974). While it is understandable that so disturbing an experience might have to be relived and interpreted more than once, it is less clear as to why, in novel after novel, apparently identical episodes, characters and settings of not so traumatic a nature reappear. Being jilted, trying to lose one's virginity, working in a mental hospital are among the experiences we encounter in similar form more than once, reworkings which, however therapeutic for the author, must have some

more artistic justification if they are not to seem merely repetitive and self-indulgent. When one looks closely at all of Thomas' novels, it becomes apparent that the episodes are not in fact repeated; each telling is in a different form and for a different artistic purpose, as a painter might give the same model in different poses. Whatever the origins in real life might have been, the experiences are altered by their fictional contexts and it is the artistic shaping that gives them universal significance. Rachel, the writer who narrates the novel *Latakia* (1979), comments on the need for such formal control in art. Looking at a friend's painting she thinks, "Yes, the pain is there and very real, but where is the organization? She is at the beginning of a long, long road. . . ."[4] That is a road Audrey Thomas has travelled in her six novels, where the pain may be very real, with its origins in actual experience, but where it is controlled and given meaning by fictional organization.

If we look at the novels in the order of their publication, we see that in each one the organization involves a technique, variously handled, that for the time being we might call "splitting." This is seen most clearly in *Mrs. Blood* where the unnamed narrator sees herself as two figures: Mrs. Thing, the "acted-upon," fearful, self-conscious wife of a university teacher, and Mrs. Blood, a guilt-ridden bundle of memories and poetic visions, wracked by physical and psychic forces beyond her control. Instead of chapters, the novel is divided into sections spoken sometimes by Mrs. Thing and sometimes by Mrs. Blood.

A somewhat similar kind of character-splitting occurs in the volume containing the two short novels *Munchmeyer* and *Prospero on the Island* (1971). Loosely related to the tradition epitomized by Gide's *Les Faux Monnayeurs*, which is a novel about a man writing a novel about a man writing a novel, *Prospero* is the diary of a woman who is writing the novel *Munchmeyer*, about a male writer who keeps a diary. Although Miranda says that no-one could tell from her diary what *Munchmeyer* is about, the two narratives are in fact subtly related, both in the narrator's projection of a reverse image of herself as an egotistical male writer and in shared perceptions and images. One simple example of the latter demonstrates the technique. In *Prospero*, Miranda describes being out with her child: "I walk through the crisp leaves with Toad and suddenly think of new, crisp bank notes. Then laugh at the simile. 'My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun.' Why must I always search for similarities?"[5] It seems here as if Miranda is rejecting that simile but in fact she uses it in *Munchmeyer*: "Leaves crisp as bank notes crackled under their feet. . . ."

In *Songs My Mother Taught Me* (1973), what may appear at first to be a conventional first-person narrative, split only chronologically into the "Songs of Innocence" of childhood and the "Songs of Experience" of adolescence, is in fact a curiously constructed record of two voices, where the narrator refers to herself sometimes as "I" and sometimes as a third person she observes. The division is

not made as one might expect into infant Isobel, not yet conscious of her individuality except as a name, and the older, self-conscious "I." Sometimes, a distancing occurs during a recollection of something the older girl was afraid of: "At first Isobel did not dare go beyond the swinging doors until the inert shape beneath the blankets had been wheeled away."[6] Sometimes, on the other hand, it is the adult teller of the tale who is objectified: "Look how well Isobel remembers." The process is described elsewhere in the novel as a means of protecting against pain, especially as inflicted by the mother's cruel comments: "I learned to disconnect myself early, to leave my body and stand outside, above really, looking downward at Clara holding Isobel." This technique is found also in the story "Still Life with Flowers" (*Ten Green Bottles*), where an adult distances herself from painful encounters with death by speaking both of "I" and "she."

With *Blown Figures* we enter a world where the technical word for psychological splitting can appropriately be used, for Isobel is now indeed schizophrenic. The miscarriage suffered in *Mrs. Blood* has haunted the narrator with guilt and loss until she has gone mad. She relives psychically a journey to Africa, gradually turning in her own mind into a destructive and doomed witch. She directs her story to a named but unidentified auditor, "Miss Miller," thus providing the reader with a kind of double, someone within the book who is addressed but cannot intrude.

Latakia, like *Prospero on the Island*, is a "portrait of the artist" and the splitting technique here reflects the crisis faced by a woman who wants both love and art, but cannot give up the second for the first. The split Rachel sees between her physical/emotional and her mental/spiritual needs is reflected in the time and space pattern of the novel. In the "present," Rachel writes from her solitary rooftop in Crete, where she endeavours to capture as accurately as possible the total look, feeling, sound, taste, and scent of the place. Interwoven with the vivid colours and heat of the present scene, where nothing much happens in terms of plot but where everything is happening in terms of artistic being and creativity, are the episodes of the past action, the full story of the relationship with her now-departed lover to whom she addresses this "longest love letter in the world." Fully secure in herself as artist, Rachel does not split her own self schizophrenically as Isobel did. The choices sometimes threaten to tear her apart, but that is a different matter from being in a state of disintegration, and she is strong enough to withstand the threat. Instead, the split is observed as one of the processes of creative response to experience. The artist lives imaginatively in two places at once, or simultaneously at two different times: "The artist almost always lives in a Double Now. Therefore, it is not difficult for me to be up here on the roof, thinking of you, and still very much aware of the sound of Heleni's loom two doors down, and the noise of a motorbike coming down that last spiral before the village proper, and the moon slowly surfacing behind the hill."

THE REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST serves a double purpose in Audrey Thomas' fiction. On the one hand, the deliberate memorizing of details, first as a childhood habit and then as a writer's trick-of-the-trade, is a means of triumphing over time. The narrator of *Mrs. Blood* compulsively hoards the little details of important days as she did in childhood: "Thus on the way to my grandfather's cottage I would try to memorize the billboards or the number of cows in a field in order to preserve that day more perfectly in my memory." Isobel analyzes the habit more thoroughly in *Songs My Mother Taught Me*:

> From as far back as I could remember I was aware — and afraid — of two things: death and the passage of time. ("Isobel, you are dying faster than the day.") On the way to the mountains each summer I tried to memorize each group of Burma Shave signs we passed, every new billboard or poster slapped against a barn. If someone made a remark and I didn't hear, I would be driven nearly frantic. "What did you say?" "Please, oh please." And sometimes I would say to myself, "Ten years from now you will remember this moment and it will be the past." If something truly unusual happened I tried to impale the whole complex of sight/sound/touch/taste/smell on my consciousness and memory as though such an experience was like some rare and multicolored butterfly.

Memorizing is a necessary part of the writer's craft. Miranda keeps a notebook: "I *must* try to record important things — the way trees look in certain lights, the sound of the wind howling around the cabin, the changing colors of the sea. How many past impressions, like skillful, slippery fish, will elude my nets I shudder now to think." To Rachel, memorizing has become an almost automatic process; whatever she may outwardly be doing or saying, inwardly she is registering every detail around her: "And I am a magpie; I pick up information whenever I can get it."

Memory takes a less conscious form, too, surfacing in dreams or breaking from its deep suppression under stress. Rachel keeps a dream-notebook and recognizes one of her dreams as a warning from the subconscious about the affair with Michael. Possibly all of *Blown Figures* is a kind of dream, an inner journey of horror needed to exorcise a long-suppressed guilt. The stress of the long confinement calls forth buried events and emotions from the narrator of *Mrs. Blood*: "I have memories preserved intact, like men in peat to be found by a later me." It is only when the foetus is expelled from the body that the cause of the guilt and fear is fully recalled and for Mrs. Blood the interior journey of miscarriage is an ironic parody of the famous madeleine cake: "Proust had it easy with his tea and bun."

Such literary recollection is an almost obtrusive part of Thomas' fiction and one could make a very long list of authors alluded to or quoted in the novels. The touch of academic pedantry is, however, quite consistent with the characters of

the college-educated Isobel or the writers Miranda and Rachel. On two occasions, literature of the past furnishes an ironic framework for the entire novel, with Blake's titles used for the two parts of *Songs My Mother Taught Me* and with *The Tempest* providing not just names but a controlling set of images throughout *Munchmeyer* and *Prospero on the Island.* There is also the form of literary echoing where a present experience is implicitly assessed by comparison with an earlier literary statement. When, for example, Rachel recalls how skillfully Graham Greene or Somerset Maugham could create the full "perfume" of a described scene, she invites the placing of her own evocations beside theirs. The process occurs most often in the three treatments of the miscarriage where, under physical and emotional stress, the mind is triggered into a schizophrenic pattern of associative language, the sound of one word evoking another apparently for its sound alone but producing highly resonant connections: "Love. *L'oeuf.* Nothing. Nothing will come of nothing. Speak again." Foreign languages are often used to give this kind of shock, as when charged significance is found in a dictionary definition or when the impact of orthography overrides pronunciation and meaning: "Avez-vous du pain?"

One of Audrey Thomas' favourite literary reference points is *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass.* The epigraph to *Mrs. Blood* focuses that novel's concern with absurdity, futility and the topsy-turvy:

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

At the end of *Songs My Mother Taught Me*, this same quotation appropriately comments on Isobel's work in the mental hospital but it also points forward to the kind of experiences she can expect to find on her European travels.

Echoes of Carroll's work are everywhere in *Mrs. Blood* and *Blown Figures* to enforce the narrator's sense of alienation in the strange "mad" land both of Africa and of her own mind and body. In addition to this psychological level of reference, *Through the Looking Glass* also contributes to the pattern of mirror images which Thomas uses not only to enforce the kind of doubling of a person's image that we have been observing but also to explore the nature of the relationship of art to life. Using the old critical idea that art "holds a mirror up to nature," Rachel in *Latakia* wants to capture Crete exactly as it is, but has to acknowledge that "it's all done with mirrors, it's all illusion" and furthermore, that the illusion depends almost as much on the reader's imagination as it does on the writer's skill: "I have to make you believe in the Emperor's New Clothes."

If mirrors give a reflection of reality, it is a reverse and therefore distorted reflection only: this theme is treated at some length in the stories of the collection *Ladies and Escorts* (1977). In "Rapunzel," a Californian flower-child wanders through Africa looking for artistic images and forms, "Old ways of looking at the world." Her notebook of sketches always shows her own face with camera lenses instead of eyes; all her verbal sketches are set down in "mirror writing," except for the one word that has shocked her out of her dreamy fairytale naiveté. "Initram" is a complex working out of ironic double images, where a woman writer visits another woman writer whose circumstances and experiences she finds to be a striking and painful reflection of her own. The title reverses the word "martini," seen in the story on a wrongly projected slide which, even if viewed correctly, gives a distorted picture of the facts: "that is to say [it] told me nothing about the two people who had taken that trip." Nevertheless, martini does exist in the real world and so did the scenes photographed. One of the more subtle explorations in this story is of the transformation of autobiography into art. In the opening passage, the narrator discusses the topic in terms of the subject-matter of the preceding story (a situation slightly reminiscent of the way *Prospero on the Island* relates to *Munchmeyer*). Is, then, the narrator "really" Audrey Thomas herself? Dare we identify the other writer as specifically as some of the "facts" in the story seem to invite us to do? There is an element of playful teasing in the method of this serious and subtle story, with several warnings to keep us from the quicksands that would confuse fictional reality with literal fact.

Closely associated with the mirror motif is a set of image patterns to do with vision blurred by water, as in weeping, swimming underwater, or looking through a glass darkly into, or out of, an aquarium. These blurred visions invariably occur when a sexual relationship is doomed: they are most forcefully deployed in the fine story "Aquarius," which opens *Ladies and Escorts.* In *Latakia*, the images are perhaps over-explicit: "Ours was certainly a relationship remarkable for its liquidity!" Rachel says wryly, as she notes yet once more that she began to cry. Despite the Mediterranean sun, much of the affair is conducted in torrential rain, and it began on a wet night when Rachel was contemplating a friend's aquarium: "Every time I see an aquarium from now on, I will think of you." In context, the remark implies more than just a memory of that encounter: it suggests that the relationship has put her in a state of suspension, disoriented by seeing things through a veil of water. Rachel is caught by Michael's "octopus-love" for her, "suffocating, drowning, ruthless" and caught too by her own "octopus-need."

WE HAVE SEEN HOW "SPLITTING" or "doubling" occurs within the individual novels; a larger version of this device is apparent when one

looks at the work as a whole. Speaking in an interview of the relationship of *Blown Figures* to *Mrs. Blood*, the author suggested ways of reading these novels either individually or as a connected pair:

> Someone, probably Durrell, talked about the novel of sliding panels. Well, in a sense, that's what I'm doing. It's all one novel really — *Mrs. Blood* and *Blown Figures*. But the novel of sliding panels can be read separately. The panels — like Chinese panels if you like — can be read separately; they also fit together. It depends which way you want to do it.[7]

Since *Blown Figures* deals with Isobel's attempt to exorcise her guilt over the miscarriage suffered in *Mrs. Blood*, it is not surprising that similar episodes are found in both. As in decorative art, a repeated motif may be set in a different context, to catch a different light. Take just the simple example of the satisfying Saturday breakfasts of pre-marriage days. These are mentioned twice in the earlier novel, first by Mrs. Blood: "Every Saturday he brought me a brown paper bag full of eggs and bacon and tomatoes. And we would have a huge breakfast, Jason cooking, and fried bread and coffee to complete it." Here there is nostalgia for a loving, indulgent past; a few paragraphs later it is made clear that the past is irrevocably lost, both because the neighbourhood has changed and because of something eroded in the relationship: "Even the street was gone, he said, and we looked at each other, appalled and maybe a little frightened." Later in the novel, it is Mrs. Thing who now interprets the breakfasts as something to resent in Jason, a male plot to prepare a sacrificial victim: "On Saturday mornings he would bring me a brown paper bag of bacon, eggs, tomatoes and a loaf of bread. And cook my breakfast for me. Fattening me up." When this is recalled in *Blown Figures*, it manifests Isobel's greater willingness to sympathize with Jason, to recognize his sufferings and sacrifices as well as her own:

> [she] never asked him how *he* felt, coming back on the train from the city every day, back from youth and laughter and comradeship, to a dinner left warming over a saucepan of hot water and these two women, so obviously fierce enemies, who wanted to devour him. How *dreary* it must all have been. How different from their crazy Saturday morning breakfasts of the winter before, he arriving with a big bag of tomatoes and eggs and rashers of bacon. . . .[8]

Songs My Mother Taught Me also forms a "novel of sliding panels" with *Mrs. Blood*. In both books we learn of an inherited "legacy of fear," of an early sexual experience with a lifeguard, called "Trigger" in *Mrs. Blood* and "Digger" in *Songs*, of celebrating the end of the war and a memento in a Japanese silk parachute, of a summer's work in a mental hospital. The general horrors of meal-times in the hospital, of bed-making and working in the operating room, are presented in both novels and so are specific episodes: a bungled taking of blood from one of the patients (called "old George" in *Mrs. Blood* and "old Harold" in *Songs*), being called whore by "Eleanor la Duce" (who also appears in the

same setting in "Salon des Refusés" of *Ten Green Bottles*) and being accidentally cut by a possibly infected scalpel. Although these episodes appear to be repeated, apart from minor name changes and different phrasings, they are used for very different effects and are substantially altered by their context. In *Songs*, the mental hospital is the shaping-ground of Isobel's maturity, her "experience," showing her that misery and hostility can be played out on far more grotesque battle fields than she has known in her own unhappy home and social life. Isobel emerges with new strength from this trial, but that much of the horror was suppressed and buried in the psyche appears when the episodes surface in *Mrs. Blood*, not as in the consecutive narrative of *Songs*, where chronological sequence orders events and makes them appear to be logical, but as scattered fragments periodically marking the narrator's obsession with blood and madness.

If we add *Blown Figures* to *Mrs. Blood* and *Songs*, we have a kind of triptych, where the story of Isobel is told from childhood through marriage and motherhood to psychic disintegration. Motifs from one "panel" reappear in another, not necessarily requiring reference back and forth for interpretation, but certainly gaining new dimension when juxtaposed. The greater amount of biographical material about Richard in *Blown Figures*, for example, is not in any way necessary to understanding the narrator's mourning for a lost lover in *Mrs. Blood*, but it rounds out a picture and gives fresh detail. The very title of *Blown Figures* is illuminated by reference to another panel in the triptych. As George Bowering aptly demonstrated in his review of the book, the power of the title lies in its ambiguity:

> What are figures, and what is blown? There are fly-blown corpses, and corpses once were figures. Craftsmen blow figures in glass. If you don't have a good figure you'd better turn the light off if you want to be blown. Bad counters blow their figures. Poets who reach for effects blow their figures up fat. Some flute-players blow outlandish figures. Add you own, and you'll be ready to read. . . .[9]

Each of Bowering's suggestions is appropriate, in some degree or other, to the experience of the novel; that the phrase has yet a further significance for the author is apparent in a passage from *Songs* about the ending of the war: "the 90,000 killed in Hiroshima, the 40,000 killed at Nagasaki, the mushroom cloud, the screams, the blown figures melting in the heat." Here the glass-blowing metaphor fuses with the idea of violent disintegration, the sinister pun on numerical figures increasing the horror. The image relates powerfully to Isobel, her mind violently disintegrated, as she is blown on her psychic journey through the melting heat of Africa. But the blown figures of Hiroshima were also blasted into nightmare silhouettes, outlines of the human form burned into walls as a perpetual memento mori. Thus the blown figures are part of a pattern of memory images, the people, places and experiences of Isobel's past burned ineradicably into her subconscious.

Bowering is right in suggesting that the author intends the reader to work at interpreting the title, and one of the ways of working is to remember how the phrase was used elsewhere. All of *Blown Figures*, in fact, requires unusual exertion on the reader's part, if only in turning over so many pages which are empty except for a line or two. Audrey Thomas explained the intention behind this device:

> Partly so that these things will have force, like slides or bullets or anything that there's a slight time lag between — A plus B plus C plus D — maybe like breathing? It's up to the reader how fast he turns the pages, but he has to turn the page; there has to be a time lag. . . . They all relate just as if you showed me slides of Greece or something to do with Greece. Occasionally there's one thrown in, as you might do with friends, that doesn't relate to Greece and that's to keep you on your toes.[10]

The comparison to a photographic medium again implies the illusion/reality theme but also suggests the author's manipulation of the reader into "interpreting" the novel as one "interprets" a work of art. It is not "meaning," character, or story one only looks for in a novel, but shapes, textures, and colour also.

I HAVE ALREADY MENTIONED the way in which *Munchmeyer* and *Prospero on the Island* are intimately related, though even here each work can be read fully without reference to the other. The two novellas appear to be set apart from the Isobel series, and *Latakia* to follow, with a different name for the main character and a study of an enriching friendship with a male artist instead of the desperate struggles of love and guilt in the other novels. But Miranda obviously has the same background as Isobel: there are several references to an earlier time in Africa and to the same fear of blood. She has her youngest child with her on the island and when she talks to another mother, she feels very much as Mrs. Thing did: "We are together on an island of babies and women with babies." Even the childhood obsession with memorizing reappears, with the same advertisement mentioned as in *Songs*: "as a child I was desperate to remember everything; would stare hard at billboards, burning their inane messages into my head, terrified I would not pass that way again. Burma Shave, Burma Shave, Burma Shave."

Miranda's name is chosen for all its resonances, both ironic and emblematic, of *The Tempest*, as well perhaps of that poem of a lost past, Belloc's "Do you remember an inn, Miranda?" In *Latakia*, the narrator, fully fledged now as a writer and free at least of a restricting domestic pattern, if not of the longing for love and sex, is aptly and ironically named Rachel, she who in the Bible waited fourteen years for the fulfilment of her destiny. But Rachel shares at least one

memory with Isobel and the narrator of *Mrs. Blood*. Each recalls a deaf old relative of her grandfather's who had "a black and silver ear trumpet" (*Latakia*, p. 22), "an ear trumpet — black, with silver-gilt decorations on it" (*Mrs. Blood*, p. 134), "her ornate ear trumpet, black with silver chasing" (*Songs*, p. 47). "Aunt Deveena" lived to be a hundred, and in *Songs* she is a focus for Isobel's fear of and curiosity about death; "Mrs. Blood" finds her to be one of the "encrusted" memories of death and dead babies, for homage to the family graves was always a part of the visit to the old lady. In *Latakia*, the self-conscious writer seeks an appropriate analogy for the distortion of personality she and her lover have wreaked on each other and finds it in the supposedly senile but highly sensitive remark of the re-named aunt: "An enormous dog, a sheepdog, I guess, came loping down the road and Aunt Aggie took a look at it and said in her high, cracked voice, 'My, what a small dog in such a big box.'" The ear-trumpet and senility are useful images in a novel that wrestles with the problems of communication and the world behind the looking-glass.

Audrey Thomas' novels, then, do in some sense form a continuous semi-autobiographical narrative, a kind of *roman fleuve*, and it is clear that the narrating voice belongs to the same person at different phases of experience. The split in the narrator/persona is similar in many respects to the split between Mrs. Thing and Mrs. Blood: Isobel is the girl and woman who struggles to be defined in terms other than someone's granddaughter, daughter, mistress, wife, or mother; Miranda/Rachel is the self-conscious artist and craftswoman who is able to insist on her own identity and purpose even at the cost of losing the men she loves. As the author herself sums it up: "I think that's what I was trying to deal with in my writing, the two different sides of me."[11] Each novel is completely self-contained[12] and very little is repeated in exactly the same form. The reader can respond to each novel as a shape in itself but may find totally new levels of response in remembering the others while reading any one. The demands on the reader's memory are considerable but the results are rewarding.

NOTES

1 "Initram," *Ladies and Escorts* (Ottawa: Oberon, 1977), p. 88.

2 "My Craft and Sullen Art . . .," *Atlantis*, 4, no. 1 (Fall 1978), 153.

3 *Ten Green Bottles* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1967), pp. 5-16.

4 *Latakia* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1979), p. 46.

5 *Munchmeyer* and *Prospero on the Island* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1971), p. 101.

6 *Songs My Mother Taught Me* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1973), p. 221.

7 Elizabeth Komisar, "Audrey Thomas: a review/interview," *Open Letter*, 3, no. 3 (Fall 1975), p. 61.

8 *Blown Figures* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1974), p. 216.

[9] George Bowering, "The Site of Blood," *Canadian Literature*, 65 (Summer 1975), p. 86.

[10] Komisar, p. 63.

[11] "Interview/Audrey Thomas," *The Capilano Review*, 7 (Spring 1975), p. 95.

[12] This is contrary to the view of Robert Diotte, who argues that, of the Isobel Carpenter "trilogy," only *Mrs. Blood* "is even remotely capable of standing alone." See "The Romance of Penelope," *Canadian Literature*, 86 (Autumn 1980), pp. 60-68.

POETRY READING AT THE VETERANS' HOME

Glen Sorestad

They are mustered together in the lounge
a dozen veterans, legions of memories on stiff legs.
The marshall is a young woman devoted solely to program
some interest into their dying.

She introduces me, and I read to them — or try.
One silver-haired vet of Vimy dozes fitfully
snapping upright from the past, on occasion
like a sentry caught napping on duty.
Others stare past me to distant fields —
past horrors, past glories, comrades lost, past loves . . .

I read a few humorous poems into a maimed silence
profound as the aftermath of battle.
I try a few poems about old-timers, pioneers
and read them with the inspired passion of second generation.
But they fall on the floor around and between us
and burst like mock shrapnel, wounding no one.
I try pub poems, and finally one vet stirs
and announces loudly that he is going to the john.
My poems collapse around me and I stop reading.

"Does anyone have any questions?" I implore,
prepared for another barrage of silence
and the ignominy of my imminent departure.

One old warrior finally breaches the wall of hush
we have wrapped ourselves in. "Have you ever
been to the pub in St. Albert?" he asks.

"St. Albert, in Alberta?"

"Yes, in Alberta."

"No, I've never been in the pub there."

"Well, you should.
Then you can write a poem about it. My daughter
lives in St. Albert. I would like to visit her.
I haven't seen her for a long time." He lapses
back into wherever he has been all this time.
But another veteran stirs uneasily and fixes me
with a bayonet stare. "If I told you about me
and Billy in France, I bet you could write
a whole book of poems about it." Then he laughs
and is seized in the grip of a spasm of coughing.
"Yes, I probably could. Would you like that?"
But by this time his coughing has become entrenched
and he has forgotten having spoken at all.

The white-haired dozer bolts awake
and thumps his cane twice on the floor for attention.
"By God," he quavers, "those were good poems.
I myself once wrote poems . . . to my wife . . .
when she was still alive . . ." and his voice retreats.
Then . . . "Read us a poem about veterans," he suggests
brightly, imagining the reading has just begun.

"I haven't written one yet," I say. "But I will.
And furthermore, you'll be in my poem."
He smiles broadly and thumps the floor again in approval.

So this poem is for him, though he'll never read it.
He never got to make that visit to St. Albert either.

VERNISSAGE

Ray Smith and the Fine Art of Glossing Over

Arnold E. Davidson & Cathy N. Davidson

Get up in the morning, pull on yesterday's clothes, instant coffee in a dirty cup, smoke a cigarette. In other times, other places, Gussie's acting, his poetry, failed: she became a whore, a druggie, he died young of disease and failure. But those were other places, other times.[1]

We have been reading an unabashedly romantic chapter describing the older age and long-continued idyllic relationship of a renowned Canadian poet and his equally famous actress wife when Ray Smith, in the penultimate paragraph of *Lord Nelson Tavern*, interjects these sad words about what might have been. Then we are immediately returned to the same Gussie and Paleologue whose successes we have followed throughout most of the book, and the novel concludes with a characteristically playful, sensual, and irreverent scene. Yet other times, other places — the failed poet, the drug-addicted prostitute — exist in the universe of this comic novel, never fully articulated, but there, beneath the action, the characters, the dialogue, like the naggings of a nightmare during an otherwise perfect day.

Evil and failure are obviously important to this author, to any serious contemporary author. So Ray Smith does not present evil by mostly glossing it over. On the contrary, the book alludes to wars, murders, rapes; it portrays humiliations, hypocrisies, devastating defeats (especially in love), and different deaths. One main character, Naseby, is, as his name suggests (like Faulkner's more famous Snopes), as unsavoury as any villain in contemporary literature. But if the canvas has its dark corners, Smith nevertheless manages to paint upon it with a refreshing luminosity. Even Naseby, for all his nastiness, displays a certain brio. He enjoys his villainy. He throws himself wholeheartedly into any black task at hand, thereby avoiding the apathy, the *accidie*, which plague so many existential and post-existential anti-heroes. And herein lies, we would suggest, the distinguishing quality — possibly even the genius — of Smith's novel: his characters are vital and significant even as the darker shadings of his chiaroscuro seem to suggest that vitality and significance are impossible in *this* world.

Which is why Ray Smith has created another. In the universe of *Lord Nelson Tavern*, time does not rule all beneath the circle of the changing moon but is itself governed by the author's narrative perspective. Smith can dwell luxuriously on the moment or race pell mell through a decade. He consequently has the freedom to highlight what he chooses, to mute what he chooses. Set approximately in the middle sixties, the action reaches back, incongruously but plausibly, to World War II and ahead to the twenty-first century. The result is a temporally absurd world, and more important, Sisyphus in reverse. Through the prestidigitation of narrative and the selectivity of art (both of which depend on the mastery of time), Sisyphus can quickly achieve the top of his mountain. Or, conversely, his trip down, unencumbered by rock, can be sensuous and prolonged. Moreover, Sisyphus' joy should only be increased by his awareness that a flick of the author's pen and life again becomes the tedious, all-consuming ordeal up the mountainside, painful, pointless, exasperating, and slow.

Neither should the reader forget that Ray Smith presides in this other world, ever able to turn good to ill, comedy to tragedy. The continual authorial intrusions give us intimations of what might, could, or did happen — what should or would be made clear — if only the author or even one of his characters chose to tell *that* story:

> Paleologue turned on his heel and stomped off to sit on a rock in a field of daisies on a hill overlooking a village where he considered the problem of meaning in action.... He then considered the problem of whether or not Grilse had been in the drug trade and concluded he had been. *He was right.* (Italics added.)

"He was right." Obviously there is a sordid tale here — the ever taciturn Grilse, with his forged passports and faked deaths, involved in illicit drug traffic. But we hear no more of it. The Protean narrator of the novel, unstuck in time, assumes the omniscience allowed by his liberated state and almost parenthetically provides the reader with glimpses of other stories. Another grimmer world is there beyond the focus of the novel, out of sight of Paleologue idly contemplating the "problem of meaning in action" on his daisy-covered hillside. But except to be assured that it exists, we do not see this world: other times, other places.

Smith allows his characters some of the latitude that he claims for himself as author and narrator. Most of what we learn of the unusual Haligonians portrayed in *Lord Nelson Tavern* we hear firsthand, directly from them, as written in diaries or journals, as recited to friends or other auditors. These characters, recounting episodes from their lives, shape that tale to the situation in which it is told, to the interests of their listener, and to their own need to perceive their life as following a certain form. Each consequently has his or her own allotment of varnish. They can highlight what might otherwise seem dull; gloss over what might otherwise seem unflattering. They can also omit that which does not foster the impression they would make. In still other exchanges — other times and other

places — we may learn more of the story. So, briefly put, the novel is structured as a montage. Various narrations overlie one another to give the reader a larger view, although never the whole picture. It should also be noted that Smith does not employ conventional unreliable narrators who simply misestimate the significance of what they report thereby throwing the burden of interpretation entirely on the reader. Instead we have narrators who are themselves artificers used to shaping the materials of life: painter, poet, professor, actress, con man, crook.

The art of such narrators, deployed through the greater art of the author, produces a book that is subtly spacious despite its brevity. Indeed, even a listing of the main characters and *some* of their primary relationships can sound bewildering: Paleologue and his wife, Gussie; Ti-Paulo and his mistress, Odile Saulara (and then seven imitation Odiles in a row); the perfect lovers, Dimitri and Francesca; the less than perfect lovers, Gould and Rachel, with their daughter, Sarah (although Ti-Paulo is Sarah's biological father); Nora Noon, who is long posed between Grilse and her husband, Roger Portable; Lucy, who is first Paleologue's lover and later Ti-Paulo's father's wife; and, finally, Naseby, who never has relationships but who is seldom alone. But such a listing can hardly suggest the controlled complexity with which these characters are allowed to play out their stable and unstable pairings. Thus Ti-Paulo's father marries the first lover of Ti-Paulo's daughter's first lover — symmetrical conjunctions that the casual reader can easily overlook.

We first meet most of this cast of characters when they are college students gathered in the tavern that presumably provides the book with its title. From Ray Smith's earlier collection of short stories, *Cape Breton Is the Thought Control Center of Canada*, we know that Lord Nelson Tavern is located in Halifax, near Dalhousie University. Yet the novel, *Lord Nelson Tavern*, never names the eponymous tavern nor specifies where it is to be found. This spatial uncertainty, like the continual blurring and slurring of times past and present, is deliberate and with a point. The setting is Halifax and the setting is also everywhere. Thus Gussie and Paleologue can pursue their transatlantic careers without ever abandoning home base — their relationship, their work, and their conveniently isolated country retreat. In contrast, Grilse rushes from Tunisia, to Paris, to Rome, to Finland, to Sweden; "here and there," in his own phrase; every new place "the same only different," to again quote this indefinite man. Hopelessly parted from Nora Noon, he finds that his destiny is always diverted and his journeys are ever off centre.

But the novel itself has a centre, which is, simply, its beginning. The reader can keep all of the characters and their convoluted lives straight because we see them, originally, together, young, engaging in almost archetypal student-barroom talk, dreaming of future careers and ultimate successes while muddling their way through the business of the present mostly by falling hopelessly in love. Even as

we move away from Lord Nelson Tavern, in time and distance, we still retain a cohesive vision of the group, as do the characters themselves who mark time by how long it has been since they have seen each other.

LET US LOOK NOW AT ONE of these "reunions," at, more precisely, the vernissage with which Ti-Paulo prepares to open a new art show and through which Smith fully develops a basic metaphor that governs the entire novel. This gathering is portrayed in the third chapter, "Breakup: From the Journals of Ti-Paulo," and is attended by Grilse, by Paleologue and Gussie, by Naseby, and perhaps by Rachel and Gould (a brief comment later in the book suggests they may have been there too). Oblique time references, some made in this chapter, others scattered throughout the rest of the novel, indicate that the participants in the vernissage are in their mid- to late-thirties, almost two decades beyond their student days at Lord Nelson Tavern. Way stations on the road to death are being passed. Furthermore, in a rational world, Ti-Paulo points out, an artist's shows should mark that passing; "one at the end of each period." But as he also observes at the very beginning of this chapter, "painting periods are usually life periods. More specifically, woman periods." He soon finds out how right he was. The highlights shift, and the occasion designed to mark a professional triumph becomes, partly because of old acquaintances unforgot who attend it, the beginning of a personal defeat, Ti-Paulo's break-up with Odile.

Or perhaps that break-up is another victory. The two, victory and defeat, are not easily distinguished from one another. As Ti-Paulo notes in his journal, the entries of which constitute Chapter Three: "A show is an exhibition of the most painful failures, the ones closest to being successes." And taken together, his journal entries attest that the love affair meant most as it was ending, even after it had ended. Chapter Three also illustrates how metaphors of life and art and love all intermingle. Indeed, the real "show," in the chapter, the true vernissage, is not the art show, but the journal itself, self-consciously literary with its numerous references to Shakespeare, its exhibition of love's labours lost.

Consistent with the vernissage which he sees as marking the end of an affair, Ti-Paulo will put a bright face on the mundane sorrow that he feels. He does so by becoming, in his journal, a smiling private man, ironically aware of the role he plays as philosophical abandonee, but not so aware of his older compensating role as ironic observer. Thus Smith, with this portrait of the artist portraying himself, shows how humans symbiotically shape both their lives and their fictions — the showing of their lives. Even in a most painful situation, the parting of lovers, there is some posing. Yet the posing is also real. It, too, becomes part of the experience, just as the applied varnish becomes part of the painting. More-

over, it is only through artful pose and honest pretense that Ti-Paulo can transcend his personal loss and paint again.

Chapter Three, one of the longest I-narratives in the novel, suggests that all of the characters — and thus all humans — create their lives, or partly create their lives, or — at least — *can* partly create their lives. Consider, for example, Odile Saulara, the former fashion model who leaves Ti-Paulo. Odile is a great beauty but she is also a woman with a tortured past. An orphan who was never adopted, she passed her childhood in a "couple of foster homes where the wives spent the agency allowance on gin and the husbands molested her." But that is all we are told of this model's unmodel childhood. Or equally obliquely, Ti-Paulo once notes that "Odile Saulara is not her real name. Probably Mary Smith or Betty Grable Jones or something." As with Grilse and his drug trafficking, we have only the shadow of an otherwise hidden story. But it is Odile's story and she does not choose to tell it. She insists on remaining aloof, distant, a mannequin turned editor whose polished surface is her own best work of art. Yet glimpses of the human woman beneath still shine through the carefully maintained façade that is itself a version of the woman shining through:

> I love her for her entrances and exits. If she is sitting in here and wants an apple from the kitchen she gets up and strides toward the doorway, not long steps, but tall and straight, and with her head up, perhaps even turned around to ask if I want something. The very form of confidence, mmmm-mmh. Then she trips on the door sill.
>
> Her whole life is like that. Not appearance and reality because both the tall and the tripping are real.

Ti-Paulo sees in others what he does not so fully comprehend in himself — how substance and surface, the human assuming and the mask assumed, intricately combine to rule out easy dichotomies such as the hoary literary theme of appearance versus reality. Appearances have their reality too.

But even in the stumbling elegant Odile, what we might term "the seemingness of seems" is not seen completely. Ti-Paulo is too much an artist to make that mistake. As he observed, a painter's work is generally divided into "woman periods." His work at that "time is figure drawing, the woman is Odile Saulara." He needs her seemingness. The mannequin turned editor must still serve as his model of what a beautiful female should be — even though he actually paints those who more Rubenesquely embody that ideal. Her thin beauty inspires him to draw beautiful figures of fat women. "Metaphysics again," Ti-Paulo says in exasperation, well aware that even when the artist limits himself to shading and line, reality can still take on many guises.

Although Odile casts roles for herself, that does not prevent Ti-Paulo from casting her in other, different roles, as his model and his muse. Consider also the journal in which he anticipates her departure. Is Ti-Paulo here shaping the living

woman every bit as much as he shapes her figure in his drawings — and with as little attention to verisimilitude? He clearly expects and perhaps thereby precipitates Odile's every move: the special presents, the alternations between sullenness and fawning flirtation, the "business" that keeps her away in the evenings. And do these details attest to her defection mostly because Ti-Paulo sees them as "proof"? For example, when Naseby turns up at the vernissage and Odile declares that his glance is "like being handled by some obscene, slimy swamp creature," Ti-Paulo immediately decides that the two will become lovers: "Odile has a strong streak of masochism, self-disgust, and Naseby is the guy to satisfy her." Odile does leave, but we do not know if she goes to join Naseby in his mire. Ti-Paulo believes that she does but Ti-Paulo, in his journal, paints with a vivid palette, intense contrasts, Odiles and Nasebys.

How much Ti-Paulo shapes the break-up records must be a matter for conjecture. We see only his side of the story. The problem, however, is still more complex. Even the evidence Ti-Paulo presents supposedly to demonstrate his own good faith "seems" (a loaded word in this novel) ambiguous, and no authorial intrusions resolve that ambiguity. Thus Ti-Paulo's very gestures supposedly designed to persuade Odile to remain are precisely those that demonstrate, for him, her desire to leave: "I went over and told her I loved her and she said she adored me . . . when they talk adoration [or love?], it's already too late." He uses chess metaphors to describe the end game he plays in a match that he sees as already lost. After the opening move, the gambit of pretended gentleness, he concludes that "White's game is in its last throes," and White's game can be either "hers or mine." He seeks stalemates in defeat. Or he would find Pyrrhic recompense in the patterns established and the postures struck as the game winds down — the artist's eye for grace under pressure. One morning, he wakes her with a kiss, serves her an elegant breakfast in bed, bathes and anoints her while she applies make-up to her face. He then sits back to gaze upon the perfect beauty he has helped her to achieve: the "sun streaming in, . . . her face turned quarter face from me so I could see the good lines in her cheek, her throat." A Vermeer — or only a Wyeth? He also notes again that "it's already too late," and even hopes that when she subsequently leaves to go shopping, she will not return: "Perfection would be nice just once in my life." He has created a perfect picture, a tableau, and the artist insists on the ending that will hurt the man. When Odile returns for a few days, before her final and permanent departure, the man welcomes her back. It is the man who has begun to realize how much he loves her.

When she does leave, Ti-Paulo even more slowly begins to recognize that love is other than art:

> Today I read *Measure for Measure*, watched a ball game on TV and listened to some Mozart. While I was making lunch I listened to an interesting radio program

about archaeological digs in Tanzania. Then I went out and got drunk. So I loved that woman. So what?

The "So what?" shapes the rest of Ti-Paulo's life: "So I loved her, love her. All right, I admit it. So? I even admit I can't replace her." Yet, as we discover from a single parenthetical line dropped much later in the novel, Ti-Paulo tries desperately to replace her. Ever the artist, he manages to find seven close copies of the first Odile, but he never recovers the original. We need not be fooled by his flippant phrases.

At the beginning of the chapter, Ti-Paulo described how, for the great nineteenth-century exhibitions, "painters would slap on a new coat of varnish to make the garbage look fresh for the public the next day." He continues: "My stuff is drawing under glass. Just for the fun of it, I ought to varnish the whole lot." But this is precisely what Ti-Paulo does with his life and in his journal. He creates the situation, the work of art, and then covers it over with varnish — with the varnish that an artist would wish to apply, a thin coat that does not at all obscure the picture beneath:

> So I went out for a few beers. Students in the cheap bars, ad-men in the expensive ones. When I got home it was a shock to my eyes to find everything, every light, every book, every cushion, even the match I dropped in the hall on the way out all exactly as I left them.

Still life, indeed.

WE HAVE ANALYZED THIS CHAPTER in some detail and not just because it effectively illustrates the subtlety of Smith's technique. The vernissage also merits careful attention because it represents a sustained exercise in the painting metaphors that run through the work. And still more important, the larger vernissage, Ti-Paulo's glossed-over portrayal of his failure in love, the way he makes a fiction from possibly fictional facts, serves as a synecdoche for the whole novel. The one chapter can be seen, then, as a key to the structure of the book. Furthermore, this question of structure is particularly important because John Moss, one of the few critics who has written substantially on *Lord Nelson Tavern*, admires the novel for some of its qualities but still dismisses it as an interesting failure — a work that sadly lacks any unifying vision or artistic unity:

> Rather than a plot to the whole, there is a filling in, an almost random compilation until the picture is complete. But the picture itself is irrelevant, being so entirely different from every perspective. What in the end are important are the stories that make it up. There is meaning in particulars, but the whole they add up to is meaningless, the shape of a void.[2]

But pictures do not become "complete" nor stories "important" through the process of an "almost random compilation." Neither are kaleidoscopic configurations ("different from every perspective") thus established. Moss obviously overlooks the pattern that informs *Lord Nelson Tavern.* The shifting perspectives continually intersect and, at their loci, imply meaning. The vernissage, as earlier observed, is one such obvious locus. Against the backdrop of Ti-Paulo's success at art and failure at love, we catch glimpses of the other characters who are struggling to achieve in both mediums and who succeed — if they do succeed — not by chance but mostly through acts of will, a sense of design, craftsmanship, handiwork.[3] What Moss sees as a void seems, instead, to be an answer: a reassertion of one's power to direct the course of one's life or — probably more accurate — to live, at least in part, the fiction of one's ideal life. Smith's most admirable protagonists artistically gloss over their inevitable human failings in order to achieve the larger perspective they have set for themselves. A few imperfect strokes need not ruin the whole canvas. But the less capable characters get stuck in their own varnish. Reconstructing a more flattering past, envisioning a more perfect future, they make little of the workable reality of the present moment.

This contrast is effectively established in Chapter Three when Ti-Paulo recounts in his journal "an incident with my father." That incident occurred much earlier, soon after Ti-Paulo was out of art school and probably while he was living unsuccessfully with plump Sigrid (he had not yet found his model muse) in a purple apartment filled with Chianti bottles. But more important is the placement of the digression. In the middle of his own account of his own disappointment in love, Ti-Paulo tells of his father's earlier comparable experience:

> He was about fifty then and having his problems. My mother had finally taken her money and gone to Rome to live among the gigolos. The old man was hitting the booze, his law practice was slipping. Then he started going with a new typist from the architect's down the hall. It was serious. He called and offered me the plane fare home.

The young artist finds the lovers "ludicrous." But their relationship still has a kind of appeal and Lucy, the twenty-five-year-old typist, shows a certain class:

> She put out the best tableware for honoured son, was careful with it but not finicky. Served the meal without apologies (even if she knew about the old lady's cooking, this showed a cool hand) and never once called my father by his first name. That last was genius. I could hardly wait to call her Mommy.

For all his glibness, Ti-Paulo admits to a begrudging admiration. It is merited: "The old man was on his way to recovery." The "old man" also recounts how he discovered the route he is following: "I was having supper one night, if you could call it that. Sitting at the kitchen table with greasy dishes all over the place,

eating a fried egg with the yolk broken." The cat leaps onto the table and starts cleaning off the other plates: "I keep eating, the cat keeps eating, we're watching each other. Suddenly it dawns on me, I'm fifty years old and I'm going to spend the rest of my life eating supper with a cat. Was I? No goddamn fierce I wasn't." It is a "good story" made so, the cynical son suspects, through many tellings. Yet the father does more than repeat his compensatory tale. He also chooses Lucy, even though that choice well might lead to his being abandoned again: "I figure I can give her ten years before she wants something more." It is still a wise choice. Ten years of Lucy is much preferable to ten years with the cat. Yet then Ti-Paulo (to his father he is simply Paul, and small Paul at that), at the conclusion of his account of his abandonment, writes: "Maybe I'll get a cat like the old man. . . . A house-trained cat."

Ti-Paulo's backward glance at the lonely father who *solves* his loneliness through a pragmatic love stands in marked contrast to his account of the aesthetically shackled son who proposes a cat but will really settle for nothing less than an impossible ideal, a perfect copy of Odile. In short, Smith gives us a different version of the story even within that story. It is in this sense that the chapter sets forth the pattern of the book. The internal parallel also parallels external ones. For the Lucy Ti-Paulo barely recollects when he meets her as his father's prospective wife is the Lucy who occupies most of Chapter One, which is Paleologue's tale of love lost to poetry and another version of life sacrificed upon the altar of art. In that opening chapter, Paleologue, at university, writes poetry to his muse. Like Ti-Paulo painting even his plump models in the image of Odile, Paleologue refracts Lucy through a lens of Petrarchan romanticism. The down-to-earth, gum-chewing secretary becomes "my pale Lucy, pale Lucia, light and airy, brave love." Like Odile, Lucy finds that unlikely casting uncomfortable. Yet her love for Paleologue is apparent even in the way she leaves him, which, incidentally, occurs during a celebration designed to mark his first professional success — a dinner during which he intends to propose:

> "No, don't say it," the glitter on her cheeks now, it would never work, it had to end, to end now, she wanted him to take her home now, she was sorry, she was really, really sorry, love, it wouldn't work, they came from two different worlds, love, he was a poet, he had sold a poem, he was going to be famous, he should marry someone from his own world, she was only a dumb typist, no, let's be honest with each other, we always have been, love, we just come from two different worlds, a couple should come from one world, . . . and I'll always love you, always, the glittering tears on her cheeks. . . .

And she is right. Paleologue does not realize this at first; he tries to find the poet's eternal sleep beneath the waves in the harbour. But he is saved (inexplicably by Grilse) to realize that Lucy must have her older businessman, the secretary her boss. He needs something else, and not a succession of imitation Lucys. Paleologue

learns the lesson of his first love. He finds Gussie and lives as happily ever after as any character in serious contemporary literature can reasonably hope to do.

But what is *Lord Nelson Tavern* all about? We would suggest that it is both a return to an older type of fiction and yet one of the most experimental novels in Canadian literature.[4] The older form is the novel of manners. Jane Austen presides here. We follow characters through vernissages, sophisticated cocktail parties, crass student gatherings, celebration dinners, barroom sessions, polite teas, book signing parties, and extended summer visits. Yet in these public settings we see private faces too. Again Smith's narrative technique allows him to transcend the usual limits of the realistic mode. The shifting I-voice and the playful omniscience of the narrator results in a continuous counterpointing of oblique views. With pointillism, the blue and yellow dots together and from a distance seem like green. In much the same fashion the private perspectives in the novel add up to a larger public picture, yet the constituent primary pigments remain distinct and can be closely examined.

In exploring the discrete scenes, the separate highlights and their countering dark contrasts, we can begin to see more clearly what Ray Smith has been showing us all along. The characters in the novel who live best live with a kind of good sense and decorum, peculiar values in a twentieth-century book. And yet their decorum is suited to the age. Note, for example, how Gussie has an affair with a sleazy actor while Paleologue fights at the front in a war unaccountably past and future. Gould and Rachel are incensed by her behaviour, yet Paleologue, informed of his wife's infidelity, realizes that Gussie's temporary escape from the battle of loneliness has little to do with him or the nature of their relationship. Conversely, when Paleologue finally accommodates the precocious Sarah who has been trying all day to seduce him, it is Sarah, not Gussie, who for two decades plays the betrayed wife. Sarah, it should be added, also imitates Ti-Paulo, her father, in her extended search for another Paleologue and the lost innocence of virginity innocently lost. Only belatedly, when reading the diary she wrote to her older self, does she realize that one cannot live imprisoned in the past. Yet other characters, most notably Gould and Rachel, play out the defeats of their past in their present, always tormenting each other with what "other times, other places" might have wrought, neither one budging from the time and place they share, unhappily, together. They lack Paleologue's "balance," his ability to "see the good and bad in all things" and to be "neither impressed by the one nor disgusted by the other." And they all, from Paleologue and Gussie, through Ti-Paulo, Nora, Sarah, Rachel, Gould, and even Naseby — like the Bennet sisters in *Pride and Prejudice* — get pretty much what they deserve. In short, despite the seeming

randomness of exposition, the erratic time, the displaced place, we have a balanced and symmetrical work. Lord Nelson Tavern looks rather like Pemberley Hall after all.

So the novel exhibits a coherent vision, and a clearly moral one at that. Naseby, significantly, never recovers from his first mistake. The realization that he was outmanoeuvred both financially and aesthetically when he tried to con Paleologue and Gussie into making a pornographic movie (pornography was elevated into art and his intended victims collected most of the cash) precipitates further failures. No longer sure of his base abilities, he dies a victim of his continuing miscalculation. Grilse would substitute nefarious business for Nora Noon yet cannot live without her. He saves Paleologue from suicide but, forty years later, will not allow Paleologue to return the favour. In contrast, Nora Noon puts debasement behind her and even transcends the "figures in the cave," the perpetual nightmares of her waking world. She, too, becomes an artist, a better one than Ti-Paulo, precisely because she can replace the figments of her haunted imagination with the pale pigments of her awesome canvasses. In love, too, she plays a better game. With Grilse on his aimless travels, with her journalist-lover too drunk to be her lover, she joins, instead, Roger Portable:

> They ran into each other every morning for a week. The following week they were married.
>
> "Because you found my bench."
>
> "Because you found me on it."
>
> As good reasons as any, they felt, and a better marriage than most.

And meanwhile, through all the other tales of loves lost and won, the "perfect lovers," Dimitri and Francesca, stay young forever, bound only to each other and the present moment, as vacuous as a soap bubble — and just as self-contained.

The characters who live most admirably — and most happily (an unusual state in serious contemporary fiction: *happiness*?) — are those who recapitulate in their fictional lives the method of the artist who creates them. But their happiness does not demonstrate an easy optimism. Halifax is not located in Arcadia; *Lord Nelson Tavern* is not romantic pastoral. The numerous references to Dante and Chaucer, particularly to "The Inferno" and "The Wife of Bath's Tale," are not bucolic at all. As Dimitri and Francesca especially demonstrate, fortune — luck and riches — is not enough. As all the characters in the novel show, a certain art in living is required. Those who do not achieve it are condemned to live their failures. As in Dante's "Inferno," they might protract their limitations — their sins — by insisting they have none. As in Chaucer's "The Wife of Bath's Tale," they might seek solace in fantasy alternatives and the sympathy of listeners as unconcerned with them as they are with others. The sinners of Dante and of Chaucer never escape the psychology of their sin, just as the more modest sinners of our secular age regularly re-enact the neurosis implicit in their imperfect lives

— Jean-Baptiste Clamence, Moses Herzog, Madame Tassy Roland, Jake Hersch, characters Canadian or otherwise, who are trapped in an I-voice of self-consciousness, a hell of self-examination, the tedium of psychoanalysis. Smith's shifting "I's" present the other side of other stories. Contrary to Moss's assessment, these intersecting lives and chapters offer a completeness almost cosmic in its very human comedy.

We began by quoting the penultimate paragraph of *Lord Nelson Tavern*. With that authorial glance at "other places, other times," the reader must also clearly glimpse again the dark possibilities that serve throughout the novel as mostly hidden underpainting. The final paragraph then completes the picture:

> In the bright dining car almost empty at third call, Paleologue and Gussie ... leaned toward each other and kissed over the white linen. A red rose floated in a glass bowl. They smiled at their reflections in the window and could not see the snow-covered countryside they passed through. Gussie glanced about to see if anyone was paying them any attention, then shifted forward in her chair.
> "Higher," she purred, "Yes, higher."

And this is the way the novel ends. The train, a symbol (for journeys and connections) that recurs throughout the novel, passes through the night. The elderly couple inside kiss sedately "over the white linen" but underneath the table they are adolescents still. Here, too, are other places, other times. The world outside is dark, cold, snow-covered, connotative of death (as all northern landscapes regularly are), but the window reveals only the bright reflection of smiling faces. As the red rose, another touch of Dante, floats in the bowl, two autumnal lovers re-experience the fires of their long passed spring. Thus time runs backwards to allow, for those who can achieve it, an earthy heaven. "Higher . . . Yes, higher." Smith toys with the vocabulary of mysticism but he does so with serious intent. Higher is sometimes lower. Paleologue and Gussie are happy because they possess the ability to play with and play over the paradoxes of life, which are themselves — a basic point in the novel — the different shadings that an honest rendering of human experience must convey. And Smith gives us an honest rendering polished to a high art. With Paleologue and Gussie and their final play, he completes a group portrait that is strikingly Rembrandtesque in the way in which it highlights, juxtaposes, blends, and mutes both the dark and the bright possibilities of life.

NOTES

[1] Ray Smith, *Lord Nelson Tavern* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1974), p. 160.

[2] John Moss, *Sex and Violence in the Canadian Novel* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1977), pp. 150-51.

[3] Yet Ray Smith, it must be emphasized, is not a Canadian version of Ayn Rand. Thus Gussie, at one point, talking of how "lucky" she and Paleologue have been,

observes: "I was reading Herodotus again; I had forgotten how chaotic and accidental life can be."

[4] Moss does pay partial tribute to "Smith's brilliant formal innovations" but sees them as "not matched, quite, by the quality of the vision they are meant to convey."

FROM 7TH AVENUE

Stephen Bett

It becomes increasingly
problematical that the
house is not the place
described, but a
place enacted. Having
no real features save

those you make of it
moving past a window or
throwing open a balcony
door, it could easily be
reduced to the mimicry
of design. But surfaces

are constantly being
confronted by your hand
weaving its own purpose
through the rooms, like a
painter who has inherently
consented to his medium.

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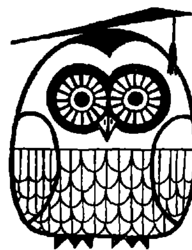

HIPPOS AND BIKERS

Glen Sorestad

Radium Hot Springs this August afternoon
looks the same as any other summer mountain day:
a congestion of swimsuited tourists that ring
the government hot springs pool in a drove.
Half-submerged they bask, pale hippos sans mud
lured to this concrete wallow to luxuriate
from every corner of the continent, pilgrims
in multi-coloured trunks and bikinis
hip to hip around the oblong pool.

Inside the National Hotel down the road
cold beer is spilled into government glasses as locals
offset the valley heat with beaded brown bottles:
those fine brews from Creston — Kokanees and Kootenays
and bubbles rise in the chilled amber of snowy heads.
In this refuge from the hippo hive we repair —
my wife and I free from the wheel and the long drive
content to let the cold beer bring the sun down.
The rumble of low conversation surrounds us
and the punctuation of bottle on glass.

The door opens and yanks someone in from the sun
a black-leathered biker, white helmet in hand
greasy wind-strewn hair flung akimbo. He enters
with a second, third and fourth clone hard on heels.
The door has barely rejected the sun again
when another group of four or five clatter through
their heavy-booted tread a militant percussion.
Each one is bearded, hair askew or pony-tailed
each leathered black back emblazoned
with its unartistic club insignia: Rebels,
Kings, Chiefs, from every western city.
And as the door swings open again and again
the march of helmets and bikers garb grows
and the throng is marshalled at the back of the pub.
The beer flows downhill to meet the thirst.

When the last one is finally seated at the back
two bikers take a seat at the front at a window
to survey the street outside and the bike pack
at rest now, roars stilled, chrome aglint.
"There are at least forty-five bikes out there,"
my wife announces quietly, and that's too much
for several tables of locals in this sudden power shift
and beers are drunk in haste, tables vacated:
they have heard wild tales of bike gang terror.
Outside the hotel six bikers are deployed
as late afternoon sentinels over the silent machines.
A few bikers stroll from table to table
and exchange unheard remarks with the others.
Some wear headbands, some neckerchiefs, most
are greasy-jeaned, almost all seem over thirty.
The room wears their presence in unseemly quiet.
A sharp smell of fear hangs in the smoke.

Across the street a lone mountie has materialized
and sits in his car in the service station lot
talks to several locals with feigned indifference
and pretends not to notice just across the street
this gleaming armada of spoke and chrome.
The minutes slide by like swallows of draught
and the pub, its tables all occupied now
drinks in wake-like solemnity. Conversations
are the low drone of prayer. There are no guffaws
or high whinnies, no bellows or gut-shakers
nothing to impart the usual to the place —
and the bikers have established the mood themselves
their air of propriety has deceived us all.

Inside an hour they rise as one and troop away
and as they pass our table in a barrage of heavy heels
I note several knives in sheaths slung from belts
that slap against their thighs as they retreat.
One by one the motors catch and growl, the rumble
of Yamaha, Suzuki, Harley shakes the thin air.
Helmets snap into place as bike by bike they roll
away to shatter the mountain evening. The cop disappears.
The young bartender pastes his smile back on
and moves among the empty tables to pick up glasses.

Radium Hot Springs, August 1981

books in review

ICELANDIC RHYTHMS

KRISTJANA GUNNARS, *One-Eyed Moon Maps.* Porcépic, $5.95.

KRISTJANA GUNNARS, *Settlement Poems 1, Settlement Poems 2.* Turnstone, n.p.

A BOOK OF POEMS declares its quality in its rhythms. If their rhythms are good the poems must be good. On the other hand, many promising poems seem to fail their promise because their rhythms are uncertain. Free-form poems are especially subject to rhythmic flatness and sameness, however ingenious their spacings and line-lengths may be.

The rhythms in Kristjana Gunnars' three books, *One-Eyed Moon Masks* and *Settlement Poems, 1 & 2*, are good, and give one confidence in the over-all goodness of the books. They are based on the Old Germanic metres, though by no means strictly. These metres are current in Iceland yet, though many of the poets now use them in modified forms, if they have not given them up altogether. Kristjana Gunnars was born in Iceland and studied there, and the Icelandic content of her three books is made prominent, so it would not be surprising if their rhythms were Icelandic too. Only in *One-Eyed Moon Maps*, however, are they identifiable. Here is an example, the first stanzas of the poem called "Bear":

> the ring of moon
> changes something
> as bearskin changes bear
>
> on the floor, skin
> looks half-human
> what once was bear
> is changed by slaughter

There are two stresses per line. All but the first line of the second stanza are identifiable types, according to Sievers' metric, as follows: B,A,B, —, C,B,A. The unidentified line might be called a reverse D.

The poems in this book are not all to be scanned in this way, but many lines and whole stanzas are, and my impression is that where they wander much from the regular types the rhythms, by contrast, seem commonplace.

The collection is a unity, and makes use of an association of the moon with the god Odin to present a series of vigorous, though not easily intelligible, statements on life, death, poetry, and other weighty subjects. The first poem begins with the landing of Armstrong and Aldrin on the moon in 1969 and then immediately brings Odin into the picture, who, like the moon, was one-eyed, and hung in the World Tree as the moon hangs in the sky. Odin was the god of, among other things, poetry; he hung in the Tree for nine days and nights, a sacrifice of himself to himself, in order to acquire the runes. The poems keep Odin and the moon, and stories about both, and several more immediate things, the poet's Icelandic grandfather, for instance, and her own wishes, all in the air at once, with great skill. The paganism at times reads like hocus-pocus to me, but, though it does not seem to be erudite, it maintains the heroic stance consistently, along with the posturing that belongs with it by kind. Take, for example, the following poem, "Smoke":

> burn this house, all that's in it
> send it to sea, a blazing ship
> death by knife, death
> by rope, death by fire
> anything is better than the slow bed
>
> to sleep like maginus, lined
> with craters on the brink, struck
> by a red strap of sunrise
> sunset
>
> place me in a large fire
> surrounded by high flames
> like werner, aliacensis
> circled by peaks, place me

in clavius the larger lunar bed
ringed with mountains
higher the sunrise, sunset
faster sooner to ashes

all is as it ever was
the sea of earth, the ship
of old & rotting house
the oxygen we eat

send back the sea-king who said
steeper smoke, deeper honor

The poems are identified by runes and some runic kind of signs, as well as by titles. I was not able to make the associations between runes, titles, and poems that Gunnars speaks about in her appendix, but runes are magic, not rational, and my dictionary, furthermore (Cleasby, Vigfusson, Craigie), though it gives the Norse runes, may be out of date. There is no denying the decorative value of the runes, and the titles in the old letters, nicely done; and the book as a whole is handsome and free of proofing errors.

The heroic stance more effectively, in my view, sustains the mood of the *Settlement Poems, 1 & 2*. These poems are based on journals and documents that tell of the settlement of Icelanders north of Winnipeg during the latter half of the nineteenth century. The settlers were tough and superstitious, resourceful people who left grim conditions in Iceland to come to conditions almost as grim in Northern Manitoba. Here is how one poem puts it; Volume 2, "Johann Briem 2, II":

hannes scheving (dead 1726)
has been unearthed
in the munkathverar-cemetery
inadvertently

jon farmer, curious
has them dig it all up
the coffin strung in black
tanned leather, nailed

tight around the gable-
end with brass tacks
one side of the gable-head
loose where the corpse is

slipped in
for a burial like that
i'd go to new iceland
(when you're poor you're buried

without graveclothes, without
coffin, tied to a thin board)
though it's slow sailing
i can't say

it's bad, this moving over
from old to new iceland
a bit crowded on the boats

& wagons, unusual
food, some stomach
illness, mainly
for the kids, but other-

wise i can't say
it's as bad as the great
smallpox of 1707
& 1786, or the famines

of 1756 & 1784 (with
starvation on every
farm, no one
had anything for any-

one) only
30 or 40 children are dead
of the stomach pain
going to canada (11

in the first group dead
on arrival in winnipeg)
but it's not as bad

as 1785 (when, without
timber, you were buried
without even a board, dumped
with everyone else together

under a cairn
in the black-tanned night
nailed in with brass
stars) not that

bad

The writing in these two volumes is excellent. It is elliptical, and the sense-connections are sometimes hard to make, yet it is always vivid and gives one the sense of being present at whatever is going on. And something is always going on. The style reminds one of the sagas in its dramatic immediacy, yet its incidents and observations are joined not in a narrative sequence but by juxtaposition, as in the

"field" way of writing. I prefer the narrative line but would not deny the effectiveness of the juxtapositions in these two books.

The metres of the *Settlement Poems* are not identifiably Germanic, though their rhythms are reminiscent of them. The rhythms are good and, to my ear, have a longer swell than those of *One-Eyed Moon Maps*. In all three books the language is admirably used, economical, sparing of adjectives, adverbs, and all forms of comparison. Poetry is by nature metaphorical, but too many separate metaphors become distracting and tiresome. Comparisons with "like" and "as" are still more objectionable. There are few "*likes*" in these books, most of them in *One-Eyed Moon Maps*, and the comparisons they draw are rather identifications with mythical or heroic figures than descriptions. The vocabulary is predominantly English. In *One-Eyed Moon Maps* Latin words are used effectively in a special way, mostly as geographical place names on the moon. There are few Latin words in the *Settlement Poems* but an exotic tone is given by the many Icelandic names. This tone is deliberately reinforced by including the diacritical marks on the letters, though the peculiarly Icelandic letters are not used. The effect of these marks must be mainly visual, for few readers will know the sounds they indicate.

Altogether they are three good books; handsome to look at, good reading, and full of promise.

GEORGE JOHNSTON

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POETS IN PROSE

DERK WYNAND, *One Cook, Once Dreaming.* Sono Nis, $6.95.

RALPH GUSTAFSON, *The Vivid Air.* Sono Nis, $6.95.

POETS WHO RESORT to fiction tend to be faced with an uneasy choice: whether to adapt themselves to a prosaic medium, or whether to shape that most public of forms to their own needs and their private imaginations. Derk Wynand has chosen the latter course, and in *One Cook, Once Dreaming,* his first book devoted purely to fiction, he achieves a narrative style that is elegant and rugged at once. The book is beautifully written: in other words, the force and sensuous grace of its language are apt for the subjects at hand. These subjects — the relations between art and dream, the ways in which dreams and waking lives illuminate each other, and the difficulty of finding any sure or lasting knowledge — are hardly foreign to poetry. Indeed, much of *One Cook, Once Dreaming* could be described as "prose poetry" were it not for the effete, purplish-pink connotations that linger around that phrase. Some of Wynand's fictions (chapters? parables? fables? stories? none of these words is adequate) jut out from the text like disconnected rocks or slabs of cake, but on the whole he sustains enough of a narrative current to make this book something more than merely the sum of its burnished parts.

As the title suggests, the central figure of the narrative is a man equally adept at making cakes and dreams. He teaches the art of cookery in a school to which apprentices come from many miles around, passing through a landscape that (fittingly for Wynand) contains elements suggestive of both central Europe and British Columbia. In much of the book time seems irrelevant, as it does in numerous fairy tales and myths. We gain little sense of the passage of months or years, and even less of characters "developing" through a series of yesterdays, for *One Cook, Once Dreaming* unfolds in the present tense of all dreams. Wynand uses various devices to make a reading of his book as near as possible to a succession of dreams: the characters are unnamed, their personalities blur continually, and sensory images are provided with a minimum of explanation. Such methods can easily become self-indulgent, but here that rarely happens; Wynand's tact usually equals his audacity. One of the most powerful episodes, however, deals directly with the effects of time, for it describes the advent of a virtually omnipotent cooking machine which threatens to put all the teachers out of work. As Wynand evokes the desperate competition between the beleaguered teachers and the machine, his prose attains an intensity and a resonance which would not have disgraced Kafka.

The narrative is framed by passages at the book's beginning and end which are specifically concerned with the act of creation; Wynand is a knowing writer, and the simplicity of many of these fictions is the result of artifice. His ironies are mostly gentle and his attitude to sex occasionally verges on the sentimental: if this is post-modernism, it is post-modernism with charm. Even though the cook's dreams often throw a reflection back onto the original dreamer, an author who dreams of a cook, they reveal an imagination that can only be described as *wholesome.* One of Wynand's more surprising accomplishments in *One Cook, Once Dreaming* is to show something of the dignity of teaching. For all the novelty of images and style, this is a profoundly unworrying book. One might even say that Butor wouldn't melt in its mouth.

Whereas Wynand modifies the fictional mode according to his own requirements, Ralph Gustafson has been content to

leave the short story much as he found it. His collected stories, published under a slightly strained title borrowed from Stephen Spender's most famous poem, are a small disappointment, though not because of any technical deficiencies in the writing; Gustafson is too alert, too professional a writer to permit incompetence. Nevertheless, the fourteen short stories that make up *The Vivid Air* give an unfortunate impression of slightness. The suspicion arises that they were written over the decades more from curiosity or memory than from artistic necessity, and that (unlike many of Gustafson's poems) they have not been fully imagined. They seem somehow peripheral. Too much of the author has been left out of his fiction; the musical, shining imagination behind, say, *Rivers Among Rocks* and *Fire on Stone* appears only briefly in *The Vivid Air.*

The teen-age hero of the title story learns "once and for all that sensuousness was not sinful, that to hold richness within him was right." It is a belief that only a few of the tales exemplify. Most of them are filtered through the worried, edgy consciousness of their central characters; the stories which concentrate on the rich world of childhood are among the most evocative. In two stories about the boy Jimmy, possibly founded on direct reminiscence, and one about a little girl called Deborah, Gustafson allows himself space and breath to write at leisure. Elsewhere he seems cramped, as if the desire to publish his fiction in magazines with very restricted space had affected the quality of perception as well as the quantity of words. A few of his stories offer the cold bath treatment, plunging the reader fast into a chilly world but refusing to let him stay there for long. Perhaps surprisingly, *The Vivid Air* betrays a certain fascination with danger, mutilation, and torment — a dark interest that more than matches the "lyrical intensity" of which the publishers boast, and far outweighs the promised "humour." The socially observant realism characteristic of so many Canadian short stories is not a prominent feature of Gustafson's work; the tones and themes of his fiction often recall instead the private intensity of poetry. Yet that privacy remains somewhat at odds with the freely accepted conventions of the form and the demands of narrative. He is by no means a bad writer of fiction; but it is not for fiction that he will be remembered.

MARK ABLEY

BEING AND BEING ABOUT

ALICE VAN WART, *Positionings.* Fiddlehead, $3.50.

MIRIAM MANDEL, *Where Have You Been.* Longspoon, n.p.

PAT LOWTHER, *Final Instructions.* Ed. Dona Sturmanis & Fred Candelaria. West Coast Review/Orca Sound, $4.95.

DESPITE WHAT NON-READERS of the form think, poetry attempts to elucidate and not bemuse. Even though each of these books fails in some way (and to wildly differing degrees), the attempts at least reflect back a look at ourselves as well as the poet writing.

The sources of Van Wart's poems are dreams and sex. Although she has thus succeeded in tracking down this power-source of many a good poem, she hasn't discovered how to tap directly into it. The poems "discuss" and "are about" these things rather than being creations arising out of them: "In dreams / I fly / the dark night / lights my way"; and "here your body haunts / mine, an interloper I resent / the time I spend examining / your intentions / our positionings." There's a quiet attention to rhythm in these poems although nothing striking in

language or imagery. Their lack of strength is due in part to dearth of intellectual line, and it's impossible to say what Van Wart's work could be if she were to find one: but seeing oneself at the centre of a mystic process is (however characteristic of much, both good and bad, in our literature and visual art) insufficient to engender the myth-magic that Van Wart desires.

Vulnerability, fragility, and madness are the hallmarks of Miriam Mandel's world. *Where Have You Been* is a diary arrangement of poems chronicling a journey to London and back via tourist stops and psychiatric institutions. The poems are long and thin on the page and the language is simple in the extreme — it skates along the surface of thought and feeling, although the emotional chaos that hovers around the child-like naive tone is inescapable. Again, this is poetry about rather than arising from experience; but it does mirror an odd thing back, a belief in reality as found in old things: "these / strange living customs / all this vast age / pressing down / upon me." Reality appears to have a geometric relation to the number and size of cemeteries in a country, and illusion to the amount of unoccupied landscape around. Is it any wonder that we worry about identity?

Mandel has one lovely and simple poem, however — called "London, June 15, 1978" — where the naiveté works, rather like a Faulkner faded belle describing herself: "I will write of Coventry / some other night / if the Lord / who creates / such passion / such beauty / in his Homes / leaves me / sufficient time — / now / I have become / the empty, beige sweet pea pod / ready to fall / to earth / and blend there / in peace."

Even though these are early, flawed, and in some cases unfinished poems, Pat Lowther's *Final Instructions* reflect a complex mind engaged in looking at a world that demands a complex response. The poems demonstrate an intellectual curiosity and a willingness to risk and struggle with language, thought, and imagery that is compelling. These poems are philosophical, much more so than the more familiar poems of her later work, and deal explicitly with the place of man in the universe and the cycles of consciousness found in myth. The poem "Personae" with its lines "not even the pink and sapping roses / that are hands / of human love" is quintessential Lowther. Some of the poems are open-ended, failures in terms of craft, and yet move in wider, more exciting arcs than others that are more technically expert. In fact, the reach of these poems surprised me — perhaps she'd been encouraged to tie later poems together too tightly, to remove all evidence of the construction. But in some cases, to do this removes the link to understanding for the reader.

My one objection to this book is its arrangement. The editors explain that they collected the work in order to show Lowther's development (the poems cover a period of 15 years) and yet they have arranged the poems "thematically" rather than chronologically, indicating by italicization in the table of contents which are the earliest poems — an irritating device. The sections are not that discrete in theme and, for this type of book, a chronological arrangement would have been much more to the point.

MARILYN BOWERING

ON EVALUATION

WILFRED CUDE, *A Due Sense of Differences: An Evaluative Approach to Canadian Literature*. University Press of America, $17.75; pa. $9.50.

THIS VOLUME IS DIFFICULT to bring into focus because it is at once a collection of "separate and self-contained" essays on

four works of Canadian fiction and a framing set of definitions and arguments meant to justify the essays — and their collection — by reference to the enterprise of evaluative criticism. There are eight of these "self-contained" essays, six reprinted and retitled from previous publication in Canadian literary journals, one expanded from a previously published essay, and one anounced as soon to appear in a journal; two are on Ross's *As For Me and My House,* three on Davies' *Fifth Business,* two on Margaret Atwood's *Lady Oracle,* and one on Richler's *St. Urbain's Horseman.* I might wish for more space to commend and to quarrel with the readings offered in these essays, and such a response would be necessary to satisfy the author when he characterizes his work as "a style of reading that demands more than others, proving itself only by the results it attains: and it is by those results, rather than the format of their presentation, that this study's contribution to Canadian criticism should finally be assessed." But perhaps these essays, since they are now offered as a collection, are equally well reviewed by attention to their framing format, contained in a long preface, two initial chapters, and a final one, because there Cude raises issues that go well beyond his readings of specific novels to bear on his understanding of evaluative criticism itself — with results that colour an estimation of his individual essays.

By means of his format, Cude sets out to demonstrate both the need and the direction for the evaluative criticism of Canadian letters, an enterprise so important in itself and so counter to the authority of Northrop Frye's arguments against evaluation that one has to begin by admiring both Cude's priorities and his courage. Unfortunately Cude's definitions of what evaluation is, and what it does, work in such restrictive and finally contradictory ways that they seriously undermine his case. On the first page of his preface, Cude uses Dick Harrison's *Unnamed Country* to illustrate his contention that (with the exception, as he later makes clear, of John Moss and Edmund Wilson) critics of Canadian literature "flatly refuse to consider the literary merits of the works they discuss." Cude then illustrates one of his own methods for such consideration by flatly refusing to concede Harrison's authors any literary merit whatsoever: "Whatever the context of judgment, the novels of authors like Joseph Collins, Alexander Begg, Ralph Connor, Nellie McClung, Arthur Stringer and Edward McCourt are rubbish." Without worrying the accuracy of this comprehensive judgment, we can marvel at the ease with which it is here affirmed; Cude goes on to call such judgments "observable facts readily accessible to any intelligent and careful reader," and presumably as fact they are beyond argument; at least Cude offers none. No need then for a searching process of discrimination here; the identification of rubbish seems immediate, a matter of simple inspection, albeit with the qualification that the inspector be neither stupid nor careless. What then requires the effort of evaluative judgment? Cude's own considerable efforts are devoted to "the isolation of Canadian works of excellence, arguing from a detailed explanation of why and how they might be deemed works of excellence." Proper evaluation, then, "must isolate the classics from the lesser works." Cude emphasizes again and again that this kind of isolating is demanding work, but once it has been accomplished, critical discrimination reaches another kind of limit: Cude is "convinced that criticism will never succeed in ranking the classics relative to each other." Adapting John Maynard Keynes's "principles of uncertain argument" as set out in his *Treatise on Probability,* Cude rejects any principle of dis-

crimination beyond the distribution of works into two categories, the canon of classics and the rubbish bin for "ephemeral art." As one consequence of this position, Cude's claims for his collection seem modest: "It is highly probable that my four selections are all classics, and it is a waste of time attempting to rank them relative to each other." But there is contradiction here. If the detection of literary rubbish is, as Cude initially affirms, so easy, a matter of "observable facts readily accessible," of simple inspection, why does the identification of classics require "a style of reading that demands more than others" and why are classics only capable of being recognized as "probable"; classics are, aren't they (given only two categories), the good stuff left over after we've thrown out the rubbish? If, however, as Cude later insists, such sorting is so demanding, shouldn't he have been less abrupt in consigning Collins, Begg, Connor, McClung, Stringer, and McCourt to the rubbish bin?

This contradiction is, however, less important than one implication of Cude's refusal to discriminate among classics; if the classics can't be ranked with respect to one another, it seems to follow for Cude that they are related as equals, or at least he relies heavily on making such equations in order to seek classic status for the novels he is sponsoring. He frequently asserts similarities between his candidates and "touchstone" works already and more or less securely within the canon of recognized classics. The implication is that the analogy will continue to hold, that if the touchstone is accepted as a classic, then surely the analogous candidate must have equal status. This is, I submit, a covert form of up-grading or ranking in which the not yet secure work is elevated in rank by means of its equation with the securely classical work. The strategy is not itself illegitimate, but Cude's repeated use of it seems to contradict his theoretical arguments against the ranking of classics. Further, his theory, because it confines him to equation, poses unnecessary problems with his specific judgments. For example, in the last paragraph of his first essay on *As For Me and My House*, Cude offers this: "Ross handles personal relationships with all the delicacy of Jane Austen; he handles first-person narration with all the sophistication of Jonathan Swift; and he handles the bluster of a drought-scourged prairie with all the awareness of Emily Brontë." Aside from a reminder that Swift, like Ross, uses an unreliable narrator, this is the first mention in the essay of these established authors, so that the judgment stands not as the summary of an argument, but as an invitation to the reader to agree. But the thrice repeated formula of equation, "with all the ...," makes agreement impossible because, as multiplied, the odds against three such equations being equally accurate become astronomical; isn't it more probable that we are dealing with degrees, that Ross's work may reveal a degree or two less delicacy than Jane Austen's, or a degree or two more awareness than Emily Brontë's? In any event, the formula of equation imposed by Cude's refusal to rank the classics defeats any hope of precision in such comparisons. Cude is right to reject ranking if it means undertaking a strict hierarchical placement of works from one to, say, three thousand, but surely evaluative criticism works best not as it lumps classics into a capacious set of equals, but rather as it weighs the relative merits of two or more works that may be profitably measured against one another.

But even if we grant that the evaluative critic's job is confined to identifying classics, Cude's theories about how this is to be done impose even more limitations upon the critic. Cude believes that a convincing argument for establishing modern and contemporary Canadian authors as

classic "is to be found in an adaptation of the scientific technique of predictivity." He then undertakes "a chapter-long digression into the convoluted realm of critical procedures" in order to explain. "This digression is completely unavoidable, since from the days of Aristotle every attempt to transform literary criticism with the methodology of science has consistently and generally been adjudged chimerical." Note first the strength of the consensus asserted here; this consistent and general judgment has persisted since the fourth century B.C. Cude goes on to explain that the major reason behind this judgment is that literary critics have lacked access to the kind of facts that might verify their judgments and thus have remained "swamped in subjectivity." Cude then asks two questions: "What, in criticism, constitutes a demonstrable fact? And how, in criticism, could such a fact be used in conjunction with scientific predictivity to develop a self-correcting and progressive scholarly tradition? The purpose of this chapter is to argue that answers to these questions do exist, to argue that criticism can at last move beyond Aristotelian methods." This claim is astonishing on a number of counts, not the least of which is that Cude means to break from the strong consensus he had first described by offering the existence of such consensus as the answer to his questions. Cude believes that undeniable facts of literary history — like the facts which establish that Shakespeare has been long and widely regarded as one of the great poets of the world — are "a reasonable basis for asserting as fact 'Shakespeare was one of the great poets of the world.'" Cude's effort to collapse the distinction between *actually being something* and *being long and widely regarded as something* works against his own dissent from consensus, for if he is right, wouldn't it follow that *actually being chimerical* is the same as *being long and widely regarded as chimerical*? And wouldn't, then, his own argument be chimerical? But such a collapsing, however elastically invoked, is necessary for his argument because it is the basis of his surprising claims for historical consensus. The existence of such a consensus of opinion is transformed for Cude, apparently by simple addition through time to the number of people who hold the opinion, into the *fact* of that opinion's absolute certitude, the *fact* that will save literary criticism from subjectivity: "Unlike the value-judgment advanced by a single person or group, which would be open to inaccuracies induced by either misapplication of standards or changing public taste, the consensus that coheres about a classic is not subject to error." This statement is fallacious because it asserts no distinction except size between a group that is subject to error and one that is not, but I can see its appeal, for if it were true, useful things might follow. "Scientific predictivity" becomes for Cude the use of the consensus as a standard "not subject to error" for measuring the work of critics. Insofar as the critic confirms or advances the consensus, he conspires with "fact" and will survive; insofar as the critic dissents from the consensus, he is not only wrong, he is destined for obscurity. Armed with this measure, Cude can prophesy with all the moral certainty of a Savonarola; in a previously published essay, of which this digressive chapter is a version, Cude applied his measure to Yvor Winters:

> Consider, for example, the criticism of Yvor Winters: a thinker whose Johnsonian insistence upon the pre-eminence of morality as a critical standard has earned him a substantial reputation, Winters is uniquely relevant because he reserved to himself the prerogative of overruling the consensus. When evaluating the accepted canon of literary classics, he coolly declared: 'every writer that the scholar studies comes to him as the result of a critical judgment, single or multiple . . . and in fact many of the judgments have been wrong.' In making

> this chilling declaration, Winters was guilty of the sin of pride: and the consequence of his Faustian error has been that the spirit of his beloved labours now stands in peril of the intellectual perdition of oblivion.

Cude's prophecy, despite its splendid rhetoric, does illustrate one difficulty with his attempt to conjoin consensus and predictivity. Because one mark of consensus is persistence through time, and because Winters' — and Cude's — work is contemporary, we will have to wait awhile for a sufficiently large consensus to form in order to see whether or not Cude's prediction is correct. But whatever else may be claimed for consensus, it can also be said to negotiate, in a more immediate way, its own burden of proof; when a dissenter like Winters challenges an established consensus, the burden of proof is on him, and the relevant question is "why *isn't* the work a classic?" Cude is clearly less willing to assess Winters' assumption of this burden than to prophesy his doom. Let me then, for the record, enter a counterprediction that Winters' work as an evaluative critic will long survive Cude's own, and let our progeny judge between us — not really very useful for our present critical needs, but maybe instructive for them. It is also difficult to see how the measure of consensus is helpful for contemporary critics like Cude who wish to argue for the classic status of contemporary works, for here and now the consensus negotiates the burden of proof so that it falls immediately on the initiator, and the question becomes "why *is* the work a classic?" This is the burden that Cude assumes in his "self-contained" essays, but while the hope for a consensus that will ultimately vindicate his pioneering judgments might inspire him with confidence, it will come too late to help in actually shouldering this burden of proof.

But there is a final set of arguments in Cude's framing format which raises doubts about whether *any* consensus can emerge by placing yet another restriction on evaluative criticism. Despite his concession that the emergence of a consensus is "the product of the interplay of critical argument, the advocacy pro and con in the light of countless readings," Cude's tolerance for the contrary is limited to granting it the "very limited" function of forcing "those defending the work to explore its resources further and evolve answers satisfactory to the general reading public." In the first and last chapters of his collection, Cude undercuts even this bare toleration by mounting a series of attacks on those who engage in "negative criticism." The object of these attacks is, in Cude's rendering, something of a straw man, a fierce fellow intent on "purging," "condemning," "denouncing," "decrying," and "deprecating," all with an "intemperate zeal." Cude's conception of this figure is dictated by the theoretical limits he has already imposed upon evaluative criticism. Because he has already ruled out discrimination among classics, Cude can imagine no other activity for the negative critic than the detection of trash, and since *that* act is virtually automatic, since "artistic garbage inevitably finds its own way to the trash-heap," the work of Cude's negative critic is bound to be pointless. Thus even if the negative critic is correct in his judgments, he is "guilty of capitalizing on the obvious, of playing the mighty hunter with a grand show of bringing home the easy meat: for it takes no great skill to expose and attack the lurid, the inept, the pretentious and shoddy." And if these negative critics are wrong, they make "utter fools of themselves," a fate, it is interesting to note, which does not await the positive critic when he is wrong. In his preface, Cude had asked "what if, when all the critical reckoning is done, I am absolutely wrong?" His answer is not explicit, but in the subsequent passage the consequences are all honorific; there is certainly no hint

of any foolishness that might attend being wrong. Cude makes other charges against the negative critics from which he exempts the positive ones. "The critic writing in deprecation sometimes judges in error, condemning a work of considerable excellence as an effort of little worth: and when that occurs, not only does a fine achievement have to struggle for recognition, but the study of art itself — far from being advanced — also receives a temporary check." Here Cude would have us feel the literary community as fragile and easily misled, but, in excusing the positive critic from any such mischief, Cude assures us that this community — "the good sense of generations of readers" — is not fragile at all. Cude asks "what will happen if the critics make mistakes and start singing the praises of inadequate works?" and he answers "absolutely nothing will happen." The truth is that Cude means to silence all forms of discriminating judgment save praise: until the critic "can find a work that is proof against his most penetrating analysis, until he can find a work that is rewarding after his most intensive examinations, let him leave his pen stand idle." We must wonder how, if Cude had his way, "the interplay of critical argument" which is said to create consensus could exist at all.

Another of Cude's attacks upon negative criticism might serve as a final illustration of the ways in which Cude has limited, and thereby misunderstood, evaluative criticism. Cude poses what he calls "a virtually unresolvable methodological problem" for the negative critic. Since such critics are engaged in arguing inadequacy, in arguing the absence of some quality that should be in the work, they face logical difficulties which for Cude seem insurmountable. "It is easy enough to demonstrate that something does exist: it is an activity of quite another logical order to demonstrate that something does not exist." But, as it is posed, Cude's problem is yet another consequence of his earlier refusal to discriminate among classics, for it is precisely because of that process that judgments of inadequacy or absence of quality *can* be made. It is precisely because we *do* perceive the achieved "delicacy" of Jane Austen's handling of personal relationships that her work serves as a proper measure for assessing the degree of such achievement — or its absence — in the work of Sinclair Ross and others. And the probability that, after such a measuring comparison is undertaken, the two achievements will be seen as exactly equal is infinitesimal compared to the likelihood that one must be judged the greater achievement and, it follows, the other as the lesser achievement — and that is what responsible and discriminating evaluation is and does.

It was a mistake, I think, for Cude to collect his "self-contained" essays on specific novels within the embrace of the general arguments put forward by his framing format. The essays themselves suggest that he understands one half of the task of criticism as it was defined by T. S. Eliot in "The Function of Criticism": "the elucidation of works of art"; these essays often do illuminate the works they examine. But the general arguments in the framing format compromise Cude's authority as a critic by suggesting that he has misunderstood what Eliot defined as the second half of the critic's task: "the correction of taste." As I have tried to indicate, his framing arguments, instead of supporting his title, *A Due Sense of Differences: An Evaluative Approach to Canadian Literature*, are so contradictory and so restrictive that to follow them would make evaluation virtually impossible.

MORTON L. ROSS

DUPLICITE NARRATIVE

MADELEINE MONETTE, *Le Double Suspect*. Quinze, $12.95.

CLAUDE BOUCHARD, *La Mort après la mort*. Quinze, $12.95.

"MOURIR . . . N'EST PAS UN ACTE simple" déclare le narrateur de *La Mort après la mort*. C'est à partir de cette maxime que Claude Bouchard et Madeleine Monette créent chacun une fiction dont la densité et la complexité soulignent à la fois la duplicité de la vie et de l'écriture. Puisqu'une telle synthèse du fond et de la forme caractérise les oeuvres de la collection *Prose entière* des éditions Quinze, le lecteur peut s'attendre à une expérimentation qui, dans les romans en question, s'avère plutôt heureuse quant à la particularité structurale du récit.

Madeleine Monette, gagnante du Prix Robert Cliche pour son premier roman, *Le Double Suspect*, tisse une histoire où l'agencement inversé des événements cède à la découverte entreprise par la narratrice, Anne. Manon et Anne, s'étant échappées à Rome pour se détendre et voyager, cultivent une amitié qui sera interrompue par la mort "accidentelle" de Manon. Restant à Rome avec les cahiers de son amie, seul indice du tourment de cette dernière, Anne devient obsédée par les événements confus et schématiques qu'ils lui laissent entendre et elle se lance à la découverte de la vérité en réécrivant les expériences intimes de son amie. Et voici ce qui nous mène à l'originalité du récit: se disant à la recherche de la vérité, de "faire vrai à tout prix, même au prix d'inventer ce que j'ignore," la narratrice annonce:

> Or ces cahiers n'épuisent pas, au niveau de leur contenue explicite, toute la vérité à son sujet, car ils n'offrent jamais qu'une vision trouée, morcelée et fragmentaire des événements qu'elle a vécus. Et ce qu'ils ne disent pas je dois l'inventer, ou plutôt le découvrir, car ce que j'écris n'a rien à voir avec l'*invention romanesque*. En d'autres mots, mon récit n'est pas une pure construction imaginaire, mais le résultat d'une lecture attentive qui cherche à dévoiler ce que Manon a voulu taire.

Le lecteur décèle très tôt que ce n'est pas la vie et la mort de Manon qu'elle veut découvrir mais sa propre vérité encastrée dans celle de son amie et, il faut le dire, son pouvoir d'écrire, de raconter. Si cette structure ne mène pas le lecteur à la désinvolture totale, elle aura au moins le grand mérite de remettre en question non seulement la fiction même mais aussi le moi du discours.

Dans ce récit, tout événement, tout personnage a son double, comme l'intrigue même. Tandis qu'Anne sonde la vie intime de son amie, celle-ci, narratrice fictive recréée par Anne, explore l'enfer et le suicide de son mari; le suicide de Paul est répété par celui de sa femme; les personnages se ressemblent physiquement; les gestes s'entremêlent; enfin l'homosexualité suspecte de la plupart des personnages semble éveiller les craintes d'Anne quant à sa propre sexualité. Serait-ce la quête de cette vérité qui forme le prétexte du récit? Enfin, et qu'on félicite Monette de ce double jeu, la narratrice est à la fois Anne et Manon: Anne explore et raconte le suicide de Manon: Manon, narratrice fictive réfléchit sur les relations entre les sexes. Discours à la fois homodiégétique, hétérodiégétique, et autodiégétique effectué grâce au prétexte des cahiers, véritable récit dans le récit. La perception limitée est déjà suggérée par la couverture du roman — une illustration d'Alex Colville, *Vers l'île du Prince-Edouard*. Comme les jumelles limitent, tout en précisant l'objet de la perception, la focalisation est nécessairement limitée par l'obsession d'Anne ainsi que par une lucidité fausse devant une vérité trop inquiétante. Comment le lecteur peut-il s'assurer que l'apport du texte ne soit pas une déception fabriquée

par la narratrice? La fiction cache-t-elle la vérité ou est-ce qu'elle nous la révèle?

Si la structure de l'intrigue est fondée sur la duplicité, il en est de même pour les personnages. Chacun trahit une nature sexuelle qui cherche à rompre les contraintes traditionnelles: les femmes sont garçonnières, les hommes délicats et sensibles, le désir latent est plutôt homosexuel qu'hétérosexuel. Comme Manon l'explique à Anne, admettre ce désir serait se trahir:

> Mais quand une femme séduit une autre femme, on appelle ça de l'amitié, de la tendresse ou du respect, parce qu'on s'imagine que le désir n'y est pour rien. Et d'ailleurs, même s'il y était pour quelque chose, on aurait trop peur de l'admettre pour que ça change quoi que ce soit.

Est-ce là le drame de Manon qu'Anne découvre à travers les cahiers? Ou Manon serait-elle le subconscient d'Anne? Quoi qu'il en soit, les rôles interchangeables des narratrices, des personnages, des hommes et des femmes nouent une trame d'une densité extraordinaire.

Si le thème de l'incertitude devant la vie et la mort donne au récit sa structure, il n'en reste pas moins vrai que l'intérêt principal se concentre sur l'écriture elle-même. Par une méta-narration qui s'insère de façon vraisemblable dans les cahiers d'Anne, Monette, tout en semblant garantir l'authenticité du récit, en double les doutes. La conclusion ambigüe suggère soit une acceptation résignée de sa propre sexualité, soit l'interminable dédoublement de personnalité qui mène toujours au suicide car l'actant ne peut jamais accepter la vérité et donc brode une toute autre réalité qui, à son tour, est découverte par un autre personnage qui l'approprie. En obscurcissant ainsi le système du décodage, Monette remet en valeur la question fiction/réalité — l'essence même du roman.

La même question d'authenticité se pose quant au roman de Claude Bouchard, *La Mort après la mort*. La préface écrite par le docteur S..., personnage fictif du roman, psychanalyste à l'allure freudienne, assure le lecteur de l'authenticité du récit de son patient Léo Tremblay qui a vécu l'unique expérience d'être le "premier être humain à entrevoir L'Au-delà (expirer), y séjourner (être mort) et en revenir (ressusciter)." Celui-ci entreprend, comme exercise thérapeutique, la narration de son propre décès. Le fait qu'il cherche à éviter le sujet d'abord en décrivant minutieusement tous ses maux et ses thérapies et qu'il retarde la description de sa mort même suggère qu'il y a là soit un oubli (le patient simule une amnésie), soit une expérience si angoissante que le souvenir en est supprimé. C'est dans la deuxième partie du roman qu'il décide enfin, à l'instigation du docteur S..., de rapporter les choses de l'intérieur; dans ce cas-ci, de raconter l'expérience de mourir au "paroxysme de l'orgasme" et son expérience ultra-terrestre vers la cinquième dimension.

Bien que les événements même manquent d'intérêt et de points de repère et que les jeux de mots ("noumène/nous mène," "Gomorrhe/Gonorrhe") et les banalités philosophiques ("Mourir est autre chose que de perdre au ping-pong. C'est un événement marquant dans la vie d'un humain") paraissent gratuits, ce journal d'un "schizophrénétique bénigne" évoque chez le lecteur des questions importantes quant à la nature de la fiction. Même si on ne ressent ni l'angoisse ni l'oubli qui, on doit supposer, retardent le vrai sujet du roman, la question d'authenticité ne peut nous échapper. Vraisemblablement, l'esprit peut-il revenir de l'enfer et s'en souvenir? Par contre, l'expérience serait-elle celle d'un malade qui subit une thérapie fort originale mais sans efficacité? L'authenticité du récit est remise en question par le fait que le journal, donc le texte que nous lisons, est le résultat d'une suggestion faite par le docteur

S..., qui plus tard, lorsqu'une cure lui paraîtra impossible, donnera à son patient un schéma pour faire avancer l'écriture, et corrigera et interviendra dans le texte par des notes (où parfois, grâce à des références fictives, il donne encore plus de crédibilité à la duplicité narrative). L'inconsistence et le manque de fiabilité du narrateur nous inquiètent davantage: "j'oubliais que je suis amnésiaque"; "Je ne fais plus la différence entre une chose réelle et un produit d'imagination." Ces incertitudes font contraste avec le réalisme pressant du docteur: "Ce n'est pas du Ferron que l'on vous demande, mais un simple rapport personnel"; "'A aucun moment, Léo, vous ne décrivez ces choses tout à fait effarantes dont vous jugez bon, au début, de nous prévenir, ce qui enlève à votre récit, au fur et à mesure qu'il avance, tout intérêt et diminue votre crédibilité en tant que locuteur.'"

Si le but de Claude Bouchard en écrivant ce roman était de nous dissuader du fait que la mort ait "la *soudaineté* d'un éternuement ou l'*instantanéité* d'un ballon qui crève," il a fort bien réussi, car la lecture de cette mort après la mort nous rappelle l'éternité. Si, par contre, il cherche à représenter les ruminations internes d'un malade, la lucidité et les analyses saines de ce malade ne convainquent guère. Les coïncidences, les jeux de mots, les perceptions poussées au-delà du vraisemblable ne sont pas suffisamment intégrés au récit et donc restent gratuits. Le lecteur ne peut que vaguer dans l'incertitude. Les indices sont trop faibles pour une mise en signification réussie, la forme trop lourde.

Tandis que Monette atteint un degré de densité et de complexité dans son premier roman où la souplesse de la forme, où le mystère et les entrelacements enchantent le lecteur, Bouchard, tout en concevant une problématique intéressante, ne réussit pas à entraîner le lecteur dans une nouvelle dimension. En dépit de l'inégalité esthétique, ces deux romans nous affirment que la littérature qui provient dernièrement du Québec s'adresse à un lecteur de plus en plus sophistiqué: Monette s'inspire de Barthes pour structurer son récit; Bouchard nous taxe par son lexique érudit et les conceptes sémiologiques prêtés au docteur S.... Heureusement pour nous, lecteurs, écrire et lire, comme vivre et mourir, ne sont pas des actes simples.

ESTELLE DANSEREAU

NEW FRANCE & OLD

MARY ALICE DOWNIE, *The King's Loon*. Kids Can Press, $2.95.

SUZANNE MARTEL, *The King's Daughter*, tr. David Toby Homel and Margaret Rose. Douglas & McIntyre, $14.95; pa. $6.95.

VIRGIL BURNETT, *Towers at the Edge of a World: Tales of a Medieval Town*. Nelson, $12.95.

ALTHOUGH ALL THREE of these books may be termed historical fiction, the first two are clearly children's books. *The King's Loon*, with its accompanying French translation (*Un Huart pour le Roi*) by Jacques Loïc Lorioz in the same volume, is essentially an adventure story about Andre, an orphan in Count Frontenac's New France. Running away from his aunt in Quebec, Andre becomes a stowaway in Frontenac's flotilla sailing up the St. Lawrence to Katarakouis on Lake Ontario, where Frontenac plans to parley with the Iroquois. Discovered at last by Frontenac himself, the boy accomplishes the remarkable feat of catching a loon which Frontenac promises Andre will present to Louis XIV in person in France. While Frontenac makes peace with the Iroquois chiefs and has Fort Frontenac built, Andre finally decides to offer the dejected loon its freedom. Hurt by the loon's quick departure, Andre now rea-

lizes how his aunt must feel at his own running off. Frontenac approves of Andre's release of the loon and sends the boy home to his aunt with royal fanfare. Detailed drawings in the book by Ron Berg — of Andre discovered on shipboard, the parley with the Indians, the loon diving to freedom — punctuate the narrative which primarily invites the young reader to identify with this boy who is on intimate terms with a great historical personage of Canada's past. This identification, as well as the descriptions of the voyage upriver and of the Iroquois, contribute to a good though somewhat spare tale. Its characters are too one-dimensional for children in Grades Four to Six, the envisaged audience for the book in the Kids Canada series. A slightly younger readership, however, should enjoy the book.

Suzanne Martel's *The King's Daughter* appears to have been written for an older, pre-adolescent readership because of its greater length, proliferation of adventures, and psychological depth of characterization. Jeanne Chatel, the orphan too boisterous for the convent she lives in, and her friend Marie become "King's daughters," girls sent out by ship as wives for colonists in New France. After Marie falls in love with an officer on shipboard, Jeanne quietly takes Marie's place as wife-to-be of pioneer Simon de Rouville. Then Jeanne's struggles with her taciturn husband begin. Simon sees her as a replacement for his previous wife Aimée, who was killed by the Iroquois, and as a female fixture to mind the children and the cabin while he traps and builds forts elsewhere most of the year. In the series of episodes which follows, the reader is in for some exciting adventures: an Iroquois raid on the de Rouville home in Simon's absence, and Simon's near-death at the hands of the Iroquois and recovery through Jeanne's healing arts. The adventures also explore the "thawing" of their marriage, as Simon comes to see his new wife as an able partner in the wilderness, particularly after he discovers that she has impersonated a *coureur de bois* and gone on a long voyage to sign his trading permit in his absence. For her part, Jeanne persists in being her forthright, able self and risks loving Simon in spite of her fears that she is only a substitute for Aimée. The story explores this larger question of men's and women's roles in scenes of remarkable emotional depth, while memorably bringing to life the local colour of the period and setting. Debi Perna's illustrations further vivify the story, reiterating that Canadian history need not be bland and distant for the young reader.

Virgil Burnett's *Towers at the Edge of a World* is a very different kind of book from Downie's and Martel's: its literary sophistication and eroticism make it suitable for an adult audience. This "chronicle of a high town in some fantasy France" portrays the changing faces of Montarnis, a medieval town, and the fates of its inhabitants: saints, warriors, devotees of the dark cults, and passionate lovers. The stories unfold with a pleasing variety of narrative styles — third-person, epistolary — illustrated by a series of arresting, even haunting drawings. Such a collection of stories could be diffuse, but the tales cohere not only by dealing with a common subject-matter and using numerous narrative links, but also by exploring a sense of surprise and mystery, all the more powerful for its oblique realization in hints and signs. On one level, there is suspense at least prolonged, if not unresolved: in "King Folly," for example, we never know who the imprisoned (perhaps mad) man is, who tells us of his circumscribed daily round of walks and cardgames, although the nagging question of his identity and the reason for his confinement palpably informs the whole story. On a higher level the

stories sometimes excel in describing the "élan peculiàr to this high place," the mystery which impinges on the towers at the "edge" of their world. In one of the longer pieces called "Fausta," an artist sleeps in his patron's house after a party thrown in his own honour at which he has met the strikingly beautiful and acute Fausta. In his dream, he guts a cadaver in stages, finally discovering the face, his own. Awakening in a fit of claustrophobia, he finds no respite in a walk through the town, for footsteps pursue him. Back in the repose of his host's garden, he discovers an almost naked Fausta, and in the lovemaking which follows, on a stone cylinder in the garden *tempietto* beneath the moon, he sloughs off his role as sexual *afficionado*; like a priestess Fausta initiates him into "some terrifying miracle ... a double triumph ... for the walls of his heart collapsed in the instant of his orgasm, so that a greater and a lesser death were simultaneously achieved." The mingling of the mundane and the mystical, praeternatural, or sublimely erotic is difficult to make credible, even when creating a "secondary world" of fantasy. At their best, Charles Williams and D. H. Lawrence portray, respectively, moments of incarnate mystical and transcendentally erotic intensity in which the vehicle and the tenor of the imaged experience cohere, and sustain in the reader "that willing suspension of disbelief ... which constitutes poetic faith." In the climax of "Fausta," however, the elements of a *rite de passage* into death remain trappings which do not coalesce with the description of supreme sexual passion. In some other stories in *Towers* also, while rich diction, admirable wit, and mastery of pace are clearly present, the reader may not always find the marriage of finitude and the transcendent convincing. Two notable exceptions are "Hughes" and "Gerardus," where masterly suspense and understatement heighten the implied presence of the supernatural in the astonishing repentance of a hunting lord and the survival from plague of only one monk in a monastery, the one who continues doing his allotted task. While this adult fantasy, then, does not always attain the demanding goals it sets itself, its other impressive qualities guarantee some intriguing reading.

MURRAY J. EVANS

SIX CHAPBOOKS

JOHN LENT, *Rock Solid*. Dreadnaught Press.

HELEN ALBRIGHT, *Wheat Fields*. Dreadnaught Press. *Portmanteaux*. Dreadnaught Press.

JACK HANNAN, *For the coming surface*. Dreadnaught Press.

A. F. MORITZ, *Music and Exile*. Dreadnaught Press.

ELIZABETH JONES, *Nude on the Dartmouth Ferry*. Black Moss, $5.95.

CHAPBOOKS HAVE ALWAYS BEEN a vital part of twentieth-century Canadian literature — the ground level where most major poets and authors first appear in book form. The Ryerson Chapbook series of the mid-century is still considered the essential spawning ground for most of Canada's major contemporary poets. The chapbook has not lost its popularity. It is still a medium for initial exposure, experimentation, and creative energy.

Dreadnaught, a small press which operates from an old house on the fringes of the University of Toronto campus, has caught some of that energy in its most recent series of chapbooks. Dreadnaught has also captured a sense of experimentation with form in John Lent's *Rock Solid*. *Rock Solid* is a neatly packaged series of poem-cards with prose poems on the outside of each folio and poems within. The design of *Rock Solid* expresses an interesting idea, but to read the book is like sorting through a pile of debris. However, the book demands this sifting. Lent's poems are unfolded in glimpses of day-to-

day events, and the reader must have as much of a hands-on approach to the poems as the poet himself. It is rare in literature for a reader to have a glimpse of the poet chipping through the rock solid of experience in order to see the poem. The process of *Rock Solid* reminds one of Michelangelo seeing the David in a flawed piece of marble.

Helen Albright has contributed two conventional but very exciting books to the Dreadnaught collection. *Wheat Fields* is a series of brief flashes of a wheat field and the activities related to it. The wonderful sense of things going on just out the corner of the eye is reinforced by Deborah Barnett's unusual but interesting illustrations. The full impression of *Wheat Fields* can be gained only by a quick first reading and then a slow second and third reading. The violent yet static motion of the field caught by gusts of wind connects the book, impressionistically at least, with the unpredictability of a stormy sea. At one point Albright compares the wheat field to a "dark ocean reflected in heaven." The great strength of the book is Albright's power to observe the momentary and to record it poetically.

Observation plays a role of singular importance in Helen Albright's other contribution, *Portmanteaux*, a book of prose poems describing life in a small Belgian village as seen through the eyes of a school girl. The book is a collection of character sketches and portraits of the townspeople. However, these portraits are never inhumane or removed from the perceptions of the young girl. Without moralizing, the central character learns something from each individual portrayed. The net result is a persona who is never fully described in her own right, but is a pastiche of the host of characters she encounters. It is rare to see such an intriguing book and even rarer to read a chapbook that is not composed solely of poetry.

There is a strong feeling of anticipation in Jack Hannan's *For the coming surface.* Hannan writes in a blurred and tangled impressionistic style that often leads the reader away from the point of a poem just when the end seems in sight. Problematic as it may sound, the reader should just sit back and enjoy the trip. Hannan is not a narrator, he is a feeler, cautiously edging his way through perceptions often without caring whether he drags the reader in or not. One wants to anticipate the coming surface — the concrete visibility of perception in Hannan's work — but the poet never quite gets around to straightening himself out. This is the beauty of the book for those who are willing to indulge themselves with the poet.

Music and Exile by A. F. Moritz is far more direct and structured in its vision. Moritz can be hazy but this isn't to his best advantage. His voice is strongest when he speaks in direct address with concrete events and defined emotions at hand. "Letter Written from the Country to One Engaged in Charitable Work" is one of the finest poems to be found in recent chapbooks. The voice is simple, searching yet magnified with a humanity that is often missing amongst those young poets who are treading their ways through the chapbook process. The type of eloquent searching of self and topic is very rarely found in recent Canadian poetry and is best compared to some of the finest poems written by British poets such as John Wain.

A British influence, via South Africa, is evident in the work of Elizabeth Jones. In her most recent book from Black Moss Press, *Nude on the Dartmouth Ferry,* Jones displays a very fine hand for painting pictures of other women. Indeed, the strongest poems in the book are those that observe women, old ladies sitting around at a tea party or young girls dancing around a bonfire, through the percep-

tions of a poet sure of her own femininity. She underplays these portraits with a strong sense of place, and provides the work with a definition of events happening because of their locale. Jones's best poems in the book, such as "Women Bathing" or "Fall Collage," are an exploration of herself through the process of observing other women. A certain "know-thyself" aspect sparkles throughout and her delicacy of voice is balanced with a definite perception of her purpose in literature — a hard task to accomplish without dragging the reader through the quagmire of obscurity. One is quite capable of feeling at home in her kitchen or on many of her poetic journeys.

BRUCE MEYER

PROSE LYRICS

DAVID HASKINS, *Reclamation*. Borealis Press, n.p.

STEPHEN HUME, *Signs Against an Empty Sky*. Quadrant Editions, $5.95.

KEVIN ROBERTS, *S'ney'mos*. Oolichan Books, n.p.

"PROSE LYRIC" is Stanley Plumley's useful label for the overwhelmingly dominant poetic convention of our time: "the intersection of the flexibility of the free verse rhythm with the strategy of storytelling . . . a form corrupt enough to speak flat out in sentences yet pure enough to sustain the intensity, if not the integrity of the line." The taste for the prose lyric has resulted in a proliferation of poetry (the form is relatively easy to learn and to practise competently) and, except for the beginning made in Jonathan Holden's *The Rhetoric of the Contemporary Lyric*, in a critical vacuum (the form is exceedingly difficult to write *about*).

The prose lyric's attempt at the naturalness of conversation implies no prosody, no literary allusion, no figurative language. The meaning and feeling are to be carried not by elements inherent in the language, but by the subject seen through a transparent language. The strategy demands extraordinary skill with repetition, lining, economy, and punctuation to give the poem some significance beyond its literal content. (It's a talent, for example, essential to Margaret Atwood's power.) The prose lyrics in David Haskin's first book, *Reclamation*, speak "flat-out," but severe honing is needed to add "intensity":

It's been a month since I've seen Timmy
My car has a cracked block
I can't get to school to pick him up
Gene phoned
"Would you like to buy a picture?"
He's moving his family to Florida
as soon as his bills are paid.

And so on. Even allowing that quoting excerpts destroys the storytelling, I think the quotation reveals the tedium of the prose poem indifferently presented.

Perhaps sensing the banality of his flattest prose poems, Haskins compensates with metaphor and abstraction. The terse description — "two gulls / sail to silver water" — which opens one poem is made to bear this grandiose complaint:

with predictions of certain possession
and avarice the catylist [*sic*]
they thrust into
the wrenched chemicals
with single minded blindness
of pioneer imperialists
and are consumed
the reaction
a dead city's
non degradable boxes
and battery operated toys
the holocaust
minus the explosion
waiting for the feast
of the windigos.

As Haskins writes in "Lake Sociology," surely these "cloyed gulls scream / equivocation." The clutter of metaphor and muddled concepts is a reflection of the whole book: it seems to be an unculled

collection of the poet's verse, with no apparent shape or order, the poems crowded together on the page. Somehow, perhaps, the expansiveness implicit in the prose lyric is reflected in the excesses of the book.

Stephen Hume's *Signs Against an Empty Sky* is another first book, but one much more carefully edited and designed than Haskins'. Hume's poems, again typically for the prose lyric, are organized by a narrative line drawn by the often rambling eye of his observer, rather than by verbal or imagistic dictates. But no matter how colloquial Hume's voice, he is never offhanded about his language. The single unusual word — "concupiscent," say, in the poem "Flight" — alerts us to it, alters our sense of how we listen to his language. Hume's collection of forty-eight poems is divided into three sections. The first is mainly set in the "echoing country" of the far north; much of the poet's attention is given to the "old language" of the Inuit and Indian. The second section draws primarily on Hume's experiences as a journalist (he is a senior editor at the *Edmonton Journal*) and contains the book's strongest notes of concern for society's outcasts. The third section often draws on a west coast setting and shows most strikingly the poet's ability to extend his narrative by twisting and pursuing a metaphor, most often elegantly erotic. Along the way are several novel visions of prairie where Hume studies its sounds, and its mythic echoes.

Hume knows how to exploit the contemporary format, not by drawing back from metaphor, but by an exact, metaphorically suggestive verb, an extreme economy, a particular care with sound imagery, and a fine sense of repetition. One result is a moving six-part poem, "Gork," which seeks to know the meaning of a child born without a cerebral cortex. Another is "the pale hibiscus" which the mind wants to use to symbolize the Japanese world view in "The Wreck of the Indianapolis," the poet's impression of the American ship sunk with 1200 men a few days before Hiroshima.

Kevin Roberts' *S'ney'mos* (Salish word for Nanaimo) is the poet's fifth and most integrated book. This is a suite of three dozen short poems on the coal mining era of the Vancouver Island boomtown. Here, because of the documentary element, we can see the problems and strengths of the prose lyric at their clearest. The problems first: the second poem opens "1858 and the townspeople / of S'ney'mos / straining to hear the manager." The awkward elisions are typical of a writer trying to turn document (a photograph?) into poem: he leaves his reader fumbling for a sense of the occasion, the speaker, the angle of vision. A later poem awkwardly tries to identify its speaker in the second line: "a capitalist, Sir, / Dunsmuir before the Commission / is a man thrifty / enough to spend / less / than he earns." By inserting the imperative "consider," or beginning poems with "and," Roberts tries to provide connections and framework, but often the reader feels the need of the source book in order to appreciate the shadings of the poet's perception. But whatever the clumsiness of individual lyrics, the *sequence* makes quite compelling reading. If there is a frustrating facelessness in one poem, names and personalities gradually emerge in subsequent poems. Motifs of names and voices, of coal and Sinekwa, build and vary and illuminate the emerging poem. There are abrupt and revealing shifts of tone and voice, as the meditation becomes a restless, dramatically intense fragmentedness at the height of struggles for unionization. But the ending, which wants to be more compact but doesn't have the verbal energy to justify it, and which offers a glib expression of continuing social concern, is a disappointment.

Roberts is no more than a competent

poet, his work a good example of what is possible for a diligent practitioner of the prose lyric. There is only one poem completely successful in its own right. But *S'ney'mos* deserves attention because it uses its poetic strategy well, as it must be used, to compel us to find meaning, to look at the history in the locality where we live and work, to discover the significance of insignificant lives, to recognize, in William Carlos Williams' terms, that we are growing on the roots uncovered in this poem.

LAURIE RICOU

MYTH AND THE MYTH-PROOF

KAREN LAWRENCE, *The Inanna Poems.* Longspoon Press.

J. O. THOMPSON, *Echo and Montana.* Longspoon Press.

LESLEY CHOYCE, *Re-inventing the Wheel.* Fiddlehead Books.

KEN BELFORD, *Sign Language.* Gorse Press.

BARRY MCKINNON, *The The. (Fragments.* Gorse Press.

PLAIN SAILING IS SELDOM the way of the poet's craft these days. For one thing there are cross-currents of criticism to be reckoned with, powerful undertows especially that tend to draw all towards dark and deep waters. Also, whipped up by windy dogmas of fashion, even the shallows are given an illusion of depth. Then there are the siren songs of the past, the mermaids and misty headlands of myth and legend ripe for rediscovery, for recasting in modern dress. It was under the latter, or some such enchantment, that Karen Lawrence and J. O. Thompson slipped their moorings.

Lawrence's volume is a product of high erudition that, on one level, charts the underworld experience of Inanna, a Sumerian goddess of unknown date, and on another plies the inner seascapes of an imagination overwrought with torments of the flesh, thoughts of death, sex, birth, love, rebirth and so on. Access to these arcane regions — to the brainpan where poems deteriorate "like a bag of small, bruised pears" — is through imagery of considerable visual intensity relating to medical procedures and thereafter to maladies and malignancies of various sorts. But as in a bad dream, bits and pieces materialize just out of reach and maddeningly disconnected. More notes might help, because while each reader can perhaps be counted on to have glimpsed his own amended version of hell, few have the poetic powers to assume — unassisted — the lineaments of mythic figures, not without considerable struggle at any rate: particularly when the figures are supernatural. As it stands, academicians familiar with the Ur tablets and other Sumerian matters will possibly find such mythic sublimations more successful than elusive, but ordinary readers may feel that for an old and obscure story they have been offered a new and obscure poem, one not exactly explicable by any reference to form, style, or content.

Like Lawrence, J. O. Thompson gets underway with a good idea that ought to have fared better considering the company that has been smuggled aboard his bark. The idea is that verbal echoes from the old world often reverberate mockingly in the new, a discovery helped along by Ovid who provides part of Thompson's title and much of his mythological rigging. Also supportive in the structural line of rhyme and diction are several later Augustans — English — satirists principally. One of them, Garth, contributes a highly ironic overview of the proceedings when a much neglected couplet of his echoes posthumously from the notes: "What frenzy has of late possess'd the brain! / Though few can write, yet fewer

can refrain." As for the others, it is difficult to see how they lend a hand at all. Invisible throughout the voyage, most of them are simply hustled on deck at the end, exposed like first-class stowaways, an odd galaxy, among them Jeremy Collier, Karl Marx, Ezra Pound, Saint Mark, and Douglas Fairbanks, Sr. Still it is not this exotic ballast but a narcotic hankering after joky wordplay and rhyme that brings all close to foundering in bathos and flapdoodle. It is a shame that poems such as "Warehouse" and "Cutter" in which thought and expression find some buoyancy and balance, should be forever supporting pieces composed of lines like: "Half the time I Britishly say petrol, / the other half Canadianly gas" or deathless trimeters such as: "Graduate Studies moon, / O shed your thesis beams / over the paths I croon / 'side Knowledge's night-streams."

Thus we see that the present when decked out in hand-me-downs from the past can be made to appear diminished, its inhabitants dwarfed as though viewed through the wrong end of a telescope. Lesley Choyce, it is a relief to report, runs no risk along these lines. His work is agreeably mythproof, constituting in a novel manner a resolute response to what is going on around him indoors and out. The scene is the east coast. He cruises it by car. Not that he is unfamiliar with academe. He knows what is valuable there, but he does not wish to perish in it ("The Professor Lectures") or be buried in "a flurry of dandruff" ("Of Education"). Keen eyes, ears and nose throughout, indicate that Choyce knows he is going somewhere, even if occasionally his headlights fade "like sick yellow flowers" ("Watt Lighthouse"). There are some weaknesses, however: a tendency to overuse the same voice and stance, to sermonize a bit as in some of the "Memories of America" pieces and to slip into prose, usually when straining for an off-hand comic manner as in "Summer Morning Barter" where nothing, it appears, comes of nothing.

Allusions of various kinds make it clear that Ken Belford and Barry McKinnon are anchored on the west coast, although not too firmly or joyfully it seems. Both have endured the trials and agonies of everyday domesticity. Both have been within an ace of getting swamped, Ken Belford so much so that he declares: "The only place to write / a book is in hospital. / This is an accident report." Indeed it is, and one calculated to scuttle, too, all those hearty rhapsodies of country living found in *Mother Earth News*. Here snowshoes break "both / one at a time" and while plumbing, heating and chores of all sorts strain human relationships, the cat starves on potato peelings, vomiting up meat so unappetizing that only the dog seems up to tackling it. Then there is the endless bad weather: "Can anyone stop / that god / forsaken rain of no intent?" Still, what makes this monologue tiresome is not its dispiriting substance but its tongue-tied and halting style that may or may not have been intended to suggest the onset of a near catatonic state, or to sound and look like a very private telegram, one not at the end easy to decode.

Barry McKinnon's volume is not a monologue but, as his title proclaims and reinforces with its open-ended parentheses, a chain of fragments which, like the life they describe, go on and on and on. A sprinkle of idiosyncratic punctuation over a scattered typography ought, however, to surprise not boggle the mind. As it is, several readings of these fragments left little impression except one image of sad and meaningless pain: a child "who clutches her ass all day / long, cries, she can't go — the obsession / with constipation."

Stunts, tricky effects, and derivativeness mar nearly all the works examined here

except those by Lesley Choyce. He, as a poet should, covers his tracks quite nicely.

PETER MITCHAM

HEMON ET MYTHE

NICOLE DESCHAMPS, RAYMONDE HEROUX et NORMAND VILLENEUVE, *Le Mythe de Maria Chapdelaine*. PUM, $19.75.

GILBERT LEVESQUE, *Louis Hémon, aventurier ou philosophe?* Fides, n.p.

CONTRAIREMENT A NOMBRE de mythes québécois, celui de *Maria Chapdelaine* est parti directement de l'oeuvre pour s'en éloigner et en brouiller graduellement la trame; l'amplitude de l'après-texte en engloutit la teneur même. Deschamps, Héroux, Villeneuve tracent minutieusement ce cheminement mythique dans *Le Mythe de Maria Chapdelaine*.

Séduits par les "voix," les membres de la droite et du clergé français et la bourgeoisie conservatrice canadienne-française récupèrent de manière réductrice l'oeuvre de Hémon et l'adaptent à leurs besoins immédiats. Grâce aux stratégies de Grasset, éditeur parisien de l'oeuvre (lettres circulaires, éditions de luxe, plaque commémorative à Brest ...) et de Louvigny de Montigny, promoteur canadien de l'oeuvre, une sacralisation de *Maria Chapdelaine* s'opère avec les années. Gardant de la lecture un goût de mysticisme, de survie, la droite la consacre en objet destiné à édifier et à accomplir des miracles, entre autres à réconcilier romans et catholiques.

La récupération de la religion, qui prend dans l'oeuvre une saveur routinière et où les intercessions restent sans résultat, témoigne de l'impuissance généralisée à *lire Maria Chapdelaine*. De façon analogue, la vie des colons suscite des rêves de vie champêtre idyllique et ce malgré le quotidien accablant des personnages. De ceux-ci, on ne garde comme souvenir qu'un profil qui correspond à l'idéal voulu par l'idéologie à desservir: une mère prolifique, un père viril, une Maria fidèle à son rôle tracé de femme. La sensibilité française au sortir de la guerre, à la recherche de l'idylle, effleure le texte de manière évasive, superficielle "à la limite, tout se passe comme si ce texte n'existait pas. Ceux qui en parlent semblent ne l'avoir jamais lu."

Au Québec, le texte de Maria Chapdelaine sera récupéré de manière différente. Louvigny de Montigny le passe méticuleusement au crible; les guillemets colonisent le texte, les canadianismes seront bannis, offrant un tableau trop rustre de notre belle vie champêtre. L'utilisation abusive de citations qui, hors-contexte, connaissent l'amplification du mythe, brise l'unité du texte. "Au pays de Québec, rien ne doit mourir et rien ne doit changer" (seul passage cité par Emile Boutroux dans la préface de l'édition Lefebvre) devient un hymne à la colonisation et au conservatisme.

En 1927, l'honorable J. E. Perreault prononce une conférence aux visées pédagogiques, intitulée *Maria Chapdelaine, l'épouse et la mère*. Celle-ci, représentée en Déméter, gerbe de blé et faucille à la main sur la page couverture de l'édition de cette conférence, est assimilée à des images de fécondité qui servent la cause de la colonisation. Damase Potvin, à la recherche des sources de Hémon associera Maria à Eva Bouchard, de Péribonka, qui en profitera pour mousser la publicité. Les témoignages grossiront la réalité; on associe de près Hémon à sa famille; Marie Hémon entretient une correspondance avec Eva Bouchard.

D'autres manifestations augmenteront l'amplitude de l'après-texte: des films, des chocolats et des étoffès, une bande dessinée, des discours au parlement, un documentaire de l'O.R.T.F., des rééditions et des traductions innombrables, suscitant

périodiquement des soubresauts de popularité à l'oeuvre.

La vivacité du mythe se manifeste jusqu'en 1980 par des fêtes marquant le centenaire de Louis Hémon. A cette occasion, Gilbert Lévesque prononce devant les membres de la Fédération des Sociétés d'histoire du Québec, une communication publiée sous le titre, *Louis Hémon, aventurier ou philosophe*. Hémon porte lourdement le poids de la parole de ses personnages dans cette oeuvre. "C'est à Péribonka, au pays de Québec," en interrogeant les habitants, en observant leurs menus déplacements que Louis Hémon sut déclarer (mais avec quelle assurance!) : "Ces gens sont d'une race qui ne sait pas mourir (tiré de Maria Chapdelaine)." En lui attribuant, à de nombreuses reprises la parole de ses personnages, Lévesque dissimule Hémon derrière l'épais masque de l'écrivain-reflet-de-l'oeuvre, le mythifiant en déguisant la réalité. Ce mythe, "exorcisé" fort efficacement dans l'oeuvre de Deschamps, Héroux, Villeneuve, trouve sa survie chez Lévesque.

Souvent, Maria Chapdelaine sera qualifié de chef-d'oeuvre; ce superlatif permet d'évacuer tout autre commentaire. Lévesque, étudiant Hémon, sentira "l'ombre du génie rôder dans les parages"; Felix-Antoine Savard, dans la préface de l'édition Fides, le suite dans "l'ordre des plus purs chefs-d'oeuvre," évitant par là toute étude approfondie du texte. La parole est négligée au profit du discours qu'elle suscite. "Cette façon apparemment superficielle d'aborder une oeuvre exprime pourtant le refus inconscient de partager une vision brutale de la réalité québécoise."

Le mythe, issu de l'oeuvre et rapidement détaché d'elle, deviendra bientôt périphérique à l'auteur et à l'oeuvre. Tout comme Maria Chapdelaine est assimilée à Mme Philippe Croteau, femme modèle, épouse et mère, ou à Eva Bouchard, on attribuera à Hémon nombre d'affinités avec François Paradis, son personnage. Ce glissement écrivain-héros donnera lieu à des multitudes d'inexactitudes dans le foisonnement du discours "chapdelainien." Sa mort, survenue en juillet et causée par un accident de train, sera rapportée comme suit dans les journaux: "écrasé un jour de tempête de neige par un train." Le texte de Lévesque, truffé de lyrisme, déforme également la vision de l'homme qu'était Hémon. Ses relations avec Lydia Hémon, fille de l'écrivain, imprègnent sa vision d'une sensibilité qui détruit toute objectivité et donne naissance à une image idéalisée, à fonction éternisante.

Associé directement à sa famille, digne représentante de la droite française, on a créé de toutes pièces un Hémon officiel. Au nom de ce qu'il récusait, s'est édifiée la célébrité du livre, sur le sentier du conformisme. Maria Chapdelaine est devenu un symbole de la survivance des valeurs anciennes, contre lesquelles luttait Hémon, et lesquelles sont dénoncées dans *Le Mythe*.

LISE ROCHETTE

FOR YOUNG READERS

MARGARET ATWOOD & JOYCE BARKHOUSE, *Anna's Pet*, illus. Ann Blades. James Lorimer.

MARY ALICE & JOHN DOWNIE, *Honor Bound*, illus. Joan Huffman. Oxford, $5.95.

BARRY DICKSON, *Afraid of the Dark*, illus. Olena Kassian. James Lorimer.

HEATHER SMITH SISKA, *People of the Ice, How the Inuit Lived*, illus. Ian Bateson. Douglas & McIntyre.

AS RECENTLY AS FIFTEEN YEARS AGO, there were few Canadian children's books in print. "Language Arts" courses and school libraries relied heavily on American publications. Little wonder if Canadian children had an identity problem

when they saw the Stars and Stripes waving over the schoolhouse, the Fourth of July parade marching down the street, and the Pilgrim Fathers celebrating Thanksgiving in the pages of their school readers! Now Canadian children's literature is sufficiently important to receive critical attention in major journals and to attract the skills of such successul "adult" authors as Margaret Laurence, Mordecai Richler, Marian Engel and Margaret Atwood. More important, a substantial number of accomplished writers and illustrators make this genre their primary vocation.

The five-to-twelve age group has been particularly well served by books presenting the life and folklore of our native peoples. Heather Smith Siska's *People of the Ice; How the Inuit Lived* is part of a series, *How They Lived in Canada*. Information about the land, people, clothing, housing, customs, arts and crafts and so on is conveyed in precise language complemented by detailed pencil drawings that depict everything from Arctic wild life and the various steps in building an ice-house to such artifacts as a soapstone lamp stand, snow goggles, ulus, and the fastenings of a dog trace. Not only the *how's* but also the *why's* of Inuit life are considered:

> Sometimes a man had more than one wife. There was much work to be done, and one woman could not row the large *umiak* when the family was on the move. If a wife was sick and could not travel, a man might borrow a wife from a friend. In the harsh climate of the Arctic a traveller could die if his garments became torn and he did not have a woman to mend them quickly.

The harmony between man and nature that underlay traditional Inuit life, art, and mythology is stressed; for example, about carving we are told that

> The Inuit believed there was an image within each stone that would be freed when it was carved, that its soul would be released.

This book has an obvious role as accompaniment to elementary Social Studies units on the Inuit; it is good enough to find a place in a child's home library as well.

Anna's Pet and *Afraid of the Dark* are physically similar since both belong to James Lorimer's *Kids of Canada* Series, but there the resemblance ends. In *Anna's Pet* a city child visiting her grandparents in the country for the first time makes several misguided attempts to find a pet and place it in a home. A toad is consigned to the bathtub, a worm to the dust under the grandparents' bed, a snake to a pail (after narrowly avoiding the oven). Finally Grandma wades into a pond and captures a tadpole which Anna can take home. When it turns into a frog, it will satisfy her desire for "a pet I can hold in my hands." The story follows the folktale pattern of repetition with variation, though less entertainingly than is the case in A. A. Milne's "In Which Tigger Comes to the Forest and Has Breakfast," for example. Anna seems extraordinarily naive and her adventures are less than breathtaking. One wonders why the talents of two authors, Margaret Atwood and Joyce Barkhouse, were required to produce this simple tale with its obvious didactic ending.

This picture-storybook contains eight full-page colour illustrations by Ann Blades. Blades is the kind of artist who responds brilliantly to an imaginative text — witness her award-winning illustrations for *A Salmon for Simon* by Betty Waterton — but becomes simplistic and even careless when confronted by the prosaic. In *Anna's Pet* a feminine visual reference is denied by the depiction of unisex grandparents and the drawing of a child who could just as easily be a boy as a girl. The regular alteration of close-up and distant vista becomes monotonous and there is a general lack of animation which is not mitigated by the flatness of the picture

surface and the simplicity of form and colour. Furthermore, the young reader may be puzzled by the proportions of the human figures when Anna's head is level with the grandparents' shoulders. Either she is much older than the text implies or the grandparents are dwarfs.

Barry Dickson's *Afraid of the Dark*, illustrated by Olena Kassian, combines bilingualism, adventure, and a common childhood phobia without any sense of strain. An impression of authenticity is created by using the child as narrator: "My name is Allen. I'm five years old. I used to be afraid of the dark.... The dark was spooky. The dark gave me the shivers. I hated it."

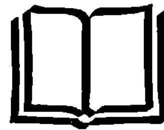
The darkness that inhibits visual perception is skillfully realized by means of sounds; once the causes of the sounds are identified — a tree branch tapping, the TV cable blowing over the window, father coming up the stairs — the dark's fearfulness is diminished. Furthermore, sounds in the dark are used positively to facilitate the rescue of Allen's new neighbour Alain when the storm sets his house on fire. In the end, Allen realizes that "Being afraid of the dark is really silly. There is nothing in the dark that isn't there when it is light."

Olena Kassian's pencil drawings provide a literal realization of scene combined with a sensitivity to mood as the scene changes from the darkness of a stormy night to the brightness of a lighted room and as Allen's feelings move from fearfulness in bed to the security of sitting on his father's knee. Special relationships are varied. The two boys, leaning out of their bedroom windows to talk to one another, are presented horizontally across the top of two pages. The frighteningly contorted branches of the storm-rocked tree reach diagonally across the page, and, in the following picture, cast their shadow on the bedroom wall as Allen stretches to reach the light switch. This apparently simple book is accomplished and disciplined in both illustration and text.

In her critical guide to Canadian children's literature, *The Republic of Childhood*, Sheila Egoff dismisses Canadian historical fiction as "a succession of failures" featuring manipulated plots, *papier-mâché* characters, and large, undigested gobs of historical facts. While *Honor Bound* by Mary Alice and John Downie cannot be described as a great book, it manages to avoid the chief weaknesses of the genre. The title involves a *double entendre*. For the sake of honour, four members of the Avery family leave their home in Philadelphia after the American Revolution and as Loyalists take up land at Cataraqui (Kingston). Their travels first to Albany and finally to Quebec are also motivated by their desire to find the older daughter, Honor. Didactic information ranging from military background to herbal medicines is sprinkled with a light hand. Dialogue is the favoured technique for creating character and facilitating the plot which is finally resolved through the fulfillment of a *Macbeth*-like prophecy uttered by an Indian medicine man: "'Your sister will return as surely as trees walk, liars tell the truth, and there is honour among thieves.'"

This unpretentious but gracefully accomplished romance, with its lively young hero and heroine, and its feckless villains, will help the young reader to understand an important aspect of eighteenth-century Canadian history.

MURIEL WHITAKER



IN GERMAN

WALTER E. RIEDEL, *Das literarische Kanadabild: eine Studie zur Rezeption kanadischer Literatur in deutscher Ubersetzung* [The Literary Image of Canada: a Study of the Reception of Canadian Literature in German Translation]. Studien zur Germanistik, Anglistik und Komparatistik, No. 92. Bonn: Bouvier.

GERMAN TRANSLATIONS of major as well as minor literature by British and American writers have always been readily available to the general reader. American authors have of course had the inestimable advantage of catering to European curiosity about North American settings and subjects. That Canadians have until recently not been able to contribute much to the demand for North American literature in German translation will surprise no one. Still, the more than one hundred translated writers that Riedel lists should impress anyone interested in our literature. In addition, Canadian literature in English and French has been gaining some systematic critical attention since the 1970's in a number of German universities.

Das literarische Kanadabild, then, is a timely book. Riedel, a professor of German language and literature at the University of Victoria, traces the history of German translations of our authors from Colonials like John Richardson to contemporaries like John Metcalf and provides a checklist of English and French Canadian books in translation up to 1978. This bibliography is indeed a useful contribution to the study of Canadian literature on both sides of the Atlantic. The book, however, is not without weaknesses that need commenting on here.

In the checklist, for instance, Riedel gives a 1960 translation of *Maria Chapdelaine*, whereas in his text he refers to a 1951 edition. Why this casual approach? Why, above all, the omission of the 1922 Zurich and the 1927 Leipzig editions? It was in the 1920's that Hémon's bestselling novel appeared in numerous European languages, and German was no exception. Furthermore, a chronological rather than an alphabetical arrangement of the checklist would have been preferable to document the publication history of Canadian books in German editions.

Among the most translated authors, according to Riedel, are Leonard Cohen, Mazo De la Roche, Allan Roy Evans, Grey Owl, Arthur Hailey, Hugh MacLennan, Margaret Millar, Farley Mowat, Brian Moore, Martha Ostenso, Charles Roberts, E. T. Seton, and David Walker. Such a mixed lot, of course, will always raise the academic question of literary standards; but, more appropriately here, it raises the old nuisance issue of Canadian authorship. Riedel includes Canadian-born authors as well as immigrant and emigrant writers. Yet unfortunately any principle of selection for the purposes of establishing a national literature is bound to be flawed. Riedel is aware of this problem, which is why, for instance, he does not include Lowry. Why, then, include Brian Moore? Why Hémon with his scarcely two years in the country, if other comparable foreign sojourners are explicitly left out? Why add Millar who, though Canadian-born, is really a popular U.S. writer? There is no simple answer to these questions, when the choice of eligible authors needs to do justice to the many meanings of the term "Canadian."

Not all authors are as easy to "nationalize" as MacLennan, and not all translations are as spectacular as that of Anne Hébert's classic, *Kamouraska*, which was serialized in a prestigious German daily. Of Grove's work, for instance, which should have attracted considerable attention in Germany after Spettigue's discovery in 1971 of Grove's German past, only two stories had appeared by 1978: the, it seems, inevitable "Snow" and, alas, "Water."

While Riedel's broad use of the term Canadian literature brings out the term's metaphoric and matter-of-fact meanings, his adoption of the notorious quest for Canadian identity as the central theme of his study is of quite dubious value to assess the reception of the translations. The general thematic ordering of the translated books under consideration is, nonetheless, convenient. Particularly the sections on books about Eskimos and Indians, about the North, and about pioneers and settlers reflect well the popularity of traditional North American fare among German-language readers. The section on temporary expatriates like Norman Levine, Mordecai Richler, Leonard Cohen, and Margaret Laurence underlines, not without over-simplifications, the interdependence in their works of geographic, historical, and psychological space.

The step from themes to recurring plot summaries is one that Riedel should have avoided, though. He indulges in such summaries as if his intention were to introduce German-language readers to Canadian books available to them. Yet the purpose of his study is, at least according to its title, preface and introduction, not at all so narrow. It is thus disappointing for the Canadian reader not to find the promised focus on the *reception* of Canadian literature. Indeed, with few exceptions, notably in his discussion of Cohen, Riedel makes astonishingly little concerted use of book reviews and related sources such as publishing records, articles and dissertations. Taking for granted the relative dearth of such material, one nevertheless wonders about the seeming preponderance of Swiss and southern German reviews. One also wonders whether Riedel's caution about the complexity of Canadian literature does not warrant similar caution about the complexity of German-language areas in Europe, be they Austria, Switzerland, East or West Germany. The literary image of Canada is perhaps not quite the same to readers from Graz to Bremen. Only in connection with the expected differences between West German and Communist East German views does Riedel present some of the ideological and multicultural sides of the reception of our authors.

The sense of literary pioneering that carries this study is indeed welcome, but the manysidedness of its subject clearly wants more critical refinement and more circumspection regarding bibliographical and cultural assessments than Riedel has demonstrated. In this context it is not out of place to mention Louis Hamilton's substantial review articles on Canadian-German literary relations in the *Canadian Historical Review* during the 1930's, and Gösta Langenfelt's examination of "Kanadas Schönliteratur [Canada's Belles Lettres]" in the 1926-27 volume of *Englische Studien*. Maybe I am unduly critical of Riedel's efforts from my perspective as a Canadian specialist on this side of the Atlantic and as someone who can still be annoyed by unnecessary plot summaries, thematic oversimplifications, the hasty shouts of "Eureka" in Canadian literary studies, and the praise of *In Our House* as a "wichtig [significant]" addition to Canadian criticism.

As it stands, *Das literarische Kanadabild* seems either too short to let Riedel accomplish his worthwhile intentions fully or too long to serve as a critical overview of its appended checklist of translations. Despite my reservations, however, I want to commend the book for its bibliographic contribution to the study of Canadian literature and for its likely encouragement of further supra-national perspectives on our authors. After all, the multicultural complexity of the Canadian identity increasingly qualifies Canada for the role of a Global Village whose literary resources deserve attention abroad as well as at home.

K. P. STICH

A FAIRE PENSER

JEAN-GUY DUBUC, *Nos Valeurs en ébullition.* Leméac, n.p.

JEAN-GUY DUBUC, éditorialiste de *La Presse* et recherchiste à Radio-Canada, ancien professeur et grand voyageur devant l'Éternel, tient lui-même son récent ouvrage, *Nos valeurs en ébullition*, paru à Montréal, chez Leméac (1980), pour un essai, voire un "effort de rapprochement entre hier, aujourd'hui et demain." L'auteur entend par valeurs la foi, la famille, l'autorité, la tradition. Sans doute peut-il en considérer d'autres comme l'épanouissement personnel, la liberté d'expression et la libération. Son livre comprend quatre parties, respectivement intitulées: 1. La référence aux valeurs; 2. Les deux cultures; 3. Sensualité; 4. Vers la tolérance. Jean-Guy Dubuc termine par Un dernier mot. Tout au plus y ai-je relevé en bas de page deux références au même volume, *Quelle foi*? puis un renvoi à *Maurice Duplessis et son temps.* Cela ne l'empêche pas, cependant, de parler des personnes suivantes: Georges-Henri Lévesque, Gérard Dion, Louis O'Neill, Pierre (?), Valéry, Marshall McLuhan, sans indiquer de renvois. L'auteur nous livre ses réflexions personnelles sur quelques-unes de nos valeurs, dont le bouleversement, l'ébullition, le renversement même nous préoccupent.

A mon avis il n'y a point de valeurs nouvelles; il existe seulement des idoles nouvelles. Quoi qu'il en soit, le temps serait venu de donner aux futurs enseignants des cours d'éducation aux veleurs fondamentales; éducateurs et étudiants devraient aussi commencer par se remettre eux-mêmes en question avant de vouloir tout remettre en question. Ces valeurs dites nouvelles sont nombreuses, originales, séduisantes, superficielles. Aussi doit-on faire un choix, prendre conscience et réfléchir là-dessus: ce qui demande un effort intellectuel trop pénible pour la plupart. Mieux vaut passer d'une mode à l'autre, de l'anticonformisme au nouveau conformisme, qui consiste à suivre l'opinion de la majorité, à accepter de nouveaux maîtres et de nouveaux absolus, à accorder une autorité infaillible aux chefs des partis politiques et des syndicats, à se vêtir et à mal parler comme la masse etc. La nouvelle culture de masse transmise par la presse — radio — télévision, par la disque, le cinéma et l'opéra est fort bien analysée par l'auteur. Mais Jean-Guy Dubuc abuse de l'expression "maître à penser"; la télévision comprendrait même mille maîtres à penser; elle embrasse trop et trop vite pour étreindre longtemps; c'est une nouvelle façon d'apprendre et d'oublier vite. Le "village global" est devenu incommunicable. La nouvelle élite est aussi détestable que celle qui l'a précédée; elle est fondée sur la mode dénuée de sens. Une valeur du passé n'est pas nécessairement dépassée. Je doute forte que nos journaux contribuent au rapprochement des deux cultures.

Autant dire que l'auteur remue plus d'une idée importante dans son essai remarquable de lucidité et de plénitude. Que de gens se rencontrent sans pouvoir se parler, faute d'être sur la même longueur d'ondes! Ce qui divise une société, c'est beaucoup plus l'inculture ou la demi-culture que la culture proprement dite. On n'a que faire de maîtres à penser; mieux vaut maître à faire penser. A l'instar des journalistes, Jean-Guy Dubuc aime les faits "brutaux," comme d'autres aiment la vérité "brutale." Quelle étrange épithète sous la plume d'un essayiste! Superbes sont les pages que l'auteur consacre aux sens, au voyage, à l'observation, au goût, à la sensualité-sexualité, à la libération et à la pornographie, aux valeurs chrétiennes, morales, religieuses. La culture de l'esprit n'est pas plus un luxe que la sensualité. Il est vrai que la confusion est générale aujourd'hui, entre-

tenue qu'elle est à l'envi par les moyens de communication sociale, y compris "la linge ouverte." Les pages sur la révolution improprement appelée tranquille, la rapide transformation des structures et des institutions scolaires, la lente évolution des mentalités et la nouvelle intolérance: tout cela mériterait d'être monté en épingle, à tel point l'auteur a le rare don de dire beaucoup en peu de mots. L'émotion serait un luxe. L'intolérance engendre l'intolérance, comme la démesure engendre la démesure. Au dire de Jean-Guy Dubuc, "les Québécois ne s'aiment pas." Comment alors peuvent-ils aimer les autres? Et ils ne s'aimeraient pas parce qu'ils ne se sentent pas encore capables d'affirmer ce qu'ils sont et ce qu'ils possèdent. No gauchistes — la plupart de nos intellectuels le sont par snobisme plus que par conviction: il faut suivre le troupeau — sont radicaux, intransigeants, condamnent la droite, ne tolèrent ni les images ni les institutions du passé; beaucoup d'entre eux vont jusqu'à mépriser l'histoire, le passé.

Jean-Guy Dubuc exprime des idées en ébullition dans son essai pénétrant, qui abonde en vues justes ou discutables. Cet éditorialiste de *La Presse* est un maître à faire penser.

MAURICE LEBEL

POWER PLAYS

DAVID FREEMAN, *Flytrap*. Playwrights Canada.
GEORGE F. WALKER, *Gossip*. Playwrights Canada.

SEX AND VIOLENCE, those staples of entertainment, take radically different forms in recent plays by David Freeman and George F. Walker. If you like your sex and violence grimly funny and firmly chained to the realistic kitchen sink, you'll like Freeman's *Flytrap,* though the play does have a flaw. If you prefer your sex and violence satirical, intellectually stimulating, and more ebulliently funny, Walker's *Gossip* will suit your taste.

Flytrap is set in a claustrophobic, rundown apartment living room with windows overlooking an alley in which an old man masturbates and is later crushed, twice, by a deliberately aimed car. Inside, the sex and violence are less overt but equally real, sometimes squalid and sometimes funny. A middle-aged husband (Bobby) and wife (Ruthie), shoe salesman and school teacher, co-exist in the trap of a sterile marriage, short of money and seething with hostility and frustration. Into this trap walks the fly, Stanley, a gormless young man whose mother was Ruthie's close friend. He is to be their source of additional income, sleeping on the couch and dining on meatballs which Ruthie concocts according to his mother's recipe. Soon he becomes much more than a lodger, as Bobby and Ruthie compete for his time and attention, she offering shopping trips and the new Robert Redford movie, he offering trips to his favourite pub and porno flicks. Stanley tries to satisfy both and thus satisfies neither until, preparing at last to walk out, he unwittingly unites his tormentors. Their combined force is too much for him and he stays.

The play is neatly constructed. The balance of power shifts believably from Ruthie to Bobby and back several times as they fight for Stanley. They both need him: they lost their only baby, they no longer sleep together, Bobby has no pals at work, Ruthie's friend (Stanley's mother) is dead and her cat has vanished — killed, we discover eventually, by Bobby. Stanley represents, disturbingly, son and lover for them both, as well as friend, pal, and household pet. His multiple role is heavily charged with sexuality (Oedipal, homo, and hetero), sometimes distressing, sometimes comic. In one of the funniest scenes, Stanley prepares to water Ruthie's new hanging plant, a

creeper in a cage. Carrying a watering can, undoubtedly one with an erect spout, he accidentally heads for Ruthie's bedroom door instead of for the caged creeper and is challenged by Bobby in a visually and verbally witty few moments. All is soon forgiven, and Bobby invites Stanley to sleep in his bed; Bobby, however, takes to the couch, perhaps regretfully. The sexuality, both overt and covert, is part and parcel of the power struggle and the realism of the play.

Realism, of course, does not preclude symbolism, and Freeman has included many details which work well symbolically without calling undue attention to themselves. The dry caged creeper, for instance, is not only Ruthie's plant but also Ruthie. The dead cat's saucer of milk and box of kitty litter, renewed daily, show Ruthie's pathetic hope and focus Bobby's hostility. When real violence breaks out at the end, Bobby drenches Stanley with a phallic soda siphon and Ruthie sprinkles him with the kitty litter; he is reduced to sexual victim and household pet. They follow this display of triumphant power with some further business with spray cans of air freshener. Action and significance are carefully welded together.

The one weak spot in the play is the inconsistent character of Stanley. He begins as nearly moronic, explaining laboriously in response to a snide remark by Bobby that the shoestore where he works has no candy bars in stock but that they sell shoes — yuk! — by the foot. Later, he delivers accurate assessments of Ruthie's character and takes firm stands about keeping his dates with her. It is credible that the moronic Stanley would be successfully ensnared in the flytrap; it is not credible that the analytic and decisive Stanley would be. Here, and elsewhere, comparisons with Joe Orton's *Entertaining Mr. Sloane* are inevitable. In that play, a brother and sister compete for the sexual favours of Mr. Sloane, the sister's lodger. The sex is all in the open, with the sister considerably pregnant by Act Two; the violence too is up front, including the murder of an old man on stage rather than in an alley. And Mr. Sloane, who has been trying to exploit the brother and sister while they exploit him, is believably in their power at the end despite his cleverness because they have witnessed his murder of their old father. Brother and sister then work out the terms of their agreement for sharing Mr. Sloane quite amicably. Both the characterization and the close-to-Absurd mode are consistent. *Flytrap*, however, does have the virtues of greater realism: one doesn't usually bed one's father's killer; domestic power struggles are more commonly covert than overt. But Stanley's inconsistency is a serious flaw.

Walker's *Gossip* has no such flaw — and no such realism. Chris Johnson has accurately described Walker's plays as "B-Movies Beyond the Absurd," and *Gossip* is no exception. In the first scene, which lasts only a minute or two, a crowd of well-dressed people is staring at a rubber tire, apparently a piece of "minimal art." The gallery's patroness raises her wine glass, toasts such art, and promptly falls through the tire, dead. The second scene begins with T. M. Power (the T. stands for Tyrone, and T. M. might mean something, too) sitting at his desk in the newspaper office, brooding. He says, "Who killed Bitch Nelson? (pause) And who the hell cares?" *Who Killed Roger Ackroyd*? asked Agatha Christie. "Who Cares Who Killed Roger Ackroyd?" Edmund Wilson responded. We're off and running in a cloud of allusions, following Power in his efforts to solve the murder and to get into Margaret's bed. He fails in the latter but apparently accomplishes the former — apparently, because the plot is so intensely complicated that no one could possibly follow it, in spite of the

classic recapitulation scene in which he spells out "what we have so far." There is so much plot that it becomes insignificant, or rather significant only because there is so much of it, not because of what the story is. Walker has pushed the conventions of the sleazy thriller to their limits and beyond, exploiting the form as entertainment and making it expose both its own ridiculousness and, perhaps more important, the sleaziness of some of its component elements.

Most interesting here is Margaret. Margaret lives in Ottawa most of the time. She is young and beautiful, wears a trenchcoat and tinted glasses, carries a rose which she presents to Power, talks endlessly of her tensions, is unhappy because the diplomatic corps prevented her from giving the emperor of Japan a copy of her poems.... Guess who. But this Margaret has an incestuous passion for her brother Paul, an important cabinet minister. Walker has turned caricature into B-movie (almost porn-movie) sleaze, with the implication that the model for the character *belongs* in a B-movie. The form defines and comments on its own contents.

Margaret tempts one to look at *Gossip* as a *drame à clef* and search for models for other characters: the poet and prophet, Brigot Nelson, whom nobody reads but everybody admires; the theatrical director, Peter Bellum, who announces crisply, "I'm a British faggot"; Sam and Norman Lewis, lawyers with as many kinks in their sexual as in their legal practices. But Walker is too un-pin-downable to trap himself and us in a neat pattern of one-to-one correspondences. Instead, he keeps our minds hopping, from the comparatively simple irony of a tough, cynical (but fundamentally decent!) gumshoe/newspaperman who should have been named Sam Spade but who is named Tyrone Power, to the complex self-reflexive theatre ironies of actors who play characters who are student actors who are directed by other characters to pretend to be still other characters. Walker calls the play "a sort of satirical comedy about what happens to a man [Power] when he's taken out of his milieu and asked to do a job which he conscientiously feels he must succeed at." It's much more than that. *Gossip* sparkles with barbs aimed at drama, poetry, art, politics, journalism, murder mysteries, law, philanthropy, and just about every other activity of our world — and the performers of these activities. Walker's steady intelligence shows us a world in crazy chaos which, invisibly, he controls. For all its grim implications, it is wonderfully funny.

Both *Flytrap* and *Gossip* are comedies, despite their radical differences. When *Flytrap* opened, the Montreal *Star* rejoiced at the appearance of a "straightforward ... entertaining ... unpretentious" play; despite its flaw, it has the funny awfulness, or awful funniness, which is Freeman's trademark. When *Gossip* opened, the Toronto *Globe and Mail*, though puzzled by the style of the production, revelled in the play's "absurdity" and "high jinks"; it also has the challenging and mercurial ironies which are Walker's trademark. In Comedy's house are many mansions: dark and bright, foursquare and multi-faceted, with and without kitchen sinks. *De gustibus....*

ANN MESSENGER

FOUND PLAYS

ANTON WAGNER, ed., *Canada's Lost Plays, Volume Three; The Developing Mosaic: English-Canadian Drama to Mid-Century.* CTR, $14.95; pa. $9.95.

NEIL CARSON, ed., *New Canadian Drama — 1.* Borealis, n.p.

AT THE TURN OF THE CENTURY, Canadian theatres were dominated by foreign

professional companies out to make money on lucrative tours. But since then a lot has happened, as the ten plays in these two volumes testify. In his admirable introductory essay, Anton Wagner, editor of *Canada's Lost Plays* (vol. III), outlines the developments between 1900 and 1950. He singles out the Margaret Eaton School of Literature and Expression (with its playhouse donated by Timothy Eaton) and Toronto's Arts and Letters Club as manifestations of the forces at work changing Canada's artistic climate just after 1900. Inspired by the European "art" theatre model, itself a reaction against commercialism, our own "little theatre" movement developed in the 1920's. It drew strength from the increased national consciousness during the early decades of the century, and grew in popularity as foreign touring fell into a decline by the 1930's. Hart House Theatre had opened in 1919 and quickly became an influential focus for the movement.

At this point, Wagner is able to move to Merrill Denison, the first important playwright of the century, and the first represented in the volume, for it was at Hart House that Denison got his start. With a host of historical details, Wagner is able to show how the play and playwright fit into the "developing mosaic." He does the same with the six succeeding plays and their playwrights, bringing us up to 1950 and the beginnings of a professionally-based indigenous theatre. This lengthy Introduction is supplemented by a valuable foreword to each play, written by the playwright in question, except for Denison who died in 1975.

The Weather Breeder, Denison's light comedy, was staged at Hart House in 1924, after amateur productions in Ottawa and Montreal. Like other of his plays, this is an ironic piece about a farmer, Old John, who is happy only when he is complaining: here, about sunny autumn days which he says bring bad weather. When a threatening storm passes over without harming his crops, the old fellow greets the reappearing blue skies with "Grrr, more of them damn weather breeders." On that contrary note, Denison ends his play, having captured in a humorous vein the fatalism he seemed to feel lurked in corners of rural Ontario.

Lois Reynolds Kerr's *Open Doors* is overtly more serious. Winner of the 1930 I.O.D.E. playwriting contest and staged at the Little Playhouse in Toronto, it too is bound up in amateur theatre. In an uncomfortable mixture of agit prop and social realism, Kerr dramatizes the experiences of Sylvia Martin, a wealthy industrialist's daughter. Secretly she has been aiding the family of an unemployed labourer, George Cole, who overhears the industrialist's scheme of bringing immigrants to Canada to work for low wages. In anger and despair, Cole burns the slum building where the immigrants stay. Realizing what Cole has done, Sylvia lies to her father and the police, then gives the Coles money to escape — where is never considered. As the play ends, overwhelmed by her guilt and the complexity of the situation, Sylvia kneels and asks God to help.

For a comparatively right-wing author (she was society editor of the *Globe and Mail*), Kerr paints a sympathetic picture of the 1920 labourer. At the same time, although the agit prop style is forceful, the subject calls for a more thorough hearing, which the evasive ending avoids. Coincidence, the rapidity with which things happen, and the often unconvincing dialogue also weaken the play.

The more experimental drama of the period is highlighted by an effective contrast between two of Herman Voaden's plays: *Wilderness* (1931) and *Murder Pattern* (1936). The first, a realistic drama, centres on a young teacher in northern Ontario who waits for her

betrothed to return from a winter lumber camp. As she becomes conscious of his death, her loneliness and feeling of entrapment give way to a spiritual strength derived from her memory of his faith in the north. For many people, the dialogue and dialect, to say nothing of the situation itself, will create only an inferior *Riders to the Sea.* Yet Voaden's passion for the north makes *Wilderness* worth reading, as it does the other play included.

Murder Pattern takes for its subject a famous Haliburton murder, the details of which have Jack Davis shooting his dead wife's brother who tormented him constantly. First sentenced to hang, Davis is given life imprisonment because of a public outcry. During his jail term, he becomes ill and is sent home where he dies.

Again, only this time in a style he called "symphonic expressionism" — an abstract set, sculptural lighting, ritualistic movement, *Emperor Jones*-like drums, music, symbolic characters, narrators and incantatory language — Voaden tries to express man's triumph amid tragedy. A choral figure ends the play on these words:

> You [Davis] have entered the temple at last. ... Your body is one with the earth.... In them [the winds] your spirit shall brood and pass endlessly among the hills... lonely and enduring as the hills.

The language, while suggestive, is hardly poetic. But a more serious problem exists in the play's philosophy. Davis' victory is at best a pyrrhic one in which the only laudable aspect is his dignity in the face of inevitable catastrophe. Since lines early in the play state that the wilderness has caused life to move "backwards toward the animal, the grotesque, the warped, the evil," Davis' union with the spirit of such a land cannot be seen as a triumph. This play does offer, however, a daring stylistic adventure. For that reason, alone, it is worth including, although, since *Murder Pattern* is available in *CTR* 5, another of Voaden's "symphonic expressionist" pieces might have done as well.

The House in the Quiet Glen is John Coulter's simple tale of Sally, an Irish lass whose parents betroth her to the father of her secret lover, Hughie. When Sally stands up for her rights, rejects Hughie's Da, and the truth is out, all ends happily. The play's cheery outlook and Irish dialogue gave it enough charm to sweep the 1937 drama awards.

Gwen Ringwood's *The Rainmaker* (1945) relates the effect George Hatfield had on drought-ridden Medicine Hat when he was hired in 1921 to make rain. A wistful air pervades the action as a result of its being framed by a fifty-year-old widower, Tom Arnold's memory of the night in question twenty-four years earlier. Margaret, his wife, was about to board a train, to leave him and his dried-up land. Theirs was a painful solution to the drought. Other people were equally desperate. But that evening rain came, the crops were saved, and Margaret stayed with Tom — for better or worse. Whether the rain was Hatfield's or "His" doing is left slightly up in the air. In any case, we again see people battling the natural environment and themselves. Certainly heartache is involved, but unlike Voaden's plays, this one has a magical quality from its being set in the carnival that accompanies Hatfield's rain-making. The result of the struggle is the protagonists' clearer understanding of themselves, the wisdom of passing through a trying ordeal. Although loosely constructed, a little sentimental, and peopled with characters who are a trifle thin, the play's light touch with its serious subject is refreshing.

The most recent play of this collection is Robertson Davies' neglected *Hope Deferred* (1948), in which a witty and eloquent Count Frontenac battles two Quebec clergymen over his plan to stage *Tartuffe* in 1693. Bishop Laval and the unimaginative Monseigneur Saint Vallier

object with the usual reasons brought against such evil devices, and ultimately are successful in banning the play. Frontenac, however, aided by Chimene, a charming Huron girl he has sent to France for schooling and who is to play the female lead, has argued forcibly and articulately. The result is that the audience for Davies' play comes away not only with a humorous, entertaining drama about a moment in Canadian history, but an irrefutable argument on behalf of the need for art in the New World — or in any world, for that matter.

Hope Deferred received its first production by the Montreal Repertory Theatre, an amateur group which contained performers who made part of their living from Rupert Caplan's radio drama. This professional-yet-not professional status is a fair representation of Canadian theatre at the time. By the late 1970's when the plays Neil Carson has chosen for his volume were performed, Canadian theatre possessed a professional base. In fact, the first play in the collection was written to exploit the commercial aspect of the contemporary professional stage. *Westmount*, by Richard Ouzounian, brings together three sisters for their annual reunion. One is the WASP wife of a wealthy Montreal businessman; the second is a pregnant neurotic married to a psychologist; the third a gossip columnist who, to spite her WASP sister, invites Big Bert, a Vegas casino owner. Because he has run off with $500,000, Bert is pursued by Mafioso types who lay siege to the Westmount mansion. Shooting starts, and after many dips and dives, Bert is revealed to be the sisters' long-lost, bastard brother. Familial ties unite them all in driving off the Mafia as the curtain falls.

As Carson points out, "*Westmount* makes few demands on a reader." Even as commercial fluff the play is no better than T.V. sitcom. It consists of a series of improbable incidents for the sketchily-drawn characters who spout one-liners like, "Doris, you're so naive you think a separatiste is something made by Wonderbra." Some of the sophomoric jokes aim at satire: "The only place you can be sure of finding a dummy nowadays is in the National Assembly." Optimistically speaking, one can observe that commercial theatre exists in Canada. But Ouzounian is a far cry from Alan Ayckbourn or Neil Simon.

The other two plays in the volume offer richer potential. Tom Cone's *Stargazing*, which was done at Stratford's Third Stage in 1978, is a short play in which two couples watch falling stars. Undoubtedly the play is more accessible to a theatre audience, but because the characters, in pairs, carry on conversations that interweave, it takes slow reading to sort things out. When one does, he finds that the stargazing is really a metaphor for the characters' everyday behaviour. Each fills an empty area of his or her life by watching various "stars." Eleanor follows the singing career of a former high school friend. Ed is obsessed with the idea of contact between aliens from outer space and earthlings. The result, he repeatedly warns, will be a revolution in religion, culture, and philosophy. Jan's stars are a neighbour couple on whom she spies with binoculars bought for meteor watching. Henry appears to be above all this voyeurism. He refuses to stargaze, ridicules Ed's banal apocalyptic vision, and coldly analyses the others' psychological dependencies. Ironically, not only is he shattered when he discovers his wife Jan's window peeping, but he fails to recognize his own obsession with plants (bougainvillea, named after the famous star-gazer/navigator) as equally neurotic.

Cone spends all his time merely revealing the duplicit lives of these dull characters. More rewarding for his audience would have been an exploration of the frightening implications of why these peo-

ple, like many others, are forced to seek voyeuristic satisfaction in life. Although promising, this play does not go far enough.

Set amid Russia's glittery 1830's aristocracy, George Jonas' *Pushkin* is rife with political intrigue, love and adventure. The jealous Pushkin accuses Lieutenant d'Anthes of paying too much attention to Natalya, Pushkin's wife. Their quarrel erupts into a duel in which Pushkin is fatally wounded. The tale abounds in irony. A womanizer himself, Pushkin cuckolded enough men to lead him into thirty duels; Natalya, an alluring mixture of naiveté, coyness, and beauty, was promiscuous herself, and was eventually seduced by d'Anthes. She was rumoured to be the Czar's mistress, and the main reason Pushkin was retained at court when his caustic wit and outspokenness were feared, particularly by the Czar's advisors.

For all of that, *Pushkin* is disappointing. It opens on a static scene in which five statues (Jonas forgets to identify one), report things an experienced dramatist would work in later. In addition, the dialogue is often turgid, the focus diffuse. At one point we learn that the Czar has sent troops to Poland to quell a revolt. The parallels with modern occurrences hint at a political focus. Yet the play is really a documentary. In the Introduction Jonas says, "The following play is based entirely on the facts of Pushkin's life," as if that in itself were justification for its writing. But documentary form is not inherently dramatic. Nor is the romance of Pushkin's escapades. However theatrical and exciting, the real life details require an effective dramatic structure as well as a clear focus. By not establishing either, Jonas allows his rich material to falter.

None of the plays in Carson's volume had an overly auspicious beginning in the theatre. Carson's editing, in contrast to the skill of Anton Wagner's, has done nothing to enhance the plays' reputations. In 119 pages there are enough typos and other editorial gaffs to average one for six pages. Most are minor, but leaving Pushkin out of the character list of Jonas' play, and allotting Stephen Markle a wrong role, smacks of carelessness. One wonders, in fairness to the editor, whether he and the authors saw proofs.

Conceptual errors are more troubling. For example, also about *Pushkin*, the editor writes: "it is a sign of maturing that Canadian dramatists are at last dealing with historical figures other than John A. Macdonald and Louis Riel." One wonders what Canadian drama Carson has been reading, for from the late 1700's on, our playwrights have dealt with historical figures: Francis Bacon, Pope Gregory, Talleyrand, Saul, Hitler, Churchill, the Kings and Queens of England and other countries, *ad nauseam*. The trouble has rarely been in the choice of subject, but in the handling of it.

Carson's editing aside, these two volumes provide a revealing look at Canadian drama in the twentieth century. Already commented on is the amateur movement away from the commercial fare of 1900 toward plays with a serious purpose. Implied is the recent return to commercial plays like *Westmount*. The differences between 1900 and now are notable. A majority of contemporary pieces, like *Jitters*, *Maggie and Pierre*, and *Mayonnaise*, and unlike *Westmount*, are themselves quite serious. They are, in turn, surrounded by more serious dramas than those at the beginning of the century. Now both the commercial works and those with greater aspirations are products of a professional indigenous theatre — something that did not even exist in 1900. Also notable in the collections are the preponderance of short plays and the dearth of experiment. Almost all are cast in a realistic mode. Yet the plays are entertaining; most of them are

thought-provoking. In an artistic climate beset with the financial restrictions of today, we can thank both of these editors for making the plays available.

RICHARD PLANT

POETS BEYOND BORDERS

PETER AICHINGER, *Earle Birney*. Twayne, n.p.
JOHN FERNS, *A. J. M. Smith*. Twayne, n.p.

PUBLISHED IN THE United States, the Twayne World Authors Series has, on the whole, advanced the cause of Canadian literature abroad. Because it is a large, well-distributed critical series, it has fostered a discriminating foreign readership for Canadian literature, established the reputations of many Canadian writers abroad and, just as important, developed new markets for them. In short, it has helped make Canadian literature a world literature. Two recent Twayne volumes by Canadian scholars, Peter Aichinger's *Earle Birney* and John Ferns' *A. J. M. Smith*, point up some important congruities between two close contemporaries and leading figures in twentieth-century Canadian literature.

Before Birney's celebrated rejuvenation of the 1960's, his poetry shared with that of Smith's Montreal Group of the 1920's an interest in verse technique, social satire, and political action, and a conviction that a lack of national myths rendered urban Canada boring, bourgeois, and ugly, and its wilderness a terrifying mirror of the Canadian unpreparedness for its challenge. Both believed poetry to be a socially useful discipline, and used it to criticize the bloated egotism of the machine age and modern technology. No doubt to their surprise, both have been widely honoured by their country. Both were "nature" poets, Birney favouring the interaction of man and closely observed nature to illustrate political or social themes, Smith the lyrical response. Both were preoccupied with loneliness, old age, and approaching death (even when Birney was 36, his poetry had a valetudinarian note).

But the differences are perhaps more revealing. If Smith's poetry retained its classical precision and lyric mode, Birney's became increasingly varied and experimental, with new forms, such as concrete poetry and found verse, inspired by the Black Mountain poets, Op Art, Pop Art and, Aichinger suggests, by the general activism and freedom among Canadian writers that grew out of the new sense of nationhood and the international youth movement of the 1960's. Though Smith advocated a single, international style for Canadian poetry — partly to increase international acceptance of it — his fifty years in the United States had little discernible effect on his poetry. In later life Birney not only left his formative environment but embarked on international odysseys, writing poetry on alien cultures to show that in an age of nuclear anxiety Canadians were not *sui generis* but part of mankind as a whole.

Smith and Birney admired each other's work for much the same reasons. Reviewing *David and Other Poems* (1942), Smith wrote that Birney "combined a cosmopolitan sensibility and an adventurous technique with a thoroughly native pride in what is excellent in Canadian life," adding that the book's favourable reception was due in part to the "way it captured the mood of a nation going reluctantly to war." Reviewing *Selected Poems* in 1966 Smith went further, asserting that Birney was "one of our major poets, perhaps since the death of E. J. Pratt, our leading poet." In *Canadian Literature*'s "Salute to A. J. M. Smith" issue (Winter 1963), Birney paid tribute to Smith as "both historian and shaper of our litera-

ture, perceptive in discovering new talents, courageous in reassessing established ones," and specifically praised the *Oxford Book of Canadian Verse* (1960) as a consummate realization of Smith's "consistent purpose to discover and encourage whatever uniqueness in the Canadian pattern, either 'Canadian' or 'cosmopolitan,' may be worth the world's attention."

Aichinger's book is a careful, thorough, always intelligent study. Familiarity with the Birney Collection at the University of Toronto, and extensive consultation with the subject himself, enable him to deal authoritatively with such complex matters as Birney's constant revision of earlier poems, the changing meanings of key symbols and images, and the gradual emergence of the poet behind the poetic personae. His analyses of the poems are both balanced and sympathetic, urbane yet appreciative of the earthy ebullience as well as the tender lyricism of the later Birney. The thematic organization, however, leads to some repetition, especially in discussing principal poems like "David" and "Near False Creek Mouth." Aichinger is more generous than Frank Davey (*Earle Birney*, 1971) toward the novels, *Turvey* and *Down the Long Table*, and less curious about the underlying reasons for Birney's late start as a writer and for the seven-year dry spell between *Down the Long Table* (1955) and *Ice Cod Bell or Stone* (1962); but such highlights as his mythic interpretation of "David," his relation of Birney's humanism to his politics, and his nose for sardonic anecdote compensate handsomely. (The best of these recounts Birney's publisher's refusal to reissue *David and Other Poems* in 1943 out of a conviction that Birney would be killed in World War II and write nothing else.)

The first full-length study of A. J. M. Smith, John Ferns' book succeeds as an introduction to Smith's fifty-year career as poet, critic, and anthologist; it falls short in its attempt to explicate the poetry, assess the criticism, and acquaint the reader with Smith the man. Though Ferns frequently asserts that there is a unifying vision linking all Smith's work, he does remarkably little probing of thematic relationships between poems, groups of poems, and periods in Smith's poetic development, as opposed to simplistic descriptions and catalogues. And Ferns' decision to discuss, or at least mention, all the poems in the order they appear in *Poems: New and Collected* (1967) — rather than the more recent *The Classic Shade* (1978) — curtails discussion and reveals no more than the broadest outline of Smith's lonely poetic land. "The Archer," one of Smith's best poems, receives not quite four lines. By his own admission, Ferns is reluctant to engage the poetry's complexity (while insisting that Smith is at heart a simple poet); so the "difficult, lonely music" remains just that. Similarly, Ferns elects to let others analyze the fusion of classical symbolism and other influences with Smith's own poetic voice.

He believes that Smith is fundamentally a religious poet, finding evidence throughout the poems of spiritual regeneration and renewal, but his fondness for moralizing reduces Smith's religious sensibility to the born-again variety. Though he may sound like a high-church Anglican, Smith was not at all religious in his personal life. His religion was literary, much more so than that of his English models. Though one can argue that a religious predilection drew him to these models in the first place, Smith's poetic idiom, his language of symbolism and imagery, is rooted in the Christian and classical ambiance of his training and the seventeenth-century Metaphysical and modern poetry — Yeats, Hopkins, Eliot — in which he steeped himself. Actually, Ferns comes closer to the truth about his religion when he notes that, for Smith,

poetry gave permanence to the transient, and was itself a way of overcoming mortality. At its best, his poetry is in fact the kind of "pure" poetry Smith found in the work of Carman and Roberts, "timeless and changeless, dealing with everlasting verities, human love, human loneliness, the sustaining strength of the earth, man's response to the voices, fancied or real, of nature."

The chapters on Smith as critic and anthologist, though largely descriptive, document the familiar claim that he helped prepare the ground for the acceptance of literary modernism in Canada, while shaping and defining the Canadian literary tradition itself. Ferns bases his discussion on *Towards A View of Canadian Letters* (1973) — but not the equally important *On Poetry and Poets* (1977) — concluding that, while mindful of what was unique in the Canadian experience, Smith was more willing than Frye, Atwood, or D. G. Jones to judge Canadian writers critically by contemporary international standards. In the best of Smith's criticism and anthologies, as Earle Birney observed, "both regionalism and Canadianism are not so much adjured as transcended."

Its flaws notwithstanding, the value of Ferns' study is that it provides a first overview of the nature, significance, and diversity of A. J. M. Smith's talents and achievements. Because his influence was strongest in the 1920's, 1930's, and 1940's, Smith has been somewhat neglected in recent years. Any book that increases, as Ferns' does, the present generation's understanding and appreciation of Smith's seminal importance in Canadian literature deserves commendation.

JOHN H. FERRES

BROOKER

BIRK SPROXTON, ed., *Sounds Assembling: The Poetry of Bertram Brooker.* Turnstone Press, $7.00.

IT WAS WITH PLEASURE that I agreed to review this collection of Bertram Brooker's poetry, edited and introduced by Birk Sproxton, because it is a timely and attractive publication. The title, "Sounds Assembling," is from Brooker's stunning abstract canvas of 1928, but Brooker was not only a painter. As Sproxton explains in his Introduction, Brooker (1888-1955) was a journalist, music and art critic, business man, editor and writer of essays, fiction (his novel, *Think of the Earth*, 1936, won the first Governor General's Award) and poetry. In fact, Brooker also wrote two expressionist plays for Toronto playwright and teacher, Herman Voaden, and was an important figure in the modernist movement in Canada.

So far we know Brooker through his paintings and Dennis Reid's 1973 monograph, but it is high time that we knew more, and Sproxton's intention is "to close part of the gap in our appreciation of Brooker." This he does very well with a brief biography, a critical introduction and selection of twenty-eight poems (all but three hitherto unpublished) interspersed with brief prose selections and two longer essays by Brooker. Although it is impossible to date all the poems, Sproxton believes they are from the late twenties and early thirties; both essays were written in 1930. As a whole they provide insight into the ideals and style of their author. In his Introduction Sproxton draws attention to Brooker's mysticism, his imagist and cinematic techniques and the links between the visionary themes in his painting and poetry. He also offers a fine analysis of one of the best poems, "The Ice Man," which is a Joycean exercise in sound and verbal energy.

Brooker's poetry, while not a major literary discovery, is of interest for its highly visual, imagist qualities, open form and energy, and it should be considered along with F. R. Scott's, A. J. M. Smith's, or W. W. E. Ross' when the Canadian Moderns are discussed. His themes range from the occasionally cynical portrayal of sterile modernity reminiscent of Eliot to a delight in modern technology, and these latter poems, together with a number of his abstract paintings, reveal an affinity with the Vorticists and the abstract expressionism of Kandinsky. His central theme, according to Sproxton, is his understanding of mystical vision and spiritual awakening, the subject as well of several fine paintings such as "The Dawn of Man" (1927) and "The Way" (1927), both reproduced in Reid's monograph. On the whole, mystical illumination resists linguistic expression, but Brooker comes closest, I feel, in this sharp visual image from "The Destroyer":

> The sins of those around me
> are the oblique angles of their lives
> retreating from the sharp edges of their laws

The brief selections from Brooker's prose reveal his expressionist view of modern art in which the artist depicts "not so much what he sees as what he feels," his attitudes about the Group of Seven with whom he had exhibited, and the genesis of his own work. Of the two longer essays, the one on E. E. Cummings is especially noteworthy because in it Brooker reveals his own goals such as his preference for the mathematical and musical qualities of metaphysical verse and the parallels between such verse and abstract painting. The review of John Middleton Murry's *God: An Introduction to the Science of Metabiology*, while a clear statement of Brooker's understanding of mysticism, seems of less importance to me than his introductory essay to *Yearbook of the Arts in Canada, 1928-1929* entitled "When We Awake!" This essay is an important modernist document which should be included in our anthologies and it is too bad that Sproxton, whether for reasons of emphasis (e.g., on Brooker's mysticism) or simply of space was not able to include a selection from it.

This last point, however, is a minor one. *Sounds Assembling* is a most welcome volume for its layout and introduction as well as for its sampling of poetry by a hitherto neglected modernist writer. Not only does it provide information about Bertram Brooker, but it also reveals more about Canadian modernism, particularly its interdisciplinary nature, for modernism in Canada began with the painters and then moved out through the poetry of Scott, Smith, and Ross, the drama of Voaden, and later the fiction of Sheila Watson to embrace all the arts. And Brooker was one of the earliest spokesmen for such Canadian artistic endeavour.

SHERRILL GRACE

CINEASTE, MORALISTE

YVES BEAUCHEMIN, *Le Matou*. Québec-Amérique, $14.95.

AGNES GUITARD, *Les Corps communicants*. Québec-Amérique, n.p.

EN 1975 YVES BEAUCHEMIN reçoit le prix France-Québec pour son premier ouvrage, *L'enfirouapé*, basé sur les événements d'octobre 1970. Son deuxième roman, *Le Matou*, malgré ses quelque 600 pages, sait, comme le précédent, garder le lecteur en haleine par une intrigue passionnante, toujours renouvelée de rebondissements inattendus, et par ses personnages excentriques, engagés dans des aventures saugrenues, où se mêlent le réel et le fantastique. Il se lit d'un trait comme un bon roman policier auquel il man-

querait cependant la chef à la fin. Dans une entrevue pour le magazine Québec-Amérique, Beauchemin se déclare être un cinéaste frustré et son livre est en effet construit à la manière d'un scénario de film d'aventures où les personnages sont sans cesse en action.

L'histoire se centre autour d'un jeune couple de Québécois moyens, Florent et Elise Boissoneault. Ceux-ci tentent de construire leur bonheur en achetant un petit restaurant, grâce à l'aide financière d'un mystérieux inconnu étranger qui dit s'appeler Egon Ratablavasky et qui s'impose soudain dans leur vie. Ce personnage est la source de tout le suspens. Il apparaît d'abord comme le bienfaiteur du couple, puis se révèle de plus en plus malfaisant, persécutant Florent et Elise, leur faisant perdre leur restaurant, leur premier enfant et leur fils adoptif, surnommé Monsieur Emile, pauvre enfant alcoolique, complètement délaissé par sa mère prostituée et toujours flanqué de son chat.

Ratablavasky semble symboliser les différents visages d'une oppression qui continue à se faire sentir au Québec: attaché à l'église dans son passé, il s'allie à l'Anglais Slipskin et exerce un pouvoir destructeur qui repose sur la force absolue de l'argent. Son nom, qui pourrait n'être qu'un faux pour un certain Robichaud, laisse entendre que Ratablavasky représente également l'influence, vue comme néfaste, des étrangers dans la province et celle des Québécois qui pactisent avec eux. Il est significatif que Florent et Elise, menacés par ce personnage aux diverses identités, finissent par le mettre hors d'état de nuire quoique, peut-être, seulement temporairement. S'agirait-il donc encore d'un épisode de l'épopée québécoise dans sa lutte jamais achevée pour son authencité et son autonomie?

A ses meilleurs moments, le roman dégage une chaleureuse sensualité dans ses descriptions de petits restaurants où se débitent dans un feu roulant, tourtières, fèves au lard, ragoûts de boulettes, tous mets préparés tambour battant par un chef français, Picquot, reconverti à la cuisine québécoise et drôle dans sa haine implacable de la cuisine américaine en boîte. Un autre personnage, l'abbé Jeunehomme, se spécialise dans des repas littéraires, tel celui où l'on célèbre la mémoire de Philippe Aubert de Gaspé par un magnifique pâté de Pâques, fabriqué selon la recette donnée dans *Les Anciens Canadiens*.

Le roman de Beauchemin qui prend parfois des allures de "grande bouffe" nous paraît être le reflet d'une société en mouvement, mue par l'argent, le miroir d'une jeunesse entravée dans son élan par d'anciennes chaînes.

Autant *Le Matou* est un livre d'action, autant *Les Corps communicants*, premier roman d'Agnès Guitard, est une plongée vers l'intérieur et les abîmes du moi.

Agnès Guitard déroute de prime abord le lecteur en le transportant au domaine de la science-fiction, dans un pays et à une époque imaginaires dont elle donne les coordonnées et points de repère en préface. En fait, ceux-ci se révèlent être presque inutiles car le paysage extérieur reste peu important.

Il s'agit dans ce livre du journal d'un certain Joarès qui, aprés avoir été drogué et opéré au cerveau, relate la destruction progressive de sa personnalité à la suite de cette intervention chirurgicale. Cette expérience, menée par le couple Valenze-Xiela dont il était l'hôte, devait permettre à Valenze de rentrer peu à peu dans le corps et l'âme de Joarès, de vivre ainsi en double et de ce fait d'atteindre à la grandeur comme le célèbre Alcabore qui, quatre siècles auparavant, avait dû connaître une aventure semblable avec le Bariolé, son inséparable compagnon. C'est Xiela, en déchiffrant de vieux manuscrits, qui a trouvé le secret de cette opération, donnant à un être le faculté de vivre dans et par un autre.

Dans un premier moment Joarès tente de s'échapper physiquement vers un autre pays mais Valenze commence à exercer son pouvoir à distance, le forçant à revenir. Il doit se soumettre à l'imposition de Valenze dans ses bras, dans ses jambes, dans son corps tout entier. Il fait le récit de ses vains efforts pour résister à cette invasion de son corps, à cette atroce et graduelle perte de son identité.

Cependant, lorsque Valenze tente l'étape définitive en voulant s'emparer de la tête de sa victime, il échoue. Peu à peu, Joarès se rend compte que l'autre peut le posséder physiquement mais que c'est lui, Joarès, qui impose les impulsions de son propre subconscient à Valenze. Ce subconscient sur lequel il n'a aucun contrôle est donc la source de toutes les tortures que Valenze lui inflige. Ainsi c'est à ses propres démons que Joarès est finalement soumis. Le lecteur est entraîné dans un voyage au bout de la nuit, dans l'odyssée kafkaesque d'un homme livré à ses obsessions sado-masochistes: il s'expose à la dérision des gens, il se ramène de nourrisson, se faisant ramper, grouiller comme une larve impuissante, il devient victime de ses envies inconscientes de se mutiler et de s'anéantir. Cette exploration révèle qu'au niveau du subconscient les désirs les plus forts de l'homme sont ceux de la captivité, de la cruauté, de la folie et que son élan le plus puissant serait le besoin de détruire la vie et de se détruire lui-même par le suicide.

Près de quatre cents pages de ce cauchemar intérieur fait de peur, de souffrances physiques et mentales, de nausée, de désintégration progressive de l'identité, d'hallucinations obsessives, finissent par devenir quelque peu répétitives, lassantes et indigestes.

Il est cependant intéressant de noter que, femme, l'auteur choisit le thème de la possession d'un être par un autre et en souligne l'horreur. Rien de surprenant puisque la femme a justement été le sujet historique et littéraire privilégié de la possession. Le vocabulaire et l'imagerie du couple uni ont surtout servi à décrire la prise de la femme, corps et âme, par l'homme. Dans la rébellion de Joarès il nous semble entendre un cri de révolte contre les efforts d'un être quel qu'il soit pour en dominer un autre et le faire sien. Derrière les délires et tourments du subconscient nous paraît surgir le puissant désir de la conscience claire cette fois, chez chacun et peut-être plus particulièrement chez la femme, de se garder libre, entière et intacte.

MONIQUE GENUIST

THAT DELIGHTFUL CANADIAN

THOMAS E. TAUSKY, *Sara Jeannette Duncan, Novelist of Empire.* P. D. Meany, n.p.

THOMAS E. TAUSKY, *Sara Jeannette Duncan, Selected Journalism.* Tecumseh, $4.95.

I OFTEN THINK OF Sara Jeannette Duncan as an author without a country. Had she written more extensively about her native land, she would be duly recognized as Canada's foremost pre-1920 novelist. Had she been born in England or the United States, critics of those countries would have accorded her a respectable (albeit secondary) niche in the turn-of-the-century tradition of realistic internationalist fiction. However, it was her fate to hail from Brantford, Ontario, to leave Canada before the age of thirty to spend the rest of her life in India and England, and to produce nearly twenty novels (some comic, some serious), all but two examining the responses of English or American characters to foreign climes and customs. In the past six or seven years her work has been the subject of a handful of critical articles, but these two books from Thomas Tausky represent the

first attempt to pay Duncan extensive, serious attention.

The Tecumseh Press volume of selected journalism reprints forty-five pieces culled from Duncan's remarkably productive journalistic career, the bulk of them from her active Canadian years (1885-88), augmented by four 1896 samples of her work for the *Indian Daily News* (Calcutta). The critical study covers both her journalism and her fiction, moving more or less chronologically through her career. Because only one of Duncan's books is currently in print, Tausky has found it necessary to devote much of his pioneering study to summarizing plots. As a result, *Sara Jeannette Duncan, Novelist of Empire* proceeds methodically from novel to novel. However, when Tausky comes to *The Imperialist* (which he groups with an Anglo-Indian novel, *The Consort*, in his chapter titled "The Political Novels"), he can count on his readers' familiarity with the text and concentrate on critical analysis. I was particularly interested in two points raised in this section: that *The Imperialist* was written and published "at a time when the fate of Chamberlain's fervent crusade for imperialism was completely unknowable," and Tausky's reading of the book's "unnecessarily obscure, but crucial" final paragraph as Duncan's assertion that "imperialism is good for Canada."

Regrettably, the whole of this book is not equal to some of its parts. Its interest lies primarily in isolated perceptive comments and in Tausky's revelation of Duncan's limitations as both a writer and a thinker. While it does not pretend to be biography, it lacks even the basic biographical details one would expect to find in this kind of introductory study; for example, the first chapter, "Facts and Opinions," is noticeably short on dates, the most elementary of facts. In the region of literary history, it skimps drastically with regard to Duncan's milieu and models, both in Canada and abroad. Except for numerous references to Howells, even passing comparisons are drawn with few writers, and the concluding brief discussion of Duncan's affinities with contemporary Anglo-Indian novelists appears almost as an afterthought. And as literary criticism, it lacks a central focus or argument to weld the separate chapters into a cohesive whole.

In contrast, Tausky's critical introductions to the various sections of Duncan's *Selected Journalism* are terse and fluent, almost as if the critic's own style had been enlivened by the vitality of his subject. The pieces reprinted here suggest that Duncan was her own best spokesperson: witty, irreverent, and, as Tausky points out, at times rather inconsiderate, she used her columns in *The Week*, *The Globe*, and the Montreal *Daily Star* to expound on topics ranging from Christmas cards to Canada's position vis-à-vis England and the United States. As "the first woman to be hired on a full-time basis" by *The Globe*, she was fully aware of the significance of her position as both a woman and a writer. Probably of greatest interest to readers of her fiction are the articles outlining her opinions on women's issues and on literature, her views on both being rather radical for Victorian Canada. The flexibility of her thinking is indicated by her ability to see several sides of an issue. While she was all in favour of careers and advanced education for women, she at times expressed sympathetic interest in traditional female roles and activities; while she advocated Howellsian realism in fiction, she understood as well the appeal of old-fashioned romance.

With this book, my only regret is its brevity. Tausky's selections include many of Duncan's best and most representative pieces, yet omitted (among other things) are her comments on female suffrage, a sample of her essays on nature and the

seasons (a topic more popular in her day than now), and "On Two Wheels to Lorette," the early piece which, according to the autobiographical sketch Tausky discovered in the Stirling Library and which he reprints here, helped launch her career. However, given Tausky's unenviable task of selecting from among the many hundreds of daily and weekly columns which Duncan produced steadily for more than three years in Canada, not to mention her work in India, he has acquitted himself admirably, giving us the opportunity to enjoy the views of a young woman as outspoken, spunky, and clever as some of her own delightful heroines.

CAROLE GERSON

REAL, SUBTLE, TRUE

TERENCE BYRNES, *Wintering Over.* Quadrant Editions, $6.95.

HAROLD HORWOOD, *Only the Gods Speak.* Breakwater Books, $4.95.

MARTIN H. MOOSE, *Three of a Kind: Letters from Eden.* Prism Books, $4.50.

DONN KUSHNER, *The Witness and Other Stories.* Borealis Press, n.p.

THE EIGHTH OF THE NINE stories in Terence Byrnes' *Wintering Over* is called "Food People." It is about a painter named Ray Thompson who, like his new dinner friends in Montreal, is an artist munching precariously on the spicy edge of recognition. He paints — "but without much hope" — and his wife works. Their friends "all had projects and plans. There was a book on early television advertising, a new and unperformed choreography, a memoir, a basement photo gallery, an unmarketed invention, cookbooks, and a story forever waiting unread on some editor's desk." When Thompson's paintings suddenly begin to attract critical attention, Thompson himself is ostracized from his group of elite failures, and is allowed back in only when a promised exhibition at an important uptown gallery seems to have fallen through.

Byrnes' stories, like Thompson's paintings, are efficient and well directed. They are written with a kind of detached compassion, and they reflect a certain amount of tranquil reflection. They are, in fact, an excellent choice for the kick-off set of Quadrant Editions — a fine new discovery for a basement gallery hoping to become an important uptown gallery. But, like the paintings, they seem somehow to lack whatever it is that elevates a good story into a successful story. They end wrong, for one thing. An example is "Coupal Street," about a young couple who drift into Montreal in search of a house. They are offered one by a Mme Girard for $150 a month (cheap even by Montreal standards), on condition that they oust the present tenant, whom Mme Girard says is "no good." We never find out who the tenant is, or what "no good" means. Craig accepts the condition, goes to the house, confronts the tenant — and then what? The story ends with Craig, Mme Girard, and the tenant (possibly Mme Girard's sister) yelling at each other in front of the house. Presumably it doesn't really matter whether Craig gets the house or not. The story is about something else, about systems breaking down, or how the need for shelter takes precedence over our need for a social conscience. But if we aren't allowed to *care* about what happens to the story's central character, the story doesn't succeed.

One of the best stories in the collection — though it, too, suffers from an inconclusive conclusion — is "Getting the Hang of It," about a young Canadian who moves with his family to Florida. The point of the story is Paul's sense of alienation, both from his own family and from his essentially foreign surroundings. The sixteen stories and one play in Harold Horwood's *Only the Gods Speak* are also about the interplay of cultures, the

clash between barbarism and civility (with the barbarians usually being the most civilized). The book is divided into two sections: "Ten Tales from the Tropics" and "Seven Pieces from the North." The tropics means the Caribbean; the north means that much-trodden land of the down-trodden Inuit. Horwood is very good on the tropics. His Newfoundlander's knowledge of island ways serves him as well in the Caribbean as Jack Hodgins' does in Ireland, and almost as well as V. S. Naipaul's does in any colonial country. In such stories as "The Sound of Thunder," in which a group of white tourists sits out a storm in a bar, and "The Lady Who Fought at the Siege of Jerusalem," about a young American who meets and falls in love with an English boy and his expatriate mother, are sensitive examinations of the subtle relation between the intruder and the intruded. Horwood belabours the subtlety somewhat, both in the predominantly sexual metaphor he chooses to convey it and in a rather strident Foreword: "'The Sound of Thunder,'" we read, "describes the jungle of dehumanization, the appaling [*sic*] waste land that we created in the mid decades of this century under false banners of liberation. By contrast, 'The Lady Who Fought at the Siege of Jerusalem' is a story about salvation from this jungle when the alienated 'I' meets not one but two 'Thous' simultaneously." This may be what Horwood intended: thank God the stories seem to have gone their own ways.

The northern stories are also about intrusions. In "Men Like Summer Snow" two Inuk boys smoke marijuana while waiting for a seal near its diving hole. When the "squareflipper" finally surfaces, the descendants of mighty hunters are too stoned to kill it. In the next story, "Love in a Very Cold Climate," a young schoolteacher named Gail Emden has a torrid affair with a sixteen-year-old native student named Atka (the same Atka who couldn't kill the seal). The white council members learn of it and ship her rapidly back south. These and the other northern pieces are less impressive than Horwood's island stories. Perhaps Mavis Gallant's Gabrielle Russier has made it hard for us to feel much sympathy for Gail Emden. Perhaps we have had too much about the "child-like" Inuit and the imposition on them of our Kablunit "culture." Perhaps, also, we suspect that we have visited worse things upon the Inuit than marijuana and pretty young schoolteachers.

Martin H. Moose's "philosophical fiction" seems to owe more to philosophy than to fiction. It takes the form of three "Letters from Eden," one each from the Serpent, Adam, and Eve, who try in turn to justify Man's ways to God. Eve's choice of the Tree of Knowledge rather than the Tree of Life seems to Moose to be the *ab ovo* of woe; using that act as a starting point, each Letter is a monologue on the nature of Evil (the Serpent, who expounds his Theory of Negativity); on the conflict between emotion and intellect (Eve, or Even, or Event, who moans "O thou poor Serpent, how miserable thou must be not to see all this; how alone and how cold"); and on the concept of guilt as redemption (Adam, or Adamant: "By sin a man becomes separate, and by being separate he becomes his own, alone.... It was guilt that led me to question, to try to understand, what it *means* to be a man").

The fiction works, one supposes, as a kind of sugar coating to help the philosophy go down. But the philosophy seems inoffensive enough not to need it. And it isn't really fiction anyway, at least not in any recognizable form. The three monologuists never approach the status of fictional characters — they have more life in Genesis than they do in these Letters.

Donn Kushner, like Moose and, in a way, like Byrnes (who once "mixed free-

lance journalism with designing and building electronic equipment for biological research," according to the dust-jacket), has intruded from another discipline into the realm of fiction. Kushner teaches microbiology at the University of Ottawa. His stories are quiet and simple, his characters — farmers, librarians, real estate agents — are realistically portrayed and adequately developed, at least as adequately as such characters are in real life. The last two stories, "Miami" and "The Scientist's Wife," are the best — one suspects that the nine stories are arranged chronologically. There is, however, something of the fire of creation missing from Kushner's prose: his intent is to trap a bit of life rather than to make sense out of it. The stories are, in a way, too scientific; the specimens are observed and recorded, given an illusion of reality, but there is no real understanding. Facts are related, but no real truths are revealed. This is also the technique of such writers as Norman Levine, but in Levine's case the writing is good enough to tell the reader that the truth is sequestered somewhere in there among the facts. In Kushner, who is capable of such lines as "Sarah felt tears rise in her throat," no such trust is generated, and one feels that the facts are there only to hide a basic absence of truth. Kushner seems able, however, to isolate the telling detail that distinguishes appearance from reality — his strength, and perhaps his weakness, is in siding uncompromisingly with the latter.

WAYNE GRADY

CULTURAL ICONS

VERONICA ROSS, *Goodbye Summer.* Oberon Press, n.p.

HUGH HOOD, *None Genuine Without This Signature.* ECW Press, n.p.

HERE ARE TWO VOLUMES of contemporary short stories, a first collection and the latest in a succession of publications by one of the major writers in Canada today. Neither should feel ill at ease in the other's company. Both Ross and Hood make it clear that the short story continues to provide writers with a significant and still lyrical mode of expression.

Goodbye Summer: The title evokes warmth giving way to chill, sunny skies to leaden clouds, holiday to routine. All eight stories in this collection are set in the Maritimes, Nova Scotia in particular. And all are about LOSS: loss of love, loss of home, loss of place, loss of energy. Six of the eight feature women as protagonists, anonymous women, often quite literally, first names only if any offered at all, quiet, quietly desperate. Here is one, Magdalena ("Magdalena") who lives with her mum and three-year-old daughter, who works at the Moonbeam Motel and who spends some evenings a week with her friend Goldie easing back and forth among the bowling alley, the Royal Cafe, the Capricorn Lounge, and the Clover Leaf Tavern. Unless there is a bus station cafe, these are IT. Along comes Mark who is seeing the country, taking it easy, good-natured fellow, charming, sincere, who likes Magdalena and Co. and moves in and then moves on. Magdalena falls in love with him but doesn't, can't put up a fight when he leaves, distraught as she is: "He had given her this wonderful thing and then taken it away, just as if it were his right to do that." "Picnic" is about an old lady named Emma ("I'm a character ... which is the way I want it") who lives in a nursing home and who is wise and witty and quick and tough and sad, why not? And when they all go off to a picnic, she walks away for a bit with an old guy named Henry who is likewise o.k. And they talk, and kiss once and know it's o.k. to dream, and then they go back. This is pretty much recited by Emma in the present tense. The unnamed narrator in "Between Lives" is separated

and staying in Seaport, N.S., where she runs into Willis, an old high school friend who is also separated and so they meet often and talk and reminisce and dream and tease and then Willis picks up and leaves for the coast. The unnamed narrator of "On the Road" is the confidante of one Marty who is married to Harvey. The narrator is privy to all of Marty's terror and grief and meanness and drunkenness over a misspent marriage. Harvey seeks some advice and appears not to be quite the bad news that Marty has described. Harvey and Marty go off for a long trip, come back, nothing changes. Judy in "Accounting" receives a note about a class reunion and proceeds to write a series of letters (never mailed) to Sam, the reunion chairman, in which she becomes increasingly personal and upset and confessional about her miserable life with her husband and then receives one more invitation from Sam and ends with a cheery lie about how neat things are, sorry she can't make it.

Persia ("Persia Awakening") is on welfare with two kids by two fathers and in comes this great case worker named Jeffrey Saunders (who might remind one of Magdalena's love, and Henry when he was young and Willis) and Persia begins to fantasize and they get on all right and then Jeffrey Saunders goes back to the office, makes a phone call later that day, is all business and bursts Persia's fantasy.

There are two other stories: "Once He Started Looking" about Mike, who wants to do a history of this village and is thwarted by the fear and indifference of the residents. Tucked inside this piece are two vignettes, one about a simpleton and the other about a black girl married to a local. The one is gelded, the other run out of town. Finally, there is Jack in "I'm Still Here" whose family home is being expropriated by the government. Jake won't leave, stays inside, the media and groupies come, stay for a while, Knowlton Nash talks about him, they all go away. Jake stays on.

It's a sure thing that these folks, Jake, Magdalena, Persia, the whole lot, are endearing, plausible, worth our time. They come through because Ross, the author, has the way with conversation, or in the case of Emma, with a rattling first-person voice. So much of the stories is conversation, show and not tell, and the lilt, the funny quirkish way we talk, the gentle, sad wonder, they're all there. When she resorts to descriptive writing, Ross' touch is sound: texture without being self-conscious about it. The one reservation I have about these stories is that they are all set at the same temperature. The voices are all muted, private, the plots almost non-existent. The stories just ease on by which is to say the lives here ease on by. I guess Nova Scotia just does that to you.

The variety of subject, theme, and technique across the Hood collection of twelve stories may be summed up by the two pieces which open and close the volume. The first is a manic narrative by a fellow named A.O. (Anal/Oral?) who jangles his way through a celebration of conspicuous consumption joined in by his girl friend, Dreamy. Both have come to eschew meals and sex because they detract from the time needed to watch ads on TV. There is no plot in this story, only a succession of lists of products and services: MARTIAL ARTS SUKIYAKI, LE CAMPING CHEZ COLEMAN STOVE, WONDERBRA, punctuated by such passionate confessions as Dreamy's: "I want the eight-ply steel-belted Polyester Radials," she whispers, "with the added protection of Hiway-Biway Winter Big Paws." Such is Hood's ingenuity that one comes away with his ears ringing from A.O.'s braying cries which end when he chants "Good taste is dead / Marx is dead / The sixties are over / Freud is dead / Keep on truckin'." That is why

the story is called "God Has Manifested Himself Upon Us as Canadian Tire."

"Doubles," the last story, is also about our popular culture but in this respect: the narrator is a well-known singer/composer whose picture is always in the papers and magazines but who is yet "your invisible star," content to look ordinary, not compelled to egotism with one exception: he continues to mourn his rejection by Belle, a girlfriend of his youth. The story weaves in time back and forth from that scene of disappointment to a meeting on a train between his fiancee, himself and Belle and Fred who are on their honeymoon, to a contemporary coffee-date with Belle, seventeen years after. Rather smug about his success in contrast to Fred's seeming lacklustre career as an educator, "I felt the meanness ebb" as he realizes that Belle's comments about her husband are "spoken with such enormous pride and love and confidence that I was ashamed." His temporary aberration sent flying (for he is really a decent man), our narrator can ease away thinking "In music, in a song, you can freely mix vice and bliss. Bliss has a better sound."

Not since *Lady Oracle* have I encountered such an interest by a writer in the icons and debris of our vast, mass meretricious (though sometimes worthy) culture. Here is "Crosby," the biography of one Dom Squatrito who sang as a kid on amateur nights at the local movie theatre but then changes his name to Don Stanley, enters the Civil Service and spends his life there, trailing after him the legend of a pop singer in the Crosby, Cornell, Cherry, Como crooner tradition, rises in the government and suffers through twenty years of Elvis, the Beatles, Dylan, survives, only to confront Bing's death on that golf course in Spain. "The noise forced itself out again, and he heard what it was, a long howl of pure grief."

And "February Mama" which is a reggae song composed by Rafe Salvidge, a retired songwriter who finds refuge from his rapacious wife-manager in the Caribbean. The song is written as a welcome for his wife who comes to see him but when she tries to tear the piece away for publication and recording, begins to corrupt the good intentions in the song, Rafe rebels. As you might infer from this and the other summaries thus far, Hood is also interested in the passage of time, the loss of the past, the burden of the past. This is an old theme but ever accessible to fresh insights.

We find it implicit throughout "Ghosts of Jarry" in which an Expo fan named Mario foregoes the dubious pleasure of shifting with the team from Jarry Park to Olympic Stadium and instead returns to the empty bleachers and follows the home games on his portable radio and tv. Hood provides a running account of marvellous moments in baseball, exotic colleagues, righteous players, fragrances, sunlight. But Mario really misses the old times, Jarry with "the world's crappiest outfield, frost-humped, deceptively grassy, stippled with rabbit holes, hell to run on." But, oh! it had *character!* One night a young woman shows up with her radio and tv: "Would I be safe with you?" she says. "Would one Expo fan insult another?" Rightly so, Mario says that others will come. "This is exactly how a house gets to be haunted." Sure enough, they come.

The sixth in order of these twelve stories, and thus possible a pivotal piece, is called "New Country." Brenda and Lester become lost driving east from Toronto and while they drift along highways and backroads, increasingly confused by the terrain, their conversation turns on depressing recitations of dead or afflicted friends, failed businesses, lost energies. And gradually, of course, those themes become self-fulfilling prophecies as the landscape loses all familiarity until they

come upon a body of water, a lake? a river? "flat and black and very cold." By now the conversation and the terrain have coalesced, Brenda is hysterical, "Where did the middle of our lives go? When we used to take this trip what we talked about was who was getting engaged. Who was getting married . . . having a baby. . . ." "'We'll find a place,'" he said through his teeth. He speeded up heading into a blind curve."

There is no reason to like or dislike Brenda and Lester. Whoever they are, they have moved out of the known and into the unknown, the "new country" which is death. Perhaps they will die around that curve, perhaps they died on the outskirts of Toronto. This is a spooky story, tense, nervous. Rather like the old Twilight Zone episodes. I have a picture of the car sweeping out of sight and the camera turning on your host, Rod Serling, standing beside the road.

Elsewhere, Hood portrays the stream of consciousness of a retarded child, contemporary courtship, pontificating intellectuals, childhood trauma. The range of subjects, the experimentation with forms, and through them all, the sensibility of an artist whose craftsmanship, whose good sense, whose compassion and whose intelligence make him surely one of the most important short story writers around.

And one more, the title story and its subtitle: "Peaches in the Bathtub." Harry Felker, salesman, is out of work and stranded in Sweet Cream, Manitoba, where he takes a room in a boarding house owned by Winifred "Ma" Hislop and occupied by Peaches Hislop, her daughter and Peaches' beau, Tim Bodsworth. Ma Hislop has inherited certain recipes from her dead husband which produce natural-flavoured sweets. With the help of Tim and Peaches, she is concocting a line of "lotions, shampoos and soaps with natural fruit flavours: apple, plum, coconut, peach, pear." Once convinced, Harry joins up as salesman/marketing director. And soon the *Winifred Hislop* brands are a fine success. All of this having taken place in Sweet Cream, Manitoba.

While this is clearly a satire on consumerism, marketing, selling, hustling, Hood does not include the quartet in his assault. Ma, Harry, Peaches, and Tim are rather decent folks, greedy sure, but not yet (and maybe never) to be corrupted. They are all courteous to one another, all good natured. Harry, who might have been otherwise, is really only as innocent as the rest. What it is about them is that they BELIEVE in their product. Except — that each bottle will bear the slogan "None genuine without this signature" though of course they won't use Winifred's REAL signature. A little scam, there. Illusion and reality. And I am left pondering: Why did Hood use that title for the whole book?

VICTOR HOWARD

YANKEES IN CANADA

JAMES DOYLE, ed., *Yankees in Canada: A Collection of Nineteenth-Century Travel Narratives.* ECW Press, $6.95.

THE GNAWING QUESTION underlying the relationship of Canadians to Americans has traditionally been: "do they realize that we're here?" The answer provided by James Doyle's collections of eighteen travel narratives written by Americans visiting Canada in the nineteenth century appears to be: "somewhat."

The appreciation of Canada by these American visitors was usually mitigated, if only mildly, by the wistful thought that the country would inevitably be swallowed up by the United States. Walt Whitman put it as blithely as any: "It seems to me a certainty of time, sooner or later, that Canada shall form two or

three grand States, equal and independent, with the rest of the American Union." Even W. D. Howells, one of the more favourable viewers of Canada in this book, was forced to concede that Canada would eventually melt in the American pot. All the same, he hoped faintly that it wouldn't happen, that Canada could, once it had freed itself from its graceful and "poetic" attachment to Europe, further those "experiments" which were no longer possible in the United States but which could still be attempted in Canada "to the advantage of civilization." With somewhat greater robustness, if a trifle vaguely, Henry James felt that it was of "good profit to us Americans to have near us, and of easy access, an ample something which is not our expansive selves."

Howells' and James' scrupulous respect for the separateness of the Canadian identity is offset in *Yankees in Canada* by the more strident voice of the minor writer, W. H. H. Murray, who on a trip through western Canada in 1888 lamented the fact that British Columbia had not been grabbed when the grabbing was good. He ironically laid the blame at the feet of James Polk, one of the most acquisitive presidents ever to head the Union. "No intelligent American," Murray observed, "ever visited this province of Canada, and saw what it contains, and did not grind his teeth as he recalled how the miserable, blundering, partisan politics of the Polk *régime,* lost it to the Great Republic." Has the time finally arrived, one wonders, for James Polk to be installed as a Canadian folk hero?

The Americans in *Yankees in Canada* ventured north for a variety of reasons — Henry James to do a paid travel piece, Henry David Thoreau to search for the origins of the New World drama among the French Canadians, the Moravian clergyman Benjamin Mortimer to serve as a missionary among the native peoples of Upper Canada. Few of these writers came to feel any sort of intimacy about their northern neighbour, and most felt challenged to defend the path taken by their own republic. Even Thoreau, who might be expected to be hospitable to the idea of a nation engulfed by nature, succumbed to condescension as he looked at the unprogressiveness of French-Canadian society, a society that seemed to him to have settled stolidly in contrast to the nomadic heroism of the first immigrants from France.

In this connection Doyle comments in his general introduction that the "tension between the superficial attractions of pastoralism and the commitment of progress and republicanism is one of the most pervasive features of nineteenth-century American attitudes toward Canada." Perhaps another way of seeing the matter, at least with respect to someone like Thoreau whose pastoralism was certainly not superficial, is to note the underlying disappointment in these American travellers that Canadians seemed neither to have caught fire imaginatively at the sight of the new world nor on the other hand to have effectively exploited that world. In a sense, if one may read between Thoreau's lines, Canadians were simply not "American" enough. Indeed, as one looks at these narratives, it becomes apparent that Canada had the effect on many of these travellers of simply reinforcing their own national consciousness and buoyancy, and, from an historical point of view at any rate, the reaction is worth capturing.

There are moments, though, when the inhuman immensity of Canada overpowered the sensibility and accumulated experience of these American writers to bring them face to face with something that was unsettlingly new. The New England Unitarian clergyman and Transcendentalist, David Wasson, friend to Emerson and Thoreau, had such an experience in Labrador:

> Above was the coldest gray sky I remember to have seen; the sea lay all in pallid, deathly gray beneath; islands in all shades of grimmer and grimmest gray checkered it; vast drifts of gray old snow filled the deeper hollows; and a heartless atmosphere pushed in the sense of this grayness to the very marrow. It was as if all the ruddy and verdurous juices had died in the veins of the world, and from core to surface only gray remained.

More characteristic, though, is the reaction of the New York merchant and writer, Frederick Cozzens, who on being confronted by the Canadian mosaic felt obliged to assert the superiority of the American melting pot. He wrote off Nova Scotia, for example, as "existence without nationality; sectionalism without emulation; a mere exotic life with not a fibre rooted firmly in the soil. The Colonists are English, Irish, Scotch, French, for generation after generation." Once in a while one catches a glimpse of a more constructive, cultural cross-fertilization. Trekking from New York to Upper Canada in 1898, Benjamin Mortimer was struck by the fact that if "some of the people of Canada have their complaints to make against the government, there seems upon the whole to be more loyalty and attachment to it, than we have been able to discover among the inhabitants of the States."

While *Yankees in Canada* richly repays historical interest, the literary quality of the narratives leaves something to be desired. A number of the minor authors are simply tedious, while major authors like Whitman and Thoreau tend not to be at the top of their form. Perhaps this is why the piece by Charles Haight Farnham on Nova Scotia emerges as such an unexpected treasure. One is grateful to James Doyle for reprinting the writings of this forgotten American writer whose limpid descriptions of Cape Breton provide the most evocative portrait of nineteenth-century Canada in the book. There is the following account of Cape Breton courtship ritual, for example:

> When a young man decides that he will marry, he often first builds a house; and it is no trivial matter here, where most of the lumber is sawn by hand in a pit. A man may be said to be in earnest when he begins his suit with months of such hard labor — and that, too, from a disinterested motive, not having the faintest idea, perhaps, as to who will be the mistress of the house. We saw a number of such expectant buildings, in all states and of many ages; for some, failing to get a tenant, stood without windows or doors, the image of a desolate and empty heart.

Doyle's own writing in the various introductions of *Yankees in Canada* is generally illuminating and incisive, often more than that of the authors he introduces to us. On the whole, one can be thankful for his unearthing of these forgotten works, which provide a useful chapter in the evolving biography of North American man.

ROSS LABRIE

PESSIMISTS

PIERRE DAGENAIS, *Isabelle*. Leméac, $6.95.

LOUIS-MARIE DANSEREAU, *La Trousse*. Leméac, $6.95.

JEAN GAGNON, *Les Vaches sont de braves types et trois autres pièces*. Leméac, $6.95.

IN A CONTINUING EFFORT to bring a wide selection of Quebec dramatic works to the reading public through its "Collection Théâtre," the Montreal publishing house Leméac brings up three volumes of plays representing three very different phases of Quebec dramaturgy. Pierre Dagenais' *Isabelle*, first staged in 1966, is an intellectual tragedy completely divorced from the socio-political context of the "Quiet Revolution." Louis-Marie Dansereau's *La Trousse* is a monologue in Québécois French by a whore who has paradoxically found liberation through protitution on

"la Main." Jean Gagnon's four radio plays, *Les Vaches sont de braves types et trois autres pièces*, are brief social commentaries on life in rural and urban Quebec. Despite differences in genre, style, and language, these three writers are related by the deep-seated pessimism which shapes their thoughts and their characters.

Dagenais, whose career as an actor, director, and playwright spans almost forty years, has also written fiction, poetry, and an autobiography. The reader suspects that he has now published this fifteen-year-old play in hope of a revival. But so much has changed in the Quebec theatre since 1966 that this play, despite its obvious merits, seems curiously outdated. During the late 1960's and 1970's, a virtual revolution took place in the Quebec theatre with the introduction of *joual*, experimental forms, poetry, and previously forbidden political and sexual subject matters. *Isabelle*, an existential drama played out in genteel drawing rooms, belongs to another era. The characters, members of the educated middle-class, find themselves caught up in a tragedy of adultery, betrayal and suicide. Avoiding the emotional explosion that the situation seems to warrant, the play's three characters sip champagne and discuss abstract philosophical notions in elevated metaphorical terms. Dagenais accomplishes an interesting dramatic ploy by having two other key characters remain unseen. The first of these non-appearing characters is Isabelle herself. She is the wife of a bookdealer named Xavier and for two years she was the mistress of their mutual friend, Jean-Claude. The second missing character is Jean-Claude, whose suicide sets the drama in motion. Xavier's need to understand Jean-Claude's death provokes a discussion on truth, falsehood, silence and infidelity, which threatens to erupt in violence when Xavier discovers the truth. Eric, a journalist, and Mathieu, an artist, knew about Isabelle and Jean-Claude's liaison and hid it from their naive, bookish friend. Xavier is so devastated by the betrayal of his wife and friends that his first impulse is to murder Isabelle and then commit suicide. Eric and Mathieu finally convince him that, in her own way, Isabelle always remained a faithful wife and that acknowledging the truth about the affair and suicide can only destroy the marriage and the relationship of the four surviving friends. In order to prove that silence, ignorance, and falsehood are often preferable to truth, Mathieu reveals the terrible secret which haunts his existence: his father was a murderer, condemned and executed for his crime. Eric, who passes for a cynical, blasé seducer, reveals a secret even more horrible: a war injury deprived him of his manhood. The profoundly negative message of the play then is that in order to bear the pain of existence, we must learn to silence and disguise truth.

La Trousse, produced in October 1980, is the first play of a young Montréalais actor/singer who has turned to playwriting with promising results. Louis-Marie Dansereau has created a memorable character in Suzelle/La Trousse/Minoune, a prostitute on "la Main." In this monologue in seven scenes, La Trousse anxiously awaits the visit of her younger brother, Jean-François, encountered by chance in a bar twelve years after she left the parental home. As she waits, she recalls the accidental meeting and, hopefully, anticipates a renewed closeness with Jean-François. She also reflects on her unhappy childhood and her career as a prostitute. Anger, resentment, nostalgia, humour, vulgarity, and pride — a full range of emotions and postures have their moments in la Trousse's monologue. A rebellious child who hated being merely "number eight" in her mother's "gang" of ten children, she became a troublemaker to be noticed. Her given name is

Suzelle, but her mother gave her the vulgar nickname "la Trousse" when she caught her sneaking out of the backyard with a neighbourhood boy. To escape from home, la Trousse married at sixteen, only to be abandoned three months later by a shiftless husband who had already pointed her toward a career in prostitution. Homeless, jobless and uneducated, she had no alternative other than prostitution. Fortunately, la Trousse was befriended by another prostitute, Lison, who taught her the tricks of the trade and now at twenty-eight, she is not ashamed of how she earns a living. On the sidewalks of Rue Saint-Laurent, Suzelle/la Trousse has become "Minoune" and she has fully assumed her identity as a prostitute, a marginal member of a society which has never given her a real chance. Being a prostitute is a continuation of her rebellion against the repressive conformity symbolized by her family and through her vulgar language and sexuality she has achieved a form of liberation. As it becomes clear that Jean-François will not come to visit her, she realizes that he will never free himself from the family as she has done. The break with the past is now complete.

La Trousse is a gripping monologue, clearly influenced by Michel Tremblay, to whom it is dedicated. It belongs to the Quebec of the mid 1970's, when large families, domineering mothers, beer-drinking fathers, the Church, and convent education were favourite scapegoats for Québécois trying to liberate themselves from the past. Quebec feminists may well object to a male writing a monologue for a woman and using the whore stereotype. Although Dansereau's whore has used prostitution as a means of liberation, feminist critics may argue that prostitution is a form of dehumanizing exploitation rather than a form of freedom. Before passing final judgment on *La Trousse*, we should wait for the next installments of this promised trilogy.

Jean Gagnon, a native of Quebec City and a producer for Radio-Canada, displays talent and originality in his four short radio plays, *Les Vaches sont de braves types et trois autres pièces*. These social satires in miniature share a black view of human nature and a common theme of cruelty; cruelty toward non-conformists, strangers and animals. In Gagnon's opinion people invoke public morality and capitalist principles to hide their own self-interest, meanness and intolerance. The pieces are mini-morality plays, illustrations of lessons articulated by narrators, talking cockroaches or cows.

"Jean-Baptiste Poupinot, insecte domestique" is the tragic story of a middle-aged bachelor living in a small village in the Beauce region in 1960. Falsely accused of taking indecent liberties with a young girl, he is ostracized by his neighbours. Finally, he barricades himself in his house where his only companion is a talking cockroach, who has also experienced unmerited scorn. At the urging of his insect friend, Poupinot metamorphoses into a cockroach, reasoning that since society has treated him like a disgusting insect he may as well be one. Two weeks pass before the curious villagers break down the door of Poupinot's home, only to be horrified by the man/insect inside. A volunteer steps forward to kill Poupinot with an ax, a communal crime which will bind the community together in a conspiracy of silence. This "volunteer" just happens to be a neighbour who had coveted Poupinot's property for the expansion of his auto repair business.

The second text is the title piece, "Les Vaches sont de braves types." It is the story of a civil servant who, while strolling in the countryside, meets a militant dairy cow anxious to complain about man's callous exploitation of cows and bad working conditions. The civil servant

becomes the press agent for the Cow Liberation Movement, dramatizing the problem by means of this radio play.

"La Permanente à cent vingt piastres" is the story of a middle-aged bachelor who lives with his mother and runs his own small beauty salon. One day the wife of a wealthy butcher enters his shop, self-righteously accuses him of seducing a young boy, and then orders an expensive permanent. Although she is the first customer who ever ordered the deluxe wave in this modest neighbourhood shop, the hairdresser is less than obliging. He kills the butcher's wife and then shoots himself.

The fourth play, "De gauche à droite, en allant vers le bas ou la P.M.E. de A à Z," focuses on a group of small business owners taking an evening course on management. The professor (a government administrator) has no plan for the course and soon loses control as class members argue and taunt each other. The marketing problem presented by the professor remains unsolved as the students take turns dwelling on their own problems and attacking government economic policy, bankers, bureaucrats, leftists, intellectuals, unions, and immigrants. At the end of the class, the narrator informs us that all of the business owners have failed miserably except the Greek immigrant who has achieved success as a union official in the United States. In this radio play as well as in the others, Gagnon reveals a talent for creating character types and situations with a few quick strokes. It will be interesting to see how his dramatic art develops in more traditional theatrical forms.

JANE MOSS

SIGNIFYING SELF

WILFRED EGGLESTON, *Literary Friends*. Borealis Press, $4.95.

DAVID MCFADDEN, *A Trip Around Lake Huron*. Coach House Press, $6.50.

DAVID MCFADDEN, wondering what it would have been like to have known Bliss Carman, Charles G. D. Roberts and Raymond Knister, once asked Dorothy Livesay what the poets of his generation would have thought of them. "'I think you would have found them boring,'" she answered. Livesay's response (recorded in *A Trip around Lake Erie*) was surely a judgment about McFadden as well as about the "Canadian avant-garde of the 1920's"; McFadden, in repeating it, is self-consciously and ironically telling a story against himself as well as about himself. Such ambiguity, allowed to rest in the accurately observed object, the precisely recorded event or remark, quickens McFadden's work; a contrasting absence of *ironic* self-consciousness leaves Wilfred Eggleston's *Literary Friends* lifeless. Eggleston most certainly reverences Carman and Knister, but his descriptions of them make them as boring as Livesay predicted they would be.

His is not a failure of literary appreciation (for he has proved himself an early and an informed admirer of the good writing of his time), but a failure of literary imagination. Both his novels and his memoirs are marked by an unfailing preference for moribund over living language: Grove, in a typically mixed cliché, is described in *Literary Friends* as both "on the crest of a wave" and "at the helm of a promising new Canadian publishing house"; Knister may "set the literary Thames on fire"; Eggleston and his friends "did not miss any of the bouquet or sachet" of Peggy's Cove. His use of the literary forms and conventions he finds ready to hand without seeming to con-

sider how they might best be adapted to his material, cannot entirely destroy a reader's interest in his first autobiography, *While I Still Remember*; there the personal relation of an active and varied and useful life gives the narrative an energy and shape that compensates for many faults. But before the greater looseness and lesser intimacy of the memoir, his failure to think creatively about form and his inability to use language evocatively produces, in *Literary Friends*, a book that simultaneously is full of journalistic (and frequently trivial) detail and is fleshless.

Eggleston's accounts of his acquaintance with Bliss Carman, Raymond Knister, Lloyd Roberts, Frederick and Catharine Grove, Ephraim Weber, Duncan Campbell Scott, and Pelham Edgar are all carefully documented from frequently quoted letters, columns from his *causeries* for the *Lethbridge Herald*, and Mrs. Eggleston's social diary. They are also restrictively journalistic: very rarely does the natural speculation we all indulge in about our friends, a gesture or an expression, an emotion or an undocumented memory, a passionate opinion or the real substance of a conversation, erupt through the superficial narrative of "whom I knew and what we did together."

Some of the diffuse, lifeless quality of these memoirs arises from a fundamental difficulty of the genre, the question of the relative emphasis to be placed on the "narrator" as opposed to the other "characters." Eggleston's irresolution before this difficulty is evident in his inconsistent approaches to Raymond Knister and Frederick Philip Grove. Although he insists that "Of all the literary folk I met in my Toronto days, Raymond Knister made the deepest and most enduring impression," when he comes to Knister's suicide, Eggleston tells us first of the circumstances which make a last meeting with the poet "quite impossible," then that "his death ... haunted Lorne Pierce"; he says not one word of his own feelings about Knister's drowning. By contrast, his account of his growing doubts about Grove's "autobiography" and of his playing "literary detective" is personal and energetic, conveying his curiosity and his pride at anticipating Spettigue. Part of the discrepancy in tone between the two passages is perhaps the function of a personality that finds it easier to speak directly about activity than about emotion; some of it may be due to the comparative recency of the Grove research. But the second passage owes its liveliness largely to its focus on *discovery*, that is, on *Eggleston's* mind, not his character's.

His unease about his own function in his memoir ("observer"? or "character"?) can be deduced from the plaintive tone with which Eggleston explains, on the first page, why his youthful ambition to be a Canadian writer was less fully realized than he wished. In a series of passive constructions that imply the "fault" (if fault there be) was not his, he tells us he "was assigned" to Ottawa, "was lured" into serving on a Royal Commission, "was coerced" into censorship during World War II, "was coaxed" into the School of Journalism at Carleton. This coy and self-exculpatory tone works against the memoiristic functions of *Literary Friends*, particularly since Eggleston's contributions to Canadian letters have been many and signal: a prominent journalist, he was among the first to write appreciatively and informedly about our literature and our intellectual history; he was also one of the initiating members of The Canadian Writers' Foundation. What will be useful is his description of the recovery of the Montgomery-Weber correspondence and of the early years of the Writers' Foundation. But most of *Literary Friends* adds little to our knowledge of the writers it describes. Nor does the form and the language of this memoir serve its author or his subjects well. We are no nearer

Wilfred Eggleston's "friends" or their works for having read his memoir.

What *can* be done with the conventions of autobiographical and documentary forms is one of the adventures of David McFadden's *A Trip around Lake Huron*, the second of a projected five-volume *Trips around the Great Lakes*. Notepad on the dash, wife Joan beside him, daughters Jennifer and Alison in the back seat and dog Bruce in the rear of the campervan, McFadden sets off around Lake Huron on a trip he will turn into a witty "documentary novel" of middle-class America, encased in Winnebagos, on the move back to nature. McFadden places himself and, through himself, his "typically Canadian family" at the centre of his account in a self-confessed egocentrism which, like the position of the camera lens, limits *what* he documents and the angle from which it is seen. The result is situation comedy: it rains; the children clamour for amusement parks and David and Joan try to avoid them; Joan gets angry and thinks poems impractical; Bruce gets ill and bites Jennifer; fellow campers are noisy or dirty or friendly or aggressive; Americans generalize about Canadians and the McFaddens about Americans with about equal prejudice. But as this easy-going, occasionally fumbling, and whimsical narrator (given to rowdy behaviour in restaurants and embarrassment in public washrooms) proves tenacious of his *own* perceptions and very ironic, his "documentary" acquires unusual restrictions and possibilities.

Each "chapter" records an encounter, a stretch of road, a scene, an event witnessed or experienced — records it carefully, paying equal attention to every physical detail, to each nuance of emotion, but never going beyond what McFadden himself noted. The style initially seems journalistic: direct in its statement, impartial in its emphasis, denuded of metaphor. But we soon realize that McFadden's humour and whimsy nudge us out of the passivity "documentary" so often induces (for example, of empty-handed fishermen: "And under the watery flatness we could hear huge schools of fish, giggling"). Each chapter comes with a "title" printed in bold type as a marginal gloss which reinterprets the narrative. The effect is much like that of some of McFadden's poems where a flatly stated observation acquires significance by a sudden turn in the last line. Here the titles stand poised against the descriptions and comment ironically on them; by emphasizing one detail, they alter the significance of all the other details. The act of interpreting and the act of observing illuminate each other in a binary structure that keeps both meaningful and each distinct from the other. McFadden's final restriction of "documentary" is that both acts should signify: they may signify in themselves; the fantasies or memories they trigger may signify; the present act of writing may make them signify. Observation and interpretation become more real by having been alertly, lovingly, exactly seen, thought about, written.

McFadden frequently refers to Greg Curnoe and particularly to his painting of Highway 401. The attraction of Curnoe's subject to the author of "Travellin' Man," *On the Road Again* and *Trips around the Great Lakes* is obvious. But the road and Curnoe's painting fascinate him in other ways. In *Lake Erie* and *Lake Huron* the road becomes a principle of contiguity; it emphasizes position over connection. And just as the objects along Curnoe's 401, because they are presented as contiguous, not connective, and because they are looked at intensely, become super-real, so too do the scenes noted by McFadden. We suddenly notice the hallucinatory quality of a world in which there are girls without arms, men who give away nineteen wheelchairs, husbands who beat wives in public campsites (and

wives who defend their husbands' right to do so), lifeguards who insist dogs be kept on a leash and let children drown. The sight that, because of its strangeness or the intensity of its perception, seems like a hallucination merges with the effect of poisonous mushrooms, becomes contiguous with premonitions, dreams, memories, time-warps and déja-vus in a "fabulous" project. In this narrative in which, finally, it is the narrator's *consciousness* that is being recorded so matter-of-factly through his perceptions, things take on new possibilities. Where coincidences were present but not omnipresent in *A Trip around Lake Erie*, during which the Canadian McFaddens accidentally met the American McFaddens, *A Trip around Lake Huron* asserts coincidence as a second binary principle of the projected series (the dedications of the first two volumes are to two different men who died differently in different provinces, both accidentally, both on January 3, 1979). Coincidence asserts the primacy of contiguity over continuity, of inexplicable meaning over meaningful explanation. Its perception is one of the ways McFadden makes what he observes super-real. The reader is asked to stand back with the writer, to see with accuracy, with concentration, with pleasure. Out of such seeing comes vision.

SHIRLEY NEUMAN

INTIMATE PRAIRIE

ELIZABETH ALLEN, *A Shored Up House*. Turnstone Press, n.p.

LAURA MCLAUCHLAN, *Lacuna*. Turnstone Press, n.p.

ANNE SZUMIGALSKI, *A Game of Angels*. Turnstone Press, n.p.

LORNA UHER, *Humans and Other Beasts*. Turnstone Press, n.p.

READING THESE NEW CONTRIBUTIONS to the current flowering of prairie poetry, I was struck by a certain uniformity of tone and theme among them. It is perhaps heretical to say that the inferior Atwood poems of sexual struggle, present in all four collections, are the least interesting. The distinctive virtues in these offerings, for me, lie in the extent to which these writers convey their vivid, intimate experience of the prairie landscape as an imaginative correlative for their emotions.

Humans and Other Beasts is Lorna Uher's fourth book; she is an established prairie poet, winner of the Saskatchewan Poetry Prize for 1978. The first section, which gives its title to the collection, intersperses poems which personify animals with portraits of people as curious freaks and grotesque victims. The themes of betrayal and bestiality appropriately conclude with "Mother Was a Lovely Beast":

> mother was a lovely beast
> she gave to me a lovely feast
> three teats hanging from her chest
> I found the third one quite the best.

Unfortunately, in this poem as in others, the sensitive pathos of the man-woman relationship is marred by an almost pornographic sexuality.

The second and fourth sections of this book are brief poem cycles in two radically different but authentic women's voices — one raw, violent, vengeful; the other quiet, moving, reaffirming. In this Uher demonstrates her versatility and range of emotions. However, the third part, "Letters to a Distant Lover," I think captures the best of her work. The poems in which the moods of love are reflected in realistic, detailed metaphors of prairie life have a natural freshness and balance:

> But there is no going back
> All the boundaries have disappeared:
> the sky spills over the horizon
> Even the trees are buried,
> the fences, the paths
> we broke through snow
> And every bird we create
> flies from our palms
> beats itself
> against the sky that betrays.

Less successful are her poetic clichés on male aggression.

Anne Szumigalski, another award-winning Saskatchewan poet, has published two previous books. The title poem and lead poem in *A Game of Angels* have already appeared in *Canadian Literature.* This slim volume portrays the games of humans aspiring to angelhood. The first poem "A House with a Tower" defines the two interwoven, and competitive, strands of her own creativity — ecstatic utterance:

> the Celt within
> who likes to stand up and sing
> ecstatic and undulating songs
> is the one who opens my mouth
> and lets the lies out

and careful craft:

> verse is a shelter
> of blocks that must be built
> carefully for, in the end,
> it may become a palace
> with electric stars.

Her poems take place in an absurdist and surrealistic world, in which fantastic characters perform bizarre rituals, and irrational narratives are only occasionally given a reassuring explanation:

> well, my dear
> are you wondering
> why I tell these bizarre stories?
> I am doing it to reassure you
> for we all know
> that such strange things
> could never happen twice.

All of which suggests that Szumigalski is cleverly illuminating our universal fantasies and exorcising our collective fears.

Her poetic craftsmanship, on the other hand, always ties the startling and idiosyncratic invention to prosaic and closely-observed fact, although her imagery is only occasionally prairie-inspired. She deftly sketches a character, tells a tale, creates a mood, often garnishing them with wild humour, or quiet irony as in "The Weather":

> I have been dead all winter
> no one has noticed it
> my bones, sewed up in a cheerful
> print sack, balanced on the seat of a chair
> answers all your questions
>
> I shuffle into the kitchen to make tea
> soft dust rises from the floor
> I pour and pour
> the cups remain empty

Unfortunately, only a few poems inspire the same immediate, emotional empathy as this one. Her surrealistic visions and clever conceits too often distance, and even confuse, the reader.

Of these four poets, my favourite is Elizabeth Allen, a New Zealander only recently transplanted to Saskatchewan. This is her first published collection, although many of the poems have appeared in little magazines and anthologies. *A Shored Up House* is divided into five sections. The first two, "wargames" and "lovepoems," deal with the common theme among these poetesses, the love that is war between the sexes. However, Allen combines simplicity of treatment with exactness of imagery to achieve some sensitive insights:

> my eyes are cups
> which you fill
> with cold tea
> and daffodils
> to give the room
> an air of elegance.

After a brief interlude, the final two sections are again thematically twinned. "Transplant" movingly contrasts the poet's roots in "my father's land / where sea is / the constant / tide / moving in & out of my ear" with her reality in "my husband's land / ... wind / a constant clawing / at my throat breath / torn spittle threads / dry on cheeks." The final section, "dryland winds," contains the most powerful imagery and mythology of the prairies that I found in these collections. In both lyrics and narratives, Allen vividly conveys an intimate experience of the land and its inhabitants, past and

present: "the prairie's song / thin as birdsflight / against a darkening sky."

Lacuna by Laura McLauchlin is the slightest volume of the four, in size and substance. The previously unpublished poems by this Manitoba native are a product of her travels in Ontario, the Bahamas, the Orient, and Nova Scotia where she now resides. There are poems about Haiti, Stratford, Toronto, India, and Norman Bethune in China, and a hymn for Canada. However, only the first of these settings is strongly evoked. McLauchlin's poetry is clever and cerebral. She produces a delightfully bitchy anti-male tirade in "The One About You" and a startling metaphor for marriage in "Teeth." But several of the poems are dedicated to individuals and are characteristic of a private self-indulgence in her poetry that seems to inhibit accessibility. She manipulates words well and creates some interesting images, but her work seems finally ephemeral.

BARBARA PELL

FOLKLORE

ROGER MARTIN, *L'Anguille*. Leméac, n.p.

GEORGES ARSENAULT, *Complaintes acadiennes de l'Ile-du-Prince-Edouard*. Leméac, n.p.

GILLES LANDRY, *Sept-Iles Racontée*. Leméac, $9.95.

MADELINE DOYON-FERLAND, *Jeux, rythmes et divertissements traditionnels*. Leméac, n.p.

BENOIT LACROIX, *Folklore de la mer et religion*. Leméac, $6.95.

ALICE MICHAUD-LATREMOUILLE, *Chansons de Grand'mère*. L'Université d'Ottawa, $7.50.

BIEN AVANT LE REVEIL d'intérêt québécois dans le patrimoine de la belle province, Les Archives de Folklore de l'université Laval, fondées par Luc Lacourcière en 1944, promouvaient la recherche, l'étude et la dissémination des traditions populaires canadiennes. Il fallait pourtant attendre les années soixante-et-dix pour que les éditeurs québécois commencent à chercher profit dans ce domaine. Depuis dix ans, tirant avantage de l'intérêt du public québécois, les éditeurs français ont fait paraître un véritable flot d'ouvrages consacrés au folklore canadien d'expression française. Malheureusement, de nombreux auteurs, séduits sans doute par la possibilité d'un gain réel, ont sacrifié leurs penchants savants sur l'autel de la facilité. C'est ainsi que les éditions Leméac, mal conseillées, peuvent publier des livres d'une qualité très variable.

Sept-Iles Racontée n'est autre qu'un relevé d'enquête ethnographique de cinq mois entreprise en 1959-60. On dirait un mémoire de maîtrise quelque peu édité aux fins d'une rapide publication. C'est un travail compétent qui résume en 75 pages les *Lieux et Genre de Vie* (première partie) ; les *Travaux saisonniers et quotidiens* (deuxième partie) ; et les *Divertissements* (troisième partie), mais chaque partie est tellement superficielle qu'on n'apprend que des détails très secs, on lit une poignée de textes de récits traditionnels (où l'on voit jusqu'à quel point on peut dénaturer l'oral par un souci de lisibilité littéraire). On est en droit de se demander pourquoi on nous donne vingt-deux pages d'un Inventaire topographique complet de la collection Gilles Landry, et non une évocation du contexte humain dans lequel placer ses contes et légendes. Le problème du livre, commun à de nombreuses publications du genre, est l'absence d'un cadre théorique qui donnerait une direction plus sûre à l'enquête. Car le folklore n'est pas du tout une sorte d'archéologie de la parole ou de l'objet.

Sur un autre plan, l'ouvrage de Madeleine Doyon-Ferland, *Jeux, rythmes et divertissements traditionnels*, est un mélange d'articles parus ailleurs, de conférences et communications, publié, peut-on supposer, d'abord comme une sorte d'hommage à cette folkloriste qui fut as-

sociée aux Archives de Folklore depuis sa fondation en 1944 jusqu'à la mort de celle-ci en 1978, et ensuite comme un début de réflexion pour ceux qui s'intéressent à ce domaine de la culture traditionnelle. Malheureusement, comme le précise Andrée Paradis qui collige et présente les textes, son auteur n'avait pas songé à publier la plupart des textes qui n'ont pas, pour cette raison, toute la rigueur méthodologique qu'on voudrait.

Certaines des conférences visent à attirer l'attention du public sur les avantages de l'enseignement aux jeunes des vieux jeux canadiens; si l'on y retrouve un élément de nationalisme dans ses paroles, on peut tout de même lui reconnaître d'avoir été une practicienne du folklore appliqué bien avant la lettre. Son article sur les Jeux, Jouets et Divertissements de la Beauce, paru dans le vol. 3 des *Archives de Folklore* (1948) est de loin le plus important du recueil, tant par sa longueur que par la description minutieuse des jeux. Mais en fin de compte, l'absence d'un solide cadre théorique, qui n'est certes pas la faute de l'auteur, fait de l'ouvrage rien qu'un recueil disparate. On peut se demander si Mme Doyen-Ferland aurait approuvé sa publication.

Folklore de la mer et religion de Benoît Lacroix promet, par son titre, plus qu'il ne donne. L'auteur est inspiré par sa conviction personnelle autant que par une solide recherche chez les gens de la mer. Il semble trop porté à interpréter, dans un langage quelque peu mystique, un esprit religieux qu'à en faire une analyse raisonnée à partir des textes qu'il consulte. En fait, comme le démontre sa typologie des sources et le questionnaire qui la suit, l'ouvrage est l'esquisse d'une méthode de recherche plutôt qu'une description ou une analyse des rapports suggérés par le titre. Bien trop de pages sont occupées par des illustrations et une annexe de vingt-cinq pages de sorte que la partie substantive du livre ne comprenne que douze pages.

L'Anguille de Roger Martin est par contre un livre qui vaut le titre de document ethnographique valable. Après un chapitre consacré à l'Historique de la Pêche à l'Anguille, qui note les procédés des Amérindiens et suggère les influences de ceux-ci sur les méthodes des pêcheurs québécois, Martin fournit une description claire et précise des matériaux pour la capture; des techniques d'installation de la pêche; et de l'exploitation de la pêche. Pour ce faire, Martin a travaillé entre 1967 et 1973 chez les pêcheurs de Rivière-Ouelle, et c'est ainsi qu'il peut fournir de nombreux détails contextuels qui nous permettent de mieux comprendre le rôle de cette pêche sur le plan social et économique. Une dernière section évoque quelques aspects folkloriques; c'est la section la moins réussie, car Martin semble croire qu'un échantillon de croyances, de coutumes et de contes suffit pour compléter notre aperçu de la culture des pêcheurs d'anguille.

R. Martin a le mérite d'avoir situé son travail par rapport à une typologie établie. Il fournit une exposition qui est peut-être un modèle à suivre; son livre représente à coup sûr le meilleur des publications ethnographiques inspirées par l'école de l'université Laval.

Dans le domaine de la littérature orale, le *Complaintes acadiennes de l'Ile-du-Prince-Edouard* de Georges Arsenault est certainement un des meilleurs ouvrages sur le folklore franco-canadien paru chez quelque éditeur que ce soit depuis bien longtemps. C'est un livre à la fois savant, fort bien recherché, instructif et très facile à lire. La complainte est une chanson dite de composition locale qui traite d'un sujet d'intérêt local. Les spécialistes de la chanson folklorique ont longtemps dédaigné le genre, sous le prétexte que les textes n'étaient pas assez vieux, manquaient de poésie ou de qualités littéraires. Ils ne

s'adressaient nullement à la question de la créativité et de l'esthétique du peuple.

Georges Arsenault, acadien, à l'encontre de l'habitude de nombreux jeunes chercheurs québécois, n'ignore pas la littérature de langue anglaise sur ces questions, et il réussit ainsi à voir le genre de la complainte dans une perspective plus large. Il examine tour à tour l'art de la complainte, les auteurs, la transmission orale: des questions de portée à la fois théoriques et d'intérêt humain. Il regarde de près ensuite les textes et le contexte d'un choix de complaintes, dont deux en profondeur, pour donner une étude qui servira sans doute d'inspiration à de futurs chercheurs acadiens. Mais des folkloristes ou ethnographes de partout profiteront d'une lecture attentive de ce livre excellent.

Il est dommage que le dernier titre présenté ici, *Chansons de Grand'mère* d'Alice Michaud-Latrémouille ait si peu à recommander au lecteur. C'est en apparence un recueil de chansons traditionnelles, mais l'auteur n'a aucune prétention savante. Sur 110 chansons, dont un certain nombre sont des textes reconstitués, 24 ont une transcription musicale et deux, nous dit-on, sont "sur l'air de." Nous apprenons que les chansons proviennent du Bas-Saint-Laurent, qu'elles datent pour la plupart d'avant le siècle actuel, et que l'auteur a compté beaucoup sur des membres de sa famille, et un peu sur quelques personnages âgées "qui se souviennent de cette époque où vivait ma grand'mère," et c'est tout. Le livre n'a aucun appareil critique, ni même une introduction. C'est le produit d'une manière de penser qui croit que "tout ce folklore tend à se perdre." C'est en fait un exercise de nostalgie romantique qui reflète mal les préoccupations de nos éditeurs universitaires.

GERALD THOMAS

DRAWING ON

JERROLD MORRIS, *100 Years of Canadian Drawings*. Methuen, $16.95.

THE COMPASS OF THIS BOOK is slightly more than the one hundred years of the title. It also embraces the Canadian "Colonial Period" prior to 1880. During that early time the pictorial record was the work of English army officers, visitors and finally immigrants. Then comes the "Academic Era," after 1880, the year in which the Royal Canadian Academy was founded, that term being used by Morris to characterize "official" art.

In Europe official art was the art of the Establishment, including various levels of European governments. "While the academies were supportive of artists they approved of, they were also restrictive, resisting any changes which might undermine their authority to guide public taste, which was largely moulded by productions of their members." Of course much the same restrictions were also prevalent in Canada.

One of Morris' primary purposes is to find qualities in the work of nineteenth-century Academicians "which can be appreciated in the light of contemporary taste." I suppose he means unrestricted and imaginative art, "art for art's sake" perhaps? At any rate, vivid and striking pictures which would appeal to any non-academic age.

The collection proceeds chronologically, the Colonial Period followed with a big chunk of Academicians, then the Group of Seven, the Canadian Group of Painters, Independents, war-time artists, Introverts, Extroverts, and so on until the modern era. (I am, of course, using Morris' own caps for the various terms.)

Early Canadian Colonial artists had a market in Europe with people who wanted to know what it was like in the New World, some of whom probably regarded Indians and rough frontier life

with horrified superiority from their remote cultural pinnacle. In any event, market dictated subject matter. The same must have been true in Quebec, despite "early emphasis on portraiture and religious painting." And yes, examples of Colonial drawing here seem to me dull and uninteresting.

The Academy is crowded with familiar names — familiar at least if you pay even minimal attention to art galleries and art history, which is also part of Canadian history. Lucius O'Brien, first prez of the R.C.A., with a beautifully simple landscape. Daniel Fowler with "Man in Doorway Smoking." Replace the archaic dress in this picture and it belongs to any period.

But much work of this Academic era is still dictated by Europe. T. Mower Martin has a log cabin in western Canada. Alan Edson depicts immigrant children aboard ship. William Armstrong, Indian wigwams. Although in "The Evangelist Moody," Robert Harris makes his man timelessly fat and pompous. As Morris says, "Moody would have been well qualified to join the ranks of the fraternity (evangelists, that is) of our own time."

Up to this point I can't see anything that Morris is looking for: art that would appeal to contemporary taste. Frederick Challener's 1910 "Nude" is a nude is a nude. Frederick Brigden's "Woman Sewing" is a woman sewing. Looks a little quaint and old fashioned, so what! And just the sort of thing you expect from C. W. Jefferys, historic drama. Whereas some of Jefferys' recreations of Sam Slick in a Haliburton book I looked at recently are wondrously alive and kicking. Clarence Gagnon has a male nude, complete with jockstrap, which looks like a photograph.

And the Group of Seven drawings are disappointing to me, with the exception of Jackson's "Maynooth, Ont." which is so casual it's almost a doodle. And Varley, his female "Head" being a reason why men fall in love. (But then, Varley has always been special for me.) Philip Surrey has a charcoal and wash of "Three Girls" running into a building at night, with a motorcyclist on the road behind. And it seems to happen before your eyes. André Biéler's "Les deux vieux St. Famille" looks exactly the way an Anglophone might imagine an old Quebec couple, in fact too much so. Surely the eye doesn't want to be unsurprised by the absolutely typical. Emily Carr's "Jacob" — an Indian boy with an independent look — is a great contrast for me with Carr's massive rain forests and weird totem poles.

But I can't go the "Automatistes," Borduas, Bellefleur, Molinari and Riopelle. My no-doubt old-fashioned eye searches for something it probably shouldn't be searching for. And I like Colville, but this business of numbering and measuring all the angles as if a drawing was mathematics incarnate! Well, maybe it is. Kurelek conveys the heaviness of things. If he were Dutch instead of Ukrainian, I'd think of those super-real Dutch house interiors five hundred years ago. And I love Jean-Paul Lemieux, with his attenuated figures like those of El Greco and that pointilliste painter whose name I can't remember.

It does seem to me that the later portraits are among the best drawings collected here. Dorothy Stevens' "Portrait" and Dennis Burton's "Portrait of Malka Fry," which looks like author Sandra Martin. And Gordon Rayner's "Self-Portrait" (also on the cover) pokes out of paper with real savagery. David Blackwood's stuff looks like illustrations for a Newfoundland Book of the Dead out of the Ancient Mariner. Harold Town's "Vale Variation #212" seems merely cute in this book; whereas I've seen many Towns I like much, with an artful/artless simplicity. John Newman's near full-

length portrait of a young girl ("Nude About to Move") has something definitely indefinable; someone you know but have never known.

It seems useless to keep on listing stuff I like chronologically, from the beginning of the book to the end. There's too much of it. One major complaint is that many of these drawings were originally in coloured oil or ink, and black and white can't do them justice. But I am thankful that Morris doesn't use the awful prose jargon in his commentary, with which I've seen reviewers semantically pollute the pages of *Arts Canada*. Although I don't think he's achieved his stated aim, to find among older work drawings that escape the bounds of their own contemporary style and historic slot. He didn't say it quite like that, but it seems a worthwhile objective.

What *100 Years of Canadian Drawings* does do is collect together a small range of hills from which a few taller peaks project. No doubt the book's relatively low price prohibits colour, but I mourn its absence. I'm sure my reactions to many of these drawings would be completely different if the colour spectrum was present.

Anyway, Morris' aim and intent here is entirely laudable to me; and presumably he doesn't have my own blind spots of incomprehension sometimes and non-appreciation for the obvious. In short, I give the book very high marks, but not the highest possible.

AL PURDY

SKELTON'S CANON

ROBIN SKELTON, *The Collected Shorter Poems, 1947-1977*. Sono Nis, $14.95.

ROBIN SKELTON WANTS the 256 poems in this volume, twenty-five of them hitherto uncollected, to be "regarded as the canon" of his serious shorter poems for the years it covers. Here, as in other volumes, the poet shows a self-consciousness about the shape of his career that, though perhaps disconcerting, befits his scrupulousness as a craftsman of verse. But to dismiss as "uncanonical" poems already collected seems an empty gesture.

The title of the new book may mislead. Far from comprehensive, it retains an average of only eight poems a year, and excludes many that were in the *Selected Poems* of 1968. From *Patmos*, his first substantial collection, thirty of the thirty-seven short poems are omitted, including the engaging "Advice From Sloth" with its ingenious rhyme-play. A group of nine ballads from *Begging the Dialect*, a couple of which survived into *Selected Poems*, has now all vanished. Nor is it only the early volumes that are pruned. Eight poems are gone from *Timelight* (1974) and several from *Because of Love* (1977), including the whole section called "The Hold of Our Hands" (now perhaps thought of as a single long poem). In general, the more whimsical pieces, those relatively loose in texture, and those approximating to technical exercises (including most of the essays in Welsh forms) have been relegated to the apocrypha, as well as a few weakish poems that had somehow survived the initial exercise of the poet's intense self-scrutiny. But the reasons for omission are not always clear. The product of all the self-topiary is a book of formidable intensity and concentration, with no weak or casual spots, strong but unrelenting. A muse with a migraine must have presided.

Why did Skelton close the canon four years ago? In his preface to *Landmarks* (1979) he writes, "Only now . . . do I feel that I have made a true beginning," writing not as exile or immigrant but from within a Canadian experience. The observable division is not sharp, but in the new work there is less gratuitous artifice, the texture of thought is looser, the link-

age of imagery is relaxed, and the rhythms often achieve a beautiful, interlocking, melodic movement. In this peace something is lost, and the long title-poem of *Landmarks* is perhaps weakened by the consciousness of belonging. One who proclaims that he feels at home is not at home yet. (Both reviewer and reviewed are 55, were born and educated in Britain, ended military service as sergeants, since arriving in Canada have settled in one town and taught in one university, and have hairy faces; but the reviewer immigrated twelve years earlier than his victim, and thinks he recognizes an earlier phase of acclimatization.)

For the new collection Skelton adopts a topical arrangement, though the order of time is partly served by having some of the sections relate to successive times of life. He argues that a chronological ordering would scatter poems that are thematically related. But the preface to his *Selected Poems* argued that only a chronological grouping would serve, because events in 1957 and 1962 (marriage and migration) "fundamentally altered my way of life and my poetry." Again, the book *Timelight* was said to have an "overall plan" in which the poet had "attempted to create a whole that is more than the sum of its parts" — but only three of its sections retain their identity in the new collection, and they are not in sequence and have had their contents and arrangement changed. One therefore suspects that the present contents and arrangement of the "canon" have only a provisional inevitability.

Skelton has respected the integrity of his earlier work. Most of the few textual changes are in punctuation and stanza division. In two places, a period has been changed to a comma but the following capital retained: whether these are incomplete changes or ordinary misprints is unclear. A few poems are newly titled. Casual comparison has revealed only thirteen changes in the wording, mostly minor. A whole section is dropped from "The Voices," but perhaps this could not be thought of as a change *within* a poem. At least two changes are restorations. The interlocutor in "The Slickensides," female in *Selected Poems,* is now male again, and the essential third stanza of "A Ballad of Despair," omitted in *Selected Poems,* is restored. In "Cat and Bird," what was "indecent" in *Begging the Dialect* and *Selected Poems* is now, regrettably, "erotic." Some obscurities are corrected: the opaque "rise from ashes' rhyme" in "Nursery Wallpaper (*Patmos*) is now "risen up from rhyme," and "bell-tongued" in "At Tutankhamun's Tomb, Thinking of Yeats" is more explicitly "bells' tongued." Other changes are similar in scale and character.

What kind of poems are here collected? One notices at once an intense power of vision. Many poems read like transcriptions of something stamped indelibly on the inward eye. Some of the visions are recollected (many from childhood), some imagined; of the latter, some are day visions and many (like the haunting "The Doors") belong to the night. This obsessional intensity of realization goes with a persistent personal involvement. More than most poets of comparable stature, Skelton is present to his poems. When not reminiscing or recalling, he is palpably there as seer or writer. This brooding presence combines with the omission of the more casual poems to give the whole book an oppressive and claustrophobic air.

In "The Fence," Skelton envisages language as a fence built to keep a beast out. As immediately as one senses the visionary force, one notices in his poetry what a strong fence he has built. He wields a fine, unfailing, sober, sonorous eloquence that at first is intoxicating in its mastery — a Yorkshire *hwyl,* if such a thing can be. But sometimes, as in "Walden Pond,"

though no one word is wrong, there are too many words. And consider the end of the very fine "Virgin of Torcello": "The water silts *with mud.* / Our boat must bear us west / upon the *stale* canal / between the *withering* vines / of our disquietude." Do the words here italicized add as much as they take away? But it may be that the silting of the diction is meant to re-enact that of the canal.

Skelton makes much use of traditional versification. He uses and varies rhyme and half-rhyme to produce rich effects and make precise points, with unparalleled inventiveness and virtuosity. One must applaud. But it is one thing to rhyme when rhyme is almost a necessary part of versifying; it is another thing when, as nowadays, the choice of rhyme is itself a conspicuous art. Rhyme then risks obtrusiveness and, if cleverly used, obtrusive cleverness. This sometimes happens here. In "Among the Stones," a splendid poem not previously collected, the movement from roughness to rhyme and order is a controlled achievement of the first rank. But in "Quaternion," the predictability of "certain" as a rhyme for "curtain" may make the reader wince — until he notices that the inevitability itself is the point of the rhyme. At that point, the excess of cleverness may make him wince again. But what a rare pleasure it is to be able to carp at the obtrusiveness of a poet's skill! Consider, for instance, "The Pretence," which consists of one nine-lined and one ten-lined stanza. Each line rhymes with one other, except that in the first stanza "lift" is left unrhymed. This may bother us until we notice that the second stanza is all about acceptance, and we realize that the ostentatiously avoided rhyme-word has to be "gift." Remarkable! Even so, Skelton's tact in rhyme (as in metre) is not perfect: in the same poem, the rhyme-word "stick" obtrudes gracelessly, and there are other such lapses. In the days when rhyming was second nature, accomplished writers avoided such things without having to think.

Besides the intense vision and the rich language, a third thing one notices in Skelton is the dense interweaving of thought and imagery. Almost every poem is highly wrought, with interlocking themes and a tight argument. The quality is covertly celebrated in "An Uncertain Meaning," and overtly displayed in "A Piece of Orange Peel." Brahms comes to mind. This persistent complexity, however, and the concomitant loss of a sense of spontaneity, combine with the thematic grouping of the poems to produce one effect that cannot have been intended. In the section called "The Climbing Wave," which consists of love poems in which thought and feeling are for once (and fittingly) simplified, the contrast with the rest of the book yields the impression of an affected naïveté, as though the poet were talking down to a teen-aged inamorata. By contrast, one assumes that the pieces in the erotic section "Amores" were kept in because they seemed to hold some irony or insight, either in the experience or in the relating of it; but their effect in collocation is that of a pornographic "naming of the parts" that would be acceptable from most poets but seems out of keeping with the controlled decorum of this one.

The worked-over character prevailing in the poems gives the whole collection a peculiar steadiness of movement. Though metrically varied (less so than seems: "Bread," for instance, is regular blank verse chopped up), and rhythmically deft, an iambic measure is never far away. An insistent pulse throbs through the whole book, and becomes deadening if one reads too much at a time. An important part of this effect is that the poems lack psychological incident. Each has an unbroken movement from first line to last. The voice never turns back on

itself, everything has been foreseen. No other poet of such excellence writes in such a lifeless way. If Skelton has a weakness as a poet, it is perhaps that his splendid control is itself out of control.

Skelton has been too prolific to keep up with, and the magnificence of his achievement will surprise most readers. His collected poems make a daunting monument. His careful cultivation of his splendid, if rather unfashionable, gifts has enlarged the boundaries of what is known to be achievable in the art of poetry. Why, then, do we know so few of his poems by heart? Why, when we name Canada's leading poets, does his name not come first to mind? Perhaps the excess of competence creates an illusion of facility, or perhaps the unfaltering eloquence seems to be impersonating its own integrity. Perhaps we feel, ungratefully, that in poetry as in prayer one should somehow betray one's weakness. Is it possible that poetry, at least here and now, is something one can be too good at? If so, it seems rather unfair.

FRANCIS SPARSHOTT

LOST DREAMS

MYRNA KOSTASH, *Long Way From Home.* James Lorimer, n.p.

JOHN KETTLE, *The Big Generation.* McClelland & Stewart, $16.95.

WORLD WAR II ENDED in 1945. And ever since, some have talked of two things — the war babies and the postwar baby boom. John Kettle's futuristic vision is informed by the image of an anchoring reality, the "tidal wave" of 6½ million babies born during the postwar economic boom between 1951 and 1966. Myrna Kostash's book concerns, as the subtitle states, "The story of the Sixties generation in Canada." Both books are well researched (a vision that also grows out of thorough documentation). They are also almost hopelessly ponderous. Either one will wear you out (portents of Jacob wrestling with his God). Read both books, and the info-sensory overload may prove to be lethal.

SUPA, AFL-CIO, SNCC, ERAP, SDS, CUCND, UGEQ, CYC, and CUS. If you remember what anywhere from one to three of these mean, then you lived in Kostash's Sixties when those letters were your very synapses.

Reminiscing about the Sixties revolves around a single question that has become a pastime steeped in good wine or beer: "When did the Sixties begin for you?" The question borders initiation rites (and the generation's heroes' rites of passage). It is a question on the nebulous margins of a coming of age — as Kostash clearly articulates in her foreword:

> I wrote this book because I am in love with the Sixties, with the passions and ideas, friendships and loves, music and dance and poetry, stoned highs and sorrows the period generated. I "came of age" in 1965: I turned twenty-one, and threw myself into the great learning about camaraderie, war, imperialism, rock'n roll, the Godhead, vagabonding, lust, appetite and woman power; and I consider myself blessed to have been young in a period when the vision of the good and the true was up for grabs. In seeking our revision, thousands and thousands of us wandered very far from "home," from our families, our communities, the values with which we were bred, the ideals with which we were entrusted, the country we were to inherit. Along the way we experienced corruption, disillusion, pain and death, as well as joy, but these were tracks to another "home," lives of our own construction. It is the vision and millenarian dream of one born when the War is ending and another generation (and era) begins. It is the beginning of a chronicle of quantum leaps in human consciousness for the next three decades.

What fascinates me most about Kostash is her clear perception of that twofold sense of "home" — the latter finally rooted in psyche as place mirroring what

the old blues players always talked of as home: "Man, home? Home's the open road, man, only thing I ever known — sangin' these las foety yees. . . ."

I was born a war baby in 1942. My Sixties began back in Wood Mountain in 1955 when SASK POWER and television arrived in the southern hills. Us punk, town kids did the rounds — tuned into *Country Hoedown, Zorro* (good Mexican *machismo*) and Ed Sullivan (the wholesome, orthodox, American Dream). The radio's *top twenty* from "CKXL — *Wahtahloo, Iiiwah!*" was finished, man ... ah dat remain weh da dehville's musezak from Lexington, *Kentucky!* An, man, it was da worrld incarnate — an we din need da Mahshall ta tell us weh the *hot* oh *cold* began (we *wahz* it). And I failed grade nine because of it and Kerouac's *On the Road* I discovered in 1957. For those last few Wood Mountain years, as dropout, I listened to the local Métis, a migrant seasonal worker high on Kerouac and Hemingway, Buzz Ogle who was the hitchhiking medium message eternally moving between Squaw Valley and Sun Valley (where he was befriended by Hemingway) winters, unrequited loves, and summers as assistant parks warden in Banff National Park.

Unlike Kostash, I "came of age" when Buddy Holly and Big Bopper fell like some fabled Icarus from the sky. The spring of 1959 I took the Métis hitchhiker's advice to heart and decided to leave home. I landed a potwasher's job at Lake Louise in the neverneverland thick of all those students with so many ideas so new to me. In the evenings some talked of some fabled professor, George Woodcock, in the English Department at UBC. ("Like, man, you don't take notes — too much to miss — man, this cat pumps yer head so fulla ideas about myth, anarchy, politics and archetypes that wen the bell rings, you simply float outta the classroom on a cloud of helium. Guy's incredible! Doesn' even have a degree!") The image and model stuck like a burr in my mind. That movement from a single book to professor always fascinated me. However, I went back to school in Nelson, B.C., the autumn of 1960 (after a second Lake Louise summer). I was magnetically lured by "the tidal wave" and the myth bearing the seed of disillusionment that John Kettle points to:

> The school explosion triggered an educational revolution.
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> * * *
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> The pressure to expand the school system arose from several sources, although one predominated — the "human capital" theory, the idea that public investment in education would bring economic benefits to society as well as the individuals who got more education.
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> * * *
>
> Slightly extending the metaphor, parents told their children, "Education pays." The generation that had gone through the Depression had not failed to notice that educated people survived best. "Stay in school, you'll get a great job, you won't have to worry about your life, everything will fall into place," the parents said.

Yes, even your student friends told you that. The teachers reaffirmed the lie they unwittingly believed.

By 1969, I was at Simon Fraser University. I had already been bowled over by Allen Ginsberg reading *Howl* in SUB at UBC. Had already witnessed, with jaundiced eye, the antics and charade of that sham called Jerry Rubin and his aspiring acolyte. Vancouver's town fool was better theatre the night he, with flute, led the procession out of the Allen Watt talk to demonstrate intimations of *Zen and the Journey into Void* in an industrial area where he was arrested for disturbing the peace (to be jailed and released the next day). Yes, I too witnessed the torn student body and faculty at SFU during that PSA tragedy of the waiting game where contracts were not renewed for the dissident professors. I was the

student scab who crossed the activists' picket lines at the doors to some of my classrooms. I had always believed the university was a neutral place of refuge (a world apart from the so-called real world at the bottom of the mountain). I had read about that fire and pillaging of the computer centre at Sir George Williams University. Colin Wilson and the myth of the strength one gets from destroying another's possessions were familiar to me. Behind me, the lower-class war baby, were nine mountain summers of hard-earned money (non-union wages) that saw me through high school, art school, and a few years of university. Now some of those activists and their groupies were sitting in the SFU Registrar (their *sit-in* in face of some nebulous issue I could not understand); but, I recall there was a single gnarled idea serpenting through my mind ... *those little bastards! If they start a fire there and burn my transcripts, I'll muddlfuckin' club down with a piece of deadwood the first one that comes scurrying out!* A reverie a tad demented, I confess. However, those who taught me had their lapses too. I remember him, the *Victorian Prose and Poetry* professor, shackled and bilboed to his own century. It was an ozone, clear, early morning. He was nervously pacing Victory Square at SFU. I stopped to say good morning; he scratched his grizzled head, then muttered: "This place — it was perfectly designed for revolution! Look at this square — they can all gather in a matter of a few minutes. But, note the architectural irony! Note that thin horizontal at the bottom of all those verticals on *The Quadrangle*. Just imagine how many activists could hang from it!" I avoided his shadowed, wild eyes — walked on, reassessing the lethal magnitude of my own confused feelings (... *what does New Left, Marxist Revolution of the youth have to do with poetry written in the profound illusion of freedom this side of the Iron Curtain?*). I dropped out again in 1970. Asked my last question of a young lady on top of Burnaby Mountain: "A B.Ed. at the end of this year? But where will you go? I mean there are already too many teachers." Slightly bewildered, she replied in a wispy voice: "I don't know ... maybe North." There were no jobs on the West Coast (few jobs anywhere — as Kettle graphically points out). I retreated to Banff to what Kettle snidely defines as the "lazy sojourn under the UIC's auspices until the payments ran out." What Kettle, for all his statistics and documentation, forgets is the economic spin-off from a North American reality where the student and the migrant seasonal worker keep a certain amount of money flowing (be it UIC, or the money a tourist spends on an airplane ticket, steak, bed, or a gallon of gasoline). Like man, a lotta those "lazy" UIC freaks worked long summer hours for scandalously low wages nudging in overtime at mountain resorts or elsewhere. So don't tell me where ripoffs begin, or end, Kettle (I had sixteen mountain summers of them).

Anyway, at the end of the Sixties I no longer dreamed of that movement from book to professor. My last few summers at Lake Louise were spent as a night-watchman. I was bewildered by the New Left's talk of some incredible sense of global community anchored in tribal memory. By the mid-Sixties I had witnessed the death of the folk era and the young people's oral tradition. Once you could go to a weiner roast with a hundred people from three different mountain lodges — you could sing songs (that nearly everyone remembered) for a whole night till sunup. By the mid-Sixties it was — "Like man, if you wanna kill a party, jis bring yer Afghani ... or a bag of Jamaican Brown!" The party was one's own head. Twelve people in a small cabin; twelve parties reeling in the colours of bannered light of one's own oblivion. The

nightwatchman picked up the morning roaches in front of the chalet. When the freaks were out, they knew exactly where to go. So much for the Sixties and tribal memory. The mountains were still there, but who climbed them anymore? So were the fish, but who could cast anymore? The mountains and fish only existed in the resinous shadows of the mind ("Oooooh . . . there goes another one!"). Who could remember a stanza from *Five Hundred Miles*, let alone get straight a couple lines from Bobby D.? Who ever remembered Crosby, Stills, and Nash at Woodstock when that one line — "It's bin a long time comin . . ." — rang like a coin on a marble floor. Who ever remembers one's own dream?

ANDREW SUKNASKI

ROMANTIC MODES

TILOTTAMA RAJAN, *Dark Interpreter: The Discourse of Romanticism*. Cornell Univ. Press, n.p.

TILOTTAMA RAJAN ARGUES that Romanticism anticipates "the recognitions of existentialism and radical modernism" and that those recognitions can provide a framework for interpreting Romantic poems. Her central premise is the contention of modern theorists like Sartre, Derrida, and De Man that language cannot mediate between man's condition in the world and his desire for a better one. Building on that premise, Rajan reassesses the main Romantic genres, displacing, as the most important, romance with tragedy. She argues for a development in Romantic aesthetics which moves from quest romance, through irony, to rest in the sort of tragic vision detectable in *The Triumph of Life* and *The Fall of Hyperion*.

Rajan's theoretical scaffolding takes issue with the reigning orthodoxy which claims that Romantic aesthetics can be best traced in Schelling and Hegel, who posit a theodicy which records a romance journey from a primal unity, through an alienation from nature and society, spiralling back again to a higher, renewed unity. Supported by the post-modern denial of such a unity because of the very nature of language, Rajan traces instead another tendency in German Romantic theory which begins with Schiller, passes through Schopenhauer, and culminates in the early Nietzche of *The Birth of Tragedy*. In these three phases of Romantic aesthetic development, she detects a series of dichotomies that struggle within Romantic consciousness: the naive and the sentimental, will and representation, Apollo and Dionysos. She associates each of these phases with enabling genres that best accommodate its preoccupations, finding in Keats and Shelley the clearest exemplars of this development.

In so doing, she argues that both begin with quest-romances (*Alastor* and *Endymion*) which fail partly because the rhetoric demanded by the genre fails to provide a language that can insulate "the enclosed space of romance" from the demands of the actual and the temporal. The result is a repression of "insights that are nevertheless acknowledged," that is characteristic, Rajan claims, of the sentimental text. The second phase of the development of Romantic aesthetics turns to a form of skeptical irony that is openly, even aggressively, aware of the limitations of its own mode. This sort of irony (associated with Schopenhauer's reluctance to abandon idealism of the beautiful aesthetic surface to a voracious, pre-conscious will) results in poems like Keats' late romances (including *Isabella* and *Lamia*) where the reader detects irony, but cannot be certain where the poet's sympathy falls. The difficulties of interpretation that result from this uncertainty (can we really condemn Lamia?) derive from a vacillation between the claims of

the real and ideal, the claims of the will against the power to represent.

In a poem like *Mont Blanc,* Shelley's skepticism might seem to propel him toward just such an irony, but Rajan sees that poem as saved by the tendency of the Romantic lyric to convert the vacillation of the ironic second phase into a genuine synthesis, one which respects the inevitable undercutting of the aesthetic surface by the demands of a Nietzchean Dionysos, while at the same time allowing the aspirations of the Apollian ideal. Rajan concludes that Shelley and Keats found an accommodating vehicle in the dream vision, a mode which allows the narrator to see "the dark course of history in a dream and through the mediating eyes of a surrogate figure such as Rousseau or Moneta." Such a narrator thus avoids not only the sentimental aloofness from the pull of the actual, but also the inward misery of Keats' Titans which can lead only to the bitterest sort of irony.

It is asking quite a lot to pull together the aesthetics and metaphysics of three quite different German Romantic theorists, together with the current formulations of what Rajan calls "existential phenomenology" to produce a new alignment of the major Romantic genres. While she acknowledges that her main purpose is not interpretation but rather the theoretical framework for interpretation, Rajan's book retains many of the signs of its origin in her Toronto dissertation (albeit a provocative and important one), with too many of the most important explanations and qualifications relegated to footnotes (which, fortunately, Cornell has allowed to stand at the bottom of each page). It would make for smoother reading if Rajan had integrated these notes into her finished text. And, while readers might agree that such an elaborate theoretical framework is necessary, they might still object to the style; too much of its syntax and vocabulary has been taken over undiluted from the post-structuralists, who in turn, exhibit much of the gracelessness of psychoanalysis and the social sciences. Poems are set adrift from their authors to become merely "texts," which then suffer themselves to be continually "deconstructed" by "sub-texts" or explained by intertexts." And it is sometimes difficult to know whether a text suffers more if its contradictions are repressed or sublimated.

Even so, Rajan's book can be read and admired not only for its courage in challenging the current orthodoxy of Romantic theory, but also for a revisionist theory which allows a coherent account of those cruxes in familiar Romantic poems that continue to pose difficulties in interpretation. Among these cruxes are the puzzling frame of *Alastor,* the two Demogorgons, the function of the "shape all light" in *The Triumph of Life*, the problematic ending of "The Eve of St. Agnes," as well as the superiority of "Tintern Abbey" over Coleridge's conversation poems. Despite its scaffolding, a method that allows a competent and consistent explanation of these puzzling matters deserves to be considered with care and, as Rajan proposes in her conclusion, applied to a wider variety of Romantic texts.

PETER A. TAYLOR

TEXTURES

PAUL DUTTON, *Right Hemisphere, Left Ear.* Coach House, $4.75.

GEORGE MCWHIRTER, *The Island Man.* Oberon, n.p.

IN *Of Grammatology*, French philosopher theoretician Jacques Derrida refers to nonlinear writing as "suspense between two ages." He contends that while the smooth linear text may satisfy our need for thematic synthesis pointing to order and Truth, it does so at the expense of

pluri-dimensionality — nonlinear writing where meaning is not subjected to successivity or the order of logical time. While nonlinear writing does not necessarily interrupt the solidarity of linear thought, it corresponds to another level of experience adding another dimension to writing. It can restore what psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan defines as "discourse of the other: the self lost to the self."

"Let's liberate poetry on and off the page," writes Paul Dutton in his note introducing *right hemisphere left ear*. Dutton is a member of the performance group, The Four Horsemen, with whom he has collaborated on two albums and one book, *Horse d'Oeuvres*, but this is his first full-length collection of "poems," a collection inviting the reader to not only read but sing, play, contemplate and "act on it." It focuses on "texture" with the generative idea that diversity of forms will map new modes of perception both for the writer and the reader. Two concrete poems using the words "texture" and "true text" launch the text. Intuition and the senses become the main guidelines leading the poetic impulse towards its most appropriate form of expression. "Uncle Rebus Clean Song" exemplifies very well the "suspense between two ages of writing." Uncle Rebus recalls Uncle Remus, narrator of childhood stories, while the rebus, a representation of words by pictures of objects whose names resemble the intended word, is not unlike the hieroglyph which lies at the root of most writing systems.

The coherent structure of speech has been subordinated in "Uncle Remus" to a structure of digressions, phonic connections, word and thought associations, resulting in a very scenic chain of representations as they register in the writer's mind. Where old time bawdy songs were cleaned up by avoiding "naughty" words, Dutton's coming clean is achieved by avoiding censorship of controlled thought and speech. It's a demanding but imaginative "poem" following the Steinian "method of the mind." My main reservation is that many of the sexual images come very close to being sexist. Dutton refers to the piece as "locker-room fluff." Derrida would probably call it "phallogocentric." Ironically Derrida connects phallogocentric thought with the acquisition of linear speech in a patriarchal culture. It obviously exists at other levels of speech as well.

In his attempt to liberate the sentence, Dutton has used no punctuation throughout the text, except in the "mondrian boogie woogie" pieces which consist solely of punctuation marks literally punctuating the pages. Mondrian was much influenced by jazz. He believed that deconstruction of melody led to more dynamic rhythm, a view Dutton shares and has applied to his poetic language.

There is ample evidence in *right hemisphere left ear* that Paul Dutton possesses a finely tuned left ear although I have seen him perform and feel that some of these pieces would be more effective in performance. As for "the right hemisphere of the brain controlling the intuitive functions" it is most effectively tapped in his Visionary Portraits, especially Visionary Portrait 2 where the poet longs for the restoration of something lost, something repressed and which is embodied by his sisters.

I don't know whether Dutton is familiar with the new feminist writings in France and Quebec (Kristeva, Brossard) which claim that the restoration of the repressed female unconscious can be achieved through experimental avant-garde writing. It is a goal which is not restricted to women, and with this collection Dutton gives the impression that he is well on his way.

While George McWhirter's *The Island Man* cannot be considered experimental

in the same sense as Paul Dutton's book, it does contain excellent examples of writing "between two ages." Much of the book revolves around the writer's dilemma created by different forms, cultures, traditions. The result is an interweaving which could be compared to Roland Barthes' definition of "texture" where the "spider dissolves in the constructive secretions of its web" (*The Pleasure of the Text*). Images of the poet enmeshed in a spider's web recur at least twice in *The Island Man.*

The first poem, "A Journal for Don Caamaño," a dream-vision unfolds in a series of exotic Rousseauistic "tableaux." It tells of the initial impressions of Don Caamaño, a Spanish Odysseus who has just sailed upon the shores of Lotusland, or more precisely Vancouver Island. It is a highly visual poem where imagery, language, the noble simplicity of its inhabitants, all prove to be an illusion where Odysseus "can no more stay ... than cohabit with a spectre. ..."

The next poem, "7 AM," stands in sharp contrast to the previous one. The over-abundant imagery and dream-like quality have been replaced by a precision and economy (and humour) which capture perfectly a dreaming Odysseus waking to the stark reality of a Canadian morning. It is a delightful poem and personally I wish McWhirter would write like this more often. At times, in his attempt to capture the richness of his language and his environment he has achieved the exact opposite. You can hardly see Lotusland for the lotus.

Generally, however, the imagery and the formal variety serve McWhirter's poetry very well. The two cut across each other, resulting in a redistribution of language. Mythical, heroic figures are transformed into everyday and sometimes comic people. Prophetess Cassandra has become a shapely teasing Cassie and he who lusts over her "minimum of fat" (minimalism) must tango "over turnips and cold curlicues of cauliflower ..." (alliterative and metaphorical overload). These alternations, plus the healthy irreverence towards literary origins, not only help to assimilate the great archetypes but also create a compromise between languages, people, places, where the author establishes his own individuality, his own island.

It is within this textured background/ foreground of measuring differences, dis/ covering, naming that Odysseus traces and weaves a circuitous path home. It is a sensuous path (Barthes would say erotic) permeated with details about wife, children, friends, animals, the new natural environment. "Hangdog" Odysseus may have had to trade his sails for an old car, his lotus food for chocolate and cigars, but he has created and claimed his own space. For the island man, the mark of utopia is the everyday, but it is the everyday which can still be measured against dreams and aspirations.

LOLA LEMIRE-TOSTEVIN

NEW THEATRE IN QUEBEC

RENE-DANIEL DUBOIS, *Panique à Longueil.* Preface by Normand Chaurette. Leméac, $5.95.

NORMAND CHAURETTE, *Rêve d'une nuit d'hôpital.* Preface by Jean-Cleo Godin. Leméac, $5.95.

NEW AUTHORS, FIRST PLAYS. In the cases of Dubois and Chaurette, lack of experience was no handicap. Within the confines of relatively simple production techniques (the *café-théâtre* Nelligan, and the Théâtre des Quat'sous) these young dramatists (Dubois is 26, Chaurette 27) have written surprisingly rich, complex works which stack up well against the

recent efforts of more established playwrights.

Dubois' *Panique à Longueil* is, to me, the more interesting of the two, perhaps because of the multiplicity of interpretations it invokes. It is essentially an actor's play (Dubois himself studied acting in Montreal and in Paris), and uses a small but skilled cast who can play numerous roles requiring substantial improvisation. It is also a very literary play, one which makes bows to Dubois' dramatic baggage and inspiration, from Sophocles to Racine to Vian and Ducharme.

Ducharme seems the major influence on this play, though Dubois never explicitly refers to him. But the mixture of comedy and real anguish we see in *Inès Pérée et Inat Tendu* is reflected not only in the title of Dubois' play (the serene bourgeois suburb of Longueil hardly seems the place for panic) but also in the play's structure, where one young man, like so many of Ducharme's protagonists, confronts a nightmarish series of adventures while looking for a home port, some sort of security. There is even the characteristically Ducharmian revenge taken out on a representative of the established order by a youthful hero. Dubois' debt to Boris Vian is more specific (a quotation from *L'Ecume des jours* prefaces the play). The dramatic structure of *Les Bâtisseurs d'empire* seems to have served as a model for *Panique à Longueil* except that where Vian's characters flee to higher (and more claustrophobic) apartments only to jump out the window at the end, Dubois' Monsieur Arsenault descends a multi-storey dwelling, going from apartment above to apartment below, until he reaches a basement from which he takes an elevator back to the top.

But despite these (and other) literary debts, there is nothing derivative about the play itself, for Dubois' message is neither that of Ducharme nor of Vian. The plot is deceptively simple. One weekday evening, M. Paul Arsenault, a 28-year-old high school teacher of zoology, is preparing dinner in his ultra-modern 3½ on the seventh floor of a high-rise in Longueil. The phone rings; it is his wife calling to say she'll be late for dinner — traffic is blocked up on all the bridges out of Montreal. M. Arsenault goes out to the balcony to see if a parking space will be available for her, closes the glass door behind him, and, as he is about to reenter the apartment, finds that the handle has fallen off and that he is locked out. He then begins a series of adventures which take him to every apartment below his in a frantic (and fruitless) search for the key to get back to "chez nous."

The panic M. Arsenault feels during his descent is not merely the fear of never again being able to find a home port. It is also — and especially — a metaphysical panic, a growing doubt, as he goes ever lower, of who he is or whether he exists at all. Ghislaine, in the apartment just below his, takes him for a gluttonous gymnast; the building's owner, in the next apartment, takes him for a plumber; the psychiatrist takes him for a homosexual, and so on until, in the mezzanine, the robot-like, computerized information lady reveals to M. Arsenault that he is no one at all: "La direction, faute de preuves de votre existence, se voit dans l'obligation ... d'aviser tous les organismes laïcs, civils, et militaires concernés de votre disparition."

As the play progresses it becomes clear that M. Arsenault's profession is the key to understanding his predicament. As a zoology teacher he specializes in the dissecting of sheep's brains, teaching students how each part, despite its resemblance to something else (the cortex looks like yoghurt and the meninges like baloney) plays a specific role in the animal's consciousness. Similarly, the entire play can be seen as a dissection of M. Arse-

nault's brain, and each floor in the high-rise, despite appearances, is yet another level in our probe of M. Arsenault's psyche. As Normand Chaurette points out in his excellent introduction, M. Arsenault, despite his desire to return home, is fascinated by and drawn to the levels below him. These levels (each of which implies one of the seven capital sins) are, in a very real sense, the foundations upon which M. Arsenault's character is built; there is the homosexual in him, though it isn't on the surface, as there is the gigolo, the greedy capitalist, the drunkard. As M. Arsenault goes ever deeper into the basement of the building, he meets the Rat, guardian of the elevator which can take him back to the land of the living. In the deepest circle of Dubois' hell is the intellectual/teacher, for the Rat, a hideous mirror-image of M. Arsenault, likes to cultivate young minds and, Sphinx-like, poses three questions before he lets anyone into the elevator. M. Arsenault, unable to answer the third (and frankly unanswerable) question, turns on the Rat and easily vanquishes him (the Rat is all words and no substance). He then enters the elevator for the long awaited trip back to the seventh floor where he will meet his apocalypse in the form of a violent battle and a written, truth-revealing message from his wife who is waiting for him on the (non-existent) eighth floor.

The return of Ulysses? A Freudian nightmare? A religious allegory? *Panique à Longueil* is all of these and more. But above all it is a play which shows that, in the words of the author, the true panic of all mortals is "l'angoisse du vide."

Normand Chaurette's *Rêve d'une nuit d'hôpital* is, like, Dubois' play, a drama of the imagination. But where Dubois' nightmare is purely theatrical, Chaurette's dream world is essentially poetic, for he has chosen, as inspiration and subject of his play, Quebec's *poète maudit*, Emile Nelligan.

The title of Chaurette's play is, of course, the title of one of Nelligan's poems, the one where he imagines that angels will bring him out of the hospital into which he was interned from age twenty until his death. But the title takes on a more universal meaning for Chaurette. The hospital, a metaphor for a prison (the prison of the mind) is the final destination of those whose imagination takes them a bit too far (for the rest of us); or, as the dramatist says in his preface, "au bout du rêve, il y a toujours le risque d'un hôpital."

Chaurette has chosen to portray the inevitability of the hospital by using two theatrical conceits. The first of these is the establishment of an artificial, theatrical time which replaces the chronology of the poet's life. Three moments in time are presented simultaneously: Cacouna, where Nelligan led a seemingly idyllic childhood surrounded by his mother and two sisters, the Ecole Olier, where his silence and daydreaming, coupled with his evident brilliance, were a threat to his teachers, and the hospital, a living hell. But we do not see these time-frames in that order; rather, Chaurette shows us how Nelligan's *folie* and his poetry can be understood only when the past meets the present, and when the imagination dictates which events preceded others. Thus the play begins and ends in the Ecole Olier because it is here that Nelligan's imagination ran wild as he was exposed to the forbidden fruit of Baudelaire, Flaubert, and especially Rimbaud ("Si Rimbaud n'avait jamais existé, il l'aurait inventé," says Nelligan's mother; it is also here that society's reaction to the poet is the most evident, both in the punishment he must endure and, ironically, in the way his teacher tries, much later, to bask in the glory of the bad pupil become famous poet. In contrast to this essentially masculine world, the scenes at Cacouna are dominated by women and it is here

that the seeds of poetry are sown in Nelligan's mind as he reads Baudelaire and recites it with his sisters. But it is also here that we see Nelligan's early refusal of the world as others have defined it; "Emile n'a rien mangé," laments his mother, and the metaphor of eating (refusing to eat, being force-fed) is pursued throughout the play. The hospital scenes are the most pervasive of all — they intrude on Cacouna and on the Ecole Olier — and though they are, like the childhood scenes, essentially feminine (Nelligan's two nurses, La Grande and La Petite, remind us of his sisters), it is far more menacing. No punishment here, as in the Ecole Olier, but a continuous torture of the mind made worse by the cruelty (real or imagined?) of La Grande and only slightly alleviated by the sympathy of La Petite who, sensitive to the poet's imagination, will quietly edge towards the twilight of insanity. The pivotal scene here (and the only verifiable authentic scene) is the day in 1932 when Nelligan was taken from the hospital to Gonzalve Désaulnier's house in Ahuntsic, there to hear (but apparently in total indifference) his poem, "Le Vaisseau d'or," read on the radio. "Ouvre un peu cette fenêtre," says the mother shortly after the poem is heard, but Nelligan's mind is already shut up within itself, as the hallucination scene will show, and the poet's windows on the outside will remain forever closed.

To further unify the motion of time in his play, Chaurette has used another conceit, that of a single moment during the day which appears in all the scenes. Noon, or even more precisely the time between the tenth and eleventh chime, is the summit of the day, a privileged moment for the poet who needs no midnight to dream. It is, as Jean-Cléo Godin remarks in the introduction, the hour of the angelus, not Millet's peaceful scene but the ambiguous meeting of the day's equilibrium and the disordered imagination of the poet. As the play advances towards its end — one scene for each time the noon bell is struck — the sense of time as a destructive force becomes oppressive. "Si nous essayions de ne plus jamais connaître l'heure," says La Petite in a moment of lucidity which enables us to escape the notion of a beginning and an end, or to see Nelligan's life defined by its important moments, limited by his internment.

Arsenault's play is, as Godin points out, a celebration both of Emile Nelligan's works and of the maturity of a culture which can look back upon Nelligan as a *grand poète* without any prejudice to living poets who (like Miron, Lapointe, Giguère) may one day also be labelled great. As a celebration, *Rêve d'une nuit d'hôpital* is in the tradition of Ferron and Germain; it is the occasion for a collective reflection on a common heritage. *Panique à Longueil*, on the other hand, is in the tradition of Michel Garneau and Michel Tremblay — explorations of the mind which denounce received values and fight with the phantoms of the past and present. But these plays further confirm that the new Quebec theatre is anything but a passing phenomenon. Chaurette and Dubois have entered the fold.

JONATHAN M. WEISS

TALKING CLEARLY

ALAN TWIGG, *For Openers.* Harbour, n.p.

THE INTERVIEW ARTICLE or interview book seems to many to be a pretty easy publication. You don't actually need to write anything. You just arrange a nice lavish expense account and go visiting. After your sumptuous breakfast at the Four Seasons you take a cab to the home of a famous writer, walk in and turn on your tape recorder. When you have enough material and/or you have finished

off his or her scotch, you go back to the hotel for dinner and some shopping before flying on to the next subject.

One immediate problem with this is that bit about the tape recorder. Even if you can convince someone to pay your way and even if you can convince the writer to receive you (often two very large "ifs"), you have to be able to interview him. First you have to know enough about the writer and his works to avoid appearing a fool. This is much easier in a critical article, in which intimate knowledge of one novel and a quick glance at a few dust jackets might get you through.

Then you must be able to strike the right "tone." That may sound vague but it is probably the most important element. One author might like a bit of a debate. She talks best with a sparring partner. Another might find the slightest hint of criticism enough of an offence to clam up permanently. Then there are the various other subtleties. Author A feels her private life is her own affair, thank you. Author B loves to talk about his first sexual experience and talks best about his novels when making analogies to various girlfriends. Then, of course, there is Author C, who might best be left alone. She doesn't speak about her private life, her books, or other writers. There are some subjects on which she is happy to hold forth but do your readers care about a marxist analysis of parking meters?

I write from experience, although much less than Alan Twigg's twenty-four experiences in *For Openers*. My interviews were for videotape, which meant I could do less editing than Twigg but it also meant that my audience might blink during my more idiotic moments whereas Twigg's questions can be dissected in cold hard print. But, luckily, Twigg stands up well to such an examination. He is invariably well prepared, with a good knowledge of both primary and secondary sources. To accomplish this for twenty-four writers is no small feat. Also, he seems very able to adapt himself to specific writers. Thus the interview with Matt Cohen is very personal and quite rapid, with few instances where Cohen speaks for more than about four lines without a comment from Twigg. In Cohen's case this approach leads to a variety of interesting revelations.

The interview with the other Cohen, Leonard, is similarly successful. In this, Cohen is treated as a normal person. Absurd though it may be, I have come to think of Cohen as a "rock star" figure, for whom *Rolling Stone* would be the best venue. Twigg treats him as just another writer, who requires the usual questions. He neither emphasizes nor avoids Cohen's "Bohemian" lifestyle. In return, the latter likes Twigg's questions and gives as clear and full answers as possible. Sometimes his comments are very revealing:

> For instance, I just read an analysis of *Beautiful Losers* in a book called *Savage Fields* by Dennis Lee which is pretty good. It's certainly better than I could do. His approach is so comprehensive and brilliant. Once every couple of years I get that brilliant.

At other times Twigg provides openings for the black joke that Cohen is so good at:

> T: As a matter of fact, Errol Flynn finally died of an overdose in this very hotel . . .
>
> COHEN: Yeah? It gets risky, I know. But I'm too old to commit suicide. It would be unbecoming.

With the successes, there are naturally failures. Not in the sense of the breakdown in communication that can lead to some inverted insights, but simple mediocrity. Twigg wasn't able to get on the same wave length with Robertson Davies, which perhaps isn't surprising. Similarly, Margaret Laurence, usually one of the better interviews around, comes out as banal, and her position at the end of *For Openers*, while it fits her stature as a

Canadian writer, makes for a let-down in the book.

Even in these cases, however, there are usually at least a few insights to be gained, even if indirectly, as when Twigg's question to Laurence inadvertently informed me that *Settlers of the Marsh* was banned from public libraries in 1926. The interview with Margaret Atwood perpetuates her image as someone who plays things close to the vest, avoiding personal and creative revelations, but it also provides her comments on the fear she inspires in many readers and critics. Her analysis may not be absolutely correct but she has certainly recognized something important. Many have commented on her sensibility as paranoid but few have noted that the reaction is no less so. Whether it is simply to cut her down to size or to reject her dark view of contemporary reality is hard to determine. The way she would like her work to be seen is probably summed up in her final comment, after her assertion of the likely destruction of literary culture in Canada: "This is not optimism or pessimism. It's just looking at things that are there."

I have my arguments, as anyone would, but on the whole the interviews are valuable. Twigg tends to be too positive with his writers, at times suggesting that a certain work was too this or too that to be accepted by the critics when most of us would agree it was simply too bad. Still, Twigg is probably more honest than most of us would be in that situation, as when he tells Marian Engel that he didn't like *The Glassy Sea* and Rudy Wiebe the same about *The Blue Mountains of China.*

The choice of subjects might be questioned. Some, such as Hugh MacLennan, have been examined so often that there isn't that much more to be brought out. Others, such as Peter Trower, are rather strange to find in a select group of only twenty-four. Their inclusion leads one to reflect on many much more major writers who are not included, such as Timothy Findley, the most interviewable author I personally have encountered.

A partial explanation for this choice is that Twigg comes from Vancouver and his book was published in B.C. Thus writers like Trower and Bill Bissett probably seem much more important than they do to those of us in the east. The most interesting thing about the interview with Bissett is that he is revealed as just as much of an anachronistic hippie as many of us suspected. But then again, maybe that is an eastern perspective.

That is *East.* Which brings me to the really infuriating aspect of the book. Twigg feels forced to title his interviews with pretentious and reductive phrases like "What Is" for Alice Munro and "What Can Be" for Jane Rule. This is unnecessary and off-putting but a small point. However, it reflects a larger issue when he turns to Jack Hodgins as "Western Horizon" and Matt Cohen as "Eastern Horizon." All right for Hodgins but where the hell does Twigg think Cohen lives? Last time I looked there were five provinces east of Cohen. You would be hard-pressed to guess that from Twigg's choice of writers. Quebec gets some representation but afterwards what? John Gray and Hugh MacLennan might be seen as Nova Scotia writers but not in the way that Hodgins and Wiebe are western writers. What about Alden Nowlan? Or Al Pitman? Or various others at least as important as Trower.

The answer of course is the old western alienation blinkers. Twigg's comments show him to be a committed westerner, which is fine, but any regionalist must recognize the existence of other regions. And most of the western writers are similarly myopic. When you are reading this book, and enjoying it, and yelling three cheers for the west, remember: "Ontario

is not the east, Ontario is not the east, Ontario is not the east. . . ."

TERRY GOLDIE

SUBURBS & SHAMANS

ARITHA VAN HERK, *The Tent Peg*. McClelland & Stewart, $14.95.

DAVID WILLIAMSON, *Shandy*. Queenston House, $15.95; pa. $6.95.

ARITHA VAN HERK'S *The Tent Peg* is likable because its tone is intense, its format is crisp, and the edge of mischievous intrigue in the opening chapter is genuine: a young woman has disguised herself as a youth so that she can be hired as cook for an all-male summer geological survey crew.

David Williamson's *Shandy* lacks these virtues: its style is gabby, its protagonist prim and its opening action implausible. However, such a high level of suspense goes into introducing the main female character that it propels one well past the point where she, like the hero, has proved charmless.

Both novels draw their readers in with the bait of a powerful female character. I wonder which feels more duped: the reader of *The Tent Peg*, in which the woman's importance becomes unrealistically inflated, or of *Shandy*, in which women are obliquely belittled?

Shandy purports to look with humorous detachment at the mid-life crisis of a reasonably sophisticated male suburbanite. This man, Richard Page, is inventive in his work and dutiful in his private life. Yet before the novel even establishes these credentials it has him treating his secretary like furniture and expressing no moral reservations (only aesthetic ones) when asked to market the canvases of a callous painter who has posed his obese wife for his nudes and then has left her, to live with a willowy younger woman. "Woman as contemptible object" becomes a theme that continues with Page's witless sex fantasies and positively jumps out mid-novel when Page, annoyed by his dog's whining, opens the door and spits, "Come in, *bitch*." If Williamson supposed that the humour of this pun would save his hero from seeming borish and misogynistic, he was wrong. From chapter one he underestimated the care that must go into establishing the essential benevolence of a comic figure.

Shandy sets out to show that both the urban and the suburban worlds are full of perils for the man who has surrendered the caution of his years. However, Richard Page's second youth is not the youth of innocence but rather a reversion to a seventeen-year-old self who was already inclined to bargaining with life.

The sociologist Richard Sennett has something to say about the nature of suburbia and the survival style of such adolescents. In *The Uses of Disorder: personal identity and city life*, Sennett shows that the youth who chooses the refuge of social clichés and comfortable norms is like the householder who chooses the homogeneity of the suburbs. Both are unplayed social instruments. More important, the suburbanite neglects the development of his city's character and the youth neglects his own.

If this thesis is correct and suburban living can be equated with adolescent compromise, then the failure of *Shandy* is to take the man out of suburbia but not suburbia out of the man. When in a retrospective chapter we see Richard Page at seventeen, his idea of adventure is to be seduced by a vapid stranger. At forty-two his idea remains the same (if his fantasies are any measure) and though he takes on a more mentally assertive sexual partner he seems more enthralled by the role of lover than by the impact of intimacy. Sweetheart, advertising model, prostitute, wife — in his charade of desire

there is only one mannikin, making costume changes. And there is only one adolescent, whether forty-two or seventeen, striking poses with her.

Van Herk's protagonist — a woman named J.L. — is more consistent, more complex, more admirable; it is not her fault but the narration's that before long she becomes something of a juggernaut. She starts off well, boldly abandoning the city where she has found only one frail bright light during a year of unconvincing university studies and uncommitted sexual liaisons. The beacon in her life is a woman, and as the story progresses we see what qualities this woman represents: celebrative strength, freedom of feeling, and faith that men can love these traits. Over the summer J.L. tests her own share of these qualities.

This is not to say that J.L. surrounds himself with nine men in order to inspire someone's love for her life-embracing nature. On the contrary, as much as possible she leaves them to their own company and quietly attunes herself to the wilderness. Van Herk presents this active meditation skilfully so that one can see J.L. entering into a sort of spirit quest, then realizing the nature of what she is doing and taking pleasure in the process.

There is much potential in the idea of a young woman tapping shamanistic insights while actively absorbing a modern milieu of geological survey grids, helicopter flights, and assay results. However, two flaws deprive this story of full success.

One is an intrusive submotif: the biblical story of J.L.'s spiritual forebear. This was the Kenite woman Ja-el, outwardly acquiescent and inwardly fierce, who felled the Canaanite general Sisera. The motif works well at first; it is reasonable to think that, having been named after her, J.L. would ponder the significance of this figure, particularly since the woman she loves has an appropriate biblical counterpart. But nothing in the novel suggests that the geologist Mackenzie would know this story, so a very odd note clangs when he intones, "Ah, Sisera, I would trade with you . . . ," as if J.L. has taught him the myth by psychic transfer. Intuitive teaching has limits.

The second major shortcoming of this novel is that, except for the hostile relations that grow around Jerome, J.L.'s antithesis, nothing builds in the story except a ponderous awareness of J.L. Spiritual, social, sexual and even aesthetic hopes are vested in her — the photographer decides that the proper shot of J.L. will yield him "the perfect photograph." Inevitably the men begin to appear stupidly idolatrous and the woman — despite the author's stalwart efforts to introduce brisk, light action and dialogue — seems more and more wrapped up in a sanctimonious idea of her pure Jungian femaleness. "We can all rest now" is her last thought in the book, as if she held the gavel on all of life.

I dislike pat endings, but perhaps van Herk is entitled to one, since she has shown us a genuine moral struggle — a struggle about how to live. Williamson garnered himself a very tidy ending, and he only gave us a clumsy scuffle in the broom closet of suburban gossip.

CATHERINE KERR

** WILLIAM REYNOLDS, *Point Pelee*. Oxford, $15.95. Another in Oxford's series of photographic portraits of Canadian regions, this book takes a naturalist's approach, defining place by means of flowers, birds, reptiles, but mostly butterflies. Butterflies in the pictures appear to grow on trees, bushes to leaf in wings.

W.N.

opinions and notes

A NOTE ON "BEAR"

"You do not come to Northern Ontario to study London in 1825. Or do you?" The question arises in *Bear*,[1] when Marian Engel groups Blake, Wordsworth, Byron, Shelley and Capability Brown into the "perfect library for its period," houses it in a "classic Fowler's octagon," and isolates that on an island in Northern Ontario: the scene seems set for yet another satirical swipe at nineteenth-century cultural colonialism. The founder of the library, Colonel Cary (owner of the original bear), appears as a misplaced Beau Brummel, one of a nineteenth-century tribe of "landscape nuts," who came to Ontario intending to "make watercolours and have Robert Adam do their drawing-rooms, Humphry Repton their facades and Capability Brown their gardens." But Engel also provides an informed critic, the librarian, Lou, whose researches into Colonel Gray and his library gradually reveal that the carefully-chosen composition of the library and shape of the house should be more to the reader than another "ho-hum" patch of sociocultural criticism serving an overall indictment of "immigrant idiocies." By the end of the novella, what Lou brings back from her sojourn on Cary's island has at least as much to do with the library as with the more spectacular bear.

Lou does not always judge Colonel Cary's romanticism in the negative light of the landscape nut. After immersing herself in Trelawny's book on Byron and Shelley, Lou can see that

> All the Victorians, early or late ... were morbid geniuses. Cary was one of them and bought himself an island here. He didn't have Ackerman's Views, or Bartlett's prints to go by. He sensed what he wanted and came and found it.... He came to find his dream, leaving his practical wife behind him in York. He was adventurous, big-spirited, romantic. There was room for him in the woods.

Though Lou uses the word "morbid," she uses "genius," too, and her feeling for the worth and strength of the romantic impulse pervades the passage. Significantly, this accolade to Cary's romanticism ("He came for some big dream") directly precedes her first love-scene with the bear. Lou's first glimpse into the seriousness of the romantic soul paves the way for a descent into her own.

But there is another aspect to Cary's romanticism which seems awkwardly allied with these Shelley-esque depths of the pioneer soul. This offshoot of romantic thought is represented in Cary's library by Capability Brown, the "more practical philosophers," and the *Penny Cyclopaedia*, published, as Lou tells us, "by the society for the Promotion of Useful Knowledge." It is a strongly practical, common-sensical vein of mid-Victorian thought, linked to its predecessor, true romanticism, by its unshakeable faith in the perfectability of the human experiment.

What makes this practical, idealistic romanticism directly relevant to Cary is the design of his house. Lou notes at once that it is a "classic Fowler's octagon," a species with which she, as librarian and archivist, obviously has some familiarity. Orson Squire Fowler (1809-1887) was an American natural philosopher, whose specialty was phrenology — the determining of human character from the configuration of the skull — a "scientific" practice based upon the tidy division of the brain into spheres of control. The copious titles of a few of Fowler's books should illustrate the breadth of his interests (a scope typical of his era), and sufficiently suggest his connection with the common-sense idealism of his day:

Education Complete. Embracing Physiology, Animal and Mental; Applied to the Preservation and Restoration of Health of Body, and Power of Mind; — Self-Culture, and Perfection of Character, including the Management of Youth; — Memory and Intellectual Improvement; Applied to Self-Education and Juvenile Instruction.

Matrimony; or, Phrenology and Physiology Applied to the Selection of Congenial Companions for Life; including Directions to the Married for Living together Affectionately and Happily.

Religion. Natural and Revealed; or, the Natural Theology and Moral Bearings of Phrenology, including the Doctrine Taught, and Duties Inculcated thereby, compared with those enjoined in the Scriptures, together with a Phrenological Exposition of the Doctrines of a Future State, Materialism, Holiness, Sins, Rewards, Punishments, Depravity, a Change of Heart, Will, Foreordination, and Fatalism. By O. S. Fowler.[2]

Designing houses was a minor, though obsessive, interest of Fowler. His manual, *A Home For All: a New, Cheap, Convenient, and Superior Mode of Building*, had such success when first published in 1848, that it was revised, enlarged and re-issued in 1854 as *A Home For All: or the Gravel Wall and Octagon Mode of Building.* The work proves by a positive torrent of figures and calculations that the most practical shape for a house is octagonal. Fowler applies the same obstinate common-sense and cheerful faith in figures to the division of the space for the body as he does to the division of the space within the mind. The octagonal form is chosen, after detailed mathematical calculations, because it is "more beautiful as well as capacious, and more consonant with the predominant or governing form of Nature — the spherical."[3] "Its phrenological designer," Lou tells us, "thought it good for the brain."

In Fowler's octagon the occupant lives out the rational, ordered existence of the mid-nineteenth-century scientific mind, with each function allotted its own space, and each space contributing to the well-being and happiness of the occupant. Fowler enthuses:

> How much fretfulness and ill temper, as well as exhaustion and sickness, an unhandy house occasions. Nor does the evil end here. It often, generally, by perpetually irritating mothers, sours the tempers of their children, even BEFORE BIRTH, thus rendering the whole family bad-dispositioned BY NATURE, whereas a convenient one would have rendered them constitutionally amiable and good.[4]

He is particularly sanguine about the benefits of an exercise room, or a "gymnasium room for females" in every dwelling, as well as a space for "private dancing parties," the effects of which Fowler feels to be of special importance to human mental and physical health: "How many hopeless invalids, now dying by inches, would such rooms in our buildings restore to life, health and happiness! How many a child save from a premature grave!"[5] As Lou concludes, "He was the sort of American we are all warned about."

Beyond Fowler's enthusiasms and exclamation points lies a determined partitioning of human space; a corpus of philosophical and pseudo-scientific ideas is implicit in his design for a house. Colonel Cary chooses this model for his house — must have chosen it consciously, owning, perhaps, a well-thumbed copy of Fowler's book. We have it on good authority that his adaptation of the model was successful. On her first morning there, Lou describes the "incredible house":

> Its faceted white bulk gleamed in the early sun; its black-roofed verandahs hung like an apron over the first floor. The windows of the second storey were broad and shining. From its roof, two chimneys and a windowed lantern rose like the crown of a hat. She could hardly believe its perfection.

But, as Lou quickly realizes, the house is neither as perfect, nor as self-sufficient, as the contained bulk of its form on the landscape suggests. Immediately after

commenting on its perfection, Lou remembers the bear, and goes on to explore the area behind the house:

> From the front, the house looked single and solitary, but there was a fungus of outbuildings behind it: a broad and batten woodshed, and a tumble-down log house connected to it by something that looked like a corncrib and was perhaps a wood shelter or the remains of a chicken house. Together they formed a fenced compound.

This fungus of outbuildings behind the house would have been anathema to Orson Squire Fowler. He spends pages of his work detailing the evils of separate outbuildings, and urges the simplicity, economy, and suitability of centralized dwellings.[6] How did the Cary who built the incredible house so far forget his Fowler as to allow this fungus to flourish? The outbuildings were built, presumably, because they were needed — a corn-crib, a hen-house, an out-house, a bear-house. These structures grow up behind Cary's house because there is no room for them in Fowler's carefully-planned space. In the gap between Fowler's plan and Cary's reality lies one essential dilemma of romanticism, and the rationale behind Lou's exploration of Cary's library.

Moving from the library to the outbuildings, Lou is immediately conscious that she is taking a step "from the known to the unknown" whereas, navigating around Cary's octagonal house, she knows exactly what to expect in each room. Not only has she an inventory of the rooms and their contents, but she is knowledgeable about Fowler's traditional divisions of the house space, and notes approvingly that the kitchen "took only one plane of the octagon, as opposed to the parlour's two."

For Lou, the "perfect library" formed by the "typical early nineteenth-century mind" is also an aspect of the known. But it is out of the books in this library that Cary's cryptic notes on bears periodically fall. Informative, yet mystifying, trivial, yet disturbing, they are to the books that contain them what the outbuildings are to the house — not simply because of their shared character as the unknown, the secret fungi, but because they are Colonel Cary's creations. The outbuildings and the bear-notes qualify Lou's experience of the "typical early nineteenth-century mind" as housed in the octagon, and reflected in the library.[7] Both the practical-idealistic octagon and the typical nineteenth-century library are inadequate receptacles for whatever mode of life and thought Colonel Cary created on his island — an inadequacy which Lou strives to understand.

Lou feels closest to the brink of understanding during her reading of Trelawny's book on Shelley and Byron. Marian Engel has been heard to dismiss the prominence of Lou's researches in the library as "my fascination with the Regency bit."[8] It is nevertheless difficult to ignore the genuine urgency of Lou's search for meaning in her reading. She exhibits both a genuine need to discover meaning, and a strong sense of its reciprocal need to be discovered. She mentions a "mystical acrostic," and even an "I-Ching," as possible forms that such a construction of meaning could take. But her librarian's soul always undercuts the validity of the irrational avenue to meaning: "She did not believe in non-rational processes." Still, her intimations of significance persist: "There's some connection there," she says while reading Trelawny. "Trelawny. Colonel Cary. The bear. There was some connection, some unfingerable intimacy among them, some tie between longing and desire and the achieveable." Here Engel allows Lou to isolate and articulate an essential romantic dilemma, the unbridgeable gap between desire and the achievable — the same sort of gap as that between Fowler's octagon whole and indivisible, and Cary's octagon with a

bear on its back step. She reaches the conclusion after the sudden realization that the worth of Trelawny is the fact that he speaks with his own voice. "Trelawny's good. He speaks in his own voice. He is unfair, but HE SPEAKS IN HIS OWN VOICE. . . . Colonel Cary had left her tiny, painful, creepily paper-saving notes. She was still searching the house to find his voice."

Lou cannot recognize that the creepily paper-saving notes *are* Cary's voice. Trelawny's comes across with greater clarity precisely because it is biographical, possesses a measure of detachment (is not, as Lou notes, required to be "fair"). Trelawny talks *about* poets, and *about* vision, without having to *be* a poet, to convey the vision. Cary's problem is one of vision-conveying — a basic romantic dilemma again. How do you speak of visions to a sane world without seeming ridiculous, stilted, fulsome, insane? How do you tell of bears and retain your voice, or your credibility? (A problem Engel herself has encountered.) The great romantics in Cary's library added their own bear-notes and outbuildings to the world of articulated human experience by virtue of their visions of the human subconscious. Even for Blake, Shelley, and Wordsworth, a central problem was the translation of the moment of vision into apprehensible human experience. Apart from the bear itself, the only evidence that Colonel Cary had anything other than that pervasive typical nineteenth-century mind is that of the notes. They record a fragment of his vision, whatever it may have been. And though Lou, in the middle of the novella, cannot hear Cary's voice, she does hear it eventually.

Response to Engel's *Bear* indicates that the average reader sees the novella in much the same way as Lou initially sees Cary's notes on bears. The truncation of Lou's character, and the cryptic nature of the book's style, are suggestive of an elusive inner logic which is as informative, and as mystifying, as the fragmented notes. In the same way that the notes seem trivial, irrelevant glosses on more "significant" works, the novella has struck many (critics as well as casual readers) as trivial, a badly-executed exercise in symbol-mongering, demanding, as the notes do, an effort of faith and I-Ching to release a dubious significance. But in the same way that the notes and the bear are necessary qualifiers of the Victorian vision embodied in house and library, the novella is a valuable extension of the world of articulated human experience right here in the twentieth century.

NOTES

[1] Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1976.

[2] Orson Squire Fowler, *A Home For All: or the Gravel Wall and Octagon Mode of Building* (New York: Fowlers and Wells, 1854), in its appended "List of Works on Phrenology, Physiology, Hydropathy, Etc.," pp. 2-4.

[3] Fowler, p. 88.

[4] Fowler, p. 14.

[5] Fowler, p. 65.

[6] Fowler, pp. 66-81.

[7] Cary's note is a particularly apt qualification of its containing book in the case of the note which falls from Milton's *Poetical Works*.

[8] In conversation with Prof. Frank Watt and his students, at the Univ. of Toronto, December 1980.

MICHELLE GADPAILLE

DAVIES, HIS CRITICS, & THE CANADIAN CANON

ROBERTSON DAVIES'S TRILOGY, especially *Fifth Business*, has proved to be a mecca for critics. Canadian literature has at last been blessed with a puzzle, a seemingly unbounded web of magian intricacies and mythological allusions, which unwary

critics have wandered into, like flies into the spider's parlour. And, of course, they (we) have done so in response to Davies' arachnidian invitation. However, in entering the parlour, what have we done to ourselves and what have we done to the text? Such are the questions I want to ask. The two questions are related, since how we *see* the text depends on our sense of what we see as our task and that in turn conditions our sense of what the text actually is.[1] If we want to see a puzzle, that is indeed what we will see. And if we value the puzzle, then we will value the text that projects it.

In the most recent foray into the Davies web (*Studies in Robertson Davies' Deptford Trilogy*, ed. R. G. Lawrence and S. L. Macey), several more puzzling strands are isolated and described.[2] We learn, for example, that the initials ME + DR (appropriate mirror image of RD) = Robertson Davies[3]; that Denise Hornick's first name "recalls" Dionysius and her last name links her to "female devotees [of Dionysius] wearing horns"[4]; that Diana Marfleet is linked not only to her huntress namesake (and Ramsay "therefore" with Actaeon) but to the Pietà and the Great Mother (*Ram*say, still horned, is metamorphosed from stag to sacrificial *ram*)[5]; and that the stone in the snowball is, variously, the philosopher's stone, a sacred symbol of Cybele (the Great Mother), and a covert reference to Jung's childhood secret and long-hidden stone.[6] Davies himself, in a somewhat disingenuous preface, speaks of the "allegorical element" in the story which, he suggests, "is for others to discover and determine" and thereby make him "seem cleverer than [he] really [is]."[7] Indeed it does! There are, to be sure, some useful insights to be gained from this volume — for example, Merivale's convincing case for MacLennan's influence on Davies, Patricia Monk's tracking down of the curious bear-cult lore behind *The Manticore*, or Samuel Macey's intricate clocking of time and watchmaking in the trilogy.[8] But even these seem usually to be moving away from the novels instead of toward them, pursuing allusions, myths, background, in a flurry of what might be called polymathic perversity.

Now, texts that lend themselves to a certain kind of analysis current at a given time, tend to be raised to a high level of value by the very fact that they can be studied, and their secrets "revealed," according to a particular methodology. Thus, during the heyday of new criticism, Donne, whose explosive rhythms, juxtapositions, and ambiguities were especially open to the formalist and organicist ideology of that movement, was overvalued at the expense of writers like Jonson or Pope. Davies' texts (like those of Fowles and others) are highly self-conscious and clever, alert to their own allusiveness and somewhat coy in their relation to their readers. These qualities, as is evident not only from the commentary cited above but from much of the work done so far on Davies, lend themselves to a scrutiny eminently suited to current critical practice and hence to the production of scholarly discourse in the form of articles which, in ways very different from the "new criticism," pursue allusions and intricacies beyond the text or chase them around within it. The Deptford novels, written by a highly erudite professor of literature, who, despite his protestations, may very well have been able to predict the effect his writing would have on the academic community, offer a gold mine of allusions and relations to sift and examine, or, to alter the metaphor, a dazzling array of clues to follow up, puzzle over, and finally tie together in a unifying interpretation. *Fifth Business* thus teases our critical appetites. What, over the past several years, has emerged in relation to it and the trilogy in general, is an abundance of intertextual and comparative studies (Davies

and the Faust tradition, Davies and Heine, Davies and Mann),[9] scholarly and/or anagrammatic trackings of names and allusions,[10] and, especially, Jungian mytho-psychological probings.[11] Teaching the novel generates the same kind of activity. Who has not decoded Libby Doe, Gloria Mundy, and Agnes Day to duly impressed students (has anyone, by the way, looked into Davies' relations with Nabokov?)?

The textual element which I regard as central to most of these investigations is the *clue*. The text is to be de-ciphered; the clue is raised to the level of special signifier. What it signifies may begin as a mystery, but the critic sees it as his function to unravel that mystery. The *name* (Denyse "recalls" Dionysius) is the paradigmatic clue, setting the stage for a complex performance, based on a specific *mise-en-scène*. The text, that is, is seen and read in a particular way: it provides clues. Behind the clue, there is the assumption that it can be followed up and fitted into a pattern; a meaning can then emerge from the pattern. The search for meaning thus inevitably becomes the search for clues. But what is not acknowledged is that the meaning thereby produced is dependent on the assumption that the clue is the key signifier.

What I said before about Davies' arachnidian invitation comes in precisely at this point. For Davies underlines his clues, invites the reader to follow and ultimately unravel them, even, at times, provides an explanation himself. A well known example of this is Liesl's taunting challenge to Dunstan Ramsay: "do you know what my name really means, Liselotte Vitziputzli? It sounds so funny, but one day you will stumble on its real meaning" (*Fifth Business*, p. 227).[12] The question is not answered till near the end of the final volume and even then it is answered mockingly, incompletely — the invitation to explore is still open and has been admirably accepted by F. L. Radford.[13] Again, the re-naming of Dunstan, itself part of a pattern of re-naming explicitly pointed to by the author, is explained by Diana Marfleet in terms of its legendary appropriateness; and there too the explanation is incomplete. Dunstan's new name becomes a clue to his "sainthood." Much later on, we are invited to see its applicability in the fight scene with Liesl. If we have failed to make the structural connection, the next scene with Padre Blazon makes it for us. Even then, as Wilfrid Cude suggests, the associations are far from complete.[14] Critics, then, in seeking to *explain* Davies' texts, are in a way doomed to *perform* them, to act out in their analyses the very gestures made within the text.

The role of the clue as signifier is consistent with the status of the book, or the whole trilogy, as a mystery. The cry at the end of *Fifth Business*, "Who killed Boy Staunton?" echoes through the next two volumes and is only answered definitively in the final pages of *World of Wonders*. Hence the central mystery, that of the plot, is solved for us, as it is in the conventional detective novel. Its clues fall into place. But those other clues, which exist on the level of "meaning" rather than plot, are left for us to investigate. And these clues are weighted with a promise of significance that I doubt can be delivered.

It might fruitfully be argued that there is a structural connection between the process the reader (or critic) goes through, of spying clues, identifying them, and assigning significance to the series thus constructed, and the process of solving a mystery in this, as in any "ordinary" mystery story. Thus an account of *Fifth Business*, say, could be written concentrating on these structural connections and suggesting that at a metatextual level, *Fifth Business* is "about" the process of investigation and interpretation

itself — it sends us chasing after clues, not so much for the sake of what the clues signify, but for the sake of the chase itself, for the processes which looking for clues and following them up involve us in. After all, each of the three volumes is a kind of autobiography which presents a man tracking himself down (*The Manticore*, because of the psychoanalytic context, being the most explicit in this regard).[15]

A reading like the one just sketched would hence surround those readings which are derived from the specific signifieds that the clues refer to, and subordinate, or bracket, or deconstruct, all attempts to construct a particular meaning for the puzzle. The text, it would assert, is operating on a different level of discourse, that of signification itself. Regarded thus, the text dissolves the very meanings it encourages its readers or critics to construct. Such "meanings" would then be seen as simply the result of a calculated effect that the text has on a reader, rather than a "true" rendering of what the text is "about"; and hence to perform the text would be the only thing that one could in fact do with it.

Whether such a meta-reading would be "valid" or not, I am not concerned with here. (It would, no doubt, be fashionable!) My purpose is less to assert than to question. The text certainly *involves* us in clue-tracking; but to assert that it is *about* that process is to take (for the key to its meaning) not the clues that it proffers but the fact that it proffers them. How can we claim that the latter is prior to the former, or vice versa? Whether, and on what basis, we can assign a priority to one particular vehicle of interpretation is a complex theoretical question. But let us at least be clear about our assumptions.

This brings me back to my original question — what, in accepting Davies' arachnidian invitation, have we done to ourselves and to the text? We may, indeed, have trapped ourselves through our very attraction to the web, i.e., through our unexamined love for our own critical methods. As for the text itself, we have canonized it (an appropriate metaphor, I think, given Ramsay's interest in saints) because of its susceptibility to the sorts of analyses in which the clue is central. We hold it up for admiration because it contains all the meanings which we have in fact put there.

In an essay on *As For Me And My House*, Morton L. Ross employs the same metaphor as I do and makes some similar points.[16] Ross traces the history of the criticism of that novel, showing how the introduction of critical concepts like "ambiguity," "unreliable narrator," and the like, has led to a concomitant rise in *evaluation*, to the extent that *As For Me* is now often classed with the best novels in English. Ross's essay corroborates the point I am making here, although I disagree with his apparent assumption that there is a simple, readily available meaning of this or any other novel, which is being distorted by overemphasizing the role of the reader. He fails to show why he thinks the newer critics are wrong in their readings or to indicate what actual features of the text they are responding to, though he is extremely trenchant in mapping out their assumptions and mocking their conclusions. Another thing that I want to emphasize in the present essay, which Ross does not discuss, is the powerful presence in today's academic circles of the need for discourse. This leads naturally to the production of discourse and, again naturally, part of the function of such discourse is to reassess and ultimately replace earlier discourse. Hence, in the case of *As For Me*, the production of new interpretations and hence the making ambiguous of what was earlier thought to be perfectly clear. With the Davies trilogy, later discourse seems not to be re-

placing, but rather corroborating and complicating, earlier work. The obvious has been taken care of, and the dark corners are now being peered into.

In his critique of the morality of the trilogy, Stephen Bonnycastle argues that it "sets itself against the ideals of liberal education in an uncompromising . . . way and promotes a fierce aristocracy of the spirit." To be really educated, to really possess one's spirit is to enter into a tiny elite — culture and education are seen as private property.[17] Critical fascination with the erudition and allusiveness of the novels seems to me to reinforce this view — in the sense that knowing all these things puts us there too. We can enter the select circle by catching the allusions, recognizing the clues. This suggests that the basis for our "canonization" of *Fifth Business* might go beyond the critical issues raised earlier. To examine what lies beyond, we must veer temporarily into the realm of sociology. What interest, what stake, we may ask, do we have in the canonization of texts at all?

I think it is fair to say that the Canadian academy is on the lookout for masterpieces; and it is understood that the critical establishment will ordain the priests, or guardians, of these works, once they are produced. But this is only one, and perhaps the least generous, of the motivations behind the widespread desire for Canadian masterworks, a desire which found its *reductio ad absurdum* in the vote taken not long ago to establish Canada's greatest novels. Masterpieces are, after all, a delicious temptation — they are like Falstaff, "not only witty in [themselves], but the cause that wit is in other men." By the challenge they offer, they can disturb and enrich our discourse. But this fact does not in itself justify the process of canonization that is currently going on, nor does it explain our desire to canonize certain texts.

At the 1980 meeting of ACUTE in Montreal, Robert Kroetsch proclaimed in public what people teaching Canadian literature have known for quite a while: that there does indeed exist an unofficial canon of "central" Canadian texts which looms behind the making of reading lists from first year English to graduate school.[18] It is now possible, even likely, that a new M.A. graduate from a Canadian university will have studied *Fifth Business, As For Me And My House*, or *The Stone Angel* four or five times in her/his five or six years at university. As I suggested above, there are many causes for this situation. What I want to emphasize is that the desire currently felt in Canadian academic circles for great works derives not only from literary and quasiliterary considerations but from unacknowledged ideological needs as well. From an ideological standpoint, the establishment of a canon creates a mythology which asserts that Canadian literature exists, that it is legitimate and successful, that it is worth studying and worth writing about. Masterpieces, then, have not only literary value, but ideological value as well — they proclaim Canada's coming of age and they legitimize, even valorize, a wealth of literary investigation. If we look at the actual canon, we can see too that these ideological pressures are linked to a conservative ethos, manifested not only in the existence of the canon itself but also in the form and content (narrative structure and overt morality) of the canonized texts.

If then we have overvalued *Fifth Business*, there are powerful incentives to have done so. But these incentives themselves need exposure and examination, and our critical strategies need at least that measure of clarity that can be achieved by a close scrutiny of assumptions and aims.

NOTES

1 See Stanley Fish's two articles, "What is Stylistics and Why are they saying such

Terrible Things about it?" The first part appeared in *Approaches to Aesthetics*, ed. S. Chatman (N.Y. 1973), pp. 109-52, and the second part in *Boundary 2*, 8, No. 1 (Fall 1979), 129-45. In the latter, he argues that the recognition of "formal patterns" in a work of literature is necessarily the product of a "prior interpretive act."

2 *Studies in Robertson Davies' Deptford Trilogy*, ed. Robert G. Lawrence and Samuel L. Macey. English Literary Studies, #20 (Victoria, 1980). Cited hereafter as *SRDDT*.

3 Patricia Merivale, "The (Auto)-Biographical Compulsions of Dunstan Ramsay," *SRDDT*, 64.

4 F. L. Radford, "The Great Mother and the Boy: Jung, Davies, and *Fifth Business*," *SRDDT*, 73.

5 Radford, *op. cit.*, 69-70, 72.

6 Terry Goldie, "The Folkloric Background of Robertson Davies' Deptford Trilogy," *SRDDT*, 28, Radford, *op. cit.*, 71-72, and Merivale, *op. cit.*, 59, respectively.

7 Robertson Davies, "The Deptford Trilogy in Retrospect," *SRDDT*, 11.

8 Merivale, *op. cit.*, Patricia Monk, "Davies and the Drachenloch," *SRDDT*, 100-13, and Samuel L. Macey, "Time, Clockwork, and the Devil in Robertson Davies' Deptford Trilogy," *SRDDT*, 32-44.

9 The connections with the Faust tradition, and hence with Goethe and the "old play," are clear enough and are referred to in the text itself, as well as by several commentators; those with Heine (also following from the Faust hook-up) have been traced by F. L. Radford in *ESC*, 4, no. 1 (Spring 1978), 95-100; those with Mann mentioned by Radford, have been developed by Patricia Merivale, *op. cit.*, 62-63, who argues that Davies has designed each of the three Deptford novels after specific texts of Mann. See also Nancy Bjerring, "Deep in the Old Man's Puzzle," *Canadian Literature* 62 (Autumn 1974), pp. 49-60.

10 In addition to those already mentioned, see Wilfred Cude, "Miracle and Art in *Fifth Business*," *JCS*, 12, no. 4 (November 1974), 3-16, as well as Radford's article in *ESC* (see note 9). Ronald Sutherland's allegorical reading of *FB* (see *The New Hero* and his article in *JCS*, 12, no. 1, 75-81) fits in here too.

11 See Gordon Roper, "Robertson Davies' *Fifth Business* and That Old Fantastical Duke of Dark Corners, C. G. Jung," *JCF*, 1, no. 1 (Winter 1972), and Goldie, Merivale and Radford. Patricia Monk, in "Confessions of a Sorcerer's Apprentice: *World of Wonders* and the Deptford Trilogy of Robertson Davies," *Dalhousie Review*, 56 (1976-77), 366-72, goes beyond Jung to Spengler in linking the careers of the four major protagonists of the trilogy to quest myths.

12 The text I have used is the Penguin edition (Harmondsworth, 1977).

13 In "Heinrich Heine, the Virgin, and the Hummingbird: *Fifth Business* — a Novel and its Subconscious," cited in note 9. See also Gertrude Jaron Lewis's "Vitzliputzli Revisited," *Canadian Literature*, 76 (Spring 1978), pp. 132-34.

14 See "Miracle and Art in *FB*" (cited in note 10) and "Historiography and those damned saints: shadow and light in *Fifth Business*," *JCS*, 12, no. 1 (February 1977), 47-67.

15 The function of the law as a correlative to the psychoanalytic process, studied by Peter Brigg in "*The Manticore* and the Law," *SRDDT*, 82-99, would also fit into this argument, since the legal process is above all a way of knowing, or getting to know.

16 Morton L. Ross "The Canonization of *As For Me And My House*: A Case Study," in *Figures in a Ground* (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1978), pp. 189-205.

17 Stephen Bonnycastle, "Robertson Davies and the ethics of monologue," *JCS*, 12, no. 1 (February 1977), 38. See Ralph Heintzman's reply in the editorial of the same issue for a different view (as well as Cude's articles mentioned above). The Heintzman piece offers a good example, I think, of the tendency to overvalue, based not so much on the intellectual framework of the novels as on the moral claims they make, claims which are in a sense the flipside of the aspects of the trilogy I have been considering.

18 Kroetsch made the point during the question period following a reading. Some of his remarks might easily be interpreted, and hence rejected, as nothing more than sour grapes. But the general point about the canon itself, and the further argument that most of the canonized texts are relatively "straight," easily accessible, non-experimental ones, seem undeniable.

ANTHONY B. DAWSON

ON THE VERGE

**** S. E. D. SHORTT, ed. *Medicine In Canadian Society: Historical Perspectives.* McGill-Queen's Univ. Press, $23.95. Prof. Shortt's introduction, entitled "Antiquarians and Amateurs," remarks on the low visibility and high value of medical history in Canada — a value more philosophical than pragmatic in that it seeks to "reunite with a common heritage an increasingly fragmented discipline." One could write the same sentence for the history of science generally. In Canada, with our history of political histories, we stand in need of substantially more analyses of the relations between the sciences and our broad cultural heritage than we have, and Shortt's book is therefore a doubly welcome contribution to our understanding of ideas. "Doubly," because the essays it brings together are themselves fascinating to read. They range in stance from the solemnly statistical to the wryly amused, and they range in topic from the impact of particular diseases (influenza, cholera, smallpox) to attitudes towards insanity, antisepsis, abortion, and public health. Connecting most clearly with intellectual history are essays by Michael Bliss on Christian beliefs about sexuality in the nineteenth century, and by Veronica Strong-Boag on medicine and feminism. With an excellent guide to further reading in the field, this is a book that thoughtful readers of literature will find well worth reflecting upon.

W.N.

**** *Gathering What the Great Nature Provided.* Douglas & McIntyre and Univ. of Washington Press, $18.95. This book — about the food traditions of the Gitskan peoples, assembled by the residents of 'Ksan village — is unusually rich with information. Not only does it contain details on the foods available to the Tsimshian before and after the European arrival, it also explains cooking methods, and offers indirect glimpses of the code of ethics which related food to the human place in Nature. The illustrations by Hilary Stewart are basic, but clear; the photographs would have been more instructive in colour.

W.N.

*** WILLIAM MANSELL & GARY LOW, *North American Birds of Prey.* Gage, $29.95. "I have seen exactly twice as many merlins in the past twenty years as I had in the same period preceding,'" writes Mansell, the *Globe & Mail*'s nature columnist; then he adds the kind of phrase that lifts his text from descriptive copy into delightful essay: "But statistics do not say why, and that is what I'd like to know." He enquires beyond surface information, in other words, and reflects on the habits of birds and the habits of falconers besides. The fascination and the nature of the fascination with birds of prey are both his subject. Low's paintings, all in colour, are handsome designs, but static — pictured against a backdrop rather than in nature.

W.N.

*** BELL, I. WILEY, ed. *Slaves No More: Letters from Liberia 1833-1869.* Univ. Press of Kentucky, $21.50. During the three decades before the American Civil War, many slaves were purchasing their freedom; others were granted it; still others fled to freedom — many of them to Canada, where settlements became established in Nova Scotia and on the Gulf Islands. A large group returned to a part of Africa they had culturally scarcely more to do with than they did with Canada: Liberia. But at least they were "free." This collection of 273 letters back to the Old Country (i.e., the U.S.A.) records many of the problems of cultural dislocation. "I take this opportunity of droping these few lines as a man of much respect," writes one man. "We land on the fare shores of Liberia safe and with a little difficulty. Sence the attack of the African fever I have enjoy good health, so have father. Mother had several severe attack.... Both of them send there love to you both hopeing that your latter days may be more prosperous than your former has been, glorous, honable, and independence." Such sentences — and those that follow, pleading for "good chool Books" to be sent — convey the pressures and the aspirations of a time more vividly than scores of formal histories.

W.N.

*** OSCAR WHITE MUSCARELLA, *Ladders to Heaven.* McClelland & Stewart, $40.00. This is a handsome book — a coffee table book with meaning, a catalogue with information in it, a visually clear and scholarly introduction to the "art treasures from Lands of the Bible." As the foreword avers, the catalogue (for an exhibition originally presented at the Royal Ontario Museum) is a record of ancient artifacts and also an exploration of the collective art and — in large degree — *shared* culture of the lands and religious systems of the Middle East. The writers intend it to be consequently a trib-

ute to the unity of the spiritual aspirations of mankind. Perhaps more directly it is a reader's guide — with maps, transcriptions, interpretations, and illustrations. Those in colour make one long for more in colour. But the black-and-white ones serve scholarship, and the scholarship throughout is substantial.

W.N.

*** REBECCA SISLER, *Passionate Spirits: A History of the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts, 1880-1980*. Clarke Irwin, $35.00. In 1880 the Marquis of Lorne established the Canadian Academy, in response to the impulses of current Canadian artists and his own enthusiasm for an establishment that would give public recognition to an essentially private cultural endeavour. Academics, as sculptor Rebecca Sisler observes, have become symbols of Establishment since then — certainly the Canadian Academy's various internal tensions and its initial lack of warmth towards the Group of Seven, for example, have marked it as a conservative structure — yet the Academy has helped grant respectability to the leading edges of modern art as well. Simply by being an institutional rather than a cultural history, however, this book pales too often into lists of bureaucratic officers. There is information here, undoubtedly, for future art historians — and the work is handsomely illustrated — but one longs yet for a Canadian equivalent to Bernard Smith's *European Vision and the South Pacific*, a work about ideas and attitudes as well as about the politics of membership.

W.N.

*** EDITH IGLAUER, *Seven Stones, A Portrait of Arthur Erickson, Architect*. Harbour Publishing/Univ. of Washington Press, $29.95. Richly illustrated, with architectural plans and drawings as well as photographs (many in colour) of Erickson's remarkable buildings, *Seven Stones* is a quietly insightful study, by a journalist and enthusiast, of the shaping mind behind Erickson's shaping style. It proceeds by interview and reports by means of much quotation. Hence Erickson himself: "Concrete is as noble a material as limestone." And Erickson again: There must be a "dialogue" between *form* and *site*. And Iglauer: he is "a witty, semi-mystical, not at all humble man in his mid-fifties." And, revealingly, a fellow architect: he "designs [buildings] as a visitor. The kids at Simon Fraser do get tired of being part of a designed experience, no matter how Zen and open-minded. . . ." Repeatedly, however, the *force* of the designs takes over. Influenced by Angkor Wat and Japanese gardeners, Erickson has revelled in the impact of intersecting planes. Now if only he could become fascinated by texture and colour as well. . . .

W.N.

*** D. J. HALL, *Clifford Sifton. Volume I: The Young Napoleon, 1861-1900*. $27.50. There are figures in Canadian history whom one looks back on with about the same degree of affection as one might accord a sixteenth-century condottiere. They were there; they were powerful; they profoundly affected the country's history; they were in some ways admirable and in most ways unloveable. William Van Horne was one of them and Clifford Sifton another. Sifton deserves a biography, and D. J. Hall is providing it as a massive two-decker. The first volume, to 1900, contains much of the important part of Sifton's career: his period as a provincial minister, his entry into national politics, his immigration policies which drastically changed the ethnic and cultural makeup of Canada, his entry into the newspaper world. It is full of public detail and skimpy on private, for Sifton was in some ways a reticent man. It is good at spotting the main trends and the connections, but written in a kind of utility prose whose outbreaks into eloquence tend to be disastrous. Eg.: "A remarkable iron will asserted itself, a fierce determination to overcome the handicap and prove himself."

G.W.

*** CLAUDE BISSELL, *The Young Vincent Massey*. Univ. of Toronto Press, $22.50. There are few Canadians whose image has tarnished so rapidly after death as that of Vincent Massey. Once he was valued as giving a lustre to the image of Canada abroad and as one of the fosterers at home of a distinctively Canadian culture. More recently he has been seen as a social snob, a cultural elitist, a political opportunist, and even a religious climber who ascended out of the Methodists, not into the Anglican Church of Canada but into the Church of England, where he managed to be confirmed by the Archbishop of Canterbury himself. An aura of the pettily ambitious now hangs over his name, and a suspicion that his desire to turn himself into an untitled aristocrat made him betray Canadian democratic traditions. The time has certainly come for an adjusting of the balance, a new recognition of Massey's real contributions to the making of modern Canada, and

also perhaps an admission that if a man is not gifted in the arts, a civilized dilettantism like Massey's may well be the next best thing. Claude Bissell attempts this task in *The Young Vincent Massey*, which takes Massey's life up to 1935, when he became High Commissioner in London. Thus some of the most interesting years of his life are yet to come, including the period of the Massey Commission. Bissell bases his book "primarily on Vincent Massey's private papers," and rarely shows Massey through outside views except his own, which is favourable. He writes with his usual fluency and grace, and there is a blandness to the book which comes partly from its consistency of approval, but is partly also a reflection, one feels, of his subject's nature. We still need the balanced study of the heir to new industrial money seeking his way into the preserves of old aristocratic wealth, and serving his country remarkably on the way.

G.W.

*** THOMAS BERGER, *Fragile Freedoms: Human Rights and Dissent in Canada*. Clarke Irwin, n.p. Thomas Berger dropped out of active politics to become a Supreme Court Justice, but in a very important way he has never been other than political, since he is deeply concerned for the freedom and rights of the minorities in Canada's avowedly pluralist society, whether they are native peoples, or ethnic groups, or people who hold unpopular opinions. His great single contribution was *Northern Frontier, Northern Homeland*, the 1977 report of his one-man commission on the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline in which he showed a clearer recognition than earlier official representatives of the fundamental rights of the native peoples of the North. *Fragile Freedoms* is an extension of this concern to other minorities whose rights are or have been endangered in the process of developing a Canadian unity which politicians have perhaps too often seen in nationalist rather than confederal terms. He writes of the Acadians, the Métis, and the francophones in provinces other than Québec, of the Japanese banished from the Pacific Coast in World War II, of persecutions of Communists and Jehovah's Witnesses, of the implications of the 1970 invoking of the War Measures Act, and of the struggle of the Nishga Indians to win their aboriginal rights to land. Surprisingly, for a British Columbian, he neglects one of the other great civil liberties struggles in Canada, that of the Doukhobors to be allowed to live according to their beliefs. These essays were originally lectures for a civil liberties seminar, and those familiar with Canadian history will find little original research in them. What is fresh and important is the way Berger holds a mirror before us, showing how often the majority has in our country oppressed the minority, and stressing the fact that only if the minorities are safeguarded can we think of ourselves as truly democratic.

G.W.

** CECIL J. HOWTON & WILLIAM J. SMITH, *The Sash Canada Wore*. Univ. of Toronto Press, $15.00. The Orange Order, like other fraternal organizations, has long had an appeal in Canada. Such organizations were partly social, partly ideological, and they had the effect of institutionalizing various social norms. To trace the growth of the Orange Order is therefore to trace the spread of a set of ideas; for students of Canadian writing possibly the most useful function of this book therefore is its revelation of the interrelation between culture and historical geography. Contrary to popular belief, geography is a person-centred discipline as well as one enamoured of the land. The authors, literate social scientists, make ample use of statistics and maps; if their generalizations about the spread of Loyalism seem perhaps overinclusive, their methodology is instructive.

W.N.

** JANE CORKIN, *Twelve Canadians: Contemporary Canadian Photography*. McClelland & Stewart, n.p. "In order to create a legend," says photographer John Reeves, "you have to photograph and talk and write and talk and photograph . . . with care . . . and . . . often." "Often" isn't shown much by this slim book, but it does demonstrate "with care" some select examples of the current art of Canadian photography. Reeves himself, Robert Bourdeau, David Hlynsky, and Volker Seding are the most impressive practitioners, their work ranging from Bourdeau's delight in visual texture to Hlynsky's holographic magic, from Reeves's revelations of personality to Seding's technically contrived images of revelation. Sensible commentaries accompany the sharp plates, although — if they are invitations to a legend — the legend itself remains unclear.

W.N.

** WAYNE BARRETT & ANNE MACKAY, *The St. John River Valley*. Oxford, $15.95; JOHN DE VISSER, *Upper Canada Village*. Oxford, $15.95. The latest in Oxford's visual glimpses of Ca-

nadian regions look at history arranged in Ontario and history ill-at-ease in New Brunswick. De Visser's photographs are the more consistently fine: crisp glances at artifacts, trades, and people in costume. But Barrett's and Mackay's portray a region doing battle with its own image: nineteenth-century pastoralism and an apparent industrial reliance seem to counter each other. It's a more dynamic view of history than De Visser is able to provide, and to some degree an illumination of the differences between a static region-by-definition and an active region-in-space-and-time.

W.N.

** GABRIELLE ROY et al., *Chapeau bas*. Les Editions du Blé, n.p. This book is a set of six memoirs by people associated with the Manitoba French theatre and the world of music. Illustrated and fragmentary, it is therefore best seen as a kind of scrapbook, in which Gabrielle Roy's own piece is central. It provides a glimpse of her amateur theatrical career with Le Cercle Molière in the late 1930's, but more than that, her essay is a personal testament; theatre became for her, she writes, a *porte ouverte* — to "life" and to wider horizons.

W.N.

* PETER DESBARATS, *Canada Lost, Canada Found*. McClelland & Stewart, $00.00. *Canada Lost, Canada Found* is perhaps as good an example as one can find of how lost and bewildered even Canadians who think themselves informed have become. Peter Desbarats is an experienced journalist with a series of reasonably perceptive books to his credit. But his latest, a passionate tract for the times of confusion, is itself an example of what it criticizes. For Desbarats is no more able than any of the commentators who cling to outworn political orthodoxies to offer a timely solution to our ills. He complains that we are indeed the most over-governed country in the world, and goes a long way towards proving it with his evidence regarding the growing power of the various bureaucracies — federal, provincial, municipal — who roost upon our backs. Yet, failing to see that Macdonald's National Policy is the historic root of our present national disagreements, and that Pierre Trudeau's drive for "unity" has produced merely deeper divisions, he still seems to find the possibility of a solution in some new centralism that would curb provincial autonomies that would turn them to positive use.

G.W.

Among recent reference books are several with narrow but particular uses, including *Contemporary Authors*, 102 (Gale, $66.00) with a 9-column sketch (by B. H. May) and interview (by C. H. Gervais) concerning Gordon Sinclair; it is of interest primarily for its portrait of Sinclair in the 1920's and 1930's, when he was a political journalist with remarkable energy, and for Sinclair's connections with Hemingway. *Something About the Author*, 24 (Gale, $44.00) also has a 9-column commentary, this time on Archibald Belaney, and primarily of use to those who see Belaney as a children's author — biographical material, with quotations and references for further reading. The 24-column entry on John Galt, in *Nineteenth Century Literary Criticism*, 1 (Gale, $55.00) contains "excerpts from contemporary criticism," by which (this new series advises us) is meant quotations from nineteenth-century journalism; the promise and the fact are curiously different: the Galt excerpts date from 1805 to 1976, and the additional bibliography unaccountably omits all reference to Elizabeth Waterston's valuable commentary on Galt in Canada. The *Directory of Canadian Plays and Playwrights* (Playwrights, n.p.) is a catalogue list of plays available from several different publishers, but is more than that; it contains brief biographies, indications of running times, lists of forthcoming plays, and still more data — and is a handy resource for theatre historians and dramaturges. Of another dimension in reference books are Frank J. Wilstach's *A Dictionary of Similes* (1916; Gale rpt., $33.00) and *Metaphors We Live By*, by a linguist, George Lakoff, and a philosopher, Mark Johnson (Univ. of Chicago, $13.95). Wilstach's *Dictionary* indexes various writers' similes under a series of keywords, for what purpose is difficult to know; looking up *shine*, *florid*, and *beard*, we can discover Kipling's "pile of fish" which "shone like a dump of fluid silver," Anon.'s "florid as a milk-maid," and Sheridan's "beard like an artichoke, with dry shrivelled jaws": memorable phrases, all. The Lakoff and Johnson book is more of an enquiry into the process of human thought, which the authors take to be largely metaphorical, indicating that *metaphor* means *concept*, and that an empirical fear of metaphor derives from a fear of subjectivity. Some of the metaphorical clusters it probes include notions of future (involving virtue, the rational, "up") and past (involving gravity, the emotional, and "down"), containers, conduits, creation, causation, etc. Burdened by its jargon, the book is more seriously flawed by its cultural bias,

of which the authors seem unaware; repeatedly they talk of "human" resources, when in practice (as a wider grasp of world literature would teach them) they mean "Judaeo-Christian" in broad terms and "American" in narrow.

In some ways, books of humour are reference books also; we read them in fragments, and usually find only parts of them to be funny. So it is with *The Maple Laugh Forever*, ed. Douglas Barbour and Steven Scobie (Hurtig, $18.95; pa. $7.95), a salutary reminder that Canadians do laugh; *Maple* is a kind of update of *The Blasted Pine*, and gives every indication of a shift in what the society finds funny. This book is full of contemporary ironies, mostly about sex and language (as in works by Gom and Ondaatje), often more pointed than funny; it also seems to presume that 1960's rebelliousness is intrinsically funny, which is true often enough to cause one to wonder. Duncan Macpherson's *Daily smile Sourire quotidien* (PAC, $12.95) is an exhibition of Macpherson's newspaper cartoons — good on international figures, superb on Dief and Pierre, less persuasive in its moralist moods, and downright bad on people (Bennett, Lyon) who are clearly sketched from imagination rather than life; significantly, Macpherson says it's the cynic in him, not the moralist, that reacts to situations.

Two recent reprints are of interest. Laura Goodman Salverson's *Confessions of an Immigrant's Daughter* (Univ. of Toronto Social History of Canada Series, $30.00; pa. $15.00), with an introduction by K. P. Stich, is "a rare first person account of growing up Icelandic in the New World" between 1890 and 1923, and is of interest to readers concerned with autobiographical and fictional method, ethnic history, feminism, and Salverson alone. The "confessional nature" of the book, Stich writes, imparts an "authenticity" to the book, but never tells all. Indeed not. But it does tell you about childhood, school, religion, and homelife, in sufficient detail to *depict* a place and a culture and a time. I like the conversational control Salverson manages here — the "fictionalizing" of her past, which paradoxically brings it to life. Another voice from the past is that of Captain John Knox, not the theologian but an Irish-born army officer in the North American campaigns of the mid-eighteenth century, whose journal is a source book for details on the life and times of a soldier. First published in 1769, the journal reappeared from the Champlain Society in 1914, then from the Folio Society in 1976; with an introduction by Brian Connell, it appears again from Pendragon House ($5.95) as *The Siege of Quebec*. Maps and lithographs illustrate the work; but it is most vigorous in its records of sights at sea, its accounts of rations and comparative prices in Nova Scotia and Ireland, its details about the animals of the new world and the pressures of moving camp, its list of the army orders at the siege of Quebec, its portraits of Wolfe, Murray, and Montcalm, and its documentation of the British consolidation in Quebec after the Battle of the Plains of Abraham. A sourcebook, it remains an account of one man's war, however, a testament to duty and the watchful soldier's eye for significant detail.

W.N.

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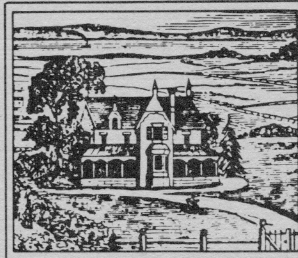

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