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WILSON, LAURENCE, GALLANT, GLASSCO

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BY ROBERT GREEN

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editorial

OUTSIDE CHANTS

ONE OF THE MORE REMARKABLE developments in Canadian studies in the last decade has been the growth in the number of international contributions being made to the understanding of Canadian literature and other aspects of Canadian culture and social structure. Canadian Studies centres have sprung up in countries as close geographically as the United States, as close in cultural history as Scotland and France, as related and as far-flung as Germany, Italy, Denmark, Israel, India, Fiji, Australia, Russia, and Japan — for different reasons, one suspects, and unquestionably with different results. Sometimes Canada serves as a contrast or a parallel with the "home" culture, as for example in Australia. Sometimes it appears to fulfil, as for many years it did in Germany, a romantic dream of open space and rugged wilderness. Sometimes it looks like America's Poland, a buffer zone of curious politics and uncertain temperament, which might be taken as a "reasonable" trial territory for a possibly unreasonable idea.

Canadian responses to this international interest vary considerably, from the ideologically defensive ("no-one but the Canadian-*born* can ever know Canada"), to the suspicious but perhaps realistic ("to conquer your opponent you must know him first"), to the blandly indifferent, the serious but puzzled, the curious and welcoming. Undoubtedly much of the variation relates directly to the nature of the enquiry. But often it demonstrates something else: a degree of limitation — possibly unconscious — in the critical approaches that Canadians themselves most commonly bring to their own writers. Thematic still, despite the technical revolution led by Frank Davey and others, Canadian criticism remains as rooted as most literary works themselves are in the mores of the culture. It is grounded in views of society, in the values of the people, in notions of a shared or defined or distinctive nationalism which are often more real in the mind of the writer than in the facts of national experience — but which nonetheless shape the moral and political expectations which so often constitute the active criteria behind critical judgments. Reading Canadian literature, in other words, Canadian critics

repeatedly perceive the indirect dreams and the expressed pleasures and the open critiques of their own society; their literature, for them, in some measure enacts themselves, connects their sensitivities with the values of the culture that has shaped them. This seems to be a perfectly reasonable, right, and proper function of criticism. But it is not the only one. And it is in this regard that critics from outside the culture can teach the insiders some lessons on critical method.

For if the outsiders fasten on the mores and politics of the literature, they often do so with an inexactness that tells more of the culture they themselves come from than of the culture the literature directly portrays. But if they fasten on literary form, they often do so with such a precise focus that they illuminate the suppleness and subtleties of a laconic methodology that within Canada is often ignored — ignored, I think, because the natural cadences of the laconic speaking voice are familiar, therefore seem ordinary, therefore are taken for granted. What the sensitive reader realizes, however, is that the able writer can shape these cadences and these habits of language into an aesthetically pleasing construct, an intellectually pleasing form.

French critical methods are particularly useful in this respect, as Michel Fabre's recent issue of *Etudes Canadiennes* (December 1981) shows. Devoted entirely to essays (by ten Canadian, French, and German scholars) on *The Stone Angel*, the issue demonstrates not only the strengths of Laurence's novel, but also the virtues of two kinds of critical methodology. One kind probes biographical roots and cultural mythologies, the social resonances of the narrative events and the effective allusions, the particularity of the characters and the commonality of the experience. The other kind distinguishes more severely between text and reality, separates *character* from *person*, fastens on the artist's shaping of artifice (conscious or unconscious, but in either event a *donnée*), and explores the novel's use of speech act discourse, its patterns of binary opposition, its fragmentation of time-frames and narrative frames, and the *system* of conventions on which it relies. One critic, disputing others, avers that a literary form does not have to be justified on mimetic or psychological grounds. But presumably this is a formula that can be stated just as adamantly in some inverse way. Seeking (or finding) formal pattern can be as barren an enterprise (whatever the pleasures of intellectual order) as the lamest of thematic descriptions. The fact of the matter is that a good novel succeeds both because it is said well and because it has something to say. That's a reductive way of putting it, but it's a strong challenge to any artist to meet. By extension it's also a strong challenge for any critic (none free of bias) to elucidate, which merely reaffirms that critical enquiry is never adequately seen as a set of absolute pronouncements, but is only comprehensible as an exchange of insights and understandings, and therefore as a collective enterprise that national boundaries affect but do not enclose.

W.H.N.

THE HIDDEN MINES IN ETHEL WILSON'S LANDSCAPE

(or, An American Cat among Canadian Falcons)

Blanche Gelfant

"I HAD HANDLED DYNAMITE," Frankie Burnaby thinks at the end of Ethel Wilson's novel *Hetty Dorval*: "I had handled dynamite, and in so doing had exploded the hidden mine of Mrs. Broom to my own great astonishment. . . ."[2]

I start with this image of a hidden mine in Ethel Wilson's fiction because I am an American reader, accustomed by my literature to explosions of violence in the novel and also to abundance, to the presence within a vast and varied landscape of rich deposits — the inexhaustible resources of art. Canadian critics, as they describe the abundance contained in Wilson's fiction, its richness of natural and social detail, have praised the surface serenity of her art: the detached tone; the compassionate and comic insights into the foibles of the great human family; the faith that remains unshaken even when these foibles, our seemingly innocent but obsessive meddling with each other, turn into destructive or coercive acts, violations of each other's freedom. I wish to excavate to a depth hidden beneath the surface sustained so beautifully by Wilson's style and tone and the seemingly casual meandering of her form; I wish to dig for the dynamite I suspect she has concealed. By her own image she has alerted us to the possibility of hidden mines and so validated the process of excavation, which I take to be the critic's essential act. First of all, I want to extract from Wilson's fiction the violence that lurks beneath its serenity. In these dangerous depths, I expect to find also abundance — a rich subterranean treasure of motives and meanings that constitute the source of Ethel Wilson's art.

To the critic, surface and depths evoke complementary images of light and darkness, the contrast integral to Wilson's art and to her vision of the duplicity of life which allows us brilliant evanescent moments whose meanings are shadowy and elusive. In a striking passage, Wilson describes a fluidity of light flowing over the landscape of British Columbia and defamiliarizing the "daily look" of moun-

tains and forests. Falling obliquely upon mountain slopes, light "discloses new contours"; in forests, it "discover[s] each separate tree behind each separate tree."[3] Then it fades, leaving us with unforgettable images. The light I hope to bring to Wilson's landscape is also oblique; but I hope its illumination, coming from an unfamiliar direction and moving into an unexplored darkness, can discover aspects of Wilson's art — images of hidden violence and of abundance — that we will remember long after the critic's light fades.

Obviously, violence in Wilson is much more muted, much less shocking and perverse, than in the fiction of William Faulkner and Ernest Hemingway, not the most brutal but the most famous male American novelists writing as Wilson's contemporaries. American women writers also shed blood more unsparingly than Wilson. Murder, rape, mob vengeance, and war erupt in Flannery O'Connor and Katherine Anne Porter; and in Willa Cather, violence assaults the peaceful Nebraska landscape with the suddenness of locusts. In Wilson's novels, a child can slip into a turbulent ocean in one unobtrusive sentence, a beloved mother die almost parenthetically, a wife submit to her husband's "hateful assaults" as a nightly aside to daily life, and a war, or two wars, fit incidentally into the unimportant gaps within a family's continuous life. If in these wars, a man's hand should be "blown off," neither he nor his family "look upon this as anything out of the way."[4] Nor do we, for Wilson somehow disposes of the violence she has released, tucking it away among the details of daily life which resumes its ordinary course after an explosion; or else she separates us from violence, as Frankie is separated from war-torn Vienna, by a convenient "wall of silence." In Wilson's stories, however, the violence contained within the beautiful Canadian landscape cannot be concealed by silence, hardly allowable in the short story's urgent form, or by dense details that attract our attention in the novel, detracting it from hidden dangers. The "humped" body of a murdered woman lies exposed on the dyke in "Hurry, hurry"; the blood of an innocent Chinaman flows from repeated stab wounds and a gun-shot in "Fog"; blackness and the sea pour into a reeling boat that strikes a reef and splits, spilling four people into death and causing the suicide of a pregnant woman in "From Flores"; and in "The Window," a would-be murderer stands with "a short blunt weapon in his hand," arrested in his deadly assault only by the shocking image of his own imminent violence.

Violence held in arrest by its own image seems to me a stunning effect of Wilson's art. At the moment when the would-be murderer sees *himself*, his hand is halted, perhaps (to use one of Wilson's favourite words) only temporarily, but long enough for Mr. Willy's life to be spared. Violence thus allows for providential rescue, common in Wilson's fiction; and rescue influences our perception of life, of its indifference to human needs or its concern, its accidental nature or design. With these polarities we plunge to the depths in Wilson's fiction, reaching

her bedrock thematic issue. Has human life ultimate meaning, or is it simply — like Topaz Edgeworth's life — a succession of "sparkling dots" uninscribed in a "significant design"? Nihilism and belief struggle for supremacy in Wilson's fiction, which like the darkened window of her story reflects the interior space of the mind — or perhaps it is the soul — where significant human action takes place. When the murderous thief brings violence into Mr. Willy's *living room*, the consciousness where life is centred, he cracks the darkness that is slowly enveloping Mr. Willy; he allows in an unexpected slant of light that can show Mr. Willy where meaning may exist in an apparently meaningless life. To recognize the danger of irrational, unpredictable, undeserved violence seems in Wilson's fiction a necessary preliminary to believing in providential design. Such recognition, however, brings one precipitously close to the Abyss, the empty darkness that Mr. Willy sees outside and within his window when night effaces the day's stirringly beautiful Canadian landscape. However abundant and variegated external nature appears in Wilson's lavish descriptions, human reality enacts its drama in an interior private living room — in the heart and head, as Nell Severance tells us in *Swamp Angel*.[5] Any human being isolated in this room, cut off from significant relationship to others, must find his or her thoughts mined (or undermined) with dangerous elements: a fear of nihilism, a suspicion of life's ultimate meaninglessness, a sense of the fortuity of encounters that may end in death or in permanent scarring such as Ellen Cuppy will suffer in *Love and Salt Water*. If we dig deeply enough into Wilson's fiction, we strike against the Void; and when Nothingness lies below us, leaving us unsupported, then life and fiction may catapult us into a violence as sudden and meaningless as that which engulfs the odd assortment of men who drown together in the death-drenched story "From Flores."

LIKE THE WATERS INTO WHICH A WILSON character may at any whimsical moment sink, the desert represents an endless Void. Thus *aridity* recurs as Wilson's thematic term for deprivation of meaning, an invidious form of violence that can enter a room impregnable to a thief. In "Tuesday and Wednesday," Victoria May Tritt (who has more of a name than an identity) lives "in a parched way," lost in a "desert of loneliness" created by time — "the desert between now and sleep." Water and desert sand, both vast, elemental, and seemingly empty, both dangerous for men and women to traverse, especially alone, stretch before the reader as irradicable images of a cosmic Void. "Do we always live on a brink, then," Nora asks in *Love and Salt Water*. Wilson's fiction shows us that "we do," while every urbane aspect of her style and tone, so admirably discussed by her Canadian critics, tries to pull us back from the Void, providing

us with a calm or comic or collected perspective that diverts us from the emptiness of spirit into which anyone, particularly anyone of our modern world, may fall. If oblique means of preventing us from exploding the hidden mines of nihilism, means of formal control, seem inadequate, then Wilson openly moralizes against despair, insisting upon the "beautiful action[s]" of which human beings are capable, acts of compassion, performed by Maggie Lloyd in *Swamp Angel*, of loyalty and love, exemplified by Morgan Peake and George Gordon in *Love and Salt Water*, of self-discipline developed by Lilly in her story, and miraculous rescue produced by "dirty, old" men like Mr. Abednego.

A profound fear that man may be an island, a desert island, the fear that leads Mr. Willy to despair over the "aridity" of his isolated life (rather than exalt over his freedom) makes Wilson insist, I believe, upon the integrity of the human family. This insistence, however, raises my anxiety, and like Lilly, I grow afraid of unforeseen "Trouble." For since we are all related, enmeshed though we cannot know how in each others' lives, I worry about effects upon my own life that may come from gratuitous and unfathomable causes. I feel myself treading over hidden mines, any one of which may accidentally blow up in my face and leave me, like Ellen Cuppy, scarred. How can I tell what "arrangements of circumstance" have been prepared for me by those nebulous agents of causality in Wilson's fiction, "life and time," which are fusing all of us into one continuous family, relating me to generations past or distant whose effects I can neither know nor avoid? Occasionally the long-range fortuitous effects of family ties will be amusing. In *The Innocent Traveller*, Rose attends the theatre (and develops "a taste for . . . the deceits of beauty") because ten years earlier her Great-Aunt Annie and a famous actor had met as ship-mates, in an encounter arranged by chance. But when chance becomes causality, linking together a chain of events we find incongruous but destructive, I fear its vagaries. If they affect my life — as they effect Mort's death in "Tuesday and Wednesday"[6] — then life itself seems random, without intrinsic order. Wilson tries to mollify the fear of chaos she arouses by showing how families maintain order as they transmit from one generation to the next a pattern of manners, traditions, and beliefs. Families provide a context of relationships which give a woman (in particular) a meaningful role in life as mother, wife, daughter, sister, cousin. *The Innocent Traveller* celebrates these roles, but also undermines them, I believe, by showing Rachel as a woman held in perpetual if loving servitude, and Topaz as a "youngest child" held in perpetual helplessness. Always cared for by her family, Topaz seems extraordinarily lucky in her hundred years of cheerful idle life; but even she may not have escaped the explosions of hidden mines. Triviality may be one; helplessness, another. The loving family that pampers Topaz also infantilizes her, I believe, by accepting (if not fostering) her helplessness; in her comic way, she remains forever helpless, a child even when she reaches venerable age. Though family ties are

tenuous in "Tuesday and Wednesday," they do hold together Myrtle's ego, but also they bind Myrtle forever to her cousin's life. If in this novella Wilson parodies family life, creating an aunt who is a "kitten" and a "conveniently anonymous" cousin, she nevertheless reveals its profound ambiguities which her most serious fiction cannot resolve. In *Swamp Angel*, Maggie Lloyd's surrogate family focuses the heroine's new identity, but also infuses it with new anxieties and problems; and in *Love and Salt Water*, Nora Peake's loving sister nearly wrecks Nora's life.

Wilson also celebrates and undermines marriage, which stultifies characters to whom it brings the only fulfilment possible. Married men and women run away from each other in *Swamp Angel*, "The Window," "Beware the Jabberwock . . . "; wives dream of freedom, and husbands of "slugging" or even murdering their wives. In "A drink with Adolphus," Mr. Leaper notes in his secret diary that a man "is undergoing trial for the murder of his wife. The thing that impressed me [he writes, thinking of his own marriage] was that he and his wife had *seemed* to live a devoted and harmonious life together."[7] I emphasize *seemed* because appearances conceal the truth of family life in Wilson's fiction; or the fiction itself conceals the truth it makes us suspect, hiding it beneath the surface of serenity so that we see the Edgeworths, or Cuppys, or Forresters as "ideal couples," much as Vicky May saw that irascible pair, Myrt and Mort. In *Swamp Angel*, Maggie experiences marriage at its best (but death ends her happiness) and at its most crimping. In the same novel, Nell Severance understands that her marriage, never sanctified by law, only by love, required her to hurt her only daughter. This daughter, at first fearful of marriage, finds in it her fulfilment; but happiness demands her submission to another, and Wilson's women typically say they wish to be free. Thus family relationships involve so many complexities they elude understanding or judgment. They become mysterious though ordinary; and mystery engenders fear. If a woman, in a moment of carelessness, might cause her nephew's death, then sisters and aunts, no matter how loving and well-intentioned, have ominous potential. Wilson never lets us forget the harm we might do each other within the family; and since she insists that family bonds (the commonplace phrase implies imprisonment as well as security) somehow connect all of us to each other, she implies that the invidious effects of human relationships are general and inescapable. Within the great human family are hidden subterranean links that no one can discern because they are buried like an enemy's mines where one would least suspect their presence and where one would be sure to tread.

The enemies to human happiness are often coincidental circumstances which defy rational explanation. How can we find meaning in life, the "belief" that Mr. Willy seeks to rescue him from the aridity of his desert island, the faith that Nell Severance magisterially declares in *Swamp Angel*, when we see that at any

moment coincidences may spring upon us as the hoodlums sprang upon old Mrs. Bylow, precipitating her death in the aptly named story "Fog"? Coincidence, sheer coincidence, brings together Eddie Hansen, Mort Johnson, and Victoria May Tritt at the corner of Powell Street, from where the men march to their accidental death and Vicky to her unexpected apotheosis as a teller of tales. What I call accident other readers may consider providential design, a view we can justify when we see fortuity as part of a comprehensive plan to educate characters to their responsibilities and to love. In *Love and Salt Water*, family members meddle with good intentions in each other's lives, but the results are almost disastrous. Though she is a strong swimmer — Wilson's repeated metaphor for a self-reliant, courageous woman — Ellen Cuppy nearly drowns, and worse, she nearly causes the death of her beloved nephew Johnny. From this experience Ellen learns that "She had better mind her own business. Everyone had better mind their own business." But in a family where everyone's business is inherently connected, bound together by inextricable and untraceable human ties, letting others *be*, an allowance that is surely one equation of love, may prove impossible. Acceptance of others does lie within one's capacity. Ellen learns to value Morgan Peake and to trust George Gordon's love which her terrible accident could not jeopardize. *We* learn a lesson I find frightening: that the "circle of life is extraordinary," including relationships among people widely separated in space and time whose lives touch by coincidence, by accident (or design? what design?), in ways that may affect them "perhaps temporarily," Wilson equivocates, "or perhaps permanently and fatally." Wilson's uncertainty catapults me into an unknowable world where, I suspect, only caprice rules. We may be trapped: we may escape. We may be rescued: we may die. Whatever happens seems beyond control and beyond reasonable prediction. We do not know where the hidden mines in life are buried and which will explode when.

IF I WERE TO IMAGINE EDITH WHARTON taking over Wilson's novel *Love and Salt Water*, I would feel certain that fate would be cruel. Once Ellen and Johnny fall into the sea, I would expect them to drown,[8] for again and again Wharton shows that life is so constituted that rescue never comes when we need it, when we are trapped by the capacious web woven by circumstance, by small choices, weak mistakes, fortuitously untimely encounters, by a lapse in manners, a break in traditions that Wharton like Wilson fastidiously portrays. No one rescues Lily Bart in Wharton's inexorable novel, cruelly entitled *The House of Mirth*. Lily dies, probably by her own hand, and Selden arrives, when he arrives, too late. Only death releases Lily from the despair which time makes inevitable. Sometimes, Wharton will not allow even death to give her characters

respite from pain. They live on in *Ethan Frome*, caught in an incredible web woven of human passion and irrational accident. Perhaps I am saying that for all the similarities between them as keenly observant novelists of manners, Wharton as an American has a vision of life somehow inaccesssible to Wilson. Providential rescue from seemingly inescapable dangers, like those besetting Oliver Twist, belong to the tradition of the Victorian novel with which Ethel Wilson's fiction seems to me continuous. Though Wilson creates for her readers (and for an American reader especially) a magnificently highlighted Canadian landscape, her vision of life seems as unconditioned by this landscape as her famous travellers who retain in the new world an "innocence" they acquired in the old — whose innocence consists precisely in their preservation of English traditions in the new Canadian city of Vancouver where they come to live with family connections intact. In *The Innocent Traveller*, when Sister Annie looks at the vast Canadian country passing elliptically outside the railroad window, she says: "We shall have to try and learn new ways . . . and I for one am quite ready."[9] But almost immediately, as she sees the "same sheep, same cows, same horses as in England," she dispels thoughts of a new life and thinks instead, "I am rather old . . . to be able to assimilate great change." But her daughter Rachel is not too old. Yet though Rachel falls in love with the Canadian landscape, responding mystically, ecstatically, to its "dark endless prairie," she lives in Canada the traditional life of filial responsibility she would have led in England. We all know that the Canadian landscape figures in Wilson's fiction as a constant source of wonder and beauty, giving to her themes of nihilism and faith, isolation and love, randomness and providence a richly symbolic representation through abundant indigenous detail. Moreover, her characters need the *space* of the Canadian continent both to effect their escapes from confinement and to discern "the miraculous interweaving of creation — the everlasting web" that engenders their faith in God's boundlessness. Ultimately, however, Wilson uses a uniquely Canadian setting to universalize human experience, to arrive at truths that transcend place or time. To say this is not to diminish her stature as a Canadian writer, but to praise her as she praised "great" writers — for being "both regional and universal."[10]

Willa Cather, the American writer with whom Wilson would inevitably be compared, also sought for universal meanings, those expressed in the cycles of nature and the passage of time. But when Cather dealt with time, she focused on change — upon development, maturation, and decline; upon history. She recalled, with nostalgia, a past associated specifically and uniquely with the transformation of America from an inchoate land — "the material out of which countries are made"[11] — into a country. In *A Lost Lady*, a novel to which *Hetty Dorval* bears almost startling formal resemblance, the fate of a beautiful woman melds inseparably with the fate of the American West. Marion Forrester disillusions young Niel Herbert as Hetty Dorval does Frankie Burnaby; but the American woman's

betrayal of the ideals of honour with which, Niel (and Cather) believes, a great country was created represents a crisis in history, the passing of an old chivalric order to make way for a new crass society represented by such grasping men as Ivy Peters. When the "lady" of Niel's visionary dream of the West becomes "lost," an entire community dependent upon her civilizing force suffers. Mrs. Forrester understands her cultural role, that she personifies a dream and must purvey grace, beauty, and manners to a crude primitive people living through a time of historical transformation. Even when she is depleted, without money, friends, or honour, Mrs. Forrester tries with her dinner party to bring civilization to the impervious stolid young men of Nebraska. Like Antonia in *My Antonia* and Alexandra in *O Pioneers!*, Mrs. Forrester's destiny intertwines with the future of the American West, and as time diminishes her brilliance, it also fades the dream that, Cather believes, imbued the American past with heroism. Hetty's fall from grace carries no such historical connotations. Frankie's changed perceptions of Hetty invite no thoughts about the destiny of Canada. The context of Wilson's drama is a moral world in which change arranges for the convergence of two lives that momentarily flow together, like the cojoined Fraser and Thompson Rivers, and then separate, leaving a young woman to ponder the unfathomable mystery of human relationships. Hetty's amorality remains unattached to historical or even psychological causalities (though we might infer that her fatherless childhood, which she thought also motherless, may have conditioned her to the sense of isolation that becomes merely selfishness). Hetty appears gratuitously in Lytton and later in London as a wanderer who brings disorder because disorder is inherent in life and will make its presence known even when it is hidden behind the face of beauty. Marion Forrester belongs to her particular time and place; and when she suffers displacement, her loss entails the loss of Captain Forrester's heroic dream of the future, of Niel Herbert's romantic dream of the past, and of the pervasively shared American Dream. Even Hetty's end in the novel seems adventitious as she disappears into a country where she is a stranger. But Marion Forrester remains an irrefrangible part of the land in which her husband and her honour lie buried. She survives in Niel's consciousness as "a bright, impersonal memory"[12] — the memory of the glorious "promise" that life extends to youth and to young countries. Hetty Dorval, like Topaz Edgeworth, both sharply defined but atomistic characters, can be forgotten.

In her own wrong way, Hetty seeks freedom and security, the goals of all Wilson's women, incompatible goals perhaps and perhaps not susceptible to clear definition. By freedom, Hetty means a life without "complications," a term immediately familiar to the American reader because it recurs thematically in Ernest Hemingway's famous collection of short stories, *In Our Time*. Unlikely as a comparison between Wilson and Hemingway may seem at first, it discloses contours in Wilson's landscape that perhaps the oblique light of an American per-

spective can best reveal. Both writers were consummate stylists using style to curb meanings too turbulent to release. Both were masters of understatement: of irony — each creating a discrepancy between tone and meaning; and of elision — each leaving narrative gaps implicit with meanings, often terrible meanings, we must infer. Both sense the tension between natural beauty, which endures, and human vulnerability: "you are walking along through the grass on the cliff top, admiring the pretty view, when — crack crack."[18] Either could have written this sentence (though "pretty" would have had a special ironic intonation in Hemingway), for both have been alerted to the profound insecurity of human beings who may at any moment be surprised by violence. Their unsurpassed fishing scenes dramatize a concern with surfaces and depths, as well as a love of the art of fishing, of nature, and of the possibilities for self-possession in solitude. Like Hetty Dorval, Nick Adams in "Big Two-Hearted River," the greatest of American fishing stories, seeks to escape human "complications," but unlike her, he has already felt the world "crack" beneath him, literally, shatter as the bombs of war have exploded. The wounds he suffers end his innocence as a young traveller. A traumatized hero, hurt physically and emotionally, he wants to be alone so that he can be *let* alone and perhaps recover the balance he has lost. He needs to hold himself "steady," like the big trout in the depths of "deep, fast moving water" who resists the current that could sweep him away. Hetty's avoidance of complications is different, an effect of laziness, indulgence, or egoism. She wants to be alone to do so as she pleases because she considers herself an island, free from any intrinsic connection with others who share her human state. She desires only sensuous ease, at least superficially; perhaps beneath this desire lies fear of the possibly dangerous currents of life. Like Nick, though for different reasons and to a different degree, she feels the tenuousness of her control over her own destiny. How little it would take to throw her off-balance — only some shipboard gossip. "I want security," Hetty says, "I want it badly"; and though Frankie and her mother suspect Hetty of artfulness, they believe that her plea for security is real, that Hetty is truly "frightened." She does not know, of course, all that she has to fear, the war that "life and time" are arranging. After Nick crawls inside his tent, "the good place," he thinks "Nothing could touch him." Eventually, however, inevitably, he will have to enter the swamp and fish in its "tragic" waters. Neither he nor Hetty can remain safe. *Hetty Dorval* ends in uncertainty, the milieu that, I believe, Wilson, like Hemingway, finds as natural to us as rivers, forests, mountains, and sky.

"We have no immunity," Mrs. Severance tells Maggie, saying in effect that life cannot be ordered and that in its disorder, it allows no one to remain secure. Though Wilson's characters travel and run and hide, trying to escape from "Trouble," they can never rest at "the good place." Where is it to be found, her women ask, the place where they can be secure? Is it by the Similkameen River,

where Maggie hides from the meanness of her husband only to become threatened by the jealousy of Vera Gunnarsen? Is it at Comox on Vancouver Island, where Lilly remains isolated with the Butlers, or in the Fraser Valley, where she merges into the order of the Matron and her well-run hospital? But here, inexplicably, a strand of her former life as a hunted creature reappears, woven fortuitously into the web no one can elude. The Chinaman Yow arrives in the Valley, and once more, Lilly is on the run, seeking in the anonymity of Toronto the security now imperilled by this figure from her past. Love and marriage seem to promise security; but the happiest of marriages, like those of the Cuppys in *Love and Salt Water* or the Burnabys in *Hetty Dorval* or the elder Edgeworths in *The Innocent Traveller*, may be terminated abruptly by death. Impersonal forces as well as people threaten any woman's security at any time. So do one's own emotions, especially the welling of loneliness. Even Vicky May Tritt recognizes the danger of "insupportable" insights into one's isolation, insights that threaten the security she tries so carefully to create through the meagre "arid" routine she calls her life. Like Lilly, like Hetty, Victoria May wants to be safe. But "at unexpected times" (chosen, one guesses, by chance), she cannot help catching a "frightening" glimpse of "something vast" that is usually "concealed," something always "there" — like "the sorrow of humanity."[14] To protect herself against the pain of "revelation," Vicky May "averts her gaze" and waits until what she cannot bear to see is once more concealed. But she cannot deny this revelation of human sorrow, and neither can Wilson's fiction, though it persuades us also to avert our gaze from the suffering it reveals. Like Wilson's women, we want security and see it jeopardized by life's hidden mines. How can we avoid them — the destructive emotions of others, jealousy, meanness, the will to oppressive power, and the accidents of chance?

WHAT LITTLE PROTECTION WE HAVE comes, it seems, from an innate human impulse towards order; and when we share the order we create, we perform the beautiful act of charity. It occurs almost always in Wilson's fiction in a clean well-lighted room, to use one of Hemingway's famous phrases. Again and again, Wilson shows that we may find safety in an interior made comfortable by human hands, though when this safety remains unshared, it seems pathetic if not simply ludicrous. Vicky May's room, illuminated by one small naked bulb, is not a well-lighted place, but when Vicky is there, reading her old newspapers or her movie magazines and munching on her apple, she feels "safe": "Here in her room she was at home and secure."[15] In her diminished way, she has found the good place for which all the homeless, alienated characters of American fiction yearn. Perhaps because I have so often identified myself with these homeless in-

secure Americans, I particularly appreciate the recurrent image in Wilson of a small protected world that human hands create. If a "room lit by a candle and in a silent and solitary place is a world within itself,"[16] it is one that the human being makes and offers as a refuge to other members of our oddly assorted chaotic human family. When Vera, near death, enters Maggie's room, Maggie thinks that warmth, not words, should communicate between these two estranged women: "it seemed to her the least important thing that she should speak and make words, and the most important thing that a fire should burn and warm the cabin and then there would be, somehow, a humanity in the room." Maggie warms Vera as she has warmed Mr. Cunningham, rescued by her hands from death. She instructs Angus "to start the fires everywhere" when they return to open up the camp. She understands that a clean well-lighted place offers us the only security we can expect in a vast impersonal complicated landscape that could overwhelm us with its immensity as well as its indifferent beauty, its inevitable darkness, its dark waters, its fog. Earlier, alone in a cabin, she had retrieved her own life. At Chilliwack, Maggie repossessed herself in a room that she had first to hold private and inviolate so that later she could share it with others who come to it ravaged by the sea and by life. "The cabin was a safe small world enclosing her" — this image of security is appealingly regressive: Maggie has gone back to a former and authentic identity; to a place still untouched by time; to a primitivism that historical change will challenge and in time destroy; to elemental needs, like the human need for warmth, touch, food. Maggie cooks, and Lilly cleans; and both women, by responding to elemental needs, create order in a world that can fall quickly into chaos. "It seemed as if order flowed from her fingertips," Mr. Sprockett thinks, watching Lilly straighten out his hotel room.[17] Intuitively, he feels she will bring order into his life, disrupted and left in confusion by his wife's death. Making Mr. Sprockett comfortable becomes Lilly's equation of love as she earns her right to respectability and marriage through years of self-discipline spent in creating a clean well-lighted place for others. If the world were not intrinsically chaotic, asks the American reader, why would we so delight in women who bring order? If it were not so menacing, so full of imminent "Trouble," why would we seek refuge in a solitary warm room; why would women who can bring order into others' lives be on the run seeking for themselves a security that has been denied? If the world were not indifferent to our needs, why would we turn again and again to another for comfort and compassion, so highly valued in Wilson's fictional world?

As an American reader who is also a woman, I respond ambivalently to Maggie cooking at camp and Lilly making Mr. Sprockett comfortable, though I celebrate their ability to care for others. I like the desire of Wilson's women for self-possession, and I am not always pleased at their acquiescence to a servant's

role, no matter how much I admire the order they bring into others' lives and by this means into their own. Guiltily, I enjoy Myrtle's merciless domination of her employer; but at the same time I am annoyed at simpering weak Mrs. H. X. Lemoyne who "was terrified by Myrtle's eyelids, and could be disciplined any minute that Myrtle chose."[18] What an invention — those formidable drooping domineering eyelids and those outlandish soap-opera instantaneous lies! Wilson makes me laugh, and for the sheer pleasure of laughter I am grateful. Laughter may also instruct us, and Wilson's funny satiric treatment of Myrtle sets into perspective for me the serious impelling need almost all her women have for freedom. Myrtle does not want anyone to dominate her — but neither do other characters. Ellen Cuppy initially refuses George Gordon's proposal of marriage in *Love and Salt Water* because she did not "want to be controlled by him or by anybody." As soon as he proposes, freedom becomes essential to her, and marriage seems, mistakenly as it turns out (or so we imagine), "a prison far away with a stranger." Mrs. Emblem, though "formed for" male companionship, resists another marriage, having discovered that one of "the joys of privacy" is that "she now owns herself." For a hundred years, Topaz Edgeworth has remained irrepressibly herself. Oddly, of all the characters in *The Innocent Traveller*, only she sees Canada as offering its immigrants freedom. She suggests a quintessentially American theme — that of a new life in a new land. "This is a free country, isn't it," Topaz asks insistently, as she crosses the prairies on her way to Vancouver; "We've come to a free country, haven't we?" But Topaz's idea of freedom (she is here defending her right to enter the gentlemen's smoking car) is, of course, comically skewed. For freedom means to Topaz being her idiosyncratic self — obsessively loquacious, basically idle though busy, dependent upon others and yet detached — a likeable and occasionally admirable woman who might fill us with dread at the ultimate inconsequentiality of a human life. Having always been treated lovingly, Topaz responds to life with a continuous interest which effects nothing. On a few crucial occasions, she shows generosity of spirit and exquisite manners — when she defends Mrs. Coffin in danger of being blackballed, and earlier, when she withdraws from Mr. Sandbach's dinner party. I like her best when she curses Mr. Sandbach aloud in her bedroom, but that may reveal my secret wish for release from gentility rather than the novel's moral high point. If Topaz remains a free spirit through the Family's financial and moral support, other characters like Maggie Lloyd and Lilly struggle towards freedom through the murky circumstances of desertion, betrayal, jealousy, moral meanness, isolation. Both undergo a "rebirth" in which they act as their own midwives. In her cabin in Chilliwack, Maggie Vardoe is reborn as Maggie Lloyd. In the beauty shop of Miss Larue, Lilly Waller becomes immutably Mrs. Walter Hughes, an identity which permits her a new life as Lily [*sic*] Sprockett. Wilson

tells us that fitting Lilly with a wig and advising her on wardrobe, "Miss Larue, on a fine creative spree, was assisting at the rebirth of a free woman, Mrs. Walter Hughes." "But will it change me?" Lilly thinks, "Shall I be safe?" Perhaps she can never be safe, but she has become free of feckless Lilly Waller.

Wilson's free characters are also fugitive, running like their American relatives to a territory ahead where they can elude repressive men like Edward Vardoe, Huw Peake, or Yow. They need the space of the Canadian landscape to effect their escape. But while Wilson's sense of spaciousness suggests to me the American theme of freedom (for space and freedom are often synonymous in American fiction),[19] her manner seems alien to American writers, insofar as we differentiate them from the British. Occasionally, Wilson reminds me sharply, and with pleasure, of Virginia Woolf, whose consummate novel *To the Lighthouse* she recalls to me with a work that apparently I like much more than her Canadian critics. In *Love and Salt Water*, Wilson shows the passage of time through elision, as Woolf does in the central section of her famous novel. Like Woolf, Wilson evokes the menace of the sea and the world of nature which makes the warm safety of home so essential to the human community; of fortuitous death described but not dismissed in one sentence; of a child's wish-fulfilment — to see the seals, to go to the lighthouse — that brings unanticipated realizations and unanticipated terrors. Ellen learns to let her sister Nora *be* — and letting others be (as Maggie Vardoe thinks, her husband "would never have let me be") emerges as the essential equation of love that Woolf works out in *Mrs. Dalloway*.[20] As I read Wilson, I enjoy her evocation of English literature, her command, her deftness, certainty, and lightness of tone, her confidence in the quixotic phrase, the wry aside, the moralizing moment. I find in her work both the fastidiousness and the insouciance that belong to one who possesses a native tongue as her birthright. But I miss the struggle contained within American writers like Theodore Dreiser, Sherwood Anderson, or Gertrude Stein. Bereft of a language of their own, they laboriously invent a style that turns out polyglot, awkward, cacophonous, colloquial, confused, but also powerful: a style that confronts, without possibility of easy evasion, the profoundly difficult and unanswerable questions of life. I find Wilson's use of John Donne as a kind of last resort for coping with ultimate problems uncomfortably facile. I brood with Dreiser, whose work is impressed indelibly upon my American imagination, over the possibility that man or woman *is* an island, a person essentially alone and adrift in life, like Hurstwood or Carrie in Dreiser's ponderous and imponderable novel *Sister Carrie*. Perhaps, as Dreiser shows, we are creatures driven by chemic compulsions that nullify our pretensions to personal freedom. In Dreiser, great economic forces, as well as hormones, are released upon the world to determine not only an individual's fate but also the evolutionary direction of a vast society. When Wilson described the growth of

Vancouver, she made it seem, by her simple cartoonish description, almost comic: "Down came the forests. Chop. Chop. Chop. . . . The forests vanished, and up went the city."[21] Wilson does note that "men of the chain-gang" were doing the chopping, but she disposes of their plight and of the implications of power and powerlessness, and of tremendous historical transformations that effected radical social reorderings — of the entire drama of growth, industrialization, urbanization, and their consequences — in three words now rather terrible for modern ears attuned to cries of ecological depletion and economic greed: "Chop. Chop. Chop." Because Dreiser could not be fluent, lacking a literary language and tradition as an American writer, because he could not reach into a bag of past poets and pick out a consummate line that would epitomize a world view — "no man is an island" — because he had to struggle in his life and in his work, he became enmeshed in the endless web about which he wrote, a web woven by desire, irrational chance, coincidence, natural forces, evolutionary drives, social designs. He cared about his characters in ways that could not allow him to be detached or superior. Never could I imagine Dreiser describing a woman or man as Wilson describes Victoria May: "Insipid," "unimportant," "anonymous," "stupid." Wilson is "cool" but Dreiser heatedly compassionate and committed to his characters. Though obviously unlike Dreiser, Willa Cather shared Dreiser's absorbing interest in characters, no matter how humble. In *One of Ours*, half-witted illiterate Mahailey emerges as loving and lovable, worthy of the esteem given her by the family she faithfully serves. None of Cather's women is "insipid." Each is potentially a creator of life, is herself alive, and finds life interesting. A minor character in *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* epitomizes this interest: "Mrs. Ringer was born interested." Though Mrs. Ringer is poor, unendowed, alone, "misfortune and drudgery had never broken her spirit. . . . She had probably never spent a dull day." If her days were never dull for Topaz, they seem so to us; but all the days of Cather's women belong within a large significant pattern in which, whatever they do, they sense themselves a creative part. Nell Severance would have been quelled by them, I think, for they could have articulated fully and precisely the faith she asserted in vague incomplete terms. Even when they lived in Canada, like Cécile Auclair in *Shadows on the Rock*, they sensed themselves part of a process that was creating out of individual and inchoate efforts a whole way of life, creating by preserving and by making anew, by continuing and beginning again, as Cécile continues the French traditions her mother transmitted to her and makes them pristine and permanent by transferring them to Quebec. Unlike Wilson's women, Cather's seldom seek security; rather, they provide it as they make a home and a great nation. A hidden mine that Cather describes is not explosive, except with life, as we know from the famous image in *My Antonia* of children bursting out of a subterranean storehouse — "a veritable explosion of life out of the dark cave into the sunlight."

PERHAPS I AM SAYING THAT in American novels the sense of the new — of a new land, new pulsating cities like Chicago, pristine prairies of colour-drenched grass, new railroads, new openings, new beginnings — stirs American readers deeply because they share the writer's concern with a new American language and a new style. Americans know they must create a style that expresses a perennial sense of discovery, dream, and disillusionment. As an American novelist, Dreiser could not rely upon what was said before, because the city he describes had not existed before, and even as he wrote, he saw it grow, develop, and change. He was driven by the historical urgency of capturing a kaleidoscopic scene that would not stay still long enough to be memorialized. Wilson feels neither this urgency — the typical sense of rush that Americans experience as their daily lives — nor Cather's nostalgia over what has been and will be no more. Her anecdotal ease in dealing with the past in *The Innocent Traveller* seems inaccessible to American writers, who invariably regret and long for a past that has disappeared. Think of Cather's *A Lost Lady* or Scott Fitzgerald's quintessentially American novel, *The Great Gatsby*. Not without reason, the most popular American book is entitled *Gone With the Wind*, and the greatest Southern writer, William Faulkner, shares with the most widely read, Margaret Mitchell, a passion for the past to which American readers resonate as they typically feel loss and separation as their real experience. In Vancouver, Wilson's characters find continuity: as Annie noted, correctly or not, "the same sheep, same cows, same horses as in England." Beyond the city, in mountains, lake areas, woods, Wilson's characters can recapture their own past, or at least exorcise a present they find oppressive; in unchanged places (of which few remain in America), they can retrieve a pattern of peace they once knew. They cannot "escape" from life, as Nell Severance tells Maggie in *Swamp Angel*, but they can *recover* — recapture the past and recuperate from the present. Nick Adams knows that a wounded American can hope only for a temporary stay against chaos before he fishes in "tragic" waters that Maggie may not have to enter. Maggie will not escape Vera Gunnarsen's jealousy, but Nick will never escape himself. Nor will he find refuge with others, even temporary or turbulent refuge, as Lilly found with the Butlers and Maggie with the Gunnarsens. Like Wilson, Hemingway turned to Donne for a definition of human relatedness, for directions on how to deny his own bleak vision of life, one which I believe he found, finally, both inviolate and intolerable. Much as he wishes to deny it, he saw that man was an island — separate, alone, adrift. In *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, Hemingway's hero tries to link himself with others in a concerted effort to make shared ideals prevail, but the occasion of his union is war, and the outcome is death. Robert Jordan lies alone, merging himself in lyrical rapture and in terror with the earth. Hemingway's vision of life is ecclesi-

astical: it contains the vanity of human wishes — even the wish for love, marriage, family — and the eternality of the earth upon which, with an order denied to chaotic human affairs, the sun rises. As a reader of American fiction I feel buoyed by Wilson's way of tucking war, chaos, and violence into the parenthetical asides of her novels; but unlike Maggie, when she thinks she can swim about obstacles, I feel insecure on surfaces, accustomed as I am to the inevitability of depths. Even while I delight in reading of a happy but thoroughly inconsequential life, like that of Topaz Edgeworth, I cannot help remembering other characters to whom nothing happened. I remember Marcher in Henry James's "The Beast in the Jungle," and then I feel my pleasure adulterated as I consider the life of a woman to whom nothing happened — though everything in the world was happening — and who made nothing happen, who in effect was powerless? Powerlessness, fear of isolation, alertness to violence and acts of violation, the vagaries of chance and indifferent if not malign forces, as well as the urgencies of economic and social inequality which must lead to conflict — so I learn from *The Grapes of Wrath* — how could I not be conditioned by all this which I encounter again and again in American fiction? Abundant as it is, American fiction is deeply mined with skepticism and uncertainty. Its landscape is vast, beautiful, and bleak. I have travelled in it for many years, and to deny its influences, to say I am still innocent and can enjoy without wryness the surface skimming of a waterglider or even the complex skill of a juggler (juggling a weapon of destructive power) would be to deny the power of literature.

Wilson celebrates this power by consciously drawing attention to the creative act of story-telling. Her characters tell stories — are unabashed liars; and sometimes by withholding their stories, they assert their autonomy, their possibility of eluding facts and consequences by refusing to acknowledge that they exist. In *Love and Salt Water*, Ellen Cuppy tries to keep her mother alive by not telling that she had died, and her sister Nora tries to keep her son whole by not telling that his hearing is impaired. Frankie collaborates in the fiction Hetty Dorval creates by not telling what she knows about Hetty; and Hetty herself remains somehow inviolable because she has not told the truth about herself, by this withholding making herself inaccessible even to Frankie in whose consciousness she lives. Frankie knows she is inventing the story of Hetty Dorval; this act frees her of Hetty's influence and at the same time, since stories last, makes the influence of Hetty's distinctive beauty and power permanent. Through the art of story-telling, Frankie both dispels the trance in which Hetty has placed her and captures it for all time; and she becomes a force powerful enough to cause an explosion in which another story, Mrs. Broom's version of the past, will be released from the depths of silence in which it lies buried. Frankie makes Mrs. Broom tell the story she has withheld, and we cannot minimize the power she exercises in forcing, without forethought, another's confession. In "Tuesday and

Wednesday," characters make up stories all the time. Mort and Myrtle lie unconscionably, and by their lies, they subdue others, sometimes each other, and so exercise their wills. The stories that give them momentary victories cannot save them, however, from the fate that coincidence has laid in store; but rescue does come from a most unlikely source, from the story of heroism that reticent neurotic Victoria May Tritt invents. By telling her story, Vicky frees herself, if only for a moment, from the prison of shyness, insecurity, silence, and a sense of worthlessness; from the inconsequentiality of her life; from powerlessness. She effects a change in how Mort will be remembered, in how Myrtle will feel, and in how an inexplicable accident will evermore be described. She changes her own behaviour, her very identity from a silent and withdrawn woman to a purposeful active storyteller, the focus of rapt attention. In *The Equations of Love*, Lilly's lies become the truths of her life, the means by which she can possess herself and give a happy useful identity to her daughter. Through her own fictions, she learns how to serve others, and though she seeks isolation, she belongs to a community that includes the Matron, the hospital, and finally the wide world where she may, perhaps, live as a free woman with the man to whom she brings comfort.

This confusion of lies with truth celebrates the story-teller's power to convince us of the reality of fiction; it also dramatizes the mysteriousness of life whose essence we cannot know with certainty. As Wilson's stories show, we cannot know each other because we present, in everyday life, social faces that conceal a real identity shown only to a friend or lover. Though Mrs. Forrester smiles and talks and entertains in the story "Truth and Mrs. Forrester," her reality exists thousands of miles away from the room where people come and go and where all her familiar things are placed — thousands of miles away where her husband lies ill, possibly dying. The "true Mrs. Forrester" is the loving wife, not the charming hostess who lies out of politeness and boredom or the helpless employer "in thrall" to her garrulous maid. "Truth is so hard to tell," says Mrs. Forrester, "while fiction is the easiest thing in the world."[22] Certainly, Ethel Wilson makes fiction seem easy, though the truth of her women is hard to define — whether they are utterly traditional creatures finding happiness only in caring for others, cleaning, cooking, creating comfort, yielding compassion. Is Family their essential need, and marriage, though initially avoided (as by Ellen Cuppy and Hilda Severance), their ultimate fulfilment? Is Mrs. Emblem, in "Tuesday and Wednesday," with her pink boudoir and her pink complexion and golden hair and her three husbands, truly an emblematic Woman as the story insists? "Vicky Tritt does not know what it feels like to be a woman," the story tells: "Mrs. Emblem knows nothing else." "Truth is so hard to tell," Ethel Wilson might answer, and she enacts the difficulty in her equivocal style. She shows us complexities, gains and losses within a single situation, and generosity and withhold-

ing within a single person: "I knew I was in the web," Mrs. Severance says, explaining her desertion of her daughter; "I did the best I could in the web, and it takes God himself to be fair to two different people at once." One must juggle one's responsibilities, as Mrs. Severance, a skilled juggler, knows; and one must distinguish between the symbol and the essence, deciding finally for the essence, though one has become attached to the symbol as though its glitter were real. Perhaps the truth is that, like Wilson's characters, we are all story-tellers. When we tell our own story, we come into possession — not of objective truth, but of a reality we imagine, that of the person we would wish to become, like Mrs. Walter Hughes, or wish to retrieve, like Mrs. Maggie Lloyd. Perhaps our own power of invention is the truth about us, and those who possess this power strongly imagine a person into being, becoming in fact their own fiction, as Lilly becomes Mrs. Walter Hughes. Naming one's self represents a quest for one's own truth. Topaz Edgeworth never changes her name in her hundred years of life, and her reality as a person becomes evanescent, forgettable — except in the story that Wilson tells. Lilly changes her name several times, and in the end accepts the name of a stranger in order to become the self whom she has imagined into being. Kind as he is, her future husband takes possession by reiterating the name he will impose — "LilySprockettLilianSprockettLilySprockettLilianSprockett." The name delights him and with it he makes Lilly a character in the story of his life. "Would you mind me calling you Lilian?" he asks, and Lilly, either entirely secure now in her achieved identity or else willing to relinquish it for another that promises love, does not mind losing a name that gave her "self-possession." Is Wilson mocking Lilly when she has her confess her secret at the end of her story — that she wears an "adaptation" — or is she rejoicing in the erasure of Lilly's past, once so full of "Trouble?" The truth is hard to tell, though the fiction, "Lilly's Story," is easy to read. "Perhaps" or "perhaps not," "I think," "it was impossible to say," the omniscient narrator says again and again in Wilson's fiction, implying that even the all-knowing story-teller does not know the truth. Sometimes we as readers have a choice, because the narrator, uncertain of the truth, offers two exclusive possibilities, two adjectives or nouns linked together by *and* though they require *or*. Perhaps we need faith because we cannot know the truth. This, at least, is what I think when I read Wilson's fiction, but of course I cannot be sure. Her fiction makes me certain and uncertain.

Of her descriptive powers I have no doubt. Her effulgent images of the Northern Lights, of the perfect V of flying wild geese, of indigenous creatures, changing landscapes, sky and space, are famous. Her short short story, "Hurry, hurry," to which I referred at the beginning, is charged with natural scenery which seems to me translucent. Mountains, trees, slanting rays of light, fog, birds, dog, hawk, heron, bushes, blackbirds, steep grassy dyke — all take on a brilliant and unforgettable urgency, a cosmic meaning whose truth might be so terrible that it eludes

us as the image of the "hunched" hawk gives way to that of the "humped" corpse of a woman. Human life and animal life seem internecine. The hawk "with its sharp beak and tearing claws . . . would have mauled the terriers, and they would have tormented it." The hawk stares brightly, and so does man the murderer, compelling the woman to hurry away as "he held her eyes with his eyes." She escapes, running. The murderer shows her mercy, or perhaps only indifference. The woman he has killed lies "beside the salt-water ditch." His tears must be salty as he stumbles along "sobbing, crying out loud." Does he cry in regret or for love lost? Are love and salt water inseparable in Wilson's world? If some lucky ones escape the salt water, if they are rescued from drowning, is it at the sacrifice of others, like the drowned boy in *Love and Salt Water* or the murdered woman in "Hurry, hurry," characters linked with the living in Wilson's great web of life? Meanwhile, the light falls obliquely on the mountains. Each tree stands out separately. We see each clearly. We see each fade. "The light is gone" — the story is over — "but those who have seen it will remember." The memory of Ethel Wilson's story lies deeply buried in our consciousness, our imagination. It is a hidden mine that we might at any moment of recall explode with terror and delight.

NOTES

[1] In her essay "A Cat Among the Falcons" [*Canadian Literature*, 1 (Autumn 1959), 10-19], Ethel Wilson avers that she is not a "qualified critic," not one of the "falcons [who] cruise high above and search the literary plain." Rather, as a country cat, she remains indoors, keeping her literary convictions safely private while she watches the sky where the "formidable and trained" — and contentious — falcons soar. Having been invited to give an American perspective upon Ethel Wilson's fiction at a conference distinguished by Canadian critics immersed in Wilson's work, life, and milieu, I recognize my affinity with the country cat. If I venture out with the falcons, I do so in the hope of making criticism "interesting" and perhaps even "amusing," the effects that Wilson valued in diversity of critical opinion. [ED. NOTE: This paper was first delivered at the Wilson Symposium at the University of Ottawa in 1981.]

[2] *Hetty Dorval* (Toronto: Macmillan, Laurentian Library, 1967), p. 86. *Hetty Dorval* was published originally in 1947.

[3] Ethel Wilson, "Hurry, hurry," *Mrs. Golightly and Other Stories* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1961), p. 106. "Then the light fades [Wilson writes] . . . , but those who have seen it will remember."

[4] *Love and Salt Water* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1956), p. 152.

[5] " 'I don't care for fresh air myself except for the purpose of breathing. I exist here . . . and here . . . ' Mrs. Severance touched her heart and her head. 'Everything of any importance happens indoors . . . ,' " *Swamp Angel* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1962), p. 149, original ellipses. *Swamp Angel* was published originally by Macmillan of Canada in 1954.

[6] "Tuesday and Wednesday," *The Equations of Love* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1974 paperback, published originally in 1952). See pages 127-28, in which the word

caused appears seven times, linking together an incongruous sequence of events that "life and time" effect through "manipulations . . . of circumstance and influence and spiked chance and decision among members of the human family."

[7] "A drink with Adolphus," *Mrs. Golightly*, p. 79.

[8] David Stouck reported to the Ethel Wilson Symposium (Ottawa, 1981) that other manuscript versions of *Love and Salt Water do* show them drowning.

[9] *The Innocent Traveller* (London: Macmillan, 1949), p. 101.

[10] See Wilson's letter of July 12, 1953, to Desmond Pacey, quoted in his book *Ethel Wilson* (New York: Twayne, 1967), p. 25.

[11] The phrase comes from a famous passage in *My Antonia* that describes young Jim Burden's first sight of Nebraska: "There was nothing but land: not a country at all, but the material out of which countries are made" (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, Sentry Edition, 1954), p. 7. *My Antonia* was published originally in 1918.

[12] *A Lost Lady* (New York: Random House, Vintage, 1972), p. 172. *A Lost Lady* was published originally in 1923.

[13] *Love and Salt Water*, p. 149.

[14] "Tuesday and Wednesday," *The Equations of Love*, p. 68.

[15] "Tuesday and Wednesday," p. 77.

[16] *Swamp Angel*, p. 146.

[17] "Lilly's Story," *The Equations of Love*, p. 262.

[18] "Tuesday and Wednesday," p. 101.

[19] In an essay on modern American city fiction, I discuss this relation between space and freedom. See " 'Residence Underground': Recent Fictions of the Subterranean City," *Sewanee Review*, 83 (Summer 1975), 406-38.

[20] I have discussed this thematic meaning of love in Woolf in the essay "Love and Conversion in *Mrs. Dalloway*," *Criticism*, 8 (Summer 1966), 229-45.

[21] *The Innocent Traveller*, p. 124.

[22] "Truth and Mrs. Forrester," *Mrs. Golightly*, p. 111.

THE HOME OF THE BEWILDERED

Naomi Rachel

The birches guard the straw lawn, a chorus of singers
stripped of their finery.
The old clapboard house, as if touching memory, harbours
a corniced roof and gabled windows.
Its age is revealed in the peeling paints, layers of effort
and the strength of summer suns.
A wheel from an ancient farm machine gathers moss; by the well,
a china doll robbed of her silk curls stares exposed at the sky.

On the veranda a rocker, stock-still for many a year, cradles
nothing but dust.
The oak darkened to a motley black, like wet leaves fallen
and trampled.
Cracks from the high straight back to the wide armrests seam
a tale of neglect.
These are only objects.

Enter the home of the bewildered.
Austin lives here.
Martin lives here.
Marilyn as well as others are housed in these rooms, walk over
the oak floors, up the balustraded stairs, seek faces in carved mirrors,
seasons through the panes.
Silently they eat in the kitchen by the wood stove, later they gather
at the hoarse piano.
They are not demented.
Their only sin is muddlement, the inability to reconcile what is
happening here to what happens there.
They have forgotten how to place truth along with dread on
the horror shelf and walk past gingerly to the travel section beyond.
They reside in a state of nonplusation more aware than reason,
more trying than insanity.

Austin with pipe and worn red sweater has not for years been able
to fathom why we die and is lately uncertain how we live.
He came to the home of the bewildered from a crossroads without
even a main street.
A wide place in the road without locks or mailboxes.
In that place a young girl, hired to babysit imaginary children,
ended up three weeks later at the bottom of a body of water
with lead weights on her arms.
Austin laments a private hell so public.
Unable to bear the intense horror of premeditation, he renounced
his former home to come here, to make bewilderment his dwelling.

Martin cannot grasp radiation.
To the side of the warm fire in the front room, he reads
scientific articles, blueprints of the ultimate device,
political statements, sagas of one disaster after another war.
Martin ponders fate as mutation, his perpetual thoughts work
like termites against wood.
In solitude he transmits only small sounds, communications
strangled in fear.

Marilyn reads newspapers, clicking her tongue on the back of false
teeth.
She is caught up, poor dear, in details.
Is it possible to survive ten years of torture in a political prison?
Can it be that twenty children were murdered by one man within
five days?
Will a woman raped seven times in that manner survive forgiveness?
Marilyn makes extensive charts with a complex code of comparisons.
She does not ask why, only how.
Why is a word not uttered lightly in the home of the bewildered.
A word which creates so intense a purgatory is not to be taken in
vain.

The inhabitants of the home of the bewildered do not often connect.
Slippered feet shuffle through the dim halls, heads nodding in
tune to a shared grief too common to mention.
They look neither to the right or left; they have
discovered a tunnel vision that contains its own peripheral field.
"How are you?" becomes a question too complex to answer without
either
dishonesty or guilt.
James once announced that it was raining in the right side of
his brain, and it was understood how intense was the shine in
the left hemisphere.

FOREST

Ron Miles

i. Words whispered in your sleep:
needles on the tree
you hide behind.

ii. Seeking is no game.
My dreams are littered
with abandoned campfires.

iii. Paths re-cross my memory.
We chase each other deeper
into known territory.

iv. If the wilderness had edges
we might fall out of it.

A FEMINIST READING OF "THE STONE ANGEL"

Constance Rooke

THE STONE ANGEL is a carefully organized novel which operates on two obvious levels: the present time of the novel which takes us through Hagar's last days on earth, and the past time of memory which moves us in strict chronological order through the major events of her life to explain the old woman whom we see now. In support of this structure, we are made to sense the physically decrepit Hagar as a mask behind which the true Hagar continues to reside. The novel is also elaborately based upon the biblical stories of Hagar and Jacob and upon sacramental patterns of confession and communion, so that the reader may well arrive at yet another sense of the novel's two dimensions: in the foreground (both past and present) we have the realistic tale of a woman's pride, and in the background (where confirmations or hidden meanings are supposed to lie) a Christian context within which we are to measure the significance of that pride. Thus, we might suppose that Hagar's pride is something like Eve's and that it is seen by the author as reprehensible, the cause of her fall from the garden. Yet here we falter. In the realistic foreground we feel that Hagar's pride is not merely her downfall, but also her salvation — and we may question what sense to make of that within the religious context. Our difficulty is compounded by Hagar's refusal to capitulate finally to that insistent religious dimension. While she does clearly make certain accommodations, it is equally apparent that Hagar approaches her death still in the spirit of those lines from Dylan Thomas which Laurence employs as epigraph: "Do not go gentle into that good night. / Rage, rage against the dying of the light."

The difficulty which has been described here comes from our expectation that background and foreground should cohere, and perhaps from an assumption that any extensive use of the Bible and sacraments will very probably signal belief. Some of this difficulty can be resolved if we approach *The Stone Angel* from a feminist perspective. If we consider the role of Christianity in Hagar's life as a woman, we may find another justification for the weight which is given to Christianity in this novel and a partial explanation for Hagar's resistance to it. We will also discover another significant area of backgrounding, an area of femi-

nist concern which explains or corrects our vision of the foreground in which a woman is chastised for her mistreatment of men. These various backgrounds — the past time of the novel, the religious and feminist dimensions — must be considered together if we are to understand *The Stone Angel* as a whole. They cohere as an historical explanation of how Hagar came to be the woman she is at the point of death.

The feminist dimension of *The Stone Angel* can be described as a kind of backgrounding because there is almost no overt consideration of these themes, and because the foreground may seem to be occupied with antithetical ideas. If Hagar is Everywoman, she is apparently a woman on trial for her crimes against men. Indeed, Hagar sees in the woods of Shadow Point the imaginary props and players for a jury trial in which she will summarily be found guilty; her sense of guilt is also indicated when she finds an old scale with its weights missing. But if the trial were a fair one and her attorney as eloquent as Margaret Laurence, there is little question that Hagar would be let off on compassionate grounds. *The Stone Angel* is told in the first person, by Hagar Shipley — so that Laurence must do all her pleading behind the scenes. In that background she prepares a devastating brief, a full-scale feminist analysis which operates as counter-weight to the crime of pride. While she admits Hagar's share of responsibility, Laurence also cites patriarchal society as a kind of instigating culprit; and she argues that men and women alike have been injured by the forces which lead to Hagar's intractable, compensatory pride. The novel avoids polemic by this fortunate circumstance, that Hagar cannot herself articulate (because historically she does not know) the feminist view of her case. Thus, Laurence is compelled to embody these ideas rather than to discuss them, and she does so ultimately in defence of her heroine.

Hagar is consistently identified with the stone angel which is the central image of the novel, indicative obviously of her pride and blindness. But the angel is in fact a monument to Hagar's mother, "who relinquished her feeble ghost as [Hagar] gained [her] stubborn one." The association between angel and mother will require our careful attention, for it is obscured by Jason Currie's evident lack of interest in his dead wife and by our knowledge that the stone angel is essentially a monument to his own pride. Indeed, so thoroughly has she been obliterated that even her name is missing from the text. Hagar has supplanted her mother, rejected her image, and chosen instead to mirror her father's pride. But in the shadow of that stone angel which she becomes is another angel, ministering and mild — the kind of woman we take her mother to have been.

This stone angel is an imported creature, not anything original to the Canadian soil. The would-be pharaoh Jason Currie has purchased it from Italy, presumably because he thinks he can establish his pre-eminence in Manawaka only through an image crafted abroad. Clearly his is the colonial sensibility which looks to the old world for its values and for a continuation of class privilege. By

the time Hagar is an old woman, Jason's pretensions (like those of Ozymandias) will have turned to dust: the Currie-Shipley stone will be recognized by a new generation as simply Canadian, marking the graves of two pioneering families with little to choose between them. The angel itself is "askew and tilted"; and even marble does not last forever — as we know from the description of Hagar's aged skin: "too white . . . too dry, powdery as blown dust when the rains failed, flaking with dryness as an old bone will flake and chalk, left out in a sun that grinds bone and flesh and earth to dust as though in a mortar of fire with a pestle of crushing light." In the light of truth, which is partly the recognition of our common mortality, the proud marble angel will finally be dissolved. But there is another angel which also must be laid to rest. And that is the image which Jason Currie seems to have imported from Britain: the Victorian image of woman as "The Angel in the House," a seminal conception of the Victorian era which is celebrated in Coventry Patmore's poem of the same name. This angel is soft, but it is ironically as rigid in conception as the marble image which Jason Currie erects over the corpse of a wife driven to an early grave — a woman puzzled, we may suppose, that her accommodation to the feminine ideal has served her no better than this. The stone angel in this sense expresses Jason Currie's privilege as a *man*, as well as the privilege he enjoys as a man of substance. Jason had little use for women, and little reverence for those feminine virtues which inspired men like John Ruskin or Coventry Patmore to such absurd heights of idolatry; but he shared their more significant belief in male superiority, and he accepted their notions of what behaviour and what education were appropriate for a lady.

Hagar very naturally wishes to exhibit whatever qualities are consistent with her pride and are admired by others. Her nearest judge is Jason, who encourages the male virtues in her and neglects certain of the feminine virtues which he will expect her eventually to display. Proud of her refusal to cry in the scene where he beats her with a ruler, Jason remarks that she has a "backbone" and takes after him. He is proud also of her intelligence, but wishes it had been granted to his sons instead. So Hagar is courageous, proud, brainy — everything that her father admires; and she is also female, so that these virtues are perceived as useless. Moreover, they prevent the subservience which Jason ultimately expects of her. The tender virtues are not developed in Hagar: she perceives them only as weakness, a malleability which is unacceptable to her sense of self. She repudiates the silliness of other girls, dislikes anything flimsy or gutless. Only when she becomes aware of the standard which holds Lottie Drieser's china doll prettiness superior to her own strong-boned handsomeness does Hagar begin to share her father's view that a genetic irony has transpired in the Currie family: *she* should have inherited her mother's "daintiness," and the "graceful unspirited boys" should have had their father's ox-like strength. Symbolically, however, Hagar's

backbone and other insistent bones preserve her from the repulsive formlessness which is stereotypically assigned to women, even as they condemn her in another sense to the rigidity of a stone angel.

In particular, Hagar loathes the vulnerability which she associates with the image of her mother, and which she perceives is equally despised by her father. Jason Currie would occasionally squeeze out a tear at the thought of his late wife, for the edification of "the matrons of the town, who found a tear for the female dead a reassuring tribute to thankless motherhood." Margaret Laurence reminds us here of the perils which attended childbirth in the days before antibiotics, and which required that women be rather forcibly locked into a notion of themselves as mothers to the race. Hagar has no wish to be a martyr; thus she approaches the birth of her first son reluctantly, convinced it will be the death of her. Often in the novel, images of the birth process seem repulsive — as when Hagar observes the "mammoth matriarchal fly . . . labouring obscenely to squeeze out of herself her white and clustered eggs." As a child Hagar refuses to be lulled by her father's crocodile tears; she knows that her mother was "the brood mare who lay beneath [the monument] because she'd proved no match for his stud." So Jason Currie pays his token dues to womankind in pretending to honour his wife for her status as victim, but Hagar — instead of feeling compassion or anger on her mother's behalf — merely shares in his contempt for the biological slavery of women.

Jason's wife, in the daguerreotype which Hagar keeps of her, is "a spindly and anxious girl . . . [who] peers perplexed out of her little frame, wondering how on earth to please." That little frame is, of course, the straitjacket which Hagar wishes to avoid in her own life. It requires of women that they live to please others, and it is clearly pernicious. But Hagar reacts too extremely, becoming hidebound in pride — so that only at the point of death can she engage in "truly free" acts of maternal tenderness. The first of these, involving the pursuit of a bedpan for her young room-mate in the hospital, is possible only because Hagar has been liberated from an actual straitjacket. The second of her free acts also signifies a release from constriction and a motherly reaching out to others, as Hagar breaks the death hold of her wrestling match with Marvin (in the role of Jacob) to give her son the angel's blessing. Although she does not remember her mother in these last hours of life, Hagar as she approaches her own grave has achieved something like a reconciliation with that other angel. So it is that Hagar's last thought, as she holds the glass of water triumphantly in her own hands, taking what is there to be had, is "There. There." These are the mother words, which she has failed to supply for others in their deepest need — and which should have been as free as water. At least three times before in the novel these words have appeared, once when she thought but could not say them to Bram, once when she was trying to calm herself into remembering the name of

Shadow Point, and once when she congratulated herself for standing upright in the woods: "There. There." Motherless, Hagar has for nearly all her life been unable to give a mother's love and consolation to the people who needed her. In these last words, she appears as mother to herself: it is a beautiful resolution of her independence and her need.

As THE WOMAN WHO WAS NOT THERE, Hagar's mother figures powerfully also in the lives of her two sons. Their sexual identity is uncertain. Dan is described in terms which may suggest effeminacy, and Matt is childless for reasons which are bitterly apparent to his wife (the suggestion is that they did not make love, or not often). Although either or both of the brothers might be considered homosexual, Laurence does not give us enough information to conclude that — nor does it matter in the least. What does matter is that the Currie brothers have been made deeply miserable in two ways: they have not been allowed to experience or to express feminine tenderness, and they have failed to achieve an imposed standard of masculinity. These sons are a considerable disappointment to Jason Currie, whose expectations about what a man ought to be and what a woman ought to be have damaged the lives of all his children.

The extent of that psychological damage to his sons is indicated symbolically in their early deaths. Particularly in Matt's case, death seems a release from an impossibly blighted existence; Dan presumably escaped before the bars of his cage were altogether apparent to him. At the moment of Dan's death we see clearly what has been missing from their lives: Matt wraps around himself the plaid shawl of their mother, and so becomes her in order to console Dan. We realize in this poignant tableau that both boys have been sorely deprived by their mother's death, occasioned by the birth of Hagar — and that this is one reason for their resentment of Hagar. But that feeling might have been avoided if Hagar had supplied anything of the mother's tenderness which they missed on her account, or if their father had done so. At it happens, Jason Currie prefers his daughter. Thus it would seem to the boys that Hagar has deprived them of both parents, and they express their resentment by taking a switch to Hagar whenever their father has beaten them. The harshness of the father is in this way communicated to the surviving female, who has refused to embody the gentleness of their mother.

The plaid shawl is first offered to Hagar, who refuses to wear it despite Matt's pleading. It is easier for Matt, a boy, to assume this maternal guise than it is for Hagar — who is unwilling to relinquish even for this occasion her own identity, and particularly unwilling to associate herself with what she takes to be the

mother's frailty. When Hagar marries, Matt thinks of sending her the shawl as a wedding gift, either to mock her lack of womanliness, or to invest her with those qualities which the shawl represents and which she will need as wife and mother. For whatever reason, Matt changes his mind. And Hagar goes into marriage without the talismanic shawl, unable still to express the tenderness she mistakes for weakness. Repeatedly we see Hagar on the point of relenting, of acknowledging despised feminine sentiments in herself — feelings which *are* there, and which are needed badly; repeatedly, she retreats into that pride which is based on her rejection of the mother image.

Another face of the angel is mistaken as belonging solely to the stone angel of her father's pride, and this is the image of herself as lady which she embraces gladly. What she forgets is that a lady is first of all a woman. Essentially, Hagar falls victim to the lure which is held out by John Ruskin in *Sesame and Lilies*: much as Jason Currie would produce a tear in payment to thankless motherhood, so Ruskin sugar-coats the pill of servitude to men by describing woman as queen of her own household. Ruskin appeals covertly to a sense of class in his audience, an eminence which women achieve through the standing of their fathers and husbands. In this way women are to be compensated for the inferior position they hold in relation to men; with this pride of class in their hearts, women who were less than wholly convinced by Ruskin's arguments about a woman's special powers (of gentleness, piety, and so on) might still be reconciled to the subservience which is in fact allocated to them as a sex. We may suppose that some women were so daunted by male authority that they neglected to take refuge in this bounty of Ruskin's; thus, Hagar's mother in the daguerreotype "looks so worried that she will not know what to do, although she came of good family and ought not to have had a moment's hesitation about the propriety of her ways." Hagar would not be so intimidated, but it takes her some time to realize that behind the lady she becomes is a woman in harness.

As her mother was a brood mare, so Hagar when she is sent by Jason to the young ladies' academy in Toronto is described as "the dark-maned colt off to the training ring." Jason *wants* the angel of his house to be proud, requires her social arrogance as an extension of his own — although he naturally expects obedience within doors. It was his wife's failure to embody both halves of this paradoxical ideal which made him feel that her death for Hagar's life was "a fair exchange." He would rather have a thoroughbred who acts like one, so long as he can keep possession of the reins. Hagar is sent east because " 'there's no woman here to teach you how to dress and behave like a lady,' " and she returns two years later to confront her father's evaluation of the expense. Always the canny Scots merchant, Jason examines his daughter's lady-like attire and nods approval, "as though I were a thing and his." Hagar does rebel momentarily when she discovers her father's opposition to her plan to become a teacher, but she yields and

walks upstairs to begin her duties as Jason's chatelaine. She pauses there on the landing to stare rather enigmatically at an engraving of cattle. Hagar is on her way to discovering that the distance from chatelaine to chattel, from dark-maned colt to brood mare to cow, is not so very impressive after all.

Hagar's education has been as close as possible to that of a Victorian young lady: "I know embroidery, and French, and menu-planning for a five-course meal, and poetry, and how to take a firm hand with servants, and the most becoming way of dressing my hair." Thus superfluously equipped, she returns to grace Jason's transplanted haven of Victoriana, his "square brick palace so oddly antimacassared in the wilderness." Like certain of his brother merchants abroad, Jason requires such aristocratic trappings in his chatelaine as proof to the world (in this case, Manawaka) that he is a rising man. Very little of what Hagar learns in Toronto would have served her in a career as a teacher, still less in the life she chooses after three years as Jason's hostess. In each instance, we see the irrelevance of imported concepts of gentility to life on the Canadian prairie. We see also that an education which aims at making woman decorative will keep her dependent upon men. Later Hagar will envy young women like the nurse who have been better equipped for autonomous survival.

When Hagar has had enough of her father's rule, she marries Bram Shipley — because he offers an opportunity for rebellion, and because she is attracted to him physically. Since the erotic component in the masculine image has been carefully obscured in Jason Currie's household, Hagar's response to this in Bram is rebellious; but since Jason's own stereotypical view of masculinity has been communicated to Hagar, he is peculiarly responsible for the fact that she prefers Bram with his exaggerated masculinity to "the pliable boys of good family whom [Jason] trotted home" for Hagar's inspection. Mare-like and malleable, they must have seemed like women to her — and singularly unappetizing, as most things female are to Hagar. There ought to have been other alternatives, but Hagar has reached the point where it is necessary for her to leave Jason: the harness is chafing beyond endurance. Bram looks like freedom because he would look so unsatisfactory to her father. But again, her rebellion is not so thorough as she supposes, for Hagar intends to reform Bram into something more like what her father has in mind. Thus, she luxuriates in his savagery — "he looked like a bearded Indian" — and in the next instant imagines him "rigged out in a suit of gray soft as a dove's breast feathers." Her laundered, fairy tale vision of the life she would lead with Bram is similarly inspired by the poetry she has read in Toronto, so that Bram is cast in her imagination as the primitive who would miraculously prove to be a gentleman. The lady is still in harness, blind to the rough plebeian life outside her sphere.

Then Hagar marries and the veil is lifted. She finds that one of the identities envisioned for her husband is impossible: Bram Shipley is obviously not going to

improve his grammar, or prosper, or take to wearing the clothes of a gentleman. He is not going to do any of these things because he never wanted them enough, and because the contempt which his new wife shows for what he is makes him resist any of her efforts to remodel him. Yet Bram had been attracted to Hagar largely because of her lady-like ways; like the Victorian male, he aimed at procuring an angel for his house — some gentle female refinement as a compensation for the roughness which the male endures in his role as provider. Bram's roughness is more literal, his provision scantier by far — but he is not so different from Jason as Hagar thinks. Thus, he gives her the elegant decanter as a wedding gift, and so like Jason he wants sons (not daughters) to create a dynasty. Hagar's response to this ambition in Bram is "*the nerve of him,*" anger both at his absurd social presumption and at this new proof of masculine arrogance. Bram could not have supposed that the angel would find his manner so disgusting, or that her pride of class (based irrevocably on her father rather than on him) would so thoroughly obstruct her wifely subservience and love. Bram's genteel ambitions (never very strong) wither in the stone angel's gaze. But there is another Bram, corresponding to Hagar's more genuinely rebellious image of the man she married — and this is the sexual, laughing Bram, the one who seemed to promise joy.

We come now to one of the most insistent themes of the novel. Hagar is unable to let Bram know the satisfaction she feels in their love-making; her pride as a lady forbids any admission of that kind, so that ironically she cannot profit fully from her choice of a virile man. Immediately following her memory of this forced coldness in Bram's bed, Hagar is seen as an old woman lying flat on her back and "cold as winter" in another bed, remembering how children lie down in snow to make "the outline of an angel with spread wings." Significantly crafted in childhood, this snow angel recalls obviously the whiteness and chill of marble as well as the chastity of the Victorian angel. The root cause of Hagar's dilemma is religion, by way of Jason — for her father's dour Presbyterianism holds that sexuality is evil. Accordingly, his affair with "No-Name Lottie Drieser's mother" is perceived as dirty, something to be concealed from decent folk. Jason's partner in crime is a Victorian stereotype, abused and dwelling in shadows: "her face soft and blank as though she expected nothing out of life . . . she began to trudge up the hill." Because women like this exist, others may remain pure . . . so absurdly pure in fact, that Hagar is condemned to enter marriage with absolutely no information about what will happen on her wedding night. The sum of Jason's teaching is that " 'Men have terrible thoughts,' " a notion which explains in part (for there are also economic motives) the Victo-

rian allocation of chastity to women: as angels they must compensate for the bestiality of men, keeping humanity as far as possible out of Satan's grasp. Particularly was the lady to be unimpassioned, while women of a lower order (harlots and half-breeds) might be lascivious in the service of any man who chose to risk perdition. Hagar is not devout, but she is Presbyterian and Victorian enough to associate sex with stable beasts and the lower classes, with men who cannot help themselves, and with ladies least of all. In this way is her body victimized — not that she must endure her husband's embrace, but that she may not labour in love for their mutual satisfaction. She is paid for her sacrifice in being known as a lady. Again and again. Hagar relinquishes her claim to a full humanity — always in order that she may remain a lady, always failing to perceive that this apparent superiority is a ruse.

Hagar's exposure to genteel poetry and art have also contributed to her view of love as asexual: "Love, I fancied, must consist of words and deeds delicate as lavender sachets, not like things he did sprawled on the high white bedstead that rattled like a train." Bram has proven more rough Indian than Hagar had any reason to suspect. She brings to his house a print by Holman Hunt which she had acquired in the East (always the avenue for Victoriana): "I did so much admire the knight and lady's swooning adoration, until one day I saw the coyness of the pair, playing at passion, and in a fury I dropped the picture, gilt frame and all, into the slough, feeling it had betrayed me." Significantly, this picture is juxtaposed against another of horses — which Bram dislikes, despite his passion for horses, because he is annoyed that Hagar prefers the picture of the thing to the reality. The horses here (recalling Jason as stud to his wife's broodmare) obviously signify the truth of sexuality, in contrast to the myth which is perpetrated in Holman Hunt's picture. But Hagar knows that she has been betrayed, is angered not by the harsh reality of love so much as by the fact that lies such as these pale images of Holman Hunt have cut her off from authentic passion.

Hagar enters in her marriage to Bram a new kind of subjugation. She has escaped the destiny of Victorian females who sacrifice everything to their parents, a fate like that of the poor Manawaka spinster whose tomb inscription reads: "*Rest in peace. From toil, surcease. Regina Weese.*" But sexual experience is not liberating for her, and the work she must perform for a houseful of men is still drudgery. That ox-like strength she would once have exchanged for daintiness takes her through twenty-four years of hard labour in which she becomes increasingly like Bram's first wife. Clara Shipley, "inarticulate as a stabled beast," was fat, her voice gruff as a man's; likewise, Hagar gains bulk (for lack, she believes, of a proper lady's corset) and wears a man's overcoat without remembering to object. But internally she remains Hagar Currie. She is contemptuous of Bram's daughters by Clara, coarse women who cannot in any way transcend their condition. At the same time, she is reduced in the fashion of all such farm wives to

cheating her husband on the egg money and never questions that what little Bram's farm makes is not his own entirely. She is Hagar the Egyptian bondwoman of *Genesis*, no happier in her servitude than was that other Hagar. Always she rejects the satisfactions of martyrdom, the support which Clara Shipley received from what Hagar calls her "morbid motto": "*No Cross No Crown.*" Even as an old woman, Hagar will recoil from the martyrish attitudes of her daughter-in-law, despising that slavish Christianity which looks for its reward in another world. Hagar is too proud to grovel for profit, and we may honour her for that — even as we deplore her failure to appreciate the labours of Doris, and of those other women with whom she denied kinship.

Finally, Hagar decides to leave Bram. The offence of her pride has become unendurable, and she is anxious to provide another sort of environment for John, the favoured son in whom she believes the Currie heritage will flower. Ironically, she must become a servant in earnest — a woman in uniform, no longer veiled as daughter or wife — in order to earn money and to live in the sort of house she thinks is appropriate for a Currie. Also ironically, her new position echoes that of Auntie Doll, housekeeper to the Curries, in relation to whom Hagar had supposed herself "quite different . . . a different sort entirely." That she has gone from bad to worse is suggested by the peculiarly unsavoury manner in which Mr. Oatley, her employer, has made his fortune: he has shipped Oriental wives into Canada, allowing them to plummet through the false bottom of the vessel whenever Immigration became suspicious. This grisly practice obtrudes oddly in the book, until we realize that it announces the author's concern with the wrongs which have been perpetrated against women by male society.

In a male fortress, then, a house founded on the death of women, Hagar lives quietly with John and at night (but only then) yearns for the body of her husband. She has resumed a version of the place she held in Jason Currie's house, and in her retreat to such spurious prestige has re-created for John the prison of her own childhood. John is deprived of Bram, as the Currie brothers were deprived of their father's love; and he is raised to hold himself aloof in pride, in circumstances which reveal the foolishness of pride. When the Depression strikes and his prospects are reduced to zero, John returns to Manawaka. There he presides over the death of Bram, caring for him as Matt had for Dan — again as a substitute for Hagar, who comes finally but is not recognized. This is a kind of retribution for her unwillingness at Dan's death to bend and assume another's role: now Bram, the one person who called her Hagar, mistakes her for "his fat and cow-like first wife," Clara.

During this and a subsequent visit to Manawaka, Hagar observes the love which is growing up between John and Arlene Simmons, who is Lottie Drieser's daughter. Arlene's position in Manawaka society is superior to John's, a neat reversal of the time when Hagar could hold herself superior to Lottie. Thus, John

thinks at first that he is Bram-like for Arlene, illicit and therefore attractive as an opportunity for rebellion. But Arlene is free of such considerations. She has abandoned the sense of class superiority and with it the sense of sex as something a woman cannot enjoy without demeaning herself. She loves John and is capable of redeeming him for a life of joy — not of changing him exactly, as Hagar (thinking of Bram) warns her that she cannot, but of being open to him in such a way that John will change and grow of his own volition. That "stiff black seed on the page" of her *Sweet Pea Reader*, at which Hagar had stared as a child, hoping it would "swell and blossom into something different, something rare," shows signs of doing just that in the relationship of Arlene and Hagar's son. Seeing how freely Arlene can show her passion to John, Hagar finds it "incredible that such a spate of unapologetic life should flourish in this mean and crabbed world" — incredible perhaps, but for an instant she believes in this new, miraculous life for men and women.

Then she conspires with Lottie to separate their children, symbolically to stamp out their life, just as once before she stood by as Lottie trampled on the chicks emerging from their shells; in both cases death is accomplished presumably for the good of its victims. In the same punishing spirit, Jason Currie had claimed that he beat his daughter for her own good; thus he forbade her marriage to Bram. In fact his motive was self-interested, and the motive is what counts. Hagar, in need of water (her well in the wilderness) at Shadow Point, will quote Coleridge and ask "What albatross did I slay, for mercy's sake?" She will wound a gull (the spirit of love) and think "I'd gladly kill it, but I can't bring myself to go near enough." The significance of this seems to be that Hagar's fastidious pride keeps her from an act of mercy, as it had when she refused to wear the plaid shawl to ease Dan's death. In causing the separation of John and Arlene, however, their mothers do not kill "for mercy's sake," but for their own. John (whose mother will not allow him independent life) regresses to the recklessness of an embittered child and kills both himself and Arlene in a car crash. Their life is coolly stamped out. And Hagar's albatross, the guilt she feels for John's death, will be appeased only when Hagar in the role of the ancient mariner can look into her heart and admit the failure of love.

THE CIRCUMSTANCES SURROUNDING John's death are repressed by Hagar (and kept from the reader) until the turning and gathering point of the novel, which occurs at Shadow Point. Hagar has run away from her house in Vancouver because Marvin and Doris intend to put her in the nursing home which Hagar the Egyptian thinks of as "a mausoleum": she is running still from incarceration, from any imposed image of herself as feeble or subject to

another's will. Twice before Hagar had fled — from her father's mausoleum to Bram's house, and from there to Mr. Oatley's death-like mansion in Vancouver. Her destination now repeats the flight to Bram's house. The abandoned house in which she first seeks shelter is unpainted, as the Shipley place had been; but now Hagar takes satisfaction in its weathered state, thinking how Marvin (the proper son, who sells house paint) would disapprove as once she relished Jason Currie's disapproval. Her second shelter, the cannery, with its "rusted and unrecognizable machinery" and the "skeleton" of a fishboat, also recalls the Shipley place, where "rusty machinery stood like aged bodies gradually expiring from exposure, ribs turned to the sun." These connections are important, because at Shadow Point Hagar will confront the deaths associated with the drought-plagued Shipley place — Bram's death, and finally John's. Hagar, we may remember, is herself a figure of the drought: her aged skin is "powdery as blown dust when the rains failed . . . left out in a sun that grinds bone and flesh and earth to dust as though in a mortar of fire with a pestle of light." But she will also, when she has suffered enough of such fiery enlightenment, be granted the mercy of water before her own death comes in fact.

Significantly, she must descend a stairway to arrive at the place where her genuine freedom will begin. There may be echoes here of that staircase she climbed up in Jason's house to begin her tenure as his chatelaine. Now, as the stone angel topples, as a lady would come down from her pedestal, so Hagar laboriously descends the half-rotted steps which lead to the beach. "It's not a proper stairway, actually" — it is returning to its natural condition, just as Hagar, "feeling slightly dizzy," abandons propriety to enter the depths of her own nature. On the way down these steps she feels the "goatsbeard brush satyr-like" against her — as Bram had done when they met; and she sees a kind of wildflower called the Star of Bethlehem, which (together with the Pan images) implies the spiritual rebirth which is waiting for her at Shadow Point. She delights in thinking of herself as Meg Merrilies, from the poem by Keats — an old gypsy woman (common, by the world's reckoning) whose house was "out of doors," whose "book" (like Hagar's) was "a churchyard tomb." It is as Meg *Merrilies* that she will encounter *Murray Lees*, her spiritual double, and drink the wine which is referred to in Keats' poem. They will exhibit toward one another something of that ease-giving generosity which is also contained in the poem: "She plaited mats o' rushes, / And gave them to the cottagers / She met among the bushes." Old Meg is compassionate; she sings and decks her hair with garlands (as Hagar does with June bugs); she rejoices in nature; and she dies. The model of womanhood she offers to Hagar on the eve of her own death is also one of independence and of undiminished pride: "Old Meg was brave as Margaret Queen / And tall as Amazon." This is the resolution of compassion and pride which Hagar seeks.

On the beach, Hagar sees a small boy and girl playing house. These children are later compared to John and Arlene, and there is also a connection with Hagar and Murray Lees, who take up residence together in the cannery. The girl is nagging at the boy, fussing about appearances; and Hagar wants to warn her that she will lose him if she continues to be so critical, so niggardly of praise. Again, the drought metaphor is employed: "*The branches will wither, the roots they will die, / You'll be all forsaken and you'll never know why.*" When she intervenes, however, the children cling to one another — and this show of unity makes Hagar think that she has underestimated them, as clearly she does in the case of John and Arlene. Rather strangely, Hagar has claimed that she was herself forsaken: "I never left them. It was the other way around, I swear it." In any case, she is at last beginning to know why. She acknowledges here that love is the water required for growth, and that false pride can kill as surely as the drought. When love fails, each partner is forsaken; both lose, and blame is not the crucial issue.

The turning point comes with the arrival of Murray F. Lees. Almost her first remark to him is " 'I hope you'll excuse my appearance,' " but soon Hagar relaxes enough to share his wine and listen to his tale. What she hears is essentially her own story: a tale in which religion plays an important role, where the chief villains are a concern for appearances and the denial of sexuality, and where the catastrophe involves the loss of a son. Murray's story is about two women, his mother and his wife. Rose Ferney was his mother's name, " 'A delicate name, she used to say,' " but Rose was in fact as tough as a morning glory vine. Ironically, Hagar fails to see herself in Rose: " 'Fancy spending your life worrying what people were thinking. She must have had a rather weak character.' " The point, of course, is that the proverbial clinging vine takes many forms, both strong and weak; the frailty of women can be deceptive (as in the case of Rose or Lottie), and the tenacity which is shown in an obsessive regard for appearances is also weakness.

Murray's grandfather was a circuit rider, an evangelist who greatly embarrassed his Anglican daughter-in-law; yet Murray preferred " 'hellfire to [his mother's] lavender talcum,' " and became himself a Redeemer's Advocate. The passion of that sect became still more attractive when he met Lou at Bible Camp, for here it seemed was a religion in which " 'prayer and *that*' " were not the " 'odd combination' " which Hagar thinks they are. Then Lou got pregnant and began to worry (as Murray's mother always had) about her reputation. They married, but her concern grew with the arrival of a child too big to be premature — and her heart went out of sex. She thought that God was punishing her, and her religion became (like Jason's Presbyterianism) a denial of the flesh. But the real punishment came for Lou and Murray, as it had for Hagar, in the *death* of their son — and not his birth, which was the fruit of love. Thus, the child is

killed in a fire while Lou is in the tabernacle with Murray, " 'begging for the keys of heaven.' " They are punished symbolically, as Hagar is throughout her life and especially in John's death, for the denial of sexuality which Laurence opposes so vehemently in this novel. In Lou's original sensuality and its demise, we see clearly what Laurence believes has been done to women in the name of religion and propriety; in Murray's deprivation at the change in his wife, we see how this process has worked also to the disadvantage of the male.

Hagar does not come to any conscious realization of her error in listening to Murray's story. But it works on her subconsciously, as in a sort of dream she admits the guilt which is parallel to Murray's, and he assumes the role of John in order to forgive her. She also exhibits forgiveness toward Murray, first in trying to assuage his guilt over the fire, and second in pardoning him for the broken promise which brings Marvin and Doris to the cannery. Strictly speaking, Hagar is wrong when she tells Murray that " 'No one's to blame' " for his son's death. Yet there are times when compassion requires us to act and speak not strictly in accordance with some ideal of truth, but with a clear sense of the other's plight. That same generosity in which Hagar has failed so often, and which she is learning with such difficulty now, must in the end be applied to her. We judge her less harshly than we might because we acknowledge the power of those forces which have worked against her. At the same time, we admire Hagar's pride precisely because it is a form (however twisted) of resistance to those forces — a statement, in fact, that Hagar Shipley is her own woman. She will not beg at heaven's gate, or cite excuses; if there is a God, he must take her as we do — for better or worse.

With the arrival of Marvin and Doris at the cannery, we learn that Hagar is dying. She is taken to a hospital, where her pride seems to be thriving still as she insists that Marvin get her a private room. A ward full of helpless women, where you sleep "as you would in a barracks or a potter's field, cheek-by-jowl with heaven knows who all," is not the place for Hagar. Although she has just been comforted by a night in the proximity of Murray Lees, "Nothing is ever changed at a single stroke." In fact, the ward is exactly what Hagar needs, and she is kept there long enough to make friends with Elva Jardine, a common *woman* — as if to repeat in another key her experience of comradeship with Murray Lees. It is at this point in the novel that the theme of sisterhood becomes apparent. After a lifetime of despising women, Hagar is at last compelled to join the ranks of her own sex. Her democratization (the lessening of class pride) takes the form of a movement toward her fellow women in order to suggest that Hagar has turned to pride of class partly as an escape from the humiliations of her sex.

Elva Jardine recalls Mrs. Steiner, the woman at Silverthreads Nursing Home who had seemed briefly to hold out the promise of friendship for Hagar. It was she who spoke of the comfort to be had from daughters (a point also made by

Lottie), and who articulated Hagar's own astonishment at the way a woman's body can travel from puberty through childbirth to menopause with such harrowing speed that the *mind* seems left behind at every stage, aghast and wondering. Hagar liked Mrs. Steiner immediately, but saw her as a trap designed to make Silverthreads and resignation seem attractive. She ran from that "oriental shrug" which accompanied Mrs. Steiner's ironic question: " 'Where will you go? You got someplace to go?' " Having run from "oriental" (or submissive) womanhood as far as she was able, Hagar at last can run no more; the body is insistent, and now what it insists upon is death. Thus, she confronts her *human* fate simultaneously with her identity as woman, which she recognizes through Elva and other women in the hospital. It is important for Laurence that Hagar should make this connection before she dies.

Hagar doesn't like Elva immediately, for her pride interferes, and she recoils as usual from the sort of woman who seems "flimsy as moth wings." But Elva is tough in spirit, as well as compassionate toward other women and tender in the love she exhibits toward her husband. All of this is a lesson for Hagar, one that strikes to her roots because Elva (by a fortunate coincidence) is from Manawaka. Thus, Hagar can return in imagination to claim Bram instead of Jason (whom she might have used to impress Elva) and to admit through Elva her kinship with those common women of Manawaka she had once denied. Like Mrs. Steiner, Elva Jardine faces her own imminent death as a woman and with courage, revealing to Hagar that the two are not at odds. And she offers another lesson in the way she handles the indignities of bowel and bladder which have been so oppressive to Hagar in her infirmity. She struggles to the bathroom on her " 'own two pins,' " but will accept help when she needs it — as well as *offer* help, in the shape of a bedpan for Mrs. Dobereiner. Hagar proves that she has learned what Elva has to teach when (valiantly, but with an appreciation of absurdity) she gets the bedpan for Sandra Wong, her final room-mate. Those bedsheets which Doris washed so frequently, without complaining to Hagar until the end, are recalled by these events — so that we have a sense of many women joining together to admit the realities of the body, and to deal with the indignities that oppose them.

In Sandra Wong, Hagar confronts the changes which have occurred in women's lives. Laurence makes her Chinese so that Hagar can imagine her as "the granddaughter of one of the small foot-bound women whom Mr. Oatley smuggled in, when Oriental wives were frowned upon." But Sandra "speaks just like Tina," Hagar's own liberated granddaughter — which places Hagar squarely in that generation of women whose feet were bound. The corset of a lady was more appealing to Hagar, and would seem more natural; but it is not dissimilar in function, as both forms of binding work to restrict the movements of women and reduce their size. And all of this occurs for the delectation of the male, whose

vanity is flattered by an implicit comparison to his own superior mobility and stature, while ironically the vanity of woman is provoked to make her collaborate in the process of diminution. In effect, woman turns to self-love in order to avoid self-hatred; she defeats herself in order to save herself when she embraces pride of class or personal vanity as her defence. This image of constriction (the foot-binding) connects with that straitjacket of pride from which Hagar must be released in order to get the bedpan for Sandra and to bless Marvin — her two "truly free" acts — and so reveals the deep interpenetration of these themes in the novel. Hagar's own complicity is further implied when she thinks, "Maybe I owe my house to her grandmother's passage money. There's a thought." She does not pursue that thought, but we may — and we realize that Hagar's mistake has been to join forces with the oppressor (all that Jason Currie has represented in the way of patriarchal, Victorian arrogance), and that she has done so for her own profit, although that profit has been illusory. In fact, she has been deformed as badly as those other women from whom she had hoped to dissociate herself. As their feet were crippled, so in her compensatory pride Hagar has been kept from the natural, healthy development of feeling which was her birthright as a woman and as a human being.

Hagar welcomes the changes which have come about for women, that the young nurse has training which allows her independence and that Sandra Wong can refer knowledgeably to hysterectomies, but she knows that nothing changes all at once: "The plagues go on from generation to generation." With Tina, however, it seems that progress has been made, for contrary to her grandmother's expectation, Tina has found "a man who'll bear her independence," and Hagar sends her a sapphire ring as a wedding present. With this ring, the novel comes a full circle. It had belonged to Hagar's despised mother, and should have gone (as Hagar tells Doris in a gesture of reconciliation) to her despised daughter-in-law first of all. It might also have gone to Arlene, of course, if Hagar had possessed the wisdom then that she shows now in sending the ring to Tina. Hagar does not envision here a future for women without men, but a situation in which both men and women will be free to love one another and to respect each other's needs. She cannot undo the past. She will not deny the person she has been. But in the act of ring-giving, Hagar succeeds in linking four generations of women with some faith that whatever plagues continue, of pride or other oppression, there will also be increasing joy.

LAURENCE'S FICTION

A Revisioning of Feminine Archetypes

Stephanie A. Demetrakopoulos

MARGARET LAURENCE SAYS THAT SHE writes what she believes everyone has always known.[1] Yet she is making a radical change in the whole literary tradition by re-telling from a woman's point of view traditional and archetypal feminine life patterns that have been portrayed hitherto by male authors only. In this essay I will trace her delineation of feminine archetypes and culture in Africa, both native and colonial; her development of Stacey and Rachel as modern versions of Aphrodite and Artemis, of Hagar as a redeemed yet Medusan Crone, and of Morag as perhaps a new form of feminine individuation, a positive Arachne, weaver of truths: an artist on the move but grounded in the matrilineal roots of mothering. My analysis follows the chronological published order of her work except for *The Fire-Dwellers* and *A Jest of God* which I treat together as two sides of one coin.

It is Laurence's very ease and comfort at being a woman and an artist in the same skin that makes her work so remarkable, so trustworthy, so full of vision and compassion. Even her Somali travelogue, *New Wind in a Dry Land*, reflects this in her loving study of all the natives and especially her feminine insights concerning the women. By the end of the book, she has articulated the plight of the native women, as well as some of the problems of the wives of foreigners working in Somaliland. She makes us aware of the suffering of native women who "fail" to produce sons; the repression of individuation in the native women through enforced "modesty"; the plight of the young fifteen- or sixteen-year-old girls married to elderly men; and the low status of the women in tribal and religious traditions: "a woman's wits and her sharp tongue were often her only protection." We are also made aware of the terrible and "desperate boredom," "the sense of life being lived pointlessly and in a vacuum" suffered by the wives of the English stationed in Somaliland.

Because Laurence is a woman, the Somali women felt they could ask her for help with the considerable pain that menstruation, intercourse, and birth caused them, because of the clitoridectomy they underwent at puberty. The nomadic women who led the camels especially found this pain unbearable. Laurence had only aspirin to offer them and was obviously chagrined at having to commit "the

lunatic audacity of shoving a mild pill at their total situation. . . . " She tells them she has nothing and

> The nodded their heads, unprotestingly. They had not really believed I would give them anything. Women had always lived with pain. Why should it ever be any different? They felt they ought not to have asked. They hid their faces in their cloths for a moment, then spoke determinedly of other things.

With this single passage, Laurence demonstrates what happens when a woman is available for women of other lands to approach; she also shows that the many people who defend these mutilations as mere "traditions" do not realize the pain these women undergo in their most purely female functions. Yet we see the courage and perseverance of the women in spite of it all. Self-pity is never part of Laurence's own baggage, and she recognizes a certain heroism in these women who have so much to endure but complain so little.

Her sense of the plight of the children again reflects her feminine point of view. She learns that one of the camp followers "Asha . . . about eight years old with a curiously vacant and withdrawn look" is a child prostitute. Laurence gives the unkempt, dirty little girl a comb, the only thing she ever asked for; during the months the family travelled with their camp, she frets over how to help the child. She does nothing because there is no way to take the child out of the situation, and to interfere would only make things worse:

> But Asha's half-wild, half-timid face with its ancient eyes will remain with me always, a reproach and a question.

Typically feminine, she internalizes the plight of these people. Her response to the children of Africa is always maternal, womanly, and compassionate:

> Malaria is the largest child-killer in all Africa . . . the children under six . . . are most afflicted, and it was these young ones whom I found hardest to look at. . . . I turned away, unable to meet those eyes. . . . To me, it seemed that these children died pointlessly, and vanished as though they had never been, like pebbles thrown into a dark and infinite well.

This is an especially feminine image, a Demeter sense of death as a devouring Hades or even Chronos — death is not so much a brutal antagonist as men tend to see it.[2] It is rather like a return to the unconscious or to non-being. The children seem to have flickered into consciousness only to sink back, to be re-immersed in the dark waters of origin.

It is Margaret Laurence's response as a woman and a mother that gives the following passage its depth and poignancy:

> Driving along the Awareh-Hargeisa road, we saw two burden camels laden with the crescent-shaped hutframes and the bundled mats. They were halted by the roadside, and as we drew near, we saw one of the beasts slide to its knees, sunken in the apathy of thirst and exhaustion. Beside them, squatting in the sand, was a

> woman, a young woman, her black headscarf smeared with dust. She must have possessed, once, a tenderly beautiful face. Now her face was drawn and pinched. In her hands she held an empty tin cup. She did not move at all, or ask for water. Despair keeps its own silence. Her brown robe swayed in the wind. She carried a baby slung across one hip. The child's face was quiet, too, its head lolling in the heavy heat of the sun. We had a little water left in our spare tank, and so we stopped. She did not say a word, but she did something then which I have never been able to forget.
>
> She held the cup for the child to drink first.
>
> She was careful not to spill a drop. Afterward, she brushed a hand lightly across the child's mouth, then licked her palm so that no moisture would be wasted.
>
> To her, I must have seemed meaningless, totally unrelated to herself. How could it have been otherwise? I had never had to coax the lagging camels on, when they would have preferred to stop and rest and die. But what I felt as I looked into her face, was undeniable and it was not pity. It was something entirely different, some sense of knowing in myself what her anguish had been and would be, as she watched her child's life seep away for the lack of water to keep it alive. For her, this was the worst that Jilal drought could bring. In all of life there was nothing worse than this.

I quote this haunting passage in its entirety because it not only shows her depth as a human being and as a woman but is also exemplary of her superb prose style, which keeps her vision from ever becoming sentimental. She emphasizes the complete fatigue and inertia of the small group through the details of the camel that "slides" and "sinks." This stillness and the poignant stasis of despair in the once "tenderly beautiful" face carry the first full paragraph. The starkly juxtaposed affirmation of the mother's love for her child, the self-sacrifice, is contained in the two one-sentence paragraphs which formally centralize the depth and beauty of the young woman's selfless devotion to her baby. I think this passage demonstrates John Baxter's assertion that Margaret Laurence is as much a master of the plain style as Shakespeare was of the Elizabethan.[3] In the last paragraph Laurence herself not only experiences this maternal anguish but also sees herself from the mother's point of view as a being light years away from her plight. It is this constant sense of feeling with her characters, yet moving outside of them to the universal human condition, that gives all of Laurence's works their archetypal depth, their numinosity.

Laurence thus brings to this male-dominated genre of the travelogue the freshness of a typically feminine sensitivity, what Nancy Chodorow calls the more "permeable-ego-membrane" of the woman, who wants not only to describe the natives objectively, but also to get actually into their skins, to feel with them their subjective and internal sense of reality. By filtering her experience through a finely honed analytical mind that rests on a rich, insightful, and sensitive feminine sensibility, Laurence takes the travelogue into an unexpected and new

dimension. We experience her portraits more complexly, more subjectively, and hence more fully.

ALTHOUGH HER AFRICAN FICTION features mostly male protagonists, the men's psychic ground of being is the world of women; feminine symbols usually carry the theme. In *This Side Jordan*, both male protagonists are driven away from and out of their pasts by fear of certain faces of the feminine. Johnnie Kestoe is repelled by the pregnancy of his wife Miranda, which seems to trigger in him the horrible memory of his own mother dying from an abortion. He rejects the world of the feminine — *eros*, relating, bonding, empathy. He prefers a hierarchical world that keeps women and the natives beneath him so he need not deal with their feelings but only with their role. He is most comfortable with the idea of the native women as low-level, faceless, interchangeable creatures of nature. When he actually has intercourse with a native girl, he sees to his horror that he has in essence mutilated her with his penis, ripped open her sewn organs. He has torn apart her clitoridectomy, and she becames a metaphor of the suffering, voiceless, passive African continent, unavailable to the white man except through mutilation. This African woman also reflects the low-level anima of Johnnie, shows that his feminine principle is virtually undifferentiated. Johnnie's own wife Miranda (though blundering in her attempts) shows him the path that he must follow if he is going to relate with the natives other than as a hierarchical superior. Though naively Western, Miranda does at least somewhat connect with the natives and it is important that she gives birth to a girl; her husband must face the matrilineal, feminine values as they proliferate in his own house. The novel's ending foreshadows Johnnie's future; he will be pulled back from a proud, pathologically masculine and alienated self into a feminine matrix or ground of feeling.

Nathaniel Amegbe, on the other hand, needs to fight his way clear of a devouring mother in the form of his people and the African mother/river who call him back to his village. Laurence gives these forces feminine gender — metaphorically in that the pleading river is called his mother. His wife Aya reflects the pathological side of the matrilineal, Demeter/Persephone side of woman.[5] She pleads to have her baby delivered among the women folk, a desire that Laurence makes understandable but also irrational and dangerous by discussing the horrors of primitive delivery. Nathaniel's victory when Aya decides to go to the hospital is ambivalent; the feminine has lost some of its own more primordial alliances in order to go with the African masculine in its heroic ego/consciousness development as it assimilates Western masculine consciousness. The term "assimilates" is important here because Nathaniel seems the most developed of the male protagonists. He never loses his roots in his own culture, and that ground seems

healthier, sounder than Johnnie's. Nathaniel prays to a Black Madonna and his whole sense of reality seems richly syncretistic and polytheistic, reflecting, I believe, Laurence's own metaphysics.[6] Aya's giving birth to a son, of course, signals Nathaniel's own deeper connections with another type of masculinity that is highly futuristic.

The characters who are not part of the future (like Cora and James) have dead children, who highlight the meaning of the fertility of the two protagonists' wives. Children of course carry the archetype of the future, and the ending of the novel points towards a merging of traditionally separate realities that will ultimately constellate into a pattern that Laurence does not define. Nathaniel has changed a good deal; Johnnie's changes seem rather *in potentia*. The novel's values and open-ended form reflect what Ann and Barry Ulanov would call a highly developed "matriarchal superego":

> Matriarchal clarities are found more than created, discovered in the joining of ambivalent responses to situations that require mixed reactions. We are far now from the certainties of determinism and universal law patriarchal values. We are in the indeterminate tonalities of lived experience . . . the "both-and" style of the matriarchal superego is characterized by its openness to a variety of conflicting viewpoints . . . and a widely inclusive judgment rather than a narrow discriminating one.[7]

The Tomorrow-Tamer also reflects a structure that sees the feminine as a ground of being. The first story, "The Drummer of All the World," features a young white man who longs for his beloved African nurse, who suckled him and soothed him in the dark when his own parents ignored his fears. His loss of her seems to cut him loose from his moorings forever, as he drifts about in Europe dreaming of "the beauty of African women." The last image in the book is beautifully archetypal — an older native woman through whom the goddess Demeter shows herself:

> Mammii Ama straightened her plump shoulders. Like a royal palm she stood, rooted in magnificence, spreading her arms like fronds, to shelter the generations.

The tree whose roots grow deep and whose branches (arms) become as the brooding hen's is an image that many women are generating now to express the powerful endurance and protectiveness of older women.[8] It is an image of incredible beauty and naturalness, reflecting matrilineal connection and a sense of existential anchoredness that older women embody for themselves and the culture. The African matriarch is an unchanging source and future for her people. The book begins with a male cut off from and yearning for the mother and ends with an image of the permanence of the mother.

Thus Laurence gives tribute to the feminine principle throughout her works on Africa. Nor does she shrink from naming the negative aspects of the

feminine principle, such as the women of Aya's family who would more or less eat Nathaniel alive if they could. Also, the lack of education among the African women makes them a dreary and grim weight that the often lonely and more advanced African men must carry in their quest for national development. Nathaniel works at a school for only boys; and although he never directly sees the connection, the reader sees the ironies when he wonders why his wife is involved with an evangelical, ignorant religious group. Nevertheless, Laurence never lets us look away from the suffering of the African women, and for me an important part of her African works is that she speaks for a voiceless group, from the mute suffering of the child prostitute and the mutilated women of Somaliland to the puzzled, frightened wife of Nathaniel who is being scurried into Western civilization with no true understanding of it at all.

IT IS IN HER MANAWAKA NOVELS that the full breadth and scope of Margaret Laurence's sensibility most comes to life. For the sake of brevity, I will confine myself to configurations of adult feminine archetypes for the remainder of this essay. I would only point out that I think the stories in *A Bird in the House* accomplish several kinds of exorcism/revelation without which perhaps Laurence would not have been able to write her later novels. Vanessa looks squarely at the psychological brutality of her grandfather; he is the face of the negative World Father, the patriarchal mindset that all women fight against in some form and at some time. Vanessa is able to feel compassion for him finally — she comes even to admire his strength. Laurence develops his shadow figure of failure, Uncle Dan, and finally shows that the grandfather can and does change. He would not let her mother go to school although she had the highest marks in the province. He finally breaks his other daughter Edna, chiefly furious because she is just like him; she loses the man she most loved because she has so internalized her father's pride that she cannot reach out to her lover. Although he has crushed the psyches and blocked the development of his wife and two daughters, he in the end sells bonds so that Vanessa can go to school. This in no way lessens the crimes he has committed against the other women. Yet Vanessa does see him as a changing person and it is important for her animus development that she recognize the potential for change in even the most rigid personality. The collection of stories also portrays the significance of woman's often unquestioned and unconscious feminine ground of being, the Mother/Aunt/Grandmother faces from among which we choose our future. More than that the book reflects in Vanessa's mother our collective mothers asking their daughters to go forth as their delegates, to break the umbilical cord away from a solely feminine, sex-typed role in life. They ask us with their *lives,* as Laurence so poignantly portrays.

Perhaps the most fascinating amplification of an archetypal feminine that Laurence develops occurs in the polarities embodied by Rachel of *A Jest of God* and Stacey of *The Fire-Dwellers*. These two faces of women are present even in the earliest Greek myths.[9] They reflect woman defined as she relates to man. One type of woman orients herself entirely towards man and she becomes at varying times Aphrodite, Demeter, Hera: his lover, mother of his children, his wife. The other sort of woman flees from man and defines herself as Artemis or Persephone. Persephone is the eternal "puella,"[10] the mother's daughter; and Artemis lives in a purely matriarchal realm, killing men who enter her realm. Pluto and Actaeon are typical of the obtrusive role of men in the totally feminine world of Persephone and Artemis. Spenser in *The Faerie Queene* portrays twin sisters named Amoret and Belphoebe who are taken, respectively, to Aphrodite and Artemis to be raised. Amoret is raised only for wifehood as a sort of "anima" hook for male projection. She is too passive, fearful, does not know how to simply be a friend to men or women. She gets captured by a professional adulterer (a courtly lover) and must be rescued by a more balanced, active female figure, Britomart. Spenser shows that Belphoebe on the other hand is a sort of teaser, riding bare-thighed through the woods, never giving any favours to Timias who hopelessly follows her about. He, in fact, just sort of withers up. Belphoebe is cold, vain, and though Spenser gives typical Renaissance lip service to the glory of her virginity, he clearly finds her distasteful. This archetypal pair emerges again in modern male-authored literature in D. H. Lawrence's *Women in Love*. Ursula is the good woman, naturally formed for wifehood; she and her lover go south where she will warm him to her hearth. Yet he mourns for the more "true" friendship of another man — so Ursula like Amoret (and Aphrodite/Demeter/Hera) supposedly *cannot* provide the intellectual and moral companionship that a male friend can give. Lawrence makes his Artemis figure much darker than Spenser's. Ursula's sister Gudrun destroys Gerald, taking him north where he literally freezes to death. Her independence of men is seen as devouring, killing. Her art work is described as abortions. She is sterile, anti-life.

These are male fantasies. Spenser and Lawrence mainly treat these women in terms of how they affect men as types of anima figures. Laurence takes the same images and renders them from the woman's point of view. (She says that she knew somehow that these two women were sisters, Stacey and Rachel.)

Stacey is like the Aphrodite/Demeter/Hera faces of woman. She begins her love relationship with Mac as a type of Aphrodite; after their marriage, when we first meet her, she has slowly metamorphosed into the Demeter/mother and Hera/wife archetypes. Like all Laurence's women, she goes to a body of water to connect with her own deepest self. There she finds her "flower boy," whose offer of fleeing responsibility with him makes her realize how deeply committed she is to her children and Mac. As a resolution to the novel Laurence gives Stacey an

Athena kind of development. Athena is like a sister-anima, an often rather militant and helpful companion to man. Contrary to Spenser and D. H. Lawrence, Laurence shows that the woman who chooses wifehood as a major source of her identity can individuate and become a friend and companion to her husband. The novel does not fall into the weary pattern of so many feminist novels that insist the woman leave the home or take a job to become a person. I think Stacey has the hardest job of self-actualization of all Laurence's women. The constant distractions and interruptions that a housewife lives with make it easy for her to fall into a peculiarly feminine kind of sin. Many women theologians are insisting now that pride is more usually a masculine sin and that women sin oppositely through

> triviality, distractibility, and diffuseness; lack of an organizing center of focus; dependence on others for one's own self-definition; tolerance at the expense of standards of excellence; inability to respect the boundaries of privacy; sentimentality, gossipy sociability, and mistrust of reason — in short underdevelopment or negation of the self.[11]

By keeping her protagonist at home, Laurence is, I think, affirming the need and worth of feminine values in a masculine world. Stacey is the connector, the harmonizer in a family consisting of three predominantly male generations in one house. The metaphor of fire seems an important one in delineating her place in a world dominated by masculine values — the news media constantly announce potential or actual destruction of Stacey's world by fire.

An alchemical fantasy deepens and helps explain the elemental basis of the human psyche as Laurence develops it. Alchemists identify the masculine elements as fire, air, and sulphur (a hot demonic substance); the feminine elements are water, earth, and salt (too much makes you bitter, but a little salt smarts and "wises you up").[12] Mercury is the element that connects salt and sulphur, the imaginative element that connects the masculine and the feminine in this scheme. The overweight Stacey perhaps begins with too much earth — she has become too much Hestia, the goddess of the hearth.[13] Stacey connects with her own watery depths through Luke, and the salty wisdom she derives from that connection helps her to imagine and understand Mac. Mac is burning up with frustrated ambition and must connect with little Duncan who has been delegated the "inferior" masculine principle in the family. Duncan almost drowns (too much water, he needs more connection with the father) and is carried, loved for the first time by his father at the end of the novel. The novel ends with Stacey's youngest daughter finally speaking, and speaking comes the hardest to the side of the feminine for which Stacey stands. It is hard for the feminine in a masculine-patterned world to speak, to name herself, to find herself. But when she does she not only establishes self but also gives self and connection to those around her.

Rachel, too, can be seen in archetypal terms as going finally, for the first time in her life, to the deepest waters of the self, there to take her chances, to take risks in Vancouver beside the Pacific Ocean. Unlike Spenser's and Lawrence's figures, she does not finally hurt anyone, except herself, with her cold, critical view of life. She carries the matriarchal world with her, taking her mother with her; but now she is no longer the Persephone/daughter,[14] but the mother herself, in command. Leaving Manawaka is in itself leaving a matriarchal realm of the known and comforting. Had she stayed, she would have risked falling more deeply into a purely feminine world, with Calla. It is important to see that Calla is *not* a repellent character. She is plain, even a little dull; but she does genuinely love Rachel other than erotically. But Rachel cannot stay in one place anymore; she needs to change more than just internally like Stacey. The novel is open-ended, but one feels that whatever happens, she has escaped the traps she made for herself.

Stacey has too much impinging on her life, and her task is to order and rank priorities. Like Psyche sorting the seeds,[15] this is often the task of a woman who orients herself to a man and her home. Rachel, on the other hand, is spiritually dying from lack of connections in the real world; she becomes pregnant with her own internality. One of the appealing things about Rachel is her rich inner life, but it is unanswered by her outer world. Interestingly, in each novel, the protagonist envies her sister's life. Each needs the balance the opposite other symbolizes.

LAURENCE'S DEVELOPMENT AND TURNING inside out of these polar feminine archetypes suggests that the right side of the brain (left-handedness, the feminine, the dark and irrational) suddenly after thousands of years of evolution has begun speaking, explaining itself to the left side. Just as Laurence spoke for the African women, she has spoken for two very "oppressed" archetypes of our culture and literary heritage. Stacey and Rachel also show how Laurence intuits the advent of middle-age as a "boundary" time of new identification for women. It is important to see that unlike two other protagonists of Laurence, Morag of *The Diviners* and Hagar of *The Stone Angel*, neither Stacey nor Rachel really take the risks of moving from one lifestyle to another. In contrast, Hagar and Morag both accept a lack of security and a life of hard work (supporting themselves both economically and emotionally) to secure the independence and autonomy that take them into new situations and give them opportunity for psychic expansion. Since neither Stacey nor Rachel essentially changes her life-style, her change must be internal so as not to jostle or worry her dependents. (Rachel does move, but takes her mother along.) Both make these internal changes through connections with dynamic animus figures that the women internalize although the men themselves are ephemeral figures in their

lives like Hermes, the messenger god. They are both typically feminine in the ease with which they assimilate the values/personalities of others. Hagar and Vanessa's Aunt Edna are antithetical in their tight hard ego boundaries which reflect the negative animus influence of their fathers.

A sympathetic rendition of the Medusa, Hagar of *The Stone Angel* re-tells an old story from a feminine point of view. She corrects the myopic masculine vision that tends only to see woman as she affects him and as he hence imagines she is. I will mention here only a few important distinctions between Hagar and such old women as Chaucer's Wyf of Bath or Joyce Cary's Sarah Monday. Older women have often been seen as revoltingly lecherous, spending their days and nights plotting how sexually to entrap various men. Male authors depict the women as feeling great sadness over losing their sexual charms. Hagar, however, still feels nice-looking in certain dresses, and clearly needs no man around to tell her so. In fact, independence and autonomy are her most impassioned desires. Hagar's problem is a sort of "animus-bound" pride that makes her reject feminine relatedness, as embodied by her daughter-in-law Doris who is truly concerned about Hagar. Again we see the image of water. Hagar has become not just earth but cold marble and too much salt, bitter. Afraid of being placed in a nursing home, she escapes to a deserted building by the sea where she learns how she has destroyed others through her pride; when dying, she wrests a cup of water[16] from Doris at the end. Although she is still quite stubborn and prideful, Hagar symbolically accepts feminine relatedness from the hands of a woman she sees as less beneath her than before. She has moved to a healthy Demeter role with her young female hospital room-mate shortly before her death. Laurence shows an old woman interested in metaphysics, younger women, her children, the meaning of the past. Cary's Sarah Monday dumps her children behind like Defoe's Moll Flanders. Chaucer's Wyf sees life only in terms of male/female relationships. This is not how women imagine old age for themselves.

Hagar is one face of the daughter with no mother. Hagar had no ameliorating feminine to save her from internalizing the harshness, severity, even cruelty of her father. She is Persephone trapped forever underground with the depressing, disconnecting masculine values of Hades. In some ways she is redeemed by becoming a daughter, a dependent to Doris. She signals her sudden awareness of a matrilineal alliance with Doris when she tugs off her family ring and gives it to Doris to give to Tina, the granddaughter.

Thus we see Hagar's metaphysical dilemmas, not just her assessment of outside forces like the Wyf of Bath's listing of lovers and her wistful hoping (through her story) that men will love her soul more than her body. Hagar's psychic quest is to break through to an affirmation of feminine values, eros, relatedness. She does not need a man to establish her self worth. In a sense she always has loved herself — her own ferocious wit and observations nourish her soul. She is remi-

niscent of the older Lillian Hellman, or May Sarton's Hilary Stevens — we see inside the face of Medusa or Hecate, an aged and not-to-be denied Fury. As her son says in despair and pride, "She's a holy terror." There is a holiness in her life energy and a kind of holy terror indeed in her impassioned expression of self. Like the protagonist in Tillie Olsen's "Tell Me a Riddle," Hagar's consciousness is evolving; she is learning to her last breath — which is a truly marvellous affirmation of life. She embodies the older woman as Mary Daly in *Gyn/Ecology* defines her, a self-proclaimed Crone.

Often one can recognize the worth of an artist by the quality and type of critics she/he attracts. As a Renaissance scholar, I can attest to the humane openness of Spenserians as opposed to the more hierarchical and elitist Miltonists. There are several brilliant and insightful essays on *The Diviners*.[17] As Thomas remarks, it is an epic work.[18] We finally have in Morag the feminine counterpart of Odysseus. She carries a lot more burdens than he does, including the whole metaphysical baggage of the twentieth century, but she comes home more surely and enduringly than he. Morag constellates a new archetypal feminine.

Morag, like Hagar, is motherless; but like Jane Eyre, she is fortunate enough to have some surrogate mothers. Prin is a fascinating study of a woman trapped into a purely Hestian or domestic role, but not by a man or society so much as her own limited intelligence and lack of will. She spins herself a cocoon of fat that slowly submerges her psyche into total non-individuation. She is one of the terrifying (especially for women) faces of the feminine and represents the way that the flesh itself can swallow up the feminine spirit. Buckle's mother in *The Fire-Dwellers* is blind, also hugely obese, and drinks wine all day from a teapot — another rendition of psychic nothingness that women fear. Women can retire from life into a domestic setting more easily than men and can slowly drift, slip into oblivion. Yet Prin is nevertheless a grounding force in Morag's childhood and her very fleshiness is an embodiment of the great good mother; Neumann says this figure is usually mostly torso with tiny legs and heads with no eyes.[19] Prin apologizes to Morag that she is not a more complete person, a better mother:

> "But now — I don't know how to be any different, like. That's why I don't know, look after you better, sort of. I'm that sorry, Morag."
>
> Morag is crying. Holding onto Prin's awful fat belly wrapped around in the brown wraparound, Prin's good good good.
>
> "Prin — I never meant! I never!"
>
> Prin wipes Morag's eyes with fat warm hands.

The earthy, brown, fat warmth here is typical of the Hestian image that grounds all children in their beginning years. Ella Gerson's mother provides the more individuated mothering that Morag needs and she realizes that she has missed her mother as profoundly as her father; Mrs. Gerson is important not only for

her "ability to reach out her arms and hold people, both literally and figuratively. It is also her strength." Mrs. Gerson also teaches Morag to read Russian revolutionary authors, and so she sows the seeds of rebellion that finally explode when Brooke insults Jules' Indian heritage.

Thomas finds Morag's ten years with Brooke amazing, marvelling that "such superficiality could hold her for ten years."[20] Yet Brooke is an extension of Morag's need to assume a Persephone role as she grows up. Brooke like Pluto holds her in a psychic underworld of depression. He treats her like a child with no past, and part of their split is asserting her own fathers against his fatherhood by speaking in Christie's rhetorical forms. It is important for a woman to have been a daughter, a Persephone, and in orphaned Morag's case her marriage with Brooke is rather like a protracted grounding in the father's underworld.[21] Jules is the dynamic, moving, loving animus who releases her to the roving, independent woman she becomes.

He releases her to become a Demeter figure herself, and it is this role that provides her with a continuity of roots for the rest of her life. One critic says that Morag hits rock bottom in the same way all Canadian protagonists do before rebuilding.[22] This is not true. Because she is a mother, she cannot and does not ever really give in and wallow in her despair as a male protagonist might do. She makes her despair for Pique's sake as when she visits her artist lover's home and sees his wife and children. Laurence's women are strongly enduring through an almost infinite flexibility that is probably the base of feminine strength and resilience. Vanessa's mother is the most quiet example of this. Matrilineal roots are the ground of being for women, and Pique is part of this matrix for Morag.

THE ENDURING CHTHONIC is imaged in the beginning of the novel by the river that flows both ways. Morag's form of water makes me hope that she will be the matrilineal antidote for Pique whose ancestress Piquette dies by fire, a sinister foreshadowing. But Laurence always insists that we must go *through* the fire to become whole. She in fact reiterates the idea of the Fortunate Fall that a redemptive growth and wholeness come from engaging in struggles and taking risks; from a feminine and psychological point of view, exposure to the fire of patriarchy hardens and articulates the self. Laurence shows innocence is at best a vacuous state (Morag's first novel on Lilac) and at worst is painful to others (Miranda of *This Side Jordan* embarrasses and alienates Africans in her lack of decorum and awareness). The fall is into hard work and complexity. But using the resources of the feminine principle can make the redemptive quest for achievement and self easier. Morag shows how one can sort of flow around obstacles; a good example is her stay at Vancouver when Pique

is born. She lets life eddy and push around her as she accomplishes her goal of becoming a mother; the spiteful landlady, the economic difficulties, none of this stops her. Laurence makes a point of Morag's astrological sign of Cancer, a sign of sensitive water. This flowing dynamism of Morag, her forward movingness, are perhaps the most important aspects of this feminine archetype of the woman artist. Morag embodies a type of soul development common to many modern women.

But the variation in her protagonists reflects Laurence's knowledge that feminine individuation is pluralistic. I suspect that Laurence's own openness to life is what gives each work its own breathtaking new and unique sensibility. So far she has never written the same novel twice; each of Laurence's novels traces a highly individual yet universal type of development. Laurence's polytheism is best expressed in *The Diviners*. Each critic finds new diviners within the novel, and it is important that Laurence gives mystical skill and vision *via* diverse routes to each character. The actual diviner is Royland who has left his fire-and-brimstone religion behind him as he searches for water in the ground (think alchemically here). Christie divines people through their garbage, and he knows more truths than anyone in Manawaka. The divining "medium" or stuff through which she/he sees reality becomes a sort of existential anchor for each character. Morag's sense of continuity is through her matrilineal roots and through her writing.

Laurence tells us a singular truth about the woman artist — that she must be alone to create — and answers an age-old query, "Why aren't there more women artists?" The child Pique's interruptions of and resentments towards her mother's writings, the many kinds of care that only that one child needs (stories to build past/soul/myth; nursing during illness; daily affection and care: time and energy consumers) demonstrate the difficulty a woman faces trying to find time and energy to create. Pique is necessary to Morag's own development; but like all existential anchors, there is the cost of commitment. She is glad that her lover Dan McRaith does not live with her and leaves periodically. But her life has great continuity internally. It is through her art that she remembers the past, makes connections.

The Diviners also establishes the kind of men that this type of woman connects with and needs. Margaret Laurence creates two of the more powerful and memorable portraits of men I have seen in literature by women. In different ways Jules and Christie are the garbage, the refuse of their society. The effervescent, mercurial artist Jules Tonnerre is totally unconcerned with immortalizing himself, even calls his work "crap." He teaches Morag that the drive to create is in its finest form unselfish, impersonal, an expression of love as deep and abiding as Jules' love for his father. Morag learns from Christie more than is possible to sum up. He teachers her for one thing that no matter how entrapped a person

may look to others, the mind need never stop questing. He teaches her the power of the analytical mind that can literally cut through garbage to meaning. I think he is the first layer of the dynamic animus that keeps her restless and moving. (Every woman needs an outspoken anarchist in her childhood!)

As an American I am curious as to what in Canadian culture is producing women writers like Laurence, Margaret Atwood, Alice Munro, Gabrielle Roy. Several hypotheses occur to me. Canadian literature is not imbued with the American "go west" motif, the idea that geographic movement causes growth. The separation motif in American literature encourages concentration on the Oedipal complex, the act of severing oneself from one's roots as the primary way to find identity. To stay in one place, to return to that place, as is more possible in Canadian thought, is to insist that one can and must go home again.[23] This encourages what some psychoanalysts would call concentration on the pre-Oedipal concerns of the female child who cannot and does not separate from the mother so much or in the same way as the male child. Also, the Canadian woman author seems to create because she wants to and according to her own standards as she envisions life. Laurence, it is important to note, creates form to carry her vision. Perhaps since the various cultures in Canada have not amalgamated so much as in America, Canadians may have more respect for many ways of becoming; Canadian experience would allow the feminine sensibility more scope perhaps in expressing its "both/and," more polytheistic view of reality. Perhaps the lack of a strong, national image has discouraged the more narrow sexual stereotyping that American women fight against. No matter what the explanation, I think Margaret Laurence's body of literature will take its place among that of the great women writers of all time like Jane Austen, Colette, and Virginia Woolf. She is re-visioning what it means to be a woman, and her heroines are changing the very structure of characterization in world literature.

NOTES

[1] Clara Thomas, *Margaret Laurence* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1969), p. 12.

[2] For a good discussion of the difference between the way men and women view death see Kurt W. Back, "Metaphors as Test of Personal Philosophy of Aging," *Sociological Focus*, 5 (Autumn 1971), 1-8.

[3] "The Stone Angel: Shakespearian Bearings," *The Compass*, 1 (August 1977), 15. Another critic who particularly appreciates this passage is George Woodcock in his helpful "Many Solitudes: The Travel Writings of Margaret Laurence," *The Journal of Canadian Studies*, 13 (Fall 1978), 3-13.

[4] "Family Structure and Feminine Personality," *Woman, Culture, and Society*, eds. Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1974), pp. 43-67.

[5] This mother/daughter bonding can become regressive, inward-turning, in its rejec-

tion of masculine values. Or, in other words, feminine bonding can cause one-sidedness, a lack of balance.

[6] David Miller, one of the more visionary of modern theologians, says that "A polytheistic theology will be a feminine theology (Rosemary Reuther), but in the manner of all the Goddesses — the thousand daughters of Ocean and Tethys, to name only a few. By being many, these Goddesses avoid a monotheistically chauvinistic view of the feminine," *The New Polytheism* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), p. 74.

[7] Ann and Barry Ulanov, *Religion and the Unconscious* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), p. 154.

[8] A clinical psychologist who has studied depth images of female patients also finds that women identify their deepest selves with trees; see Katherine Bradway, "Hestia and Athena in the Analysis of Women," *Inward Light*, 41 (Spring 1978), 36.

[9] An interesting analysis of how the Greek goddesses emerge in Canadian literature complements my study of Laurence's works; see the chapter "Ice Women vs. Earth Mothers" in Margaret Atwood, *Survival* (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 1972), pp. 195-213.

[10] Linda Leonard has authored a series of articles on what she calls the "puella" or woman fixated into the daughter role, an immature woman. Her article most relevant to my essay is "Puella Patterns," *Psychological Perspectives*, 9 (Fall 1978), 127-47.

[11] Valerie Saiving Goldstein, "The Human Situation: A Feminine Viewpoint," in *The Nature of Man in Theological and Psychological Perspective*, ed. Simon Doniger (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), p. 165.

[12] A difficult but rewarding work that elucidates the connections between depth psychology and alchemy for women is Robert Grinnell's *Alchemy in a Modern Woman* (Zurich: Spring Publications, 1973). A complementary study to mine that examines the earth, air, fire, water elements in the novels is by David Blewett, "The Unity of the Manawaka Cycle," *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 13 (Fall 1978), 31-40. I read this essay after finishing mine and find it interesting that he finds the masculine elements of air and fire predominantly in the Aphrodite/Artemis duality.

[13] Readers will have recognized Demeter's name as the mother half of the mother/daughter Demeter/Persephone dyad on which the Eleusinian rites are based. The Hestia/Vesta archetype is not as well known. Hestia is the hearth fire goddess who warms, contains, and holds the family together. She is symbolic of the process that supports human life. The earth, the number four (wholeness), the circle — all these images are important to this archetype. For a fuller treatment of Hestia, see my article, "Hestia, Goddess of the Hearth: An Oppressed Archetype," *Spring: An Annual of Archetypal Psychology and Jungian Thought* (1979), pp. 55-77. See Bradway's excellent article cited in note 8 for an analysis of how Hestia manifests in modern women's psyches.

[14] A short but very insightful essay on Rachel as Persephone is by Warren Stevenson, "The Myth of Demeter and Persephone in *A Jest of God*," *Studies in Canadian Literature*, 1 (1971), 120-23.

[15] This is the first task Venus sets Psyche as she sets about seeking for Amor, her lover and animus figure; see Erich Neumann, *Amor and Psyche: The Psychic Development of the Feminine* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1956).

[16] The cup is also a communion cup, part of the Christian imagery that underlies the novel as traced by several critics. Thomas in *Margaret Laurence* gives an inspired and thorough reading of this imagery; see especially p. 49.

[17] Though I do not agree with all her ideas, Sherrill Grace's essay "A Portrait of the Artist as Laurence Hero," *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 13 (Fall 1978), illustrates the polish and depth of the critics who write on *The Diviners*. Another excellent essay is Ildiko de Papp Carrington's " 'Tales in the Telling': *The Diviners* as Fiction about Fiction," *Essays on Canadian Writing*, 9 (1977-78), 154-69.

[18] She works this out through contrast and comparison to *Paradise Lost* in her chapter on this novel in *The Manawaka World*.

[19] See his chapter on the great good mother in *The Great Mother*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1963).

[20] *The Manawaka World*, p. 151.

[21] For an interesting discussion of Pluto/Hades as an animus figure who can hold woman trapped in a peculiarly feminine underground of depression, see Patricia Berry, "The Rape of Demeter/Persephone and Neurosis," *Spring: An Annual of Archetypal Psychology and Jungian Thought* (1975), pp. 186-99.

[22] Sherrill E. Grace, "Crossing Jordan: Time and Memory in the Fiction of Margaret Laurence," *World Literature Written in English*, 16 (1977), 335.

[23] Morag actually says this in *The Diviners*, p. 302. The importance of the family, the Canadian emphasis on it as an ontological structure in self conception, also gives women writers access and perhaps permission to write about those things women have always known more about than men. David L. Jeffrey develops the importance of the family in *The Stone Angel* although like many male critics, he does not see that for women the health of the self concept seems to depend upon the extent to which she can affirm her matrilineal roots. The patrilineal roots are important, but not as emphasized in women's fiction or autobiographies. Jeffrey's article is otherwise very helpful, "Biblical Hermeneutic and Family History in Contemporary Canadian Fiction: Wiebe and Laurence," *Mosaic*, 11 (Spring 1978).

NEED

M. Travis Lane

Need is a spare island: a beach
rubbed clear of diamonds,
a moon-pronged antler,
a white tree trunk
scoured by the urgencies of sand —

as if plain weather could redeem
our cankers, drain
our inward autumns!

Time,
(oh boats, oh voyageurs)
absorbing breast of water, take
your paddlers like apprentices
and ease us out of memory to rest —
excursion on the instant of your lap
rolled round in time's abstraction,
sleep —

and you will dream us as we were,
childlike and rowing in your sea
hung round with stars and majesties,
the intimate, tender netherlands
from which our fountains leap.

ANGELUS DOMINI

Erin Mouré

To say *prophecy,* to say *reason*
& fight out
the length between them,
a broken board for a measure, for an audience
a girl in the fast-foot apron, reading a comic on the lawn.
The stale houses of memory shut their doors,
sweepings on the doorstep.

You're swept away by the tide of cars
passing red lights into infinity.
The radio brings back
rock & roll of the sixties,
you turn it up,
curious,
wondering where you stand in this.
It is what you remember.
It is all.
It is all a noise.
It is all over.
The young are
younger than you.
The sum total of reason has not changed
one bit.
& the sum of prophecy:
the time you've wasted, an Incarnation
you couldn't quite manage, divided
by the pell-mell cars

THE BOOK REVIEWER

Len Gasparini

In my study — snug as a monk's cell,
the mushroom-coloured walls are book ends.
Here one can almost read the smell of books:
novels, books of poetry, short stories
I've reviewed in magazines and newspapers
over the past fifteen hack-written years.
The paper ghosts of authors haunt this room,
breathing my blurbs and squibs.
They stand on dusty pinewood shelves,
and rub shoulders with the classics.
How can I venture a further judgment
except to repeat what Auden once said?
"Some books are undeservedly forgotten;
none are undeservedly remembered."

WORDS AND THE WORLD

"The Diviners" as an Exploration of the Book of Life

Michel Fabre

CRITICS HAVE ADEQUATELY ANALYSED Margaret Laurence's last volume in the Manawaka cycle as an experiment in "voice and pictures" which attempts to convey the quality of experience through an "audio-visual" narrative process.[1] Still, it remains that *The Diviners* is patterned as much as a pilgrimage along epic lines as a *Bildungsroman*, and that Morag Gunn's archetypal quest for salvation and meaning is linked, through fable and dialogue, to an insistent theme: that of writing as a creative and communicative process indissociable from the problematic relationship between fiction and reality, between the Word and the World. Evident as it is in the programmatic title, *The Diviners*, the rendering of the exploratory process inherent in both experience and writing deserves more than a mere decoding of allusions because it proposes at the same time an exhaustive, coherent inquiry into the verbal creative process and a mimetic, self-contained symbol of whatever "divining" may be.

By professional, more than religious, definition, diviners at first appear to be somewhat different from word-makers, creators, and even readers. The story provides explicit answers to the question: what is it to divine? The professional diviner is, of course, Royland, a water-diviner who makes a living finding springs and wells underground with the help of a Y-shaped willow wand. Although one must have the gift, he concedes, this is no magic trick but only a process which works most of the time even though it cannot be explained. His character, however, is endowed with more than the usual professional and even human attributes. His name makes him the "king of the land," the Prospero of McConnell's Landing, the genius of inland and underground waters. He also is a fisherman, "the Old Man of the River" (as Pique likes to call him), a sort of river god or Fisher King who brings Morag offerings of pickerels. Like the mythical Fisher King he has been cursed. Indeed, his fanatical religious zeal (he thinks he has received "the revealed word") brought about his wife's suicide, because, though initially close to God, he had turned priesthood into tyranny. He is thus left

without offspring as a retribution for his sins. Even more than his long, grey beard, his "terrible eyesight" — he is too stubborn to wear glasses — marks him as gifted with "some other kind of sight," the visionary powers of a seer. Thus, Royland is not only a "diviner," through unseen vibrations, of water, but also a prophet from whom "Morag always felt she was about to learn something of great significance . . . which would explain everything . . . his work, her own, the generations, the river."

Morag is linked paradigmatically to Royland, not only as a substitute daughter (since he considers Pique his granddaughter), ready to welcome his wise teachings, but as an antithetic equal: she is 47 and he is 74; he is nearly blind, she is terribly myopic. They are companions in many ways, although she apparently does not have his gift. As she remarks: "She wasn't surprised. Her area was elsewhere. He was divining for water. What in hell was she divining for?" You could not doubt the value of water, she implies, the way you can doubt the value of words and literature.

"Old as Jehovah," "ancient," Royland embodies an inexpressible, archaic force. He is

> Old Man River. The Shaman. The Diviner. Morag, always glad to see him, felt doubly glad. He would, of course, not tell her what to do. Not Royland's way. But after a while she would find she knew.

Royland's gift as a soul-diviner duplicates his ability to release earth-locked water; he releases pent-up spiritual resources from others' innermost beings. He does not create them, however, and when Morag speaks of his Celtic second-sight he answers that *she* is the Celt, not he. Gradually, they exchange roles, or with time his powers at least seem to be transferred to her. One day, when he comes to see her, he says he has lost his divining abilities. He insists it is not an uncommon occurrence, rather a rule as one gets older and "by no means a matter for mourning." And as he loses his power, he imparts a lesson to Morag — maybe not the secret she expected, but one that enables her to hope:

> It's something I don't understand, the divining . . . and it's not something that everybody can do, but the thing I don't usually let on about is that quite a few people can learn to do it. You don't have to have the mark of God between your eyebrows. Or if you do, quite a few people have it.

The elect are more numerous than is believed. Royland's power (or faith) can be acquired by trying hard and, especially, by not attempting to understand and explain. And the gift can be transmitted:

> The inheritors. Was this, finally and at last, what Morag had always sensed that she had to learn from the old man? She had known it all along but not really known. The gift, the portion of grace, or whatever it was, was finally withdrawn to be given to someone else. . . .

Contrasting Royland's true achievements, to which existing springs testify, Morag doubts her own "magic tricks . . . of a different order," because the reality of her achievement — communication — cannot be gauged: "She would never know whether they actually worked or not, or to what extent. This wasn't given to her to know. In a sense, it did not matter. The necessary doing of the thing — that mattered." Such is the answer to her earlier, anguished question: "Why not take it on faith, for herself, as he did. Sometimes she could, but not always."

The second character who comes to mind as a diviner is Christie Logan. Their appearances, as well as their ages, point to a parallel between Christie and Royland. There is something clownlike about both — Royland is "a loon" and Christie laughs like a "loony" — and both are brothers to the mythical Piper Gunn. When Royland performs, he stalks the ground "like the slow pace of a piper playing a pibroch. Only this was for a reverse purpose. Not a walk over the dead. The opposite. . . . " This recalls the pibroch piped at the funeral of Christie and his tales of Piper Gunn.[2] Also, structurally, both men stand in the same relationship to Morag as adoptive fathers and as spiritual guides and mentors.[3]

Christie is early characterized as another type of diviner — a garbage reader. Like Royland, his appearance marks him as one of the elect. He "looks *peculiar*," slightly misshapen with bobbing head and "cloudy" eyes. He is soon revealed to be a clown, a jester, a sacred idiot. When he acts for the children, he is possessed, in a sort of drunken ecstasy.[4] He becomes, by physical similarity, a "redskin," i.e., a "natural" man or shaman, and uttters his divining words, "By their garbage shall ye know them." Christie yells like a preacher, a clown preacher: "I swear by the ridge of tears and by the valour of my ancestors, I say unto you, Morag Gunn, that by their bloody goddamn fucking garbage shall ye christly well know them." Christie prophesies, in biblical language as befits his role, and interprets men's "monuments in muck, reading their lives from their garbage — a true fortune-teller." Appropriately, the text reminds us that Christie gets into such states when "the whiskey is in him," thus linking this episode with another section, "Christie With Spirits." Here "spirits" is nicely ambiguous, the meaning slowly progressing from *alcohol* (namely "red biddy"), to *inspiration*, as "he gets into the subject he always talks about when the spirits are in him," then to *possession*: "the spirits are really in him. His eyes are shining. His right hand comes up, clenched. He is pretending he is holding a claymore . . . " until the "spirits start to get gloomy in him. . . . " He tells Morag tales "sometimes when the spirit moves him."

Moreover, his name and his favourite swear words ("Jesus" and "christly") make Christie an incarnation of Christ. Indeed, he takes upon himself the physical and moral muck of the Manawaka community, making the Nuisance Ground homologous to a peaceful cemetery. His symbol is a heart pierced by a passion

nail, not unlike the image of the Bleeding Heart of Jesus Morag can see on the wall of Lazarus's shack.

A later episode develops "Christie's Gift of Garbage Telling":

> "Did I ever tell you, Morag, that telling garbage is like telling fortunes? . . . You know how some have the gift of second sight? . . . Well, it's the gift of garbage telling which I have myself, now."

Telling, in this sense, is richly ambiguous again since it means deciphering and recounting, interpreting and handing down to others through oral tradition. This is in part what Morag attempts as a novelist. Several years after Christie's death, she wonders: "Would there be a special corner of heaven, then, for scavengers and diviners? Which was Morag, if either, or were they the same thing?" And again, nearly despairing of emulating him, she proclaims her spiritual and vocational relationship to Christie just as she had to Royland:

> Christie, tell the garbage — throw those decayed bones like dice or like sorcerer's symbols. You really could see, though. What about me? Do I only pretend to see in writing?

Then, at last, Morag regrets that she could only see "too late" the beauty of Christie and his love for her. And she grieves at her lack of response: "I told my child tales about you, but never took her to see you. I made a legend out of you while the living you was there alone in that mouldering house." Indeed, literature is a pale substitute for life, words for feelings. One should keep legends for the time when death has taken our relatives, for myth-making cannot equal the giving of love.

This may be one of the secrets Morag was incapable of guessing, the message associated with her river- or bird-watching, or with the cry and flight of the geese, themselves associated on one occasion with Royland's divining. The flock sounds a "deep drawn resonant raucous cry that no words can ever catch but which no one who ever hears it will ever forget." Through this indescribable, yet unforgettable and eternal sound, divining and memory are associated. The river and the geese also become spatial equivalents through their north-south dynamic movement: the river seems to flow simultaneously in two opposing directions, while the geese twice-yearly ply their route between the arctic cold and the milder south. These movements can be watched and their meaning read by Morag. Part diviner, she is a bird-watcher and a river-gazer, still fascinated by the apparent contradiction, "even after the years of river watching." Bird-watching is not for her primarily a form of scientific inquiry: she is more interested in metaphor than in observation. She reads human behaviour (although railing against her own pathetic fallacy) into a bird giving advice to its fledglings, or adopts Eula McCann's deciphering of the sparrow's trill as a "loud and clear message," "Pres-pres-pres-pres-Presbyterian!" That for her bird-watching is a

means of gaining access to the primeval secrets of nature is revealed in the climactic and emblematic Great Blue Heron episode.

The apparition of the heron is led up to linguistically by Morag's fear of the weeds. They evoke in her mind "a river-monster, probably prehistoric, which has been hibernating here in the mud for ten million years and has just wakened. Or Grendel in Beowulf, and me without courage or a sword." The monster clearly represents a being contemporaneous with the beginnings of creation, waiting in the clay of life in an enchanted sleep, opponent of a mythical literary figure out of the dark ages. The prehistorical metaphor is continued through "mini-dinosaur bullfrog" until it turns into a "pterodactyl," thus making the heron into a divine, archetypal bird, "like a pterodactyl, like an angel, like something out of the world's dawn." The description of the heron began in a very literal fashion: it was simply signalled by its long legs, neck and beak as in La Fontaine's fable. Then it became a listing in a book compiled by a local Audubon: "A Great Blue Heron (note the generic name). Once populous in this part of the country. Now rarely seen." The third, evocative description at once transforms the bird into a mythical embodiment of flight, serenely balanced in its trajectory toward death and eternity. A "creature" and "a thing," the heron is indeed a monster, not only because of its hugeness or association with prehistory, but in the etymological sense of "monstrum." It is a prodigy which reveals and demonstrates some hidden meaning in creation.[5]

Filled with religious awe, communicating "in unspoken agreement," Royland and Morag take the boat home:

> That evening Morag began to see that here and now was not after all an island. Her quest for islands had ended some time ago and her need to make pilgrimage had led her back here.

Now is the log cabin of pioneer Sarah Cooper allowed to become properly Morag's home because it is no longer a retreat cut off from the world and time. The bird's flight has re-established for her a link with history and eternity. Such is the moral of the heron.

DIVINING THUS AMOUNTS, in many senses, to being able to read the meaning inscribed in the world, in nature, and in events by the hidden hand of God. It is the ability to discern a design or a "pattern." The word significantly recurs in the novel, calling to mind the Jamesian metaphor of "the figure in the carpet." When Morag scans snapshots of her parents, she cannot "discern the pattern" in her mother's dress; in another snapshot "you can see the pattern quite clear." At school, the visibility of a dress pattern similarly serves as

a criterion for the value and social standing refused Morag. "Pattern" refers to the used, worn-out condition not only of garments but of words, while the dress itself, according to the metaphor in Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*, is the visible manifestation of essence and being. The metaphor of meaning is thus compellingly pursued when Morag, wearing glasses for the first time, can discern the patterns of leaves on the trees, thus reading what Whitman called "leaves of grass" as she would the leaves of a book.

To discern word patterns and to wield language is tantamount to creating some degree of reality. Practically all references to words in *The Diviner*, from Morag's early attempts at school to her later hesitations as a novelist at work, point to this. Words generate words through sound combinations, it seems: "they are dumb, dumb-bells, dumb bunnies!" They generate images which give the illusion of being visually real: "Morag thinks of the sparks, the stars, and sees them again inside her head. Stars! Fire-stars! How does it happen?" Metaphors, born from words, change appearances in a funny way: "The blinds are pulled down the front-windows of the houses to keep out the heat. . . . The windows are the eyes, closed, and the blinds are the eyelids, all creamy, fringed with lacy lashes. Blinds make the houses to be blind. Ha ha." Very soon Morag masters the meanings of new words — "principal," "strap," or "recess" at school, and "gaelic" or "scavenger" out of school. From denotative, functional meaning she accedes to plural senses and connotations. When Prin calls her a "mooner," she superimposes her (preferred) new meaning, that of a child from a fabulous planet like the moon, on that of "daydreamer." She perceives the scandalous situation of a term whose morphology is at odds with its referent: "The flies are *blue-bottles*. How come they got this nice name given to them? They're ugly." A name is thus felt as emblematic of its referent and the reality link between signifier and signified is vindicated as a rule. Whereas Prin is a big, fat, slovenly woman in the novel, her "real Christian name is Princess. Morag thinks this is the funniest thing she has ever heard." Of course, such textual incidents or remarks must be read as pointers to the way in which the narrative should be decoded, not only as steps in Morag's discovery of words or of the fact that certain things, like the face of Botticelli's Venus, cannot be described for lack of them.[6]

The same words can mean different things in different places, and even at a later age, Morag notes dissimilarities between the referents of "bluff" in Ontario, where it applies to a ravine, and on the prairies where it designates a clump of brush. Or the same *signified* can have phonetically different *signifiers*, and Morag proudly insists that "coyote" should be pronounced "kiyoot" in Canada while only in John Wayne's movies does one hear "co-yo-tee." This introduces the notion of local linguistic custom, of the link between language and communal roots.

The most liberating use of words for children is the making of puns. Thus, Mrs. Crawford becomes Mrs. Crawfish in the classroom, or Christie, his face dusty and his skin red, becomes for a while a "redskin." And thus can Christie invert the usual phrase and say, "Bad Riddance to Good Rubbish." But one can run into contradictions, which at times seem inherent in language itself: "How can one say 'dead when born': how both at the same time?" As a child Morag early discovers proper usage. She comes to understand that Christie says, "Did they *learn* you anything today?" intentionally, whereas Prin would say it "not on purpose." And she discovers that status is attached to the *proper* wielding of words (note how "proper" recurs in the book, its meaning undefined by heraldic reference). Those who master the prevailing linguistic usage are rewarded at school and and placed in a special category; an "educated" elite is thereby granted status. Even in Manawaka Morag can acquire as a novelist the recognition she had been refused as a poor girl of the people. This power will eventually become her temptation — a sin — against which Lachlan, the newspaper editor, vehemently warns her:

> If you ever in your life presume to look down on them (those not very verbal people) because you have the knack of words and they do not, then you do so at your eternal risk and peril.

The writer's attempt at properly reading and expressing the pattern of life is an attempt at reducing chaos, dispelling ambiguity, eliminating "the blur" in vision. Some forty years later, Morag is still struggling with the same problem of rendering referential reality in words:

> How could that color be caught in words? A sort of rosy peach color, but that sounded corny and was also inaccurate.
>
> *I used to think that words could do anything. Magic, Sorcery. Even miracles. But no, only occasionally.*

As she reflects upon her "trade" as a writer, the protagonist is aware that she must aim both at mimesis and at respecting the prevalent cultural code; she must be neither inaccurate nor "corny." As a result, she is always compulsively looking for the right word. Speaking of "creases" to evoke the effect of wind on water, she catches herself: "Naturally the river wasn't wrinkled or creased at all — wrong words, implying something unfluid, like skin, something unenduring, prey to age." The right word is most difficult to find in the case of images, precisely because the link between the referent and the connotation is so tenuous. And words are always ambiguous because intent can modify meaning. Maybe the only occasion when Morag could be sure of the match between intent and meaning was when Christie (who often used "blessed" as a swear word in order to express surprise or indignation) answers, "Well, I am blessed" from his death bed with clear purpose and joy, as Morag thanks him for having been a father to her.

But which is the right word when love is at stake? When Pique asks Morag whether she loved Skinner, her father, Morag is unable to "reply and get across so much complexity in a single well-chosen phrase":

> I guess you could say love. I find words more difficult to define than I used to. I guess — I felt — I feel . . . I'd known him an awfully long time *then,* even. I'm not sure *know* is the right word, here.
>
> Who cares about the *right* word? Pique cried. Then, suddenly, the hurt cry which must have been there for years, "Why did you *have* me?"

There are times when words come too late and are ineffectual, times when some other means of communication should be established between living people; yet this does not negate the value of the word, in the form of the Book, within the larger context of the world.

The Book: the Bible. Throughout Morag's life, books are essential. In the family setting evoked by a snapshot of her at age three, she places "stacks of books" in the closet under the stairs, with leather bindings and "the names marked in gold." Books recur, though in less fine form, among the items rescued from the Nuisance Grounds and displayed in Christie's sitting-room:

> books, old old old books, and one has real leather for the cover, and the letters are in real *gold* but now you can hardly see them, and you can't read the book because *it is* in *another language,* but Christie says it is the Holy Bible in Gaelic. Throwing out a Holy Bible! Oh. But would God mind so much seeing as it was in Gaelic?

In spite of the attenuation in the last sentence, the sense of sacrilege is plain, because the Holy Bible is archetypal. Like the Blue Heron, it is divine, ancient and superlative. ("Gold" symbolically increases its value. It is the Book.)

Here, the book is, significantly, in another language, which implies that it should be translated and deciphered, and which introduces the theme of different and/or lost languages, an important topic in the novel. When the school children sing "O Canada," rendering the second line, in roughly phonetic French, "Teara da nose ah yoo," it always makes them titter: "They know it means the land of our forefathers but that is not what it seems to mean." French is perceived as possibly ludicrous through mispronunciation. Yet, when Morag listens to Christie reading Ossian and he shows her the Gaelic words but cannot say them, the "old language" is highly valorized:

> "It must sound like *something* in the old language" . . . Christie claims, . . . "I never learned the Gaelic and that is a regret to me."
>
> Together they look at the strange words, unknown now, lost, as it seems, to all men, the words that once told of the great chariot of Cuchullin:
>
> Carbad; carbad garbh a' chromhraig
> 'Gluasas thar comhnaird le bas;
> Carbad suimir, luath Chuchullin

Sar-mhac Sheuma nan cruiaidh chas;

"Gee. Think of that, Christie. Think of that, eh? Read some more in *our* words, eh?"

"*Our* words": language creates kinship and a sense of belonging, tradition and identity. At school, when Skinner Tonnerre does not join the children singing "The Maple Leaf Forever," Morag concludes: "He is not singing now. He comes from nowhere. He is not anybody." In fact, Skinner refuses to sing because the song does not belong to his cultural tradition. Of course, he should be able to speak French and Cree, but he only remembers scraps of these tongues. Morag's remark that Christie pronounces "Ossian" "aw-shun" and Skinner's remark that Morag pronounces "Jules" "jewels" point to translinguistic homophony, but they mostly emphasize lack of communication or language as obstacle. When Pique sings Louis Riel's song, which she has learned from a book, in French and then in English, she acknowledges: "I only know how to make the sounds, I don't know what they mean." Here, the non-French-speaking reader is in the same position as the non-Gaelic-speaking reader was when spelling out the stanza from Cuchullain's ballad.

When Morag plays the record of "Morag of Dunvegin" in Gaelic, she cannot understand the words nor even make out any kind of pattern and distinguish between the sounds:

> Yet she played the record often as though if she listened to it enough she would finally pierce the barrier of that ancient speech and have its meaning revealed to her.... Too lazy [to take lessons]. She would have liked to gain the speech by magical means, no doubt. Yet it seemed a bad thing to have lost a language. Talking to one or two old fishermen at Crombruach, she had realized that. They spoke a mellifluous English, carefully, as though translating in it in their heads and some of their remarks were obscure to her, but they would never explain or could not.
>
> Christie, telling the old tales in his only speech, English, with hardly any trace of a Scots accent, and yet with echoes in his voice that went back and back. Christie, summoning up the ghosts of those who had never been and yet would always be.
>
> The lost languages forever lurking somewhere inside the ventricles of the hearts of those who had lost them. Jules, with two languages lost, retaining only broken fragments of both French and Cree, and yet speaking English as though forever it must be a foreign tongue to him.

This need to recapture one's lost linguistic heritage and the inability to magically have access to it explain Morag's frustrated urge to look up the Gaelic nickname Dan McRaith has given her — Morag Dhu, Morag the black — in the Gaelic glossary in *The Clans and Tartans of Scotland*: "It says *dubh, dhubh, dhuibe, dubha*, but omits to say under what circumstances each of these should be used. Morag Dhu. Ambiguity is everywhere."

Again, words and books are not enough. There exist dictionaries, catalogues, lists of recipes and sets of tools and terms, but these must be reinterpreted, put in context, recreated by reader and writer alike. More interesting than Margaret Laurence's attempt at "audio-visual fiction" in *The Diviners* is her repeated reaffirmation that reading and writing are not only complementary but also homothetic or homologous activities. Just as a professional writer encodes in a text his reading of other books, including the Book of Life, so does a reader recreate the book he reads, or rewrite it in his specific idiom. From the genesis of fiction, the emphasis is thus displaced to reading as an active form of communication, most textual incidents in *The Diviners* being evident metafictional reflections on and hints at this process.

In the course of the narrative, the writer is defined not only as a diviner, with all the connotations the word assumes, but as a craftsman, in a coupling which evokes the "Tinker, tailor, soldier, sailor" rhyme:

> Wordsmith, liar, more likely. Weaving fabrications. Yet, with typical ambiguity, convinced that fiction was more true than fact. Or that fact was in fact fiction.

The crux and truth of *The Diviners* may thus be found in its demonstration that fact and fiction are indistinguishable in appearance and may well be alike in essence.

Practically all of Morag's activities, past and present, tend to prove this truth. At five she would surround herself with imaginary creatures like Blue Sky Mother and Old Forty Nine, drawn from songs she had heard; she would project herself into blonde Peony or her true alter ego, Rosa Picardy, who slayed dragons and polar bears and was Cowboy Joke's mate. At forty-seven, she is still engaged in repeating the recreation of imagined memories from a handful of photographs in which, as in a pack of tarot cards, she guesses her past and future. Although she can recognize that some memories are "totally invented," she cannot stop elaborating upon scraps from her half-forgotten past, not only in a compulsive attempt to compensate for her being able to remember only her parents' deaths "but not their lives," but because a distinctive mark of the creative imagination consists in elaborating ancestors, in giving voice to a presence which, Morag feels, is "flowing unknown in my blood and unrecognized in my skull."

This explains Morag's peculiar relationship with her photographs, kept, as if in a treasure chest, in an "ancient tattered manilla envelope" which Christie had given her when she was five:

> I've kept them, of course, because something in me doesn't want to lose them, or perhaps doesn't dare. Perhaps they're my totem and contain a portion of my spirit. Yeh, and perhaps they are exactly what they seem to be — a jumbled mess of old snapshots.

Ambiguity again characterizes the snapshots which are preserved not so much for what they reveal as for what they conceal, "not for what they show, but for what is hidden in them." They are monuments to memory, totems, items to be deciphered without one ever being certain of their meaning and of the reality of the past.

The narrator presents a skeptical view of man's power to establish meaning and order:

> Morag put the pictures into chronological order. As though there were really any chronological order, or any order at all if it came to that. She was not certain whether the people in the snapshots were legends she had once dreamed only, or were as real as anyone she now knew.

More than one of Morag's psychological hang-ups, this is a clue, indicating how the novel should be approached and stressing the undefined, changing relationship between the real and the fictive.

One has to look for answers to the question of the status of fiction in the novel itself. Christie is unambiguous. Just as the Bible is the archetypal book and the blue heron is the archetypal bird, he establishes Ossian as the archetypal poet:

> In the days long long ago . . . , he lived, this man, and was the greatest song maker of them all, and all this was set down later, pieced together from what old men and old women remembered, see, them living on far crofts hither and yon, and they sang and recited these poems as they had been handed down over the generations. And the English claimed as how these were not the real old songs, but only forgeries, do you see, and you can read about it right here in this part which is called Introduction, but the English were bloody liars then as now. And I'll read you what he said, then, a bit of it.

Not only is Ossian cast as the superlative example of the poet, the nature of song (or ballad, or legend) is also defined as a collection of generations-old oral traditions. The relation between literary criticism and literature is also hinted at. Clearly, the stanzas by "Ossian" are taken from a volume which is described in accurate bibliographical fashion as "*The Poems of Ossian — In the Original Gaelic with a Literal Translation into English and a Dissertation on the Authenticity of the Poems by the Rev. Archibald Clark, Minister of the Parish of Kilmallie. Together with the English translation by Macpherson*, in 2 Vols., 1870." The extra and referential reality of the volumes is indubitable, and the truth (i.e., the non-authenticity of the poems and non-existence of Ossian) established in the "Introduction" is part of European literary history. Yet there is no way of going against "the strength of conviction" here evidenced by Christie. Not only

in his mind, but also in Morag's and in the reader's the existence of the bard and the authenticity of the poems are established as truth. His "act of faith" (embodied in the "Strength of Conviction" motto) duplicates the reader's "willing suspension of disbelief" usually required by tale-telling. This is a magical practice rooted in belief which, not unexpectedly, connects Morag and yet another ancestor-diviner, Old Jules Tonnerre.

In her "Tale of Piper Gunn's Wife," as she plans to set it down in her scribbler (a tale thought out is as good as written), Morag had decided: "*Forests cannot hurt me because I have the power and the second-sight and the good eye and the strength of conviction.*" This is the definition of a heroic wife, a persona Morag would like to project herself into, yet, interestingly, it also equates divining (second-sight) with "the good eye" (bringing luck as the antithesis of spell-casting or "the evil eye") and with "faith" or an active decision to entertain forceful belief — although Morag later wonders what "the Strength of Conviction" means and will try to find out in her quest throughout the novel. In other words, Morag's problem will stem from her eagerness to understand and her inability simply to believe, while faith constitutes a deliberate affirmation.

The characterization of divining as second-sight, or seeing through people, is developed in several scenes in which one character looks at the other intently, as though seeing the deeper truth and reality behind his appearance. This face-to-face reading of the other comes to a climax in the perfect understanding brought about by love. Not only is it referred to in John Donne's lines about two lovers seeing as one, which Morag explains at the university, but it is dramatized in the tête-à-tête between Skinner and Morag.

Second-sight or the good eye serves as a powerful talisman when the time for action comes. Thus, the strength of Louis Riel as a "prophet" is rooted in his strength of conviction, as evidenced in "Skinner's Tale of Rider Tonnerre and the Prophet." He is

> Somebody who can [be a leader] . . . who is just waiting the chance. — I guess you'd call him Prophet. He is like a prophet, see? And he has the power.
>
> (The power?)
>
> He can stop bullets — well, I guess he couldn't, but lots of people, there, they believed he could. And he has the sight, too, that means he can see through walls and he can see inside a man's head and see what people are thinking in there . . .
>
> Well, the Prophet, then, he's a very tall guy, taller even than Rider Tonnerre . . . and he carries a big cross with him all the time — this protects him, like. He's a very religious guy, see?

Here, although he is recounting a tale handed down by tradition, Skinner is also sketching, making up, creating the portrait of an archetypal religious and military leader, endowed with clearsightedness, with a sense of being invincible and with religious faith which enable him to rally people to his cause. His cross is

only a material sign for his faith, just as the fact that people believe he can actually stop bullets is sufficient, even if contrary to actual fact. And Riel is also cast as a "very tall man" — tall not only in actual height but in mythical size — a hero out of the "tall tales." In the following episode, the tale of "Old Jules and the War Out West," the Prophet is defeated, less because of the sheer military superiority of the English than because, instead of attacking, he "is walking around with his big cross, waiting for the sign . . . a bit too long, because by that time the big guns begin." Defeat comes to those who wait for omens too long or who cannot read them properly at the right moment.

Piper Gunn stands in very much the same relationship to Morag as Old Jules Rider Tonnerre stands to Skinner. In "Christie's Tale of Piper Gunn and the Rebels," Gunn plays a role comparable to Riel's as a leader. He finds his people, the Sutherlanders, "sitting on their butts and [doing] nothing," just as Riel found the Métis. And Gunn arouses them to battle through the power of his music:

> So walk he did, along every farm on the river front, there, and he played the entire time. He began with the pibrochs, which was for mourning. To tell the people they'd fallen low and wasn't the men their ancestors had been. Then he went on to the battle music. And the one he played over and over was "The Gunn's Salute." A reproach, it was.
>
> The Sutherlanders listened and they knew what he was saying. They gathered together and Piper's five sons with them, and they took the Fort at the rising of the day the very next morning.

The most evident characteristic of these two tales is the fact that each one stems from an oral tradition which runs counter to the other; each one presents a version of the past which apparently negates the antithetic version of the other insofar as each side may claim to have been the only heroic one. But the two traditions also are complementary, just as the Gunns and the Tonnerres are needed to converge and create Pique. When Christie tells the tale of Piper Gunn and the Rebels, Morag has not yet heard Skinner's tale of "Old Jules and the War Out West." Yet she has learnt about the Canadian past in History class, and her heart is on the side of the Métis, partly because of her attraction to Skinner. She reacts accordingly at the end of the tale:

> (I liked him, though. Riel, I mean.)
> That so? Well, he had his points, no doubt.
> (The book in History said he was nuts, but he didn't seem so nuts to me. The Métis *were* losing the land — it was taken from them. All he wanted was for them to have their rights. The government hanged him for that.)
> Métis, huh?
> (Halfbreeds)
> Well, well, hm. Maybe the story didn't go quite like I said. . . .

Similarly, when Skinner tells "The Tale of Lazarus' Tale of Rider Tonnerre," where tradition is at second-remove, a frequent occurrence in tale-telling (namely the existence of variants) is introduced. Variants can result from the telling of the same tale several times, yet each performance is unique, as Skinner comments: "Lazarus Tonnerre sure isn't the man to tell the same story twice, and maybe he couldn't remember, because each time he told it, it would be kind of different."

The questions Morag asks the tale-teller are concerned with accuracy of name and detail. "Arkanys?" she asks, which leads Skinner to explain his father's term: "That is how my dad called the Scotchmen. Men from Orkney, I guess." And when Morag interrupts him with, "Hired guns? I bet they weren't," he reacts the way Christie did above: "Sure, they were. Anyway, it's just a story." Each claims a right to his own version of a story and disclaims it as exclusive or as historical truth. Finally, when Morag provides precise historical references like the "Falcon's Song" and "The Battle of Seven Oaks," Skinner only answers: "Is that so? I never connected it with that, because my dad's version was a whole lot different." Alternative versions are, then, up to a point, potentially equal in the value of the truth they convey.

More important than Christie's willingness also to consider the point of view of the Métis as an antithetical variant is Morag's measuring a story (tale or legend) against the yardstick of History. It is commonly assumed that what is printed in history textbooks and taught at school is true. Indeed, it is consecrated, official "truth" but nothing more. Rather, truth is not reality but the interpretation of it by and for a given person or group at a given moment. Such recognition is implied in Morag's remarks about the official, national characterization of Louis Riel as a "mad" rebel and her own conviction that he was not. A further example of how partisan truth enters into history is provided by Lachlan McLachlan when Morag's report on Piquette's death mentions that "the deceased's grandfather fought with Louis Riel in Saskatchewan in 1885, in the last uprising of the Métis." Lachlan just deletes the sentence, saying "that many people hereabouts would still consider that Old Jules fought back then fought on the wrong side." If truth is nothing more than individual conviction or group consensus, it ensures that history and legend, factual report and fiction, are on the same footing. This is the point of Morag's interruptions when she listens to Christie's later stories or to Skinner's tales. Earlier Morag was only able to respond to the unlikelihood of certain details — "Did they eat *foxes*?" or "They walked? A *thousand* miles? They couldn't." — which caused the teller to reduce the scale of epic descriptions in order to achieve a sense of versimilitude. In the later stories, Morag intervenes as a critic, an intellectual, full of bookish knowledge, in order to re-insert legend into history, to sift myth from fact, or at least to distinguish clearly between the two. When Christie tells about Piper

Gunn and the Rebels, her acceptance is mitigated ("You are romantic, Christie") or skeptical. She identifies "the short little man, with burning eyes" whom the teller calls Louis Riel as "Louis Riel," and she restores official truth: "The government Down East sent out the Army from Ontario and like that, and Riel fled, Christie. He came back, to Saskatchewan, in 1885." Later, she even denies that the Sutherlanders had taken back the Fort.

The teller is forced to compromise on unimportant points ("this Reel or Riel, however you want to call him") and to acknowledge the possibility of different versions:

> Well, some say that, others say different. Of course I *know* that the Army and that came out, like, but the truth of the matter is that them Sutherlanders *had taken back the Fort* even before a smell of an army got there.... I'm telling you, what happened was this. Piper Gunn says to his five sons....

As a consequence, truth is defined explicitly as what the teller of the legend says it is, here and now, because this is necessary for the telling to function and the tale to exist. The teller may know (rationally or by having read volumes of nonfiction) that certain historical events took place, but the telling of the tale demands another truth, not so much a different version as a different *kind* of truth whose criteria are not to be found in fact but in language. Later in her life, when writing fiction about the same episodes, Morag discovers that legend and history mix, indeed, in an unbelievable and inextricable fashion:

> I kept thinking about the tales Jules once told me, a long time ago about Rider Tonnerre. Which brings to mind a curious thing — something that must've come from Old Jules. Rider was called Prince of the Braves, Skinner said, and his rifle was named La Petite. Infactuality (if that isn't a word, it should be), those names pertained to Gabriel Dumont, Riel's lieutenant in Saskatchewan, much later on. That's okay — Skinner's grandad had a right to borrow them. I like the thought of history and fiction interweaving. The tale of how Rider got his horse, Roi du Lac, I've recently discovered, comes from a Cree legend — probably Old Jules didn't know that. You wonder how long that story has been passed on.

She then readily accepts and even welcomes "the thought of history and fiction interweaving."

IT THUS APPEARS THAT THE CRITERION for evaluating the success of a story is not the measurable degree of truth it contains but the "agreement" — both as pleasure and mental or spiritual adhesion — it can evoke in the audience: "I liked it fine" is Morag's ambiguous appreciation.

Evidently, such dialogues and episodes of story-telling as we find in *The Diviners* have to be read as parables of the writer's situation and the way litera-

ture functions. They also point at the difference existing between oral text and written literature. The gestural or verbal response of the audience while the tale is being performed and told, as well as the comments which express pleasure or displeasure after the telling, are clear signs of success or failure. The same goes for the singing of a song as is evidenced in the several sessions when Skinner or Pique perform and the listeners' emotions are shown through their physical or verbal response. But, in the case of fiction, the audience is absent; the person reading a tale is separated from its teller by time and distance. This probably entails more creative participation on the part of the reader, but it also leaves Morag at a loss as to how she can measure her success as a novelist. In spite of the bunch of review clippings she receives from her agent at the publication of each novel and of the statistical reaction they more or less adequately express, she continues to wonder about the way in which her novels are being read and about the degree of communication she has achieved.

> At least Royland knew he had been a true diviner. There were the wells, proof positive. Water. Real wet water. There to be felt and tasted. Morag's magic tricks were of a different order. She would never know whether they actually worked or not, or to what extent. That wasn't given her to know.

Literally, no writer can gauge how his books will be read, deciphered and understood by readers.

To revert to the ambiguous relationship between tale (or fiction) and truth, a further step towards reversing the status of history as official record and the status of personal versions or visions of it is provided by the Battle of Bourlon Wood episode. As in the case of Ossian's poems, the bibliographic reference to a real, extra-textual book, *The 60th Canadian Field Artillery Battery Book* (1919), the reproduction of its complete Table of Contents and a partial listing of its illustrations all serve to authenticate and establish its existence as fact. Christie only has to read what the book "says" — an 18-line, third person, matter-of-fact, condensed report of military operations in the Bourlon Wood section on September 26th. Since he actually was on the battlefield with Morag's father, Christie can comment, "Oh Jesus, don't they make it sound like a Sunday school picnic?" Consequently, he feels moved to tell his eyewitness version of it: "Well, d'you see, it was like the book says, but it wasn't like that, also. That is the strangeness. . . . " His is a story of fire, mud, and slime, guns pounding, horses dying, noise, and a man blown to pieces, and such fear that it left him "shaking like a fool" at the time and still leaves him shaking as he evokes the events again.

"It was like the book says and it wasn't like that, also. That is the strangeness." Such is the Janus-faced appearance of reality and/or literature. Not lies, as Morag-the-novelist first thought, but ambiguity. Ambivalence, rather monumen-

tally symbolized by the apparent contradiction with which the narrative opens, as opposing dynamics arrest the river in statuesque stasis:

> The river flowed both ways. The current moved from north to south, but the wind usually came from the south, rippling the bronze-green water in the opposite direction. This apparently impossible contradiction, made apparent and possible, still fascinated Morag even after the years of river-watching.

The first paragraph not only introduces the theme of "the River of Now and Then," the possibility of a simultaneous journey back into the future and ahead into the past; the complementary action of the two elements, air and water, also serves as a superlative paradigm or emblem cast in bronze, of the ambivalence of reality couched in words and "divined" in fiction.

Only thus can the dilemma of the writer be solved and can Morag accept what she at first half-ironically called her "trade" as a worthwhile vocation. Quite rightly, A-Okay Smith had once said "with embarrassing loyalty and evident belief: 'It's there you have to make your statement'." Morag meditates that she could fail and that she cannot write a novel in such an intentional fashion, possessed as she often is by her characters: "They'd been real to her, the people in the books. Breathing inside her head." Word-beings are therefore akin to the old, long-lost languages "lurking inside the ventricles of the hearts of those who had lost them" or to one's real or imaginary ancestors. The writer is possessed like a shaman, chosen as a vehicle or voice for spirits to speak through:

> The words not having to be dredged up out of the caves of the mind but rushing out in a spate so that her head could not keep up with them. Odd feeling. Someone else dictating the words. Untrue, of course, but that was how it felt, the characters speaking. What was the character and who? Never mind, not Morag's concern. Possession or self-hypnosis, it made no difference.

Again, the narrator refuses to act as a critic, to analyze the nature of character and of so-called inspiration, but fully accepts the role of the writer as "posssessed" (in a fashion comparable to Christie moved by the spirits) while claiming the responsibilities attached to it.

The writer is thus defined as an interpreter of the past, a transmitter of tradition in a relevant and usable form to new generations, as well as a diviner of the pattern of the world. Again, art and belief are reconciled in action; for, like divining, writing has to be taken on faith because it sometimes, magically, works and sometimes does not. Morag's letter to Ella concerning *Prospero's Child* contains a paragraph which is another way of answering this question:

> I have always wondered if Prospero would be able to give up his magical advantage once and for all, as he intends to do at the end of *The Tempest*. That incredibly moving statement "— what Strength I have's mine own. Which is most faint —" If only he can hang onto this knowledge, that would be true strength.

> And the recognition that the real enemy is despair within and that he stands in need of grace, like everyone else — Shakespeare did know just about everything.

Of course, Morag is speaking for herself, alluding to the magical island she has tried to build in order to fend off harsh reality. And her enemy is her own despair at not coping with her responsibilities as a twentieth-century Canadian woman, mother, and writer now that she has definitely asserted her own worth in the face of Manawaka and achieved recognition. She still stands in need of love and grace and security, however. And she finally learns from Royland's loss of his divining powers the lesson that she, too, can be an inheritor and have inheritors: "The gift, the portion of grace, or whatever it was, was finally withdrawn to be given to someone else." She can experience this "now," at the end of her career and of the narrative, which has been an exploration or incantation leading to such epiphany and self-realization.

Also, she has been able to see the sign (the Great Blue Heron's rising) and to accept the token. The token is the plaid-brooch of the Shipley family which, properly traded against the knife of Lazarus Tonnerre (whose hieroglyphic mark is at last read for what it means, a half-inverted "T"), provides Morag with the symbolic weapon she needed to slay the Grendels of doubt, "an arm in armour holding a sword." She also receives (adopts?) a motto blessing her with what she lacked, the Strength of (religious) Conviction: "My Hope Is Constant in Thee." Finally, her war cry, "Gainsay Who Dare," allows her to assert herself as well as to create a possible meaning and order in a world where she could see no pattern. "Everything is improbable. Nothing is more improbable than anything else," explicitly applies to the coincidence of the knife finding its rightful owner but also refers, by extension, to the not improbable, hence possible — it is a matter of faith — design of a superior order or providence.

With the buying of the house at McConnell's landing, the protagonist has found her roots: "Land. A river. Log house nearly a century old built by great pioneering couple, Simon and Sarah Cooper. Ancestors." She has accepted her ancestry to be, not of pre-revolutionary Scottish stock but of post-immigration Canadians, "here and now." She has allowed the half-breed line of the Tonnerres to blend with a line of Scottish descendants to make a truly Canadian offspring, whole in the flesh and spirit of Pique. She duplicates this creation in life and blood with a creation in words by writing *Shadows of Eden*, which follows the trek of the Sutherlanders to Hudson Bay and York Factory. She thus allows history and fiction to blend:

> Christie always said that they walked about a thousand miles — it was about a hundred and fifty, in fact, but you know, he was right; it must've felt like a thousand. The man who led them on this march was young Archie MacDonald, but in my mind the piper who played them on will always be that giant of a man,

Piper Gunn, who probably never lived in so-called real life but who lives forever. Christie knew things about inner truths that I am just about beginning to understand.

All passion spent, and confidence — however fragile — restored, the quester/writer at middle-age thus brings to a close her spiritual pilgrimage, the wiser for knowing the limits of her ignorance, the more secure for having experienced the presence of a pattern and meaning in the Book of the World. She can finally proceed to return to "the house, to write the remaining private and fictional words and set down her title." The phrasing is ambiguous and broad enough to duplicate literal meaning — the final words and title of a novel (possibly *The Diviners*) in the process of completion — and the connotation of a life to be continued and a title to be claimed, be it that of inheritor through heraldry and tradition or that of diviner through clear vision and deliberate faith.

NOTES

[1] See, among others, Marcienne Rocard, "Margaret Laurence s'oriente-t-elle vers un roman audio-visuel?" *Etudes Canadiennes*, no. 8 (1980), pp. 113-20.

[2] Royland and Christie are also linked through their connection with the Great Blue Heron (see Note 5).

[3] Lachlan McLachlan is another of Morag's mentors and guides. It is symptomatic that the only occasion when he performs as something more than a newspaper editor should be signalled by a change in his appearance: "God help me, I have all the symptoms of a pregnant woman this morning — except I suppose they don't normally twitch or imagine their eyeballs are falling out." No mere mimetic expression of his headaches, words make him akin to Royland (nearly blind) and to Christie (twitching); they transform him into a seer. His frequent references to God and inspired tone ("low but slightly menacing") emphasize that his warning is supremely important — "you do so at your eternal risk and peril." It literally becomes a message from God about the sin of intellectual pride.

[4] "He is twisting his face like different crazy masks. His tongue droops out. . . . He crosses his eyes and his mouth is dribbling with spit. Then he laughs . . . like a loony."

[5] It is to be noted that the heron's gait and stalking along the river connect it with Christie, with Royland when he is divining springs, and with the pibroch players, especially Piper Gunn; he also is "The Old Man of the River" as totem.

[6] Morag's description of Venus in Botticelli's painting significantly connects the goddess with the archetypal woman. She has "tresses, as it says in very ancient tales and the bardic songs . . . like a queen in the old old poems, like Cuchullain's queen, the woman beloved by all men." An antithetic homologue of Morag, Venus also is "an angel," i.e., an archetypal being of the air like the Blue Heron. But what strikes Morag most is that "maybe there are not [any words to describe her]. This thought is obscurely frightening. Like knowing that God does not actually see the little sparrow fall."

EVERY NOW AND THEN

Voice and Language in Lawrence's "The Stone Angel"

W. H. New

MARGARET LAURENCE'S MAIN CHARACTERS seem to spend most of their waking hours seeking the right words to tell the story in which they live. Morag Gunn, the novelist-narrator of *The Diviners* (1974), is only the latest in a line of language-conscious figures.[1] Artful, articulate, and acutely aware of the limits of articulateness (her own or anyone's), Morag retrieves from memory not just the events of her life and the emotions she at least once attached to them, but also the language of different stages in her development. There was a language of class and place, a language of song and race, a language of teaching, a language of learning, a language of seeing, a language of knowing, a language of flesh and a language of shaping form. But how does it all come together? Out of her daily round and the tangle of her memories, out of the tension between now and then, she composes a world that sometimes rises to eloquence, and *every now and then* descends to the banal, and otherwise records the different reaches of the Canadian English tongue. That there should be this unevenness of diction does not seem to me a flaw in the work, but instead a deliberate effect: the novelist-author forcing the novelist-character to explore the limits of her verbal understanding, so that in turn the reader might learn the connection between mode of speech and pattern of thought. We are made conscious of the artifice of her linguistic variation, because Margaret Laurence chooses to make us aware; by making Morag a writer, by making Morag so deliberately reconstruct a life, she draws our attention to the process of fabrication, in other words — by indirection finding direction out. But to talk of Morag is to talk not just of the latest but also of the most obvious case of this authorial concern. Even with characters who are neither writers nor public speakers, Margaret Laurence calls our attention to the language they have access to, no matter how indirectly. So it is with Hagar Shipley in *The Stone Angel* (1964), the first of her series of Manawaka novels; Hagar's is a world that is riddled with the tensions of language and utterance, and it is with the language of Hagar's

world — and what it tells us about the shape and the reading of the novel in which she appears — that I am here concerned.

In fact, though it's not perhaps been apparent, I've been talking about *The Stone Angel* from the very beginning — indirectly (in order to emphasize the irony and the other indirect methods Laurence uses), and methodologically (for my opening paragraph, full of rhetorical salvoes and variations in diction, deliberately emulates some of Laurence's stylistic techniques). For all the formality with which Laurence examines and employs every *now* and every *then*, that is, we have to listen in the text for the moments when she fades into the colloquiality of *every now and then*.[2] It is part of the way she shapes her characters, and part, too, in *The Stone Angel*, of the way the language she uses shapes an argument of anger into a revelation of love.

Let us begin, then, with the opening chapter of the novel, and with the language it uses to establish the character of the 92-year-old narrator and the earlier selves with which she claims kin. The plain contrast between Hagar's *now* and Hagar's shifting *then* is implied by the perspective of memory, and confirmed by the detailed record of events — but from the very beginning we are invited to see two features more of the character's dilemma and the novel's character. Each will, first of all, delve backwards into the past; the *structure* tells us this, for the novel opens with an *inversion*, with a reversal of standard English sentence order ("Above the town . . . the stone angel used to stand") (parenthetically we might compare this rhetorical gambit in function, if not in precise form, with the symbolic opening of *The Diviners* — "The river flowed both ways" — and observe how Laurence has continued to experiment with ways to probe the workings of the associational mind). Secondly, both Hagar and *The Stone Angel* as a whole will concern themselves with language, and in the process will draw inferences and conclusions from differences in usage and level of diction to which we must respond.

Thinking about the stone angel in the Manawaka cemetery, that is, Hagar speaks of why her father built it: to mark her mother's bones, she says, and then, with a sharp ironic edge that at once uses her father's colloquial vocabulary and criticizes her father for his patriarchal ambitions, adds "and to proclaim his dynasty, as he fancied, forever and a day." Almost at once she begins to discourse on the angel itself, in a sentence whose form enacts a careful contrast with what has gone before: "I think now she must have been carved in that distant sun by stone masons who were the cynical descendants of Bernini, gouging out her like by the score, gauging with admirable accuracy the needs of fledgling pharaohs in an uncouth land." Tonally, the sentence continues the irony we have already heard; semantically, it carries notes on the differences between style and public taste, between Europe and the Canadian West; but formally, it draws attention to its own formality. The techniques and cadences are those of stylized written

English: alliteration, assonance, slant rhymes, allusion, the doublets (as in other passages the triplets) of balanced parallel structures. This pattern of alternation between the colloquial and the formal voices continues through the rest of the chapter and then in varying ways through the rest of the book as well. The shifts in pattern are clear in sentences like those that concern the cowslips that grow naturally in the cemetery, about which Laurence writes (or Hagar remembers):

> They were tough-rooted, these wild and gaudy flowers, and although they were held back at the cemetery's edge, torn out by loving relatives determined to keep the plots clear and clearly civilized, for a second or two a person walking there could catch the faint, musky, dust-tinged smell of things that grew untended and had grown always, before the portly peonies and the angels with rigid wings, when the prairie bluffs were walked through only by Cree with enigmatic faces and greasy hair.

The alliterative formality of "portly peonies" is deliberately comic here, for we hear Hagar's voice fairly spitting out her dislike of them; the use of the word "bluff," moreover, declares the degree to which Hagar uses the local idiom, and "greasy hair" declares a distance and distaste the old woman still maintains in her view of society. And then at once the discourse is rendered rigorously formal, as Hagar slowly fades into the past, declaiming in an elevated turn of phrase, "Now I am rampant with memory." Subsequent passages emphasize even more clearly the *writerly* quality of the language with which Hagar constructs the world. Between the informal put-down with which Jason Currie dismisses Telford Simmons's father and the childish singsong chant with which the children taunt Henry Pearl ("*Henry Pearl / looks like a girl*"[4]), Hagar finds the formalizing words to isolate No-Name Lottie Drieser from the plainly ordinary. The passage takes a cliché and a significant simile, and by turns alliterative and assonantal, shapes a different effect: "Then Lottie Drieser, tiny and light with yellow hair fine as embroidery silk, bold as brass although her dress was patched and washed raw."

The patterns of alternating formal and informal diction continue. With alliteration and syllepsis, Hagar speaks of Manawaka being largely "shacks and shanties, shaky frame and tarpaper, short-lived in the sweltering summers and the winters that froze the wells and the blood." We are told dismissively that the Shipleys have "squat brown names, common as bottled beer," as later we are told that the "square" prairie houses "squatted" during the Depression, their windows "boarded over like bandaged eyes." We are given an adjectival catalogue about the chicks on the dump (they are "feeble, foodless, bloodied and mutilated, prisoned by the weight of broken shells," and a formal catalogue of the dump itself, in which clichés, formal diction, and ironic jests, all juxtaposed, rebound off one another:

> Here were crates and cartons, tea chests with torn tin stripping, the unrecognizable effluvia of our lives, burned and blackened by the fire that seasonally cauterized the festering place. Here were the wrecks of cutters and buggies, the rusty springs and gashed seats, the skeletons of conveyances purchased in fine fettle by the town fathers and grown as racked and ruined as the old gents, but not afforded a decent concealment in earth. Here were the leavings from tables, gnawed bones, rot-softened rinds of pumpkin and marrow, peelings and cores, pits of plum, broken jars of preserves that had fermented and been chucked reluctantly away rather than risk ptomaine. It was a sulphurous place, where even the weeds appeared to grow more gross and noxious than elsewhere, as though they could not help but show the stain and stench of their improper nourishment.

To this Hagar adds, in a passage that we must read as a comment on the fictional method as well as on the event itself:

> I walked there once with some other girls when I was still a girl, almost but not quite a young lady (how quaintly the starched words shake out now, yet with the certain endearment). We tiptoed, fastidiously holding the edges of our garments clear, like dainty-nosed czarinas finding themselves in sudden astonishing proximity to beggars with weeping sores.

The formal and the vernacular, in "sudden astonishing proximity," that is, connect.

And what then? The novel, instructing us how to *read* the novel, requires us obviously to see things in both conscious and unconscious opposition. The linguistic tension, between formal and informal, enacts a social tension that exists both within Hagar and within the social structure of the world she inhabits. But we would be unwise to view any of these oppositions oversimply. The novel does not enact a rigid confrontation between two absolute sides, whether we call those sides high-born and low-born, stylish and crude, exclusive and inclusive, metropolitan and provincial, foreign and native, European and Canadian, static and dynamic, artificial and natural, learned and unlettered, or written and spoken in pattern or form. The examples of style I have been drawing attention to are only to a degree classifiable in such ways. Far more importantly, they demonstrate a shifting linguistic hierarchy, a fluid interpenetration between formal and informal patterns, which is neither rigidly coded nor *easily* interpretable. For these reasons, the shifting language patterns, like the novel's shifts in narrative perspective or narrative voice, convey more adequately than would an unalloyed style the kinds of tension that the particular character of Hagar Currie Shipley, and the particular generation that in her way she represents, must try to resolve. To hark back to my title and put this contention another way, we are led by the novel first to perceive a sharp categorical distinction between Hagar's *now* and Hagar's *then*, but then led further to realize that this binary distinction is not adequate to the occasion, and that (if we seek a parallel) such a distinction manifests Hagar's repressive, divisive, will; the fluid associations of memory, by contrast,

like the dynamic processes of the living colloquial language, are expressive and connective. Hagar has to come to terms with the ongoing language of remembering, in other words, as well as to understand the shaping effect that the divisive language of now and then has had upon her. Indeed, we might go so far as to say that the success of the novel stylistically derives directly from the interpenetration between levels of discourse, and that when it depends solely on one level (as it does in the straight narrative of Chapters 6 and 7, which recount the romance between John and Arlene and the events leading towards their deaths), then the novel is at its flattest, its weakest, functioning only to record externals and not to reveal the internal growth of the narrating characters as well.

To follow further this important role that the colloquial voice has in marking Hagar's world, we must now turn our attention to the elements which distinguish it from the *writerly* "thinking" patterns of Hagar's *educated* mind.[5] I have referred already to several aspects of informal style: to localism, relaxed speech cadences, vernacular intonations. There are others, too: slang, vulgarisms, solecisms, and the unthinking speaker's more or less automatic reliance on the vernacular patterns, although Hagar's private finishing school has educated her childhood cadences almost out of her. Hence Clara Shipley, with her "impermissibles, I *seen* and *ain't*," offends Hagar, for they are "even worse coming from the woman than the man" — after which Hagar adds her own, genteel colloquial disclaimer, "the Lord knows why." At this point, of course, Hagar has little to do with the Lord: it's what *she* thinks that matters to her, and her *ironic* voice is to be heard through the phrase, somewhat condescending towards the world around her. She puns condescendingly, "a pint-sized peacock, . . . haughty, hoity-toity," thinking "*tend* — as though I were a cash crop" or "in their prime, as they say, like beef." And herself always precisely careful about pronoun case ("It wasn't I"; "It could not have been I"), she mimics her daughter-in-law Doris (who says "*Marv and me*" "are having a cup of tea," " 'It's me that trots up and down these stairs a hundred times a day' "): " 'I dasn't give a good loud rap these days or you know what she'll say. Oh, the secret joys of martyrdom.' " About which, of course, Hagar knows a good deal.

It is her husband Bram, though, who offers Hagar the greatest linguistic challenge — as it is her son John, later, who continues to defy her efforts to train him: to train him, I might add, not so much to the linguistic patterns of her own day as to the linguistic patterns — even the archaisms — of an earlier generation still, which Hagar has unquestioningly adopted from the past as though dimly aware that the dynamics of the language, which she acknowledges but overtly

rejects, record the changes in society which she is unwilling to accept, if to see at all. She marries Bram because he is a challenge to the old code, just as he fancies her because she represents it. She alienates her father by choosing Bram, but expects him to "soften and yield, when he saw how Brampton Shipley prospered, gentled, learned cravats and grammar." But neither man alters. Bram continues with his mistakes: " 'This here's for you, Hagar,' " he says, and she is so caught up in his grammatical error that she fails to notice his gesture of conciliation towards taste, his gift of a decanter with a silver top: "I took it so casually," she recalls, "And laid it aside . . . Then he laughed. . . . " Steeled against syntactical rules and the niceties of diction, he walls himself off in deliberate affronts: "Bugger the money," "Won't the saintly bastard ever shut his trap?", "What the hell's the matter with you? Judas priest, woman," "I should of kicked the living daylights out of her," "I don't give a good goddamn."

We are given other examples, too, of controlled and uncontrolled speech: the Reverend McCulloch's formal intonations, the matron's "professional benevolence," Murray Lees's mock Pentecostal rhetoric, the senile babble of Miss Tyrwhitt in Silverthreads nursing home, the polite daggers and verbal fencing that constitute Hagar's conversation with Lottie Simmons over John and Arlene. Such passages reinforce for us the kind of articulateness Hagar possesses, the degree of control she exerts: *over* speech and *through* speech. Yet the important fact to bear in mind is that even for Hagar, language will not be static. Her language changes, partly by exposure to other patterns, partly by choice, partly by the accidents and unconscious alterations of time. The elements of language that reveal these changes are both lexical and dialectal; their implications instruct us both about Hagar's character and about the relation Margaret Laurence draws between Hagar's development and the development of Western Canadian society.

We are dealing in this novel with four generations: Jason's, Hagar's and Bram's, Marvin's and Doris's, Steven's and Tina's. The point about Hagar's two-sided connection with her own generation is made again if we consider the speech patterns they all use. Jason Currie, the Scots Presbyterian Western pioneer, speaks with the Scots burr, the Old Country idiom (" 'Do you want to grow up to be a dummy, a daft loon?' "), and the colloquial formulae of his birthplace (the homilies, the clan motto, the Selkirk Grace, and the tight-lipped message of approval: " '*Hayroot, strawfoot, / Now you've got it.*' ") He yearns for connection, but also for propriety, as we see in his three tonally different comments on Lottie Drieser's mother's death: the one full of pity (" 'Poor lass. . . . She couldn't have had much of a life' "), the next indignant and self-righteous (" 'Her sort isn't much loss to the town, I'm bound to say' "), the third at first appalled at the implications he thinks of and then formulaic and smug (" 'Consumption? That's contagious, isn't it? Well, the Lord works in wondrous ways

His will to perform' "). It is his overriding will to achieve success — which is measured in terms of financial security and public propriety — which dictates the way he educates Hagar. But his own Scots patriarchal upbringing recognized propriety in terms involving *language*; so in Western Canada by buying Hagar an Eastern education, he imposes on her an artificial tongue and presumes he has thereby provided her with status. But by so doing he has separated her from the Western rural norms of her generation, as represented by the speech of Bram and Telford and Lottie and Henry Pearl, and she spends most of her life listening to the quarrel between the voice of her training and the voice of the generation to which she belongs.

For despite Hagar's personal style, the ordinary language in Canada takes on its own characteristic patterns. Marvin and Doris emulate the flat norms of the generation before them; Tina and Steven — and their contemporary Sandra Wong — display the characteristic, American-influenced, laconic speech patterns of the present. My point here is fourfold: to say first that the standard process by which the English language has developed is to *adopt* foreign words into the lexicon rather than to *translate* them in, which means that the vocabulary makes English out of various original structures; second, that such borrowing has also taken place in Canada, which means that some words will have developed or re-rooted there and will geographically mark a speaker; third, that the successive waves of multicultural immigration into Canada are observable in speech pattern, at least while the society undergoes the process of producing a new norm for itself; and fourth, that Hagar's life records — through language — one angle of understanding these changes in social structure. Steven and Tina, urban, independent, and professional, that is, represent opportunities that Hagar either never had or could never seize, but they do so *in their own idiom*, without the particular artifice of speech that Jason had seen fit to value.

In some sense it can be suggested that Hagar has always known that the linguistic distinctions she makes are dislocating. Certainly her formal "speaking patterns" differ from her formal "thinking patterns" — and both are punctuated by informal interruptions and regional vocabulary. The Canadianisms (or sometimes the Canadian adoptions of isms from elsewhere) appear in phonology; they also show up in lexicon and local allusions — in words like *bluff*, *baldheaded prairie*, *shinplaster*, *gopher*, *chokecherries*, *slough*, *T. Eaton's*, *The Hudson's Bay*, *blackflies*, *a tin lizzie*, *saskatoons*, *Indian paintbrush*, *Toronto couch*, *sockeye*, *cohoe*, *Cariboo and Peace River Country*, *a two ninety two* — and in the endemic *eh* that we hear from John, Hagar, Sandra Wong, and from Marvin, when he uncharacteristically gets his emotions outside him and says to Doris, " 'Dry up, honey, eh?' " Hagar will use such words without apology; but it's almost as though she doesn't hear the paradox that therefore emerges in her own voice. She *resists* changing forms and contemporary slang, but she expresses her-

self ably enough in the slang of an older day — in phrases like "stem to gudgeon" or "hey-day, go-day, God-send-Sunday." Her adaptation to Murray Lees and her conscious response to Sandra Wong late in the book therefore mark a significant alteration in attitude which as readers we are meant to *hear* — for the change in language signifies an easing of the resistance she has erected against her own emotions, her ability to connect with others. " 'Quite — okay,' " she says to Sandra in the hospital, after voluntarily helping the girl: "I have to smile at myself. I've never used that word before in my life. *Okay — guy* — such slangy words." We recall one of her last conversations with Elva Jardine in the public ward, mildly comic in the way the two old ladies rationalize their frailties and manipulate an out-of-date slang:

> "My memory is very good . . . but sometimes a thing slips my mind — "
> "Yeh. Same here. Well, let's hit the hay, kiddo."
> I have to smile at that. And then I feel myself sliding into sleep.

And then: shortly after, the tone changes, as we hear Hagar admitting something else:

> "I can hear my voice saying something, and it astounds me."
> "I'm — frightened. . . . "
> "What possessed me? I think it's the first time in my life I've ever said such a thing. Shameful. Yet somehow it is a relief to speak it."

And thus her resistance to herself eases more still.

Elva Jardine is of her own generation and her own rural background; Marvin is her son and therefore akin to her in another way; we might presume connections to be possible between them. But Sandra Wong is of a new generation and another background entirely (a background, moreover, from which Hagar's experience of Mr. Oatley's smuggling stories has further divided her); hence to connect with her is doubly significant. With the other patients, both in Silverthreads and in the hospital, Sandra demonstrates the processes of linguistic change that have been wrought by the demographic changes within the community. As we have seen, Hagar has approved of a strict pattern of speech; she does not suffer deviations from these patterns easily. In Manawaka, the poor and the "Galicians" and the Métis Tonnerres are all beyond the pale; at Silverthreads, the pointed ironies and Jewish cadences of Mrs. Steiner's speech first attract and then dismay Hagar, so that she retreats into the formal balances of the language of her mind:

> "Don't mistake me," she adds in haste. "Nobody said in so many words, 'Mamma, you got to go there.' No, no, nothing like that. But Ben and Esther couldn't have me in that apartment of theirs — so small, you'd think you walked into a broom closet by mistake. I was living before with Rita and her husband, and that

was fine when they had only Moishe, but when the girl was born, where was the space?"

. . . .

"Do you — " I hesitate. "Do you ever get used to such a place?"

She laughs then, a short bitter laugh I recognize and comprehend at once.

"Do you get used to life?" she says. "Can you answer me that? It all comes as a surprise. You get your first period, and you're amazed — *I can have babies now — such a thing!* When the children come, you think — *Is it mine? Did it come out of me? Who could believe it?* When you can't have them any more, what a shock — *It's finished — so soon?*"

I peer at her, thinking how peculiar that she knows so much.

"You're right. I never got used to a blessed thing."

"Well, you and I would get on pretty good," Mrs. Steiner says. "I hope we see you here."

Then I perceive how I've been led and lured. She hasn't meant to. I don't blame her. I only know I must get out of this place now, at once, without delay.

By the end of the novel, in the multicultural ward, Hagar becomes accommodated to other cadences, however, and to her own part in the connections among them. At first it is only the flat accent of Elva Jardine that connects with Mrs. Reilly's Irish and Mrs. Dobereiner's German, with Hagar holding back:

"Funny, ain't it?" Elva Jardine says. "Take me, for instance. I could stuff myself with bread till the cows come home, and I wouldn't put on a blessed ounce. Well, it's God's will if a person runs to fat."

"That's so," Mrs. Reilly penitently says. "And I'm the willful creature, to be sure. To think it was you that had to point it out to me, Mrs. Jardine, and you a Protestant. I should be ashamed."

Her meekness turns my stomach. In her place I'd roar for bread until I was hoarse; and die of apoplexy if I pleased.

"Pan."

The voice is like a puff of smoke, faint and hazy. Then, as it comes again, it has a desperation in it.

"Pan. Pliz — pliz — "

Elva Jardine cranes her wrinkled neck like an aged seafarer in some crow's-nest, peering for land.

"Oh-oh. Where's that nurse got to? Nurse! Yoo-hoo! Mrs. Dobereiner needs the bedpan."

"All right," an unperturbed voice answers nearby. "Just a second."

"You'd better get a hustle on," Elva Jardine says, "or the dear knows what'll happen."

The nurse arrives, pulls the curtains. She looks tired.

"We're short-staffed tonight, and everyone needs a pan at the same time. I never knew it to fail. Okay, here you are, Mrs. Dobereiner."

"Danke vielmals. Tausend Dank. Sie haben ein gutes Herz."

But then in the nighttime chorus, with Mrs. Dobereiner muttering passages from the Litany and the song of the Lorelei, and Mrs. Jardine expressing her love for

her husband, Hagar participates; the controls gone, the inner volition allowed to surface, she openly declares — even "almost screeche[s] — her abiding need for "*Bram!*" With these utterances of the last two chapters, moreover, we move into another level of understanding the language which *The Stone Angel* employs.

I HAVE REFERRED TO DIFFERENCES between written and aural patterns, between formal and informal vocabulary, between learned and vulgar usage, and to the intricate tensions among them. I have referred to the connections between notions of language and attitudes to class, taste, and snobbery, between the localisms of language and the changing sociological structures of place, between the cadences of speech and the changing values of the speaker. But there is more. For the language in this novel is also *an act of communication*, which goes beyond any of these systems of analysis and also beyond any one of the separate physical acts of speaking, writing, or thinking-in-words. So it is that in coming to terms with the way Laurence has created Hagar, we are led to perceive the difficulties Hagar has in voicing her deepest self, or in translating, as it were, her wishes and needs rather than her biases and defences into *effective* speech.

From the fragmentary utterances of the novel's opening pages, the empty threats and the inarticulate, half-thought-through phrases, we presume we are to follow a narrative involving uncompleted communications. The narrative process then confirms this supposition by what Hagar directly tells herself and indirectly reveals to the reader. Repeatedly she finds herself hampered by the fact that her tongue will not co-operate with her mind. One way of interpreting such a statement is to understand it figuratively, as a comment on the discrepancy between her will to join in experience and the linguistic barrier which her father's education erects against it. Another is to see it as a literal truth: a declaration of the physical infirmities of the aged. Between these two positions is a third — one which is essentially psychological, which explores the *readiness* of the speaker to reveal the innermost self: in this case Hagar's readiness to admit her love, to admit her fear, and to reveal thereby a vulnerability which she has always scorned in others and (quite untruthfully) denied in herself.

Through much of the book she believes she is declaring the truth; but the careful reader will not wholly trust her. Sometimes she knows she lies, as when she tells Mrs. Steiner John died in the war, and wonders why, but more often — living the lie about high culture and evading her own culpability in John's death — she does not even know. Between her mind and her spoken words, between her intent and her actions, between her belief and the truth about herself, there lies a substantial chasm. In the novel Hagar gradually tracks her memories *to-*

wards the truth and towards an admission of fear and love; and as Laurence has structured them, the processes of the novel lead the reader to follow, more clearly than Hagar herself can, this growth in understanding.

For Hagar's prose has to it, as well as a balance between formal (and therefore conscious) speech and colloquial (and therefore familiar, even unconscious) speech, a kind of *burden* or refrain which draws our attention to the mixture of wilfulness and inability that sabotages her *acts* of speech. Repeatedly she tells of a disparity — always of her own making, though not always under her conscious control. The examples are numerous: when she can neither comfort her brother Dan nor communicate with her brother Matt, she "used to wonder afterward, if I had spoken and tried to tell him — but how could I? I didn't know myself. . . . " "I will not tell him more," she says about her conversation with the Reverend Mr. Troy. "Oh, but that was not what I meant to say at all," she thinks after insulting Marvin; "How is it my mouth speaks by itself . . . ?" "I wanted to say 'There, there' " to Bram, she thinks, one night after they make love, "but I did not say that. My mouth said, 'What is it?' But he did not answer." She wants to joke with her X-ray technician, "But I've bungled it. My voice . . . falters and fades." The fact that the voice does speak without the interference of her conscious will gradually leads, however, to the truth that will free her from the past. Fragmentarily she recognizes what is going on — indeed, she does so even to the degree that she is aware of how her memory associatively takes over her conscious mind (and for that matter shapes the novel). At first the revelations are both short and fragmentary, as when she discovers herself irrationally screaming at Marvin " 'I'm not worked up a bit!' Is it my voice, raucous and deep, shouting? 'I only want to tell you — .' "

She cannot complete what she wants to say here, partly because all her actions up to this point have been saying something else. Clearly, words are not always required for communication, as many of the other characters in the novel know. Doris and Marvin, for all their limitations, have a working marriage, and they can communicate by sigh and eyebrow. Tom and Elva Jardine touch each other in mutual tenderness. Murray Lees, talking of the springtime of his own marriage, declares his delight in the sweetness of sex with his wife Lou (and the "plain words" by which he recalls the fact take Hagar aback). For Hagar loves the body but denies it by her learned language. When they are first married, she says to Bram:

> "It seems that Lottie Drieser was right about you. . . . although I certainly hate to say it."
>
> "What did they say of me?" Bram asked. *They* — knowing more than one had spoken.
>
> I only shrugged and would not say, for I had manners.

A "prissy Pippa" by her own admission, she uses her learned skill with words — her allusions to Coleridge and Browning and Keats and the classics (the satyr, Socrates' hemlock, the gorgons), and the Bible — to distance herself from life. She even refuses to admit to responding sexually to Bram, because she perceives it as a betrayal of her dignity. "It was not so very long after we wed," she recalls, "when first I felt my blood and vitals rise to meet him. He never knew. I never let him know. I never spoke aloud, and I made certain that the trembling was all inner. . . . He never expected any such thing, and so he never perceived it. I prided myself upon keeping my pride intact, like some maidenhead." But she tells more and he perceives more than she realizes, as when they part:

> "I wouldn't take eggs onto a train," I said. "They'd think we were hicks."
> "That would be an everlasting shame, wouldn't it?" he said.
> "That's all you've got to say?" I cried. "Food, for heaven's sake?"
> Bram looked at me. "I got nothing to say, Hagar. It's you that's done the saying."

Capable of tears, she turns to stone when John dies. Educated to be the "chatelaine," she is embarrassed to become "the egg-woman" instead. For safety, she closes herself up, as she indirectly admits when Marvin and Doris first raise the possibility of selling the house and storing the furniture:

> If I am not somehow contained in them and in this house, something of all change caught and fixed here, eternal enough for my purpose, then I do not know where I am to be found at all.[6]

But there finally follows a set of reconciliations. Murray Lees is boring and crude, but she finds his voice "comforting," and when she talks to him about John, she speaks aloud once again without knowing it, this time the truth. When she utters Bram's name aloud in the hospital night, it is an open declaration at last of her desire and her need. When she deigns at last to hear the Reverend Mr. Troy, he sings, and all the "fumbling of his speech is gone. His voice is firm and sure."[7] But the partings that proceed to take place are still troublesome. Mr. Troy thinks he has failed, and she "can't muster words to reassure him"; she tells Doris the truth, but Doris does not believe her; she "would have liked to tell Steven that he is dear to me" but instead they "have nothing more to say to one another." And the parting with Marvin is most troublesome of all. She deliberately lies to Marvin and calls him "A better son than John"; what she means by this she is herself unsure, except that the reconciliation itself matters to them both. When she later reflects, though, that it was "a lie — yet not a lie, for it was spoken at least and at last with what may perhaps be a kind of love," we still cannot accept the statement at face value, for it is couched in that writerly balance, that formal "thinking" rhetoric with which she has all through the book distanced herself from what she didn't want to face. What the phrasing suggests is

that she finds "a kind of love" but refuses fundamentally to back away from her feistiness; "She's a holy terror," Marvin says — a *holy* terror: struggling to hold life, as it were, "in my own hands," to hold in another kind of balance her independence and her need. What she thinks about one of her last quarrels with Doris — "I won't take back the words" — could stand as a kind of paradigm for her whole life, the colloquial thought being redolent with meaning: which takes us once more back into the language of the novel.

LET ME DO SO BY RETURNING to the rhetorical passage of the opening page, to the sentence about the stone angel itself:

> I think now she must have been carved in that distant sun by stone masons who were the cynical descendants of Bernini, gouging out her like by the score, gauging with admirable accuracy the needs of fledgling pharaohs in an uncouth land.

I have referred already to the artful shape of this sentence, and I have referred, too, to the propensity of English to derive its vocabulary from a variety of sources — a fact that the "multinational" character of the words in this sentence only confirms. But further consideration reveals something else as well, which derives from the main distinction one makes in dividing English words by their root-derivation — between the native or "Germanic" words and the Romance or "latinate" and "Classical" ones. By and large the native words are the everyday ones, the words for family, animals, farm and house, the words for praising, the words for swearing, and the sentence function words like *then* and *now*. The latinate words record ideas, attitudes, the language of civil mores, social style, and aesthetic order. It's the difference between a title like *chatelaine* and a function like *egg-woman*, between the domesticated *petunia* and the wild *cowslip*. It's a rough distinction, and one which the native speaker less *realizes* than *responds to*, not knowing precisely where the words come from, most of the time, but knowing when vocabulary, level of usage, and given audience meet. Now Laurence didn't invent this distinction, of course, but she makes deliberate and creative use of it. Her ordinary vocabulary, influenced as it is by the word-stock of the King James Version of the Bible, is markedly Germanic: this fact, coupled with the supple way she manipulates current idiom and Canadian localism, helps to give her writing its vernacular character — and therefore to a Canadian reader its sense of familiarity: which makes the occasional latinate passages seem all the more sharply outlined, more consciously foregrounded. To go back to the stone-angel sentence, then, is to appreciate how latinate (or classical) the key words are — *distant/masons*, *cynical/descendants*, *gauging/gouging*, *admirable/accuracy* — as well as how ordered the pattern is, and to reflect on the audience for whom the sentence is shaped.

In one sense the audience is the reader, of course, but this holds indiscriminately true for all the words in the book; within the book, the sentence appears to be one that Hagar concocts for Hagar herself to listen to, an articulate shaping and orderly interpretation of events, one which will, as we have seen, defend her against the *flow* of life, the *body* of truth, the *nature* of change. But these are the evasive moments. The moments of revelation come during the passages of uncontrolled utterance, when the *natural* Hagar can be heard — not less feisty, but certainly more caring, more in tune with the world around her. They come in the vernacular interruptions, therefore, and in the native vocabulary of her ordinary speech. We hear her ironies, her beliefs, and her wants all mixed together, but what I am emphasizing here is the fact that the regional or "daily" vocabulary persists to puncture the forms of discourse she uses as her defence and (she thinks) *her* norms. The true base, I suggest, lies in the community from which she cuts herself off. But that her connection with it persists despite her artifices and her outward beliefs appears in most central metaphors she uses — of which I propose to look at two: those involving animals and shade.

Various commentators have remarked on the animal imagery, and indicated how it suggests that Hagar perceives the animal rather than the spiritual in the human beings around her — or perhaps in the nature of life. Certainly it would be in character for Hagar to value the body but to use a language which would at once demonstrate this preoccupation and yet appear to devalue the body's importance. Indeed, to follow the animal comparisons through the book is to come up with quite a catalogue: early on Jason considers an uninformed person a "daft loon"; shortly after, Hagar, still touched by her father's accent, is afraid Doris will think her "daft entirely" if she takes "both her hands in mine and beg[s] forgiveness," but goes on at once to characterize itself as "an old mare, a slow old sway-back" and Doris "a calving cow"; then on subsequent pages she hears "frogs . . . like choruses of angels with sore throats"; she calls herself and then Marvin "fish," herself a "colt," Jess and Gladys "heifers," Doris a "pouch-faced gopher," herself a "crow," a "constipated cow," and a "berserk bird," Doris a "flounder," the Silverthreads patients "ewes," Bram an "eel," the Tonnerre boys a "swarm," the Oriental wives "tinned shrimp," John a "spider," herself a "chambered nautilus," Clara a "cow," Arlene a "pouter pigeon" (though John calls her a "rabbit"); she calls John and herself "two moles" when they are scrabbling to put the angel up again; her pursuers (as she sees them) are both "hounds" and "hunters"; Mrs. Reilly is a "slug," Mrs. Dobereiner a "mosquito"; she herself is a "ladybug," and with June bugs in her hair becomes the "queen of moth-millers, empress of earwigs"; she has "a parody of a smile, a serpent's grin"; and when Marvin tries to aid her once again, she "snappishly" ironizes over her hospital transfer, which is cast as a need for a "new wing," though whether of bird, insect, or angel she does not make clear. Now I can appreciate,

compiling this list,[8] that the animal references permeate the entire book, but I can neither see any particular progression — ontogenic or phylogenic — in the arrangement of epithets, nor any philosophy governing the selection beyond the suitability of each word to the comparison at hand: *unless* we consider the effect of the word choice itself. Of the thirty epithets I've named, only five (*pigeon, serpent, nautilus, mosquito,* and *gopher*) are not drawn from the Germanic wordhoard — and *serpent* is Biblical and *gopher* a North American Indian word. Only *nautilus* is unusual; in the way that *albatross* alludes to Coleridge, it may be another covert literary reference, in this case to a poem by Oliver Wendel Holmes[9] and in any event in context (beside "hulk" and "baggage") it is an educated irony. The rest are equally ironic, but also reductive, ordinary — attempts to assert either the ordinariness of Hagar's antagonists (as she perceives them), thus reducing them from some presumed superior status, *or to admit Hagar's own ordinariness,* the ordinariness of her social milieu, the ordinariness of the animal body that has always threatened or embarrassed her, and which slowly decays.

The animal body is the substance of the world Hagar has primarily seen in shadow, and here the other strain of imagery reveals its function — partly to return us to appreciating the process of human time, partly to contrast Hagar with the two women who dominate the way she thinks about herself: No-Name Lottie with her tasteless ornaments and silken hair, and Doris with her propriety and her "rayon shoulders." Hagar has kinship with them both; her sense of propriety links her with Doris despite her overt protestations, and her delight in silks links her with Lottie despite her inclinations. But Lottie has a capacity that Hagar lacks. Lottie can confront reality, and knows her own connection with the chicks she destroys on the town dump. Hagar, preoccupied with death but always less able to confront it, more fearful of the moment — until the very end of the novel, when she still chooses to rage — wears Oriental silks and bright colours of life against it: as the imagery tells us. In one passage we are told that the children

> played shadow tag around the big spruce trees that shaded and darkened that whole yard. All of us except Lottie, that is. She went home.

And about Doris we are told that

> She wears her dark brown artificial silk. Everything is artificial these days, it seems to me. Silks and people have gone out of style, or no one can afford them any more. Doris is partial to drab shades. She calls them dignified, and if your dignity depends upon vestments the shades of night, I suppose you're well advised to cling to them.

By contrast, Hagar struggles with the dark, as she struggles against her own body. Leaving Silverthreads, she feels she is "Emerging out of the shadows . . . [,]

gifted with sight like a prowling cat," finding "the darkness not complete after all." But it is to Shadow Point she must go before she can reconcile herself with the past, declaring more truthfully than she realizes: "I'll have a word or two to say . . . before my mouth is stopped with dark." She still needs Bram, the eel who could "swim . . . in a pool of darkness"; but as she is unable yet to be reconciled with herself, the darkness threatens her: "I merely sit on the bed . . . until the dark comes and the trees have gone and the sea itself has been swallowed by the night." Once again we recognize in *this* prose, however, the tell-tale signs of elevation and defence, which convey less the world of shadow than her artificial way of *thinking about* the world of shadow. Only in the hospital at the end does she come closer to realizing that one kind of language has been illusory, and that the trust she has placed in *form* has paradoxically not been in *substance*:

> when the lights are out, the darkness swarms over us and talk between bed and bed is extinguished. Each of us lives in our own night, a drugged semi-sleep in which we darkly swim, sometimes floating up to the surface where the voices are. If you shut your eyes after looking at a strong light, you see shreds of azure or scarlet across the black. The voices are like that, remembered fragments painted on shadow. I'm not as frightened by them as I was before. Now I know where they come from.

At the same time, the eel or fish image persists through passages like this as well, or as when Murray Lees speaks to her at Shadow Point: "His voice is blurred, or else it's my hearing. The words swim waveringly to me across the dark that separates us." And so to learn words, she discovers, is not only to learn form but also to learn communication, which is as often an act of the body as an act of mind, a kind of sexuality of speech, a fertility of hearing, which governs the reader as well as it governs Hagar herself.

How then do we hear that central contrast in the narrative form — the distinction between *then* and *now*? Which is substance and which shadow? Clearly, to think of the structure is to differentiate Hagar thinking and speaking in the present from Hagar living and reacting in the past: but this is not the same question. Throughout Hagar's quest to relive the moments that have eluded her and to stave off the moment that awaits her, she thinks of her past life not as *then* but as something interpenetrating *now*: as something ongoing, as a body of moments of transformation. "I think now," she writes; "Now I am rampant with memory"; "Only now, when I recall it"; "Up flames the pain now"; "Emaciated trunks of maple and poplar were black now" — until at Shadow Point she is "crying now," "trembling now," "feeling better now"; "If there's a time to speak, it's surely now," she thinks — but hallucinates about Arlene instead, so that her ostensibly calm reasonable speech does not connect with the present; "I'll sleep now," she adds, and thus we are led irrevocably towards the separateness she has always sought and feared, towards her moment of death

and her unquiet peace. At this point the novel shifts again: "And then —," it closes, *on* this moment; and we are asked to hear through the language — in the triple meaning the word *then* has: meaning *next* and meaning *on the other hand* and meaning *at that time in the past* — the paradox that has been Hagar's life. We hear continuity in the phrase, and we hear alternative possibility, and we hear the finality of the past imposing itself on the present moment. Hence to close the novel this way is therefore on the author's part a remarkable dramatic ploy.

In another context, the short story writer Clark Blaise has commented on the structure of narrative in this way:

> The first paragraph is a microcosm of the whole, but in a way that only the whole can reveal. . . .
>
> In the stories I admire, there is a sense of a continuum disrupted, then re-established, and both the disruption and reordering are part of the *beginning* of a story. The first paragraph tells us, in effect, that "this is how things have always been," or at least, how they have been until the arrival of the story. It may summarize . . . or it may envelop a life in a single sentence . . . until the fateful word that occurs in almost all stories, the simple terrifying adverb:
>
> *Then.*
>
> *Then,* which means to the reader: "I am ready." The moment of change is at hand. . . .
>
> And the purest part of a story, I think, is from its beginning to its "then." "Then" is the moment of the slightest tremor, the moment when the author is satisfied that all the forces are deployed, the unruffled surface perfectly cast, and the insertion, gross or delicate, can now take place. It is the cracking of the perfect, smug egg of possibility.[10]

To read *The Stone Angel* properly requires listening, I suggest, in this way: for the possibilities — to listen to the message that the *voice* in the words declares, a message often hidden, often indirect, often overlaid with fabrication and contrivance, but there to be heard. The novelist has created a book of echoes; she invites us to understand what F. R. Scott has referred to as the "cabin syllables," the "nouns of settlement," the "steel syntax" of the New World. For Scott, in his poem "Laurentian Shield," the land "stares at the sun in a huge silence / Endlessly repeating something we cannot hear. / Inarticulate, arctic, / Not written on by history, empty as paper. . . . / It will choose its language / When it has chosen its technic, / A tongue to shape the vowels of its productivity."[11] But for Margaret Laurence, the Manawaka World shows history already shaping character, the paper no longer empty, the language in flux, and the voices repeating words for us to hear with care. In *The Stone Angel,* we follow an old woman less through the shadow past than through the present mazes of her mind, and listen while she unravels the substantial possibilities that have been her life's story.

NOTES

[1] George Bowering, for one, has noted how language is a recurrent *subject* in Laurence's work; see "That Fool of a Fear: Notes on *A Jest of God*," *Canadian Literature*, 50 (Autumn 1971), 41-50; see also Theo Quayle Dombrowski, "Word and Fact," *Canadian Literature*, 80 (Spring 1979), 50-62.

[2] John Baxter, in "*The Stone Angel*: Shakespearian Bearings," *The Compass*, 1 (August 1977), 3-19, points to Laurence's orchestration of a "plain" and an "elaborate metaphoric style," finding a parallel with Shakespeare in that the two styles "interinanimate each other."

[3] In an admirable essay on art and nature in *The Stone Angel*, Dennis Cooley also begins with an analysis of this passage, and through his essay refers to a number of the same passages as I do: but to the rather different end of arguing the Jungian nature of the novel; Cooley's use of "conscious" and "unconscious" is also different from mine, therefore. See "Antimacassared in the Wilderness," *Mosaic*, 11, no. 3 (Spring 1978), 29-46.

[4] Cf. the later chant concerning Hagar's brother Matt.

[5] Laurence herself avers "I felt... an enormous conviction of the authenticity of Hagar's voice," "Gadgetry in Growing: Form and Voice in the Novel," *Journal of Canadian Fiction*, 27 (1980), p. 54; Simone Vauthier notes, however, in "Notes on the Narrative Voice(s) in *The Stone Angel*," *Etudes Canadiennes*, 11 (December 1981), 131-53, that the novel is told not by one voice but by at least four.

[6] Her concern for putting *framed* pictures on her walls also reiterates this notion. On the Benjamin West painting, see Laurie Ricou's "Never Cry Wolfe," *Essays on Canadian Writing*, 20 (Winter 1980-81), 171-85. Various critics have examined order in the novel, or the contrast between order and nature, including Cooley, Linda Hutcheon ("Pride and the Puritan Passion"), André Dommergues ("Order and Chaos in *The Stone Angel*"), and Pierre Spriet ("Narrative and Thematic Patterns in *The Stone Angel*"); the last three articles are all in *Etudes Canadiennes*, 11 (December 1981), pp. 55-61, 63-71, and 105-19 respectively.

[7] On the role of Mr. Troy and the framing function of The Lorelei and Litan allusions, see David Jeffrey, "Biblical Hermeneutic and Family History," *Mosaic*, 11, no. 3 (Spring 1978), 91-97.

[8] The list is not exhaustive; Cooley mentions still other examples. The point is that they occur *throughout* the book.

[9] I.e., "The Chambered Nautilus," which reads in part: "This is the ship of pearls, which, poets feign, / Sails the unshadowed main, / The venturous bark that flings / On the sweet summer wind its purpled wings / In gulfs enchanted, where the Siren sings.... / Still as the spiral grew, / He left the past year's dwelling for the new... / Stretched in his last found home, and knew the old no more.... / Build thee more stately mansions, O my soul, / ... / Till thou at length art free, / Leaving thine outgrown shell by life's unresting sea!"

[10] "To Begin, To Begin," in *The Narrative Voice*, ed. John Metcalf (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1972), pp. 22-26.

[11] *Events and Signals* (Toronto: Ryerson, 1954), p. 16.

THE VOICES

Ken Norris

I listen to the voices.
There are more than one.
One voice sings creation,
one prophesies destruction,
one whispers of the heart's compassion,
one tells of the heart's sad failings,
one explains its joy of life,
one declaims its love of death,
one speaks of the daily round,
one foretells a night of bliss,
one praises the lover's virtues,
one condemns her for her flaws,
one talks of the moment passing,
one gives voice to eternal calm,
one cries out against injustice,
one makes excuses for shabby crimes,
one looks at itself in mirrors,
one peers out beyond existence,
one rhapsodizes high events,
one mutters of small occasions,
one invokes the silvered moon,
one chants the golden sun.
I listen to the voices.
There are more than one.

EXILES IN TIME

Gallant's "My Heart is Broken"

David O'Rourke

As is often the case when attention is first turned to a neglected writer, a good deal of the criticism which has been written on Mavis Gallant has been influenced by those personal glimpses which the author has allowed of herself. To be sure, the biographical approach is valuable in illuminating certain aspects of Gallant's fiction. Her interest in familiar relationships might be assigned to the fact that she was left orphaned at an early age. Her own attendance at seventeen different schools might account for some of the transients who drift through her fiction. An early and unhappy marriage might explain the presence of so many young widows and divorcees in her work. Every writer draws from personal experience, but the problem with the biographical approach is that it is often just too convenient. Anything may be drawn upon to explain anything else. With Mavis Gallant and the theme of exile, this is particularly the case. Gallant is a Canadian who lives in Paris and publishes in the *New Yorker*. Because many commentators view her in the romantic sense of expatriate or exile, a kind of hangover from the twenties, there has been an unfortunate tendency to look for romantic exile in her work. In short, there has been a great deal of wishful supposition.[1] It is quite possible that the author lives in Paris because it is an exciting and vibrant city — briefly, because she likes it — not because she feels unable to return to a geographical home. It is true that Gallant's fiction is populated with exiles, but the process of identification in this regard is not difficult; more debatable is the implicit suggestion that their rootlessness is tied to some sort of physical alienation. To say that Gallant's exiles are "out of place" simply because they have left one country for another is to state a half-truth: metaphorically quite correct, but on a literal plane without much meaning.

Exile may well be Gallant's preoccupation, but it is not so much an exile of space as it is one of time. Her characters have typically taken a wrong turn in life and are unable to go back. In *My Heart Is Broken* (1964), Gallant fuses technique and theme in order to portray this universal dilemma. A careful analysis of each story reveals the unity of the collection and clarifies the Gallant "exile" as a person who is locked into a present situation, condition, stage of personal history, from which escape is difficult, and sometimes impossible.

"Acceptance of Their Ways" is set against the backdrop of winter, "the dead season," in an Italian Riviera pension distinguished by the smell of "decay." The story covers the span of one evening and the morning after. During Mrs. Garnett's "last meal" before her departure from the pension, an argument erupts between her and the owner, Mrs. Freeport. Watching the owner, water lily in hat, shouting at Mrs. Garnett reminds the only other guest, Lily Littel, of similar fights with her former husband. Mrs. Garnett finally, and literally, buckles under the verbal onslaught of Mrs. Freeport. After the rather orgasmic triumph, the victor becomes very loving toward the sobbing Mrs. Garnett. This tenderness is shown again the next day at Mrs. Garnett's farewell. It is when Mrs. Freeport is feeling her most wretched and, perhaps, most human, that Lily delivers the blow of her next-day departure for Nice. It should be remembered that "Mrs. Freeport couldn't live without Lily, not more than one day." Mrs. Freeport comes to the realization that eventually she will be abandoned completely. "Instead of answering," Lily adjusts Mrs. Freeport's water lily, "which was familiar of her." Not surprisingly, Lily becomes identified with the water lily. As Mrs. Freeport has cruelly triumphed over Mrs. Garnett, so Lily has won at the expense of her instructress, Mrs. Freeport. Lily has come to accept their antiseptic ways. She has become adept at stinging in a gentlewomanly, sophisticated fashion.

"Acceptance of Their Ways" offers a portrait of three rather genteel widows. Mrs. Freeport lives in a state of poverty in order to remain close to "someone precious" in a nearby cemetery. Mrs. Garnett's thoughts are never far away from her dead husband, William Henry. It is not clear whether Cliff Little died during the war but, for Lily Littel, he might as well have. The claustrophobic scene is set in winter to accentuate the near-to-death existence of the three characters. For Freeport and Garnett, after the death of their husbands, life is essentially over. One lives near Bordighera to be close to a corpse, the other cannot help but retreat to the past in simple conversation. The younger Lily willingly adopts the sterile lifestyle. As a "widow" herself, it is likely that she has come to identify with the older women. It is also quite clear that she is attracted by a certain aura of snobbery, having long ago changed her name from Little to Littel. Although apparently more innately vicious than either Freeport or Garnett, having deliberately chosen her course, Lily is still able to escape the vestiges of decay through a kind of schizophrenic existence. "Two-faced Lily Littel" has a secret life in Nice. Under the pretext of visiting her sister, she becomes the "old forgotten Lily-girl" caught in "the coarse and grubby gaiety of the French Riviera." This escape to a more youthful, liberated self is always short-lived — not unlike the effects of alcohol.

In "Bernadette," Robbie and Nora Knight, although considerably younger than Mrs. Freeport and Garnett, are also exiled from the vitality of their youth. They have come to live a façade: a picture of the liberal WASP, bourgeois life-

style. Their maid, Bernadette, is everything that they are not — she stands for spontaneity and life, as opposed to analytical dissection. Bernadette is given books to read but, unlike Lily Littel, is not a very good student. She chooses not to accept the Knights' ways. Rather than trying to understand things to death, Bernadette stands in awe of the mysteries of life. She represents a youth that is ultimately compelling in attraction for Robbie, but a threat at the core for Nora. The reason is that Bernadette symbolizes something they might both have become. After college, Robbie and Nora sacrificed authentic feelings and desires in order to programme themselves for a materialistically rewarding existence. The route taken has left both discontented, resulting in a very precarious sort of marriage.

The time of the story is late December. The living-room has been set for a post-Christmas, discussion-group party. It is ironically described as being "like a room prepared for a colour photo in a magazine."[1] As "Acceptance of Their Ways" builds to a climax in which a character loses all composure, so Nora loses control when the party gets out of hand. Throughout, Robbie's temperature rises. It is significant that his illness is a cold:

> Because he had a cold and Nora had gone out and left him on a snowy miserable afternoon, he saw in this picture [Orwell's portrait of a working-class interior] everything missing in his life. He felt frozen and left out.

Winter is used to depict the decline of the Knight marriage; that it is the end of the year does not suggest a very optimistic future for Robbie and Nora as a couple. But winter is also employed to represent a stage in life into which Robbie, particularly, finds himself locked. It is not a coincidence that Robbie has a cold and feels frozen at the same time he is trying to get back to the warm centre of his school days. He has left behind an important vitality — "the only result of his reading was a sense of loss." By contrast, the younger Bernadette represents "an atmosphere of warmth and comfort": "She was the world they had missed sixteen years before, and they, stupidly, had been trying to make her read books."

Like "Acceptance of Their Ways," the story covers a time-span of just under two days. On the second, Nora confronts Bernadette with the knowledge of the latter's pregnancy. She tries to dissect the situation in the same way that she dissects her relationship with Robbie. Not surprisingly, she is shaken by the prospect of Bernadette's harbouring new life. Her mistake comes in assuming that Robbie is the father. It leads Robbie and Nora to individually admit that their marriage is a sham — like their living-room, a picture lacking much substance.

Bernadette, like Lily Littel, flowers outside of a claustrophobic boarding house. She leads a secret, and double, life in which emotions are given full reign. She is also able to find refuge in fantasy. Sitting in a theatre, she identifies with the

people in the film who are looking on, never expecting the "picture" to become true for herself. In this sense, she lives the authentic life compared to the Knights' rather empty existence. She feels nothing but warmth for the child, aware that it will become an "angel" awaiting death — very similar to her own situation, trapped in an environment and culture neither of which is conducive to life.

"The Moabitess" is also set in winter; it is November, and again out-of-season on the Riviera. Miss Horeham's identification is clearly with this time of year:

> She was thinking about the Bible and the old days, and of what a nice time of year this was; in spite of what she had said about its being off-season, it was really the period she liked best. . . . In Miss Horeham's vision of life this was the climate in which everything took place. On November nights, the world closed comfortably in.

Here winter does not represent the kind of sterility exhibited in "Acceptance of Their Ways" and "Bernadette." Miss Horeham is elderly and ready to die, and hence winter offers more of a tranquil dream-state than an abrupt death. What is interesting is the imaginative, treasure-box world Miss Horeham has created to obtain some comfort in the desolation of life. Like Lily and Bernadette, Miss Horeham juxtaposes a meek and mild public life and a secret world of her own. The major difference is one of tense. Miss Horeham moves from a day-to-day present, characterized by change, into an idyllic past where she is once again the daughter-wife of her father. In this way, nothing is lost or left behind. The important treasures of the past are always under lock and key in the present.

"An Unmarried Man's Summer" presents yet another character against a background of the off-season Riviera months, by now clearly a motif in *My Heart Is Broken*:

> He is surrounded by the faces of women. Their eyes are fixed on his dotingly, but in homage to another man: a young lover killed in the 1914 war; an adored but faithless son. . . . Walter must be wicked, for part of the memory of every vanished husband or lover or son is the print of his cruelty.

But Walter is not the only window on the past. "An Unmarried Man's Summer" turns on the irony that Walter employs the elderly women for exactly the same purpose: "Once, he had loved a woman much older than himself. He saw her, by chance, after many years, when she was sixty."

An event equal in importance in shaping Walter's life occurred during the war when his body was burnt from head to foot. The author does not draw a lot of attention to this event, but it surely goes a long way towards explaining why

Walter prefers the winter months with elderly women to frolicking on the beach each summer: " — for it had all of it gone, and he wanted nothing but the oasis of peace, the admiration of undemanding old women, the winter months." It is tempting to say that Walter's scars are symbolic — that, having once been "burnt," he does not seek to venture into the realms of love and affection again. But, more likely, he has been rendered physically incapacitated to return sexual love. The women are "undemanding." Even if Walter could have sex, he has probably accepted the fact that his scorched body is not very appealing. He has adjusted to this situation and gives the appearance of being carefree, but he is still seen to mutter such unheard remarks as: "I wish it had been finished off for me in the last war."

In "Bernadette" and "The Moabitess," fragile, make-believe worlds are shaken at their roots by some realistic intrusion. In "An Unmarried Man's Summer," the visit of Walter Henderson's family serves as a "revolution" ("nothing to do with politics, just a wild upheaval of some kind") which upsets the "mosaic picture" Walter has formed of himself. It forces an epiphany of his empty existence, and leads Walter to the key question of what he will do at sixty. His life has no direction; it wanders in seasonal cycles. At sixty, he will be asked to vacate his house. Removal will be tantamount to abandoning what little life he has left: "Look at the house I live in. Ugly box, really. I never complain. . . . No heat in winter. Not an anemone in the garden."

Walter is able to ride out the revolution by means of great cruelty to his servant, Angelo: yet another "angel" given more to warmth and life than to the sterility exemplified by his master. With the return of winter, Walter resumes his orderly, vacuous existence. Like Robbie and Nora, however, he has been shaken by a vision of an energetic past, a past that is no longer accessible to him. He is left locked in the present, apprehensive of what is to come.

"Its Image on the Mirror" is of novella length, yet the story line is relatively simple. The lives of two sisters — one vital and spontaneous, the other prim and predictable — are traced more for reasons of contrast than to arrive at any specific point in plot. This is not to say that "Its Image on the Mirror" is a simple story. Gallant orchestrates several levels of time and provides a well-intentioned but not totally reliable narrator in the person of the prudent sister, Jean Price.

Briefly stated, the chronology is all backwards. The story begins with a middle-aged Jean carefully trying to think back to the summer of 1955. She recalls helping her parents move from their Allenton home in July of that year, then remembers her sister's promise to join them at the cottage for the Labour Day weekend. The weekend is recounted in some detail before the reader is led even further back in time to a World War II Montreal. Still more light is shed on Jean and her Isadora Duncan-like sister, Isobel, before the reader is left "hang-

ing" with a conclusion not unlike, in style, the ending of *The Great Gatsby*. Jean feels that, for the first time, Isobel needs her and, consequently, will never shut her out of her life again. Of course, this conclusion is quite ironic. The narrative has already shown that the sisters grow even further apart. Not only does Isobel end up moving to Venezuela, but Jean also becomes a perfect carbon copy of her mother.

"Its Image on the Mirror," being longer, magnifies the technique used in most of the short stories. References to the past are employed to inform the present. Middle-aged Jean, the picture of contentment, is revealed to be a very insecure person who is envious of her sister's rebellious spirit. Early in the story, Jean is seen to feel sorry for her father: "It seems hard to have your views shared by everyone around you all your life and then confounded in your old age." And yet there is a real danger of this happening to Jean. The narrative demonstrates that she clings to, and echoes, her mother's opinions like someone holding on to a lifeline. She has sacrificed spontaneity, vitality, in order to fulfill some preconceived notion of proper behaviour. Isobel is her opposite, and must be attacked and criticized, or Jean's life will be revealed for the sham that it is. Isobel is the person Jean might have become.

There are a number of rather remarkable similarities between "Its Image on the Mirror" and "The Cost of Living." In the former story, there is a five-year age difference between Isobel and Jean. When they meet at the summer cottage after a separation of six years, Isobel is thirty-three and Jean thirty-eight. In "The Cost of Living," Patricia and Louise also meet after a six-year separation; Patricia is thirty-three and Louise thirty-eight. Patricia describes herself as having been the "rebel" of her family: "I had inherited the vanity, the stubbornness, without the will; I was too proud to follow and too lame to command." In contrast, the older Louise is best described as "prudent." She has a predisposition towards proper behaviour, and frequently adopts not only her mother's stance but also her inflection. The echoes of "Its Image on the Mirror" are quite clear. Isobel and Jean are back with an important twist. Although Louise makes "a serious effort to know" Patricia, she eventually becomes more interested in Sylvie. The latter is described as "the coarse and grubby Degas dancer, the girl with the shoulder thrown back and the insolent chin": another Isadora Duncan. As the story unfolds, the differences from "Its Image on the Mirror" begin to multiply. In a sense, the other sides of an Isobel and a Jean are presented. Louise is prudent, but there can be little doubt about her warmth and love. Sylvie is energetic, but also selfish and immature. The most dramatic difference lies in the reaction of Louise to her own mother's death: "With every mouthful of biscuit and every swallow of tea, she celebrated our mother's death and her own release."

Louise's sudden liberation is like a springtime in winter. She meets Patrick on December 21st, falls in love, and begins to transfer the attention, previously paid

to her invalid mother, to this new lover. It soon becomes apparent that Patrick represents to Louise more than simply his own person. After Patrick's departure, Louise says to Sylvie, "I've forgotten what he was like"; Patricia, the narrator, quickly notes, "But I knew it was Collie Louise had meant." Later, Patricia observes:

> Louise never mentioned him [Patrick]. Once she spoke of her lost young husband, but Collie would never reveal his face again. He had been more thoroughly forgotten than anyone deserves to be. Patrick and Collie merged into one occasion, where someone had failed. The failure was Louise's; the infidelity of memory, the easy defeat were hers.

In a theme typical of Gallant in *My Heart Is Broken*, one character employs another as a kind of double for a person who has been lost in the past. When Patrick rejects this love, Sylvie becomes the next emotional surrogate. In a sense, Louise's history has been one of displaced love — from Collie to her mother to two characters in Paris. It is significant that the narrator notes that Sylvie is young enough to be Louise's daughter: "Sylvie must have been born that year, the year Louise was married." The winter in Paris then becomes to Louise an opportunity to play out what might have been in her own life.

But Louise's attraction for Sylvie probably goes even deeper. If "Its Image on the Mirror" is considered an expansion of this situation, we may conclude that Sylvie represents to Louise a certain vitality or exuberance which she herself lacks. The interest in Sylvie then becomes a fascination with an aspect of herself which has never been developed. The difference is that by living a life that might have been, Louise is better able to adjust to her present situation instead of being left with a vague sense of loss. She comes to recognize by contrast with Sylvie's irresponsibility her own distinct merits. She even goes so far as to encourage Sylvie to adopt some of her own rather old-fashioned (for bohemian Paris) attitudes: initiative and prudence in monetary matters. By April, a genuine spring, the narrator observes of Louise, "the ripped fabric of her life had mended." It has been a painful process, hence the title of the story, but she has been able to accomplish in physical encounter what is usually only attempted on the psychiatrist's couch. Having come to terms with the past, Louise is able to leave the stage of the present for what appears to be an optimistic future in Australia.

THE FEMALE CHARACTERS in "My Heart Is Broken" and "Sunday Afternoon" are not so fortunate. They appear as helpless victims of lives that have "gone wrong." In "My Heart Is Broken," Jeannie has been raped and beaten by an unidentified assailant. The assault is an implicit com-

ment on the beating that Jeannie is taking at this stage of her life. She lies on the bed, pathetically still doing her nails. She is still trying to look pretty in an environment which steps on whim and penalizes any sign of sensuality. The stern and sexless Mrs. Thompson knowingly tolls "Winter soon," despite the fact that it is only August. She signals the reality that if Jeannie is to stay with her husband and adjust to the life presented in "My Heart Is Broken," she will have to abandon her youthful instincts, her wonderful naiveté. But the story is as much Mrs. Thompson's as it is that of Jeannie. It is not unreasonable to assume that Mrs. Thompson may once have been as vitally alive as Jeannie, prior to accepting the grotesque sentence of pushing a doll carriage. In this sense, Jeannie is Mrs. Thompson's window on the past. It is therefore natural for Mrs. Thompson, when she looks at Jeannie, to end up "trying to remember how she'd felt about things when she was twenty." Mrs. Thompson's state is even more pathetic than Jeannie's. The younger Jeannie still has her humanity, still feels pain, whereas all Mrs. Thompson can do is sit "wondering if her heart had ever been broken, too."

The setting of "Sunday Afternoon" is a "married scene in a winter room." As in "My Heart Is Broken," a brief sketch is offered of a young, and seemingly helpless, heroine trapped in a relationship — really a life situation — not older than five months. Veronica Baines clearly sees her forlorn position in the "black mirror" of the apartment window. Jim feels no more love for her than does the Algerian for the European girl being led from the Montparnasse café. Just as Jeannie wants to be liked, so would Veronica like to be loved. Unfortunately, she has to settle for "a ribbon or so, symbols of love" which she, herself, has to provide. The climax of the story arrives when Veronica discovers that not only has she not been sufficient reason for Jim to dip into his large cache of money, but in fact the money has been hidden for the express purpose of preventing her from spending it.

Veronica and Jeannie have much in common with the character of Sylvie in "The Cost of Living." All three are sensual women with child-like mentalities; they prefer to be taken care of as opposed to developing their own initiative. When something goes wrong, particularly in the case of Veronica and Jeannie, there is a tendency to stand bewildered rather than change course. They tragically lack the discipline of a Louise, and have not (yet) developed "double lives" to allow for the protection of what is vital in environments hostile to emotional growth.

It is appropriate that "The Ice Wagon Going Down the Street" is the final story in *My Heart Is Broken* because it brings together a number of the techniques and themes previously employed in the collection. The story begins in the present tense. It is once again a Sunday and, while Peter and Sheilah dote on the past, their hall-closet clothes become "crushed by winter overcoats." The bulk of

the story is set in the past in order to illuminate the present domestic scene. The reader is led back via reminiscence to a lost paradise: a "fragile" Paris winter when the "dream of a marriage" held true. Once the dream falters and paradise is lost, the husband and wife find themselves "in exile" in Geneva. Eventually, Paris becomes to them not so much a geographical place as a period in time: "Paris was already a year in the past."

Of the other short stories, "The Ice Wagon Going Down the Street" is most closely allied in theme to "Bernadette," with particular parallels between Robbie and Peter, and Bernadette and Agnes. Although both Sheilah and Peter lament a "golden" period in the past, it is Peter who sees in Agnes something he might have become: "I'd be like Agnes if I didn't have Sheilah." Like Bernadette, Agnes is strictly working-class. When she hangs her university degree on the office wall, Peter notes, "It was one of the gritty, prideful gestures that stand for push, toil, and family sacrifice." Agnes lacks Bernadette's immediate warmth, but she has all the discipline and fortitude of a character like Louise. When Peter complains of the cold in Geneva, a complaint not unrelated to Robbie's condition in Montreal, Agnes replies, "Your blood has gotten thin." At the costume party, Agnes's directness, or honesty, is symbolically portrayed by the unassuming costume she wears. When the tramp outfit is later discarded for an "orphanage dressing gown," she comes even closer to a declaration of what she really is: a young Norwegian from Saskatchewan trying to make her way in the strange city of Geneva. Agnes is as much a transient as Peter, but whereas Peter looks back and is bewildered about why no one is helping him, Agnes is building toward a future on her own. The question raised is one of control. Agnes, as does Louise in "The Cost of Living," takes charge of her life without losing her humanity.

Like the conclusion of "Its Image on the Mirror," the ending of "The Ice Wagon Going Down the Street" is reminiscent of *The Great Gatsby*. Peter "thinks about families in the West as they were fifteen, twenty years ago — the iron-cold ambition, and every member pushing the next one on." He "wonders what they were doing over there in Geneva — not Sheilah and Peter, *Agnes* and Peter." Finally, he sees Agnes's "Western town" complete with "prairie trees" and "shadows on the sidewalk." This is a Nick Carraway who is realizing that a glamorous dream, in this case his own, has gone sour, and is looking to a period in the past for more stable values. The irony, of course, is that he does nothing with this epiphany. At the end of the story, he is back holding Sheilah's hand, trapped in the present.

Although the *New Yorker* stories collected in *My Heart Is Broken* range from the years 1957-63,[2] they achieve a tight unity through a repetition of theme and technique which approaches pattern. Throughout, Gallant is shown to be primarily interested in problems of the status quo. The sterility of an old order, fre-

quently manifested by a pseudo-aristocratic gentility and symbolized by the season of winter, is contrasted with a vitality traditionally assigned to the working-classes and youth. Characters suffer "revolutions" in which they come close to losing "control," or lead "double lives" in order to conform to societal expectations and, at the same time, retain what is essentially human and true. This is not to say that all of the younger characters in *My Heart Is Broken* are paradigms of desired behaviour. Many lack the very "control" without which independence is impossable. What is called for is a balance, a determination, a flexibility which allow for continued growth.

NOTES

[1] Gallant employs photographs to depict "appearance" — veneers of existence — as well as to stop time. It is ironically employed here, as the scene described is a *living*-room.

[2] A chronology is as follows: "Bernadette," 12 Jan. 1957; "The Moabitess," 2 Nov. 1957; "Acceptance of Their Ways," 30 Jan. 1960; "My Heart Is Broken," 12 Aug. 1961; "The Cost of Living," 3 March 1962; "Sunday Afternoon," 24 Nov. 1962; "An Unmarried Man's Summer," 12 Oct. 1963; "The Ice Wagon Going Down the Street," 14 Dec. 1963. The date of publication of "Its Image on the Mirror" is 1964.

WINTER

Liliane Welch

Goosedown arms
raised against
the north wind —
winter crackles
in our walls.
Snow withers
the stars' track:
frozen dance.
All is blue cold
down to the pink
paperbirch skin.
We chop maple trunks
for evening fires
in our woodstove
and quiver
under heavy blankets,
inward dawns.

JOHN GLASSCO (1909-1981)

and his Erotic Muse

Leon Edel

JOHN GLASSCO CULTIVATED THE LYRIC and erotic muses — Euterpe and Erato. He was, above all, in his later years, a tough-minded poet who mingled reflection with satire, and most of his reflections were on the wear-and-tear of life, the crumbling of man's creations, old houses — like the body — disintegrating in a mournful landscape, mixed with sweet and bitter memories and delicate observations; the triumph of the dust and yet somehow out of death and decay the hardness of reality:

> It is the world that counts, the endless fever
> And suffering that is its own and only end.

The elegance and polish, rhythm and cadence, the perfect pitch, as it were, is curiously to be found also in his erotic writings which are largely in prose. John Glassco — he had been Buffy to us from his earliest years — made a distinction between "porno" written as art and that which is scribbled as commerce. Yet even when he attempted to write for commerce he proved unfailingly delicate and aristocratic: he wrote in the tradition of Cleland, or the *Contes drolatiques*, or the French *élégants*. He captured the spirit of the *conte leste*, the frivolous and "improper" fantasy, for which the Gallic world has so many more synonyms than we have. The phallus was for Buffy a wanton and pretty bird of flight and repose; the libido an exquisite gift of nature. His erotic muse was forever young, born of pre-adolescent titillation and exposure. There are brief backward glances in various of Buffy's prose writings — "in view of my own upbringing" and "my own early memories supplied much of the psychology," and an allusion to "that susceptible teen-ager who could never say no to anyone." These brief autobiographical references allow us to extrapolate some early governess in Montreal's Simpson Street, where Buffy was born, who perhaps administered spankings that had erotic overtones; or some early housemaid taken with the charms of the juvenile Buffy — he had so many. He is our one writer in Canadian literature who has completely escaped self-consciousness. And if his poetic musings on death are unsentimental and confront reality, he is an unabashed romantic when

erotism triumphs. His porno is a reaffirmation of the life-spirit and the magical solace of fantasy.

Glassco was the one sensualist of the "Montreal Group." F. R. Scott was intellect and gambolling wit; A. J. M. Smith aesthetic force and bourgeois rebellion; A. M. Klein, rectitude and rhetoric of the prophets and Hebraism; and Leo Kennedy was Puck. Buffy was a shy youth who talked of "lesbians and lavender boys" and went to a Paris to be, if possible, a libertine. The word has a certain vicious overtone that could never be applied to the faun-like creature I knew between his seventeenth and twenty-first years. And then he had thrifty Montreal in his veins, in spite of his desire to be rid of it; and strong literary ambitions. His late poem about the old city, its Scottish-French mix, its sordid annals of rapacity and piety, the established streets of his childhood and his memories of the red light district make curious reading beside Klein's Montreal, the weighted city of Joyce's cosmopolite verbal mix, polyglot and romantic. Klein, the ghetto stranger, observed Montreal as a phenomenon; Buffy, the rooted Canadian, took it for granted and brooded over its changes. I think that in his poetry he was the most ingrained existentialist of our little group.

I met Buffy at McGill when he was seventeen and in full rebellion against his father — the family dictator and pillar of affluence and authority, bursar of McGill University. Later we met in the bars of Montparnasse; and during an idyllic episode, shared a flat with Graeme Taylor and a young girl from the Canadian west in Nice. I have suggested in my preface to *Memoirs of Montparnasse* some part of our youthful feeling of irresponsibility and the fleeting fool's paradise — a paradise of delight — in which we lived till the Depression caught us. Buffy's precocious memoirs, which he was writing then as if he had already lived his entire life, became his liveliest — and in some ways saddest — book. Our ways parted in 1931 for many years, and we met again in late middle life and renewed the old friendship on the basis of our late maturities. In his last years, Buffy was still in full possession of his quick imagination, his grasp of the colour and detail of life and his ability, as always, to take the world in an easier stride than those of us who had grown up inhibited and been limited by poverty or conflict — as Smith was in his middle-class ways and English heritage, or Scott in his marvellous and consistent knightliness arrayed against economic dragons, or myself in my role of perpetual "outsider." John Glassco's good fortune was to have accepted early the benignities of his sexual self. He was a very handsome youth when I knew him; there was something faun-like in his aspect, the bright eyes, the slightly receding chin, the soft smooth roseate skin — one can see his physical charm and vitality in a photograph reproduced in one of Kay Boyle's books of reminiscence. He was a faun ready to make friends in some enchanted woodland with man or woman; a bit frightened by certain kinds of women and nearly always delighted if he could establish a triangle. He then liked

best as a kind of untragical Oedipus a male companion and a woman to be shared between them. This is the subject of Morley Callaghan's acute yet crude story "Now That April's Here" about Buffy and Graeme Taylor and their plump little girl at Nice. One finds the pattern in Buffy's works and it may sound a bit kinky. It depends on the sexual point of view, for uninhibited sex demands free souls as well as free bodies. I think Buffy felt that a male companion defended him against predatory females; he could then all the more enjoy the latter, for — to judge by the forms of his fantasies — he could, given the right woman, be comfortably bisexual.

Some years ago Glassco, in an interview, listed his three primary fears — "the fear of women, the fear of poverty and of course the fear of death." His fear of women is constantly illustrated in his "fatal women" stories — the Electra female of the brandishing whip who brings the joyful pains of traditional masochism and subjugates the male. His fear of poverty came from his having been for a longish period genuinely down-and-out in Montparnasse where he lived hand-to-mouth as a writing or typing hack or as a sexual convenience to women willing to pay a price. This is all confessed in the *Memoirs* with the lightest and yet most probing touch. To have grown up in a millionaire's family and to have to scrabble for his food eroded Buffy's sense of self: and in his later years he rebuilt his finances by scrupulous study of the business pages and apparently shrewd sallies into the stock or bond market. As for his fear of death, this was, in Buffy's case, not at all the normal "existential" fear we all share. For Buffy, death was terror: like one placed in a firing squad and reprieved at the last minute. After his scrounging days in Montparnasse he returned to Montreal — he was 24 — suffering from galloping consumption. The story is touchingly told, even humorously, in his memoirs. But the trauma was permanent. He was saved by a now obsolete kind of lung surgery that left him with a single lung and a consequent shortness of breath. He had learned the meaning of survival; and during his months on the edge of death he escaped into memories and fantasies of his life abroad. He relived his brief happy years. Most of *Memoirs of Montparnasse* was written in the Royal Victoria Hospital in Montreal, and then laid aside, as if Buffy now had a new life to live.

JOHN GLASSCO'S POEMS about man's daily death-world spring, as we can see, from old intensities. His pictures of human fragility are etched out of his own fragile yet life-consuming passions. His erotic writings thus carry, in the midst of their frivolity, the post-Montparnassian experience. There is surely a distinct relation between Buffy dying and surviving at 24 and his picking up later the last writings of Aubrey Beardsley who did die of tuberculosis

at 26. Buffy's emotions on discovering Beardsley's unfinished *Under the Hill* were a kind of reliving of his own reprieve — with the difference that there had been none for the great artist in black and white who revolutionized the *art nouveau* of the nineties. Buffy was nearing fifty when he set out to finish Beardsley's work even as he had completed his own memoir of himself which at that time lay unpublished in his attic. The Olympia Press in Paris, which specialized in both erotic and porno publication, produced a beautiful green-cloth edition of the Beardsley work limited to 3,000 copies in which we may read: "Under the Hill or the story of Venus and Tannhauser, in which is set forth an exact account of the manner of state held by Madame Venus, Goddess and Meretrix, under the famous Horselberg, and containing adventures of Tannhauser in that place, his journeying to Rome, and return to the loving mountain, by Aubrey Beardsley, now completed by John Glassco." In the introduction — and Buffy's introductions to his erotica are miniature masterpieces of the mock-pedantic and mock-academic — he tells us how Beardsley's pen dropped from his hand (so to speak) at the end of a sentence on page 69 of this edition, and how he picked up the pen at that moment. Here are Beardsley's last sentences:

> Venus was in a ravishing toilet and confection of Camille's, and looking like K——. Tannhauser was dressed as a woman and looked like a Goddess. Cosmé sparkled with gold, bristled with ruffs, glittered with bright buttons, was painted, powdered, gorgeously bewigged, and looked like a marquis in a comic opera. The salle à manger at De La Pine's was quite the prettiest that ever was. . . .

And here Buffy begins:

> The walls, covered with pale blue satin, held in silver panels pictures of shepherds and shepherdesses, of nymphs and heroes, moving in measure in Sicilian landscapes or upon the azure shores of Aegean waters. From the ceiling beautiful divinities made as to throw garlands on the guests, with such effect that one was surprised that the roses, as if unwilling to quit Olympus, would not descend on earth. . . .

The transition from one writer to the other is harmonious. It is, however, no easy task to compare the two texts, for the Beardsley fragment contains bedroom sequences while Buffy's deal with larger frolics and the journey of Tannhauser to Rome, the sadder part of the story. Beardsley's exotic work is filled with passages that seem to be describing his own drawings:

> Before a toilet-table that shone like the altar of Nôtre Dame des Victoires, Venus was seated in a little dressing-gown of black and heliotrope. The coiffeur Cosmé was caring for her scented chevelure, and with tiny silver tongs, warm from the caresses of the flame, made delicious intelligent curls that fell as lightly as breath about her forehead and over her eyebrows, and clustered like tendrils round her neck.

Buffy in his portion understandably gives the effect of Beardsley's art as well, but he works more out of literary allusion, the words come to his mind before the

picture. Both delight in using French and other foreign words as if they were a part of the English language. Beardsley thus speaks of "all the décolleté spirits of astonishing conversation," and in Buffy's portion we find him exclaiming "What frolics and romps! What bagatelles, fredaines and folasteries!" Buffy captures the girlishness Beardsley imparted to Venus in accord with Edmund Wilson's observation that Beardsley made "the grotesqueries and orgies of her court . . . quite natural and harmless." This is the effect Buffy gives not only here but in all his erotic writings. But it is again in his Introduction to his Beardsley pastiche that Glassco reveals to us the depth, below the surface of the frolic, of his identification and empathy with the artist's ability to laugh and mock and invent during the short hours left to him. Beardsley, Buffy writes, may have partly failed "due only to his partaking of the all-too-human faults of dejection, listlessness, ennui. But now, in an age whose painfully enlarged vision he may have anticipated, an age which has learned to value, as his own never did, the existence of a world apart from the sphere of our sorrow, we can appreciate the marvellous cohesion of his fancies, the sheer boldness and élan of his conception, the perfection of taste shown in the apposition of thought and epithet which is always startling and always delightful, and the sheer freedom and beauty of this elegant, playful, sad, supernal world of the spirit which he was still attempting to realise even while he was slowly dying." It is as if Buffy were remembering his own spirit when he was writing the *Memoirs of Montparnasse*, and he adds this sentence that expresses not only his emotion but also defines his erotic writings: "Above all let us not make the mistake of identifying his partial failure with what was in truth his greatest strength, his essential unabashed reliance on the prodigious inner power of eroticism, his sense of what makes man's private universe revolve." Completion of Beardsley's fantasies appear to have meant more to Buffy than the stimulus of matching wit with wit, cleverness with cleverness, bawd with bawd. The old and the new text are seamed together — it is all but invisible — by the common life-in-death and death-in-life experience of a strange, one might say almost macabre, English artist who founded a new style in art, and an artistic spirit from Canada who possessed the empathy needed to forge the posthumous union. In Buffy, there seems to have been in the experience, a way of proclaiming his own survival and the permanence of art, through a reliance on fantasy. We find a repetition of the Beardsley experience a few years later, when Buffy translates into English the French-Canadian poetry of Saint-Denys-Garneau. Buffy's preface to this translation, which received the Canada Council translation award, refers us back once more to his brush with death in 1932. For Garneau's art was born out of the same experience: he had in 1928 suffered a heart injury which forced him to abandon his studies. Buffy writes; "Thus, at the age of 22, he was brought face to face with his own imminent death; and the next nine years of his life — the last nine — were passed in

intimate converse with a few close friends and in the feverish search for the religious certainty and the poetic 'truth' that had always obsessed him." We need not labour the point. Translation is a form of imitation: and as Buffy had imitated and completed Aubrey Beardsley in the 1940's so in the 1970's he carefully rendered Garneau into English and made his prolonged struggle and his poetry available to English readers.

We can see the imprint on an entire literary career of a life-and-death experience — the life reprieved to do its work. Buffy was not a Catholic, like Garneau, and so was free to be more light-hearted in his secular alternations between poetic meditation and the aphrodisiac delights of Harriet's whip or Squire Hardman's voyeured double satisfaction: a relish both of the whipping of the young and of the sexy female form that is administering the punishment — and all in heroic couplets derived from Alexander Pope.

BEFORE WE LOOK AT JOHN GLASSCO's poetry, which together with his *Memoirs* is perhaps the most enduring of his writings, we might linger briefly over his pastiches and collages, the ingeniosities of "porn." I have already suggested that his erotic writings, because they are fantasy and aphrodisiac, contain affirmations of life and of life's health-giving sensuality. Buffy's flagellism, in various books, shows a young exuberance fluted through high verbal divertimentos. It also suggests his curious plight, for he is always describing a passive male whose sexual power is derived from a whipping *femme fatale*: a kind of romantic agony described by Krafft-Ebing and earlier in the works of Leopold Sacher-Masoch, whose novel *Venus in Furs* Buffy translated and inevitably prefaced. The "fatal woman" rather than the punishment is the prime mover in this area of Buffy's erotic world. She whips the flesh into activity and with her own compulsive erotic drive makes the male rise before her; he has been subjugated but he triumphs. It was perhaps no accident that Buffy's first book of poems was titled *The Deficit Made Flesh* — the process I describe is that of a deficit for which compensation is found: pain inflicted by female hands so to speak takes the delicate youth "out of the red" into an Elysium of sexual delight. Within this process we can discern the narcissistic element — it is inevitably there. One must learn first to admire one's self in order to admire others; there must be a love of self to learn the love of another. This is enacted for us when Buffy writes a book under the name of Sylvia Bayer and has her dedicate this book to John Glassco. There is more than authorial vanity in the act: there are all the pleasures of transvestitism. When Sylvia's heroine contemplates the phallus as a work of art, it is Buffy who is doing the contemplating — our components are now beyond narcissism and the love of Hyacinthus. The beauty of flesh, the

artistic form of flesh, is discerned through a series of masks. The mode is always one of indirection.

One of Buffy's inventions is that of *collage*: he transports the term from modern art into his way of grafting on another text a quantity of erotic activity not originally intended. We can see his elaborate gambit in a collection of homosexual stories which he bluntly titled *The Temple of Pederasty*, borrowing his text from some standard translation of the Japanese realist Ihara Saikaku (1642-1693), and doubtless dressing it up a little; and then interpolating erotic detail. Saikaku wrote vividly in the Tokugawa period of that "floating world" which has given the west so much delight — in the form of those delicate and documentary prints made from wood blocks of streets and waterways, men and women, and notably poised and indeed "floating" courtesans in multi-coloured kimonos reflecting an entire era of popular as well as courtly sex. *The Temple of Pederasty*, published in 1970 with a warning that it was not to be read by children, gives Saikaku as primary text. The translator is invented: he is none other than Buffy in a kimono bearing the name Hideki Okada. However, Buffy writes the preface as John Glassco and it gives the work an air of solemn authority. In his preface, Buffy explains very carefully that Saikaku lent himself to this treatment — "the rather highflown sentiment of the original is subtly and sharply redressed by a frankness of epithet no less than by the tone of genuine passion, supplying elements which give an added dimension to the stories themselves and in many cases transform them entirely." He adds that "the authorship of these interpolations is extremely doubtful" — but we may be sure that their author is John Glassco alias Hideki Okada.

A word needs to be said about the introductions in which the transvestitism and other acts of role-playing are performed. An entire essay might be written on Buffy the prefacer; and it is difficult to tell when he is himself and when someone else. I suspect he is himself, for example, in the preface to his translation of Leopold von Sacher-Masoch's *Venus im Pelz* which James Joyce so much admired and had in his library. Who knows? Joyce may have named Leopold Bloom, who is quite a masochist, after the man whose name gave the language that word. Perhaps the most amusing of Buffy's mock-introductions is the one he appended to the amusette he created called *Squire Hardman*. He printed a limited edition of fifty copies at his own expense and carefully explained to the reader with a show of pedantry that the author of this early nineteenth-century flagellant poem, written in the manner of Pope, was George Colman, whom critics called a writer of "filthy facetiae." For those who want to pursue the elusive pseudonymous life of John Glassco, I might as well enumerate all the pennames I have found (there may be others) under whose masks Buffy created his diversified erotic works. I have already mentioned Sylvia Bayer, Hideki Okada, and George Colman. There are also Grace Davignon, W. P. R. Eadie, Albert

Eddy, Silas N. Gooch, S. Colson-Haig, Nordyke Nudleman, Jean de St. Luc, and Miles Underwood. The latter is the pen-name used for Buffy's international success, his best-sold tale of the governess and the whip. Indeed it was pirated and translated in so many countries that Buffy — given the new dispensation to such works — decided in the end to legitimize the governess. *Harriet Marwood, Governess* had been published by Grove Press in the U.S.A. and in 1976 he brought out a Canadian edition that bore his own name as well as his usual preface. The book is filled with much amusing pastiche-and-collage of Victorian novels — all careful reticence and politeness until one arrives at the whippings. These have the usual monotony of porn though they are constantly lightened by Buffy's waggish style. We are satiated with the constant cut of the whip or strap. Buffy was well aware he was administering pain and saccharine — but mostly the latter — in these masturbatory fantasies. They are written in a closely-imitated style and Buffy supplies a genuine source:

> the whole problem had resolved itself, quite simply, into the question of what literary *style* would be the most effective; this, I came to see, was crucial, and on choice the success or failure of my book would depend. After long deliberation, I found that the finest model I could take was Frances Trollope, that shrewd courageous and observant Englishwoman whose *Domestic Manners of the Americans* I had long admired: her leisurely periods, her stylized dialogue, her ringing clichés and redundant cadences seemed perfectly adapted to my purpose. Accordingly, having soaked myself in her dreadful and now forgotten novels for a whole week, I completed my own book in the comparatively short period of four months, finishing it on March 4th, 1955. I have never written a novel so rapidly, nor with so much pleasure.

IT IS CLEAR FROM MY ACCOUNT of John Glassco's erotic writings that his method has been one of imitation, of pastiche, of using well-tried models, but invariably wrapping them in the delicacy and elegance of his own large literary talent. Buffy's poetry, however, is neither pastiche nor collage: and if it is imitative we might say this was because he adheres to the traditional forms and to classical models. His ear is for the dignity and verbal power of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. He tends to be elegiac but he is looking backward from Gray to Marvell and Donne and the less strenuous metaphysicals. His modernity resides in his using his own immediate world and his own death-in-life experiences and his capturing the old tone with a cold unsentimental ear: yet behind all he wrote there is the warmth of passion and a love of the fantastic. Occasionally he returns to the poet of his youth, T. S. Eliot, as in this echo of the *Four Quartets*:

The day when it will not matter
The day no longer depending on another day
When time shall have run out
When nothing will matter.

Yet he is not religious. "God will desert us when we come to die." The fatalism runs deep. And so we are not surprised when he selects Don Quixote as subject for death — an unsentimental elegy in reality for the self, an extended epitaph. We might have suspected that the Knight of the Sorrowful Countenance would please Buffy. He had lived by his fantasies and when these dreams were gone it was time to die:

The withdrawal of the vision,
The removal of the madness,
The supplanting of a world of beauty
By God's sticks and stones and smells
Are afflictions, I find, of something more absurd
Than any book of chivalry.

The same hard almost relentless inquiry is pursued in a finished sonnet that reaches into the heart of Utrillo's painted streets:

Streets without figures, figures without faces,
Desolate by choice and negative from need.
But the hoardings weep, the shutters burn and bleed;
Colours of crucifixion, dying graces,
Spatter and cling upon these sorrowful places.
— Where is the loved one? Where do the streets lead?

The light-hearted pornographer is not light of heart when he writes poems which are the truest expression of John Glassco. He is indeed the poet of "Grief without voice, mourning without mind . . . The shame and self-loathing of mankind." The romantic eroticist looks backward to Pope or to Dryden; and when he invokes Eros in his poetry it is to use her with irony, and satire, and to make of her a metaphysical conceit. As in "Belly Dance":

The corpsewhite column spiralling on slow feet
Tracing the seashell curve, the figure eight,
Coldly unwinds its flowing ribbon
With public motions of the private psalm
Of the supposed woman to the thought of man.

The belly dance and the masturbation become one "the viewless member in his nerveless hand, / Working within the adverse air." In his metaphysical vein, John Glassco is close to his old friend in the Montreal Group, A. J. M. Smith. But if I were asked where the difference lies, I would find myself forced to say (for I do not want to diminish Smith's achievement) that the latter drew his poetry out of literature much more than Buffy, who was keenly literary and in-

tellectual but drew his poetry out of felt experience. There lies the crucial difference. In his poetry, Glassco is making use of the central experience of his life and it takes over as he looks upon "hope battered into habit, and a habit / Running to weariness." The houses in the countryside — in the Eastern Townships where he lived — are mute and sealed with their secrets; they are dark and void of man and set in dull meadows that have gone to seed. He finds the White Mansion "which is the death of man and of his dream" as in the Quebec farmhouse in which he reads the earlier history of the Canadian French — the house that is "the sweet submissive fortress of itself / That the landscape owns!" and in it "the airless dark, / Of the race so conquered that it has made / Perpetual conquest of itself." The graveyards "minding their own business," "the green paths trodden by patience," "the fathomless future of the underdog" who beats the ploughshares into an honest dollar. "April again," he sings, echoing Eliot, but with a wry twist

> and its message
> unvaried, the same old impromptu
> Dinned in our ears by the tireless
> dispassionate chortling of Nature.

He looks with this aging cold eye acutely enough to observe the flowers, the snakes, the squirrels, the willow-wren, and the field-birds, and for the eroticist at a given moment sex becomes "the bitter triumph over a stranger's body."

I have quoted enough to suggest the mood of Buffy's poetry; when he remembers, it is to recall such matters as the dictatorship of his father, in a poem titled "The Whole Hog" where he asks himself through what consciousness of his own fragility his parent

> set himself to become
> Great God to a little child? It is a question
> that opens up vistas of personal hell. . . .

Buffy unfolds for us in other poems other aspects of his life removed from such hells; and nothing is more moving than the moment, in his long poem about Montreal, when he remembers how in the rue Jeanne Mance, when he was an adolescent, he made his way to an elaborate house, "pre-eminent in the houses of ill-fame / Of our metropolis" and there lost "my too-long-tried virginity." He was fourteen and "warm beyond my years." It would have been another of life's ironies for John Glassco if he could have foretold that in that very street, at the age of 71, one cold January day of 1981, in the town rooms in which he and his wife lived when they were not at Foster, Quebec, the end would come, with great swiftness, a sudden moment of malaise, without the time to meditate, like his Don Quixote, on the moment that did not lead to another moment.

PARTS OF SPEECH

Erin Mouré

Not knowing how to take the bird as he did
& release it into air:
the strange protective motion of the arm,
his hand cupped, a whistle of feathers
& the bird disappears,
becomes a dot, then nothing

Our fears are all melancholy
& make me laugh.
I can put on my coat & walk
Or I can stay

& talk about anything that's in newspapers.
From murders to movies to motives
to criminal negligence

What do you like, anyhow?
Last night in the late movie while you
slept
the trapped hero tied his message to a pigeon,
a bird as ordinary as the ones on the roof outside;
he cupped it in his hand
& threw it upward out the window,
his arm tuned perfectly
When he let go it just got smaller,
its words more & more
compact & sure

Not knowing what he knew,
how to send the message when you're cornered
with no gun or food
just scares me
I can only wish, or dream;
& when I dreamed I didn't see the movie end,
or find out if it helped,
or if rescue was something else, or
if I can describe it, when you speak to me/

books in review

IN PLACE

JACK HODGINS, *The Barclay Family Theatre.* Macmillan.

IN HIS LONG STORY "More Than Conquerors," Jack Hodgins briefly lets an old Finnish painter speak for the author. Eli Wainamoinen has been resident on Vancouver Island for decades, but only at the age of seventy is he honoured by a full-scale exhibition, which occupies a local ballroom. At the ceremony that opens the show, Eli remembers the voices that counselled him against this distant home: "Why, why, they said, did you choose to hide yourself on that island? . . . In a country that is only beginning to care, you hide out on an island that is not yet even aware of itself." He answers that the island is big enough, and that the prospect of being "a Canadian painter, or a North American painter," induces only fear. "How was it possible to identify with anything so unimaginably huge except by induction, except by seeing the small first and knowing it so well it must include all of the rest?" There, in a sentence, stands a manifesto for regional art. Jack Hodgins is known to delight in Marquez's Macondo and Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha, and he has become famous for seeing a small patch of land so well that it embraces the world. "Be not afeard: the isle is full of noises, / Sounds and sweet airs that give delight and hurt not."

It's a cheering image, but in *The Barclay Family Theatre* it isn't all of the truth. Or at least: the truth is that on Vancouver Island, like everywhere else, the sense of being "in place" is a blessing granted to fewer and fewer people. In "The Plague Children," the bemused inhabitants of Waterville find themselves invaded by waifs and strays from Saskatoon to Katmandu, from Nome to Rome. The obese real-estate salesman whom Hodgins lovingly satirizes in "Mr. Pernouski's Dream" has a vision of providing all the hungry, dissatisfied citizens of the planet with a new home on Vancouver Island — where they'd be stranded like beached dolphins, as alien as the humourless couple from Regina who refuse to buy any of Mr. Pernouski's houses. This sense of foreign-ness reaches its maximum in "Invasions '79," the main characters of which are from Vancouver, Boston, Armenia, and Russia; they come together in Ottawa, a city where poetry is a product that arrives in a foreign language on an official tour. Elsewhere in the book, too, art is something that comes from a distance, something to be regarded with suspicion. Mr. Pernouski laughs at the idea that his island town might have a gallery in it: "With all this beautiful scenery to look at, he said, why would anyone want to look at pictures?" Eli Wainamoinen finds that the people he lives among don't understand and don't much like the paintings that have been his life. By contrast, the two stories that happen abroad (in Ireland and Tokyo) put residents of Vancouver Island in settings where artistic endeavour seems as natural as light and water. On these other islands, the protagonists are out of place. But by defining themselves against the strangeness of their environments, they can, Hodgins suggests, gain the confidence to act.

He has a sharp eye for foible and self-delusion, the sort of crisp perceptiveness that once led to lapidary epigrams or heroic couplets. Hodgins, however, is a good-humoured writer: he refuses to grant the reader any easy feelings of superiority over the characters, no matter how ignorant and vain they may appear. His sense of social comedy is basically

affirmative: pretension is tolerable, selfishness is not. For an undue concentration on the self threatens the existence of the group. We can laugh at Mr. Pernouski, the extrovert salesman who dresses for work in a red and white suit to take advantage of his monstrous bulk; but we stop laughing when he's left to his solitary fate by a pair of clients who place a higher value on catching their ferry than on phoning for help. The destructive forces in *The Barclay Family Theatre* (a Canadian in Tokyo, a Russian in Ottawa, the Plague Children in Waterville) always reside in those who think only of their own egos, their own pleasure. In this sense imagination, the process of reaching out, has in Hodgins' work a moral force. The humour in these stories stops, sometimes abruptly, at moments of public humiliation.

The six stories I've been discussing so far are all set in the present. But Hodgins opens and closes the book in the past, with tales about the boyhood of Philip Desmond. Philip's mother is a Barclay, the eldest of a rollicking tribe of sisters who give the book its title (each of the other stories contains a Barclay in it somewhere). And here, in a profusion of home-grown theatre, music, and yarns, Hodgins does provide examples of indigenous art. The Barclays make their own music; if life threatens to grow dull, they liven it up with a miniature circus or an elaborate practical joke. Their zest and creative enthusiasm form an acute contrast with the passivity of a few characters in the other stories, who merely wait for experience to hit them, and deny it when it does. Hodgins has used the framing device before (in his first book, *Spit Delaney's Island*) and these two stories of boyhood form a kind of touchstone against which the present-day episodes can be measured. They are a celebration, not so much of physical as of spiritual innocence; they are boisterous

laments for an irretrievable time. "When tragedy or even sickness struck one of the homes in the community — an accident in the logging camp, say, or chicken-pox — the aunts were happy to spread the word themselves, since telephones hadn't yet been installed in private homes in the 1940's. They were happy to embroider the details with morbid speculations while they were at it." And these speculations form the basis of the fabulous, melodramatic, wildly popular Barclay Family Theatre.

This was, then, a folk culture based on the word, a culture where language entertained. Almost as isolated from the outside world as Yoknapatawpha or Macondo, the Waterville of Philip Desmond's boyhood was free from tourists, telephones, and television — a liberty which had its drawbacks, needless to say, but which permitted the tradition of story-telling to flourish. It's useful to read Hodgins in the light of Walter Benjamin's remarks about "The Story-Teller": "If the art of story-telling has become rare, the dissemination of information has had a decisive share in this state of affairs. Every morning brings us the news of the globe, and yet we are poor in noteworthy stories. This is because no event any longer comes to us without already being shot through by explanation. In other words, by now almost nothing that happens benefits story-telling; almost everything benefits information." Jacob Weins, the protagonist in "The Sumo Revisions," doesn't comprehend the Kabuki theatre or the Sumo wrestling that he watches one afternoon; yet the two spectacles infiltrate and fertilize his imagination. For the most part we know too much; we are paralyzed by facts. "Invasions '79" ends with Bella Barclay Robson watching a TV report on the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. It relates to nothing in her own experience: "Was that what an invasion was like — soldiers stretching their legs and stomping around in the snow? Did it happen like that?" She feels helpless, we all feel helpless. But in Waterville, as a young woman, where the outside world impinged only in the form of rumours and radio, Bella might hardly have known the meaning of helplessness. At present people talk glibly about the "information explosion" as if it was the greatest thing since sliced bread; have they forgotten the effect that sliced bread had on good baking?

The idyll ends. (Perhaps it was never idyllic — yet the imagination needs a faith.) Story-telling slides into the careful making of a short story by a skilled professional writer; the most beautifully shaped piece in *The Barclay Family Theatre*, "The Lepers' Squint," evokes the rewards and difficulties of writing. Hodgins leaves us in self-consciousness, even self-referentiality. The impromptu public spectacle of the Barclay Family Theatre has turned into a private act of scribbling and an equally private act of reading. "Our revels now are ended. These our actors, / As I foretold you, were all spirits and / Are melted into air, into thin air. . . ." But the dream, the longing, remains.

MARK ABLEY

L'ENFANCE

LIONEL ALLARD, *Mademoiselle Hortense ou l'école du septième rang*. Leméac.

JACQUES FILLION, *Il est bien court, le temps des cerises*. Leméac.

BIEN QUE L'ENFANCE soit le sujet du livre de Jacques Fillion et de celui de Lionel Allard, il s'agit de deux ouvrages très différents. Dans celui de Fillion, un premier roman, le narrateur est un garçon d'une dizaine d'années, dans celui d'Allard, c'est un adulte qui se remémore ses premières années à l'école du rang.

Il est bien court, le temps des cerises début par un prologue dont les événements se situent en 1952, deux ans après ceux qui constituent le corps du récit. Puis le narrateur se remémore l'été fatidique de 1950. C'est une saison que l'a marqué, car cette année-là, il a appris que rien ne dure, que la mort frappe aussi bien les vieux, que l'amour et la beauté sont souvent sources de douleur. A travers les yeux du jeune Toto, qui possède un invraisemblable don d'ubiquité, nous voyons le village d'Isieux se lever devant nous avec sa faune humaine. Malgré certaines mesquineries, la vie s'écoule paisible, jusqu'au moment où paraît le beau Damien qui vient de la ville. Survenant et citadin par surcroît, Damien apporte, malgré lui, le malheur au village. Il s'amourache de la jolie Rose-Mai, soeur du narrateur, et cet amour causera trois morts: celle de Damien, celle de son rival Bernard Caux, et celle du jeune François, frère de Bernard. Le prologue, qui pourrait tout aussi bien clore le roman, nous avait appris que Rose-Mai avait trouvé un autre amour, mais ce nouveau bonheur coûte la vie à Pépé, qui aime Rose-Mai sans espoir, et qui se tuera à l'endroit même où ont péri Daniel et Bernard. On ne badine décidément pas avec l'amour dans l'ouvrage de Jacques Fillion.

Malgré cette hécatombe, *Il est bien court, le temps des cerises* est un roman grouillant de vie. Isieux est peuplé d'êtres à la fois pittoresques, loufoques et pathétiques. La sympathie qu'éprouve l'auteur pour ses personnages est contagieuse. Il est vrai que le groupe des épouses frustrées en mal de chair fraîche est quelque peu flou, comme l'est aussi celui des ivrognes que le lecteur a de la peine à ne pas confondre. En revanche, certains personnages sont bien vivants et bien caractérisés, telles Madame Gloire, ancienne prostituée au grand coeur, et sa fille Sophie, pour qui elle s'est vainement sacrifiée, tels aussi Monsieur Damase, le

sage du village, et Monsieur Onill, qui s'est enrichi à force de travail et de ruse.

Toutefois, les amoureux Damien et Rose-Mai n'ont guère de personnalité et, ce qui est plus grave et constitue à notre avis le défaut principal du livre, le personnage du narrateur n'est guère convaincant. Comme Brian dans *Who Has Seen the Wind?* et Christine dans *La Route d'Altamont*, Toto, bien qu'un peu plus âgé, est initié aux mystères de la vie et de la mort. Mais alors que nous connaissons Brian et Christine, Toto n'est qu'une paire d'yeux à travers lesquels nous assistons aux événements. Il est rare que l'auteur nous révèle les sentiments ou les pensées du garçon. Lorsqu'il lui arrive de le faire, il attribue à Toto une précocité qui frôle le génie, comme dans ce passage:

> Je ne me sens pas trop inquiet à devenir païen, au contraire cette éventualité caresse une corde sensible, presque sensuelle, quelque part dans les méandres mystérieux de mon âme. Je crois que le monothéisme est une leçon apprise, une valeur purement intellectuelle qui néglige de faire une part aux sens. . . .

Voilà qui ne manque pas d'éloquence, sans doute, mais sont-ce là des réflexions possibles chez un enfant de dix ans?

L'humour est certainement une des qualités maîtresses de l'ouvrage, mais ici encore, *Il est bien court, le temps des cerises* pèche par l'excès. La grivoiserie cède trop souvent la place à la scatologie et à la vulgarité. L'épisode du championnat de fers, que l'auteur voudrait sans doute scabreux, est profondément ennuyeux; celui où Madame Roma, vieille bigote desséchée, tente de violer Lévis est grotesque et ridicule; on se demande comment une femme âgée et malade pourrait déshabiller de force un jeune homme en pleine santé.

Malgré ces défauts, Jacques Fillion a réussi à écrire un roman qui amuse souvent et qui, parfois, passionne. Son style, truculent et vert lorsqu'il raconte les frasques de ses personnages loufoques, se fait lyrique et émouvant lorsqu'il décrit les affres de l'amour ou la fatalité de la mort.

> Le temps passe comme les nuages dans le ciel, en passant il pourrit les choses et les gens, la fleur s'étiolera à l'automne, les foins se dégraderont, les feuilles aussi, un oiseau partira, un autre mourra, la vie coule comme l'eau de la Ridée, parfois en terrain calme, parfois dans un rapide, mais toujours elle s'anéantira dans le vide comme l'eau dans l'océan. Pour la première fois, la mort fait partie de mon paysage et déjà l'enfance s'enfuit comme de l'eau vive entre les doigts.

Il est bien court, le temps des cerises est un coup d'essai remarquable. Lorsqu'il aura appris à se limiter, à élaguer, à démêler le tragique d'avec le mélodrame, l'humour d'avec la grossièreté, Jacques Fillion réussira, nous n'en doutons pas, un coup de maître.

L'entreprise de Jacques Allard est plus modeste que celle de Fillion. Il veut simplement évoquer ses premières années à la petite école du rang et tracer le portrait de ses premières institutrices. S'il se souvient sans plaisir de l'austère Madame Célina, dont la sévérité frôlait le sadisme, c'est avec une gratitude mêlée d'admiration qu'il évoque la jolie Mademoiselle Hortense, à qui la majeure partie du livre est consacrée. Malgré des difficultés en apparence insurmontables, la jeune institutrice a réussi à inspirer au narrateur le goût de l'étude et de la lecture, et sans doute est-ce grâce à son exemple qu'il est lui-même devenu instituteur.

Même à notre époque, l'enseignement est rarement facile; autrefois, il fallait être héroïque ou téméraire pour s'y consacrer. Et c'est aux femmes qu'on réservait la tâche ingrate d'enseigner dans les écoles de campagne où les conditions étaient déplorables: une salle unique pour toutes les classes, un poêle qui tirait mal, des instruments de travail défectueux ou non-existants. Mais le principal adver-

UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA MEDAL FOR CANADIAN BIOGRAPHY

1981

The books received this year suggest that the field of biographical writing either in Canada or by Canadians seems to be broadening out, much to the benefit of readers interested in Canadian history. The books were not as much concerned with Canadian politicians as they have been in the past few years; rather, the range represented many aspects of Canadian life.

There were at least three good studies of public servants — Hugh Keenleyside on Hugh Keenleyside, J. L. Granatstein on Norman A. Robertson, and Claude Bissell on Vincent Massey; Bissell on Massey was by far the best, for it was well researched and written, giving a well-drawn picture of the man. Other books added to the variety: the study of Wilder Penfield by his grandson, Jefferson Lewis, was most informative. Mary Meigs' memoir/autobiography possessed many fine qualities, the main one being its exceptionally fine writing. The anecdotal-form biography took a large step forward in Jock Carroll's book on Greg Clark, and in Scott Young's edited autobiography of Conn Smythe, which proved a refreshing exception to the rule that works on sporting figures tend to be juvenile in approach; and Raymond Fraser's study of Yvon Durelle was journalism at its best. There was also the fascinating story of David Lewis which indicated that there was much more to tell by the man himself before he died. The biographical form was extended with the Gundy collection of the letters of Bliss Carman, a book exceptional not only for its content but also for its cover.

Emerging from the short pile of very good books is Elspeth Cameron's book, *Hugh MacLennan: A Writer's Life*, the winner of this year's award. It is a substantial, candid portrait of a living figure, a fact that can often create a problem for a biographer but does not appear to do so in this case. The mixture of psychology and literary criticism in this finely written work reveals the essence and the fundamentals of the artist; this is a deftly drawn and well-rounded assessment of Hugh MacLennan, a great Canadian writer, by a careful and uncompromising critic.

D.S.

saire de l'institutrice était la terre, car la culture du sol avait nécessairement la priorité sur les tâches écolières et, à certaines époques de l'année, les absences étaient plus nombreuses que les présences. L'hiver, c'est le climat qui s'acharnait contre l'institutrice en rendant les mauvais chemins impraticables. Mademoiselle Hortense, qui décide de quitter l'école du 7e rang pour se consacrer aux missions, a dû trouver l'enseignement en Afrique une véritable sinécure.

Dans l'ouvrage de Lionel Allard, l'école et Mademoiselle Hortense, comme l'indique le titre, figurent au premier plan; mais le narrateur donne aussi un bref aperçu des gens qui ont marqué son enfance: de son père, toujours courbé sur sa terre, de sa mère, morte en couches, du curé qui surveillait de près l'enseignement, surtout celui du catéchisme, matière privilégiée entre toutes. Le sujet ne manque certes pas d'intérêt et pourtant, le livre se lit sans enthousiasme. L'auteur n'a pas insufflé la vie à ses personnages. On aurait voulu mieux connaître cette petite soeur emportée par une méningite, cette mère morte en donnant naissance à son septième enfant. Quant aux petits camarades du protagoniste, c'est à peine s'ils sont mentionnés. Même Mademoiselle Hortense et surtout le jeune élève en adoration devant elle ne sont pas convaincants. Un enfant n'aspirant qu'à plaire à tous les adultes qui l'entourent est un oiseau vraiment trop rare. On voudrait le voir désobéir, jouer, avec ses amis, quelque tour pendable. On pourrait alors croire à son existence.

Le style de Lionel Allard n'est pas non plus une des qualités maîtresses du livre. Sans doute cherche-t-il à bien montrer la tâche herculéenne à laquelle Mademoiselle Hortense et ses semblables avaient à faire face, mais dans son désir de rendre hommage aux institutrices d'autrefois, il ne nous fait grâce d'aucun détail:

> Nous étions donc vingt-quatre en tout: cinq en première année, six en deuxième, quatre en troisième, cinq en quatrième et quatre en cinquième. Deux ou trois piétinaient en deuxième et en troisième: ils n'arrivaient pas à apprendre à lire convenablement; parmi eux on trouvait le grand Jules qui avait déjà un soupçon de poil sous le nez. L'an dernier, la maîtresse l'avait placé en arrière de la classe pour qu'il dérange le moins possible les autres élèves.

Une telle exactitude finit par devenir fastidieuse. D'autre part, les dialogues, d'ailleurs assez clairsemés, sont artificiels. Et que vient faire, au milieu d'un passage sérieux, une expression telle que "se plaçant les fesses avec précaution sur le banc noueux"? L'auteur tente-t-il de faire de l'humour? Malheureusement, c'est précisément l'humour qui manque le plus à un ouvrage qui devrait se lire le sourire aux lèvres. On pourrait alors pardonner plus facilement des fautes de syntaxe, des fautes de genre qui, de toute façon, auraient dû être relevées par l'éditeur.

Bien qu'Allard et Fillion aient tous deux été inspirés par l'enfance, leurs ouvrages n'ont guère de points communs. Fillion tente de créer un univers, Allard fait un panégyrique. Il reste que le livre de ce dernier n'est pas sans intérêt. Sans doute le voudrait-on mieux fini, moins naïf, plus vivant. Mais l'auteur a tout de même écrit un ouvrage honnête, ayant valeur de document.

P. COLLET

JOE WALLACE

Joe Wallace Poems. Progress Books, $7.95.

THOUGH HIS WORKS travelled all over the world, were translated into many languages (one such transcriber being Boris Pasternak) and did not really have that few readers at home, Joe Wallace spent his life in the role of a prophet in Galilee, ignored by the pundits of his

own land. It takes sophistication of a high order to recognize that what is bizarre can nevertheless shine if judged by its own terms. There were reasons for that ignorance aside from the political; for he wrote in a style which if it were not for his vitality would be called *arcane*. Today his mannerisms would not be regarded as out-of-date by readers who had not gone through the literary controversies of his time, or known of the great numbers of lame and thoughtless rhymesters whom he superficially resembled.

The see-saw of fashion has tilted into regions new, and of a strange flat calm. What is accepted now as the latest greatest thing is the syntax and vocabulary of the soap opera; and nothing more exciting may happen in a poem than would happen in the aura of the suds. Outside Joe's native Maritimes the art of talk is dead. No one of the younger generation seems to know it ever existed. Therefore the gaucheries of Joe's artistic method go unnoticed. On the contrary Joe's verse strikes the young reader as remarkably fresh.

"He writes like a man who couldn't write would write if he could," said one such young fellow. It is the effect Joe was seeking, and actually (as many an artist who has attempted to counterfeit a child's drawing knows well) a hard thing to do. Also he had one foot on one side and one foot on the other of the Freudian rift, while the earthquake continued. Joe had a tendency to deal with sex almost as if it did not exist, and of course when sex goes out the door sentimentality comes drooling in. His faults were of his own time, his virtues of the future with which he was occupied as much as was Tennyson; and he made some lightning prophecies.

The filaments from your fingers spun
Repeat your message from sun to sun;
And where our sun is a ray at most
You've planted an observation post.

Joe wrote this in 1923, the year your good grey poet, presently writing, was born; 34 years before Sputnik was to orbit.

All right. You can make all the allowances you like for philosophical difficulties, apart from those issuing from a differing class stance, encountered by the educated readers of Wallace when Wallace was actually popular with workers ... but what exactly was wrong with "How High, How Wide"?

My prison window is not large
Five inches high, six inches wide,
Perhaps seven.
Yet it is large enough to show
The whole unfettered to and fro
Of heaven. How high, how wide is heaven?
Five inches high, six inches wide,
Perhaps seven.

Didn't Blake say, "To see a World in a Grain of Sand, / And a Heaven in a Wild Flower"? Ah yes. But part of a poet's duty is to say old things again because they continue to be true. In fact Blake's approach, though that doesn't matter a damn now, is rather didactic, while Wallace *shows* the reader the unity of finitude and infinity.

Joe lived, and we still live, in the era of the "Lunar Lacuna," in which poets consider it old-fashioned to look at the moon, or describe any cosmic phenomena. The attitude of your usual poetaster is that of the American matron who when asked to view a magnificent stellar spectacle, said she didn't believe in all that science-fiction stuff.

Now who, I ask you, is bizarre? I presume most of our secret fantasies, if we spoke of them openly, would look pretty bizarre: but a poet who doesn't speak of the real world in the light of his/her fantasies is worth even less than the miserable wages one gets.

Is Pratt's line, "*There is no silence on the earth like the silence under the sea*," bad? Even though it can be contradicted by anyone who's put a head under water?

Not with the magnificent poem that goes with it, it's not . . . and Wallace rarely recorded a faulty observation.

One of Joe's poetic strengths was in the art of the epigram. A couple of his shorter ones, published in *The Blasted Pine*, are so well known now there is no need to repeat them. He has received the ultimate compliment of the folk poet, being quoted by persons who don't know his name. Here is one of his longer ones, "Your Arm Is Long Enough":

Your arm is long enough
To reach the stars
Your arm is strong enough
To break all bars.

Your arm has skill enough
To set all wheels in motion
To skim the sky with ships
To mine beneath the ocean.

And yet your golden guests
In their eternal south
Swear that your arm's
Too short
Too weak,
Too lame,
To reach your mouth.

Anyone who's read Joe Wallace with percipience, or so I fancy, has his favourite Joe Wallace poem. Mine is "The Road To Understanding," which I have quoted enough. He never used a word that anyone half-familiar with the English language would have to look up in a dictionary. There was a reason for this. He was writing for the workers, and during most of his days most workers did not own dictionaries. Couldn't afford them.

(Two of the poems mentioned were written in prison. It is fashionable now to speak of the travails of Canadians of Japanese ancestry, unjustly imprisoned during the Second World War. The internment of many Nova Scotians is less often spoken of. It does not bespeak a racism "*of which we are all guilty*"; it shows a plain dirty oppression of the working class, a section of it with the "highest" ethnic qualifications. One was a man guilty only of taking leave of his acquaintances with a saucy "*See you after the revolution*"! One was Joe. He wrote several of his best poems while under confinement, but wrote quite a few other good ones before and after. Long before and long after.

He lived 85 years, though plagued with ill-health, from late Macdonald to middle Trudeau. He wrote hundreds of poems, many flippant to the point of carelessness, but never dull. In his last decade-and-a-half some chinks began to show through the curtain of obscurity which surrounded him. John Robert Colombo, I believe, was the first to write an article about him for an establishment magazine — if you can call the *Canadian Forum* that. Later came the appearance before a wide audience in Scott and Smith's *Blasted Pine*. I saw his *Making Hay*, dramatized with dancers in folk costume on the CBC . . . not however in Maritime folk costume — I wonder if there is any?

I must confess, though I knew and appreciated Joe Wallace, I greatly underestimated him. I would say "*There's something to old Joe*," quote "The Road to Understanding" when asked for my favourite poem; and leave it at that. A slighting reference to Wallace was included in the introduction to my *I've Tasted My Blood*. I pencilled it out, but somehow it got in again. This book is going to start a controversy. It will be a long one. I think I'll write Joe a letter. Though a Communist he also had the brass to be simultaneously a mass-every-Sunday, confessing Catholic; so there's a chance he might receive it.

MILTON ACORN

GENERATIONS

IAN MCLACHLAN, *Helen in Exile*. McClelland & Stewart, $14.95.

IAN MCLACHLAN'S FIRST NOVEL *The Seventh Hexagram* was a pleasant thriller, set amusingly in Hong Kong, whose energy as an entertainment was vitiated by a combination of prolixity and solemnity with regard to political message. *Helen in Exile* works better, though verbosity remains a flaw, because the author seems much less confused about what genre of book he is trying to write, so that the political struggles which interest him arise more naturally out of the general texture of the book. The novel consists of a polyphonic interweaving of three narratives, each concerning a woman: the women are mother, daughter, and granddaughter, but there is also a fourth, still a child, who ends the novel with a little story or parable of her own — a parable whose meaning is not as clear to me as perhaps it should be. Sometimes the woman speaks in her own voice, sometimes a narrator speaks for her. Not much distinction, regarding style, is made between one voice and the next so that reading the novel requires a good deal of attention.

The oldest woman is named Helena. She is the daughter of a Greek shipping magnate and is brought up by him in Smyrna when that city was still a Greek enclave on the coast of "Asia Minor" or, as the Greeks perceived it, a bridgehead of high culture on an alien and barbaric shore. Though she is surrounded by the trappings of upper class society and, as a debutante, is the toast of the Mediterranean military and nautical chivalry, she chooses for her mate an ungainly but highly energetic and ambitious Scottish engineer possessed also of great sexual drive. He deceives her almost immediately and eventually, as their life together grows more and more impossible, deserts her. He winds up broken in a Japanese prisoner-of-war camp while Helena survives World War II comfortably enough in an apartment in Paris hiding refugees. After the war she joins her daughter in Montreal and, aging, is farmed out to a succession of old people's homes in which she awaits her death twitching intermittently with residual life energy, some of it directed towards feuding with fellow patients and the nursing staff while the rest of it goes on haunting a Greek restaurant in search of some of the flavour of her youth.

I think McLachlan is saying that each generation is confronted with a particular struggle which defines morally all who engage in it: Helena's life, seen in this light, is almost entirely meaningless since her engagement with the problems of her time is minimal. She has, instead, been almost totally defined by her husband and, when he abandons her, she becomes a Separated Middle-Aged Woman, then, after he's dead, a Widow. What she *remembers* is what creates her individuality and humanity and her memories are certainly rich enough. They include the sensuous delights of her youth, the violence of the war between the Greeks and the Turks and the role her husband, who has friends in both nations, played in the escape from Smyrna. This section of the book is done with great panache and vividness. In fact McLachlan's great talent lies in descriptions of violence, rapine, torture, and physical ugliness. First the Greek armies land in Smyrna to make as much offered by the Turkish defeat in 1918 as they can. They push the Turks back almost to Ankara: much looting, defiling, desecration of mosques, binding of prisoners together and hurling of flames, shootings, and dumpings in the harbour. A Turkish officer, in one of McLachlan's little anecdotes, lies paralyzed in the gutter with his neck broken, moaning for water: women taunt him then

urinate in his face. Three years later, of course, and it is the turn of the Turks. They pursue the Greek rabble exacting terrible revenge. This particular horror was depicted, of course, so well by Hemingway in the famous dispatches and in the vignettes of *In Our Time*. McLachlan is more long-winded but approaches these events with the same horrified mixture of fascination and recoil.

Helena is a spectator of her war: her Scottish husband is more involved and throughout it he retains a certain humanity. In the next generation the roles are somewhat reversed. Helena's daughter, confusingly named Hélène, is married to an ineffective French nobleman who disappears at the time of the French defeat in 1940 while she is thrust into an active participation in the war. She begins by hiding allied airmen but is betrayed, unwittingly, by her own small daughter. She and the young French-Canadian radio operator she is captured with are tortured by the Gestapo and rescued, in the nick of time, as they say, by the *maquis*. When everybody is recovered in health they participate in a raid on a German airfield and, in withdrawing, almost get captured again. Again McLachlan is at his best in this section of the book: in fact the reader has, by this time, learned to trust McLachlan's expertise in *grand guignol* so that even a simple sentence like "As the car rounded a curve, Maurice slumped against her and groaned" presages a fine exercise in the pornography of violence. Some of the action is presented stereotypically: there are the last minute rescues, the ripping-yarn hairbreadth escapes, the fat, gentle Gestapo officer who likes Mozart and sadism, the dedicated, bespectacled young torturer, the stocky, down-to-earth guerilla leader cutting through the middle-class ambivalences of his temporary friends and allies. But it is all highly readable and entertaining, particularly to those of strong stomach. After the war, they settle happily in Montreal, but Maurice dies prematurely of a heart attack leaving Hélène utterly defeated. Despite her participation in the defining events of her time — her "European education" in torture, rape, execution, totalitarianism, and total war — she has still used her husband, as women of that generation typically used their husbands, as the centre of her system of values. When he dies, then, her emotional being is a wasteland and her only way of coping with it is to relive the past.

Her daughter, named Helen, whom she detests, seems intended by the author as an example of a woman who has at least begun to perceive a solution to this basic problem. She is a good painter who reaches out for independence by leaving the man she married while she was still an adolescent. She finds that the path to emancipation is narrow and twisting and beset by two great dangers: the first is of easy and ultimately futile sexual promiscuity, and the other is of being nurtured by a paternalistic figure by whom she could quite easily allow herself to be taken over. Naturally there are people in the novel who "represent" these extremes. Helen's other struggles consist of determining the kind of painter she would like to become, and of trying to connect her life with the radical politics she has become involved in. While her mother's participation in the war was forced on her both by external circumstances and her reactions to the execution of her brother, Helen's is more voluntary. The nature of Quebec politics at the time of the government crisis concerning the F.L.Q., violent though they are, permitted men and women to make conscious choices. The discussions about the morality of action, the ends and means of engagement so much a part of Hélène's life during the war in France are repeated in Helen's time in the context of Quebec sovereignty and the role of violence in securing it.

Helen is arrested under the War Measures Act during a three a.m. round-up of "suspects" and miscellaneous innocents and spends time in jail being casually mistreated — an experience far less intense than her mother's but, in its own way, just as formative. As the novel ends Helen hides a terrorist involved, though unknown to her, in the murder of Pierre Laporte and the narrative climaxes melodramatically with a police round-up and a shooting and this just at the point when she has decided to share a house with a group of women.

McLachlan, then, attempts to chart the growth in consciousness concerning female autonomy that has taken place in people since the war-to-end-all-wars ended in 1918. The woman most conscious of her enslavement is, as seems appropriate here, the youngest, though the little coda presented as the work of her infant daughter, Ann, seems to promise yet further growth though, as I say, I have not yet been able to figure it out. The novel generally is tight-lipped and humourless but it is convincing enough in its earnest way. I enjoyed especially the inclusion of the F.L.Q. manifesto, *verbatim*, as a souvenir of the past, the James Cross episode, and, again, *verbatim*, the incorporation of a peculiarly nasty coroner's report on the body of Pierre Laporte. Apart from these fringe benefits, which I think most readers will skip, I found the novel structurally interesting though, on the actual page, overintricate to the point of distraction.

JOHN MILLS

NOVELLA BLUES

JOSEF SKVORECKY, *The Bass Saxophone*. Lester & Orpen Dennys.

JAZZ FOR EUROPEANS has always had symbolic connotations. Jazzmen were often seen as mysteriously romantic figures in a faraway dream-America, playing in plush but dimly-lit, smoke-filled rooms, all gently high on dope, blowing beautiful solos to gorgeous women waiting for them on high stools at the bar, showing off their sleek, silk-stockinged legs.

Those of us who collected their records were part of that aura, we thought, a cult with secretive inroads into that subculture, rebellious disciples of a music that undermined society's staid authority and highbrow culture's condescension.

That is something of an exaggeration, of course, but it's hardly too florid, as Josef Skvorecky makes clear in his introduction to this coupling of his two novellas. For him, growing up under the Nazi occupation and then later as a writer under the Communist regime, jazz has always had that element of rebellion about it, but not as politically dynamic in its empathy with black militancy against the white establishment as Leroi Jones would have it. "Its essence is some-

thing far more elemental: an *élan vital,* a forceful vitality, an explosive creative energy as breathtaking as that of any true art." Skvorecky continues by suggesting that it is a music, as is the case with other arts as well, because of its creative energy, that will always be anti-authoritarian. "When the lives of individuals and communities are controlled by powers that themselves remain uncontrolled... then creative energy becomes a protest."

The title novella is obviously about music but it is linked in this volume with another novel, "Emöke," titled in the original Czech as *Legenda Emöke,* and in a short dedication, the author alludes to it as the Emöke blues. So, although its subject matter has only peripheral references to jazz, the novella takes up the thematic concern of a mysterious being, Emöke, towards whom the young narrator edges affectionately but never totally convincing of his true feelings. He is in competition with a petty official of the Party, an older man who boasts of his conquests but whose feelings are obviously corrupt, and whose life is conditioned by his lowly officialdom.

The narrator's tale is a kind of cathartic song, a blues. After his experience with Emöke, he flounders back to his desultory affair with a married woman "in that great game of petty cruelties, artifices, pretences and lies," a game that Emöke herself had been damaged by previously. Yet at one point the narrator had convinced her of his genuine feelings for her through jazz: he had recited the lyrics of blues while dancing with her, and the band had suddenly seemed to be transformed into a musical equivalent of his words, and Emöke had responded in kind. But the transforming moment is destroyed by the Party official, and the narrator can only work vengeance against him later, leaving himself only an image full of wonder and wondering about Emöke.

This novella, then, is a song based on a real woman, a presence reached through music, lost in reality but preserved as an image, even though the actuality of the woman is lost. A sad romanticism remains.

The other novella, "The Bass Saxophone," has the same kind of simple plot. It recounts the way in which an adolescent, full of that exquisite romanticism about jazz and its players, encounters a German band coming into town to play for the Nazi occupiers and their sympathizers. He is fascinated by the sight of a bass saxophone, an "almost unusable instrument" yet shining with legend for him like "a blind silver tower."

In the town the code of non-co-operation and refusal to collaborate was strict. The townspeople were ever watchful: no one could even speak to a Nazi without it being seen and noted. Yet the adolescent is drawn to the band and to the instrument, so that when he is asked to play it at the concert with the band because of the mysterious unavailability of the usual musician, he is sorely tempted. Eventually, he agrees to appear with the band in disguise (the other members of the band also dress somewhat outlandishly in costumes). He spends time with the other musicians, learning about their lives, their pasts, their travels, their dreams, and their music which transcends their differences, their nationalities, even their enmities.

The experience of playing, the fear of discovery, the effect of the lugubrious, sombre, primitive sound of the saxophone remains with him as a "desperate scream of youth," constantly reminding him of "dream, truth, incomprehensibility."

While the outlines of the narratives are clear and simple, the surfaces of the novellas reverberate with those often indescribable moments of musical involvement and transcendence. Skvorecky is faced with the problem of rendering an

essentially non-verbal experience in verbal terms; furthermore, these musical moments are not the considered and known structures that can be given to the reader as a frame of reference (as in Forster's passage about Beethoven's Fifth Symphony in *Howard's End*) but are spontaneous overflowings and improvisations.

Skvorecky attempts to solve the problem not with the free-wheeling flow of Kerouac's prose but with a more formal arrangement that contains a rigorous, even meticulous concern for structure, yet allows for associative connections, perhaps a verbal equivalent of a jazzman improvising on the chord changes of a song.

His prose, then, tends to be Faulknerian: long paragraphs filled with apparently loosely-knit sentences that weave a sinuous line through dreams, memories, digressive associations, name-dropping, romantic exaggerations, and a piling up of details. At times the ends of sentences seem to have lost contact with their beginnings. Paragraphs lurch and skitter, narrative is suspended, and the narrator analyses his responses, and the effects of jazz recordings on him, expressing his desire to inhabit that world of Chicago jazz inscribed in shellac, banned and discredited.

Sometimes the prose seems a little self-indulgent, even too cluttered. It is difficult, then, to agree with one critical opinion that this is the "finest fiction ever written about jazz," for the jazz element is imposed on ordinary, even sentimental dance tunes and folk music. But then jazz can synthesize many disparate elements, make over other music for its own purposes, elevate the most ordinary dress into a pure distillation of joy or sadness. And perhaps that's what Skvorecky's prose does — it is the manner, not the matter, that may correspond most fully with the world of jazz.

Skvorecky makes a parallel of jazz with the soaring, passionate melodies of gypsy songs in both novellas, and the parallel works, for that spontaneity and outburst of feeling is at the heart of jazz. And it is perhaps no accident that one of the finest guitarists in jazz, Django Reinhardt, was a Belgian gypsy, and that some of the most prodigiously accomplished bass players in contemporary jazz come from Skvorecky's part of Europe.

It is that uprush of feelings through blues that enables the narrator to reach Emöke and she responds with a wild folk song. It is through his involvement with his saxophone playing that he transcends the band's "circus sentimentality." And that is what Skvorecky's prose in all its rambling intensities, its sudden shifts and oblique flow, captures — the magical reach that embraces loss and despair, that plays with rebellion and the bridging of bleakness and joy in adolescence, the union of human beings through love and its transience, the memories, dreams and legends that all coalesce in listening to the music of master jazzmen, though it avoids for the most part the tendentious outpourings and the closed, secretive references known only to jazz aficionados which bedevil much writing about the music.

PETER STEVENS

IMAGINATION'S SOURCES

JOAN FINNIGAN, *This Series Has Been Discontinued.* Fiddlehead Poetry Books, $6.00.

BRIAN FAWCETT, *Tristram's Book.* Capilano Review, No. 19, $3.00.

JOHN BARTON, *A Poor Photographer.* Sono Nis, $5.95.

GILLEAN CHASE, *The Distress of Harvest.* Fiddlehead Poetry Books, $3.50.

GREG GATENBY, *Growing Still.* Black Moss, $4.95.

THIS GROUP OF NEW POETRY serves to remind the reader of several different sources of the imagination. In the case of

Finnigan, the history and the legends of the Ottawa Valley Irish settlements furnish material for charming and lively tales. For Fawcett, the story of Tristram and Isolde, one of the world's great love stories, is the starting point of his lyricism. And, for Barton, Chase, and Gatenby, personal experience provides the raw content for poems.

Finnigan has been writing about the Valley for several years but she may just now be on the verge of becoming recognized as one of its significant voices. In poems such as "Do Ya Mind the Time?" and "O'Kane Kielly," she reveals a sure touch in the handling of garrulous characters and folkways. "Seana Quilty" is a lovely rime in the traditional gypsy-lover motif. But perhaps the most notable poem on the Irish theme in the collection is "A Legend from the Valley," a tale about a giant named Joe Mufferaw who was a misfit until he got a job as the Walking Boss (i.e., peacekeeper) in the tough lumber camps. The climax of his adventures occurs when he does battle with the deadly Windigo, that fierce spirit of the woods, and slays it. Then the ladies of the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches gather to help Joe with the "burning" of the demon (else it would rise again); thus, "The burning of the Windigo / brought creeds and breeds together in a Melting Pot. / And the Ottawa Valley was melded into a separate entity, / unique and special as an island." In later years Joe's fame as the heroic giant-killer spreads far and wide as his sons and grandsons become such great hockey teams as the Montreal Canadiens, the Ottawa Silver Seven, and the Trail Smoke Eaters; and, "In time they even became / the Wolves from the North-West Territories."

Not all of Finnigan's work is quite so mythopoeic in design. Her usual medium is the short lyric, used effectively in the poem series "A Set of Marriages" and "Men" to comment on ordinary domestic relationships or to puncture the egos of fellows like Harry, King of the One-Night Stands — "a woman would have to bend down / to love him." But always her thoughts turn back to the Valley, especially when chronicling the woes of "toned-down men / and wired-up women" who've moved away from its familiar rhythms to the suburban mazes of the big cities.

At first glance Fawcett's subject matter seems to take him light years away from Finnigan's down-home approach. After all, he has at his disposal all the ingredients of a fabulous romance. Disappointingly, then, he chooses to focus on the aging character of Tristram rather than on the doomed lovers at the height of their passion. Fawcett's method does allow him to reflect, with Tristram, on the affair; but we miss the active presence of the bewitching Isolde or the scheming villainy of King Mark. The result is a set of one-dimensional lyrics, a certain monotony, and the constant danger of trivializing a great theme. Yet some of the poems do work. Sitting disconsolately in exile, besieged by plots against his life, and yearning for his beloved, Tristram sings his songs of woe. He remembers the magic potion that sealed his love for Isolde, and their happy idyll together in the Cave of Love. Momentarily, he thinks all of his travails have been illusory: "Maybe / there were no dragons, no castles / not even windmills. Just / women and men, men and women / and infant dreams / of pure crystal." Yet, he can't "shake off / the hangover, nor the fatal pride / that demanded a life-long enchantment," and so, like all "modern" lovers, is left to brood "in the opacity of a world / where no magic can be believed."

Barton's "Poor Photographer" pursues almost as solipsistic a route to the truth of his existence as Fawcett's Tristram, but

the way is less marked by sorrow and highlighted more by the real world of natural and social milieux. Indeed, the poet's use of ocean, island, seashore, mountain, plain, and river imagery provides an artful structure for his inward journeying. But whether the terrain traversed is a memory of adolescent guilt, an incident recalled from European travels, or the mixed emotions of relationships with friends and the region of his birth, Barton maintains a delicate balance between the inner and outer worlds. It seems to me he has the true poet's sense of wonder, as these lines from "Hieroglyph" suggest:

> to dance afresh
> from sun-up
> on
>
> wide-eyed &
> dew-rich
> with music
>
> bright
> with archetype

In sum, *A Poor Photographer* is an impressive first book.

As a contrast to Barton's work, the tone of Chase's and Gatenby's books is gritty, iconoclastic. *The Distress of Harvest* is full of poems about what the author calls "our mangled histories," even if it is also her intention "to discover an identity beyond roles" for men and women. An example of this backward-forward tension occurs in "Adjusting Lenses," where we see "eyes in which anguish / and love / are twin / contradictory legends / at the beginning of our fugue." And while the surface of her verse is often liquid and dreamy, it does not mask an essentially shrill, moralistic viewpoint. On the other hand, *Growing Still* manages to be moral without losing a sense of humour. Gatenby is a satirist; he is at his best when mocking pretension ("The Sophisticates") or smiting the pusillanimity of fellow poets ("Wenceslaus Was No King"). However, the invective of his attacks on present and former politicians and his smirking put-downs of academe are merely ephemeral diatribe.

ERIC THOMPSON

QUEBEC EN TEXTES

GERARD BOISMENU, LAURENT MAILHOT, et JACQUES ROUILLARD, *Le Québec en textes 1940-1980*. Boréal Express, n.p.

LE TITRE DE CETTE VASTE anthologie destinée surtout aux étudiants d'histoire et de science sociale, est à la fois ambigu, incomplet, piquant, populaire et trompeur. Il ne correspond pas exactement au contenu; il suggère plus qu'il ne donne. A mon avis, il n'est pas très heureux. Mais il s'inspire des Américains, et c'est ce qui compte le plus pour les trois auteurs de cette anthologie, un peu massive et spécialisée en économique, en histoire, en politique et en sociologie. Le Québec est divisé en comtés, en régions, voire en royaumes. Le voilà maintenant divisé en textes, comme le jambon et le pain en tranches. Autant dire que tout recueil, qui est un choix, est discutable, à commencer par le titre, et ne peut plaire à tout le monde. Trois autres auteurs pourraient en composer un autre tout à fait différent, qui serait aussi discutable.

Ce recueil, substantiel et varié, est bien imprimé — très rares y sont les coquilles — et possède de solides qualités pédagogiques.

La première partie: 1940-1960 est ainsi subdivisée: A. *La Guerre* B. *Le développement économique et l'urbanisation* C. *Le duplessisme* D. *Refus en mutations.* La deuxième partie: 1960-1980 est répartie de la façon suivante: A. *La révolution tranquille et le développement de l'Etat* B. *Economie et travail* C. *Montréal* D. *La question nationale* E. *Luttes populaires.* Voici les noms des auteurs dont on

cite des extraits: François-Albert Angers, Hubert Aquin, Sheila Arnopoulos, Henry Aubin, Francine Barry, Gérald Bernier, Gérard Bessette, André J. Bélanger, Paul R. Bélanger, Maurice Blain, Robert Boily, Gérard Boismenu, Paul-Emile Borduas, Guy Boulizon, Gilles Bourque, Michel Brault, Dorval Brunelle, Paul Chamberland, Pierre Chantefort, Hubert Charbonneau, Robert Charlebois, Dominique Clift, Collectif, Confédération des syndicats nationaux, Conseil Attikamek-Montagnais, Hugues Corriveau, Pierre Dagenais, Marcel Daneau, Hélène David, Paul-Eves Denis, Roch Denis, Réjean Ducharme, Jeanne Duval, Jacques Ferron, Gérald Fortin, Francine Fournier, Mona-Josée Gagnon, Gérard Gardner, Hervé Gauthier, Jean-Denis Gendron, Roland Giguère, Gouvernement du Québec, Richard Jones, Paul-Marie Lapointe, André Laurendeau, Camille Laurin, Charles Lemelin, Vincent Lemieux, Jules Légaré, Jean-François Léonard, Pierre Maheu, Laurent Mailhot, Manifeste du Front de Libération du Québec, Gilles Marcotte, Fernand Martin, John Thomas McDonough, Alain Médan, Gaston Miron, Denis Monière, Louis O'Neil, Roland Parenteau, Jacques Parizeau, Michel Pichette, Luc Racine, Marcel Rioux, Léo Roback, Jean-Claude Robert, Leslie Roberts, Jacques Rouillard, Robert Rumilly, Céline Saint-Pierre, Michel Tremblay, Louis Trotier, Pierre Elliott Trudeau, Pierre Vallières.

Si j'ai tenu à dresser cet *Index Nominum*, ce n'est pas seulement pour combler une lacune de cette Anthologie, c'est aussi et surtout pour faire ressortir le fait que "les auteurs sont presque tous du Québec." Entendez par là de Montréal, comme il en est d'autres, très importants, qui brillent par leur absence. Le recueil vise à "reconstituer les principaux moments de l'histoire récente du Québec, à présenter, dans une perspective historique, la société québécoise dans son ensemble." Pour arriver à cette fin, on a accordé la priorité aux articles de périodiques; quelques-uns sont un peu courts. La perspective a beau être multi ou pluridisciplinaire, il ne saurait être question de trouver ici une présentation de toutes les disciplines. D'ailleurs les trois auteurs de ce texte de base pour les étudiants de la Faculté des arts et des sciences de l'Université de Montréal, n'en ont pas du tout la prétention. Nous ne saurions trop recommander la lecture de l'Avant-Propos et de l'Introduction pour bien comprendre l'esprit de ce livre, même si le style manque de clarté et de simplicité. En effet, que d'adjectifs et d'adverbes, de phrases et de tournures m'ont fait sursauter! J'ai eu souvent l'impression de lire du franglais et non du français, de l'américain en français.

Excellente et fort instructive est la chronique des événements d'ordre politique, socio-économique et culturel. D'autre part, trop peu de pages sur la peinture; rien sur l'architecture, la création musicale et la sculpture. Les Inuit — "hommes par excellence" — les Amérindiens auraient pu être mieux traités. Ne sont-ils pas, bien avant nous, les descendants des premiers occupants du sol? Les minorités ethniques qui groupent des citoyens québécois à part entière, le rôle du clergé et de l'enseignement à tous ses niveaux: voilà des thèmes qui auraient gagné à être présentés dans ce recueil visant à donner une vue exacte et fidèle de la société québécoise. Que d'articles de revue n'a-t-on pas écrits sur ce sujet! Je forme le voeu ardent que la seconde édition de ce volume en tienne compte. Tel quel, *Le Québec en textes* nous présente un certain Québec vu sous un certain angle. Reste à le compléter pour en avoir une bonne vue d'ensemble.

MAURICE LEBEL

FABULOUS, GREY

HONORE BEAUGRAND, *Jeanne la fileuse*. Fides.

HONORE BEAUGRAND (1848-1906) has never quite found his place as one of the major nineteenth-century French-Canadian novelists. New editions of his major works are welcome, because they typified so much of his time, while showing some important variance with it. Anyone wishing to have a full idea of traditional Canadian literature needs to take this into account. Beaugrand now has a well assured place in Fides' prestige collection Nénuphar, where his *La Chasse-galerie* is followed by *Jeanne la fileuse* (first edition 1875-1878).

The novel falls easily, as do so many of its time, into two parts: the fabulous memories of a harmonious *canadien* existence, and the grey light of actuality. In a world of *voyageurs*, *habitants*, violinists, story-tellers and their ghosts, rural banquets, haymaking, and plentiful drink, two young lovers begin their edifying story in the stilted language and shallow psychology of Victorian convention. Old hatreds between their two families provoke them to seek a new life, and from here on, interpolated legends give way to selected information regarding wage rates and emigration figures. An intelligent reviewer in 1878 commented that Beaugrand would have done better to write a pamphlet about the emigration question. The same critic objected that the *coureur de bois* content was anachronistic, as if the characters were got up in Carnival costumes. As for the author's didactic intentions, the book looked equally confused: Beaugrand was clearly not against emigration in the same way as his clerical contemporaries, so they were not sure which side he was on.

The many questions raised by this book are not to be answered in a brief review. Beaugrand's novel deserves attentive

reading and careful deliberation in the wider context of literary myth and ideological infrastructure. Roger Le Moine's 50-page introduction (to which he adds excellent bio- and bibliographical notes) gives some very positive directions, finding the real centre of the novel in the failure of the 1837 rebellion. This would account for the hiatus between a fabulous past and a factual present. Le Moine's argument is visibly dominated by his own ideologicgal concerns and his own mythification of 1837. He omits mentioning obvious questions such as Beaugrand's lavish flattery of the mill owners whose mantraps occasionally caught fire, decimating the new proletariat without regard for ethnic loyalties. But he is right to insist that ideological extrapolation is the main interest of what he describes as "our first bourgeois novel." Beaugrand was exasperated by a Canadian political élite that wasted its time on constitutional problems rather than tackling the economic situation of the people. The novel as a whole sustains a confused but lively mixture of political and social consciousness which the author could not resolve in his copious journalism. The imaginary remains the right meeting place for his conflicting types of concern.

JACK WARWICK

GOLD AND COAL

DENYS CHABOT, *Eldorado on Ice*, trans. David Lobdell. Oberon, $17.95; pa. $8.95.

JEREMY AKERMAN, *Black Around the Eyes*. McClelland & Stewart, $14.95.

ELDORADO SOUS LES GLACES, Denys Chabot's first novel, won the *Prix littéraire Gibson* for 1979. Translated into English and out of its own literary context, it may seem, to the reader unfamiliar with Québécois literature, disconnected, bizarre, and experimental. Disconnected and bizarre it is, but, ironically, these qualities connect it securely to the conventions favoured by the best Québécois novelists, notably Hubert Aquin and Réjean Ducharme. For novelists in this tradition, a narrative fragmentation that reflects the state of mind of a psychopathic revolutionary, a mad dreamer, a suicidal poet, or a despairing child is quite commonplace.

In *Eldorado*, an unidentified narrator explains that the story was dictated to him by a "capricious lunatic," Oberlin Fonteneau, on a transatlantic voyage from Le Havre to Montreal. In case any particularly obtuse reader might persist in seeing this novel as a story, rather than as a literary artifact, Chabot names the ship *Vaisseau D'or*, after the poem by Emile Nelligan where he records the shipwreck of his heart and its descent "dans l'âbime du Rêve." As the ship, so the novel. Oberlin's naive literalism, which leads him to believe that the ship is made of solid gold, is only a little more naive, Chabot implies, than that of average readers, who are "predisposed, one and all, to believe anything that they are told." Here, this belief becomes impossible, as the narrative breaks into the first person stories of six "characters" who may be "masks" for Oberlin, just as Oberlin is a kind of mask for Chabot. These voices give different versions of the same "event" and almost everything recounted is either impossible, implausible, or unconvincing. Chabot refuses to enter into the usual comfortable literary conspiracy where the author pretends to write "truth" about the "real world" (or fantasy about a *consistent* unreal world), and the reader pretends to believe it.

Some of the "real world" does struggle into the novel, only to be buried under "a profusion of lies." Oberlin leaves the ship and travels north from Montreal to the gold-mining country around Val d'Or, Chabot's birthplace. Val d'Or becomes an

inverse image of the Spanish-American El Dorado, the marvellous paradise of gold and delight. Chabot's gold country is a hell of ice, on ice, or, in the punning French title, paradise as mirror image, and certainly through a glass darkly. Of course there are several conflagrations, whose survivors avoid roasting only to face freezing to death.

Also part of Chabot's tradition is a central scene of pornographic violence; as in Aquin, a main female character is subject to brutal sexual attack. Such scenes are problematic enough when they are there to shock, arouse, or gratify; they are even more difficult to accept as necessary when they seem to be included, not out of passion, perversion, or obsession, but simply because the tradition requires them. Chabot has mastered his tradition and his form; now he has to convince the reader he is not simply playing literary games.

To move from Chabot's *Eldorado* to Jeremy Akerman's *Black Around the Eyes* is to move from formalism to social realism, from a novel that looks inward to art and up to the "high" literary tradition, to a novel that looks outward to society, and down to the "low" forms of popular oral culture. Akerman only recently resigned as leader of Nova Scotia's New Democratic Party and member of the coal-mining constituency of Cape Breton East. He became interested in politics after spending several years listening to yarns about the "men of the deeps" in Cape Breton kitchens. The narrator of the novel is an old man, Donnie Ross, who is looking back on his turbulent past as a union leader in the mines. Although he is the narrative voice, and his memories the focus, the novel's real hero is a historic figure, J. B. MacLachlan, who arrived in Canada in 1902, after having been blacklisted during a strike in Scotland. He immediately plunged into union organizing in Canada, and in 1923 he was jailed. Miners all over Canada struck to show sympathy. The novel focuses mainly on the battles of the 1925 strike, where the miners burned company stores, the owners sent in "goon squads," the government rigged trials, and food trains came in from the west too late to save many Cape Breton children from death caused by starvation.

Akerman's approach to his material is the one Donnie's Uncle Walter uses to recount Scotch history: "In reality, Uncle Walter was giving me history lessons (and surprisingly accurate ones, I later discovered), but painting this history with broad strokes and vivid colours to catch the imagination and coax the memory to retain them." Akerman, in trying to turn a period of history into one long yarn for us, forgets that much of the charm of these stories cannot be captured in print. Since his main purpose seems to be to rescue a part of labour history from oblivion, the novel may not be the best choice of form. Popular social historians, like Barry Broadfoot or Heather Robertson, have achieved good results with transcriptions of taped interviews, photographs, and a linking historical narrative. This mode of history allows room for the kind of evocation of place that Akerman does so well. The fascinating content of *Black Around the Eyes*, because of its form, the novel, is unlikely to reach its best audience, or to stay in print long, which is a pity.

MARGERY FEE

DEEP PLEASURE

GREG SIMISON, *Disturbances*. Thistledown, $14.00; pa. $6.95.

JILL ROGERS, *Alternate Endings*. Sono Nis, $4.95.

PETER CHRISTENSEN, *Rig Talk*. Thistledown, $14.00; pa. $6.95.

LEONA GOM, *Land of the Peace*. Thistledown, $14.00; pa. $6.95.

JOHN V. HICKS, *Winter Your Sleep*. Thistledown, $14.00; pa. $6.95.

THESE FIVE BOOKS, all beautifully produced and designed, show something of the strength and variety of recent western Canadian poetry. Two of these are first collections, two second collections, and one is a third, but, in spite of their seeming inexperience, the poets' voices are assured and distinct and their imaginative territories sharply differentiated by tone and the use of language and image. The two first books demonstrate in particular what one hopes for in a new poet — a freshness of approach and a sense of potential which more than compensate for any lack of range or risk-taking.

Greg Simison's *Disturbances* is a fine book. His poems are short, like extended epigrams, usually employing just one running image, explored and developed, leading to an ironic twist at the end. The writing is tight and highly disciplined; the tone perfectly controlled. Many of these poems concern male-female relationships with, as often as not, the man as victim, but treated through semi-comic imagery to create a subtlety of tone. The poet often ends up smiling wryly as he realizes the way the experience has worked on him; the reader smiles at the way the image has worked itself out and resolved matters. It is refreshing these days to be shown the world from the often very funny point of view of the ruefully musing exploited male, surrounded by predatory and calculating females, "barely clearing out / before the sack was on, / my feet firmly knotted." But he hits back at times in his sardonic style:

> she once told some friends
> that if she were tattooed
> from head to thigh
> as a detailed map of Canada
> my favorite spot would be the Niagara
> Gorge
>
> it's only recently I've realized
> how very clever the image was
> considering the lifeless tundra
> stretching beyond
> the arctic circle of her throat

There are also more serious and moving poems here, which show directions this talented poet might take in the future — about his grandfather, his ex-wife's family, a dead fisherman, ageing into mid-thirties domesticity. A really good first collection, brilliant in its use of imagery, consistent in tone, cheerfully grotesque.

Less direct in her treatment, Jill Rogers also explores male-female roles and relationships in the first section of *Alternate Endings*. Still only in her mid-twenties, she is an accomplished poet who has largely managed to avoid the often soft-centred "shells and spells and stones and bones" approach which has characterized some recent Vancouver Island poetry. More subtle than Simison, she is also more elusive, and occasionally her "people" seem unreal, and the poems sometimes seem to merge together because they don't have strong and distinct enough imagery or enough variety of tone. But she can write, and write well. The best poems here — "Plans for Survival," "Second Day," "Expect a Haven," "The Women," "Counting Our Losses" — are finely crafted and deeply felt, their ambiguities carefully worked for:

> your recent return
> announced last week on the news
> is puzzling

I stay at home
await the doorbell
holding a knife

and flowers

There is toughness beneath the fragile surface of these poems. They repay many readings, but I feel that Jill Rogers is going to have to become a little more hard and realistic, more direct in her use of image. She and Greg Simison should study each others' books — both so promising, yet each, perhaps, lacking something of what the other has in profusion.

To move from Jill Rogers to Peter Christensen is to move from gentle quietness to a deafening roar. It is interesting that the inside-cover cataloguing data of *Rig Talk* reads "Petroleum Workers — Alberta — Poetry" in that order — not "Poetry" — and this is perhaps a clue to the strengths and weaknesses of the collection. This book concerns the oil-rigs of Alberta — it is dedicated to the province — and the men who work them. It is as tough and uncompromising as the country, the job, and the people, and is illustrated with drawings of rigs and trucks and other hardware.

The problem with the collection is that, at times, the poetry does take a back seat to the endless details of the rig-workers and their jobs and becomes mere descriptive gloss:

Derrick man
in the crowsnest
racks the pipe along the tower
A new bit is screwed onto the pipe
You drill another hundred feet
maybe ten
before the pipe must come up again
slick and running mud

This kind of catalogue description does not produce good poetry. It is just not enough to say that this happened or that happened, and too often the poet relies on the descriptive details without transforming them imaginatively into poetry. But it is not all like this. The strength of the book lies in its unflinching treatment of a swaggering, *macho*, often pathetic world of isolated action, introducing us to areas of experience poetry does not often touch. If sometimes we feel bludgeoned and overwhelmed, so perhaps we should.

Personally I prefer Christensen's mountain poetry — a short section tucked in among the dark satanic rigs — which reveals a shrewd observer of the wild coming to terms with the Rockies in a way he never quite does with the oil-rigs. The language softens and expands and the poetry demonstrates awarenesses beyond mere description. To describe and apprehend and come to terms with extreme toughness does not necessarily demand extreme toughness in the writing. But Christensen can be a very good poet, and at his best makes us feel the hell, the losses, the sad bravado of a strange ethos.

Another world, just as dramatic in its own way as that of the rigs, is created in Leona Gom's *Land of the Peace*, where she writes of her childhood in the newly settled Peace River country of Alberta. But time is her real subject: time which has reduced the family homestead to ruins, memories which will not let her go, and the urgent need to face and understand her past, her family, the forces and people which have shaped her.

Beautifully produced, with sepia-tone photographs from an old family album complementing the poems, *Land of the Peace* follows up on what the poet was doing in parts of her last book, recreating a vanished way of life, at once brutal and comforting, which, through the clarity and imaginative power of her writing, becomes a moral, emotional and psychological referent against which the self was, and is, measured and judged. Being caught with purple gas in the car, the shock of an electric fence, going to school on horseback and selling rides, getting the strap, being locked in a cellar, setting her

hair alight, killing bears, her father's death, the terrible life of the farm-women — all this subject-matter is richly autobiographical, but it is a place and a life in time which is examined as well as merely described. She visits retired pioneers now living in town:

They tell me of the good old days
and then they laugh,
waving at the walls folding them in,
and say,
we never had it so good,
running water and electricity,
such miracles!
and of course it is true,
of course
it is true.

And the hundreds of arrowheads found, taken to the museum which would take only a few:

A dime a dozen, they said.
The memories so cheap, eventually,
and all of us harvesting
still that history.

"Pieces" is a superb poem on the passing of time; "Horsepower" deft and funny.

Finally, John V. Hicks' *Winter Your Sleep* is another splendid volume. Now in his mid-seventies, this poet-musician — an organist and choirmaster in Prince Albert — has brought out a second collection which is distinguished and attractive. There is a quiet dignity in this poetry, a wide range of tones from the high-serious to the ironically comic, an impressive lyricism and love of language. John Hicks treats words with respect. He tries nothing new or trendy, but his work has a flavour all its own and a remarkable depth and resonance. Any lack of surface excitement is more than compensated for by an intelligence, a wit, a cultured management of theme and tone.

It is the endings of his poems which impress me the most. Fully earned by the developing patterns, they are often full of a soft, heavy sadness, or, at other times, cautiously optimistic:

That much, then,
is certain; let us look toward new
strengths, peace of sorts at the last.

His poems on old musical instruments are a delight; so is the sequence on the ritual Church services with which the book ends. Poems to do with music run throughout the book; sonnets, rhymed and unrhymed, punctuate the careful free-verse. It is a collection full of richness by one of Canada's best and most underrated poets. Reading these poems gives deep pleasure because we are in the presence of a good person who feels and cares — for words, for music, for the fragile and transient epiphanies which life gives us. *Winter Your Sleep* is humane, generous and wise.

CHRISTOPHER WISEMAN

TIME IN YOUR FLIGHT

MARY ALICE DOWNIE and GEORGE RAWLYK, *A Proper Acadian*. Kids Can Press.

MARY HAMILTON, *The Tin-lined Trunk*. Kids Can Press.

BETTY WATERTON, *Pettranella*. Douglas & McIntyre, $8.95.

FRANK CONIBEAR and J. L. BLUNDELL, *The Wise One*. Abridged Edition, adapted by Nicky Millard. Scholastic-TAB, $1.50.

UNTIL RECENTLY, Canadian children's fiction, like Canadian fiction generally, has been predominantly local and contemporary. L. M. Montgomery's paradisal island, Roderick Haig-Brown's Pacific rain forest, and Mowat's prairie towns and northern barrens are described in the context of the authors' personal experiences. Now as evidence of our literary sophistication we are developing a sense of the past and an awareness of the circumstances that effected geographical and cultural transitions from France, England, the United States, and various East European countries to our land. The

historical approach often has didactic motivation — fair enough, since fiction may convey a more memorable impression of historical events than does a textbook full of dates and treaties. (How many of us have taken our idea of the French Revolution from Charles Dickens and the Baroness Orczy?) In the case of historical fiction for younger readers, however, there is a danger that characters and events may be swamped by a mass of factual information. The best modern practitioners — English authors like Rosemary Sutcliff, Joan Aiken, and Hester Burton — scrupulously research their chosen period, then with equal care select only those details that can be melded with particular characters and a particular story line. Creating a sense of what it must have felt like to live in another historical period requires more than the substitution of horses and candles for cars and electric lights. At the same time, the exoticism must not be so overwhelming that the reader feels alienated. In adult historical fiction, sex and violence are common elements that link past to present. In children's fiction, present readers often identify with the past through a child hero or heroine. Furthermore, an author's use of such archetypal motifs as the loss of parents, the quest or journey to an unknown land, and the happy ending can give historical fiction the patterns of familiar fairy tales.

A Proper Acadian by Mary Alice Downie and George Rawlyk deals with the eighteenth-century persecution of the Acadians, a subject that may be unfamiliar, now that Longfellow's "Evangeline" has disappeared from school readers. Timothy Parsons, an engaging young hero, is sent in 1754 from Protestant, Anglophone Boston to Minas, Nova Scotia, where he is to live with his dead mother's Catholic, French-speaking family. In comparison with the sober, Puritanical Bostonians, these hard-working farmers are "a merry-hearted people. You'll hear more laughter in a day in Acadia than in a month in Boston," as the sea captain, Ebenezer, tells Timothy. The characters are plausibly distinguished from one another — Timothy, his nagging sister Priscilla, his cousin Martin (a mirror image of himself), the Yankee-hating French priest, and Uncle Pascal and Aunt Madeleine who, like the other Acadians, "love their land, their families and the church and haven't much use for anything else." When, on the eve of the Seven Years' War, the new English governor in Halifax decides that the Acadians must swear to bear arms against the French and their allies, the Micmac Indians, Timothy is forced to choose between two cultures and two causes. The theme of *A Proper Acadian* is the nature of loyalty and the injustices of war.

The story is developed largely by means of dialogue and short expository passages. Careful attention is paid to sensory details that recreate the milieu — the smell of salt water, molasses, and stale fish in the *Reliant*'s hold; the cabin table set for the Festival of the Geese with wooden trenchers, pewter dishes, horn spoons, cider, French wine and brandy smuggled from Louisbourg, and quantities of food; the old women in black dresses watching and wailing as English soldiers set fire to their village. While *A Proper Acadian* is simple enough for quite young readers, it does not give an impression of superficiality.

The background of Mary Hamilton's *The Tin-lined Trunk* is the British Child Emigration movement which between 1868 and 1925 brought 80,000 children to Canada to work on farms. A quarter of them came from Dr. Barnardo's rescue homes, one of which is described here. Polly, a scrawny eleven-year-old, and her brother Jack live on the London streets, spending their few coins on periwinkles, steamed puddings, ginger beer, and theatre tickets. Rescued by Dr. Barnardo from

the rats, bed-bugs, and child-exploiters like Old Briggs, they are cleaned up, doctored, fed, and introduced to a regimen of lessons, prayers, Bible reading, and vocational training. In 1888, they are sent to Canada where they find themselves working on separate farms near Stratford, Ontario.

Unfortunately, Mrs. Hamilton does not do justice to this promising subject. In an effort to downplay the abuses revealed in such sociological studies as Joy Parr's *Labouring Children, British Child Immigrants to Canada 1869-1924* (1980), the author has produced only a shadowy impression of the children's sufferings and deprivations both in England and Canada. Most of the participants seem caricatures from Victorian "penny dreadfuls" rather than real people. *A Proper Acadian* and *The Tin-lined Trunk* are published by Kids Can Press in a similar format — a map at the beginning, about sixty pages of text, an afterword giving the historical context, and several black and white illustrations by Ron Berg that are adequate but rather short on atmosphere.

The prize-winning team consisting of author Betty Waterton and illustrator Ann Blades has treated the immigrant theme in a picture-storybook of considerable charm. When *Pettranella*'s parents decide to exchange an upstairs apartment in a European factory town for a homestead in Manitoba, Grandmother must be left behind because she is too old to make the long journey. Grandmother's gift of a muslin bag filled with flower seeds is to form a bridge between the old world and the new when Pettranella has carried out her promise to "plant them and make a beautiful garden for you." On the trip across the prairie, however, the seeds, which the child has poured out onto her lap, are lost. Pettranella is disconsolate. The garden beside their log cabin will contain only turnips and cabbages. But one day, while driving down the track, they suddenly see "blowing gently in the breeze, their bright faces turned to the sun and their roots firm in Canadian soil — Grandmother's flowers." This story describes separation and hardship and loss, a kind of pain that even small children can understand, but redeemed by the symbolism of seed and blossom.

The text gives little specific indication of time and place but the meaning is expanded by the illustrations which show tall stone houses with rows of shuttered windows such as might have been seen in a central European country; lamplight falling on a round table; the grandmother's brightly striped apron, blue shawl and white cap; Pettranella in high black boots, black stockings, a long black dress and blue coat seated on a steamer trunk in a room crowded with peasants; and a big-wheeled ox cart carrying the family along a dirt track lined with poplars. Colour is used to create moods appropriate to the context. The dull tones of the old world scenes are replaced by the delicate tints of the early spring landscape, suggesting that the new homeland is hospitable and innocent. Pettranella's brown depression as she looks into the empty seed bag is followed by a brightly lit pastoral scene showing the child surrounded by the gently coloured flowers that "bloom each year beside a country road in Manitoba."

The Wise One, by Frank Conibear and J. L. Blundell, belongs to a genre that Canada contributed to world literature — the realistic animal story. Conibear, who was born in England in 1896 (he is still alive and well and living in Victoria), spent much of his life as a trapper in the Northwest Territories where his observations of animal life inspired his writing. He evidently agrees with Charles G. D. Roberts' contention that a writer must first note the animals' forms and colours,

seasons and habits, food, tracks, dwellings and matings, and then "'get under the skins' . . . to discern their motives, to uncover and chart their simple mental processes, to learn to differentiate between those of their actions which are the results of blind, inherited instinct, and those which spring from something definitely akin to reason."

The Wise One, the biography of a rare black beaver, begins when an old trapper who has chanced upon an uncharted lake determines to solve the mystery of the empty lodges around the shore:

> Some tragedy had befallen the beavers that had lived here for so long. He knew from his inspection of the lodges that now only one beaver remained. A large, old buck beaver.

We are then given, from the animal's point of view, that beaver's life story from the time when the two-year-old is chased out of the lodge where he was born until, old, lonely, and mourning his mate and family who have been slaughtered by a pack of otters, he himself dies in the white man's steel trap. Ernest Thompson Seton claimed that "there is only one way to make an animal's history untragic, and that is to stop before the last chapter." What occurs before the last chapter in this book is an affirmation of animal heroism, as the courageous, kindly, and intelligent beaver outwits and outfights a variety of opponents, including the despicable wolverine, eagles, owls, and a whole family of Indians, in order to protect his mate and successive generations of their offspring. Sensitive descriptions of landscape, details of natural history, vignettes of the animals who share this aqueous world — "desperado" otters, sybaritic muskrats, rival buck beavers, the malicious wolverine — are combined to produce what the *Ladies' Home Journal* quotation on the back cover calls "one of the very best animal books ever written."

By reducing the lengthier nature descriptions, omitting some events, eliminating digressions, and tightening the sentence structure, Nicky Millard has actually improved on the original. Fortunately, this abridged edition has retained many of Michael Bevans' original illustrations, careful pen-and-ink drawings that not only convey faithfully the architecture of a beaver lodge and the shoreline of a northern lake but also suggest the joy of early spring or the demonic gloom of the enemy-infested underwater world. We should be grateful to Scholastic-TAB for resurrecting this masterpiece of its kind.

MURIEL WHITAKER

SUBVERSIVE FORM

MARGARET CRAVEN, *The Home Front: Collected Stories*. Putnam, $15.50.

W. P. KINSELLA, *Born Indian*. Oberon, $15.95; pa. $7.95.

STEVE LUXTON, ed., *Saturday Night at the Forum*. Quadrant, n.p.

THE SHORT STORY IS A rigid and essentially conservative form which resists radical alterations to its established framework and casts an imposing shadow over the entire field of short fiction. Yet, the "conventional short story" remains a vital and dynamic genre whose fragmentary, hit-or-miss quality seems particularly well-suited to the modern consciousness which Nadine Gordimer summarizes as "fearful insight alternating with near-hypnotic states of indifference." In other words, at its best, the story is a subversive form, hostile to the world of decent appearances, easy judgments, and rationalist perspectives.

When, on the other hand, a conventional story-structure is imposed without irony upon the "polite" conflicts of inoffensive characters, or is used simply to verify established values, the short story

can easily degenerate to a mechanical exercise. Indeed, the pieces collected in Margaret Craven's *The Home Front* demonstrate that, without a subversive testing of its formal boundaries, a story may seem all the more static, the greater the author's mastery of technical conventions. In terms of structural cohesion and narrative control, most of Craven's stories are exceptionally well-crafted; in the story, however, perhaps more than in any other form, technical competence is not equivalent to artistic value.

The subject-matter of several of the stories in *The Home Front* suggests potential for an original and effective treatment of the short story form: for example, the changing economic and social role of women, and the difficulties of post-war reconstruction, the social hazards of rapid urbanization. Craven's approach, however, is unremittingly sentimental, her treatment of serious issues too easily definable in terms of a narrative parabola of exposition, climax, denouement. Simply stated, there is no *evil* in these stories, no sense of the author grappling with a truth only partly or momentarily recognized. Consequently, the tension between form and content (requisite, in so well-defined a structural context, to the revitalization of received forms) is almost non-existent. The notion of the story as a controlled, rationalist form is further intensified by Craven's tendency to underline her themes, or to force characters into representative roles: "Even then, Ben knew she was not going to be merely important to the plant and to her sex. No, this girl was going to be the significant one" ("The Wall Between"). Nor is this undercutting of dramatic tension countered by an ironic narrative perspective which might place events in fuller relief or suggest a significance beyond the anecdotal surface: the narrative tone is generally more one of amiable gossip than of full ironic detachment.

In succession, then, the stories take on the unmistakable character of a pre-determined form imposed upon particular sets of circumstances: the story as magic formula through which all human experience can be distilled, its significance reduced to a brief closing paragraph: "She was gone, and in a sense she would never be back. Yet the mother watched her go with pride" ("Leading Lady"). The full thematic force of the story is thus directed towards a closed end; epiphany becomes a rationalist tool. The collection is finally a set of moral fables whose dominant theme is "You have to believe that no matter what happens to any of us these days, we can keep our — our essential decency" ("White-Collar Town").

The difference between *The Home Front* and W. P. Kinsella's *Born Indian* is principally a difference of social perspectives. The view of society as a rational unit, controlled by "essentially decent" men and women, gives way in Kinsella's portraits of an impoverished central-Alberta Indian reserve to the artistically more wholesome notion of society as a vast unknowable, maliciously indifferent to the fate of those groups or individuals whom it deems unworthy. In *Born Indian*, Kinsella creates the composite impression of a carnivorous, overtly hostile white society: "the daughter, who was named Dora, went off to Edmonton, got swallowed up by the city and it be just the same as if she died" ("Born Indian"). On one hand, the sheer absurdity of racial oppression becomes almost a liberating force; as one character says, "When we're down as low as we are on the totem pole then the only thing there is to do is laugh" ("Jokemaker"). Balanced against the humour of the stories, however, is the sense of dangerous unpredictability which generally prevents the narratives from lapsing into the seductive category of the formulaic short story. For Kinsella's long-time narrative *persona*, Silas Ermineskin,

any tendency towards artistic complacency is prevented by the constant evidence of his "beneath the underdog" role as an Indian and a creative artist; as Silas says, "Being smarter than I used to sure ain't as much fun as I thought it would be" ("Indian Struck").

As in the case with most single-author story collections, a successive reading of the fourteen stories in *Born Indian* accentuates certain narrative and structural deficiencies. Most notably, Silas occasionally seems little more than a mouthpiece for his author; at these moments, the charge of Kinsella's presumptuous liberalism seems justified. And yet, it is a tribute to Kinsella's story-telling ability that, overall, the stories benefit from placement in an anthology. In particular, the subject of cultural, rather than economic, poverty emerges as the most important and convincingly stated theme of the collection. The surprising shift, in the final piece of the collection, to magic realism, however, radically affects the significance of this theme. The process of cultural degradation is momentarily reversed as Silas realizes, in his ability to create fictional worlds, a far greater power than that of his antagonists. The story, "Weasels and Ermines," is one of the more impressive pieces of short fiction to appear in Canada in recent years.

It is not possible here to describe in depth the particular strengths or weaknesses of any of the stories in *Saturday Night at the Forum*, or to discuss how the best narratives together represent a considerable range of responses to the "institutional imperatives" of the traditional short story form. It is necessary only to say that this uneven but generally impressive anthology of works by new Quebec anglophone writers ranges over styles from surrealist fantasy, to Márquez-like magic realism, to Alice Munro Gothic, and contains successful experiments both within and outside the familiar boundaries of the short story. Especially noteworthy are Ludmilla Bereshko's "And With Two Such Husbands," Jerry Wexler's "The Bequest," Anne McLean's "Confession of Lucille Robillard, Accomplice," and above all, "Rosamunda," a hypnotically beautiful, wonderfully concentrated piece by Frances Davis.

IAN B. MCLATCHIE

PENSEE AMERICANISANTE

GUILDO ROUSSEAU, *L'Image des Etats-Unis dans la littérature québécoise (1775-1930)*. Naaman.

"DE LA NOUVELLE-FRANCE à nos jours, le Québec a toujours possédé une pensée americanisante." A partir de cette phrase, Guildo Rousseau se met à analyser comment et pourquoi le mythe des Etats-Unis a tellement préoccupé les écrivains canadiens-français entre 1775 et 1930. Il prend soin de souligner que son étude est littéraire et "laisse de côté tout l'aspect historique des rapports entre le Québec et les Etats-Unis." Précisons que son ouvrage est un survol historique, une vaste synthèse de la littérature québécoise de 1755 à 1930. Son dessein n'est pas d'analyser les écrits afin d'y déceler l'esthétique littéraire; l'approche qu'il choisit est plutôt celle de l'historien littéraire, rôle qu'il revêt d'ailleurs dès l'avant-propos lorsqu'il propose "de faire ressortir des situations historiques particulières." En fait, M. Rousseau a raison de ne pas s'occuper de la "littérarité" des écrits car la ligne de démarcation entre la littérature et la propagande est souvent mince chez les auteurs traités. D'ailleurs, c'est un problème dont il est conscient.

La littérature québécoise du XIX^{e} siècle foisonne d'images de notre voisin du sud. A force de puiser dans les romans,

contes, pièces, et, à un moindre degré, dans les poèmes et essais de l'époque, Rousseau nous démontre que ces images illustrent sans cesse le phénomène de ce qu'il appelle le "mirage américain." En plus, notre auteur a découvert que l'image globale des Etats-Unis subit d'importantes modifications au cours de la période en question. Il y aurait trois orientations successives et distinctes qui, toutefois, se chevauchent.

Les premiers écrits des auteurs québécois sont caractérisés par une sympathie pour la liberté et les institutions démocratiques américaines. L'Amérique est vue sous un jour favorable par les romanciers, conteurs et poètes de la première moitié du XIX[e] siècle. Le désir d'inciter le Canadien français à suivre l'exemple américain pour mieux se faire valoir ainsi que l'influence considérable du romantisme les amènent à peindre les Etats-Unis comme le nouvel Eldorado; un pays légendaire d'aventure, de richesses et d'opportunité illimitée.

Vers le milieu du XIX[e] siècle cette image se ternit et cède la place à une autre, plus réaliste. Les premiers écrivains avaient trop bien accompli leur tâche; la fascination qu'exercent les Etats-Unis déclenche un exode massif des Canadiens français et, par le fait même, un rejet de la vie et culture traditionnelles. La littérature des années 1850-70 se caractérise donc par un effort de la part des écrivains de contrebalancer l'attirance des Etats-Unis. Pour contrer cet exode, les auteurs s'en prennent à tous les éléments d'une Amérique néfaste; le culte de l'argent, le manque de sentiments, la vie malsaine des usines et des villes, le matérialisme et la corruption régnantes, et ainsi de suite. Une telle résistance au mirage américain aboutit à une "exaltation des valeurs nationales." La littérature devient donc très nationaliste. On y prévoit même la déchéance inévitable des Etats-Unis et, par conséquent, le rachat de l'Amérique par les Canadiens français. On rêve de voir un jour "les Canadiens français seuls possesseurs d'une Amérique française et catholique."

Cependant ce rêve s'effrite contre la réalité. Vers 1900 se distingue une nouvelle orientation dans la production littéraire. On commence à se rendre compte de l'énorme influence des Etats-Unis sur le Québec. Il y a par conséquent une tentative littéraire "pour subjuguer un puissant voisin" dont l'influence s'accroît de jour en jour. Pour mieux résister à l'impérialisme américain on exalte la fidélité à la foi catholique, à la langue française, aux valeurs nationales et culturelles et surtout la fidélité à la patrie. Pour échapper à l'influence prépondérante de l'Amérique, les écrivains n'ont qu'une ressource — l'imaginaire. La littérature pullule de héros romanesques qui démontrent la supériorité inhérente de la société canadienne-française tout en se vengeant de la société américaine. L'enjeu est considérable; comme le dit M. Rousseau, "l'idée fondamentale qui se dégage de cette revanche finale aboutit à la lutte pour la survivance nationale."

Voilà, en résumé, le tableau que brosse M. Rousseau. Ces trois images distinctes permettent à l'auteur d'organiser le contenu de son ouvrage sous les rubriques suivantes: le mirage américain, le combat contre l'Amérique, et la revanche finale. Faisant preuve d'une affinité pour le chiffre trois, Rousseau établit ces parties de sorte que chacune se subdivise en trois chapitres dont chacun à son tour se compose de trois sections. S'il y a une signification à cette démarche ternaire, je l'ignore.

Bien présenté, d'un style lucide et concis, l'ouvrage de Guildo Rousseau se complète fort heureusement par des appendices, une bibliographie exhaustive, des index complets et une table analytique des matières très détaillée. Il a en outre richement documenté ses trou-

vailles. On pourrait néanmoins lui reprocher que les notes deviennent parfois un peu fastidieuses, comme, par exemple, à la page 137, où au lieu de se contenter de nous donner deux ou trois exemples de lettres parues dans les journaux de l'époque, il nous en donne une quinzaine.

Cette remarque faite, on doit avouer que M. Rousseau a bien su structurer son livre. Il procède toujours d'une logique solide et méthodique et ne laisse jamais le lecteur dans le vague. Les résumés à la fin de chaque chapitre en sont un témoignage pertinent. On apprécie en outre la façon objective dont il traite sa matière. Il nous fait voir, par exemple, l'idée exagérée chez les écrivains de leur propre importance et de l'importance du Québec face à une nation aussi puissante que les Etats-Unis.

En contrepartie, il est regrettable que l'auteur ait choisi de passer sous silence l'image du Canada anglais dans la littérature québécoise. Je conviens qu'une telle étude aurait dépasse l'étendue de son livre; néanmoins, un silence aussi total laisse l'impression que le Haut-Canada n'était considéré qu'une extension des Etats-Unis. On aurait aimé au moins connaître les raisons de cette exclusion.

Le livre de Guildo Rousseau tombe bien à point aujourd'hui, car le problème de "l'américanisation" du Québec est encore plus épineux à l'heure actuelle qu'à nulle autre époque. En choisissant de fixer les bornes de son étude à 1930, il nous fournit le point de départ pour des recherches supplémentaires dans ce domaine. Ainsi, il peut réaliser son but: "à savoir de constituer un cadre pour de futures recherches." Il serait en effet passionnant de voir comment l'image des Etats-Unis se dessine dans les ouvrages écrits à partir de 1930, surtout en vue des grands changements qui se sont produits au Québec pendant les trois dernières décennies. Le tiraillement entre "l'américanité" d'un côté et la "francité" de l'autre n'est certes pas près de disparaître.

MARK BENSON

FOR THE KICK

TOM WAYMAN, ed., *Going for Coffee: Poetry on the Job.* Harbour.

BARRY MC KINNON, ed., *The Pulp Mill: An Anthology of Poems/Prince George, B.C.* Repository.

ROBERT ALLEN, STEPHEN LUXTON, and MARK TEICHER, *Late Romantics: A Collaborative Book of Poems.* Moosehead.

JAY MACPHERSON, when asked why she studied literature, said, "For the kick." This is presumably why most of us read, for the thrill, the elation that seldom comes but is always hoped for. It is also a major part of evaluation. Criticism is an attempt to explain: "It hits me; why does it hit me?"

In prose there are a number of more mundane factors added, such as: is the syntax clear? Is the story cohesive? Are the characters fully realized? If the prose is non-fiction some of the questions change but the essence is the same. And then, of course, there are the great writers who break all the rules and still succeed magnificently.

In poetry, evaluation is much more difficult, even for the most minor versifiers. If there are any rules left that we all agree on, I don't know them. If you ask for a clear syntax someone will reply with a "me happiest" from Layton or even Browning's "Irks care the crop-full bird?" If you ask for scansion or a precise narrative you will be considered a brontosaurus and treated as such. Thus what is left but the kick?

I am attempting to justify my very subjective examination of three poetry anthologies. Very few of the poets are well known in general and only a couple well known to me. Thus I am also lacking

the crutch that I might have if reviewing the work of someone for whom there is a received wisdom.

Not that some received wisdom doesn't take part. At the end of the 1960's one poetry editor said, "One day, some time after Atwood became popular, I looked at my latest pile of rejects, and I realized how I had been influenced. Each time I read a poem I was looking for the Atwood hook, a grabber. No hook and I chucked it into the rejects. And I wasn't even sure that I liked Atwood's poetry."

I don't think I was looking for Atwood in these volumes but I was looking for whatever it is that produces my kick. I thus will examine them in the order of kicks I received. This also happens to descend from the anthology with the most poets to the one with the least. Which might simply show that if you include enough writers you are bound to find someone that the critic likes.

The inspiration behind *Going for Coffee*, edited by Tom Wayman, seems clear. He wanted to anthologize work poems which didn't romanticize work or refer to future proletarian valhallas. These are poems by people who are doing the work or have done it. There are 221 poems and 93 poets. Some have become academics or professional writers and some remain "workers" in the traditional sense but all appear committed poets, not just people who happened to write a verse one day.

The poets are American and Canadian. Their geographic range seems to reflect Tom Wayman's life more than anything else. Thus the majority are in some way connected with British Columbia, the Detroit-Windsor area, the prairies, and California. One inspiration seems to have been *The Waterfront Writers*, a publication by the San Francisco Waterfront Writers and Artists, of whom a number are represented in *Going for Coffee*. Some of the Canadians are part of the Vancouver Industrial Writers' Union, a group which is new to me but which would appear to be similar to the San Francisco collective.

The poems are distinguished by straightforward diction and the common use of narratives. Simplicity is the norm and brevity is cherished. The main problem I see is a certain lack of inspiration. This may sound like a bourgeois reaction, but a poem becomes special only when it transcends the subject. For the most part, these poems about work are not much more exciting than the work itself.

Thus the best section of poems seems to be the one on hospital work. The experience of caring for the severely ill and the dying has an inherent impact which most of these poets are able to transmit, particularly Phil Hall. In an instance like this, all that is required is the restraint to let the experience stand, without overtly poeticizing it. Kirsten Emmot reflects on her success with one small baby:

> Long live Surinderjeet!
> You were the first whose life I ever saved.
> Any long and tiring night I can go to the nursery
> and have another hit
> of what it can mean to be a doctor.

In a similar way, Hans Jewinski does a fine job of recounting life as a policeman. Jewinski is one step further along, however, in that his success is created as much by his hard, clipped style as by the experiences behind the poem.

Some very personal reactions are quite compelling, such as those from Patrick Lane and Helen Porter, two of the better-known writers in the collection. I think the best two individual poems are "Factory Time," by Wayman himself, and "Loading Rice at 14th Street," by Gene Dennis. The former gives a perfect account of the way the clock rules a labourer's life. The latter describes that almost mindless transcendence which many labourers seek and so few achieve. The best group of poems is by Gwen Hauser. She

has a reasonably wild wit which she applies to a variety of assembly line tasks. Hers is the one new voice which I will be eager to hear again.

One work, "Industrial Poem," by Peter Trower, raised a couple of interesting questions for me. It comes near to falling into a regular metre and rhyme and I kept wishing it would. Is it possible that work poetry might still respond well to the traditional forms that most poets, including the ones in this volume, have rejected? Also, Wayman's introduction makes the point that in the Thirties political poets did not really write from within the immediate work experience and about it. However, the authors of traditional work songs did. It would be interesting to see if the old shanties and logging ballads could provide some models for new writers.

I'm afraid the other volumes offer far less on which to ponder. Barry McKinnon's *The Pulp Mill* gives us a look at a creative writing workshop in a reasonably isolated industrial environment, Prince George, but the poems tend to be of less interest than the situation. A free-wheeling stream-of-consciousness piece by Brian Fawcett has moments but also a lot of padding. Kathy Donovon may not be much of a poet as yet but she has some hard feminist insights which are worth examining. Peter Lindelauf needs a few sparkling phrases and ideas to set off the pleasant clarity of his brief pieces but he still holds up well against the pretentiousness of some of his colleagues. The one writer of real potential here is Sharon Stevenson. But the editor notes that she died in 1978. She had some unusual insights into radical politics and also a gift for putting the right words in the right places.

Something is almost always lacking in *Late Romantics*. The image of Daedalus on the cover gives some idea of the pretensions of the authors, Robert Allen, Stephen Luxton and Mark Teicher.

To make things worse, they drift through the usual references to butterflies and Greek myth until they end with a poem from Teicher to the other two. As they are also the publishers, everything seems just a bit too incestuous. I stated that critical opinions are subjective and mine obviously are. But I still think the Late Romantics should be encouraged to go for coffee. And make it a nice long break.

TERRY GOLDIE

HARD THINGS

ROBERT LECKER and JACK DAVID, eds., *The Annotated Bibliography of Canada's Major Authors. Volume Two*. ECW Press, $30.00; pa. $18.00.

THOMAS VINCENT, ed., *Eighteenth-Century Canadian Poetry An Anthology*. Loyal Colonies Press, $6.00.

THOMAS VINCENT, comp., *Joseph Howe: An Annotated Chronology of the Poems 1816-1872*. Loyal Colonies Press, $6.50.

IN AN ARTICLE PUBLISHED IN 1973, the late Desmond Pacey argued that it was time in "The Study of Canadian Literature" to try the hard things: bibliographies, biographies, and editions. And in the last few years, several attempts to perform these tasks have been made. The works which are the subject of this review represent three examples.

Eighteenth-Century Canadian Poetry is an anthology of thirty-seven poems collected from colonial newspapers and magazines, published books, and unpublished papers, and presented in order of "types": "religious, moral, and philosophic verse," "love laments and pastoral poetry," "descriptive and topographical verses," and "social and political satire." The authors are mostly anonymous, although poems by Henry Alline, Jacob

Bailey, Jonathan Odell, and Joseph Stansbury are also included.

What bothers me about this anthology is not the content itself but its presentation. In preparing this edition, Vincent has done such hard things as spending hours reading through papers of various sorts and sifting their material. His patience and thoroughness, in fact, should be commended, as should his making available a selection of the poems his labours have uncovered. But in the end the value of all this work is much reduced because, instead of telling us the precise source for each poem, Vincent refers us in "A Note on Sources" to rare editions of poems by Alline, Odell, and Stansbury, two sets of unpublished papers, and to the *Chronological Index of locally written verse published in the newspapers and magazines of Upper and Lower Canada, Maritime Canada, and Newfoundland through 1815* he compiled with Ross Stuart and published in a small limited edition in 1979. Thus the information we most need is not given to us in a usable form.

What I shall call Vincent's lack of perspective is revealed again in *Joseph Howe*. Aiming for "more than a checklist of [Howe's] poems," the compiler provides for each entry the year in which the poem was written; its first line; its "length / verse form (metre and rhyme scheme) / genre-mode"; its subject; the history of the text; and, if necessary, notes. In addition to this "Annotated Chronology," Vincent includes a "Mode / Genre Index," a "Title Index," a "First-Line Index," and a "Thumbnail Biography."

There is, of course, nothing intrinsically wrong with any of these parts. In this case, however, their number is excessive, and their information a curious mixture of hard fact, critical definition, and aesthetic judgment. Since the poems are arranged chronologically, the biographical details, for example, might well have been either integrated into the checklist — although that would have encumbered it even more — or into the "Prefatory Remarks." Simplification and integration, in fact, would have produced a shorter, sharper "chronology" suitable for publication, in say, the *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of Canada*, where, among other advantages, it would have had a wider readership.

The form of publication of these two works is too pretentious, and their modes too mixed. But the gold among the dross is the result of the hard things Vincent has done as a researcher into a relatively unknown area of Canadian literature. His job now is to eliminate the dross and fashion the gold into a careful study of our colonial poetry. When he does this, these preliminary publications will fall naturally into place as steps — albeit somewhat ill-advised — along the way.

I wish I were as optimistic about the ultimate value of the series and volumes called *The Annotated Bibliography of Canada's Major Authors*, or ABCMA. The series is "designed to be the first collection of comprehensive, annotated bibliographies of works by and on Canada's major French and English authors from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries." The volumes — there are ten planned — will each contain five of these bibliographies — a more suitable name would actually be checklists. So far two volumes have been published, and checklists of nine writers produced. Margaret Atwood's "Prose" appears in Volume One; her "Poetry" in Volume Two, the subject of this review. Also included in this volume are checklists of Leonard Cohen, Archibald Lampman, E. J. Pratt, and Alfred Purdy, each compiled by a different person or persons. One of the many problems with ABCMA is that the compilers are named but not otherwise identified.

Whoever they are, neither they nor the editors know enough about bibliography and its types or comprehensiveness and its traps to avoid making inaccurate claims. In the "Introduction," the editors state that the "bibliographical *principles*" (italics mine) are those of the *MLA Handbook*; that each bibliography presents "*full* listings of *all* works" by each author, except for selections in anthologies; that the "*comprehensive* presentation of primary sources includes *all* book editions"; and that secondary material is "*complete*" up to 31 December 1979, except for book reviews "selected according to such criteria as critical importance, regional response, idiosyncratic perspective, and non-Canadian evaluation."

In the face of this apparent competence and confidence, it seems churlish to be negative. But, there are few "bibliographical principles" enunciated in the *MLA Handbook*; its purpose, as the editors themselves recognize, is to describe conventions of bibliographical style "for writers of research papers, theses, and dissertations." While comprehensiveness is the ideal of every good enumerative bibliographer, it is so rarely attained that it is distinctly unwise to claim, let alone emphasize, inclusiveness. Although a selection of reviews seems sensible, one needs factual and easily applied criteria for making the choices. One also needs clear guidelines on the style, content, and length of annotations. Finally, since Lecker and David describe themselves as editors, they need to edit — to verify information and to render consistent all entries in all the checklists. Most of all, however, they need to define their concept of "major." Why, for instance, among modern and contemporary poets are these five "major"?

The quality of the checklists varies. Marianne Micros' "Purdy" seems good. Alan J. Horne's checklist of Atwood's poetry is marred by such examples of bad prose as "The poems are specifically addressed to an audience and are so reader-involving, using rhetoric to achieve power and force." Bruce Whiteman's "Introduction" to the Cohen checklist has a confusing statement about the "comprehensiveness" — or lack thereof — of its secondary material. George Wicken, the compiler of "Lampman," misses the first publication of Duncan Campbell Scott's "Poetry and Progress" lecture, and does not record the reprinting of Pacey's "A Reading of Lampman's 'Heat'" in his collection of essays. The group of four who compiled the Pratt checklist need to make their entries on the subject of "Clay" consistent. Did Pratt burn *a* or *the* manuscript, for example?

The editors, however, not the compilers, are ultimately responsible for the success of these volumes. Certainly their energy, initiative, and courage in attempting to get fifty checklists compiled and published in a relatively short time are admirable. But it is not enough just to decide to do bibliographies. One must know how, and if one doesn't, one has to learn, and the lessons are hard. But unless and until Lecker and David learn a good deal more about editing and bibliography than they appear to know now, they need to be less assured about the nature of their checklists and their publication. Otherwise, despite their undoubtedly good intentions, they will actually delay the achievement of the hard things that must be both done, and done well, if we are to make the next leap forward in "The Study of Canadian Literature."

MARY JANE EDWARDS

PAST AND FUTURE

KEVIN MAJOR, *Far from Shore*. Clarke, Irwin, $9.95.

ERIC WILSON, *The Lost Treasure of Casa Loma*. Illustrated by Gavin Rowe. Clarke, Irwin, $10.95.

IN THEIR LATEST BOOKS, Eric Wilson and Kevin Major provide, in a sense, a virtual history of the boy's adventure story in Canada. Wilson's *The Lost Treasure of Casa Loma* is a journey into the past, a nostalgic glimpse at what these stories once were. His is a world of spunky junior detectives, stern Mounties, and "spine-tingling" adventures, a world accurately and traditionally described by Wilson's publishers as "light-hearted and fast moving." In such texts, there is little if any characterization; the focus instead is on the plot, the variety of adventures faced by the rather faceless protagonists. Major, on the other hand, clearly points to the future. His first children's book, *Hold Fast*, winner of almost all of the major children's book awards in Canada, signaled a major change in Canadian children's fiction, a sudden maturity; Major's second book, *Far from Shore*, is of the same high quality, proving conclusively that the Canadian boy's story has come of age. The hero of *Far from Shore* is not a hockey player, nor is he lost in the barren North. He is instead a painfully ordinary boy — lazy, selfish, and not terribly clever — who is trying to survive in a family dominated by a drunken, out-of-work father and a mother who is a potential adulteress.

The first few paragraphs of the two books quickly establish the vast differences between them. Wilson's book begins in Casa Loma, a Gothic castle conveniently situated in the heart of Toronto. It is a dark and gloomy night; suddenly there is a flash of lightning and the castle's sombre butler speaks: "We fear it was murder." Tom and Liz, the two protagonists, shiver with delight; here is a mystery to be solved. Just then Hatfield, the valet, appears; he clearly knows something. But, just as he is about to reveal his dire secret, the lights go out. Moments later, light is restored and the children find, to their horror, that "sprawled on the floor, the twisted features of his face yellow in the candlelight, was Hatfield."

To be fair, the story does become a bit less predictable as one reads on, but it does nonetheless remind one of an old children's game in which, after some manoeuvring, one finally discovers that Colonel Mustard is the murderer and that he did it in the conservatory with a candlestick. Not surprisingly, Wilson's children also discover whodunit, exposing a smuggling ring along the way. The butler didn't do it, by the way; in fact, he turns out to be a Mountie in disguise. The adventure ends rather effectively in the traditional series of chases, rescues, and unmaskings, the final episode chronicling the children's desperate attempt to avoid being swept over Niagara Falls. To his credit, Wilson does provide along the way a series of clues which the intelligent child can decipher, long before the rather dim-witted protagonists in fact. But there is still predictability to all of the adventures. It's like watching an old black-and-white cowboy movie of the Forties, one which once seemed so vital but which now just seems out of place.

Major's world, on the other hand, is anything but predictable. Again, as in Wilson's story, the first few paragraphs tell all. Though *Far from Shore* begins with a description of a traditional Newfoundland Christmas dinner, one notes immediately that there is something different here. For one thing, they're eating lasagna. More importantly, the dinner is not being described by some omniscient third-person narrator, but by each member of the Slade family. And each has a clearly unique voice; the teen-agers ac-

tually sound like teen-agers. The festive scene ends abruptly when Gord, the father, returns home drunk and knocks over the Christmas tree: "Shit, I can feel the feet giving out on me . . . and the branches piling in on top! Jesus Christ, my face!"

Thus, in an extremely courageous departure from the narrative patterns traditionally found in children's fiction, Major allows the Slade family to introduce themselves. Although the son, Chris, comes to dominate the story to such a degree that much of it becomes a single first-person narrative, the overall technique is extremely successful, for what the audience learns quite quickly from this cacophony of voices is that, ironically, the family's main problem is that they cannot communicate with one another. Thus, the audience alone realizes the complexity of this troubled family.

Just as Major's narrative style is innovative, so too is his examination of contemporary society. Chris's problems do not involve smugglers, murderers, or even opposing goalies. They are more immediate and far more frightening: an unemployed, drunken father; a restless mother; and most importantly, a world in which he seems to have no place. In a sense, the story is nothing more than Chris's day-by-day account of the worst summer of his life. He loses his girl; he flunks grade ten; and finally, when he gets drunk and apparently helps vandalize his school, he becomes a criminal. But Chris is not an eternal victim of fate; he clearly causes most of his own problems. He is selfish, not too bright, and most tragically, entirely susceptible to even the most ridiculous of his friends' schemes. Simply put, he is a follower, and when his father leaves to find work elsewhere, he is left with virtually no leadership. In the midst of his despair, however, the town's minister comes to his aid and invites him to come to his summer camp as a counsellor.

Anyone familiar with children's fiction can now predict the inevitable pattern of Chris's life: he will find a place through helping others and return to his family with a new sense of his true worth. But Major does not provide such easy answers. Chris does not redeem himself at summer camp; instead, he is talked into smoking some dope by one of the other counsellors and, as a result, almost kills himself when he unwisely takes his boat too far from shore during a summer squall.

Ultimately, Chris does begin to move back to shore, to find some small place for himself. His father returns; his mother breaks off her affair with her employer; and Chris finds a new, more understanding girl. But, above all, Chris simply learns that he is going to have to change himself; he can expect little help from others. When he finally does decide to return to school, signalling the emergence of the "new" Chris, he fully recognizes his own capabilities: he won't get straight A's; in fact, he'll be lucky if he passes. When the story ends, Chris's father is still awaiting confirmation of his new job. The family is optimistic, but there is always the chance that it will not come through and that he will have to leave again. If so, Chris's world could once again crumble. Such is Major's vision of contemporary adolescence.

In his autobiography, Leslie McFarlane, creator of the Hardy Boys and probably Canada's most prolific teller of the type of adventure stories epitomized by *The Lost Treasure of Casa Loma*, occasionally feels compelled to apologize for the lack of sophistication in his stories, admitting that some of his adventures were simply good hack-work. With the advent of Kevin Major and writers like him, the writer of realistic children's fiction need never apologize again.

J. KIERAN KEALY

SOUR GRAPES

GEORGE JONAS, *Final Decree.* Macmillan.

HEATHER ROBERTSON, *The Flying Bandit.* Lorimer.

ANNORA BROWN, *Sketches From Life.* Hurtig.

FROM THE SEEDS OF BITTERNESS have sprung three very different books: *Sketches From Life* by Annora Brown, the autobiography of a prairie painter, *The Flying Bandit* by Heather Robertson, a somewhat thin biography of Ken Leishman, and George Jonas' novel *Final Decree*, each telling of an individual's response to the bitterness of the soil from which it grew.

Annora Brown is a painter mostly known for her lyrical renderings of wild flowers. The picture she paints in her autobiography is a much darker one, a little family tragedy where the good daughter, who harbours the fragile light of creativity but is conditioned to self-effacement, is caught between the dust of prairie depression and the demands of elderly parents, and is nearly pressed as flat as the flowers in her sketchbook.

What Brown may not realize is that her problem is hardly unique. Women artists have always been trapped in the vise of parents and children and the mundane requirements of house and garden. I hope she has read Germaine Greer's *The Obstacle Race*, a semi-historical account of women painters. What Greer lacks in scholarship, she more than compensates with a sense of humour that turns on the oppressors of women who would be artists: time, biology, men, other women, all the miscellaneous cultural circumstances of our civilization. It is true, there have been very few great women painters or composers, and those who survive to achieve greatness must rage.

Brown is, I suspect, too polite to rage. Her book, well drawn and anecdotal, recalls to me the letters of my own maiden aunt, whose generally optimistic Christian view of the world only occasionally slips into crankiness, mostly directed at life's little irritations rather than the great deep sources of anger. "My kitchen was not a shrine. It was a cell." Amen to that.

The terrible sense of being wasted is a legitimate source of anger and the spark of creativity which Freud identified as the offspring of neurosis. Brown overcame the assault of her time and energy through a strong belief in herself and vicarious experience of the other world through friendships with other artists whom she had met during the years of freedom before her mother's last illness.

She persevered and survived to see the optimistic colours of her changing prairie give pleasure to others. The pictures and the book are a celebration of that world and an indictment of the unnatural one we have struggled to replace it with.

Ken Leishman, the flying bandit, made anger his vocation and became a spectacular folk hero of the prairies during the Sixties and Seventies. He turned a dazzling intelligence to crime and changed an ordinary life, marked by childhood deprivation, into a metaphor for the changing values of the Sixties, when authority was being challenged everywhere, largely as a result of the Vietnam war.

Robertson is obviously as charmed with this stylish rogue as was the public who followed his adventures in the newspapers until the time of his mysterious death in a flying accident in late 1979. Her style is reportorial and somewhat facile. No doubt her hero would have enjoyed reading this adventure-filled and awestruck story of his life. It is a good, fast read, but what of the agony of this lonely man and the wife he took from prairie farmhouse to stardom in the ephemeral world of newspaper heroes? This pain is only sketched in the brief biography replete

with two- and three-word sentences, the real life that was the substance of a glamorous and futile pose.

Final Decree, a novel written by George Jonas, is the story of an immigrant who is a stranger in his own house. Kazmer Harcsa is a Transylvanian, exiled from birth in a country which never completely belonged to its own people, continually transformed as it was by more aggressive Europeans.

Bound to Hungary only by poverty and memories of youth as an outsider and bridegroom to a corpse spit out of the latest invaders' shiny new combine on the eve of her wedding, Kazmer takes his isolation to North America, where he works hard to establish a dynasty in the body of Petrona, a Polish Hungarian-American, who awakens on her marriage bed to a warped understanding of freedom gleaned from glossy magazines and colour television.

Petrona takes the children, the TV, a lamp and six hundred dollars and files for divorce, leaving Kazmer in a terrible personal and cultural void. He is angry and inarticulate in a strange world of jargon and amorphous morality. What he does with his rage is predictable. For a man abruptly weaned on war and revolution and the disgusting insult of the thresher that ate his Hungarian bride, the only means of expression is violence.

Kazmer is a gentle man, neutered and without dignity, like a castrated pig. "Yet even if the pain lasted only for a minute, a piglet would still be neutered for all time. A knife was a knife whether it severed bits of flesh or feelings."

His revenge is an act of high drama. It finally wins him respect and a sense of peace with the machine. There is only God left to contend with, and the avenging ghost of his conscience.

As the novel quickly progresses, Jonas skilfully leads us from the facile ironic view of Kazmer, the cuckold, to the very bowels of his pain. Then the book becomes not only Kazmer's but also Petrona's, because she, too, is a victim in the steel-sided dialectic of change. They are both foreigners to themselves and to each other, struggling to maintain some sense of who they are in a throwaway world. Jonas is telling us we can't afford to be strangers. The adversary system will not work on this tiny frightening planet, where some men and women still have the energy to transform powerlessness into action and damn the consequences.

LINDA ROGERS

PUBLISHING CRITICS

FRANK DAVEY, *Louis Dudek and Raymond Souster*. Douglas & McIntyre.

W. K. THOMAS, *The Fizz Inside: Critical Essays of a Lighter Kind*. Univ. of Waterloo Press.

FRANK DAVEY'S *Louis Dudek and Raymond Souster* is a welcome addition to the Douglas & McIntyre series "Studies in Canadian Literature," under the general editorship of Gary Geddes. Although the inclusion of two such different poets within the covers of a single volume may at first seem suspect, Davey offers ample justification in his first chapter, where he discusses the overlapping careers of the two men as publishers. Indeed the volume opens most fittingly with a description of Dudek and Souster's first meeting in 1943 at the apartment of John Sutherland. Sutherland, who was then editing *First Statement*, taught both men a great deal about the publishing of little magazines. Davey's presentation of the tangled histories of *Direction*, *Contact*, *CIV/N*, *Combustion* and *Delta* is extremely informative and valuable, although perhaps a little more credit might have been given to Wynne Francis, pioneer in the field. More than a mere history of publishing,

this first chapter establishes the importance of private publishing to Canadian poetry in the post-war period, and points up the centrality of Contact Press, begun by Souster, Dudek, and Layton.

Davey's intention, however, is not merely to catalogue short-lived magazines. He sees in Souster's and Dudek's experiments with private publishing a profound estrangement from Canadian society and its commercial presses. Davey's thesis is that the same impulse that drove Souster and Dudek to private publishing drove them also to strive for a kind of poetry that would avoid all appearance of slickness, all sense of a literary artifact that was packaged for the North American consumer society. Both writers wanted an anti-aesthetic expression that would allow them to describe their time, not sell it, to create literature not merchandise. Dudek, especially, appears as a strong and striking spokesman for the position that the poet must take into his own hands the power of the press in order to write poetry that could exist in its own right without becoming a commodity that society could "accept" without ever feeling the need to make the changes that the poetry advocated. Needless to say, there are important differences between the two poets, Dudek being strongly influenced by Pound, and Souster by Williams. While Davey is relatively discreet, the tensions between Dudek and Souster become evident, as Davey describes how each fought to use his publishing ventures as a means to promote his own conception of literature.

What is perhaps most intriguing about Davey's approach is the way in which he shows convincingly that Dudek and Souster developed their styles as a response to a perceived social disease. Confronted with the formalist tendencies of early modernism to create perfectly polished, highly *recherché objets d'art*, and refusing to follow the Layton road to become entrepreneurs of their own personality cult, Dudek and Souster developed a "functional" or "minimal" style of writing that allowed the poem to appear as part of the world of continuous ongoing experience, taking it out of the early Yeatsian world of art as idealized vision. Davey develops this central insight throughout the rest of his book, treating the poetry of Dudek and Souster separately, and showing how each developed in terms of his own preoccupations.

While Davey's explications are basically sound, the fact that he begins with Dudek-as-critic, stressing Dudek's belief that the modern poet must first be a culture critic, runs the risk of mistaking the criticism for the actual poetry. From Davey's account one might be pardoned for thinking that most of Dudek's early verse is concerned with factories and the working classes. Yet in turning to these poems one finds a fine lyric talent, as well as a likeable person, attempting in small private ways to create beauty and order in a world of chaos. Indeed, in his split between the poet of private experience and the poet of social criticism, one is reminded of Lampman's dilemma, the difference being that Dudek aspires to live a much more fully developed romantic hedonism than Lampman, and can see all too clearly the relation between restrictive social practices and the smallness of man's private expectations.

Davey is at his best in his analysis of Dudek's two long meditative poems *Europe* and *En México*, where he quite rightly points out that Dudek is writing a kind of "functional" poetry in order to be true to his own unsuccessful search for a better social order. As Davey emphasizes, Dudek deliberately shuns the spectacular in the belief that an attitude of faithfulness to the banality of experience will eventually reveal insight, spots of time in which the dross is erased to reveal the truth open only to those who

can still believe that the ordinary contains the miraculous. To my mind, however, it is in the third of Dudek's long poems, *Atlantis*, where he is at the height of his powers in creating a sense of plenitude within a world of apparent social desolation. I could have wished that Davey had spent more time with this quite remarkable work, in which Dudek mixes experiences and styles to create a most unusual canvas of intersecting private and public planes.

In the case of Souster, Davey's approach appears not quite so radical and exciting, perhaps because more has been written about Souster's poetry (some of the best criticism is by Dudek himself). Still, Davey's notion that Souster's poetry contains an opposition between inside/outside, and that Souster has deliberately refused to give his poetry a machined aesthetic appearance, offers interesting handles on a poet who has always seemed to refuse such helps. Like Dudek's, much of Souster's poetry is about seemingly uninspired moments, but as Davey observes, this was the only course open to Souster when he saw that inspiration itself had become a marketable quantity. Unlike Dudek's poems, where one can feel the pressure to break through into a new kind of experience, Souster usually identifies himself with victims, although there are a number of important Souster poems where the spell of victimization is broken in moments of whimsy. Davey also comments on Souster's two novels, neither of which appears to be very good, but both offering intriguing insights into Souster's war experiences.

In his final chapter, Davey gives a summary of the modernist movement as it has developed in Canada, and offers the tentative conclusion that whereas the first wave of modernism in the 1920's and 1930's was formalist in conception and linked to the despair of the early Eliot, both Dudek and Souster evolved a new style of modernism which has important links to post-modernist involvement with the world of process, and perhaps even to exuberance.

A different kind of critical book is that by W. K. Thomas, an established scholar and writer at the University of Waterloo, who has collected a number of his essays under the title *The Fizz Inside: Critical Essays of a Lighter Kind.* The idea for a book of light essays directed to the general reader is certainly welcome at the present time, to fill the gap between scholarly publication and slick literary journalism. Appropriately enough for a book of light essays, Thomas begins with a section entitled "Satirists at Play," in which he offers essays on Alexander Pope, Jonathan Swift and Joseph Heller. Indeed, the first selection is a satire in its own right — aimed at the many critics who have rather heavy-handedly interpreted Pope's two-line poem: "I am his Highness' Dog at Kew; / Pray tell me Sir, whose Dog are you?" In other sections of the volume, Thomas discusses a wide range of writers such as Sidney, Shakespeare, Milton, and Goldsmith, and finishes with a section on "Early Canadiana," in which he comments on Canadian nineteenth-century political oratory as well as George Cocking's heroic tragedy *The Conquest of Canada.*

While recognizing that individual essays have much to recommend them and that Thomas's material shows extensive research, I confess to being a little disappointed in the volume. I had originally reserved it for bedside reading, thinking it would offer interesting human insights into some of my favourite authors. All too quickly, it became obvious that the articles were standard academic fare. The essay on Cocking, for example, originally appeared in *Canadian Drama*, and many of the others appeared in the *Dalhousie*

Review. They would have been better served left in their original, decent homes, awaiting the occasional academic caller.

RONALD HATCH

CLOSE ENCOUNTERS

JOHN ROBERT COLOMBO, ed., *Friendly Aliens: Thirteen Stories of the Fantastic Set in Canada by Foreign Authors*. Hounslow, $8.95.

THIS IS THE SECOND COLLECTION of science fiction and fantasy by the most tireless and ingenuous collector of literary curiosities in Canada. The catchy but somewhat misleading title refers to the alien origins of the authors, all of whom are British or American; the "friendly" qualification, however it may be applied, does not refer to the authors' use of Canadian landscapes, which are consistently associated with remoteness, barrenness, disorientation, monstrosities, and terror. Not unexpectedly, the favourite Canadian setting for foreign writers of this kind of fiction is the Arctic. As Colombo rightly observes, the frozen wastes, like other infrequently experienced regions of the earth, provide an irresistible setting for the mysterious and monstrous, as Mary Shelley, for example, demonstrated when she set Frankenstein's monster adrift on an Arctic ice floe. But there are other images of Canada here as well: Algernon Blackwood makes effective use of the Laurentian resort region in "A Haunted Island"; the Manitoba prairie is the scene of August Derleth's "The Thing that Walked on the Wind"; and Vincent Starrett's "The Tattooed Man" is set in a village near Toronto.

All the stories in the collection have considerable historical interest, for the glimpses they provide of the occasional inspiration Canada has provoked in the imagination of foreign artists, and for the inferences they make possible about popular foreign notions about Canada. Not all the selections are deathless literary works: John Russell Fearn's "Arctic God" is pure pulp fiction, more unintentionally funny than frightening — although readers of a certain generation raised on the Toronto *Star Weekly* can blow their minds on the revelation that Fearn is none other than the author of the "Golden Amazon" stories of the 1940's. Some of the pieces, however, are of considerable literary distinction: the Blackwood tale, written in 1899, is one of the best studies in suspense and ambiguity by this neglected author; H. P. Lovecraft's "Polaris" (1918) is a brief, suggestive exploration of dream and reality reminiscent of Poe.

The numerous formal and thematic variations on the science/fantasy genres in this collection compensate for the restrictive tendency of foreign authors to see Canada mainly as wilderness. Jack London's story of prehistoric monsters in the modern Arctic, "A Relic of the Pliocene" (1901), is a tall tale almost worthy of Mark Twain; M. P. Shiel's "The Place of Pain" (1914) is a study of insanity; James Tiptree's "Forever to a Hudson's Bay Blanket" (1972) is good futuristic science fiction, and C. Q. Yarbro's "Swan Song" (1978) effectively opposes the imaginative idealism of ethnic folklore to modern scientific materialism. It is not easy to discern any substantial distinctions between the American and British fantasy images of Canada, especially since only three of the writers represented are British. The editor's introduction might have indulged in a little speculation in that direction, and perhaps said something more about other tales which were turned up in his research. But like a good master of ceremonies, Colombo says his brief piece and, except for providing further biographical and bibliographical detail in the well prepared headnotes to each

story, lets the writers speak for themselves. Some general speculation is provided in the concluding item, an article on the possible development of a Canadian fantasy tradition, written by an American editor during World War II when American pulp magazines were banned from Canada and home-made productions briefly flourished.

But *Friendly Aliens* obviously aims somewhere short of heavy scholarship, seeking a balance between entertainment and literary history. In its modest aims it succeeds well, and should attract readers interested in American/Canadian literary interrelationships as well as SF/fantasy fans. The editor was evidently the victim of evil vibrations from outer space, or the curse of the wendigo, while he was correcting proof: there is an inexcusable number of misprints in the book.

JAMES DOYLE

DISTORTIONS

ANDRE GAULIN, *Entre la neige et le feu.* Les Presses de l'Université Laval, $13.95.

JEAN-CLAUDE MARSAN, *Montreal in Evolution.* McGill-Queen's Univ. Press, $27.50.

THE SUBJECT OF EACH of these books is suggested in its subtitle. *Entre la neige et le feu* deals with "Pierre Baillargeon, écrivain montréalais"; *La Neige et le feu,* probably his best known work, provides, in fact, Gaulin's title. *Montreal in Evolution* is an "Historical Analysis of the Development of Montreal's Architecture and Urban Environment." Despite the emphasis, however, that both authors give to what has certainly been Canada's most important city, neither work illuminates clearly and concisely either its people or its places. Indeed, the respective subtitle of the two studies might well have been "Un Montréalais manqué," and "Montréal méconnu." Despite, furthermore, the numerous sources each writer has consulted, and the often interesting insights each has on his subject, both books invite questions about the adequacy of the choice and handling of their material.

Entre la neige et le feu is Number 18 in the series "Vie des Lettres québécoises." Like other works in this series, it deals with an aspect of French-Canadian literature, and it is based on a thesis. Pierre Baillargeon (1916-1967) was a Montrealer who published poetry and fiction, and contributed essays and other items to the Canadian periodical press in the 1940's, 50's, and 60's. Gaulin's doctoral dissertation, accepted by the Université de Sherbrooke in 1975, was "Pierre Baillargeon, l'homme et l'oeuvre." Such characteristics of *Entre la neige et le feu,* in fact, as its substantial checklist of works by and about Baillargeon, its numerous footnotes, and its rather arbitrary division into three parts — "L'homme," "Le romancier," and "L'essayiste" — all suggest its origin as the formal exercise which most theses necessarily become. Gaulin's decision to study Baillargeon because he was "un auteur majeur et inconnu du Québec" also smacks a little of a Ph.D. student in search of a subject, for the claim that Baillargeon was unknown is at least partly contradicted by the number of reviews of each of his works Gaulin himself lists. The claim that Baillargeon was a major writer is, of course, both less verifiable and more debatable.

Gaulin's thesis is that Baillargeon's most important works were *Les Médisances de Claude Perrin* (1945), *Commerce* (1947), and *La Neige et le feu* (1948) published in Montreal before their author left Canada to live for almost a decade in France. Usually called novels, Gaulin discusses their genre at some length, and points out the connections between their style and that of *Le Scandale est nécessaire* (1962), the collection of essays and epigrams that Baillargeon

published following his return home in 1959. Gaulin also argues that these semi-autobiographical works reveal most clearly Baillargeon's sense of balancing "entre le silence et le cri, entre l'être et le néant, entre une mère patrie envoûtante et — encore maintenant — le non-lieu historique."

These final phrases of *Entre la neige et le feu* provide a key to what I think is the essential distortion of Gaulin's portrait of this "écrivain montréalais": his attempt to turn Baillargeon into a political writer, even an "indépendantiste, converti . . . à la cause du nouveau nationalisme québécois." The idea, of course, "scandalizes" in the best Baillargeon tradition of the writer "shocking" the reader into thought. Since Gaulin has read the unpublished diaries which Baillargeon kept until his death, the interpretation may also contain an element of truth. Baillargeon's published works, however, offer contradictory evidence. Chiron, a friend of Philippe Boureil, the chief character in *La Neige et le feu*, complains that "nos rares entretiens roulent sur la politique et les affaires. . . . A vrai dire, les Canadiens n'ont pas de vie intérieure." And Boureil himself seems most concerned with his private life. After the death of his wife's child and her departure with her lover — the events which end the work — Baillargeon's alter-ego mourned "sans fin." In *Le Scandale est nécessaire*, moreover, Baillargeon makes very ambivalent statements about Quebec politics, including "ces séparatistes" whom he compares to Don Quixote.

But even if Baillargeon wrote long passages about politics in his diary, his worth as a writer must ultimately be judged on his published work or that written with a view to publication. And that work, it seems to me, deserves finally to be judged by literary — not political — criteria. I should have preferred at any rate to have read more about Baillargeon's careful crafting of words and phrases into the brilliantly polished and witty images and aphorisms on the ironies and ambiguities of life characteristic of much of his work.

If Gaulin ultimately misses his man, Marsan finally fails to provide a satisfactory appreciation of his place. Actually his study *Montreal in Evolution* is an English translation of a book first published in French in 1974, and reprinted "with only minor corrections and changes" in 1976. To this edition, dedicated "To all Montrealers at heart and in spirit," Marsan has added a "Preface" and an "Epilogue." The former points out that the French version "was well received by the critics and the general public." The latter focuses on "the major projects implemented since 1974," including the Olympic installations, and "offers a new interpretation" arising from the "recent evolution of the metropolis." The main part of the book is divided into four parts: "Where the Old World and the New World Meet," "The Frontier Town, 1642-1840," "Victorian Montreal — World War I," and "Montreal in the Twentieth Century."

Being a sometime-Montrealer and a member, at least when it comes to "architecture and urban environment," of the "general public," I too expected to receive the book well. And in some ways I did, for *Montreal in Evolution* provides interesting and little known details about such aspects of the city as its streets, buildings, and transport systems from its beginnings to the present. It is fun, for example, to follow the Bank of Montreal building on Place D'Armes through its various evolutions. In the end, however, I neither saw Montreal nor felt its "essence," as at one point Marsan promised I should.

I think there are several reasons for this failure. Marsan organizes his material in a way which creates repetition. The

reader, for example, is constantly being told that "we shall return" to something or other "later." There are too many details about too many buildings and too many types of buildings. Would the book have suffered, for instance, if the evolution of the architecture of only a few representative churches were traced? The book contains illustrations, but Marsan's prose does not make the reader see the details of the architecture he is discussing. The details themselves do not accumulate in a way which builds either a total picture of an evolving environment or a convincing thesis about the reasons for the nature of its evolution. Those theses which are suggested are often vague. Marsan, for example, talks about "nineteenth-century romanticism" and "eighteenth-century rationalism" without offering a convincing and usable definition of either. The result is that such terms sound pretentious, mean little, and allow the author to substitute clichés for sharp analysis.

I supose what strikes me most about this study is its lack of humanity. Reading it, I had the curious feeling that apart from such constructs as "capitalists" and the "poor," few individuals used Montreal's buildings, walked its streets, and lived in its environment. To be fair, of course, Marsan is an architect, an urban designer, and a regional planner, not a humanist in the more conventional sense of the word. To be just, too, he does mention Stephen Leacock and cite Gabrielle Roy's *Bonheur d'occasion*, and he does reprint early sketches of Montreal, including William Henry Bartlett's "Interior of Notre-Dame Church." But I think that what is missing from Marsan's admittedly impressive list of sources are more references to such items as novels, paintings, and even essays about Montreal that describe — or imagine — how individual Montrealers have perceived their urban surroundings.

Entre la neige et le feu and *Montreal in Evolution*, then, are both stimulating books. Neither, however, fully succeeds in illuminating its subject, and both raise problems about the material chosen by their respective authors. Should, for example, late writings in a diary be used to help interpret early novels? Should an architect interested in the "mentality" which produced a style of building look to other forms of contemporary art for comparisons and contrasts? However we choose to answer these questions, they need to be asked, for the tendencies to politicize literature and to ignore other relevant cultural material are strong in current Canadian criticism.

MARY JANE EDWARDS

*** TWAYNE WORLD AUTHORS SERIES. Patricia Morley's *Margaret Laurence* ($13.95) takes the Twayne-format survey and transforms it into a thoughtful account of the connections between Laurence's African and Canadian worlds, based largely on O. Mannoni's theories of colonial encounter. Politics (coupled with comedy) emerges as Morley's chief theme, therefore, and the work includes summaries of Métis history and accounts of the East and West African elements in Laurence's stories and translations. Occasional errors mar the work (Jessie Weston at one point turns into Jessie Watson), and a fuller bibliography would have been more useful than the one provided. Two other Canadian books have also recently appeared in the Twayne series, and they will attract aficionados of Brian Moore and of theatre history. Hallvard Dahlie's *Brian Moore* ($14.95) offers a solid portrayal of Moore's life, travels, fictional stances, and the connections among them, but sometimes tries too effortfully to defend Moore's failures and his political journalism. Geraldine Anthony's *Gwen Pharis Ringwood* ($14.95) is richest as a descriptive account of theatre history; on Ringwood's novels and stories, she, too, is effortful, struggling to find a way to discuss fiction more full of heart than craft. But by drawing documentary attention to Ringwood's remarkable career, Anthony does Canadian literary history great service.

W.N.

opinions and notes

THE FUNCTION OF POETRY IN BRIAN MOORE'S "THE EMPEROR OF ICE CREAM"

THE EMPEROR OF ICE-CREAM (1966) was Moore's fifth novel. His first two works, published in the 1950's, had treated failure and frustration in Belfast (*Judith Hearne*, *The Feast of Lupercal*). These were followed by a study of the partial, conditioned, ironic success won by an Irish immigrant in Montreal (*The Luck of Ginger Coffey*); and, in 1963, by *An Answer from Limbo*, the first of Moore's novels to look at the nature of the artist's own craft, a theme repeated in *Fergus* (1970) and *The Great Victorian Collection* (1975). *The Emperor* returns to the Ulster setting of the first novels, but at an earlier period — the Belfast of the late Thirties and early Forties.

It has been acclaimed as "one of the finest and most moving books about adolescence of our time," and it's certainly true that the passage of the hero, Gavin Burke, from dependent, stumbling adolescence into a mature independence is narrated with great insight and conviction.[1] Moore himself described the novel as a *Bildungsroman* and, as a novel of individual development, *The Emperor* is assured and achieved.[2] But its treatment of youth is only a part of the novel's interest, for Moore is also concerned with the way in which poetry, the poetry of the Twenties and Thirties, is able both to foretell Gavin's development, and, more interestingly, to offer an imaginative form through which private experience will be comprehensible.

Of all Moore's novels *The Emperor* is the most "literary," in that it is so deeply saturated with allusions to other works, particularly to the poetry of the early twentieth century. The novel's very title, beckoning towards Wallace Stevens, boldly announces its intention to exploit this area, and the prefatory acknowledgments record Moore's indebtedness to Stevens himself, to Yeats, MacNeice, and to Auden for permission to quote from their works. In part the frequency of poetic allusion in *The Emperor* is a function of the character of Gavin Burke, an autodidact who, against the grain of his philistine family and utilitarian education, enjoys reading literature. Moore has recorded how he was first introduced to the great modern poets at Gavin's age, seventeen, and, as *The Emperor* is undoubtedly partly autobiographical, it is scarcely surprising to find its hero so often returning to the poetry he has been reading.[3] Nevertheless there are still more important reasons why *The Emperor* is so imbued with poetic references.

In addition to functioning as a means of characterizing Gavin's alienation from family and school, several of the quoted poems also operate as ways of structuring the narrative. Thus poems by Auden, MacNeice, and Yeats are employed "metonymically," to suggest certain literal parallels Gavin perceives between his own life and the content of the poems. Yeats' "Easter 1916," a poem inspired by a particular episode in the Irish Revolution, has an obvious relevance to Gavin's intuition that Ulster in the early 1940's was also in the process of change. Similarly the quoted poems of Auden and MacNeice are close to Gavin's apprehension of himself and his existence in the same decade. Furthermore the novelist uses another poem, Stevens' "The Emperor of

Ice-Cream" (1923), to imply certain "metaphorical," less direct or mechanical, parallels.[4] On the surface the Stevens poem doesn't possess an obvious applicability, for nothing in it seems to correspond to Gavin's circumstances or to the history of Belfast between 1939 and 1941. It appears to be a frugal meditation on the rhythms of marriage and death, beyond anything as specific as personal or national history. "Easter 1916" and the work of Auden and MacNeice could provide an "instant" gloss for the adolescent Ulster non-conformist in the 1930's, whereas the difficult, allusive, ahistorical poem by Stevens offers a rather different kind of illumination.

The poetry of the Thirties had equipped Gavin with an apocalyptic vision, a confidence that the world in which he was growing up was doomed to destruction. Indeed he left school and joined the A.R.P. as a wager that the poets were right, and that there would be no future. If the world was going to be blown up, he reasoned, why should he waste time obtaining those qualifications whose sole purpose was to secure his future for him, as a solicitor?

> The poets knew the jig was up; they knew the rich and famous would crumble with the rest. . . . It was all prophetically clear. . . . It would not matter in that ruined world if Gavin Burke had failed his Schools Leaving Certificate. The records would be buried in rubble. War was freedom, freedom from futures.[5]

MacNeice, Auden — even Yeats earlier with his "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold" — had revealed to Gavin the shortsightedness of his father's devotion to examinations and university work as an assurance for the future. Moore, then, shows how much of their attraction for a young man growing up in the Thirties was that the poets appeared to be equipped with a clarity of vision denied those who, like Gavin's father and brother, ignored or derided their work. The poets could cut away the obfuscating pieties of their generation to disclose the approach of the millenium.

> It is now or never, the hour of the knife,
> The break with the past, the major
> operation.

Gavin doesn't quote these lines, the conclusion of Day Lewis' "The Magnetic Mountain" (1933), yet he certainly is drawn to the poets' surgical powers of incision and revelation. Gavin worships the poet as seer, and to a great extent *The Emperor* endorses such confidence: life in Belfast assuredly was changed by the Blitz, Mr. Burke's house was damaged by a bomb, and the family fled to safety in neutral Dublin.

Gavin is indeed convinced that change is imminent and an earlier poem, "Easter 1916," has exerted an enormous influence on the young man. Gavin's every use of the verb "change" indicates how deeply he has absorbed the images of that poem. On the day when his academic failure is announced Gavin meditates on how his father, who until then had made all his son's decisions, "was unaware that, this morning, all had changed." Yeats' poem stands for Gavin as a model even of private domestic changes, the altering relationship between a father and a son. Returning briefly to his house, which has now been rocked by bomb-blasts and vacated by the family, Gavin looks into a mirror in the deserted sitting room. (This episode in the final chapter repeats in a different key a moment in the first chapter when, long before the Blitz, he'd looked into the same mirror.) This mirror, as so often in Moore's novels, offers not the distorting falsities of the fairytale, but the harsh truths of life as it now is:

> He went toward the fireplace, holding a candle aloft and, in the round looking glass, saw himself, dirty and strange, his steel helmet askew. In that world, encircled by the looking glass, he had acted and reacted,

> had left his mark and had, in turn, been marked. . . . Over his mother's writing desk, the fierce stag still peered from a dark forest glade. But the picture which had hung beside it, a framed Raphael print, had fallen behind his father's bookcase. The looking glass room, unchanged since his childhood, had changed at last.

The episode that immediately follows this meditation and that ends the novel is the fullest ratification of Gavin's reading of "Easter 1916." In this scene the father returns from Dublin in search of his son, who has elected to stay behind in Belfast. Now, though, the roles are reversed, with the father confessing that he had misjudged both his son and the course of history, and the son providing mature paternal absolution:

> His father seemed aware of this change. He leaned his untidy, gray head on Gavin's shoulder, nodding, weeping, confirming. "Oh, Gavin," his father said. "I've been a fool. Such a fool."
>
> The new voice counseled silence. He took his father's hand.

This final scene thus confirms that major changes have really taken place as a result of the air-raid; and that Gavin was correct in divining the prophetic quality of Yeats' poem.

Modern poetry, then, provides Gavin with the power both to anticipate historical changes and to understand and describe such changes when they do come to pass. His brother, Owen, believes that Belfast is a "benighted outpost," safe from the Luftwaffe bombers, and wagers on the continuation of pre-war security. His anti-British father stakes a pound that Hitler will win the war by the summer of 1940. At first they appear to be right, for planes fly over and beyond Belfast, "turning in formation as they went out to sea, toward England, toward Europe, far away to that faraway war. German or English, they ignored Belfast." For many months Gavin, discouraged by the peaceful stolidity of Belfast and by the public ridicule the A.R.P. attracted, is fearful that he has made the wrong choice, misled by the poets' visions of the imminent apocalypse. At one point indeed he is convinced that Yeats had been wrong to claim that Ireland was capable of "change." Seated in a room in the Catholic hospital where his girlfriend works, Gavin's attention is caught by a photograph of the medical staff for 1930:

> He looked at this photograph and felt uneasy. Nothing had changed in this room since 1930. Nothing would change. Out there, in the world, governments might be overthrown, capitals occupied, cities destroyed, maps redrawn, but here, in Ireland, it made no difference. In convent parlors, all was still. . . . Nothing would change. . . . Yeats was wrong in '16 to think that he and his countrymen,
>
> Now and in time to be,
> Wherever green is worn,
> Are changed, changed utterly:
> A terrible beauty is born.
>
> This room denied that boast. Even Hitler's victory would not alter this room. Armaggedon would bypass Ireland; all would remain still in this land of his fore-fathers. Ireland free was Ireland dead. The terrible beauty was born aborted.

Gavin's relapse here into pessimism is only temporary. Belfast is soon involved in the war, the air-raids proof that the facile optimism of his family had been mistaken.

At last, in the Spring of 1941, the German planes do turn towards Belfast and as their first bombs drop on the city,

> within Gavin, there started an extraordinary elation, a tumult of joy. He felt like dancing a Cherokee war dance on the edge of the parapet. The world and the war had come to him at last. Tonight, in the Reichschancellery of Berlin, generals stood over illuminated maps, plotting Belfast's destruction. Hitler himself smiled in glee, watching the graphs of the planes' progress. Tonight, history had conferred the drama of war on this dull, dead town in which he had been born.

Watching the bombardment of Belfast from the roof of the hospital, in which

he had earlier feared that Ireland might be forever immobile, Gavin and his friend chant the death of the old bankrupt world, elated that finally they have been included in that history prophesied by the poets. Tonight Belfast was part of the "world"; "Tonight, all was changed."

However, although the climax of *The Emperor*, the air-raid, confirms the proleptic force of Gavin's readings, in another respect the novel demonstrates how, as in *Northanger Abbey* and *Madame Bovary*, an adolescent reading of literature is capable of generating quite fallacious expectations. Poetry, allied to theatre and the movies, had implanted in Gavin stock notions of his heroic response to the anticipated disaster. Thus, many months before the raid, he looked out onto the backs of neighbouring houses and envisioned himself, "wearing his steel helmet, dashing into the house across the way to carry the typist downstairs, she half-naked and hysterical in her relief." A few moments later, in his parents' sitting room, he "tried to imagine himself a Siegfried Sassoon commando, crawling through no man's land with a dirk in his teeth." Gavin had these two daydreams when he first joined the A.R.P., some eighteen months before the air-raid, but even later, during the bombardment itself, Gavin was still decoding the world in terms of the literature and movies he knew: "the hall of the extern reminded Gavin of field hospitals he had seen in films of the First World War." As Michael Roberts remarked in his Introduction to *New Country* (1933), the Thirties generation "grew up under the shadow of war."

Reality is quite other. During the bombing of Belfast Gavin is given the opportunity to behave heroically, but his demonstrated bravery isn't of the kind commemorated in film or literature. There are no hysterical typists or Sassoon commandoes in the yard of the morgue where Gavin volunteers to work, coffining blasted and dismembered corpses:

> He went back into the yard . . . he thought of old films he had seen: perhaps, at this very moment, smiling German pilots were eating a hearty meal of sausage and beer in their mess hall, while, outside on the tarmac, German mechanics fueled the big bombers for their long run up the Continent and across the Irish Sea. He saw the German pilots exchanging gallant toasts across the mess hall table in a scene from *The Dawn Patrol*. But this was no film. There were no ugly corpses in films.

In the morgue Gavin is initiated into adulthood, this development being inseparable from a realization that literature and film had in fact previously offered him cameos of heroism that were caricatures of the test he had to face in actuality. None of the received images of the heroic correspond to the messy, whiskey-dulled "black comedy" of the morgue scene, but, nevertheless, Gavin's heroism as he remains at his post, outstaying men older and more familiar with death, is real and utterly persuasive. Still, for all their prophetic power, nothing in MacNeice, Auden, or Yeats had prepared him for *this* kind of heroism.

The most important poem in Moore's novel is, of course, the title-poem, Wallace Stevens' "The Emperor of Ice-Cream." This was a poem Gavin had long admired, for, though he didn't understand the meaning of the climactic lines —

> Let be be finale of seem.
> The only emperor is the emperor of
> ice-cream.

— they "seemed to sum things up." Stevens' "The Emperor" differs from the other poems cited in the novel because it contains no clear announcement of the future in comprehensible narrative form. The American poem, on the contrary, is spare and elliptical, communicating instead through the accumulation of memorable images, rather than on a narrative

axis. In a letter Stevens provided a brief commentary on the poem:

> the true sense of let be be the finale of seem is let being become the conclusion or denouement of appearing to be: in short, icecream is an absolute good. The poem is obviously not about icecream, but about being as distinguished from seeming to be.[6]

This poem doesn't function as the figure in Gavin's carpet, suddenly revealing to him the whole pattern of his life in a flash of insight. Indeed, he's unable to offer a neat paraphrase of it at the end of the novel. Instead, as he awaits his turn at the anaesthetizing whiskey bottle and gazes at the pile of corpses, "his attention" is "caught by the bare, callused feet of an old woman, sticking out from the bottom of a pile of bodies," and he recalls the last four lines of Stevens' poem:

> If her horny feet protrude, they come
> To show how cold she is, and dumb.
> Let the lamp affix its beam.
> The only emperor is the emperor of
> ice-cream.

In this moment the images from a poem Gavin had failed to understand overlap with what he perceives around him in the morgue. The young man is still too close to the experience to organize and verbalize it, but clearly he believes that the whole of his life to that point, the movement from illusion to reality, is encapsulated in the Stevens' poem.

The latter affects Gavin in a different manner from the other poems that influence him, "Easter 1916" and the verse of MacNeice and Auden. These provide him with metonyms of his own life, extensions and parallels he can elucidate with some facility, whereas "The Emperor" is more like a yeast, lying dormant until activated by a sugar. The various stages in this gradual process, Gavin's reading of the American poem, are clearly delineated in Moore's novel. At first the poem exists for him as a powerful, albeit incomprehensible, mystery; a group of images that, the boy suspects, have a wise synoptic potency. As yet he cannot elucidate the poem's hold, but its magic is undeniable. The second stage, at the conclusion of the novel, is reached when Gavin's experiences at the morgue assume an identity with the images in the poem, confirming the accuracy of his earlier intuition that the poem summed things up. "The Emperor of Ice-Cream" provided Moore with the title for his most explicitly autobiographical novel and with the structural principle on which it was built. Stevens' belief that "being" was the finale, the decisive climax to "seeming to be" or "appearing to be" was given narrative treatment in the novel.

At the beginning of *The Emperor of Ice-Cream* Gavin "seems" and "appears" to have won independence from his father through his decision to leave school early and enlist in the A.R.P. The young man wants to believe he's escaped his father's attitudes towards class, politics, sex, religion, and race, but the early episodes only prove that Gavin is still basically unliberated. The "voices" of his twin Angels, relics of childhood catechisms, still criticize his every move. He is critical of his colleagues at the A.R.P. post, because, echoing his father's snobbery, "they're the sort of men who never wear collars and ties," and ashamed of inviting his parents to watch him acting in Odets' socialist play. His first meeting with a Protestant minister, a couple of Jewish refugees and some young homosexuals fills the naive Catholic boy with shock and confusion:

> Jews, left-wing ministers, pansies, poets, boozers, puppeteers: this was a grown-up world, undreamed of in the St Michan's school philosophy.

Freddy Hargreaves, a worldly philandering "independent Marxist," plays Hamlet to Gavin's innocent Horatio. The latter is pulled between the adult world of sexual and moral freedom and the "normal ordinary life" of his father, elder

brother and his deeply conventional girlfriend. Offered a friend's beautiful wife, Gavin is so intoxicated and shocked that he collapses, limp and inert.

The young man's independence from his upbringing is, then, still illusory. In reality he is becalmed between two "worlds," respectable dependence upon his father and bohemian independence:

> His life, since leaving school, had been a seesaw, going up to the height of the grown-up world . . . then down with a bump to being a child again, slapped by Daddy, lectured about exams, sent to bed in disgrace. Yet both worlds ran on the same old moral lines: although he had left God behind in the dusty past of chapel, confessional, and classroom, the catechism rules prevailed. In both worlds, lack of purpose, lack of faith, was the one deadly sin. In both worlds, the authorities, detecting that sin, arranged one's punishment. All of life's races are fixed and false. You stand at the starting line, knowing that you can run as well as the others, but the authorities, those inimical and unknown arbiters, have decreed that you will not get off your marks. They know, those authorities, that your place is with the misfits, that your future will be void.

Gavin's gloomy meditation here marks the nadir of his fortunes, his deepest sense of being a failure in both worlds, neither grown-up nor child, "seeming" to belong to the adults but really imprisoned in the parental home.

The next chapter opens with the first German raid on Belfast, which is literally a baptism of fire for Gavin. The last three chapters of the novel are, like the second verse of Stevens' poem, dominated by images of death and destruction. The "three glass knobs," missing from Stevens' "dresser of deal" that provides the dead woman's shroud, are transformed in Moore's novel into the terraced houses of Belfast, shattered by bomb and blast. Stevens' single corpse, "how cold . . . and dumb," becomes the hundreds of cadavers in the makeshift morgue. This indeed is the world of "being" and here, amidst horror and carnage, Gavin finally proves his independence and courage. Refusing to kneel for prayers in the hospital, Gavin says to himself that

> You're not afraid now of bombs, or priests of Our Father or your father or anybody. You've changed, Gavin.

He realizes that at last "he had grown up, escaped," and he demonstrated this new liberation by volunteering to work overtime in the morgue, coffining the corpses. The task is deeply unsettling but Gavin does not shrink, and knows at the end that "he had done the first really grownup thing in his life." He has, as Stevens put it, left the world of "appearing" and begun to "be." This new maturity is marked by the realization that he can never build his future with the conventional Sally, who's incapable of "change"; and that his relationship with his father has been decisively altered: "His father was the child now; his father's world was dead."

The events of this novel can, therefore, be seen as fiction's narrative expansion of the images in Stevens' poem, both works mediating the development from appearance to reality. Each validates the other. The poem provides the novel with its title and its narrative spine, while Gavin's original commitment to Stevens' vision is endorsed by the uncanny correspondence between the corpses in the morgue and the dead woman in the poem. "Easter 1916" and the poems of Auden and MacNeice impress Gavin with their power to foretell the *general* course of historical change, though he finds them inaccurate in their presentation of the *individual's* role in this change. (His heroism is enacted in a temporary morgue, not in Spain nor in a political uprising.) The Stevens poem, though superficially private and apolitical, may have a more lasting resonance, precisely because of the generalizing power of its

imprecisions. Stevens' enigmas were truly able to illuminate the personal changes that overtook Gavin and his father — each moving from illusion or self-deception to an acceptance of the reality of a changed present; and to illuminate the larger developments in Belfast, as the hopes of the "phoney war" were succeeded by the reality of the Blitz.

Nevertheless, despite their different functions, all the poems cited in the novel are alike in that they are employed by Moore to demonstrate the value of the artist's imagination as against the calculating faculties of those whom Shelley had called the reasoners and mechanists, Gavin's father and brother. *The Emperor of Ice-Cream* is, in truth, Moore's "Defence of Poetry." When, at the age of seventeen, he was introduced to the work of Yeats and Joyce, his father called the latter a "sewer."[7] *The Emperor* was Moore's validation of the integrity of his adolescent reading and of his chosen vocation. Though quite free of rancour or arrogance, the novel was clearly "a personal and artistic resolution of tensions which Moore [had] been working towards for ten years."[8] Tellingly, *The Emperor* was the first of his novels to which Moore had planned the ending in advance.[9] The conflict between Gavin and his solicitor father, between the rebellious embryonic writer and the successful professional parent — Moore's own father was a doctor — is here resolved. In the novel's concluding sentence Gavin "took his father's hand."

In Moore's earlier novels the power of the imagination had seemed a dubious, potentially dangerous quality. The fantasies of Judith and Devine were aberrant, self-destructive: the "successful" figures in *Judith Hearne* and *The Feast of Lupercal* were those — the University professor and his wife, or Heron — who were unambitious, unimaginative, stolid, reliable. Ginger Coffey, in the third novel, only reached an accommodation with his wife and his new Canadian environment through learning to discipline his prolix Irish imagination. The novelist of *An Answer from Limbo*, Brendan Tierney, was a selfish, destructive force, partly responsible for the death of his mother and his wife's sordid infidelity. *The Emperor*'s portrayal of the writer's imagination as a liberating force, capable of reconciling familial tensions, marked, therefore, an important development in Moore's artistic career. It has generally been recognized, indeed, as a decisive and successful novel.

Nevertheless, certain reservations have been recorded. *The Emperor*, for one reader, "is flawed by Moore's use of the techniques of narrative realism when he no longer has a view of the world which can be expressed by such a convention."[10] The argument here is that there's a disjunction between Moore's new-found commitment to the imagination and his continuing employment of third-person, linear narrative; realism is an inappropriate vehicle for a novelist now convinced of the legitimacy and power of the imagination. In later novels, it is true, reality will increasingly be confined to the inner consciousness of the central figures, the private worlds of Mary Dunne, Fergus, of the hallucinating historian of *The Great Victorian Collection* and the rebellious heroine of *The Doctor's Wife*. These texts may indeed suggest that in *The Emperor* Moore was still restrained by some vestigial unconfidence; that he didn't quite possess the imaginative certitude ascribed to Gavin. This reading of the novel, though, is flawed because it assumes an exact correspondence between Gavin's imagination in 1941 and Moore's method of recording that imagination in 1966. It assumes, to put it crudely, that Moore was in every respect identical with Gavin, was incapable of standing outside his own younger self and criticizing the

boy. Gavin's virginal abhorrence of homosexuality and Thirties socialism is ascribed to a forty-five-year-old novelist whose wartime service had taken him to North Africa, Poland, and Scandinavia, but who can still only "caricature" Protestant bohemianism.[11] The ending of *The Emperor* is criticized because *in fact* the world of Gavin's father did not collapse, and because the novelist appeared ignorant of the continuing bigotry of Ulster. Moore's lengthy exile in North America, it is implied, has prevented him from seeing the extent to which Ulster is still dominated by the implacable bigotry personified by Gavin's father.

Such misreadings arise from an inability to dissociate the creating novelist from the *Bildungsroman*'s experiencing hero. Just as Joyce was cognisant of Stephen's callous arrogance, so too was Moore aware that Gavin's confidence in his own sudden maturity and in the destruction of his father's *ancien régime* was over-weening. Gavin is not intended to be viewed uncritically, for the author's affection is mixed with an ironic, uncensorious understanding of the boy's callowness. Moore's use of Stevens' poem is an ironizing device, enabling his readers to perceive what is invisible to Gavin himself. Even at the end of the novel Gavin cannot fully understand Stevens' puzzling lines, but Moore does grasp them, employing them as a "grid" superimposed upon his young hero's experiences. Moore's employment of "The Emperor" renders any intrusive authorial commentary unnecessary. Moore doesn't have to intervene to point up Gavin's errors when newspaper headlines and television images have so eloquently exposed the boy's misjudgment of his father's capacity for change. The poem frees the novelist to create a world as it appeared to Gavin as he experienced it at a particular moment in history, Moore being confident that the reader will be able to discern for himself Gavin's tendentiousness, his flashes of irrational malice (particularly to his girlfriend), and his adolescent self-consciousness. Controlled by the framework of the title-poem, the novel aspires to the intimacies of the diary, in which it would be maladroit for the older, wiser novelist to intervene with a wagging finger. Simultaneously we are both within Gavin, as he tries, and often fails to understand himself and his world; and within Brian Moore, the watching, quietly critical novelist.

The Emperor of Ice-Cream is, then, a substantial achievement as a form of "historical novel," in its embodiment of how the late 1930's and early 1940's in Belfast appeared to an intelligent, self-educated boy coming to maturity at that period. Introducing an anthology of Thirties poetry, Robin Skelton has remarked upon the rare self-consciousness of that decade. This, he claims,

> makes the study of the poetry of the period interesting, for so many gestures are deliberately "placed" in the period that it is often hard to tell whether a poem is to be condemned for undergraduate and narcissistic posturing, or praised as a truly witty impersonation of the *Zeitgeist* made more subtle by ironic overtones.[12]

Gavin is very much a figure of this period, acutely — to our eyes, comically — aware of himself and his city as actors in history's play. Several times he imagines himself a great actor; the quarrel with his father is experienced by Gavin as if it were being acted out; Royalty's brief farcical descent upon the Belfast hospital is felt and described as a charade; Gavin's feelings on the night of the Blitz that "history had conferred the drama of war" on Belfast is as portentously self-conscious as his optimism that his father's world had collapsed is naive and impetuous. The reader's uncertainty as to how much self-deflating irony is present in these scenes only indicates the scrupulous fidel-

ity with which Moore recorded the history of himself and his city, the ironies that accompanied what Charles Madge in "Instructions" (1933) called "the new world lying in ambush round the corner of time."[13] Moore had turned that corner twenty-five years before, the darkening sectarianism of Ulster not hidden even from the exile's eye, but he is careful not to betray his presence, not to allow his shadow to cross Gavin's stumbling path.

NOTES

1 Philip French, "The Novels of Brian Moore," *London Magazine* (February 1966), p. 89.

2 Hallvard Dahlie, *Brian Moore* (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1969), p. 85.

3 Richard B. Sale, "An Interview in London with Brian Moore," *Studies in the Novel*, 1, no. 1 (Spring 1969), 69.

4 For the metaphorical/metonymic contrast, see David Lodge, *Modes of Modern Writing* (London: Edward Arnold, 1976).

5 Brian Moore, *The Emperor of Ice-Cream* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977).

6 Letter to Henry Church, dated June 1, 1939, in *Letters of Wallace Stevens*, ed. Holly Stevens (London: Faber & Faber, 1967), p. 341.

7 Sale, p. 69.

8 French, p. 90.

9 Sale, p. 73.

10 Jeanne Flood, *Brian Moore* (Lewisburg: Bucknell Univ. Press, 1974), p. 69.

11 J. W. Foster, *Forces and Themes in Ulster Fiction* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1974), p. 125.

12 "Introduction," *Poetry of the Thirties*, ed. Robin Skelton (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964), p. 13.

13 Skelton, pp. 83-84.

ROBERT GREEN

ON THE VERGE

***** HELMUT KALLMANN, GILLES POTVIN, and KENNETH WINTERS, eds., *Encyclopedia of Music in Canada*. Univ. of Toronto Press, $65.00. It is hard to know how to begin to praise this work adequately. Over a thousand pages of close-written commentary on over 3,000 subjects, this book is both a browser's delight and a scholar's handbook: a guide to music in Canada and a set of histories and critiques. Composers, performers, broadcasts, librettists, orchestras, singers, prizes, folk traditions, pop groups, regional enterprises, church music, festivals, performances, musical education, operas, the recording industry, summer camps, archives, relations with music in other nations: all these and more are subjects for extended consideration. For those interested in literature and cultural history there are added bonuses: substantial accounts of (for example) school songbooks, of musical publication, of musical adaptations of Canadian literary texts — all of which are at once fascinating to read in their own right and a stimulus to further enquiry into the many connections among the arts and into the many further connections between the arts and society.

W.N.

**** A. G. MCKAY, ed., *The Written Word/ Prestige de l'écrit*. Royal Society of Canada, $7.00. The proceedings of the 22nd Royal Society of Canada Symposium (March 1980), this collection of talks by 14 distinguished academics on the subject of the printed word is mandatory reading for anyone concerned with the survival of books and reading. D. G. Jones on poetry, James Reaney and Ann Saddlemeyer on theatre, Philippe Sylvain on history, Francess Halpenny and Naim Kattan and George Whalley: these are among the contributors. By turns witty, didactic, reflective, and hortatory, they record their own connections with literature — the values they find in it, the nature of their commitment to knowledge and discovery and the not-always-simple play of style. Repeatedly there sounds a note about technology: its advantages and its threats to communication. Central to this collection is a quietly brilliant essay by Basil Stuart-Stubbs, called "The Library and the Unwritten Word." Cast as an analysis of the role of microfilm and data base communication in scholarly research in science, it sounds a cautionary note — affecting both cost and methodology — about the assumption that these methods can be trans-

planted wholesale into the humanities. At this time, when every journal in Canada is in danger of losing its financial support unless it converts solely to microfiche format, readers who still value scholarly communication in print form should make their views known, to their MP and to the SSHRCC.

W.N.

**** *The Dalhousie Journals,* Volume Two, ed. Marjorie Whitelaw. Oberon Press, $17.95. This is the second volume of Marjorie Whitelaw's edition of the journals of the Earl of Dalhousie, Governor General of the Canadas from 1820 to 1828 and perhaps best known for his inability to get on with Papineau, then Speaker of the Lower Canadian Assembly. History — or at least Canadian history — has tended to look sombrely on Dalhousie's record, though he failed in a role in which it is doubtful whether any other potential Governor General could have been successful. The journals certainly reveal a different Dalhousie from the man history books tend to present. He was conservative by nature, but also sensitive to other personalities and to the country through which he restlessly travelled in response to his wish to make himself familiar with the outposts of that smaller Canada of the 1820's. He had good ideas of efficient administration, and much of the blame for his failure to get on with his Speaker must be placed on Papineau's obstinate resolution not to reach an understanding. When Dalhousie writes on travel in Canada during the years of this journal (1820-24) he is never less than interesting with his sharp and often amused observations, and much he says is still the unused raw material of Canadian history. An attractive and humane personality emerges, and not the least interesting aspect of the journals is the gradual shift in Dalhousie's response to the Canadian land. In November 1820, seeing the last ship of the year leaving Québec for London, he feels "as if the door of St. Lawrence is now shutting against the European world," and in August 1821, when he has pushed as far as the shores of Lake Superior, he remarks: "I turn my face homeward, conceiving that all I leave behind is a world uncivilized, a forest inhabited by wild beasts and by human beings nearly as wild & as ungovernable. . . ." Yet the Canadian landscape was imposing itself rapidly on his mind, and only a few days later, on the Ottawa River, he remembered that it was the opening day of the grouse season in Scotland, and realized that when he looked around him at nature "bold & wild, & beautiful beyond language to describe," "I would not exchange my day's pleasure for theirs."

G.W.

**** CLAUDE DE LORIMIER, *At War with the Americans,* trans. and ed. by Peter Aichinger. Press Porcépic, $5.95. This is an extraordinary small classic of frontier warfare. Claude de Lorimier, a French-Canadian gentleman who rallied to the British cause during the American War of Independence, left a journal of his adventures that has been available in French since 1873, but this is the first time it has been translated and presented with useful supplementary material about the author and his milieu for the benefit of English-reading Canadians. The English version, by the historian Peter Aichinger, adds to our detailed knowledge of the struggles by which Canada kept free from American domination. Apart from that, it is a first-rate piece of adventure narrative, gripping from beginning to end.

G.W.

*** MARY LEE STEARNS, *Haida Culture in Custody: The Masset Band.* Douglas & McIntyre, $29.95; pa. $14.95. Mary Lee Stearns went as an anthropologist to the Queen Charlotte Islands village of Masset to study the effects on the Haida culture of generations of white dominance. Her approach was unorthodox, since she earned the confidence of the local Indians by working as a school teacher and marrying into the community. For this reason her account is more intimate and humane than one has come to expect of academic anthropologists, and refreshingly undominated by the outdated Boasism that is still so prevalent among British Columbian ethnologists. There are really two main themes: first the changing relationship between the Indians and the federal government that appointed itself their guardian under the Indian Act; second, the division within the Indian community between the official, government-supported band structure, and the unofficial, traditional structure, dominated by the hereditary lineages which in fact direct the ceremonial and economic aspects — the important ones — of life in Masset, that has provided the circumstances in which traditional Indian arts could — with the support of outside interest — be revived. It is the role of outside interest — the interest of the unofficial non-Indian artistic community — that has not been sufficiently studied by Stearns or any other anthropologist. For no

creative community is any longer entirely self-generating. Both of the great modern Haida artists, Bill Reid and Robert Davidson, were largely inspired and sustained by white friends and patrons before their fellow Indians acknowledged their existence, let alone their art, and it is debatable whether there would have been any renaissance of Indian culture on the West Coast if its importance had not been recognized in time by the wider community of artists and art-lovers in Canada and abroad, taking off from the historic People of the Potlatch exhibition at the Vancouver Art Gallery in 1956.

G.W.

*** THOMAS MCMICKING, *Overland from Canada to British Columbia*, ed. by Joanne Leduc. Univ. of British Columbia Press, $19.95. Thomas McMicking was the leader of the largest group of Overlanders who crossed the plains and the mountains from Upper Canada to British Columbia in 1862. His account of the trek was published in the New Westminster *British Columbian* in 1862-63, and is the most important of the several contemporary narratives. Now, for the first time, it is published in volume form. But the journal itself forms less than a third of *Overland from British Columbia,* and the supplementary material is almost more valuable than the journal itself. It consists of Joanne Leduc's excellent introduction, elaborate and very useful explanatory notes describing almost every person and place involved, together with appendices relating to the McMicking family and the actual course which the trek took. The book is copiously illustrated with photographs and, most important, with reproductions of 29 of the paintings and drawings which the fine artist W. G. R. Hind made when he travelled with one of the smaller groups of Overlanders along roughly the same trail as McMicking's company.

G.W.

*** JANE RULE, *Outlander*. Naiad Press, $6.95. This collection of 13 stories and 12 essays explores a variety of attitudes towards lesbian experience. Deftly, the stories tell of jealousy, separation, affection, badinage, gossip, cruelty, and all the other sides of human connection. The brief essays, more powerfully still, confront directly the issues of isolation, bigotry, and fear which women generally and "outlanders" in particular repeatedly experience. Whether reflecting on the publishing history of her own works or critically examining the morality of language and the ethics of cross-generational relationships, Jane Rule reveals a lucid intelligence. What emerges most clearly from this work is her quiet and persistent will — even in the face of deliberate hostilities — to celebrate the power, the complexity, and the plain ordinariness of love itself.

W.N.

*** LOIS DARROCH, *Bright Land: A Warm Look at Arthur Lismer*. Merritt, n.p. Almost all the members of the Group of Seven now have separate books devoted to their lives and work, and it is always a great pleasure when one of them, like Lois Darroch's warm biography of Lismer (the adjective tells a lot), draws attention to strengths in the person and the painting that have not to this point been widely appreciated. In her enthusiasm, Darroch overwrites a little, waxing eloquent about the vigorous new land for which Lismer had fresh eyes. More compelling is her account of Lismer's own enthusiasms — his ability to encourage children to paint spontaneously, for example — and his quick-wittedness. She recounts (but does not explore) the many facets of Lismer's career: his involvement in commercial art, his teaching career in Halifax at the time of the *Mont Blanc* explosion, his trip to South Africa in the 1930's, South Africa's influence on him and his on South African children's art teaching. (These subjects have wider implications than Darroch pursues; perhaps one should greet them as hints of other books that need yet to be written.) Lismer's connections with many people in Canada's cultural community besides the Group — among them Emily Carr, Merrill Denison, Barker Fairley, and Murray Gibbon — testify to the range of his interests but also to the closeness of the community. The excellent plates which accompany the text give evidence, too, of Lismer's growth as a painter — a growth which (countering the received judgment of the Group of Seven movement) continued into yet another new form in the lively line paintings of Lismer's late years.

W.N.

* M. S. WADE, *The Overlanders of '62*. Frontier Books, Surrey, B.C. This is an abridged version of M. S. Wade's 1931 book, *The Overlanders of '62*, which is unfortunate since the original has been out of print for many years. Much more useful would be a complete new printing of the book, with notes to bring it up to date with facts of which Wade, more than 50 years ago, was unaware.

G.W.

** DAVID RICARDO WILLIAMS, *Trapline Outlaw*. Sono Nis, $12.95. Simon Gunanoot has been a legend in British Columbia ever since the day in 1906 when he fled into the wilderness rather than face charges of two murders near Hazelton on the Skeena River. Gunanoot stayed out in the bush for 13 years, and in 1919 emerged to give himself up, face trial, and be acquitted. Many articles and at least one long radio documentary have been written on the case, but *Trapline Outlaw* is the first book about it. David Ricardo Williams used both written material and oral material gathered from people surviving into the 1970's who knew Gunanoot. He does not appear to have been thorough in his research of the written material, since some important secondary items are missing from his Selected Bibliography, but he certainly combed out a good many new facts through interviews with participants and spectators in the Gunanoot affair and through painstaking research in the Provincial Archives of British Columbia, so that he presents the fullest account yet offered of Gunanoot's life, and does so with considerable style. As a lawyer, Williams reassesses the evidence, and *his* verdict seems to differ from the trial jury's and to veer towards the assumption that Gunanoot was in fact a double murderer. But he is guided by second-hand and third-hand hearsay evidence, by oral confessions Gunanoot is *said* to have made two generations ago, and by statements of Simon's relatives made at a time when active resistance on the part of the native people was regarded as praiseworthy among Indians. It seems to me he shows at most that the case was never really proven either way, which is essentially what the jury concluded.

G.W.

** GERALD DONALDSON, *Books*. Van Nostrand Reinhold, $19.95. Another scrapbook about books — handsome, though the quality of the colour reproductions is singularly poor — *Books* is a kind of John Robert Colombo version of publishing history and the book trade, all notes and quotes and amiable designs. There are snippets on alphabets, print, book burning, book worms, book plates; figures on the world's most valuable book, the biggest book, the production totals in the world at large. There are anecdotes about people who make books, and there are quotations about books and people who read books, among them one from Schopenhauer: "We throw away a book when we find ourselves in a darker mental region than the one we have just quitted."

W.N.

OLD MAN FALLING

Ron Miles

Arms outstretched after the just
missed bus, body leaning
into the space he only now
looks up amazed to find

empty, the crooked man
would shout, would run
but then, admitting
years have left him
lame and nearly mute
jerks back toward the shade

instead of falling, leaving
me alone, my thought
of calling to the driver
unresolved
in a bus that moves too steadily
toward the light.

POEM WITHOUT VOICES

Robert Bringhurst

The light that blooms in your body
blooms in my hands. Around us the ground
is strewn with its petals.

I have seen on a street in Guadalajara
wind set the petals of a jacaranda
down on the ground surrounding a pine.

Love, this is evergreen. Let it be.
You will see, they fall also. Listen
again: the silences

ripen
deep in the sullen beaks
of the intricate wooden flowers.