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## A QUARTERLY OF CRITICISM AND REVIEW

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editorial

# ON VISIBILITY

"ETHNICITY" IS ONE OF those words that has sprung into general usage with several meanings, making lucid communication sometimes dubious. As a neutral word to describe any cultural subgroup, it has a nice sociological ring to it, redolent with fairness. But when I not so long ago heard a woman begin her comment on a radio phone-in programme by saying "I have a friend who's ethnic," I realized how quickly ordinary speech can reassign meaning. Clearly, no society loses its prejudices overnight, nor the people in it their expectations of cultural subgroups not their own. That phone-caller's assumptions, moreover, are given a more solid base than might seem logical in Canada by the way in which "ethnicity" is discussed, and by the parallel attitudes that underlie the term "multiculturalism." Although "multicultural" in Canada means more or less what it says (in the South Pacific, by contrast, it at least covertly and perhaps even openly means "multi-racial"), by focussing on the variety of ethnic sub-groups that exist in Canada *besides* the two main groups established by convention and constitution, the term effectively excludes English and French elements from consideration — or, by extension, from "ethnicity." Social scientists have terms for such processes of classification. They talk of "visible culture," or (as in the Multiculturalism issue of *Journal of Canadian Studies*, Spring 1982) of the " 'invisible' ethnics," in this case meaning the British, the Scandinavians, and the Germans, who have disappeared into the apparent "norm."

Whether it *is* a norm and whether they *have* disappeared are other questions. The Scots have scarcely been faceless in Canada, nor the Irish; Kitchener-Waterloo claims that Everyone is German there during Oktoberfest, but some of this is merely the theatre of ceremony at work. The "Vertical Mosaic" still enacts its family compacts, both in anglophone and francophone circumstances, and civil and military power in Canada remains in remarkably few hands. One might reasonably wonder to what degree Ethnic Studies merely record the majority's views of the minorities in what they see as "their" midst — or, pushed further,

wonder at what point claims for ethnic difference become transformed into lines of demarcation, boundaries of power and possibility.

Robert Kroetsch and others have noted (in *Canadian Ethnic Studies*' special "Ethnicity and Canadian Literature" issue) how, with Marlyn and Wiebe and Laurence and many others, "ethnic genealogy" has become an interest of many recent writers; but the subject has almost always been probed with an enfranchising rather than an enclosing purpose, intended to explain enough to close cultural divisions rather than to define the limits of an "acceptable" heritage and so the boundaries of prejudice. "Explaining" to others is, of course, often tantamount to "discovery" for oneself. Sometimes the desire for a past shows all the signs of the adopted child's quest for natural parents: motivated sometimes by the need to *know*, in order to corroborate independence, and sometimes by the fear of being separate or isolated, different or alone. The notion of having roots in a Civilization Elsewhere, and therefore of Being Civilized because (and perhaps *only* because) of the *historical* connection, confounds many people's attitudes to the past (and the society they identify, often sentimentally and inaccurately, with the past) and to the present as well (and the culture they could be shaping and sharing with their compatriots in the present). Many immigrants to a new land take not only their heritage with them but also their feuds, and whatever legal status they may acquire, they remain citizens of their old society as long as the feuds go on: they do disservice to the new. In Margaret Laurence's world, Manawaka serves as a crucible in which characters discover a lot about who-they-are-now by learning the limitations of defining themselves and their culture by who-they-were-then. It's a cautionary message as well as an enquiry into moral history, and worth learning from.

Bonnie J. Barthold's interesting book *Black Time* (Yale) shows another side to this question. Concerned with attitudes to time in the works of black writers, Barthold queries the very notions of *past* and *present* as black writers have inherited them — *or had imposed upon them* when European definitions of "civilization" came to be considered a "majority culture" for global empires. An oral (and within a European system a *"visible"*) culture, African society operated with a cyclic notion of time rather than a linear (or "historical") one, not unlike that which is available to Western writers in "myth." But, Barthold avers, as European norms began to define Africans from outside Africa, African culture was classified as somehow primitive: "freed" from its pagan reliance on myth, it was to European eyes still not imbued with "history," and so was cast adrift as a continent or culture of "developing" or transitional status, by definition of less consequence than their own. The polemical level to Barthold's book challenges the bias of this attitude; the critical level considers how black writers in Africa, the Caribbean, and the United States have challenged this version of their history and made their cultural inheritance a literary virtue.

She might have added black Canadian writers, too, though there are only a few and though those few (Austin Clarke, for example) have largely emigrated from the West Indies. She might have pointed out, too, how non-black writers in the Caribbean have also had to investigate the implications of their rootedness, as does the Montreal-born Jamaican writer John Hearne in *The Sure Salvation* (Oxford), an account of the class distinctions as well as the racialism aboard the slaving ships; or *All of Papa's Children* (Cairi), by the late chief minister of Trinidad, Albert Maria Gomes, about the Portuguese minority in an Afro-Asian community. A kind of personal credo in Gomes' book sounds yet another note: "I refuse," he writes, " . . . to join the new diaspora of embittered nostalgics in their Canadian winters, Australian summers and desolate regressions to their once mother-country. Madeira exported Papa, and the way I see it, that's about as much exporting a family can take in a generation." It's an implicit critique of the kind of passage one finds, for example, in Cyril Dabydeen's story collection *Still Close to the Island* (Commoner's Publishing): in the falsely eloquent tropical tropes ("in the angle of virulent sun I watched her and dwelt on the vampire") or in the socially-blasting understated realism (" 'Where d'you come from?' Max was used to the question; used to being told no as well"). But if Gomes (or Gomes' character) might have disputed the emigration to Canada of writers like Barbados-born Clarke, Guyana-born Dabydeen, Tobago-born Lorris Elliott, or Trinidad-born Samuel Selvon, for him to prejudge their tone or their subject is once again to miss the point: to fail to see how visible ethnicity within a Western culture remains a challenge to social comprehension, and how the literature that enquires into such visibility will likely involve both nostalgia and confrontation.

These terms epitomize much about Canada's long relationship with the Caribbean in particular and with black people in general. As John N. Grant's *Black Nova Scotians* (N.S. Museum) points out, there were blacks in Canada as early as 1606, African slaves at Fort Louisbourg, and slave sales in Halifax; but attitudes to black people were also honed by the American Revolution and Civil War, for there were "Black Loyalists" to praise and "fugitive slaves" to aid — perhaps at least as much for political reasons, at the time, as for humanitarian ones. Many of the books that have taken account of the presence of black people in Canada have been anecdotal as well as documentary, from Benjamin Drew's *Narratives of the Fugitive Slaves in Canada* (1856), through Robin Winks' *The Blacks in Canada* (1971) and Crawford Kilian's *Go Do Some Great Thing: Black Pioneers in British Columbia* (1978), to John Grant's *Black Nova Scotians*. Two other recent books are Michael Bradley's *The Black Discovery of America* (Personal Library) which tries to prove — with what it calls "amazing evidence," of the *Chariots of the Gods* sort — that African mariners crossed the Atlantic in prehistoric times, and Daniel G. Hill's *The Freedom-Seekers: Blacks in Early Canada* (Book Society). Together these books tell of a border-crossing escapee who arrived

disguised as a Quaker woman, of the Niagara Underground Railroad, of successful boxers, singers, preachers, and teachers, of military participation, and of the importance of the Baptist Mission schools in educating black children; they also tell of failures: of famine in the late 18th century, which led many freed slaves to seek greater freedom in Sierra Leone, of the shipment of three boatloads of Maroons to Canada to try to resolve a *Jamaican* political problem, and of failed economic experiments. There were also failed political experiments involving a possible trade-off (Canada for Guadeloupe) between England and France, and the possible union between Canada and various British Caribbean colonies. It appears that when race didn't get in the way, economics did, as it has from early on. An article in the Spring 1981 issue of the *Dalhousie Review* records how British attempts in the post-Revolutionary years to contain the new United States by limiting its trade routes — by instituting an enclosing trade connection between Nova Scotia and the Caribbean — failed, on the one hand, because of a lack of Nova Scotian capital and surplus food, and on the other because it was the illicit trade between the United States and the British West Indies between 1783 and 1802 that helped the Caribbean recover from its economic doldrums. A similar story is told, about another era, in Jacques Mathieu's academic treatise *Le Commerce entre la Nouvelle-France et les Antilles au XVIII^e siècle* (Fides); after a slow start, trade was developing rapidly in the 1750's between Quebec and the Caribbean (mostly with Guadeloupe and Santa Domingo), with fishoil, coal, animals, peas, and flour being exchanged for sugar, tobacco, coffee, and cotton. But there were legal problems, and political ones; after Bigot imposed an embargo on the export of wood, the trade routes essentially became economic history.

Such routes have perhaps been reopened in recent years not by fishoil and sugar alone but also by cultural discovery and cultural exchange. Journals like *Ariel* (Calgary), *WLWE* (Guelph), *The Toronto South Asian Review*, and *Ecriture française dans le monde* (Sherbrooke) all provide a context for Canadian literature that is larger than Europe or North America; Canadian publishers are publishing West Indian writers (Talonbooks, for example, recently released Lennox Brown's *The Twilight Dinner and Other Plays*, a set of ironic comedies and private tragedies in a non-paradisal, NFL-and-supermarket-and-Diana-Ross-dominated culture); Canadian writers (Atwood, Birney, Ryga, Mandel, Purdy, Pat Lane, Diane Giguère, and D. G. Jones) are imaginatively visiting the Caribbean and Latin America and writing out their observations and understandings of their acquired sense of Otherness; Caribbean writers are responding to Canada, both as a stereotype of opportunity and as a palpable economic presence in their own midst; and writers of Caribbean origin, writing in Canada, are making an enormously vital literary territory out of their substantial ethnic heritage. They are writing out of their awareness, too, of the pressures that sometimes attend social visibility. We can learn from such enterprises more about how Canadian

society changes and about how it sometimes resists change, and about how culture, politics, and economics intertwine. For in their continuing endeavour to establish both their international separateness and their international visibility, Canadians have still to remember these interconnections, to remember that separateness does not have to mean the severing of all links with other worlds and other people's values, and that acquiring an international cultural presence is also a political gesture and an economic act.

W.N.

# FABRIZIO

*Irving Layton*

*for William Goodwin*

Fabrizio is wise. The stars tell him all
he needs to know: that foreplay ends in boredom
or despair, that greed and lust agitate
the treacherous ant heaps till disaster comes
to smash them with the conqueror's thicker heel.
He scans the heavens for sense and there finds none,
nor in his wife's scrawny arms and devotions;
sons can disappoint but see him rally
to advance a nephew's human need for gold,
a fair face; recollection and desire
stirring the embers in his slack loins
till a scholar's self-irony snuffs out
the small flame licking at his groin
to leave him seedy before the noble's choice
'twixt sex and death: knowing the choice is each man's
to the very end though the priests and Father Pirrone
rave and wave their superstitious crucifixes
to scare satyrs back to their forbidden wolds
and the diseased bourgeois deed his estates
to the cretinous son, the spoilt daughters.

*Cuba*
*December 31, 1981*

# THREAD AND NEEDLE
## *(Brazil)*

*Ricardo Sternberg*

Stern, starched, moustachioed,
my great-uncle spent the days
policing the stones in his garden,
the mangoes on his trees.
He spoke to me of the emperor.

Sinhazinha, my aunt, the seamstress,
purblind with cataracts at sixty-five,
would hand me the needle and ask:
child, thread this for me.

If I moved my head a certain way
Sinhá was inside the aquarium
lost among the ferns,
sewing and muttering prayers
oblivious to bright fish
threading in and out of her hair.

> Silver needle, golden thimble,
> I will sew your bride her dress.

Sanctuary of boredom, that house
was a world, a system complete,
self-sufficient as the aquarium.

So who was it that interfered,
introducing into the house
a device that could thread needles?

I no longer remember.
But soon after I touched it
the contraption would not work
or would not work as well
and Sinhá, suspecting
a demon in those gears,
turned her eyes towards one
lost inside the aquarium
and asks, again and again:
child, thread this for me.

# TROPICAL TRAUMAS

## *Images of the Caribbean in Recent Canadian Fiction*

*Stanley S. Atherton*

TRAVEL WRITERS NEVER GIVE US the straight goods about the places they visit, according to Annette, the protagonist of Margaret Atwood's short story, "A Travel Piece."[1] Persuaded that her own readers, "even the ones who would never go to the places she described . . . did not want to hear about danger or even unpleasantness," Annette filters out the reality of violent crime and the ever increasing examples of pollution — "small black beads of oil . . . appearing on the white sand beaches" — and substitutes clichéd fantasy: *A gem of an island almost undiscovered by tourists, with brilliant white sand beaches and blue-green lagoons complemented by the friendliness of the people.*

Writers of more serious fiction are expected to treat their readers differently, of course, and they usually do. Nonetheless, Canadian readers nurtured on popular northern notions of paradisal islands in the sun are likely to find recent Canadian writing set in the Caribbean increasingly disconcerting, for with few exceptions the tone of these works has been overwhelmingly dark. In most of them the idyllic dreamland of the travel pages has been replaced by a nightmare world of tropical traumas in which the lives of dislocated protagonists are circumscribed and defined by elements of confusion, fear, hatred, agonized introspection and physical and spiritual suffering. Almost always the central characters are outsiders. In Diane Giguère's *L'eau est Profonde* (translated as *Whirlpool*) (1965), in Juan Butler's *Canadian Healing Oil* (1974), and in the stories in Harold Horwood's *Only the Gods Speak* (1979), for example, the protagonists are mainly young or middle-aged Canadian tourists hoping to exchange the rigours of northern winters for adventure under the tropical sun.[2] In Margaret Atwood's *Bodily Harm* the central character is a Canadian journalist doing a travel article on a Caribbean island called St. Antoine; and in Timothy Findley's *Famous Last Words* the narrator is a writer and close associate of the Duke and Duchess of Windsor during their wartime exile in the Bahamas.[3]

The literary possibilities of using an outsider as protagonist are essentially ironic, for there is an inevitable discrepancy between the point of view subscribed to by

the visitor and that of the local residents, an inconsistency that may be recognized only occasionally by the visitor, but one which is clearly evident to the reader if the writer is any good at all. In Harold Horwood's *Only the Gods Speak*, a collection of seventeen stories of which ten are set in unspecified Caribbean locations, the protagonists encounter various local customs, attitudes, and intentions; and in their individual reactions to them move towards their personal salvation or damnation — usually the latter. Many of Horwood's protagonists are mis-shapen, emotionally and spiritually, and fail to find possibilities for redemption in the situations in which they find themselves. In one story, "The Sound of Thunder," a group of life's failures drinking in the garden bar of a "hilltop resort" dismiss the significance of a local religious celebration they can hear going on, but they have nothing to substitute for it, and their evening ends in meaningless orgiastic revelry. In another story, "Through Dreaming Towns," an insensitive young Canadian and his girlfriend spend Christmas Eve getting high on marijuana and daiquiris. They spend the rest of the night and part of Christmas morning wandering through the town, totally divorced from its life, unable to transcend their chemically induced sensual responses and to get beyond vulgar metaphors and their feeling that everything was "freaky" and "outside your head like."

The visitors' failure to touch local reality is echoed in a number of Horwood's other stories. Deaths of one sort or another — physical, emotional, spiritual — take place in most of them: in "Island of Innocents" the North American owner of a tropical island is killed when he flies his private plane into a hillside; in "Coming to an End" the protagonist commits suicide. In "Among the Snarks" Helen, the wife of an enthusiastic Canadian naturalist, enjoys "the continuous sunshine and the lush vegetation" of the tropics but becomes more and more paranoid about local attitudes and the possible dangers posed by local fauna. " 'Snarks' was her name for all the native monsters," people included. Watching one of the local boys, "she wondered about the mixture of Spanish and Indian blood that had produced such notable physical beauty . . . after all Spaniards were addicted to bullfights, and Indians of central America used to sacrifice people by the thousands, throwing them into wells or tearing out their hearts . . . and they'd punished their own children with thorns and stinging nettles; she'd seen pictures of it in the museums; the Spaniards, too — they'd been even worse, if possible. Helen was glad her ancestors had come from northern Europe with no taint of such darkness in their souls, and had settled in Canada, where people were self-righteous, perhaps, but neither cruel nor violent." When her husband picks up an iguana, "Helen covered her mouth to choke back a scream. Some lizards were poisonous. And this one certainly *looked* dangerous — beautiful, but dangerous, a deadly work of art by some heathen god who enjoyed black jokes." Inevitably there is a point at which Helen can no longer handle the pain caused by her failure to accept the world around her. That point comes when a fellow

Canadian tells her that the innocuous looking sea snake her husband has just handled is one of the world's most deadly reptiles. The resolution is tellingly understated in the final sentences of the story: "She looked at Ed. . . . then she went inside and picked up the telephone. She had trouble making the operator understand her, but at last she got through to the airport, and a friendly voice speaking in perfect English."

The protagonist of Diane Giguère's short novel, *Whirlpool*, a young Montreal woman named Nathalie, shares Helen's ambivalent reaction to the Caribbean milieu. Although the novel takes place primarily in Montreal, and concerns Nathalie's attempts to extricate herself from a rapidly souring affair with Yves, a married man several years her senior, the Montreal scenes are balanced by Nathalie's recollections of the beginning of her affair with Yves on the island of St. Croix the year before. "Down in St. Croix [she muses], that's the phrase that touches off the song which has oppressed me since I returned." The reminiscence is bittersweet — memories of the "whispering tropical night" and passionate lovemaking are tempered by Nathalie's continuing concern for lost innocence and the unforeseen consequences of her infatuation. At times she feels the island has cast a spell on her — the word and its variants recur a significant number of times in the novel — and that she acted under the influence of forces over which she had no control; at other times the Caribbean experience is "nothing but an evil dream in which I wept, cried out, and shuddered in a hell that never existed." For the most part, however, the memories lead to negative feelings, of being bruised and soiled by her St. Croix experience, and to the depressing recognition that "the woman Yves made of me [on the island] grows like a weed in my body." For Nathalie, the garden has been contaminated forever, and the reader is left with the overwhelming image of paradise lost, of dream turned into nightmare.

Juan Butler's *Canadian Healing Oil*, a curious work about a Montreal bookseller who sees himself as St. John, the Apostle whom Christ loved the most, also deals with distorted dreams. Early in the novel St. John is suddenly impelled to travel the world in search of the meaning of life. The narrative of his journey is surrealistic and disjointed, interspersed with photographs, labels, advertisements, sketches, poems in various languages, and epitaphs from statues and burial plaques, many of them of Caribbean origin. His initial stop is (appropriately or coincidentally) the island of St. John, and the first thing that draws his attention is a 1733 proclamation listing penalties of maiming, dismemberment, torture, and death for disobedient or rebellious slaves. This is followed by the history of a slave rebellion and its inevitable bloody suppression by the authorities. So begins a long

series of anecdotes and commentaries which deliberately negate the popular North American dream of edenic islands in the sun.

To disabuse his readers of the idea that the Caribbean is a paradise on earth, Butler (like Atwood) inserts mocking examples of tourist brochure prose: "over thirty jewel-hued bays and inlets await your pleasure. Beachcomb. Daydream. Or adventure your way along twisting trails, catching a glimpse now and then of abandoned eighteenth century sugar plantations." Against this lyrical illusion he sets a real world in which images of violence abound: what St. John notices about a Dominican carpenter is his "tarantula fingers"; women in a Puerto Rican slum are "slovenly," their men "slouchy and drunky" and the children tough and wild, "all looking as if they'd cut your throat just to see the blood rush out." In St. Thomas, young blacks are "warriors all," and random violence occurs without warning: "a car pulls up, machine gun poking out a rear window. Bullets spatter against pink and white masonry, whiz through trees and flowers"; it's "Chicago in the Caribbean."

Predictably St. John's travels in the Caribbean dystopia bring him no answers and no peace. Like many of the characters in Horwood's stories, he fails to connect with the life around him, and in the end he is murdered (near the grave of Sir Thomas Warner, colonizer of St. Kitts) by a crazed black man with "a crown of thorns rammed into a shaggy, bleeding Afro." The self-styled St. John, best loved disciple, dies at the hands of a posturing Christ figure — a fitting end to Butler's unremittingly bleak Caribbean vision.

Timothy Findley's latest novel, *Famous Last Words*, is not primarily a Caribbean novel, though some significant events which occupy about a quarter of the novel's 400 pages are set in Nassau.[4] The Bahamian sequence is essentially self-contained, linked to the rest of the novel mainly through the personalities of its principal fictional characters — the Duke and Duchess of Windsor and the brilliantly recreated Hugh Selwyn Mauberley (Ezra Pound's famous persona) as writer, bon vivant, and intimate of the Windsors. But the sequence may also be read emblematically, encapsulating the larger world the novel represents, a picture of hell on earth of which Hieronymous Bosch might be proud.

Almost all the characters in the novel are warped in some way, displaying a series of moral imperfections which range from the silly to the vicious. Elsa Maxwell, who takes the Windsors' underclothes to New York once a fortnight for laundering, rents out the Duchess's lingerie, offering her friends the chance to "dance in the slip that danced next the shirt that was worn by the Prince of Wales"! The brittle bitchiness of the Duchess, and her total insensitivity to anyone or anything that does not further her outrageous ambition, alienates her from nearly everyone in Nassau; the Duke, whom one acquaintance calls a "henpecked impotent twit," spends much of his time in spiritual self-abuse. Even at official functions "he could barely look . . . people in the eye or hear their names

without a gun going off that was loaded with accusations against himself." Hugh Selwyn Mauberley is a calculating, traitorous viper. Sir Harry Oakes, the immensely wealthy Canadian who has settled in the Bahamas to avoid death duties, is "a walking summary of all that is crude, contemptible and mean." His son-in-law Alfred de Marigny is a pederast. And Harry Reinhardt, an associate of Mauberley's, is a vicious murderer.

The two major events that take place in the Bahamian sequence are both horrific. The first is the deadly disruption of the garden party the Windsors hold, ostensibly to aid the war effort but really to celebrate and display their redecoration of the Governor's mansion. In the midst of the festivities a small plane drops a gasoline tank on the main lawn. As it descends it is shot at by a member of the Duke's bodyguard and it explodes in mid-air, loosing a holocaust of flames on the assembled guests.

> Everyone rose and ran. First they went one way. Then they went another. Then another. And then it struck them all at once. They were trapped. There would be no running anywhere. On every side they were blocked by marquees; by the Mansion; by the ambulance at the top of the drive and by the press of motorcars that filled every gap between the trees. Five hundred people and more were entirely hemmed in and there was not a hope of getting out. . . . By now the marquees were going up one by one in candy-stripe volcanoes causing an enormous, roaring updraught which lifted the remnants of the canvas and the bright green papers into the air like burning flags.
>
> More and more people were rising from the ground. Fire was flooding out around them over the stones and shells and through the grass. There was a second conclusive movement, again *en masse*, towards the canvas enclosures that only moments before had offered shelter from the sun. Now, there was nothing but a wall of flame and a corps of struggling human torches flailing against the holocaust, drowning for lack of air in waves of fire and smoke.

This hellish set-piece is followed by the grisly murder of Sir Harry Oakes, who is bludgeoned to death in his own home at the instigation of Mauberley because he had discovered a German plot to spirit the Windsors away from the Bahamas by submarine.

A CAREFUL READING of these hellish events, the paradisal setting in which they are ironically placed, and the characters who figure largely in them, suggests that Findley's writing is essentially parabolic. That is to say, what we are offered in the Bahamian sequence of *Famous Last Words* is a cautionary moral tale. In this part of the novel at least, Findley is being as openly didactic as a serious novelist dare be these days, offering the reader an unambiguous portrait of evil in contemporary life, and a pointed reminder of its ubiquity.

Margaret Atwood's most recent novel, *Bodily Harm*, is also about evil, and particularly about the consequences of failing to recognize and come to grips with it. Arguably Atwood's most depressing work, the novel is an intense study of an individual's exposure to a set of conditions and actions which are totally alien to anything she has known before, and of her failure to profit in any significant way from the experience. The protagonist in *Bodily Harm* is Rennie Wilford, a Toronto freelance journalist in her late twenties who concentrates on trendy trivia called "lifestyles" and who is sent to the Caribbean island of St. Antoine (near Grenada) to do a Fun in the Sun travel piece. Almost at once and against her inclination, she is caught up in local politics — the island has only recently obtained its independence from Britain and is about to hold its first "democratic" elections — and very quickly she learns of the real island world that lies behind the tourist brochure illusion of sunny tranquility. With a seventy per cent unemployment rate and sixty per cent of the population under twenty, a predilection on the part of the police to use violence and on the part of everyone else to feel politically involved, the stage is set for dramatic confrontation. As Michael Dixon pointed out in a review of the novel, "given the opportunistic nature of the participants, the course of events is predictable: subverted democratic elections lead to assassination to abortive revolution to the tyrannous exercise of brute force in the name of order."[5]

As these events unfold, Rennie receives a series of shocks to her sense of what is "decent" — a term that echoes the prim respectability of her upbringing in the provincial Ontario town of Griswold. She is, for example, disagreeably surprised to learn that a supply of Maple Leaf tinned ham sent by the Canadian government to aid hurricane victims was used at the Independence Day banquet to feed "leading citizens," and that $500,000 from the same source for the same purpose was being used to bribe electors. She is appalled to see the police give a vicious beating to a man in the street. Everywhere around her there is violence, menace, and threat of further violence, yet she remains unconvinced that things are really dangerous *for her* until a politician with whom she has become acquainted is brutally murdered. She makes immediate plans to leave on the next flight out, but it is too late. The airport has been shut down.

Nothing that has happened so far, however, is adequate preparation for her arrest, "on suspicion," and her imprisonment under degrading conditions in the old British fort she had visited earlier as a tourist. The prison sequence which follows is clearly the heart of the novel, for it is here in her cell that Rennie ought to reflect on the meaning of her predicament and, if we are to hope for any kind of salvation for her, on the ways she understands and copes with reality. Unhappily there is little in her background to prepare her for the challenge. When her cell-mate Lora is beaten senseless by two guards, "Rennie wants to tell them to stop. She wants to be strong enough to do that but she isn't, she can't make a

sound, they'll see her. She doesn't want to see, she has to see, why isn't someone covering her eyes?" Instead of acting, Rennie fantasizes about her release; and when the beating is over she worries as much about a burnt-out light bulb in the corridor ("I should tell someone") as about Lora. Rennie does realize a limited capacity to respond, to reach out and hold the suffering Lora, but as a gesture of compassion and understanding it is too little and too late. Survival for Rennie Wilford lies in clinging to what is reasonably and "Canadianly" normal: even at the end of the novel she remains unwilling or unable to cope when confronted with the harsh realities that have invaded her world of comfortable illusions.

In *Bodily Harm* and in other novels and stories referred to in this essay, the Caribbean is anything but paradisal. One after another these works of fiction inform us that beyond our dream of the tropical garden and behind the tourist brochure illusion of idyllic islands in the sun lie the same harsh realities of life we know in a cold climate, or anywhere else for that matter. In recent years an increasing number of Canadian writers have established new perspectives and found fresh images and metaphors by locating their work in the Caribbean and other "exotic" places. In doing so, they are finding innovative means of achieving the traditional ends of all good art: to shake us up, to tell us more about ourselves, and to force us to exchange too-cherished myths about the nature of things for new insights and understanding into the dilemmas of existence we all share.

NOTES

[1] Margaret Atwood, *Dancing Girls and Other Stories* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1977), pp. 145-60.

[2] Juan Butler, *Canadian Healing Oil* (Toronto: Peter Martin Associates, 1974); Diane Giguère, *L'eau est profonde* (Ottawa: Le Cercle du Livre de France, 1965), transl. by Charles Fullman as *Whirlpool* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1966); Harold Horwood, *Only the Gods Speak* (St. John's: Breakwater Books, 1979).

[3] Margaret Atwood, *Bodily Harm* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1981); Timothy Findley, *Famous Last Words* (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin, 1981).

[4] The dust jacket of the original hardcover edition, which features a fiery explosion in a tranquil tropical setting, suggests the importance of the Bahamian sequence of events in the novel.

[5] Michael Dixon, untitled review, *Fiddlehead*, 132 (April 1982), 88.

# THE BOOM

*Margaret Atwood*

It's a freak accident. This man, a captain, was loading an engine, and for some reason the boom swung around or came down (the stories differ) and killed him.

Here, where there are few printed pages and no faces on screens and the radio flickers off and on depending on the weather, this man was one of the few who could carry words, island to island. People knew him, they trusted what he said. Therefore he spoke carefully.

The ship is coming into the harbour now, bringing the body. Right now there's no moon. The people gather by the wharf to receive him, he is carried off, some cry, others have not yet discovered what they will do or say. A few bottles are passed around but tonight they don't drink much, you drink at a celebration.

A man from the outside, a man from the company, explains how valuable this man was; he points to the excellence of the coffin, which the company has supplied. The people take note of this. If the company had supplied an inferior coffin it would have been a scandal. Nevertheless, everyone knows that the company and this man were enemies. The dead man carried words from island to island and they were not words the company wanted said.

Now the man himself is a word, he pronounces himself into the crowd, into the harbour, into the dimly lit houses on the hillside and the darkness beyond, there's a ripple, an echo. The people stand silently, listening to him.

# MEETING GEORGE LAMMING IN JAMAICA

*Earle Birney*

I FIRST BECAME AWARE of George Lamming when I read *In the Castle of my Skin*, which Michael Joseph had brought out in London in 1953. Naipaul was not yet into print, and Lamming's was the first work of fiction by a "British West Indian" writer that I had read, since C. L. R. James' *Minty Alley*, to impress me both with its reality as a record and its artistry as fiction. It was not only the story of his own growing-up, a poor black boy on a British-colonial island; it was, as Gerald Moore has remarked, the "collective autobiography of a whole Barbadian village." But Lamming's *The Emigrants*, which appeared the next year, was too formless and discursive for my liking, and I came away from it with the uneasy feeling that its author, like his boatload of characters, had taken flight to an England that would either reject him, or by accepting, turn him into just another permanent expatriate. It wasn't until 1962, when I began my "homework" on Caribbean literature, in preparation for a reading tour, that I realized how wrong I was, and that Lamming had brought out two more novels, *Of Age and Innocence* and *Season of Adventure*, whose emotional power and maturity proved him to be already an established writer in our common language. From the press notices, however, I gathered he still made his home in London, and I did not expect to find him in Jamaica when I took sea passage there from Trinidad that November.

I remember indeed, as I sat in the darkened lounge of the *Golfito* (while an exotic dawn wasted itself on the harbour, and I waited for the usual unpleasantness of Customs and Immigration), that I was worrying whether there would be anyone on this island I'd ever known or any occasion at all to sound out a single Canadian poem.

But the clang of the lowered gangway had scarcely died when the ship's purser came padding in, with an unusually deferential manner, leading three strangers to my table. A reporter from the island daily, armed with smile and camera, was followed by a handsome light-brown man who introduced himself as John Hearne, the English professor/novelist on the Mona campus of the University of the West Indies. I had written him without answer but he now assured me he had scheduled a week's list of things for me to do. Hearne then introduced me to

a tall very white man, the Acting/High Commissioner for Canada. The latter told me he had already secured me a room and even cleared my bags through Scylla and Charybdis — and here was a packet of mail from home. The world was wonderful again, and became almost unreal when I found myself beside the A/HC and being chauffered rapidly, red ensign flying, from the stinking docks of Port Royal through a flowering countryside to cozy quarters in a tropical sort of Sussex inn called the Maryfield.

There the desk clerk handed me a note to phone, as soon as possible, an unknown Doctor Figueroa at the University. I rang and got a voice deep and jovial, the accent good London academic with a hint of Jamaican lilt. When was it convenient for him to pick me up for something cool and a spot of lunch at the faculty club? John Hearne would be joining us there and, o yes, an old friend is with me who wants to meet you — George Lamming.

The two arrived in a battered Morris. "Fig," as he preferred to be called, was instantly memorable, a huge chuckling fellow in his forties, a wide multi-racial face haloed with grey beard and alive with warmth and humour. His education, he told me, was as hodge-podge as his genes: grade school on the island, secondary in Massachusetts, college and graduate degrees from the University of London. He had only recently returned from lecturing at that institution to be Mona's Professor of Education. George and Fig had been postgrad students together and had later developed programs for the BBC. But they were both quite plainly happy to be back in Jamaica, and at this moment bent on sharing their euphoria with me.

I was surprised to learn they had read some of my verse, and that George knew *Down the Long Table*. Fig had published only a single chapbook of verse at this time, but had another in a local press. George got him talking half-seriously about a third project: translating Horace into calypso rhythms! I was curious to hear a sample, but they preferred listening to whatever literary gossip I'd brought from Trinidad. There I'd been seeing something of the island's leading young playwright, Errol Hill, and the poet Derek Walcott, who interviewed me on radio. Also, my hosts had been David Wyke, the sculptor-doctor, and his gifted wife, Marguerite, first woman senator of the West Indian Federation; the Wykes had lived in Toronto and been contributors and supporters of the *Canadian Forum* in the thirties. Inevitably with any conversation about Trinidadian personalities, our talking came to focus on "Nello" (C. L. R.) James, Marxist comrade of mine in London in depression years. I was happy to learn that Lamming and James had, more recently, become friends and political allies when both backed Premier Manley's shortlived Federation of the West Indies.

This union of Jamaica, Trinidad, Barbados and some smaller islands, born in 1958, had dissolved a few months before my visit, whereupon James, never a disciplined politician, had quarrelled publicly with Manley, declared he was

"through with the West Indies," and returned "for good" to London. There was a rumour he had even abjured Marxism.

THERE WAS A CERTAIN UNREALITY for me, sitting gnawing at a mango under a grape-like bougainvillea that cooled the verandah of this thatched guest-lodge Tenniel might have drawn for Alice in her Wonderland. For I was feeling immediate kinship with two natives to these isles whom I'd met only minutes before. A strange variety of hummingbird zinged over hedges of oleander and hibiscus beside me; beyond the too-green lawns *lignum vitae* flamed and royal palm trees towered. Yet however diverse our flora we three were cousin writers and brothers political, united in puzzling over the peculiar tangles that empires leave for their ex-colonials to straighten. And we were agreed that, of all the "British" West Indians we had known, C. L. R. James was the most eloquent in voice and in print, a many-talented, informed and courageous fighter for the freedom of exploited peoples, whether in Africa, the U.S.S.R. or the U.S.A. His apparent giving-up was a shock.

Lamming now told me Nello had been seriously hurt in a car accident in the U.S., and looked aged and bent from it. It was hard for me to accept that image, for I remembered him as a youth in Britain in the thirties, when he was a wildly energetic orator who earned his living reporting cricket for the *Manchester Guardian*, and who spent his nights either on platforms denouncing the stupidities of both the Social-Democrats and the Stalinists, or in smoky committee rooms plotting Panafrican liberation and world revolution under the banner of a Fourth International. And somehow between night and day he had written and published, before that decade was out, not only a book-length analysis of the "rise and fall of the communist international," but also his *History of Negro Revolt*, *The Case for West-Indian Self-Government*, several short stories, a novel, a play, a lighthearted memoir of his days as a cricketer, and the definitive biography of Toussaint L'Ouverture, *The Black Jacobins* — a work of scholarship today regarded as a classic in its field.

I remember asking if James hadn't burned himself out even before the war. No, George said, but he was too bookish for us, a one-man party, a scholar not an executive. Did I know he had been lecturing at American universities on American literature, and had privately published a book on Melville in New York? I didn't.

Fig, grown restless, had been wandering about my genteel inn inspecting its notices and embroidered cushions, my huge flaking bathtub, the framed fox-hunting prints, as if he were in a museum. Indeed that's what Maryfield Lodge was, the last hotel in Jamaica that harboured only whites, a cheap retreat for

Victorian ancients too poor or too asthmatic to return "home." I was here, Fig explained, only because this was near the University (where there were no vacant rooms) and because I would feed at his place or anyplace where overboiled veg and suet pudding were not *de rigueur*. This reminded him that he was hungry, and they bore me off to their faculty club. The road ran east between lush cane-fields and banana groves toward the tall wave of hills, their ancient cones blurred by dark woods. I was startled when George told me the highest was almost 7,500 feet above the Caribbean. These were the famed Blue Mountains where runaway slaves hid out in the 1830's. Some of their descendants were still there. "If you like," George said, "we'll make a trip up." I made polite protests that I was monopolizing his time but George was firm. He and Fig had visited Vancouver a while back, when I wasn't there, and had been treated royally, he said; they were going to see that I had as high a time in Jamaica.

At the Mona campus we joined John Hearne, who had drinks waiting for us. Our conversation moved quickly from the mysteries of *academia* to our varied origins and roots and favourite places: Montreal, where Hearne was born and I had worked; and to dear dirty all-comprehending London, where all of us had one time or another lived, studied, and loved. But it was questions about my recent travels that, despite the comforting sub-tropical sunshine and the leisurely eating, bogged us down in politics and the ominous present. This island, only a little larger than Cape Breton, with a population less than Toronto's, had been set loose by its own voters a few months before and was now its own democratic "nation." And its nearest neighbour, a mere hundred miles away, was Castro's Cuba. I hadn't yet been there, but a few weeks earlier I had given a poetry reading to students at Peru's national university, most of whom went from my classroom to demonstrate with makeshift banners but no guns in a Lima square in support of Castro's Cuba against Kennedy's America. Some of those students certainly died that bloody afternoon, machine-gunned by the junta's militia. The next day, when everybody thought the world might end, with Kennedy and Krushchev in eyeball confrontation, I was flying to Santiago de Chile, not too sure there would be an earth to land on. At the airport I was asked what Chilean writers I wanted to meet. I said "Pablo Neruda," and was nearly arrested. Chile's finest poet had been publicly cheering for Castro, and the President of Chile had sworn out a warrant for his arrest. A few days later in Buenos Aires I witnessed the police of yet another junta firing on another crowd of unarmed demonstrators against American imperialism. Could it all happen here, I asked my table companions, and got strangely varied answers.

For the moment the U.S. had won the bluffing duel, Hearne said, and made the Russians ferry their missiles back home. Kennedy had circled Cuba now with warships and Castro would never have another chance to grab Jamaica. "God," said George, "who would want to? This country's bankrupt! We've got a debt of

a hundred and fifteen million bucks from the British, and Bustamente's busy doubling it."

But Alex B—, I think it was, pointed out that U.S. capital investments in Jamaican bauxite, sugar, and luxury hotels had increased significantly since Jamaica got independence. There was dry laughter from George and Fig. Our bauxite, declared the latter, is not owned by Jamaicans, creates almost no work for them, and is destroying the soil of the island. George argued that although tourism was now a forty million dollar industry "the profit goes back to the U.S. and comes from hotels no Jamaican can afford to stay in. Most Jamaicans sleep in one-room shacks in the Kingston slums or on the sugar cane plantations, where they work for subsistence wages. One in five doesn't work at all; he's unemployed."

I said it sounded like Cuba before Castro. "Was it better here when you were a British colony?" There was an unhesitating "No" from all of them. "We have a democracy, at least," Hearne said. "A bourgeois one," George added, "and we must use it to vote Bustamente out. That egomaniac has already sold us to Yankee imperialism. We must get Manley back and make the bugger socialize this country the way he promised." Somebody who was a government employee, on the table's fringe, tut-tutted, and somebody else accused us all of talking red expropriation — Castro stuff. "We don't want a bloody revolution here." "Agreed," said George, and got up. As we walked to Hearne's car, he muttered — "But we still need a revolution."

Hearne left me at my lodge for a welcome siesta (I'd been waked at five by the ship's steward) but he was back in an hour to drive me for drinks at his home. Like most of the Kingston middle-class, he had bought well up the mountainside, where the climate's cooler. He drove us expertly and with considerable speed up a maze of narrow and dangerously twisting roads sunk in groves of fern and vine-hung trees. We came out on his terrace in time to watch a glorious sunset suffuse the sea and the lights twinkle on in the Kingston slums "far away and very far below."

Over drinks I complimented him sincerely on his driving, and learned he had joined the RAF at seventeen in the middle of the war and served as an air gunner for the next three years. He had married and gone to university afterwards and had not begun writing his fiction until a few years ago. Yet he had already published five novels with Faber in London, as well as several short stories and two television plays. Since I had read far too little of Hearne's at this time we talked more about other Caribbean writers, the Haitians friend of Macolm Lowry, Philippe Thoby-Marcelin, whom I'd visited in his U.S. exile recently, and my favourite Cuban poet, Nicolás Guillen. Hearne impressed me as a sensitive, imaginative man, although with still an uncertain image of himself. Jamaican born but "white," versatile, intelligent, an individualist with a social conscience,

he was a bookish man who was also an adventurer. I would have liked to talk longer but soon had to rush off in a taxi to join George at a dinner given by a lawyer friend of his.

IT WAS A PARTY OF HARD-DRINKING, heavy-eating blacks who, it seemed, were newly-rich on real estate, and owned most of the immediate mountainside. The talk was of local cabarets, travels, the Wall Street market and — perhaps as a courtesy to this odd Canadian pal of George's — Montreal's St. James Street. About midnight most of the guests left for their homes but the rest carried George and me off to find a good night club. Our driver was wildly drunk and sped down the mountain at about 80 mph, barely missing various parked trucks, tethered roadside goats and farmers pushing handcarts down to the Kingston market. He paid no attention to our cries of warning, and I remember feeling much the same sort of helplessness I'd been experiencing about the world situation. But the driver had madman's luck, and though we never found a night club, we came safely to a stop at his own home. There we played calypso records and ate a four a.m. pre-breakfast before George got a cab and dropped me at my guesthouse.

The next day I took time to call dutifully on the Canadian High Commission and then took a nostalgic walk through dock and market areas where I had first set foot on this island, in 1934, when I was a deckhand on a limy coaler bound from Port Alberni to Grimsby on the North Sea. The changes were not notable; the slums seemed bigger and stinkier, their inhabitants less friendly, the beggars and the whores more numerous, less glamorous. But of course I was no longer 30, and I had a hangover.

George Lamming routed me out from the Maryfield at seven the next morning and into a two-door jeep for the mountain expedition he'd promised me the first day. He slid nimbly into the back seat where a cuddlesome chocolate girl sat and was introduced to me as "one of my Mona students escaped from Guyana." The driver was none other than the Chief Engineer of Jamaica's most important agricultural development, the Yallahs Valley Land Authority, one of whose projects we were setting off to visit. Behind us, in a big rickety army truck, was the Hon. A. C. Dogsbody, O.B.E., and an entourage of stenos, reporters, handymen, and political henchmen, all of whom had joined our expedition, it was soon obvious, more for fun than for information about Yallahs.

Engineer Martin was a light-brown man with a rugged face and a bluff friendly air. I'm always happy on mountains, especially on a tricky route with a good driver, which Martin quickly proved to be. For the next four hours our two-car caravan climbed and dipped, roared and climbed again, on slippery dirt

roads that gradually narrowed to nothing much more than goat tracks, while Martin, a great talker, filled me in on Yallahs. A long branching river system with fertile slopes rising up thousands of feet had already in the eighteenth century been turned from wilderness to coffee and cocoa estates by the simple process of burning down the forests. Slave-holding planters built their bungalows on the crests, like feudal barons. But the soil was quickly exhausted, or carried away by flooding rains that eventually destroyed even the banana plantations in the river bottoms. The owners moved to other mountains. Between the bared rocks the jungle crept back, thick enough to hide escaped slaves in flight from the slavers' hounds. Through the nineteenth century the survivors and free descendants of these "hill negroes" developed their own precarious farms and backpacked their scrawny root crops down to the valley markets. With independence, in the 1930's, came the Authority. It turned the tracks into jeep roads, installed cement bridges and run-offs, reforested where the hillsides were bared, hired the farmers to terrace the slopes, and taught them the rudiments of mixed-crop farming.

Now, Martin told me, there were 15,000 farmers making a living from 50,000 acres on these hillsides. He pointed out, as we came to a viewpoint, rows of fountaining banana "palms" far below and the dim shadows of coffee bushes between them. Up where we were, mango trees were spreading, and occasional rows of oranges and other citrus trees, shading lines of corn and root crops. Above us, where the soil was thinnest, some goats were grazing. All this was being "mothered," Martin said, from the Kingston offices of "Government" — a magic word in Jamaica now — supervised by college-trained agriculturalists, and his engineers. Already they had flooding licked, but not pests — fruit flies, animal diseases, goat abortion, and so on. Somebody comes up once a month to hold talks with the farmers, inspect crops and livestock. "But today is special," Martin said, and looked quizzical. "Guests . . . that's why I brought a jug." He brushed a sack by his feet to reveal a gallon jugful of something. "Rum." George gave a cheer from the back seat. "Not just for you guys; there's the Honourable Dogsbody behind us, and all his supporters, come up for a good time. Practically a national holiday. The great man has supplied several jugs and they seem to have lifted a cork or two already." There were fitful snatches of singing from the truck now.

We stopped then on a hilltop at an ancient planter's house which the Authority was reconstructing into a guest lodge. "We're in luck," Martin said, "the old ballad girl's here." He hailed a very small and wizened woman mopping a verandah floor with a witch's broom. George, directed by Martin, filled a mickey from our jug and the four of us walked over. The old girl swiftly found a glass and as promptly filled and emptied it. She then stood, broom in hand, and in a remarkably clear and strong voice began singing a succession of haunting Jamaican ballads and folksongs, comic and tragic. Was it possible, I asked George,

that some of them had been passed down to her from a great-grandparent who had escaped and founded a family up here? "Quite possible. I heard that Lomax plans to record her on his next trip to Jamaica." Perhaps more than even her singing moved me. When she had stopped unexpectedly she made a little speech, in a quaint Victorian style, wishing us all brotherly love and loving-kindness.

Our ears were almost at once, however, taken over by the spastic rhythms of a hit parade programme pulsing in from another verandah to which the Honourable Dogsbody and most of his retinue had retreated long ago to listen on a stenographer's transistor to the selections being wafted from Puerto Rico by an American disc jockey. It seemed these Jamaicans were striving as anxiously to keep in tune with the North American present as I was to understand their West Indian past.

We drove on beside steep terraces and under brilliant flowering trees to the village splayed against the hilltop which had been chosen for the day's festivities. These were held in the open on muddy terraces. The rum went round and the excited Jamaican talk that seems half-melody, half-quarrelling, till it breaks to laughter. At last, from a great cauldron, I was ladled out my own bowl of something so pungent it almost knocked me down the slope. "Rongone so-ap," they seemed to shout, laughing hugely. "Ram and rum," Martin said, and slurped his down.

Now the Honourable Dogsbody began a speech, while half-listening farm wives brought us green boiled plantains wallowing in a stew of mackerel and curried goat. The rice tasted of the paraffin that fueled the cook-fires but the general effect was marvellous, especially when combined with the soup, to which we kept returning.

The Honourable D. finished his speech to much applause and began moving unsteadily about, apparently for the purpose of pinching the ladies' bottoms. "More roam," the males called. By now I didn't know what was rum, ram or roam. "A whole ram in the soup?" I asked George. "No," he said, "just the balls. And lots of rum on top."

Later, Martin went charging with us back down the mountain through oncoming darkness to get George and me on time to an evening lecture/discussion on the West Indian theatre. We arrived at Mona late and too sodden to contribute much to what appeared already a dull affair, and soon broke away for blessed sleep.

THE NEXT DAY I WANDERED ALONE, browsing in a bookstore on Kingston's main street. The quiet shop made me feel I was back in Victoria, B.C.: genteel English accents from the clerks, the poetry shelves lined with Victorian English classics and a few Americans but of course no Canadians or

Jamaicans. There were "seasonal" cards, all holly and Santas in the snow, and white-faced angels decorating the windows.

I walked a block or two away from the town centre and was into board-and-cardboard slums. Rastafarians in eccentric garbs glowered at my corpse face. The alleys were filled with the idling workless. Eyes carefully blank or turned away from me. I began to feel a little in danger and certainly very guilty for showing myself to these luckless ones. I took a bus to the other extreme, the beautiful Hope Gardens. At least I was seeing flowers not on Victorian Christmas cards. I strolled past great banks of poinsettias under tulip and ginger trees, flamboyantes, white petria, and sat beside a pool patterned by blue waterlilies. It was easy to forget the world of flesh — until a covey of motorcyclists burst roaring across the green lawn, splaying turf in all directions.

In the evening I went with Lamming and Fugueroa to dinner in the Students' Union and a poetry reading. This had been elaborately programmed (before it was known I'd be on the island) by some colonially-minded member of the English department. A few resident poets, including George and Fig, had been allowed to begin the affair by reading one short poem of their own and then one from the textbook anthology currently in use at Mona. So we listened to a pot-pourri of Marvell, Ogden Nash, Blake, Roy Campbell, Frost, Auden, Dickinson, and Hopkins. We would have had a Hardy, too, but Fig had persuaded the departmental committee to drop the old boy and let the Canadian recite something short of his own.

After this anti-climax came the star of the evening, Louise Bennett. A buxom Jamaican lady in her forties, she at once rescued us from our academic parlour games by launching into an hour of lusty folksongs, dialect ballads, and "mentos" — a more melodic and satiric Jamaican cousin of the calypso. I could see why George had urged me not to leave early. Admittedly, Louise was no Emily Dickinson, nor was she trying to be. She was a Jamaican-born "woman of the people" but also a professional: a lecturer in drama, folklorist, actress graduate of RADA, experienced radio performer on BBC — in short an entertainer with international experience. For the first time I listened to an artist's use of "West Indian English," its sharp yet good-humoured wit now concentrated and its melodic qualities fully exploited. When George told me she had published six books I felt ashamed I'd never even heard of her. But then, as I discovered when I talked with her, she had just returned from a TV gig with CBC in Montreal and had never heard of me or my eight books. The reasons were clear: she was published in Kingston and I in Toronto. Three years later I waved at her in London at the Commonwealth Arts Festival. I don't think she recognized me, but that was the festival where nobody had heard of anybody.

My travel notes tell me that George and I lunched next day with Fig and his lively East Indian wife, and that she made us an excellent curry. I think it was on

that occasion we talked about the hoped-for "United States of the Caribbean" which my friends felt it would be logical now for the U.S. to back, if only to prevent the spread of Castroism. First revive the Federation, only recently expired, add Bermuda and the Bahamas and then begin to forge a multilingual English-French-Spanish unity of sovereign states with Haiti and the Dominican Republic. The masses throughout the Caribbean wanted peaceful socialist governments such as the Scandinavians had achieved. They cared less about island identities than about building towards West Indian unity through a customs and immigration union. I reminded them that U.S. voters always rejected socialist ideas, and that U.S. governments had repeatedly used force to overthrow even peaceful liberal regimes in the islands and the mainland states bordering the Caribbean. My friends, however, thought Kennedy had learned a lesson and might have to give the Puerto Ricans independence rather than deal with a second Castro.

Moreover, George pointed out, we were forgetting Mexico. That country didn't want Russians all over its Gulf, or the Americans either. I told George I hoped he was right but I had a feeling that every day more of Mexico became the property of the U.S.A. and might soon be so much in debt to Wall Street it could not risk the possibility of American marines landing again in Vera Cruz. In any case, I believed that Bustamente was still in the saddle in Kingston and riding the country back to colonialism. I think at that timely moment John Hearne arrived and drove me off for an interview on Kingston radio and then to tea with the English department, before I gave a reading.

I gave my usual violin piece of this tour — a talk, with readings, on contemporary Canadian literature. The audience of about forty, staff and students, was attentive but, as often in academic surroundings, most of the students were too shy to ask questions and the faculty too eager to get home for supper.

I was able consequently to make off myself by six to a supper party arranged for me by three former U.B.C. students of mine now batching together on the Kingston slopes. One was Wayne Hubble, the third secretary at the Canadian High Commission. The other two were with Kingston business firms. The trio had persuaded their Jamaican girlfriends to cook a dinner in their residence for us all.

Both the food and the company are still memorable after twenty years, perhaps because they prompted a poem, "Saltfish and Akee." My hostesses explained to me that akee is the pulp of a ripe pod which, when cooked, looks and even tastes like highly spiced scrambled eggs, and that saltfish in Jamaica is cured Newfoundland cod. Akee's Linnaean name, *Blighia sapida*, perpetuates a story with perhaps an allegory. Some of Captain Bligh's crew, just before the *Bounty* was to sail out of Port Royal for the Pacific, ate their akee from unripe pods, and died. Unless the seeds are black the fruit is poisonous.

There had been rum cocktails, followed by good dry Beaune, and inhibitions were loosened enough for someone to remark that we seven were seeds of different colours. Eloise, who had come with Wayne, promptly claimed to be the blackest and therefore quite harmless, and that Wayne, whose skin was parchment white under fiery red hair, must be definitely not edible. I came rather weakly to his defence by telling her the last time I'd seen him he was brown-skinned, decked in eagle feathers, and had passed for a B.C. Indian chief in a U.B.C. players club presentation of my "Damnation of Vancouver." There was then a more serious attempt to compare origins. Tony, dusky-white, had been born in Victoria, B.C., of Welsh and Italian parents. Swarthy-brown Roger, a failed medical student but now an enterprising importer, was half Greek, half Irish. I was English and perhaps Norman from my father, Shetland-Norse from my mother. Tony's girl, the journalist daughter of a successful Kingston publisher, was "velvet-skinned and graceful as a dark gladiolus." She thought there were Ibo slaves and a colonial Britisher in her family tree, and maybe others, but she didn't know for sure and plainly didn't care. Roger's partner, the truly beautiful creature present, was racially the most complex. Chinese, South Indian, West African, Spanish.

They seemed happier than most of the other groups I had been with in the West Indies. Was it only because they were a little younger? No, I thought, it's because they're successful here in Jamaica as well as young. They are in no immediate fear of joblessness or exile; they have climbed to a special middle-class shelf where origins are unimportant and politics a bore; they can joke with their white boyfriends about Black Power in a country where nine out of ten are at least part-African. I thought it a precarious perch, yet silently hoped they would never fall but climb to a "new found land" more civilized and sunny than any my own country had created.

On the beach the next afternoon by chance I came across another U.B.C. student, a Jamaican girl who had returned a year earlier with an M.A. in sociology to take up a post in the Manley government — and been dropped from it when Bustamente's party came to power. She was not in economic straits, since her father was a successful lawyer in Kingston, but she was not a happy girl. She had been long enough in Canada to appreciate the wider opportunities there, but also to realize that her negritude was a handicap limiting sharply her opportunities to succeed as a teacher of anything. On impulse, and hoping to rally her from depression, I asked Lane to be my partner that evening for a party at Figueroa's. She accepted and offered to call for me with her father's car.

It was a huge affair, with George as joint host. Fig now owned what had been a plantation house on the edge of town, with ample gardens and driveways. He also had an ample family, and had dressed eight of his offspring East Indian style and posted them with flashlights to guide cars into parking areas under the magnolia trees and by the night-blooming cereus. The beautiful children were

omnipresent with trays of nuts, fruits, drinks, and other goodies. Apart from those who crashed, there were 150 invited guests. I remember, of course, that I at last met Manley, by now only leader of the opposition in the Jamaica government — a lean-faced, intense, intelligent man, and an undoubted idealist. He was too beset by old friends and well-wishers, however, for true conversation. I had more time with his English wife, Edna; since Mrs. Manley was a sculptor, we talked of David Wyke, a friend in common, and about her hopes for an intercultural West Indies. I felt she rather assumed too easily such a creation would follow quickly on her husband's return to power.

But it was not really a party for talking, only for dancing, for hour after dreamy hour of sambas and twists, tangos, rumbas, boleros, mambos, waltzes, and a dozen other sinuous prancings with a succession of lithe girls (most of whom, it seemed, were friends of George). Later I learned they were part of the surplus of island maidens which large Jamaican parties were always careful to invite. We danced on and on to the music of marimbas and marimbolas, guitars and maracas, congas and bongos. My shy Lana, however, had wilted by midnight and insisted on driving herself home; as the guest responsible for the occasion, I stayed, willingly enough, till the party broke up at three.

I'm sure I'd hoped to sleep through most of that day, since it was Sunday, but I see from my notes that Wayne Hubble (who had not made Fig's party) dug me out of my ancient guest lodge bed at noon for a visit to the antiquities in the Spanish Town museum, followed by a tour of the fort Captain Morgan built when he was the island's Pirate Governor, and a *cuba libre* at a sombre white-only country club back in Kingston. Wayne then drove me to the YWCA for another reading of contemporary CanLit.

It was the hottest and most humid day I'd encountered in Jamaica and there wasn't even a hand fan moving. Sweat rolled into my mouth as I spoke, and the audience was sparse. However, it did include the A/HC of C and his wife, the President of the Canadian Club, and a Kingston poetess, and though I performed indifferently, my listeners were much more attentive than I'd have been had I been listening to me. Afterwards there was a brief reception from which George and his little Guyanese girl whisked me to the apartment of a girlfriend of hers, Rosalie, for a small farewell party — the four of us and three other couples.

Rosalia was a treasure, a lively, witty, and curvaceous lady who possessed also a flat, superior rum, a good playback and a great set of records, including the best bawdy calypsos I'd ever heard and a wide range of dance bands. There was a moment, just before we broke up at one in the morning, when all of us linked hands and moved in a dancing circle. I caught sight of myself in a mirror, an instant of heightened happiness, and the title of George's first book flashed in my mind.

My first act, when I got settled aboard a ship in Port Royal the next afternoon, bound for Spain, was to write a thank-you letter in verse for George Lamming, which ends:

more than rum happy
I was giddy
from sudden friendship
wanted undeserved
Black tulip faces
self swaying forgotten
laughter in dance
Suddenly on a wall mirror
my face assaulted me
stunned to see itself
like a white snail
in the supple dark flowers
Always now I move grateful
to all of you
who let me walk thoughtless
and unchallenged
in the gardens
in the castles
of your skins.

# REHEARSAL

*Cyril Dabydeen*

*"Language the chameleon seeks to explain*
*the chameleon reality."* A.I.

Old father tongue sticking out
over the fenced yard,
scampering out from the coop,
this reptilean self
breaking out without a warning —

changeable again, across the barrier
scattering feathers —
a life gone rampant
in dreams; the insane among us presenting
emblems from the scuttled sea —

all talk, old words, dropping scales
the dung of reality, moon-shape
pitching stars from the tips
of my fingers, blood oozing at the thighs
wetting the ground to form our roots

# CHALLENGED BY SPRING

*Ricardo Sternberg*

His tropical glands
secrete the stuff,
his insides churning:
come spring, he wants
to be like trees
so arms extended
he welcomes the birds.

A rank mango for a heart
this lyricism
does not get him far.
The birds read trouble
in his moist eyes,
ignore the nests
erected at the elbows
and fly to simpler trees.

After the third day he desists.
Humbled and in a sulk
he writes:
surely it is to rebuke us
that the world flares again
when winter within us
settles as the only season.

# IN THE SEMI-COLON OF THE NORTH

*Austin Clarke*

GOING STRAIGHT NORTH AS AN ARROW, had I looked at a map to shoot my direction and progress, the Ontario Northland Railway was taking me to Timmins where I would work on the *Timmins Daily News* as a reporter for thirty-five dollars a week. It was December, nineteen fifty-nine. One week before Christmas.

One week before Christmas, six years ago, I was sitting in the warm friendships built from birth in Barbados, inhaling the fumes of new polish and varnish and paint that was green and dark blue on the furniture that surrounded me like the knowledge of those friendships. And six years later, now, I am sitting in a crowded coach of this CNR train, surrounded by women and by men who look like trappers out of the adventure books of the West I had read in Barbados, and out of the conversations I had heard from university students who came from the West, and who said they hated the East. My closest friends at the university were Westerners. But where are these Westerners now that I am taking this long journey into the semi-colon of the unpunctuated North?

The men sitting around me on the slow-moving train making up its mind on a divorce from Toronto where I had lived for five years, all looked like miners and prospectors. Their skin was rough-hewn and burned and tightened as if by a different kind of climate or sun-lamp from those I had seen in the tanning bedrooms of Rosedale and Forest Hill in Toronto; and they all looked half-asleep just as those women in the sun and under the lamp seemed to be. They resembled the Indian I had passed on Spadina Avenue, men and women of tanned skin, inheritors of abuse and scorn I had listened to in the streets of Toronto.

"Would you sell a *Molson's* to a goddam Indian?"

I was myself like a prospector, travelling light and lightened by the uncertainty of expectation, no bags and baggage to suggest permanency, enough clothes to ensure personal hygiene, no notebooks and no typewriter for I was not yet a writer of fiction, no writer at all, but a dreamer of ambition larger than the land over which the train was taking me. I was equipped with the music, the memory

(From *The Colonial*, second book of the memoirs, of which *Growing Up Stupid Under The Union Jack* is the first.)

of the music I had listened to in the jazz clubs and bars of Toronto, and in other places; and the three pieces I had selected to memorize and bring along on this journey, were *Milestones* by Miles Davis, Beethoven's *Third Symphony*, and the *Russian Easter Overture* by a Russian composer whose name I could hardly pronounce.

*Milestones* was the metaphor and the definition of this horse of a train, this horse of iron, with its slow pace, its excitement and strange smell of coffee weakened by the touch of cold hands, hardly any steam as it touched the lips, and no recognizable strength of caffein to deaden the disorientation of the journey; Canadian apples that reminded me of cider when they were crushed by the strong teeth of these men, only because I had heard that you could make cider from apples; the smell of clothing, heavy shirts that were famous for their plaids in another country, and for some reason, the smell of fish, although the only sea was the waves of snow through which we were travelling. The music in my mind showed me a horse trotting slowly and surely, aware of its pace and destination. The snow outside the train was like a large white pasture over which the hooves were travelling; a "comforter" of pure white which looked blue in the distance. The wheels on iron, and my speculation of the time they took to make one revolution, were the hooves of the horse in the music, and the tempo of the drummer as he beat his measurement on skins and brass.

But the music that was in my mind belonged to a different drummer, to a faster means of travelling, to a land in which I was at one with the colour of sweat and the creed of labour and exploitation: Miles Davis was not a "comforter" on the brittle, rasping and sometimes piercingly clear trumpet; he was defining a journey of changing destination, of changing intention, of changing purpose. And it was making me nostalgic for Toronto. The journey on which my body was now being carried could not tolerate that excitement. For I was surrounded by nothing but whiteness. Snow.

Not even the wind outside, and I imagined that there would have to be a wind no matter how slight; not even the wind had succeeded in altering the patterns of mild undulations, careful hills of snow, without any purpose of rhythm and beat; and the wind gave the snow no threat of ever being conquered. Valleys and dales looked smooth, not treacherous, and exciting enough for the cover of a galvanized pail with a child in it, to slide down the disappearing sides from the train. It was all snow, and the windless caress of white rectitude and order and a puritanness of the snow itself.

I BEGAN TO THINK OF DIFFERENT MUSIC. *The Russian Easter Overture* composed by that man of Russian origin with the unpronounceable

name, which I recognized on sight but could not put vowels to; this music which reminded me of Barbados and its own colonial puritanism, where the only snow, at Easter and at Christmas is the make-believe whiteness of the "marl" from the rock quarries; and which we spread around our homes in devout obedience to the purity of those two Christian holidays, or eating days. We ate more than we worshipped the sacred metaphors of those days. And in Toronto, where I had first heard the *Overture*, one Christmas Eve night among friends and drinks who were "artistic," I gained a more focussed understanding of the Russian countryside. It comes to me now, and with it comes that Group of men, Seven in number, who gave their art the same name as the number of their membership; and I wondered if they too had listened to this Russian music and had seen the fierce snow in its chords; if they had captured this part of the northern country with its desolate weather, or whether they had drawn the reality of this North, purely from the warm comfort of picture postcards and Toronto beer parlours.

The sun must have been still high in the Russianed sky, and fierce as the music, even at four; or was it already seven o'clock?; for I could feel light and life and wonder within the wilderness outside the murmuring train. The life outside was stronger than the life of the snoozing well-travelled passengers. Inside the train, these men and women had already arranged their bodies in a resignation of comfortable position to the well-known long journey. Although the journey was beginning to be broken up by constant interruptions of stops and stations. Miles Davis changed the pace of his journey on the trumpet from a gallop to a canter. And my understanding of the riffs of his climb was altered and heightened. But these men and women seemed to know when the train would stop, when their portion of the journey would end. They had become no longer so impatient as the colonial from the South about the clattering of miles. Their sense of destiny and music and long living was stronger.

They also ignored, through custom and perhaps with love, the coming and going of the "coloured" porter. He was a fact of the train, and a fact of their lives; a metaphor of this kind of railroad travel. They looked up, smiled, bought a cheese sandwich from him, or a red Canadian apple, and steaming styrofoam cups of dark liquid which made their faces redder, and then, as quick as it takes to forget a stranger, they closed their eyes, and re-settled themselves among heavy coats and blankets. The few children in the coach with me, were chewing gum to help them fight their restlessness. Two strong, handsome, unwarlike Indians stomached their steaming black coffees just as gamblers try to stay awake, to cut the journey into gulps.

And the trees; for I was looking and watching and hearing the *Overture*, and not eating nor drinking as the others were; the trees, green even at this death of time, unaware of the inhuman coldness that was sharp enough to kill a man, manly as a trapper and as noble as the two Indians, including those in storybooks,

the trees were just a little similar to the genius in the paint boxes of two of the members of the Group of Seven, I had seen in exhibitions.

I could have been crossing the Steppes, or the Himalayas, or the Canadian Shield, for the music was so international in the wideness, just as the land around me was wide; and the music could have been invented by a Barbarian to be played in any small Christian-Missioned church on a green hill, so constricting was it to my far smaller context of origin.

A man can imagine any colour to give to the whiteness of the snow outside, or to the gold of a sunset. And if he is fused to the electricity of genius, or if he is infused with enough of the natural means of keeping the body warm, as it was becoming almost impossible to do inside this train, then in his drunkenness of originality and craftiness, brought about by his heavy drinking and by the inordinateness of the alcoholic and surrounding beauty, then what he does do with the colours in the eyes of his art, is not so commonplace a trick as bending the normalness of colour and perception, but is merely the adding of his conviction to it.

I was now travelling on the brass and reeds of Russian movement, no blanket to match the white and green-bordered regal robes of the two Indians who sat facing me to make myself comfortable. They did not talk, nor blink, nor smile. They were mysterious masks.

The heat in the train was turned off after we pulled out of North Bay. This may not be a fact, but it is an artistic liberty of the fiction writer whose craftiness and words can see the land and the passengers becoming more wedded to their freezing surroundings; since he has seen with his artist's eye that there are no longer any politicians, nor reeves, nor managers of banks, nor cold-blooded southerners after we have passed North Bay, and that the only residents of this slow-moving cold-storage train are Indians and "coloured" porters, and people who are stupid enough to live in the North.

I had heard of North Bay before. Once. But I imagined it to be closer to Toronto. When it came, and when the train changed its tempo after it disappeared on the narrowing lines, I sensed that I had come to the end of the line, the end of all reasonable expectations and of survival without extreme violence. I had reached a state of awareness of a time before men became avaricious and greedy and adventurous, and sought to pan for gold and kill for skins, and kill everything that was not gold or bears, everything that lay in the sights of their transits. I could imagine men in the coach with me, as *those* men who had first prospected on the land which they thought was covered in gold, just as the streets of New York and Toronto were glittering with golden success for the immigrant. A colonial's dream, and a fool's fantasy. North Bay must have been crawling with men like these, my companions on a train, before the time when those two Indians and their families were pushed back even farther, back into the reservation and

into extinction, as the buffalo and the trees that impeded progress and development were shot and axed.

Were there Italians among these first "Canadians"? Were there Jews then, too? Some bears are like this "coloured" porter, and like me, only in colour.

It is too cold now, and too late, back in Toronto, for the Italians, the worker-ants of the Fifties, to meddle in trenches and on scaffolds from which they fall like flies, and die like martyrs in their new hyphenated Canadian experience. "On the street cars, when you get too close to them, all you can smell is garlic . . . "

I can see a time before the Indian was skull-capped by versions of his resistance to national development, and how from scalping and raping he was turned from flesh and blood into symbols on coins, and into names of insurance companies and exclusive resort areas and lakes; and I turn to the Indians sitting before me and try to compare their silhouetted forward look to their images on American coins. My body is cold. And the coldness becomes the disposition of their fortunes and their prospects.

This train bound for my personal glory, stops nowhere. It has stopped, it is true, in a certain ordinary meaning of time, because I can see the trees are no longer evading the thrust of the train through the vagina of this Indian territory. But in the bigger meaning of time, this train stops nowhere. Little insects of specks of snow scurry just above the surface of the sheet of milk. A man gets off. There is a gust of steam like the overdue passing of gas from a tired human body.

I am scared. I am terrified that this man has pressed the wrong stop. And then I wonder how do you stop a train, except to lie in front of it? But this man gets off like a man would get out of a taxi. He must be an Indian. Or a fool. He seemed too much in a hurry to reach his destination, unwilling to remain in the belly of the train, and had decided to get out, and end the rhythm of movement. And now, I see him through the mist of the window, wandering through a path in the uncut wilderness. He seems more knowledgeable than the rest of us, who are too frightened, too unwilling to take up the heavy ploughs of chord in Beethoven's *Third Symphony*, of which I am thinking now, and become a part of that tragic retreat through a different country, but in the same thickness of snow. So, we sit and wait for another destination to come, one that is more habitable, for some unpure station that offers a habitable ordinariness.

The man injures the snow as he moves in a straight line in the lineless landscape, and he constructs his own highway, just as the Italians do on virgin land in a Toronto suburb, or as the tentativeness of retreat had done in the Symphony. And then, before the train abandons him altogether, before he can change his mind, as I would have done, and run back to the ordinary safety of the train, he walks and walks in the shrouds of interminable bandaging snow, and approaches a hill on which there is a tall noble tree, the sentry for many more, and then, from the distance he is from me, all of a sudden he finds his bearing in the rubberless-

ness of the field. I envision drums and horses and soldiers tired as construction workers, and silent defeated cannon and artillery that look like gigantic cement mixers.

The train is now at another angle of his departure. There are houses now in my view. And I become disappointed that he is not lost, that he is not going into a field of defeated battle and more snow, and possible suicide.

IF I WERE A PAINTER, I would paint this snow black. Last month, or last year, in the previous season, this whiteness was a field of wild growing grass, with flowers which we from the city could have picked or cut and put into a vase, or into a wine bottle of cheap Italian wine that we had for dinner, to decorate our crowded space.

The man who has left the train, is perhaps, now home.

But before that, before he enters the door, I see him as a black dot. I had ignored his progress before this diminution, to think of the rails and miles before me. The train takes me headlong into more towns in this disregarded North. I count the hours and I count the sheep in those hours, and I wonder what has driven me from the comfortable house on Grace Street near Bloor, to enter this landscape which I could have been satisfied to have *seen* in the music of Beethoven's *Third?*

I think of the thirty-five dollars I am to be paid each week, perhaps at two in the afternoon on each Friday, so that I might sled through the streets of Timmins to the bank on time. I think of the size of immigrants' wages, which is merely his means of buying necessities, which is the dignified alternative to begging and unemployment insurance, and which is not the important impetus for the immigrant's contribution to this country's weath. It is my dignity that I can spend, and pay for things. Not my wage.

So, the wage may be a small wage. I cannot ask questions about its size simply because I have the immigrant's surrealistic optimism that says that larger wages will come with larger experience, even if, for the moment, that experience is called "Canadian experience."

I wonder if I can get the larger knowledge without the larger insults and the larger unhappiness?

I will therefore accept this pittanced wage, and leave the North when the time is golden. And afterwards, with this "Canadian" experience, conspire to climb faster than the newest immigrant, rapidly, and suffer the castigation for being "uppity," in the silence of my integration.

I count the trees that run along the wires, with my eyes, until I must have travelled around the sea that surrounds Barbados, one thousand times. And if the

line does not end where I am heading, if the line could not end, and the train becomes a ghost train after the ghost towns we have passed, and could go on and on, I can conceivably end up right where I have started out, in the small village of Flagstaff, since too far North must be South. I begin to put my mind into that deceiving discipline of informing it that this is the best, most enjoyable journey I have ever taken. I tell myself that the journey is really not simply the two parallel lines which refuse to end within my sight, but that they are joined to each other in the unseeable distance. The drums in the retreat of the music are heavy, and I can see mothers along the way, including my own; discarded lovers hot from the shortened exhilaration of a climax of victory and orgasm.

I pretend that I have fallen out of the train. The train does not stop. I am merely a dot left to blacken the snow in one spot.

The "coloured" porter has just helped an old grey-bearded man down the slab of iron of the stopped train, to the ground.

"Been South?" the porter asks.

"Yeah, Joe."

He put his hand into his pocket and puts that same hand into the porter's hand.

"Been visiting the kids. Last girl got married. Temagami, ya know. She been living south these two years."

The music of retreat rushes over the snow, like an avalanche of thick spoiled milk. And before this conversation is off my mind, before I can fill in its spaces with faces and bodies of snow-bitten, beaten soldiers, we are at Haileybury. A little north of the South.

The train is warmer now. I had travelled through many towns with the heat off and my body was now acclimatized by the fresh northern Canadian experience. The distance between these towns was now speeded up like a magic-lantern slide show, played at the wrong, faster speed.

New Liskeard, Englehart and Swastika . . .

*Swastika?*

Could this train have passed through compass-points while I had been dozing between stations? Perhaps, this part of the wild bush had been an iceberg and had been drifting backwards through a slower snow that did not melt; perhaps this part of the bush was ignorant while other trains criss-crossed Europe bearing this same swastika, and filled with different passengers whose namesakes in Toronto could not rent a cottage in the weekended lakes. Perhaps other men than I were dozing while other passengers were being gassed and then buried. Perhaps, it was this cold that drove us to this drowsiness.

Through the breathing glass window that showed the hissing steam: rub the palm of the hand on the ice that has formed there, and clear the two-temperatured air, and see if there is a swastika painted on the station door, if there are people goose-stepping on the platform. See, too, after you have seen that, if there are

any persons who "looked like Jews," who have not got summer cottages to rent down South, and who are now come, or forced to come, to this destination.

I try to imagine how a namesake of those European times, would feel entering this northern Ontario town with its brazen name, for the War is still raging in our painful memories.

Look and see if you can recognize anyone in the small crowd of thick coats and furs, and women in mink's clothing, if there is a Pierre Berton investigating here, as he has been investigating everywhere, including the pages of the Toronto *Star*.

Kirkland Lake was bellowed out, but it was too dark, and I was too sleepy and too numbed to see.

Ramore I could see. I saw the second "coloured" man in the North at Ramore. And an American army base was there, and many American "coloured" boys, so the porter said, were living there.

"Don't bother nobody none," he said, "and nobody don't bother them. You won't think they were such nice boys. When you think of it . . . "

I decided I would spend my weekends in Ramore. It is closer than Toronto. Ramore was also close to Rama, and although it had some similar sound to that Biblical city, I still was not discouraged to invest in its brotherhood.

But what were the Americans doing in the Canadian North? Had they come to gain "Canadian" experience, too?

After Ramore, with the "American coloured boys" changing the town no doubt, and making polka-dots of the beer parlours, dancing to the rhythm of the Ska and rock-n-roll, Fats Domino and Billy Eckstein and Jimmy Brown and James Brown, wriggling their black asses on the football fields of these northern white corsetted climes and times, like Friday nights along Spadina Avenue in Toronto, after Ramore, came Matheson and then North Porcupine, South Porcupine, and then, as God would have it! . . . Timmins. I had reached the end of my line.

# TWO CAMERA POEMS

*Michael Thorpe*

1. *Obsolete Images*

Black-sleeved fathers
Guide their new children
In stilled old-brown streets
Of Dublin, Vienna, London —
Any foxed city
Coffee-tables preserve.

We can hardly foresee
Ourselves so mutely remembered,
Strolling, interpreting wonders
To white, uptilted faces:
Touching relations immune from analysis.

2. *Moving Lives*

While we live, we possess the world
Arms akimbo, beside some machine —
Then death sweeps the streets clean:
The incredible substance of photographs,
Perpetual images — parade us now
As if we lived three lives ago;
We are only transparencies, moving
Projections in an endless procession.
This vision makes even our present
Nostalgic — fading as we move in it.

# IN THE ANDES

*Al Purdy*

Among the stone faces
nothing is human
after fifteen thousand feet
air burns in your lungs
like chemicals bubbling

there is only
an abstract geometry
of intersecting shadows
a high singing sound
at the borders of nothing

These are the great spaces
the measure of upness
distance from stars
made manifest
in the way a mountain's fraction
calibrates infinity

# HAROLD LADOO'S ALTERNATE WORLDS

## *Canada & Carib Island*

*Clement H. Wyke*

JANE AUSTEN CHOSE TO DEFINE the sphere of her literary world as that of "three or four families in a Country Village."[1] Two years later, she modestly described the boundaries she set for herself as the "little bit (two Inches wide) of Ivory."[2] Harold Ladoo, too, chose the country village as his world. In fact, he was forced to limit his territory after he submitted his first piece of work to Dennis Lee at the House of Anansi: the key phrase in Lee's long letter of rejection was "Write about things you know."[3] The world Ladoo knew best was the plantation area near McBean village, Trinidad, where he grew up and where by a tragic irony of fate he was murdered in 1973. But the world Ladoo produced, unlike that Austen created, was certainly not a "little bit of Ivory." Instead it was a limiting region of bizarre violence and human misery, whose crude, grotesque, yet strangely comical depiction serves to emphasize the author's own bleak vision of Caribbean life and to allow, by extension, an indictment of the white man's world.

His invented "Carib Island," evidently a portrait of Trinidad, obliquely becomes the macrocosmic mirror in which the white Canadian must see his own dark soul. In *No Pain Like this Body* (1972), the Hindu inhabitant of Carib Island is the victim not only of his own dehumanizing existence, but also the voice of vengeance rising from the excremental world of *Yesterdays* (1974) to become the nemesis of his white Canadian missionary exploiters. The descendant of exploited indentured labourers, he must carry the scourge of vengeance; he must turn the tables on his oppressors and give a taste of their own medicine to those who punished him in his childhood.

Ladoo had come to live in divided and distinguished worlds, one the necessary outcome of the other. The inhabitants were related to each other as proselytized and proselytizer, as prey and predator, as victim and source of survival. These alternate worlds, where Ladoo lived as native and as immigrant, became ironic mirror images which confront the reader of his two published novels. In the earlier novel, *No Pain Like This Body*,[4] the Trinidad East Indian reader sees him-

self trapped; in *Yesterdays*[5] the Canadian reader confronts the ironic and menacing consequences of his own misplaced mission of detribalization. Ladoo's larger vision was to compose a saga or a series of novels (he had written approximately seven more novels in sketch form[6]) "about the Caribbean-Canadian community."[7] — He was fascinated by the contiguity between the two worlds, the Caribbean and Canada. And although he never transformed his vision into a sustained literary world, it holds its own fascination, in part for its detailed portrait of Island life and in part for its revelation of Ladoo himself.

In choosing to use the familiar territory of his native land as a mythological centre for later ethnocentric themes Ladoo is not original. His focus on the small East Indian village, for example, is more competently handled by fellow Trinidadians like Naipaul and Selvon and in a different setting by the noted Indian writer Narayan. The theme of pursuing the ethnic and cultural progress of the West Indian inhabitant through a cyclic pattern of history — by appealing to settlement history, to the problems of identity, and to the evolution of racial consciousness — has been more skillfully explored in poetry by Edward Braithwaite. The ironic clash between intruder and inhabitant, and the strange ironic mingling of the status of victim and victimizer, have received more complete and masterful treatment by Wilson Harris. It is against this dazzling firmament of literary stars that Ladoo's tame and unfinished creations stand. Clearly Ladoo's work is dwarfed in this universe; but it is dwarfed for reasons other than comparison with the works of more mature artists. The reason also lies in the character and plight of the author.

LADOO, AS A BLACK ARTIST in the Canadian milieu, eking out a living as dish-washer and short-order cook in all-night restaurants as he attended college,[8] found himself illustrating *in propria persona* a harsh existence in the country to which the characters of Carib Island aspired as an alternative to their own limited world. As Basdai, in *Yesterdays*, says, "Young people have no future in Karan Settlement." Rookmin tells Choonilal, in the same novel: "Carib Island have no future for de boy"; and Poonwa asserts: "I am already 25 yrs. old. It is time I leave this island father." For Poonwa, Carib Island was destined to "become a nation of rum drinkers." Against this future and this native world, Canada provides the alternative as it eventually did for Ladoo. It was, however, a sardonic and cynical alternative, where he had to cope with the menace of artistic failure and where he was traumatically overshadowed by the burning of all he had previously written because he received editorial criticism and publishers' rejection slips. From the distance of Trinidad, Canada was a world where educational and professional advancement existed and money

seemed to be available, but, as Ladoo discovered, it did not come easily to young men who emigrated from Carib Island. Ladoo had to struggle not only with the nightmares of the unpublished writer but also with the bitterness and rage of the culturally disadvantaged immigrant.

Dennis Lee captures Ladoo's predicament quite accurately and dramatically in his long poem, "The Death of Harold Ladoo" (Kanchenjunga Press, 1976). He portrays Ladoo in his shifting roles, striking various stances, wearing several masks, carrying in himself centuries of social injustices, and struggling both to survive and to achieve. He is the soft voiced speaker.

> catching fire —
> a lifetime of intricate fury, . . . four
> centuries of caste and death
> come loose in [his] life, the murdered
> slaves come loose, great cycles of race and blood,
> come loose the wreckage of mothers and sons
> in Trinidad. . . .

But this montage shifts and Lee also presents the image of Ladoo the sycophant who needs favours to survive, and who writes frantically to publish:

> guide change,
> eyes brooding, hangdog, the
> tricky apologies,
> swagger of total humility — and then again quick change and
> four days writing straight — no
> sleep tell it *all*,
> and then the phone call — one more
> bird book in draft: from the Caribbean to Canada,
> the saga piecing together.

As Ladoo tries to piece together the saga of alternate but contiguous worlds, Canada and Carib Island, he becomes the living embodiment of the contradictions and conflicts of his own fictional creation. His motivation to write becomes wedded to what Lee describes as a "hot holy rage." Indeed, he was contemplating a novel called *Rage*, in which, as Peter Such states, he was attempting to get at the sources of the awful rage and violence that were the dark driving forces of much of Trinidad's plantation society.[9] This work, according to Such, was "a terrible piece about a character being knifed up by his enemies and managing to escape by hiding in the sharp razor grass of a coulee."[10]

In the process of dealing with the forces of rage and the years of cultural conflicts and evils, Ladoo often seems to lose artistic control over his material. The result is that his satirical intent becomes unclear at times, his images (especially in *No Pain Like This Body*), become excessive and incoherent,[11] and for one Canadian reader he "manages to animate for us a culture so unlike our own as to be barely comprehensible."[12]

What Ladoo had written had become, in Lee's words, "frenzied drafts" that were "brilliant and botched." In the wake of this kind of performance Ladoo received some modified praise from a reviewer: "The Book [*Yesterdays*] is an almost total success."[13] Lee, however, is more excoriating: "Life and work [are] wrenched farther apart"; in his poem he sums up Ladoo's efforts this way: "Your final heritage — two minor early novels, one being merely first-rate."

Yet, for the reader familiar with Ladoo's ethnic and cultural background, *No Pain Like This Body* evokes the mood, lingo, and local colour of Trinidad East Indian society. Ladoo offers such indigenous snatches of dialogue as: "Sumaree saw Balraj coming like a jack spaniard," or "Now Rama and Panday behave, all you self!" or "Look a skopian!" Or again, "Man, I tell you, dat priest start to make a ruction," and "Ma . . . handed him a cocoyea broom, saying You sweep out de kitchen Panday." Ladoo catches Selvon's authenticity here and entertains a familiar audience, but in Ladoo's attempt to keep the focus so closely tied to the little world of Karan Settlement, he fails to allow the reader the relief of seeing the rest of Carib Island; he does not even bother to provide some point of reference for the urban Canadian reader.

In *Yesterdays*, Ladoo maintains the same narrow focus of *No Pain Like This Body*, but with an invitation to Canadians to take a look as well. Peter Such believes that Ladoo wrote *Yesterdays* "for Canadian audiences."[14] But the novel remains out of emotional control. Admittedly it was published posthumously, in an unrevised version, which explains and excuses several shortcomings. One can, however, hardly deny the pervasive lack of subtlety, even at the first stage of writing, in dealing with the outworn issue of detribalization by the white missionary and the dominant sense of revenge which the author invests in one of his major characters. Poonwa resolves to

> go into the white country with the Hindu Bible and the whip. The white Christians came with their Bibles and whips and they succeeded just like that. I will take the Bhagavad Gita with me and open a school in Canada and employ East Indian teachers. I will build a torture chamber in the school.

Every word is italicized. The same theme is put in different words at least six times again before the novel ends. Basdai tells Choonilal:

> "How dem white people who come on dat Canadian Mission to Carib Island beat dem Indians and make dem learn English? How come dey make de Indians Christians? Well de same way Poonwa goin to make dem learn Hindi. I tink he could do it."

This crusading attitude continues throughout the novel as Poonwa writes in his notebook in large capitals: "CHRISTIANS ARE CRIMINALS!" The final straw is a sexual *coup de grace*, complete with sacrilegious explicitness. Poonwa takes "an opportunity to get even with the Christian blonde [the Canadian

woman who taught him in a Mission School] and the blue-eyed Jew [Christ]" by performing an act of sodomy with Sook, the village queer, in a Christian church. This is not literary art but immature protest literature.

Ladoo's sub-standard performance in the novel *Yesterdays* receives this wry comment from a reviewer from Edinburgh: "Presumably Anansi chose to publish it as an act of homage."[15] To the Canadian reader for whom the novel was composed, however, Ladoo unquestionably offers an unflattering national portrait: "for once," wrote another reviewer, "Canadians are seen as oppressors."[16]

YET WE MUST RESIST the temptation to dismiss any work of the imagination without a reasonable examination of it. One can easily put Ladoo's work under the bland social label, "Man and Society," as was done in the supplement to *The Oxford Companion to Canadian History and Literature* (1973). However, *No Pain Like This Body* is more than a slice-of-life account of East Indian life in 1905 — with family fights, scorpions, superstitious grandparents, and immoral "fakirs masquerading as Hindu priests" (*Oxford Companion*, p. 86). The novel is a not-too-successful attempt to evoke a world, a milieu, a *Zeitgeist* which is an integral part of the evolving consciousness of a nation. Ladoo tries to provide a topography, folklore, values, heritage, religion, psychology, language, and even a cosmology in this novel. The reader is made aware of an atmosphere and a climate of thinking as well as a way of seeing, but unfortunately the author lacks the skill to sustain what he has initiated and to give some organic unity and direction to his work. And *Yesterdays* is less successful than *No Pain Like This Body* particularly because of its heavy-handedness and the bludgeoning mismanagement of its constituent parts. It takes the *Zeitgeist* of the first novel, tries to intensify its horror while broadening its social spectrum beyond the few members of a family to include other villagers apparently for satirical reasons; but it also shocks our sensibilities, offends our taste and disappoints whatever curiosities it may have aroused.

In brief, *No Pain Like This Body* and *Yesterdays* portray alternate worlds that are also contiguous in terms of the *Zeitgeist* they try to present. The novels present the human world of Trinidad East Indian existence, which is malevolently and whimsically influenced by a metaphysical world of Hindu or Christian divinities. These divinities have their earthly ministrants in the forms of corrupt pundits or white missionaries who manipulate power for selfish ends. Both the characters of Ladoo's world and their creator, Ladoo himself, exist in these worlds as victims. The victimizers are despised but needed. The distressed villagers need the pundit during the great crises of life and the illiterates need the missionary teacher to

educate them. This irony results in the haphazardness of the worlds and in Ladoo's unsteady attempt to depict them.

A brief look at the world-view of Carib Island as depicted in *No Pain Like This Body* would be pertinent here. Ladoo creates it partly through his attention to physical detail and partly through his command of dialect and the implications of his style. One of the two planes of existence Ladoo introduces, for example, is the tough, physical world of Ma, Pa, and their children Balraj, Sumaree, Rama, and Panday, who are introduced in their domestic cultural and geographical settings. Their world is the product of an era of indentured Indian labourers brought to Trinidad plantations between 1845 and 1917. The cultural context shows a historic dependence on the imitative Brahmic ethics and ritual which allowed lower-caste Chamars to parade illicitly as village pundits. Pa is initially presented "quiet like a snake" at home, the children and Ma are in the riceland. And as Ladoo explores these factors — home, riceland, and the surrounding atmosphere of rain, lightning, snakes and tadpoles — through the rest of the novel, even though he does so somewhat superficially, we are made to see the members of the small family experiencing the bodily pain of human existence and death.

Introduced against this world is the world of the gods and of God in particular. God is shown to be unfeeling, revengeful, tyrannical, and sometimes motivated by an uncanny sense of humour. During Balraj's and Rama's illness, their own father Nanna pleads with God: "He closed his eyes as he recited the Sanskrit verses. He was begging the great sky God and also the minor Aryan gods, he was begging them to forsake their beds and their wives in heaven, begging them just to look down from the sky through the rain clouds on Balraj and Rama. . . ." Nanna prayed and prayed and prayed, but "God was too busy sending the rain to drown the earth." Not only is God unresponsive, he also becomes a monster who causes the Devil to devour his subjects: "Sunaree told Panday that God was going to make the Devil eat him *crips, crips*." When Rama dies, accusations begin to flow angrily; God is seen as a killer as far as Pa is concerned: "God kill Rama." Ma cries in desperation, "Which part in dat sky you is God?" Ladoo thus sets the divine supernatural world against the human world with an awesome and bitter hostility.

In order to heighten the realism of the human world Ladoo draws a map of Tola District. But the geographical setting is also shown to be the haunt of semi-divine forces, popularized in the folkloristic elements, repeated in the references to jumbies, lagahus, duennes, and other popular creatures from Trinidad legend. In order, moreover, to give a feeling of the eerie and accentuate the dramatic in this world that is permeated by the supernatural, Ladoo heavily employs the technique of onomatopoeia. "The choking sound of the thunder came from the sky zip, zip zip crash doom doomm doomed." "Bahraj was afraid. He knew Pa

was going to beat him real bad. Crax, crax, cratax doom, doomm, doomed." "Rama was going "Kohok! Kohok! Kohok! like a dog."

Other stylistic features are also noteworthy. Sometimes, for example, Ladoo draws on the linguistic peculiarities found in the creole forms of the language — occasionally for emphasis, but mainly for atmosphere. One such feature is the way he uses reduplication as a substitute for a grammatical intensifier, as when he writes: "The wind was blowing cold, cold"; "No. I is a little, little chile. Little, little"; the Pandit recited a few mantras over Rama — "he spat the verses fast, fast." Ladoo also proves himself to be quite competent in exploring the cadences of dialogue: "Pa came home. He didn't talk to Ma. He came home just like a snake. Quiet."

Though stylistically Ladoo generates the atmosphere he wants by drawing heavily on simile, he loses control in doing so and the device becomes stilted. Several similes are flat (e.g., "Pa spoke like a stone") or commonplace ("cold as ice cream"), and some are unnecessarily sacrilegious ("Pa stupid like God"). Ladoo can, however, give an edge of colour and brilliance to a simile for effect: "Then the lightning moved as a gold cutlass and swiped an immovable tree. . . ."

A phrasal structure characteristic of Ladoo (which incidentally, adds a touch of semi-epic elegance) is his beginning phrase pattern: *'And'* + *name* (as when he writes, "And Ma: 'Where me Panday and Sunaree is?' "). This kind of expression is often inserted for dramatic effect between verbal interchanges —

> "Rama dead! He dead and gone!"
> "O God! O God! Me, chile God!!!"
> And Nanna: "He's get over de skopian bite, but he dead wid umonia fever."

— and the dramatic interchange takes on greater poignancy, coming after the staccato effect of the short interjections. But Ladoo fails to be authentic when he has the local Hindu priest speak in standard English to tell a folkloristic tale to a semi-literate audience, to whom he later speaks in normal creole English. Perhaps, though, this shift in language underscores the parallel lack of authenticity in the pandit's behaviour. He is not very authentic when he has Panday exclaim: "I was fraidin in dat house."

A final device Ladoo uses to create the world-view of Carib Island is description — particularly when he wants to present the physical cosmos or recount some incident which is given cosmic and metaphysical or religious dimensions:

> Nanna got up. He took Rama and went into the water. Nanny, Ma, Sunaree and Panday stood as a heap of living mud: just waiting for Nanna to cross safely. Then the time grew long: long like a rope, and tied them like a rope too. Their bodies formed one great beast reaching up to the sky. And the clouds opened and out of the middle came water: water that washed away the earth into the mouth of the darkness. Then the thunder beated as the heart of rage in space, and out of the space came the lightning as a great spike and it stabbed the mouth of darkness.

> And the winds became hot and carried death into all the corners . . . then the rope caught fire and the great beast danced to the tune of death between the darkness and the void. The beast danced even though it knew it was going to die . . . it danced and danced, till the void and the darkness strangled the beast. . . .

or

> The sky twisted like a black snake and the clouds rolled and rolled and rolled as a big spider; the wind shook Tola in a rage and the rain pounded the earth; the lightning came out of the mouth of the darkness like a golden tongue and licked the trees in the forest and the drum ripped through the darkness like a knife. They moved deeper and deeper into the forest, and they felt the rain falling upon their heads from heaven.

The sense of religious devotion and sympathetic concern is poignantly conveyed in the scene where Nanna and Nanny beat the drum while they are searching for Ma who is lost outdoors:

> About an hour after Nanna left Nanny started to beat the drum. The rain was falling making its own music. Sunaree was playing the flute. Nanny's fingers were long and bony. They touched the goat's skin as if they were accustomed to it. She beated the drum slow slow. Sunaree played the flute good; her fingers touched the holes in the bamboo flute as if they were made for them. The music of the flute was sweeter than sugar; than life even. Ma was dancing, Balraj was watching. The kitchen was full of music and sadness: music from the sky and the earth, but sadness from the earth alone. And their spirits were growing and floating in the air like silk cotton flowers.
>
> Nanny started a song. Her eyes were dark and sad. She sang a part and Ma repeated it. Ma sang a line, and she repeated it. So it went on and on. The song was in Hindi. The sky God was listening, because the drum was beating like cake over Tola: like honey. It was beating and beating and beating; beating only to keep them awake like bats; it was beating only to keep them happy and sad, happy and sad; it was beating for the black night that was choking Tola, and the rain that was pounding the earth; the drum was beating in the sky and it was beating on the earth; it was beating, and even the great sky God could not stop it from beating, because it was beating and beating and beating just as the heavens roll.

In *Yesterdays*, moreover, Ladoo elaborates the religious element and sets that world against the human one more starkly, and somewhat more humorously as well. He ridicules the phoniness of decadent forms of Hinduism and the pitiful forms of human behaviour this religious belief engenders. The gods are shown to be ungrateful to Choonilal, for example, for though Choonilal prayed to the gods for his wife to become pregnant, she only got thinner. Then he prayed to have the process reversed. "But the gods hadn't the time to change back the whole process." The priest settles this state of affairs by fathering Basdai's child for her. The gods not only are given this humorous depiction, but they are depicted as instigators and exemplars of human conflict. They fight to establish righteousness,

which in turn provides a reason for Choonilal to quarrel with Tailor and for the tensions of the novel to ensue.

LADOO HITS OUT MORE VIGOROUSLY at the religious world of Hinduism in creating the *Zeitgeist* of Carib Island in the 1950's. Many elements of Hindu religious mythology become absurdities in the transplanted context of village life in Trinidad: the monkey god Hanuman becomes the god of power for Choonilal. In other words, monkey business is the means of power. The Hindu priest is dressed in cowboy boots and drives a Cadillac — a satirical picture of his modern materialism and westernized manners. Choonilal and Basdai show blind devotion to the Aryan gods, which leads the couple to abandon the use of their indoor toilet for the cane fields. For religious reasons the sex act is seen to be "ungodly in the house," but when performed outside it becomes a source of village humour and scandal. Views of Jesus and God are deliberately satirized as part of the criticism of the system of education Poonwa receives. Repeatedly Ladoo counterpoints Hinduism and Christianity.

But Carib Island also has its social prestige, its pride in education and language: "Man Choon I tell you, dis island is something else man. Dese young Indian boys and dem, dey drink rum and talkin English too bad man. De more dey does drink rum is de more dey does talk English." "Choonilal said, 'Just now you go see wot go happen in dis island, Rag. Everybody in dis island want to go to school. Nobody want to work in the cane or plant tomatoes and ting, you know boy." Despite this bitter pessimism expressed by Choonilal, the generation of his parents was not all committed to the land as the only salvation in Carib Island. In a short story called "The Quiet Peasant" (1972) Ladoo presents a different, admirable image of a father who sees education as the means of gaining independence from the white man. The father, Gobinah, tells his son, Raju: "A few days every week, try to go to school and learn something. Take education beta, so wen you come a man, you wouldn't have to kill yourself for a bread like me. . . . Wen you have education beta, you wouldn't have de cause to rent land from dese white people."[17]

Ladoo reveals here the ironic clash between the rustic realities of an agricultural existence and the imported ambitions of a modern progressive life style. Carib Island is divided in itself. It becomes a split land in the Faulknerian sense: placing the young ambitious youth educated in the white man's system against the stubborn old-timers like Choonilal who must be forced to surrender their security for the new generation.

As the climate of both the East Indian and white worlds is depicted, it becomes fairly clear that Ladoo finds himself in a veritable *cul de sac*. The city life of Carib Island is characterized by "stabbings in alley ways" and "whores at street cor-

ners." Canada, on the other hand, is described in terms of its wintry climactic conditions and the injustices and cruelties of its settlement history. Canada is no different from Carib Island. Each of these two worlds is made to seem repugnant, then, one by juxtaposition with the other.

Clarity of purpose and control are, however, lacking in Ladoo's depiction of sex, excretion, and profanity. Peter Such speaks too kindly when he says that Ladoo's writing genius shows a facet of itself in the comic and scatological vein.[18] Ladoo's comedy and scatology are not always linked with a show of artistic genius. He chooses to emphasize sex mainly for its shameless self-indulgence; for its perverse expression in the many escapades of the village queer, Sook; in the crude humour involving a man and woman stuck together helplessly in a copulative embrace in the cane field; or in the snide cuckoldry which the pundit perpetuates against Choonilal. The final episode of the novel is the stark scene of Rookmin baring her genitals before a gazing pundit who reverently drools before her. The whole gamut of sex seems mindlessly unmotivated, even if one wants to pretend that Ladoo is commenting on this misdirected and twisted focus of the life force in society. The satirical point is lost and the reader seems to be merely given a heavy-handed treatment of sex for the sake of its own perverseness. Even surpassing the over-attention to perverted forms of sex are the endless references to and accounts of the process of defecation. This approach has nothing of Swift's metaphorical satire behind it. Ladoo is totally without the grace of art or the control of the purposeful writer. He shows Choonilal and Basdai to be caught in the religious restrictions placed upon their normal body functions, and declares Poonwa to be modern because he can adjust to the idea of eating and defecating simultaneously in pleasant indoor surroundings.

Traditionally filth and the human condition have been equated as metaphors with moral and spiritual implications, but Ladoo hardly bothers to construct the links or even to allow subtle hints to fall in his scatological gallop through the novel. The *Zeitgeist* seems to be one within which we are to read Carib Island as a dung heap or as a place where life is directed no longer toward creative ends but rather toward the sordid, ugly, and sterile. Better alternatives are not offered, and we are not given hope when we shift to the depiction of Canada, for Ladoo then speaks of "the nakedness of the trees and the havoc of regenerating death." The Canada for which Poonwa sets out after he leaves Carib Island is the place where we see

> the red Indians who had been living for thousands of years in North America; just living with nature and worshipping the land. Then came the Whiteman with his Bible and guns and a paper that had been given to him by some blue-eyed King. The paper said that the King owned the land; the Indians were trespassers. Then there was war. There was death in the land.

This area of darkness and death, like Marlow's choice of nightmares in *Heart of Darkness*, is the milieu Ladoo chose as his world, just as Poonwa did. It was his alternate world. Ironically Ladoo left it to die in the one he knew more intimately. His two novels are the ironical commentary on the tragic fate he shared with his own fictional characters.

NOTES

[1] Jane Austen, *Letters to Her Sister Cassandra, and Others*, Vol. II, 2nd ed., ed. R. N. Chapman (London: Oxford, 1952), p. 401; letter to Anna Austen, September 1814, cited in A. H. Wright, *Jane Austen's Novels* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1953), p. 13.

[2] Austen, *Letters*, II, p. 460; letter to Edward Austen, 16 December 1816, cited in Wright, p. 16.

[3] Peter Such, "The Short Life and Sudden Death of Harold Ladoo," *Saturday Night*, 89 (May 1974), 36.

[4] Ladoo in *Yesterdays* had used material drawn from stories written earlier than *No Pain Like This Body* (1972). As such *No Pain Like This Body* may not be earlier so far as its composition is concerned. All references to the two novels are taken from Harold Ladoo, *No Pain Like This Body* (Toronto: Anansi, 1972) and *Yesterdays* (Toronto: Anansi, 1974).

[5] Ladoo had planned to give this title to his first published novel, but changed the name after critical comment from his editor. See Such, "The Short Life," p. 37.

[6] Peter Such, "Harold Lowry Ladoo — *Yesterdays*," Tamarack Review (October 1974), p. 78.

[7] Nancy Naglin, "The Tale of Poonwa, the unofficial white," *Saturday Night*, 89 (June 1974), 37.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Bruce F. Bailey, "*Yesterdays*," *Canadian Forum* (May-June 1974), 17.

[11] Frank Birbalsingh, "*No Pain Like This Body*," *Open Letter*, 2 (Summer 1973), 106.

[12] Mark Sarner, "Yesterdays," *Books in Canada* (Aug.-Sept. 1974), p. 16.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Such, *Tamarack Review*, p. 79.

[15] Ronald Hatch, "Yesterdays," *Canadian Fiction Magazine* (Summer 1975), 110.

[16] H. J. Rosengarten, "The Walking Ghosts of Empire," *Canadian Literature*, 63 (Winter 1975), 96.

[17] H. Ladoo, "The Quiet Peasant," *Canada in Us Now* (Toronto: N.C. Press, 1976), p. 93.

[18] Such, *Tamarack Review*, p. 78.

# THIS ISLAND

*Linda Rogers*

1. *Genesis*

On this island there are many
Cats.
Some, dressed like eagles
In eagle feathers,
Sit on the top branches of cedar trees
Watching traffic.
Their smiles are large, I would say they
Grin,
and from these fine pointed
Teeth a chittering
Song like eagle
Laughter, high and bright,
Carnivorous.

They jump, not so much like birds but more
Like the hang gliders who celebrate
Every Sunday in summer,
Their arms held out in cruciform, on the summit
of Mt. Somenos.

And, cat-like
Land, claws extended, on the roofs of little
Cars, moving like grey mice
On the grey highways where I
Live.

One bare-gummed creature, disguised
Eyes luminous, feral iris
Crazy as headlights,
Peered in my window. When I
Looked up, I saw that grin arranged
On the moon's face like an obedient
Cloud.
His wagging tail arranged a half
Circle of rain on the glass.

"We are all mad here," he said.

2. *Shibboleth*

When I was visiting, I noticed
The house smelled.
"It smells like death," I said. "Your house
Smells bad."
It happened they'd used foam
Insulation and had to take the walls apart.
In the wall between his
Bedroom and hers because they slept
Apart,
There was the skeleton of a rat curled
Inside a cat,
Peacefully sleeping.

Later, an old man, who'd been a carpenter, told them
They often did that in the old days,
To keep away evil.

"Do you ever feel the tiny
Pea under your mattress?" my friend asked,
Laughing.

3. *Eloise and Abelard*

On this island,
There are places where women
Appear to sleep
Alone, the convent walls
Patrolled by black castrati,
Their soprano
Voices are all we hear on the
Outside in our grey
Cars on the grey highways.

Someone told me it was nuns
Who started putting
Bones in walls
To scare the Devil, Tom cats
And sometimes babies with strange
Vestigial tails and ecclesiastical
Smiles.

The sign of the cross was not
Enough.

4. *Apocrypha.*

On the wild western sea,
A man sat watching, his hand
Warming the valentine in his breast
Pocket, both retinas
Frozen as usual on the white mammalian
Froth.

The cougar, painted day-glo yellow,
Waited,
Not in the tree like my dark hunter,
But crouched in the shadow of a giant
Crab with legs, cancerous, seeking
Refuge in human
Society.

The cougar's cubs were dead, her breasts
Painful, she watched
His salt lips with hungry
Fascination.

In that night, there were no smiles,
No disembodied
Teeth, just four eyes glowing in the crab's black
Aura, and a human voice,
Feminine,
That made him turn at last.
Remember, this is still my island.

5. *Felix Domestica*

Cat — carnivorous quadruped.
Yes, I thought,
He has four feet and seems to want
Me.
I have been singled out, because
My car is grey and I
Drive carefully around the rolled
Fur, catsup coloured road signs signifying
Death.
Probably, he saw I had mongolian
Eyes and didn't go in for
Electrolysis.

Probably, he knew
There were mice in my freezer with turgid
Tails and teeth that needed
Orthodonture.
("Everyone knows a cat makes things
Vanish quite slowly,
Beginning with the end of the tail and ending
With the grin,
Which remains for some time after
The rest is gone.")

6. *In the Lovely Garden*

My garden has a fence, a gate, four
Hydrangeas and a pool,
Where he sat
Dreaming of orange marmalade,
Fishy tasting with no
Bones.

"Are you hungry?" I asked,
Offering my bare
Foot for washing, I was never
Frightened. His obedient
Grin was the only
Cloud in the blue sky.

"Once," he said,
"I met an Indian.
She was standing in the wild grass.
Her skirts were wet.
She offered me her fish,
Her hands tasted of salt."

Later, he told me,
"You are too much in the sun.
Your garden is not perfect."

7. *Evensong*

In the west, we sleep
In feather beds, the slow
Accumulation of salt-water birds
Caught drowsing in cat's nocturnal
Glare,
And sometimes feel the small
Heart still beating inside.

"When you smile," he said,
Licking, licking,
"Your teeth look like piano
Keys."

"I may be your pillar of salt," I told him,
"But I am not insensitive to night
Music, the smell of flowers,
Your tongue rasping and the west
Wind farting requiem in dormant
Nests."

Later, I heard him walking up and down,
Avoiding the semi-tones, he was not
That subtle.

8. *Anorexic*

"You're thin," they said, admiring.
"Vegetarian?
Sex life picked up, the moon
Favourable?"

"No. Yes, yes." Moon, I thought,
Lunatic.
And then I knew,
If the world was flat, I was definitely
On the edge of it.
This must be my apotheosis.

I began to read my dictionary,
Cat-house, cat-gut, cat o'
Nine tails.
"Did you say, Pussy?"

9. *Suffering Catfish*

Did you hear, there's a lake
On a mountain on my island, full
Of fish, their flesh
Licked clean?
When you look, you can see
Luminous bones and small
Cinnamon hearts crying out,
"This is my island."

We like it here.

10. *Te Deum*

Now,
I am hardly more
Than a skeleton myself,
Bones and teeth and a snow white
Heart.

My grey car sits in the garage,
His marks,
Iridescent on the roof,
A sign, I think, of some supernatural
Interest in my island,
Licked almost clean by cats
With desecrated breath and receding
Finger nails.

He is gone,
Hunting for souls, disguised,
Waits on the same branch near
The same highway.
There are other grey cars, there is still
Madness,
And the sea is all around us.

11. *Valentine*

I am not sad.
It is very peaceful here.
Everyone in my family smiles.
Everyone in my family has seen the orthodontist.
I recently received a valentine, it was from a
man who lives by the sea
On the west coast of my island.

# SAM SELVON TALKING

## *A Conversation with Kenneth Ramchand*

*Samuel Selvon*

K.R. Samuel Selvon, you are the first writer-in-residence that we have had at St. Augustine and this is an important breakthrough for us, but I'm sure that many people will wonder why you are here for one month only, and why you have come in June* when our students are preoccupied with examinations.

S.S. I had hoped to come for the full student term, from October to December 1982, but I'm working on a new book which I have started and I have found that some research that I'd hoped to put off till a later period has to be done right now. I can't really move with the book until the research is done.

K.R. Are you doing a non-fiction work?

S.S. No, but in a way it is a departure for me. I hope to do a work of fiction, but it will be based loosely — very loosely — on historical material. Although it will be in the main a fiction and invention, and will related more to human and social relationships than to events, I would like to adhere to the history of the period — roughly the 1920's and 1930's — as closely as possible. At the same time if I find that the fiction and the creativity are working to my satisfaction, I might forsake historical authenticity. In other words, if I feel the need to shift an historical event or circumstance out by a few years I might very well do so. I don't know if this sort of thing has been done by other writers, and maybe critics and historians would find fault with this unorthodox way of handling the material, but I am going to try it anyway.

K.R. You said earlier that you are locating the book in the South.

S.S. Yes. It is set in and around San Fernando, and deals with the movement of East Indians from the sugar cane areas into the town and, in a way exactly

* This conversation took place when Samuel Selvon visited the St. Augustine Campus of the University of the West Indies in June 1982. He was in Trinidad on a Canada Council grant to carry out research about life among Indians in and around San Fernando with special reference to the 1920's and 1930's, in preparation for writing a novel.

like what is happening now, forsaking the land, being attracted by the life of the town — going into business, working as tradesmen, etc. just like the Negroes are supposed to have done after Slavery was abolished. There are two elements I would hope to involve. (a) The Christianizing and educating of the Indians by the Canadian missionaries which to some extent influenced them to forsake the land and move into the town. (b) The slave (Black) and the indenture (Indian) have always fascinated me because in spite of what is happening in Trinidad today it is my belief — tinged as it is with more and more disillusionment as the years go by — that a very strong human bond existed between these two factions though it has become more and more fragmentary.

K.R. I am reluctant to press for more details at this stage because I know your method as a novelist has never involved analyzing before writing the work itself. I can guess there might be something like the relationship between Tiger and Joe in *A Brighter Sun*, but I don't want to draw you out if you feel you would like to stop there.

S.S. If I did that I would have to treat it as the earlier stages of that kind of relationship. The Tiger - Joe relationship had already been there in the period I was writing about in *A Brighter Sun*, but I can't have that approach with two races coming into contact for the first time. In the new book, I really don't know if I would do it, or how I would handle it.

K.R. But it seems that you are not as optimistic about that kind of relationship now as you were when you wrote *A Brighter Sun*.

S.S. I feel it is easy to keep the dream alive because I spend most or all of my time living abroad, but whenever I come back to Trinidad and I listen and hear about what is happening my disillusionment is fuelled. In other words, if I had remained in the island experiencing the realities of what I hear is happening the dream would turn nightmare. But whenever I come, and go to the market and see the races together, or whenever I go in a taxi and sit beside a Negro and an Indian I find that elements of human tolerance still exist and that the picture is not as black as it appears. I believe that this strikes at the very root of the controversy and argument that go on concerning the subject matter that our writers choose.

K.R. Very few writers of African origin have had the courage to deal with this sort of issue. A notable exception is Earl Lovelace who writes about the attempt of an Indian to fit into a largely African community in *The Dragon Can't Dance*. But I agree the subject does attract controversy. Are there other difficulties for a writer dealing with this subject?

S.S. Yes man, that is a great thing about that book. If I choose to keep the dream alive I would be tempted to write about aspects that enhance the dream. But while I am all for the ultimatest freedom for the writer, his work should encompass a broad unbiased picture.

K.R. Did you feel any need to do research about African-Indian relations when you were writing *A Brighter Sun*?

S.S. No. I was living in Trinidad at the time and I wrote about something I knew from first-hand experience. In fact I took the Negro-Indian relationship so much for granted that it still amazes me that when some people talk about that novel they mention the Tiger-Joe relationship as a racial statement. To me I was just portraying the relationship that existed between two human beings and that was all.

K.R. Looking at the design of the novel, the structure, the choice of characters and even some of the conversations one can't help thinking that the impulse to write about African-Indian relationships was present although it was not the main thrust of the book.

S.S. Yeh, but you are asking a question there to rip open the guts of a writer's creativity to find out what processes go on here. There is a saying that I like, "When the pot was cooking you wasn't in the kitchen." So now, Ken, you are suggesting that I contrived during my creative process to have Tiger and Urmilla living near Joe and Rita but that wasn't planned in my mind when I was writing the book. The fact that Joe happened to be a Black man is quite incidental. To many Trinidadians it would appear that I deliberately made this set-up. I do not work this way. I have never worked this way. I start a book and I allow this creativity/charisma that writers are supposed to have to do its thing. What would be truthful is to say that I selected Barataria as the setting because I was living there between 1945 and 1950, that was deliberate.

K.R. Well, then, do you think that in the book you are now writing you are going against your usual method of composition?

S.S. Yes, and it comes back to that first question, where I told you I made a start, and needed to do some research.

K.R. When you first wrote to me about coming to do the research, I felt intuitively that you wanted to get the feel of the period, to immerse yourself, and this was more important than the facts you would nevertheless be wanting to check on. When you said on arrival that you were trying your best not to look around or to listen to what is happening now, I took it that you did not

want any interference with that process of getting the feel of the earlier period.

S.S. Well I think the facts are important but the point is that I would select what I want to use, what I feel would be helpful to me. Also it is not so much to get the feel of the period for itself, as to get the feel of the people of the period, because I would be after human relationships, lifestyle, social behaviour and so on.

K.R. Do you think that the research you are doing will help you to discover things that were not apparent to you about African-Indian relationships when you lived here in 1945-50?

S.S. Quite so. Not only that. I can't say at this stage what I may create or what I may not. I would certainly hope though that in this novel set in the early period there would be a great deal that would cast light in what was likely to happen in the future.

K.R. Sam, I feel I am making you talk too much about the new book which you are still writing.

S.S. I didn't want to do this but I'm doing it for you — like a kind of thinking aloud, so you must take it like that. I am sounding a little more ambitious than I might accomplish. I realize now that covering a period of 20-30 years in this way is not easy. And I don't want to make a statement to make people say "That will be a great book," that in itself would create a hang-up in my approach. I know that I would only superficially and selfishly be taking out certain events to write a novel. I have no feeling at all that this book will turn out to be an epic or saga covering the movement from country to town. There is more than enough history and drama here for others to do more comprehensive and detailed studies, and I earnestly hope it is being done.

K.R. I hope we are not using up too much time on the new book or on the issue it now looks as if you are going to deal with, even though it is the most important issue in the social and political life of Trinidad today. Besides, you are a novelist not a politician or social commentator, and I feel bad about pushing you to talk in this way.

S.S. I would much prefer to have had the novel already written than to talk about it in this way in truth, because hitherto I have never discussed with anybody what I hope to accomplish in a future project, because a man could tell you a lot about what he's going to do tomorrow, but when the time come he ain't done one arse, and I would feel much happier if the book had already been written and we were talking about it in restrospect. Also I do

not feel that I express my thoughts and views as well as I would like to in interviews and public statements, and I prefer to be read than heard. If I have anything significant to say on any issue it is to be found inside my novels and stories. I would say that my interest would lie more in my characters' reactions to issues and situations than in the issues themselves.

K.R. What is coming out of this conversation, Sam, is how one writer takes possession of his material, or becomes possessed by it, so even if you never wrote the new novel what you are revealing now is of great value to those of us who feel a sense of awe about the creative process.

S.S. When a writer is writing, it should be approached with a certain amount of innocence and when a writer loses that innocence he ceases to be a writer as far as I am concerned. Therefore I deliberately cultivate a certain measure of ignorance about everything in order to allow the innocence to feel its way into a situation or issue.

K.R. Would you say that you cultivate this innocence in your use of language?

S.S. To the extent that it does not worry me if I invent a turn of phrase or word, and interpolate it into what is commonly accepted as Trinidad dialect. Some people accuse me of writing a kind of hybrid dialect which is not truly authentic. What they fail to see is that apart from Vic Reid's *New Day* I was the only other West Indian novelist to write a novel in which both narrative and dialogue were written in dialect, and that I had to consider being read by an audience outside of the Caribbean to whom a presentation of the pure dialect would have been obscure and difficult to understand.

K.R. This sounds very much as if you are saying that if you did not have to think of a non-Caribbean reading public you would have written differently. Do you mean that?

S.S. No, because I am a writer and language is a tool. I do not think I could have said what I wanted to say without modifying the dialect. And if I had not done this modification the dialect would have been Greek to a lot of people.

K.R. Yes. I go along with a view similar to this, held by the Martiniquan Edouard Glissant, that for our society to make a transition into full self-development and self-expression it is necessary for dialect to cease to be a secret language and become an open language. It must come to terms with writing and still retain its essence as the language of our community.

S.S. In spite of the modification I consider what I do to be dialect. Furthermore I saw potential in this modified dialect to the extent that in my last novel using this language form, *Moses Ascending*, I experimented even further

with it using both this and an archaic form of English which is not spoken anywhere today. The point I want to make is that that archaic form is a kind of dialect. So I am combining two kinds of dialect. Another thing that a lot of people forget is that Standard English or "proper English" is also used as part of our dialect in certain phrases or words. For instance if I rudely interrupt a creolized Trinidadian and he or she turns to me, looks me up and down and says in the Queen's English "I beg your pardon," I would consider that to be part of the Trinidad dialect.

K.R. The terms you are using are straightforward, but the ideas coincide with those of a number of modern theorists who speak about the literariness of the text.

S.S. My language is being taken in as written language off the page. I am not writing spoken dialect directly on to the page with phonetic spellings and apostrophes and half-spoken words because to me those are handicaps to the reader. People love to hear me read, but I am not very much concerned with that. My concern is that they read the book as a reader, and that they use the senses of a reader rather than those of a listener to interpret the language and once they can interpret it as readers that is the main thing to me.

K.R. How do you respond to the assertion by a number of critics that *A Brighter Sun* is a dialect novel?

S.S. To tell you the truth I did not even know the full meaning of the word dialect when I wrote that book. The dialogue and a few sections when Tiger is thinking out his thoughts aloud are in dialect, but a great deal of it is straight basic English. I consider *The Lonely Londoners* and some of my later books to be dialect novels.

K.R. I can't agree with you about *A Brighter Sun*. What you call straight basic English is what I call Trinidadian Standard English. To the eye it doesn't seem very different from English Standard English, but if either of us were to read it aloud it would declare itself to be closely related to the dialect — it has the same system of sounds as our dialect. If Trinidadian Standard English does not look different from English Standard English or American Standard English, that is only because writing is an unreliable guide to the phonology of a language, especially its tone and accent. This is not a difficulty for a native speaker of the language however. When you or I read aloud a narrative passage from *A Brighter Sun*, and pass from there into the character thinking aloud or speaking, nobody notices the changeover. There is continuity. I would say *A Brighter Sun* is written in the Trinidadian language or Trinidad Creole which includes both Trinidadian standard and Trinidadian dialect. *The Lonely Londoners* is written in Trinidadian Creole

too, but it prefers to locate itself for the most part in the dialect of our language.

S.S. I have never really considered the language in that light before, and I find it very interesting. We must look at *A Brighter Sun* together before I leave. But I still maintain that there must be a distinction between the written and the oral.

K.R. I don't want to abolish that distinction either. While we are on the question of language, have you thought about how you would approach the language of the characters in the new novel? Will some of your research be related to that problem?

S.S. The answer to the last part is no. The answer to the first is that I am more concerned with the translation of the emotions, feelings and situations than with reproducing a historically accurate language. If I find a language form that works I will use it. If I could write French, and French suited my purpose, I would use it.

K.R. Will that be your attitude to place as well?

S.S. I can't afford to be too far wrong topographically so I want to look at Cross Crossing, to envisage the land as it was then. I want to talk to a few people who know what it was like. I have to get an idea of the physical layout. I want to know what roads were asphalt, which ones had gravel and which ones had mud, them kind of little things. I might write about a man coming in to San Fernando from Cross Crossing barefoot and gravel hurting his foot, and people would say "No, that road had pitch not gravel." That is the kind of research I want to do.

K.R. The book you may end up writing will not be exactly like the one you are talking about now, I don't think. And yet, as you talk about how a writer approaches his task one feels glad that you are being so generous, giving from what is private and very personal. This is the sort of exchange that universities take on creative writers for.

S.S. I would be much happier discussing this face to face with a group of student writers. I have had some experience teaching creative writing in Britain and in Canada, and many times I have wished I was talking with people from my own country. I feel that any contribution that I have to make as a writer should be directed towards our own culture, and most of the writers I know are disappointed at the fact that while our potential has been appreciated and used abroad, nothing has been done at home.

K.R. I know how you feel. We are only now making a start. Sometimes I am sure that this country has got so materialistic, its soul is so dry, that people are ready for what our artists, thinkers and creative people in every other field have to offer. But then one can lose heart so easily.

S.S. In some countries the very fact that you are resident as a recognized writer is sufficient for that country to encourage and support you. I moved to Canada in 1978, and in a very short time, even though I was not well-known to the Canadian public, I was doing a paid-for writer's tour, visiting certain provinces that even published Canadian writers themselves had never had the opportunity to visit. If one were in Trindad one would visit schools all over the island and talk to pupils and students about the art of writing, and encourage them if they were inclined to that art form. I am sure that in practically every school in Trinidad teachers would remember our late cultural officer, M. P. Alladin, who managed to direct his energies towards this kind of work as an artist, and was able as well to function at an international level. M.P. once approached me with the idea of having a literary officer who would do the same kind of thing that he was doing as an art officer. This was an original proposal of his but as far as I know nothing has been done about it.

K.R. Another possibility is that you might do paid-for reading tours to different parts of the country, and these would bring your work to a general public who might not otherwise have come into contact with it.

S.S. I enjoy reading from my own work and a listener or an audience can catch some of the nuances more quickly but my concern is not with public rendition. I prefer to talk with people after they have read my work, after they catch this nuance from the written word. Mind you, I am not against reading in public. I don't do readings every day but I am reading at the Normandie next Sunday. I am here only for a month and while I am here I would like to reach as wide an audience of my own people as possible.

K.R. And a public reading can give the pleasure appropriate to a public reading. Now what about people who won't read but would come out to listen?

S.S. I'm not all that interested, not really. I would be catering to a kind of laziness. I would read to them in the hope of showing them what they are missing, and encouraging them to read.

K.R. Would you read more whole-heartedly to people in our society who are not so educated and who can't read and in any case don't have access to books?

S.S. Yes I would read to them. But I don't feel that the ability to read is one of the criteria human beings should be judged by.

K.R. O.K. then. How about the problem of the higher illiteracy? Do you think that reading your works to intellectuals, academics, and others who usually read can help them to a better understanding?

S.S. I would find this very difficult to understand because I consider myself to be one of the few writers who expresses himself in the simplest possible forms. Those readers who can't see what I mean need to be educated like the common masses who understand what I write about very well.

K.R. I think you are not all that interested in reading your work partly because you have a great respect for writing as writing, and partly because you are not interested in power and do not feel that you have a message which has to be communicated to save people. It is good to know a writer who does not wish to conscript us and it is a relief to know that if we close the book he will not pursue us with his microphone. But still I must ask, would foreigners benefit as readers from hearing you or a Trinidadian read your work aloud?

S.S. Yes, but I would like to be the one to read it. *(Laughter.)* I think that I am the best reader of my work and I have been told so very often.

K.R. Isn't it generally true that a writer is usually the best reader of his own work? I have an idea that if this is so, it is because in some way what the writer writes is to a large extent determined by his own breathing patterns, by his vocal chords, by the shape of his mouth and lips. What he writes is his word and he can speak it best.

S.S. I like that because I have always felt that I would like to be identified as an individual writer. I hate comparisons. My work has been compared to Steinbeck for example, and I have been called the Steinbeck of the West Indies, but that means nothing to me. When a reader says "I hear Selvon's voice," that satisfies me — whether they think Selvon is right or wrong. I can take adverse criticism as well as the praiseful. What I find in my writing is my identity and personality, and people's views that what I say is right or wrong becomes less important to me because in my writing I am being my own self.

# A SUN'S LIFE

*Cyril Dabydeen*

An alligator's mating
cough and call. I am on
a lookout
in dreams
surfacing once more.
I am livid for a while —

a somersault next,
more things going down,
water and mud slaking;
then the softnesses

reaching out,
a resounding call
in my life, from deep
deep below

water spurting,
bits of weeds floating,
grass, shells —
glass too

eyes looking back
the creek in me, belching out
the sun's ancient

rust

# SNAKE'S BELLY TURNED OVER

*Cyril Dabydeen*

A yellow thing in the sun
tried to brown it
it resisted with the energy of fangs
it rolled over more than once

but the sun persisted with this strange
desire to make all things one — elemental again;
it tried to create frenzy in the snake's heart,
lungs, entrails

Snake refused to die despite the wound
despite being confounded: it remembered being able
to moult, how it could change colour like the rainbow;
how, too, it could try to hoodwink the sun

But sun knew everything from the beginning
sun surged with a new attack, thinking
of blending with snakeskin, snakeanger —
a mouth widened,
fangs jutting out
whipping tongue-like

At night the sun called
upon the moon; but the moon was aloof as always —
nothing much happened
Snake waited with a ceaseless energy,
breathing heavily

Sun was ready to sing its swan song above
snake's head; but the lungs covered with the pulp
of flesh and blood, refused to be tricked —
a hissing music surged forth. Snake knew its limit
despite the sun —

and the shadows skirted everywhere, the moon
displayed patterns in the dark, the leaves
hung low, filigree scattered in air; water
coruscated ripples. Sun remembered. Snake crawled out
one last time, heaving a body, bedraggled — how much longer;
and it began to swell after a while

bloating against an angered sun

# HEDI BOURAOUI'S QUEST

## *Poetry as Cultural Bridge*

*Elizabeth Sabiston*

HÉDI BOURAOUI IS A TORONTO POET born in Tunisia, raised and educated in France, with a doctorate from Cornell University in the United States. He is now Master of Stong College, York University, Toronto, where he is a Professor of French and Comparative Literature. From the very beginning of his poetic and academic careers, he has perceived himself as being astride three cultures: North African, French, and North American. This cultural mix has proven fertile ground for experiments in poetry, creative criticism, and the breaking of genres. It has also challenged his critics to illuminate the reasons underlying his refusal to stay within the linguistic and generic conventions generally accepted by each culture.

Bouraoui's ambition to build bridges between and among his native and adopted cultures has generated most of his scholarly publications, as well as his poetry. His academic interests have ranged from language studies to cultural criticism, evidenced in his *Créaculture* texts (Philadelphia: CCD and Montréal: Marcel Didier Canada, 1971) which analyze French culture against a North American backdrop: from experimental theatre (French, Polish) to contemporary trends in literary criticism (structuralism and post-structuralism, phenomenology, etc.), from American literature to the modern French novel and Francophone North African and Caribbean literature. His 1976 book of literary criticism, *Structure intentionnelle du 'Grand Meaulnes': vers le poème romancé* (Paris: Nizet) melds several of these concerns. Bouraoui attempts to infuse the critical act with a strongly creative element by wedding the contours of the novelist's own process, showing that the intention of the novel in some ways transcends the conscious intention of its author. He has deliberately chosen to break genres and to stress the nature of the creative-critical act. As Abdallah Bensmaïn has written, "Le critique ainsi n'existe pas: il sera produit par l'oeuvre. . . ."[1]

Bouraoui has published seven volumes of poetry: *Musocktail* (Chicago: Tower Associates, 1966); *Tremblé* (Paris: Éditions Saint-Germain-des-Prés, 1969); *Éclate Module* (Montréal: Éditions Cosmos, 1972); *Vésuviade* (Paris: Saint-

Germain-des-Prés, 1976); *Sans Frontières* (Saint Louis: Francité, 1980); *Haïtuvois, suivi de Antillades* (Québec: Éditions Nouvelle Optique, 1980); and *Vers et L'Envers* (Toronto: ECW, 1982). For the most part, the five earliest volumes have received more sensitive critical attention in North America than in France or North Africa, probably because the poet refuses to stay on well-beaten paths of national pride and cultural identity. His humanism is both local and universal, and for that reason the North American audience, whether part of the American "melting pot" or the Canadian "mosaic," seems to seize his intention better. As he suggests in *Créaculture*, he is firmly convinced that man shapes his culture as much as it shapes him. As Bouraoui stated in an interview with Édouard Maunick, he is "un homme de partout," who has only one mother country, the "patrie de l'homme."[2]

Even in his first volume of poetry, *Musocktail*, Bouraoui seems to shake a musical cocktail composed of diverse elements and influences — Michaux's surrealism, Ponge's concentration on the object, Mallarmé's stress on poetry as a game, Alfred Jarry's literary jokes. But these were all blended to evoke a new inebriation, the rainbow's end of the poet's quest for his "muse," "music," and poetry.

By the time of the second volume, *Tremblé*, the playfulness, still there in the ironic distance he maintains, is yet muted in favour of an existential poetry of social commitment in a world that has "trembled," exploded, about him. In a review of *Tremblé*, Marc Alyn, in *Le Figaro littéraire*, praises the "force de frappe de ces textes bourrés de calembours, de sonorités volontairement grinçantes et d'éléments populaires."[3] He admires its denunciation of our modern "pasteurized society," but somehow fails to see that homogeneity is not unique to North America but is an attribute of the "global village" we all inhabit. As early as "Crucifié," the first poem in *Tremblé*, Bouraoui refuses to play the game of nationalism or to accept cultural labels of any sort. He wants to call himself "oui," but "un oui neutre, / Sans rime ni Maison," "Un oui qui nie." It is this dream of remaining free, "un simple Mortel / qui passe sa vie / dans les Motels / du Monde / Sans identité," which will make the poet as much at home in Haiti as he is in Ithaca, New York, Sofia, Bulgaria, and Warsaw, Poland. His "Soif de communication" in the earlier volume translates into the "Articulation" of *Haïtuvois*, with the difference that "Soif" builds on a metaphor of love between man and woman, whereas "Articulation" takes on an almost cosmic consciousness. Many poems in *Tremblé* — "In God We Trust" and "Au Secours," for example — denounce the exploitation of underdeveloped countries by the superpowers and hence predict the perceptions of *Haïtuvois*, told from *within* the point of view of the exploited land, not as a detached observer.

*Éclate Module*, the third volume, separates itself even more drastically from any existing French literary tradition. The shock waves of *Tremblé* become a veritable *éclatement* or explosion whose metaphor is located in the "Lem" of the space age.

It should be remarked that the poet uses the French language as a weapon against itself and accomplishes a linguistic revolution which is also political in its repercussions. As I have said elsewhere about this volume:

> *Éclate Module*, en faisant appel à la sensibilité actuelle, traduit l'égarement et la désorientation caractéristique de notre époque et nous donne l'impression de vivre dans le monde du "choc du futur" de 2001. Le recueil expose la vision d'un monde en pleine révolution, révolution qui se révèle jusque dans la facture des poèmes, asyndètes, ellipses, brisures stylistiques, acrobaties verbales, rimes qui s'entrecroisent et s'entrechoquent par "l'étonnement immense du désordre." Cependant, un ordre esthétique et éthique parfait surgit des négations didactiques, des malentendus linguistiques, des cacophonies sémantiques. . . .[4]

Among contemporary writers, one can name only one other, the novelist Thomas Pynchon, who seems willing to poetize technology, and not merely to retreat into romantic nostalgia for a dead past. Bouraoui's fusion of disparate elements, science, technology, and poetry, could be seen as a twentieth-century parallel to the Renaissance metaphysical poetry of John Donne. From *Musocktail* to *Tremblé* to *Éclate Module* the poet seems to undergo a kind of rite of passage, moving from self-exploration to a global vision.

*Vésuviade* moves beyond the critical view of the modern world taken in *Éclate Module* to the creation of the poet's own universe. No longer just a Columbus exploring new worlds, he insists on creating a poetic cosmos triggered by the metaphor of a volcanic eruption or explosion. Hence the book is divided into seven parts, corresponding to the seven days of creation in Genesis, starting with "Volcanigramme," passing by "Projectologos" — "In the beginning was the Word" — and ending in "Phénixode" as the new Phoenix arises from the volcanic ash. There is a dialectic of creation-destruction, and before the explosion of Mount Saint Helens, Bouraoui draws on the natural metaphor of volcanic eruption to suggest the paradoxical creation of a new world out of the destruction of the old.

WHY DESTRUCTION? For one thing, the poem "Intellectuairement" is characteristic, for Bouraoui has an acute distaste for the abuses of arbitrary power in any situation, including among intellectuals who should know better:

> La ménagerie de l'intellect se pavane
> Dans son couloir urinuversitaire
> Une noirceur inégalée. . . .

*Vésuviade* sees destruction emanating from many of the ikons of today. In a superfluity of means of communication — tape recorders, video cassettes — people stop listening to people, and human contacts are blocked:

Hymne international du système abondant
En bobines à conditionner le refus des ans
Le graffiti de mes combines prend la relève
Mais les ondes brouillées sillonnent seules
Mon singulier traqué
Orchidée qui s'achève.

("Sotto Voce")

The "décodeur" is "atone," and communication never passes over to communion:

Tu refuses de parler toi le prêtre
De la communion
Que fait ton téléphone occupé.

("Vidanges communicationnelles")

The technology of the global village has produced only global mediocrity, short-circuited communication. As Nathaniel Hawthorne once commented, he would have been more impressed with the invention of the telegraph if he had felt its use would not be confined to stock market analysis and investment counsellors. It would perhaps require not too great a stretch of the imagination to guess that Bouraoui has turned to the creative, imaginative, untechnologized, rich-in-its-poverty culture of Haiti to counteract the opportunistic, mechanistic Western world depicted in *Vésuviade*, where "l'ordinateur fait le reste." In one sense the transition is shocking; in another it is predicted in the earlier work. Both volumes are unified by the poet's quest for expression as a means of human contact: "Je ne saurais jamais dire / Je n'aurai jamais le mot" ("A Perdre Haleine").

Le monde entier ergotte ses flots verbaux un Vésuve
Irruption qui calcine l'étuve de l'inspiration.

By our worship of technology, we have sold out our spontaneity to an infernal machine:

L'invulnérable machine courtcircuite
L'intuition et son éclair
Galvanise l'angoisse du livre-situation.

("Occupations Barbelées")

Human beings are reduced to expressing their anguish anonymously, on walls: "Le graffiti sert l'individu de son cri pollué." There are no dialogues but "dialogues de sourds," and we witness "un monde sur le déclin"; love itself is mechanized and reduced to a science.

To the "technologie récidive / Orgie qui crée un monde / Architruqué de signaux," Bouraoui opposes his "Force du Désordre": "Ma révolte se sacralise." His sympathy for the "analphabète" is already evident. By the third section, "Acoustiquerie," he is already predicting "Éruptions volcaniques / Suçant de la

nuit l'amère plénitude." He tries to restore the power of the Verb, drowned by computer programmers: "Je n'ai que des mots / Pour tout dire" ("Vocables engorgés").

"Lave Lévrose," the fourth section, predicts the vision of "Lèvres Femellées de la Liberté" in *Haïtuvois*. The emphasis is always on human speech as the highest of the art forms, because issued by the breath of life itself. "Pessimistologie" and "Transfusion" use a metaphor of circulation to convey the poet's passion for visceral contact, an image that will be reprised to powerful effect in *Haïtuvois*.

Part VI, "Génératuerie," is also close to the paradox of *Haïtuvois*. We have compressed in one word both the theme of the generations (of fertility) and the threat of death — "Tuerie": as in the later book we have love-hate, perception-destruction. "Balançoire Vocale" articulates the relationship between poetry and revolution:

> Le verbe
> Suit sans cesse des déviations
> Révolution constante
> Au seuil de l'approbation.

This whole last section culminates with the exhilaration and effervescence of "Tour de Force" and "Acrobaties artistiquées," seeking the "équilibre" of the "Balançoire." The poet seeks a new creation, the Word made flesh, not the neon surrealism of our daily lives:

> Où est donc la sombre image
> D'une naissance
> De chair à morsures amidonnées
> De caresses
> Je les veux recréer.

Yet this ambition is what renders the creation vulnerable. As Bouraoui writes in "Entre la Pierre et la Statue une Agonie," there is a real physical struggle between inspiration and execution, between destruction of the old ikons and creation of a new order, and such is the greatness and weakness of art:

> Les mots venimeux s'agglutinent et se déchaînent. Hurlement qui arrête le battement du coeur. Le pays de l'esprit aride se peuple de suppositions bannissantes malgré et en dépit du corps-statue, oeuvre d'art à jamais condamnée à être vulnérable.

*Sans Frontières*, the very brief book of poetry immediately preceding *Haïtuvois*, can be viewed as a transitional work. Published bilingually with translations by Keith Harrison, the work suggests by its very title the author's insistence on freedom and rupture. It is also an attempt to reach a wider Anglophone audience. His dense, clotted style, with its rapid gear shifts and juggling of protean images, invites the reader to participate as an equal in his modern odyssey.

*Haïtuvois* is a taut, muscular, controlled book of lyric poems, prose poems, and poetic essays that marks a new departure for Bouraoui. Somewhat more accessible, less hermetic, than his earlier work, it seeks to build bridges of understanding between the peoples of Francophone Haiti, the poet's mother land, North Africa, and Canada, specifically. It has broader implications, as well, for countries of the West and of the Third World generally as the latter move from colonial status into the modern, technologized, industrialized universe.

The title, as usual in Bouraoui's works, is a new word forged of disparate elements. Never a mere neologism, his titles invariably explode the text and the reader's perceptions of it. "Haïti," of course, is imbedded in the title, as is the theme of the reader's reaction: "tu vois." In her Preface, Jacqueline Leiner points out that the "calembour-titre, grinçant, populaire" also is a cry, "aïe, tu vois!" There is a possibly more crucial pun, however, in the "haï," literally the love-hate relationship the Haitian artists and people have with their land under the Duvalier dictatorship which rules it. By extension, the hatred is extended to all forms of cultural colonization and domination practiced throughout the world. In this context it is no accident that a Québec publisher should have detected the implications of an acerbic cultural criticism directed at the remains of nineteenth-century imperialism.

The "tu vois" becomes almost a command to the reader to open his mind as well as his eyes and to sense fraternity with the aspirations of people both like and unlike himself. In fact, throughout the work Bouraoui plays with pronouns, shifting, for instance, from "I" to "we" at crucial moments to indicate his empathy with exploited peoples. Finally, "tu vois" is also a pun on "tuer," to kill, and "voix," or voices, a pun which we recollect later in the title of the poem, "Vois les Voies éparpillées des Voix," in which the homonyms underline the connections between perception ("Vois"), the blazing of new paths to diverse peoples ("Voies"), and articulation ("Voix"). The entire work, in fact, becomes an attempt to articulate that refuses all linguistic, as well as social, geographical, religious, and cultural barriers.

"Vois les voies éparpillées des Voix" enriches and enhances the puns in the book title, addressing itself to the "brain drain" from a "terre inachevée" which desperately needs native talent. There are cries of pain from the people; often they take the form of loud radio music which is not an intrusion on privacy, but "Un moyen facile de partager / Le chant et le rêve." Only the poet can articulate these cries, but often there is no constructive response: "Les cris abondent mais l'écho s'absente." These voices finally burst through the eternal plaint of the guitar and throb of the drums. This poem, with its sketches of prisons and soldiers, is more overtly political than any of the others. "Souviens-toi que tu es poussière" is the constant Biblical refrain presented to Haitians. A perfectly lovely, but loaded, image caps the poem:

L'éplucheur d'oranges offre
Deux quartiers de soleil
A étancher la crainte du passant
Remonté par la mécanique
Du jugement dernier.

Thus the tactile, erotic, sensual fruit image encapsulates the tropical sun, but at the same time shades over to the "clockwork orange" of modern mechanism, which could bring us all a merciless last judgment. Instead, the poet hopes for "Un poème d'espérance éjaculé / L'amour dans l'orgasme."

ALTHOUGH THE EMPHASIS OF THIS COLLECTION is new, as is the more evident social commitment likely to engage a whole new audience, it should present no startling shift to followers of Bouraoui's career. In *Haïtuvois, suivi de Antillades*, Bouraoui creates a poem-essay, a new form, in which he dialogues with another people, in particular with their "Voices," their poets or artists. The poet's "I" is somehow less evident than in the other volumes, as he seeks to work his way into the skin and the heart of these people so like and yet so unlike him. The dominant motif is a fraternity which weds Caribbean culture but, at the same time, by cultural comparisons and contrasts, transcends it.

*Haïtuvois*, the first and more substantial part of the book, establishes links between such aspects of society in North Africa, Haiti, and Canada as the role of women, superstition and religion, local dialect, and the arts. The poems are grouped thematically and linguistically. The first two, "Vaccine Tam-Tam et Nada Qu'a," and "Les Globules de ton Ile," provide hooks on which the North American reader can hang his perceptions. They set the tone and provide culture shocks to initiate us into a culture for which apparently nothing in our background prepares us. Immersed in this tropical bath, we are invited to perceive with our eyes, skins, and hearts, not with rational, sequential logic. For this reason, the "I" of the poem adopts the persona of a naive North American, probably Canadian, tourist, eventually horrified to discover that he is himself implicated in all this wealth, all this poverty.

The title of "Vaccine Tam-Tam et Nada Qu'a" provides an initial linguistic, as well as cultural, shock. It could be chanted to the beat of African drums or tomtoms. "Pas d'poôblème a Haiti" is the constant message they beat, conditioning the populace. The noise of the drum blocks instead of facilitates communication. The poet reminds us that Canada, so accustomed to see itself as the colonized and not the colonizer (Québec by Anglophones, English Canada by the Americans), is itself an instrument of imperialism in the Third World. "Nada Qu'a" is simply Canada pronounced backwards, with an additional pun on the Spanish

"Nada," or "Nothing," a favourite philosophic stance of Ernest Hemingway, that old frequenter of Caribbean islands. The harsh sound of "Nada Qu'a" contrasts the Western world of the "haves" to the ex-colonial "have-nots." The new colonizers are the tourists housed in luxury hotels blinding them to the tar-paper shacks outside the gates:

> On ne meurt pas de faim disent les impérialistes
> On meurt d'abondance de nourriture . . . de
> sur-alimentation.

Bouraoui denounces the tunnel vision of tourists who refuse to look into their own hearts. The humour of the Haitian, the philosophic tolerance and stoicism of "Pas de poôblème," is seen as a defence mechanism, a kind of voodoo chant "Servant lieu de religion / Tout est pris à la légère: / seul moyen d'éviter le suicide." Tropical sunshine, engendering mindless fertility like that of North Africa, will not fill empty bellies, and there is indeed trouble in paradise, which for all its lushness is not far from a Dantesque inferno.

Paradoxically it is all this poverty that also helps engender art; and that thesis is the centre of gravity of this book: "c'est quand les estomacs sont vides que / fleurissent les oeuvres d'art." There is no art without tension and conflict, as we see in the English Renaissance, the Irish Renaissance, American black literature. Bouraoui could well be describing his own writing, as well as that of the Haitian writers whom he introduces later. African himself in origin, like them, he is at home with "Des couleurs / éclatantes africaines." Even the "marchandage" of these Haitians is implicitly compared to that in a North African souk, as a means of communication: "Le marchandage est le seul moyen / de s'entre-pénétrer émotionnellement, tactilement, intellectuellement. . . . " It, too, becomes an art, and art is smilingly for sale on every street corner. Bouraoui makes it clear that the new tourist industry is built upon a kind of slave trade — "L'esclavage continue." There is a subtle shading over, from the "Je" observing to the "nous" of identification with the Haitians, through a shared heritage of language, art, and colonization: "ceux qui *nous* exploitent." It is through poetry that he hopes to achieve a "HIATUS" (the all-useful pun on HAITI), to hang as a slave collar around the neck of the tourist industry. The vaccine drum provides a rolling, hypnotic overture and mood piece for the rest of *Haïtuvois*.

"Les Globules de ton Ile" shows the metamorphosis of world traveller to Haitian, prepared by the pronoun shift in the previous poem: "Je t'ai dans la peau HAITI" — which translates into English as the old Cole Porter lyric, "I've got you under my skin." That the skin is another colour makes the act of penetration beneath the surface essential:

> Je t'ai dans la peau
> Parce que je ne peux pas changer de couleur
> Et ma colère est ta colère.

The almost-rhyme of "couleur" and "colère" exacerbates the poet's sense of frustration at the barriers dividing people. Like them, he is bursting with hunger and love, and he draws a parallel with the creative volcanic eruption of *Vésuviade*: "Éruption qui ne dévide jamais le volcan / De mon estomac." In particular, his own memory of colonization makes him identify with "La haine de tes poètes." The metaphor shifts from the appearance, the skin, to the circulation of the blood; from "Je t'ai dans la peau" we move to "Je t'ai dans les veines." Blood is the fitting emblem of equality and democracy, the same colour in all men, the underlying reality and life force.

"Had'ra-Vaudou" is an amalgam of North African superstitions and Haitian voodoo rites; it takes us back to the roots of both cultures and to their folkloristic expression which today continues to serve as a weapon against the oppression of imperialism. The uninitiated could use some notes in the form of vocabulary helps, since the poem utilizes both local dialects and the names of local priests, gods, and presiding spirits. Its language is dense, loaded, rich. The word becomes a totem, an "open sesame," an incantation, permitting transcendence, through the poetic voice, for the fantasies of the two popular imaginations. The poem reverberates to the deep, rich sound of the voodoo drums and the African tomtoms, and we are reminded that Haitian religion represents a local variant on a theme inherited from Africa. As Bouraoui has said, if he travels, "c'est pour comprendre les 'chocs culturels' qui en dérivent, capter la dimension essentiellement humaine de ces pays, bref, me tremper dans de nouveaux bains de valeurs, en espérant projeter par la même occasion la mienne."[5] He underlines his cultural nomadity and plurivocity.

The "démons vivants et visibles" exorcised in this poem are the invaders in paradise, colonized countries being pre-industrial but a kind of playpen for the industrialized nations. Their tropical climate and lush beauty do not feed the inhabitants, but are for sale to the exploiters. Superstition, far from being primitive, has its own logic, giving the individual some sense of control over his own destiny. The magician, the sorcerer walking on coals, sucking blood, eating broken glass, is escaping the reality of daily poverty and sublimating pain itself into "un rêve flamboyant" in the space between life and death; between yesterday and today. (Bouraoui's reference to "le bel Hier" and "L'Aujourd'hui" reminds us of an *engagé* Mallarmé.) Destruction and love, male and female, Haiti and North Africa are fused in the prayers of two peoples to "Auguferaï Dieu du feu / Erzulie Déesse de l'amour." We seem to witness a nightmare, an oneiric vision, in which the dreams of the poor are acted out, even to extracting green bills from a mouth that cannot speak. The T'BAL, talking drum, of Kherkhennah in Tunisia answers to the sounds of the Haitian Mama drums. By the end we have a procession of spirits and gods from the Arabian Nights, Africa, and voodoo

joining hands in a mad dance of "aggressive transcendence": "Des Djinns Damb-Allah Marabout Papa Legba."

After the first three poems, which serve as bridges between the *idées forces* of the North American, North African, and Haitian peoples, there is a group of poems about, and dedicated to, individual brother and sister artists who have helped articulate the aspirations of the masses. "Lèvres Femellées de la Liberté" joins the theme of the artist to that of the role of women in the Third World, and is dedicated to four gifted Haitian literary women. The "lèvres," this time, articulate clearly — they do not swallow swords or broken glass as in a voodoo ceremony. The poet senses a double slavery in the women, political on the one hand, sexual on the other: "Toujours le Mâle-obstacle dresse l'écran / Où tu tisses les mots écorchés de l'étreinte." Nevertheless the poem begins with the liberating command: "Parle Femme douée du verbe rare délie / Ta Terre par derrière l'esclavage et la mort." The entire poem turns on the metaphor and reality of the woman's breath giving voice to her concerns. Imprisoned by the "colossale arrogance du sacré passé," this "Femme du Tiers-Monde" is invited to join hands with the "I" of the poem and establish a liberating dialogue through the fusion of woman and artist. The revolution may be a "tranquil" one, but it will extirpate the root causes of this double exploitation. Caribbean and African women are sisters in their past and present, and in their quest for liberation. Thus each is addressed as "O Femme riche et pauvre du Tiers-Monde" — poor in the material sense, but rich in perception and the oracular gift of words. Her smile becomes the new, regenerating because intelligent, sun:

> Sur les lèvres-ailes du logos
> De nos nations.

The next four poems, to balance "Lèvres Femellées," are addressed to four male artists. "Génie à Humaniser" is dedicated to Frankétienne, a painter-poet and the author of *Ultravocal*. For Bouraoui, Frankétienne represents a human and literary contact with a kindred soul, between the "rue des esclaves" and the green book (*Ultravocal*), between submission and artistic revolt. Ultra-vocality, it could be said, is at the end of both writers' quests, though Bouraoui's has a "modulation africaine" and Frankétienne is "le fils légitime des Caraïbes." The bearlike Frankétienne, unlike the women poets, gives rein to a "violence sanguine" (confined to the verbal level, to be sure), pushing vocality to the ultra-extreme. He is compared to a bull and a giant, as well as a bear, capable of liberating the "Perles d'Haïti." Bouraoui urges him to decolonize Haitian literature, which, like North African and to a certain extent Québécois, exalts classical French at the expense of a local tradition. Bouraoui wishes that "l'ivrogne du Tap-Tap me dise / Aimer ton oeuvre au lieu de celle / d'Hugo et de Zola." He recognizes in the Haitian

poet his own syntactic disruptions and those of the fraternity of Third World poets.

"Projets Fraternels," addressed to René Philoctète, again underlines the quest for fraternity of a voice trying to make itself heard. Philoctète's mode is to mythologize and demythologize, to create symbols "pour exorciser la misère du monde," as opposed to the violent imagery of Frankétienne. Philcotète's "Iles qui marchent" are heading towards liberation and may point the way for the Third World generally. They become "des flèches libératrices / De ta terre, de *nos* terres." Michaux's opium-induced hallucinations are as nothing compared to the oneiric visions of "NOUS, fils de Dahomey des / Caraïbes, d'Afrique" in our "crises de possession," a pun encompassing both the poetic divine afflatus and social status as ex-colonial possession. The poet is also a *houngan*, or priest, in the voodoo tradition.

"Partagé" is addressed to René Belance, like Bouraoui himself a poet at the time living in voluntary exile from the mother country, and who is tempted to return like the prodigal son, living a kind of "délire bordant sur la folie."

"Articulation" (to Rassoul Labuchin) is in many ways a crucial poem, at the end of the first section of the book. All of *Haïtuvois* is, after all, about articulation, and this one about communication "dans ma langue sevrée / Violée par 'nos pères les Gaulois' " — in other words, it is about communication in the language of the colonizer. North Africans and sub-Saharan Africans also use the language of the colonizer imposed by force and now become second nature. By implication, the mother country, like the mother language, has been raped. It is a further ironic note that even in Black Africa children are taught that their fathers are the Gauls. Labuchin is viewed as a prophet who returns to Creole in his works, the language of the people and of folk tales; his first name, "Rassoul," signifies prophet in Arabic. His proper name, in fact, is Yves Médard, so even his artistic identity is a kind of fictional creation, or call to arms. The "chants de la liberté" include then "Chants créoles / Chants Wolof / Chants Arabes / Chants Berbères." A people returning to its roots depends heavily on an oral tradition and on minority languages. The latter also exercise an influence on literary French or classical Arabic as writers make daring experiments in a mixture of languages, as, for instance, Michel Tremblay does with joual in Québec, Kateb Yacine with Berber and local dialects in North Africa, and Médard-Labuchin with Creole in Haiti. Bouraoui and Labuchin speak for "Des peuples sur le point d'alphabaptiser," so the language of literacy and that of folklore and the oral tradition are found on minarets and crosses, as well as in voodoo and folklore, "En serrant Pierre Loa / Legba et Baron Samedi." Labuchin, using ancestral Creole as a literary language, rebaptizes and immerses his people in a new-old tongue, in much the same manner as Bouraoui has spoken of "bathing" in different cultures on his travels.

THE COLLECTION INCORPORATES ESSAYS on two of the poets to whom Bouraoui has dedicated his own poems: "L'art de saturer pour raturer" on Frankétienne and "Le Chant glorieux de l'homme total" on Philoctète. It should be noted, however, that Bouraoui's poems dedicated to Frankétienne and Philoctète are also creative-critical efforts and quite consistent with the essays in their insights.

In the first of the two poem-essays, on Frankétienne's *Ultravocal*, the author is seen as the type of resistance to the emasculation of colonized people. Bouraoui perceives Frankétienne's "roman-poème" as somewhat didactic; its nightmarish vision virtually abolishes characterization. The protagonist is mythic, the "medieval shade" of Mac Abre, a devil figure, who reappears from time to time, and mystically makes his first entrance, Bouraoui notes, on page 111, three unities, implying a new trinity. He is a sort of Mac the Knife, who is dangerous sexually as well as physically menacing. There is, according to Bouraoui, a "cohérence interne" in Frankétienne's work in spite of hallucination. Frankétienne attacks the consumer society and technology, in the person of the President of the United States. The role of the poet is perceived as "éclatement," a description that fits Bouraoui at least as well as Frankétienne. Animal totems of an ancient African agrarian or hunting tradition are transformed into the slum rats of a modern urban one. But "plus il y a . . . d'éclatement, plus il y a possibilité de création." In a world overwhelmed by things, communication is possible only in the "intermittences," the empty spaces between. In both his paintings and literary work Frankétienne declares war against naked power based on authority and technology, and war is the road to liberty. Because of its avant-garde quality, Frankétienne's audience is likely limited, but this is generally true of literature rooted in revolutionary ideas, including Bouraoui's own. So closely does Bouraoui identify with Frankétienne's vision that he at times, instead of analyzing his work, assumes his character and weds the contours and poetic rhythms of his work. The poetry is cleverly interspersed with the straightforward academic essay, liberally sprinkled with quotations from Frankétienne's text, and it is the reader, finally, who must fill up the literary space left to him. The latter is challenged to assess his own role, whether as cultural colonizer or colonized.

In the piece on *Ces Iles qui marchent*, Bouraoui views Philoctète's drama of exile. This essay should be of interest to Québécois readers as well, since Philoctète's chosen place of temporary exile was Québec, of which he gives the reader his impressions. His preoccupation with death and destruction is dramatized in Philoctète's four illustrations as well as his poetry. He sees history as "un perpétuel recommencement" from which, unfortunately, we learn little. We are reminded of the Joycean definition of history as a nightmare from which we are trying to awaken. The native land, on the other hand, is not susceptible to rational

thought; it is imaged as a mother country in the guise of a Haitian peasant woman, the whole bathed in an "atmosphère de joie, de fête et de flottement." Philoctète has created a modern epic in which he plays the role of a Haitian Roland who, unlike his predecessor, sounds the horn of poetry to open the eyes of the world to social injustice. We can see why Bouraoui is attracted by his work, for he forges bonds of sympathy with the peoples of Africa, from which the Haitians originally came, and with the Vietnamese.

Philoctète views Canada ambivalently as the "terre des exilés, ses frères, mais aussi terre industrialisée effrayante dans son isolement et son aliénation." He defines this ambivalence beautifully: he is "un enfant terrible des traditions de ma race." A similar ambivalence is highlighted in Bouraoui's attacks on the North American tourists (of whom he is one) in "Vaccine Tam-Tam," in favour of the formerly colonized (of whom he is also one).

*Antillades* is a little book inside a longer book, but its purpose is to expand the Haitian vision to the Caribbean in general and, by extension, to the entire Third World. If the first section seems to take the "microscopic" (that is personal) view for the most part — to be a kind of "novel as history," to borrow Norman Mailer's terms — the second is the telescopic, long, or bird's-eye view — "history as a novel." The "je" seems distanced here, rather than absorbed "under the skins" of his subjects, although the difference is merely a matter of degree or emphasis, not of kind.

"Ces Airs Qu'on Chante Partout" is a tribute to the Martiniquais poet Aimé Césaire ("Ces Airs") who, along with Senghor, pioneered a national consciousness in the Third World. Like Bouraoui's native Tunisia, Martinique is a *plaque tournante*, a "carrefour" of different cultures: "L'Afrique, l'Europe, l'Amérique s'ajustent poliment." The "exubérance verbale" of Césaire is compared to that of the Breton. A political figure as well, Césaire is compared to Senghor and Bourguiba who have both moved from attitudes of revolt to stasis as cultural monuments. Bouraoui's view of Césaire is somewhat sardonic: he is an artist who has been co-opted, consciously or unconsciously, by the establishment. It is the same story on both sides of the Atlantic. As Bouraoui writes of Césaire, "On votera pour lui jusqu'à sa mort."

Parallels are drawn between France's influence over North Africa and its influence over Martinique; both lands are inscribed in a history of slave markets. Césaire, frozen into Buddha-like monumental status, is no longer able to promote social change. There is an ambiguity in the treatment of this man who put Martinique on the artistic map and who was committed to the betterment of his people. For increasingly, Césaire suffered from a cleavage between his role as artist and his political role as man-of-action. It is as if fame and power almost inevitably separate the leader from his people. Martiniquais children, questioned about him today, say, "Césaire connais pas." It is not his fault, but when the

artist or spokesman becomes a monument in his own lifetime, he cannot feel the pulse of his people, because he is surrounded by political aides and buffers who keep the real world at bay.

Even the Martiniquais topography is inscribed in Bouraoui's veins because of its resemblance to his native Maghreb. But the tourist side of the persona is also an exploiter. The "I" appears as a guilt-ridden tourist aware of his own complicity: "Mon tourisme me fait honte moi. . . . Moi le transplanté sur trois vagues." The Frantel and Méridien Hotels stand as visible manifestations of cultural colonization, "Où règnent l'ennui américain / Et le vertige européen de l'arrogance," where food is thrown out while the people outside the gates starve. Ironically, Bouraoui notes, watching pigs rooting in the débris as they have to all eternity, "Rien ne change même chez les innocents." Great men, heroes of the day, may change, but it is always the same for the poor man. In this virtually stagnant society, any hope is deferred to an ever-receding future. As the taxi-driver says (in "Testament de Minuit"), "Il faut des siècles. . . ." Meanwhile, the world belongs to the "pétro-nullards," since everything is for sale in the Third World. Only the flora, which one cannot eat, is luxuriant, and the political comment is more explicit in the *Antillades* series. The sole refuge for the masses, in the face of starvation and death, is the imagination:

> Et l'imagination se régale
> En dépit des fossoyeurs.

In "Les Dévoreurs," the metaphor of the cannibalization of the turtle (an image of the people helpless on its back) is aimed at both the exploiting tourists and the wealthy Martiniquais who have forgotten their past. The people cringe, fearful, and only the "walls have words" of protest:

> Parfois les graffiti crient:
> "Halte au chômage et à l'émigration"
> Reprenant
> Comme un refrain
> le soutien moral d'une hantise.

The torpor and helplessness of the Martiniquais are, by implication, sharply contrasted to the militancy of the Haitians, even though the latter is translated harmlessly (for the moment) into the violence of words and voodoo.

"Excès de Silence," on Martinique, is at the opposite pole from "Vois les Voies," on Haiti. The victim here addressed is even unable to "découvrir [sa] castration." His condition goes beyond alienation to a kind of fugue state of passive acceptance and rule by a reactionary and imitative middle class: "On importera toujours son camembert outre Atlantique / Juste pour dorer son cantique / dans les sourires bourgeois." The poet also exclaims "Inch-Allah!" at

one point, reminding us that more than the Caribbean has been lulled into passive receptivity and victimization:

> Inch-Allah! Espagnol ou mauresque
> On le dit à qui veut l'entendre . . . prédire et redire
> Son paradoxe de vouloir naître
> Dans le présent labyrinthé des nuits.

In "Yo Pas Ka Tiré Boyau / Pour Metté Paille" ("Don't pull out your vitals to replace them with straw"), the mother country sucks the blood of its colony like a leech or vampire: "La France mère patrie s'incruste comme une limace douloureuse / Dans la chair laiteuse des noix / De Coco." Meanwhile, the library, source of literacy, is hidden among huts while the police proliferate in luxury. And the blind sky looks down on the fertile sugar cane. We are reminded that this is an economy once built on slavery, and that the slavery continues under another name and other exploiters.

Madame Rosette is the type and symbol of the descendant of slaves now become herself a bourgeois colonizer. From her luxurious nest, Madame Rosette explains "La splendeur et la misère des goûts" in an echo of Balzac's novel, *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes*. Bouraoui suggests that we are witnessing a form of prostitution on the part of the native bourgeoisie, and that perhaps Madame Rosette is a "madame" in more ways than one. Black herself, she calls her servants "Negroes" and treats them like slaves. Bouraoui establishes an exact parallel with the North African bourgeois who, an Arab himself, scorns his servant as an Arab, "l'Arbi":

> Mais le frère bourgeois appelle Félix
> Son nègre comme le cheikh son l'Arbi.

White exploiters of black slave labour in the nineteenth century, such as Napoleon and Josephine, have been replaced by black exploiters like Madame Rosette — who, ironically, lives in a museum dedicated to the colonial past.

"Salut à Toi Mère Caraïbe" is a reprise of country-as-woman which dominates the book. As in "Je t'ai dans la peau Haïti," the poet feels her corals circulating through his veins, such is the extent to which he has internalized this alien but similar culture. The people's pockets cannot be filled with tourists' smiles. If tourism is the only industry, the people have nothing to sell but themselves and their services — no material productivity in the Marxist sense — and that is another form of slavery. They are thus prevented from coming to grips with their own problems. The poet discovers "Une forêt d'idées / Sur les murs de tes villes avilies" in creole. Hope resides in the future:

> Planter et récolter en toute saison
> Dans le champ de l'entente.

It is evident that Bouraoui feels Third World countries will only achieve true independence by breaking out of their isolation and comparing their plights with those of others like themselves. The ikons of French and North African high and popular culture mingle readily with the local in this last outpost of the old French empire. North African couscous supplements Caribbean cooking, and even a local fishing boat bears the name "Monastir," referring to Bourguiba's palatial dwelling. It is, to be sure, difficult to determine whether these ikons derive from a French or North African physical presence, or whether they indicate, as one would hope, an empathy with other cultures in travail.

The diptych of *Haïtuvois*, followed by *Antillades*, invites the reader to compare and contrast the similar, and yet dissimilar, plights of the Haitian and Martiniquais peoples. Bouraoui offers a poetic fusion, through memory, of their conditions with those of the North Africans (indeed of Africans generally) and the Québécois, presenting at least four facets of colonialism and its aftermath. In Québec, we have a people of French origin who often see themselves as having been conquered by the English, but who strongly maintain their own culture. In North Africa we have a native people who have been conquered and colonized *sur place*, as it were, but who have a clearly defined culture of their own on which the culture of the colonizer has been superimposed to create a new and original blend.

In Haiti and Martinique, by contrast, we have peoples first transplanted from Africa under slavery, who then had an alien French culture imposed on them. But even between the two Caribbean countries there are striking differences. Haiti has been independent since the slave rebellion of Toussaint l'Ouverture in 1804, during the Napoleonic era. The Haitians are a historically rebellious and independent people. Under slavery, the wildest and proudest slaves destined for the American South were first landed and seasoned in Haiti. These were the slaves who sparked the l'Ouverture rebellion. Their decendants have had a lid kept over them by the Duvalier dictatorship. Rebellion, which can be said to be in their blood, can now express itself primarily through the poets and artists, while the people have channelled their expression into local colour and voodoo. In Haiti, Canada (especially Québec because of its proximity and shared language) has also had an important influence.

Martinique and Guadeloupe have been longer under the French hegemony, since 1635, and in 1946 became a *département* of France. In a sense, they have remained *too* French for any form of overt rebellion. Aimé Césaire, who was a revolutionary at the beginning, has had success rebound against him, since his classic status has tended to discourage younger artistic voices.

Poetry is the nearly ideal instrument by which we can move from "attente" to "entente." As Bouraoui said in an interview, "Le poète est toujours constructeur.

. . . La poésie, la littérature, les arts, bref, les idées forces culturelles métamorphosent subrepticement le monde."[6]

What he says about René Philoctète's contribution defines beautifully the goal he is setting himself to achieve, a "prise de conscience." When the world becomes poetic, we will have a literature of silence, or "the Word made Flesh":

> C'est seulement à ce moment que le poète, et l'homme en général, sera ébloui par tant de beauté et de majesté que la poésie s'effacera pour laisser place à une entente parfaite, à une fête globale, à une résurgence universelle qui ancrera toutes les îles du monde à la racine fugace de la plénitude.

NOTES

[1] "Hédi Bouraoui: *Le Grand Meaulnes*; autobiographie romantique ou nouvelle forme romanesque?" *L'Opinion*, lundi 2 mai 1977, p. 6.

[2] Radio France, Émission Bibliothèque, 12 avril 1977 à 19 h.

[3] Marc Alyn, "Un Français en Amérique," *Le Figaro littéraire*, n° 1241 (2-8 mars 1970), p. 27.

[4] E. J. Sabiston, "*Éclate Module*," *Présence Francophone*, 8 (Printemps 1974), 157.

[5] "Hédi Bouraoui, citoyen du 'Village Global'," Propos recueillis par Ridha Kéfi, *Le Temps* (Tunis), samedi 7 mars 1981, pp. 1-2.

[6] Kéfi interview, p. 3.

# ERASMUS IN THE KITCHEN

*Ricardo Sternberg*

Who is to know
if Erasmus, alone,
brewing his tea,
for once considers
the steps taken
that brought him,
pell mell and wide-
eyed, to where he is.

Who is to know
if he — still alone —
begins subtracting
the years and steps
until standing again
at the blind hour
of some choice.

Who I am today
this bearded man
brewing his tea
alone alone alone
can be blamed on
the man I was then
and the poor devil
knew of no choice.

Travelled backwards
the road reveals
its hidden fork;
a retroactive wound
flares briefly
at the disclosure.

The kettle whistles
and Erasmus, alone,
turns to other matters.

# "UNDER THE VOLCANO"

## *The Politics of the Imperial Self*

*Michael Cripps*

In chapter ten of *Under the Volcano*, the tension between Hugh and the Consul touches off a bitter political argument. Feelings of jealousy and humiliation may underlie the Consul's attack on his brother, but the exchange brings into clear focus their apparently antithetical attitudes to the political struggles of the 1930's, and to the question of political action in general. Throughout the novel, Geoffrey Firmin represents himself as a confirmed quietist, whose indifference to political involvement is grounded in a conviction that history, like a man's life, is ordered by "a sort of determinism." There is nothing to be done: the people of Spain and Mexico cannot be relieved of their misery, any more than he can escape his suffering, since it is the lot of all men. Characteristically placing the upheaval in Spain *sub specie aeternitatis*, he takes comfort in the assumption that Spain's culture "will survive intact," whatever the outcome of the civil war may be. For the Consul, all intervention is self-serving interference, all Samaritans likely to conceal a predatory purpose, and he asks only to be left alone to pursue his own "little fight for freedom." But for Hugh, history is shaped by man's actions, and his failure to fight against Fascism, although he has visited many battlegrounds as a reporter, leaves him feeling guilty and ashamed. Still, he continues to style himself as an ardent anti-fascist who believes in historical progress and the brotherhood of man; and he holds on to a dream of heroic action, which he hopes to realize by shipping out on a freighter carrying arms for beseiged Spain.

But we should not allow ourselves to be misled by the rhetoric of either man. However admirable Hugh's social ideals may be, his interest in political action, like his sympathy for the Jews, is of dubious origin. Laruelle's description of him as a "professional indoor Marxman" is apt: Hugh's political stance is largely posturing, part of a purely personal battle to escape self-condemnation. Finally, the cause he upholds is irrelevant, since the enemy he opposes is himself. It might be argued that it is the Consul who has a fixed commitment to a political position, whereas Hugh's leftism is likely to be discarded along with his guitar, to become

another episode in the romantic story of his life. Certainly the Consul's opposition to Hugh's socialism goes beyond his antagonism to his brother and rests on an ideological base. Prompted by his own self-hatred, Firmin views all men in Hobbesian "physiological" terms,[1] and so he is ready to accept any régime that will subdue the individual's insatiable desire for power over others. The turmoil of the 1930's has not persuaded the Consul that political authority does not remain an abstraction that arbitrates between competing interests, but represents an interest itself, and if unchecked comes to serve only itself, provoking rather than preventing "the war of all against all." But then, as his dispute with Hugh demonstrates, the Consul's reactionary position, like Hugh's socialism, has not been reached by careful political reasoning. Although he objects to Hugh's confusion of the general interest with his own compulsive need for action, the Consul's political views also are formed by psychological pressures, and serve to mystify his own narrow idea of self-interest, which he confuses with historical necessity.

And so, in their politics, as in other aspects of their characters and ideas, Hugh and the Consul present different sides of the same dilemma; or, as Lowry put it in his letter to Cape, different sides of the same man.[2] Political dialectics is to Hugh what his "battle for the survival of the human consciousness" is to the Consul: a struggle in which the romantic will seeks to establish its dominance. In their attitudes to action in the world of other men, Hugh and the Consul enact different strategies by which the "imperial self" pursues its manifest destiny. Neither man regards himself as an agent defined by what he does "to and with others." For both men, the "inward scene" dominates the external world and the "outward becomes the mere acting out of the inward."[3] What Quentin Anderson has described as a characteristic development of the American tradition, Lowry represents as a danger common to all men in the modern western world. *Under the Volcano* explores a central theme of Anderson's *The Imperial Self* — the transformation of the public realm by men for whom the "associated life has become almost unreal," for whom "the middle ground is filled, insofar as it is filled, with projections out of the self." For the Consul, the ordinary social world of men and events is devalued by the absolute primacy he assigns his own spiritual life. The imperium of the "inner empire" of the soul reduces the world beyond the self to the status of colonial outposts, whose resources are drawn upon to serve the interests of the governing power, but otherwise ignored. Appropriately, the Consul's "imperial self" finds political expression in the British foreign service.

Firmin's disdain for political opinion and action makes it easy to overlook the importance of Laruelle's recollection that the Consul had been a British patriot who "passionately believed" in the empire he served.[4] That he is known simply as "the Consul" suggests how fully Geoffrey Firmin identifies himself with imperial Britain. His background perfectly suits him for service to king and empire. He

is, after all, a true son of the Raj, born in India and originally intended for the Indian civil service. But there is no reason to believe that Firmin was caught up by the British imperial myth, that Britain conquered and colonized less in its own interest than in the service of humanity. Like the British Empire he represents, the Consul's attention is always directed inward, and what lies beyond is made instrumental to his own purposes, illustrating V. S. Naipaul's observation that "the Raj was an expression of the English involvement with themselves rather than with the country they ruled."[5]

Never solely a political entity, the British Empire depended upon the exercise of economic power beyond its borders to achieve its dominant position. A long-time representative of His Majesty's government, Firmin seems well aware of whose interests he serves abroad. Even in his obscure post in provincial Mexico, there are British financial concerns to be protected and advanced. The local narrow-gauge railway, built by an English company to follow a meandering route because it was paid for by the kilometre, is a legacy of the nineteenth-century exportation of British railway technology, and a reminder of whose interests were served by such trade. Although never a major colonial power in Latin America, Britain continued to have significant business interests there, such as the oil holdings in Mexico nationalized by the Cárdenas government in March of 1938, an action which occasioned a discontinuance of diplomatic relations, and leaves Firmin an ex-consul in Quauhnahuac. In a sense, Señor Bustamente is not far wrong in supposing that the Consul has been a spy, for it was surely an important part of a British consul's duties to keep a close watch on domestic political developments which might have an effect on British business interests.

BUT FIRMIN ALSO FOLLOWS political events in Mexico because he has his own investments there to oversee. However unworthy he may feel, a large part of his reluctance to follow the other members of the diplomatic corps home to Britain is a fear of the loss of his property in Mexico. Although he has no intention "of going to live among the Indians," the Consul is more serious when he tells Yvonne that he is "thinking of becoming a Mexican subject," undoubtedly to escape the confiscation of the holdings of non-Mexican nationals. Critics of the *Volcano* seem to have disregarded how the Consul earns the money to support himself while he conducts his "great battle." They are like Yvonne in this respect, who takes for granted, as the Consul sees it, his "habit of making money": "But for one's habit of making money, don't you know, all very mysterious to you, I suppose, outside looking in . . . the result of so much worry, speculation, foresight, alimony, seigniorage —." As the Consul here protests, his investments require close superintendence, which he gives, however oblivious he

may be to whatever else goes on in the world around him. The mysterious phone call he receives in Chapter Three, and drunkenly muddles through, is from a fellow investor in resource-based companies in Mexico:

> he started to speak into the receiver, then, sweating, into the mouthpiece, talking rapidly — for it was a trunk call — not knowing what he was saying, hearing Tom's muted voice quite plainly but turning his questions into his own answers, apprehensive lest at any moment boiling oil pour into his eardrums or his mouth: "All right. Good-bye . . . Oh, say, Tom, what was the origin of that silver rumour that appeared in the papers yesterday denied by Washington? I wonder where it came from . . . What started it. Yes. All right. Good-bye. Yes, I have, terrible. Oh they did! Too bad. But after all they own it. Or don't they? Good-bye. They probably will. Yes that's all right, that's all right. Good-bye; good-bye!" . . . Christ. What does he want to ring me up at this hour of the morning for. What time is it in America.

When he returns from his search for a restorative drink after this ordeal, and his encounter with the man with the Trinity tie, Yvonne asks him, apropos the telephone call:

> "How's the market?"
> "Tom's a bit fed up because they've confiscated some property of his in Tlaxcala, or Puebla, he thought he'd got away with. They haven't my number yet, I'm not sure where I really do stand in that regard, now I've resigned the service —"

This supplies a more serious context for the Consul's jest about being turned out of Eden.

> "Or perhaps," he added, in more cheerful vein, "perhaps Adam was the first property owner and God, the first agrarian, a kind of Cárdenas, in fact — tee hee! — kicked him out. Eh? Yes," the Consul chuckled, aware, moreover, that all this was possibly not so amusing under the existing historical circumstances, "for it's obvious to everyone these days — don't you think so, Quincey? — that the original sin was to be an owner of property. . . ."

Although the Consul richly enjoys sending up his neighbour, the sober, upright Quincey, "a credit to Soda Springs," their economic interests are identical. Quincey may turn "the cold sardonic eye of the material world" upon the Consul, but Firmin himself relies upon his stake in the material world, and is also an exponent of "*realpolitik*" to maintain his economic position. America has succeeded Britain in the economic domination of Latin America, but this makes little difference to the Mexicans. The American highway which turns into a goat track after it has passed through Quauhnahuac is a twentieth-century version of the narrow-gauge, meandering British railway. As if to underscore this identity of interests, to many of the Mexicans he meets, Firmin *is* an American, as far as they can tell.[6]

The oil affair is mentioned by the passing English motorist who finds the Consul face down in the Calle Nicaragua. He may well be a travelling businessman, but his phony Trinity tie suggests that he is one of the many con-men,

spongers or remittance men that England set loose on the world during the height and early decline of her imperial ascendancy. Perhaps this is a rather nice distinction in any case. Economically, imperial expansion is achieved by the export of superfluous capital. Imperial states also expect their superfluous men to manage their colonial affairs, men like Quincey, the Consul, and perhaps this Englishman with the "King's Parade voice." The economic interests of these men are inextricably bound up with the exploitation of the resources of the countries they work in, and the domination of the indigenous people. As Albert Memmi maintains, it is impossible for the colonizer "not to be aware of the constant illegitimacy of his status."

> A foreigner, having come to a land by the accidents of history, he has succeeded not merely in creating a place for himself but also in taking away that of the inhabitant, granting himself astounding privileges to the detriment of those rightfully entitled to them. And this is not by virtue of local laws, which in a certain way legitimize this inequality by tradition, but by upsetting the established rules and substituting his own. He thus appears doubly unjust. He is a privileged being and an illegitimately privileged one; that is, a usurper.[7]

Or, in the context of the *Volcano*, a "*pelado*." Hugh and the Consul argue about the meaning of this word; but if Geoffrey's definition is more strictly accurate, Hugh's gloss is essential to an understanding of the role the Consul plays in the country he lives in, and the effect the colonial context has on Firmin himself.[8] Hugh has seen "*pelado*" defined somewhere "as a shoeless illiterate."

> According to the Consul, this was only one meaning; pelados were indeed "peeled ones," the stripped, but also those who did not have to be rich to prey on the really poor. For instance those halfbreed petty politicians who will, in order to get into office just for one year, in which year they hope to put by enough to forswear work the rest of their lives, do literally anything whatsoever, from shining shoes, to acting as one who was not an "aerial pigeon." Hugh understood this word finally to be pretty ambiguous. A Spaniard, say, could interpret it as Indian, the Indian he despised, used, made drunk. The Indian, however, might mean Spaniard by it. Either might mean by it anyone who made a show of himself. It was perhaps one of those words that had actually been distilled out of conquest, suggesting, as it did, on the one hand thief, on the other exploiter. Interchangeable ever were the terms of abuse with which the aggressor discredits those about to be ravaged!

The drunken, unkempt *pelado*, with his "rapacious" hands of the conqueror, embodies for Hugh "the confusion that tends eventually to overtake conquistadores." But the Consul also lives in a state of confusion that is, in part, a consequence of imperialism. The Chief of Rostrums fits Geoffrey's definition of a *pelado*, but just before he shoots the Consul, he calls *Firmin* a "*pelado*." Both are right. Although he would hardly rob a dying man of a few coins, the Consul is also a confused conquistadore, preying upon the poor. Like the *pelado*, he lives in a fog of complacent fatalism which mystifies his readiness to take economic

advantage of the colonial situation. As the two brothers stand helpless over the dying man, Hugh notices the *pelado*, looking on from the bus, who "made again that gesture of hopelessness, which was also like a gesture of sympathy: what could they do, he appeared trying to convey to them through the window, how could they have known, when they got out, that they could do nothing?" With the same bad faith, the Consul profits from the economic exploitation of the Mexican people, while brazenly protesting against those who would "interfere" with history's "worthless stupid course."

HANNAH ARENDT'S VIEW OF "the imperialist character" casts some light on the muddle that finally overwhelms the Consul. Arendt sees a fundamental immaturity in the political consciousness of the secret agents and bureaucrats who created and managed the British Empire: "Imperialism to them was nothing but an accidental opportunity to escape a society in which a man had to forget his youth if he wanted to grow up."[9] Unconditioned by the weight of a recognized social context, the imperial will was able to seek its own fulfilment without reference to the interests of the implicitly devalued peoples and cultures of the dominated nations. Having left behind the reality of civilization in Britain, "the adventurers had a feeling of unreality and irresponsibility, the feeling, as in a dream, that everything is possible."[10] And, because imperial expansion was conceived in economic rather than political terms, there was a sense that colonization was a "pseudo-natural process" and "the imperial bureaucrats and secret agents . . . merely the instruments of this expansive force."[11] Imperialism enfranchised Faustian dreams of power, while at the same time seeming to excuse the imperialist from responsibility for his actions.

But this extraordinary liberation from constraint is an allusion. As Memmi observes, "if colonization destroys the colonized, it also rots the colonizer."[12] The imperialist cannot overcome the guilt and self-condemnation consequent upon the exploitation of the subject peoples. However much he may separate himself from the community in which he operates, the "dehumanization of the oppressed . . . becomes the alienation of the oppressor," as Sartre argues in his Introduction to Memmi's *The Colonizer and the Colonized*.[13] Isolated within the culture he lives in, he has no shared world to fix for him "what is real and what is imagined, what is real and what absurd."[14] The imperialist suffers from what Arendt describes as "loneliness," a condition "among the most radical and desperate experiences of man." He is not merely isolated, but estranged from the people around him, and ultimately set at odds with himself. Quoting Epictetus, Arendt characterizes the "lonely" man as one who "finds himself surrounded by others with whom he cannot establish contact or to whose hostility he is exposed."[15] "Loneli-

ness" drives the Consul to his death, and it also ruins the life of Yvonne's father, once American consul to Iquique in Chile, and identified in many ways with Geoffrey Firmin. Noting the resemblance to her father in the Consul's "brooding expression," she thinks of those "long war years in Chile" and wonders "what, precisely, was her father brooding about all that time, more spiritually isolated in the land of Bernardo O'Higgins than was once Robinson Crusoe, only a few hundred miles from the same shores?" The alienation of the confused imperialist is that of the "uprooted" and "superfluous" man. In Hannah Arendt's words, "To be uprooted means to have no place in the world, recognized and guaranteed by others; to be superfluous means not to belong to the world at all."[16] The Consul's "world-alienation" embodies in an extreme form the experience of the modern age, "where man, wherever he goes, encounters only himself."[17] Such spiritual isolation is the inevitable fate of the imperial self, whose desire for mastery sets him against the world in which he must live.

Those critics who argue that the novel presents the Consul's alienation as a necessary consequence of the deep penetration of his vision, a kind of spiritual breakthrough, disregard Lowry's careful association of Firmin's self-destructiveness with the forces that are leading the world towards war.[18] Far from suggesting any heroic Promethean struggle, his retreat to an inner world is shown to arise from the debilitating effect of the misconceptions that he has allowed to govern his life. Firmin finally submits himself to the forces that destroy him because of an enervation of the will by which "Faustian man" has lived. Following Spengler, Lowry sees in the Consul's inability to live in the world he has inherited, the death-wish of an entire civilization, even though America may rise as Britain declines. Like the drunken rider of the rebellious, runaway horse who reminds Laruelle of the Consul, the West retains its dominant position only temporarily, slipping from the saddle, regaining a precarious hold, but still plunging on to meet its inevitable end.

The collapse of the overextended British Empire provides Lowry with the perfect vehicle to explore the historical and political fate of the imperial self. In the Consul, as Tony Kilgallin observes, Lowry depicts a dying John Bull,[19] giving way to the ascendant American will, as Spain had yielded to Britain. Accordingly, Quincey, the retired American walnut grower, displays the upright posture and self-possession the Consul was wont to show. Firmin confuses his "deceitful air of infallibility" modelled on the Taskersons' "erect manly carriage," maintained even in total drunkenness, for genuine imperial authority. But Quincey is fully in control of his dealings with his neighbour, as he stands watering his trim garden, and the Consul staggers through his ruined, jungle-like "estate." As an imperial power, Britain is in sharp decline, or asleep, like the Consul when Yvonne and Hugh leave for their morning ride: "A snore, ricochetting, agonized, embittered, but controlled, single, was wafted to his ears: the muted voice

of England long asleep." It may be "indefatigably English" of their "ruddy monarch" to sleep on unconcerned, but no bravado can conceal that Britain and Geoffrey Firmin have lost their imperial majesty, and retain only the spoils of conquest. But even the hold on the loot is insecure, as the Consul's unsettling ride on the Ferris wheel suggests. Suspended upside down by the "bewildering convulsions" of the "Máquina Infernal," the Consul reflects that this "was scarcely a dignified position for an ex-representative of His Majesty's government to find himself in, though it was symbolic, of what he could not conceive, but it was undoubtedly symbolic." Overturned by the wheel of history, Firmin has lost his identity — his British passport — and his confusion is that of Britain herself, divested of the external basis of her power. Having fallen, the Consul is at the mercy of those who attend upon his decline. Although his valuables are returned by the docile and friendly children he has shaken off when they begged money of him, the loss of his passport will have disastrous consequences when he falls into other hands.

However obscure it may be to the Consul, the political parallel here is both obvious and emphatic; and so is the author's intention in having Firmin look into the copybook of one of these children, and discover the following exercise:

> Escruch is an old man. He lives in London. He lives alone in a large house. Scrooge is a rich man but he never gives to the poor. He is a miser. No one loves Scrooge and Scrooge loves no one. He has no friends. He is alone in the world. . . . Who is Scrooge? Where does he live? Is Scrooge rich or poor? Has he friends? How does he live? Alone. World. On.

Dickens' Scrooge has become a mythic embodiment of the economic man produced by English mercantile capitalism, exploitative of those who fall into his power, justifying his accumulation of wealth by pointing to the inexorable laws of political economy. Although Firmin's selfishness certainly has a wider significance, in one sense at least the Consul is Scrooge's great-grandson, economic man in decline, who has merely transferred the focus of exploitation overseas. He lives "on" the world, but not in it, and his loneliness is no longer bearable. Unable to believe absolutely in the ideology he lives by, still he excuses himself from responsibility for his own choices by reference to another kind of determinism.

But the Consul cannot dodge the responsibility for his actions, which return to haunt him, as the legacy of colonialism rebounds upon Britain herself. Obsessed with the disloyalty of Hugh, Yvonne and Laruelle, Firmin tries to push from his mind his own betrayal of others. Although he holds them accountable for failing him, he attributes his own failures to historical and spiritual forces too powerful to resist. But Firmin has placed himself upon the wheel of history. He has *chosen* an "historical" life as an agent of British imperial power, as the Tlaxcalans chose to betray Mexico. In the same way, he has chosen to betray those who would love him, by enclosing himself within a religious hermeticism which excludes even his

own wife. His muddled values represent a betrayal of the religious life, as his meditation on spiritual treachery suggests: "The soul! Ah, and did she not too have her savage and traitorous Tlaxcalans, her Cortez and her noches tristes, and, sitting within her innermost citadel in chains, drinking chocolate, her pale Moctezuma?" By rejecting human love, and courting his own death and damnation, Firmin perverts the spiritual quest to which he has sacrificed so much. The Consul may view himself self-pityingly as "the Knight of the Sorry Aspect," but the dangerous spiritual journey he has undertaken is treacherous, not quixotic. Lowry makes his self-deception clear by the telling juxtapositions in the Consul's jumbled thoughts as he is about to leave the Salón Ofélia after his argument with Hugh. Having rejected the possibility of a new life with Yvonne, the Consul tells her that "'far from wanting it, thank you very much, on the contrary, I choose — Tlax —' Where was he? 'Tlax — Tlax.'" He sinks off into a stupor, but is recalled "to his senses," by the little clock behind Cervantes' bar, "its ticking very loud: *Tlax: tlax: tlax: tlax:. . . .*" As he hurries off to meet his death at the Farolito, he calls back to those he has left behind: "'I like it . . . I love hell. I can't wait to get back there. In fact I'm running, I'm almost back there already.'"

In his letter to Cape, Lowry emphasizes the importance to his general purpose of his association of the Consul with the Tlaxcalans:

> but the whole Tlaxcala business *does* have an underlying deep seriousness. Tlaxcala, of course, just like Parián, is death: but the Tlaxcalans were Mexico's traitors — here the Consul is giving way to the forces within him that are betraying himself, that indeed have now finally betrayed him . . . Dialogue here brings in the theme of war, which is of course related to the Consul's self-destruction. (*Letters*, p. 82)

For Lowry, the private life and the public world are never disjoined, and he sees in the self-absorption of the Consul the same inability to engage external realities and the same failure of will that led Chamberlain to Munich. The Consul believes that he can make a separate peace with the world and sidestep the struggles and sufferings of others, but like Moctezuma and Chamberlain seeking appeasement, he brings disaster down upon himself and those who follow him. Firmin is willing to countenance the rise of Fascism, hoping to be left alone to pursue his own course inward, just as he tries to avoid involvement in the plight of the dying Indian, although as Hugh observes, the Consul "was the one most nearly representing authority" among the bystanders. That Lowry means this particular abandonment of responsibility to take on a general significance is underscored by the appearance of the speeding "querulous expensive cars" bearing diplomatic plates which ignore Hugh's shouts to stop and give aid. In Hugh's eyes, such evasions typify the Consul's own diplomatic career, as well as the attitude of the western democracies to Fascism. Recalling his brother's service in Spain, Hugh indicts a diplomatic corps that could stand idly by, "hoping Franco will win

quickly instead of returning to Madrid to tell the British Government the truth of what's really going on in Spain." In this instance, Hugh's judgment on the Consul is upheld by the novel, through a characteristic chain of associations. As the travel-folder read by the Consul notes, the city of Tlaxcala is said to be like Granada, the city where he met and married Yvonne, where the "shadows" that darken their future were first cast. These shadows include his indifference to the threat of Fascism rising before him, the "hieroglyphic of the times" he has not deigned to heed. In due course, the Consul's own plea for intervention is ignored by the impassive Chief of Gardens when he is being interrogated by the brutal Chief of Rostrums. Appropriately, the Chief of Gardens bears a striking physical resemblance to the Consul. Firmin recognizes that he "might have been the image of himself when, lean, bronzed, serious, beardless, and at the crossroads of his career, he had assumed the Vice Consulship in Granada." The Consul's hands, like the pelado's, are tainted by his part in the exploitation of Mexico, and Firmin's hands are also guilty, like those of the Chief of Gardens, and the hero of *Las Manos de Orlac*, although he commits no murders himself. Munich only confirms the abandonment of responsibility, the irrecoverable decline, apparent in England's acquiescence in Franco's overthrow of the Spanish Republic. "Spain's the grave where England's glory led," and it is fitting that the map of Spain that the Consul draws in the spilled liquor on the Farolito bar precipitates his murder by the Fascists.

In as much as the Consul is a representative of British imperial power, his death may be seen as confirming his own observation, that nations "all seem to get what they deserve in the long run." Geoffrey Firmin dies by an order of history he has endorsed, a degenerate imperial consul murdered by a barbarian Fascist. In his dispute with Hugh, the Consul maintains that small nations must expect to be subjugated by great nations, since the lesson of history is that the powerful impose their will on the weak. Such a belief is perfectly consistent with his political first principles, and a comfortable doctrine for a British consul of the time to advance. But it enfranchises without qualification not only the rule of military and economic power, but also political terrorism and totalitarianism. Hannah Arendt attributes the rise of modern totalitarianism to the reintroduction into Europe of political ideologies and practices developed by the great imperial powers in their overseas possessions.[20] The feeling of mastery and the absence of restraint conferred upon the imperialist by his colonial privilege returned to plague Europe in the form of Fascism and Stalinism. And so despite the Consul's scorn for Hugh's suggestion that there is "some social significance" in the murder of the Indian, his own death, like that of the Indian before him, may be seen as "a kind of latter-day repercussion of the Conquest." And, for that matter, the war that is about to tear Europe apart, a repercussion of its imperial heritage.

Hampered by his drunkenness, and his brother's reluctance to understand, the Consul doesn't entirely succeed in exposing Hugh's dishonest rationalization of his political motives. But by mixing his grievance against Hugh with their political dispute, Firmin shows that he too is trying to evade the issue. His notion that intervention in the cause of "poor little defenceless" nations actually represents a "contemptible acceptance" of the *status quo*, is rhetorically effective, but utterly disingenuous. After all, intervention in the domestic affairs of weaker nations has been the order of the day for the British Empire Firmin has served. Of course, a British consul is unlikely to find the principle of political self-determination congenial, but Firmin's indifference to political freedom goes deeper still. Presumably, he would uphold the individual's economic freedom, but he scarcely acknowledges any other rights of man whatsoever. For the Consul, political freedom is no more than the right to withdraw from other men's concerns into a private world. But then, he has never been subject to arbitrary power himself, until the political thugs he has tried to ignore, prove themselves capable of violating even the sanctuary of the barroom.

After he has been shot by the Fascists, the Consul reflects that now "he was the one dying by the wayside where no good Samaritan would halt." As Lowry pointed out in his letter to Cape, Firmin's death rounds out the novel's "severe classical pattern"; but it is also intended to drive home an urgent "political warning" (*Letters*, pp. 88, 66). In the modern world, the politics of the imperial self can only be a politics of death.

THE CONSUL'S GENERAL OBSERVATIONS about political intervention may be discredited, but he has good cause to doubt Hugh's political intentions, and to fear his brother's interference in his personal life. Hugh's commitment to the cause of the brotherhood of man does not seem to embrace his half-brother Geoffrey. The moral lassitude that allows him to seduce his sister-in-law under the guise of helping to rehabilitate the Consul, is at the root of Hugh's failure to act upon his political convictions; and despite his readiness to express his views, his political objectives remain unclear. Hugh is driven by an "absurd necessity" for action, and his political ambitions, like the Consul's own confused ideas, are dangerous to himself, and others. As Hugh dimly realizes, his own behaviour, despite his efforts to help save the world, has become "part of its plan" of self-destruction. His intervention in his brother's problems only brings more misery, and finally helps bring on his death. He may "aspire to the light" with Juan Cerillo, but unlike his friend, Hugh seems incapable of action that is at once meditated and disinterested. In searching his past to find evidence of a single unselfish act, he can do no better than the bathetic recollection of his advice to a hot-dog vendor to move his cart to the Fitzroy Tavern.

Nearly thirty, Hugh is still absorbed in adolescent fantasies. Politics now offers him what the sea once did — an opportunity to display the heroic potential that he imagines lies latent in him, untapped by the triviality of everyday life. The humdrum seaman's routine stifled his earlier hopes, but he has kept his new dream safe by avoiding any political effort beyond talk. He is no more than a political raconteur, telling stories such as those he tells Yvonne, featuring the romantically conceived philosopher-soldier Juan Cerillo, and an English communist — "approximately the best man I ever knew" — who reads De Quincey before an important battle, and has a dog named Harpo. Hugh projects himself into these starring roles, but not the grim round of fighting and waiting that lie behind such images. He doesn't seem even to consider involving himself in Cerillo's work in Mexico, probably because the struggle there lacks *la gloire*, with no International Brigade, and no worldwide press coverage. Cerillo returned home to work in his own country, but Hugh shows no concern for the uninteresting poor and unemployed in England. He prefers to wander the world, looking for the next troublespot, hoping to find the kind of "real fun" he expects will be "coming out of Trinidad some day." Inevitably, the object of political action is demeaned by his fantasies of romantic adventure. Finally, only the *beau geste* appeals to his imagination, and the chance it offers to prove himself against great and perhaps insuperable odds.

In many ways, Hugh's moral confusion and compulsive need for political action serve to characterize the uncertainties of his generation. He is Isherwood's "Truly Weak Man," seeking to conceal his fear of inadequacy by frantic activity and by imposing upon himself tests of bravery. For the "truly strong man" there is no need "to try to prove to himself that he is not afraid, by joining the Foreign Legion, seeking out the most dangerous wild animals in the remotest tropical jungles, leaving his comfortable home in a snowstorm to climb the impossible glacier. In other words, the Test exists only for the Truly Weak Man."[21] Hugh is drawn to the idea of political action for the same reason he is drawn into the *corrida*, and hopes to climb El Popo. To allay his doubts, he must have frequent trials of his mettle — preferably before an audience. His dangerous voyage to Spain is envisaged as a test and a spectacle, even though, as he is painfully aware, "none of his friends knew he was going to do it." He regards this venture as an act of atonement for his "negative, absurd, selfish, dishonest" past. And because "the Loyalists had already lost . . . no one would be able to say of *him* that he had been carried away by the popular wave of enthusiasm for Spain." The apparent pleasure he takes in the futility of his gesture, because of the notional credit it would reflect upon him, overrides his concern for the cause of the Spanish people. For Hugh, political action has lost connection to the world of real people, real events and enduring values, dwindling to no more than the stuff of daydreams.

> — The time has come for you to join your comrades, to aid the workers, he told Christ, who agreed. It had been His idea all the while, only until Hugh had rescued Him those hypocrites had kept Him shut up inside the burning church where He couldn't breathe. Hugh made a speech. Stalin gave him a medal and listened sympathetically while he explained what was on his mind. "True . . . I wasn't in time to save the Ebro, but I did strike my blow —" He went off, the star of Lenin on his lapel; in his pocket a certificate; Hero of the Soviet Republic, and the True Church, pride and love in his heart —

The nominal beneficiaries of Hugh's intervention never figure in his dreams of action because he has no interest in taking up the cause of others for their sake. His reveries are dreams of power, dreams of Faustian mastery sought by a man "just beyond being mediocre" (*Letters*, p. 75).

Hugh's need to dominate situations and other people almost invariably subverts his best intentions. Certainly he delights in the reversal of roles that leaves his imperious older brother dependent upon him. The form of aversion therapy he devises to reduce Geoffrey's drinking is a particularly diabolical stroke, which does no good, and only adds to his brother's insupportable burden of humiliation. In his reduced state, Geoffrey even dutifully confesses to Hugh that he "cheated a little on the strychnine" in his absence. Shaving the incapable Consul, Hugh hovers over him, "pleasantly menacing," waving the razor while joking about the "strength obtained by decapitation." It is hardly surprising that Firmin should feel he is being murdered slowly by Hugh's "salvage operations," as he half-seriously remarks to Yvonne. The new moral order Hugh tries to impose upon his brother is charged with a deep-seated resentment of him, which he may hide from himself, but not the Consul. Geoffrey recognizes the work of a "fine Italian hand" throughout Hugh's entire campaign to save him. But Hugh, confident of his own good intentions, blunders on. Having become involved with Yvonne once before while plotting with her to help the Consul, Hugh must recognize the delicacy of his position when she returns to Quauhnahuac. But though he realizes he should leave immediately, he stays on, in the face of his brother's evident hostility to his presence. He occupies himself by conceiving fantasies of the couple's future happiness together, marshalling the sight-seeing excursion, and monopolizing Yvonne's attention throughout the day, effectively smothering any possibility of a reconciliation between husband and wife. No doubt Firmin again pushes Yvonne at Hugh, and makes little effort to re-establish his relationship with her; but Hugh can hardly be excused. Singularly insensitive to the feelings and needs of those he would help, Hugh contrives to increase his brother's misery, rather than alleviating it. Preoccupied with his fantasies of action in the service of suffering humanity, he is unable to understand the dismal tragedy unfolding before his eyes. As Douglas Day notes, Hugh is contentedly "banging out songs of martial brotherhood on a cheap guitar as his half-brother and Yvonne are destroyed only yards from where he stands."[22]

The self-effacement the situation calls for is utterly beyond Hugh. Fatuous in his self-importance, he fails to see that in this instance his intervention can only make matters worse. This need to assert himself distorts even his anti-colonialism, for Hugh wants to *confer* freedom upon others, dominating even in the process of liberation. As Mannoni and Fanon have argued, such notions of interventionism cannot really free the oppressed, but only perpetuate the colonial mentality of dependence.[23] Earlier generations of idealistic Englishmen found an outlet for their "immeasurable longings" in shaping the destinies of colonial peoples, and Hugh's kind of internationalism fulfils much the same need. A "passionate desire for *goodness*" is not enough in itself (*Letters*, p. 73); and though action is "absolutely necessary," it is essential that action be conditioned by commitment and self-knowledge. As it is, his rhetoric of activism is no less an expression of the exhausted Faustian will than the Consul's rhetoric of quietism. Unlike Juan Cerillo's socialism, there is "nothing constructive" in Hugh's politics, "merely a passion for fatality." His confused political impulses exemplify Spengler's view of the attraction of socialism for Faustian man in decline:

> The Northern soul has exhausted its inner possibilities, and of the dynamic force and insistence that had expressed itself in world-historical visions of the future — visions of millenial scope — nothing remains but the mere pressure, the passionate desire to create, the form without the content. The soul was Will and nothing but Will. It needed an aim for its Columbus-longing; it *had* to give its inherent activity at least the illusion of a meaning and an object . . . For deep down beneath it all is the gloomy feeling, not to be repressed, that all this hectic zeal is the despairing self-deception of a soul that may not and cannot rest.[24]

Even Hugh's work as a newspaperman feeds a Faustian power-urge. Spengler argues that the role of the press in modern society is to shape the "public truth" so as "to shepherd the masses."[25] He describes the press in military metaphors, as "an army with carefully organized arms and branches, with journalists as officers, and readers as soldiers." He sees the journalists' "intellectual artillery" as an expression of the "will-to-power operating under a pure democratic disguise." Although Hugh himself is contemptuous of the modern press — he tells Yvonne that he agrees with Spengler that journalism "equals intellectual male prostitution of speech and writing" — his work as a crusading journalist is perfectly adapted to his emotional needs. As a reporter, Hugh is able to imprint his will upon others as he could by no other activity. As Spengler observes, the press is able to decide what others think and believe: "What the press wills, is true. Its commanders evoke, transform, interchange truths. Three weeks of press-work, and the 'truth' is acknowledged by everybody."[26] But to achieve this power, Hugh has made his own Faustian bargain. He suspects that his exercise of power is only self-serving and probably dangerous to the welfare of the people and causes he supports. It is in his capacity as a journalist that Hugh fears his "curious thoughts"

may be "merrily brewing" the next war. And as he tells Yvonne, "Even when there are no wars think of the damage [journalists] do." Walking by the *barranca*, Hugh imagines that he sees a large party of "defunct newspapermen," cast down into the ravine, "still spying through keyholes and persuading themselves they're acting in the best interests of democracy." This, it seems, is the only punishment fit for journalists, to be cast into the "Malebolge," Dante's punishment for those who betray their responsibilities. Driven by self-hatred, Hugh is no more able to heal his self-division than is his brother. Just as the Consul has sought the death he finds under the volcano, Hugh also is led by a self-destructive urge to court a violent death atop his ship's cargo of explosives.

The absolutism of the self that governs the lives of both brothers not only impoverishes the life of society, it also undermines the interdependence that is equally the basis of the private life. Lowry recognizes, with Buber, that individuality is only achieved fully in the social life, that "in the beginning is relation." It is precisely because Lowry so intensely values the individual spirit that he fears the solipsistic drive in modern individualism. His own life offered him all too clear an insight into the fate of the imperial self, and a presentiment of the "creeping apocalypse" that threatens us all.[27] Like Lawrence, Lowry was particularly well qualified to offer a critique of the radical individualism that has sunk so deep beneath the surface of our lives that it is no longer recognized for what it is. Surely he would endorse much of Lawrence's analysis of the modern individual's inability to love, suggestive as it is of the plight of Hugh and Geoffrey Firmin.

> To yield entirely to love would be to be absorbed, which is the death of the individual: for the individual must hold his own, or he ceases to be 'free' and 'individual.' So that we see, what our age has proved to its astonishment and dismay, that the individual *cannot* love . . . When the individual loves, he ceases to be purely individual. And so he *must* recover himself, and cease to love.[28]

For both writers, the consequence of such individualism "is simply, suicide. Suicide individual and *en masse*."[29]

Unlike Lawrence, Lowry makes no real attempt to go beyond his searching self-criticism, to imagine new ways of being for western man. Juan Cerillo is at once selfless and fully alive, but he is seen only from afar, and is not wholly dissociated from Hugh's heroic fantasies. He remains a lay figure who serves, like Swift's Portuguese sea captain or Dickens' Amy Dorrit, as a testament to the author's good faith. If the *Volcano* overcomes despair to offer "a positive statement in defense of basic human values and human hopes," as Alfred Kazin has maintained Lowry does,[30] it is because Lowry is unafraid to look directly into the face of the imperial self and report exactly what he has seen. Lowry the novelist is able to follow the path "right through hell" that is closed to the Consul, because unlike Geoffrey Firmin, he was able to see far beyond the self, and see clearly.

NOTES

[1] See C. B. Macpherson's commentary on Hobbes in *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962) for a suggestive discussion of the ideological basis of the position the Consul develops in his argument with Hugh. See esp. "Human Nature and the State of Nature," pp. 17-46.

[2] *Selected Letters of Malcolm Lowry*, ed. Harvey Breit and Margerie Bonner Lowry (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1965), p. 60.

[3] Quentin Anderson, *The Imperial Self* (1971; rpt. New York: Vintage, 1972), pp. 22, 57.

[4] *Under the Volcano* (New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1947), p. 31.

[5] *An Area of Darkness* (London: Deutsch, 1964), p. 212. On a number of occasions scattered through the novel, Mexico is associated with India.

[6] The Consul is taken for an American by Señor Bustamente, and by almost everyone he meets during his last visit to the Farolito — Diosdado, the Chief of Rostrums and the old fiddler who attempts to warn the Consul of the danger he is ignoring.

[7] *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, trans. Howard Greenfeld (1965; rpt. Boston: Beacon Press, 1972), pp. 8-9.

[8] See Ronald G. Walker's discussion of the meaning of "*pelado*" in his *Infernal Paradise: Mexico and the Modern English Novel* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1978), pp. 261-62, 279-80.

[9] *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, 1973), p. 211.

[10] Margaret Canovan, *The Political Thought of Hannah Arendt* (1974; rpt. London: Methuen, 1977), p. 32.

[11] Canovan, p. 37.

[12] Memmi, p. xvii.

[13] Memmi, pp. xxvii-xxviii.

[14] Canovan, p. 25.

[15] *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, p. 476.

[16] *Origins*, p. 475.

[17] Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future* (1954; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), p. 89.

[18] See, for example, Chet Taylor, "The Other Edge of Existential Awareness: Reading of Malcolm Lowry's *Under the Volcano*," *Literary Half-Yearly*, 14, no. 1 (1973), 138-50.

[19] *Lowry* (Erin, Ont.: Press Porcépic, 1977), p. 193.

[20] In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt argues that many of the rudiments of modern totalitarian rule were to be found in the British Empire itself — for instance, in the arbitrary rule of colonial administrators, which violated Britain's heritage of constitutional government.

[21] Quoted by Samuel Hynes in *The Auden Generation: Literature and Politics in England in the 1930s* (London: Bodley Head, 1976), p. 127.

[22] *Malcolm Lowry* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1973), p. 324.

[23] See O. Mannoni's *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization*, and Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth.*

[24] *The Decline of the West*, trans. Charles Francis Atkinson, 2 vols. (1926 and 1928; rpt. New York: Knopf, 1976), I, 363-64.

[25] *Decline*, II, 462.

[26] *Decline*, II, 461.

[27] Anderson, p. vii.

[28] D. H. Lawrence, *Apocalypse* (1931; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974), pp. 123-24.

[29] *Apocalypse*, p. 124.

[30] Kazin's letter to Albert Erskine, published in an appendix to Lowry's *Selected Letters*, p. 438.

# COLONIAL WARS

*Alexandre L. Amprimoz*

At first model soldiers:
toys breeding honest desires
of war.

And then the real game:
flies against the screen
died like men
in my father's army.

Such germs of death
I caught in the African landscape.
There dragonflies would melt
their candied wings
in the sun,
there leaders drew with their nails
pale plans in the sand.

# THE VILLAGE OF MELONS

## *Impressions of a Canadian Author in Mexico*

*George Ryga*

ASKED SOME YEARS AGO as to my most memorable impression of my months in Mexico, I involuntarily and with lingering fear recalled the village of melons.

It was an arid village, somewhere south of Tepic along the west coast of the country. We drove into it late in the afternoon. We had driven since dawn without food, and were looking forward to a family meal and a rest from the heat and highway stress of the day. Entry into the village was through a narrow lane surrounded by peeling adobe walls enclosing shops and houses. The lane was cool and gloomy, sheltered overhead by palms and banana fronds. Then suddenly the lane ended, and we entered the dazzling light of the village square, crowded with stalls of melons. There were all manner of melons — from vegetable squash to sweet pumpkins, gourds, honeydew, musk and watermelons. On the far end of the square beside the steps to the church, a small cluster of stalls displayed vegetables. But these stalls were dwarfed by the melon stalls in the square. That was my first impression on entering the square.

The second was fearful. For the stalls were run by women and children with distended bellies and blank faces which revealed no animation whatsoever. Despite this cornucopia of melons, the people of this village were starving to death.

I drove quickly out of this village, over the protests of my children, for I was chilled by a spectre I was in no way prepared to face — that of a slow death within an illusion of wealth and abundance.

Over the days following, and over subsequent years, this impression became a disturbing metaphor. It troubled me for a variety of reasons, both personal and sociological. No sooner would I reconcile myself to one face of this image, then another visage, more gaunt and distressing than the first, would turn to confront me with contradiction of the spirit.

Personally, I was distressed by my initial but enduring horror at the seeming inevitability of things. And the dawning realization that I on my own could do nothing to alter events shaping before my eyes. Coming out of a culture whose paramount feature is mobility — the ability to change geographic location easily

in pursuit of self-betterment — as well as the ability to flee horizontally from disaster — what I had seen that afternoon was unthinkable. I could not reconcile myself to such fatalism. To the death of will, or so it seemed to me.

Yet even in those moments in the village, serious contradictions began to bedevil me. I was old enough and travelled enough to realize that a purely mechanistic approach to problems of cultures and traditions was immature and prone to miscalculations. Perhaps I had only half-seen the village and its calamity. Or maybe I had seen more than was really there — and had added details to observations singularly my own. How could I tell?

The fabric of commerce, culture, and spiritual values in an ancient landscape is dense and extremely complex. From the standpoint of my own references, which are historically so youthful as to weigh lightly in such matters, the problems in the village of melons appeared quickly evident and easily resolvable.

Simply this: the agricultural soil off which the village survived was either nutritionally depleted, or seriously contaminated and therefore no longer capable of providing nourishing food. Therefore the village should, for reasons of survival, abandon the fields and village and migrate elsewhere to re-establish another village and farmlands from which they could produce health-giving vegetables, cereals, and fruit. It was a simple and practical solution, evident to anyone coming from a nation of people to the north where each individual can change geographic and provincial residence twice in one year in pursuit of career, education, or satisfaction of restless whims. Where it is not unusual to meet people daily who have bought and sold homes four or five times in their lifetimes — and who, when asked, would define "home" as a dimly remembered address on a dimly remembered street of a city to which often as not they had only the vaguest stirrings of affection or belonging.

The village of melons had likely existed on its present site for five hundred or a thousand years. In all probability it was built on the ruins of one or more previous ancient villages of which there is no longer memory or record. The cobbled streets over which I had driven so quickly would hold some memory of my passing, as they harboured the mute echoes and minute imprints of ten million footfalls of people and animals relentlessly coming and going through the nights and days of a hundred and a thousand years. And in antiquity prior to that. Here people had loved, laboured, murdered, fled pestilence and returned, died and been reborn in a baffling panorama of time and history which I could only guess at. The stones and fields were hallowed by the endless procession of people, shaping and reshaping the earth to survive. All this I could only guess at, from evidence no more substantial than silent echoes of the walls.

So the simple resolution was meaningless. Even measured against the horror I had seen, the death of history would be far more profound than the possible extinction of a hundred villagers through starvation. It would be an outrage to

suggest these villagers had arrived at this decision through considered personal choice. Had there been a choice, the village might have been abandoned when we came.

SO I HURRIED OUT of the village of melons, while the villagers remained, numbed and bloated, victims of vague and complicated emotional and spiritual interactions of which I knew nothing. I parked on the outskirts of the village, listening to complaints of my children and watching a bent young woman approaching on the dusty road, leading a burro laden with dried corn husks.

And as I watched her approach and move past our vehicle, the nature of my visit to Mexico changed. I was a writer, but this time I was not researching or writing. I had come for the sun and a rest, leaving behind all my notes on pending work. My family and I had already swum in the warm waters of Mazatlan, had seen our first shark, had tasted our first fresh coconut, which had fallen overnight beside our van in the campgrounds. But actively writing or not, I was still busy harvesting impressions. On the outskirts of the village of melons, I was confronted with a dilemma which required all the resources I had honed over the years as an author before I could go anywhere ever again.

Confronting me was a conditioned reaction rising out of my own culture, which is so ego-centred with the maintenance of physical comforts. Posed against my welling emotions was a different cast of mind and spirit — one which appeared to willingly accommodate frailty, aging, and eventual death of people and things as inevitable and necessary. With the village smoldering behind me in the heat of late afternoon, I struggled against the deepening sensations of moral helplessness and pain.

In my mind I scrambled into my own early country unbringing — knowing that a village must have a well for water and surrounding fields for an economical supply of food. That would suffice in Canada. Our prairies are dotted with such hamlets.

But in Mexico, the village square and the church are equally essential, for this civilization is more gregarious than mine. Man and God live in close proximity here, in a natural relationship which northerners find disturbing, but somehow reassuring. People walk in this hot desert country, covering distances slowly. They carry burdens on their heads and shoulders. The aged and very young share much in common — know of each others' existence and shortcomings. The old person lifts the infant to its feet for the first time. The infant in time leads the old person through the streets by the hand, conscious of the elder's faltering footsteps and declining days of life.

Despite this reduced alienation of people from people, life is far from benign. Only a fool or insensitive brute would fail to notice drudgery, minimal schooling,

inadequate health care and other social shortcomings as highly visible components of the landscape. I marvel to this day at how a well-fed, indulged northerner in good health can sit in a cantina and stare into the street through an open archway and see virtually nothing except that his money buys more than at home. This indifference and detachment separating us from them has entered all too easily into popular myth.

It is not the role of the writer to deepen such divisions created by ignorance and calcified personality traits. The world is better served through facing and carefully exploring the reasons for such differences, even if such an exploration creates personal cultural or moral distress. Again, one does not choose the time or place for such decisions. One is thrust upon them willy-nilly, and seldom in the best of circumstances. To flee from such turmoil and confrontation of the spirit is not admirable, unless one has already opted for a gloomy and cynical withdrawal from faith in human potential.

Responding to my own cultural conditioning, my first impulse was to flee from the village of melons. But pausing on the outskirts of the village, I could not escape the metaphor of this chance encounter with devastation and what it implied. It was not something as isolated and alien to me as I would have wished it to be. There were many parts of the scenario I already knew of, yet dared not assemble, concentrating instead on better craftsmanship in my work.

From my craftsmanship I had learned long ago that studying another language strengthens understanding of one's own language. Extending that truism further, it should be possible to comprehend ones' own culture in a new way by entering another. Particularly an ancient culture, so close to us geographically. Yet as I write these lines, I am deluged by recollections of acquaintances who went to Mexico over the years, and the surprisingly narrow focus of their observations, their tastes and preferences. They spoke highly of the whore-houses in the border towns, the spicy food, the beggars, the availability and low cost of textiles and leather goods.

Even Malcolm Lowry can be faulted for a consumer fascination with this ancient world, even though his consumerism was tortured and burdened with heavy demons of the heart and mind. Unlike Lowry, my friend the bee-keeper settled for one good dinner and getting himself laid. Hardly a seasonal accomplishment, yet complete in its own dimension. So what is left to do then? Turn the car around and head for the American border and the familiarity of the Western Hotel chain? And on return home, add to the restless myth dividing peoples by dwelling in conversations on the other's poverty — making that the total distinction between ourselves and them on racial, economic, social — and eventually human worth values?

It is such a simple and unfulfilling tack to take. Repeated over the years and generations, it must invariably lead to a deepening gulf between civilizations. An

indifference and a faltering of curiosity which enters into the very language that we use. The designation "banana republic" is not so much derisive as it is cynical. For it implies that some people are capable only of producing bananas. Their languages, songs, what they think and feel, count for nothing. Such a dismissal of human worth may have little effect on the peoples against which it is directed, for human worth matters little in economic exploitation — either for its architects or its victims. But it is a disastrous reflection on the cultures from which it originates, for it tarnishes them with decadence and raises the spectre of another kind of eventual decline and death.

An artist in our time can turn and flee from all this — rush away to some patch of earth reasonably insulated from the drumbeats of ongoing history. Here you can, if you wish, select the birds you wish to sing in your trees by shooting down those whose songs you do not wish to hear. You can build a house with irregular walls if you wish, and spray-paint your lawn some different colour from the universal green. All it takes is money and an extra burst of energy, both of which we have in abundance compared with the villagers in the tropics. You can create, with modern technology and some electrical current, your own environment of sound and light to mirror the growing madness festering in your skull. Yes, you can turn and flee. Flee from the village of dreadful illusions. . . .

BUT THAT IS NOT THE ONLY choice. There is another method of approaching this uncompromising dilemma. And that is to continue on into the desert, accepting what is there as a distressing fact of life, and losing garments of personal culture in the process — memories and attitudes — all the real and cosmetic dressings of what I and you once were — approaching nearer and nearer to the abyss of revelation about what it is to be human in a universal sense. It is not a journey for the timorous. One must brace for anguish and self-denial. One must be free to receive — to allow new language and metaphor to filter into oneself through osmosis of food, climate, pacing, humour, fear. Even the theft or loss of personal possessions and surface trimmings on the vehicle you drive are inconsequential. They were only surplus acquisitions to begin with. And they will be replaced by late night rituals and processions of worship as alien to the national catholic church as they would be to any foreign influence attempting to penetrate and redirect one of the world's oldest civilizations. You will hear folk songs whose language and nuances reveal a new dimension of dramatic and emotional expression. You will discover explosive humour and profound introspection. You will experience legends such as those incorporated by the folk writer, Azuela, that transcend death in moving the human personality into a nether-world populated by the spirits of those departed and those to come in a complex and dynamic

relationship, struggling out of the morass into something more just and moral than the life of streets and fields in the endless procession of nights and days.

You may, if you are fortunate, stumble into a primordial darkness of spirit. And engage in spiritual and physical slavery wrestling with yearnings for fascism, socialism, a craving for vengeance against the oppressors who came with Cortes. And left only yesterday morning in a Toyota Celica, its trunk loaded with crafted Tasco silverware which they acquired for less than the market value of the metal.

You will bear witness to the darkness and the light, the skies crackling and exploding as faceless horsemen and their women appear racing from near shadows into distant gloom, the horses trailing sparks beneath their pounding hooves. Celebrations of simple food and passionate discussions, laced with timeless hatred for the mendacity of those who rise from among the people only to betray their trust, race, and history.

And through this fierce vortex will pass the men with rifles — the robbers, the corrupt police and militia — the warriors cut loose from command or personal discipline, surviving on the fear they generate. Through this fierce vortex will pass the revolutionaries, bandoliers across their shoulders and guitars in hand, linked to the people more through emotion than political consensus. Brilliant, god-like, tragically foolish — all grouped into a common body of fatal heroism from which the legends and folksongs of the future will erupt.

Through it all I recall how the light pales and darkens. In the fields, the corn matures and is gathered by the shawled, black-clad women. In a small town where I lived a while, the most beautiful young woman I had ever seen is scandalized by her husband, her children taken from her, and is driven out to survive in the streets as a scavenger and a whore. It was all a brutal joke. The entire town became smaller for it. While in the fields, the corn aged and was gathered.

And in the mountains, young boys wearing large sombreros — my sons among them — poach wood, returning home under cover of darkness. I sit in a doorway with my friend and watch them pass by silently, their slight shoulders burdened with bundles of twigs and branches. They vanish in the darkness and my friend and I speak of Emilio Zapata, who could not read or write — and Hidalgo, who could. And my friend sings two fragments of songs he remembers of the time.

I HAVE NOT RETURNED to the village of melons. But in a way, I have never left it. My seasons in Mexico altered me, more profoundly than any comparative event of like duration in my entire life. I abandoned my intent at a holiday and began writing again, feverishly and late into the night. Around me in the darkness, the restless animals in the hamlet called to each other. Children cried fitfully in their sleep. Drunkards sang raucously and off key and rang the

churchbells in the square. I heard the cries of birth and the low moans of the dying as I completed final work on *Paracelsus*. Then in a happier state of mind, began writing *A Portrait of Angelica.*

And as I wrote and listened in my pauses to the sounds of the dusty streets around me, the village of melons took its place in a deepening mosaic of observations which defied the sequences of time and chronology. Pressing new questions began to preoccupy me: since life and human destiny were so uneven and full of surprises, what validity should I give to the traditional demands of order and progression in my work — particularly my dramatic writings? Was not life itself a revolutionary process, with its own fluid and everchanging discipline? Did I not learn this from the folk procedures of Azuela, when he took my imagination into impossible places with the authority and ease of someone documenting a commonplace event?

On our return to Canada, I was startled by the austere visions I had somehow acquired during my time away. And reminded in a different way of the village of melons. For here food was overabundant, housing sumptuous and airtight. Our own home was suffocating with the clutter of needless accumulations gathered as a family over the years. These illusions of plenty baffled even my children, and for days we wandered through rooms and over grounds of our garden. We missed adversity, and the fine edge of despair which made all the seconds and minutes of life so precious and memorable. We had everything we needed once again, and yet we collectively experienced the haunting realization that we had nothing. All this surrounding us was transient, destructible and a purely material and cosmetic assurance of security against a savage climate and the loneliness of a young culture barely finding its own feet. We had yet to rediscover the medical and social security systems of our country — those great and reasoned achievements of our society that commit us to help one another in times of hardship.

Some days later, I was called by Judy LaMarsh to appear on her radio talk show in Vancouver, to speak of my impressions from my visit to the south. She was a representative of the Canadian establishment — authoritative, confident, glacial in spiritual inflexibility. I have my problems with establishment, not unlike problems I have with God: namely — with such credentials, why are they so prone to mistakes? She questioned me, and I recalled with rising animation what I had seen and confided my conviction that despite all the problems of poverty, armaments and the oppression of peoples, the human will to live and perfect itself would prevail. Even as I spoke, I was aware she had become distant and dull eyed. . . .

And in the parking lot of the radio studio that morning, I again remembered the village of melons and the vendors I had seen, starved of will, staring uncomprehending at something distant and visible only to themselves.

# GOOSE, IN LOVE

*E. F. Dyck*

He is entirely rhetorical:

plucking a brassy poppy from his garden
to present to the woman he is yet to meet,
the woman who with a look or movement
will capture his dying love
for an afternoon.

His way is the shorter of two ways,
the way to take when the rain threatens
(though it never actually rains),
the way to take when the sun in fits
and starts shines brilliantly,
the way to take while the canker
sleeps in his black style.

The longer way is not for him.
That way lies a river which carries
the tossed flower down to the sea
where it is lost in the flotsam.

His way is the quick red puff
in a slender glass vase
filled with tepid water.

books in review

# TALE OF TWO COLONIES

MARGARET ATWOOD, *Bodily Harm*. McClelland & Stewart, $16.95.

IT IS THE BEST of her books, it is the worst of her books; the funniest, the grisliest, the most poignant, the vaguest; the most honest, the most pretentious; the most profound, the most banal.... The good news is that *Bodily Harm* advances the *oeuvre*, overcomes the inertia of her last two novels, and should spike "Atwood Commentary" in interesting new ways. Atwood is close to achieving the position in prose that she has in poetry — namely, that the individual additions to the shelf no longer matter as much as they did. Eccentric favourites, irrational dislikes, will all be a part of the public response. It's a dynamic; that's how it should be.

Insofar as the bulk of *Bodily Harm* takes place on the Caribbean island of St. Antoine (and its Tobago-like afterbirth, Ste. Agathe) and concerns itself with a bloody (and bloody-awful) little coup, *Bodily Harm* may be said to be an ambitious political novel. The island-writing is low, mean, dispirited; Rennie's (Renata Wilford of Griswold, Ontario) travel-piece commission from a Toronto glossy called *Visor* has taken her to a dingy little backwater about to endure its first free elections. We've visited these "free states" before, notably in Naipaul, and Atwood really doesn't add to our understanding. (Naipaul probably said it all in *Guerrillas*, as violence is about to erupt in shades of tropical green: "You didn't think this island was that kind of island. But every island is that kind of island.") St. Antoine is a kind of Grenada, one supposes, with the far left (Marsdon and Prince) competing against the liberal centre (Minnow, a one-time Ontario veterinarian, who is given some of the best lines in the book, at the expense of "the sweet Canadians"), and the local Papa Doc pretender, Ellis. Fifteen parliamentary seats are up for grabs. The CIA is interested. The Canadians have an observer. The election is one of those tiny teapot tempests that barely rate a line or two in the *Globe & Mail*, but which can scald you if you're caught without a passport, in the wrong hotel, with the wrong friends. It's a small island and everyone has a theory about Rennie, and her stunning naïveté. (Can anyone be so ignorant, so innocent? Her blankness is a provocation. She is used.)

Rennie, steadfastly denying all interest in politics, is of course the classic pigeon in such a cross-fire. The lesson is an obvious one: there are no neutral corners, even in forgotten little islands. And there is no "life-style" that doesn't deal with life itself. Otherwise, your witty trust in surfaces makes you merely superficial. In Toronto she was paid for her coy brittleness (much of it very funny, in the portions Atwood includes); here she learns that irony offers no protection. The point is made by Dr. Minnow:

> 'It's not my thing,' she says. 'I just don't do that kind of thing. I do lifestyles.'
>
> 'Lifestyles?' says Dr. Minnow. He's puzzled.
>
> 'You know, what people wear, what they eat, where they go for their vacations, what they've got in their livingrooms, things like that,' says Rennie, as lightly as she can.
>
> Dr. Minnow considers this for a moment. Then he gives her an angelic smile. 'You might say that I also am concerned with lifestyles,' he says. 'It is our duty, to be concerned with lifestyles. What the people eat, what they wear, this is what I want you to write about.'

Dr. Minnow, the gentle, ironical moderate, is doomed to die in the coup. (Na-

turally, one thinks.) Rennie meets the island's other Canadian woman — Lora, Prince's mistress — tough and knowing where Rennie is naive and disapproving. Lora is pure Queen Street East, basement apartments, drunken, rapist step-fathers, to Rennie's Queen Street West of trendy used clothes, and chic boutiques.

The political lessons of *Bodily Harm* are familiar. They come from Greene and Naipaul and Theroux and Stone, all the way back to Conrad. They're not the reasons I'm attracted to *Bodily Harm*.

The second plot (not at all a sub-plot, since the two are developed in counterpoint) is feminist. Rennie is a familiar Atwood creation — struggling Southern Ontario Decent — from a sterile, hypocritical, sexless background. Readers of *Life Before Man* and *Lady Oracle* already know it too well (as do readers of Munro and Gallant, from lower and higher on the same social scale). In both books, the background tended to swamp the foreground. This time out, the town's name is Griswold, which seems to say it all. Rennie has made more of her life than either Joan Foster or Lesje/Elizabeth. It would seem to be a Toronto update of the old "living well is the best revenge" strategy, to say in effect that knowing who's living well and how they do it, and even being a little superior to it all, is even sweeter. Atwood catches the beat of the new, "*trés nouveau-wavé*" Toronto, with such pitiless authority that it borders on grace. Rennie is the classic doctor-in-need-of-a-cure; her antennae tell her who's in, who's out; what to eat, drink, wear, smoke; she's up on therapies, pills, lawyers, remodellers, she knows where to be seen and who to be seen with. Eventually, even in Toronto, age or self-disgust or burn-out would set in; even ageing Rockers become absurd. In fiction, something more drastic is required.

Rennie has recently been invaded. She has lost a breast to cancer. Her reaction to one form of intense violation has driven her lover away. (A good character, this Jake; an ideal man for the woman she was.) At the novel's opening, she is "involved" in a groveling infatuation with her surgeon, a blank young man of stunning rectitude and responsibility. The trip to St. Antoine is meant to restore health and perspective. In an ironical way, it probably succeeds. After the self-pitying protectiveness brought on by the surgery, she needs something to "take her mind off her troubles" (as the choric "Griswold" would say, adding probably that she deserves her cancer for the irresponsible, lascivious life she leads). After the troubles she sees in St. Antoine she comes to realize a universal fragility, everyone's reliance on luck to survive. She left Toronto a "life-styles" columnist looking for a slick, funny article; she returns, ready to be a journalist with a new clientele, and a new story to tell.

In other words, redemption is possible, even for the spiritually smug Ontario United Church drop-out. The greatest success of this book, for me, is the rendering of a "modern woman" from such a background; the unconscious disapproving, selfish baggage she still carries, despite all the signs to the contrary. And it is a portrait that fills me with sympathy.

Thus, a simple recitation of plot and theme does violence to the texture of fiction. If *Bodily Harm* were nothing more than the professional resurrection of a trendy Toronto journalist (and if considerable amounts of Caribbean blood had to be spilled in order to effect it), then we would be correct in terming the novel a kind of political pornography. (It doesn't entirely escape the charge anyway.) It certainly would not be one of the "best" of her works, which I continue to think it is. I would say rather that the Caribbean material is not wholly integrated to the text (as the intrusive reminders from cancer terminology serve to

make clear), and that dangerous literary conceits are being played in running the twin tales of despoilment together.

The plots are joined in a scene that has already become much-quoted. From her cell, where her private degradation has not quite run its course, Rennie is boosted to the window by Lora, in order to watch the "proceedings" against the prisoners in the courtyard. Watching the beatings, the blood, she thinks back to a "safer" time in trendy Toronto when she'd toured a police exhibit of torture and pornography aids (a rat peeking out of a vagina had done it for her then), and Rennie thinks: "She's afraid of men and it's simple, it's rational, she's afraid of men because men are frightening." It's a neat quote, and the context frames it very professionally. Political and sexual perversion, power politics if you wish, are tied together; it is also a forced moment, a melodramatic leap from a character who's been behaving more like Private Benjamin than Joan of Arc.

Never in Atwood's novels have the two sexes seemed more like beings from different planets. We are dealing with Atwood's special, chilly gift: a vision of threat and separateness so carefully worked out in prose and poetry that it becomes something over which reasonable people must simply choose to disagree.

Sometimes, we catch sight of a shadow surrounding a book, a haze that doesn't quite lift, but which remains stronger than a suggestion, and that's the feeling I have about *Bodily Harm*. I'm more interested in Rennie the product of Griswold turned lifestyles reporter, than I am in Rennie the reborn activist. The funniest writing in the book is Atwood's nailing of the lifestyles "scene," the frantic with-itness. Bright, glib, amusing, hard-edged, impatient, cold — all the watchwords of that parasitic sub-world. Rennie presumably does it well; the scraps of her writing that we're given all ring true.

Perhaps because I am a recent refugee from Toronto myself, I'm prone to projecting a few impure thoughts of my own. I think of Toronto as the "Miss Teen Canada" of cities — perky, bright, beautiful, talented — and also silly, vain, shallow, even cruel. In ten years, she may be wonderful — or a slattern. Rennie embodies both tendencies. Just as I sympathize and feel I understand, Atwood jerks the strings and Rennie stumbles, stupidly. She's a strange combination of sophistication and innocence — like Toronto — and her struggle toward cosmopolitanism is tentative at best. There are only three cities on this continent with the money and the talent to support a book like this — Toronto being the third — but if Rennie were portrayed as a life-styler in Los Angeles or New York, we'd know how to take her. All brass, brittle as fresh celery stalks bought at just the right time of day from your trusted Korean greengrocer. There's a quality to Rennie that catches awkwardness, the looking-over-the-shoulder gawkiness that makes her both real, and slightly unsettling. Long after the revolution and other melodramas, it's that quality I'll remember from *Bodily Harm*.

But at least Rennie is free of Griswold. In the future, it won't take cancer and a revolution to show the way.

CLARK BLAISE

# TRUE DILEMMAS

MARGARET ATWOOD, *True Stories*. Oxford, $5.95.

*Two-Headed Poems* (1978) is a book of elegies and of poems about torture, political and sexual, rising to a conclusion affirming the power of language to transform the world, of words to create community. "Footnotes to the Amnesty Report on Torture" is balanced against "All Bread," and "A Red Shirt" against "You

Begin." The poet's contract with her medium is unbroken, her rhetoric fluent, balanced, moving through the careful gestures of a cycle like "Five Poems for Grandmothers." The poet dares to be graceful and succeeds.

But *True Stories* is indeed a different story. Gone are two-headed debates, conclusions left for readers to resolve. Here it is too dangerous to leave conclusions implied. Implicature must be sewn up, closing all spaces of uncertainty, revealing not stories but blood, torture, death. Boundaries are blurred or denounced. "Prose" shifts into "poetry," the reader's comfort in the act of reading into the pain of abrupt revelation:

> The razor across the eyeball
> is a detail from an old film.
> It is also a truth.
> Witness is what you must bear.

Just as the opening frames of Buñuel's "Un chien andalou" create through rupture the aesthetic possibility of making a critique of a corrupt society, so Atwood's truth, equally violent, abjures both silence and myth as guises of story-telling, forms of entertainment which fail in their duty to bear witness. Silence contains implicit reassurance, and myth, diversion. What must be written is "the poem that invents / nothing and excuses nothing," the poem which does not in itself constitute an excuse by virtue of its display of rhetorical invention.

These are poems which seek to go beyond words, to put aside elaboration and eloquence and break through technique in order to render the force of pain, the denial of the freedom to speak truth:

> The woman lies on the wet cement floor
> under the unending light,
> needle marks on her arms put there
> to kill the brain
> and wonders why she is dying.
>
> She is dying because she said.
> She is dying for the sake of the word.
> It is her body, silent
> and fingerless, writing this poem.

Gone beyond the luxury of surface into the attempt to speak pain without mediation, this section of "Notes for a Poem that Can Never be Written" dares the reader — like much in Klein and Lowther — to employ aesthetic categories in the face of moral injunction. To recall *True Stories* to the perfect structuring of a work like *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* — as some readers may be tempted to do — seems an act of bad faith, a breaking of faith with a text which in its profession of disillusionment and denial of comfort, in its painful confrontation with a demystified world, represents an act of both lesser aesthetic importance and greater emotional daring. It is a dilemma appropriate to a book which questions both truths and stories and wrestles with its own creation.

LORRAINE WEIR

# ART, AMOUR, POESIE

SUZANNE PARADIS, *Les Hauts cris*. Leméac, $9.95.

LAURENT DUBE, *La Mariakèche*. Leméac, $11.95.

ROBERT LALONDE, *La Belle épouvante*. Quinze, $8.00.

L'ART, L'AMOUR et la poésie sont des expressions de l'âme qui se marient agréablement. Cet heureux trio, exploité d'une façon originale, sous-tend la toile de fond des romans de Suzanne Paradis, Laurent Dubé et Robert Lalonde, ce qui procure au lecteur un plaisir toujours renouvelé.

*Les Hauts cris* de Suzanne Paradis, que publie Leméac dans une nouvelle édition définitive, consacre le talent patient et continu de l'auteur qui, depuis une vingtaine d'années, fournit à l'amant de la littérature des recueils de poèmes et des romans où le foisonnement des passions humaines, le désarroi face à l'existence et les interrogations multiples de l'amour

jaillissent de chaque page comme un éclatement de lumière.

Les femmes de ce roman, splendides dans leur solitude, fortes malgré leur fragilité et amoureuses de leur art comme de leurs amants, s'entêtent à ciseler leur existence au gré de la fantaisie et de la jalousie. Doris, "figure de proue," règne sur la maisonnée et l'atelier de son fils Damien, qui ne peut créer de sculptures géniales sans l'autorité écrasante de sa mère. Telle une sorcière à la parole impérieuse et aux gestes tranchants, la "tutrice" subjugue son entourage et Marie-Andrée, sa bru. La beauté de sa femme, dont Damien ne pourrait être privé, s'offre comme une porcelaine précieuse résistant mal aux moindres brusqueries de la vie. Enfin, Luce, soeur cadette de Marie-Andrée, fascinée par le théâtre, subit, elle aussi, les méfaits du "mauvais oeil" de Doris. En effet, en se suicidant, l'altière Doris culpabilise outre mesure Luce qui mourra en mettant au monde un fils, David. Ces trois femmes, par leurs agissements et leur perception de l'existence, s'amusent, pour ainsi dire, à mêler l'écheveau des fils amoureux. Déchiré entre le respect possessif de sa mère adoptive et la fascination du culte de la beauté de Marie-Andrée, Damien hésite entre les avances non équivoques de Luce et la plasticité impressionnante de sa femme qui s'attache à Camille, le poète, comme un enchanteur proposant un intermède au milieu de ces existences contraignantes.

Ce roman de Suzanne Paradis, où la poésie brille dans une gerbe d'images bibliques, se compose d'intrigues multiples où l'amour fait naître et mourir illusions, désirs, espoirs. Les nombreuses allusions au futur donnent à l'ouvrage un art raffiné du suspense, un intérêt soutenu dans l'attente. La solitude des êtres, le maître à penser qu'affectionne l'auteur, s'incarne avec vigueur et cruauté dans tous les personnages et surtout en Damien qui, à la fin, reclus dans sa cabane, répond désormais au nom du "Sauvage." La peur, la fragilité et l'incompréhension ont quelque chose d'épouvantable parce qu'elles imprègnent l'amour d'un goût de mort.

Amours déçues, ennui, solitude, rêves, telles sont aussi les avenues qu'emprunte Laurent Dubé dans son premier roman, *La Mariakèche*. L'argumentation tourne autour d'une philosophie de l'existence où le passé est considéré comme une valeur sûre et remplie de sagesse. Méo, le poète, se laisse envoûter par la poésie, la nature et une espèce de nostalgie qui donnent le ton à l'ensemble. Entouré d'amis sympathiques, Isidore, l'avocat, le père Eugène qui inspire la douceur et la tolérance, et Ella rencontrée à un méchoui, Méo, tel un Diogène, sème des mots et des phrases qui cherchent le vrai, la poésie, tout ce que les hommes ne peuvent souiller.

Le narrateur, comme affolé par la bousculade du temps brisant tout sur son passage, se complaît à relever et à faire revivre ce que le passé avait de franchement agréable pour les habitués du Carabin. Méo et Isidore rêvent aux bons moments de leurs études, Eugène, le solitaire, considère le présent comme trop moderne et tapageur, alors qu'Ella s'emmitoufle, elle aussi, dans tout ce qui a odeur d'hier. Le couple amoureux que forment Ella et Méo redécouvre, en visitant le "pays," la ferme des ancêtres qui sent bon et la Mariakèche avec sa digue, son moulin et toute son histoire, ce qui permet d'interroger son intérieur et d'y voir plus clair. Et, comme un enfant, Méo invente des formes, des couleurs et des mots à son rêve inaltérable: s'approprier le moulin. Grâce aux contacts heureux d'Isidore, Ella et Méo prennent enfin possession du patelin de la Mariakèche revêtu d'une certaine nostalgie. Et comme pour démontrer l'intolérance et la folie du présent, la fin du roman est tissée, entre autres, par la mort atroce d'Eugène, le solitaire pacifique, et par l'accident irréparable que subit Isidore.

En somme, ce roman est un heureux voyage dans le passé par des retours magiques aux origines terriennes, aux années du pensionnat, aux étés dans le Pôle-Nord, au stage au sanatorium, le tout marqué d'une note de regret que Tortue, la vieille Citroën de Méo, vient comme authentifier.

L'idylle amoureuse entre Ella et Méo est reprise avec plus de vigueur encore dans *la Belle épouvante* de Robert Lalonde, prix Robert-Cliche 1981, où le *Moi* du narrateur livre son histoire d'amour virant à l'épopée. Son amour fou avec *Elle* détaille les multiples contours d'une aventure où fusent, jaillissent et éclaboussent des émotions débridées. Le *Je* narrateur, pour oublier les rigueurs d'un hiver qui n'en finit plus, se lance dans l'autopsie de "la mour, la maudite mour." Toute l'intrigue s'organise autour des liens qui attachent le narrateur à *Elle*, jamais nommée, mais toujours omniprésente. L'attrait irrésistible de l'amour est démontré par les frémissements et les jouissances du couple, où l'un est "infusion" et l'autre "effusion."

*La Belle épouvante* s'inspire du journal intime: *Je* s'interroge sur plusieurs sujets qui se résument, à la fin, à sa relation amoureuse avec *Elle*, et il pratique l'art du coq-à-l'âne en écorchant les gynécologues, ces "zigs-là," en jonglant avec les coquerelles et en s'intéressant à Marie-Jeanne, fermière et comédienne. Mais il revient constamment à sa préoccupation, son aventure amoureuse. Intarissable et comme obsédé, *Je* échafaude par ses "élucubrations socratiques" une morale sur l'amour et crie son goût d'être heureux. Il compte même sur la connivence sympathique du lecteur pour poursuivre la dissection de son *Moi* amoureux. Bref, ce journal intime entretient un dialogue avec *Je* en amour, *Elle* et aussi le lecteur qui se laisse prendre au jeu.

Le "ti-cul," *Je*, dans la trentaine, se classe lui-même parmi les paranoïaques, les schizophrènes, les lucides, les exagérés, accouplé à *Elle* qui transforme tout en bonheur de vivre de faire l'amour, tous deux forment un *Nous* "beaux et lisses," unis dans des "noces brèves et drôles," celles de l'amour. Les chansons de la radio, qui tombent pile, consacrent d'une certaine façon le "My heart wants more" que le narrateur emprunte à Billie Holiday.

Ces trois romans, dans chaque cas le premier de l'auteur — *Les Hauts cris* fut d'abord publié en 1960 — présentent une recherche étudiée de l'écriture où des réflexions continuelles, celles de Camille, de Méo ou de *Je*, par exemple, consacrent leur valeur. L'introspection de *Je* de *la Belle épouvante* d'une part, s'amusant avec une écriture composée de phrases syncopées, courtes et comme désarticulées, expose son "drôle de destin" et ausculte son *Moi*, ses frissons et ses désirs dans une projection d'images qui ressemble à un feu d'artifice éblouissant! Comme un souffle de vie, de jeunesse et d'éclatement, la belle épouvante, "c'est finalement ce qu'on a et ce qu'on est de meilleur," soutient le narrateur. D'autre part, le verbe féérique de Suzanne Paradis et de Laurent Dubé, crée les chocs qu'appellent les cris désespérants, ou bien enlumine et idéalise le passé que le charme de la Mariakèche symbolise. La solitude du père Eugène comme celle de Damien, colorée par une espèce d'atmosphère bucolique, suscite la réflexion.

L'évolution du sculpteur Damien, la jouissance amoureuse toujours présente de *Je* en *Elle* et la richesse poétique attachée au passé de la Mariakèche donnent à ces trois romans une sorte d'intériorité et de fascination qui ne peuvent laisser indifférent le lecteur.

YVON BELLEMARE

# SECOND LAUNCHING

MIRIAM WADDINGTON, *The Visitants*. Oxford, $5.95.

OCCASIONALLY THERE WILL BE a posture, a gesture — some coincidence of action and setting — which recurs so frequently and significantly in a poet's work that it feels like home base, a launching pad for the whole of that poet's work. In Miriam Waddington's case that place involves a child cavorting, dancing, flying, hurling itself forward into a natural sphere. It is an act of assertion, of the child's ego celebrating its arrival in a world of leaves and air and stars. This note was sounded clearly in *Green World* (1945), Waddington's first volume, and is echoing still in *The Visitants*, her tenth. The persona is much older now, appearing in poems called "Old Age Blues" and "Managing Death," but she remains (for all her intermittent grumbling) essentially childlike — an "old child, infant lady."

The opening and closing poems reveal that Waddington has "managed" the ideas of disappointment, aging, and death by holding on to that quintessential image of the child launched upon the world. With the placement of these poems she implies a renewal at the end of life, a second launching. In the first poem, "Playing," nothing is said of a world gone sour; the speaker invites us to fly with her and to rock "baby continents . . . in their blue / sky cradles to a / gentle laughing / sleep." But why solicit sleep in the morning of the world? Partly for the pleasure of a lullaby, when it is not *really* the morning of the world, and partly for the reversal at book's end of a "Wake-up Song." In that last poem, the nursery colours have darkened; yet the "old child, infant lady" is instructed to "close accounts," to "lay aside" her anger and grief, "and wake the sleepy world." The world's yawn, of "purest gold," announces that Waddington's birthday celebration has come round again.

The image of posture I have been discussing appears with an interesting difference in a poem called "Running Up and Down Mountains at Changing Speeds." In her youth, the speaker was ecstatic, expansive: "I used to open my arms / to the wind, be embraced," and "I used to shout / to the sky: *hey, look world — / world, here I am!*" World and girl were joined, as the wind would shout back at her, "*look who just blew in!*" But time, Waddington says, has made her more modest, more sedate. Nowadays she will, admittedly, "give a little secret run / when no one is looking," but she doesn't "have the nerve anymore / to shout up at the sky," and is pleased if the wind only whispers "*hello old friend, so you're / still here!*" She commends herself, in fact, for not overreaching:

> Whatever they are saying
> they will never get the
> chance to say about me
> that it is one of the sins
> of my old age to pretend
> I'm still running up and down
> mountains the way I used to.

Something unpleasant intrudes at this point, as well as elsewhere in the volume: a kind of arrogant self-pity, based on the failure of others to perceive her true worth. Still, "Running Up and Down Mountains" is an attractive poem, one of the most successful in the book.

"The Green Cabin" is another strong poem in which Waddington suggests that she is distinct now from the jubilant child:

> I mourn
> the death of the lover
> in me who ran to meet
> a world full of love and
> star-blessed miracles,
> but now those doors are shut,
> and the miserly world
> has locked all the rainbows
> in earth.

World and self are equally lost — and it is hard to say whose doors shut first. The poem ends in the beautiful, driving repetitions at which Waddington excels:

> I hear the rain on the roof
> black and dark as the heart
> of November, a rain dark as
> the heart of old age, dark
> as my heart of stone that
> mourns the dark stone of
> age, itself a dark stone
> in a dark dark age.

By no means all of the poems on old age are so dejected. Indeed, the assortment of moods (the inconsistency, if you like) is one of the attractions of the volume. Often Waddington's tone involves a spirited, tough sort of irony — as in "Old Age Blues" or "When the Shoe is on The Other Foot for a Change." When she moves on to poems about death, particularly about the continuing presence of the dead, Waddington becomes more lyrical. The little poem and "In a Summer Garden" are fine examples, both of which illustrate as well her use of music (the singing of the dead) as a submerged link to that original, celebratory child.

The age in which the poet lives, as well as her own aging, may account for the disruption of her easy intercourse with the gods of nature. As love fails her, some of Waddington's anger takes on a familiar, feminist colouring. Men are portrayed as opportunists, abusers of the environment, and women as conserving, nurturing creatures. The harm man does to his world merges with the damage he does to woman, and the ultimate crime is that in his betrayal of each he separates woman from her world. Thus, nature *is* woman and is at the same time her truest lover; man-the-rival interferes with their ecstatic identification. Poems which explore this triangular relationship include "Conserving," "The Milk of the Mothers," "The Big Tree," "Honouring He-

roes," "Warnings," and "A Good Man and a Passionate Woman."

There are also poems about place, several of them overtly political, in which Waddington describes the manifold, ingenious violations of her green world. In "South American Nights," a woman who sleeps with mercenaries and guerrillas in a "starved / river bed" has lost her own name and is called "Rose Red" — so that together with women and nature, the world of fairy tales is sullied. Waddington's sense of an alliance between nature and nursery rhymes or fairy tales is apparent again and again in this collection. In "Holiday Postcards," for instance, she writes:

> I meant to send you
> a postcard but the
> farmer came out of
> his dell and went
> commercial the scene
> changed old Mother
> Goose was forced out
> of the fairy-tale
> business nursery
> rhymes were passé

Greece now has "battered wives" and a "new kind of / retirement condominium / that was just being / built in Delphi." In such circumstances, Waddington considers it miraculous that the ocean still tastes of salt. Similarly, in "Lady in Blue: Homage to Montreal" she grieves over "a thousand steel- / armoured apartments," and delights in the natural magic which remains: "the blue-sleeved / avenues of your still- / flowing rivery wonder."

*The Visitants* is an uneven collection, and not finally a particularly distinguished one. Some of the poems are very weak indeed — "Crazy Times," for example; and even the best are not in the same class with recent poems by Phyllis Webb, Al Purdy, or P. K. Page. Waddington's short line becomes tiresome. Often her endings are sentimental or too obvious. Several poems (such as "Real Estate: Poem for Voices," "The Secret-Keeper," and "Letter from Egypt") are irritatingly opaque. Still, there are compensations and sources of interest — in the working out of her central image and, above all, in the play of rhythms, the flowering in small patches of Miriam Waddington's undoubted lyrical gift.

CONSTANCE ROOKE

# REMEMBERING WAR

GRACE MORRIS CRAIG, *But This Is Our War.* Univ. of Toronto Press, $14.95.

ANITA MAYER, *One Who Came Back.* Oberon Press, $15.95; pa. $7.95.

CHARLES RITCHIE, *Diplomatic Passport: More Undiplomatic Diaries, 1946-1962.* Macmillan, $12.95.

TWO WORLD WARS AND the Cold War are the three occasions of these autobiographical volumes. In *But This Is Our War* (which belongs to the "lest-we-forget" sub-genre), Grace Morris Craig quotes from her own pre-World War I diaries and from letters written home by her brothers, by a classmate of one of them, and by the man who will become her fiancé; three of the four would give their lives to the war effort. She stitches these documents together by a narrative written sixty-five years later and intended to commemorate the personal courage and the sacrifices of the men of her family during the Great War.

Early and late, Grace Morris Craig's language is far more limited than the emotions it is intended to convey. Touring Canada in 1911, she rhapsodizes in her diary about Banff's mountains, those "towering sentinels"; at ninety, she recalls herself dancing through the summer of 1914 as "the happy days . . . slipped by" and "no one really noticed the dark clouds that had appeared on the horizon." War is a "great adventure"; when it is over, marriage, too, will be a "wonderful adventure." At their worst, these

clichés betray their author's *unquestioning* acceptance of a simplistic patriotism, loyalty to the British Empire and her own privileged social position. Grace Craig writes, she says, for "her grandchildren, the first generation of Canadians since 1914 to know a world without war." No one could be ungrateful for the freedom Canada's peace has given that generation. But neither would the many among us who have lived with the disabled from both wars, or the far greater number who have been overwhelmed by the media's loving attention to just those *specifics* of war (its physical horrors, its political corruption) from which Craig's brothers so anxiously protected her, share her assumption that war is a "great adventure." Where she perceived her "good fortune in being part of the British Empire, shown coloured pink in their areas on the world map," and felt "we would be safe anywhere, protected by a navy that ruled the seas," we are cognizant that navies and the imperialism denoted by large pink areas on maps play their part in causing wars. And many of us will feel that Mrs. Craig's isolation in her own privileged social class keeps *her* war from being the war of *our* grandparents. *Our* grandfathers were not likely to have had the education or connections which purchased the Morris brothers officers' commissions; they were far more likely to have been like those 133 unemployed from "rural areas" whom Basil Morris persuaded to enlist without stopping to think (in his sister's account at least) that, however eager their patriotism, it could not have been uncoloured by their economic situation. Those of *our* grandmothers who spent several months in 1911 touring the West were likely looking for a homestead, not vacationing; few of them could afford a trip to England in 1916 to see their sons and brothers on leave from France and to catch up on the "shows"; many felt that a conscription vote the passage of which was ensured by giving the franchise to women for the first time (but to "a very select group — the mothers, wives, and sisters of the men in the overseas forces") was a vote undemocratically serving the interests of only a portion of the country. *Our* war about which Mrs. Craig writes with such high-toned patriotism was, in fact, not the war of many of *our* grandparents. The courage and suffering of those whose patriotism was more pragmatic or even more cynical or more unwilling than that Mrs. Craig describes and who nonetheless came to the defence of an Empire which had been far less kind to them than to the Morris family deserve our praise and remembrance too.

Grace Morris Craig's unreflective language and unquestioning assumption of the values of her class in her time have, however, their own eloquence and produce their own narrative restraint. This restraint becomes most moving in the letters from the front and it is the unspoken messages of those letters that finally partly integrate Grace Craig's war with the war of all those she never considers. The letters initially develop through all the conventions of the young man going off to the "great adventure": the enemy is an unreal presence, the whole trip is a masculine romp, and it is "all in the game." Homesickness surfaces first with requests for any "trivial detail" of news. The language of the letters gradually becomes stripped of clichés, more halting and precise (though never graphic); it simultaneously gains in sincerity, in dignity and in depth of emotion. There are brief allusions to nightmares, to friends being killed, to "being blue," and a more articulated rationale for Basil's desire to escape the mud and confinement of tunnelling operations for the greater risk of flying. The restraint is eloquent of young men willing themselves not to see, not to think, not to feel too much lest the ability to

carry on give way, of young men convinced that part of their duty to those they love consists in protecting them from the full knowledge of what war is like. The courage and dignity that permeate these letters may rest on principles that our hindsight sees as insufficiently meditated, but it is a deeply felt and lived courage that gains in thoughtfulness, intensity, and restrained suffering as *But This Is Our War* tells its story. In this, Grace Morris Craig's memorial speaks for what *all* soldiers (and what all their families) shared and for what all their "grandchildren" must respect.

That war is no "great adventure" and that some wars must be waged for reasons having nothing to do with Empires are among the most obvious unstated messages of *One Who Came Back.* Anita Mayer's account opens in Tilburg on August 2, 1944, with the arrest of the Mayer family at the home of friends who have been hiding them. Their "processing" through successive concentration camps and Anita's separation from the rest of her family who "disappear" are rigorously told from Anita's point of view. Her straightforward and self-controlled narrative records the ultimate horrors of gas ovens and the smell of burning flesh and the daily horrors of forced marches, roll calls, sleeplessness, near nudity, hunger, overwork, and continual physical and spiritual humiliation. Before faces "that seemed beyond any kind of human feeling," in which "All that was left was the animal drive to survive and lots of deep sorrow," she persists in human feeling, in steadfast friendship with her fellow prisoners, in hoping that the war will end before will and body succumb to fatigue, illness, cold, and, above all, starvation. Anita Mayer was young, physically and emotionally strong; she was also arrested late in the war. She outlasted it.

During the last twenty years, we have read so many journalistic accounts of concentration camps, seen so many photos and so much film footage of bodies being bulldozed into pits, that perhaps we have numbly accepted the historical fact and put it behind us. *One Who Came Back* militates against such acceptance. Mayer makes no futile attempt to comprehend a reason for the camps; she uses no polemics to make us all co-conspirators in the Nazi crime or to expiate our guilt for what we ignored. There is nothing rhetorical about this autobiography which is remarkable for the discipline and chastity of its language (Nazis are always *Nazis, guards,* or *Germans* without rhetorical modifiers). She simply records what happened to one young woman and what happened is more powerful than any rhetoric. This is as true of her repatriation as of her time in the camps. On the train home, a neighbour recognizes her and asks, "Why didn't you let us know you were coming . . . today? We would have had a band at the station to welcome you back home." "I really didn't know when I'd be coming back," Mayer tells her. At the house where her family has agreed to meet after the War, the wife greets her "just as if she had seen me the day before." The genocide over, even those close to it have begun insulating themselves by pretending that it never happened, that Mayer's absence was like any other. Unlike Grace Morris Craig, Mayer feels no need to justify her autobiography, but her gentle responses provide their own trenchant rationale: hers is a PERSONal account, which, by the act of its telling, insists that we must not relegate the concentration camps and their victims to "history."

Charles Ritchie was one of the advisors to the Canadian Delegation at the Peace Conference in Paris in 1946. *Diplomatic Passport* covers his years at the Conference, as a staff member of the Canadian embassy in Paris, as a "working diplomat" in Ottawa, as Ambassador to Bonn and as Permanent Representative to the

United Nations and President of the Security Council. While memories of Germany's World War II and fears of the Cold War hover in the background, Ritchie leads, he insists, a "double life," and is not about to mix "diplomatic discretion" in his diaries or "the diarist's indiscretion" in his diplomacy. His diaries will be personal and social, an obsessive alternative to diplomatic tact motivated by a need to prove himself more/other than a career diplomat and a "stuffed shirt."

A pity. For these *Undiplomatic Diaries* would benefit from being more undiplomatic or else more diplomatic. The first chapters lack the verve of Ritchie's two earlier volumes of selections from his diaries; while his punning conclusion to Ritchie Week, organized by Lady Diana Cooper ("You don't think, do you, that now we have an *embarras de Ritchies*") may be worth the entire volume, there is little here so pungent. The fault may be the period itself: the Parisian "high society" he observes ran out of both wit and youth in the 1920's and German Post-War diplomatic society seems to have been the quintessence of careful, hypocritical courtesy and social stodginess (Ritchie doesn't help matters by being too diplomatic to pursue inquiry about what his dinner companions did during the war). *Ennui* and an undefined spiritual malaise colour Ritchie's life during the Ottawa and Bonn years and become pervasive in the diaries as he spends far too much time complaining about a clumsy maid and an untrained dog who pees where the stain will be most conspicuous.

There are exceptions: his wife's "two old aunts" are keenly and wittily observed; the Windsors are tellingly revealed in a malicious summary of their tics and conversation; St. Laurent's patience when he finds himself late for a State Dinner with Nehru because his staff have left his trousers behind is told with fine comic

timing. Of more political interest are the observations of St. Laurent's indifference to pomposity, his firm reticence and his openness to experience, or Nehru's mobility of feature and gesture combined with a "Bloomsbury" style. Granted historical hindsight, we applaud Ritchie's perception of Indira Gandhi: "She talked humanitarianism and social reform but in a bloodless fashion, tinged with immense smugness and self-righteousness." Regretting as I did that Ritchie was not equally undiplomatic about the diplomatic more often, I found his final chapter at the United Nations the most satisfying of the *Diaries*. Like his government, Ritchie believed intensely in the promise of the United Nations: his hopes for it, his progressive disillusionment, his great affection for Hammarskjöld, his real distress as "all these dictators" come "strutting and bullying" on the scene replace the persiflage of the earlier chapters. Ritchie's account of this post engages his reader because it is both personal *and* about diplomacy. Out of this combination, a real and deeper Ritchie irony finally emerges: "Of course, Canadians are different. There is no malice in us. We are the family doctor whom no one has called in for consultation. We are the children of the midday who see all in the clear, shallow light." The distance in tone between this and *But This Is Our War* not only marks the distance between the professional civil servant and the naive consumer of patriotism; more significantly, it marks the distance of 1962 and the Cold War from 1914.

SHIRLEY NEUMAN

# HOBBLED

LEON ROOKE, *The Magician in Love*. Aya Press, $12.00; pa. $6.00.

THE TROUBLE WITH LEON ROOKE'S latest book, *The Magician in Love*, is that it has too many tough acts to follow. The first is Rooke's own: the work he has produced during the past two years has been consistently remarkable. The two short story collections, *Cry Evil* and *Death Suite*, and his fine first novel *Fat Woman* set lofty standards for his subsequent fiction. So too does the recent special Leon Rooke issue of *Canadian Fiction Magazine* (38), where in an extraordinarily uncritical essay Geoff Hancock turns Rooke into the Gilles Villeneuve of Canadian writing. "Leon's art is one of high performance; he travels in the fast lane of short fiction" amid high-powered international competition — "the latest in fabulation and metafiction." Leaving in his dust "the sprawling verbal Cabbagetowns of much traditional short fiction in Canada," Rooke "has shifted the gears of the Canadian short story" and can only be appreciated, Hancock suggests, in the context of contemporary American fiction and theory. Be all that as it may, *The Magician in Love* does not present much of a challenge to its American prototypes nor is it likely to herald a new look in Canadian fictional engineering.

The narrative is slight, both in length (93 pp.) and substance, and reads more like a long prose-poem than a short novel. In an unidentified setting (the west coast of Canada? the American Alps?) at an unspecified time (vaguely nineteenth century?), a magician carries on a fiery romance with his mistress Beabontha, alternately inspiring and disillusioning, scandalizing and titillating the provincial town that responds like a sensitive instrument to every slight alteration in their affair. The narrator, perhaps a little too appropriately, is the town's weatherman — although the narrative is not consistent on that score since at times the narrative voice is omniscient, and later the first-person narrative carries on even after the weatherman appears to commit suicide. In any case the magician's story

exists almost entirely at the level of rumour and gossip filtered through the voyeurism of the townspeople. Inconsistency and uncertainty are built into the story as structural principles.

Like a number of the recent stories in *Death Suite*, the overt theme of *Magician* is the difficulty of love. At first it appears no more than a harmless delusion: "The Magician is in love: he sees only beauty." But as the relationship progresses the magical is subsumed in the mundane; romance falls victim to jealousy, infidelity, and the banalities of everyday social existence. The magician in love is an artist reduced to performing parlour tricks to keep his demanding mistress entertained. And it only gets worse. Soon the lovers can do nothing but ravage one another ("Each would like to drop off into a grave and be covered"), and since their love is paradigmatic its failure is especially terrible. "If such misfortune can happen to the Magician, to Beabontha, then no one is safe!" By the end love is a kind of plague. "The Magician's home is deserted.... The boardwalk rots. ... The village is empty.... Such is the power of love."

The power of Rooke's tale, however, is hobbled by his decision not to give us full access to his central characters. In his best stories and in *Fat Woman* Rooke doesn't just peddle fabulation and metafiction and a zippy verbal texture; he takes us right inside his people and makes us care about them. But Beabontha and the magician are litle more than ciphers whom we know only from the outside. Far more interesting is the narrator who plays Salieri to the magician's Mozart. When his initial admiration and envy turn desperately bitter in the face of the lovers' great passion, he takes upon himself the magician's destruction. The stolid bourgeois is revealed as an underground man, "sick to the death," goaded, crippled, betrayed, and capable finally of expressing his depth of feeling only as self-loathing. Unfortunately, his story never quite gets itself told.

In fact nearly all the best things in this book are either incidental or undeveloped. Mlle Capuchin's speech to the Ladies' Club is a lovely set piece, telling of her seduction by the magician when she was thirteen, and the satire on writing when the magician struggles with the title and first sentence of his new book, *Ventriloquism for Beginners*, is delightful. There is also an interesting hint of political parable in one section that focusses on "our country" (is the magician an American big brother or another northern magus?). But nothing much comes of any of that.

In its use of such fragments, as in its archaic language, tone and setting, its quasi-mythical overtones and slightly surreal humour, *The Magician in Love* feels a lot like Donald Barthelme's *The Dead Father*. But it lacks the coherence and sustained wit of that book as it lacks the inspired stylization and characterization of Rooke's own best work. "A story is anything I can make it be and get away with," Rooke has said. Uncharacteristically for him, he doesn't get away with it this time.

JERRY WASSERMAN

# ROOKE'S STORIES

LEON ROOKE, *Last One Home Sleeps in the Yellow Bed*. Louisiana State Univ., n.p.

LEON ROOKE, *Death Suite*. Firefly Bks., n.p.

THESE TWO VOLUMES of short stories, published thirteen years apart, are, respectively, Rooke's first and fifth collections. They differ from each other at least in the Canadian setting which figures in some stories in *Death Suite*, published after Rooke came to live in this country. The characteristics of these col-

lections are consistent in kind though different in degree through the writer's use of exaggeration, humour, absurdity, and the grotesque, and through his great skill in the creation of different voices. Invariably, the best stories are recalled in the accents of their telling.

Each volume ends on a different note. "Brush Fire," the final story in *Last One Home Sleeps in the Yellow Bed*, is an account of physical and spiritual destruction and despair. It takes place in Alaska where an army platoon, one of whose members tells the story, is sent to help fight a forest fire. In this setting of devastation, the values of the American way of life are placed in deliberate and ridiculous juxtaposition with the suicide of a former Hungarian freedom-fighter who was also a member of the platoon. The world of the consuming inferno is reflected in the description of the two battling caribou whose locked horns in the path of the fire doomed them to death. The final sentence — ". . . yes sir, Kuimets, they gonna give you a military funeral! ain't that the living end?" — identifies the irony and oblivion of death in life. In contrast, the last story in *Death Suite*, "The Problem Shop," is about hope. The protagonist, just released from police custody, experiences despair in his conviction that he has no future and is beyond redemption. In a restorative gesture, he is led to water and to a schooner in whose crow's-nest he feels "the fearless future splashing him beautifully in the face. It was hope and love and sweet mercy." The death in this story is the death of despair.

The stories in the first collection are fundamentally realistic. The characters inhabit worlds which, though exaggerated in particulars, are plausible. All these stories are told in the first person and all seem to be obsessed in some way with the contrast between innocence and experience or between dream and reality. There is in them a child-like yearning for stability which cannot be satisfied and which is often captured in the anxious, weary, or rueful tone of the narrator. Lassitude pervades these stories in the nostalgia of memory, in unresolved misunderstanding, or in aimless wandering through corridors, streets, and landscapes. For me, the most memorable story is "The Ice-House Gang" in which a man remembers the occasion when he first made love to his wife when they were teen-agers. The sensual details of the setting are precise, the language conveys the delicate irony and humour of a wider and mature understanding, and the conclusion modulates the episode effortlessly into the present. The other stories in the collection, apart from the last, deal with the relationships between men and women, with varying degrees of irony that sometimes point to hope and sometimes to an awareness of futility. Many of them contain a sense of fate, of a drama that is being played to a particular conclusion. Not all are successful. "When Swimmers on the Beach Have All Gone Home" is weakened by the classic pathological pattern of the love between rescued and rescuer. "The Alamo Plaza" follows a narrative rhythm that tends to drag. Consistent throughout all these stories is Rooke's effective use of pliable and convincing first-person narration.

*Death Suite* mixes fantasy and realism. "Murder Mystery" is a three-part absurd and grotesque satire on some of the conventions of the genre. Sexual pathology is central to the strange and rather tedious story of an adolescent murderess. Comic satire is deftly employed in two entertaining stories — "Lady Godiva's Horse," which plays on a woman's self-deprecation, and "Standing In for Nita," in which a young woman's sexual conquests result from perpetuating a case of mistaken identity. Underpinning these, however, are implicit feelings of rage and even self-loathing. For me, three stories

in *Death Suite* stand above the others — "Mama Tuddi Done Over," "Winter Is Lovely, Isn't Summer Hell," and "The Problem Shop." They are notable for the way in which the narration is infused by an understanding of the characters. The colloquial voices of the first two of these take us directly into the action and tensions of another culture through the immediacy of unique learning. In the first, the story progresses unhurriedly to its climax and resolution, effectively using a traditional narrative pattern that draws a dynamic and rounded portrait of the shrewd Mama Tuddi. In the second, the colloquial language of the narrator gives the young mother a dignity in the face of uncertainty. Rooke also uses the unusual or bizarre to dramatize the theme of reconciliation. In "The Problem Shop," hope and healing rise above chaos, and in "Hanging Out With the Magi," a surrealistic tale, hatred between a husband and wife is miraculously effaced, if only momentarily, in the presence of a mysterious baby, brought by a delivery truck. Like the Christ-child, the baby makes love possible.

Between *Last One Home Sleeps in the Yellow Bed* and *Death Suite*, Rooke has moved toward a wider range of technique and tone as his talent in the use of voice has remained distinctive and strong. His fascination with the grotesque and with the ways in which many of his characters find themselves at almost violent odds with their society reminds me of the fiction of the American South and has been discussed by others. The affinities between his work and Alice Munro's suggest another line of comparison. Rooke's fiction is also characterized by the recurring theme of grace, of the undeserved, healing gift that ensures on occasion a precarious equilibrium. He has shown himself to be obsessed with the importance and possibilities of voice and to be willing to experiment with different narrative structures. In my estimation, the experimentation is not always effective. Invariably, however, at the heart of the stories that held me to their conclusion is the vitality of his obsession.

JOHN LENNOX

# MANDEL'S SELVES

ELI MANDEL, *Dreaming Backwards: The Selected Poetry*. General Publishing, $9.95.

ELI MANDEL, *Life Sentence*. Press Porcépic, $5.95.

It's 1981, and Eli Mandel is gathering the results of over thirty years of struggle with the muse, that other self who as often mocks him as it brings him the possibility of true speech. Simultaneously, he is gathering poems and journals from 1976 to 1980 for a new book. The two, *Dreaming Backwards: The Selected Poetry of Eli Mandel* and *Life Sentence*, propose a Life Work which has been full of challenges and dangers, of fighting to purify the language and the life it speaks from in the face of corrupting and chaotic complexity. Not to deny the corruption, the chaos or the complexity, but to say them as clearly as they can be said, to *see* them that way.

*Dreaming Backwards* is the second volume of General Publishing's Spectrum Poetry Series, which began with the Mandel-prefaced *Field Notes* of Robert Kroetsch. Kroetsch repays the favour here, and leaves a poor reviewer with very little to say, as he pinpoints both formal and thematic aspects of Mandel's changing poetic during the fifties, sixties, and seventies. Listen to him begin:

> Eli Mandel comes from the Saskatchewan interior of the continent, from the literary wars of a generation that had to turn against the Moderns, from the memory of his Jewishness, from the intimacies of his uneasy body. But he is, always, the America seeker.

> It is the paradox of Columbus' perceptual moment that it cannot end. The moment of the discovery of America continues. Its re-enactment becomes our terrifying test of greatness.... How do we who are already here in America find the astounding *here*? And the first answer, the one that must be resisted, is the attraction of the landscape itself.... The landscape of Mandel's poems is a collage in which the pictures are placed, not beside each other, but on top of each other; each picture evokes, announces, its own violation....

Already, perhaps, Kroetsch has said too much; but no, he simply articulates better than most just how complex Mandel's response to the world is and therefore how complex our response to his poems must be. Yet Kroetsch notes Mandel's epigraph, from Yeats's *A Vision*:

> It is from the *Dreaming Back* of the dead, though not from that of persons associated with our past, that we get the imagery of ordinary sleep. Much of the dream's confusion comes from the fact that the image belongs to some unknown person... "We have no power," said an inhabitant [of the spirit state], "except to purify our intention," and when I asked of what, replied: "Of complexity."

What the selection of poems which follows demonstrates is that there is purification and purification. As Mandel has argued in his essays as well as his poems, "doubled words are poetic words / this is the true meaning of duplicity," and in many ways the complex rhetoric and mythography of his early poetry is simpler than the pared language and popular iconography of the later work. Moreover, although Kroetsch is correct to identify Mandel's descriptive mode as collage, some of the later poems *appear to* present pure landscape in a stripped down, imagistic-like, form (as in the "Wabumum" poems of *Stony Plain*, 1973), only to double-up the stakes of what is both seen and said.

One of Kroetsch's most important insights into his fellow poet's endeavour appears in his first sentence: it is that Mandel belongs to that generation of writers (it is Kroetsch's too) which had to slowly fight its way through retreating Modernism to something newer and rawer and more specifically of this place in this time (the ironies and duplicities of Mandel's two 1977 titles — *Out of Place* and *Another Time* — would fill a book). Mandel first appeared as a mythopoeic poet under the influence of Northrop Frye, and there's no denying that the early poems are somewhat rococo and full of heavily laden allusions. Take "Estevan Saskatchewan," with its references to Cain, Greek tragedies, and *Hamlet*. Yet, as Kroetsch insists, Mandel is a prairie-born seeker of authentic speech of place (a word which certainly proposes "region" in today's Canada, but which also, in Mandel's rich tapestry of language, proposes precisely who we are in relation to others, a "place-ment" Mandel continually confronts as a twentieth-century Jewish intellectual) and his struggle to discover such speech through the past three decades maps the main movement of poetry in our time. Still, if much of the recent poetry is more concerned with social, cultural, or political place, Estevan is still where everything began, and where he returned in 1975 to write less rhetorically allusive, more colloquial, more apparently realistic, and starker poems of life in that profoundly remembered place. In "estevan, 1934," he tells of "the family we / called breeds" and creates his own myth of frightening eros with no reference to *Hamlet* or Cain; yet their traces are there, if only in our reading of the earlier poem. That the later poems insist on their predecessors is one of their most complex duplicities.

Lately, Mandel has forced a confrontation with the major avatar of duplicity, his own double, the doppelgänger, in his poems. Prefigured in the short poem, "Autobiography," in *Stony Plain*, the

doppelgänger comes into his own in *Out of Place*, where he takes his stand *between* the poet and the people and world he loves. Here, he "doubles" for the poet in his life (which he writes into his poems) yet also "doubles" as "the necessary angel," the muse. Who is speaking here, anyway, the poet asks, and if there are two mirrored worlds with the poet writing the same poem in each, where indeed *is* "here"? "Nothing on either prairie changes," he tells us in terror, "though the winds blow / across immensities your heart would shrivel to imagine / knowing they pass between the worlds and can be heard to do / so on the road to Wood Mountain. That is what was written / in the rocks." The Place he is Out of is both those places, known for a fact in the windswept landscapes of his childhood, fictions of memory now, traces of being there, and, since you can't go home again, some place else now he has returned.

This "double" turns up again, in new and more frightening guises, in *Life Sentence*. Prefaced by a quote from Clark Blaise — "When autobiography ceases to be, then I shall write from the point of view of a Brazilian General" — *Life Sentence* confronts the dangers of autobiography and the necessary betrayals of other people art appears to demand. Doubles are more complex here: the poems and the journals reflect and distort each other, the whole book a third thing beyond either; more intriguingly, political life with its power madness and personal betrayals doubles for domestic life and its struggles (Mandel has always confronted the political realities of our time, but since the beginning of the seventies — the key poem is "On the 25th Anniversary of the Liberation of Auschwitz: Memorial Services, Toronto, January 25, 1970, YMHA Bloor and Spadina" — he has recognized himself in the mirror of public life); finally, the concept of poet and poem as doubles continues to thrive, as in "Poem Like a Stone, Like a General," where the poet accuses the poem of showing "no tact, no discretion, / You betray decent people, / you anger and hurt my wife." This is surely one meaning of the title: that the poet is sentenced by the life he has chosen to betray and to be (or believe he has been) betrayed; and *Life Sentence*, as it traces the contours of one life over four years of travel and encounter, unflinchingly digs up the evidence in Toronto and South America and India, in private and in political behaviour. It is a brave book, confronting questions concerning the writer's rights to use others' lives as his material and the personal pain too close inquiry into those lives might bring. Of course, it is duplicitous: the poems propose possibilities; both memory and imagination are fictional — Shakespeare knew that when he created Iago, a great and most duplicitous storyteller, and Mandel knows that when he says he "can no longer believe / my friends who speak in new words, / or my wife who won't let me touch her, / *or* the sister of the Brahmin novelist / who tells me ill-fated stories of domestic / quarrels in a house that could be in Downsview / though in fact it is in suburban Delhi," and then goes on to tell his own version of a story about a king driven mad by his wife's affair with his best friend: any story can double for another, can reflect our own lives if we want it to. Moreover, in today's world of political violence, "the belaboured husband as tyrant / [raging] against imagined treachery in a young wife" is a mirror-image of Somoza or Pinochet as they battle to preserve their "marriages" to their people.

It's in the poems that Mandel raises the toughest questions, and like any true artist, he finds no one answer, finds only that the questions must be confronted, he can't pretend they don't exist. The world is not a safe place for the imagination

yet the imagination absolutely must continue to encounter it. In the journals, he says as much, and takes us on some interesting travels — the life of a Canadian writer as lecturer in other countries or teacher here is full of fascinating encounters. In the poems, though, the language opens up, the connections are more passionate, more frightening and more exciting. If there is pain there is also ecstasy. *Life Sentence* is thus a highly moral, even didactic, work: for it seeks to make us confront the demons in our own souls which have brought suffering to whole populations when unleashed by persons in power; to recognize the dark possibilities in ourselves is (according to the old humanist hope which Mandel still subscribes to despite himself I think) to be able to control them. The various "political" poems of *Dreaming Backwards* as well as of *Life Sentence* testify to this faith on the poet's part, and, as poems and as testaments to the apocalyptic imagination in our time, they are greatly superior to similar attempts over the years by Irving Layton, if only because Mandel has continually sought an authentic, contemporary poetic speech while Layton has too often gone for an easy and outmoded rhetoric.

Both *Dreaming Backwards* and *Life Sentence* reflect Eli Mandel's lifelong struggle to purify the language of the tribe and the perceptual intent which finally emerges as poetry. Often savage in their honesty, his poems can also be hauntingly beautiful in their honest recognition of what is there, before us in the here we are beginning to recognize as Canada, its many magic places. Mandel has earned our attention and these books deserve the most careful reading.

DOUGLAS BARBOUR

# JOHNSTON'S FAROESE

GEORGE JOHNSTON, *Rocky Shores: An Anthology of Faroese Poetry.* Wilfion Books, $10.00.

THIS VOLUME PROVIDES a generous sampling of the works of present-day Faroese poets, and is, as George Johnston says at the end of his introduction, "representative of a small, self-contained and unusual tradition of twentieth-century poetry." Eighty-two poems by nine poets have been translated here, twenty-three of the translators having appeared previously in various journals. Although all of the poets are natives of the Faroe Islands, one, William Heinesen, writes exclusively in Danish, and is primarily known throughout Scandinavia as a novelist. All of the poems of Regin Dahl in this volume were originally written and published by the author in both Danish and Faroese. Since very few copies of the original poems are available in North America, it is unfortunate that space could not be found for them here.

Literature in the Faroese language begins in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The native antecedents of this literature are folktales, Danish hymns and the many ballads, both Faroese and Danish, preserved orally from the late Middle Ages. Faroese poetry, however, has made little use of these antecedents. The earlier poets, such as J. H. O. Djurhuus (1881-1948), originally followed Romantic forms and conventions, and the later poets, such as those translated here by George Johnston, have been influenced by the developments in modern Scandinavian and other European poetry. Indeed the only characteristic feature of Faroese poetry may be the awe of nature resulting from childhoods spent in close contact with the moods of the North Atlantic.

Faroese, with under fifty thousand speakers, is by far the smallest of the Germanic languages, and yet probably the

least at risk of the so-called "minority languages" of Europe. The population of the Faroe Islands is well-educated, literate and also bilingual, since all advanced education remains in Danish. Before World War II the functions of Faroese and Danish were, to a large extent, distinct. Faroese was the language used at home, in traditional occupations and for most social purposes, whereas Danish was the language of education, the church, newspapers and modern technology. There was considerable literary activity in Faroese, but leading authors, such as William Heinesen and Jørgen-Frantz Jacobsen, chose to write in Danish, largely for economic reasons. After the war Faroese gradually began to spread to most areas of modern life. The closely related Icelandic language provided the model for numerous additions to the vocabulary. Yet many of the older speakers of Faroese remain truly literate only in Danish and frequently find the neologisms of Faroese radio broadcasters or poets incomprehensible.

One result of the modernization of life and language has been the gradual impoverishment of native Faroese terminology dealing not only with outmoded technologies but also with the description of the natural environment. As in Iceland diligent lexicographers have preserved many of these words for later generations of writers. Foremost among Faroese scholars of this century has been Christian Matras, whose poetry encompasses the old and the new language.

The poems in this collection afford George Johnston little opportunity to display the skill at translating highly stylized verse which he demonstrated in his fine translation of *Gísla saga*. Aside from nine rhyming poems, which he mainly translates with half-rhymes, all of the remainder are in free verse. The translations are, for the most part, very close to the originals, both in the choice and order of words. Some variation is introduced by the etymological translation "eye-blink" for Danish *øjeblik* on p. 26; the rendering of *uhyre* as "unheard-of" on p. 21 is perhaps folk-etymological. The translation of two lines quoted by William Heinesen in his poem *Sommerdagen* (pp. 25-27) is perhaps a bit misleading. The lines are taken from the first verse of N. F. S. Grundtvig's poem on old age, *Alderdommen*:

> For dig, vor Herre, som Dage kun
> Aartusender er at regne.
> Et Øjeblik er den liden Stund,
> Vi aande i Støvets Egne.

(I.e., "For thee, our Lord, millennia count only as days; the little time we breathe on earth, an instant.") George Johnston translates the last two lines as, "An eye-blink and the time is past / of our breath in this place of dust."

Aside from "botanical" on p. 90, I have noticed no misprints in the text. The very useful bibliography on the Faroes, Faroese literature and English translations contains a few errors. On p. 124 in item no. 10, read "þrándr"; in no. 11, "þránds" and *Afmaelisrit Jóns Helgasonar*, Reykjavík; and in no. 12, *Onomatology*.

It is clear from this collection that Faroese poets are not writers of folk or dialect poetry, but, despite language, are part of the modern European mainstream. They are fortunate as well in the skilful and sympathetic treatment of their verse by George Johnston.

HARRY ROE

# IN AFRICA

KILDARE DOBBS, *Pride and Fall*. Clarke, Irwin, $12.95.

KILDARE DOBBS' new book contains six short stories and the novella which gives the book its title. Set in British East Africa in 1951, "Pride and Fall" is a subtle

and complex story about decadence and treachery. The protagonist is junior District Officer St. John Russell, who is in charge of the township jail and not cut out for the job.

Russell is a misfit because he has scruples, compassion, and sexual curiosity, qualities that are noticeably lacking among his peers in the colonial administration. When a scapegoat is required, therefore, Russell is the obvious choice. He is convicted of stealing ivory and sentenced to 18 months' hard labour.

Later, living in London, he finds he misses Africa, for "it was the place where he had transformed his life, where he had freed himself of the illusion of power." Ironically, Russell's lost pride is restored by another example of bureaucratic treachery. He accepts a luncheon invitation in good faith and discovers he is being recruited as a spy. His feelings of revulsion give him courage to reject the offer. ("There is nothing dishonourable about serving your country. Nothing at all!" says the tempter, while Russell thinks, "This is not my country.")

The theme of the protagonist as witness to the end of an era is continued in "A Wedding," a story set in Ireland in 1933. Two members of "the gentry" are married, the bride a popular "hard-riding master of foxhounds," the groom a Royal Navy commander resplendent in full dress uniform. Dobbs skilfully captures the atmosphere of the period through the memories of the narrator, who was 10 years old at the time. He also balances the innocence of the boy with the foresight of an often "sozzled" professor, whose field is Irish history and who astutely declines to attend the wedding. When violence shatters the gentry's "happy world," the narrator reflects that "Perhaps . . . it was one reason why we did not stay in our country after we had grown up, why we left and never came back."

With one exception, the remaining stories are set in Africa. "A Question of Motive" describes a murder among the white community, grown mildly decadent through boredom. "A Memsahib's Confession" is about a restless wife who seduces a Canadian missionary and discovers she loves him. "Yusuf and Maria," about another bored wife and her black servant, continues the decadence-*vs*-innocence theme. A newcomer to jail copes with shame by lying to his fellow prisoners and is found out, in "The Dreamer." And in "The Happy Warrior," set in Scotland and Italy, a young sailor's admiration for an experienced soldier turns to shame when he realizes that the man enjoys killing in cold blood.

Though Dobbs chooses to write of duplicity, violence, guilt, and shame, his style is cool, detached and even debonair. His ear for dialogue is exceptional, making his method of revealing character through conversation highly effective. (The exception is "A Memsahib's Confession," told in the first person with a studied brainlessness that seems condescending.) Despite the choice of subject, *Pride and Fall* makes pleasant reading. Depicting the twilight of the British Empire from an emotional distance, Kildare Dobbs knows his limits, and works within them exceedingly well.

PAT BARCLAY

# WORDS FOR NOW

BERYL BAIGENT, *Ancestral Dreams*. Third Eye Publications, $5.95.

GERTRUDE STORY, *The Book of Thirteen*. Thistledown Press, $14.00; pa. $6.95.

DAPHNE MARLATT, *Our Lives*. Oolichan Books, $5.95.

BERYL BAIGENT'S previous collections of verse have not been distinguished. The poems in *The Quiet Village* (1972) and *Pause* (1974) might be mistaken for

C.A.A. prizewinners at a time when Smith and Scott were trying to get funding from the *McGill Daily*. Lines are contorted to rhyme; anachronisms such as "wand'ring," "'neath," and "fay" accompany thoughts down "tranquil rustic lanes"; and, if one can get through the "Motherhood," "Simple Joys," "Be Glad," "A Poem A Day," and "The Doctor Calls" — unquestionably the worst poem I have ever read — one is likely to encounter something like "Farewell To An Indian Prince (From a handmaiden)." *In Counter Joint* (1976) showed considerable improvement; the rhyme is almost gone and at least "The Chief" is set in the twentieth century. *Ancestral Dreams* (1981) continues this evolution, and Baigent is finally beginning to make a few strides. The vocabulary has improved, the lines are much tighter, and a few real poems are starting to surface. "Portrait" and "Emma 1842-1863" are fine character studies, and this is "Threshold":

Kerith
born
beneath the socialist banner
behind the shutters
of a Welsh grocery shop.
A Trick of heritage brought
Marx and Jesus
into line and literature
represented by
Dylan
the first discerning visitor
in his proletarian green world.

"From My Window" is a lovely haiku, and the personal lyric, "Against the Wind," escapes sentimentality by the very touching last line: "invisible clinging always there."

Baigent still has a way to go, however. Her tendency to employ repetition for dramatic effect, as in the past, just becomes boring. Without the harness of rhyme, she frequently stumbles into wordiness. Perhaps if she were to follow her natural bent for portraits, injecting a little humour but keeping the lines tightly imagistic, or if she were able to admit to some uneasiness — at home or in the galaxy — instead of offering stale answers to large questions, her obvious dedication to poetry might begin to reward others.

*The Book of Thirteen* is a very good first book of poetry by Gertrude Story. Story's broadcasting and short fiction have already made her fairly well known in Saskatchewan, and in Winter 1981 she was profiled in *The Canadian Author & Bookman* after having won the Okanagan Fiction Award for her story, "Car of Maroon." *The Book of Thirteen* is nicely produced and divided into six sections with thirteen poems apiece. Unfortunately, the individual poems are neither titled nor marked as such, so it is not always clear where one leaves off and another begins; this results in some occasional confusion of character and hurts to some extent the symmetry of the book. On the plus side, however, the sections are composed of loose sequences, so there is good flow from one poem to the next with the author's forceful and occasionally eerie voice lending a solid unity to the whole.

Story's work is thoroughly professional, somewhat surprising for a first book. She writes concisely, employs puns subtly, and has a way of mounting interest, if not developing suspense, in each sequence. "Night Lovers" and "Songs of Pain" are easily the best sections; "Whiskey Poems," "Animals Dead," and "Birds of Prey" probably the weakest. There are frequent references to the prairies, but Story doesn't flog this, being more interested in relationships and the interior of a woman's mind than in where her house is located. Her strength is in a colourful use of dialogue, though her dry wit is a close second:

Crows
are so black
and obvious
they are overdone.

Story's effects with alliteration are always pleasing ("Long lean love leans over me"), and she has a nice feel for where words belong:

A ball of blue
sky/light/neon/light
blue ball.

This is not to say she's ready for the Governor General's Award. Too many of the poems say nothing, or say not enough, but it is clear that there is genuine talent here.

Oolichan Books has done a valuable service to Canadian Letters with the reprinting of several important books within the last few years. I'm thinking specifically of John Newlove's *Moving In Alone* and *The Green Plain*, but Daphne Marlatt followers will be delighted with the new Oolichan edition of *Our Lives*. First published in 1975 by Truck Press in North Carolina — a total of 526 copies were printed — *Our Lives* consists of five narratives, or sections, or stories, or chapters — Marlatt has always been hard to pin down — each written in long-line poetry, or prose poems, or prose, dealing with a year spent in communal living in Vancouver. The writing itself dates back to 1972-73, with the exception of a "Postscript" which nostalgically attempts to place the year/book into some kind of context. It would be tardy to record any first reactions; one might be better directed to read Jack Silver's "Moving into Winter: A Study of Daphne Marlatt's *Our Lives*" in the Spring 1978 *Open Letter*. Nevertheless, I think a few things about Marlatt have to be said.

There are not many writers in this country who can carve with such precision and are capable of such acutely sensuous images. And, of course, Marlatt's fascination with language asserts itself in nearly every line. In her hands, language flows in and out of itself: a sea in a box of mirrors called a book. Marlatt is first and foremost an experimenter. Because the narratives are so raw and the perceptions so frequently phenomenological with relatively little, at least of interest, reflective substance, *Our Lives* can be tough-going for anyone conditioned by the more traditional narrative framework. The question is then, is Marlatt worth the work? To those who believe the text should be more interesting than the reality portrayed, the answer is an emphatic yes. But to those interested more in vision than in snapshots, who find lab work with language little more than clever, if not boring, Daphne Marlatt will appear as a new breed of academic surpassed in theorizing only by those appreciative critics who stumble over each other trying to sound scientific in praising her work. Yesterday's revolutionaries have become the party in power; poetry isn't made out of books (Frye) or experience (Layton) but out of chemicals called words. For now, anyway.

DAVID O'ROURKE

# AQUISITIONS

JON WHYTE, *Gallimaufry*. Longspoon Press, $9.50.

STEPHEN SCOBIE, *A Grand Memory for Forgetting*. Longspoon, $8.50.

MARY HOWES, *Lying in Bed* (with drawings by Jane Ross). Longspoon, $7.50.

BP NICHOL, *Extreme Positions*. Longspoon, $7.50.

FOUR BOOKS TO FIT into one review. Only natural (only academic) to look for some common chain, link, line, rope to hang them all on, not that I want to, but a review(er) abhors dissimilarity, disconnectedness. Let's see. Of four authors, one is female, three male; of three males, two mention Scotland; of these two, one was born there. Of four books, three are poetry and one says it's a novel, though it looks like poetry. Of three (or four) books

of poetry, three use wordplay and puns, two contain concrete and visual poetry, one contains somebody else's drawings. Of four, two use lists, two mention cooking, two use the phrase "lying in bed" — the same two in fact. Of three writers, two mention Paris, two mention Edmonton, one refers to Saskatchewan, one to Calgary; none were born in any of these places. Of four, two mention painters. Two refer to other writers, but one only once (and Atwood at that), three mention movies, but one only once (Bergman at that). Two use lots of brackets, one uses lots of quotation marks. One quotes Gaelic, one quotes Latin. Only one mentions *Lord of the Rings*. Only one mentions Martin Gardner, Kenneth Burke (twice), Mishima, only one writes double dactyls, and uses words like acersecomic, aphelion, anulates, ranunculi, ductile, quiddity, paggling, strabismal, orthognaetheous, technopaegnia. . . .

And that one writer is Jon Whyte, whose *Gallimaufry* is indeed a stew, ragoût, goulash, a zarzuella of lyrics, lists, charms, intellectual flourishes, rhetorical play. I have a friend who objects to my belief that almost anything can and should go into a stew. He thinks such a democratic, not to say promiscuous, pot will at best lack taste, at worst ruin culinary standards and definitions. Whyte's book I offer as proof that an improvisatory and amphigoric approach — to poetic creation at any rate — can produce not just an eccentric, acephalic hotchpotch, but sophisticated, demanding, and rewarding fare. Whyte, a galimatias Banff resident, publisher, and curator, who has written books on the Rockies, stories and poems on Peter Pond and Henry Kelsey, and designed and executed print-poems, has an imagination verbal and visual, linguistic and lapidary (as in "concrete" poetry). The poems here range from a long section, "Fells of Brightness" (from a longer autobiographical anatomy, *Sources*), which mixes mountains, Nashe, memory, Hopkins, history, to reflexive circular graphics, looping lexical lyrics, bicameral dialectics, and lists based on sources as varied as *A Grammar of Motives* and *The Ducks Geese and Swans of North America*. All this comes together on several grounds: the Rockies, the page, the mind. The initial impression is of an accretive process, a piling up or on of sedimentary layers of knowledge, syllables, details, repetitions, nonsense. A hotel room in Yokohama fills up like the Marx brothers' stateroom. Lines pile up, as in a Russian hockey game where the puck

> masses
> dispelling crosstalk, crosseyes, crosschecks,
> body checks, high checks,
> coat checks, high tippers and bipedal
> normalcy's cathartic implosions. . . .

Repetitions are, of course, incremental:

> Next, of course, to lying in bed
> is lying next to you instead;
> instead of lying, I'll lie in bed
> and next to you, of course, instead . . . , *etc.*

Yet this increase, multiplication, and exaggeration is a shoring up against the tendency of matter and mind to dissolve into shimmer and silence. The phenomenal world is held in place, held still, only in the temporary stasis of language, itself an unstable system of sounds and signs. The circus rings language runs round things *are* circular, the mind's reflective ways reflexive, but even such apparently endless cycles stop. The circular poem made of EARTH can "Hear the Art," hold "Hearth" and "Heart," but is finally an "Epitaph." Mind has mountains, but also cliffs of fall, "autumn is / leave-taking," we are left with memory's till: "unconducive," says the dictionary, "to growth." Though there is faith here in the sturdiness of things and people, in the ambiguities, tyrannies, and anarchies of language, and in the grace of the "found," the final sense is one of loss. The concluding poem is a Sendak/Eugene Field-

like composition called "The Place Where the Lost Things Go":

> Right hand mittens,
> tortoiseshell kittens,
> the minute hand from the broken clock,
> the second book of *Lord of the Rings*,
> Mother's copy of *Captains and Kings*,
> Daddy's diamond left foot sock. . . .
>
> Harsh winds have taken
> the forgotten, forsaken
> things to the place where the lost things go;
> and they will never
> return, not ever:
> just like the past and the snow. . . .

And the poem "More or Less" is a witty but to me wittily despairing account, counting, of memory's paralipomena:

> Of negative capability, I can remember
> nothing
> Of the two pillars of Hercules I can
> remember one
> and of the two eyes of Greece I recall one
> one of the two moons of Mars, two of the
> three basic chords, two of
> the three musketeers (and of the four
> musketeers, three, and
> of them, of course, only two) . . .
> six of the seven basic plots, six of the seven
> deadly sins, six of the seven
> cardinal virtues, six of the *Seven Types*
> *of Ambiguity*, six of the
> seven days of creation, six of the seven
> seas, six of the wonders
> of the ancient world, all of the seven
> days of the week
> ten of the members of the Group of Seven
> putting me at least one over the eight
> and . . . now let me see, where was I?

Whyte's opening poem is "Magot Pie," a picturing of that acquisitive, complaining thief, the motley magpie. Almost omniverous in diet, this "Madge," "Margaret," "maggoty-pie," glossy in pied plumage, is "unpopular because of its fondness for the eggs and young of larger birds, though useful as a predator of mice and rats." I thought of this bird, common in Western Canada and Northern Europe, while reading Stephen Scobie's latest and large collection, *A Grand Memory for Forgetting*. The title might suggest a neat connection with Whyte's "More or Less," but more interesting to me is a comparison of the general effect of their poems. Though Whyte takes metres and modes from anywhere, borrows and alludes eclectically, his writing, certainly intellectual, is individual: made-in-[the]-person. Scobie, too, has a wide field of reference — Marguerite Duras, Joni Mitchell, hockey, Hobbema, Munich, Matisse, Wayman, and more. This collection, described on the cover as "personal and reminiscent . . . an imaginative autobiography," does present a variety of images and experiences, political, private, purist, and pop, through the lenses and filters of memory. Yet when I'd finished the book, several readings of it, I had less the sense of reading the poems of a single person than of hearing a collection of voices, some recognizable, some just echoes, of other poets, many styles. I began to wonder if it is possible to *acquire* poetry, its habits, as opposed to evolving, learning, poetic skills. The persona of *A Grand Memory for Forgetting* remains to me as vague and mottled as a tiny newsprint photo. Indeed, the first two poems, "The Children of Photographers (1) & (2)," and a number of others, suggest that we acquire ourselves, at least in this century, like a collection of photographs, as one collects ideas and friends. But such acquisitions, only images, tell us little, are finally hateful in their capacity and as reminders of our commonality. Though

> it is what is forgotten
> that chooses to be so:
> forgetting is not your murder, it is
> the image's suicide,

forgetfulness comes as a relief: past self forgotten. These poems, recent acquisition from myths, movies, memories, lovers, and friends, call attention to the gathering obliterations of time, yet all but obliterate for the reader the original of the images. "Go, go, go, said the bird. . . ."

The best of Scobie's poems, such as "You remember me," have an acute sense of past and memory as both powerful and fragile, as affecting others' lives quite as much as one's own. The best poems in Mary Howes' *Lying in Bed* are tough, witty takes on the sexual myths women suffer, on the physical experience myths engender. Howes is sharp with the clichés attached to birth, menstruation, women's sufferance of men and sex, sharply turning cliché back on itself. In fact, play with clichés, puns, and colloquial language is the source of much of the humour in this collection. "Looney tunes" begins

> I am the woman
> who lives in a basket
> though my heart's not in it

and ends

> ahhh such a mystical thing
> at this time in this place
> to finally release a basket case.

"20 years later" plays on bored / board ("being board / she just cracked / . . . ah well / she said / back to the old drawing board"). "The title poem" is typical: "lying / in / bed / is / easier / than / telling / the / truth / standing / up." Several of the poems are lists which proceed by verbal and connotative association. "What I'm good at" includes "setting the table setting you up / macrame plant hangers / hanging on"; "Not too much to ask," a long poem probably better read to an audience than read on the page, works the same way:

> I want you under my skin
> I want you out on a limb
> I want you treed
> I want you floored
> I want you swept under the rug

and so on for 14 pages. Like Whyte, Howes loves the way language can imply, deceive, misdirect. A series of questions without answers can suggest situations that the answers belie, and vice versa: two of the poems juggle such linguistic expectation and trickiness. It would be easy to dismiss these "games" as "only" language play. But the stories that rhyme women together from nursery to bed, cradle to divorce court, are made up of just such dialect and dialogue. Howes' poems are a kind of quipping dialectic, diagnosis of the symptoms of speech. (*Symptom*: from the Greek, a casualty, anything that befalls one, to fall in with, to fall, together.)

Howes' poems are partnered by some fine lying-in-bed drawings by Jane Ross, views of the feet, lying on wonderfully suggestive backgrounds, as seen by the opposite extremity. bpNichol's *Extreme Positions* uses the power of language, in its visual and aural extremes, to imply, confuse, terrify. The book tells a complicated tale with minimal but sophisticated means. Beginning with successive "s's," their sinister snake's head shape and sound hissing warning, suspicion, suspense, a story is woven of two wives in an involuted, at times painful and violent, ménage à trois. The "setting" and "plot" are given in words arranged visually on the page. The "narrator" is less a person than a camera eye, more voyeur than participant. Emotions, tension, light, night, silence, shouts, are conveyed through juxtapositions and repetitions that discomfit, disconcert, disorient, startle, lull. The technique is Hitchcock's: the simplest elements — moon, owl, tree, road, wave, boat — turn sinister in composition, composed and angled shots freeze contained violence, the silent conversation shot through a window cannot be innocent. The book's six parts progress in general from nouns to verbs to adjectives, to multiplications, complications, and questionings of language/relationships. That wave, rock, cloud, head, hand, land, can be things *and* motions, that one word can contain many without changing shape, that words can weave a tissue of lies, fabricate lives, are mysteries ponder-

able and profound as the impulses and murmurs of the chambered heart, which, *in extremis*, wants unlocking, openness. This book, novel, "murmur mystery," simply, sibilantly, dissolves with a wave into a single "s," a still sign recalling, 1970, *Still Water*'s run deep.

The obvious connection between these books, academically avoided at the beginning as too blatant and easy, is simply that all four are published by The Longspoon Press, a mail order press located in Edmonton and drawing financial assistance from various bodies such as the University of Alberta Endowment Fund, The Canada Council, and Alberta Culture. Though a little expensive even as paperbacks go now (a discount of 30 percent accompanies an order of any four titles), the books are handsomely designed with care for the individuality of each one, and nicely typeset and laid out by Marni Stanley. All four have pictures of the authors on the back. None of the authors resembles each other.

ANN MANDEL

# REQUIRED: ENTHUSIASM

*81: Best Canadian Stories*, ed. John Metcalf and Leon Rooke. Oberon, $7.95.

*Second Impressions*, ed. John Metcalf. Oberon, $7.95.

TERENCE BYRNE'S "Food People," one of ten stories collected in *81: Best Canadian Stories*, involves a minor artist who works persistently, but without hope, until he is suddenly "discovered" by the local media. Bewildered and even alarmed by his sudden good fortune, he cannot quite believe that his years of obscurity are over, and his wife's reaction to his new success only increases his anxiety: "When he finally told her about the show he was having, Lorraine had acted as if she didn't want to hear, as if anyone's real success frightened her." Strangely, the editor of these two anthologies seems equally daunted by their potential success, for his introductions are unlikely to encourage a prospective reader. After noting that Canadian short stories are becoming "generally more sophisticated," he continues: "*Best Canadian Stories* still cannot stand comparison with *Best American Stories* but that is not, and should not be, surprising; what is pleasing is that the comparison is no longer quite so devastatingly painful."

Actually, what is painful is that Metcalf believes such a disclaimer to be necessary. Any anthology including stories by Clark Blaise, Mavis Gallant, W. P. Kinsella, Norman Levine, and Alice Munro scarcely requires an apology. Moreover, as three of the stories originally appeared in *Harper's*, *The New Yorker*, and *Atlantic Monthly*, with one of these — Linda Svendsen's "Who He Slept By" — winning *Atlantic Monthly's* American Short Story Contest in 1980, it would seem that Canadian short stories *are* competitive on an American scale. But that's beside the point.

The stories by the well-known writers previously listed are juxtaposed with stories by Terence Byrnes, Katherine Govier, John Riddell, Linda Svendsen, and Kent Thompson. The selections by Govier and Svendsen clearly establish them as exciting new voices. Govier, whose first novel *Random Dissent* was published in 1979, dramatizes in "The Dragon" a psychiatrist's slow decline into madness. "I have done what I can for you," he inevitably tells his weeping patients, "You know I cannot go out and slay the dragon." Govier's aloof third-person narrator traces his deterioration with both irony and compassion — the story's violent conclusion is brilliantly convincing. Svendsen's "Who He Slept By" portrays a young girl's changing perceptions of her lethar-

gic older brother. Until he blames his failure on "a dose of mononucleosis that had lasted 34 years," the narrator worships him. Then, she explains, "I gradually came to believe that my brother might be an asshole."

Linda Svendsen is easily the most accomplished of the three young writers represented in *Second Impressions*, the second volume in a series begun in 1980 with *First Impressions* and intended to introduce relatively unknown authors to a wider reading public. Before Svendsen's work can be enjoyed, however, the reader must endure another condescending introduction by John Metcalf: ". . . Canada remains so very much the land of Anne Murray, *Anne of Green Gables* and Toller Cranston," he announces, and, therefore, "It is at present rather difficult to read a Canadian book without feeling faintly *virtuous*."

Unfortunately, it is probably true that a feeling of virtue is the only reward for reading the selections by Peter Behrens and Ernest Hekkanen. Behrens explains in his preface that the "only" point to writing fiction is "to uplift men's hearts." In his stories he translates this assumption into a series of miniature sermons, with characters who address the reader, rather than each other: "in Florence I learned that there is nothing else to do except love, hold faith in your love and damn all the rest; that if you give yourself up to it the love will not weaken but sustain you." Hekkanen's absurdist fictions offer a striking contrast to Behrens' obtrusive moralizing. Apparently more concerned with documenting a world in decay, than with vivid characters and intriguing plots, Hekkanen tends to focus on all that is most disagreeable in human life. In "The Rites" a father forces his miserable son to flagellate him; in "Have a Little Decency" four tramps are tossed out of a mission: "Andy kept sniffing back snot. The others looked at him and he stopped sniffing."

Svendsen's four stories in *Second Impressions* confirm the promise of "Who He Slept By." Her preface to her selections reveals a lively and discriminating mind, determined to understand the nuances of the short story as a literary genre: "A story that does not try for its characters, or *try* its characters, cannot hold or move. And that's what I hope my writing will do." Svendsen's stories are indeed both compelling and moving. Her acute ear for the cadences of everyday speech brings her characters vividly to life; her reluctance to impose a particular theme or form gives her creations a space to breathe in. Eschewing direct statement, she relies instead on delicately rendered scenes to evoke her meanings, as in "Marine Life," where she portrays the intense relationship between an ageing mother and her pregnant daughter:

> About 3 AM she fetches a small china box and places it in front of me. She opens it and spreads tiny molars and bicuspids and incisors on the table, beside our saucers and tells me it's my first set of teeth.
>
> "You're kidding," I say.
>
> "No," she whispers. "I'll always keep your teeth."

Linda Svendsen is a welcome addition to the literary scene. I hope she will find a more enthusiastic editor.

PETER KLOVAN

# IN MELLOW MOOD

ANTONINE MAILLET, *La Contrebandière*. Leméac, $6.95.

BERTRAND B. LEBLANC, *Fau Divorcer!* Leméac, $6.95.

GEORGES DOR, *Du Sang Bleu Dans Les Veines*. Leméac, $6.95.

A REFERENDUM, an election, and a recession, almost back-to-back, have left Québécois audiences glutted with life's reality and earnestness. What they itch for these

days is escape — a trend which has the local entertainment industry turning gleeful handsprings. Vigneault and Charlebois, who yesterday cried the virtues of political militancy, now, like born-again flower-children, croon the charms of love and peace. *Les Plouffe*, that quintessence of habitant ham, is reborn on film and television. Even Gratien Gélinas' hoary Fridolin radio comedy scripts are dusted off and published. Three new plays — an historical romance, a marital comedy, and a farce — discover the theatre capering enthusiastically, if somewhat awkwardly, to mellow melodies as well.

Antonine Maillet's *La Contrebandière*, based upon her novel *Mariaagélas* (1973), premiered briefly and unremarkably at Montreal's Théâtre du Rideau Vert in the spring of 1974. Extensively revised, it resurfaced at the same house in April 1981; and the script for the revival is now published.

Set in an Acadian coastal village during the Prohibition era, the action features the picaresque efforts of twenty-five-year-old Maria à Gélas to prove to her bootlegger-grandfather that, although a female and the fag end of the line, she is a worthy heir to the family's outlaw traditions. Inspired by tales of her legendary Aunt Clara, who burned down an exploitative lobster-shop and triumphantly sailed for foreign parts, Maria joins Old Gélas as an active partner in his rum-running operation. Forever on the brink of arrest by Ferdinand, the dashing young Customs and Fisheries officer, she ferries illicit French booze ashore from a schooner anchored in international waters, ingeniously caches it, and arranges for its eventual transshipment to the United States. Indefatigably nipping at her heels is Calixte's Widow, the village scandalmonger and Ferdinand's self-appointed tipster. Whether the precious jugs are buried under the feet of a tethered bull, sunk full fathom five in lobster pots, or enshrined in a convent chapel, the Widow relentlessly noses them out and rallies the Law. Her pains are largely vitiated, however, by Maria's quick wits: Ferdinand, deftly distracted by lurid emergencies, consistently arrives either too late or at the wrong place to exercise his function. In the course of frequent encounters on land and sea, Maria and Ferdinand, without giving up a jot of their vocational antagonism, discover a mutual respect which at play's end promises to ripen into love.

*Mariaagélas* is by no means the richest-textured of Maillet's novels; and the dramatic version can ill afford the deletion of the darker strands in the prose source. Particularly regrettable is the metamorphosis of Ferdinand, the elderly customs official murdered for betraying his class, into a youthful romantic daredevil. Nor was it well-advised to advance Sarah Bidoche, the community fortune-teller, from her relative obscurity in the novel to an unjustified theatrical prominence. Now a participant in the action, now an omniscient chorus, she and her wicked pack of cards are virtually a stage fixture: yet, despite her ubiquity, her exertions prove all but irrelevant to the dramatic outcome. At best she is a picturesque appendage, and at worst, a clog to the play's momentum. One suspects that the part was deliberately written — or overwritten — for Viola (La Sagouine) Léger, who created the role and whose genius might tempt any dramatist to excess. Most of the novel's other key characters retain a fair measure of integrity, if not always their pristine subtlety. Maria struts with winsome insouciance; the Widow pries and prays with her wonted vigour; and Bidoche, the village idiot, maunders on valiantly in a world where ignorance turns out to be something less than bliss.

*La Contrebandière*, if hardly the *tour de force* of *La Sagouine*, is nevertheless a fine nostalgic romp graced with memor-

able folk characters, and colourful, if somewhat episodic action. Opportunities for picturesque visual effects are legion, particularly the night sequence during a fog at sea when Ferdinand searches Maria's boat with a lantern. And Maillet's scrupulous re-creation of the Acadian idiom has one fairly chewing dulse and sniffing tar throughout. Underpinned by a tuneful down-East score, *La Contrebandière* might make an agreeable musical — just the thing, perhaps, to tickle the palates of Charlottetown Festival audiences.

Bertrand B. LeBlanc's *Faut Divorcer!* proclaims itself a belated Québécois derivative of the problem comedies long flogged by American television and cinema. Premiered 29 September 1981 in Quebec City by the Compagnie La Commune à Marie at the Théâtre du Petit-Champlain, LeBlanc's drama chronicles the struggles of Oscar Garneau, a long-time railwayman, to come to terms with retirement. After a year at home he is embittered, bored, unwashed, and glutted with beer and TV. His mortification vents itself in ceaseless tirades against the government, the church, Women's Liberation, international politics — in short, against anything but himself. His married children, alienated by his negativism, no longer bring their offspring for visits. The primary victim of Oscar's maladjustment, however, is his long-suffering wife Martha, who finds her routine disrupted, her house disordered, and herself denigrated. Marital stress reaches crisis dimensions when Oscar, infuriated by Martha's interruption of his televised sport, cuts the cord on her vacuum cleaner, and, in the ensuing dust-up, demands a divorce. A less-than-fortuitous visit from his old friend and notary, Octave, persuades Oscar to see the error of his ways. He decides to build himself a den and workshop in his basement, to cultivate a garden, and to construct an elaborate model railroad for his grandchildren. Meanwhile, however, the much-abused Martha concludes that a separation, and even a divorce, might not be the unmitigated disaster she had long imagined. Deaf to Oscar's pleas and promises to reform, she departs for a vacation which threatens to become permanent if Oscar fails to implement his strategies. But the tearful adieux of both parties at the play's climax leave little fear of that. When the chastened Oscar cries at curtain-fall, "Ça va changer! . . . Tu vas r'venir ben plus vite que tu penses," the reunion champagne is as good as on ice.

Within the problem comedy genre the woes of the senescent threaten of late to outstrip the plight of the single parent in cinema and television appeal; but *On Golden Pond* or *Going In Style* this drama is not. Nor, despite the superficial resemblance of Oscar and Martha to Archie and Edith Bunker, will anyone mistake *Faut Divorcer!* for an *All in the Family* rerun. In the hands of Norman Lear, LeBlanc's material might have made a diverting half-hour TV sit-com episode; but stretched to a two-hour format by a tyro dramatist, tedium is inevitable. A further, and perhaps worse, flaw is the dramatist's tendency to mistake the stage for a lectern. His keen sympathy for Golden Agers leads him again and again to allow his message to override his medium. And when intellectual detachment bows to passionate preachment, the comic flame is wellnigh snuffed. The play's structure amounts to little more than three one-act debates. In Act I, Oscar, spiritedly countered by Martha, denounces her and an ill-ordered universe. "J'te passe un maudit papier," he concludes, "si j'serais le bon Dieu, moé, j'te mettrais d'l'ordre là-dedans." Act II sees Octave and Oscar, in a lively give-and-take, grapple with the anxieties of the elderly male, particularly his sexual and social concerns. Act III, reversing the

pattern of Act I, allows Martha a lengthy tirade, ineffectually interrupted by Oscar, in which she catalogues her husband's shortcomings from their nuptials onward and asserts a new-found independence. The aging female gets the final and triumphant word.

Oscar's malady is not new nor does the playwright limn it with any particular freshness. LeBlanc's prescription, too, is routine — the self-help nostrum administered by every retirement counsellor, social worker, and psychologist in the country. The characters of Oscar and Martha, although credibly drawn, are stereotypes; and Octave is little more than a faceless mouthpiece for the author. The play's major redeeming feature is its topical humour. Oscar's Bunkeresque reflections on René Lévesque, the Parti Québécois, the vernacular mass, trade unionists, contemporary education, and inflation will flatter the prejudices of aging conservatives, and may even afford mildly sardonic diversion to youthful radicals as well.

Georges Dor's high farce *Du sang bleu dans les veines*, first staged 25 June 1980 at Les Ancêtres, a summer playhouse at Saint-Germain de Grantham, attempts to extract a last comic drop or two from an already oversqueezed theatrical lemon — incongruities in language, customs, and values between Quebec and France. As usual, Quebec's rough-hewn, earthy honesty leaves decadent French sophistication at the starting-post.

When the aristocratic Sorbonne genealogy professor Octave de La Tour La Garde addresses the Literary Circle in the rural village of Saint-Edmond, the mayor's wife, Agne-Aimée Boisson, discovers that she is descended from nobility. Elated by her new eminence, she invites the professor home for dinner, along with her rich spinster-neighbour Hortense. In the course of the soirée Agne-Aimée's husband Hector, a prosperous businessman and local politico, finds his rustic tastes running a slow second in his wife's eyes to the urbane charms of the French pedagogue. He fights back valiantly if maladroitly. The professor's gift to Ange-Aimée of a single rose is countered by a heart-shaped floral monstrosity; and the scholar's erudite sallies are answered with quotations from a crossword-puzzle dictionary. In the end, however, native horsesense triumphs over foreign guile, and the suave academic stands unmasked as a patrician con-artist.

The characters are well-wrought and neatly-localized comic types. The dialogue, as befits the work of an experienced radio writer, is deft and sparkling, a treat for the ear. What the play wants, unfortunately, is action; in the absence of which Dors' profusion of puns, wordplay, and clever allusions probably becomes the page better than the stage.

JOHN RIPLEY

# TO AMUSE, TO BITE

JUDITH THOMPSON, *The Crackwalker*. Playwrights, $3.50.

MARC DIAMOND, *The Ziggy Effect*. Playwrights, $3.50.

BETTY JANE WYLIE, *The Horsburgh Scandal*. Black Moss, $3.50.

GEORGE SZANTO, *The Next Move*. Playwrights, $3.50.

*The Crackwalker*, a remarkable, heart-wrenching play, explores the psyche of those who compose the sub-strata of our society. Stripped of the refinements of our culture — two are mentally deficient, two struggle constantly with the morass that confines them to the lower depths, one leads a non-human existence on drugs and alcohol — the characters are utterly exposed in all their imperfections and weaknesses. Judith Thompson's title is a metaphor for the "bogeyman" that haunts our sleepless nights, the thin line we tread

between sanity and insanity, the fears we elude but are always with us.

The central character, Theresa, a child-like innocent, earns $5 a shot at prostitution until she moves in with Alan, a loveable schizophrenic. Alan unintentionally strangles their retarded baby when he imagines it crying, an unconscious act of aggression turned against himself — he is constantly warring with serpent demons inside his head — and escapes into total madness. Sandy, the barmaid, and Alan her macho partner, are trapped in a bad marriage; their tough exterior only masks a relentless vulnerability.

In one of the many moving scenes, Theresa carries her dead baby in a shopping bag to Sandy's place where she attempts to resuscitate it:

> Danny? You live? You breathin if I breathe into ya? S'okay, I'm your Mum! . . . Danny? You dead, eh? You not live. You never comin back, eh.

*The Crackwalker* has all the elements of great drama; it is painful and funny, sad and joyous, pathetic and uplifting; much of this is due to the beautiful poetry juxtaposed with violent images. And underneath the sordid atmosphere lies much compassion and love.

*The Ziggy Effect* by Marc Diamond is a comic satire on contemporary civilization and like all good satire evokes laughter on the wrong side of the mouth.

A former hippie couple (they fled north to avoid the draft) spawned Ziggy, a freaky kid high on punk rock, television, drugs, colours, sunglasses and the sound of his own voice. His psychiatrist mother makes futile attempts to normalize her crazy young patients but realizes that conditions in her own home are wilder than anything she encounters in her practice. Her husband grows vegetables and hoards food in the basement in preparation for the imminent nuclear catastrophe. Since she cannot cure anyone's neurosis, she may as well join 'em, hands over the house to Ziggy and his pals and donning the sunglasses of the new generation goes off "to explore" the world in a communal space in San Francisco. Having cast off "our power relationships" she feels "free at last." Though mother realizes she is a victim of Ziggy and the new youth, she is responsible for his condition; the sins of the hippie fathers have been visited upon the next generation:

> He was an outsider to me . . . I pretended I was eager to have a baby . . . I resented him. . . .

Neither did she nurture Ziggy when she had grown accustomed to his presence, but relegated him to the care of communal members who left him in front of the TV set all day while she went out to work. Human relationships between parents and offspring are absent — the former's function is mainly to provide money — Ziggy demands $25 to dye his hair next week's colour.

The biggest villain, however, is the television and its deadly rays (the glasses ostensibly protect Ziggy's vision) which have damaged his brain and capacity for rational behaviour.

> He looks like a robot receiving messages from some strange planet . . . there's something wrong with the kid, organically and genetically. . . .

Since television programming is nonsensical and stupefying, one might as well turn the set around and "watch the colors on the wall." The viewers are so addicted, they establish TV Anonymous:

> Suppose it's the middle of the night and they need a fix. There's nothing on but the test pattern. They gotta have someone they can call, right?

When Ziggy, who might just as well have been generated by the tube, becomes master of the house, he relegates his father to the basement where he is metamorphosized into an animal-like creature. The non-human Ziggys have taken over the world.

The play's zany plot is its theme; the characters reflect their own empty existence, the language and rhythm, carefully executed, reproduce the beat of punk rock. Absurd dance, gross music, crude poetry, inane characters inhabit the playwright's surreal nihilistic world. The sixties' youth attempted to improve society but succeeded only in botching themselves up along with the next generation. Void of human values, we will self-destruct before the neutron bomb does it for us.

By exaggerating the ludicrous aspects of our culture, the author forces us to take a sharper look at ourselves. It is fear of the future that promotes nihilism — "the alien environment . . . where man has nothing to grab on to." *The Ziggy Effect* is both a frightening and comic vision. And a warning. Ziggy sings: "This is the future. I hope you like it." Some future!

The Talmud exhorts us not only to refrain from doing evil, but from giving the appearance of doing evil. Appearances, it seems, accounted for Russell Horsburgh's demise; a Reverend of the United Church of Canada, he resigned his ministry when arrested on charges of contributing to juvenile delinquency and subsequently served time in prison. In Betty Jane Wylie's excellent introduction to her play, *The Horsburgh Scandal*, we learn that the Minister loved young people, devoted his energies to provide the restless youth of the 1960's with a program which intended to serve as "an antidote to delinquency." To keep the kids out of undesirable surroundings, he installed a pool table in the church gymnasium, organized basketball games even on Sundays, dances, and looked the other way when they engaged in sexual activities. "If they're doing it in the park, they might as well do it in church. At least you know where they are." His innovative programs — handshaking, invitations to a Rabbi and Roman Catholic priest to address the congregation, group therapy sessions, a series of lectures on sex education, gained him notoriety and incensed the staid Christian community of Chatham, Ontario. The "impulsive, headstrong" Minister was alternately described as "naive," "proud," "conscientious," "a monster," "a free-loader," "publicity hungry," "broad-minded," "a true Christian." Though Horsburgh pleaded not guilty at his trial, the silver-tongued Minister remained silent. Did he feel guilty? Was he so certain of his innocence he did not deem it necessary to speak? Or was he so pained by the betrayal of the kids he had supported? Acquitted by the Supreme Court four years after his conviction, and reinstated by the Church several months prior to his death, many questions, however, still remain unanswered. Wylie concludes her moving introduction with these lines:

> There in the gravel of the crawl space under the centre aisle, beside a support pillar, is a plain tin box containing his ashes. I said a prayer and backed out.

The Horsburgh saga is indeed powerful raw material for a drama. Wylie's play, a collective creation with Theatre Passe Muraille, dramatizes the events leading to Horsburgh's trial and the trial itself, but provides no new insights into the man's character. It is obvious that the author's sympathies lie with the "Rev," but we wonder why she refrains from delving into her hero's personality; like all heroes he is a man ahead of his time and not without flaws. Instead, we are presented with a docudrama which urges the audience to decide whether or not justice was misdirected. Horsburgh, the person, intrigues us, rather than the witnesses and their conflicting testimonies. Why did he become a Minister? Why did he remain in the Church despite his flagrant defiance of Church convention? What were his own sexual experiences and biases? Why did he permit the kids to take advantage of him? "He was a good man and we ripped him off." Why the death wish

as illustrated by his habitual speeding and silence at the trial? In his pride, did he consider himself a Christ figure? In the absence of available facts, the dramatist must employ his creative imagination to bring a personal vision to the audience. All our questions need not be answered, but the character should be explored as deeply as possible.

One powerful scene between Barby, who assumes she is pregnant, and her mother, recalls the hysteria Arthur Miller engendered in *The Crucible*; the girl admits to drinking in the church, claims the "Rev made us do it" (i.e., have sexual intercourse) and even asked "how we like it." Here, and in a previous scene, the mother-daughter relationship is strongly defined. In the final analysis, the play reveals more about the people of Chatham than about the man himself.

*The Next Move* by George Szanto is set in Montreal in 1977 when Bill 101 makes French the official language of Quebec. The play examines the effects of the French national movement on the lives of Quebec's anglophone citizens in the characters of an Anglican establishment lawyer, his Jewish wife, their two sons and Jean, proprietor of an "eclectic left" cabaret — and the prejudices and fears that political upheaval kindles in one family.

Sara, distraught throughout the play, having sustained many traumatic experiences in the holocaust, professes her reasons for marrying out of her faith:

> that I and my children should never again fear any sort of persecution . . . your ancient respectability would always outweigh my immigrant improprieties . . . the wealth — that I should never again be offended and insulted.

She used to speak German, now that language has been "obliterated" from her mind, just as the French are obliterating English. Though it is suggested they emigrate to the United States, Fred, having lived and worked in Montreal all his life, feels the family belongs here.

An important character who never appears in the play but whose presence is always felt, is the grandfather, Max. His cabaret had been destroyed by the German fascists; now his grandson keeps adapting the old man's songs, recounts the horrors of the thirties, until he finally begins to write his own political pieces for Jean's cabaret, which satirize French nationalism, the language bills, American influence. . . . Unlike Max who finally feigned senility to avoid reality and further disillusion, the young people, Anglophones though they be, will build their lives here. Set in the cabaret, the play ends on a positive note: "Would you write us a couple of songs?"

Though it is unreasonable and objectionable to equate Nazism with French Canadian aspirations for cultural and political independence, Sara's fears, her husband's anxieties, the young people's struggles for survival are legitimate. The author has captured a particular moment in Quebec's history. Relief from the general solemn mood of the play comes in the cabaret scenes where Jean and Mark sing Brechtian-style songs which are both amusing and biting.

AVIVA RAVEL

# STREET LIFE

BRITT HAGARTY, *Sad Paradise*. Talonbooks, n.p.

KEITH HARRISON, *Dead Ends*. Quadrant Editions, n.p.

SCOTT WATSON, *Platonic Love*. New Star Books, $13.95; pa. $6.25.

*Sad Paradise* is Britt Hagarty's second novel. Here he presents the sixties of Vancouver, Seattle, and San Francisco from the point of view of teen-age Sean Gallagher, the hero of his first novel, *Prisoner of Desire*.

This is not just another "sixties" novel, however. The difference is that it is concerned primarily with the development of Gallagher, rather than with that of any social thesis. This gives it the force of narrative as opposed to merely a wealth of nostalgic, kaleidoscopic psychedelia which characterizes so much else written about this era.

There is a wealth of detail here, but only that which bears directly upon Gallagher's trying "progress" from mildly rebellious fourteen-year-old, through reform school and the drug scene of Vancouver's Fourth Avenue, to jumping bail on a charge of drug trafficking and the death of many of those who had made up that scene.

It is a sad story — not because Gallagher goes wrong so much as because there seems no way for him to go right, or even to be left alone, given the attitudes which prevailed then. Gallagher finds no path by which to be true to himself that does not involve the underworld.

For this reason it is also a compelling story, this search for a mode of life impervious to the authorities, this attempt to build a paradise on terms unacceptable to society at large.

*Dead Ends* is a clever, episodic mystery, also set mainly in Vancouver. The mystery concerns who is taking over whom, whether it be in terms of corporations, personalities, or cultures. Harrison writes in what approaches an epigrammatic style with frequent incomplete sentences which entirely suits the theme — though there are times when one tires of this for his prose becomes contrived. Nevertheless he captures many of our modern troubles even if he fails to decipher them clearly.

*Platonic Love* is nothing of the kind, but rather three tales of gratuitous sex — which are of no particular value simply by virtue of their devotion to homosexuality, which appears to be the premise of the author. Gratuitous sex is gratuitous sex. The only thing that can save a book like this is masterful prose, such as that of Anaïs Nin, which Watson nowhere even approaches. *Platonic Love* is sloppy in the manner of a confessional; worse, it is pretentious.

SIMON RUDDELL

# SEPARATE LENSES

ALASTAIR MACDONALD, *A Different Lens*. Harry Cuff Publications, n.p.

CANDACE ADAMSON BURSTOW, *The Songs of Bathsheba*. Fiddlehead, n.p.

TIM INKSTER, *Blue Angel*. Black Moss, $6.95.

ED JEWINSKI, *The Cage in the Open Air*. Black Moss, $4.95.

ALEXANDRE L. AMPRIMOZ, *Odes for Sterilized Streets*. Vesta, n.p.

THOMAS A. CLARK, *Madder Lake*. Coach House, $6.50.

JIM STEWART, *So the Night World Spins*. Breakwater, $4.95.

WAYNE WRIGHT, *The Girl in the Brook*. Breakwater, $4.95.

DES WALSH, *Seasonal Bravery*. Breakwater, $4.95.

ROBERT HILLES, *Look the Lovely Animal Speaks*. Turnstone, $6.00.

JOHN MCAULEY, *What Henry Hudson Found*. Véhicule, $3.00.

GREGORY M. COOK, *Love from Backfields*. Breakwater, $4.95.

MONTY REID, *The Life of Ryley*. Thistledown, n.p.

C. H. GERVAIS, *Up Country Lines*. Penumbra, n.p.

AT A POINT WELL PAST the three-quarters mark in this century of technology, poetry is supposedly having a difficult time. Yet the striking feature of these 14 books of poems is that the poet can still succeed in overturning conventional perception to make us aware of hidden, even noumenal, dimensions. In the Canadian tradition, there has always been a strong component of idealism, and the best of these poems show it to be far from dead.

In this regard, the most striking collection is undoubtedly Alastair Macdonald's *A Different Lens*. A member of the English Department at Memorial, Macdonald has published two earlier collections, although this is his first with a Newfoundland publisher. Divided into three sections — "Spring," "Summer," "Fall and Decline" — the book gives a powerful sense of a man moving surprised through time, a feeling that Macdonald evokes as palpable enough either to enfold or to release him completely. The poems reveal a human being not entirely in control, and yet not altogether minding, for Macdonald recognizes that the individual, despite conventions to the contrary, is always between phases. To this end, Macdonald's most interesting metaphor is that of the camera, able to catch and imprint moments, but unable to go beyond such superficial conjunctions with time to embrace the ongoing scene. For such an embrace "a different lens" is needed, bringing about a second sense of life in which each particular nexus, action, is part of a larger pattern, a pattern which becomes apparent as the collection unfolds. As Macdonald says: "Poems may be signatures / in sand, thread of feeling's drift, / thought, webbed in spun rhythm and sound." While the larger patterns are clearly Macdonald's goal, he refuses obstinately to ignore the sharp particularity of existential experience. In fact, Macdonald speaks movingly of the death of his wife and of his own approaching death, the final poem being a plea for still more time to play. Yet throughout the collection the pattern clarifies, the reader being brought to use the other's lens, not just to capture, but to embrace illumination.

Coming from the quiet, reflective poetry of Macdonald to Candace Adamson Burstow's *The Songs of Bathsheba* is to encounter a sunburst of emotion so strong as to be almost overwhelming. Such uninhibited love poetry is rare, very rare, in these northern climes; one is immediately led to comparisons with the "Song of Solomon." Burstow paints with bright, primary colours, rendering the feeling that flesh itself is conscious without the meditation of spirit. The early poems are particularly resplendent in the images of flesh fulfilled, and one is hardly prepared, at first reading, for the second section — a combination of children's forms and fairytales which inexorably leads the reader into a terrifying region of madness and institutions where the poet now seems to be virtually helpless, barely able to manipulate the simplest devices. "Fairytale" is particularly moving in this regard, for Burstow uses the story of the princess and the frog to tell of her own unavailing attempts to make the frog perceive the prince within. Failing, she realizes that she is herself caught in "a fairytale / that has no ending."

Yet as in most books with a three-fold form, *The Songs of Bathsheba* returns to the source in the final section, although in this case it proves to be an exploration of the situation of breakdown. In a number of rich, sensuous poems, Burstow characterizes the plight of the singer of flesh who finds that she is being burnt "in the holocaust" of twentieth-century discretion, an attitude of impartiality that allows for "nuclear grins," where the "fine needle of the mind" is employed to create, not the richness of tapestry, but the darker secrets of night. While the final poem manages again to sing and fly, it is not with the full release of tongued glory but with "naked spines" climbing in "high crazy flight." Burstow's dark pen and ink line drawings throughout give the volume a superb graphic design, but one feels that colour was needed as well to give the full impact of poetry which is itself an act of sensuality.

The irony of mentioning Tim Inkster's *Blue Angel* in the same breath as Bur-

stow's poetry of sensual acceptance would probably appeal to Inkster, for he delights in such paradoxes. As a printer, Inkster is already well known, particularly for his founding of "The Porcupine's Quill," a printing/bookbinding shop that turns out books of impressive design. The author of five previous books of poems, Inkster carries over the printer's meticulous care to the *Blue Angel* — poems that are created almost entirely by a process of exclusion, by statements of what the poet is not. The result is a series of short, highly worked pieces that maintain their existence on the slightest of all possible grounds, the poet's integrity to profess nothing. Often this insistent nay-saying has an edge of humour, as if the poet knows that the thicker the etching pen, the bolder will be the resulting white spaces. And certainly this humour is necessary, for at times one can detect the schoolboy's grin when the magician sombrely waves his cape to make the entire world vanish. I confess to being more than a little uneasy about Inkster's pretense of complete mental control, which easily becomes an affectation, but in the better poems the realized success is great, and we have the sense of an embattled individual distilling a heady liquor from the last of the lees. In the final poem there is the fine image of a man approaching down railway tracks "without leaving / footprints." These poems leave small footprints, but the sense of craft in the midst of desolation is powerfully conveyed.

The title poem of Ed Jewinski's collection *The Cage in the Open Air* has as its subject Ezra Pound. It is a remarkable *tour de force* in being both an act of homage to the grand master and also a demystification of Pound's own troubled psyche. Jewinski traces Pound's drive to conquer new poetic lands to his desire to gain his mother's/country's love, something which he never had as a child, and which in the end led him to his iron cage in Italy, a cage that Jewinski suggests is both literal and psychological — a cage in "plain air" as Pound, the lover of Provence, might have said. The sense of a cage which is virtually invisible to the artist and yet which forces him restlessly to pace, to create, is powerfully rendered, for Jewinski has adapted Pound's idea of "direct treatment of the 'thing'," and has applied it as a psychological as well as a poetic technique. Yet both in the Pound poem and in the later, shorter poems, there is never a sense of reductivism, partly because the images are always of simple everyday things, bathed in a new light. For example, in the short poem, "Recurrence and the Empty Chair," Jewinski portrays the artist working at night to capture something that goes beyond the everyday recurrence of such things as the sun rising; yet in the end, when it is the sun who reads the poems, the reader is forced to re-examine the entire relation of the artist's imagination to the world that surrounds him. These cool, detached poems also contain a good deal of humour, as in the poem, "She Discovers Masculinity," about a little boy on his tricycle, "his horns curved like handlebars," charging a woman in a red dress. The noise of the woman's heels forms an antiphony to the mad ringing of the tricycle bell. As well, Jewinski offers a number of tilts at the "new woman," suggesting the force of biology is far stronger than the clenched fist of the movement.

Among these poets of sensuality and force, Alexandre Amprimoz stands out as a writer who is both witty and urbane, a poet who in "Odes for Sterilized Streets" is able to use the long tradition of western art and architecture in statements about the contemporary situation. In "Words to a Young Architect" Amprimoz warns the young man that, while Corbusier cubes possess a hard crust, "the rest softens like

easy friendship." There is also much pleasure to be derived from Amprimoz's sharp eye and even sharper way with words, as when he describes the young girls from Toronto who come to Winnipeg as tourists, especially one who wears a camera as a pendulum "against the reinforced background / of a CNE T-shirt." And yet for all its sophistication, this is a difficult book to warm to as a whole. Cleverness in poetry requires a high eighteenth-century polish, and in poems such as "Les Philosophes" the fine image of time as an "old butler / dusting pride / off the castle's walls" is simply not sustained to the end. Still, for the most part the book is a pleasure to read, especially for Amprimoz's ability to put his Mediterranean tradition and sensibility to good use.

*Madder Lake* is an unusual departure for Oberon Press, being a collection of haiku by the Scottish poet Thomas A. Clark. Many of these are exquisite, and will stay long in the memory. For example — "The light / constraint of / the horizon's rim. / The small / pressure of / a wedding ring" — is a poem whose luminous pressure on the mind exactly repeats the kind of pressure the poem describes. And yet it was perhaps not the wisest choice to collect all these haiku into a single volume. Surely the poet like the novelist needs to learn to pace his reader. For all my delight, I found that somewhere shortly after the mid point, I could no longer distinguish profundity from cuteness. Certainly the delightful, small-scale drawings help, but one needs a larger context in which to fit Clark's reworkings of Basho, Gilbert White, and the *Compleat Angler*.

Like Clark, Jim Stewart was born in Scotland, but he has lived most of his life in New Brunswick. His *So the Night World Spins* comes complete with an introduction by Alden Nowlan recommending the poems in part because Stewart is a poet who "possesses a sense of the past." And certainly this is true, especially in the first half of the collection where Stewart tells and retells stories of the celtic past in a narrative mode that captures much of the mood of his own Scotland. Many of these folk tales would be delightful when accompanied by an instrument. Yet it is also a little disturbing to find that Stewart does not — as did the writers of the nineteenth-century celtic revival — attempt to make the stories new. Indeed, this is the weakness of the collection as a whole, for in the second section where Stewart deals with his present day experience, the poems often seem derivative, almost as if Stewart had settled down to write in the style of Purdy, Cohen, Nowlan, et al. Too often, as well, Stewart indulges in high romantic phraseology which falls into bathos. Yet when Stewart leaves behind the past, he can write moving poetry. "Love Poem" speaks simply of a love affair that is ending, while "Clearings: For Clifford" is an eloquent testimony to a pioneer who created clearings both in the wilderness and in the spirit. It would seem that Stewart himself needs such clearings for his own voice to develop.

Wayne Wright is clearly a poet who loves language. In *The Girl in the Brook* he writes in a style that is richly luxuriant of images, and of images that do not always connect in any obvious way. The reader is kept often on the far edge of understanding, and yet the surprising thing is that most of the time the poems succeed in holding our attention and drawing us on, as if by a subliminal force. One is reminded a little of the early Andy Schroeder and the West Coast Surrealist School. Perhaps there is beginning a similar east coast school among the Breakwater poets? Wright also has a puckish sense of humour in such poems as "Never Mention Isadora" as well as Dennis Lee's

ability to write children's poetry that is both amusing and provocative.

*Seasonal Bravery*, Des Walsh's second book of poetry, has one theme — stated boldly but rather repetitively — the anguish that comes from a lost love. Entirely concerned with the suffering "I," these poems are reminiscent of Leonard Cohen's later verse of wounded feelings, although Walsh lacks Cohen's sensuality. The early poems in the collection are by far the best, with the later pieces having a good deal of the poseur about them, as if Walsh came to take self-conscious delight in the role of the suffering writer. The same format for each poem, a dozen or so short lines of free verse, becomes wearying after a time. One ends by leaving Walsh in his unreachable pain.

To this point, the poets considered have been largely personal expressionists, but the following writers place a much greater emphasis on the documentation of everyday Canadian rural life, a topic that has been of increasing importance ever since Al Purdy led the way with his seemingly casual narrative line. In this regard, Robert Hilles's *Look the Lovely Animal Speaks* bridges the two traditions in the documentation of his struggle to break free from his inarticulate prairie environment to learn to speak. He tells of how he was brought up without any real structure by a father who was forced to leave his farm to tend the government's "concrete gardens." Most of his friends stayed to mark time, "to rehearse / their lives between the / job site and the bars." But Hilles needed to go beyond the armour of convention to find a nexus between what he calls his "garnished self" and the buried life, and thus to speak from this crux. The point for Hilles is not to make a "crystal clear ending," but to speak "as a vowel" which "interprets its own sound." The attempt is by no means an easy one, and at the end there is still a good deal of surprise and irony in Hilles when he sees himself as "the lovely animal" straight off the ship, who has "climbed onto the / dock" to speak. Although some of the autobiographical passages are a bit flat, the collection moves powerfully, for one can feel the pressure of the self inching forward the mass of inarticulate experience.

The opening long poem of John McAuley's *What Henry Hudson Found* is a superb recreation of what Hudson and his crew might have experienced when set adrift to die in 1611. The characters of the men are all highly individualized, as are the ways they meet death when winter finally overcomes their desperate attempts to survive. It is yet another poem in the narrative tradition that aims to put some flesh onto rather cold historical bones. McAuley's free verse does a fine job of capturing the accents of the seventeenth-century diary form, and in the end the sense of historical reconstruction is so vividly achieved that one feels McAuley must have had access to secret documents. The quiet understatement of the Hudson poem, however, leaves one totally unprepared for the verbal pyrotechnics of the remainder of the collection — a series of shorter poems in which McAuley reflects on how it feels to be alive in a scientific and historical century where theories and ideas make the mind of the individual a bomb of possibilities. The result is stunning imagery, erudite reference, all coupled with intentional banality. It is as if McAuley has reversed Purdy's depiction of the average man moving towards occasional moments of illumination to show that the plethora of ideas and verbal richness in which we live is almost, but not quite, capable of blowing away the grey matter that creates it all.

Greg Cook's *Love from Backfields* is a collection of poems about rural experience which create the sense of a person groping his way back through the disorder of emotion to a centre that no longer ex-

ists. The poems have the uncanny ability to suggest the missing quality, while never being able to define it. As Cook says, "Returning is instinct / of something lost." He approaches what is missing by using his "knowledge of option," the ability to play one thing off against the other, always narrowing the gap. As the alternative would be deadly stasis, the poems work back and forth, indicating that something is still in process. As he says about his family, "We always lived by making up as we went along." And so he does still. The poems have an honesty to them and also a kind of bleakness — "the purpose is not to deceive" — so that when we come abruptly to a close, there is the sense of a task completed for the time being, of persistence itself as an act of centring.

As editor of *NeWest Review* and co-founder of *The Camrose Review*, Monty Reid is becoming a well-known figure in prairie literary circles. In *The Life of Ryley*, his third volume, Reid writes about the everyday life of the small town of Ryley: as he tells of running jack rabbits with skidoos, losing fingers to machines, and scarifying roads, it soon becomes evident that all is not so easy as the title's pun might at first indicate. Reid gives a strong sense of the town's occupations and pleasures, and this is both the strength and weakness of the volume. Despite the occasional fine poem, such as "Commuters," there is little in the collection that raises it above the mediocrity of unreflective small town life. Here we have lack of intelligence and sensitivity presented as it is, and one wonders if it was worth recording. When Reid attempts a clinching phrase, it tends to sound overworked. The life of Ryley has little to recommend it.

Of all these poets, C. H. Gervais in *Up Country Lines* seems the least successful in his attempt to describe the country and his various travels through it. The accumulation of detail is rarely fused by imaginative rendering, and one ends by feeling that the landscape needs waking up, that it must be more vital than Gervais's quiet stare will permit.

RON HATCH

# ARIGHT & AWRY

JACK HOWARD, *Wry & Ginger*. Borealis, $11.95.
MARIE MITCHELL, *Tally Ho!* Borealis, $8.95.

WHEN EVERY MAN is not in his humour, the differences in achievement between wordplay, wit, and flaccid irony can produce a sudden erosion of the spirit.

*Wry & Ginger* is a collection of Jack Howard's columns from the Ontario government journal *Topical*. In a dozen divisions, under such rubrics as "Wifie, and Related Irritants" and "Sour Notes from an Anglosaxophone," the reader may discover such titles as "Old Whine in a New Battle" and "Ammonia Burden A Gilded Cage." Howard's humour is brisk, unlaboured, and punning; in the main these pieces are sketches and anecdotes, and their predominant tone is that of the wry closure: "we are not ready to go from the sacred to the propane." There are many ingenuous lead-ons and incidental stories which support old-fashioned fun like Sadistics Canada, "irrelevant never forgets," or a sausage-eating seagull which is "a tern for the wurst." A character featured in several pieces is John the Bartender, a consummate malapropist who "reeks haddock on the English language" when egged on by the patronizing, self-entertaining, and droll narrator.

Howard consistently uses the editorial we, calling himself "a plurality of one," though the effect is never entirely comfortable; however, there are several clever and outstanding items amid the considerable amount of indulgence. "A Non-Negotiable Instrument" amusingly de-

fends the clarinet, and abuse of the language brings out Howard's best irony. "Sneezer's Commentaries," with appropriate inflections according to gender and syllabification, is a sheer delight. And what does one say of a reflection on contemporary replacements of earlier conveniences that are less effective which concludes, *Que seran, seran?* The endpiece, "The Offensive End," is a mock-horoscope which despite its brevity has some of the spirit of Samuel Marchbanks's almanac. But read all of a piece, *Wry & Ginger* loses some of its sparkle.

*Tally Ho!* is the story of a woman's attempt to accommodate her husband's initiation into the horsey set and the accoutrements of the hunt, counterpointed by the perils of domestica and her resentment at country living. She tries to exert reason over the mentalities which surround her, chiefly through the device of irony, her sense of which is questionable. Adele sometimes flatters her own cleverness, though a compensating tone is an out-of-character hyperbole. Unfortunately, her language is often strained and unnatural — "'Hi,' said I, in my most effulgent enthusiasm" — and occasionally confusing: her injured husband "held his arm like a tourniquet at the wrist." Sometimes her formal language has little connection with the supposed heat of a scene, and sometimes she talks like an expository textbook.

This pales beside the grammatical and syntactical problems with this fiction.

But the impenetrability of some sentences and mistakes in punctuation and spelling are symptomatic of the novel's unshakable awkwardness: the horse opera plot finally turns to homicidal conspiracy and psycho-sexual trauma, quite at variance with what its intention seemed to support.

Despite the scenes of comedy, *Tally Ho!* has no light touch in situation or narrative voice, and its material would very much like to have both. Readers may be offended by the carelessness in the production of this book, both in its form and in its content, and might turn to Jack Howard's bartender on Sir John A. Macdonald, who was "very adapt at speaking on varicose subjects."

LOUIS K. MACKENDRICK

# A SENSE OF ALL

GARY GEDDES, *The Acid Test.* Turnstone, n.p.

ROBERT FINCH, *Has and Is.* Porcupine's Quill, $20.00; pa. $7.95.

GARY GEDDES'S LATEST WORK is filled with signals that he has at last come to the surface of his maturity. *The Acid Test* resounds with careful accuracy in the exact choice of language, the precision of the rhythms, the respect for form. Not always had I taken Geddes's previous work as important in the mainstream of Canadian poetry; it seemed to be diffuse in its diction, the ideas were frequently unclear, the forms reflecting what, for me, were a kind of dilettante approach to poetry. Quite frankly, I could not take him seriously, for I thought that he was pretending to be a poet, was wearing various disguises and none of them completely worked. At times, I did see a glimpse of something that was solid and hinted at strength, but the next time I would be disappointed. But always, I cherished the hope that sometime he would seek to become the kind of writer that his well-known narrative poem, "Letter of the Master of Horse" persuaded me that he could be.

This collection of poems concludes, in revised form, with "Letter of the Master of Horse." It is a fine way to conclude what is a very fine book. This poem which will become — if it is not already — a major and significant poem in Canadian letters, convincingly reveals that

Geddes can establish himself with a clear and unified poetic voice. The delirium of his speaker attaches itself to the rhythm and form of the poem so that for awhile the "I" is dismantled into a state of concern for animals and others that grips the sensibility of the reader. The death which "the Master" sees around him horrifies but it also soothes, for it brings him into a paroxysm of meaning which he has not known before. He says, finally, that he "will come soon," knowing that he will achieve another state of being and with that, he hopes, another kind of wisdom.

With "Letter of the Master of Horse" as a culmination of the feelings and thoughts of this volume of poetry, the other poems in the book extend how Geddes saw the world in his last book, *War & other measures*. He is concerned with the psychosis that pervades twentieth-century society, no matter where it is. He asserts that disturbances of the soul and of humanity are everywhere. The first poem, "Tower," shows a complacent (and mad) killer waiting to shoot his victims in the courtyard below him; he feels "like a cat collecting kittens," the final line of the poem, presented with a casualness that leaves the reader utterly unprepared for the way the scene seizes the imagination. This kind of unexpected jolting occurs in many of the poems, establishing refrains that echo a mind that not only sees things differently but also can talk about them in a different way. We have been told many of these stories before, about the horror of international politics, Vietnam, the genocide in Cambodia, the arms race, ecological manoeuvres throughout the world. Readers are often so familiar with these subjects that they are dulled about reading them again, not only because they have heard it all too often but also because they realize that perhaps there is nothing that can be done about them. But Geddes will not let that happen; he will not accept the universal alibi. He reminds us that compassion is needed, again and again, that human loneliness needs a human comforter, that people can see together, think together, feel together — and stay together. "Sandra Lee Scheuer," a poem about a girl killed at Kent State University in 1970 by the Ohio National Guard, reflects on the tragedy of the death of one girl who enjoyed being kind to others and whose life was relatively humdrum — just like everyone else's. He reminds us that we all approach the world of the lowest common denominator by the whimsy of circumstance. It horrifies him; it attests to our horror.

Geddes has written an extremely good book here; he seems to be able to do just about everything right: about people, places, problems. His attitude is deeply perceptive; if there is a weakness, it is in the occasional echoes in language of the tradition to which he belongs, that romantic, lyrical capturing that is intrinsic to Canadian poetry, that tradition extended by Klein, Layton, and Cohen — all writers who, like Geddes, marvel at the cruelties of the human condition. The writing takes a reader to the edge of human concerns by arresting images, fierce intelligence, and a poetic language that forecasts for me that Geddes is not only a poet to watch but also a poet who will continually surprise and please.

One of the poems in Robert Finch's *Has and Is*, entitled "Summation," contains the lines "'He is modest,' you say, or 'average' or proud, but at each word he melts into a crowd." The poem addresses the problems of assessing characters, and how it is preferred to "sum them up in an embracing word" (a poem directed to the critic, perhaps). For me, the word to sum up Finch's latest volume — his sixth to date — is "modest" but not, I think, in the way the word is usually defined. The poems in this volume reflect what I feel is the important aspect of Finch's work and

of his contribution to the growth of Canadian poetry since 1936, when he, along with Klein, Pratt, Smith, and others, brought out *New Provinces*, the collection that heralded modern Canadian poetry. Since that time, Finch has been "modest": the tone of the poetry has reflected a man who has a humble estimate of his own merits; as a matter of fact, there is often a self-deprecating wit that acknowledges a speaker who is both retiring and bashful. The forms of the poems — often variations on the fourteen lines of the sonnet — are decorous in manner and conduct. There is nothing demanding in statement or excessive in thought. The poetry is thoroughly unpretentious in appearance and amount. It is solid and clear, careful and coherent. Other stars may shine more brightly, but there is to Finch's poetry a constant light that does not waver, nor spit out, and will glimmer much longer than that of others.

The man is a craftsman chiefly concerned with form. I have mentioned the sonnet, and Finch is obviously most at home with it, for as a form it comprises approximately ninety percent of the volume. What is appealing is the way he can use the strictures of the fourteen line, yet create unity when he breaks the form into stanzas of varying lengths, using both the Elizabethan and Petrarchan modes to improvise on his themes. He never goes too far, and instead stretches the form as far as it will go, yet holding on to both the rhythm and rhyme scheme to indicate his respect and care for the craft. His syntax, also, is developed with such care that at times it appears almost too simply moulded, as though the words were chosen at random so that they would fit the mould that the form dictates; rereading the poems reveals, however, that what appears as casual language is instead an instinct for the right detail and the telling image.

Many of Finch's interests are implicitly affirmations of his standards as a poet and as a human being. He says that "Poems are tree and plant of your growing" in a poem, "A Certain Country"; here, not only is he talking of Canada, but also of the landscape of the poet who uses his pen to create breath for the present and for the past. He reminds his readers to look again at the everyday things, to participate in the average motions of the world, to see clearly the flowers and the sea, to glimpse the "flood-lit dark." Throughout his work, Finch projects himself into his subject; he views, he sees, he goes into the world around him, to recreate experience not only for himself but also for his readers. He sees renewal in a snowstorm, he takes the Romantic credo of optimism: he sees in the falling snow a moment when merging takes place, for "Even when in reverse the flakes of flowers / Whirl upward to an everywhere of spring." His is a poetry of ratification, and as the book works toward its close, Finch's voice becomes steadily more intimate, his concepts more inward. The metaphysical eye sees mix in all things; he sees paradox around him, for he is himself one who believes but is full of unbelief. The last poems harbour spiritual strivings, those of a man who accepts the traditional values which were prominent when he was a struggling poet in the early thirties and who feels it imperative that he exercise his mandate to say it for all of us again. Finch's obvious delight with language underlines his major theme: the continuity of all forms of life.

These two books are at first studies in contrast, but I found that when I thought about them together, there was a peculiar kinship between them: Geddes's *The Acid Test* reminds us of what violence and confrontation are doing to our world, of how man in his beginnings has the seeds of his own destruction, that compassion and love are needed in our world. Finch's *Has and Is* affirms that if we look

again around us with less jaded eyes, we may rediscover that which has lasted, is with us, and will always be. A sense of self becomes a sense of all.

DONALD STEPHENS

# IN THE GASPE

REAL-GABRIEL BUJOLD, *Le p'tit ministre-les-pommes*. Leméac, n.p.

NOEL AUDET, *Quand la voile faseille*. Hurtubise HMH, $11.95.

G.-ANDRE VACHON, *Esthétique pour Patricia suivi d'un écrit de Patricia B.* Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, $8.95.

THE FIRST TWO WORKS, both novels set in the Gaspé, have a great deal in common, both stylistically and thematically. Bujold's *Le p'tit ministre-les-pommes* is an ambitious attempt to portray life in the parish of Saint-Gildas in the fall and winter of 1954-55. Audet's first novel, *Quand la voile faseille*, is an even more ambitious and, in the final analysis, much more successful portrayal of life in the Gaspé from the 1920's to the 1970's, as seen from the perspective of three generations of the same family. Despite the much longer time span covered and the greater complexity of its structure, Audet's novel is a much more unified and coherent text than is Bujold's rambling and sometimes excessively nostalgic collection of memories about life in the Gaspé. The third work, G.-André Vachon's *Esthétique pour Patricia* belongs to the very different and, in comparison, highly esoteric world of literary theory, its very formal and academic tone contrasting sharply with the extremely colloquial nature of the language used in the two novels. In an unusual format for a study of this kind, Vachon presents his aesthetic theories in the form of a series of answers to questions ostensibly raised by a young student named Patricia concerning the nature of literature (primarily of poetry).

In *Le p'tit ministre-les-pommes*, the Narrator relates, in an episodic and disjointed manner, a number of minor events in the lives of a large number of characters, none of whom are ever fully developed. The reader of Bujold's novel is subjected to detailed accounts of events such as the funeral of a cat named Farinette, the exemplary "démarches à l'horizontale" of Graziella Mènik (originally McNichol), and the hardships imposed on the population by a major power failure in mid-January. The main plot centres around the local *curé*'s dream of building a new church, and the political and social repercussions of such a project in the Gaspé under Duplessis. In many ways, this novel is reminiscent of Louis Hémon's *Maria Chapdelaine*, particularly because of the importance accorded to the changing seasons and to the effect of the harsh climate on the lives of the families of the parish. Like many novels of its kind, *Le p'tit ministre-les-pommes* is of some interest because of the colourful language used by the characters (and by the Narrator) but as a novel it is very disappointing, especially in comparison with some of the other works which have appeared recently in the "Roman québécois" collection.

After publishing two collections of poetry, Noël Audet has now tried his hand at the novel. His first novel is a powerful evocation of the profound sociological and cultural changes which have taken place in Québec over the last forty years. The action, most of which takes place in the village of Bonaventure, on the south coast of the Gaspé peninsula, is filtered through the consciousness of the Narrator, who is very much a product of the Quiet Revolution, a cultivated man of letters who has completely rejected the political and intellectual conservatism of the Duplessis era and the narrow-minded dogmatism of the Catholic Church but who, paradoxically, remains faithful in

many ways to the traditional values of his native Québec. The narrative is divided into four "récits" which at first do not seem to bear much relationship to each other, but which in fact constitute a carefully constructed framework within which the Narrator combines anecdotes about the lives of members of his parents' and grandparents' generation with his own experiences, both in the Gaspé and elsewhere, from Montreal to France. The first "récit," entitled "Mon oncle Arsène," deals with the adventures of the Narrator's uncle in the forties and fifties including such exploits as rum-running to Saint-Pierre, opening a clandestine bar, and chasing two sisters named Laurette and Graziella, one of whom he later marries. A flashback to the 1920's and early 1930's, to the childhood and adolescence of "Grazie et Laure" traces the formative years of the two characters against a background of Depression-era politics. In the third "récit," "l'Arche de Noé pêle-mêle," the Narrator relates his memories of his father Ernest-N., the death of his mother, and his loss of religious faith. The final "récit," and perhaps the most interesting, is entitled "Une simple histoire d'amour" and deals with the Narrator's early adulthood, and the transformations which take place as he acquires what he calls "la culture livresque," as well as his marriage to Hélène and his subsequent affair with Alexandra, the last stages of which take place at the time of the October Crisis. Throughout this remarkable novel, there is a sharp contrast between the language used by most of the characters, particularly "Oncle Arsène," and the Narrator's sophisticated and often very literary style. Many descriptive passages are very lyrical, and the reader is constantly reminded that the author is a poet. *Quand la voile faseille* is above all an extremely readable work whose author displays very real talents as a novelist.

In his *Esthétique pour Patricia*, Vachon examines some of the fundamental questions of literary theory, such as what differentiates poetry from prose and how the literary text reflects or "reproduces" reality. His basic objective is to show how the poem creates meaning — certainly not a new topic but one which he handles admirably well. Basing some of his arguments on analyses of texts as different as poems by Paul Eluard and e.e. cummings and the first two lines of Racine's *Phèdre*, the author of *Rabelais tel quel* (1977) tries to show that poetry "n'est rien d'autre que le langage perpétuellement, continûment violenté." Some of his conclusions are not always completely original but do show a high degree of understanding of, and sensitivity to, the functioning of the literary text. Among other influences, Proust and Nietzsche seem to have helped to shape Vachon's theory of literature, particularly with respect to the ideas that "la réalité n'a rien de commun avec ce que nous percevons habituellement du monde" and that "l'écriture est un combat contre Dieu." This essay contains many such provocative and thought-provoking assertions which will make interesting reading for anyone involved in the writing or the criticism of poetry.

RICHARD G. HODGSON

# SELF VOYAGES

LILIANE WELCH, *Brush and Trunks*. Fiddlehead, $5.00.

KRISTJANA GUNNARS, *Wake-Pick Poems*. Anansi, $6.95.

T. D. MACLULICH, *Voyages*. Turnstone, n.p.

ALL THREE OF THESE EXCELLENT books deal primarily with self-exploration through confronting nature, but their ideas about what this confrontation involves, especially in relation to sexuality, and to the sexual myths of our culture, are interestingly different.

The most ambitious of the three is Liliane Welch's *Brush and Trunks*, a book-length poem defining the New Brunswick sensibility through three voices: "a Hunter," "a Lumberman," and "an Acadian." The central voice is the Hunter's, who rarely uses any pronoun other than "I." He voices the dream-consciousness, the libidinous urge, the violent passions. He is the Male Hunter of Western convention who combines his urge to kill and his sexual instincts in his pursuit of Feminine Nature (the injured cow moose). He is also the male teacher, the husband, and the male artist for whom teaching, espousal, and creation normally combine murderous and sexual impulses toward nature as well as an intermittent identification with nature's pain.

The second voice, the Lumberman's, usually speaks less passionately at the anecdotal level, using not only "I" but also "we" and frequently "he." Yet this voice also uses the dream-violence imagery of the Hunter, and it sometimes rises to the more generalized and historical perspective of the third voice, the Acadian. The Acadian voice less often uses "I," most often uses "we" or "they." Yet this third voice, the collective sensibility (as opposed to the group/camp voice of the Lumberman or the individual voice of the Hunter), also uses imagery of sexual violence against nature:

> black beards, burning eyes,
> ruthless, reckless, contemptuous,
> with a dark and fatal tongue
> lay siege to Fundy bay.

In spite of its fierce imagery and mythic eloquence, *Brush and Trunks* has two flaws. First, its three voices are aspects of a single persona/myth and cannot reflect the whole of a society's experiences. A little domestic affection, religion, quilt-making, or fiddling may have gone into the making of Acadia — even a little politics — but you would not know it from Welch's poem. Nothing of the French/English/Indian conflicts is developed. Second, the idea that the hunter/killer and the erotic poet and the Canadian spirit historically developing are one and male is a bias so endemic to Canadian literature that I am not sure Welch is conscious of it as a bias.

What keeps *Brush and Trunks* from being as good as it nearly is can also be seen in Welch's essay "Mountain Climbing — Reading — Writing" in her 1980 Fiddlehead collection *October Winds*. There she retains throughout the convention of using the singular masculine pronoun to represent the human spirit as explorer, thinker, creator. In *Brush and Trunks* Welch lets a woman speak but once. Her woman calls her hunter "Simpleton." I would like to have heard more from that taciturn femininity.

The most original of the three books is Kristjana Gunnars' *Wake-Pick Poems*. I knew when I saw Gunnars' first two books that, once she had digested her material, she would be a very good poet. (Not that her earlier books were immature, but they relied a little too much on witchy paraphernalia.) Little girls who are witches are as common as little girls who are horsy. Both represent the feminine urge to mould and overpower the brute universe. Both see Mind as feminine, and Nature as muscular and half-witted (the horse, the man). This gyno-mythic bias is thus the reverse of the bias Welch uses. But the world of the witch is ultimately the same world as Conan the Barbarian's — adolescent, and I am pleased to report that Gunnars is developing her folkloric material towards a more sophisticated use.

In *Wake-Pick Poems* Gunnars explores the effort-filled development of human consciousness, with its feelings of "otherness," in its relationships to the perceived world of nature, to social and family demands, and to perceived sources of dan-

ger, power, inhibition. The book is actually three long poetic sequences: "The Changeling Poems," "Monkshood Poems," and "Wake-Pick Poems." Oversimplifying (for review purposes) one might say that these three sequences represent first, birth, the child as changeling and changing, becoming human; second, the adolescent concerned with questions about death and with perceptions of sexual identity, becoming woman; and, in the last sequence, matured woman, the knitter-weaver holding the world together with her ferocious, creative wakefulness. The first sequence moves out from nature, out from the cave/house/womb. The second is a trip, a new life-voyage into the external world. The third represents the speaker as wholly confined to her arduous work, imprisoned by obligations and passions, and yet as a tremendous, centric power, like water under the earth. I know nothing else quite like it. The confined cloth-maker sings:

> though i be put to fulling eternity
> soak me, stiff & small
> wring me in the doorway
> but leave me with hands to tie
> love for my people.

There is a good deal more to Gunnars than I have indicated, and I plan to restudy these poems and write about them more fully in the future. Gunnars is already one of our most interesting poets, and if she can avoid quaintness and self-parody, she may become one of our best.

T. D. MacLulich's small collection *Voyages* is the most polished of these books, though the least ambitious. His are well-written and well-thought-out poems in which emotion sometimes moves to lyric expression so lovely I can only hope he will be more frequently overwhelmed in the future.

The prevailing theme of *Voyages* is that of the European immigrant discovering/exploring the new continent/experiences. Of the two prevailing poetic or symbolic images for the opening up and exploration of the Americas, Welch (and Gunnars, to a lesser degree, in her earlier *Settlement* poems) used that of pioneering as sexual violence against nature. But MacLulich uses the alternative image, that of Adamic discovery, of naming the unnamed, of filling the blank page. MacLulich's immigrant's chores are seen primarily as related to perception rather than power. Sexual love is a creative pattern against violence (see "The Parents") rather than a pattern of violence. MacLulich's new-worlder is not Welch's rapist. And his hunter, in "The Forest," becomes more animal, more cunning, more shy, more of a quarry himself, than Welch's hunter, whose blood-thirstiness becomes that human sort we call bestial.

The sexual myths with which Welch and Gunnars work represent our primitive urges, predating ethical values and what Aldous Huxley called "the perennial philosophy" as the furies of childhood predate the adult mind. But the fear of death and the cravings for power that direct the energies of Welch's and Gunnars' protagonists do not direct the voyages of MacLulich's poems. For his explorers are moved by philosophic passion, which delights in the tiny, domestic details of natural life, yet moves beyond the organs of perception toward a Huxleyan enlightenment. Instead of discovering the self defined by battle against life's forces, whether the hunter's rage or the knitter's endurance, MacLulich's typical protagonist voyages beyond battle. In "The Vanished Explorer" the seeker:

> has found his country
> his eyes focus inward
> past all known latitudes
> his mind is too full now
> to hold any further terror.

These delicately complex poems well repay rereading.

M. TRAVIS LANE

# KITCHEN SINK TO TEATRUM MUNDI

LOUISE ROY, LOUIS SAIA, MICHEL RIVARD, *Bachelor*. Leméac, $6.95.

LOUIS-MARIE DANSEREAU, *Chez Paul-Ette, bière, vin, liqueur et nouveautés*. Leméac, $6.95.

DANIELLE BISSONETTE, LEO MUNGER, MANON VALLEE, *Le Fleuve au coeur*. Leméac, $6.95.

JEAN-PIERRE RONFARD, *Vie et mort du roi boiteux*. 2 vols. Leméac, $10.95 each.

THE 1981 SELECTION of plays published by Leméac in its "Théâtre" series features a number of plays by young playwrights who clearly follow patterns evolved by Michel Tremblay and the collective creation companies. Theirs is a "poor" theatre on all levels. It leaves the reader with a sense of disappointment and attrition, for what we get is Tremblay's kitchen-sink realism without the added dimension that gives his plays their multiple meanings. Throughout the sixties, Quebec dramatists had made demythification their major concern. When Tremblay formally closed his Belles-Soeurs cycle, and the poetic drama of Sauvageau and Michel Garneau made its appearance, it gave cause for hope that the family complex had finally been exorcised. And indeed the *jeune théâtre* of the seventies veered towards a concern with larger social and political issues, using collective creation techniques.

Looking at the 1981 Leméac plays, however, we must come to the conclusion that Quebec playwrights are still — or once again — in the grip of a "repli sur soi-même," with the small, everyday concerns of the individual, the family or at best the neighbourhood their main source of inspiration. The characters may be convincing, lovable, usually pathetic; but the plays definitely lack scope.

In total contrast to the approach of the young generation, Pierre Ronfard, one of the deans of contemporary theatre, has produced a colossal magnum opus, *Vie et mort du roi boiteux*, presented here in two large volumes. Ronfard's work is comparable to Goethe's *Faust* in its all-embracing sweep through time and space, a neo-romantic "épopée sanglante et grotesque" (the subtitle) in six plays, prologue, and epilogue. In view of the current physical and financial restriction in theatre, and the resulting aesthetics of restraint, Ronfard's drama represents a bold challenge indeed.

Young playwrights, on the other hand, are fully aware of these restrictions and have built them into their plays. The number of characters is small. Monologue has become a popular genre. Where a great number of characters are needed, the play is structured in such a way that actors can take several parts each. Staging is simple, with emphasis on props, rather than sets.

The three plays under discussion here provide a good sample of the scope of contemporary Quebec drama: *Bachelor* is a monologue, the self-revelations of a young woman, a window-dresser at Eaton's, who examines her life and loves while shaving her legs and performing other equally mundane parts of her weekly beauty routine; *Chez Paul-Ette* removes the fourth wall from a family grocery store, giving us a glimpse into the lives of a married couple who live with their mother-in-law, and the lives of assorted neighbours and the delivery boy; and *Le Fleuve au coeur* is a feminist play about rape in the strict collective creation tradition of political theatre. Of the three, the last is by far the most engrossing.

*Bachelor* (the title refers both to the lifestyle and the type of accommodation) clearly follows the pattern of Tremblay's *La Duchesse de Langeais*; but its heroine lacks the grandeur and pathos of the Duchesse. Like Tremblay's play, the monologue is made up of two parts, with the heroine keeping her illusions, together

with a stiff upper lip, in the first part, and breaking down to face the truth about herself in part two. Like the Duchesse, Dolorès excels at impersonations; her repertoire even includes the Lord himself. The character comes through convincingly; the play provides a perfect slice-of-life — but nothing further.

*Chez Paul-Ette, bière, vin, liqueur et nouveautés* again follows the two-part pattern. Part one creates a grotesque, if compassionate, caricature of an impossible family situation. Paulo and Réjeanne have been married for seven years; he is much in love with her and theirs could be a happy life, in spite of the hardships of running a grocery store which must be open seven days a week, if it wasn't for the presence of Mme. Robidas, Réjeanne's formidable mother. Although she is in perfect health, Mme. Robidas plays the invalid so well that the young couple have not been able to go out by themselves once in seven years; more than that, the mother's sense of enforced togetherness goes so far as to insist on sleeping in their room. The author underlines the caricature of the mother-in-law by specifying that she must always be played by a man. Around the family gravitate a number of neighbours: Mme. Bérubé, a middle-aged drunk; Vicky Paquette, an old maid who lives in a fantasy world where she has to continually fight off over-ardent admirers; Françoise, a stubbornly loving wife who forgives her husband any callousness or cruelty.

The second part of the play leads to the characters' eventual realization of the truth about themselves; one by one, they sink into dark despair, with the exception of Mme. Bérubé, who lies dead drunk, and blissfully asleep, on the sidewalk. "C'est elle la bienheureuse," concludes the author in a cynical postscript. Like *Bachelor*, the play is convincing and potentially effective on stage; but it lacks both scope and originality.

*Le Fleuve au coeur* is definitely one of the more interesting specimens of militant feminist theatre. The value of the book itself is greatly enhanced by Claire Bonenfant's "Foreword," as well as the inclusion of a description by the three authors of the genesis of the play. This description, together with an excerpt from their "journal de bord," provides interesting insights into the process of collective creation.

*Le Fleuve au coeur* deals with the theme of rape as seen by women — which means in its widest sense. The play examines not only physical violence, but also the untold forms of degradation to which women are subjected by men. Part one remains largely realistic. Two close friends, Francine and Lucie, exchange confidences about their men over a bowl of salad. Lucie is deeply hurt over her boyfriend's callousness and the way he exploits her ruthlessly; Francine suffers from her man's total indifference: "Roger, c'est un gars OFF." Eventually, the two women attack a bottle of wine, daydream, scheme for independence.

Part two introduces the theme proper: Lucie has been raped. Discussing what has happened, the two women recall other rape incidents they had known about, but ignored. These memory scenes are acted out by the same two actresses, between dialogues. They include "La Secrétaire mutilée," the story of a young woman who had her beautiful breasts surgically removed as a result of the trauma she suffered after being raped; "Denis Beaudet" — a "respectable" young man who expects his date to submit to his advances after he has taken her out to several expensive restaurants, and cannot understand why this insistence should constitute rape; "Johanne Mercier," a young woman permanently traumatized since she was raped by her father at the age of ten; and "Tante Rita," a middle-aged wife and mother who consciously

pushes the concept of "conjugal rape" out of her mind. These four episodes are underlined with a "pantomine of fear," which demonstrates the constant state of terror women live in. The memory scenes are definitely the best part of the play. The ending which follows displays all the heavy-handedness usually associated with political theatre, as the two friends draw up an agenda for a women's meeting and, Nora-like, discuss the advantages of leaving their men to achieve self-fulfilment.

Ronfard's *Vie et mort d'un roi boiteux* provides a strong counterbalance to the humble scope and slice-of-life naturalism of much current québécois drama. Unapologetic, the author has specified that the eight-part work must always be performed in its entirety, either on six consecutive evenings, or else in the course of a breathtaking "journée de théâtre," which would last from 9:00 a.m. to midnight, and include meals and "divertissements de tous genres." This approach brings theatre squarely back to its origins as religious celebration, an attempt to recapture the spirit of the City Dionysia in ancient Athens, the Corpus Christi pageantry of medieval towns. The play is a dizzying mixture of contemporary, québécois, classical, Biblical, literary and historical themes — a densely woven tapestry of characters and situations against a background which defies time and space. A "genealogy" provided by the author gives us a clue to the basic historical linkups of the play; le roi boiteux (echoes of Oedipus), named Richard I (echoes of Shakespeare), is the child of François Ier (Renaissance France) and Catherine Ragone (contemporary Quebec). Catherine's parents, Filippo Ragone and Angela Roberge, represent two warring families in a contemporary québécois setting. Angela's sister Judith Roberge is the mother of a child she abandons by a riverside: Moses. Thus the play functions on a multitude of levels simultaneously.

The language reflects the eclectic nature of the work. Like *Faust*, it alternates between verse and prose, includes poems and folk songs, goes from torrential flow to pithy epigram. Latin, Greek, Hebrew, nonsense words and phrases are interspersed among the French and québécois. Surrealistic stage imagery adds to the powerful effect. The birth of Richard, for example, is described as follows:

> Catherine Ragone hurle, un flot de sang se déverse sur sa robe blanche, la porte est enforcée. Arrive un char allégorique portant, en son centre, un amas de viandes rouges, et . . . dessus, le jeune roi Richard en bobette avec une chaussure orthopédique.

The six plays of the cycle are introduced by a "Prologue" in which fifteen characters bring on stage a huge wheel of fortune, with a man strapped to it. These characters include "a blind monk, a Japanese geisha, a medieval lady, a cosmonaut, an Arab, an elegant lady, Golda Meir, Robespierre, a Roman warrior, the Ayatullah Khomeini, some children, some domestic animals . . ." (live animals are a recurrent feature of the play). Surrounding the wheel of fortune, the audience finds the titles of the six plays of the cycle: *La Naissance du roi boiteux*; *L'Enfance du roi boiteux*; *Le Printemps du roi boiteux*; *La Jeunesse du roi boiteux*; *Les Voyages du roi boiteux*; *La Cité du roi boiteux*. With a gesture of his hand gloved in white, the tortured man on the wheel points to the play about to be performed, and the show begins.

Like Faust, *Le Roi boiteux* is an Everyman play; it is also a play about contemporary Quebec, about lust for power, about growing up, about living and dying — but most of all, it is a magnificent spectacle which one would like to see performed in a suitable outdoor setting — the courtyard of the papal palace in Avignon, say, the theatre at Epidaurus, perhaps — the plains of Abraham outside Quebec City most definitely.

RENATE USMIANI

# TWO-UVA-KIND

K. H. WIRSIG, *Gleebs of Wizagon.* Illustrated by Enrico Renz. Pilouale Publications, $13.95.

GARNET HEWITT, *Ytek and the Arctic Orchid.* Illustrated by Heather Woodall. Douglas & McIntyre, $12.95.

> FORTY-NINE Tom cats, none the same size,
> had teardrops in each of their ninety-eight eyes.
> Tied to a plank in an orderly row,
> they twisted and moaned as their tails hung below.

Thus begins K. H. Wirsig's enchanting *Gleebs of Wizagon*, a book that is a significant step forward in the history of Canadian children's fantasy.

Wirsig's moaning Tom cats are screeching the witch-anthem of Snagratch the Green, awakening all Gleebs from their dreams to face a nightmare world in which, garbed in their "itchy, identical suits," they are forced to labour like "little machines gone berserk." Snagratch, the Foremost Advisor of Borumtum, King of all Gleebs, has obsessed this once respected leader with visions of material splendour, arguing successfully that "Respect was alright, but it couldn't be spent / or gain kingly interest at ninety percent."

But there is hope. The King's abandoned daughter, the diminutive Sonya Wee, has vowed to rescue her deluded father. Unfortunately, however, before she can begin her campaign, she is kidnapped by the Collector, a little man who defines his existence by placing everyone and everything in tidy little rows. Though Sonya is ultimately able to escape her curious captor, she does so only after he has swept her off to a land where she finds herself totally at the mercy of the "things in the darkness." Enter Whunuvakind, a thin, asexual minstrel who carries an elfin-shaped cello which he both plays upon and uses as a bow to shoot arrows — a musical soldier of fortune *par excellence.*

Whun, as he likes to be called, quickly assures Sonya that she need not fear, for the legends tell of the great Taliban tree of Soldo the Great, the pomme of which destroys Snagratchian witches. Though the Taliban quest which the two immediately embark upon is quite predictable, the creatures and worlds they encounter on their journey are delightfully unique. They must confront Gnarrs, Loblots, worry-warts, and well-beaten paths, encounters which are described with a humour that truly individualizes Wirsig's approach to traditional fantasy. Note, for example, the description of Sonya, just after she has barely escaped from Snagratch's attempt to burn her alive:

> Sonya was thankful the curse had been shattered,
> it sank in the water, effectively scattered.
> All that remained of that devilish plan
> was a tired young Gleeb with a beautiful tan.

Finally, the two adventurers do arrive at the Edge of Night, where they meet the Great Soldo. But even in this most predictable of scenes, Wirsig provides the unexpected. When Sonya is asked by Soldo to answer the traditional three riddles, she refuses:

> "But no!" Sonya cried, "That's a terrible sham,
> three riddles can't show you the Gleeb that I am.
> Wizagon suffers and I don't have time
> to fiddle with riddles of meter and rhyme."

Nowhere, however, is Wirsig more innovative than in his ending, for the inevitable defeat of Snagratch is actually more a beginning than an ending. The Edge of Night is now the Brink of Morning, but much is left to be accomplished. Snagratch's defeat is merely the first step:

> Their questions were many, their answers were few,
> still, they both felt they were starting anew.

Such a brief plot description can only hint at the breadth of Wirsig's success. His subcreation is delightfully new and alive, described with a meticulous and loving attention to language which has so long been missing from such works. His couplets may become a bit burdensome to casual readers, but when read aloud, as this book truly should be, the world of Sonya and Whunuvakind emerges with a life and magic seldom found in modern fantasies. Wirsig demands and rewards careful attention.

The only criticism one might make of the book is that the pen and ink illustrations by Enrico Renz are a bit too abstract and busy for the rather simple story. They seem a bit out of place, actually, drawing one away from the text rather than reinforcing it.

Whereas the illustrations in Wirsig's book seriously restrict its overall success, Heather Woodall's magnificent full-page watercolours provide an invaluable contribution to Garnet Hewitt's *Ytek and the Arctic Orchid.* The tale itself, an Inuit legend, tells the traditional story of Ytek's initiation into manhood, his quest to discover the reason for the mysterious disappearance of the Tuktu, the caribou. The answer ultimately is found in a magical land beneath the Arctic ice, the land of the Arctic Orchid. Here Ytek finds Tukturak, leader of the Tuktu spirits, who tells him of Akla, the evil Beardemon who threatens the ecological balance of this world. The defeat of Akla provides the inevitable final moment in Ytek's maturation rite as the young boy proves his right to be his tribe's next shaman.

Though Hewitt's story is well told, it is ultimately undistinguished. Woodall's illustrations, however, are not. Her vivid watercolours, orchids in their own right, brilliantly illuminate the quiet beauty of the Inuit world. They are among the most impressive illustrations ever presented in a Canadian children's book.

Ytek's primary lesson in the orchid world is that "the life of Tuktu and the life of the Inuit are like one." So, too, are the creative instincts of Hewitt and Woodall, as they provide a blend of text and illustration very seldom found in any children's book of any culture.

The words of Wirsig and the illustrations of Woodall provide concrete examples of the true vitality of Canadian children's literature. And yet, their books should not really be confined to such a small audience, for they both have the power to delight and enchant readers of all ages, providing that they can appreciate that which is truly magical. Perhaps Whunuvakind says it best when he speaks of the wonderful age before Snagratch:

> No one used curses and no one was hexed
> for no one knew who would be magical next.
> Everyone mattered and everyone cared
> for magical matters were commonly shared.

J. KIERAN KEALY

# STUDYING FOLKLORE

EDITH FOWKE & CAROLE HENDERSON CARPENTER, *A Bibliography of Canadian Folklore in English.* Univ. of Toronto Press, $25.00.

CARMEN ROY, *Littérature orale en Gaspésie.* Leméac, $29.95.

ALTHOUGH MATERIAL OF INTEREST to Canadian folklorists was collected and published as early as the second decade of the seventeenth century, it was not until the second half of the nineteenth century that the first scholarly item appeared, Ernest Gagnon's *Chansons populaires du Canada* (Québec, 1865). And while scientific collecting of native peoples' traditions began at the end of the century under the leadership of anthropologist Franz Boas (followed up admirably by the father of Canadian folklore studies, the late Marius Barbeau), it was not until

1911, when Barbeau began researching French-Canadian traditions, that the folklore of European settlers began to receive serious and on-going attention, although W. Roy Mackenzie in Nova Scotia and Cyrus Macmillan in Prince Edward Island had collected folksongs at the same period, but without much immediate influence on other scholars.

Under Barbeau's influence, folklore studies in Québec began to flourish, leading to the creation in 1944 of the *Archives de Folklore* at Laval University. There, several generations of fine folklorists were taught and trained by Luc Lacourcière. Although current French-Canadian folklore scholarship seems to be more and more historically oriented, opting for straightforward ethnographic descriptions rather than theoretically based interpretations of data, Quebec folklore remains the best documented of all French-speaking countries or regions in the world. Folklore scholars are eagerly awaiting Lacourcière's forthcoming *Bibliographie raisonnée du folklore français en Amérique du Nord*, which will be undoubtedly one of the major scholarly productions of this century in folklore studies.

As the compilers of *A Bibliography of Canadian Folklore in English* point out in their very useful *Introduction*, folklore studies of groups other than native peoples or francophones tended to be sporadic and isolated until quite recently. Until the creation at Memorial University of Newfoundland in 1968 of a Folklore Department offering eventually degrees in the subject at the B.A., M.A. and Ph.D. levels, the discipline had no formal academic recognition in Canada outside of Laval University. Although folklore is now studied in a growing number of post-secondary institutions in Canada, "the discipline has yet to achieve the broad academic acceptance it enjoys in the United States and other countries."

This bibliography, listing almost 4,000 entries, will contribute significantly to the growth of folklore studies in Canada. The careful reader will see the breadth and depth of research already achieved, especially in the last twenty years, and will recognize that while folklore studies owe much to related disciplines such as anthropology, linguistics, history and language studies, with which there is always some overlapping, the discipline stands as a viable and healthy academic subject.

Fowke and Carpenter underline this conclusion by avoiding the inclusion of the numerous popular works which purport to be folklore but which are often ill digested, garbled and badly documented commercial undertakings; works which, however, lead the general public into a sad and distorted perception of the subject. Indeed, similar publications in France over the years have led folklorists there to eschew the use of the word, since it has become synonymous with the spurious, the quaint, the antiquated, the domain of witless and hoary old academic codgers and the occasional revolutionary revivalist.

The *Bibliography* is divided into 14 chapters, essentially generic. Generic chapters include those on Folktales, Folk Music and Dance, Folk Speech and Naming, Minor Genres (proverbs, riddles, games, children's lore), Superstitions and Popular Beliefs, Folklife and Customs, Folk Art and Material Culture (chapters 4-10). Chapters- 1-3 include Reference Materials, Periodicals and General (historical, descriptive, overviews; works containing more than one genre); chapters 11-14 include Biographies and Appreciations, Records, Films, Theses and Dissertations, this last a particularly useful inclusion, for while they are few in number (128 entries), the more recent theses and dissertations suggest the theoretical orientations of tomorrow's folklore scholars.

Each generic chapter, excluding the too short sections on Folk Speech and Naming and Minor Genres, are subdivided into five sections: General, Anglophone and Celtic, Francophone, Indian and Inuit, Other Cultural Groups. While some Celts might balk at being lumped together with Anglophone (i.e., English) and while Other Cultural Groups might similarly resent being cast into an anonymous pot, these sub-divisions fairly reflect the extent of collecting and publication, and the overlapping which has occurred in Canadian research. At least the compilers have avoided the term "Anglo-Celtic" which is only one step removed from "Anglo-Banglo." However, since they recognize the "decided emphasis on local and regional studies in Canadian folklore," Fowke and Carpenter might have considered a regional or even provincial section which, without repeating the bibliographic data of earlier entries, could give the interested reader a guide to the richness (or paucity) of particular areas. But that is a relatively minor point. Given the rapidly growing number of scholarly works in folklore published in Canada since their 1979 cut-off date, it seems likely a revised and enlarged edition of the *Bibliography* will be required within not too many years.

An equally minor point concerns the compilers' attempt to evaluate entries. Admitting that "To annotate a bibliography of this size would have required far more time than we were prepared to give it," they have devised a rather complicated code of letters both large and small which attempt to give the reader "some basic information about the various items. The main division is between authentic and popular folklore. By authentic we mean material stemming directly from the folk and presented as nearly as possible as collected. By popular we mean re-written or more generalized material. Authentic folklore is indicated by capitals A, B, or C, and popular by P, plus in some cases small a, b, or c where entries include some valuable folklore. Similarly, capital letters are added to F to indicate the value of the Canadian material in foreign items, and small letters are added to G to indicate the value of the folklore in general items."

My quibble is not with the minor chore of having to memorize the values of the letters, rather it is with the emphasis placed on the *lore*, authentic or otherwise. In other words, the *Bibliography* gives no indication of any theoretical import an article or book might have. Thus entry 552 [Jolicoeur, Catherine. "Le Vaisseau fantôme: Légende étiologique." *Archives de Folklore*, 11 (1970)] is given a rating B, presumably because the (English language) data includes "Good items of somewhat less importance." I would rate the English data no higher than C, but that would be to miss the point completely. First, the title should be underlined — it is a solid book of 342 pages, only 23 pages of which include English material — and secondly, the book is a major study — indeed, the major study on legend to have appeared in Canada. The notation is, to say the least, misleading. The compilers do admit, however, that their "quality judgements implicit in the A, B, C notations are necessarily subjective and tentative." Nonetheless, the system seems to me to be the least trustworthy element in the work.

A final point of criticism, the general utility of which users will have to assess, concerns the accuracy of individual entries. I give two examples, both of which I note because they mention my name. The compilers state quite clearly that "by 'Canadian folklore' we mean folklore that is found in Canada; we do not list titles dealing with non-Canadian folklore even if written by Canadians or published in Canada." Yet their entry 1254, an article I published in an English folklore journal dealing with a British army song sung by

a British soldier, has nothing to do with Canada save that I collected the song in Newfoundland while its singer was on holiday there.

The second point concerns entry 3341, an appreciation of the late Madeleine Doyon-Ferland. I am given as the author of the entry, whereas I was only the translator of the original (which appeared in the same issue of the *Bulletin of the Folklore Studies Association of Canada*) by Quebec folklorist Jean-Claude Dupont. These may be fortuitous observations on my part, but it is essential that compilers of bibliographies, especially those who use student assistants, make sure that all articles and books have indeed been read, and that (especially in the case of bilingual journals) the proper author is acknowledged.

Despite these minor criticisms, Fowke and Carpenter's *Bibliography* is the most valuable scholarly tool yet to have appeared dealing with folklore in English in Canada. It will provide an extremely useful source of documentation for years to come, and marks a further step in the consolidation of folklore studies in Canada.

Carmen Roy is the doyenne of Canadian folklorists. Together with Luc Lacourcière of Laval and Herbert Halpert of Memorial, she is one of only three honorary presidents of the Folklore Studies Association of Canada, and was recently honoured by the Association at its annual meeting in Ottawa. Following in the footsteps of Marius Barbeau, this native of *Gaspésie* has devoted her life to the study of French-Canadian folklore and to the organization and development of folklore at the National Museum of Man in Ottawa, since 1948. It was in that year that Marius Barbeau retired from the National Museum of Canada, and in that year that Carmen Roy began her field research for the Museum on the Gaspé peninsula. In 1957 she assumed responsibility for a section of the Ethnology Division devoted entirely to folklore. Her systematic organization of collections, including work done by Helen Creighton, Kenneth Peacock, Luc Lacourcière and others, made accessible a rich documentation, to which she added research sponsored by the Museum and her initiative in the folklore of recent immigrant groups. By 1966 her work was so well established that it led to the creation of a separate Folklore Division (along with Ethnology, History, Archaeology, the Canadian War Museum, and the Communications Division). In June 1970, following a growing interest in multicultural studies, the Folklore Division was renamed the Canadian Centre for Folk Culture Studies, with Dr. Roy as its chief. After seven years in this role, she was promoted to the rank of Senior Scientist at the Museum, allowing her to devote more time to her own research interests.

The administrative duties accepted by Carmen Roy obliged her to restrict her collecting, and her last published study, the much underestimated *Saint-Pierre et Miquelon: une mission folklorique aux îles* (Ottawa, 1962) reflects the growing demands made on her time by other duties. For Carmen Roy is in the great tradition of French-Canadian folklore collectors, and nowhere is her zeal and dynamism more apparent than in this new edition of her *Littérature orale en Gaspésie*. First published by the National Museum of Canada in 1955 in 3,200 copies, reprinted in 1962 in another 2,000 copies, it is remarkable that a book so manifestly scholarly should sell so well. The new, enlarged edition comes at the demand of numerous young scholars and members of the general public.

Apart from some refinements of a linguistic nature, some added clarifications, the new edition differs from the original by the addition of an analytic index of

folktale motifs according to the system devised by Stith Thompson in his *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature* (6 vols., Bloomington, 1955-58), and a list of Roy's singer-informants. The motif index is a particularly useful scholarly addition, while the informant list pays homage to many singers who have since died.

*Littérature orale en Gaspésie* includes chapters on the socio-historical milieu, essential to understanding the lore of the *Gaspésiens*, on place names, folk medicine, traditional beliefs and their practice, the supernatural world, children's lore, with special emphasis on rhymes, formulaic sayings, proverbs and riddles, folktales and folksongs. A lengthy final section provides the airs to tunes and various analytic and classificatory tools.

The book is rich not only in hard data, concrete *lore*. Although it is the lore which, no doubt, made it so popular, and which remains both readable, fascinating and instructive, Carmen Roy was not satisfied merely to present the raw material only. She is aware of problems of interpretation and theoretical questions which underline her familiarity with international scholarship — a feature sometimes lacking in French-Canadian folklore scholarship, at least in works with popular appeal.

It is safe to say that there is no other regional survey in Canadian folklore, in either English or French, which presents such a broad and substantial portrait of oral traditions. Thirty years after its original edition, *Littérature orale en Gaspésie* remains a work of solid scholarship and will remain an invaluable research tool in comparative folklore studies. More studies like it are needed.

GERALD THOMAS

# INTOXICATION

EDNA ALFORD, *A Sleep Full of Dreams*. Oolichan, $8.95.

DOUGLAS H. GLOVER, *The Mad River and Other Stories*. Black Moss, $4.95.

TERENCE BYRNES, ed., *Matinees Daily*. Quadrant, n.p.

PAUL BELSERENE, ed., *Canadian Short Fiction Anthology*, vol. II. Intermedia, $12.95; pa. $6.95.

EDNA ALFORD'S *A Sleep Full of Dreams* deserves its positive reviews. It is the best of the four books reviewed here; the characters, situations, and language resonate in the mind for a long time. A collection of ten stories, it has as its focus a young geriatric worker, Arla Pederson, and each story is about one of the old women in her care. Five of the stories were published in various journals, and each of the ten could stand alone. Therefore, the unity that we expect of a novel is not found here, and because Arla does not appear in all the stories, the book does not have the unity found in short story collections by Laurence, Roy and Munro, though the quality of Alford's writing is good enough to compare with that of these older writers.

In our youth-oriented society, Alford has taken on the difficult task of showing us that there is beauty and dignity in growing old. Avoiding sentimentality, she gives us all the unsavory details about old age, and yet makes us care about the old women who are Arla's patients. Arla is a sensuous yet sensitive young woman who values her youth and good health, and as she learns to care about her patients, we learn to care about her and them. If there is any weakness in the stories, it is that we don't get to know Arla better than we do. But perhaps only in a novel could such character development be possible.

The female patients (nowhere in the collection is there any explanation why there are no old men in this nursing

home) are in various stages of decay, and it is Arla's special duty to use a contraption called a hoyer to bathe nonambulatory patients. The ugliness and deformity of old Miss Bole in the first story, "The Hoyer," has made it impossible for anyone to love her. The way she repeats stories full of gore and horror is ritualistic; just as her ugliness and deformity are exposed in readiness for her weekly bath, she launches into the details of endless mutilations and unusual deaths that she has stored in her mind. It is her oblique way of distancing herself and her nurse from the ugliness at hand. Just as Arla knows that she will never get used to these macabre stories and puts a "distance in her voice," so Miss Bole has never got used to her deformity and must tell the stories to protect her inner self.

What Arla learns from Miss Bole is that "everybody is full of secrets" and no one ever knows another human being completely. Miss Bole's secret is that she is an artist able to create beauty out of ugliness and pain. From Mrs. Langland (in "Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday"), an old woman who refuses to communicate in any way, Arla gets an epiphany of perfect horror: the embarrassing betrayal by one's body, a possibility which is constantly there for the old as it is for the very young. From Mrs. Dawson (in "Companionship") she learns that one day in the future she, too, will embrace death as her last "dancing partner."

Once Arla has learned everything from these old women that they have to offer, she is free to leave and live the next stage of her life. These old women are pioneers, "the first ones," and they don't die easily because they are "used to hanging on." Arla, too, hangs on. But once Mrs. Dawson, the one example of a happy old age, dies as the new year begins, Arla decides to quit her job, move in with her fiancé, and sell her engagement ring to buy a decent bed. She knows, even if her materialistic parents don't, that a sparkle in the eye is more valuable than the sparkle in a diamond.

Douglas H. Glover's *The Mad River and Other Stories* will appeal to the kind of reader who admires Hemingway's heroes, the kind of men who make "danger the sole source of significance" and the women who despise the slightest weakness in a man. Hunter and his companions in "The Mad River" are obsessed with risk; the rush of adrenalin that white water kayaking gives them is addictive. Fear must be exorcized by repeated tests against nature because, as a younger version of Hunter learns in "Horse," to admit fear is to be like a woman and, thus, "dirty." A man must be a hero or he is nothing. Hunter has the awareness at least to admit to himself that what drives him is "an antique motivation" and that this kind of heroism is "false because it involves no necessity beyond the subjective and eccentric volition of its bearer." This realization, however, does not change his behaviour or his values. Clearly, one who does not share his values could easily see that Arla Pederson's life or Miss Bole's life or the life of any of Arla's patients is more heroic than that of Glover's Hunter.

"Hail" is the most straightforward of the seven stories and might remind the reader of Sinclair Ross's stories except that here the knowledge that the crop is tobacco rather than wheat can stretch the reader's sympathy to the breaking point. Also, the wife's decision that the family go on a month-long camping trip after the hailstorm destroys the crop undercuts the farmer's misfortune. The first person narrative voice is most successful in "Between the Kisses and the Wine," which is narrated by a woman who makes her life into a little drama and whose "amorality is the parody of innocence." In terms of metaphor "Pender's Visions" is the most noteworthy of Glover's stories. Here we have the artist (writer) as outlaw using

the tools of language as weapons against a complacent and authoritarian society. The metaphor of artist as outlaw can be changed a little to read "artist as nigger" except that in a Canadian story "half-breed" is the more appropriate word. Glover's Pender is a half-breed with a difference; he is "half Ojibway with a weird condition that left his skin mottled, an unhomogenized breed." I look forward to more visions of a resurrected Pender.

Visions and fantasy are not what a reader should look for in *Matinees Daily*, edited by Terence Byrnes. Neither is experimentation in narrative technique a characteristic of these nine stories; all are fairly conventional, and no unity of theme or style is evident in this collection.

The contributions of Edeet Ross, "Shortly after the Incident on the Haifa-Tel Aviv Road," and Angela Monserrate, "The New Lords," are more anecdote than story, and I was puzzled by the fact that in the one by Ross the little girl's nightmares last only two weeks. The motivation of the wife in Sandy Wing's "Casualties" for waiting so long before escaping from her unsatisfactory sixteen-year-old marriage is not clear. On the other hand, in Miriam Packer's "The Helper" concrete details provided about Rustner's office, his clothes, his wife and her clothes, his preference in food, and his manner when dealing with clients give the reader an insight into the mind and motivation of a social worker who regards his life as a bitter disappointment. Instead of being a real helper like Arla Pederson, Rustner takes out his disappointments on an old man who reminds him of his pathetic father — and perhaps puts in his mind the possibility of ending his own days at the bottom of the heap and at the mercy of other "helpers." Packer's story shows that the line between pity and hatred is almost non-existent. Her achievement is to make us interested in a fairly unsympathetic person. If we judge Rustner by the definition of heroism (being a hero "means being stuck with doing what's right") in Robert Harlow's "Heroes," he does not qualify. Harlow's David probably does, but that makes him a less interesting character.

Other stories are less successful, and none of the stories in the Byrnes collection are as memorable as a few in the *Canadian Short Fiction Anthology* vol. II, edited by Paul Belserene. But nor are any of them as slight as many in Belserene's book. Some of the stories, such as Steve Wexler's "Bool Sheet on the Scissor Maniac of Mexico City," are merely anecdotes. A number of stories have nothing in them that lives up to an arresting opening sentence: for example, "They planted Amanda with the usual pomp and ceremony" (in Frances Duncan's "Flowers for the Dead"). Since most of the stories are very short, there is no room for character development or psychological insight. Whatever impact the stories have usually results from the unusual situation chosen: W. D. Valgardson's "Identities" tells in a couple of pages how the police shoot a completely innocent man; the preparations made by the protagonist in Chris Redmond's "Preparations" are fascinating even though we don't know the motive or final outcome of all his activity; in "Demeter's Daughter," the story of a mother-daughter relationship gone rancid, Brenda Riches turns the Persephone myth inside out.

Although a number of the stories in this collection use a first-person narrative technique, it is used to best advantage in the stories by Lois Simmie and Leon Rooke. The strength of "Emily" is that the action is seen through the eyes of Beth, a child who does not understand the events she observes. At sixteen, Susan in Rooke's "Sixteen Year Old Susan March Confesses to the Innocent Murder of all the Devious Strangers who would Drag her Down" is not much older in

years than Beth, but in terms of sexual fantasy and vocabulary she is an old pro. She likes to imagine herself and her mother as seductresses who entice numberless naked strangers to drown in their lake. She gushingly speaks to her "Daddy," who might be one in a long line of men, "father/husband/lover," whom she fancies and who cannot resist her charms and her four-syllable words. The only competitor she has in this last department is the wonderfully eccentric Adele Mauron who, in Ara Baliozian's "Organ Recital," is "obsessed with words" and would rather talk than make love.

In the introduction to his anthology, Paul Belserene says, "I've invited people who I think will engage one another and make for a lively time." He sees the stories as guests at a party and invites us to join in and intoxicate ourselves. We can accept the invitation that he, Byrnes, Glover, and Alford extend to us; and, if we do, we can find among these five dozen a few stories that do intoxicate.

M. G. OSACHOFF

# PICTURING OUR PAST

RICHARD HARRINGTON, *The Inuit: Life As It Was*. Hurtig, $14.95.

ROGER HALL & GORDON DODDS, *Canada: A History in Photographs*. Hurtig, $24.95.

*The Icelanders*, ed. David Arnason and Michael Olito, with a commentary by David Arnason. Turnstone, $14.95.

*The Islands of Canada*, text by Marian Engel, photographs by J. A. Kraulis. Hurtig, $29.50.

THE FOREWORD TO *Canada: A History in Photographs* provides the justification for each of these attractively produced collections of photographs which, despite appearances, are not designed simply for the coffee table. *Canada*'s authors, an historian and an archivist, explain that "The past is infinitely more complex and multidimensional than we would expect from reading Canada's traditional written history," and that some of this complexity can be approached through archival photographs. They insist that their book is "*not* an illustrated history, nor is it a mock-antique bow to the nostalgia trade in photographs. . . . It is simply a photographic record of Canada—from Confederation (1867) to Constitution (1981)." In compiling this record, Hall and Dodds have rejected the "great figures" and "great moments" approaches, to show instead images of ordinary people at work and at play. The result is fascinating. I found the pictures of women at work particularly interesting, but the coverage of Western history and of the participation of minority groups in building our country is also excellent. The publishers and authors are to be commended for making this wide range of previously inaccessible photographic documentation available, accompanied by a lively and knowledgeable text.

I cannot praise this book too highly. When I first picked it up, I wondered what audience it might be expected to reach. Because none of the photographs are in colour and there is a fair amount of text, it is not immediately engrossing; yet once begun, it is impossible to put down. Although I would recommend it to anyone interested in Canadian social history, and particularly to anyone tired of the standard Ontario-centred "searching for roots," I think it would be especially useful to an adolescent beginning to think about our past.

The more narrowly focussed *The Inuit* and *The Icelanders* supplement the wide-ranging revisionist perspective and archival research of Hall and Dodds. Harrison's book offers a selection of some 150 photographs of the thousands he took on six lengthy trips into the Far North between 1947 and 1953. He describes the book as "a tribute to the indomitable

spirit of the Inuit and to the harmony of their vanishing way of life." But it is also an adventure story, describing one man's exploration of another culture and the harsh environment that formed it. Living and travelling with the Inuit, Harrison developed a sympathy for their way of life that shows in his photographs. Whether depicting good health and joy in times of plenty or the almost incredible deprivation of famine, these images reflect the dignity and vitality of an alien way of life, moving beyond documentary into art.

*The Icelanders* records a different kind of journey, "a journey into memory and myth, a collage of photos, remembrances, poems, statements and fragments." It warns us: "This is not a history.... Think of this book as a poem about ancestors." Despite the disclaimer, this book also contributes to the revisionist enterprise of reimagining our history through relocating archival images of our past that have previously been overlooked. The images here include not only photographs but also interviews, poetry, documents and commentary relating to the Icelanders who settled in Manitoba in 1875 on the shores of Lake Winnipeg. Such diversity of forms makes the book idiosyncratic and discontinuous; it is self-consciously a work of art, sharing many of the concerns of contemporary Canadian literature, not only with collage structures, but also with catalogues, with naming, with the colloquial voice, with poetry as a way of life, and most of all with "the way stories get rooted in a new land." Nonetheless, it shares the revisionist historian's emphasis on the social and working lives of ordinary people, an emphasis that remains its greatest strength.

In many ways, *The Islands of Canada* is the odd book out in this grouping. It alone offers glossy colour photographs and gushy prose, with an emphasis on geography. Yet even this is somewhat better than your standard coffee table decoration, if you can get beyond full page photos of cute little rabbits and statements like: "Islands in their nothingness are everything to us, the heart of our history and the home of our imagination." The pretentiousness and conventionality of this book irritated me, particularly after the real sense of discovery I felt in reading the other three. Yet even here, there is an interest in recovering lost histories and out-of-the-way places and peoples for the mainstream, and in making the inaccessible available to a wider range of Canadians.

DIANA BRYDON

# WEAVING

DOROTHY K. BURNHAM, *The Comfortable Arts: Spinning and Weaving in Canada.* National Museums of Canada, $19.95.

CANADIANS, OF COURSE, are still trying to find a common factor that can bind them together and now they have at least one in this simple, handsome book. Dorothy Burnham has taken and presented the homely arts — as she points out, they are usually called crafts — of the people who have created Canada: Indians, Doukhobors, Ursuline nuns, Highlanders, Germans, American Loyalists, etc. She has given an off-beat history lesson in the culture of Canada.

She tells of how Indians spun their thread by rolling fibres on their thighs; of how habitants and voyageurs braided in a way peculiar to Quebec, not known anywhere else in the world; of how some mid-nineteenth-century census reports included the number of bolts of handwoven cloth with the number of chickens and pigs on a man's land; and of how Nancy Carmichael paid her weaver John Campbell an extra fifty cents to weave her name into her coverlet in Middlesex County, Ontario.

Burnham is described at the back of her book as "one of Canada's greatest authorities on textiles" and this ignorant reviewer has no reason to doubt the claim. She may not be skilled as a writer, and she admits that she isn't, but she is a writer who can speak of a tapis à languette and a rigid heddle or a niddy-noddy with complete assurance. She can also slip into this palaver some quite charming incidentals like the one accompanying the photograph (all are black and white) of the Tabby with boutonné coverlet woven in Kamouraska County, P.Q.:

> Its history is that about 1863, at Ste. Anne-de-la-Proctaière, Alida Thiboutat grew and processed the flax, spun the linen thread, wove the coverlet, and won first prize with it at the Quebec Provincial Exhibition.

Normally that would not drive you out of your seat in a burst of excitement, but it is a diversion from the rigid heddles and the niddy-noddies. And, mind you, she does drop the diversion right there and get on with the "boutonné patterning on the ground weft," but that is to be expected and we are grateful for the refreshing incidental.

Not long ago the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York gave a stunning show titled *5,000 Years of Korean Art*. What stunned was not just the beauty and sophistication, gentle humour and grace of the exhibit, but the memory that only too recently we sent our bombers and soldiers over there to ravage a civilization far more sophisticated than our own. Oddly, this came into the reviewer's mind when faced with the outstanding, few examples of Doukhobor art, particularly a bed sheet of hand-woven linen trimmed with lace as fine as gossamer. It is difficult to see the creator of this bedsheet or her neighbours turning up on front pages of newspapers looking for all the world to see like nothing more than arsonists and eccentric strippers.

Essentially, this is the surprise in *The Comfortable Arts*. It does what history books or, in fact, intelligent propaganda should do: draws a light across the land. This was not its intention, which was to bring a short visual history of a wealthy variety of arts into one comprehensible book. It succeeds well.

MARY MCALPINE

# WAR & AFTER

MAGGIE HELWIG, *Walking Through Fire*. Turnstone, n.p.

SEYMOUR MAYNE, *The Impossible Promised Land: Poems New and Selected*. Mosaic Press/Valley Editions, $14.95; pa. $7.95.

ANDY WAINWRIGHT, *After the War: Poems and Stories*. Mosaic Press/Valley Editions, $12.95; pa. $6.95.

R. H. ROBBINS HAS WRITTEN, "Germany was the classic land for witchcraft": beside the tortures of the witch-hunting Inquisition in Europe during the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries, the methods of the Nazi Holocaust seem almost merciful. In recreating a witch-hunt, which she places in Trier in 1485, the year after the papal bull of Innocent VIII that licensed the inquisitors, Maggie Helwig convincingly keeps the perspective of her period. *Walking Through Fire* is a narrative poem for voices — the voices of victims, accusers, judge and executioner caught up in the superstitious faith, fears and delusions that ruled them all. Interspersed bleak prose passages record the "process" in its black absurdity, so heightening the pathos of the individual voices affirming, denying, agonizing. This is history reenacted, free of the contemporary colouring that might have tempted, and which the blurb misleadingly suggests, with its emphasis on the victimization of women. The witches' worship of moon-goddess or

earth-mother accords with pagan belief, no more. Maggie Helwig's restraint of style and attitude achieves the more strongly a moving evocation of an episode which, as Auden thought of Auschwitz, might seem an evil beyond poetry. This is an assured and promising debut by a twenty-one-year-old student.

Seymour Mayne is another poet who dares still (as Auden himself did) challenge with words "the perennial outrage." His "New and Selected Poems "are mostly selected, from volumes published in the 1970's, but this substantial volume gives readers only passingly familiar with his work a chance to take stock of his achievement. Mayne's free verse is tight, reined in. Though he tends to eschew conventional punctuation, his line and stanzaic structure are usually logical and clear. Occasionally, where speaking anecdote gets the better of expression, as in "David" and "Mick," or where, as in "He who hides," the short lines seem unrelated to sense and rhythm, the free form becomes inert, shuffled prose or a stutter, but there are few such failures. His spare style is strongest in the sequences "City of the Hidden" and "Strength in the Stone," celebrations of love and Jerusalem. His imagination quickens to sun, rock, "springs of light," the prophet's passion and purpose that can still animate "the petrified / mouth of history" — but with a Jewish and modern fatalism, renewed by the Holocaust whose victims he constantly remembers. There is a stoical sense of exacting destiny in the search for "the impossible promised land / where all the refugee words / are gathered and make shelter" ("Abraham Sutkever") — a poet's unending pilgrimage, in a land that is both Israel and all lands that can "not be possessed as yet / by peace."

To adapt words from his remembrance of Henry Wentworth Monk, "the Laurentian wilderness / [is] not [his] promised land": Canada, where it is most felt in over a hundred poems, by a "fearful city imagination," is an uneasy setting for an ingrown Montreal Jewish community. We enter this from many angles in the numerous poems remembering, portraying, honouring family members, valued friends, "characters" and fellow-artists. These, almost a third of the whole, knit present to past, link the dying generations the poet's gift is bound to preserve — beyond the "burning synagogue." Mayne is a strong elegist, most notably in the indignant cry against death of "For J-C. Robichaud, Student (1952-76)" and in "Zeydeh," with its affirmative close:

> the light rose
> with the loud wail of the Laurentian
> morning and its clamouring insects.

The Jewishness is never, as in the Layton he admires, strident or strutting: there are a few Laytonesque attempts at wry humour, but these are strained and untypical; rather, Mayne has at his best a restrained "etiquette" (to borrow a word from his "Melech Ravitch"), a spare decorum upon which he can, as his own poet, stand beside Layton and Klein.

*After the War* contains thirty-two short poems, two short stories, and opens with a self-explanatory Preface which leaves little about the stories to the reader's imagination. (The cover also quotes arch praises by Purdy and Layton, embarrassing puffery.) The poems are at their best in what Wainwright calls "my customary compaction and paring down of things," where in the conflict with fear, doubt, the muddle of "reality," the answer is "arrange it all / there is control / not chaos here." Notable are the elegaic "Genesis," the title poem's sharp probing of mental confusions, the tender strength of a father/son poem, "The Other Country," and a handful of incisive political poems. The closing piece, "The Other," is about the elusive self, never quite here, or anywhere in time — a frequently suggested theme, so much so that this poet assumes

no strong identity, and this may be his métier. However, the reader's engagement is often needlessly confounded by a wilful avoidance of helpful punctuation — a common contemporary practice, of course, but less controlled in Wainwright than in Mayne, often obstructing communication of quite straightforward matter. The prefatory comments on the stories almost disarm criticism. "Desire" works modestly as a memory of "place/time" and a state of suspended erotic feeling conveyed in avid sensuous recollection, in which narrator and subject merge as in an unfulfilled dream. "Islomanes" has more pretensions to orthodox story-telling, though with a Fowles-like technical twist: Richard, the protagonist, is again a seeker, exploring in an island retreat his need of an absent friend, the poet Michael. He comes to recognize that Michael uses him and decides that he will begin to write his own "legend." The style is, as the Preface promises, carefully attuned to the mind's movement, but the poet is a contrivance of clichés whose absence is a relief. Wainwright's preoccupation with the teasing relation between "reality" and "fiction" is often a private pursuit, excluding the reader.

MICHAEL THORPE

# IN REMEMBRANCE

SUZIE MURRAY, *La Mère morte*. Nouvelle optique, n.p.

ANTONINE MAILLET, *Cent Ans dans les bois*. Leméac, n.p.

IT IS PERHAPS UNFAIR TO review Suzie Murray's *La Mère morte* and Antonine Maillet's *Cent Ans dans les bois* together: one is a first novel, the other the product of an established writer with eight novels, ten plays, several short stories and the Prix Goncourt to her credit. My compunctions are the greater as I have little positive to say about *La Mère morte*. The book appears to be a pastiche of Anne Hébert's *Le Torrent*, Marie-Claire Blais's *La Belle Bête* and *Les Nuits d'Underground*, and Jovette Marchessault's *La Mère des herbes*, without any of the originality and forcefulness of these novels. Murray's book deals with the spiritual rebirth of a young woman, interweaving "en pièces détachées" moments from her tormented childhood and scenes from her present life which she shares with a woman about to give birth. It is not quite clear just what it was that poisoned the protagonist's youth, but it seems that she was dominated and sexually abused by an overpowering woman (not unlike Claudine in *Le Torrent*) who hated all men and all the physical vestiges of female weakness, who forced the narrator to detest her own body. Her memories of the crimes committed "dans la chambre jaune" against her awakening sexuality eat away at her like a cancer; she speaks of her companion's child as if it were a malignant growth, a succubus much like her own remembrances. As the book proceeds, hope for renewal announces itself in the shape of a mysterious man who offers food, wine, and solace to the troubled women. The child is born — at Christmas-time, needless to say — into an atmosphere of renewal and peace regained. *La Mère morte* is written in a heavily symbolic, hyperbolic style bordering at times on the ludicrous. The landscapes in the novel are, for instance, invariably brooding, wild, and forbidding; the beach, as the startled reader learns, feels "à la fois dur et tiède comme un sexe d'homme tendu." There is a juvenile wallowing in images of sickness and decomposition, "C'est un monde de femmes pourries, nourries d'un sang semblable à une mare d'eau pleine de déchets, de cadavres en décomposition. Je sème la corruption partout où je vais." Considering the intelligence and technical bril-

liance of much of Québec's recent women's fiction, *La Mère morte* is a self-indulgent exercise that should have been left unpublished.

In Antonine Maillet's *Cent Ans dans les bois*, we are dealing with a different kind of fiction altogether. Her subject, instead of personal confession, is the collective memory of an entire people; her style, instead of using psychologizing symbolism, draws on a rich oral tradition; her point of view, avoiding the solipsism of a single outlook, combines layers of narrative voices and imaginary dialogues in an attempt at evoking the complexity of Acadian history. *Cent Ans dans les bois* is a sequel to *Pélagie-la-Charrette* (1979), recently translated into English by Philip Stratford as *Pélagie: The Return to a Homeland*. While Pélagie described the 1780 odyssey of a group of Acadians making their way back from the South of the United States to Acadia, after "le Grand Dérangement" (i.e., the Expulsion of 1755), *Cent Ans dans les bois* speaks of the emergence, about 1880, of the Acadians who had been hiding in the woods of New Brunswick for over a hundred years. This emergence climaxes in the first Acadian convention, in 1881, at Memramcook where a college had been founded earlier in the century, helping to revive and preserve the Acadian cultural heritage. In illustrating the Acadian renaissance during the nineteenth century, *Cent Ans dans les bois* joins two plots, held together by the overriding concern of keeping history alive in a people's stories. One narrative strand of the novel deals with the search for a treasure. As soon as the inhabitants of Fond-de-la-Baie have emerged from their hiding-places in the woods, they begin to look for a mysterious chest but find only a barrel of liquor on the beach. So far their search has been guided by bits of information, orally handed down from their ancestors. Their luck improves when a Frenchman arrives, a "survenant" (and a positive version of the arrogant "Français de la France" in such novels as Carrier's *Le Deux-Millième Etage*) from the sea, who teaches the Acadians to write, thus giving them the means to add, to the wealth of their imagination, the power of precisely recorded knowledge and communication. The Frenchman helps his Acadian students to find their treasure although it turns out to be something of a joke à la Don Quixote: it appears, from a document found, that the city of Philadelphia belongs to the Acadians; as a result, *they* ought to be the masters of the English.

The theme of communication through the written word also dominates the subplot of the novel, a love story, much of which centres upon a letter written by Pélagie-la-Gribouille to her daughter's suitor. Pélagie-la-Gribouille, a descendant of Pélagie-la-Charrette, tries to prevent marriage between her daughter Babée and Pierre Bernard because he is a sailor; as such he represents an element of incertitude and unreliability that Pélagie — whose name, ironically, suggests the sea — rejects instinctively: the trauma of the "Great Disruption" has taught Acadians the value of belonging to a place, of sinking roots into the ground. In previous novels, Maillet had conceived of the sea as a life-giving element; in *Cent Ans dans les bois*, her opposition of sea and earth is an important variation on the theme of exile versus attachment to the soil that pervades so much of French-Canadian writing (in her 1976 play *Evangéline Deusse*, Maillet explored the Acadians' exile in comparison to that of other Canadians, e.g., the Jews). The influence of women in establishing a tradition by providing a sense of continuance has been significant concern all through Maillet's oeuvre, the most popular one perhaps being La Sagouine, the charwoman. Acadian history, as Maillet has explained in

an interview with *Books in Canada*, is that of a matriarchy, "Acadie is female, its virtues are all on the side of patience, a sense of time, some kind of interiority, more *viscérale* than *cérébrale*."

When Pierre renounces the sea in order to be able to marry Babée, he finds the treasure, as it were, that the people of Fond-de-la-Baie had been looking for in vain: a settled home. La Gribouille's efforts to keep her family together are reflected, on a larger scale, in the Acadian convention in Memramcook where Pélagie pleads for "la culture de la terre, salut de son peuple." In describing the gathering, Antonine Maillet practises the precision of the recorded word that her characters learn to appreciate as the novel proceeds: the descriptions are footnoted with references to authentic sources. Yet Maillet does not relinquish the humour created by the fictive characters' supposed comments on the sermons preached and speeches made at the convention. In fact, their reactions — questions, puzzlement, laughter — serve as a corrective to recorded history. A certain P. Poirier, for instance, bewailing the endless miseries of Acadia, has difficulty making himself understood over the arrival of the delegation from "la baie Sainte-Marie": under their jackets, they hide "veuzes et accordéons qui, sous l'agitation de la foule qui se pressait pour leur crier la bienvenue, laissèrent échapper quelques notes." The dynamic development of dialogue, its need for expansion, correction, clarification, its use of persuasive strategies, determine much of Antonine Maillet's narrative style. Although her characters are illiterate peasants as the novel opens, the tales of Jérôme le Menteur are shaped by an instinctive knowledge of rhetoric and an anticipation of his audience's response whom he expects to be as active in the weaving of his stories as he is himself, "Ici le conteur de la lignée des Bélonie s'arrêta pour respirer et laisser le temps à ses compères radoteux de protester contre cette monstruosité. . . ." Controlling the many voices of *Cent Ans dans les bois*, although unobtrusively so, is that of a sophisticated implied author who, for instance, comments on one of Jérôme's performances as follows, "Il mélangeait les circonstanciels de temps et de lieux, prenait une causale pour une finale, et accrochait des propositions relatives à des complétives à des subordonnées, en parsemant son discours d'imparfaits du subjonctif . . . Des subjonctifs au plein coeur du Fond-de-la-Baie de 1880!"

It is perhaps the irony and self-consciousness of this controlling voice, more than their universal symbolism and theme, that saves Antonine Maillet's novels (specifically *Pélagie-la-Charrette* and *Cent Ans dans les bois*) from the reproach of parochialism. Indeed, Maillet has time and again insisted that she is *not* a regionalist writer, that her literary Acadia is the world *in nuce*. Maillet's protestations point toward a catch-22 typical of the post-colonial writer's situation, perhaps only to be overcome by official (i.e., political) recognition on a large scale such as the Prix Goncourt.

EVA-MARIE KROLLER

***** *Contexts of Canada's Past: Selected Essays by W. L. Morton*, ed. A. B. McKillop. Carleton Library No. 123; Oxford, $9.95. This may survive, if not as W. L. Morton's greatest book, certainly as his most characteristic. The essays it contains project more subtly than his large volumes the outline of a warm personality and a mind exceptionally sensitive and varied in its perceptions. They recollect his life, they show his feeling for places and people, but they also reveal the special characteristics as a historian that distinguished him from his major contemporaries, Donald Creighton and Frank Underhill. Creighton and Underhill, though one of them was a Tory and the other a Radical, were both essentially Ontarians with centralist views of Canadian history. Morton, intensely loyal to his western links, was perhaps the most determin-

edly regional in outlook of all the notable Canadian historians. And in these essays one sees how his regionalism is based, not only on the long history of the west's subordination to central Canadian interests, but also on a lifelong love for the west as the land of his childhood, the land to which his loyalties were lifelong. Reading these essays, I knew why Margaret Laurence's voice was so heavy with sorrow when she rang me up to tell me that this great man, who was her friend, had died.

G.W.

**** DENNIS REID, *Our Own Country Canada.* National Gallery of Canada, $29.95. This is a major study of the classic period of Canadian landscape painting which began as the *catalogue raisonné* of an exhibition with the same title which the National Gallery of Canada opened in November 1978 and then sent touring the country. The achievement of the Group of Seven in giving Canadians an easily understandable visual codification of their country was so complete that for many years the great surge of landscape painting which emerged in Ontario during the 1860's and reached its peak when the landscape masters followed the CPR into and over the mountains, was almost forgotten. Perhaps one of the reasons for this near oblivion was that, as Dennis Reid points out, the landscape painting of Krieghoff, Légaré, and their contemporaries before 1860 had been conceptual, which, essentially, that of the Group of Seven became. But the landscape painting between 1860 and 1890 was essentially perceptual, and one of the most fascinating aspects of *Our Country Canada* is the way Reid traces the connection between the fine early Canadian photographers, notably William Notman, and the new ways in which the leading landscapists of the time, many of whom worked in the photographic studios, saw the landscape of their country as they moved westward with the advancing railways.

G.W.

*** ROBERT W. PASSFIELD, *Building the Rideau Canal: A Pictorial History.* Fitzhenry & Whiteside, $24.95. If Ottawa had not begun with the strange name of Bytown, it is likely that we would know even less than the little we do about Colonel John By. Almost nothing has been written about him personally, and even the history of the Rideau Canal and its construction has been so poorly recorded that we are left with the image of the elusive Colonel as an incompetent manager who grossly overspent his estimates. In fact, By was a first rate engineer who did much better under very difficult conditions than most of his fellow canal builders. He had to deal with wild country hard to survey, with the difficult climatic and geological conditions of the Shield country, with incompetent contractors, and with the malaria that 150 years ago made the land between the Ottawa River and Kingston almost as deadly as the Maremma. Yet he completed a splendid waterway (while it may have outlived its economic and military importance) that remains as a handsome artifact which still — whether fluid in summer or frozen in winter — gives great pleasure to thousands of people. *Building the Rideau Canal: A Pictorial History* makes up for a great deal of the neglect. It is an excellent narrative of how the Rideau was conceived and planned, and it is greatly assisted by the survival of a fine series of drawings and watercolours, mainly by Thomas Burrows and John Burrows, two of By's best civilian assistants. This has made possible a pictorial account of the Canal that, after the introductory section, goes almost lock by lock, calling on the engineering records for details of the actual building techniques and the conditions of work. It is a fine contribution to the history of Canadian transportation, besides doing justice to a neglected historic figure.

G.W.

**** JAMES W. ST. G. WALKER, *A History of Blacks in Canada.* Ministry of State for Multiculturism, $8.50. Designed as a study guide for teachers and students, this is much more: a mini-history; an extensive bibliographic guide to books, articles, and other resources; and a set of reflections on prejudice, community, and identity. Topics range from slavery in Canada (including an account of the Mohawk chieftain Joseph Brant's slaves), fugitives, Loyalists, and immigrant movements, through accounts of public policy and the effect of various Public School Acts, to the role of the Church and the Canadian impact of the American Civil Rights Movement. Walker is clear throughout, and quietly persuasive.

W.N.

** HELMUT BONHEIM, *The Narrative Modes: Techniques of the Short Story.* D. S. Brewer, £17.50. Few Canadian readers of the short story will find the critical techniques of this book familiar, nor the book itself easy to read, though half the examples are drawn from Ca-

nadian literature. (The other half are English and American.) Unabashedly "Teutonic," the author says, his method is formalistic, analytic, categorical, statistical. Basing his work in the language and theory of linguistic discourse, he isolates four "modes" of narration (description, report, speech, and comment), examines various attempts to systemize them, then proceeds to a set of examples that illustrates various combinations of these modal elements — in the beginnings and endings of short stories. Statistical tables, based on 300 stories and 50 novels from each of "Canadian" and "Anglo-American" sources, record the incidence of particular starting and closing devices — which Bonheim calls "anteriority," "habituality," "epanalepsis," "polysyndetic," etc. Some readers might wish to know that while 74% of the Canadian stories (and 10% of Canadian novels written during the 1900-1940 period) start with habituality, 61% of the Anglo-American stories and 36% of the novels do.

W.N.

*** JEAN-PIERRE BONNEVILLE, *Marc-Aurèle Fortin en Gaspésie*. Stanké, n.p. Painters who portray the character of a region will have much to say to people beyond it as well. This brief account of Fortin's bicycle trip to the Gaspé in the 1940's is beautifully illustrated with thirteen of the oils and watercolours he did at that time. Fascinated by boats and rocks, his blue houses seem at once perched by the sea and sailing through the landscape. These are vigorous drawings, bold and alive.

W.N.

** LUO ZEWEN et al., *The Great Wall*. Hurtig, $29.95. The Great Wall is, of course, China's — a decorated defense scheme that has lasted for thousands of generations and captured the imagination of foreigners and Chinese alike. There were walls before it, as this profusely illustrated popular history acknowledges; but none was so compelling a symbol or so successful a barrier. Kilometre by kilometre, the text takes us on an illustrated tour — which makes the book particularly useful as a school library teaching tool. Its diagrams are clear, its variety of illustration remarkable (paintings, photographs, statuary, manuscripts, maps, silks — much drawn from Chinese holdings, and presented under the guidance of the Cultural Relics Publishing House in Beijing); the photographs and prints are least helpful — sometimes supernumerary, often dark, the colour discrimination of the prints not as sharp or as true as it ought to be.

W.N.

opinions and notes

# THE WEST INDIES & THE LITERATURE OF MARITIME CANADA

NEAR THE BEGINNING OF Hugh MacLennan's *Barometer Rising*, it is made clear that the Wain family fortunes rest on inherited privateering money and on the profits of the West Indian trade developed by the family after the War of 1812. "Exchanging dried apples and fish for rum, tobacco, and molasses,"[1] generations of Wains have built the family import-export business into a solidly prosperous venture. "Not rich by American standards,"[2] they nonetheless enjoy a handsome house in Halifax's class-conscious south end and "for five generations" have been considered "leading citizens"[3] in the town. It is fitting, therefore, that over the living-room mantle there hangs a map of Jamaica, a visual reminder of the source of the family's privilege and its pride.

While little detail is provided in *Barometer Rising* about the Nova Scotia-West Indian connection, the very presence of the islands in the Wain family background not only illustrates an important side of Maritime financial and family history but also provides an insight into Hugh MacLennan's informed understanding of the social and economic traditions of his native Nova Scotia. From the beginning of seventeenth-century British settlement in the Caribbean and along the Atlantic coast, a mutual trade and interdependence had grown up as fish, lumber, and livestock were exchanged for rum, molasses, and sugar.[4] While the thirteen colonies dominated the North American side of this trade, until the American Revolution, settlements like Halifax (1749), Liverpool (1759), and Yarmouth (1761) early in their histories began to transact business with the West Indies. The Maritimes were never able to outcompete the American states in producing goods and vessels for the Caribbean market, but in periods like the American Revolution or the War of 1812, they enjoyed the commercial advantages offered by Britain's monopoly on the islands' trade. Thus, it is consistent with historical events in Nova Scotia that the Wain family in *Barometer Rising* should make its fortune in privateering during the War of 1812 and that the bulk of that fortune should be invested in an import-export business with the Caribbean.

It is one of the ironies of the West Indian trade that few Maritimers involved in it in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had either the time or the inclination to give imaginative expression to their experiences in fiction, poetry, or drama. Merchants like Simeon Perkins of Liverpool kept careful account of Caribbean transactions in their journals,[5] and sailors plying between the provinces and the islands preserved a body of chanteys like "The 'Flying Cloud.'" However, few images of the islands or what they meant to Maritimers emerge from these conventional poems and prose sketches that inform the modern reader of the impact of the Caribbean trade on the lifestyle and imagination of the Atlantic region. Coming to Prince Edward Island from Skye in 1803, Bard Malcolm Bān Buchanan concluded his poem "Emigration of the Islanders" with a tribute to the settlers' new "isle of contentment" on this side of the ocean. Not only a land where "oats grow / and wheat, in full bloom," it is also a place where "There is fresh red rum / in every dwelling and shop, / abundant as the stream, being imbibed there."[6]

Such references to the West Indies' most popular export to the Atlantic re-

gion are frequent in early Maritime literature, especially in Halifax where an eighteenth-century wag noted that "the business of one half the town is to sell rum and the other half to drink it."[7] Certainly, the ready availability and influence of grog impelled Thomas McCulloch's Mephiboseth Stepsure to speak out in *The Acadian Recorder* in 1821 against the many visitations made by his neighbours to Mr. Tipple's well-stocked establishment. Such "strolling about and drinking"[8] leads many of the townsfolk of *The Stepsure Letters* into financial dependence on Calibogus, the West Indian merchant (whose name comes from a New England drink of cold rum and unsweetened beer). Calibogus benefits from the West Indian trade in a double sense, for he not only imports the rum that gets the townspeople into difficulties in the first place but he also buys up their mortgages when demon rum has done its work. As Stepsure ironically expresses it elsewhere in the sketches, "an invitation to drink" usually ends up being "an invitation to something else."[9]

Given the absence of a large body of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century imaginative literature about the West Indies-Maritime connection, it is fortunate that the letters of Mather Byles III have survived with their personal descriptions of one Nova Scotian's life in Grenada between 1790 and 1802. The great-grandson of the Boston theologian, Cotton Mather, and the grandson of the satirist, Mather Byles, Sr., young Byles was a Loyalist living in Halifax and Fredericton before he decided to take a position in the West Indies. A somewhat ironic poet in the tradition of his father and grandfather, he also wrote lively letters home describing every stage of his journey from Halifax to the islands:

> Tho' traversing twelve hundred unnecessary miles was not one of the pleasant things I have met with in my pilgrimage, I contrived to keep my body & mind in tolerable good order. The number of bottles I had stocked myself with contributed much to the one, & Blackstones commentaries to the other — the last bottle of the liquor & the last page of the author were thoro'ly digested before I had finished my wanderings & with less substantial resources I should certainly have quarrelled both with my companions & myself. Fortunately I did neither.[10]

Byles's residence in Grenada ended in 1802 when he became a victim of consumption. However, during the dozen years he lived on the island, he kept his family in Halifax and Boston regularly informed of his daily activities and of social events that might be of interest to their circle. His life was the comfortable one of a colonial civil servant and his discretion as well as his desire to entertain undoubtedly influenced both the content and the tone of his letters. Nonetheless, although he rarely commented on political events, the plantation system, or any other topics which undoubtedly preoccupied him in a professional capacity, he left in his personal communications to his family an interesting insight into the architecture, work habits, and social life of middle-class Maritimers who sought business and government opportunities in the islands during the economic depressions which afflicted Nova Scotia in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries:

> As for descriptions of this part of the world I take it for granted that an old married woman with two children cares very little how it looks in the West-Indies — However in the towns I have visited the buildings are of brick & stone — the houses high, the streets narrow, and the grounds as confined as your own; for land is so valuable that the building lots are cut up as small as possible — This does very well in Halifax where you are obliged to employ a servant during half the year wheeling out snow, but it adds greatly to the heat of this sultry climate, and strikes a stranger as the most injudicious mode of building they could have adopted. The house I at present inhabit fortunately fronts on the publick

> square which gives it a great advantage in point of coolness — it stands a hundred feet back from the street; the yard in front is protected, and shaded by a large & beautiful sand box tree — on the right hand and left are the offices, & rooms for our nine domestick servants which are built of brick & roofed with tiles — the house is of hewn stone — you ascend by sixteen stone steps, & a large folding door opens in to the galery which is 40 feet by sixteen & lighted by six windows four of which fronting the square are without sashes and secured only by shutters which are never closed but at bed time. From the galery a door opens into the dining hall, lighted by seven large windows, two of which are in the partition that divides the hall from the galery and are without sashes that the air may have free current. — The rooms are about 14 feet high, without ceilings which an earthquake would shake about our ears, and in most houses paneling is preferred to plaister for the sides. The upper story is divided into four chambers, in one of which I lucubrate and sleep — tho precious little time is allowed me for the former, as our hours of business are from ½ past six in the morning to sunset and I generally feel myself too much fatigued by the time they are over to do any thing but roll on a sofa — a luxurious piece of furniture, & calculated altogether for the climate.[11]

While Byles's sofa may have been "calculated . . . for the climate," many Maritimers going back and forth between the Atlantic region and the West Indies on shipping, mercantile, or military business found themselves ill-suited to the sudden changes in climatic conditions which they had to experience. Logs, letters, and newspapers report how frequently Maritimers fell victim to "West Indies fever," and popular imagination long held the memory of Nova Scotian poetess Griselda Tonge whose "Lines Composed At Midnight, On My Passage To The West Indies . . ." reached Windsor in 1825 concurrent with the report that she had died from fever in Demerara. Less is recorded, however, of what must have been the shock and misery of the more than five hundred Jamaican Maroons who were settled in Nova Scotia by the British government in the summer of 1796. Viewing the resettlement of the Maroons as an expedient way of dealing with a political problem, the Colonial Office little thought of the disastrous psychological effects of uprooting people from a warm climate and distinctive cultural environment and re-establishing them on the cold and rocky shores of Halifax. Settled around "Maroon Hall" in nearby Preston, the Jamaicans spent several bleak years there before a large contingent of them joined disillusioned black Loyalists who had already sailed to Sierra Leone.[12] Nevertheless, a fragment of the Maroon population remained in Preston, appearing from time to time in early prints of Halifax and forming part of the black population mentioned in nineteenth-century travelogues and prose accounts of the city.

Of all the regional writers who have referred to the West Indies-Maritime relationship in their work, Thomas Raddall is the one who has most frequently made the trading and privateering connections between the two areas part of the narrative and cultural fabric of his fiction. The snugness of pre-Revolutionary Liverpool in *His Majesty's Yankees* lies in the "West India trade" where "our trading brigs exchanged their fish for what was offered there, salt from Turk's Island, molasses from Jamaica or some other of the Indies, with a few seroons of indigo and some log wood now and again. . . . On the way home, too, our vessels put into New England ports and sold what West India stuff they could in exchange for dry goods and grain and cider and potatoes and apples and turnips and other garden sauce."[13] From time to time, the pattern of this trade is broken by hostilities, resulting in "prisoners from the Caribbees, strange, sad, swarthy men in outlandish garments"[14] coming into towns like Liverpool as prisoners of war during the Napoleonic era. As Raddall describes them in stories like "The Passing Show," these

refugees from wartime skirmishes attract "the bright curious glances of the healthy Bluenose girls," while in the taverns "bearded and ear-ringed seamen drank their ale and spun long yarns of hurricane and the yellow jack, of sea sharks and land sharks and the busy ship-worm of the warm seas that broke men's hearts at the pumps, of fights ashore and afloat under a burning sun, and the lotus life of the islands where rum flowed like water and every night was Midsummer's Eve and none of the girls was shy."[15]

Of all Raddall's descriptions of the Caribbean connection, the most detailed lies in *Pride's Fancy* where the relationship of Lia Dolainde and Nathan Cain unfolds against the backdrop of a bloody slave uprising in Haiti at the end of the eighteenth century. While Raddall's novel draws a vivid picture of the breakup of the plantation system on the island during this time and of the violence and politics surrounding Toussaint l'Ouverture's move for power, its Foreword articulates the author's sense of historical continuity as he describes the links between Nova Scotia and the West Indies. Liverpool is typical of many sea-faring communities in its relation to the islands, Raddall notes, and after the French Revolution its townsmen were characteristically active in sailing the waters of the Caribbean under letters of marque granted by the governor of the province:

> During the long wars which followed the French Revolution a good many seamen from my town cruised in the Caribbean under letters of marque issued by the governor of Nova Scotia. A few got rich. Most of them gained nothing but a romantic experience, the risks being more than the rewards. Some perished in battle, some of yellow jack in the islands, some by the common hazards of the sea. Fortunate ones survived the wars and lived out their days as seamen, woodsmen, farmers, or merchants in the long peace afterwards. One of them struck up a friendship with the black king Christophe, after the passing of Toussaint and Dessalines, and for years enjoyed a semi-monopoly of the coffee trade out of Haiti. Another (my wife's ancestor) founded a prosperous timber-and-shipbuilding firm and died a deacon of his church. At least two served their province in after years as members of the legislature. Another built a college and a temperance hall, and his widow bequeathed the land on which our town hall stands. And there was one who founded a bank and died the richest man of his time in British North America.[16]

The town hall still stands, as Raddall notes here, and so possibly does the college, the temperance hall, or the bank. The record of history does not lie wholly in buildings, however, and Raddall's understanding of his town therefore directs him to the everyman-figures who sailed from their home province to the Caribbean over a hundred and fifty years ago ("Most of the Nova Scotia privateersmen were men of simple trades and humble destinies").[17] Leaving an unvarnished record of memories and language in their logs, letters, and diaries, these men have given Raddall and others the foundation on which to build imaginative interpretations of Maritime-West Indian history. Their past illuminates Nova Scotia's present. Or, as Thomas Raddall expresses it in lyrical as well as literal terms: "More than one garden" in Nova Scotia "blooms actually in West Indian soil, brought north as ballast in the days of the Caribbean trade."[18]

NOTES

1 Hugh MacLennan, *Barometer Rising* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1969), p. 19.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 C. Bruce Fergusson, "The West Indies and the Atlantic Provinces: Background of the Present Relationship," in *The West Indies and The Atlantic Provinces of Canada* (Halifax: Institute of Public Affairs, Dalhousie University, 1966), p. 24.

5 Simeon Perkins, *The Diary of Simeon Perkins* (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 5 vols., 1948-1978).

[6] Margaret MacDonell, "Bards on the *Polly*," *The Island Magazine* (Fall-Winter 1978), p. 37.

[7] Thomas H. Raddall, *Halifax, Warden of the North* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1971), p. 65.

[8] Thomas McCulloch, *The Stepsure Letters* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1960).

[9] Ibid.

[10] Mather Byles to Rebecca Almon, 6 April 1790, Byles Papers, typescript, MG1 Volume 163, Folder 2, 54, Public Archives of Nova Scotia, Halifax, Nova Scotia.

[11] Ibid., pp. 57-58.

[12] Raddall, pp. 121-23.

[13] Thomas H. Raddall, *His Majesty's Yankees* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1977), pp. 37-38.

[14] Thomas Raddall, *At The Tide's Turn* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1971), p. 54.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Thomas Raddall, *Pride's Fancy* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1974), p. xii.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid., p. xi.

GWENDOLYN DAVIES

# CARIBBEAN REVOLUTION & LITERARY CONVENTION

*"It took place in a foreign country, as everything does."* Margaret Atwood: "Circle/ Mud Poems."

CONVENTIONAL WAYS OF LOOKING at ex-colonial cultures mainly just reinforce colonialism, or are unknowingly neo-colonial: this is the basic message in Margaret Atwood's *Bodily Harm* and Austin Clarke's *The Prime Minister*. These novels not only decry the political naiveté of tourists in the Caribbean, who see only postcard prettiness or its underside, racial violence; they also challenge the linguistic naiveté of those who would ignore the political volatility in the region to write of it in an inappropriate language.

Both novels are by outsiders about outsiders. Clarke, an expatriate Barbadian living in Toronto, writes about a West Indian expatriate returning to his unnamed country (unnamed — but obviously Barbados) after a long period abroad, hoping to contribute to its development through his new position as Minister of Culture. Atwood, a Canadian who has visited the Caribbean and read Austin Clarke, writes about a Canadian journalist who visits a fictional Caribbean island in search of a rest and material for a travel piece. Both these fictional innocents abroad encounter revolution, become unwillingly involved, and flee the consequences.

Both writers use these simple adventure plots to explore the political dimensions of language. In *Bodily Harm*, the pressure toward a crippling self-consciousness exerted by journalism's need for instant and disposable commentary renders Rennie Wilford effectively silent: her writing holds thought at bay, instead of inviting it. In part, her story depicts someone slowly learning to write — to think — again. She learns that her skills at labelling, and thus dismissing, reality are illusory. It will not go away. Jake's career as a packaging expert (all style, no content) matches Rennie's as a journalist — no wonder together their dialogue sounds like Hollywood movie repartee from the 1940's. Their brittle style, however, collides against the pious maxims of Rennie's Griswold childhood, the colourful political slogans of the Caribbean, the ambiguous "please" screamed by Rennie's anonymous neighbour in either pain or ecstasy, and the numerous atrocities for which there seem to be no words. Atwood's search for the words to make her readers see involves exposing the hollowness of language misused. Believing that the "aim of all suppression . . . is to silence *the voice*, abolish the words, so that the only voices and words left are those of the ones

in power,"[1] Atwood depicts this process as it occurs simultaneously in Canada (through market and social pressures on Rennie) and in the Caribbean, somewhat more crudely (through overt political oppression). The voice of *Bodily Harm* assumes many disguises in its attempt to serve, as Atwood believes the novel must serve, as "the guardian of the moral and ethical sense of the community."[2]

For Atwood, then, the language of contemporary pop culture poses the greatest threat to Canadian writing. Clarke's poet-politician John Moore experiences the neo-colonial challenge differently. For him, the Miltonic rhythms and Edenic myths of *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* pose the greatest temptation, while the indigenous strength of the local calypso or political speech remains beyond his reach. Unlike Rennie's Canada, his world heeds the newspaper article. Although famed overseas as a serious writer, in his own land he has no audience. When his press conference is suppressed, his friend Shirley tells him: "You are just a witness without a defense, without a mouth."[3] He is further silenced through silence: when a fraudulent article libelling him is published in the local paper, the government destroys him by their "no comment." This silencing, this refusal to comment, involves a refusal to recognize his existence. He himself becomes invisible: "*He was conspicuous in Toronto.* But here he was just another black man, and no one could tell the difference."

An early image defines the pattern of his experience. Discovering a scrap of newspaper with his photograph and a headline announcing his return, he sees that "tires and recent footprints had left their mark on the entire story that went with the photograph; so he could not read what they had said about his returning." This incident mirrors his difficulties in "reading" the culture he is supposed to be directing. His own country, because of his Western education, now appears to him as a partially obliterated text. In attempting to reconstruct it, he turns to externally defined images: the paradise of the Northern Hemisphere's dreams and the net of intrigue of Graham Greene's *Comedians.* What is locally generated remains obscure, beyond his grasp. He is warned to watch what he says, and learns to listen for a hidden meaning behind the words of others, but remains puzzled by what he cannot understand. He never hears the joke that condemns Juliet to social oblivion, never sees the photographs that cost Weekesie his life, never grasps the intricacies of the revolutionary plots that cost him his job, and he never sees the Prime Minister face to face, except on the television screen when everything is over. His own invisibility is merely an extension of the significance of these gaps in his experience, and a sign of his powerlessness in a world he had hoped, naively, to change.

Rennie's powerlessness in *Bodily Harm* is also linked to her invisibility, although ironically she has first assumed it as protective camouflage.[4] At first her very visibility as a tourist tends to make her invisible as a person; later, in jail, she becomes literally invisible, in that she is hidden from the outside world and not important enough for the Canadian government to protest her incarceration. Her operation begins her disappearance; her imprisonment completes it. Yet even as a child, crucial absences characterized her experience. One of her first memories is of being shut in the cellar by herself for doing something wrong, but she can't remember what. In such ways, Atwood underlines the connections between Rennie's Canadian and her Caribbean experiences. Safety is an illusion anywhere in the world, as silence is a weapon. The silences in Griswold are so powerful they are almost visible. In Toronto, Rennie is haunted by a faceless stranger, the man

with the rope, who symbolizes all the unvoiced threats to women which are immanent in our culture. Silencing language, either literally through denying it speech or more subtly through trivializing its use, becomes the chief form of violence depicted in both novels.

While Clarke uses the metaphor of the comedian, the actor who can imitate action but cannot initiate it, and of the witness, who can watch but cannot bear witness, Atwood combines images of the journalist who reacts but never acts with that of the tourist who sightsees but cannot see. Both novels show how tourism turns foreign cultures into objects of cultural consumption. (The Canadian tourists in *The Prime Minister* ask unthinkingly where they can buy some "broads on this island"; Rennie regrets her choice of St. Antoine when she learns how little there is to consume there.) Both novels also equate tourism with irresponsibility, showing their tourists as the new imperialists, happily exploiting a country they can easily leave behind. Atwood, however, takes her analysis one step further than Clarke's, to argue that tourism is the twentieth-century way of life, not just in the Caribbean but everywhere. Rennie is just as much a tourist in Canada, writing lifestyle pieces about trends, as she is in the Caribbean, writing about resorts. She sees every aspect of life as something to be labelled and consumed, and that is the essence of tourism. Condemned to superficiality, the tourist can only see what has been selected for him to see: he sees in prescribed and circumscribed patterns. Suggestively, the museum and tourist site in *Bodily Harm* is also the jail. Trained to see the other as object, the tourist carries the jail of his assumptions with him wherever he goes. After the failed coup, Rennie's metaphorically jailed consciousness is literally jailed: she sees the trap her tourism has led her to; but ironically, in attempting to imagine an escape, she constructs yet another hackneyed plot, in which jaded journalist becomes romantic reporter. Yet Atwood's only too realistic conclusion does not deny the validity of responsible reporting, as the achievement of *Bodily Harm* itself indicates. The novel bears witness to the ways we fool ourselves, as well as to the ways we fool others.

Atwood's "permanent tourists" (to borrow a phrase from P. K. Page) are also voyeurs: tourism is a kind of pornography. Both activities use the concept of "aesthetic distance" as a respectable cover for aggression. Clarke, too, links the violence of sex to the violence of tourism. The airplane bringing tourists to the island in *The Prime Minister* punches itself "like a penis into the valley." John Moore's lyrical evocations of his country as a beautiful black woman, however, detract from his analysis: they are sentimental and embarrassing. To define paradise as the possession of a beautiful black woman is still to be caught in the tourist trap of trying voyeuristically to possess another, instead of learning self-possession. John Moore's failure to possess himself completely results in false visions of woman as paradise regained, and idle daydreams of power, both of which are undercut by the physical reflection of his general impotence — his sexual impotence. John Moore cannot see what the reader can — that his impotence derives from his isolation from his community and from his ignorance of its contexts.

What had been implicit in *The Prime Minister* is made explicit in *Bodily Harm*. Tourists are the new imperialists, colonizing themselves as much as others. In some ways, a colony is to a metropolis as a woman is to a man. Atwood's epigraph from John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* stresses the complicity of the victim in the act of victimization and the necessity for questioning traditional ways of seeing. Berger writes: "A man's presence suggests

what he is capable of doing to you or for you. By contrast, a woman's presence . . . defines what can and cannot be done to her." The same might be said of a colony. The authorities on both fictional islands welcome tourism, despite its disruptive effects on their societies, because of the immediate wealth it can afford them. Their complicity also reveals a failure of imagination. They cannot imagine questioning the basic assumptions underlying the societies they have inherited; their innovations consist solely of attempting to introduce Western efficiency into the exploitation of their resources. Only Dr. Minnow in *Bodily Harm* dreams of substantial change which would revolutionize thinking instead of merely power structures, and he is killed.

Although Rennie and John Moore remain trapped in their basically American or British ways of seeing, the reader learns to see the inadequacy of these languages as ways to convey a Canadian or Caribbean reality. Both *Bodily Harm* and *The Prime Minister* parody the imperialist novel of an education through a confrontation with the colonial "heart of darkness." The very structure of such a novel militates against its protagonist discovering anything that can be useful to the development of the colony's point of view. Clarke's closeness to Moore in *The Prime Minister* creates some doubt as to how clearly he himself perceives Moore's failure. Yet Clarke raises some important issues through Moore. What is the poet's role in an ex-colony? Should he try to provide leadership through his poetry or through political action? Or should he divorce his writing from society entirely? *The Prime Minister* remains pessimistic about the ability of literature to effect change, though it is ambivalent about the power of the written word. No one reads John Moore's poetry, but the newspaper runs the country. Is Clarke suggesting that the writer who genuinely wishes to contribute to his country's real development (as opposed to the development of underdevelopment) should turn to journalism or music, to the popular forms that are reaching the people because they employ their language? But if he is, then why does he continue to write novels? Because he is trying to change the novel form, to make it more accessible as a popular genre, reflecting political concerns and challenging "literary standards of the colonization period."[5] The powerful writing in *The Prime Minister* records the language of the people, particularly Kwame's speeches. As John Moore recognizes in a rare moment of insight: "The speech had ceased to be a political harangue and had become a work of art. . . ." Its strength mocks the false sentimentality of John Moore's lyrical evocations of "the blessed woman with her black beauty." If one could be sure that Clarke meant his readers to see John Moore as a false poet, then all would be well, but Clarke carries ambiguity to the point of confusion.

In *Bodily Harm* there is less uncertainty. The disorienting fragmentation in narrative technique questions the conventions of chronology, of cause and effect and of aesthetic distance, and exposes the language of cliché. By deliberately using an unsympathetic central character, Atwood forces her readers to think as well as feel. She provides no more answers — indeed, possibly fewer alternatives to the language of the metropolis — than does Clarke, but her questioning is more incisive.

Clarke's concern in *The Prime Minister* is to find a creatively violent language to challenge the old Miltonic rhythms that still hold John Moore's imagination in sway, but Clarke himself seems moved by some nostalgia for these European forms and by some fear of where violence in the language may lead him, so that *The Prime Minister* leaves us in limbo. Atwood writes with a surer sense of moral

purpose. She believes "that fiction writing is the guardian of the moral and ethical sense of the community," and that to write is to bear witness. *Bodily Harm* itself bears witness to how power operates in our society. Revolution is a messy, obvious way of quelling dissent. What *The Prime Minister* and *Bodily Harm* both show is how opposition may be censored before it has ever surfaced: in the writer's selection of literary form and language. What they do not show is whether ex-colonial cultures can develop their own voices sufficiently to circumvent these obstacles.

NOTES

[1] Margaret Atwood, "An End to Audience?" *Dalhousie Review*, 60, No. 3 (Autumn 1980), 427.

[2] Ibid., p. 424.

[3] Austin Clarke, *The Prime Minister* (Don Mills: General Publishing, 1977).

[4] Margaret Atwood, *Bodily Harm* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1981).

[5] Austin Clarke, "Some Speculations as to the Absence of Racialistic Vindictiveness in West Indian Literature," in Lloyd W. Brown, ed., *The Black Writer in Africa and the Americas* (Los Angeles: Hennessey & Ingalls, 1973), p. 178.

DIANA BRYDON

# SOME NOTES TOWARDS "UNDER THE VOLCANO"

As I was recently working through the Lowry manuscripts of *Under the Volcano* in the Special Collections Division at the University of British Columbia, I had in mind a number of small but annoying questions about the book which I hoped might be clarified by the drafts. Some were, for Lowry in his early drafts sometimes dropped a clue as to the source of an allusion or the intention behind a phrase; and others, such as the identity of "Lee Maitland," remain as big a mystery as ever. I want to comment on six of these points, partly because each touches upon a small but significant aspect of the novel so far overlooked by commentators more interested in the dark wood than the trees that comprise it, but also because, collectively, they show something about the way that Lowry worked and reworked his sources and early drafts. I shall take each of these one by one, but the growing complexity of the answers should demonstrate that Lowry's art has at times a most curiously and intricately wrought structure.

1. *Why does Yvonne get upset, p. 58,*[1] *when the Consul says "Peegly Weegly"?*

This still remains a mystery. The Consul points with his stick through the trees towards the "little American grocery store, catercorner to Cortez Palace," and Yvonne, hurrying on and biting her lips, is determined not to cry, whereupon the Consul, taking her arm, is suddenly contrite, saying, "I'm sorry, I never thought." Thought of what? The drafts here are of little help, but in one and only one version of the chapter (*UBC* 10-7, p. 10)[2] both Yvonne's grief and the Consul's contrition were heavily accentuated, still without an explanation. "Piggly Wiggly," more correctly "Piggly Wiggly Southern," is a supermarket chain based in Georgia and Florida, dealing in groceries and general merchandise. There was a celebrated one in Mexico City, on *Independencia*, the first of its kind in Mexico, and a smaller branch in Cuernavaca, not quite "catercorner to Cortez Palace" but not far removed, being located on the *Avenida Guerrero* about one block up from the *Zócalo*. One is forced to speculate: perhaps Yvonne is reminded of her dead child, to whom she might have said, "This little piggy goes to market. . . ." Or perhaps that very rhyme — "This lit-

tle piggy stayed at home" — is somehow related to her departure and return? What seems undeniable is that Lowry has deliberately created a mystery, perhaps because he wished to include something private between himself and Jan, or to hint at a tension between the Consul and Yvonne over her failure to give him children, or simply to illustrate the fact that Geoffrey and Yvonne are a married couple, who possess shared intimacies that those outside cannot possibly know about and never will know. As with the *Samaritan* incident, so too with this small exchange: the truth is unknowable, and the incident deliberately designed to tease us into thought.

2. *Who is "another William Blackstone," p. 139?*

William Blackstone, "The man who went to live among the Indians" (p. 56), is such an attractive figure that one is inclined to forget that he is by no means the only one of that name. On p. 138 the Consul describes cats to Mr. Quincey as "Animals not fit for food and kept only for pleasure, curiosity, or whim," and attributes this statement to William Blackstone, then, a few lines later, asks the unresponsive Mr. Quincey, "Or was that another William Blackstone?" This "other" seems to have attracted little critical curiosity. The 1940 draft of Ch. v (*UBC* 7-6, p. 8) foregrounds the comment about cats being animals not fit for food by having Mr. Quincey reply, "Right here, in this town, during the Revolution, they barbecued 'em in the market place," but as Mr. Quincey in subsequent versions became more morose and taciturn that remark was deleted from all later notes and drafts. The reference is not difficult to track down: the other William Blackstone is Sir William Blackstone (1723-80), English jurist, King's Counsel, and M.P., best known for his *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (1765-69), in which (II, 25, p. 393: "On the Rights of Things") is considered the status of animals *ferae naturae*:

> For if the pheasants escape from the mew, or the fishes from the trunk, and are seen wandering at large in their proper element, they become *ferae naturae* again; and are free and open to the first occupant that has ability to seize them. But while they thus continue my qualified or defeasible property, they are as much under the protection of the law, as if they were absolutely and indefeasibly mine: and an action will lie against any man that detains them from me, or unlawfully destroys them. It is also as much felony by common law to steal such of them as are fit for food, as it is to steal tame animals: but not so, if they are only kept for pleasure, curiosity, or whim, as dogs, bears, cats, apes, parrots, and singing birds; because their value is not intrinsic, but depending only on the caprice of the owner.

A small but tidy clarification of an otherwise obscure point.

3. *Why does the Consul, p. 232, address the three-legged dogs as "pichicho"?*

While the Consul is in the *cantina* El Bosque, a starving pariah dog enters and looks up at him. The Consul stands up and suddenly addresses the dog: "Yet this day, *pichicho*, shalt thou be with me —," at which the dog hops away in terror *on three legs* and slinks under the door. Unlike the previous example there was, I thought, no unexplained difficulty here. The reference to *Luke* 23:43 stands out: Jesus says to one of the thieves crucified beside him, "Verily, I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise." The unfinishing nature of the Consul's quotation leaves his presumed destination more ambiguous, and the allusion to Nordahl Grieg's *The Ship Sails On* was pointed out as early as 1965 by Tony Kilgallin;[3] at the end of Grieg's novel, as Benjamin Hall is contemplating suicide, the ship's dog Santos (also diseased) appears:

> Santos jumped up at him and licked his hand. He lifted the dog on his arm and patted him gently.
>
> "Santos," he said, "this day shalt thou be with me in paradise."
>
> Then he slowly climbed over the rail with the dog in his arms. . . .[4]

There is a possible parallel to this incident in Conrad's *Lord Jim*, when Captain Brierly farewells his dog before jumping, but that reference seems unconvincing. The case was unaltered. That is, until I read Lowry's additional notes to Ch. VII and realized that although the Grieg reference had been present from the beginning, and the dog had always had three legs, the word "*pichicho*" was distinctly an afterthought, added to the manuscripts some time after the rest of the sentence had been composed. With Lowry, such additions tend to be literary allusions to "thicken" the text, but this one meant nothing to me. A Spanish dictionary stated simply that *pichicho* was a common term of affection, but the feeling remained that something else was going on. I was very lucky here. Picking up *Far Away and Long Ago* to check out Hugh's reference to the armadillo doing his damnedest to pull W. H. Hudson down its hole, my eyes lit on p. 9 of that enchanting volume, the description of a strange-looking lame dog that suddenly appeared on the scene:

> One of his hind legs had been broken or otherwise injured, so that he limped and shuffled along in a peculiar lopsided fashion; he had no tail, and his ears had been cropped close to his head . . .
>
> No name to fit the singular canine visitor could be found, although he responded readily enough to the word *pichicho*, which is used to call any unnamed pup by, like pussy for cat. So it came to pass that this word *pichicho* — equivalent to "doggie" in English — stuck to him for only name until the end of the chapter; and the end was that, after spending some years with us, he mysteriously disappeared.[5]

One can only imagine Lowry's delight in finding this *after* the rest of the paragraph had been written: not only is the dog's appearance (in both senses of the word), its lameness, and its mysterious disappearance perfectly appropriate, but there is the added bonus of the Biblical phrasing, "So it came to pass," and the irrelevant coincidence of "the end of the chapter."

4. *In what sense is the timber-line of Popocatepetl, p. 80, like a giant surfacing whale?*

Obviously because Popocatepetl is to the Consul what Moby Dick is to Captain Ahab. Although in the final version of *Under the Volcano* this relationship between the smoking mountain and the white whale is never explicitly insisted on, throughout the drafts and manuscripts the equation is frequently made, and in earlier versions of this passage Moby Dick is mentioned by name. The precise reference here seems to be Ch. 133 of Melville's novel: when the white whale is finally spotted, the cry rings out, "There she blows! — there she blows! A hump like a snow-hill! It is Moby Dick!" This is a neat, tidy and sane reference, to which nothing more need really be added. However, a note in Prescott's *History of the Conquest of Mexico* suggests the very devious route by which this terrestrial whale (the hint of Charles Fort is also present) was grounded on the volcano. Discussing the appearance of Ixtaccihuatl from a very similar vantage point, Prescott writes:

> This mountain . . . with its neighbour Popocatepetl . . . has been fancifully likened, from the long dorsal swell, to the back of a dromedary.[6]

Lowry knew his Prescott,[7] and probably appreciated Prescott's tendency to use Latinate words in their original etymological sense, but the word *dorsal* seems such an incongruously inappropriate word to use here: very like a whale, indeed!

5. *What on earth does the Consul mean*

*by "Coclogenus paca Mexico," p. 188?*

The Consul is describing the deceptive camouflage of the S.S. *Samaritan*, stating that the galley could become a battery "before you could say *Coclogenus paca Mexico*." Gladys Andersen is the only person, to my knowledge, who has sensed the very mundane meaning of the apparent mystical-magical grimoire:

> Probably either a punning or erroneous reference to Coelgenus paca, a tailless rodent found in South and Central America whose skin is used for leather.[8]

Originally the manuscript at this point read, "before you could say Jack Robinson" (*UBC* 10-25, p. 15), and the reference to the *Coclogenus paca Mexico* (the error persists throughout all the notes and manuscripts) came a few pages later: the Consul, looking at his neighbour's Scotty dog, Angus, who is in turn looking adoringly at Yvonne, remarks, "We could go to the zoo and see the tepezcuintle." Hugh asks in return, "What's a tepezcuintal?" (Lowry uses both spellings), to which the Consul mutters, probably having confused his cages at the Chapultepec Park, "A dog . . . Coclogenus paca Mexico. Well, a sort of high class scavenger, a groomed hyaena" (*UBC* 8-7, p. 16). And, in another version (*UBC* 10-25, p. 17), he adds, "a pariah with a university education." In the earliest drafts the Consul is more bloody-minded towards Yvonne and Hugh, originally his daughter and her boyfriend, and his remarks are more obviously directed at them, but as the relationship between the characters changed the tepezcuintle episode became increasingly redundant. However, at least three traces remain in the final version of the novel:

a. Yvonne suggests, p. 190, going to the zoo (presumably the tiny one in Chapultepec Park, the only possible one that could be closer than the fictional Tomalín: there is also a hint here of the original destination of Chapultepec, on the outskirts of Cuernavaca). The suggestion, originally the Consul's, is designed to lead up to the Díaz-Prescott reference to the infernal regions.

b. A scotch terrier barks merrily from the rear seat of one of the cars rushing "diplomatically" past the dying Indian, p. 249: with the help of the manuscripts identifying Angus as the neighbour's dog, and the reference to the Argentine ambassador next door, p. 80, we can deduce who it is who half-recognizes the Consul, p. 249.

c. The *Coclogenus paca Mexico* itself, p. 188, whose unnecessary presence in the text has made possible the elucidation of the other details: Lowry was clearly very attached to the phrase, and thereby hangs a tail.

6. *Why should a parrot be beside the undertaker's sign, p. 235?*

There isn't even a problem here until the manuscripts, or rather the additional notes, are consulted, but what then emerges is a fascinating instance of a writer refining one of his best passages almost completely out of existence. This time, unlike *Coclogenus paca Mexico*, Lowry was able to resist the temptation of leaving even the tiniest of clues for his private delectation, and since there is no clarification of anything in the final version of the novel, nothing but a curiosity about the life within the "depths" can justify this note. However, in the first extant version of the novel that we possess, the 1940 version, there was a long shaggy-dog story, originally placed in Ch. v (*UBC* 7-6, pp. 29-30), about a parrot at sea who challenged the magician at the ship's concert to do his tricks and make things disappear. The parrot was invited up front, a cloth placed over it . . . and at that moment the ship hit an iceberg, sank instantly without trace, leaving the parrot

all by itself on a little spar in an empty ocean: "Marvellous," said the parrot. The story, a delight in itself though by no means original with Lowry, fitted rather awkwardly into its original context, but it neatly anticipated in Ch. VIII of the same 1940 version the Consul's reaction to the undertakers': "Marvellous," the Consul said.

When Lowry decided to submit Ch. VIII for separate publication, he used essentially the 1940 version, but with minor changes, so that there is no sign of the anecdote at all. And so with all the major versions of the drafts: the story disappears from Ch. V but does not reappear in Ch. VIII, so that the second novel version (*UBC* 8-20), the Texas Manuscript, and the final typescript and galleys are each virtually identical with the short story version and the final printed one: there is no sign of the anecdote at all, not even the word "marvellous" — simply the suggestion of the Consul's rajah shakes leading him directly to the *inhumanciones*. However, Lowry's own pencil draft and the typescript Margerie made from it (*UBC* 11-4), as well as other notes held by the U.B.C. Library, show Lowry trying out different versions of the anecdote before abandoning it altogether. The typescript (*UBC* 11-4, p. 2) reads:

> They passed the undertakers: *Inhumaciones*. A parrot, head cocked, looked down from its perch above the entrance where a notice asked them: Quo Vadis?
>
> 'Marvellous,' Geoff observed, hands deep in pocket, feet on the opposite seat.
>
> Hugh chuckled: it was the ship's parrot of course, and lone survivor on a lone spar, according to Geoffrey's story, that, surveying the empty sea and attributing its late berth's disappearance to the wonderful magician at the ship's concert, had remarked, superbly, 'Marvellous.'
>
> He was still chuckling — that parrot was something else, though, in his mind, something familiar he couldn't quite place — when they stopped at the market. . . .[9]

In this version there is no previous mention of the story in Ch. V, so once again it sits a little awkwardly in context, which is probably why in later rough versions the anecdote is reduced simply to the Consul's observation, "Marvellous," sometimes with and sometimes without Hugh's appreciative chuckle, until even that disappears.

Why did Lowry work so hard on the anecdote, only to discard it in the end? And what is the "something familiar" (ominous words) that Hugh cannot quite place? The answer to both questions, I believe, is to be found in Ch. XII, where, shortly before he is shot, the Consul strikes out wildly at a cock flapping before his eyes, and tries to cut off its head (p. 372). In some of the earlier versions of the story this cock was once a parrot, and it was only as Lowry accrued other symbolic meanings about the word *cock* that the parrot became completely unnecessary. These additional symbolic meanings include:

a. "Half past sick by the cock," p. 353, and the encounter with Maria — both surprisingly late additions to the manuscripts, but crucial to both the Faustian theme and the various meanings of the Consul's impotence.

b. Cervantes's *bruto*, which at one point materialized in Ch. XII. In the earliest drafts, a major psychological force driving the Consul to his chosen death was a rather crude notion of atoning for the afflictions wrought by the Europeans upon the Tlahuicans of the valley; this was replaced by a more complex and self-centred notion of betrayal, in part echoing Peter's betrayal of Christ, but associated above all in the Consul's mind with the "traitorous Tlaxcalans," p. 287, who had "betrayed Christ into being in the Western Hemisphere," p. 288, of whom Cervantes was one: betraying the number of his secret drinks to Hugh and Yvonne, who, like Paris and Helen, Cortés and Malinche, are now betraying him.

c. Above all, there is the hint of M. Laruelle, Gallic cock and ultimate betrayer, whom the Consul sees and strikes at in the expression of the Chief of Rostrums; the word *merded* adds force to this parallel.

None of these highly significant thematic links was part of the original intention, but as the emblem of the cock took on such thematic significance, the anecdote about the parrot became increasingly irrelevant. Even so, a reference to the parrot was retained in Ch. XII right into the galleys before being finally struck out: "The cock — or was it a parrot? — flapped before his eyes" (*UBC* 9-24, n.p.). In the earlier drafts Lowry probably intended Hugh in Ch. VIII to have had some kind of premonition of Geoffrey's coming death when he sees the parrot, but that idea too was sacrificed as it became less compatible with the changing patterns of symbolism. And so the anecdote, like the ship, sank virtually without trace from Ch. VIII, leaving only the parrot, but this time without even a "marvellous" to mark the place of what once superbly had been.

The increasing complexity of these examples perhaps raises the question of where legitimate interpretation ends and speculation begins. Such matters are best left to people with ideas. With Lowry it is often impossible to separate text from context, for as the book unfolds, new vistas of meaning are suddenly revealed, and more and more depths of meaning are seen to be included. If these scattered notes about six of Lowry's animals have helped to make a few things a little clearer in *Under the Volcano*, or, alternatively, to have suggested complexities where all seemed serene, they will have achieved their end.

NOTES

[1] References to *Under the Volcano* are to the 1962 Penguin Edition.

[2] This and other like references are to the Malcolm Lowry papers in the Special Collections Division of the library of the University of British Columbia. The first number refers to the box, the second to the folder within that box, and the third, if possible, to the page. Thus: Box 10, folder 7, page 10. Quotations from the papers are printed by permission of Literistic, Ltd., as agents for the Estate of Malcolm Lowry.

[3] Anthony Kilgallin, "The Use of Literary Sources for Theme and Style in *Under the Volcano*," Unpub. M.A. thesis, Univ. of Toronto, 1965, p. 77.

[4] Nordahl Grieg, *The Ship Sails On*, trans. A. G. Chater (New York: Knopf, 1927), p. 217.

[5] W. H. Hudson, *Far Away and Long Ago: A History of My Early Life* (1918; rpt. London: Dent, 1951), p. 9.

[6] W. H. Prescott, *History of the Conquest of Mexico* (1843; 2nd ed. London: Dent, 1844), Bk. v, Ch. vii, p. 422.

[7] Lowry may have known his Prescott, but not, I believe, his Díaz, since every reference to the latter's *True History of the Conquest of Mexico* could have been taken equally from Prescott.

[8] Gladys Marie Andersen, "A Guide to *Under the Volcano*," Unpub. Ph.D. Diss., Univ. of the Pacific (Stockton), 1970, p. 94.

[9] Lowry's syntax and punctuation have been maintained, but lines pencilled in and bits shifted around in his original have been regularized.

C. J. ACKERLEY

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AMONG RECENT PUBLICATIONS are several reference works and several items, reprints, texts, and general reflections on culture and literature. Of key use for researchers is the appearance of the microfiche edition of *Canadiana 1867-1900*, a list of some 38,000 monographs of Canadian relevance (National Library). Among Gale's publications, *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, vol. 21 ($72.00) includes 14 pages of excerpts from Haig-Brown criticism, and vol. 22, a section on F. R. Scott; while *Contemporary Authors*, vol. 104 ($68.00) includes interviews with David McFadden and Raymond Massey, and vol. 105 includes a sketch by Susan Tresky on Hubert Aquin. *Twentieth Century Literary Criticism*, vol. 7 ($72.00) includes a 22-page section on Carman; *Contemporary Literary Critics*, with a

commentary on Frye, has gone into its 2nd edition ($55.00).

In the Australian journal *Westerly* (September 1981) there appears Tom Shapcott's interview with Michael Ondaatje, a discussion that seeks in part to distinguish between socially-grounded and textually-grounded critical commentary. In many ways this distinction informs a number of recent theoretical works as well. Jacob Korg, for example, writing historically about novelty in *Language in Modern Literature* (Harvester, $16.50) and exploring the nature of experiment that turns up as ambiguity, parataxis, parody, and surrealism, observes that literary collage presents a disjunction between the real and the imagined, but "by combining the two in a single text, it shows that they can exchange attributes, and tempts us to believe that art and reality can intersect and co-ordinate with each other." Because "meaning and being" can be "endlessly transformed into each other," the reader sustains his connection with the experiment; and Korg goes on to explore the world of words which through experiment writers as diverse as Williams, Pound, and Joyce could contrive. The importance of the reader in establishing an appropriate connection with a text is the subject at the heart of *The Question of Textuality*, ed. William Spanos, et al. (Indiana, $21.88); based on a symposium sponsored by *boundary 2*, the book includes the sparks of critical quarrel among some two dozen substantial critics (Said, Krieger, Fish, Riddel, and others) — largely to do with the limits of mimesis and the nature of the process of reading. Behind it all, as the editor notes, is an implicit assumption about the function of literature and the nature of literary value. Revealingly, the editor celebrates the processes that "postmodern critics" use because they "*must* now examine . . . [their] procedures theoretically and always search . . . for new theoretical insights and modes of praxis in a powerful counter-tradition to the humanistic. . . ." But too much thereby becomes linguistic game-playing; too little of the powerful intellect that so obviously goes into theorizing is supplemented by sensitivity to language or to the human beings who use language in order to create art. The lack of sensitivity shows up in the barbarous jargon of the new categories; it implies an odd kind of amorality about the subjects and effects of art as well: justifying the shape of ideas (however styptic) over the nature of judgments and actions. In such an arcane world, literature appears to have no connection with culture, to be born of minds trained in abstract reasoning rather than of people skilled in understanding other people around them. I do not believe it.

One reason for enjoying the *Poems & Sketches of E. B. White* (Beaverbooks, $17.75) is the sheer challenge they offer to the contrivances of theory. White's forte is not opaqueness but simplicity, not the barricaded life of a category but the connected life of the heart. His world is unabashedly American — as is Wallace Stegner's in *One Way to Spell Man* (Doubleday, $19.50) or as Julian Symons's world, revealed in his essay on George Woodcock in *Critical Observations* (Faber, $36.75) is inescapably English — but unlike Stegner (curiously blind in his interpretation of the "provincial" Canadian literary scene), and unlike Symons (whose imperial distaste for America riddles his paragraphs), White manages both to observe his culture and to transcend it: reaching for a common humanity, reaching to express the kinds of frailty and love which still stir at the centre of those literary works we are moved to reread.

Recent reprints include revised versions of Ralph Gustafson's *Gradations of Grandeur* (Sono Nis, $5.95) and J. G. MacGregor's *A History of Alberta* (Hurtig, $15.95). An excellent new anthology, with an historical introduction and a useful appendix correlating literary and political events in Quebec, is edited by Laurent Mailhot and Pierre Nepveu: *La Poésie québécoise des origines à nos jours* (Les Presses de l'Université du Québec, n.p.). One final note: Quinze has published Atwood's *Life Before Man* as *La Vie Avant l'Homme* ($12.95) "par Marianne Véron," we are advised, "traduit de l'américain."

W.N.

# LAST PAGE

IT IS A PLEASURE to draw attention to four publishers' important paperback series — the African Writers Series, from Heinemann Educational (available in Canada from The Book Society); the publications of Penguin Australia and Penguin New Zealand (available by direct order only, because Penguin Canada does not distribute them); the Portable Australian Authors series from the University of Queensland Press, which with John Barnes's recent *Joseph Furphy*, provides a splendidly thorough sampling of this early twentieth-century nationalist writer's novels, minor fiction, verse, letters, and journalism, all with an able introduction and helpful notes — and hence a model

that Canadian publishers might usefully consider; and the Longman series of African and Caribbean writers (available from Academic Press). Among several new books in the last of these are three early works by Sam Selvon, who has in recent years emigrated from Trinidad to Canada. *The Lonely Londoners* and *A Brighter Sun* are novels, respectively about immigrant experience and colonial coming-of-age. "One grim winter evening," opens the former, "when it had a kind of unrealness about London" — and we are at once in the company of a talented wordsmith, a writer who can orchestrate sound: not only to reconstruct dialect origins but also to capture in print the tonal modulations that convey his characters' uncertain wandering through their lives. Selvon's delightful book of short stories, *Ways of Sunlight*, also appears in this series; in nineteen sketches of characters named Johnson, Franklin, Enrique, Romesh, Mangohead, Teena, and Razor Blade, Selvon shapes more than merely a world on the periphery of orderliness: it teems at once with cosmic vitality and with the tensions between desire and circumstance that rake the lives of the Third World people he portrays.

Other volumes in the Longman series — all African, like Isidore Okpewho's *The Last Duty*, which explores the impact of the Nigerian civil war — more directly (and conventionally) portray the violent realities of racial and civil conflict. *Jazz and Palm Wine*, edited by Willfried Feuser, is a representative anthology of French African short stories in translation, varying from folk tale to science fiction. But none reveals the civil tensions more clearly than the works of James Ngugi in the African Writer Series, chief of which are the English text of a Kikuyu play for which he was imprisoned — *I Will Marry When I Want* — and *Detained*, his account of his prison experiences. With a deliberate calm, the latter tells a quite horrifying tale of deprivations both petty and great, and of the cumulative pressure that mounts when any system denies an individual access to information and the opportunity to communicate. It reminds us, too, of the tenuous hold that most people have on peace, order, and liberty.

In the Penguin volumes, the tensions are more internalized, and though desperate in other ways, often more open to comic irony. The three separately published volumes of the late Frank Sargeson's autobiography are collected as *Sargeson*; the volume tells not only of the literary life of New Zealand's most central writer since Katherine Mansfield, but also of his times. We are given a narrative portrait of a New Zealand that Sargeson in his way created, for he did alter the map of New Zealand prose, turning from rural realism to the sort of solemn bizarre comedy of a novel like R. H. Morrieson's *The Scarecrow*. Lovers of George Walker will understand Morrieson at once: he uses verbal cliché against social cliché, claiming the freedom of the imagination as a force with which to challenge the failure of imagination in a world that equates security with convention.

W.N.

# ARIEL

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EDITOR: IAN ADAM

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