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ON DENNIS LEE

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editorial

THE FLOWERS THAT BLOOM IN L.A.

THE RECENT REPORT THAT there are now several hundred thousand Canadians living in Los Angeles, making it one of Canada's largest cities, is instructive on several counts. It testifies yet again to Social Mobility In Our Time; it says something about at least one dimension of Canadian taste; it is an implicit comment on our cultural flight from winter, echoed annually in Miami, Bridgetown, and Honolulu; and it hints at the slow Canadianization of the American media, which just may or may not be an illusion. That American cliché, the Great White North, was amply gored by the Canadian ironies of "Bob and Doug MacKenzie" — and one could tell they were Canadian ironies because they were self-reflexive, too, puncturing the defensive pompousness that the notion of the Great White North sometimes engenders in the Great Canadian soul. Totting up a list of Great Canadians in the American media has long been a cultural pastime, of course: from Mary Pickford to Donald Sutherland to SCTV and the writers for assorted films and comedy programmes (*Silver Streak*, Rosie Shuster), Canadians have managed somehow to affect the speech on centre stage even if they don't always occupy centre stage themselves. As various Royal Commissions have been told, these successes in the States (always we must pause to ask ourselves if we consider them successes *because* they take place in the States) tell of more than individual talent: they tell of the excellent training — and the limit on recognition — which the CBC and Canadian theatre experience have long been providing writers and actors.

But of course training and experience and even talent are not enough all by themselves. There are dangers of self-satisfaction in art as in any other human endeavour. We remind ourselves frequently of the dangers of a "recognition" that comes "too early," and of the problems that derive from reviewing each others' books. We insist, too — and rightly — not on the need to preserve a fixed Canadian culture but on the need to preserve the opportunity to express ourselves individually, thereby to give voice to the dynamics of the culture we have in common, and on the need to guarantee Canadian artists access to the Canadian

market. Such needs, given the international dynamics of marketing — which would minimize choice to maximize profit — require protective legislation of various kinds: guarantees of cultural opportunity to those Canadians who possess a cultural talent. But there's the catch. A cultural policy has to support and encourage quality, not guarantee support to mediocrity. And there is a point at which mechanical protectionism encourages mediocrity, for it erects barriers against stimulus rather than against takeover. Ideas cross borders; so does talent; so does imagination. And all can cross borders creatively — not to become impositions on the culture to which they travel, but to be absorbed and reanimated in the flux of the new.

Collaborating with L.A. — or New York or Miami — is of course no more a guarantee of quality than refusing to collaborate with L.A. The fact of working together is not the issue; access to creative stimulus is, and a sensible culture gives its artists the opportunity to express themselves partly by not imposing on their freedom of access to ideas and opportunities. Some of these ideas and opportunities do involve working together — actors and writers, for example, can learn from each other, from the stimulus of talent meeting talent. It is through such creative collisions, whether international or intranational, that cultures prosper. And there is a degree to which Canadians, who are perfectly capable of recognizing quality, have still to learn to welcome its presence among us, wherever it comes from. It's always possible the source might not be L.A.

Sometimes, moreover, the mere fact of coming from outside provides an extremely healthy degree of distance towards a cultural pretension; sometimes the Great White North needs to be satirized. And it certainly needs to be satirized more from within. We have able political cartoonists. And we have John Metcalf, whose devastating send-ups are too often taken for put-downs, too seldom recognized as the earnest, impatient side of a desire for Canadian culture to estimate accurately the qualities it possesses and the talents it has managed to foster. But of satirists in words there are too few; of distance towards ourselves we have too little; of distance between us, too much. Which is another reason that creativity in the various public media becomes yet again so important to us.

This is one of the reasons that of all new television programmes of recent months I so value that collaborative venture between the Muppets and Dennis Lee, *Fraggle Rock*. It is not just that the athletic versatility of the puppets and the joyful inventiveness of Lee's lyrics make good theatre; they are inventive for children and adults alike. And cautionary. Every week telling tales of the "fraggles" who live behind warehouse baseboards, the programme offers us a satiric glimpse of others and a creative distance from ourselves. In one early episode, the central characters, in the depths of depression, seek advice from the local oracle, an animate gypsy trash-heap named Margerie. Rising to her full height, Delphic, but

replete with banana skins, she intones: "For lonely, you need friends" — and the two brash rats that feed upon her presence pronounce in unequivocal conclusion, "The trash heap has spoken." We might remember that, when next our politicians speak. And it's advice to which even editorial writers have to listen. The trick is to choose one's prophetess clearly, to tell the difference between Margerie and Cassandra.

W.N.

THE BALLAD OF THE HELL-HOUND

George Faludy

translated by Arthur Koestler

It happened last night. Some months ago
the hell-hounds arrived: six monstrous beasts
with a sergeant of the Secret Police. We couldn't
care less. What were to us these creatures

amidst the camp's familiar features:
watchtowers, pistols, barbed wire,
machine guns and flame-throwers to boot?
I can assure you we did not care a bit.

The cops selected some of our mates
to impersonate the quarry, while they taught the hounds
how to behave should any of the convicts
entertain the notion of making for the gates.

"Hold the thief," they screamed and broke into a run
in hot pursuit of the half-crazed fugitive.
On reaching him they pulled in the dog's leash
or else they didn't. On some nights I woke

on the rotting straw that was my nest
to the sound of baying when they changed the guards.
I learnt to shrug it off, like the rest.
It surprised me nevertheless

that our guards were just as merciless
in treating their savage allies to whip and belly-kick

as they were to us. Or to the squirrels
they killed with stones, or to the salamander whose

graceful legs they chopped off with an ax.
I marvelled at the care they took to spot
far off the road, and squash under their heels,
a single, faintly blue forget-me-not.

When I was free, I liked all sorts of dogs,
they liked me too. But here these hulking brutes
filled me with dread. Especially one,
a milk-white bitch with a calf-like head.

She terrified me. Whenever I worked in the camp
she would flop down to keep me company,
watching me sideways out of blood-shot eyes —
staring at me steadily.

"Stop staring, bloodthirsty beast," I prayed.
"I stink and my legs are like sticks,
a fat lot of good it'll do you
to feast on a scare-crow for kicks.

My thighs are those of a skeleton,
my buttocks of all meat bereft,
moreover, I told you I am innocent,
a loyal man of the Left,

like most of the blokes in this camp.
Enough! I've had my share!
Stop goggling at me, disgusting brute!"
But she continued to stare.

* * *

Last night, while dreaming, I heard them bark
savagely in front of our hut,
the watchman removed the iron bolts,
I was awake, though my eyes were shut.

He called out a name: to be taken
for interrogation. Drugged by sleepiness
a man becomes docile. This is the time of night
to break him and make him confess

to his part in a fascist plot
the Police Chief dreamt up as a pretext
to have his deputy chief shot
— unaware that his turn would be next.

The gale raged through the open door,
the hut was nearly torn apart,
and suddenly that milk-white bitch
was sharing my bunk, heart to heart,

and perfectly still. Only her tongue
was busily licking my cheek, while I
embraced the brute and whispered to it
a silent lullaby.

The watchman became curious
where did the creatures hide?
A mocking voice informed him:
— They've changed to our side.

We roared with mirth. Across the aisle
a dark behemoth of a cur
was squatting 'twixt Zoltan and Arpad, my pals,
four hands were stroking its fur.

Water is plentiful, but how shall I feed her,
these hounds are not easy to keep —
I mused as, her head on my aching chest,
we both fell asleep.

* * *

Throughout the long day the miners' brigade
was working in the quarry. When we got back
into the camp the sun was already setting
behind the mountain. But there was no petting

of dogs. Five of them were lying
on the slope in their frozen blood,
only the white one was still trying
to stay alive. On three legs she staggered

slowly, in circles, along the barbed wire,
her head hung low,
her coat no longer shining,
bespattered with blood and mire.

From time to time she stopped for a moment
uncertainly, not knowing what next.
She raised her head and gave out a long howl
directed at the police barracks. A foul

coward I: just a hundred steps between us —
but watchtowers have eyes. A foam of blood and air
broke from the flank of the white bitch
where the bullet had hit her. They'd do the same to me,

and bury me with quicklime in a ditch.
So I just stood there. What else could be done?
I sighed: woe to thee, poor country,
and watched the setting sun.

* * *

Once more I lie on the rotting straw,
my hands lying beside me
like parched leaves fallen from a tree.
A bat sits on my knee.

The wound is inflamed. I fight for breath,
blood oozes from my flank.
I know it is only imagined.
I shall imagine it unto my death.

Red Camp, Hungary, 1951

THE DANCER

George Faludy

translated by Eric Johnson

Vain, bold, wild and warmed by wool,
steel-cable muscles, satin skin,
I make no sound with throat or lips:
in *ronds de jambe en l'air* I laugh,
words issue from my fingertips,
manifestoes from my nod,
and from my eyes a laser beam
shoots down to cut a heart in half.

Levitation is my whim,
my vertebrae are gyroscopes,
and when I turn or jump or leap
I smile at Newton on the ground;
my thighs do beats like *casse-noisettes*,
my arms are branches in the wind,
my legs precision compasses.
Snow-flowers hover at my nape,
and in the closed eyes of my navel
a thousand boys and girls are drowned.

Mother-naked is my body,
nudeness pushing through the silk,
for when I dress, in truth I strip
down to the essence that I am:
a Form on which is pinned a heart.
I'm the scene you've paid to see,
both the actor and the play;
I am the sculptor and the stone,
a statue, I, of flesh and bone.
Not just the artist, I'm the art.

Intrigue cannot touch me here
where nothing in the world attracts:
eyes that burn with hot desire,
money, things that money buys.
Sometimes forgetting, though, the dance
I let my body sprawl in lust —
then ask myself: Narcissus, fool,
why squander all your force on sex?
Look in the mirror as you dance
and know where real pleasure lies!

The house-lights dim, the world is black,
a deep Gehenna, silent till
I /a hand-grenade/ explode; or
perhaps just float out from the wings
and blossom slowly on my stem.
Lightning feet and flashing hair I fly:
a comet's tail against the night,
pause, preparation, pirouette:
I spin, and dazzled mortals stare
to count the facets of the gem.

Every day I'm something other
than I was. I cannot stop.
Whole galleries of statues wait
to breathe through me, to know the strife
of flesh with gravity and air.
They take their blood, their style from me
and metamorphose note by note,
inhabited and brought to life.
Could marble dance if I weren't there?

What will happen to them, to me
for whom the dance is everything:
my days, my nights, my mania,
love, salvation, endless goal?
For in my very dreams I dance,
trusting even there in strength.
What will happen on the day
that retribution comes to one
who has a body for a soul?

Fifteen, ten, perhaps five years,
and strings of muscle come untuned,
no one there to put them right.
The body that was all my wealth
will let me down: death will smile contempt,
loathing gallop at my side.
There'll be no peace with others then,
no treaties with myself.

LEE'S "CIVIL ELEGIES"

in relation to Grant's "Lament for a Nation"

R. D. MacDonald

IN HIS ESSAY, "Cadence, Country, Silence: Writing in Colonial Space," Dennis Lee describes the psychological and political sources of his poetry. Listening to a busy inner voice which he names "cadence," Lee apparently makes out a path of meaning and appropriates a language suitable to the expression of this inner voice and meaning. However remote or obscure "cadence" may sound, Lee argues that it is encountered only through the immediate particulars of one's own civil space, and he argues that the loss of these distinct particulars through the Americanization of Canada in the 1960's has meant the loss of both cadence and its language of expression. Thus Lee links his own reported sense of inauthenticity, his own lapse into anxious silence, to the fate of a whole nation transformed into a colony by the American mass media:

> Canadians were by definition people who looked over the fence and through the windows at America, unselfconsciously learning from its movies, comics, magazines and TV shows how to go about being alive. The disdainful amusement that I and thousands like me felt for Canadian achievement in any field, especially those of the imagination was a direct reflection of our self-hatred and sense of inferiority.[1]

Did Canadians loath themselves? Is American pop-culture the source of Canadian self-loathing and dispossession? Or could it be that Torontonians like Lee uncritically absorbed the metropolitan or imperial viewpoint of New York and Washington only to realize to their chagrin that Toronto (like the remainder of Canada) is also a colonial hinterland? Whatever the truth of the matter, having apparently seen through "our" Americanized perspective, Lee now takes on the satiric stance, the guise of the naïve ironist supposedly unaware of a Canadian tradition distinct from that of the United States:

> We kept up with *Paris Review* and *Partisan*, shook *our* heads over how Senator McCarthy had perverted the traditions of *our* country; in some cases we went down to Selma or Washington to confront *our* power structure, and in all cases we agreed that the greatest blot on *our* racial history was the way *we* had treated negroes. [italics mine]

Lee attributes his political awakening and satiric style to the philosopher George Grant, who argued in *Lament for a Nation* that Canada ceased to exist as a nation

in the mid-twentieth century. Lee's use of "our" and "we," his ironic identification of Americans and Canadians, works from Grant's notion of American culture homogenizing Canadian culture and is similar to Grant's ironic torpedoing of unexamined values, especially Grant's strategy of comparing Canada present unfavourably to Canada past and then revealing that Canada past (the British Conservative tradition) had already passed away *before* Canada's beginnings: as Lee himself says, "This under-cutting of a past he [Grant] would like to make exemplary is a characteristic moment in Grant's thought, and it reveals the central strength and contradiction in his work. He withdraws from the contemporary world, and judges it with passionate lucidity, by standing on a 'fixed point' which he then reveals to be no longer there." While this is a strategy that Lee himself had adopted earlier in "Civil Elegies," Lee differs from Grant because at this earlier stage he defines Canadians only in terms of Americans and shows less compassion that does George Grant for both the American and the Canadian and shows little love of the past itself. In "Cadence, Country, Silence" (published two years after "Civil Elegies"), Lee now shows, however, a fuller understanding of how to Grant the loyalists and Canadians differed from the Americans. British North Americans believed that man lived within limits; Americans believed in man's unlimited freedom:

> in refusing the American dream, our loyalist forebears (the British Americans who came north after 1776) were groping to reaffirm a classical European tradition, one which embodies a very different sense of public space. By contrast with the liberal assumptions that gave birth to the United States, it taught that reverence for what is subject to sterner civil necessities than liberty or the pursuit of happiness — that they must respond, as best they can, to the demands of the good. And that men's presence here is capable of an organic continuity which cannot be ruptured except at the risk of making their condition worse — that any such change should be taken with fear and trembling. (Grant would not claim that all Hellenic or Christian societies used to live by these ideals, only that they understood themselves to be acting well or badly in their light.) And while our ancestors were often mediocre or muddling, convictions like these demonstrably did underlie many of their attitudes of law, the land, indigenous peoples and Europe.

Lee's summary does not seem to set any distance between himself and Grant, and indeed like many others of his generation, Lee has been amazed and then thankful to find his own faint premonitions spoken aloud by Grant:

> To find one's tongue-tied sense of civil loss and bafflement given words at last, to hear one's own most inarticulate hunches out loud, because most immediate in the bloodstream — and not prettied up, and in prose like a fastidious groundswell — was to stand erect in one's own space. I do not expect to spend the rest of my life in agreeing with George Grant. But in my experience at least, the sombre Canadian has enabled us to say for the first time where we are, who we are — to become articulate.

To examine "Civil Elegies" is to find that indeed Lee has incorporated many of Grant's themes and catch phrases into the tissue of his poetry. Here as in Grant: the nineteenth-century American hope of manifest-destiny is transformed into the twentieth-century Canadian fear of "continentalism"; the Americanization of Canada becomes the "homogenization" of what could have been a distinct identity; the exploitation of Canada's natural resources by Americans becomes a "sell out," the selling of a "birth right"; the recovery of any central authority or good is assumed to begin from the immediate particulars of our existence. Finally, Lee seems to pick up Grant's set of contradictory feelings, anger and yet resignation towards the departure of the potential good that was Canada.

Grant's "lament" and Lee's "elegies," however, express very different meanings and faiths. Unlike the *Lament for a Nation,* "Civil Elegies" does not conclude with a celebration of a departed or distant good; Lee does not in his dismay turn from the dubious authority of reason to the accumulated wisdom of tradition; he turns instead to the promise of the here and now and future of the human city "in the early years of a better civilization,"[2] the natural and human world which is our only genesis and home, our only starting point to a better world.

This faith in the future is highlighted by the unusual nature of the last six lines of "Civil Elegies": the short three-stress and four-stress lines and the plain, imperative tone embody the stripping of experience to the barest bones of the particular and the barest bones of wish or prayer. Lee's last verse recalls the earlier refrain of "letting be," that is allowing another to be himself, not loosely condoning but actively "allow[ing]" (or fostering) another's goodness. The final lines then comprise a laconic prayer that our natural and human matrix —the "green" and the "grey" — permit us another beginning:

> Earth, you nearest, allow me.
> Green of the earth and civil grey:
> within me, without me and moment by
> moment allow me for to
> be here is enough and earth you
> strangest, you nearest, be home.

While Grant's *Lament for a Nation* turns finally in a spirit of reconciliation to a distant and shadowy God, the God of eternal order, Lee's turns finally to the god or power of green earth, that "nearest" and "strangest" of our daily existence. The new good will begin, if at all, from the grainy texture of the near — the mixed matrix of the human and natural world. Not only is the form of their language different (Lee working in the long, and loose-limbed tradition of elegaic verse, Grant in the academic prose of the political philosopher), not only are their Gods different (Lee's close and Grant's remote), but their attitudes toward and their accounts of Canada's history, the failure of a colonial people to achieve an independent nation of their own, are also quite different: Grant emphasizes our fail-

ure to perpetuate what was good in our heritage while Lee, the modern liberal, makes much of becoming "our own," achieving independence from an out-moded past. While Grant recognizes that English Canadians are seen to be indeed a "dull and costive lot"[3] (especially when compared to their more dynamic neighbours to the south), he argues that British North America (and the unbroken Europeanness of Canada) exemplified a real alternative to the dynamic and revolutionary republican experiment of the United States: though the authority of the British and European heritage had been challenged and weakened by the New Learning of the Renaissance and though the conservative centre of British society had already been eroded by the very fact of colonial expansion, nevertheless there remained a faith that a British North America could be built in the new world, that the new could be made continuous with the past.[4] While in all this, Grant holds dear the humaneness and the wisdom of our predecessors, Dennis Lee does not show the same loving attachment to the past. Indeed Lee's poems continually question the nature of love or insist upon bringing airy notions of love down to earth: love of one's own self and friends (see especially "The Death of Harold Ladoo" in *The Gods*); love of one's spouse or generation (see poem 7 of "Civil Elegies"); love of one's past or patria (see poem 1 of "Civil Elegies"); and love of the ancient Gods (see "The Gods"). Lee's Gods (or, their absence) and Lee's past (or its absence) will certainly seem familiar to the reader of Grant's *Philosophy in the Mass Age*. To Grant, the men of antiquity did not "see themselves as making events but as living out established patterns."[5] To Grant, man achieved his sense of freedom and well being "only so far as he cease[d] to be himself, and imitated and repeated the eternal archetypal gestures of the divine such as the creation of the world and the bringing forth of life." Against this ancient view, Grant places the modern humanist view, a view which I find all too close to that of the mid-twentieth-century Dennis Lee:

> Man makes the world and there is no overall system which determines what he makes. To act is to choose what kind of a world we want to make. In our acts we show what things we regard as valuable. We create value, we do not participate in a value already given. We make what order there is; we are not made by it. In this sense we are our own. We are independent. We are not bound by any dependence on anything more powerful than ourselves. We are authentically free because what happens in the world depends upon us, not on some providence beyond our control. The fate of man is in his hands.

As one discovers from the same book (and from *Technology and Empire*), the vast spaces of North America, the intense energy, will, and resourcefulness required of the new settlers by the new land, the removed or hidden God of the American Puritans which paradoxically led the Puritans to seek *any* proof of their election including the "proof" of earthly success — these conditions led Americans to an "exaltation of action over truth and thought" and to the pragmatic phil-

osophy of a William James who took the expedient, the profitable or workable to be the test of truth. Grant makes James into a caricature of the modern American humanist and technocrat by singling out this optimistic declaration of James: "The world stands ready, malleable, waiting to receive the final touches of our hands."

Against this background, Lee's optimism could be seen as an extension of the William James of George Grant. Lee's "wisdom" arises from disenchantment with false hopes, the sense of having been deceived by the gods, the demonic forces, the treacherous passions which have blasted the hopes of his generation. His "stand" or "measure," however, is really little more than the discovery that our earlier beliefs have not worked; therefore there must be something else:

> But to live with a measure, resisting their terrible inroads;
> I hope this is enough.
> And to let the beings be.
> And also to honour the gods in their former selves,
> albeit obscurely at a distance, unable
> to speak the older tongue, and to wait
> till their fury is spent and they call on us again
> for passionate awe in our lives, a high clean style.[6]

When Grant uses the term "measure," he implies more than a vague hope: he repeatedly refers to an eternal order not subject to man's tinkering, an order to which we are subject. Lee's "measure" is little more than the quiescent expectation that if we "let . . . be," our furies may run their natural course (i.e., achieve a purgation), which in turn may permit the restoration of "passionate awe" and a "high clean style." Unfortunately, "Civil Elegies," "The Death of Harold Ladoo," and "The Gods" show a dialectical scepticism with little sign of "awe" or a high clean style."

Grant, however, bases his hope upon something substantial. He shows an appreciation of our pioneer heritage, the pioneers' difficult or heroic battle to make a new life for themselves. He shows a respect for the hard discipline of mind and body to ensure their survival, and an understanding of the "worldly asceticism" which has been created in North America by "the meeting of the alien and yet conquerable land with English speaking Protestants."[7] Yet like Susanna Moodie in *Roughing it in the Bush*, Grant recognized the costs and dangers of making a life in the new world: "To know that parents had to force the instinct of their children to the service of pioneering control; to have seen the pained and unrelenting faces of the women; to know, even in one's flesh and dreams, the results of generations of the mechanizing of the body; to see all around one the excesses and follies now necessary to people who can win back the body only through sexuality, must not be to forget what was necessary and what was heroic in that conquest." Lee's attack upon the excesses of his own generation, however, seems

to have emerged almost entirely from his having lived through those passionate excesses of the present; Lee shows little historical sense, a sense which might have resulted in regret for the passing of an earlier way of life that had been good. Again in Lee there is nothing like Grant's sympathetic characterization of John Diefenbaker as a representative figure of courage and integrity, a tragic hero who, despite his fight against the demise of Canada, contributed to the fall or destruction of the nation. And Lee does not even begin to consider, as does Grant, how Canada became a nation distinct from any other. Grant writes of Canada:

> It was an inchoate desire to build, in these cold and forbidding regions, a society with a greater sense of order and restraint than the freedom-loving republicans would allow. It was no better defined than a kind of suspicion that we in Canada could be less lawless and have a greater sense of propriety than the United States. English speaking Canadians have been called a dull and costive lot. In these dynamic days, such qualities are particularly unattractive to the chic.
>
> Yet our stodginess has made us a society of greater simplicity, formality, and perhaps even innocence than the people to the south.
>
> (*Lament for a Nation*, p. 70)

In "The Death of Harold Ladoo," something of this stodginess, this unheroic reserve is attributed to Dennis Lee himself, the admiring "Wasp kid" from the suburbs, who as it turns out, however, is a cannibal (though a quiet one) like everyone else (pp. 46-47). In "Civil Elegies," these dubious traits are attributed to the Canadian politicians, the "honourable quislings," the Paul Martins who helped to further the American empire and Vietnamese war (pp. 47-48). Lee's undercutting of the virtues of the compliant or quiescent way undermines finally the call for quiet decency which he presents at the conclusion of both "Harold Ladoo" and "Civil Elegies." One is left asking: if the quiet Canadian is the source of our failure to be, is Lee's own quietness any more legitimate? Is the quietness of conclusion merely a strategy dictated by the imperatives of the elegaic convention? If so, why has not Lee avoided this disease of "style" when elsewhere he has been so self-conscious and doubting of the deceptions or distortions of literary style?

To answer these questions one must look more closely at the relation between "Civil Elegies" (1972) and "The Death of Harold Ladoo" (1979). Before that, however, I must concede that even as Lee describes the "whole chaotic gospel" ("Civil Elegies," p. 47), "the adrenalin highs" (p. 48), the romantic passion of his generation, he notes that what was really true was their quiet loving: men and women who "handled each other gently" ("Ladoo," p. 48); beneath the rage to write and the colossal egotism, "a deep tough caring" (p. 48); beyond "the very act of words . . . the plain gestures of being human

together" (pp. 48-49). Here as elsewhere, Lee in retrospect subordinates literature to life, but his declaration that there was a quiet loving centre to their creative fury is not borne out by his main account of their past. Certainly Ladoo's monomaniacal drive suggests nothing of this loving calm. And Lee's own words as they swing self-consciously from celebrations of the supposed absolute to negations of those less-than-absolutes, suggest the careening course, the oversteering and overcorrecting manoeuvres of a drunken driver. It seems to me that as Lee pauses in midcourse, in his excoriation of his group as "god's hit men," cultural revolutionaries who were not in control of even their own lives, he also begins to negate the small hope, the "civil words" of "The Death of Harold Ladoo," and the "earth you nearest and dearest" of "Civil Elegies" as the starting points of a new life. In "The Death of Harold Ladoo," he speaks "civil" (public or civilized) words from a mere "private space," caught once again by "salvations" that turn "demonic" — "for [each salvation] too gets cherished as absolute":

> Even that glorious dream
> of opening space to be in, of saying
> the real words of that space —
> that too was false, for we cannot
> idolize a thing without it going infernal. . . .

These words refer (surely?) to his earlier poem "Civil Elegies," and they undercut the hopeful conclusion of "Civil Elegies," hope for the "early years of a better civilization," the hope for "new nouns" to replace the withdrawal of our "most precious Words," and the modest hope of honed-down prayer that the "nearest," the "green of the earth and civil grey" be "home." From the vantage point of seven years ("Elegies" [1972] — "Ladoo" [1979]), even that modest hope now seems extravagant and the "quietist fadeout" all too possible ("Ladoo," p. 57). The escape from the dilemma of neither indifference or mad commitment apparently lies in the realization that "Everything matters and / nothing matters. It is harder to live by that on earth and stubborn than to / rise full-fledged and abstract, / and snag apocalypse" ("Ladoo," p. 47). The obvious weakness of "Civil Elegies," however, lies in Lee's tendency to overstatement ("rising full-fledged and abstract") which necessitates correction, but the main source of this unevenness would then seem to reside in Lee's ahistorical understanding and hence his comic-strip presentation of Canada's formation and development.[8]

Poem 1 of "Civil Elegies" takes place in the April morning sun, a time of beginnings; but resting in the city square and "brooding over the city," the speaker is oppressed by the unredeemed, squat existence permitted by the city: it is a place of "gutted intentions," a claustrophobic space in which the past is experienced merely as an oppressive, dead weight; the symbol of the "unlived life" of the past and present are the furies or spectres, the surviving vestiges of

lives never fully lived. Showing the unreality of those lives, he "casts back" and presents a comic caricature of the Rebellion of 1837. The cause of the rebellion is simply the patricians who made "their compact against the gangs of the new." The act of rebellion itself becomes "regeneration twirl[ing] its blood" and the outcome, a silly farce:

> Eight hundred-odd steely Canadians turned tail at the cabbage patch when a couple of bullets fizzed and the loyalists scared skinny by the sound of their gunfire, gawked and bolted south to the fort like rabbits, the rebels for the most part bolting north to the pub: the first spontaneous mutual retreat in the history of warfare. Canadians in flight.

The past (our forebears) becomes a "dead weight" oppressing our lives in the present: "the dead persist in / buildings, bylaws, porticoes — the city I live in / is clogged with their presence." The excuse that our ancestors, if not heroic, were at least good men is answered by, "good men do not matter to history"; moreover the "good men" were merely quislings involved in the forceful, criminal and imperial actions of the American nation. Against this past, in the city he "longs for," men "would complete their origins"; they would discover and take possession of their origins, achieve a genuine presence by turning against the modern and American empire:

> And the people accept a flawed inheritance
> and they give it a place in their midst, forfeiting progress, forfeiting dollars, forfeiting Yankee visions of cities that in time it might grow whole at last in their forebears, becoming their own men.

This is the hopeful dream. The nightmare is the unlived and unloved past, the "acquiescent spectres" who "gawk and slump and retreat" and who block the life-giving rays of the springtime sun.

While it is all too easy for a Canadian to fall into line with these "patriotic" sentiments, the poem and the feelings are badly muddled. If our "forebears" were as cowardly and comical as Lee's heroes of 1837 and if our heritage were merely a weight deadening our life, how could we "*accept* this flawed inheritance" and how could we "belong once more to (our) forebears" by "becoming (our) own men"? Lee shows no redeeming virtues in our forebears and shows no generous sympathy for their insufficiencies.

Instead then of coming to sympathetic terms with the human background, Lee in his utopian vision of Canadians coming into "their own" turns to the physical background — the natural or geographical milieu, the hinterland — of the metropolitan present; but this route to becoming "our own men" is also unconvincing and contradictory though it works in a familiar way from the pastoral naturalism of Sir Charles G. D. Roberts, E. J. Pratt, A. J. M. Smith, and the Group of Seven, and from the nineteenth-century romanticism of Wordsworth who suggests,

too, that man cannot live his cities until he has lived the countryside. Any Canadian reader is likely to be enthralled by childhood-summer-vacation memories recreated as follows:

> to live
> the land, our own harsh country, beloved the prairie the foothills —
> and for me it is awakened by the rapids by stream-fed lake, threading
> north through the terminal vistas of black spruce, in a
> bitter cherished land it is farm after
> farm in the waste of the continental outcrop —
> for me it is Shield but whatever terrain informs our lives and
> claims us.

Here Lee substitutes the natural world for the human world, geology or geography for history or tradition. But again he is unconvincing in offering this source of "regeneration" because he does not adequately face what it has meant to live the Shield, what has indeed been the historical necessity, the economic and human necessities which have been part of that experience of the Shield.

While Poem 3 is a capsule history of man on the Shield, it is little more than a recycling of the polemical slogans of Canadian nationalists: until we own our means of production, we shall remain the slaves of the foreign or multinational (i.e., American) corporation. What the slogan overlooks is the older Canadian recognition (expressed in T. C. Haliburton, Susanna Moodie, Sara Jeannette Duncan, Stephen Leacock, and Hugh MacLennan) that the Americans have taken possession of our economy because they have been a more dynamic, entrepreneurial people than Canadians. Moreover, Lee seems to overlook the "virtues" of a more cautious, orderly, and conservative people — virtues suitable to a northern geography which permits only a small margin of success and safety. He does show the "barren Shield" breaking the settlers and "towing them deeper and deeper each year." He does recognize a "despotic land" where father "reaped stone" and sons gave way to drunkenness and passivity. And he does effectively foreshorten our economic history from that period of agricultural failure to the modern technological age where the sons of the pioneers (their birthright sold out, their mines owned abroad, their ores refined abroad) stare helplessly after their future:

> now what
> races toward us on asphalt across the Shield —
> is torn from the land and the mute oblivion of
> all those fruitless lives, it no longer
> stays for us, immemorial adversary, but is shipped and
> divvied abroad though wrestled whole from the Shield.

But what would Lee have: pioneers still attempting to eke out a pastoral existence on glacial till? And in a mining economy would the Shield be any less "imme-

morial adversary," any less exploited or alien for our owning our own means of production and for our refining and recombining the elements of the Shield at home rather than abroad? To quibble further with Lee's economic history: is not much of the smelting and refining now done in Canada? How else do we account for the moonscape of a Sudbury? Lee's romantic and literary nationalism does not confront the complexities and consequences of our own industrial society in large part precisely because the "enemy" is assumed to be foreign, or multinational or American. And what, by the way, is a "TV mind"? Is it any more than the quick-draw epithet of a "literary mind"? Facile sloganeering of this kind again prevents one from coming to terms with or rebelling against a technological society.

Yet in Poem 3, Lee does attempt to show how a more dynamic spirit might be achieved; he holds up a "radiant" life against the "unlived lives" of Poem 1, and attempts an answer to the prayer of Poem 2 which asks how we are to make a start in a world where "sometimes a thing rings true" but where that momentary truth fails to hold:

> I know
> the world is not enough; a woman straightens
> and turns from the sink and asks her life the
> question, why should she
> fake it? and after a moment she
> shrugs, and returns to the sink.

Poem 3 answers the sense of void and the difficulty of making a start out of emptiness, but the answers prove insufficient. The longing for a more than nominal or symbolic reality — "Master and Lord, there was a / measure once. / There was time when men could say / my life, my job, my home / and still feel clean. / The poets spoke of earth and heaven. There were no symbols" — is answered through the primitivist works/symbols of Henry Moore and Tom Thomson. Both work within or out of naturalistic forces, which in turn work upward and outward from a dark, uncontrollable primal: "Great art" then is in the service of something much larger than the merely made-up or individual and is "less than the necessity which gave rise to it":

> when the monumental space of the square
> went slack, it (the statue) moved in sterner space.
> Was shaped by earlier space and it ripples with
> wrenched stress, the bronze is flexed by
> blind aeonic throes
> that bred and met in slow enormous impact,
> and they are still at large for the force in the bronze churns
> through it, and lunges beyond and also the Archer declares
> that space is primal, raw, beyond control and drives toward
> living stillness, its own.

In the Moore sculpture, nature, the artist and artifact "complete their origins." Similarly, Tom Thomson's work is shown to complete nature or the Laurentian Shield. But even Thomson's "work in the shield" is not seen to be sufficient for a new beginning. Though from the darkness of the Shield the "radiance of the renewed land broke over [Thomson's] canvas," Thomson or Moore or Christ or any of the other "ignition" points of our past are insufficient precisely because they are of the past, not the present: to become "our own" means making our own beginning. The difficulty at this point, however, is Lee's suggestion that as we are in the void we are incapable of answering to a call from beyond the void:

> Small things ignite us, and the quirky particulars
> flare on all sides.
> A cluster of birches, in moonlight;
> a jackpine gnarled and
> focussing heaven and earth —
> these might fend off the void.
> Or under the poolside arches the sunlight, skidding on
> paper destroyers
> kindles a dazzle, skewing the sense. Like that. Any
> combination of men and time can start the momentary
> ignition. If only it were enough.
> But it is two thousand years since Christ's carcass rode in glory
> and now the shiny ascent is not for us, Thomson is
> done and we cannot
> malinger among the bygone acts of grace. For
> many are called but none are chosen now. . . .

In his opening of Poem 3, instead of providing premature answers to how we are to move beyond "unlived lives" and the "void," instead of now offering a genuine prayer to the absolute Lord and Master, Lee continues to examine or to "honour the void." Poem 3 works from the Old Testament stories of a wayward people who sell their birth right, a people who have violated their "immemorial pacts" with the land by selling it before they lived it, a people who must then suffer the consequences of the violated covenant by "botch[ing]" their cities and filling their city squares with the "artifacts of death" — that is, the Moore statue of the Archer.

A REMINDER OF THE DIRECTION that "Civil Elegies" as a whole is taking: the middle of the long poem (Poems 4 through 7) continues to delineate the course of the void. The last two poems, 8 and 9, move from the state of void or detachment to attachment redefined and to an annunciation of the slippery but "lovely syllables" of the world, "the ache and presence joy of

what is," the world where no thing (not even nothing) holds and the world which thereby demands the human response of "letting be."

Before that, however, let us consider Lee's void — Poems 4 to 7. Poem 4 continues to delineate a fallen world, a wasteland where things hold back or fail to hold fast. Lee's meditation carries with it the dark pessimism of the Old Testament, an Ecclesiastes-like vision of a world where nothing holds or is secure. In the world then where things "hold back" or "hesitate to be" or "will not come real" or will not "hold," Lee asks whether our vocation might be that of void itself. In the first verse paragraph he asks whether we "are not meant to relinquish it all, to begin at last / the one abundant psalm of letting be." A long diverse catalogue of transient things, of things not holding, does suggest that life is a letting go, but also indicates the difficulty of willingly "letting be":

> goodbye the lull of the sun in the square, goodbye and
> goodbye the magisterial life of the mind, in the domination
> of number every
> excellent workaday thing all spirited
> men and women ceaselessly jammed at their breaking
> points goodbye who have such little time on earth and
> constantly fastened
> how should a man stop caring?

The point of the catalogue, however, is not to suggest the difficulty of not caring but to take us through the "rigours of detachment" — "letting it bring us down till every / itch and twitch of attachment loses its purchase" — so that we achieve a state of emptiness, an openness or receptiveness to a new fullness of being. The poem's development seems to conform to the recurring pattern of the Old Testament: having separated ourselves from God, we return to him by means of a remorseful and willing acceptance of the hurtful consequences. Whatever the source of Lee's hope, he abruptly declares that "at last we / find ourselves in the midst of what abounds," and he prophesies: "now they / move at last in the clearness of open space, within the / emptiness they move very cleanly in the vehement enjoyment of their bodies." Out of the anguish of spiritual alienation and the willing sacrifice of all unessential attachments emerges something like an abounding grace.

But once again Lee's argument turns back upon itself: how can this individual salvation be real when the letting go or the "gut[ting]" and "peddl[ing]" of our nation (our collective soul) goes on? He turns then to those who go down in "civil fury" rather than in distant hopes of beatitude — "how should they clutch and fumble after beatitude, crouching for / years till emptiness renews an elm tree." And so though he turns back for the moment to the ascetic Hector de Saint-Denys-Garneau who turned inward to "nothing but desert and void," the final lines of Poem 4 celebrate the bloody fury of the few, a civil fury which will

not forestall the Modern and the American but will at least permit the fullness of "shame abounding," "a few good gestures between the asphalt and the sky," the achievement of a stand that will give a full account of our situation — "Yet still they take the world full force on their ends, leaving the / bloody impress of their bodies faced forward in time and I believe / they will not go under until they have taken the measure of empire."

While Lee has described two alternatives to the Americanization of Canada — (1) the religious alternative of detachment from the world for the achievement of spiritual abundance, (2) the political alternative of protest, facing the world and taking "full measure of empire" — he does not finally suggest what relation (if any) there can be between these two alternatives nor suggest which course is the wiser. As we have seen, the inwardness and passivity of Hector de Saint-Denys-Garneau finally mean spiritual bankruptcy. How then are we to distinguish Lee's hope of a trustful openness to the particulars of the world, the awaiting of a new abundance, of new beginnings — how is this worldly passivity or receptivity superior to Garneau's passive acceptance of the world within? Again, if the political rebel is to take "full measure of empire," what base is he to measure from? Will civil fury itself make for clean or pure or authentic gestures? Will fury itself refine or synthesize an adequate "measure" or understanding of Canada's demise? Are the rebels against the new (like the Tories of 1837) to base their stand and their understanding merely upon fear of the new or upon the wisdom of the past? Both these bases seem unlikely, given Lee's earlier contemptuous presentation of the unlived lives of our Canadian ancestors. I contend then that Lee has not thought through the implications of his liberal/conservative political philosophy.

Poem 5 continues to examine the contraries of the passionate and dispassionate by juxtaposing the civil fury against the indolent reverie of the citizen at ease in the civic square of the noon-day sun. What brings the two separate feelings — the uncaring ease and the indignant concern — together are the children playing in the square unmindful of the spectres overhead, the "fitful" nature of momentary existence, and the civil atrocities committed by imperialistic Americans and compliant, colonial Canadians. The speaker complains ironically of the children awakening the adult from his indolent, uncaring state:

> It would be better maybe if we could stop loving the children
> and their delicate brawls, pelting across the square in tandem, deking
> from cover to cover in raucous celebration and they are never
> winded, bemusing us with the rites of our own
> gone childhood; if only they stopped
> mattering the children.

The ironic signals here are in the "maybe" and again in the "perhaps" of "Perhaps we should bless what doesn't attach us, though I do not know / where we are to find nourishment." While the anaesthetic attractions of the void are enter-

tained, the poem surely presumes the inevitability of human caring, the necessary pain of human caring. And so in the midst of a nightmare vision of "bacterial missiles" released "for the love of mankind" and his sense once again of "acquiescence press[ing] down on us from above," the speaker becomes aware that the children make us aware of our having "no room to be": "It is the children's fault as they swarm for we cannot stop caring." The poem shifts again to a haranguing catalogue of American war crimes — "For a man / who / fries the skin of kids with burning jelly is a / criminal" — and the criminal complicity of Canadians — "And the consenting citizens of a minor and docile colony / are cogs in a useful tool, though in no way / necessary and scarcely criminal at all and their leaders are honorable men, as for example Paul Martin." The criminal act-and-consent refers specifically to American/Canadian collaboration during the Vietnamese war. Lee's metaphor for criminal complicity, the numb indifference of the modern citizen, becomes a German civic square during the holocaust of World War II. His banal language mimics the clichés of modern mass-advertising and the dull, inactive disposition of the modern citizen/consumer:

> In Germany the civic square in many little towns is
> hallowed for people. Laid out just so, with
> flowers and fountains and during the war you could come and
> relax for an hour, catch a parade or
> just get away from the interminable racket of the trains,
> clattering through the
> outskirts with their lousy expendable cargo.
> Little cafes often fronting the square. Beer and a chance to relax
> And except for the children it's peaceful here
> too under the sun's warm sedation.

So once again, brought back to life (almost it seems, despite himself) by the impingements of the children, the speaker again begins a haranguing catalogue of the sellouts of history, the "old story" of "imperial necessity," of the tired and quiet and diplomatic and "honorable" men who helped make the imperial necessities possible.

The conclusion provides a political definition of the void — "And this is void, to participate in an / abomination larger than yourself . . . to fashion / other men's napalm and know it, to be a / Canadian safe in the square and watch the children dance and / dance and smell the lissome burning bodies. . . ." The ambiguous syntax permits the children dancing to be those in the German or Canadian square dancing for joy or those of Vietnam dancing in pain from napalm. The close (perhaps even causal) relation between private pleasure and public pain is caught in the close joining of "dancing" and the "smell of the burnt flesh." Double-dealing hypocrisy is again summed up in Lee's double-edged syntax: "it is the sorry mortal / sellout burning kids by proxy acquiescent / still

though still denying it is merely to be human." The line could mean that our very inability to imagine, or accept or believe the full extent of our cruelty gives proof of our being "merely" (or at the very least) humane. It could also mean that as we refuse to accept that it *is* our human nature to commit such acts, we show ourselves less than "human."

ONE CAN NOW DISCOVER the base from which Lee takes his stand against "imperial necessities," against the "abominations" larger than ourselves, the temptations of indifference. The past merely records past failures but does not provide guidance. The alive present, our children, force upon us concern, duty, a sense of natural justice: the liveliness, joyfulness, and fragile helplessness of the children awaken us to our need to preserve them and our own humanity which starts from these beginnings.

Nevertheless, in Poem 5, though conscience is awakened, the individual will to resist the slide to "barbarian normalcy" remains inactive — "numb in my stance I hear the country pouring on past me gladly on all sides." Consciousness itself, his preoccupation with the precedent of ancient Rome's decline, dislocates his feelings and will and disengages him from the ongoingness of life — "the upshot is not that I am constantly / riddled with agonies / my thing is often worse for I cannot get purchase on life."

Poem 7 brings the experience of the void even more closely home. Just as the child has brought the adult to an awareness of duty but failed to incite him to action, the relationship of lovers again suggests no easy release from the general drift to "barbarian normalcy." Indeed lovers are shown projecting and imposing false roles upon each other and then upon discovery of the falsehood, turning in anger against each other, iconoclasts smashing the false selves. The hope of a new start out of destruction is undercut by Lee's lovers yet again erecting false images which will yet again have to be torn down. Only rarely, he suggests, do the lovers achieve the plain but difficult reality of marriage — "a difficult rhythm together around / their job and the kids, that allows for a tentative joy and often for a grieving together." The iconoclasm of lovers becomes a metaphor of politics — "do we also single out leaders because they will dishonour us, because they will diminish us?" Having chosen leaders who will necessarily enact failure ("bull-dozed by Yankees, menaced by slant-eyed gooks"), the citizen is as unlikely to come to terms with "our claimed selves" or to terms with the "difficult world" as the lover is to achieve "the difficult rhythm" of marriage. Disillusionment, the exposure of falsehood, does not here lead to the restoration or beginning of a genuine private and public life.

Poems 8 and 9, nevertheless, achieve a conclusion of sorts. Having considered

various aspects of the void, Lee returns full circle to the Civic Square "each time there is nothing" and asks again what we can commit ourselves to. The answer, despite the dialectical turns of the poem (especially the attraction of Saint-Denys-Garneau's ascetic detachment), resides in the diverse stir of the mundane world. The opening catalogue of Poem 8, like Whitman's catalogues celebrating the all in the many, presents the various and vital imperatives of here and now:

> catching the news boy's raucous cry of race in the street and the war
> and Confederation going
> smelling the air, the interminable stink of production and
> transport and
> caught once more in the square's great hush with the shopper's,
> hippies,
> brokers, children, old men dozing alone by the pool and waiting,
> feeling the pulse in the bodies jostling past me driving to climax and
> dollars and blood,
> making my cry here quick and obscure among many in transit —
> not as a
> lyric self in the skin but divided, spinning off many selves to attend
> each lethal yen as it passed me — thinking of
> death in the city, of other's and also of my own and of many born
> afterwards,
> I saw that we are to live in the calamitous division of the world
> with singleness of eye and there is
> nothing I would not give to be made whole.

Whereas Whitman exhibits a glutton's delight in the dynamic diversity of life, Lee shows the painfulness of diversity and shows a desire to forsake the "calamitous division of the world" in order "to be made whole." He entertains then the ascetic alternative of Hector de Saint-Denys-Garneau: in him, "the glitter was made single"; he retreated from the nonchalance, the unconscious vitality of his worldly comrades to become the ascetic, aristocratic worshipper, "a man made / empty for love of God, straining to be only / an upright will in the desert, until at last the world's hypnotic / glitter was made single in the grace of annunciation." But once again "the kids" and the vital particularity of the world itself recall the speaker from the ascetic route of Garneau, to the recognition that modern man has lost the "lore of emptiness" and thereby lost the bearings necessary for surviving the "lonely inward procession." This recognition is consistent with Lee's sceptical liberalism, the disillusionment with or casting off of past truths and consistent with his modernist cynicism, his stripping of Garneau's spiritual pretensions to uncover false, ignoble underpinnings of motive: "you Hector / our one patrician maker, mangled spirit, / you went all out for fame and when you knew you would not survive in the world you turned to sainthood." Garneau's "detachment," his inward pilgrimage, becomes no more than the "exquisite pene-

tration" of the self, an onanistic intercourse or preoccupation with the self — "it was the fear of life, the mark of Canada." In the last verse paragraph the speaker warns that "of high detachment there are many counterfeits" and declares that his first obligation is to live in and to construe the world itself:

> And I will not enter the void till I come to myself
> nor silence the world till I have learned its lovely syllables,
> the brimful square and the dusk and the war and the crowds in
> motion at evening, waiting to be construed
> for they are fragile, and the tongue must be sure.

Is it unfair to answer Lee by saying that "Civil Elegies" itself does not sufficiently attend to the "lovely syllables of the world" and that he does not show a "sure[ness]" of tongue that might make one believe that he has honestly encountered the basics of the human and natural worlds? As I find Lee's stance in "Civil Elegies" to be carping and unsympathetic, I see little evident hope of his coming to loving terms with any lovely or benign basis of life.

The last poem of "Civil Elegies," however, promises reconciliation with the less-than-perfect world. It is not a world remade into the remote forms of a "Cold Pastoral," not the timeless world of Keats' "happy boughs that cannot shed [their] leaves, nor ever bid the Spring adieu," but instead a world built out of a tissue of world-weary detail — "rusty leaves hang[ing] taut with departure," "crisp leaves blow[ing] in gusts, tracing / the wind's indignant lift in corners"; it is a "dying civilisation," and a city of "bare familiar streets." It is a world of change toward Autumn, to decline and fall, a human experience of "void." But finally the void like everything else is shown to be merely a season subject to the passage of time (and indeed not truly perceived until past — "we enter void when void no longer exists"). But even if void were to become "a mood gone absolute," it would be limited: "we should (still) have to live in the world" making our lives "on earth." And so as the departing Autumn leaves exemplify the transience of all things including the void itself, Lee records his emergence from the void "disabused of many things of the world / including Canada and [I] came to know that I had access to them / and I promised to honour each one of my country's failures of nerve and its sellouts." In the last poem, hot satirical indignation has been transformed into a dutiful and ironic chronicling of our less-than-perfect reality. But even this kind of distanced complaining becomes a "game" better left behind for the basic business of living the only world we have. Against his earlier complaints about the void and the distant Gods, Lee celebrates the unavoidable and more basic reality of earth-bound human existence:

> But we are not allowed to enter God's heaven, where it is all a
> drowsy beatitude, nor is God, the realm above our heads but
> must grow up on earth.

Nor do we have recourse to void.
For void is not a place.
Void is not the high cessation of the lone self's burden,
crowned with the early nostalgias;
nor is it rampant around the corner, endlessly possible.
We enter void when void no longer exists.

The overview or larger-view achieved at the close of "Civil Elegies" suggests optimistically that change brings not only the destruction of the old but also the beginnings of the new — "the early years of a better civilisation." Letting go, clearing out the rubbish of the past, implies the promise of renovation; the anthropomorphized leaves of autumn (like the emigrant settler) conform to a natural law of change and renovation:

The leaves, although they cling against the
wind do not resist their time of dying.
And I must learn to live it all again, depart again —
the storm wracked crossing, the nervous descent, the barren wintry land
and clearing a life in the place where I belong, re-entry
to bare familiar streets, first sight of coffee mugs.

To live well then is to live in accord with the God who "must grow up on earth" and to find "a place among the ones who live on earth somehow, sustained in fits and starts / by the deep ache and presence and sometimes the joy of what is." The final lines of the poem then are a plain, stripped-down, prayer to the God who is now Earth. In a traditional Christian prayer, Lee's petition would be for God's "Grace," but Lee's prayer here is worked out of a studied pedestrian language, an appeal to the natural and human worlds "green of the earth and civil grey" and an appeal to let be — "allow me for to be here is enough." The final prayer is in accord with the contemporary liberal faith that change, the destruction of the old truths or old order, allows a truer hold on life, a truer accommodation to the ongoing human condition. As Lee celebrates the possibilities of the immediate present, he loses any sense of the continuity of time past, present, and future or of the continuity of space — the connection of there here and there:

Earth you nearest allow me.
Green of the earth and civil grey:
within me, without me and moment by
moment allow me for to
be here is enough and earth you
strangest, you nearest, be home.

Lee's concluding poem is consistent with what has gone before. Throughout, truth or truism or preconception has led to disillusionment and to a hope of a

more basic truth. The "truth" sloughed off is first experienced as the void: the deeper truth now exposed is the possibility of renovation or regeneration out of destruction, an Autumn which promises Spring.

Despite his many snipings at the "continental drift to barbarism," Lee's own first principles seem to me all too North American, too naively optimistic, too unconsciously or thoughtlessly destructive. Can we trust that just as we clear the forests to make new human settlements, we can also "clear" our minds or clear the past, the heritage of tradition that has remained a part of ourselves as we have migrated from other continents and other times? Lee's attitude seems to me all too consistent with the destructive inclination that D. H. Lawrence saw in the Americans in *Studies in Classic American Literature* or that Ivor Winters saw in *Maule's Curse*, the American assumption that the old world could be left to itself and the new world transcend traditional wisdom. Both Lawrence and Winters characterize this faith in the present and future as murderous, destructive to any sense of authority or order. Despite Lee's attack upon American imperialism, the brutal spirit, the violence done by the Americans against other peoples and the earth, Lee's own "Civil Elegies" expresses a belief in renovation through void (letting go and letting be) which verges upon an anarchistic faith. He does not show in the texture of his poetry a close or loving concern for the actual and nearest, he only indicates a generalized world of "coffee mugs," "dreary high rises," and "people plodding past through the raw air, lost in their overcoats."

In "Civil Elegies" Lee fails to realize that the "nearest," the "within me, without me and moment by moment," the here-and-now of the natural and human worlds are in large part the consequence and continuation of what is supposedly remote in time and place. Thus his characterization of Canadians as a "stunted" people because they were never fully "at home" (which means they didn't sufficiently give up their past home), his comic caricature of the mild rebellion of 1837 as non-history because the rebellion failed to become revolution, his terming the past a "dead weight" "oppressing" the present — these presentations of Canada indicate to me an all too familiar imagination incapable of appreciating much more than the bold, the novel and the "dynamic." Can we really believe that the man earlier oppressed by the dead weight of the past could muster the vitality and receptiveness to appreciate the "coffee mugs" and "dreary high rises" of the present? We are told that through the void he comes to a fresh possession of the "near," but the "near" has not been shown with any plausible or striking detail.

I conclude then that Lee's anti-historical attitude is even more disturbing than that of the forward-looking Americans, for they at least revere their Colonial architecture, their old towns, their wars and heroes, their wild west and their constitution. Lee, like a caricature of Thomas Chandler Haliburton's American, Sam Slick, seems to say: if only Canadians did not have such a stodgy reliance

upon precedence, law, and custom; if only we had gone through the "clearing" of a genuine revolution; if only we could be less cautious, less worried about consequences; then surely we would come into "our own." Haliburton's Sam Slick, however, also employed the metaphors of spontaneous combustion and the maelstrom to indicate that the forward-looking, individualistic dynamism of America may lead to catastrophe. As Lee seems unaware of these implications or consequences that a T. C. Haliburton or George Grant warns against, his poem seems insufficiently thought out and thereby muddled.

NOTES

[1] *Boundary 2*, 3, no. 1 (Fall 1974), 156.

[2] "Civil Elegies," in *Civil Elegies and Other Poems* (Toronto: Anansi, 1972), p. 56.

[3] George Grant, *Lament for a Nation* (Toronto: Carleton Library, 1970), p. 70.

[4] This summary of Grant is more fully developed in my article, "The Persuasiveness of Grant's *Lament for a Nation*," *Studies in Canadian Literature*, 2, no. 2 (Summer 1977), 239-51.

[5] *Philosophy in the Mass Age* (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1959), p. 16.

[6] Dennis Lee, "The Death of Harold Ladoo," in *The Gods* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1979), p. 59.

[7] George Grant, "In Defense of North America," in *Technology and Empire* (Toronto: Anansi, 1969), p. 19.

[8] A reader has indicated the possible unfairness of this view of Lee's "ahistorical understanding" by drawing my attention to Lee's *Savage Fields: An Essay in Literature and Cosmology* (Toronto: Anansi, 1977). In this book published five years after *Civil Elegies* and two years before *The Gods*, Lee explores the relation of modern man to history and nature.

In *Savage Fields* Lee writes of the modern "ontology" in which man (World) sees himself at odds with nature; in this "false dualism" or "strife" man presumes that he can turn the natural world (Earth) entirely to his own purposes while ignoring the inevitability of earth returning all, including man's work, to earth (pp. 6-8). Beyond the "savage strife" of World and Earth, Lee imagines Planet, a "seamless whole" (p. 9), a holy flowing unity, a magical state (p. 64), a "luminous unified field of here and now" which he finds at the heart of Leonard Cohen's religious vision. In Cohen, "trees, elbows, radios, young ladies — all *are* magic, *are* holy, *are* eternal" (p. 72). Lee argues that the movement of Cohen's *Beautiful Losers* is based on the following proposition: "In the economy of the whole novel, Book One imagines the possibility that the Isis Continuum [the seamless unity] is real here and now, and that sexual ecstasy and the dislocation of rationality give entry into it. Thus the ontology of savage fields is overcome by a dionysiac ontology" (p. 82). Cohen's novel, however, does not complete this end: Cohen's "demolition job" on reason and technique is so complete that the "governing consciousness had already shot its bolt before the third movement began"; and thus as Cohen "took the line of least resistance," his conclusion became a "cop-out" (p. 94). Lee is very understanding of this failure of imagination. In the post-Nietzschean world where man exists in "radical freedom" beyond a numinous God or history (pp. 97-100) and where man can only invent himself and where all is merely a matter of construct or

technique, the only possible "conclusion" might well seem the following: "and yet [we] must go on spewing out new I's like a machine gone amok. Still trying, desperately and pathetically, to cram itself inside one — any one — forever" (p. 101). At his own "conclusion," Lee admits that he had been working at *Savage Fields* for five years and that his voice too "kept sounding false, excluding too much of what [he] was" (p. 109). Indeed Lee generalizes once again his own sense of inauthenticity to include the modern intellectual condition itself: "Thinking proceeds by objectifying and mastering what is to be thought. The process is erratic and intuitive, yet the overall drive is towards systematic clarity of idea which takes possession of the subject and wrings the structures from it, leaving behind the husk of one more object" (p. 110). This is a dismal view of modern thought or criticism or history and runs quite contrary to the intent of George Grant in his book upon Nietzsche, *Time as History* (CBC Massey Lectures 1969, published 1971): here one's duty is to think or "enucleate" the other man's thought, not to objectify and to dismiss the dead structure of another's thought. Grant then presupposes the possibility of a sympathetic, historical understanding: "for myself, as probably for most others, remembering only occasionally can pass over into thinking and loving what is good. It is for the great thinkers and saints to do more" (p. 52). Lee, however, sees little more than the possibility of setting one's mind against the other for the sake of overcoming and mastering the other: "To think sanely must be to think against thought and to think more deeply than thought." At best it seems, "thinking can be faithful to its situation only by sitting still, and unclenching and waiting to see what will happen" (pp. 111-12).

With such complexities it could be argued that Lee must express more than a cartoonist's version of our history. His "Civil Elegies," however, is such a remote and unloving caricature and so deliberately "ahistorical" that his concluding speculation upon a better time, "the early years of a better civilisation," can only be looked upon with Lee's own amused disbelief. One must ask how such a "better civilisation," such a "construct," could follow and ask the more basic question of whether an anti or ahistorical mind can truly think through the form of an elegy.

STORY

Russell Thornton

Out of the unknowable
Rung centre

Of the dark
Constellations are flung like frigid sparks.

With the watery hammer eye
The precise white fire

Of the desperate suns is struck —
A last-ditch light

A dazzling story
That the eye of everything must tell

Of containing the dark
Of how the dark contains

Of how light sees
Even in the dark.

THREE POEMS

Cathy Ford

*

(my mother said no)

(she candy fed the stale virgin
to her daughters

the statuesque whiten their robes
against obscene flourishing ritual)

the peddler is here, mother
he's a wanderer, a refugee

he brings news, mother,
his clothes aren't clean

(the powdered root of the gallows
narcotic as dampened flowers shrieking

he blocks his black dog's ears)

my mother, see how you spin
mother, he says i am a girl of gold

the country grasping at straws

the charms are in his sac
the mandragora bringing riches, mother

shall we buy

sugar, sugar.

The news is not good, mother
mandrake the same as under the hazel bush

should we look for ourselves

*

there are wolves in the timber
hoary like the demon's oak staff.

Our mothers ask us not to play here

we compromise & twine wreaths for the lady on the hill
twist beech leaves into our hair
hang chaplets & garlands over the well of the thorn

we pretend there are no wolves

we haven't seen them

in the apple trees
from the flowers
sprout the armagnac heads of men
hanging

or whole
bodies weighted by the feet
to be tossed
into the river

dancing dead upright

the bowing & swaying visionary

common as salt, the children are laughing, starving
tear a hunk of bread, stuffing
supper & bruised fruit by the streaming blooded bridge

we understand wolves, gravediggers.

We haven't seen them

*

together we walk the marshes to the house of his ailing bride
nearly a mother — sickle-shaped — she spins, she sews —
& i was taught the same.

The ice on the march
like mirrors
dark broken mirrors.

He wonders at the offer to come
he doesn't ask — blood like this frightens him.
The birth of hope. He hopes it's because i know

— these things —

i stand over my cold pelvis
viewing from a distance

as if it were an unheld goblet
just tipt with wine
red reflective on a fine damask

i wait
i wait
there is nothing

no blood of my own
waiting for morning
tucked around a hollow stomach

gnawed at by dreams.

The child in her arms
the simple habits of
what to do

*

SPRING WOOD

Harold Rhenisch

The hills are as blue
as the water would be
if it did not reflect
the weather, not a reflection
but the earth seen distant:

clouds of earth
as light as sky, the way
the sky would cloud
if light were water, but not
overly distant: how far

a man could walk
before nightfall, the softly swaying
birches that watch us
out of darkness.

STONE

Harold Rhenisch

When skies are pale
as the sheen on a stone
pulled from the river,
as dry in the sun
and as hollow
when rattled in the hand,
the yellow leaves
on the sandbar willows,

stronger than this late
earth, a blow of darkness
spills over the valley;
to the river's shadow
I sing my name
in alder: moon.

RECLAIMING THE BODY/ RECLAIMING THE NATION

a process of surviving colonization in Dennis Lee's "Civil Elegies and Other Poems"

Dale Zieroth

IF MOST OF US THINK OF OURSELVES as residing somewhere just behind our eyes, it is surely because we live in a time that separates consciousness from the objects of consciousness. We are not our bodies, but somewhere in our bodies. In *Civil Elegies and Other Poems*, Dennis Lee takes us on a journey "behind the eyes." We are introduced to a consciousness that is talking to itself, and more importantly, one that is striving to make contact with the world of actual objects, in which it lives, in such a way that value and meaning may be found to inhere in these objects. Lee's world of objects ranges from the natural to the cultural, from falling sumac leaves to Nathan Phillips Square. But there is an even more desperate struggle at hand: the attempt by consciousness to become at home in its own body, the physical surroundings of its own flesh, the first of all perceived objects. The poet discovers, as his stance shifts and wavers, as he is alternately attracted to and repelled by his life in his society, that the problem with the nation mirrors the problem with his body. It may seem perverse to focus on this aspect of "body" in a poem that seems so determinedly "mind," but I don't believe so. The human body is peripheral to no thing, regardless of how it is perceived, and through the language that conveys the image of the body, we are drawn into the questions of colonized perception, language and meaning.[1]

Seen from the perspective of the liberal cosmology as defined by Lee, the body becomes value-free, simply another objective part of the universe, "raw material, to be manipulated and remade according to the hungers of one's nervous system and the demands of one's technology."[2] While Lee is aware that he is part of this cosmology, he does not share its values; instead, he looks to the social philosopher George Grant and the Red Tory tradition that Grant evokes, one which taught that "reverence for what is is more deeply human than conquest for what is."[3] Lee is painfully aware of this conquest in the immediate terms of a Canada swamped by an American Empire, and he does not hesitate to say "we did not

want to be American at all. Their dream was wrong."[4] Yet the *Elegies* move in a field larger than the political domination of one country by another. Lee is grappling with the numbness of a colonized consciousness, particularly the colonized writer who has reached that dead point in his work where "words [have] become the enemy. To use them as a writer [is] to collaborate further in one's extinction."[5] Colonization leads to isolation, then, from country, body, speech: it becomes space-lessness. This is the day-to-day world in which the poet, again and again, circles his despair.

In the first section of the book, the 16 shorter poems of "Coming Back," the poet's experience of his body is largely sensual and sexual. While the body inhabits a world of excellent pleasure and after-pleasure, the poet's consciousness is haunted by isolation and failure. Sexual love provides a larger unity, a larger frame of reference, but coming back to the world becomes a return to the mind-body dichotomy. "Come over here with your body"[6] is not the same as "Come over here." The poet is distanced not only from his own body, but also from his lover, and this tremendous gap gets filled — with silence, with absence that nags and irritates at first, then negates. Breakdown results in "testing the cutting edge on your own flesh"; the "body slouches," and there is "fragile breathing." Everywhere the poet's failure is described in images of the flesh, while the consciousness remains trapped in the prison of itself; as Don Coles suggests,

> beneath the conjoined and simple surfaces of the lovers is the complexity of the watching and listening poet, mindful of the past and present joys, seeking to make them last, to fix them in words . . . but [he is] finally distrustful.[7]

In "Sibelius Park," near the end of the first section, the poet comes to a difficult realization: "in the / bodies we live in we are / acceptable." The poem has spent its wrenching way working toward this hard-won starting point. It is a kind of reconciliation, and yet the first section of the book ends here with Lee still on the opposite side of the subject-object fence from his body: he is not his body, but rather lives *in* his body. Nevertheless the condition of dwelling "in" the body (and dwelling there "acceptably") is a step ahead of the condition in which consciousness finds itself solipsistically estranged from the body.

It remains for "Civil Elegies" to follow a similar trajectory, and to discover some of the cultural grounds for this persistent dichotomy. The poet does not "solve" the mind-body problem, for that is not his intention, but he does engage in a process of examining and articulating some of its aspects in the particular context of a colonized Canada, and by moving through several stances, he comes to realize that a tentative claiming and connection can occur. I wish to follow that movement, elegy by elegy through the nine meditations, many of which start with the poet located physically in Nathan Phillips Square, the large plaza in front of Toronto's city hall.

APPROPRIATELY, the "Civil Elegies" begin with the absence of bodies and the presence of non-bodies, the ghostly spectres: in their "fetid descent, they darken the towers," polluting the here-and-now. They occur quite literally as "airborne shapes among the pollution," and at a first level probably are smog and air pollution. They then become perceived as the ghosts of previous unfulfilled citizens of Canada who look for some action by present-day Canadians which will lay them, grant them a fully-resolved death. These spectres are not merely fabrications of the poet's mind. He registers them also with his body, perhaps there first and foremost: "whenever / the thick air clogs my breathing it teems with their presence." Thus these inarticulated lives of the past become a source of physical strangulation. Lee becomes locked in a death struggle with the process of articulation, and only by speaking the names of the past will he be free to breathe. This becomes exceptionally difficult because the language required to express such presences does not in fact exist. Living with a discontinuous past is living in speechlessness, in the disruption of the very rhythm of breathing.

There is even worse news. The spectres not only crave articulation through the poet (in fact, so ghoulish do they sometimes appear that I am tempted to say "through the poet's blood"), but they are not "citizens of a human body of kind." At this point in the poem, the body becomes a metaphor for society: the body as object-of-consciousness has extended its boundaries beyond the individual flesh to the civic body structure called the nation. In its isolation, however, colonized consciousness cannot distinguish between body and nation, between private and public. Neither is real, and immediately the poet finds himself caught. His body is not just his flesh, it is all the country, but a country that specializes in depriving itself of both physical and communal existence. For some, this failure to connect with others in the larger civic body beyond the individual consciousness is itself a first death, and Lee cites Chartier, the mad bomber who "blew himself to bits in the parliament john, leaving as civil testament / assorted chunks of prophet, twitching and / bobbing to rest in the flush." Here, early in the poem, we see the destructive force inherent in alienation from the civic body.

Yet just as the poet despairs, he also yearns for connection and wholeness with the nation — at the very same time as he needs to reject it as unclean and impure. The physical body and the civic state have now become bound together; now acceptance of one must include acceptance of the other. Lee will develop this point further, but at this early stage in the sequence it seems not simply paradoxical but unresolvable, and in fact much of the poem re-phrases and re-examines this problem. The elegy includes, I hasten to add, the vision of what might be, of connectedness with the past through the flesh and bone of one's ancestors, yet the final stance

becomes a bitter unacceptance, a consciousness alone and more aware of the invisible spectres than the actual sun that "does not shine through."

In desperate retreat from the world, the poet turns to "Master and Lord" in what appears to be a traditional religious prayer. But it is an address to no thing and to no one: "Where are you?" This critical absence creates a despair that leads us to the central problem in the poet's life: "I know / the world is not enough." Objects themselves do not give him a sense of value and he knows that there has to be a larger value to which the world (and its smaller partner, his body) must yield. If that could happen, the result would be the experience of one-ness and real-ness: meaning. But the Lord and Master is itself meaningless, gone. The poet inhabits a world full of objects that have no value, and without value, they disappear. Now it is no longer a matter of feeling alienated from his body: there is no body, only a despairing will and consciousness hanging onto its emptiness, the full dead weight of absence. The poet yearns not just for a past when Master and Lord was present in its fullest meaning, but also for a different consciousness, a pre-abstract shape of mind that would be greater than religion *per se*. In such a time there would be no need for symbols because the distance between flesh and consciousness would not exist: it would be living thought. Recognition of this loss is, perhaps, the first step toward reclamation.

The poet's consciousness pours out, and finds a slumber-state norm where people are placidly eating bag lunches on the concrete benches by the pool, in sight of the Henry Moore sculpture, the Archer. He then feels his "body's pulse contract and / balk," as if there were circles closing in around him, driving toward their centre, his consciousness. The commotion in the forearms announces the experience of on-coming void: all the world goes slack and begins to recede, and the speaker is without hold or purchase. As this happens, he searches for some point of reality that will anchor him, and as he connects with the knotted space generated by the Archer, there is a corresponding response in his forearms. They are not *just* disappearing into the void, for there is also this simultaneous discovery that within the void there lies a node of space so charged that it is real — austere, primordeal, even threatening, but *real.* The poet senses bedrock reality in the Moore because it is the artistic embodiment of the landscape of the Canadian Shield that the speaker (and his progenitors) first started living in. The void all around the Archer is the direct result of the failure of these citizens to measure up to the land.

We soon discover how often the landscape has defeated Canadians. Like the void, it, too, is vast and barbaric; it, too, tows the bodies under, as void pulls them under, as empire drags them under. The speaker is beginning to attach himself to these historical realities of defeat and sell-out. He is scarcely able to articulate what they mean at this point since he is still registering viscerally the wash of

experience (of both void *and* the Archer), and his nervous system and its mind have only begun to explicate what his body already knows: the assault of Canada-as-void on the nerve ends, and through the Archer, the implications of failure.[8] The speaker sees that the artist, a Christ figure, may enter this void and give it meaning, but Lee the poet cannot fully believe this achievement since he sees both Thomson and Christ collapse into carcasses, finally decaying. The creative artistic meaning and the creative religious meaning are both somehow betrayed and terribly undercut by the death of the body. Without recourse to the meaning implicit in art and faith, and faced with the truth of Canada's innocent greed and violence, the poet has little alternative but finally to honour the emptiness, honour the void. This understanding can only come after the experience in the Square, which explains why the elegy is so difficult to read: it has to recreate the encounter in the reader without the reader knowing what the encounter is about until the poem itself unwinds. Through this enactment, we come to the beginning of acceptance.

LEE CANNOT PROGRESS through the *Elegies* in anything like a linear fashion towards self-knowledge. He moves back and forth, attracted to absence, repelled by absence, drained of the will to continue, alternating between what he feels and what he scarcely dares to hope. He moves in and out of various states of perception, often so quickly that we have little time to register the shift. It is these shifts (occurring often in the same line) that collide and carry and announce in us the perceptual space the poet is in. His is a poetry that moves by qualification, gliding on an interior monologue of "but" and "and" and "yet." As the poet's consciousness examines the world, it comes to the void, and what the poet does with this absence will determine his relation with his body and his country.

A central problem already stated as "I know / the world is not enough" becomes re-phrased now as "If only / here and now were not fastened so / deep in the flesh and good-bye." By implication those objects to which the poet says good-bye — the lakes, the earth, the corner stores — these are part of his flesh. The death of the lakes becomes then the gutting of his self-respect, and the poet feels this as more than metaphor. The larger civic or national body is no different from his flesh; good-bye to Canada is good-bye to the flesh. We have seen this conjoining before and while this is hardly a positive connection, it does represent, I think, a movement beyond the purely world-denying, body-denying rhetoric of the earlier stances. The body is inextricably bound to the world and the poet is groping his way towards some sense of acceptance of both, following the tacit recognition that the nation exists first and foremost in its citizens' flesh and blood.

Yet the poet is hounded by absence and returns there again and again. At

that centre he becomes momentarily free to see the world anew. He discovers within the emptiness there is a regenerative possibility: if he gave up trying to own the elm trees (for example), they might be released into a valuative existence of their own, might begin to "move very cleanly in the vehement enjoyment of their bodies." Here is the renewed earth full of sexual-like energy; the trees are wild, clean, un-self-conscious bodies, or perhaps, phrased differently, theirs is a consciousness more vast than we can fathom. The emphasis on renewal and recreation makes the poet aware that this power underlines the void, is co-existent with the void, and is forever available to him *by virtue of his body*. The elms become evidence of the procreative power latent in all of earth's "objects," including the body of the poet, and which mind-consciousness alone cannot perceive. This is the beginning of reclaiming the body, for it is a *re*claiming, a rediscovery of the connecting power between earth and blood. But the poet does not trust this new knowledge, so that it is immediately undercut, massively rejected: "What good is that in a nation / of losers and quislings?" At the very moment when a new perception arises from the contact between the body and the full force of the all-sexual earth, a perception born of emptiness that promises a renewal of the body through a vision of primal energy, the poet rejects all. His reason is clear: any renewal that does not include the civic body is inadequate. Nowhere in the *Elegies* does the debate between attachment to, and detachment from, the world become so formalized, so stanza to stanza, as here in the Fourth Elegy. While stanzas 1 and 3 argue that detachment is healthy and (ideally) would allow one to be in the world without constantly grasping at it, stanzas 2 and 4 (there is a stanza break at the bottom of page 43) suspect any attempt to break from citizenship as pure escapism. This debate continues, of course, throughout the poem, with each side modifying the other.

As frequently occurs in the *Elegies,* the poet recoils from his world, here from the possibility of beginning anew *in* the world, and now veers towards the extreme asceticism of the French-Canadian poet, Garneau, who saw "not lost souls but a company of lost bodies." Once again the poet expresses his "appetite" for such emptiness, and for the peace it would presumably bring. Unable to accept the denigration of the civic body, unwilling to allow the earth's power of renewal to carry him, he yearns once again for the extinction of the difficult world. He sees now that he will die on occupied soil, that the body of the nation is not only unclaimed, but virtually unclaimable since it is completely occupied by the service to empire. Only different levels of sacrifice remain, and just as the mad bomber died, so there are those who "take the world full force on their nerve ends, leaving the / bloody impress of their bodies" on the underside of the mind-driven machinery of empire. Once again we have circled back to the most barren of places, where there are few alternatives but death.

As the poet rallies his strength to denounce the criminals of sell-out, he attempts to move from a private hopeless stance to an angrier position confronting war and genocide and "the lousy expendable cargo" of bodies thundering to their deaths. When bodies are value-free, raw material, Lee is suggesting we are all criminally implicated: our minds become fascists willing to sacrifice our bodies; indeed, they are scarcely able to appreciate any other possibility. The poet implies that we can accept the "lissome burning bodies" of the Vietnamese children because the self we call "we" is divorced from the body. We do not own our bodies just as we do not own our nation — and he calls this a failure of nerve. When the body is no longer valuable in its own right, then clearly the nerves have no choice but failure. A consciousness that is without prime knowledge of its nerves and flesh and blood is a totalitarian consciousness in the service of empire. Here, more than ever, it becomes apparent that consciousness cut off from its flesh is death. The poet passes through this lethal field without offering any solutions, but he is slowly coming to understand that the problem of the reoccupation of his own body is central to this quest to be made whole in a colonial space. At the moment he is stiff and "numb in [his] stance," unable to get "purchase on life."

The poet continues to document his failure to achieve some first place of solidity, and by so doing, begins to come to terms with his "need to fail and be hurt." He shows how the lives of his friends and lovers are equally touched, although it is occasionally possible for them to come to "some kind of ease in their bodies' loving." We are reminded of the mind-body dichotomy of "Coming Back," but this goes further: the poet senses that a kind of sado-masochism "draws them together for love and the kill." Love and death fuse; consciousness is now totally cut off from the body's last redemptive quality, unity through sexual love. We arrive at one of the most lonely and bitter positions in the poems. Yet, as the poet makes clear, there is some part of the man that needs to *live* these "postures of willing defeat," that lives through them in order to go beyond. In these continual articulations of the meaninglessness and failures to connect, he creates a *gestalt* that begins to promise a moment of being "with our claimed selves, at home in the difficult world." However ironic these words may be, however slight their promise, it becomes a step beyond the bitterness and isolation beforehand. As the poet shifts his stance again, he comes to face Garneau and his exact solution to all the poet's alienation: the divine void.

We watch as Garneau's body vanishes. First there is "the palpable void that opened between the bones of your spine," then the ever-continuing death-wish: "feeling inside you the small incessant gush of the cardiac lesion" until finally the body becomes "sick" and "destroyed," and nothing remains of the man but his

"upright will." At the expense of losing the world, Garneau experiences his (autoerotic) real-ness with God. But Lee cannot do this; he discovers that his multifarious attachments have, in the end, thankfully prevented him from going into the void with a radical misunderstanding of the process involved; they have enabled him to draw back from this neurotic version of detachment. He watches as Garneau dies again, bleeding, watches his "blood lap wide on the lake at sunset," disappearing entirely "as the ferns come shouldering up through [his] body." The poet knows now what his choices have become: all the world, or none of it. In confronting this negation-of-the-world in Garneau, confronting it in terms of the death of the body, the poet comes to see "his own wrong start."

He is now able to resolve not to enter void "till I come to myself." This sense of journey and arrival is, I suggest, one of a fuller acknowledgement of the body as self; the space of Garneau's void is replaced by the space of the body. In much the same way, the poet refuses to reject the world before he learns its language. This act of resolving to honour the body and the world more fully reclaims them from meaninglessness, and this in turn triggers a wide variety of external particulars to flood his consciousness: the "square and the dusk and the war and the crowds in motion at / evening." Through his body, he has come closer to the brimful fragile world; through it, he has heard the world and now must speak it, make it his. In the final elegy, it becomes clear that reclaiming the body is necessarily a reclamation of speech itself.

For the final time, the poet shifts back to doubt: "What if there is no regenerative absence?" and he celebrates those who "do not salute the death of the body / before they have tasted its life." He now declares that he himself was guilty of a similar offence, of adoring the void neurotically. But that has passed, and he has reached a point of absolute first beginning, where even the void has "gone void." He discovers he is able to "honour each of [his] country's failures of nerve" and this is full acceptance of the body, human and civic. He realizes that defining what the void is not is a renewed function of the body's speaking, the attempt by the poet to articulate his new perspective, his new claims. Out of this acceptance a language is created, and it is no longer the language of bitter acquiescence, but a new language which struggles to find new nouns — and one of them is "body," another is "land." This final stance, full of green earth and civil grey, is the first tentative gesture of wholeness at home.

In *Civil Elegies and Other Poems*, Lee handles a dual progression; one movement yearns to complete itself in self-annihilation while the other moves towards self-renewal and re-birth. Lee comes first to a rejection of Garneau's version of the void and then to an acceptance of the absence that he feels everywhere so deeply. But it is an acceptance that is the courageous outcome of a long process of slow, articulated reclamation. He has slowly gained back his right to be, to

actively *live* in colonized space, a space which deals in the strangulation of speech and the disruption of language. The constant qualification and shifting stances attest to the difficulty of first words, particularly first words that are spoken without the alliance of consciousness to "motherwit and guts." This quite literal "bloody-minded" union asserts the values of the organic and the flesh in surviving colonization. Moving through colonized space becomes, then, a process of rediscovering one's flesh and the nation that lives through that flesh; it becomes a journey inward. It becomes not only a journey that stumbles upon this place of mapless emptiness, but also one that slowly seeks to re-shape such a place and fill in the blanks of the map. By the end of the poem, Lee is ready to begin his own process of re-claiming the world, moving out from the isolated consciousness to include a larger frame of reference. The journey behind the eyes ends in a place quite different from where it began. With the full resources of a new place, the poet begins to live in his body and in his country.

NOTES

[1] While the ideas about consciousness that emerge in this essay are derived from several writers, I would like to acknowledge the work of Owen Barfield, *Romanticism Comes of Age* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan Univ. Press, 1967) and Shirley Sugarman, ed., *Evolution of Consciousness: Studies in Polarity* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan Univ. Press, 1976).

[2] Dennis Lee, "Cadence, Country, Silence: Writing in Colonial Space," *Boundary 2*, 3, no. 1 (1974), 159.

[3] "Cadence, Country, Silence," p. 159.

[4] "Cadence, Country, Silence," p. 160.

[5] "Cadence, Country, Silence," p. 163.

[6] Dennis Lee, *Civil Elegies and Other Poems* (Toronto: Anansi, 1972), p. 18. p. 18.

[7] Don Coles, review of *Civil Elegies and Other Poems*, *Toronto Globe & Mail* (April 1, 1972), p. 23.

[8] As readers, we have to be prepared to accept that "Nathan Phillips Square" equals "Canada" at this point. The questions that arise from this assumption deserve another essay.

FOUR POEMS

Neile Graham

SWUTLAK BUILDS FALSE SPRING

Sky naked as flesh. The air
cracked and cold as stone,
chipped like obsidian
into a cunning blade.
These days strip you
till you're raw as a man
who sees just one direction,
and you hold the wind
like ice till it melts
in your hand. The river's
skin peels and flakes,
the river bleeds
mud from the hills.
Light pours from your flesh:
a scarce, fertile rain.
Clouds darken and shuffle in
from the east. And now
the night is a bear,
his bulk a shy eclipse.
Near morning his fur
is black, clear as obsidian,
his purpose never blunted.
Wind shaves your hands.

HIGH WATER

hot wind came from the marshes
we wade through air thick
with rotting weeds
fish from the spawning steam
in Indian summer, in red
leaved shrouds fleshy anchors
our legs weigh us into the mud

death-chill from the mountains
we reach the rock and begin

to climb an old stream-bed
crevasse between mountains
shale and scree that run past us
like water

a leaf in the current
pushing ourselves the wrong direction
leaving the marsh for these foreign
heights, our hands fall away
from each other there it is
the first clue that we may
be lovers wait there's more

but the eyes and stance between the eyes
love, this is not beauty
but trial here is a place
we can turn and look
distance spreads the air
before us, winter and summer
meet exchange themselves again

casting but shade beyond the other lights
and we're here, hands held
with touching
the sun fades with the heat
not setting but distant
we wait for the stars to fade in
brighten us waiting

sky's clear/ night's sea/ green of the mountain pool
and now sky is water but clear
and we breathe it to fill ourselves
we are not each other
not ourselves what is beneath us
is no longer the mountain

ANYTHING YOU SAY

Anything you say can and will be used
to make children uneasy, to make them
sleep. You tell tales to the children
dreaming to the dragon-keep, where all
the pale maidens have clear eyes,

modest hair, and breasts uncovered
only in the struggle deep in the heart
of the hero (you) who takes her
from her scaly, lascivious lover. O the look
in their eyes when they wake to your
weeping, keeping sleep away — first
in the magic of your voice
and then in what you say.

SALTSPRING

for Brenda

Early island light
with characters: the heron
skimming from rock to rock, just off shore;
the crows that led me far down the beach,
taunting me farther; the sea itself, coming in;
my friend inside, sleeping; the gulls; the terns;
the river otters, who bobbed their heads
over the log below me, the last otter, hesitant, stared.

Light with objects: the feather
the crows left to take me farther; the shells
I'm certain are mine, perfect and whole, yet
still inhabited; the stone whale, beached and buried,
like the plants on the shore rocks, clinging
certain of soil and rain; the rock breakwater before me
a path into the sea in all its certainty;
in my hand the feather, a pink shell
found broken for my sleeping friend.

RIVALS FOR THE SUN

Allan Safarik

We who felt
the shiver
that is death
watched our lives
spinning like coins
cast into a dark field
of wheat or water

where you'll find
what is left of me
as we found the others
who moved out
over the continent
making fires
under the stars
ploughing the land
for gardens

every high
and low point
all the landmarks
named
order exceeding
order
there is always
some artifact
dug from the soil
by the workers
or the foraging beasts

in the fields
of circumstance

the past remains
luck against luck
to prove the future

CRAB

Allan Safarik

The crab scurries
sideways revving
his eye beads
Antennae twinkling
Ultra robot claws

if crabs could live
for long in air
they'd soon be feeding
in the streets

crabs and dogs
fighting it out
all over the city

freeway crabs
fat with plunder
move relentlessly
across the continent

imagine the day
the first crab
scuttles into
Saskatoon

SPRING AT THE COTTAGE

Richard Outram

As once, at pressures that would serve to force
Us into jelly, Beebe came to peer,
Incredulous, through bolted rounds of quartz,
Out of his cramped, deep-dangled bathysphere

At nightmare lights within the black abyss,
Fantastic-fired creatures with a need
Unfathomed heretofore to luminesce,
Coldly encounter, copulate or feed,

We stand together silently and watch,
Long after the last chill light has gone,
Beyond the rippled glass, a tracking batch
Of fireflies' pulsed spangle on the lawn:

And have exhaustive knowledge found to prove
Specific-coded, heatless fire to be,
Like truth in season and like other love,
But intermittent intermittently.

"LA LEÇON DE LA VIE DES BOIS"

Wilderness and Civilization in Constantin-Weyer's "La Bourrasque"

Thérèse Eveline LaFontaine

AN IMPRESSIONABLE YOUNG man eager for adventure left France to visit North America at the beginning of this century. His travels ultimately led him to Western Canada and, finding the beauty of the prairies enchanting, he chose to spend the next ten years of his life in Manitoba. He occupied himself with hunting in the north, selling horses and later settling in a homestead. This Frenchman delighted in observing the wildlife indigenous to the Canadian plains and made friends with many Métis and immigrants like himself. However, his life on the frontier ended abruptly with the war; early in 1914 he returned to France. After the war, this young man, Constantin-Weyer, began writing extensively about his experience in the Canadian Northwest. In 1928, he won the Prix Goncourt for his novel concerning the dispossessed natives and the arrival of the immigrants in *Un Homme se penche sur son passé.*

Numerous novels and essays constitute Constantin-Weyer's "Epopée Canadienne." These volumes may be divided into two categories: some of his texts like *Manitoba* (1924), *Cinq éclats de silex* (1927), and *Clairière* (1929) recall the author's encounter with a foreign and primaeval landscape or present vivid vignettes of animal life; his other works on the west, inspired by heroes or explorers of Canada, tell the story of Louis Riel (*La Bourrasque*, 1925; *Cavalier de La Salle*, 1927; *Champlain*, 1931; *La Vérendrye*, 1941).

Readers in France unanimously extolled Constantin-Weyer for his probing of an innovative subject matter — the land, the people, the plants and animals of a new country and for his skill in describing exotic regions and in emulating the dialects of the French-speaking Métis.[1] However, critics in French-Canada were outraged at Constantin-Weyer's denigration of and contemptuousness toward the inhabitants of Manitoba. The author's irreverence was incomprehensible to Western Canadian and therefore was bitterly censured. Since these readers were offended, a fierce quarrel ensued, a quarrel led by Donatien Frémont, a French

journalist living in Saint-Boniface. Frémont violently opposed Constantin-Weyer's abusiveness and vulgar sensationalism which ensured his literary success abroad but which insulted the native population in Canada.[2]

The few contemporary critics of Constantin-Weyer such as Roger Motut tend to mitigate the quarrel about his treatment of pioneer life by arguing that his novels would no longer scandalize if compared to a modern literary text like *The Studhorse Man*.[3] Nevertheless, the sardonic tone and the "gaillardise" of Constantin-Weyer remain distasteful to many Western Canadians. The historian W. L. Morton, for instance, is touched by the poetry which emanates from his descriptions of the plains yet hastens to reproach him:

> His *Manitoba*, an autobiographical work, and *La Bourrasque*, a novel with Riel as hero, though starred with brilliant descriptive passages, were highly coloured, inaccurate, and brutal sketches of life among the Manitoba French.[4]

It is instructive that Constantin-Weyer was much more respectful and restrained in his later historical novels and this can be attributed to the fact that, as Gérard Tougas notes, his hero La Salle was an illustrious figure known in France and not a "sauvage" from the prairies: "Son esprit railleur, n'ayant plus de prise sur des hommes et des événements entrés depuis longtemps dans l'histoire, se fait révérencieux."[5]

A discussion specifying the various accusations of immorality and falsifications of historical data brought against Constantin-Weyer may in itself be very enlightening. But, in our opinion, this type of commentary does not in any way do justice to the author and his writings on the Northwest. In order to go beyond this quarrel, one should approach the literary texts themselves in an attempt to discover Constantin-Weyer's true vision of nature which provoked controversy and his resulting idea of the underlying conflict between wilderness and civilization.

As hunter and trapper, Constantin-Weyer gained firsthand knowledge about the survival in the wild of the strong and the destruction of the weak. Such experience of nature "red in tooth and claw" or "la leçon de la vie des bois" which the author dramatically objectified in his novels could be related to the biological and philosophical theories fashionable at that time in Europe. This interesting connection or extension between the reality of strife in Western Canadian nature and the influential Darwinian and Nietzschean thought surely impressed Constantin-Weyer, especially since he had the opportunity to enter Valery Larbaud's select circle. After the war, Constantin-Weyer married the niece of Larbaud and dedicated *Cinq éclats de silex* to the cosmopolitan *homme de lettres*. Larbaud, most assuredly, imparted to Constantin-Weyer some of his own absorbing literary and philosophical preoccupations: the translator of Samuel Butler certainly spoke of his enthusiasm for the discoveries of Lamarck, his reformulations of the hypotheses of Darwin, his fascination with the applicability of Nietzsche's

original system and curiosity about Gide's adherence to the notion of the affirmation of man or "amor fati."[6]

Understandably, the men who opened the west realized that in order to survive the rugged frontier environment they should become of superior physical and moral strength and attain a high degree of resilience and fortitude. This latent Darwinism or survival of the fittest and latent Nietzscheism or the will to power in early Western Canadian life is not often referred to or expressed openly:

> Canadians in all walks of life at this time felt that the difficult nature of Canadian soil which meant that men had to struggle so hard would lead eventually to a superior northern nation which would rival those other democratic and northern nations of Europe, from which it had sprung.[7]

Constantin-Weyer's daring adventures in the north encompass these types of struggles for self-preservation and even supremacy. In fact, these struggles can be envisaged at two levels: first, the animal realm in nature where there is an interlocking chain of killing and being killed, and secondly, the human world where some men strive to conquer, vanquish, annihilate.

WHETHER IN A LYRICAL PASSAGE about the northern lights or whether in scenes focusing on Riel's disillusionment about the petitions, the reader of Constantin-Weyer's *La Bourrasque* quickly apprehends that only a few premisses or syllogisms govern this world of experience. One of the most poignant scenes in Constantin-Weyer's novel depicts succinctly how this lesson of the wild prairie nature is essentially the struggle for survival. This scene occurs at the centre point of the Riel novel. Donald Smith, later Lord Strathcona, the man responsible for the building of the railroad across the West, and his personal secretary travel for days by dogsled and will soon arrive at Fort Garry to meet with the rebels. Smith is confident that "les anglais" will easily squash Riel and his band. Although happy to converse at length with his secretary about his plans to attract immigrants to this new land once the Métis have been suppressed and extinguished, he suddenly stops his detailed explanations to demonstrate a perfect image of victim and executioner. Far out in the distance a coyote can be seen pursuing a rabbit. Pointing to the ravage left in the snow, Smith proudly concludes: "—Pas besoin de métaphysique, mon vieux.... La voilà la leçon de choses toute trouvée."

With the composure of a huntsman, Constantin-Weyer relishes in drawing attention to the precise action of the merciless slaughter of the feeble. Nature permits this brutality and savagery where "la clémente Nature est un monstre aux griffes rougies de sang!"[8]

> [Le coyotte] fit un bond dans la neige, le dos courbé un instant, la gueule déjà basse et ouverte. La seconde d'après il lançait en l'air le "jack" énorme, fourré de blanc, et qui s'empourprait déjà de sang.... Les pattes de la victime griffèrent inutilement l'air, avant de pendre inertes.... Le chasseur, sa proie à la gueule, fila la queue basse.

This picture of the instinctive violence of animals in nature leaves one in an emotional and moral quandary; the tender-hearted would have reason to say it is amoral. To witness such a scene of force and carnage or reflect on such a "leçon" or image of power and powerlessness produces an extremely ambivalent impression on the mind: on the one hand, there is the glory of victory and energy, on the other hand, there is the horror of defeat and death. This mixed reaction to the laws of nature and the struggle of the fitter encourages in man a dual stance where nature becomes at the same time serene yet violent, beautiful yet terrifying, "magnifique et horrible" or in the author's words "Ce grand rythme de la Vie et de la Mort, éternellement, circulairement enchaînées l'une à l'autre, ... c'est le thème même de la Nature. Elle est merveilleuse et terrible."

The coyote ripping apart the flesh of the rabbit without an iota of sympathy is an ideal metaphor for a stupendously cruel Canadian historical event. In fact, to illustrate the strangulation of the uncouth prairie-born at the hands of the sophisticated forces of state and army, the Riel rebellion is perfect. The inherent laws of nature are re-echoed in the Canadian battle where the natives raged against the government or between wilderness and civilization. In this scheme of things, Donald Smith is the powerful figure who dominates *La Bourrasque*. He is characterized by Constantin-Weyer as a builder, a man of vision and wisdom who never falters in his devising and scheming. This autocrat will "naturally" disarm Louis Riel and the Métis people and obtain western Canada for Britain and the east. After his quelling of the first Riel rebellion, Smith hurriedly promotes campaigns in Europe to fill the western plains with immigrants thereby driving out forever the natives and the Métis. Just as it was expected that the coyote would destroy the rabbit, it was simple for Smith and the bureaucracy to exile the natives or place them in a marginal position.

Because of Constantin-Weyer's unequivocal admiration for the stronger and the more civilized, the novel *La Bourrasque*, which concentrates on the story of the first rebellion, is consequently narrated in a tone of indignation and disrespect for all characters except Donald Smith. Of course, this novel deals with victims, a people plunged in disgrace; hence the author has no inhibitions about resorting to vulgar language, ridicule, sarcasm, and even the grotesque. We recall that it was this attitude of scorn for the Métis people which astounded readers like Frémont and Trémaudan. It is our contention that this profound spirit of irreverence and amorality in the novel is due to Constantin-Weyer's demonstration of the law of nature and the inner struggle of man towards the surpassing of self. With respect

to Riel, throughout the novel, the author resorts to animal imagery which emphasizes the hero as victim and as dispossessed. Riel is thus seen in terms of animal leitmotivs, first as a defenceless sheep brought to slaughter, secondly as a solitary wolf living on the periphery, on the boundaries of civilization. However resourceful in their apprenticeship of political warfare, Riel and the few men stationed in Fort Garry could never hope to impede the forces of government and progress. To his followers, Riel will repeat the idea that the government is playing the unheroic role of a wolf in a sheep-pen: "un gouvernement qui lui paraissait jouer le rôle d'un loup dans une bergerie." And to continue his animal imagery or leitmotiv of the Métis people as hounded sheep, the author will designate all their harangues and discussions as an ineffective "bleating": "un homme et deux femmes braillaient des choses contradictoires, sur le ton de la plus véhémente colère. Au milieu des beuglements discordants. . . ." In order to underline the reality that the Métis are no longer lords of the plain but scavengers on the land, the author equates Riel to a lone wolf:

> Très loin, vers l'ouest, . . . un loup hurla, d'un ton de défi plaintif. Riel se sentit frère de cet être qui réclamait, dans la nuit, les droits dont les premières approches de la civilisation l'avaient privé! (p. 102)

> Riel fut frère des loups. En marge de la civilisation, comme eux; habitué à la libre nature, comme eux; et comme eux, encore, obligé de mendier ou de voler sa subsistance à un quelconque des poulaillers de la civilisation. . . . (p. 195)

The opposition between Donald Smith and Louis Riel or the executioner and the victim captured in ruthless animal imagery is highlighted further by means of another very pertinent literary device. Out of three epigrams which open various chapters of the novel, two are taken from Rudyard Kipling. These intertextual references written by an advocate of imperialism and included in a novel about skirmishes in an English colony, sum up with clear precision the distinction between symbols of power — the English flag, and Constantin-Weyer's image of defeat — the bleating sheep:

> Qu'est-ce que le drapeau Britannique?
> Vents du Monde, répondez. (p. 139)
>
> (Kipling, *Barrack Room Ballads*)

> Nous sommes de pauvres agneaux égarés . . .
> Bée bée bée . . . (p 201)
>
> (Kipling, *Gentlemen Rankers*)

APART FROM THE MACRO-STRUGGLE or the more overt strife of the Métis in the west against the encroaching powers of progress, there is another very immediate micro-struggle within the Métis' inner self. When Con-

stantin-Weyer arrived in the Canadian West in the early 1900's, the image of the native on the prairie had been totally shattered and even reversed. The native indigenous to the Northwest was now labelled a man of vile appetites, a man without moral conscience, polish, knowledge, or language. For Constantin-Weyer, the concept of the noble savage as promulgated by a James Fenimore Cooper had degenerated into the Métis race.[10] The Métis, by definition, has in his veins the mixture of French or other European blood and Indian blood; therefore, it is a widely held opinion that this inner tension of being situated "betwixt-and-between" gives rise to "the half-blood's enigmatic mediatory place as a new species between primitivism and civilization [and] manifest[ed] at once [by] his capacity for subhuman depravity and superhuman potentiality."[11] The idea behind this *mélange* of races or half-blood is that the Métis will be engaged in a perpetual *fight within himself* for the ascendancy of his civilized manners over his savage instincts. Needless to say, knowing Constantin-Weyer's unbridled cynicism *vis-à-vis* the Métis people, the refined manners more often than not crumble and succumb to the brutish ways. This notion of the inner struggle within the Métis where the man of wilderness fights the man of culture parallels the rebellion or the outer struggle in Constantin-Weyer's novel.

Let us look at a few examples to distinguish how the savage-civilization state of inner conflict operates in *La Bourrasque*. Except for rare instances, Louis Riel, as one would expect, leans towards savagery and barbarism. When it comes to sexual exploits, the hero Riel is the epitome of the savage: he is always disposed to go out into the bushes and make love to any wanton Métis girl "et de culbuter sur les feuilles mortes la joyeuse commère, toujours prête à se faire trousser." However, with the respectable wife of Mr. Hamarstyne, Riel is transformed into the most exquisite blushing lover. As he climbs to the lady's chamber, he loses all traces of his savage ancestry and enters the room metamorphosed into a perfect gentleman: "A ce moment, l'amour avait chassé de Riel toute trace de sang sauvage, et il ne restait plus que le Français."

Constantin-Weyer considers Riel's enjoyment in stalking the fields and woods as another expression of the Métis propensity for the untame. For example, while visiting various communities and inciting the Métis to armed insurrection, Riel meets a hunter in the forest. Instead of pronouncing his usual diatribe about injustices and petitions, Riel helps the hunter with his trap and asks questions about the animals in the region. Again, Constantin-Weyer explains this facet of Riel's character by resorting to his notion of the inner struggle or the sheer predominance of the wild over the urbane:

> Riel subitement intéressé se pencha. Dans cette minute la chasse seule valait la peine d'être vécue. Le sauvage avait reparu en lui. Il suivait haletant la démonstration du vieux métis. . . . Il n'était plus qu'un chasseur, descendant de nombreux chasseurs.

More significant instances of Riel's metamorphosis from civilized, educated man to savage transpire at critical moments during the second rebellion. When the grievances and land rights of the Métis are demanded and when the history of their expulsion from Manitoba and exile in Saskatchewan is recalled, Riel becomes furious and calls for revenge. To understand Riel's outbursts of hate and vehemence, the author again furnishes us with his idea that the savage in him has resurfaced:

> A l'entendre parler tortures, Riel se révélait physiquement un fils des Sioux et des Crees. De la façon la plus curieuse du monde, ses yeux se bridaient et à eux seuls abolissaient toute trace du sang français. Parallèlement, son âme devenait barbare. . . .

Whenever such violent or extreme actions are planned or carried out, Riel and the Métis people are always judged as having given way to their savage nature: "Le sauvage reparut immédiatement en eux. Il en était toujours ainsi lorsqu'il s'agissait de guerre, de chasse ou d'amour!"

Even with Riel on the gallows, Constantin-Weyer will pursue his thesis of the inner conflict between savagery and civilization. At the end, before being hanged, Riel is asked if he wishes to speak. The officiant reminds him of his pride, his immortal soul, and entreats him to remain silent. However, Riel has a few words to say. This last gesture is interpreted by Constantin-Weyer as a visible sign of the ultimate domination of the forces of unrestraint in the leader and victim:

> Comme si le sang sauvage eût brusquement réveillé sa moitié indienne, la couleur revint aux joues de Riel . . . Il haussa les épaules et sourit d'un air dédaigneux . . . Il se détourna à demi, et prononça d'une voix très nette:
> — Dites donc? c'est ça, votre civilisation?

THE MÉTIS REBELLION and its inevitable defeat provided Constantin-Weyer with an ideal story which had the built-in drama and conflict between spheres of primitivism and progress. Along with the larger canvas depicting skirmishes between the native population and the dreamers of railroads and expansionism, Constantin-Weyer imagined the more intimate battle waged within the mind of the Métis, as exemplified by Riel, where his inclinations towards the cultivated and refined clash with his Indian past and prairie roots.

This singular vision of "la leçon de la vie des bois" is not only apparent in *La Bourrasque* but is at the heart of most of Constantin-Weyer's novels and essays on the Canadian West. His more well-known novel *Un Homme se penche sur son passé* concerns itself with the same overriding idea as in *La Bourrasque* but from the alternate perspective — the builders of the prairies and not the dispossessed or losers of the land. This later novel, which adopts the format of a confession, pre-

sents the demise of the adventurous frontiersmen and the growth of an agrarian society and the settling of the West because of the influx of immigrants. The hero (like the author) arrived in Manitoba in the early years of this century and swiftly learnt to appreciate the harsh existence of the hunter and trapper on the plain. Soon this huntsman is constrained to interrupt his life-style and become a homesteader. Yet, clinging to the old frontier life, the hero sells horses to farmers and travels to the far north for furs in winter. His close friends, one after another, leave him to find a place where they can recover their peaceful primitive ways: the Métis Napoléon emigrates to Oklahoma and David establishes a fishing trade on Lake Winnipeg. Although the French hero (Frenchy) decides to leave Canada, he is not bitter about his experience nor does he claim to be a weakling who cannot accept change and progress. He regrets the passing of an old way of life; nevertheless, he is impressed with the energy and endurance of those pioneers who fight to maintain farms and build cities in the wilderness. Within the span of thirty years, he has witnessed the complete annihilation of the native and Métis people.

This chain of events whereby Riel's nation was easily destroyed and supplanted by another is not only a remarkable achievement but also an excellent illustration, according to Constantin-Weyer, of the laws of nature. After a trip across the West and prior to his departure for Europe, the narrator of *Un Homme se penche sur son passé* celebrates the victory of civilization and sings the praise of the new strong men of "the great lone land":

> J'avais sous les yeux la genèse même d'un pays magnifique. Le triomphant poème de la réussite canadienne chantait à mes oreilles son rythme puissant. C'était la magnifique conquête de la nature par la volonté. . . .
>
> Ainsi, en moins de trente ans, l'effort de quelques hommes, conducteurs de peuples, avait fait de ce désert un pays riche. Une race toute entière avait disparu dans la lutte, et des Sioux, des Crees et des Pieds-Noirs, qui avaient jadis dominé ici, il ne restait plus que quelques rejetons destinés à disparaître devant l'effort continu de la race blanche. . . .[12]

NOTES

[1] Constantin-Weyer was able to approach a high degree of similitude in his recreation of the French Métis patois. The following passage should be read aloud to savour the colourful dialect: "Voiés-tu Riel, j'ai la doutance que si on attaque les v'limeux sans y offrir à s'rend ça va faire du vilain! . . . eune saprée maudite affaire . . . Ça r'virera en mal, cré Mausus! . . . Et pis, te comprends! jongle moié un peu tout ça, y vaut mieux qu'y ait pas de sang versé . . . y font ds bonnes cordes en Ontario. — J' m'en sacre ben d'être pendu, gronda Riel." Maurice Constantin-Weyer, *La Bourrasque* (Paris: Rieder, 1925), p. 133.

[2] The substance of Frémont's argument in the quarrel could be reduced to this statement: "*Vers l'Ouest* et *La Bourrasque* constituent une défiguration grossière et calomnieuse de l'histoire comme il en existe peu d'exemple. La malveillance et le dessein arrêté de dénigrement sont trop visibles pour qu'il soit possible d'invoquer

les moindres circonstances atténuantes. . . ." Cited in Hélène Chaput, *Donatien Frémont: Journaliste de l'Ouest canadien* (Saint-Boniface: Les Editions du Blé, 1977), p. 148.

[3] Roger Motut, who has closely examined the quarrel, reports, for example, that in *La Bourrasque* "if the figure of Louis Riel is not true to fact, the scenes that shocked the critics then would perhaps appear quite normal in today's modern fiction." "From Ploughshares to Pen: Prairie Nostalgia," *The New Land: Studies in a Literary Theme*, ed. Richard Chadbourne and Hallvard Dahlie (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier Univ. Press, 1978), p. 66.

[4] W. L. Morton, *Manitoba: A History*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1967), p. 419.

[5] Gérard Tougas, *La Littérature canadienne-française*, 5th ed. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1974), p. 139.

[6] The "correspondance de coeur" between Larbaud and Butler is discussed by Allison Connell in "Forgotten Masterpieces of Literary Translation: Valery Larbaud's 'Butlers'," *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature*, 1, no. 2 (1974), 167-90. And, the affinity that existed between Larbaud and Constantin-Weyer is alluded to in the dedication "A Valery Larbaud," *Cinq éclats de silex* (Paris: Rieder, 1927), pp. 7-8.

[7] Barbara Thompson Godard, "God's Country: Man and the Land in the Canadian Novel," *Revue de Littérature comparée*, 47, no. 2 (1973), 231.

[8] Constantin-Weyer, *Un Homme se penche sur son passé* (Paris: Rieder, 1928), p. 63. Northrop Frye speaks of the manifest Darwinism in nineteenth-century Canada: "the obvious and immediate sense of nature is the late Romantic one, increasingly affected by Darwinism, of nature red in tooth and claw." "Conclusion," *Literary History of Canada*, ed. Carl F. Klinck, 2nd ed., Vol. II (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1965), p. 355.

[9] *Un Homme se penche sur son passé*, p. 175.

[10] Edward McCourt concedes that James Fenimore Cooper's ideal of the "noble savage" was hard to erase from the minds of the early pioneers. See "Prairie Literature and its Critics," *A Region of the Mind: Interpreting the Western Canadian Plains*, ed. Richard Allen (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1973), pp. 153-62.

[11] William J. Scheick, *The Half-Blood: A Cultural Symbol in 19th-Century American Fiction* (Lexington, Ky.: Univ. Press of Kentucky, 1979), p. 88.

[12] *Un Homme se penche sur son passé*, pp. 205-06.

MY SYMPATHY IS WITH THE FISH

R. G. Everson

Beak like a long, thin Austrian cigar,
the Great Blue Heron
stands with wings folded on high shoulders
in old-fashioned opera-cloak style.

A man about mangroves, he leans down
delicately into the water as though
stooping for a light at a cigar counter.

Now he straightens crookedly
in a tall gentlemanly flourish,
smoking a death-pale puff of fish.

THE DAUGHTER RECREATES HER MOTHER

Davy James-French

This rag doll mass
is empty but prophesies
health. Stuff the arms,

stuff the legs, with mother's
old stockings, remembering

her legs, the veins
sluggish and torn
from your weight.

Innocent burden!
Did she forgive?
Stuff, stuff,

all the way down
to fingers and toes,
those soft gingham clubs.

The head droops like a breast,
absurd! Fill it with sand,
each grain a curse.

Now name it, bless it,
ask it to dance. And laugh
and laugh and laugh.

AUGUST IN SYDENHAM WARD

Robert Billings

(for Gail Fox)

No-one here wants the trees to catch fire
They grow hearts that are older than waiting

Slowly, one dream at a time I have watched
porch lights go on and off, the blue animal
that paws at the wind down Union Street

Cars A beach without footprints And out there
the lake with its drenched blossom of islands

We have watched ourselves turning grey
as this street in late winter The wings
we have tried to grow is a love for white stone

City City All summer I have been in love
with the last flowers to close before sunset

On Bagot Street the world opens into the park:
we want our children to have bodies as alive as the sky

books in review

INTENSELY ANGLOPHILE

GORDON D. MCLEOD, *Essentially Canadian: The Life and Fiction of Alan Sullivan 1868-1947.* Wilfrid Laurier Univ. Press, $9.95.

GORDON MCLEOD'S BIOGRAPHY unveils a complex man and a prolific writing career, until now largely ignored by Canadian scholars and critics. Sullivan's *Three Came to Ville Marie* (1941) won the Governor General's Award, but *The Rapids* (1920), now in the University of Toronto Press's Social History Series, is the only novel now in print of the eighty-odd he wrote, some under his own name and others under the pseudonym, "Sinclair Murray." Sullivan was a constant traveller, spending years at a time abroad, beginning with four years in an Edinburgh boys' school as a teen-ager; he later settled with his family in England, where his children still live. But Sullivan remained "essentially Canadian," as Professor McLeod argues. His deepest ties were to Canada, especially to the rugged land of the Laurentian Shield which he had known as a boy and young man from the time that his clergyman-father was made Bishop of Algoma. Sullivan's best work came from his wilderness experience; perhaps McLeod's most interesting and convincing insights link him with the artists of the Group of Seven.

Partly because of his parents' Anglican loyalties and Bishop Sullivan's frequent fund-raising trips to England, and partly because of Mrs. Sullivan's social predilections, Alan Sullivan was brought up in an intensely Anglophile fashion. He married Bessie Hees of Toronto, equally intensely Anglophile, socially ambitious and wealthy as well, so that she could and did indulge her desire to live in England as the mistress of a country house, Sheerlands in Berkshire. Bessie was never entirely successful in making Alan a settled member of the squirearchy, however, though he accepted the role to please his wife and played it intermittently for several decades. His youthful experiences around Sault Ste. Marie and his later work as prospector and mining entrepreneur had developed in him a strong strain of the solitary wanderer who could tolerate domesticity, however luxurious, only sporadically. In the Canadian north he met and mixed with all sorts of men, from trappers and traders to adventurers on a far grander scale than his own, Sir James Dunn for instance. The most intriguing to him was the glamorous Francis Clerque, a financier-entrepreneur of larger-than-life proportions of whom he wrote in *The Rapids.*

Though that book at least deserves our interest and consideration, Gordon McLeod's biography is unlikely to spark a Sullivan revival, for he was mainly a facile writer of adventure stories, for some decades a popular author with English audiences who were fascinated by stories of the Canadian north. More interesting than most of Sullivan's work is McLeod's picture of the man: he was complex and somewhat haunted, part compulsive writer, part charming adventurer, part country squire, and devoted husband and father, much beloved by family and friends. He was never entirely easy with any of these roles, however, and therein lies his interest for the reader.

Not the least factor of this book's charm is its author's presence in his narrative. Reading *Essentially Canadian* is rather like being treated to an informed but informal lecture by Professor McLeod: anecdotal, digressive, and entirely pleasurable.

CLARA THOMAS

RACIAL EXCAVATION

REESA GREENBERG, *The Drawings of Alfred Pellan*. National Gallery of Canada, $14.95.

ROSEMARIE L. TOVELL, *Reflections in a Quiet Pool — The Prints of David Milne*. National Gallery of Canada, $39.95.

THESE TWO VOLUMES are exhibition catalogues, Tovell's taking the form of a "coffee table" art book, Greenberg's a more modest paperback. Both are copiously illustrated, handsome books presenting a wealth of painstakingly amassed data on the drawings and prints of these two major figures in modern Canadian painting. And both whet one's appetite for more, much more, especially in the case of David Milne.

A certain amount of art historical work has already been done on Pellan, as Greenberg's study indicates. His importance to the Automatistes, his international stature and longstanding commitment to Surrealism, his power as a teacher in the years at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Montréal: all this is already well known. Greenberg's contribution is to have drawn attention to a hitherto neglected area of Pellan's work, an area of considerable interest as the illustrations indicate, and her prose — exact if not elegant — serves the purpose of the catalogue well. One could wish only that the occasion had permitted fuller use of her 1979 interviews with Pellan. Quoted from time to time throughout the book, these interviews provide some material of interest to anyone wishing to pursue the question of the influence of Surrealist poetry as well as painting on Pellan, a study which, as Greenberg notes, should be undertaken. We learn, for instance, of Pellan's suppression of the original titles of his illustrations for Eluard's *Capital de la douleur*, fearing that reprisals might ensue in Duplessis's Quebec (as a result of Eluard's Communist sympathies).

A book on a grander scale than Greenberg's, Rosemarie Tovell's study of David Milne's prints, *Reflections in a Quiet Pool*, is, unfortunately, flawed by poor editing, cumbersome organization, and pedestrian style. Plodding fact-finding is much in evidence, intuitive understanding not at all. But the facts are, of course, useful despite the style in which they are presented, the data from the Milne archives (to which Tovell was granted free access) providing fascinating glimpses of the youthful but ill-educated Milne stumbling onto painting while in pursuit of a career as a commercial artist. Later Milne discovered the aesthetic theories of Ruskin and Clive Bell in a similarly haphazard fashion and embarked on his own aesthetic statement in response to his reading. In the same way his reading of Thoreau's *Walden* seems to have influenced his evolving concept of nature but of this Tovell is able to provide only

seductive hints. Particularly interesting is Milne's statement that even in his middle period, well versed in international Modernism, he preferred to retain a foothold in imitation of nature rather than launching into total abstraction because the latter represented imitation of the work of other men. Originality was possible for Milne only in direct encounter with nature.

A Canadian Romantic and a maverick (asked at one point whether he was one of the Group of Seven, Milne responded that he preferred to be "one of one"), David Milne is a project in search of an author. Rosemarie Tovell is, alas, not that person and one suspects that Tovell was more interested in Milne's development of the colour dry-point *per se* than in any other aspect of her project. On these technical points her book is clear.

But much remains to be done as both Tovell's and Greenberg's books indicate in their different ways. Pellan's work opens the complex question of the relationship between the verbal and visual arts in Canada and, in particular, of the ways in which international Surrealism has been used by groups as seemingly diverse as the "Magic Realists," the so-called "phenomenological poets," painters like Shadbolt and Lemieux and Bates, and film-makers from Norman McLaren to Michael Snow. One could go on complicating the question of adding, say, P. K. Page, bp Nichol, and bill bissett to the list. And in the process of working with names like these, one would, I suspect, reveal a Canadian tradition more profoundly radical than the socialist one which now, for some critics, usurps that adjective, and discover a territory whose boundaries would stretch from Milne to Pellan, from Nichol to Hébert and Brossard. The work is what Michel Foucault would call an archeological endeavour, the excavation of a discourse system. Perhaps now that Milne prints have become thoroughly unaffordable and the futility of further pursuing the comparison of poems with paintings (lonely lands and jack pines, etc.) evident to all, we can get on with the immense task of thinking through the territory.

LORRAINE WEIR

FORMS, POINTS, DETAILS

CHRISTINA LOGAN, *Selected Poems of Christina Logan*. Dreadnaught, n.p.

SUSAN MUSGRAVE, *Tarts and Muggers: Poems New and Selected*. McClelland & Stewart, n.p.

MIRIAM WADDINGTON, *Summer at Lonely Beach and Other Stories*. Mosaic, n.p.

WITH THE PUBLICATION OF *Selected Poem of Christina Logan* Dreadnaught Press is, I feel, doing a subtle disservice to the poetry reader. Christina Logan died of cancer in 1979, and this slim volume is a compilation of presumably the best of her poems, "a mere fragment of her work" according to Wolfgang Schmidt in his preface. That Dreadnaught should see fit to note Logan's personal tragedy is far from wrong; what offends me is their implication that her suffering somehow enhanced the quality of the work. The press release has as caption "Poetic journal of cancer victim published by Dreadnaught." Here is how Schmidt concludes his preface: "Many have suffered her fate; some could tell the rest of us about it; only a chosen few have been able to transform such cruel suffering into poetry."

To put it simply, all poetry is a serious matter, and great suffering is not a necessary prerequisite for the creation of great art. While neither Dreadnaught nor Schmidt claims this outright, they make no attempt to curb the implication. And when poetry is presumed to be of greater interest because of the circumstances of

its authorship, and because the reader is aware of certain events and circumstances behind the poetry, then we are no longer being asked to consider what the printed word bears.

The sad fact is that most of this poetry does not fully stand up on its own. There is a strongly conventional feel to it, as if an objective poetry were somehow being wrested from a voice not yet strong enough to create a subjective one. Almost all of the poems are uninteresting in purely technical terms. The forms they take seem conventional and general, sometimes far too *imposed* to have any integral links to the mood being established. Not far into the book, the formal generality and looseness assumes a ponderous repetitiveness which in turn generalizes the statements themselves.

> You locked in layers
> of protected pride
> watch me
> like a child unmoved
> calling me 'child'
> telling me
> 'stop snivelling'
>
> While i
> with barefaced look
> and clumsy eyes
> struggle to make
> the appearance
> you want to see ("Anger")

The line lengths seem arbitrary, the effect is choppy, and the use of words is imprecise. The few moments of clarity and vision in the book serve merely to pale the rest.

This is more of a scrapbook than anything else. The publisher's press release observes:

> [this volume] is more than a collection of poetry: it is a journal kept by a young woman who suffered from Hodgkins Disease for 19 years before dying at the age of 35.

The "moreness" is in fact "otherness." Paradoxically, Logan's situation led her to put *less* of herself into the poetry than she otherwise might have. She was taking refuge in a poetic *mood* — as the conventionality of the work bears out. There certainly could be much more substance here; these are bright, fleeting surface reflections only hinting at greater depth. It is none of my business to criticize Logan's use of poetry — how could I? — but it is very much my business to say that I do not feel that great or even good poetry can come of such use. At best this book is an uneven document, interesting in other ways — the work not of a good poet but of a lonely, frightened soul seeking comfort in a medium not quite her own.

* * *

I feel guilty, somehow, that I do not understand more of what is going on in Susan Musgrave's poetry, and I suspect it is a similar shortcoming in the poetry-reading public which has kept her from having acquired an even more formidable reputation than the one she now enjoys. *Tarts and Muggers* is an enigmatic work, but not so enigmatic that one cannot see the unique talents of the mind behind (within) it.

The most interesting poetry in the book is founded upon a fascinating use of syntax which seems to tap sources in the reader's mind of which he or she had been unaware. Each work is a mosaic of phrases, a cathedral built of verbal fragments seemingly lifted from conversation. Often the phrases, individually, approach "natural" speech (that ideal so often abused by poets). Yet the effect accomplished by the enjambment of many such phrases undercuts any sense of the natural. These seem to be fragments lifted from *different* conversations.

Musgrave achieves an utterly eloquent poetry capable of adjustment to any contour, not syllable by syllable or word by word, but phrase by phrase — *in segments*. Her poetry is a dazzling juxtaposition of angles — the proverbial infinity of straight lines forming a curve.

All the animals in the forest, all the birds
are
weeping. I alone can hear them — I have
not been spared
those powers. Yet look — you cry too. Read
a book,
get some work to do.

("The Angel-Maker")

Musgrave's ability to build flow from segments closely parallels a basic perception of reality. Infinite, discrete bits of what is familiar blend into a continuum which jolts us with sudden, surprising resonance. Energy crackles in the joints, and the poems are as valuable for what they say implicitly — for their tangential energy — as they are for what they say directly.

In addition to her penchant for the productive subversion of syntax, Musgrave possesses a highly individual sense of drama. I say "individual" because the drama we find here consists not in that accumulation of context which comprises what is commonly called drama — Musgrave's use of disjointed (or "rejointed") phrases prevents that. Here, the accumulated thrust of a poem commonly runs at right angles to that of the individual phrase which the reader is encountering at any given moment. The drama comes from somewhere beyond, or immediately around, the actual words.

Animal! Animal!
You are nobody! You cannot be
anyone.

But I had known that
long before your birth.

So you died then? Only the dead
can know. My lips revealed you
and my black heart has eaten the hole.

("Entrance of the Celebrant")

The absence of the conventionally dramatic makes a mockery of the mere suspension of disbelief — we question the validity of disbelief itself. It does not repossess us when we turn the final page, but remains in some fundamental sense revalued.

The truths — the identities — for which the poet is reaching are reached for obliquely. There is little directly verbal confrontation here. There is more of the quest, a hunt through a landscape of attributes and relatitonships often at cross purposes, or, tantalizingly, only partially revealed. At the centre there is always the firm "I" giving a focus which is stable and personal at the same time. The personality at the centre is firmly enough etched — Musgrave is really speaking to us here — that the poetry is prevented from becoming aphoristic or "clustered" like poetry by, say, Roo Borson, in which all elements of the writing and all the entities it serves are in a state of flux. I don't mean to dismiss Borson — she is as good a poet as Musgrave — but Musgrave's poetry has a unique integrity. There is hardly the slightest shift in real concentration. The poems remain firmly cemented throughout and lines more "pithy" than others are not easily lifted. Each poem is a single point of consciousness, the universe within the atom, relentlessly probed and opened up.

* * *

It's a common compliment used by reviewers because it notes a common element of good writing, and it bears repeating here: most of the stories in Miriam Waddington's *Summer at Lonely Beach* are distinguished by an acute sense of detail. A meticulous perception creates stories so convincing that one can't be sure just how much in them is autobiographical. A good deal I suppose — another truism. Waddington's exercise of the writer's basic skills draws us with uncommon subtlety and persuasiveness into her fictional world, and belies a considerable appreciation of experience and a talent for translating it into prose. The boundary between fiction as fiction and memoir as memoir is difficult to pin down. She achieves a sense of realism not

only through the skilful etching of detail but also through an acute feel for situation. Events seem to have their own impetus and do not contour themselves around the characters. But a balance is achieved, and character frequently interacts with situation to produce great and telling moments. The closing paragraphs of the title story are a good example of how the relentless pressure of events seems to build almost autonomously into a scenario which allows the fullest possible expression of character.

> It was just turning dusk, a warm, late summer dusk. We had boarded the train, found seats, and my mother had settled us around her. Just outside the window Miss Menzies and Dr. Galill stood waving at us. As the train began to heave and creak out of the station, the smell of lake water and sand came to me through the glass like something alive. We were losing it, losing it!
>
> Without knowing why, I felt frantic. I wanted to lean out of the window and to shout that I was sorry to Dr. Galill, sorry that I didn't think he was handsome. And to Miss Menzies I wanted to cry out that I didn't mean to ask her about George, really, I never meant to ask! But the train was moving and wouldn't stop, and the weak light of the sun hit Miss Menzies' hair and made it glow for the last time, blue-green like peacock feathers.

The whole collection could have been this good; unfortunately it is not. Stories such as "Day in the Sun" and "The Honeymoon" are less convincing, more self-consciously conventional. Here Waddington tends more to telegraph her themes, allowing them less freedom to surface naturally through the subtle play of situation and relationship so cleanly mastered in the rest of the book. I suppose I might feel more generous if these stories appeared singly — they certainly master the conventions — but Waddington has set herself a high standard.

Most of the stories, in fact, bear at least minor touches of unsureness; this, at least, is the impression one gains after rereading. Some of these touches are serious, but, incredibly, most do little harm, as if Waddington has actually managed to rescue herself. Take the conclusion of "A Mixed Marriage" for example:

> My mind put away the images of Linda and David, as I then thought, forever. But as I grow older I keep meeting them again. I often pass them in the windows of downtown art galleries. Their faces look out at me from the canvases of Georges Rouault. And sometimes, to my horror, I meet them not in paintings but much closer to home.

"Horror" and references to Roualt simply aren't an accurate or suitably personal way to close this moving story about the decay of a Jewish/Irish intermarriage. Yet in its own inconsistent way the misfire is just slight enough to be forgiven, and the story is not unduly disturbed.

This is Waddington's first short story collection, and however wary one wishes to be about issuing fatuous conclusions as to the unevenness of a major Canadian literary talent, some unevenness must be admitted here. The good and the bad in *Summer at Lonely Beach* are remarkable in their different ways. Fortunately, the good makes the bad bearable, and then some.

ANDREW BROOKS

NAVY BLUES

JAMES A. BOUTILIER, ed., *The RCN in Retrospect, 1910-1968*. Univ. of British Columbia Press, $28.00.

IN ANY TITLE, a term such as "Recollections" or "In Retrospect" normally indicates that the subject, whether individual or institution, is no longer in being. That is so in this case, as the editor points out in his Introduction; James A. Boutilier plots like a tactician the course of events leading to the 1980 conference from which emanated the nineteen contributions that make up this handsome volume.

Such a work might have been called "Proceedings of"; the title chosen, however, helps the reader to identify with Canada's naval service and with those who served in it.

The arrangement of the topics is, by necessity, chronological, with three surveys — two on naval engineering and one on naval aviation — serving as informal divisions between groups of chapters dealing with more limited time periods. The first six papers, then, deal with the period 1910-39, and the second unit — the pivotal one — covers World War II, followed by events of the immediate post-war years to about 1953, the end of the navy's involvement in the Korean War as part of a United Nations task force.

Thereafter follows the aviation survey with a first foreshadowing of the fate that was eventually to befall the whole service. A similar note is struck in the next chapter, in which a description of H.M.C.S. *Labrador*'s services in Arctic exploration ends with the ship being decommissioned and turned over to the Department of Transport. In like fashion, the account of the fortunes of one RCNVR division from the 1950's on is summed up in the caption to Plate 95 (photo credit, U.S. Navy) to the effect that the reserve constitutes "a paper force fighting a paper war." Given such a scenario, it is not surprising — though it is saddening — that the final paper laments the annihilation of the Royal Canadian Navy — not in battle on the high seas — but by the manoeuvres of federal politicians.

One inevitable feature of such a compilation is unevenness in the quality of contributions. This is exemplified in the first grouping, in which pride of place must surely go to Nigel D. Brodeur for his survey of events leading to the navy's coming into being. In it he amplifies and amends G. N. Tucker's account in *The Naval Service of Canada*, Vol. 1, using papers that had belonged to his grandfather, L. P. Brodeur, to give a more positive picture of the country's acceptance of the new force than had appeared in the official history. The chapter just mentioned and the one following are enlivened by references to the first major units of the new fleet, H.M.C. ships *Rainbow* and *Niobe*, with photographs of these vessels and, in the case of the latter, her crew. Plates 3 and 4, indeed, provide an interesting juxtaposition with the formally posed officer (not "officers" as stated), midshipmen, and ratings set above the insouciant black squad.

Less satisfying is the paper on the navy between the wars because of its heavy reliance on chapters 15 and 16 of Tucker. Similarly, the contribution dealing with RCN officer training in capital ships of the Royal Navy consists of a somewhat episodic account of gunroom life, apparently personal, but written from a third-person point of view. From it, one gathers that the writer objects to "snotty" as a form of address, but his discussion of the term's popularization is curiously flawed by his ascription of it to two pseudonymous writers of naval fiction, Taffrail (not "Traffrail" as in the text) and Bartimeus. These he wrongly associates with the nineteenth century and to them he gives the credit instead of to Rudyard Kipling, who used "snotty" in a tale published in 1904, following its appearance in a dictionary of slang dating from the previous year.

Undoubtedly the highlight of *RCN in Retrospect* is the group of chapters dealing with the navy's role in the Second World War. Beginning with details of the service rendered by three converted CN ships, each a Prince, the account proceeds to a fascinating analysis of Canada's relatively minor role in convoy protection during the three months or so in 1943 at which time the U-boat menace was finally overcome, so that credit for the victory went to the Royal Navy. The diagnosis:

sheer exhaustion following the savage battles of 1942, the subject of this volume's longest chapter.

Before that gripping tale, however, has come an intelligence thriller with its story of a deadly code-breaking game played by U-boat trackers operating on land, far from their natural environment. Then follows the actual confrontation in the narration of three convoys presented in heroic terms and enhanced by quotations from E. J. Pratt's saga of Convoy SC 42, "Behind the Log." In the work under review, the events are viewed from opposing perspectives by the collaboration of W. B. Douglas and Jürgen Rohwer, but the definitive assessment is still Pratt's:

> Sailors above the sea, sailors below
> Drew equally upon a fund of courage.
> No one might gamble on the other's fear
> Or waning will.

Thereafter begin the accounts of slow erosion. The surviving member of the Mainguy Commission's inquiry into the mutinies in RCN ships during the later 1940's assesses causes and results, incidentally sounding a warning for all Canadians of today that camouflaging an ugly truth by euphemism leads only to repetition and aggravation of the original offence. The events here chronicled, however, represent only the first signs of damage. Thenceforth the quality of silence on which the service traditionally prided itself had a negative effect on its fortunes, giving politicians the opportunity to consign it to oblivion in the name of efficiency, the point underlined in the final chapter.

Besides the criticisms voiced earlier, some slips in typography and usage fail to be noted: U-boat concentration "Panther" is given as "Panter"; "though" becomes "thought"; and there are others. Lack of a complete index is a drawback also, one that is not fully compensated for by the list of ships and the alphabetized abbreviations accompanied by meanings. The latter, however, totally omits terms applied to convoys and their movements; thus the reader is left to guess at meanings for SC, ON, ONS, HX, TM, CHOP, and EG or to search the text for fugitive references. More surprising is the caption to Plate 61 stating that H.M.S. *Duke of York* is firing broadsides when the positions of the 14-inch gun barrels indicate otherwise.

All things considered then, the final summation may be left to the Augustan poet-critic, Alexander Pope, when he says: "if the means be just, the conduct true, / Applause in spite of trivial faults is due." Just how sustained the acclamation is will depend on the reader's willingness to put up with human error.

DAVID MACAREE

DÉPOSSESSION & COMPLICITÉ

CLAUDE JASMIN, *L'Armoire de Pantagruel.* Leméac, $9.95.

MADELEINE FERRON, *Histoires édifiantes.* La Presse, n.p.

RENOUANT AVEC LA TRADITION amorcée par Parti-pris du roman de la revendication et de l'aliénation, Claude Jasmin remet en question dans *L'Armoire de Pantagruel* la notion même du pouvoir. Ce texte vif et provocant conjugue presque sans heurt un discours dont l'effet ultime est de démasquer le caractère arbitraire des puissances sociales.

L'intrigue, qui est menée avec verve, raconte l'histoire d'un jeune révolté Richard Mars dont la dépossession le pousse à la destruction. C'est-à-dire, à la destruction des forces sociales qui l'ont d'abord réduit à la pauvreté et à la déchéance pour ensuite le condamner à l'emprisonnement pour vie à cause de certaines activités terroristes. Libéré pen-

dant trois heures de l'hôpital où il subit un examen médical, Richard va tuer tour à tour ses parents, son psychiatre, le juge qui l'avait condamné et sa maîtresse qui l'avait trahi. Ces meurtres n'ayant pour but, toutefois, que l'acquisition d'une certaine liberté "morale" puisque le prisonnier, en connivence avec un gardien, compte retourner à l'hôpital avant minuit.

Si cette intrigue réussit à capter l'attention du lecteur, ce n'est pas uniquement à cause du suspense — qui est admirable — mais également parce que les actes du jeune révolté sont motivés sur un plan psychologique. Le thème de l'emprisonnement (physique et spirituel) du héros est mis en rapport avec son enfance par le biais de nombreux détails qui s'agglutient dans le motif de l'armoire. Ce motif concrétise, d'une part, la misère de sa jeunesse: "Lui, le malchanceux du sort, le petit garçon qu'on enferme dans une armoire bancale," alors que, d'autre part, il en révèle la puissance avortée: "Il redeviendra le petit garçon fort et brave qui faisait sourire un évêque dans une sacristie à armoire de chêne défectueuse." De même lorsque plus tard Richard rencontre des amis dans le bar "Le Pantagruel" c'est pour tenter de revendiquer l'impuissance par la force. On s'aperçoit, en fait, que chaque drame propose une inversion de sens comme pour mieux appuyer la question qui hante le texte: "Pourquoi deux mondes?" Lorsque Richard va tuer sa mère qui ne l'a jamais aimé, elle crie: "'Tire mon enfant de chienne, t'as jamais aimé parsonne au monde! Parsonne!'"; face à la mort le psychiatre, jadis rempli de certitudes arrogantes, prend conscience de l'injustice monstrueuse de la condition humaine alors que le juge tout puissant se transforme en un condamné à mort "soufflant, suant, muet, stupéfie." Tout endroit détient à un acte près l'envers de ses structures et de son fondement.

L'enjeu de cet arbitraire est également démasqué par le recours à une certaine mythologie. Ce n'est pas, en effet, par hasard que le héros révolté, dont le nom évoque une planète et un personnage littéraire, rêve d'être un surhomme, fils d'un dieu, avatar de l'évêque habillé d'or. Inversement, ce n'est pas non plus par hasard que dans la réalité son père qui est "ce bossu trop gras, sourd, timoré, muet" incarne l'impuissance totale. Tributaire d'une possibilité de transcendance, cette dimension mythique permet au récit, de dépasser un aspect référentiel qui risquerait d'en limiter la signification à une seule donnée historique par les références au F.L.Q. et à Carole Davault (dans le personnage de Carole Malbeuf).

En outre, le thème de la possession et de la dépossession personnelle ou sociale s'articule sur celui de la parole. Richard est avide du désir de dire, voire de libérer, le cri muet de sa révolte par l'intermédiaire du langage. Il revient à Claude Jasmin le mérite d'avoir su exprimer, dans ce roman captivant, la complexité, toujours authentique, de ce cri.

En comparaison aux révoltes par Claude Jasmin, celles qui sont mises en place dans le recueil de Madeleine Ferron frappent par leur nature particulière et restreinte. C'est, en réalité, tout un autre monde que l'écrivain dessine en renvoyant à ses souvenirs de la Beauce. Or ces souvenirs, qui inspirent la narration d'anecdotes émouvantes, posent toujours en sourdine la question de savoir ce qui constitue les limites de la complicité ou de la solidarité humaine. Doit-on accélérer la mort d'un ami pour lui épargner des souffrances? Dans quelle mesure une société se doit-elle de protéger ses faibles? Qui est responsable du suicide d'un jeune homme déprimé à la suite d'une déception amoureuse? Finement axée sur une petite morale, chaque nouvelle renvoie ainsi, non sans ironie, au titre du recueil *Histoires édifiantes.*

Curieusement, toutefois, ce n'est pas le thème de l'édification qui constitue à notre avis la plus grande réussite du recueil. On serait plutôt tenté de privilégier le motif d'"Histoires" parce que celui-ci suggère l'activité de la création artistique. Activité dont l'écrivaine retrace l'émergence dans le préambule. Et c'est là qu'on voit, en premier lieu, s'amorcer une articulation entre l'être qui écrit et le monde qui la nourrit; monde dans ce cas marqué par la joie, par la connaissance et surtout par la prise de conscience de l'importance du conte, "Ou peut-être n'avais-je, tout simplement, que la nostalgie des interminables récits dont mon père nous entretenait." La fécondation artistique de l'auteur est illustrée avec un tel bonheur dans le préambule, qu'on imagine facilement ce que pourraient être les mémoires de Madeleine Ferron.

Débordant dans la fiction, l'expression du "je" narratif permet de mettre en rapport le mouvement d'une conscience avec celui de l'anecdote racontée. Par exemple, lorsqu'à la fin du récit "L'Echarde" Madeleine Ferron affirme: "Il suffit que je touche à ce point douloureux ... pour que j'entende aussitôt ces cris épouvantables qui nourriront sans fin ma honte," le sens même de l'histoire est amplifié par l'expression inavouée d'une matrice de l'écriture. De même quand l'écrivain s'autoreprésente par le thème de la création artistique dans l'excellente nouvelle "Le Luthier," c'est la signification du livre entier qui est enrichie. L'entreprise prend un sens plus large, plus complexe, un sens qui correspond à ces "voix intérieures" dont nous souhaitons entendre beaucoup d'échos.

JANET M. PATERSON

ZEUS ET MINERVE

JOSETTE MARCHESSAULT, *Lettre de Californie.* Nouvelle Optique, $7.95.

MONIQUE BOSCO, *Portrait de Zeus peint par Minerve.* L'Arbre HMH, n.p.

LE TEXTE DE JOSETTE MARCHESSAULT est court mais très beau. Il s'agit d'un hommage à Meridel Le Sueur, romancière, historienne, journaliste, mémoraliste du 20e siècle, née aux Etats-Unis et qui a beaucoup voyagé, et d'un hommage aussi à toutes les femmes, minorités minoritaires, venues d'ailleurs: "chicanas, négresses" ou appartenant à la terre d'Amérique: "ouvrières de toutes nos tribus ou autres sauvagesses." Son souffle généreux fait chanter avec amour les laissées-pour-compte, ces femmes pionnières et méconnues: les mères "invisibles comme le vent, pesées à la livre de chair dans le jeu des spéculations," "les nourrices, les femmes des hommes, les oies blanches" et ces femmes, ces déesses, guerrières, poètes, amazones, anti-esclavagistes, révolutionnaires, humanistes, amoureuses, anti-militaristes, "semeuses d'oxygène de notre tradition." La poésie de Marchessault vous atteint par la force de ses images qui ne reculent pas devant l'évocation de la violence. Femme, elle ne craint pas l'emportement passionné, la véhémence de la répétition, le reassassement même, c'est son témoignage, c'est son empreinte à celle qui "voyage dans le ventre d'une chienne de la toundra." Et si, venue de loin, venue de bas, c'est bien à la gorge, aux entrailles que sa poésie vous saisit, c'est pour s'élever aussi, fulgurante:

> Elles sont gueule à gueule dans le temps des planètes,
> jettent leurs étincelles, ondulent comme des bannières,
> et cela fonde la braise,
> passe la fumée au soufre.

Dans ce poème, rien de niais, rien de mou, rien de gratuit, tout y est voulu et

senti. Marchessault a donné sans compter le meilleur de ce qu'elle était, de ce qui l'habitait.

Ce poème attachant et fort est suivi d'une série de belles photographies et de la biographie de quelques femmes qui marquèrent l'histoire de l'humanité. A l'ubiquité de la fiction qui parle juste et fort, elle a voulu joindre l'irréfutable, l'inoubliable vérité du portrait de certaines héroïnes.

Si Marchessault s'engage à fond dans la cause de la femme et de l'humanité portée par le "coyote," ce loup américain, frère du chacal, ce bâtard en somme qui passe outre les appartenances et les distances, Monique Bosco, elle, s'engage à raconter la lente et douloureuse métamorphose de la femme, à partir de ce lieu où elle écrit, le Québec, et de ce moment qu'elle vit.

Son long poème qui mêle légende et réalité, histoire de l'humanité et défoulement personnel, tente, après "ce printemps," "ces grandes marées d'équinoxe" maintenant qu'il "fait beau" de "recommencer l'histoire à sa façon." Zeus le père, le tyran est démystifié et nous assistons à son obscure et pénible agonie. Minerve, sa fille favorite, déesse de l'intelligence, protectrice de la famille, de la cité, elle aussi se découvre, se dévoile dans toute son obscurité, "muette et gauche," totalement et volontairement soumise au père, ignorante, inutile, impure. Mais, grâce à ce retour sur elle-même, Minerve purifiée, renouvelée "est allée au fond des apparences," elle est "prête à affronter la lumière crue du soleil levant."

Ce poème constitue la confession totale, courageuse et émouvante d'une femme, de beaucoup de femmes longtemps aveugles aux changements qui se dessinaient autour d'elles, "three blind mice," et qui reconnaissent avoir raté et freiné "l'heure de la délivrance"; femme, elle a peut-être ou plutôt sans nul doute, joué contre les femmes, contre l'humanité même, "le jeu selon les règles séculaires." Une "minerve," n'est-ce pas aussi cet appareil orthopédique, ce carcan qui enferme le cou et est destiné à maintenir la tête en bonne position.

Sa poésie qu'anime un souffle épique a su choisir une palette aux couleurs vives. Bosco sait se situer hors du mièvre, du pleurnichard. Chez elle, rien de passéiste: "elle ne regrette rien" et "est prête à s'élancer en avant." Au mythe de Zeus perpétué par Minerve, Bosco substitue "Le Portrait de Zeus peint par Minerve." Alors que Marchessault tente de reconstituer la somme de ses mémoires perdues, élément précieux de notre histoire et qui s'effiloche, se perd dans la nuit des temps, Bosco essaie de boucher le trou en refaisant le chemin de la femme dépassée, déphasée, à qui l'on a imposé le parfait apprentissage à l'impuissance et qui s'est aliénée, s'est vidée de son corps et de son esprit. Bosco refait ce chemin pour toutes les femmes, avec toutes les femmes car elle sait que ce n'est que si elle réussit à "recommencer l'histoire" que la femme s'épanouira.

Avec Marchessault ou Bosco la femme demeure pour l'instant veuve de l'homme, vierge de l'homme.

Pour ce qui est de leur écriture, écrivent-elles comme des femmes? C'est un des droits qu'elles revendiquent, elles veulent avoir droit à leur différence comme tout écrivain a droit à sa différence, qu'il soit homme, qu'il s'apparente par son style et par ses préoccupations aux écrivains de son époque.

CLAIRE-LISE ROGERS

REVIEWS

Dossiers de presse, Bibliothèque du Séminaire de Sherbrooke, n.p.

THE *Dossiers de presse* published by the Bibliothèque du Séminaire de Sherbrooke

is a massive project including, to date, 637 French-Canadian authors in 21 voluminous loose-leaf folders, similar files being available on Québec film-makers. The dossiers contain clippings from major newspapers, a few articles from periodicals otherwise difficult to locate, as well as some radio broadcast transcripts. Occasionally, cross-references to periodicals like *Lettres québécoises* are provided. *Le Devoir*, *La Presse*, and their weekend supplements have been covered almost exhaustively since 1975; there are selections from such publications as *Action Québec* (1968-70), *Le Jour* (1975ff.), *Le Quartier Latin* (1938-40), *Le Soleil* (1975-80), and others. In addition, some clippings from English newspapers like *The Gazette*, *The Montreal Star*, *The Globe and Mail*, and *Weekend Magazine* are included (these increase in number in cases like Roger Lemelin's *Les Plouffe* which, made into a film, played to both French and English audiences). Libraries receive updated material twice a year, containing both recent newspaper articles as well as older ones as they become available. Some of the dossiers can now also be purchased in book-form for those who are interested in press comments on individual authors and do not wish to invest in the entire series. Copyright is reserved for all of the material; the publishers indicate that some articles have not been included because rights could not be cleared.

The *Dossiers* are largely organized by author's name; writers are classified as "chansonnier," "critique," "dramaturge," "essayiste," "historien," "journaliste," "monologuiste," and "poète," with quite a number of them — e.g., Gilles Marcotte and Fernand Ouellette — occupying several categories at once. Most of the authors included are contemporary, but there are also sections on older writers who continue to attract French-Canadian attention for a variety of reasons, e.g., Arthur Buies, Octave Crémazie, Louis Fréchette, Emile Nelligan, and others. The number of pages available on each author gives an interesting indication of their popularity with the press and, by implication, with a fairly broad readership. Michel Tremblay tops the list with 267, followed by Gilles Vigneault with 226; the gap between them and other much discussed authors like Marie-Claire Blais (206), Anne Hébert (138), Victor-Lévy Beaulieu (138), and Hubert Aquin (133) is fairly large; performed literature (theatre, song) has a predictably wider appeal than the often experimental and intellectually demanding writing of novelists and poets. The difference in the coverage of Marie-Claire Blais's and Anne Hébert's work is, of course, due to Blais's much longer list of books, but it also points to the significance of more or less sensational biographical data for newspaper criticism. Blais's personality and life style have always intrigued her interviewers whose descriptions of her range from "une petite fille toute simple, toute menue, toute timide" (Martial Dassylva, *La Presse*, 19 juin 1965), "un tendre petit oiseau tombé du nid" (*L'Action*, 30 novembre 1966), to "a mouse in a throne room . . . a cheeky, out-of-place urchin" (George Russell in *Weekend Magazine*, October 25, 1976). By contrast, Anne Hébert's deceptively bourgeois bearing and her unwillingness to talk about either herself or her work frustrates many of her interviewers. With studies in biography and autobiography being among the most popular fields in literary criticism at the moment, these interviews with Québec authors could provide valuable source material for the study of an author's typecasting through his critics over an extended period of literary productivity, as well as of tendencies toward, or refusal of, autostereotyping. Such explorations might be of particular interest with respect to

women authors, as Suzanne Lamy has suggested in her analysis of female dialogue in *D'Elles*.

Of particular interest to an English-Canadian user of the *Dossiers* may be the inclusion of such authors as Mordecai Richler, Leonard Cohen, David Fennario, and Jack Kerouac, all of whom are considered relevant to the Québec literary scene either because their work has been translated into French (although that alone does not guarantee attention, as neither Margaret Laurence nor Dennis Lee is included to this point) or because their work contains affinities to the French situation. Richler and Cohen seem to be almost considered honorary Québécois because their Jewish background has given them a comparable experience of physical and mental alienation, Cohen's international reputation as a folksinger adding to his attractiveness. Some of the articles in the dossiers on English-Canadien authors are of particular interest to the comparatist because they contain discussions concerning the co-existence of the Canadian literatures and of their reputation abroad otherwise rarely found in Québec criticism, a particularly penetrating example being Robert Guy Scully's "Le Grand Romancier québécois: un Juif anglophone?" (*Le Devoir*, 1er avril 1972) with an assessment of Richler's *St. Urbain's Horseman* as a Québec novel.

Apart from the entries by author's name, there are also 28 thematic entries, among them "censure québécoise," "droits d'auteur," "édition québécoise," "féminisme québécois," "chanson québécois," "journalisme québécois," "prix littéraires," and "théâtre québécois." Again, performed literature is most strongly represented, with a hefty 545 pages covering Québec theatre. Surprisingly little information is collected on Québec feminism (5) and women writers (8), as compared to male writers (103). Considering the liveliness of Québec feminism and writing by women, is one to deduce that the major newspapers continue to be dominated by male critics writing about male authors? (A section discussing leading Québec reviewers is also available and makes excellent introductory reading because the dossiers covering as they do only a selection of papers contain, to a large degree, the views of only a few critics like Jean Ethier-Blais, Gilles Marcotte, André Major, and others.) However, information on Québec feminists also appears under different headings such as "censure québécoise," an impressive collection of 163 pages mostly consisting of press comments concerning the various scandals surrounding the production of Denise Boucher's *Les Fées ont soif*.

It is perhaps in cases where literature becomes a political issue that the immense usefulness of the dossiers becomes especially apparent. The rapid developments of a theatrical éclat can only be adequately appreciated through a more or less complete sampling of press reports, especially if views from both conservative and liberal sources are included. Thus, the clippings on Boucher's play include numerous letters to the editor, cartoons, and articles written by authorities in the fields of theology, law, medicine, philosophy, and others. (An edition of *Les Fées ont soif* published by Les Editions Intermède includes major press comments in such a way as to make them almost part of the stage directions.) Some of the articles attempt to place the case of *Les Fées ont soif* in historical perspective by citing earlier occurrences of censureship in Québec (going back as far as the banning of *Tartuffe* in New France), thus giving valuable historical information.

Closely related to the politicization of literature through a theatre scandal is that surrounding literary awards in Québec. Most major awards like the Governor General's Award or the Prix Fémina,

Prix Médicis, and, above all, the Prix Goncourt, elicit extended discussions whether the book thus distinguished is indeed a book Québec writers wish to be identified with. Some of the more heated debates surrounded Marie-Claire Blais's *Une Saison dans la vie d'Emmanuel* (accused by both progressive and conservative critics for misrepresenting Québec to an international audience), somewhat less so Antonine Maillet's *Pélagie-la-Charrette*. Québec authors have been notorious for refusing to accept the Governor General's Award; Victor-Lévy Beaulieu, however, accepted the award in order to be able to make a public statement in the presence of high state dignitaries. His speech is included among the clippings in his dossier.

The *Dossiers de presse* is, in short, an indispensable research tool having so many uses that one wishes a similarly time-saving collection were available for the study of English-Canadian literature. The lack of such material is particularly painful to critics working on authors on whom (for one reason or another) academic criticism is not yet available, or on little-known writers who are not widely reviewed. I, for one, am grateful to have easy access to a sampling of previous reviews, which help to place more recent comments in a better perspective.

EVA-MARIE KROLLER

COLONIAL

R. A. DAVIES, ed., *On Thomas Chandler Haliburton: selected criticism.* Tecumseh, $7.95.

THOMAS CHANDLER HALIBURTON, *The Old Judge, or Life in a Colony.* Ed. with introduction and notes by M. G. Parks. Tecumseh, $5.95.

ONLY THE SPECIALIST is likely to be interested in Davies's book, and he will soon give up in exasperation. The general reader, or the undergraduate student, could well confine himself to the introductions by McDougall and Watters, and say the section by Fred Cogswell in the *Literary History of Canada.* But for the specialist this is an untidy and inexpertly edited volume. Apart from the many typographical errors, a disordered table of contents, and inconsistencies in bibliographical detail, most of the criticism is readily available, and the chief benefit is in having the early reviews gathered together — though the real value of these remains debatable. On the whole, neither publisher nor editor nor critic is well-served by this publication; not to mention Haliburton himself. It is for example an absolute unkindness to put in such a garbled (edited?) lump of Liljegren, so chopped up as to be virtually incomprehensible critically. On the other hand, the editor fails to intervene in printing in full Watters's introduction to *The Sam Slick Anthology*, when Watters had lifted some bits of it from his introduction to *The Old Judge*, also reprinted in full. It doesn't look good.

Most of the essays survey the range of Haliburton's achievement, and draw attention to the distinctiveness of his accomplishment. In other words, most of them are in essence critical introductions. But it is an odd effect to read a whole volume of these — after 150 years, Haliburton is still being introduced. Something is clearly very wrong; but Davies, in *his* introduction, does not seem to have noticed.

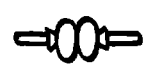
The common preoccupation of the essays is with Haliburton's reception, and Davies's selection of reviews and notices 1837-1855 is yet another attempt to discover just how to go about reading Haliburton. Yet in his introduction he no more than notices the range of response. In fact his real interest, it appears, is in Haliburton's missing correspondence. He is not, on the evidence, a particularly sensitive reader of the texts, and he has no new line to offer.

The other common feature is a strange hiatus in logic, revealed (remarkably) most openly in Watters. The typical argument is that Haliburton devises Sam Slick to goad the Bluenose "towards greater exertion of mind and body in ingenuity and industry," in direct competition with the Yankee. Yet it is by no means clear that such a desirable reform of character would encourage greater union with Britain. Rather, by developing habits of resolution and independence, it is more likely to advance the political ends espoused by Joseph Howe. It is not at all clear how the device of Sam Slick could effectively promote Haliburton's own political views. Haliburton may have been confused, but so also is that line of analysis, and Watters and company are on much safer ground in developing the proposition that Haliburton was by temperament a satirist. The terms and the nature of his satirical achievement have still in fact to be adequately spelled out.

The Old Judge is not Haliburton's most characteristic work. It has been largely disregarded, and those who recommend it think that the concentration on scenes of Nova Scotian life may have limited its appeal, as well as the absence of Sam Slick. Watters thinks it is a forgotten masterpiece (by the end of his essay that is scaled down to a minor classic), and Fred Cogswell finds it the most satisfying of Haliburton's books, comparable to *Roughing It in the Bush* for human insight and range of interest. M. G. Parks in his introduction does not confine himself so much to subject matter, but in drawing attention to the variety of humour and the variety of subjects and tones, he still leaves unidentified the purpose of all this. "Your story is like a broken needle, it has got no point," complains Stephen Richardson on one occasion; and Milton Wilson has drawn attention to the fact that Haliburton's tales all serve some purpose, illustrate some precept.

Reading *The Old Judge* right through, one can agree readily enough that this is much more carefully and elaborately written than the Sam Slick tales, but they are only intermittently entertaining, and it is undeniably an effort to read the whole of them. A rather different version of Frye's rather hurried argument about mask and ego seems to apply here. *The Old Judge* suffers precisely from being so carefully written: it is, if anything, overwritten. More than a series of sketches of life in a colony, it is a display of narrative virtuosity. The "Keeping-Room of an Inn" sequence in particular discusses the right way to tell a story, but there and in the other chapters Haliburton too often confuses narrative effects for narrative effectiveness, and what emerges most strikingly is that Haliburton's self-consciousness here is not political ego but artistic ego. Even that might have been tolerable enough; yet one sees that he was not attending to his own artistic instincts, but writing in imitation of literary fashions — writing, in particular, in imitation of the manner of Washington Irving, as in the various melancholy and gothic tales which most captured his imagination. The set descriptions are too ambitious to impress, the style is frequently artificial ("the winged insect tribe") and distastefully precious, the sentiments familiar, the action melodramatic. In contrast with the folksy and the "nateral" of Sam Slick and Stephen Richardson, there is much here that is literary and deliberate. Not Haliburton's melancholy, but his vanity, seems to be the issue at this stage of his career — his inexact self-awareness, his colonialism.

ADRIAN MITCHELL



TREMBLAY

RENATE USMIANI, *Michel Tremblay.* Douglas & McIntyre, $5.95.

ONE OF THE STRENGTHS of this, the first book-length study of Michel Tremblay's works, is its thoroughness. The author manages to comment on a range of aspects — themes, characters, language and structure, among others — in all of Tremblay's pieces excluding only *L'Impromptu d'Outremont* (1980), *Les Anciennes Odeurs* (1981) and his recent novels. Realizing the lead-time publishers require, one can understand, if lament, these omissions.

Dr. Usmiani begins her survey with a chapter that, through a careful selection of details, traces the history of theatre in Quebec into the 1960's. Throughout the book she continues to outline the historical, political, or social context for each of the plays under discussion, which may indicate that the book is aimed at an audience largely unfamiliar with Quebec or Tremblay, the same one which might require the English translations that accompany French quotations. The second chapter proposes that, overall, three contexts, the rue Fabre, the Main, and the "Great Beyond" — a metaphorical make-believe world centred on a search for metaphysical values — control Tremblay's vision. Usmiani contends that Tremblay's styles, ranging to fantasy from what she somewhat misleadingly calls naturalism, allow him to comment on domestic, social, moral and political levels, as well as a metaphysical one. This chapter is enhanced by a precisely-illustrated, short discussion of the limitations of English translations of Tremblay's works.

On this foundation, Usmiani is able in the next chapter to show, through an analysis of *Les Belles Soeurs,* the stylistic range and levels of meaning she has just described. Added to this chapter is a brief discussion of *joual* and swearing which concludes that "vulgarity, linguistic limitation and limitations in thought" give "a sense of the intellectual and emotional impotence, which underlines the central theme of the play" — that "Each one of *les belles-soeurs* appears condemned without hope of reprieve to a *maudite vie plate* indeed."

In "Debunking a Myth" (chapter 4), stylistically and thematically we analyze *Forever Yours, Marie-Lou, En pièces détachées* and *Bonjour, là, bonjour* to reveal the *maudite vie plate* of the frustrated, potentially powerful women and the impotent men trapped by the Quebec myth of the family. "Debunking a Dream" (chapter 5) traces individuals in *Hosanna* and *La Duchesse de Langeais,* among other plays, who have escaped the family and the rue Fabre only to discover that their new home on the Main, while a step toward the dream of liberation, is also a ghetto trap. The real discoveries here are personal, so that Hosanna, for example, emerges from his/her ordeal aware that "I am a man." Unfortunately, Usmiani implicitly argues from a stance that homosexuality is wholly unhealthy, which fails to take full account of the metaphorical implications of sexual liberation in Tremblay's work. She appears at times to be making moral judgments about the characters and a moralist of Tremblay.

After discussing the sublime height approached by Carmen in *Sainte Carmen of the Main* as a movement "towards freedom and ecstasy," Usmiani goes on to look at *Damnée Manon, Sacrée Sandra.* In this play, she argues, the three worlds — rue Fabre, Main, and "Great Beyond" — merge, as do the various stylistic forms, in an effective comment on the "absence of true spirituality and . . . healthy sexuality" which Usmiani sees as a problem for all modern life, but one of particular relevance to Quebec. The final chapter looks at Tremblay's lesser-known, mythopoeic

works which centre on the previously-mentioned fantasy world, "le grand ailleurs."

In all of this, the individual looking for a comprehensive introduction to Tremblay will find informative, engaging reading, and will be directed in further research by a valuable bibliography. Despite its many merits, however, the book will leave advanced scholars still seeking an in-depth study that expands rather than largely reaffirms their knowledge. The categorizing that is inherent in Usmiani's approach, which places each work in a thematic and stylistic slot, tends to be limiting. As a result, the book is less successful dealing with Tremblay's larger issues, stronger when locating his thought somewhat restrictively within Quebec. One is left wondering whether this represents a limitation in Tremblay's vision or Usmiani's, for she never confronts the question of why Tremblay's works, even his better ones, have trouble moving onto the metaphysical level, and with audiences appear less successful outside Quebec than within.

On occasion, the author seems to miss undercurrents. Describing Serge and Nicole's relationship in *Bonjour, là, bonjour,* Usmiani writes, "One can hardly imagine a more convincing statement of romantic love," which leaves out the prickly implications of their incestuousness. On a few occasions the author's critical perspective is questionable; for example, when she says in a hedging negative of *Forever Yours, Marie-Lou,* "Because of its structure, the play as a whole creates a sense of tragic fatality not unlike that evoked by *Oedipus Rex,*" or when she vaguely mentions the "classical grandeur" achieved by Carmen in *Sainte Carmen of the Main,* or when she calls Toothpick (in the same play) a "man of great imagination." Despite what Maurice says of him, Toothpick's "long and involved story" of Carmen's death, no matter how theatrically effective, is the kind that any petty criminal could concoct.

These shortcomings aside (and one is always able to find problems in serious scholarship), readers of the book will surely agree that Dr. Usmiani has provided us with a needed and valuable work which will stimulate more detailed Tremblay research.

RICHARD PLANT

TREMBLAY'S TROUPE

MICHEL TREMBLAY, *The Fat Woman Next Door Is Pregnant,* trans. Sheila Fischman. Talonbooks, $8.95.

MICHEL TREMBLAY, *The Impromptu of Outremont,* trans. John Van Burek. Talonbooks, $4.95.

MICHEL TREMBLAY, *Damnée Manon Sacrée Sandra,* trans. John Van Burek. Talonbooks, $4.95.

MICHEL TREMBLAY, *Sainte-Carmen of the Main,* trans. John Van Burek. Talonbooks, $4.95.

MICHEL TREMBLAY, *Les Anciennes Odeurs.* Leméac, $6.95.

IN THE MID-1970's Michel Tremblay became the Quebec dramatist most familiar to anglophone readers and audiences, largely as a result of the nine English translations done by John Van Burek (four in collaboration with Bill Glassco) for presentation at Toronto's Tarragon Theatre and subsequent publication by Talonbooks. In the same period a tenth translation, by Allan Van Meer, also appeared, and in 1977 Michael Bullock published an English version of Tremblay's *Contes pour buveurs attardés* in *Stories for Late Night Drinkers* (Intermedia). To these works Van Burek has recently added three Tremblay plays in translation, Sheila Fischman a novel, and Tremblay himself another play.

In *The Fat Woman Next Door Is Pregnant,* Fischman's English version of *La Grosse Femme d'à côté est enceinte* (1978), Tremblay offers a Joycean view of one day in the intersecting lives of an

urban society. These characters, several of whom have appeared in earlier works, are presented with great compassion and high comic spirit. A loving celebration of fertility and hope, the novel concludes with seven pregnant women sharing a single balcony in a *tour de force* that Gilles Marcotte has called "l'apothéose des ventres gonflés" (*Canadian Literature*, No. 86). In her English translation Fischman has faithfully retained the tenderness and tone of the original, for *The Fat Woman* consistently displays the sensitivity and reliability we have come to associate with the work of this translator. While there is much that is excellent throughout the translation, her treatment of dialogue is particularly good, especially those sections dealing with the children and those that present angry confrontations between adults. In *The Fat Woman* one finds much to admire throughout.

This is not to say, however, that there are no weaknesses in the translation. In addition to the omission of a half-dozen sentences and some imprecision in translating verbs, we also find an inconsistent translation of cursing and swearing, and some inaccuracies in transcribing those that remain in French. Nor has Fischman always been as inventive here as in earlier work in dealing with puns like "la grosse Petit" (which is also misinterpreted as a place rather than a person). At times she simply sidesteps hurdles created by the nature of the original language (a comment on the gender of "bédaine," a discussion about the appropriate use of *tu* and *vous*) though equivalent counterparts can be found in English. Such oversights are very rare, for Fischman is by no means careless in her work. However, her diligence creates some difficulties when her translations adhere too rigidly to the French diction and syntax: for example, *de mine* (in appearance) is translated as "in mien"; and in "Tell her hello," "with serious aplomb," "He gives me his confession," and "disappeared from circulation," idiomatic English equivalents have not been found. On occasion, the English text misses the full colloquial range of the French version, especially in the words of Willy Ouellette, and fails to indicate where Tremblay has used English. Finally, *The Fat Woman* includes a few misinterpretations of the original by contradicting Tremblay's point about ballerinas (p. 117) and by confusing Beatrice's feelings with the vagrants' (p. 239). Nevertheless, *The Fat Woman Next Door Is Pregnant* remains, on the whole, a very good translation (one of Fischman's best) and a worthy addition to her many endeavours in the field of literary translation. Let us hope that we may now anticipate still better work in the translations of the second and third volumes of the Tremblay triptych, "Chroniques du plateau Mont-Royal."

While *The Fat Woman* is unfailingly impressive in its handling of dialogue, John Van Burek's response to the challenges of Tremblay's language in the plays considered here is less satisfactory. The quality of these recent translations is all the more disappointing when we recall the excellence of some of his earlier treatments of Tremblay's work. *L'Impromptu d'Outremont* (1980), in which the four Beaugrand sisters gather for an afternoon birthday party in Outremont, poses particular difficulties for the translator because it includes discussions of grammar, pronunciation, and the most appropriate French language for the Quebec theatre. Additional challenges are encountered in Tremblay's use of *joual* and puns. As a rule, Van Burek deals skilfully with these matters, finding good English equivalents and, on occasion, displaying genuine talent in transposing Tremblay's wit — notably, his inspired treatment of Lucille's remarks about the pronunciation of *québecquette*.

Unfortunately, the quality of the translation declines as the work proceeds. Lorraine's extensive use of *joual* is inadequately reflected in the translation — a serious matter, especially in her arguments with Fernande, who deliberately distances herself from her sisters by her speech. Van Burek occasionally adds and deletes words, phrases, stage directions, and several full sentences, and has unaccountably overlooked Tremblay's dedication. The translation also contains examples of too-liberal and too-literal renderings into English — thus, for example, *moins dangereux* (less dangerous) becomes "no danger," while *sensibilité* (sensitivity) is given as "sensibility" and *Je te voyais venir* (I could see what you were getting at) as "I saw you coming" (pp. 14, 57). There are a few mistranslations of numbers and adverbs, and occasional misprints (e.g., *canons* as "cannons"). It is also surprising to find a translator of Van Burek's experience mishandling the translation of *c-h-i-e-r* by suggesting that "S-H-I-T" can be found in *Le Petit Robert*. Finally, *The Impromptu of Outremont* omits six speeches between Lucille and Yvette (p. 16). In all fairness, however, Van Burek cannot be blamed for much of the play's wooden dialogue, clumsy structure, and dull action, for all these faithfully mirror the substantial limitations of the French text.

In *Damnée Manon Sacrée Sandra* (1977) and *Sainte Carmen de la Main* (1976), Tremblay explores a Montreal territory far removed from Outremont — the Main and the neighbourhood minutely documented in *La Grosse Femme*; indeed the three characters named in the titles of these plays have all appeared in previous works by Tremblay. In the former, he juxtaposes monologues on the sacred and profane to highlight similarities in the hidden desires of the devoted but deranged Manon and the unhappy transvestite Michel/Sandra. On the whole, Van Burek's English version of this play is somewhat better, for he seldom adds gratuitous details, and omits only four full sentences. While Van Burek's talents as translator are in evidence here — his handling of Manon's argument on the bus (p. 13) and the pun on *dieux/deux* (p. 16) — so, also, is his inattention to levels of language and particular nuances. The English text does not reflect adequately the colloquial jargon of the French nor Tremblay's repeated use of English in his plays. *Chus folle* (I'm crazy) is given as "you're crazy" (p. 9), and some of Tremblay's emphasis (via capitalization) is overlooked. But two larger problems emerge. Van Burek completely ignores the transvestite's recurrent use of feminine-ending adjectives to describe "herself," thereby overlooking the subtlety of Michel/Sandra's self-analysis. Furthermore, the translator has not altered Tremblay's title, which will remain an enigma to anglophone readers. The pun in "sacrée" and Tremblay's use of assonance and alliteration should be conveyed in English; Van Burek has certainly demonstrated elsewhere that he can meet such challenges.

Most of the merits and shortcomings in the translation of *Damnée Manon Sacrée Sandra* can also be found in Van Burek's English version of *Sainte Carmen de la Main*, whose singer-protagonist is Manon's sister and a character familiar to readers of other Tremblay plays. Like *L'Impromptu d'Outremont* this work examines the role of indigenous culture and its abortive struggle to find its own voice and a sympathetic audience. Colloquial speech heavily loaded with English vocabulary and *joual* is Tremblay's characteristic idiom, but Van Burek has not found an adequate English equivalent. Words, phrases, stage directions, and several sentences are omitted, along with the author's footnote about his "partition musicale" (p. 34). There are a few mis-

translations: *piste de danse* (dance floor) becomes "runway (p. 28), *épouvantail* (scarecrow) becomes "fan" (p. 49), etc. On balance, *Sainte-Carmen of the Main* is a generally faithful but unremarkable translation which, like the other two plays translated by Van Burek, falls short of his previous achievements with Tremblay's work.

Given the extent of anglophone awareness of and interest in Tremblay's drama, we will undoubtedly soon see published an English translation of yet another recent play, *Les Anciennes Odeurs* (1981). In this case, however, links with earlier works are established by theme and imagery (especially of smell), for we are far removed from the Main. This play explores the lives and loves of better educated and more affluent individuals, yet reveals their fundamental insecurities and lack of self-knowledge. Ironically, Jean-Marc, a conscientious but frustrated CEGEP French teacher, and Luc, a talented but unfulfilled actor and formerly Jean-Marc's lover, know each other better than they know themselves. Tremblay cleverly conveys the depth of this mutual understanding by having Luc end the play with a *verbatim* repetition of the words with which Jean-Marc begins it — a skilful device to demonstrate this profound meeting of minds, and hearts, that has supplanted the more ephemeral contact of bodies. Theirs was, and indeed remains, a relationship based on familiarity, tenderness, and sensitivity; it is, very often, a subtle but convincing communication by silences, in looks and smiles. The courageous look into their own dark heart is precipitated by the terminal illness of Luc's father, which in turn provokes an assessment of the father-son roles these former lovers, to some degree, are still playing for each other.

In the play Tremblay gives smells their Proustian due, illustrating the sensuality of this sense and its role as a nostalgic vehicle to carry Luc and Jean-Marc back to the remembered past, Luc's "bon vieux temps." Still, *Les Anciennes Odeurs* is, for Tremblay, a more ambitious undertaking than *Hosanna* or *La Duchesse de Langeais*, primarily because it goes beyond and beneath an investigation of homosexual desire to the more comprehensive and profound universal human need for love, tenderness, and understanding. Both Jean-Marc and Luc undergo epiphanies that lead them to a fuller and more exact self-knowledge. Each has needed to be free of the other, yet must confront the painful emptiness that accompanies that independence. As each acknowledges his limitations he steps closer to a kind of serenity, the final tender release from the paternal-filial bonding that has been at once refuge and restraint. By confronting uncompromisingly their secret selves and the hidden fear of mediocrity, they subdue it and enter a more honest and secure phase of their lives. Having set aside their masks, their role-playing and their fantasies, they are now able to be more freely and fully themselves.

It should also be mentioned that additional merits of *Les Anciennes Odeurs* are outlined by Guy Ménard in his fine and detailed introduction. For Tremblay, too, has entered a new phase of his dramatic art with this play. Because Luc and Jean-Marc are so deserving of membership in his distinguished company of fat women, unhappy sisters, transvestites, and singers, anglophone readers will undoubtedly be looking forward to a repeat performance, in English, as soon as possible.

JOHN J. O'CONNOR

PARADISO, PURGATORIO, INFERNO

JEAN-PAUL FUGERE, *En Quatre Journées*. Leméac, $10.95.

SUZANNE PARADIS, *Emmanuelle en noir*. Leméac, $13.95.

DENYS CHABOT, *La Province lunaire*. HMH, $9.95.

JEAN-PAUL FUGERE's third novel, *En Quatre Journées*, opens in the autumn of the Max Baer/Joe Louis fight. Nineteen-year-old Charles Lavigne, a salesclerk at the Regent Knitting Mills and a student of Gallic romantics and symbolists, has been advised by his bosses to take a night course in accounting at Sir George Williams. What to do? The chaste youth who has always had to live in the garments of others cannot do as he wishes, become a journalist, since he does not have the Latin prerequisite (public school taught him none). He buys his first made-to-measure suit from a tailor on St. Hubert and decides to take the advice of his employers.

It is now summer six years later, and Camilien Houde is in a concentration camp. Having duped the Canadian Army with a studied neurosis, Charles is at liberty to work for a French-Canadian printer. The man whose great-great-uncle had participated in the 1837 Rebellion recognizes the need "de se dégager des anciens modèles sans les renier" and to reconcile his love of culture with his commercial training. The ritual arrangement for a second suit from rue St. Hubert anticipates his marriage and his translation to a love-nest in English Montreal.

It is now spring fifteen years later, and the Duplessis régime is ready to fall. Editor Lavigne decides to vote for an unknown new order. A third suit from his St. Hubert tailor signals the prosperous family man's entry into middle age.

And, finally, it is the winter of civil servant Lavigne's sixty-third year. The Dominican priests have gone and old rue St. Hubert with them. It has been transformed into a covered mall, a "Floride des neiges." The employee of Affaires culturelles has returned to be measured for a fourth suit. Made thin by illness, he will need a new one for his burial — but now from a different tailor, for his old one has died. The street and the changes it reflects prompt Charles Lavigne to take up "le fil de sa vie," to follow it back through the seasons. Recollection brings this understanding: that there is an appointed time for everything, and a time for every affair under the heavens. This wisdom brings to his eyes tears of sorrow and joy, but no glimpse of the Infinite.

"Il nous intéresse à ses personnages, à leur humbles désirs," Pierre Gobin notes of Fugère in a review of his first novel, *Les Terres noires* (*Livres et auteurs canadiens*, 1965). The years have not changed novelist Fugère very much in this regard. The sixty-one-year-old author of *En Quatre Journées* continues to celebrate a wisdom and a humanism in an art not at all *recherché*. He is unlike his youthful protagonist, a reader of Verlaine who is attracted by "une lecture difficile dont on doit longtemps . . . chercher la clé, une lecture qui . . . ne donne sa joie, si elle la donne, qu'après un long malaise." Readers who prize such difficulty, searching, and unrest will not feel entirely at ease in this book.

Desire is not so humble or simple in Suzanne Paradis' *Emmanuelle en noir*, a revised version of her 1971 fiction with that same title. The similarity between Paradis and Marie-Claire Blais remarked by Michel Tétu in *Livres et auteurs québécois* (1971) — both plunge the reader into an equivocal and glimmering world — continues to be pronounced in the 1982 version of *Emmanuelle en noir*. The kinship of these authors goes deep: the epigraph Melroyd Lawrence adds to his

translation of Blais' first novel, *La Belle Bête* — "Descends the way that leads to hell infernal," from *Les Fleurs du mal*" — might also serve as an epigraph to *Emmanuelle en noir* in either of its expressions.

"Un orage de feu et de froid," in its own words, Paradis' most recent novel unveils the flowering of "l'amour absolu" in a moral universe where "la haine" and "l'amour . . . portent le même maquillage." Incest, murder, insanity, suicide, and drug addiction are instrumental in Paradis' enactment of love's creative and redemptive power. "Que la lumière soit!" Emmanuelle's mother proclaims as she digs her way to the bottom of her daughter's incestuous love and reviews the "film d'horreur" it has set in motion. "L'aimable et répugnant Baudelaire," whose poetry moves "au même rhythme d'enfer," has lighted the way for Paradis' exploration of "[des] songes noirs comme le soleil d'Afrique." "Quand on vit à l'abri d'un volcan il faut apprendre le langage du feu," Emmanuelle, author of a volume of poems entitled *Deep Magic*, records in her *journal intime*. Like Faustus, also a seeker after the "trucs du métier du créateur du ciel et de la terre" in "la magie noire," Emmanuelle is plainly a dark messiah. Her maker, too, has learned the language of the infernal — and teaches it. Paradis's *sententia*, like Fugère's, is clear enough and easy to find, though what she teaches, ironically enough, is the tragic comedy that follows on the absence of a clear ethic.

"Il va de soi que cela ne se soumet en rien aux lois de la logique, ennemie des réticences et de tout mystère" — so writes Denys Chabot in his first novel, *L'Eldorado dans les glaces* (1978). But he also has his narrator express a distrust of unreason, acknowledging that mystery or incongruity "abrutit de même que les sciences incertaines dépravent la raison." This affirmation, taken in relation to the first proposition, formally expresses "l'aspect paradoxal" of man's thought and being: humanity is governed by a roundabout logic. In view of this, André Vanasse's uneasiness with *L'Eldorado dans les glaces* is understandable when he rightly and reasonably observes that "à la lecture de ce texte on éprouve toujours ce vague sentiment que l'on tourne en rond" (*Livres et auteurs québécois*, 1978). Such vertiginous proceeding is so up-to-date that Paul Steuwe's description of the novel as a "post-modern concoction" (*Books in Canada*, 10 [October 1981]) is as unexceptionable as it is expected. But the concoction is ancient, too, as the fiction's own logic, working its ironies in the unfolding of time, makes inevitable. "La même vieille chanson sans cesse s'arrête et recommence. . . . Tout se répète. . . . Aucun épisode n'est conclu," in the words of this fictional quest for the legendary land of riches. In accordance with that conviction, Chabot's second novel, *La Province lunaire*, imagines a pilgrimage to mystery, a journey into a *terra incognita* which has attracted map-makers for the better part of a millennium.

La Province lunaire is a tale of travellers in infinity, its imagery and conception borrowed from medieval and baroque lore. It evokes "un sens presque médiéval de l'émerveillement," as a ship of fools, its rudder unattended, floats before the eyes of treasure hunters ("vérité ou apparence"?), as skeletons dance and cadavers walk ("prodige ou simulacre"?). Warmed by "une gelée vivante," the world of *La Province lunaire* is a vivified irony: here, "les flammes qui ornent . . . les enfers" coincide with "le froid de la fosse." This imagery recalls the centre of Dante's hell and pictures the logic of the infinite as described by Nicholas of Cusa in his *De docta ignorantia* (1440): it is by way of the *coincidentia oppositorum* that man can come to a "learned unknowing" of the truth beyond reason.

Chabot's pilgrims drift in a boundless enigmatic universe, where "l'unisson des contraires" provides what coherence there is; their "ignorance savante" is their only guide. These travellers are bound for "*l'inconnu*," which has the name of "Champdoré."

The journey can have no known destination, of course, and *La Province lunaire* can have no known conclusion. Journey and novel end with a search for an old amnesiac woman lost in the forest on the outskirts of Champdoré. Following "LA LIGNE BRISEE DU LYRISME BAROQUE," Chabot's creatures are free endlessly to wander in circles. Without the certain guidance of an authoritative revelation — here they part company with Dante and Cusa — these travellers are at liberty to experience the delights of the condition John Donne had reason to bewail. "Tout unité rompue, tout ordre, tout relation" echoes the famous cry of *The First Anniversary*. Here is "l'âge des ténèbres," clearly understood and playfully, powerfully expressed. In the words of *La Province lunaire*, "quelle allégresse dans l'absurde!" Chabot has written a book world-class in more ways than one.

CAMILLE R. LA BOSSIERE

GESTALT REVISITED

LOUIS-MARIE DANSEREAU, *Ma Maudite Main gauche veut pus suivre*. Leméac, n.p.

CLAUDE MEUNIER et LOUIS SAIA, *Les Voisins*. Leméac, n.p.

CLAUDE MEUNIER et LOUIS SAIA, *Appellez-moi Stéphane*, Lemeac, n.p.

OF THESE THREE RECENT Leméac publications in theatre, *Ma Maudite Main gauche veut pus suivre* is by far the most interesting; the two plays created in collaboration between Claude Meunier and Louis Saia not only suffer from technical weaknesses, but also leave the reader with a sad sense of déjà-vu.

A gripping statement on the human condition, *Ma Maudite Main gauche* represents the second part of a planned trilogy; it follows *Chez Paul-Ette, bière, vin et nouveautés*. The author's progress from the first to the second play follows the pattern set by Michel Tremblay in the sequence from *Les Belles-soeurs* to *Forever Yours, Marie-Lou*. *Chez Paul-Ette*, like *Les Belles-soeurs*, uses a family group as a starting point to develop a full panorama of a particular neighbourhood with its diverse characters and their problems. *Ma Maudite Main gauche veut pus suivre*, like *Forever Yours, Marie-Lou*, focuses in on one family cell of four characters. More important, Dansereau's new play clearly evokes the sophisticated and complex dramatic techniques of Tremblay. Like that author's "string quartet," its structure is based on musical composition; it features four fully static characters, each in his own assigned space; and the dialogue cuts freely across time zones. Dansereau's move away from naturalism also achieves a considerable increase in scope. He now goes beyond the traditional *québécois* slice of life to an exploration of universal themes: the dichotomies between life and art, dream and reality, the beauty we crave and the vulgarity which surrounds us.

Like *Forever Yours, Marie-Lou*, *Ma Maudite Main gauche veut pus suivre* is a one-act play of high emotional intensity. The setting consists of "Quatre lieux différents où chaque personnage se retrouve dans son univers construit d'imagination, de rêve et de musique." The four characters are Gaétane, the Mother, aged 45 and 70; Jean-François, her youngest child, now dead; and La Trousse, a 30-year-old daughter. At the premiere performance at the Quat'Sous in Montreal, the two Mothers were played by the same actress, thus creating a further blurring of the time zones.

The entire play revolves around this

double mother figure, a modern archetype of frustrated womanhood. Gaétane's heart belongs to music, while life has forced her into a relentless routine of domestic duty. Only at night, after the children are in bed, can she indulge her dream of being a concert pianist by "playing" sonatas on her kitchen table.

The "present" of the play is Mother's Day, with Gaétane 70 years old. She has at last realized part of her dream — she owns a real piano. But as she prepares to play her favourite, the Moonlight Sonata, she must admit to herself that she is no longer able to perform: "ma maudite main gauche veut pus suivre."

This theme of the frustrated search for beauty serves as the leitmotif for the play, which opens and closes on the moonlight sonata. The central symbol, the echo, is also auditory. The echo effect also provides the basic structure for the dialogue, as present and past reverberate against each other.

The two minor characters reinforce the theme of the play. Jean-François does not speak, but sings his part: the dead son, once a musician, has become part of the mother's dream world of beauty. La Trousse, a black sheep in the tradition of Tremblay's Pierrette, seems to be the only one who understands her mother, but is rejected.

Like Tremblay, Dansereau cleverly interweaves naturalistic detail with stylization in a gripping play which goes far beyond contemporary and local interest.

By contrast, *Les Voisins* is anything but a gripping piece, as it piles cliché upon cliché in its satire of the big, bad suburbanite. A day in the life of three middle-aged, middle-class couples, it follows the pattern of a multitude of similar plays (one is particularly reminded of Dubé's *Les Beaux Dimanches*) in exposing, once again, the vapidity of social intercourse, the lack of communication between marriage partners, housewife ennui and middle-age crisis. The authors do go somewhat beyond the Dubé model by adding to the slice-of-life of act one a second act filled with dramatic incident. The characters' response when tragedy hits gives the authors a chance at some particularly acerbic, if overworked, satire.

Appellez-moi Stéphane, by the same co-authors, is a pleasant, if not profound, little play on the age-old theme of life as a stage, combined with the modern idea of the liberating effect of role-playing. Unlike many similar works of the past decade, however, it questions the validity of the Gestalt theory and exposes some of its pitfalls.

Set in a small cultural centre, it brings together a motley group of characters who sign up for a drama class. Stéphane is their guru/teacher, who succeeds in getting every one of them to take the plunge into his individual subconscious and eventually formulate previously repressed desires, hostilities and aggressions. As they construct a play on the basis of their own experience, then perform it, the work turns into an interesting triple play-within-the-play. The dénouement, however, is anything but satisfactory. Stéphane, a sorcerer's apprentice of Gestalt therapy, makes his escape, leaving his charges somewhat bewildered and certainly no better for the experience.

An entertaining play, *Appellez-moi Stéphane* is perhaps significant in signaling a trend away from certain attitudes and beliefs proclaimed especially by the collective creation groups of the seventies. Are we moving towards a demythification of Gestalt?

RENATE USMIANI

INFORMATION & VERVE

JEAN-MARC LARRUE, *Le Théâtre à la fin de la XIX^e siècle*. Fides, n.p.

MAURICE LEMIRE, *Introduction à la littérature québécoise (1900-1939)*. Fides, n.p.

IN THE LAST DECADE of the nineteenth century, theatre in Montreal experienced a "boom" that was as unprecedented and unanticipated as it has been unparalleled since. From 782 performances of 142 different works in 1890, only nine years later there were 1,885 performances of some 305 dramas, comedies, vaudeville, operettas, operas, tragedies, and others (in descending order of numerical importance). As Jean-Marc Larrue points out in his Introduction, words like "dynamism" and "effervescence" are really not adequate to describe the phenomenon: "Il faut parler d'explosion."

Although the author effectively discusses the background and context in which this explosion takes place, most of his book is concerned to describe the phenomenon itself, and this he does mainly by means of statistical analyses. Thus we are given chronological presentations of the number of works performed, the various genres, comparative tables of English and French offerings, lists of the most popular playwrights, actors and plays, tables showing the relative importance of Canadian productions, and so on. Quantitative assessments are grounded in statistical evidence and qualitative appreciations seem to be based, whenever possible, on newspaper reviews by the critics of the time.

Because the study encompasses both English- and French-language theatre, many of its most interesting elements are comparative in nature. We see, for instance, the astounding proliferation of French productions compared to a relatively stable growth in the English scene. Differences of genre are also noted: while the English taste runs to melodrama and vaudeville (considered by the Church to be a threat to public morality), the French prefer their melodrama with lyric theatre. Occasionally, the observations sound distinctly contemporary: despite the preponderance of English-speaking theatre, for instance, most of these productions are British or American imports, while on the French side local plays enjoy relatively greater popularity.

If the comparative method is to some extent abandoned as the book progresses, this is for the perfectly legitimate reason that, while the period under study is of little particular consequence in English-Canadian terms, it was vitally important for the future development of French-Canadian theatre. As the author shows, it was in these final years of the century that theatre first became established in Montreal, initially with amateur societies, college productions and European professionals, and eventually with the creation of professional French-Canadian companies.

The period is thus an important one, and the book offers a great deal of information about it. We learn, for example, of a production of *La Fille de Roland* performed entirely by men (for reasons of decency), and of an *Antigone* presented in the original Greek to an audience of priests; we can even learn, by reading the footnotes carefully enough, that Sarah Bernhardt liked mussels and refused to wear glasses.

In general, though, the quality of the information outstrips the effectiveness of its presentation. This is a scholarly book, dry in tone, rather technical in approach, academic in both conception and execution. One senses behind it a university thesis left vaguely unrevised before publication. With its exhaustive documentation, its bibliography, index, and myriad footnotes, those very qualities that make

it a valuable tool for specialized research detract from its appeal for the general reader.

With its greater scope and livelier style, Maurice Lemire's *Introduction à la littérature québécoise (1900-1939)* is likely to have a broader appeal. Written with verve and inventiveness ("les terroristes," "la gangue patriotarde"), the discussion ranges widely through the central issues of the period and presents them — intelligibly — in the language of current French criticism. When these concepts and categories do not apply to Quebec literature, as he argues in his account of the regionalist novel, Lemire convincingly proposes the necessary adjustments and alternatives.

Until recently, most of the literature produced between 1900 and 1939 has been out of fashion as a field of study. It is much to the author's credit that he shows not only the interest of this writing but also its future importance, since it was in these years that what he terms "l'institution littéraire" became firmly established and the foundations of modernism were set.

Lemire convincingly views the lopsided battle between regionalists and "exotics" as constituting the essential debate of the period. Leading the establishment offensive were the clerics/critics who promoted a resolutely nationalist literature: "Canadian" in setting, theme, and inspiration; Catholic in morality, message, and didactic intent; traditional and rural in its values, focus, and expression. Opposed to this "official" culture were the relatively few writers who championed art for art's sake, international (meaning French) standards, and the complete freedom of the individual artist to write however and whatever he wished. That the latter views eventually prevailed would no doubt have seemed inconceivable to virtually all of the prominent literary figures prior to 1939.

Lemire's division of the book into sections entitled "Production" and "Consumption" enables him to present both the literature and its economic, social, and cultural contexts — to adopt the perspectives of both then and now. This variety and flexibility of approach allows, for instance, full discussions of nationalism, genre, and language, a section on feminine writing, an extremely good summary of the criticism — and at the same time analyses of the situation for publishers, booksellers, periodicals, and the reading public. Even radio and painting are included, although the relevance of the latter remains elusive.

What emerges, then, is a broad and persuasive portrait of the Quebec literary scene in these years and an engaging critical commentary upon it. One might take issue with the occasional polemical jibes or some questionable theoretical statements or the absence of footnotes and bibliography, but these are quibbles when compared to the overall accomplishments of the book. Whether he is presenting the arguments of the exotics or revealing the unsuspected importance of school prizes and secondhand bookshops, Lemire writes with economy, authority, and wit, which make for pleasant and profitable reading.

LARRY SHOULDICE

VARIETAS DELECTAT

MICHEL GARNEAU, *Emilie ne sera plus jamais cueillie par l'anémone.* VLB Editeur, $11.95.

FRANCINE RUEL, *Les Trois Grâces.* Leméac, $7.95.

MARIE LABERGE, *Ils étaient venus pour.* VLB Editeur, $6.95.

RECENT TITLES FROM VLB EDITEUR include works from the two opposite poles of the dramatic range, in theme as well as technique. Michel Garneau's *Emilie ne sera plus jamais cueillie par l'anémone* is that poet-dramatist's latest contribution to the genre of "poèmes a jouer," follow-

ing *Voyagements* and the highly acclaimed *Quatre à quatre*; Marie Laberge's *Ils étaient venus pour* follows the tradition of politicized historical drama, complete with documentation. *Les Trois Grâces*, a new title from the theatre series of Leméac, represents a collective effort by four women — an eloquent plea for the preservation of that endangered species, the Rubensesque female.

The Garneau volume owes as much of its attraction to its visual appeal as to the text itself. Square in format, the small (111 pp.) book attempts to provide the reader with a total aesthetic experience. Each page of text is elegantly framed; six full-colour illustrations by Maureen Maxwell, each one centred on an individual page of glossy grey, beautifully re-echo the tone of the poems; and even the stage instructions are given in the form of poetry.

Emilie ne sera plus jamais cueillie par l'anémone is Michel Garneau's recreation of his personal perception of the character and work of Emily Dickinson, in the form of a dialogue between Emily and "Uranie," her sister (Laetitia). Garneau attempts to capture the essence of his fellow-poet, and obviously kindred spirit, through every detail of his work. The stage instructions include a list of "correspondances" — sensual elements which, to Garneau, are evocative of Emily. These include colours, music ("concerto pour flûte et harpe de Mozart"), foodstuffs, textures, and pungent smells. The dialogues are preceded by a six-page introductory poem which summarizes Garneau's perception of Dickinson, partly through echoes of her own work ("la petite ivrogne de rosée"), partly through interpretation ("elle était naïve Emily / naïve comme le diable / et parfaitement sceptique"). Garneau uses his own rhythms, diction and surprise effects in the creation of the dialogue for the fourteen scenes which make up the play itself. Each scene is set into a specific season and time of day; each one ends on a colour indication. The only actual change throughout the work occurs halfway, when Emily changes from a blue dress into a white one.

The dialogue between the two sisters covers every aspect of living and dying — but most of all, it is a rapturous ode to life:

> je connais l'extase / parce que le simple / mouvement de vivre / me donne de l'extase / il me semble que l'exaltation est l'état / naturel des êtres / qui ont conscience du monde / de l'univers / l'exaltation l'extase / sont donnés à tout le monde /....

Emilie ne sera plus jamais cueillie par l'anémone obviously does not lend itself to formal theatrical performance; it is a beautiful volume of poetry, which may come to life on stage in a very special setting, such as the Café de la Place at the Montreal Art Centre, where it was premièred in October 1981.

Ils étaient venus pour, by Marie Laberge, represents a total antithesis to the Garneau poem: a well-documented historical play, realistic in tone and suggested production style, this work deals with the ill-fated Val Jalbert plant, which opened in 1902 and closed in 1927. The author emphasizes the plight of the workers and their families, who, after having found a haven from misery and unemployment, were eventually forced to abandon the community they had created, leaving Val Jalbert a ghost town. The author tries to establish a balance between social history and human interest focused on individual case histories. The play is divided into six "tableaux," of which four are devoted to the community, two to personal problems. There is a strong political as well as a feminist element in the play. As she follows the fate of the workers of Val Jalbert, Marie Laberge underlines the gap between management and labour, and the exploitation of the French-Canadian

worker at the hands of an English-Canadian capitalist class. She also underlines the essential weakness of the oppressed working men, who must be fired to eventual protest and rebellion by their indignant wives.

The work is convincing, in spite of the rather simplistic division into black and white, and the somewhat naive idealization of the Val Jalbert families. The theme is nicely underlined through a circular structure. The play begins and ends with a picnic. But, whereas the opening picnic reflects the joy and enthusiasm of the beginnings of the Val Jalbert operation, the closing scene shows us the same place, now turned into a camping ground, with visiting tourists gawking at the ghost town that once was Val Jalbert.

While *Ils étaient venus pour* deals with a specifically québécois problem, Francine Ruel's *Les Trois Grâces* represents a protest against the obsession with slenderness which pervades the contemporary Western world. Aptly subtitled "une ode aux natures vivantes," the play carries its message in the pun of the title (Grâces/grasses). The Leméac volume includes the genesis of the work which could be summed up as a case of three overweight actresses in search of an author: France Arbour, Manon Gauthier, and Mireille Thibault originally conceived the project, and eventually recruited Francine Ruel to create a script on the basic theme of the tragic fate of the woman who once would have been "a Renoir, a Rubens, a Botticelli," and now finds herself reduced to the role of a freak "qu'on regarde, mais ne touche pas."

In keeping with the theme, the set represents a circus tent, the three graces taking turns in playing the traditional fat lady. They are Dame Jeanne, the Mother; her daughter Grâce, and daughter-in-law Rose. The author is careful to emphasize the extraordinary beauty of their faces, as well as their delicate, soft complexion.

The play is divided into an introduction, which calls the audience to view the wonders of the freak show; and two parts, which take place inside the tent and let us follow the events behind the scenes. Throughout the play, sensuality remains the leitmotif. Part one centres around the ritual of food, a ceremony performed by the three women with all the concentration of a strip-tease act. In the process, the concepts of "food" and "hunger" are subtly translated into metaphysical terms. Part two complements the food ritual by an equally sensuous love scene, performed on top of the table (altar, love couch) between Rose and the "petit monsieur" who loves all three fat ladies. The end of the play finds the all-protective mother alone. Both Grâce and Rose leave to find "real life" outside the cocoon of their mother's skirts, the circus tent. The little man sadly sums up the situation: "si les hommes et les femmes continuent de collectionner de belles images, les petits monsieurs et les grosses madames vont être des chefs-d'oeuvre en péril. . . ."

As the six illustrations from the première performance at the Quat'Sous testify, the work can be most attractive visually. While the dialogue is not brilliant, the verbal and stage imagery suffices to create a powerful impression.

RENATE USMIANI

TROIS GRANDES FÊTES D'ADIEU

NORMAND CHAURETTE, *Fêtes d'Automne*. Leméac, $7.95.

RENE-DANIEL DUBOIS, *Adieu, docteur Münch*. . . . Leméac, $7.95.

FRANCINE RUEL, *Les Trois Grâces*. Leméac, $7.95.

THESE THREE PLAYS from the 1981-82 Montreal Theatre season illustrate the continuing trend of Québécois drama away from the socio-political conscious-

ness of the 1960's and 1970's. Normand Chaurette, René-Daniel Dubois, and Francine Ruel go beyond the particular reality of Quebec to the universal questions of love, death, solitude, and self-fulfilment. Unrestricted by time, space, or logic, they transform the stage into a poetic space where past and present, dream and reality, human and inhuman coexist. In this strange theatrical world where the mystical mingles with mundane, the visionary with the grotesque, the poetic with the absurd, unusual characters search for themselves, for love, and for transcendence.

Adieu, docteur Münch . . . by René-Daniel Dubois was first performed at the Café théâtre Nelligan on October 21, 1981, with the author playing all twelve roles in this "Sonata for one actor." Sitting in front of his own tombstone in a public garden, the recently deceased Doctor Münch takes stock of the life which is slipping away from him. His first words ("Je suis le docteur Carl Octavius Münch. Et j'ai faim") announce two of the major themes of the play: the need to establish one's identity and the unsatisfied existential hunger for knowledge and meaning. As the anonymous Voice attempts to establish the facts needed to fill out the death certificate, Dr. Münch begins the slow, bewildering process of questioning his identity, his past, and his beliefs. In a play with few simple facts, Münch does tell us that he is a direct descendant of the potato's premier promoter, Parmentier. He is also a world-famous medical doctor and the author of major scientific and linguistic texts. Despite his fame, power, and fortune, Münch is a solitary man troubled by the hunger, doubt, and limp which are part of his being. As he searches for certainties, he gets frustrated, confused, and lost in a verbal delirium. Obsessions, memories, ideas, doubts, and artistic images swirl around him in a deluge of words. As the monologue becomes a heated diatribe against modern life, Münch loses himself and becomes a cast of others (the Statue of Liberty, the Pietà, Çiva, Lara, disembodied telephone voices, laboratory rats, etc.) who represent decadent humanity. If there is a conclusion to this play, it is that the true cause of Münch's death is the existential anguish produced by doubt, indecision, and the inanity of modern life.

But if the world is monotonous and inane, Dubois's play is not. Although the lack of dramatic action gives it a static quality and the verbal barrage from dissonant voices makes it difficult to follow, the reader/spectator must applaud Dubois's virtuosity as writer and actor. Despite its troubling message, *Adieu, docteur Münch* . . . has its humorous moments, such as the Statue of Liberty's comic lament ("Faut que j'me r'cycle. Que je repense mon image . . . A l'en peut pus la Statue . . .") and the legendary Lara's complaints about tourists at her tomb, the Taj Mahal. René-Daniel Dubois belongs to the new generation of Québécois playwrights who entertain us with their original poetic visions at the same time they force us to consider anguishing universal problems.

Francine Ruel's play, *Les Trois Grâces*, takes us underneath the big top for a tender but humorous insight into the lives of three circus fat ladies. First performed at the Théâtre de Quat' Sous on January 13, 1982, the play was inspired by the idea of one of the overweight "Graces," Manon Gauthier, and written by Ruel in collaboration with all three — Gauthier, France Arbour, and Mireille Thibault. These actresses, like the play's main characters, have chosen to accept and exploit their obesity. Dame Jeanne, her daughter, Grâce, and daughter-in-law, Rose, have put together a circus act playing on all the clichés about fat women: they are warm, tender, and jovial with beautiful

faces, melodious voices, and Rabelaisian appetites for food and men. But behind the masks of the circus performers, there are three women who fear solitude and need love. Beneath the grotesque humour of the circus act, there is anguish and sadness. Grâce's laughter turns to sobs as she speaks of her need to be touched, loved, and seen for herself, not just looked at as a sideshow freak. For Grâce, eating is a way of taking in the whole universe. As a child she devoured sand, snow, flowers, and leaves; and in her dreams she gorges herself on sunlight, springtime air, and children's laughter. Now, feeling suffocated by her mother's protective warmth and hungry for the world beyond the big top, she has lost her appetite for food. Rose, too, craves understanding and love. In an erotic encounter with the Petit Monsieur, she satisfies her need to be loved for what is inside of her as well as for her sumptuous exterior. Rose and Grâce leave the circus abandoning the oral and psychological gratification offered by Dame Jeanne, willing to risk rejection in the search for self-fulfilment. The Mother accepts their departure as a necessary step in the process of integrating overweight women into society. She also accepts her own solitude which she predicted in the parable of Mira the whale who, angered and grieved by the harpooning of her son, Jonas, beached herself so that all may marvel at her size and sorrow.

In *Les Trois Grâces*, Francine Ruel uses highly theatrical scenery, costumes, language, and gesture to create a stylized circus which is both grotesquely exaggerated in the manner of Fellini and intimately poetic. The women perform the songs, dances, and comic skits of their circus act; they eat a Gargantuan meal with ritual and erotic overtones; they reveal their hopes, fears, dreams, and desires. It is an original and entertaining spectacle which lives up to the promise of its subtitle and becomes an ode to the living figures who incarnate Botticelli's mythic Graces in this "tableau vivant."

Normand Chaurette's *Fêtes d'Automne* was first seen at the Théâtre du Nouveau Monde on March 19, 1982. It is an avant-garde passion play in which modern-day characters re-enact Judas Iscariot's treachery. Past and present, miraculous and mundane, poetic and prosaic blend together in an imaginary setting which is both a convent school and ancient Jerusalem. On one level, it is the story of a young convent student named Joa, who has hated her mother, Memnon, since a childhood accident years before. She finally revenges herself by bringing about Memnon's death. On another level, it is a revised version of Christ's passion, inspired by the mysticism and nascent eroticism of a young girl who confuses Christ's call to love and a new life with an invitation to death. From the stage foreground, Joa narrates the drama she has written, occasionally stepping back to play her victim/heroïne role. Too pure, honest, and innocent to survive in the real world, she falls victim to a conspiracy directed by the powers that be and led by Memnon, the convent superior Mère H. Augustine, and her classmate Magali Lange. Ordinary people can neither understand nor accept the extraordinary Joa; she is the daughter of Socrates and the twin sister/lover of the Christ-like Roi Septant. In her mystical fantasies, Joa sees the Roi Septant nailed to the cross, beckoning her to join him in the gardens of Paradise where they will celebrate their love in an eternal autumnal wedding feast. When her desire for absolute peace, purity, and love becomes stronger than her fear of death, Joa dies. With Joa dead, the conspirators turn against Memnon and hound her to death. Once the compromising witness has been eliminated, order can be restored on earth and

the "fêtes d'Automne" can begin in Paradise.

In *Fêtes d'Automne*, Normand Chaurette deals with love, death, and madness with the striking originality of a visionary poet. Abolishing the line between reality and dreams, Chaurette lures the spectator/reader into his unique dramatic universe, amusing us with the humorous antics of adolescents, dazzling us with surreal mystical images, making us uneasy at the spectacle of society persecuting those who do not conform, and forcing us to interpret for ourselves a complicated work.

JANE MOSS

EARTHLY RADIANCE

STUART WATERS, *One Man's War*. Potlatch Publications, n.p.

JOHN GRAY with ERIC PETERSON, *Billy Bishop Goes to War*. Talonbooks, n.p.

ONE OFTEN UNACKNOWLEDGED foundation of Canadian literature is the "local history" volume, the compilation recording a township or town from pre-history till the present, full of lists and tales of reeves and harvest yields, marriages and merchants, life daily lived by real people. These troves of facts nourish artists on their way to works like Reaney's Donnelly trilogy, Kroetsch's *The Ledger*, Hood's *A New Athens*. Although set during World War II and in a dozen countries of Europe and Africa, *One Man's War* reminds me of those local histories. The title is apt: the book is the memoir of Captain Stuart Waters of the Royal Artillery. We get not the overview of general or historian but — something they must have missed — the view from the ground.

One scene has the author monitoring German mail seized from a Greek caique in the Dodecanese archipelago:

> One man was written to by mother, sister, aunts and an uncle.... His family had a small farm and their news revolved around it and the difficulties the war had caused them. Hitler received no mention, but "Wolf" the dog proved newsworthy, and so did the pigs!

Waters compiled, and his superiors distributed, a biography of the man, to impress on military readers "the importance of small details." The key to *One Man's War* is "small details." They lie in the text like nuggets in ore. Not everything Waters tells us is gold, much is ordinary rock; but, as in those local histories, we need it all to appreciate any of it. To read the book is to watch cartloads of ore-rock pass by, giving us a feel for gold no connoisseurs of finely crafted jewellery can know. On a troopship off Norway, a priest of the French Foreign Legion with a German head in his kit-bag; a camel's skeleton in the Libyan Sahara; Barbary apes on the roofs of Gibraltar: the details pass by in the book artlessly undeveloped — as they must have in wartime real life for soldiers with a job to do and no time to linger and ponder. Characters and settings appear, then fade out of range. A lovestruck Canadian stowaway from Gibraltar en route to his Glasgow fiancée; an empty hunting lodge in Sherwood Forest, guarded by the Army nobody knew why; a homosexual camp baker; a haunted manor house in Kent. No other kind of book could more thoroughly tell someone who was not there what, day after week after month, scene after shifting scene, World War II was like.

It needs to be mentioned that *One Man's War* does little else. It has the flaws of amateur prose — too much passive voice, anticlimactically structured sentences, imprecise "and" clausal connectors, haphazard paragraph integration. Don't look for shrewd narrative pacing or psychological insight. It is a book to read as a local history, for content, not for structure and style.

But out of this undifferentiated detail a myth emerges, the myth of a Captain

who lives inside a tent. It moves as he moves; its size varies; and its canvas walls are the bounds of the Captain's perception. He knows only what goes on inside; beyond is someone else's province. But he's taken on a noble and difficult enterprise that can be no one else's: to articulate what happens therein, in the process reminding us that everyone lives inside such a tent, each in his own.

The difference between Stuart Waters's book and *Billy Bishop Goes to War* is that between an unsung Captain and a V.C., between an essentially private memoir and (whatever New York may have thought) one of the half-dozen best Canadian plays ever made. John Gray's drama is about a hero of the grand and public variety. Like Findley's *The Wars*, *Billy Bishop* examines two opposing stereotypical realities — (1) war is hell, (2) war is glory — whose broadening and deepening and melding make the play's rhythm and structure. A typical Bishop monologue from Act I:

> I got my horse stuck in the middle of the parade ground. The horse is up to its fetlocks; I'm up to my knees. Mud, sweat and horse shit from head to toe.
>
> *The music becomes ethereal and gentle.*
>
> Then, suddenly, out of the clouds comes this little single-seater scout. You know, this little fighter plane? . . . What a beautiful picture! I don't know how long I just stood there watching until he was long gone. Out of sight.

But when Bishop the naive Canadian colonial leaves behind mud for clouds, he discovers the air war to be much more complex than he had imagined: the play shows the zest *and* death, splendour *and* danger, publicity *and* loneliness.

"Survival. That's the important thing." For a pilot to survive, calculated professional efficiency must supersede emotion. And yet — after that interval of temporary necessity, emotion does come back, deeper and richer, because more *earned*: the warmth of writing letters home to Margaret, later his wife; the passion of a night-time tryst with a cabaret singer, the Lovely Hélène; even "that old dry throat, heartthrobbing thrill" when he shoots down a kill. Thus Bishop grows from Innocence through Experience to a kind of Higher Innocence till he's awarded, by King George, the Empire's most coveted medals, in a splendid ceremonial pageant where Owen Sound meets Buckingham Palace and both are the better for it. "Hero remains small-town boy at heart" is cliché, but in this play it's cliché-turned-archetype, as McLuhan put it.

Being Canadian is very much a part of Bishop's experience. (The shifts from Ontario accents to those of British sophisticates are one of the play's many dramatic delights.) Canadian is rough and humble vigour; British by contrast is bloodless and circumspect — clichés again, but brought alive and grown to archetypes. The British generals at play's end pull Bishop down to earth, order him home because a living colonial hero is worth more in PR than a dead one. Although he loves flying, Bishop understands their reasons and necessities; he is dutiful, responsible; he is civilized. In one of the play's wise ironies, to be civilized is what Bishop learns from war. By facing death, by watching men whom he's shot tumble dead from their planes, he learns a respect — reverence, even — for life. He's a sensible Canadian, he possesses — in their best Jane Austen meanings — sense and sensibility.

The final image of each Act is that of the dancer:

> In the sky,
> In the sky,
> Just you and I up there together,
> Who knows why?
> One the hunter, one the hunted;
> A life to live, a death confronted.
> Oh, let us dance together in the sky.

Yeats's dance poems come to mind, where

dance is human life at its noblest and most articulate — *and* its most physical, human muscles striving toward the limits of body and gravity. It happens that those best moments of life often occur during dance, song, story-telling, mime. *Billy Bishop* exploits all of these. A skilful dramatist is at work, one who knows that theatre is the composite of all the performing arts.

As John Gray tells us in his introduction, something else that went into this play is months of research in the Ottawa archives, reading the sort of concrete detail Stuart Waters writes, the sort he read in that mail from a Greek caique. In a scene from *One Man's War* Captain Waters enters Jerusalem.

> It was evening as we approached the city and I understood all I had often said or sung.... Most revealing and stunning was "Jerusalem the Golden," literally true, as the setting sun lit the yellow limestone buildings with an unearthly radiance.

Up rises for an instant the renovated city of William Blake, of John of Patmos, not in a holy book but in the awestruck eyes of a tired dusty soldier. *One Man's War* has that radiance occasionally; *Billy Bishop Goes to War* glows all the way through.

WILLIAM BUTT

DECENTRING REGIONS D'ETRE

LAURIER MELANSON, *Zélika à Cochon Vert.* Leméac, $9.95.

REAL-GABRIEL BUJOLD, *La Sang-mêlé d'arrière pays.* Leméac, $16.95.

DIANE-MONIQUE DAVIAU, *Histoires Entre Quatres Murs.* L'arbre HMH, n.p.

IN THE WAKE OF Antonine Maillet's success with *Pélagie, La Charrette* (Prix Goncourt 1979) is was to be expected that other writers would soon follow in their attempts to capture the Acadian world in their fiction. One such attempt occurs in *Zélinka à Cochon Vert* where Laurier Melanson offers a comical portrayal of the Acadian spirit during the thirties in the village of Fourche-des-Deux-Rivières. This novel opens with the picture of a well-endowed Zélika, who at the age of thirteen has spent four years in grade 3. But her academic life ends when her old teacher dies and the new replacement, with her religious views, becomes unbearable both for Zélika and her mother, la Cochon Vert. A sort of regional picaresque follows, in which our young heroine takes to the road leading to comic episodes beyond her village and the larger Acadian region. "C'est par un samedi matin frisquet de septembre que Zélika à Cochon Vert prit le chemin du Coude en compagnie de son oncle Valentin."

Regionalism has often been defined by setting or state of mind; more specifically, a region may be defined in contrast to the external world as characters enter into and depart from this microcosm. Just as settings become decentred, so the decentred or eccentric character emerges as a prominent feature of regionalist fiction. As soon as she leaves her village, Zélika goes to work for Madame La Tour, a woman of European origins: "Ben sûr que c'est pas un nom de par icitte. Ah ben! Ça se comprend. Coumme de bonne raison, c'est du monde d'en dehors." Linguistic decentring occurs in the dialect of "ben," "icitte," and "coumme," set off against the more formal French of Madame La Tour who speculates on "la ferveur des époux acadiens en particulier et sur celle des maris du monde en général." But she does not remain for long in Madame La Tour's service since she is caught in the embrace of Monsieur La Tour. Just as Zélika had reflected philosophically on the contrast between her regional self and the world at large before she entered Madame La Tour's, so she comments on her departure: "Du monde

coumme nous autres, c'est pas fait pour la ville.... Austeure, prends ben garde à toi, la ville, hein! Tu me reouèrras pas de si tôt...." Her comical apostrophe to the city points ironically to the differences between a naive, decentred perception and an external urbanity.

If the region becomes decentred through excursions into the outer world, so too do characters through their eccentricities. Redolent of Hoda in Adele Wiseman's *Crackpot*, juicy, plump Zélika appears in the following manner:

. chapeau cloche terreux et cobi;
. plume de coq estropiée et défraîchie;
. cotte de robe sale et percée;
. souliers crottes;
. parfum: cabane à poisson.

Her mother is caricatured by her long nose and profile resembling a can opener; the new teacher is called "Tomahawk"; Monsieur La Tour looks like an ostrich; and Zélika's future husband, Otto de la Veuve, is known as the "coureux de taouilles."

The focus of the novel soon shifts from Zélika to Otto who works in the general store, "pas un magasin spécialisé comme on en trouve en ville," but leaves the region in search of success in the United States. After a month of work at the Waltham Watch Factory in Massachusetts, Otto realizes how much he misses his native village. "D'abord, il lui semblait avoir laissé sa liberté derrière lui, dans son bercail acadien, puis, surtout, il n'arrivait pas a se libérer de son naturel d'Acadien." So he returns to Fourches-des-Deux-Rivières where he marries Zélika. For their honeymoon they decide to go to Quebec City, but once again these regionalists become disoriented as soon as they leave their circumscribed territory. Zélika's sister's comments prepare for their farcical dislocation: "Hôrmis qu'i' alliont jusqu'à Toronto. Pis encore non! I' pourriont pas tout ouère. Apparence que Toronto, c'est pus grand qu' Ontario. C'est ce que j'ai tout le temps entendu dire." Indeed, regionalists cannot see everything they've heard about: beyond their limited geographic setting they are blind. Thus, the honeymoon coupie mistake Lévis for Quebec City and they spend the night in a brothel which is raided by the police. After this decentring experience, they return to their native village where Zélika gives birth to triplets, thereby outdoing her mother.

The final words of wisdom in the novel belong to the heroine's mother, la mère Cochon Vert, who lists among her possessions one imbecile husband, nine children, four cows, two pigs, and a dozen chickens: "C'est pas aisé, tout le temps être obligée de bailler les réponses au monde qui comprend pas les questions! Les villages d'Acadie pouvont dormir en paix tant qu'i'aura des parsounnes coumme moi pour ieu fournir les réponses pis ieuz-expliquer les questions..." These remarks recall Gertrude Stein's last words and point to a certain knowingness and truth that counteract any decentring outside the region. Like La Sagouine's, this regional *parsounne*'s wisdom immortalizes Acadia.

Regional decentring recurs in Réal-Gabriel Bujold's *La Sang-mêlé d'arrière-pays*, only instead of Acadia, the Gaspé is presented as the village of Saint-Antoine-de-Ramelet is expropriated by the government. Like la mère Cochon Vert, the mother in this novel endures hardships and defies destructive forces from the external world. The novel opens with the eighty-eight-year-old woman, the eponymous half-breed, la Tawaingue, la vieille Épiphanie Innis, or Madame Théodule Baumier, returning after ten years to the cemetery of her destroyed village. Through a flashback the rest of the novel outlines the month-by-month events leading to the village's destruction in 1969. Only a few families and a group of hippies remain in Ramelet awaiting the gov-

ernment's bulldozers in this lament for a region. "Réinventer l'histoire" is not only to create the place but also to prevent its demolition.

At seventy-eight, la Tawaingue is left with her cat and her forty-year-old diabetic daughter, Bernadette, the village's schoolteacher whose stamp collection offers her through fantasy the only means of escape outside her region. Her microcosm becomes decentred with the arrival of a letter from an admirer in Napierville. "Bernadette alla fouiller sur une carte géographique pour dénicher l'emplacement exact du village de son correspondant. . . . À la frontière des États, au Québec! Si loin quand même. Bernadette n'avait jamais voyagé ailleurs que dans son album de timbres et n'avait jamais dépassé, en voiture, Gaspé à l'est et Carleton à l'ouest. Les États, c'était loin!" The other decentring event in her life involves Antonio, one of the hippies who takes an interest in her, and an "agent" for her escapist fantasies. "Elle retourna dans la légendaire coulée des Baumier sur un ressort simulé et se vit soudain devenir la grande fée de sa naissance, marraine des lourds sommeils de la Belle immunisée, encadrée dans la traditionelle histoire de tous les lutins auxquels elle s'identifiait et à qui elle apprenait à tenir crayon et à apprécier les pièces dentelées de la philatélie de ses amours, instructive et cosmique, à travers tous ces arbres morts ou absents, qu'elle traînait dans son envol sur la chevelure ondoyante de la princesse d'où, de son trône dans l'espace, elle largua une vaste corbeille de tous ces timbres dépouillés sur les toits qui pleuraient dans les coulées de Ramelet."

In the summer Bernadette actually leaves the region with Antonio "pour les grands espaces sur les routes lactées dont rêvait la pâle institutrice depuis longtemps, dans un grand tableau d'étoiles tirées au pinceau du grand Picasso, un bon voyage de santé." En route to Montreal, the couple pass by Port-Daniel, Gascons, Paspédiac, Bonaventure, New Richmond, Carleton, Amqui, Rimouski, Rivière-du-Loup — the names unfold along with Bernadette's freedom as she is reminded of the happiness she read about in Gabrielle Roy's fiction. From her earlier Gaspésian parochialism she expands to the "C o s m o g o n i q u e !" But once in Montreal she remembers what she has left behind, for her memory acts centripetally to counterbalance her flight from the region. "À certains moments, Bernadette se perdait dans le labyrinthe de l'inquiétude. . . . Elle pensa à l'insaisissable Tawaingue qu'elle avait confiée à la jeune Gisèle, son élève assidue, l'inconséquente Tawaingue. Elle pensa aussi au choeur, à la nef, au transept, réincarnant les thèmes divins tellement doux à l'oreille, composée dans des éditions de grands musiciens classiques!" From Montreal Bernadette wishes to visit Napierville, home of her secret admirer, but when she arrives at the exact address, she discovers that her admirer has been dead for fifteen years. Unable to recover the original letter, and doubting her own sanity, the fragile schoolmistress returns to her village to die. The mystery surrounding the letter is not revealed until the final chapters when the reader learns that Antonio has been working for the government as an agent for destabilizing the village. Though he ultimately feels guilty about his actions, he has been responsible for the demise of Bernadette and the rest of the village.

Aside from the decentring setting, village eccentrics characterize this "arrière-pays." La Tawaingue repeats "chaque-noix" after everything she utters and at seventy-eight she overindulges in sexual activities with Hildège O'Hara, a grotesque vagabond who lives in his memories of World War II. Each caricature possesses a nickname. "Ah! bon! (Un surnom pour Mag'rite???) Pourquoi pas!

En Ramelet, les surnoms faisaient partie du folklore. En bien oui, pour Mag'rite, la femme de Jean-Joseph, c'était Chicklet," because she always chews gum. Hildegarde Durand is called Maman Trognon (core) because of her dexterity in devouring entire apples. (The author provides a glossary at the end to explain some of the Gaspésian linguistic eccentricities.)

At first glance, the opening short story of Diane-Monique Daviau's collection, *Histoires Entre Quatre Murs*, seems to continue with these regionalist concerns in its description of the self-contained village of Gourmont, but on closer examination one discovers a different emphasis. Where the two novels develop a broad picture of Acadia and the Gaspé, Daviau's sketches concentrate on creating a more restricted atmosphere of internalized regions or states of mind *in camera*. In concert with the seasonal rhythm that dominates the agricultural life of the village, two young lovers work hard for half the year, and in the autumn relax to enjoy the fruits of their labour. This idyllic existence ends, however, when Xavier suddenly leaves Annie who then wanders around Gourmont in despair. At a Hallowe'en party the odours of nutmeg and cinnamon recall the smells associated with her departed lover. Through a kind of synaesthetic nostalgia, Daviau's short stories create a Proustian atmosphere in miniature. In the story from which the collection takes its title, a father tells his son about the history of objects in his room before he falls asleep. In these chambers of fiction, the fourth wall may be missing or it may be pierced by a window that reflects the open-ended structure of many stories. "Une fenêtre, rouge poème. Une chambre qui touche à l'infini. . . . Dans la réalité, les choses n'ont pas de fin." But in regionalist fiction, closure always competes with "un système décentré." MICHAEL GREENSTEIN

NOT HER STORY

FLORENCE MCNEIL, *The Overlanders*. Thistledown, $7.95.

ACCORDING TO MARY BALF'S *Kamloops: A History of the District up to 1914*, the famous Overlander Party of gold seekers bound for the Cariboo in 1862 included, besides 220 men, one pregnant woman and her three small children. They left Fort Garry in June, reached Tete Jaune Cache at the end of August, and there divided their hopes between the Fraser and North Thompson rivers. Thirty-six of them, including Augustus and Catherine Schubert, opted to drive 130 horses and cattle down the North Thompson; but soon discovering that the trail was almost non-existent, they slaughtered the animals, made saltless jerked beef, and launched rafts near the end of September. After a month of drownings, portage, rebuilding of rafts, and near starvation, the Overlanders straggled into Kamloops. Catherine soon gave birth to a daughter in the Indian settlement, and in 1863 the Schuberts moved to Lillooet. By 1877 Catherine was matron of the Cache Creek Boarding School, and in 1883 she made her final move to what is now Enderby.

No filmmaker or writer could ignore the drama of the Overlanders' story, or overlook the particular fascination of a pregnant woman in a party of daring, sometimes desperate men. But material alone does not guarantee success. Technique must do that. Despite the difficulty of developing effective technique, many contemporary Canadians have been impelled to write lyric poetry based on historical material. Among the most successful are Margaret Atwood and John Newlove, whose poems about Susanna Moodie, Samuel Hearne, and others have been good lyrics quite apart from their historical interest: condensed in language; apt in metaphor and in form. Florence Mc-

Neil's *The Overlanders* suffers greatly by comparison.

The first of a series of complaints to be made about *The Overlanders* is that it sounds like prose.

> and I hold my stomach tenderly
> lurching through
> and hope the drenching will not
> tell the men what my thick skirts
> have hidden with success.

The last three line breaks here seem arbitrary and the diction ("with success") excessive. McNeil's line breaks commonly do little more than substitute for punctuation, the lack of which often causes either confusion or awkwardness:

> The food is growing scarce
> our expedition announcing its coming
> drives off game the birds who could feed us
> are always out of sight
> and ducks that float on small green ponds
> become air or ripples as we near
> the children's whimpering empties out my heart
> squirrels and pemmican our only food
> and an occasional ox to sacrifice
> against starvation

Awkwardness results also from occasional weak rhymes and an overabundance of similes — rather than the strong identity of images conveyed by metaphors. In ten lines early in the book, for example, Fort Edmonton "gleams like a city in an Arabian book"; the Overlanders wait "like withered hay"; men are "like circus tramps." Clichés (wildflowers stretch "like a magic carpet") compound the problem.

Because *The Overlanders* attempts to reproduce the interior monologue of an immigrant Irish woman — interrupted by the observations of traders and prospectors encountered enroute — some of its stylistic weakness might be excused on the ground that McNeil represents Catherine Schubert's level of insight. But this would be condescending, and it would also ignore the fact that good poetry has to be good. In any case, McNeil attributes to Schubert references which imply refinement: Valhalla; "chaste dark geishas" with whom to compare Indian girls: curious learning for a woman whose most urgent recollections of Ireland include "days and nights when corpses clogged / the bare potato fields." Strange also is the opening comparison of the prairies to a giant flat checkerboard, an image surely more appropriate to the era of airplanes than to 1862.

There are good lines in *The Overlanders*, enough to suggest that Florence McNeil could have written a strong lyric poem from her imaginings of the struggles of a pioneer woman over a century ago, but not enough to warrant forty pages, a book. This is McNeil's seventh book. Her fourth (*Ghost Towns*, 1975), which exhibits her capacity for wit, condensation, and appropriate diction, is probably her best.

RON MILES

VERSE INTO POETRY

MARILYN BOWERING, *Giving Back Diamonds*. Porcépic, $6.95.

JOHN SMITH, *Sucking-stones*. Quadrant, $5.95.

BOTH John Smith and Marilyn Bowering are competent verse-writers, yet one, in my view, has turned verse into poetry while the other, as yet, has not. When I talk about competent verse-writing, I mean matters of technique — the ability to write a fluent line, the possession and manipulation of a good vocabulary, a sense of structure. When I talk of turning verse into poetry, I mean the inspiring of technique by feeling, the imagination using for its purposes the sense of pitch and the knowledge of proportion that form the basic equipment of the poet. I mean ultimately, I suppose, what is the criterion of success in any art, the creation of a credible and self-consistent world of the mind.

Such a world Marilyn Bowering has

created in clear and memorable shape. *Giving Back Diamonds* is her fifth and in my view her best book of verse. She writes with a kind of absolute pitch, her use of words spare, accurate, evocative, as in the taut poems about sexual relationships in the title section of her book, "Giving Back Diamonds."

We are a landscape
of life events,

my memories are half-creatures
of floods and dryness;

my small tributary is of no consequence
without you.

I imagine us continuing
making a deep channel of sadness.
We will leave our mark on the countryside,

but when we merge with the sea
will our constancy be a virtue,
and being joined,
a form of deliverance?

I ask these questions
as if wisdom takes sides.

("Life Events")

Marilyn Bowering's imagery is as restrained and as transparent as her diction, yet though density is not a quality of her work, tangibility is. In the section of her book entitled "The Swan on the River of Death" the recollections of places are rendered with an almost Proustian memorableness, and so is the painful and ambiguous pleasure of returning.

Whatever intervening time held
has vanished and seems no more than a night
spent alone in the cottage;

returning unchanges, content in the lap
of the valley

but unable to remain. This place absorbs life,
its blotter is river, moor, cliff, brimmed with
sun and weather, cattle, people: my mother
is with me and picks out familiar flowers —

yellow tormentil and white star —

my father notes the ropes of flint
in the rock. The wind makes them young.

In the glen the rowan berries hang red as
thumbs on the pliant branches.

The river is full
and streamers of waving weeds lie back, smoothing,
tangled with cream wool the sheep lose
when they drink.

All who come receive new names,
as in fearful, perfect paradise.

("Going Back to a Former Haunting")

Proceeding through intimate personal encounters, through the illuminations and darknesses of memory, through myths sardonically reconstructed ("Is there a choice, after all, / in the kind of beggar the gods send?" as she ends a poem on Penelope) one has the sense not only of walking in a fascinating mind but also of perceiving through a subtle and highly tuned sensibility. The diction is unerring; the tone is always appropriate; the poise is so assured that one longs for and welcomes the occasional awkwardness, the necessary imperfection.

There is certainly an abundant and even clamorous energy in the poems of John Smith's *Sucking-stones*, but the clear shape and intention one finds in Marilyn Bowering's poems is lacking. Smith is consciousnessly workmanlike in his craftsmanship. He begins his volume with a well-made sonnet in unrhymed decasyllables, and he leaves us in little doubt of his ability to use intelligently almost any poetic form. It is in the use of words and images that his weakness lies. As first one is swept along by the dense tumbling of the words; then one becomes sated by the plethora, and aware of excesses and incongruities that are the result less of deliberate artifice than of a poor sense of what goes on in poetry. Take, for example, a stanza like this:

Rich with capabilities now, we think of that emplaced
where we have only to flick our minds to abrogate gravity,
touch limitless silent power to beneficent circuits,
dissolve time,
exceed all measurable velocities, sweep from channel to channel

through the spectrum of the music of all
motions,
and are yet no closer than you in the past
of desolations,
when you were poor in the face of the
sublime
inscrutables of natural sense.
("Letter Thirteen")

Too many resounding abstractions — "abrogate gravity," "beneficent circuits," "measurable velocities," "sublime inscrutables," etc., too few clear and direct images, and, above all, the fatal tendency to use two complex words where one simple one might do. The memory can grasp little of poetry of this kind, and so much energy is used in the cerebral act of inventing conceits that there is little left for the evoking of emotions or the projection of a recognizable poetic persona.

I remember once in South India meeting a surgeon who was engaged in relieving the victims of elephantiasis by cutting away large pieces of inert tissue from their legs. Mr. Smith should perhaps be the surgeon of his own poetry, cutting away, simplifying, and eventually revealing behind his current persona which is rather thick with words the thin man who may be his true poetic self.

GEORGE WOODCOCK

BRITISH WOMEN

SUSAN JACKEL, ed., *A Flannel Shirt and Liberty, British Emigrant Women in the Canadian West, 1880-1914.* Univ. of British Columbia Press, $21.95.

SUSAN JACKEL'S BOOK is one of the all-too-rare tributes to that vast and noble company of makers of Canada — the housewives, particularly the housewives of the west — for as she says, "The labour of women was recognized from the start as essential to western settlement." Throughout the thirty-odd years of the peak period of western immigration, until the war stopped all immigration, Canada wanted women. The C.P.R. wanted women, provincial governments wanted women, bachelors on lonely homesteads wanted women, harried mothers wanted women. But the demand was specialized, "women to do farm and household labour." Daunting as that may sound, women still came and they laboured, creating homes out of waving grass and log shacks, supporting their families with butter and egg money when times were hard. With their help, the west grew and burgeoned.

However, Professor Jackel is concerned with only one special group of the great company, that of middle-class women from Britain. The nineteenth-century population explosion and the resulting exodus of men seeking space and work in far places had the unhappy consequene in Britain of accentuating the overabundance of women, particularly of middle-class women whose main avocation had been marriage. Lacking independent means and prohibited by their class code from taking the jobs that working-class women could take, they faced a grim future as spinsters of impoverished gentility, dependent on the charity of relatives. For them, the call from Canada could be a godsend.

As Agnes Skrine, one of the ten writers represented in the book, says, "I like both the work and the play here, the time out of doors and the time for coming home. I like the summer and the winter, the monotony and the change. Besides, I like a flannel skirt and liberty." That was the lure and it was genuine, the sweeping away of barriers, the social freedom, the limitless space, the financial independence.

Yet Agnes Skrine, whose rather lyrical article appeared in *Blackwood's Magazine* in 1898, was hardly representative of the women who came and created homes. She had married the owner of a prosper-

ous "ranche" in the Alberta foothills, where there was a cook and household help, and they returned to Britain in 1902. Nevertheless, she was not misleading. While she gloried in the Rockies, "high and shining, a rampart to the world," she warned that the life could be one "of much harder toil than a common labourer and his wife would lead in England.... Life cannot be made easy for people without money anywhere on this globe. However difficult it is for a lady to keep house without any servants in England, it must be ten times harder in a country where she cannot call in a charwoman to scrub the kitchen floor, or get water by turning on a tap."

But if Mrs. Skrine was not representative of those who made their lives in the west, her article is representative of the selections which Professor Jackel chose for her book. Apart from replies to a C.P.R. publicity questionnaire on the life of women in the west, and a very down-to-earth account of that life by an unidentified Englishman, the excerpts are all from books and articles by professional women writers, only two of whom seem to have been bona fide settlers. They were visitors, observers, investigative reporters, emissaries of colonization societies or of the Department of the Interior, all of whom were conscious of the foreseeable end to their western experience.

Their lack of involvement may have increased the air of sparseness in the book, which stems from what Susan Jackel says is "a relative scarcity of documents." Still, this volume is thinner than it need have been, for although Professor Jackel gives no explanation of the fact, she has limited her interest to the homesteads and settlements of the south, of the C.P.R. line, centring on Winnipeg, Qu'Appelle, and Calgary. There is nothing about the towns on the branch lines going north, about the Saskatchewan Valley, the C.N.R. towns, nor even about the Edmonton area. Perhaps the most surprising of all is the absence of any comment or even mention of the Barr colonists who emigrated in 1903, and who included what must have been the largest concentrated group of middle-class Englishwomen ever to have arrived in Canada. There is another sense of incompleteness in that this book is the book of exhortation; it needs, as Professor Jackel notes, its complement, the book of experience — the letters home, the diaries, the journals — which, she says, is being prepared by a researcher at Carleton University. Together, the two should make a valuable record.

In the meantime, the exhortations are in themselves revealing. The writers appealed to their countrywomen's patriotism: "It is a great call for women... giving their best of mind and body for the race and for the Empire." They appealed to missionary zeal "to soften and sweeten life in the Wild West." They appealed to compassion — go out and save your brothers — and of course they appealed to romance; marriage was almost inescapable.

Yet, like Agnes Skrine, though they were propagandists, they were not dishonest. The desired freedom could be bought only by hard work, the classless society meant "we are all working women here," the blessed space could become a prison of loneliness (bring a musical instrument if possible; bring return fare). As for romance, "it is still within the wisdom of love to refuse to become a married woman on the prairie." Two of the writers conclude that the so-called "home-help" — a euphemism for "hired girl" — was only a household drudge, and that educated women were not fitted for homestead life. It was not their solution. As Susan Jackel says, "supply and demand were out of joint.... The gender was right, but the training was all wrong."

In spite of all the hazards, a remarkable

number came, and the state of many of them is illustrated in the reprint on the jacket, a touchingly comical scene of maid in cap and apron serving tea to her behatted mistress seated on the prairie, farm buildings in the background; it is the Canadian equivalent of dressing for dinner in the desert, and a quality that made a notable impact on the developing country.

MARGARET STOBIE

THEATRE OF ACTION

TOBY GORDON RYAN, *Stage Left: Canadian Theatre in the Thirties: A Memoir.* CTR Publications, n.p.

UNTIL RECENTLY Canadians have believed not only that a native theatre didn't flourish here until the late 1960's, but also that there was little or no Canadian theatre worthy of the name until that time. As late as 1977 Brian Parker could call an important analysis of plays by three Canadian playwrights "Is there a Canadian Drama?" and the question seemed to make sense. But things are rapidly changing. Since 1974 (and the University of Toronto Conference "Canadian Theatre Before the Sixties"), there has been a growing critical interest in Canadian drama, particularly in the history of Canadian drama — and regardless of what we mean by "Canadian drama" (whether we are "localists," "regionalists," "nationalists," or "internationalists"), the dramatic archeology of the past few years has gone a long way toward qualifying the idea that, prior to the 1960's, Canada was a dramatic wasteland. That a native theatre has been slow in developing and beset by a wide variety of problems is true. It is also true that the 1960's and 1970's witnessed an exciting upsurge in the writing and production of Canadian plays. But things *were* happening in the Canadian theatre during the 1920's, 30's, and 40's, and the story of these years is an exciting one.

One of the most recent efforts to tell this story is Toby Gordon Ryan's memoir, *Stage Left: Canadian Theatre in the Thirties.* Ryan's *Memoir* of the years from 1929 to 1940 deals with the organization of Workers' Theatres in Toronto, Vancouver, Winnipeg, and Montreal, and it explores the various elements of these amateur groups which, together, constitutes a truly alternative, agit-prop theatre. *Stage Left* is, in fact, less Ryan's personal memoir than a collective recreation of the personalities, social issues, and theatre activity of the time. Interspersed with Ryan's own remarks are the recollections of many people who were active in the Workers' Theatres — people such as Harold Griffin (a founding member of the Vancouver Progressive Arts Club who reported on the PAC Players' successful production of *Waiting for Lefty* in 1935), Joe Zuken of the Winnipeg Workers' Theatre (recalling the defeat of a government ban on *Eight Men Speak*), Rose Kashtan of Montreal's New Theatre (recalling performances of *Bury the Dead* and *We Beg to Differ* as well as harrassment from Duplessis's watchdogs), and Wayne and Shuster, who as students were active in Toronto's Theatre of Action. The driving force behind all these groups was the belief in a social theatre directly involved with current affairs and the social inequities of the period. Although Irving Myers is speaking of Montreal's New Theatre Group, his remarks are representative of the "stage left" movement as a whole: "It was inept in many places, it was gauche, it was young, it was awkward sometimes. But it had a dynamic and it had a goal that was absolutely right. The things we were fighting against absolutely had to be fought."

Because she was instrumental in the formation of the Toronto Workers' Theatre in 1932, and its continuation in a

more permanent group called Theatre of Action (formed in 1935), Ryan devotes several chapters of her book to the history of Toronto social theatre. And many aspects of this history are fascinating. While studying theatre at Artef (Workers' Theatrical Alliance) in New York, Ryan saw the German agit-prop group, Prolet-Bühne. She was so impressed by their structure and techniques that when she returned to Toronto in 1932 she and Jim Watts modelled their Workers' Theatre upon the German troupe.

Workers' Theatre was an informal organization in which all the members participated in as many ways as possible and in this, as in other ways, it foreshadows the contemporary Theatre Passe-Muraille. The later Theatre of Action, however, had a director (imported from New York), a regular core of members and a summer school. Its productions of plays such as *Waiting for Lefty* (1936), *Bury the Dead* (1936), and the powerful *Steel* (1938) were staged at Hart House or Margaret Eaton Hall, but the troupe also toured southern Ontario towns in an effort to bring social theatre to the people. For example, despite the strong union propaganda, *Steel* was well received by local audiences and reviewers who praised the power of the play and the clever expressionist sets of a massive steel plant. Theatre of Action won at the Central Ontario Regional finals in 1938 with *Steel* and took the play to the Dominion Drama Festival finals in Winnipeg that year. Although they did not win in the finals, their work was praised, as *Bury the Dead* had been in the 1937 finals (when John Coulter's *The House in the Quiet Glen* received the Bessborough trophy). But Ryan remembers feeling ostracized by the regular Festival crowd and it is not surprising, as Ryan points out, that Betty Lee all but ignored the Workers' Theatres in her history of the DDF, *Love and Whiskey*.

Ryan's method for putting *Stage Left* together is appropriate, in that the book (like the theatre it chronicles) is a joint-effort by many socially active and aware Canadians. But this collage approach makes for a fragmented text which is not always easy to follow. What is gained by the sense of immediacy and the enthusiasm of personal voices remembering is at times undercut by the lack of organization. Although there is a wealth of information here, and although the several very fine and useful photographs of personalities and stage sets are supplemented by Appendices with press comments and a list of major productions, there is no index. Given the book's structure and content, an index would have been invaluable.

However, I want to conclude on a positive note because *Stage Left* is a fascinating record of the Canadian theatre past. In addition to recreating the activity of a unique theatre of the time, Ryan sheds light upon the problems facing the development of a Canadian theatre in the 1930's. The plays performed by Theatre of Action were American plays and their directors were American because, as Ryan explains, there were very few Canadian plays around, especially socially relevant ones, and there were no schools to train Canadian actors and directors. When Syd Banks, a long-time Canadian member of the Toronto group, did take over in 1939, Theatre of Action was reaching the end of its short but vibrant life because a new world war drew energies and talents in other directions. Nevertheless, in its group structure, social ideals, summer schools, and devotion to Canadian theatre, Toronto's Theatre of Action was a forerunner of the alternative theatres of today. If it did not produce a Canadian repertoire in five short years, it did provide the place for talented Canadians (among them Lorne Green and Lou Jacobi) to practice their art. It was, in

Toby Ryan's words, a unique and important theatre, "a dissenting voice, a true alternative theatre," and its story is one "that needs to be heard" today.

SHERRILL GRACE

IN DEBATE

IRVING LAYTON, *Taking Sides: The Collected Social and Political Writings*, ed. and intro. by Howard Aster. Mosaic Press/Valley Editions, $10.00; pa. $4.95.

Taking Sides is both annoying and embarrassing. It is annoying because of the careless way in which it has been edited (of which more later); it is embarrassing because Layton too often — on the evidence of the writings here reprinted — wants to be at once the farsighted political commentator or student of political theory, and the irresponsible wearer of motley, the garlanded innocent, of whom everything can be forgiven. There is every reason, of course, for poets to be political theorists and even political activists. There is room in politics — indeed there is a crying need — for the joy, the anger, and the life-affirming zeal that Layton brings to every subject he writes on. The poet, at least a poet-prophet such as Layton, is more likely than the company director or university professor to speak for humane values against the conspiracy of rival imperialisms which daily threatens our lives with annihilation. When he enters the political arena, however, he must expect the same rules of debate to apply to the poet as to other men and women, and if anything, the poet's standard of conduct should be higher than the politician's. Certainly self-contradiction, outrageousness, and verbal abuse of one's opponents carry penalties no less severe for the poet than for the merest political hack.

These observations sound, and are, prissy, in an age when "public debate" consists mainly of television appearances lasting anything from twenty to thirty seconds, but *Taking Sides* is calculated sooner or later to outrage everyone's sense of what makes for a fair fight. It must also be admitted that in this age the convolutions of history can make a fool of the most well-intentioned and circumspect political analyst. Still, in this post-Vietnam, post-Watergate era it is disturbing to find that in 1965, during the Johnson administration, Layton wrote this: "For all her mistakes in judgment and deed, I know of no other country that has so persistently sought to ethicize power as the United States" (p. 101). To *ethicize* power? With all that was coming to light, even then, about the activities of various U.S. agencies in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the U.S.A. itself? Or this, also in 1965: "[America's] leaders have again and again told the American people they must resist the ever-present temptation to equate dissent from their policies with disloyalty. When I read over the account of the huge peace rally in Washington or of the peace marches, I'm left wondering what sort of weed must be smoked to produce a judgment as ill-balanced as that" (p. 104). Certain subsequent events, such as the shootings at Kent State in 1970, might lead one to expect some sort of retraction, some recognition from Layton that he had not understood American politics as well as he thought he had, but Layton does not apologize, still less retract. History has also cruelly called into question much of what Layton wrote in his despatches from Tel Aviv in 1968. In the era of Begin and Sharon anyone who shares the agony of Israel can surely only weep at this: "Jews are too individualistic, too fond of irony and mockery, and too humane to fawn on military leaders. The strut of de Gaulle would provide only endless laughter to a nation which was the first to attempt to teach other nations the

hollowness of military power and glory" (p. 137).

Perhaps it's unfair to continue pointing out the more obvious lessons of history, however. Perhaps political commentary is not a field in which one should expect constant apologies, adjustments, and retractions. The reader should not ask "is this position tenable in light of facts which are accessible to us now but may not have been accessible then?" but rather "however partial this person's view of the facts may be, do his or her statements clarify the point at issue? do they make a constructive contribution to debate?" Layton very rarely meets these requirements either. Consider the following two passages — both from 1967, if the editor's dates are to be trusted:

> the western democracies are under attack by the Soviet Union and its satellites who are bent to destroy them by subversion or by starting brush fires in their vicinity. Russia's championship of the most reactionary elements in the Arab world against democracic [*sic*] and progressive Israel shows up her humanistic pretensions for what they are — Soviet propagandistic clap-trap.... Will the western democracies finally get the message? ... Sharing a moral, political and religious tradition with Israel, they are menaced by the Soviet Union which with the assistance of its dupes and stooges is striving with all its might to extend its tyranny over men's minds and to enslave the human spirit where it cannot extinguish it. (pp. 131-32)

> Communism today is not the monolithic thing that it was, or that it appeared to be, several years ago.... There's a point where you have to use your head and realize that Russian security depends, or the Russians think that their security depends, upon having a strategic area allotted to itself.... what has happened is that the two powers, the United States and the Soviet Union, are slowly working toward some accommodation, toward some kind of adjustment. And all this I find very hopeful.... The *present* leadership of the Soviet Union is much closer to the bureaucrats and the engineers that we know in our own society. ... They are not ideologues in the sense that Lenin and Stalin were ideologues. (pp. 191-93)

It may be said that these quotations are taken out of context, and so of course they are. But nowhere is there any explanation of how two such completely opposed positions might be reconciled with each other.

The editor of *Taking Sides* seems uneasily aware of such contradictions, and tries to camouflage them with appeals to "tensions," to "layers of human meaning" and "the dialectic of reality." "Reality" here, however, seems to mean the limitations imposed upon us by mortal and material existence, for Aster adds that there are two ways to "conquor" [*sic*] reality — love and imagination — and continues, as if by way of explanation, "Politics is the manner in which men and women try to seduce reality, to become its master through power." The limitations of mortal existence apply equally to everyone, however, and a universal condition cannot be invoked to excuse inconsistency, or disregard for the etiquette of debate.

After this rather unsatisfactory introduction, the editor decides to let Layton speak for himself, and follows Layton's own principle of never explaining and never apologizing, which leads to some irritating problems with the text which a careful editor would have dealt with. On p. 189, for example, Layton refers to "this poem," and later to "my recent poem." Neither poem is identified. On p. 177, Layton answers what is evidently a question from an interviewer by saying "I really don't know," but the question itself is not printed. Typographical errors abound. A letter reprinted from the *Globe and Mail* and dated "April 13, 1971" refers to a letter that appeared in that newspaper on April 19, 1971. The German chancellor, Dr. Kiesinger, becomes "Kissinger" on p. 123 and "Keisinger" on p. 194; to add to the confu-

sion, the Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands is sometimes referred to as the NPD and sometimes as the NDP (pp. 124-25, 194-95). Allen Ginsberg becomes "Alan" (p. 55), the Deity becomes the "Diety" (p. 171), and so on. Graduate students wanting to write theses on Layton's political views would be best advised to ignore Aster and go to the original sources. For students and academics generally, an accurate bibliography of Layton's writings would have been far more useful. Other readers will find here a few valuable comments on the flowering of Canadian poetry in the 1940's and 1950's, and an imperfect but provocative record of Layton's considerable achievement as the nemesis of Canadian complacency and puritanism. For the rest, the time would be much better spent reading *For My Brother Jesus* or *Nail Polish* or *The Bull Calf*.

ANTHONY JOHN HARDING

THE SCRATCH, NOT THE ITCH

GEORGE BOWERING, *A Way With Words*. Oberon, $19.95; pa. $9.95.

GEORGE BOWERING, *West Window: The Selected Poetry of George Bowering*. General Publishing, n.p.

THE ALMOST SIMULTANEOUS publication of two books by George Bowering — one a selection of his critical articles and the other a selection of his poems — affords an opportunity to test his theories against his practice. His essays are indicators of his taste, what alerts his interests, and indirectly, his theory of poetry; so one book can serve as a gloss on the other. His allusions to Keats and Shelley in the first few essays, for example, attest to his roots in Romanticism, and his dabbling references to Barthes, semiotics, and post-structuralism in the final essays demonstrate his alignment with some of the various theoretical positions which come under the heading of post-modernism. His choice of poets for critical scrutiny is identical to those he writes about in his poetry collection (Atwood, Avison, Davey, Jones, Kearns, McFadden, Newlove, Wah), and it is fair (not exactly illuminating) to compare the tone of the essay to that of the poem "on" the same poet. There are, in fact, a number of points of intersection between the two books. His comments on the "self" as process, his rejection of notions of centricity, his puzzling assessments of versification and music, to cite only a few examples, all help to locate the context within which to appreciate (even understand) the poems. It is handy, then, to have the poems and essays collected together as they are in these two volumes.

What of the books examined singly? In *A Way With Words* Bowering resembles a tour guide taking us through a greenhouse of his favourite exotic, albeit indigenous plants. He points out a particularly colourful marking on a leaf here, a cluster of blossoms there, the shape of a flower over there. He mentions root systems in passing, lingers over an unusual hybrid for a minute and then hurries us on, filling in the time between observations and impressions with anecdotes about how one plant nearly died or how he cross-fertilized another. His commentary is associative, selective, benevolent and, when necessary, sprinkled with enough jargon to remind us that he is an expert. All in all, the tour is informative and we nod our assent at how agreeable our guide is. Even the odd petulant remark only piques our interest; these kinds of tour guides are supposed to be a little eccentric anyway.

The specialist in the field might be less enchanted with the tour these essays provide for a number of reasons. They badly need a scrupulous editor. The essays are

undated, for example, even though some are at least ten years old. Does Bowering still believe that Davey's "*Weeds* is as good a book as any that has ever been composed by a Vancouver poet [and] one of the most brave and beautiful and important books of our time," or does that judgment come out of a specific historical context? The essays are also badly documented so that when Bowering writes, "All images are symbols — Frye says that," there is no reference given that would enable the reader to verify the accuracy of that statement. The book cries out for an editor to get rid of all those unnecessary hyphens, spelling mistakes, vague terms such as "actualities" and "epipsyche," and to clean up all those strange sentences such as: "The poem that refuses to keep its distance in terms of space does so in terms of time too, then, now." Too often Bowering seems to be an *apologist* for the *Tish* poets in both the positive and negative senses of that term. His criticism is often far more elaborate than the poems seem to warrant, and at times one senses that he is reshaping the poetry to suit his own predilections.

Having said all of that (mostly out of duty), it should be emphasized that Bowering's impressionistic approach to these poets is very helpful, because he has a special talent for picking up nuances, cadences and subtleties of form that are often difficult to articulate. His essays on Avison, Jones, Kearns, and Davey are the kind that teach us how to read these poets and nothing could be better than that. His anecdotes give readers something of the flavour of a poet's personality as it relates to his writing, so they are a bonus: "[Fred Wah] does not write fiction because his aesthetic is not geared to construction. (Once, trying to build a cabin, he put the hammer through his front teeth.)"

West Window is a collection of previously published books. *Curious* (1973) is a collection of poems which record Bowering's responses to his meetings with forty-eight poets. The poems are prosaic in rhythm, often polemical and mannered, but never flat or dull. *At War With The U.S.* (1974) does not seem to stand up very well and parts of it are boring, while *Allophanes* (1976) is beginning to look better and better. *Uncle Louis* (1980) is a lighter series of poems about the Louis St. Laurent era and it carries a running commentary which is even funnier than the poem; the mischievous interplay of the two is the real poem which turns out to be about Canadian poetry. The final section entitled "Between the Sheets" is a collection of five shorter pieces (another one mentioned in the acknowledgements is missing in my copy) which seem to be left over and dangling at the end of this book.

In her preface, Sheila Watson notes that the poems fit together as explorations of the meanings of the Greek word *polis*, and in the sense that Bowering is studying notions of community that is a fair statement. His explicitly political stanzas, however, are really shouts of moral indignation dressed up as political assessments, but he characterizes himself as an idealist-anarchist so his tendency to posture can be expected and possibly forgiven as poetic licence. Taken together, the poems are samples of Bowering's post-lyrical phase. They are often experimental and they hold all the promise of success, and danger of failure, that any experiment holds. There are sudden flashes of insight and wit when the language works for him and long flat areas when he plays around to see if he can do it again. The reader must engage in the whole process. Sometimes (too often?), the language only half-succeeds when, for example, a pun seems to be too contrived ("thru the flowing world / of Hera's clitoris" or "the egg-ziled gods").

The line lengths, rhythms, spaces and notation also seem to be struggling for form most of the time and these things, too, can try a reader's patience, but the rewards can be considerable for the reader who "takes his time." If to display "mind in process," "language in action," "poetry creating itself" is the purpose of writing, as Bowering indicates it is, then the collaborating reader will find many delightful passages in this volume. The energy and playfulness in many sections are in themselves enough to recommend the poems. If, on the other hand, you sympathize with that little poem about process versus product which McLuhan used to quote (it ends: "So that is reckoned wisdom which / Describes the scratch but not the itch"), then you turn these pages at your own risk.

JOHN ORANGE

ALL THAT JAZZ

MARK MILLER, *Jazz in Canada: Fourteen Lives.* Univ. of Toronto Press, $18.95.

THE FIRST QUESTION which occurred to me when I was asked to review this book for this periodical was: what does jazz have to do with Canadian literature? Only a few direct connections come to mind. At least three Canadian novelists — Malcolm Lowry, Michael Ondaatje, and Josef Skvorecky — have woven their jazz interests into fiction. Miller's book has nothing to say about the links between jazz and other art forms, but the fleeting connection with these three novelists relates to a significant point which Miller makes about the relevance of jazz to Canadian culture in general. Jazz, Miller notes, is "one element of an otherwise pervasive American culture that Canadians have accepted with uncharacteristic reluctance." Lowry, Ondaatje, and Skvorecky were all born and raised outside Canada. Can it be that only Canadian writers with non-North American cultural backgrounds have the cosmopolitanism, or the detachment, or the simple curiosity, evidently lacking in many native-born Canadians, to cultivate an interest in jazz? For as Miller's book demonstrates, and as most Canadian jazz fans know, there are few cultural phenomena more liable to the neglect or contempt of even the most culturally sophisticated segment of this country's population than jazz. When Canadians listen to or write about jazz, furthermore, their attention is most likely to be directed towards music produced in the United States. Miller deals with the much more recondite subject of jazz produced in Canada by Canadian-born musicians.

Canadian historiography and biography have gravitated in recent years towards narratives of unknown, forgotten, or grossly misrepresented personages, whose stories have often yielded new insights into that elusive concept, the Canadian identity. As a biographical study of fourteen unjustly neglected and often misunderstood Canadian artists, *Jazz in Canada* belongs in the same literary context as Thomas Flanagan's revisionist biography of Riel, or Charles Taylor's brilliant biographical analysis of Canadian imperialism, *Six Journeys: A Canadian Pattern.* As biography, *Jazz in Canada* is a promising book. "The history of jazz in Canada," Miller declares in his preface, "is not the history of a music, but of musicians"; "jazz musicians are interesting characters, and their lives colourful, often darkly so." The glimpses provided in the subsequent narratives of frustrated ambitions, compromises with popular taste, frenetic life styles, drug and alcohol addiction, and above all, unrelenting devotion to music, bear out the author's introductory statements.

Yet for all its potential interest, *Jazz in Canada* — as biography, at least — is also

a rather disappointing book. The images of psychological conflict and zealous commitment promised in Miller's Preface and Introduction are not developed beyond superficial impressions. A recurrent theme in these fourteen mini-biographies is tragedy, as the various protagonists move toward personal crises, professional failure, artistic frustration, and in at least five cases, untimely death. But Miller has made very little attempt to develop the thematic unity of his material, beyond his introductory suggestions and occasional allusions or conjectures. Relentlessly cautious in his treatment of their personal lives, unfailingly adulatory in his analyses of their music, Miller sidesteps or underplays the deeper psychological, moral, and cultural questions which the lives of his subjects raise. Why was pianist Chris Gage, once hailed as the artistic equal of Oscar Peterson, evidently self-condemned to a life of professional obscurity and eventually to suicide? What complex combination of psychological and social factors has led pianist Wray Downes to walk away repeatedly from his professional and private circumstances and make a series of fresh starts? What, if anything, has the zany behaviour of Montreal drummer Guy Nadon to do with his self-awareness as a French-Canadian committed to an art form overwhelmingly dominated by Anglophone North Americans? What drove the brilliant young saxophonist Brian Park to drug addiction and an early death? And finally, comprehensively, why are all the musicians dealt with in the book — including cornettist Trump Davidson, saxophonists Paul and P. J. Perry, trumpeter Herbie Spanier, drummer Larry Dubin, guitarist Nelson Symonds, drummer Guy Nadon, guitarist Sonny Greenwich, saxophonist Brian Barley — so little-known and appreciated either in Canada or in international jazz circles, especially if they are as good as Miller claims they are?

Jazz in Canada raises many such questions, but offers few answers. Instead, Mark Miller has taken a reportorial, documentary approach, reproducing many pages of excerpts from the interviews which he has accumulated with commendable energy over the last ten years. In an art form where the practitioners are not widely given to the writing of autobiography or memoirs, oral histories obviously have a very important place, as the American jazz critic Nat Hentoff demonstrated some years ago with his collection of transcriptions of interviews and monologues featuring older jazz musicians, *Hear Me Talkin' To Ya.* The trouble is that many jazz musicians are not given to verbal eloquence, let alone to profound self-analysis or historical insight. The result, in *Jazz in Canada*, is a series of often repetitive, often cryptic, often frustratingly guarded soliloquies which fail to shed much light on the allegedly dark lives Miller attributes to the speakers.

But *Jazz in Canada* is a valuable book, because it deals knowledgeably, if rather selectively, with a subject which has been almost completely neglected. In Canada, where thanks to our continuing reluctance to acknowledge native talent or genius, such a historical record as this assumes particular importance. I highly recommend this book, in spite of its limitations, to anyone interested not only in the subject of jazz, but in the subject of Canadian culture, which I assume includes all of us. But I can't help wishing for the more comprehensive history of jazz in Canada which Mark Miller is obviously qualified to write. And alternatively, I can't help wishing for the bolder, more adventurous, more controversial biographical study that *Jazz in Canada: Fourteen Lives* might have been.

JAMES DOYLE

LA LANGUE POETIQUE

GILBERT LANGEVIN, *Issue de secours.* L'Hexagone, n.p.

HUBERT WALLOT, *Intermèdes, poésie et prose.* Editions Namaan, n.p.

MICHEL DALLAIRE, *Regards dans l'eau.* "Prise de parole," Les Perce-neige, n.p.

PARMI LES POETES de l'Hexagone, Gilbert Langevin a toujours un peu fait figure de marginal. Depuis *A Gueule de jour*, son premier recueil publié en 1959, le ton revendicateur, les appels à l'insurrection, l'ironie violente de sa poésie faisaient de lui un "paria solitudinaire," image qu'il cultivait avec une certaine complaisance. Langevin n'a jamais cherché à écrire de beaux poèmes propres, bien faits, fluides. Pour lui, l'écriture est fulgurance et rage de vivre.

Issue de secours (1981) marque un changement de ton dans son oeuvre. L'atmosphère y est, du moins dans la première partie, sourde et feutrée. Il semble que ce volume, tellement moins agressif que les autres, marque une crise d'angoisse devant un tournant de la vie. On est cependant loin d'une poésie subjective, tournée toute entière vers l'intérieur. Langevin a gardé son goût pour l'image qui objective et dépersonnalise l'émotion:

> géophase ascension
> sphères conciliées
> cohérence auréolaire
> autour des larmes.

Ce recueil est remarquable par l'importance des rapports entre les différents poèmes, groupés par deux, trois ou quatre, qui se répondent, s'opposent ou s'entrecroisent, qui partagent tous, suivant le groupe, une même forme poétique, un même rythme, des images qui se font écho. Chaque "faisceau" de poèmes a son titre et son dessin à la plume, de la main du poète.

Ces dessins non-figuratifs ne constituent pas un des moindres attraits de ce recueil: insects énigmatiques, en suspens sur la page, ils stimulent, par leurs lignes inachevées, les rêves du lecteur comme le font les vers fluides et non-ponctués des premiers poèmes. Le ton change dans la deuxième partie pour se faire plus hargneux et revendicatif, échos du Langevin que nous connaissons.

> Il y aura de la tempête
> Ces hérodes je vous le prédis
> grilleront.

Il manque souvent une pointe d'humour ou la distance de l'ironie à ces imprécations solennelles:

> Ecrans tentaculaires
> on crachera bientôt
> sur vos faces totalitaires.

Mais on se laisse souvent emporter par le souffle de ces vers où Langevin réussit à faire passer sa colère avec les armes d'un poète authentique qui sait trouver les mots qui sifflent où qui crachent, les phrases et les images qui éclatent avec la fulgurance d'un coup de révolver.

Pour Hubert Wallot, la poésie n'est pas avant tout une arme mais une aventure fascinante de la psyché humaine, une des activités les plus riches de ce que Merleau-Ponty appelait la pensée concrète. Le dernier recueil de Wallot réunit des poèmes et des essais qui reflètent l'intérêt de l'auteur pour l'exploration du moi et du monde à travers la poésie. Ainsi, les essais, rééditions de diverses compte-rendus déjà parus dans des journaux, abordent l'art, la poésie et le cinéma par le biais de leur fonction ou de leur contenu psychologique.

Psychiâtre de son état, Hubert Wallot est fasciné par l'oeuvre de Nelligan où il recherche les rapports complexes entre aventure poétique et psychopathologie. Suivant Wallot, la folie chez Nelligan apparaît à la fois comme un choix et une fatalité. A travers l'oeuvre, la maladie cesse d'être un fait absurde pour devenir

une possibilité générale de l'existence humaine quand elle affronte un de ses paradoxes; le point-de-vue du psychiâtre transparaît aussi dans les compte-rendus de théâtre qui recherchent les éléments "expressifs" et thérapeutiques de chaque spectacle. Les courtes chroniques (parues précédemment elles aussi dans des journaux) portent certains diagnostics sur les troubles de la santé morale de l'époque actuelle, par exemple, la mode rétro "reflète une population vieillissante de plus en plus importante qui commence à faire porter le poids de sa moindre créativité sur une jeunesse bloquée."

Les premiers poèmes du recueil — "Rêve suisse," "Arpège," "Je suis toi" — sont des poèmes d'amour agréablement romantiques et sentimentaux:

> Ô mourons ensemble
> demain si tu veux
> Que sont devenus les temps
> où s'égrènaient les guitares antiques . . .

avec des échos du poète admiré, Emile Nelligan: "Il vente de tes bleus regards comme neige de lilas." Les images de fleurs et de musique y abondent ainsi que celle de la poésie qu'on offre à l'aimée comme un bouquet. On ne peut cependant accuser Wallot de mièvrerie, certains poèmes dérangent profondément le langage quotidien ou les poncifs poétiques par l'originalité d'images surprenantes

> Les étoiles en frissons de fleurs
> Clignotent, papillotent, l'obsession de tes yeux
> radieux ciel siamois qui azurent mon délire.

Bien que ces poèmes aient été écrits à des dates aussi espacées que 1959 et 1976, ils manifestent une étonnante unité de ton et de cohérence langagière. Certains poèmes de circonstance dédiés à des amis, "Maître Pierre qu'il fait bon chez vous" par exemple, ne méritent pas la consécration de l'imprimé. La dernière série de poèmes, dédiée à Gilbert Langevin (les dédicaces ont une grande place dans ce recueil) qui s'intitule *Scènes de quartier* est consacrée à des sujets ayant une certaine portée sociale: descriptions de marginaux "Le dormeur," "Le veilleur," satires de l'époque actuelle "T.V. dinner," nationalisme québécois "L'avion français," "Colonisés volontaires." On regrette le patriotisme un peu facile de ces derniers, notamment de celui qui s'adresse aux gens de l'air et qui se termine par cette pieuse invocation "Puisse un jour la voix française survoler notre beau pays." On retrouve ici la couleur romantique des poèmes d'amour, notamment dans les refrains nostalgiques qui ponctuent les accusations contre la société moderne:

> Dans ce fond de cour où les gens
> se regardaient, s'aimaient, s'enviaient,
> s'engueulaient ou bavardaient.

Regards dans l'eau de Michel Dallaire est paru dans la collection "Perceneige" aux éditions Prise de parole qui se spécialise dans la publication de textes littéraires franco-ontariens et qui donne souvent leur première chance à de jeunes écrivains comme Dallaire. On ne trouve dans ce recueil ni la puissance de Langevin ni le romantisme un peu désuet de Wallot mais une poésie qui mêle étrangement le philosophique et le quotidien pour exprimer un désarroi existentiel parfois prenant.

> Mon empire de la nuit
> est un royaume de rêves
> où je suis roi
> . . .
> Où les vers ne sont que
> Les citations de soi.

Le monde des poèmes de Michel Dallaire ne contient que le moi, la matière, le temps et l'espace. Etonnamment vide de toute autre présence vivante que le regard, c'est un monde où l'eau et le temps se conjuguent sans cesse dans la solitude d'un moi plus philosophique que lyrique. Les premiers poèmes d'un jeune

auteur pêchent souvent par surcoît d'épanchements, d'effets rythmiques ou musicaux. Ceux-ci pratiquent presqu'une ascèse de la langue poétique recherchant le dépouillement à la fois dans la forme et dans le fond. Le ton est original et pénétrant et on attend avec impatience d'autres poèmes qui réussiront à enrichir le registre de ce nouvel écrivain de talent tout en préservant son originalité.

JACQUELINE VISWANATHAN

UNE SOURCE

CELYNE et RENE BONEFANT, eds., *Petite Anthologie du Noroît*. Editions du Noroît, n.p.

JEAN CHARLEBOIS, *La Mour suivi de L'Amort*. Editions du Noroît, $10.00.

MARCELLE ROY, *Traces*. VLB Editeur, $7.95.

MICHEL GAY, *Eclaboussures*. VLB Editeur, $8.95.

JEAN-PIERRE PETITS, *La Terrasse du roi lépreux*. Collection sur parole/Hurtubise HMH, n.p.

L'HUMILITE DE Célyne et René Bonenfant ne doit guère tromper le lecteur car la *Petite Anthologie du Noroît* est un bijou en son genre. Il s'agit d'une "présentation de textes de chacun des auteurs que le Noroît a publiés au cours de ses dix premières années d'existence (1971-81)." Mais les éditions du Noroît étant déjà une anthologie dans le sens étymologique du mot (une collection de fleurs), la *Petite Anthologie* est une anthologie au second degré. Et quel livre utile pour les trop rares professeurs qui veulent vraiment initier nos étudiants à notre poésie contemporaine! Car il est vrai, comme le dit si bien Alexis Lefrançois (l'un des poètes de la *Petite Anthologie*) que:

> les poètes de ce temps
> se chantent en silence
> le tourment des grands arbres
> et leur chagrin de bête.

Et c'est bien "les poètes de ce temps" et de ce lieu que continuent de publier les Editions du Noroît — ce vent, qui comme l'inspiration, "souffle ou il veut." C'est Jean Charlebois qui avec *La Mour suivi de L'Amort* confirme la qualité de cette maison d'édition. C'est d'abord les demi-teintes des paysages intérieurs que nous livre *La Mour*:

> un oiseau se violace
> les arbres vont bientôt parler
>
> la lumière est assise par terre
> dans la lune.

Que d'honnêteté esthétique chez ce poète qui a la force d'aller toujours plus loin pour saisir une aube nouvelle sur le vif! Mais c'est surtout *L'Amort* qui fait de Jean Charlebois un poète "de ce temps." Cette longue suite à deux voix a une portée universelle car on peut y lire, à côté de l'angoisse et des injustices d'aujourd'hui, le grand lyrisme d'une âme amoureuse capable de célébrer d'une manière expérimentale la totalité du monde. *L'Amort* fait de Charlebois l'écho discret du Baudelaire de "Bénédiction" mais le lecteur n'a aucune difficulté à être touché par la profonde simplicité de l'engagement du poète:

> Le South Bronx est grignoté par les rats d'égout
> Beyrouth hécatombe les Palestiniens saignent
> La Pologne se soldiarise contre son étrangleur.

Une autre maison d'édition qui a le courage de publier "les poètes de ce temps" c'est VLB Editeur. *Traces* de Marcelle Roy et *Eclaboussures* de Michel Gay sont deux beaux exemples correspondant à deux articulations de cette sensibilité contemporaine se traduisant elle-même par des écritures dont l'exploration est un véritable plaisir pour le lecteur.

Traces constitute le livre total d'une femme et si l'expérience évoquée est plu-

tôt commune, la sensibilité, elle, est des plus touchantes. Il s'agit, en effet, du journal poétique d'une femme sur le point de céder à l'amour, ou peut-être uniquement au désir de l'autre. Une femme, donc, en perpétuel devenir et tiraillée entre le cris du coeur et la subtile méditation si propre aux âmes blessées: "je ne suis pas venue / j'ai à marcher encore." La simplicité de ce vers, qui clôt l'un des plus beaux poèmes de *Traces*, résume l'ambiguïté des relations possibles entre un homme et une femme. Ce verts n'est, en effet, pas neutre si l'on en croit les connotations familières des verbes "venir" et "marcher." Mais *Traces* c'est aussi l'érotisme du quotidien:

> Je n'ai sur moi qu'une chemise indienne flottante, et les seins libres. Au bas de la chemise, la peau foncée de mes cuisses vient contraster avec le rose vibrant du coton égyptien et dans l'encolure, une chaîne en or légère chante le sombre de la peau à la naissance des seins.

De tels passages permettent au lecteur de produire sa propre lecture. En allant au-delà de la simple vérification référentielle, la découverte de la fonction signifiante est un véritable plaisir. En effet, le système descriptif de l'érotisme passe ici par une isotopie exotique. Des mots comme "indienne" et "égyptien" sont utilisés selon une méthode qui trouve son archétype textuel dans *Les Illuminations* d'Arthur Rimbaud. C'est ainsi la chemise rose qui permet à la narratrice d'être autre et d'éveiller le désir de l'amant. Le passage peut se lire comme un renversement du cliché "l'habit ne fait pas le moine." Ce passage, comme d'autres, permet une étude phénoménologique du corps. En effet, l'habit n'est pas simplement une extension du corps comme l'a dit Marshall McLuhan. Chez Marcelle Roy le vêtement devient plutôt un instrument qui permet au sujet de développer la connaissance de son propre corps. Ainsi quand l'amant exprime son admiration sexuelle pour la narratrice, cette dernière répond:

> — Je sais . . . Ça me vient de l'intérieur. Je porte cette chemise pour sentir le vent chaud, ensoleillé, explorer mon corps sous le tissu. Le moindre souffle d'air me caresse délicatement, le tissu tendre me frôle.

Qu'il me soit permis ici de faire appel à un grand poète pourtant sous-estimé: Léon-Paul Fargue. Ce que je voudrais, c'est souligner que Marcelle Roy a choisi la bonne voie et que l'avenir nous réserve peut-être, au-delà de *Traces*, de très beaux textes. Comme Léon-Paul Fargue, cette femme écrivain à fait de la sensibilité sa méthode. Dans son introduction à *Le Piéton de Paris* (1932), l'auteur de *Haute Solitude* donne ce conseil à un disciple virtuel:

> Sensible . . . s'acharner à être sensible, infiniment sensible, infiniment réceptif. Toujours en état d'osmose. Arriver à n'avoir plus besoin de regarder pour voir. Discerner le murmure des mémoires, le murmure de l'herbe, le murmure des gonds, le murmure des morts.

Certains poètes contemporains ont eu le bonheur, comme Marcelle Roy, de revenir au lyrisme fondamental de Léon-Paul Fargue ou celui de Giuseppe Ungaretti. Revenir n'est peut-être pas le terme exact. il s'agirait plutôt d'un renouvellement qui aurait assimilé un certain nombre de techniques expérimentales. L'on se rend compte d'une telle fusion d'écritures si l'on compare les passages que je viens de citer à celui-ci:

> naissante je suis en boule je ne veux que moi qui
> m'entortille dans un bienheureux néant
> je ne sens rien
> oubli sein que j'invente et que je suce
> ventre où est-il
> qui me protège et me tient chaud.

Dans le domaine de l'écriture expérimentale, Michel Gay va, avec *Eclaboussures*, beaucoup plus loin que Marcelle Roy. Cela ne veut naturellement pas dire

que Michel Gay est un meilleur poète; l'idée n'est d'ailleurs pas de comparer les deux textes. L'importance de Michel Gay me semble être d'une autre nature. L'auteur d'*Eclaboussures* représente une école bien définie: celle de *La Nouvelle Barre du Jour*, une revue groupant des écrivains qui gravitent autour de Nicole Brossard. *Eclaboussures* se présente beaucoup plus comme une recherche qu'une écriture. Les citations, les notes marginales et certains dispositifs typographiques sont là pour prouver que la découverte formelle est plus importante que le choix d'un contenu thématique selon des principes personnels. Cela ne neut pas dire que nous ayons à faire à une sorte de néoparnassien car l'engagement idéologique, moins marqué que chez Jean Charlebois, est cependant bien présent: "piétinement du pouvoir," "Discours de la répression."

En opposant *La Terrasse du roi lépreux* à *Eclaboussures*, je voudrais revenir sur la question des maisons d'éditions qui me paraît aujourd'hui, plus que jamais, étroitement liée à la productiton poétique. En effet, contrairement au Noroît et à VLB, la maison Hurtubise/HMH publie très peu de poésie. De plus, comme on y publie les ouvrages de Rina Lasnier, on se rend vite compte qu'un nouveau courant poétique peut difficilement souffler chez Hurtubise. Encore une fois il s'agit d'évoquer des perspectives et non pas de reprendre certains préjugés plutôt que d'autres. Ainsi *La Terrasse du roi lépreux* n'est pas un volume de la règle mais un volume de l'exception. C'est, en effet, la mythologie du Cambodge qui inspire Jean-Pierre Petits — un poète qu'on se doit de prendre au sérieux. La clôture de *La Terrasse du roi lépreux* permet d'évaluer la portée universelle de ce poète:

Je suis au fond d'un puits vertigineux
Qui prend figure de colonne de lumière.
Je vois que très haut danse la nuit
Et s'embrase la lueur des étoiles,
Alors que pour la millième fois
J'escalade ce qui me sépare de toi.

La mythologie exotique n'est donc pas la seule caractéristique de ce livre qui réussit le difficile mariage de la poèsie et de l'inspiration mystique. S'il est un poète de l'exception, Jean-Pierre Petits est aussi un poète qui nous offre une oeuvre de très haute qualité que j'oserai qualifier de Néo-Classique; l'ombre familière d'Homère hante d'ailleurs ce recueil.

Plus que tout autre chose, les cinq livres considérés prouvent la haute qualité de la grande variété de la poésie québécoise, une source qui — malgré certaines prophéties malveillantes — ne semble guère tarir.

ALEXANDRE L. AMPRIMOZ

INSIGHT & INSIDE

DOUG BEARDSLEY, *Kissing the Body of My Lord: The Marie Poems*. Longspoon, $7.50.
DANIEL SLOATE, *A Taste of Earth, A Taste of Flame*. Guernica Editions, $5.00.

THE AUTHORS OF THESE TWO volumes of poetry are both Canadian-born, both have lived abroad for a good many years, and both, on returning to Canada, have become university professors. Here the similarity appears to end: their literary expressions in no way resemble one another. Doug Beardsley's book is an ordered attempt to give new insights into the spiritual and practical life of the "Mother of the Canadian Nation and its first teacher," Marie de l'Incarnation; Daniel Sloate's book is an introspective look at chiefly personal landscapes — both interior and exterior.

In an "Afterword" to his book, Beardsley states: "These poems attempt to repossess an essential part of our Canadian past. I wish to stress that while many of the events and much of the language, come from Marie's letters, and I consider her to be co-author of the book, a very

different, fictional Marie emerges from these pages, a Marie of my own making." Despite this explanation, Beardsley's "Marie Poems" by and large do not breathe life into the remarkable woman who helped to found Canada, nor do they heighten the reader's understanding of the natural or social environment of mid-seventeenth century New France — as undoubtedly E. J. Pratt's narrative poem "Brébeuf and his Brethren" or historical novels such as Willa Cather's *Shadows on the Rock* and Suzanne Martel's *Menfou Carcajou* do. Unfortunately in Beardsley's pages there are few memorable or touching manifestations of Marie's strength of purpose, of her frustrations and weaknesses, of her originality of insight, or of her endearing or exasperating words or actions. She emerges as neither human nor saintly.

In Beardsley's poems there is a woodenness comparable to the most laboured of the Jesuit records covering missions in Quebec and Acadia during the same period. Yet even in *Les Relations* . . . (which Pratt obviously used as his source), one can sometimes read between the lines and imagine how a talented writer could breathe life into these dry records and the selfless missionaries whose doings are so painstakingly recounted therein. The same is true of the original writings of Marie de l'Incarnation. Yet in a poem such as the following, even the most imaginative reader would be hard-pressed to read between the lines:

First look at the Indians

A staff in his hand
a hand on his head
how the 'sauvage'
carries my 'sac'
from the shore
to the fort

the French
reaching port
with their baggage
piece by muddied piece
back & forth
up the path.

Champlain and Nicholas Denys at their prosaic worst after a long voyage could both come up with a livelier account than this — and Pratt's religious epic seems earth-shaking by comparison.

Although most of the "Marie Poems" tend to be dull and almost totally devoid of colourful or metaphorical language, there is one poem with a good central image which gives a briefly touching insight. The sister, on her way to Canada, sees the icebergs looming out of the fog as cathedrals:

Yesterday

We were
washing well
before four

when one of us
saw two
icebergs

looming
out of the fog
they were

longer
than the ship
higher

than the mast
I might have said
they were

cathedrals.

Unfortunately, this poem is almost lost among its pedestrian companions.

Whereas Doug Beardsley spends his words cautiously, Daniel Sloate's words pour out so that the reader tends at first to be overwhelmed by the flow — perhaps even swept off his feet. But unlike great poets such as Walt Whitman or Dylan Thomas, who can also inundate the reader with a flood of words, Sloate does not often bring his private outpourings into clear and sustained focus, nor does he give them universal implications. His imagery, modelled on that of the French

symbolists (on whom he wrote his thesis), is occasionally highly effective ("The whole night sky staccato with ice-light"), sometimes jarringly inaccurate ("or march with the mushrooms in the Fall"), and all too often simply obscure ("I saw minds like suns and children rising; falling flowers as abstract as rain; while the rock was turning to rib over rainbow"). But whether in themselves weak or strong, the images generally cannot be clearly seen to illuminate the poems; instead, the poems seem to lead nowhere.

ALLISON MITCHAM

VILLAGE VISITOR

GEORGE GALT, *Trailing Pythagoras*. Quadrant, $7.95.

THE FIELD OF Mediterranean travel writing is fairly full of folk needing no introduction, against whom the latest peripatetic is generally measured. George Galt alludes to some of his predecessors, including Byron — in many ways the founder of the genre — and his own great-great-grandfather John Galt in the nineteenth century, Henry Miller and Lawrence Durrell in this. D. H. Lawrence, John Fowles, Gwendolyn MacEwen, and Audrey Thomas also tempt comparison. Quadrant Editions — probably trying to do the author a favour — states on the back cover that Al Purdy prefers Galt to D. H. Lawrence as a travel writer. All this is a heavy burden for a young writer to carry, and Galt occasionally seems oppressed even by his ancestor's modest achievements, as well as intrigued by the parallels in their lives. In truth, the book fares better when judged simply on its own merits.

Trailing Pythagoras is a potpourri of history, philosophy, current politics, general information of the sort one finds in a guidebook, and a record of personal travel. Hence some chapters are a bit of a dog's breakfast, and the book as a whole lacks a sharp focus, but Galt's rich eclecticism works well for him at times, as in "A Valley by the Sea" or "Karpathos," where his own distinctive voice — serious but flexible, literate but unpretentious — emerges from the mixture. He must have been attempting to preserve and transmit the kind of whole vision that he attributes to Pythagoras.

It must be confessed that the title is rather misleading: Pythagoras is not the fixed star of the book. He is introduced in chapter two, forms the subject of chapter eight, and makes a farewell appearance at the close of chapter fifteen, where Galt tries to justify his title by passing off the "magus-philosopher" as his guru. I found that unconvincing: an unnecessary distortion of what I had read, a straining after unity.

There is, however, one idea associated with Pythagoras which *is* crucial to the book, and that is "centring." In Greece Galt comes to realize how fragmented our North American urban existences are, whereas in "the silence of Pythagoras" or of an Aegean island "the still centre holds." The references to Yeats' prescient lines in "The Second Coming" — "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold; / Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world" — is later made explicit: "For them [the villagers of Olimpos], the centre holds here, and beyond these peaks mere anarchy tips the world." Notice that now the emphasis and the saving grace have shifted from classical philosophy to primitive village life: the true centre and guru of *Trailing Pythagoras*.

We have been idyllizing village life for even longer than we have been rhapsodizing over the Mediterranean. The process goes back at least to Goldsmith's "Deserted Village" (1870); Mary Russell Mitford's *Our Village* (1824-32) remains a classic. To us, a village represents the

coherent community we have lost, "a little world of our own, close-packed and insulated" (Miss Mitford); it is the Garden we had to leave because we knew too much, or the Happy Valley that we (like Rasselas) chose to abandon because we wanted to know more, and now long for. By our lights, even Periclean Athens or Johnsonian London seem village-cultures: small, familiar, with comprehensible issues and a human scale. The idea of the "global village," if it is not just a cruel joke, is a piece of nostalgia for a place where we were not so alone. Galt and his wife, hand in hand, with wandering steps and slow, try to return to this Eden.

I do not mean that Galt idealizes the village. He sets down his experiences there, for better, for worse, and finds that his needs are being met by being rendered minimal: "So much is missing from this village, and still we lack for nothing." Writing about Lagada is what Galt does best, in "A Valley by the Sea": his longest chapter and, together with "The Silence of Pythagoras" that follows it, the structural as well as thematic centre of the book. Lagada seems to him the *omphalos*, the "heart of things," and "one enormous domicile." The great communal feast and the Greek emphasis on family — set against Galt's (and our) rootlessness — lead directly into the treatment of Pythagoras as a philosopher of unity, "in tune with all time," as opposed to Aristotle the dissecter. We can leave that (Aristotelian!) distinction to professors of philosophy: Galt's message is that his Chiot village had resources and healing properties that Toronto and Montréal do not. It is really Lagada, not Pythagoras, that he is trailing.

The village also serves as a barrier against the outside world, in which respect it is like an island. Galt thinks that "many . . . have lost faith in the possibility of islands, a faith we must all keep to live well. We all need a haven. . . ." He finds one — until his free-floating restlessness moves him along: who can say why? — but he knows how fragile all such barriers and Edens are. The great threat, of course, is tourism, destroying that which calls it into existence. The effect of tourism on Greek islands and villages is the *Todmotif* of Galt's book; on Karpathos he feels "It's all coming to an end. . . . I imagine myself the last traveller in old Greece." Exactly — which makes it almost a moral issue to write a book like this, evoking the beauties of the Sporades, now that most of the Cyclades have been overrun.

The book has its share of minor weaknesses. It strikes me as gauche to quote from "letters home," as if they were the best he could do, and there are other awkward moments. Some of the *errata* must be blamed on Galt — "Mr. Argenti seats my wife and I" — and some on his editor; between them they will not find a "cyprus tree," even on Cyprus. Quadrant has granted Galt a generous type and format, yet provides no maps, no table of contents, no illustrations, and the proofreading is careless. Should they have invited comparison with Lawrence? If you set *Trailing Pythagoras* next to *Sea and Sardinia*, or almost anything by Durrell, it will disappoint you; Galt lacks their descriptive powers and intensity and lyric gift. Yet the book has its uses and he has many good moments as a writer — e.g., his set pieces on bread, feta cheese, village cafes. Moreover, Galt comes across as a good traveller, one who learns the language and tries to merge with the local life, not seek out his own kind. For a travel writer, that's not a bad epitaph.

R. W. BEVIS

opinions and notes

NOSTALGIC REPETITIONS

IMPERIAL SENTIMENTS can continue to work long after empires have vanished, as Mussolini's efforts to raise the ghost of ancient Rome strikingly demonstrated during the 1930's, and the British response to events in the Falklands is showing as I write these words. Seldom, fortunately, does the regret for lost glories manifest itself in such perilous actions. More often it is expressed in nostalgia, which can take literary form as it has done during the last decade and a half with the publication of so many novels recreating the British Raj in India, in its glory and its decline. Some of these novels, like Paul Scott's *Raj Quartet* and *Staying On*, have been works of high literary quality; others, like the books of John Masters, have been craftsmanly novels of adventure, plausible rather than imaginative; yet others, too numerous and in some cases too bad to mention, have been florid romances not unlike those produced by memsahib writers under the Raj, like Maud Diver and Flora Annie Steele, but swollen often to monstrous length and extravagance by the demands of the contemporary best-seller market.

One of the elements of nostalgic expression is an almost irresistible urge to repeat and imitate. John Masters, for example, has tended to repeat the kind of situations that first appeared in the boys' stories of G. A. Henty, salted with a little sex, though this was not immediately recognized since he was not writing for boys but for adults of the post-Henty generation. A more precise example of nostalgic repetition emerges in the striking parallels between a little-known Indian work of the Canadian writer Sara Jeannette Duncan, and a recent best-selling novel about India, *The Far Pavilions*, by M. M. Kaye.

The Story of Sonny Sahib is a modest juvenile tale of 112 large-print pages, which Sara Duncan may well have written as a potboiler to bring in a few thousand rupees. It appeared early in her Indian career, in 1894, the year after publication of *The Simple Adventures of a Memsahib*. *Sonny Sahib* is a well-wrought little story, written with a great deal of the author's natural wit, and showing Sara Duncan as a skilled woman-of-letters anxious to make the best of anything she undertook. It is a charming minor book, but not very much more.

The Story of Sonny Sahib develops one of the legends that were commonly heard after the Indian Mutiny; that of the white child saved from the ferocious sepoys by faithful Indian servants and eventually restored to his family or in a more general way to his people. Sonny is a baby when his mother dies, on her way down to the river at Cawnpore after the surrender of the British there to Nana Sahib. As Sonny is being carried by his ayah Tooni, she is warned by a sepoy that the people going to the boats will not survive. She slips into the watching crowd, and so Sonny is saved. The one surviving token of his identity is his mother's prayer book which Tooni has pocketed before leaving the house in Cawnpore because she believes it to be a magic talisman.

Fleeing northward out of the main area of the mutiny, Tooni takes Sonny to the Rajput principality of Lalpore. There he is brought up like an Indian child. Eventually the Maharaja sends for him since his son, the crown prince of the little realm, wishes to have the fair-skinned Sonny as a playmate. Since Tooni cannot bear to part from him, she is allowed to live humbly in the palace, while Sonny

becomes the companion of the little Maharaja. Once he saves the prince's life because he suspects that some cakes that have been left for him are poisoned, and indeed the fish in the palace pond die when the cakes are fed to them; it is a plot by a lesser wife jealous of the prince's mother.

Eventually, when a British missionary has been killed in the principality, Lalpore is invaded by a British force. Sonny decides that he must join his people. He persuades Tooni to give him the prayer book that proclaims his identity, and then escapes from Lalpore by letting himself down on an improvised rope from a secluded balcony. He does not know that the commander of the invading force, whom he will meet shortly, is in fact — as the prayer book's inscription establishes — his father, who was serving elsewhere in India at the time of the Cawnpore massacre. The book ends with Sonny reunited to his father and his people; we can assume that eventually he will become in his turn a servant of the Raj.

In *The Far Pavilions* Ashton Pelham-Martyn, called Ash and also Ashok, loses his mother immediately when she dies after giving birth, and his father shortly afterwards dies in a cholera epidemic in the Himalayan foothills. The ayah Sita flees with Ash, intending to reach his father's friends in Delhi. She arrives just after the rising at Meerut, in time to see the bodies of the massacred sahibs in the capital, and flees from the area of the Mutiny until she reaches the Rajput principality of Gulkote. In her pocket she carries a little packet of documents and photographs Ash's father gave her before he died; the packet seems to her a kind of talisman as the prayer book did to Tooni in *Sonny Sahib*. Brought up as an Indian boy, Ash — like Sonny — eventually attracts the attention of the Maharaja's son, and is taken into his household with Sita, who like Tooni lives humbly in a corner of the palace. Ash becomes the playmate, sometimes petted and sometimes abused, of prince Lajli, and saves him from being poisoned by a jealous wife of the Maharaja through cakes Ash throws to the palace fish, which die like the fish in *Sonny Sahib*. Ash eventually flees from Gulkote because he fears the anger of the wicked rani; he escapes on a rope let down, as in Sonny's case, from a secluded balcony. With Sita he flees north and, when she dies on the road, finds his way to the headquarters of the Corps of Guides at Mardan on the Northwest Frontier. There he presents the packet Sita has treasured, and which identifies him. His father of course is dead, and his uncle, an officer in the Guides, has recently been killed, but the regiment adopts him so that in a sense, like Sonny, he has found his father.

After this, Ash goes on the kind of career as an imperial servant Ash might have followed if Sara Jeannette Duncan had decided to extend her little story into a 960-page monster of a book. Seldom have the repetitions of nostalgic writing been more striking than the echoes of *The Story of Sonny Sahib* that chime through the early chapters of *The Far Pavilions*.

GEORGE WOODCOCK

DUNCAN'S REPRESENTATIVE MEN

IN *The Imperialist*, Sara Jeannette Duncan uses the phrase "a representative man"[1] to describe Octavius Milburn, a practical manufacturer whose dollars and cents view of patriotism contrasts with the idealism of the novel's protagonist, Lorne Murchison. The phrase causes some confusion; although Milburn is "representative," very few of his fellow townspeople endorse his selfishly capitalist views. In fact, John Murchison and Dr. Drum-

mond seem much more in tune with the balance of idealism and pragmatism with which the people of Elgin, Ontario, face the issue of Imperial Union. Milburn is not "representative" of their views; rather, the phrase "a representative man" alludes to Ralph Waldo Emerson's popular collection of essays, *Representative Men*, and through that allusion indicates Duncan's views on the quality of leadership in Canada.

Representative Men was Emerson's comment on his friend Thomas Carlyle's book, *On Heroes and Hero Worship*, and Emerson's work recalls Carlyle's main ideas. The representative man "inhabits a higher sphere of thought, into which other men rise with labor and difficulty; he has but to open his eyes to see things in a true light and in large relations. . . ." He discovers some great truth of the natural or philosophical world, and so becomes representative "first of things, and secondly of ideas."[2] His clear adherence to one view offers a solid reference point against which the ordinary man can test his own ideas. Emerson numbers Plato, Swedenborg, Shakespeare, and Napoleon among his representative men.

Duncan was sensitive to the (unintended) suggestion of irony inherent in Emerson's choice of the word "representative" to designate men who, like Carlyle's heroes, are above their peers morally and intellectually. The label denigrates the idea of the hero by implying that he is merely representative, but it also seems to elevate the commonplace by allowing the merely representative man to take the role of the leader. The fact that Emerson was an American is significant, for Duncan deplored the tendency of American democracy to create an aristocracy of the average and to ignore the gifted. She shows how the American political system embodies the paradox of the representative man in *His Royal Happiness* (1914): a very average man, President Phipps, is treated like a king, while the truly great man, Lanchester, is slandered by the press. Perhaps Duncan also noted (as Emerson must have) that American members of congress are called "representative."

Duncan draws attention to the paradox of the representative man in *The Simple Adventures of a Memsahib* (1893). The ignorant British Labour MP, Batcham, is touring India; he is introduced to a senior civil servant, Mr. Sayter, at a dinner party hosted by the heroine, Mrs. Browne.

> He shook Mr. Sayter warmly by his slender and frigid hand and said he was delighted to meet him — it was always a pleasure to meet representative men, and his young friends had told him that Mr. Sayter was very representative indeed, standing almost at the head of his department.[3]

The florid Batcham insults Sayter by implying that he achieved his position by being merely representative, and underlines his social misstep by illogically insisting that Sayter must be "very representative." Consistent with his political alliance, Batcham approaches Sayter as an equal, only to be firmly rebuffed.

When Duncan declares in *The Imperialist* that "Octavius Milburn would not, I think, have objected to being considered, with relation to his line in life, a representative man," she is not describing Milburn's relation to Elgin or to the manufacturing community in general, but commenting on the kind of leaders which American society produces. Selfish, pragmatic, unconcerned with ideas, Milburn, like Batcham, is merely representative, "a man of averages, balances, the safe level" (p. 51), completely opposed to the "constructive, fertile, magnetic"[4] representative man he patterns himself after. He demonstrates the power of the average to overshadow the heroic in everyday life, as Mr. Chafe the British manufacturer demonstrates the same principle in England.

NOTES

[1] *The Imperialist*, NCL edition (McClelland & Stewart, 1971), p. 51.

[2] *Representative Men, The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Vol. IV (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1903), p. 6.

[3] Duncan, *The Simple Adventures of a Memsahib* (New York: D. Appleton, 1893), p. 197.

[4] Emerson, p. 7.

MISAO DEAN

LAST PAGE

ENGLISH POETRY in the South Pacific used to be a little on the dreary side, all academic fustian and distant isolation. It was hard (adapting Rudy Wiebe's phrase) to hear where the voice was coming from. In part this derived from a curious reluctance (CBC actors please note) to relax into the local speaking voice; an imitation British took pride of literary precedence, which incidentally had the effect of making much literature in both Australia and New Zealand appear to have little to do with regional reality. In Canada it was one of F. R. Scott's accomplishments to make a poetic art out of Canadian cadences; for many both here and in the South Pacific, however, ratification of cultural value appears to have been necessary from the outside.

Some of this contrast is apparent in the difference between the contained and containing rhymes of an older poet like R. A. Simpson (*Selected Poems*) and the colloquial ironies, the ecological politics, the elastic rhythms of a more recent one like Andrew Taylor (*Selected Poems*, both books from Univ. of Queensland Press). "The fountain tinkled and dripped above them / like the love of God," Taylor writes; "and the fish rose and drank its rain / gravely like Presbyterians." There are recurrent themes: love, silence, the poetry to be communicated beyond silence, and the U.S.A. Like many of the new poets, Taylor has been influenced by contemporary American writing while at the same time ("The ice fishermen, Lake Erie," "Memorial day, USA 1971") offended by the perceived threat of American encroachment.

Grace Perry's journal *Poetry Australia* has been one of the major outlets for an indigenous speaking voice; though its pages have been open to poetry of many kinds and from

many places, its heart is at home; a recent issue, No. 82, is devoted to John Millett's *Tail Arse Charlie* — a moving account (by turns lyrical, dramatic, introspective) of an ordinary World War I soldier. It is extraordinary how important that war is for the old Commonwealth societies. Findley's *The Wars* responds one way; Millett, animating a sense of loss but at the same time (lodging it in one man) a whole cultural will to survive, connects more obviously and directly with the world of the new Australian cinema, reliving its sense of frustration with Empire in order to reassert its separate self.

Recent New Zealand poetry books indicate this same bifurcation. Penguin's *Denis Glover — Selected Poems* gives a substantial tour of a renegade poet from an earlier decade, who sought the poetry of the ordinary when others were seeking traditions in Modernism (like C. K. Stead and Allen Curnow, whose newest books *Geographies* and *You will know when you get there* respectively, are available from Auckland/Oxford) or history in Classical forbears. Yet the tradition represented by Stead and Curnow remains part of the national life, is not utterly replaced by the new willingness to use the vernacular but overlaid by it. Reading the ostensible iconoclasts of the last two decades, Sam Hunt (*Collected Poems*, Penguin), Ian Wedde (*Castaly*, Auckland/Oxford), is to discover that (for all their allusions to Pynchon and their deliberate and occasional obscenities), they are reaching also to Conrad and Proserpine for their heritage; Maori writers — Keri Hulme (*The Silences Between*, Auckland/Oxford), Hone Tuwhare (*Selected Poems*, John McIndoe) — draw more directly on oral and matrilineal traditions, while writers like Elizabeth Smithers (*Casanova's Ankle*, Oxford) and Brian Turner (*Ladders of Rain*, John McIndoe) have returned to Roethkean reflective conventions. Vincent O'Sullivan, listening directly to Denis Glover and watching indirectly his society's phlegmatic, dreaming, gruffly orthodox males, constructs in *The Butcher Papers* (Oxford) a dramatic analysis of current social archetypes (and therefore current sexual conflict). For all of them the local landscape remains instructive, if only inferentially: "I read the sea's chronicles," writes Michael Jackson in "Porongahau," in an admirable collection called *Wall* (John McIndoe), "walking a beach which muses / no more but gleans / and whispers / all night to ear-shaped / brakes in inattentive hills, / promises, promises." The ear has come home, to listen — and with the best of contemporary New Zealand poets, Bill Manhire, to speak. In *Good Looks* (Auckland/Oxford), Manhire writes of song and talk, home and reading; joins Old English with local oral forms; plays riddles with history and the present. In "An Outline" his persona recalls his life — the rejections of childhood, formal English, sobriety, and death — till deaths around him age him. "We were young too," he closes: "we thought / that every goodbye was the last goodbye / and that every last word was made to be careful. (We waved and we waved of course, and now / we find we don't stop waving: believing we see / our life at last, and thinking it over, / knowing how far the road goes home."

W.N.