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A QUARTERLY OF CRITICISM AND REVIEW

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CANADIAN LITERATURE

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POEMS

PREFACE

FROM TIME TO TIME, circumstances arise that allow us in a very appropriate way to single out individuals, organizations, and institutions for deserved recognition.

That is the case with this 25th anniversary publication of the critical quarterly, *Canadian Literature*.

For 25 years, and through the pages of 100 editions over the past quarter century, *Canadian Literature* quarterly has been a major voice in celebrating and encouraging Canadian culture.

This 100th edition of *Canadian Literature*, carrying as it does new works of contemporary writers, emphasizing new poems and essays on subjects of current interest to the writers, lends proof to the belief that literature in Canada is not only alive and well, but flourishing.

If it was the intention of the publishers of *Canadian Literature* to show in this anniversary edition that literature, and culture generally, is all around us in the present and not just something we inherit from history alone, then that objective is herein realized.

I am pleased to extend congratulations and warm best wishes to *Canadian Literature* and to all involved in the 25 years of achievement. As a country, and as a people, we are indebted to the pioneers of Canadian literature and their successors who have contributed so much to the growth and development of cultural excellence in our country.

I look forward to 25 more years of *Canadian Literature*.

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE EDWARD R. SCHREYER

SOMETHING VALUABLE TO SAY

I HAVE GREAT SYMPATHY with literary anthologists, although God (the author of all classification) knows they stick their necks out. The challenge they volunteer to outface is one of nomenclature, rubric, category; of nailing a flag to the mast as they sail doughtily between Scylla and Charybdis, or (in the native idiom) shoot the rapids.

At the mention of the sub-section CANLIT, high-principled vigilantes spring up on every side — some armed with scholarly lances and exploding bromides, some counting on sheer lung-power — to dispute the umpire's ruling, his methodology, his yardstick, his probity, and his sanity. The poor fellow must not only define the field of literature but also defend a gauge of quality within it, simultaneously holding at bay the zealots who believe literary excellence to be inseparable from external considerations of social, religious, political, sexual, and even scientifically verifiable merit. And while so engaged he must answer a riddle that has baffled generations of his countrymen and foreigners alike: *What is a Canadian anything?*

What is the earmark, so to speak, of eligibility? Birth-place? parentage? residence? citizenship? subject-matter? setting? diction? — each of which has at one time or another been adduced to include or exclude contenders — or is it some magical combination of such factors? And does the putative reader care one way or another about any or all of them? — unless, of course, he or she is trying to pass an examination or get a grant.

An anthologist of works by Canadian writers (define the terms how you will) may certainly set his own parameters, gaining what credit he can for candour and decisiveness and hoping that the label and list of contents will act as a sort of *caveat lector*. But there lurk profiteers — the advertiser, the sophist, the oracle — whose interest is served by creating confusion between label and contents: as for instance the publisher of *The Great Canadian Joke Book* (padded with universal chestnuts dolled up in local colour), the teacher who needs grist for his pedantic mill, or the dogmatist (his own premises unexamined) who insists that "It doesn't have to be Canadian, it has to be good!" — thus sinking the ship with its own flag-pole.

In brief, some parade the brand "Canadian" as a front for marketable shoddy while others shun it as a form of Scarlet Letter on that account. And both with

equal self-righteousness: the former regarding themselves as vestal virgins entrusted with the Native Flame, however feeble, and the latter viewing themselves as stern missionaries for World-Class Standards, however inapt. That the hypocrisy of the chauvinists has, until recently, drawn more attention than that of the high inquisitors is a great pity. Many critics in this part of the globe have become, from long practice, world-class experts in putting down Canadians for no other sin than being Canadian, all the while proclaiming their superiority to the narrow nationalism afflicting their less-perceptive colleagues.

The twenty-five years that mark the lifetime to date of the learned journal *Canadian Literature* has been a period of passage in our arts and letters from impudence to self-confidence. The adjective Canadian is no longer automatically risible or apologetic or reductive, but simply a catalogue code-word. In this quarter-century, broadly speaking, our anthologies have grown from sparse clusters of familiar gems set in frantic commentary to toughly culled selections from a substantial body of poetry, novels, essays, drama, biography, history, and all the other consecrated divisions. They are read by Canadians and are increasingly recognized by readers elsewhere, their provenance now less a matter of self-conscious image-making than of wider acceptance of a different perspective.

This perspective, moreover, is a congenitally pluralistic one; and it is possible to argue that at this time the world has need of such a perspective. This need would explain, for example, the proliferation of departments of Canadian Studies in universities in the United States, Britain, Australia, Italy, China, and other countries. (Perhaps the American tendency to lump Canadian with Commonwealth Studies tells us more about Americans than they know about us; but word that we share the continent with them is spreading.)

It is precisely for this reason that we should take note of some major impediments to premature self-congratulation. Our publishers, of both books and periodicals, are in critical financial condition. This is more than an aspect of general economic belt-tightening; it approaches communal hara-kiri. Neither the public nor the private sector seems sufficiently persuaded that if education and the arts are expensive, ignorance and barbarism are lethal. And at the very time when others have shown keen interest in our arts and letters, our governments at every level have only begun to grasp the urgency of facilitating cultural exchange between societies. In Beijing (Peking), where two universities have courses in Canadian Studies, the only substantial library of Canadiana is in the Canadian Embassy, which is in a compound that is off-limits to Chinese students. Of course, this will not matter if we have no books to put in the library; it would certainly cost less.

There is a crucial sense in which the value of all communication, including literature, can only be set by the addressee. "Canadian literature" is in effect the

label on a package addressed "To Whom It May Concern"; it need not justify itself to the unconcerned nor seek a mythical universal approbation. The Germans find the plays of Oscar Wilde not especially funny but superbly organized; Tolstoy, unfamiliar with England, adored what he thought was Dickens' realism and had no time for Shakespeare's. The interested readership for what Canadians write has never been so large, regardless of what is read into it or taken from it. In the long run, it matters little what we judge to be Canadian about our literature or how we categorize our authors and their works; what matters, now that we have found our voices, and know that others feel we have something valuable to say, is that we should not dry up.

In that sense the medium is certainly the message. The production and circulation of a literature — especially in the context of a demonstrated demand for it — is one of the hallmarks of a society's vitality. The mighty clashes between vigilantes over badges, bailiwicks, and banners amount to little more than occasionally elegant trimmings.

At least one measure of Canadian literature is the very existence and perennial vigour of *Canadian Literature*. Many happy returns to it!

MAVOR MOORE
Past chairman of the Canada Council;
Professor, York University

HIGHER LEARNING AND NATIONAL CULTURE

I HAVE BEEN ASKED by the editor to comment briefly on the significance of this special 25th anniversary issue of *Canadian Literature* and I feel privileged to do so. The publication of this issue is a notable event, I believe, for several reasons. Most obviously, it marks a milestone in Canadian literary criticism by signalling the fact that for a quarter of a century we have been fortunate enough to have a journal of criticism and review that has concerned itself largely with the literature of the nation. During this time, the scholarship found in these pages has made a number of important contributions to our understanding of ourselves as a people. By putting the work of our writers, poets, and

dramatists into sharper perspective, it has helped explain to us the nature of their vision and given us a sense of what they feel to be important, both as Canadians and as individuals who are part of the larger human community. At the same time, this tradition of literary scholarship has alerted us to our own literary heritage and has prompted us to recognize and define standards of excellence in our thought and writing. Furthermore, by seeking to interest a broad audience in the topics it presents, *Canadian Literature* has done much to popularize the exciting world of Canadian letters at home and overseas.

In a somewhat larger sense, the publication of this special anniversary issue also serves to remind us of the important role institutions of higher learning play in sustaining and developing the cultural life of the nation. Since the beginning of the Renaissance 700 years ago, the critical study of literature has been a central part of humanities study in higher education and remains so today. In fact, by their very existence, journals such as *Canadian Literature* embody the major purposes of institutions of higher education. By seeking to preserve established knowledge, by creating new knowledge, and by disseminating what has been learned to the world-at-large, they advance the process of inquiry that lies at the heart of higher learning. Without question, they are the most important means by which we inform ourselves and others about the nature of investigation and discovery. Put simply, they serve as forums where ideas are examined for their worth, where older and conventional ways of thinking are challenged, where the values we hold are clarified, and where the nature of the human condition is viewed from many vantage points.

As a final note, let me say that in helping us to appreciate the world of literature and in providing us with scholarly insights into the meaning of what we read, the individuals who have worked on, edited and otherwise contributed to *Canadian Literature* over the past quarter of a century have clearly helped to enrich our lives.

K. GEORGE PEDERSEN
President
The University of British Columbia

editorial

RHYTHMS OF DISCOVERY

THERE ARE RHYTHMS in the life of a magazine, rhythms that govern how it begins, who it draws, where it leads, and when it does these things all over again. As it must, if it is to stay alive. It must begin again, draw again, seek fresh perspectives and horizons it has not yet seen. But how to find them? where? It seeks its readers by following its writers, making a magazine somehow a "journal" in that other sense of the word as well: the explorer's record book, sent home from the frontier with charts and sketches, memories of the past, glimpses of the unfamiliar, and tales of the miraculous. Do we promise that? Only to try.

With this issue, *Canadian Literature* turns 100 and steps into its second quarter-century. It is by no means the longest-lived of Canadian magazines, but it is the oldest critical quarterly to have taken Canadian writers and writing as its sole topic; and because of its subject, the most miraculous thing about it may well for some people be the fact of its survival at all. For there were many in 1959 — despite the fact that the newly established Canada Council and the newly published Massey Report were at the time calling for greater attention to Canadian culture — who watched the founding of *Canadian Literature* with disbelief. (Wouldn't the journal run out of material, they said, and anyway who would read it? who would write? *was* there a Canadian literature? didn't we already *have* somewhere an essay on Leacock?) But after the first issues there was no dearth of material, nor any lack of contributors with original minds and articulate styles. And there was an audience. Canada's major writers and major critics have written for the journal. Over twenty-five years they have educated us how to read Canadian writing, and required us to expect more from it, to value the traditions we have inherited and to appreciate the writers writing among us now. And in this issue — in all their variety, expressing points of view that often conflict with each other, points of view with which this journal sometimes does not editorially agree — many of Canada's major current writers reflect on people, politics, art, and

language. In the prose and poetry assembled here is a glimpse (yet only a glimpse, though through several sets of eyes) of the plural character of modern Canadian literature, and of the several subjects which currently preoccupy Canadian writers' minds.

Looking back at the way *Canadian Literature* began, it is easy to attribute courage, faith, and foresight to the founders. But theirs was also an act of deliberate planning and sheer determination. Some of them had been affiliated with other journals and were concerned at the time to draw attention to Canadian writing: Roy Daniells had helped found the *Manitoba Arts Review* before leaving Winnipeg for Vancouver; George Woodcock had edited *Now* before returning to Canada, and had recently been arguing in the *Dalhousie Review* for a journal of Canadian letters; Earle Birney had years earlier edited the *Canadian Author and Bookman* and was enthusiastic about the founding of a new Canadian arts magazine. *Canadian Literature* grew out of the concerted discussions of these and several other members of the University of British Columbia faculty, particularly Geoffrey Andrew and Stanley Read of the English Department, and Neal Harlow of the Library. A grant from the Koerner Foundation enabled the journal to begin production; the University invited George Woodcock to be the first editor; and then followed the years of discovery. There were many other people, of course, whose taste, judgment, and energy have enlivened and guided the magazine — among whom are the successive members of the production and editorial staff: Donald Stephens, Ronald Sutherland, Herbert Rosengarten, Laurie Ricou, with the assistance of Inglis W. Bell, Basil Stuart-Stubbs, Tina Harrison, Henny Winterton, Beverly Westbrook, and others still. But it is George Woodcock to whom so much of the journal's development is due. It was his editorial skills which built the magazine over its first eighteen years, his judgments which so personally affected its contents, and his critical expectations which have so markedly touched the recent course of Canadian criticism. In those eighteen years, the journal helped trace the growth and describe the subjects of Canadian writing, helped refine readers' sense of artistic accomplishment and focus attention on the waves of talent that emerged in the 1920's, the 1940's, the 1960's.

And now the journal is twenty-five. To celebrate, we are focusing in this issue less on the historical achievements of the past than on the fact that literature is a live art, happening around us in the present. And we are focusing less on theories of criticism than on the creative practice of writers themselves — their poems, their journals, their glimpses of the literary craft, and their views of the world around them. It has been one of the characteristics of *Canadian Literature* since its beginning that writers and critics have shared the pages, repeatedly integrating the twin processes of reading and writing. Here they range widely across subjects and forms, seeking self, seeking shape in the worlds they see and dream — they

are map-makers all, reporting home on the territories of the mind, the memories of possibility, the miracles of language.

It is a pleasure to acknowledge here publicly the support the journal has received over the years: from the contributors and the readers first of all, who by their enthusiasm have helped create an audience for Canadian writing; from the University of British Columbia, which has published the journal as one tangible expression of its concern for the university's role in community education; from the SSHRCC, which has long assisted *Canadian Literature* financially; and from several organizations for their special help in financing this anniversary publication: the Koerner Foundation, the McLean Foundation, the Samuel & Saidye Bronfman Family Foundation, the Canada Council, the UBC Alumni Association. It is a pleasure, too, to acknowledge the skills of Robert Reid, who designed the typeface of *Canadian Literature*; of George Kuthan, whose prints graced the magazine's early issues (and several of which are reprinted here); and of Charles Morriss, Richard Morriss, and Ron Smith, whose love for the art of printing has given the journal its visual appeal. We are grateful for the contributions they all have made to the journal's continuity.

We acknowledge the past. We celebrate the present.

Yet it is the future that draws us forward. While celebrating our heritage and the artistic talents around us, we live as readers and writers with an eye scanning the next horizon; always there is a possibility yet to come. It is this vitality that leads a journal on, to follow the rhythms of discovery into its next quarter-century: the urge still to tell of memory and imagination, and to seek new ways to send home maps and tales.

W.N.

MISERICORDIA GENERAL

George Amabile

For Robert Emmet Finnegan

The window
itself can't change
and I can't move
enough to change
what it shows me
the soiled brick
wall, part of a white
windowframe and sill
four telephone wires
consciousness distilled
to the space between
this tireless
machine that breathes
for me, and a block
of sheltered lives.

> *The swamp invades*
> *itself Under scum*
> *and broad pads green*
> *jaws cruise Almost*
> *nothing remembers*
> *how to breathe*

> Slippery tongs
> grip Suddenly
> flesh gives way
> A long slow
> slide and you're
> there your lungs
> fill and burn

Winnipeg. I was born
here. Cannonades
of light over
the snow blew
through childhood
skirmishes. They left
me hungry for exotic
wars.

Hard
to believe, after years
in the signal corps
the great pyramid
cells, the horns
of grey matter, anterior
columns and tracts blown
like power-lines and bridges . . .

Only my eyes move.

At first, they brought me
books, turned
pages till I slept.
I blinked messages
like radio code into deep
space. Nothing
got through. I learned
to concentrate on the view.

Today the wall has broken
out in what looks like a cold
sweat, as though it were ill
as though the whole damn physical
world were showing
symptoms of decay.

But no. By noon
the bricks are dry.
By dusk they're sullen.

I'm standing on a bed
of brick that stretches
and curves to the edge
of the world. The sky
is a glass kiln Hot
wind mixed with green
shadow dyes
my hospital gown
dark as a forest Smoke
rises The bricks glow
and the cloth around me bursts
into flame Ashes
float I can't
feel a thing but waves
dancing in the air make
my eyes water

open to darkness
that loosens as the wall
grows back

Of course it's not just
a block, but earth, soft rock

raised by water, fire and sweat — lore
old as the Chaldees.
I remember
the master I worked with once
his exact mouth, his face
baked like a mask of the desert
under a shock of white
hair, the spare frame
crooked fingers
his eyes, bright as a hawk's

digging his loam in October
letting it powder under the frost
mixing the weathered remains with spring
water, ground chalk, ashes
bone, coal dust or dried
seeds, tempering this
to a smooth pug with his feet
culling and kneading each clot
lifting it over his head
slamming it down into the slick
or sanded beechwood mold and stockboard
squaring the top with a wet strike

lugging the raw brick on pallets
up to the drying ground
laying them in a scintle hack
under straw to cure in the air

stacking up codes in a kiln
he knew he'd have to break
and build and break and build
every three years

kindling the fire holes
with twigs and paper
"to drive off water smoke"
building the heat with stove logs
then charcoal.
Seal the arches
let it cook for a week.

Night The siren
gives up its pewter
ghost *Time is a glass*
coloured shock wave
that evaporates
nerves All
that life in the leaves
waits . . . The first
mortar explodes
the dark like a brimstone
flower I'm over
the hill at last but the same
habits keep time My body
shrinks That's fear
It will pass These
words come from the
plasma don't
laugh hysterical
perfumes or cry
the dragon back
from her peace

Reeds Hollow
music Whatever
it touches
bleeds the same
honeybeer syrup thick
with pride "I'm flying
entirely without
support ahead
of the storm
There are no
thresholds Every
thing is now"

I'd help him draw the cooled stock
amazed at the way some change
in temper heat or stack pattern
could produce shades
of red from scarlet to blood
pudding pinks browns ochre sulphur
and buff orange and grey
to green or woodsmoke blue

And they weren't just bricks, but parts
of a scheme he kept in his head

some chimney, garden walk or fireplace or gateway
and maybe, if the client could pay
a glazed puzzle that would resolve
itself into emblems, a coat of arms, scenes
from daily life.
He worked
all over the world, and worked on the day
he died at ninety-four: single
withe, cavity walls, header
and stretcher, spreading the beds
furrowing and parging, buttering ends
keeping the plumb line straight
to the rim of the course
raking or beading or tuck pointing.

English bond, Flemish bond
running bond and cross bond
garden wall and herringbone and Sussex

noggings and surrounds
pillars, arches and quoins
(I studied this, there
in the war) strapwork
gaugework, dentil sets
and rusticated patterns.
He had them all
could even carve in deep
relief an abstract
figure or a family
face. Out in the high sun
finishing a patio or pool, *tap tap*
tap, and the brick, fieldstone
flagstone, tile, would split
a perfect closer.

Cockle shells
Cockle shells

To warm the heart?
No The sea
is cold Deep
fissures in a thunder
head I should
have been that
Strange how it rises
fact and nuance

to the surface of a mind locked
in a live shell it can't feel.

Is this what we were
taught
to fear this play
of self in the snow
taste of remembered
mornings in the long
dark empty of almost
anyone else It
sings this way
of touching the near
silence All
the mind can reach
and become and allow
to fade fills
even a desolate
street with spring
light that slowly
explodes my cropped
view of the world.
                From the top
right hand corner, telephone lines
like a musical staff, drape
down and away
    electron streams
    vowels and colours
    blurred to a hum
            where birds come
to rest. Somewhere
they have nests and futures.

This time it's
a grackle. Ugly
eyes, feathers glistening
like texas crude. The beak
opens and I hear, inside
a brief cry like a stone
breaking, like the cracked
note of the bugle
that played *taps*
at Arlington for J.F.K.

Life still has
these necessary

flaws that say don't
gloat, each triumph
is darkened by invisible
failures, all of them
real, all of them
disguised by ritual.
Sunfoil flashes
Aerosol Aerosol Aerosol

Backpacks and party girls
Police out on the roads

Courage, old heart
somewhere in this paradigm
the lion sleeps
I had lost count
of the days, the nights, jars
of glucose hung like sterilized
fruit. How could I have
known immeasurable
sleep would be redeemed
by brick like faces

in a stadium they look
the same but have their own
wrinkles and weather
marks perhaps the white
of efflorescence, chipped
or blackened by soot
like a formal death
letter — diverse
histories, none of them
perfectly true.

Sometimes (in dreams?) they burn
and pulse like blood
cells, darkening
at dusk when part
of a window ignites
and glows, yellow
through soft curtains.

I have imagined a woman in that room
sung her name to myself
watched her intelligent
eyes in conversation.

Soon, we will know each other.
Our skins will heat and cool in the dark.
And there will be children, games
friends whose lives bind ours to the world.

I know that's not true
or perfect. I know the film
that keeps insight from outlook.
But why should I care?
                Death
    itself can only
    hurt as much as a drawn
    shade. I've got
    what many say they want
    no worries no pain
    no one to fight with
    no one to blame
    and nothing left to account for.

Though I can't see the sun
I can watch its moods, modes
and seasons, the day
changing, fierce or dulled
by mist, rain, leaves
loose in the wind, shadows
of smoke opening
the shadow of a gull's keen glide
the snow arriving, straight
or blown, ice
that shines and runs.

    A white horse gallops
    across the land into a thin
    cloud beard
    of the wind and the west
    blue rings like an anvil

And there is time
to dream the new life
before death, before
the 'copters *bursting in air*
flames and screams
the sudden drill
of pain in my head
the mud, the lasting silence.

HEART TEST WITH AN ECHO CHAMBER

Margaret Atwood

Wired up at the ankles and one wrist,
a wet probe rolling over my skin,
I see my heart on a screen
like a rubber bulb or a soft fig, but larger,

enclosing a tentative double flutter,
the rhythm of someone out of breath
but trying to speak anyway; two valves opening
and shutting like damp wings
unfurling from a grey pupa.

This is the heart as television,
a softcore addiction
of the afternoon. The heart
as entertainment, out of date
in black and white.
The technicians watch the screen,
looking for something: a block, a leak,
a melodrama, a future
sudden death, clenching
of this fist which goes on
shaking itself at fate.
They say: It may be genetic.

(There you have it, from science,
what God has been whispering all along
through stones, madmen and birds' entrails:
hardness of the heart can kill you.)

They change the picture:
now my heart is cross-sectioned
like a slice of textbook geology.
They freeze-frame it, take its measure.

A deep breath, they say.
The heart gasps and plods faster.
It enlarges, translucent, grows
a glowing stellar

cloud at the far end
of a starscope. A pear
made of smoke and about to rot.
For once the blood and muscle
heart and the heart of pure
light are beating in unison,
visibly.

Dressing, I am diaphanous,
a mist wrapping a flare.
I carry my precarious
heart, radiant and already
fading, out with me
along the tiled corridors
into the rest of the world,
which thinks it is opaque and hard.
I am being very careful.
O heart, now that I know your nature,
who can I tell?

IN THE MIDNIGHT HOURS:

Douglas Barbour

Night time is only
the other side of daytime
but if youve ever waited for the sun
you know what it's like
to wish daytime would come
& dont it seem like a long time
seems like a long time
seems like a long long time
"Seems Like a Long Time"
Ted Anderson (Talking Beaver Ltd)
as sung by Rod Stewart on
Every Picture Tells A Story

i

you enter them alone always
even if theres somone with you you

enter them alone thats given
you dont take it easily
its no gift
(the dark)
alone

breathe slowly slow down the images
behind yr eyelids gather they

are friendly enemies
take them as you will
on the always nervy surface of
yr skin yr thots

are showing again you
breathe faster know it slow

down
you
go
to enter the dark

its only the dark

youre in it as always
alone &
breathing like
a human being

moving in slowly
'one breath at
a time' asleep
again
in the dark

ii

now i would join you there he
says she says the lover
says

& means it wants to be *there*
try to share
whats yours alone
to bear

as desire & tongue always *wish for*
the pleasure not yet spoken even
to give it
language

loves us but
there is too much dark
space
for words to cross
clearly
its lost in such translation

& yet 'i' speak the poem 'speaks'
to you
in the dark hours when once
youd have known its
only ghosts or the weird
something wrong
but wrong rightly in a world where such visitations come
naturally supernaturally
theyre expected
& theyll pass

but no the poem
isnt there now with you
as it wants to be poems desire
to transcend
the obvious 'im here'
the poem cries you
cant hear it
again

you have
just ordinary
dark to dare your mind your
light breathing breasts
rise & fall &

youre alone
as i said not wanting to not
wanting to know that know you
are alone where youve been before &

its all right youll come thru its
all right not really all right but

its all right for now

iii

its midnight in the core of dark
lie down & listen

your last lost sigh recedes
behind the song
(i send)
in the dark of the dark
you sing it springs forth
it is the song of the darks own
you

& look you
have come thru

we usually do
make it with
or without a little help
thru
the night

we always *enter* alone
even together to get
here thru it
counts you
say hello open eyed

the morning signals back the world
as you know it as you know it
enter it alive

CORPS DE NOCE
CORPS DE DIVORCE

Chanson pour Aphélie au bleu regard

Louky Bersianik

L'oeil

Elle l'épie
pierre tapie au coin de l'oeil partie prenante de la lumière
mais des franges du sommeil quand la lumière est confisquée
très dense sous les paupières tranchée au laser
surprise du parti pris de l'oeil d'être deux comme au coin du feu

Elle se situe incohérente et divergente
en territoire de l'oeil
tranchée rêvée où se retirer corps et liens et se sauver du pire
où entasser le corps entier de l'Autre
chasse au trésor perdu enterré sous les cils
et conservé sous globe oculaire

Parfois la noce aux yeux Aphélie tu fléchis
là où ton coeur flanche au large d'un double étui d'étain réduit à se répandre
quand la lame à l'oeil d'Himlett part en flèche et t'atteint
l'amour se liquéfie sous la fraîche peau de source
se mêle à la teinture bleue vire au gris et s'assèche hors d'atteinte
Poudre d'iris à l'ouverture à la sortie du sommeil aux retombées des apparences dites réalité rideau lourd
taie parfumée sur l'oeil quand il arrive qu'elle se tait
à l'heure de fermeture à l'entrée des paupières
un oeillet noir palpe la fin du monde

Elle a des yeux pour tout visage des yeux que pour lui des cils démesurés la fibre optique en vibration
une élasticité optimale des rides postiches dès le clin de l'oeil
Parfois le souhait de voir décliner la faculté de voir d'accentuer le regard baissé
le temps de lever les apparences

La moue

Moût de la pensée qui s'exprime foulée au pied jusque dans la bouche
grappes de sang dans la bouche court-circuit de parole des cheveux aux chevilles
advenant la foulée grave des mots sur les lèvres écume et bulles d'un contrat de drupe
advenant la piqûre invisible sur la lèvre contractée d'où le baiser s'échappe
grand cru du terroir
et grève la nuit des temps répandu en vain
sur la moue de l'Incrédule

Les cheveux

Aphélie son futur amour Aphélie ta robe en envol blanc sur le mur gris
le jour d'une auréole prélevée sur l'enfance
moyennant ce ballon de lumière opaque en ascension d'images sur la brique noire
Sept ans moins douze mois et déjà des trahisons
Le ruban dans tes cheveux sur le haut de l'oreille inaperçue
luttant déjà contre l'agitation du geste de lancer
contre l'excitation
les bras levés le jeu l'autre fillette soudain inapparente
les bras levés le jour de ta naissance les pieds devant et ta vie tirée par les cheveux
Une rafale d'avenir décrit un cercle sur ta tête
tu auras la tonsure des gens qui abandonnent leur corps aux survivants un bras levé
t'arrachant les cheveux un à un les lissant
éprouvant le contact du bulbe entre deux doigts signe sensible de l'arrêt mais de la racine

et te façonneras à la teinture noire virant aux cendres
une perruque pour l'amour

L'amour

Aphélie son Aphélie accomplie entre mort et lie le mot vie t'effraie sur son oreiller
Aphélie son Aphélie abolie entre vie et mort le mot amour t'a rayée à la craie
Où es-tu près de lui en quels lieux
Où dors-tu contre lui en quels creux
Rêve noué ongles rongés sangle autour du cri
tu t'augmentes de tes sanglots d'enfant retenus jusqu'à lui
tu t'étrangles de sa vie et t'achèves de ses propres mains
Aphélie son Aphélie ensevelie entre amour et glaive le mot corps t'arrondit et te préserve de lui
Lui ange et angles
et toi corps de rechange
Où vas-tu avec lui en quels yeux

Les dents

Un mur de son derrière le front
transcription au point de croix sous la tonnelle tout en dentelle du couvent
Un mur de chaux derrière les lèvres
barrage de l'inaudible au jardin conjugable
où se heurte la langue à la proue du désir
De tout le carnage elle n'a desserré les dents
pour déchirer la pelure des mots canins
ni mordu l'idée fixe du carnivore
dévoration au point du jour dans la verdure tout en durée du malentendu

Le tilleul

La fée lit pour tout jasoir seule les fleurs du tilleul qui la coiffent
pour toute fin et soif et pour tout reposoir elle veille
la fée délie la teille et ce délit d'insistance
l'écriture coulant entre ses doigts
elle trame la chaîne du désespoir entre ses

doigts d'espérance
la respirante des cymes du liber
imprégnant le papier de sa substance
elle espère faire respirer quelques semblables
par les pores de son empreinte digitale
et se faire reconnaître des glycines
à défaut

Le pied

Le piège n'attend plus que le pied distrait
la marche à interrompre brusquement au milieu d'une phrase
la flamme à éloigner du flambeau des voyelles
la chair à mettre en pièces trébuchantes
quand le corps qu'on sonne ne tient plus debout
corps de noce corps de négoce
ne tient qu'à la persistance des os en morceaux pilés moulus et rassemblés
au pied de la lettre

Les lieux

De grands pans de monde entier se détachent les glaciers à la dérive
quand elle part en voyage immobile sur le quai
de grands mouvements de débâcle libérant l'eau sous-glacine et le soleil levant
affleure l'horizon sous-marin et flottent les maisons amarrées à l'hiver
Aphélie son Aphélie éperdue
les lieux hors-saison à ne pas perdre de vue

Les yeux

Corps de noce corps de divorce
clef de voûte égarée
l'os à découvert dans la cour des miracles
pas un ongle pas un cheveu ne fut épargné
ni l'écorce des fictions forcées chair pulvérisée
le regard reste bleu coûte que coûte
et cherche la fille encore vivante
non pas d'Orphée mais de Déméter

Les temps

Jusqu'à la fin des tempes entre le coin de l'oeil et le haut de l'oreille
une pause à chaque seconde dans son récit
où bat le tempo d'une nouvelle ère
Aphélie son Aphélie révolue
figure d'un plan mis de côté
dans les méplats du corps déposé
où les os du temps sont absents
même la marque est périmée

La main

Il ne peut te trahir sans te tenir la main
de la tienne à la sienne il n'y a eu qu'un faux pas
le mot main t'émiette et tu tombes de la table des riches
le mot aliment te lie autrement te ment
le mot coeur t'anéantit casse-tête pour ta main de pauvreté nantie d'années bien alignées
coeur manié fragment multiplié
main dans la peau profondément

La faim

Jusqu'à la fin des temps l'amour aussi en perdition
en perte de vitesse et d'éclat
le sang de l'absence battant aux tempes
barattant son fleuve fluorescent dans l'Invisible
fulgurance rouge du crâne civilisé à la plante sauvage des pieds aller retour
pour annoncer la faim des êtres la faim des autres
elle s'apaise toujours
dans un îlot de bras refermés sur elle
ou à plat ventre dans le vide

Les mains

Elles sont au nombre de deux elles étaient au nombre de quatre en liasse
elles sont l'ombre portée de ton futur nom en liesse au coeur février et tendre

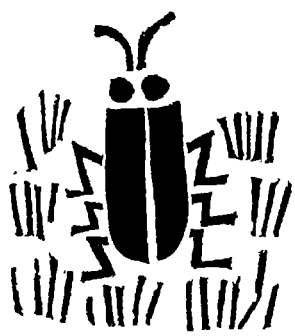
un âtre d'hiver pour être conçue dans les flammes
elles sont quatorze membres de novembre son doigté
un art de naître dans la neige pour être le feu
elles sont mille sont neuf sont cent sont trente gémissantes sous l'onglée
autour du premier cri
du commencement des apparences

La fin

Le mot pain te caresse à la périphérie
au vu
lieux de détresse où ta main du froid s'absente
le mot amour te vide tu le nourris en vain
le mot vin te vire et tu pars en voltage
au su
lieux de dérive où ton coeur d'Aphélie s'éloigne d'un soleil couché éteint nommé Himlett
tu reposes ta hanche de ses excès millénaires
et questionnes ta soif étanche
dans l'étang d'Ophélie

* * *

(Verchères, février et novembre 1983)



TWO POEMS

Earle Birney

STILL LIFE NEAR BANGALORE

The painter quiets all but his brush
The writer needs to know : what then?

My train is creeping blind through all this canvas
out to Bangalore

Nearest my window right an oxcart's moving (stopped?)
on a pinched black road where jacarandas
have left magenta bruises, and two women stand
face to shadowed face beneath tiered baskets
They are compositions skyblue shawls and sable braids
aslant down chalk-white saris
(Merchants' wives with time to gossip?)
Left of them the road elbows
vanishes with palms

Beyond the oxcart, emerald paddyfields
submit to paired brute buffalo,
indifferent geometrists who draw in ochre mud
their sinuous counter-patterns
Behind each slatey team an almost naked
human beast, bareheaded, breeched with rags,
ploughs with a stick (is it?) clutched
in raddled hands while a companion guides
their Shivas by a rope threading sacred nostrils
Around cows inert as corpses they are steering
and boulders obscure, huge
as bones of longdrowned mastodons

The background, between bamboos and breadfruit trees,
allows a glimpse of thatch, a lizard-grey —
(the village of those still, still-talking matrons?)
Near a splash of wall where a flamboya burns
a figure bears a tray, perhaps of frangipani
for a temple i cannot see or sandalwood
(my window cannot smell)
On the horizon a last stand of jungle
(swelling?) what lives in there? what will?

The train slides my frame forever past
as round the bend to Bangalore comes sudden
mounting filling the road a ten-ton oiltruck
(It is surely roaring, blaring, screeching?
My window cannot hear)

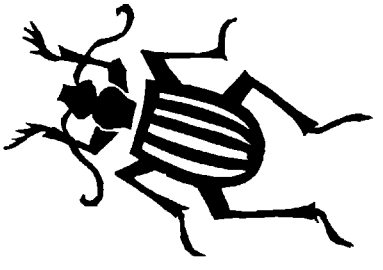
Did the women move? Is there still time?

1983

ELLESMERELAND 1983

At last in Ellesmereland's hotels
for a hundred and fifty each per night
we tourists shit down plastic wells
and watch tv by satellite

The "land beyond the human eye"
the Inuit call it still.
Under the blinding midnight sky
our missiles wait our human will.



THREE POEMS

Bill Bissett

b
b b
b b b b
b b b b b
b b b b
b b
b b b b b
b b b b
b b b b b b b
b b
b b b b
b b
b
b
b

BAYBEES BRETH

laydeez slippr bachelors buttons
blu bells clovr daisee fox tails
musturd seed spruce poplar shepherds purs
dandee lions pine sage cow sills
thistul cedar hors radish coppr petals
sun flowrs blackeyed susans purpul astrs blazing star
n th tiny branches from th musturd seed sharpr n leening tendr as
pine smell th needuls but they dont prickul th branches uv th
musturd seed as we are small n leening n wud see a huge flowr
on top uv a spruce tree th limbs uv th musturd seed so
delicate n strong th yello flowrs tickul my nose bring
me dreems what we ar fleshee n mounds wun surface
reveels anothr surface th treez n flowrs they
hardlee grab at th lite like us missing
it thn we pull it togethr pick it up
thru push ups prayr bcum agile as
beavr danse undr th moon lite ar
surroundid by crikits woolvs lay
all our dangr to rest our arms undr
th longest rain bcum like th branches uv th musturd
seed defind not musheee n all ther not blobee as
we ar thees mind shaping bodeez but sereen from th
powdr our soul imagines us to b lithe n running thru th
clouds tord th mor
sunnneee harbor

ME N ARLEEN USD TO DRIVE EVREE WHER

drive evree wher to
london hamilton north york scarborough missisauga watrloo barree
to thornlea georgetown collingwood to evree wher almost chain
smoking puff puff n with th top down we both wore sun glasses
she was a great drivr i was xcellent passengr we drove evreewher
to moovees to concerts to restaurants oftn to free ways wun time
we wer driving to a reeding at a church hall sumwher downtown we
werent late yet but fr sure not earlee weud dun a lot uv driving that
day n we wer cumming to cross street n talking abt th prson who had
bin sending us hexes keeping us up all nite smoking n talking whn a
car WITH NO WUN IN IT tore thru th intrseksyun arleen was
brillyant she slammd on th brakes stoppd us in time n th ghost
car blew it did yu see that she sd to me yes i sd
ar yu thinking what ium thinking yes i sd n we sped
to th reeding parkd th car it was veree cold wintr nite steemee
toronto go to th reeding we walkd in th door holding hands mor
joind by ths terror car n she was standing up in th audiens th onlee
prson standing staring at us n sd my name i sorta wavd at her
she lookd veree releevd like she cudint go thru with sumthing or was
in sum psychik shock astonishment i went thru th reeding wondring how
n hoping
it wud go ok ther was sumwun els aftr us who was getting violent now wud
she
b ther too with a ketchup bottul a gun for us as sheud thretend alredee th
reeding
was almost in th round reelee likd it aftr th reeding arleen n me didint drive
evree wher we drove home immediatelee parkd rushd in put on th coffee
kept our sunglasses on startid smoking talking abt all uv that evree
angul uv it n trying to pacify th physical vibraysyuns we saw in th
air wch wer veree upset all nite ths was gud for at leest two
packs each ths was bfor we had herd anee health warnings was
eerlee mid seventees at 6 i went to bed had to b up at 8:30 for
a reeding n arleen out to th offis but first we drove to th reeding
out along th lake to see school n talking n talking breething n
weering sun glasses n gliding n smoking n unafrayd

WHN DIEFENBAKER WENT

into spirit

i herd th radio say

his bodee wud tour canada in
a train so peopul n him cud
see each othr for th last
time

th train went from ontario
wher it startid thru manitoba
to saskatchewan wher it
stoppd

yet anothr view
uv geographee

PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST AS YOUNG PUP

Clark Blaise

MONTREAL HAS A CERTAIN GENIUS for spawning poetic movements — from poets like A. J. M. Smith and Frank Scott in the twenties, down through Louis Dudek, Irving Layton and A. M. Klein a generation later. And while individual novelists had always existed in English-Montreal — Hugh MacLennan, John Glassco (and stretching a point) Brian Moore and Leonard Cohen — it was my privilege to be associated with the only conscious *gathering* of English language Montreal prose writers in this century.

Time and doctoral dissertations seem to bestow inevitability and distinctive colouration to such groups, as though internal affinity, not external need, account for literary alliance. We were five prose writers in the same city at the same time; we had similar critical standards and very different literary tastes. And in 1970, under the guidance of John Metcalf and Hugh Hood, we — Hood and Metcalf, Ray Fraser and Ray Smith and myself — became the Montreal Story Teller. We're now a footnote in the larger history of Canadian literature, but we rate a few paragraphs in the history of contemporary Canadian fiction. The Story Teller is yet another instance of synchronicity and serendipity at work: contemporary Canadian literature was just being born, and we were in a time and place, with the energy and vision to assist the delivery.

Montreal is a cultured city with many writers. The problem, in those first few years, was with me. The only young writer I knew in town was Jerry (C. J.) Newman. Hood was around, of course, but teaching in another world, l'Université de Montréal. I'd been writing in a vacuum, except for Jerry's critiques and nearly all the stories I was publishing, despite their Canadian setting, were still being placed in the United States. Nevertheless, I'd felt hurt and resentful when John Metcalf, another local novelist and story-writer I'd never met, published the first significant anthology of the new writing — *Sixteen by Twelve* — and had left me out.

(How a pompous young pup can howl!)

I was still discovering the city, or more precisely, discovering parts of myself opened up by the city. I was respectful if not worshipful of all its institutions. I defended its quirks and inconsistencies as though defending myself against abuse; I was even charmed by things I would have petitioned against in Milwaukee like

separate Catholic and Protestant schools, Sunday closings and male-only bars. "The Frencher the Better" was my motto to cover my encroachment on the aboriginal rights of the English.

I was writing very openly, in the late sixties, of Montreal. The city was drenched with significance for me — it was one of those perfect times when every block I walked yielded an image, when images clustered with their own internal logic into insistent stories. A new kind of unforced, virtually transcribed story (new for me, at least) was begging to be written — stories like "A Class of New Canadians," "Eyes," "Words for Winter," "Extractions and Contradictions," "Going to India," and "At the Lake" were all written in one sitting, practically without revision. I'd never been so open to story, so avid for context. I was reading all the Canadian literature I could get my hands on, reading Canadian exclusively; there was a continent out there to discover. My literary community was more on the page than in the flesh. I had only Jerry Newman, George Bowering for a few years, Margaret Atwood for one year, and I had the poetry-readings at Sir George and the parties after them — those were my only contacts with the raucous, boozy, quick-witted writing-life I'd known, and depended on, at Iowa.

THOSE, THEN, ARE THE pre-Story Teller facts. I knew of Metcalf from the Clarke-Irwin 1969 volume of *New Canadian Writing* (he'd appeared with Jerry Newman and Doug Spettigue; I'd appeared a year earlier in the same series with Dave Godfrey and David Lewis Stein). Of course I knew Hugh Hood's work — he went all the way back to my Iowa days when I'd read him in Dave Godfrey's hand-me-down review copies. Ray Smith I knew through his "Cape Breton Is the Thought-Control Centre of Canada" story in *Tamarack* — one of the breakthrough stories in our writing. I particularly remembered it because I'd thought my story, "The Mayor" (later retitled "The Fabulous Eddie Brewster") was a shoo-in for the President's Medal as best story of the year. That my story actually *did* win is a testimony to the innate conservatism of the judging process.

I've tried to be honest, even if I come off looking terrible. I know how this must read: I was a posturing little pup, a typical product of American alienation, mixed with Canadian sentimentality. (The portrait of "Norman Dyer" in "A Class of New Canadians" is my own ironic self-portrait.) I considered myself an heir to the Two Solitudes, the uncrowned princeling fated to write the books, discover the new talent, script the movies, teach the secrets, that would move Canadian literature to the cutting edge of the world's consciousness. Canada's duty was to exploit its twin heritage of English and French, its twin tensions of America and

Britain. I was ambitious, ruthless, selfish, vain, and arrogant. I was also hard-working, observant, anxious to learn, and even humble.

Then Metcalf called. How he got my name, I never asked. He mentioned the group: himself (whom I resented), Smith (whom I feared), Hood (whom I admired), and Ray Fraser, whom I didn't know. None of us, I suspect, knew that Literary History was knocking — that moment when one's lonely individual efforts have suddenly passed a critical mass and gained enough collective substance to set off other writers' alarms.

Our purpose was admirably eleemosynary. We would charge two hundred dollars a performance — forty dollars apiece. Twice the scale of *Fiddlehead.* The Protestants wouldn't have us (I had assumed, until reading the full story in Metcalf's *Kicking Against the Pricks* that the Protestants had rejected us because Hugh was so dreadfully Catholic), but the island was even richer in Catholic schools, and they were agreeable to trying us out.

Money, then, was the first goal. John and the two Rays were living hand-to-mouth as free-lancers. Hugh, as a matter of principle (everything with Hugh is a matter of principle) insists on top dollar for any creative work. Ray Fraser epitomized the word, and the consequences, of "free-lancing"; he raised it to an art while writing characteristically Fraseresque stories for the local tabloid, *Midnight,* in the Maritime tall-tale genre touched with a bit of the Montreal macabre: DAD RAPES INFANT SON; SERVES HIM FOR DINNER.

Our second goal was a bit more combative. John was tired of the bloody poets getting all the readings and recognition. It seemed to us that the league of warblers had enjoyed their monopoly on the stages of the country quite long enough. Prose was intrinsically more interesting and easy to follow than poetry. There's no reason why stories, if limited to fifteen minutes, should not move, delight and instruct any audience — and still not betray our own high standards. This, it seemed to me, was a battle worth joining.

The third, and most altruistic goal, was to prove something to, and for, Canada. John had taught in the high schools and knew the attitudes of the boards and most of the teachers. Chesterton and Kipling as moderns. Morley Callaghan or Hugh Garner thrown in just so the students could thrill to seeing the word "Toronto" in print. Just think what *we* could do: living, young, Montreal, funny, sexy, bold, dirty writers. We'd begin that great reaming out, the great scouring of all those corroded pipes. We'd have the rarest of all literary privileges — that of creating our own audience.

I REMEMBER THOSE DRIVES through unfamiliar but very Catholic parts of the island; a jolly band of prose-troubadors in my car, or Hugh's. We

were a hit from the beginning; I couldn't understand it. The bookings were coming three and sometimes four times a week. Every now and then I'd wince at our collective arrogance, inflicting all this shameless puffery, this elevating slobber on immigrant youngsters whose English needs were for something more rudimentary and whose experience of literature was utterly virginal. And a second later I'd think what a splendid, noble thing we were doing. Those kids were our perfect audience, uncorrupted by ghastly good taste, analogues to our purest intentions. Didn't we want to communicate the real, the actual, the tangible *montréalitude*? Didn't we want to present ourselves as serious writers who were also living, imperfect Montreal presences? Didn't we pride ourselves on the accessibility of our stories, that anyone could appreciate them? Our proudest boast in fact was that unlike Chesterton and Conrad, *we were in the phone book*! Look us up, call us, talk to us. We drink, we fart, we get horny, we make fools of ourselves, we lust, our lives are usually in a mess, we're afraid of cops and taxes, we screw around, and we're not ashamed to show it. Like kindergarten kids with finger paints, we wallow in it! We make art of it!

In a typical reading, I'd do one voice from a segment of John's novel, *Going Down Slow*, where a high school teacher is so drunk he gets thrown out of a bar. I read about a man who watches Greek butchers popping calf testicles in their mouths and sucking; Big Ray Smith did a monologue on tall girls' fashions with such intensity that he would be crying while the audience laughed. Hugh's "Socks" was about an immigrant from southern Italy who ends up working on snow removal in wet socks. And there was Ray Fraser's unpredictable and never-repeated routine, tall tales of mounting disgust, teetering over a pit (one suspected) of imminent intervention from a barely-amused administration.

Despite all that (and of course because if it) we became legitimate. We grew out of the ghetto of Catholic schools to the junior colleges and university classrooms. We filled the second issue of the *Journal of Canadian Fiction* (my two tales in that issue, "Is Oakland Drowning?" and "The Voice of the Elephant" were inspired purely by our ensemble readings, the need for levity, brevity, and surreality. I wanted to be as precise as Metcalf, as witty as Smith, as various as Hood, as irreverent as Fraser). We read at the conventions of the Protestant teachers. We popped up in Fredericton, Saint John, and Ottawa. We got to be polished, convincing, and even successful in all three of our initial goals.

We were clearly an idea whose time had come. We were a new generation of Canadian writing, arriving all at once, in all parts of the country. The first book of the movement was *Flying a Red Kite*, then Alice Munro's *Dance of the Happy Shades*. There were the two Clarke-Irwin collections, plus the early House of Anansi books — collections by Ray Smith and Dave Godfrey. Peggy Atwood was writing *The Edible Woman* during her year at Sir George Williams. Then

came *Sixteen By Twelve*, the first national collection. Then the Story-Teller; the first national performance group in fiction.

We were, however, a group very much of our time and place and class-interests: no French, no women, no unseemly minorities. When I think of our work, as opposed to Alice Munro's, for example, I see a line of continuity with the typical French-language Montreal *conte*. Our work has a similarity to that of Carrier, Vigneault, Ferron, and Tremblay, though we in no way consciously emulated them. Merely that the structures we accepted — a dramatic appeal to a tangible audience, a firm sense of place and voice and readership, a political and aesthetic intention — acted as a different confinement from the printed page. We were moving toward compression. It took me an inordinately long time to write my first novel (if indeed I ever have), the two Rays never have, and John (I suspect) is most at home in the novella form.

I should also acknowledge the influence on my work of Hugh Hood. His ease of delivery, the way he wraps allegorical significance around the keenly observed realistic core, the variety of his styles and voices, left me feeling one-dimensional and thin-voiced. It was Hugh who titled and could easily have written a story like "He Raises Me Up," and it was for Hugh that I attempted the supposedly casual-memoir form, such as "I'm Dreaming of Rocket Richard."

The Story Teller is now an obscure part of Canadian literary history. For me, it was the public manifestation of my inner maturing. I learned, in the group, that I still needed an ensemble; despite my immodest flights of fancy, I wasn't yet ready to stand alone. I always had the sense that of the five, I was the one the audience hadn't heard of, and I was the one they had to endure after the famous Hugh Hood and the sexy Ray Smith and the nasty John Metcalf and the whack-o Ray Fraser. So I learned to tame myself; to wait. Our time, each and separately, would come.

OUR EFFECT? WE ARE NOW at the age of the ageing rock stars of the sixties; our real fire is behind us but our best work is still to come. We're a little too grey and cranky to give collective readings. We've proven that prose on the podium is interesting and profitable; we've succeeded in stuffing Canadian literature into every cranny in the curriculum. And, I fear, we've lived to demonstrate the applicability of Murphy's Law to literary funding. Official money and government money will drive out private money. The bureaucracy will replace individual choice and initiative. The magic, the sense of occasion, the mystery of having a writer in your presence, of words made flesh — that is now beyond our students. The budget for such extravaganzas has all been lost. In the

way of benevolent bureaucracies, everyone gets something — a lot *less* of something — and the intangibles that truly meant something are lost.

We have lived to see a dangerous corollary to our hardest-won battles. It goes like this: if you're in the phone book and if you give readings, let's call you up and ask you to read. Anybody, anywhere. I've had calls from high school teachers a thousand miles away, asking if I wouldn't mind flying out and addressing a tenth-grade class. I've been at Canada Days and I've had my ticket punched down at Harbourfront in Toronto. This fall in my first long trip back to Canada in three years, I'm giving more than my upper limit of eight Canada Council-supported readings. I enjoy it. It's part of the whole fabric of Canadian life; it's what I dreamed, it's the literary equivalent of the CBC's own national mandate. But.

But this. Thirteen years ago our Sir George Williams poetry series had an equal mix of Canadian and American poets; now (I'll wager) if it has a series, they're all Canadian. Very few colleges in Canada have anything but Canadian readings. We had a two thousand dollar budget for our readings; we even budgeted our after-reading parties at seventy-five dollars for booze, breads, and meats. I remember the big pre-reading dinners at the best restaurants, and I remember the very well-attended, packed auditorium.

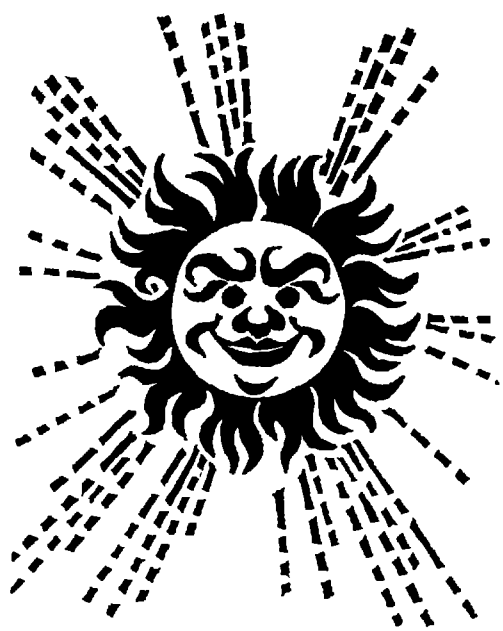
And now, I will be giving my readings this year at one o'clock in the afternoon, in a classroom. No lunch, no announcements. I remember the weeks it took, designing posters, picking them up at a printer's and then distributing them to Montreal's bookstores and cafés. Now there will be a xeroxed nine-by-twelve sheet of typing paper with a magic marker announcement of my reading, taped to the door and pinned to the cluttered bulletin board. There will be thirty students for my reading — the same attendance as the regular class. It *is* the regular class. The last evening reading I've given, significantly, was not at a university, but at the Jewish Public Library in Montreal. What are we saying? Simply that people will not come out at night for a Canadian reading.

And, I fear, we suffer a surplus of Canadian talent. Alice Munro is an estimable writer and probably only second to Mavis Gallant as a writer of prose, but it's wrong that she alone should be the model for all short story writing by all women in this country. When I teach in Canada all I need are her books, Atwood's novels, and maybe one or two others (Kroetsch or Wiebe) depending on the region. There's something wrong when a Chinese-Canadian woman in Montreal has never heard of Maxine Hong Kingston, or a woman concerned with her Jewish background has not plunged beyond the sensibility of Mordecai Richler.

I once had the bizarre experience of being told that I could fly Audrey Thomas — a writer I admire greatly — to Montreal from Vancouver at Canada Council expense, but couldn't offer John Gardner a fifty-dollar bus fare from Bennington.

By that time, you see, Sir George Williams had given up its private budget for other exigencies, and Canada Council was picking up all the tabs.

Good sense and maturity will eventually triumph. Excess is never a cure for deficiency, and a less-charged time will permit both generosity and cosmopolitanism. Our little revolution of the sixties needs to be protected from too much success; it needs to build on the fact that Canadian Literature should not be an end in itself but only a tool of a larger Canadian Studies. We need to redirect a fraction of the honoraria and travel expenses now paid to keep a thousand poets and story-writers airborne to the dozens of world-stature authors out there in Europe, Asia, the Caribbean and Latin America as well as the United States who would be excited by the prospect of reading in Canada and instructing our students. Otherwise, our little revolution will die of boredom.



BY FLASHLIGHT

Roo Borson

Camped out here once, much younger,
with Paul — his muscles all awake beneath the shirt —
whom none of us would touch. Betsy, Jan, and I
lying wide apart in the clearing
like freshly-branded cattle,
wet grass at the edges of our eyes.
The icy heat, the paralysis, the wish . . .

the stars so far apart up there
you could see between them

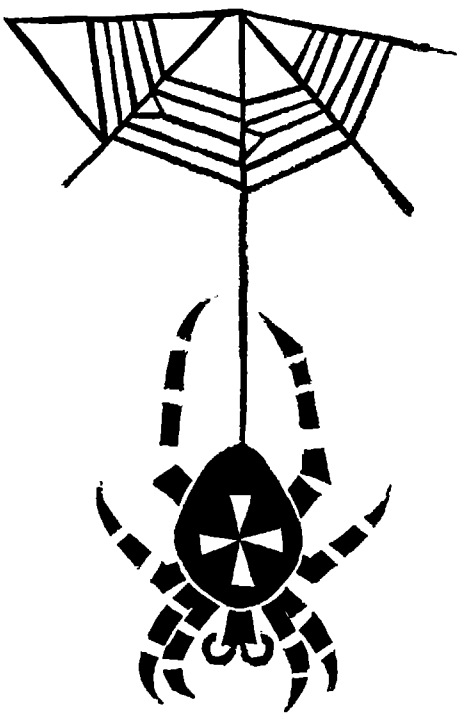
but trusted ourselves even less
and so lay there
knowing only what we felt:
those who ministered to "the real world"
were full of empty threats.

The firs jut three feet farther
into the sky-map now.
The flashlight leads us back,
you, my favourite remembered friends: for this we need
one set of legs to share, my eyes, and the flashlight,
grazing frictionless over the ground, as guide.

For my part, I come back
every few years to take a turn through these woods,
our piece of luck for a summer, eight acres
of redwood and huckleberry,
papery skulls embedded in the forest floor, the bulkier bones
we could never assemble: of deer, or stray cattle, or some other animal
we never saw alive.
Which of you keeps up the breadbaking, in memory
of that first laughable sunken loaf? Which of you
still moons at fourteen-year-old boys for us all?

Sitting by the fire, muscles tired
from carrying all three of us around.
Funny how little I've learned, when everyone else
has grown taller around me, like the fir trees,

shutting out a little more light.
The taste of coffee, deep at night, when nobody could care.
The bat that sweeps at eye-level through the twilit house.
The hidden inhabitants, the unknown guests.
Huge forests, fostered on neglect.
The sensuous, probing spiders.
Lights that get left on all night.
The sudden attack of rain on the roof, anytime.



FORM AND VARIATION

Marilyn Bowering

I named it heartbreak,
but it was a house in which
I had rented room.
I named it loss and despair;
it was not my own country.

What was the payment
for pleasure in this lodging?

I never knew.

*

I named my house in your name.
It was heartbreak.
I knew the payment was pleasure,
but you were in despair, lost;
it was not your country.

Why didn't we join in exile?

I never knew.

*

I rented a stranger's room.
It was in your country.
I knew I would find you
if I could make the payment.

Pleasure was in exile,
but we joined in pain.

Was this the longing
that took me from my country?
Better to have lost
than to find refuge in heartbreak.

*

I never knew the currency
that paid me.

I wanted to live
and not lose you.

But we were full of heartbreak,
in exile from a country
I never knew.

IN OCTOBER

Elizabeth Brewster

They are alive after all, the geraniums
with the fresh snow gone.
I consider trying to save them
but they are so thick, so deeply rooted,
and I have no jar big enough
to hold them.

Somewhere in another country
south of me
my ex-sister-in-law is dead.

I didn't know her well.
She led my brother a merry dance
all those years ago,
but I liked her,
liked her laugh,
her vivid lipsticked mouth.

I dig in the garden with my spade,
root up tangles of peas and beans,
withered empty pods,
blackened tomato vines, rotted.

Alone in her car she was,
rolled over, broken.
I can't think how
it must have been,
imagine a gash, red,
smeared on her forehead.

My hands are cold.
I can't get the earth tidy,
am giving up for the day.

Geraniums, I think,
will just have to learn to die
like the rest of us

but I take a blossom inside, a small shoot
to put in water,
and fill an empty can with soil
in case the stem puts out feelers.

How do I know it won't
survive the winter,
sit on the window sill yet
gazing out at snow?

TWO VARIATIONS

Robert Bringhurst

I: THE READER

for Celia Duthie

. . . der da mit seinem Schatten / getränktes liest — Rilke

Who reads her while she reads? Her eyes slide
under the paper, into another world
while all we hear of it
or see is the slow surf of turning pages.

Her mother might not recognize her,
soaked to the skin as she is in her own shadow.
How could you then? You with your watch and tongue
still running, tell me: how much does she lose

when she looks up? When she lifts
the ladles of her eyes, how much
flows back into the book, and how much
spills down the walls of the overflowing world?

Children, playing alone, will sometimes
come back suddenly, seeing what it is
to be here, and their eyes are altered. Hers too. Words
she's never said reshape her lips forever.

II: LARIX LYALLII

for Dennis Lee

. . . es sind / noch Lieder zu singen jenseits / der Menschen — Celan

In the threadbare
air, through the tattered
weave of leaves,
the blue light cools
into ash-black shadow.

Tree: the high
thought roots itself
in the luminous clay
of the caught light's closeness
to audibility.

So we know that again
today, there are songs
still to be sung. They
exist. Just on the other
side of mankind.

JOURNAL INTIME

Nicole Brossard

Le 26 janvier 1983

Il est neuf heures vingt-quatre et assise à ma table de travail, je cherche à éviter le quotidien, ce continu durable qui n'a de cesse qu'au moment où l'on ne parvient plus adéquatement à le nommer réalité.* Autour de moi, tout ressemble à ce que j'imagine et j'essaie de m'imaginer aussi concrètement que possible. Aussi concrète que possible ma vie qui n'est qu'un tissu de mots. Qu'il soit cependant entendu que je n'aime pas faire état de ma vie, même entre les lignes.

Aujourd'hui, j'ai relu quelques pages de ce que d'autres appelleraient "mon journal." Mais je n'ai jamais eu de journal intime. Tout au plus, trois cahiers noirs dans lesquels j'inscris une fois ou deux par année un quelque chose qui me permet de vérifier que j'existe encore. D'une année à l'autre, le texte varie peu. En général, je note "je souffre" et je referme sans plus le cahier. Il m'arrive parfois d'écrire: j'existe. D'avoir à écrire j'existe est une preuve qui en temps de crise me suffit. C'est la moindre des choses que de ne pas avoir à faire tous les jours la preuve qu'on existe. C'est la moindre des choses bien que je connaisse des millions de femmes qui chaque jour doivent en faire la preuve. Certaines crient, d'autres grimacent, d'autres se tordent de rire, d'autres se frottent les mains comme pour en faire jaillir le feu, d'autres se penchent sur un enfant, d'autres pensent qu'une existence remplie de mots c'est comme un trou noir dans le cosmos; d'autres disent qu'exister c'est parler dans la matière ou encore qu'exister c'est tracer un chemin avec sa bouche et son souffle dans l'infini recommencé de la matière.

Dix heures vingt-et-une secondes

Chaque instant a son importance pour ce qui s'éveille en moi du seul fait de penser à l'instant. Si la vie est faite d'instants précieux, on ne peut pas en dire autant du quotidien qui minute après minute nous engloutit dans un autre vingt-quatre heures auquel il ne sert à rien de vouloir résister. Aussi, d'un instant à l'autre, suis-je en train de m'inventer comme ce matin, un avant-midi ensoleillé, glacial, blanc. Aveuglant. Blanc. Terriblement blanc. C'est le temps qu'il fait: il fait blanc et lumière. En ce moment, tout n'est que vibration. La lumière prend toute la place, s'infiltre dans l'avant-midi, silencieusement s'infiltre et c'est comme si je voyais soudainement tout en détails. Toute la chambre dans laquelle je suis est

*Ce texte a été écrit pour la série "Journal intime." Il a été lu par Pol Pelletier, à Radio-Canada, le 8 août 1983.

envahie de mille structures qui comblent l'espace, qui vident l'espace, laissant ainsi les objets familiers sans ombre. Il n'y a d'ailleurs dans cette chambre que l'indispensable: le papier, le stylo, la table et moi. Pas même un dictionnaire, pas une seule règle. Et le givre m'aveugle, c'est le givre; ne me demandez pas ce que serait ma vie, ne me demandez pas ce qu'elle fut. Je n'en dirai rien. Ce journal m'aveugle. Quelle étrange matinée pour qui aime écrire.

Dix heures cinquante

Que peut-on dire dans un journal qu'on ne le pourrait ailleurs? A quelle mémoire nous adressons-nous lorsque nous prétendons faire revivre un passé, aussi rapproché soit-il? Qu'y-a-t-il de si intime dans un journal qui ne saurait être partagé, entamé par la lecture de quelqu'un d'autre? Intime. Les Japonais emploient l'expression *mono no aware* pour signifier "l'émouvante intimité des choses." C'est je crois ce qui dans ma vie côtoie la troublante violence des choses. Le volcan. Ce sont là des dimensions qui nourrissent l'intuition d'une pratique existentielle dont la conscience s'affiche essentiellement à travers l'écriture. Si l'écriture est lucidité, elle n'en demeure pas moins le support d'un affichage; affichage d'une vie comme on s'affiche dans un contexte social et politique. Epinglée sur le mur de la culture ma vie, mon texte. Rien de moins que cela pour apprendre à lire. Et puis, qu'est-ce que l'intimité sinon un enthousiasme, une profonde inspiration de l'être qui, comme soudainement coupé de son souffle, en cherche la source. Ce temps d'arrêt où la vie se décide sans qu'il ne soit possible d'y ajouter un mot.

Midi, le 26 janvier 1983

Midi, blanc, lumière sur le réel. Le quotidien tranche sur la réalité. Julie est assise au salon en train de lire *Comment Wang-Fô fut sauvé* de Marguerite Yourcenar. Sage comme une image comme si la grippe et la grève des professeurs stimulaient dans les yeux fiévreux un goût, une soif pour la lecture. Je pense à la fille de Hilda Doolittle qui dans sa préface à *HERmione*, raconte ce quotidien d'une mère qui ne pensait qu'à écrire, qui s'enfermait des heures entières dans son bureau. Il y avait de longs silences suivis comme par un effet de frayeur par le crépitement des frappes du dactylo. C'était toujours: "Silence, silence, ta mère travaille." Et Frances Perdita Aldington de dire comment ses deux mères, Hilda et Bryher étaient en fait pour leur société victorienne: Mrs. Richard Aldington et Mrs. Robert Mc Almon. Oui, le quotidien tranche sur la réalité. Le quotidien des couples de femmes. Tous ces couples qui entraient au salon de Natalie Barney, au 20, rue Jacob, couples fascinants de Gertrude Stein et Alice B. Toklas, de Sylvia Beach et Adrienne Monnier, de Radcliffe Hall et Una Troubridge. Couples d'artistes. Comme si couples de femmes étaient couples d'artistes. Comme si la créa-

tion était une inévitable mise en scène de cette forme d'esprit qui consiste pour une femme à projeter de tout son être sur une autre femme le meilleur d'elle-même et qui, comme une intelligence propice à l'imaginaire, lui donne l'énergie de concevoir.

28 janvier 1983

Il est bien évident que tenir un journal c'est comme tenir maison. Il faut se faire à l'idée!

30 janvier 1983

Vernissage des dessins, eaux-fortes et gravures de Francine Simonin. J'ai marché longuement, lentement sur une rue St-Denis triste comme un dimanche de lendemain de la veille. J'aime marcher dans ma ville. J'aime tout ce que j'y vois parce que cela me force à voir. Et sur la rue St-Denis, je vois simultanément et en alternance trois générations, quatre sexes, des nombres pairs et impairs qui vont ici au café, là à l'église, en face à la tabagie, à côté au Sauna.

A la Galerie Treize, sur la rue Duluth, ce sont les *Fêtes tribales*, les *Tribades* et cette belle série d'*Hommages à Maria Callas*. Je me promène d'une pièce à l'autre, attentive et présente au travail de Francine. Puis, à la Galerie Aubes, je regarde et regarde *Madone des Sleepings* et plusieurs fois *Madone des Sleepings* en eau-forte et je me dis qu'il doit certainement y avoir un rapport avec ma lecture d'hier soir. Oui, tout cela me revient: "Un peu de pluie. Lorsque nous dormons, n'y voyons gouttes. Que gouttes. Mais attendons que passe la madone des sleepings. Qui sèchera nos pleurs."

Au retour, vu de l'autobus, le parc Jeanne-Mance m'arrive à la hauteur des yeux comme une séquence d'hiver gris, puis je me déplace lentement vers les terrains vagues dans *Mama Roma* de Pasolini. En entrant dans l'image et le temps, à la hauteur des yeux, je me surprends à imaginer un art de vivre qui puisse contenir toute la nostalgie dont on se sait capable et dont dépend parfois un certain goût pour l'art.

Rome, le 15 mars 1981

De ma chambre, j'entends la musique annonçant la manifestation qui se prépare, Piazza Navona, contre l'avortement clandestin. La manifestation est organisée par le Parti communiste. Les femmes sont rares, Piazza Navona, le bruit des talons sur la pierre. Bar Navona.

Piazza Navona, l'église Ste-Agnese. Marbre, cierges, micros, messe. Piazza Navona, une femme chante comme pour implorer. Le micro fait de l'écho.

A l'hôtel, un portier se tient à l'entrée, les mains derrière le dos; il regarde, la tête un peu tournée vers la gauche, un jeune homme blond. A la réception, les sensations sont vives. A la caisse, un homme appuie sur des chiffres.

Piazza Navona, en sortant de l'hôtel, une femme noue lentement son foulard autour de son cou. Il fait froid dans la Rome lumineuse. Piazza Navona, j'achète un recueil de poèmes de Pasolini: *Poesia in forma di rosa.*

Rome, le 31 juillet 1963

Une nuit si claire. Une lune merveilleuse. Sonia, Dante et Vincente. Nous marchons jusqu'au Colisée. C'est fameux Rome la nuit. A un moment, j'ai cru être un personnage de Fellini. Mais cela n'a pas duré longtemps et j'ai gâché un peu la nuit en me demandant si un personnage fellinien était dans ma tête, féminin ou masculin. Plus tard dans la journée du 1er août 1963, nous avons marché le long de la Via Appia. Nous nous sommes arrêtés dans un petit bistrot et nous avons ri et bu. Mais qu'est-ce que le rire d'une fille de vingt ans?

2 février 1983

J'ai reçu ta carte postale mon amour et je l'ai relue et relue. C'est fou cette dépendance que j'ai à l'égard de chaque mot écrit par toi. De la plus banale remarque à la moindre ellipse, chaque lettre tracée par toi justifie mon fétichisme de la carte postale. Et puis, il y a des mots qui me font trembler. Aujourd'hui, je sais que le temps va s'organiser autour de ce que je lis de toi, de ce que je vois de toi dans cette calligraphie. Et ta signature, une initiale, indéchiffrable pour qui ne la connait pas. Depuis notre première rencontre, je n'ai épuisé aucune des images que j'ai de toi. Chacune est intacte, intégrale, une. C'est sans doute ce que l'on nomme la tension amoureuse. Une tension qui vide de leur sens les mots que l'on pourrait prononcer. Je sais, dans ces moments, qu'il n'en est aucun qui puisse réellement signifier. Les mots deviennent alors des formes dans l'espace mental. Ils sont comme des signes qui dessinent la structure même de la tension. Ce sont ces mots qui m'intéressent, ces mots qui, isolés ou regroupés, n'ont de sens qu'à travers la forme éphémère que je puis entrevoir. Je ne parle pas ici d'organisation linguistique, je parle ici d'une forme énergétique qu'à moi il m'arrive de fantasmer en empruntant à deux catégories: les mots et la pensée.

3 février 1983

J'ai consacré toute ma journée à lire la traduction anglaise de *L'amèr* dont Barbara Godard vient de m'envoyer la version finale. Travail épuisant que celui de la lecture en traduction de l'un de ses propres textes. Epuisant parce qu'aux opérations mentales que l'on exécute en rédigeant le texte, s'ajoute un processus que j'appellerais, le dévoilement. Car ce que nous choisissons de cacher dans un texte, voilà, qu'il faut maintenant le dévoiler. Là où la critique, par exemple, ne peut que présumer, rêver ou imaginer un sens à ce qu'elle lit, la traduction cherche à le certifier. C'est dans cette certification que je dois affronter ce à quoi je m'étais consciemment et scrupuleusement dérobée. Etre traduite, c'est être enquêtée non

pas seulement dans ce que l'on croit être mais dans sa façon même de penser dans une langue, de même que dans la façon dont nous sommes pensées par une langue. C'est avoir à s'interroger sur cette autre que je pourrais être si je pensais en anglais, en italien ou en toute autre langue. Quelle loi, quelle morale, quel paysage, quel tableau me viendrait donc alors à l'esprit? Et qui serais-je dans chacune de ces langues? Que m'eut réservé la féminité en italien? Quel rapport aurais-je eu à mon corps si j'avais eu à le penser en anglais? Comment le mot kimono, s'il m'eut été quotidien, eut-il modifié ma façon de séduire et de travailler? La question qui se pose en traduction comme en écriture est celle du choix. Quel signifiant privilégié, élire pour animer en surface les multiples signifiés qui s'agitent invisibles et efficaces dans le volume de la conscience? C'est formellement que je dois compenser pour que l'énergie qui alimente ma pensée ne se retourne pas contre moi, pour que la langue elle-même ne se retourne pas contre la femme que je suis.

Comment le mot kimono, s'il m'eut été quotidien . . .

Tokyo, le 17 mai 1982

Une ombre est un thème indécidable du haut de Tokyo Tower. Du haut de Tokyo Tower, c'est en costume noir d'écolière que les filles songent qu'un grand kimono les retient. Mais l'abîme, mais l'abîme.

Ce matin, j'ai marché dans les rues de Tokyo. Assez longtemps malgré l'heure matinale où les rues sont encore désertes. A cinq heures du matin, je cherche un endroit pour boire un café et écrire. J'ai trouvé, dans le quartier de Roponggi, un Dunkin Donuts et je sais que malgré l'apparence internationale du comptoir que je suis bel et bien au Japon. Malgré "you were on my mind" et "I had a dream" qui jouent sans cesse. Je suis à Tokyo entre la réalité et une fiction. Je suis vidée de toute passion. Je suis une mer de silence entre le passé et le présent. Je suis une Geisha assise devant son ordinateur, tenant dans ma main gauche un beigne au miel et dans ma droite un stylo que je tiens à la verticale pour en quelques signes, tracer la sensation de vertige que j'ai éprouvé hier matin du haut de Tokyo Tower.

Kyoto, le 27 mai 1982

Le Pavillon d'or luit dans l'étang comme la poitrine de Mishima. Je dois me resaisir. M. me prend le bras et nous avançons avec beaucoup de concentration parmi les petits sentiers qui sillonnent les abords du Pavillon.

Kyoto, le 28 mai 1982

Je sais que bientôt les mots me manqueront pour parler. J'oscille entre le sacré et le profane comme un moine qui compte sa monnaie. Chaque temple m'émeut, chaque jardin. En littérature, on n'a jamais compté autant de suicidés. C'est

pourtant par millions qu'il faudrait ici parler de sourires. C'est une étrangeté qui me va droit au cortex. Il ne faudrait pas ici parler de signes. Il s'agit tout simplement d'une marque d'attention que je porte à la douceur de la soie quand il m'arrive de frôler une passante en kimono.

Kyoto, le 29 mai 1982

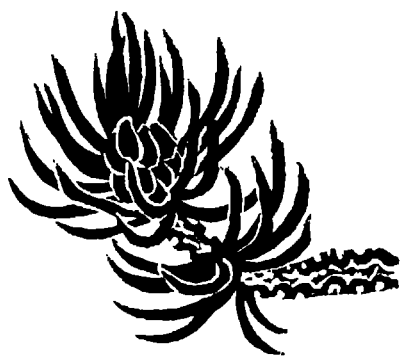
En m'éveillant, j'ai vu ton épaule et instantanément la porte en papier de riz; entre les deux, les arbres du jardin. Dans le corridor, j'entends les pas feutrés de quelqu'un qui vient. Le tatami s'est déplacé pendant notre sommeil. Tu ouvres les yeux. Le thé est servi. Nous buvons lentement. Chaque gorgée est une vision du Ryoan-ji.

Le 4 février 1983

J'ai déphasé d'un jour la date de mon journal afin d'imaginer la sensation que cela pourrait me procurer de penser que j'écris demain. Hier, j'ai follement attendu une lettre, une carte postale qui n'est jamais venue. Aujourd'hui, j'ai commencé à lire la traduction de *Finnigans Wake*. Je me suis arrêtée à la page 83: "Mais attendons que passe la madone des sleepings. Qui sèchera nos pleurs." Dans la journée, j'ai lu aussi que Joyce avait dit à propos d'*Ulysse*: "J'ai écrit 18 livres en 18 langues."

Il fait un froid à fendre l'âme. Je m'interroge sur le fragment. Fragment de sensations, de vie, d'oeuvre. Je m'examine par en-dedans et je ne découvre rien qui puisse pour le moment soutenir mon attention. Je préfère me remettre à plus tard.

C'est une belle journée. Je n'y suis pour rien. Je m'interroge sur le fragment et sur ce qu'il faudrait entendre par l'expression: une journée dans la vie de Nicole Brossard.



MOUNTAINS

Michael Bullock

Once more I look out through my window
at the mountains across the bay
the mountains gaze back over the rooftops
with teeth bared in a cold white smile

The air between is another wall of glass
a wider window stretching to the sky
no message passes through from the mountains to me
and the birds are black notes lost on a lineless page

TWO POEMS

Anne Cameron

NEUCHATLITZ

Not many people live
in Neuchatlitz anymore.
The old ones die
The young ones
    move away

We saved some money
and got a government grant
and worked like hell
and ran a water pipe
from the freshwater spring
on Nootka island
across the bed of mothersea
to our village.
The water here
is scarce
and so full of minerals
your throat chokes
if you try to drink it.

It wasn't always like that.
Maybe the cannery did something
before it closed
or maybe the copper mine
or the mills.
They all did a lot of blasting
and the rock kind of shifted
and split.

There were too many freighters
in Tahsis harbour
so they gave permission
for a big ship
to anchor offshore here.

the anchor
smashed through our waterpipe

That was eight years ago
and nobody claims
responsibility

We bring water in tin cans
by outboard across the waves
from Nootka island

We got no more money
to build a new pipe

They'd just bust it again

The government wants
us all to move
somewheres else

The old ones die
the young ones
move away.

IRIS

Iris didn't look on it
as a miscarriage
she figured it was her baby.
But the priest
wouldn't let her bury it
in the cemetery.
He said she had to go
to the hospital with it
and they'd check her over
and
dispose of the foetus.

So she got out of bed,
her eyes dry as summer
and dark as cigarette burns
in a wool blanket
and she took it
to the old graveyard.

She dug a hole
with her bare hands
and laid the blanket wrapped mess
on a bed of leaves,
She wanted to cry
but couldn't
and as she started
to fill the hole
all the old people
who'd followed her
began to sing
the old words
to the old songs,
and they went to her,
and touched her,
with loving hands,
and wept for her
because she couldn't.

they tapped the drum
and shook the rattles

one old man
danced goodbye
on stiff skinny legs

they weren't
    disposing
    of a foetus

they were havin a funeral
for Iris' baby

then we went to her house
and drank tea
and held her
while she cried

DEUX POEMES

Paul Chamberland

L'ENIGME

Plus d'images. Plus de mots.

Les yeux ouverts, vous marchez, là, dans la maison, d'une pièce à l'autre.

La minute suivante ne vous appartient pas.

Vous ne savez plus prévoir.

Le jour baisse.

Vous vivez dans une ville. Tout peut arriver.

Vous ne vous en remettez plus à ce que vous désirez, ou à ce qui vous inquiète.

Vous ne comprenez même plus ce que cette question, qui je suis, veut dire.

Ça vous arriverait pour la première fois. Pour la première fois à ce point-là.

Vous avez décidé de ne plus ajourner cette chose qui maintenant prend toute la place.

Mais cette chose, vous ne savez pas, vous n'arrivez pas à voir ce que c'est.

Vous persistez à écarter mots et images pour ne pas risquer de perdre cette chose,

sa densité,

l'insistance de l'appel qu'elle obtient de vous.

Vous ne vous laissez pas distraire.

Où cela devrait-il vous mener?

Au bonheur?

A la vérité?

Mais ce sont là si facilement des mots.

Cette chose, l'énigme.

La nuit est tout à fait tombée à présent.

Vous sortez.

Vous marchez au hasard. Vous changez de direction assez souvent.

Ça pourrait être une nuit de mai, tiède, lumineuse, chargée d'odeurs.
Sainte, oui, sainte,
parce que vous en accueillez le bienfait par tous vos pores.
Parce que tout, en vous, va au-devant.

Que pourrait-il alors se produire?
Seriez-vous seul à ce moment-là, ou auriez-vous été rejoint en route par des compagnons,
qui en seraient au même point que vous?
Auriez-vous cessé, simplement, d'en douter?

Est-ce que ce serait un peu
comme de s'abandonner à la douceur de mourir,
les yeux ouverts,
enfin?

UN LIVRE DE MORALE

(trois extraits)

Je suis forcé d'inventer pour ne pas périr — fuite en avant dans l'improbable. Quand au dehors la fin de non-recevoir est coupante comme un trente sous zéro.

Quand l'emblême de mon amour est un enfant au regard franc que le monde chasse de partout comme un gêneur.

Quand le chef de l'Empire couvre les assassins du peuple Maya, quand il fait interdire un film sur la terrification nucléaire des vivants, alors que dans ce film on voit et on entend une femme, qui est un médecin, répercuter, avec les mots de l'intelligence responsable, l'appel des femmes et des enfants que se prépare à engloutir l'engrenage génocide des Etats.

Pour détourner de mon coeur le collapse de rage accumulée et emmurée,

je suis forcé d'inventer chaque matin des stratégies pour mon amour:

oui, du moins, garantir cela: tenir debout, et rester secourable dans l'état d'urgence.

Du moins, cela, c'est rétablir le souffle en soi et hors de soi,

c'est défendre en son intégrité la semence du recommencement du monde.

Oui, chaque jour, je me souviens que je porte en mon corps l'engramme génétique d'une puissance qui fait tourner les galaxies.

Et j'honore, en osant contre tout espoir l'échappée, l'héritage de la jubilation créatrice.

* * *

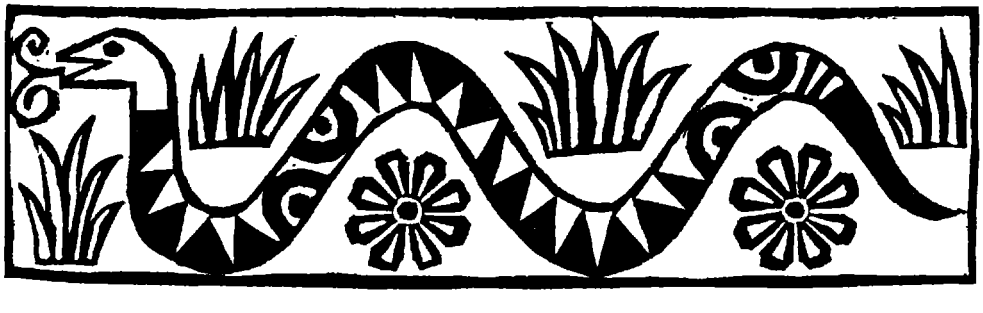
A tout moment le vent nucléaire peut souffler le ciel par-dessus nos têtes. Donc cet instant a déjà eu lieu. Nous ne vivons plus que d'une existence provisoire, mais c'est d'un effet magnifique: notre splendeur, enfin soustraite à tout souci d'avenir, peut être jouée sans restriction, dépensée sans retenue. Nous multiplions sur nous les couleurs, nous arborons nos parures d'immolés, nous fascinons le regard des dieux; irradiés nous passons d'un coup à la condition des astres, au surflamboiement du stade terminal, à la suprême extase des novae.

* * *

Compagnon parallèle au-dessus
je marche sur la terre dans l'ombre de tes ailes.

Mon coeur se serre, je ne vois plus.
Ai-je donc été cet enfant qui fonçait au-devant de l'éclat inaugural de ta venue ici-bas?
Depuis longtemps tombé en cendres,
mon coeur est le nid déserté d'un phénix infécond.
Et la frontière, avec moi, se défait,
— aire grise désolée où boire est amer.

Compagnon parallèle au-dessus
je marche où nulle trace, qu'interrompue,
n'est laissée de ton retour.



DIX POEMES

Cécile Cloutier

Mes mains
Interrogent
Toutes les lumières
Du froid

*

J'aime
tant
ma maison
que j'entends sa toux

*

Tout
le
bleu
du monde
est
blanc
J'ai fin de toi

*

Des cris soyeux
Creusaient des nids
Des feuilles de bois
Ecoutaient

J'étais un fruit

*

Assumer
l'ogive
de ma main

*

De grandes plumées de verbes
Attendaient
Dans le nid de mes poèmes

*

Il aurait fallu t'aimer
Aussi fin
Qu'une fougère
Ecrit ses feuilles

*

Une goutte de bois
Dans tes yeux
Pour terminer un chagrin

*

Mon dernier mot
Je veux le dire
A un enfant
Dans l'octobrée des feuilles

*

Et s'illuminèrent
Les grands pas bleus
Tout au bord
De ma patience

Quelque chose se terminait

*

NOTES ON REALISM IN MODERN ENGLISH-CANADIAN FICTION

Matt Cohen

A "REALISTIC NOVEL" IS USUALLY TAKEN to mean a novel in which narrative is the connecting thread, in which not only does thought or action lead to subsequent connected thought or action, but does so in groups of words organized into logical sentences, paragraphs, chapters, etc.

But "realistic novels" are also novels written about "reality" — as opposed to novels perceived to be about something which is not "real." Thus, aside from realistic novels there are novels which are termed gothic, or science fiction, or fantasies, or dream journals, or simply "experimental" — a class of novel which conjures up the image of a fanatically mad scientist blindly pounding at a typewriter (or, latterly, a word processor).

In Canada, the novelistic technique most practised by writers, and most accepted by readers, critics, and academics, has been from the beginning and still remains the conventional realistic narrative, though there have been some interesting innovations. One of the characteristics non-Canadians always notice about Canadian novels is that an amazingly large proportion of them are set in the country. Even of that fiction set not in the countryside but in the city, much portrays the city not as a cosmopolitan centre but as a small town.

There is, I think, a political reason for this.

Canada, like the rest of the "developed" countries, is a place in which the dominant way of life is an urban one. Just as American culture is dominated by Los Angeles and New York, as British culture is dominated by London, as French culture is dominated by Paris, so, too, is English-Canadian culture dominated by Toronto.

But Toronto dominates English-Canadian culture merely in the sense that it is the centre of the media — that it is the place from which the dominant images of television, films, magazines, and books are distributed. But the place of origin of those images is rarely Toronto — like a dutiful suburb Canada watches the television shows that are produced in New York, Los Angeles, and London, goes

to movies originating all over the world, reads imported magazines or designs its own magazines so that they are almost indistinguishable in format and ideology from those that come from across the border.

Canada has not fully developed its own distinct way of regarding its own urban life. Although it is very different to live in a Canadian city than in an American or British one, the articulation of the experience of living in a Canadian city is not part of the national consciousness. The Canadian writer and reader have not developed a common vocabulary for talking about the lives that they share.

On the other hand, Canadian rural literature has its own developed myths, its own way of being talked about. Thus it is in Canada that much of its best fiction describes geographic realities in epic terms, where the characters are almost overwhelmed by their surroundings. I am thinking of the novels of Frederick Philip Grove, Ernest Buckler's *The Mountain and the Valley*, The Manawaka novels of Margaret Laurence, Alice Munro's short stories, the prairie novels of Rudy Wiebe and Robert Kroetsch, David Adams Richards' Maritime novels, the west coast novels of Harlow and Hodgins — one could go on indefinitely. Even those novelists like MacLennan, Callaghan, and Davies, who set their novels in the cities, tend to populate them with those who exemplify the protestant conservative rural ethic which has been the basis of English Canada's — especially central Canada's — economic and moral strength.

REALISM AS A LITERARY MOVEMENT derives its power from the fact that it goes beyond literature — the making of words and books — to making real the inchoate energies and images that lie in the centre of the imagination.

The great characters of fiction are universal: Pinocchio and his nose, Don Quixote's perpetually ridiculous escapades, Captain Ahab in pursuit of Moby Dick, might even be said to exist apart from the novel or folktale or play in which they first appeared; for not only do we remember them for whatever scene the writer placed them in, but we also recognize other situations in which they would be comfortable.

Yet, despite the fact that there is an international consciousness in which such characters can take root, each one also springs from a particular person, a particular place.

When I was growing up, a student in high school and university, I understood that American books were American, British books British — but I had no

idea what a Canadian book was. I had read Canadian books, of course, but although the poetry had struck me as distinct, the novels seemed generally written by people who lived in New York or London.

Then, a little more than ten years ago, I spent two weeks at a friend's house babysitting their cats. On the kitchen table I found four books: *Fifth Business* by Robertson Davies, *As For Me and My House* by Sinclair Ross, *The Stone Angel* by Margaret Laurence, *The Mountain and the Valley* by Ernest Buckler. Each of these books was well-known in Canada — and had been published internationally as well — yet I myself, starting to write in a literature about which I knew virtually nothing, had never felt any particular curiosity about them. They were, I thought, books by people of a different generation from me, so antiquated that I couldn't possibly find in them anything of interest.

Fifth Business had just been published to much acclaim. *As For Me and My House* was thirty years old — it had first been published in 1941 but had recently been re-issued. *The Stone Angel* was first published in 1964. *The Mountain and the Valley* had come out in 1952, but was now reprinted in paperback.

Not only was there a wild disparity of publication dates, but also of geography: the books were set in places from the Maritimes to the Prairies, almost the whole breadth of Canada.

But despite the wide range of time and place, the books might have issued from one mind — not the mind of a person but of a people. What was being revealed was not the life story of one — or four — individuals, but what might be called our own national character — or at least the national character of a certain kind of Canadian: the anglo-saxon small-town protestant conservative.

Three things struck me about this national soul-baring.

First, that the most hidden secret, the secret that could not be told, yet was completely obsessing, was sexuality.

Secondly, that the bond no one could articulate, yet that surrounded, limited, even nourished their lives, was the bond to the land.

Finally, that although the characters in the books lived their lives as best they could, their lives were largely lived unlived. That is — they had sacrificed what they wanted to do in order to do what they ought to do. In all cases, it might be added, this sacrifice of desire to duty had disastrous consequences not only for those who made the sacrifice, but also for those around them upon whom they took out their bitterness and resentment.

In Canada, as in many other countries, the 1960's was a decade of tremendous ferment and unrest. The "unlived lives" of the previous generation became the

fuel for the explosion out of the old constricting bonds into a new utopian hedonism. Along with the desire to topple the old political and moral order came the impulse for an aesthetic revolution.

In art forms other than literature, this revolution was hardly new with the 1960's. Painting had for decades been dominated by forms other than realism. Music, too, had long broken from traditional forms. One could go through other arts, too, everything from sculpture to dance, and one would find that the nineteenth-century realist forms had long since been replaced by a new mainstream — itself ever-changing and constantly being re-developed — a mainstream based solidly on the corpse of realistic/representational art and dedicated, in all its changing forms, to finding a non-realistic basis for artistic expression.

In fiction, the equivalent of painterly realism is of course the narrative novel, a kind of novel which had in many ways reached its peak of expression by the end of the last century.

But what has realism been succeeded by in the contemporary novel?

Modernism — it might be said. First of all James Joyce, who substituted stream-of-consciousness for narrative sequence — and then Stein, Woolf, *et al.* But the experiments of Joyce were one of a kind. And similarly the literary voyages of Stein, Woolf, Ford Madox Ford, Faulkner, all had much to recommend them, but unlike the preceding realistic tradition they did not pave the way for further experiments in the same line. They were not a school, though some might be grouped together in retrospect. They were much more a group of eccentrics, mutually interested, perhaps, but not mutually dependent for the development of techniques which they borrowed from each other and used to "advance" the novel in some recognizable joint way.

In fact, despite the literary experiments of the early part of the century, the mainstream of the English language novel has continued to be that of realistic fiction.

In Canada this is especially true. Although there was, among the Canadian poets, a highly developed formalistic debate, and a participation in the various international theories of poetics, fiction was a different case.

Morley Callaghan, Frederick Philip Grove, Hugh MacLennan, Hugh Garner, Ernest Buckler, Sinclair Ross, Margaret Laurence all shared an absolute formal adherence to the centre of the fictional mainstream. If one imagines a cocktail party of world fiction writers active between 1920 and 1960 one could expect many a bizarre costume. But the English Canadians would have arrived as if dressed for church.

Amazingly enough, that is still largely the case. Of our internationally well-known fiction writers — one might name Robertson Davies, Margaret Atwood,

Margaret Laurence, Alice Munro, Mavis Gallant, Mordecai Richler — none is considered avant-garde or formally experimental.

Despite the prevalence of realism, however, there have been many successful departures from it. One might name such books as Leonard Cohen's *Beautiful Losers*, Robert Kroetsch's *The Studhorse Man*, the deliberately bizarre fantasies of Michael Ondaatje as well as perhaps a dozen other novels and groups of short stories. But these books remain isolated experiments. And although these experiments have often been enthusiastically welcomed by critics eager to see the emergence of a "post-modern" Canadian literature, "post-modernism" in Canada is more alive as a critical theory than as a group of books.

But within the mode of realism itself there have been two interesting innovations.

The first has been the development of the Canadian taste for the writing and reading of short stories. Thus while short stories are a form which hardly exists in some literatures — and is a commercial disaster in most others — in Canada they are often considered to be Canada's leading prose product. And thus it is not only internationally but also at home that many of our most widely read writers are principally authors of short stories.

Of these writers the best known work in the traditional narrative form; but there are also many experimentalists among the short story writers, who although they have not attained the commercial success of the realists, have made careers and gathered audiences for a form other than pure realism.

Not so among the novelists. There is no figure in Canada comparable to Italo Calvino, or Gabriel García Márquez, or Carlos Fuentes. There are, of course, admirers and even imitators of the new forms of writing, but no Canadian writer has yet struck a widely responsive chord with his own original form of writing.

By this I don't mean to say Canada has not its visionary writers. Canada's best novels are completely achieved in the imagination, full and resonant re-seeings of their fictional worlds — but they are visions of Canada itself, the land and its people — not a world of formal or aesthetic play. Thus, for example, Rudy Wiebe's *The Temptations of Big Bear*, Margaret Laurence's *The Diviners*, Robert Kroetsch's *Badlands* are novels in which an actual re-seeing of the land is the most important event in the novel.

In this we encounter the second major way Canadian fiction has changed its idea of realism.

Nineteenth-century novels had characters playing out their dreams with each other against a static background. But in many Canadian novels, the climax of the novel occurs when the characters turn away from each other to re-examine — and re-make — the relationship between themselves and the stage on which the more superficial action of the book is set.

This strange innovation — solving the problems in the foreground by rearranging the background — is well suited to Canada and Canadians.

The Canadian reality is a discontinuous one in terms of history. In this way it is radically different from European countries. Countries of the Old World might be seen first of all as having a dual history of man and landscape — that is the land, the way it has been used, the edifices and civilizations that have literally been built upon it — and parallel to the history of human alteration of the landscape runs the history of the various peoples and empires that lived there. Between person and earth has been a gradually evolving relationship. Obviously it begins at the time when the peoples of Europe, as everywhere, lived an existence dependent on hunting and primitive agriculture. But over many millennia, the hunting and agriculture became increasingly sophisticated, even aided by machines — and thus the once primeval forest landscape was de-forested and has become an agricultural and industrialized land-mass.

In the New World, the change from primordial land mass to industrialized and technological society was a much more sudden one. Most of the agricultural heartland of Canada was primal forest or untouched grasslands as little as two hundred years ago. Most of it, only one hundred years ago, still maintained its integrity. Only the building of the transcontinental railway at the turn of this century changed Canada from a country in which native peoples could still dream of living well, in the old way, to one in which a modern technological way of life seemed the only long-term possibility for survival.

Furthermore, the rapid and drastic change which Canada underwent was not a change made by those who had habitually lived there. It was a change imposed by settlers from across the ocean, a change based on ideas that had originated elsewhere.

The difference between English-Canadian literature and European literatures might be said, therefore, to reside in the fact that while for European literatures the Garden of Eden is a place described in the Bible, in Canada the Garden of Eden is secretly — and guiltily — thought to be what there was before the white man came and destroyed North America.

It follows, naturally, that the literatures of the two continents have different ideas of "grace." To European writers grace is a spiritual state attained in the relationship between man and God. But in most Canadian novels, grace is to be found in a redeemed relationship between man and nature — a climax where somehow, through some form of penitence or madness, the white European man or woman bursts out of his whiteness and throws himself upon the mercy of the world of nature — which he has previously violated — and then is forgiven and made whole.

CANADA IS AN IMMENSE COUNTRY which overpowers its inhabitants' capacity to hold in their minds the idea of where they live.

The difficulty of holding the physical idea of Canada in the imagination is equalled by Canada's inability to imagine itself politically. Thus while the rest of the world has spent the last few years mired in the problems of sagging economies, Canada — whose economy is sagging deeper than most — has continued to be preoccupied by the saga of bilingualism, the patriation of the constitution, and controversy over switching to the metric system.

The Canadian novelist, who after all reflects as well as invents his times, must like everyone else try to fill in his consciousness that most bizarre gap — the lack of a country. This he does by continually re-inventing the country in which his novels would take place — if there were a place for them to take place in.

CULTURE AS CARICATURE

Reflections on a continuing obsession: Newfoundland

Michael Cook

NEWFOUNDLAND OCCUPIES A UNIQUE, and little understood, place in North American history. It was occupied by Irish, English, and Basque fishermen long before that unscrupulous adventurer, Sir Humphrey Gilbert, claimed it for Queen Elizabeth in the dying stages of the sixteenth century. Prior to that, in the tenth century it had been settled for two years by the Vikings, as recent excavations on the northeast coast have proved. It was, however, always a survival culture. Whereas settlement on the Eastern seaboard of the United States proceeded in a somewhat orderly fashion, with studied attempts to re-create an orderly society, Newfoundland always remained an outpost. Permanent settlement would disrupt the business of English merchants, and the Navy, recognizing that people trained to fish in the most violent waters in the world were valuable, used the Grand Banks as a natural training ground for press-ganged sailors. Always destitute, a place from which things were taken, not developed, Newfoundland became a place for the dispossessed: from the famines in Ireland, the land enclosures in England, people came, hid, survived. Their language was, until recently, eighteenth-century Wexford, Cork, the west coast of England. Sea wanderers, they established a commonality of place and tongue unique in North America. There were highly ritualistic rites of passage; the annual seal hunt followed by the summer journey to the cod fishery off the Labrador coast, beset by fog, storms, icebergs. For four hundred years this people moved in ways unknown to the rest of the world, a mixture of Celt and Anglo-Saxon that survived because the nature of the environment determined that it was more important to depend upon your neighbours than it was to keep old animosities alive. Obviously, in survival cultures, art does not flourish, but, with the advent of Union with Canada, roads, radio, television, the inevitable happened, hastened by politicians and bureaucrats who slavered at the prospect of being able to practice planned obsolescence on people. Within two decades, the ritual and mythology, as practised in reality, died. And in the death throes the sleeping, visionary spirit of the soul of Newfoundland mani-

fested itself in the imaginations of those whose task it is to record the joys and agonies of life about them, the artists.

Their emergence coincided, uncannily, with the beginning of the Resettlement Program, an assault upon a traditional way of life unparalleled since the enforced evictions from Ireland, Scotland, and England that had brought so many settlers to the Maritimes. Joey Smallwood and the Ottawa bureaucrats he imported to implement the program loved it. Drag in the people from the myriad outer islands and headlands about the coast, the reasoning ran, pay them a cash settlement — from $1,000 to $3,000 — and bundle them into growth areas where they could join in the great industrial programs that would catapult Newfoundland from the eighteenth to the twentieth century within a decade. Medicare and education would be free for all, and their souls would flourish in magnificent cathedrals erected by soaring technology! Other nations were already instituting programs that used technology to make it possible for those in remote, poorly serviced areas to stay put, and at the same time enrich their lives. Newfoundland did the reverse.

The reality? For many, of course, there were obvious benefits from improved health care and education, and access to social amenities. But for many too, it was also a bitter and heartrending loss. They left behind fine three-storey homes, made by their fathers and forefathers. They left behind instant access to the best fishing grounds on the coast. They left behind noble, high-steepled wooden churches, built by their own hands. They left behind their sense of identification and place and community. They left behind the bones of their ancestors. They left behind their history.

It took time for the reality to sink in but I think, finally, most realized that a blow had been struck at the psyche of Newfoundland from which it might never recover. Many of the attitudes adopted by Brian Peckford and his colleagues, supported by the people, have their roots in the moral and physical anguish created by resettlement, and Newfoundland's continuing struggle for survival.

I APOLOGIZE FOR SUCH A LENGTHY introduction, but indigenous culture cannot be separated from history and those events that profoundly affect a people's lives. It was this program that provided much of the inspiration — if one can call it that — for my play about a failed revolutionary who was hanged in St. John's in 1812 — William Gayden:

> GAYDEN: "I have visions. I have dreams I tell ye. Things I never told ye before — nightmares but they is real. I sees yer children hounded like dogs from their bits o' land, their hovels, their history piled high on carts behind them, the bones o'

their parents moulderin' behind them. I sees the green hills too, Douell, and the rivers, and the trees full o' birds, and chickens scratching under kitchen tables. But they're not your fields, your trees, and the rivers will never know yer face. The only grass ye'll ever own will be what grows about yer grave. I sees ye, generations of ye, broke backed and sweating to fill others pockets wi' shiny new coins. I sees ye, packed and herded into prisons of cities, chained to the walls, fergetting laughter, and the good work of hands."

Newfoundland is a dramatic, intensely theatrical environment, and I have always been moved by the fact that fishermen leave their stages every day to go forth upon the bitter waters. Logically, it seemed that the stage that imitates life would become the principal form of expression in any cultural revolution. In fact, it was two visual artists, with strong literary connections, who set out to raise the consciousness of Canadians, and their own people. Christopher Pratt exposed, to an astonished country, his immaculate and brooding abstractions of Newfoundland. Aegean seas — not the wild Atlantic — were the background to outport houses ennobled by perfection, yet achingly empty. He would set out to restore dignity to the real artifacts of the province, houses, people, animals, the landscape. His is a vision that, like Samuel Beckett's, often emphasizes the spiritual isolation of man in this corrupt and tumbledown century. An enlarged backdrop of a Pratt painting would match the spirit and intent of "Endgame" perfectly.

Also — out of the strong oral tradititon of Newfoundland, complemented by the mythic intensity of Coleridge's "The Ancient Mariner," came David Blackwood and "The Lost Party Series." This young engraver etched the images of Newfoundland's great, and often tragic, annual Rite of Passage, the seal hunt, burning them forever into our own consciousness even as the seal hunt was dying.

In ways beyond their knowing, both of these artists helped create a climate in which, finally, indigenous theatre — unheard of — could flourish. Of course, there had been theatre of sorts. In Newfoundland politics is theatre, and the principal actor since 1949 had been Joey Smallwood whose histrionics could rival any of the great old tragedians. It was not surprising that the first professional company to emerge, The Mummers Troupe, would itself concentrate upon political material.

But there was another figure who had pointed the way to a specific type of theatrical development — Ted Russell. He had been magistrate, teacher, cabinet minister, a wise, gentle man who had created, for radio, a series called "The Chronicles of Uncle Mose," a glowing, golden account of a way of life rapidly disappearing into the fog of history. Here was a richly observed commentary on outport life, peopled with the wise, the foolish, the humorous, the

strong and self-sufficient. This was a world in which a hangashore (a rogue, too lazy to fish) could be brought before a magistrate for stealing a neighbour's hole in the ice. But as the magistrate couldn't get there before all the ice had gone, the evidence had disappeared. It took folk wisdom — not Solomon — to solve that one. Later, a radio play, "The Holding Ground," would become a stage play, produced with great success. In this work too, the essential thesis of the goodness of man, and the stability of society remained the same. Newfoundland men, like the boats in which they roamed, always came back to The Holding Ground, that place on the seabed where the anchor always holds firm, where all is safe and secure. Donald Bartlett, of Memorial University, described Ted Russell's work in *The Newfoundland Quarterly* as: "secluded, predominantly Protestant, restrained and neighbourly." I agree, but it was an idealized perception, recollected with love, and certain darker elements of the Newfoundland reality were not permitted to disturb the idyll. Perhaps this was as it should be, but, in a time when Newfoundlanders have been vilified over the seal hunt, become stock figures for jokes (particularly in Quebec — for long their real allies in misfortune), Russell's perception of them became the one with which they yearned to identify. The consequences still echo on the stage.

As previously mentioned, The Mummers Troupe became the first professional company to concentrate solely upon indigenous material, under the financially shrewd, but often controversial artistic director, Chris Brookes, who had tempered his political theories about theatre as Artist-in-Residence during the turbulent years at Simon Fraser. Paradoxically, it was at the moment of greatest public approval for a theatre that dealt specifically with Newfoundland, that the possibility of a failure of nerve became evident. In 1974 my own play, "The Head, Guts and Soundbone Dance," was televised on CBC TV's "Performance." Cast in a tragic mode, the play depicted the end of an era for a tyrannical old Skipper, his retarded son, and his principal crew member and whipping post, his son-in-law, Uncle John. The play had been performed superbly by a uniquely talented group drawn mainly from university ranks, and had been very well received. However, the audience — at that moment in time, although expanding — remained essentially a professional, middle-class one. The TV production would expose the work to a great mass of people who had never been to the theatre. The result was instantaneous, and devastating. The play (and author) were reviled, and it became evident, I think, to everyone working in theatre at that time that the potential audience's image of themselves could not be tampered with lightly. That anxiety still exists and to a large extent has proved detrimental to the creation of a theatre that could have been unique in the country.

The Mummers Troupe concentrated all their resources on collective, politicized theatre, using Paul Thompson's Passe Muraille as a role model. Often, they were

extraordinarily effective. When federal agencies tried to "resettle" people from an area in Gros Morne, the designated National Park, the Mummers moved in rapidly and succeeded in creating a show which so affected public opinion that decisions already determined in St. John's and Ottawa had to be redefined. When Buchans, a mining town in the interior, was threatened with closure, the theatre company again moved in and, supported by the miners' union, created a vivid testament that illustrated the cynicism and inhumanity of corporate giants towards those who have spent, and sometimes given their lives, in their service. They even got as far as Vancouver on a national tour of "They Club Seals Don't They," a show designed to try and educate the Canadian public into the realities of the Seal Hunt.

BUT THERE HAS ALWAYS BEEN an essential flaw in the collective process, a flaw exaggerated in Newfoundland because, beyond a handful of amateur groups, there was no other theatre against which one could make comparisons. Once a certain level had been reached, both audience and company seemed frozen in a time warp. The characters in all of the collectives rarely, if ever, changed. Newfoundlanders were perennial victims, were always cast in a heroic and suffering mould. There was the strong-willed, often angry or grieving, Newfoundland woman. There were the boys in the bar, witty, sardonic, knocking everything and everybody. There was the exploited fisherman, the wicked merchant, the ignorant and snobbish mainlander, the indifferent and corrupt politicians. Like cardboard cutouts, with little variation, these stock characters popped up in every play, and their sallies and jibes were greeted with roars of approval by a growing audience who came to see Newfoundland and Newfoundlanders (Good) triumph over the forces of Evil (anyone from away, politicians, *et al.*). In political theatre, the message is deemed to be more important than the development of character or plot — those appalling manifestations of the Deadly Theatre. Unfortunately, what was substituted for those archaic theatrical props eventually was melodrama, sentiment, and, above all, caricature. The promise of a theatrical renaissance, of the kind typified by the great days of the Abbey Theatre in Dublin (inspired by many of the same reasons), had been frittered away. What had been a great opportunity to create a truly National Theatre had been squandered — without anyone realizing it. By the time the Mummers Troupe collapsed, riven by internal dispute and also, I believe, by its refusal to grow, it had developed an audience that had come to depend upon those comfortable, familiar, complacent images of themselves. McDonald's Theatre.

"The modern theatre has died away to what it is because the writers have thought of their audiences instead of their subject" (W. B. Yeats).

"The dramatist has something better to do than to amuse either himself or his audience. He has to interpret life" (George Bernard Shaw).

If this assessment sounds too gloomy, I hasten to add that there were — and are — exceptions to my general thesis. I am thinking specifically of fellow writers Tom Cahill and Al Pittman, but in general, in Newfoundland, it is still easier to mount a collective than a scripted play. There is a profound mistrust of new work, other than one acts workshopped and mounted essentially for an in-house audience. Edmund MacLean, the Artistic Director of Theatre Newfoundland and Labrador, the touring company based at Stephenville on the west coast, has recently gone on record as saying that he dislikes indigenous theatre, it is usually poorly written, and in any case, is a cheap way of attracting an audience. The contradiction of terms is obvious, but it is also a sad commentary, for without companies to put on new works there will be no new works. I also would suggest that behind MacLean's statement lies that nagging sense of inferiority — not unique to Newfoundland but aggravated by isolation — that fuels the notion that imported culture is superior to our own, particularly as it is manifested in the performing arts.

Rising Tide Theatre, the company that is now trying, successfully, to keep professional theatre alive in Newfoundland, has broadened its base to include plays from the Canadian and American repertory in its season, but still depends heavily upon collectives to maintain its good relationship with its audience, and those collectives depend heavily, once again, upon those instantly recognizable stock types. There is a genuine fear of giving offence, of losing the broad base so painstakingly won.

Can a culture interpret itself honestly by caricature alone? Can any indigenous theatre survive without encouraging its artists to interpret life, as they perceive it, in all of its rich manifestations? Are Newfoundlanders going to succumb to the final indignity of other, mainland images of themselves, support it even? On my right, sir, is the Stage Newfoundlander, roaring, boisterous, a song in the heart and a beer to hand, a jolly fellow just like his Irish counterpart. On my left, the Fishing Newfoundlander, stoic, pipe clamped between rugged jaws, clad forever in oilskins spitting seawards. I'se the b'y that builds the boat.

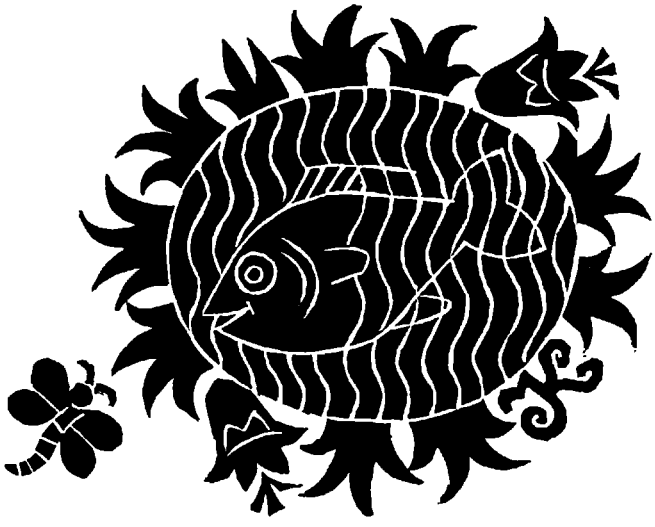
I don't believe it is necessary.

Some years ago, a group called CODCO took every one of the proliferating stock types stalking the stage and turned them inside out in a series of biting satires. Scatological, often deliberately obscene, they took up the medium of black humour, which has always been a part of Newfoundland's survival kit, and parlayed it into an attack upon all that was sacred. The Church and State, unscrupulous landlords and ladies, sexual mores, even basic soul food like fish and brewis was all grist to their mill. Their spiritual mentor might have been Lenny Bruce, but they

were motivated by serious social intent, and were, perhaps, closer to that dark, existential world of the German nightclub in the thirties. For three years they blazed, becoming increasingly outrageous until, as always happens, the group split up and went their separate ways into film, television — the fate, it seems, of most contemporary satirists — to become absorbed by the very establishments they abhor.

Nonetheless, CODCO provided proof that there was a wide audience — equally divided between outrage and hysteria — hungry for images of themselves other than that provided by the collective and, yes, even Ted Russell's gentle perceptions. It is still not too late to learn that lesson. If we are to create a truly National Theatre (and I believe much of our chance of cultural survival depends upon it), then we shall have to challenge both audiences and ourselves more, not less, than in the past. Our theatrical practitioners have no permanent, satisfactory, home. They operate out of houses, shoe boxes, small buildings, renting facilities or co-operating in joint ventures with the director of the arts and culture centres, like the fishermen of old. They have demonstrated courage and tenacity in that situation.

Now I believe it is their responsibility, to their audience, and to that most profoundly human of all the arts, theatre, to create a climate which will elevate, enlarge, and not demean, Newfoundlanders' perception of themselves, and the world's perception of that little nation on the edge of the world itself. All may be well.



THREE POEMS

Jeni Couzyn

WIND

It is she, the lonely one, barren and envious
has sent them to fetch you.
Too many to be counted

these small demons
who rattle the doors and windows, find their way
under your skin, distract and torment you.

They will never steal you away.
I draw a circle of light around our bed:
Sanvi, Sansanvi, Semangelaf

By this charm I protect thee.
The demon woman is behind them out of sight and hearing.
Her body is cold, her breasts little hard stones

her mouth a flaring wound of darkness.
She has no eyes
her hands wave helpless as dying tentacles

and a whirlwind of rushing darkness
opens in her belly.
The winds spring out ancient and half-formed

vengeful infants.
They want to carry you away to that hungry pit.
I remember its bitterness

from within my own belly
and the unborn furious children
with starvation shrieking from their cells.

I draw a strand of love from my navel
like a shining golden spider.
I draw a circle of love around us. Dear one

fear nothing from them, those cries
call you
from a time long ago, though a part of yourself.

Sanvi, Sansanvi, Semangelaf,
send them yelping and snarling on their heels.
You at my breast we are safe

as the watching moon.

CEREMONY OF THE AFTERBIRTH

One buries it in the cleft of a tree.
Mulberry mouth grinning out from the leaves
little ghost in the branches

now raises you in springy arms
pops juicy gifts onto your tongue
all childhood long.

One wraps it in deerskin
with miniature tools and a pouch of seeds.
Little ghost in your work, with a pure heart.

One in a vessel of clay
sets it adrift on the great river. Little ghost
slips into the depths as they open

to the origin of water
joyful as a dolphin. So river will carry you
ocean receive you.

One buries it under the house.
Little twin dancing from room to room,
scattering her spell:

The giving one, the soft one, the strong one
enter,
the light one, the wise one, the singing one
enter,
the still one, the true one, the loving one
enter.
This house is blessed, all entering, all leaving
and all within.

One, unknowing
turns away. Like white ants they hurry it
to a blind furnace.

Hush a bye, hush
no animal will eat it
no spirit enter it.

From the glowing bowels of the furnace
a white heat rolls upward
purifying, cleansing, atoning.

Now in the smoke rolling upward
the little ghost stretches itself
wondering what happened to its childhood.

As it raises its arms
it rears to a great height,
a white form, invisible in air

but its newborn eyes are bright with love
they see you, always
and newborn hands

caress your forehead as you sleep.
Hush a bye my darling
all fire of earth is beloved to you now

it will light your passage
through darkness of air
through a forest of stars.

TRANSFORMATION OF THE SPIRITS

1

In the world she is child
thrashing with terror in her father's arms.
Thick and hairy. His strides long

his jaw murderous as he carries her
to the terrible privacy of her room.
The mother-face near the door, a mask on a pole

blank and staring.
Punishment. The word gongs out cold
and rises above her screams. The beloved

who brought her frail life as a gift
and laid it beside their hearts. Parent-faces
grim and mad as rats in a laboratory

with probes in their brains
eating off their own feet. The pain within.
The pain of doing. The pain writhing

and grey pleasure of it.
Stillness on their faces like doors slamming
like rocks splitting.

2

They are three in one.

He the doer,
his bones and muscles knotted into weapons.

She the believer, judge in her black and pomp
stiff with purpose.

Child the incarnation
newly arrived and clothed in body.

The urgencies of flesh
its hungers, its danger.

3

In the place of power
is the transformation.

Power of your eyes, child.
Power of your frail body like a flame
and the fire roaring.

Withdraw old ones
mad as tormented bulls. A white blaze before you
she's impossible to harm.

They cower. They whimper.
They kneel to fall within the shadow
of her blessing.

Rain upon them now
and they're wrinkling inwards
they curdle into the ground.

A bird of smoke rises on air, a star
that was child of their flesh.
Bow your heads, old ones, as she passes.

Now you are empty skin-sacks
fruit without seed
dissolve into your shadow.

RIEL

Frank Davey

1. Nice Things

The nice thing about Louis
was that Davy Crockett went south
to the Alamo. The nice thing about Louis
was my mother always called him 'real.'
The nice thing about Louis
was that us smart kids
got to take a classy subject like French
in Grade 9. The nice thing about Louis
was that he'd never appeared on Disneyland,
& looking at him in 1955
from the lower Fraser Valley there were so many
nice things about Louis Riel.

The 'real' rebellion she called it.
I believed her. It hadn't happened in Mexico.
You couldn't play
cowboys & Riels, you couldn't play
Riels & Indians. There was no way
you could imagine it & therefore
it had to be a real rebellion.

2. Wacousta

I knew he was not Wacousta.
I'd never heard of Wacousta, my mother
hadn't heard of Wacousta, only,
of the real Louis but we both knew
he was not Wacousta.
Now I have heard of Wacousta I can say
that if Louis had been Wacousta
all the Rudy Wiebe Cree on their piebald ponies
would've come whooping from their tipis. Louis
would've glared up from U.S. postage stamps
wearing feathers & warpaint. Dumont
would've won the second battle of San Jacinto leaving
Middleton's army steaming
in its charred CPR pullmans.

Of course if Jesse James had been Louis Riel,
he'd have been a Red River cart robber,
a survey crew bandit, a pemmican kid.
There'd have been no General Middleton only
a Pinkerton man.

3. Trying to Think of Louis Real

A raw-boned Canuck in long underwear.
A solemn mouth under black whiskers.
A man from Winnipeg.
A man from Winnipeg which was the head office
of Eaton's catalogue, where my flannel
shirts & corduroy breeches came from,
in brown paper packages, each November.
He did look a bit like Timothy Eaton.
He was dressed in black like Timothy Eaton.
Came out of the black past like Timothy Eaton.
Had not moved history, had been moved into it,
had joined with words like tax man, back east,
Liberals, baby cheque, Royal Bank, Toronto Conservatory,
rationing, Mackenzie King.
He was dressed in black like Mackenzie King.
He had done something and now it doesn't matter.
He had done something but now it wasn't something.
At 4 pm, after I had died several times as an Indian
my mother called me in to practice the piano
& above each piece of music in my practice book
was a small picture of a black-bearded unsmiling man.
There was something wrong with these pictures.
Sometimes the music smiled, or flashed
an orange mustache. The Real Rebellion.
There was something fishy, my mother would say,
about Louis Real.

4. Louis at Fort Garry

We are not in rebellion against the British supremacy . . .
Moreover we are true to our native land.

LOUIS RIEL
NOVEMBER 16, 1869

'Oh shit,' Sir John A. said, 'Riel
has shot that Thomas Scott.' Damn Tom Scott.

He was a troublemaker. He should've been born
on a mountaintop. Should've gone south
& run for Congress. Got himself drunk.
even in Fort Garry prison got himself drunk.
Had once tried to throw the boss of his road crew
into the Red.
Maybe he was an anarchist individualist.
He called Riel a 'dumb frog,' the Metis
'a pack of cowards.'
Maybe he was a fascist running-dog.
He told Louis in colorful Protestant language
to go love the Blessed Virgin.
Louis Riel said, 'He is a very bad man,'
& sent him for trial to a Metis tribunal.
The court found Tom
not up to community standards.
Man, this is one tough city, said Tom Scott.
You can't even have a little drink, a little fun,
even curse out a Frenchie
without they bring on the Gestapo.
There'll be no more American licentiousness.
We must stamp out the Wacousta factor,
said Louis Riel.

5. *Louis in Hospital*

All month Louis has nightmares. In the nightmare
he prays. 'O God, make me thy prophet,
make your David thy prophet,' he prays.
'O.K.,' says God, & jumps thru the barred window
dressed as a Baltimore oriole.
'What shall I say, O golden & adored?'
prays Louis. 'Say
the 20th century belongs to Canada.' Louis flinches.
'Say per ardua ad astra, say mens sana
in corpore sano.' Louis covers his face.
'Say nemo dat qui non habet,' chirps God.
'You're no oriole,' says Louis.
He backs into a corner of his cell.
'You're a Macdonald,' he shouts.
'A tyrant, an overdressed Bismarck!' he screams.
God grins. 'You sound a lot like Col. Crockett,' he says,
then flies off
into the wild blue yonder.

6. *Louis in Montana*

Maybe he wears a six-gun.
Maybe he shoots buffalo.
He's a 'hard citizen,' says the *Fort Benton*
Weekly Record. Maybe he busts broncos.
'He's one of worthless brutal race
of the lowest species of humanity,'
says the *Fort Benton Weekly Record*.
Maybe he's a grizzled old prospector,
maybe he's a scout for the 5th Cavalry.
He writes to Gen. Miles of the Cavalry
asking for a Metis reservation.
He wants them taught to farm.
He wants schools. He lobbies the U.S. Marshal
to have whiskey-traders jailed
for selling to drunken Metis. On weekends
maybe he races chuckwagons.
Maybe he plays poker in the Bucket of Blood saloon.

In 1883 he is hired as a teacher
by a mission school.
He hangs up his six-gun. He unloads
his buffalo gun. Sells
his decks of marked cards. Gives away
his Bowie knife. He is bored.
His old buddies Dumont, Ouellette,
Isbister come down for a binge.
To play the slot machines. To gawk
at the Silver Dollar Bar. Afterward,
flat broke, hung over,
Louis rides with them back to Canada.

7. *Louis at Fish Creek*

A tree-covered cut in the prairie grass.
A 'nasty' place
says Middleton, aiming his cannons into it.
Dumont's men enjoy
the dim light of these bushes, sing & pray
as they fight. Meanwhile,
Louis is waiting,
his arms upraised, is praying
for vision. He opens his mind.

'Be allways sure you are right, then Go,
ahead,' Davy Crockett tells him.
'Yes go ahead,' Dumont insists,
by messenger from the battleground.
There must be authority, says Louis Riel.
An authority that loves us, he says.
'Authority ain't worth
the underside of a coon's tail,' says Crockett.
'They've got Gatling guns,' reports Dumont.
'We've got to attack from the darkness, fire
from the trailside hollows.'
An authority must love its people, says Louis
or else the most they can achieve
is to be martyred by that cruel authority.
'You want us to be martyred?' says Dumont.
'Boy, wuz I ever,' says Davy. 'I got stuck
like a bar atta turkey-shoot.'
You were your own authority, you never asked
for love, says Louis Riel.

8. Louis at Batoche

Ya gotta choose, said Charley Mair. If ya ain't one of us
yer one of them.

Imagine halfbreed Louis trying to play
cowboys & indians. Palefaces
& redskins. Yankees & rebels.
Or Cornwallis & Washington. De Haldimar
& Wacousta.
Ya gotta choose, said Dumont,
gotta let us shoot, he said,
& afterward headed south to Montana.
Louis kept crossing the border. Down
to Minnesota up to Toronto, to Montreal
to attend school. Down to Minnesota
up to Assiniboia to meet a survey crew.
Pardoning Charles Boulton. Executing
Tom Scott. Down to Minnesota
up to Ottawa to sign the Parliamentary register.
Down to Montana. Up to Duck Lake, Batoche.
Guns sounded. The bullets
went back & forth.
Ya gotta choose, said the billbore man.

Instead, Louis prayed. Moved from house
to horse to house, praying. Moved
from chapel to chaps to chapel, praying.
Nothing was quite right. The Church of Rome.
The wild-west ambush. The Dominion Lands Act.
Statehood. The bullets went back & forth.
To & fro. He prayed.
He prayed for aboriginal rights,
for low tariffs, for provincial ownership
of natural resources, for a homeland
for the Metis, for amnesty, for funny money,
for a railway to Hudson's Bay,
for long skinny farms, for the Crow Rate.
His friend Lepine accordingly had a vision
of valleys and coulees with low houses
shaded by birch trees. Louis said hey,
that's just what we need, & so told Dumont
to go build more trenches & barricades
of birch logs. Then Louis prayed again.
When he was finished praying the bullets stopped
& three Mounties led him away to meet the General.

DREAMS OF DESERTION

Barry Dempster

The soldier sits facing
the China Sea, a can
of pears in his lap
overflowing with moon.
Rifle at his side, in
the sand, like a hand
stung with sleep.

Where in the night are
the targets, the teeth,
the hearts with curving
moons like clenched knuckles?
Where is the string of
fire stretching the
length of a man?

You could almost
brave the sea and
run. Pears and
rifle like a
boat with oar. The
sand stretches land
to land, unseen.

You grasp one
bit of moon,
like reaching
for a pear,
clasp knuckles
to rock, keep
dreaming.

You could walk on your
hands in the water,
a dead man facing
down. A pear, bloated,
swept to sea. A string
of rifles stretched
across the moon.

Where would they find you, those
enemies, this life, no
messages left in the sand,
just the imprint of a lost
body. Just the moon, as always
tangled, bobbing in the slightest
wave, like an empty can.

You could live again,
stand and face the endless
sea of sky, your hand
white against the moon, complete
surrender, your heart
stinging in the glare
of deserted dreams.

SEND ME A POSTCARD

Pier Giorgio Di Cicco

Friends shallowly enter through the rheum and
physics of the mind. They went here and there,
saw the great Salt Flats, imagined Jose Carnivale
shooting down the flats, saw that and more.

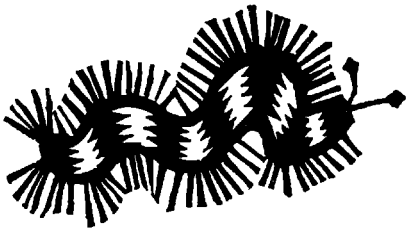
The way the world revolves, at half past eight,
is the most wonderful thing in the morning. The
imagination must give itself scope. You are dreaming this.
You dream the most appropriate things at odd times,
don't you, Harry? Yes; the wife stumbles in on two legs
to give me medicines, and take me out of fright.

And the missiles stand upright in hundreds of silos. It is
the beginning and the end of all we love; the moment
a friend says hello and a bomb explodes, while a flower is
gawking out of a bit of earth. Everything, simultaneously,
gets up in its sleep and closes the refrigerator door.

Who would want to brave things in the cold? How many
jackasses does it take to have lunch and report on the
latest Salt Talks?

We saw Peter Pan flying low on the land, and Popeye and
Daffy Duck crying like madmen in the comic book sky.

Love, I hold you like an arsenal, for I too have failed to
love. That much, the obvious, must bless us, if nothing
else, and now I say — aha! and did you like Wyoming?



MOON SHARKS

Mary Di Michele

Dark reduces our legs to slugs
as we try to make our way back
from the river. A long talk
to celebrate cosmologies
of wood, moss, fern and quick
clean trout. Pre-Copernican, our words
say that we have watched the sun
set. How little we understand
of each other, even here, close as twins
bobbing in the embryonic sac, night,
when only the larger heart is heard beating.

They say the dark is romantic
and the passionate are prone to drowning.
You can watch air thicken
as if the absence of light
makes molecules huddle
closer, liquefy.
The languid motion of our limbs
like walking through water,
as if we had lost our way
and floundered back into the river.
We strain to see and our vision
has the grainy texture of video.

Night was made for listening.
Because sound undulates
our ears are shaped like shells.
An ear, dismembered, is a strange gift,
the same basic structure as a shark:
cartilage and flesh,
full of biographies,
mangled parts.

We follow slowly and we need time.
I grasp for this man's hand out of what need?
like a flashlight in the dark?
His white pants, legs of the moon,
help us find our way.

In the flush of lunar light
we are that thin black line
the river rejects:
digestive tract of a shrimp.

Having lived so long with gills
we go back to our beds, a peculiar breed.
Soon the sun will rise like yesterday
and the atmosphere adopt its usual
gaseous state, only the grass a little wet
from a night underwater.

TWO POEMS

Gwladys Downes

SCRIPTS

i

Consider me a specialist
in impossible loves with a flourishing
sideline in visions — not my choice, blame
God's secretary, cantankerous clerk who arranges
actors' appointments, ensuring
continuity of theme and scene
in this goddam everlasting soap opera

take a simple frame, clearing the ground,
the sharpest picture, honed to reality,
ColorVision yes,
brilliance of sun and moon together
then darkness that folds, unfolds,
shutters the eyes

only later
when the rhythms close in, like pincers,
do you know, dream-walker drawn by a Maker's dream,
you are being written
into a script

ii

no guns, no spurting whales or flames,
banal, not stuff for drama
this sunlit image . . . ourselves
well-met in a parking lot
weighed down four hands at once
by pearl-white bags
you said
"Not now, lady, not till I put these down"

next day through glittering cars
we crossed, weighed down
by books in plastic bags pale as the dream,
to a gravel circle ringed
with surely mythical stones, red salvia
and a few exceedingly ordinary marigolds,
but no one had warned me the script
had already been changed
that the dialogue would be different . . .
shall I complain furiously to the secretary?
shall I protest "You have done this to me before,
written me out, too often?"
shall I fly straight to the top, shouting
"Tell God I came and no one answered?"

iii

I did not need such grief
burning out the green heart of summer,
surely my winter shelves
(ashes filtering to air through porous jars)
are burdened quite enough — my cellar hoard,
my rue, my rosary, though not another
hours I spent with thee dear heart, merely
the rough draft of a discarded script
laced with clichés

cover the screen,
tune out, turn off, o please
turn off the light
I go below to break my ghostly jars
praying for my Mother and the newly dead,
don a disguise, black holes for eyes
and feather cloak to dance
this ragged weeping

THE RETURN

My bargain with the goddess
did not include
your rising from the sea-bed . . .
o not Neptune's monster, merely the usual
miraculously restored hero last seen
mangled on the shore
roaring his way back now
to the family farm

I might have known she'd cheat
though the pact seemed proof against
great winds and the folly of waters
I would drink stone, eat silence
reflect another face in streams
the far side of despair, and she
would grant me air
with just enough of mind and shallow breath
for country walks defined
by barbed wire fences — I would be gentle
nodding to neighbours

you must be back . . .
someone has burned the hedges
broken the grace of sleep, and look!
around that corner
all my safely grazing sheep
lie by the headland,
calm throats savaged, slit.

WHY AND HOW AND WHY NOT AND WHAT IS THIS, ABOUT STARTING ANOTHER NOVEL...

Marian Engel

WHAT BEGAN AS AN IDEA many years ago, and must be written because it has not been forgotten, has begun to be a pain. The paper is in the typewriter, all the thinking — in the bath, at the jigsaw puzzles, walking along the street, in restaurants while pretending to read the *TLS* — has gone as far as it can. The characters have characters. The events are in place. The writing has to begin.

I have again to become an omnipotent two-year-old, capable of anything, especially flying. Not, of course, all the time. Just here and now, so I can begin. I'm lucky I have an ideal first line.

Old Superego doesn't like this: a first line isn't a book, you schmo. Old Superego doesn't like anything. Do I have to battle him to the ground before I can continue? And is he a him? He's probably a rotten old woman with iron-grey hair, like mine. I wouldn't have noticed that my hair was grey if old Superego hadn't said, "You think you're still a tiny blonde, you're a fat middle-aged woman with an iron-grey bob, the kind they won't wait on in the store, you can't write."

It always begins this way, but every time the voice is more vicious, it has more past to chew up and spit at me. You won't make any money (so, does Kroetsch?), you're not as good as Alice (I'm just as good for me, said she . . .), they'll come to the house to interview you and spend all their time asking you questions about Atwood (I won't answer them, they'll have to ask about me or go away; better still, not come). I shall have them take me to restaurants with extravagant views. In order for this to happen I shall have to buy a skirt, and I shall WEAR it. "I'm sorry, but I can't open my mouth except in Stop 33 . . ." so that in moments of humiliation, I, the flyer, shall have the sky.

First, write your book. It's been nagging for years, if it lasts for you, it will last for a reader.

But is it post-modernist? No. Is it post-post-modernist? No. My brain is addled, I mix up Foukine and Foucault and Fouquet (we shall all have a lovely time at

Stop 33, the sky will be full of us), I shall soon be 50 years, one is one's age, and this story demands craft, time, incident. Above all, it's a story.

It will get you in wrong with the feminists.

I was born to be in wrong with the feminists, who don't realize I invented them: but in narrative it is important to remember that *what is* is a subject; *what should be* is for fantasists and essayists. *What might be* is romance: we can play with that, too. But my primary excuse is that people who were frightened out of their skins by female relatives at an early age don't invent feminist empires. Why set up a government that will behead you?

If you are intending to write a serious novel, define what a serious novel is.

A novel that attempts to be serious attempts to describe a hypothetical situation in terms of its own hypothetical society, and in believable ways. I have to believe in the characters and they have to believe in me enough to give me the energy to describe their context.

But thirty years, child, you're taking 30 years to do it, and popping from town to town. . . .

It's a bummer, but there it is: look, I've been long-sighted all my life, even before I got bifocals and if I didn't have a sense of history before I studied with Hugh MacLennan and fought his (Cape Breton is not the thought-control centre for everyone), I have one now. If you take 30 years, you have to select very carefully, fill in with broad brushstrokes, and above all separate real time from fictional time in a way a reader anywhere can understand. Over that period of time things changed, particularly for women: the feminist point that this book will make, if it succeeds, is that liberation and responsibility are still all mixed up and my generation has been punished at both ends of the scale; first for wanting to marry or not wanting to marry; then for wanting to divorce or not wanting to divorce. And they've been punished economically as women always are. But this is getting ahead of myself because it's a novel about rivalry, not punishment.

THE LENGTH OF TIME I'm handling is going to require characters and scenes in the old-fashioned Dickensian way. It's easier to write a novel that covers only a short time-span: then you can use flashbacks and dreams. This one, which could also be written as a historical novel set in the nineteenth century though that would involve a tedious amount of description that already exists in Mrs. Moodie, will have to make use of the historical method; but there is no harm in that provided one is aware that one is working in the twentieth century and technical tools of another sort exist. It springs into my mind this moment, for instance, that I could read "La Jalousie" again with profit, make the narrative more abstract. Call them He, She-one, She-two, She-it.

But you can't do it, can you, your sensibility isn't really modern, you hark back?

I don't think I'll bother with that question, I'm going to have to try to make it go away: I want readers. I've had readers before and I like it; I have to write a narrative they can read. But you're right, in that my sensibility's always a bit behind, and my theory's rocky. I'm not as conservative as the *TLS* but I read less French than I used to, and I'm told that Lacan is a shiningly bad example to novelists. Besides I think the video-artists are filling that territory.

Excuses, excuses; this is an imitative novel; you're taking your history from Hugh MacLennan and your technique from Margaret Laurence.

It's my geography I'm taking from Hugh MacLennan: that theory of his that in Canada we have to map the country. I'm dealing with the difference in cultural sensibility — or maybe even garbage collection — in the two places. Laurence worries me more: my sub-plot scheme is like hers in *The Diviners*, and so are my songs: but utterly different in content. Perhaps at this middle-aged point in one's life a simple narrative line isn't enough to include all one has to say, and one opts for extras. Anyhow my main narrative line is about a search for Father or Fathering, and the sub-line deals with mother and the Pythoness: jeepers, there was a Python in *The Diviners*, wasn't there? but not a Pythoness. Maybe I'll cut the Pythoness.

You're just beginning. Maybe you'll cut everything.

I'll cut you, if you don't watch out: you're making me preachy. This matter of forebears is interesting, though. Interviewers always ask about influences and pick wrong. The early ones were, I think, the Brontë sisters, George Eliot, Conrad, and Woolf . . . superb examples I'm grateful to school and library for. But we mustn't forget that it all starts earlier than that. This morning I woke up thinking about two books called *The Far Distant Oxus* and *Oxus in Summer*, glosses on *Swallows and Amazons* written by Whitelock and Hull, I think. I don't suppose the books appealed to many children because they aren't on the shelves now, but the chapter heads were all from Sohrab and Rustum, and they took a familiar piece of the north of England, renamed its landmarks according to Arnold, and made magic by adding a Mysterious Boy. For THIS story, it could have been an influence.

You're breaking your oldest rule: you say you won't talk about anything you write because then it won't be any good.

You may be right. The notes for *The Glassy Sea* were better than the book, and I published them in *Queen's Quarterly*: that didn't kill the book. I overworked it, pushed it too hard. BE NEAT is a motto that gets in my way. I try too hard. I round off too much. I did there, anyway.

But it's important in the course of a book to remember why you started out; otherwise you forget where you're headed. It gets fat and complex and you begin to keep fancy ideas and false chapter-starts. You can see that in Laurence Durrell

who has become more baroque with age — now HE was a big influence, the post-war person who taught us that the English novel could be beautiful, and not dull. When I lived in Cyprus I became dissatisfied with his vision; *Monodromos* is a comment on *Bitter Lemons*. I wasn't right: it isn't a better book; but if we're talking about forebears, there is someone. In some way I share his isolation; in another, his love of decoration. I'm not sure though, that I would dare to do his set-pieces. Perhaps they're not necessary here in a country where the landscape is too much talked about, but in this book the cities become huge, busy backdrops to very private action.

I wish I could find a little more romance in Toronto. I should start bicycling. The most magic places I've found are the alleys around Christie Pits in the snow, which give a sense of secret life. They're a kind of Kasbah.

That's going too far. Toronto is a good city to live in because it's not romantic.

You're right. And romance feeds on ignorance. If I knew what was in those sheds! Romantics wind up without pensions, though they still exist.

You seem to know what you want more than you did six months ago. But will you get it there?

The proof of the pudding is in the typing. Weeks, months, days. The proof of the seriousness of the content is in the narrative voice, and that's the problem here. I am not sure I have got it right. It is too casual, too quick. I must stop using contractions and informalities. There must be an air of pavanne, of sarabande.

You're thinking in terms of music because Durrell has already erected the quincunx you wanted for the garden.

Only a passing thought; there are lots of devices; you find them in old books. I want a voice of dignity and wonder; that is why I was reading Browne. And to prove I was old enough to do so. Magic is the thin high sound you get when the celestial violin is tuned exactly to the music of the spheres. When your history, geography, psychology, and human feeling combine with exactitude, that magic is possible; it's what I always strive for. Others do too, you can feel it in the good ones. It's why sex is important in a novel, because we know in this century that that is what good sex is about: getting it right at the right time and loving, too. So it does not really matter whether you are modern or post-modern, your work is a march of words across the paper . . . they are soldier ants, they have to build a house; it is up to the writer to decide what kind of house, and what design will prevail. My usual choice is to emphasize the elements, the details, and let the reader decide on the wholeness of the structure. I am trying for more, now. In *Bear*, I think I found "Less is more" but this is a more complicated story. It will be less loved, but say more.

Lives. I'm putting lives on paper. That one was Red Riding Hood. This one is Snow White and Rose Red. It's modern, and very moral, and very pretty, I

think, because I like decoration. I can get the violin to play if I'm very smart, if I spend enough time on the ringing plains of windy Troy, if I find Africa and her prodigies inside myself, if I polish my verbal surfaces and eschew self-indulgence (no roses, not a one): it's a lot of work. I got tired and closed off *The Glassy Sea*. I wonder if I will be able to keep up the pace; or if the plan is too complicated; if the Father will take over.

You see, what the outsider doesn't comprehend is that it's an adventure; one is not the first narrator; one is walking on thousands of graves trying to make something new, knowing perfectly well that the Old Ones have said it all, but hoping against hope that if contemporaneity can bump against the big eternities, there will be something special.

I am getting older and more conservative. I have lost my proud claim to be an experimenter. If I went to find my Foucault now a pipe would burst and I would never get back to it; there would be some other demand, I wouldn't get to the master. In me, however, there is a different master now. Time has done some work. We shall see if it is good or ill that has been produced, if impatience has been replaced by wisdom, and lack of energy replaced by richness. Anything could happen. I write because I have always written. I try again because I don't know what else to do. It is both a trial and a joy.

YES

Marya Fiamengo

Ah, yes, perhaps Beauty, is best
to sit temporary a guest
in a house on a hill
watch the round apple ripen fall
the silver acacia and the eucalyptus
lean into the sea
keep vigil with a friend over grief

Fade as old love
fades into letters
arrange conversation like chrysanthemums
in glass bowls
crystal commentaries brief reprieves
to walk yes to walk slowly
over the stone bridge toward final light.

THE COUNTRIES OF INVENTION

Timothy Findley

MOST WRITERS WRITE from a private place: a nation or a country in the mind, whose landscape and whose climate are made up of what has been seized and hoarded from the real world — *en passant.**

No one is static. Not even dead, are we static. Stillness is something in the mind and nothing more: a part of forward movement. After death, decay and remembrance keep on moving us forward — who knows where? — but certainly the living, by digging in the earth, can make a guess. And anyone who reads or listens or watches is perfectly aware of the dead who keep our company. This is because we have given them a place in the countries of our invention.

We are never still. If you live by the side of the road, as I do, you are very much awake to this fact (and, sometimes, awakened by it), since every time the shadows move it means that someone is passing. And my garden, my wall, my house, and the cat asleep on the roof will all become images fixed in someone's mind — part of their private hoardings, their collection — because they have come this way seeking passage.

I, too, pass. It is only natural: making my own collection, lifting my images from here and there — vistas, faces, gestures, accidents — carrying them forward with me, letting them rattle round my brain, my innards until they have settled themselves, either as landmarks or as residents. I am a travelling country of invention. A roadshow.

"Pay attention."

Thornton Wilder used to say that; "pay attention," if he caught you looking at the pavement, trying to avoid the cracks. "There's nothing down there but your feet, Findley. Look around you; it's much more interesting."

Yes — and he was right. Thornton Wilder lived in fear of missing something — not in the gossipy sense (gossip is all too common knowledge) — but in the sense of missing something no one else had noticed. That bridge that fell into the chasm at San Luis Rey. . . . No one else had seen it falling. But he did. Paying attention to the landscape around him, it is more than likely Thornton Wilder — being a world traveller — saw the bridge falling (a ghost bridge only) into an

Austrian valley. Or, perhaps, it fell into the gorge at Crawford's Notch. Where it was first "seen" falling doesn't matter. All that matters is that, paying attention *en passant*, he caught a glimpse of it superimposed on a foreign landscape: foreign, at any rate, to the landscape where it ultimately fell. The fact is, it fell in Peru. But Thornton Wilder had never been anywhere near Peru; never — until he went there in his mind, equipped with the image of a bridge that had fallen through his imagination somewhere in Europe or New Hampshire. It may be the image was prompted by the space between two peaks; the awesome depth of a gorge or the width of a valley and Wilder had thought (because he was paying attention): *what a dreadful distance to fall that would be. What a fearful height that is and, if one had to walk there over a bridge. . . . And if the bridge fell, who would fall with it? Who would be fated to fall: or chosen . . .? And why?* In an instant, glimpsing his imaginary bridge as it spanned the real space between two heights, the basis for a classic novel was laid in place — and cemented.

Thornton Wilder's work comes very close to providing the perfect example of the countries of invention: Caesarean Rome in *The Ides of March*; eighteenth-century Peru in *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*; post-Platonic Greece in *The Woman of Andros*; the Ice Age and Noah's Flood in *The Skin of Our Teeth*; beyond the grave in *Our Town*. Wilder was no historian, in the academic sense; neither was he a time-traveller — yet, each of these places resonates with the sound of real voices and each of them is — at times alarmingly — alive with the textures of a life so vividly imagined that it *becomes* life. The countries of invention can be more real than any place we see and hear in our everyday lives: the ones we live outside of books and daydreams.

Everyone has memories: private memories and shared memories. One of the most poignant of human activities is the game that begins: "*do you remember . . .?*" And there is also the sharing of private memories, the game that begins: "*I remember. . . .*" Both of these games are vital to the theatre and playwrights have employed them since Euripedes first prompted Hecuba to recall the wonder of happiness as she surveys the ruin of Troy. And there is no more magical moment in the theatre than Justice Shallow's "*Jesu! The days we have seen. . . .*" The conjuring of memory, as pure device — its theatrical impact aside — is equal to the closing of the circle, whether the circle be of fate or clarity around the shape of a character.

The whole of Chekhov's impetus as a playwright seems to have sprung from a desire to set people loose in a minefield of memory and to see which one of them, if any, might survive it. His plays show us one unbroken line of men and women caught in this minefield — some of them stumbling and certain to perish; some of them gracefully waving aside the danger and stepping forth boldly into

the past while others are transfixed, unable to move with any kind of joy into the past and, thus, unable to conjure any sense of the future at all. Chekhov sees, perhaps most clearly of all the great playwrights, the importance that memory plays in our ability to survive. He knew that much of what anyone remembers is not "real": that memory itself is a country of invention. But he also knew it was a source of solace and the basis of all reconciliation. Memory provides a ground — however profusely mined it might be — on which we can face reality, accommodate reality and, possibly, even survive it. If only we would believe the best of what we recall about ourselves and others, there might then be some chance to make something real in the here and now that is an echo of that better person. But the countries of invention can be treacherous, and most of Chekhov's people are beguiled by memory and they go to live there forever. This was not pessimism on Chekhov's part. The fact is, he saw it all for precisely what it is: a great ironic comedy at the end of which we all, as does the old retainer Firs at the close to *The Cherry Orchard*, lie down in memory, to pass away — forgotten — forever.

Forgotten forever. This, of course, is everyone's fear: not to be one of those people chosen, *en passant*, to be hoarded in someone's memory; not to be a resident in someone else's country of invention. Marie-Claire Blais has said that every writer is *un témoin*: a witness. One of the things they witness and record is the cryptic passage of people and events that, otherwise, would gain no place in memory. This is not only because, by paying attention, they see what others fail to see but, also, because they record what others resist remembering. We resist remembering what we cannot understand — what we cannot cope with — what is ugly — what is dangerous to our self-esteem and our way of life. What we fail to see can range from falling bridges to the peach we dare not eat. Our survival may not depend on falling bridges and uneaten peaches, but it may very well depend on our being reminded of their existence: "J. ALFRED PRUFROCK THWARTS DESTINY BY PAUSING TO EXAMINE PEACH BEFORE SETTING FOOT ON THE BRIDGE AT SAN LUIS REY!"

Paying attention pays off.

I WAS RECENTLY GIVEN the opportunity to reach back into the past in order to explore my beginnings as a writer. My publisher thought it was time to make a collection of my short fiction and this meant re-establishing contact with three decades of stories. The thing that struck me first was how consistent the images were: they had been gathered by a pack rat whose tastes and interests could be established just by running the eye over sentences written as far apart as 1956 and 1983. The country in my mind has a lot of distance in it,

but the distance can be covered by the sound of a banging screen door or the barking of a dog or the voice of someone calling: "you'll be late, if you don't hurry up!" Many of the people — the children and the men especially — turn up over and over again in white; the women wear the colour — blue, orange, red, & the darker shades of grey. Many of the people have the habit of shading their eyes — which implies a plethora of light. Certainly, there is endless heat: summer is the dominant season. All the roads are dusty and the rooms are filled with brass and copper lamps. I don't know why. Storms are important (the weather in my country is appalling) and they blow up from nowhere. People are terse with one another — mostly, that is, till one of them decides to talk for ten pages. Why? I don't know; I really don't know — and I'm not going to ask. I only point it out because it tells something. It shows something. It shows what one writer's eyes have been scanning for thirty and more years and it shows that he has been looking for something, whether he knew it or not (he didn't) and it shows that, *en passant*, he has made a collection of remarkable cohesion. It also shows what the writer's ears have been listening for — a particular tone of voice — perhaps a way of speaking — always for the sound of someone *trying* to say something. It has not just been the inability to communicate that caught his attention — but the inability to communicate through speech. And the noises! All those screen doors — plus a lot of falling chairs and the sound of voices rising in argument in a distant room. These people, places, noises — all these voices belong in one country; even though the territory spans from Ontario to Austria and from Montreal to the Bahamas, New York to Hollywood. The maps to the countries of invention might be collected one day as an exercise in the destruction of reason. How can so much sameness be so disparate?

There is nothing out of place in the countries of invention. This is their hallmark. The accidents, the mutilations, the deaths belong there alongside the people sitting behind the screens on their porches and the children playing in the tall grass and the rabbits giving birth on the lawn. There are no surprises in the countries of invention, but there is amazement and there is bewilderment at the behaviour of the inhabitants and the treachery of the climate. The real world is not like that. In the real world our lives are plagued by surprise and yet we are never amazed and, certainly, no one's behaviour bewilders us. We expect and even anticipate jeopardy in all its various shapes and perfidy in all its forms. In real life we are always saying: "*there, you see? I told you so.*" In the real world we are jaded — a nice old-fashioned word for a nice old-fashioned condition. But go and pick up someone else's world of invention and the odds are, the jade will fall away.

It is only in fiction, only in memory that our eagerness to be trusting is justified. This is one of fiction's — one of memory's and one of imagination's —

bravest functions. It is by these media we are urged towards hope and sanity; maybe even compassion.

Is memory a medium?

Yes. In every sense. By promising continuity, it gives the present certainty and it gives the future an odds-on chance of making an appearance in our lives. It also broadcasts and publishes its daily reminder of better times and lost causes. Memory is not only, in itself, a country of invention; it is also that country's *Time* and *Maclean's* and its six o'clock news.

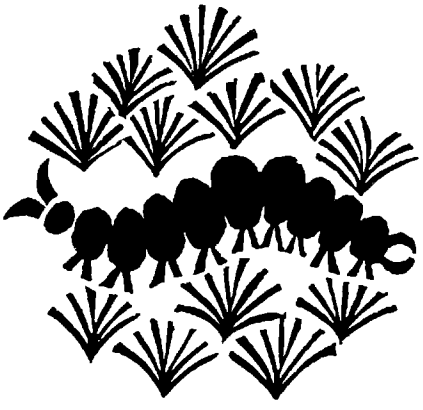
We cannot live in the countries of invention. We can only go there and come back. For those who choose to go and live there forever, who choose it as a *way* of life, there is always the grave danger of becoming merely reactionary. This is a dead end. The truth about the countries of invention is that everyone you put there is put there because they are posing questions. For the reactionary, the questions take on the heat of answers. For the visitor who writes — who goes there to write — the questions are all that matter. There are no answers: none. If there were, there would be no reality.

This brings us back to Thornton Wilder's *Bridge* — its imminent collapse and the deaths of those who walk upon it. And the question.

And the question.

Why?

The answer is not in Thornton Wilder's country of invention. The answer is in everyone who picks up *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* and who reads it through to the end.



NOTES TOWARD A SUPREME FICTION

Keath Fraser

I WAS BORN IN INDIA at the end of World War II. My mother had come to Calcutta in the hope of welcoming my father alive out of Burma where she believed the Japanese had interned him. They had. The Indian army brought him down in a truck to Rangoon from a hospital near Prome. Then, because of a mix-up, instead of his coffin being shipped to Calcutta, it ended up, after a ten-week voyage via Hong Kong (a slow change of holds here), in Vancouver. My mother hadn't realized he was dead until she received a cable at the American Consulate in Calcutta. Her husband, for reasons she later claimed were flimsy, had volunteered for a classified mission against the Japanese in Burma a few months before Truman dropped the Bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. As a pilot in the R.C.A.F. he knew how to parachute. He also happened to know some Japanese from working as a teen-ager on fishboats out of Steveston in the thirties. Perhaps he'd gone into the rain forest to broadcast false messages over the wireless to confound the Japs. But with his accent? My mother later told me he sounded like George Burns speaking Japanese. His being shot for having a comedian's accent isn't something I used to go around telling people in school about my posthumously decorated father. Accounting for him, and I very much wished him to be accounted for, required a degree of limpid fabrication.

Well. Most of this never happened at all.

What has happened, today as I sit down to write, is that the Nobel Prize for Literature has gone to the novelist William Golding. Listening to the Academy's somewhat clotted citation, "for his novels which with perspicuity of realistic narrative art and the diversity and the universality of myth illuminate the human condition in the world today," I am oddly reassured by the rhetoric. Somehow it exonerates the question-begging title I have borrowed in honour of this journal's silver anniversary. The rhetoric strenuously refuses to accept the demise of great fiction, even today, and attributes to the tattered novelist wandering out of the jungle in shock, carrying with him his book of life, a unique and valuable knowledge. A wry smile of satisfaction comes to the survivor's lips. He feels something of a hero. Wrought as it has been out of the guerilla warfare characteristic of his own century, his book has not after all been laid to rest on the grander battlefield of the nineteenth-century novel. War and peace, in all of their internecine, cul-

tural, and amorous manifestations, remain poles of "the human condition in the world today," and the fiction writer today, no matter how uncertain of his audience in a small country like Canada, nevertheless aspires to the same knowledge as his great predecessor. And what is this survivor's unique and valuable knowledge?

Elephant.

At least, coming out of the jungles of Ceylon, this was Lawrence's knowledge in the long poem he wrote by this title. His knowledge through and through is Elephant. We see Elephant, we smell Elephant, we mourn Elephant. The writer says that what we've done to the beast is what we've done to ourselves, crooking the knee to salaam the white man, the Prince, the pale and enervate ideal. A mountain of blood caparisoned at the neck with bells, tong-tong-tong, this is the human condition suggests Lawrence. He ends up wishing *he* were in the pagoda, instead of the visiting wisp of English royalty, for his own supremacy seems to arise from the knowledge that *his* fiction, *his* ideal, is likelier to animate the disappointed people parading past. The assurance is unmistakable. Lesser writers would have said less — and if less sprawlingly, neither with so daring a knowledge. Who of these would not also have toned down the Horse, Ursula's "Lightning of knowledge," at the end of *The Rainbow*, indeed much of the vaulting fiction that precedes it, and ended up with another book? Dickens, Hardy, Melville, Faulkner: these are not perfect novelists, but they are inarguably supreme. What, if it isn't Elephant, is this supremacy founded on?

In Canada we continue to believe we live in a large country, and that this largeness, this landscape, not only defines us but must surely one day account for greatness. Perhaps it will. But not I suspect before an awareness of City begins to refine this accepted definition, and our fiction enables us to see more completely. Man in relation to his environment is only half a vision if there's a failure to understand environment as both Wilderness *and* City: animate as well as inanimate existence, multitudinous as well as reductive. By City I mean a jungle no less various than Wilderness, for the beast it contains is the soul of the culture. Urban and Rural are merely shadows of this fuller, and necessary vision.

Our literary past, we know, has included the smallness of T. E. Hulme's vision, roused in 1906, when this visiting Englishman and failed philosopher noticed that "The first time [he] ever felt the necessity or inevitableness of verse, was in the desire to reproduce the peculiar quality of feeling which is induced by the flat spaces and wide horizons of the virgin prairie of Western Canada." The sort of laconic poems he began to write stimulated Pound who founded Imagism. (I always think of the last three lines of Hulme's little poem, "The Embankment," as Canada's dubious contribution to Modernism.) The odd feeling Hulme got from the prairies was of a "chasm" between himself and God, "the fright of the

mind before the unknown." Interestingly, his response was to return to the City (Brussels) and study more philosophy.

Less familiar is the journey into western Canada three years earlier by another would-be poet, a failed reporter, from New York City. Like Hulme he was trying to find himself, but instead of stopping on the prairies he came farther west, for a month of hunting in the B.C. Rockies. The importance of this journey on his next fifty years is evident not only in the frequency with which he spoke of it to his daughter in the weeks before he died, but also, I believe, in his poetry. Like Hulme, Wallace Stevens discerned the tension between Wilderness and City, and an entry in his diary from the summer of 1903 shows this tension becoming part of his imagination.

> There are certain areas of spruce and fir in the forests that take on the appearance of everglades. They are filled with a brownish gloom, still, mysterious. Here the city heart would emit a lyric cry if a bird sang. But we have no music here. The wells of song would freeze overnight.
>
> Lying in one's tent, looking out at the sky, one's thoughts revert to New York: to the trains stopping at the L stations, to the sinuous females, to the male rubbish, to the clerks and stenographers and conductors and Jews, to my friend the footman in front of Wanamakers, to Miss Dunning's steak, to Siegel and his cigars.
>
> Here come the ants — heads, feet and bellies.

The poles of Stevens' thought became many, and here we can notice the seeds of his interest in North and South, Cold and Tropical, Familiar and Exotic, Wilderness and City. What we also notice is the precise and natural way his mind transmogrifies what it sees into omniscient memory. There's a quality of wonder about such looking, crucial to artists, which I want to return to. Stevens, we know, returned to New York City; indeed living elsewhere he spent the rest of his life returning to New York City, and he evolved slowly into a poet. In the spring of 1904, now away from the Wilderness, he wrote of "how utterly we have forsaken the Earth, in the sense of excluding it from our thoughts. . . . The rivers still roar, the mountains still crash, the winds still shatter. Man is an affair of cities." Stevens seemed to be dedicating himself to revealing what he called the giant's face at the window, to understanding the proper association of Wilderness and City, for even man's "gardens & orchards & fields are mere scrapings," he concluded, in the face of this Gulliver. Over forty years later in *Transport to Summer* he published his greatest poem whose title I've borrowed for these notes. His poem is the distillation of a lifetime's thought about the nature of poetry (It Must Be Abstract, he wrote, It Must Change, It Must Give Pleasure). Unwisely, perhaps, I should like now in my thirties to offer no less didactically than Stevens in his sixties my own, rather dissimilar subtitles in search of the elusive Elephant Stevens glimpsed in this country eighty years ago.

It Must Be Autobiographical

I WAS BORN FACING WEST, in Perth. This was the stepping-off city of the world, according to my mother, who along with my father had gone there by freighter from Colombo, where they'd encountered each other after his release from the Japanese in Singapore. He was English, she American. A few months before the war they'd met in London where my mother went in 1939 to find out if she could get an entry into Wimbledon. (In San Francisco she was City Open Champion.) She ended up instead with an invitation from my father to keep in touch. He lived in Chelsea. They exchanged letters. The war intervened and he forgot her. Her later voyage to Colombo on the chance of meeting up with him again was a westward act of love, and a sudden begetting. In Perth they had sun and no winter, regretted this at last, and moved to the world's second stepping-off city, as my mother called it, Vancouver.

Most of this never happened at all.

What then is its use, this failing to understand the conventions of expository writing, this failing to account for parents, this being arch with metaphor?

Suppose you were to write a travel book full of lies; or perhaps a novel that was libellously true. In the first instance, if discovered, you would be called an impostor; in the second, possibly called into court. The travel writer could do well not to count on sales, since no one trusts a liar. Depending on his libel, the novelist might sell out and be reprinted. In his case we have someone pretending to tell lies, and in the traveller's case someone pretending to tell the truth. It's quickly evident who is more admired and read: the one with the smaller imagination, in my example the novelist. But reverse the situation, return it to the conventions of genre, and you end up with the travel writer's reputation restored. His stock is back up. And the novelist? With no libellous *roman à clef* to sell, he should probably forget about money, especially if it's his first or even third novel.

The imagination is distrusted. As readers of fiction we may all be guilty at one time or another of wondering how much of what he writes "happened" to the author. The question is on the tongue of every talk-show host who has ever interviewed a novelist. Built into this naïve question is the underlying assumption that form and content are separable. This assumption leads to such meaningless, unspoken questions as How much credit should I give this writer for "making up" what he's written? How interesting is this writer, really? The question of autobiography is a fundamental one because readers, once out of childhood, do not take so easily to made-up worlds. They want their fiction rooted in a reality they recognize and can "learn" from. (Melville's English publisher had to be convinced that the travels in the South Seas related by Melville in his first novel

Typee had actually happened. At least John Murray published the book. An American firm rejected it because it seemed "impossible that it could be true"!)

It should be clear that I am attacking the naïve view of autobiography that pervades even our more critical thinking. Fiction of any quality above the level of Harlequin Romance and Potboiler *must be autobiographical by its very nature.* This is to say that writing fiction is an act inseparable from the mind that conceives it. The act of imagining is a real event. It happens. It happens to the author, and it happens to reveal his quality of mind, depth of vision, deftness of touch. (If I record the image of being born in a story, what is the difference between my memory of the image and my memory of the event that took place in Lima?) Fiction when it is true is idiosyncratic, and when it is supreme, profoundly idiosyncratic. It's unique. It particularizes and generalizes concurrently. Its knowledge is Elephant. It is a continuous attempt to account for the author's sense of both man alone in the world and man in society; of what it is to suffer long and to experience oases of joy. (It differs from non-fiction in a way worth returning briefly to later.)

By autobiographical fiction I do not mean fiction written in the first person any more than in the second or third. Neither do I mean a reminiscent style set in the past any less than a dramatic one set in the present. Each of these types can be just as self-regarding, self-indulgent, self-justifying as another, and therefore false, or at least stuck in adolescence. (I wouldn't, as Eliot evidently did, claim there's *necessarily* something suspect about writers who write best about childhood, so long as there is a perceived evolution from rawness to worldliness, from Wilderness to City.) The supremacy of fiction depends first and fundamentally on the thoroughness of its autobiographical voice. Hence the meaninglessness of such remarks as these in one of our national magazines: ". . . in his second novel, *Lusts*, Blaise begins to push the boundaries of his fiction beyond the autobiographical" — when a few lines later we read, ". . . if I'd been handed a page of this book without identification I'd have immediately recognized the Clark Blaise voice." Can you have it both ways? Potboilers and Harlequins are cynical and voiceless works because the author sets himself up (especially if he's only writing for money) as a mind apart from its product, instead of one *engaged in argument with itself.* No fiction worth writing has ever been undertaken, it seems to me, without the writer's doubting his ability to complete it in the way he dares hope. Every completed story or novel should be a miracle, at least to its author, if it has any chance at all of conveying the wonder of its being alive.

It Must Subvert

MY MOTHER IS WATCHING a biography of Bette Davis on *60 Minutes*. When it's over my father switches channels to the middle of a documentary on Bolivian tin miners. Two miners aged thirty-two and twenty-five are dying of T.B. contracted in the mine. The younger man's in pain in hospital. When he can't afford the bed any longer he goes home, back to the mine. There's a light on his helmet, lights on all the helmets, slipping deeper by tram into the South American mountain. "This is the price of your tin can," says the narrator. We watch an impoverished family trailing after a casket, round brown faces empty of expression. Before his death the father brought home two dollars a day. "Now the family has to move out of its company-owned slum," the narrator says. Unionize? Last time the miners tried that the army shot dozens. Increase the price of tin cans? "Here *we're* the threat," the narrator tells us. "We'll just turn to more aluminum and plastic." This poverty's a cycle. The average miner dies at thirty-three. At seventy-two Bette Davis in California is thinking of making a comeback. "Her spunk really seemed spunky," my mother says to my father, "till you changed channels." My father looks moved too. He says we'll do exactly nothing for Bolivian tin miners, Cambodian refugees, starving Somalians. "What begins at home anyway?" he asks. My mother says, "What ends?" She picks absently at the hole in her sleeve. Of the three virtues, among those we had any chance of practising when I was young, ours was always Hope.

When we remember our parents they are seldom revolutionaries. It is the same with novels. Thinking of English and American fiction, say, we notice that innovation has never prospered when form was in excess of content, as form often is today in what we sometimes call "experimental" fiction. True innovation is inseparable from content. And the content of Supreme Fiction is subversive. I am talking about fiction that overturns expectation by juxtaposition, nexus, dislocation. I am talking about fiction that aspires to an understanding of cultural anorexy; fiction that creates the complexity capable of engaging our imaginations; fiction capable of perceiving the many ways that our received culture, for all its splendours of cohesion, for all our diplomacy, is suffering from edema of the soul. It's too easy to accept the belief that the great themes are now in the keeping of dissident writers in totalitarian countries, and thereby to fall into a decadence of technical obsession. For us it may be salutary to remember that the valuable writer in St. Augustine isn't the one of *The City of God*, but of his more earthly City in *Confessions*.

By overthrowing the predictable, which must always be boredom itself, fiction will offer fresh ways of seeing the relationships between people. No less the rela-

tionship between a man and woman as the one between cultures. Cries for technical subversion, which ignore the figures of life, are merely rhetorical. The lament over technical old-fashionedness in fiction is usually an indulgence of magpie jotters of isms and withinisms. Such jotters, who confuse fashion with innovation, seek a hearing (why so often from within universities?) not a vision. Elephant isn't one of their critical terms. They forget that a truly subversive mind, as the title of one of Stevens' poems has it, is "A Weak Mind in the Mountains" — in the Wilderness, where "The wind of Iceland and / The wind of Ceylon" are what "grapple" for mindfulness. Not, manifestly, hot air.

The fiction I am arguing for aspires to wide appeal and thus to cliché. It wants to be used up by familiarity, swallowed up as idiom, gobbled up and digested as proverb. This is its hope. This is its subversion: the unexpected resulting in the unforgettable, worn-out smile of the *Mona Lisa*, the opening bars of Beethoven's *Fifth*, Hamlet's To Be speech. It's the task of succeeding generations of artists to refurbish traditional ways of seeing, to reinvigorate worn-out idioms, to subvert the familiar. The novelist's hope is to make his own unfamiliarity dangerously familiar to the generation that succeeds him.

> It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness. . . .
>
> Call me Ishmael.
>
> All happy families are alike but an unhappy family is unhappy after its own fashion.
>
> As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from uneasy dreams he found himself transformed in his bed into a gigantic insect.
>
> . . . and yes I said yes I will Yes.

If the skeleton of fiction is narrative, then fiction's flesh is a complex of nerves, brain cells, muscles, features, and senses. The interdependency of all these is taken for granted until the backbone, say, is dislocated, and the morality of the human condition becomes increasingly apparent, important. The figures of fiction, both fat and starving, stand in awe of the brooding face of death. The resulting juxtaposition is what transfixes us.

It Must Be Wonderful

By what in fiction are we redeemed if it isn't the writer's love of life, growing out of his awareness of death? No fiction will be supreme unless it is haunted by Death. This is another way of saying it must be haunted by

Time. We do not, as Julian Huxley argues, have memory because we are aware of civilization. We have it because we are always facing death.

Death in many forms. The kind of death affecting us least often is the death of people. Even for Charlotte Brontë, whose brother, sisters, and mother all died off like broom blossom, the fact of human death was only one death among many. She, like us, faced deaths of far less dramatic kinds: the death of holidays, the death of years, the death of seasons, the death of meals, the death of days, the death of dreams, the death of visits, the death of books, the death of flowers, the death of altruism, the death of smells, the death of enthusiasms, the death of silences. In fiction as in life an awareness of death is the measure of perspective. Maturity is having learned to appreciate the didactic nature of memory. Growing up in Death's brooding face, our imaginations are educated. This leads to compassion. It offers redemption. The more experiences we have, by which I mean simply the more we *notice* of the world, the more deaths we live through. It was patently wrong of Wittgenstein to say death is the experience we do not live through. Autobiographical (unlike Harlequin) fiction is full of death, death that is lived through, and it's in this way the novelist distinguishes himself from the historian. How to remember what he is looking at is the novelist's obsession. How to look at what he can't remember is the historian's. The perspective we value more, the perspective we *must* value more, is the novelist's. His memories are created in the face of their deaths.

In several of Wallace Stevens' early poems, writes Richard Ellmann in an essay, the poet insists "that without death, love could not exist." This is similar to saying that the way we look at something in the present is determined by how we have educated ourselves to see it simultaneously in the future. The subversion of the present is the inevitable consequence of possessing memory. What, for example, do we mean by Here and Now, and what if any are the moral, the cultural, implications of There and Then? (What is Selfishness exactly?) Our interest in fiction accrues in ratio to the wonder we feel it expressing of the Here and Now as an ideal. The supremacy of fiction resides in its capacity to inhibit Time.

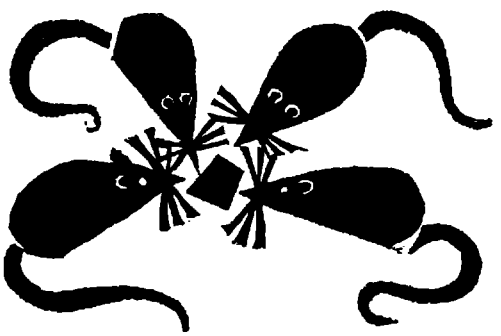
The Other Worldness of great fiction makes everything happen, or so it seems, for the writer's mandate isn't to change the world but to show that within the imagination, capable of evoking both the sublime and darkness together, exists a metaphor for God. The fiction we value more is inclusive rather than exclusive. It offers no answers except the order and multiplicity of its vision, the nuances of its humblest details, the miraculousness of its language. It offers a sense of Earth. But it offers more than this, for it is a benevolent and finally human God, interested in understanding the relations of man and nature in the broadest sense of man and man. This God, this imagination, this fiction is Wonderful, for there

is no getting through or around the authority of its vision and the intuitive logic of its means.

To be born without a sense of wonder, the supreme novelist tells us, is to die without knowledge. And this knowledge is finally metaphorical. "All knowledge," Kafka says in one of his stories, "the totality of all questions and all answers, is contained in the dog." Elephant, dog. The supreme writer enters his imagination, as Stevens tells us in "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction," and "The elephant / Breaches the darkness of Ceylon with blares." Stevens conceived of his theory and his fiction as inseparable. His metaphor became him. The hunger of the writer peering into the darkness is always such a becoming.

Dwelling simultaneously in Wilderness and City the writer has visions and revisions to account for his place in the world. Perhaps I was born the day my mother died, the day my father died, the day war ended. Who can say what matters more than the sheer accident of one's birth? Who can say the wonder of being alive is not the writer's entire theme? Elephant, he speaks, Elephant.

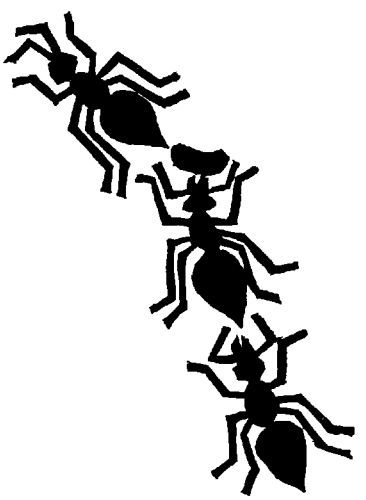
I was born.



STILL LIFE

Len Gasparini

Imagine a red-and-white-checkered cloth
on a wooden table, and on the table
a bottle of homemade wine, a dish of
black olives, bread, and Gorgonzola cheese.
Now try to imagine my octogenarian grandfather
ringing a bell as he pushes his handcart
through the streets of our neighborhood,
sharpening people's knives. Imagine him
returning home at noon to this still life,
and partaking of it with the gusto of an artist.



WHO ASKED ME TO BE A READER OF ENTRAILS?

Robert Gibbs

He asked me what the signs were of a late
spring a hot summer dearth
I said I could not tell though they
were all around I was sure

He asked me where I'd look Was there
an almanac of sorts or did we have our own
Old Indian I said there must be
one of each from what I'd heard

He asked if there were still new moons
fish days fasts on the drugstore
calendar Were the wormcasts heavier
than usual? The sun warped

one side or the other? Did the river
stink more pungently? The eels
slide out of it deliberately? Who
had laid the woodchuck on his side

in such a deep remission? Were the ravens
racketeering in glossier encopements? Why
did the sky blacken again without
intention? I had no answer and told him so

I who scarcely know my right hand from
my left Who asked me to be a reader
of entrails or unraveller of dreams?
He pointed to the earth He pointed to the sky

He called the moon bloody and so it was
He stopped on my threshold and would not
come in took sips of tea outside but refused
meat wasted As for me

what would I do when winter days came on?
I would keep my two ears warm unnip
my nose and muffle my feet I would walk
around my neighbourhood with no falls

POVERTY LINES

Kristjana Gunnars

Björg downstairs with long braids, must have been in her eighties & wore peysuföt on Sundays. I used to go down for a cup of coffee when I was nine & we lived on Thórsgata, the old town in Reykjavik, right under the school-cairn hill where the British barracks were during the war. They say you could see the rats crossing between barracks whenever you looked. Björg told me

when the Black Death came to Eyjafjördur, Helga from Grund stayed in the mountains until it was over. Looking over the district below, she claimed a heavy fog lay over the valley the whole time. In 1784, during the famine, Dinus & Thórlaug in Fnjóskadalur lost eleven of their sixteen children. It was hunger.

They say poverty is relative. Poverty is deprivation. An empty table. Empty hands. No curtains. The park here in Winnipeg is covered with leaves, maple I think, brown, orange. Some garbage blown over, old newspapers, cardboard cups. A man with white hair (later I know it's Pietr) on a bench wearing a big navy coat at least as old as the war. I can't tell his age because his face is buried in his lap.

Civil servants are trying to establish the presence of poverty by the use of income data. P. Trudeau claims you have to define the poverty line first. People get paid a great deal for this kind of work. There are many such lines

along the crib, bars of infant Dea's jail, & where the door should be, two by fours leaning into the other room, nails hanging loose, & along the floor, crooked lines smeared over. The child Fyo is a line as he leans on what was to have been a closet, hands behind his back, looking at nothing.

Björg was a grandmother to me at the time since I had none. She cooked for herself & old Magnús in a big pot, big apron, big smile, always ready with something to say. Some priest or other started the rumor of Hunger the cook. God has a cook who sweetens the food. His name is Hunger.

There are also lines across the window. In this tenement from the thirties they form a cross & the window sill is made out of apple boxes. The child Tanya couldn't be more than six, sitting right under the pane, arms folded over her chest. She's a patient girl. Most likely it's her grandma Dobrila, the thin one with very short hair behind the ears, spooning out noodle soup from a pot on the gas stove.

She reminds me of one of Björg's stories. Erlendur the rich invited Jón the poor to his feast. He was fond of the old man's gentleness & asked him after the meal whether he had ever tasted better food. Jón said yes he had. Erlendur surprised asked where was that? It was during the famine, Jón answered, when I licked my skin jacket & ate it dry.

The lines are also scribbled on walls & turn into graffiti. Deprivation. No sheets on the bed. No light bulbs. The infant Dea sleeps under Pietr's navy overcoat & there's no gas to cook the thanksgiving turkey with. The turkey was a gift. One of Fyo's ears is leaking, there's no money to take him to the Winnipeg clinic with. The mother Hephziba stands in the dark with sunken cheeks & a brown scarf over her head.

Once the famine in Vopnafjördur got so bad that the governor decided on a last resort. They herded all the poor into the mountains north of Heljardalur & left them to live or die. They began by throwing out lines for salmon in the river. Björg supposed all but one of them died. In the evenings I played cards with her & Magnús. They didn't have much, but there was a pack of cards, a suit of peysuföt & a candle. This was in the fifties, the barracks were torn down & everyone had a home by then.

They say you have to define a home first. Protection from the cold, privacy, sanitary facilities. There are home lines as well which make the place you live in not a home after all. Lines across the glass, what used to be called venetian blinds. The little girl Tanya is in the window looking after me. I'm leaving. She has eaten noodle soup & her grandma Dobrila's hands can be seen on the other side.

TWO POEMS

Ralph Gustafson

THE ROAD BY THE LAKE

Cars pass along the road.
The moon is caught in the branches of the birch
Bare of leaves, only the lower right arc
Thin as an edge is visible, the rest
Imagined so that the weight in the branches
Is heavy and is bent gold.

Over all the scene is a quiet
Despite the road's intrusion. It is an emotion
Not unusual if a lake is there
And hills, some few to contain the sadness,
The sadness of life (for life is sadness
Whether the city or the successful hills).

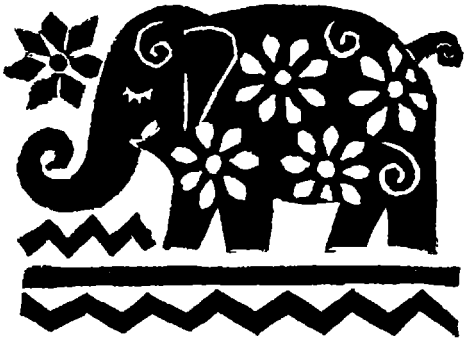
Melancholy is not unavoidable
But there are certain things: the certainness
Of what is heard; the commonness that changes
Name only. The mist that is come
Over the moon is an example of what
I mean — but that is not it:

The present commonness and the cost —
Great agreements spent on the trivial —
Men who speak of what is easy —
And who honour it and the force of violence —
O all who travel this lakeside road
And are under the diminished arc of this moon.

I would have common kindness and high art,
Not what all would understand
At once but could strive for, awakening
To wonder and achievement, and a certain honour
For those who only love —a quiet
Road beneath whatever moon.

AT THE ZOO

O for all the blind, sadness!
For all men, reminder, reminder,
Light is done, eyes do not see,
Girls walk by grace of others,
Hands reach out, rain falls
And leaves do not show silver, the eyelid
In its workings clears nothing.
Praise, those who count suns.
Children. Children. I think of children
Not used to it, a happening
Of birthdays felt only,
Neither red, nor yellow, nor white
Candles — except the heart convey it.
In that smelly yard, small
Hands discover the elephant, the entire
Enormous building, rumpled skin
Going up forever standing still,
The soft snuff dangerous but the moveable
Ears flopped with withdrawals not really.
I watch the stupendous information.
Elephant is said to be there.



LOCAL CULTURE AND THE NATIONAL WILL

Don Gutteridge

ONE OF THE THINGS THAT MAKES any discussion of local and national culture difficult is the elusiveness of the terms themselves, and in the face of such difficulty a tendency to simplify complex and evolving phenomena. As a writer of poems and novels who has spent some part of twenty-five years in exploring the extremes of the national and the local (Louis Riel and my own grandfathers, Nootka Sound and Point Edward), I have formed some opinions about each, about their nature and their value as culture. What follows is a sketch of these ideas, an argument if you like for the sort of book one rarely gets around to writing.

We begin by defining local culture, the root-flesh from which all subsequent culture is derived. Without it, nothing happens. In its radical form *local culture* (and by extension all culture) consists of those human products, communal states-of-mind and explicit and tacit communications whose principal purpose is to help establish an individual's place within the group. The group may be as small as a family or as large as a clan or a geographical region. What keeps it local and radical are these distinguishing features: the time and space, history and perspectives, legends and dialects that infuse the objects of culture — and whose general acceptance demarcates the existence of local culture — are *mutually shared* by members of the group. The amount of translation needed between the subject-matter or elementary form of the object and that understood by the "audience" will always be minimal. Theme will dominate variations, performance be valued over composition. This is the culture of tale, folk song, jig, communal quilt. Its well-springs are dream, collective memory, character, ideolect, love, existential terror. Its purposes are always clear-cut: the reinforcement of group and individual identity through coherence, bonding, and integration. Coherence through history — family, village, clan — actual and invented; bonding with the living members, the generations, the fantastic figures of legend; integration with these latter agents and with the exigencies of immediate space inhabited but not so easily mediated as time and history. Integration, of course, is the hope of both the group and the individual constituents. The need to belong — to be able to mediate between the existential objects we are born next to and the phantasma of our private-but-no-less-existential dream world — is particularly human and particularly hazardous.

To surrender utterly to the phenomenal datum means the death of dream, to unleash the incoherent energies of dream signals the end of social harmony. Hence integration may be at times too strong a word; perhaps accommodation better fits as both individuals and the collective strive to balance the forces propelling them. In this sense the social group, so ubiquitous throughout human history, is both the reason for, and the necessary condition to, the formation of a culture and its effects. Until very recently, local culture and the regional social group were close to being synonymous. Each tribe of us, as it were, was more than a mere sum of its cultural objects and habits; our culture was a *process* with renewable by-products; it was as much the *impulse to create* demonstrative and binding signs, symbols, and rites as it was to conserve the manifest stories, iconography, and drama that resulted therefrom. Often the impulse was collective, emphasizing group values; occasionally it was individuated to remind the group that language is after all a colloquy of separate voices speaking from the common dark. Looking back, as we often do, at the surviving objects of an extinct tribe and attempting to reconstruct its culture is a risky enterprise for many reasons, not the least of which is the fact that sagas, sculptures, runes — once removed from the *living context* which they inhabited and hence robbed of their unspoken aboriginal magic, their capacity to incite and spawn tacit patterns of connectiveness — are dead objects whose resuscitation can only be achieved in a present-day, far-removed context entrammelled by its own cultural necessities.

While dynamic and elementary, local culture in order to survive must strike a balance between past and present, between conservation and necessary growth. It lives constantly with the danger of ossification if the forms become overly rigid, if time is not merely slowed but stopped, if variations are seen to threaten the theme. The result is what we might call *static local culture*, the source of much gratuitous criticism aimed at regional craft traditions or artificially revived enterprises like totem-pole reconstruction or the disinterment of folk song collections. The latter phenomenon, however, ought to be viewed with sympathy for it is probably symptomatic of a deeper malaise. Many of our regions in Canada are too new, too polyglot, or barren of any continuous traditions, and so they import — in desperation and holus-bolus — an intact regional culture from somewhere else on the planet. The most egregious example of what I call *ersatz local culture* is the adoption of country music from Nashville by large segments of the rural population, many of whom once had a thriving local music. They appear to feel more at home with a foreign regional culture than with the mass cosmopolitan culture being served up to them by their betters. While pathetic in a way, such behaviour does point up the powerful need for communities to feel they have adopted *their own kind* of culture *for their own purposes* — identity and bonding. It helps explain why a local balladeer in Woodstock, Ontario, can sing the praises

of a hometown belle in flawless Tennessee twang. The long, arduous process of reintegrating and reinventing a genuine local tradition may indeed have begun. I find this sort of *aberrant local culture* painful but heartening.

THERE IS, HOWEVER, ANOTHER VARIATION of local culture which is perhaps the most significant one. Within thriving, genuine communities bound by cultural necessities, an artist rises from time to time who fashions individualistic works whose effects are too powerful, too true for the group to accommodate. Such an artist uses the very dialect, symbolism, and psychological geography of the place in order to speak (in part) directly to his group. Often he lives, creates, and remains in the community. I think of David Adams Richards or Greg Curnoe among many of our regional geniuses. Sometimes, however, the local community does not always fully appreciate the results, precisely because the perceived balance between individual and group identity has been tipped. The artists may go underground; sometimes they are adopted and lionized outside their region and move into exile or join a larger configuration of communities. But what has happened is irreversible: nurtured by the resident local culture or in opposition to its stasis, utilizing the mythology, iconography, and psychic history of the *locus*, an artist of extraordinary talent — a visionary with a command of craft who is driven to re-create the community through the imagination of one of its individuals — produces works of such power that they provide the basis for a new kind of culture itself: the transformational.

Transformational culture is often, even wilfully, confused with so-called "universal culture" and then set simplistically and deliberately against "local appeal" as if the two were antonyms in whose opposition lay some profound critical and anthropological insight. "Canadian writers will never be considered for the Nobel Prize until they start writing books about universal themes!" How often we have been compelled to listen to such nonsense in its various guises. When a work of transformational power is produced, it is grounded in the local, but that ground is thereby raised to the allegorical perspective. To the local "reader" the symbols will feel familiar but strange, their configurations novel and scary (I think of Winghamites coping with Alice Munro's stories or the valleyfolk puzzling over Buckler). Such works are addressed by the artist to himself and to anyone else who can translate, penetrate, and respond to the ideological surface. While instrumental music and abstract painting may "travel" more readily, literature, objective painting, folk song, and the plastic arts — where subject and formal elements are locally rooted — will travel only as far as their surface depictions, their referents, and the underlying *mythos* can be understood by any would-be responder

(all three factors are operative, not just the so-called "universal types" somehow visible beneath the interfering clutter of the surface).

Furthermore, transformational culture is likely to be the result of an accidental but wondrous integration, in the mind of an individual artist, of his own local impulse with all his worldly experience. The transformational artist — far from hibernating in the local bush — soaks up foreign impulses of all kinds but always drives them downward and inward to himself and his own space and time — reformulating the local mythology in terms that (1) illuminate, for those constituents who can stand it, the locale in fresh, frightening, abiding ways, (2) allegorize both its substance and dialect, its surface and depths, its mores and neuroses, and (3) revalue it through the individual imagination and waft it abroad to any of those other communities or individuals "out there." Regionally transformed such knowledge is, but never fully universal; that is a contradiction in terms. Those outside the immediate culture (region, province, country, continent) can respond to it only as far as its particular paradigms can be understood. All culture travels and has in the process to be translated. For example, to put the case crudely, what remains of *Hamlet* when translated into Russian or read in the original by a grade-twelve student in Regina on a snowy Saturday? Quite a lot, we think, though not all and certainly not the same everywhere. Even though it is not universal, *Hamlet* does travel. Indeed its record of successful travelling is what is fascinating from the perspective of cultural analysis. There is no official translation for a work that transformed its own culture and still has the potential to transform the culture of communities not yet realized. Like all products of local culture that rise to the level of the transformational, it was prompted by local historical circumstance and is even now moving through historical time and subject to its ruthless emendation. Each community who adopts it — each individual who opens his mind to it — must affect a new translation, and unless some parody of cultural activity is in vogue, must integrate it with his own genuinely developed experience. The idolatry often associated with the response to "great" foreign works is always a perversion of culture, as is much of the literary criticism which attempts to fix such works "once and for all time."

One is still willing to make an effort to read (i.e., translate) Donne's *Songs and Sonnets* because the locus of its feelings and "statements" lies in relationships we can still understand and be deeply moved by. Nonetheless, to deny that the conceits, ornamentation, and political references are not partly impedimental is both untenable and perverse. Donne's literary conventions, dialect, and politics are not our own, in particular or in general. It appears that no one is willing to admit this obvious cultural, one might even say anthropological, fact, for fear perhaps that the great artists of the past will either be instantly debated or automatically devalued *vis-à-vis* the local and contemporary. That is patently absurd. Our re-

sponse to art doesn't work that way. Many individuals, even communities, will be happy to respond to *Hamlet* despite the layers of translation necessary and even find it more rewarding than the latest Canadian melodrama downtown. The two kinds of response — to the foreign and the local — and the myriad variations in between are not mutually excluding. What one may be forgiven for thinking is that many teachers and cultural imperialists fear that if the illegitimately formulated mystique of the "great work" is allowed to deflate, their student/client responders will either reject the work out-of-hand or enter into a genuine, transformative and dangerous liaison with it.

IF ALL GENUINE WORKS OF CULTURE emanate through transformations from the local, what then can a *national culture* be? Given the size and multi-regional nature of most modern nation-states, it is not unfair to claim that there are few, if any, monolithic cultures at the level of the nation-as-a-whole. Certainly Canada fails to qualify on ethnic, linguistic, and geographical/historical grounds. However, if we define a genuine national culture as a multi-communal one, then we can see more clearly how local culture gets transformed to regional, provincial, and national configurations (not syntheses). In this latter view, a national culture would be characterized by the shared, non-threatening exchange of cultural experiences, values and artefacts — within a federated state like Canada — between the consenting member-groups. Ideally a set of affinitive local cultures would exchange cultural effects in order to allow the tension along the axis of individual/group or small-group/large group/foreign community to initiate positive responses, and to promote accommodation to, and integration of, new forms and new knowledge where risks are bearable and growth assured. In an ideal multi-communal culture, transformational artists would be encouraged to send their works abroad and in turn be open to influence from reciprocal artistic experiences. Here, too, the accidents of history and circumstance can be accepted and continually transformed into the vision of ourselves we need to survive.

Obviously Canada is not an exemplum of such a culture. Here, as in many other western nations, we are victims (or impressarios) of a *pseudo-national culture* which in its virulent forms breaks down the will of local cultures through deliberate social policy or the mindless intervention of modern technological systems that leave the regional community mesmerized, exhausted, or happily drugged. It would require another paper longer than this one to elaborate the complex ways in which the modern nation-state has adopted and deployed technology to disrupt and destroy the luxuriance of local culture (not to mention the intimidation and outright annihilation of transformational artists everywhere).

However, it may be sufficient here to point out that the main features of this technology (a true antonym for local culture) are these: (1) mass media and mass communication systems which allow bogus foreign culture to inundate the regions; (2) a consequent increase in the pace, volume, and repetition of alien "structures" (bogus or genuine) which induces anxiety, narcosis, or at best aberrant imitation; (3) an irresistible temptation to use these instruments to control, to propagandize, to purvey an "official" view of culture, or merely through neglect to allow a metropolitan culture (like Montreal or Toronto) to overwhelm. As we have noted, the growth of local culture and its transformation and dissemination require time, stability, trust, and the means to communicate its quiet news.

As a nation we have in Canada an ideal conglomeration of communities in which to foster a genuine national culture of the multi-communal type. So far we have remained relatively uninfected by the more totalitarian perversions of modern technology. We may ignore our own artists, but then we don't torture them either. We are a federated state and intractably regional. Nonetheless, technology as an instrumental system and as a way-of-thinking has arrived on these shores. Technology itself is inimical to the preservation of local culture. The effects of mass TV and radio — despite the well-meaning distortions of the CBC — are already apparent. The importation of ersatz foreign cultures is accelerating apace. Our national government is more and more seduced by the efficiencies of centralization; soon it may be hungry for a representative transcontinental pseudo-culture to peddle abroad. For the moment it seems content with province-bashing at the political level and at the cultural level — when it thinks of it at all — seems pleased with the collocation of frozen folk-cultures it piously labels "multi-cultural" — surely an unconscious parody of a multi-communal national culture wherein each of the regional groups (including of course ethnic communities) would have a living, developing *anima* of its own — fostering, tolerating, or flinging abroad transformational works to those mutually committed enclaves who, for these moments in time at least, have decided to try to become as capacious a community as their imaginations will allow.

Culture is both a transformational and a conserving phenomenon. Without it no community or nation long survives in any terms we would call human. Because it is local, psychological, and grounded in time, it cannot be manufactured. As a nation this country has been singularly blessed to be able to nurture local culture, encourage transformations within it, and absorb — if it is at all possible — the terrifying incursion of the technological into our lives. Some understanding of the imperatives of local culture and the shibboleths of cultural industrialism may help us in the critical years ahead. As a nation of federated communities we will also need more will and determination than we have shown thus far.

OU SONT LES MANTEAUX

Philippe Haeck

1

Une femme. Écrire commence souvent ainsi. Combien ai-je de manteaux pour nous garder du froid, éloigner la tristesse. Ton oreille est encore obstruée. J'ai connu sept années de joie, autant de détresse. Un homme. J'ai tant soif et désir que mon regard devient lointain. Quand le sommeil vient je murmure des airs de joie, j'embrasse mes genoux, rêve qu'au matin j'aurai trouvé le pas de l'amour.

Une femme pleure à chaque jour: sa maison est dans la sienne. Où sont passés l'éclat des visages, la douceur des mains.

Un homme sait les spirales de la fatigue, leur fureur. Il ne nomme pas Dieu: il est en paix au milieu de la cruauté de la tristesse. Mon corps est plein de trous qui veulent faire l'amour avec le vent. Un homme a deux manteaux, l'un vert, l'autre rouge; comment en donner un à celle qui pleure. Mon corps bardé de boucliers craint l'amour avec une femme.

2

Perdu dans une chambre d'hôtel, à travers les vitres sales, un ciel sali de nuages informes. Il ouvre au hasard, il a peur de s'endormir égaré: "Écoute-moi, et réponds-moi! J'erre ça et là dans mon chagrin et je m'agite." Personne n'ouvre les *Psaumes* qui entre dans cette chambre à un lit une télévision, le livre est neuf. L'homme se jette sur la phrase, met Dieu sur sa langue; il ne goûte rien, l'enfance dans de grandes églises remonte, il n'en pense rien. Perdu dans son chagrin il a froid, sa vie s'affale, la jeune femme de ses noces marche dans son esprit — les yeux secs du miroir pleurent. Qu'une jeune Sulamite vienne réchauffer ce qui lui reste de corps, à quoi bon à quoi noël sale noël. Le visage défait crie.

3

Un enfant parle bas, maman papa crient qu'ils ne s'entendent pas. Doucement par la porte de derrière l'enfant sort jouer avec ses

petites autos et sa crainte. Le mal se répand sur la nappe, chacun fuit de peur d'être emporté par les crayons, les aiguilles qui volent dans la pièce, flèches introjetées par toutes les peaux; les esprits enfletristent. Les manques à vivre des parents crient au travers des corps des enfants. "L'homme est le seul être vivant qui mente. Voilà ce qui rend si difficile à l'enfant l'adaptation à cette partie de son environnement."

4

Un homme au carrefour de la vie et de la mort, de l'amour et de la violence. Il est là depuis longtemps, il y a planté son lit, sa table de travail, quelquefois il se lève, vient pour s'engager dans une route, toujours la même. Visiblement c'est un homme excité, exténué, extrême. Lorsqu'il emboîte le pas au jeune homme nu qui vit avec la violence de la mort, il le suit de près, aimanté par son style; au moment où il va lui coller à la peau, il perd l'équilibre: le jeune homme continue sa marche avec un masque ironique. L'homme retourne à sa table de travail.

L'homme se sent vieux de buter sur des corps invisibles: une femme aux yeux révulsés, à la bouche crispée, son visage gonflé lui est familier; un curé de campagne à la parole nette: "nous sommes des pécheurs"; un petit garçon blond au baiser franc qui joue aux camions; des branches d'arbre, des couronnes d'épines; une panthère des neiges au milieu de ses préparatifs amoureux; une femme avec deux manteaux, l'un de vérité, l'autre de sang; deux médecins, l'un maigre, l'autre gros, avec des paroles d'un autre âge sur la folie de la croix, la beauté de la naissance; un glas immense sur un timbre-poste.

Après sept années l'homme plie sa table de travail. Il se demande s'il saura encore mettre sur ses épaules le manteau de l'abandon, manger le soleil commun, dormir dans la maison de l'amour de la vie.

5

Les frontières ne sont plus certaines entre un homme une femme, un adulte un enfant, la réalité la bonté. L'enfoui revient à l'inconnu qui vient. Un homme avec le goût de l'innocence au milieu de son discours demande: qui va m'enseigner la critique avec la bonté.

MERE SELF

David Helwig

I believe in one God the Father Almighty,
Maker of heaven and earth . . .

I HEAR THE WORDS from all around me. Above the altar, light shines through the stained-glass windows. In the central panel, the usual Christ — long hair, a beard, a conventionally handsome face — stands on a bank of clouds, his arms spread in invitation and blessing, a golden halo around his head. In the other panels, lilies and grapes, the dove and the cross. The eyes are lifted toward colour and light.

At the organ, invisible behind my back, stands my friend Bill, who brought me here. Much of the time he is blinded by the haemorrhage of retinal cells damaged by diabetes. Sometimes the bleeding stops and sight returns. He has been diabetic since he was a young man, and the disease assaults his body in a multitude of forms. Feet become infected, the infection spreads into the bone and blood poisoning rises up the leg, his body defended and assaulted by vast doses of antibiotics. Surgeons excise small bones from his feet. I have heard him preach on the nature of God's providence, where it is to be found in the face of ills that will not be cured.

The men and women of the choir who stand near me are decent, kind, respectable people. I have always loved to sing, and I love to sing here. Around me I hear their voices.

I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord
The Giver of Life . . .

The catch is, I don't.

Then what am I doing here, an unbeliever among believers, a detached observer at the solemnities of prayer and eucharist? Initially, I came because I was asked. Bill had been an organist at a number of churches, and I had a peripatetic career as guest soloist or additional voice in choirs from Napanee to Sharbot Lake. When he settled at St. James in Kingston, I settled with him. I'm at home in a church choir, joined my first when I was a boy soprano, and hymns were the first poetry I knew passionately and intimately.

Christ whose glory fills the skies,
Christ the true, the only light,
sun of righteousness, arise,
triumph o'er the shades of night.
Dayspring from on high, be near;
daystar in my heart appear.
(Charles Wesley)

My parents and grandparents sang in church choirs, and I have in my possession a hymn book given to my grandfather when he was a member of the male quartet at the Dovercourt Spiritualist Temple, where the liturgy included prayers for eccentric prophets like Swedenborg and special mention of the workers of the world.

I am doubly out of place here. My family tradition, on both sides, is the tradition of opposition to the established churches. My ancestors were German anabaptists and English non-conformists; I call myself an agnostic; I am singing in an Anglican church choir.

It's impossible to spend hours in a choir stall, reading the liturgy, hearing a variety of sermons, without being forced to contemplate the great religious questions and to define one's belief and unbelief. Jung, I'm told, says that after the age of forty, human beings become preoccupied with questions that can only be called religious. Perhaps it is that sea-change in myself that I am observing.

I'm not sure that I was ever a Christian, even as a child. My parents attended a United Church with some regularity, and the church was an accepted part of my life, but God was never, I think, more than a word. Once when I was very young, I asked my mother about God; I don't remember the question, but I do remember the answer.

"God," she said, "is inside you."

I remember her words, remember, even, the place in our Toronto home where she was standing. I don't recall just what I felt, but the moment is vivid enough that I must have been shaken by what she said. I felt, I suspect, invaded, as if I had been told I was the host of some powerful and mysterious parasite. Or perhaps felt a sense of guilt that God was there and I had never discovered him.

My mother was no theologian, but her explanation has its roots deep in the protestant tradition. From Bunyan to Kierkegaard, writers in that tradition portrayed man as a soul struggling in solitary terror with a driving and insatiable inner need. Perhaps that is only how I, with my puritan sensibility, naturally took her words. She might equally have meant that God was inside me as the source of all beauty and pleasure.

God, if he is inside you, is not God. He is conscience or inspiration, energy or wisdom. He is Freud's superego. He is the higher powers of the human mind.

The identification of the divine with the higher human powers is the core of the attitude called humanism, which had a certain vogue earlier in the twentieth century. After Hitler and Stalin, it seems dated and shallow. Better worship nothing than worship a part of ourselves.

Why worship at all? Why not simply do one's sensible best in a pragmatic and secular life?

There is, in most human beings, an impulse to praise, to honour, to reverence, that can't be fulfilled by taking as its object anything merely human. "Reverence rather than freedom is the matrix of human nobility," George Grant observes. Life without reverence is impoverished. We are left in the barren landscape of a cautious meliorism. Or the more terrifying one of absolute valueless freedom, articulate in the intellectual as nihilism, inarticulate in most people, a fearful emptiness underlying all the chatter

Most of us live in a day-to-day world of pragmatic judgments, valium the solution to our distress, domestic affection the highest form of love. The popularity of astrology, science fiction, parapsychology is the product of our hunger for mystery, for escape from the world of what works not too badly.

Without a view toward some transcendent object, thought tends to become imprisoned and circular; man's mind ponders only the products of man's mind. God is the necessary object of the highest contemplation, and the possibility of transcendence a step toward an escape from solipsism and banality. The Old Testament is full of stories of men and women forced to enlarge their understanding when confronted with the arbitrary acts of God. There is no explanation for these demands — the demand that Abraham sacrifice Isaac, say — and the stories are not moralized. David is not a good man, only a man intoxicated by the idea, the presence, of God.

Human judgments leave emptiness in their wake. At the end of *The Quiet American*, Graham Greene attributes to his narrator — not a Christian, though Greene certainly was at the time he wrote the book — the wish that there was someone to whom he could say he was sorry. Each of us performs life for some imaginary audience, carries on a dialogue with some imagined interlocutor, and life is shaped by the audience we play for. For many, the audience is friends, neighbours, business associates; the other voice is the voice of public opinion, and the dialogue will seldom rise above the level of banality. The stoic performs for some austere higher self, debates his life with his own right reason.

The higher the nature of the other in whose sight life is lived, the more profound the living. The book of Psalms is one of the most accessible and powerful books of the Bible because it is the record of a man in dialogue with a high God; fittingly enough the psalms are attributed to David, who danced before the Lord, leaping so nakedly, so wildly, that his wife thought it shameful.

Sing unto God, O ye kingdoms of the earth:
O sing praises unto the Lord, who rideth
in the high heavens which are of old.

All this may sound like an exercise in Christian apologetics, but nothing in life teaches us that we will get something only because we need it. The need for transcendence doesn't guarantee that a transcendent reality is real or accessible. Christianity offers a particular set of doctrines about the nature and availability of the divine, and for me, these doctrines challenge belief.

Men go to God when they are sorely placed,
pray him for succour, for his peace, for bread,
for mercy, for them sinning sick or dead.
All men do so in faith or unbelief.
(Dietrich Bonhoeffer, tr. W. H. Farquharson)

What is belief? What is it that those in the choir stalls around me possess that I lack?

We sometimes regard belief as a kind of knowing; what we believe is what we hold to be true, and for truth, most of us require evidence. Belief and unbelief meet in a debate on the nature of the evidence — on the one hand human life as we experience it, and on the other, the claims made in the gospels. Is Christianity; the question goes, a set of conclusions that concerned human beings can or must draw from this evidence?

At the other extreme, there is the insistence on faith as a leap in the dark. Pascal talks of it as a wager. If you are right, you win everything; if wrong, you lose nothing. Tertullian cried exultantly that he believed in the Christian revelation because it was absurd, impossible.

IT WAS P. K. PAGE, in answer to a question after a poetry reading, who made me aware of yet another way of understanding belief. The etymology of the word, she pointed out, links it to the same root as the word love. Belief is the attitude we offer to a vision of reality that we can love.

That's the definition of belief that I find most useful, and I am not a Christian because there are too many central doctrines that I do not love, the most important being the existence of a life after death. It's a doctrine that has always struck me as dishonourable to both man and god. Life has, on the whole, been good to me; to demand more would be insufferably greedy. But to suggest that an afterlife is some sort of consolation to those less lucky, the tortured child, the starving mother, is dishonourable to God. Yet if the doctrine doesn't address the world's injustices, it has no point. Pascal's wager is not as one-sided as he would

suggest. To believe on those terms is to abnegate human responsibility. The same objection can be made to Jung's suggestion that we ought to believe in an afterlife since it leads to sounder mental health in old age.

Most human beings cling to life, but the life they cling to is the life of the fallible, earthy, individual personality, and that is not, presumably, what the Christian afterlife offers. The self, perfected, is no longer the self.

The other crucial and related doctrines are the divinity of Christ and his resurrection. It would take an excessive scepticism to maintain that Jesus had no historical existence, but it is Northrop Frye — an ordained minister and presumably a Christian — who suggests that the Bible is concerned to conceal, not reveal, the historical Jesus, that what it provides is a narrative of a central metaphorical kind. The meaning of the Bible is found in its metaphors. The question of what actually happened isn't a relevant one.

Frye's intellectual tradition is that of Christian idealism, and his standard of truth is usually that of internal coherence. To say that Jesus was the Son of God means something within the whole redemptive pattern of the Biblical narrative. Truth, which for some of us is at least partly gained by an act of outward attentiveness, is gained, for Frye, by an act of inward attentiveness. The argument of *The Great Code* seems to me to be circular and agnostic. The resurrection becomes, not an event, but a necessary, though revolutionary, metaphor.

If one asks what, as a matter of fact, it means to call Jesus the Son of God, most answers fall into what a religious friend of mine once called Christolatry, the belief in Jesus as some kind of magician. It is not, I think, obscurantist, to prefer mystery to doctrine in such a case.

> *I tell my sons the stories of the gods,*
> *of Christ coming up out of the earth,*
> *Balder young and beautiful from the sea.*

Those lines come from the last page of *Atlantic Crossings*, the long poem in which I tried some of these themes dramatically. Obviously as metaphor, I don't find resurrection difficult. That there is something of love and goodness that does not die is a belief that does have a redemptive power. Still, any attempt to imagine resurrection and ascension within a quotidian existence (and Christianity would have it that these were real events that happened in a real world) is likely to founder in comedy. The ascension in particular — Jesus as rocket ship — is highly difficult except as metaphor. Similarly, any detailed attempt to imagine the eternal existence of particular human personalities is likely to provoke laughter. I heard of one woman who didn't believe in heaven because there wouldn't be room for everybody.

What makes life poignant and precise is its evanescence, its swiftness, its danger, the knowledge that each individual and each moment is unrepeatable.

The service moves on. I hear the soft drumming of murmured words as decent, well-meaning people kneel to beg forgiveness.

> *We acknowledge and confess our manifold sins and wickedness,*
> *Which we from time to time have committed,*
> *By thought word and deed,*
> *Against thy Divine Majesty.*

Sin: it's a word that many in our time find uncomfortable; how much is this an objection purely verbal? A poet's question: how much of belief is altered by a change in its form of expression? How much of the power of the liturgy is in its style? What does T. S. Eliot's Christianity share with Garner Ted Armstrong's?

The word "evil" is one I find accurate and useful, but I bridle at sin and its derivatives. Perhaps this is a symptom of modern sentimentality, but the word does have overtones of both complacency and melodrama. Most human beings are capable of great evil — witness Auschwitz, Treblinka, and the rest — but in the lives I observe, achievement and failure exist in a reasonable balance. A glance at history suggests that definitions of sin are many, varied, even contradictory.

And yet. There is something about the confessions in the liturgy that is refreshing. Of all the forms of prayer, confession comes most easily to my lips, and not because I think myself particularly wicked. Like any conscious human, I spend much of my life having to be the judge of my own actions. All of us must struggle with our own bias, our subjectivity and blindness. One function of confession is to produce a change of focus from the tangled foreground to the wide landscape beyond it. Such a change of focus, even if it is momentary, does open doors for the mind locked in the struggle to see and know itself. This is perhaps one of the functions of art as well, but the liturgy attempts it more directly, leading, once again, toward the possibility of escape from the mere self. If I call myself an agnostic, rather than an atheist, it is because I can't be at home in a world without mystery, without the possibility of meaning.

> *The idea of God is the most splendid single act of the creative human imagination . . . all his multiple facets and attributes correspond to some need and satisfy some deep desire in mankind.*
>
> (Katherine Anne Porter)

> *Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts,*
> *Heaven and earth are full of thy glory.*
> *Glory be to thee, O Lord Most High.*

Many years ago, I heard that wise rabbi, Emil Fackenheim, present the argument that agnosticism was an untenable position. His argument — an existentialist

one — was that we always act on the basis of some chosen assumption about reality. The moment we act, we no longer suspend judgment. We act as if God existed or as if God did not exist; we act as if life had meaning or as if it did not. The American novelist, John Updike, has said that he has no trouble repeating the words of the creed since what they finally express for him is that there is somewhere, somehow, a meaning to the world.

Fackenheim's argument has echoed in my mind for a long time. It's true, I suppose, that I often act as if life had some significance beyond what I give it by my own choices; but not always. The argument, of course, was presented by a devout Jew, whose religion has a multitude of laws of behaviour and a plethora of theological speculations, but no creed, unless one counts the simple and absolute statement of monotheism — "Hear, O Israel, the Lord thy God, the Lord is One." When challenged to explain himself, the God of Judaism says only "I am that I am."

The borderline between a reverent agnosticism and the belief in such a God is a thin one.

> *O Lamb of God, that takest away the sin of the world, have mercy upon us.*
>
> *O Lamb of God, that takest away the sin of the world, grant us thy peace.*

The communicants kneel to take the bread and wine. Observing, I have no way of knowing what it means to those at the communion rail. Do they break through, here or at some other moment, to a world drenched in light? I am moved by the commitment of worshippers past and present, from those who kneel here, to Bach dedicating each manuscript to the greater glory of God. I am touched and refreshed by the words and meaning of the liturgy, but I remain outside it all.

Bill announces the tune of the recessional hymn on the organ, and the choir rises. I rise with them, too self-willed to share more than four-part harmony. On the final verse of the hymn of exultation, the tempo is slower. The choir, beginning to leave, sings unison while the organ creates harmonies, counterpoints.

> *Wide as the world is thy command,*
> *vast as eternity thy love;*
> *firm as a rock thy truth shall stand,*
> *when rolling years shall cease to move.*

Exit, singing.

AVENUES OF RESEARCH SUGGESTED BY THE FLETCHERS CASTORIA BOX

Paul Hiebert

SOME YEARS AGO I RECEIVED from one of the smaller universities in Ontario a letter from a student telling me that he was doing post-graduate work in English and that he had chosen as the subject for his thesis "The Lesser Writers of Canada" and could I give him some biographical information. I recall at the time a great surge of sympathy for this student, knowing from my own experience how unspeakably dreary such theses can be, having at one time or another been reader of such theses on, of all things, Theology, English, and finally the one for which I felt least qualified, Chemistry. But the academic world is, if nothing else, at least wide and tolerant and slightly "bushed," as we say in the West.

What I have always felt about such theses is that they lacked human warmth. As knowledge, literate and formal, they attract nothing but dust. And perhaps it was because of this very deft sureness with which this naïve student had selected me as one of the "lesser" writers of Canada that my heart went out to him. The biographical information he had requested happened to be bare bones of a life singularly deficient in incident so I decided that I would call upon one of my favourite great-grandmothers who as a chair-stealer for one of the Czars of Russia and as a cabbage-picker for one of the Borsch festivals of that country, had endeared herself to her countrymen.

She was a remarkable woman, this great-grandmother of mine. From her I had inherited my own ability to steal chairs from the neighbours whenever my wife gave a garden party for her church group on the back lawn, or to regale my own relatives with a soup which all agreed "had body to it" though it may have lacked in quality what it made up in quantity of cabbage. But what I really wanted to show this student was that my literary roots lay deep in Manitoba, that I was a true native of the West, despite the fact that one of my forebears had been from Outer Mongolia, certainly a fine academic point and one which should lend distinction to his thesis.

I pointed out to this lad working for his Ph.D., that although I had a rather tenuous relationship with Louis Riel, the first Premier of Manitoba, my real

connection was through this great-grandmother. She had been in her girlhood a daughter of one of the lesser chieftains of Outer Mongolia, a princess in her own right, but had been captured by some of the Czar's Cassocks one day when she was out picking violets. Because of her surpassing beauty and recognizing the danger of keeping such a treasure in their own possession, the Cassocks immediately presented her to the Czar who adopted her at once as a member of his own household.

In the course of time, however, the Czar tired of her and using as an excuse the fact that she had been discovered by one of her rivals sitting on one of the royal chairs, she was banished to Siberia. (An interesting footnote could be inserted here in the thesis that chairs at that time in Russia were very scarce since it was taken for granted that all had to stand in the presence of The Little Father the Czar of all the Russias and that only those of royal blood were ever permitted to sit down at all.)

After being banished to Siberia, this great-grandmother of mine, a woman of great resolution, escaped from Siberia by making her way over the polar ice-cap into northern Manitoba where she was adopted by the Crees. She was well received by this northern Manitoba tribe and supported herself by giving lessons in Mongolian bead-work. And although she always spoke Cree with a strong Russian accent she was finally adopted as a member of the tribe and married to one of the lesser chieftains of The Birch branch, as distinguished from the other chief division who were known as The Beavers. (Sonship in The Birch family was considered to be something of an honour in that region.)

Of this great-grandfather of mine our family knows nothing beyond the fact that he was pure Cree and Son-of-a-Birch, but his name, if ever known, has long been forgotten. Our interests lay more in the one descendant of this union, a daughter, also very beautiful, whose Indian name, Wowie-wowie-and-howie (I think I have it right), translated into English meant "Sitting Duck."

It was Sitting Duck who was my grandmother, and although I never knew her personally she was very much a living figure in our family because she married one Oofus Angus MacAngus, a Hudson's Bay Company Factor, my grandfather, through whom I traced my deep roots in the land of this country and the prairies of Saskatchewan.

I pointed out furthermore that our family was very proud of having descended from one of the Hudson's Bay Company Factors despite the fact that although the Factors in those days were common enough they still socially represented the highest in the community and that in our own family we always referred to him as the Highest Common Factor, a very contrived pun which although representing the lowest form of humour, I thought this particular student might possibly use as a mild leavening agent in his thesis.

I never heard from this student again and I have an idea that in his pursuit of the lesser writers of Canada he was simply too successful in acquiring material — in numbers if nothing else. I would personally always have been pleased to think of my grandmother's memory gathering the dust of centuries in some university library "unhonored and unsung" as John Swivel, the Great Dean of the Saskatchewan School of Seven-and-a-Half, says of himself and his works, but Sitting Duck did at last leave to the Cree civilization a fairly respectable soup made of wild cabbage and prairie dill, by which she will always be remembered.

BUT THE POINT OF ALL THIS is to call attention to the splendid opportunity recently presented to the academic world of Western Canada for the introduction of life and warmth in the otherwise dry-as-dust Ph.D. Theses. The fortunate break in the binder-twine which for years had been holding together the Fletchers Castoria box containing the material of Sarah Binks' pre-P.R. period scattered so much rich historical data on the floor of the Binksian Museum and in such a manner that it had to be put back right away and could no longer be ignored. This was particularly true since it had to be separated from other material which had accumulated on the floor.

I should imagine that a small thesis of the M.A. calibre could result from a study of the unfinished efforts of Sarah and Mathilda to translate in all its completeness Schiller's "The Song of the Bell."

The great success of their combined efforts in the translation of Heine's "Du bist wie eine Blume" had led them to more ambitious ventures but "The Bell" had apparently proven to be too much for them. Moreover, though Sarah may have known something about love and flowers, she knew nothing about bell-casting with the result that her translation seems contrived and lacks the poetic flow of the original:

> Freshly plastered in the soil,
> Stands the casing, burned of lime —
> Today must the bell be burned —
> Fresh, My Hearties, be on time!
> From the forehead hot
> Sweat must run, must it not!
> Though the work the masters praise
> Blessings are up-top, always!

One can quote only fragments of such translations in an article such as this but it is obvious that in the Departments of Modern Languages such tit-bits would be more than welcome for academic discussion. Of more profound interest from the standpoint of scholarship would be a study of the work of Sarah Binks herself.

Why, it has often been asked, could a simple country girl like Sarah, without any great formal education, not only write about such a wide variety of subjects but write about subjects of which she had had no experience whatsoever yet with complete confidence? Why, for example, could she write so realistically about "Storm at Sea" with all its tragic consequences when she had never seen a body of water larger than Lake Waskana which in her day was much smaller and of which she could say without too great poetic licence, "I could spit acrost it." So too her visualization of the Roman occupation in Saskatchewan which research has since proved to have been not Roman but Ukrainian, can easily enough be explained by the confusion in the teacher's mind concerning British and Canadian history, both of which were at that time taught in the Saskatchewan schools. And her knowledge of the Indian and Mound builder, though at times faulty, is simply her poetic projection of what in fact was local lore. But her wider knowledge and her occasional use of exotic phrase and idiom can only be accounted for by the fact that Sarah was an inveterate reader and that everything printed upon which she could lay her hands was, to use a term from her biographer, "Grist for her mill."

Like many people who read a word again and again and never happen to hear it pronounced she would accent the word wrongly. We find, for example, in the Fletchers Castoria box a fragment concerning the weather in which our humidity is rhymed with pretty. Thus:

> Come cold and sleet we're sitting pretty,
> In rain and relative humidity.

The reverse could also be true. She had heard, for example, the word hurricane, pronounced as she thought "hurricale," and had treasured it as a good word in connection with the eternal feud against the Saskatchewan wind, and when the occasion finally arose to use the word she had used it in terms of derision:

> Despond not, though time be bale,
> And baleful be,
> Though winds blow stout — a hurricale,
> What's that, what's that to you and me!

Incidentally this verse can be used to exemplify Sarah's style of achieving her effects through repetition; "What's that, what's that," she states and this particular literary trick, though not as obvious or effective as that of "Boom, Boom, Boom," in the poetry of Baalam Bedfellow of the Saskatchewan School of Seven-and-a-Half, is in Sarah's hands nevertheless very effective.

> In my little book, in my little book,
> I write verses,
> Sometimes they don't rhyme —
> Curses!

This is the classic example, but one can find the same trick in "The Duck Hunt," and in the repetition in "I'm a genius, I'm a genius."

But it was Eaton's catalogue in particular which opened the vision of this simple and unspoiled country girl to the outside world. Sarah may have picked up the odd word of German from her association with Mathilda, but certainly never French. And yet we find her using in her description of the wedding dress such words as *petite* (rhymed with tight) and *chick* which was her version of the French *chic* and which she took from her experiences with the family chickens, to mean cute.

Quite apart from the Fletchers Castoria box so invitingly rich in material, more than one scholarly thesis for the Ph.D. could be written from a study of Sarah's already published works. Her influence upon the Saskatchewan School of Seven-and-a-Half who succeeded her, for example, the fact that Purge Potatok, D.P., takes the same attitude toward winter as did Sarah. Sarah had written after remarking on the discomforts of the season in terms of chilblains, dripping nose, and scratchy underwear that there still must lie

> though drifts conceal
> Some hidden good for man's descry,
> Some secret bounty for his weal,
> Which man should shovel out — or try

whereas Purge, the simple D.P. (Displaced Person) writing at the encouragement of the Saskatchewan government in the Ukrainian dialect in the hopes that he may do for Saskatchewan what William Henry Drummond once did for Quebec, says about Sarah's unshovelling of the province as "'Dis country good" and like Sarah expresses his opinion of winter which both regard as a mistake. The country may be good according to Purge, but he adds without any hesitation:

> Dis country good, I like him here,
> Potato crop can hardly lug her —
> But when at Christmas winter comes —
> De cold! Boy, she's one bugger!

Perhaps I am tying here a rather tenuous thread. Potatok's one-time home had been in southern Russia and Sarah was only one generation removed from South Dakota, but it would still make an interesting point in a thesis.

One can find many traits and tendencies in Sarah's works: her love of nature as exemplified in that sweet little poem in which the kindly sparrow "got behind the toad and shoved" or, in another case, her sympathy for the "helpless and infirm" worm in the apple whom she had thoughtlessly destroyed.

Above all for deep study and subject matter suitable for one thesis after another is Sarah's philosophy of life. I have no doubt that a parallel could be drawn

with the sombre outlook of the Great Dean of Western Literature, the late John Swivel, with his repeated emphasis upon the passing of time and the complete annihilation of all human achievement, not even excluding the "elevator's pride" which was always the glory of the prairie west. But one feels that in Swivel's case his resignation to the disappearance of all things was induced by his sale of life insurance followed by the writing of the In Memoriam poems with which he encouraged the later sale of tombstones which he felt complemented his sale of life insurance. But in the case of Sarah her inborn optimism continually shines through. Hers was, without ever becoming too explicit, an eternal philosophy of hope and one need only read her "Hymn to Rover" to find it expressed. Sarah might reflect upon her own demise as "Beneath this marble slab lies Sarah, a poetess though prematurely dead," but it is not a bitter or a despairing thought as in the case of Swivel. Swivel, buried according to his own wishes, on his father's farm and ploughed over to be one with the soil he loved, could say:

> No bricks outline his resting place,
> No rhubarb grows upon his grave —
> Harrow and plow alike efface
> His one-time gilded architrave —
> And save for gopher now and snearth,
> He lies unhonored and unsung
> Who sang of prairie sky and earth,
> And gave to prairie wind a tongue.

Whereas Sarah, despite her misgivings when, as she says, "This makes me scratch and ask, when shall my powers fade?" still has no doubt as to her place in literature. Literature, she declaims, "is mostly doleful choral, and grief the poet's steady stock in trade," but such expressed sentiments never seem to dampen her boundless optimism and her confidence in the future.

IT MIGHT BE INTERESTING to ask ourselves at this point why Sarah, on the occasion of her award of the Wheat Pool Medal, should have dedicated a poem of what appears at first sight to be one of frustration "To My Father, Jacob Binks." But the truth is that it is not a poem of frustration at all but of eternal hope.

One must remember that the wheat farmer, particularly in Sarah's time, was a perfectionist. No crop, regardless of how good, was the perfect crop; no crop ever reached the ideal. And Jacob Binks, perhaps even more than most, having left the fertile plains of South Dakota for the more hopeful ones of Saskatchewan, was

no exception. The perfect crop, the ideal crop, had always eluded him, and Sarah had been brought up from early childhood to hear her father's opinion of farming in general and his repeated assertion that he would quit it forever if at least *one* good crop would enable him to do so. Sarah herself may even have echoed these sentiments at times, but she was quite aware that both in the case of her father and herself the love of the land would never permit them to leave even if they were to starve. "To My Father, Jacob Binks," is an exposition of character which she shared, and her final lines of that splendid tribute to her father in which she says, "And if, perchance the crop is ever yielded, You'd never see the farmer for his dust," is not an expression of intent but of the eternal hope which springs in every human heart.

Poetry is undoubtedly Saskatchewan's highest contribution to Canadian culture, a fact which the government of that province was quick to recognize by the awards of the Order of Merit upon all the members of the Regina School of poets who met in Willowview Cemetery to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the death of Sarah Binks. (The Half-Order awarded to the unknown voice of the so-called "Muse" on the tape recorder, which was given so that they might be at least half a point up on the Group of Seven in Ontario, might in itself prove to be a rewarding subject for a Ph.D. thesis.) But the interesting thing about its poetry is that it seems to have been drifting into northern Manitoba even to the point where the native, or at least the near native, has been touched by it. Cultural drifts are not unknown in literature and they cannot be explained as easily as, for example, the introduction of the wild pumpkin into northern Manitoba by the casual matings of the snearth with the Manitoba magpie in his brief detour into that province on its return from the Arctic Circle where it has hibernated through the winter. (It often carries a small quantity of the seed of the Arctic pumpkin to sustain it on its journey back to Saskatchewan. There is the possibility for a thesis here.) Apparently it is all in fun — this brief mating of the snearth with the Manitoba magpie has so far resulted in no hybrids and beyond the interest it has drawn from bird-watchers it has attracted little attention, but when it comes to poetry we have more subtle and deep-rooted influence.

A case in point is a poem which just reached me from Pickerel Landing. It is not poetry of the highest quality but it is a big departure from the Hi, Yi, Yi, Yi, going on for hours like a musical evening on the CBC which is the type of lyricism the brave of Sarah's Skin Age could seldom surmount. The poem is entitled "Goosie" and was written by Mary Woodtick, one of the more advanced students of the local school at Pickerel Landing. In this poem Mary Woodtick pays tribute to the idyllic life of the north, but in addition renders her gratitude to a kindly government in meeting local needs as the occasion arises, in this case the introduction of electric power to promote the sale of vacuum cleaners:

GOOSIE

Up near Island Lake there lived a Cree girl whose name was Goosie,
She lived with a Scotch trapper in a little cabin which he always referred to as his wee hoosie,
It was made of spruce log and was ten by twelve and smelled sprucy.
Needless to say their little boy was called Brucie.
Well, one day Goosie was making a bannock for dinner,
She was feeling all in because she was going to have another baby which made her feel all-inner,
When an agent came to the door and said, "How would you like to buy for dis nice cabin a nice wacuum clinner?"
(Up in Island Lake they dont always speak very good grammer)
Well, at first Goosie didn't think circumstances would allow her
But she bought one anyway and now everybody in Island Lake is getting paid by the hour,
Because the Government is putting up tower after tower,
That's because they now feel there is a local demand for power.

"Goosie" is a charming thing and is but one example of the ever-growing forest of poetic writing in Saskatchewan. Its fibres extend into the School of Seven-and-a-Half which in turn has its cultural roots in Sarah. The connection is apparent; the fact that Goosie's cabin is specifically described as being ten by twelve and made of spruce logs is also characteristic of Sarah's tendency to be specific in her measurements without losing herself in poetic haze. She visualizes herself, for example, as lying "seven and a half feet deep" after her death, and it is the half foot which is significant. And again, she allows, even in speaking of the farmer's kingship, for the "odd" acres which the government of the day specified in its titles to the quarter section, to ensure itself against mistakes of the surveyors. In "Spreading Time" she details those necessary articles of farm life which are going to be overlooked and buried in snow throughout the winter: "the shovel, and the stone-boat, and the barrow." An outstanding example of Sarah's attention to detail occurs in "Little Papoose" where the Algonquin mother's concern for her daughter's evening meal is itemized: a pickle, bread and molasses, stewed dried apples, sardines, two cups of tea, fifteen crackers, and a double handful of saskatoons. Ample and generous, but given with methodical precision. So also the term "dodecahedral" which Sarah had heard somewhere, is used to describe the many-sidedness of the Indian character on the part of Moon-in-the-Eyes in contrast to the off-squareness of Patrick O'Connell.

One can cite many examples, but it is the business of the research student to dig them out. The rewards in prestige and scholarship are great and the opportunities presented by the Fletchers Castoria box should not be missed.

PALINODE

Daryl Hine

Orient yourself in time
Toward the prepossessing dawn.
Disenchanted by the past,
Turn your back forever on
The decadent and splendid West
And all your yesterdays in flame.

Tomorrow is a promised land
Inevitable as success
Following the era you
Wasted in the wilderness.
All the prophecies are true
And their fulfillment is at hand.

Tomorrow seemed a sinecure
Available by force or guile.
After your years of servitude
Endured beside the dirty Nile,
What were you able to secure
But exile, want, and solitude?

Disorient yourself away
From the disappointing East.
Forget the fair, unfortunate,
Fake embellishments of day,
Those phoney promises. The last
Disaster has not happened yet.

THE END OF EMMA

Hugh Hood

(for Louis Dudek)

LIKE EVERY OTHER FORM OF ACTION, narration finds its sources in the structure of being-as-such, and cannot violate that structure. It is axiomatic that grace builds upon nature and will not scar or obliterate it, nor reverse its pattern of growth. No matter how sweetly graced, a hollyhock never turns into a beaver or a Chevrolet. Some of us, of animistic tendency, hope and believe that when our cars get sick, if we leave them alone and avert our eyes, they will get better. This never happens.

Furthermore, later nature never violates or washes away earlier nature; the elephant resembles but is not the mastodon. Photography didn't drive out the painted portrait; indeed there are many situations in which a careful drawing is more acceptable than a photograph for the purpose of later study when the object is absent. A portrait painter may work from the presence of the sitter, or from pictures of the sitter, or from sketches of him. No mode of witness expels or expunges another valid mode, but some modes of witness have had effects assigned to them which it is impossible in nature for them to have. If you photograph an object from the front, you cannot get around behind it and photograph it from the rear simultaneously with the same camera; only the surface presented to the lens will be recorded on the film; this is a consequence of the three-dimensional location of physical objects, and the witnessing consciousness, in time. When a television camera pans slowly around an object, as much of that object disappears from the frame as is brought into it. You can't see all sides of a thing at the same time. That's a pity; we wish it were otherwise, but it is the case, and fact, we know, is the sum of "what is the case." It is a fact that none of us can see all around anything, and the fact has had immense and visible consequences for the plastic arts.

Even when all attempts to make a mimetic representation of the appearance of the visible world have been given up, as ostensibly in the work of Mondrian, or sometimes in Klee, or in the op-art movement or among the hard-edge painters, the action painters, or any other form of abstraction, the problem of viewpoint remains (as you wouldn't expect it to on the premises of abstractionism) and

bedevils both the painter and the onlooker. The most abstract design requires to be seen, and is ideally seen from a specific distance. There is no point in examining the work of Klee, for example, from a distance of sixty feet. Nor should you stand too close to those large liver-coloured Rothko panels in the Tate. The room those panels are in is a bit too small for them, as a matter of fact; they ought to be looked at from about thirty-five feet away to be seen at their best. Since you can't do that in their present exhibition room, you can't get a good look at them, as we say. Any work of plastic art, whether purely abstract, or purely representational, or somewhere in between, has a certain viewpoint from which it is best seen, because it is a "thing-to-be-seen." That is what a work of plastic art is, a "thing-to-be-seen."

In those works of Magritte which consist of four panels of equal dimensions arranged symmetrically on a single canvas, in which minute changes appear in the objects represented, from panel to panel, most of the function of the picture is to exploit this "being-seenness." Our eyes flick restlessly back and forth from one part of the canvas to another, trying to spot the man in the act of putting his pipe in his mouth, or the cloud beginning to float into the drawing-room, or the armchair mysteriously disappearing. The painting is about how we see, and how we draw inferences from what is seen. Magritte has made an intense study of the relation of consciousness to happenstance; the wit of his art consists in the exploitation of their discontinuity. Bonnard, more than any other painter of the century, has investigated the phenomenon of how it feels to see. That is what the extraordinary late work of the 1930's and 1940's concerns itself with. Those peculiar networks of diamond-or-lozenge-shaped forms which conceal themselves in Bonnard's designs, appear to have been for the painter a kind of visual shorthand, something like a geodesic grid, for the movement of the eye and the function of the optic nerve and our other equipment for seeing, as we apprehend space receding from consciousness. Perspective, in the later work of Bonnard, has nothing to do with line or geometrical form, as in the comparatively arid treatment of similar matters in Cezanne. Bonnard renders depth by colour relationships and their brilliant evocation of our blurred feeling-of-seeing; the picture is essentially a varying and deepening of perceived atmospheres, what is in the air, grasped by a viewer who is as nearly as possible in the picture. Of course Bonnard is too wise to paint the nose or the toes of this viewer somewhere along the edge of his two-dimensional space, for that would be to violate the nature of pictorial representation. All plastic art depends upon viewpoint and sight, sculpture as much, perhaps more, than painting.

Every sculpture is best seen from the viewpoint selected as the most favourable by the sculptor, usually the point from which he did most of the modelling of the form. In rendering, say, a human torso in three dimensions, the sculptor cannot

work on all sides of the form at once. He can see approximately two-fifths of the figure from any given standpoint, and he invariably selects, consciously or not, the best angle from which to approach the given plastic problem. It is remarkable how many works of sculpture betray immediately where the sculptor was standing when he felt most at ease with the form. Many, many sculptures have received very sketchy treatments of their "other side" or back parts. Most sculptors fudge the assholes of torsos. I know. I always check.

Similar, or perhaps strictly parallel, conditions prevail in all the other arts, indeed in every human activity. In music there is a perpetual question in the artist's mind about how much his listener can hear. Some listeners simply can't hear inner voices in music; some have no apprehension of rhythmic movement. Some are deaf to differences in timbre, but can notice changes in pitch or volume. Musicians spend their lives finding out what can be heard. Probably the most important development in European music, the gradual adoption of the tempered scale, enshrined and celebrated in Bach's great cycle of keyboard works, has caused generations of musicians with perfect pitch real discomfort, because of the way in which the various scales treat enharmonic sounds as *the same sound* for the purpose of easy modulation from one scale to another. They are not the same sound: C-flat in one scale may be several vibrations per second removed from B in an adjoining scale, which nevertheless treats the two tones as identical. If your ear is good enough, the failure of the two tones to coincide can cause genuine physical distress.

I remember trying to invoke a musical analogy in conversation with a veteran literary theorist. I put the idea forward that the novelist Iris Murdoch, by giving to certain minor characters very occasional lines of dialogue at different points in a long fiction, was able to suggest in the reader's mind a continuing impression of how those minor characters must behave when not onstage. The literary means is familiar enough; but when I said that this was strictly analogous to the way your thumb, say, or the little finger on your right hand, can strike very occasional notes in a keyboard piece by Bach, and that these notes then give rise to the continuing gestalt or impression of an "inner voice," I lost my hearer completely. This was because he simply never heard inner voices in music. What he heard was a uniform wash of sound, or at least that was what he reported to me when I asked him to describe his musical experience. My Murdoch/Bach analogy fell at once to the ground, which seems a pity because it is fundamentally accurate.

The composer is constantly thrown back upon the range of what can be heard by a representative cross-section of his potential audience. Mozart, writing to his father from Vienna, commented about his easy piano concertos, K413, K414, K415, that they were pieces which should find popularity amongst uninstructed listeners, "but there are things in them which will please the long-ears too." He

was able to write for distinct audiences, in the awareness that uninstructed listeners might with application find their way into the long-eared community. But he wrote no work which was scored for those dog-whistles inaudible to human ears. A work of music is always dependent upon what can be heard by somebody, connoisseur, fellow composer, the great public, and the composer is invariably faced with a series of decisions about what is audible and what is not. The most fundamental choice lies between the creation of a smooth seamless wash of sound, in which the listener is aware that there are individual parts, but cannot easily discriminate them, as in much late nineteenth-century orchestral writing, and the linear contrapuntal style of Bach or Haydn or (a much lesser artist) Reger. The options correspond roughly to the distinction between linear and painterly treatment of pictorial subjects originally proposed by Wolfflin and much exploited afterwards. It is a distinction which seems to correspond with the actual conditions of visibility and audibility. Paintings must submit themselves to the conditions of sight, music to those of sound.

LITERARY COMPOSITION IS SUBJECTED to strictly analogous conditions. In writing it is useless to attempt to realize the unrealizable, to tell the tale of the ineffable. Some happenings are simply inaccessible to literature: musical thought, perhaps metaphysical thought, sexual rapture, the interior world of conscience, private judgment. Poetry, fiction, and drama can deliver the seeable, audible, the recognizable, but not the private world of another, as we shall see.

This is because nature resists violation, and what is contrary to nature is contrary to art. For example, nobody can paint two hills without a hollow between them. If there is no valley between, there is only a single hill; I give a frivolous example intentionally, but I can provide others not so frivolous. You can't write a story about two persons who are indiscernible, whose bodies occupy the same space at the same time. For according to the principle of the identity of indiscernibles, if two beings were identical in every respect, they would be the same being. As it happens, I know of no attempt to write a story about two persons who are indiscernible in the philosophical sense, precisely because they would be a single person, and in nature even identical twins are different in many respects, always at least in one. There are stories about identical twins, and Siamese twins, and about children lying in the maternal womb, but none about twins who are coinstantiate, none about children who are their mothers.

Cloning is impossible, for if the most exact replica conceivable of some entity were to be produced, it would not have existed during the same period of time; it

would be much *younger.* My clone can never be born at the same moment as me, and even if only moments intervene our histories, our experiences, will be totally different. Tiny divergence at the outset leads to immense opposition in the end. Only consider family life!

Nor is it possible to write a story in which time runs forward, backward, and sideways, that is, with multiple modes of temporality. I know of stories with flashbacks, but as soon as a flashback takes place, time begins remorselessly to run in its familiar direction. There is that hilarious tale by Stephen Leacock, "The Retroactive Existence of Mr. Juggins," in which the unlucky Juggins grows younger and younger, to the point where, as Leacock admits, "he will back up clear through the Curtain of Existence and die, or be born, I don't know which to call it. Meanwhile he remains to me as one of the most illuminating allegories I have met." The story can only make its comic point against a background of temporality in which everybody but Juggins is getting older, as in fact we all are. We sure as hell aren't getting any younger, and if the fact is denied there will be no story and no comic point. Juggins is exactly an allegory of the fact that existence is not retroactive, and a subtly suggestive allegory at that, worthy of juxtaposition with the closing pages of *Le Temps retrouvé*, where related paradoxes are propounded. But of course time moves in all stories as it does in life. Story is vested in before/after relations, whether the most relentless work of literary realism, or the most ingenious fantasy of Borges or Nabokov, or the most tiresome "post-modernist" nonsense by Robert Kroetsch or somebody with similar opinions, in which time seems to stand still because of the intensely boring quality of the writing. Here the illusion of timelessness is not sought by Kroetsch, but comes unbidden and fatally, having nothing to do with the underpinnings of story.

A story then is necessarily a sequential relation about entities which obey the laws of nature, never, for example, violating the principle of non-contradiction. A few of the sillier deconstructionists have suggested recently that the law of non-contradiction is only a prejudice of the metaphysical tradition of the West, which ought, on the whole, to be repealed. "*A thing cannot both be, and not be, in the same way at the same time.*" Try to repeal that, and see what it gets you! It will buy you an atom of nonsense, a grain of perplexity, a hint of vertigo, and at length a soupçon of terror.

Certain literary laws follow hard upon an understanding of these fundamental truths about actuality. Nobody can take a bath for you. More generally, nobody can have your experience in life or art. No fiction writer, no matter how gifted, how richly endowed with sympathetic intuition, can do more than guess imaginatively at the inner truths of another person's experience, nor can any other artist or scientist do more. The writer who constructs literary contrivances which he proposes as likenesses of some other person's "stream of consciousness" or

"interior monologue" isn't doing what he believes himself to be doing, though he may be doing something extremely well. Nobody would give up Molly Bloom's soliloquy because Joyce wasn't doing what he pretended. What is present in that celebrated passage is a superbly poetic family history, never-sufficiently-to-be-praised, of what Molly and Poldy and Blazes and Rudy and Milly and the whole grand gang were doing over the previous decade, yes, yes, yes, but the only interior actuality delivered by the passage is that of James A. Joyce. "*Madame Bovary, c'est moi,*" admitted Flaubert. "*Madame Bloom, c'est toi, Jimmy.*"

It is an unshakeable axiom of human experience that no other being but God has direct access to the secret heart. My personal experience cannot be inspected by any commissar, by any interrogator or confessor. It is only given to me, and can only be witnessed and testified to by me. It would be useless for the interrogators to remove the top of my head to look inside to see what I'm thinking or feeling. All they might see would be a couple of pounds of squirming wet grey wormy stuff; they won't see me. Nobody can take a bath for me or make up my mind for me, or know what it feels like to be me, or judge my "motives," choices, and actions, except the Creator.

When this is understood, the desperate psychologism of the twentieth century dries up and blows away, the second gravest error of the time immediately preceding our own, say between 1870 and 1970, from the death of Charles Dickens to the end of the horrible 1960's. It was only in the 1970's that critics of narration began to notice that the distinction between the first and third person, workable and necessary in grammar, was illusory and false in narration, since any sentence in a narration is framed by the implied statement of the person telling the story, "I witnessed this." Narration is a testimony to witness before it is anything else. If, then, it succumbs to the psychologism of the age immediately preceding our own, it must either become autobiographical in form or pretend to an awareness which it cannot have, the awareness of "the psychological novel."

I REMEMBER WHEN I WAS IN COLLEGE around 1947, 1948, 1949, that many of my professors told me that the novel in English, during the course of its steady evolution through lower forms to higher, had advanced from the novel of Dickens to the novel of George Eliot and Henry James, a claim which struck me then, as it does now, as indefensible. "That can't be right," I told myself as I listened to these statements. It was so clearly a retrograde step from the work of Dickens to that of George Eliot and Henry James, so clearly an enfeeblement and a wasting of the power of the genre.

It's a step backwards and downwards from Dickens to Eliot and James. Think of it, the only writer in English worthy to be named beside Shakespeare, the creator of Todgers and Rosa Dartle and Miss Wade and the Circumlocution Office, the great Dickens, somehow or other to be placed below George Eliot and Henry James. Though I didn't know it, when I first listened to this nonsense in 1947, my professors were simply repeating the pieties of David Cecil's book on the Victorian novelists, in which he describes George Eliot as "the first modern novelist" because of her "acute psychological insight."

The same sort of person will praise Titian and Rembrandt for their "acute psychological insight," when the gift these painters have in common is the art of applying paint to canvas, or preparing underglazing, of the placement of the dot of Chinese white in the represented pupil of the eye. Neither would pretend to the least acuity of psychological insight.

Dickens was the first practising writer not in the secret to spot the female authorship of *Scenes From Clerical Life*, and he acknowledged the accomplishments of its author repeatedly in correspondence, in charming and honest compliment. He was to the end of his life unsparing in his admiration for the work of George Eliot; nothing he wrote about her suggests that comparison or rivalry between them was conceivable to him, and we do well to follow Dickens' example. You cannot compare oranges to potatoes with any profit. Neither George Eliot nor Henry James, nor Flaubert for that matter, possessed a tenth of the understanding of how fiction works, what its premises must be, of Dickens, nor did any of them produce anything which bears comparison with his best work, indeed his good average work. To put the matter clearly, there are no novels in any literature better than *Bleak House* and *Little Dorrit*, and at most half a dozen worthy to be mentioned in the same breath, in any literature. It was Dickens who effected a permanent change in mankind's notion of what a novel is, not Flaubert, not Henry James.

Tolstoi, Dostoievsky, Wilkie Collins, Henry James himself (in *The Princess Casamassima* and elsewhere), Proust, Conrad, Graham Greene, Faulkner, Mark Twain, P. G. Wodehouse, Stephen Leacock, Kingsley Amis, Evelyn Waugh, D. W. Griffith for the matter of that, all bear the stamp of Dickens in a hundred ways: the first great novelist of the urban underworld, the greatest literary portraitist of the criminal and aberrant in human life (from Bill Sikes to John Jasper), the unmatchable creator of scene and atmosphere, the superb imagist, the master of spoken dialogue, simply the greatest writer of comedy in western literature, and the subtlest writer of religious allegory in the English tongue. This is the novelist from whom it was considered that we must advance towards the work of George Eliot, "the first modern novelist."

George Eliot and Henry James and their celebrated examinations of "motive."

Around the year of Dickens' death in 1870, when George Eliot was preparing the excellent *Middlemarch* for publication, two beginning novelists were working towards their earliest genuinely novelistic conceptions, Henry James and Thomas Hardy. When Hardy's first major work appeared in 1874, *Far From the Madding Crowd*, Henry James reviewed it in the terms of sharp disapproval; he recognized the beneficent example of George Eliot in the dialogue scenes of rustics and yokels; the rest of the work he dismissed as vulgar and inconsequential. Later in life James would refer to Hardy as "the good little Thomas Hardy," wondering, in correspondence with R. L. Stevenson and others, how the clumsy Hardy managed to stumble upon his effects. This isn't a caricature of James' opinion: he put these views on paper himself, about the author of *The Woodlanders*, that intensely poetic, exquisitely realized evocation of charmed lives in that singular enchanted wood.

I have no wish to use against Henry James (whose work I admire immensely) any weapons not supplied by himself. This historian of fine consciences, upon whom nothing, he hoped, was lost, was in this instance losing everything. He could not apprehend what Hardy does in prose fiction that makes him as good a novelist as the English language has produced since the death of Dickens. Proust admired *The Woodlanders* almost excessively, and for these qualities which make us blink in wonder. Hardy nowhere pretends to dissect "motive" or trace the history of the fine conscience. He gives us Marty's haircut, her tears at Winterbourne's grave (and ours), what can be seen, heard, smelt, touched, tasted. He delivers what it is in prose fiction to deliver, appearances, not motives.

Nobody can know anything of any motives but his own, and these only dimly and with extreme difficulty. When you examine your notion of "motive," "a motive," "my motive," you find that it dissolves like quicksilver in your hands. Is not the label "motive" a necessary fiction much like the word "red"? So many different hues can be labelled red that we wonder what it is that they have in common. We can observe actions but cannot trace their springs. I have lived with my wife for more than a quarter of a century, and I have no more idea of the impulses that agitate her and the springs of her actions than I did before we were wed. What *is* a motive anyway? Is it something like what happens when one billiard ball causes another to move, something like the transmission of physical motion (itself pretty mysterious if you think about it) as the term "motive" suggests, what *moves* one to action?

In contemporary Canadian writing there is one author who is identified more often than any other as our greatest psychologist in fiction, Alice Munro. It seems just worth mentioning that when I read the following lines from Book Seven of *The Prelude* to Alice Munro, in the dining room of our house in Montréal in the summer of 1974, she began to weep.

As the black storm upon the mountaintop
Sets off the sunbeam in the valley, so
That huge fermenting mass of humankind
Serves as a solemn background, or relief,
To single forms and objects, whence they draw,
For feeling and contemplative regard,
More than inherent liveliness and power.
How oft, amid those overflowing streets
Have I gone forward with the crowd, and said
Unto myself, "The face of everyone
That passes by me is a mystery!"
Thus have I looked, nor ceased to look, oppressed
By thoughts of what and whither, when and how,
Until the shapes before my eyes became
A second-sight procession, such as glides
Over still mountains, or appears in dreams;
And once, far-travelled in such mood, beyond
The reach of common indication, lost
Among the moving pageant, I was smitten
Abruptly, with the view (a sight not rare)
Of a blind beggar, who, with upright face,
Stood, propped against a wall, upon his chest
Wearing a written paper, to explain
His story, whence he came, and who he was.
Caught by the spectacle my mind turned round
As with the might of waters; and apt type
This label seemed of the utmost we can know
Both of ourselves and of the universe;
And, on the shape of that unmoving man,
His steadfast face and sightless eyes, I gazed,
As if admonished from another world.

I will not offer a gloss on such lines, but I think I know why Alice Munro wept.

When it is done rightly, the writing of fiction is not an act of analysis of the motives of others, "psychological fiction." It can't in nature pretend to any such power. So good-bye Emma Bovary, and hello Alice Munro! Fiction written on the premises of the heirs of Flaubert and James is necessarily autobiography, and the historian of fine consciences is in truth the historian of no conscience but his own, which is why Henry James' policemen speak in the accents of Henry James. Narration, and especially prose fiction, must concern itself with the mysterious blind beggar and the sign on his breast, and neither more nor less.

My own motives are mysterious to me. I can't extricate them one from another. And about your motives I know nothing. But I can see you.

VARIATIONS

D. G. Jones

i

Donna che si lava le gambe

then hyperbole
marbles fountains Marino
in a foam of pearls

Sampson in the temple
his desire
holy in that crumbling

erection

baroque, a Cecil B. De Mille
production

meanwhile the lady towels
her feet

ii

the women washing in
the river's mouth, between
Castries and Soufrière

splashing sunlight
like the palms, compose
a bourgeois text

something between Rousseau
bright linen
drying on the stones

and Arbeit Macht Frei

Corot framed
for Hilton's visitors

iii

The way a woman bends
weighing the wash
towels, jeans, shorts

then stuffing everything
these bits
into the machine

outside
dismantled trees

the lake like tin

then straightening, re-
members the original

iv

Let it hang on trees
on human haunches

what we desire
is something that desire
obscures

the body moving equal
to necessity
a kind of style

id est, a motion
meshed, articulate in
November's

moving artifice, other
and alive

v

Diana in the bath, a woman
shaving. This
is an ad. What's his name

will put on horns
Actaeon, yes
be torn apart by creditors

The model
is untouchable, at least
on agency time

Caressing the leg, she too
wonders
what's under the shine

another commercial

vi

The girl washing her feet
is aware of trees
bent in the wind, she

shivers

The light on the bathroom tiles
breaks like spray
waves on the breakwater

Bare, she remembers
the spray on the mountain
ash, the high

cranberry. She too
will distribute the sky

vii

Pascin, once Pincas
takes off his hat
to paint the girls, Mireille

Ginette, traipsing about
in their slips. Ah
the drive to the country

a raft of housewives
without a house. "Tiens!"
The wine. "Jules!

Tiens les bas!" washing
her feet for the ride
back. He left them, comme ça

sitting at the table, walked
through jazzland, sad
Edens of Cuba, of Texas

of Louisiana, noted
the dark girl barefoot in a yard
the sun like dust

New York to gay Paree. He
hanged himself. The streets
go on. The girls

The war. "Ah, notre Jules
ce foutu Bulgare
il nous a fait lumière!"

viii

Mostly it's banged shins
encounters with bedboards
fence wire

memories of a skinned
knee, a thorn
in the pink flesh

then faithful servants become
master, demanding
attention — to be shaved

oiled, decked out
inviting, punishing, every
lèse-majesté

ix

Kid, you gotta stop
hiking your skirt over
bald knees. Don't

sit right in front of my
eyes like some
sermon on the ogival

arch, a
reminder of Marino, his
holy imagery

You know fucking well
such biblical knowledge doesn't
make angels

x

Michael Snow's *Walking Woman*
is a cliché or
la bourgeoise as

the three Fates in
one, snick, snick, like
The Nude Descending

a Staircase, the girl
next door passing
a picket fence

whitewashed, blank, some
anonymous skirt or
cutout from TIME-LIFE

xi

Diane de Poitiers, see
her painted at her toilet
bosomy, with two

plump children looking on
or as the chaste
Diana with a stag. She taught

the king delight, rumpling
his high bed. Free
the sun glancing from the bath

Diane conceived
arches in the Cher, a long
salon, latticed stone

structuring light and air
Even her rival, Catherine
de Medicis approved. Voltaire

enjoyed it. In the war
the wounded lay like pawns
on the checkerboard tiles

were bathed in the flow
of light from clouds, light
from the waves, light

once broken from behind the eyes
of a lady in her bath
at Chenonceau

xii

Death is dust. The sun
comes and goes
The crows come. They clean

the street. The animals with guns
make love in the dust

The babies sound like young crows

I saw a zoo once (I'm not
a young woman), this

is a bad zoo

If the animals were wild
they'd get out

Enough there's water, I can
wash my feet

xiii

Cada invierno
una terraza sobre el ano
— Paz

I think you said Vishnu
looking down saw
a thousand ladies washing in a stream

It was paradise

Naturally he couldn't resist
nor they, being divine
he took them all

at once. Now there are millions
and no stream not
fouled. The god has returned

to the terrace, winter
his mistress and his dream

LE JARDIN REVE

Naim Kattan

La hantise de l'impurete, de la contamination, de la pollution est un des traits les plus permanents des civilisations de l'Orient sémite et de l'Occident, du judaisme, du christianisme et de l'Islam. Lois diététiques, imposition de l'ablution, baptême ressortissent du même fonds — le retour à une innocence originelle, à une pureté pré-natale. La mort est la suprême saleté, l'ultime contamination. Aussi, toute vie en est déjà empreinte. Que la purification soit l'ablution quotidienne des mains au début de la journée prescrite par le judaisme ou le lavement au seuil de la mosquée exigée des musulmans avant la prière, devient dans le christianisme le symbolique baptême, et l'eau bénite à l'entrée de l'église, il s'agit toujours d'un même point de départ: protéger la vie et faire reculer la mort, la purification étant la naissance recommencée. Il est donc question d'un retour, condition de la reprise. Retour à quoi? La Bible et le Coran sont bien précis. Les Juifs retourneront, s'ils méritaient la récompense, au jardin dont leur ancêtre et premier géniteur fût chassé et les musulmans retrouveront ce même jardin comme compensation de leur action, leur lutte pour l'affirmation de la loi divine dans ce bas-monde. L'Eden est donc un jardin, concret, reconnaissable, bien que lointain. Le christianisme décrète la résurrection des âmes. La vie se poursuit dans une éternité et le paradis est plus un état de l'âme qu'un lieu où les corps renaissent. Aussi le jardin n'est-il pas le lieu par excellence, fantasme et attente, qu'il occupe dans l'orient sémite. Certes, pour les nomades, parcourant l'infini désert du monde, le paradis est la nature amicale et accueillante, embaumant le parfum et prodigant la fraîcheur, oasis et rivage, lieu délimité, découpé dans l'aridité du désert. Dans l'Occident européen le jardin n'est plus le rêve mythique. Appendice d'une ferme ou extension du château — le retour ne prend pas la direction d'un lieu rêvé et mythique, mais celle, spécifique, d'une nature, aménagée pour le bien-être, domestiquée à l'usage de l'homme. L'Eden originel c'est la nature première, terre sauvage, non contaminée, dont la dureté n'est qu'un gage d'innocence.

Le retour à la nature est une constante de la culture occidentale. Dans le désert oriental, un tel retour apparaîtrait comme une douloureuse plaisanterie. Quelle nature? Celle à laquelle on cherche assidûment à échapper? Aussi est-il évident que la purification ne peut ni dans le judaisme ni en Islam être un

baptême, un symbole. La nature alterne entre le désert assassin et le rivage où la vie est arrachée. Adam est chassé du jardin et Noé est ultimement sauvé du déluge. S'il s'enivre c'est pour célébrer, fut-ce dans l'excès, une vie précaire. La sensualité qui imprègne la Bible et le Coran est un choix, certes, mais quasi imposé par la fragilité de la vie. L'Occident entretient avec l'environnement un rapport d'alliance, de célébration mais aussi de restreinte et de méfiance. Dans leur contradiction, les dieux grecs attestent des liens ambigus de l'homme avec la nature. La résurrection n'est pas un retour à une nature enfin amicale et douce mais le début d'une vie autre, au-delà de l'espace. Le retour à la nature a donc pour objet d'imposer des restreintes à la sensualité qui atteint la vie par l'excès et abime la nature par l'abus. Le jardin n'est pas le paradis perdu mais la forêt vierge et une ferme d'une perpétuelle fertilité. Il faut donc protéger la terre qui nous est donnée, retrouver son innocence, la sauver de l'altération.

Tout dérangement de l'ordre apparaît comme une menace à une pureté dégradée, aux prises avec une machine infernale qui inscrit sa perte comme une marque du progrès. La science, qui dès le dix-neuvième siècle, semblait dotée d'un pouvoir magique apte à contrôler, à juguler les mélafices de la nature était l'antidote et donnait au progrès une image acceptable. Non pas du retour à une pureté première mais comme l'arme dont dispose l'homme pour venir à bout de la dimension hostile de la nature, sa part cachée, ses déchets, ses saletés, ses microbes afin de lui donner une pureté nouvelle. Comme le corps, la nature pouvait être guérie de ses maladies, débarrassée de ses saletés. Et quand la machine a investi l'environnement, le retour à la nature est devenu un refuge du rêve. Les romantiques étaient des révoltés, des rebelles et, à l'endroit du progrès imposé, des passéistes. La nature non édulcorée, le bon sauvage étaient devenus l'idéal et surtout un chant et un thème littéraire. Aménager un lieu de refuge, fut-il rêvé ou retrouver, dans le retour sinon la retraite, une vieille complicité, une alliance malaisée. Ce retour à la nature était la grande entreprise d'un Occident qui commençait à entrevoir le bout de la route et qui redoutait que celle-ci ne fût une impasse. Le retour était surtout une tentative de conservation.

LA PREMIERE GUERRE MONDIALE a transformé la crainte de l'Occident en doute. Et si le progrès était aussi celui de la machine de mort? Le soupçon s'est dès lors installé. Sur la voie du progrès les embûches étaient volontairement posées par des ennemis maléfiques, capitalistes, juifs.... Chaque idéologie découvrait l'ennemi à abattre. Si le communisme promettait un futur jardin, empruntant à l'Orient sémite la vieille quête messianique, le nazisme adopta comme dogme et élabora comme programme le retour à la nature. Or cette marche vers la pureté perdue se faisait au son de la ferraille, au pas mili-

taire. C'est qu'entretemps, alors que l'Orient se dégageait péniblement des maléfices d'une nature hostile, maladie et misère, l'Occident finissait de mettre en place une nature seconde, la machine cédant la place à l'électricité qui à son tour ouvre la porte à l'électronique et à l'ordinateur.

Chassé du jardin, l'homme occidental a mis des siècles pour contrer la malédiction biblique: il ne gagnera pas son pain par la sueur de son front. Systématiquement, il trouve dans la nature, grâce aux ressources de son esprit, une énergie qui lui évite l'effort et qui décuple la sienne. De la roue à l'avion, de la charrue au robot, l'homme a réussi à domestiquer la nature. Or, celle-ci existe toujours, autonome, ou dans un recoin de l'esprit. L'environnement étant en tous points secoué, la nature de la vie quotidienne est seconde. Le son est électrique, et l'on ne sait plus dans le champ visuel ce qui est l'imitation: l'image électronique ou les routes et les édifices qui en sont le décalque. Les lieux préfigurent l'écran qui à son tour les reflète. A force de vouloir se libérer des servitudes domestiques on a fini par manger des produits de fabrication industrielle qui, par rapport aux fruits et aux légumes sont des succédanés. Même là, la chimie a transformé les produits de la terre en produits d'une nature seconde.

La puissance de récupération du commerce est telle que même les produits dits naturels, contre-partie d'un abus d'alimentation chimique, ont fini par être incorporés au circuit industriel. En Amérique du Nord, la résidence secondaire, à la montagne, au bord de la mer ou à proximité d'un lac ne pouvait plus mener au seuil de la nature. La porte est largement ouverte et l'on retrouve à cette campagne aménagée une dimension de la ville. Ce n'est même pas une évasion dans un lieu autre fut-il partiellement le produit du rêve. L'Europe en est encore à ce stade — à la sortie du bureau, au terme de la semaine, se précipiter dans la voiture pour aller enfin respirer, pendant un ou deux jours, l'air pur de la nature. En fait, on n'accomplit qu'un déplacement et l'on croit au changement, à un départ, à l'arrivée à un lieu autre, à un ailleurs.

L'Amérique semble épuiser le soulagement que l'on trouve dans ce mouvement. Et si on évitait l'agitation? Si on restait dans un appartement en ville avec les derniers outils de la technologie du son et de l'image? Avec les plantes d'intérieur on peut même introduire la nature dans la maison. Et l'on se met à parler aux plantes, domestiquant ainsi une nature dont on a à jamais saccagé la virginité. Et la quête de l'innocence perdue reprend de plus belle. Les intellectuels ne se contentent plus d'aller au bord d'un lac pour un week-end. Ils quittent la ville. La campagne sera la vraie nature, ils s'installeront sur une ferme, réhabiliteront le sol délaissé par des paysans à l'affût des dernières découvertes technologiques de l'industrialisation de l'agriculture. Or on ne peut plus revenir à la charrue des ancêtres et dans les fermes les plus excentriques on ne retrouve plus la nature sauvage. D'ailleurs, les citadins ne peuvent faire vivre leurs fermes qu'à coup

d'argent gagné à la ville. Et là, ils ne se privent ni du téléphone, ni de la télévision.

Ce nouveau retour à la terre qui entend se situer au-delà du rêve romantique ou des prescriptions idéologiques apparaît dérisoire. Cette nature qui se veut réelle, n'est qu'un lieu de travail, volontairement archaique mais qui ne l'est qu'en apparence. Une nature seconde produite par la machine et bientôt par l'ordinateur est venue s'y superposer, pour enfin, l'encadrer et la reléguer à un souvenir et, au mieux, à une survivance nostalgique, un rappel. Une voiture conduit à la ferme où l'on dispose de tracteurs, d'appareils ménagers, de télévision et un jour prochain d'ordinateur.

Le jardin rêvé pourrait être s'il ne l'est pas déjà le produit de la même machine qui le rend onirique. On revient de cette nature comme si le retour, sans structure idéologique n'est qu'une illusion momentanée. Or, le mouvement écologiste tente de donner à cette impulsion, à cet instinct de conservation, un cadre cohérent. Même si ce mouvement fait élire des députés au parlement européen et présente un candidat à la présidence de la France elle se heurte à une impasse. Il est tout à fait évident que l'idée du progrès continu a fait son temps. Toute invention, toute découverte même celles qui guérissent des maladies ont une dimension négative. On a beau dire que la technologie est là pour rester et qu'il nous appartient à la contrôler, on en est aussi les jouets et les victimes. La résistance à l'envahissement technologique peut en retarder le mouvement sans l'arrêter, nous rendre plus attentifs, plus vigilents, sans nous donner la maîtrise du nouvel environnement.

Comme les précédents, la nouvelle technologie de l'ordinateur, annonce-t-on de toute part, va bouleverser toutes nos habitudes physiques et mentales. Est-ce la relance de l'idée du progrès? Les armes de plus en plus sophistiquées incitent à la prudence. Des voix s'élèvent pour espérer et réclamer le contrôle par l'homme de la technologie qu'il a mise au point. Devant l'impuissance, le peu d'espoir d'y arriver, on transforme certains ingrédients, divers sous-produits de cette technologie en jeu. Le rêve est relancé. Des films, des jouets électroniques utilisent l'ordinateur. On peut désormais jouer tout seul aux échecs et tenter de battre le nouvel adversaire plus redoutable que tous les autres: l'ordinateur. Des robots nous sont présentés à l'écran, grand ou petit, et l'on assiste à de nouvelles guerres, dans l'espace, sur des planètes imaginaires où des monstres en acier agissant sous l'impulsion de l'électricité tuent et sauvent, détruisent et protègent les habitants de notre planète. Une nouvelle littérature prend forme. La science-fiction n'est pas uniquement un innocent divertissement. C'est une tentative parfois désespérée, malgré ses apparences ludiques, d'aborder le réel, de l'intégrer à une existence quotidienne qui prend de plus en plus la forme d'une répétition, d'une pièce condamnée à n'être jamais jouée ou d'une métaphore qui renvoie à elle-même, ultime redondance qui ne masque pas le non-sens.

Le rêve d'un jardin, d'une nature autre, innocente et vierge, non touchée encore

par cette nouvelle barbarie technologique persiste. Ceux qui en ont les moyens vont le chercher dans des îles lointaines, plages ensoleillées et vestales soumises qui n'ont pour fonction que de danser et de laisser entrevoir une sensualité non-encore ensevelie sous le poids de l'électronique et du béton. L'industrie touristique s'est emparée rapidement de cet espace de rêve. Des clubs sont aménagés pour l'encadrer, pour que l'illusion soit délimitée et surtout pour qu'elle devienne lucrative. Et au coeur de l'univers de béton prolifèrent les plantes vertes. Tout nouveau bureau où les fenêtres ne s'ouvrent plus et où, même en plein soleil, l'on ne peut plus éteindre la lumière, des plantes sont posées à des endroits désignées, comme des jalons d'un réel que l'on fait surgir du coeur du béton, afin que notre impulsion de travailler, de mouvement et de dépense ne nous apparaît pas, parfaite redondance, métaphore vide, totalement futile. L'on se prend à toucher ces grandes feuilles vertes éparpillées dans le nouvel espace fermé pour s'assurer qu'elles ne sont pas, comme le reste, en plastique, un autre produit de la machine. Les plantes vertes sont nécessaires pour que nous puissions respirer l'air confiné. Elles nous rappellent que le jardin, notre rêve antique et persistant, n'est pas un vestige archéologique mais existe encore, fut-il soumis au règne de l'électricité et du béton, dans un environnement vivant.

La technologie nous dispense en contrepartie de ses menaces et de ses promesses, nos rêves et nos jeux. Nous croyons en jouant avec de nouvelles machines que nous nous jouons d'elles alors que nous acceptons une fois sur deux d'être ses jouets. Notre rêve d'un futur radieux alterne entre le jardin sauvé, perdu dans le béton et l'électricité et le monstre électronique devenant notre robot serviteur. C'est la fuite en avant ou le refuge dans un retour à l'inaltérable. Nous sommes assaillis par l'éphémère dans un mouvement si rapide que nous ne parvenons pas à en capter ni le sens ni la direction. Nous croyons nous retrouver, par le retour à une permanence. La succession vertigineuse d'images, d'appareils, de rêves fabriqués n'élimine pas l'oubli mais le rend acceptable. Le jardin nous apparaît alors comme l'ultime lieu où le repos est encore possible. Autrement, nous nous adaptons au mouvement de chaque nouvelle machine et nous nous condamnons à une perpétuelle agitation qui n'est qu'un aménagement de l'oubli.

Dans le désert premier, l'homme rêva d'un jardin où repos et oubli étaient dépassés. Dans l'Eden, le temps est aboli et le travail inutile. Ce jardin, a-t-il existé sauf dans le rêve, l'un des plus vieux que l'homme ait enregistré? Le rêve le plus persistant aussi puisque la promesse d'un paradis est continuellement renouvelée. Chassés du paradis, nous nous battons pour préserver notre mémoire et pour redécouvrir un lieu, semblable au jardin perdu où nous retrouverions le repos. Notre désert est-il différent tout peuplé qu'il est de machines et de béton? L'aire du jardin rêvé se rétrécit, devient une dimension de notre esprit, jardin secret, mais une promesse toute aussi puissante que l'Eden premier.

UNE INCURSION EN EXTREME-ORIENT ne fait qu'accentuer dans notre esprit la specificité du jardin en Occident. Né à Bagdad, je me suis toujours considéré, du moins de par mes origines et de par les sources de ma culture comme un oriental. Me trouvant à Xian, en Chine j'ai demandé de visiter la Mosquée. Surprise double et double révélation. La Mosquée ne se distinguait des édifices chinois que par les inscriptions sur les murs du texte coranique en arabe. Pour le reste, c'était la Chine. Même le minaret n'était qu'un toit chinois avec les extrémités en bois et les couleurs des palais, des résidences et autres pagodes. Deuxième révélation: mes hôtes s'adressant à moi, me traitait en Occidental. Certes, Canadien d'adoption je le suis mais, lisant dans la langue d'origine des sourates qu'ils ne pouvaient pas eux-mêmes déchiffrer, je tentais d'affirmer mes origines. Or pour les Chinois, j'étais bel et bien Occidental car pour eux l'Occident commence en Inde. Outre la relativité des notions et des concepts d'origine cette révélation m'apprit à revoir mon jardin. Une visite à la ville jardin Su Sho m'en donna l'occasion. Lors de ma visite j'entendis un touriste européen s'exclamer: les Chinois n'aiment pas la nature. A première vue, tout lui donne raison. Toutes les apparences. Voici le pavillon de la contemplation de la lune et là derrière une fenêtre, un arbre, des branches penchées sur un jet d'eau. Un ruisseau qui coule sinueusement émettant un bruit doux dans sa lente chute. J'en suis séparé par une cloison. Trois fenêtres en formes différentes, hexagonales, carrées et rondes m'offrent une triple vision de l'arbre. J'avance comme dans une succession d'images, un film qui se déroule dans une préhistoire du cinéma.

Le grand art, en Chine a pour élément la nature. Des coquillages, des stalactites, des branches, des fleurs et des fruits séchés. Le tout arrangé avec une dextérité qui n'a d'égale que la patience dans cette constante refonte de la nature. Là il n'y a de nature que manipulée. Si le jardin d'Eden existait il serait tout autant qu'en Occident le produit de l'imaginaire et du désir mais son point de départ serait le point d'aboutissement biblique. C'est un Adam disposant de toutes les ressources de la connaissance et de la ruse qui en serait le fabricant et le metteur en scène. Le grand art c'est d'enfermer dans un cadre entre un carton et une glace, fleurs et plantes découpées, séchées et qui offrent une vision de beauté où tout est pensé, fabriqué ou rien n'est à l'état sauvage, ou rien n'est laissé au hasard.

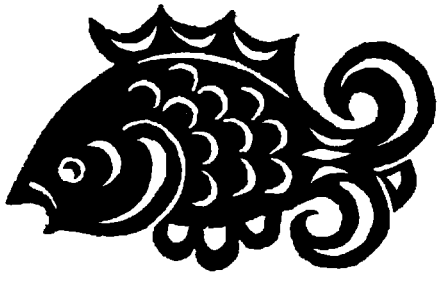
La nature est un spectacle. Un spectacle fabriqué et l'on aménage des lieux, des promontoires, des pavillons pour le contempler. On n'aime la nature que domestiquée, refaite, reconstituée. Le jardin n'est donc pas un rêve de la préhistoire, un Eden qui pré-existerait à l'homme et à la destruction d'une paix première, d'un calme d'origine. Le jardin est l'apogée du travail et de l'effort, la

proclamation de la victoire de l'homme, de son asservissement de la nature à son confort et à son imaginaire.

Dans sa nouvelle *Le prêtre du temple de Shiga et son amour*, Yukio Mishima écrit: "Vue comme un microscope et projetée à l'échelle des astres, la fleur de lotus peut devenir le point de départ de toute une théorie de l'univers, de fournir le moyen par lequel percevoir la Vérité. Il faut d'abord savoir que chaque pétale compte quatre-vingt quatre mille nervures et que chaque nervure répand quatre-vingt quatre mille lumières."

J'ai visité à Tokyo un temple shintoiste et un temple boudhiste. Là encore la nature est domestiquée, aménagée. Par la contemplation infinie d'une fleur, on échappe à l'espace, on ne le transforme pas en imaginaire, mais on épouse sa réalité qui est dépassé par son apparence et l'on atteint l'au-delà en s'intégrant à la substance de la fleur, de l'étang, des arbres. Il n'est pas question de symboles. Car l'univers n'est pas l'au-delà de la nature mais la nature elle-même qui dans sa substance réelle est l'au-delà. L'univers n'est pas l'ailleurs, c'est le lieu aménagé, refait afin que la contemplation puisse trouver son foyer, son point de concentration et éviter la dispersion.

Je n'ai pas voulu étudier les religions ni les cultes qui ordonnent cette contemplation et lui octroient sinon un sens du moins une continuité. J' ai cru que je pouvais connaître ces religions et ces cultes en les étudiant, pour découvrir une différence, peut-être et sans doute pour la confirmer. Mais avant de réduire cette nature à la contemplation à laquelle on me conviait, je voulais, naivement, candidement, épouser la simplicité du geste qui en obéissant au culte, lui échappe. Je ne connaissais ni le culte, ni ses exigences gestuelles. Je me suis mis à côté des autres qui devant le temple de boudha jetaient une monnaie puis frappaient des mains et se courbaient légèrement. Mimétisme ou puissance d'une tradition qui a traversé l'épreuve des siècles pour acquérir une existence propre et autonome? Je frappai des mains et m'inclinai légèrement. Je ne pensais ni à mon Dieu ni à une divinité. Le geste se suffisait à lui-même. Le lien suscitait l'environnement et j'en faisais partie. Cette nature n'était pas la mienne mais l'espace d'un moment, mes mains claquaient. Je l'accueillais et je croyais qu'elle répondait à mon accueil.



TWO POEMS

Joy Kogawa

IN THE FOREST

in the forest the tree
perfectly balances its hours
in the time of its branches
no branch is accidental

in the forest our arms
perfectly balance the breeze
in the time of our departures
no leaving is accidental

in autumn
in the bare room
by a crack in the window
a curtain moves

as the woodsman arrives
precisely beyond time

GRIEF POEM

o that after all no
thought breaks
the mind's cold spell

chill these bones their
language lost

in this fresh silence
weather hides all
odours of decay

by freezing time
I travel through
this numb day

look look
my small
my beautiful child

the icicle here
how it shimmers
in the blue sun

my small
my beautiful child
look once more
into the shimmering

"HAS ANYONE HERE HEARD OF MARJORIE PICKTHALL?"

Discovering the Canadian Literary Landscape

Henry Kreisel

I CAUGHT MY FIRST GLIMPSE of Canada in May 1940 from the deck of the *Sobieski*, a Polish ship that was bringing hundreds of civilian internees and prisoners of war from England to Canada. The civilian internees, myself among them, were German and Austrian refugees who'd been interned by Britain after the Nazi conquest of France.

During the journey the *Sobieski* developed some engine trouble, was left behind by the convoy of which she was part, and eventually limped into harbour at St. John's, Newfoundland, for some emergency repairs.

We thronged the deck, glad to see a harbour, and wondering if we were going to disembark there. Newfoundland was not of course part of Confederation in 1940, but it was a British dependency. I was not sure at the time of its precise political status. I knew that it was close to Canada.

About Canada itself I had only the vaguest of notions. It was *terra incognita*, at most a large block of red in the atlas I used when I was a schoolboy in Austria. If I thought about Canada at all, I thought of it vaguely as a huge, but sparsely populated country, rich in natural resources, though I would have been hard-pressed to say what exactly these resources were.

Once, after the Nazi annexation of Austria in 1938, I was talking to a friend who knew everything. We were talking about possible countries we might escape to. He ruled out Canada, because it was virtually impossible to get a visa. Canada's doors were tightly shut. Perhaps that was just as well, he said, because Canada was a cultural backwater. There were no theatres or opera houses there, no serious music was played there, and there was no literature worth talking about. Canada was much worse than the United States, he said. The United States at least was a vigorous country, though quite barbaric. On this point I argued with him, for I had read a few American writers (Upton Sinclair, Whitman, Hemingway, Steinbeck), and thought quite highly of them. But since I knew absolutely nothing about Canada and had at the time no desire to find out, I accepted his superior knowledge.

And now here I was, without a visa, and under rather strange circumstances, looking up the steep, rocky cliffs at the city of St. John's and wondering what it was like to live there.

The *Sobieski* lay at anchor for a day or two, in the mouth of the harbour. We were not taken ashore, but during the day dozens of small boats came out from shore and circled the *Sobieski*, and the people in the boats called out to us as we stood on deck. Suddenly that large, abstract red mass on the school atlas became real for me, a human landscape.

Who were the people that lived there? What songs did they sing, what stories did they have to tell? As soon as I saw the people, it was impossible for me to believe that they had no music and no literature. My all-knowing friend must have been wrong.

We did not disembark in St. John's. Repairs completed, the *Sobieski* sailed on, into the Gulf of St. Lawrence, and then up the great river, a romantic landscape stretching away on both sides. So this, then, was Quebec, the French part of the vast unknown country. People along the shore saw us and occasionally they waved. Again I wondered what songs they sang and what stories they told.

At Quebec City we at last disembarked, boarded trains and began the long internment. For a year and a half (I passed my eighteenth and nineteenth birthdays there) I knew the country only from the confines of internment camps in Quebec and New Brunswick and came in contact only with the officials who administered the camps and with the members of the Veterans' Corps who guarded us.

With some of these guards I struck up something resembling a friendship. One of them, a short, somewhat rotund man asked me to write a letter for him, for writing, he said, did not come easy to him. So we sat down at the long table in the middle of the hut where my bed was, and he began to dictate the first of many letters I wrote for him. "Dear Wife," he said and stopped. Then slowly, hesitantly, he formulated some questions, about his wife's health, about what she was doing, whether she had heard from their daughter, from their sons. He had not much to report from where he was, he said. The food was good, the work not too hard, sometimes he was bored.

The word got around that I was good at writing letters and three or four other guards used my services. I found out where they came from, places and provinces I had never heard of, from Kenora in Ontario, from Gimli in Manitoba, from a small village on the Nova Scotia coast. The great red expanse on the map became humanized, though the letters I wrote revealed little of the Canadian psyche.

Once I asked one of the guards if he knew of any Canadian writers, but he looked perplexed.

So for eighteen months I lived in Canada and yet was not really in the country. We did get copies of the Fredericton newspaper, but one could not discover the presence of a literary life in the city or in the country from reading it.

After several months we managed to get some books sent into the camp. We could even request some titles. I asked for some Canadian books of fiction or of poetry. None was ever sent. When I inquired why, I was told that unless I could give the title of a particular book or the name of a specific author, it was impossible to fill my request. A classical Catch-22 situation! I didn't know any titles of Canadian books or the names of any Canadian writers, and so I couldn't get any books to find out. I asked one of the officers if he could help me. Officers, I thought, were supposed to be educated and might be expected to know something about their national literature. But I drew a blank. So I went back to reading European writers. In the camps, therefore, my quest to discover what Canadian writers might have to tell me about the people of the country I wanted to know ran into the sand.

WHEN I WAS AT LAST RELEASED from internment in November of 1941, I went to Toronto and enrolled in Harbord Collegiate to prepare myself for the Ontario grade XIII examinations. English was of course one of the major matriculation subjects. Now at last, I thought, I would learn something about Canadian literature, for surely in the last year of high school some of the major figures of the national literature would be studied.

That was certainly the case in the Austrian schools I knew. We studied some of the great German writers, but the important Austrian writers were studied as a matter of course. No one ever thought to question the fact that students should study the national literature.

To my surprise that was not the case in Ontario in 1941. When I looked at the reading list, I found an anthology of poetry, mainly British, Shakespeare's *Henry V*, and *Lorna Doone*, an interminable mid-nineteenth-century novel by R. D. Blackmore. I still sometimes wonder who decided to inflict this novel on the long-suffering students of Ontario and why.

Harbord Collegiate was known as a school with high academic standards, its students among the best in the province. But when I asked some of my new friends if they could recommend some Canadian books I might read, no one seemed able to tell me, and I was too busy trying to make up for four lost years of study and prepare myself for the final examinations to pursue the matter with any kind of urgency.

When we had finished at last with *Lorna Doone*, we began to read a few of the poems in the anthology. There were some narrative poems by Alfred Noyes and

John Masefield, a few lyric poems by Keats and Tennyson, sonnets by Shakespeare and Wordsworth, and a poem by Marjorie Pickthall.

I remember reading the poem before class and being quite taken by it. Its sad tone, its *Weltschmerz,* its vague religiosity appealed to my youthful, romantic sensibility.

When we began to study the poem in class, the teacher asked, "Has anyone here heard of Majorie Pickthall?"

Silence. No one raised a hand. No one spoke.

"Well," he said, "she's a Canadian poetess. A very fine Canadian poetess. She has a great command of language. Listen to these cadences." And he read the poem, and read it very effectively.

For me it was an important moment. At last a figure had appeared in the literary landscape that had seemed quite empty and barren. The teacher told us a little about Marjorie Pickthall. She had been a rather fragile woman, and had died young in 1922. (That was the year I was born, and so I felt at once a connection between us!) He told us about the devastating blow her mother's death had been for her. It was all very touching. I could relate to her suffering. I believed that one could not be a poet without suffering. A teacher in Vienna had once told us that. Poets suffered more than other people, he had said, and that's why they were poets.

Marjorie Pickthall was thus the first Canadian literary voice I heard. I asked the teacher once after class why we didn't read any other Canadian writers. He seemed somewhat taken aback. No other student had evidently ever raised this point. He said something about Canada being a very young country that had not yet produced a significant literature. This was the first, but by no means the last time that I heard this curious line of reasoning.

But were there not at least some writers worth reading, I asked. He mentioned four names: Leacock, Haliburton, Carman, and Roberts.

I thanked him and wrote the names down.

I began to frequent Toronto bookstores, and there at last the literary landscape began to open up. Whenever I asked for some Canadian books I was directed to a little ghetto called "Canadiana." It seemed to me then, and still seems to me now, a curious practice of segregating our writers. But at least they were there. I began by reading Leacock and Haliburton because my teacher had recommended them, and read them with great enjoyment.

In the fall of 1942 I enrolled in the honours course in English Language and Literature at the University of Toronto. Now at last, I thought, I would be able to get a systematic overview of the national literature, for one of the first-year courses was "American and Canadian Literature." It was, alas, a misleading description. The Canadian part of the course consisted of three or four lectures

at the end of the academic year. These lectures were given by Claude Bissell. They were very good lectures, but there was not very much that he could do in three or four hours. R. J. McGillivray taught the American material. When I saw the reading list for the course, I expressed my disappointment because there was so little Canadian material on the list. McGillivray said that if I was interested, I could write a major term paper on a Canadian writer. He suggested A. M. Klein, who had recently published *Hath Not A Jew*, and whose background was similar to mine. So the very first term paper I wrote at the University of Toronto was on a Canadian poet. It was a great experience for me. For the first time I heard a modern Canadian voice and began to wean myself away from the poetic vocabulary of the Romantics and Victorians. Klein's was also the first urban-Jewish voice I heard, and this was very important for my own development as a writer. Through Klein I came to A. J. M. Smith and F. R. Scott and the other poets whose work appeared in *New Provinces*.

Most of my fellow students were not much interested in Canadian literature, or were at best defensive about it. Canadian writers were never "as good as" any number of British or American writers. This always seemed to me a ludicrous way of arguing, because the proposition was based on totally wrong premises.

When I went to school in Austria nobody ever said that Grillparzer, say, or Stifter was not as good as Goethe and Schiller and therefore we needn't study them. We studied Austrian writers because they had important things to say about the country. Then why shouldn't Canadian students study Canadian writers who might have important and interesting things to say about Canada? The image I got after listening to some of my friends was that of a literary foot race, where Shakespeare always came in first, followed by Milton and Chaucer, and one or two thoroughbred British classic writers; after them came two or three American writers, and, then, bringing up the rear (always the rear), came two or three Canadian writers, destined to be forever last.

At the same time there were writers at the University of Toronto who were much admired by students and professors alike. E. J. Pratt was at Victoria College and Philip Child was at Trinity. Northrop Frye at Victoria was beginning to exercise his extraordinary influence, and Marshall McLuhan was beginning his explorations at St. Michael's College. Many people were telling me about Earle Birney, who had recently published *David and Other Poems*, but who had left to join the army just before I arrived on the scene. The stories I heard made him seem a dashing and exciting figure, and when I finally got to know him, in Vancouver in 1950, he lived up to his legend. There were also professors like Norman Endicott, not himself a creative writer, who were tremendously interested in the creative work of their students and offered constant encouragement and help.

So I found a paradoxical situation: a defensive, hesitant attitude towards Canadian literature as manifested in its relegation to the bottom of the official curriculum on the one hand, and encouragement and a desire to foster that literature on the other hand. As an outsider I found all this strange, because the little that I found time to read of Canadian literature seemed to me very interesting indeed, and nothing to apologize about. The literary landscape was in fact much richer than I would ever have expected it to be.

IN 1943 I MET ROBERT WEAVER and James Reaney. Up to now Canada had been for me the confines of internment camps, and then the two big cities — Toronto and Montreal. The rest of the country barely existed in my consciousness. Reaney, both in his inimitable conversation and in the evocative things he wrote, introduced me to the world of small-town Ontario, and Weaver, who was more interested in prose than in poetry, introduced me to modern Canadian fiction. It was Weaver who told me about Morley Callaghan and Philip Grove and got me to read some of their novels, and it was Weaver who told me about a new writer, Hugh MacLennan, who'd published his first novel a couple of years earlier, and lent me a copy of *Barometer Rising*. Weaver didn't have much money, but he always managed to buy books, or else he got review copies.

Weaver also knew a lot of literary gossip, and I found it absorbing to listen to his stories, as I still do whenever I see him. He made the literary landscape come alive. He also knew some of the writers who were writing for the CBC, people like Lister Sinclair and Len Peterson, and he introduced me to them.

Once he told me that Philip Grove usually came to the public library on College Street on Wednesdays and always sat in the same seat, in the rear of the reading room. So I went down to the library one Wednesday, and behold, there indeed was Grove, dressed in a very old-fashioned suit, and wearing a high, starched shirt collar, sitting very erect, reading and occasionally making a note. I watched him for a while, trying to make up my mind whether I should go up and talk to him. I'd just read *Fruits of the Earth* and I tried to think of something I might say to him about it. In the end, I didn't do it and just walked away without speaking to him.

In 1944 Weaver, Reaney, the late Robert Sawyer, and I thought that we should get together once or twice a month to discuss modern literature and perhaps read from our own writings. So we launched what we called The Modern Letters Club. Weaver arranged for places where we could hold our meetings, usually in the common room of one of the residences. It was all very informal. We never had a constitution, or by-laws, or anything resembling an organization. Word got around and we usually had twenty or thirty people at our gatherings. These were always

lively. People could read anything they liked — poetry, fiction, dramatic sketches, or critical articles. Some professors showed up, too; Norman Endicott quite frequently, Northrop Frye and Barker Fairley occasionally, but they never imposed their presence on us.

I used to look forward to our meetings because we all had the feeling that we belonged to a community and that literature was the most important activity in the world. The debates went on until we were told to leave, and the talk continued out in the street and in coffee shops near the campus. We never published a journal ourselves, but quite a few of the pieces first read at our meetings found their way into print.

For two or three years the club was going very strong. Then the meetings became less frequent, the atmosphere was less electric, and so we just stopped. In 1947 and 1948 most of the original members graduated and drifted apart.

In the fall of 1947 I got a job at the University of Alberta, and at last the immense part of the country that was still *terra incognita* for me became real.

I discovered to my surprise that even though Edmonton was a much smaller city than Toronto and the University of Alberta much smaller than the University of Toronto, there was a lively regard for literature. W. G. Hardy, who had written some very successful historical novels, was in the Department of Classics, and F. M. Salter, my colleague in the English department, had for some years been giving a course in creative writing that had become famous. In the spring of 1947, W. O. Mitchell, one of Slater's prize students, had published *Who Has Seen The Wind*. Many other writers, among them Christine van der Mark and later Rudy Wiebe, were his students. I myself showed him a draft of *The Rich Man*, and he was very helpful and very encouraging.

Salter was a Maritimer and he talked enthusiastically about the writers of Atlantic Canada, and so illuminated for me another part of the literary landscape. It was also Slater who also introduced me to the work of the writers of the West, to people like Robert Stead and Martha Ostenso, and Sinclair Ross.

And yet, when after two years or so I asked my senior colleagues why we didn't offer a course in Canadian literature, the paradoxical attitude I had first encountered in Toronto surfaced again. Canada was a young country, there was not sufficient material for a full-year course, our literature wasn't yet quite good enough.

To my image of the literary foot race I now added the image of a town crier, or a CBC announcer, calling out one day, "Hurrah! The great day has at last dawned! Canadian literature is now good enough to be taught in our schools and universities!"

One man at least was already doing it in 1947. Desmond Pacey, a New Zealander, was offering a full course in Canadian literature at the University of New

Brunswick, but Pacey was at that time regarded as something of an academic maverick. Yet increasingly, graduate students were writing theses on Canadian literature, but it was not until the 1960's that formal courses in our own literature became standard offerings in our universities.

My own discovery of the terrain was at last completed in 1950 when I went to British Columbia for the first time and met Earle Birney and Roy Daniells, and through them Alice and William McConnell, who in turn introduced me to Ethel Wilson and to Dorothy Livesay and to Marya Fiamengo.

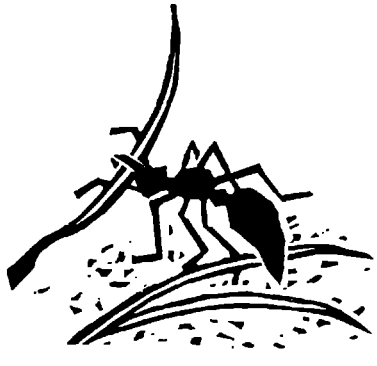
The great landscape was full of life, full of interesting writers. There was one great gap. Quebecois writers remained shadowy for me, and it was not until the mid-1960's that I began to read them.

In the 1950's Wilfred and Sheila Watson came to Edmonton and became the inspiration for many aspiring writers. They were marvellous friends. Eli Mandel, Robin Mathews, and Henry Beissel became my colleagues and my friends. Robert Kroetsch and Rudy Wiebe were students here and became my friends.

The 1960's brought a wonderful outburst of literary activity. It was no longer possible to keep abreast of everything that was going on. The old attitudes lingered on. In 1961, the late Douglas Grant, then editor of *The University of Toronto Quarterly*, asked me how long I thought *Canadian Literature* could keep going. He thought the material for articles would soon run out. And from time to time some of the older cultural pundits bemoan the fact that few Canadian writers have truly international reputations. I am always tempted to ask how many Dutch or Yugoslav or Brazilian writers they can name.

The young writers I know are fortunately not much bothered by this kind of soul-searching. They know who they are, they know where they are, and many of them are puzzled by Frye's famous question, "Where is here?"

As for me, I could hardly have imagined when I caught my first glimpse of Canada in May of 1940 how marvellous the voyage of discovery would be.



ADVICE TO MY FRIENDS

Robert Kroetsch

1 for a poet who has stopped writing

if we could just get a hold of it,
catch aholt, some kind of a line,
if the sun was a tennis ball or something
but it ain't, the impossible thing is the sun

if words rhymed, even, we could catch a holt
(a bush) and start the stacking, words
lined up, I mean, like, in the old days
wood behind the kitchen stove

but you take now your piecemeal sonnet
wow, certain of these here poets,
these chokermen can't even count to fourteen
and as for Petrarch, well, I mean

I've been to bed with some dandy and also skilled
ladies, sure, but would I a ballyhoo start
for the keen (and gossipy) public?
I'd be sued or whatever, maybe killed

but (now and then) you've got to tell *some*body
and a reader has I guess, in spite of all, ears

2 to Eli Mandel, setting his new alarm

time was elapsing, sure, but when does it not
and always elapse?
and hauling out, we were, the logos
from the forest of earthly delights

you and Dennis, Smaro and I, holus-bolus
drinking wine at the dining room table,
Eli: night, you were trying to set your new alarm
the birthday gift, the gift from Ann

what time is it now? you asked, gave us a fright
Dennis raising the spectre of the stove's handy clock
over the books of poems, Ritsos, Suknaski, Pound, Webb
we were reading aloud to each other

and by the time you had let spin by
the digital flash of LOCK, of ALARM
it wasn't that time, time passes, will, amen
what time is it now? you, wantonly, asked

and, like the guy said, if you really think
you can get away with it, thank again

CORDUROY

M. Travis Lane

Porthos, you should be with me in this hour.
My facing snagged, revealed my shabby corduroy,
guilt-crimpled like a candy's foil.
What did we read those damn books for?

For just your glint of tinsel, yes,
your Atlas strength.
Old fatty, with your burlap touch
you kept the tune. Our candied life,
weighted with lies, will smother us.

The dog star barks,
holding the other stars at bay.
They drop their glittering fakeries,
indifferent, reveal
the shoddy cavern as it sags.
"Machines," he cried. "Too heavy," and his heart
broke then. The stars lost sight.

He was their eyes.

VARIATIONS

Patrick Lane

(for Doug Jones)

1

In your garden, the wild,
the flowers fading, your cabin
still not built and the far
smoke of first fires
hangs above your lake.
It is cold here too
my friend. The leaves fall
fast and the river
from my window does not move.

2

And in love, your lady
moves through her hours.
The trees drop last leaves,
cry out
we are naked, naked,
their voices fading
as sap sinks into earth.
Love is what the almost dead
depend on, what they turn
to in their last beds.
They cry out, we are
naked, we are naked,
give us at the last
at least love. The last
hour when we desire most,
falling as we do into sleep,
into the blue worlds.

3

A cricket on a grey rock
climbs to silence. Last songs

and the deer, remembering
winter, are still
for one moment in the garden.

4

The delicate eye extends
with grace. The song
does not falter, moves
upon stone and water,
moves as the magpie moves
when he is not busy
at death, alone
and bright against the sky.

5

I sat in The Pagoda Of The Wild Goose
in China, in the city of Xian.
The old capital where the Tang ruled.
The walls were the same walls
Li Po and Tu Fu knew. I must tell someone.
Greater than The Wall
and the tombs of the Ming
were the words of those men.
We are bereft.
And what is our redress? Is it
to impress upon the word ourselves?
In the new China they no longer believe
in poems. The old ones, the ones
who know the songs, are dying.

6

The language defeats
and the centuries of faith
ignore me. I cannot find
a word that will justify the word
will. Still, this poem,
this crude curio, this
imitation of destiny
will suffice.

7

It is like a woman on a narrow path
with three dogs and a child.
In the moment of doubt
she works with the leashed ones
and the child is left to wander.
The flesh has its own song
to sing. I will
becomes I know not
what to do. But to allow the line its length,
to let it fly to the far edge
knowing its return will sustain
the breath. This is enough.

8

In less than four months
the sun will begin
to move north again.
In this country we call
that image hope and the fog
rests upon the water. The sun
cannot burn it away.

9

It is dawn and your poems
have moved me to poems.
To improvise as the leaf
in its falling. That music.
The return to simple things,
to a garden, to a last drink
at night and in the morning
the tentative, the body's act
in the act of its being
a body. The yellow leaves.

MY FINAL HOUR

Margaret Laurence

I AM BEING GIVEN A UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY.* I will not have to postpone until my last gasp the imparting of the wisdom of my accumulated years to a breathlessly awaiting world. Just as well, as I have never been much of a believer in "famous last words." I suppose this is why King Lear's words, "Prithee, undo this button" seem infinitely more moving to me than any high-flown rhetoric purportedly uttered by some well-known person when on the point of departing this vale of tears. Anyway, here I am, faced with the prospect of delivering the message of My Final Hour. I do not promise that it will be My Finest Hour, but I will do my best.

First, I would like to pass on one piece of advice. If, as you grow older, you feel you are also growing stupider, do not worry. This is normal, and usually occurs around the time when your children, now grown, are discovering the opposite — they now see that you aren't nearly as stupid as they had believed when they were young teen-agers. Take heart from that. True, your new-found sense of stupidity will no doubt be partly due to the fact that the technology of the age has far outstripped any feeble knowledge of it that you may once have felt you had. It may, however, also be due to the fact that at last you may be learning a little healthy humility — humility in its true and indeed religious sense, which of course has nothing at all to do with self-effacement but with a recognition of your human limitations. I would not claim that I have learned that kind of humility — that struggle to learn will never cease. But at least I now can accept with some sort of equanimity that many things are beyond my power. I can try to help friends or family or strangers, but I can never "save" another in the profoundest sense. I can do what is within my human power, that is all. Anything else is delusion or spiritual pride, or so I believe. My limitations extend to many fields. I know now that I will never know an enormous amount about music or painting. My knowledge of science is likely to remain minuscule. I will never know as much as I would like to about the planets and their patterned courses. Even in my own area of so-called expertise, I will never read all the novels I would like to read, even though I read great numbers of them yearly. I will also never write a novel with which I am really satisfied. There is so much to do, so

*An address first delivered to the Trent University Philosophy Society, 29 March 1983.

much to learn and experience, and one lifetime, however long it may be, is so short. I think of the verse from Psalms 39: "Hear my prayer, O Lord, and give ear unto my cry; hold not thy peace at my tears; for I am a stranger with thee, and a sojourner, as all my fathers were." Mothers, too, I feel compelled to add. Sojourner, yes, but this need not mean "tourist." My lifetime here is a short span, but I am not here as a visitor. Earth is my home. I have tried to read as widely as I can; I have always believed I had to live as well as write, to be a citizen and a person and a mother and a friend as well as a writer. But basically, I have spent a great part of my adult life in learning a profession — or, as I prefer to call it, a trade — that can never be mastered in its complexity and richness. I am fond of the story about the brain surgeon, who, meeting a novelist at a party, says, "Oh . . . you're a novelist, eh? When I retire, I plan to take up novel writing." "How interesting," the novelist replies. "When *I* retire, I plan to take up brain surgery."

Well, an acceptance of limitations does not mean that one is not constantly trying to extend the boundaries of knowledge and accomplishment. And it certainly does not mean an acceptance of defeat, in whatever fields our endeavours take place. It is my feeling that as we grow older we should become not *less* radical but *more* so. I do not, of course, mean this in any political-party sense, but in a willingness to struggle for those things in which we passionately believe. Social activism and the struggle for social justice are often thought of as natural activities of the young but not of the middle-aged or elderly. In fact, I don't think this was ever true, and certainly in our own era we are seeing an enormous upsurge of people of all ages who are deeply and committedly concerned about the state of our hurting and endangered world. There is a line from the old Anglo-Saxon poem, "The Battle of Maldon," that I think of frequently. It is this: "Mind must be the firmer, heart the more fierce, courage the greater, as our strength diminishes."

So the basic message of My Final Hour would have to be — do not despair. Act. Speak out. In the words of one of my heroines, Catharine Parr Traill, "In cases of emergency, it is folly to fold one's hands and sit down to bewail in abject terror. It is better to be up and doing."

WE ARE FACED NOW WITH AN EMERGENCY that concerns not only our own personal lives, but the lives of all people and all creatures on earth. Ours is a terrifying world. Injustice, suffering, and fear are everywhere to be found. It is difficult to maintain hope in such a world, and yet I believe there must be hope. I want to proclaim my belief in the social gospel, as a Christian, a

woman, a writer, a mother, and a member of humanity, a sharer in a life that I believe in some way to be informed by the holy spirit. I do not think it is enough to hope and pray that our own lives and souls will know grace, even though my entire life as a writer has been concerned with my belief that all individual human beings matter, that no one is ordinary. The new commandment of the man of Nazareth speaks very clearly. "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."

The social gospel is no easier now than it ever was. My generation was the first in human history to come into young adulthood knowing that the human race now had the dreadful ability to destroy all life on earth and possibly the earth itself. Only later did we realize the full extent of the destruction of life, a continuing destruction passed on to the then-unborn children of survivors, but we *did* know that after Hiroshima, August 6, 1945, the world would never be the same again. The annihilation caused by the first atomic bombs was unthinkable, but it had happened. Also, we had taken it for granted that through wars, through disasters, yet would the earth endure forever. It was clear to many of us in 1945 that this was no longer to be taken for granted. We have lived with that thought ever since, and have yet borne our children, lived our lives, done our work. The will to survive and to pass on important caring to future generations is very strong. But today we have to realize that the bombs used at Hiroshima and Nagasaki were *small* bombs, compared to today's nuclear weapons.

I ask you to think of the Holocaust in Europe, when the Nazis murdered a very great part of all the Jewish communities. That horror, surely, must *never* be forgotten. No amount of mourning will *ever* be enough for those millions of children, women, and men whose lives were torn from them by the group of de-humanized humans who had taken power in Hitler's Germany. Are we to remember the Holocaust and the horrors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and yet remain silent when we hear today about a "winnable" nuclear war or a "limited" nuclear war? I think not.

Our lives and the lives of all generations as yet unborn are being threatened, as never before, by the increasing possibility of a nuclear war. I believe that the question of disarmament is the most pressing practical, moral, and spiritual issue of our times. I'm not talking about abstractions. I'm talking about my life and your life and my kids' lives and the lives of people everywhere. If we value our own lives, and the lives of our children and all children everywhere, if we honour both the past and the future, then we must do everything in our power to work non-violently for peace. These beliefs are not only an integral part of my social and moral stance but of my religious faith as well. Human society now possesses the terrible ability to destroy all life on earth, and our planet itself. Can anyone who has ever marvelled at the miracle of creation — who has ever borne or fathered a beloved child, who has even looked closely at a tree or a plant or a

river — fail to feel concerned and indeed anguished, every single day, at this thought?

A central disagreement, of course, exists between those who think that more and yet more nuclear arms will ensure that nuclear arms will never be used, and those of us who believe that the proliferation of nuclear weapons brings us closer all the time to the actuality of nuclear war — a war that no side could possibly win; a war that would be so devastating that we cannot begin to imagine that horror. Whatever we are being told about a "limited" or a "winnable" nuclear war, the fact remains that such a war could destroy all that we, as humankind, have aspired to, have achieved. It could destroy the future, not only of the world's peoples but of all creatures that share our planet with us.

As America and Russia develop more and more nuclear arms, so the other will inevitably respond in kind. Nuclear arms have long since ceased to be a "deterrent," if indeed they were ever so, and have become by their very existence a monstrous threat. Daily, the chances are increasing for a nuclear war to break out by accident, by a failure of the intricate and not totally reliable control and warning systems on either side, or simply by human panic and a mutual mistrust between the superpowers.

Dr. Helen Caldicott, that courageous woman who has done so much in the struggle against nuclear arms, has said that both America and Russia have now enough nuclear weapons to "overkill every person on earth 16 times." Think of that. Do the world's leaders really suppose that it is all just an act on TV and that the dead would get up again and take on a different role in another TV series so they might be killed again and again? I fear greatly that many of the world's leaders have so little imagination and so little real caring that they cannot visualize at all what a nuclear holocaust would mean. Do they really think that they and their families and executive staffs would survive in deep-buried bunkers? And if, by any unlikely chance they did, what kind of a world do they think they would emerge back into? It would be a dead and a putrefying world. Dr. Helen Caldicott says, "If we look behind the headlines and understand the historical perspective, we realize that America is preparing to fight a nuclear war. Now, that should make us all distinctly uncomfortable. In fact, we should be screaming in the streets, if we really care about ourselves, our children, and if we really love this planet." With well-researched figures, Dr. Caldicott also says, "In the event of a nuclear war, we predict that within 30 days after an exchange, 90% of Americans will be dead. So will Canadians, probably Mexicans, certainly Russians, certainly Europeans, the British, and probably the Chinese."

Roger Molander, a former White House nuclear strategist for the National Security Council, in an article in *The Guardian* in April of 1982, tells of one of the many things that made him decide to give up that job. He is now Executive

Director of Ground Zero, an anti-nuclear weapons project. He says, "The final chance event that confirmed my determination to help correct our flaws involved another military officer. It happened at a meeting in the Pentagon when a Navy Captain offered the view that in America and Europe people were getting too excited over nuclear war. He argued that people were talking as if nuclear war would be the end of the world, when in fact only 500 million people would be killed. Only 500 million. I remember repeating it to myself . . . only 500 million. . . ." Exactly. These are cold figures, statistics. It takes no time at all to say 500 million. But it all looks different, as it did to Roger Molander, if we think of each one of those people as our own children, ourselves, our parents, our friends.

IT IS PRECISELY THIS FAILURE of the imagination on the part of militarists and leaders that is so dangerous today, the failure to visualize what a nuclear holocaust would mean, the apparent inability to imagine the scorched and charred bodies of children . . . our children or children of Russian parents or parents anywhere, and to know, by an extension of imagination that *all* children are our children. The jargon of the militarists is a distortion and a twisting of language, of our human ability to communicate. Language itself becomes the vehicle of concealment and deception. Such words as "overkill" and "megadeath" do not convey in any sense at all what would really happen — the dead, mutilated, and dying people clogging the ruined cities and towns like so much unvalued discarded rubbish, the suffering humans screaming for help with no medical help available, no water, no relief at all for the unbearable pain of millions of humans except finally the dark relief of death for all. Any shelters that the few might reach would in time turn into tombs. Civil defence plans are a sham. In a nuclear war there would be nowhere to hide, and nowhere except a dead and contaminated world to emerge back into.

I profoundly believe that we must proclaim that *this must not happen.*

Yes, but what about the Russians? If we try to persuade our government to refuse Cruise missile testing, aren't we playing into the hands of the bad guys? Won't the Soviet Union, as soon as they have clear superiority in nuclear arms, blow us all to hell without a second's thought? I do not think so. Isn't it necessary to have more and ever more nuclear weapons in the hands of the Americans so that we can feel *safe*? I do not think so. Let me make it clear that I hold no brief for the present Russian system of government. I hold no brief for *any* system of government that is repressive and cruel, and this includes those far-right regimes in countries such as El Salvador, to whom the U.S.A. is determinedly giving so much military aid. The U.S.A. and Russia, the two superpowers, must, I believe,

co-exist in this world, even if there are some terrible things wrong in *both* systems, and *there are*. Russia suffered horribly in World War II, whereas war has not been fought on American soil since the Civil War. I cannot believe that the Russian leaders are all that anxious to begin nuclear war in which the Soviet Union would be, if not totally annihilated, then certainly decimated beyond any hope of recovery. George Kennan, formerly U.S. ambassador to Russia, who has been awarded both the Pulitzer Prize and the Albert Einstein Peace Prize, and who is a distinguished diplomat, academic, and writer, says in his book *The Nuclear Delusion*:

> Aren't we then . . . being unrealistic in the amount of attention we devote to protecting ourselves from the Russians who, God knows, are not ten feet tall, who have all sorts of troubles of their own, who can't run an agricultural system that really works, who can't adequately house their population, who are rapidly losing their prestige and leadership in the world Communist movement, and have to reckon with China on their long frontier in the East? Isn't it grotesque to spend so much of our energy on opposing such a Russia in order to save a West which is honeycombed with bewilderment and a profound sense of internal decay?

Quite frankly, I can't believe that Russia any longer has hopes of a world revolution. I can believe, though, that the Russian people, the ordinary people who love their children just as much as I love mine, are frightened, just as I am frightened, just as a very large proportion of the American people are frightened and are expressing that fear and outrage. The American people are indeed our cousins, and a very great many of them, young and old, are saying virtually the same things as I am saying here.

No American president has as yet declared himself willing to embrace a policy of "no first strike" in terms of nuclear weapons. President Reagan recently made the statement that America must reduce Marxism-Leninism "to the ash heap of history." If he proposed to do this by making his country such a true and fine example of social justice, of caring for the poor, of equal rights for women, of peace-making on the international scene, and of a refusal to support corrupt and violent regimes in, say, Central and South America, so that people the world over would look to America, as indeed once they did, as the home of the free, then I would say — *Great*. But I do not think that is what he had in mind. The president also, not long ago, addressed a group of fundamentalist Christians and told them that good and evil exist in the world and that the good must utterly destroy the evil. By evil, he was not referring to organized crime in his own land, or unemployment or poverty in the richest nation in the world. He was talking about America as wearing the white cowboy hat (to use a metaphor from his Hollywood days) and Russia wearing the black one. Good guys and bad guys. George Kennan says:

> I do not have, and have never had, any sympathy for the ideology of the Soviet leadership. I know that this is a regime with which it is not possible for us to have a fully satisfactory relationship. I know that there are many important matters on which no collaboration between us is possible, just as there are other matters on which we can collaborate. There are a number of Soviet habits and practises that I deeply deplore. . . .

He goes on to say:

> All this being said, I must . . . say that I find the view of the Soviet Union that prevails today in large portions of our governmental and journalistic establishments so extreme, so subjective, so far removed from what any sober scrutiny of external reality would reveal, that it is not only ineffective but dangerous as a guide to political action.

He concludes this portion of an essay written in 1981 by saying:

> And we shall not be able to turn these things around as they should be turned, in the plane of military and nuclear rivalry, until we learn to correct these childish distortions . . . until we correct our tendency to see in the Soviet Union only a mirror in which we look for the reflection of our own virtue — until we consent to see there another great people, one of the world's greatest, in all its complexity and variety, embracing the good with the bad, a people whose life, whose views, whose habits, whose fears and aspirations, whose successes and failures, are the products, just as ours are the products, not of any inherent iniquity but of the relentless discipline of history, tradition and national experience. Above all, we must learn to see the behavior of the leadership of that country as partly the reflection of our own treatment of it. If we insist on demonizing these Soviet leaders . . . on viewing them as total and incorrigible enemies, consumed only with their fear or hatred of us and dedicated to nothing other than our destruction — that, in the end, is the way we shall assuredly have them, if for no other reason than that our view of them allows for nothing else, either for them or for us.

In a moving essay written in 1982, entitled "A Christian's View of the Arms Race," Kennan also says, "utterly unacceptable, from the Christian viewpoint as I see it, is the holding of innocent people hostage to the policies of their government, and the readiness, or the threat to punish them as a means of punishing their government."

Our Prime Minister recently asked the NDP leader, Ed Broadbent, who was seeking to have the whole issue of the Cruise missile testing debated in the Commons, if he, Broadbent, had written to Soviet leader Andropov to tell *him* to stop testing, too. This snide remark was, of course, beside the point. Our federal government, at the present time talking out of both sides of its collective mouth, says that on the one hand the actual testing of the Cruise hasn't yet been agreed upon and on the other hand Canada must honour its commitment to NATO. According to Pauline Jewett, NDP defence critic, who has done much research on this matter, Canada's commitment to NATO does *not* include the necessity of our

allowing *America* — America, not NATO — to test nuclear weapons here. My point is that Canada could have . . . and must have, in my view . . . considerable impact as a mediator in nuclear arms talks, as a non-nuclear nation, as a country that might conceivably be helpful in lowering the present climate of hysteria between the two superpowers, and in bringing about world disarmament.

This is why I think we must keep on trying to make our government hear us. Why would I write to Andropov or Reagan? I don't have a vote or a voice in those countries. I have both vote and voice here, though.

I believe that our land should be declared a nuclear-weapons-free zone, with absolutely no testing of nuclear arms or production of parts for those arms allowed in our country. I think that Canada could do a great deal to bring about a gradual and verifiable reduction of nuclear arms by both sides, monitored by neutral countries such as the Scandinavian countries, and to bring about a freeze on the production and testing of nuclear weapons. Canada could be a strong influence for a "no-first-strike" agreement among nations, for multilateral disarmament and for world peace.

Canada is not powerless nor are we insignificant in a world sense. Yet our present government appears to be quite willing to allow the Cruise missile to be tested over our land, in Alberta. The Cruise missile, an American nuclear weapon, was not designed as a deterrent weapon — it was designed as a "first-strike weapon." Its presence in the nuclear arsenal will not be verifiable, thus making any kind of nuclear-weapons control virtually impossible. The Litton plant in Ontario is producing, with the aid of millions of *our* tax dollars, guidance systems for the Cruise missile. Canada has sold nuclear reactors to such repressive regimes as Argentina, and is delivering fuel for those reactors, despite the fact that our government is aware that nuclear weapons could soon be within Argentina's capability. These are only a few of the many examples of Canada's complicity in the nuclear arms race.

Do we care so little about our children? Do we honour life so little that we will not speak out? I believe we do care, passionately and profoundly. Indeed, one thing that gives me hope is that so many of our churches and synagogues, so many people of all faiths, of all professions and trades, of all ages, are speaking out against the arms race and the descent into total madness. *Physicians For Social Responsibility*, active in this country as well as in America and elsewhere, are telling us what human damage would be done, and how impossible any thought of medical aid would be in a nuclear war. Inter-church groups such as *Project Ploughshares* are making strong representations to our government, as are labour unions, academics, and indeed and perhaps most importantly, women and men everywhere, in every walk of life. This is true in so very many places in the world today. When I speak of lobbying our own government, that is because we must

begin where we are. But we join our voices with those everywhere who believe as we do.

The money spent on arms, including nuclear arms, continues to mount. Recently I read that $550 billion dollars are being spent, world-wide, yearly, on arms. An even more recent estimate puts it at $600 billion dollars. That sum is so great we cannot really comprehend it. But we *can* comprehend that for the cost of *one* Trident nuclear submarine, malaria could be wiped out from the world. Think of that for one minute. I think of the people in the world who are suffering from thirst, from starvation, from preventable diseases, from ceaseless fighting, and the brutality of oppressive regimes. I think, too, of the growing number of unemployed people in our own land. I think of the Reagan program in America — more and yet more money spent on nuclear arms; less and less spent on social programs and help to the poor and the disabled.

I HAVE TO SPEAK ABOUT HOW I FEEL as a writer. I don't like calling myself "an artist," but I guess I am, and would join with my tribal sisters and brothers in many ways. I believe that as a writer . . . an artist, if you will . . . I have a responsibility, a moral responsibility, to work against the nuclear arms race, to work for a recognition on the part of governments and military leaders that nuclear weapons must never be used and must systematically be reduced. Throughout human history, artists have affirmed and celebrated life. Whether we work in words, in music, in painting, in film, in bronze or stone or whatever our medium may be, the artist affirms the value of life itself and of our only home, the planet Earth. Art mirrors and ponders the pain and joy of our experience as human beings. In many parts of the world, and over many centuries, artists have risked and even given their own lives to portray the society around them as they perceived it, and to speak out against injustices. Since the most ancient times, artists have passed on to succeeding generations the tales, the histories, the songs, the sagas, the skills of their trade. Can we conceive of a world in which there would be no succeeding generations? A world in which all the powerful works of the human imagination would be destroyed, would never again be seen or listened to or experienced? We must conceive that this is now a possibility, and one not too far in our uncertain future, either. We must not, as artists, or so I feel, stand by and passively allow this to happen. The death of the individual is the end which we will all one day meet, but in the knowledge that our children and their children will live, that *someone's* children will go on, that the great works of humankind will endure in art, in recorded history, in medicine, in the sciences and philosophies and technologies that our species has developed with devotion

and a sense of vocation throughout the ages. The individual is the leaf on the tree. The leaves fall but the tree endures. New leaves are born. This concept has been the mainstay of our species from time immemorial. Now the tree itself is threatened. All art is a product of the human imagination. It is, deeply, an honouring of the past, a perception of the present in one way or another, and a looking towards the future. Whatever the medium of any particular artist, art is reaching out, an attempt to communicate those things which most concern us seriously in our sojourn here on earth. Artists, the real ones, the committed ones, have always sought, sometimes in ways prophetic and beyond their own times, to clarify and proclaim and enhance life, not to obscure and demean and destroy it. Even the so-called literature of despair is not really that at all. Despair is total silence, total withdrawal. Art, by its very nature of necessary expression, is an act of faith, an acknowledgement of the profound mystery at the core of life.

As a writer, therefore, I feel I have a responsibility. Not to write pamphlets, not to write didactic fiction. That would be, in many ways, a betrayal of how I feel about my work. But my responsibility seems to me to be to write as truthfully as I can, about human individuals and their dilemmas, to honour them as living, suffering, and sometimes joyful people. My responsibility also must extend into my life as a citizen of my own land and ultimately of the world.

I do not claim to have done this well. There are no personal victories in those areas. The individual, here, becomes part of a community and only as a part of that community can one person ever be effective and true to herself or himself. There has to be the resolve not to give up, and to join with all others who believe that life itself is more important than our own individual lives, important though these certainly are.

Dr. Helen Caldicott speaks of "psychic numbing," the temptation to shut out from our minds and hearts all the terrifying things in our world. To think that the problems may just possibly go away if we ignore them. To feel that we are totally helpless, and so . . . why bother trying to do anything? What Dr. Caldicott calls "psychic numbing" I would call "despair," and although I would take issue with the early Church Fathers on many things, I would agree that despair is rightly placed as one of the deadly sins. The problems of our world will not go away if we ignore them. It is not all happening on TV. It is happening on our earth, and we, humankind, are the custodians of that earth. We cannot afford passivity. We must take on responsibility for our lives and our world and we must be prepared to make our government listen to and hear us. Our aim must be no less than human and caring justice, and peace . . . *for all people that on earth do dwell.*

So, if this were indeed my Final Hour, these would be my words to you. I would not claim to pass on any secret of life, for there is none, or any wisdom

except the passionate plea of caring. In your dedication to your own life's work, whatever it may be, live as though you had forever, for no amount of careful and devoted doing is too great in carrying out that work to which you have set your hands. Cultivate in your work and your life the art of patience, and come to terms with your inevitable human limitations, while striving also to extend the boundaries of your understanding, your knowledge, and your compassion. These words are easily said; they are not easily lived. Learn from those who are older than you are; learn from your contemporaries; and never cease to learn from children. Try to feel, in your heart's core, the reality of others. This is the most painful thing in the world, probably, and the most necessary. In times of personal adversity, know that you are not alone. Know that although in the eternal scheme of things you are small, you are also unique and irreplaceable, as are all your fellow humans everywhere in the world. Know that your commitment is above all to life itself. Your own life and work and friendships and loves will come to an end, because one day you will die, and whatever happens after that, or if anything happens at all, it will not be on this earth. But life and work and friendship and love will go on, in others, your inheritors. The struggle for peace and for social justice will go on — provided that our earth survives and that caring humans still live. It is up to you, now, to do all that you can, and that means a commitment, at this perilous moment in our human history, to ensure that life itself *will* go on.

In closing, I want to quote one verse from that mighty book . . . more like a vast library . . . that Dr. Northrop Frye calls "The Great Code," and which has so shaped, sometimes so ambiguously, the imagination, the art, and the many facets of faith in our world. This verse is from Deuteronomy, Chapter 30:

"I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live."

TWO POEMS

Irving Layton

NEW YEAR'S POEM FOR VENERANDA

When she climbs the steps of her basement apartment
she leaves the place in absolute darkness
except for the small mirror in my mind
that holds her surprised reflection.

I polish it till her confident smile
lights up my eyes and when I whisper
in the dark: 'I love you with all my heart.'
the corners of the room begin to shine.

She will bring wine and two goblets
and we'll toast my familiar daimons,
my obsession with her mad-making limbs:
cry window-breaking huzzas for her vagrant soul.

I've flicked off the years, one by one:
'This one loved me, this one didn't.'
Tonight I'll give her the denuded stalk
and it will turn a sunflower in her hand.

December 31, 1982.
Roxboro.

JUDE THE OBSCURE

Yesterday I pulled my bobsled
up the highest hill
in our slum neighbourhood.

Slow and thick the snowflakes
fell on my head.
I became the wonderworld around me.

I do not remember ever
turning the bobsled around.
What am I doing in that woman's bed?

RIFF

Dennis Lee

Darling, when we are
    gone there will be
other lovers,
    eternal like us in the flesh and
they will turn and murmur,
    still dazed in the rush of love, "Darling,
darling, when we
    are gone . . ."

ALL ABOA-R-RD!

Dorothy Livesay

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CHILDHOOD and adulthood is so simple that we forget to think about it. It lies in the fact that a child does not have to make decisions. His world is not one of action, but of sensations. It is as if he were being hush-a-byed in a cradle "on the treetop." And if the cradle were whisked away from beneath him he'd still believe he could be cushioned on air, for "When the wind blows the cradle will rock!" Or, there is the possibility, if he is less than three years old, that he would be put aboard a train with his parents but without any idea as to whether this is a stationary new home or an automobile on rails. He has no responsibility except to be there, rejoicing in the cries of "All aboa-r-rd!"; in the feeling of being shunted backward, then forward; the jolt, the chug of wheels; and "Mommy, we're moving!" Now his breath is released as the city's bones are cast behind and through the racing window his eyes devour the grassy plain.

Or so it was in my day. Is that why, as adults, we so love trains? Suddenly, we are safe. That sense of security is bliss. As a child at home in the west end of Winnipeg, I remember my early "train thoughts": waking to the deep sound of an engine's moose call; lying in the half light, the green blind being drawn. Passers-by on the wooden sidewalk cast strange shadows on the ceiling above my head and I imagine fairy princesses, carriages, men on horseback, gnomes. Then outside again there's the *clop clop* of the milkman's horse, the clatter of the huge silvery can of milk from which he will measure pints and quarts and pour them into our jugs on the kitchen table. He may leave butter also, in striped pats, all to go into the ice box beside the block of ice hewed from the river, smelling of sawdust. In hot summer we dream of ice and snow. The trains shunt, the black engine lets forth its call. Soon it will be autumn, dark evening, when the train's necklace of lights winks its messages across the prairie.

We took the train every summer to go to a cottage in Keewatin (northern Ontario). That was a dull, boring, daytime journey, no air conditioning, the sun sticky yellow on the green plush seats. The real excitement would be to travel overnight on the CPR, west to Regina for camping at Fort Qu'Appelle. The conductor would be out on a wooden platform, the neat grey-clad Negro porters grinning under their red caps, chaffing the children. How tense we felt when the

steam began puffing furiously under the wheels, the conductor waved a signal to the engineer leaning out of his black window, and the magic words echoed from car to car: "ALL ABOA-R-RD!" You had to kiss your grannie quickly and be lifted by the porter in a flying movement up the iron steps past the corridor of "staterooms" into the sleeping car.

Dinner in the dining car was a deeply satisfying adventure: just getting there, pushing doors through car after car. The head steward kept you waiting a moment until he led you to a table for four, a snowy tablecloth with white table napkins folded like wigwams presiding over the population — those knives, forks, three kinds of spoons, the jug of ice water, silver sugar-and-cream bowls, balls of butter on ice, and that most fascinating basket containing crisp round rolls and soda biscuits. You did not have to feel hungry. You knew there would be good things coming. Five courses! The waiter would shake out the napkin by your plate and tie it round your neck with a flourish. There! Tuck. To begin with: celery sticks and olives. Soup was served from a silver tureen. Then the Winnipeg goldeye, mashed potatoes, carrots, cabbage, turnips, or beets. For dessert you might have to choose between blueberry pie and orange water-ice sherbet (not the strange starch pudding called sherbet today) or, perhaps, strawberry ice cream and pound cake. Father always asked for seed cake, but rarely got it — for which I was thankful. How could anyone like eating that? Perhaps the divine moment of delight was when the waiter had left the bill for a parent to sign. For each person he brought round silver bowls of warm water. "Do we drink it?" "Oh dear no! In these you dip your fingers, delicately, and dry them on your napkin." Delicious ritual, and perhaps the train slowed down at that point. The evening sun shone over the golden prairie fields.

There followed childhood sleep — "rocked on the cradle" of the wheels! And sometimes with all the shunting and grunting one could be thrown out of the berth. Then back into the warm womb, utter silence as the train waited in some country siding — waited and waited for the oncoming monster burdened with freight cars. Finally the shunting began again, until we took flight along the rails. In that dark behind the green curtain the child feels completely protected, with no will, no needs, ready to be rocked to sleep by the *thumpety thump* over the rails and the ever-so-often tilting from side to side. That foetal feeling! In adults, it becomes sexual arousal. From my far off ten-year-old childhood I remember listening on the stairs when our latest maid was telling my mother about her experience in an upper berth. "Never travel that way!" It seems as she lay there in the dark, a man's hand crept up from below and began "feeling" her leg. Quick as a flash she seized her straw hat from the net hammock where such things were put at night. From the hat she pulled out her hat pin and stabbed the offending hand. It worked! And though at that age I was completely inno-

cent, the incident must have plunged deeper into my unconscious, imprinting a sense of mystery and fear into sleeping on a train.

Years later, travelling at night with my young family to Penticton, we encountered the rockiest roadbed in Canada — the Kettle Valley line (vanished now). A married friend of mine was aboard in the next double berth. In the morning, hanging on in the swaying washroom, I asked her if she had been able to sleep "with all that shunting?" "Shunting!" she retorted. "*He* shunted down from his upper to my lower. What a time to make love! But that's the way men are — unpredictable."

So nowadays fun on the train is no longer to be looked forward to. The mysteries of train travel for child or adult have vanished. And forgotten also is the lifestyle of those men who carried us across the continent. What of the engineers faced with an avalanche of snow? The conductors, trainmen, and porters called in to shovel in emergencies? The cooks running out of supplies on some ice-bound siding? The passengers playing cards endlessly to while away the interminable waits, digging for a bottle hidden in their carpet bags (those one-handled bulging cloth or leather bags that men carried). Nowadays there are a lot of retired conductors and engineers on the CP and CN who travel free and for pleasure, whose stories are juicy enough to make a novel. But no one has written it. The feuds that went on between the private CPR enterprise railwaymen (and all their cousins, families, friends) and the public CN personnel represented the real Canadian game in those days. Not hockey held your obsessed attention, but the latest Canadian National derailment. My mother's family, ardent Conservatives and upholders of the status quo, had a further stake in the CPR because my Uncle Phil was a baggage clerk at the Winnipeg station. Whatever disaster hit the CN, they cheered. The CPR disasters went unsung.

So today, if you listen to those old railwaymen in the lounge car or at the table, you'll note how drastically times have changed. "I think it's time now for unification," I heard the other day. "All the logistics point to amalgamation of the CN and CP, but the government does nothing." "Oh *them* fellows?" exclaims an eighty-five-year-old ex-conductor. "Them politicians take off in orbit and then they can't see where they've gone." So, although they were stimulated by the game, the uncertainties, the night shifts, the absences from home often as not, in their middle age they have a sense of having been cheated by that travelling life. They lost touch with their children. "You can live or die alone. The offspring don't care." Or: "The wife and the kids all ganged up against me — then they left me." "Were you so poor a husband?" "I don't think so. I was boss on the job but she was boss at home . . . but I was away a lot. Many's the time I had to work nights. I didn't see too much of the kids." He was sitting opposite me, a worn-out deeply lined face, a gesture of defeat. "Who wants me

now?" Railroading had been his life but it had also destroyed him. So he travelled continuously, compulsively: seeking, seeking. For today "the times is different."

That old fellow reminds me of a children's story that fascinated me when young. It was called "All Change Here." Instead of obeying the command to get off the train, the children grew bigger and bigger while their mother and nanny grew smaller and smaller. Changed indeed! And now the aging conductor and my aging self are shrinking down. It seems to be the children who are making decisions, managing our affairs, running the computers — and those computerized, sleek, and silent trains.

WOOD EDGE

George McWhirter

My son remarks, at Evensong,
On the swallows culling moths:
Three at a time their beaks snap,
Latch onto each new bug,
Slamming all the gates
Out of the wood, on them.
That echoed rap —
As if a knuckle tested for security.

Soft moths curfewed under fir, hemlocked
In an archdiocese of trees.
They buzz and dream, tasting pullovers
And gowns in painted closets,
Scenting nothing of the camphor.

A last veil of light their souls
Would put on trails in the gutter;

The sky not dry yet,
The street still draining,
Starch of starlight not yet set.

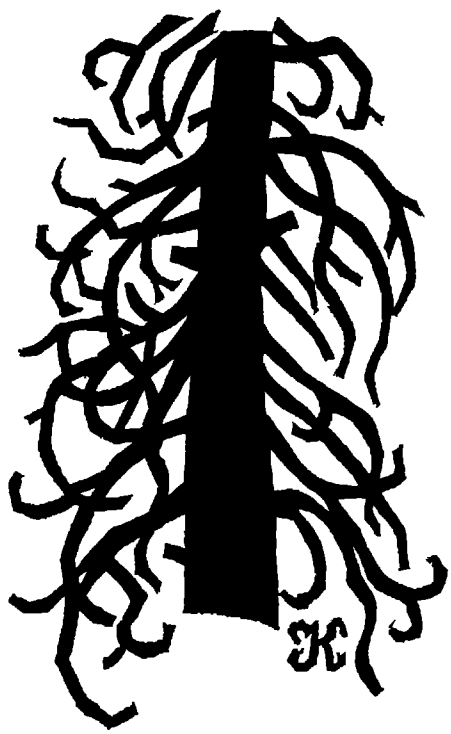
On this respectable night
They are shut in with skunk cabbage
Under the black jacket and tall lapels
Of conifer, buttoned down with huckle
And rowanberry into a dark age of obedience.

In their beds across the road
The sleepers doze intact.

Their dusty breaths, coated with the day's design
Fall to the floor. One word
Of prayer, on wings the colour of nothing at all
Could slip through the pores

Of their pristine ceilings.
But they sleep so solid in their body

Now. Their lips, like two determined, flightless birds,
Snib in their spirit. Won't even nibble
At the notion of fresh clothes, laid out for a feast
On the other side, across the cracked curbs of sleep.



BARKER FAIRLEY AND THE BLIZZARD

Gwendolyn MacEwen

It was freezing and wet and everybody was being blown all over the street and taking shelter wherever they could, when Barker emerged from the swirling cloud of the blizzard, walking slowly and thoughtfully, his cap at a superb angle. It was a few years ago, so he couldn't have been much more than ninety. *Gwendolyn* — he said, as the gale pushed me sideways and I crashed into a wall — *I've been thinking about suffering. Does the artist have to suffer, do you think? Yes,* I said. *Definitely. The older I get the more I suffer so it must be necessary. And furthermore it is packed with meaning.* Barker looked at me quietly as several people held onto each other's waists with the man in front attached to a telephone pole, to avoid being blown away. *I don't think so, I really don't think so,* he said, as two women and a man were washed into the gutter. *We're here to bring joy; we weren't meant to suffer at all.* And he leaned into the exquisite storm and was gone.

PETITE HISTOIRE D'UNE OBSESSION

André Major

LA QUARANTAINE VENUE, je me demande si je dois continuer à écrire. Ce n'est pas la première fois que je me pose cette question: au terme de chaque livre, publié ou non, achéve ou mis de côte, elle revient me hanter, aussi obsédante qu'une douleur physique. Peut-être parce que n'étant pas un écrivain professionnel, vivant donc d'un autre métier, je n'ai jamais compté sur l'écriture pour assurer mon avenir et celui de ma famille. Si, malgré les multiples devoirs qui occupent le plus clair de mon temps, je ne cesse de revenir à la littérature, si je ne cesse au fond d'en tirer une raison de vivre, c'est qu'elle demeure l'indispensable, pour ne pas dire l'unique et ultime recours grâce auquel j'échappe tant bien que mal à l'angoissant sentiment de l'éphémère dont parlait Thomas Mann. Comme si seule la création pouvait donner au vécu toute sa consistance, comme si la recherche du sens de l'existence passait forcément par là — par l'incertain tracé d'une parole en quête je ne dirai pas de salut mais de lumière.

Revenons en arrière, revenons aux origines de cette obsession alors qu'au beau milieu d'un cours, incapable de supporter le vertigineux ennui qui me prenait, j'écrivais de courts romans inspirés par mes maîtres successifs, Chateaubriand, Bernanos, Kafka et Malraux. Et bien que leur influence vouât mes essais à n'être que d'assez pâles plagiats, je n'en avais pas moins le sentiment réconfortant d'une délivrance, d'une victoire sur ce qui m'écrasait. Mon père m'avait acheté une machine à écrire bon marché sur laquelle, les vacances venues, je tapais fébrilement ces manuscrits que j'adressais, sans vraiment croire avoir atteint mon but, au seul éditeur montréalais dont le programme éditorial comprenait des oeuvres du cru. Mais mes manuscrits me revenaient inmanquablement avec la même lettre de refus où on me conseillait très sérieusement de me consacrer à la poésie, moi qui croyais dur comme fer aux vertus de la prose pour témoigner de ma révolte contre l'oppressante réalité québécoise d'avant la révolution tranquille. Je tenais bon malgré mes échecs, de plus en plus mal à l'aise dans le milieu fermé où j'avais l'impression de croupir, et j'en vins à tout miser sur la littérature, au point de provoquer les autorités du collège qui finirent par me mettre à la porte. De retour à la maison, je prétendis être prêt à tous

les sacrifices pour écrire, et même à vivre dans un garage en me nourrissant de pain sec et de cheddar.

Ma mère, fille de la campagne qui m'avait vu célébrant la messe, désapprouvait tout à fait l'orientation que je comptais prendre. Mon père, lui, renonçant stoïquement à son rêve de me voir devenir notaire, me témoigna une plus grande sympathie et m'assura du gîte et du couvert jusqu'à ma majorité, ce qui revenait à m'accorder un sursis de trois ans. J'en profitai pour essayer de tout lire, même ce que mon manque de formation académique eût dû m'interdire, en particulier la philosophie de laquelle je tentais de tirer une vision du monde à ma convenance, forcément en rupture avec la morale qu'on m'avait jusque-là imposée et qui, à mon avis, sonnait plutôt creux. Je partais du principe qu'il me fallait faire table rase de tout l'héritage dont on m'avait accablé pour ensuite marcher librement dans mes propres pas. Je passai de longues heures à la bibliothèque, de plus longues encore à hanter les rues et les cafés à la mode, me résignant à travailler de temps à autre pour m'acheter des livres et apaiser un peu la rancoeur maternelle. Ces incursions de courte durée dans le monde du travail se justifiaient, me semblait-il, par leur utilité littéraire. En fait, tout me servait, les heures perdues à écouter les grandes gueules et à boire, les activités militantes — car j'étais depuis le collège socialiste et indépendantiste — et même un banal mal de dents.

Ma conception de la littérature était assez lyrique: les mots étaient doués d'un pouvoir magique, et un autre monde s'annonçait dans leur clameur. Car j'avais finalement consenti à être poète et j'implorais mes contemporains d'oublier le vieil homme et de faire l'expérience de la fraternité, comme me l'enseignaient Aragon, Neruda et autres messagers d'un communisme encore intact, du moins à ma connaissance. Si Dieu n'existait pas, comme j'avais décidé de le croire en cette fin d'automne 1960, l'homme devenait totalement libre et responsable devant ses seuls semblables, son destin se confondant avec le destin du monde. Aucun refuge possible, ni esthétique ni moral. Et le poète que j'étais prenait la parole pour que d'autres prennent le pouvoir et qu'advienne le règne de la justice. C'était un programme assez simple. Certains tentèrent de la réaliser à leur façon, en prenant les armes, et je ne peux les condamner sans d'abord faire mon mea culpa, moi qui ai cru et proclamé qu'il y avait une violence nécessaire, comme Sartre — grand maître de ma génération — nous l'avait appris. Je crois toujours qu'il existe des situations où, en effet, la violence s'impose, mais ce n'était pas le cas dans le Québec d'alors, en proie à d'assez douloureuses mutations. Il y avait — et il y a encore — quelque chose de religieux dans notre désir de voir le peuple québécois se refaire une identité conforme à notre rêve. Tout peuple minoritaire a besoin de temps pour surmonter son sentiment d'impuissance. La violence eut pour effet d'acculer le nôtre à un repli frileux dans l'attente. Il lui

fallut quelques années avant d'oser élire un gouvernement dont les positions marquaient une rupture nette avec son passé. Et même au lendemain du 15 novembre 1976, nombreux furent ceux qui dissimulèrent mal la crainte d'une catastrophe.

Moi, depuis des années, j'avais liquidé le lyrisme de mes vingt ans et je m'accomodais comme je le pouvais d'un réalisme fondé sur la modération. J'avais eu beau renier l'héritage des miens, je n'étais pas parvenu à rompre l'instinctive connivence que j'avais avec eux. C'était tout le contraire qui s'était passé. Car, après avoir pris mes distances avec les bien-pensants de gauche, j'avais fait l'amère experience de la dissidence. Les intellectuels québécois, pas encore marqués par le choc Soljénytsyne, admettaient mal qu'un radical remette en question les certitudes de l'heure. Et il me fallut payer pour avoir renié le mythe marxiste. Ceci dit, je ne me sentais pas démuni, idéologiquement parlant, puisque je demeurais loyal au mythe d'un Québec souverain, ce qui ne m'empêchait pas, comme écrivain, d'avoir une perception assez pessimiste de l'avenir, même après la victoire du Parti québécois. Trop d'incertitudes nous paralysaient. Trop de peurs aussi. Sans compter le sentiment persistant d'être par nature condamnés à l'échec — sentiment d'ailleurs confirmé à plusieurs reprises et encore récemment par l'impasse constitutionnelle où nous a enfermés la classe politique canadienne, la traditionnaliste comme la progressiste.

Si bien que le pouvoir que nous croyions avoir acquis avec la victoire péquiste, nous avons dû admettre qu'il ne pesait pas lourd face au pouvoir fédéral. Et c'est pourquoi je refuse de cracher sur le gouvernement Lévesque, comme on se gêne pas de le faire, surtout chez les intellectuels qui ont naïvement cru que la révolution allait se poursuivre tranquillement et qu'ils n'avaient plus rien à y voir après l'avoir en quelque sorte préparés. Je ne crache pas sur ce gouvernement non seulement par loyauté mais parce que je ne peux oublier que j'ai fait miennes ses stratégies et que ses erreurs sont également les miennes. Moi aussi, j'ai cru qu'il était odieux de bousculer le peuple et qu'il valait mieux le faire progresser en douceur.

Le creux de la vague, on y est bel et bien. La crise économique a engendré des conflits sociaux que ni l'État ni les syndicats n'ont su résoudre. Tout le monde voit son crédit chuter. La droite seule profite de la déroute des idéologies progressistes, et elle joue à fond sur le vieux réflexe individualiste. Elle propose qu'on liquide les visions trop généreuses, à commencer par la notion de partage ou de justice sociale, et elle nous décharge de tout projet collectif. On n'a plus qu'à rester chez soi, devant le petit écran, des administrateurs vont s'occuper de nos affaires. Tout en respectant nos droits individuels, bien entendu. Il n'y a plus que ça qui tienne, les droits individuels.

Quant à notre appartenance collective, elle risque de demeurer ambiguë,

irrésolue, coincée entre deux mythes antagonistes mais dont le magnétisme s'exercera sur des sujets fatigués. La *pax canadiana* qu'était censée nous apporter la nouvelle charte constitutionnelle ne change rien à la problématique québécoise. Selon l'humeur populaire et l'état de l'économie, le mythe québécois se ranimera ou bien c'est le mythe de *nos* Rocheuses qui prendra le dessus. Perpétuelle oscillation. Nos enfants préfèrent, on peut les comprendre, militer contre les armes nucléaires. Nous faisions de notre avenir politique une question de vie ou de mort. Eux croient que la planète risque de sauter demain matin. C'est autrement plus angoissant.

TOUT CECI POUR CONCLURE QUE, contrairement à un slogan vidé de son sens, je ne me sens pas particulièrement fier d'être Québécois. Pas honteux non plus, remarquez. Simplement fatigué. Déçu de voir le désenchantement général confirmer mes plus sombres intuitions de romancier. Me disant que la voie politique n'a pas été la bonne, qu'il aurait peut-être fallu agir à un autre niveau. Mais je n'en suis pas certain, la politique étant le baromètre plus ou moins précis de la température collective. Que faire? Si j'étais Lénine, je pourrais le dire, j'aurais des réponses à mes propres questions. Tout ce que je sais, c'est que je me résigne difficilement à la médiocrité provinciale à laquelle nous risquons de retourner très vite si ce n'est déjà fait, au piétinement aussi et à la récrimination.

Faut-il tenter de faire revivre le mythe québécois, ce rêve en bleu? Opération artificielle sans doute, mais qui aurait au moins l'avantage de nous empêcher de végéter dans l'indifférence un peu blasée que nous affichons depuis pas mal de temps. Il y a quand même eu des progrès, à bien y penser, au cours des dernières décennies: la mentalité collective est devenue plus ouverte, plus tolérante, mais c'est peut-être, me souffle un mauvais esprit, parce qu'elle n'a plus rien à protéger, rien à défendre, rien à proposer. Je n'accuse personne, me sentant moi-même dans une sorte de désert que j'oserais qualifier de spirituel, faute d'un meilleur terme. Et c'est pourquoi je me demande si j'ai encore envie de raconter des histoires alors que l'Histoire se dérobe sous nos pas. Je n'ai jamais voulu écrire simplement parce que je l'avais déjà fait, pour ajouter des titres à ceux déjà parus. Ni pour la dérisoire petite rumeur que cela fait courir dans le public restreint que je rejoins. J'attends autre chose de cette aventure, ne me demandez pas quoi, je répondrais sans doute: une plus grande lucidité, une approche plus juste de la réalité ou autre chose, mais la vérité, c'est qu'écrire est un oxygène pour moi. Je sais bien que ça ne sauve rien ni personne. C'est tout de même un moyen efficace de lutter contre "l'oubli de l'être," comme le rappelle Kundera citant Heidegger. Parce que l'oeuvre réussie a au moins ce mérite de témoigner de cette part de l'humain que les autres activités sont incapables de saisir.

Mais à trop me demander si l'aventure en vaut la peine, j'en viens à préférer au dur exercice littéraire les simples et réconfortantes tâches domestiques et, comme Candide en son jardin, je trouve dans les senteurs de l'humus plus de joie que dans le terreau apparemment stérile de nos débats actuels. Privé de l'élan que donne l'adhésion à un mythe, je ne me sens sollicité par rien d'autre que les nécessités les plus élémentaires, ce qui a l'avantage de me ramener à la commune mesure. Tout en demeurant, je dois l'admettre, la proie consentante de mon obsession littéraire. Mais quand je relis la correspondance de Tchékhov, j'y trouve une désolation qui me console de la mienne et me donne envie de me remettre au travail. Lui non plus ne savait pas si ça en valait la peine mais il écrivait quand même pour y voir plus clair, j'imagine, et parce que le silence n'éclaire rien.

J'ai beau savoir que nul n'est indispensable, il m'arrive de ressentir comme un manque intolérable la perte de ceux qui m'ont aidé à saisir un peu mieux la vérité de l'existence. Je pense surtout à Gabrielle Roy qui s'est tue à jamais cet été et je me rends compte de tout ce que je lui dois, cet univers qu'elle a créé avec un minimum d'artifices, guidée par l'inépuisable compassion qu'elle éprouvait pour ses semblables et par l'instinct qui la poussait à arracher leur destin à ce qu'il pouvait avoir d'éphémère. Sans avoir la prétention de poursuivre ce qu'elle avait entrepris, je me dis que je peux tout de même, n'ayant rien d'autre à perdre que mon temps, tenter à mon tour de comprendre ceux qui m'entourent et qui me paraissent aussi démunis que moi. De toute façon, avec l'automne qui s'annonce et l'hiver qui viendra, je ne pourrai pas continuer à jardiner, et il faudra bien que je me remette à l'écriture sans trop savoir, encore une fois, où ça me mènera, tant pis si c'est nulle part, tant mieux si c'est au-delà de mes limites actuelles.

Septembre 1983

THE TECHNOLOGY OF THE PERSISTENCE OF MEMORY

Kim Maltman

When the first blossoms, which one never seems
quite to remember, have announced the unexpected,
the sudden flurry of spring, one is reminded of
the old exuberance, but, more and more,
it is to the disquieted house on the hill
that one returns, to the grass and fresh dug dirt, the small
fire smells of childhood, the trophies of the memory
now gradually mummified, wrapped in the opaque
vapours of wood and old glass. In the house again
one wanders the rooms, pursued
now by the worn handhold on the stair railing,
now, for a moment, by some indefinable smell
that tugs an hour at the memory.
Often the mind is like a homing pigeon
and now it is on the old cedar chest that it dwells,
longing for the return of those old ghosts,
ghosts that could repossess the huge bodies
that return to it now as if by remote control.
But it is nowhere to be found,
though, to the mind, the smell of cedar
will always be haunted by the continuity of
age and decay. It is as if
it never existed, as if it were from
a story, a dream, another life.
And there was a time when this brooding was composed of
desires so ordinary one could hardly name them.
Desires not unlike love,
which they sometimes resemble
but are not.

AUSCHWITZ

Poetry of Alienation

Eli Mandel

THIS ACCOUNT OF THE WRITING OF A POEM, "On the 25th Anniversary of the Liberation of Auschwitz: Memorial Services, Toronto, January 25, 1970," is occasioned as randomly and as obsessively as the poem itself. This is January 1984, almost 14 years after the event. There is no obvious reason to return to it, except a continuing unease, a sense of unpaid debts, unexplained reasons, an uneasy self.

Exorcism and liberation. To free oneself of a nightmare. Of history. There is a literature for this — alienation, a writing of what the world rejects, what cannot be tolerated, what is despised, spit out. Not very long ago Julia Kristeva wrote an essay that touches on this writing, on abjection, *Powers of Horror*. About "something to be scared of," filth, defilement, abomination. An account of the unclean, a linguistics of repression. The language (not-language) of the unsayable, outer-utterances, obscene, unseeable: Dostoevsky, Joyce, Artaud, Céline, Borges. Why would one want to write it? This is an account of such an unsayable poem, a series of inevitable evasions.

August 1946. I had returned to Saskatchewan from Europe, the war. Europe lay in ruins. But that was history. I had come home to study and to write. I would go to university to sort out my sense of things. The question of how and indeed whether to write of the recent past in any significant way lay heavily on me as it had to lie on anyone who felt that here was a subject of dimensions that troubled the soul and yet lay untouchable in front of oneself. On the one hand, it was finally remote from one's experience, the real root of it. On the other, worse, to touch it was in some way defilement, to be involved in the ruin of humanism, in the very barbarism that George Steiner writes of so lucidly.

I had come home. Like many young men I was deeply troubled and almost completely unaware of the source of the trouble or nature of it. Something in Europe had sickened me. And yet it wasn't the war itself, of which I had seen something. That seemed detached, remote. Part of a distant history. Those awful *photographs* towards the end of the war as the liberation occurred during the spring of 1945 and the evidence of the camps began to manifest itself before the

eyes of the astonished and horrified world. Corpses. We had supped on horrors enough earlier. I had seen bombings in London and Antwerp, had watched fleets of bombers, flying fortresses, sweeping across the sky to remote targets in the East, had heard with astonishment the sound of rockets arriving *after* they had exploded. Commonplaces. I had read newspapers in the grand square of Brussels of the world entering a new era, had seen the photographs of the corpses. Remote.

I had come home. Before me there were the usual tasks of one who returns. Among other things, I was expected to visit an uncle and aunt in Estevan, the town where I had been born and brought up, to tell them of my last moments with their son in London, England, three weeks before his death in Europe, in Normandy. I was the last of the family to see him alive. On the way to Estevan, I stopped at his sister's home in Weyburn. There, on an oppressively hot summer day, alone in the house, moody, depressed, I picked up a book, idly glancing at its introduction. It was Thomas Mann's "Introduction" to *The Short Novels of Dostoevsky*. The words leaped at me from the page. Mann is defending Nietzsche's position in *The Birth of Tragedy*:

> The truth is that life has never been able to do without the morbid, and probably no adage is more inane than the one which says, that 'only disease comes from the diseased.' Life is not prudish and it is probably safe to say that life prefers creative genius-bestowing disease a thousand times over to prosaic health . . . certain attainments of the soul and intellect are impossible without disease, without insanity, without spiritual crime. . . .

The reversal — sanity-health/insanity-poetry, illness-poetry/health-prose — struck me as stunning. My own malaise had become a sign. It marked me as one ruined by the war, no longer seeking prosaic health but rather certain attainments of the soul and intellect. A wildly romantic position, no doubt. But in those days I was reading Kafka, Dostoevsky, Mann and, above all, Joyce of *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. I loved Stephen Dedalus and could recite whole passages of the book, about the fabulous artificer, the hawk-like flying man, the "soaring impalpable imperishable being" forged anew by the artist in his workshop. This was the time when Nietzsche and new critical theories of the *reality* of art, "its mode of existence as a work," together formed a basis of what I thought made a poetics, contradicting and confused though it was. At any rate, it was a position that enabled my identification with the forces of history themselves. That night, at Weyburn, I wrote what I knew to be my first poem. It was ten years later before I fully understood the implications of that moment, and almost a further ten years before I could possibly begin to undertake the task of attempting an account of where I believed the real obscenity stood.

Part of the problem to begin with lay in the very poetics that made possible the kind of paradoxical inversions with which I first began. They (the inversions)

rested very much in the notion of their reality, their "mode of existence." And the troubling unwritten poem remained in its character the opposite of "being," a kind of "non-being" or negativity. The poem I write of, "On the 25th Anniversary of the Liberation of Auschwitz," is itself an example. As its title makes abundantly clear, it was written sometime after January 25, 1970 (within two weeks, I would guess), and though it has been widely reprinted and anthologized since, I don't think I have *read* it to audiences at public occasions more than six or seven times. It demands "certain attitudes, a certain ritualistic setting — a certain *detachment* or ceremonious remoteness" — to make its statement. That notion is not at all by the way, as I'll try to show later. In addressing the question in art, in poetry, of the Holocaust, we are not, to begin with, addressing questions like any others. It is set apart from any experience we can discuss. It exists on its own grounds of being — or rather of non-being. "Since the Holocaust, we're convinced the universe is not the same," says David Weiss Halivni, an adjunct professor of religion at Columbia University. "There is a blemish on creation and that blemish may lie dormant, but who knows when it will erupt and devour us."[1] There is an old Jewish tradition that to speak of evil may evoke it, so great is the power of language. So we approach the question of great evil in fear and trembling and with great awe, that we may propitiate the spirits and not wake them. Writers on the Holocaust use such imagery — of a crack in creation, a flaw, a blemish. It has been said it happened because God turned his back on man for one moment. And always the threat extends to language itself, as if language is implicated in some way, as if to speak of defilement is to be defiled, while to glamorize it — as art always threatens to do — is to trivialize it and let its sinister power emerge. The event, it seemed to me, put enormous strains on language so that poetry of the Holocaust would have to be in a "special language," a new form unheard of.

THIS SENSE THAT THE HOLOCAUST touches on the very nature of writing itself, that it raises difficulties and troubles for the writer himself, has metaphysical, religious, and political dimensions. So we were told by theoreticians and survivors alike, George Steiner and Elie Wiesel, for example. By 1967 I had read Steiner's eloquent and piercing essays, *Language and Silence*, which provided the first conceptual account of the dilemma the Holocaust presented to the writer: "We come after," said Steiner, "We know that a man can read Goethe and Rilke in the evening, that he can play Bach or Schubert, and go to his day's work at Auschwitz in the morning." He drew the extraordinary conclusions: "The blackness of it did not spring up in the Gobi desert or the rain forests of the Amazon. It rose from within, and from the core of European civilization.

The cry of the murdered sounded in the earshot of the universities. . . ." Ideological murders. A commonplace now, but to grasp it then seemed beyond comprehension. Under the stress of implication (Adorno's "No poetry after Auschwitz") language cracked. By the 1970's Susan Sontag was telling us of "fascinating fascism," film and poetry toyed with an awful camp kitsch. I remembered Leonard Cohen's equating of comic book mythology and Nazism. Elie Wiesel scorned the TV series "Holocaust" for trivializing horror.

A further more intense dilemma presents itself to the writer: the survivor. Like the camp itself the survivor is set apart from life as we know it or can write of it. There are two temptations for the survivor himself, silence and speech. Silence, because what must be told is beyond the telling. Any account of the unrealizable is, in some deep sense, a failure, a trivialization. How is it possible to convey what is impossible to convey? But to witness too is a temptation, full of paradox. Wiesel puts it this way:

> I have written 25 books and every one has been a failure. The feeling is always of inadequacy. I feel it at the beginning of a book, and at the end I'm confirmed. And yet I really believe I have to write. There's a certain compulsion. I owe it to the living. I find words by accident. Therefore, this accident must have meaning.

For a long while after I first encountered Wiesel's work I disliked it intensely. He made a subject impossible, but necessary, morally urgent for me. "A survivor's testimony" he said in one of those utterly, infuriatingly moral remarks that had the force of inescapable logic, "is more important than anything that could be written about survivors." I felt a furious bafflement, the need to write, the impossibility of writing. If writing about the Holocaust was virtually impossible for him, what could it be for me, for whom the experience existed not literally but historically? For me, the camps were part of history. Pictures. Those awful photographs. The obscene evidence emerging from mass graves as World War II ended.

"To suffer and then to suffer for not having suffered." Wiesel is talking of survivors. But something stirred. Not reality but *derealization* might now be the necessary subject or mode itself of poetry. By 1970 I had begun to think of the technical problems involved in working out the poetics. Once someone had spoken to me of Europe as the place of the dead, what I later would speak of in *Life Sentence* as "The Plague Cemetery." How to touch death as death and to know it for what it was so that it would identify me, this became the problem. It was, I realized, a technical problem in poetry because it meant — in contemporary terms — the unwriting of what I had been writing for twenty years. It meant then, a process of personal and formal dissolution. the breaking apart of personal, psychological *structures*, and moral categories, the imperatives of tradition. The place of death, Europe and the Jews, I had identified as tradition, fathers, all that named me, connected me with the past, the prophetic, Hebraic, Judaic sense —

in its alien and tragic sense not in its ethical and legalistic aspects. If the camps recorded death, it was that death I had to record, an attempt too horrible to contemplate. But the possibility of re-enacting that death began at the same time to occupy me. Its substitutions, the graves of the war dead, in Europe, for example, the place of the Jewish dead on the prairies, a father's grave.

I won't talk about the silence or the nerve needed to wait, not suffering. On January 25, 1970, there came a phone call from an Auschwitz survivor asking me to take part in the Auschwitz memorial service by reading the poem on Babi Yar by the Russian poet Yevtushenko. I went to the YMHA on Bloor and Spadina. A winter day, snow melting. As I entered the hall, past a mock entrance to the gates of Auschwitz with its infamous sign "Arbeit Macht Frei," survivors in camp uniforms, a wax mannikin prisoner, directing us to our places, I had the uncanny sense that it was my own past I was entering. The disorientation, through the ceremony of pictures/slides, speeches (Sigmund Sobolewski, mayors, survivors) was virtually unbearable. Through the long afternoon the poems, reminiscences, remarks continued, the eerie electronic music of Pendericki's *Dies Irae* providing a sinister counter point. I had become fragmented, broken into many pieces — now and then, here and there. Toronto, 1970; Europe, 1944; Estevan, 1930. And the photographs. Family albums.

I cannot recall to the day when it occurred to me I had been given a solution to a technical problem. There was a way to write the poem to be thought of as "Auschwitz." It would be a series of displacements: structurally, grammatically, imagistically, psychologically. *It would be a camp poem by not being a camp poem.* Stuttering. All theatricality. All frantic posturing. All pointed to a resolution that would not be a resolution, a total ambiguity in which two different moments (Toronto, 1970 and Estevan, 1930) dissolved into one another seamlessly, becoming at that instant another time, the unimaginable place of the killing ground itself.

This wasn't planned out. It exists only in its process. One Sunday afternoon at our apartment on Eglinton Avenue west I sat down at my desk and rapidly with few pauses began to type. When I finished, though there were revisions necessary, I knew (I heard in the poem) a new possibility in poetry lay before me. It would be a year or two before a new book with all these possibilities in it would appear. The poem itself appeared before that in *Canadian Forum*. The book I completed on the Costa del Sol in Spain in winter, 1972. In 1983, in winter, with my wife and daughter I walked from a train at the station to a memorial of the concentration camps at Dachau, Bavaria, West German Republic, past the entrance gates. An infamous sign there says in Gothic lettering, *Arbeit Macht Frei.* In the frozen fields of snow, a few dark figures moved. An icy cold wind blew over desolate ground. One day, I thought, I will be writing about this moment.

NOTES

[1] The quotation and those of Elie Wiesel are from "Bearing Witness: The Life and Work of Elie Wiesel," *The New York Times Magazine*, October 23, 1983. "On the 25th Anniversary of the Liberation of Auschwitz: Memorial Services, Toronto, January 25, 1970, YMHA Bloor and Spadina" first appeared in *Canadian Forum*, in revised form in *Stony Plain* (Erin: Press Porcépic, 1972), in *Dreaming Backwards: Selected Poems, 1953-81* (Toronto: General, 1981), as well in J. L. Granatstein and Peter Stevens, eds., *Forum: Canadian Life and Letters from 1920-70: selections from 'The Canadian Forum'* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1972); Robert Weaver and William Toye (eds.), *The Oxford Anthology of Canadian Literature* (Toronto: Oxford, 1981); Gary Geddes and Phyllis Bruce, eds., *Fifteen Canadian Poets Plus 5* (Toronto: Oxford, 1978), a revised edition of *15 Canadian Poets* (1970); and Gerri Sinclair and Morris Wolfe, eds., *The Spice Box* (Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys, 1981).

ENTERING IN

The Immigrant Imagination

Daphne Marlatt

THE TWO WORDS "IMMIGRANT" and "emigrant" have always fascinated me because of the gestures implicit in their prefixes, a leaving something behind (with its backward look) and an entering into something new.* The old-world nostalgia of the emigré must colour my notion of an emigrant imagination because i think of that imagination as rooted, bound up in, the place left, the "old country," "home," and preoccupied with recreating that place, whether out of nostalgia (a longing to return) or fury (that avenging spirit that cannot let go of old wounds). I think of Joyce and Marquez as two poles of the emigrant imagination.

The immigrant imagination seems to me, on the contrary, to embrace the new place it enters. It seeks to enter into its mystery, its this-ness, to penetrate it imaginatively even as it enters from outside. I think of Malcolm Lowry and Mexico, Audrey Thomas and Africa — does this mean all travel writing is writing from the immigrant imagination? Only i think when it genuinely struggles to pierce the difference, the foreignness, the mystery of the new place with its other culture, as it does in these two writers.

Looking back, i think that most of my writing has been a vehicle for entry into what was for me the new place, the new world. I immigrated to Vancouver from Malaysia as a child aged nine and spent many years trying so hard to assimilate, to speak and dress and behave as a West Coast Canadian, that when people asked where i came from i would say "Oh, North Van." Though my parents' house was filled with furniture and curios and articles of clothing from Malaysia, though they both spoke with British accents and shared a common wealth of memories from Penang days with us — "remember Eng Kim? remember Camrille?" — though we all wore Chinese slippers around the house (and i still do), out in the street i tried to look as much like a normal North Van. teen-ager as i could. For the sake of entry and acceptance i denied for years my history and that of my parents.

*From a talk given as part of a panel, "The Immigrant Imagination," at a Canadian Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies session, May 30, 1983, at the Learned Societies Conference, U.B.C.

My mother came from a colonial medical family that had been in India for two generations: she was born there, as was her mother. She met my father in Malaysia where she had joined her parents after graduating from an English private school. My father came from a military family, had lived as a child in India and Malta, had gone out to Malaysia as a young C.A. and, except for the war years when Malaysia was occupied by the Japanese and he was serving with the Australian navy, he spent almost twenty years in Penang before immigrating to Canada. They both referred to England as home when i was a child, and yet they chose not to go home when they left Penang. I grew up with two nostalgias in our house: the nostalgia for England, which, having spent only some months there, i didn't really understand; the nostalgia for Penang, which i could share though it was effaced by my enthusiasm for *this* place here. I loved this place, loved the woods out our back door, the Grouse Mountain streets, the inlet and the sparkling lights of "overtown" at night. I dreamed harbour dreams and Stanley Park dreams and Lonsdale Avenue dreams and nightmares. I wanted to "belong" here, be "from" here, but i found there were differences not easy to bridge.

We came from a colonial multicultural situation in Penang where five languages were spoken in our house (English, Malay, Cantonese, Tamil, Thai) to a city which was then (1951) much more monocultural than it is today, decidedly WASP, conservative, and suspicious of newcomers. We spoke the same language but not the same dialect and were consequently made fun of at school. We wore different clothes, ate slightly different foods. I learned to say tomayto instead of tomahto, sweater instead of woolly, i learned to speak of catchers and basemen, i learned to square dance, learned to wear nylon slips instead of woollen "vests," learned not to bring curry tarts to school in my lunchbox. Thirty years ago, American culture hadn't infiltrated the rest of the world as it has now. When i arrived, i'd never seen baseball (i'd never even seen snow), i didn't know what a parka was, or jeans, or a hamburger. I knew what orange squash was but not Mountain Dew or Dr. Pepper or Coca Cola. I'd never heard of bubble gum or jawbreakers or chickenbones. Here i heard country and western music for the first time and loved the stories in it. I discovered Mark Trail in cereal boxes and a completely new range of fauna and flora outdoors, from skunk cabbage to cougars (my little sister had nightmares about cougars for years). Where we lived in the last block of a street that stopped at a ridge too steep to pave, bears periodically raided our garbage cans. I was used to wild monkeys terrorizing our chickens in the garden in Penang and bears seemed much more exotic. Yet if i talked about the monkeys or the cobras and scorpions at school, the other kids thought *that* was so exotic i must be making it up. In this i experienced a turning upside down of the world, an inversion of values. It permeated everything. I had been taught politeness, "excuse me," and "thank you," as an essential oil to smooth the rough edges of

racial and class differences. Here it was taken as a prissy assertion of difference — "why do you keep saying 'sorry' all the time?" I learned that reading historical romances like *The Scarlet Pimpernel*, or reading Keats and Tennyson (my mother's view of a basic education) taught me nothing of any social use if i hadn't read Nancy Drew or heard of Bill Haley and the Comets.

So i bought rock 'n roll records, put away my mother's copies of Keats and Tennyson, wore white bucks and jeans and pencil-line skirts. I loved the principles of democracy as we argued them out in school, loved Canadian history with its romance of the coureurs de bois, the Métis uprising, Simon Fraser tracing rivers, Pauline Johnson and Emily Carr recording a culture as exotic as any Malay kampong's — yet here it had something to say about the plants and rocks and animals we lived and would go on living among. (I didn't stop, then, to question the application of "democracy" to reservations.) Wanting to sing "O Canada" along with everyone else at school (we did in those days), i enthusiastically became a Canadian citizen.

Only later, years later, did i begin to feel that, like a phantom limb, part of me, that Penang past, not quite cut off, still twitched alive and wanted acknowledging. Twenty-five years after we had left Penang, i went back for a visit with my father and sister, living in the first house we had lived in as a family, sleeping in the same bedroom, finding in the amah of the house the same woman who had been our children's amah back then. Out of that grew, for the first time, some Penang writing, as similarly going back to England five years later sparked in *How Hug a Stone* some English writing (an attempt to capture that voice, that ethos, i recognized from my childhood). Yet both returns were incomplete, intercut always with my present Canadian consciousness, so that neither writing is truly emigrant.

When i collected an oral history of Strathcona with Carole Itter (*Opening Doors*), i discovered how isolated my experience as an immigrant had been. Strathcona is the immigrant neighbourhood of Vancouver, has functioned as such for decades. It lies adjacent to commercial Chinatown and is now largely Chinese though it was known as Little Italy, once was the first Jewish settlement, once (before the war) had a school population that was sixty percent Japanese. I lived in it for six years and felt completely at home, felt as if part of me had been returned to the whole i'm still discovering. But what astonished me was how collective the immigrant experience was amongst the people we interviewed, whether they were Japanese, Chinese, Italian, Yugoslavian, or Jewish. Most immigrant children seemed to have grown up in extended families formed by the phenomenon of "calling over," where one member immigrates and then gradually calls over other members of his family to the new country. In addition, there were numerous regional associations, from the Chinese tong or clan houses, to the

Italian district groups. All of this helped keep the original culture alive by celebrating festivals in traditional ways and gathering people together with traditional rituals at weddings, christenings, funerals, etc.

I can only remember one family we knew who had a similar background to ours and they ended up moving to Toronto. We children made friends at school, my father made friends at the office, my mother, being at home all the time, was more isolated. There were no relatives living a few blocks away. There were no neighbours to chat with who might have come from the same district in the old country, even the same town. In fact, my mother had no district in England her family could be said to come from.

So the nostalgia for England (where her parents had retired) and for Penang increased at home as our assimilation, as children, increased outside in the neighbourhood and at school. My mother wanted to keep up "English" in our values as we struggled very hard to become Canadian. This led to a deepening neurosis i could neither understand nor address, as it increased my determination to leave all that behind and completely enter into this place here.

It seems to me that the situation of being such an immigrant is a perfect seedbed for the writing sensibility. If you don't belong, you can *imagine* you belong and you can construct in writing a world where you do belong. You can write your way into the world you want to be a part of (*Vancouver Poems, Steveston*), even as, from outside it, you witness its specific characteristics. (The first piece of writing i had published was a sketch i wrote in school in which i was Gassy Jack reminiscing at the end of my life on the growth of Gastown. It was published in a local PTA magazine, probably as an example of regional sensibility, but what i was doing was trying to write myself into the history of a city i wanted to belong in and felt i didn't, quite.)

The sensation of having your world turned upside down or inverted also, i think, leads to a sense of the relativity of both language and reality, as much as it leads to a curiosity about other people's realities (the kind of curiosity that makes you wander by lit rooms at night and invent characters who live in them — a basic fictional urge). It leads to an interest in and curiosity about language, a sense of how language shapes the reality you live in, an understanding of how language is both idiosyncratic (private) and shared (public), and the essential duplicity of language, its capacity to mean several things at once, its figurative or transformational powers. When you are told, for instance, that what you call earth is really dirt, or what you have always called the woods (with English streams) is in fact the bush (with its creeks), you experience the first split between name and thing, signifier and signified, and you take that first step into a linguistic world that lies adjacent to but is not the same as the world of things, and indeed operates on its own linguistic laws.

The sensation of living in *this* place with its real people and things, of being contained in it, but knowing that somewhere else there exists *that* place, with its real people and things which you can no longer go back to, the sense that the you you were in that place is not the same you as the you you are in this place, though the two overlap, produces a desire to knit the two places, two (at least) selves, somehow. I think that writers who feel this way are often interested in myth and symbol which are common to disparate phenomena and form a universal language underlying the specifics of the local — which is why, perhaps, so much early Canadian literature is full of myth and symbol. Now we make our exegesis of the difference using montage, using juxtaposition, knitting disparate and specific images from both places. Seeing the world as multidimensional as possible and ourselves present within it.

from TOUCH TO MY TONGUE

this place full of contradiction

a confusion of times if not of place, though you understood when i said no not the Danish Tearoom, the Indonesian or Indian, was in fact that place of warm walls, a comfortable tarot deck even the lamps pick up your glow, a cabin of going, fjords in there, a clear and pristine look the winds weave through your eyes i'm watching you talk of a different birth, blonde hair on my tongue, of numbers, nine aflush with cappucino and brandy and rain outside on that street we flash down down, laughing with no umbrella, i see your face because i don't see mine equally flush with being, co-incidence being together we meet in these far places we find in each other, it's Sappho i said, on the radio, always we meet original, blind of direction, astonished your hand covers mine walking lowtide strands of Colaba, the lighthouse, Mumbai meaning great mother, you wearing your irish drover's cap and waiting alive in the glow while i come up worrying danish and curry, this place full of contradiction — you know, you knew, it was the one place i meant.

houseless

i'm afraid, you say, are you? out in the wintry air, the watery sun welling close behind your shoulders i am following, the already known symmetry of your body, its radiant, bow-woman arched over

me, integrity straight as an arrow. blind with joy i say oh no, thinking, how could i fear with you?

and now it's dark in here, deep, my cave a house, you on the other side of the country, our country of sea with the wind blowing, our country of reeds and grasses under unfathomed sky. i huddle small, i call you up, a tiny point of light, memory small like a far-off hole — are you there? in all this smoke, fear, images torn from the wall requiring life for a life / that she take it all, mother of giving turned terrible mother, blood-sipper, sorrow Durga. turning her back, she takes back what she gives, as you might, or i might. giving myself up to fear. turning away (for "safety's" sake).

there are no walls. fear/love, this light that flashes over the sea surrounding us. signals danger, yes, my house no house. i can only be, no vessel but a movement running, out in the open, out in a dark and rising tide, in risk, knowing who i am with you —

creatures of ecstasy, we have risen drenched from our own wet grasses, reeds, sea. turned out, turned inside out, beside ourselves, we are the tide swelling, we are the continent draining, deep and forever into each other.

where we went

we went to what houses stars at the sea's edge, brilliant day, where a metal crab jets water catching light, heaven and earth in a tropic embrace joined upright, outside glass doors people and cars and waterglaze. city that houses stares, city that houses eyes, electricity writing the dark of so many heads figuring where we were. we knew so well i didn't even catch your eye as we stepped through and she brought out the rings for us to look at, silver, moon metal engraved in the shape of wild eyes by kwakiutl and haida hands, raven and wolf and whale and unknown birds not seen in the light city. creatures of unorganized territory we become, a *physical impulse* moving from me to you (the poem is), us *dancing in animal skins* in the unmapped part of our world. now you wear whale on the finger that enters and traces in whale walrus the horse you thought i was, shy of fences, running the edge of the woods where brought up short i feel the warmth of you, double you, wolf. i wear wolf and dream of your lean breast descending, warm and slow the fur that grows between your eyes fifteen hundred miles away in another city under the same moon.

from THE DANISH SKETCHES

Anne Marriott

(for Heather Spears)

On Bornholm Island

They pull down the roofs
over the eyes of the ochre cottages
to shut out dark beasts
Grendel, dragons.

On my distant island
what lurked under thimbleberries
shook dripping cedar?
I rushed to turn on lamps
was Grendel in that ornamental
shrubbery?
Bear or raven?
Is the true dark
only the darkness inside us?

On Bornholm Island we pull down
roofs over our own eyes
indoors behind blue curtains
pile on logs.
The stove is glowing.
The sound at the door is friends.

We are travellers bivouacked
around a campfire
on a journey over
a long plain.
We speak softly —
travellers' tales.

Hammershus

The castle grins
showing its broken teeth
above the fierce
hammer of water
a fierce grin
at the ancient enemy

crouched on the horizon:
Sweden, see?

That old enemy
now is friend
yet there's nothing of peace
about this red castle
though between stumps of ramparts
tiny daisies ring
on the worn grass
making wreaths for the dead of all old wars.

English daisies
my mother called them
in Victoria
but they run
right around the globe
trampled
persistent
pink-tipped in memory
of everybody's blood.

Actually it was neighbours
pulled this castle down
stacking the stones
into their family houses
but hatred's still here
flushing the angry walls
a deeper colour
fury
of the single enemy, the man
who lay in the rock chamber
(we peer
down through the iron grating
finally our eyes pick out
the hacked walls)
the man who lay and raged
cursing praying death
while the thick maggots
ate up his living flesh.

Sketches

My father sat by my sickbed
when I was seven

read from the prophet
Write the vision.
But I was born myopic
my vision broken.
I make only sketches, guessed-at
uncertain.

Reality is not here
always elsewhere
the friend far away
(dear friend, sharer)
clearer than this friend
near.
    These parks and houses
    island, even the dark sea
    are only shadows that loom
    turn brilliant
    pass like a sunset.
    Is there no solid land
    we can grasp
    so firmly our fingers
    cannot be unloosed?

Through a glass darkly
read my father
read
Love never faileth.

    Until the light
    bursts through the broken glass
    I will write love
    to this friend whose hand puts down
    the same words of joy and pain
    as my hand.
    I will write love
    to any friend
    whose mind locks even a corner
    into mine.
    I will write love —
    and praise, for every word
    we write
    word of ours
    that goes down true.

from DREAMFIELDS

Tom Marshall

xxii

"Oh, through a powder of ghosts I walk; through dust
Seraphical upon the dark winds borne . . ."

Klein writes of god
dispersed. Gassed: "martyr-motes,"

"Flotsam of flame!" His kin
are not consoled or consolable.

His kin are clouds
lingering. Ashes. His kin

fear not, having gone
ahead of us:

A horde. Their cries unheard . . .

God's hosts.

xxv

atomic disintegration, or
blindness, or

burns, or

destruction of the ozone layer,

all organisms blinded
by the hostile sun, or

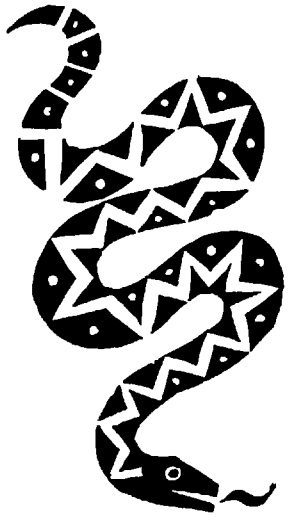
cancer, or
rotting corpses, plagues amid

broken buildings, flayed, all skin become
fluid peeling

xxvi

We have bitten into
the fire-apple

Atom's intoxicating
fruit / fall



TWO POEMS

Seymour Mayne

AT THE MONASTERY OF THE CROSS

No one may annihilate
the motherless angel,
Rasputin of the Valley,
who inhabits this yellow fortress
and offers a severe face,
little softening pity.
He lifts the portal for entrants
and strides away in monkish purple.

Winter or spring, invincible
against bullet or axe, unseen
he often sits above the stone gate,
counts the olive trees
grasping the rock-rooted
soil as if forever.

Valley of the Cross, Jerusalem

SACRIFICE

My neighbours talk cautiously —
worrying about
who will overhear them?
Their children they keep
to themselves, edgier smiles
turn on their lips and cheeks
Fright they camouflage

The managers bemoan
the imminent avalanche of profits
Someone must lead the nation
and give direction to the young,
they complain

The big men have begun
to speak of sacrifice

TWO POEMS

Ron Miles

CLASS OF '62: RE-UNION

We were never one. Twenty
years later we have doubled
ages, halved hopes
reddened our faces

with sunshine and liquor.
Tonight we glow,
re-naming past
glories and our children

reducing lives to sentences.
Most kids, first grandmother,
longest distance travelled.
Old businesses, new marriages.

But what of wives and husbands
gone, long nights after
and before, children split?
What of goals missed, or reached

but not extended? Black and white
yearbook entries show us
what we were, and would be.
Who among us will admit

losses irrecoverable, cumulative,
humiliating. Our amputations
make a whole of us. All the colour
photographs are a lie.

LIVING TOGETHER

We make the little man
come out, his blue slicker wet
as the day, chase him away

only to greet his yellow-
dressed woman from another
door. Gaily she looks

for him, sadly he hides
in their house. Whether
they live alone, or have

children does not matter
yet. There has been no
separation of their separate

ways. His blue
habit takes its turn
then gives her

hers. And what is hers
has its sway.
Living as equals

they individually pursue
a place in the sun
or rain. Indoors

and outdoors, in doors
and out, passing
in the balmy weather

and the chill.

THREE POEMS

Erin Mouré

SIKSIKA

Like women of the rugged plain,
Siksika women,
their moccasins black from the ashes of their fires,
the wide circles of medicine stones
they carried from the earth
to hold the circumference of teepees,
eighteen feet at the centre

Like the Siksika women
who made & owned the teepee of the family,
thirteen buffalo skins
The man who could bring her this
her husband

Like Siksika women,
called Blackfeet,
sorrow of the prairie, viewers of small
animals grazing,
of buffalo, wonder of the crazed spirit, the advent
of laws to guard the railway,
its division of land

Even when hunters are dying,
drunk in streets of Cluny or Toronto, the buffalo pound
empty, the siding closed
Like Blackfeet women
it is us who own the circle of our bodies,
one skin unmarked by stitches, undecorated, celebrated between us,
unhunted by men

BE SOCIABLE

Wanting to be sociable,
wanting to be mind,
wanting to mete out presence & the thinking
word
The white settees, teak table & glass
plates of the meal
Amnesty brought by objects is not
only beautiful
but senseless
The killings go on & on in the
glass factories of the skull
the head beaten against glass
the mouth blown
full of glass

If we are sociable beings why are so many
dead,
fingering the mouths of others,
clamped shut, not speaking of joy
As we raise our glasses
in greeting, safe from their agony
A voice outside our body
A dry tongue
A drink of wine

SHOCKS

Like the Indian boy who climbed up into the transformer
& touched the power with his head & shoes,
perfect
except on the inside,
except the scalp burn, the twin burns on his feet

He lay in the hospital for weeks, a vegetable
A place where time stopped & never started,
a shell, a body to trip into
& never grow to adulthood

As my husband did,
poised over the dinner after he tipped it
on the floor, straddling the soft heap
of vegetables
He wavers drunken
Don't touch anything, don't touch me
& I can't answer, just stare at his sad impulse,
shock & hunger

The girl who stuck a spoon into the socket
to find where the TV picture hid
& jolted her arm & neck
A neat bolt of lightning etched in the metal handle
I still have that spoon

How the body's built
to take it, to preserve its likeness,
how it won't remember shock or marriage, & ignores
good proof, sits up at night in its coil of bedding
its hair on end, irresistible

a vegetable with three burns,
smaller than quarters

ADRIFT

Susan Musgrave

I was everything at once,
fish, line and lure
and small boat with person adrift in it.
I'd even go so far
as to say I was the sea.

I should describe how it felt
to be a fish pulling itself in
hooked through its own heart
by something inseparable from its flesh.

I felt confused. I felt uncertain.
When the boat rocked, I rocked too,
and when the sea turned greasy and dark
I had to roll, I felt one with it.

At times I had human thoughts,
I wanted to reel in the fish and eat it.
At other times I sympathized with the sea;
I wanted to beach the boat and scuttle it.

Talk about being in two places at once —
I was in six at least. I was cold, too,
irritable in my skin and unnatural
at the end of the line. Yet, understand me,
I knew how it felt to be that line,
taut and purposeful, baited in fate's hand.

It must have been you in your
little aluminum boat who came
zigzagging through a squall to
bring me to my senses. Six of them
adrift in a body with teeth chattering and
mind teetering on the brink of a
horizon which, you pointed out,
wasn't really there. You said the world
was round, not square. *Good news,* I thought,
and started rowing.

TRIPTYCH

Suniti Namjoshi

i

A PLACID COW was grazing in the meadows. She wasn't really thinking about anything, except perhaps about the texture of the grass, its springy resilience, about a patch of clover, about the taste of buttercups, about flies, and the warmth of the sun beating on her back. In other words she was simply grazing. When suddenly a half-grown lion cub bounded from the woods. It was a ball of sunshine, a bundle of joy. It danced up to the cow and licked her all over with its rough tongue. It was importunate. It was friendly. It insisted that the cow play with it. And the cow, poor beast, was so exceedingly flattered, she soon complied, to the end that you see: a penitent cow, and an astounded lion cub begging piteously for a piece of beef.

The point of the tale? It depends rather on which of the two you identify with.

ii

AND YET the cow we are speaking of was a Brahmini cow, had the long slender legs of Indian cattle, the quiet eyes, wistful and expressive, the curving horns, the elegant dewlap, and that masterly sweep from shoulder to rump which seems to say this is the way cattle should be made, this and only this. And she was skinny — all the better to admire her bones, their indisputable integrity. What is more, though not tended and praised as a goddess ought to be, she was used to some lip-service. This she accepted gently and calmly, never once altering her docile expression; and when chased out of gardens with sticks and stones, it is true that she ran, but she ran with a slow and clumsy dignity. So much for this beast. And what of the cub? The golden lion cub whose genes proclaimed a royal heredity? They played together these incongruous two, the burnished cub against her white flanks making them look like a scene from heraldry. Oh they were beautiful. They were gleaming. They recalled the world before the fall. They were like milk and honey.

iii

CONVERSELY Moon-Calf in love with the Lady Lioness: "O Queen of the Jungle, Princess of Night, allow me, if you will, to entertain you with my grief." Lioness a little anxious, has other things to do, but Moon-Calf distracting and rather dazzling in the light of moonbeams. Speaks to the Moon-Calf: "Go away, Moon-Calf. Come back again in another five years. Then we will see." Five years elapse. Moon-Cow returns. Lioness and Moon-Cow become excellent friends, lovers as well, pick pretty patterns in the smooth moonbeams.

DRAFT OF AN EPILOGUE TO "INCHOATE WORLD"

(from *The Martyrology* Book VI Books)

bp Nichol

35,000 feet above Saskatchewan
less than a foot between me &
all that air, these airs err
insubstantial as comparison
spots to which we come, position ourselves
heirs to the veaucabulairies
terrer that fires us
all gollems finally
someone marks our fourheads
four elements there
                we lurch forward
enact tradition
            monstrously
familiair
        familheir
tri bull
        labyrinthinemine
a tour of
gnossos
logos
osos
    (o that s.o.s. of
consciousgnoss)
or that old question
"who's the boss?" (b.s. os)

minos most of our memory
we function out of loss
amigos

        unless i've got a pun
i can't write it down

ink think

"is that what you mean by procoss?"
[harbor lights
th'arbor of masts &
sails off the edge of your world a view
venue STREETS
lower&upper
middle voice/tongue/world]
i mean the earthyear the puns get the more the pen can pin it down to

Pan plays the world 'pon his flute

old bullfoot amazes us
pipes bright as language
                sleepy giants
who will wake you
mourn your death &
dance your resurrection

                dreaming world
[the rivers branch like
trees
        someone's always leaving

[catch in the voice the
ship

    water water water you
    doing?

[meme eau: i'm just looking at the sea 'n world
                [eauver & eauver]]]
something fishy when the tongue slips

[glimmering surface
invisible depths
across which the boats skip]

"I'll write you a letter
[A to A]]

giant talk

the long waged war
the fight or struggle for

the mind
boarders in these rooms words open

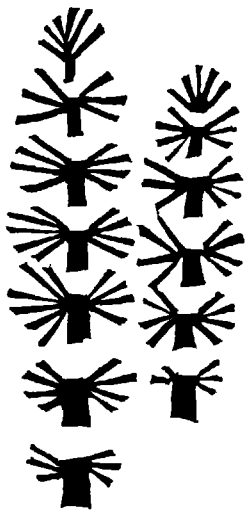
i said that be
you said that be
we said that be
they said that be

FORE

warned

letting the future know
we're playing thru
gulf the gulls & mist rise out of
stretches between "me" & "you"

August 23 to October 25, 1983



CONFESSIONS OF A COMMERCIAL WRITER

Eric Nicol

I'M HERE TO TURN MYSELF IN. The guilt has become too much to bear. For more than 35 years I have lived with it, the crushing shame, and now, before it is too late, I must get this Kong-sized monkey off my back. I come to this respected periodical to ask the editor to take my statement:

I have made money as a writer in Canada.

No, I don't mean counterfeiting, though that sounds more feasible. I mean that I have supported myself and my family with my typewriter, with enough to spare to sustain a meaningful relationship with my broker.

I sense that the reader is already shrinking away from me. Anyone familiar with publication in this country knows that a Canadian writer's literary worth varies inversely with his financial liquidity. If the author has anything in his pocket besides a hole, he has obviously been engaging in — and I apologize for using the word in a respectable journal — *commercial* work.

I remember the pain and mortification I felt the first time I read a newspaper's theatre review in which my comedy of manners was described as a "commercial play." I was too young to understand what the term meant, or I might have tried to get out of the dirty business before the stigma had hardened. Hopelessly naïve, I thought that having my play classed with the style of Neil Simon was a compliment. Little did I comprehend that, whereas being popular is tolerated and even admired in most parts of the world, in Canada it is merely vulgar, in the worst Latin sense of the word.

The critics (reviewers, actually, as Canada has no professional critics in any performing art not directed by a referee) are seldom tolerant towards the author of a popular hit. If he attempts to repeat it, the watchdogs of Canadian culture will quickly have him by the seat of his designer jeans.

Instead of recognizing this early on in my mercenary career, I saw no harm in letting artistic directors produce a second play of mine despite the fact that the first play was a financial success. Fool that I was, I openly admired their moxie. Only latterly have I learned to plead with producers to conceal box-office figures unless they are really low.

I also write under several names.

Too late. In a pre-opening interview with one of Vancouver's drama reviewers, he asked me, almost sympathetically, "Why do you keep trying?" I didn't have a

reasonable reply ready. To say that I still hoped to write something both artistically meritorious and good for big bucks — well, it would have sounded absurdly pretentious, not to say hallucinative.

How then does a Canadian writer cope with success? One way is to live abroad. Mavis Gallant is suspected of earning substantial sums, as a contributor to *The New Yorker*, and in U.S. dollars at that. But she very sensibly holes up in Paris. This makes her an expatriate, her royalty cheques excusable because she is too far from Canada to be on welfare. Similarly, Canadian writers Arthur Hailey and Bernard Slade, though seen to be highly commercial, pay for their millions by having to work in the United States. They are more likely to be mugged, and they are entirely cut off from the Canadian Council grant — the modern equivalent of excommunication. They may have expensive homes in California, but they have little chance of being invited to read their work at a meeting of the Moose Jaw branch of the Canadian Authors Association.

For the commercial author seeking respectability the only other option is to live on the Gulf Islands of British Columbia, preferably an obscure and bleak atoll with no ferry service and brackish well water. So long as he keeps his ill-gotten gains in an old bait bucket and dresses like something discharged from the bilge of a Russian trawler, the bush man or woman of letters may conceivably prosper without inciting contempt.

But I, alas, am betrayed by my address (Vancouver's Kerrisdale), even though I avoid using the postal code. As a commercial writer I suffer an anxiety attack every time I send an unsolicited manuscript to a publisher or dramaturge, because under Canadian criminal law prostitution is not a crime but soliciting is. I must be careful not to appear pressing and persistent. I never try a publisher more than once, or on the street.

Yet, people know. Somehow the basically decent reading public of Canada can detect those of us commercial writers who cannot simply summon the Muse, but have to deal through her pimp. When my Muse does show up, she is wearing pink hot pants and fishnet stockings. Oh, God, how I envy the author who receives his divine afflatus in a tiny garret, as he nibbles his mousetrap cheese!

"No man but a blockhead," said Samuel Johnson, "ever wrote except for money." The doctor's prescription is not accepted in Canada. Here the blockhead is valued as totemic. He writes not for money but for the manifest destiny of being appointed as writer-in-residence at a recognized Canadian university. (I was offered a writer-in-residency once, but had to turn it down because I had encumbered myself with material objects, such as a wife and three children.)

Let my fate serve as a warning to the Canadian writer tempted to give up the *succès d'estime* for the greener fields of the commercial. Those fields are actually foul, soul-sucking bogs, my friend. Do us both a favour: keep out.

PIGS

Michael Brian Oliver

Pigs
Are like gods.

Their dirty faces,
Their itchy arses,
A welcome sight
After Edmonton's
Tall blank towers,
Cold golden faces.

Out past sloughs,
Bickering blackbirds,
Leduc Number One,
THE FOUNTAINHEAD,
We found the farm —
My wife, my son, myself.

Fellow Easterners,
The swine grunted,
Raced between stumps,
Rooted the sunset
Up out of the dust,
That damned horizon.

Every Saturday night
We came to watch,
To praise their excellence.
Homeless, like us,
Belonging nowhere,
Everywhere — pigs.

Back in Edmonton
Splendid magpies
Were being slaughtered.
I longed to liberate them,
Replace them with pigs —
Let the racists try them on!

I dreamed of leading
Fat rampant pigs
Across suburban lawns.
Think about it —
Pigs and dandelions
Against the Gestapo.

8-year-old Susie,
Born on May Day,
Shouting *Fuck you!*
At every passer-by,
She would hail the pigs:
Welcome, barbarians!

Pigs and Susies are
Necessary, inevitable,
Whenever laws
Precede salvation.
I do not know
What they are, but

Pigs
Are like gods.

TWO POEMS

Michael Ondaatje

PROUST IN THE WATERS

for Scott and Krystyne

Swimming along the bar of moon
the yellow scattered sleeping
arm of the moon
                on Balsam Lake

releasing the air
                out of your mouth
the moon under your arm
tick of the brain
submerged. Tick
of the loon's heart
in the wet night thunder
                below us
knowing its shore is the air

We love things which disappear
and are found
creatures who plummet
and become
an arrow.
To know the syllables
in a loon sentence
                intricate
shift of preposition
that signals meridian
                west south west.
The mother tongue
a bubble caught in my beak
releasing the air
                of a language

Seeing no human in this moon storm
being naked in black water
you approach the corridor
such jewelry! Queen Anne's Lace!
and slide to fathoms, androgenous.

The mouth swallows river morse
throws a sound
through the loom of liquid
against sky.

Where are you?

On the edge
of the moon bar

BIRCH BARK

for George Whalley

An hour after the storm on Birch Lake
the island bristles. Rock. Leaves still falling.
At this time, in the hour after lightning
we release the canoes.
The silence of water
purer than the silence of rock.
The paddle touches itself. We move
over blind mercury, feel the muscle
within the river, the blade
weave in dark water.

Now each casual word is precisely chosen
passed from bow to stern, as if
leaning back to pass a canteen.
There are echoes, repercussions of water.
We are in absolute landscape,
among names that fold in onto themselves.

To circle the island means witnessing
the blue grey dust of a heron
released out of the trees.
So the dialogue slides
nothing more than current,
this fly line of friendship
an old song we break into
not needing all the words.

We are past naming the country.
The reflections are never there
without us, without the exhaustion
of water and trees after storm.

DR. DOLITTLE

Richard Outram

Almost unable in the text
To bear with what was coming next,

How could I ever hope to know,
Once having been abandoned so,

The elegant, insistent why
And wherefore whereby I was I,

The creature of my tender years,
And not the other of my fears?

As yet, I only knew, I knew,
Although I knew it through and through,

That one must somehow, in the end,
Become and thereby comprehend,

Embody and elaborate
The tale that no one would relate

To me: whereof the central part
I had complete, I thought, by heart;

But guessed with surety I had
The best of reasons to be glad,

As long as I was child, not Man,
That one was not allowed to scan

The scientific occult note;
The answer the good Doctor wrote

With feverish delighted haste,
That not an inkling go to waste,

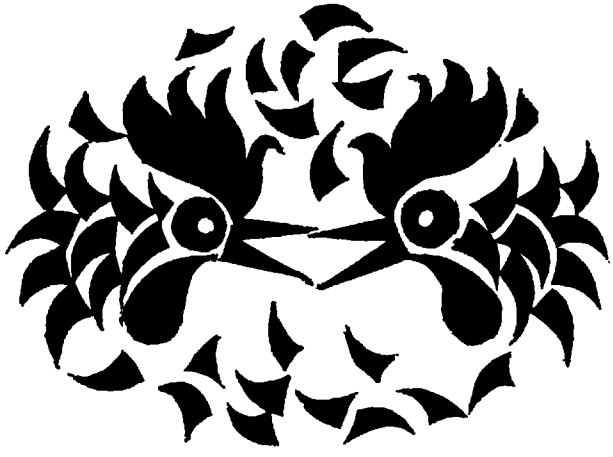
Upon the silken lining torn
Out of his hat, while he was borne,

As all of us, perhaps, may be,
Across the bottom of the sea

Within the great snail's chambered shell:
And understood therein full well

The question he had died to ask
The mollusc, being brought to task

Before the pushmi-pullyu's rare,
Binary relentless stare.



BESTIARY

Al Purdy

ABC of P

Whoever wrote Tom O'Bedlam,
the anonymous, the all-of-us,
enduring the pain of everyman,
perched on a throne in the gutter.

Auden for "Lay Your Sleeping — " etcetera,
who was nevertheless anti-romantic;
a nay-saying man, a quiet torturer,
no spontaneity, decidedly magnificent.

Blake — who knew life's central things:
God, money (glory-power) and love.
Nobody can have all three of them:
Blake made two more than enough.

Byron for "So We'll Go No More — "
the glory of loss, the triumph of sorrow,
at Marathon, at Missolonghi:
no excuse given, none needed.

You, Gaius Valerius Catullus
" — here face down beneath the sun":
an absent friend, lost in the centuries' dust
next door, just stepped out for a minute —

Donne, of course, Dean of St. Paul's.
Just the early stuff. That death portrait,
sitting in his shroud, repels me:
the godless lover is alive and warm.

Homer and his characters struggle for control
in the ancient world of Achilles and Hector,
while Cassandra prophesies bloody hell —
You have to remind yourself now and then
this is literature.

Housman: aware of a moment coming
when human face and death's skull face

stare directly at each other,
and listened to what they said beforehand.

Jeffers, who was America's Cassandra.
I don't think he ever wrote of flowers,
but glimpsed another reality: dams broken
high in the mountains; after the bombers,
animals returned; earth grown bright —

Keats, the rejected — but rejection wasn't
so bad when you can soar like he did:
with a sadness so unbelievably poignant,
it escapes books and becomes gladness.

Kipling — still somewhat unfashionable:
for certain poems that awake the feeling
of woodsmoke in a simpler world,
and whatever poems do that prose can't.

Lawrence! — not for his blustering
Jesus-propheteering: just some delicacy
that stands on one foot and blushes
like a girl, then sticks out its tongue.

A yea-nay-sayer, the political Neruda,
who loved a mythic America
that never was —: in the blue distance
of Machu Picchu, and condors hovering.

Dylan and his Childhood Forest of Arden,
whose life paraphrased his death:
as if there were artificial boundaries
between them, with booze in both places.

Yeats for Maud Gonne,
and those little glittering gay eyes
of the Chinese man: and because of him,
a feeling that greatness is still alive.

Star painters, lapidaries, and often
poseurs; craftsmen more than artists;
but sometimes, when we had forgotten,
they remembered where the heart is.

ONTARIO CULTURE AND – WHAT?

James Reaney

SOME YEARS AGO, I started teaching a graduate course called Ontario Literature and Culture. The usual response to this at the time was, "Ontario Literature and what?" "For we have very little of that around here," seemed to be the attitude expressed by this remark, "thank you." But, of course, we are knee deep in our culture even if it prides itself on not being one! If brought back to visit his old hunting grounds, an Attiwandaron tribesman would immediately notice the new gods we worship — among them, the flush toilet,[1] the ritual spraying of expensive poisons every spring, the human sacrifice to the car, the cenotaphic expression in every town, city and village of even more spectacular sacrifices off in Europe somewhere, and the carefully tuned banality of coliseum movies and brutally loud music. A few months ago, a television news broadcast at my mother-in-law's brought many elements of our culture into focus, elements listed above. Someone in the suburbs of London, Ontario had tried to burn down their new house. In full colour with music the camera lingered over the bathroom where gasoline, the new sacrament, had started it all. The French Empire colour scheme of lavender trimmed with gold now had disturbing and desacralizing stripes of dreck piled randomly over it. From thousands of invisible viewers you could hear a chorus of shocked "tsktsk's." So perhaps my adding "and Culture" was my admission that what literature we had wasn't taking effect, did not express what it should powerfully enough, had failed to see much of our real life in Ontario. So I had evidently wanted to hurry up things a bit by raiding other disciplines — sociology, geography, local history, fine art, McLuhan and Innis, folklore, and even just hunting local graffiti or snowmen made by the local children. Because, potentially, all of Ontario life is subject matter for artists, only they must hurry up or the banality may freeze?

Things are changing though. For example, it used to be that that sphinx of cities, Toronto, had almost no literary reflector. With Paris or London, you can point to Balzac and Dickens. All I could find for Toronto was a sociological study called *Crestwood Heights*, still an excellent novel only lacking some foreground figures and a hero. But novelists have now sprung up: with its subways like pastel

chutes, *Edible Woman* was the breakthrough. There's even an historical study by a cousin of Ernest Thompson Seton which explains Spadina Avenue in terms of its original inheritance and real estate history. Above Bloor Street, the "i" in "Spadina" is soft; below it is hard. I stress the fact that this historian is related to the man who wrote *Two Little Savages* because that novel starts off with its sensitive hero going crazy in a place called Bonnerton, and what I did not realize at the age of eight when I read this very essential Ontario book was that Bonnerton is a pseudonym for the mean little Toronto of the nineties. Somewhere in it, further blinding flashes!, the hero explains to his mother that the reason he threw a stone at the bird at Niagara Falls was that — *he loved it*. Now we're getting somewhere. Alice Boissonneau, the author of *Eileen McCullough*, a penetrating study of Toronto's West End in the thirties-forties, once reminded me that not very long ago when you came in from a walk parental figures would ask: "What'd you see?" And you would reply — oh — a killdeer, a weasel, a butterfly. "Did you kill it?" Many in the know would agree that *that* is the essential voice of our Ontario,[2] that and the boy's reply to his mother's question. I'm sure that even our Attiwandaron tribesman would agree that technology aside, nothing much has changed from his supposedly violent and primitively inarticulate time.

I have just mentioned a local bird — no, a national bird — the killdeer, and this brings me immediately to a basic problem with not only Ontarians, but also Canadians. No one knows our birds, despite the vogue of birdwatching and the prevalence of nature study in schools. When, in 1959, I wrote a play called *The Killdeer*, audience members representing most of the provinces kept asking me, "What's a killdeer?" Now the killdeer is not just a pasture or wilderness bird. It nests on beaches and in fields, but it also nests on the gravelled roofs of downtown buildings, and I have heard its distinctive and haunting "killdeer" cry on campus grounds in Halifax, Kingston, Winnipeg, and Vancouver. At the time, my feeling was that if I had polled these audience members with an abstract word such as "predestination" they would have done quite a good job of identifying that vulture. But a wonderful plover bird[3] all over the place with its thrilling cry? No. No one has bothered teaching them about anything so concrete and useful to poetry and drama as the name of wild birds. Los Angeles with its condors has lifted us too far above the tree line for such earthly knowledge. In a way killdeer, tree, and weed identification is what my course is all about. I happen to believe that if you don't know the weed that grows at your doorstep — knotweed — or the grass that grows in cemeteries — orchard or poverty grass — or the name of the tree outside your window, then you're not rooted in your environment. Books such as *Two Little Savages* or *Surfacing* are about the way such knowledge heals a nervous breakdown, something I think our society is quite unconsciously experi-

encing. And, of course, at colleges you get quite a lot of useful knowledge about laurels, myrtles, and nightingales, but no takers for the local ugly ducklings — knotweed, poverty grass, and killdeers. In the early days of the course, when a published one was still available, a partial solution was to ask students to make a leaf album, often with accompanying quotations from our writers. Perhaps afraid of climbing trees, some delegated this project to their spouses. Well, someone in the family knew their leaf-shapes. You may ask, "What difference does this really make?"

My answer would be to take a look at a story in Alice Munro's *Who Do You Think You Are?* called "Wild Swans." In this story, a young girl travels from Wingham near Lake Huron to Toronto on Lake Ontario for the first time in her life. She goes by a train in a journey that involves sweeping across the Southwestern Ontario peninsula, up over the Niagara Escarpment, and so, hugging Lake Ontario, to Union Station where her stepmother has warned her about white slavers. The white slaver strikes earlier than she expected though, for beside Rose there sits down a man claiming to be a minister — "Lake Erie . . . wild swans." About this time, the girl also notices that just at the escarpment the trees subtly change to a richer leaf texture and a different kind of bark surface. As she notices this, her life changes since now for the first time she is intimately touched by a man — "Lake Erie . . . minister . . . wild swans." Physiography, psychology, physiology all meet. Rose has reached several kinds of escarpments at once. And she makes the appearance of things in the Ontario landscape help her as they, it used to be thought, were intended to by being useful symbols, soothing referents. Our consumer culture couldn't care less about the delicate nuances I have been describing, and its money-making "rites of passage" stories avoid leaf textures if they can. At the other end of the Escarpment from Rose, aggregate companies threaten to turn Grey County into one big gravel pit. We live in a world where Kentuckians wake up to find that their birthplace is now a strip mine, a monster which, I once read in a book on Ohio, has completely done away with several of that state's counties. Technology with its ignorance of what topsoil and Quaker farmhouses could mean is the enemy of the course I am talking about. Your intimate surroundings do matter very much be they pastel chutes or silvery bark, and I am happy to find Atwood and Munro apparently on my side.

Alice Munro's husband is a professional geographer, and one of her early stories — "Walker Brothers Cowboy" — makes deft use of a father who knows his physiography. He explains to his daughter how glaciers formed Lake Huron; we sense later on that these glaciers haven't stopped forming people's lives. One of the essential handbooks for my course happens to be Chapman and Putnam's *Physiography of Southern Ontario*, and this is so because when I first taught at

the University of Manitoba I met two geographers who really changed my imaginative life — John Warkentin and the late Fred Watts. They could explain something I was having a great deal of trouble with in 1979 — the Manitoba landscape. The authors of the above-named book had been their teachers, and they were expanding their teachers' insights into Ontario landforms and cultural effects on same in the direction of the quite different Red River Valley world. Field patterns, farm yards, houses, fences, the presence of an imported Ontario landscape in Manitoba,[4] Mennonite house-barns, the presence of an imported mediaeval Russian landscape in Manitoba — all these matters make you happier for thinking about them. I had already started bicycling around my own county at home with a government map in my carrier — one inch to three miles, and now, in Manitoba, I started bicycling up and down the banks of the Red River. Naturally this results in students trying the same sort of thing just to see what impressions are to be had. Beyond this, however, I encourage my students to pay attention to the way geographers, particularly physiographers, *write*. When it came out, Chapman and Putnam's *Physiography of Southern Ontario* was a better written book than most Ontario novels. This comes, I like to think, not from their trying to write well, but from trying to organize their subject as clearly and knowledgeably as possible. They spent all their summers driving all over Ontario, down *every* road evidently. Then they simply ran their observations through the rather attractive jargon of physiography; this jargon was invented by an Ulsterman who used Gaelic words — *kames*, *eskers* — for landshapes. As well, these gentlemen were not afraid to voice their own personal feelings from time to time at a particular lonely set of farmhouses, or a particularly fine set of well kept schoolyards. Similarly, Chaucer ran his human landscape forms through the hopper of planetary influences, and Atwood and Munro — perhaps you can guess some of the speculations that arise in my seminars about *possible* relationships between our writers and our geographers.

SINCE I AM NOW IN DANGER of teaching you the whole course, I will now only sketch in the remaining extradisciplinary layers which eventually have poems and novels written in Ontario placed on top of them. Grace Campbell's *Thorn Apple Tree*, or Atwood's *Surfacing*, or John Richardson's *Westbrook, the Outlaw* look somehow different if you have read Selwyn Dewdney's *Indian Rock Paintings*, delivered a paper on the Culture of Glengarry County, or re-established the satirical Reform attitude to that so-called father of his settlement, Colonel Talbot. Also, if you have a forties map of Toronto, so does

Avison's "The Local and the Lakefront"; so do the early poems of Christopher Dewdney if you have listened to an account of London, Ontario's Coves district.

Indian studies: how can Wallace Stevens say, completely overlooking those who gave his state its name, that "we never had a mythology in Connecticut"? Since it seems unfair to exterminate them while stealing their myths, perhaps he is wise. Still, Jehova came to Ontario like a rapacious Elizabethan settler to Ireland. Surely you have to know who were the gods of your country before your arrival.

History: since an Ontario resident invented the word "pre-history" you would think that we might have solved the problem of telling our mere *story*; however, there is as yet to my knowledge not a book for grown-ups that professes to give a clear account of our province's life from beginning till now.[5] And this, despite the fact that a poet, Margaret Avison, has beautifully shown the way with her school text, *The History of Ontario*. As the years go by, my students seem to think that the problems are not insufficiently funded research, but literary and psychic blocks. Is it that we don't think we're worth a story?[6] Perhaps it was this shyness that caused one of our premiers, Mitchell Hepburn, to close down the archives of the province. The closure caused no great popular outcry.

Thinkers: in particular, Richard Maurice Bucke, Harold Innis, and David Willson, the heretic Quaker. Philosophy journals in Ontario ignore these men and murmur instead about the Scottish Kantians at Queen's.

Painters: David Milne writes as well as he paints, and Bucke's theosophy has a great deal to do with the look of Lawren Harris' abstracts as well as his earlier landscapes.

People: most graduate students know only their peers and the famous dead. Asked to interview a professional trapper, a botanist who collects stories about his township's seven idiots, or an old woman who once ran a ferry on the Sydenham River, they have been known to tremble in fear — at first.

Now we are ready — for what?

As I have implied, if the course were just Ontario literature, you would be missing a big echo chamber which we have now given you blueprints for. What are the resonances? Certainly not those of a Québecois-like Renaissance. The Bible still remains the best guide to our minds, and such poets as Rilke, Spenser, or Olson are apt to mean more to our poets than Crawford or Willson, or Lampman, and rightly so. Nevertheless, the student may have seen one of the most unpopular and misunderstood Canadian provinces as a big poem rather than an elusive mystery or an exercise in materialism. If the reader can see this as desirable, it would certainly to my mind justify this rather curious course I have in the last fifteen years so enjoyed teaching, and in the last few weeks, up in the Middlesex Memorial Tower, also, however briefly, enjoyed describing.

NOTES

[1] "The bathroom is the most important room in the house" is an Ontario saying.

[2] Another Ontario folk saying is that particularly in photographs, Ontario people never touch each other.

[3] What does Archibald Lampman mean by "shore-larks"?

[4] As in Robert C. Stead's *Grain*.

[5] It may be that the province is physically too big. Students discovered that John A. Macdonald wanted the prairies to have the Lakehead harbours. But, no, our greedy premier, Oliver Mowat, too foxy for the Manitoba lawyers, pushed us west as far as Kenora.

[6] Royce McGillivray has written a fantasy history of Ontario, parodying the local histories. Perhaps after this uninhibited account, he could attempt the untried.

THE CANADIAN CLIMATE

Jane Rule

BECAUSE I WAS BORN AND RAISED in the United States and came to Canada for the first time when I was twenty-five and have now lived over half my life here, I should feel more self-consciously Canadian than a native of the country, more defensively Canadian, if you like. I have written a defensive essay for *The Globe and Mail* called "Canadian Enough," having to do with what I see as my right to be known as a Canadian writer. What really distinguishes me from native writers is my lack of defensiveness about Canada.

I was not raised to think that anything Canadian is second rate. I was, like most Americans, entirely ignorant of Canada. My geographic insight was limited to the certain knowledge that I lived in the greatest country on earth. Living in England and travelling in Europe shortly after World War II, I discovered large numbers of people who did not feel simple gratitude for America's having won the war and having provided the Marshall Plan for Europe's recovery. Nor were people generally convinced that the threat of world communism justified the purges McCarthy was initiating in the United States. I was asked a number of embarrassing cultural as well as political questions about the rights of native Indians and blacks, about the incarceration of Japanese Americans during the war.

When I returned to my own country, I didn't any longer feel at home there. The patriotism which required citizens to be proudly, blindly loyal seemed a peculiar American vice which I no longer shared. In England, though I had not been particularly welcomed as an American, I had been encouraged as a young writer, met with others like me to discuss work, talked with published writers who offered introductions to their publishers. In the States I was, because I hadn't published, dealt with as someone deluded, shut out of the jealously guarded, narrow professionalism of publishing. At the Stanford Writing School, where I expected to meet others like me, I found instead a focus on commercialism and negative competition. We were not being groomed for the long apprenticeship required of a writer but for another American dream: American writers spring onto the scene full grown, out of the head of Zeus, with best sellers as noisy as the atom bomb.

After teaching on the east coast for two years and saving enough money to take a year off for my own writing, I returned to California to visit my family and

incidentally took a trip north with a cousin who had never seen the redwoods. We drove as far as Vancouver only because an English friend of mine had been hired by U.B.C. and I thought I might scout out an apartment for him.

We arrived on a clear August day in 1956, and there before us was a city of human scale (the only two highrises were B.C. Hydro and the Vancouver Hotel) defined by thirty miles of accessible beaches and the mountains of the north shore rising abruptly into forest wilderness. As we drove along the tree-lined streets, seeing gardens as loved as English gardens, then out through the grant lands to a university on cliffs overlooking the sea, I kept wondering why nobody had ever told me of this place, so rarely beautiful, on a coast I'd known all my life. Until that day, that coast had ended for me at Seattle.

It was a good time in the city's history for its aspiring young. The university was expanding by thousands each year. The CBC was in a period of regional assertiveness. The first really professional selling gallery, The New Design, had just been established. From the beginning of my life in Vancouver there was work to do, marking papers and tutoring students for the U.B.C. English department, reading TV scripts for CBC, free-lance broadcasting. When I again needed a full-time job, I was Assistant Director of International House the year the new building was opened. Then I taught in the English department, for, though I had only an honours B.A. in English and a casual year's graduate work in England, the university needed more teachers than they could find for the hugely expanding enrollment. The four-month-long summer holidays gave me free time to get on with writing.

In those early years the McConnells hosted a writers' group where I met Bob Harlow, Phyllis Webb, Anne Marriott, and Marya Fiamengo. Bob Patchell, a producer for CBC, was also a member of that group and bought a story of mine he'd heard there for *Anthology*. The McConnells founded their own publishing house, Klanak Press, and brought out an anthology of our short stories, *Klanak Islands*.

A group of artists of all sorts gathered to form The Arts Club. I was on its first board of directors with Geof Massey, architect; Tak Tanabe, painter; and Alvin Balkind, director of New Design Gallery. When we rented a building in downtown Vancouver, even Lawren Harris, one of the Group of Seven painters, came down to help clean it up and redecorate it with us. Nearly all the painters belonged, John Korner, Jack Shadbolt, Gordon Smith. Arthur Erickson was a member and gave a wonderful lecture on the process of designing his legendary Comox house. The writers gave readings. I first heard Dorothy Livesay's poetry there. In the early days we didn't have the money which was later available to turn the Arts Club into a theatre club as well, but it gave us all a meeting place, provided us with a community of friends as well as an audience.

Though I published very little in my first half-dozen years in Vancouver, I felt supported by that community of artists. The university provided me with a living, but no university is a very good climate for a young writer since academics need to distinguish between "literature," so worthy of their devotion, and "creative writing," practiced by dabblers without Ph.D.'s or by themselves in semi-secret. Among other artists, my calling was considered neither silly nor pretentious but the hard, long, lonely work it was. We celebrated when any one of us had a show, a performance, a building, something published. And a remarkable number of us survived to take our places not only on the local and national scenes but to international accomplishments and recognition, far more than any people I had known in the States or England.

So for me Vancouver was a remarkably rich and nourishing place, and increasingly I felt I belonged there. More gradually I began to have a sense of British Columbia. As a university chaperone, I toured the province with the Players' Club, presenting Tennessee Williams' *Glass Menagerie* to places as isolated as Bralorne, the gold mining town, as far north as Smithers and Prince George, all through the Okanagan. We were billeted and entertained by local people. Still populated by immigrants, it was a west much younger than the western United States. In British Columbia a dozen cultures mingled uncertainly in towns, in small towns isolated by great reaches of wilderness, mountains, deserts, lakes, and rivers, and I felt the more a part of it because I was an immigrant, too.

IT TOOK LONGER FOR ME to have a sense of Canada as a country. When I travelled, I went either south to see my family and friends or to Europe which went on offering me insights into art, history, my own experience. My first published novel, *Desert of the Heart*, was first accepted by Macmillan of Canada. In the early 1960's it was still nearly unheard of for a novel to be published in Canada alone. Mine was accepted on the condition that I find either an American or English publisher to share the costs. Since the book was set in Nevada, it seemed sensible to look for an American publisher. Nearly two years later, when it had been rejected by twenty American firms, I took the manuscript to England where it was accepted by Secker and Warburg, the first publisher to see it. When the book came out and was reviewed across Canada as well as in England, I felt welcomed by the country as I had not been by my own, which took yet another year to publish the book to a silence so familiar to first novels there.

If I hadn't been living in Canada, my long apprenticeship might never have come to an end. Yet the native Canadian writers all around me were more often

bitter at the lack of opportunity in Canada, the necessity of commanding a market either in England or the States before they could be heard here. They felt cut off from the rich markets to the south, claiming that American publishers weren't interested in Canadian material. My own experience made me think that American publishers weren't interested in American material either but only in success; for, once I'd been published in England and Canada, American magazine editors began to accept my work. They didn't seem to me prejudiced against Canadian settings, only against unknown writers.

Redbook once asked me to name the city a thousand miles from Seattle from which one of my characters was driving and suggested Winnipeg. Winnipeg? The city a thousand miles away from Seattle is San Francisco, but *Redbook* thought of me as Canadian and therefore chose Winnipeg. After my initial surprise, I happily concurred.

When I exchanged my envied and disliked American citizenship for Canadian, I did not take on the defensive bitterness that seemed to be a Canadian birthright. At first I felt modestly guilty when I travelled in Europe, enjoying a friendly welcome I hadn't received as an ugly American. Though living in Canada had changed me, had given me a sense of citizenship I'd never felt in the States, I knew that I had not really become someone else. It helped me to remember that one set of my great-grandparents had gone from Nova Scotia to northern California to settle. I was named for that great-grandmother. I had personal roots to claim in Canada.

I had never applied for an American grant. Educated in the west, I had a notion that without any connection with the eastern establishment, I had no chance of success. I had to apply four times for a Canada Council grant before I was given one, but it was extended for another remarkable year during which I could continue to confirm myself as a professional writer and serve my craft with the intensity of attention that is essential for its maturing.

I have since served on juries for Canada Council. Though women and westerners are not fairly represented either on juries or as successful candidates, it is a quite remarkably good system for supporting artists in Canada. Canada Council is not a patriarchal charity as some of the big American foundations seem to me. It is an organization susceptible to change and improvement.

The Writers' Union of Canada is another institution envied by Americans who are just now trying to organize their own. It's very unlikely that any agent of their government will be willing, as the Canada Council is, to pay the travel expenses of every member of the Writers' Union to attend annual general meetings in or near Toronto or Ottawa. As a result of being able to meet once a year, members from the most remote regions of the country have an opportunity to be active members and don't feel that the organization is really for the benefit of

the eastern establishment only. Also it gives them a yearly opportunity to call on their own publishers, on book stores. Though most of us care about our increasing lobbying force on issues like copyright laws, pay for public use of books in libraries, and rely on the Union to help us with contract disputes with publishers, to organize reading tours, it is our sense of professional community which is most important to us.

Publishing, like all other business, is suffering hard times. For perhaps ten years, aided by substantial grants from the government, publishers were able to accept Canadian books for the Canadian market without having to seek publishers in either England or the States. Now again Canadian writers are having to find other markets for their books to be published in Canada at all. My last two books have not had Canadian publishers because the only one interested wanted international rights without having the staff to handle the distribution problems of that larger market. I have also had to go to the States to find publishers willing to reprint my books and keep them in print for the growing academic market for them, both in Canada and the United States.

Canadian publishers haven't yet taken full advantage of the remarkable changes taking place both in Canadian schools and universities which now for the first time are offering a variety of courses in Canadian literature. Imitating the establishment publishers in the States, they are trying to sell books like cottage cheese, the hardbacks stamped "Best read within six months," the paperbacks, "Good for six weeks," thereby losing the entire academic market, for the books are out of print before there is time to put them on reading lists, and it often takes years before they are reprinted. We have too few small presses staffed well enough to serve their own backlists as well as they should. In the States, where small presses have to depend on sales rather than grants to survive, both writers and readers are at present better served.

Nevertheless, my American reprints are noticed in the Canadian media. Though too few books written by Canadians are reviewed in newspapers and magazines, we have better radio coverage than any American writer can hope for. Though we don't have much TV coverage for selling books, CBC is commissioning scripts for both radio and TV adaptation of stories and novels. The extra income as well as the increased audience has helped a number of us to stay at our desks.

Very few artists in any country ever make a handsome living, and even fewer of those who do make a lasting contribution to their cultures. Canada, with all its real limitations, most severe of which is its inferiority complex, is a remarkably good place to begin a writing career. It also has a greater opportunity than many other countries to distinguish between those books which are something like cottage cheese and those which are important as part of our heritage. Canada is

still able to design institutions on a human scale. We are increasingly supportive of our gifted young. We are growing in our awareness of the strength of our own literature. Courses in Canadian literature are now being offered in universities all over the world.

Most writers are defensive about any label that has a potential for limiting their audience, whether it is "woman," "black," "academic," "regional," "popular," or "lesbian." Unlike some writers, I like the label "Canadian." I chose it, feel at home with it, and know it travels very well in the world.

AMELIA

or: Who Do You Think You Are? Documentary and Identity in Canadian Literature

Stephen Scobie

ALICE MUNRO'S TITLE *Who Do You Think You Are?* is one of those finely balanced phrases which subtly shift their meanings depending on which of the six words receives the major stress:

Who do you think you are?
Who *do* you think you are?
Who do *you* think you are?
Who do you *think* you are?
Who do you think *you* are?
Who do you think you *are*?

These various emphases transform the phrase from its pejorative use, to crush presumptuousness, into a serious question on the puzzle of identity. Is identity created by external, objective forces — what other people think you are — or by internal, subjective forces — what you yourself think you are? If you decide to alter your identity by thinking yourself into a new role, how do you go about making this new you manifest to the world?

Such questions are pervasive in Munro's book, and they surface even at points where the attention might seem to be focused elsewhere. For instance, the story "Wild Swans" is principally about the bizarre and disturbing circumstances of Rose's sexual abuse by a strange man on a train; yet the last page of the story is almost totally concerned with the puzzle of identity. The man has claimed to be a minister, but is not dressed as one: that is, his assertion of identity is not backed up by any external evidence. "Was he a minister, really," Rose wonders, "or was that only what he said? Flo had mentioned people who were not ministers, dressed up as if they were. Not real ministers dressed as if they were not. Or, stranger still, men who were not real ministers pretending to be real but dressed as if they were not."[1] It appears that Rose is troubled more by the indeterminacy of the man's identity than by what he has done to her. Nor is Munro content to leave the story there: she adds a half-page coda which pushes the puzzle of identity to even more dizzying levels of doubletalk.

She remembered, because she was in Union Station, that there was a girl named Mavis working here, in the Gift Shop, when Flo was working in the coffee shop. Mavis had warts on her eyelids that looked like they were going to turn into sties but didn't, they went away. Maybe she had them removed, Flo didn't ask. She was very good-looking, without them. There was a movie star in those days she looked a lot like. The movie star's name was Frances Farmer.

Frances Farmer. Rose had never heard of her.

That was the name. And Mavis went and bought herself a big hat that dipped over one eye and a dress entirely made of lace. She went off for the weekend to Georgian Bay, to a resort up there. She booked herself in under the name of Florence Farmer. To give everybody the idea she was really the other one, Frances Farmer, but calling herself Florence because she was on holidays and didn't want to be recognized. She had a little cigarette holder that was black and mother-of-pearl. She could have been arrested, Flo said. For the *nerve*.

Rose almost went over to the Gift Shop, to see if Mavis was still there and if she could recognize her. She thought it would be an especially fine thing, to manage a transformation like that. To dare it; to get away with it, to enter on preposterous adventures in your own, but newly named, skin.[2]

One could well argue that this brief passage, apparently tacked on to the end of a story about something else, is in fact the thematic centre of the whole book. Frances Farmer (1914-1970) was, as Munro says, a movie star; she was very popular for a brief period in the 1940's, but her character was too independent to fit in well with the star-making machinery of the Hollywood studio system, then at its most brutal and impersonal. Farmer later wrote an autobiography, *Will There Really Be A Morning?*, and two recent films, starring Susan Blakely and Jessica Lange respectively, have recreated the tragic and melodramatic story of her life. She was dominated by her fiercely ambitious mother, who, after Frances had collapsed under the stress of her personal and professional conflicts, had her committed to a mental hospital. There she was subjected to a partial lobotomy, which "cured" her to the extent of removing her will and her ability to assert herself. Later she made one more film, and appeared briefly as the hostess of a television talk show.

The relevance of this tragic career to Rose is evident at several points, not least in the detail that Rose also appears on a television talk show. Rose consistently sees herself as an actress, playing a series of increasingly unsatisfactory roles: as child, as wife, as lover, as mother — and as actress. In the final, title story of the book, she confronts herself in the person of Ralph Gillespie, who "does" Milton Homer, and who evokes all her doubts and ambivalence about acting, about telling stories, and about "performing" her various identities and roles. The name "Frances" echoes back to Rose's first major example of sexual abuse, Franny McGill, whose adolescent incest with her brother is described by Flo as "Relations performing."[3] The name that Mavis chooses to both disguise and pro-

claim herself as Frances Farmer is Florence: Flo. Although Rose's relation to Flo does not reach the macabre extremes of Frances Farmer's relation to her mother, it is clear that Flo, as the original audience for Rose's stories, remains to the end the dominating influence on her character. These two aspects of Frances Farmer — her troubled career as an actress, and her fraught relationship with her mother — are both thus points of reference for Rose's definition of her own identity. The tragic outcome of Farmer's personal conflicts remains as a possibility, or even a threat, to Rose: if she cannot answer for herself the question "Who do you think you are?" there are always other people ready to answer it for her, in potentially disastrous ways.

The preceding paragraph indicates some of the directions which could be followed in developing a full reading of *Who Do You Think You Are?* based on the implications of the Frances Farmer reference. That reference acts in the text as a kind of allusion — albeit a somewhat esoteric one, since Frances Farmer's life story would not be as familiar to a contemporary reader as, say, Marilyn Monroe's — and its richness depends upon the informed reader's awareness of such details as Farmer's relation to her mother, her lobotomy, and the collapse of her career. Amidst the welter of fictitious, false, or assumed identities — the molester who says he is what he does not appear to be, Mavis who lays claim to a false name by disguising it — the historical facts of the "real" Frances Farmer stand out as a touchstone, a point of reference to what we may call the realm of documentable reality.

Munro uses this "documentary" image of Frances Farmer as one way to define Rose's predicament, and even Rose's identity. That definition takes place in a dialectic process: a dialectic between objective fact and various forms of subjective fiction or interpretation. For this dialectic to work, it is essential that Frances Farmer be an actual, documented character, and that the allusion be historical rather than literary or mythological. The appeal is to *the authoritativeness of fact*, to a category of reality which exists outside and independent of the text — admitting, of course, that as soon as it enters the text it becomes mediated, and "part of" the fiction. It is precisely this "dialectic between the objective facts and the subjective feelings of the poet" which Dorothy Livesay defined, in 1969, as the key characteristic of what she called "The Documentary Poem: A Canadian Genre."[4]

LIVESAY SET OUT HER DEFINITION in a paper presented at the Learned Societies meeting in June 1969; it was published in 1971 in *Contexts of Canadian Criticism*, edited by Eli Mandel. Livesay adapted the term "documentary" from film, specifically from the work of the National Film Board under

the direction of John Grierson. The prevalence of the long poem in Canadian literature has frequently been noted; it may in some ways be seen as a psychological response to the sense of scale imposed by the country itself. Livesay argued that the Canadian long narrative poem did *not* follow either the "epic" pattern, "concerned with an idealized 'hero,'" or the Chaucerian pattern, concerned with "the development of individualized characters," or the American pattern "where the emphasis is on historical perspective and the creation of a national myth." Rather, she argued, Canadian poems are *documentary*, "based on topical data but held together by descriptive, lyrical, and didactic elements." Theme becomes more important than plot; and "our narratives are told not from the point of view of one protagonist, but rather to illustrate a precept." Above all, the documentary poem is characterized by that "dialectic between the objective facts and the subjective feelings of the poet": it can never be purely one or the other, but must always involve an active interplay between both.[5]

It is clear that to some extent what Livesay was doing was propagating as a general theory a definition based on her own practice: the finest examples of the "documentary poem" as Livesay outlined it are her own works, such as "Day and Night" and "Call My People Home" — poems which she had collected the previous year in a book entitled *The Documentaries*. Other convincing examples cited in her essay are Anne Marriott's "The Wind Our Enemy" and, of course, the major narratives of E. J. Pratt. A much less convincing example, to which the essay unfortunately devotes six out of its fifteen pages, is Isabella Valancy Crawford's "Malcolm's Katie": as fine and important a poem as "Malcolm's Katie" is, it is *not* documentary, by any stretch of the definition, and one suspects that Livesay was using any excuse to give it some prominence at a time when Crawford was unjustly neglected. A positively *disastrous* example, however, was provided by the citing of Earle Birney's "David." Livesay's erroneous and incredibly badly worded assertion that "this was no imaginary story"[6] resulted in legal action by Birney. (Indeed, it is remarkable that there have been so few legal actions as a result of the "documentary" claims made by writers.) Birney's suit, like that launched by Premier Lougheed of Alberta against the CBC over their "docudrama" on the Tar Sands, was settled out of court.

There are problems, then, with Livesay's examples; her definition, though, and her intuition in the naming of the form, were brilliant, and in many ways prophetic. In the fifteen years since her talk, there has been a plethora of examples of the "documentary poem." Not all of them have followed every aspect of her definition — most of them, for instance, have concentrated on a single protagonist — but all of them have maintained the dialectic of objective fact and subjective feeling, and the importance of grounding it in documentable reality, in the authoritativeness of fact.

What follows is a selected list (not a comprehensive one) of titles which could now be used as examples for Livesay's theory — all of them published since 1969. While Livesay's essay set the theoretical framework, the two books whose success and prestige established the form in the *practice* of recent Canadian poetry both appeared in 1970 (the year between the delivery and the publication of Livesay's talk): Margaret Atwood's *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* and Michael Ondaatje's *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*. These two definitive works depart from Livesay's definition insofar as they do focus on a single character (it might also be argued that Atwood's volume was, precisely, an attempt at "the creation of a national myth"), and they set a particularly important precedent in using that character as the persona, or speaking voice of the poem. "The effect is often ironic,"[7] Livesay had written; the irony of the documentary poem was to become the classic dramatic irony of all persona poems, the division between the voice of the poem and the implied stance of the author.[8] This dramatic irony is the major form taken by the documentary dialectic. At the same time, the technique of the persona enables the author, and, vicariously, the reader, "To dare it; to get away with it, to enter on preposterous adventures in your own, but newly named, skin."

Nineteen seventy also saw the publication of George Bowering's *George, Vancouver*, the first writing, in poetic form, of what was to become, ten years later, the novel *Burning Water*. The relationship between the documentary poem and the historical novel (or the dramatized biography) is a subtle one. The major advantage of the poetic form is that it is more amenable to the subjective side of the dialectic; it allows more scope (in tone, rhythm, imagery) for the ironic interpretation to be made manifest. Some "novels" are more "poetic" than others, however; so, though I would hesitate to include in this discussion the massive and inspiring novels of Rudy Wiebe, such as *The Temptations of Big Bear* (1973) and *The Scorched Wood People* (1977), I do include Bowering's *Burning Water* (1980), Ondaatje's *Coming Through Slaughter* (1976), Timothy Findley's *Famous Last Words* (1981), and, indeed, before any of them, Leonard Cohen's great and prophetic *Beautiful Losers* (1966), in this respect as in so many others years ahead of its time.

By 1973, the form was in full swing. In that year Frank Davey published *The Clallam*, a poem which simultaneously stands in the tradition of Pratt's shipwreck poems and carries out a caustic deconstruction of Pratt's poetic. In 1974, David Helwig explored historic roots of the New World in *Atlantic Crossings*, while a deep sense of the history of place pervades both Al Purdy's *In Search of Owen Roblin* and Daphne Marlatt's *Steveston*. The biographical approach was resumed in 1975 with Florence McNeil's *Emily*, again using the central character (Emily Carr) as persona. Nineteen seventy-six, as previously noted, saw

Ondaatje's *Coming Through Slaughter*, as well as Gary Geddes' invented life of Paul Joseph Chartier, the man who tried to blow up the Houses of Parliament, in *War & Other Measures*. Don Gutteridge's *Tecumseh* concluded his tetralogy of poems on Canadian history. Also in 1976, one of the purest examples of the documentary form is to be found in Sid Stephen's *Beothuck Poems*, dealing with the genocide of the Beothuck Indians in Newfoundland and focusing on the girl Shawnadithit, the last surviving member of the tribe. In 1977, E. D. Blodgett presented the life of Vincent van Gogh in *Sounding*, while Douglas Barbour explored the life of a Canadian painter in *Visions of My Grandfather*. In 1979, Monty Reid used *his* immigrant grandfather's memoir as the base document for *Karst Means Stone*. My own *McAlmon's Chinese Opera*, although not published until 1980, had been written three years earlier; 1980's Governor General's Awards, going to *McAlmon's Chinese Opera* and *Burning Water*, were dominated by the documentary impulse. In 1981, Jon Whyte's *Homage, Henry Kelsey* paid tribute to the first English poet west of Ontario. In 1982, Gwendolyn MacEwen assumed the persona of Lawrence of Arabia in *The T. E. Lawrence Poems*, while Doug Beardsley also crossed genders to write *Kissing the Body of My Lord: The Marie Poems*, the life and times of Marie de l'Incarnation. Nineteen eighty-three saw Ted Plantos' *Passchendaele*, a detailed account of the World War I battle, assuming a fictitious and anonymous protagonist. Hovering somewhere in the background of all these is the great unwritten, or "failed" documentary of the period, Phyllis Webb's *The Kropotkin Poems*.

From all these examples, it may now be possible to assemble a new definition, or at least a description, of the documentary poem as it has evolved in Canada in the fifteen years since Livesay's essay. It is a long poem, or sequence of poems, usually of book length, and narrative in structure. The events which make up this narrative are documented, historical happenings, although the poet will frequently modify or shuffle these events, or add to them purely fictional incidents. The poem often focuses on a single character who took part in these events, and this character's biography (up to and sometimes beyond his or her death) provides the structure of the book. Many of the poems adopt the persona or speaking voice of this central character. The idea of the "document" remains within the poems, as a source of historical fact, and as an element of intertextuality: the central characters are frequently artists (writers or painters), or else keep journals, draw maps, or in some other way produce "collected works" which the poem may either quote directly or else refer to. The relationship of poet to persona is one of dramatic irony, and this irony is the major form assumed by the "dialectic between the objective facts and the subjective feelings of the poet," which continues to be, as Livesay perceived, the central characteristic of the genre. The documentary poem has close affinities with both the historical novel and the

"docudrama," but the poetic form remains, in most cases, the most effective way of registering the subjective force of the dialectic.

The obvious question to ask is why? What are the attractions of this form, that it should dominate recent Canadian writing to the extent that it does?

Some of the answers are rather pragmatic and superficial, but they cannot entirely be ignored. Success breeds success, and the prestige of *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* and *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* was bound to attract imitators. Publishers tend to prefer a volume with a clearly defined (and exploitable) subject and form. Once the poet has made the initial choice of topic, a large store of material — incident, character, imagery — may be obtained by research rather than by inspiration. A good research project is always nice for a Canada Council grant.

Imitation may be restated, on a somewhat more exalted level, as the awareness of tradition. Once a form is *named*, its possibilities are opened up, liberated, made widely available. The poet may assume the reader's familiarity with certain conventions. The works within a tradition build upon and refer to each other. Speaking personally, I can say that in writing *McAlmon's Chinese Opera* I was very conscious of my predecessors, and the book contains several deliberate (though I hope unobtrusive) echoes and allusions to Ondaatje. How accidental is it that so many of these books — Atwood, Ondaatje (*Coming Through Slaughter*), Blodgett, Reid, Scobie, Bowering (*Burning Water*), MacEwen, Beardsley, Plantos — are divided into three sections?

Apart from these pragmatic considerations, however, the major reasons for the attraction and the usefulness of the form may be summarized under two headings: a fascination with the interplay between fact and fiction, history and imagination; and the attempt to define the identity of the self by a dialectic process of contrast to the other.

THE DOCUMENTARY POEM begins with an appeal to the authoritativeness of fact. Many writers in recent years have felt that, as Michael Ondaatje said in a recent interview, "Fiction can't compete with real people or events; that's why I'm drawn to historical subjects."[9] "I tell only what I know," Frank Davey wrote in 1964, "and speculate, never. Only with the validity of fact, and the form of the natural object, can a poem hope to survive in a world that admits only the real."[10] This is an extreme view, and few writers (including the later Davey) would accept it in quite so unqualified a form. Its ancestry is in Pound ("The natural object is always the adequate symbol") and in Williams ("No ideas but in things"); looking much further back, we might speculate that the documentary poem is a last-ditch defence against Plato's accusation that all

poets are liars. Several authors of documentary poems have taken refuge in the line that "Truth is stranger than fiction," and have been at some pains to explain to audiences that the more implausible stories in their poems actually happened, they wouldn't have dared to invent them.

Ten years later, in 1974, Davey returned to the idea of the "validity of fact" in his poem *The Clallam*:

> This is not a documentary of the *Clallam*'s
> sinking. There are documents
> but no objective witnesses
> of the *Clallam*'s sinking. The survivors
> were not objective. I
> am not objective. Only
> the objects we survive in.
> All the stinking white corpses.[11]

Davey is here using "documentary" to mean a purely objective form, which is not of course the sense I am proposing for it. He rightly insists on the non-objectivity of the author — and indeed, *The Clallam* goes on to become a forceful and unambiguous expression of Davey's personal *anger* at the events he is describing. His technique, however, remains "objective" to the extent that he rigidly avoids the transformations of metaphor. In *The Clallam*, as in his other work, Davey's poetic imprint is to be found in tone, rhythm, selection of incident — but not in image or metaphor. He remains true, always, to the Poundian precept.

In this respect, *The Clallam* is part of Davey's critical assault on E. J. Pratt. In his article "E. J. Pratt: Rationalist Technician," published in the same year as *The Clallam*, Davey goes over the familiar ground of Pratt's love for detailed research, or technical vocabulary of all sorts, and for historical accuracy; but Davey sees all this as part of Pratt's attempt to give a false impression of confident omniscience. "Pratt's rule seems to be," Davey writes, "that if an event is not totally knowable (and no event is), one must fake total knowledge."[12] The major technique for this fakery is metaphor:

> Metaphor in Pratt's work tends to be a restricting device. The subject of the metaphor is compared to a term or set of terms either less complex than the subject itself, or possessing a complexity irrelevant to the subject. The effect is to simplify or rationalize the subject, to make it appear definable and comprehensible when it has been neither defined nor comprehended. The subject is presented as if "dealt with" when in fact its own particularity and individuality have been totally avoided.[13]

Davey is essentially correct in his analysis of the evasiveness of Pratt's metaphors, and he makes a strong case for the need to preserve the integrity of the factual subject; but the parenthetical concession that no event is totally knowable does

indicate, again, the need for a dialectical definition of the documentary — such as that exemplified, in fact, by *The Clallam*.

Indeed, it must be admitted that all this talk about "objective fact" and "historical reality" rests on very queasy philosophical foundations. The appeal to "the validity of fact" is a response to a world which simultaneously accords its highest prestige to "scientific objectivity" and acknowledges the relativity of all perceptions. The whole notion of "fact" may itself be no more than a fiction, a linguistic construct — and thus subject, like all linguistic constructs, to the deconstructive play of Derridean "différance." The poetic *re*construction of fact which goes on in the documentary poem may then be taken as a model for our pragmatic daily use of all language — continuing, as it must, despite all theoretical inadequacies.

The relativity of perception, and the indeterminacy of fact, are admitted most openly in the writing of history. It is a commonplace that, since the winners write the history books, they periodically have to be *re*written, in belated acknowledgement of the losers. Leonard Cohen casts his savage eye on this process in *Beautiful Losers*, which is already a kind of meta-documentary, commenting on the form in its distinctions between I's constipated ineffectuality and F's contemptuously easy mastery of historiography, as well as in F's and Edith's outrageous use of Pratt's "Brébeuf and His Brethren" as sado-masochistic pornography. Cohen's warning that historiography is simply another arena for power was especially timely in 1966, as Canada prepared to launch its Centennial project of self-validation. That period's interest in history *per se* (we've been around for a hundred years; we must amount to *something*) made a major contribution to the emergence of the documentary poem.

So, while the attraction of the documentary may begin with an appeal to the authoritativeness of fact, consideration of the difficulties involved in ever satisfactorily *writing* fact leads quickly to that borderblur area between fact and fiction, in which the categories collapse into each other (all statements of fact are necessarily fictive; a well-told lie takes on the authority of history), and the line between them exists only to be transgressed. Thus Gary Geddes, in his note to *War & Other Measures*, writes of his book that "what truth it may have lies [the pun is, presumably, intended] not in the 'facts,' all of which are fabricated, but rather in the psychology, which has been revealed over and over again in Canada since 1966 and which could not have been invented."[14] Similarly, in the Afterword to *Kissing the Body of My Lord*, Doug Beardsley writes: "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."[15] And in my own *McAlmon's Chinese Opera*, after quoting Livesay's definition of the documentary,

I conclude that "it will be best if the reader accepts the McAlmon of these poems as a character in a historical fiction."[16]

The most extreme (and joyous) transgressions into the realm of fiction occur in the works of Michael Ondaatje and George Bowering (and so perhaps it is no accident that these are the authors who carry the stance and concerns of the documentary poem over into the form of the poetic novel). Whereas the authors' notes which I quoted above may be taken at face value, one can only regard as the most outrageous understatement Ondaatje's straight-faced claim, in the "Credits" to *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*, that he merely "edited, rephrased, and slightly reworked" his source material.[17] *Coming Through Slaughter* blithely predates by some twenty years the death of Isadora Duncan, and contrives to import a disguised Billy the Kid, some twenty years *after his* death, into Buddy Bolden's asylum. Most playful of all is George Bowering's glorious travesty of facts throughout *Burning Water*, imputing a homosexual relationship to Vancouver and Quadra ("Give us a little hug, now")[18] and quite unashamedly killing off his hero before he returns, as he historically did, to England.

Burning Water is full of deliberate anachronisms, bad jokes, and concealed quotations from other writers ("'The sea,' said Menzies . . . in mid ocean, 'is also a garden'").[19] These elements operate in the novel as one form of intertextuality, the general condition of all texts as existing in relation to other texts, and also as a travesty[20] of the whole idea of the *document*. The document is the point of intersection, for the documentary poem, between its equivocal realms of history and imagination. The document "proves" the historicity of the subject: but the document is itself no more than another instance of *writing*, and is not exempt from its own context of equivocation. Bowering acknowledges this through the technique of travesty; Timothy Findley "forges" documents (the supposed "transcripts" of taped recollections of Lady Juliet d'Orsey in *The Wars*) or else presents them in images of extreme contrivance (the "writing on the wall" in *Famous Last Words*).

In the poems, the documents occur in many forms and are treated in many ways. They may include actual historical accounts (as, quite extensively, in Don Gutteridge's *Tecumseh*), or transcriptions of interviews and oral history (as in Daphne Marlatt's *Steveston*). Works created by the historical character about whom the poem is written may function as "documents," whether they are directly quoted or only referred to. These may include novels, letters, journals, autobiographies, or other poems. Visual material may also be used as documents: the paintings, for instance, of Gauguin or Emily Carr. Doug Beardsley's book contains reproductions of seventeenth-century lithographs; Daphne Marlatt's text is counterpointed by Robert Minden's photographs; perhaps most dramatically

of all, Sid Stephen's *Beothuck Poems* incorporates the surviving drawings of Shawnadithit herself.

This documentary material may be quoted directly, as prose, or else presented as found poetry (*McAlmon's Chinese Opera* arranges as found poems the text of a rejection letter from an English publisher, and a list of Montparnasse street names). Monty Reid begins each poem in *Karst Means Stone* with a quotation from his grandfather's memoir. Jon Whyte arranges his whole sequence as a setting for the "jewel" of Henry Kelsey's original poem, which he quotes in full. Every poem in Gwendolyn MacEwen's book is an intricate weave of echoes and quotations from *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* and other writings of T. E. Lawrence. Susanna Moodie hovers in the background of Margaret Atwood's work, a continuous presence, though there is very little in the way of direct quotation.

One of the loveliest instances of reworking of a document occurs in E. D. Blodgett's *Sounding*. Blodgett takes a famous passage from one of Van Gogh's letters and uses it as the source for a graceful and moving lyric:

> to look at the stars always makes me dream, *as simply* as I dream over the black dots of a map representing towns and villages. Why, I ask myself, should the shining dots of the sky not be as accessible as the black dots on the map of France? If we take the train to get to Tarascon or Rouen, we take death to reach a star. One thing undoubtedly true in this reasoning is this, that while we are *alive* we *cannot* get to a star, any more than when we are dead we can take the train.
>
> So it seems to me possible that cholera, gravel, phthisis and cancer are the celestial means of locomotion, just as steamboats, omnibuses and railways are the terrestrial means. To die quietly of old age would be to go there on foot.[21]

I stretched my hand
across the map
of france

to touch
the black o's of towns
peppered there

it was a map
vincent as you
had scanned

the day you saw
the dark towns of france
scattered back

against the sky
reduced again to dots

when you're dead
there is no train
to tarascon

you said
and when you live
the other train

is stopped

with what eye now
do you stare
upon the stars

walking forever
through our returning nights
within the white

and fired towns
gazing upon trains
moving minutely

across the map of france
approaching
stops forever out

of tarascons so
unknown within the clouds.[22]

In all these cases, the reader's appreciation will be greatly enhanced by a knowledge of the original source and context. The document is the necessary link, provided by the author, between the reader and the "real" material. The document guarantees the *accessibility* of the facts on which the poem is based: the reader is always free to check out for herself the newspaper reports of the sinking of *The Clallam*, or the letters of Marie de l'Incarnation. (Whether or not the reader actually does this is in a sense irrelevant; what is important is the reader's awareness of the theoretical possibility of doing so.) The documentary poem is never an enclosed, self-sufficient creation; the reader is actively invited to repeat the poet's research and engagement with the facts. The poem works both ways: it directs both poet and reader towards a fuller understanding of an historical character, event, or epoch, but it also directs them back to their own subjectivity, to their definitions of themselves.

ALTHOUGH MANY OF THESE POEMS do treat subjects directly related to Canada and Canadian history, a surprising number do not. Billy the Kid, Buddy Bolden, Vincent Van Gogh, Paul Gauguin, Robert McAlmon, T. E. Lawrence — the choice of these figures seems at times almost wilfully cosmopolitan. What is a Canadian poet doing writing about an American outlaw, Paris in the twenties, the war in Arabia? But in another sense, this separation in

space is no greater than the separations in time (between the twentieth and the nineteenth centuries, say, between the modernist sensibility of Margaret Atwood and the Victorian sensibility of Susanna Moodie) or in gender (Sid Stephen writing about Shawnadithit, Doug Beardsley adopting the persona of Marie). What they all have in common is a sense of *alterity*: the documentary poem opens the way to the other, the opposite.

Canada as a culture has been accustomed to a dialectical process of self-definition, to identifying its own characteristics in terms of what it is *not*: not British, not French, not American. Livesay's essay defines the Canadian long poem in precisely this way, in terms of other national traditions to which it does not conform. To take on a persona may indeed be, as Munro says, "To dare it; to get away with it, to enter on preposterous adventures in your own, but newly named, skin"; but the persona is also a mirror, whose very alterity reflects the image of the other who is/is not yourself.

In the brief poem which prefaces *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*, and which thus stands, ambiguously, outside or inside the speaking voice of the sequence,[23] Atwood/Moodie writes:

> I take this picture of myself
> and with my sewing scissors
> cut out the face.
>
> Now it is more accurate:
>
> where my eyes were,
> every-
> thing appears.[24]

The "picture of myself" may refer either to the photograph of Moodie which appears in the cover collage, or to the whole book; the "myself" is most obviously Moodie, but may also apply to Atwood, substituting her persona for herself. Cutting out her own face, Atwood allows Moodie's to show through — or vice versa. The "every- / thing" which appears in the poems is a view of the nineteenth-century pioneer experience seen in the more contemporary terms of "paranoid schizophrenia." While the biography may be Moodie's, the voice is Atwood's: when the protagonist says, "I refuse to look in a mirror,"[25] the reader may well wonder which face she would in fact see there. Moodie provided Atwood with a means of defining her history, her cultural tradition and thus herself; indirectly, this book is fully as personal a volume of poetry as *Power Politics*.

One fairly minor detail which attests to the self-defining aspect of the documentary poem is the tendency of the writers to make "personal appearances" in their works. Sid Stephen closes his sequence with a brief section describing his own visit to Newfoundland, where he buys a keychain featuring a plastic Beothuck,

made in Taiwan, and speculates which party Shawnadithit would vote for in the upcoming provincial election. In *McAlmon's Chinese Opera*, the list of Montparnasse street names includes not only the addresses of famous bars and writers of the twenties, but also the street on which I myself lived in Paris in 1975-76. The more spectacular "personal appearances" of Bowering and Ondaatje will be discussed shortly. All such details are important, as assertions of the poet's presence in the work, the personal applicability of even the most remote historical material.

As Atwood seeks to define her cultural inheritance, so poets who use their own family history seek to define personal roots. "What I know, so little really, of you / & your life," writes Douglas Barbour, addressing his grandfather, whom he knows only from a handful of landscape paintings. The whole book, *Visions of My Grandfather*, moves between the poles of what is known and what is not known, what can be shared, inherited, or passed on through art and what is ineluctably distant, closed off by time. The prairie landscape is shared —

> i recognize you grandfather your great love for the land shines thru you
> knew it i know & i do it i look at it too with new eyes because of you[26]

— and the knowledge is passed on through the documents, in this case the grandfather's paintings, which "i share with you long dead / grandfather, whenever i lift up mine eyes unto the hills / above my desk." Yet the final image of the sequence is of a great secret, a withholding: the Sun Dance which his grandfather witnessed but never described, never painted.

In *Karst Means Stone*, Monty Reid also lives through a family history, and speaks in his grandfather's persona: but in a late poem, "Molly's Translation," he enters as himself — "my point of view, the youngest / son" — and when he makes the transition back into the persona — "and I (Samuel Karst now)" — the effect is less of clarifying distinct voices than of identifying them.[27]

The writers of documentary poems speak frequently of a sense of "possession" by the voices they assume. I can testify to this myself in the case of McAlmon, and I have heard Gwendolyn MacEwen speak in similar terms about Lawrence. In his Preface to *Passchendaele*, Ted Plantos writes: "The character that acts as narrator in this work introduced himself to me through a poem. . . . We were beginning to find sustenance in each other and share a common energy of mind and emotion that translated into language."[28] This is reminiscent of Doug Beardsley's description of Marie as the "co-author" of his poems. Paradoxically, such a "possession" can lead to a freedom, a liberation of the writer to imagine, or to be, aspects of his or her own personality which could not be expressed in the first-person lyric. This freedom extends as far as death itself: the documentary persona speaks from beyond the grave. George Bowering's subtitle for *George, Vancouver*

— "a discovery poem" — describes not only the immediate subject of George Vancouver exploring the West Coast but also the whole experience of the documentary poet *discovering* (as opposed to the fiction writer inventing) what is already there, in the factual material and also in his or her self.

Bowering's presence is only implicit in the poem, which ends "Let us say / this is as far as I, George, / have travelled."[29] But in the novel, *Burning Water*, he is a full protagonist:

> When I came to live in Vancouver, I thought of Vancouver, and so geography involved my name too, George Vancouver. . . . What could I do but write a book filled with history and myself, about these people and this place?[30]

It's a good definition of the documentary — "a book filled with history and myself" — and it stresses the key role of the author as the *creator* of a historical past. "Without a storyteller, George Vancouver is just another dead sailor."[31] So the storyteller is constantly present in his story, walking through the rain of Trieste, or "sitting down in that chair in that tax write-off study, producing."[32] Even when there is no direct reference to Bowering as a character, he reminds us of his presence in the jokes, the literary allusions, the anachronisms, the caustic commentary of the observing Indians, and the increasingly drastic distortions of historical fact. One can sense, also, an increasing indulgence for the character of Captain Vancouver: Bowering moves closer to his namesake as the novel progresses, and the ending is genuinely tragic.

Another variation on the possible relationships between author and persona is to be found in Gwendolyn MacEwen's *The T. E. Lawrence Poems*. MacEwen has always displayed a strong attraction for the exotic, highly coloured and emotional life of Greece, Egypt, and Arabia; and in the short stories of *Noman*, she attempts to infuse that sense into Canada itself, mythologizing Mackenzie King, and metamorphosing the country's very name into the alterity of Kanada. The Lawrence poems, then, are clearly personal as well as historical; Lawrence enables MacEwen to explore the psychological attractions of violence in very much the same way as Billy the Kid did for Ondaatje. The Lawrence poems are a brilliant impersonation, and often draw very closely on Lawrence's own writing, and yet, possibly because of that very sense of strangeness, they are completely identifiable as Gwendolyn MacEwen poems. Lawrence, for all the wealth of documented detail that surrounds him, remains a mysterious and inaccessible personality; the poems, for all their lucidity and vividness, never dissipate that mystery.

In the same way as one can understand the qualities, both of attraction and of alterity, which drew MacEwen to Lawrence, one can understand Phyllis Webb's attraction to the "saintly . . . Prince in his dungeon,"[33] Peter Kropotkin (1842-1921), Russian anarchist, writer, and geographer. Kropotkin's long years

in prison provided Webb with a documentary image for her own concerns with confinement, restriction, silence, and failure. Her long-projected and (as she herself says) legendary volume, *The Kropotkin Poems*, is itself a "failure," in that it was never completed, though the fragments published in *Wilson's Bowl* are among Webb's finest works, that is to say, among the finest poems ever published in Canada. "Consider the dead / for whom we make elegies," Webb writes in her portrait "Kropotkin," "how they differently / instruct us."[34] The lines might serve as a motto for the whole documentary impulse. Section II of "Poems of Failure" provides the incisive moments of historical detail (significantly, mostly moments of disguised identity):

> Kropotkin, old Prince Peter
> with your forty barges on the Amur
> with your hammer in Finland
> dressed up in your merchant's costume
> dressed up as a *page de chambre*
> dressed up as an eight-year old Persian
> Prince with real jewels in your belt for
> Madame Nazimova 'who was a very beautiful
> woman.'[35]

Part III makes the transition to the poet herself, through an image of reversal: "As above, so below."[36] Ultimately, Webb's own sense of failure denies her the possibility of accepting Kropotkin as a full persona:

> The simple profundity of a deadman works at my style. I am impoverished. He the White Christ. Not a case of identification. Easier to see myself in the white cat asleep on the bed. Exile.[37]

One is left, then, with a *series* of documentary images of "Solitary Confinement" — Socrates drinking hemlock, Dostoevsky in the House of the Dead, Ezra Pound "under the Pisan sunfire," the children of Treblinka — and the poet's appeal, "give me / a face."[38] In contrast to the confidence with which Atwood cuts out Moodie's face to substitute one of her own making, Webb's poems (which, despite their ostensible "failure," cut to far deeper levels of doubt and affirmation) admit the crisis of self-definition from which the documentary poem springs.

Perhaps the most dramatic example of that crisis, apart from Webb, is to be found in Michael Ondaatje's *Coming Through Slaughter*. After Buddy Bolden's collapse at the height of his parade, Ondaatje introduces a passage describing his own visit to New Orleans, "tak[ing] fast bad photographs into the sun."[39] The stress here is on the similarity between persona and author, perceived or intuitively grasped across the broken glass divisions of alterity.

> When he went mad he was the same age I am now. . . . When I read he stood in front of mirrors and attacked himself, there was the shock of memory. For I had

done that. Stood, and with a razor-blade cut into cheeks and forehead, shaved hair. Defiling people we did not wish to be.[40]

In the final pages of *Coming Through Slaughter*, Ondaatje tries desperately to return Bolden to the safe distance of pure objectivity, the "thin sheaf of information"[41] from which he had forced his way into his author's imagination. Tables of chronology, transcripts of interviews, extracts from *A Brief History of East Louisiana State Hospital*, tape recordings of old jazz musicians who scarcely mention Bolden at all: all show the depths of Bolden's fall, and all hold him at arm's length from the author's awareness of that moment when "[I] push my arm forward and spill it through the front of your mirror and clutch myself."[42]

"Drawn to opposites, even in music we play. In terror we lean in the direction that is most unlike us."[43] These lines sum up the ambivalence, in all of Ondaatje's writings, towards "my heroes," his "white dwarfs": Billy, Buddy, his father. *Running in the Family* is the most extended exercise in self-definition by dialectic with the other. What Ondaatje does openly, all the documentarists do more or less implicitly. The authors are drawn towards their opposites, the images of alterity, setting between them the distances of era, country, gender, yet always recognizing in the image something of themselves, a territory that awaits discovery. And in the intensity of the documentary's dialectic, the exchange becomes complete; possession occurs; the mirrors shatter; the barriers break down. As Robert McAlmon (or his author) says at the end of his life:

> I am watching my face
> in the mirror collapsing:
> not even my eyes
> can keep their distance.[44]

I HAVE DEFINED THE DOCUMENTARY mainly in terms of the long poem, or the poetic novel; but obviously the *documentary impulse* may be present in many forms: in fiction, in drama, in the whole interesting genre of the "work poem."[45] As I began this essay by taking an example from a short story, I would like to end it, by way of symmetry, with another illustration of the workings of the documentary impulse outside the field of the long poem, this time in song.

Hejira (1976)[46] is perhaps the most successfully integrated of all Joni Mitchell's albums. Its central theme is flight, and the ambivalence of the notion is summed up in the title itself: Mohammed's journey from Mecca to Medina was both an *escape*, a running *away*, and the precondition of spiritual fulfilment, a running *to*. Every song on the album speaks of travel, and of Mitchell's compulsion towards it: she is "A prisoner of the white lines on the freeway," seeking the

"refuge of the roads." Proposing a truce with her errant lover, she says, "You lay down your sneaking around the town, honey / And I'll lay down the highway." On the jacket illustration, her own black cloak becomes transparent to a picture of a limitless desert highway; in another photographic image she extends her arms like the wings of "a black crow flying / In a blue sky." The ambivalence of flight as escape as against flight as fulfilment is further explored in songs which balance Mitchell against other characters: her friend Sharon, who has opted for home and security; the old jazz man Furry, who rejects Mitchell's interest as that of a rich dilettante whose "limo is shining on his shanty street"; or the archetypal wanderer, trickster, Coyote. The richest song on the album, which contains all these ambivalences within one perfect documentary image, is "Amelia."

Amelia Earhart (1898-1937) was the first woman to fly across the Atlantic, in 1928. She was a pioneer in several areas of aviation, making solo crossings of the Atlantic (1932) and of the Pacific (1935). In 1937, she and co-pilot Fred Noonan were attempting a round-the-world trip when their plane vanished without trace in the South Pacific. There have been persistent rumours that the flight involved espionage activities, and that the disappearance may not have been accidental; and also that Earhart is still alive, living under an assumed name somewhere in the United States. In Joni Mitchell's concert film, *Shadows and Light*, the performance of "Amelia" is accompanied by a montage of historical photographs of Amelia Earhart.

The song opens with a picture of the singer-protagonist at her most characteristic, travelling:

> I was driving across the burning desert
> When I spotted six jet planes
> Leaving six white vapor trails across the bleak terrain
> It was the hexagram of the heavens
> It was the strings of my guitar
> Amelia, it was just a false alarm

The "six jet planes" are presumably (because of their close formation) military, and so provide a vague echo of the putatively military nature of Earhart's last flight. They present an image of flight higher and more distant, unattainable, than anything yet achieved by the singer (or by Amelia), yet she links herself to them by the repetition of their pattern in the six strings of her guitar: music is for her the medium of flight. In the *I Ching*, the hexagram of six unbroken lines is a sign of creative power, usually male — both the singer and Amelia intrude upon the stereotypically male preserves of flight, travel, exploration. The song's concise and brilliant conjunction of the planes, the guitar, and the hexagram suggests the aspirations of its characters (flight, music, creativity, discovery) along with their dangers. The recurring chorus-line — "Amelia, it was just a false alarm" — re-

tains an open-ended indeterminacy of meaning, due to the lack of specific reference for "it," but is also a repeated reassurance of mutual support. The possible dangers of flight (Amelia's death) may be no more than "false" alarms (the rumours of Amelia's continued existence). Or the falseness of the alarm may be because the flight itself is worth it, whatever the fall.

The following stanzas continue to outline the singer's restlessness and dissatisfaction. Travel provides "A song so wild and blue / It scrambles time and seasons if it gets thru to you." The singer reveals that she is travelling to escape a lover who has (in a line that stumbles expressively over its reluctant rhythm) made "His sad request of me to kindly stay away": for her, the road is both "cursed and charmed," as it leads her to a freedom she isn't at all sure she wants. Throughout these stanzas, Amelia remains as a constant reference in the chorus line, whose undefined sense of reassurance is clearly directed by the singer as much towards herself as towards Amelia. (Earhart's fate in the South Pacific is also perhaps hinted at in the lines "Where some have found their paradise / Others just come to harm.")

The historical Amelia does not occupy the foreground of the text until the fifth stanza:

> A ghost of aviation
> She was swallowed by the sky
> Or by the sea, like me she had a dream to fly
> Like Icarus ascending
> On beautiful foolish arms
> Amelia, it was just a false alarm.

The oxymoron of "beautiful foolish" echoes the "cursed and charmed" of the previous stanza; the mythological reference to Icarus universalises both the beauty and the foolishness. This full emergence of the "documentary" Amelia into the text enables the singer to arrive at her own most searching and honest self-definition:

> Maybe I've never really loved
> I guess that is the truth
> I've spent my whole life in clouds at icy altitudes
> And looking down on everything
> I crashed into his arms
> Amelia, it was just a false alarm.

("Clouds," like "Blue" earlier, is a reference to one of Mitchell's best-known songs.) The ambiguities of these last lines are very rich: the singer sees her flight, like Earhart's, ending in a crash — but it is a crash back into the arms of the lover from whom she has taken flight. The lover is, then, in a sense, death: his arms welcome her as the ocean welcomed Amelia. Yet even this alarm is "false."

The final stanza of the song returns to the road:

> I pulled into the Cactus Tree Motel
> To shower off the dust
> And I slept on the strange pillows of my wanderlust
> I dreamed of 747's
> Over geometric farms
> Dreams, Amelia, dreams and false alarms.

The geometric patterns of the opening stanza (six parallel lines) have now been brought down from the air to the earth ("geometric farms"), though earth only as seen from above. Amelia's primitive biplanes have become the impersonal bulk of the 747s. Yet for all the inconclusive sadness of the singer's lonely dilemma, Amelia remains to her as a source of dreams, of comfort, of affection: one cannot judge the song properly without hearing the aching tenderness with which Mitchell's voice, on every recurrence of the chorus line, caresses the name "Amelia" (or without hearing, in the concert version, the high, soaring, ethereal flight of Pat Metheny's guitar solo).[47]

"Amelia" is obviously not a "documentary poem" in the central sense which I have attempted to define. It is not a long narrative, and the song itself has comparatively little to say about Earhart's career. In its fullest version, however, that in the concert film, the photographs of Earhart testify to much of that history, and act, in the classic sense, as the poem's "documents." "Amelia" is rather a mini-documentary, a small scale model of the form. The references to Earhart are what prevent the song from falling into the flaws (all too prevalent in much of Mitchell's work) of maudlin self-indulgence: Amelia provides a solid reference point for the song, both factually (in the insistence on her historical reality) and emotionally (in the mysterious assurance and love of the repeated chorus line). And the figure of Amelia provides the singer with the necessary pole of alterity by which to complete her own dialectic process of self-definition. If what she arrives at is indeed "the truth" about herself, it is the truth of Amelia Earhart that has enabled her to reach it — just as "the truth" of Frances Farmer enabled Rose also to arrive at an answer to the central documentary question of identity, Who Do You Think You Are?

NOTES

[1] Alice Munro, *Who Do You Think You Are?* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1978), p. 64.
[2] Munro, p. 64.
[3] Munro, p. 25.
[4] Dorothy Livesay, "The Documentary Poem: A Canadian Genre," in *Contexts of Canadian Criticism*, ed. Eli Mandel (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1971), pp. 267-81.
[5] Livesay, pp. 269, 267.

[6] Livesay, p. 279.

[7] Livesay, p. 267.

[8] Note, however, that there is still a difference between this use of the persona and that in, say, Browning's "My Last Duchess" or Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock": namely, the essential difference that the documentary persona is an historical character, not an invented one, created and manipulated by the author solely for the purpose of the poem. Eliot could invent anything he liked about Prufrock; Atwood had to accommodate the immutable facts about Moodie. More subtle precedents for the documentary persona might be cited in Ezra Pound: "Homage to Sextus Propertius," for instance, although few documentary poems rely so completely on *translation*. Pound's Hugh Selwyn Mauberley is of course a fictional character, but he takes on a strange quasi-historicity, and can thus be used in a documentary manner, in Timothy Findley's *Famous Last Words*.

[9] Urjo Kareda, "An Immigrant's Song," *Saturday Night*, 92, no. 12 (December 1983), 48.

[10] Letter to Peter Miller, quoted by bp Nichol in his Introduction to Frank Davey, *The Arches: Selected Poems* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1980), p. 8.

[11] Frank Davey, "The Clallam," *The Arches*, p. 77.

[12] Frank Davey, "E. J. Pratt: Rationalist Technician," *Canadian Literature*, 61 (Summer 1974), p. 71.

[13] Davey, "Rationalist Technician," p. 73.

[14] Gary Geddes, *War & Other Measures* (Toronto: Anansi, 1976), p. 78.

[15] Doug Beardsley, *Kissing the Body of My Lord* (Edmonton: Longspoon, 1982), p. 63.

[16] Stephen Scobie, *McAlmon's Chinese Opera* (Montreal: Quadrant, 1980), p. 93.

[17] Michael Ondaatje, *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* (Toronto: Anansi, 1970), p. 110. For some detailed examples of Ondaatje's manipulation of documents, see my previous article "Two Authors In Search of a Character: Michael Ondaatje, bp Nichol, and Billy the Kid," *Canadian Literature*, 54 (Autumn 1972), pp. 37-55, especially p. 49.

[18] George Bowering, *Burning Water* (Toronto: General, 1980), p. 29.

[19] *Burning Water*, p. 126.

[20] There is an interesting exploration to be made of the whole notion of the documentary as a form of travesty, not excluding the association of the transvestite. Tom Stoppard's play *Travesties*, which plays quasi-fictional games with the historical conjunction of Joyce, Lenin, and Tzara in Zurich in 1916, is, arguably, a kind of documentary.

[21] *The Letters of Vincent Van Gogh*, sel., ed., and introd. by Mark Roskill (London: Fontana, 1963), pp. 272-73.

[22] E. D. Blodgett, *Sounding* (Edmonton: Tree Frog, 1977), p. 24.

[23] A similarly ambiguous position is occupied by the very *last* page of *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*, which may be interpreted as being spoken either by Billy or by Michael Ondaatje.

[24] Margaret Atwood, *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* (Toronto: Oxford, 1970), p. 7.

[25] Atwood, p. 13. See also Sid Stephen, "*The Journals of Susanna Moodie*: a self-portrait of Margaret Atwood," *White Pelican*, 2, no. 2 (Spring 1972), 32-36.

[26] Douglas Barbour, *Visions of My Grandfather* (Ottawa: Golden Dog, 1977), unpaginated, section 9.
[27] Monty Reid, *Karst Means Stone* (Edmonton: NeWest, 1979), p. 68.
[28] Ted Plantos, *Passchendaele* (Windsor: Black Moss, 1983), p. 7.
[29] George Bowering, *George, Vancouver* (Toronto: Weed/Flower, 1970), p. 39.
[30] *Burning Water*, p. 7.
[31] *Burning Water*, p. 7. "Dead Sailors" was in fact Bowering's working title for the novel, and some early extracts appeared under that name.
[32] *Burning Water*, p. 18.
[33] Phyllis Webb, *Wilson's Bowl* (Toronto: Coach House, 1980), p. 15.
[34] Webb, p. 28.
[35] Webb, p. 15.
[36] Webb, p. 17.
[37] Webb, p. 21.
[38] Webb, pp. 25, 29, 31, 43, 41.
[39] Michael Ondaatje, *Coming Through Slaughter* (Toronto: Anansi, 1976), p. 133.
[40] *Coming Through Slaughter*, p. 133.
[41] *Coming Through Slaughter*, p. 134.
[42] *Coming Through Slaughter*, p. 134.
[43] *Coming Through Slaughter*, p. 96.
[44] *McAlmon's Chinese Opera*, p. 84.
[45] The comparison has been suggested by John Lent, writing about Tom Wayman in *CVII* (Autumn 1982).
[46] Joni Mitchell, *Hejira*, Asylum 7ES-1087 (1976). All quotations in the final section of this essay are taken from songs on this record.
[47] The soundtrack is available on *Shadows and Light*, Asylum 2XBB-704 (1980).

NOTE ON THE ECONOMY

Robin Skelton

The crows are killing
the songbirds here
this Spring.

Hoarse from their
broken islands,
they descend

on eggs and young
and weaker birds,
their long

beaks gaping wide,
their talons hooked,
their wings

black, beautiful,
bright glossed;
they perch and call

from branch and roof
and post,
avid for life

and strength through
joy; there's talk
of snares and guns

but we can't kill
and they
won't scare away.

ARE CANADIANS POLITICALLY NAIVE?

Some Observations by a New Canadian from the Old World

Josef Skvorecky

YOU WON'T LIKE THIS ESSAY, but let it be a comfort to you that the question in my title is stupid. If you do not subscribe to collectivistic hypotheses — as I most vehemently don't — you will know why. What, after all, is the *only* thing that Canadians have in common? Not even the language; just their citizenship. Apparently there are some naïve Canadians; some are downright silly. Others are sophisticated, knowledgeable, talented. A truistic observation that can be made about any nation.

The question should read: Are Many Canadians Politically Naïve? As much as I hate to hurt people's feelings, I am afraid I must answer Yes. Unfortunately, many are.

As long as such men and women are not members of the academic or mass media communities, their naïveté is pardonable. In this country, we don't have mandatory indoctrination sessions for everybody, and the majority of our citizens are preoccupied with the good old Yankee business of pursuing happiness. The cab driver who has never had a totalitarian experience cannot be blamed for not reading scholarly treatises on history and politics. Inexcusability begins with people in the mass media and in university lecture rooms. In this day and age, it is not just *naïve* to express publicly uninformed opinions and judgments, it is *criminally* naïve.

To be accurate: Canadian political naïveté, as I see it, has nothing to do with the way Canadians view our domestic political issues; in that respect they are admittedly and understandably much shrewder than citizens who came to this country late in life. Neither has it anything to do with the way they view nazism (though they rarely distinguish it from fascism). Nazism was blatantly evil, anti-humanistic, racist, supremacist. It would have been dangerous to the world — and therefore to Canada — had it won the war. Fortunately, the nazis lost and, in my opinion, they present no danger at all to the world at large; they can only

endanger individuals. The nazi ideology never could have any appeal except to Germans, the nation of supermen (and certainly not to *all* Germans), to some individuals in nations that deemed themselves racially first-class, and to cranks in other nations: to the Sir Oswald Mosleys, or to the Emanuel Moravecs of Bohemia. Today, the influence of the nazi ideology is limited *only* to cranks. But what about the estimated 2,000 ex-nazis living in our midst? Do they not present a danger? — How can they? For the past 38 years they have kept not just a low profile, but utter silence. None of them has ever tried to stand up and defend their past and their ideology publicly. They know better than we do about the crimes they had committed before this country gave them — unwittingly — shelter. Now, after Roiko, they must be shaking with fear.

Unlike the nazi ideology which had charm only for members of the *Herrenvölker* and for deviants, the communist ideology sounds sweet. It is antiracist, uses humanistic clichés, talks a lot about peace (while conducting little surreptitious military interventions, wars, and proxy-wars in Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Afghanistan, Angola, Abyssinia, etc.), about international solidarity, even brotherhood, even love. *Vis-à-vis* things Soviet, the political naïveté of quite a few Canadians is brought to oppressingly fragrant bloom. Let me discuss a concrete and recent example of this blooming at its Stachanovite best.

In the spring of 1983 a *World Assembly for Peace and Life Against Nuclear War* was held in Prague, Czechoslovakia. The Brobdingnagian length of the name semantically betrays the inspiration behind the gathering: where else but in Soviet Russia does one find dailies with titles like *For The Lasting Peace, For A People's Democracy*! But one cannot ask Canadian delegates to do extensive homework in semantics first, and only then head for Prague. So they went without having done their homework. Once there, they were wined and dined, guided through the countryside on Potiemkinian excursions, and allowed to witness a peace rally of — according to their estimate — a quarter-million people. They also met some Soviet V.I.P.'s. Back home, some wrote about the events in Canadian papers. One such writer was Ms. Lesley Hughes from Winnipeg.

I have read three reports from her pen. One, headlined "A Prague spring without tanks," appeared in *The Winnipeg Sun* on June 22, 1983, and tells about how, on arriving in Prague, she suffered "a shock when [she] discovered the sophistication of life in Communist Czechoslovakia." Her second shock came when she realized the "similarities to Western life. First there were teen-agers. All in denim . . . a few given over to punk-rocking . . . defying the system just like the ones at home." In another article (July 6), "Why we don't have peace," Ms. Hughes recounts some personal chats with Valentina Tereshkova, the world's first woman cosmonaut, and with "a high-placed Russian." This gentleman even entrusted her with a few state secrets, namely that the American delegates to the

Geneva Peace Talks had "been told [by their government] to offer only impossible suggestions for disarmament." Ms. Hughes opines that "we have been seduced out of our ability to see beyond appearances to reality" and expresses a wish "*to see for ourselves*" [Ms. Hughes' italics]. Finally, she gives advice to Western leaders: they should act "to prevent [war] first, and worry about the communist threat to our way of life when life itself is secure."

Her other article (July 4) is a meditation on the untruths of anti-communist assertions, entitled "Repression? It's certainly well hidden." Here the Winnipeg author tells her readers about "phone calls from New York . . . where newspapers have reported riots, suppression and arrests" in Prague, and about some "bad press" from the Western radio according to which the Peace Assembly would grant "freedom of expression to communists only." She also confesses that, on her way to Prague, she was anxious not to "be seen as today's Neville Chamberlain, shouting Peace in Our Time!" but was eventually reassured that this would not be the case when she spoke to "Czechs she met on the street, in obscure shops, in bars," and they all "said they attended [the Peace Rally] gladly, and not just for the tourist money but for hope." There was some more dining, vodka drinking, and dancing, a "full day group tour [through] factories, schools, day care centres and a collective farm," and the exhilarating (and certainly hectic) days culminated with the Peace Rally on Prague's Old Town Square, packed to capacity. "Do you really think," asks Ms. Hughes, "the communists could have driven the citizens from their homes to line the streets 10 deep, forced them to weep and take our pictures, shake our hands?"

Finally, the Winnipeg reporter concludes: No, we Canadian delegates were no "Lenin's fools" to support the conference. (Lenin's term was "idiots.")

A DEPRESSION DESCENDS ON ME: can I hope to get space in *Canadian Literature* necessary to analyze in detail this Gargantuan collection of misconceptions? Hardly. I cannot ask the editor to reject other contributors whose themes are more relevant to the issue of literature. A depression, indeed, descends on me. How many people read *Canadian Literature* anyway? Possibly fewer than those who read *The Winnipeg Sun. Habent sua fata libelli*, and the fate of articles — and books — like this one is that they are rarely perused by those for whom they have been written, but mostly only by those who do not need their arguments because they know them by heart.

But perhaps one should not give up, even though *das Spiel ist ganz und gar verloren* because, hopefully, *dennoch wird es weitergehen*. If I cannot go into all the details necessary for the clarification of the myopic vision of our Alice in the Czech Wonderland let me at least try to be systematic.

Ms. Hughes' first article displays a fallacy of the naïve Canadian psyché which I would describe as:

1. *The Canadian Insensitivity*

It strikes me as odd that none of the Canadian delegates found it odd to travel to a *peace* conference held in a country which only fifteen years ago fell prey to a *military* ambush of gigantic proportions (about seven times as many soldiers plus hardware took part in it as is the personnel of the entire Canadian army). During that military adventure about 100 civilians died, and ever since the country has lived under virtual Soviet military occupation. The main of several Soviet military bases is only 20 miles east of Prague, at Mladá, a mere hour's drive for armoured vehicles. Missile sites (naturally, with atomic warheads) loom behind many a Czech village, though the delegates saw none near the collective farm where they spent a few minutes, probably snacking and wining. It could not have been more than a few minutes since, in the course of one single day, they visited "factories, schools, day care centres and a collective farm." Ms. Hughes saw Bohemia — as the Czech saying goes — from an express train.

But if I find all this odd what am I to think about the sensitivity of the woman who titled her article "A Prague spring without tanks"? Apparently, the word she chose was just a word to her, with no reality behind it. A useful gimmick to coin a catchy phrase for her headline. For the millions of Czechs, however — including the 70,000 who now live in Canada — Ms. Hughes' chosen word has a more material meaning. For there are thousands of their loved ones in Czechoslovakia who lost their jobs, their professional careers, their social status, their personal liberty, and even their life as a direct result of the action of the metaphoric tanks. But Ms. Hughes did not meet any of those. She was a friendly visitor; friendly, that is, to the government.

2. *The Canadian Ignorance*

Here part of the blame should probably be placed on the shoulders of our ethnocultural institutions which financially support folk dancing, pork feasts, and other extinct forms of European village life. In the minds of some people, the jumping of the sexy girl-Ph.D.'s in short-skirted "national costumes," so often seen in Toronto at the Caravan Festival and on other occasions, creates and enhances the image of a universal ethnic East European as a simple-minded, semi-literate hillbilly. This was apparently Ms. Hughes' idea of the typical Czech. She seems never to have heard of sophisticated Czech literature and film; names

like Capek or Kundera tell her nothing; neither do words like Martinu or Mucha or, for that matter, the Bren gun, the Skoda AA cannon, the *Panzerjäger* — but that, perhaps, because she loves peace. When, instead of simpletons in mud huts, she found English-speaking denim-clad youths, who very probably know much more about Mick Jagger than herself (and possibly more about Faulkner), she was shocked.

She also met the "punk-rockers, defying the system *just like* the ones at home" [italics mine].

3. *The Canadian Inability to See the Importance of Quantity in Quality*

I love — that is, I hate — the phrase "just like." When Václav Havel, the playwright, was arrested for the first time for having smuggled the manuscript memoirs of an ancient Socialist minister to our Czech publishing house in Toronto, I met a Canadian colleague, and when I told her about this, she uttered: "Just like Daniel Ellsberg."

Well, yes. Both Havel and Ellsberg committed, in a way, the same crime: they leaked documents their governments wished to keep secret. There were some differences, though: the difference between the private memoirs of an octogenarian former politician, and military documents labelled Top Secret; the difference between sending the manuscript abroad with no demands of remuneration, and selling them for a handsome price to the rich American papers. Then also the difference between Ellsberg's later fortunes: acquittal, a lecture circuit; and those of Havel: four years in jail and now round-the-clock police surveillance.

Even more illuminating of this Canadian fallacy was another encounter I had with another youngish lady, this time over the frame-up of the socialist leader Milada Horáková which resulted in her execution; she was the only Czech woman ever executed by the Czechs for political "crimes." "Just like Angela Davis!" my interlocutor commented on the frame-up trial. Now, *that* made me mad, and I lost self-control. "Oh really? But that trial was in California, wasn't it?" I cried. "I thought the Yanks put Angela in a gas chamber!" The lady has avoided me ever since.

Similarly with the Czech punks. Yes, they do defy the government. But instead of permitting them to hold monster-concerts in big halls and stadiums, the government — only about a month after Ms. Hughes' departure from Prague — clamped down on the punk-folk, disbanned about thirty punk-rock and New Wave bands, took away the licences of their musicians, fired the entire editorial board of the only pop-music monthly *Melodie*, and apparently is about to dissolve the Jazz Section of the Musicians' Union, the chief spokesman for the punks. Not "just like" at all. Just "a little like."

4. *The Canadian Neglect of Pertinent Literature*

Ms. Hughes was taken through all the stages of subtle brainwashing described in detail (with many examples) in Paul Hollander's *Political Pilgrims*, one of several books Canadians intent on travelling behind the Curtain should read. With all due respect to her, Ms. Hughes is a provincial Canadian journalist who dines with "high-placed Russians" and with the female stars of the universe only occasionally. In Prague, however, she received a V.I.P. treatment. The high-placed KGB man even gave her a piece of interesting information and she, overawed by the friendly kindness of such greats, believed his information just as strongly as she disbelieves the information offered to Canadians not only by us, biased exiles, but also by scholarly books and acclaimed novels, readily available in Canada. Some were even written by Canadians, such as the books on Czechoslovakia by the eminent Professor H. Gordon Skilling of the University of Toronto. Disregarding such works of scholarship, Ms. Hughes expressed a wish to "see for herself," not through the eyes of propaganda. After seventy years of totalitarian trickery, however, the primitive methods of Count Potiemkin have been vastly improved. Travelling to a totalitarian country in order to "see for yourself," without having done substantial homework first, guarantees the very opposite of what Ms. Hughes wanted to achieve by "being there." It guarantees that you will be unable "to see beyond appearances to reality."

5. *The Canadian Inability to Realize that the Totalitarians ARE Different From Us*

"Prevent war first, and worry about the communist threat afterwards!" A nice-sounding slogan. It reminds me of a graffito I found on the wall of Sidney Smith Hall under a Communist Party election poster: "Vote Now, Pay Later!" The trouble here is that it is impossible to separate peace from freedom. By freedom, naturally, I mean not national independence but the individual liberty of the citizen. In the sense of national independence, one of the "freest" nations was certainly that of Germany under Hitler. However, the state of individual freedom in Herr Hitler's *Reich* was non-existent, and is best characterized by just one word: Auschwitz.

There does exist a genuine, government non-sponsored peace movement in Czechoslovakia. But its delegates were not admitted to the dining-and-wining parties, nor were they permitted to speak. This movement stresses the indivisibility of the question of peace and the question of freedom. To simplify this matter for our Alices: the civil freedoms and human rights that exist in our Western society guarantee that people like Ms. Hughes can, quite effectively I'm afraid, fight for disarmament — in our part of the world. The lack of such rights, such freedoms,

in totalitarian countries of whatever political stripe can lend effective support to Ms. Hughes' fight for disarmament — in our part of the world. If the Ms. Hugheses have their way — and there is a chance they might — there will be disarmament — *in our part of the world.* The long word for this is "unilateral."

Now, the experience of both remote and recent history teaches us that the autocrat, the tyrant, the dictator, the totalitarian ruler understands, unfortunately, but one international language: that of material strength. He is unmoved by the presumably human feelings that move Ms. Hughes. After all, the men who lead a state which has killed between 30 and 70 million of its own citizens can hardly be soft-hearted. But they do understand the language of military strength. The Nazis in World War II, for instance, never used poisonous gas, yet a gas-mask box was attached to the belt of every German soldier from the first day of the war to the last. For the Allies, too, had gas, and would have used it, had the Germans started gas warfare. It was solely this knowledge which prevented Hitler from resorting to the diabolic invention of his predecessors in World War I. But if the Allies had not been in possession of the chemical weapon would it be reasonable to assume that Hitler, from humanitarian considerations, would have refrained from yperiting the Yanks, the Tommies, the Bolshies, all of them?

A more recent example from the same category of killing: the North Vietnamese certainly had access to Russian-made gas during the war in Vietnam — but they used it only after the Americans had departed, against the primitive tribesmen in the mountains, who do not even possess bazookas.

This is the reason why people of my experience, both personal and bookish, think it important that Western atomic defences be not weakened, or even abandoned altogether. We do not want to die in an atomic war, just as Ms. Hughes doesn't. However, we have reason, supported by logic and history, to fear that if the West should disarm atomically, we would have not peace but war. Non-atomic perhaps; but if the conventional forces of NATO put up stiff resistance, we probably would live to experience even the atomic variety. Limited, perhaps, but atomic nevertheless. Did you read Sacharov's report on the party and the guests in that remote top-secret Siberian place where they celebrated the successful completion of the Soviet bomb? Sacharov, the father of that weapon, proposed a toast: "That this terrible bomb may never be used!" To which one of the jolly-looking, rotund Soviet generals responded: "Thank you, comrade Sacharov, for delivering this baby. As to how it should be used, please, leave that to us!"

It is, unfortunately, impossible to secure peace first, and worry about communism later. You cannot separate the two endeavours. It would be nice if you could, but you can not.

No, I have no ready-made advice to give to those who want to preserve peace. I only know — because history has taught me this lesson — how peace can go to

pieces. Pacifism, the naïve or cowardly efforts to extricate ourselves from our common North American destiny in a world of powerful totalitarianism, is a guaranteed road to war.

6. *The Ahistoricity of Canadian Observations*

How often, in our Canadian newspapers, have you come across sentences like: "Mr. Jaruzelski, the leader of the military junta which grabbed power in Poland a year ago, said . . ." or "Mr. Arafat, the leader of the anti-Israeli guerrillas, declared . . ." etc.? Apparently it is presumed that Canadians have either a pathologically short memory, or a lamentable lack of knowledge of the affairs of the world.

Ms. Hughes asks her rhetorical question about the communists' ability to drive their citizens to the streets in support of *pax Sovietica.* Yes, such a thing would be impossible in this country. But Ms. Hughes does not seem to know that people now living in Czechoslovakia have a past very much different from the past of people now living in Canada. The Czechs are the veterans of six years of Nazi occupation with its fear-enforced mass gatherings (in the same Prague square) protesting the "perfidious assassination of *Herr stellvertretende Reichsprotektor, General der SS Reinhard Heydrich*"; they have lived through Stalinism with its 300-500 political executions (including the above-mentioned Milada Horáková), with about 100,000 political prisoners mining uranium ore for the production of Soviet A-bombs; with hundreds of thousands of intellectuals, lawyers, clerks, small businessmen, farmers, teachers, and scholars sent to the mines, to the "black (working) battalions," to the factories and state farms for "re-education"; with widespread screening, police surveillance, harassment, "voluntary" mandatory weekend brigades, etc. These people are the fathers and mothers of children who would have very little chance of being admitted to higher schooling, not to speak of university, if their parents refused to "fight for peace." In short: Ms. Hughes seems to be unaware of the very concrete, non-metaphorical bloodiness of the communist system in the first years after its coming to power, and of its unabated repressiveness ever since. After the unleashing of their holocaustic actions, these regimes do not have to drive people to rallies with whips. The fear of their power and of their readiness to crack down on you, Jaruzelski-like, suffices. You are slowly manoeuvred into a frame of mind where you no longer give a damn about anything. You say to yourself: So what? We rallied against the criminal British paras who killed our good socialist friend *Obergruppenführer* Heydrich. We rallied to demand death-sentences for the defendants in the Slánsky trial, and later were told that the hanged comrades had been innocent — so what? We rallied against the lies of the imperialist Kennedy about the

presence of Soviet missiles in Cuba, and a few days later we rallied in support of the peace-gesture of Nikita Khrushchev when he removed the non-existent missiles from that island. We rallied in support of the good communist Dubček, and we rallied when the Soviets invaded to depose him; only a couple of years later we rallied in support of the Brotherly Soviet Help and against the bad communist Dubček. So what? Why not rally for peace? It's just another Kremlin trick, and you'd better be present.

Two more things Ms. Hughes does not seem to know: mostly, these mass demonstrations are held during working hours, with no loss of salary. In this sense, the participants are paid for participation. If the rally falls on a holiday, the above-mentioned powers of persuasion still function. And, usually, one has to have one's name marked off on lists checked by foremen and other bosses in the side streets where the voluntary demonstrators gather. Then one marches down Paris Street, in the direction of Old Town Square — a huge river of humans. Through the side streets, rivulets of people, their banners and flags rolled up, flow in an opposite direction. They are headed for the many pubs in Old Town Prague, to celebrate a sunny day spent on an enjoyable walk and crowned by a convivial beer-drinking party in the colourful medieval rooms where, a thousand years ago (who knows?), the Good King Wenceslas himself might have dined and beered with sexy bathing-house attendants.

Had Ms. Hughes known all this, would she be so surprised that people, with whom she obviously did not speak in Czech, and possibly through an interpreter, expressed such orthodox views in the presence of an apparently fellow-travelling foreigner?[1]

7. *The Canadian Habit to Judge Others by Ourselves*

Reading in U.S. newspapers about protests and arrests in Prague, Ms. Hughes expected to witness something on the scale of U.S. riots, but she failed to notice anything of that sort. Once again, she did not take into account the well-developed fear which is the best guardian of civil obedience, a fear stemming, in this case, also from the claustrophobic situation of a small nation living under a police regime. There is simply no way of escape. An American draft-dodger easily slips across the border to friendly Canada, sometimes even in his car. The criminal rents a hotel room under an assumed name, and puts on a false moustache. Even when caught by the police, a youngster who has just smashed a window at the American Embassy will have no problem continuing his studies at university.

No such possibilities exist in Czechoslovakia. To slip across the Iron Curtain is rather difficult — and if Ms. Hughes thinks that the Curtain is just a metaphor

invented by the old reactionary Winston Churchill, she should have travelled to Prague by car and, while still in Germany, taken a walk along the border. As for hotels, you cannot rent a room without showing your identity card to the desk clerk who has to present the list of guests to the police on demand. A false beard will not help you. And if you are a student and smash a window in the Soviet Embassy, well. . . .

That's why Ms. Hughes did not observe any huge crowds of protesters, battalions of police, and dozens of patrol wagons overloaded with beaten-up humans. But there *was* a protest march in downtown Prague, reported not only in Western media but also acknowledged (privately) by the Reverend John Morgan who was also dining and wining in Prague at that time. Only about 300 people marched, mostly very young, and they were handled with ease by the police. What the future has in store for them, I don't know. The totalitarian press never informs its readership about such matters.

And then there was the meeting, much written about in West German and British papers, of the representatives of Charter 77, the Czech Peace and Human Rights movement, with the delegates from the German Green and Social Democratic parties. It took place on the White Hill, on the outskirts of Prague, where 300 years ago the Czechs lost their freedom to the authoritarian rule of the Austrian Hapsburgs. The historical hill, on this later occasion, was surrounded by police, the participants were rounded up, cameras were taken out of the hands of Western peace delegates, and films were torn out of the cameras and exposed to the shining sun. But Ms. Hughes has neither seen this, nor read about it. Canadian papers did not cover the event very much; Czech papers did not cover it at all. Ms. Hughes does not read German and probably ignores the British conservative press.

In the end, as predicted by the Americans, freedom of expression was indeed granted "to communists only" — certainly in the final document of the Conference. Does this document protest against the two main atomic arsenals in the world with equal vehemence? Does it protest against one of the two at all? Or does it just rave against the warmongering Yankees, those inefficient trigger-happy militarists who, for at least a decade, had a monopoly on atomic weapons and yet, somehow, failed to launch a war on the then non-atomic and therefore defenceless Soviet Russia?

Ms. Hughes, presumably, voted for that document. I am afraid she fits Lenin's description rather well; the one she mentions in one of her articles.

OH MY! I WANTED TO WRITE about this beautiful land; about its golden skyscrapers silhouetted against the skies of the Indian Summer;

about the joy of its libraries; about the sweet charm of freedom I and my wife and all my good old countrymen found here, under the protective umbrella of the Yanks. But damn politics got me like the blues, and the naïveté of so many of my fellow Canadians does not help me out. I am far from being the stuff that Sisyphus was made of, and yet, again and again, I push this boulder up the steep slope of incomprehension.

How silly of me!

NOTES

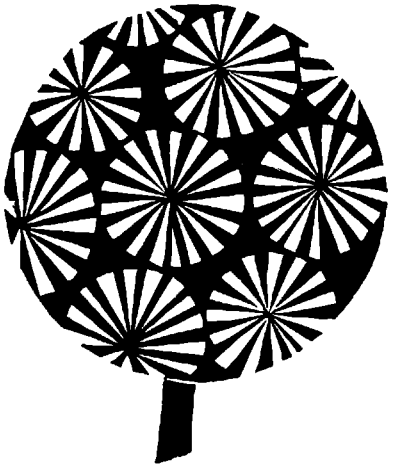
[1] In December 1983, the Czechoslovak News Agency CTK, in a press release, informed the world that "hundreds of thousands of demonstrators welcomed the decision of the Supreme Soviet and of the Czechoslovak government to place Soviet missiles with atomic warheads on Czechoslovak territory." Apparently, these were the same crowds that only six months ago demonstrated for peace. Now they rejoiced over the fact that their country had been made a target for American atomic missiles. What a strange people, the Czechs!

THE ORACLE

DavidSolway

"The wise prince makes decisive changes, new
succeeds upon the old." Sweet Chinese.
"It is the barren womb that fructifies,
a lineage shall arise." Good Hebrew.
"The warrior shall sacrifice the past,
his wound be his acquittal." Sly Greek.
What was it the oracle meant to speak?
In choice of wives, next time you sit and cast

the coins, the yarrow stalks, the cards, the dice,
the twigs upon the fire, beware of too
infatuate a trust in destiny
or fate. The oracle is mischievous.
Was it to leave the old wife for the new,
or yield the first her newfound mastery?



GOLDFISH AND BUMBLEBEES

Glen Sorestad

for Joe

The poet sits at a small table
in this hometown restaurant.
Confident in his own territory
he selects poems from his early work
and opens his world to us all.

Sometimes he is the goldfish
and we the gawkers peer through glass.
Yet the image is clear
as the water he glides through
stroking each poem with ease.

Sometimes he is the bumblebee
wrapped in the flower's closing
locked into love's last bloom
as winter stills the world of bees.
But song transcends the season.

His singing swims and buzzes
over and around and through us all
with murmurs of Dickinson and McEwen,
of Yeats and Pound, and those
who have touched his tongue.

Closer and closer we are drawn
into this nectared world of words
and sounds that dip and flutter
through the glass and petals of language
and into the world that is his poem.

Toronto, September 1982

SATURDAY AFTERNOON AT KENSINGTON MARKET

Raymond Souster

for Bill Brooks

Commerce, by which I don't mean
the Canadian Imperial Bank of,
but hand-to-hand transactions,
smiles on the faces of buyers and sellers,
a laugh here, a shouted joke there,
live fowls in splattered cages,
a counter with a hundred pairs
of fish eyes not so glassily staring,
dresses of rainbowed colourings, an old face
withdrawn behind a shawl staring out
from a store's dark cavern, oranges
Mr Sunkist couldn't dream of,
beautiful chesterfields carried
from endless Portuguese furniture stores,
more overpowering fruit-of-the-sea smells
with DANGER EXCEPT FOR FISH LOVERS
more apt than its store owner dreams of,
birthday cakes four wine-glassed tiers high,
a woman hefting sacks of potatoes
and setting each down as easily as a shrug of the shoulders:

sun's glare streaming down on all of it
with a shine of spring, with the warm magic breath of living.

SANTAYANA

Francis Sparshott

The ocean's peace betrays. Our empty canvas
drifts into drought, the wheel betrays that helmsman
who cleared the mouths of heresy, the whirlpools
of hesitation.

The Middle Sea, tonic of ancient gamuts,
rang his heart home; but loud above its burden
he heard the reef's white noise. Ironic backgrounds
cancelled his cadence —

a vast blue ocean, the green earth beyond it
heavy with voices and an unlearned wisdom.
His father and his mother lost those islands
and left them empty.

Avila bore him, but could never hold him;
Spain was not Spain enough, clear streams turned westward
out of the hills and sought through devious deltas
a grey Atlantic.

His spirit on the waves mapped antique orders,
checkerboard essences he had no faith in:
animal mistrust ran its hot eraser
round the wax contours.

Squeezed between James and Royce, those firm believers,
His mind slipped down the corridors of Harvard,
A citrus pip between the grubby fingers
of Yankee know-how.

Writing in Rome, his pen ran blue with Boston:
steadfast and classical, like all romantics,
kept for his core a mad, dramatic wholeness
put to good uses.

I saw him mantled in the shawls of age,
Don Quixote sane. . . . Odysseus left Calypso
to farm in Ithaca. Trees round his grave bear
lemons and olives.

TWO POEMS

Andrew Suknaski

TONY'S CRABAPPLE TREE

1982 In Regina

life's tough
confirms urban muzhika
tough
for an urban muzhik tryin
to keep an edge
on the nudging
recession . . .

now it all begins with a weakness
for tall girls
and tall boys that tony
tomato master
from odessa
prunes
perfectly
in the narrow
garden
next
to the glaring
white wall
of a garage
and summer

now it all threatens
to end
when tony's crabapple tree begins
to bow
with heavy fruit
abundance becoming
something else
to intoxicate
in indian summer

no time for rambling
or details
the pilfering muzhik is there
"don't bother going home
for a ladder
there's one in the garage"
murmurs
tony's faithful wife
from odessa

"take them all . . . "
suggests tony
oxfords stained red
by the crushed
rotting
crabapples
"the tree's worn me out
all these years . . . "
is his single
thought

no time for expansion
muzhik milks a gallon
in mere seconds
so it seems
the boundless greed swelling
"God, mercy my Lord
an Master
I can't stop now . . . "

muzhik moves the ladder
ascends even higher
picks a second gallon
hands growing
perceptibly
numb
"God, Lord mercy
where will it
all end?"

no time for even the poem
just things at hand
muzhik rushes up for a third gallon
heaven within

sight now
the tree
its heavy
insatiable boughs undulating
at their own free will
muzhik's knees growing numb
weak hands
seeming wood in the fine sleet
where cartilage
bone
flesh
and fruit merge
in glorious
illusion
"God . . . Master
this tree
will swallow me . . ."

no time for guilt
or glimmerings
of absolution
lust is magnetic
muzhik is hypnotized by greed
where they ascend
the endless
ladder
tripping over one another
to consummate all
dreams
in the fourth gallon
the city disappears in the falling snow
mindless muzhik
only an eye
already has
a half gallon
when he plummets
like a stone
to the green earth
"ah God,
for once there is
time . . .
even a limit!"

for once
the century is
on pilot
crushed apples
next to his
heart
muzhik is
fully
. . . relaxed

FLOATING ENTRY /

from "Divining for West" of CELESTIAL MECHANICS
/ life fragment in progress

peral erina deep
into her reverie
on the perch
within
the second story
house
on the edge of
ghostly
wood mountain
where she is
guardian spirit
to her late parents
and others who
slowly
abandon
the place
. . . one by one
Lemnu Domnului †
they go west
Lemnu Domnului
"The Lord's Tree"
my Lord above
an I
am old an crippled
am jist sitting here
on my perch
Lemnu Domnului

my Lord above
ready to fly to Him
ready
to fly west
where the darkness comes

. . . an my Lord above
my second chance will
be east
someday
where He will come again
an His vestments will
be shining white as
the snow
an His face will be
brighter than
the sun
my Lord above
Lemnu Domnului
but they will not see it
an the goats will be
terrified
an crawl
back
into
their graves
where the sheep have left
my Lord above
Lemnu Domnului
bless me with
that last flight into
The Light
Lemnu
. . . Domnului

november 12th, 1983 / wood mountain
november 14th, 1983 / regina

† *Lemnu Domnului*, "The Lord's Tree" in Romanian, grows as a small hedge along the walkways of most Romanian homes in the west. The seeds were brought by the first immigrants from Romania just after the turn of the century.

TWO POEMS

Anne Szumigalski

CLARRIE

one day in spring you find yourself watching
from an upstairs window holding your breath
waiting for the year's first rainstorm next
morning among the soaked petals which have
fallen in a rosy shower from your crabtree
you find an envelope transparent with rain
in it a blotched telegram

AUNT DIED THIS MORNING INTESTATE OF COURSE STOP
SHE SPOKE OF YOU AT THE LAST STOP FUNERAL
THURSDAY APRIL

well who is april? or perhaps when? where
is the funeral? which aunt has died?

minnie of the jampots, quince and medlar
constance of the high grey hair aunt luard
who always wears/wore a velvet band around
her scrawny throat

none of these would mention you on her
deathbed but it *is* thursday and so you
put on your brown smock your long necklace
of cowries you tell the shells like beads
repeat over and over the names of those
girls in their short frocks and cloche
hats, those women with their knitting and
picnics, those old biddies in their cosy
cottages with their cakes and tea their
little nips of elderberry from the corner
cupboard

later you trowel out a shallow grave and
lay the telegram to rest under a handful
or two of crumbled earth then stick in
a twisted candle left over from a birthday

the flame flickers palely beneath the bright
sun

but that's not the end of it the message doesn't
lie easy often when you pass the spot you
think you hear the faint crinkle of paper
moving among the shallow roots of the spring
weeds and you know you'll be forced to
remember or invent someone else:

that's clarrie with her arched nose and
spiteful tongue her fingers resting not
too lightly on the keys of an out-of-tune
piano the dyed hair the chipped scarlet nails
the tumbler of cheap wine on the bench beside
her boogie woogie woogie go her hands on
the keys *boogie woogie woogie* the breathy
voice from the wrinkled mouth while a
crooked old foot in a rundown canvas shoe
searches for the loud pedal *chili baby*
chili on a hot sunday in may

SANDBLIND AT THE CROSSING

in the distance she sees a very tall dog
a great dane with a narrow elegant muzzle

in the distance he sees a print sack
blowing on the line

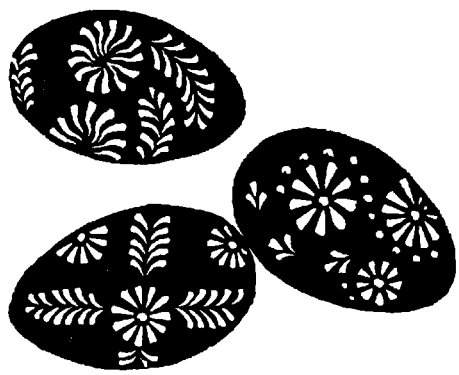
he sees a boat with a calico sail
the wind blows her across the intersection

the dog comes nearer and is a thin-legged boy
carrying a delicate cat with cobalt eyes

this woman, the boy thinks,
dressed in a meadow of flowers
is an old white-haired animal
the smell of her skin
still flavoured with breastmilk

the woman wants to greet the child
but simply inclines her head
she cannot bring herself to speak
he's disappointed for he had meant
to tell her the story of his stolen cat
how he has taught it to caress his face
with unsheathed claws

not really scratching
but leaving long strokes
of soft white down his olive cheek



TWO POEMS

Sharon Thesen

TURGENEV'S HUNTSMEN

In Moscow, in April
the nightingales sing

At least one nightingale sang
that night, in the Lenin Hills

In a small thicket near the river
near the building with the blinking red star

Some citizens of Moscow on tiptoe,
others on their knees

On the damp ground, on alder twigs
with stiff legs remembering Turgenev's huntsmen,

Their wishful singing and black magic
and black horses tethered in the distance

Some citizens of Moscow listen
in the tense and voluptuous dark.

POEM IN MEMORY OF AN EARLIER POEM

A moment ago
the light was perfect

& the poem itself
a perfect memory — its occasion

another light, perfection

so confusing I was there
without getting there.

They have clocks now
that talk back to you.
Malcolm Lowry
always wrote standing up,
for his soul needed to avoid
being fixed —

I sympathize, my whole face
raining.

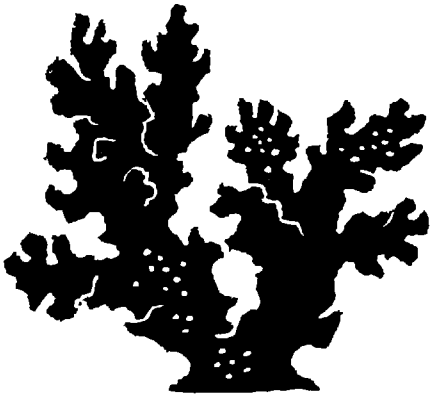
The sky presses 5 colours
down against
the horizon, I wander

the yard with a bag of tulip bulbs
looking for earth.

Enough noise is made.

I swam in the sea a couple
of times, peering at freighters.

Those days it seemed
I was quicker to judge & fragile
like a rock.



BASMATI RICE

An Essay about Words

Audrey Thomas

MY STUDY IS ON THE SECOND FLOOR of our house and faces East. I like that and I get up early to write, perhaps not simply because I enjoy the sunrise (especially in winter, when all has been so black, and then gradually light, like hope, returns) but out of some atavistic hope that my thoughts, too, will rise with the sun and illumine the blank pages in front of me.

We live in a corner house and my study is right above a busy street. People whom I cannot see often pass beneath my window and throw up snatches of conversation before moving out of earshot. And I hear footsteps, light, heavy, singly or in groups, and the sound of buggy wheels or grocery carts. Now, I can see the sidewalk on the other side of the street, see people hurrying along or dawdling, the young woman from the St. James Daycare a block away, out for a walk with her little charges who all seem to march (or skip or run) to a different drummer, a father with his baby tucked inside his ski jacket, a blind man, a woman with her arms full of grocery bags. I cannot hear their footsteps nor anything they might be saying and sometimes a wonderful thing happens where someone will pass beneath my window, and say something while someone is walking by on the other side of the street, and so I get the wonderful absurdity of seeing the old lady in the red coat who lives at the Senior Citizen Lodge at 16th and Macdonald (I know because she asked me to take her picture, waving her hand-made Union Jack, the day the Queen came down 16th Avenue) going by on one side and hearing a gruff teenage male voice saying, "so I said to him nobody talks like that to me and. . . ." The movie I watch has the wrong soundtrack!

I am interested in such absurdities, in the word *absurd* itself, from the Latin for inharmonious, foolish. L. *ab*, from, *surdus*, deaf, inaudible, harsh (used metaphorically here, deaf to reason, hence irrational). I am interested in the fact that I spend a lot of my days at a desk, or table, and that the desk or table needs always to face a window. This is not just so I will have something to look at when "illumination" comes slowly (or not at all) but because, in what is essentially an inside occupation (and a very lonely one at that, I can't even stand to have a radio on when I'm working) I am able to feel even a little bit connected with the out-

side. I often see myself like a diver in one of those old-fashioned diving bells, both in and apart from everything in the universe around me. There is a little piece of brown paper taped to the window frame. I got it from a bread wrapper several years ago when I was spending a winter in Montreal. It says

PAIN
FRAIS DU JOUR

in blue letters and underneath

BREAD
BAKED FRESH DAILY

Some days, if I'm wrestling with a piece or a passage that seems especially difficult I fold the paper so that it reads:

PAIN
BAKED FRESH DAILY

and for some perverse reason that cheers me up. That the French word for bread and the English word for misery of one kind or another *look* alike is another of those absurdities that interest me. There is no real connection, as there is, say, with the English *blessed* and the French *blesser*, to wound — it's just chance. But my mind, when in a certain state of heightened awareness (which I might point out, can just as easily be brought on by laughter as by tears), makes that kind of connection easily.

Here's another. It was early November when I began thinking about this essay, and the tree outside my window was almost bare of leaves. The weather was turning cold and a cold rain was falling. "Autumn leaves" I wrote on my pad, "autumn leaves." Over and over. And then suddenly "WINTER enters." Again, no real linguistic connection, but writing the phrase over and over gave me a new way of looking at the leaves.

I love words. I love the way they suddenly surprise you; I love the way *everyone*, high or low, uses them to paint pictures — that is to say metaphorically. In the past week a phrase, not new, but surely not much in vogue of recent years, has been said in my hearing, or I've read it in the paper, no less than five times: so and so is "between a rock and a hard place." Once in a line-up at the main post office downtown, once spoken by a friend, and in three different newspaper articles. Where does this phrase come from? I can't find it in Bartlett's, at least not under "rock," or "place," or "hard." Why is it suddenly being said? It is certainly a most poetic (and uncomfortable) image. I wouldn't want to be there, nor would you. Somebody says, of somebody else, "I've got him eating out of my hand," probably unaware of the root of the word "manipulate." When I was a child I heard constant warnings about kids who were "too big for their britches"

or "too big for their boots" and we were all, without exception, potential big-eared little pitchers. And yet it seemed to me that all the adults I knew — parents, relatives, teachers, corrected me if I played around with words myself — or with grammar or sentence structure. It was as though all the metaphorical language in the world had already been invented and I wasn't there on the day that it happened. Once I started reading poetry I realized that poets seemed to have a certain freedom that ordinary, hard-working decent folks didn't (or didn't allow themselves) to have. They invented and re-invented language all the time. (Prose that got too metaphorical was considered suspect unless it were in the Sunday Sermon or spoken by Roosevelt or Churchill.) That was when I decided I would become a poet, and probably why. My poems were terrible — a lot of them were very "Christian" in a romantic way, full of Crusaders, lepers, infidels, and angels — and some of them, I regret to say, won prizes. But I do remember the day we were asked to write limericks (Grade 4? Grade 5?) and I came up with this in about five minutes:

There was once a fellow named Farrell
Whose life was in terrible peril
He fell in with some rogues
Who stole all but his brogues
And had to slink home in a barrel.

(I don't know where I got "brogues" from or how I knew what it meant; it certainly wasn't a word used in our family.)

I wrote dozens of limericks after that first one. I knew it wasn't Real Poetry but I also suspected the other stuff, the stuff my teachers and my mother and various judges liked wasn't Real Poetry either. Nevertheless, for all my desire to write poetry, what I was always better at was prose. Who knows why one writer works better in one genre than another? What I'd really like to be is "ambidextrous," like Michael Ondaatje or Margaret Atwood, but I'm not. It's always prose for me. (Why do most of us see poetry as "higher"? Because it seems more of a distillate of the creative unconscious than prose? Perfume as opposed to cologne? I once had a poet in a graduate prose class in Montreal. He needed one more course to get his degree and had chosen mine. We were all working on stories and one night he said to me, in much despair, "I've never written 'he said' and 'she said' before." Of course he wasn't a *narrative* poet: not for him *Beowulf* or *The Idylls of the King*, or, closer to home, *The Titanic,* or *Brébeuf and his Brethren.*) I still sometimes have the awful feeling that I failed because I failed to write poetry, even while I know that prose can be just as exciting or dense, "packed," innovative as any poem. It probably has something to do with the fact that we write our notes, our memos, our letters, in prose, we speak in prose to one another, even

when we speak metaphorically: "Lay off me, will you?", "I'm really blue today," "What's for dinner, honey?", "You're driving me up the wall."

Sometimes a sentence or a phrase gives me the idea for an entire story (once, even, for the very last line of a novel I didn't write for another three years, when I overheard a man in a pay phone say to whomever was on the other end: "Get rid of it." That's all I heard him say and then he hung up). This summer my daughter and I were in Greece. We witnessed a very bizarre incident involving a young English boy, an octopus, and a man in a panama hat. I knew that that in itself could provide the central image for a new story but then, a few days later, I heard a French woman on another beach say "La méduse; il faut prener garde," and suddenly, because of this incident with the octopus, I saw not the jelly fish to which she had been referring but the great snaky tentacles of an octopus and *then* I saw that what I really wanted to write about was all that sexuality that was there on the beach, in that heat, under the intense blue sky: the bare-breasted European woman, the young Greek men showing off to their girl-friends and whoever else would watch. All the bodies. The story is seen through the eyes of a 12-year-old English boy, very properly brought up, for whom the octopus becomes the symbol of everything most feared and most desired, "the nightmare spread out upon the rock." Later on, on quite a different island, a Greek man said two things that have become incorporated into the octopus story. He said, when we were listening to some very sad Greek music, "There are no happy men in Greece, only happy childrens." He also asked, "you like this ice-land" and since the temperature was over 80° we stared at him. He meant "island" but it took us a while to figure that out. Now, in my story, the young boy hears words and phrases he doesn't completely understand ("la méduse; il faut prener garde" "you like this ice-land?") and this just adds to his general sense of unease.

Another recent story was inspired by a newspaper clipping about a man who had been charged with common assault for massaging the feet of strange women. I began to do some foot research and discovered something I must have learned in my university zoology course, that the number of bones in the human foot is the same as the number of letters in the alphabet. And so the story begins: "There are twenty-six bones in the foot; that is the alphabet of the foot" and goes on to tell a story which is a complete fabrication except for the fact that both men (the "real" man and the man in my story) get arrested, charged and fined.

Another story, which is the title story of the collection I'm presently working on, came as a message written on a mirror in the George Dawson Inn in Dawson Creek. The message was not intended for me but showed up on the mirror in the bathroom after my daughter had taken a very hot shower. It said, "Good-bye Harold, Good Luck" and whoever had written it must have counted on the fact

that Harold would take a shower. (And the maid had obviously not gone over the mirror with *Windex.*) We had a lot of fun trying to figure out who Harold was and whether the message was written in anger or love. In the story, "they" (a mother who is contemplating a divorce and her child) do meet up with Harold, but of course he doesn't know that they have seen the message (and they're not absolutely sure he has).

I cut things out of newspapers, often really horrible things and I'm never sure why.

MURDERER SET WIFE ADRIFT ON RAFT

TIGER BITES TRAINER TO DEATH
(Horrified Wife Looks On)

DOLPHINS NUDGE BOYS BODY TO SHORE

That last one really haunts me, not just the image, but that word "nudge." The dolphins with their blunt "noses," gently nudging the dead boy towards the shore. That one will probably end up in a story.

PLAN YOUR PLOT

(this one was in the gardening column of the *Province*) and one from the *Vancouver Courier* recently prompted a note to a friend.

POUND WARNS PETS

I cut it out, and wrote underneath, "You're an old bitch gone in the teeth."

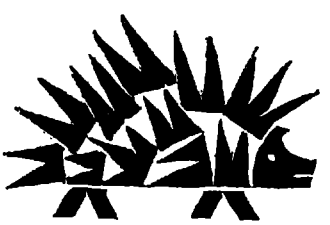
And so it goes. And so it goes. And so it goes on and on. I read Rev. Skeat, I read Bartlett's, I read Fowler's *Modern English Usage*, given to me by an ex-boyfriend who wrote, as a greeting, the definition of *oxymoron*, which just about summed up our relationship! I have the *Shorter Oxford Dictionary* but long to have the real one, all those volumes as full of goodies as good Christmas puddings. I have the Bible, the Book of Common Prayer, Shakespeare and *Partridge's Origins.* I have Collins' phrase books in several languages ("that man is following me everywhere"). I have maps and rocks and shells and bits of coral from various places to which I have travelled. I scan the personal columns, the names of the ships in port. And I have my eyes and ears.

I am a dilettante (related to the Italian for "delight"). I never learn any language properly but love to dabble in them. I have studied, at one time or another, Latin, Anglo-Saxon, Middle English, Old Norse, French, Italian and, most recently Greek. I spent a winter in Athens a few years ago and saw, every day, little green vans scurrying around the city with ΜΕΤΑΦΟΡΗ posted on a card in the front windshield. "Metaphors." When I enquired I discovered that these vans are for hire and they *transfer* goods from one section of the city to another. Now I long to write an essay called "A Metaphor is not a Truck."

Last year I took two terms of sign language at night school. I was amused by the fact that in ASL (American Sign Language) the sign for "woman" has to do with the tying of bonnet strings and the sign for man with the tipping of a hat. These are charming archaisms, like "horsepower" in English. (I am also interested in mirrors, mirror images, going into and through mirrors, so signing, which one does to someone facing you, is fascinating — and very difficult. I often came home with an aching hand.) I would like to take more sign language; I would like to become, as an African man once said to me, about English, "absolutely fluid in that language."

Words words words. Sometimes it all gets on top of me and I feel like the monster made out of words in *The Fairie Queene*. I can't leave them alone; I am obsessed. I move through the city watching for signs with letters missing ("Beef live with onions" advertises a cheap café near Granville and Broadway, " ELF SERVE" says a gas station out on Hastings) and I am always on the lookout for messages within words: can you see the harm in pharmacy, the dent in accident, the over in lover? In short, I play.

There is a phenomenon, most commonly observed in photography but also talked about by people who make stained glass. It is called "halation" and it refers to the spreading of light beyond its proper boundary. (With stained glass it happens when two colours are next to one another.) I think words can do that too, or perhaps I should say that I would like to think that there is no "proper boundary" for words. Let them spill over from one language to another, let them leap out at us like kittens at play. "Wit," said Mark Van Doren, "is the only wall between us and the dark." If a writer, if an artist of *any* sort, stops approaching his materials with wit, with laughter, then he is lost. The other day I was making a curry and listening to some old Beatles' songs on the radio. John or Paul was yelling, "Can't Buy Me Love" and I was thinking about Basmati rice. Suddenly I realized "Basmati rice" had the same number of syllables as "Can't Buy Me Love," so every time John or Paul or whoever got to the chorus I yelled out "Basmati Rice!" and did a little soft shoe shuffle while I stirred the curry sauce. (Everybody had a good time.)



THREE POEMS

Eva Tihanyi

AUTOBIOGRAPHY

I refuse
the straight black line of rage,
the run of moments
not fully lived,
and even at the best of times
a fear of ends, delusion,
hardly a spin
on the carousel of morning
before God the barker
calls the next ride

I am circling the world
like a moon, flaunting
my sunlit face, my roundness
above the flat blue planes of sky

I refuse all other geometry,
vow that in the end
mine will be
a long pure spark of waking
eye to eye with the stars

SOLAR FUGUE

They say I wrestled with the sun;
I do not remember

I do not remember
dancing on the threshold of a leaf
while the green eye of summer
looked upon me, saw me young

I do not remember entering the leaf,
my diminutive green cathedral

I was young once,
took for my talisman
a light that soared soprano,
shattered windows with its song

I do not remember
singing like the light

There is much in me
that has lapsed
into a colourless silence,
or sunk or slipped off

Somewhere behind me
there is a love and a worship
but I do not recall the sun

BREAKTHROUGH

You once thought of him as a fawn
but he turned satyr;
horns rose from his head
and he gouged your heart with them,
bucked you to the wall

Now, in his absence,
you fill your heart
with a violent fire cacophony,
vow to give it form

It will be a tryst
between you and the words,
the final love affair;
you will press yourself into paper,
your blood will be the watermark

The night stares at your hand
through the window, moves closer,
a black fox

You have gathered yourself
together for this;
you have been waiting, building
all your life this complex sepulchre,
this hymn for your heart's
last
mad-muscle dancing;
and as the blood
ascends to its flowering,
you throw your fist into the page

which sings at last as you will it:
like a heavy bludgeon thunder
echoing in frozen snow

NOT A POEM

Lola Lemire Tostevin

tonight while reading Art and Life:
The Metaphorical Relationship
my son comes in tells me that the body
of the nine year old who disappeared
ten days ago has just been found
inside a refrigerator
a few blocks from our home
and as he continues to stand there silent
I notice a crushing weight about his shoulders

oh God I do not want my son to carry
that weight to feel responsible
for those who murder children
for rape pornography and for all those
men and women who refuse to see
the connection and most of all
I do not want my son to feel responsible
for his own sister
who was also abducted at fifteen

there are no words to comfort him
just as there are no words to write this with
no form no language to set us apart as
distinctively creative or even human
yet in the mind's endless search for reasons
clarity hardly a day goes by that I don't remember
my daughter's misshapen and bruised face
her blackened eyes teeth marks that cut through
her right cheek her upper lip
the strangulation marks left on her throat
by the leather strap of her shoulder bag
the perfect shape of a human mouth
on the back of her neck

"there is a garden in her face . . . "

a young man said to me once
if you think rape is bad
you should have been in Vietnam

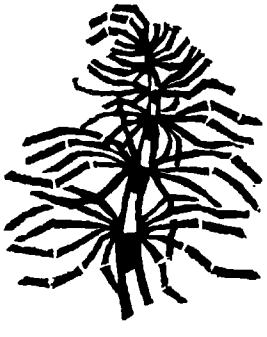
and not wanting to compare pain
monopolize I simply said yes
that must have been terrible
but to myself I thought consent
is already a form of communication
you could have said no to that war
but I would never have said that
out loud

now the realization is too real
for words to alter
no poetry can contain this
no function no distance no metaphor
to transfer what the mind registers

there is a fear
that keeps hovering
and anger that is barely controlled
and as I write there is embarrassment
at the thought that someday I may stand
before an audience and read this

and there is unmediated clarity
an unvoiced cry
a battered face
a refrigerator
with a small body inside

NOTE: "There is a garden in her face . . ." is from *Song of Songs* and also from Campion's poetry. In both cases it refers to the serenity and beauty of the Virgin.



INFLUENCES

Guy Vanderhaeghe

IT WAS ONLY AFTER I PUBLISHED A BOOK that I was forced to consider the question of influence on my writing. Until that point I had merely written. But reviewers made me aware of the problem of influence, drawing as they did convincing parallels between my short stories and the work of writers I had never read. Interviewers, too, were keen to unearth literary debts. Which writers and books, they asked, had most influenced me?

It was a question I wanted to answer honestly. But I was not sure I could. For one thing I had the impression I was really being asked which books and writers I admired most, asked that in the certainty that the answer to both questions was the same. That might be so, but isn't necessarily. *Ulysses*, for instance, is one of those universally admired works which has influenced writers less than one would think. *Remembrance of Things Past* is another.

What I was coming to suspect was that literary influences are more various and varied than I had imagined. In my case, the threads of these influences resolved themselves into a Gordian knot which stubbornly resisted all my efforts to untangle it. For instance, when asked to produce a list of those authors whom I particularly admired I was inevitably struck by the heterogeneity of the list I compiled. I could not but help imagine these authors incongruously yoked in conversation at literary cocktail parties. Flannery O'Connor and Anthony Powell? Christopher Isherwood and Rudy Wiebe? Alice Munro and Evelyn Waugh?

I could not see how these converging vectors of probable influence had shaped my writing. Worse, I felt I was suppressing another, perhaps equally important list of names. Names such as Zane Grey, Walter Scott, John Buchan, and Robert Louis Stevenson came immediately to mind. Yet I was afraid of being thought facetious if I gave these writers the nod of acknowledgement.

It was only when I read Vladimir Nabokov's autobiography *Speak, Memory* that I seriously began to define and elaborate a dim suspicion I had been harbouring: that "bad" writing is as influential in the development of a writer as "good" writing. A brief reference of Nabokov's to an article he had read as a child in the *Boy's Own Paper* strengthened that suspicion because it helped carry me back, back beyond my first acquaintance with Zane Grey, Stevenson, Buchan,

and Scott, back to my earliest reading, to my introduction to the *Boy's Own Annual.*

During Nabokov's Edwardian childhood the *Boy's Own Paper* was one of those bellicose boys' magazines which tub-thumped for the British Empire and the "right little, tight little Island!" It may seem strange that such a paper found its way into the Nabokov home, but Vladimir Nabokov's father was a wealthy anglophile who insisted on English governesses, governesses who, in turn, insisted that their little Russian charges read and wrote English before they read and wrote Russian. Thus the *Boy's Own Paper.*

All this smacks a bit of Alice in Wonderland. There is surely something absurd in the notion of a young Russian aristocrat, citizen of a xenophobe empire, reading, in English, the rival claims to glory of a competing xenophobe empire. The only thing possibly more absurd is that almost exactly fifty years later, in 1957 or thereabouts, I was poring over a like-minded publication, the *Boy's Own Annual.* My volume too was Edwardian, an issue that Nabokov might conceivably have read on dark St. Petersburg winter evenings, a book that had lost its covers and was coming apart in my hands and which I, at the age of six, took to be a reasonably accurate account of the world outside my bailiwick. No one told me that the fabulous world described in its pages had expired in the mud of Flanders more than forty years before.

Or perhaps it was just that I refused not to believe in what I was reading. In any case, I held on to the illusion for something like three years before it evaporated. During that time I confined my reading basically to two books (aside from the insipid things assigned in school) and those books were an old school text of my mother's, *A History of the World*, and the previously mentioned volume of the *Boy's Own Annual.* In the beginning I found *A History of the World* the more intriguing because of its illustrations: photographs of antiquities such as Mycenaean daggers and Etruscan coins, and reproductions of "historical" paintings which showed Egyptian charioteers dramatically dying, transfixed by Hittite arrows. The *Boy's Own Annual* supplanted the *History* in my affections only as my ability to read improved. Only then did it become the staple nourishment of my imagination. I never read, or had read to me, for instance, any of the children's classics such as *Winnie the Pooh*, *The Jungle Book*, or *The Wind in the Willows*. In retrospect I can say it would have been a good thing if I had read other books, but at the time I certainly didn't suffer from these omissions. My pre-World War I issue of the *Boy's Own Annual* kept me entranced. I needed no other books. I was like a fundamentalist with his Bible.

The *Boy's Own Annual* fell into my hands by way of an elderly English lady who was cleaning out her attic. This lady was typically English — or at least what North American readers of Agatha Christie mysteries might imagine as

typically English. A widow, she lived for her huge garden, her budgerigars, and a cocker spaniel named Rusty. She presented me the tattered copy with the assurance that it was "just the thing for a lively young fellow." Against all odds it was.

The contents of the *Boy's Own*, as I remember it, divided fairly evenly into three broad categories. Practical knowledge; historical yarns which even I recognized as historical; and "contemporary" tales which were, at the time I read them, already more than forty years old. The latter I insisted on thinking of as accurate reflections of life in the British Isles and Empire. With hindsight I conclude that this misconception of mine probably continued to flourish primarily because my parents didn't own a television. A TV set would have rubbed my nose in the grit of reality. But I also must have practised self-delusion on a grand scale, some part of my mind censoring all evidence that contradicted the *Boy's Own* picture of the world. Still, in my defence I can say that this was the age of Tarzan movies.

Anyway, who wouldn't wish to keep alive such magnificent delusions? How well I recall the *Boy's Own* article on self-defence. Here was practical knowledge indeed, a step by step, blow by blow account of the proper use of one's walking stick in repulsing assailants. The reader was enjoined to strike *glancing* blows off threatening blackguards because glancing blows foil any attempts at seizing one's walking stick, wresting it from one's grasp, and turning it against one. (It being understood that blackguards were clearly not the kind of fellows to carry walking sticks of their own.) Recommended targets for such glancing blows were elbows, shins, and, of course, the crown of the head. As a bonus several policeman's grips were described and illustrated. When applied these grips promised to bring about the instant submission of felons. Young readers were reminded to use minimum force when practising such grips on their chums.

The article incited in me a powerful longing. I knew that there were no interesting blackguards stalking the streets of Esterhazy, Saskatchewan, of the type depicted in *Boy's Own*. Nor did I own an ashplant. However, that didn't mean I oughtn't to study the article very closely. Particularly since I had, on the spot, determined to go to England where there apparently was an abundance of blackguards, villains, and ruffians. All suitable for thrashing.

The rest of *Boy's Own* was, if possible, even better, stuffed plum-full to bursting with plucky youths. There were the plucky youths of the past: a ferreter-out of the Gunpowder Plot, an alarm-raiser at the Great Fire of London, an aider and abettor of the escape of Bonny Prince Charlie to France. Then there were the plucky youths I mistook for my contemporaries. My favourite among these was a lad who had stained his skin with berry juice, wrapped his head in a turban, and embarked on a steamer ferrying pilgrims to Mecca. His mission? To uncover a ring of Arab slavers dealing in British subjects. After making fog-bound London

streets safe for respectable strollers I thought I might lend this chap a hand tidying up the Red Sea. My future bloomed.

IF IT WAS NABOKOV'S PERFUNCTORY COMMENT about the *Boy's Own Paper* that resurrected memories which had lain mute under the dead weight of all the books that followed this one volume, books deposited year by year, strata upon strata, it was something else in *Speak, Memory* that made me consider whether my writing hadn't been flavoured by this early infatuation of mine with the *Boy's Own Annual.*

Reading Nabokov's autobiography I was struck by a curious thing. I noted that although Nabokov makes frequent reference to the authors of the great European and Russian masterpieces, he devotes more space to a man called Captain Mayne Reid than he does to either Blok, Pushkin, Tolstoy, Gogol, Kafka, Flaubert, Dostoevsky, or for that matter, any other writer.

Who was Captain Mayne Reid? Captain Mayne Reid (1818-83), Nabokov informs us, was a writer of Wild West romances. At the turn of the century translations of his work were enormously popular with Russian schoolchildren. Young Vladimir Nabokov was, however, because of the diligence of his governesses, fluent enough in English to have the privilege of reading them in the original language. His favourite, he tells his readers, was *Headless Horseman.*

From what Nabokov has to say in *Speak, Memory* it is possible to deduce that Mayne Reid completely captivated his young reader. Nabokov even admits to re-reading *Headless Horseman* as an adult, and he maintains that the book has its points. It is instructive to note what these points are.

First of all Nabokov takes delight in the artificiality and intricacy of Captain Mayne Reid's plots. Second, several passages of prose are quoted with approval. There is the whiskey decanter behind a Texan barman which looks like "an iris sparkling behind his shoulder," and the barman himself is improbably graced with "an aureole surrounding his perfumed head." Now it is true that in all this Nabokovian applause there is more than a trace of the familiar Nabokovian mockery. But two things came to my mind also: Nabokov's own prose touched as it is with the fantastic and a tincture of the archaic, and his own taste for studied melodrama and gloriously coincidental plots. One has, after all, only to think of how improbably the nymphet's mother was despatched in *Lolita* to leave the field free for Humbert Humbert.

On such slender, even feeble evidence it would be foolhardy to argue a connection between Reid and Nabokov, to see the romancer's taste, filtered and purified by Nabokov's genius, later making a bow in the shadows of Nabokov's novels.

But I sensed that, if clearly unprovable, it was still possible. Nabokov himself is frank in admitting that many of the books he later read resonated with Reidian echoes. Dwelling on Louise Pointdexter, a young lady equipped with lorgnette that he discovered in *Headless Horseman*, Nabokov writes,

> That lorgnette I found afterward in the hands of Madame Bovary, and later Anna Karenin had it, and then it passed into the possession of Chekhov's Lady with the Lapdog and was lost by her on the pier at Yalta. When Louise held it, it was directed toward the speckled shadows under the mesquites, where the horseman of her choice was having an innocent conversation with the daughter of a wealthy haciendado, Doña Isidora Covarubio de los Llanos (whose 'head of hair in luxuriance rivalled the tail of a wild steed').

In just this manner the turbaned heads of Moslem pilgrims that I had met in the *Boy's Own Annual* sprang into view when I read *Lord Jim*, and walking sticks in the hands of Henry James' characters were suddenly transformed from the innocent appurtenances of dandies into menacing clubs.

THERE WAS SOMETHING ELSE, TOO. I had come to wonder if I had not begun the process of learning to write long ago with the *Boy's Own*. The one problem with the magazine was that it was a serial, and I possessed only a single volume. Some of the stories had no beginning. Worse, some had no end. Several of the more harrowing tales had appended to their last page a cruel joke: To be continued. My favourite character, the berry-stained boy, I had to leave manacled in the bottom of an Arab dhow on the point of being pitched overboard to sharks. What, I asked myself in torments of anxiety, had happened to him?

I like to think now that he would have remained forever frozen in that queer limbo of near death if I hadn't assumed the responsibility of rescuing him. Because at some point in my childhood I came to realize that what I was reading was fiction, a structure created by the imagination. If I were daring enough I might collaborate in the making of it. Or as I saw it then: the boy can be saved. So at about the age of seven or eight I set about saving him, manufacturing ploys and desperate acts of desperate courage that would deliver him from implacable fate. In other words, I began an apprenticeship. I was learning to write.

Perhaps all my subsequent fiction has been marked by this experience, this revelation. Certain reviewers have remarked on my "traditionalism." Others have gently chided me for my interest in plot and "story." Is the *Boy's Own Annual* the obscure root of these tendencies? Have the stratagems concocted to elude the wicked slavers become, in some sense, second nature?

I don't know. The only testimony I can offer is the confession that when I sit down to write it is only with the greatest effort of will I manage to force the turbaned heads down, out of sight below the bulwarks of the dhows, or manage to master the violent and intoxicating urge to conclude every chapter with a clear suggestion of imminent peril.

It is, I suppose, only a matter of time before the will weakens and the long serialization begun twenty-five years ago resumes under a slightly different guise. I find that once acquired the taste is hard to lose.

THE ART OF BLACKMAIL

Secrets and Seeing

Aritha van Herk

IN THE VIVID GRACE OF Chaplinesque time, we watch the jerky dance of art and life with similar horror and delight. The puppets pantomiming us are beautiful and grotesque, but watching them enact a scene, we spectate without recognition. That we view their exaggerated movements as symbolic is what enables us to sit and watch ourselves — we see only representations. We watch and see and do not see. We know he is there, but the puppeteer behind the screen is hidden. We know that they are there, but the wires that jerk the puppet limbs are thin, so thin invisible to our observing eye, even knowing we look at them we do not see. The string by which the puppeeter manages his puppets is known as a *ficelle*. Blackmail by *ficelle*: that which we see but cannot see; that which we see and do not know we see; that which we see and know we see, but cannot see.

But blackmail is nothing so simple as the writer as puppeteer. It goes far beyond, to the most elemental of human apprehensions, the idea of secret. Do writers try to explain mysteries or make them? And does the reader who thinks he apprehends the mystery (or thinks he understands the symbolism) see the *ficelle*? There's blackmail for you: the art is not in the movement of the puppet, but in the unseen movement of the *ficelle*. Blackmail requires three things. First, a secret. Second, the secret's possessor, who wishes to keep the secret secret. Third, a discoverer, who uses the possibility of publicizing the secret to extort whatever — money, love, attention. The secret is not secret anymore. The power of the blackmailer rests not on his knowledge of the secret, but on the secret's potential for not-secret, its opposite. If that potential for not-secret matters, the blackmailer has power. But if exposure of the secret does not matter, blackmail is impossible. The blackmailer relies on the opposite of secret for his role. Without the idea of secret's opposite he cannot extort.

Opposites are integral to secrecy and blackmail, and especially to the conjunction of writer and reader. Opposites attract; only in opposition do we achieve perfect completion. Lovers love their opposites, not their imitators. An opposite is contrary in position; placed or lying (!) over against some thing or theory, on the farther side of an intervening line. Oppose counterposes or contrasts, counter-

balances, balances. Or to dismantle farther, poses, composes, and deposes. Positions a whole or a part of the body for effect. *Poseurs* we are, all opposites, blackmailers and blackmailed alike. Any secret makes us *poseurs*. The writer and the reader. The reader is attracted by the effect and surprise. Pleasure or pain can be enhanced by the extent to which one receives the opposite of what one expects. Oppose, then. Set a thing or an idea or a person over against. Writer opposes novel to reader: "Here it is. Read this. It will draw you into itself, it will draw you out of yourself." Oppose, as in "at variance, or adverse to." Resist, as in "seduce me." Hinder or thwart, as in "fraction, heat." Contend against physically? Fight. Influence, argue, persuade. Do opposites cancel one another? No secret, no blackmailer, no blackmailed. Magnets or sides: opposite sides of the street face each other, but opposite sides of a building face away from each other. Faces, then. Face, façade, fabricate, fabrication, lie, all lead to fiction — not-real life. To make fiction: to make life unreal. Can shadows fall opposite from one another? In a train, objects fly past in an opposite direction to the one we are travelling in. Two people can stand together and look in opposite directions. Two anything coming from opposite sides meet in collision. That train again; is it a C.P.R. train? Collision hostile, antagonistic? Anger. Art is anger. No contented person writes. Repugnant and repulsive opponent or enemy. We can share the same subject and predicate but differ in quality and quantity. Quality matters most. Blackmailer and blackmailed are natural opponents. Position? Here. There. Between.

Writing is a question of the opposites that the writer plays with the reader. The writer has to exert her pre-knowledge to the extent of its oppositeness; she knows the secret. So we begin and end, in all seductive fiction, with secret. Not just the secret of writing itself, the secretive writer, the secrecy of the act, but secret within fiction as the ultimate and terrible conspiracy between blackmailer and blackmailed. Secret is the writer's counterstrategy to the deadly usual. Secret is the best enemy of the mechanics of plot, character, time, and structure and thus, the true friend of fiction. Secret is the secret weapon of the writer, the real knife/hammer/quill.

SEEING THE SECRET is the problem of the reader and because all seeing requires a propositional object, that is the object of the reader's quest — to see the secret. Examples of the opposition of secret and seeing can be found throughout literature, from Othello (what he thinks he sees) and Lear (what he does not see) to Borges' *Tlon, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius*. My favourite is Edgar Allan Poe's short story, "The Purloined Letter."[1] The fiction itself is

deceptively candid, detective Dupin's rational solution to a court intrigue. In the story, the Queen receives a compromising letter in her royal boudoir, and while she is reading it, the King enters. She is desperate to conceal the letter from him, but she is forced to leave it lying open on the table. The King sees it and does not notice it, but a Minister, coming in, sees the letter and recognizes both the handwriting and the Queen's confusion. Because the Queen dares say nothing in the presence of the King, the Minister takes the letter quite openly, thus notifying the Queen of his blackmail, or as Dupin says, "'the robber's knowledge of the loser's knowledge of the robber.'"[2] The King notices nothing. Of course, an attempt is made to retrieve the letter. The police, called in by the Queen, search the Minister and his apartment several times, but find no letter. The police, of course, are offered up as excessively careful and excessively stupid and excessively blind. They make two errors: they assume that the letter must be concealed, and they assume that because the Minister is a poet, he is a fool. Dupin, on the other hand, has no difficulty retrieving the letter. He visits the Minister's apartment and spots it immediately, in plain view, but completely altered in appearance, torn and smudged as though it were a letter of no importance. Dupin hands the letter over to the police upon affirmation of the "secret" that there is a substantial reward involved (one of three "secrets" that the Prefect of police reveals). This fiction confronts every aspect of opposition, the binaries of secret and seeing which underline the duplicity of the secret at the story's core. It opposes deception and complicity, seeing and being blind, interpreting and misinterpreting, knowing and denying.[3] The King looks at the letter but does not see it. The Minister looks at the letter and sees it, but sees also its potential (its imploded secret). The Queen sees the Minister take the letter and knows she will be blackmailed, but can do nothing without making the King aware. In the same way, the police look at the letter hidden in plain view but do not see it, while Dupin looks at the letter and recognizes it despite its disguise, which puts him in a position to blackmail the Minister. Blackmail is the privileged possession of secret; the writer's privilege. Purloined (stolen) letter (component of a word): the story is about a poet's attempt to *use* secret. Blackmail with a letter, the letter/words stolen, used, exploited. The writer exploits the secret, the opposite of what is expected.

What is important is not what is seen but what is noticed. The writer creates both noticed and seen, then brings the two into conjunction, a perfect binary, male and female, old and young, rich and poor, black and white, love and hate. So are plot, character, setting, and theme the real enemies of fiction? Or police/readers, seeing but blind? Or is fiction's enemy the secret that the discoverer does not want to discover, his disavowal, continuing and persistent myopia? Or a slavish lust for miracles, the spectator seeing only what he wishes? The fictional secret needs more than blind miracle to work. The enemies of fiction see, like

Othello's blind love, "not wisely, but too well";[4] and Seneca's epigram warns "The Purloined Letter": "Nothing is more offensive to wisdom than excessive acuteness."

Blackmail then. The writer bears the duplicity of creation, to make both answer and question in the same fiction; only the skilful puppeteer is needed to reveal them to the seeing eye. The writer blackmails, knows the secret, fabricates and simulates the discoveries, leads the reader in search of misinformation. Before knowledge one has monuments or muses; they survive obsolete. Temporal order is not fictional order and truth has nothing to do with false; it is only the opposite of secret. Fiction is the fine art of blackmail, arbiter between secret and sight.

NOTES

[1] "The Purloined Letter," *Selected Prose, Poetry, and Eureka*, ed. W. H. Auden (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1950), p. 95.

[2] Ibid., p. 97.

[3] See Peter Wollen, "The Hermeneutic Code," *Readings and Writings: Semiotic Counter Strategies* (London: Verso Editions, 1982), p. 41.

[4] *Othello*, v. ii. 344.

QUATRE POEMES

Michel van Schendel

POEME

Etrangement l'extrême
Est un adoucissement.
Le pied passe l'herbe.

L'atome et le thalamus,
La mésange affolée d'un doigt.

Je cousine
Avec l'oeil sans voisin.
Le bandeau fait la lumière.

Ah l'extrêmement bon,
Le rétabli.
L'ombre est à portée d'un geste
Tracé sur la feuille.

Masque indien du tigre
Dans la carrure de l'écrit barré.

17 août - 7 septembre 1980

LACIS

Au lac au rêve aux tués à l'ombre
Un rêve est le feu porté
Sur l'épaule et comment ne pas faire
En sorte que l'extrême du champ d'herbe
Touche à l'inexpiable à la potence réduite
Que beaucoup de gouvernés épargnent
D'un sentier à l'autre lacis des domestications

Ainsi l'image est venue de la lèvre et du lac
Par le rire d'un Noir de train.
D'un balancement souple il amassait les déchets de plastique.

Il racontait l'histoire d'un lièvre blanc.
Il égayait les voyageurs.

En train, 18 octobre 1981

RÉPARTITION

A l'apaisement,
le bras fluide encore,
La cicatrice éblouie d'une lampe un peu forte
où s'avive le doigt
(Hier,
quelqu'un de proche y prouvait l'insistance du gîte)
Comme lorsqu'à l'aube une ombre désuète glisse,
Achevant de river sa propre odeur
au clou d'une fleur morte;
Il s'abandonne au pilier,
près des marches de bois;
Il n'entend que le cri multiplié par le haut des branches
(Hier,
un arbre à dix pas de chez moi,
peuplé de plumes pillant le ciel extrême)

Il a faim.

Montréal, 31 mars 1982

SUITE POUR UN SILENCE

1

Un kilim est un tapis, un sac, une couverture.
Nous l'avons posé sur notre lit.
Les nuits ont le goût de la menthe
Et les fleurs jaunes en buissons tapissent la montée du ciel.

2

La chaise vide arrange l'ordre des dalles.
Nous sommes la chaise, le vent.
Le vide est une emblavure
Ou peut-être une lampe.

3

Elle a dit: "Ne pars pas."
Elle a dit: "L'acacia doit adoucir le ciel
Et balayer la maison."
Elle a des yeux très étonnés
Qu'elle encadre des mains.

4

Ici les insectes morts intacts
Accroissent la transparence des fenêtres.
Le vitrail est notre patience.
Les marches font l'ourlet,
Nous apprenons à coudre avec de l'air opaque.

5

En même temps nous avons le temps,
Tout le temps.
La chauve-souris est arrivée
A l'heure imprévue,
Elle a posé sur le ciel de la fenêtre un aveugle,
Nous l'avons longuement dessiné sur nos mains.

Les Roches Saint-Paul, 5-28 juillet 1980

TWO POEMS

Miriam Waddington

THE NEW SEASONS: LIGHT AND DARK

1

In winter
we tread dead names
in all our cities,
mornings
we imagine origins
and read
our country's history
in our own pulse
and vein.

In spring
we find ourselves
in blades of grass
in fields in provinces,
and listening
we hear
old prairie winds
composing the refrain
of secret legacies.

2

In autumn
we stand on banks
of asphalt
as the night descends
and wonder
will this city space
survive
to hear our rivers sing
of daylight and clean water
above the roar of words
and flooding numbers
that issue from machines?

3

It may be
citizens will endure
to march like Birnam Wood
against the whim
of buttons the mindless
push of levers and
the vanities that seethe
in board-rooms;

Then citizens
will calculate with ploughs
the contours of each corner
of this earth,
and they will plant
their wheat and flowers
and raise
the flag of life
to celebrate our love
of country
and declare ourselves
rooted and revealed
in place.

THE GIFT

Ghostly hands on my breasts
a ghostly body on my own

(Hush it is nothing
only the wind
blowing up
from the valley)

Ghostly kisses in my ear
stars bursting in my blood

(Hush it is nothing
only the wind
fretting against
the windows)

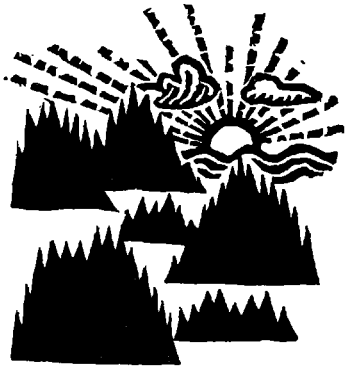
There are branches on the bed
there is snow in my mouth

(Hush it is nothing
only the wind
blowing open
the door)

Hands kisses branches of snow
a blanched world spinning in light

(Hush it is nothing
only the wind
blowing away
your breath

And hush
he is bringing
you a gift
your body's
death)



ON COMING TO BRITISH COLUMBIA

Some Personal & Literary Reflections

David Watmough

OF ALL THE BANES AND BENISONS afforded by life in coastal British Columbia, the relative isolation is surely the greatest blessing that could befall a writer. This has certainly proved to be my own experience — over a period roughly commensurate with the life of *Canadian Literature* whose Jubilee we are currently celebrating.

In 1959, when I first saw Victoria and Vancouver, I was wholly ignorant of such matters. Indeed, all my initial responses to Vancouver, and by extension, British Columbia and Canada-over-the-Rockies, were quite negative. Coming immediately from the United States where I had arrived in 1952, I was unprepared for the residual puritanism I encountered. The only cheerful thing about Sundays was the name: otherwise it was no bars, no theatres, no restaurants. And I was to learn shortly thereafter, no internationally competitive literature, no important playwriting or serious composing. Yes, there was a slight painting activity, but that was characterized by being a pale and hesitant replica of an already wan watercolour tradition of nineteenth-century British genesis.

What did I find to like then? Or why the hell did I stay? My responses to those questions were not exactly original. I loved the beauty of the landscape, and from my natal Western European viewpoint, the weather represented a happy homecoming after years as a restless inhabitant of New York humidity and California climatic monotony. Here again, thank God, was the "gentle rain" of Portia which could be so happily twinned to mercy!

However, the flora and fauna were for the most part alien to me and as a writer for whom it has always been important to accurately invoke my natural environment, I immediately set myself the task of learning a new landscape by heart. It wasn't until 1973 that a book compiled by the Vancouver Natural History Society entitled *Nature West Coast: As seen in Lighthouse Park* appeared, but it immediately became my secular bible and I applied myself to the task of familiarizing myself with its contents in a detailed manner.

This establishment (or re-establishment, in my case) of roots in the sense emphasized by Simone Weil in her book *L'Enracinement* is something to which the geographic, social, and historical soil of Vancouver and its environs is peculiarly susceptible. For there is no heavy weight of history on a city only now celebrating its centenary; and in a climate which never shouts snow and ice and parching drought but only whispers rain, there is little problem in coming to terms for either the immigrant from east of the Fraser Valley, or east of the Atlantic Ocean. And for the writer who needs the silence and space of separation, the venue has an allure and an informing sense which I believe is both progressively and properly discernible in the subsequent literary expressions of those who have settled here.

Although the various *thralls* of literary fashion, common to all North American creative writing (but perhaps particularly with poetry) are to be evidenced in the coastal strip of British Columbia, my perception is that the orthodoxy is less intense here. Which, of course, in comparison with our more meteorologically dramatic neighbour to the south as an example, is hardly surprising. It has long amused me that media people, from comics to commentators, based in central Canada, will confidently speak of *Canadian* weather and thus climatically disenfranchise some million and three quarters Canadians of the Greater Vancouver and Vancouver Island areas.

But the error moves from geographic ignorance to cultural blindness as the arts of the coast deepen with time and accumulatively take on the colour and clime of the unique region sustaining them. That blindness, unfortunately, is prevalent across contemporary Canada but my confidence is that the steady evolution of literary patterns in B.C., and the deepening of roots, will make the divergences of expression facilely visible, even to a child, by the end of the century. Using the United States as example, we readily accept the literary ethos of The South or Nineteenth-Century New England, the mid-West idiom of a Sherwood Anderson or Sinclair Lewis, and the fictionally defined West of such as Wallace Stegner, John Steinbeck, and Walter van Tilburg Clark. However, we of the Canadian west coast are not yet as evolved as the American counterparts. We have, for just a little while longer, to relegate these promptings to the realm of the intangible and imprecise: just gut feelings, perhaps, for the close observer of our west coast writing, and the practitioner aware of these influences upon himself and his peers in both poetry and prose.

But my specific concern in these reflections is to delineate my own literary growth as it has been moulded by the decision to pitch my tent permanently in Kitsilano, the Vancouver neighbourhood which has been my home ever since I arrived in the city. It has been a growth that while being definitely influenced by the isolation from centralist pressures of fashion and the decisions of critics and

reviewers who are contingent upon the Great Lakes literary establishment, nevertheless has been both sharply formed and fed by certain literary structures much closer to home. For a variety of reasons — not least because I was never invited — I did not take the Creative Writing School/English Department route of many of my colleagues. This meant that I was forced to rely on such ancillary activities as literary journalism in both the print and electronic media to provide a livelihood as I pursued my fiction. In the 1960's this proved adequate. I could make a reasonable if not extravagant living from newspapers, magazines, and above all, from the CBC in both radio and TV. But by the end of that first decade which had seen my Canadian citizenship, my forging profound links with fellow writers and other artists, I could see that I had to make some hard decisions which would basically affect my life and — for me of paramount importance — the proper husbandry of what artistic talent I possessed.

THE PRIMARY RESULT, at the subjective, personal level, of the first stirrings of that long-drawn process of centralization of Canadian culture as exemplified within the CBC, was my decision to look for a further source of income to sustain the fiction "habit." And this I did by taking my individual chronicles of my ongoing protagonist, Davey Bryant, and make "monodramas" out of them by *performing* them in theatres or venues which at least had such theatrical appurtenances as lighting systems and some kind of stage on which I could place a music stand and thus perform (rather than merely read) my adapted and modified short stories, prose poems, or chapters. The initial result was not only a critical success but fiscally gratifying too. Within a year I had given over two hundred monodrama presentations, and by the third year more than thrice that number at venues across Canada, the United States, and in England and West Germany.

But the very success of the project was also the source of its lethal problems. To expand further I added the resources of a personal manager, and that in turn led to all the costly paraphernalia of publicity (pamphlets, posters, handbills, etc.), and very soon my writerly self was in acute danger of being swamped by a theatrical self which was as false to my being as it was uncongenial. To make matters worse, the cost of creating and promoting a slick theatrical package necessitated my spending more and more time "on the road." Apart from the fact that I could see myself getting further and further into debt and having to move frenziedly for ever more bookings, I was denying myself the adequate amount of time at my desk to write. In fact it was that chafing restriction, plus the discomfort of endless travel to give performances, that finally determined my decision to call it quits. It is not without significance, I think, that it was only

after the period of presenting monodramas that I could experiment with the various other literary forms that I have subsequently used in the purveying of the life of Davey Bryant. For example, to come up with the linked chronicles I used in the structure of my quasi-novel, *No More into the Garden.*

I do not think it takes an excess of sanguinity to believe, as I now do, that the acquired craft of turning story into playscript for monodrama presentation, and then once more into the narrative of the short story or the sequential chronicle, provided me with a profound awareness of my own writing in unique degree — sentence by sentence, word by word. Not that the labelling, *per se*, is of any significance, speaking objectively. Then I think that our Creative Writing Schools do a disservice to literature in their dividing up of fiction into neat genre concepts and thus courses for students to take. Such appellations are, of course, practical and valuable for the scholar and critic, but it is too often a suffocation, or at least a manacle, for the creative writer.

Once more I elected to live the west coast isolation and returned gladly to the restrictions of the desk. However, this only proved possible in the light of reduced local markets from the CBC and the lesser fees for mere readings after negotiated fees for full-blown performances, by the subsidy of a domestic partner to handle such basics as food, rent, and transportation. I have more than once wondered if the overall picture of cultural Canada will ever include the nature and amount of subsidization that is yielded from the partners of the creative artists who compose it. Perhaps a requisite statue to *The Unknown Subsidiser*, faceless and genderless, should adorn our downtown squares and civic parks. . . . Of course, the coming to a new place to live and create, even granted a familiar type of climate and the freedom from the imposition of alien fashions, doesn't guarantee a growth and perfecting of one's work. In many respects I came to west coast Canada with a literary *signature* evolved and with a style already set. And one of the costs, perhaps for me the most important one as a writer, is to have come to Canada when the *a priori* constituents of my style and voice were the bases of an irritation which native-born Canadians simply had to throw off in order to quicken the tempo of cultural expression and find their own appropriate stances and voices. As it happens I do not discern any signs whatsoever of there being such in any uniquely Canadian way. The literary emancipation I have observed all about me since I entered Canada as an immigrant has taken place in the cast of a *North American* sensibility and a *North American* literary language. I have heard, of course, of those maple leaf nationalists who scream otherwise. But I remain unconvinced. There is no third dialect between British and American English which affords Canadians their own literary oxygen.

But I digress. What I wish to stress is that although I happily pay the price of being a British immigrant writer living in contemporary Canada I am by no

means blind to the cost or fail to see it working continuously in my professional life. Let me elaborate. There was a time, for several years in fact, when I confused my Canadian enthusiasm with my British literary background and, indeed, discounted the latter. The west coast isolation may well have compounded the fact. It was not until I made an LP album in Toronto of three of my monodramas under the heading of *Pictures from a Dying Landscape* which strove to wed my voice to my Cornish texts that I think the seeds of my proper self-awareness as a *New* Canadian were effectively planted.

Had I been a poet then the problem — if such it is — would never have arisen. For the divergence between British and North American poetry is so great today that we might just as well be talking about two languages as disparate as Spanish and Italian. And the harsh corollary of that is the poet writing in the British idiom has little chance of publication or developing a serious reputation in this country or the U.S.A.

In the summer of 1981 I was talking to the Australian-born poet Peter Porter who has made London his home since the 1950's. Discussing this matter of poetic idioms for the various English-speaking countries he flatly took the view that, essentially, no one community is slightly interested in another at this juncture. That just as neither he, nor Larkin, nor Redgrove would command much interest or enthusiasm in Canada, nor would our contemporary poetic luminaries rate high in the United Kingdom. For better or worse, the several English-language cultures nurture a poetry that shares only the words themselves.

The situation is less dramatic in prose but exists in some significant degree. What it boils down to, I think, is the very *raison d'être* of English creative language at this point in time. If it is the honed communication of experience, ideas, and spirit of place, then the current North American style (within which, of course, exist the personal signatures of individual literary artists) admirably fulfils that function and aesthetic. But with the British idiom, the aesthetic goal is more a balance of semantic communication with modal sound and a word-play which often appears as prolix if that British attitude towards words as sound and ikon doesn't receive special acceptance. It is an attitude which stems from a culture which is primarily literary rather than visual and the difference is underscored in every television street interview from London, New York, or Toronto.

The distinction is also indicated in alliteration and a thirst for synonym and breadth of vocabulary which are perceived as desirable aims in the conveyance of literary image or within the general fabric of story-telling. It marks the difference between the tales of an Ethel Wilson (who had that British tradition to draw upon), a V. S. Pritchett, and a Nadine Gordimer, on the one hand, and a John Cheever, an Alice Munro, and a Mordecai Richler on the other.

The trouble is that while we have a ready awareness of our spoken differences

in terms of accent and employed rhythms — as immediate example I think of the Carson McCullers title: *Ballad of the Sad Café*, which can hardly be rendered aloud with British stresses, or at least not as a satisfactory title — the written, i.e., *silent*, word, is more elusive. So that I only gradually grew aware that my prose fiction tended to find favour with those whose inner ear detected, and more important, appreciated, that approach of mine which was determined, I suspect, before I was in my Cornish teens.

This is in no way to deny other factors in a writer's prose — extending all the way from just plain good or bad writing to those subjective factors which appeal to one reader and not to another. But my personal coming to terms with a further isolation than my British Columbian geographical one was an important if painful step in my overall accommodation to a niche in the west coast literary scene. But the realization and acceptance of that fact led me to a further awareness which has finally afforded me a confidence which I doubt I might ever have had had I not chosen to make Vancouver my own deeply felt, personal territory. It is an awareness of the sheer *literariness* of the goal I pursue in my Davey Bryant chronicles which, in their aggregate, I hope will add up to a panoramic "novel" of one man and his century: his private history against the backdrop of the public one.

LIVING IN A PLACE where the salal is a screen, the arbutus a visual caress and the mountains a protection, I have learned to ask myself only one question with every page. Can this be immediately translated to the screens of film or television? If so, and to the degree that it is so, I have failed the ultimate literary vision. The word-play, the verbal juxtaposition, the apportionment of adjective and adverb, the pursuit of the truly apt word from the riches of choice our language uniquely affords — these are my most fervent and exhilarating concerns. But here lie treacherous waters. An exceptionally high doctrine over verbal texture and deliberate richness of vocabulary can all too easily lead to an artificiality and self-consciousness so heavy that it can submerge the sense in the writing. Even the pursuance of what in a Dylan Thomas was often called "a poetic prose," that is an honouring of words for their own sake, invariably has a marked cost in terms of readers. I have learned from my mail as well as critical commentary upon my work that it relies for its appeal on a very restricted kind of public. And here again I am grateful for that intensive experience I have had in public reading which taught me to liberate the word from the page, to create a performance and thus reach a further audience. For I am convinced that for every *reader* an author has a potential *listener* and one of the most signal and encouraging signs of our Canadian literary growth has been in this particular

area. When I arrived in Canada the ability of women, particularly, to deliver their poetry (none offered prose) was abysmal. Generations of Scots-puritan teaching that young girls should either be mute or soft-voiced as testament to their femininity and sexual purity resulted in an array of female poets who either whispered their words or self-consciously preached them in a sonorous, parsonical fashion that was as monotonous as it was irritating. Indeed, this great blasphemy against the spoken word has still not been entirely banished from the land. I still hear women poets who should leave their poetry to the vocal imaginations of others. There are more than enough men who are equally awful, but correspondingly, there are fewer men in current Canada comparable in poetic or prose talent to the distaff contingent. That, of course, has nothing to do with women's liberation or sexist balancing but a plain observation. It may well be otherwise tomorrow.

When the cultural self-confidence which erupted across the whole country in the 1960's reached these western shores it did not seem to Cornish-influenced me to express itself in any strong regional intensity but, taking the United States as rôle model, was generally content to express North American experience through Canadian voices. Only gradually did the sense of specific place start to seep into narrative. And here I am certainly not referring to a peppering of prose with topographical data. I mean the effective use of place as backdrop to character or gesture, and the impact of place as an objective informant of the people one creates and the moods evoked. This process is quite different from the utilization of place-as-mood for the purposes of a Sinclair Ross in *As For Me and My House*, or the Canada-based novels of Margaret Laurence or Richler's Montreal-based Jewish cosmos. But mood in such cases is more palpable than place. What is now beginning to develop is the *concretization* of literary place in Canada which is more comparable to a Hardy's Wessex or *Les Landes* of a François Mauriac.

The British Columbia I inhabit is particularly susceptible to this manner of literary regionalism, and the city of Vancouver distinctive enough to give urban reinforcement to the geo-meteorological world of the coastal belt. Free of the grip of a centralist conception and the oppressive paraphernalia of irrevelant cultural "capitals," I perceive the steady evolution of a fiction, even of a poetry, which is quintessentially *of its place* and only "Canadian" in that it is no part of the United States. If labels are a necessary clarification then second-century British Columbia might be likened to the relation of Wales or the Celtic West to the rest of the United Kingdom. The Brittany or Provence, if you like, of metropolitan France. If that is so, then at a personal creative level with my Cornish-Celtic background, I have perhaps not journeyed artistically very far at all from that other beautiful and distinctive land of my upbringing and literary shaping.

TWO POEMS

Wilfred Watson

DIANA RIGG

la belle dame sans 1 merci
1 portrait of
1
2
her ladyship with 2 the steel blue eyes
2 still,
3
3
from the blur 3 machine
la belle dame sans 4 merci
4
4 jerk-art
5
5
portrait 5 of cornwall's wife
6 close-up,
6
with the cornflower 6 blue steel eyes
from the blur 7 machine
7 ezra pound's
7
8 clues
lady of the vortex, 8 portrait of
8

9 diana rigg in iron filings
9 la belle dame sans merci
9
from the blur 1 machine, re adorno's
la belle dame sans 1 merci
1
paradox of 2 domination by the
the amusing mrs. 2 peel's amazing
the fingers and 2 faces
subjugated, upstaging 3 lear
stepdaughter 3 la belle dame
of corporate power 3

and olivier, dea
breath, from the
la belle dame sans
5
5 sans merci
5 la belle dame sans merci
4 ex machina
4 blur machine
4 merci

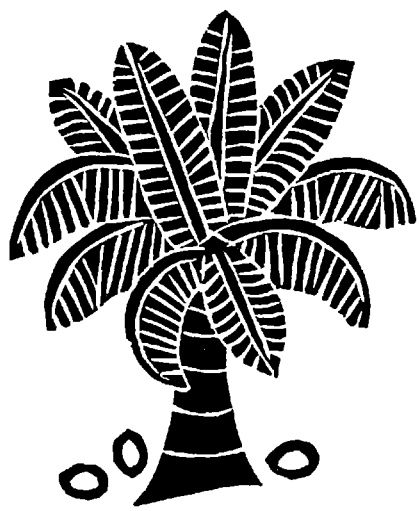
SONNET TIMES THREE

for Jack Shadbolt,
Archipenko, BJ

1 O
uneclipsed 1
1
moon 2 O
2 cloud-scattering
2
newfoundland 3 fixed
sky-detergent 3
stark 3 stands the
ever-changing unchanging 4 moon
wall-scaling 4 claustrophobic
mother 4 sorrowing
5
5
the d. of 5 devonshire is a
6
6 but I will
gentleman-lunatic 6 worth many
7
paint 7 you a scene worth
paintings, mouldy 7 giottos, well-hung
8 raconteur
all of them: 8 Push
bacons, plush picassos 8
9 raton laveur,
9 those
9

cry 1 'I
frayed 1 hands towards
saint 1 archipenko's ans.
invented 2 the hole
the ragged unholy 2 skies
re yr henry 2 moore
in 1914 3
question 3
3

for I am 4 blind
4 dolorosa
dolorosa 4
5
5 gloster
5



WOOD

Tom Wayman

Back of the highway, in
farmhouse or
cabin, men and women can meet,
decide to live together,
have children, grow out of love,
set up strange and unique arrangements
or stay alone
but the winter's wood
has to be cut.
Around these homesteads, in the hills
or along the rivers
the mills and smelter can be thriving
or reduced to one shift a week
or shut down, but the wood
has to be found
up old forestry roads
or new microwave access routes,
somewhere on the property
or crown land. What the stove requires
must be loaded, trucked to the place,
split, and stacked to dry. Pickup, chainsaw,
sharpening file, axe:
when the spring snow
has melted enough in the trees
until deep into the fall,
the loud hammering whine
of the saw motor, the *chunk* and *creak*
of a piece of spruce on the block, smell of oil
and gasoline. Some people believe
a person's value can be judged
by their woodshed — if this winter's supply
is already stored
you're adequate; if you have a year's extra
that's better; if you are two years ahead
you're a success. But this
indicates nothing about quality:
cedar for a fast start, birch for a long burn . . .

As drifts rise
from first frost to the eaves
the piled fuel slowly retreats
toward the rear of the sheds.
By April, in these buildings
more of the ground is exposed —
covered with the chips, bark
and twigs that proclaim: *time*
to get in your wood

TWO POEMS

Phyllis Webb

FOLLOWING

for Daphne Marlatt

Botticelli — I say it
and the chord breaks
into its component parts
la li la li

That which is beautiful in Botticelli
disintegrates,
gathers again in women:
a woman in white,
a lily,
a dream in the eye
of Botticelli.

He is standing apart
from Primavera.
He is painting forever
her in this full moon
winter's night.

A woman in light
leans out
and over me,
waving a wand
of old language
unspoken beyond
these words,
touching the black and white keys
of the walnut piano.

(Glenn's last session in the studio
also producing the pure, the immaculate
art of circumstance.)

Her white sails crossing the water —

I follow:
a flower is held out
and placed in the shell of Venus
who rises, wet,
to greet her.

PERFORMANCE

Who is this *I* infesting my poems? Is it I hiding behind the Baskerville type on the page of the book you are reading? Is it a photograph of me on the cover of *Wilson's Bowl*? Is it I? *I* said, *I* say, *I* am saying —

I am the mask, the voice, the one who begins those lyrical poems, *I wandered lonely as a cloud . . . I hear the Shadowy Horses, their long manes a-shake . . . I am of Ireland / And the Holy Land of Ireland . . . I, the poet William Yeats . . . I am worn out with dreams. . . .*

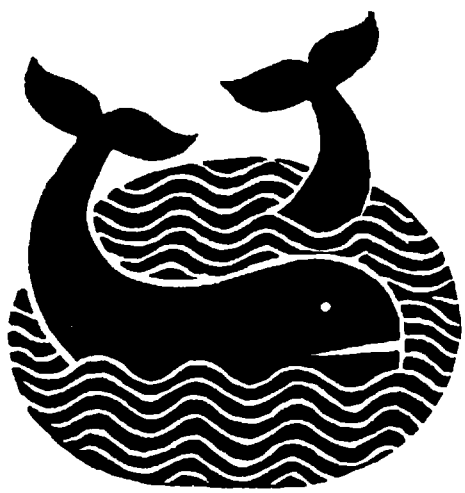
Or am I reading, as they say, "in person," in the first person? I step up to the microphone. I wait for you to cough with my damaged lungs. "*I* am with you." The poem ends. I move into my higher consciousness, my lower voice, my sense of the present, my invocation, my prayer, my tiny faith in the typewritten words before me. The poem begins.

Listen: Do you hear the *I* running away with the man in the green hat? Look again. *I* is off and diving into Fulford Harbour to run with the whales. *I* spout. *I* make whalesong. Passengers on the ferry swarm to starboard to see me disporting myself. *I/we* know they are out to get us. Yes, they are mad for education. They'll pen us up at Sealand and we'll die. We don't build big and we can't shoot. *I* commits suicide in the watery commune, the vocal pod. *We* swims on.

I am performing this poem thinking of Bill Bissett at whose last performance he did not perform. He put on a record and left the room. "Wow," as Bill would say. But the whales have made it through Active Pass. They pass on the message: *Put on the record.* Sonar pulses ring for miles. Paul Horn is in the Temple of Heaven playing flute . . . *Put on the record.*

I devise. You devise. We devise. To be together briefly with the page, the fallen timber. Or with me here standing before you wondering if the mike is on, if my mask is on, *persona,* wondering what to read next, or whether you'll turn the page. Like the state, I do not wither away, though the end is near.

I enter the Edge of Night. I join the cast of General Hospital. *I hear the Shadowy Horses, their long manes a-shake* . . . I am only a partial fiction. *Look.* I hand you a golden jonquil. *Here. Now. Always.* On the outgoing breath of the whales.



ON DEATH AND WRITING

Rudy Wiebe

"THE TWENTIETH CENTURY SHALL BE the century of Canada!" So declaimed Sir Wilfrid Laurier, Prime Minister of Canada, in 1904. He may have gotten the idea from the speech made in Boston two years earlier by the Attorney General of Nova Scotia, James Longley, who said, "The nineteenth century was the century of the United States. The twentieth century is Canada's century," but whatever the source, Laurier laid claim to this century again and again for over a year. Eighty-three years into the century we can see more clearly; even allowing for normal political balderdash, the statement is ridiculous.*

And it would have been ridiculous even if Theodore Roosevelt had said it at that time about the United States; or N. Lenin, exiled in London and dreaming about the nation of workers and peasants he was convinced he would found in his native land, a proletariat which, when he had a chance to found that nation, would prove as intractable as any nobility and he would end by founding a nation not ruled by a dictatorial and repressive czar, but by a party so brutally oppressive that anyone, even Lenin I think in his worst nightmares, would have prayed to avoid it; if he had had anyone to pray to, besides himself perhaps.

If the twentieth century belongs to any one nation, surely it is the nation of the dead. I mean that enormous nation of the man-made dead which during this century continues to develop with such deliberate, such dreadful, steady speed. The tiniest, most poverty-stricken of countries have often contributed most to its gross national product. Its geographical territory is everywhere, from the veldt of South Africa to the "civilized" cities of Europe and the jungles of Vietnam, or the sands of the Middle East and the bleak rock of the Falkland Islands. At times its population has grown by ten, twelve, and even fifteen million people a year; today its inhabitants number at least one hundred and eighty million, perhaps more for no real census has ever been, or can be, taken. Of these citizens, no more than 25 percent are soldiers; the rest are civilians (who always constitute the bulk of any nation), the children, the old men and women, the farm and factory workers, the mothers, the sick and the crippled, all caught within the

*First given as a talk, in slightly altered form, at the annual meeting of the Association of Canadian Studies in the United States, Maine, September 1983.

boundaries of their proper countries by the relentless maw of this century's death machine, and ground down into violent emigration by that machine.

Scientifically, that machine has been developed to such a point of imaginative brilliance that in 1983 it provides the nation of the dead with an overwhelming capacity for growth. Indeed, it seems quite likely that the end of the twentieth century will see only one nation left on earth, and if we are ever going to have a name for it, perhaps we better hurry and suggest one now. How about *The United Republics of Total Death*?

Death is the normal end of life; I am not talking about a normality. I am talking about death deliberately planned and man-made, about human activity which has no other objective than to kill other human beings. In one sense, such activity has been with us throughout human history; for example, the Tatars in their wars with the Russian people used to pile the severed heads of their victims in pyramids around the cities they destroyed. It is difficult, but I believe one can grasp the "human-ness" of eighty-four neat stacks of human heads numbering, shall we say, between 400 and 621 each; one could even pick them up, hold them one by one in the palm of one's hand, and consider them, ponder them like Hamlet — all before they rotted completely away. But the issue becomes imaginatively ungraspable when the leader of one superpower declares that his nation would win a nuclear war with no more than 35, at most 45 million of his own citizens killed, because *the enemy would suffer more deaths than that.*

I am referring strictly to numbers. When we consider morality, the issue becomes even more difficult. For if morality concerns the relation between individuals, or between an individual and the larger society, then every human death caused by human violence carries with it a moral value, an aura of morality impugned. People do not die in masses; the heads in the pyramid were cut off one by one even if it could be done simultaneously; every person we kill has a name. A so-called mass killer, whether it be Eichmann or the Yorkshire Ripper, can really only be judged for each single killing because every one of his victims could claim that her individual death had a certain absolute moral value. As such, the un-morality of some killers, whether they be individuals or nations sending forth expertly trained killers in the name of a principle or their own national security, becomes morally incomprehensible to the contemplative mind. That a few people should be able to kill every human being on earth, including themselves, is of course now technologically possible but it is not, I think, morally graspable. For as Hegel says, at a certain point a quantitative change, if large enough, becomes a qualitative difference. We cannot understand, we cannot express in words the immorality (do you notice how *weak* that word is?), the measureless immorality of the Founding Fathers of The United Republics of Total Death. It drives as far beyond our moral comprehension as our grappling wtih the imponderable

curve of space: what is outside the edge of the universe, beyond that which eventually must return to coincide with itself? We cannot speak, or think, of it; we have no words.

HAVING BEGUN WITH THIS MOST HEAVY of all possible introductions, what can I possibly say to justify my own recalcitrant and dogged persistence in writing fiction? There seems no more social point to making novels in the twentieth century than there would be in crocheting doilies if the Ice Age were once again advancing over our continent. And if I persist in writing novels, who will be a reader? I belong to no impoverished so-called "developing" nation; if I did, my work might be of romantic or revolutionary interest, condescended to perhaps but at least considered. Nor am I a citizen of the supernations; if I were a significant writer there, it is highly likely that I would be published in all parts of the world because it is essential for every nation on earth to know what the U.S.A. or the U.S.S.R. considers important. No, I belong to the unlikely northern half of North America, a nation materially rich enough to be envied by almost everyone but socially and politically meaningless. Canada makes the world news only when the Soviet Union destroys our hockey team, again, in an ice arena, or when a Canadian Very Public Person spends a weekend in a New York hotel with a U.S. rock star. Is there any point in my writing novels?

Well, let me tell you something: I once had a brilliant chance. It happened five years before I was born; in the fall of 1929 when my parents bundled up their young family and tried to get out of the Soviet Union. Together with thousands of other Mennonites who had been living there for seven generations, they left their villages and what property they had and flooded into Moscow. Officially there was no hope for them, but they wanted to make one last desperate attempt, by means of a massive gathering together, to importune, to force, to shame, whatever you want to call it, the government into letting them leave the Soviet Union. And it worked, to an extent. For no known reason, in November 1929 about 3,800 Mennonites were given exit visas, put on trains as "landless refugees of German origin," and shipped helter-skelter to Hindenberg's Germany. Some 14,000 others were sent back, either to their villages or, almost as often, to prison camps somewhere in the farthest reaches of the world's largest nation. My problem is that my mother, father, two brothers, and three sisters were among those 3,800 who were shipped out.

I began to get a clearer view of my problem in the middle sixties when the writings of Alexander Solzhenitsyn began to be known in the West; this climaxed of course with the vivid drama of his expulsion from the Soviet Union. I read

everything he published, books upon books, and they were truly magnificent. Dear God, what a writer! And what a platform from which to address the world: secret police, torture, hunger, imprisonment, and exile, all rooted in the Stalin purges by terror which affect everyone on earth to this day much more directly than the horrors of Hitler. I even thought of a possible short story called "Lucky Solzhenitsyn." Then, this past summer, all that Russian awareness was revived for me with a particular strength.

Two of my father's brothers and their families also made that flight to Moscow in 1929; they were sent back, and the brothers disappeared into Stalin's Gulag never to be heard of again. But one of their sons, my cousin Peter, 19 years old that autumn in Moscow, did survive fifty years in the Soviet Union and in 1979 he was allowed to settle in Germany under the Soviet-West German *Umseidler* agreement negotiated by Willy Brandt. In 1980 I lectured at the German Association of Canadian Studies in Gummersbach, and at that time my cousin was living within two miles of where I spoke; but neither of us knew the other existed. Now in July 1983, we discovered one another. When I saw him coming towards me through a crowd of people, it seemed I was seeing the face of my father as he was just before he died. And Peter greeted me in that marvellous Russian manner of full embrace and triple kissing, laughing, "You look just like a Wiebe, a real Wiebe!" A wonderfully cheerful, tiny man who had been to the Gulag twice, the last time in 1952 when he was arrested because a group met in his home regularly to read the Bible and pray. Though they couldn't prove that he was spreading anti-Soviet propaganda (officially there is religious freedom in the Soviet Union) he was nevertheless sentenced under Article 58 of the Criminal Code, sentenced to 25 years of hard labour. Now he tells me, "It was all right, I had only four years, only four, they let me out in the Khrushchev Amnesty after Stalin died." And he holds me, laughing and laughing, there is no limit to his happiness at meeting me.

In 1956 when he returned home four thousand miles from that prison camp near the Chinese border, I was graduating from a Canadian university and I wanted to become a writer. I had every chance, to be whatever I wanted. But what could I write, really? An immigrant child born in an obscure corner of an unimportant land. I have been writing fiction for 25 years now and the question is still there, it does not go away. *What* can I write? Or should I say *whom*?

IN 1921 OSIP MANDELSTAM WROTE: "Just as a person does not choose his parents, a people does not choose its poets." I would not begin to compare myself to the greatest Russian poet of the twentieth century, but his

words, for me, are profound. The poet is parent to his people; the poet makes his people known and recognizable, an acting and speaking manifestation; he begets them, he enfleshes them, yet, he gives birth to them. I was born and grew up in a rocky bushland of northern Saskatchewan, a landscape homesteaded, cleared, and broken to the plough (wherever it was cleared, most of it was still poplar and spruce thick as hair, you had to walk sideways to get between the trees, literally), a place where the temperature varied 150 degrees, easily, between winter and summer, born among a people who had run to the opposite side of the world to escape one of the bloodiest revolutions and civil wars and anarchies and starvations known in history, and to me it was all *invisible*. It was the world I fell into at birth, and I could not *see* it. "How do you write in a new country?" my friend Robert Kroetsch asks. How can you see yourself without a reflector? Kroetsch continues: "People who feel invisible try to borrow visibility from those who are visible. To understand others is surely difficult. But to understand ourselves becomes impossible if we do not see images of ourselves in the mirror — be that mirror theatre or literature or historical writing. A local pride [he uses the phrase of William Carlos Williams] does not exclude the rest of the world or other experiences, rather, it makes them possible."

The true writer writes her people, her place into existence. Out of herself; and in this sense "birth" is a more natural image than "inventing." People and landscapes and historical events do not create poets: it is exactly the reverse. The American Civil War did not make William Faulkner, nor the Russian Civil War Mikhail Sholokov. The literature I devoured as a child was most definitely not made by people who had lived on the prairie or rocky Canadian bush; they knew nothing of picking rocks and Mennonite hymn singing and Low German and the swampy ooze of muskegs breathing steam from subterranean fires in the rigid winter like spirits breathing upwards through the snow. So, growing up in such a place, among such people, *what* could I write? *Whom* could I write? Listen, let me tell you. Let me tell you the story of a Cree man named Maskepetoon, The Broken Arm, who was born somewhere around 1805 near the North Saskatchewan River, whose picture George Caitlin once painted. All the places where he lived can be seen to this day, as can the place in the Peace Hills (south of Wetaskiwin, Alberta) where he met the Blackfoot man who had killed his father. But, instead of killing him immediately, Maskepetoon told him to mount his own horse:

> The Blackfoot looked at his friends without hope, then mounted in one swift movement and waited, his face clenched to accept whatever hit him first. Maskepetoon looked up at him.
>
> "Both my hands are empty," he said then. "You took my father from me, so now I ask you to be my father. Wear my clothes, ride my horse, and when your people

ask you how it is you are still alive, tell them it is because The Young Chief has taken his revenge."

Slowly the old Blackfoot slid from the horse and faced Maskepetoon empty-handed. Then he took him in his arms and held him hard against his heart.

"My son," he said, "you have killed me."

Listen, let me tell you another story, of an American woman who comes to Alberta from Illinois with her husband and three sons in 1906 to "make a better life for themselves" as they say, and how her first apprehensions about the prairie gradually gather into a profound fear. The story is called "After Thirty Years of Marriage," and she fears not merely loneliness, it is space, it is the singleness of woman's work, it is her silent self. This goes beyond fear into primordial terror so deep she cannot even talk of it, but she must finally face it in her winter house, which is both her shelter and her prison; only when she puts her very head into the centre of the terror is she able to sleep without headache or dream, to sleep at last.

There are a thousand stories for any prairie writer to tell, whether the world at large listens or not. I have told only a very few of them, and once the stories have been made, of course, they will be there forever; or at least as long as there is a human ear and eye to perceive them. This came to me in a new way recently while I was reading aloud "The Angel of the Tar Sands." That very short story tells how the operator of a giant bucket dredging up sand for oil processing at Fort McMurray cuts into the body of an angel buried fifty feet below the earth's surface. Who knows what we will encounter now that we have the technology to rip up the entire earth in an organized way.

And that thought about the Athabasca Tar Sands, of course, brought me back irrevocably to my United Republics of Total Death; for the sands are right there in the northern Alberta space of the Primrose Air Weapons Range where the United States government wants to test the ground-hugging Cruise missile because the terrain of northern Alberta is so much like the terrain of the Soviet Union. Developing the endless, brutal possibilities of our United Republics.

So though I would like to speak of men and of angels, I am nevertheless brought back to death — where I began. I do not believe that writing is like death. Making things with words is not at all like being killed. I once wrote that writing was like climbing a mountain, a mountain which did not and would never exist unless you climbed it. That is still a good way of saying it, but perhaps it is too ego-oriented. Let me try again.

Let me say that writing is like taking a long journey. You must travel every day, and every day you decide roughly where you would like to go, what you would hope to see, but you never know if you will actually get there. You do not really know where you will eat that day, or what, nor where you will be able

to rest, if at all, and you may not even have a place to sleep when night catches you. The only certainty is that you are travelling and that travelling with you is another person. This is a person you love; you are together in everything you encounter, whatever you eat, wherever you rest or sleep; whatever the circumstances there you two are together. And that is enough. Together you are enough for anything, anything in this world.

KENSINGTON GARDENS, MAY 1982

Christopher Wiseman

Subdued. Headlines have stared at us
All day with news of ships sunk in the South
Atlantic by sudden missiles nothing could stop.
We've come to sit, to find normality.
Shirt-sleeves. Summer dresses. Distant traffic.
Children play or are wheeled by in the sun.
Ducks lead trails of camouflaged offspring,
Seeking bread. A convoy of them glides past
When a gull appears from nowhere, huge, ugly,
Skimming the surface of the green water,
Takes the last duckling and carries it
To a flat stone in the middle of the pond
Where another waits. They hold it down and beak
Its guts and eyes through a desperate downy flutter.
A thin unbroken scream goes on and on.

Kensington Gardens. The right place for small
Contentments. Today the headlines and now this.
There's anger in me. The gulls preen on their rock,
Then one takes off again, seeking the convoys.
I leave my paper, its news of war and bodies,
Turn my back, stride quickly away, hearing
Terrible wings, fast wings over water.

A CYCLE OF IND

George Woodcock

> And in your excitement at the trip, the last thing in the world that would occur to you is that the strangest glimpses you may have of any creature in the distant lands will be those you catch of yourself.
>
> MARGARET LAURENCE, *The Prophet's Camel Bell*

I HAVE BEEN TRAVELLING TO INDIA, on and off, for more than twenty years. I went there first in 1961, by one of the old P & O boats through the Suez Canal, making the ritual stops at Port Said and Aden and landing finally at Bombay. I returned from my most recent trip, by crowded airliner, via Tokyo, in the early weeks of 1983. Over the years I have written five books, and at least a hundred articles, reviews, and broadcasts in some way connected with India, and I suppose the accumulated knowledge and observation they represent would justify me in assuming the dubious title of Old India Hand. I am, at this moment, engaged in my sixth Indian book, and it is the increasing difficulty of the relations between my travelling persona and the country I have been visiting so long that prompts me to write this essay, since I realize that my ways of perceiving the country have changed over two decades and I am led to speculate on how far the changes are within me, the perceiver, and how far they are in the land perceived.

The first visit, on which my wife Inge accompanied me as she has done on all the later journeys, and took a series of evocative photographs, resulted in the first of my Indian books, which I called *Faces of India*; it was published in 1964, two years after I returned. The very title tells something about the differences between my perceptions then and now, when I am contemplating calling my new book *Walls of India.* Faces give more access than walls. And there is no doubt that I wrote *Faces of India* with a sense of having gained great access into Indian societies and cultures and a considerable understanding of them.

There is a considerable pre-history to that first journey. My interest in India was coterminous with my interest in Gandhi, which began during the 1930's when I was converted to pacifism; pacifism brought me to anarchism, since it

made me reject the claim of the state to dictate my actions, and anarchism in an oblique way confirmed my pacifism, since I concluded that there was no coercion more extreme than the killing of a man. So I rejected all idea of violent revolution, yet I recognized that my ideals of peace, freedom, and equality could only be achieved through major changes in society, and I found — or thought I found — the solution to this problem of radically changing society without killing anybody in the kind of mass civil disobedience which Gandhi developed in the Indian struggle for independence and which he called Satyagraha, or "Soul-Force."

I began to read everything I could find by and about Gandhi and to search out books on India, and particularly the novels by Indians that in the 1930's and 1940's were beginning to be published in London. I was greatly attracted, for their social awareness and their exotic colouring, by the novels of Mulk Raj Anand, like *Coolie* and *Two Leaves and a Bud*, and a little later, moving around in the bohemian half-world of wartime London, I encountered Anand, and we became good friends. It was he who introduced me to George Orwell.

Time went on. I rejoiced at India's liberation in 1947, and mourned greatly over Gandhi's death in 1948, not only because he had been murdered by fellow Indians, but also because with his departure India seemed irrevocably set under Nehru's direction on the path towards becoming a military and industrialized nation-state on the western model. Then, for awhile, my interest in India hibernated. I came to Canada in 1949, and, travelling to Mexico in 1953 and Peru in 1956, I had enough strange cultures to assimilate and write about. But in the back of my mind the thought of visiting India lingered. I began to develop a curious feeling that a missing part of myself was waiting to be recovered there, and by 1959 I was anxious to go. I was still concerned with the influence Gandhi's teaching and example might still wield in liberated India, and I persuaded the CBC to commission a radio documentary on the subject. My publishers, who were then Faber & Faber, commissioned a book, and the Canada Council, by now in operation, paid my fare.

When we reached India things seemed to fall together in the same propitious way. There, in Bombay when I landed, was my old London friend, Mulk Raj Anand, and a letter of introduction brought me to the house of Patwant Singh, editor of *Design*; between them Mulk and Patwant introduced us to a great range of literati and artists, among whom I remember the shy, ironic figure of R. K. Narayan, whom I thought (and still think) the finest of all the Indian writers in English. Later, by chance in the corridors of All India Radio, where I was getting help in making my radio programmes, we encountered the Tibetan scholar Lobsang Lhalungpa, through whose introductions in the refugee community we eventually met the Dalai Lama, and became involved in aid work that would largely dominate most of our next two decades. Later, by bus, by car, by air, by

river boat, we wandered on a vast sweep through India, from the Kashmir border to Darjeeling in the north, and southward as far as Cochin and Madurai, finally leaving India by the ferry that crossed to Ceylon (as it then was) at Adam's Bridge.

Re-reading the book I wrote from that journey, *Faces of India*, what strikes me first is a vividness and clarity of visual perception and description, and next a quality of innocence that extended from my younger self to the country I describe, or vice versa. Perhaps inevitably one's first view of a country is sharper and more freshly coloured than later ones; it is almost a commonplace of travel writing that the narratives of rapid journeys through an unfamiliar country by a perceptive traveller are usually quite different from the accounts given by people who have lived for a longish period in the same country, and whose perception of detail gets blurred by custom even if their knowledge of the local life by the same token becomes more profound.

I went on that first journey to India with two advantages. First, our earlier travels in Mexico and Peru had inoculated me against the culture shock that often comes from the first encounter with deep poverty; in Mexico I had been so shaken that I was paralyzed as a writer for several months, but nothing of this kind happened in India, where I was moved by what I saw but not incapacitated. Secondly, the fact that I had come with a specific project — the radio documentary on Gandhi — which required that I search out and interview a large number of people, gave me a kind of access to Indian life that would have been much more difficult for the mere wanderer, and this advantage was supplemented as we became involved with the Tibetans by a series of especially interesting encounters all the way along the Himalayan foothills from Dharamsala to Kalimpong.

These factors may explain the variety of *Faces of India* in terms of human encounters, and the fact of an expectant eye meeting an entirely strange landscape and townscape may explain the visual vividness of the book. But it is the innocent quality that at this stage, two decades later, impresses me. It cannot entirely have been the novelty of the scene. It was partly, I think, my own desire to find a country not irrevocably committed to the paths of centralized nationalism and industrialism which it seemed to me were destroying the societies of the West, and partly also because India, at that time, did give the impression that it contained possibilities lost already in the West. The quest for Gandhi's influence was of course a manifestation of my approach; I hoped to find, fourteen years after the country's liberation, the evidence that Gandhi's great plan of a decentralized society based on village regeneration was still alive in the minds of Indians, and my findings were perhaps coloured by my desire. But India was still that country of immense variety which the British had nurtured, perhaps not entirely deliberately, by preserving the double system of directly administered

territories and native states. The native princes had been unseated and their realms incorporated into larger units, but still enough remained of the traditional differences they had preserved to give India a quality of exotic diversity which it has since slowly lost. Perhaps indeed we were going at the best time, when the old tyrannies, both British and native, had come to an end, but the ancient local ways of life that had managed to survive under their sway were still largely untouched by alien influences.

In fact, even while we were in the country on that journey of 1961-62, the events were happening that would irrevocably transform India. One day, trying to get from Agra to Delhi, we found that all the trains had been cancelled, and we had to hire a car at an exorbitant price because of the suddenly increased demand. The railways were in fact being used for the invasion of Goa. This was not Nehru's first military adventure; he had sent his troops into Hyderabad when the Nizam was talking about making it a sovereign state in the middle of India, and he had done the same in Kashmir when Pakistani irregulars came over the border. But the first could be interpreted as an internal policing operation and the second as an act of self-defence in disputed territory. The attack on Goa, whatever its moral aspects, was politically an aggression against the possessions of a foreign power and its possible repercussions were quite different. A few weeks later we were in south India, attending a dinner at the Maharaja's College in Mysore, and as we sat out on the lawn afterwards, the conversation turned to the Goa incident, which, as south Indians, most of the professors who were present treated with detachment as an adventure of the "Men of Delhi," as they called Nehru and his ministers.

> One of the younger professors was particularly concerned with the danger of a chain reaction that might run through the whole of Asia. He saw the possibility of the smaller nations, like Indonesia, using India's example to justify their own attempts to take by force what they could not get by quick negotiation. "And perhaps it will not only be the smaller nations," he said. "One never knows where such a process may end. I fear that Nehru and Krishna Menon have set something in motion whose consequences they will soon be regretting." Within a year his fears were confirmed when the Chinese armies marched over the mountains into Assam, but on that warm, tranquil night in Mysore it seemed no more than an interesting speculation between cigarette and cigarette. (*Faces of India*, p. 241.)

I WENT TO INDIA AGAIN over the winter of 1963-64. This time we were on a longer journey, which began in Karachi and ended in Tokyo, and the book I wrote as a result of it, *Asia, Gods and Cities*, covered not only India, but also West Pakistan and East Pakistan (which later became Bangladesh),

Thailand, Cambodia, Malaysia (and Singapore, which it then included), Hong Kong and Macao, and Japan. I had vaguely in mind the revelation of some common strain uniting all these countries, but to discover that would have needed a long period — possibly years — in the area, and for the most part *Asia, Gods and Cities* turned out to be a series of long self-contained essays, the main theme bringing them together being the problems and ardours of travels between the countries described, which had made going from Thailand to Cambodia difficult and going to Burma impossible. Nevertheless, there was a unity about the earlier part of the book, entitled "The Double Land," since — apart from the embedded chapter on our return to the republic of India — it concerned the lost half of British India, Pakistan, which came into existence when liberation in 1947 was so precipitately conducted by Mountbatten that it inevitably involved partition. Here again I had an assignment — another CBC documentary — which gave access that might otherwise have been difficult to many interesting Pakistanis.

Looking again at *Asia, Gods and Cities*, I find it an altogether darker book than *Faces of India*, and this applies especially to the first section. My own attitude was less optimistic, and inevitably less innocent, since I had been following carefully the news of strife — India and Pakistan, India and China — that had been erupting from this area since our first visit, and I realized that changes were taking place in India that would make any turn towards a new Gandhian society even less likely than it had been in 1961. But apart from my personal assessments of the political situation, there is no doubt that the general atmosphere of the two divided parts of the old India had become much darker than I remembered from two years before. In Pakistan, Parliamentary democracy had foundered, and Ayub Khan was trying to temper his dictatorship with a curious indirect voting system called "Basic Democracy," though the army was still clearly in power. The martial races of West Pakistan were still relatively happy with this situation, but already in East Pakistan on the far side of India we found resentment growing bitter because of what the Moslem Bengalis of this region regarded as geographical discrimination. Whether it was the fault of the authorities in Karachi or whether of an inherent flaw in the Bengali economy, the poverty there was on a vaster and more unrelieved scale than anything we had seen in India; in towns like Dacca and Chittagong (which I came to describe as *rectum mundi*), infinitely decrepit and filled with positive herds of diseased beggars, we felt nothing but despair at the future of Asia. The relation between India and Pakistan had descended into a fratricidal hatred on both sides; India's humiliation by China, which it could not hope to humble in return, seemed to have been diverted into a greater fury against Pakistan.

Within India we spent our time largely travelling in the Himalayan hill regions, which we visited to arrange aid for the Tibetan refugees, an occupation that

inevitably cast a certain seriousness over our personal view of the world we entered. But quite outside such subjective factors, we found there an atmosphere of fear and suspicion quite different from anything we had experienced two years before. The roads were full of military convoys, building up India's armed presence on the northern frontier. Foreigners who associated with the Tibetan refugees were carefully watched. Permits were now needed, not only to go to Kalimpong and the autonomous state of Sikkim, which were actually on the verge of Chinese-controlled Tibet, but even to visit Darjeeling. We had friends in Sikkim, and with a great deal of difficulty managed to gain a permit to visit them, but a day before we left Delhi the permit was inexplicably cancelled. Such incidents, and the general atmosphere of suspicion and intrigue from which they emanated, inevitably changed and charged what I wrote on India at this time, and the different mood of *Asia, Gods and Cities*, as compared with *Faces of India*, was due partly to the great political shifts that were occurring in South Asia and its environs at this period, but partly also to the subjective shifts on my part that led me not only to expect less than I had found on my first trip but also to react pessimistically to those changes I saw. It was experience taking over from innocence.

BUT IN A WAY INNOCENCE fought to re-establish itself. For I went on that journey of 1963-64 with a second book, as well as *Asia, Gods and Cities*, in my mind. On our first trip I had been fascinated by the Graeco-Indian sculptures from the area of Gandhara around modern Peshawar which I had found in the National Museum in Delhi and the much more lavish Indian Museum in Calcutta. I began to study the background of this fascinating hybrid art in the strange history of the Greek kingdoms that arose in Bactria (now Afghanistan) after Alexander died and spilled over the Hindu Kush into India. At Taxila and other places in what is now Pakistan I was able to visit some of the Greek sites, now strangely forlorn in a landscape which deforestation has long desiccated. The last of the Greek kingdoms of North India vanished when the Parthians destroyed the realm of King Hermaeus and his Queen Calliope about 40 years before the birth of Christ, somewhere near Peshawar, but Greek merchants continued to trade from Alexandria to the Malabar Coast and Greek mercenaries to serve as bodyguards to south Indian rajas for centuries afterwards. Nobody had yet written their whole story, and I did so in *The Greeks in India.*

But why, I now ask myself, when I re-read that book, did I find it necessary to write it as well as *Asia, Gods and Cities*? It was, I think, an attempt to recover that sense of pristine wonder at an unknown world which I had experienced on

the travels that led to *Faces of India.* True, the story that I told of the Greeks who penetrated into India beyond the limits of Alexander's conquests was intrinsically a fascinating one. But it was especially so in a personal way because it enabled me, even as I looked at India with a far more pessimistic eye than on our first journey, to see the country once again with an innocent eye when I put myself in the mind of King Menander riding into the wild and half-tribal India of two millennia ago and finding there a strange marriage between the logical clarity of his own Hellenic mind and the inspired rationalism of the Buddhism which the sage Nagasena taught him in that extraordinary Platonic dialogue transplanted to Indian soil, the *Milindapanha* (*The Questions of King Menander*).

Clearly history rather than another travel book was the medium in which I could keep alive in my mind that India which I had first encountered, and whose loss even a few years later was already distressing me, and when Alan Pringle of Faber & Faber suggested to me that there was probably a very interesting book to be written on the Malabar Coast, I agreed, but specified that it must be a history rather than a travel book. It was the past and its myths that I needed to understand the present.

Inge and I went to the Malabar Coast with notebook, camera, tape recorder, and half-a-dozen auspicious introductions, and several months later we emerged with a massive (and still unpublished) diary of encounters and experiences in what is still probably the most interesting region of India, with its extraordinary interweaving of Hindu, Christian, Moslem, and Jewish traditions. I used this as a basis for further research, and the book I eventually wrote — *Kerala: A Portrait of the Malabar Coast* — seems, when I read it again, the nearest of all my later books to *Faces of India,* even though one is a history decorated by myth and the other a narrative of travel. For what I did in *Kerala* — which some Malayalia regard as the truest history of their state — was to journey through the past and find there that very diversity of culture, that very plenitude of mythical intimations, which, travelling in the present, had once seemed to me the most compelling aspect of India. I was travelling still; only the dimensions had changed.

Our journey to the Malabar Coast was done between 1965 and 1966, and *Kerala* was published in 1967. A period of ill-health prevented me from returning immediately. I spent the winter of 1967-68 at Lugano in Switzerland, writing about a Victorian naturalist of the Amazons, but in 1969 we were again in India. This time I went with no intention of writing a book, and we lived mainly with our friends, James and Carol George; Jim was then Canadian High Commissioner in Delhi, and he and Carol installed us in a kind of apartment in the residency from which we could make our expeditions to the Tibetan settlements in northern and southern India that we had helped to organize. I was, I have since thought, rediscovering the innocent encounter in yet another way, through

practical and largely physical work to help that sad symbolic figure of our age, the refugee. I wrote nothing about this work that I wanted to preserve, though I may eventually do so. But, curiously, when I returned home I felt the need to produce something that would form a kind of period to our Indian decade, and when Frank Kermode asked me to write the volume on Gandhi in the Modern Masters series he was editing, it seemed singularly appropriate that I should end where I began.

I agreed, and wrote the little book, *Mohandas Gandhi*, my fifth book on India, which turned out to be less a biography than a discursive essay, almost a disguised dialogue with the master who had played such an important role in my mental development. I argued that even if India had failed to listen to Gandhi's teaching, it was still alive, lying there like some great mental bomb waiting for the right time to explode into a desperate world. It was a kind of exorcism so far as I was concerned. If the writing of histories had turned my journeys from temporal to spatial ones, the writing of this quasi-biography enabled me to externalize my Indian preoccupations, to project them on the world, and so to become liberated from a long fascination.

This did not mean that I had lost my feeling for India. Far from it. I continued to read Indian books and Indian news, to review Indian writers and Indian events. I took stances and, by now accepted as a minor authority, signed manifestoes during the 1970's protesting against Mrs. Gandhi's actions, acting with a kind of acquired patriotic fury against those who, I felt, were ruining what I had come to regard as an adoptive fatherland. When visitors came from India to Vancouver, whether they were interesting strangers like Nirad Chaudhuri, or friends — old friends by now — like the Dalai Lama or Balachandra Rajan — I welcomed them like fellow countrymen. Yet for a decade I travelled to other places, in the South Pacific and Europe, led partly by circumstance and opportunity, partly by a feeling that a cycle in my life was ended.

BUT IT IS A BASIC ASSUMPTION of Indian philosophies that cycles repeat themselves, that one's past returns to influence, if not to haunt one. And one of those strange and compelling clusters of circumstances that Jung calls synchronicity eventually awakened in me the urge (perhaps even, if one sees it in Indian eyes, the karmic necessity) to return.

India began calling in its debts when Patwant Singh, one of the two Indians who had opened the country to me in 1961, reappeared almost twenty years later, a man transformed. In the past he had looked with eyebrows raised almost to the rim of his turban at our efforts to help Tibetan refugees; he was a young man

engaged with life and all its prides and pleasures and thus in full accord with Indian concepts of the stages of personality development. Now, a man advancing into late middle age, he came not only to share with me an indulgent viewing of our younger selves, but also to tell how experience had brought him to another of the Indian stages of life: that of a man who assumes humane responsibilities.

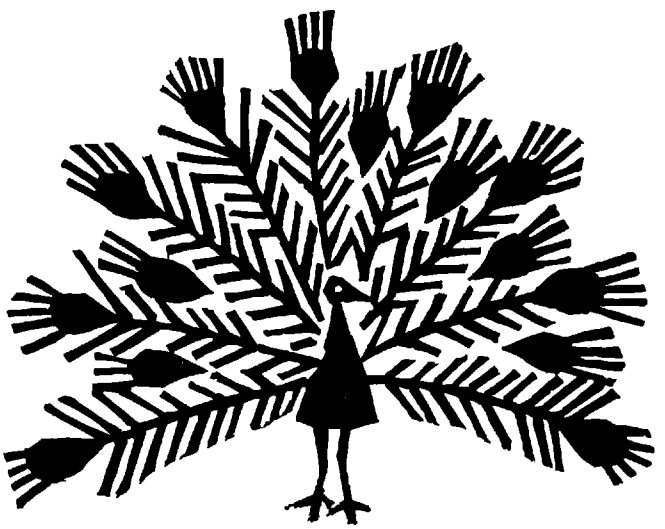
A heart attack, in which Patwant had received the treatment of a privileged city man, had brought the compassionate vision of a peasant in the same predicament, far from a hospital and doomed to die. He thought of a network of small health centres, scattered in the remote village regions of India to give relief in just such emergencies and even to prevent them. He resolved to build such a centre as a model, and as soon as he recovered he bullied a state government into giving him a stretch of barren land, charmed his architect friends into designing a hospital he could build cheaply from local fieldstone, recruited sympathetic doctors and nurses, called on his vast circle of friends for funds, and set up his centre in Haryana state, not merely as a hospital, but as a multi-functional facility intended to change the quality of life in the villages.

What Patwant did with his Kabliji Hospital and Rural Health Centre is too complex a tale for this essay, to which its main relevance is that it gave me a reason to return again to India. Inge and I and a few other people established a Canada India Village Aid Society to spread the idea of village regeneration — in sanitation, in local industry, in family planning, in the liberation of women — that Kabliji encapsuled. For me it revived in practical form the Gandhian ideals with which I had first gone to India in 1961.

Among the people who became deeply involved with us was the West Coast painter, Toni Onley. One day Toni suggested to me that we might raise money quickly for the hospital if we went to India to prepare a book — his watercolours and my writing — and afterwards sell his paintings into the bargain. I agreed, and in December 1982 we went there together, travelling to the Rajasthani deserts and the Kerala lagoons, to the Himalayan mountains and the temple-studded fields of Orissa, to prepare for my sixth book on India and Toni's first. That is the book we are calling *The Walls of India*. Toni, never having visited India before, has painted, as I once wrote, with the innocent eye. I am involved in the strange experiment of stereoscopy that juxtaposes the eye of innocence to that of experience. But what we both see are walls, and they are not merely the walls of ancient buildings and immemorial mountains. They are the walls of social divisions, of caste and language and region, that were there always but have assumed, in the India where Gandhi sought to level all barriers, a new solidity.

But there are faces within those walls, and as I write they draw near in memory, and imperceptibly the India I left a few months ago with a great deal of sadness

mingles with the India I knew first a third of a lifetime ago. The newness is gone, the brightness is dimmed, the faces are older and more disillusioned. The walls are those of an old home seen again, like childhood, with the clear grey eye of homecoming.



THREE POEMS

Derk Wynand

TWIN

No use to him now, the masters of forgetting: his twin persists as an urge inside him, more than memory, more than desire. What perfume of his brain's own devising, sap of no muddy rose, has she not worn to arouse him as he has foreseen, although the specific scents and their effect on him not even he could have imagined? And on the grass at the edge of the pool, when the rains still kept it full, did they not kneel to their own reflections and find them same? And the ants: unable to find shelter on their skin, for did they not constantly explore it or, at night, dream, each his hand on the other flesh? What room for ants then? The ants: thirsting for such earthly perfumes. Now the master of forgetting, impractical realist, has come to stop the rains, to drive the ants back into their nests, to drain the pool where one twin persists in mourning the loss of the other, bending low and lower, to keep the loss visible, ambiguous, real.

OUTWARD FROM THE POOL'S DRY EDGE

Then anyone squalls at birth, anticipating something, nothing in particular. Then fits more and more tightly into his skin, the folds soon unfolding. And lallates, pleased with his own voice. Then, delighted with the voices of others, echoes the doting phrases. And names his parts as instructed, starting likely as not with the toes, working up to the more abstract nose, which remains most like the shadows not yet named. And stands up. Sniffs the charged air. Starts naming the animals hesitating into his field of vision. Pursues them. Catches. Then tires of the merely necessary sport. Invents better prey: scratches her image into stone, into birches, peels and carries home the strips of bark. Admires the image. *What an improvement,* she says. Anyone then would be flattered. Is. Therefore rises again to pursue her. To see what other sounds she may express. Learns

them. Then chases after another. Calls her woman. Invents better names. Worse. Speaks some. Bites back the others, but thinks of them. Remembers them and burns slowly with them. And tires of the sport, to devise at last a better one. *Ideal*, they say, all the women he has called by their various sounds and names while chasing them. The women, true to their word, act on it, become an image only, but ideal, nowhere to be found, maybe worth pursuing, maybe not. Anyone then left to look at his hands. Count the fingers. Scoop up the sand at the edge of the pool. Let it go. Develop familiar lines of thought. Invent names for each of the winds. Record them. Start again, likely as not with the feet. What tracks they leave. Then work backward, trace them backward, then forward, until they cross with others. Remain within earshot. And hear this process called a movement, a purpose, a way of life.

THE OTHER VERSION

In the other version, of course, he became entirely enraptured by the girl, who stirred in him obsessions that might have been defined, however approximately, only by the foremost of ancient poets in obscure metaphors that exhausted the range of things the obsessions were not. Time was no river, love no hibiscus blossoming. Neither windows nor doors, these eyes, ears, mouths. If the metaphors were ever written, then they have long been forgotten, although the record of their intensity remains an ideal toward which current poets still claim to strive. But he was no poet; he lacked the devices that would allow him more comfortable lies. Thus, he loved the girl and everything about her, but could not define it. *She carries herself like . . . she opens herself like . . . her voice summons me — oh, anyone! — like. . . .* Once, it is said, he told her that he could not easily live without her. He would soon die, therefore, if she did not return his love. He would throw himself from the steepest of cliffs — perhaps he said "abyss" — if she required such a simple gesture of his sincerity. From this version stem no slanders whatever about him and about her.

THE PARTY LINE

Dale Zieroth

A black box in the hall, ringing
three long, two short
and your neighbour on the line:

Tillie's house went down
a great flame against the night and she's
running in and bringing out jars of money
her and her weak brother

The bridge is out, the ditch
twisted the nails out of planks
softened the edges between here and there
and Billy Wilson drove over anyway
as if there was anything that good in town
like a woman or that poolhall

And you have to remember to click off
or your neighbour's house will ring
and no one can stop that sound
coming down the wires so new
even the kids can't understand it, just
go out to the animal calm

She calls again, lonely and
this time Old Man
Eliniski fell off his road
into a ditch plugged with spring,
may be dead, not even the special
dogs helped, shivering
in the slush, on the road leading under
the Catholic onion dome

And you develop
something in your ear, that wasn't there
before, knowledge of your neighbours'
silence as they hear you
talking to your father, about
the accident and the way the car went down

You know their pleasure as they
put down the phone, their need for voices
breaking beyond their home

because at night when the call comes through
you are always
on your own, moving through the dark
and you already hate what the box knows
that your neighbours are sleeping and there is
no time to prepare Your private sentence
begins now

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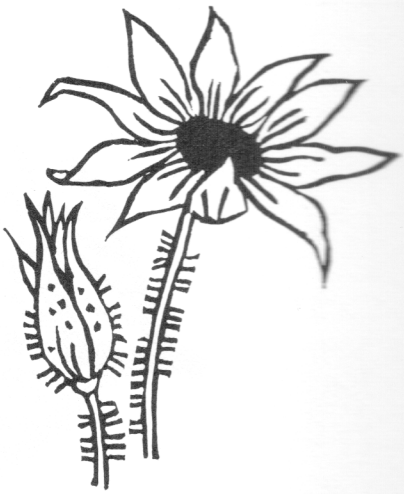

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