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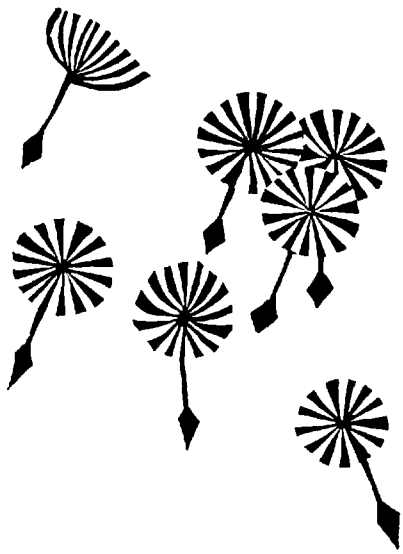

DOCUMENTING THE LANDSCAPE/ NOTES ON SINCLAIR ROSS

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EDITOR: W. H. New

ASSOCIATE EDITORS:
H. J. Rosengarten
L. R. Ricou

BUSINESS MANAGER
Beverly Westbrook

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editorial

HIGH PUNK & LOW SUAVE

THERE IS A PHENOMENON IN MUSIC called "enharmonic change." It happens when a musical score alters a $C^{\#}$, for example, into a D^{b}, in mid-composition. Nothing appears to change, except in theory. Nothing changes except the way listeners are asked to think of the tone they play or hear. The sound is the same, but the mental effect is different — at least if you have an ear for theory and can listen your way past pitch. That means, perhaps, that everything changes altogether. But you have to listen.

There are occasions when the significance of minimal distinctions seems less than consequential. Some political labelling is like that — a point for which the language has ready clichés: different bottles don't alter the taste of the beverage inside them, garbage wrapped nicely is still garbage, plus ça change. . . . What effect, then, does appearance have? Of what consequence is style? Clearly it affects the image projected, and depending on quality it is sometimes the substance, sometimes just the wrapper. The problem is that the quality of the packaging often exceeds the quality of the thing itself, whether it's merchandise, politics, or literature we're actually talking about. We know that "image" can command attention and exert power whether it's "real" or not. The trick for the observer is to tell substance and illusion apart, and as contemporary culture loses its ability or will to make any distinctions at all, the trick seems rapidly to be becoming a rare talent. Every generation appears to think this way, and given the recurrence of such generational *angst* it is a wonder culture persists at all. But the fact of its persistence says something about style as well as about culture — not about mythical "universals" of standard and judgment, but about the persistence of value. And about the persistence of a need for value.

The difference between *fad* and *fashion*, between *bizarre* and *suave*, as often involves marketing as excellence; for many, a thing becomes acceptable by the numbers of people doing it rather than because of its intrinsic worth. (Is there any such thing as intrinsic worth, their actions ask.) Value for them inheres in quantity, as for others it exists in the rituals of received tradition (rather than in

their significance) or in the latest pronouncements by the current power-holders. Indeed it seems that, without thought, it doesn't matter what the product or the activity is. Pierced ears. Jay-walking. Swallowing goldfish. Cheating on the government. Selling kiddie porn. Haircuts. Violence. Graft. Unless a community sustains its own power to make discriminating judgments, all such activities become one; but once they take on a uniform dimension (because a high moral outrage directed everywhere is effective in no direction at all), they become alike *in*consequential. The process does not elevate; it trivializes, diminishes, negates, and nullifies. Except that we know there *are* still significant distinctions to be made — about human behaviour and about literature both. What matters is to remember that things *don't* all matter in the same way. Hence the need for a discriminating press — one which investigates and researches news and does not rely blandly on handouts ("*wait* for the *story*," say the politicians; no: *find* the *facts*). Yet story sells, or story of a kind (is scandal alone newsworthy, because that is what provokes interest? is politics simply the art of engineering images? are serious issues of less consequence than their entertainment value, and therefore dependent on their packaging? is honesty predicated on survival, but survival so predicated on evasion that *survival* has become a synonym for *success* and honesty has become an unnecessary luxury?) People can be misinformed, sometimes even deliberately misled. They are sometimes naive, and often cynical — reactions which can get in the way of honest expectation. But they are also fundamentally committed to the value of truth and they have a great store of common sense. That works in their community's favour if they listen closely, watch critically, judge probingly. Hence their need, too, for a discriminating literature.

Like the more obvious trappings of fad and fashion, literature follows trends more often than it sets them, a fact which publishers frequently depend on, critics overlook in their immediate enthusiasm, and publicists blithely ignore. The publisher's economic survival depends more and more on marketing strategy than on the quality of publication — a fact that is *true* more than *right* if your heart is with "quality," a fact that also suggests the further equation of *art* with *commodity* and an increasing difficulty for able writers to break into print. At least if their works depart from the form of the current "fashion." Simply put, the distribution system works against them. It depends on quick turnover, fast review, instant appreciation, and almost as instant forgetting. It gives no margin for leisurely reflection, for the slow maturing of taste, the fascination of things difficult, or the education of understanding. A booklist has to keep its good writers available until they are absorbed into the reader's world, which takes time, but it relies on its "instant" products to make *this* year's profit; a bookstore has to be able to stock good writers long enough for browsers to find them — which the mass economics of stock and storage no longer permits. Paradoxically it is not

time that works against good writers, should they ever see print; it is the clock. It's not lack of quality; it's lack of familiarity, as Doris Lessing's "Jane Somers" hoax amply illustrated: the books she wrote under a pseudonym got little notice, and those she wrote under her own name got noticed everywhere. But at least they got published. In the meantime there are those less lasting writers who also stumble into print — mistaking fashion for feeling, platitude for style, obscurity for substance, and anger for art. They are packaged well, and they sell: to democratic enthusiasm and mistaken applause.

I am at war with blancmange here, looking for distinctions which *matter*, priorities with a purpose. But such a quest bangs instantly into the covert elitism of secure banalities and the sheer banality of automatic charges of elitism. It's got so that any effort to distinguish quality and so to *recognize* and *honour* quality is attacked as condescension — at least as far as art and academic skills are concerned (people make distinctions in athletics all the time and no-one blushes). Thus when Susan Sontag argues forcibly, in the Toronto Amnesty International anthology *The Writer and Human Rights* (Lester & Orpen Dennys), that it's time to reclaim the word "elitist" from its resonances of moral horror, she has first to attack

> a kind of democracy of literature that destroys literature, that destroys the very notion of literature, which has an intrinsic relationship to excellence. We know that excellence exists, that some writers are better than other writers, and that only a few writers in any time are great. And that literature has to do with participating in activities which make it possible for there to *be* great writers — and not just writers.

She is not arguing that you have to *agree* with writers for them to be great, nor (worse) that they have to agree with you. Greatness is not decided by poll. What she's arguing for is not a hierarchy of literary management ("Who's to say what's good," shouts the automatic chorus), but a discriminating democracy — a "democratic elitism," so to speak — which honours the potential for quality in all but refuses to locate it where it does not exist.

The problem with reclaiming the word *elitist* lies less with such an argument than with the attitudes of those other writers, like V. S. Naipaul in his lofty responses to Bharati Mukherjee (her provocative interview is collected, along with a number of striking essays, in *The Salmagundi Reader* [Indiana University Press], ed. Robert and Peggy Boyars), for whom distinction somehow equates with class and expresses itself as snobbery. It is the kind of overlap that gives judgment a bad name. When a commitment to a fixed idea of cultural tradition cuts off any sympathy for anything else, any need to read or *see* anything else, or any*one* — women, for example, or Africans, or Australians — the result is not culture but ignorance. The plain fact remains: some rarefaction does not elevate; it narrows. And some distillation just produces gas.

But the problem that accompanies the practice of *egalitarian* art is that nothing begins to matter at all: not style, not words, not skill, not ideas, not story nor purpose nor intelligence, not even the human experience from which, despite metafiction, art continues to derive. Theory tells us that there are reasons why writers turn their backs on tradition sometimes, and reasons why they sometimes appear to do so collectively, seeking signs in speech of their desire for significant change. Acts of verbal rebellion can serve as calls for people to break out of their unconscious biases, or to reexamine their conscious ones, to change the ways they see, hear, understand. But sometimes the signs themselves become familiar and lose their power: rebel punk becomes high punk, "fashion" merchants intervene, and high becomes suave. It sells. But it's *low* suave, fad still, soon drained of its power to stir either outrage or enthusiasm. What then? The sales strategists say to go up market or down, to specialize, advertise, intensify. For some writers this impulse appears to translate into a kind of geometric repetition: *more* explicitness about gothic enthusiasms, *more* crudity, *more* violence, *more* degrees of victimization, as though the magnitude of the *more* somehow intensified the shock to the social system. Usually, however, the magnitude is merely boring. The system may still be in need of shock, but the verbal signs, once having lost their power, need as much regeneration as the system does if they are to serve value as well as shape meaning. That calls for readers to recognize what they champion. Of four contemporary Australian writers, Dorothy Green observes, in her quietly acerbic, highly articulate, continuously engaging collection of essays *The Music of Love* (Penguin):

> McKie belongs to the row-of-asterisks school and, after a session with Drewe, Moorhouse and McGregor, a line of dots would be welcome. In deference to modernism, there is at least one obligatory reference to menstruation and vomit, but McKie's heart is obviously not in it. It is in the right place, bless him; his medico is in favour of People rather than Things, and he is suspicious of 'development' as a synonym for 'progress.'

It may be that, in literature today, there is more shock to the system in a vision of peace and possibility than in a surrender to the verbal theatre of "the way things are."

Does this sound naive? There are moments I despair of behaviour and banality. But I refuse to accept that people must live their lives according to the limited talents and narrow aspirations of the humourless, the envious, the unimaginative, and the vengeful. There are priorities. Some things are just different from others, but some things are better. Some differences are more than enharmonic. And some things are *right*. There is such a thing as the public good; people have the right to expect the governments who serve them to recognize it, and to set their priorities accordingly. People are more important than packages and the neatness of paper plans; and of all people in our society, children need time and encourage-

ment and challenge and real support: they only have one chance at learning *while young*, and the best education we can imagine for them is the one we ought to be trying to provide. That means educating good, critical, demanding readers, among other things: readers who refuse to accept automatically and passively the exaggerations of "*more*" as the norms of a civilized culture. Here, still, literature does not by mandate serve the state, and we are freer because of that. But we must continue to ask — of writers, publishers, and readers alike — that such freedom be purposeful. Literature does serve human needs. It can be a radical force when doing so, radical even in reclaiming the existence of commonsense community values.

W.H.N.

DARWIN AND THE GALAPAGOS

James Harrison

I

What was it you discovered
on these enchanted islands
that so took you aback?

Oh, I don't mean your surprise
that newly created species
for a newly created, unique habitat
should be so routinely South American
in overall character (as those
on the Cape de Verdes had been African) yet differ
island to island in such absurdly trivial
detail. Nor even that glimpse,
the cloud lifting for a moment as when you had stood
on a high col in the Andes and seen
the sun glint from a thousand tributaries
meandering across the pampas toward some far
confluence beyond the horizon,
of how it would all come together
in a handful of years.

No, what intrigues me is why it took
you almost a further twenty
to publish your findings — and then only
because Wallace was hard on your heels.
What was it that you sensed, here, to make
an invalid of you for one in three
of your remaining days on earth?

What revelation or spell still awaits
a pilgrim in your footsteps on
this road from Damascus?

II

The swift — as with such dogged perspicacity
you pointed out — the swift
survive, the slow succumb,
leaving the swift to the swift to breed a swifter
antelope or whatever.

For swift read long-legged and longer-necked,
telescopically sighted,
well-insulated,

and for antelope giraffe,
vulture,
walrus.

Specialists all,
each doing its thing
superlatively well.

All the signs were here, the entrails laid out
for such retrospective augury, all the exceptions
needed to prove your rule on these last strongholds
of biological amateurism:
finches free, in the absence of accredited
experts at pecking wood, catching flies, etc.,
to evolve their own crude armoury
of differently shaped bills or the trick of using
a cactus spine to winkle the white grubs
out of hiding;
tortoises at liberty, no longer in competition
with parvenu mainland mammals,
to perfect, at their leisure, a leisured
gentlemanly approach
to survival, leaving vulgar

world-wide success to the hustling specialists.
And yet
what could be more totally, more terminally

specialized than a tortoise?
Unless, perhaps,
giraffes left standing disconsolately
after the last tree has been chopped down,
vultures blundering around a planet
perpetually shrouded in mist,
walruses wilting as the polar ice-cap
melts to a mediterranean,

dinosaurs like abandoned automobiles
in a changing world.

Specialism: a comfortably appointed
mews leading nowhere.
Sex, nerves, backbones, lungs, warm-blood,
brains, language, technology —
all life's quantum accomplishments
*un*specialize, increase the range
of possibilities; man himself, naked,
seems almost unfinished — embryo
of an undetermined species.

Yet, expert above all
in adapting himself to a wide range of environments
and a wide range of environments to himself,
can he, could it have occurred to you
to ask from your Victorian
stronghold of optimism,
adapt or adapt to such adaptability,

or is he at last imprisoned in a specialism,
irredeemably nailed
to a knack?

III

Islands as laboratories — that much is clear —
conducting their millennia-long experiments
to verify the hypothesis you had still
to come up with; yet islands, too,
as poems and sonatas — fragments that,
like chromosomes, tell all —
or as time-lapse movies accelerating, like a Chekhov

play, processes within which they themselves
become, like a Chekhov play, a backward
swirl or eddy; island sanctuaries
where those unable to survive anywhere else
can play for the time being at being
fittest; third-world islands
no upwardly mammalian
bourgeoisie, just balanced budgets
in the stable peasant ecologies of crude
reptilian Edens
till man arrives:
man,
his usual camp followers, and a portable
environment of his own making in which only he
is allowed to be fittest — a sort of adaptively
endemic disequilibrium.

Islands as the site less of the experiments
themselves, in fact, than of the
controls (now hopelessly contaminated) for nature's
major experimental ventures
elsewhere — as fixed points
of reference, like stone-age tribes in New Guinea
or Greek derivations of words, that let us see
how little and how disastrously
we have changed.

Was it some such sense of islands as metaphor
you responded to, tagging your specimens,
naming your new species, two by two,
aboard the Beagle?
Could it have been the consoling
surf round these volcanic outbursts that
whispered to you nightly how all will be well
again and earth shall heal
when man, hunted down like a forest fire
by desolation of his own making
and fast running out of trees,
takes up his last
stand?

Weren't you tempted to step out of your time-machine
and disappear by somehow wrecking the mechanism
at work around you that would one day
make you possible?

IMAGINING A NORTH AMERICAN GARDEN

Some Parallels & Differences in Canadian & American Culture

Ramsay Cook

In the beginning (he said) God created me and you and put us in a second English garden Victoria where to prove his love primrose and hawthorn bloomed in the wilderness

And why (I asked) did you leave the first English garden?

England (he said) being perfect required looking at from a distance and proved more perfect from Victoria than from London my ship rounded the Horn I heard whales with mermaids' heads singing I touched a Gold Rush the whales turned into seagulls and crows who flew impudently said raucous fascinating things about this new England

I see no other England (I said) I see trees bigger than the tallest English mountain wider than the British Isles I see myself now trunk shaped settled like a tree my hands long branches that feather a sky with irridescent paint I have rolled out a new map giving names to unknown indentations

I am Canadian

> Florence McNeil, "Conversations with my Father Establishing place," *Emily.*

"CROSSING THE BORDER" is one of those claustrophobic stories so characteristic of the American writer, Joyce Carol Oates. It is the story of a failing marriage in a failing country, of a young American couple heading north into exile, to Canada, looking for "a new life, a new country." From Florida Canada looked like a northerly country, "with fresh air, chilled from the arctic, a ceaseless cleansing wind." But from Detroit, Canada only three minutes away, the view was different — it would be sweltering there, too. Indeed, you travelled south from Detroit to enter Canada." Momentarily Canada was south, the United States north. But that was mere geography. "The border between two nations," the young woman in the story mused as she looked at the road map, "is

always indicated by broken but definite lines, to indicate that it is not quite real in any physical sense but very real in a metaphysical sense. . . . "[1]

Though she lived in Canada for several years, Joyce Carol Oates seems never to have attempted to specify the metaphysical nature of Canada, except perhaps to hint that its best writers were still trying to cast off the yoke of the nineteenh-century British tradition.[2] If that perception is a bit outdated, it is nevertheless true that in looking for cultural comparisons between Canada and the United States, it is the metaphysical rather than the physical that must be examined. Well, not quite. Both Canadians and Americans have a lot of geography and it is the fashion in which that geography has been interpreted that provides each of these two nations with a culture — what Joyce Carol Oates meant by "metaphysical." As Northrop Frye once remarked, "The countries men live in feed their minds as much as their bodies: the bodily food they provide is absorbed in farms and cities; the mental in religion and the arts. In all countries this process of material and imaginative *digestion* goes on."[3] It is the manner and speed of imaginative digestion that offers a clue to parallels and differences between nations like Canada and the United States.

Let me begin at the beginning with a few, simple, obvious but important historical observations. First there was Europe which from the sixteenth to the twentieth century spread out through much of the world. In that process North America was Europeanized, its indigenous populations pressed to the margins as European peoples, institutions, and beliefs became dominant.[4] But a second process was also taking place: Europeans, peoples, institutions, and beliefs, were being Americanized. By that I mean that Europeans in North America came, at various rates, to think of themselves as distinctive, as people no longer of Europe, but rather as people of North America.

In the case of the United States, that process of Americanizing European culture was completed before the end of the nineteenth century. The decision to enter into that process was taken quite explicitly in 1776 with the Declaration of Independence. By approximately the centenary of Independence the process of nationalizing the community — a process which included a bloody civil war — was virtually complete. In Canada the process was far slower, for reasons that are commonplace. The country was founded on two distinct European cultures. One, the French, had been separated from Europe not by choice, but by conquest. The other, the English, was composed to a large extent by people, the United Empire Loyalists, who had come to Canada to avoid separation from Europe. Together these communities were small and divided in almost everything that counted: language, religion, and culture. They were united, mainly, in the conviction that they did not wish to become part of the United States. To both communities that appeared to mean retention of European ties: military, political, economic and, at least for the English Canadians, cultural ties. Unlike the people of the United

States, whose decision to Americanize European culture was being fulfilled in the nineteenth century, Canadians believed that an Americanized culture, one cut loose from its European roots, would destroy the distinction between Canada and the United States. Canada, then, was to be British North America, the name which remained on its constitution when it became the Dominion of Canada.

The United States was a revolutionary society which had a Declaration of Independence and a belief in self-evident truths about man's inalienable rights to "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." Canada was a conservative society with a British North America Act committed to "peace, order, and good government." The United States was a society that had evolved from history, and took its self-image from the past. For Canada borders were important — they defined its separateness from the United States. Greg Curnoe's "Close the 49th Parallel, etc.," could have been painted in the 1850's as easily as in the 1960's, though the style would have been British Imperial rather than American Pop. For Americans not borders but "frontiers" were what was important. Frontiers were not boundaries, but places to go, to expand. Above all they were places to go to become American — further away from European inflence. Frederick Jackson Turner, exponent of the frontier interpretation of history, summed up a century of American thought when he wrote in 1893 that "the frontier is the line of most rapid and effective Americanization. The wilderness masters the colonist. It finds him in a European dress, industries, tools, mode or travel, and thought. It takes him from the railroad car and puts him in the birch canoe. It strips off the garments of civilization, and arrays him in the hunting shirt and the moccasin. . . . Little by little he transforms the wilderness, but the outcome is not the old Europe. . . . The fact is that here is a new product that is American . . . the advance of the frontier has meant a steady movement away from the influence of Europe, a steady growth of independence on American lines." "Me impurturbe, standing at ease in Nature," was Walt Whitman's way of expressing his attitude to nature whose frontiers encompassed "the Mexican Sea and Kanada."[5]

Canada expanded, too. Economic imperatives and population pressures were present by the mid-nineteenth century as they were earlier in the United States. But the ideology — the rationalization for expansion — was revealingly different. Americans wanted to "Americanize" the west; Canadians were engaged in laying the basis for "the Britain of the west." The Canadian frontier would provide a place to "reproduce the British constitution with its marvellous heritage of balanced power and liberty; and to do this across the whole breadth of a continent — these are objects which are worth some labour, some sacrifice to obtain."[6] What that magazine writer of 1874 made explicit, was clearly implicit in Ralph Connor's novel, *The Foreigner* in 1909: the frontier was not an escape from Europe, but an extension of Europe.[7] In the United States, nature made man; in Canada, man civilized nature.

DURING MUCH OF THE NINETEENTH CENTUY Canadians, especially English Canadians, expressed an attitude toward nature that was markedly different from their United States contemporaries. A painter like Thomas Cole, or a writer like Ralph Waldo Emerson, looked at nature and found God. In his 1835 "Essay on American Scenery" Cole wrote that from nature could be learned the "laws by which the Eternal doth sublime and sanctify his works, that we may see the hidden glory veiled from vulgar eyes." In 1836 Cole painted a series of five pictures entitled "The Course of Empire." They were individually entitled "Savage State," "Pastoral State," "Consumation," "Destruction," and finally "Desolation." In each painting a lofty mountain symbolizes Nature. But only in the second panel, "Pastoral State," does a second, sublime, peak reach high above the first. That was the perfect state. Here was a visual version of Emerson's essay on "Nature," published in the same year. "There I feel nothing can befall me in life — no disgrace, no calamity (leaving me with my eyes) which Nature cannot repair. . . . I become a transparent eyeball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or parcel of God."[8]

These views contrast starkly with the fashion in which nature and civilization are presented in, for example, John Richardson's novel *Wacousta*. There civilization and morality are found within the military garrison, while chaos and terror lie outside, in nature. Here is the central image:

> When the eye turned woodward it fell heavily and without interest upon a dim and dusky point known to enter upon savage scenes and unexplored countries, whereas whenever it reposed upon the lake it was with an eagerness and energy that embraced the most vivid recollections of the past, and led the imagination buoyantly over every well remembered scene that had previously been traversed, and which must be traversed again before the land of the European could be pressed once more. The forest, in a word, formed the gloomy and impenetrable walls of a prison house, and the bright lake that lay before it the only portal through which happiness and liberty could again be secured.[9]

Where James Fenimore Cooper's Natty Bumppo might "light out to the west" in search of life, liberty, and happiness, Colonel de Haldimar obviously preferred the peace, order, and good government of Europe. And as has often enough been remarked, Mrs. Moodie, while *Roughing It in the Bush*, also had Richardson's sense of being surrounded — by the Irish, by "the ultra-republican spirit," by rampant disrespect for authority. Some might say by North America, where wilderness was a "prisonhouse."[10]

It was not merely the belief that moral order lay in European civilization, and moral chaos in nature, that prevented Mrs. Moodie and other nineteenth-century Canadian writers from leaving their garrison. It was also a conviction that they

would find nothing outside to stimulate their imaginations. Emerson and Thoreau urged their countrymen to look at nature, rather than to history, to find imaginative inspiration — "the landscape," Thoreau wrote, " . . . is earth's eye; looking into which the beholder measures the depth of his own nature."[11] Catharine Parr Traill, for all that she recognized and painted the beauties of Canadian nature, found nothing there for the imagination — largely because she was looking for something that was not there. "As to ghosts or spirits they appear totally banished from Canada," she wrote in *The Backwoods of Canada.* "This is too matter-of-fact a country for such supernaturals to visit. Here there are no historical associations, no legendary tales of those that come before us. Fancy would starve for marvellous food to keep her alive in the backwoods."[12]

Where Mrs. Moodie and Mrs. Traill looked to Europe to discover the mythologies necessary to feed their fancies, Thomas Cole, his biographer tells us, had concluded that "remoteness from the old world is not a disadvantage as many may suppose, but decidedly beneficial . . . Nature is the foundation on which to build and not past art."[13] Cole's Canadian contemporary, Joseph Legaré, used nature to depict historical themes and yearnings, for history was close to him. He was always conscious of his people's defeat in 1763, and the need to struggle to preserve a distinctive identity. If American romantic historians — Bancroft and Parkman, for example — extolled the making of a new nation in America, the French-Canadian historian F-X. Garneau called upon his people to preserve their Frenchness: which was made not on the frontier, but in Europe. Where Walt Whitman turned to nature as an inspiration for his songs about America's glorious achievements and unbounded future, Louis Fréchette and Charles Mair each turned to a version of Canadian history — not the same one — to inspire their nationalistic verses. Whitman wrote of "Democratic Vistas"; Fréchette of "Le légende d'un Peuple," the struggle to conserve its identity, Mair of "Tecumseh" and the struggle for the border.

Almost every European visitor to North America — Alexis de Tocqueville, Lord Bryce, André Siegfried — when they bothered to visit Canada — was struck by the contrast between the two nations. Tocqueville thought he found the *ancien régime* alive and well in Quebec, Bryce and Siegfried were both struck by the continuance of European institutions in an American context. Friedrich Engels, in 1888, wrote that "It is a strange transition from the States to Canada. First one imagines one is in Europe again, and one thinks one is in a positively retrogressing and decaying country."[14] This, of course, was a perceptive but limited observation. There was much about Canada that was unEuropean. Goldwin Smith, that pessimistic polemicist of the Grange, was totally convinced that Canada was, in reality, a North American nation by the 1890's, and that the British connection and British institutions only shallowly disguised reality.

Whatever the truth of Goldwin Smith's claim, the Canadian "metaphysic"

remained distinct from that of the United States. That was demonstrated by the Canadians' unwillingness to accept the logic of Smith's argument which was simply that since Canadians and Americans had a common environment, and a geography that united them, nature in the form of annexation should be allowed to run its course.[15] But accepting nature and rejecting tradition was exactly what Canada's whole history had refused to do. Americans had founded their identity on nature; they had nationalized that history. This is simply another way of stating what Ann Davis says in her splendid catalogue, *A Distant Harmony*, when she concludes her analysis of parallels in Canadian and American art with the observation that differing approaches to man and nature "encouraged an American concentration on the present and future and a Canadian interest in the past."[17]

If Americans during the nineteenth century "imaginatively digested" North America, Canadians were certainly beginning the same process. Even Mrs. Traill, for all of her sympathy with the poet's lament for the lack of a mythology, recognized another source of at least "amusement and interest." "If its [Canada's] volume of history is yet blank," she observed, "that of Nature is open, and eloquently marked by the finger of God. . . ."[18] Before the end of the century Archibald Lampman had grasped the full potential of this romantic theme. In a poem entitled "Freedom" he declared:

> Out of the heart of the city begotten
> Of the labour of men and their manifold hands,
> Whose souls, that were sprung from the earth in
> her morning,
> No longer regard or remember her warning,
> Whose hearts in the furnace of care have forgotten
> Forever the scent and the hue of her lands;
> . . . . . .
> Into the arms of our mother we come,
> Our broad strong mother, the innocent earth,
> Mother of all things beautiful blameless.
> Mother of hopes that her strength makes tameless,
> Where the voices of grief and of battle are dumb,
> And the whole world laughs with the light of
> her mirth.

Lampman also wrote a poem entitled "The City at the End of Things"[19] — which might have been composed after a viewing of Thomas Cole's "Destruction" — for it is a bitterly apocalyptic denunciation of industrial society's destruction of nature. That poem may offer a key to the drift of the Canadian imagination. As Canada became an increasingly industrial and urban society — a development which followed not far behind the United States — a new view of nature's meaning emerged, a view not dissimilar from one widely held in the

United States.[20] At its most elementary this new view presented nature as a physically and morally healthy alternative to the city, manifested itself in hiking clubs, summer camps and cottages, Boy Scouts and Alpine Clubs, and produced national parks and conservation. It can also be seen in the popularity of the animal stories of Ernest Thompson Seton and in the life and writings of Grey Owl. In 1910 a young Canadian painter named A. Y. Jackson expressed the unease that he shared with many other Canadians about the spread of machine civilization and its effects upon the artistic sensibility. "Some day the farm hand will go to work," he told his cousin,

> start the day by punching a clock in the Farm Products Co. Ltd., and then set about turning levers and pressing buttons. Even now the romantic milk maid has faded away, and cows are being milked by machinery. The ploughman weary homeward plods his way no more — its nine furrows at once and run by gasoline. And how on earth the artist is to find any sentiment in that kind of thing beats me. The big round cumulus clouds that pile around the horizon in the summer time and look so majestic and calm — just imagine when the aeroplanes and dirigibles get busy at 90 miles an hour; won't we see the poor old cumulus stirred up like custard, and flung all over the sky.[21]

It was out of that sense of unease about the way of the Canadian world that the philosophy of the Group of Seven was born.

THAT STORY HAS BEEN TOLD often enough, and well.[22] But four aspects of it deserve repeating with emphasis: the rejection of Europe, the discovery of the north, the influence of nineteenth-century American writing, and its relation to Canadian writing. Let me look at these aspects separately and briefly.

Over and over again members of the group insisted that what needed to be done, and what they were doing, was emancipating Canadian painting and Canadian culture, from Europe. F. E. Hausser made the point most emphatically when he wrote that "Our British and European connection, in fact, so far as creative expression is concerned, has been a millstone about our neck. . . . For Canada to find a complete expression of herself through art, a complete break with European traditions was necessary; a new type of artist was required, a type with sufficient creative equipment to initiate of its own through handling new materials by new methods and what was required more than technique as a deep rooted love of the country's natural environment." If Canada wanted to discover what was distinctive about its culture its artists would have to desert the cities, "Which are like all cities the world over," Arthur Lismer claimed, and get out into the natural environment.[23]

For the Group, especially for its most articulate spokesman, Lawren Harris, the

natural environment was the North. The discovery that Canadian nationality was connected with the north was hardly new.[24] But Harris' north had a special, even a religious, meaning. Writing in 1926 Harris declared that

> We in Canada are in different circumstances than the people in the United States. Our population is sparse, the psychic atmosphere comparatively clean, whereas the States fill up and the massed crowd a heavy psychic blanket over nearly all the land. We are on the fringe of the great North, and its living whiteness, its loneliness and replenishment, its resignations and release, its call and answers — its cleansing rhythms. It seems that the top of the continent will ever shed clarity into the growing race of America, and we Canadians being closest to this source seem destined to produce an art somewhat different from our southern fellows — an art more spacious, of greater living quiet, perhaps of more certain conviction of eternal values. We were not placed between the Southern teeming of men and the ample replenishing of North for nothing.[25]

Since Doug and Bob Mackenzie have taught us that the "comparatively clean psychic atmosphere" of the great, white north has long since been polluted by beer and back bacon, we now find Harris' messianic rhetoric rather naive, to say the least. But in a twentieth-century Theosophical way, characteristic enough of Canadian culture of the time,[26] Harris was rationalizing nature, the north in particular, for Canadians, as American artists and writers had done a century earlier.

By the time that Harris was writing, the mid-1920's, American writers had already developed an attitude toward nature that rejected the pantheism of Lampman, and the theosophy of Harris. In a poem published as early as 1890 Emily Dickinson had written of a Darwinian nature:

> Apparently with no surprise
> To any happy flower,
> The Frost beheads it at its play —
> In accidental power —
> The blonde assassin passes on —
> The Sun proceeds unmoved
> To measure off another Day
> For an approving God.

Thirty years later in 1919 Wallace Stevens published a poem "Anecdote to a Jar," in which a jar symbolizes civilization on a mountain top surrounded by "slovenly nature." At the end of the poem, in direct contrast to Thomas Cole's "Course of Empire," the jar, civilization, "took dominion everywhere."[27]

It was not American poets like Dickinson and Stevens who impressed the poets who dominated Canadian art in the 1920's. Rather it was American writers of an earlier period. While Walt Whitman had always had a following in Canada — Richard Maurice Bucke, the London psychologist and mystic had been his biographer and literary executor — it was not until the twentieth century, when

European traditions were being discarded and nature discovered that he came into his own. Searching to find a way to describe Tom Thomson, whom he mythologized as a man who "had nothing to do with Europe," Arthur Lismer described him as "a sort of Walt Whitman, a more rugged Thoreau." Emily Carr read Whitman and "learned heaps of him by heart," and also carefully perused Emerson's essay on Nature — all at the urging of members of the Group of Seven. Though engaged in a rather different artistic enterprise than the group, David Milne also took inspiration in nineteenth-century American writing, specifically Thoreau's *Walden* which he once described as producing "an explosion in my mind."[28] What these American writers provided for some of Canada's artists was something they had already provided for their American contemporaries: they turned attention away from Europe and inherited culture, toward nature as the source of an indigenous culture.

By the 1920's, then, an aesthetic revolution was underway. That revolution brought modernism in culture and a North American perspective. The European tradition, according to Harris, "was totally inappropriate to the expression of the character, the power and clarity and rugged elemental beauty of Canada."[29] And that same discovery was being made by a new generation of Canadian poets. Where Mrs. Traill with her European way of seeing could find no mythology in Canada to sustain her imagination, F. R. Scott concluded that she had looked in the wrong place. He wrote:

> Who could read old myths
> By this lake
> Where the wild ducks paddle forth
> At daybreak?

For this new generation of painters and poets and writers, Canada had to seek its metaphysic in nature rather than in history; "Geological time," Scott wrote, "made ancient civilization but yesterday's picnic."[30]

Yet Scott realized, as perhaps the Group of Seven did not, that nature alone was no answer for Canadians in search of a culture in the modern world. Indeed Scott knew very well that while nature had to be assimilated in culture, it alone could not make a culture. That, in part, was the meaning of his wonderfully satiric poem ironically entitled "The Call of the Wild," doubtlessly taken from the he-man American writer, Jack London. Scott wrote:

> Make me over, Mother Nature,
> Take the knowledge from my eyes,
> Put me back among the pine trees
> Where the simple are the wise.
>
> Clear away all evil influence,
> That can hurt me from the States,
> Keep me pure among the beaver
> With un-Freudian loves and hates

Where my Conrads are not Aiken,
And John Bishop's Peales don't sound
Where the Ransom's are not Crowing
And the Ezras do not Pound.[31]

Scott, and those who thought like him, knew that the Canadian imagination could not reject history any more than it could reject the modernism of Ezra Pound, at least if it wished to have a living culture. But the history that would inform Canadian culture would be of Canada's own making. That is essentially the meaning of Scott's well-known poem, first published in 1946, entitled "Laurentian Shield." It brings together nature and history in a way that finally nationalizes nature in Canada. The story begins with the new land:

Inarticulate, arctic
Not written on by history, empty as paper.

But the land searches for an appropriate voice, a way of expressing itself. From the "prewords of prehistory" it moves to the words of history: the story of the exploitation of Canadian resources by fur trade, gold seeker and monopolistic mining companies.

But a deeper note is sounding, heard in the mines,
The scattered camps and mills, a language of life,
And what will be written in the full culture of occupation,
Will come, presently, tomorrow,
From millions whose hands can turn this rock into children.[32]

"THE FULL CULTURE OF OCCUPATION," man and the land, history and nature. Perhaps this is what we find in the paintings of Carl Shaefer and Charles Burchfield in whom civilization and nature seem to unite in harmony. Here are two artists whom Ann Davis has described as painters of the rural mood. But reading her perceptive text it is evident that something more is needed to capture the way of seeing that is found in these paintings. Neither strains to present nationalist claims, a theme that runs through many of the earlier paintings, more persistently in the insecure Canadian ones than in the confident American works. Those issues seem settled. Burchfield had no time for nationalist art: "the American scene is no better or worse than other scenes, and the worthwhile artist doesn't care about a subject for its national character," he maintained. Though he moved from place to place, he had a powerful sense of locality, a conviction that real roots, roots that nurtured the imagination, drew on a specific locale. That was a conviction which he shared with his Canadian friend, Carl Schaefer. "Returning to Hanover in the summers and Christmas time, in

the early thirties," Schaefer remembered, "where I discovered my own heritage, the land, man in harmony with nature."[33]

Here are two artists who, like their predecessors, needed to belong to an identifiable community. In the United States in the nineteenth century and in Canada well into the twentieth, they called that community a "nation." In reality, however, each painter interpreted not a nation, but a part of a nation: even the Group of Seven was as regional as the Laurentian shield. Quebec art, for example, had few affinities with the Group's version of nationalism.[34] Burchfield and Schaefer knew that locality fed their imaginations. In that they demonstrated — as a novelist like William Faulkner or a poet like Robert Lowell in the United States, a W. O. Mitchell or an Al Purdy, to say nothing of an Anne Hébert or a Roch Carrier, in Canada — that imagination and identity, as Northrop Frye claims, are rooted in locality.[35] Once, in 1963, when William Kurelek returned to paint on his father's farm in Manitoba he wrote about what that meant. "The vastness of the prairies with occasional clumps of poplar bushes really gives me a feeling of communion," he remarked. "No one seems to understand why I am fascinated with this place, not even the local people. Only I it seems can express it though others may feel it inarticulately."[36] David Milne at Boston Corners or Palgrave felt that sense of communion. So did Emily Carr who, as Doris Shadbolt has shown, through "her prolonged contact and empathy with one segment of the world's skin has led her to touch the pulse that animates the whole."[37] Even an automatist like Paul-Emile Borduas, who had wandered from Sainte-Hilaire, to Montreal, then on to New York and finally Paris, recognized the source of his imaginative nourishment. Depressed and ill in 1958 he wrote that "a little hunting and fishing, a little affection in my luminously beautiful country would be the correct treatment."[38] Even in his most abstract work Borduas remained close to the mountain at Sainte-Hilaire.

What Burchfield and especially Schaefer also demonstrate is the reintegration of Europe into North American art. Having come to terms with North America and nature, it was no longer necessary to reject Europe and history. That tension, which sometimes made spokesmen for the Group of Seven sound shrill and even silly, was resolved by a painter like Schaefer who readily recognized his indebtedness not only to Arthur Lismer and J. E. H. MacDonald but also to Dürer, Hirschvogel, and Altdorfer.[39] He realized, as Jacques de Tonnancour observed, that "art is not made after nature, but after art and with nature."[40]

The realization that nature and history together provided nourishment for the imagination allowed American and Canadian artists more fully to digest their countries. Through their imaginations, and in the different ways that their separate histories drew them, they were making North America their own. "An art must grow and flower in a land," Lawren Harris wrote in the 1920's, "before the country will be a real home for its people."[41] And making a home meant creating

that metaphysical border that Joyce Carol Oates knew was more real than the physical one. Artists — poets, painters, novelists, even historians — provide new maps, new ways of seeing north and south. As Al Purdy put it:

> A. Y. Jackson for instance
> 83 years old
> half way up a mountain
> standing in a patch of snow
> to paint a picture that says
> "Look here
> You've never seen this country
> it's not the way you thought it was
> Look again."[42]

Or Paul-Emile Borduas in his *Refus globale*: "Les frontières de nos rêves ne sont plus le même" — "The frontiers of our dreams are no longer what they were."[43]

NOTES

[1] Joyce Carol Oates, *Crossing the Border* (New York: Fawcett Crest, 1974), pp. 11, 12, 16.

[2] Joyce Carol Oates, "One Half of Robertson Davies," *The New Republic*, 178 (15 April 1978), 22-25.

[3] Northrop Frye, *The Bush Garden* (Toronto: Anansi, 1971), p. 199.

[4] Ramsay Cook, "The Social and Economic Frontier in America," in Howard Lamar and Leonard Thompson, *The Frontier in History* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1981), pp. 175-208.

[5] F. J. Turner, *Frontier and Section* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1961), p. 39; Walt Whitman, *Collected Poetry and Selected Prose* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1959), p. 11.

[6] "Review of the Times," *New Dominion Monthly* (1874), cited by Doug Owram, *Promise of Eden* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1980), p. 127.

[7] Ramsay Cook, *The Maple Leaf Forever* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1977), pp. 148-57.

[8] Cited by Barbara Novak, *Nature and Culture* (New York: Oxford, 1980), p. 38; Perry Miller, *Nature's Nation* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1967), p. 205; Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature Addresses and Lectures* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1903), p. 10.

[9] John Richardson, *Wacousta* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1964), p. 159.

[10] Susanna Moodie, *Roughing it in the Bush* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1962), p. 237.

[11] Cited by Novak, p. 41.

[12] Catharine Parr Traill, *The Backwoods of Canada* (London: C. Knight, 1836), p. 153. In this section I have benefitted from Marcia B. Kline, *Beyond the Land Itself. Views of Nature in Canada and the United States* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1970).

[13] Cited by Ann Davis, *A Distant Harmony* (Winnipeg: Winnipeg Art Gallery, 1982), p. 3.

[14] Cited by Cook, p. 156.

[15] Goldwin Smith, *Canada and the Canadian Question* (Toronto: Hunter, Rose, 1891).

[16] Carl Berger, *The Sense of Power* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1970).

[17] Davis, p. 181.

[18] Traill, p. 155.

[19] D. C. Scott, *Poems of Archibald Lampman* (Toronto: Morang, 1900), pp. 6, 17, 179.

[20] George Altmeyer, "Three Ideas of Nature in Canada," *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 11 (August 1976), 21-36; Douglas Cole, "Artists, Patrons and Public: An Enquiry into the Success of the Group of Seven," *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 13 (Summer 1978), 69-78; Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1967).

[21] AGO, N. G. Jackson Papers, A. Y. Jackson to cousin, 23 September 1910.

[22] Ann Davis, "The Apprehended Vision: The Philosophy of the Group of Seven" (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, York Univ., 1973).

[23] F. G. Hausser, *A Canadian Art Movement: The Story of the Group of Seven* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1926), pp. 13, 17; Arthur Lismer, "Art and Life," in *Foundations: Building the City of God* (Toronto: SCM, 1927), p. 74.

[24] Carl Berger, "The True North Strong and Free," in Peter Russell, *Nationalism in Canada* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill, 1966), pp. 3-26.

[25] Lawren Harris, "Revelation of Art in Canada," *The Canadian Theosophist*, 7 (15 July 1926), 85-86.

[26] Michèle Lacombe, "Theosophy and the Canadian Idealist Tradition: A Preliminary Exploration," *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 17 (Summer 1982), 100-18.

[27] Thomas A. Johnson, ed., *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1960), pp. 667-68; *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens* (Boston: Knopf, 1972), p. 76.

[28] Arthur Lismer, "Tom Thomson: Canadian Painter, 1877-1917," *The Educational Review of the Province of Quebec*, 80, no. 3 (1954), 170, 172; Maria Tippett, *Emily Carr* (Toronto: Oxford, 1979), pp. 175-76; "David Milne His Journal and Letters of 1920 and 1921," *Artscanada* (30 August 1973), p. 22.

[29] Lawren Harris, "The Group of Seven in Canadian History," *Report of the Canadian Historical Association* (1948), p. 29.

[30] Sandra Djwa, " 'A New Soil and a Sharp Sun': The Landscape in Modern Canadian Poetry," *Modernist Studies. Literature and Culture, 1920-1940*, 2, no. 2 (1977), cited p. 10; See also Sandra Djwa, "F. R. Scott," *Canadian Poetry*, no. 4 (Spring 1979), pp. 1-16. In an uncanny way Scott here seems to be replying to Mrs. Traill who wrote that "instead of poring with mysterious awe among our curious limestone rocks, that are often singularly grouped together, we refer them to the geologist to exercise his skill in accounting for their appearance: instead of investing them with the solemn characters of ancient temples or heathen altars, we look upon them with the curious eye of natural philosophy alone." Traill, *Backwoods*, pp. 153-54.

[31] *The Collected Poems of F. R. Scott* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1981), p. 255.

[32] Ibid., p. 175.

[33] Davis, *A Distant Harmony*, pp. 175, 169.

[34] François-Marc Gagnon, "Painting in Quebec in the Thirties," *The Journal of Canadian Art History*, 3, nos. 1 & 2 (Fall 1976), 2-4.

[35] Frye, pp. ii-iii.

[36] Ramsay Cook, *William Kurelek. A Prairie Boy's Visions* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1980), cited p. 37.

[37] Doris Shadbolt, *The Art of Emily Carr* (Toronto and Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1979), p. 196.

[38] Paul-Emile Borduas, *Ecrits/Writings, 1942-58* (Halifax: Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1978), p. 153. In an unpublished paper entitled "Paul-Emile Borduas et le Paysage de Sainte-Hilaire," François-Marc Gagnon argues convincingly that the mountain at Sainte-Hilaire informs Borduas' most *automatiste* work. LeMoine Fitzgerald wrote that "subconsciously the prairies and skies get into most things I do no matter how abstract they may be." Cited by Ann Davis, "Lionel LeMoine Fitzgerald A North American Artist," in *Lionel LeMoine Fitzgerald The Development of an Artist* (Winnipeg: Winnipeg Art Gallery, 1978), p. 63.

[39] Davis, *A Distant Harmony*, pp. 145, 149.

[40] Cited by Ann Davis, *Frontiers of Our Dreams. Quebec Painting in the 1940's and 1950's* (Winnipeg: Winnipeg Art Gallery, 1979), p. 14.

[41] Cited by Eli Mandel, "The Inward, Northward Journey of Lawren Harris," *Artscanada* (October-November 1978), p. 20.

[42] Al Purdy, *Selected Poems* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1972), p. 77.

[43] Borduas, p. 46.

TWO POEMS

Peter Stevens

YORKSHIRE SPRING

Over the ragged nests, fists hammered
into winter-brittle trees, then thrust
lost, knuckles torn to splinters, the rooks
are riding the high wind on frayed wings.
With a blunt clatter of wings and wood
they perch rocking on the meagre limbs.
Caught in wind's bluff bombast, their harsh throats
rasp dishevelled scatter of defiance.

The sky churns in grey slabs — memories
of snow dimmed to drizzle: late slivers
skimmed off early in the day, then thinned
to sleet and rain now streaming down hills.

The wind is thick in unsteady gusts
like slammed-in-face doors, accommodating
only to itself.

The drystone walls
reach across the sodden slopes, fingers
gripping, some crumbling in the effort
to stop the slither back to winter.

The morning snow's unravelling veil
stretches taut across the upper hills,
while old snow drifts to oblivion
in clumsy snuggles under the walls.

Sheep are clumped like the rocky outcrops,
their fleeces a straggle of lichen;
they wait unmoved under the bustle
in the trees, in racing clouds that shred
to tatters on the rough horizon.

They lie unflinching, black mouths moving
round and round, monotonous chewing
inexorable as time, waiting
for the lambs.

MARCH WEATHER

I

Dried off and belly full
of milk, a new lamb'll
take anything this place
can give it. His round face
sun-scorched, with an eye-flash
he wiped beer-creamed moustache
but words and looks belied
the cantankerous wind outside.

II

In York Minster the choir
rehearsed; hymns soared higher,
higher till they faltered
where windows had altered
light from the sun. The heat
drained thin; on stone-cold feet
we stood, anthems unheard
but flicked like a small bird
through trees in clear fly-ways
through arches of vast praise.

III

Close to seventy years
since he's seen them, yet here's
my father's memory
calling them back clearly:
they're Ripon Cathedral's
finely chiselled choirstalls,
wooden candles or spears
raised against ambushing fears.
In this silence, unseen
shells from nineteen sixteen
burst — my father untried
in war, his youth denied,
sent to train here, to shoot,
ask no question, the brute
disciplined bayonet
symbol of command to set
against soldiers who'd failed —
misconduct in the field,
in no man's land they ran,
the whole troop to a man,
sentenced in shame, to rot
forgotten, shambling, drilled
broken rather than killed.
My father's task: to stand
firm on this bare island,
desolate prison camp
where he held like a lamp
in his mind the carved art
of Ripon, that true heart
of the human, not this
unmanning Judas kiss.

IV

Afternoon weather breaks
into sunshine; light takes
to flooding up the slopes
laddered down from clouds, lopes,
till shadows race again;
cloud-ambush breaks in rain,
the fields a sodden green.
And look, till now unseen
up the valley a charge
of boiling mist in large
swirl of ice, needling sleet
like gas stinging to beat
into eyes, tears, unmanned,
battling the wind's command.
Hunched against this bluster
we wonder how we'll muster
strength, dry off, save face,
carve life from this hard place.

POEM OF PROBABILITIES

Roger Nash

Today, everything seems quite likely.
The mountains are entirely on the cards, kneeling
peaceably by the sea, with tides smoothing
their knees into pebbles. And the sea is, as always,
highly probable, down to the smallest
of its waves, which are never too young to be legally
attractive. In such clear air, love
or dislike at first sight are equally
possible; and a fox with white albino
eyes is nothing unusual, as it crosses
the tracks for the tenth generation of its line,
limping with the responsibility. Even
the lighthouse looks unavoidable, though it falls
down twice a century. In town,
reflections in shop windows predictably
cast people onto the streets. Ten
to one, our doubly mortgaged homes
are dreams in the mind of the surrounding forest,
which may any time wake up.

SAMUEL HEARNE & THE LANDSCAPES OF DISCOVERY

I. S. MacLaren

> Like men of every age, we see in Nature what we have been taught to look for, we feel what we have been prepared to feel.
>
> - MARJORIE NICOLSON[1]

ALTHOUGH THE LITERARY MERIT of Samuel Hearne's *A Journey . . . to the Northern Ocean* (1795) has been recognized, and while the narrative has been deemed "one of the most sophisticated early journals and narratives," a search has not yet been undertaken for demonstrations of this sophistication in either the explorer's writing style or the ways in which his pen and pencil describe and depict the terrain through which he conducted his truly astonishing feats of exploration.[2]

Only six years after the publication of Hearne's *Journey*, Alexander Mackenzie published his *Voyages*. In his Preface, he recognized that, as a fur trader like Hearne, he was "better calculated to perform the voyages, arduous as they might be, than to write an account of them."[3] Not a candidate for literary fame, he is anxious that his narratives manifest sufficient "charms of embellished narrative, or animated description" to suit the demands being made on travel literature by the British readers of his and Hearne's day. These demands issued, in large part, out of a taste for landscape tours which had developed during the course of the second half of the eighteenth century. A book publisher could not afford to bring out a book of travel which ignored the prevailing expectations of treatments of nature in terms of the Sublime and the Picturesque. The taste for illustrations of the Sublime in nature had been greatly influenced by, among many others, Edmund Burke, in his *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757), and by Milton, in the landscapes of Hell in *Paradise Lost*. For a taste in the Picturesque, the eighteenth-century Englishman was indebted to many writers, but to none more than William Gilpin, whose six published regional tours of Britain (tours made 1769-1776, and published in 1782, 1786, 1789, 1798, 1804, and 1809) taught the reader how to view nature as a series of individually unified landscape paintings. Not only was this taste for the Sublime and the Picturesque in descriptions of nature firmly founded, it was also widespread. As John Barrell has stated, "in the later eighteenth century, it became impossible for anyone with an aesthetic interest in landscape to look at the

countryside without applying [principles of landscape composition], *whether he knew he was doing so or not.*"[4]

The habit of seeing tracts of land as landscapes — sublime or picturesque — had become entrenched in the British understanding during Hearne's lifetime (1745-1792). Both the traveller and the reader shared this habit. When voyaging abroad, whether to Europe or North America, Hearne, like his contemporaries (including Mackenzie, a discussion of whose aesthetic response to nature must be undertaken in its own right) took this habit with him, whether he knew he was doing so or not. By deploying the taxonomies of the Sublime and the Picturesque which he shared with his readers, this habit permitted Hearne to describe foreign natural scenes in terms of or in contrast to landscapes familiar to him and his readers. This process of the identification of nature bears an affinity with the purpose of astronomical measurement: just as the determination of longitude and latitude told the traveller/explorer where he was in relation to Greenwich, so the habitual description of terrain by means of the Sublime and the Picturesque told him and his readers where he was relative to the landscapes roundabout Greenwich and the rest of England and Scotland. As the aesthetics of landscape appreciation had grown up with the science of cartography in the second half of the eighteenth century, Hearne's habitual identification of terrain in terms of these two eighteenth-century modes of perceiving and describing nature demonstrates nothing more, in a sense, than his affinity with his age. And, while his narrative displays several unique instances of landscape description which combine and adapt aspects of the Sublime and the Picturesque in order to picture thoroughly unique natural scenes, it remains clear that his geographical awareness is generally controlled by the modes of perceiving nature which he shared with his age. During the three journeys which he undertook from Prince of Wales' Fort across the modern Northwest Territories between 1769 and 1772, and between the ages of twenty-four and twenty-seven, he found and described, as Marjorie Nicolson suggests all observers of nature find and describe, what he had been taught to look for.

In his first, aborted, journey Hearne agonizes over the sight of the Barrens upon which he is about to venture. He records the deprivation he feels at the loss of recognizable signs of external nature in a style which he calls, as if in accordance with James Beattie's dictum (and the known standard) for the achievement of sublime Truth in literature, "plain and unadorned."[5] While the tundra confronts him, his inhospitable Cree "guide" chooses to desert him. Thus, amidst "the cold . . . now very intense, our small stock of English provisions all expended, and not the least thing to be got on the bleak hills we

had for some time been walking on," Hearne watches Chawchinahaw and his mixed "Crew" of Chipewyans and Cree

> set out toward the South West, making the woods ring with their laughter, and [leaving] us to consider of our unhappy situation, near two hundred miles from Prince of Wales's Fort, all heavily laden, and our strength and spirits greatly reduced by hunger and fatigue.

The sublime prospects engage the reader at this juncture: the view looking on to the Barrens to the north — Hearne's intended direction — offers only, to reverse Coleridge's definition of the Sublime, a boundless or endless nothingness;[6] to the south lie the woods permeated with the threat of the Indians' "diabolical villainy," and, beyond, the Fort whose symbol as a sanctuary is undermined both by Hearne's remarks on Governor Norton's incompetence and by his personal animosity towards him, as well as by its location, though further south, on the edge of the Barrens. Thus, Hearne, William Isbister, and Thomas Merriman, together with a few Indians, are caught at the end of November 1769 in a void that is utterly foreign to them; and, although Hearne states that "our situation at that time, though very alarming, would not permit us to spend much time in reflection," the reader's situation is not unlike what it would be in the sublime gothic Romances that were contemporaries of Hearne's *Journey* — a situation permitting what Edmund Burke, in *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), considered the key element of the literary Sublime: reflection on the predicament of an innocent, vulnerable character.[7]

Proceeding on to the Barrens, Hearne encounters a taxonomical crisis, the type of situation in the external world which, as the geographer Yi-Fu Tuan has argued, in *Man and Nature* (1971), threatens no less than one's whole sense of self.[8] No vertical elements of landscape, such as trees, are present to reflect the mind's learned perception of spatial definition. But Hearne experiences not just the absence of phenomena whose presence would permit use of the British taxonomies of landscape composition: his dilemma is compounded by the absence of a common language among him and his "guides," the absence of sources of food, and the absence of conventional natural provisions of shelter. The threat of alienation, in the sense that the explorer cannot determine his relation with his surroundings, becomes actual and the threat of annihilation real. Faced with the prospect of consummate desolation, Hearne has no recourse but to return to the Fort. Likewise, on the second journey, in 1770, the damaging of the quadrant precludes the establishment of any conventionally verifiable point of reference, a situation which again leaves Hearne destitute. His reader participates vicariously in these experiences, some of the first in non-fictional eighteenth-century British literature that isolate an individual in a foreign terrain to such a sublime extreme.

The first two expeditions of near disaster act as a prelude to the third, successful journey. In terms of narrative style, Hearne exploits the sublime aspects of the tundra encountered on the first two expeditions as the backdrop to the main body of the narrative. Because the anxious tone of the first episode dominates the journal from the outset, many of the subsequent episodes can be conveyed effectively by the use of understatement. For example, the semi-barren land along Hearne's Little Fish River (probably the Thlewiaza and Thaanne Rivers, N.W.T., at approximately 61°-61°30′N) is characterized simply as, "like all the rest which lie to the North of Seal River [in northern Manitoba, at approximately 58°45′N], hilly, and full of rocks. . . ." In this region of hundreds of square miles, Hearne encounters a solitary Indian family, the description of whom has helped as much as any passage in literature to encourage the perception of the Barrens as an inhospitable desert.

> Those people were the first strangers whom we had met since we left the Fort [forty-six days previously], though we had travelled several hundred miles; which is a proof that this part of the country is but thinly inhabited. It is a truth well known to the natives, and doubtless founded on experience, that there are many very extensive tracts of land in those parts, which are incapable of affording support to any number of the human race even during the short time they are passing through them, in the capacity of migrants, from one place to another; much less are they capable of affording a constant support to those who might wish to make them their fixed residence at any season of the year. It is true, that few rivers or lakes in those parts are entirely destitute of fish; but the uncertainty of meeting with a sufficient supply for any considerable time together, makes the natives very cautious how they put their whole dependance on that article, as it has too frequently been the means of many hundreds being starved to death.

More than dissuading the governors of the Hudson's Bay Company from establishing posts in the eastern Arctic mainland, this wintertime account evokes a stark prospect that is sufficiently vivid to reawaken both the memories of the disappearance of the Knight voyage up the west side of Hudson Bay fifty years earlier (1721) and fears dating from the seventeenth century of desolate regions as the natural manifestations of God's wrath at man's sin. Hearne, who had visited the sublime ruins at Marble Island and had exhumed the bodies of the Knight expedition in the summer of the year of his first expedition (1769), emphasizes the "truth" and "certainty" of the picture he paints, as he equates visual emptiness with infertility, aridity, and uninhabitability. For the reader back amidst the variegated splendour of England, such an equation confirms the implication of the Picturesque aesthetic, that visual variety in landscape alone provides a comfortable environment. (Indeed, Hearne's equation anticipates the equation of the absence of trees with aridity made in the surveys of the Canadian Prairies undertaken in the nineteenth century by Henry Youle Hind and Captain John Palliser.) Hearne describes the tundra as "dreary" and "wretched"; the

lands about Churchill River near Hudson Bay as "nothing but a hot burning sand, like the Spanish lines at Gibraltar"; and one mine on the Coppermine River as a "ruins" comprising "an entire jumble of rocks and gravel, which has been rent many ways by an earthquake."

Not only would Hearne's late-eighteenth-century reader appreciate the image of the earthquake as the voice of God's displeasure with man, he would also relish Hearne's use of the ruins motif. As a literary and artistic device dating at least from the paintings of Claude [Gellee] Lorrain and Salvator Rosa, ruins lent to a scene a romantic effect by juxtaposing a present visual chaos with the suggestion of a past beauty of secular, religious, or mythical import. In the case of Hearne's view of the Coppermine River, it is geographical beauty which has been ruined. But Hearne also employs the motif inversely in his account of the Coppermine River, in order to describe, not a chaos but, equally sublime, a uniform geography whose appearance he attributes to the ruination of a previous geography:

> The general course of the [Coppermine] river is about North by East; but in some places it is very crooked, and its breadth varies from twenty yards to four or five hundred. The banks are in general a solid rock, both sides of which correspond so exactly with each other, as to leave no doubt that the channel of the river has been caused by some terrible convulsion of nature; and the stream is supplied by a variety of little rivulets that rush down the sides of the hills, occasioned chiefly by the melting of the snow.

Close topographical survey gives way to an imaginatively forceful response which colours the scene being depicted. But there is, as well, a measure of pathetic fallacy at work in this description since its imaginative force derives, in part, from the preceding episode, the ruination of the Esquimaux encampment by Hearne's Chipewyan and a band of Copper Indians: the description of the river follows the account of the massacre on its banks. It may be that Hearne's experience of that violence governs his perception, as it did his survey, since the whole account was added to the original MS after 1783.[9] At any rate, the massacre represents a superb adaptation of Salvator Rosa's sublime convention of the banditti ambush, while providing the North with one of its first historical ruins.

> The land was so situated that we walked under cover of the rocks and hills till we were within two hundred yards of the tents. There we lay in ambush for some time, watching the motions of the Esquimaux. . . .
>
> While we lay in ambush, the Indians performed the last ceremonies which were thought necessary before the engagement. These chiefly consisted in painting their faces; some all black, some all red, and others with a mixture of the two; and to prevent their hair from blowing into their eyes, it was either tied before and behind, and on both sides, or else cut short all round. . . .
>
> By the time the Indians had made themselves thus completely frightful, it was near one o'clock in the morning of the seventeenth [July 1771]; when finding all

the Esquimaux quiet in their tents, they rushed forth from their ambuscade, and fell on the poor unsuspecting creatures, unperceived till close at the very eves of their tents, when they soon began the bloody massacre, while I stood neuter in the rear.

In a few seconds the horrible scene commenced; it was shocking beyond description; the poor unhappy victims were surprised in the midst of their sleep, and had neither time nor power to make any resistance; men, women, and children, in all upward of twenty, ran out of their tents stark naked, and endeavoured to make their escape; but the Indians having possession of all the landside, to no place could they fly for shelter. One alternative only remained, that of jumping into the river; but as none of them attempted it, they all fell a sacrifice to Indian barbarity!

The shrieks and groans of the poor expiring wretches were truly dreadful; and my horror was much increased at seeing a young girl, seemingly about eighteen years of age, killed so near me, that when the first spear was stuck into her side she fell down at my feet, and twisted round my legs, so that it was with difficulty that I could disengage myself from her dying grasps. As two Indian men pursued this unfortunate victim, I solicited very hard for her life; but the murderers made no reply till they had stuck both their spears through her body, and transfixed her to the ground. They then looked me sternly in the face, and began to ridicule me, by asking if I wanted an Esquimaux wife; and paid not the smallest regard to the shrieks and agony of the poor wretch, who was twining round their spears like an eel! Indeed, after receiving much abusive language from them on the occasion, I was at length obliged to desire that they would be more expeditious in dispatching their victim out of her misery, otherwise I should be obliged, out of pity, to assist in the friendly office of putting an end to the existence of a fellow-creature who was so cruelly wounded. On this request being made, one of the Indians hastily drew his spear from the place where it was first lodged, and pierced it through her breast near the heart. The love of life, however, even in this most miserable state, was so predominant, that though this might justly be called the most merciful act that could be done for the poor creature, it seemed to be unwelcome, for though much exhausted by pain and loss of blood, she made several efforts to ward off the friendly blow. My situation and the terror of my mind at beholding this butchery, cannot easily be conceived, much less described; though I summed up all the fortitude I was master of on the occasion, it was with difficulty that I could refrain from tears; and I am confident that my features must have feelingly expressed how sincerely I was affected at the barbarous scene I then witnessed; even at this hour I cannot reflect on the transactions of that horrid day without shedding tears.

"Barren hills and wide open marshes" entirely constitute the land roundabout the scene of the massacre, but what makes the situation of the Equimaux "very convenient for surprising them" is its location at the foot of a fall, "where the river was contracted to the breadth of about twenty yards," between walls of red sandstone. The roar of the river over the falls thus assists the Indians in their ambush as much as the cover provided by the treeless hills does. For the English reader, the desolate tracts and the roaring cataract provide a sublime landscape proper, in his view, to acts of barbarity. Moreover, Hearne sets the scene "near one o'clock in the morning," suggesting, as his English reader would expect, that the

subsequent tragedy is enacted in darkness. Significantly, only in his record of the day does Hearne remind his reader of the brightness of a July night above the Arctic circle when no hour of complete darkness occurs.[10]

An accomplished dramatist of the scene, Hearne pauses after setting the scene in order to heighten audience suspence. He details the preparatory rituals undertaken by the Indians to an extent sufficient to redirect his reader's attention. Then, in nine swift sentences he springs the action. Clauses build upon clauses a momentum of their own, apparently no more under Hearne's control than is his "undisciplined rabble" of a crew.[11] The narrator, able neither to control his charges nor to retreat from the scene of genocide, experiences a paralysis from which he proves incapable of extricating himself. Like Burke's witness to a sublime scene, he can only reflect on the predicament of others while suspended "neuter in the rear." This close association of the authorial spectator with the reader is not unintentional: viewed from Hearne's prospect, the "engagement" occurs at the foot of the wildest falls on the Coppermine River, thus presenting a picture of shadowed, horizontal, criminal action in the foreground that is set against a wild, vertically-structured, remotely-located landscape background whose waterfall, facing the northwest, catches, with the effect of *chiaroscuro*, the sun's rays — in short, a scene not unlike many of Salvator Rosa's paintings.

The horror is noticeably heightened by the pathetic epithet of "poor unsuspecting *creatures*" (emphasis added) for the dormant Eskimos. As well, the descriptions of the demise of the Eskimo girl, a "poor creature," "fellow-creature," and an "eel," detail a further horror for Hearne as the picture of the massacre bursts out on its spectator. Like Samuel Richardson's Clarissa, Walpole's Matilda, or Radcliffe's Emily (who, introduced in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* only a year before the publication of Hearne's *Journey*, must have been fresh in the British readers' minds), Hearne's innocent eighteen-year-old attempts to flee a life-threatening pursuit. But in Hearne's narrative, the literary emotion is superseded by a waking nightmare, the universally-experienced dream of an indescribable serpentine creature appending itself to one's limb, seeking to derive succour from it. The innocent heroine for whose plight Hearne feels guilt, and the frightful image of an eel for which he feels only repulsion, together cast the narrator and — because his former spectatorial role allied the narrator with him — the reader into a bedlam of emotion amidst a chaos of slaughter. As narrator, Hearne prolongs the girl's life while, as participant, he seeks to terminate it mercifully. The tension arising out of this simultaneity serves to produce an interminableness appropriate to a nightmare sensation, and demonstrates Hearne's keen awareness of how conducible his experiences were to the conventions of the literary Sublime practised in late-eighteenth-century Britain. The whole scene is superbly staged by a narrator well accustomed to both native and, by virtue of his eleven years' service (1756-1766) as midshipman under Viscount Hood's wartime command,

European bloodshed. The dramatic picture culminates in a pathetic, but wholly conventional note — Hearne shedding retrospective tears at the recollection of the massacre.

MUCH OF THE TERRAIN over which Hearne travels, and some of the incidents which occur, can be represented to the English reader only in terms of the taxonomy of the Sublime. But, below the treeless tundra, the landscapes of the boreal forest/tundra transition zone differ sufficiently, not least because of the regular presence of such conifers as the black spruce, to warrant attempts to organize terrain by means of the taxonomy of the Picturesque. En route to and from the dreary and wretched wastes and the scenes of violence on the tundra, Hearne discovers more appealing and ordered scenes of open woodland. Not surprisingly (both because the Picturesque depends upon vegetation for spatial organization, and because, to a traveller, trees signify shelter, fire, and hot food), when Hearne finds himself below the tree-line, his eye notices and organizes landscapes more readily. The following one-sentence paragraph from the record of the third expedition demonstrates Hearne's use of such vocabulary of the Picturesque as "intermixture," and "here and there," to image a varied landscape:

> Early in the morning of the twenty-eighth [December 1770], we again set out, and directed our course to the Westward, through thick shrubby woods, consisting chiefly of ill-shaped pines, with small dwarf junipers, intermixed here and there, particularly round the margins of ponds and swamps, with dwarf willow bushes; and among the rocks and sides of the hills were also some small poplars.

If not the quality, certainly the variety of vegetation and rock attracts the English eye, nourishing it with aesthetic sustenance before the push onto the Barrens and their (comparatively speaking) visual uniformity. The single-sentence structure serves to integrate various landscape features that are recognizably picturesque, including a tree-lined, small-sized area of water, even though a single scene is not composed. Indeed, the use of the preposition "through" to describe movement in the open woodlands suggests more interaction on the part of the perceiving eye with the terrain than do the prepositions "onto" and "across," which are used to describe tundra treks.

On the outgoing portion of Hearne's second voyage, his guide, Conne-e-quese, elects to remain below the tree line, and to await the weather of the late spring before embarking onto the Barrens. Hearne describes in one paragraph the situation of his spring encampment in March 1770, at, according to Gordon Speck, in *Samuel Hearne and the Northwest Passage* (1963), "the western end of Shethanei Lake [Manitoba] just below 59° north and 98° west":[12]

> The situation of our tent at this time was truly pleasant, particularly for a

> spring residence; being on a small elevated point, which commanded an extensive prospect over a large lake, the shores of which abounded with wood of different kinds, such as pine, larch [tamarack], birch, and poplar; and in many places was beautifully contrasted with a variety of high hills, that showed their snowy summits above the tallest woods. About two hundred yards from the tent was a fall, or rapid, which the swiftness of the current prevents from freezing in the coldest winters. At the bottom of this fall, which empties itself into the above lake, was a fine sheet of open water near a mile in length, and at least half a mile in breadth; by the margin of which we had our fishing nets set, all in open view from the tent.

By his guide's choice not to travel, Hearne's time is freed to appreciate the terrain about him. He transforms it, by means of the Picturesque, into a landscaped picture, just as he transforms himself from an explorer into a tourist-cum-sportsman. With his tent on an elevated point in the foreground, he looks out on an animated falls, to one side, which is connected to the forest-lined lake in the middlescape by the unfrozen (hence, animated) river, and snow-clad hills in the offskip or background, which contain and order the space in the scene. The picture, painted within the frame of a paragraph, presents a scene of "pleasant" contentment and "repose." Moreover, much of the variety in landscape that is so dear to the English eye is evidenced: different kinds of vegetation; variety of topography, with the middlescape set deep in the picture and the offskip higher than it or the foreground; and contrast in colours. A steady supply of fish from a moderately large opening in the lake ice provides the opportunity for sport and sustenance, while the falls enliven an otherwise frozen view.

So attractively does Hearne paint his paragraph scene that he feels it incumbent upon himself to account for the time spent at the "spring residence" to his "reader," which is originally to say, his employers. Far in kind but not in distance from the inhospitable, threatening landscapes of the Barrens, this landscape hospitably entices the Englishman to take up residence in it. Indeed, Hearne's "great surprise" at the discovery of empty fishing nets in April, and the "sudden change of circumstances," from pleasant repose to anxious travel, which that discovery occasions suggests that Hearne had been, to some extent, charmed by the favourable prospect he sees in the landscape. But the charming illusion of the picturesque scene at Lake Shethanei is shattered by September, when Hearne's death by starvation is forestalled only by the wholly aleatory and almost miraculous appearance of Matonabee.

Two examples from Hearne's narrative indicate that the ordering of terrain reminds the English explorer of picturesque features of an English landscape. The construction of a caribou pound on a frozen Kasba Lake (N.W.T., 60°N, 102°W) in March 1771, seems unconducive to the Picturesque; yet, Hearne remarks how the rows of brushwood resemble hedge-rows, employed by the Indians in a manner not unlike the way hedgerows are occasionally used in

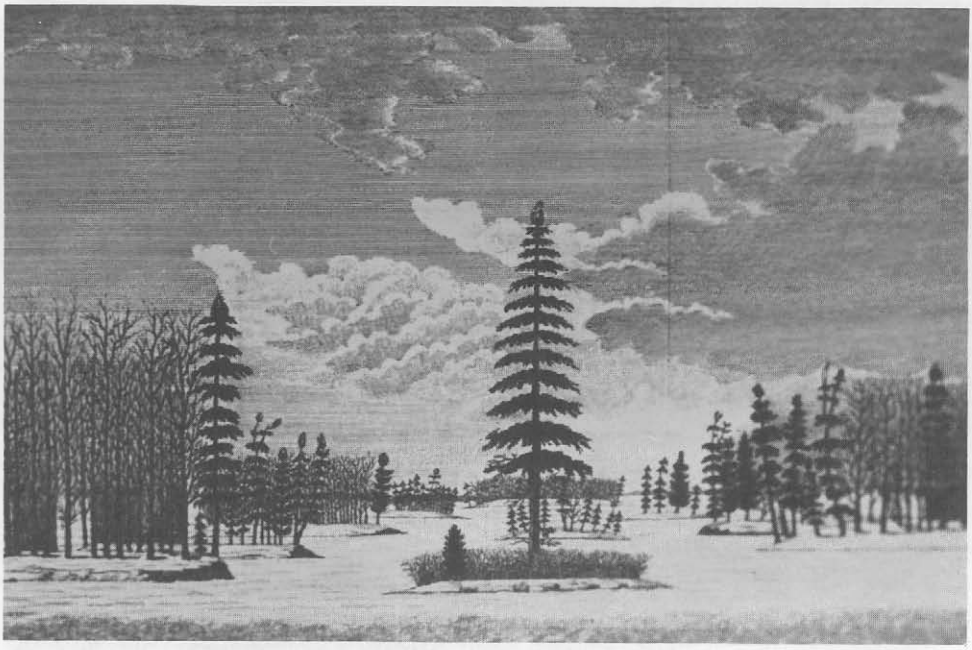
England, to limit the travel of animals. However unsportsmanlike he may find the Indian practice ("This method of hunting, if it deserves the name . . . ," he, clearly, is charmed by the Indians' ingenuity and resourcefulness, and by the hunting scene itself. In another instance, while traversing the Stony Mountains of the barren Upper Coppermine River region, where the first Franklin expedition would encounter catastrophe fifty years later (1821), Hearne finds his perception of landscape altering with the appearance of a familiar topographical and human feature:

> We . . . walked twenty-seven miles to the North West, fourteen of which were on what the Indians call the Stony Mountains; and surely no part of the world better deserves that name. On our first approaching these mountains, they appeared to be a confused heap of stones, utterly inaccessible to the foot of man: but having some Copper Indians with us who knew the best road, we made a tolerable shift to get on, though not without being obliged frequently to crawl on our hands and knees. Notwithstanding the intricacy of the road, there is a very visible path the whole way across these mountains, even in the most difficult parts; and also on the smooth rocks, and those parts which are capable of receiving an impression, the path is as plain and well-beaten, as any bye foot-path in England.

To be sure, this is not a picturesque landscape, but its potential sublimity as an "utterly inaccessible" "confused heap of stones" is tempered by the sign of human presence — at once an ordering, humanizing, and reassuring guide across a daunting terrain. In short, the path, in making the mountains a place, offers Hearne and his reader picturesque sentiment if it does not actually transform the traveller's first impression of the mountains.

Another, different, combination of form and sentiment occurs in Hearne's picture, entitled "A Winter View in the Athapuscow [Great Slave] Lake," Hearne's only landscape sketch of the expeditions, commemorating his discovery, on Christmas Eve, 1771, of the world's tenth largest lake. Perhaps the most striking feature of this picture is its symmetry: although the foreground pine is not precisely centred, its absolutely perpendicular relation to the tops of the dwarf trees and the ground on its island, as well as its uniform pairs of branches compel the attention and stamp the scene with a formal and regular division of space. Moreover, the uniformity in the height of each island's deciduous trees (a vision of fancy in the latitude being portrayed), the unbroken "lawn" of the frozen lake, and the orderliness of the three files of islands (suggestive of a *patte d'oie*[13]) all bear some affinity to the formal gardens of a Le Notre, Wise, or London. Yet, the still, stark, vacant quality of the view, achieved by the whiteness of ice and sky, does not accord well with the scene's order. The sense of isolation promoted by the location of such small islands miles, one supposes, from either shore of Great Slave Lake,[14] overwhelms the symmetry with which Hearne strives to govern the view.

Moreover, several factors preclude the contentment sought in this view by the eye trained in the Picturesque. The island in the middle ground fails, either



because of its absolute size or its size relative to the foreground conifer, to carry off its double function as both middle ground and background, and thereby fails to contain the eye stretching to the horizon. Secondly, an indeterminable spatial quality is created in the foreground because of an absence of an elevated point of view, a human figure, footprints, or any feature which would assist the viewer with spatial orientation. Lastly, the difficulty, encountered by the viewer because of the dominant foreground conifer, of following the sight line suggested by the *coulisses* upsets the apparent intention of the picture, as do the absence of a vanishing point at the end of either sight line, and the fact that the *coulisses* themselves fail to achieve one of their customary functions, that of containing the view to either side. Not the least important factor contributing to the picture's mysterious quality are the areas of the lake beyond the islands, to the left and, to a lesser extent, to the right of the central view. Their presence beckons the eye to the realm beyond the picture's borders. By virtue of the vastness of northern space, the visual phenomena seem to resist telescopic ingestion by the perceiving eye. The viewer of the picture is left thinking as much about the space beyond and outside the view as about the scene in it.

Finally, the icebound setting of the scene posits a curious sense of imperma-

nency which is incompatible with the security sought by the Picturesque. Such unconventionality questions even the authority of the artist's single point of view. But rather than disappointment or failure, the picture evokes a sense of wonder, and, whether or not bafflement of the viewer is Hearne's intention, his work marks one of the first combinations of picturesque order and sublime sensation in the representation of a northern Canadian landscape. Somewhere between the north shore's "entire jumble of rocks and hills, for such is all the land on the North side," and the south shore's "fine level country, in which there was not a hill to be seen, or a stone to be found," appears to Hearne the aesthetic hybrid of the picturesque sublime, a foreign, yet orderable, landscape, neither alien nor humanized, which induces a quiet thrill of aesthetic discovery. That Hearne, his quadrant again broken and his watch stopped, misjudges the lake's whereabouts lends an added mystery to the magic of the silent scene.

The depiction of the picturesque sublime reflects a transformation that is only one of several that Hearne's sensibilities undergo. A British officer made to haul his own baggage, an explorer who chronicles anthropological as much as geographical discoveries, an Englishman of gentle Dorset rearing who survives all seasons on the tundra — all such anomalies produce the enigmas of Hearne's journal, his picture, and the man himself. Hearne's aesthetic experience of the North, far less roughhewn than it appears at a cursory glance, anticipates the experience of many explorers and travellers after him. The Sublime is ubiquitous in the region but the viewer, prompted by a thirst for the Picturesque which increases in proportion to his temporal distance from England, imbibes the meagre variety of form provided by the tundra and Arctic seas to produce recognizable landscapes out of voids whenever possible, even when the natural terrain displays variety and animation to a degree which could only stimulate an enthusiast of the paleozoic. As Al Purdy realizes in his poem, entitled "Trees at the Arctic Circle," the beauty of the land could not be found by the eye accustomed to organizing landscapes with "tall maples waving green / and oaks like gods in autumn gold."[15] In a way that is similar to Blake's idea that the Sublime reveals itself in the beauty of minutiae, Purdy learns how to appreciate aspects of a land which frequently offers only an immediate foreground or an expansive background.[16] Almost two hundred years before him, Hearne was learning how to adapt to northern landscapes the taxonomies with which every late-eighteenth-century Englishman with an aesthetic regard for nature had learned to describe and identify the external world. During the course of those two hundred years, Hearne's achievements in charting an aesthetic map of the North were followed by a remarkable number of overland and marine expeditions of Arctic exploration, the narrative and pictorial records of which continue to chart landscapes on the map whose first features were Bloody Fall, spring camp, and the Athapuscow Lake.

NOTES

[1] Marjorie Hope Nicolson, *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory: The Development of the Aesthetics of the Infinite* (1959; New York: Norton, 1963), p. 1.

[2] Victor G. Hopwood, "Explorers by Land (to 1867)," in *Literary History of Canada: Canadian Literature in English*, ed. Carl F. Klinck et al. (1965), 2nd ed., 3 vols. (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1966), I, 27. See also Dermot McCarthy, " 'Not Knowing Me from an Enemy': Hearne's Account of the Massacre at Bloody Falls [sic]," *Essays on Canadian Writing*, no. 16 (1979-80), pp. 153-67.

[3] This and subsequent quotations refer to Alexander Mackenzie, *The Journals and Letters of Sir Alexander Mackenzie*, ed. W. Kaye Lamb (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, for the Hakluyt Society, 1970).

[4] John Barrell, *The Idea of Landscape and the Sense of Place 1730-1840: An Approach to The Poetry of John Clare* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1972), p. 6, emphasis added.

[5] This and subsequent quotations refer to Samuel Hearne, *A Journey from Prince of Wales's Fort in Hudson's Bay to the Northern Ocean 1769, 1770, 1771, 1772* (1795), ed. and intro. Richard Glover (Toronto: Macmillan, 1958). Beattie's call for "words very plain and simple," appears in *Dissertations Moral and Critical* (London: Strahan and Cadell, 1783), p. 630. Of course, his statement echoes the call for the plain style in 1660 by The Royal Society, but also, and more importantly, it echoes Longinus' remarks on the suitability of a plain style to convey sublime thoughts. Beattie is cited here to demonstrate the concern for the dictum of style relative to the Sublime in the work of one of Hearne's contemporaries.

[6] Coleridge emphasizes the extreme of excess of visual phenomena in his definition of the Sublime as "boundless or endless allness." See Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria . . . with Aesthetical Essays*, ed. J. Shawcross, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1907), II, 309. The reversion suggested for Hearne reflects the other aspect of nature which the eighteenth-century landscape aestheticians considered sublime. Besides representing the extreme of profuse visual detail, the Sublime also represented the extreme of uniformity and emptiness. This latter extreme was influenced markedly by Milton's scenes of Hell. Thus, the aesthetic of the Sublime incorporated, as it were, both the mountain and the abyss, both vast presence and vast emptiness.

[7] Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), ed. and intro. J. T. Boulton (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958), pp. 44-48.

[8] Tuan's statement is as follows: "To live comfortably among the welter of sense impressions man must know how to organize them. A man without a system of values is as lost and unable to survive as an animal deprived of its instinctive patterns of behaviour. The conceptual frame is not only a shelter shielding a person from alien winds of doctrine and from anarchy, but it provides a directrix for human action: it enables a person to direct and rationalize his behavior." (Yi-Fu Tuan, *Man and Nature*, Association of American Geographers Commission on College Geography, Resource Paper no. 10 [Washington, 1971], p. 17.)

[9] Cf. Glover's note, p. 107.

[10] Indeed, at the mouth of the Coppermine River, the sun does not dip below the horizon during the month of July. This fact is witnessed by the multiple-exposure photograph of the sunset and sunrise at the mouth, taken by the Hudson's Bay

Company, and reprinted in Gordon Speck, *Samuel Hearne and the Northwest Passage* (Caldwell, Idaho: Caxton, 1963), p. 251.

[11] The qualification, "apparently," is a needful one because no evidence exists to suggest that Hearne did not have the scene under literary control. Indeed, the sublime effect of near chaos which he manages shows him at his most creative. That this passage comprises part of the larger section added to the MS after 1783 (Glover's note, p. 100n.), suggests that the explorer may have shaped it during the course of several draughts. The manuscript as a whole, according to Glover (pp. xxxv, xxxix) certainly went through many versions during the twenty-three years between the last sojourn and the publication of *A Journey*.

[12] This suggestion of the location is offered by Speck, p. 128.

[13] Literally a goose foot, this device was employed in French, Italian, and, to a limited extent, English formal gardens of the seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries. It consisted of a number of cinder paths which, like spokes in one quadrant or one half of a wheel, converged on a single hub where there was placed a statue, gazebo, fountain, or building; on a smaller scale, the *patte d'oie* is similar to the plan of the avenues which converge in front of the palace at Versailles.

[14] Such was perhaps not the case, since Hearne appears to have traversed Great Slave Lake near its eastern end, where the Pethei Peninsula extends up from the south almost to the north shore.

[15] In Al Purdy, *North of Summer: Poems from Baffin Island* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1967); rpt. in *Poems of Contemporary Canada 1960-1970*, ed. Eli Mandel (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1972), pp. 12-13.

[16] See William Blake, *Annotations to the Works of Sir Joshua Reynolds*, ed. Edmond Malone (London, 1798); rpt. in *The Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1965; 4th rpt. with revisions, 1970), p. 636.

HOW TO IMAGINE AN ALBATROSS

Don McKay

(assisted by the report of a CIA observer near Christmas Island)

To imagine an albatross
a mind must widen to the breadth of the Pacific Ocean
dissolve its edges to admit a twelve foot wingspan soaring
silently across the soft enormous heave as the planet
breathes into another dawn.
This might be
dream without content or the opening of a film
in which the credits never run no speck appears
on the horizon fattening to Randolph Scott on horseback or the lost
brown mole below your shoulder blade, the albatross
is so much of the scene he drinks the ocean never needs

to beat the air into supporting him but
thoughtlessly as an idea, as a phrase-mark holding notes
in sympathy, arcs above the water.

And to imagine an albatross
we must plan to release the rage
which holds this pencil in itself, to prod things
until their atoms shift, rebel against their thingness, chairs
run into walls, stones
pour like a mob from their solidity.

A warm-up exercise:
once
in London, Ontario, a backhoe accidentally
took out a regulator on the gas-line, so the pressure of the system
rushed the neighbourhood. Stoves
turned into dragons and expressed
their secret passions all along the ordinary street
the houses bloomed fiercely as the peonies in their front yards.

Meanwhile the albatross, thoughtlessly
as an idea, as a phrase-mark holding notes
in sympathy, arcs into a day
that will escape the dull routine of dayness and achieve
crescendo.
Placing ourselves safely
at a distance we observe
how the sky burns off its blueness to unveil
the gaze of outer space, which even here
has turned the air psychotic. The birds
start smoking, then,
as though Van Gogh were painting them, turn
cartwheels in the air, catch fire
and fall into the ocean.

What saves us now from heat and light
what keeps us now from biting off our tongues
what stops blood boiling through the heart blocks
recognition of this burning curve
slicing like a scythe through the mind
is what hereafter will protect us

from the earth.

THE DESERT, THE RIVER & THE ISLAND

Naim Kattan's Short Stories

Michael Greenstein

WITH THE APPEARANCE OF Naim Kattan's fourth volume of short stories critical assessment, which has lagged far behind his output, is long overdue. Like Norman Levine's fiction, Kattan's displays a stylistic clarity to portray the two sides of a borderline existence and the need to renew one's life at any given moment.[1] The stories encompass a variety of cultural situations — Arabic, Jewish, European, North and South American — each characterized by a sense of absence — whether spatial, temporal, or existential. While the title of the first volume, *Dans le désert*, seems to locate spatially or existentially an arid wasteland setting, the introductory "En bordure du désert" shifts the frame of reference to the borderline. Indeed, the titles of the four volumes of short stories suggest diasporic boundaries or borderlines between space and non-space: in the desert, the crossing, the river's edge, and the island's sand.[2] This marginality of space through the diaspora is matched by Kattan's diachronic base of biblical history that emphasizes themes of waiting, expectation, memory, and renewal — boundaries between time and no-time. "Le récit, marque la halte entre la mort et la vie nouvelle." Kattan poses a series of rhetorical questions in the introductory "En bordure du désert" that bear directly on the themes within the stories themselves as characters at turning points in their lives judge their past performances. Have they lived a full life? Or have they lived a false existence? Will memory be a source of energy and renewal or will it dissipate into nostalgia that blocks future achievement? Kattan analyzes the spatial title, *In the Desert*, from temporal and existential perspectives: historically the title is a literal translation of *Numbers*, the fourth book of the Old Testament, which chronicles the Jews' forty years in the desert before reaching the Promised Land. Like the children of Israel, the protagonists of the short stories inhabit a desert while looking forward to a new life.

The first story, "Le Tableau," contrasts the eternity of a large Corot canvas in the Frick Gallery with the transitory rendezvous between the narrator and his lover as the former indulges in an interior monologue addressed to his absent

lover. Effusive in his love, the narrator repeats his lover's "sourire d'éternité," her synedochic representation played off against the immortal canvas. The story interweaves three levels of time: the past when the two lovers met in San Francisco two years before the story opens; the present as the narrator describes the canvas and the tourists who pass by to examine it; and the future expectation of the reunion of the two lovers which occurs in the last paragraph. All of the characters remain nameless, suspended between ghostlike evanescence and eternity, while the name and canvas of Corot serve as a focal point for the reunion, the passing tourists, and the narrator's Browningesque musings about love and art. "Tu n'étais plus qu'un tableau" fully identifies the woman and the painting, yet all that we learn of her is that she has left her husband and has one son who is very ill in hospital. The story begins and ends with questions: What will they do now that they are reunited? Can they reclaim their past passion? "Le Tableau" seems very much a phenomenological study examining the intersubjective responses of characters to each other and to the Corot canvas that is the common, immortal ground for international tourists. Despite the painting's vast horizon there are weighty limits everywhere, just as freedom has its own boundaries. "Peut-on enfermer l'espace pour que son étendue ne brise pas notre imagination, ne la reduise pas à la répétition perpetuelle d'une image affadie de notre soif?" Can the narrator recover his past emotions as Corot has managed to do throughout the ages?

The somewhat surreal blending of different chronological sequences recurs in "Rue Abou Nouas" with the Dijla river measuring time and emotion in the objective-correlative manner of the Corot canvas. The opening paragraph in the third person acts as a frame for the narrator who is seized by nostalgia for his past in Baghdad as the water flows by him. The rest of the story switches to first-person narration with alternations between the oriental past in Baghdad and the occidental present in Ottawa. Towards the end the paragraphs become shorter, the alternations more lyrical. While the Iraqi scenes with Hassan and Hind are filled with love, nature, and the out of doors, the Ottawa scenes are predominantly indoors with the narrator isolated for the weekend in his friend's apartment. The first transition epitomizes the difference; the natural rhythm of love and the river changes to the new mechanical elevator that is already decrepit. He further contrasts the two streets — Rideau and Abou Nouas — until the end of the story when he comes to the clock, the pendulum oscillating between two hemispheres: "Voici l'horloge. C'est la Porte de l'Est. Ici commence la rue Abou Nouas." The gateway to the east returns to primitive origins at the same time as it welcomes the dawn of a personal renaissance.

The third story, "Sur le Balcon," also has a double spatial-temporal frame of reference between Blois of the past and Rio in the present. The balcony setting points to the interface between internal privacy and the public outside admired

by the narrator but feared by his paranoid friend Julio. On the balcony overlooking the beach with whose pleasures the characteristically hedonistic narrator identifies, Julio reminisces about their escapade twenty years earlier with a young woman in Blois, the illuminated château contrasting with the Rio highrise. The contrapuntal rhythm of the memories of French youth combined with the domesticated actions of Julio's Brasilian neighbours highlights his Kafkaesque vision of a world pursuing him as he decays in his own paranoia. The narrator cannot comprehend who is persecuting Julio, but the latter's reference to Gogol's *Dead Souls* provides a clue, for the Russian novelist was a tortured man like Julio whose soul is enslaved to thanatos; and Julio, like Chichikov, collects souls from the past.

Like "Sur le Balcon," "L'Hôtel" creates a Kafkaesque atmosphere with the wealthy, sixty-four-year-old protagonist suffering from paranoia as he checks all the locks in his hotel room. Now that his mother has died, Maurice has finally gained his independence but he does not know what to do with his leisure in a strange country where he does not understand the language. He has situated himself in this manner to avoid the past and become a new, liberated man, master of his own destiny. Yet the shadow of his mother accompanies his inherited wealth as he becomes a flâneur and remembers his missed opportunities with Muriel and Ginette. Unable to enjoy his present freedom because of past failures and future expectations, Maurice prepares to return home with the memory of his deceased mother weighing heavily upon him.

A hotel also provides the setting in "La Rupture" which explores split and shifting identities in the form of the narrator's interior monologue alternating between his two lovers, Marcia and Edith. As the protagonist waits to meet Marcia at the Plaza, the second paragraph shifts to the past tense to Holland with the narrator suffering from a toothache and waiting for Edith. Indeed, through much of his fiction Kattan repeats the multiple love affairs, plural identities from the past, and waiting in expectation for the fulfillment of love celebrated in a torrent of consciousness and linguistic sensuality. The lyrical interplay of paragraphs creates a synchronic *ménage à trois*, but the paradox of absolute love for each woman cannot be sustained beyond the bounds of a short story which allows this experiment in form. The relationships become dreamlike until the present reality intrudes and ruptures the emotion as love ends. Kattan's urgent and spontaneous overflow of emotions — perhaps an oriental trait — requires a spatial objective correlation to supplement the temporal stream of consciousness.

KATTAN'S CHARACTERS find themselves again in the desert or on its fringes in his second collection, *La Traversée*, for they are on the

threshold traversing two modes of being, and in this intermediate state a gap always remains between characters separated by age, geography, and sex. So many of the characters are emigrants, travellers, or transients visiting friends, family, or lovers before pursuing another destination. Having crossed the Atlantic in *La Traversée*, Kattan relies on Canadian settings far more than in the earlier stories. In "La Fin du voyage" a young couple, recently married, return to Montreal from Africa to stay with the wife's parents, but soon grow tired of the routine and decide to move into their own apartment. After their extensive travelling, the end of their voyage presumably coincides with the end of the story when they are about to settle down to a new life in which "Peut-être allait-elle se remettre à aimer son mari." But the flat, neutral tone of the story's last line, "Il n'y avait dans sa voix ni colère ni amertume," provides no guarantee that the future will prove promising; experience ends one stage of life only to be followed by the unknown in the next stage.

The title of the second story, "Les Bagages," also implies some kind of journey: this time, a female narrator recounts her love for and marriage with Edouard. "Et maintenant que tout est fini, je cherche à reprendre le fil afin de comprendre." The clash between the anglophone South African husband and his bourgeoise francophone wife reaches a crisis after they move to the east end of Montreal. At first the marriage ceremony had been "un départ, une reprise. Elle traça une frontière, marqua un passage d'un état à un autre." But soon after they settle into a routine which includes Edouard's insistent courting of the lower-class neighbours, she decides to leave him. "Qui etait-il, lui qui connaissait si bien mes origines? Soudain, il m'est apparu, tel que je l'imaginais: un homme qui me voulait, que je desirais et dont je ne savais rien." So she crosses the city to her parents' home where she realizes that she has forgotten to bring her luggage with her. "Il fallait retraverser la ville, seule, pour aller chercher mes bagages." Exiled in her own home, the narrator compresses her existence into portable baggage to start a new life or resume her pre-Edouardian origins, having traversed Montreal and an important stage in her life's cycle.

The female narrator in "Le Substitut" also suffers from insufficient knowledge of the men in her life. Recently divorced, she meets Donald who restores her love when he visits her in Montreal away from his own wife and two children in Quebec City. But as soon as he crowds her apartment with his own daughter and his mistress, Odile, who is presented as his cousin, life becomes difficult until the narrator discovers the truth about Odile and decides to move from her own apartment. Donald substitutes for her estranged husband, and Odile in turn is a mistress for Donald. Once again insufficient knowledge of origins leads to a flat, physical separation in the light of a more recent revelation. "Sans prévenir personne, je suis allée chercher mes meubles. Je suis enfin seule. Je crois que Donald n'était pas un homme pour moi." Many of the other stories in *La Traversée*

present lonely and anonymous passengers from an Arabic bookseller isolated in Prince Edward Island to an Arabic preserver of an outdated alphabet in Edmonton.

The stories in the third collection, *Le Rivage*, demonstrate Kattan's continuing preoccupation with themes of departure, expectations in beginning a new life, waiting, absences, and repetition. In the first story, "Les Adieux," the first-person narrator, George, visits Paris with his cousin's wife, Brita; they desire each other but do not consummate their affair before returning to America. "J'avais l'impression qu'elle allait partir pour toujours." Mimi, the protagonist of the last story "L'Attente," carries her passport with her at all times since she is a perpetual foreigner. "Et elle exhibait le document qu'elle emportait toujours dans son sac à main, même quand il n'était nullement question pour elle d'un départ pour l'étranger. L'étranger, ce mot-là faisait sourire. Où commençait cette frontière et où s'arrêtait-elle? Mimi était toujours à l'étranger." With her Egyptian past, her South American experience, and her languages and accents, Mimi concentrates the whole world in herself in Vancouver; nevertheless, despite this world of experience "elle était seule et elle attendait." The story ends, as it commonly does in Kattan's fiction, by sounding a note of departure as Mimi reflects, "Oui, il va falloir que je parte. Les rues de Vancouver lui semblaient alors comme la seule réalité définitive, recelant la fraîcheur de la nouveauté et une fixité d'éternité. Et alors, comme par une irrépressible illumination, elle était envahie par le sentiment de les regarder pour la première et la dernière fois."

In between these first and last stories appear several short stories that focus on broken love affairs, divorces, absences, and other departures that are often set in apartments, hotels, restaurants, or other public places where actions during vacations contrast with habitual domestic routine. In "Les Comptes" an elderly brother and sister discuss members of their family who have abandoned them: "Ils sont tous partis: mariés, divorcés, remariés." Yet they look forward to the routine of their next Sunday visit: "ils attendaient avec impatience de les revivre, leurs voix leur parvenant comme un lointain écho." "Les Messages" recalls the earlier "Le Libraire de l'Ile" since in both stories situated in the Maritimes the bookish protagonists are forced to leave when the privacy of their routines is interrupted by external forces. "Et quand il partirait, personne ne s'en apercevrait."

"L'Etude" refers to physical space as well as to a state of mind. An illusory centre of the world, David Christopher's study contrasts with a diverse macrocosm: his Belgian father-in-law makes his fortune in Texas and settles in Montreal with his British wife; his own parents live in Hamilton; and he alternates weekly between Bishop's and McGill, his utopian study somewhere between the river and the desert. Spatial irony appears in the opening reference to the "Far West" and the repeated "Est" and "Occident" which will be affected by

the global reverberations of a modernized Casaubon's economic theories. Ironically, while his father-in-law made a fortune, the "expert" economist fails to progress in an essentially marginal universe. Irony also arises from the religious terminology applied to the holy study: "le péché primordial, la transgression suprême d'un pacte, d'un accord sacré."

But the spatial borderline of the river's edge must also be viewed from a temporal perspective of the boundary between past and future. Thus, David announces that he is "un futur économiste," and according to his own criteria he never achieves the rank of economist, for his sterile theories belong to the desert, like his passionless love for Carla who reciprocates in a routine of perfect harmony. With the announcement of his mother's hospitalization, the present impinges on the "timeless" study, and David returns the call, his voice full of "l'ennui et l'indifférence." The emergency call provides Carla with a sudden revelation as she enters her husband's inner sanctum to discover his emptiness, her own naiveté, and her hitherto undeveloped emotions of pity and compassion. The reader is left with Carla on the inconclusive bank of the river, not knowing what hope the future will offer. If the desert remains sterile and the river offers potential fertility, then the river's edge represents another transitional image of the borderline existence between the desert's memory and the river's promise of possible fulfilment.

KATTAN'S FOURTH VOLUME of short stories, *Le Sable de l'Ile*, opens with "Les Yeux fermés," the title referring at once to the literal physical reaction of one of the characters and the figurative condition of ignorance shared by the two major characters. Ruth and Mordecai, two former inmates of the concentration camps, rendezvous at the bar of Montreal's Ritz-Carlton furnished with "les dames d'un chic suranné dans le décor insolite du début du siècle." Mort's name, Ruth's "air d'absence," and the absence of their respective spouses contribute to the disjunction between their past tragedy united by memories of the holocaust, and present love united sexually in a motel room after they have left the Ritz. By keeping her eyes closed and repeating Mordecai's name during their lovemaking, Ruth manages to obliterate the past through total immersion in the present. "Ruth fermait les yeux, l'entourant de tout son corps, cherchant avec acharnement un abri, le lieu où, au-delà de l'oubli, elle decouvrirait enfin une immobile sécurité." Then, one day she opens her eyes and a double shock results: the expression in her eyes recalls the past for Mort, while Ruth cannot bear his discovery of her innermost self. "Ces yeux le renvoyaient à son monde, au malheur de toujours. Lui, qui voulait être une armure et une protection, n'était qu'on fragile residu, si foncièrement, si fatalement vulnerable." And once he has invaded her privacy, "elle ne pouvait plus subir Mort sans étouffer."

After such knowledge, what forgiveness? Departure is inevitable: "il partait en voyage" while she hangs up the phone "sans dire un mot" in contrast to Ruth's former repetition of Mort's name.

The other stories in this collection such as "Une Fin" and "Le Déménagement" further demonstrate the sense of an ending or the instability of moving from one situation to another as characters after some revelation ineluctably divorce and depart while awaiting a new life. Characters from diverse backgrounds meet by chance, and with incomplete knowledge of their origins they become involved with each other. When an epiphany occurs foregrounding the present, the future of relationships is thrown into doubt. The short story seems an appropriate vehicle or genre for the presentation of transient relationships because the high degree of selectivity requires spatial limitations with inconclusive endings that keep the reader wondering about the possibilities for the characters' renewal after the story's closure. The completion of a "nouvelle" implies renewal: the short story serves as the intermediate bank of a river that can overflow its borders to renew the desert.

NOTES

[1] Absence of elaborate patterns of imagery in Kattan's fiction may be attributable to his "oriental" conception of confronting reality directly as outlined in his first book of essays, *Le Réel et le théâtral*. This stylistic transparency or "zero degree" coupled with the separateness of each story compounds the difficulty of any critical approach. In contrast to the separate stories of Kattan or Levine, the more interconnected format of Alice Munro's or Jack Hodgins' fiction provides opportunities for stylistic development or structural thickening. See W. H. New, "Pronouns and Propositions: Alice Munro's Short Stories," *Open Letter*, Third Series, No. 5 (Summer 1976), 40-49.

[2] For a discussion of "river" and "sand" symbols see Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power* (New York: Seabury, 1978), pp. 83-84 and 86-87. For the semiotics of boundaries, border regions, and "rivage" see Anne Ubersfeld, "The Space of Phèdre," *Poetics Today*, 2 (Spring 1981), 203-06; and for a striking similarity with Kattan's categories of memory, promise, place, and desert see Jacques Derrida, *L'Ecriture et la Différence* (Paris: Seuil, 1967), pp. 101 and 109.

THE SETTLEMENT

Greg Kearsey

The sea rolls up and disappears
into the bawn
where all that's left to dry
are old memories.

Crags answer the angry breaks
where once scarped
faces of old fishermen
lined the stages.

No more the gurry slides
from splitting tables;
now the gulls squall
to skeletal breach.

Now that the resettling's done
the houses stand;
bleached, bleak remnants
scorning the forgotten livyeres.

The wind chants eerily
with children's laughter
as the water rolls
over the beach.

THE NIGHT SHIFT

Don McKay

This is a secret.
The barn across the road grows dark and inward
sending thin gleams through its chinks like hints.

The dog sniffs, barks at nothing
dissolves into a tawny pool on the porch.
Absent mindedness

finds its medium.
The last tractor dies,
chortling. There are

birds no one has ever seen
uncaged in any book unguessed
by metaphor
chirping from the uncombed fringes of the lawn.

Flowers begin inhaling through their roots
exhaling darkness.

Fields are seduced outward to their edges where raccoons
sharp as elves
whet their wits against us.

THE PAINTING IN PROGRESS

P. K. Page

It talks back
endlessly talks back
the painting

However long or hard
you stare at it
it will have the last word

Catch a glimpse of it
unexpectedly
and it will whistle
like boys at a passing girl

Is provocative
rude

Will even shout
four-letter words at you
shamelessly

Has no manners

Insists on connecting
whatever the cost

It must talk
Talk

PERFORMING FACT

Canadian Documentary Theatre

Robert C. Nunn

DOCUMENTARY THEATRE IS A CREATION of our century: its history begins with Erwin Piscator's production of *In Spite of Everything* in 1925.[1] Many reasons have been advanced for its development: it is a response to a deeply-felt need to penetrate to the truth hidden in the massive accumulation of facts;[2] it is an adaptation of the rhythm and tempo of theatre to a sensibility created by the mass media, especially film;[3] it is designed to dispel "the artificial fog behind which the world's rulers hide their manipulations."[4] It is indeed, like its close cousin, epic theatre, theatre for the scientific age,[5] and like it, foregoes the traditional emphasis of dramatic theatre on the timelessness of the human condition in favour of an emphasis on the human situation unfolding in a specific historical context.

Reasons can likewise be offered to account for the dominant role documentary drama has played in Canadian theatre. A colleague of mine has overheard people looking at paintings by the Group of Seven and saying "I know where that is; I was there," and suggests that documentary plays offer Canadian audiences that elementary satisfaction of recognizing real places and real people — perhaps satisfying the deep need, which Northrop Frye has spoken of, to find answers to the question "where is here?"[6]

There is another way of looking at documentary theatre which offers a particularly fruitful approach to the critical study of Canadian documentary plays. That is to see it as one of a number of efforts whereby the modern theatre has sought to revitalize itself and rediscover its own possibilities. Let us examine two statements by major practitioners of documentary theatre to see what specifically theatrical concerns have gone into its making.

Peter Weiss, in an interview published in 1966, said: "There are new possibilities for a theatre which can take up the reality in and around each human life, and a renaissance is coming for theatres from vastly different and unexpected directions — at one side, the Theatre of Happenings, and on the other extreme the theatre of documentation."[7] He is speaking of the relation of theatre to the world outside itself, and of documentary's capacity to breathe new life into that relation.

Peter Brook, introducing *Tell Me Lies*, a book about his work with the Royal Shakespeare Company on a documentary play about the war in Vietnam, says, "all theatre as we know it fails to touch the issues that can most powerfully concern actors and audiences at the actual moment when they meet. . . ."[8] Here Brook expresses a concern not only for the bearing theatre may have on the reality surrounding the theatrical event but also for the quality of the theatrical event itself.

Documentary theatre, then, is a vehicle for exploring two areas of vital concern: the relation of theatrical performance to reality, and the relation of performers to their audience.

Indeed the dual focus on the actual world and on the actuality of performance appears to be the structural principle of documentary theatre. The two are intimately related in performance by a powerful sense of the analogy between them. As the performers reveal the truth hidden within the facts, they lay bare their own activity as performers. As in Brecht's epic theatre, their primary gest is the gest of showing.[9] By its very nature, documentary performance is presentational. The form of documentary theatre is generated by the relation between these two actualities. The real event and the actual moment in the theatre form a binary pair which can be combined in an abundance of ways: hence the richness and diversity of the documentary form.[10] Paul Thompson, talking about *The Farm Show*, provided a fruitful metaphor for this fundamental relationship:

> You have the reality and you have what we did in the play, and of course there's a difference. . . . But to be confronted with the two is just fantastic because — you feel that you can respond to both — echoing off this one and echoing off that one. . . .

Thompson's "echoing" is a useful metaphor for the relation between the actuality of the subject and the actuality of the theatrical moment because it points to the essential fact that the relationship is directly apprehended in the immediate moment of the performance.

Canadian documentary theatre must be seen in this context. In a culture which scarcely can be said to have had a theatre until the last two decades, the question "what is theatre?" has no answers except those borrowed from other cultures or those we discover for ourselves. Documentary theatre has proved to be a particularly congenial instrument with which to conduct this process of discovery by virtue of its inherent capacity to generate an intense awareness of two areas of experience represented by the question "where is here?" ("here" being a specific place in the real world) and by the question "what is going on here?" ("here" being the actual place where actors and audience meet). Both questions have an urgency in the Canadian context, and this urgency may account for the fact that a substantial number of the most interesting plays to emerge during our first period of sustained theatrical activity have been documentaries. An examination

of representative documentary plays of the last decade is worth undertaking, partly because the plays merit the closest attention, and partly because they exploit the potentialities of the documentary form with such clarity that analysis contributes to our understanding of the genre.

THE SIMPLEST RELATION between the reality and what is done in the play is the thematic affinity we observe in *Paper Wheat*.[12] The theme of the subject matter, co-operation, is exemplified by the activity we witness in the here-and-now of the performance. Of course any play is a co-operative enterprise: but in *Paper Wheat*, the ensemble's co-operative activity is foregrounded: that is to say, an element of performance that normally and automatically registers as subordinate is granted unusual prominence.[13] Here, the foregrounding of co-operation immeasurably enhances the force with which the theme is communicated. Don Kerr puts it well in his contribution to *Paper Wheat: The Book:*

> The play shows us intensely things we know well, how people come together to work, how important and substantial human endeavor can be. The way *Paper Wheat* came together and the way it was performed are examples in action of the values the play supports.[14]

We can see more clearly how the reality of the play's subject and the reality of its mode of performance combine once we have looked at each one separately. Looking at what is performed, we see a thematic contrast between two opposing theories about how human beings function together: one pictures human society as a collection of separate individuals each acting out of self-interest, while the other pictures human beings as capable of working collectively for the common good.

At the beginning of the play, we are presented with an image of settlers arriving on the prairies one by one, each pursuing his or her private goal. Bill Postlethwaite, the character who comes from the cradle of private enterprise, the industrial North of England, exemplifies this individualist thrust. He has come "to be [his] own master," he announces. As the play progresses, we see the settlers forging links with one another as a creative response to the caprices of the weather and the exploitative practises of speculators and capitalists. The Grain Exchange, symbol of the ethic of private enterprise, is opposed by progressively stronger symbols of the ethic of co-operative enterprise: first the Grain Grower's Grain Company and then the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool. In a thematically important scene, Bill Postlethwaite painfully sets aside his adherence to the ethic of private enterprise to accept help from his neighbour in return for the help he discovers he can give. If Bill can change, it is implied, anybody can. Or, more to the point, if Bill can learn, anybody can, for the play stresses the capacity of humans to

educate themselves into an awareness of the power of the co-operative spirit to transform the world and human nature itself.

Whether or not human nature is capable of change is indeed the philosophical issue at the heart of the play. Ed Partridge, the founder of the Grain Growers' Grain Company, addresses the issue squarely when he takes on the critics of his vision of a co-operative society and their clinching argument: "you can't change human nature." He quotes an ironic poem about a stone-age visionary who foresees modern civilization and is silenced by his neighbours who all cry:

> "Before such things can come,
> You idiotic child,
> You must alter human nature!"
> And they all sat back and smiled.

Underlying this is a central feature of socialist thought, the idea that human nature is not a given but a progressive revelation of possibilities of being human as man and society alter and are altered in the historical process.

This is contrasted with the ideology of an unalterable human nature supporting the social relations characteristic of private enterprise. A "representative of a Private American Grain Company" explains that the farmer "has to look after his own best interests and get as much out of his work, his hard work, as he can. It's just human nature. And you can't change human nature . . . free enterprise is the natural . . . way of life." The exponents of this ideology appear frequently throughout the play, for example John Pearson, "the farmer's friend," who sells the same horse, wagon and provisions over and over again to a series of would-be settlers, and in the elevator agent:

SEAN: The scale's working, eh?
AGENT: Oh, yeah. She's working great.
SEAN: Who for?

Its essence is captured in a line from the cynical "co-operation" song which declares "the only Pool I want is in my backyard." Thus, underlying the specific historical processes and events referred to in the play is a debate over the nature of man as a social being.

The performance exerts a powerful influence on how that debate is perceived by an audience. The co-operative effort of the company is manifest in that the actors did not hide their own individual identities or the fundamental gest of showing. The strong personal magnetism of the cast that toured Saskatchewan with the version recorded in *Canadian Theatre Review* was their own stuff, which they invested in the multiple roles they played.[15] Quite literally then an audience saw not only characters working together but actors working together. Moreover, the theme of the play was radically transformed in the mode of performance; whereas in the first, private enterprise and co-operation were set at

odds, in the latter the conflict was turned around into mutually-enhancing opposites. The performance was a co-operative effort but was also designed to display the strong individuality of the performers; their personality, their ethnic identity, and most importantly their unique talents. Lubomir Mikytiuk's juggling skill was highlighted, as were Sharon Bakker's skill at mimicking men, David Francis' dancing skills, Bill Prokopchuk's fiddling skills, Michael Fahey's guitar and banjo playing, and Skai Leja's strikingly beautiful singing. The cumulative effect of these moments in which each performer steps out from the ensemble is suggested by the title of a piece the fiddler plays towards the end of the show: "My Own Little Two-step." Everybody in the cast owned some unique talent and displayed it so that it received the maximum degree of attention. They owned them *and* they pooled them. It was like seeing private enterprise included within a larger and fuller collective enterprise, and neither losing that special sense of individuality nor being cut off and set in opposition. In sum, actuality and theatricality in *Paper Wheat* share a theme in a very striking way. The thing that is really happening on the stage and is immediately and concretely apprehended by an audience is a radical transformation of the theme conveyed in the drama, and indeed provides the experiential basis for arriving at a judgment on the issues addressed in the play.

In *Paper Wheat*, the theatrical event served to effect what Peter Cheeseman calls "an imaginative penetration of the source material."[16] The principal reality was the actual event, while the theatrical event was so to speak at its service. It is possible, however, for that degree of emphasis to be reversed, in which case, the principal side of the relationship is the immediate moment in the theatre, and the truth that is being illuminated is an aspect of the real world which the audience inhabits and which in fact either stays as it is or changes as a result of daily choices in which that audience participates. The theatrical reflection of a real event functions in that context as an alienating device: it renders strikingly visible, or foregrounds, an aspect of the audience's reality which has hitherto been so familiar as to be invisible. The veracity of the material presented is every bit as important as it is in *Paper Wheat*, but it serves a different purpose: the material authenticates the alienation-effect, by the simple fact that it was found, not invented.

LET US CONSIDER Sharon Pollock's *Komagata Maru Incident*.[17] While not literally a documentary in that no primary source material is identified as such in the play, it is in the spirit of documentary because it is based on documented facts, and because it effects a significant meeting of the actual event and the theatrical event. The play chronicles an incident in 1914 when the Canadian Immigration Department refused entry to all but twenty of three

hundred and seventy-six British subjects of East Indian origin. The truth that the play conveys, however, is not primarly the truth about that incident. It is the truth that is immediately apparent to any member of an average Canadian audience who looks around him when the houselights go up. The audience is a component of the theatrical event that is rarely singled out as an object of attention. When this normal, automatic state of affairs is interrupted, as it is in *The Balcony* by Genet or Handke's *Offending the Audience*, an audience becomes sharply aware of itself. This is what happens in *The Komagata Maru Incident.* From the beginning, the audience is reflected back to itself in the role of an idly curious crowd at a carnival sideshow, by a character who functions as Master of Ceremonies. The auction is punctuated by speeches like this:

> Hurry! Hurry! Hurry! Absolutely the last and final chance to view the Komagata Maru! Anchored in picturesque Vancouver Harbour for two, count 'em, two glorious months! Note the cruiser standing by to the right, see the sun on its guns, what a fantastic sight! Ladies and gentlemen, can you truly afford to bypass this splendid spectacle? Run, my good friends, you mustn't walk, you must run! Cotton candy, taffy apples, popcorn and balloons! All this and a possible plus, the opportunity to view your very own navy in action with no threat to you!

The irony of this assigned role is underscored at the end of the play. The last fact we learn is the execution of the East Indian who assassinated an inspector of the Immigration Department. Then the master of ceremonies "does a soft shoe shuffle to centre stage, . . . stops, looks out, raises his arms, pauses for a beat, and makes a large but simple bow." This foregrounding of the audience is designed to make it acutely aware of itself as a literal confirmation of the truth of the events depicted in the play. How can a Canadian audience reject the proffered role of idly curious uninvolved passersby without having to consider the predominance of caucasians in its own composition? As an audience we are alienated from our automatic acceptance of the predominance of "the White Race" in our country: it didn't just happen; choices were made and continue to be made to maintain it. The play forces us to either criticize or justify this state of affairs: we cannot take it for granted.

Sharon Pollock says something very illuminating in her "playwright's note": "As a Canadian, I feel that much of our history has been misrepresented and even hidden from us. Until we recognize our past, we cannot change our future." She is describing the function of the type of documentary play we are discussing now, which is to bring to our attention the hidden or ignored events that have created our present reality and to use them to bring that reality to our consciousness in the immediate present time of the performance.

In *1837: The Farmers' Revolt*,[18] as in *The Komagata Maru Incident*, the principal side of the relation between the actual event and the theatrical event is the latter. The past is re-enacted for the purpose of alienating the present. As in

Paper Wheat, an element of performance is foregrounded in order to create a tension with the factual subject matter. Here that element is a self-conscious theatricality.

The "flamboyantly theatrical gesture"[19] has always been the signature of Theatre Passe Muraille. Indeed *1837* fairly bristles with it. But the play does more than simply inject theatricality into its account of historical events: it reads theatricality back into them. It treats its historical figures quite legitimately as actors on the stage of history, who invested their gestures with a larger-than-life, histrionic quality, acting both as agents and as actors in the assumption that their deeds would shape the destiny of a nation, and would form the core of events that their descendants would re-tell and re-enact as their myth of origin, the kind of subject that historical painters used to treat, and still do in some parts of the world: "Washington Crossing the Deleware," for example. (It might be mentioned in passing that the historical painting we *did* get, picturing the fathers of confederation, is about as theatrical as a photograph of a boys' hockey team.) The play is thick with incidents possessing this histrionic quality: Mackenzie addressing the patriots; Mackenzie and Van Egmond recruiting Tiger Dunlop; Van Egmond taking command of the rebel forces just when all seems lost; Mackenzie defying Colonel McNab from Navy Island (worthy of comparison with Castro in the hills, or Mao in retreat); and finally, the martyrdom of Lount and Matthews.

Of course, the irony that runs through the play is that none of these histrionic gestures has in fact reverberated through history. The central figures in the rebellion make their gestures in the vacuum of what did *not* come to pass. Dunlop was not recruited, Van Egmond arrived too late, Mackenzie left Navy Island for exile in the United States. As for the battle at Montgomery's Tavern, it was "the first spontaneous mutual retreat in the history of warfare,"[20] a tragicomic anti-climax. Just when all seemed lost, all *was* lost.

Simultaneously, the play presents the deeds of the rebellion's leaders as theatrical gestures played on the stage of history, and dismantles the stage. This ironic treatment is at its fullest in Lount's speech on the scaffold. It was a brilliant idea to end the play with this execution, for by its nature the public execution of a political martyr is profoundly theatrical (as Marvell was perhaps the first to observe in his "Horatian Ode upon Cromwell's Return from Ireland"). National myths give the dying statements of such figures a place of honour: what American hasn't heard: "I only regret that I have but one life to lose for my country"? These flamboyantly theatrical gestures become exemplary models of a society's most cherished values.

According to contemporary accounts, Lount and Matthews met their ends with exemplary dignity. What they did not do was address the crowd at the gallows. Theatre Passe Muraille assembled a gallows speech out of the things Lount is

recorded as saying in prison;[21] in effect they used documentary source material to amplify the inherent theatricality of that moment on the gallows.

> My friends, I address as friends all those in the jail behind me, in all the jails across this province, in the ships bound for Van Diemen's Land, in exile in the United States — there are over eight hundred of us. I am proud to be one of you. John Beverly Robinson — Chief Justice Robinson — You seem to fear we will become martyrs to our countrymen. Well still your fears. This country will not have time to mourn a farmer and a blacksmith. It will be free, I am certain, long before our deaths have time to become symbols. It cannot remain long under the hell of such merciless wretches that they murder its inhabitants for their love of liberty. As for us, I do not know exactly how we came to this. Except by a series of steps each of which seemed to require the next. But if I were to leave my home in Holland Landing again, and march down Yonge Street, I would go by the same route, only hoping that the journey's end would differ. . . .

The theatricalization of Lount's words carries its own irony: a contemporary audience must admit with some pain that not only has Lount's death not become a symbol, it has never heard of Lount, and that his ringing prophecy of a Canada free of colonial dependency is a long way from being fulfilled a century and a half later. Sharon Pollock's observation about our hidden past could not find a better instance than the events of 1837.

The irony with which the play treats these histrionic gestures is given a further dimension by another kind of theatricality in the play. As well as showing individuals taking poses on the stage of history, the company reads back into the events of 1837 the use of theatre by groups of people to grasp and change their situation. Several episodes in particular do this. In the first, a farmer acts out the defeat of his hopes to purchase land, casting his friends in roles as he goes along. In the process, he and his friends become aware of the structure and mode of operation of the forces that oppress them and dispel the artificial fog of ideology through which the Family Compact hides its manipulations. In the second act we see the same farmer joining the rebellion. A piece of homemade theatre leads to critical awareness which leads to action. This process is evident in "The Dummy," in which "a couple of the folks" warm up a crowd waiting to hear Mackenzie with a skit featuring John Bull, the "imperial ventriloquist" and Peter Stump, the Canadian axeman. The skit develops the ventriloquist act as a metaphor for the imperial mentality of the mother country and the colonial mentality it engenders, and the end of the skit, in which the dummy finds his own voice, leads directly into Mackenzie's call for action. One of Mackenzie's editorials is made into a theatrical documentation of the closed circle of power in the colony by presenting Mackenzie as a conjurer transforming a "gang of thieves, rogues, villains and fools" one by one into "the ruling class of this province." A proclamation by Sir Francis Bond Head, governor, is recited by the actors who form a giant head out of their bodies.

The twentieth-century models for these portions of the play are not far to seek. Salutin calls the "Dummy" sketch "agitprop of '37." Weiss' definition of documentary theatre is particularly germane:

> The strength of Documentary Theatre lies in its ability to shape a useful pattern from fragments of reality, to build a model of actual occurrences. It is not at the centre of events, it is in the position of spectator and analyst. It emphasizes, through montage, significant details in the chaos of external reality. Through the confrontation of contradictory details, it shows up existing conflicts. According to the underlying material it then makes a suggestion for a solution, or an appeal, or asks basic questions.[22]

Another model is the system developed by Augusto Boal, which he calls "Theatre of the Oppressed," whereby the oppressed are taught the language of the theatre in order to be empowered to use it to articulate and fully grasp their predicament, free themselves from the obscuring myths of the ruling class, and rehearse fundamental change.[23]

The contrast between these two modes of theatricality, the histrionic gestures of the leaders on the one hand and the use of theatre by groups of ordinary people to grasp their situation on the other, reinforces one of the major themes of the play: the contrast between the revolutionary energy of the working people (hence the subtitle "The Farmers' Revolt") and what Salutin terms "the unreliability and timidity of bourgeois leadership in a struggle for Canadian independence," which the play presents as a betrayal of that strength. Indeed, we can go a step further: the peoples' theatre that the company reads back into the past is not offered as a reflection of what might have been done then but as a model of what needs to be done now, and in fact *is* being done in every moment of the performance of *1837*.

As in *The Komagata Maru Incident*, the principal side of the relation between the documented reality and the reality of the theatrical event is the latter. The source material effects an imaginative penetration of the here-and-now. In his preface to *1837*, Rick Salutin says: "It felt to me when we first put this show up in January of 1973, that we were expressing something of what was happening in the country at the time: a determination to throw off colonial submissiveness in all areas. *1837* was a theatrical expression of that feeling, making it more of a political event, and not just, or even primarily, a theatrical one." Like agitprop, and like Augusto Boal's "Theatre of the Oppressed," it was not a theatrical reflection of something else, but a political act in the mode of theatre. The events of 1837 were presented as a means of alienating the contemporary state of affairs. Salutin goes on to say that the revised version of 1974, which is the source of the printed text, "became more of a theatrical, and less of a political, event," reflecting the fact that "the nationalist, anti-imperialist impetus was still present, and *more* necessary than ever; but it was less fresh, was in a bit of a withdrawal."

This difference, however, is only a matter of degree. The published version is still very much a political event, and I imagine will continue to be so for some time to come. Consider the last few lines of the play:

MATTHEWS: *A bitter laugh.*
LOUNT: What Peter? What?
MATTHEWS: Sam, we lost —
LOUNT: No! We haven't won yet.

The play's status as a political event was enhanced by an underlying analogy between the larger political situation and the internal politics of the acting company. To quote Rick Salutin again: "Actors have been so infantilized. Writers tell them what to say and directors tell them where to stand and no one asks them to think for themselves. They come to work with Paul [Thompson] because they want to break that pattern, but then they freeze up. I remember my first horrified encounter with actors, during *Fanshen*. They were treating the play exactly as they would any other.... Like the mailman, they'd deliver anything. It shocked me that they were like any other group in the country, politically, that is. But the actors are also the real proletariat of the theatre.... They take shit from everyone else, and their labour holds it all up." The very process of creating the show contradicted the internal structure of directorial authority and actors' submission: Paul Thompson placed the emphasis on the collective process, playing a role much like the Mackenzie the company discovered: his function wasn't to impose his authority but to release the actors' own energy and will and resources.

Salutin himself insists that his role was similarly non-authoritarian: he was "the writer on — but not of — *1837*." The collective creation of the show was foregrounded *in* the show: it could not have been mistaken for a play written and directed in the conventional way.

Certain elements of the performance of *1837* were vehicles by which the non-authoritarian process of creating the play was conveyed to the audience. One is the clear emphasis on a collective protagonist, matched by the absence of any distribution of leading and secondary roles among the performers. The actor who played Mackenzie, a part which might appear to make both the actor and the historical figure dominate the show, played a large number of minor roles in other scenes, thus effectively pulling both his performance and the character back into the context of the ensemble performance in the present and of the popular movement in the past. This absence of fixed roles in a hierarchical order characterized all the performances, to the extent that women played male roles in several scenes, while a man played the ineffable colonist, Lady Backwash. The loose, episodic structure of the show likewise conveyed the sense of a collective at work. Although the placing of individual scenes produced frequent ironic effects through montage, the whole still appeared to be oddly and sometimes surprisingly put together.

These elements permit the collective creation of the play to be visible in the theatre, where it functions as an effective contrast to the failed collective effort of the past and as a theatrical analogy of the collective creation of an independent nation which the play calls for in the present.

The plays that we have examined are remarkable for their fusion of the most serious concern for what really happened and the most profound attention to the reality of the moment in the theatre when actors and audience encounter each other. The distinction between these two realities, maintained by the overtly presentational mode of performance, is like the potential difference in an electric field. If the energy is sufficient, a spark leaps across the gap, and an audience apprehends that not only is something important being said but that something important is happening, here and now, in their presence. It is this accomplishment that makes these instances of documentary theatre a significant contribution to the growth of Canadian drama, and indeed, a significant contribution to the critical understanding of the genre.

NOTES

[1] Gregory Mason, "Documentary Drama from the Revue to the Tribunal," *Modern Drama*, 20 (1977), p. 263.

[2] Peter Cheeseman, "Introduction," *The Knotty: A Musical Documentary* (London: Methuen, 1970), p. vii.

[3] Diane Bessai, "Documentary Theatre in Canada: An Investigation into Questions and Backgrounds," *Canadian Drama/L'Art Dramatique Canadien*, 6 (Spring 1980), pp. 13-14.

[4] Peter Weiss, "The Material and the Models. Notes Towards a Definition of Documentary Theatre," trans. Heinz Bernard, *Theatre Quarterly*, 1 (January-March 1971), 41-43.

[5] Bertolt Brecht, "A Short Organum for the Theatre" in *Brecht on Theatre*, ed. and trans. John Willett (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964), pp. 179-205.

[6] Northrop Frye, "Conclusion" to *Literary History of Canada*, ed. Carl F. Klinck et al., 2nd ed. (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1976), II, 338.

[7] Paul Gray, "A Living World: An Interview with Peter Weiss," *TDR*, 11 (Fall 1966), 108.

[8] Peter Brook, "Introduction" in *Tell Me Lies*, ed. Michael Kustow et al. (Indianapolis: Bobbs Merrill, 1968), p. 9.

[9] *Brecht on Theatre*, p. 136.

[10] See Keir Elam, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* (London: Methuen, 1980), p. 126.

[11] Taken from the soundtrack of *The Clinton Special* (1974), a film directed by Michael Ondaatje.

[12] 25th Street House Theatre, *Paper Wheat*, in *Canadian Theatre Review*, 17 (Winter 1978), 38-92.

[13] Elam, pp. 16-19.

[14] Don Kerr, "Paper Wheat: Epic Theatre in Saskatchewan," in *Paper Wheat: The Book* (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1982), p. 30.

[15] Cf. Peter Cheeseman: "As the actor is the means of exposing factual material he must have a totally candid and honest basic relationship with the audience to start with. It is almost as if this permitted the audience to trace on him the shape of each character when they could see it so clearly standing out against his own openness" (*The Knotty*, pp. xvii-xviii).

[17] Sharon Pollock, *The Komagata Maru Incident* (Toronto: Playwrights Canada, 1978).

[18] Rick Salutin and Theatre Passe Muraille, *1837: William Lyon Mackenzie and the Canadian Revolution* (Toronto: Lorimer, 1976).

[19] Chris Johnson, "*The Farm Show*," *Canadian Literature*, no. 85 (Summer 1980), p. 132. See also my essay, "The Meeting of Actuality and Theatricality in *The Farm Show*," *Canadian Drama/L'Art Dramatique Canadien*, 8 (Spring 1982) 42-54.

[20] Dennis Lee, *Civil Elegies* (Toronto: Anansi, 1972), p. 32.

[21] See Charles Lindsay, *The Life and Times of William Lyon Mackenzie*, 1862, I, 190-91, and J. C. Dent, *The Upper Canada Rebellion*, 1885, II, 249-50.

[22] Weiss, p. 42.

[23] Augusto Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed*, trans. Charles A. and Maria Odilia Leal McBride (New York: Urizen, 1979).

TWO POEMS

Dianne Joyce

THE LULL

This is the second time
I've lived in this house
familiar and empty

walls turned in on
themselves leaning like death
towards a centre

impossible to stay here
though to you I suppose
everything looks normal
an ordinary monday
and me not dressed
watching the neighbours
veer off into bright traffic

no I cannot imagine it
still here in winter
with the fire going
and the sloth
dreaming the hot scent
of turtle:
        their clean imprints
        the bloodless snow

          glaring

STRANGE DEVELOPMENT

she went crazy
that winter

started drinking
all kinds of wild
vegetable cocktails

at the spa she used
every available device
to develop her
bust you see it was
that flat statement
drove her there

six months later
she realized
the exercise was
great for her
nerves

and the strength
in her
flexed fingers
astonished
even the dumbells

books in review

TRAVEL TALES

PERCY G. ADAMS, *Travel Literature and the Evolution of the Novel.* Univ. of Kentucky Press, $30.00.

BOOKS OF TRAVEL MARK the beginning of Canadian literature. Written by temporary visitors with marked national and political allegiances, such books document the mapping, measuring, recording of a territory slated for economic exploitation, possibly settlement. As Janet Giltrow and Germaine Warkentin have demonstrated, travelogues followed the rhetorical and structural conventions which their European audience had learned to expect of this genre: early Canadian literature was written by and for Europeans.

With *Travel Literature and the Evolution of the Novel,* Percy G. Adams provides a broad basis for the study of travel literature as an international phenomenon, and as a Janus-faced genre partaking of both the empirical and the fictional, of truth and the tall tale. Adams draws from a wide range of materials because travel writers read each other (some translations were more popular than the originals) and freely borrowed from each other. The book covers travel writing from its beginnings to James Cook and associates. The nineteenth and twentieth century are only briefly discussed, with references to Mark Twain, Henry James, W. D. Howells, Nathaniel Hawthorne, but the reader can easily find information on travel literature written by Americans about Europe in Christopher Mulvey's *Anglo-American Landscapes: A Study of Nineteenth-Century Anglo-American Travel Literature* (1983) and in many earlier studies and anthologies.

Many of the materials included in Adams are relevant to Canadianists; he speaks of Cartier, Lescarbot, Champlain, Lahontan, Stephen Parmenius, the Jesuits. His discussions are particularly interesting when they help to document a cultural rebound effect. Thus Cartier influenced Rabelais in his writing of *Gargantua et Pantagruel*; one remembers that Antonine Maillet, citizen of New France, in her turn professes to be a disciple of Rabelais. Botanists like Sir Hans Sloane and Peter Kalm gathered specimens of North American fauna and flora that were to form part of European natural science collections in the British Museum and elsewhere; many years later, the Canadian naturalists Léon Provancher, Ovide Brunet, and Ernest Thompson Seton visited the natural science departments and the libraries of the British Museum and the Crystal Palace to help them set up classification systems at home. Adams does not speak of nineteenth- or twentieth-century Canadian travellers in Europe, nor do Mulvey or other studies provide information on them, but many of Adams' conclusions can be seen to bear on Victorian travel literature in Canada as well.

Adams analyses such structural elements as "the hero and his journey," "the narrator," and "action, character, theme." Revolutionary developments in transport (the steamship, the railway) and travel organization (Cook's, Baedeker, and Murray guides) might lead one to expect that travel literature of the nineteenth century was divested of its romantic/literary components and became exclusively concerned with an accumulation of facts — particularly since the increasing sophistication of the media

and means of communication made — or so one would assume — the "truth-lie dichotomy" obsolete. But travel literature continued to define itself by traditional structures and purposes, some of which fed conveniently into current Victorian values and attitudes. Adams speaks for instance of the *grand tour* and its typical cast, the spoiled young aristocrat and his frustrated tutor. Egerton Ryerson, eager to let his children have both a useful and cosmopolitan education, played tutor to his son Charles in 1866, complaining in a letter to his daughter, "At my age I feel that sightseeing, & especially going to countries & places that I have seen before, is lost time to me, & beyond what I ought to do. If I am successful with Charley I shall be amply rewarded; but if it makes him more captious & vain, & less industrious, it will cast a dark shade over my last days."

The motif of the religious quest which Adams analyses with respect to pilgrimages to Jerusalem, Santiago di Compostella, and other shrines, was adapted to describe a colonist's return to his mother country. Joseph Howe, for instance, approached England on his way to Queen Victoria's coronation, with "something of the awe and the excitement under which the Mahometan Pilgrim may be supposed to approach the Tomb of the Prophet." Later in the century, in 1884, Elsie Maria Lauder, a prolific writer of travel books, who had studied theology at Oberlin University, Ohio, before coming to Canada, felt that she was setting out on a Pilgrim's Progress when she sailed for Europe to explore its art and architecture. Such religious analogies were, of course, especially appropriate when the purpose of the journey was indeed a pilgrimage, such as Léon Provancher's voyage to Jerusalem in 1884; they became overwhelming in the letters and travel reports of the papal *zouaves* who left Quebec in 1868 to join Pius IX's troops in his defence against Garibaldi: ultramontanist newspapers saw them as Knights of the New World, crusaders come to the rescue of Europe. Adams' "truth-lie dichotomy" has a modified application here: just as the Jesuit Relations had been carefully edited before printing, the zouaves' letters from Rome were screened and allowed to give only an ideologically acceptable image.

In a chapter on "style and language," Adams speaks of the new hierarchy of styles informing eighteenth-century travel writing, a hierarchy roughly divided between the Ciceronian (i.e., effusive, ornate) and the Senecan (i.e., plain, terse) style. Similar observations can be made about the language used by travelling nineteenth-century priests, church ministers, judges, and journalists brought up in universities and colleges which placed a heavy emphasis on oratorical accomplishments. Thus, the Methodist Hugh Johnston's letters to the *Christian Guardian*, later collected in *Toward the Sunrise* (1881), are not only deliberately composed "sermons," but also include knowledgeable criticisms of preachers listened to *en route*.

Methods of characterization continued to follow the traditional patterns of the travel genre, and here its demands become obsolete, even dangerous (some historians would argue the same for the *zouaves*). The inn and and coach, both discussed by Adams as vehicles of national and temperamental stereotyping, are replaced by the boat. Once aboard their Cunard or Allan liner, Canadians proceeded to apply the stereotypes their forefathers had brought with them from Europe, with increased intensity, and sorted their fellow passengers into Irish, Scots, and English — as the Reverend Moses Harvey did on a "Trip to the

Old Land" in 1872, or into various brands of Protestantism — as Laval's François Pelletier attempted to do in 1895. Both English and French Canadians stereotyped Americans — in the era of "the new woman," especially the young female American — as loud, brash, uncultured (see especially James de Mille's *The Dodge Club in Italy* for a fictional version of this view), but were offended beyond measure when Europeans failed to draw a clear line between Canadians and their republican neighbours. "L'Italien est très sensible à la flatterie, il est avide d'honneurs, il prise hautement la considération," affirmed the Abbé Provancher, before drawing similarly conclusive pictures of the French and the English. Europeans on the other hand stereotyped Canadians as savages in snowshoes, on sleighs, or in rocking chairs, or else confused them with Africans or Polynesians, as Canadian commissioners at world expositions in London and Paris had occasion to find out. The new "science" of phrenology enhanced rather than dispelled ancient prejudice (the Reverend W. M. Cochrane's collection of biographies, *The Canadian Album: Men of Canada; or, Success by Example*, published in 1891, is a remarkable document of Victorian racism), and for the average traveller, the increasingly hurried style of travel did not foster brotherhood as initially hoped — on the contrary, there were fewer and fewer opportunities to meet people other than porters, guides, hoteliers.

Adams' book, then, is a mine of information and inspiration. A hefty 386 pages, it is best used as a kind of encyclopedia, for as a critical study it does have its faults. Precisely because it includes so much material, the book is often unwieldy; it enumerates rather than synthesizes, and is enamoured with titles, names, and examples. Often I wished Adams had analysed fewer examples more thoroughly and provided a bibliography for the reader to keep track of his sources. Adams includes a methodological chapter, chiefly an unoriginal summary of pertinent critical theories (Scholes/Kellogg; Frye; Vinaver; and others) but one is not always sure what his intention is: there is no need — one would hope — to recount the Russian formalists' theories on genre at great length! Despite his analysis of "style and language" in travel books, Adams' own writing is often gauche, sometimes involuntarily funny: "One well-known structuralist, Tzvetan Todorov, talks attractively about narration" or, worse, "Barthes, Lévi-Strauss, Bremond, Todorov and Julia Kristeva with her eight structures." Still, *Travel Literature and the Evolution of the Novel* will be an indispensable research tool for anyone interested in travel writing.

EVA-MARIE KROLLER

PLAIN MAN'S SCRIPTURE

MORLEY CALLAGHAN, *A Time For Judas*. Macmillan, $18.95.

WANDERING THROUGH THE STREETS of Paris in the 1920's, Morley Callaghan would often imagine "the way Matisse looked at the world around him . . . a gay celebration of things as they were. Why couldn't all people have the eyes and the heart that would give them this happy acceptance of reality? The word made flesh." Callaghan has never spared much sympathy for the lyricists of anguish, the criers of despair. In *That Summer in Paris* (1963) he deplored "the terrible vanity of the artist who wanted

the word without the flesh. I can see now that I was busy rejecting even then that arrogance of the spirit, that fantasy running through modern letters and thought that man was alien in this universe. From Pascal to Henry Miller they are the children of St. Paul."

Callaghan's most recent novel, *A Time For Judas*, presents a view of the Gospel story that St. Paul would have found anathema. It suggests that Judas, alone among the dozen apostles, had the courage and intelligence to understand Jesus's need to be betrayed. In the garden of the Mount of Olives, Jesus tells Judas that "Someone must betray me. The story requires it. Now is the time." And Judas complies, his reward being endless obloquy. Callaghan's novel is, in part, an explanation and a defence of Judas's behaviour. Its theological heresy and its Biblical trappings should not, however, blind us to its essential consistency with Callaghan's earlier fiction. His Jesus, like his Matisse, offers people the happy acacceptance of reality. And Jesus has enough spiritual power that his followers can, at least for a time, fulfil the longing felt by Father Dowling in *Such Is My Beloved*: "to make each moment precious, to make the immediate eternal, or rather to see the eternal in the immediate." In *A Time For Judas* as in Callaghan's pre-war writing, a replenished sense of humanity is the basis, not the opposite, of transcendence.

In order to reach Judas's story, the reader must peel away a number of layers. Callaghan provides a foreword in which he claims to have received the manuscript of the novel from a dying TV producer and former monk by the name of Owen Spencer Davies; Davies had compiled the work from notes he took while studying an original Greek text (soon destroyed by the Vatican). This text was supposedly the writing of an erudite, sceptical scribe named Philo of Crete, who yearns to live in Rome but has found himself, without much enthusiasm, assigned to the administration of Pontius Pilate. Callaghan uses our familiarity with the events of Holy Week, as described by the four Evangelists, as a kind of translucent backdrop for Philo's version of these incidents. An intellectual and a civil servant, Philo contemplates the Jews with a good deal of detachment. He has, moreover, the temperament and pride of an artist. Early in the novel he mentions, "I created my own Judas out of the strong impression he had made on me" — one of many instances in which his voice merges with that of Morley Callaghan.

Callaghan pays homage in his foreword to the tradition in which his fiction stands: Gnosticism. In the Gnostic *Gospel According to Thomas*, for example, Jesus announces: "I am the Light that is over them all. . . . Split wood and I am there. Raise a stone and you will find me." Likewise, Callaghan's Judas experiences a moment of revelation in which "I saw Jesus in each bright star . . . he was in the earth under my feet, and in the cry of the night bird and each beam of moonlight on the low hills." When Philo chooses to bury his precious writing in a Greek jar, he acts in accordance with another statement of Jesus' in the *Gospel According to Thomas*: "The Scribes . . . received the keys of knowledge and hid them away." Most importantly, perhaps, Callaghan follows the Gnostic tradition that Jesus and Mary Magdalene were lovers: "The Lord loved Mary more than all the disciples," reports the *Gospel According to Philip*, "and he kissed her on the mouth many times." The word requires the flesh. These Gnostic scriptures are often confused and contradictory (at least in their fragmentary form today), but

clearly Callaghan finds many ideas in them that match his own beliefs and intuitions better than the dogmas of St. Paul.

Such matters might count for little were it not for Callaghan's continued mastery of narrative, his sweet inventiveness with plot. To put it bluntly, he remains one of the best story-tellers in Canada. Contrary to my expectations, the twists and turns of *A Time For Judas* are rarely predictable. And this, in turn, pays tribute to Callaghan's subtlety at creating character. Philo is sufficiently shifty, corrupt, curious and intelligent that his actions and reactions keep the reader continually alert. His turbulent life in Jerusalem provides a natural basis for new variations on Callaghan's perennial themes of love and treachery. Philo has much in common with Judas, his friend and rescuer: a fondness for the sea, an aversion to blood-sacrifice, an unusually high level of education, and a Greek origin (Callaghan departs from his Biblical sources by making Judas a Cypriot, not a Judean). Judas is portrayed with comparable skill; he kills himself out of remorse not for having betrayed Jesus but for having confessed the secret truth to Philo, and demanded that Philo write it down. As in the *Gospel According to St. John*, much depends on the sacred power of the word. "It's the story," Judas insists to Philo, "only the story that lives. . . ." But Jesus had demanded silence.

Compared to the central characters — Judas, Philo, Pilate, Mary Magdalene, and a bandit called Simon — Jesus is a distant figure. Other characters define themselves against him; he remains elusive. This is not necessarily a drawback, although it does seem a kind of challenge which Callaghan elected to avoid. For a full comprehension of Judas, we may need to know more than the author tells us about the complex love he shared with his friend and master. Once Judas has vanished from its pages, the book takes a long while to wind down.

But the main flaw in *A Time For Judas*, one which may not exactly come as a surprise to readers of Callaghan's postwar fiction, is linguistic. Philo's narrative has been "translated" into a colloquial, speedy English that suits the story well. Yet the exact register of language slides about alarmingly: "'Whom will I ask?' I said. 'Ask Mary.' 'My Mary, eh? Well, where is she?'" For a sceptic, Philo displays a distressing tendency to lapse into the easy warmth of adjectives; a single paragraph of description contains the following words: *great . . . happy . . . gay . . . bright . . . great . . . great . . . beautiful.* Callaghan's language lets him down when Judas experiences a cosmic harmony that somehow links Jesus with the entire universe. At such a crucial point, one does not want to be reminded of the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi.

The novel is gripping to read, but I did not find it particularly memorable. And for that, its language may well be to blame. In a well-known section of *That Summer in Paris* Callaghan declared, "The words should be as transparent as glass, and every time a writer used a brililant phrase to prove himself witty or clever he merely took the mind of the reader away from the object and directed it to himself." But that passage establishes a false dichotomy: transparency on the one hand, self-conscious cleverness on the other. The finest writers are sensitive to language not for its own sake, but because it enables them to explore regions of conscience, perception, and feeling that are beyond ordinary discourse. Now as ever, Callaghan's writing has tremendous virtues; now as ever, there are large areas of conscious-

ness from which his work is barred. The saddest thing about *A Time For Judas* is that it remains *prosaic*. Better prosaic than pretentious — yet to fulfil the author's ambition, the book needed a few sparks of poetry. By dealing with extraordinary subjects in cool, undistinguished words, *A Time For Judas* makes the Gospel story more accessible, and more diminutive.

MARK ABLEY

LAY HISTORY

MARY BEACOCK FRYER, *John Walden Myers, Loyalist Spy*. Dundurn, $9.95.

RUTH MCKENZIE, *James FitzGibbon: Defender of Upper Canada*. Dundurn, $9.95.

ROBERT CRITCHLOW TUCK, ed., *The Island Family Harris: Letters of an Immigrant Family in British North America, 1856-1866*. Ragweed, $13.95.

ALL THREE VOLUMES under review are aimed at the same sort of audience: the tourist who has become interested in the origins and history of the area being visited; the local history aficionado; and the individual interested in particular episodes or eras in Canadian history. One cannot expect such works to add substantially to scholarly knowledge about Canadian history. That is not their goal. All one can ask, from a scholarly point of view, is that the authors' historical presentations are reasonably accurate in fact and plausible in interpretation. All three volumes pass this test.

Two of the books, *Myers* and *FitzGibbon*, share many similarities aside from the same publisher. Both are biographies about moderately interesting individuals who achieved importance but not front-stage status; both concern military episodes which were crucial in shaping Canada. *John Walden Myers: Loyalist Spy* tells the story of a New York farmer whose parents had been immigrants from Prussia. With the outbreak of the American Revolution, Myers wished to remain neutral but like so many other colonial residents he was forced eventually to choose sides. While his brother and eventually his father sided with the rebels, Myers became a loyalist. For much of the war he was separated from his wife and children and operated as a recruiting agent and courier of secret messages in and through rebel territory. The author's tale is most effective in demonstrating how the Revolution created a Loyalist and it enables one to follow part of the story of the War of Independence from the interesting perspective of a Loyalist participant. On the deficit side the author has used little of the voluminous secondary literature on the period which has been published over the last twenty years (the volume is, in fact, a reprint of a 1974 publication). Moreover, the author's style is flowery, unexciting, and contains unnecessary speculations.

The *FitzGibbon* book makes for better reading (although readers would have been aided had some maps been provided as they were for the *Meyers* volume). The author has a clear style and moves rapidly, if somewhat jerkily, through the material. FitzGibbon was an Irish Protestant who, through military service before and during the War of 1812, worked his way into civil service positions in Upper Canada after the war. In this era of the so-called Family Compact, such positions were patronage appointments and FitzGibbon certainly got his share. But FitzGibbon had an enormous appetite for aggrandisement and he continually felt less than adequately rewarded for the services he had provided for the colony and the Empire. The author's examination of FitzGibbon's search for "proper" compensation provides insight into the basis for élite

status in the political realm in Upper Canada. FitzGibbon, while he possessed many of the necessary qualifications, such as conservative ideas, a fine military record, the ear of governing British officials, and membership in the Church of England, was lacking in other respects. He was deficient in education, had no more than adequate administrative ability, possessed no political network of friends amongst the colonial élite, and was Irish. His rise in Upper Canada, therefore, only went so far. Academic historians should be pleased that a not unsophisticated interpretation is presented to laymen in a relatively lively and uncomplicated manner.

Island Family Harris may be aimed at the same sort of audience as *Myers* and *FitzGibbon*, but it is a much different product. It is, in essence, a collection of documents. True, the author/editor provides some introductory chapters which demonstrate diligent research but are primarily of genealogical value. The heart of the volume, however, is the correspondence written back home by members of the Harris family during their attempt to establish themselves in Prince Edward Island in the late 1850's and early 1860's. These letters provide a valuable and intriguing portrait of a mid-Victorian family in the colonies.

Through the letters the reader becomes involved with the welfare of the family and gains some understanding of its personalities (Mrs. Harris or Sarah is gentle, supportive, and very likeable; Mr. Critchlow Harris is rather a complainer but a hard worker when employed). One watches with interest the early and persistent desire Robert (who painted the famous picture of *The Fathers of Confederation*) has to become an artist. One sympathizes with the family as Critchlow tries again and again to obtain secure and financially rewarding employment. One agonizes along with Sarah when eight-year-old Patty dies. One feels the pangs of being separated from relatives and friends and one's place of birth.

Beyond the emotional appeal, however, the documents illustrate, in an unpretentious manner, many themes in nineteenth-century social history. Critchlow's search for appropriate employment, from farming to clerking to hammaking, demonstrates not only the occupational mobility so prevalent at the time, but also the susceptibility of people to the vagaries of nature and the market. Along with occupational mobility went spatial moblity and not merely from the old world to the new. The Harrises moved to different residences about once a year, sometimes to save money, other times to acquire more space, depending on how family finances were progressing. Disease, the place of religion, child-rearing practices, gender roles, social attitudes, household work, and numerous other facets of social life are illuminated in the letters. Even the value of family pets takes on a new dimension in one of Sarah's letters: "I have made . . . caps for the boys out of our old dog Nap's skin, which we tanned with the fur on it. It is a beautiful glossy black, and makes handsome caps." *Island Family Harris* is not only an interesting, emotionally involving work, but also is academically stimulating in that it makes concrete many of the themes that social historians of a statistical bent have been presenting in the last two decades.

WILLIAM BAKER

P.M.'S PROGRESS

HEATHER ROBERTSON, *Willie, A Romance. Volume 1 of the King Years.* James Lorimer, $19.95.

THE SUBTITLE of Heather Robertson's audacious first novel *Willie* is *A Romance,* although another phrase quickly follows: *Volume 1 of the King Years.* The contradictions implicit in these two terms — romance and history — prepare the reader for an erratic, possibly unfocused narrative of Canada's most enigmatic political leader. But exactly the opposite occurs. Just as Mackenzie King was privately a figure of romance, intensely attached to his mother and absorbed by the supernatural, and publicly a man of history, dominated by the politics of power for over twenty-six years, so too the novel combines aspects of the heroic and freedom from literal truth with an encompassing sense of historical detail and careful attention to character. The balance of romance and realism in the novel justifies the initially opposing subtitles and creates a fictional world that enhances the factual while never letting the imaginary stray too far from the actual.

To achieve her union of romance and history, Heather Robertson creates Lily Coolican, a young, liberated photographer, press secretary and, finally, wife of Mackenzie King. Her diary supplies the principal narrative of the novel although it is supplanted by excerpts from letters, journals, and autobiographical selections from two other characters. Following a stylized opening on the death of King — Lily ironically possessing the last known photographs of King taken four days before he died on 22 July 1950 — the novel becomes a prose retrospective of Lily's involvement with Ottawa political and social life and her entanglement with King. Historical figures populate her account, from the then governor general, the Duke of Connaught, to General Sam Hughes, John D. Rockefeller (for whom King briefly worked as an advisor), and Sir Wilfrid Laurier. But it is the energetic, bold and passionate voice of Lily that resounds through the book and prevents the novel from becoming either a panegyric or a nostalgic account of our past. Lily's love affairs, anxieties, and fears become as central to the novel's progress as Mackenzie King's worries over his political future, his relationship with women, or his quest for financial support.

Reflecting the modernist *cachet* of self-reflexive fiction, Robertson predictably has her diarist read and comment on her subject's diary. In a passage from the "Prologue," Lily discovers what she had indeed suspected, that King's personal record is a work of fiction, "a political pilgrim's progress, justifying the ways of Willie to man, or at least to Willie. . . . The crucial pages are blank or excised with a razor blade, Willie acting true to form as his own mythologist." Ironically, the passage highlights the very nature of the novel, itself largely a fictional diary that mythologizes its principal subject. Through the narrative strategy of a diarist storyteller who is witness to and participant in the life of the major character, Robertson is able to develop the personal as well as the political dimension of Mackenzie King. However, in the novel the forty-year-old politician has not yet become the figure F. R. Scott describes in "W.L.M.K." who "will be remembered / Wherever men honour ingenuity, / Ambiguity, inactivity, and political longevity."

Extending the dichotomy between romance and history in *Willie* is the presence of another male who competes for the love of Lily Coolican: Talbot Papineau, great-grandson of the leader of the

1837 rebellion in Lower Canada. On his way to fight in Europe and eventual death in Flanders, Papineau is everything King is not: handsome, young, decisive, courageous, and independent. In contrast to King, romance foregrounds the character of Papineau while history sits offstage. Robertson skilfully laces the actual letters of Papineau from the front into the action of the novel, again merging history with romance. One result is the immediacy of the personal suffering of war, exceeded by few Canadian writers. From France, for example, Papineau reveals the honesty of his fears: "I am not by nature intrepid, nor even quarrelsome enough to make fighting enjoyable. On the contrary, I shrink from the naked disclosure of human passions . . . they fill me with a cold horror and dread. But to see a man afraid could be worst of all." Papineau's moral conflict reflects the emotional conflict of Lily who must decide between affection for King and attraction to Papineau. Such opposition, however, sustains a dramatic conflict in the novel that intensifies its presentation of character.

Setting is equally crucial to the success of *Willie* and Robertson vividly presents Ottawa life just before and during World War I. Whether it is the devastating fire that virtually destroyed Parliament or the numerous appearances of Ottawa suffragettes, bureaucrats, politicians, or prostitutes, Robertson conveys the social life of the capital with acuteness and colour. There is, furthermore, a positive sense of humour in the novel that is often a release from the tension of Lily's personal involvements and the distressing impact of the war. Her idea of humour, however, is often at odds with her conservative peers so that when she reports to a friend after the Parliamentary fire that "the House of Commons is going to sit in the Invertebrate Fossil Room at the Victoria Museum," she is not always appreciated.

But it is the narrative style of *Willie* that one must repeatedly acknowledge, for in its combination of epistolary, first-person, and journalistic methods it sustains an intimacy and involvement between the reader and the text. Yet the technique never short-cuts the complexity of dealing with historical figures in a fictional form. A letter from Talbot Papineau to Lily epitomizes the issue when he writes, "I have picked up and thrown aside half a dozen books. I am sick to death of the life histories of imaginary people. I shall be interested only in my own, or in those of real people, and then only if they seem to influence or direct me." This expresses the implied aesthetic of the novel that only the lives of "real people" are valuable, although their fictional presentation can make them better understood. The concentration on facticity in the novel creates not a historical romance but a work that in its innovative treatment of Canadian history contains both the abstractness and energy of romance with the detail and precision of historical data. The result is that the fullness of a life *in history* has assumed literary form. In this, however, Robertson does not so much initiate as extend techniques anticipated by Robert Kroetsch, Margaret Atwood, Michael Ondaatje, and Timothy Findley. Yet where she differs is in the boldness of her attaching fictions to such public and historical figures who, while they have long remained central to the history of the country, now find a place in its imagination.

IRA B. NADEL

FOUNDING FATHERS

PHYLLIS R. BLAKELEY and JOHN N. GRANT, eds., *Eleven Exiles: Accounts of Loyalists of the American Revolution.* Dundurn, $24.95 cloth; $14.95 paper.

ROYCE MACGILLIVRAY, *The House of Ontario.* Natural Heritage/Natural History, $9.95.

ROBERT S. ALLEN, *Loyalist Literature: An annotated bibliographical guide to the writings on the Loyalists of the American Revolution.* Dundurn, $9.50.

ELEVEN EXILES contains biographies of a diverse group of men and women driven from the American colonies who emigrated north. All played some role in the founding of a future English Canada and it is this aspect of their lives which dominates these stories rather than their expulsion from the United States. The title of this book does not convey any sense of positive achievement. *Eleven Exiles* is an important contribution to the growing body of literature on the Loyalists. It is well-researched and documented and carefully edited, avoiding the unevenness often found in multi-authored collections. The editors have achieved variety by including with the more characteristic U.E.L.'s the stories of an Indian woman, a farmer's wife, and a black. They have also chosen settlers to the various colonies of British North America, thus providing some history of how each one developed. Since most exiles came from New England, however, the diversity does not extend to their origins.

John N. Grant points out in his introductory chapter that the narratives "appear to support the myth that loyalism was the creed of the élite in American society." This is necessarily the case since it was the prominent and well-educated who left written records. Rich or poor, however, their most pronounced qualities were courage and tenacity. It is probably true that the vast majority of those who opposed the rebels, preferring not to risk mob violence to themselves or their homes, kept quiet about their convictions. The exiled Loyalists made no such choice and the bravery with which they stood up for their principles was matched by an equal courage in facing the rigours of a northern wilderness. The speed with which they cleared the land and established civilized communities in all of British North America is a truly impressive tale. Those who fancy that they see something negative in the Canadian character or believe that English Canada was founded by "losers" would do well to read these biographies.

The House of Ontario is a bedside book. A work of fiction that masquerades as vignettes of local history, it reads like a collection of newspaper columns. There are nearly a hundred items averaging about one- and-a-half pages each. The spirit of the local history or family memoir has been cleverly and amusingly captured. Did you know that a town called Lampsden was once a slave colony where twenty-nine people from one log cabin voluntarily sold themselves? Karl Marx visited Ontario in 1865 seeking the Professorship of Moral Philosophy at a planned Lake Ontario University and Adolf Hitler just might have been a hired man at an Ontario farm in 1911. A particularly choice piece, entitled "Literary Progress," recounts the nineteenth-century story of a shiftless nagging farmer and his "driven" wife in bits of letters, diary items, and newspaper notices. The farmer publishes a book, *The Duties of the Backwoods Housewife*; two years later, failing to sell a novel, he drowns himself. His wife, by dint of unremitting toil, becomes a successful property owner. Her life ends with a grand funeral. The final irony is that 1963 historical research "proves" that *Duties* was the work of a woman.

This collection of parodies might have become an outstanding example of Canadian humour if the author had maintained the parodic voice. Unfortunately, MacGillivray's voice intrudes, and it becomes more strident and bitter as the book progresses. Life on a farm, he tells us repeatedly, is little better than life in a concentration camp, such misery being caused largely by holders of mortgages and owners of cheese factories. The author's interest in economic matters is not matched by much understanding. However, MacGillivray appears to be well acquainted with Ontario history and biography (he is a Past President of the Ontario Historical Society) and has put this knowledge to good use in attempting to create a mythology for the province. *The House of Ontario* is an attractive book with excellent black-and-white silhouettes by Mark Grice.

Robert S. Allen's *Loyalist Literature* is a clear and concise collection of bibliographical essays. The book is divided into four chapters: General References, The American Revolution, The Diaspora (with regional subdivisions), and The Loyalist Legacy. It is timely — appearing before the 200th anniversary of the arrival of the main body of Loyalists — and appears to be comprehensive. It will be useful to all those interested in Canada's Loyalist past.

KATHERINE L. MORRISON

INTUITIVE CRAWFORD

DOROTHY FARMILOE, *Isabella Valancy Crawford. The Life and The Legends.* Tecumseh, $8.95.

IT WAS KATHERINE HALE who first recognized that Isabella Valancy Crawford (1850-87) was no "poetess" but rather a "poet." In this 90-page biography of a remarkable Victorian spinster whom she compares frequently to Emily Dickinson, Farmiloe tells us why Isabella was a "poet." Farmiloe emphasizes Crawford's professional attitude to her writing, which was her sole financial support, and her tough, aggressive attitude toward the editors who published her novelettes and poems in their magazines and newspapers. Farmiloe also stresses the daringly erotic imagery of Crawford's poetry, calls "The Lily Bed" "an account of the first full sexual experience of a virgin" and speculates that it may have been realistically rooted in a love affair with Theodore Clementi, grandson of the famous Italian pianist and composer.

Farmiloe sees Crawford's life as the classic struggle of the starving, suffering artist and certainly Isabella's life was a tragic one, given her alcoholic father, more skilled at embezzling public funds than at practising medicine, the family's constant moving to poorer and smaller quarters, the deaths of nine siblings, and Isabella's own precarious health. Crawford's life, as Farmiloe points out, "in her progression from wilderness to small town to industrial city, is Canada's history in microcosm." The Crawfords moved from Paisley, Ontario, a small pioneer community in a wilderness setting, to the larger and more culturally stimulating environment of Lakefield, where Catharine Parr Traill became mentor and friend, and finally to the industrial clangour and congestion of Toronto, which Isabella hated.

Farmiloe is handicapped by the total lack of Crawford private papers, and states in the "Introduction" that she is therefore forced to fall back on contemporary accounts (often contradictory and misleading), her own psychological insights, and a close reading of Crawford's poetry and prose. On the basis of such less than ideal sources, Farmiloe

has produced a competent biography, notable for its conscientious sifting of facts and opinions, and for a good intuitive grasp of Isabella's character. Farmiloe is least competent in analyzing the writing as relevant to the life, although she does have a good eye for images in the life which find deeper symbolic resonance in the poetry, such as Isabella's beloved Lakefield canoe. To be able to interpret the life from the literature is a rare skill, and Farmiloe could learn from Leon Edel. She should also have resisted the temptation to offer purely critical judgments of Crawford's work, not only because they have no place here, but because they are biased and unsound. She is a much better psychologist than literary critic.

Crawford's life, coloured by deaths, dramatic reversals, and her own reclusive eccentricities is the stuff out of which great biographies are made. Like Farmiloe, we can only hope that some fine day a zealous CanLit buff will find a trunk full of Crawford diaries and letters. A fully fleshed portrait of Canada's own Emily Dickinson would be a rare treat.

MARIAN FOWLER

SPIRITUAL AUTOBIOGRAPHIES

ANNE CAMPBELL, *No Memory of a Move.* Longspoon, $8.00.

ELIZABETH GOURLEY, *The M Poems.* Fiddlehead, $6.00.

YVONNE TRAINER, *Customers.* Fiddlehead, $6.00.

BROWNWEN WALLACE, *Signs of the Former Tenant.* Oberon, $9.95.

T. E. HULME, GREAT THEORETICIAN of memory, said that "Literature, like memory, selects only the vivid patches of life," and that "Life is composed of exquisite moments and the rest is only shadows of them" ("Notes on Language and Style"). All four of these poets are to varying degrees concerned with the power of memory in their spiritual autobiographies, the ability of memory to recollect those spots in time or timeless epiphanies in which the meaning of a life is given sudden growth into understanding, and this sense of the renovating and reassessing power of memory is central to the work of all of these poets. They are also poets who are concerned with the plight of the sensitive woman in the (insensitive) male-dominated contemporary world. Because of the formulaic possibilities in especially this latter regard, at least three of these books give off the appearance of having been written in the same room or poetry workshop, one with "Sisterhood Poetry" or "Canadian Women's Writing" captioned over the door. Many of the poems of this category are narrowly opinionated, quarrel more with others than themselves, and seem to have a steady eye on what is (thought to be) fashionable at Canadian publishing houses in the 1980's. The least of these poems are written from recipe, are uninspired and predictable.

Relatedly, Gourley, Trainer, and Wallace are also given to the writing of very self-conscious poems, seemingly intent on demonstrating their right to write poetry in the first place. They write many lines which appear as dubious evidence of the "poetic" life of the poet. This writing includes ultimately self-regarding gestures about the poet's poet-friends and writerly surroundings (this is my desk, that is my pottery, these are my paintings, my favourite books, there is my old Volvo, and this poem is for a suffering poet-friend of mine): it is a writing highly mannerist in the end, almost nugatory. Standard dead spot filler in poetry books these days, it is the artificial

art of uncritical self-absorption, and it falls far below the high standard Hulme held up with his comment about literature as captive of the "vivid patches of life," life's rarest moments of intense meaning.

Yvonne Trainer is the youngest and the least accomplished of these poets, and *Customers* is so hackneyed in its figurations and awkward in its rhythms that the writing seldom rises above the level of inarticulate, column prose. The subject matter of her volume is the otherness of others as perceived amidst relationships which take place in the world of buying and selling. The settings of the poems are in places like craft shops, pet stores, bookstores, and marketplaces; but the ostensible motion outward which such a post of observation implies is not realized with anything like beholding vigour because Trainer's exceedingly casual view of other people is as vague as the language she employs at almost every turn. Most images, all adjectives, and an astounding number of the human figures in the volume stay at the level of the abstract cliché, the generic. So people are seen as vaguely as "My mother," "Father," "the Apple man," "This trucker," "THE WRINKLED CHINAMAN," "The drunkard," "Our neighbour," "The doctor," and "The workman." They remain pretty close to such wraith-like bearing throughout most of the poems, almost never coming to life as beings in themselves. *Customers* lacks a precise feeling for mature experience and there is no zest here in the possibilities of language.

Elizabeth Gourlay's *The M Poems* is marginally a more expressive volume than Trainer's but it too is truncated by a laxity of craft and a narrowness of sensibility. Largely a song of celebration of womanhood and the moon, the first suite moves toward lyricism in the tonal energy of the poet's lines, but many of these lines are close to sexist (ironically) in the way they view men; and they are narrowly feminist in their subject matter to say the least. Amidst a series of tributes to the moon ("she remains / empress," and "she is so white, this flying lady"), cheap shots are delivered about the astronauts: "these men / funny walking trying / to lift their feet" — shots which were once more gracefully executed by such writers as R. S. Thomas, Elizabeth Jennings, and Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. (to name only three) during the 1960's and early 1970's before the juxtaposition (of organic moon goddess and mechanical man) became corny and shopworn. The second section of *The M Poems* is a series of numbered pieces gathered together as an elegy for the persona's mother, but it is also a suite about the politics of family life. Given the feminist tenor of the first section in the volume, we are not surprised to find (especially in "XII") that the mother was a suffocated beauty and the father a bit of a bore, an animated cucumber. The recipe, that is to say, is a strict one and a comfortable one in that it stays clear of things like the complexities of human relationships and the essential opacity of individual lives, their elusiveness next to the intolerant use of abstractions. In the end, *The M Poems* are the idle and dull musings of a feminist author: they are not vivid or generous enough to have a lasting effect and must honestly be described, I think, as the diary notes of a woman who has mastered a slight tonal gift.

Brownwen Wallace's *Signs of the Former Tenant* is quite oddly a volume in which the least successful poems take up the most space. It is composed of three sections ("Moving Away From the Past," "Between Words," and "The Cancer Poems") and the first two sections contain the lesser poems and take up 82 of

the book's 109 pages. "The Cancer Poems," in their sheer lyric intensity and unusual opening into a generosity of imagination, render the idle sensitivity and the sometimes feminist grousing of the previous two suites empty and low-key by comparison. Given the structure of the volume, and also the suggestivity of its title, it is highly likely that Wallace does herself view the large number of earlier poems as small-minded relative to her concerns with the terrors of Hodgkins Disease in "The Cancer Poems." The doors of death keep opening and closing throughout the persona's rediscovery of the brevity and preciousness of life in "The Cancer Poems," and this makes the earlier poems about suffering women (and inadequate and brutal men) seem parochial when viewed in retrospect. The existential thunder of the poet's width of feeling and refined purchase on her subject matter in the volume's last section has a critically placing effect on most of the other poems in the book. Wallace is as given to recipe writing as the others, but her considerable writerly gifts (syntactical poise, precision of diction and figuration) co-operate in "The Cancer Poems" with a new capaciousness of poetic personality and a residual sense of the beauty of life (symbolized quite often as streams of light in domestic settings) which steps past the impediments of feminist writing, and is refreshing after the complacency, almost bigotry, of much recipe writing about womanhood. The proportion of accomplished writing in *Signs of the Former Tenant* is decidely a lopsided equation, but the volume as a whole remains interesting in terms of the poet's spiritual growth, her motion away from laziness of feeling toward the striking intensity of vividly human, spiritual autobiography.

Anne Campbell's *No Memory of a Move* contains its share of girlhood recollections, sisterhood moments, moments of discomfort next to the male of the species, and self-involved analysis about the fate of contemporary women. Interestingly, it is primarily because Campbell is both a conscientious artisan of words and a poet with a wide range of subject matter and tones, that she manages to treat these conventional reference points with a freshness and give them a new life. Campbell is above all else a buoyant poetic personality; tonally, her poetry is expressive of a willingness to experience, an often whimsical sense of irony, and a desire to praise, to "give expression to grace," whether it is noticed in the dense meaning of an observed landscape or in the blessed habits and traits of people she has known. There is a reverence for life in her volume, a generous one, and it is best stated in poems like "The Magician" and "See," each of which embodies the central goodwill of her aesthetic of poetry, its essential concern with the failure of abstractions next to the particularities of human experience. *No Memory of a Move* is also rich in its imaginative grasp of space, its living sensations of the natural world and of the feel of the prairie landscape (see especially "Old country painting," "The corduroy road," and "Echo Lake, Saskatchewan"). There is a solid way in which this poet participates in the world which surrounds her, is serious in her openness to all experience rather than lost in emotional quibbles.

No Memory of a Move is diversified in its subject matter: it is a volume containing the poetry of pain, of recollected meanings from childhood, of present troubled and yet often fulfilling human relationships. Perhaps most telling of all, it contains the writing of a woman who has survived, one whose spiritual autobiography contains as many epiphanies of beauty and joy as it does of regrets

and failures. Her poetry is about relatedness, the special connections the truly serious, truly authentic poet explores between human beings and the natural world in which they live. Finally, Campbell is respectful of that most important relation of all worthy poetry, the relationship of poem to reader: because her poetry manages to reach Hulme's high standard that it state only the most "exquisite moments" in the poet's spiritual journey, it offers us a borrowed experience which is valuable and will last. Campbell has something none of the others have in deep measure, an intelligent sincerity and a basic curiosity about living experience which takes her far past the spiritual shabbiness of the stock response.

TERRY WHALEN

SPECULATIONS

MARIAN FOWLER, *Redney. A Life of Sara Jeannette Duncan*. Anansi, $19.95.

FLESHING OUT THE BARE BONES of history is a literary enterprise that can be both exciting and illuminating, whether conducted at the plebeian level of historical romance or in the more rarefied zone of historiographic metafiction. In recent Canadian novels like Timothy Findley's *Famous Last Words*, George Bowering's *Burning Water*, and Heather Robertson's *Willie*, as well as in plays both Canadian and non-Canadian like Peter Shaffer's *Amadeus* and Leonard Angel's *Eleanor Marx*, the reader/spectator is teased with the blending of facts and possibilities. Witty, irreverent, insightful, and often profoundly moving, these works are usually presented as speculative fictions, clearly differentiated from the realm of conventional scholarship which they both complement and challenge. Marian Fowler adds a new dimension to this current literary trend by giving *Redney* the subtitle "A Life of Sara Jeannette Duncan." The choice of article is significant: "A," not "The."

The problem of finding an entrance into the life and personality of an author who has offered only tantalizing glimpses of her inner self in her published writings, and has not left behind a sufficient collection of letters and diaries to allow the biographer a fuller view, was confronted several years ago by Carol Shields in her work on Susanna Moodie. Shields ended up producing two books: a critical discussion of thematic and structural patterns in Moodie's work, and a novel in which the main character is writing a biography of Moodie. In *Small Ceremonies*, Shields' fictional biographer is allowed to accomplish the task which has so far eluded any real-life biographer, but the reader never sees that book. A creative writer with academic training, Shields drew a decisive curtain between the two literary domains.

Marian Fowler appears to have entertained few reservations about the compatability of scholarship and fiction. Her research into the life and career of Sara Jeannette Duncan Cotes (nicknamed "Redney" by her family) has been extensive and thorough, in Canada, England, India, and the United States. She has interviewed surviving members of the Duncan and Cotes families, traced the biographies of Duncan's friends and acquaintances, read carefully every piece that Duncan published, and trekked around the world in Duncan's footsteps. Hence she can offer a detailed itinerary of Duncan's lively career, colourful descriptions of her milieu, family anecdotes, and her own engaging depictions of the settings of Duncan's various domestic and public experiences. The failure of these investigations to unearth

a secret cache of private documents has not discouraged her from serving up speculations and inferences on the same platter as documented facts. While this book is given the framework of a scholarly biography — acknowledgements, footnotes, bibliography, and index — its spicier material springs full-formed from the head of its author.

An example of Fowler's method appears early in the book in her description of Duncan's youthful connection with Pauline Johnson, which seems to be bolstered by a footnote referring to three published sources. When checked, however, these sources simply substantiate Fowler's description of Johnson's home and family and give no evidence that a close relationship — however appropriate it might have been — ever existed between the two young literary women who were fellow students in Brantford. Fowler suggests: "It may have been Pauline . . . who taught Redney how to paddle a canoe. . . ." She then glides from conjecture to the assertion that "Redney explained to Pauline, that summer of 1879, as she determined the direction of the canoe with a decisive flick of her paddle, that she had decided to become a journalist."

Fowler applies her mode of speculative biography primarily to her subject's emotional life, from her responses to her travels (on the way to New Orleans, "Redney looked at the Negroes lining the track at each station, holding out their hands for pennies, felt the arm of her own ambition reaching out, ready to grasp") to her responses to men. Reading between the lines of Duncan's journalism, Fowler develops a lush romance between Duncan and Joaquin Miller in New Orleans in 1885, complete with a scene of attempted seduction. However, Miller failed to add Duncan to his bouquet of conquests, for Fowler tells us that when she married Everard Cotes in 1890, "Redney was still a virgin." She infers that "Redney realized two years into marriage that it was a mistake" because "Everard loved Redney with all the fine sincerity of his nature, with unfailing gentleness and sympathy, and she took advantage of his love to dominate and manipulate him, then despised him for letting her do so." These interpretations result from Fowler's conviction that the transformation of the vibrant, occasionally radical young idealist of the 1880's into the resigned ironist of later life must be attributable to more than her change in environment (from eastern Canada to Far Eastern Calcutta) and the inevitable disillusionment of middle age.

Yet Duncan's life and writings are interesting enough to sustain a full-length biography without the embroidery of "the strange green fire" of her attachment to Miller. Charming, ambitious, and moderately unconventional, she dedicated her first book to Mrs. Grundy and helped forge the identity of the New Woman by travelling unchaperoned and by penetrating the male terrain of newspaper journalism in Washington and Toronto. Fowler's determination to recreate the nuances of Duncan's psyche diverts the reader from the extraordinary diligence with which she has pieced together Duncan's life — especially the later years which, until *Redney*, remained unresearched. She has traced the original sources of many of the characters and scenes in Duncan's fiction as well as the complicated paths of Duncan's transcontinental career and personal meanderings. Publishers' records reveal the later Duncan to be a "shrewd, calculating businesswoman," writing "to keep herself in steamship tickets" for her frequent voyages to England. The ardour of Fowler's description of Duncan's

early years mellows in the last two chapters where we find Duncan a restless exile, her attempts to negotiate a permanent escape from the stifling atmosphere of Anglo-India thwarted by her husband's inability to secure employment outside Calcutta, and her efforts to reclaim her Canadian roots frustrated by the poor reception of *The Imperialist.*

Nineteen eighty-three proved an interesting year for Canadian literary biography. At one pole is *An Odd Attempt in A Woman,* Lorraine McMullen's account of the literary life of Frances Brooke, which is characterized by absolute authorial restraint concerning its subject's undocumented personal affairs. At the other pole is *Redney.*

CAROLE GERSON

MULTIPLE VISION

Visions: Contemporary Art in Canada. Essays by Alvin Balkind, Gary Michael Dault, Terrence Heath, John Bentley Mays, Diana Nemiroff and Charlotte Townsend-Gault, ed. Robert Bringhurst et al. Douglas & McIntyre, $29.95.

IN A BRIEF PREAMBLE to *Visions: Contemporary Art in Canada* the volume's several editors declare their intention of presenting us wtih "a multiple cross-section, not a survey, not a history, of Canadian art since the Second World War." To help them "toss the art of four decades into the air and allow it to settle into fresh configurations" they have commissioned from some of this country's most astute observers of the contemporary art scene six essays that approach their subject from different but overlapping points of view.

Alvin Balkind's "The Triumph of the Egg" is a splendid general introduction to the visual arts in post-war Canada; Terrence Heath's "A Sense of Place," as its title suggests, surveys the artist's response to his geographical and psychological environment; Gary Michael Dault's "The Alternate Eden" establishes a basic grammar for the interpretation of abstract art, which is then applied to the work of some two dozen Canadian painters. The volume's final three essays are more broadly thematic in scope and approach. In "Redefining the Role" anthropologist Charlotte Townsend-Gault considers art as social response; in "The Snakes in the Garden" *Globe and Mail* critic John Bentley Mays examines art as a form of personal statement within a specifically urban context; while Diana Nemiroff in "Rethinking the Object" — perhaps the most provocative essay in the collection — looks at the ways in which Canadian artists of the post-modern period have attempted to readjust the balance between art as process and product. Most of the essays are refreshingly free from the obscurantist jargon that too often disfigures art criticism in this country, and as a result the "cross-talk" between these individual pieces is often as "enlightening and engaging" as the book's editors envision.

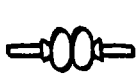
So much for the tossing. Whether the art of four decades settles into fresh configurations is another matter entirely. For in spite of lucid observations in each of the above essays, the new methodology hinted at in the volume's introduction never materializes. In fact the categories most often used to organize the disparate material within each essay are precisely those of "region" and "medium" disavowed in the editors' preface, and in most instances these groupings trace chronological developments of form and style in a way that looks suspiciously like the survey or history of post-war Canadian art the book professes not to be. In some of the essays we even catch echoes of a neo-Darwinian approach to

the subject, as in Dault's assumption of a "stylistic evolution" that takes us from the abstractions of Lawren Harris to those of Gathie Falk, or that same author's description of Jock Macdonald's career as "a joyful study in the progress of Canadian modernism." (And this in the face of Duchamp's observation, duly cited by Nemiroff, that the very notion of "progress" in modern art was at best a specious idea.)

Elsewhere we find authors who should know better falling into many of the traps of "traditional" critical writing — toying semantically with definitions until they cease to distinguish, as Heath does in his extended discussion of "place" in Canadian art; falling back upon unsubstantiated "impressions" in attempting to interpret individual works of art, as does Mays in his bizarrely apocalyptic reading of Falk's *Pieces of Water*; or taking the proclaimed novelty of avant garde movements at face value, as Nemiroff seems to do in calling our attention to Fluxus, a performance group whose stated aims bear a remarkable similarity to Wagner's mid-nineteenth-century programme for an art work of the future, or for that matter the collaborative efforts of the sixteenth-century Florentine Camerata.

Taken individually such lapses are matters of minor concern, and do not generally detract from the usefulness of the essays in which they appear. Collectively taken they serve to remind us that a new methodology for examining modern and post-modern art in Canada has not yet arrived, nor is it likely to until this art is subjected to a more rigorous process than tossing and settling.

JOEL H. KAPLAN



POSTED

GEORGE WOODCOCK, *Taking It to the Letter.* Quadrant, $7.95.

EDOUARD & CLAUDE JASMIN, *Deux Mats une Galère.* Leméac, n.p.

"I BECAME PRETTY EXPERT at digging a ditch to true levels in the process," George Woodcock informs an irate poet, referring to his own unorthodox "career" as a writer. Documenting friendships with academics and anarchists, poets and publishers, such as Avakumovic and Atwood, Purdy and Page, his letters are marked throughout by synchronicities of feeling, incisive cultural commentary, and the occasional, delightful touch of autobiography. *Taking It to the Letter* is the portrait of a writer's mind at work, editing *Canadian Literature* on a shoestring budget between recurring travel to Europe and the Orient. It is the cultural by-product of daily toil by an inquisitive, encyclopaedic, and accessible "old Canadian returned."

There is considerable overlap between the editor, critic, writer, reader, political being, and friend in Woodcock's letters. I enjoyed his observations to writer-friends about other writers. Woodcock on Atwood: "she totally fascinates me"; on Thomas Merton: "the common ground isn't anarchism . . . but interest in Asian religions"; on Orwell: "far too sweeping . . . authoritarian"; on Theodore Roethke: "that joker in the Freudian pack, the non-Oedipal man"; on Octavio Paz: "a very pleasant man"; on Glassco and Matt Cohen: "between you and me, I distrust all literature that needs explication"; on Dale Zieroth: "the total feel of living in a very remote prairie community"; on Tom Wayman: "the only one of the New Leftists who . . . is writing social poetry." He finds James Reaney eccentric on Crawford, and Sandra Djwa excessive on Heavysege.

He agrees with Louis Dudek on Reaney, and with Clara Thomas on Glassco's prose and Pacey's influence. Richler and Callaghan are not beloved, Colombo is a point of contention, and Robin Mathews merits Woodcock's most finely honed wit. Closing the book, I am tempted to look up the writing of Anthony Apenzell, Woodcock's pseudonym "when I feel a special need to review."

Friendships are tested but never endangered by politics — a lively debate with Marian Engel and others about the policies and procedures of the Writers' Union is balanced against letters to Atwood on behalf of the imprisoned J. P. Narayan; to Laurence on Dumont, the Métis, and pre-colonialism; to Alan Twigg in support of *Georgia Strait*; to Roy Daniells on the active and the contemplative life in India. Woodcock the editor charms by asking simply for "something longish" in a review, and amuses with mock despair — "I knew writers were a hysterical lot, but writers when they become publishers!" By 1979, having given up the editing of *Canadian Literature*, Woodcock can honestly confess to Al Purdy that "I still see the 'Establishment' as a 'they' that interferes with my life without my having much say about it, and it's a rather uncomfortable feeling that others might think of me as one of 'them.'"

Perhaps the most engaging aspect of the letters is Woodcock's description of his travels. A voyage to New Zealand is "a modest trip," much curtailed because of the illness of a pet cat. Another trip entails a near-fatal exchange with the nephew of a Tongan king. Australia is a terrible place, which Woodcock had then not visited, and the South Pacific is tragically marred by missionaries and blackbirders. Bavaria alternates with Bhutan as the source of epistolary travel writing, while Mexico is remembered with Proustian immediacy and affection. The world traveller and the reader/critic are inseparable: travel "always helps one's *speed* of understanding," whether of Mann, Lowry, or Purdy.

Letter collections impose awkward choices — the frustrating principles of ordering and selection operate differently in this genre. Woodcock wisely chose to offer us a chronologically arranged sample of moderate length, refusing to hide, to amend, or to bore. The sequence thus combines the appeal of narrative with a unified point of view. We do not feel the absence of his correspondents' letters — Woodcock's style and tone enable us to reconstruct the other half of the exchange, indeed to enjoy the tacit game between editor and secondary reader, which encloses that between the original sender and receiver. *Taking It to the Letter* enables us to see how common concerns (people, ideas, events) are affected and affirmed by the personalities of the participants. We can extract and enjoy both the essential Woodcock and the universal themes for which he becomes a vehicle of expression, although a proper index would assist us in this endeavour.

The plot thickens with *Deux Mats, une galère*, by Edouard and Claude Jasmin. In the summer of 1981-82, the novelist Claude Jasmin presented his seventy-eight-year-old father with a series of questions to be answered in writing during the intervals between his twice-weekly visits to the old family home on St.-Denis. The resulting book, imitating the dialogue format of a play and reproducing the verbal and written exchanges between father and son, is comfortably situated somewhere between autobiography, correspondence, and the journal. A dual autobiography in ten parts, it records Edouard's wily answers and digressions in the face of his son's

impertinent questions, interspersed with Claude's editorial observations, written after the fact but anticipating his father's tricks. In his quest "à le recherche du père," Claude queries Edouard about money, pleasure, politics, art, and apocalypse. The witty reflections of Edouard Jasmin, the self-educated "false naive" ceramics artist, fully justify his son's expressions of wonder, frustration, amazement, despair, and love. Edouard's allegorical circumlocutions and untutored unorthodoxy are the perfect foil for Claude's post-modern methods and preoccupations. The father will not be contained within the son's rigid grid of questions.

Beginning with a colourful recapitulation of Lucifer's defeat, and concluding in an apocalyptic vision of the Virgin, Edouard's thoughts meander through the story of his life (travelling to Vancouver as an importer of Chinese curios during the Depression), his theory of art (he learned pottery from his son and is represented in New York and Toronto galleries), and his favourite obsessions (ranging from Nostradamus to the future of spaceship earth). Playfully and effectively combining the perspective and methods of the traditional "raconteur" and the lay preacher, Edouard illumines us with the wisdom of the ages, describing art, and living life, as a sort of marriage between primitivism and Gestalt:

> Les arts? un mode de communication, un besoin de chanter sa joie ou de crier sa peine, un désir d'être entendu comme on tend la main, une invitation au festin musical, à la danse des formes et les couleurs, à la lecture ou à la méditation en m'y plongeant comme je fait présentement.

It is unfortunate that the editor(s) did not include reproductions of Edouard's murals along with the many photographs of the family over the years; nevertheless, this book joins Adele Wiseman's *Old Woman at Play* as a unique document about the philosophy of the folk artist.

Edouard's concern about the retention of real names in this book and in the autobiographical columns and television series "La Petite Patrie" is mitigated by his obvious desire and capacity to express himself, and by his son's sense of renewed respect "depuis que j'ai lu Papa." His preconceptions at once eroded and confirmed, Claude Jasmin well-nigh drops the post-modern presumption if not the real names: "Et pourtant, devant sa confiance, je n'ai guère envie de sortir ni Freud, ni Lacan, ni même Jung, le croyant." Quite cognizant of the situation's dynamics, Edouard invokes the metaphoric language of dominoes and the chess game in insisting that *this* book is his: "je reviens à mes moutons, à mon sujet, puisqu'il s'agit de ma biographie, de mes réflexions, de mon jeu de dominos en sept étapes." The last paragraph belongs to him, and he concludes by asking whether "je serais, le temps qui court, un écrivain courant après son souffle?" *Deux Mats, une galère* answers its own question. Let us hope that Edouard Jasmin, like Hubert Evans, will continue to offer us his memories and insights. With the help of his rebellious son, he just might.

MICHELE LACOMBE

SPEAKING OF WRITING

JEAN ROYER, *Ecrivains Contemporains. Entretiens 2. (1977-1980)*. L'Hexagone, n.p.

ACCORDING TO JEAN ROYER, whose second volume of interviews with contemporary writers from Québec, France, Latin America, and Eastern Europe is devoted to poets speaking of their craft, the interview is not an innocent genre. After all, the interviewer decides which writers to meet, what questions to pose and in what order, not to mention the possibility of his editing the material once it has been transcribed. (In this regard, Royer's introduction is too brief: one would like to know why most of the interviews do not include the actual questions asked. The methodology of putting together an anthology of interviews, for there is a methodology, however implicit, needs to be made explicit, to be problematized.) Partaking both of the oral and the written, the interview is indeed a strange animal, of an "androgynous" nature although not without a certain discrete charm — one hears the voices of the writers speaking through the transcription of these 27 pieces. However, in this age of literary theory, the interview might seem an old-fashioned exercise. Does the writer have anything left to tell us that the theoreticians have not already said more accurately, more abstractly? The fact that some of the writers seem to have had difficulties in speaking about poetry (Michel Beaulieu, Alfred Desrochers) would corroborate this view. Another non-book of lists then? Perhaps, but not quite. For despite the wide variety of backgrounds, traditions and generations, not to mention native languages, of such a motley crew of now close-mouthed, now garrulous scriptors, a number of common themes or *motifs* are to be heard throughout this anthology. Extratextual stimuli and concerns, the real dangers which threaten the existence of poetry in this age of prose, and finally the eternal question of identifying what constitutes poetry — such are the subjects raised by these writers.

Cristina Peri-Rossi, a Uruguayan forced to emigrate by the government of her country, underscores what is the state of poetry in a state of siege: "De mon pays monte un silence collectif." We tend to forget that political power has been and still is all too prompt to cancel that freedom without which there can be no poetry, no writing, no art, no life in the end. For many of the poets represented here, power is seen to be held by those on the other side of the verbal barricade. Indeed several of the Québécois poets take pains to distance themselves from the political party in power and from the mythology of *nationalisme* (Michel van Schendel, Paul Chamberland), while the French poet and poetician Henri Meschonnic sees poetry as an attack on "le règne de la raison et de la raison d'Etat." Poetry then must be considered as a political act in and of itself (François Charron, Pierre Perrault), a gesture of protest against the *doxa*, that devitalized discourse chock-full of commonplaces which characterizes the political arena. The point at stake here is that the poet sees himself as an alien living in the margins of society (György Somlyó). There can be no official "writing" in the real sense of the term and the pen of the poet must oppose all constituted forms of authority. All the more so in the case of the woman writer and especially in Québec where, as Nicole Brossard points out, "Toute femme qui écrit désobéit en quelque sorte à la loi qui assigne le fils — et non la fille — à l'écriture." On the other hand, Michèle Lalonde recalls that

the tradition of language in Québec is essentially an oral one and that the men of the province did not hold the real power in such a colonialized society. Hence, the link between all forms of liberation both of men and of women in the Québécois context. François Charron sees a fundamental femaleness in the actual practice of writing poetry given its necessary opposition to the discourse of reason and the Father. In contemporary writing, according to Charron, the Mother is no longer clothed, hidden, and disguised. The body of the Mother is there to be seen and written about, a real body, made of flesh and bones, a being of desires, no longer the pale "virginal" figure of traditional thematics.

The single most often cited *raison d'être* of poetic writing, indeed one could extend it to all *écriture* (as opposed to *écrivance*, to coin a Barthesian binary opposition), is its resistance to the mass reification (*la "zombification"*) of the individual's most precious possession after life itself: her language. The enemy, all the more insidious because its omnipresence makes it almost invisible, is modern man's drive to totalitarian uniformity, in a word: prose. Here it must be understood that if "prose" is the number one enemy for so many of these poets, they are referring to a special kind of prose, unfortunately the most pervasive: the debilitated and debilitating lingua franca of the global market place, a "language" which includes all the diverse discourses of rationality and convenience. According to Claude Esteban of such is made the "general," that form of speech which cuts us off from the universal in human experience. It is only by an anchoring (*enracinement*) of language in the domain of the provincial and the local, in the private urges, drives, and idiosyncrasies that make up one particular individual's experience that writing can speak to *all* mankind and thereby survive and flourish as literature. No wonder then that France is seen by some as the Bad Mother and as such soundly reproached for her tendency to vague abstractions and for her linguistic policemen, the hated Green Coats, i.e., the forty "immortal" members of the French Academy (Perrault). Of course, the "massification" of language is not limited to France.

The realm of the general, the kingdom of the cliché, and the home of prepackaged thoughts and frozen ideas are everywhere and all effectively outlaw one of man's basic wants: the need to create, to produce, to *make* things. "Toute l'aliénation d'aujourd'hui vient de ce que l'homme est fait pour faire et qu'on lui empêche de faire quoi que ce soit" (Robert Marteau). Writing must be considered not as an experience nor an emotion, nor a piece of information to be represented, conveyed, and transmitted but rather as an *activity*, for such is the only way to combat the media of the masses (Meschonnic). But in the way stand several obstacles, such as the temptation of sterile silence (Clément Marchand), not to mention the *bête noire* of several of the writers grouped together here: linguistics and its more exotic cousin, semiotics (Esteban, Marie Uguay, Kenneth White). Abstract, rational, and chrome-like, semiology is often cited as a kind of intellectual totalitarianism. The will to analyze, to dissect, in a word to *use* poetry as a mere illustration of the general features of human discourse — of such is the semiotic approach to language guilty according to the poet. Interestingly enough it is the poetician who strikes the hardest blow against structuralism: for Henri Meschonnic, linguistics simply has nothing to say about poetry.

What then is poetry? First and foremost, it is, of course, language. It is language beloved, language caressed: "Poésie ce m'est comme la joue ou la fesse aimée du langage" (James Sacré). But then poetry is also the stuff of the poet's body, and especially the link (*liaison*) between his or her body and the body of language. Making (out) is thus a question of informing the loved one in the sense of "giving form." Neither seer nor prophet, the poet is conceived of as "un ouvrier du langage, un artisan, un inventeur" (Michel van Schendel). And according to Robert Marteau, it is not by accident that "pottery" and "poetry" are so close phonetically, for both entail the production of artefacts, whether the raw materials be unformed clay or the lexical and rhythmic resources of the writer's native tongue. If the instrumentality of language — its referential and denotative function — is the greatest threat to poetry, there is another grave danger: the self-perpetuating myth of poetry as sacred trust and mission. Thus the poet must be taken from his pedestal in order to be appreciated fully as a real worker who gets his hands dirty in a glaze of words (Sacré, van Schendel). All of which points to the need of writer and reader alike to take pleasure in the enjoyment of texts. For Nicole Brossard, writing is a "space of bliss," and for Paul-Marie Lapointe, "Je veux que la personne qui lit trouve son propre plaisir de créer le texte." The pleasure of the text implies an act of love, a moment of bliss taken with language in all of its arousing material self.

In their own ways, in their own voices, and perhaps even without their realizing it, these poets have developed an *oral poetics* (as in "oral history"). Of course, post-structuralist theory has raised many of the same points, from Roland Barthes to Julia Kristeva and Jacques Derrida. What is unique in Jean Royer's anthology, however, is the manner in which it is done. The discourse is *pré-* or perhaps it would be fairer to say, *post*-theoretical, for this poetics is quintessentially a poetics of the poetic subject, that maker of texts who loves language for its feel, its rhythms, its "grain," that anarchical *artisan*, that *bricoleur* of verbal icons, of whatever nation, whether she or he writes in verse or not.

RALPH SARKONAK

THIRD EYE

MARGARET ATWOOD, *Murder in the Dark.* Coach House, $6.95.

LIKE *True Stories*, *Murder in the Dark* is concerned with sexual politics, interpersonal and internecine violence, the duplicity of language, the trickiness of all human action. The lies of love and of poems; the endless struggles to see clearly, to experience sharply; the isolated moments when the "third eye" gives clear sight: these are among the recurrent themes of Atwood's recent work, represented here in brief writings which are ambiguously subtitled "short fictions and prose poems." As measured and deliberate as any other phrase in Atwood, this plural and conjunctive categorization constitutes a refusal of traditional generic distinctions between fiction and non-fiction, prose and poetry, and — like the fictions of Borges — a refusal of any association of brevity with incompleteness and superficiality.

Some are deeply Borgesian writings in other senses as well, suddenly revealing the triviality of plot and social custom, the waning of cliché, the intersection of the fantastic with ordinary life. Consider

"Before the War" with its tales of a lost golden age of simplicity and plenty, tales which were only words. The reality is abruptly other: "There's no one here. One step off the path and there's never been anyone here, you think perhaps wrongly that it could all still be saved, even now." Nostalgia is impossible. Even the myth of mysterious absence has gone, transmuted into an insistent awareness of death as the landscape of "This is a Photograph of Me" is echoed in "Autobiography":

> Once, on the rock island, there was the half-eaten carcass of a deer, which smelled like iron, like rust rubbed into your hands so that it mixes wtih sweat. This smell is the point at which the landscape dissolves, ceases to be a landscape and becomes something else.

The language is stripped, bare; sentence structure resolutely plain, unadorned, refusing to become "art," existing only for the olfactory sensation of death.

In the title piece, the rules for a game of "Murder in the Dark" are given: "You can say: the murderer is the writer, the detective is the reader, the victim is the book. Or perhaps, the murderer is the writer, the detective is the critic and the victim is the reader." In any case, the writer "must always lie," and the reader must always be interrogated about his or her gullibility, simple acceptance and belief being the responses most likely to produce victimage. Belief takes many forms here. There are the cherished norms of Realist fiction and bourgeois heterosexuality as seen in "Happy Endings" with its six variations on the theme of "John and Mary meet," leading inevitably to "the only authentic ending": "*John and Mary die.*" There are the cherished conventions of fictive romance: "In men's novels, getting the woman or women goes along with getting the power. It's a perk, not a means. In women's novels you get the power by getting the man. The man is the power. But sex won't do, he has to love you." There are the moments of bitter awareness that worship of gods, or of women transformed temporarily into sex goddesses in the eyes of their lovers, amounts to the same thing: "After you've been serviced, after you've been used, you'll be put away again until needed." And there is fear engendered by the exercise of power whether civil or religious, power which seems less fearful when situated in the context of the ordinary but is nevertheless an abomination: "The most important thing is making her. Over, from nothing, new." "We fall back into these rhythms," we are told at the end of "Iconography," "as if into safe hands," and that is the horror in this "mirror story."

Juxtaposed with "Iconography," "Liking Men" presents a voice arguing in despair and cynicism that an act of faith is necessary to the set task, faith and a willingness constantly to trace the lover back to "The day he was born," to understand the journey "Again and again." In "Him," forgiveness is added to faith in this undertaking which becomes at the end of the book "the journey of the body . . . as it walks back into its own flesh" with the "third eye" as guide. Requiring perception of the "gassed and scorched corpses at the cave-mouth, the gutted babies, the spoor left by generals, and, closer to home, the hearts gone bubonic with jealousy and greed," that visionary eye is the counterpart of Atwood's probing, mocking, cleansing language, which in its acerbity and wit invites us to see the malignancy of our world and still hope. Avoiding the twin traps of lyricism and melancholy, Atwood has again refused us the option of escape through language.

LORRAINE WEIR

DARK MOTHER

MARGARET ATWOOD, *Interlunar*. Oxford, $9.95.

Dark mother . . .
I will never deny you
or believe in you
only.

"O DARK DARK DARK. They all go into the dark, / The vacant interstellar spaces": often-quoted words which open the third part of Eliot's "East Coker." Less familiar are the first words of the next sentence, "And we all go with them." Intimations or "whispers" (another Eliot word) of mortality. *Interlunar*, Atwood's tenth volume of poetry in nineteen years, is alive with such whispers. Between the stars "brilliant as steel nails," between moons, space is hugely dark. Casting her characteristically cold (like burning ice) eye on her own "interstellar / dust," the poet says, "I wish to show you this darkness / you are so afraid of."

From first poem, in which snake woman remembers carrying what she calls (elsewhere) a "sinuous ribbon of fine darkness" into the dining room because snakes were "something that even men were afraid of," to last, "Interlunar," in which "Darkness waits apart from any occasion for it; / like sorrow it is always available," this collection breathes in darkness, is a meditation on why and when and how to confront it. You "must learn to see in darkness," she insists; you may be tempted to extinguish it (darkness-as-snake), "batter it / with that hoe or crowbar,"

But pick it up and you would hold
the darkness that you fear
. . . . . .
and it would be in your hands
where it has always been.
("After Heraclitus")

In Atwood's hands, certainly, in her ink, in her poems, because she has always been a dark lady, living on edges, roughing it, "choosing a violent duality," identifying with the crow whose wings "radiat[e] darkness" and with crow saying, "I become cynical, / you have defrauded me of hope / and left me alone with politics" (in *You Are Happy*) — the power politics of two "hostile nations," men and women. Struggling to live with her faulty heart, Atwood knows that "hardness of heart can kill you" and that one of them, either she or her heart, "will finally / betray the other." Eyes blazing out of photographs on the back cover of volume after volume, Atwood stares into the heart of this world's darkness, "the place / you would rather not know about, / . . . the place you cannot imagine. / . . . the place that will finally defeat you." She has learned the lessons of pain, and can say for sure that "The facts of the world seen clearly / are seen through tears" (in *True Stories*).

Seen through tears, the facts of the world are both magnified and distorted, acquiring the surreality of a Bosch painting in which "The surface is clear / and without texture" ("One Species of Love, After a Painting by Hieronymous Bosch"), like so many Atwood poems. "Snake Poems," the first section of *Interlunar* ("O Snake, you are an argument / for poetry: / . . . / O long word, cold-blooded and perfect"), contains dozens of examples of magnified clarity in the form of magnificent metaphors and images. Some of these snake poems are, for me, as fine as those written by Emily Dickinson and D. H. Lawrence — and that's saying something.

But this section, like the rest of the volume, and like Atwood's nine other poetry books, is also a grand Boschean guignol, "a melodrama" in which suffering grotesques enact scenes out of Cana-

dian Gothic. The speaker in "Three Denizen Songs" advances and is seen "as cavern: larval darkness," as "a vacancy pumping night out," "a cleft heart, / drain-hole and quagmire," "a lagoon / . . . black and oily / out of which something venusian / with skinfolds and many teeth will certainly lift soon." A feminist Eurydice rejects a chauvinist Orpheus who sings to those (women?) about to "tear / his head from his body in one burst / of furious refusal." Persephone writes letters to "left-handed mothers" about the "struggle of amputees / under a hospital sheet that passed / for sex." The robber bridegroom rummages for souls in his young brides' flesh; Giselle gets blood out of a stone in a scene where the "tree arching above her / is dead, like everything / here." A female David sings to Genghis Khan, who "will not be consoled / by her or pleasure or any / thing, for being / alive on this earth." Another woman, about to be burned as a witch by former lovers, watches their children ape her agony while their wives bring bowls "as if offering food / at a feast."

Atwood's world is not a happy place, nor is her vision easy to take in large doses (I fled to the beach seeking sun, needing warmth after reading the last seven of her ten volumes in chronological order). What makes "the ordeal of seeing" even more excruciating is her growing awareness that time is running out, life is short, man mortal (a tragic flaw common to both sexes). In "A Blazed Trail," the telling title of a seven-poem sequence which is my personal favourite in this volume, the poet speaks of "the body of clear air" she thought she "could always / come back to and inhabit."

> I thought I could be with myself only.
> I thought I could float,
> I thought I would always have a choice.
> Now I am earthbound.

Committing herself to the "dubious mercy / of the present" — "the X in time," "an intersection that has happened already" — the poet seeks to recover what she has lost, picking her way through "the blazed forest, / scar by scar, back through / history." She discovers instead that "Living backwards means only / I must suffer everything twice." Poems with titles like "Doorway," "Before," "Valediction . . ." "Precognition" and "A Blazed Trail" bespeak her preoccupation with the passage of time and the coming confrontation with darkness, death. "The blackness that keeps itself / under the surface in daytime / emerges" from the lake: "We have come to the edge," and an acknowledgement of the "Dark mother, whom I have carried with me for years":

> When the appearances of things have left you,
> You will still have this darkness.
> Something of your own you can carry with you.

The poet whistles in the dark to encourage herself and us: "This darkness / is a place you can enter and be / as safe in as you are anywhere." Older and therefore closer to the edge than Atwood, I am not so sure. Like Genghis Khan, I am not consoled by a woman singing about gardens, even bush gardens, "For the verb *to die*."

JOHN F. HULCOOP

CROSSING BORDERS

TERRANCE HUGHES, *Gabrielle Roy et Margaret Laurence: deux chemins, une recherche.* Editions du Blé, $10.00.

DELBERT W. RUSSELL, *Anne Hébert.* Twayne, $18.95.

RUSSELL'S BOOK ON Anne Hébert completes the analysis of her work up to *Les fous de bassan,* which will have to

wait for another study. An earlier monograph was written by Pierre Pagé in 1965 and hence excludes recent works such as *Kamouraska* and *Les enfants du sabbat*. Despite the existence of other studies of Hébert's writing, Russell provides an important service, perhaps particularly to anglophone students and teachers. His study is complete and competent and deals both with major prose and poetry and with lesser-known dramatic pieces (*La mercière assassinée*, *L'arche de midi*). The annotated bibliography he includes is extensive and well researched, and his comments are especially useful to the scholar wading through theses and articles. Russell has obviously looked at all of the literature and is able to distinguish between the excellent and the mediocre.

Nevertheless, one might have hoped for a little more from Russell, who is obviously well informed and discriminating. Having seen his sensible judgment and the quantity of research he has done, the reader would certainly trust him to choose the most valid perceptions from among the available literature, add to these his own interpretations, and formulate hypotheses on Hébert's work. Russell's study completes our knowledge of Anne Hébert, but hesitates to supply us with the illuminations the author is certainly capable of offering. This is likely due to the author's intention to provide an overall look at Hébert's work. But how does Russell situate the rather surprising changes in her style, from fairy-tale lyricism to gothic symbolism to historical detective work (which he carefully documents in chapters on *Kamouraska* and *Les enfants du sabbat*) in "the essential unity of her work"? Are they simply due to "her experimentation with different literary forms," or to something more complex?

Terrance Hughes uses a different approach, but he, too, is trying to fill a gap in our understanding. A rather long introduction locates the roots of his method in Comparative Canadian Literature. Despite the dozen names he cites and the numerous comparative theses that now exist, Hughes speaks of "voix plutôt solitaires" and "l'absence d'instruments de travail" and reproaches Canadians of both linguistic groups for their indifference towards the other. It seems to me that his harsh and misleading judgments alienate the reader interested in these two remarkable writers.

In the first chapter, Hughes places Roy and Laurence in the context of their respective literary traditions. I found the irregular alternation between the two histories somewhat difficult to follow, especially since Hughes alludes to unclear categories in each. Once again, his tone is generally condescending. His study is more interesting when he turns to the two writers themselves, in a series of studies of the female characters, marginal characters (this label is somewhat vague), artists and visionaries, native groups, childhood, and space. All are interesting subjects of comparison. In fact, the study of Roy and Laurence is a comparatist's delight: there are numerous parallels in their work, and their visions are compatible yet subtly different. Hughes, unlike Russell, gives free reign to interpretation. Unfortunately, some of his ideas are difficult to accept. The major problem seems to lie in his belief that any two characters can be compared with enlightening results. For instance, his study of mother-figures starts with Rose-Anna and Stacey, two very different types of women. He defines Rose-Anna as a *mater dolorosa*, condemned to unhappiness as her mother before her, and fails to see that the passage he quotes proves precisely the opposite, i.e., that Rose-Anna is not re-

signed to the misfortunes of life. The next parallel, between Luzina and May Cameron, remains totally implausible: Luzina has no counterpart in Laurence's novels or in any other English-Canadian novel. Closer similarities, such as Florentine's and Pique's convictions that they can escape from the ambiguity of the female condition, are not investigated. Finally, his conclusion that Roy and Laurence move from optimism to pessimism seems to me to be false. *The Diviners* is generally seen as being the completion of the Manawaka cycle, and Morag the one character who comes to terms with her past and recognizes the gift of life for what it is. Roy's most pessimistic novels are her first and third, the urban ones. In her later works, she returns to the subject of childhood and presents a view of the world as a child at the dawn of life.

Perhaps no study can do these writers justice. However, some of Hughes' discoveries are fascinating. He develops a theory that in Canadian and Quebec novels the majority of relationships explored are between generations rather than within them. The little-known quotations of Roy and Laurence which head his conclusion show an identical conception of characters and creation: Roy's characters appear "déjà vivants" from the unconscious; Laurence feels that "the whole process . . . of getting to know a character" probably "takes place at a subconscious level."

Hughes lacks the academic rigour of Russell, and his book is not meant to be the authoritative study of Roy and Laurence. His bibliography is of limited usefulness; it would be hard to assemble a complete list, but a few comments might have been in order. The text itself is occasionally hard to follow because of the insertion of quotations from Laurence in English in the body of the text and in French translation in the longer passages. It is, however, one of the first on authors representing the two cultures (his claim that it is the first and only ignores a few theses) and as such is a breakthrough of sorts. We can only agree with him that this "étude comparative en appelle d'autres."

Russell's book is a completion, an update. Hughes' is a starting point, and an incentive to scholars and publishers to widen the limits of the study of Comparative Canadian Literature.

JO-ANNE ELDER

BALANCING ACTS

DERK WYNAND, *Second Person.* Sono Nis, $5.95.

MONTY REID, *The Dream of Snowy Owls.* Longspoon, $7.00.

FRANCIS SPARSHOTT, *The Cave of Trophonius and Other Poems.* Brick Books, $5.00.

JAMES HARRISON, *Flying Dutchmen.* Sono Nis, $6.95.

DERK WYNAND constructs all the poems in *Second Person* from one mould: a two-line stanza, free of punctuation and capitalization, left and right margins prosaically aligned. A quick flip through this book unpromisingly offers page after page of the same, apparently monotonous form. However, Wynand uses this structural limitation to display his faith in the creative power of words and imagination. In one poem, he sends the reader "skating down a dutch canal what do you think of snow / on ice over water or brimstone or fire," and this is a metaphor for his technique. Balanced on the blade-edge of his form, Wynand skates smoothly through and around his subjects, sometimes whizzing past syntactic ambiguities of unpunctuated, crossed words: "a pedestrian crosses his words if he's talking / fall into their

places." At other times, he pirouettes dizzyingly, completely absorbed in his subject, whether it be thick-blooded canine desire, a voracious dream of "coming into money," or mystic contemplation of a centrefold nude, lost "in her eye mouth skin hopelessly lost in the oiled / places of her body so down we go losing deeper." Wynand, as the skater-poet, never loses his balance, performing his act with the skill of the magician in "The Magician's Wife": just as Wynand creates worlds out of his flat verse-form, the illusionist pulls life from his collapsible hat and, at the end, with a wave of his wand, "he turns his wife in mid-sentence into a rabbit / he thrusts into his hat which before your eyes he collapses." *Second Person* is a daring virtuoso performance by an exciting verbal technician.

Monty Reid, in *The Dream of Snowy Owls*, is a more cautious and uncertain performer. One poem is a series of reflections on pictures of William Carlos Williams, and Williams' influence on Reid's work is obvious. There is sometimes the same patient, respectful approach to the particulars of the physical world — a world of sidewalks, shrubs, automobiles, and radios — but seldom is there Williams' excitement of discovery. Reid is a careful, thoughtful user of language and occasionally finds the right circuitry to charge his writing with life. In the title poem, nightmare and reality precariously drift into each other with ghastly visions of owls:

> not the immaculate birds of midwinter
> but spring, the hollow
> bones brooding with instinct

This piece touches the nerve-ends of the unconscious and crackles with danger, but too much of the rest of the book lacks urgency. A woman paints her fingernails and each finger assumes a distinct personality: the effect is clever but not much else. A survivor of a nuclear war, sitting in a bunker, fails to convince us that he has been through anything that really matters. The variety of approaches in this volume suggests a poet in search of a voice. Like a nervous, beginning skater, Reid often seems to "play it safe"; something like a true voice emerges only when he skates to the dangerous edge of consciousness, as he does in the owl poem.

Risk-taking is implicit in the style and themes of Francis Sparshott's *The Cave of Trophonius and Other Poems.* The poems in this book often consist of several small illuminations, hovering at the brink of fragmentation. Sparshott's subject is connections, and he trusts us to make those connections far below the outward levels of consciousness: "Metaphors brood in the deep." Ultimately, we are given not fragments, but the discrete brush-strokes of a master who believes that attending to small moments of light is how we penetrate the mystery around us. "The Cave of Trophonius," poetry winner in the 1981 CBC Literary Competition, takes us on a groping descent into the dark cave of the unconscious:

> In the book of the dead
> there is a poem you have not read.
> Now on the slick page of sleep
> you write it and weep.

There we find an inarticulate knowledge that calls into question the poet's art, for it is knowledge of the essential wordlessness of the universe:

> Nameless as they were made,
> the bear and the spider are not lost.
> They never know where they are not.
> . . .
> Earth is a dead rock, rolled away,
> offering up to the illiterate sun
> the unread name.

Sparshott's art is an effort to read the

"unread name." In "The Cave of Trophonius," he shows his willingness to respect and challenge readers who join him in this quest. With both maturity and humility, he offers us a true poetry of thought — thought that is dense and authentic and felt.

In James Harrison's *Flying Dutchmen*, a writer's many concerns perplex him until he thinks of his wife,

> and all life's
> simultaneous
> imponderables
> dissolve into a
> single question mark.

For Harrison, finding the single and specific question mark is a "solution" of sorts, a faith in the specific that warns him away from generalizations. A sudden sight of the moon, "broken by dark earthbound shapes," seems ripe for symbolic application, but brings only a shrug:

> Pity,
> I thought, that such a coincidence
> was wasted on me, that I couldn't have
> lent it
> to George Herbert or someone
> as an image of grace or something.

Harrison may claim to eschew generalized symbolism, but his extended metaphors are intense: he ferociously works through equations of cell division with nuclear proliferation and a shedding maple with a suffering martyr. Like Sparshott, Harrison invites us to descend beneath words, to dive with whales into an Edenic ocean

> of gestalt perceptions shared
> in sonic holograms, of relationships
> and states of mind in wordless
> poems — bare co-ordinates of metaphor.

"Whales" is rich and evocative; indeed, this whole collection is delightfully successful — wide-ranging in its interests, colourful, aggressive, extroverted, and reflective by turns, and, above all, witty. "Eve's Version," a winner in the 1979 CBC Literary Competition, is a sequence of twenty superbly entertaining sonnets, wry retellings of legends by their female protagonists. Eve grumbles:

> Another time I'll let him pick his own
> apples. Since then all he's done is bitch
> about how I was the one responsible.

Leda responds to Yeats' depiction of "a sudden blow":

> A furtive blow, more like. There was I
> thinking that all he wanted was to take
> bread at my hand. . . .

Helen protests her innocence:

> So how was I to know, when he invited
> me to see his Trojan urns, that they
> were aboard his yacht . . . ?

Harrison's unforced and humane wit guides him with a "fluid, fastidious balance" through the particulars of a fallen world; it is this wit that makes *Flying Dutchmen* the most appealing and engaging of the four books in this review.

BRUCE PIRIE

FERTILE FORMS

E. F. DYCK, *Pisscat Songs*. Brick Books, $4.00.

ROBIN BLASER, *Syntax*. Talonbooks, $5.95.

PATRICK LANE, *Passing into Storm*. Harbour Publishing, n.p.

IN *Pisscat Songs*, AN ATTRACTIVE volume of fifteen poems, illustrated engagingly by Joyce Meyers, E. F. Dyck shows the fascination with form and convention which characterized his previous volume, *The Mossbank Canon*. That book consisted of six-line stanzas modelled on the *I Ching* hexagrams. This time Dyck has chosen to work within the constraints of the fourteen-line poem. The poems do not fit precisely the standard definition of a sonnet,

as they are not regularly iambic pentameter and do not follow traditional rhyme schemes. Almost all the poems, however, break into octaves and sestets, and in the volume as a whole, the fourteen poems which follow the "Introduction" fall into an octave and a sestet, with the focus in the last six poems becoming more intensely personal.

Dyck discovers his subject matter close to home, in the stories of Jack, a domestic cat, and his master, the writer of these "songs." And, as the book's title and the nature of the protagonists might suggest, Dyck approaches his subject with considerable playfulness, dubbing the grey Jack a "classical cat" because his "colour is middle," for example, or juxtaposing the four "classical" elements of earth, air, fire, and water with the four "practical" elements atop his kitchen stove.

While Dyck obviously delights in the humorous possibilities of his subject, he also addresses more serious topics. One of the most exuberantly playful of the poems, for instance, introduces a central concern of the volume, the matter of poetic creativity. "He Lost his Tanks" focuses on the removal of Jack's testicles: "Eggs cracked, oysters fried, bombs away! / From a clear glass orb on my desk / His jewels view my fertile coupling: / Jacket, Jacket, lost his packet." The "fertile coupling" refers specifically to the last line but more generally to the whole of the poem, which turns almost entirely on the proliferation of metaphor, as no fewer than nine different expressions refer to Jack's loss. That the writer's creativeness should be so closely entwined with Jack's newly inflicted infertility suggests one of the directions Dyck follows as he explores the question of poetic creativity: what kind of power does a writer wield over his subject? Other poems raise this question more unsettlingly when the poet says "I own [Jack], his body, his soul," or when he repeats "I own him completely, / I can take him apart."

The relationship between God and man has long offered an analogy, equally as apt as that of a master and his pet, for the relationship between a poet and his material. Several times Dyck mimics Biblical language and rhythms, adopting a godlike stance towards Jack: "His seed shall not be as the stars in the sky, / Therefore has he been separated from his tanks." Such a voice, weighty, inexorable, calculated to forestall any criticism of actions, raises further questions about the poet's authority, about poetic decree. In his use of parody to explore poetic convention, Dyck draws as well on common nursery rhymes. "Jack was nimble, Jack was quick" begins one poem; but the expectations set in motion come to an abrupt halt as the rhythm, as well as the mind, slows its pace to absorb the intractable material of an injury: "But the day he slowly crossed the road / From the park to the house, he walked / To the side door, the child let him in — / And screamed: his jaw was smashed." When he disrupts the metre of a nursery rhyme or introduces a Biblical voice, Dyck forces us to attend to the assumptions about reality and experience which underlie those, and by extension, all, poetic conventions.

Poems talking about poetry have grown commonplace, of course. But *Pisscat Songs* escapes the charge of triteness, and Dyck remains far from self-indulgent in his exploration of poetic creativity. His emphasis on form, especially on such conventionalized forms as the sonnet and the nursery rhyme, ensures a degree of impersonality. And the playfulness preserves a refreshing detachment. This is not to say that the volume presents only the formulating mind of a poet. In fact,

in many ways the book seems designed to reveal the speaker's intimacy with his "true love." Following this line of enquiry, one could focus on the speaker and treat the considerable emphasis on form, design, and symmetry as an obsession with its source in the troubled emotional life of the persona. *Pisscat Songs* thus yields a richness of possibilities, showing that, for Dyck, form and convention do not constrain, they liberate the imagination.

Robin Blaser's latest book, *Syntax*, confirms his reputation as a philosophical poet whose difficult but brilliant work has earned an admiring, if still small, audience. *Syntax* presents a remarkable range of voices, drawing on sources as far apart as washroom graffiti and medieval mysticism. At the same time, the volume challenges us, as its title suggests, to find the meaningful order which holds together such seemingly disparate elements.

The attempt to understand these poems as what Blaser calls a sequence remains a difficult challenge, even after repeated readings, as Blaser deliberately eschews any sort of conventional narrative or sequential form. He refuses to impose on his poetry the order which finds its source in the consciousness and intentions of the poet, preferring to let the poetry and its attendant order come to him from some source outside himself. In his poetry and poetics, Blaser has long advocated the displacement of the poet from the centre of meaning, arguing that the "I" of the poet should be "a returning and disappearing note." His wish to de-centre the lyrical "I" of the poet leads, in the present volume, to the incorporation of a large number of quotations as well as to the absence of familiar principles of order.

Blaser's commitment to an invisible realm — his mysticism, some might call it — similarly leads him to suppress or exclude immediately apprehensible principles of order and sequence. He wants always to push us to the edge, to the boundary between, to use his terms, visibility and invisibility, to that place where the known becomes the unknown and the unknown invades, as he puts it, the known. Accordingly, the poet's language and forms must move to that edge too, must become unstable, relinquishing the easy but thought-deadening security of familiar, pre-conceived discourse, discourse which remains empty because closed to experience.

Thematically, such concerns as those just sketched find a focus in *Syntax* in passages dealing with appearances and disappearances. In the opening poem, for example, Blaser directs our eyes to the "endless" play of the northern lights, particularly to the "restless / disappearance" which "glimmers at the top / of the north." Other poems present us with the remaining visible traces of now invisible, or nearly so, worlds, with an epitaph pointing to the disappearance of the North American Indian's way of life, or with fossils testifying to the vanished world of the pterodactyl.

The two passages just cited lead directly into a poem which documents various instances of a "*vocation for / the invisible world.*" "Image-Nation 15," describes first a peregrine falcon whose presence in a cherry tree drives other birds and "even the cats" into hiding, into other gardens; then a candlestick shaped as a crucifix, an icon which points to an as yet invisible world of redeemed life; and finally, a child who, imagining he will fly, tumbles — "his head full of wings" — from the branches of a catalpa tree. In this last instance, the vocation for the invisible world seems to exact a high price, as the child's commitment to the imaginative world which grants him wings precipitates his down-

fall. In each instance, in fact, a violence, implied or realized, marks the boundary where the invisible and visible worlds meet. The closing words of the poem, "oh, flower," seek to soften that harsh edge by offering a vision of the fallen child as a blossom of the catalpa tree, something which falls, presumably, not violently but tenderly in the natural course of things.

Elsewhere in the volume Blaser raises, more explicitly than in "Image-Nation 15," the question of the relation between violence and, variously, tenderness, love, divinity. He raises such questions without wishing to resolve them: his is not a poetry of statement or definition, however much it is a poetry of ideas. Indeed, indefiniteness lies at the heart of *Syntax*, as the poet intimates when, in a section entitled "*lake of souls* (reading notes," he punningly alludes to the title of the volume:

> it's dawn and things move about quickly,
> a bird sound at the end of every sentence,
> the period dissolves and becomes a curve
> of notes
>
> this indefinite spiritual condition it is
> probably the secret of syntax itself.

Patrick Lane's *Passing into Storm* represents little really new work, as a book was published under the same title in 1973 by Traumeri Communications, though without the eight drawings and with only sixteen of the present twenty-two poems. Twelve of those sixteen poems appear as well in Lane's *Poems: New and Selected* (1978), as does one of the six poems added to the 1982 edition of *Passing into Storm*. On the other hand, the combining of poems with drawings makes the new edition of *Passing into Storm* quite a different volume from the edition of 1973.

In the opening poem, Lane tells us that "Finding a white man / in snow is to look for the dead." Further, such a man leaves no traces: "He has left too much / flesh on winter's white metal / to leave his colour as a sign." In the volume's closing poem, "White Mountain," Lane sketches a landscape which registers no human voice, which retains no human warmth, which will obliterate even the vestiges of human presence as "Tracks fill with snow."

In these poems and throughout the volume, Lane points to the difficulty of impressing the human form on an unyielding landscape, to the difficulty of even preserving a recognizably human form in a world where "Everything" — work, weather — "is hard." We read, in "Thirty Below," that "living things pull into pain / like grotesque children / thrown in the wrong season." The relation between work and an individual also figures prominently in this volume. The "ritual" of work does not take its form from individual, human, needs and desires any more than does the landscape which erases man's tracks with snow.

The distinctiveness of Lane's treatment of such familiar themes as the dehumanizing effect of many jobs and the unyieldingness of the land rests partly in his sense that while it can be difficult to forge a humanly ordered relationship with the world outside oneself, one remains inextricably attached to that world. The poetry points in quiet, subtle ways to such a belief. For, while thematic emphasis falls often on defeat, isolation, separation — that is, on the absence of humanly ordered relationship — certain structural and formal qualities of the verse create an underlying sense of interconnectedness. Lane writes consistently, if not elaborately or obtrusively, metaphoric and analogical verse, and metaphor, simile, and analogy express connections. Just as pervasively, Lane uses assonance, alliteration, and rhyme,

patternings which suggest continuity to our ear. On a more conceptual level, narrative intelligibility and syntactical regularity similarly lend a sense of continuity: Lane's verse seldom disrupts our expectations, either on the level of its story or in its treatment of line. Finally, several poems move outward from a particular event or emotion into statement, into a wider context.

Like the poetry, Lane's drawings express the tension between a belief in the difficulty of sustaining a humanly ordered relationship with the world and a sense of one's inevitable attachment to the world. The drawings underline the point in troubling images which present the human body, in deformation, but never in isolation. Interconnectedness strikes grotesque, often violent, notes: in one drawing, a hose winds through three figures, binding them together; in others, sexual relationship becomes a nightmare of dehumanized contortions. The drawings thus suggest in a bizarre and shocking way what the poetry suggests in generally quieter and less startling ways. This contrast in tone and manner itself contributes to an informing tension in the volume, the tension between surface sanity and inward disintegration.

JUDITH OWENS

VIRTUOSO TURNS

PETER VAN TOORN, *Mountain Tea.* McClelland & Stewart, $12.95.

THE POETRY OF PETER VAN TOORN is new to me, though he is forty years old, and both Penguin and Oxford anthologies have included him. And, indeed, so they should: for van Toorn is the kind of linguistic virtuoso (*à la* Klein, Layton, Dylan Thomas, or Hart Crane, for whom he has written a poem) who

is impressive even when he is most irritating. My initial roundhead resistance to his work formulated itself in questions such as these: Isn't the eloquence, the wordplay, often gratuitous and a little empty? (But these are "stunts" performed at a pretty high level, replies my cavalier alter ego.) Isn't he overfond of showy excess, what he calls the "brandy-powered rhythms of excess"? Certainly one has to adjust and get used to his style, his unusual and rich diction, his "fingering." One has to suspend aesthetic disbelief.

For here is a poet given to virtuoso turns. This can be exhilarating, at times dazzling. But there is also a development in this selection of work from the last decade towards greater clarity, and a higher definition and resolution. This is what is most commendable about *Mountain Tea*, and it is most impressive in van Toorn's versions of other poets.

These include Tibullus, Rimbaud, Heine, Villon, de Vega, Baudelaire, Goethe, Basho, Hugo, Vigneault, Rilke, Tu Fu, Li Po, Ungaretti, and even Michelangelo. These poems are van Toorn's clearest, wittiest, and best, since he is here less given than elsewhere to verbal pyrotechnics for their own sake. Citing the "imitations" of Pound and Lowell, he speaks of "transmutation" or "transposition" to "the genius of contemporary English in Canada." (One could compare these poems, then, to George Bowering's quite brilliant Canadianization of Rilke's *Duino Elegies* in his recent *Kerrisdale Elegies*. But Bowering's language is much cleaner.)

Recurrent van Toorn icons seem to be mountain and Kora (Persephone). But in this poetic universe diction and rhythmic shape are foregrounded, "content" somewhat submerged. "Mountain Tea" is itself partly a sonnet sequence —a little like one of Lowell's, though van Toorn's sonnets are rather more traditional. It is all very accomplished. But my mixed feelings persist after I set the book down: I remember an interesting and rewarding experience but not a particularly compelling vision of life.

Being only forty, van Toorn doesn't seem to feel the kind of middle-aged blues detectable in new work by Atwood (*Interlunar*), Bowering (*Kerrisdale Elegies*), and myself (*Playing With Fire*). But he is one of those newer voices of scope and power — like Robert Bringhurst or Christopher Dewdney — who could have a salutary effect on us aging codgers.

TOM MARSHALL

CO-TRANSLATIONS

GEORGE FALUDY, *Learn This Poem of Mine by Heart*, ed. John Robert Colombo. Hounslow, $8.95.

GEORGE FALUDY became an important figure on the literary scene of Budapest in the 1930's when his free translations of Villon's ballads appeared. After that, his work was published only to be banned by both fascist and communist regimes in his native land. Since his arrival in Canada in 1967, he has struggled for recognition as a poet despite the publication of *East and West* (1978), a selection of his poems in translation, his *Collected Poems* (1980) in Hungarian, and this second selection. Of these sixty poems only two appeared in *East and West*, and those by different translators. This selection is presented in a rather lop-sided frame. The foreword, courtesy of *The Times Literary Supplement*, reproduces a dull argument between George Mikes, Arthur Koestler, Stephen Vizinczey, and George Gömöri about whether or not Faludy *really* is the best contemporary Hungarian poet. The afterword by Colombo apologizes for the

"co-translations" — Colombo worked with Faludy's literals — which only intended to make "crystal clear the arguments of the originals," and briefly refers to some of the problems with the translations. Immediately after the poems, however, is Faludy's Convocation Address upon being awarded an honorary doctorate from the University of Toronto — an eloquent statement about the power of learning to "somehow arm the spirit to the point that it could prevent the body's collapse," based on an account of how Faludy's and some of his fellow prisoners in Hungarian concentration camps lectured on everything from Roman Law to *War and Peace* in order to keep alive a world from which they were isolated. Faludy argues that the death of one prisoner was due to his decision "to sleep rather than talk," and goes on to compare the mentality of those prisoners who were concerned with bodily survival alone, to that of the consumer societies of the world.

The danger of privileging comfort over culture is one of the main thematic concerns of the poems. In a poem written in 1940, the narrator paints a bleak picture of the capitalist democracies: "It looks as if we will stand in slag up to our ears and factory chimneys will smoke us / with industrious happiness. We will be free to collect industrial junk / while fat hypocrites cook their profits from our souls." The same concern is echoed 32 years later: "There will be no cart, no place / To which to run — when the rotten basket / Of plenty crashes down upon our heads." Throughout the selection there are references to those who have rejected physical comfort: Erasmus of Rotterdam, Christ, Voltaire, and a Mr. Pang of Cathay who "taught himself to swim and loaded in a boat / his ten thousand and twenty six pieces of gold / and capsized the boat in the centre of the Yangtse / so his money would be of injury to no one."

While some of the poems present a powerful critique of the poisonous effect of technology and consumerism on the West, others attack the oppression of past and present regimes in Hungary. "At the Hungarian Border" describes Faludy's arrest after his invitation by the Hungarian authorities to return to his native land; and "The Ballad of the Hell Hound" focuses on the mentality of the servants of such regimes. The narrator is stunned by the brutality of the prison guards at Recsk to

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

One of Faludy's main criticisms of the country from which he is exiled is its oppression of the writer. In his bitterly ironical "Hymn to Stalin," he writes:

> O shining fountainhead of truth,
> You rewrite human history,
> From day to day and night to night
> Announcing what the past will be.

Part of the function of these poems is revenge. In a recent interview, Faludy spoke about his reasons for writing his autobiography *My Happy Days in Hell*: "Whenever I was beaten up . . . I thought, 'I will take my revenge: I will write you,' and this in Hungary is the worst that you can say to someone — that I will describe your character." However, his criticism of censorship, in the regimes under which he has suffered, at times rather insensitively belittles the achievements of writers still working in Hungary:

> They'll never give me such a medal,
> not in a thousand years they won't!
> Not me — because of what I write.
> It's yours — because of what you don't.

Although *Learn This Poem of Mine by Heart* suggests the range of Faludy's formal experiments — sonnets are juxtaposed with prosaic anecdotes, quatrains with Whitmanesque songs — many of the translations fail to convey the quality of the originals. However, Colombo and the other translators, David Donnell, Eric Johnson, Arthur Koestler, Dennis Lee, Robin Skelton, Fraser Sutherland, and Stephen Vizinczey, hardly had an easy job. Hungarian has very little in common with Indo-European languages: its syntax and rhythm (the first syllable of every word in Hungarian is stressed) are completely different. As a result, some of the translations sink to the level of journalese: "Marshlands consume lead and oil, / factories oxygen. / Lakes are littered with dead fish, / entire oceans grow sulphurous." Similarly, the English versions cannot begin to reproduce the important effects of rhyme in the poetry of a language whose plurals nearly all end in *-ak*, *-ek*, *-ok*, and *-uk*. For example, the 73rd sonnet — a bleak look at the men who pay homage to the popular fashionable stereotype — ends, "All they have are cars, apartments, women, money, nothing else at all. / That must be why they are so desperate." The ironic sense of plenty produced by the list of nouns is accentuated in the original because Faludy exploits the possibilities of rhyme in Hungarian: "*Csak autójuk, házuk, / nőjük, s pénzük van, semmi másuk. / Azért ily boldogtalanok.*"

Although these translations are weak in places, they are generally far superior to those in *East and West*. To take one of the poems common to both selections, Colombo's version of "White Mice" in *East and West* fiddles with the original for what seems to be uninformed reasons, while Dennis Lee's in *Learn This Poem of Mine by Heart* is far better for staying closer to the original. The narrator of the poem recounts his attempt to drown some pet mice. Having recognized the connection between himself and the mice, he rushed out of the house and vomited. The original describes his exit with three successive verbs: *Térdem megcsuklott, émelyegtem, / aztán futottam gyorsan, át / a konyhán*. Colombo's version, "My knees gave way, Nauseated, / I crossed the kitchen floor," cripples the drama by adjectivizing *émelyegtem* and turns the sudden exit into a stroll — *futottam gyorsan* is literally "I ran quickly." Lee's version, on the other hand, stays close to the original and maintains the three verbs: "My knees gave way; I gagged; I fled, straight through the kitchen." One of the best translations is Colombo's version of the title poem, which, appearing at the end, is a thematic summary of the selection.

Each stanza argues a reason for learning the poem by heart, from the censorship of the state to the gradual destruction of culture by technology. The final stanza is a haunting projection of life after nuclear holocaust in which "man and his means" have no value:

> How may I send you my solace
> when the only solace lies in lies?
> Should I now confess to you
> that you were ever in my thoughts
> across the years
> in sunshine and starshine,
> and though I may be long dead
> my sad eyes see you still?
> What else is there to say?
> Unlearn this poem of mine by heart.

Despite the improvements from *East and West*, the quality of the translations in *Learn This Poem of Mine by Heart* is still uneven. Occasionally their status as poetry is questionable. Although we should be grateful for the work of those translators who make Faludy's poetry accessible to English-speaking audiences, unless the quality of their work is consistently high, Faludy is never likely to get the attention he deserves. In the afterword, Faludy himself argues that "all those bad translations are doing us enormous disservice! It may sound too severe, but we should really apply the highest expectations in spite of the immense difficulties."

JOHN HAVELDA

DICKENS IN QUEBEC

JACQUES FILLION, *Pourquoi cracher sur la lune?* Léméac, $14.95.

JACQUES FILLION'S *Pourquoi cracher sur la lune?* is an honourable example of a genre well entrenched in Québec fiction, a story of boys growing into manhood, cushioned for a time from the hazards of life by their vivid proto-poetic imaginations, by the games they play and the stories they tell, which both mimic life and enlarge upon it, to make it bearable under testing circumstances. There is a repertoire of themes for such novels, as written by Marie-Claire Blais (whose *Une saison dans la vie d'Emmanuel* seems to have some ancestral status among books of this type), René Ducharme, Victor-Lévy Beaulieu, and Jacques Poulin, to mention only a few, from which Fillion seems to have drawn generously, as in, for instance, the pairing (cf. Beaulieu's *Race de monde*) of a novelist-narrator with a more heroic poet-brother.

The first two-thirds of Fillion's book recounts the lives of the two orphan brothers and their friends in a rather Dickensian orphanage called "Sing-Sing." Only Géronimo's through-composed fantasy of their escape by boat to other more marvellous lands can protect him and his younger brother, Pétit Cactus (vivid nomenclature is among Géronimo's finer poetic gifts), from the bad faith and cruelty of the rather Dickensian director of the orphanage, one Mauvais Présage. Their friends are noble, picturesque, unselfish, quaintly named; their (few) enemies are child's-eye caricatures. Their namings reconstruct the world according to a mythic vision in which the god Puma Vengeur can right the wrongs of his worshippers, the little Peaux-rouges, and protect them from Joker Fou, the principle of unfairness, of malignity, of random pain. Within this scheme episodes are touchingly comic, and characterization is skilfully individualized and believable. Although the boys grow, their mythology remains constant; this static world, though very satisfying in itself, perhaps goes on a bit too long. It is not unlike the world of Jimmy in Poulin's *The Jimmy Trilogy*; although (except for the nomenclature)

it is less linguistically innovative and less subtly poetic, it is, withal, funnier and perhaps more "like life." Géronimo's sense of the relationship between fiction and "life" could be seen as a kind of Magic Realism; statements like this can be found, almost verbatim, in, for instance, Salman Rushdie's masterpiece of Magic Realism, *Midnight's Children*:

> Géronimo mêlait allègrement les fabulations à la réalité mais il le faisait consciemment. La réalité donnait un air d'authenticité à la fiction et la fiction égayait la réalité. L'important était de ne pas se laisser aller à une confusion déréglée.

But all too soon, from their point of view if not the reader's, Géronimo and his brother fall from Magic Realism into History. Part Two of the book, the last third, leaps over several years and gives us Géronimo, turned from incipient poet into Nice Kid, out of the orphanage and living in one of those cutely eccentric families (found in, say, *Race de monde*, Beaulieu's wicked parody of Blais' *Saison*), poor, overcrowded, fecund, but, oh, so cheerful, so eccentric, so reciprocally devoted! "'C'est une famille de fous,' répliqua grand-maman Whipet [the familiar matriarch with nerves of steel and heart of gold], 'mais on s'endure, on s'entraide et, au fond, je crois qu'on s'aime bien. En tout cas, on ne s'ennuie pas!'" To cite this is perhaps unfair, as Fillion's book Shows instead of Tells almost all the time, but it does express compactly what makes one uneasy about such families, their capacity to slip over into the Good and the Sentimental — another possibility inherent in a Dickensian model, of course.

We only discover toward the end that the brother's narration of Géronimo's imaginings and their adventures has been both retrospective and elegiac. The second section modulates, though again perhaps not quite soon enough, into a conclusion in which, quite movingly, Joker Fou catches up with all the key characters of the first part, bringing senility, sudden death, suicide, all the worst punishments for the most deserving people. In a remarkably effective chiasmus, the black millionaire benefactor of their boyhood turns out to be a poet-liar, as much a mere dreamer as the boys themselves; yet he has generously fulfilled their dream of a boat, with not quite the boat they had imagined, but with a better one than he could afford. Near the end of his life, he goes off to capture a tiny piece of his own dream, a fortune in crocodile leather. Mauvais Présage turns from a monster into a lonely, pathetically mutilated old man, Zéro, the perpetual loser, ends his own life, in which nothing has ever been given to him, who has given everyone else so much, when he realizes the tenuousness of his one emotional bond, to a girl whom Géronimo hasn't time for (compare the suicide of Le Cardinal in *Race de monde*). This episode catches the sense of inevitable pathos better than does the death of the hero himself, to which it forms a premonitory prelude. For Géronimo is about to set out at last in his small boat on the voyage for which (in rather more modest terms than he had imagined for himself) he has at last completed the real-world preparations. It is, fictionally, too much that he should be struck down with (shades of *Love Story*) leukemia, which allows for such a pale, pathetic, dignified death that surely, again, Dickens must have been watching from the wings. The narrative persona of the brother comes into its own here; the novel now reveals itself as something like an elegiac romance (unusual in Québec fiction), that is, the story of how he first worshipped, then lost Géronimo;

yet his own character has been too self-effacing throughout to make his fall into bitterness acrid enough; we are left with a sense of authorial manipulation in the direction of easy sorrow. Boy-imaginations are better done with the poetic integrity of a Poulin, Mad-but-Happy Families with the sheer raunchiness of the wickedly funny Victor-Levy Beaulieu, elegiac darkenings with the serious, earned pathos of a LaRocque or an Archambault.

But these comparisons are meant to be suggestive rather than invidious. Fillion has made his own compound of all these themes and qualities and produced a very readable, satisfying novel, well-written, rocking no boats, contributing soundly to the novel of sensitive children growing up into the cruel, Québec-shaped, generous, funny world. If its ideology implies an unlikely goodness at odds with a somewhat sweetened malignancy, an excess of picturesque niceness, and if the heroism of the ordinary person in this grim world is too explicitly saluted, perhaps these are the necessary defects of bringing some Dickensian virtues into Québec fiction.

PATRICIA MERIVALE

DEVELOPING POETS

KENNETH SHERMAN, *Words For Elephant Man*. Mosaic, $6.95.

A. F. MORITZ, *The Visitation*. Aya, $7.00.

DAVID DONNELL, *Settlements*. McClelland & Stewart, $9.95.

MICK BURRS, *The Blue Pools of Paradise*. Coteau Books, $6.00.

THE "FOR" IN THE TITLE of Kenneth Sherman's *Words For Elephant Man* means "on behalf of," as well as "given to" and "in search of," that extraordinarily deformed nineteenth-century celebrity named Merrick. This series of poems is by turns a touching narrative, a documentary, a monologue, a social critique, a flirtation with poetics. Yet, in all of that, Sherman never loses his clear focus on the suffering and courage of the man who cannot help being a symbol of so much in his century and ours. In his opening "Psalm" the poet identifies himself and his song with Merrick's dilemma:

> This is the song of thy suffering servant.
> This is the articulation of the New Age.
> This is God's hobbling little poem.
>
> I drone on in His image.

Having established this set of associations in his preface poem, Sherman has the good sense to allow the poems to operate on a number of levels by themselves without too many rhetorical nudges and reminders from the author. Consequently we are allowed to enjoy whatever "discoveries we make without being browbeaten, and the trapped human voice inside the grotesque form is allowed a hearing, just as the trapped poetic truth emerges from the somewhat documentary form of many of the poems and journal entries. Clearly, the poet has an acute eye for those details in a story which point in a number of significant directions at once.

The poetic style of the monologues is remarkably clear and transparent. It hardly ever strains for its similes or metaphors, though here and there the Messianic allusions are a little overwhelming. The voice of "I" can slip easily back and forth between Merrick and the poet so that Merrick takes on the role of poet's Muse as well as being the builder of a model church, a freak on display, an exotic medical case study, a lover of the Word, a dreamer, a Caliban. In each case the metaphorical possibilities are provocative and sustain interest.

Sherman's strengths seem to elude Mick Burrs who in some ways is also attempting to locate the significant in history in

The Blue Pools of Paradise. This time the poems go back through the personal history of the poet, but they fail to stir up much interest or enthusiasm for their subjects. He includes a monologue or two by his great-grandfather and portraits of his grandmother, aunt, mother, and father. His own feelings of rootless exile prompt him to resurrect his relatives, often through gazing at photographs or movies. At one point, when visiting a cemetery, he explains:

> Now I visit this garden
> overgrown with marbled names
>
> where not even memories stay rooted
> where every fragile blossom
> every dropped petal
>
> shines.

Evidently the poems in this collection are supposed to shine like those dropped petals but the poet's style makes that unlikely, if not impossible. The poems, taken together, read rather like a short story with its sentences broken up on the pages. Imagination is severely constrained by a style that is thin, full of clichés and those meaningless rhetorical questions to which poets resort when they don't know where they are going anymore. The poems are mostly anecdotal self-indulgence in the final analysis. They offer little surprise, delight, or insight to the reader.

David Donnell's *Settlements* pulls together a number of poems, half of which appeared in earlier books, and places them under two rather arbitrary headings. Donnell's style is on the prosaic side of the spectrum too, but short choppy sentences, blunt assertions, anecdotes, sly asides, and rhetorical blustering, all seem well integrated into his designs and purposes, his attitudes and insights. His voice is confident, often self-mocking, wry, bawdy, and very amusing. He sounds like a mixture of Milton Acorn and Al Purdy with a soupçon of Layton and a dash of Souster. The poems succeed, when they do, because of the energy of mind that has gone into them. Donnell's associative imagination is never predictable, always very concrete and personal, so that his style is a perfect correlative for the skirmish with the anarchy of his urban (Toronto) world which the poems imply.

Donnell's straight-laced Irish sense of humour, his Epicurean sensibility, and particularly his unusual associations create a uniform tone and style — a special voice — so that he can get away with almost anything by keeping his reader busily engaged in jumping through hoops of chop-logic and falling through spaces between sentences and stanzas. Of the white rats used in experiments, for example, he concludes:

> They want us to feed them more of these
> tricks.
> A wire cage and a slice of tomato,
> They want to be intelligent like us. They
> enjoy development.
>
> They represent our aspirations, like
> 12th-century angels
> that consume us and become autonomous.

Most of his metaphors revolve around appetite and desire (food, sex, bank robberies) and his more rhetorical pieces focus on versions of history and Canadian identity. Though many of the poems seem little more than sleight of hand tricks, still they promise real magic.

In the publisher's blurb for *Settlements* there is an endorsement by A. F. Moritz, which indicates an astonishing breadth of taste because his poems in *The Visitation* are about as different from Donnell's as one can imagine. Stylistically heavy, convoluted, slow, and very cluttered with modifiers, these poems shift and twist and struggle with their subject matter, groan under the weight of their odd verbs and too frequent metaphors until they drop into a void of obscurity or open out into a disappointing rhetorical question. As the title of the volume indicates, they are

evidently designed to suggest the presence of the transcendent, and there is a consistently used set of images from nature (trees, sun, fire, and the whole spectrum of colours), as well as words, messages, the muse, music, "You," and the eye, all of which function as channels between a world of ruins, monuments, statues, shells, crows, and snakes, and the transcendent original Word of words. In a vision of the beginning, the poet imagines, "Through the multiplication of their bodies and acts, they grope / as through shadows for our body struck by the sun," and in a poem addressed to "You, Whoever You Are" he ponders "the silence not of words unspoken / but of words unknown, the forms / curled on themselves in a necessary dream." Those forms curl on themselves in these difficult, very self-conscious poems often leaving the reader feeling that he is intruding on some private, personal prayer that retreats further with each rereading. Perhaps the poems are meant to work this way, but there lingers the suspicion that Moritz is trying too hard or reaching beyond his still-developing poetic skills. In any event these four books represent a fair summary of the variety of styles and attitudes in our new poets.

JOHN ORANGE

NEED TO WITNESS

SUSAN GLICKMAN, *Complicity*. Véhicule, n.p.

MARY MEIGS, *The Medusa Head*. Talonbooks, n.p.

SHARON THESEN, *Holding the Pose*. Coach House, $6.95.

OF THESE THREE BOOKS, *Complicity* is, quite simply, the best: truest to its own dictates, most powerful in its synthesis of language and subject — honest, rigorous, and sharp. Which is not to say that Glickman is perfect on every occasion, but the few poems which lapse into sentimentality serve in this collection to reveal some of the strengths of the best ones. Missed poems are works in progress rather than disasters; the best simply move off the pages of this unassuming book with its gray cover, and into the mainstream of what is most interesting in current writing in Canada. But let me consider Thesen and Meigs briefly before returning to a more detailed look at Glickman.

Holding the Pose is technically inventive and ingenious work, sometimes whimsical, frequently ironic. But the pose is indeed held and although the epigraph, from Norm Sibum, tells us that "The arms of heaven open, / stiff from holding a pose," there is less evidence in the book of "heaven" (ironized or not) than of stiffness for its own sake. And stiffness in a variety of forms. For instance, the beginning of "Hello goodbye":

> The quiet of a silver afternoon
> quickens, a magnet scattering
> of books under lampshades
> & in the gentle, eerie music
> the skyline of Toronto

— and so on until the inevitable conclusion about "a numbing silence & the rhythm / of another word written, / and another." If we wonder about that pressure to write and are not content with the response that technique is its own reward (Thesen can, after all, write a fine, bristly sonnet or a "Spiritual" or pick up the rhythms of bored dismissal of the bourgeois life), then "X," dedicated to Jacobo Timerman, may give us an answer. Near the end of a poem on Timerman's account "of torture and solitary confinement in / clandestine Argentine prisons," Thesen writes:

> With these words I try to imagine Jacobo
> Timerman
> and I am ashamed. I do not wish to use
> the pain

of others to write a poem. Yet it is my own
pain
I write, & the realization that I paid a
certain careful
attention to Jacobo Timerman's advice for
it is
precisely this poem that could lead me
down the corridor toward Susan

— "Susan" being the torture machine to the grisly embrace of which Timerman was subjected. Thesen's use of plain style here is significant, pointing toward an apparent association of stylistic variation and flashiness with refinement of experience away from brutal directness. Though not a good poem, "X" is the most authentic statement in the volume, indicating that perhaps this fine technician knows all too well what is missing in her work and will redress the balance in due course. On the basis of this volume, one might recommend less Bowering and more Neruda for the poet's bookshelf.

The Medusa Head, the most recent volume of Mary Meigs' ongoing autobiography, is concerned with the writer's long and painful involvement in a love triangle with two other women, and with her emergence at the end of the affair into a state of new freedom which she describes as finally being "*there* in my difficult entirety." Meigs' gift for being "*there*," being fully present and alive to every moment, every nuance, is what is most painfully at risk in her frequently symbiotic relationship with Marie-Claire (Blais: though her surname is never specified in Meigs' book, her identity is clear and the relationship well known in any case) and a French writer identified as "Andrée." The mysterious Andrée, the Medusa head of the title, enters the lives of Meigs and Blais and with her the seeds of dissension and confusion which are perhaps inevitable in such an attempt. Preferring first one and then the other of her lovers, Andrée turns them against each other and finally against her, though before that resolution and the relative peace which follows it, we are informed at length of Andrée's tastes, Meigs' life in France, her attitudes towards French high society, and so on.

Meigs' clear and fluent style and her careful attention to detail — especially visual detail significant to her as a painter — sustain the book as for her in the beginning of the narrative does an impulse which is more than confessional. The need to arrive at an understanding of a difficult relationship by assembling its details, consulting old journals, measuring "Andrée's" novel about the same relationship against Marie-Claire's assessment of it and so on: this provided Meigs' understandable impetus to write *The Medusa Head*. For her the effort has clearly been worth it; for her readers, less so. Though the book is certainly more than therapy, it is, I think, less than major writing. Less detail, more concentration on Meigs, and less on Andrée as villain of the piece, would all have helped.

Although the title poem of *Complicity* is one of the less successful in Glickman's book, it is interesting to see the ways in which that term indicates the poet's sense of receptiveness to, and involvement in, a wide range of experiences and stances and her willingness to set a serious subject, ironize her own interest in it, and sustain the resulting ambidextrous poem nevertheless. Take, for example, "Song without Words," whose ghastly title prepares us for the worst, which we do encounter in the poem, but in a different sense:

I'm tired of finding
the day
bundled on my doorstep in a hospital
blanket:
not even a bit of ribbon for a token, a
silver locket,
a bracelet of hair. Every night I have to
bury it again

under the radiator with the sprung
mousetrap
and hear it crying through the pipes.

Recalling both Denise Levertov (to whom the book is dedicated) and Sylvia Plath, this sense of complicity with one's own failure opens into an urgent sense of the poet's need to witness, to voice the world around her unknown to itself. From "The Artist in the City":

Someone has to give these streets their
real names.
Someone has to see them
so they remember who they are.

Poems as clear, acute, and direct as the best of Page and Atwood echo their mentors and claim their own space — poems like "Living Alone," "Looking In," "The Country of Old People," "The Contract," "From the Balcony," "Shelter," "False Spring," "Saga," and "The Sadness of Mothers," the latter a long conjunctive elegy so perfectly executed that one is carried relentlessly to its magnificent conclusion without a false move on the poet's part or a careless comma across thirty lines.

Love affairs are similarly anatomized but here the tone is sharper, the wit biting. Consider "The Cold Days," recalling Atwood's "Marrying the Hangman," or "Saying Yes":

It is easy to love a man asleep
pulling up the blanket of dreams.

His flesh is young again, he can do
anything,
he has never heard the word *no*.
. . . . . .
He has forgotten you, he is so happy,
and all night you are saying *yes*.

As Glickman's epigraph from Thomas Mann says, "Relationship is everything. . . . And if you want to give it a more precise name, it is Ambiguity."

From Glickman one can expect perfection and, when perfection isn't available, a clear statement accounting for hazards along the way. From "Il mondo senza gente":

I know I am being stubborn; I know
the sentimentality of *the real*
can simplify as fatally
as art.
. . . . . .
But this resolves nothing.

With such knowledge, the holding of poses is unnecessary.

LORRAINE WEIR

DOWN HOME

MORDECAI RICHLER, *Home Sweet Home: My Canadian Album*. McClelland & Stewart, $19.95.

BESIDES HIS EIGHT NOVELS, Mordecai Richler has published a number of collections of autobiographical, critical, and journalistic pieces throughout his career. These include *Hunting Tigers Under Glass* (1968), *The Street* (1969), *Shovelling Trouble* (1972), *Notes on an Endangered Species* (1974), and *The Great Comic Book Heroes and Other Essays* (1978). *Home Sweet Home* is a readable addition to this series which reveals that Richler is a professional journalist and critic as well as a novelist. The title is characteristically ironic. Throughout, Richler reveals an ambivalent response to the loved and hated country to which he returned twelve years ago.

The volume contains nineteen pieces in all. The most memorable are "Home Is Where You Hang Yourself," in which Richler recounts his return to Canada; "My Father's Life," a moving account of his father, all the more necessary, perhaps, in view of the fact that his mother has recently published an autobiography (Leah Rosenberg, *The Errand Runner: Reflections of a Rabbi's Daughter*);

"From Roland Gladu, Through Kermit Kitman, to La Victoire Historique and After," which recounts the history of baseball in Montreal from the Royals to the Expos; "Making a Movie," on the filming of *Duddy Kravitz*; "The Fall of the Montreal Canadiens"; "Language (and Other) Problems," about Quebec, Canada, and Bill 101; and "O Canada," about the Conservative leadership struggle, which includes a bleak summing up of Canada's predicament.

What's striking about Richler is that while he has his share of artistic egocentricity, he is able to reach beyond it to a real interest in Canada — his country, which, we feel, he loves and hates as he loves and hates himself. Yet his interest in Canada reaches beyond the self. He returned to Canada because it *was* home — more so than Europe, Israel, or the United States. He writes in the final essay, "It's a dizzying and depressing time, this country, like Stephen Leacock's famous horseman, riding off in all directions. Without much faith in its own future." In such comments on Canada, we sense his sincerity: "This country, 116 years old but still blurry, is like a child's kaleidoscope that remains in urgent need of one more sharp twist of the barrel to bring everything into sharp focus. Making us whole. Something more than this continent's attic, filled with resentful folks, wheat, yearning, resources we have seldom been able to manage to our advantage, and a lamentable tendency to repeat our mistakes."

Yet, in the last analysis, Richler does not go far or deep enough in his discussion of Canada. Though he includes a section from *The Legend of John Hornby*, he does not discuss George Whalley or George Grant who, in my judgment, are the two critics of our society who most fully show us ourselves, where we have gone wrong, and where we should be headed. As a satirist, Richler is often caught on the social surface. Although he can give us such witty one-liners as the school kid's "Margaret Atwood, Margaret Laurence — never heard of them, so they must be Canadian," his writing often lacks the depth of thought and judgment that can truly show us ourselves.

JOHN FERNS

OEDIPAL MELODRAMA

JACQUES FILLION, *Un An de sursis pour Timi*. Leméac, $13.95.

JACQUES FILLION'S LATEST NOVEL, *Un An de sursis pour Timi*, recreates a twelve-month period between the summer of 1941 and the summer of 1942 in the lives of a group of people in an unnamed Quebec town. At the centre of this group is Timi Terrassier who is coming of age during this eventful time and who will die in 1942 on a European battlefield. Timi's death is announced in the prologue and gives his experiences at home a special poignancy. Fillion is particularly adept at evoking an atmosphere of impending catastrophe, both in Timi's private world, and in the world at large as it lies under the shadow of war. However, Timi himself seems not unduly worried about the war; he is too busy coming to grips with an incestuous passion for his mother. His oedipal conflicts form the main action, although they are certainly not the only nor the best part of the novel. As in his earlier works (*Il est bien court le temps des cerises, Pourquoi cracher sur la lune?*), Fillion is best at creating an array of quite fascinating characters who find themselves in situations which are often funny, extravagant, sentimental, pathetic, melodramatic, and occasionally vulgar. Who can forget the scene when an inebriated

Timi wanders off in search of the mayor's house to "embrasser madame la mairesse sur les fesses"? Similarly amusing is the distribution of posters on which the name of a corrupt politician has been changed from "Blaise Cuisson" to "Baise Cu." Other episodes can be painfully sentimental. I am thinking in particular of the time Timi forgets a date with Avril, who then sinks into abject misery and lets herself be seduced by her lesbian landlady. In fact, even the best episodes only narrowly miss the melodramatic. Despite such weaknesses, the novel exudes a love of life which makes many episodes entertaining and well worth reading.

Whether Fillion's creative energy can compensate sufficiently for certain shortfalls and excesses is open to question. For a relatively short novel, it is too populated, too fast-paced, and thematically too ambitious. Intended as a sociological document, a commentary on war, a study of morality, a contemporary exploration of the Oedipus myth, and a psychological analysis of love, *Un An de sursis pour Timi* cannot satisfy all these requirements at once and therefore tends to offer us hastily drawn characters, episodic events, and superficially treated themes.

Although many characters are potentially interesting, they are not allowed to develop fully. The glimpses we get of figures like Viateur Dubuque, Avril, Anna-Anne, Madame Ongaro, or Cyrille and Mia Terrassier make us want to know more about them. Since characters in this overpopulated novel make only fleeting appearances, the reader finds it difficult to care for them.

Even Timi himself remains a curiously incomplete and abstract character. Although Fillion has successfully imagined the situation of a young adult with a forbidden passion, Timi never comes into clear focus. It seems that his creator could never quite make up his mind who and what Timi is meant to be. In one place, for instance, Timi is presented as an unselfconscious adolescent: "Timi n'avait rien de l'intellectual à l'esprit tortueux, il aimait les choses concrètes et palpables. Il était de taille à comprendre un carburateur, mais inapte à saisir le sens de la vie et de la mort."

Part of the time, Timi's behaviour bears out this characterization. But much of the novel directly contradicts it; Timi is frequently credited with highly eloquent philosophical musings:

> Il n'y avait pas d'avenir possible pour lui et ses fantasmes. Ce qui, aujourd'hui, brillait de beauté, de pureté, de grandeur et de générosité, ne serait plus demain que déchéance, pourriture et ignominies. Les héros doivent mourir jeunes, les grandes passions aussi, sinon le temps les corrompt, comme il corrompt tout ce qu'il touche. Paradoxalement, c'est par la mort qu'ils atteignent l'immortalité. Laissons faire le temps, se dit Timi, fataliste, il forge l'âme et le coeur, il jongle avec la vie et la mort, il fait la grandeur et la déchéance et on n'a pas de prise sur lui.

This passage is elegant in its eloquence, but the feelings and thoughts it attributes to Timi's consciousness are out of step with his supposedly uncomplicated temperament.

Despite uneven characterization, Timi might still have succeeded as a convincing figure if Fillion had not burdened him with a heavy-handed oedipal theme. Timi's love for his mother and hatred for his father are treated quite schematically and without much imagination or originality. Timi's struggle to understand and deal with his desires lacks emotional depth; the oedipal conflict appears primarily on the level of a melodramatic plot. The climax of the novel, the murder of Viateur Dubuque, is a good case in point. The crisis of Dubuque's murder arrives with the unexpectedness of a

good plot, but it is marred by the irritating coincidences that explain it. Both the main plot and the many sub-plots of *Un An de sursis pour Timi* tend to be too mechanically orchestrated to be convincing.

I find that *Un An de sursis pour Timi* often makes good reading and regret that it is not better crafted. The novel's humour is generally appealing, and Fillion's language shows signs of great talent (except for grammatical and typographical errors as well as expressions that sound too modern for the early 1940's). But irritating inconsistencies, superficialities, and technical weaknesses tend to diminish the accomplishment of Fillion's ambitiously broad novel and undermine the energy and vitality of his imagination.

EVELYN COBLEY

ROMAN AMÉRICAIN

JACQUES POULIN, *Volkswagen Blues*. Québec/Amérique, n.p.

LE MYTHE DU GRAND ROMAN national traverse plusieurs littératures: l'Espagne a *Don Quichotte*, l'Irlande, *Ulysse*, les Etats-Unis, *Moby Dick*. Au Québec, Victor-Lévy Beaulieu incarne cet idéal par l'annonce d'une longue suite romanesque, *la Grande Tribu*. Dans *les Grandes Marées* (Leméac, 1978) de Jacques Poulin, le personnage de l'Auteur rêvait lui aussi d'écrire "le grand roman de l'Amérique," sans y parvenir. *Volkswagen Blues* prend l'exact contrepied de ce rêve: toute en nuances, cette évocation du "Grand Rêve de l'Amérique" est un roman important, certes, mais qui ne repose pas sur le parti pris épique qu'on serait en droit d'attendre d'un texte fondateur. L'écriture n'est pas ici totalisation; c'est plutôt une "forme d'exploration."

Jack Waterman est écrivain. Durant une période improductive où il cherche à quoi s'accrocher, il se met en quête de son frère Théo disparu depuis une vingtaine d'années. De Gaspé à San Francisco, en passant par Québec, Toronto, Chicago, Saint Louis et Kansas City, suivant la Piste de l'Oregon après avoir remonté le fleuve Saint-Laurent, Jack interroge le moindre signe laissé par ce frère quasi mythique dans une Amérique qui ne l'est pas moins. Aidé par la Grande Sauterelle, une mécanicienne métisse rencontrée à Gaspé, Jack retrouve à San Francisco un Théo infirme qui ne le reconnaît pas: "*I don't know you.*" Le but du périple américain de Jack et de la Grande Sauterelle n'était toutefois plus uniquement de retrouver Théo; il avait été remplacé par une recherche de l'identité culturelle chez la jeune fille et de la vie hors des livres chez le romancier. Se greffera également à ces recherches un quête, fondamentale celle-là, du bonheur, mais ce dernier "est rare et pour l'obtenir il faut beaucoup d'efforts, de peines et de fatigues." La Grande Sauterelle restera à San Francisco, Jack reviendra au Québec sous l'aile protectrice des "dieux indiens" et des "autres." Avant d'en arriver là, il leur aura fallu traverser un continent et sa violence à bord d'un vieux minibus Volkswagen.

Les indices sur lesquels se guident Jack et la Grande Sauterelle sont ténus: "une carte postale bizarre, un dossier de police, un article dans un vieux journal ... et une traînée de lumière sur un visage de femme." Jouant sur le modèle du roman d'aventures, *Volkswagen Blues* est une suite de rencontres chaleureuses: un gardien de bibliothèque philosophe, un grand écrivain né à Montréal (Saul Bellow), un garçon de stationnement, un journaliste enquêtant sur les francophones des Etats-Unis, la femme d'un "*bull rider,*" un vagabond se prenant pour Hemingway, un poète de la *beat generation* (Lawrence Ferlinghetti), une vieille chanteuse de rue. Chaque fois que la piste de Théo s'efface, survient une rencontre qui relance la quête.

Les cartes géographiques tiennent une place toute spéciale dans ce roman de la route. L'itinéraire de Théo, et donc celui de Jack, est calqué sur celui des premiers colons français et américains, comme le montre la carte reproduite en hors-texte. Le trajet des protagonistes est clairement délimité dans l'espace: routes suivies, arrêts, rencontres. Le périple est également temporel, historique. Comme dans un roman pour enfants, Jack et la Grande Sauterelle se racontent toutes sortes de légendes, revivent l'histoire des pionniers, explorent autant un passé qu'un territoire. Enfin, les relations entre l'écrivain vieillissant et la jeune fille rencontrée miraculeusement dans la brume de Gaspé dessinent une véritable Carte du Tendre.

L'univers de Poulin est riche en livres de toutes sortes. Dans une des plus belles pages du roman, la Grande Sauterelle explique à Jack qu'il ne faut pas juger les livres un par un: "Ce que l'on croit être un livre n'est la plupart du temps qu'une partie d'un autre livre plus vaste auquel plusieurs auteurs ont collaboré sans le savoir." Ainsi, les cinq romans qu'a écrits Jack, les livres qu'"emprunte" la Grande Sauterelle et ceux dont ils sont tous les deux "amoureux" et qu'ils lisent durant leur traversée de l'Amérique font partie d'un vaste ensemble qu'on pourrait appeler le texte de l'Amérique. Lire et voyager, c'est tout un: un parcours.

Américain, ce roman l'est encore par la récurrence du thème de la frontière. La maison d'enfance de Jack et de Théo était située près de la frontière américaine. Jack et la Grande Sauterelle traversent successivement la frontière des

Etats-Unis, "Le milieu de l'Amérique" (Kansas City) et "La ligne de partage des eaux" (au Wyoming). Entre rêve et réalité, la frontière est mince: Théo n'est-il pas "à moitié vrai et à moitié inventé"? Le romancier de poursuivre, plongeant dans l'onirique: "Et s'il y avait une autre moitié... La troisième moitié serait moi-même, c'est-à-dire la partie de moi-même qui a oublié de vivre." Au travers de ce frère voyageur faussement héroïque, Jack tente de refaire sa vie, de repousser la dernière frontière, la mort.

On a beaucoup parlé, dans la presse, de l'influence de Jack London et de Jack Kerouac, celui de *On the Road*, au sujet de *Volkswagen Blues*. Il faudrait aussi mentionner Hemingway, Réjean Ducharme, Gabrielle Roy, Salinger, Boris Vian, Brautigan, et quelques autres, tous "écrivains favoris" de Jack. Le voisinage est flatteur et a de quoi surprendre; pourtant, avec *Volkswagen Blues*, Jacques Poulin témoigne encore une fois d'un merveilleux talent de romancier. Par son refus de la chute, du *punch*, et la précision de sa prose, Poulin s'impose comme le romancier québécois dont le ton est le plus juste. Chaque mot pèse ici de tout son poids. Les quelques illustrations du livre, même si elles tendent à authentifier le récit, à le faire basculer dans le réalisme n'enlèvent rien à la richesse de l'imaginaire, au contraire: elles ajoutent une autre dimension à ce roman déjà fort riche. *Volkswagen Blues*, qui n'est pas le grand roman de l'Amérique, est un grand roman américain.

BENOIT MELANCON

COUNTRIES TO VISIT

GUY VANDERHAEGHE, *The Trouble With Heroes and Other Stories*. Borealis, $8.95.

VIRGIL BURNETT, *A Comedy of Eros*. Porcupines Quill, $7.95.

MARK FRUTKIN, *The Growing Dawn*. Quadrant, $9.95.

HERE ARE THREE EXTREMELY dissimilar works of prose fiction. Vanderhaeghe's little collection of stories belongs to the main line of realistic storytelling, Burnett's novella somewhere near the border of surreal country, and Frutkin's book, called "documentary fiction" on the cover, is deep in the land of the fantastic.

About the only thing they have in common is that their authors are Canadian and all three books have been published by small presses. A good thing, that. Fiction is an endangered species in these troubled economic times and the big publishers seem to grow more timid by the day.

Vanderhaeghe's stories, as the title piece promises, all deal with the theme of heroism. That title story is little more than an anecdote with a brief preface setting up a flashback. It, like "Parker's Dog," with which the book ends, is set in modern times and deals with recognizable contemporary issues. Characters in both stories are marginal, living in the world like figures on a badly tuned TV set late at night. Heroism in these stories is wryly ironic.

Not so with stories like "The King is Dead," "No Man Could Bind Him," and "Lazarus." These stories are set in Biblical times and, like Anatole France's "The Procurator of Judea," depend for their effect on our knowledge of the Biblical events. In all three stories, as in France's, there is a built-in sardonic twist towards which the story is directed. Pontius Pilate, Procurator of Judea, did not know that history would remember

him for one event in his career — only one. So when he is asked if he remembers a certain crucifixion, he frowns and says no.

It's the Three Dot School of literature. "Jesus of Nazareth?" Dot, dot, dot. "I don't recall." Thus we feel one up on Pilate and on the complacent wedding guests in "Lazarus." The oily narrator of "No Man Could Bind Him" does not know about the Gadarene swine and the exorcised demons, but we do. We have advance information and that makes us feel superior to the stories' characters. Perhaps the advance information is more esoteric in "Cafe Society." Not everybody knows who Gabriel Dumont was. But the sardonic lesson of history is still the main point of that story as well.

There are passages of power and authority in these stories, however. At the end of "Lazarus," the resurrected man sits in the dark, waiting for the one who brought him back from the dead:

> Tonight with the sky pressing down upon him pitted with brililant light, Lazarus feels for a moment that past and present is bound within his flesh and bone. He rules this kingdom of time as a steward rules in his master's absence.

A Comedy of Eros. Here we go, I thought, into the White Hotel and the desk clerk is John Fowles. Jaekin, a middle-aged art teacher, has a portentous dream one night. It's one of those almost wet dreams with mythic overtones. He wakes up late for class and hurries into his drab, gritty real life. Only there is someone strange among the students. It is a girl half his age with a face that suggests all sorts of classical art. Soon the class is dismissed and they are coupling on the floor.

Things progress. She will not tell him her name. She has a mysterious past. He calls her "Calypso." Each night is given over to great sex. One evening there are strangers in her apartment who attack him. He has to travel to Italy to find her. It goes on.

Despite my initial annoyance at being handed what I took to be fancied up soft porn, I found myself drawn into Burnett's labyrinthine narrative. It *is* a comedy after all, like the private joke antique statues seem to be sharing.

"What colour is this?" I asked my wife, thrusting the book at her.

"Mauve," she said.

"That's what I thought," I said. "Of course."

There is a stylized drawing of a Medusa-like head in gold on the mauve cover. Burnett's own shyly erotic line drawings are set between chapters. A lovely container for the tale.

But my chief and remaining complaint is the style. It is carefully laundered of contemporary reference so that the narrative could have taken place in any time period and any country. There are a few slips, like a reference to an expressway, but mostly the discourse steps mincingly along, a stately amble avoiding the muddy puddles of the mundane. If John Fowles is the desk clerk, then Mario Praz is running the elevator.

The Growing Dawn is a prose collage with Guglielmo Marconi at the centre. The first letter of the alphabet received by him in Newfoundland in 1901, sent across the Atlantic by wireless, was "S." It is the shape of a wave. Walt Whitman some fifty years earlier sang the body electric. With Marconi, the world's atmosphere became peopled with sound.

Frutkin mingles imagined events in Marconi's life with snippets of documented fact. It is the blend, the intermix, or rather, just where one meets the other and interfaces that I find fascinating. Frutkin sees Marconi as the creator of a new mythology. In a sense, Frutkin is making that new myth in a marvellously oscillating mobile of prose. Curi-

ous coincidences are recorded. The etymologies of words conjure up new associations.

I began by saying I could find no common ground on which to place these three new works. Perhaps any such attempt is self-defeating. Taken on their own merits one can find individually something of worth. I know which country I prefer to visit, but I promise not to show you my slides. Go your own way.

EUGENE MC NAMARA

ANARCHIST & ILLUSIONIST

JIM CHRISTY, *Travelin Light*. Simon & Pierre, $9.95.

TOM HENIGHAN, *Tourists From Algol*. Golden Dog, $5.95.

THIS COLLECTION OF 12 STORIES is more polished than Christy's autobiographical novel, *Streethearts*. A literary veneer is applied unevenly over similar first-person narrators to produce differing effects. Though the pieces enjoy varying degrees of success in their own right, the colourful colloquial fire of the urban Huck Finn who narrates *Streethearts* is cooled.

Some of the selections in *Travelin Light* are fragments familiar from earlier writings which have been spruced up. "To Hell With this Cockeyed World" is the biographical portrait of an anarchist jazz poet from Atlantic City named Charlie Leeds. Christy's love for this incredible person, and his knowledge of the cultural circumstances that made Charlie Leeds possible, then destroyed him, are very well conveyed. "Dead Drunk" is another thumbnail portrait of a man driven to lovable alcoholic destruction by personal tragedy. A woman from a small Texas border town is the subject of "No Offense to Any Gringoes Who May be Present." She rejects the proper marriage prescribed by her family, but is ultimately crushed by the blind mechanism of conventional society.

The Christy hero does not always lose, however. Especially when the first person narrator is the focus of attention, he consistently enjoys superheroic success. The character of the hero as well as the style of the writing in "La Mordida" evoke Ernest Hemingway. There is an element of parody in this story, though, absent from "Too Old to Quit" and "Boomer." An old hobo and an independent woman are portrayed in these two works as examples of the possibility of maintaining personal integrity in a hypocritical world.

The best statement in this book of Christy's anarchist attitude is probably the piece titled "My Fate." Here, he debunks the European cultural mystique by overcoming his own idolatry of André Malraux. Instead, the first person narrator, apparently again an idealized alter ego of the author, makes an exhilarating individual accommodation with the world. He finds a bizarre kind of love and community in the frontier country of the far north. "Man's fate" is seen as an abstract illusion, and the personal creative gesture as the only reality and hope for fulfilment.

Ultimately, however, time may be the anarchist's greatest enemy. Like boxing, Christy's favourite sport, anarchism is a young man's game. The effective stroke of spontaneity requires reflexes which rust with the passing years and decades. Some of the suburban hypocrisy Christy despises, for example, in "The Beat to Keep" may be a function of age as well as economics or demographics. But the writer may be said to thrive on maturity. While Christy's writing ability continues to develop, there is some indication that

the old subjects and themes are nearly exhausted. This writer has all the tools to be one of our best, if he can now find a rich mine in which to work with them.

While Jim Christy writes almost exclusively out of his own experience, Tom Henighan in *Tourists From Algol* seems to take his inspiration from all points of the imaginative compass. This collection of nine short stories demonstrates a wide range of style, form, and theme.

Stories titled "Famine," "Sargon and the Fabulous Guests," and "At Approximately Three P.M." use a language which is plain, though powerful. The use of repetitive sentence structure to evoke a solid sense of material reality again recalls Papa Hemingway. But elsewhere, such as in "The Explorers," Henighan creates striking passages of lyrically poetic description. Then again, words get moved around with the abstract precision of chess pieces in "The Medium" and "The Borges Transfer."

Henighan's use of the short story form, furthermore, shows great versatility. The first and last story in this collection could be considered science fiction. In addition to "The Borges Transfer," both "Captain Flynn" and "Massenet and the Disappearing Sopranos" create images of utterly fantastic imagination. The remaining four stories are realistic, or naturalistic.

The thematic concerns of these stories are also wide-ranging. Three of the realistic pieces project visions of domestic entropy. The best, at least the most thorough treatment of this theme, is "Famine." Two brothers running a farm find themselves trapped in a state of sterile paralysis. The attempt to escape brings catastrophe. In three other stories Henighan decries the possibility of romantic, erotic, or intellectual fulfilment. "Massenet and the Disappearing Sopranos," "Captain Flynn," and "The Borges Transfer" deal respectively with the frustration of the human heart, sexuality, and mind. Shifting veils of illusion subvert the goals of the protagonists. In "The Medium" the mental balance of Dr. S. (Dr. Science?) is undermined by the powerful illusion of television.

The first and last stories are more lengthy and serious works. "The Explorers" shows the results of a nuclear Armageddon in which *homo sapiens* vanishes. His animal part is reborn as a superphysical being called the Yeti, his intellectual part emerges as a purely computerized, mechanical consciousness. Finally, "Tourists from Algol" describes the economic and cultural invasion of a rural Canadian town, which recalls Leacock's Mariposa, by mysterious foreign forces. This story flirts with the fine line between environmental protection and fear of technological progress, between the maintenance of Canadian national integrity and nationalistic xenophobia.

STEVEN LEHMAN

DREAMS & SAGAS

OLIVE SPENCER LOGGINS, *Tenderfoot Trail.* Sono Nis, $9.95.

TOM CUMMINGS, *Gopher Hills.* Western Producer, $9.95.

BARRY BROADFOOT, *My Own Years.* Doubleday, $22.95.

MARJORIE WILKINS CAMPBELL, *The Silent Song of Mary Eleanor,* Western Producer, $17.95.

OLIVE SPENCER LOGGINS' dedication to her pioneering husband includes her sonnet "Wild Geese Fly," which ends with a comparison of the geese and man: "Though we are bound by customs' drab demands / Like them, unfettered, we could wish to be."

That last line provides one key to the dream of pioneering: life is always more

unfettered just beyond the fence, or coulee, or northwoods. The persistent dream, to be free as the birds, seems to be a common denominator among those who search out remote regions, survive them, settle them, and then attempt to explain their charm to effete easterners, who may, like me, have this notion that birds too are bound by custom, migratory urges and demands. Who's to say that a bird's dream isn't to ramble around loose on the ground, as the protagonists in these books do? From a distance, it looks like fun. But up close, down to earth? Well, you've got to have the dream.

Tom Cummings is the most distanced writer here, in his reminiscences "of the bittersweet struggle . . . at the turn of the century on a little wheat farm" in the West. His book presents highlights of events — the storm, the wolf hunt — and setpieces on people of the past — the railway engineer, the restaurateur, the teacher, and Father Finnigan, who rode the white horse in the Orange Parade. The book is a compendium of most of what we have heard about, or would expect, in the rural world of the prairie three generations ago: "In 1914 a boy's education" involved "no sleazy drug pushers, no soapy operas, no painted ladies; only sweat, horses, and liniment." In that scented enclave, nonetheless, the narrative does uncover, for the reader, some nostalgic happenings, and before the First Great War destroys forever that amber world, the memories weave a certain charm.

Olive Spencer's more personal saga is of homesteading in B.C.'s Cariboo area near Deka Lake in the late 1920's. The pioneering dream was that of her first husband, Arthur James Spencer, who died in 1965, and the near-nightmare from which they escaped was jobless Vancouver where in 1926 the depression was beginning early.

The Spencers took up the provincial government's offer of 160 acres of high-plateau Cariboo land, free for the working, but too cold in winter for any mammals except dream-driven man. Olive's most obvious act of independence was to insist that they take along, all the way from Vancouver, a bulky, spreading Kitchen Queen stove. The stove is an appropriate symbol, in its nature and size, for the contribution that Olive made to the family fortunes. By sticking close to home and the oven, she made openings, through her good cooking, with Indians and trappers and wild-horse catchers and even with two murderers hunted by the RCMP. They tarried to taste her meat stew and got caught, and Olive and Arthur got $2,000 reward. Indeed, if it hadn't been for Olive's care and inventiveness with the domestic chores — quite unliberated proceedings by today's standards — she and Arthur might have joined the ranks of the failed — of whom it was said, "Another dream gone west."

Barry Broadfoot, well-known as a chronicler, in oral history, of other people's dreams and data, sets out this time to examine his own years through "Recollections of People, Places & Peregrinations." About half the content is oral history still, provided by: a singer, an actress, a fishing guide, a hitchhiker, a hustler, a rodeo cowboy, a verbose gent in a Saskatchewan village pub, a woman who helps Indian street-girls, and a man who explored the Fourth Avenue hippie-ground of Vancouver. The best writing, the most detailed and evocative, is in Broadfoot's personal recollections of family vacation at Lake Winnipeg's Grand Beach, his summer on his uncle's farm, school and streetgangs in Winnipeg, cub reporting on the *Winnipeg Trib*, going

to college after going to war, and surveying with a government road crew north of Manigatogan.

Despite their richer prose, the Broadfoot recollections seldom conclude with much deeper insight than is gained from the oral reporting. That he tends to make no more penetrating conclusions about his own years than he does about others' may be the secret of the, as he says, "astounding" success of his first oral history, *Ten Lost Years* (first of four). He becomes totally involved, as if he were personally involved, with the people he interviews. And perhaps it is true after all for most of us that we do not articulate our own dream any better than, or as well as, we do other people's.

The author's best manipulation is in his boy-meets-farm recollection. Broadfoot's enduring boyhood dream, after he gave up an earlier notion of sailing his own ship on the unbounded sea, was of owning a farm. He switched to that because it was more realizable. After his summer working on his uncle's farm, after the prickles and the heat, after the reality and the sunlight, he boards the bus for the long ride back to Winnipeg and settles down to dream once more of going to sea, to the unfathomed, blessedly unknown sea. For moderns, unlike the pioneers, perhaps an unreal dream, the obviously unattainable, is best.

Marjorie Wilkins Campbell's book is the most artistic and professional of these four and quite likely the most significant. The Mary Eleanor of the title is the author's mother and the "silent song" is the internal adjustment made by this refined and fragile London-born English woman to the unfolding dreams of her vigorous Yorkshire husband. His enthusiasm for frontier living extends even to its drudgery.

The solid analysis and psychological insight that Campbell brings to this examination of a marital relationship in the wilderness belies the dimension of soap opera implied in the title. In fact, the book is most professional in its avoidance of what could have been mawkish sentiment, and in the quality of the author's own life as a child — her own years, to borrow from Broadfoot — that she is evoking.

Two of Campbell's previous works, *The Saskatchewan* and *The Nor'Westers*, won Governor General's Awards. After eight books, at the age of 81 (in the year of publication) she breaks new ground — recreating her own family's departure in 1904 from South Qu'Appelle by ox-drawn wagon. She was a two-year-old perched on top of all their worldly goods beside her mother who held fast to a younger child.

As with a novel, the reader comes to perceive the reality of the conflict between a man whose glory was in exterior action, the "need to meet the pioneer challenge," and a woman who had a "need for music and the enrichment of inner life." As Campbell says in her introduction:

> Modern marriage counsellors would have warned against so unsuitable a match, but . . . they [her parents] would never have listened. They were in love as long as she lived, despite hardships neither could have imagined.

Surprisingly (at least it's surprising if you've read before that it was barleycorn booze that justified God's ways to settlers, and made tolerable the uneven tenor of their lives), Campbell says sex smoothed frontier existence, a kind of self-giving sexual renewal that a D. H. Lawrence might envy. After the young mother's fearsome nights alone, and her father's tramping alone for a week out-of-doors, "they were overwhelmingly ready for one another and the solace that made many a pioneer woman's isolation and hardships bearable."

Having, by my excerpt of the sexual, just boosted immeasurably Campbell's sale of *The Silent Song* (is *that* what she meant by it?), I must add that occasionally her articulation of the psychological state of her parents leaves one as unenlightened as if the job had been done by a specialist.

I do admire the restrained eloquence with which she closes the story. Her father (of six girls now) comes out of the room off the dining area where her mother has just died:

> He said we must finish our supper, and got us all upstairs to bed. Then he phoned the doctor and made the inevitable arrangements. She was buried in her nightgown in the lonely little cemetery across the north coulee, still wearing the gold wedding ring he had made for her in Africa. She was forty-two.

The homestead knoll, with its mixed farming and its years of life and love, is bulldozed flat now to make way for another stretch of wheat. Only this book, produced by one of the survivors three score and ten years later, attests to its existence. That that should be so would surely startle any of the pioneers who dreamed of the future in the first decade of this century. And yet this recreation of their lives, in a book, by one of the Wilkins children, would surely startle them too as a possibility never thought of "as they plodded . . . up and down those long furrows . . . dreaming many dreams."

GERALD NOONAN

ABUNDANT FORM

DAVID HELWIG & SANDRA MARTIN, eds., *Coming Attractions*. Oberon, $9.95.

ELIZABETH BREWSTER, *A House Full of Women*. Oberon, $8.95.

DAVID HELWIG & SANDRA MARTIN, eds., *83: Best Canadian Stories*. Oberon, $11.95.

THE CURRENT REVIVAL — full-fledged boom, some say — of the short story has been exclaimed overabundantly but explained satisfactorily by none. Speculation flourishes: short stories are quick reads, easy fixes, manageable doses; short stories offer young writers the ideal form for experiment, for apprenticeship — poets' playground, novelists' training ground. Short stories, hazarded a Canadian reviewer recently, are often written by women because women know the domestic details of life more intimately than men do. On the evidence of these three books, all of this is not much more than chat. Yes, many of the writers are women: *Coming Attractions* features three women writers, Elizabeth Brewster's *A House Full of Women* is just that, and nine out of the fourteen *Best Canadian Stories* are by women. Some of the writers are poets, some are essayists and diarists, some are, in fact, apprentice novelists. Some of the stories *are* quick reads; others are very difficult reads. Some are traditional, some experimental, some realist, some reflexive. There is no easy generalization to make about them or about the current popularity of the form. They succeed or fail, not because they confirm or disprove half-baked theories, or are written by one sex or another, about one thing or another, by one kind of writer or another, but because *as fictions* — of whatever persuasion, intention, or tradition — they do or do not engage their readers.

But which readers, with which biases, announced or covert? Readers who fa-

vour regional realism and clear, bold presentation of character, plot, and situation will enjoy Sharon Butala's three stories in *Coming Attractions.* Butala's strengths are sincerity and a blunt honesty. Her worst weakness is a tendency towards unintentionally melodramatic endings. The best of the stories is the atypical "The Mission," a writer-painter's recollections of her broken Halifax marriage and her teaching in the mission building there, set against her contemplation of her quietly distanced marriage to a prairie farmer. Less successful, but still powerful, is "Breaking Horses," the story of a woman's break for freedom from her passively domineering husband, a hostile Saskatchewan landscape, and a horsebreaker who offers her sex but no alternative life. Perhaps the main weakness here is that the characters become too typed because the story is too thesis-bound.

Readers who favour acute psychological realism will find much to admire in Bonnie Burnard's four stories. "Grizzly Mountain" dramatizes the effects of an impending breakup upon a couple's surrogate child, closing on the woman's realization that she is guilty of an enormous deception in not telling the boy that her relationship with the man is ending. Her insight is powerfully presented, but the story is weakened by its closing, crushing weight of pronouncement, which threatens to collapse into apocalyptic gloom in the final sentence: "And she became, there on top of the mountain, with the fire and the man and the boy, another aberration." "Crush," which explores a teen-age girl's awakening sexuality and documents her instinctual decision to nurture and protect it against her mother's stifling conventional wisdom, is a compellingly acute portrait of adolescence. "Reflections" charts the interior musings of an elderly couple as they contemplate their own burial plots. The most carefully constructed of these stories, "Reflections" is almost *too* symmetrical, so that it threatens to undercut its true-to-life psychological portraits by too neatly resolving in a radical reversal of character when the woman, for the first time in her life, roars with laughter.

The most gifted of these three writers is Sharon Sparling. Her sensibility is urban, her settings contemporary Montreal, her style clipped, terse, and charged. She has a distinct idea of how she wants her sentences to sound, to read. She has a strong sense of how to convey voice and mood in character, and a sure descriptive touch as well. Two of her three stories involve Chloe, a pianist unhappily married to Laurence, a shallow, fashionable, and manipulative character whom she has left in the last story, "A Hinge of Possibilities." Adam, her composition teacher and sometime lover, is the more real and troubling man in her life. The stories probe Chloe's defection from herself in marrying Laurence, and her related struggle between attraction to Sebastian, her glossily packaged New York agent, and to Adam. "Diminuendo" follows the narrator's precarious existence in a seedy world half submerged in Montreal rain, with a dream-child (lost? dead?) slipping along the borders of her imagination. The story is a fine demonstration of Sparling's ability to evoke the nuances of a mood in all its diminishing shades of gray, alloying the narrator's rundown apartment, the shabby cityscape, her dissolving relationship with her lover, Jason, and the damp bitterness of her own frame of mind. Like Butala, Sparling needs to be careful with her endings; they close off her stories too adroitly, too knowingly, as with the overly obvious last line of "The Chinese Coat," where we are told what we already know — that the stylish but

wine-stained coat has come to signify Chloe's complicity in the progress of a shallow marriage.

A House Full of Women is an uneven book of stories. There are two very good stories, one ("visiting aunt alix") nicely capturing the cloying, bittersweet entrapments of a family across its generations, half-willed, half fought against, and the other ("her first apartment") sensitively evoking a girl's passage into womanhood and independence. There is a quiet matter-of-factness about Brewster's prose that works very well at times, but that can also make the unassuming lives of her characters seem to signal themselves too preciously, too coyly, as if both everyday reality and the ordinary woman — *all* ordinary women — were *de facto* remarkable, extraordinary. Perhaps they are, but then the writer should show us how this comes to be.

If in *83: Best Canadian Stories*, the intention is to showcase the range of possibilities in short fiction today, Helwig and Martin have succeeded admirably. Readers who hold that the short story should reveal character and meaning by casting quick, quiet, often ironic illumination over moments in a life will find Rona Murray's "New Year's Day," Ann Copeland's "Fame," Don Bailey's "Hamburger Heaven," Edward O. Phillips' "Matthew and Chauncy," Margaret Hollingsworth's "Tulips," and Gertrude Story's "Das Engelein Kommt" to be fine fulfilments of these "traditional" expectations. Mike Mason's "All I Know About Incest" and Margaret Dyment's "Never Seek to Destroy" show how the short story can flex to accommodate the essay, the digression, and the reflection. Elizabeth Spencer's "To the Watchers While Walking Home" and David McFadden's "Hiroko Writes a Story" show the rich possibilities of the self-interrogating and reflexive story. David Watmough's "Fury" and, particularly, Joyce Marshall's "My Refugee" show how the story can shade gracefully into memoir and autobiography. I found Marian Engel's "Blue Glass & Flowers," coming from Engel, a bit slight and disappointing, and Isabel Huggan's "Sorrows of the Flesh" especially strong in a book which generously displays many of the strengths of contemporary short fiction.

NEIL BESNER

ON HOOD

KEITH GAREBIAN, *Hugh Hood.* Twayne, $22.00.

TWAYNE WORLD AUTHORS SERIES books tend to exhibit a standardized awkwardness that cannot be blamed on individual contributors. A plodding chronological comprehensiveness requires the repetition of critical points relevant to several works, and large patches of plot summary impede arguments and bury insights. These books may be useful to the undergraduate audience for which they are apparently intended, but writing to their somewhat Procrustean requirements may not always be good for their authors. Keith Garebian seems to have risen to the challenge with enthusiasm: he hopes that "good sense and celebration" are the spirit of his work, and thanks Hood for advice, several discussions, and access to archival material. Garebian's interest and thoroughness prevent him from becoming boring, and allow him to deal with textual detail helpfully, but when he steps back for an overview he fails his audience. His obvious admiration, not only for Hood's fiction, but also for his ideas, even for Hood's "calm spiritual self" seems responsible for some of the book's problems.

Garebian's tone often swings to de-

fensive or effusive extremes. He concedes occasional flaws in Hood's work, such as flat characterization, ineffective presentation of evil, and lack of dramatic conflict, without clearly connecting them to Hood's aesthetic theories or his unproblematic religious vision. Hood's faith is of a kind unusual even when Christianity formed the structure of Western thought. Neither damnation nor doubt troubles either Hood or Matt Goderich, the narrator of the New Age series. Such complacent security makes no concessions to non-Christian readers, or even to struggling Christian ones. Garebian takes a similar stance, arguing that Hood's Christian allegory is what makes "passionate admiration" for his work "not altogether an extravagance." Yet although Garebian analyses Hood's allegorical technique, the foundation of the allegory — Roman Catholic Christianity — is left as an unassailable good, as indeed Hood would obviously leave it. Are readers to admire Hood's art, or his moral vision? Hood, of course, argues that they are indistinguishable, and that all great art is religious. Unfortunately, a lot of bad art is religious too. Hood's critics have to justify his work to the unconverted in aesthetic terms. It is not enough simply to point to Heaven.

Admiration also seems to drive Garebian into the intentional fallacy, despite his New Critical methodology, which is supplemented by the ideas of Northrop Frye. Garebian's method of refuting the major critical complaints about Hood's work is usually to quote or paraphrase Hood's own rebuttals. Hood provides a running commentary on his own work — a kind of *critique fleuve* — that is a terrible trap for the unwary. Like an encyclopedic amoeba, Hood cheerfully incorporates everything he likes into his world picture, integrating it in a plausible and fascinating way. For example, he aligns himself with an eclectic group of writers: not only are Dante, Spenser, and Wordsworth important influences, but so, he insists, are Arthur Ransome and P. G. Wodehouse, not to mention the Eaton's catalogue. He is also cavalier with the idea of genre. He adores lists. Epics have lists, so he argues that because his work contains many lists, he is writing epic. This kind of association is what he himself calls the "sportive play of the imagination." To take it seriously and to try to incorporate it into an interpretation is to sink into the critical equivalent of the Slough of Despond, as Garebian sometimes does.

Of course Hood does provide some useful keys to what he is up to. He uses emblems more than images, and hates symbols. Images refer to themselves only; symbols refer to a meaning outside themselves, but an imprecise, personal, and ultimately ungraspable one. Emblems, however, are unambiguous images clearly tied to a supra-personal system of meaning. Company logos, heraldic devices, and liturgical colours are emblematic, rather than symbolic. So the red of the kite in "Flying a Red Kite" is linked to pentecostal fire, and the red of the berries on the little girl's mouth to the blood of the Eucharist. Garebian talks of Hood's "emblematic style," "emblematic mode," and "emblematic imagination," but his discussion of specific emblems in Hood's work is often confusing. For example, the Governor's Bridge in Toronto, which is always closed, "expresses Hood's belief in permanence," and is, "although rickety . . . a permanent emblem of temptation and peril." Garebian's account of this bridge's meaning for Hood makes it seem personal, ambiguous, and symbolic, rather than emblematic, especially since no reference is made to any of the conventional associations of bridges. And in the next sen-

tence Garebian talks of Quebec City as, for Hood, "a symbol of primeval consolidation" as if *symbol* and *emblem* were synonymous.

Often Garebian digresses from his primary task to tilt at reviewers, admittedly legion, who have misread Hood as a defective realist rather than as a successful allegorist. And Garebian repeatedly berates Robert Fulford for "inventing the canard" that Hood is a better journalist than novelist. Surely Fulford has atoned since 1967, when he made the statement. As a good reviewer himself, perhaps Garebian can be forgiven for his desire to set the record straight, but he might have been better off if he had concentrated on unfurrowing the brow of the undergraduate puzzled by Hood's unfamiliar use of allegory and emblem.

MARGERY FEE

SCHOOL DAYS

MICHEL TREMBLAY, *Thérèse and Pierrette and the Little Hanging Angel*, trans. Sheila Fischman, McClelland & Stewart, $12.95.

SHEILA FISCHMAN HAS PERFORMED another valuable service for Anglophones in translating Michel Tremblay's 1980 novel, *Thérèse et Pierrette à l'école des Saints-Anges*. Best known as the playwright who revolutionized Quebec theatre by using joual in *Les Belles Soeurs* (1968), Tremblay has since 1978 devoted himself to the Balzacian task of re-creating Montreal in the 1940's in his *Chroniques du Plateau Mont Royal*. Tremblay's Montreal is a personalized fictional world in which the characters of his plays act out their past in the author's old neighbourhood near la rue Fabre. The second volume of this "comédie humaine montréalaise" focuses on a trio of eleven-year-old girls who will play lead roles in the elaborate Corpus Christi celebration put on for the Saint Stanislas de Kostka parish during the first week of June 1942.

Divided into four movements like the Brahms Fourth Symphony named as inspirational background music, the novel's action begins with the school day on Monday morning, June 1, and reaches its climax during the Corpus Christi procession on Thursday evening, June 4. During those four days, a number of events occur which change the lives of the characters and foreshadow the major transformation of Quebec Society during the Quiet Revolution of the 1960's. The plot is set in motion by Simone Côté's return to school after an operation to correct the harelip which had marked her life as well as her face. Her best friends, Thérèse (the future alcoholic waitress of *En pièces détachées*) and Pierrette (the worn-out prostitute of *Les Belles Soeurs*) welcome Simone back joyfully. The school principal, Mother Benoîte, a mean-spirited tyrant whose harsh discipline has earned her the nickname Mother Dragon Devil, takes note of Simone's improved looks by angrily threatening to expel her from school. Her anger stems from the incorrect assumption that the Côté family had paid for the cosmetic surgery after years of claiming they were too poor to pay extra school fees. The principal's overreaction provokes others to rebel against the religious educational system she represents. Simone's teacher becomes insubordinate in her defence of the girl and is threatened with banishment from the school. Sister Sainte-Catherine's dispute with Mother Dragon Devil disrupts the entire school community, and her eventual decision to become a lay teacher presages the demise of the Church's monolithic control over education. Simone's mother reacts by verbally assaulting the nun who humiliated her daughter, and the whole

system which teaches shame and hypocrisy. Madame Côté's outburst, witnessed in silent approval by the humanitarian doctor who paid for the harelip operation, is an anachronistically early version of the virulent anticlerical attacks of the 1960's. Despite the unsettling events of Monday, the preparations continue for the gaudy repository which has brought fame to Saint Stanislas de Kostka parish. Sister Sainte-Catherine oversees the pageant, making sure that costumes, statues, and props are all readied and choosing the Grade Six students who will figure in the tableau vivant. Pierrette is named to play the Virgin's role with Thérèse as Bernadette Soubirous at her feet and Simone as an angel suspended by a rope over her head. As the procession nears, tension and excitement mount in the neighbourhood, in the community of nuns, and in the three little girls. Just as the parish priest is about to begin mass a tremendous storm breaks, soaking everyone, destroying the repository, and terrifying the little hanging angel.

Within a tightly structured chronological sequence of events, Tremblay follows the three girls back and forth from home to school in a way that allows him to present a realistic tableau of the life of average Montrealers during the war years, a fantasy world accessible to a chosen few, and a mordant satire of Quebec Catholicism. Thérèse's homelife is already familiar to the readers of *La Grosse Femme d'à côté est enceinte* (1978), the first volume of Tremblay's *Chroniques*. In this second volume, her aunt the Fat Lady is in a hospital Maternity Ward, grandmother Victoire is slowly dying, and Thérèse discovers sexuality in her encounters with the handsome but dull-witted Gérard Bleau. Those familiar with Tremblay's play, *En pièces détachées*, will remember Gérard as Thérèse's cartoon-loving husband and her brother, Marcel, as a madman. In *Thérèse and Pierrette*, the four-year-old Marcel enters the invisible realm of madness by visiting the empty house next door peopled by Rose, Mauve, Violette, and Florence (the knitting Québécois Fates) and the resuscitated cat, Duplessis. Beyond the mixture of realism and fantasy which characterizes life on la rue Fabre as he remembers and imagines it, Tremblay is interested in denouncing the Catholic Church's repressive control over the collective conscience of Quebec. Beneath the satiric comedy of his portrayal of the school nuns and the vulgar Corpus Christi repository, readers sense that Tremblay shares Charlotte Côté's anger. The religious procession becomes a symbol of the shallow ritualism and base hypocrisy of an institution concerned mainly with conserving its own power. But if the Church was all powerful in real life, the author is omnipotent in fiction and Tremblay uses his power to send the winds and rain which ruin the celebration. Building toward this cataclysmic finale, Tremblay skilfully combines numerous characters, subplots, and themes into a unified work, delightful to read.

Sheila Fischman has done an admirable job in translating the novel into English. Rather than translating word for word the often ungrammatical, often obscene, and blasphemous "joual" dialogue, Fischman chooses to make the characters speak the kind of colloquial language that lower-class anglophone Montrealers might have spoken in 1942. Thus, "maudite marde" becomes "shoot," "Mon Dieu" becomes "jeepers" or "Holy Cow," and "chus pas mal tannée" is translated "what a drag!" Purists could quibble over a few awkward expressions, but the overall effect is exceedingly good. Once again, Sheila Fischman has given English-speaking Canadians an oppor-

tunity to read a brilliant novel which depicts Quebec society on the verge of change. Tremblay himself metaphorically announces the end of the old era at the beginning of *Thérèse and Pierrette* when one of the girls says: "The lilacs are finished, but the / bleeding hearts'll be out soon. / I like bleeding hearts better."

JANE MOSS

SIGNE DU REVE

MADELEINE OUELLETTE-MICHALSKA, *La Maison Trestler, ou le 8e jour d'Amérique.* Editions Québec / Amérique, $16.95.

DES QU'ELLE SUT APPRENDRE à lire, la narratrice de *La Maison Trestler* nous confie que quelques phrases seulement lui suffisaient pour déclencher de longues et belles rêveries. Cette idée qu'une lecture peut fournir le saut nécessaire à l'imagination devient à la fois le processus et le sujet du roman de Madeleine Ouellette-Michalska. Ainsi, le roman cherche à entremêler deux dimensions, deux univers: d'une part, le quotidien, "le temps du vécu," et d'autre part, les envolées lyriques, "le temps du rêve." Et ce temps du vécu et celui du rêve se distinguent clairement. Le vécu c'est d'abord, pour la narratrice, l'activité d'ecrire un roman et le rêve c'est précisément une période historique, une famille, un manoir style français construit à la fin du dix-huitième siècle. Donc, ce roman tend à fusionner deux genres littéraires qu'on ne voit pas souvent faire ménage dans un seul texte. Le plus souvent, le roman autocentrique ou narcissistique présente sous forme de mise en abyme un romancier(ère) fictif en train d'écrire, et le roman historique demeure fermé, imperméable à tout sauf la reconstruction d'un temps révolu. Avec *La Maison Trestler*, l'auteur a habilement uni ces deux genres, interrompant de cette façon à plusieurs reprises l'histoire d'une famille d'antan pour insérer des réflexions sur l'actualité québécoise et nous faire part des ennuis de la narratrice-écrivaine.

Ce procédé d'imbrication s'avérerait problématique si la narratrice envisageait l'histoire comme une sévère discipline de recherches. Mais puisqu'elle croit que l'exactitude ne s'applique pas à l'Histoire, elle a toutes les raisons de fuir, d'esquiver les archives pour s'abandonner à des rêves passionnés. Or, un des hauts points du roman est bien les transitions, les mouvements de l'écriture où l'on voit la narratrice faire l'effort, reprendre l'élan, souvent pénible, de retrouver ses rêves, de préparer un état d'exaltation. Par conséquent, nous reconnaissons l'importance du coucher avec son assoupissement, son demi-sommeil, ses ombres, ses fièvres, et la crainte de l'éveil. Etant donné cette méthode onirique de recréer l'histoire, elle reçoit avec un certain embarras les certificats de mariage, les actes notariés, les photos les testaments que d'aimables gens comme les Dubuc, propriétaire de la maison et le riche historien veulent lui montrer. La narratrice soutient avec une confiance inébranlable (qui ferait frémir un historien), sa vision intuitive de l'histoire. En effet, on a l'impression, outre ses fréquentes visites au manoir Trestler, foyer des arts situé au bord du lac des Deux-Montagnes près de Montréal, qu'elle préférerait ne pas connaître toute la paperasse de cet antique dossier qui pourrait si facilement effriter ses rêves.

Il s'ensuit que de ces deux plans du vécu et du rêve, Madeleine Ouellette-Michalska a su démontrer une grande souplesse et ingéniosité en soutenant deux styles ou modes d'écriture très différents. Malgré le fait que le texte en entier est écrit dans une langue élégante

et soignée, les parties du roman consacrées à l'histoire de Catherine Trestler-Hayst, son enfance dans la magnifique résidence, sa découverte de l'amour, sa rupture avec son père sont représentées avec une sensibilité, plutôt une sensualité qui évoque d'une manière palpable le bien-être, l'ordre, et le calme de cette maison bourgeoise. Nous apprécions, par exemple, la description saillante des effets de la lumière sur le lac, le poli des meubles, l'arôme de la cuisine, la blancheur des draps parfumés. Cette portée sensuelle du langage se prête extraordinairement bien à faire l'éloge voluptueux de l'amour et de l'époux, comparable au plus beau poème d'amour d'un Eluard ou d'un Saint John-Perse, mais bien entendu de cette autre perspective, celle de la femme.

Lorsqu'il s'agit du travail journalier de la narratrice dans son bungalow près d'une presqu'île, l'écriture se veut terne, sèche, sobre, et sans essor ou chaleur. Ce langage contribue à rendre ces sections du roman assez fade et sans grand intérêt. Le portrait qu'on saisit de l'écrivaine est celui d'une femme moderne, journaliste, de grande culture et raffinement qui éprouve un vif ressentiment à l'égard des questions politiques telles les influences françaises, britanniques et américaines qui continuent, comme jadis, d'assaillir le Québec contemporain. L'histoire de cette femme distinguée et cosmopolite inclut, c'était inévitable, un bel amant Européen qui découche. Ces pages sur la vie courante devraient nous émouvoir. Cependant, on lit ces parties du texte par devoir mais on a hâte de refranchir le seuil de la maison du couple Catherine et Eléazar.

Souvent dans le roman moderne, les scènes rêvées sont tellement mêlées à la "réalité" qu'on a de la peine à les identifier. Le roman de Madeleine Ouellette-Michalska n'est aucunement d'une approche difficile. A notre avis, les deux styles de l'écriture sont appropriés et justes. (Quelle pertinente comparaison stylistique pourrait-on développer concernant le dédoublement des scènes de l'accouchement de Catherine et de la narratrice.) Néanmoins, on se demande pourquoi la vie de la narratrice ne nous touche guère. Serait-il parce que la narratrice elle-même préfère ses rêves qui s'élèvent vers l'universel, la quintessence de la vie — "J'ai pourtant assisté à des noces cette nuit. Etaient-ce les miennes, celles de Catherine, ou celles, éphémères, glorieuses, de tous les humains?" Ou serait-il que l'existence de l'homme, en cours de cette ère moderne, a perdu son élément tragique. Au niveau du texte narcissistique, nous trouvons, éparpillé parmi les réflexions sur le rêve et l'art, des pensées sur l'impossibilité de vivre, sur le non-sens, le néant de la vie. Mais, chose curieuse, le lecteur n'entend pas, ne ressent pas les cris de détresse: "la maladie des scribes qui pousse à faire du texte quand hurler suffirait à vous persuader du mal de vivre." Serait-ce parce qu'il est toujours plus fascinant de rêver que de vivre?

En fin de compte, la narratrice-écrivaine, qui comme enfant, se servait des phrases pour s'insinuer dans la porte d'ivoire, a su accomplir sa tâche admirablement. Le lecteur de *La Maison Trestler* rêve à son tour.

THERESE LAFONTAINE

INTOLERABLE

RICHARD HEBERT, *The Questing Beast.* McClelland & Stewart, $19.95.

ROBERT G. COLLINS, *Tolerable Levels of Violence.* Lester Orpen and Dennys, $17.95.

I ONCE KNEW A PRIEST who heard the confessions of nuns in a convent near where I lived. Mostly the sisters wanted to throw off the weight of their sexual

fantasies, the sins of the imagination which often as not transformed the smooth almost feminine lines of the crucifix into a live and palpable hallucination. Now, in Hébert's first novel, we have the other side of the penny, an imagination haunted by angels.

So much has been said of the French-Canadian preoccupation with sin, a social device utilized by the mother church and the aristocracy to maintain the status quo, that the doppelganger virgin of québécois fiction has become an irritating cliché. If original sin originated in Québec, then maybe it should be buried there.

What Hébert has done with his questing beast, a something less than romantic pair of expatriate Canadians searching for their roots, is bury it in an obfuscation of damned angels, saints, whores, and frigid icons, most of whom belong in the loony bin and out of what otherwise might have been a meaningful journey of two souls, father and son, to salvation in the frozen hell of Thetford Mines, where lungs are black but the breath of angels can be read in clear winter skies.

Napoleon, the father, has escaped the past and run to Florida, where the cancer of guilt finally overtakes him. He is the royal jelly in an evil sandwich toasted on either end by the hypocrisy of his father, the québécois, and his son, an American of the me generation. The story of Napoleon is the stuff of real romance. His improbable angel becomes nearly tangible. It is the son André who botches his tale by painting the family chronicle on too broad a canvas, omitting the texture of real conflict between the generations. In the book that might have been, there is no room for the tawdry parade of little American tragedies that absorb the energy of André, the failed artist. In their place he might have painted the landscapes of heaven and hell, the cold north and the fire down below, Clark Blaise's Florida of sun and suddenly lowering sky. A good editor might have taken a sharp blue pencil to these ladies and much of their clumsy dialogue, leaving a clear path home for old Leon and his son, "writing his way down to the one who lay inside that unhallowed corner of earth."

Recently, I rented a movie from a video outlet. I had requested a film I would have been proud to display along with the natural food in my shopping basket. By accident, I was given a movie called *The Best of Sex and Violence* in that familiar little black box. In hard cover these days, one expects serious literature that reflects the purchase price and the integrity of the publisher and the reader. Caveat Emptor. I think Canadian publishers are taking a cue from the hockey franchises and giving us shoddy players with the right chemistry of sex and violence, expecting that this is what we want to reflect the values in our society.

In the press release for *Tolerable Levels of Violence*, we are told the book makes a great movie scenario. The publishers are already looking beyond art to profit. How sad, and now I am forced to wonder if the Canada Council has been suckered into subsidizing this insulting notion.

Tolerable Levels of Violence is an academic potpourri of futuristic movies now in vogue, futuristic novels by more skilled writers of our recent past and masters theses. It is a self-conscious tale of intolerable violence braided around the character of a Canadian university professor. (Why they would even have need of a university in this bestial society of Ottawa circa 1999 is beyond me anyway. I think these academics just like to write about themselves.)

Collins describes a garbage heap civ-

ilization where grubby bikers confront grubby academics on the lawns of history. Neither have much to say that would instill any faith in the future of mankind. When the arrogance of force meets the arrogance of intellect, there is no dialectic. No lilies grow out of the fresh graves on this patch of grass. The author is fascinated with the violence he finds intellectually repulsive. Between blood and pencil there is very little reality. In what I can only assume is an apology, Collins explains: "Shakespeare, as well as anyone, knew that the nature of man is lust; his characteristic temper is anger at being frustrated in his wishes; his most satisfying acts, those of violence. Shakespeare's world is the same as ours, only for him illusion was still possible. If that is so, then men are, at this point in history, in some objective way, at a climactic point in fulfilling their nature as a species."

I hope not.

LINDA ROGERS

CRAFT & CRITICISM

LOUIS K. MACKENDRICK, ed., *Probable Fictions: Alice Munro's Narrative Acts*. ECW, $8.95.

IN NOVEMBER 1983, the *Financial Post Magazine* published "A Bluffer's Guide in Canadian Literature," a list advising the neophyte about clichés in Canadian literary criticism, clichés current — but also "classy" — enough to be safely dropped at a cocktail party. Listed as the most brilliant but also most neglected writer was Mavis Gallant, immediately followed by Alice Munro as the author of the "Best Volume of Short Stories Not by Mavis Gallant," i.e., either *Dance of the Happy Shades* or *Jupiter's Moon* [*sic*]. Although Marjorie Harris' guide was hardly conducive to luring readers of the *Financial Post* into the study of Canadian literature, its satire made a number of home truths painfully clear to those already familiar with it. Indeed, some of Canada's most outstanding writers — e.g., Mavis Gallant and Alice Munro — have so far received little critical attention. ECW's *Probable Fictions: Alice Munro's Narrative Acts*, edited by Louis K. MacKendrick, makes a first contribution to filling that gap. In his introduction, the editor explains the scarcity of critical material on Munro by referring to the thematic bias of Canadian criticism (a bias condemned by Frank Davey in his 1976 essay "Surviving the Paraphrase") and by proposing to reveal — and I am here borrowing some of MacKendrick's metaphorical language — stylistic marvels hitherto obscured by preoccupations with content.

Probable Fictions contains nine essays as well as the introduction and an interview with Munro conducted by J. R. (Tim) Struthers, all of them "variously stylistic, generic or structural in content." Thus, pieces by Robert Thacker, Gail Osachoff, and John Orange explore uses of point-of-view; Lorna Irvine engages in a study of "fluid narration" as an expression of the female imagination; Laurence Mathews extends Irvine's approach beyond a concern with gender in order to describe a general "distrust of aesthetic pattern" in *Who Do You Think You Are?*; Catherine Sheldrick Ross writes of myth and legend as providing narrative structure, and Michael Taylor traces Munro's faith in words as magic links with the phenomenological world, not just as referential vehicles. Notes on these contributors would have been helpful. A bibliography of Munro's works of criticism, interviews, films, etc., should have been included, or reference should at least have been made to ECW's *Annotated Bibliography*, vol. 5, which includes material on Munro. In format,

Probable Fictions resembles the *Voix et images* dossiers on Québec authors, but by contrast the dossiers excel in painstaking scholarship.

From the footnotes, it becomes apparent that much important groundwork on Munro has been conducted in M.A. theses, and it is to be hoped that some of the material in these will come to a more general attention (a similar observation can, incidentally, also be made about critical work on Mavis Gallant; here, too, some of the most astute and thorough work has been done in a thesis, i.e., Neil Besner's 1983 UBC Ph.D. dissertation). I was intrigued, for instance, by Catherine Ross' reference to the "galley of the first version of *Who Do You Think You Are?*" quoted in Linda Leitch's 1980 Guelph M.A. thesis, material which — together with Munro's comments on the publishing history of that book in her interview with Struthers — would, for instance, provide useful information for a sociological study of Munro's work. Most of the essays in *Probable Fictions* are clearly written and persuasively argued, but I do miss the breadth of background and richness in context distinguishing Lorraine M. York's "'The Other Side of Dailiness': The Paradox of Photography in Alice Munro's Fiction" (*Studies in Canadian Literature* 8:1 [1983]) or the analytic detail of Heliane Catherine Daziron's "The Preposterous Oxymoron: A Study of Alice Munro's *Dance of the Happy Shades*" (*The Literary Half-Yearly* 24:2 [1983]). Generic studies in particular would have benefited from an at least cursory reference to comparable forms; as it is, I find it difficult to accept Irbeing given comments on the nature and vine's discussion of fluid narration as a typically feminine phenomenon without status of the short story cycle/sequence/serial or on the long poem at the same time.

In his introduction, MacKendrick commends J. R. (Tim) Struthers for his "experienced inquiry" while interviewing Alice Munro. In their dialogue, MacKendrick suggests, the author spoke freely of books and writers who have influenced her own works. The impression I received from reading the interview was, however, a different one. To me, it resembled an intellectual wrestling match between interviewer and interviewee. As an academic, I was infuriated by Munro's reluctance to articulate the secrets of her craft; but as an admirer of her work (and I am fully aware of the irony involved in separating analysis and admiration), I cheered her on when she said at the end of the interview, "You see I think defining your intentions and going on about them is just a waste of time because you may be quite mistaken, not just mistaken in whether those are the sort of good literary intentions but whether they actually are what you're doing. It seems to me you just can't know." Munro's distrust of aesthetic formulae obviously includes literary criticism, and in analyzing her work we may have to accept the same ambiguity about the legitimacy of our enterprise which she feels in writing her stories.

EVA-MARIE KROLLER

SHADOWS OF THE PAST

ADRIEN THERIO, *Marie-Eve, Marie-Eve.* Editions Québec/Amérique, $9.95.

ANNE HEBERT, *In the Shadow of the Wind.* Stoddart, $16.95.

EMILE OLLIVIER, *Mère-solitude.* Albin Michel, $13.95.

ALL THREE OF THE BOOKS under review testify to Québec's continuing obsession with its own past or that of related countries: we will be looking at an old wom-

an's reminiscences about rural Québec; explore memories about a murder committed many years ago in the Gaspé; and witness a search for personal and tribal past in Haiti.

In its 1981 dossier on Adrien Thério, *Voix et images* tried to capture his versatility by describing him as "critique littéraire, animateur polémiste et romancier." *Marie-Eve, Marie-Eve,* Thério's latest novel, reflects the richness of his interests within the seemingly narrow frame of a rural story. Carmélia Desjardins writes a long letter to Claude Martel, a young author, whom she saw growing up in their village of Saint-Amable many years ago. The letter — a loosely structured transcription of an old woman's rambling memories — is both Carmélia's life testimonial and a corrective to Claude's and other writers' clichéd versions of Québec village life. In giving an honest account of the desires, loves, and deaths (most particularly Marie-Eve, her daughter's, agonizing death) in her life, Carmélia exposes the passivity of a Maria Chapdelaine or a Donalda (in *Un Homme et son péché*) as unfounded myth. Like Thério's other fictional characters, Carmélia despises resignation and apathy; she claims equality for men and women, attacks religious fanaticism and bourgeois hypocrisy. *Marie-Eve, Marie-Eve* is a contribution to the general debunking of literary clichés in Québec since the sixties, but it is a more gentle, pastoral, nostalgic approach than *La Guerre, yes sir,* for example. I confess that I feel somewhat uneasy with its charm: it seems anachronistic, even trivial at times.

No gentleness reigns in Anne Hébert's *In the Shadow of the Wind,* Sheila Fischman's impressive translation of Hébert's *Les Fous de Bassan.* For a closer comparison of original and translation, I chose the section entitled "Olivia de la haute mer" and its counterpart "Olivia of the high seas," because it contains the arguably most poetic voice in the book, with verbal echoes of Hébert's poems "La Chambre de bois," "La Chambre fermée," and "Il y a certainement quelqu'un," hence poses a strong challenge to the translator. Only in two instances did I find that Fischman had unduly departed from the original. I cannot, for example, see any obvious reason why the sentence "Comme s'il s'agissait d'atteindre quelqu'un de caché très loin dans la campagne" should be rendered as "As if she were touching something hidden far away in the countryside." But these are isolated cases; for the most part, Fischman not only remains close to the original, but also succeeds in duplicating much of its poetic texture. Thus, the repetition of "s" sounds capturing the whistling of the wind, the short, breathless sentences, and Hébert's characteristic use of strings of infinitives in "Rejoindre la marée qui se retire jusqu'au plus haut point de l'épaisseur des eaux. Le grand large. Son souffle rude . . . Epouser le vent, glisser sur les pentes lisses du vent, planer comme un goéland invisible" are skilfully rendered as "Rejoin the tide as it draws back to the deepest water's high point. The open sea. Its harsh breathing . . . Embrace the wind, glide upon the smooth slopes of the wind, soar like an invisible gull." In Olivia's section in particular, Hébert plays on the homonyms mer/mère because the voices of Olivia's female ancestors mingle with the swell of the sea. Fischman renders the sentence "Mes grand-mères d'équinoxe, mes hautes mères, mes basses mères, mes embellies et mes bonaces, mes mers d'étiage et de sel" admirably as "My equinoctial grandmothers, my high mother-tides and low, my smooth spells and my lulls, my seas of low water and of salt," although she may well have felt the exasperation of a translator who has to become gar-

rulous in order to duplicate the ambiguity of a single sound.

There are, of course, patterns and effects in Hébert's prose that are lost in translation. The most significant among these may be Hébert's gradual build-up of the word "fou" which gathers in demented force until the final climax in Stevens' account of the rape. Seemingly innocuous expressions like "Fous rires avec ma cousine Nora," "Nora, Perceval et moi les regardons . . . courir comme des fous" assume ominous overtones when Olivia prays to be desired by Stevens, "que son oeil fou se pose sur moi seule." In English, these repetitions of "fou" are variously rendered as "giggling," "running like lunatics," and "his wild gaze," not to mention the title, *In the Shadow of the Wind*, which relinquishes the ambiguity of the original *Les Fous de Bassan* (an allusion both to a kind of seagull and to the inhabitants of Griffin Creek). Lost are also the effects created by the insertion of English words in the original, e.g., "Mon père a demandé à mère de ne plus embrasser ses fils parce . . . qu'elle risque d'en faire des sissies," although it seems less essential here to maintain the juxtaposition of English and French than in Roch Carrier's novels, for instance.

Like Hébert's novel, Emile Ollivier's *Mère-Solitude* contains numerous allusions to the sea as an apt metaphor for the processes of memory, but here it is the Caribbean, not the Atlantic which sets the scene. In his 1970 study *Le Miracle et la métamorphose*, Maximilien Laroche outlined major parallels between Québec literature and writing from Haiti. Ollivier — a Haitian living in Montreal — confirms Laroche's observations. There are many points of comparison between the eccentric Morellis in Ollivier's book and the Lagacé or Beauchemin clans in Vanasse and Beaulieu, between Ollivier's luxuriantly baroque prose and Aquin's. Québec's perennial search for individual/collective roots is mirrored in Narcès' exploration of his family destiny, more particularly the circumstances of his mother's death. His quest leads him through labyrinthine houses, libraries, and gardens, but especially through the dark recesses of tribal memory. Absalon Langommier, the family servant, recalls everything he knows about his masters, "une célèbre famille de loup-garous," to Narcès; in plunging into their strange history, he also uncovers the motley roots of Haitian society: "les vagabonds, les mendiants, les oisifs, les coquins, le repris de justice, les marginaux et non-conformistes de tous crins et poils." Absalon speaks of cruelty, suppression, and murder in an exploited land; the novel ends with Uncle Gabriel shouting after a batch of American tourists, ". . . ce peuple mérite davantage que la pitié, l'obole ou la condescendance." Although there are many moving passages in *Mère-Solitude*, however, and although I do not doubt Ollivier's sincerity (in 1976, he published *Trente Ans de pouvoir noir en Haiti* with Cary Hector and Claude Moise), the book is overwritten, melodramatic, and filled with self-pity. Ironically, Ollivier's purpose would have been better served by greater aesthetic distance.

EVA-MARIE KROLLER

EXPANDING VISION

The Oxford Book of French-Canadian Short Stories, introd. Marie-Claire Blais, ed. Richard Teleky. Oxford University Press, $8.95.

THIS BOOK WARRANTS MORE than a casual visit, for the stories included here constitute a solid introduction for English Canadian readers. Looking out from the cover of *The Oxford Book of French-Canadian Short Stories*, Jean-Paul Lemieux's visiting family embodies all the

reticence and muted timelessness usually associated with pre-1960's Québec. Yet, projecting from their direct gaze is an offering of self, a desire to be understood, a desire to share an expanding vision which the stories themselves achieve through the translations offered here.

This anthology contains so many of my favourite tales and short stories, loved for their specificity, their innovative themes and some for their narrative daring, that initially the book appeared to me as a confirmation of my preferences. Richard Teleky has compiled a collection of short stories from a period of 150 years of storytelling. It is billed by Oxford as the "first major historical collection of French-Canadian short stories in translation," whose only competition, Philip Stratford's *Stories from Quebec*, features exclusively post-1940 short fiction. Though Teleky's anthology spans the entire period of production, it does not attempt, and to its credit, to present a historical development of the short story; rather it offers the best of the genre for the reader's consumption.

The stories are chronologically ordered by the birth dates of the authors. No other design is imposed in an anthology which covers almost the entire fictional spectrum beginning with a well-known legend rooted in French-Canadian folklore (Philippe Aubert de Gaspé's "Rose Latulipe") and ending with Michel Tremblay's delightfully humane and perspicacious fantasy ("The Devil and the Mushroom"). As one would expect, only ten of the twenty-two stories were written before 1960 but these are varied in both style and subject matter and do not all reflect the repressive political climate prevalent in Québec (not to mention the rest of French Canada) before the Quiet Revolution. The legends by Philippe Aubert de Gaspé and Pamphile Lemay are strongly coloured by the religious beliefs most readers would expect to find in the literature of this period, but these are effectively offset by Louis Fréchette's wonderfully humorous ritual of storytelling, "Tom Cariboo." The selection of Lemay's "Blood and Gold" does not strike me as the best choice of short fiction by this particular author, although the text from which the story was chosen (a very long one in four parts called "Maison hantée") is well crafted and richly complex. If initially the reader senses the power of these tales to keep the faithful on the straight and narrow, to promote a certain code of behaviour, it is soon evident that this power is supplanted by the "littérateur" who wishes to exert his own influence. As s/he achieves this individualization, the illusion of collective participation disappears from the texts and greater authorial influence and individual styles become apparent. The selections from the 1930's and 1940's offer great variety: irony in Louis Dantin's "You're Coughing?," satire in Albert Laberge's "The Patient," realism in Ringuet's "The Heritage" and Roger Lemelin's "The Stations of the Cross," and lyrical decadence in Alain Grandbois' "May Blossom." Grandbois' rich and exotic prose stands out in this period and makes me wonder why his prose works are so seldom read even in his native Québec. Note the voluptuousness of his imagery: this description of flowers, "great flashy, voluptuous orchids adorned the captain's table," is juxtaposed with the "bouquet" of distant battle: "monstrous crimson flowers of flame." The 1950's are represented by Claire Martin and Anne Hébert, both women but very different kinds of writers: Martin's story "The Gift" presents a harsh and typically unadorned view of male/female relationships whereas Hébert's "The Torrent" (Teleky has selected Gwendolyn Moore's solid translation), a novella rather than a short story,

is well known for its lyrical development of psychological alienation.

The stories of the sixties become less referential, more autonomous and personal, and certainly more diverse in narrative voice. The trend toward more personal dramas which is evident in the stories by Martin and Hébert truly comes into its own during this period and Teleky has chosen some excellent examples: Bessette's "The Mustard Plaster" captures the panic of old age through excellent control of narrative voice; Aquin's poignant "Back on April Eleventh" approaches metafiction; Claude Jasmin's unusual "Lulu the Tailor" depicts not one taboo but two; and Marie-Claire Blais's bleak "An Act of Pity" casts a pitiless eye on an egotistical and ineffectual spiritual leader. In contrast, the fantastic tales of Jacques Ferron and Michel Tremblay are playful, naughty, and disturbingly prophetic.

If the perspective of these stories becomes more intimate, criticism of pre-1960's society is less direct. With the stories of the 1970's and 1980's, the scope of the writers' voices is more international, less referential, the subject matter more diverse, as with Yves Thériault's tall tale in "The Whale" and Louise Maheux-Forcier's highly poetic narrative "The Carnation" which was translated with great suppleness by Sally Livingston. Faced with an obligation to select from Maheux-Forcier's *En toutes lettres*, I probably would have selected one of her metafictions rather than this one although I admit that it provides a very good example of her style ("Madame Anaïs decided to leave this earth, in grand style, choking on her own laughter as it cascaded down the tiers of her multiple chins, while on top of her head the feather tossed and fluttered for the last time"). A wonderfully unusual choice is Gabrielle Roy's "Ely! Ely! Ely!" Roy, well known to English-Canadian readers for her sensitive and serene portrayal of children and the dispossessed, is represented here by a less characteristic story which nonetheless captures the stylistic genius of this dearly loved writer. Another welcome surprise is Maillet's "Two Saints" written in the style of a traditional legend and featuring the well-known character La Sagouine.

The sensitive and nostalgic introduction by Marie-Claire Blais places each writer in his/her time frame and only alludes to differences in prose styles, but never pretends to academic evaluation. Blais' literary values are never parochial; there is, throughout her text, an unstated premise that the storytellers are part of a broader fraternity of short story writers.

By no means governed by thematic conventions or preconceived ideas of French-Canadian short stories, Teleky has opted for diversity. He successfully provides readers with a book of fictions which extend the "subject matter and stylistic range." In fact, the scope exemplified here is fairly illustrative of Jean-Marcel Léard's thesis that Québécois literature passed, within a very short time, from semantic to semiotic emphasis — a sign, he claims, of its present modernity: "Le mouvement vers la modernité en littérature est bien celui d'une autonomie du texte face à l'univers référentiel" (*Etudes littéraires*, XIV, 1 [1981], 57). This book is enjoyable; it will endure.

ESTELLE DANSEREAU

VISION & SATIRE

LORNA CROZIER, *The Weather*. Coteau, $6.00.
C. H. GERVAIS, *Public Fantasy*. Sequel, $4.95.

LORNA CROZIER'S *The Weather* is remarkably fine. It asserts the primacy of language as a shaping instrument, a means to record experience, convey feel-

ing, and above all reveal vision. It does not lose itself in cerebral mind-games in which the word becomes an end in itself, where text not experience is relevant and poetry is diminished into an algebra of syntax.

The poetry of *The Weather* is suffused with a haunting sense of the beauty and grace of the natural world cruelly blemished by the arbitrariness of fate, the malevolence of men, and the terror of the irrational and accidental which lurks in the design of things. Much of the verse is a sustained meditation on the human condition. As the title and the title poem indicate, weather is both condition and symbol, a metaphor for mutability itself, the caprices of fate, human vulnerability to chance and change, balanced by occasional lyric moments of grace and happiness.

The opening poem, "The Apple Tree," celebrates Edenic innocence, and ends in benediction. In it, "apple tree hums / white blossoms turn," while the questing soul, like "the beautiful muted birds," feeds on blossoms. Pastoral innocence inevitably yields to experience, knowledge of pain. The condition where "Even our faith in seasons / is misplaced" and "A hand moves across / a pencil drawing in the world / and smudges everything." These lines from "The Weather" follow and contrast strongly the idyllic evocations of "The Apple Tree."

In "The Last Days of Fall," love is fragile, vulnerable, a hostage of time and death. The accidental death of a bird is fused into a perception of finalities: the death of the year, the reality of suffering, the fragility of happiness.

Throughout this section the reader perceives an admirable balance of motif, theme, and a unified progression in imagery. Both "Pavlova" and "The Last Days of Fall" comment on the powerlessness of not only love but also art, against ubiquitous death. In the latter, thematic statement is considerably enhanced by poetic technique, that of a striking cadence produced by repetitive phrasing, "The wind cold, the cold wind," "the last sweet moments of fall," "this is the last day / of fall." This blend of repetition, accurately observed landscape, varied narrative voice, as well as images which resonate with symbolic equivalence, is characteristic of Crozier's poetic style. It is a style which distils for the reader the nuances of "innocence, its loss / love, its many failures."

That inextricable mix of beauty and horror which is the human condition is brilliantly conveyed by the power and the pathos of "Pavlova." An indisputable and strongly feminine perspective is present in all the work; in "Pavlova" it is conspicuously prominent. The poet comments on life, art, and the woman as artist. Art which orders experience, creates momentarily the illusion of immortality, cannot spare the artist either pain or death. Pavlova of "the beautiful feet and arms" even that Pavlova "did not die / with grace and beauty"; but with the knowledge of betrayal, "Clutching your husband's hand, / you feel the warmth of the mistress" left "moments ago." The cost paid for the life of art, for the woman as artist is bluntly raised, "Should I have had children instead?"

Perhaps the most arresting and enigmatic poem in the opening section is "The Foetus Dreams," an expanded lyric of eight sections. This exceptional piece moves audaciously through a series of associative often surreal images into a perception of original sin. At conception there is proto-knowledge. On a metaphoric level, it is a statement about growth, gestation biological and imaginative: "The foetus dreams a name," "dreams a mouth," it dreams of articulation, language.

Section Three opens with "The First Woman," the story of Marie Anne Lagi-

modière, the first white woman in the west with whom the poet makes an imaginative identification. For the poet, the unordered chaos of the imagination is also a wilderness, and the shaping of a poem an exploration of unchartered territory. "The First Woman" stands beside "Pavlova" and "The Foetus Dreams" as a poetic *tour de force*. In it the poet shifts perspective and point of view without destroying coherence or meaning. Immediacy and vitality is communicated by introspective asides which move past into present and present into past, thus humanizing and dramatizing history.

The predominant tension at the core of Lorna Crozier's vision shares a thematic kinship with the work of Duncan Campbell Scott. There is the same documentation of landscape, the same ability to evoke the symbolic from realistic detail, most significantly of all the same acknowledgement of the beauty of the world and its terror. In Crozier's Saskatchewan prairie, sky, terrain, and weather create violent contrasts of beauty and storm.

The great strength of *The Weather* is its consistent pattern of image, motif, and theme which lends it unity of perception, visionary wholeness. The poet begins in Eden among apple boughs, confronts evil in "Monologue: Prisoner Without a Name," moves beyond it to hope, the possibility of good, and ends in a house, a physical dwelling which is a human and a spiritual habitation where death is seen as a reality that need not negate the human aspiration for love: "Even the dead reach for you / as you walk, so beautiful / across the earth."

In this her fifth book Lorna Crozier's voice and style have matured into a work where felicity of language, depth of feeling, and a compassionate compelling vision calls us, "To the sun" "away / from silence and caves," where "our empty spaces / fill with wind and light."

Public Fantasy: The Maggie T Poems illustrated by John Fraser and written by C. H. Gervais takes us into an entirely different and sharply contrasting text. Unlike Crozier's work its claim to poetry is not strong. The illustration and format are somewhat lurid. This may be intentional. It does, however, put one in mind of the adage that notoriety is not necessarily fame and that fantasy like fancy, as Coleridge reminds us, is not necessarily imagination. Nor do lurid illustrations or sensational subject matter of themselves effective satire make.

The inspiration for the work (if drawings and text are to be trusted) is the once notoriously prominent wife of a prominent Canadian politician. The satiric point made through this half imaged, half factual public persona is not a negligible one. It comments on a general and pervasive lunacy: the secret or open general aspiration to acquire the glamour, the adulation and the fame of the pop-rock-film star; the reverse and exaggerated aspect of the ordinary human need for significance and recognition in the average life of the average individual. It is not the satiric point but the style and focus that is in question. Mr. Gervais is more than half in love with his Maggie T as Pope was with his Belinda. Beauty drew the one with a single hair and glamour seems to draw the other. Here the comparison with Pope must end, for there is none of Pope's ruthless incisive intelligence and scalpel wit at work in *Public Fantasy*.

Satire demands above all a sharp focus and a clear target. The back cover blurb tells us that *Public Fantasy* is "The perfect blend between Marvel Comics and Canterbury Tales." Maggie T is no doubt a latter-day Wife of Bath. Marvel Comics, perhaps, Canterbury Tales. No, and no amount of well-wishing on back

covers will make it so. The prosaic verse lines describing Maggie T seldom rise to the level of telling satire or lyric intensity. Truncated prose is no substitute for either. The bizarre, the hyperbole, the grotesque, those conventional adjuncts of satire are fully employed, but the casual vernacular idiom is laconic rather than ironic, the wit obvious and thus of muted impact.

There is much that is topical, from Billy Graham, Ronald Reagan, and Marilyn Monroe to "Norrie Frye Going To Motown In Search Of Paradise Lost." The topicality, however, only occasionally rises to the level of universal issue. There are occasional lines which succeed in conveying the desperation and the pathos of unlimited obsession with ambition and fame. Maggie T is a "show girl" with "neon eyes," "a star burning forever / into the pavement / you walk / on."

If lines such as these bring, "the vernacular towards the visionary" as Judith Fitzgerald claims, then Snow White and her dwarfs are images worthy of Dante's *Inferno.*

MARYA FIAMENGO

DREAM & FEELINGS

JOSEPH MCLEOD, *Greendream.* Penumbra, $6.95.

IAN MCCULLOCH, *The Moon of Hunger.* Penumbra, $5.95.

GEORGE STANLEY, *Opening Day.* Oolichan Books, $8.95.

CATHERINE AHEARN, *Luna-Verse.* Aya Press, $7.00.

JOSEPH MCLEOD'S *Greendream* (most of which is republished from McLeod's earlier books) divides neatly in two: the poems to the end of the section titled "from *The Sax Poems,*" and the poems in the section titled "from *Dharana (1932) F. H. Varley.*" Presumably some of the poems in this last section are new; in any case, all show a technical skill and an inner coherence that the earlier poems, which occupy over two thirds of the book, conspicuously lack. In the earlier poems, few lines contain more than six syllables, and the lines seem divided according to the smallest possible grammatical units. The rhythm is almost unvaried within each poem and from poem to poem, and the ideas and images are impoverished by the technical limitations. Many of the poems are cliché-ridden and dull.

But in the final third of *Greendream,* McLeod blossoms. The poem "I Now Speak Up" expresses just what seems to be missing from the poems in the first group and what makes the poems in the second group so successful:

> I now
> speak up
> for spook
> (the dark at the bottom of the stairs)
>
> the nuns
> hooded and black-booted
> who commanded
> the squares and walls
> of childhood
>
> I recall
> the smell of mystery
> brocades folded on linen
>
> when
> the altarboy
> swung his incense-burner
> (my eldest brother gained
> fame in a dressing room
> by pelting a sneaker at Jim
> and hitting a priest on the ear.
> None of us were asked
> to officiate after that.)

The outward and visible sign, religious or poetic, does not necessarily bring with it the inward and spiritual grace. In the second group of poems, McLeod has recovered his sense of mystery. This, with his new sense of being a true native, at

one with his northern Ontario country, link all the poems in the second group with Indian values, whether or not they treat explicitly Indian subjects:

> The circle from the sun to the green world
> to the Woodland Indian
> to the guts of the Beaver
> to the loon
> to the small fish in the belly of the loon
> and back through the bone to the sun

We share his sense of harmony and his joy in the mysteries of interconnected life because of the images and rhythms he develops in longer, more meditative lines and in substantial, controlled, and skilfully shaped poems.

The final third of *Greendream* has a unity of thought, feeling, and technique rather like the unity Ian McCulloch achieves in *The Moon of Hunger*. This book has its roots in the poet's part Cree, part white heritage. McCulloch divides the poems in this little book into two alternating voices. The Spirit Voice speaks from the past to continue the legends and affirm the traditional spiritual values of the Indian, and the Gift Lake Reserve voice speaks from the community of modern Indians living in rural debasement and squalor. The poems present a dialogue, though not an argument: the Spirit Voice poems are not nostalgic but strong with a sense of spiritual continuity, while the Gift Lake Reserve poems, though they deal with misery, violence, and poverty, remain unsentimental, unsensational, and respectful of the humanity of their subjects. McCulloch dramatizes the voice of traditional values speaking through the voices of the present in the last (and by far the longest) poem in the book, "Keep the Wagons in a Circle." In the Gift Lake Reserve voice, this poem gives three speeches each to a middle-aged Indian man, a modern Indian housewife, and a government worker installing telephones on the reserve for the uninterested and unimpressed Indians. Yet the Spirit Voice still speaks through Henry Whitefish and Mabel Thunder, whereas Joe Buchinski, the emissary of technology, feels only suspicion and fear:

> if you find yourself on
> one of these reserves don't worry
> about
>
> understanding
> just keep the wagons in a circle.

This cynical remark ends the book, but it sharpens our perception of the profound spirituality of the real community, the community of Indian people, living and dead. Although McCulloch's focus is on Indians, his poems reach outside themselves to deepen our understanding of the spiritual side of human nature. Penumbra Press proclaims *The Moon of Hunger* to be "the voice of a new poet," and we may hope that Ian McCulloch will be heard by a growing audience.

George Stanley's *Opening Day* and Catherine Ahearn's *Luna-Verse* are in a different category. Intensely solipsistic, both poets apparently believe that their personal feelings are interesting and valuable to others. George Stanley not only concentrates on his own inner and outer self, he evidently expects the reader to know his friends and recognize the important dates in his life, since he titles several poems by date alone and titles or subtitles a great many others with the names of people of (perhaps) local fame. The boastful self-effacement of *i* for *I* compounds the problem. Stanley often writes about familiar things — manual labour, restaurants, smoking, drinking — but he misses the opportunity to evoke the unfamiliar from the familiar, the wonderful from the ordinary. Two meatier subjects, flying in a small plane over northern B.C. and fear of death from cancer, offer him scope to share some in-

sights, yet he manages to trivialize both subjects with silly jokes and shallow observations.

The problem Catherine Ahearn set herself is much more interesting. She attempts in *Luna-Verse* to recreate a universe of love spun by two lovers, both speaking in the first person, who call themselves Marie Galante and Gerard. As anyone who ever tried to write a love letter (never mind a love poem) knows, trying to express this particular inexpressible is excruciating. Each experience of love is different, and yet everything we can think of or say about love is corny. Ahearn has taken a different tack. She strains for the unique, and in this her poems sometimes resemble overheated metaphysical religious poetry. Like Crashaw's weeping Mary Magdalene, Ahearn's lovers can convey pictures that are more risible than moving, although murmured into one's ear they might sound like sweet nothings. For example, she likens the lovers to salmon hatchlings, clothes-moths, homing eels, and beach crabs. She has the man, speaking as the primordial planet earth, say, "Now . . . you may touch the strata / Of my whole, mauve rocks." In searching beyond her own expertise for images, Ahearn inadvertently displays ignorance of certain delicate facts, using "ox-seed" as a symbol of male strength and envisioning a pastoral scene in which "deers and calves" stroll along together. And, alas, amid all this exuberant invention, Ahearn, too, turns corny: "I can die now that I've found you!" exclaim the lovers'-proxy moths. The superabundance of hyphenated words, puns, and other neologisms suggests the tremendous difficulty Ahearn faced in trying to write a dialogue of erotic poetry. Her attempt is heroic, and her splendid technical ability and her ear for the rhythms and sounds of language make *Luna-Verse* a delight to read, if one's intellect can be persuaded to take a holiday.

LAUREL BOONE

EAR & EYE

GEORGE MCWHIRTER, *Fire Before Dark.* Oberon, $9.95.

KENNETH BANKS, *The Tyrian Veil.* Lushino Press, n.p.

PHIL HALL, *A Minor Operation.* blewointmentpress, n.p.

NEILE GRAHAM, *Seven Robins.* Penumbra, $6.95.

DEBORAH GODIN, *Stranded in Terra.* Penumbra, $6.95.

THE PUBLISHER'S BLURB on the back of George McWhirter's *Fire Before Dark* presents him as an immigrant poet who "speaks eloquently of the pain as well as the joy of living in a new world and speaking a new language." Although the epithet immigrant is not used by the publisher, it is implicitly present behind the statement. It has become a literary term within Canadian literature and criticism. At its best, it serves the purpose of defining the thematic concerns of a writer; at its worst, it confines a writer's creativity and imagination to the resources of her or his immigrant experience. In the process of using this term, we tend to focus on the loss of home and the discovery of a "new world" while losing perspective on the aesthetics of the writing in question. McWhirter's book is a very good example of poetry that rises above the delimitations of immigrant writing. The maturity of his voice and the plasticity of his language are full proof that he feels at home in the "new world" and is totally at ease with his "new language," the language of a poet writing through a new culture.

The first part of *Fire Before Dark* is a collection of short poems that surprise

the reader with their variety of form. McWhirter moves from brief to spacious lines, from sonnets and couplets to open forms, without ever stumbling on technique or innovation. Here is a fine poem that is pure catalogue:

Old Con

On the pale spinnaker
Of skunk cabbage:
A stench of convicts' breath.
On the tall thistle
Straddling the wire: a purple prick
In flower.
On the cedar: new pods
Of pale paws and needles.
On the rowanberry:
A pile-up of peewits,
Flying drunk on red.
On the thorn: the sour haw-
Haw of an old tart's
Tongue in your mouth.
Regular as rain
On swamp and street
He commits fresh crimes
Of colour.

The vehicle of energy in this poem is not the verb, which is suspended till the penultimate line, but repetition of structure and sound which become incremental through the layering of images. McWhirter's technique does not rely on elaborate acrobatics; it derives from his mastery of language and the elegance of his expression.

The world his poems explore is vivid and multifarious, too. He writes about place and nature, children and friends, with acute perception and a careful eye for details that bridge the personal and the universal.

Oh, that strange graft
We bear: the hardness that heals
Into us and fathers fruit. Our own tree
Is cherry forked with thorn.

McWhirter's eloquence, however, is not at its most effective in the second part of the book, which is a long poem.

"Training in the Language," as the title suggests, is about learning the language of one's new country. The introductory section to this poem is a beautiful lyric expression of how "The talon-turned phrase / Scars their faces along with the foreign cold." Yet as the narrative unfolds, we don't find his usual dexterity with rhythm, his ability to control the breath of each line, his richness of imagery. But the wealth of material in the long poem compensates, somehow, for this loss. We are in Kitsilano where a *daskala* (Greek for teacher) teaches English to Greeks, Japanese, and Vietnamese. McWhirter attempts to deal not simply with one homogeneous immigrant group, but with a mosaic of cultures joined by the common experience of immigration. The immigrants, including the teacher who, like McWhirter, comes from Ireland, bring into their new language the cadences of their mother tongues and their personal histories. McWhirter shows how we shape and are shaped by language.

In contrast to McWhirter's poetry, Kenneth Banks' *The Tyrian Veil* is a poetry of controlled form and rhyme. Eleven of the thirty-three lyrics in the book are sonnets; the rest of the poems are written in four- or three-line stanzas. Banks' formal and metrical patterns are utterly conventional, but there are moments of delight because of the craftsmanship he displays:

Dark, the wind: sudden it plunders.
Quickened, one leaf, one single leaf,
could answer it, immolate grief
in this wild hour; yet it answers

Banks is always tempted to raise his lyrics from the particularity of their occasion to a stage where human consciousness strives to mesh with the numinous in nature.

There is a peculiar detachment from everyday life in these poems, an absence of the poet's self, even an absence of a specific portrait of the speaking voice.

The emphasis lies instead on Banks' creative ground. Stones, quays, ships, public parks, birds, broken windows, a samovar, candles, visibly frame the time and space of this ground.

> Always we must keep it from the sea,
> this single stone, worn by sigh
> into silence, this votive eye,
> this lasts, this alone is the key.

Images such as the above, even if they do hold for Banks the key that opens the world he wants to explore, offer for the reader no real point of entrance into his poetry. They lead toward a reality that remains "unalloyed" with the tangible world. This transference from the visible and the concrete to a world of "timelessness," "Love," and meditative response characterizes the whole collection.

What is most annoying in this book, however, is Banks' tendency to look for precious and rare words and to use capitalized abstract nouns such as "Despair," "Death," "Dread," and exclamations that are reminiscent of much of romantic poetry. Yet Banks writes in a language that is subtle and very often highly evocative.

Phil Hall's *A Minor Operation* seems to be, initially, slack and indulgent, but soon irony, together with an occasional moment of humour, reveal what is perhaps the characteristic quality of the book: an honesty of perception that resists being refined into poetic language. The minor operation referred to in the title is the poet's vasectomy. The book consists of "posthumorous poems" which respond "directly or indirectly to that." I should also add that the title section is complete with medical illustrations of this "minor operation." "So this is the child / of our love for each other / this knowledge / of the operation." The book makes explicit that Hall's relationship with his father is a indirect cause of the operation:

> I first heard the words of manhood
> spoken in anger among the trees
> by my father when he took me hunting
> deer, in the fall, through the first snow
>
> Bitch, cunt, whore, slut —
> he would break them off abruptly
> when the game was near
>
> .....
>
> He was making
> a man out of me
>
> I was making a pencil
> that knew the dead

Hall has a good eye and ear for the ugly and the disturbing and is concerned with violence against women as well as with social and political issues. All this would have been fine had Hall dealt more fully with this material and shown more care for his language. The roughness and rawness of some of his writing are not always intentional.

Neile Graham and Deborah Godin's books, besides sharing the same publisher and identical covers, also share a profound affinity with nature. Their similarities end here, though, as each poet writes out of a different landscape in her own distinctive way. Neile Graham's *Seven Robins* is set in the landscape of the rain forests of Vancouver Island where she seeks the origins of her language. Her poems, exciting in their precision of diction and imagery, speak of silence:

> On the day I lost my language
> I took a piece of wood
> and read its grain,
> travelled until I stood
> where it grew.
>
> .....
>
> I became cedar, wordheavy,
> and weighted with the cries
> of birds.

This silence is a woman's silence, and it

explains the diary and letter forms of the poems. Graham's power lies in her ability to trace language within the silence that permeates her world: "I will catch / the poem going past a fir." The signs she reads in the forest speak not of fear but of a "blessing." Her search for language involves an archetypal search for the self which is expressed through syntax rather than through obvious symbols:

> inside the darkness the door seals
> and I am complete:
> my enclosed words
> have a heartbeat, more powerful
> than discourse, pulsing
> through my eyes.

Even when she finds herself enclosed by the thick forest or within a small room, she discovers the body of language within her own body. An insightful reader of silence, Graham never allows herself to be defeated by it.

In *Stranded in Terra* Deborah Godin is also a reader of nature, this time of the prairie:

> Learn the topography of this field
> and you will learn how
> its mind works . . .
>
> . . . . . .
>
> The field is full and
> it's empty a sloping poll
> devoid of landmarks
> covered with crackling bush
> the field thinks: stone
> and creates a stone
> we think and create nothing

Nature for Godin is a reading guide for human consciousness. Landscape prefigures mindscape. The nothingness she creates, paradoxically, inscribes its own marks within the field of writing.

Godin's method is that of an archaeologist. Her sharp eye and pen unearth layers of lost lives and signs through which she imaginatively reconstructs her personal mythology:

> I want to share in the sleep
> of the silent fallen
> aspen branches here
> relics of life
> cyclic bones
> that bloomed fruited and
> brought forth seeds
> I, having brought
> forth nothing, must earn
> my own ceremonies.

The imagery of the poems is accompanied by four of Godin's monotypes but, I think, her words articulate more vividly the shapes of her vision. With great meticulousness she outlines through words images of animals, birds, and moths that successfully transform even an indifferent landscape into a field of fruitful expression.

SMARO KAMBOURELI

PERSONALITY SPEAKING

ROBERT HILLES, *An Angel in the Works.* Oolichan Books, $6.95.

MARIA JOCOBS, *Precautions Against Death.* Mosaic, $6.95.

MARILYN BOWERING, *The Sunday Before Winter.* General, $9.95.

"PERSONAL" IS SOMETIMES a dirty word for collections of poems. It connotes obsession, narcissism, obscurity, or, simply, a choice of topics that few readers share. But three recent collections, by Robert Hilles, Maria Jacobs, and Marilyn Bowering, offer good reason for revising this unfavourable notion of the personal. Whether in prosody, in vocal texture, or in myth, respectively, Hilles, Jacobs, and Bowering achieve a personal quality in their works which is inclusive, not exclusive, though the inclusiveness does not merely pamper readers with the familiar and the easy.

In his third book of poems, *An Angel in the Works,* Robert Hilles usually ex-

ercises a lyric power with finesse, grace, and passion, rarely lapsing from such strength into ungrammatical or awkward phrases. At first, even in their appearance on the page, Hilles' poems seem terribly naked, unmarked by punctuation or capitals, short lines of a breath's length. But it is precisely the movement of Hilles' generally short line that comprises the personal quality of his poems. His prosody is quirky, unpredictable, and often delightful, as in the short stanza from "I Remember Some Things Clearly":

worms are miracle workers
but they are always mistaken
for death itself

in which the interruption of the second clause by the second line-break opens an oddly affirmative ambiguity. Hilles is clearly a beneficiary — whether consciously or not — of the projective experiment with breath-units as prosodic units. The pace which he thus achieves also happily matches a pace of imagery which can be described best by the old-fashioned adjective "witty." The wit is well illustrated in the latter half of the title poem of the collection:

i want to tell you a story
about two lovers alone
in a room
each one is dancing in his own footsteps
they continue to dance
even now as i look in

there is no music nor
need there be
there is an angel in the works
and the lovers are dancing

Hilles' subjects are both intimate and common: parents and children, mutability, love's violence and ecstasy, the freedom and failings of poems themselves. He touches all of these subjects with particularity, thoughtfulness, and little pretension, and with a voice that declares its territory on the page and in the ear.

Maria Jacobs' survival of the Nazi invasion of the Netherlands and her family's direct, active resistance to the machinery of the Holocaust animates her verse novel *Precautions Against Death* with a strongly personal movement toward recovery of an extraordinary past which, as a girl of thirteen years, she could not have fully understood even as she lived it, a past whose recovery inevitably reflects not only upon the character of Maria Jacobs' family and wartime companions but also upon the character of human dignity. *Precautions Against Death* is a verse novel in the sense that it combines narrative with reflection upon events, proceeds through rough chronological order from the rumours of German invasion to the aftermath of the Canadian liberation of the Netherlands, and alternates verse and prose according to the different functions and perspective of the narrative. This last quality of the work is both distinctive and problematical. What Jacobs has attempted is a separation of the subjective views of this crucial period of her — and our — life. The prose passages, told from the vantage-point of the mature, recollecting woman, slowly amass the details of deprivation, unassuming heroism, desire thwarted and indulged, ingenuity and adventure. Most remarkable in these prose accounts is the mixed texture of vocal effects: Jacobs has, simultaneously, distanced herself from conditions so appalling that they could be borne only through elaborate yet desperate "precautions against death" (often *another's* death!), and, with acts of wilful memory, brought herself and her readers to face the peril, the ugliness, the uncertainties, and the ambiguities of the survivors' plight. The prose narratorial voice is cool and understanding, but also passionate and doubtful as it extricates mingled motives and unsettled questions. This is a mildly humorous

voice, as well, as when it describes the increasingly futile efforts of the park warden to impose order upon sheer chaos by keeping rambunctious children from playing among trees long since pirated for firewood.

The verse passages of *Precautions Against Death*, however, are exercises in subjective fragmentation of the coherent narrative. Each pretends to comment upon its events from a different point of view — most often that of Maria, her mother, or her mother's lover and protegé, Eli. Jacobs would seem to be drawing readers away from the relative safety of recollected pain and risk, through these more intimately spoken passages which express the anxieties of the moment. The problem with that strategy is that the supposedly varied voices of the poems have so few peculiarities as to sound like one voice. We know the characters better from Jacobs' prose account than by what they say in verse. Moreover, the verse voice is awkward, evidently uncomfortable with such patterned rhetoric. The verse is generally more prosaic than the prose, indeed resembles rather arbitrarily hatcheted prose, without musical principle underlying its line-lengths or sound sequences. About the most charitable construction which one might lay upon this style is that Jacobs has striven to convey the strangeness of the experience of her characters by deliberately avoiding rhetorical gracefulness in favour of ungainliness and hesitancy. Such a construction gains some cogency from the fact that the most eloquent and poetical of the verse passages is the letter from Eli to Maria, translated from the Hebrew, uttered from Eli's beloved Israel long after the Nazi danger has passed:

> But I
> the grown man
> did not remain idle.
> I made you a doll's house
> while my sisters died
> an ordinary death in the shower rooms.

There is little ordinary or ungainly about Marilyn Bowering's selected and new poems in *The Sunday Before Winter*, a gathering of work from six of her previously published books, ranging back to 1973, together with much work hitherto published only in magazines or unpublished. Mastery of form, rhyme, metre, and sound would be enough to compel attention to Bowering's compositions, as when she imagines Mary Shelley lost in mournful wakefulness:

> I am lying in the wreckage of moonlight;
> a web of shadowed furniture entrances
> the room.
> The black slab of the wardrobe
> lies down across the coverlet over me.

Yet more compelling is her invention of a mythology — whose main topics are loss, grief, dream, and delight — both attached to classical literary and mythological sources and independent from them. It is one thing to transform personal experience into myth portentous but impenetrable; it is quite another thing to recognize the universal in personal experience and to discover for it appropriately clear, startling, sometimes unnerving mythical objects:

> Night passes, snow lingers over the desert
> and footprints arrange themselves
> around the tree like prowling animals.
> But these shapes are made of fire,
> and have set us free to love the earth.

Though her poems are as concentrated as lyrics in their music, imagery, and passion, Bowering's greatest poetical gift is her ability to infuse in such lyrical concentrations the thoughtful breadth of meditation:

> There is no arithmetic in winter harbour.
> There is geometry.
> There is no teacher of wisdom.
> Winter harbour lacks for nothing.

It is not a game nor may be approached
through a game.
It is found by chance.
No one is on the way there.

Bowering's imagination is highly personal. It clearly realizes dreams, abstractions, intangibles, private facts, but it steers clear of the dangerous reefs of preciosity because it freely touches the two, often opposing, bodies of impersonal imagination: myth and philosophy. Like Hilles and Jacobs, in their own ways, Bowering has succeeded in translating personality into speaking poem. *An Angel in the Works*, *Precautions Against Death*, and *The Sunday Before Winter* richly justify the idea of a personal voice and prove that it may be used without loss of clarity, relevance to the bigger world, or wisdom.

MARK MADOFF

NORTHERN FRONTIERS

CLEMENT MOISAN, *A Poetry of Frontiers: Comparative Studies in Quebec/Canadian Literature*. Porcépic, $19.95.

ALLISON MITCHAM, *The Northern Imagination: A Study of Northern Canadian Literature*. Penumbra, $7.95.

CLEMENT MOISAN'S *A Poetry of Frontiers* and Allison Mitcham's *The Northern Imagination* are admirable in their attempts to grasp the Canadian literary experience through attention to the bilingual voice of French and English Canada. Moisan is explicitly concerned with comparing the two facets of that voice. Such a straightforward comparison is not Mitcham's design, but her survey of the North's role in the imagination of Canadian novelists bears on both French- and English-Canadian fiction.

A Poetry of Frontiers originally appeared in 1979 as *Poésie des frontières*. Although simultaneous publication of French and English editions had been scheduled, the translation to English has only recently been completed. Moisan considers his new book to correct a certain superficiality in his earlier comparative study of English-Canadian and Quebecois poetry, *L'Age de la littérature canadienne* (1969). In *A Poetry of Frontiers*, Moisan limits himself to a study of two dozen poets whose work will "sketch the poetic landscape of both linguistic groups," and although one occasionally loses sight of the cultural comparisons theoretically implicit in these detailed analyses of individual poets, the general comparison is well made. The author's organization helps prevent this book from being a series of isolated and unrelated comparisons, for he arranges his treatment of poets according to thematic patterns. Such arrangement does not limit his discussions to theme only, but helps the reader perceive the cultural significance of what the individual poets write.

First, Moisan treats Quebecois and English-Canadian poets whose introspective verse is dominated by images of imprisonment, solitude, night — the "poetry of clandestiny," as Moisan phrases it. Here he compares Alain Grandbois with Earle Birney and Anne Hébert with P. K. Page. Moisan then goes on to discuss a group of poets who use more violent and passionate language in an effort to impose a new vision on society. This "poetry of resistance" leads to comparisons between Paul-Marie Lapointe and Irving Layton and between Gaston Miron and Raymond Souster. The next grouping — the "poetry of liberation" — focuses on those poets who use language to break out of their isolation and to free themselves of the violence and anger associated with resistance — poets such as Paul Chamberland and John Newlove, Michèle Lalonde and Margaret Atwood.

Moisan's final grouping — what he calls "the brilliant minority" — includes

some of the most insightful and illuminating readings of Canadian poetry. In this section, where he treats Gwendolyn MacEwen, Nicole Brossard, Raoul Duguay, Claude Péloquin, bill bissett, and bp Nichol, he is actually treating a miscellany of Canadian poets; these writers do not otherwise fit into his clandestiny-resistance-liberation scheme. Interestingly, Moisan comes nearest his goal of locating the pulse of two similar but distinct cultural groups when he apparently exhausts his thematic groupings and addresses each poet as an individual, rather than as a voice for some facet of his culture. No doubt, he could never have accomplished this dimension in the final quarter of the book had he not laboured through the thematic organization of the initial three-quarters, but the flashes of insight appearing in this final miscellanaeous section serve to remind us that a poem can be understood as a meaningful cultural expression only after it has first been understood as the expression of a single individual, the poet.

Mitcham's *The Northern Imagination* treats French and English writing in Canada, but her approach is quite distinct from Moisan's. Where Moisan has chosen to focus on poetry, which he maintains "represents a deeper reality than those more accessible forms," Mitcham turns her attention to one of those "more accessible forms" — the novel. The greatest difference, however, is that Mitcham's book is not comparative; instead, it defines the role of the North in modern Canadian fiction, drawing on both Quebecois and English-Canadian novels. In her Introduction, she states that "in French Canada the northern wilderness has long symbolized escape from dreary settlements and conventional responsibilities," but that only recently "has it begun to impinge deeply on the English-Canadian consciousness." Such an observation, if true, requires support and invites looking into, whether or not *The Northern Imagination* is meant to be a comparative vehicle, but the reader hears little more about why such different attitudes exist in the two cultures.

Rather than subtle probings, generalized treatments of thematic issues fill the pages of Mitcham's book — the North as utopia, the indigenous people as intermediaries between white civilization and wild animals, the contrast between clerics and true visionaries, the conflict between settlement and untenanted landscape, and the violence that stems from isolation. She also devotes chapters to individual authors — F. P. Grove, Gabrielle Roy, Yves Thériault, and Margaret Atwood. Clearly, a five- to seven-page treatment of such themes or authors obviates subtle development of ideas. Her chapters generally begin with somewhat sweeping statements — such as, "Contemporary Canadian writers almost without exception have on the one hand eulogized the beauty of the natural environment, and on the other hand deplored the ugliness of the structures man has imposed on the land in the form of towns and cities" — and proceed with a list of titles and plot situations in support of the statement. Mitcham seems to prefer thinking of the North as a wonderfully pure force, full of noble savages, invigorating rigours, and healthful and ascetic simplicity. Such notions are clearly evident in Canadian fiction, but they are quite often juxtaposed to an antithetical response to the barrenness, horror, and sterility of the North. This schizophrenic vision is evident in many of the novelists she scrutinizes — Thomas York, Margaret Atwood, Fred Bodsworth — but Mitcham turns a blind eye to the more condemning view of the land. To be sure, she recognizes the paradox of the "pure terrible country" of which Gabrielle Roy speaks, but after token

acknowledgement of that paradox, Mitcham continues to celebrate northern "purity." Such a bias clouds the true response to the North in Canadian fiction.

As well, numerous small errors pepper Mitcham's study. She often refers to the writings of Emerson and Thoreau, but by some miracle Walden Pond seems to have relocated in Maine. More seriously, her limited appreciation of Thoreau is especially evident when she unabashedly compares him to that Canadian charlatan Archie Belaney, alias Grey Owl. Nor is she always reliable when she addresses Canadian prose. Grove's prairie settings, for example, which she maintains are symbolically his northern frontier wilderness, have migrated westward to Saskatchewan. And unlike the narrator of *Surfacing*, who momentarily confuses the American flag with a "Go Mets!" decal, Mitcham never seems to make the distinction.

Although published in 1983, *The Northern Imagination* is already out of date. Its most recent reference is to Thomas York's *Snowman* and Finn Schultz-Lorentzen's *Arctic*, both published in 1976. Consequently, she omits such novels as Aritha van Herk's *The Tent Peg* (1981) and Rudy Wiebe's *The Mad Trapper* (1980), but such matters of chronology neither explain nor excuse her failure to mention Robert Kroetsch's *But We Are Exiles* (1965). This omission is particularly glaring because Mitcham finds space to discuss such minor literary figures as Grey Owl, Finn Schultz-Lorentzen, and Farley Mowat. Western Canadian alienation might be an issue in federal politics, but must it extend to literary criticism as well?

RICHARD DAVIS

RIFFS OF CRITICISM

JAN BARTLEY, *Invocations: The Poetry and Prose of Gwendolyn MacEwen*. Univ. of British Columbia Press, $12.95.

SANDRA DJWA and R. ST. J. MACDONALD, eds., *On F. R. Scott: Essays on His Contributions to Law, Literature, and Politics*. McGill-Queen's, n.p.

KAREN MULHALLEN, DONNA BENNETT, and RUSSELL BROWN, eds., *Tasks of Passion: Dennis Lee at Mid-Career*. Descant, n.p.

I SHOULD ESTABLISH my prejudices at the outset, so you'll know what kind of "MacEwenist," "Scottist," or "Leeist" is telling you about these books. I'm afraid the answer to the first is, not much. I have always found MacEwen too ornate and, in my view, contrived. Bartley refers in her preface to "the repeatedly mystic nature of MacEwen's vision." Exactly, which is why I've wanted little part of it.

The other two subjects I find more appealing. When, as a teen-ager, I first discovered Canadian poetry, I also discovered F. R. Scott. At first, only his satire attracted me, until I became old enough to appreciate the spare line which is his forte. Then he became what he still remains, the one poet of the Canadian "old guard" who almost never disappoints me.

Lee presents a third alternative. He is just enough older than me that I always feel as if I have grown up behind him. The second *Civil Elegies* came at a point when I was just beginning to have that sense of Canada (although never having been a Toronto-person, not quite *that* sense). *Savage Fields* came at a point when I was just beginning to be dissatisfied with limiting Can-crit versions of unlimited Can-lit novels (although I have never been as strifefully post-linear as Lee). *Alligator Pie* came at a point five years before my first child

(no parenthesis needed — if I don't get some, I think I'm going to die).

Prejudice established. Now the books. Bartley elucidates, primarily thematically, the oeuvre. The approach is traditional, and scholarly, with many references to the Muse, alchemy, the hermetic tradition, gnosticism, Jung, and Boehme. Bartley uses his catalogue of erudition sensibly and, in the truest sense of the word, lucidly. One might feel she should do as well with the how, MacEwen's forms, as she does with the what but this cannot deny her accomplishment. I think this is a seminal work. But then again, I don't really want the plant which might spring from the seed.

The second book, a collection of essays from the 1981 Scott symposium, should be more my line of horticulture but I'm afraid not to the degree I expected. The problem, quite simply, is hagiography. And I don't know to whom I should complain. If I were editing such a volume these are precisely the people I would ask for submissions. If I had somehow achieved the stature to be a contributor, I would have written much the same. My respect for the man and his work would not have allowed me to dwell on whatever minor limitations I might have found. And my respect for the occasion would not have allowed me the facetiousness which might have brought a bit more life into the proceedings. As the blurb on the back cover states, "A summary of Scott's achievements is an index to twentieth-century culture and society."

Even the "old friends" seem rather stiff. Leon Edel shows moments of breaking out of this but he never achieves the flavour of carefree reminiscence which he has in other nostalgia pieces about the Montreal litterateurs. Louis Dudek gives a lively description of Scott as commander of the Montreal poetic brigade, taking their campaign to Kingston to provide supporting forces for a new literary magazine, but when Dudek turns to a consideration of Scott's contradictory themes it becomes straight literary criticism. He concludes: "This is the virtue of Frank Scott's enlightened poetry, that it has brought to Canada the materials of modern intelligence, and some of the new experimental forms that this diversity of ideas demanded." D. G. Jones' consideration of Burke, Gladstone, Goldsmith, and Scott has a similarly apt but less global conclusion: "Ultimately, the poet is of a piece with the political man. A poem demands liberty, it also requires restraint, and each poem is a special case."

Yes, but. Dudek's comment has the odour of sanctity to which I referred before. Jones' has all too much of the same restraint which he mentions. As guiding marks, the holy and the restrained allow little information on poetry and politics that I did not already have and few interpretations that I could not have figured out. On the other hand, similar descriptions of Scott's legal achievements told me much on a subject about which I knew nothing. Perhaps the appropriate reader for the rest of the book is someone with the poetic or political equivalent of my legal ignorance.

The one article here which delighted me did so for a rather perverse reason. Only slightly about Scott, Kenneth McNaught's "Socialism and the Canadian Political Tradition" is rather a strident defence of the Canadian liberal social democratic tradition in which Scott belongs, in opposition to what might be called the "hard left" or, in latter years, the "new left." I disagree strongly with McNaught's conclusions but I cannot help but appreciate his energy and spark. The best word would be bumptious. Most of the other pieces, in their careful concentration on summing up a living hero's achievements, are no doubt

more appropriate but a little more bumptiosity would have made a livelier book.

There is plenty of bumptiosity in *Tasks of Passion*, at times from rather unlikely sources, as in Matt Cohen's flamboyant indulgence of his early failures. Then again, Michael Ondaatje, Al Purdy, and Scott Symons are all exactly what they always are, and well worth reading because of it.

The editors of the Scott volume cannot be faulted for their conservative method, which seems to have been dictated by the project. On the other hand, the editors of *Tasks of Passion* must be congratulated for realizing that their man needed a very non-conservative, unrestrained, approach. And somewhere in a moment of collective wisdom they found one that works. The collection is as pro-Lee as the other is pro-Scott but in a way suitable to Lee, deep, probing, and yet light-hearted, as in the statements by the above authors which appear under "Dennis the Ed," Lee as eminence grise of Canadian literature.

Then comes "Dennis the Kid," the one section which I found a bit of a disappointment, not because the essays are bad but because they fail to participate in the exuberance of Lee's poetry for children. This is especially noteworthy because the other sections are so much a reflection of Lee's own methods. *Savage Fields* participates in the same activities which it perceives in the novels it is examining, qualifying as what Ihab Hassan has called "paracriticism." Thus, Robert Bringhurst's perorations about his own and Lee's poetry seem precisely the answer, although a number of them might be individually of limited value or even self-indulgent. One that I find useful is about Lee's tendency to circulate many drafts of his poems:

> Among oral poets and storytellers, each performance is textually different from every other. Some presentations are better, some worse, but at a certain level of craft and of meditation, every version of the same story or poem may be equally worth hearing, because those versions are no longer successive drafts, no longer stations along a linear progression, so much as they are temporal incarnations attending upon and dancing *around* an unrealizable, and perhaps itself indeterminate, perfect form.

The criticism of Sean Kane and Stan Dragland displays different kinds of that same freedom. Ted Blodgett places Lee in a larger, overtly philosophical context of post-modernism: "The victim of ontology is history, and what is left is *aporia*, impasse, raised to the level of a metaphysical principle." There are many who will react to this sentence in the manner of Dorothy Parker: "It makes Constant Weader want to fwow up," but those who are willing to decipher the terminology will find it to be a perceptive description of what Lee is on about.

Similarly good is a lengthy and more traditional plumbing of *Civil Elegies*, by Ann Munton, but most readers will probably be primarily interested in Lee's own contributions. "Polyphony: Enacting a Meditation" is a fascinating continuation, both in style and substance, of "Cadence, Country, Silence: Writing in Colonial Space," the latter still essential for many, more than ten years after its first publication. Lee's new essay calls for:

> Hunches. Trial and error. Hearing the music in your forearms, and trying not to muff it. . . . God knows, you spend enough time muffing it; exploring dead ends you finally have to abandon.
>
> *But that doesn't tell us anything. If you start with no pre-established plan, and content and form are both up for grabs, and you're just winging it, how can you tell when you've muffed it and when you haven't? . . . What happened to the ideal of organic form?*

Lee's answer to his alter-ego is

I think I know how an "open" poem can
cohere,
despite its bits and pieces. It's because, as
the meditation moves through textured
space,
its changing configurations of voice are
enacting what I've called an articulate
gesture of being a live coherence.

Lee's "open poem" here is a collection of short pieces, called "Riffs," about an absent lover. In general it doesn't "enact" for me, partly because of a jazzy tone which seems forced (although I admit that Lee might just be ahead of me again). Towards the end, however, either he comes closer to me or I to him:

Can't change the plenary cross-hatched
hash of world, too
bad but
have to
live it piecemeal whole
in ache & joy & riffs of neighbourhood with
one or two like, many-radiant woman, you.

I can dig that, relate to it, get near it, or whatever riff-like phrase is appropriate.

It seems ironically right that this Lee-style book should close with an "Epilogue" by George Grant. Lee is clearly rooted in Grant's anti-liberal ideology and yet their approaches are so different. In a certain sense, however, this essay might be the most important part of this book. Many have found it all too easy to dismiss Lee as too much a contemporary. In a finely written intertwining by someone who admits to "a deeply neurotic fear of poetry" Grant shows why this is not so and why the proto-typical Canadian boy at Victoria College is today an extended, matured, developed version of the same.

Three critical works, about three very different poets, in three very different forms. And they have drawn from me three very different reactions. But my final comment will be that any work in the future on these writers will be forced to pay close attention to these books. In a paracritical post-structuralist age, that may not seem much but most critics and editors should see it as a worthy achievement.

TERRY GOLDIE

FOR & ABOUT CHILDREN

DEIRDRE KESSLER, *A Child's Anne*, illus. Floyd Trainor. Ragweed Press, $5.95.

DENNIS LEE, *Jelly Belly*, illus. Juan Wijngaard. Macmillan, $9.95.

MARY RUBIO, ed. *The Genesis of Grove's The Adventure of Leonard Broadus: A Text and Commentary*. Canadian Children's Press, $10.00.

ONE OF THE REASONS that *Anne of Green Gables* is *the* great Canadian children's novel is that it can be read and enjoyed both by eleven-year-olds and by their mothers — and even their fathers. Many of the eleven-year-olds will like it because it has all the pleasing qualities of wish-fulfilment fiction: slapstick comedy, melodrama, an unloved and unlovely heroine who continually saves the day, always conquers her enemies, and inevitably becomes widely adored. Many of the adults will enjoy it for exactly those same qualities, of course; but they'll probably read *Anne* when they wouldn't be caught dead with a Nancy Drew in their hands because, as well as being a good novel for children, *Anne* is a great novel *about* childhood. For those of her readers who are no longer themselves young, Lucy Maud Montgomery brilliantly evokes both Anne's complex childlike feelings about herself and Anne's complex childlike response to the world around her.

A Child's Anne is an attempt to separate the novel for children from the novel about childhood — and to throw away the novel about childhood. Deirdre

Kessler retells the entire plot of Montgomery's novel in about as many words as it took Montgomery herself to describe the trees around Green Gables, and in prose that makes Dick and Jane sound like Dick Nixon and Jane Austen: "Anne and Diana grew. They were no longer little girls. But they remained bosom friends." We're told that Anne gets into trouble for using long words, but she uses nary a one; and her intense responses to nature, brilliantly evoked by Montgomery in page after page of descriptions of landscape, are reduced to the occasional reference to "pretty" places. The people who produced this odd desecration obviously asked themselves the greedy question, "Why should all those children who can't read well be deprived of *Anne*?" The answer that didn't occur to them is, "Because *Anne* is too complicated to be expressed in anything but hard-to-read words."

Divorced from Montgomery's leisurely and juicily elaborate prose, the events of the novel are not only rather boring, but also, quite often, incomprehensible. *Anne* is a novel of emotion, not really one of action: so when only the actions are described, they turn out to be slight and without any apparent motive. In a picture book, which this is, we might expect emotional matters to be conveyed in pictures; but instead of looking shocked at Anne's bad behaviour in Floyd Trainor's picture, Mrs. Lynde seems to be suffering from heartburn, and Anne smiles in apparent glee when Gilbert pulls her pigtails. It's no help that in picture after picture various hands and legs seem large enough to belong to quite different bodies than the ones they are attached to.

Like the original *Anne*, Frederick Philip Grove's *The Adventures of Leonard Broadus* offers both the satisfying wish-fulfilments that appeal to unsophisticated literary taste and a sensitive understanding of what it feels like to be young. Unfortunately, we get first one and then the other, in turns throughout the book. Grove brilliantly describes Leonard's ambivalence about playing detective, since it's a game he feels he's grown beyond, but now there is a real crime to solve, so perhaps it isn't so juvenile after all; but when Leonard does get involved with cops and robbers and loot and all, the book turns into a crude thriller, exciting but not much interested in character and motivation — until the adventure's over, when we go back to complex feelings again.

Leonard Broadus was Grove's first (and as it turned out, only) children's novel, and apparently he hadn't learned how to integrate these two qualities. The result is, the subtlety gets in the way of the fun, and vice-versa; it's a pity, because this book is a more convincing description of a boy's thoughts than any other I know in Canadian fiction.

Leonard Broadus appeared before only in a brutally edited, serialized version in a United Church magazine, in 1940; the version Mary Rubio presents here is based on a manuscript owned by Grove's son, Leonard, for whom the book was written. Even though it finally doesn't cohere, the book is a welcome addition to the short history of Canadian children's literature; and Mary Rubio's intelligent and careful commentary on Grove and the book are a pleasure to read.

Dennis Lee's *Jelly Belly* is an international publishing project; the copies published in this country were printed in Britain, and the book was published simultaneously there. While that larger potential market allowed for some snazzy four-colour printing, internationalism has its deficiencies: the main one apparent here is that Juan Wijngaard's illustrations not only utilize trendy Nicola Bayleyish mannerisms that identify the book

as Britain, they also place the poems in a Never-never land in which British-looking suburban houses are covered with Canadian-looking deep snow. That divests the poems of some of the strong Canadian flavour implied by their lavish dollops of Canadian slang.

But the poems themselves are brilliant. They reveal Lee's apparently boundless talent for inventing pleasing and insidiously unforgettable rhythms:

> And it's first toe,
> Second toe,
> Third toe, and
> Four;
> Tickle the top of the fifth toe —
> And then you hop some more.

These poems are also the closest Dennis Lee or any other individual human being I know of has come to duplicating the impersonal flavour of traditional nursery rhymes. Those rhymes come from an oral tradition, of course, and have that anonymous quality that comes from their having been worked on by many different creative imaginations; Lee gets so close to that anonymous feeling in this book that I've actually seen one of these poems quoted as a playground rhyme made up by children. That the poems should seem Canadian as well as anonymous — just as Mother Goose rhymes seem both British and anonymous — is just icing on an already very tasty cake.

More than any other contemporary writer, furthermore, Dennis Lee knows how to please children and to evoke essentially childlike moods at the same time. Anyone of any age who feels the occasional "childish" annoyance with always doing what *they* tell you is good for you will appreciate poems like this one:

> Anna Banana, jump into the stew:
> Gravy and carrots are *good* for you.
> Good for your teeth
> And your fingernails too.
> So Anna Banana, jump into the stew!

I suspect that Anna Banana would have delighted Anna Green Gables, who probably would have had the good sense to throw *A Child's Anne* into The Lake of Shining Waters. Leonard Broadus would have liked it too, even though he never would have admitted it.

PERRY NODELMAN

GHOSTS

ROBERT STEAD, *Dry Water*, ed. Prem Varma. Tecumseh, n.p.

R. C. MCLEOD, ed., *Reminiscences of a Bungle by One of the Bunglers*. Univ. of Alberta, $9.95.

GHOSTS FROM THE PAST periodically reappear as the resurrecting of our cultural heritage proceeds. Two such have recently materialized with the publication of a previously unpublished novel of the 1930's and the diaries of three participants in the suppression of the North-West Rebellion of 1885.

Though Robert Stead was a prolific writer, his reputation as an author worthy of critical attention has to date rested solely on one work, *Grain*. Now another work of similar significance has been unearthed, exhumed from the files of the National Archives and presented to the public under its original title *Dry Water*. Stead conisdered this work, which was his last, to be his most ambitious; it would seem his estimation is correct. *Dry Water* exhibits all the mastery of technical realism of its widely acclaimed predecessor. Yet it goes considerably beyond *Grain* in scope. It offers not merely a realistic depiction of prairie life, but a provocative exploration of a central dilemma of the human condition, *viz.* the vanity of man's ambition and his ceaseless search for happiness.

Dry Water traces the life of Donald Strand from his first arrival on his uncle's homestead as a ten-year-old orphan to

his final achievement in his fiftieth year of his life-long ambition to become the most prosperous farmer in the district. Along the way he and his cousin Ellen fall in love but decide against marriage, fearing the genetic ramifications of their union. Instead, Ellen marries Donald's best friend Jimmy Wayne, while Donald becomes ensnared by the predatory Clara Wilson. Gradually Donald comes to realize he has been "hooked" and the resulting bitterness destroys whatever chance he and Clara might have had for a fulfilling relationship. Though they keep up external appearances, they live essentially as strangers in the same house. The Waynes fare no better; though Ellen remains a devoted wife, her husband is constantly aware he is her second choice and ironically they have no children.

The title itself, which refers to that typical prairie phenomenon — the mirage — has obvious symbolic implications, as a revealing passage near the outset implies. After explaining to his bewildered nephew that the pool he sees in the middle of the road is merely an optical illusion, one of nature's cruel tricks to drive a thirsty man to his death by promising water but never giving it, Donald's uncle warns that many a man has drowned in "dry water." Throughout the novel the various characters will pursue goals that promise contentment only to find that achieving them brings them no closer to happiness, which like "dry water" hovers in the distance, as far away as before.

Were the symbol of "dry water" to epitomize the novel's ultimate vision, it would be a dark and cynical one indeed. Such is not the case, however, for in conducting his final revision in 1947 (the revision that has served as copy text for Prem Varma's present edition), Stead chose a new title, one more in keeping with the novel's sombre yet far away hopeless conclusion, *But Yet the Soil Remains*. This title seems clearly to allude to the opening chapter of Ecclesiastes where the Preacher claims all man's striving for success and happiness in this world is vain — "vanity of vanities . . . all is vanity" — ultimately because man's days on earth are numbered: "a generation goes, a generation comes: but the earth remains for ever." Lacking this insight and the peaceful resignation to one's fate that it brings, Jimmy Wayne commits suicide when his paper millions evaporate in the crash of 1929. With Jimmy's death, likewise, vanish Clara's delusive dreams of escape to a materialist's heaven in the big city with Jimmy as her lover. Even the love between Donald and Ellen, the novel implies, would not withstand the ravages of time and chance but "like something perfect in a glass . . . when you are no longer willing just to admire its perfection but must break the glass to seize it — then it withers." All that remains constant is the soil itself in which the lives of Donald and Ellen are rooted and to which each must return in the end, both figuratively and of course literally. Professor Varma's preference for Stead's earlier title as somehow "more apt and more directly related to the story," like his suggestion that the novel's ending is merely an unconvincing way of preventing the inevitable collapse of the two marriages, or even a more satisfactory spouse-swapping solution to their marital problems, would seem to be based on a superficial reading of the novel itself. For the novel ends not on a note of cynicism or despair, but of quiet resignation to the vicissitudes of fate that bring both Donald and Ellen peace.

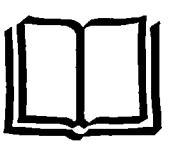
The three journals contained in *Reminiscences of a Bungle* have, unlike Stead's novel, little or no claim to literary merit. The subject matter, not the treatment of it, is significant. These are

eyewitness accounts of what may have been a minor skirmish in the annals of British colonial affairs, but of what was, nonetheless, a profoundly significant event in our own country's development. They are essentially historical curiosities, to be read primarily for glimpses of the attitudes prevalent among the Canadian volunteers who largely made up the forces dispatched to put down the insurrection. As such they provide a fascinating contrast to the official accounts to be found in military dispatches or newspaper stories at the time or works like Major C. A. Boulton's *Reminiscences of the North-West Rebellions*. The diarists are, for example, openly critical of the British commander of the expedition, General Middleton, whose insistence on conducting the campaign slowly and methodically in keeping with the standard military practice for suppressing colonial rebellions of indeterminate size and significance they interpret as a sign of his indecisiveness, incompetence, or even downright cowardice. One of the three, Lewis Redman Ord, revealing a nascent spirit of Canadian nationalism, rankles under the colonial status that the very presence of Middleton represents.

The attitude exhibited towards the insurrectionists in the accounts is also revealing. Not surprisingly, a degree of racism and bigotry pervades them all. Yet even Harold Penryn Rusden, the most disparaging of the three, expresses a grudging admiration for the defences Dumont set up around Batoche, observing that he was "astonished to see the amount of tact and genius displayed in the laying out of the defences and rebel trenches." More interesting still is the account of Richard Scougall Cassels who finds his glib assumptions of the rightness of his cause and the superiority of his culture sorely tried when he learns from Father Bigenesse, who has lived with the Cree, that many of their grievances are legitimate and that their leader Poundmaker is a man of great nobility and courage. Nor does his own encounter with Poundmaker significantly alter that view. Such glimpses may make the diaries worth the perusal of the general reader as well as the specialist.

Professor Macleod's edition is a model of what such a work ought to be. It is attractively presented, well documented, and adequately indexed. The introduction offers comprehensive background information and often shrewd commentary. The only apparent deficiency is the absence of a map to locate the numerous place names mentioned, but this is a relatively minor oversight. Unfortunately the same cannot be said of Professor Varma's edition. His introduction, while providing some useful information regarding the novel's various revisions, does not offer a particularly perceptive reading of the novel. The decision to revert to Stead's first title seems completely arbitrary. The text is poorly presented: typographical errors abound, often two or three to the page. These are at times unintentionally amusing; when Donald's aunt, for example, is at one point described as being "a little plumber," should one guess the passage refers to her expanding waistline or a new trade she has somehow managed to pick up? Often, however, these errors make the meaning confusing or even completely obscure. Surely after all the years of unjustified neglect, Stead's most ambitious novel deserves a more respectful treatment than this.

HARRY PREST



CLIMACTERIC BLUES

ROBERT HARLOW, *Paul Nolan.* McClelland & Stewart, $18.95.

PAUL NOLAN is yet another example of a current novelistic fad. You know the kind of book. The author traces the boredom of the bourgeois soul by studying the experiences of a climacteric middle-class male — an emotional and imaginative cripple who wallows in meaningless excesses. Too much spare time, spare money, spare sex, spare children, spare houses, spare cars, spare *angst.* Predictably enough we then get the fashionable "novel of crises" with a bored (and boring) hero who continuously implores "What is happening?", "Why am I here?", "Who am I?" A character from Svevo, Lewis, Updike, or Frisch?

Perhaps this response is a trifle unfair because *Paul Nolan* is by no means a thoroughly bad novel. But it is a hackneyed one. The eponymous hero is, as the ubiquitous word "odyssey" routinely implies, another modern Ulysses (yawn) seeking Meaning in a spiritually empty but materially full life. In a skilful experiment with past and present time schemes Harlow creates a compact memorial picaresque; he takes a series of recollected episodes and compresses their present consequences into "five of the most eventful days in one man's life — an experience that will leave no reader untouched." Sound familiar? Wait. There's more. Like a grubby one-night stand with some Reno prostitutes; the homecoming of the junkie-pusher son (complete with an Adam 12 escape); the crumpling marriage; the bored wife who lionizes a Spanish sculptor; fornications here, there, and everywhere; and most convoluted, the mentor-friend, Matthew, who returns to "West Van" for a funeral, but who takes the opportunity to come out of the closet when Paul remembers seeing Matthew's mother molesting Matthew just before Matthew's father enters and beats both of them causing Matthew to become "gay" and Matthew's mother to take to drink. Had enough? There's even more — and all in only five short days.

Crammed in amongst the sweating, drinking, fornicating, masturbating, and wandering are pages of humourless pontifications on the perils of the *petit bourgeois*: the usual pool-side banter about being and nothingness, nausea, death, time, vacuity, and consequentiality. To wit:

> "Dear Matthew," Paul said. "What are we doing here?" He drank and held out his glass.
>
> Matthew leaned forward, still smiling, and poured. "My dear Paul, it's quite obvious what we're doing. It's what we've been doing for a very long time. We're trying to avoid consequences. That may very well be all anyone ever does: deal with consequences." He settled back as far as his chair would let him and his head nodded emphatically. "Yes. Bad consequences are our nightmare realities, and good consequences make up that ideal life philosophers used to speak about. Life, Nolan, in short form, is consequences."

Paul Nolan, in short form, is "about" no less a subject than The Meaning of Life, a topic handled with rather more splash by both Samuel Johnson and Monty Python.

Harlow is at his best when his touch is lightest, when he narrows his focus to a smaller sphere than what the novel formally requires. Matthew the magus has some superb one-liners: "Morality is repetition. And immorality, we know, has the stench of uniqueness"; or, "Love is a verb. You do it, not say it." Like Morley Callaghan (whom he resembles in both his failures and achievements), Harlow can masterfully control his telling details, his significant incidentals.

Paul's everpresent mirrored wardrobe, for instance, works hard within its limits, reflecting indirectly this conglomerate man slipping in and out of clothing, identities, and commitments.

As a long short-story *Paul Nolan* could have been a brilliant sketch of adult neurosis springing from childhood traumas. The writing is crisp, direct, and occasionally unassuming; Harlow is usually in control of his overall mosaical construction. But as a realistic, major novel the book seriously crumbles under some fundamental mismanagements. Characterization is at best wooden, stereotypical; the dialogue recalls many of Callaghan's worst atrocities. This last is admittedly a moot point. Is Harlow deliberately using banal clichés to satirize the banal and clichéd values of his characters? Such an optimism is difficult to sustain, though, for too often the technique of handling boredom falls prey to its subject and the book limps ever onward into banality.

Above all else Harlow sacrifices subtlety to contrivance, tact to strained overstatement. The reader is always aware of the novelist trying just that little bit too hard. For example: games play a major role in the book and, as a central motif, could successfully indicate Paul's adolescent attempts to cope and systemize. His early in-pool remark, "We play a lot in here," works well as a tactful, directional clue. But as the narrative proceeds that clue is inexorably repeated, picked at, expanded, and exhausted. Harlow litters his text with so many explicit images of play, mindgames, or rituals that by novel's end the metaphor is floating lifelessly on the surface, corrupt and ineffectual. Cause of death: Overwork.

This kind of over-the-top writing infects much of the book, particularly those passages dealing with fornication —

> She pumped faster, rising up and up at every stroke she rose beyond the highest he could reach. He felt the cold of the evening air from base to tip, and then she plunged down hot again saying, Uh, and then Uh and then Uh. He felt nothing beyond that he had an erection. He wanted to.

— or where the narratorial voice itemizes Paul's tortuous introspections:

> Katherine could hope for all that. It was an ideal, and she loved ideals, planned for them. But (and here an egregiously inappropriate image rose in his mind) she was a shell-less snail in a romantic forest and unprepared for the shrivelling salt of reality. He did shiver; and leaned over the balcony rail.

Sadly, Harlow often chooses this kind of description where a potential rapier thrust gives way clumsily to the knobbly cudgel. The reader, as a result, also shivers — not at any imaginative soaring, but at the blunt heaviness of overstatement.

Whether or not *Paul Nolan* is a "shattering experience" (jacket blurb) is a delicate question. Some of the book is quite accomplished: witty, epigrammatic, pithy. But much is humdrum, schematized, or downright embarrassing. "Shattering"? Perhaps. But not quite in the manner intended.

GARY BOIRE

opinions and notes

THE "SCARLET" ROMPERS

Toward a New Perspective in "As For Me and My House"

CRITICS WHO AGREE "that *As For Me and My House* is in the mainstream of the English Canadian novel"[1] invariably disagree about how to read the novel. Puritanism, it is often assumed, is the antagonist in the work,[2] but there is unresolved doubt whether Mrs. Bentley or her husband, Philip, is the protagonist. Those who can no longer describe Mrs. Bentley as "pure gold and wholly credible"[3] nonetheless dispute the extent to which Philip's character is alloyed. One writer calls him "a weak, spineless hypocrite who cannot face what life puts before him,"[4] while another makes of him a paragon of "Christian charity" whose "frustrated art indicates his frustrated moral nature, not the other way around."[5] This latter view builds upon Warren Tallman's seminal study of Philip as a "non-artist,"[6] though it no longer shares Tallman's premise that art is essential to Philip's spiritual well-being, or that the source of his frustration lies in his "uncreated childhood,"[7] more specifically his failure to possess himself. Rather, the preacher's art is assumed to be incidental to his ministry, and his moral nature is thwarted from without by his wife's hostility to his vocation. Even an impartial reading which makes an artistic virtue of ambivalence — largely because it leaves readers "sensitive to doubt and so to reality as well"[8] — leads to another reader's doubt about the handling of narrative technique, for "the selection of Mrs. Bentley, an unreliable narrator whose unreliability we cannot verify, creates unresolved problems of perspective in the novel."[9]

Perspective, as all the critical discourse suggests, is the beginning and end of our difficulty with *As For Me and My House*. Perspective is evidently the technical problem of the artist who tries in his drawings to pierce "this workaday reality of ours."[10] It is also the moral problem of the narrator who wants to see her husband truly, and yet must ask, "Am I the one who's never grown up, who can't see life for illusions" (125)? The context of her question is especially illuminating of Ross's technique because it comes after her apparent discovery of Philip's act of adultery. The probability that the minister is innocent allows us to resolve the vexed problem of perspective in the novel, but it also forces us to reformulate the question of the artist's relation to his (or her) materials, the fundamental relation of art (and religion) to life.

It is a dream which wakens Mrs. Bentley on the night of August 14 and sends her looking for her husband who is not in bed beside her. She tiptoes to the door of the leanto bedroom where she hears a "frightened, soft, half-smothered little laugh, that I've laughed often with him too" (123). She creeps back to bed directly, "a queer, doomed ache inside me," though she has no proof that Judith is not likewise dreaming, laughing in her sleep. Mrs. Bentley has told of occasions before when she herself woke in distress, dreaming of Philip hurling a Bible out of the pulpit, only to find him "muttering in his sleep" (15). She has also accustomed us to Philip's habit of staying late in his study, as if to avoid the conjugal bed, though six nights before she "finds" him with Judith, she

has described him coming to bed to find her awake: "He didn't mind, but he wasn't eager either. Kind still, far off, as if he were sorry, understood now, felt it was the least he could do.... That was the hard part, the helplessness and finality about it. He seemed trying to tell me that I must be resigned too" (120). Hearing Judith's half-smothered laugh, then, she tries to resign herself to his infidelity, fearing the end of her marriage should she confront him. She remains silent when he returns soon after to bed, though she might wonder just what it was he understood in their moment of intimacy, what it was to which he was now resigned. Especially "if he were sorry" and "felt it was the least he could do," what might she have failed herself to understand?

The dream which awakens her is somewhat revealing. "It was a kind of nightmare. My hands were tied, and someone was stealing Minnie's hay. I could see El Greco sitting on his haunches in the garden, but when I called him he didn't hear me. He seemed a long way off, as if I were looking at him through the wrong end of a telescope. Paul was telling me he was a wolfhound, and wouldn't know how to chase burglars away" (123). The stolen "hay" is obviously symbolic, though Paul's presence is more ambiguous; it suggests, at the very least, that he is familiar with the watchdog which fails to bark. Mrs. Bentley's view of El Greco "through the wrong end of a telescope" points up a possibility that her perspective will, on awaking, be equally at fault, that she will look at Philip to diminish him. If, as she wonders at the end of this day's entry, she "can't see life for illusions," might she not have reason to feel "uneasy, afraid, as if I were the guilty one" (124)?

Another Horizon wife has no such illusions about the guilt of her husband, not even in the face of townspeople's suspicions. "Yesterday," Mrs. Bird reports some months later, "Mrs. Wenderby slammed the door almost in Mrs. Finley's face" (147). Yet Mrs. Wenderby, it would appear, is doing much more than holding her head high in the face of public scandal. At the Ladies Aid bazaar of March 16, she sells Paul "a dozen doughnuts, a pair of rompers, and a cushion top" (156). Paul, who has been sitting there "with a hangdog, guilty, miserable look," gives them helplessly to Mrs. Bentley in front of Mrs. Finley. That good worthy was sniffing "so nastily I stumped right over to Mr. Finley and sold them to him again for a dollar twenty-five."

It is not the first time, of course, that Paul has been blamed by Mrs. Wenderby. Nor is it the first time he has brought his problems to Mrs. Bentley. The previous May, when she had let herself imagine that Philip "didn't want me along" (45) on a trip with Steve to Partridge Hill, she had been too troubled to worry about Paul's silence as they waited in the study for Philip to return. "It's like being a child in the presence of grown-ups who have troubles that can't be explained to you," she reports of the feeling which the study always gives her. "The books understand, but you don't" (46). Paul then mentions a particularly illuminating book: "Faust, too, the early Faust, before they made a tenor of him, it was for knowledge, not a mere comely Marguerite, that he made a compact with the devil and let himself be carried off alive to Hell." If Paul is worried about Marlowe's Dr. Faustus turning into Goethe's Faust, it is because the schoolteacher is tempted himself to debauch a comely Marguerite. Mrs. Bentley will not let herself think for almost another year that she is

Faust's Marguerite, but then her ignorance of "the books" will let her take the place of Goethe's virgin.

Near the end of that May, when Mrs. Bentley does see at last that "Paul has his troubles too," she is pointedly unaware of their significance. Paul seems to be just another victim of the god Propriety, a humanist hero who dares to teach little bigots that, vulgarly speaking as the vulgar should speak, they have bellies. But the town euphemist has her reasons, it seems, for objecting to his particular use of "bellies." "'Cows may have them,' says Mrs. Wenderby, 'and you, Mr. Kirby, but not my daughter Isobel or I'" (70).

On the facing page Judith faces another brand of criticism which ought to remind us that we are reading a novel, not a diary. She has come to visit Mrs. Bentley where Philip now emerges from the study to stand staring at Judith "with such a direct, searching look that she flushed again and got up to go" (71). Mrs. Bentley sees no hint of reproof in the look, not even when Mrs. Wenderby has pointedly omitted Judith from the list of women without bellies in her house. Mrs. Wenderby's concern for euphemism is repeated June 26, the day Paul receives "another note from Mrs. Wenderby . . . warning him that if he insists on saying *sweat* in the classroom instead of *perspiration* she'll use her influence to have the school board ask him to resign" (91). Before Judith has gotten a belly, then, Mrs. Bentley finds grist for her mill in this grim, almost preposterous small-town euphemist. But once Judith's secret is out, the beadle of town morality proves she is capable of a higher order of euphemism. Rompers, not scarlet letters, are the real fashion of prairie towns, though Mrs. Bentley herself is quick to pin the letter on her husband without ever mentioning it to him. In fact she makes quite a point of her own martyred silences (134), certain as always that "This is the best way" (126).

This self-centred perspective may be one thing focused on Philip, but it is quite another faced with Paul and his own sort of euphemism. He remarks to her on June 7 that "while words socially come up in the world, most of them go morally down." "You learn a lot from a philologist," Mrs. Bentley says with unwitting irony. "Cupid, he says, has given us *cupidity*, Eros, *erotic*, Venus, *venereal*, and Aphrodite, *aphrodisiac*" (76). Seemingly, Paul confesses the only way he can, but he is not alone in his need of understanding. In one of a long series of paired chapters, Judith follows Paul to Mrs. Bentley's house, apparently to say something about the impending or continuing liaison. "But busy with my retrospects, looking at Horizon and drawing up a balance sheet, I wasn't much company for Judith" (77). The older woman doesn't ask the younger one about her restlessness even when they have lain down by the railroad tracks to make angels in the dirt. "Judith used to do it with the neighbour boy who keeps asking her to marry him," she says with one part of her mind. But the other part is busy sizing up the newly revealed competition. For the first time she notices that Judith has breasts. "It surprised me a little. Somehow, so white and silent and shy, she had never occurred to me as a woman before. I left off my balancing and sat watching her, with a vague uneasy feeling of regret. For I've never got along with women very well" (77).

Mrs. Bentley's own self-revelation now speaks volumes. She has warned us time and again that she is temperamentally jealous, as, for example, when the young Mrs. Holly with "fawnish" freckles comes to call on the minister: "I kept staring at [those pale yellow freckles], thinking how lovely they would be if she weren't a woman" (26). The

visit triggers a terrible fight between the Bentleys, after which she hates the furniture because "It has taken sides against me with the house" (25). Never thorough in her self-analysis, Mrs. Bentley at least has the honesty to admit that "There's something lurking in the shadows, something that doesn't approve of me." Nonetheless she flees up the tracks toward the outside world, running away from Philip "while his hand was still warm and insistent" (23). She excuses herself, though she will later blame him for avoiding her, by insisting in her turn, "I had to. The house was too small, too oppressive with the faint old smell of other lives. And the little town outside was somehow too much like a mirror" (23). We can hardly expect her to look at herself in the mirror the night she imagines Philip is in bed with Judith. But her tendency to isolate him so she can blame him has been apparent since that April day they make up their terrible quarrel by walking out along the tracks in the spring snowstorm. They stop at the ravine and sit in silence. The diary account of the day now falls back on the history of the man, as if to explain his silence. She finds fault with him for blaming his mother, as she sees it, for conceiving him. He idolizes his father the artist, he holds himself aloof from the wife who has fought so hard to possess him (31-33). It is a strange way to make up a quarrel, her own silence in person and then her blame in private.

But Philip, it seems, is avoiding no ordinary kind of wifely possession. After the first service in their new church, Mrs. Bentley sizes up the women of the congregation and concludes that "it would have taken an imagination livelier even than mine to find much to be afraid of there" (10). Her imagination comes to life, however, once Judith hints silently at her own sexual restlessness, and it is but a matter of time before Mrs. Bentley will not "get along" with Judith very well. Of course she believes she knows the reason why Judith avoids her after August 14; it is beyond her comprehension to see that the "two oranges" over which Judith weeps so piteously are not coals of fire heaped upon her enemy's head, but counters for a lost ideal of friendship. Judith grieves because she has removed herself from decency, not because she has become her friend's rival.

Mrs. Bentley's jealousy obviously gives her license to interpret Judith's lapse from "company." Much more puzzling to her is the absence of the school-teacher after the beginning of the school year. "What's wrong with Paul these days, he never comes round," she says to Philip. She is shocked and hurt by her husband's projected guilt, as she construes it: "I'd say that's one for you to answer" (132). Self-absorbed as she is, she cannot see Paul for what he has become, even though he has ridden by the house that day on Harlequin, "and when he saw me watching at the window [he] gave a nod and then bent over quickly, pretending to try the saddle girths." Paul has returned to town strangely depressed after the summer. For "He finds himself sceptical even of his theories that a boy ought to grow up alone with a horse. 'Unless he intends staying among horses. He's not much good afterwards for getting along with people'" (127). Mrs. Bentley has never shared his faith in horses anyway, not since the day Paul first "let me see his skewbald bronco Harlequin. A temperamental, knowing little beast, that plunged hysterically halfway across the street at sight of me" (40). But Paul's abrupt heresy is not so much concerned with what the animal knows about him; he sees in the dog El Greco a reflected truth about himself: "He's ashamed inside — knows this isn't where he ought to be" (137). Although

Mrs. Bentley feels a rebuke to Philip in the words, her husband has good reason to reprimand her: "Why not get your mind off Paul, and remember you're a married woman?" (134). Perhaps she lays claim to our sympathy as the martyred innocent, but only because she now transfers her jealousy onto her faithless mate. As long as we see him as the offending party, we must in some implicit sense share the narrator's opinions, including her good opinion of herself.

As early as the second day in Horizon, however, we recall Mrs. Bentley cultivating a potential admirer (though not a lover) in the schoolteacher whose "slow steady eyes . . . stay right with you till they're satisfied" (7). Later, she will not remember that those eyes have suddenly lost their moral authority. But for now, she is quietly vain about Paul's admiration for her music: "I liked him for that. The musician in me dies hard, and a word of praise still sends my blood *accelerando*. 'Come then and spend an evening with us soon,' I invited recklessly. It was dangerous, but with my vanity up that way I didn't care" (8). By contrast that evening, Judith is curiously lacking in vanity when Mrs. Bentley compliments her. But then it appears that Judith cannot afford to be vain, not in view of the prejudice of the town: "Miss Twill and the matrons . . . don't quite approve of her, and there was a tight-lipped silence for a minute when I remarked after service how well she had sung her solo. She herself broke it at last, saying awkwardly and nicely that she'd rather be like me and play an instrument" (11). Judith, of course, is tired of her solo life, and has been heard walking out along "the railroad track as late as ten o'clock at night. Naturally people talk" (11-12).

The pestered morality of the town, as it turns out, is not nearly so cruel as the woman who walks out along the track with Judith, only to send her a little gift at Christmas, "deliberately to hurt her," once she thinks her own ox is gored. Mrs. Wenderby has hardly been as self-concerned in her public crusade against impropriety. But Mrs. Bentley's concern for the proprieties begins and ends with herself. When she dares Judith, the day after Paul has confessed his interest in venereal matters, to join her on a ride back to town with the railway section hands, her fear of public scandal is more than offset by her complacency: "It was dangerous, but if I asked them to let us off before we reached town they would think we didn't want to be seen with them. I hadn't the heart for that, they looked so appreciative of our company" (78). In a more damaging way three weeks later, she makes Judith's evident romantic disquiet refer to her own marital situation, even though Mrs. Wenderby has just been fulminating against the apostle of "bawdy" language: "There was a strange wariness in [Judith's] eyes. I asked her to sing, and her voice was the same, not strong and full as usual, but constrained, lifeless. We tried a while, but couldn't find much to talk about. I admitted to myself at last that the trouble is Philip" (91).

Since all of Mrs. Bentley's crucial "admissions" are to herself, her illusions need never be denied by life. But if we find in Judith's lifeless behaviour a hint of some climax to the liaison, then we might not be remiss in counting forward two hundred eighty-two days (the full gestatory term) to the date of birth. Mrs. Bentley alone "admits" that the baby arrives "a month before its time" (161). The father is not such a hypocrite, however, that he hides his responsibility and his remorse after the girl's death. On the windy day that Paul runs an errand for Mrs. Bentley's adopted infant, he returns to offer some unusual observations. "It was a bad wind, he said

dryly. Most of the false fronts were blown down, and Mrs. Ellingson had lost her chicken coop and nearly all her hens. There was a slow, deliberate quietness in his voice, and he took pains not to look at me." Still he does not feel constrained to avoid her eyes after she ignores his implication that at least one false front still stands. "The expression in his eyes," as she presents him with the baby, "was so wondering and incredulous that I realized he knew what all along I was certain I was keeping secret" (162).

Wise in her own conceit, Mrs. Bentley doesn't doubt that Paul should wonder at her martyred silence, just as the prior week she had not doubted the necessity of his silence before her matronly virtue. On that occasion too, "there was such a strained, helpless look in his eyes that suddenly I felt the windows all accusing me. . . . It seemed strange that I now should make another suffer who had suffered so much that way myself" (158). Her reflexive thought no sooner occurs than "Paul asked brusquely, 'Why is a raven like a writing-desk?'" (159). The riddle, as Mrs. Bentley observes, comes from *Alice in Wonderland*; while she says "There isn't an answer," she fails to note the context of the Hatter's "nonsense." He is replying to Alice who has just remarked with some severity, "You shouldn't make personal remarks . . . it's very rude."[11] Mrs. Bentley, however, has just been guilty of some very personal "remarks" concerning Paul's affections. Nor does she understand, as she soon admits in the adverb "cryptically," what more he is trying to tell her in one further allusion to the raven, though Poe's poem "The Raven" ought to suggest something, especially if she were mindful of the poet's "intention of making [the speaker] emblematical of *Mournful and Never-Ending Remembrance*."[12]

While Paul has yet to lose his "Lenore," Judith's death the following week will make his "never-ending remembrance" too painful to be borne alone. So when Mrs. Bentley does show him the baby without a hint of reproach, he interprets her silence as sympathy, in fact as consummate tact. He can at last confide in her more directly, if still emblematically: "Did I know, he asked gravely, that in the early ages of our race it was imitation of just such a little wail as this that had given us some of our noblest words, like father, and patriarch, and paternity" (163). Out of the truth of grief the philologist coins a false etymology for the word "paternity."[13] His proper name as father is fittingly expressed in the sound of his own sorrow. "And I shook my head," Mrs. Bentley says, "and let him explain."

A word to the wise is deemed to be sufficient. But Mrs. Bentley is not wise enough to avoid self-deception. For she is still bent on possessing her husband through "his" child (165), in spite of her acknowledgement of conventional wisdom that love "won't survive possession" (65). And yet her possessiveness seems oddly rooted in that very "hurt" which his drawings seem to give her. His art, she says, is "the only part of life that's real or genuine. That's why I believe he's an artist, why I can't deceive myself, or escape the hurt of it" (25).

The hurt of it, as she admits at the outset, is not the same thing for both of them:

> I turned over the top sheet, and sure enough on the back of it there was a little Main Street sketched. It's like all the rest, a single row of smug, false-fronted stores, a loiterer or two, in the distance the prairie again. And like all the rest there's something about it that hurts. False fronts ought to be laughed at, never understood or pitied. They're such outlandish things, the front of a store built up to look like a second storey. They ought always to be seen that way, pretentious, ridiculous, never

> as Philip sees them, stricken with a look of self-awareness and futility.
>
> That's Philip, though, what I must recognize and acknowledge as the artist in him. Sermon and drawing together, they're a kind of symbol, a summing up. The small-town preacher and the artist — what he is and what he nearly was — the failure, the compromise, the going-on — it's all there — the discrepancy between the man and the little niche that holds him. (4)

Despite her momentary sympathy for his work, the real discrepancy is between her possessive hurt and his artistic compassion. She can't possess him when his view of home runs so contrary to her own. And she must never quite admit to herself that Philip pities and understands where she herself is inclined to jeer. But the novelist's art permits us this early to glimpse their difference. She must retract at once this dangerous implication, rewording it to fit her general proposition that Philip is a talented, but failed artist, portraying little more than his own "self-awareness and futility."

Elsewhere, however, Mrs. Bentley discovers anything but a sense of futility in Philip's drawings. In one, she notes a "broken old horse, legs set stolid, head down dull and spent. But still you feel it belongs to the earth.... What the tired old hulk suggests is less approaching decay or dissolution than return. You sense a flow, a rhythm, a cycle." By contrast, the town in the same picture "stands up so insolent and smug and self-assertive that your fingers itch to smudge it out and let the underlying rhythms complete themselves. Philip himself could feel that there was something wrong, but he didn't know what" (69). Ironically, the "broken old horse" set wtihin the natural cycle does not seem futile to her. Philip's differing perspective on the town only points up her Gulliver-like preference for "horses" over people. And so she must appeal to the reader, in the second-person, to share her urge to rub out the town. Yet even her sympathy for the broken horse creates a problem for us in trying to evaluate Philip's drawings. If her judgment of his impressionistic images is equally impressionistic, then how can we be certain that he is at all sympathetic to "natural rhythms" when he hates the town? Conversely, if the town should prove to be represented sympathetically, what does that do to Mrs. Bentley's impression, recorded two days earlier, that "He hates Horizon, all the Horizons, and he's clinging to the incident today as a justification for his hatred" (67)?

The problem of what to make of Philip's drawings is resolved in a crucial way by the problem of what to make of his ministry. His wife tells us from the outset that she is determined to make a hypocrite of the man in the pulpit: "The pipe belonged to both of us. We were partners in conspiracy" (14). But when his venial hypocrisy begins to wear at his "self-respect till at last one night he flared, said that since he couldn't smoke in daylight like a man he wouldn't smoke at all," Mrs. Bentley retorts "that so far as hypocrisy went the pipe didn't make much difference one way or another. It was no worse smoking on the sly than taking out his spleen and temper on his wife" (15). She might wonder at his silence throughout much of the remaining narrative, for if only he can hold his tongue he might forestall her charge of hypocrisy. Failing every way to convict him, Mrs. Bentley is unconsciously driven at last to make him an "adulterer." While their hypocrisy is no longer shared, she does feel that she is not alone, at least, in her difference from the town.

Mrs. Bentley is similarly determined to have an artist in the house, to preserve that conspiracy of individual difference. "You have to put in a word for me," Philip says, "— impress them — let them see that your small-town

preacher husband has more to him than they see on the surface" (89). But what she is determined to "recognize and acknowledge as the artist in him" must also come short of the accomplishment, no matter if "he pierces this workaday reality of ours, half scales it off, sees hidden behind it another. More important, more significant than ours, but that he understands only vaguely. He tries to solve it, give it expression, and doesn't quite succeed" (101). So she blames him for "seeking a beauty and significance that isn't life's to give" (94), though later, when he has "stopped to copy" Laura's horse in a painting, it will come as "something of a revelation to me, too" that he expresses such a hunger for an audience, as well as an ability to move, rather than awe, the viewer of his work. "He's not entirely disillusioned yet," she says. "I've taken him too literally" (104). Her wistful confession reminds us just how literally she has taken the representational side of his work before, without a willingness to accept its animating spirit. Looking at *Main Street* sketched at a different hour (after the fashion of Monet?), "You feel the wind, its drive and bluster, the way it sets itself against the town. The false fronts that other times stand up so flat and vacant are buckled down in desperation for their lives." Her immediate denial of the work's kinetic power is reminiscent of a more subtle theory of aesthetic stasis, made by Joyce's Stephen Dedalus to escape the claim of art upon the will. Philip's drawing does make her feel the desperation of the subject: "And yet you feel no sympathy, somehow can't be on their side. Instead, you wait in impatience for the wind to work its will" (43). Her refusal to pity is based, apparently, on the safety in stasis represented in the picture; outside the aesthetic frame, her will is one with nature. What her view denies, however, is the artist's sympathy in holding the desperate false fronts "buckled down" in time as well as space. She appears determined to have it both ways in art as in life; the artist and minister must both be her "partners in conspiracy," holding in secret contempt the world outside them.

The narrator's insistence on the "failure" of the artist should now seem as suspect as her portrait of the failed preacher. We recall that pitiable criticism of her husband on a day they pray for rain at Partridge Hill: "for the first time I wished that Philip could mean his prayers, reach out and comfort a little" (83). But the following month we hear from a desperate woman at Partridge Hill that "they won't have potatoes even, or feed for their chickens and pigs. It's going to be a chance, she says, for the Lord to show some of the compassion that Philip's forever talking about in his sermons" (113). Mrs. Bentley's earlier insistence that Philip's God is "interested in him" only to be "opposed to him" (17) is not borne out by a single objective description of his sermons.

The compassion of the preacher is equalled by the pity of the artist in his portrait of Joe Lawson, one of the farm parishioners at Partridge Hill. Mrs. Bentley sees in the drawing the man's "big, disillusioned, steadfast hands, so faithful to the earth and seasons that betray them. I didn't know before what drought was really like, watching a crop dry up, going on again. I didn't know that Philip knew either" (139). But we have known from the second page of the novel that the artist pities and understands his people; now we might conclude as well that he fits into the "little niche that holds him."

Mrs. Bentley then ridicules the town so mercilessly precisely because it takes sides with her husband against her, making her see herself the way she views false fronts in one of his drawings, star-

ing "at each other across the street as if into mirrors of themselves, absorbed in their own reflections" (69). Because she is so absorbed in her own reflection, she never admits that Philip isn't the hypocrite she makes him out to be, whether in the pulpit or the studio. Rather, as she confesses ambiguously, "I resigned myself to sanctimony years ago. Today I was only putting up our false front again, enlarged this time for three. Philip, Steve and I. It's such a trim efficient little sign; it's such a tough, deep-rooted tangle that it hides. And none of them knows.... They can only read our shingle, all its letters freshened up this afternoon, *As For Me and My House — The House of Bentley — We Will Serve the Lord*" (61). She will not understand that the shingle speaks for Philip a kind of truth, is in fact a translation of his art into life.

The pity that Philip feels for his flock in his drawings is evidently more than a matter of his medium. But Mrs. Bentley's hatred of Main Street morality blinds her to the deeper cause of his apparent "spasm of hatred for me" (36) in one memorable conversation with Paul at the supper table. Philip's resentment is not as personal as she thinks — hatred for the barren wife — for it is fueled, as she notices, by Paul's continuing criticism of the self-righteousness of the town. His personal attitude is more accurately reflected in his response to Mrs. Bird's hypercritical values (or at least his wife's representations of them) when "he asked wasn't it bad enough to put up with such people when we had to — did we have to have them every mealtime, too?" (22). Contrary to Mrs. Bentley's assumption, Philip is hardly recalling "a combative kind of bitterness" (36) in seeming sympathy with Paul's fighting words; rather, he is feeling combative toward the critic. It is fair to conclude that his wife's view of their world cannot be made to coincide with his own. She is one of those who hates the "land for which ye did not labour" (Joshua xxiv. 13) and has not "put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt" (v. 14), whereas Philip speaks for himself, at least, when he echoes the words of Joshua, "Choose you this day whom ye will serve ... but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (v. 15).

Paul, it should now be apparent, is the greater hypocrite of the two men, which might account for Philip's grudging tolerance of him. Paul has been hurt in the past by some small-town sophisticates, but his ultimate hurt is that he is like them, without being able to join their communion, or even to forgive himself in them. And yet he is also most sympathetic to Philip's art, causing Mrs. Bentley to remark of the paintings of the hills with "eternity in them" that they showed "the same strength and fatalism, the same unflinching enthusiasm. Anyway, they were words something like that that Paul used" (102). Mrs. Bentley's response is true to all that is best in her: "There was no hard thinking to do, nothing tangled to get straight. He's an artist, that's all, and he's going to waste."

The painter himself does not see any discrepancy, however, between his sermons and his drawings, between the small-town preacher and the artist. "Religion and art," he is shortly to tell her, "are almost the same thing anyway.... They're both a rejection of the material, common-sense world for one that's illusory, yet somehow more important. Now it's always when a man turns away from this common-sense world around him that he begins to create, when he looks into a void and has to give it life and form" (112). Significantly, when Philip comes back to the "common-sense" world of his wife, he will create for her an illusion that is more important than the fact of his innocence. In a very practical

way, he looks into the void of her being and gives it new life and form. It is finally this "fatalism" which is his enduring strength both as a man and an artist.

Read in this light, *As For Me and My House* is an integrated work of art of a very high order. The philologist who has served only as a sympathetic chorus on the artist's worth becomes, by his own pitiable weakness, an active agent in Philip's conversion of art into life. The narrator is now more certainly unreliable, herself a masterpiece of ironic narration, though Ross, like the woman's husband, is not without a very great charity toward her. Finally, the artist himself is highlighted in a radically submissive portrait of the artist, though the ironies of this *künstlerroman* run counter to Joyce's "rebellious" work. For it is the artist from any community of truth. In Ross, it is Mrs. Bentley, the diarist, who suffers from the kind of myopia which Stephen reveals by rejecting Cranly's sympathy for "a mother's love" and "the sufferings of women."[14] But the artist-as-diarist is countered by the preacher-painter who will not declare "*Non serviam,*" but rather serves his people in ways that most of them understand. "It turns out now that all along they've liked us," Mrs. Bentley notes with surprise. "Philip, they tell me, was always such an earnest, straightforward man. He's made it hard for his successor. And I minded my own business, came and went willingly, was the sort of woman they could look up to" (164). It is not the conclusion she is used to after a fuller term in such Horizons: ordinarily "it begins to dawn on them that in his own aloof way he still must care a little for his dowdy wife. Then his sermons become tedious, he hasn't the interests of the community at heart, I turn out to be a snob and troublemaker. Eventually they make it clear to us" (10).

If Mrs. Bentley doesn't make things quite as clear to us, it is because she dare not acknowledge to herself how she projects her own spirit into the landscape. No more desolate portrait of the Dust Bowl exists in the literature of North America because no other narrator is a barren woman, bent on blaming the earth for its infertility. Ross's vision, by contrast, is not a mean-spirited depreciation of a woman who feels betrayed by her own nature. *God Be With You Till We Meet Again,* sing the choir. Even Mrs. Bentley is deserving of our pity. But Ross himself deserves to be read with gratitude. We have limited him for too long to that stale old chestnut of the artist who flees his cultural deprivation. Ross the artist, it turns out, is profoundly sympathetic to his roots. Evidently it is not the symbolic West (why else the name Miss West?) which is barren, but ways of reading or interpreting that "landscape" which have proved fatal to "virgin land." The Sinclair Ross of this novel and the stories is much more vital to the imaginative future of that "void" to which he first gave "life and form."

NOTES

1 Sandra Djwa, "No Other Way: Sinclair Ross's Stories and Novels," *CL*, no. 47 (Winter 1971), p. 63.

2 See, e.g., Roy Daniells' "Introduction" to the New Canadian Library edition, p. vii; and Donald Stephens, "Wind, Sun and Dust," *CL*, no. 23 (Winter 1965), pp. 19 ff.

3 Daniells, p. vii.

4 Stephens, p. 22.

5 Wilfred Cude, "Beyond Mrs. Bentley: A Study of *As For Me and My House*," *JCS*, 8 (1973), 17, 18. Cude develops the most sustained ironic reading of the narrator to date. I was nonetheless persuaded by a group of graduate students at the University of Oslo, under the direction of Pro-

fessor Per Seyersted, that the ironic reading, given the fact of Philip's adultery, could only deepen the moral ambiguity of Ross' vision. Betty Jane Wylie, another able defender of Mrs. Bentley, and Francis Sparshott and I were hosted at Hovda I, a small conference for Scandinavian students of Canadian literature. The tour of Canadian writers in Scandinavia, 1-21 March 1981, was sponsored by the Department of External Affairs, Ottawa.

[6] Warren Tallman, "Wolf in the Snow," *CL*, no. 5 (Summer 1960), 15.

[7] Tallman, p. 18.

[8] William H. New, "Sinclair Ross's Ambivalent World," *CL*, 40 (Spring 1969), 32.

[9] Paul Denham, "Narrative Technique in Sinclair Ross' *As For Me and My House*," *SCL*, 5 (Spring 1980), 118, 124. Curiously, he notes an interview with Ross which implies that the story, at least in its conception, was about Philip, a man who accepts an offer "and then . . . finds himself trapped" (118). Dick Harrison, *Unnamed Country: The Struggle for a Canadian Prairie Fiction* (Edmonton: Univ. of Alberta Press, 1977), also seems uncertain about the clarity of authorial vision in the novel. While he describes some of Mrs. Bentley's "mistaken inferences" about her husband's relation to his place, he concludes that Philip's feelings toward these towns are quite "ambivalent" (150). Harrison distinguishes between two kinds of imaginative response in the work to the prairie setting, that of the outlander who feels stifled by the "overwhelming environment" (152), and that of the native who feels "stimulated" by it. He concludes that the novel demonstrates "a long cultural tradition of inadequate response" to the prairies (153), but he is not sure whether Ross's testimony is intentional or not.

[10] Sinclair Ross, *As For Me and My House* (1941; rpt. Toronto: New Canadian Library, 1957), p. 101.

[11] *The Philosopher's Alice*, introd. and notes by Peter Heath (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1974), p. 67.

[12] "The Philosophy of Composition," in *Selected Writings of Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. Edward H. Davidson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1956), p. 463.

[13] Archbishop Trench, *On the Study of Words* (1851; rpt. London: Everyman, 1926), which Mrs. Bentley presents to Paul at Christmas (149), is significantly silent on the word "father," though it comments on other words such as *pagan*: *countrydweller*. The Indo-European root of the word is to be found in the Sanskrit *pitṛi*, pl. *pitaras* (Lat. *pater*), according to *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, ed. Sir Monier Monier-Williams et al. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960), p. 626. It is used "esp. of heaven or the sky; *antarā pitaram mātaram ca*, 'between heaven and earth.'" Paul's etymology is not far from Sanskrit *pīdā*, "pain, suffering, annoyance" (629). Conceptually in error for once, the philologist is at least morally right.

[14] James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916; rpt. New York: Viking, 1964), p. 245.

DAVID WILLIAMS

"ITS BETTER NATURE LOST"

The Importance of the Word in Sinclair Ross's "As For Me and My House"

CRITICS OF SINCLAIR ROSS'S *As For Me and My House* have long been irritated by the endless disquisitions on etymological origins indulged in by Paul Kirby, the ebullient yet frustrated prairie schoolteacher. One of his remarks, however, casts illumination not only on linguistic practice but on the central concerns of the novel:

> But while words socially come up in the world, most of them morally go down. *Retaliate*, for instance: once you could retaliate a favour or a kindness — it simply meant to give again as much as had been given — but memories being short for benefits and long for grievances, its sense was gradually perverted and its better nature lost.[1]

One senses that much the same could be said of Philip and Mrs. Bentley; *As For Me and My House* chronicles their rises and falls in both social and moral spheres,

their occasional "retaliations" of kindness and affection being progressively taken over by retaliations of a more heartless nature. In short, the novel chronicles a marital perversion, a loss of each person's "better nature."

Such deft manipulation of language has been noted by several critics of Ross, most notably by William H. New: "Fortunately Ross' technique, his control over the words he allows Mrs. Bentley to use, creates the ironic tension which raises the book from a piece of 'regional realism' to a complex study of human responses."[2] I would like to enlarge upon Professor New's comment, to carry the study of Ross's linguistic awareness beyond the principles of selection and evocative usage. *As For Me and My House* is, in fact, a self-conscious exploration of language, a brilliantly constructed study of the relationship between verbal and non-verbal means of communication.

* * *

The taut, nerve-grinding silences of Ross's novel have, on the whole, received more comment and analysis than have the instances of overt communication. Nevertheless, one should also note that silences in *As For Me and My House* appear in various forms. There is, of course, the silence of the marriage; we first glimpse Philip Bentley in an extreme state of non-communication — sprawled across the bed, asleep (3). Similarly, Mrs. Bentley makes her first appearance occupied by a silent, stereotypically "female" task: "serenely making curtains" (3). Both moments of union and of severe dispute in the marriage are marked by this suffocating silence, which finds its visual correlatives in the silence of the stillborn child and in the silence of the Bentley house: "Even the smell, the faint old exhalation of the past," muses Mrs. Bentley, "it seemed sharper, more insistent, seemed trying to tell me that this is a house of silence and repression and restraint" (58).

Beyond this marital silence there lies an even more irremediable silence, the silence of the past, figured forth in the mute photograph of Philip's father. The photograph exists in a vacuum for Philip, for his father died before he was born. Nevertheless, he has built around the silent image of his father a legend and, in anti-Pygmalion fashion, proceeds to lose his own vitality in worshipping this graven image. "They say let a man look long and devotedly enough at a statue," comments Mrs. Bentley, "and in time he will resemble it" (30).[3] This preference of Philip's for the visual icon, shorn of all encumbrances of historical detail or truth, will resurface at a later stage of my argument.

Finally, silence is a socially reinforced response inculcated into those who might otherwise dare to overstep social boundaries. When Mrs. Bentley is surprised in the act of riding the railcar with Judith West, by the ruling matriarchy of the town, she is rendered speechless: "I couldn't find my tongue and just stood helpless, not even trying to make an explanation" (78). Similarly, we witness Paul Kirby being slowly driven into silence throughout the course of the novel, both by society's linguistic rules (whereby, to quote one Horizon matriarch on the use of the word "belly": "Cows may have them . . . and you, Mr. Kirby, but not my daughter Isobel or I" (70), and, one senses, by the marital ties of the Bentleys. Ironically, then, by the end of the novel, the character who has been most enamoured of words, is consigned to silence.

What many readers of *As For Me and My House* tend to overlook is Ross's pairing of his concern with silences with an even more marked emphasis on the voice. One might well argue that characters in *As For Me and My House are*

their voices. In the opening pages of the novel, for instance, we are introduced to a veritable Tower of Babel. The redoubtable Mrs. Finley is "thin-voiced, thin-featured" (5) and, as we discover along with Mrs. Bentley, thin-mannered as well. Her twins are extensions of her own self-righteous piety: "their voices tolled with such sonority" (6) while reciting grace. Paul Kirby, in marked contrast, is introduced to us as a "quiet-spoken young man" (7) whose imaginative power is suggested by his capacity to hear voices in his empty schoolroom. Judith West is christened by Mrs. Bentley "the only voice" in the choir (11), whose gift for musical expression accompanies a painful shyness and verbal awkwardness. When Judith's infatuation with Philip grows, however, she seems to inherit his own dry, ungiving voice. "I asked her to sing," recalls Mrs. Bentley, "and her voice was the same [as her speaking voice], not strong and full as usual, but constrained, lifeless" (91). In contrast, the voice of conventional piety is embodied in Mrs. Downie, the stereotypic clergyman's wife who visits the Bentleys along with her conventional mate; her voice is appropriately described as "a teaspoon tinkling in a china cup" (82). The voice of Philip, as one might expect, assumes a myriad disguises; the adjectives "neat and brittle," "harsh, contentious," "strangely compliant," and "dry and unrevealing" (15, 61, 117, 146) indicate that Mrs. Bentley's most challenging task in her diary is to discover the true voice of Philip and thus, the true Philip. Encompassing this Tower of Babel, therefore, one finds one solitary voice: the voice of Mrs. Bentley, rendered even more immediate through Ross's use of the diary form — the voice of the seeker.

Beyond this simple interplay between silence and voices, however, Ross's novel is fundamentally concerned with the clash between verbal and non-verbal methods of expression. This clash begins, significantly, on the very first page of *As For Me and My House*, with a seemingly innocuous (if mildly reproving) suggestion by a new parishoner, Miss Twill: "Other ministers we've had have considered the musical part of the service rather important. Of course, if it doesn't matter to you whether the hymns are in keeping with the text or not—" (3). In fact, the entire inner life of the Bentleys might be considered a clash between "hymn" and "text," that is, between non-verbal and verbal expression. The novel chronicles the attempts of the Bentleys to make "hymn" and "text," intuition and reason, feeling and expression, coalesce.

One concrete example of the division between the non-verbal and verbal in the Bentleys' marriage is their contrasting interests in music and books. Mrs. Bentley's search for consolation and self-expression in music (albeit with the soft pedal depressed, in deference to Horizon listeners) contrasts tellingly with Philip's self-imposed isolation with his books. Whereas Mrs. Bentley does at least derive some satisfaction — as well as communion with other music lovers such as Mrs. Bird and Steve — Philip's verbal pursuit is a solitary one. Moreover, Mrs. Bentley often discovers upon entering the study that Philip has not been reading but sketching. The non-verbal, like the subconscious, so to speak, will have its "say." Fittingly, then, these two conflicting pursuits form the basis for the Bentleys' "fresh start" at the end of the novel; she and Philip will open a music and bookstore.

On a more basic level, the conversational pattern of the Bentleys might be described as a veritable pitched battle between the verbal and the non-verbal. Typically, that is, Mrs. Bentley will express a concern or an opinion, only to be

met by a non-verbal expression which effectively seals off any further attempt at conversation. Two examples of this pattern appear one immediately after the other on one page of *As For Me and My House*:

> I try to tell him, sometimes, that he earns it [his salary], that he doesn't need to feel ashamed or look upon himself as a kind of parasite . . . I know — and he knows — but when I've said it all he looks at me quickly, then away . . .
>
> . . . I flare sometimes, ask why we can't live decently like other people, but it never helps. He just winces a little, looks at me quickly, then away again. (9)

Thus the oft-repeated scenario, wherein Mrs. Bentley utters a stinging comment and Philip slams the study door follows precisely this pattern, the slam of the door acting as the finalizing period of a written sentence.

The conjunction of the spoken and non-spoken has not always been the occasion of frustration and division in the Bentleys' lives. Music, for Mrs. Bentley, has always been inseparable in her mind from the night of her recital years ago, when her playing actually provoked a verbal response from Philip: a proposal of marriage. Nevertheless, the night of the Ladies Aid play in Horizon becomes a failed encore for Mrs. Bentley. On this occasion, her non-verbal attempts to recapture Philip's affections through her music suffer drastically in the translation when Philip believes that the intended recepient is not himself but Paul. Almost in pained remembrance of the words and music which brought them together over twelve years ago, Mrs. Bentley's sole thought after this recital is, "There was silence now" (144).

Philip's struggle with the word and a non-verbal art form is summed up neatly in Mrs. Bentley's words, "a preacher instead of a painter," which are reiterated by Paul: "Later he wondered bluntly how any man would rather preach than paint" (16, 91). Ross's emphasis of this duality — rendered all the more noticeable through the masterful alliteration of "preaching" and "painting" — resurfaces at various points in the novel. Philip is continually shown torn between two ways of expressing his experience. When Mrs. Bentley mentions the whiteness of Judith's face to Philip, he "tries to find words to describe it, and wonders could it be put on paper" (11). Later, however, we discover that Philip is no more at ease in the visual element:

> It's Judith tonight he's drawing. Or rather, trying to draw, for the strange swift whiteness of her face eludes him. The floor is littered with torn-up, crumpled sketches. He's out of himself, wrestling. (24)

As this passage suggests, Philip is a Jacob figure, wrestling with the image of his white angel. Yet this white face which eludes him is also his own face, for Judith is, as D. G. Jones suggests, a part of Philip which he and society have repressed: the wild, the "feral" (38).[4]

Whereas Philip does at least give voice to his frustrations in his sketches of ferocious congregations and of false-fronted buildings being battered by the remorseless prairie wind, his solitary attempt at verbal art meets with resounding failure. This "clumsy manuscript," as Mrs. Bentley refers to it, seems to betray the very flaw which perverts Philip's personality — a narrow self-scrutiny: "That was what spoiled it, himself, the painful, sometimes bitter reality. . . . There's another reality, kindlier, that he's never seen or understood. It's his way to look through himself, always to see just the skeleton" (29). Combined with this Puritan obsession with self-scrutiny within Philip is a sense of duty which utterly destroys any spontaneity or imagination: ". . . instead of trying to make his story popular and salable, he pushed it on somberly the way he felt it ought

to go" (33). Such a description is certainly more appropriate to a sermon than to a piece of imaginative writing and Philip accordingly becomes a writer of sermons rather than a writer of novels. Moreover, one senses at certain points Philip's resentment against his more spontaneous, verbal wife; as Mrs. Bentley remarks of the failed book, "Even I might have done it better" (29) — an opinion to which the reader must assent, on the strength of her role as articulate diarist. Later, when Philip surprises Mrs. Bentley in the act of showing his sketches to Mrs. Bird, he voices this sense of inferiority: "I don't speak well enough for myself. That's it, isn't it? You have to put in a word for me" (88-89).

Although it might seem convenient at this point to label Philip as non-verbal and Mrs. Bentley as verbal in orientation, Ross does not allow us to draw such confident, absolute distinctions. For instance, in her relationship to Paul's sister-in-law Laura, Mrs. Bentley represents the non-verbal, the inhibited, rather than the verbally liberated. Laura, for example, does not hesitate to confront Philip, even on the mundane matter of wearing a hat while in the sun. Notably, too, Laura is a mimic, a user of words, who imitates the pious, public face of Mrs. Bentley "at a Ladies Aid meeting, leading in prayer" (95). Although evidently irked by this performance at the time, Mrs. Bentley can nevertheless later acknowledge that "Maybe Laura helped us. We ddn't like it when she sneered, but she was right. We said to ourselves she was just loud and common, but she saw us pretty well for what we are" (107). Mrs. Bentley, in striking contrast, often bites back words which might resolve misunderstandings (her concealment of the knowledge that Philip fathered Judith's baby is the most glaring example). As though in conscious opposition to Mrs. Bentley's verbal concealments (represented by Ross' concealment of her familiar, Christian name), we are pointedly informed of Laura that the cowboys "call her familiarly by name" (93). Thus, the degree to which Ross's characters are verbal or non-verbal may shift, in order to reveal a complex truth: that the human being is capable both of candour and of concealment.

* * *

Apart from the collisions of verbal and non-verbal expression which mirror the marital "collisions" of *As For Me and My House*, Ross also examines various sources of verbal and non-verbal power in themselves. In the former category are various examples of how human beings rely upon the word. Most conspicuous in this regard is Paul Kirby's etymological fervour. Critics of the novel have tended either to ignore or to ridicule Paul; Donald Stephens dismisses him as the "least faceted and least successful character of the story"[5] and R. D. Chambers denounces him as "pedantic and sexless."[6] Only W. H. New is willing to allow that "Paul's continuing habit of uttering etymological facts, which seems almost gratuitous in the novel at times, is not thematically unrelated."[7] New then proceeds to associate Paul's derivation of the word "pagan" with the motifs of nature and faith. In fact, when considered in the light of the linguistic theme of *As For Me and My House*, Paul becomes not only a significant but a more complex character than one might suspect; a man whose pedantry has troubling causes and whose sexuality is partially hidden by a smoke screen of words.

If one closely examines Paul's philological disquisitions, one becomes acutely aware of the word's power to conceal as well as to reveal. The first word which Paul traces for Mrs. Bentley denotes a concept which is at the very heart of *As*

For Me and My House: "Did you know that offertory comes from a word meaning sacrifice?" (8). Not only Mrs. Bentley's acceptance of Judith's baby, but Paul's silent love for Mrs. Bentley will prove major instances of sacrifice in the novel. Philology becomes for Paul a means of indirect verbal expression; his definition of the word "company," "the ones you break bread with" (35), both continues the sacrificial imagery and reveals his essential loneliness and need for acceptance. Soon, however, one senses the carefully constructed philological barriers beginning to weaken; in a moment of enthusiasm Paul informs Mrs. Bentley that Cupid "has given us *cupidity*, Eros, *erotic*, Venus, *venereal*, and Aphrodite, *aphrodisiac*" (76). Regardless of verbal clutter, the message could hardly be clearer. As Mrs. Bentley shrewdly observes, Paul is a man "with a streak of poetry in him posing as philology" — an "enthusiasm" which "oughtn't to be taken too literally" (45). Mrs. Bentley's punning reference to taking Paul's philology literally should serve to alert the reader that there is much more than mere pedantry to be found in Paul's philological musings. Poetry and philology are contending as fiercely within him as painting and preaching are within Philip.

Other characters in *As For Me and My House* betray a faith in a word which is not linguistic but holy. The impoverished congregation at Partridge Hill, for example, are less interested in the verbal niceties of Philip's sermon than in the sound of their own voices singing, "trying to assert themselves, to insist upon their own meaning and importance" in the face of a hostile, windswept landscape (19). Despite the hardships they face, they are nevertheless an extremely communicative group; they stand in clusters after the service, "discussing crops and gardens" (19). One notes that the members of Philip's Horizon congregation, in contrast, are rarely shown exchanging anything but verbal daggers.

For Philip, the Holy Word is imbued with ambiguities and tensions. Mrs. Bentley's dream, wherein Philip is at the pulpit "searching vainly for his text" (15), might arguably represent Philip's relationship to the Holy Writ and to the ministry in general. A veritable study in contrasts is the Reverend Mr. Downie's relationship to holy expressions: "He said a word of prayer for us, and finished radiant" (82). The source of Philip's frustration is his scrupulous fear of hypocrisy; as Mrs. Bentley explains, "He still handicaps himself with a guilty feeling that he ought to mean everything he says" (4). Mrs. Bentley, in comparison, reveals herself willing to pervert the word in the interest of a worthy cause; of her arguments to the town in defence of their adoption of Paul, she impishly admits that "I parried them, cool and patient, piety to my finger tips. It was the devil quoting scripture maybe, but it worked" (61). Unlike Philip, too, Mrs. Bentley is able to separate the town's accepted connotation of the Word from her own, without feeling any compunction to close the gap: "This is a fundamentalist town. To the letter it believes the Old Testament stories that we, wisely or presumptuously, choose to accept only as tales and allegories" (111). It is Philip's tragedy as a minister and as a human being, that he cannot distinguish the Word from his own private "word."

Related to Philip's hypocrisy is the concept of the misuse of the word, which one witnesses in a myriad variations in *As For Me and My House*. The Bentleys, for instance, are chronic prearrangers of words; Philip's opening sermon is always the same "stalwart, four-square, Christian sermon" (4), obviously aimed to

please the "stalwart, four-square" Christians of each Horizon he encounters. On a domestic level, Mrs. Bentley often rehearses speeches designed to appease Philip (15, 87), rather than giving a free rein to her own feelings of frustrations. Both Bentleys, then, practise their own brands of verbal play-acting.

Words in the novel are often misapplied and used inappropriately, such as those which adorn the shingle outside the Bentley home: "As For Me and My House — the House of Bentley — We Will Serve the Lord" (61) — a sign significantly echoing the stale, prearranged sermon which Philip perfunctorily delivers almost every year. An ironic counterpart to this verbal misuse is the sign chosen by the town hoodlums to adorn the stolen privy of the Bentleys, which is placed appropriately in front of the church: "Come Unto Me All Ye That Labor and Are Heavy Laden" (13). Such examples of the inappropriate use of pious language reflect a more serious incongruity: that which Philip feels between his professions and reality. When a Partridge Hill woman berates Philip for his talk of compassion, when her family is scrambling to survive, Philip can only reply, "You never mind — I'd no right saying such things anyway" (113).

A further misuse of the word is more prevalent among Philip's regular congregation: the use of words as weapons. Mrs. Finlay truly assumes the role of the devil quoting scripture when she comments on the Bentleys' adoption of El Greco (and, by implication, of Steve), "what Christians we were, taking in every stray that comes along" (82). On the domestic level, the Bentleys' words — whenever they aren't being repressed — are often designed to conceal or to hurt. On hearing of Judith's pregnancy, Philip frames a conventionally pious response which in his mouth turns sour and hypocritical: "It's the kind like that, who slip just once" (147). For her part, Mrs. Bentley makes use of the same occasion to launch her own verbal "missile": "Sometimes it's the mild, innocent kind that are the sly ones" (147). She, at least, openly confesses her hypocrisy: "I had to speak that way, just like any other safely married matron" (147). Predictably, then, this web of double meanings and hypocrisy finally explodes at the end of the novel, to the accompaniment of the deadliest verbal "missiles": "And then, slow and deliberate at first, gradually quickening, his contempt and bitterness found words. Words that stung me . . ." (163). Thus enraged, Mrs. Bentley returns the verbal attack, but this time not with slander nor *double entendre*, but with the simple truth: "Your baby!" (163). Appropriately, then, as the novel closes, after this dramatic scene of confrontation and understanding, the Bentley shingle with its hypocritical words comes down, like the false fronts of the Main Street. The Bentleys are servants of the town — and slaves of language — no longer. Rather, the novel ends with Mrs. Bentley's clear-eyed acceptance of a verbal and emotional ambiguity; she will most certainly mix up the two Philips, giving one the love which she has tried to give the other, but maintains nevertheless: "That's right, Philip. I want it so" (164).

* * *

The sources of non-verbal power in the novel are no less varied. First and foremost among them is the awesome, indecipherable force of Nature, which often seems to appropriate to itself the power of speech. In the silent aftermath of a quarrel, for instance, the "crushed, steady murmur" of rain on the roof is Mrs. Bentley's only conversational partner — and an unintelligible one at that (27). Elsewhere, one notes the defeat of

words by the overriding power of the wind. At Partridge Hill, Mrs. Bentley notes, "They were listening to the wind, not Philip" (37). Even the master of verbal art, Paul, is silenced: "Not the history or derivation of a single word" (38). Sermon and etymology alike fall before the voiceless wind; only Judith is able to match the non-verbal forces outside with those within, her song. More often, however, the wind serves to remind man of the powerlessness of human expression; Mrs. Bentley likens it at one point to "someone with dry lips trying to whistle" (69).

Turning to the human sphere, Philip's headlong flight into pure formalism might be considered another aspect of the non-verbal in *As For Me and My House*. I mentioned earlier that Philip had taken refuge in the visual icon of his father's photograph, attaching to it whatever meanings suited his own aspirations. Later, we realize that Philip has, in fact, elevated this practise to the level of an artistic credo: "According to Philip it's form that's important in a picture, not the subject or the associations that the subject calls to mind; the pattern you see, not the *literary* emotion you feel" (80, emphasis mine). Philip carries his credo to its logical conclusion when he asserts that "A good way to test a picture is to turn it upside down. That knocks all the sentiment out of it, leaves you with just the design and form" (154). One senses that Philip would earnestly wish his marriage to be a work of formalist art as well: no verbalizing, no motive-hunting, nor sentimentalizing — just the existential fact. Nevertheless, Mrs. Bentley rejects Philip's cold artistic aims by refusing to allow her marriage to be turned upside down and accepted as a mere skeleton devoid of deeper meaning. Rather, she searches beneath Philip's words, refusing to see her husband (in the words of contemporary criticism) as an antiseptic "signifier" devoid of a "signified." "I wished that Philip could mean his prayers," she comments at one point, and later: "Lawson made me wish that Philip could preach a sermon with more comfort and conviction in it. I think Philip wished it himself today. There was something different in his voice . . ." (108).

That Philip is associated with signs, with isolated "signifiers" (and one recalls the hypocritical nature of the physical signs in *As For Me and My House*) is made clear by his repeated association with gestures. Of course, there are his repeated gestures, much deplored by critics of the novel: turning white, pressing his thin lips together and stalking haughtily to his study, slamming the door. One recalls as well that Mrs. Bentley's dream of Philip in the pulpit, unable to find his text, ends with a gesture: Philip's hurling the Bible into the thick of the conregation. Similarly, his opening sermon to the town is less a verbal meditation than a defiant gesture: "It nails his colors to the mast," says Mrs. Bentley (4). Thus, one is prepared for Philip's resorting to an *act* of defiance when all verbal attempts at reconciling his marital difficulties falter: his act of seducing Judith West. Conversely, his eventual reconciliation with Mrs. Bentley is accompanied not by earnest discussion, but by a gesture which he performs towards their new son: "Philip just stands and looks and looks at him, and puts his cheek down close to the little hands, and tells me that way how much I must forget" (164).

As the preceding example reveals, non-verbal communication in *As For Me and My House* contains a potential both for good and for evil. Mrs. Bentley's music, the intuitive knowledge and blushes of Judith and Philip, the shared conspiracy of the forbidden pipe in the early years

of the Bentley marriage and the pre-verbal state of their adopted son are all instances of communication in a non-verbal fashion. Nevertheless, each of these examples has a negative counterpart in the novel: Mrs. Bentley uses her music "to let Philip see how easily if I wanted to I could take the boy away from him" (47); the non-verbal laugh of Judith in the night almost destroys Mrs. Bentley; the pipe becomes the occasion of a fierce argument between the Bentleys (14) and, of course, the healthy baby who is "mostly lungs and diapers" (164), according to Mrs. Bentley, finds his counterpart in the silent, stillborn first child of the Bentleys.

This dual image of the stillborn child and the crying child sums up, to a large extent, the basic polarities of the novel: despair and hope, death and life, and particularly, the non-verbal and the (potentially) verbal. One might say that the child represents the "better nature" of the Bentleys, once lost and stillborn but now stirring and preparing for a new life. In this final symbol of the novel, too, the importance attached to the word in *As For Me and My Hoose* is unremitting; the Bentley child becomes a palpable symbol of the fusion of the verbal and non-verbal: "The Word made flesh."

NOTES

[1] Sinclair Ross, *As For Me and My House*, intro. Roy Daniells (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1941; rpt. 1957), p. 76.

[2] William H. New, "Sinclair Ross's Ambivalent World," *Canadian Literature*, no. 40 Spring 1969), p. 31.

[3] See Sandra Djwa, "No Other Way: Sinclair Ross's Stories and Novels," *Canadian Literature*, no. 47 (Winter 1971), pp. 49-66. Professor Djwa points out that the name Philip suggests Philip the evangelist, who was converted from idolatry (hence the association with Philip the worshipper of icons).

[4] D. G. Jones, *Butterfly on Rock: A Study of Themes and Images in Canadian Literature* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1970), pp. 41-42.

[5] Donald Stephens, "Wind, Sun and Dust," *Canadian Literature*, no. 23 (Winter 1965), p. 23.

[6] R. D. Chambers, *Sinclair Ross and Ernest Buckler* (Toronto and Montreal: Copp Clark/McGill-Queen's, 1975), p. 34.

[7] W. H. New, p. 29.

LORRAINE M. YORK

SINCLAIR ROSS'S PIONEER FICTION

WHEN NEAR THE BEGINNING of Sinclair Ross' *Sawbones Memorial* (1974) Caroline Gillespie asserts that "'I married into a family of pioneers and unsung heroes, and that's where I'm going to stay married,'"[1] she is speaking with playful pride to old Doc Hunter of her marriage to Duncan Gillespie, Upward's leading citizen. A British war-bride, she was first attracted to "the great Canadian Unknown" by Dunc's stories about his Grandmother Robinson's travails on the frontier, tales romanticizing her pioneer spirit. Doc Hunter, a pioneer himself by virtue of forty-five years of medical service to Upward, moderates Caroline's idealized image of Ida Robinson by suggesting that the old frontierswoman's real achievement was that "'she didn't just survive, she came through with her head up, telling a joke on herself, ready for more'" (30). Doc's reminiscences document the severity of frontier life, recalling the ethos of both *The Lamp at Noon and Other Stories* and *As For Me and My House*. Indeed, with *Sawbones Memorial* Ross's fiction comes full circle, as he returns to the Saskatchewan of his earlier writings to interpret the pioneer experience from another imaginative perspective and in yet another literary mode. My purpose here is to

trace Ross's use in his major works of the three literary modes, tragedy, irony, comedy, and to suggest how the evocations of each reveal the complexity of his analysis of and response to the pioneer experience as an exemplum of the human condition generally.

The grim reality that Doc Hunter recalls — the poverty, illness, isolation, and despair endured by the early settlers — is writ large in *The Lamp at Noon and Other Stories* (1968), a collection of short stories written in the tragic mode and published separately between 1934 and 1952.[2] Three stories in particular, "Not by Rain Alone," "The Lamp at Noon," and "A Field of Wheat," give the pioneer experience more graphic expression than even Doc alludes to. Together, these stories comprise a rough chronology of a prairie farmer's life from the promise of courtship and birth to the hopelessness of premature ageing and death. "Not by Rain Alone" opens with the impetuousness of youth as yet undaunted by the scorching sun and the "dusty-yellow monochrome haze" that covers the "wheat and fallow land and ripening rye."[3] Will, a young man of twenty-one, surveys his sturdy green wheat and prays for rain and a good harvest, "so that he might ask Eleanor to marry him, give her the things she deserved" (53). While working the pump to water his horses, he considers the type of life they can actually look forward to. His thoughts turn instinctively to his mother and he recalls that in her life

> There were always stones — like the pump and the mortgage — even after twenty years. Each spring the frost and the thaw heaved another litter from the bitch-like earth. They pried and made heaps of them, pried and made heaps of them — always there were more. And she too had pried, wincing on the crowbar just as on the pump. A wiry, wizened little woman, with tight grim lips, and work-thin, stubborn hands. He remembered this afternoon — thinking of Eleanor again, asking himself whether he would want to offer her the same. (54)

A sense of inevitability is evoked through implicit analogy as Will's attention turns next to his black mare Bess. After only two years of labour in the fields, she has grown wiry like his mother had, her former stature greatly diminished. And as he enters his muggy, unkempt kitchen, the cracked, sagging wallpaper reminds him of the argument between his parents over the few cents it had cost to buy it, an argument that left a "welt of bitterness" across their lives. But he exorcises these depressing memories with youthful determination and dons his Sunday best to court Eleanor, pushing the fear of what they might become safely into the background and thinking again of rain. That afternoon, Eleanor agrees to marry him whether the harvest is plentiful or not, and they seal their promise while dark thunderclouds appear on the horizon, a symbol at once hopeful and foreboding.

Within a year of their marriage, all prospects for happiness are abruptly curtailed. An early September blizzard forces Will to round up the cattle. In a high-pitched, irritable voice Eleanor begs him not to leave her alone in the house: "'I wish you wouldn't go — all you think about is crops and cows. . . . It's the wind, that's all — waiting for you and watching it get dark'" (61). She is about to deliver their first child, but true to the land and to his own dream — "'I'm selling the steers next week. If they're out all night running with the storm they'll lose weight.'" (61) — Will rides off promising not to be long. His promise is empty, because the cows refuse to be herded, Bess unexpectedly bolts back to the stable, and the driving snow compels him to burrow into a straw stack to survive the night. Under the psychological strain of the storm Eleanor fares

badly. Will returns in the morning to find the kitchen door open and snow drifted two feet above the threshold. A faint moan leads him to the bedroom where she is lying on the bed, "half-undressed, her face twisted in a kind of grin, the forehead shining as if the skull-bones were trying to burst through the skin" (66). The baby is born sometime after noon and at three o'clock Eleanor dies. Stunned by this turn of events, Will walks to the door, where he sees the cattle straggling home on their own. Through the hushed silence he hears the baby cry and feels a twinge of recognition. "He seemed to be listening to the same plaintiveness and protest that had been in Eleanor's voice of late. An impulse seized him to see and hold his baby; but just for a minute longer he stood there, looking out across the sun-spangled snow, listening" (67).

Thus, plaintiveness and protest repeat themselves in conjunction with the seasons, as Ross's characters continue to hold out against a hostile environment. Their individual miseries are highlighted by the tragic mode in which their stories are written, a mode whereby nature assumes the personality of an angry, vengeful presence bent on destruction. Particularly affected by this tragic circumstance are the women who, as Lorraine McMullen has pointed out, are most often "trapped in their houses alone in blizzard or sandstorm . . . more isolated and more helpless against the elements than their husbands."[4] This is true of Ellen in "The Lamp at Noon," as she seeks to convince her husband Paul to abandon the farm and thereby end a fruitless nine-year struggle with the soil. The debate, we gather, is an old one. Ellen's solution is for Paul to work in her father's store; his is to hang on and ply the earth for a few more years. In this instance, the argument is fueled by a three-day dust storm that literally cages Ellen in the house with the baby and Paul in the shed with the livestock, an arid gulf of blowing sand between them. The atmosphere is claustrophobic for both characters, but Paul, engaged in mending harness, finds solace among the horses, whose loyalty simultaneously comforts him and upbraids him with his present failure: "For wasn't it true — nine years a farmer now on his own land, and still he couldn't even feed his horses? What, then, could he hope to do for his wife and son?" (20); and again, "Five years since he married her, were they to go on repeating themselves, five, ten, twenty, until all the brave future he looked forward to was but a stark and futile past?" (20). For her part, Ellen paces the floor like a trapped animal, throat so tight it aches, eyes frightened and glazed, listening to the howling wind and frantically longing to "break away and run" (19).

Alone in the shed, Paul patches together his dream of success as he stitches and rivets the harnesses, which tragically represent the agency for realizing his dream and the fetters that bind him to the barren land. Hope kindles again, and determined to reclaim his farm from the wilderness he promises himself to heed Ellen's suggestion about rotating the crops. Appropriately, the wind begins to slacken, reflecting externally the emotional calm Paul now feels. But his is a false hope, for unknown to him Ellen's mind has snapped at the height of the storm and she has indeed broken away and run off with the baby. The utter waste that confronts him when he leaves the shed is therefore more profound than he at first realizes; the black, naked devastation more than even he has dared to anticipate: "Suddenly, like the fields he was naked. Everything that had sheathed him a little from the realities of existence: vision and purpose, faith in the land, in the future, in himself — is all rent now, stripped away" (22). The de-

serted kitchen, the empty cradle, and the extinguished lamp forebode the extent of his calamity, which is confirmed when he comes upon Ellen in the fields "crouched down against a drift of sand as if for shelter, her hair in matted strands around her neck and face, the child clasped tightly in her arms" (22-23). The baby is dead and Ellen's wide, immobile stare indicates that her release from reality is no less permanent than her child's; Paul's earlier premonition that "not a blade would last the storm" is mercilessly fulfilled with regard to the crops and his family. Numbed into submission, he lifts his wife and son into his arms, struggles to his feet, and turns toward home, his only sin being that he dared to dream too positively of the future.

Paul and Ellen's predicament is but another chapter in a continuing saga of frustration and failed dreams in Ross's fiction. The human tragedy is duplicated in "A Field of Wheat," as Martha looks forward to a bumper crop. Her hope is set bravely against the memory of previous years when the wheat had survived its initial growing period:

> perhaps the rain came, June, July, even into August, hope climbing, wish-patterns painted on the future. And then one day a clench and tremble to John's hand; his voice faltering, dull. Grasshoppers perhaps, sawflies or rust; no matter, they would grovel for a while, stand back helpless, then go on again. Go on in bitterness and cowardice, because there was nothing else but going on. (74)

The controlling factor in their lives, she observes, has always been the wheat. And now, after years of hardship, it is all that remains between her and her husband: "John was gone, love was gone; there was only wheat" (74). But even this realization does not subvert a brief flicker of hope — for her children, for herself: "It was the children now, Joe and Annabelle: this winter perhaps they could send them to school in town and let them take music lessons. . . . The children must come first, but she and John — mightn't there be a little of life left for them too?" (75).

Martha's folly is that she, like Paul, dares to dream again this year. Retribution is correspondingly swift and sure in the form of an ominous darkness that obscures the blue sky: "There it was — the hail again — the same white twisting little cloud against the black one — just as she had seen it four years ago" (77). Like the dust in "The Lamp at Noon," the hail pummels the crops and invades the house to render its destruction complete. This time, the storm exacts no physical human sacrifice, but the sight of Nipper, the family dog, beaten lifeless by the hail seems equally tragic in the light of the children's utter shock and disbelief. And certainly the loss is ponderous in terms of faith in the land and in the future, for nothing of that remains:

> Nothing but the glitter of sun or hailstones. Nothing but their wheat crushed into little rags of muddy slime. Here and there an isolated straw standing bolt upright in headless defiance. Martha and John walked to the far end of the field. . . . Even as waste it was indomitable. It tethered them to itself, so that they could not feel or comprehend. It had come and gone, that was all; before its tremendousness and havoc they were prostrate. They had not yet risen to cry out or protest. (80)

Martha rises falteringly to sweep away the remnants of the storm, to piece together her dream, but determination gives way to rebellion and she stalks out to the barn to inform John that she has had enough. When she reaches the stable, she is frightened to see her husband sobbing against the neck of one of the horses: "He had always been so strong and grim; had just kept on as if he couldn't feel, as if there were a bull's hide over him, and now he was beaten"

(82). Cognizant for the first time that this "slow, inarticulate man" had himself dared to dream, Martha quickly hurries back to the house and, like one of the isolated straws standing bolt upright in headless defiance, sets about to prepare John the best supper she can, fully aware that "this winter they wouldn't have so much as an onion or potato" (82).

Not all of the women in Ross's short stories are as desperate as Ellen or as brave as Martha, and not all of the men are as consistently unlucky as Paul or John, but all come from the same pioneer stock and cling to variations of the same dream. For example, Martha's ambition to have her children properly educated is realized by Tom's mother in "Cornet at Night," mainly because she has sufficient time and funds to maintain an orderly household and supervise his music and bible studies. Tom's father, though subject like all of Ross's farmers to the exigencies of nature, is prosperous enough to employ hired hands at harvest time. Similarly, the narrator's parents in "The Runaway" are now living comfortably by dint of years of patience and hard work. But even this limited prosperity has its price, a price exacted, as always, by the land itself. The cornet stirs feelings in Tom's parents that can never be indulged, for on a farm "you always have to put the harvest first" (51). And the narrator in "The Runaway" perceives how the new team of Diamond horses revitalizes his hitherto work-worn parents: "They were young again. My father had a dream of Diamonds, and my mother had something that his envious passion for them had taken from her twenty years ago" (86). A more familiar circumstance, though, is Jenny's mother's bitter tirade against her husband in "Circus in Town": "'Wrong? You — and the farm — and the debts — that's what's wrong. There's a circus in town, but do we go? Do we ever go anywhere?" (69). And Anne's infidelity with Steven in "The Painted Door" derives likewise from the frustration of living with "a slow, unambitious man, content with his farm and cattle" (100): her misfortune is that she acknowledges her love for John too late; her punishment is his death in the blizzard. John's death emphasizes the sense of tragedy that pervades the short stories. The principal forces of destruction are the elements themselves, but because they are external and inscrutable the struggle against them, though often heroic, is unavailing.

* * *

The general pattern of unfulfilled marriages characterized by the plodding, unsuccessful husband and the despondent, neglected wife is expanded upon in Ross's first novel, *As For Me and My House* (1941). Lorraine McMullen notes that one essential similarity between Mr. and Mrs. Bentley and their fictional predecessors[5] is Philip's habit of making his marriage bearable "by preserving the same dour, grim-lipped silence as Ross's struggling farmers. Whereas they escape from their wives to the barn, he escapes from his wife into his study."[6] Despite this and other significant correspondences, the chief difference between *The Lamp at Noon and Other Stories* and *As For Me and My House* remains one of tone, for the latter is written not in the tragic but in the ironic mode. Unlike their rural counterparts in the short stories, the Bentleys' struggle is internalized, their concern being less with physical than with emotional survival. Accordingly, nature proves more a psychological trial than a threat to life as the Bentleys are mocked and battered by the elements — the "thin, disheartening drizzle" (7) that greets their arrival in Horizon; the wind-blown sand that reels up the street "in stinging little scuds"

(37) and more than once drives Mrs. Bentley from the house; the heat, alternately "dry and deadly like a drill" (90), "dense and sickly" (113), "heavy and suffocating" (117); and the snow, "bitter, implacable" (148). Moreover, their discontent springs from the failure of crops in the metaphoric sense. Their only child is stillborn, Philip's early attempt at a novel is an exhausting failure, and Mrs. Bentley's pathetic little flower gardens shrivel and die as regularly as her promises to reform her small-town mentality. So the Bentleys move on: "Tillsonborough, Kelby, Crow Coulee — now Horizon. There hasn't been much change, either in the towns or in us" (33). As with Ellen and Paul, John and Martha, life for the Bentleys repeats itself with predictable monotony: "Twelve years with him now, quiet, eventless years, each like the one before it, and still what is between us is precarious" (10).

The precariousness of which Mrs. Bentley complains is virtually a condition of life in Ross's fictional world. His farmers struggle against it daily and the Bentleys confront it head on in their own lives and in those of the "sober, work-roughened congregation" at Partridge Hill, who respond through the church hymns to the "grim futility" of their lives: "Five years in succession now they've been blown out, dried out, hailed out; and it was as if in the face of so blind and uncaring a universe they were trying to assert themselves, to insist upon their own meaning and importance" (19). This human impulse, Paul Kirby explains to Mrs. Bentley, is the source of all religion, since man is unable to admit to his own insignificance and therefore creates gods to control his life. In a sense, Mrs. Bentley's life, as revealed in her journal, is just such an attempt to assert her importance as woman, wife, and mother while Philip, who rallies to life grudgingly at her insistence, seems more inclined to accept his failure and insignificance as an artist and a man, in atonement for his hypocrisy in having entered the church. Despite her efforts toward self-assertion, though, Mrs. Bentley's insignificance is as manifest as her husband's, and by clinging to Philip she ironically clings to religion as tenaciously as the poor farmers at Partridge Hill.

The congregation at Partridge Hill, and the Lawson family in particular, mirrors the Bentleys' futile existence. The Lawsons' marriage as perceived by Mrs. Bentley follows the familiar pattern of the "sharp, stirring, rather pretty woman, hurrying and managing her long lean husband like a yelping little terrier round a plodding Clyde" (20). To Mrs. Bentley, Joe Lawson looks much like Philip: "He has the same turn and gestures, the same slow strength . . . the same look of stillness in his eyes" (20). She also identifies intuitively with Mrs. Lawson's exasperation with her "plodding Clyde": "What woman doesn't like being exasperated with a man and finding that he pays no heed, pitting herself against him, finding him too strong for her" (20). But the Bentleys' kinship with the Lawsons and the other farmers at Partridge Hill is based on more than just spiritual empathy, as Mrs. Bentley realizes. Years of hardship have taught her the full irony of their situation, how completely their own well-being is tied to the success of the crops: "I sit thinking about the dust, the farmers and the crops, wondering what another dried-out year will mean for us" (39). The irony culminates when she and Philip lose Steve less than two weeks after the Lawsons' crippled son Peter dies.

The implication is that life for the Bentleys is not qualitatively different from life for the farmers. Townspeople and farmers alike learn lessons in isolation and despair, though to be sure the latter endure a physical isolation not ex-

perienced by the former, whose alienation remains primarily psychological. The distinction here is between tragedy and irony and relates closely to character motivation and integrity. The farmers' commitment to their land is complete and honest, so that each additional life-threatening setback intensifies their tragedy. The Bentleys, on the other hand, are patently hypocritical in their lifestyle and relationship, choosing to perpetuate their discontent for lack of the courage to end it. Their self-imposed martyrdom is clearly ironic given Philip's unwillingness to demand his back pay and Mrs. Bentley's desire, despite her protestations to the contrary, to have him remain just as he is.

An appreciation of the fictional mode in which *As For Me and My House* is written should promote a clearer understanding of Mrs. Bentley's journal. Irony is an intellectual mode highlighting rational and emotional incompatibilities, which are revealed through simple juxtaposition or the direct analysis of events. The principal danger for the educated mind is that while it is the most adept at perceiving the irony of a situation, it can easily succumb to substituting analysis for concrete action. Thus, Paul Kirby, the school teacher who responds to life through his study of words, and Philip, whose paintings serve a similar function, seem unable to extricate themselves from Horizon's stifling influence. And certainly Mrs. Bentley's journal represents an ongoing process of self-examination, which proves equally debilitating insofar as its overwhelming subjectivity generates self-pity and subsequent inertia. Nevertheless, the act of writing her journal is at least as therapeutic as it is self-indulgent, because it staves off madness and keeps the dream alive.

It might be said of all Ross's characters that the ability to dream is the ability to pick up the pieces and go on living; the dream, usually one of happiness and success, serves as a buffer against everyday reality. The resulting tension between illusion and reality is illustrated in Philip's response to his parents: "His father all this time belonged to the escape world of his imagination, and his mother to the drab, sometimes sordid reality of the restaurant" (30). Philip's dream therefore has been to emulate his father and becomes a painter. At first, the church provided a convenient means to achieve his ambition, but "hard years and poor appointments" (33), together with an ill-conceived marriage, have perpetuated his enslavement. A morose peevishness and slammed doors are his only defence against disillusionment and hypocrisy. Mrs. Bentley relinquished her dream of becoming a concert pianist when she married Philip, but her capacity to keep hope alive is greater than her husband's. Accordingly, after the death of their child, Philip's novel represents cause for renewed hope: "I used to say to myself, "By the time the poppies are out he'll have his book half-written. By the first snow he'll have reached the end. Next spring maybe we'll be away'" (44). When that dream fails too, there is a hiatus of several years, then Steve arrives: "Even though he doesn't last himself, Steve may bring Philip back where he belongs. Initiative, belief in himself — that's all he needs. . . . We may be packing our trunks and taking leave of Horizon sooner than we think" (53). When Steve is taken from her, there is still Philip and her resolution to save a thousand dollars: "I feel determined tonight. At least it's worth a try. I'll wait, though, till we have a thousand dollars. . . . What Horizon thinks or says — none of it's going to matter. This is to be our last year. It's got to be" (107). And finally, there is Philip and Judith's baby: "Every day my nerves get sharper and tenser. My baby — his baby — all I have

of him. It's going to be a boy, of course, and I'm going to call him Philip too" (158).

Together, the baby and the money signal the possibility of renewal, and the novel ends with the Bentleys preparing to leave Horizon. But the concluding images are ambiguous, casting doubt on the ultimate fulfilment of the dream. A storm blows down the false fronts in the town, and the Bentleys reconcile after an emotional confrontation over Philip's affair with Judith. But just as Joe Lawson's plans for the future die with his young son, and Judith's dream of moving to the city ends with her death in childbirth, the Bentleys' newfound hope appears inevitably doomed. For although Mrs. Bentley detects in the baby's eyes "a stillness, a freshness, a vacancy of beginning" (165), he is nevertheless, as his name and heritage ironically suggest, destined to be another Philip, which is precisely what Mrs. Bentley wants and needs.

* * *

Sawbones Memorial, Ross's last published novel, is a fitting coda to his stories of pioneers and prairie dwellers, for as Lorraine McMullen points out, although Doc Hunter's retirement marks the end of an era, "the old days . . . remain to haunt the present and impinge upon the future" as Doc "takes us once more in memory through the pioneer days, the depression, and the prairie drought."[7] However, both the imaginative perspective and the fictional mode have altered. The tragedy of the short stories and the irony that characterizes Mrs. Bentley's journal are replaced by the wry humour inherent in the mature perspective of a man who has lived a full and useful life in the service of his fellow men. The vagaries of fortune, the hardships of life as a frontier doctor are behind him, but his enduring interest in people, the hallmark of his character and profession, remains. Hence, he presides at his retirement party with good-humoured indulgence, bearing patiently the insincerity of the mean-spirited members of the Ladies' Aid, reminiscing with Harry Hubbs and Caroline Gillespie about the old days, counselling Benny Fox to escape from Upward and create for himself a happier lifestyle, exchanging philosophies with the Reverend Mr. Grimble about the nature and motivation of God, and imploring the townspeople to give their new doctor Nick Miller a fair chance. Doc's response to life in general and to his retirement party in particular places the narrative predominantly in the comic mode.

As the story unfolds through various forms of dialogue and monologue, it becomes clear that Doc's success over the years has been due as much to his vibrant personality as to his medical skill, and often the former held greater sway among the farmers' wives, what with poor crops, long winters, and husbands who had lost faith in their dreams and pride in themselves. Their despair led to neglect, their neglect to illness:

> "After a while they'd give up, lose heart. The poverty would get them, the isolation. The babies would come and they wouldn't keep them clean either. I've been to places, on calls, where even the floor was filthy — you never knew what you were stepping in. The mother with her hair in her eyes, the youngsters half-naked, maybe if it was cold with an old blanket around them, watching out of the corner like scared little animals. In summer, the flies —" (30)

Doc's role in these and other circumstances was more one of psychologist than doctor: "'It's crazy but they call me and I'm the doctor so I've got to go. Sometimes maybe it helps . . . because they think it helps . . . but if you want to know the truth not doing one goddam thing'" (96). The farmers' misery is as acute here as in the short stories, but the

details of their suffering are not Doc's primary focus, and therefore the sense of tragedy is much less pronounced. In addition, these serious moments in the narrative are juxtaposed with the more humorous aspects of Doc's practice, the ignorant and sometimes petty mentalities he confronts, his own randomly forthright views on the human condition, and his treatment of such momentous afflictions as ringworm and middle-age bulge.

But while most of his time has been taken up with the practical problems of his job, delivering babies and setting broken bones, Doc has also helped many people, behind the scenes so to speak, from motives of simple humanity: he arranged for John Miller to be sent to the tuberculosis sanitarium in Fort Qu'Appelle; he assisted Nick Miller through medical school and subsequently convinced him to return to Upward to dispel the bitterness of the past; and at his retirement gathering he tries to help Benny Fox understand his mother's profound psychological disorder, which led to her death and Benny's present guilt. Indeed, Harry Hubbs' simple observation that Doc "'did lots of things, for lots of people'" (99) is borne out in the reminiscences of nearly everybody who attends the party.

Not all who assemble in the hospital lounge come with open hearts to wish Doc well, however. The members of the Ladies' Auxiliary — Mrs. Ted, Mrs. Harp, among others — are virtually interchangeable in their display of small-mindedness, which though humorous in its delivery is clearly vindictive in its intent. With one voice and purpose they make sport of the Chinese who have generously donated the two expensive wheel chairs, and wait impatiently for Doc to be "'safely out of the way'" in order to sell the piano he has given to the hospital. Their bigotry is shared by their husbands, who because of their former malicious treatment of Nick Miller resent and fear his return to Upward: "'They've got funny minds and don't fool yourself, he's still a hunky'" (58). But whereas Nick's suffering ended when he left for Medical School, Maisie Bell's has been uninterrupted. Maisie, Upward's "Scarlet Woman," has for years run a makeshift hospital in her house "'with never a word of thanks,'" as Nellie Furby in her frantic search for a titillating newspaper story pauses to acknowledge: "'What I mean, all these years we've snubbed her, and yet we've been glad to have her on hand, ready to use her —'" (109). She even admits that Maisie has feelings: "'If she sees you and has time she ducks around a corner. It hurts — you can see it in her face'" (110). Despite Nellie's determined but discreet pleading, though, Maisie is still regarded condescendingly, the other women insisting that her repentance be public. And of course she is not invited to Doc's party.

These, then, are the types of people Doc has treated and befriended in his forty-five-year practice. He has answered their complaints, their prejudices, their back-biting with disgust, humour, and some measure of understanding, supported throughout by a remarkably practical philosophy of life not manifested by any of Ross's other characters. This philosophy emerges in his admiration of Ida Robinson's pioneer spirit, in his upbraiding of Mrs. Harp for her hatred of Nick, in his compassion for Harry Hubbs, Benny Fox, and untold others, in his revolutionary idea that "'if neighbours slept together more and talked about each other less, things would be a lot better all round'" (100). Significantly, it is the Reverend Grimble who experiences religious doubt in the face of Upward's moral insensibility, fearing that he has become "'a mealy-mouthed old

sham with a bread-and-butter smile'" (78), while it is Doc who displays self-confidence, advocating a little humour in the face of the inscrutable. To Grimble's charge that such an outlook is somehow Godless and bleak, Doc responds,

> "Bleak? Well, yes and no. Discards, perhaps — nobody up there even aware of us, much less concerned about our fate, nothing working for us but a few traces of intelligence, maybe a little dust and sweat rubbed off from the original contact. But just supposing in spite of everything we could hang on a while, learn to use the intelligence, spread it round —." (132)

For Doc, man's hope for the future lies in his ability to "hang on" and learn from his mistakes, to keep the dream alive, which epitomizes the pioneer spirit he admired in Ida Robinson; after all, from the larger perspective of the eternal scheme of things, man is still a pioneer after only two thousand years. Thus, Doc's sanguine approach to life has saved him from the despair that defeats many of his forebears, but more importantly it allows him to conclude sincerely that his years in Upward have not been wasted.

At the conclusion of the party, Doc is presented with the customary wristwatch as a token of Upward's esteem. Among other things, the timepiece underscores a persistent theme in Ross's fiction, the inescapable passing of time and its curiously cyclical nature; a corollary to this is Doc's idea that families also repeat themselves. Both themes reverberate through the short stories as life and the seasons repeat themselves with depressing predictability. In similar fashion, Mrs. Bentley begins a new chapter of her life by creating of Philip's illegitimate son yet another Philip. Now, Doc's final musings centre on how he helped his own illegitimate son Nick Miller become a doctor, how he convinced him to return to Upward, how the end of one professional career marks the beginning of another: "So relax, Old Man, go home and sleep. It's all over and it's all beginning . . . just as it was all beginning that day too . . ." (143). Doc's acceptance of ageing and of the transition from the old order to the new endows *Sawbones Memorial* with a positive tone not evident in either *The Lamp at Noon and Other Stories* or *As For Me and My House*. To be sure, the life he has forged for himself is less solitary than a prairie farmer's or a small-town preacher's, so his perspective is bound to be different. But what really sets Doc Hunter apart from his fictional counterparts is his unique appreciation of the human predicament, his sense of humour in the face of the inscrutable.

Ultimately, Sinclair Ross' interpretation of the pioneer experience represents a detailed study in narrative perspective and fictional mode. With deft strokes he portrays from their separate viewpoints the anguish of simple farmers, the desperation of neglected wives, the guilt of a hypocritical preacher, and the sagacity of an aged doctor. His exploration of literary modes follows an almost classical progression through tragedy to irony and comedy, broadly paralleling human emotional development from the expectancy of youth through the disillusionment of middle years to the acquiescence of old age. His obvious sympathy for the common man indicates a strong desire to comprehend the human condition on a fundamental level, while the frontier setting highlights the esesntial human emotions, bringing their range and intensity into sharp relief by the foreshortening of life and hope. And finally, Ross pays tribute through his subject-matter to the pioneers and unsung heroes of Canada's past, apparently believing, with old Doc Hunter, that the quiet heroism of one Maisie Bell far outshines the strident

prejudices of the entire Ladies' Auxiliary.

NOTES

[1] *Sawbones Memorial* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1974), p. 30.

[2] See Lorraine McMullen, *Sinclair Ross* (Boston: Twayne, 1979), pp. 23-24.

[3] *The Lamp at Noon and Other Stories* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1968), p. 52.

[4] *Sinclair Ross*, p. 137.

[5] Of the short stories discussed here, only "The Runaway" postdates *As For Me and My House*, and "Not by Rain Alone" is contemporary with it. Thus, I believe that the characters in the other stories can be regarded as the Bentleys' direct fictional predecessors both in terms of their farming interests and in terms of the refinement of Ross's skill in characterization.

[6] *Sinclair Ross*, p. 137.

[7] See Lorraine McMullen's introduction to *Sawbones Memorial*, p. 5.

PAUL COMEAU

ANOTHER CASE OF ROSS'S MYSTERIOUS BARN

IN *Canadian Literature* 94, F. H. Whitman argues that the girl in Sinclair Ross' "One's A Heifer" — far from being kept as a prisoner or, even worse, being kept as a corpse — is, in fact, "nothing more than a fiction in Vickers' mind" (see "The Case of Ross's Mysterious Barn," Autumn 1982, pp. 168-69). Whitman goes on to explain that because Vickers is schizophrenic and pathologically lonely, he "creates" the girl to fill his own unconscious psychological needs. Vickers' description of his relationship with the girl, then, is a kind of prosopographia used by Ross to persuade the boy (but not the reader) of the girl's existence. For the reader to be "seduced" by these descriptions is, Whitman says, "an elementary critical error" for which "there can be no excuse."

As Whitman observes, there is not enough evidence in the text to prove that the girl has any corporeal existence beyond Vickers' imaginings. But, granting the truth of this observation, can we then conclude that she does not exist — that she is nothing more "than a fiction in Vickers' mind"? I don't think so. And it is on this point that I wish to question Whitman's article.

Our suspicions about the girl should have been aroused, Whitman says, by Vickers' first mention of her; and if they were not, they should certainly have been troubled by his description of her checkers playing: "her inability to make decisions . . . or remember . . . or even speak." But while this passage *may* indicate that the girl is just a creation of Vickers' disturbed imagination, it may just as likely suggest that she has the I.Q. of a doormat — a not unlikely possibility especially in scarcely populated areas such as this one where inbreeding is probably common. The whole family, as Vickers goes on to say, are similarly afflicted: "The mother talks just like a child of ten."

But what puts the issue "beyond doubt," according to Whitman, is the boy's description of Vickers playing checkers with himself: "For a long time he sat contracted, motionless, as if gathering himself to strike, then furtively he slid his hand an inch or two along the table towards some checkers that were piled beside the board. It was as if he were reaching for a weapon, as if his invisible partner were an enemy. He clutched the checkers, slipped slowly from his chair and straightened." While all of these actions do remind us, as Whitman says, of what "Vickers has previously told the boy of his games with the girl," they tell us nothing about

whether or not the girl actually exists. They provide ample evidence that Vickers hallucinates, that he is capable of violence, and that he is probably mad and therefore dangerous. But that's all. Whitman continues by saying that the fact that Vickers stares fixedly at the window (rather than the door) proves that the girl "never" comes through the door. But this evidence is no more conclusive than what has gone before. Vickers' staring at the window shows that he expects to see the girl (or whatever) at the window *now*, but it does not show that he has always seen her at the window and "never" at the door.

Whitman notes that the girl appears only in the summers when Vickers is loneliest; furthermore, he says that she disappears "when Vickers goes to town and has social contact." He uses these points to support his contention that the girl is merely a fiction in Vickers' mind. But there are only two visits mentioned in the text. One of these occurs in the winter when the girl appears just two weeks prior to the boy's visit, asking Vickers to marry her. He tells her she can't stay; then he goes "to town for a few days." When he returns, she has gone. The other visit, although it does occur in summer, does not conclude with the mention of a trip to town: "Last summer I had a girl cooking for a few weeks, but it didn't last. . . . I had to send her home." Let me remind the reader that I'm not trying to prove that the girl does exist, but simply to dispute Whitman's claim that she is just a fiction in Vickers' mind.

No one, however, is likely to quibble with Whitman's suggestion that Vickers' schizoid personality is reflected in the implicit duality of the title ("One's a Heifer"). "The boy," he says, "does not find the two almost identical calves that he is looking for, but in Vickers . . . he happens upon a striking human parallel," Vickers' visions of the girl being reflections, one gathers, of the female side of his own personality. I would like to suggest another interpretation, based on the possibility that the girl does exist. Despite obvious differences, Vickers' two visitors have a lot in common with the two missing calves: all four are young (have not reached full adulthood); the two humans, like the two calves, have spent a night (the girl, of course, may have spent several) away from home in a world that is strange and threatening; the two young humans have endured the "storm" of Vickers' uncontrolled rages, while the two young cows have endured the storm of a prairie winter. Indeed, as far as their relationship with Vickers is concerned, the girl and the boy have quite a bit in common. In fact, one could argue that Vickers' two visitors, like the two calves, are "the same almost except that one's a heifer [girl] and the other isn't." We are now, perhaps, better able to appreciate the irony implicit in Ross's title, especially when we recall that Vickers used to refer to the girl as a "stupid cow." Whether or not we can push the analogy so far as to suggest that since the two heifers got home safely, and the boy got home safely, that the girl in all probability did so too, is open to question.

But the problem remains: do we know anything — for certain — about the girl's existence or Vickers' relationship with her? I think not. Whether Vickers actually victimized the girl, or imagined he victimized the girl, or imagined the girl and everything else about her, does not really matter. What matters about Vickers is exactly what Ross has the boy, in one of his more perceptive moments, tell us: "With such a queer fellow you [can] never tell. You [can] never tell. . . ."

As Whitman suggests, we mustn't let "the business of the barn, [and] what

might or might not be there" distract us from the story's main concerns. This is, after all, "a study of illusion," Vickers' illusions as well as the boy's. But since the reader also has a tendency to shape what little evidence there is into some kind of "story," might this not also be a study in the reader's illusions? Thus the difference in Vickers' belief in the girl's appearances, and the boy's belief in the heifers' being in the barn, and our own belief in the girl's existence or non-existence is one of degree only; in none of these cases is there any conclusive evidence. "One's A Heifer" is indeed a study of illusion: Vickers' illusions, the boy's illusions, and — unless we are very careful — our own.

MARILYN CHAPMAN

* KATHLEEN M. SNOW, et al., *Subject Index for Children & Young People to Canadian Poetry in English.* Canadian Library Association, n.p. A rough check suggests this guide is accurate in what it does, but what it does is not conveyed accurately by the title. It's a subject index — using library association staples as subject headings — to some seventy poetry collections. These range from two books by Edna Jacques and two by Desmond Pacey to one book by each of George Bowering, Milton Acorn, Carolyn Struthers, and Anna Shirley. The poetry collections "were chosen because in them the selectors found five or more poems with appeal for children . . . between . . . six and fourteen." It's a start of sorts. But so arbitrary as to seem a curious accomplishment more than a useful one. And it's the sort of project that might well have been more valuable on-line than in text form.

W.N.

*** PENNY PETRONE, ed., *First People, First Voices.* Univ. of Toronto Press, $19.95. The editor introduces this anthology with a quotation from the *Jesuit Relations*: "Metaphor is largely in use among these Peoples; unless you accustom yourself to it, you will understand nothing in their councils, where they speak almost entirely in metaphors." This book provides an excellent, manageable means to accustom oneself to versions of the Indian voice in written forms other than myths and legends (of which, of course, there are plenty of collections): Sara Riel's letter to her brother Louis recounting the burning of the St. Boniface cathedral; the fumbling yet lyrical English-language journal kept by a Tsimshian boy in 1860; several scenes from Jim Morris' *Ayash,* a play based on an ancient Ojibwa legend; a powerful council speech made by Ocaita, an Ottawa chief, in 1818. *First Voices* is a fine introduction to the evolution of indigenous metaphors and discourse — however blurred — in the languages of the supplanters; its thorough index of names, its illustrations, and its clear identification of sources make it an anthology that leads the reader to possible understandings beyond the book itself.

L.R.

** *Russian Canadians; Their Past and Present.* Collected by The Chekhov Society of Ottawa and edited by T. F. Jeletsky. Borealis Press, $19.95. The Russians are one of Canada's smaller ethnic minorities, and apart from special groups like the Doukhobors who have received perhaps immoderate attention, not very much has been written on them, so that this collection of essays is useful for the variety it shows the Russian community in Canada to possess — from peasant sectarians to the heirs of old princely families. However, it presents a curious combination of the scholarly and the — in the worst sense — amateurish. Most of the articles, even when their tone is journalistic, are elaborately footnoted; on the other hand, these very pieces often resort to unfounded conjecture and repeat without criticism theories that are clearly wrong, like that held by certain Russian inhabitants of Vancouver that a Russian settlement in fact existed there before Gastown appeared. Still, reading with caution, much interesting history and useful information can be found in this book.

G.W.

ERNEST REDMOND BUCKLER (1909-1984)

ON MARCH 4, 1984, ERNEST REDMOND BUCKLER died in Soldiers' Memorial Hospital, Middleton, Nova Scotia. He was seventy-five years old, had been in ill health in recent years, and had been living in a nursing home in nearby Bridgetown. Appropriately, he died in the Annapolis Valley environment which had informed all his best-known work (*The Mountain and the Valley, The Cruelest Month, Ox Bells and Fireflies, The Rebellion of Young David and Other Stories*) and was buried in the Anglican cemetery at Gibson's Lake in the region his ancestors had helped to settle.

Buckler's sense of rootedness in the traditional culture of the Annapolis Valley found expression in all his writing, but most notably in the character of David Canaan in *The Mountain and the Valley* (1952). Unlike David, however, Buckler left the Valley as a young man and received the education and external experience for which his protagonist yearned. A mathematics student at Dalhousie University in the 1920's, he worked at Kent House, Greenwich, Connecticut, in the vacation periods, inadvertently gaining the knowledge of summer hotels which was later to inform *The Cruelest Month*. In those same years, he also came under the influence of Dalhousie English professor Archibald MacMechan, attending his lectures, corresponding with him while away, and reacting critically to the books MacMechan sent him to read. Little recognition of MacMechan's role in encouraging the literary side of Buckler's education has ever been made, but it is clear from surviving letters of the period that Buckler found in the sympathetic response of his Dalhousie professor the kind of intellectual companionship which his fictional character, David Canaan, was so long and fruitlessly to seek.

Throughout Buckler's writing there is a celebration of rural life, a feeling that human values and aesthetic integrity can be nourished only when — he wrote in *Ox Bells* — "the brook, and my own flesh and I are such snug and laughing brothers that I know we are forever mingled with the sun's pulse (or the wind's or the rain's) and forever unconquerable." This perception of spirit and nature as intertwined favoured Buckler's return to the Annapolis Valley in 1936 when poor eyesight and ill health thwarted not only his doctoral studies in philosophy at the University of Toronto (he received an M.A. in 1930) but also his actuarial work with Manufacturer's Life Insurance Company in Toronto. Settling into the Centrelea farmhouse which was to remain his home, Buckler began balancing the two worlds of farming and writing, harbouring time to produce short stories, plays, and essays for *Coronet, Esquire, MacLean's, Saturday Night, The Atlantic Monthly, The Family Herald, The Star Weekly*, and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. It is in these early stories of the 1940's and 1950's that one can see the gestation of many familiar Buckler themes, particularly the insider-outsider tension which was to bring an ironic edge to his longer fiction. Like David Canaan in *The Mountain and the Valley*, a number of these protagonists are paradoxically trapped and sustained by their affiliation to family and rural life, at one moment frustrated by the limitations of their milieu, and at the next lyrically renewed by the physical and emotional beauty of their environment. In their respective situations, they begin to define the ironic dilemma of David Canaan and anticipate the focus on interiority which

was to be part of Buckler's achievement in *The Mountain and the Valley*. Often praised for its skilled control of time and its effective counterpointing of styles, *The Mountain and the Valley* also remains one of the finest novels of psychological insight to have emerged from the modernist period in Canada. Buckler's lush and poetic prose style does much to achieve this, at first creating a sense of the unique and deeply felt responses to experience which distinguish David from others in childhood, and then later defining his growing introspection and isolation as he struggles for the right phrase to express his imaginative life and his artistic perceptions. The illusion of oneness which David achieves in the moment before his death on the mountain is emotionally satisfying as a conclusion to David's dilemma, but Buckler was too consummate a craftsman to let sentiment erode the ironic distancing he had established for both author and reader. The novel, as Buckler himself has noted, is a story of self-delusion, and to that end, an element of irony dominates its final pages. David's triumph in his last moments is a pyrrhic one indeed when liberation comes only through death.

In his subsequent works, Buckler continued to explore the tensions introduced in *The Mountain and the Valley*. *The Cruelest Month* (1963) never achieved the poetic heights and control of the earlier novel but extended Buckler's exploration of the artist theme and depicted the regenerative role nature can assume in modern society. In this sense, it served as a transition to *Ox Bells and Fireflies: A Memoir* (1968), Buckler's most lyrical celebration of rural life and a return in memory to the Nova Scotia of his boyhood. An intensely poetic book, it was also to be a record of a "way of life with all its distinctive customs, institutions, values, tasks, recreations, idioms of speech and behaviour, atmospheres, and textual variety." As a memoir, it inevitably conveyed a sense of loss, for not even a world held in time could avoid the death and change that intruded themselves upon a child's perception. By the end of Buckler's narrative, the individual voice has become a collective elegy for a way of life that contemporary society has learned to forfeit but not always forget:

> We no longer see the things we used to see: Our own pulse in the lapping of the lake, our own snugness in the window pane. We see things we never used to see: the iron in band of winter — cloud behind the factory chimney, the prison eyes in the dry blade of weaving sidewalk grass, the death mask of time in the rag of newspaper blowing down the gutter.

"The death mask of time" which informs the cyclical structure of the *Ox Bell* sketches had never been far from the Buckler façade even in the early writing, and this was to be further illustrated in the imagistic prose pieces and realistic photographs of *Nova Scotia: Window on the Sea* in 1973 and the selected stories of *The Rebellion of Young David and Other Stories* in 1975. Only in his last book, *Whirligig* (1977), did Buckler seem to deviate from this pattern, but even in the pseudo-serious and worldly wise pose of its somewhat Leacockian narrator there were vestiges of the acute observation and social consciousness which had informed the author's earlier depictions of rural life. However, nothing in Buckler's last years of writing was ever to match the bold inventiveness and energy of his prose style in *The Mountain and the Valley* or *Ox Bells and Fireflies*. Sometimes soaring to heights of metaphor and music and at others pausing in the almost spiritual ecstasy of a moment, Buckler's best writing has left a rarely matched legacy of craftsmanship in Canadian fiction. His search for what Claude Bissell has called

"the precise and inevitable word," his courage in writing outside the pale of the fictional mainstream, and his almost mythic sense of rural life remain important manifestations of one artist's integrity in pursuing the values and goals which fired his imagination. In the words of his own persona in *Ox Bells and Fireflies*, "These moments were only sentences, and scattered ones, in the book of your life — but added up, they formed its vital core."

GWENDOLYN DAVIES

ON THE VERGE

***** ERIC KIERANS, *Globalism and the Nation-State*. CBC Enterprises, $6.95. This is a book anyone concerned over Canada's future *must* read. Eric Kierans is one of the few men who have gone through the political mill (he held provincial and federal ministries) and the financial mill (he was president of the Montreal and Canadian stock exchanges) and emerged with perceptions not merely unblunted but sharper than ever. He is no romantic nationalist, but he looks with a clear and unillusioned eye on the chances that Canada — a community he thinks worth preserving not only for its own sake but also in the name of the essential variety of human life styles — has of surviving as a truly independent entity in the few years that are left of the twentieth century. *Globalism and the Nation-State* is the text of the Massey Lectures he delivered under the auspices of the CBC in 1983. Concisely and trenchantly, Kierans addresses the implications of the Williamsburg Summit of that year, which he sees as a manifestation of the use by the United States of the so-called nuclear crisis to re-establish more strongly than ever its economic hegemony over the western world. Kierans prophesies a centralization and rationalization of the western economy, with the United States as its unchallengeable centre and the multinational corporations as its agents, which will assign to each country its role and will irrevocably condemn Canada to the position of a producer of primary materials less favoured than some third world countries because its costs will be higher. The only way to avert the doom of growing dependence which such a fate involves is the reassertion, in a few brief years of grace, of our economic autonomy and our political independence, which are both conditional on building a country that is a true confederation, strong in the provinces so that the centre can gain the needed powers of resistance to external pressures. Kierans sees so clearly and expresses himself so well that nobody with a feeling for the future of Canada should neglect this indispensable tract for our time and place.

G.W.

**** R. DAVID EDMUNDS. *Tecumseh and the Quest for Indian Leadership*. Little, Brown, $18.95. Tecumseh's rise to the leadership of the Indian peoples during the last period of their struggle against submersion, his association with another doomed figure, Isaac Brock, and his mysterious death during the Battle of the Thames, are the stuff of myth, and most books about him have in fact tended to stress the mystical elements, portraying him in tragic heroic terms as the last of the noble savages. In Canadian history — as distinct from American — he has a special place because of his association with the events of 1812, to which many of our historians trace the beginnings of a Canadian national consciousness. Now, at last, in *Tecumseh and the Quest for Indian Leadership*, R. David Edmunds has written an objective and fluent account of the Indian leader, his historical background, his life as it is known. In no way does this reduction of the story to real historic terms diminish Tecumseh; in any account he remains a remarkable man. But it does confer probability on his life, and for Canadians the book will be interesting because it considers him from an American viewpoint, but sympathetically. Our particular myth of him as a saviour of the Canadian nation finds no place here, and that is a good thing.

G.W.

**** GLYNDWR WILLIAMS, *The Hudson's Bay Company and the Fur Trade: 1670-1870*. A Special Issue of *The Beaver*, $4.00; collector's bound edition, $12.00. The Autumn 1983 issue of the Hudson's Bay Company's excellent magazine, *The Beaver*, is worth noting by anyone interested in early Canadian history, since it is devoted to a single subject and is in fact a book in disguise. Glyndwr Williams retells, in the light of modern scholarship, those first two centuries of the Hudson's Bay Company's record between its foun-

dation and its surrender of territorial privileges, which led to the incorporation of Rupert's Land and the rest of the West into the Dominion of Canada. It is an admirably sufficient account, whose lucid style is in no way marred by condensation. One hopes it will soon be reprinted as an actual book that can find its way onto the shelves more easily than this present magazine format, for it is perhaps the best short history in print of the Company's most important years.

G.W.

**** J. ARTHUR LOWER, *Western Canada: An Outline History*. Douglas & McIntyre, $12.95. Arthur Lower can always be relied on for a readable and interesting narrative, and his new book, *Western Canada: An Outline History*, is no exception. Eschewing footnotes and other scholarly apparatus except for a few statistical appendices, it covers the history of the four western provinces and the two territories from the early contacts with aboriginal peoples in the eighteenth century down to the end of the 1970's. It recognizes the west as a distinct economic, cultural, and political region within the dominion of Canada and in the process it shows the interplay of national and regional forces that can only find adequate expression in a genuinely federal structure. The fact that such a considerable book by a historian of national importance should be first issued by a Vancouver publisher is an appropriate sign of the way in which westerners are beginning to take their cultural destiny into their own hands.

G.W.

**** A. J. CASSON, *My Favourite Watercolours, 1919 to 1957*, foreword by Paul Duval. Prentice-Hall, $50.00. Some of the plates in this work may be familiar, but most viewers still equate the Group of Seven with oil painting and will find Casson's collection full of subtle surprises. A "demanding and unforgiving medium," Casson writes, watercolour required the painter to develop techniques to combat Canadian heat and cold. The results are sharper-edged than the English form has acquainted us with. Casson's personal notes remind us — as do the best of his paintings themselves — of his fascination with accuracy, with township perhaps even more than with landscape, and with the sight of individual people caught in moments — friezes even — of domestic activity.

W.N.

**** HELEN HOY, ed., *Modern English-Canadian Prose: A Guide to Information Sources*. Gale, $48.00. This is a useful guide to general criticism and to the work of seventy-eight writers from Nellie McClung and Mazo de la Roche to Scott Symons and Clark Blaise. The editor lists primary works and provides a selective guide to criticism and book reviews, with occasional annotations (neither discursive nor for the most part evaluative, these sometimes also seem both restrictive and unnecessary). There are some omissions, both of secondary issues and of authors, but Dr. Hoy deflects criticism of her inevitable selection by drawing up a list of nearly thirty authors who could *also* have been included. Critics are nonetheless bound to quibble: I should have preferred to see Haig-Brown and Smart rather than Garner and van der Mark — but universal agreement is never likely on such an issue. What is here will be of great use to students and teachers alike, for it updates some of the current guides available, and spreads its net wider, picking up European and other international commentary on Canadian prose writers.

W.N.

** GEORGE WOODCOCK, ed., *British Columbia: A Celebration*. Photographs by J. A. Kraulis. Hurtig, $29.95. Since editor and photographer "agreed to go their separate ways," this is effectively two anthologies. Despite Woodcock's claim that the book provides a "celebration" of correspondences, the book's design — gathering of texts, alternating with gatherings of photographs — makes the discovery of analogies difficult. But the separate anthologies are very attractive. Woodcock makes a broad selection of evocative writing, and frames it with a sensitive, concise Introduction. Janis Kraulis' photographs at first seemed to be cramped on the page, and, in their absence of foreground, little more than postcards. But on second glance, I found the evocative design of facing photographs which appeared to comment on one another — in colour, or composition, or subject. For two anthologies, in this spacious gift-book format, Hurtig has established a surprisingly reasonable price.

L.R.

LAST PAGE

Of the dozen or so new volumes in Longmans' "Drumbeat" paperback series ($1.50 each), many are most interesting for the jacket blurbs: they speak of the "lure of diamonds and the dangerous thrills of illicit mining," of "boom-time," and "the drunken debauchery of his social life." Even the quotations from the novels themselves say volumes about art and life: "Looking at her now, he knew that they were going to be lovers. The snake in his own eyes would make sure of that"; or, "she said, 'I'm pregnant.' His hand went limp over her shock of hair." Remarkably, some of the volumes are worth reading, notably Andrew Salkey's account of Rastafarianism in the 1960's, *The Late Emancipation of Jerry Stover*, and one of my favourite ghost stories — a simple thriller with a palpable sense of evil — Edgar Mittelholzer's *My Bones and My Flute*.

A major reprint (from Howard Univ. Press, $6.95) is a hardback version of Lindsay Barrett's *Song for Mumu*: set in the Caribbean, and told entirely in a lyric vernacular, the novel tells of the tragic results of love in a society upset by slave history and urban decay. But most of all it asks to be read as poetic tragedy, as *song* with choruses; though its tale is tragic, its language is a celebration of the power of utterance, and it asks for the kind of identification — with speech, character, social perspicacity — that literary tragedy inspires.

Other recent reprints come in the form of collections. The simultaneous appearance of Donald Barthelme's *Sixty Stories* (Dutton/Clarke Irwin, $12.95) and *Best Stories of Walter de la Mare* (Faber, £3.50) offers a curious opportunity for comparing forms of fable that have permeated twentieth-century short fiction. De la Mare's wistful stories of ghostly dream and difficult understandings — "Seaton's Aunt," for example — appear to have developed out of the tale of imagination and suspense: narrators tell of what they have heard, what has happened to them, how curious it all is. Barthelme's elliptical fragments of speech — "Report" or "The Death of Edward Lear" — appear to derive from a different source, less from story than from fable: the narrators speak in symbolic space; their speaking is unmotivated, disconnected, enigmatic; "significance" is left for the reader to tease into being. De la Mare hints of irrationalities that lie beneath the surface of life, but there is a leisurely sense of their being nonetheless containable; in Barthelme's world, by contrast, the madness of life appears to have leapt from fear and dream into experience, so that even ideas of order become principles of dislocation.

From Oxford come two books by J. K. Baxter — *Selected Poems* ($9.95) and *Collected Plays* (n.p.) — which bring more of the work of the late New Zealand writer to the public eye. I am not partial to the plays: they are experiments with speech, political statement, classical allusion, Eliotian form — as though by collaboration of Birney with Woodcock — which appear more attractive as variations of the poet's craft than as innovations of the playwright's. The poems are articulate reminders of Baxter's meditative skills with words; still too little recognized for his art, except in his native country, he tells of the twinned intellectual and emotional stimulus of perception, whether by sight or sound, reading or working or listening, and of the need to translate the resulting understanding into cadence and image. His compatriate Allen Curnow's *Selected Poems* (Penguin, $10.95) shows a different kind of poet entirely, a man of wit rather than a man of mood — not insensible to feeling, by any means, and quite responsive to voice, but given to analysis and judgment, as Baxter is given to passionate and Catholic intensity.

From Penguin, too, come two anthologies of new writers: *Firebird 1* ($6.95), with stories by English, Scots, and Irish writers, and *Poetry Introduction 5* ($8.50), a collection of work by seven contemporary British poets. For the most part, neither group strikes evocative chords. There are interesting stories by William Trevor, Brian McCabe, and Jack Debney, but the others slip somehow stylistically into the very suburban vicissitudes they describe. Salman Rushdie's "The Free Radio" is an exception of another kind — cultural as well as stylistic, a witty and then devastating evocation of social change, illusion, and emptiness. Among poets, the Irish-born, McMaster-educated Joe Sheerin is the best of the lot: a writer who pares his phrases, and makes us think again about sights we thought we had seen.

New writers can be found in other places as well — in anthologies like *New Directions* (ND 45 shows the European and Latin American influences that have directed much American writing), and in journals like *Poetry Australia* (No. 84-85 is a sampler of contemporary writing) and *New Letters* (vol. 48, no. 3-4 is a striking glimpse of the variety of modern writing from India: the

eloquence of R. Parthasarathy and the tight-lipped political fierceness of G. S. Sharat Chandra particularly draw a reader's reaction). Giles Gordon's *Modern Short Stories 2* (Beaverbooks, $6.50) is a solid collection of 31 writers from 1940-1980, with an English bias: it picks up Callaghan and a number of Commonwealth writers, but omits Americans and all Canadians since 1962. Thomas Shapcott's *Consolidation: The Second Paperback Poets Anthology* (Univ. of Queensland Press, n.p.) offers several poems by a small number of modern Australian poets: notable are Judith Rodriguez, David Malouf, Philip Roberts, Jennifer Maiden, and the editor himself. Two further Oxford anthologies, Fleur Adcock's *The Oxford Book of Contemporary New Zealand Poetry* ($11.95) and the much more massive *The Oxford Anthology of New Zealand Writing Since 1945* ($34.99), ed. MacDonald Jackson and Vincent O'Sullivan, together provide a substantial and clear demonstration of the range of modern N.Z. literature. Surprisingly, the two books overlap little, though both represent (even stress) essentially the same contemporary poets: Bill Manhire, Ian Wedde, Elizabeth Smither. The Jackson-O'Sullivan volume, however, amply demonstrates the growth of a clear modern idiom in that South Pacific country — both in poetry and in prose. The choices are judicious, and the 58 stories included make it (though its dates preclude the presence of Katherine Mansfield) the best N.Z. modern short story anthology available.

New volumes of poetry include Lauris Edmond's *Catching It* (Oxford, $10.99), a set of quiet lyrics on personal topics: friends, gardens, the strangeness of travel; Rodney Hall's *The Most Beautiful World* (Queensland Univ. Press, $7.50), a set of five strikingly literary "suites" about travelling through territories that seem bizarre and are "the parables of life"; Felix Mnthali's *When Sunset Comes to Sapitwa* (Academic Press, $5.95), a Malawian collection which demonstrates a forceful overlap between local myth and contemporary technology; and Edward Kamau Braithwaite's *Third World Poems* (Academic Press, $5.95), a selection of the Barbadian-born poet's brilliant dialect poems on the force of race and economics as cultural divisions: "This is no white man lan' / an' yet we have ghetto here / . . . / we have place where man die wid im eye-water dry up / where he cyan even cry tribulation / where de dry river clog im in." Such force of speech and image cracks through stereotype, evokes its own territory, demands our recognition of its authenticity.

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contributors

Bill BAKER teaches at the University of Lethbridge, Neil BESNER at Mount Royal, Gary BOIRE at the University of Auckland, Laurel BOONE at U.N.B., Gwendolyn DAVIES at Mount Allison, Terry GOLDIE at Memorial, James HARRISON at Guelph, Ian MacLAREN at the University of Waterloo, Mark MADOFF at Royal Roads, Tom MARSHALL at Queen's, Jane MOSS at Colby College, Roger NASH at Laurentian, Perry NODELMAN at the University of Winnipeg, Gerald NOONAN at Wilfrid Laurier, Robert NUNN at Brock, Terry WHALEN at St. Mary's University, and Harry PREST at Camrose Lutheran College. Mark ABLEY lives in Outremont, Marilyn CHAPMAN in Kitchener, Paul COMEAU in Burnaby, Dianne JOYCE in Hanover, Ont., Greg KEARSEY in St. John's, Thérèse LAFONTAINE in St. Paul, Alta., Steven LEHMAN in Pointe Claire, Benoit MELANÇON in Montreal, P. K. PAGE in Victoria, Linda ROGERS in Chemainus, George WOODCOCK in Vancouver. Katherine MORRISON and Bruce PIRIE live in Toronto; Evelyn COBLEY and Margery FEE teach at the University of Victoria; Ramsay COOK, Marian FOWLER, and Michèle LACOMBE at York; Estelle DANSEREAU and Richard DAVIS at the University of Calgary; Jo-Anne ELDER and Michael GREENSTEIN at l'Université de Sherbrooke; John FERNS and Lorraine YORK at McMaster; Marya FIAMENGO, Carole GERSON, John HAVELDA, Joel KAPLAN, Eva-Marie KROLLER, Patricia MERIVALE, Ira NADEL, Ralph SARKONAK, and Lorraine WEIR at U.B.C.; Smaro KAMBOURELI, Judith OWENS, and David WILLIAMS at the University of Manitoba; Don McKAY and John ORANGE at the University of Western Ontario; Eugene McNAMARA and Peter STEVENS at the University of Windsor.

ARIEL

A Review of International English Literature

EDITOR: IAN ADAM

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