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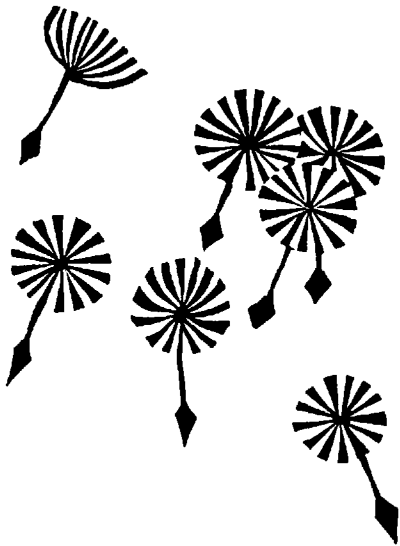

POETS & POLITICS

A QUARTERLY OF CRITICISM AND REVIEW

UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA MEDAL FOR CANADIAN BIOGRAPHY

1984

1984 was, despite Orwellian overtones, a very good year for Canadian biography, not in quantity but in quality. The book on Brian Mulroney, by Rae Murphy, Robert Chodos, and Nick Auf der Maur, for example, handled the subject of a contemporary politician at a level significantly higher than that of a pot-boiler, much of a credit to its writers.

Worthy of note were *Big Bear: The End of Freedom* by Hugh Dempsey, a compelling contribution to ethnohistory; *Black Wolf: The Life of Ernest Thompson Seton,* by a previous winner of the award, Betty Keller, who has here written a lively and well-researched book about the life of a strange self-deceiver; and *A Hard Man to Beat,* Howard White's earthy and candid study on the trade unionist, Bill White.

The winner is *E. J. Pratt: The Truant Years, 1882-1927,* by David G. Pitt, the first volume of his valuable account of the poet's life, written with flair, rich in anecdote, responsive to details of personality, poetry, and history. The book is, as Northrop Frye has said, a "landmark in Canadian letters." We thank David Pitt for his fine, indeed acute, insights into the making of a literary craftsman.

D.G.S.

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editorial

REAL NICE

I'VE BEEN LED TO BELIEVE there's a new phrase being sounded in the corporate boardrooms of the country, one designed to send tremors through executives and consumers alike: *"Have you done a reality check on that?"* I'm not sure whether it's the phrase itself or its implication that bothers me most — the blithe assumption that "reality" is controlled by statistical survey, or the suspicion that (in our age of memotalk and agency image) it actually is. "*Really,*" says the generation now in high school, meaning "*d'accord,*" meaning "*you're right, but isn't it obvious.*" But there's another phrase that this generation possesses — "*Get real*" — that just might be the best answer to *reality checks.* It means "*Get out of your cloister and look around you: the world is alive*" (though faced with this gloss on the phrase, that generation might well collectively respond: "Get real"). Resist evasiveness, in language and in life: that seems to be the message. It doesn't mean you don't market image, or don't live with masks on; but you can see the comedy of taking marketing strategy too seriously. And therefore use it, and see past it. Mr. Cleaver, meet Ms. Lauper.

These comments stem, I think, from a vague sense that we consider reality a stressful place only. The "real world," our language tells us, is the world of the street: the world of violence, illness, prejudice, money, food, foodbanks, and hate. And though no-one's ever been adequately able to tell us what "realism" is, it has something to do with not being "romantic." The happy ending gives way to the dour one, because "that's what life's like." Love is "escapism." Happiness is "luck." People in academia are deemed to be "cloistered"; and people cloistered in boardrooms are believed to have their pulse on the nation, running daily reality checks, selling ad agency romances about love and politics to a marketplace eager for escape from its grimy toil. To which one longs to say *Get real*: there's life in the real world yet. Yet there's enough truth to the scenario to give it plausibility if not accuracy. We need Voltaire again, to remind us to look past an image for its implications, to remind us to judge substance rather than accept sincerity as its reasonable facsimile, to remind us that *honest seeming* is more *seeming* than *honest.* If we buy the metaphor that *life is a game*, with *winners-and-losers*, then we've bought an image of the "heroics" of victory and the

"reality" of defeat. What we know, however, is that life doesn't divide that way. Not absolutely. The realities of poverty and violence are not "play." But "play" *is* real, and therefore within our reach. The point is to separate glib metaphor from actual fact. Sometimes doing so is the way to open up possibilities we thought were closed to us, because it's a way of restoring to ourselves some control over language and over the kind of life that we can make that language name.

Some years ago, in her 1966 book *Don't Never Forget*, Brigid Brophy declaimed eloquently against those forces in society that would deny such control — deny it by substituting for our individual (if largely shared) sense of public propriety or literary quality some arbitrary obeisance to verbal taboo. If all we do as readers is respond with horror to certain mechanical arrangements of letters, then we do not read wisely or well. We react mechanically, confusing visual signs for moral realities. ("People are never more horrified," writes Jack Hodgins in *The Invention of the World*, "as when they see others doing what they'd like to do themselves.") This does not mean that for the sake of individual liberty we must be *pleased* at what everyone says, does, or would like to say or do. We may have the verbal freedom to shout "FIRE" in a public place but we have the moral — and in this case legal — responsibility not to do so: every freedom comes with such responsibilities in tow. Every freedom asks us to be judicious about its use. *And every impulse to legislate behaviour must be weighed in terms of the liberties it would constrict.* In consequence, much literary work takes as its combined freedom and responsibility the need to use "real" language — in various configurations — in order to draw public attention to precisely this fact: that in contemporary life such links have often broken. Many intensely moral books, that is, use "taboo" language deliberately, in order to emphasize that the morality of modern life doesn't exist in isolated systems and sounds of print, but in the actions of people — and that neither verbal propriety nor the simple *legality* of action guarantees the moral worth of personal or institutional behaviour. Such books are implicitly reformative in impulse, with an eye on human ideals, not intrinsically degrading because of the clarity of their observations. Those people who claim to be moral only because their public language does not transgress current social convention apparently cannot see that surfaces can lie. They're no different, then, from those others who accept the appearance of sincerity as a substantive value more important than the issue a person is being sincere about. They use "manners" not to be kind, or to make others feel at ease, but because "knowing the code" gives them power; hence in reality they are pawns of the very conventions they pretend to rule. How "moral" is their language then?

Using a "taboo" language, of course, is sometimes deliberately offensive, sometimes accidentally so, sometimes merely rebellious. Sometimes it is itself a mask to hide uncertainty, and often it's an impulsive response to codes that are per-

ceived to be empty. Sometimes, however, it's there deliberately to prick the conscience, and to reclaim a sense of what really matters. It's not a direct model — *Treasure Island*, as Brophy observes, is not an incitement to piracy — but an oblique one. But there's its problem. For if it is to be effective, a reader must actually be able to recognize what's going on, to distinguish between the verbal signs themselves and the social significance that readers give them.

Why is it that so many readers cannot make this distinction? Blaming the signs for what they signify is a way only of perpetuating our collective satisfaction with empty gestures. Why is it that so many book-watchers have no wit, no sensitivity to irony, no capacity for following intellectual enquiry *for its own sake* in order to see where it leads? Why do they have so little tolerance for anything but their own literal truths and absolutes? Why do they so readily become book-*burners*? Blaming this state of affairs all on television is as silly as blaming it all on instant coffee. But it has something to do with a lack of language — or a lack of interest in language, even a fear of language — or a deliberate effort to train people away from the joys of language — which perhaps erroneously suggests that we are becoming a nation that does not read and cannot hear. Paradoxically, such people declare their insecurity by asserting their authority over other people's language and lives. We are at most risk if we believe them. Here is Brophy again:

> Although our libel laws are a step towards it [a phrase to be read ironically, not literally], we have not yet legislated against either clowns or wits. Occasionally we are given the chance, as we were with Wilde, to trap a wit and break his heart on other grounds, much as the Americans get their gangsters for tax evasion if they can't get them for gangsterism. Usually, we punish our wits by laughing at them and not taking them seriously. We never take their advice. Wilde's epigrams have not yet persuaded us to abolish social injustice. . . .

Nor perhaps, can language ever directly do so. Yet paradoxically, language misapplied — used irresponsibly — can hurt, malign, perpetuate injustice, create false paradigms of expectation, approximate the truth and gloss over flaws, reduce issues to false isms, and erect tissue-thin images of earnestness *with which we live.* Here is Alice Munro, asking "What is Real?"

> People can accept any amount of ugliness if it is contained in a familiar formula . . . but when they come closer to their own place, their own lives, they are much offended by a lack of editing.

I have no argument with this mini-analysis of modern prejudice and modern passivity — a prejudice against difference, a passivity towards convention, even when the convention reiterates (and to some eyes therefore indirectly ratifies) behavioural "ugliness" — *except this*: that if ugliness comes to be accepted as the *norm* by which we live, then we have surrendered our claim to the power of invention but also to the kinds of reality that are ours to enjoy.

What then can we do to *get real*? Timothy Findley — in a recent interview with Bruce Meyer and Brian O'Riordan, who asked him: "What can we do to save 'a dying civilization'?" — answered sharply:

> Pay attention. Pay attention to real reality and real reality has as much to do with Lynn Seymour and Stravinsky as it does with streetcars and bumping people off at the corner. They're both reality. We must return to the fact that we have been given the most extraordinary equipment alive, and we're not doing anything marvellous with it, are we? The marvellous is what you want.

The question is, do we want it enough?

Do we want it enough to pay for it: there's reality in the pocketbook. Do we want it enough to champion funding for the arts — and to insist publicly on an "arm's length" policy that will keep governments from directing what art shall be about? Do we want to keep art available — and therefore free from the kinds of private interest pressure that would close libraries, black out words, malign writers, and distort the truth? These are not academic questions about theoretical freedom; they're real questions about public attitude and public policy, which affect us all.

In a speech reported in the *New Zealand Listener* (2 February 1985), the current New Zealand Minister for the Arts outlined his government's declared policy, with these intentions:

(1) to invest more money in the arts, and encourage communities to promote them;

(2) to develop tax incentives to encourage business "to build arts-support programmes as part of their community responsibilities";

(3) to stabilize funding for film and recording industries and improve the sales position of the crafts industries;

(4) to strengthen regional arts development;

(5) to strengthen and support the arts programmes in the education system, affecting both curriculum and performance; and

(6) to reinforce the public broadcasting system's ability to develop local programming and reflect the nation's cultural life.

The eye is clearly on economics as well as on artistic enterprise. (The *Listener*'s editor says the government doesn't go far enough.) But they are public statements which suggest that art is not fearsome, which is a refreshing sign. Governments that are afraid of the arts are afraid of the truth. The main point is that such policies, by encouraging art to happen in all parts and all sections of the society, encourage people to recognize what art can do. It can help them to see past surface images (which is why the insecure and the manipulative try to check it): it can uncover the ugly. It can also disclose wonders, and make them real.

W.N.

IN CLASS WE CREATE OURSELVES— HAVING BEEN TOLD TO SHUT OUR EYES AND GIVEN A PIECE OF PLASTICENE WITH WHICH TO MODEL A PERSON

P. K. Page

For Judith

We made them with shut eyes — little figurines.
Worked away at them with our fingers, our whole bodies
straining to create them — foreheads, mouths,
even our leg muscles tensed in their making.

When I opened my eyes, the so-obvious form I'd worked on
was not what I had thought. A naked woman
the size of my hand. Flesh-pink. Blind.
I couldn't tell if she was cradling an invisible child.

The man beside me said that she was sleeping.
Possibly self-protective. I thought that his
was crucified or crying, 'Help me!' — spare,
male, square, as if cut with a tool.

No two of them siblings. One, like a bowl —
lap, a receptacle, torso a kind of handle;
one covered all over with small, irregular lumps;
one on her side, abstracted, refusing an offering.

Who made them? I wondered. Surely not we who observed them.
Somebody deeper, detached, had a hand in this making —
molded the plasticene, followed the blue-print.
And who was it we fashioned? Which self was the self we created —

so like, yet so unlike — a nearly identical twin
in miniature, not fully gestated,
which struggled out of us through our ignorant fingers
bearing its curious message — *noli me tangere?*

BREATHING THROUGH THE FEET

An Autobiographical Meditation

Robert Bringhurst

NYOGEN SENZAKI, A ZEN TEACHER of particular importance to me, and one whose path I have often crossed, though he was a man I never met, used to urge his students to breathe through their feet. It seems to me very good advice, and I hope that in some of my poems, if not in my life, I've been able to do what Senzaki suggested.

Some of those poems, which I wish were as empty and clean as a zendo, are actually as cluttered as a backwoods cabin yard. But it may be the cluttered ones after all which breathe through their feet, or which breathe through the feet of the reader. The clean ones, some of them, scarcely seem to breathe at all.

The distinction comes, as far as I can tell, from my sitting on the fence, or moving back and forth across the border, between the diseased yet powerful cadaver of western culture and the living body of the world, still tangible in those pockets we call by the strange name of wilderness.

Poetry, I think, has a lot to do with the crossing of borders. That is what *metaphor* seems to mean, and that is what the loons and the goldeneyes do as they dive in the bay which is ten yards down and five yards out from my open door.

That and other local references notwithstanding, it seems to me that my personal history has, and should have, very little to do with my writing. Many of my contemporaries, of course, prefer to let the facts and accidents of their lives and the language they speak set the shape of their poems. But myth, as opposed to "mere literature," never works in this way. In myth, form and content are not identical, nor is one an extension of the other, though there is interplay, and frequently tension, between them. By form, however, I don't mean mere verse form; I mean narrative or meditative shape: plot, *mythos*, structure: the higher grammar of image and event. (And by content I mean, among other things, what José Ortega y Gasset had the wisdom to call the higher algebra of metaphor.)

Where I have been, what I have done, provides the lumber for the poems, but that lumber does not generate the shape. The shape is given to me from elsewhere — unearthed or inherited — and this is the way in which I transpose my own life

into the myths and the myths into my own life. Seen in this way, it turns out not to be "my life" at all, but merely my sense of the world I live in, with the emphasis on the world, not on the I who is doing the sensing.

So for example my own experiences in the Sinai in the wake of the Six Day War, and in the red rock deserts of southern Utah, are fed to the ghost of Moses in a poem called "Deuteronomy"; a story from the Cowichan River on Vancouver Island is fueled with my own experience of the Coast Range in *Tzuhalem's Mountain*; an Algonkian ritual is transposed to the High Cascades in "Tending the Fire," and in a piece called "The Stonecutter's Horses," Francesco Petrarca is made to sound as though he had just been hiking the Siskiyous, which straddle the Oregon/California line.

For years I kept tacked to my studio wall a *New Yorker* cartoon which I'd captioned Portrait of the Artist. In it, a man, nearly drowned, was being lugged up the beach by a taciturn lifeguard. "My whole life passed before me," coughed the limp, drenched figure: "My whole life passed before me, and I wasn't in it."

"All good writing," Scott Fitzgerald said, "is swimming under water and holding your breath." But I am inclined to think that more real poetry is swimming under water and breathing.

This nevertheless is a rankly self-centred meditation not on swimming but on walking, breathing through the feet, and sneaking through the lines.

I was born in the post-Depression diaspora at the close of the Second World War, the only child of itinerant parents — ambitious father, obedient mother — and raised in the mountains of western North America, moving often and liking it well. I remember as foci the Absaroka Ranges in Montana, the Valley of the Little Bighorn and the Wind River Mountains and the Southern Absarokas in Wyoming, the Maligne Mountains and the Goat Range in Alberta, and the Virgin River country in southern Utah. In later years, I have felt myself at home in a thousand named and nameless places in that long spine of mountains, steppe, and desert which I've wandered from the Yukon to Peru. Much as I've loved the few cities I've lived in — Boston, Beirut, London, Vancouver — I've never been at ease in urban spaces. And I've felt especially uncomfortable in the large, self-confident capitals of eastern North America, where so many decisions that affect the world I prefer to live in are now made.

The place I was born used to be the country of the Kumivit — people who spoke a language related to Hopi, Shoshone, and Nahuatl, who lived in large domed houses of bulrush and watergrass, drank a broth of the sacred datura in quest of their visions, and shared a profound tradition of abstract art with their physically close but linguistically distant neighbours the Chumash.

A Portuguese sailed into one of their bays in 1542 and gave it a name on his chart but left it alone. The Spanish stole it from the Kumivit in 1769, and renamed my particular part of it El Pueblo de Nuestra Señora la Reina de los

Angeles de Porciúncula — in honour, improbably enough, of the madonna of St. Francis of Assisi. The U.S. Army stole it from the Spanish in 1846, and I arrived myself, somewhat more quietly, exactly a century later. The Kumivit were then extinct, and the Spanish colonial culture, bloody as it was, had been prettified into picturesque decor. The Kumivit village of Yangna had become the chrome-and-neon compost known to all aficionados of American nonculture as L.A.

I've often pretended I was born elsewhere, in some deeper layer of that midden or on some height or beach or raft where less imperial detritus had accrued. But my birth certificate says it was there.

And it was, in fact, a compost. Lifeforms thrived within the garbage, and almost anything could be found there. To take one improbable example, a Siberian-born renegade Zen monk, trained at Engakuji, who read Thomas Carlyle (and everything else) in his spare time, was wandering the city. He was the teacher I've already mentioned, Nyogen Senzaki, and he was a great crosser of borders. In 1946 he was freshly returned, with many other Japanese, from the Heart Mountain prison camp in northern Wyoming — a place in which, years later, knowing nothing yet of Senzaki, I also spent some time. The barbed wire was still up then too, though only the ghosts were still imprisoned. Heart Mountain was the first *ruin* I had ever seen, and it sits vivid on my mind, alongside Baalbek, Chaco Canyon, Delphi and other places, larger but seen later, which dwarf it in space and time.

The north end of Watts, where my parents were living in the mid 1940's; the Heart Mountain compound; Red Lodge, Montana; Calgary; Butte; the wild valleys I hiked as a child — those of the San Juan River and the Green — which are now under water, while the huge reservoirs they contain are filling with speedboats and marinas.... A litany of places, to conjure the long spaces between them. The earth itself is a living body, and a kind of brain. It is living information, like the cortex and the genes. We flood it with water and asphalt and concrete and standardized grass, and with signs which say Fried Chicken or Mountain Estates or Colour TV in Every Room or Jesus Saves, and we think *that* is information. I was born in the home of the celluloid vision and the armour-plated American dream, but I cannot remember a time when I was not horrified by the face of America: by its superficial brilliance, its arrogant self-assurance, its love of itself, its insentience, its greed.

Thus, while most of my colleagues in the Canadian and American poetry racket devote themselves to speaking for and within the colonial culture to which they belong — and which, of course, contains a great deal of profundity and of beauty — I have spent my own career learning to speak across and against it. I have tried to pack up into my poems all it contained that looked worth stealing, and to resituate that wealth, that salvageable wisdom, in someplace spiritually distinct: some other dimension of the physical space I inhabit, and which the maze of

governments, real estate agencies and development corporations supposes it owns.

This is a fruitless task, of course, for the machinery of progress and industrial development is destroying the non-human world far faster than a few ecologists, poets, or terrorists can protect it. But there is nothing else to do, for there is nowhere else to go. Home is where the stones have not stopped breathing and the light is still alive.

The pre- and now postmodernist assumption, that the world of colonial America, as heir to the ages and its spaces, is a universal world, and indeed a habitable world, is one I may yet help, in spite of myself, to prove. It is one which I nevertheless decry. I, like the audience I try to write for, live not in but on the fringes of that world — escaping it, contradicting it, pillaging it, and ignoring it as best I can. As a creature of the edges, and not of the collapsing centre, I have made it my business not to parody or portray the central insanities of that world — which is what much current writing is about — nor even to praise the still functioning graces — which are many after all, and which again much current writing is about. I have made it my business simply to find what I thought I could salvage and preserve, and to pack it out into another, coterminous world. There, with no hope of enduring success — and with no need of a new physical structure, so numerous are the ruins — I have been trying to live on closer, less arrogant terms with the real — which is, I repeat, for the most part non-human.

I feel fortunate that I was raised a political orphan, moving often across international borders, especially the U.S./Canada border, never learning to be at home with the sense of nationhood on either side. Even as a child, the only political act that made sense to me was to refuse to sing anyone's national anthem or mutter pieties to anyone's national flag. This unnationalism was, of course, the implicit tradition in North America until the eighteenth century, and it has survived, albeit perilously, into present times. It is the tradition of Dumont instead of Riel, Thoreau instead of Emerson, Melville instead of Whitman, Big Bear instead of Sir John Alexander Macdonald.

But because I was schooled, in the early years, much as everyone else was in colonial North America, I grew up with one foot in the confident world of western historicism. It took me a long time to find the other foot — the one I'd been standing on, as it turned out, all the while. I was thirty years old before I began the serious study of the languages and cultures native to the hemisphere I called home. Others, my elders — like Gary Snyder, Jerome Rothenberg, Jarold Ramsay, and even that strange old spectre Witter Bynner — had contemplated or taken this road before me. If I'd been less unsociable, or just quicker to learn, they might have saved me a great deal of time. As it is, I am still very glad of my little Greek and less Chinese — but the ten years I spent learning Arabic would, I now know, have been far better spent learning Hopi and Navajo.

I do still read the European and even colonial North American poets — primarily those at the two extremes of the history, ancient and modern. But I spend more time reading the works of biologists and anthropologists. I think of them often as the real poets of my age. And I read the remains of the native American oral literature. I think of *that* as what stands at the core of my heritage now. In the summer of 1984, I found in a Philadelphia library unpublished transcripts, in Haida, of performances by the great Haida mythteller Walter McGregor of the Qaiahllanas, recorded in 1901 in the Queen Charlotte Islands. And I felt then an excitement such as I think Gian Francesco Poggio Bracciolini felt in 1417, when, poking through manuscripts at a monastery in Italy, he uncovered the lost text of Lucretius' *De rerum natura.*

As recently as 1980, I taught, at a major Canadian university, a course in literature in which only the European and colonial tradition was mentioned, with the odd passing reference to India and China. I can no more imagine doing that now than I can imagine trying to restitute the British Empire — but it has been a long, slow road to learn.

ANOTHER TEACHER I NEVER MET, and who knew a lot about breathing, was Ezra Pound. But Pound also exemplifies the extraordinary factiousness, the imbalance, the self-righteousness and paranoia, and the fearful patriotism and pride of Euramerican civilization. When I was younger, I carried his books with me everywhere, and in 1965, on my way to Beirut, I went to Italy to see him. But as I neared the house I realized I had nothing whatever to tell him and nothing very interesting to ask him either, so I walked on. The thought that he might have something to tell *me* seems not to have entered my mind. In those days, I believed that a man could put everything and then some into his new books, and that another man could come along later and dig it all out again.

Oddly enough, I was not much troubled then by Pound's readiness to hate the Taoists, the Buddhists, the Jews, and any number of other groups. In him as in other large-hearted bigots, these hatreds were contradicted at every turn by individual friendships, but I was a long time in coming to wonder why, in that case, those hatreds were still there. At the time, I thought of them simply as a disease which Pound suffered and I didn't. It seems more obvious to me now that Pound suffered them in part because his cultural inheritance encouraged him to do so. It has given me plenty of unwanted encouragement of the same kind.

Pound himself touched another American bent in me too, and that was my prolonged fascination with craftsmanship and technique, with inward mechanics and outward physical forms. With Pound's example before me, I spent years on

the study of metrics. Not that I did daily exercises with the Welsh or French or Italian verse forms; I was never much interested in envelopes. But I studied prosodic systems and speech sounds, the acoustic as well as syntactic shaping of language. I focused for years on the audible half of the craft of polyphony — which in my trade means making a music one of whose voices sounds audibly in the throat while the others sound silently and differently, yet relatedly, in the mind.

After twenty years of working at it, I can now sometimes think about orchestrating a poem instead of shaping a single line — which is why, I suppose, the word *form* no longer seems to me, as it once did, merely a synonym for versification. Along the way, it seems to me I have come to learn relatively less from other poets and more from artists of other kinds. I have learned more about composition from the late sonatas of Beethoven, more about silence from the late paintings of Borduas, and — though I cannot write like he could play — as much about tonality and broken timbre from John Coltrane, as from any poet I could name.

And I don't regret the time I've spent studying prosody, though it's clear to me now it has little to do with the essence of poetry. Like its visual counterpart, typography (another physical and mechanical business which, for me, has held mysterious fascinations), prosody is in its simplest forms a ceremonial tool and in its complex forms a sometimes burdensome luxury. At its best, it is a device for retaining and touching the poetry. It may be as useful and beautiful as a bowl, but a bowl is not water, and the untranslatable stuff of prosody is rarely, I think, essential to the poetry itself. Yet I value it highly, as I always have. To borrow a sentence from Pound, I value technique as a test of an author's sincerity. I value it as evidence of his commitment to something more than a private audience with the gods.

None of this means, of course, that poetry doesn't sing. It does sing, or seeks to sing — and will try to do so visually, as the hills do in winter, if it is prevented from doing so audibly, as the thrushes do in spring. It may for all that be no more scannable than the Kaskawulsh Glacier and no more tuneful than an arctic tern.

A language is a sort of lifeform, like a discontinuous animal or a symbiotic plant. Dead, it is like the intricate test of a sea urchin or the lifeless shell of a crab. Alive, it is a working form of intelligence, a part of the intellectual gene pool which has taken on specified, localized form. It is not, as many of my colleagues in the literature business like to say, the mother of poetry. Poetry has nothing essential to do with language. Language just happens to be the traditional means — but hardly the only available means — by which poetry is touched, in which it is temporarily captured, and through which it is served (or, as we all know, sometimes disserved). The poetry seems somehow always willing

to revisit certain old poems (it helps a lot if we remember how to pronounce them), just as the gods seem never to abandon certain old temples (it helps if we remember how to approach them). Yet there are many, more modern structures which neither poetry nor the gods seem willing to touch, no matter how skilfully those structures may be engineered.

So if poetry has nothing quintessential to do with language, what does it have to do with? It has to do, for one thing, with the other forms of attention. When I say that colonial American culture seems to me dead or insentient, this is what I have in mind. For all the scientists, poets, scholars, and trained observers of all kinds, all the professional attention-payers we have in western society, attention is precisely what seems to be absent from our daily lives. "Breathe through your feet" is a gentler, more informative, less self-centred and less frustrated form of the well-known adjuration, "Pay attention." It doesn't mean pay attention to *me*; it just means pay attention.

It is, for instance, what snails do under duress. The snail, who is almost all foot to begin with, though he has gills, can breathe through almost every pore in his body. I can imagine Nyogen Senzaki, in his snail incarnation, pushing still further, saying in Snail, "Breath through your shells." He was, as I've said, a great crosser of borders, and had little patience with excess baggage.

In the year of Senzaki's release from the Heart Mountain prison camp, Ezra Pound was interred at another such camp near Pisa. He was then indicted for treason as a result of his radio broadcasts from Italy during the war. But let us remember that the society which indicted him did so not for his lunatic promotion of racial hatred. His crime, as far as the U.S. government was concerned, was simply that he had urged rapprochement with Mussolini and an immediate end to the war. Let us also remember that the society which bore, bred, and indicted him was the same one which had imprisoned Nyogen Senzaki and thousands of others merely for being (or looking) Japanese. It was a society in which apartheid was legally sanctioned and almost universally practiced against Amerindians, Asians, and Africans. It has become since then a society whose principal business is the manufacture and deployment of the instruments of mass destruction. And it has remained a society whose relentless persecution of native Americans seems destined to continue until every Indian left alive has finally consented to the state religion, which is to say the industrial-mercantile economy, and with it the real estate ethic, that land can be freely bought and sold.

It is a monster more benign than many others; of this there is no doubt, but it is a monster nonetheless. I hope that my own slow and unobtrusive treason against the nation state I was born in, while it will never be as notorious as Pound's, will prove in the long run less boneheaded and more fruitful. I would like that as much as I'd like to write poetry which the rasp-tongued, mad old master might have admired.

I'VE BROODED HERE ON THE DISTINCTION between the colonial and native American cultures. But in the tangled roots of the European tradition lay cultures which must, in significant ways, have resembled the ones which, for three hundred years, we have worked to extinguish throughout North America. The remains of those old, now voiceless, cultures of Europe — from the paintings of Lascaux to the fragments of Empedokles and Herakleitos — though they come to us in pieces, speak of a wholeness which, in our rapacious industrial society, is almost unknown.

I have lived and worked with the discontinuous ghosts of the old philosopher-poets of Greece for a long time, and I admire about those poets in particular their refusal to be compartmentalized. I admire their assumption that poetry, philosophy, physics, biology, ethics, and even theology are all one pursuit. I admire, in other words, their moral and spiritual and intellectual integrity. And I admire, by the way, the fact that they were good ecologists, good environmentalists, though they'd have made no sense out of that compartment either.

I find that same integrity in many of the philosopher-poets of the Orient — in Saraha, Lao Tzu, Chuang Tzu, Seng Ts'an — and I think I sense it in St. Francis of Assisi, though hardly in the works of those who sailed to the New World in his name. But to me it seems clearest of all in some of the quiet, cornered voices of the native American tradition. It is there to be read in the salvaged scraps of oral literature, and it is still there to be heard in the mouths of a steadily shrinking number of native gardeners, hunters, and herders who live in the steadily shrinking real world — the lean tracts not yet consumed by an insatiable white society with the stupidest goals in the world: money and jobs. Not piety, grace, understanding, wisdom, intelligence, truth, beauty, virtue, compassion. None of these. Not real wealth either, but only factitious wealth; and not a relationship with or a place in the natural order, but life in a wholly consumptive, introverted scheme: money and jobs.

I find sustenance now for that archaic sense of integrity more among naturalists than among poets, more in broken country than in social order, more with marmots and great blue herons than with human beings. I hope that my own poems, like those of the Presocratics — and like the tales of Walter McGregor of the Qaiahllanas, and the great poem of Lucretius — are not about human beings exclusively, but about the world, and about the painful business of loving and living with the world. Breathing through the feet, while the colonial culture keeps tearing the air with its hands.

But speech is in its origins a set of social gestures, and a man who turns his back upon his fellows severs himself from the wellsprings of language. Silences puncture his speech. He grows inarticulate. What kind of sentence is that upon

a poet? Perhaps the best kind. A man who turns his back upon his fellows severs himself from the wellsprings of eloquence, but not from the sources of meaning.

So like the drunk who befriends the dog, because everyone else is too far off the floor to talk to, I keep the company, for preference, of the rocks and trees, the loons and the seaducks who at this moment are close out the door. I ignore you, reader, for something larger than you, which includes you or not, as you choose — though of course, in another sense, whatever you choose, it includes you. And you include it, and our fate rests not just on our own feet but in one another's hands.

RIDDLE

Robert Bringhurst

A man with no hands is still singing.
A bird with no hands is asking the world,
and the world is answering every day:
earth is the only flesh of the song.

A man with no wings is crossing
the sky's black rapids on his hands.
His mother's bones lie slumped
by the stumps of the cedars.

I carry my own bones in my hands
into your country,
and there are no kings; it is not a kingdom;
and there is no legend; it is the land
and a woman's body, and these are my bones.
What do I owe to these strangers my brothers?

ICARUS

James Larsen

Icarus did not die
that morning off the coast of Calymne.
The evidence refutes the legend.

Time maintains
the wrong myth;
not pride,
not foolishness,
not fate —
half-god himself
he knew Phaeton
but not the sun;
knew his father
and his father's earth,
but not the wings
that were not his,
not
the sail
and
labyrinth.

There should have been a moment
within
the haloed sun,

but
the plunge
was the closest approximation.

The ploughman turned
away too soon;
wax rehardened
wings moved
but the sky held tight;
floating,
the boy knew himself
an artifice,
some thing to be
brushed by Bruegel's hand
and Auden's pen.

But he is
still Icarus,
my Icarus,
with
wax for wings
wings for the moon,
built with some strings
one afternoon.

ARCHIBALD LAMPMAN

W. J. Keith

Kicking the dust of Ottawa off his feet,
he tramped into a gentle country
smooth as his language,

paddled into a prehuman wilderness
to meditate on what it means
to be human.

But the frogs croaked back
their groggy answer that was
no answer;

the troubled lake-water
reflected, refracted
his own troubled image;

the mullein-stalks
in the November clearing
remained stark and silent.

He could find no comfort
in country things, no pastoral
peace, no feral therapy.

All he could do was return
post-haste to the post-office
at the end of things.

DIONNE BRAND'S WINTER EPIGRAMS

Edward Kamau Brathwaite

DIONNE BRAND, THIS SISTER, Toronto out of Trinidad, carries her verse with the clear sharp relaxed tension of Sistren and for much the same reasons: poor, hungry, cold, exile, inhabit the verses with a warm feminine all-embracing sense of womb: of hope, that is, and home and him in all his glaces. Her fourth book of poems *Winter epigrams & Epigrams to Ernesto Cardenal in defense of Claudia* has recently (March 1983) been published by Williams-Wallace International of Toronto; and with it we can at last begin, with some confidence, to see and overstand what the voice of the Caribbean woman poet is telling us, doing for us. How the line of that tradition begins to reveal itself from Nanny through the fias of all those slave revolts to the 1930's to the flagwomen of so many carnivals to Miss Lou, to Pandora Gomez. And Dionne, perhaps because she is our first major exile female poet (sorry about all those qualifications) helps us to make a start.

the epigram form helps too; getting her (and iani) closer to the nerve, to the bone, to the clear wide integrated circuits of her meaning; circuits of blood, that is, not stereo. And what else, what more a fitting form, we ask at the "end" of the reading, for exile, for loneliness, for such bleak loveliness, the winter of the IIIWorld's sense of present discontents and that quick radicle of green from which the poems spring . . .

Winter Poems

we begin in autumn, in early September in fact, with death coming down from the North; the world of white (re)-asserting itself in the city:

1

A white boy with a dead voice
sings about autumn.
who knows what he means!

2

no one notices the tree in the front yard
of the next apartment building
is dead, again

3
ten months in the cold
waiting
I have forgotten, for what!

this is where McKay was in 1925, in New York, with for him, too, the winter coming down. Forgetting he looked (back) home. Dionne looks out her tight apartment window in Toronto:

they think it's pretty
this falling of leaves.
something is dying!
(W4)[1]

every september, about the first week
a smell of infirmity clasps the air,
it is a warm lake like an old hand
trying to calm a cold city.
(W6)

and ?pretty soon it is her ark against the arctic:

cold is cold is
cold is cold is
not skiing
or any other foolhardiness in snow.
(W8)

and we find her, trying to keep warm heart, warm hope, warm mind, warm friendship, at a Harbourfront poetry reading; with others, too, trying to shay no to snow:

a coloured boat
sailed on a frozen lake
at Harbourfront
two northern poets, thankfully rescued
by this trip to Toronto, read
about distant grass
about arctic plains
who wants to see, who wants to listen!
(W7)

already the voice establishing itself within the enigmatic diary and the first ?cold "lyric" follows:

I give you these epigrams, Toronto,
these winter fragments
these stark white papers
because you mothered me
because you held me with a distance that I expected,

here, my mittens,
here, my frozen body,
because you gave me nothing more
and i took nothing less,
i give you winter epigrams
because you are a liar,
there is no other season here
(W9)

but the theme of exile, we understand from the start, isn't going to be conventionally rootless, conventionally protest, conventionally shivering. Poet & place interstand each other; each in ijs own space; each at ijs learning distance. So she is *here*: poet, yes; and vulnerable woman:

I am getting old
i know.
my skin doesn't jump any more
i am not young and in the company of people;
i am old and in the company of shadows.
things pass in the corners of my eyes
and i don't catch them.
what more proof do you want, look!
i am writing epigrams
(W10)

form and "condition" meshing

winters should be answered
in curt, no-nonsense phrases,
don't encourage them to linger.
(W11)

so she goes, this young woman of the IIIWorld tropics, to the winter discoes "where you get to dance fast / and someone embraces you" (W12); or to the bookstore where "I can buy books / which i do not read and cannot afford / and make plans for them to / carry me through my depression . . ." (W19); or she takes a trip out of town but the click remains locked and she is like licked within the winter solstice:

I've never been to the far north/cold,
just went as far as Sudbury,
all that was there was the skull of the earth.
a granite mask so terrible even
the wind passed hurriedly.
the skull of the earth I tell you,
stoney, sockets, people
hacked its dry copper flesh.

I've heard of bears and wolves
but that skull was all i saw.
it was all I saw I tell you . . .
(W18)

and as you would expect, at this heart of the ice, the icicle act, the insidious implosion:

the superintendent dug up the plants again,
each june she plants them
each september she digs them up
just as they're blooming,
this business of dying so often
and so soon
is getting to me
(W23)

but watch now, at the same time, from the very bottom of the pit, the lovely handled anti-line:

It was not right to say
her face was ruined by alcohol and rooming houses,
it was still there, hanging on to her
cracking itself to let out a heavy tongue
and a voice (if you could call it that).
her eyes opened not out of any real interest, not to see
where she was going, but out of some remembered courtesy,
something tumbled out of her mouth
a Black woman walked by,
one who could not keep a secret . . .
(W27)

for it keeps closing in: rape, pornography, a man in a window showing her his penis (W46, 48, 51); where the green; where the love?

If one more person I meet
in an elevator in july says to me
'Is it hot enough for you?'
or when standing, cold, at a car stop in november,
'How could you leave your lovely sunny country . . . '
(W26)

I can wear dirty clothes
under my coat now,
be who I am in my room,
on the street.
perhaps there'll be an accident though.
(W13)

it's too cold to go outside,
i hope there won't be a fire.
(W15)

I've found out
staying indoors makes you horny,
perhaps winter is for writing
love poems.
(W16)

and love, in all its various guises, its remarch of voices, is what these poems (in addition to their major ojer themes, connected, disconnected) are "about." And no, not turtle dove; not even Russe/Zhivago love. But something that a sister comes to understand from as I say the Hill Queen Nanny, the rebels at Montego Bay, and those her mothers of the Middle Passage; from Caribbean daughter who does not (yet) forget to change her underwear . . . (W13)

Epigrams to Ernesto Cardenal in defense of Claudia

the force-fields here are complex. Cardenal (he was the one in line on TV when the Pope visited Nicaragua; the revolutionary priest taking off his beret and kneeling to kiss the ring with the Pope wagging his finger at him. One of the finest poets of Our America. In *Apocalypse and other poems* (trans 1977), Ernesto, alive to the blandishments of Claudia, the Cocoa-Cola girl, one of the problems of Our America, wrote

They told me you were in love with another man
and [so] I went off to my room
and I wrote that article against the government
that landed me in jail.

(quoted in McTair's Introduction)

and Dionne picks this up; becoming herself Claudia, taking note of that male arrogance against the "other," herself so different from that Claudia, yet sharing in the common gender, the oppression, and at last the love: for in the end the Revolution cannot be only politics, but heart & whole: from which the heal itself may one day come. But before that, Ernesto, too, must understand that

Often . . . ,
little girls are quite desperate.
(E11)

and

How do I know that this is love
and not legitimation of capitalist relations of production
in advanced patriarchy?

and

so we spent hours and hours
learning Marx,
so we picketted embassies and stood

> at rallies,
> so it's been 13 years agitating
> for the liberation of Africa,
> so they still think, I should be in charge
> of the refreshments.
> (E14)

and

> can't speak
> for girls of the bourgeoisie,
> But girls like me can't wait
> for poems and men's hearts.
> (E16)

and

> Beauty for now, is a hot meal
> or a cold meal or any meal at all.
> (E20)

and, in direct response to Cardenal's poem:

> so I'm the only thing you care about?
> well what about the incursions into Angola,
> what about the cia in Jamaica,
> what about El Salvador,
> what about the multi-national paramilitaries
> in South Africa,
> and what do you mean by 'thing' anyway?
> (E21)

and

> If you don't mind,
> can I just sit here today?
> can I not be amusing please?
> (E22)

so

> Dear Ernesto,
> I have terrible problems convincing
> people that these are love poems.
> Apparently I am not allowed to love
> more than a single person at a time.
> Can I not love anyone but you?
> signed,
> 'Desperate'.
> (E27)

but she can speak like that, has earned the right to speak like that, because the

same way she knows her place as woman, she knows her place as revolutionary, as IIIWorld 20th-century person & persona:

when I saw the guerrillas march into Harrare
tears came to my eyes
when I saw their feet, a few
had shoes and many were bare
when I saw their clothes, almost
none were in uniform.
the vanquished were well dressed.
(E23)

Carbines instead of M16s
manure explosives instead of cluster bombs
self criticism instead of orders
baskets full of sulphur instead of washing.
(E24)

That is how we took Algiers and Ho Chi Minh city and Muputo and Harrare and Managua and Havana
and St Georges and Luanda and Da Dang and Tet and Guinea
and . . .
(E25)

I wanted to be there.
(E26)

for such a person/poet, as for Cardenal, there can be no separation: woman from her senses, artist from her life, politics from heart

cow's hide or drum
don't tell me it makes no difference
to my singing,
I do not think that histories are so plain,
so clumsy and so temporal . . .
I want to write as many poems as Pablo Neruda
to have 'pared my fingers to the quick'
like his,
to duck and run like hell from numbing chants.
(E34)

these are the Ars Poetica poems of the collection; like (11): *'on being told that being Black is being bitter'* — the very heart, not so, of so many of our fruitless Caribbean post-Prospero debates

give up the bitterness
he told my young friend/poet
give it up and you will be beautiful.
after all these years and after all these words
it is not simply a part of us anymore

it is not something that you can take away
as if we held it for safekeeping,
it is not a treasure, not a sweet,
it is something hot in the hand, a piece of red coal,
it is an electric fence, touched . . .

it is the generation that grew up and died with Walter Rodney, knowing that it will have to go in & go through with it over & over & over again

it is not separate, different,
it is all of us, mixed up in our skins,
welded to our bones
and it cannot be thrown away
not after all these years, after all these words
we don't have a hold on it
it has a hold on us,
to give it up means that someone dies,
you, or my young poet friend . . .

'so be careful,' she says

when you give up
the bitterness.
let him stand in the light for a moment
let him say his few words, let him breathe
and thank whoever you pray to
that he isn't standing on a dark street
with a brick,
waiting for you.
(E35)

and so we find her in Managua (' "Managua in the evening sky" . . . memorious and red' (E39); and in St. Georges . . .

there are hills, I hear,
to make me tired
and there is work, I know,
to make me thinner.
(E38)

and carefully tuned "I hear" balanced against "I know" is part of the careful craft of these epigrams: a sense of verse & line present in all her books of poems; as with this very Caribbean woman in Transkei:

you can't say that there's rationing here
you can't complain about the meat shortage
we have a good democratic system here in Transkei
you can't say there is only so much milk or so much butter
you can't bad-talk food on this bantustan
you can't put goat-mouth on it just like that.

If you don't have a cow you can't
say there's no butter.
(E37)

But always (back in toronto) there is still the "no end," the "half-home," leading to the not unexpected negative explosion, the poem coils in into itself to make its meaning:

The night smells of rotten fruit.
I never noticed before
the cicala's deliberate tune,
something about it frightens me
as always,
as when hallucinating with a fever
I saw the mother of the almond tree
shadow me in my hot bed.
say say stay, say go say!
The night decays with fruit
dense with black arrangements
(E41)

McKay dreamed back to warm deciduous Jamaica. Dionne, so much more — and so much less — the exile — confronts with household mask:

I've arranged my apartment
so it looks as if I'm not here
I've put up bamboo blinds
I've strung ever green hedera helix
across my kitchen window
I've bought three mexican blankets
to put on the walls . . .
If only I could get York Borough to
pass a city ordinance authorizing
the planting of Palm trees along
Raglan Avenue . . .
(W37)

and

Two things I will not buy
in this city,
mangoes and poinsettia
I must keep a little self respect
(W53)

seen? and at the extreme perhaps of vulnerability

Spring?
I wait and wait and wait;
peer at shrubs,
the neighbours don't know what to make
of this crazy Black woman
rooting in their gardens
looking for green leaves;
in only march at that.
(W33)

and it can she knows get to you and lonely lonely is the word for it as in

shall I do it then,
now, here,
a riddle for februarys,
shall I,
here, under this mexican blanket
clutching my dictionary (Vol. 11 the shorter
Oxford Marl-Z),
Shall I do it before falling asleep
before the summer comes
before seeing the Chicago Art Ensemble again . . .

like

maybe if Betty Carter never sang,
or Roscoe Mitchell never touched a saxophone . . .

but Betty sang like Billie before her and Bessie and Roscoe Mitchell burns it on from all those ancient tranes; and so these names are not commercial shopping lists, but ikons: they mean and they protect — like all the other names within this poem. So that within the IIIWorld circle of their fire, the voice recovers, eremite & wry: apocalypse too kaiso for utter ruin . . .

losing my life like that though,
mislaying the damn thing,
and right in the middle of winter,
me!
and it gone
flown
shall I chew the red berries
which I collected before the freeze.
(W45)

IT IS THIS STUBBORNNESS WHICH reaches Spring, which is the spring round which the poems curl & curve to Cardenal again & Claudia but

Claudia at last that Cardenal must understand in all her equal hope & fear & reason: woman, now defined, of isle & exile, art & heart & politics.

> Claudia dreams birthday cakes
> and mauve bougainvillea
> Claudia dreams high heeled shoes
> orchid bouquets, french perfume,
> Sel Duncan Dress band,
> the Hilton hotel pool, rum and coke,
> commercials of the 'free' world
> and men civilised by white shirts.
> (E48)
>
> Yet a woman is always alone,
> a case of mistaken identity . . .
> (E49)

or, less unmistakably

> you say you want me to . . .
> to what?
> no I can't tap dance
> at the International Women's Day rally.
> (E47)

or to show that there's no hard feelings either way; that even Africa doan mek it so; (even though, that is, she's "a Toronto Black poet"): this unMagnificat:

> his name meant ruler, king in Yoruba
> or god or something . . .
> and even though I was an atheist
> and a socialist, I went with him,
> not holding his name against him,
> liking it because it wasn't
> george or harold — slave names! I spat —
> what a love! this Yoruba name:
> Olu fisoye Ojo Ajolabi!
> beautiful for introductions and greetings,
> venerable and original,
> grandiose and lyrical as mother earth . . .
> a name like adire cloth
> a name like asoke weave
> Until he said: 'the poor want to be poor,
> nothing's holding them back, they're just lazy.'
> then as serf of his majestic name and tradition
> of beaten gold,
> as serfs will, I shouted at him:
> colonised lackey! comprador! traitor!
> adire cloth turn to shreds!
> death of a closet monarchist! (served me right)

> beautiful appellation of contradictions!
> I could not live with him
> even though he would have paid the rent,
> and, well, it was never personal anyway.
> (E45)

it is this woman: person:poet: this other sister Claudia: coming from all those years, from all those journeys, winter singings, that Cardenal must come to deal with, deals with Cardenal, until the equal is achieved, until the one & one is one is recognized; as in *Ars Hominis/the manly arts*:

> Since you've left me no descriptions
> having used them all to describe me
> or someone else I hardly recognize
> I have no way of telling you
> how long and wonderful your legs were;
> since you covetously hoarded all the words
> such as 'slender' and 'sensuous' and 'like a
> young gazelle'
> I have no way of letting you know
> that I loved how you stood and how you walked . . .
> (E30)

and as the negatives are worked with, worked through, like the cold, like the winter, like the snow, like Toronto, like exile, like massa day done . . .

then, when at last she can not simply say but sing that heart need not be half & half but home; that if one place be prison, the world that she inherits — no — the world she earns — is not is not but is — that then and only then within these winter epigrams — the green begins

> Cardenal, the truth is that
> even though you are not a country
> or my grandmother
> or coconut ice cream
> or Marquez' Autumn of the Patriarch
> or Sarah Vaughan
> or cuban music
> or brazillian movies
> or Kurosawa
> or C.L.R's *Black Jacobins*
> or Angela
> or Guayguayare
> I love you . . .
> (E54)

and with that quiet even handed tone which is so much the poem

> here!
> take these epigrams, Toronto,

I stole them from Ernesto Cardenal,
he deserves a better thief
but you deserve these epigrams
(W22)

NOTE

[1] W=*Winter Epigrams*, E=*Epigrams to Ernesto Cardenal*, the number referring to the poet's numbered epigram.

GOING UP

Seymour Mayne

No, he couldn't have had a knife
    in his right hand,
just the stick that helped
    him up —
and so few words. I asked
and asked: Are we there yet?
How much farther?
Won't it get dark
    before we get there?
And he nodded, his thinning
    white hair brushed
    in place with his left hand
wound with the donkey's tether.

He didn't want to go
    through with it,
I can be sure.
His heart wasn't in it.
But father,
why didn't you have
    something to say?
Why didn't you look my way
    and share a smile
as the shadows
that followed us
lengthened and pierced
the light falling
on juts of rock
    and sharp stone.

ANOTHER SON

Seymour Mayne

Why does he call me Ishmael now
that I've been kicked out
of the family tent. First they wanted me
and then, got fed up caring. He took
me up the mountain and lucky
the angel and ram appeared
in the nick of time. I was favoured then
and they called me Isaac, and she laughed
the whole Sabbath through and half the week.
But when their spirits fell
and they got tired
and wouldn't let me out with the shepherds
and their girls, they sent me off
to Hagar's tent and told me she would be
    my mother now.
I'm Isaac, I told the woman, Sarah's son.
"For me, you're Ishmael," she replied.

Ishmael, that's what he calls me
and in his aging fits, who knows,
he'll throw us both out into the desert
while he talks to himself about another son,
a perfect Isaac subservient to his dreams.

"BRIEF ARE THE DAYS OF BEAUTY"

The Wisdom of Irving Layton's "The Gucci Bag"

Joseph Kertes

In the original foreword to *The Gucci Bag* (published by Mosaic Press) Irving Layton remarked that this could "quite possibly" be his "last volume of poems." Though the comment has since been withdrawn from the McClelland and Stewart edition — no doubt because another collection must be well under way — there remains a prevailing sense of finality here — of the kind many readers have found in W. B. Yeats's *Last Poems.* It is difficult to define the tone; the subject matter that concerns Layton in this volume has preoccupied him from the beginning. But one of its characteristics is the inability to idealize any longer. In "Youth and Age 1981"[1] he writes, "One does not dream with eyes open." Another is to see life's antinomies not as an intellectual abstraction but as an intrinsic facet of experience: "pain," he writes in "Bonded," the third poem in the volume, is "pleasure's indisseverable twin." The observation may sound Nietzschean, and Wynne Francis has taken some pains to point out the philosopher's influence on Layton's previous work,[2] but the context of the poem is more significant here than ever before.

Layton has presented *The Gucci Bag* as a series of numbered poems; their titles can be found only at the back of the volume, as if they were parenthetical. We are being invited to think of this book as a sustained poetic treatment of related themes, and the structure is not artificial or superimposed. Layton has concinnated these poems because his experience of growing old, of losing true love, of recognizing the potential power of his verse seems to have occurred all at once in his life. The coupling of pain and pleasure is as heartfelt and suddenly overwhelming as Yeats's "tragic joy" in "The Gyres."

In the poem that precedes "Bonded," entitled "Of One Fairy and Three Goddesses,"[3] the poet-lover is unexpectedly plucked from his Edenic garden, where stroll the goddesses of "Ecstasy and Freedom and Love," where, with "rapturous sighs," "we sowed gardens, we builded a house":

> We might have died from an excess
> of so much happiness
> but a faery who dwells in the Black Forest
> divined the peril in our bliss.
>
> She pointed her magical stick
> at my head and turned it to old snow.
> I still adore your brooding eyes, Love,
> but where did the goddesses go?

The ability to divine "the peril" in "bliss" is precisely what makes the wisdom of the poet so impressive and the vision so coherent because it repeatedly sets in motion the process of self-discovery. The poetry throughout is replete with images of transformation from innocence, through disillusion, to wisdom. The process, though, is frequently painful, as it is in "Blind Man's Bluff":

> The long dark September nights are come,
> reminding the vacant poet of losses;
> there are no stars in his skull,
> only blackness, the fumes of dead loves.

The poet's wisdom is especially evident when we recognize that among the most painful and nihilistic poems concerning solitude and love lost are poems that caution us to consider pain merely as a *part* of experience. In "The Captive" we are told that "A failed love has disordered my sight." Order is restored when a particular experience is viewed from the perspective of universal experience. "Solitary / as that lightning-blasted birch," Layton writes in "New Shining Worlds,"

> I take comfort from leaves
> falling
>
> They tell me nothing
> endures forever
> neither civilizations
> nor a woman's malice
>
> Denuding the thicket
> leaf by leaf
> decay and the punishing minutes
> this day
> gladden my heart with promise
>
> Only from rot
> are new shining worlds begot

The parting quatrain of *The Gucci Bag* affirms this roundness of vision. If we dwell upon sorrow, the poet warns, it will consume us:

He who to himself a grief does bind
Learns to dispraise all mankind
But he who speeds the grief as it flies
Keeps a candid love in his eyes.

Moreover, other artists are remembered for their ability to balance pleasure and pain in their lives and work. "Whipping you / with epiphanies welts alone can yield," he writes of August Strindberg, "Hecate lashed you on to greatness. / Now men live more sanely for your madness." They were "Ecstasies you suffered / till suffering became your ecstasy. . . . " Boris Pasternak, similarly, is depicted being pulled in opposite directions:

Apartments of your own divided mind,
you craved to have at once passion and order,
adventure and security; the sure bridge
spanning the terrifying chasm below.
Contrary winds turned you like a weathercock.

His affliction consisted of a "terrible need to suffer and to please."

However, having recognized and recorded the presence of life's "indisseverable twins," the poet rarely adopts a defeatist attitude. It is true and sad, as he writes in "Odd Obsession," that "brief are the days of beauty" and "cruel and fleeting the loves they inspire," but "If you live long enough," he says in another poem, "the differences cancel out."

The wise and aging poet's sense of calm and reconciliation is nothing short of pervasive in this volume. The best example is the poem to Louis Dudek, a one-time friend with whom Layton had a falling out more than twenty years ago. The poem is called "With Undiminished Fire":

Louis, what the hell!
Let's bury the hatchet
(and this time not
in each other's neck or skull).

The conciliatory attitude is not affected. The poet realizes that differences of ideology do not justify rivalry and hatred:

We've gone our separate ways
to Valhalla — so what?
We still keep our rage
for bourgeois and huckster,
still scorn the fashionable lies
of pulpit and marketplace;
still keep faith with Homer and Shakespeare,
John Donne and Yeats.

The invocation, clearly, is from one old friend to another:

My left ear partly deaf,

I only half-heard your diatribes
        and literary abuse,
the gossip seething in the streets
that malice grows from grin to crooked grin.
I hope, Louis, you were similarly afflicted
        and only half-heard mine.

....

        Dear friend, dear comrade-in-arms,
in the darker nights ahead
which the revolving sun
relentlessly spins for both of us
        let us forgive utterly
the long, divisive years, the pain
and may each in his separate sky
with undiminished fire, shine.

If there is irony in these last lines, I am certain it is unconscious, but they pose an almost diabolical question: which celestial body is Dudek? The sun or moon?

Reconciliation for Layton, though, should not be mstaken for a compromise of artistic integrity. He is no less distressed than ever by avarice and covetousness, and he tells us so in the foreword:

> At present the Gucci bag is nailed to my outside housewall to keep away the vampires of materialism and acquisitiveness. A talisman, it also serves as a constant reminder of how easy it is to slide into the inferno of lovelessness, pride and greed, and of the bloated soulless faces one encounters there. Every poet discovers — uncovers — his own hell. Is perhaps inevitably constrained to make it. Mine is the bourgeois world with its contempt for the claims of beauty, justice, truth, and compassion.

Layton's abhorrence of bourgeois values is not new. Many of his earlier poems — "Family Portrait," for instance — contain scathing descriptions of people whose greed has paid great dividends:

That owner of duplexes
has enough gold to sink himself
on a battleship. His children,
two sons and a daughter, are variations
on the original gleam: that is,
        slobs with a college education.[4]

However, in the context of *The Gucci Bag*, with its spirit of forgiveness, poems about the greedy and insensitive seem all the more poignant. There are some people Layton will justifiably never forgive. Among them a lawyer, who is really "an immaculately dressed / dung beetle,"

Revelling
in everyone's bourgeois shit

> and straining . . . straining hard
> to leave his rank and name
> lying on top of it.

In "Fill in the Blank" Layton — bitter as he must have been after his latest divorce proceedings — cannot resist generalities. The obvious "blank" is filled by still more lawyers, who are described here as "poor bastards / looking for a buck," as "minions of the rich, / paid to tighten the blindfold / on the eyes of Justice," and — Layton rarely minces words — as "trained liars." They belong to a class Layton, in another poem, calls "Dead Souls":

> A decaying body reeks to heaven
> but souls that corrupt smell worse, far worse.
> A dead soul takes sweetness from the air,
> on life itself lays down its black curse.

And add to the lawyers the Canadian establishment at large who seem consistently to put the poet in a frame of mind that is neither lyrical nor subtle. "When they weren't killing off Indians / for their furs and territory," he writes in "Whitehern,"

> or corrupting senators and councilmen
> or making money off brains more inventive
> than their own, the Canadian bourgeois
> filtered their piety and wealth
> into endowments for church choirs, libraries
> and hospitals; sure of the place they deserved
> on this sinful earth and of the golden
> Edwardian chair waiting for them in heaven.

In the very first poem of the collection, "The Talisman," we are introduced to the bourgeois symbol, the Gucci bag, which "calls to mind / evil is not external but within." The last poem admonishes us not to dwell on evil. Between these two, then, we are treated to the gamut of human actions and emotions. Among the basest of humans — the insensitive, the hypocritical, the greedy, the pious — are *some* women. I emphasize "some" because it is only in their most pernicious attitudes that humans — among them women — are able to evoke the most cynical voice the poet can muster. "Sex Appeal" is worth quoting in its entirety:

> When the white-haired poet in despair
> turns away from the mindless noise, from
> the twitching figures;
>   and apocalyptic images
> of well-dressed men feasting on babyflesh
>   leap into his head
> he thinks happily of the neutron bomb,
> his face taking on again
>   the proud and serene look

> that once brought women in their hundreds
> clamouring to his bed

There is something in power, something in the ability to destroy, that appeals to the darker side of the human psyche. In this case sex appeal is enhanced by a "proud and serene look" behind which is the destruction of the species. Another poem, "Aristocrats," features Rosa, a prostitute "who does not answer," while all the other girls "jump from their stools / when the Neopolitans point at them." What brings Rosa to her feet is a "young Mafioso":

> Sensing he's different from the others
> and knows his worth,
> knows he has the sharpest knife
> in the city
> and two Alsatians that love him.

Prompted by fear and motivated by power, Rosa succumbs to the only man capable of destroying her. His dogs are his "aristocrats."

To read these two poems out of context, though, and thereby to suggest that they reveal Layton's attitude to women would be akin to suggesting that Iago embodies Shakespeare's attitude to humanity. *The Gucci Bag* is masterful precisely because it is an attempt to record the *range* of human experience. Evil makes the poet nihilistic. Benevolence and love make him exuberant:

> Imagination with an eyeblink
> wipes out space and time
> but manifests that narrow place
>
> Where love still grows
> like the first violet of spring
> and its shy prevailing glow.

Similarly, the Jews, who occupy a central place in Layton's work as a whole and in this collection in particular, are located on a spectrum at whose brightest end are the visionaries — the poets and prophets — and at whose darkest end are the sinners — those for whom vision is meaningless or event threatening. It is difficult to itemize Layton's theology precisely, but moral conduct is infinitely preferable to mindless observance of religious ritual. His injunction to the Jews is not unlike Isaiah's:

> To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats. (Isaiah, I.11)
>
> Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. (I.13)
>
> Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine

> eyes; cease to do evil; Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord. . . . (1.16-18)

In "A Brief History of the Jews" Layton seems almost to be addressing these same people "in their plush synogogues," who are now "talking only to themselves." "The Remnant" describes the kind of Jew who has wandered too far from Mount Sinai. In him the "Xian"[5] has found a counterpart, called the "Idd."

> How did it happen
> the noisome Idd usurps his place to become
> a universal scandal and reproach? What
> malignity put him at the head of governments,
> insurance companies and corporations?
> In hot pursuit of power and success are not
> the affluent moneytheists of Old Forest Hill
> an evil deformity, the Israelites' shed skin?
> Their stylish wives and daughters ogling
> the latest shipment of baubles in Miami and Tel Aviv,
> lice in the beards of Moses and the prophets?

The gift/curse that has been bestowed upon the Jews is *rochmonis*[6] (compassion) — if only because they knew too well the kind of life they have led in environments devoid of it. Since *rochmonis* is at the heart of both good conduct and vision, the peculiar lot of the Jew, for Layton, is that he use his spirit to guide the world. The problem is that he has begun to turn a deaf ear to the voice of the prophets: "the voice exhorting them / to stand alone and be a light to the gentiles / is not heard."

THE BALANCE FOR THESE VITUPERATIVE POEMS is provided in *The Gucci Bag* by expressions of almost boyish wonder and vulnerability. In "Samantha Clara Layton," which is a celebration of the birth of the poet's daughter, there occurs a remarkably subtle transference of fragility and innocence from the newborn to the poet:

> Into the ordinary day you came,
> giving your small nose and chin to the air
> and blinded by the noise you could not see.
> Your mother's smile was your benediction;
> my wonderment will accompany you
> all your days. Dear little girl, what blessings
> shall I ask for you? Strong limbs, a mind firm
> that looking on this world without dismay
> turns furious lust into love's romance?

> These, my child, and more. Grace keep you
> queenly and kind, a comfort to the ill and poor,
> your presence a bounty of joy to all
> that have vision of you, as I have now
> who hold your fingers in my trembling hand.

The humility Layton feels in the face of new life is matched only by the futility he feels in the face of death. The poem for Malka Cohen, "To Make an End," is reminiscent of "Keine Lazarovitch: 1870-1959," Layton's most masterful elegy, in that it too reminds us that vitality, fertility, and creativity are as ephemeral as life itself:

> The last indignities are over:
> the bar between convulsing jaws;
> gaunt cheeks, death's familiar foxholes,
> and breasts that once gave suck,
> now flat and unresponsive as damp rags;
> her diminutive teats, raw and wornout,
> mocking our vaporous presence on earth
> with the mordant emphasis of quotemarks.

The difference between this poem and "Keine Lazarovitch," though, is that, here, Malka Cohen leaves behind "the hopeless, homeless love / of her weeping daughters," whose sorrow — genuine though it is — is as transitory as their lives. But Keine Lazarovitch leaves behind a poet to immortalize her. This reading of the later elegy is not meant to be a cynical one. Clearly, the poet intended his lament to be genuine and, certainly, it is not only the grief of the daughters that remains, but also *this poem* to record it; but the earlier poem links its dying figure inextricably to the natural cycle and yet tells of grief and love that are so fundamental to experience that they provide their subject with the possibility of transcendence. Death is no match for the poet's mother:

> . . . I believe
> She endlessly praised her black eyebrows, their thick weave,
> Till plagiarizing Death leaned down and took them for his
> mould.
>
> And spoiled a dignity I shall not again find,
> And the fury of her stubborn limited mind:
> Now none will shake her amber beads and call God blind,
> Or wear them upon a breast so radiantly.
>
> O fierce she was, mean and unaccommodating;
> But I think now of the toss of her gold earrings,
> Their proud carnal assertion, and her youngest sings
> While all the rivers of her red veins move into the sea.[7]

I make this comparison only because I think "Keine Lazarovitch" provides an example of one of the most important functions of poetry. It may be, as Layton

suggests in "The Seesaw," that art offers us little more than "consolatory hints" about the meaning of life and death, but it may also offer "the needed culm for self-propulsion / towards the paling stars." It may, in fact, provide creatures trapped in the natural cycle with eternal life. "Trees in Late Autumn" reveals the role of the imagination in nature:

> Slowly they grow towards extinction.
> My window has seen the winter's blasts
> but looks on as impassively
> as city crowds when a man is beaten.
>
> It holds their reflection for me
> like a perfect work of art;
> on sullen days I'm moved to ecstasy
> by images of beauty and death.
>
> ....
>
> A trillion leaves appear and fall;
> season after season they come and go.
> I stare out from my sterile window.
> Even the trees are without faith.
>
> Blindly they put forth, sicken and die.
> I am the sole meaning they have;
> only if I will it to happen
> will they shoot from their roots and fly.

One of the jobs of the poet, then, is to recognize and decipher historical events and to point the correct way for his culture. In the process, however, he must also understand his own limitations and the limits of knowledge itself. In Bologna, there is an artist who is not doing his job. The poem is "Bottles":

> Mussolini came and went,
> likewise the war,
> Hiroshima, the Holocaust,
> Stalin, the smooth displacement of culture
> by pornography:
> he painted only bottles
> and one famous self-portrait.
> There must be a deep meaning
> in this somewhere
> but what it is
> I cannot tell
> but must wait for instruction
> from a wise old whore
> a philosopher
> or death at my door.

The bottle-painter, in fact, *lives* in a bottle and so has only "one famous self-portrait," but the poet, too, lives in a bottle — perhaps slightly larger than that of the painter — but smaller (in terms of knowledge) than that of "a wise old whore / a philosopher / or death."

Even if the poet's knowledge is limited, his chief responsibility is to articulate what he *does* know instinctively: the difference between honesty and corruption. His role in the world is not unlike that of the ancient prophets, for "In the creative word lies redemption," writes Layton in "The Carillon":

> Utterance alone can heal the ailing spirit
> and make man and poet a single self;
> bring back on the long vein of memory
> the laughter and wholeness of childhood.

Moreover, integrity is the *sine qua non* of great poetry: "impurity and self-betrayal / make the prophet's voice clunk like a cracked bell." To make it "chime like a carillon," he must ferret out truth in the belief that in so doing he will bring peace:

> Like a sponge the poet soaks up the sewage
> of evil trespass and self-delusion
> running through the ruts of this dark epoch.
> His head is a black cloud about to burst.
>
> From his own self must come light and truth,
> the long-awaited word to stifle discord. . . .

As peacemakers the best poets realize that their job is, to say the least, difficult because language itself is corrupt. Presumably, people in a state of communion — if such a state were possible — need not communicate because they already *understand* one another without the use of words. Language implies that mutual understanding is imperfect. Layton is well aware of the distinction between communion and communication. In an otherwise whimsical poem, called "What Do You Think of Mitterand?" he says, "A point is always reached when I can't distinguish / between lust and language. . . . " Lust is rooted in communication, whereas love comes closer to communion. So poetry is, at least in part, about love, but love in a fallen world.

"The Garden" of *The Gucci Bag*, therefore, is a post-Edenic one in which life and death play out their interminable struggle, but one in which lurk both poetry and immortality:

> The grass is waiting to cover me
> like a warm overcoat, green with age;
> the bough's luxuriant leaves are sleeves
> ready to embrace or hold me down.

Nature conspires with and against
me, brief shuttle between womb and tomb,
a centimetre on which is notched
immense vistas of anguish and gloom.

Confidently I sit here and write
though dark shadows gather near the house
and the birds have left off their singing.
The fly's cry is trapped in the neat web.

One day, my head full of summer noise
or an etude by Frederic Chopin,
the wind lifting me up by the elbows
will hustle me out of the garden.

Other insects shall come, other leaves grow.
This garden will never be empty;
my wraith will be that white butterfly.
Return a thousand years from now and see.

What else can be expected of a book of poetry but that it provide us with insight into the state of the world and some suggestions as to how to improve it? The real and the imagined are drawn so poignantly and the human condition — as it is and as it could be — expressed so unequivocally, that the "chimes" of *The Gucci Bag* — like strains of Yeats's "intolerable music" — leave us longing to hear more.

NOTES

[1] Irving Layton, "Youth and Age 1981," *The Gucci Bag* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1983), pp. 109-10. All references to *The Gucci Bag* are to this edition.

[2] Wynne Francis, "Layton and Nietzsche," *Canadian Literature*, no. 67 (Winter 1976), pp. 39-52.

[3] This poem is incorrectly listed in the M & S edition as "Of One Fairy and Two Goddesses."

[4] Layton, "Family Portrait" (1958), rpt. in *A Wild Peculiar Joy* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1982), p. 75.

[5] "Xians" were introduced to Layton's poetic vocabulary after the publication of *For My Brother Jesus* (1976). The term refers to Christians who, in spite of their ostensible piety, do not live by the teachings of Jesus. Layton writes in the foreword to *The Gucci Bag*, "Idds and Xians have this much in common: they both pay lip-service to religious institutions given to them by Hebrew prophets" (p. 11).

[6] *Rochmonis* is the phonetic spelling of a Yiddish word that has no exact equivalent in English, but it is akin to a deep and enduring compassion.

[7] Layton, "Keine Lazarovitch: 1870-1959" (1961), rpt. in *A Wild Peculiar Joy*, p. 86.

DIONYSIANS IN A BAD TIME

Irving Layton

August Strindberg. Brutal wars with women
exhausted him and he forgot his atheism
and despair, forgot the sentimental red-eyed demons
that cast their nets for the human soul. Yes, guilts
will rot a man worse than syphilis.

At the end.
closing his eyes he mumbled pieties
heard at his mother's knee,
clutching a mournful tinplate Jesus to his breast.
AVE CRUX SPES UNICA

After the cocktails and compliments
men turn wolves, women bare their serpent fangs.
Kazantzakis, too, crowed like chanticleer;
crowed once and fell silent,
numbed by the stellar chill, the vacuity
human swarms make
beneath immense star clusters moving in empty space.
At life's close,
comfortless as a newborn babe he too sank back
into the primal womb. Come, my enamoured friends,
let us pluck splinters
from the stolid cross sprouting from his pierced heart.

San Jose
March 3, 1984

FOOL'S WEEK

Patrick Friesen

a day like any other

monday morning I felt
like not going to work
for no reason
so I didn't

slept all morning
did dishes in the afternoon

on tuesday
I put God out
with the cat

house was empty for a bit
soon filled it with silence
not to say a drink or two

it was wednesday
at a committee meeting
I made a fool of myself
and everyone else
I hope

slept well

I disregarded doctor's advice
all day thursday
felt fine
in a way

had people over at night
I impersonated and ridiculed
a famous conductor
who recently slept in my basement
because of the drought

forgot an important birthday friday
didn't sleep well
all the memories I hadn't asked for
not to mention the alcohol
which had no place to go
and settled in with me for the night

on saturday
I thought of doctors
a moment of weakness

wrote a sad poem for my town
it seemed all that was left

went to sleep
with a full moon splashing
on my eyes

I dreamed a dream
of flying wallendas

sunday morning I woke
to what I thought could be my last day
or the first
wondered if I would ever learn
to forget everything I knew

realized I didn't have to
it was done

a blessing
I could be thankful
though I wasn't
left with anything
except all the monkey-business

ROSE

Harold Rhenisch

The flower rises up
through your days.

The stem is stiff
in the wind, sways:

the flower burns.
One petal

is the green current
of the river

as it flows over ice;
one petal

is the sun. The sun is the white
flesh of an apple

seen through thin cloud,
pale as bone,

shimmering with storm.
The storm is blue, grey;

another petal
underlies it, deep in the water

of your other lives, a mountain
clearing out of morning, the air

thinning into light.
One petal of the rose

is the sky, as close to you
as the surface of the sea,

watercolours brushed on
with a quick, empty hand.

The scent of the flower
is the wild water of snow,

a burn in your nostrils,
the air as dry as clarity.

One petal is the clear wind.
The flower spills through the light,

a refraction of wonder,
the names of your heart.

It is as wild as any animal
on earth, but of a different substance —

so thick, so thin, so pure,
it spills through the earth

as easily as the growing tip
of a dogwood, or a brush through water:

a name that does not speak us,
but grows in its air.

We are brushed
with that growth and stillness.

THE TRAVELLING LIFE

An Account of some Pits and Peaks in a Three-Week Poetry Reading Tour of Canada

Jeni Couzyn

THE ENTRANCE HALL OF THE COLLEGE is thick with chattering students, all animated, all in a hurry. I sway under a sense of vertigo I often have in crowded places — a feeling of the irrelevance of my purpose there, and that I'm suddenly going to pop out of existence without a ripple, leaving no trace.

Suddenly a young man darts up to me and asks if I'm Jeni Couzyn, the visiting poet? My host has posted sentries for me at each of the entrances to the college. I hear my hesitant footsteps begin to click with the confidence of someone who feels wanted as I trot beside him.

"What were you and the others told to look for?"

"Someone about thirty, with dark hair and looking lost."

Perhaps it will be a good reading. My host shakes my hand, hangs up my coat, gives me a cup of coffee and a comfortable chair in the staff room — all good omens. These first moments are the signs by which you test the water. If they're good, it probably means a competent introduction, a good room to read in, a lively audience. If they're bad, you know you're in for a cold swim.

As I walk towards the hall I ask about the students. Technical students, he says. Very few in literature. Business management, nurses, and so forth. None of them very academic, I'm afraid. I did advertise the reading but I doubt we'll get many students.

That apologetic tone — a bad sign, one of the worst. My glow of anticipation vanishes on a cold wind. A knot of frozen mercury is rolling around in the pit of my stomach. I was expecting very bright literature students. My prepared programme won't do for this audience who'd enjoy a lighter programme, personal and narrative poems, incidents and characters they can relate to directly, patter that touches on the concerns of their own lives. I'll have to abandon my prepared reading and improvise. I start stringing poems together in my head.

A notice on the door of the hall announces STANDING ROOM ONLY. Another about turn — large audiences like to laugh a lot and be entertained. They need a hard fast pacing with slick patter and lots of irony. I look around at the many

faces in front of me — they're young and neutral — no hint of what they're expecting or hoping for, no tuning A. A false start is a costly mistake at a reading, as the audience accepts the opening as a key for how to relate to you for the rest of the performance. They'll accept flexibility within the framework you've given them in the first few minutes, but seldom tolerate your coming at them from a totally different angle once the reading is rolling.

My introduction from my host is competent, warm, and brief. Then he sits down and there's nothing left between me and them. Their faces are still quite blank. Nowhere a hint of eagerness, humour, moodiness. I rummage frantically through the catalogue of poems in my head, finding nothing that seems to fit. Panicking I decide to revert to my planned programme and say:

"Robert Browning once said that when he wrote his poems, he and God knew what they meant; after a little time had passed, only God knew. I find that some of my poems do become more mysterious to me rather than less as I live with them. Like children they seem to grow away from me, until I don't really understand them at all. This is true of the poem I would like to begin with today."

The faces show puzzlement, mistrust, even a little alarm. I put my head well down, veil my eyes, and plunge in.

WHAT YOU DO WITH YOUR EYES at a poetry reading is an intricate and delicate affair — something like the ritual of undressing before making love. Too direct and naked eye contact as you read is for an audience an extremely unpleasant experience, something like having a total stranger rip off his clothes and stand naked in front of you, and then begin clumsily trying to take off yours. It's an invasion of privacy at best insensitive, at worst threatening and aggressive. The result is bound to be a drawing away.

On the other hand *no* eye contact is like trying to make love without removing one's clothes at all. Meeting eyes is a kind of touching — without it there can be no intimacy. The polite and disappointing encounter is as banal and uneventful as small talk anywhere — a travesty of the poet's work, since a poetry reading should be *deep talk.*

But this audience is as shy and nervous as a pack of wild deer. Until they relax I'll have to let them think themselves invisible by covering my face, so to speak. I keep my eyes tightly locked on the page in front of me.

The poem I'm reading is called "Leper Rejects the Missionaries." It begins:

> priest. hooded messenger in my
> territory. night mothman who makes my oneness
> glow who lowers huge lights and hungry
> lenses down it. . . .

I put all thoughts of the audience and other poems out of my mind and concentrate on the sound of the words. By the end of the first stanza the poem is beginning to sing, and I'm able to separate a part of my mind to listen to the silence.

Silence is a curious element. It's a part of the sound you weave into the heard poem, as the spaces in a painting are part of the design. There are as many kinds of silence for a poet reading as there are kinds of snow for an Eskimo. First there's the Rustling silence. It means that the audience is not with you — they are scurrying about in their minds like small animals and it's the rustling of their thoughts that you hear.

Then there's the Attentive silence. It is perfect stillness like very clear water, where every note you drop into it resonates. A third kind of silence occurs when the audience is attentive but there are frequent interruptions of sound — people arriving late, voices outside the door, laughter outside the window. Then the silence in the room turns into Clenched silence. For the audience and the reading poet it's like lying in bed trying to dream while one's body is tense and knotted, listening for the sound of a key in the door or stealthy footsteps on the stairs. As you have to sleep in order to dream, so the silence has to relax and deepen for a poem dropped into it to come alive.

Best of all is the Electric silence where you hear the audience's thoughts and weave them into the texture and meaning of the poem, so that it forms somewhere in the air between you with its own resonating life. Worst of all is the Filled silence, the kind created by the mechanical hum of air conditioning or neon lights. Trying to read against this kind of hum feels like suddenly being deprived of one's eyesight in a familiar room. It prevents anything but the crudest communication of idea and feeling, and working in it is spiritually draining, even damaging.

This silence is none of those. Its an Opaque silence. I can hear the audience hearing me, but I can't hear them. Half way through the second stanza I wonder if I can fake an ending somewhere soon, or leave out a few stanzas. But no opportunity presents itself, and I labour on into a silence thick as fog that is swallowing my words and lines whole, undigested, in great lumps.

At the end of the poem I pause and dare to look around. When a large number of people are looking at you there are many ways of looking back. Most common is to look without seeing — a kind of glazed stare, more a way of showing your eyes than seeing with them. Your awareness remains locked inside your head, and you mainly see what you imagine they are seeing in you.

But there are other more useful ways of looking at an audience. One of the best is a hard penetrating look quick as a glance, so the audience barely feels your eyes on them. But a beam of your awareness flashes across their faces like a computer, and comes to rest for an instant on one face that is a true reflection for that second of the general feeling in the room. Then it meets those eyes — not

for long enough for the eyes to change, seeing themselves being seen, just long enough to pass an idea or feeling along the eyebeam from one heart into the others.

I once tried reciting my poems and gave up within a few minutes of beginning, when I saw that everyone was listening with turned away faces. Audiences like to be invisible, which is why theatres are so often kept dark, and why I always pretend to read my poems, even those I know by heart and in my sleep.

There is a way for an author to look directly at an audience, but it has to be used with caution, and sparingly. It's a long sweeping look that seems to take in everybody in a way that says to each person in the audience: "Tell me who you are. You matter. This is a dialogue between you and me. We are alone together and no-one will interrupt us."

It's a look of this kind I give the audience now. Their response is immediate. Somewhere near the back a hand shoots up. Yes?

"Do you think your poem could mean that the lepers are afraid of being cured?"

Whatever my answer is, it has plenty of warmth in it. Others are encouraged to try to explain my poem to me as they see it. The atmosphere begins to bristle with excitement. Understanding a poem that the poet herself has forgotten the meaning of is an invigorating work, and a revelation, always, of the interpreter. People will sometimes share things with a visiting poet they would only otherwise share with a therapist or priest. As those students get high on explaining my poem to me, I am getting high on vivid miniatures of their histories that would normally take years to discover. The exchange of gifts has taken place; the magic is working as it should.

When I cut the discussion to move on to the next poem, I know that I can't fail with this audience. A bond has grown between us that will make it possible for me to read them anything I choose.

Audiences have a way of punishing poets they don't like, which takes the form of the Grim silence. This has nothing in common with the Shy silence, or the Nothing-to-Say silence, neither of which is unkind, or the Patronizing or Prying questioning, both of which are unbearable. The Grim silence is an unspoken, unveiled hostility. If you ask a question, no-one answers. If you meet an eye, it stares you down. If you make a self-deprecating joke, no-one smiles.

The opposite of the Grim silence is for the audience to want to talk. You are showered with a feast of questions that are offered as gifts. They mean "I'm on your side. I think you're wonderful. Whatever you do, I'm with you." This audience wants to give and give. Every poem I read falls on fertile ground, and grows between us like a lovely plant. At the end of the reading I am mobbed in the humble way that poets get mobbed: I sell every book I've brought with me to sell, including my reading copies.

I AM DUE AT THE SCHOOL at eleven-thirty. At eight the school librarian who's arranged the reading telephones me.

"About your African chanting groups . . . "

No, I explain, I am doing a poetry reading.

"But we've been studying Africa in our special projects. We understood that you are from Africa. . . . " I agree to play a tape or two of African music, but I am firm. I am not leading any African chanting groups.

"Well then," says the voice, a little high-pitched I think, "about your poetry reading. Will it be all right if I put the grade twos with the grade sixes, because they've been working together on reading, or would you like them separate?"

"Just a moment." There's an alarm clock going off in my head. "How old are these children?"

"Very talented six-year-olds," she sings, "and some eight- and nine-year-olds. All hand picked, these children, the cream of the school."

I am glad I didn't know in advance that I was to read to such tiny children, or I'd never have accepted the reading. I spend half an hour doing some quick thinking, then wade through the snow to my taxi. When I arrive Miss McCarty greets me warmly.

"Would you prefer to sit on the owl, or the pussycat?" She is pointing at two cushions on a little stage. I see that she is serious.

"The owl, definitely the owl."

Two groups, forty children in each. When the first group files in and sits down on the carpet in front of me they only seem to fill a few square feet. They are so tiny, their little faces look up at me eagerly like a bed of charming flowers.

"We are so lucky," says Miss McCarty to the children, "to have a real live *Poetress* who's come all the way from Africa to read us her poems today."

My apprehension melts away. I play them an African chant and they all laugh, because they can't understand the words. I read them a sound poem about a slow lorris, and they creep around the library being slow lorrises. I talk to them about magic and read them a spell: *Spell to Banish Fear*:

By the warmth of the sun
By the baby's cry
By the lambs on the hill
I banish thee.

By the sweetness of the song
By the warm rain falling
By the hum of grass
Begone.

Never has fear been so far from my heart. As they repeat the gentle lines after

me, I find myself almost in tears at the sweetness of their voices. My little poem becomes true and poignant spoken by them as it has never been, spoken by me. We talk about our senses, and the powerful things in nature around us. They suggest thunder and lightning and volcanoes and blizzards. We talk about the power we have inside ourselves to make wishes come true. As I tell them things about magic that I have said too many times, my words become true for me as if I were discovering these truths for the first time. The exquisite honesty of their faces, believing me utterly and taking every word I say literally somehow purifies what I am saying to a level of truth I have long ago lost. I read them another spell, *Spell for Remembering*, and we talk about the power in tiny things:

By the crocodile's eye
By the scorpion's sting
By the tooth of the shark
Let me remember

By the jaw of the ant
By the prickly pear's horn
By the hair of the wasp
Let me remember

By the charred cross
By the fist of ash
By the blood of earth
Let me remember.

Then we make some spells together. Spell for Happiness, Spell for Peace, Spell for Good Health, Spell for Sunshine. The eight- and nine-year-olds want to talk about magic in Africa, and the difference between magic and superstition. Afterwards one little girl says to me,

"I just wanted to hug you and kiss you when you were reading because when I grow up I want to be exactly like you."

Another says: "I used to be a follower but now you've changed my life. Now I'm just my very own self."

Miss McCarty buys three books for herself and three for the school library. Two of the children want to buy books and bring the money from their parents the next day. Miss McCarty buys the books for them out of school funds.

"It doesn't matter if they don't bring the money in," she says, "the school will pay for the books. It's too important that these children should have these books to let the chance go by."

A few days later I get a fat envelope from the school — a thank you letter from Miss McCarty, and poems from the children. Spells for Happiness, Peace, Colours of the World, Friendship, and a little love poem written for me called *Brown Eyes*:

If you are out in another world
Not knowing who you love,
Just look for the brown-eyed person
Who will care for you till up-above.

They bring good luck, wisdom and beauty,
They take away bad times and cruelty.
They share their thoughts,
And have good times. Yes,
Look for the brown-eyed person.

THE BUS RUSHES ON AND ON, through a charred landscape flat and featureless, now and then a small ugly gathering of buildings that passes for a town, stubble grass burned to khaki grey by the cold. This is not what I think of as countryside. No trees, no hills or rivers, no green no blue no earth brown. Everywhere the sky and land is steel grey, flat and endless. This is how I imagine the world will be after a nuclear war — a nightmare land of ash where nothing moves.

The bus station is like a piece of film set — a kind of glass shed, with three or four shadowy people sitting about and a single taxi. I climb into the taxi and have a strong feeling that the bus station will vanish the second I turn my eyes away. Ten minutes later I am standing in front of the school.

I stare at the massive yellow building in the middle of nowhere, unable to believe my eyes. It looks like a prison for the criminally insane. Along the whole length of the building, which is three storeys high and a few thousand yards long, *there is not a single window.*

The corridors are the same yellow brick, with neon strip lighting overhead and a grey floor. Nowhere are there any pictures, notice boards, coat hooks to relieve the desolate prison walls. The place is filled with a feeling of doom. It's a large school, two thousand pupils, the teacher guiding me explains politely. I am almost speechless with indignation: "Who would build a school without windows?"

"You get used to it," she says lethargically. "You'd be surprised. There are a lot of schools like this. They were the fashion for a time."

Groups of students stand around, leaning against the walls, hardly speaking to each other, not noticing us passing. In the classroom where I am to read, half a dozen or perhaps ten unattractive teen-agers are scattered along the back row.

"Is this all?"

"I'm afraid so. Twenty bought tickets, but sometimes they buy tickets to things just to get out of their classes."

"Out of a school of two thousand, only twenty students bought tickets to come, and only half of those turned up?"

"Well none of them have any money you see. It's a farming community around here."

I am thinking how even in the richest schools I've read at, I've never known the children being asked to pay to come to a poetry reading.

"How long would you like me to read?"

"An hour in the first period, and then we'll have a ten-minute break, and then another hour in the second period."

It's impossible. Even the keenest adults have trouble listening to poetry for two solid hours. The neon lights are hurting my eyes already, and the air is so dry I can hardly breathe. Perhaps it's the walls without windows or pictures, the ugly furniture, the featureless faces, but my throat keeps closing over as I try to speak. Luckily there's a drinking fountain in the wall outside the door. I fill a paper cup with water and begin.

My plan is to read them some poems that will stir them into discussion, make them laugh a little, and then set them free after about an hour — though freedom seems a mean gift in this sad place. I begin with a poem about a policeman going down into the subway to retrieve a body that has been beheaded by a train. In the dark tunnel he sees something twitching, and thinking it's a rat (rats are his phobia) he and his mates surround it and make a grab for it. When he has it in his hands he discovers that it's not a rat at all but the fellow's heart. The poem usually has the effect of shocking the audience into a troubled alertness, where they don't know what to expect next, and they aren't sure whether to laugh or be appalled.

By the end of the poem now, though, the faces are as dead looking as when I walked in. Something stronger is needed.

I read them a poem called "Preparation of Human Pie." It's a recipe poem, written with a deadpan detachedness, and some quite unpleasant details, from the point of view of an alien species which sees humanity in much the same way as we might see prawns — simply as potential food. I have had audiences fall about laughing at the poem. I've actually had someone rush from the hall to vomit. The previous day the teacher hosting me made me promise to read the same poem to the second class of students as well. These students stare at me with dead eyes, registering no response at all, not even censure or boredom.

I'm desperate — I *have* to get them talking. I talk about how we use animals for our convenience, without ever thinking about the quality of their individual lives, or the misery of their deaths. I talk about calves, being kept in stalls small enough to prevent them from moving from birth till their early death, so the veal will be tender. I talk about chicken batteries. And then I ask them for their

comments, and sit through a long silence before one of them finally, hesitantly asks:

"Are you trying to say that chicken batteries are *wrong*?" His voice is an almost visible shrug: Anyone could see that I am weird, a nut case, nothing to do with them.

Farm children, I think. I look around me. Chicken battery — without anything beautiful or exciting or free. None of them has known anything different in their own lives — why should they care about chickens. These are not farm children of green fields and rivers, the warm smell of hay and puppies and getting up at dawn to call the cows in by name for milking. Pails of warm milk and new laid eggs and the delicious smells of animals and wind and new turned earth and the many voiced morning. These are factory children, brought up amongst giant machines that manufacture food out of seed and flesh, without ever noticing that it is alive.

I am filled with pity for them. I give them the landscapes of my childhood, my loves, my songs, my dreams. I stir them to a pitiful flicker of awareness. But I know that for them it's already too late. Long ago they lost the use of voices and wings.

I don't sell any books at that school. I escape like someone reprieved from the death penalty. As the bus drives me back into the deep snowy streets of Toronto I listen to the joyful shouts of a group of youths playing ice hockey in the road, and find myself praying with gratitude for the richness of my life.

THE SECOND LAST DAY of my tour I do three readings, two at high schools and the third at the Women's Studies Centre at York University.

This is my ideal kind of reading. A small room is packed with fifty or sixty people. There's a table at one end well stocked with food and wine, and everyone is comfortable and at ease. A baby talks through my first poem, and when he begins to shout ditty! ditty! his mother gets up to take him out.

"Oh give him some titty" I plead with her, and she turns scarlet, protesting that he is saying kitty, kitty! The audience roars with laughter. The atmosphere is so receptive that I choose this moment to read a large chunk of new unpublished work that I haven't read to anyone before. The poems are from the book I'm currently working on, called *A Time to be Born*, about the birth of my daughter and the first six months of her life.

At a reading, nothing is as rewarding as successfully reading new poems for the first time. Tonight the reception my new work gets is overwhelming, and the reading is for me the highlight of my tour.

My daughter, now aged twenty months, has managed very well during these three weeks, taken care of partly by her nanny, and partly by her grandmother. Although she has slept in my bed each night, and seen me for at least an hour or two each day, she is seeing a lot less of me than she is used to, and by now she has had enough. On this penultimate day I leave her at eight in the morning, return at two that night, and then spend another hour talking to a journalist who is interviewing me by telephone from the west coast. She wakes up immediately wanting a feed when I crawl into bed at three a.m. and it's another hour before we are both able to get to sleep. Only one more reading to go.

Four hours later I'm woken by the telephone again.

"Get up quickly. You have to be at the reading in an hour. There's been some kind of a mix-up." This reading, at an art college, was booked for noon.

I wake my daughter and we have a bath together. Then I wake her nanny and order three taxis. I've recently discovered that after a heavy snowfall, before the roads are cleared, taxis are like gold. One of the three, I hope, will come in time.

I arrive at the reading four minutes late — a triumph, I feel, under the circumstances. Arlene Lampert, the organizer of my tour and a close friend, has chosen this reading as the one she'll come along to. With her is another close friend, a fellow writer, Rachel Wyatt. When I arrive they are waiting nervously for me on the pavement, and rush me off to a remote building, down some stairs, and into a kind of basement room where a class of students with their tutor is glaring coldly at the door.

I ask for some water and the tutor says it's not possible. "I'll get it myself, if you'll tell me where," I insist. Grumbling, he fetches some water in a paper cup. "We do hamburgers too," he says, and the class titters.

"Aren't you going to introduce her?" one of the students whispers.

"I don't know anything about her," answers the tutor loudly, and glares down at the table.

"It's quite all right, I can manage without an introduction," I smile, and then I listen to the silence. It's a Filled silence. The air-conditioning unit for the whole college is in that room, and its engines roar with a steady menace, unfaltering.

"Is there anything we can do about that roar?"

"Nothing whatsoever," says my host, smug and patronizing. I begin with a humorous anti-man poem, called "The Red Hen's Last Will and Testament to the Last Cock on Earth." I aim it directly at the tutor. Not a smile. Not a sparkle. Those students are like grim judges at a death trial.

"We'll have to do something to break up this ice," I mutter cheerfully, "Or we'll all be frozen to death." The ice creaks with menace. I read another humorous poem, this time at my own expense, satirizing the visiting poet. Nothing. The silence on top of the Filled silence is Grim silence.

To hell with them, I decide, and putting my head down I read a poem that takes twenty-five minutes to read, without once looking up, or pausing to draw them in. To my surprise I hear my voice flowing out calmly, without the slightest tremor of hurt or self-doubt. I hear myself beaming warmth into that room, without needing to be liked in return. I feel strong as a rock, unassailable, and it fills me with joy. By the end of the twenty-five minutes those students are mine. In spite of the tutor and the ugly cloud around his head, the ice in the room has broken up and floated away.

For the rest of the reading I read poems only by request. They want everything. After an hour when I suggest drawing to a close, they say:

"We're here till two o'clock. Go on as long as you like."

The tutor is ashamed. My friends are jubilant.

"That," I announce to them as we leave, "is what I call working for my money."

"You were great, great!" says Arlene, hugging me. "You were gracious, and dignified, and the poems were great, great! I'm going to get that bastard fired."

"A firing squad would do nicely," says Rachel, in her mild way.

I know that it was not a great reading, but somehow I've survived it without being raped, which is the spiritual equivalent for a poet who bares her spirit to a hating audience. There are many dangers that lurk on tour for a reading poet. Filled silence is one of them, Grim silence is another. This reading had both. If a reading is good, you come out feeling created. If it's bad you come out feeling raw and cheapened, degraded, ashamed. One of the common hazards is the Would-Be-Poet as your host, who has brought you there to read in the hope that you will somehow further his career. Worst of all hazards and all hosts is the Failed poet.

This tutor, it turns out, is a Failed poet. He's been turned down, Arlene confesses to me, by the very organization that set up my tour. My reading was forced on him, she explains, by the head of the department, as his class was the only time she'd been able to offer for me to read in. The offending tutor changed my reading time to much earlier at the last minute in the hope that it would mean cancelling the reading, and moved it to that impossible basement room from the normal reading room in the hope that if I did come to the college, I would never find the class.

The air-conditioning was a stroke of genius, but on the whole that Failed poet has done me a favour. He's made me feel capable of handling almost anything. My work is over, and I have two free days to spend with friends, skidooing on a frozen lake in the deep fresh snow. In London my beautiful serene work room is waiting for my return.

SUFFERING

P. K. Page

"Man is made in such a way that he is never so much
attached to anything as he is to his suffering."
GURDJIEFF

Suffering
confers identity. It makes you proud.
The one bird in the family bush. Which other, ever
suffered so? Whose nights, whose days,
a thicket of blades to pass through?
Deeps of tears. Not ever to give it up,
this friend whose sword
turns in your heart,
this o-so-constant clever cove — care-giver
never neglectful, saying yes and yes
to plumed funerary horses, to grey drizzle
falling against the panes of the eyes.

Oh, what without it . . . ? If you turned your back?
Unthinkable, so to reject it, choose instead
meadows flower-starred

or taste — for instance — just for an instant, bread.
The sweet-smelling fields of the earth
dancing
goldenly dancing
in your mouth.

But
suffering is sweeter yet.
That dark embrace — that birthmark,
birthright even.
Yours forever
ready to be conjured up —
tongue in the sore tooth, fingertip
pressed to the bandaged cut
and mind returning to it over and over.

Best friend, bestower of feeling,
status-giver.
Something to suck at like a stone.
One's own. One's owner.
. . . One's almost lover.

TROLL TURNING

Poetic Voice in the poetry of Kristjana Gunnars

M. Travis Lane

TROLLS, THE STORYBOOKS TELL US, are human-like creatures linked to an earthier nature than are the elves of the aesthetic sensibility. Elves are aristocrats and amateurs of arts. Trolls are peasants, mere ruffians. Elf society is feudal. Troll society is familial. Elves are healthy, wealthy, and wise, and they have beautiful manners. Trolls aren't and don't. Elves seem to be immortal, but the troll who is turned to stone by the light of day has died. For the troll is mere clod in the light of reason. Even in the stories where these calibans are permitted to endure the sun, they retain something earthen in their disposition. Ignorant, passionate, primitive, they exist in our own substance as the stony self-absorption of the child.

In literature an element of the trollish is wonderfully antidotal to effete aestheticisms, traditional or avant-garde. But trolls are not fully human. The troll is not yet analytical, ethical, bourgeois.

If one divides the myths and folk tales into greater or lesser degrees of trollishness, the most trollish are those which emphasize Luck, Magic, and Correct Information, rather than resourcefulness or virtue, as the clues to power. Such tales also tend to have a strong thematic concern with survival. Tales in which Valour or Beauty are rewarded may be considered elvish. The large group of didactic tales in which domestic or politic virtues are rewarded with great wealth are less fairy tales than bourgeois fibs. Least trollish are stories such as those about Br'er Rabbit, for whom neither luck nor correct magical information exists and whose street-wisdom is rewarded only with the continuation of her precarious existence.

Nothing could be farther from the pragmatic and intellectual world of Br'er Rabbit's briar patch than Kristjana Gunnars' magic-drenched world of nordic myth. Wotan, the self-hanged god, sacrificed one eye to gain wisdom; in the briar patch, however, one needs both eyes. Nor does Wotanic wisdom translate readily into bourgeois utilities. In Wotan's world, the interest lies in runes, not reason. Wotan's one-eyed perception and a trollish view of knowledge as composed of charms that ensure survival control the three published books of poetry by Kristjana Gunnars, the two-volume *Settlement Poems* (Turnstone, 1980), *One-*

Eyed Moon Maps (Press Porcépic, 1980), and *Wake-Pick Poems* (Anansi, 1981).

I have found it fascinating to chart the turning of Gunnars' poetic voice from the trollish primitivism of *Settlement Poems*, through wrestling with the primitive materials of nordic myth in *One-Eyed Moon Maps*, towards, in *Wake-Pick Poems*, an understanding and exploration of trollishness as it can be represented by the growing human psyche. In *Wake-Pick Poems*, too, her nordic material seems more comfortably in hand than in the earlier books. Not yet in book form is other Gunnars verse, some of which abandons the primitive or trollish voice altogether.

The primitivism of Gunnars' *Settlement Poems* is disconcerting. These poems represent the inner thoughts and daybook notations of Icelandic settlers who came to Manitoba in the late nineteenth century, enduring gruelling hardships. These Icelanders are able to read but, as Gunnars portrays them, incapable of logic. Their biology is more naive than Aristoteleans. They have no philosophy, no politics, no physics, little sense of history, and almost no theology. When they tell a "story" it is not narrative but recipe: How to see better at night (smear mouseblood on your eyelids) or How to keep your lover true (eat a ptarmigan heart) — recipes unaffected by experiential testing or scepticism. They have burned their books before leaving Iceland, and have committed methods to memory, not literature.

> this is the last story i'll tell
> the best way to become fertile: drink
> mare's milk, dry a fox's testicle
> in the shade, stir in wine, drink
> after menstruation

Gunnars gives us characters whose struggle for survival has reduced their culture to rote recitations of magical charms, and their social expression to private notation of disaster or dislike. Their sense of themselves as a people seems to preclude their ability to describe themselves as individuals, and their reluctance to make socially observant or generalizing remarks, in the manner of the standard nineteenth-century traveler's journal, makes them seem unnaturally self-concerned. But, although Gunnars' characters avoid novelistic description, Gunnars works hard to distinguish between her characters, succeeding best, perhaps, in the character of Thorgrímur Jónsson, whose entomological interests colour his growing madness, and in terse characterizations such as that by Stefán Eyjólfsson, scorning the British leader John Taylor who does not "read" nature:

> jón taylor stands on the bank
> seems dark up north
> where the red river current goes
> tell him so, 'it's dimming'

taylor's quiet for a while
then says i can stay behind
it's the future, not the sky i saw
but let him stay flatfooted

W. D. Valgardson speaks of the Icelanders as bringing with them their libraries of poetry and a "written tradition." He says that the difficulty of their life was so great that their tradition of making little of suffering led eventually to a "creative aridity." "Poetry became form without content. Fiction dealt with surface. Nonfiction concentrated on facts."[1] This kind of stoicism may be related to the lack of commentary or analysis made by the characters in *Settlement Poems*, but the characters do not make little of suffering. Instead the expression of pain and suffering is almost numbing. Gunnars' intention, of course, was not to have recreated what her characters might have written in time, but to have expressed to what thoughts and emotions they were reduced at that time. The effect, however, is reductive. Her characters do not seem fully clothed in their century.

TO SOME EXTENT GUNNARS' *Settlement Poems* is an example of a fairly large number of Canadian writings which interest themselves in primitive suffering, nightmare visions, and pre-rationalist magic, as an expression of modern paranoia. Gunnars' next book, *One-Eyed Moon Maps*, retains the blood-and-bones interests and some of the trollish primitivism of the voice of *Settlement Poems* but lacks the narrative excuse. The *One-Eyed Moon Maps* speaker is not dying of starvation or smallpox. Insofar as both *Settlement Poems* and *One-Eyed Moon Maps* direct the reader's attention away from interpretation and towards the blood and magic anecdotes of tabloid or fairy tale, they are both trollish.

The troll's world is the immediate world that presents itself, unpatterned, uncontrollable by reason. Knowledge, unrelated to the extra-self world, becomes a matter of tricks. The wisdom of the troll is dream, and perhaps no poetic voice better expresses our primitive rage, but troll poetry lacks perspective.

Gunnars' *One-Eyed Moon Maps* is filled with poetic suggestivenesses. The moon, as a blind, wounded, hanged and hanging stone, like a hanged god or rune engraving, dominates the imagery. Wotan's one-eyed telescope brings gnomic illuminations to the runes of meteor scar and star-splash on the lunar surface. But much of *One-Eyed Moon Maps* seems to be writing from recipe — the author takes a rune, a snippet from nordic mythology, a swatch of lunar nomenclature or astronomy, and juxtaposes them as if she were making a salad. The ingredients are agreeable, but some of the poems lack organic coherence or inner necessity.

For me the weakest of the *One-Eyed Moon Maps* poems are those in which the speaker imagines herself in a medieval or spooky frame of mind, as in "lots":

> bargain with mock-sacrifice
> re-enacting vikar's calf
> intestines round my neck
> praying for favourable wind. . . .
>
> for the woman's serene face
> let me hang
> with rope around my neck
> from the black mountain
> between her & the vat

I find the strongest poems where the speaker finds her material meaningful in terms of a modern sensibility, "edge," for example:

> grandfather died
> down from the north
> for the last time
> in the blue coat of youth
> tried to make it up the stairs
> & fell against me
> old man in young arms
> i pale, change shape
> depending on his movement
> my life edged with shadow
>
> he plunged his pocketknife
> first time down
> into the doorpost
> told me to pull it out
> told me sigmundur volsungur
> pulled gramur from a pillar
> but i can't match his
> strength, more than moon
> matches crescent
>
> with the quarter phase
> moon that judges
> with one eye
> falls against me in the stairs
> i can't lift
> the blue pillar
> remove the piercing pain
> in his chest, plunging
> like a ray of light
> from blue earth against
> narrow moon

A grandfather who contains Wotan and what Wotan can mean is more poetically usable than Wotan alone; equally the qualities of the moon contained by the child and the old man together are more usable than lunar place names — "fabrioius," "stevinus," "orcús," etc.

Gunnars uses a relatively unworked-over body of material for poetry in English, but it tempts her to rely overmuch on the reader's sharing her delight in lunar nomenclature or in runic alphabets. At the end of *One-Eyed Moon Maps* Gunnars notes: "Like poems, runes are used both as tools of communication and as a means of intercession with powers beyond human control." She says also that "the religious connection makes it impossible now to tell what powers the rune names were given," and that the significance of each symbol variously shifted according to where or on what it was written. But if runes are still to possess magic today, the poet must recreate belief. I no longer possess nordic myth emotionally. For me, it is all footnotes, without the ethical interest or historic contextuality of the Jesus story, without the philosophic pragmatism of Buddhism, without the novelistic interest of the Old Testament. What rune has more magic than the books of Job or Isaiah? But perhaps younger readers, imbued with the nordic sympathies of dragon and dungeon fantasy fiction, may respond more sympathetically.

FORTUNATELY, PERHAPS, Gunnars does not devote *One-Eyed Moon Maps* to a revival of a Wagnerian sensibility. Instead the book seems primarily interested in exploring what her interest in this material — nordic, runic, lunar — means. Her juxtapositions and associations intrigue her, and often us. In *Wake-Pick Poems*, however, her most recent book, she looks instead at the emotions that seek for meaning in charm, herb, and ancient tradition, and here I find her work fully successful.

In the last poem of *One-Eyed Moon Maps* Gunnars speaks of "opening the other eye / at last." In *Wake-Pick Poems* she has turned her attention away from the moons and its "one-eyed dreams" towards the stone which is earth, house, and home. And it is in *Wake-Pick Poems* that she uses the word troll for unmythic, earthy humans.[2]

Wake-Pick Poems consists of three separate poem sequences, "Changeling," "Monkshood," and "Wake-Pick." Although the persona of each is not the persona of the next, the first presents babyhood, the second, girlhood, and the last, womanhood. All three retain the charm-and-herb ridden atmosphere of *Settlement Poems*. In "Changeling" the herbs, charms, and rituals are essential in the magical and transitional world of the child becoming human. Moreover, magic "works" in "Changeling" as it can not in nineteenth-century Manitoba. In

"Monkshood" and "Wake-Pick" the herb lore is largely medicinal, and the charms and rituals are matters of tradition more than of magic. But in all three of Gunnars' books, the reason for magic, herbs, and rituals, is fear.

In "Changeling" the baby, earth-born before it is human born, and alien to the alien world, is afraid of the new world into which it has been thrust. It feels both powerless in body and powerful in will. It must be tricked into staying, coaxed into accepting dirty trollhood, baptized with magical waters. The church is pure ingredient, as chemical as bat dung, to trolls. Gunnars illustrates wittily to what extent baby mind and family are adversary and to what extent the growing self defines itself by others, using both traditional legend material and modern science fiction fantasy.

To this growing child, imbued with science fiction's stock of other-worldly reference, and finding itself within an ague-ridden, roof-leaking, unsanitary troll-stead, the fear of death doubly recurs, both as the possible death of freedom of choice, and as the possible death or injury to the body. To return to the elves, the disembodied, alien world, is a kind of dying. To choose to be a troll is to accept vulnerability, dirt, age, mortality. Trolls "take away your innocence," says the child. "I learn not to care." It's "important to get used to dead wood" — "to adjust your eyes in time / adjust your taste / to time." The child's choice to be human is a little reminiscent of the chorus from *H.M.S. Pinafore.* "But in spite of all temptations / to belong to other nations" — "Changeling" is a great romp with folk lore and the self-glory of the human child.

Both "Changeling" and "Monkshood" open with the child sent against its will into a foreign country. The newborn says "think i don't like snow country." The older child of "Monkshood," on shipboard, says: "it's not a trip i'm taking" and "this isn't my idea." She has, however, no choice. She has been sent "from reykjavik to københavn" to visit the rest of her family, and will shortly be sent away to school.

The child speaker of "Monkshood" thinks a great deal about death. Even her initial trip seems to her as "another life." She knows her grandfather, enfeebled with heart attacks, to be near dying, and death in one form or another — news, history, gossip — forms much of the family conversation. Family interest in potions and poisons makes the sequence almost a herbal of noxious weeds. But this girl child no longer has the other-worldly powers of the baby of "Changeling." Instead, she is asking the questions: What is self if you are the replica of your mother? What is the reality of memory? What can you die of? What is dying like? She tours the city with her school friends, assists Gitte to bring off a miscarriage with henbane, cooks dogbane for the girls at school (apparently out of academic curiosity) and gets sent back to the farm to contemplate nature, the anciently sacrificed Tollund man, and the possible deaths by poison of country children.

As in "Changeling," the speaker of "Monkshood," who has initially resisted identification with the family, grows to accept and proclaim her rootedness in family. And, again as in "Changeling," the speaker associates the increased sense of family with an increased acceptance of death. The two closing poems of the "Monkshood" sequence are spoken by a grown woman, and associate going back in memory with the going back of a ghost, so that the speaker, remembering, is the returning ghost of the dead. Youth is seen as a time of enclosure or walled-in-ness; maturity seems to be the going ahead, through the wall (which is traditionally broken for the dead) towards death — not the trip resisted, but the trip rejoiced in:

> everything moves anti-clockwise
> when youth ends
> even the blackeye bryony in the hedgerow
> recedes during morning song
>
> girls' voices mushroom in the fall air
> with grundtvig's lyrics:
> "du er pá vejen hjem"
> & we've heard the phaedo this morning
> about "borrowed beauty not your own"
> & "fitting yourself to await your journey"
>
> i'm tired of morning enclosures
> tired of song & dance
>
> i want to break down the wall
> get going into the open death

The speaker of "Wake-Pick" is a pre-modern woman surviving and supporting others by arduously carding, spinning, weaving, fulling, and knitting. The title refers to wooden picks used to prop open sleepy eyes during the not-infrequent all-night work periods. Necessity drives her, but she believes "freedom is spun / out of restrictions." She sees her labour as her own choice:

> in my own bed a cold
> cruel mother lies

She expresses her fatigue, her anger, and her pride:

> my work is my life
> with it i pay. . . .
>
> the strength of woman is an evergreen spreading
> a cedar of lebanon
> an ancient warp

In choosing to sacrifice herself she would give not one eye but both eyes, and not for magical wisdom but for the practical welfare of her people, the ones she loves whom she will not fail:

though i be put to fulling eternity
soak me, stiff & small
wring me in the doorway
but leave me with hands to tie
love for my people

This woman, half frozen, half-prisoned, almost stone in her working-place, rises above fear. Her heroism has mythic reference and literary tradition, but her power is not magic — it is only handiwork.

GUNNARS RESISTS THE EXPOSITORY. Her poetry has not been, by and large, written as if spoken to the reader, but rather as if speaking to itself. Her poetry tends, therefore, to have an apparent indifference as to whether or not the reader "gets" the references. But it also has the scenic thickness of a realized geography, and the social thickness of a realized community. The sparse characterizations of *Settlement Poems* mention uniqueness, not generalizations: the "poet" is an incompetent taxidermist, the "reader" of portents a bore. The troll family of "Changeling" have unique hobbies. And the subsidiary characters of "Monkshood" are as sharply sketched as notes for a novel.

The characteristic mode of Gunnars' verse is indicative or imperative, the characteristic tense present, the phrasing blunt, and the lines tending to begin with a strong beat. Often her characters, speaking as if to themselves, omit unnecessary pronouns, or used clipped colloquialisms. Although Gunnars allows her young girl in "Monkshood" the occasional meditative note, and the speaker of "Wake-Pick" lines from the ballads and psalms, Gunnar's characteristic sound is assertive, even fierce:

leave his grave flat when you go
let him throw no sundial
shadow
Settlement Poems, II, p. 15

burn this house, all that's in it
send it to sea
"smoke," *One-Eyed Moon Maps*

wrap me in shirt
in home spun swaddles . . .
name me leech
name me woodlouse
"Changeling"

if i fail you now
use me at the lake
when you fish through ice holes

let my corpse gather maggots
"Wake-Pick"

But in a group of poems from "Whale Constellations," published in the Autumn 1981 issue of *Canadian Literature* (No. 90), Gunnars abandons the primitive voice. In "Whale Constellations" she takes up again the partially unresolved problem of *One-Eyed Moon Maps*: how to combine the stars, nordic tradition, and the voice of the contemporary, thinking woman, and for this uses an intellectual, meditative voice. The poems are beautiful.

For the intellect must never be left out of the poem. Where, for reasons of characterization, as in *Settlement Poems*, or for principles of poetics, as would seem to be the case in *One-Eyed Moon Maps*, the intellectual voice would seem to be undesired, or omitted, the poems suffer. But in *Wake-Pick Poems*, although the intellectual voice is not used, the intellect shapes the poems; in "Whale Constellations" it voices them. "Whale Constellations" also gets along without the herbs and the medievalism. Instead Gunnars shows us the connections between her images, and it is the connecting mind which is the source of our delight. The speaker, remembering her whaling grandfather, and the historic decline of both whale trade and whales, places herself among species and within time:

our life too is a hazard
even in the brightest time
a fractured face reveals
hurt intelligence;
the habitual suffering
of suspicion

and when I strand
like this on your night,
remember grandfather
& the accident of whales

Very few poets have written, in what seems to have been a very short period of time, poems that have varied so much their poetic voice: the troll speaking as troll, the troll turning human, the human reflecting — the primitive, the child, the mature and contemporary woman. With this different tuning of voices and focus, Gunnars renews her material and her possibilities. What the changeling declares of its achieved humanity is true of Gunnars' poetic voice:

i've been given
the key to the kingdom
i come & go as i wish
i surpass mountain-folk

at being mountain-folk

NOTES

[1] W. D. Valgardson, "True Norse," *Books in Canada* (August-September 1982), p. 29.

[2] *Settlement Poems* contains a reference to the semi-human, with notes on how to detect one, and how to be safe with one, but the meaning of the superstition is not probed. The illustration is picturesque in intention, not metaphoric.

BROWN CUP, DIRTY GLASSES

George Bowering

fr George Economou

The white wolf hides in the snow,
a line away from blood belonging
to someone else. The flood of mutters
will find him there, betrayed by
a smart-alec scribbler with chilblains.
Whatever they are.

French novelists
treat life as if it were death, never
carry firearms, talk you to death
at dinner tables.

The white wolf hides under the trees
among the snowflakes, it is early autumn,
the earth tilts & does some people a favour.

A long female neck, now
talk about snow, a long neck like a penis,
full of blood.

Why do we let unpleasant images
push in where things were going nicely?

Why did your favourite family member
choke to death at Christmas dinner?

Why is death
so damned interesting?

The white wolf hates it
when you write black words all over him.

OCTAVE CRÉMAZIE AND HIS RETURN TO MOTHER DEATH

M. Torres

THERE HAS BEEN A TENDENCY to identify the poet Octave Crémazie (Quebec 1827-Le Havre 1879) with the national expression of French-speaking Canada, almost to the exclusion of other chords in his lyre.[1] Against this view, a strong protest was voiced by Séraphim Marion,[2] who drew his arguments from a study published by Father Valentin M. Breton in 1908. As the Rev. Breton has shown, among the 20 poems included in the *Oeuvres complètes*, edited by H. R. Casgrain in 1882, there were only six inspired exclusively by nationalist feeling. Four other poems showed no trace whatever of having been written by a Canadian in Canada, and the rest were tied to the Canadian soil only by some slight allusions.

Marion attempted, of course, to strike a balance between the two extreme ideas of a Crémazie singing of nothing but patriotism and a Crémazie singing of anything but patriotism. The critic called to mind the early poems not included in the *Oeuvres complètes*, in which Crémazie had given utterance to a conventional if somewhat artless feeling for his native land. But Marion was not quite sure that the Rev. Breton's critical analysis had sufficed to modify the current notion about Crémazie. He wrote:

> Les légendes ont toujours eu la vie dure. Malgré cette mise au point, la critique persistera longtemps encore, en certains quartiers, du moins, à voir uniquement, en Crémazie, le chantre officiel du patriotisme ... La postérité, encline à l'émondage et à la simplification, n'a retenu, en somme, de l'oeuvre crémazienne, que la silhouette épique et magnifiquement campée du *Vieux soldat*.[3]

Patriotic poets are somewhat out of fashion nowadays but that is no reason to be afraid of the genre (after all, the greatest of patriotic poets were Virgil and Shakespeare); as in everything, the question is not so much what you do, but how you do it. Yet it would be a pity if an excessively simplified image of Crémazie were to be the one to prevail. Even if he is not a poet of the highest rank, there are things to be found in him far more profound and complex than those that go into the making of a mere "chantre officiel du patriotisme."

BEFORE WE ATTEMPT a further exploration of Crèmazie's poetry, it will not be amiss to offer some comments on the kind of patriotism that is his stock-in-trade. In the first place, it is mostly of the military and *dulce et decorum* description. He delights in swords and flags and names of battles — any battles — and names of heroes — any heroes. The following lines may be read as typical:

> N'est-ce pas qu'il est bon d'entendre dans les airs
> Retentir, comme un chant d'une immense épopée,
> Les accents du clairon et ces grands coups d'épée
> Qui brillent à nos yeux ainsi que des éclairs?
> Guerriers des temps anciens, Paladins magnifiques,
> Héros éblouissants des poèmes épiques
> Dont les recits charmaient nos rêves de quinze ans.... [4]

To him any battle is heroic and epic, a joy to the combatants and a treasured memory and inspiration to their offspring, whether they are French or English, Russian or Turk or Italian. The poet himself, for all his war-mongering, does not seem to have been a man with a bellicose cast of mind. He is not in a class with the soldier-poets who could and did die on the battlefield — a Sidney or Körner or Garcilaso. There was just one occasion when Crémazie found himself close to actual war, during the siege of Paris in 1870-71, and he did not find the experience to his taste. As to the possibility of volunteering to fight for his beloved France (he was of military age and never missed a chance of referring to *nous Français*), the idea apparently never crossed his mind. His war enthusiasm was rather like that of boys who get intoxicated by a military band marching past; and in this respect our poet, as a poet, did not outgrow his fifteenth year. As a man, he came to know better, as shown by his reflections on the slaughter of the French-German war:

> La guerre est une chose horrible. Quand on ne fait que lire l'histoire des conquérants, on se laisse facilement prendre au miroitement de la gloire militaire. Mais quand on a vu de près les ravages et les désastres causés par la guerre, on se demande avec effroi quel nombre incalculable de misères sans nom, de douleurs inénarrables, de morts épouvantables, il faut à un conquérant pour tresser ce qu'on est convenu d'appeler la couronne du vainqueur.[5]

There is another odd thing about his patriotism. It is strange, to my mind at least, that for a man who wants to be the singer of national consciousness, Crémazie is continually hankering after another and distant country, namely, France. He was, of course, a French Canadian and France was the mother country of French Canada, but all that was long ago and much water had flowed in the Saint Lawrence since. The river did not stop its course when Lévis departed, nor did life cease in the cities, villages, and farmsteads on its banks. The break of the

political connection with France had emphasized, if anything, that the native land of Canadians lay right there under their feet and not on the other side of the ocean. It is significant, however, that Crémazie introduces the name of France 57 times in his poems, while the name of Canada appears only 11 times (including two periphrases: "la jeune France," "la Nouvelle France").

Like most writers, Crémazie did not arrive fully equipped on the literary scene but had to undergo an evolution, not only in acquiring the technical skills of verse-making but also in developing his views and his themes. The very first of his poems ("Premier jour de l'an 1849"), while open to criticism on several scores, is noticeable as an expression of an undiluted national feeling. Here occur the remarkable lines:

> Salut! ô Canada! salut! ô ma patrie!
> Plus heureux que le monde à qui tu dois la vie,
> Tu possèdes déjà l'heureuse liberté
> Que veut en vain saisir son bras ensanglanté.[6]

Here he speaks of his native country with pride and appreciation, exalts its contemporary achievements and — most interestingly — contrasts those achievements with the vain and frenzied attempts being then made by "le monde à qui tu dois la vie," that is to say, by France. This is perhaps the coldest and most matter-of-fact reference to France which can be found in Crémazie, still young and unsophisticated, and maybe for that very reason imbued with a strong Canadian national feeling. His regard being fixed on his native soil and the current problems confronting his own people, he did not seem to care much about "en révolutions la France si féconde."

Soon after that (1851), he undertook the first of his travels to Europe, visited France and Italy, and he underwent a profound change. This change may perhaps be best understood as an instance of a more general phenomenon, which was typical of the relations between the American continent and Europe in the second half of the nineteenth century. Many young persons from the new American countries made their way to Europe and were considerably shaken by the encounter with an older, deeper, and richer civilization. The contrast was too great with the milieu in their home countries, which at the time had little more to offer than profuse promises of a bright future. This was true of all the American countries, not excluding the United States, which might be more dynamic than the others but was still wearing out the first shoes of its development.[7] It is no exaggeration to say that political independence in the American countries had not meant by any means the end of cultural colonialism. Some of those fascinated visitors to Europe tried to absorb as much as they could for the benefit of the people back home; others were so enthralled that they remained and sought to get accepted on an equal footing in the cultural and even aristocratic European circles. In France they were often rewarded with the nickname *rastacouères*.

Crémazie could not help, either, being impressed by what he saw in France and Italy and the vast difference from the modest surroundings in which he had grown up. At any rate, it is at this point that he embraces the France-topic, which coloured so much of his subsequent verse. As Odette Condemine writes:

> A la suite de son récent voyage, le sentiment de la patrie se transforme chez lui en une émotion plus complexe et plus intense; désormais, son attachement au sol du Canada se double d'un amour profond de la France.[8]

But it is also at this point that Crémazie's patriotic poetry begins to strike the unprepared reader as peculiar. A truly national Quebec poet, one feels, should sing of Canada, and not of what for all practical purposes had become a foreign country. Who could imagine a national poet of the United States singing the glories of Great Britain and expecting the return of the British flag? It is true that Crémazie frequently refers to "nos pères" and "nos aïeux," but the true sense of these expressions is seen in the lines:

> Descendant des héros qui donnèrent leur vie
> Pour graver sur nos bords le nom de leur patrie.[9]

The opposition of *our* soil and *their* homeland makes it clear that these persons, referred to as "pères," "aïeux," and "héros," are merely embodiments of the presence of France on Canadian ground. The word-play between *nos* and *leur* is a frequent feature of Crémazie's poetry.

There is in Crémazie a clear distinction between passive and active elements, between nature and history. Canada for him is nature, the usual designation for which is "nos bords." He may not be a very close observer of this nature, but it is the only guise in which Canada appears in his poetry: so much so that he hardly ever mentions that part of Canada which must have been the best known to him (and was excellent material for a poet epically inclined), the city of Quebec. When he refers to Quebec at all, he usually makes of it a kind of stage on which to show the cross (to frighten the Indians), and the French flag (to frighten the British). France, on the other hand, is history, is the creation of human values, a source of light from which Canada may be happy to receive a distant reflection:

> O Canadiens français! comme notre âme est fière
> De pouvoir dire à tous: "La France, c'est ma mère!
> Sa gloire se reflète au front de son enfant."[10]

Furthermore, in a true national poet the song should make room for the present and also for the future, but such was not the construction Crémazie placed on his poetic exercise. After the initial period, in which he paid some attention to local current events, the present and the future of his country ceased in themselves to inspire him, and he could visualize Canada only in terms of the

French connection of old. He had not heard the Gospel word: "Let the dead bury their dead"; for he stayed with the dead and insisted on preventing their final burial. His strains were a lament for the past and an impossible expectation of reversal of the times. For the present there was little praise and less encouragement:

> Et puis il comparait, en voyant ce rivage,
> Où la gloire souvant couronna son courage,
> Le bonheur d'autrefois aux malheurs d'aujourd'hui.[11]

This is a fine antithesis but a distortion of history. Quebec did not lack problems in 1850 but nobody could pretend that, in matters of peace, security, freedom, and prosperity, it had been better off in 1750. On the contrary, here was offered an excellent subject for a national poet. He could sing not only the wonder of *la survivance* but also the rise of the French-Canadian people to new heights of achievement. Crémazie, however, seemed to be unaware of the new Canada growing around him. Immersed in a mist of romantic unreality, he kept dreaming of old battles and old glories and addressing his fervent outbursts of patriotism not to Quebec but to France. Condemine, the modern editor of his works, has gone to the heart of the matter when she calls Crémazie "le barde des gloires françaises en Amérique" and "le chantre des gloires françaises."[12] Séraphim Marion tried to obtain some indulgence for this trait in Crémazie:

> Un fils bien né ne saurait trop aimer ses parents. Et s'il donne quelquefois de son amour filial des manifestations trop exubérantes, qui l'en blâmera?[13]

Of course nobody will blame Crémazie for this. The business of literary appreciation is not to censure the poet — especially in the choice of subject, which is the first of his artistic rights — but to understand him. And the beginning of understanding is to stop and take notice of his peculiarities.

Of all 34 poems included in the *Oeuvres* as edited by Odette Condemine there are a limited number which can be classed as reflecting the current existence of the Canada in which Crémazie lived — not epic, not heroic, not flag-waving, but simple, frugal, descriptive, or hortatory, and anyway attuned to the present. These are the poems that can be called truly national and even patriotic, as they place their emphasis on national subjects and not on foreign wars or events. This does not mean that they are wholly free from foreign matters — that would be asking too much of Crémazie — but at least he tries in them to focus on the country and the time in which he really lived.

"Le jour de l'an 1852," written at the time when he had already turned his eyes toward France, contains, however, a short but faithful description of the conditions which he could see prevailing around him:

> Aux bords du Saint-Laurent, le Canada français,
> Grandissant chaque jour, en honneur, en puissance,

> A reconquis ses droits par sa forte vaillance,
> Et domine aujourd'hui sous l'étendard anglais.[14]

The poet must needs add "la France ne meurt pas," but he has nonetheless drawn a proud picture of his own country pulling itself up "par sa forte vaillance."

There are several poems of a rather lyrical bent, mostly descriptive, which implicitly or explicitly concentrate their attention on Canada, to the exclusion of foreign places:

> Heureux qui la connait, plus heureux qui l'habite,
> Et, ne quittant jamais pour chercher d'autres cieux
> Les rives du grand fleuve où le bonheur l'invite,
> Sait vivre et sait mourir où dorment ses aïeux.
>
> Recevez un conseil sous forme de souhait.
> De vivre et de mourir où vécurent vos pères
> Vous faisant pour toujours un sublime devoir,
> N'allez pas comme moi remplis d'une fol espoir
> Perdre vos plus beaux jours aux rives étrangères.
>
> Heureux qui, dévouant sa vie
> A la gloire de te servir,
> Sous ton beau ciel, ô ma patrie!
> Peut dire à son dernier soupir:
> O Canada, fils de la France,
> Toi, qui me couvris de bienfaits,
> Toi, mon amour, mon espérance,
> Qui pourra t'oublier jamais?
>
> Connaissez-vous sous le soleil
> Un fleuve à nul autre pareil . . . ?[15]

The number includes two pretty lyrical trifles which do not sound very specifically national, yet they contain a line or two where it might be permissible to find a reflection of the Canadian landscape:

> Et se mêle au murmure
> Des vagues sur nos bords.
>
> Des parfums et d'accords
> Parsemant ton passage,
> Tu reviens sur nos bords . . . [16]

On the other hand, "Fête nationale" is not so completely national as the title leads one to expect. The first two stanzas hint at rather than display the observances of St. Jean Baptiste Day in French Canada, and the last stanza loses the thread altogether, as the poet's attention wanders away to the battlefields in Northern Italy. Yet the poem contains at least one stanza in which the national feeling finds an almost unadulterated expression:

Il est sur le sol d'Amérique
Un doux pays chéri des cieux,
Où la nature magnifique
Prodigue ses dons merveilleux.
Ce sol fécondé par la France
Qui regna sur ces bords fleuris,
C'est notre amour, notre espérance,
Canadiens, c'est notre pays.[17]

This is far from being great poetry. The expression lacks in amenity and modulation ("nature magnifique," "dons mervielleux," "bords fleuris") and the repetitions ("la France," "espérance," "amour") become tiresome; but the poet's sincerity compels respect. Here is the "chantre officiel du patriotism" at work. He does not do it very competently, but it obviously comes from the heart.

"Les Mille-Iles," intended as a description of a particular and certainly very attractive place in Canada is frankly disappointing. Instead of fixing his and our regard on the spot he wants to eulogize, the poet flies off at a tangent and embarks on a wild tour, in the course of which he enumerates the marvels of all the lands under the sun. He does come to the triumphant conclusion that the Thousand Islands is a place more beautiful than them all; and far be it from me to question the conclusion, but a less roundabout method might have been more effective. Even what he really says by way of description is not at all striking and might apply to any scenery involving trees and water. Yet this curious poem, combining the near look with the distant longing, contains one of the very few references in Crémazie's poetry to an overpowering aspect of Canadian nature — the Canadian winter — and to the not unreasonable desire of some Canadians to take a winter holiday in Florida or some other place where sunshine is not rationed:

Fuyant ces plages refroidies
Où la neige tombe à flocons,
Sur des rives plus attiédies
J'irai redire mes chansons.[18]

A far more profound interest attaches to *Le chant des voyageurs*, perhaps the only poem by Crémazie where he shows us some Canadian men of flesh and blood — not historical ghosts — spending themselves in the hard work of taming their still wild homeland. As Condemine very justly remarks:

> Les thèmes sont ceux de la vie libre et insouciante des voyageurs canadiens, des coureurs des bois, des "cageux," la joie de l'aventure, le goût du risque, le plaisir du retour au foyer; ils sont aussi ceux de la vie humaine, le passage du temps et la mort inévitable acceptée par l'homme du peuple avec résignation et courage.[19]

Crémazie, for once, compels us to go with him, to share in the feelings and experiences he describes, to be thankful for a glimpse of a country which is

undoubtedly Canada as he knew it. A more human tone obtains in this poem; no allusion is made to France; we are not reminded of the poet's "aïeux"; toil is the keynote, and not war. And, most refreshingly, women and love make here one of their exceedingly rare appearances in Crémazie's poetry:

> La *blonde* laissée au village,
> Nos mères et nos jeunes soeurs,
> Qui nous attendent au rivage,
> Tour à tour font battre nos coeurs.[20]

This is, to be sure, one of the most successful of Crémazie's poems.

A high mark must be given also to "Colonisation," the only poem which, in my opinion at least, can pass the test as a convincing expression of patriotism. It is true that "de la France la langue et le grand nom" are not absent from it, and the tone is sombre and lachrymose enough; nonetheless, the poet evinces here a real concern about his own country, about the danger of letting young people drift away for lack of opportunities at home, about the need to find money for resource development. These subjects may or may not be "poetic," but Crémazie, for once, is in earnest about something immediate and vital. In urging his people to invest in their young men and in their vast forests he is more truly patriotic than in inviting them to shed their blood, if and when required, for Mother France. Among much irrelevant matter, his message rings clear and strong:

> La forêt vous attend. Défricheurs intrépides,
> La fortune naîtra de vos travaux rapides;
> Dans ce rude combat soyez au premier rang.
> L'avenir est à vous. Travaillez sans relâche,
> Fécondez de vos bras, dans cette noble tâche,
> Ce sol que vos aïeux arrosaient de leur sang.[21]

In summing up Crémazie's role as a patriotic poet one must do justice to his insight into the nature of national consciousness. He understood, or at least felt, that the present and the future are rooted in the past, that a living past is the condition and the guarantee for the new life growing out of it. But how can the past be kept alive? Not by appealing to individual memories; most people can hardly visualize any time but their own, and very few are acquainted with their families beyond their grandparents. The past of a country is enshrined in the collective memories, in the deeds and the figures which have been the landmarks of their progress through time.[22] These collective memories, as gathered by the poets and the historians, become the symbols — usually meaning more than their substance — around which they organize their expectations, hopes, and fears for the present and the future: thus supplying a vital need in a national community, for, as the Book says, "A people without vision shall perish."

Crémazie, as a poet, wanted to provide his people with such a vision of their past. He took on this burden early in his literary career, and the burden, which

suited well his youthful interests and propensities, shaped most of his poetic production. Later on, when misfortune had sharpened his outlook and new experiences had shattered many of his former illusions, he was moved to attempt poetry in a different key. The evidence shows, however, that he had, as it were, run ahead of himself: his readers, who were so fond of him as the writer of historical reminders, did not know what to make of the new strings in his lyre. His "off-key" poems were largely ignored, and Crémazie was frozen into the "chantre officiel du patriotisme." As such he maintained his place for some time in French-Canadian literature, but now, it seems, he is out of fashion. His recent editor writes:

> Les Canadiens perdirent leur engouement pour les chansons patriotiques de Crémazie, lorsque, après la seconde guerre mondiale, de nouvelles poussées économiques et sociales se firent sentir dans la vieille province de Québec, et le rêve nostalgique de 1860 fut remplacé par une vision plus réaliste de l'avenir.
>
> ... dans la seconde partie du XXe siècle, la "légende" Crémazie s'estompe. Les chansons patriotiques d'autrefois ne suscitent plus la même émotion. Une littérature nouvelle, adaptée aux besoins de la société moderne, remporte les suffrages.[23]

The fact remains, however, that Crémazie cannot be discussed as a poet without taking into consideration the ample part that patriotic poems occupy in his production. And in order fully to appreciate him, we must not forget that the role of a patriotic poet is not an easy one to perform. While the lyrical poet can, like the spider (shocking comparison!), squeeze his thread out of himself, the patriotic poet must draw on outside materials. He finds the stuff in the contents of the past but, whether he is aware of it or not, he must first answer the questions, What past, What contents.

Such questions arose with peculiar sharpness in the American countries as they started on their separate paths, gradually diverging from those of Europe. Previously, they had felt no difficulty in identifying themselves with their European mother countries. The inhabitants of Spanish America, before independence, spoke and wrote about themselves as Spaniards just as unconcernedly as Crémazie shortly afterwards wrote "nous Français." In such cases — as well as in those of British America and Brazil — the national names were used in a Pickwickian sense, meaning something which was true under the then prevailing conditions, but not otherwise. When the conditions changed, the question of the national past had to be thrashed out afresh, both in history and in literature, but again under a set of given assumptions, which, in fact, prevented for a long time an encounter with reality.

The new countries in what came to be known as Latin America tried to fabricate a satisfactory past for themselves by drawing on two sources. On the one hand, they glorified some shadowy Indian figures, usually dug out from sixteenth-

century Spanish poems and chronicles, thus underscoring their dependence on cultural colonialism while asserting their political independence; in addition, they turned the leaders of the recent wars of independence into hallowed "national heroes." The rejection of the colonial past and the acceptance of the newly devised past varied from country to country. In Argentina in the 1830's some intellectuals were all for abandoning the Spanish language altogether, as not being their "own" language, but the frenzy soon abated. In Mexico it is even now an article of faith that everything good in the country derives from the Aztecs. In Venezuela, Simon Bolivar stands above criticism and is celebrated not only as the "liberator" but also as a fine warrior, statesman, writer, and even lover. In any case, having thus peopled their Pantheon, the Latin American countries found themselves adequately supplied with feedstock for any number of patriotic songs and poems, in which easily recognizable names came forth again and again and will keep turning up until a new mythology is evolved.

Matters have taken a different course in the United States. The country has become so big and powerful, through peaceful and military expansion, that it retains but a slight linkage with the strip of land it was at the time of independence. Consequently, the real national hero is the American people itself (Whitman's *O Pioneers*), while the names of Washington, Jefferson, and other *patres patriae* receive but perfunctory homage. Interestingly enough, independence brought about there, too, a certain nostalgic feeling for the original Indian inhabitants, a feeling which found expression in literature. James Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* and Longfellow's *Hiawatha* both saw light in Crémazie's lifetime.

Crémazie, in turn, found himself as a writer in a position as peculiar as that of his own people. French Canada never had the chance to wrest its independence from the French monarchy, thus experiencing a break with the colonial past; its lot was to be wrenched from the mother country and placed under another foreign jurisdiction, which, even if exercising control, did not attempt to crush it to death. The path open to French Canada was that of peaceful development towards ever-growing self-assertion, a path leading, to be sure, to very tangible results but not particularly hedged in with heroics. Crémazie, who was a rather unpolitical man but had the epic cast of mind, could not find much inspiration in the Canadian developments taking place before his eyes.

The Indian theme did not appeal to him, either. For one thing, he did not need to fly back to the Indians since the shelter of colonial traditions had never been shaken off. Moreover, the Indians had resisted the inroads of the Christian religion as well as the French empire-building efforts, two parameters which largely determined Crémazie's scheme of things. Consequently, he looked on them from a distance, if not actually askance. There are few references to the Indians in his poetry, where they appear mostly as the hopelessly defeated, nursing their

impotent hatred in some solitary spot, but unconnected with the main stream of Canadian life:

> Il est là sombre et fier; sur la forêt immense,
> Où ses pères ont vu resplendir leur puissance,
> Son oeil noir et perçant lance un regard amer.
>
> Pensif dans son canot, que la vague balance,
> L'Iroquois vers Québec lance un regard de feu;
> Toujours rêveur et sombre, il contemple en silence
> L'étendard de la France et la croix du vrai Dieu.
>
> Nous regardons passer les ombres
> Des Algonquins, des Iroquois.
> Ils viennent, ces rois d'un autre âge,
> Conter leur antiques grandeurs . . . [24]

But while Crémazie pleaded for his own people, whom he considered oppressed and deprived, he showed himself unable to understand the fate of those indigenous Canadians who had been bereft of everything, including existence. He had a few kind words for the Hurons only, who had the merit, in his eyes, of having fought for the French:

> . . . le grand chef huron pleurant sur son destin . . .
> L'Iroquois terrassée par la valeur huronne . . .
> Allez! Des vieux Hurons les mânes ranimés,
> Se levant tout à coup dans la forêt sonore,
> Frémiront de bonheur en revoyant encore
> Les fils de ces Français qu'ils avaient tant aimés.[25]

Having neither a war of independence nor a congenial Indian background to fall back upon, Crémazie had to cast about for suitable patriotic stuff with which to fill his songs, and he laid his hands on the Anglo-French rivalry for empire in the eighteenth century. This was as good a subject as any and might have lent itself to some resounding verse-making, but it contained a fatal flaw. By playing up the struggle of the then Superpowers it reduced the small colonial people to a very passive role. It is not for me to say whether Crémazie imposed this subject on his readers or tried, rather cunningly, to play on an existing mood. His recent editor seems at one point to incline to the latter view:

> C'est en 1855 que Crémazie, encouragé sans doute par son ami Émile de Fenouillet, accepte le rôle qui s'offre naturellement à lui, celui de chantre de la patrie. L'inspiration du poème de 1854 est hugolienne et exotique, du moins dans la première partie; on y découvre à peine une allusion à la France. Mais, à partir de la *Guerre d'Orient,* Crémazie cherche à se mettre au diapason de ses lecteurs. . . . Ils restent insensibles au charme exotique des *Orientales.* Par contre, le thème de la France les remue profondément. Le poète cherche donc à se concilier leur suffrages en exploitant leur penchant pour l'émotion patriotique.[26]

Be that as it may, the fact remains — a fact which is very difficult to grasp for a reader not emotionally involved with Crémazie's views — that we are here confronted with a professedly "patriotic" poet who can hardly say anything good of his native soil except as the arena where another nation performed its exploits. Gratitude is appropriate and becoming when a people are in debt to another for their blood, their faith, their language, and their traditions, but gratitude is not incompatible with self-esteem. Quebec, in Crémazie's scheme of things, appears weak, subdued, and forlorn, and cannot aspire to any greater good than the return of the French flag. France must have been for Crémazie a singularly powerful image, which would explain such weakening of his homeland to the point of helplessness. In discussing this "patriotic" poetry, one should begin by trying to find out just who or what that France of Crémazie's was.

THE FIRST THING THAT BECOMES APPARENT is that his France existed outside the stream of time and change, and the point has been noticed more than once. Professor Michel Dassonville, for example, wrote:

> Ce serait une erreur d'interpréter en un sens politique les hymnes héroïques qu'il écrivit. . . . Par un mélange politique si audacieux qu'il eût fait gronder Victor Hugo lui-même, il chantait dans le même hymne Magenta, Marignan, Solferino, Marengo, Desaix et les *grands jours de Messidor*, Napoléon Ier et Napoléon III, mais on voit aisément que son chant dépassait l'actualité politique pour exalter la gloire française.[27]

But this idea of glory is highly ethereal since it reduces a nation to a disembodied ghost of itself. A Frenchman from France, for whom his country was a complex of problems and loyalties and interests, would have been a legitimist, an orleanist, a bonapartist, or a republican. Crémazie was simply a votary of France, unconnected and unconcerned with the issues of politics or economics. It is true that, before his enforced residence in France, and for all his talk of "nous Français," he was a foreigner to France and as such he could be excused a close interest in those matters; but this does not prove much, because he also abhorred such divisions in his own Canada and dreamt only of an unbroken unity. The real political evolution of his country interested him but little.[28]

We must also remark that if Crémazie did not feel bound to any particular time or regime in his affection for France, he felt no compulsion, either, to locate any stringent moral standards in it. He resented the Cession of Quebec and any other defeat of France, but he was always prepared to applaud a French victory, any French victory. Consistency not being one of Crézamie's virtues, he had no difficulty in presenting two contradictory portraits of France almost side by side in the same poem — as the champion of right and the mistress of the world, as

the protector of some peoples and the oppressor of other peoples. In both cases, it was only French "glory" that mattered:

> Vengeresse du droit et maîtresse du monde
> . . . .
> Dans le malheur, c'est toi qu'implore
> La voix des peuples opprimés
> . . . .
> Déjà les tribus africaines
> Devant ton nom tremblent d'effroi.[29]

Parenthetically, one might add that Crémazie, who could work himself into a passion of enthusiasm for the Turks or the Italians, provided that their causes coincided with the policies of France at a given moment, was not an unconditional advocate of smaller nations against powerful neighbours. He regarded with perfect equanimity, for instance, the increasing presence of the United States in Latin America and could even praise what the Americans were doing:

> Le peuple américain, dans son essor puisant,
> Vers son grand avenir marche à pas de géant;
> Posant un pied hardi sur le Chimborazo,
> Plante son étendard aux murs de Mexico.[30]

But five years later the United States was receiving a fierce castigation from Crémazie, for reasons which to him were extremely cogent. For one thing, he believed that America was providing assistance to the Russians, that is to say, opposing France then at war with the Czar; for another, he feared that the "pas de géant" might be turning North with a view to the annexation of Canada:

> Et si jamais un jour la république austère,
> Qui donne à l'autocrate un appui mercenaire,
> Nous voulait immoler à son ambition,
> Des jours de Châteauguay ressuscitant la gloire,
> Sachons défendre encore et donner la victoire
> Au drapeau d'Albion.[31]

No, consistency was not one of Crémazie's virtues. He was consistent only in upholding the name of France, and this devotion compelled him to perform some fearful somersaults, in disregard both of actual conditions and of standards of general validity. The fact is that France, the France that caused Crémazie to belittle his own Canada, was made for him of a stuff other than that of a real nation. She did not exist in the material world but in his own soul, as an image symbolic of some mental processes at which we can no more than guess, since his innermost feelings are still wrapped in darkness. The outward traits — his commitment to a definite set of cultural and religious values, which he found ready-made in his environment — were in full view, as they made up the burden of

most of the poetry he wrote before the source was sealed. It is arguable, however, that he carried another melody in his soul, which began gradually to emerge as the deeper notes in his respectable poems, until it burst into a terrifying fortissimo in his "Promenade de trois morts." Had he been able to surmount the crisis that shattered his expectations, he might have adhered to this new course and, putting aside the mantle of patriotic bard, given full expression to that more intimately personal source of inspiration. In the absence of specific revelations, there is nothing left but to search in his poems for clues that may help bring to light his strange inner landscape.

Let us make a start with the most famous of Crémazie's compositions, "Le drapeau de Carillon." It is a good poem for the present purpose because it is all about France as Crémazie saw it in his own mind. The image under which France is invoked is that of a mother who stays away from her children. The people of Quebec are repeatedly described as "seuls, abandonnés par la France leur mère," "un enfant qu'on arrache à sa mère," "fils malheureux," "enfants abandonnés," "ces fidèles enfants qu'il vouait à l'oubli." And when the old soldier had given up all hope and was dying of a broken heart, "il pleura bien longtemps, comme on pleure au tombeau d'une mère adorée." All the soldier's faith and love are reserved for "la France adorée"; to his fellow Canadians he cannot give any encouragement to stand on their own feet and work out their own salvation, but only the pious fraud that the French soldiers will come again and will bring back the past. While for the conquerors there is only an innocuous commonplace, "un joug ennemi," all the hostility which must form the counterpart of the expressions of love is poured on official France, including the king ("faible Bourbon," "un roi sans honneur," "ce prince avili"), the court circles ("les lâches courtisans") and the culture of the Enlightenment ("Voltaire alors riait de son rire d'enfer"). The only time when he speaks kindly of the king is when, to the still hopeful mind of the old soldier, he is another image for his beloved France ("ce grand roi pour qui nous avons combattu"). The circumstantial "grand roi" is not to be confused with another and earlier "Grand Roi," who is the embodiment of the powerful and creative France from which French Canada had issued.

It is tempting to reduce Crémazie's France, in the language of psychology, to the mother-image, and the conflict expressed in his poetry to a separation from the mother. The Cession, the wrenching of young Quebec from the protecting arms of Mother France, was a good symbol for this psychological reality, and Crémazie exploited it effectively as he projected Canada into the image of the forsaken child.[32] Of course, the usual reaction after the separation from the mother is for the new being to brave the unsympathetic world and pull himself together in discharging the responsibilities of adult age, as regards both himself in self-preservation and the species in fruitful love. Only those who feel themselves

unequal to those responsibilities shrink back and long for the lost haven of maternal protection. This is familiar psychological theory, which C. G. Jung, while dealing with it at large, expresses pithily when he speaks of:

> the longing to go back to mother, which is opposed to the adaptation to reality .... Any weakening of the adult man strengthens the wishes of the unconscious; therefore, the decrease of strength appears directly as the backward striving towards the mother.[33]

As for the father, his role, in this connection, is that of a force keeping the son at a distance from the mother, or as Jung puts it:

> the father, in the psychological sense, merely represents the personification of the incest prohibition; that is to say, resistance, which defends the mother.[34]

It is in this sense that we may interpret Crémazie's attitude to official France, which is guided by the way in which official France deals with the Canadian offspring. He expresses a violent hatred for the French regime which permitted the separation of Quebec from France; he feels respect for the "Grand Roi" as for the begetting father, a figure of power and dignity to whom the child is thankful for his life; and he may wax enthusiastic about such powerful rulers — Napoleons I and III — as are likely, in his imagination at least, to lift the incest prohibition, that is, to assist a return of Quebec to the arms of Mother France. On behalf of Quebec, but without consulting her, the poet renounces the opportunity to meet life on its own terms and prefers to turn his eyes back to the sheltered past. It is up to the historian to judge Crémazie's view of history; we are trying to grasp the construction that the poet put on his own experience of life.

Taking up the poem again, I consider the fourth stanza of particular importance as a summing-up of the themes of "Le drapeau de Carillon":

> De nos bords s'élevaient de longs gémissements,
> Comme ceux d'un enfant qu'on arrache à sa mère;
> Et le peuple attendait plein de frémissements,
> En implorant le ciel dans sa douleur amère,
> Le jour où pour la France et son nom triomphant
> Il donnerait encore et son sang et sa vie;
> Car privé des rayons de ce soleil ardent.
> Il était exilé dans sa propre patrie.[35]

Here we have the forlorn child and the absent mother, as well as two interesting glimpses into Crémazie's mind. He is thinking not really of life for his people but of death. He knows well enough that the old days were not of peace and plenty but of recurring war with all its misery and want, all for the sake of France's glorious name; yet he desires to bring back that very misery. The last line is beautifully concise and eloquent, but what a dreadful thought it is, what an utter

negation of all chance for the Quebec people to live on, in their own right and for their own ends. Indeed, in Crémazie's thought, they are forsaken children and France is the mother on whose embrace they must depend for their life and also, preposterous though it may sound, for their death. Life and death seem to be exchangeable values as long as they bring about the only fulfilment that Crémazie allows his people — reunion with Mother France.

This is the fulfilment granted, under peculiar circumstances, to the old soldier of Carillon. When it becomes certain that France will not come again, he goes back to her, in seeking to meet his death on the old battlefield and under the old flag. While on his actual trip to France the old man had felt a renewal of his youthful vigour when he came in sight of Saint-Malo; now on the hill of Carillon he seems to find again his lost childhood:

> Planant sur l'horizon, son triste et long regard
> Semblait trouver des lieux chéris de son enfance.
> Sombre et silencieux il pleura bien longtemps,
> Comme on pleure au tombeau d'une mère adorée.[36]

And now the moment has come at last for him to die, and in his final anguished cry he finds words of a truly epic tone:

> Qu'ils sont heureux ceux qui dans la mêlée
> Près de Lévis moururent en soldats!
> En expirant, leur âme consolée
> Voyait la gloire adoucir leur trépas.
> Vous qui dormez dans votre froide bière,
> Vous que j'implore à mon dernier soupir,
> Réveillez-vous! Apportant ma bannière,
> Sur vos tombeaux, je viens ici mourir.[37]

The words awaken an echo in the reader. One is inevitably reminded of Aeneas' death-wish, when the sea-storm seemed likely to engulf him and the fleet with the survivors from Troy:

> O terque quaterque beati
> Quis ante ora patrum, Troiae sub moenibus altis
> Contigit oppetere! O Danaum fortissime gentis
> Tydide, mene Iliacis occumbere campis
> Non potuisse tuaque animam hanc effundere dextra,
> Saevus ubi Aeacidae telo iacet Hector, ubi ingens
> Sarpedon, ubi tot Simois correpta sub undis
> Scuta virum galeasque et fortis corpora volvit.[38]

Crémazie's phrase "près de Lévis" unfolds itself, revealing a deeper meaning if we compare it with Virgil's double expression "ante ora patrum, Troiae sub moenibus altis": it is a regret not to have lost one's life before seeing the fall of the home city, the regret of the child who is left to face a hostile world after the

the mother is gone. Aeneas' heart in the storm scene appears at its weakest; with Crémazie this weakness is a habitual mood.

Another poem, "Le vieux soldat canadien," develops more or less the same topics as "Le drapeau." It shows the same longing for Mother France, which glides all too easily into a longing for extinction. The old soldier, when he hears the reports of Napoleon's victories, cannot hope for anything better than for his own country to be visited by the same plague of war — he calls it "cette immense épopée" — which was ravaging Europe:

> Quand les fiers bulletins des exploits de la France
> Venaient des Canadiens ranimer l'espérance,
> On voyait le vieillard tressaillir de bonheur;
> Et puis il regardait sa glorieuse épée,
> Espérant que bientôt cette immense épopée
> Viendrait sous nos remparts réveiller sa valeur.[39]

Not, in my opinion, a very patriotic wish, although allowance must be made for Crémazie's unreflecting enthusiasm for war, before he saw it at close quarters. There is some irony in the thought that, whatever the pious hopes of the old soldier, Quebec would probably have hated the very sight of Napoleon's soldiers on her soil, to judge by the abundant *littérature antibonapartiste* that was written in those days.[40]

The old soldier, in his expectation of France, is also searching for his own childhood:

> Et là, sur ce beau fleuve où son heureuse enfance
> Vit le drapeau français promener sa puissance,
> Regrettant ces beaux jours, il jetait ses regards.[41]

He lives his last days waiting for the dawn (a symbol of childhood; has not Victor Hugo written the beautiful words: *Enfant, vous êtes l'aube . . .* ?), that is to say, the dawn of the new era ("De ce grand jour quand verrai-je l'aurore?"); but in his weariness he also utters a variation on Aeneas' death-wish:

> Que n'ai-je, hélas! au milieu des batailles,
> Trouvé plus tôt un glorieux trépas. . . . [42]

Finally, he dies. The soldier of Carillon was surrounded in his last moments by a bleak December landscape; this second soldier dies while a storm is raging. In both cases, the images of an overpowering, unrelenting world pursue them in their homecoming.

IN OTHER POEMS CRÉMAZIE INSISTS on his image of France as a mother and the Quebec people as helpless children:

> Enfants abandonnés bien loin de notre mère

O Canada, fils de la France,
Qui te couvrit de ses bienfaits[43]

but we are beginning to perceive that it is the mother-image which gives significance to France, and not the other way around. The mother-image dominates the poetry of Crémazie, even in those poems in which the France-Quebec relationship is not present. The poem "La Fiancée du marin" — that rarity in Crémazie's production, a love poem — sheds some interesting sidelight on this question.

The bride is as colourless as she can be. There is infinitely more warmth in "la blonde," though sketched in one line, in "Le chant des voyageurs," than in this romantic heroine whom Crémazie describes as a paragon of all virtues but without making her alive to us. It is the mother of the sailor who presides over the story. She has found the little girl that the waves had left on the shore and has brought her up as her own daughter. Later, at the mother's desire ("répondant aux voeux de sa mère"), a betrothal is arranged between the orphan girl and the sailor son. When the man sails away, the fiancee and the mother are left in each other's company. Together they pray for him, and together they grieve when he fails to return. Soon the mother dies, too, is buried in the sea, and in a way becomes identified with the sea, just as in the beginning the sea had taken on the character of a mother in giving birth to the stranded girl. The equivalence sea: mother fits in very naturally in Crémazie's poem, although it did not originate with him and is, indeed, a very old one, as all life comes from the sea, a fact of which mankind has always been aware:

> The sea is, of course, a woman in most languages, from obvious physical associations, but in French these associations are enormously strengthened by the verbal associations: the words for 'mother' and the 'sea' are the same in sound.[44]

The fiancee, unable to live by herself, loses her mind and frequents the seashore as if looking for somebody. It would be romantic to imagine that she is looking for her dead lover, but even in this extremity the mother is there, sharing in her demented thoughts. We may remark in passing that the fiancee's complaint is not too different from the wording of Quebec's plight in "Le Drapeau" or "Le vieux soldat":

M'oubliez-vous, pauvre isolée,
Que personne n'a consolée
    Dans ses douleurs?
Car je suis seule sur la terre,
Seule et mêlant à l'onde amère
    Mes tristes pleurs.[45]

In the end, the poor girl seems to hear voices calling from beneath the waves. Is

it her mother? Maybe it is her brother (she does not call him "lover"). She follows the call and plunges in the sea with a joyful cry:

> J'y vais . . . Ah! dans vos bras, ma mère,
> Recevez-moi![46]

It is remarkable that she goes to join, as she says, not her bridegroom but the mother. We do not know what "mother" she means, whether the sea she originally came from or the woman who cared for her in childhood, but one thing is clear: in the poem by Crémazie, the reunion with the mother is a union with death. And this consummation brings back an echo of C. G. Jung's analysis:

> in the morning of life man painfully tears himself loose from the mother, from the domestic hearth, to rise through battle to the heights. Not seeing his worst enemy in front of him, but bearing him within himself in a deadly longing for the depths within, for drowning in his own source, for becoming absorbed into the mother, his life is a constant struggle with death, a violent and transitory delivery from the always lurking night. This death is no external enemy, but a deep personal longing for quiet and for the profound peace of non-existence, for a dreamless sleep in the ebb and flow of the sea of life.[47]

This is the fate of the sailor's fiancee, this drowning in her own source. The last stanza in the poem develops in a way which is familiar with Crémazie, the return of the dead in possession of an illusory fulfilment in lieu of the one they missed in life; the girl, the sailor and the mother come together again, but as mournful wraiths:

> On dit que le soir, sous les ormes,
> On voit errer trois blanches formes,
> Spectres mouvants,
> Et qu'on entend trois voix plaintives
> Se mêler souvent sur les rives
> Au bruit des vents.[48]

In happier stories it is an outside event that brings the dead out of their tombs. In "Colonisation" the old Hurons rise at the coming of the descendants of the old French. In "Le vieux soldat canadien," the report of a French gun, fired when a French warship visited Quebec in 1855 for the first time after the Cession, makes the old man leave the grave in the belief that the long awaited day is there at last. Of course, the gun of a warship was required to work this miracle: for Crémazie, in whom the businessman waned as the poet waxed, the honest noises of trade would not have awakened anybody in Quebec. And the old soldier was not the only one to find such shadowy happiness in death:

> Tous les vieux Canadiens moissonnés par la guerre
> Abandonnent aussi leur couche funéraire,
> Pour voir réalisés leurs rêves les plus beaux.

Et puis on entendit, le soir, sur chaque rive,
Se mêler au doux bruit de l'onde fugitive
Un long chant de bonheur qui sortait des tombeaux.[49]

This "long chant de bonheur qui sortait des tombeaux" is Crémazie, we won't say at his best, but certainly at his most typical. Indeed, for Crémazie the dead find the misty kind of happiness he has reserved for them when their death brings about a reunion with the mother, when mother and death are the same solemn reality. In the "Promenade de trois morts," of the three dead who return to earth (father, husband, and son), the father finds disappointment in his child and the husband in his widow, but the son is comforted in the pious and unwavering remembrance of the mother:

> Seul, le fils trouve sa mère agenouillée, pleurant toujours son enfant et priant Dieu pour lui. Un ange recueille à la fois ses prières, pour les porter au ciel, et ses larmes, qui se changent en fleurs et dont il ira parfumer la tombe d'un fils bien-aimé.[50]

The other two dead, in order to find the solace they have been denied by their family ties, must look to the mother-image under a different form — the Mother Church:

> Le père et l'époux viennent demander à la mère universelle, l'Église, ce souvenir et ces prières qu'ils n'ont pu trouver à leur foyers profanés par des affections nouvelles.[51]

Here we seem to touch upon a characteristic trait of Crémazie's poetry, the undervaluation of the present and the future, as represented by the love of wife and son, and the overvaluation of the past, as represented by the mother's love. Crémazie says quite clearly that the man who tries to save his life in the loves of adult age shall certainly lose it, while the man who gives it up in a return to the mother's love shall certainly find it again. If you marry life and beget in her, you shall find yourself cheated, for life and the fruits of life will not stay with you; but if you return to the no-life from which you originally sprang, the eternal mother will not disappoint you. Your defeat by default will be redeemed through her victory, and in this sense Crémazie could have said of death what he says of France:

Douce mère qui sait, au sein de la victoire,
Faire toujours veiller un rayon de sa gloire
Sur les tombeaux de ses enfants.[52]

In the same way, there is a close link between the mother in the garb of Glory who cries for the dead soldier, and the real mother whose tear brings solace to the dead youth who is not yet accustomed to his grave:

Et, pleurant son enfant, la Gloire désolée
Alla veiller sur son tombeau.

Ah! ma mère, c'est toi, dont la tendresse sainte
Vient répandre à la fois tes larmes et ta plainte
Sur le tombeau de ton enfant.[53]

This is the assurance that Crémazie desires. There is no hope in life, but at least let us make sure that the mother's love will not fail us in death, because if we lose that we have lost everything:

Douter si l'être pur à qui l'on doit la vie
Sur son fils verse encore une larme bénie:
Quel tourment de l'enfer égale cette horreur?[54]

The poetic expression of Crémazie is so perfectly attuned to the deep melody of death that it is not surprising to find that he borrows extensively from the vocabulary of mortality. One of his favourite words is tomb (*tombeau*, *tombe*, *fosse*), which appears 65 times; there are but few of his poems without a tomb in them.[55] The dead (*les morts*, *cadavre*, *mourant*, *meurt*, *manes*, *expirant*, *endormi*, *trépassé*) are mentioned 67 times; death (*la mort*, *agonie*, *trépas*) 48 times; the verb to die (*mourir*, *succomber*, *expirer*, *s'éteindre*, *tomber*) 46 times; the graveyard and human remains (*cimetière*, *les os*, *squelette*) 12 times; adjectives descriptive of death's presence (*lugubre*, *mortel*, *funèbre*, *sepulcral*) 9 times. A single word possessing a very high count is "worm" (*ver*, *vermisseau*), which occurs 46 times, all but one, it is true, in just one poem, "Promenade de trois morts." All in all, and not including many paraphrases and metaphors, Crémazie studs his small offering of poetry with no less than 329 references to death, and the number might be increased by a stricter treatment of allusions.

Of special interest, as illustrating Crémazie's peculiar theory of continued existence and suffering in death, are those expressions with which he indicates the abode of the dead, the place where the painful change into dust is accomplished. Such expressions are, for instance: *demeure sombre* (twice), *royaume morne* (3 times), *cité des morts* (twice), *lieu de misère* (twice), *cité pleurante*, *froides prisons*, *gouffre d'horreurs*, *l'océan de douleurs que l'on nomme la tombe*.... The proximity of some of these expressions to Dante's "città dolente" should not lead one into a false analogy. What Dante had in mind was, in keeping with mediaeval theology, the place of pain appointed for the souls, while Crémazie, who for all his rhetorical playing up of the faith made but little use of the Christian Beyond, really means the extraordinary processes he imagines going on in the charnel house, where the worm and not the devil deals with the flesh of the dead.

This abundant concern with death does not, however, place Crémazie in the line of graveyard poets, which had been ushered in by Thomas Gray's *Elegy* and was suitably closed by the Spaniard Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer (1836-1870) with a meditation on the loneliness of the dead ("Qué solos se quedan los muertos").

The difference is, it seems to me, that for the graveyard poets, however sympathetic, the dead were dead, maybe a subject for the cogitations of the living but in themselves a finality, while for Crémazie, in disregard both of biology and theology, death was a drama still to be enacted within the grave.

THE INSISTENCE ON THE MOTHER-IMAGE and the strong identification of it with the image of death make one pause in the probe into Crémazie's poetry to shift attention to Crémazie's personality. What kind of man was he? The person who knows most about him, his recent editor, although she was able to profit from all the previous publications besides following up many new documentary trails, had to admit that the poet's intimate life, as different from the figure he cut in the public eye, remains largely hidden from us. In this respect she writes:

> en compulsent divers documents, on peut tracer un portrait plus complet du poète et du libraire, du citoyen et de l'exilé. Mais notre connaisance de l'homme dans sa vie intime est malgré tout incomplète.[56]

On the basis of the known outward facts and of the self-revelations contained in his poetry, and with the utmost diffidence which must attend on such inquiries, an attempt can be made to follow the man into his retreat. While verse-making and bodily stamina are not necessarily connected, and the robust bards of the Renaissance are just as genuine as the haggard songsters of Romanticism, we may notice that Crémazie came from a physically weak strain, in which most children died at an early age. His father was the only survivor out of four, and the poet and two brothers were the only survivors out of twelve. These death rates were very high, even for the conditions of the epoch. Is it permissible to infer from this a diminished vitality in Crémazie, which may have told on his attitude to life and death? On the other hand, the predominance of the mother-image seems to point to an arrested emotional development coupled with a reluctance to face up to the demands of life. Indeed the little that is known of Crémazie's story amounts to a tale of frustrations. Physically unattractive, just average as a student, and a failure as a businessman, he did not feel, either, that he was duly appreciated by his readers, whom he dubbed the *épiciers*. To these external sources of despondency were added others derived from an inadequacy to meet the demands of social life. The testimonies point in this direction:

> Chez lui la vie sentimentale semble avoir été à peu près inexistante. Il nourrit pour sa mère des sentiments d'une vive affection; seul dans le grand Paris, il lui écrit maintes lettres imprégnées de piété filiale et de gratitude. Quant à unir sa vie à celle d'une Canadienne ou d'une Française, il n'y songe guère; c'est même là le cadet de ses soucis.

> Octave Crémazie, plus que beaucoup d'autres, était un homme classé. Il avait dit un jour qu'il ne donnerait pas un poil de sa barbe pour une femme; il ne recherchait donc pas la société des dames, d'où sa lourde apparence semblait du reste l'éloigner, et ses habitudes étaient routinières à l'extrême. Jamais on ne le rencontrait dans un salon; rarement pouvait-on l'apercevoir dans un lieu d'amusement publique ... Je le plaisantais sur ce mot de célibataire invétéré qui avait fait le tour des salons de Québec. "Pour être franc, me dit-il, je dois confesser que je songe quelquefois au mariage — mais seulement lorsqu'il manque un bouton à mon gilet ou à ma redingote."[57]

For Octave Crémazie adult life was empty of the duties and satisfactions that usually go with it. The present was distasteful and the future held no promise; Crémazie turned then to history and directed his poetic energy to a revival of the past. With or without reason, he identified his lack of personal fulfilment with the position of his people, and used the story of the Cession as a symbol of his own inability to face the world. He found no way ahead for himself, and therefore he denied any independent development to his people; he rejected adult love and sought refuge in the mother-image, and therefore he made his people into a forsaken child and bade it fix its only hope on a return of Mother France.

But this rejection of the responsibilities of adult age, once started, can go backward very far indeed. The front door shut in the face of the life instinct may cause the back door to open on its dark and dreadful opposite. The regression to childhood, or for that matter to the womb, cancels the storms and stresses of existence: the mother's love and power will stand between them and the child. And this peace and repose are more completely found when we are received into the bosom of a mightier mother, into the depths of non-existence out of which we all originally came. Thus, the quest for the mother develops into a quest for death; and this is a step which the poetry of Crémazie takes quite effortlessly.

The figure of France which appears so often in his "patriotic" poems has, as we have remarked, no specific features and it dissolves easily into the mother-image. But this mother-image is no more permanent, for the image of death is lurking closely behind it. It is not a sinister or unwelcome death, because it does not come as the thief of the future; Crémazie rather hails it as the restorer of the past, the beneficent giver of shelter against the harsh realities of living the present and begetting the future. It is really a Mother Death; and the dead, in the poet's waywardly tender image, are her babies: "Ils semblent de la mort être les nouveau-nés."[58]

But at the moment of reaching such insights, in the "Promenade de trois morts," Crémazie found himself isolated. His readers, who had met with familiar names and pointers in his "patriotic" poems, could not follow him as he entered a new field in which he dropped the conventional allusions — France and battles old and new are never mentioned in the "Promenade" — and addressed his innermost feelings in more direct terms. If he had continued to develop this way

and had fully unfolded the vision he carried in him, he might have produced a body of poetry more intensely personal, thus securing perhaps a more prominent place in literary history. He did not go far enough, however, and the new face he showed surprised and shocked his readers. Besides abandoning the well-known "patriotic" subjects, he even approached heterodoxy in religion. He held peculiar views on the state after death; he cast doubts on the consoling belief that it is for the sake of Man that creation exists. In his poem, Man exists for the sake of the worm, or such is the worm's religious tenet:

> Ton cadavre, pour moi c'est la source de vie
> Où je m'abreuve chaque jour
> . . . .
> Oh! je sais mieux jouir des biens que Dieu m'envoie.[59]

If his views had begun to isolate Crémazie, he was completely cut off when a business failure in 1862 compelled him to leave Canada for good and he sought refuge in France. Even so, one might have expected that this event, blighting as it was to his family and social connections, but coming after all his extolling of and longing for France, would release in him a vast outpouring of poetry. Nothing of the sort happened. He lived on in France for sixteen years, longer than his entire poetic career in Canada but, apart from some minor *pièces de circonstance*, no more poetry came from him. His great "Promenade de trois morts" had been left unfinished, but now all he could do was draft a prose summary of the missing second and third parts.

Octave Crémazie experienced, indeed, the return to Mother Death not only in imagination but also in person. On the 11th of November, 1862, the day he left Canada for France, he actually died as a poet. He was well aware of the fact himself and could describe it as follows:

> J'ai bien deux mille vers au moins qui traînent dans les coins et recoins de mon cerveau. À quoi bon les en faire sortir? Je suis mort maintenant à l'existence littéraire. Laissons donc ces pauvres vers pourrir tranquillement dans la tombe que je leur ai creusée au fond de ma mémoire. Dire que je ne fais plus de poésie serait mentir. Mon imagination travaille toujours un peu. J'ébauche, mais je ne termine rien, et, suivant ma coutume, je n'écris rien. Je ne chante que pour moi.[60]

This is also the finding to which Odette Condemine arrives in surveying Crémazie's French period:

> Il ne se tournera plus vers la vie: dans son exil, il peut se croire oublié comme le sont les morts dans leur tombeau.[61]

But, like his dead who sank but gradually into death, Crémazie was not yet finished. He could not or would not write any more poetry — he gave ill health as an excuse although there may have been other grounds — but he reappeared

as a competent writer of prose. His letters to his acquaintances in Canada became the vehicle for the new insights, partially cancelling his old fervours, which he gathered during his actual experience of France. He learnt that France was not the country of his dreams but a country like any other, with much good but with some evil in it. In his disappointment, however, he swung violently in the opposite direction and disparaged France as unrestrictedly as he had previously idealized her:

> Je croyais à la France chevaleresque de nos pères. Hélas! quelle était mon erreur! Au lieu de cette grande nation qui tient une si large place dans les annales de l'histoire, il n'y a plus aujourd'hui qu'une agglomération d'hommes sans principes, sans moeurs, sans foi et sans dignité.[62]

Besides, he realized that his own countrymen were, after all, and even in the absence of France, not as unhappy as he had depicted them:

> Franchement nos paysans sont beaucoup plus heureux que ceux de France.[63]

In this connection, one of the two short stories that Crémazie wrote in his French period, "Un homme qui ne peut se marier," is particularly significant. The plot is simple and straightforward. A French-Canadian trapper comes to France and wants to marry a French girl. The trapper is a handsome fellow and he has four thousand pounds sterling in his pocket; he is accepted by the girl, and by the girl's father. The project, however, comes to grief on the formalities which are routine in an old settled country but unheard of in the wilderness of the North. The trapper has, of course, no birth certificate and he cannot get one. In the Far North there are no townhalls and no registers. And who could attest to it, anyway? His mother was eaten by a grizzly bear, his father was scalped by the Indians, and his fellow trappers are all scattered by the hazards of their adventures. Consequently, the man from the Far North cannot get married in Paris. Crémazie has skilfully presented the New World at its rawest to emphasize the contrast with civilized Europe, and the conclusion is obvious. Canada, the New France, is not a new France, just as Mexico, the New Spain, is not a new Spain and New Zealand is not a new Zealand. Canada is just Canada, a part of the American continent, and, in accepting this fact, Crémazie has learnt a lesson wholly at variance with his earlier views. To put it within the framework of his story, France is not his mother and, just as with the trapper from the North, she cannot even become his mother-in-law.

Crémazie had clearly matured, leaving the phase of his "patriotic" dreams far behind him. His thought had deepened and he had finally something to say over and above the naive praises of French exploits. In his letters to H. R. Casgrain, which deserve rather the name of essays, there are acute reflections about the preconditions for the flowering of literature in the New World. But one is left with the impression of a man who has just learnt to speak when a self-imposed

silence stunts his utterance. And this withering of his powers occurred, contrary to all expectations, when he settled on the soil which contained, as he had imagined, the roots of his life. Crémazie found himself at last in the sheltering bosom of Mother France, but, as he had previously made clear in his own poetry, it turned out to be the bosom of Mother Death. There he forgot to sing, he lost his name and even his old appearance,[64] and while he could still haunt his friends with his letters, any communication with the reading public, which is the life of the writer, had become impossible. Thus he lingered for years, just a whisper, as it were, coming out of a tomb. Finally he was extinguished on that ocean shore from which he had previously dreamt that the past would return to Canada.

Enough has been said about Crémazie as a patriotic poet. His role as such seems to be played out in the estimation of the readers for whom he wrote his songs. He is not a writer who can be lightly dismissed. His powers were not perhaps of a very high order but they were real and, under different conditions, might have carried him further. He repays study, partly for his significance in a wider context than that of French Canada — namely, within the nineteeth-century literary scene of the American continent as a whole — and partly for the depths that lurk beneath his apparently facile poetry. He exhibited, for instance, a weird gift of prescience in busying himself with the subject of exile long before being personally overtaken by the need to flee his country. A spirit of prophecy seemed also at work in his warnings about an advance of Russia into Europe. And he certainly could and did convey a poetic vision of man's fate which, even if inimical to social values, did not want either in depth or in originality. A claim might be made, too, for Crémazie as the poet of childhood, in its simplest and most terrifying form:

> O mère! c'est vers toi que notre coeur s'élance
> Et que tendent nos bras.[65]

NOTES

[1] This paper was written thirty years ago at a time, during a residence of several years in Canada, in which I became interested in Canadian history and national development. I approached the subject of Crémazie with some hesitation, being well aware that my qualifications were hardly equal to the matter, but also conscious of the fact that, as I was neither Canadian nor French nor in any way directly involved in the issues, I might bring to their discussion that kind of objectivity which is dependent upon distance. The paper has now been rewritten in the light of the recent and most scholarly edition of Crémazie's works, *Oeuvres*. Texte établi, annoté et presenté par Odette Condemine, Éditions de l'Université d'Ottawa, 1972, 2 volumes. All quotations from Crémazie's writings in verse and prose are taken from this edition.

[2] Séraphim Marion, *Octave Crémazie, Precurseur du romantisme canadien-français*, in *Les lettres canadiennes d'autrefois*, vol. v (Ottawa: Editions de l'Université, 1946), pp. 47-55.

[3] Marion, p. 49 fn.

[4] "Guerre d'Italie," pp. 147-53.

[5] *Journal du siège de Paris*, II, p. 228.

[6] "Premier jour de l'an 1849," pp. 117-20.

[7] The American Henry James is a case in point. Cf. Christof Wegelin, *The Image of Europe in Henry James* (Dallas: Southern Methodist Univ. Press, 1958). It might be instructive to draw a parallel between Crémazie and Henry James in their obsession with specific European countries. And a study of Henry James would be incomplete without a reference to the Chilean novelist Alberto Blest Gana (1830-1920), who from his vantage point as long time ambassador to France wrote *Los trasplantados* (1904), a study of the Latin American wealthy in Paris who exchanged daughters and money for moth-eaten parchments.

[8] *Oeuvres*, Introduction, I, p. 46.

[9] "Le vieux soldat canadien," pp. 10-11.

[10] "Sur les ruines de Sébastopol," pp. 151-53.

[11] "Le vieux soldat canadien," pp. 37-39.

[12] *Oeuvres*, Introduction, I, pp. 19, 90.

[13] Marion, p. 166.

[14] "Le jour de l'an 1852," pp. 57-60.

[15] "Le Canada," pp. 9-12; "Le retour de 'L'Abeille,' " pp. 38-42; "Aux Canadiens français," pp. 73-80; "Chant pour la fête de Mgr. de Laval," pp. 1-2.

[16] "L'alouette," pp. 31-32; "Le printemps," pp. 9-11.

[17] "Fête nationale," pp. 13-20.

[18] "Les Mille-Iles," pp. 5-8.

[19] *Oeuvres*, Introduction, I, pp. 138-39.

[20] "Le chant des voyageurs," pp. 35-38.

[21] "Colonisation," pp. 177-82.

[22] A collective memory need not even be historical; a good fable will do just as well. The Roman Empire, in search of a past, adopted the mythical figure of Trojan Aeneas as the hero who had set in motion the chain of events leading up to the founding of Rome and everything thereafter. Virgil's *Aeneid* came at the right moment, when the expansion of Rome made a spiritual bond all the more necessary. Roman children everywhere, in Spain or on the Rhine, in Britain or in Asia, could learn from it not only their mother language at its best but also their Roman consciousness at its noblest.

[23] *Oeuvres*, Introduction, I, pp. 105, 207.

[24] "Le Potowatomis," pp. 1-3; "Epigraphe pour les anciens canadiens," pp. 9-12; "Chant des voyageurs," pp. 23-26.

[25] "Deux centième anniversaire," pp. 78, 46; "Colonisation," pp. 183-86.

[26] *Oeuvres*, Introduction, I, p. 71.

[27] Michel Dassonville, *Crémazie* (Collection Classiques Canadiens), p. 15.

[28] The most important Canadian event in his lifetime, Confederation, does not seem to have made much impression on Crémazie, let alone move him to celebrate it

in verse. He made a distant reference to it, fifteen months later, in a letter of October 10, 1868, addressed to Ernest Gagnon:

> Depuis que j'ai dit à Québec cet adieu navrant que je crois éternel, le Canada a vu bien des changements. Vous avez un nouveau gouvernement, et la ville de Champlain est redevenue capitale. Vous avez cinq ou six baronets et *Sirs*, dont deux Canadiens français (*Oeuvres*, II, p. 110).

[29] "Guerre d'Italie," pp. 50, 119-20, 125-26.

[30] "Premier jour de l'an 1849," pp. 111-14.

[31] "La guerre d'Orient," pp. 109-14.

[32] A century after Crémazie, another Canadian poet took up again the child-parent theme (with a drop of psychology thrown in for good measure) to sketch a portrait of Canada, but the different viewpoint and the time-lag yielded a picture somewhat dissimilar from Crémazie's. Earle Birney, in the poem "Canada: case history," wrote:

> Parents unmarried and living abroad,
> relatives keen to bag the estate,
> schizophrenia not excluded,
> will he learn to grow up before it's too late?

Since both Birney and Crémazie stand for stages of the past, a comparison of their views does not lack a certain academic interest.

[33] C. G. Jung, *Psychology of the Unconscious*, trans. Beatrice M. Hinkle (New York, 1949), pp. 335-36.

[34] Jung, p. 364.

[35] "Le drapeau de Carillon," pp. 25-32.

[36] "Le drapeau," pp. 179-82.

[37] "Le drapeau," pp. 209-16.

[38] *Aeneid*, I, pp. 94-101.

[39] "Le vieux soldat canadien," pp. 25-30.

[40] Cf. S. Marion, *Lettres canadiennes d'autrefois*, vol. I, ch. 7, and vol. III, ch. 2.

[41] "Le vieux soldat," pp. 34-36.

[42] "Le vieux soldat," pp. 77-78.

[43] "Envoi au marins de 'La Capricieuse,'" p. 147; "Aux Canadiens français," pp. 45-46.

[44] Donat O'Donnell, *Maria Cross* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1947), p. 184.

[45] "La Fiancée du marin," pp. 163-68.

[46] "La Fiancée," pp. 185-86.

[47] Jung, p. 390.

[48] "La Fiancée," pp. 187-92.

[49] "Le vieux soldat canadien," pp. 123-28.

[50] "Promenade de trois morts," Plan de la suite, p. 425.

[51] Ibid.

[52] "Guerre d'Italie," pp. 88-90.

[53] "Un soldat de l'Empire," pp. 31-32; *Promenade de trois morts*, pp. 212-14.

[54] "Promenade de trois morts," pp. 630-32.

[55] We may note that Crémazie falls only once into the temptation of rhyming *tombe* (verb) and *tombe* (noun), while his master Victor Hugo took this liberty several times.

[56] *Oeuvres*. Note préliminaire, I, p. 12.

[57] S. Marion, *Lettres canadiennes d'autrefois*, vol. v, p. 13; E. Gagnon, *Pages choisies* (Quebec, 1917), p. 255.

[58] "Promenade de trois morts," p. 30.

[59] "Promenade de trois morts," pp. 175-76, 407.

[60] Lettre à H. R. Casgrain, 10 April 1866, II, p. 78.

[61] *Oeuvres*, Introduction, I, p. 146.

[62] Lettre à ses frères, 29 April 1871, II, p. 265.

[63] Lettre à ses frères, 8 June 1863, II, p. 61.

[64] In 1873 H. R. Casgrain saw Crémazie in Paris, for the first time after ten years: "Ce n'était plus le Crémazie dont la figure m'était familière à Québec; vieilli, amaigri, avec un teint de cire, plus chauve que jamais, ne portant plus de lunettes, la barbe toute rasée, hormis la moustache et une impériale: c'était une complète métamorphose . . . Sa tenue était devenue correcte, avec un air de distinction tout à fait inaccoutumé." *Notice biographique* in H. R. Casgrain, *Oeuvres complètes* (Montreal, 1885), vol. II, p. 411.

[65] "Sur les ruines de Sébastopol," pp. 161-62.

FOUR POEMS

Heather Spears

PROCEDURE

This is where you begin, then.
The tidal flat, exhausted
as after childbirth, the sunk white
seafloor sucked back into the bone ring
of rib and iliac,
single eyed, brainless.
This is what is left:
continental shelf, and the moon drawn
downrun, weighted inward.
The mind winces in its attic, interested in spite of itself.

Your chances are good
there's a rumour of health
And a tough musculature
what it remembers
accumulated since who knows when
back in the blastocyst
neglected, possibly accessible
whatever you crawled and scratched after
in the papery temporals
and did not find, exists here effortlessly,
its voice is a lower octave
you may as well trust it
(you may as well love it)

FOX CUBS AT PLAY

Last night I heard the vixen's
witch-laugh up past the quarry
when I was out with the dog.
The dog's in heat, the cat's
heavy, so wide her whiskers
don't warn her in doorways.
Life's at it. In the window
the buds on the whitehorn sprig
are slick fat spheres
pushed from the inside, the small cells
busy, very busy. Visual spring
bores me, that eventual poisonous green,
but the thought of animal play
repeated a thousandfold, tumbling the country,
in hedges, woods, warrens and nothing to do with man —
that's well.

LETTER FOR STEEN

For once it is windless
the light rises straight out of the earth
with its thin snow, when we walked
above Svaneke the fields breathed upward around our feet.
dustblue footprints. And the two dogs
raced, lunged shoulders and parted, their wakes
a smoke, the hard ground hardly
covered. The eranthis in *Frenne* wood
showed its pale yellow tips, and there were bird tracks,
syncopated, like a score of music
written with a fine fast pen across the page.

Then I breathed easier, as if some weight
of impatience I did not know I had
was taken off, all my cells
rested singly and softly towards the centre
of the world, was this why
(knowing you missed me) the landscape seemed to lift —
the high island, the sea at its edge, the impoverished trees,
even the meek grass holding up its hands?

2ND LETTER FOR STEEN

The trees are no longer lineal, crisp; their edges
swell into the fog, at the top of the wood
no view but visible yellowish air.
The clean beck brims, the dogs
wade and lap, the mud's yellow, the old snow's
yellow. The horn at the lighthouse
goes on, goes off, mournful. Mette's in again, a year ago
we thought it passing. And now another good friend.
Unseasonable. Am I exempt? There was a gale warning
earlier, but nothing moves, drops hang
on the grass, fall vertical under the branches.
I feel your large hand where it touched my shoulders,
flat and protective.
Pretend you have answers.
The open fields are utterly forsaken, the stench
of spring is everywhere. I will not walk
farther than this, I am going back.

GRIFFIN CREEK

The English World of Anne Hébert

Ronald Ewing

LES FOUS DE BASSAN is a rarity among French-Canadian novels, for it deals with a self-contained English-speaking community in Quebec. Unlike most French-Canadian novels that make little or no reference to the English fact in Quebec, *Les Fous de Bassan* is set in a town whose inhabitants are of Loyalist stock. This novel, written in French about an English society and using occasional English expressions, produces an odd effect — as if one were reading a translation rather than an original work.

Why did Hébert choose such a locale? Is she attempting to say something about the English in Quebec? Or is the small town of Griffin Creek, surrounded and eventually overwhelmed by French Quebec, a symbol for Quebec, which is surrounded and may be overwhelmed by English North America? The author claims that it was an artistic decision. As in a number of previous works, she wanted a self-contained world:

> Et c'est petit à petit que j'ai imaginé l'histoire d'une communauté de gens très fermée, très réduite, là où le drame peut couver pendant très longtemps, où les sentiments sont contenus, retenus longtemps; et quand ça éclate au grand jour, ça rejoint la violence et la sauvagerie des éléments.[1]

A reading of the novel is most rewarded by considering it in this vein. To read it as a condemnation of all and only English communities in Quebec takes into account neither the singularity of the town nor the universality of the human condition within the town. To consider Griffin Creek as a parallel with French Quebec places an imposition upon the reader to force some connections which seem neither logically nor artistically sound. The Englishness of Griffin Creek seems to serve three main purposes: one, to portray accurately the situation of the rural English-Quebecer in the past and in the present; two, to allow Hébert to create a mood and use a writing style which are both strongly identified with William Faulkner; three, to illustrate how a closed society will eventually destroy itself.

Les Fous de Bassan deals primarily with two time periods: the fateful summer of 1936 and the present (1982). One could say that the novel chronicles the decline and fall of Griffin Creek, or in more modern terms, it illustrates the

effects of entropy. The first section of the novel, the recollections of the Reverend Nicolas Jones, is set in 1982. He records his bitter reactions to the town's bicentennial celebrations:

> Ils ont racheté nos terres à mesure qu'elles tombaient en déshérence. Des papistes. Voici qu'aujourd'hui, à grand renfort de cuivre et de majorettes, ils osent célébrer le bicentenaire du pays, comme si c'étaient eux les fondateurs, les bâtisseurs, les premiers dans la forêt, les premiers sur la mer, les premiers ouvrant la terre vierge sous le soc.[2]

These sour ruminations do suggest that the founders of Griffin Creek were more than the false stereotypes usually associated with English Quebec. A griffin is a fabulous creature with an eagle's head and wings and a lion's body. A United Empire Loyalist is such a creature, born American but obstinately loyal to the British crown. The founders of Griffin Creek were not carpetbaggers, encouraged by the crown to seize already tilled soil; they settled on virgin land. They did not become rich capitalists; the minister owns the most imposing house in the town. They did not exploit their French-Canadian neighbours; they remained a separate community. For these reasons Jones expresses his dismay that a group of papists should presently occupy his people's land.

Jones talks about his parish as "le peuple élu de Griffin Creek." He goes on to explain that it took only one year to disperse the chosen people. Hébert provides them with a horrifying reason for their departure, but her description of the decline of a small, rural, English-speaking town is very accurate and not exaggerated. For many generations certain communities were (a few still are) English. Sons inherited their fathers' farms, businesses, and names. In the past twenty to thirty years, for whatever reasons, this pattern has become less frequent, and the little English communities have become bilingual or have ceased to exist. Thus, the population change which occurs in Griffin Creek is symptomatic of such towns in Quebec.

Jones views Griffin Creek as a ghost town. This image is more accurate than he realizes, for Olivia does haunt the area. There are many other images of decay in the first section: the houses are falling apart; there are no young people in the parish; Jones feels dead inside; his housekeepers and nieces, the Brown twins, still act and look like children, despite their white hair; he and the twins have a fixation on the past, especially the summer of 1936.

THIS IMAGE OF DECAY and faded glory, though representative of an English-speaking, rural community in Quebec, is but one of many traits that makes Griffin Creek akin to that famous fictional town of Jefferson in Yoknapatawpha County. The townspeople of Griffin Creek are descendants of a defeated but proud American group — the United Empire Loyalists; likewise,

many of Faulkner's characters trace their ancestry to adherents to the Confederacy. The families of Griffin Creek, "Les Jones, les Brown, les Atkins, les Macdonald," are few and tightly knit. They maintain a pure blood line as do the inhabitants of Yoknapatawpha County.

The style used by Hébert in this novel further confirms that she is purposely and obviously making use of Faulkner's mythic county. The structure of *Les Fous de Bassan*, related but nonsequential sections wherein characters provide different points of view on the same action, is a technique closely identified with Faulkner. The fourth section of the novel, "Le livre de Perceval Brown et de quelques autres," establishes a specific connection with Faulkner. Perceval Brown is an idiot and this section is primarily written from his viewpoint. To further identify this section with Benji's in *The Sound and the Fury*, Perceval's section is preceded by the quotation from Shakespeare from which Faulkner derived his title.

This clue is so obvious that one is tempted to stop here — to draw the parallels between *Les Fous de Bassan* and *The Sound and the Fury*: the constant references to the past, whether real or imagined; the obsession with one incident which affects many characters; the established families being replaced by a new and "inferior" lot; the separation of races or linguistic groups; the madness which accompanies a closed society; and the degeneration of a strict and Victorian community into one dominated by violence and lust. *Light in August*, however, provides even more startling and specific comparisons. The Reverend Nicolas Jones is quite similar to the Reverend Gail Hightower, and Stevens Brown resembles Joe Christmas.[3]

In *Les Fous de Bassan* Jones is obsessed with the summer of 1936, in particular August 31, the day on which the two Atkins cousins disappear. During this summer he is consumed with lust for his fifteen-year-old niece, Nora Atkins. His wife Maureen learns of his interest in and his advances toward his niece, and as a result Maureen commits suicide. Jones is never able to admit his guilt in this affair, and he actually blames Nora for his acts: "Il dit que c'est par moi que le péché est entré à Griffin Creek." Jones' thoughts revolve around this summer when sin and Stevens Brown come to Griffin Creek.

In *Light in August* Reverend Hightower is also living in the past. He was "born about thirty years after the only day he seemed to have ever lived in — that day when his grandfather was shot from the galloping horse."[4] Hightower lives in his imaginary world and pays no attention to his wife. The sexual roles are reversed in this marriage; Hightower is uninterested in sex like Maureen, while his wife is promiscuous outside the community as Jones would like to be within his community. This marriage also ends with a suicide. Hightower's wife cannot accept the hypocrisy of his situation. While in Memphis, she jumps out of a hotel window.

Hightower is removed from his position as pastor and later beaten into unconsciousness, but he refuses to leave Jefferson, the site of his grandfather's death. He lives in isolation. Jones maintains his position, but it is an empty one. There are only a few old parishioners; he is a pastor without a flock, "pasteur sans troupeau." Though Hightower does become unwillingly involved with his community, he and Jones are ruled by the past:

> A man will talk about how he'd like to escape from living folks. But it's the dead folks that do him the damage. It's the dead ones that lay quiet in one place and dont try to hold him, that he cant escape from.[5]

The similarities between Stevens Brown and Joe Christmas form the most important connection between the two novels. The characters, however, are not identical though they share many traits and have common experiences. Hébert seems to use *Light in August* as a backdrop not as a model.

The characters are propelled by opposite forces; Stevens wishes to escape from his identity and the tightly knit world of Griffin Creek, whereas Joe has neither an identity nor a family. Stevens wanders for five years to forget his past, but he is "called" back to Griffin Creek for one last summer. He is determined to depart for Florida to rejoin his friend, Michael Hotchkiss, when summer is over. Stevens only found solace in the deep south, close to Faulkner country: "Une fois seulement dans ma vie cet ancrage paisible, au bórd du golfe du Mexique, 136, Gulf View Boulevard." Joe wanders for many years, searching for his identity by living as a white and then as a black. When arrested for murder, Joe is finally recognized by his grandmother, who tries to help him, and by his grandfather, who tries to have him lynched. Joe is "called" to Jefferson so that the mystery of his parentage can be revealed to him.

Both Stevens and Joe occasionally act as if they are not in control of their destinies. They are both harshly disciplined as children, and it seems that the violence which they suffered must be passed on to somebody else. They are both raised in a religion which stresses the belief in a devil and in predestination. Stevens senses doom and considers escape:

> Etre quelqu'un d'autre. Ne plus être Stevens Brown, fils de John Brown et de Bea Jones. Il n'est peut-être pas trop tard pour changer de peau définitivement, de haut en bas et de long en large. M'abandonner moi-même sur le bord de la route, vieille défroque jetée dans le fossé, l'âme fraîche qui mue au soleil et recommence à zéro. Ne pas laisser la suite de mon histoire à Griffin Creek se dérouler jusqu'au bout. Fuir avant que. . . .

Joe assumes "something of his adopted father's complete faith in an infallibility in events."[6] Yet the characters' behaviour fluctuates. At times they act as if free will were a possibility. At other times they act passively or as if possessed by some exterior force. Stevens believes that the sound of the wind and the ocean was a

factor in the commitment of his crime. Nicolas Jones echoes this belief: "Le vent a toujours soufflé trop fort ici et ce qui est arrivé n'a été possible qu'à cause du vent qui entête et rend fou." Joe can never decide if he is meant to be the active white or the passive black. These personal confusions may help explain their contradictory actions. Stevens commits a crime on the last day of his stay in Griffin Creek, thereby depriving himself of his intended return to the bliss that Florida represents. Joe commits a murder, but he allows himself to be shot and killed while holding a loaded and unfired gun.

Both Stevens and Joe have unhealthy relations with the opposite sex. Stevens' mother did not want any children, and her coldness affected him. Nicolas Jones implies that John and Bea Brown were happy to be rid of their children within the course of one summer: "Réalisation d'un vieux rêve enfin justifié. Ne plus avoir d'enfant du tout." Joe, on the other hand, cannot accept his adopted mother's kindness: "It was the woman: that soft kindness which he believed himself doomed to be forever victim of and which he hated worse than he did the hard and ruthless justice of men."[7]

Associated with the previous problem is the question of latent homosexuality. Stevens does not make love to a woman; he has sex with her. His only close friend, to whom he writes his letters, is Michael Hotchkiss (this very name has certain connotations). Nora does accuse him of impotence: "elle cherche un autre mot qu'elle ne connaît pas encore et m'appelle 'garçon manqué.' " Stevens' lover, Maureen, does have some masculine associations (her "veste d'homme"), but she is not like Joanna Burden, Joe's lover, who is repeatedly described in masculine terms. Joe does not seem to derive much pleasure from sex either; it's a duty, some type of instinct. Percy Grimm also accuses Joe of indiscriminate mating: "Has every preacher and old maid in Jefferson taken their pants down to the yellowbellied son of a bitch?" The evidence is ambiguous. Whether or not the characters are latently homosexual, they are incapable of establishing an intimate relationship with a woman.

Stevens' relationship with his older cousin Maureen corresponds in many ways with Joe's relationship with the older spinster, Joanna Burden. In both cases, the female is the owner of the residence; the male appears and is primarily interested in food, which is given to him; the male forces himself upon the female who does not offer total resistance; the male fears proximity and does not live under the same roof as the female; the male lives in an abode which signifies social inferiority to the female; the female becomes enamoured with the male and desires more attention than the male will provide; the male is repulsed by the female's sexuality; and the male ends the relationship because the female is too old for him. There are two important differences between the relationships. Stevens is not monogamous in his relation with Maureen; his desire to possess the Atkins

twins is the motive for his crime. Joe is not very interested in any woman, including Joanna; her attempt to kill him is the motive for his crime.

The very name Joe Christmas, his suffering, and the manner of his death suggest that he be viewed in relation to Christ. Joe's amorality and isolation, however, limit him to the role of an Anti-christ. Stevens, raised upon the Bible, mistakenly sees his transience as reason to identify with Christ: "Rien à faire pour éviter la comparison, trop de lectures bibliques, dans mon enfance sans doute, si quelqu'un ressemble au Christ dans ce village, c'est bien moi, Stevens Brown." Olivia is more insightful when she compares him to the forbidden tree of knowledge: "Il est comme l'arbre planté au milieu du paradis terrestre. La science du bien et du mal n'a pas de secret pour lui. Si seulement je voulais bien j'apprendrais tout de lui, d'un seul coup, la vie, la mort, tout." Nicolas Jones identifies Stevens as "le dépositaire de toute la malfaisance secrète de Griffin Creek, amassée au coeur des hommes et des femmes depuis deux siècles." Stevens refers to himself as a devil and to Griffin Creek as a hell. Like Joe Christmas, Stevens can be viewed as an Anti-christ.

THESE NUMEROUS SIMILARITIES do not dominate *Les Fous de Bassan*; however, they do add depth and complexity to the novel. In an interview Hébert explains that she wanted to create an impression which she had felt while reading English novels in translation. Also, she felt that the displacement of this community from English America to French Quebec would further confirm the strangeness of her characters' lives.[9] It is fitting that Hébert should use the dominant American novelist of this century to offset her story about American refugees living in Quebec. An English-speaking town more readily allows reference to Faulkner's work.

Griffin Creek is thus an enclosed town, allied with Yoknapatawpha, and representative of rural, English communities in Quebec. Is Stevens' crime then symbolic of the guilt that all English Quebecers must share for their treatment of the French majority? A careful reading of *Les Fous de Bassan* does not seem to support such an interpretation. There is no recognition of the French fact by the people of Griffin Creek. Their world is limited by the coastal boundaries of Cap Sec and Cap Sauvagine (from the dry to the savage). Since their ancestors were the first to settle in the area and did not mix with outsiders, they are not likely to feel guilty or be guilty for the political situation in Quebec. The crime is committed against their own kind. The author created a community living apart and consuming itself:

> Trop près les uns des autres. Ces gens-là ne sont jamais seuls. S'entendent respirer. Ne peuvent bouger le petit doigt sans que le voisin le sache. Leurs pensées

les plus secrètes sont saisies à la source, très vite ne leur appartiennent plus, n'ont pas le temps de devenir parole."

Griffin Creek is doomed because it is a closed society not because it is an English town in French Quebec.

The townspeople are so interbred that any sexual attraction is likely to be a taboo. Nicolas Jones lusts after his niece Nora, who physically resembles him more than she does her own father. Maureen is a Brown by birth and directly related to Stevens. The Atkins cousins are double first cousins; their fathers are brothers and their mothers are sisters. Stevens is first cousin to both Atkins girls. He wants to possess them and treat them like whores. They are experiencing sexual awakening and mistake his virility for passion and his lust for mutual desire. These family relationships are further complicated by a Victorian morality which permits the man to indulge in his pleasures and places the woman in a servile role: "Les filles d'ici sont intouchables jusqu'au mariage. C'est le pasteur mon oncle qui l'a dit. Tout le mal vient de là. Autant prendre son fun chez les guidounes et laisser les petites oies macérer dans leur jus."

There are two factors which produce the crime: the society and Stevens. Which is more culpable is a matter for debate. That Stevens is declared not guilty because of a legal technicality and the town of Griffin Creek is abandoned and left for dead by most of its inhabitants may be poetic justic or just an ironic comment by the author.

The people of Griffin Creek, particularly the women, have suppressed their emotions for generations. When the emotions finally emerge, they explode and violence occurs. Nora is attracted to Stevens and fantasizes about him. She longs to be his mate and his equal, "qu'il serait si facile de s'entendre comme deux personnes, égales entre elles, dans l'égalité de leur désir." Stevens is not interested in such behaviour though he is attracted to Nora. He desires domination not equality. He has fantasies about raping her, but he is content to treat her as a child: "Je lui parle comme à un enfant que l'on met en garde." Their meeting in the forest has ominous results. Stevens rejects Nora and she petulantly casts doubts on his manhood.

Olivia, on the other hand, is reticent, but her fate is the same. Stevens pursues her and reasons that, "[c]ette fille est déchirée entre sa peur de moi et son attirance de moi." Olivia's section confirms this statement. She is never forward like Nora, for she is warned by her female ancestors to resist: "Mes mère et grand-mères me recommandent tout bas de ne pas lever les yeux vers lui." This protection, however, is not enough. The hidden and burning desire for Stevens dooms her:

Quelque part cependant, est-ce au fond de la terre, l'ordre de mort est donné. Mes mère et grand-mères gémissent dans le vent, jurent qu'elles m'ont bien

prévenue pourtant. Je n'avais qu'à fuir avant même que Stevens pose sur moi ses yeux d'enfant.

Olivia's spirit does not blame Stevens for his crime; instead, her spirit views her own death fatalistically and as something which she could have prevented had she not permitted herself to be attracted to Stevens.

Stevens is the product of his environment: beaten by his father, unloved by his mother, and on the road at the age of fifteen. He is the catalyst that causes the closed society to explode. When he returns to Griffin Creek, he doesn't visit his parents for over a month. When he goes, the visit is treated as a confrontation and it is considered a victory: "J'ai vingt ans et je suis le plus fort."

Stevens has a fear and a hatred of women:

> Ce que je déteste le monde feutré des femmes, leurs revendications chuchotées entre elles, à longueur de journée, l'été surtout, lorsque la plupart des hommes sont en mer, ou dans les champs. Il n'y a que mon oncle Nicolas pour les calmer et leur faire entendre raison. Au nom de Dieu et de la loi de l'Eglise qui sait remettre les femmes à leur place.

This loathing for women seems to be the dominant reason for Stevens' crime. The novel never reveals whether or not the crime is premeditated. Stevens is prepared to leave for Florida the very next day, yet he empties his boat on the "final" evening of his stay in Griffin Creek. Why would he do this if he had no further intention of using the boat? Of course, he uses the boat later that evening to dump the dead bodies of the Atkins cousins into the gulf.

On the evening of August 31 when the cousins leave Maureen's house, Stevens is waiting for them. As they walk on the beach, Nora berates him: "Nora m'injuriait et m'insultait, se grisant elle-même d'injures et d'insultes, le vocabulaire grossier des hommes de Griffin Creek, leur colère brutale, passant soudain par sa bouche de jeune fille. . . . " Stevens feels a storm building around him, but the storm is completely within him. He is unable to accept Nora's defiance and rejection of her traditional, female role. She is rebelling against the closed society. Her insults concerning Stevens' manhood also rankle him. The society of Griffin Creek has not prepared him for an independent woman. His reaction is brutal and swift. He grabs Nora and she is dead before he realizes it, before he has a chance to enjoy himself: "Pas eu le temps de jouir d'elle." Olivia attempts to escape, but she is no match for Stevens. He eliminates her as a witness, but first he takes satisfaction in raping her:

> La démasquer, elle, la fille trop belle et trop sage. A tant faire l'ange on . . . Lui faire avouer qu'elle est velue, sous sa culotte, comme une bête. La défaut caché de sa belle personne solennelle, cette touffe noire et humide entre ses cuisses là où je fournique, comme chez les guidounes. . . . "

Stevens knows that he has done wrong, for he is like the tree of knowledge. After serving in World War II and spending thirty-seven years in Queen Mary Hospital, Stevens writes: "Et la plus grande sauvagerie de tout mon être je l'avais déjà accomplie, bien avant que n'éclate la guerre." Stevens is tormented by hallucinations and has taken to knitting like a woman. He is confused by today's unregimented sex roles. This hardly seems just punishment for his crimes, and at least one critic has attacked the treatment of the battle between the sexes in *Les Fous de Bassan*.[9] In defence of Hébert, one can argue that she is writing fiction and not polemics, that her fictional world is one aspect of reality and not of idealism, and that the fate of Stevens and the fate of Griffin Creek are implied condemnations of a closed society and its condescending treatment of women. Stevens and his crime do not lend themselves to a symbolic interpretation of the French-English conflict, but they do make a comment upon male-female relations in an insular community.

The town reacts to the crime in a negative and secretive way. Stevens is the obvious suspect: his omnipresent hat has disappeared; he moves into his parents' house on the night of the murder; his parents provide him with an alibi; some evidence is destroyed; and the police are treated as interlopers. One mark of a dying community is its inability to recognize evil.

There is an interesting minor voice in "Le livre de Perceval Brown et de quelques autres" which reveals the duplicity of the townspeople. It would seem to be the voice of Griffin Creek: "Nous les gens de Griffin Creek." The voice is preoccupied with projecting a proper image for outsiders: "Donner l'image des familles unies." Suspicions are directed to an unfamiliar car, and Stevens lives at home in apparent harmony with his family. The voice then becomes concerned with providing everyone with an alibi: "Refaisons pour notre propre compte l'emploi du temps de tous et chacun, le soir du 31 août." The voice suggests that all of Griffin Creek is involved in the cover-up. The people of Griffin Creek have become so clannish that they think the threat to their community is coming from the outside (the police); however, the cancer is within. They protect the malignant individual: "Celui qui nous trahira nous fera tous basculer dans le déshonneur."

Their behaviour ensures the death of Griffin Creek. Nicolas Jones admits this fact when he comments upon the common sense reasons that people give for leaving Griffin Creek: "Mais en réalité chacun d'entre eux désirait devenir étranger à l'autre, s'échapper de la parenté qui le liait aux gens de Griffin Creek, dépositaires du secret qu'il fallait oublier pour vivre." Their guilt is too great. By protecting Stevens, they have become accessories to the crime. Constant contact means constant recognition of their crime. They leave, hoping that departure from family and Griffin Creek will grant them the luxury of forgetfulness.

THE ENGLISHNESS OF GRIFFIN CREEK exemplifies the parochialism of its society. Though *Les Fous de Bassan* has as its setting an English town in Quebec, there is very little comment on any interaction between the two races. This is in itself a statement. Just as Hugh MacLennan could have the city of Montreal as his setting for *The Watch That Ends the Night* and barely refer to the French fact in the province, Hébert in like manner presents the garrison mentality of some English in Quebec. If there is any one inference to be drawn from *Les Fous de Bassan* which deals with the present, political situation, it would likely be Hébert's condemnation of a closed society, whether it be a Victorian, hypocritical one or a provincial, self-righteous one.

One of the reasons Hébert is so successful in her writing is her own cosmopolitanism. Her familiarity with English authors, Faulkner in particular, helps her to create a completely credible world wherein English characters think and speak in French. She accurately portrays the past and present of this authentic English world; there is a strong suggestion that no similar English world will continue to exist in Quebec.

The title, *Les Fous de Bassan*, will not endear itself to a translator. Yet it is a final summing-up, the clearest and most comprehensive image of the future for small, English-speaking towns in Quebec. A *fou de Bassan* is a gannet, but a *fou* is also a fool. The gannet is not a common bird; thus, its name includes its Latin terminology (*morus bassanus*) so that it will not be confused with the more commonly used word (fool). Gannets are seafaring birds that catch fish; gannets nest in remote areas in the Gulf of St. Lawrence; gannets nest in crowded, noisy conditions. The people of Griffin Creek live in similar conditions. The title, of course, also suggests that the inhabitants are the fools of Griffin Creek.

The gannet is most famous for its spectacular dive into the ocean; it is capable of reaching depths of over fifty feet. Stevens contemplates the image of the diving gannet in his final letter to Hotchkiss: "Il suffit d'un image trop précise pour que le reste suive, se réveille, recolle ses morceaux, se remette à exister, tout un pays vivant, repêché au fond des eaux obscures." Stevens compares himself to the gannet. Only his dive is into the waters of his personal memory. He cannot escape from the past or from Griffin Creek because they are always with him. Stevens knows that his Griffin Creek lives only in his mind, for he has heard from a traveller that "[s]eules les maisons de bois sur la côte subissent encore les assauts du vent et du sel, grisonnent et se délabrent, semblables aux nids abandonnés des fous de Bassan." Griffin Creek began with "robustes générations de loyalistes prolifiques." The symbol of the gannets is twofold. Once Griffin Creek seemed as prolific as a gannet colony; now it most resembles the deserted nests of gannets. Such is the final image of Anne Hébert's English world.

NOTES

[1] Françoise Faucher, "Interview," *L'actualité*, février 1983, p. 14.

[2] This and subsequent references are to Anne Hébert, *Les Fous de Bassan* (Paris: Editions Du Seuil, 1982).

[3] The name Stevens is an old family name in Yoknapatawpha County. Gavin Stevens is the district attorney in *Light in August.* He appears only at the end when he recounts to a visitor the story of Joe Christmas' death in Hightower's house. Steven or Stephen would be a more likely Christian name than Stevens. There is no explanation for the name in *Les Fous de Bassan.* Since Gavin Stevens is a decent sort in *Light in August* and his role is a small one, it would seem that the name is merely another connection with Faulkner's work and that it has no particular relevance. In the same vein, the nurse, whom the boy Joe Christmas hears as she makes love with an intern while Joe guiltily devours the contents of a tube of toothpaste, is a Miss Atkins.

[4] William Faulkner, *Light in August* (New York: The Modern Library, 1959), p. 57.

[5] Faulkner, p. 69.

[6] Faulkner, p. 194.

[7] Faulkner, p. 158.

[8] Faulkner, p. 439.

[9] Brigitte Morissette, "Lointaine et proche Anne Hébert," *Chatelaine*, février 1983, pp. 53-54. Part of the article is an interview. Anne Hébert comments on her use of an English locale: "Ce roman, je ne pouvais l'écrire en anglais, mais je voulais donner l'impression que j'ai ressentie souvent en lisant des romans anglais traduits en français. Je voulais donc qu'il y ait une sorte de dépaisement; alors j'ai voulu filtrer les mots anglais sans pour autant faire couleur locale; les mots anglais sont là pour faire résonner l'étrangeté de la vie là-bas."

[10] Suzanne Lamy, "Le roman de l'irresponsabilité," *Spirale*, novembre 1982, pp. 2-3.

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THE PLOT AGAINST SMITH

F. W. Watt

(. . . How came he poet?
Who shall say? Yet read his verses as they're writ
— Not with mind's calculating eye alone
But with the heart's, and then the secret's out. . . .)[1]

As editor, critic, anthologist, and literary historian, A. J. M. Smith belongs to the small handful of principal shapers of Canada's poetic tradition. But his reputation as a poet is less clearly and firmly established. Today it could even be said that at best Smith's poetry is more respected than read and enjoyed.[2] This constrained response is evidently due to what are perceived to be difficult, unpopular, academic characteristics of the poetry: first, its protean, metamorphic variations in form and imagery, subject, and attitude; second, its impersonality, ironic and distancing evasions of the subjective and autobiographical; and third, its classical austerity and restraint in style and feeling. These interrelated characteristics are certainly present. But at least in part the negative reactions of readers to them may be due to the strategies this strong-minded critic and editor of other writers' works has chosen, over the years since the mid-1920's, for arranging and presenting his own verse to the public. He has encouraged his readers to read his poetry in his way, or not at all.

Among the most interesting of A. J. M. Smith's many critical discussions and commentaries is the "review" dealing with his own poetry. "A Self-Review," which appeared in *Canadian Literature* in 1963, is a witty and urbane assessment of his first *Collected Poems*, published in the preceding year. In it there are many specific remarks of value to close readers of Smith's poems. But the most provocative passage is of a more comprehensive nature. In the following sentences Smith sums up explicitly the way in which (it seems) he has always wanted his readers to approach his poetry; and in so doing he states a problematical theory of poetry and raises an essential literary-critical dilemma:

> My poems are not, I think, autobiographical, subjective, or personal in the obvious and perhaps superficial sense. None of them is revery, confession or direct-self-expression. They are fiction, drama, art; sometimes pastiche, sometimes burlesque, and sometimes respectful parody; pictures of possible attitudes explored in turn; butterflies, moths or beetles pinned wriggling — some of them, I hope — on the page or screen for your, and my, inspection. The "I" of the poem, the protagonist

of its tragedy or the clown of its pantomime, is not me. As Rimbaud said, *Je est un autre,* I is another.[3]

Smith goes on to acknowledge that some readers may resist this version of — let me call it, for simplicity's sake — T. S. Eliot's Theory of Impersonality. "Indeed?" Smith speculates that a reader may complain, "Then who *is* this collector of butterflies and bugs you have been describing? Your emblem ought to be the chameleon or mole, not the Phoenix or swan." Helpful as this wry imaginary challenge is in directing our attention to the poet's metamorphic imagery — I will want to take up that suggestion later — it does not succeed in provoking Smith into a direct answer. He recognizes that there is a "problem" to be solved, a "general problem of the role of personality." But the remainder of his discussion evades an answer. Or, rather, talks about how evasive his own poetry is, because of its ambiguities of wit and irony.

The objection to Smith's theory of poetry, or, to be more precise, his description of what his own poetry is and its relation to himself as author, is not that the theory is wrong, but that it is both right and wrong. That is, it belongs in the category of half-truths. There would be little advantage in going to the other extreme and asserting the opposite half-truth. If we try to answer the question, "Who *is* this collector of butterflies?" in biographical terms we can only say, "A precocious and cocky young McGill student who was reading a lot of modernist verse"; and as well, among other answers, "A middle-aged urbane and witty Professor of English in exile from Canada at a mid-west American university." The attempt to be more profound in this direction might well throw light on certain details of the poetry-making. "A Self-Review" already does a little, and that most distinguished of biographers, Leon Edel, does even more in his personal sketch of "The 'I' in A. J. M. Smith."[4] But in the end we will almost inevitably discover that, instead of solving a problem in literary criticism, we have only raised all the problems faced by biographers and historians. The critic's job must end, as it begins, with the poetry.

Smith is entitled to defend poetry in general against the naiveté of reading it as the direct rendering of personal experience, or his own poems against narrow interpretations based on an interest less in art than in intimate self-revelations. But, on the other hand, readers are entitled to their common sense view that *somebody* must have done the collecting; *somebody* must have selected those particular "pictures of possible attitudes," and considered them important enough to be "explored in turn." Such readers may not necessarily take the moral stance implied by the term "personal responsibility." They may simply feel that an artistic world — or a collection of poems, however varied and protean — presented as a set of aesthetic objects detached from the experience of any recognizable human being, and intended to be contemplated for its own sake without reference to author, places, or times, may constitute an environment too unreal

and rare for human habitation. Moreover, if they do indeed try to enter Smith's poetic world ignoring the author's admonitions, they may discover that they are, after all, not in the presence of a "pure poetry" nearly anonymous which he seems to want to offer them, but rather they are surrounded by highly idiosyncratic works that begin to echo each other, to establish recurrences with deepening patterns; and that gradually a total impression emerges that (as it grows stronger) sets up an interplay from the parts to the whole and the whole to the parts, a mutually illuminating interplay. In fact, before long, readers may find themselves reading Smith the way they read Yeats or Eliot, Vaughan or Sitwell, the Scotts (D. C. or Frank), and Anne Wilkinson, the way that Smith himself, on the evidence of his criticism, reads these favourite authors of his — with a powerful sense of their individual human qualities. This process may seem rather like the often sublimal assimilation of words, actions, and appearances that gradually make up the overall impression we develop of a friend (or enemy) who has changed over many years but who still answers to the same name. It was, Leon Edel tells us, "impossible for a biographer like myself, and such an ancient friend, to read Smith's poetry without reading the poet."[5] We may not look for or expect to find an "I" in Smith's poems in any simple sense, least of all "an ancient friend," but we certainly will be gratified to discover a human presence which, however complex and protean, has a recognizable coherence, and which engages our own human desires, fears, and dreams.

A TREATISE ON AESTHETIC THEORY would have to delve far more deeply into this problem of the relation between the author's self or selves and the poetry he writes. But for now, and for literary criticism, it seems enough simply to assert that somewhere between the extremes of the poem as crafted aesthetic object nearly anonymous and the poem as a document of direct self-revelation there must lie a third kind of reality, one for which a creator ultimately will have to take personal responsibility. This way of putting it might still invite a critic to preoccupy himself mainly with discovering the responsible poet *behind* the poem. I think, rather, that in this direction the critic's job, even the biographical critic, is to discover the responsible poet *in* the poem — and to use whatever may be known and brought to bear from an author's life to make clear what it is that found its way into the poems and how it found its way there.

What I have just said about the critic with biographical inclinations would apply equally to the critic whose concerns are editorial or textual. Anyone who has observed the editorial strategies of Smith's five separately published volumes of verse will have noticed what little encouragement this author gives to the reader who would like to follow his career chronologically, who might be interested in the development of the author's craft over a period of half a century, or

for that matter the growth of the feelings and ideas enmeshed in that craft, or the epochs of social and political change which were their public context. In "A Self-Review" Smith notes with evident satisfaction that, of the poems in the *Collected Poems* (1962), "a few were written when I was an undergraduate and published in journals as different as *The McGill Fortnightly Review* and *The Dial*. And a few were written just the other day. Which is which would be hard to tell."[6] More or less the same thing could be said about the poems and their arrangement (never chronological) in any of his volumes. The critic who wants to talk about "early" or "late" Smith will have to go around the road-blocks erected by the poet himself. These obstacles include his resort to pseudonymns in the 1920's (itself certainly a kind of impersonality), and his inveterate habit of revision, re-creation, and transformation, which he refers to in the same passage.

In time, Smith may well enjoy the fate of truly established authors, and find his rejected versions and variants published in a scholarly collected edition.[7] Before that time there are other tasks which critics can do and have been doing with the poems mainly as Smith presents them to us: revised, polished, finished, arranged as impersonal, timeless, universal aesthetic objects, "pure poetry." But it might be useful, before going any further, to add one key example of how reaching behind the facade the poet has so carefully erected helps in understanding and appreciating the nature of his poetry, and the dominant effect towards which he has typically tended to shape it.

In 1928 a still young, as yet not fully-formed poet (he was only "A. J. Smith" on this occasion) published a poem called "Proud Parable" in the first issue of the brash new magazine, *The Canadian Mercury* (1, No. 1, December). As the poem entitled "Like an Old Proud King in a Parable" that work was to take its prominent place as the first poem in each of A. J. M. Smith's last three collections, becoming probably his best-known single work. There are important changes from the earlier version,[8] even though the revised and thereafter unchanged form of the poem appeared only four years later (in *The Hound and the Horn*, 5, No. 2, Jan./March 1932). Some of the revisions are simply better realizations along the lines of what the earlier version was trying to do, particularly those in the first stanza, which in both versions begins with the familiar lines:

> A bitter King in anger to be gone
> From fawning courtier and doting Queen
> Flung hollow sceptre and gilt crown away. . . .

Here the two versions begin to part company. The first drifts into relative wordiness and discursiveness, whereas the later is altogether more packed and concise, sharper and more vivid in its imagery — and no doubt wisely Smith elected to sacrifice the clever rhyming pun which readers would have noticed in the word "counterpane" in this passage:

> . . . And took a staff and started out alone
> And wandered on for many a night and day,
> And came, at length, half dead, half mad with pain,
> Into a solitude of wind and rain,
> And slept alone there, so old writers say,
> With only his Pride for a counterpane.

Here are the more familiar lines of the revised version:

> . . . And breaking bound of all his counties green
> He made a palace of inviolable air
> To cage a heart that carolled like a swan,
> And slept alone, immaculate and gay,
> With only his pride for a paramour.

The second half of this poem, however, offers differences of greater interest. In the earlier version, the "I" in a quite simple and direct way, addressing the King himself, asks for the "Spartan" strength to be able to emulate in the activities of "love," "fellowship," and "art" an heroic model:

> O kingly One! Divine Unsatisfied!
> Grant that I too, with such an angry heart,
> And in simplicity, may turn aside
> From any love or fellowship or art
> That is not a lying of Pride with Pride,
> That is not colder than a rain-wet stone,
> Sharper than winds that make the raw face smart,
> And has not such a strength in blood and bone
> As nerved the Spartan spearman when he died.

The reader is being invited to stand with the speaker and look with him at a rather naively, sincerely prayed-for goal. The later version seems to be presenting, instead, a fuller, possibly even more confessional, characterization for the speaker. The "I" prays to be freed from a "fat royal life" into a new asceticism. But in fact the clear, simple division between the "I" and the King, in the first version, is now complicated by the analogy implied in that word "royal," with its hints of self-conscious posturing. The reader here is being invited to look not *with* but *at* the speaker as he makes that self-deprecating comparison. And instead of insisting on the distinction, as it appears to do, the question-and-answer that becomes the turning point of the second version actually has the opposite effect: "O who is that bitter king? It is not I." The "I" of the second version emerges more vividly and strongly not as a clear and simple self-characterization but as a complex, self-aware, self-mocking persona bathed in ambiguity and irony. Readers of the first version would scarcely think of the relation between the relatively inconspicuous speaker and "A. J. Smith," the named author. Readers of the second will think of the authorial relation at once, and be wary. Far from being confident of the identification of this more prominent speaker and the poet "A. J. M.

Smith," they may even get the feeling that here we must have a case of the deliberate dramatizing and exploring of one out of a number of "possible attitudes."

A further consequence of the revisions is evident. The King whose behaviour in the first version was a model for "any love or fellowship or art" becomes in the second version a model only for the last — for art. Or to be more accurate, all three areas of life are subsumed under one, the singing of a "difficult, lonely music." The later version has become much more specifically a poem about poetry and its demands on the poet:

> O who is that bitter king? It is not I.
>
> Let me, I beseech thee, Father, die
> From this fat royal life, and lie
> As naked as a bridegroom by his bride,
> And let that girl be the cold goddess Pride:
>
> And I will sing to the barren rock
> Your difficult, lonely music, heart,
> Like an old proud king in a parable.

Here the equation has been completed between asceticism and aestheticism, between the perfecting of a life and the perfecting of an art. They are seen as one and the same.

One further feature of the later version is hard to miss. In "A Self-Review" Smith suggests that in the giving up of the "fat royal life" a "story" is "hinted at" —"an antecedent unspecified source of the bitterness, remorse, and self-disgust." He links it to the condition of "savoury fatness" referred to and so fiercely examined in a later poem of meditation on the reality of death, "On Knowing *Nothing*." "Unspecified, of course, because irrelevant," Smith notes, thereby closing the door on biographical speculation about that "source," that motive for going into exile.[9] In "Proud Parable" the choice of so austere a form of self-discipline is related, in so far as a motive can be inferred, to a kind of romantic over-reaching ("Divine Unsatisfied"). The King, having tried the life of worldly gratification and found it wanting, now moves pendulum-like to the way of deprivation. But in "Like an Old Proud King in a Parable," the King is associated with the image of the "swan" — specifically a carolling swan — in his decision to abandon the "fat royal life" of worldly desires and satisfactions. The model from which the "I" seeks to learn in the second version, then, becomes a noble singer who, like the legendary dying swan, breaks into song only to sum up his life at a fatal moment. Not, to be sure, a literal death in this case, but a death of the heart — "a heart that carolled like a swan." We have entered the region of absolutes: "difficult, lonely music" indeed, that must be worthy of the challenge to create a swan-song. But more of this poetic ideal later.

In Smith's last and perhaps his most carefully chosen and arranged collection, *The Classic Shade, Selected Poems* (1978), "Like an Old Proud King in a Parable" is once again the entry point of the volume. Lest readers feel that my comments on this poem unduly emphasized the "death" theme, it should be noted that the other part of the frame, the last poem in the book, is the no less familiar sonnet, "The Archer." Here, of course, the theme is unavoidable. Moreover, it is again intertwined with a conception of art. This time it is a difficult, lonely art of sculpture, in which the archer described in the octave, embracing the self-discipline required to aim his arrow, himself is metamorphosed into a work of statuary, a perfect balance of poise and energy; and the "I" of the second part of the poem explicitly emulates the proud and regal figure of the archer in order to achieve for himself a statuesque serenity in face of the grave. Here the three main characteristics of Smith's poetry meet and fuse: the formalizing, distancing, or straining out of autobiographical elements so that even the "I," if one exists in the poem, becomes elusive and impersonal; the metamorphic thrust which transmutes a lower into a higher form of being; and the achievement of a classical poise in face of the severest challenge to self-discipline and control, the fact of death.

These two poems, the first and the last in *The Classic Shade*, are typical of the whole volume, and of all Smith's poetry, in provoking opposite reactions. On the one hand is the distancing and transforming effect of style and image, the elegance and balance of poses and structures, the emphasis on control and restraint — in neither poem are we ever tempted to hear an "I" crying directly and sincerely from the heart. On the other hand, there is to be felt behind, or rather through, the disciplined aestheticism of word and form and idea a strong, consistent, shaping authorial presence. In fact, paradoxically, it may well be that it is this presence that draws us most certainly and most deeply into the poetry. By following the lure we may come to know the poetry much more fully, its strengths and its weaknesses, its evasions, and its candour and courage.

THE WAY TO BE FOLLOWED is to look more closely at the nature and consequences, for the poetry, of Smith's tendencies towards impersonalization, metamorphism, and classical restraint. It matters very little in which order we consider these topics because, as may be obvious by now, I believe them to be simply three sides of the same coin (the advantage of poetic coins is that they are not limited to two dimensions).

First, one of the most distinctive features of Smith's verse needs to be accounted for: the substantial element of allusion to and imitation of other poets. Smith's "A Self-Review" implies, in the long passage quoted earlier, that one correlative

of his bias towards impersonality was a strong interest in "pastiche," "burlesque," and "respectful parody," in effect, masquerading in other poets' clothing. Perhaps the most instructive example of the connection between the desire to avoid the "autobiographical, subjective, or personal" and the resort to these impersonalizing forms is "A Hyacinth for Edith," that "respectful parody" of Edith Sitwell. An abstract account of this poem could describe it as a lyric celebrating the speaker's simultaneous re-discovery of the joys of childhood and the regenerative powers of spring, amidst an urbanized, technological society that painfully suppresses the beauty and freedom of nature and of human innocence. The poem seems to move towards a conclusion in which a subjective lyric cry can break out from the liberated heart:

> ... I am grown again my own lost ghost
> Of joy, long lost, long given up for lost,
>
> And walk again the wild and sweet wildwood
> Of our lost innocence, our ghostly childhood.

But the pastiche element that dominates the opening half of the poem, the playful extravagance of the metaphors, forbids this kind of simple response to its ending. The quest through the April countryside, which the poem takes us on, for the "candy-sweet sleek wooden hyacinth" of the title is also a tour of Sitwellian poetic imagery epitomized in that phrase — vivid, startling, witty, radically artificial, out of a landscape of the mind — which Smith lovingly and gently mocks while at the same time energetically re-creating. By the end of the poem, what might have been a straightforward celebration of spring and childhood becomes an exuberant tribute to the power of art to create its own fresh universe of perpetual renewal. The speaker is transformed, not into a joyful child, walking again "the wild and sweet wildwood" of authorial innocence, but a sophisticated poseur adopting an elegant, self-conscious aestheticism, in defiance, certainly, of the debased modern "tinsel paradise" of "trams and cinemas and manufactured ice . . . ," but equally in defiance of naive, egotistical, romantic nature poems. It should be added that any reader who goes to the trouble of looking up an earlier version of this poem, printed in *The McGill Fortnightly Review* (2, No. 5, 1927), will notice that it has undergone revisions in exactly the same directions as those to Smith's "Proud Parable": that is, away from all that could be construed as naively personal and direct in reference and feeling.

Smith's most flagrant use of the sophistications of parody in dealing with what might otherwise seem highly personal material is to be found in "My Lost Youth," another hyacinth poem, but this time echoing T. S. Eliot, especially his "Portrait of a Lady." Again, an abstract account could make the poem seem almost confessional[10] in its revelation of autobiographical details about an urbane, Westmount-born professor now teaching in the Mid-West, with seductive man-

ners and a modest literary reputation to his credit. But the echoes of Eliot, amounting here to "burlesque" in their playfulness, allow the author to take away with one hand what he gives with the other. We are left with the multiple ironies of an "I" who recognizes himself as having been "a minor personage out of James / Or a sensitive, indecisive guy from Eliot's elegant shelf" when he left his over-enthusiastic lady behind in her drawing-room, swathed in the "modish odour of hyacinths," to flee to another "Reality." And so when the poem ends it is not on a note of rueful self-revelation (though that note is not entirely absent either), but rather with a flourish of dressing-up, of ham-acting, of adopting a pose which pays homage to the truths of Eliot's satiric insights while, through mocking exaggeration, denying their exact fit.

> I teach English in the Middle West; my voice is quite good;
> My manners are charming; and the mothers of some of my
>   female students
> Are never tired of praising my two slim volumes of verse.

And so, although the poem bears a superficial resemblance to confessionalism, it is in fact just the opposite — a mocking picture of one of the "possible attitudes" towards a self who remains elusive, if is not invisible, behind the aesthetic mask: a mask as effective in its turn as that of a proud, heartsick king who leaves a "doting queen" behind to go into his own kind of exile.

Just how congenial to Smith was this device of ironic masquerading, especially in regal robes, is indicated by his playful self-portrait on the occasion of his triumphal return to Canada for the Keewaydin Poetry Conference, "Astraea Redux." There the speaker, like a Stuart monarch reclaiming his kingdom or a somewhat humbled "proud king" returning from exile, graciously acknowledges the homage of an unlikely court of "lordly ones" (the "Duke of Dudek," "His Grace of Layton") and vows: "*Not to go on my travels again.*"[11] The recipe for this poem obviously includes satire, self-mockery, affection, and a homecomer's delight. But the exact proportions of the ingredients are difficult to be sure of, and the taste will likely depend on those who test it.

That kind of elusive self-representation and ambiguous tone is a particular instance of the general tendency of Smith's poetry: we expect to find evidences of the protean character of reality, of the metamorphic thrust of natural and human experience. "Your emblem," Smith had his imaginary critic argue, "ought to be the chameleon or mole, not the Phoenix or swan." But in fact any one or all of these emblems will do. They have something in common. Everywhere we look in the poetry the chameleon is hiding itself in the shades of surrounding colours, the mole is digging out of sight, the Phoenix is turning to ash or being re-born (not necessarily in the same form), the swan is incarnating a different reality. The "I" is always becoming "another." As "Metamorphosis" puts it, the "energy and

poise" of life seem to be a child's game in which old forms are continually flung away as new, equally transient forms are born. The classical statement of this theme is "The Plot against Proteus," a poem which seethes with images of changefulness.

> This is a theme for muted coronets
> To dangle from debilitated heads
> Of navigation, kings, or riverbeds. . . .

In the "muted coronets" of the first line we already have a fusion of the crowns which monarchs wear and the horns which sound the theme of beleaguered and diminished royalty. But "heads / Of navigation," whether "debilitated" or ascendant, can be both royal supporters of sea-travel and the highest points on rivers beyond which ships may not sail. So the flow and inter-flow of images continues, wittily and eloquently, through the poem, until Proteus himself, the "blind king of the water," appears, beached and ready for capture, if the hunter be cunning and fast enough.

> . . . This cracked walrus skin that stinks
> Of the rank sweat of a mermaid's thighs
> Cast off, and nab him; when you have him, call.

But at the end of this poem a reader may be left standing empty-handed, wondering how close the capture of some tangible if slippery reality actually was, perhaps even a little resentful at the poem's beautiful trickery. Is it to be read as a literary exercise on a familiar Homeric subject, or as a cryptic commentary of a philosophical or social kind on some specific protean aspect of human experience? It is typical of Smith that a direct answer will prove elusive: when you know for sure, call me.

There are, of course many other shape-changers in Smith's verse besides Proteus. One of Smith's favourite quotations, a sentence from Santayana, which appears most recently as the epigraph to *The Classic Shade*, suggests a recurrent metamorphosis of the human into the form of a bird. From this sentence Smith gets the title for one of his "two slim volumes of verse," *A Sort of Ecstasy* (the other being a not unrelated title, *News of the Phoenix*): "Every animal has his festive and ceremonious moments when he poses or plumes himself or thinks; sometimes he even sings and flies aloft in a sort of ecstasy." It is not only the "old proud king" of Smith's parable who becomes a carolling swan. The same metamorphosis transforms the immortal poet of "Ode: On the Death of William Butler Yeats." "The white bird is flying / Forever. . . . " For a lesser and still living poet, Ralph Gustafson, who survives a not so threatening fate as poet-in-residence (in the "darksome Groves of Academe"), there is an appropriately more modest metamorphosis: where the "leaden Owl did erstwhile reign supreme" now "a marvel! a green laurel springs / And from its topmost bough

a linnet sings." The song heard in "The Two Birds" is not as pleasant, and is used by Smith to suggest the opposite of ecstasy: miserable, alienated entrapment in the self. The "angular creaking note" issuing from the "cat-bird's ragged throat" finds an echo, as the "I" of the poem recognizes the kinship of "that other foul bird, my black heart." In the portrait of a lady given in "Bird and Flower"[12] a doubled metamorphosis is hinted at — "Christian bird and Grecian flower." The woman's disconcerting fusion of "holiness and joy," spirituality and a "dangerous" tenderness, is captured in the images of the catapulting "spiritual pigeon" and the "loaded violet." In another poem a similar kind of disturbing combination — an "innocent heart" housed within a passionate human body — finds expression first in images of "a tiger's spring" and "the leap of the wind," but then in the "quick flame" which goes beyond nature altogether "to turn sensation's lode, / With animal intensity, to Mind," a metamorphosis which sums up the case which the poet puts in his vigorous appeal against prudery, "To the Christian Doctors."

In a more obviously tongue-in-cheek or hyperbolic tribute to the virtues of transformation or metamorphosis, the speaker of "The Sorcerer" invites the magician from Lachine (ironically a name which has lost its magic long ago) to perfect with a spell the all-consuming wordly love he feels for his beloved:

> He will transform us, if we like, to goldfish:
> He shall swim in a crystal bowl,
> And the bright water will go swish
> Over our naked bodies; we shall have no soul.

Love is traditionally a potent force for transmutations. It is what changes the mind of the speaker of "An Iliad for His Summer Sweetheart" into a swarm of bees about Amaryllis' "golden head / And golden thighs, where love's best ore is found." Through the same cause the lover of "Angels Exist, and Sonnets Are Not Dead" becomes a "Salamander" who sleeps "in Paradisal flame / That coursed along my veins," so moved is he at the "coming" of his "Guardian Angel" — though not so moved that he feels it necessary to forego a sly play of words:

> She knew when to come and yet she came unwilled
> And undeserved, and coming, called my name.

But "A Pastoral" achieves its celebration of the power of love by the opposite device, the denial of image, metaphor, metamorphosis, and it turns the denial into a hyperbole in praise of the beloved. Though at first sight the "shepherdess" appears so beautiful that the speaker "dreamed / She were a moonbeam, a fountain, or a star," closer acquaintance not only intensifies his admiration but confirms the human reality of its object:

She was no moonbeam, star, or dream,
Nor icy changing crystal stream,
But very woman, such (I say) as no man
Might not love, nor her misdeem.

It seems unlikely that anyone who has read many of Smith's poems would be tempted to accept the simple, earnest, worshipful tone of this lover at face value. The poem is too insistent on being the perfect and complete manifest of pastoral innocence for that. But even a naive reader, if he were to encounter the poem in *The Classic Shade*, and then turn the page to read the next work, "Ballade un Peu Banale," would be shocked out of his romanticism by the ironic editorial juxtaposition it represents. In the "ballade" the pastoral lovers are transmuted into animals, "Master Bull" and "gentil Cow"; and the amorous scene is as ludicrous and randy as the preceding poem's depiction is sweet and charming: "Bull boometh from the briary bush, / Advanceth," but the "vestal turneth tail. . . . "

Where among all these fluctuating and sometimes downright discordant sounds are we to hear the true voice of feeling? There is little likelihood that this amorous Proteus will be nabbed in the nets and snares of sexuality, whether by the "rank sweat of a mermaid's thighs" or the more subtle appeal of "snake-bright hair" and "coral-tinted breasts" ("The Mermaid"), or by the still more remote lunar magic that draws the swimming lover or sea-king of "What Strange Enchantment":

. . . the shy glances of your eyes
Are the meshes of a net
For my limbs
And the dark sheen of your hair
Candle light
For my moth thoughts
And your white breasts
Twin moons
To draw my tides. . . .

This last love-goddess of tidal powers obviously belongs to the realms of mythical females conjured up by Smith in his attempt, in the "Introduction" to his posthumous edition of *The Collected Poems* of Anne Wilkinson, to define the "religious statement" of a remarkable Canadian poet whose work he found deeply sympathetic, especially her poems of love and death: ". . . hers is the classic religion of Empedocles, Heraclitus, and Lucretius. What it celebrates is a *metamorphosis*. Over and over again she descends into the earth like Flora or Eurydice or merges with white flesh, red blood, into the leafy green of a tree like Daphne."[13]

This sympathetic account of Anne Wilkinson's "classic religion," a faith that fuses the sensual and the spiritual, may make it seem less frivolous, less blasphe-

mous, to put Smith's erotic, often tongue-in-cheek, secular visions of human love beside the poetic and religious vision he recreated in "To Henry Vaughan." It too is a love poem of sorts. The world of nature, as if through Vaughan's own eyes, is depicted as real and precious in itself, "heaven'd" by its own vivid beauty, passionately and sensuously loved in its pastoral innocence. In the end, however, even that beloved creation yields up to metaphor and to metamorphosis. The "sun's first quick'ning ray" becomes "the flaming hair / Of thy wish'd Lord, thy Bridegroom dear"; the "tall feathery trees" are changed to "Earth's angels" singing the creator's praises; the air itself, in which the "happy larks" climb and sing, like caged souls freed, is "a broad golden winding stair / To Heaven. . . . " In the final transmutation of this poem, the beautiful plenitude of nature and of mortal being is reduced to the "Nothing" of death, but this in turn for Vaughan is a dear exchange for the "All of salvation into which that nothing is to be transformed.

Among the many "pictures of possible attitudes explored in turn," this yielding of secular to religious ardour is one of the most vivid and memorable. But the "respectful parody" — indeed, the brilliant imaginative emulation — of Vaughan's poetic utterance and spirit simultaneously demonstrates and sets a limit to Smith's sympathy for the model. The reader's reaction is much more likely to be admiration for Smith's imitative genius than any sense that the author has identified with the religious passion he so eloquently evokes. The poem invites us to witness and applaud a graceful performance, not to read a personal testament to an ultimate metamorphosis.

The relation is obvious enough between Smith's emphasis, in theory and practice, on impersonality —his fending off of the "autobiographical, subjective, or personal" — and his self-obliteration within a protean variety of poetic modes, voices, and attitudes, which are his acknowledgements of the changeful and fluid natural and human realities his poetry seeks to capture. The poet of the elusive or evasive "I" is also the poet who tries to encompass a multitude of metamorphoses and transformations, or failing that at least to control himself in the midst of it, hard thing that that may be to do, even imperfectly. If we were to sum up what kind of poet and poetry would be the exact opposite, and find the word for it which Smith would want to apply, that word would undoubtedly be: Romantic.

The Romantic Poet is that "One Sort of Poet"[14] who yields himself up blindly to his own heart's cry, grandiosely lifting his voice "in a great O / And his arms in a great Y":

> Whatever spring
> From the struck heart's womb
> He can only sing
> *Let it come! Let it come!*

This egotism and lack of self-restraint, "unenviously described"[15] in the poem, as Smith wryly says in "A Self-Review," has a still more extreme manifestation in "A Dream of Narcissus."[16] Peering into his own image reflected in the pool, Narcissus croons:

> I pipe sweet songs of love and joy
> And pore upon his lovely eyes,
> And he responds, that godlike boy,
> And mine are his divine replies. . . .

Self-infatuation of this kind has a logical goal, which may never be reached in reality, but Smith's poem essays a version of it. Narcissus dives into the pool in quest of identification with his own reflected image:

> I plunge into a crackling waste,
> And Chaos is unfurled.
>
> O horror! Incest of the soul!
> What reeling Furies! foul Abysm!
>
> O mad, inevitable goal
> Of proud Romanticism!

Against this abhorred enemy, Smith of course must pose its opposite, a humble Classicism.

THE WORD "CLASSICAL" is certainly a popular one, for Smith as well as for his critics. It is sometimes tempting, in face of the obvious difficulties of definition, to dismiss it as at best a vague gesture towards any of a variety of attributes in literature and life which might at the moment of its use seem desirable to Smith, or worth singling out for his commentators. In fact, the term had for this author a thin, clear thread of meaning which he liked to return to and which links several of his most significant applications of the word. By following that thread a reader can safely reach the heart of the labyrinth, or of the "classic shade," named so in "Ode: The Eumenides," where he may find himself crying out with the speaker of the poem: "I know that face!"

The word "classical" appears in the first piece of critical prose to gain a large and broad audience for Smith, his "Introduction" to *The Book of Canadian Poetry* (1943). There the clue to its meaning is already apparent in Smith's praise of the poetry of George Frederick Cameron. Cameron was only a minor Victorian figure in the history of Canadian poetry, perhaps, but one who, though he died at 31, left behind him a body of poetry sufficiently "individual and powerful" to catch the anthologist's attention — and for obvious reasons. "Cameron was a classical scholar, an internationalist, and a cosmopolitan." Sig-

nificantly climaxing a list of his themes is "an inescapable preoccupation with the idea of death." "In a romantic age," Smith goes on to say, "he maintained some of the classical virtues." And then Smith concludes with a specific illustration of Cameron's classicism in word and deed:

> Passionate yet resigned, and enthusiastic yet disillusioned, he was able in the last month of his life, under the shadow of death, to write:
>
> For we shall rest; the brain that planned,
> That thought or wrought or well or ill,
> At gaze like Joshua's moon shall stand,
> Not working any work or will,
> While eye and lip and heart and hand
> Shall all be still — shall all be still![17]

Smith shows almost exactly the same kind of precisely and intensely focused interest when he sets out to praise the work of D. C. Scott in a public lecture a few years later. Like Cameron, Scott built his "classical virtues of restraint and precision" in part on "deep and sound scholarship, constant reading of the Greek and Latin classics." And like Cameron also, Scott especially clearly demonstrates "the perfection of his calm and classical style" when he writes in the elegiac vein: when he writes of death. Smith concludes his tribute to Scott by quoting two examples, a poem which reveals "an awareness of the life-enriching nearness of death," "In a Country Churchyard" — Scott's memorial to his father's death; and after that, the "fine elegy in prose with which Duncan Campbell Scott closed his *Memoir* of his friend and fellow poet," a sombre, measured, yet lyrical description of the graveyard where Archibald Lampman's body lies buried. Fine it certainly is, sad but beautiful and serene; it "might have come," Smith says, "from the *Greek Anthology*."[18]

Just how personal must have been Smith's interest in and sympathy for the "calm and classical style" that allowed Cameron and Smith to write of the "nearness of death" with such clear-sighted control and eloquence is indirectly suggested by a quite remarkable public confession he made in his lecture, "The Poetic Process," in 1964: "The general idea of death or Nothingness as a vague but yet disturbing and, if concentrated on, frightening concept has been hanging over my sensibility for longer than I can remember." Later in the same lecture Smith offers an extended commentary on his own poem "The Archer" as a work which arose from a "state of discomfort and frustration caused I suppose by an imaginative realization of the inescapable and unpleasant *fact* of death and the seeming impossibility of controlling it in any way . . . ";[19] even more specifically, the poem had its origins in "ambivalent and very oppressive feelings about death (and especially about my own death)."[20] While complete "controlling" may never be humanly possible, Smith goes on to argue, poetic creation can provide a kind of purgation — "After all, Aristotle speaks of *catharsis*." And he ends by paying

special tribute to the "classical point of view with respect to poetic creation" as exemplified by T. S. Eliot among the moderns, a writer for whom poetry is not a Wordsworthian "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" but a "distillation of experience" in which there is a separation of "the man who suffers and the mind which creates," and in which "passion is transmuted" — these last remarks of course being quoted by Smith directly from Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent."[21]

The argument is not unrelated to the one he pursued on a more impersonal and universalized plane in his lecture, "The Refining Fire: The Meaning and Use of Poetry" (1954). There essentially Smith was agreeing with the critical tradition, running through Matthew Arnold, T. S. Eliot (whom once again he refers to approvingly), and F. R. Leavis, that sees a moral purpose in the creation and appreciation of art: "the training, developing, exercising, and strengthening of the sensibilities" and the development of "a corresponding purification and strengthening of the emotional and intellectual faculties."[22] The concept of the poet as being engaged in an athleticism of the spirit is clearly as attractive to Smith as it was to Eliot, though there is little to suggest that for Smith it had any consistent doctrine or religious implications. On the evidence of his poetry, however, the Canadian poet from an early stage in his career maintained his own strong senses of why a poet needed to be in training.

When the speaker in "To a Young Poet" formulates his advice, the terms of it will now seem very familiar. He recreates the classical tale of "Iphigenia in her myth," imagining that doomed daughter of Agememnon walking to her sacrificial death, which will free the Greek ships to sail to Troy, and accepting its necessity, with a "pace designed and grave," giving herself up in an "elegant, fatal dance." Such a bearing, the speaker says — "a hard thing done / Perfectly, as though without care" — is "alien to romance." In fact, it is the epitome of classicism as Smith seems to understand it. To equal that behaviour in the art of writing is the goal the speaker holds up for the "young poet" to attempt. The ascetic dedication to a "difficult, lonely music" worthy of the "Proud King" singing his swan-song in Smith's favourite parable, and the strenuous self-control and poise modelled on the statuesque athlete of "The Archer" and needed to sink an arrow in the heart of the grave, are obviously versions of the same discipline. To train yourself to write poetry in the "classical" manner is analogous to — is really the same as — training yourself to face death in the "classical" manner. To achieve that goal is to have achieved true impersonality; it is to have transcended romantic abandon and romantic egotism; it is to have undergone a transformation or metamorphosis. Above all, perhaps, it is to be rescued from terror, a state of mind the speaker describes himself as entering and then barely escaping ("A Narrow Squeak") in Smith's feverish "variation" on a powerful, death-obsessed poem by Anne Wilkinson.[23]

> . . . the day was gone;
> A bloodshot moonlight crept along,
> And the green hills were caked in ice.
>
> Who was it wavered in the frosty air,
> Looked back and hesitated, turned away,
> But waited — with a word to say?
> She moved her lips. I could not hear,
>
> I could not hear the word she said.
> It was a word of life or death.
> It stoned my heart, it stopped my breath.
> I dropped like stone, I dropped down dead.

"How came he poet?" Smith asks in his slyly witty eulogy of Ralph Gustafson.

> Who shall say. Yet read his verses as they're writ
> — Not with mind's calculating eye alone
> But with the heart's, and then the secret's out,
> The secret many a cryptic poem shouts
> — An *ars poetica* in two small words:
> *my love!*

If we were to apply this proposal for literary decipherment to Smith's own poetry, we might first of all expect to find it quite rewarding. After all, the vein of eroticism running through the poems is long and rich. But as we have seen, almost always Smith's love poetry is clearly hedged with irony, self-mockery, comic exaggeration, dramatic distancing, undercutting banter, and sophisticated parody, an urbanity which hardly allows us to take seriously the possibility that Smith's Venus might ever really manifest herself once and for all before us, or before this "Poor Innocent," whether as very woman or as goddess, "foam-born rising, / Maybe, nude and swell." Certainly the key "my love" would seem to open fewer doors and have less chance of being the "secret" of Smith's *ars poetica* than the "two small words" of another cry undeniably shouted from poem after poem: *my death!*

No doubt we should see the characteristically exuberant sensuality and eroticism of, for example, "An Iliad for His Summer Sweetheart" ("I love to see my Amaryllis toss her shirt / Away and kick her panties off"), of "Thomas Moore and Sweet Annie" ("Tip me and tup me and bed me down tight"), along with the superannuated memories of "Brigadier" ("I had a doting mistress, full of tang"), as part of that "fat royal life" that needs to be renounced in the effort to achieve a clear-sighted and disciplined classicism. But such a renunciation would be difficult for someone who throughout his career mocked the puritan denials of the flesh and the world, who was remarkable as a young man (Leon Edel tells us) for the "ease with which he picked up girls in London coffee shops,"[24] and who posed with a wine bottle for the back cover of his *Poems New and Collected*

(1967). Therefore it is not surprising to discover a "savoury fatness" being acknowledged as still part of the life so sombrely examined in the poem "On Knowing *Nothing*." In fact this poem, along with several like it among the last poems of *The Classic Shade* — "My Death" and "Watching the Old Man Die," notably — take their strength in large part from their candid admission that the passionately desired metamorphoses of "Like an Old Proud King" and "The Archer" have never taken place. There has been no renunciation. The spiritual athlete to the very end remains unfit, is unprepared for the ultimate challenge. The classical restraint in face of mortality has proved too difficult a discipline to achieve.

The voice of these poems is trying deliberately to eschew urbanity, polish, elegance. Metaphor is still hard to avoid, however: death is a cancerous seed that "lives on its own phlegm," "grows stronger as I grow stronger" like a flower on its stem; a wound with a scab to be picked at between the intervals of "blank surcease" provided by escapes such as the "surgeon's jab" or "a woman's thigh." But then at least once, in "Watching the Old Man Die," it becomes more simply itself: a reality afflicting the body of the "old man" which turns the abject observer into a "cowardly egotist":

> The body cannot lie.
> I savoured my own death
> And wept for myself not him.
> I was forced to admit the truth
> It was not his death I found grim
> But knowing that I must die.

The lame, bald rhyming of these lines can hardly be inadvertent. No one would know better than Smith how awkward and inelegant they seem, how remote from the "hard thing done / Perfectly, as though without care." Are they perhaps as close as this eminently civilized poet can come in poetry to a primitive, naked encounter with the one raw absolute that casts its "shadows" over his whole literary career? The poem "Shadows There Are" called them "shadows I have seen . . . / That backed on nothing in the horrid air"; but even in that "truly terror-inspiring" poem (to use a phrase Smith applies several times to the death-poems of Anne Wilkinson[25]) they were still the stuff of graceful cadences. The same shadows were no doubt the elected study of that troubled student of "In the Wilderness" who

> . . . walks between the green leaf and the red
> Like one who follows a beloved dead,
>
> And with a young, pedantic eye
> Observes how still the dead do lie.
>
> His gaze is stopped in the hard earth,
> And cannot penetrate to heaven's mirth.[26]

But here, of course, the title invites us to dress the speaker not in the personality of the poet but in the guise of a Christ whose vision may yet be restored in time. Perhaps the death contemplated by the "pedantic" student is closer to that alluded to in "My Death":

> It lies dormant at first,
> Lazy, a little romantic
> In childhood....

Certainly as a child himself Smith knew what it was to brood romantically over death. "I do remember," he says in "A Self-Review," "not any one specific moment, but as in a dream many times, always at evening or in the early morning, the swallows skimming over the rapids by the old mill at Laval-sur-le-Lac near Saint Eustache where we used to go for the summer when I was a child. I remember August 4th, 1914, there, and I remember helping to search for the body of a young man drowned in the rapids. And so the swallows, associated with loneliness and death by water, swerve into one or two of the more intimate of the poems and become a source of simile and metaphor." When the swallows reappear in Smith's poem "Hellenica," Leon Edel says, commenting on this passage, the "original child's sense of horror" has been distanced, the "starkness of death has been aestheticized... ; it has been washed clean and made classical."[27]

A kind of youthful romanticism is suggested by the image of "Death, the voluptuous, calling" so seductively from the last line of "Prothalamium." It lies behind the part of "Ode: The Eumenides" which holds out the possibility of an escape from visions of death by returning to "the classical shade" where "the casual dead / In their stained shrouds / Would not find us." But then that possibility gives way to a darker adult realization that no one shall escape

> The stench of the dead
> Emptied and butchered hope
> In lives and deaths made
> Meaningless froth.

This is the same aftermath-of-war rejection of romantic idealism that fills out the implied context of the minimalist lyric "A Soldier's Ghost" and especially its companion piece, "What is that Music High in the Air," with its nightmare ending in which the "heroic" and the "sacred" are supplanted by the "inconsequential dead."

Images associated with dying are a central nerve running through the whole body of Smith's poetry. Harsh and brutal as these images can sometimes be, they too are usually subject to the paradox that death is unspeakable, that writers despite themselves continue to "prettify, / Dress up, deodorize, embellish, primp, / And make a show of Nothing...," as "The Wisdom of Old Jelly Roll" puts it.

Only in "Watching the Old Man Die" does A. J. M. Smith come close to completely foregoing if not poetry then at least the poetry of "high-falutin' woes and shows" — foregoing even those poetic characteristics that dominated his work throughout his career: impersonality, metamorphism, and the classical poise that faces death with clear eyes and steady nerves. They are almost all gone, or so it seems; though even here is there not, in the bitterly ironic word "savoured," a fleeting gesture of restraint, as if to remind us of the civilized taste of one who would be a connoisseur of life to the very end?

> I savoured my own death
> And wept for myself not him.

It remains for the reader to decide whether, in such bleak and unpoetic lines, the protean wordsmith has for a moment put by all his beautifully crafted masks so that we can see his face; or whether he has simply enlarged his gallery of pictures with one more possible attitude explored in its turn.

NOTES

[1] A. J. M. Smith, "Poet in Residence, Bishop's University," *The Classic Shade, Selected Poems* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1978). References are to this edition, unless otherwise noted.

[2] The special issue of *Canadian Poetry* (No. 11, Fall/Winter 1982) devoted to the work of Smith opens its critical discussion with a comment that sets the tone for the volume: "the poetry of A. J. M. Smith is unfashionable and uninfluential." P. 1.

[3] From the version reprinted in Peter Stevens, ed., *The McGill Movement* (Toronto: Ryerson, 1969), p. 139.

[4] *Canadian Poetry*, pp. 86-92.

[5] Ibid., p. 86. See also Sandra Djwa, "A. J. M. Smith: Of Metaphysics and Dry Bones," *Studies in Canadian Literature*, 3, No. 1 (Winter 1978), p. 18: "As a critic of his own poetry, Smith has always discouraged the identification of poet and persona."

[6] Stevens, p. 137.

[7] See Michael Darling, "A. J. M. Smith's Revisions to His Poems," *Canadian Poetry*, pp. 7-25.

[8] Darling chose not to study them in his review of Smith's revisions.

[9] Stevens, p. 138.

[10] Leon Edel makes the somewhat misleading comment that "in his confessional poem 'My Lost Youth' . . . the 'I' is unmistakeable," *Canadian Poetry*, p. 90.

[11] *Poems New and Collected* (Toronto: Oxford, 1967), pp. 110-11.

[12] "Bird and flower, too, must die of love," wrote Anne Wilkinson in "Nature be damned," a poem Smith included in his *Oxford Book of Canadian Verse* (Toronto, 1960). But there, as Smith later noted in his posthumous edition of the *Collected Poems of Anne Wilkinson* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1968), the author replaced this line with one which is "inferior" — and in Smith's edition of her

collected poems he restores the original version echoing the title of his own poem. P. 211.

[13] P. xv, my italics. See also ll. 17-18 of Anne Wilkinson's "Nature be damned," with their verbal echoes of Smith's "What Strange Enchantment" (and possibly "Noctambule"):

I hide my skin within the barren city
where artificial moons pull no man's tide . . . (p. 109).

[14] *Poems New and Collected,* p. 54.

[15] Stevens, p. 136.

[16] *Poems New and Collected,* pp. 74-75.

[17] The "Introduction" is reprinted in Smith's *On Poetry and Poets, Selected Essays* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1977). See pp. 28-29.

[18] Ibid., pp. 56-58.

[19] *The Centennial Review of Arts and Science* (Vol. III, 1964), p. 353.

[20] Ibid., p. 367.

[21] Ibid., pp. 369-70.

[22] *On Poetry and Poets,* pp. 65-66.

[23] "Variations on a theme," *The Collected Poems of Anne Wilkinson,* pp. 112-14.

[24] *Canadian Poetry,* p. 89. See also Leon Edel, "The Worldly Muse of A. J. M. Smith," *UTQ,* 47, No. 3 (Spring 1978), pp. 200-13.

[25] *The Collected Poems of Anne Wilkinson,* pp. xviii, xx.

[26] *Poems New and Collected,* p. 96.

[27] Stevens, p. 141.

THE YEAR

Harold Rhenisch

When the year comes in your door,
closing the blank, creased wood

behind him on the cold blue fire
of his wildest fears, shaking

the snow off his face
and off his boots; pulling off

his gloves, his fingers stiff,
and rubbing his face slowly

like a boy touching a newly-sawn
stump — all this before he says a word —

look into his face. If you catch his face
when it wakes to the stiff

brushing of his fingers
and before it gives you any

familiar name to throw away,
hold fast; it will come

up in you years later
without even these words

to remember it by, a pure
distillation of strength and fear. Only then

can you put it back
in one clear shot, a burn in your

throat when you swing the door
open and gag on the blue cold.

If you were to open the door now
it would be into the wilderness

of your unsettled thought: a bear
lunging over you, a black

musty shadow, as you swing the door
open; or the blue

throat of the snow piercing you
with its cry so you'd never

catch your breath; or a green rage
of summer, yellow sunlight

splashing through the firs and the
thin gurgle of aspens

squeezing the gravel
between their roots; or a man,

standing there, staring
into you, a man only half

visible in that light —
you can see right through him:

the world you see through his body
is a landscape tearing up in wind,

leaves and catkins streaming
from the aspens with all

you've left unsaid.
If you drink the year down drink it fast

so it catches you in the pit of your weakness
as you open the door and the blue fire

shouts straight into your face
and straight through you,

and the green leaves cry out
through the snow, burning:

Through it all the long shadows
of the winter sun spill

through the snow and fill
the room behind you

so that when you turn,
without a drink now,

you do not see the darkness
but are swallowed by it,

so you do not see yourself;
so that the year is gone.

You close the door and step
back in, shaking the snow

off your face and kicking the snow
off your boots, pulling

your gloves off the way a woman
breathes the flowers' yellow dust

at dawn, the light still black with light,
that yellow pollen only grey in her

but bursting up through her,
a sunflower on a thick green stem,

as she stands,
her arms huddled around herself,

staring into the morning wind;
and rubbing your face stiffly

as if you've remembered something, as
if you've remembered something.

A TRIBUTE

Fred Cogswell

Before my daughter died, I would have made
A bargain with whatever power held
The keys of death to yield my life and health
And take instead what time was left to her;
A fair exchange, but as the outcome showed
There was no fairness in the scheme of things.

She died young. I live old. Since then, the things
I've worked at and the many poems I've made
Were less to have my name and state improved
Than for the joy they gave me. I have held
Firm to the one truth that I learned from her
Despite her early death and failing health.

When she was young and active, full of health,
She'd lose herself enjoying little things.
A moment's beauty was delight to her,
Whether a vase that her own hands had made
From clay or just a summer rose she held
Or news her branch's book-loans had improved.

Numbed by her death, when mind and nerves improved
Enough to think again, I knew all health
Was but precarious, that if one held
A firm assurance of hope-destined things
Events might damn the choices that he made.
This much of wisdom did I learn from her.

I know that it is vain to mourn for her
Who by the manner of her being proved
That meaning's in an instant if it's made

Intense by work or play, that there's no health
In postponement, and that there are no things
One can own. Life's quicksilver can't be held.

The grief that took me once is now withheld.
When I consider quality — with her
Genuine and proud — I rejoice. The things
Which I do now, I do because she proved
Ambition is not needed for the health
And energy from which a life is made.

Disease and death proved vain. Her being held
A health that made her friends remember her
Who loved so well such non-essential things.

WHAT REMAINS

Eric Trethewey

Whitened by frost and salt, narrow roads
stitch what remains of these farms to the landscape
in patterns as precise, from above, as maps.
Seen from down here, they inhabit us,

refuse the impartial view. Though we can't
define exactly the season's dry obsession
with stalk and branch, we see the gist
of alders advancing past lines of downed fence

and sense something in the way buildings
dispose themselves at dusk — barns leaning,
houses with windows boarded, shingles rotted,
hollow gestures against December's threat.

Bucket in hand, the only man we've seen
all day, rounds the corner of a swaybacked shed,
stares hard as we drive past —
                                        my dead grandfather
come back in his old red mackinaw
to finish the evening chores, remind me again
of something important I neglected to do.

books in review

KALEIDOSCOPE

JENI COUZYN, *Life by Drowning: Selected Poems*. Anansi, $8.95.

NIGHT ADDERS AND INKFISH, granadillas and luckybean trees: like Michael Ondaatje, Daphne Marlatt, and others, Jeni Couzyn brings to Canadian poetry the advantages of exotic origins. In Couzyn's fifth volume of verse, *Life by Drowning*, childhood and upbringing in South Africa show themselves directly: in lush images of alien flora and fauna, in Afrikaans vocabulary such as "knobkerrie," in Audenesque footnoting about the South African Terrorism Act of 1981. More subtly, her South African youth is conjured up in the preoccupation with sun and sea, in the recurrence of a fascination with the wild, in the almost frightening sense of the inexorable fecundity and decay of the natural world. True, Couzyn's adult self turns sophisticated, international, alluding to Russian science or American tragedies, admitting Canadian images of northern skies and towering pines. The caged rhinoceros and the Puff Adder do become the beaver in the trap and the furious wolverine in the snow. But it is clearly an expansion rather than a repudiation, and the earlier organic, marine, and cyclic references compound and amplify rather than simplify or condense their associations.

Unlike so many "Selecteds," *Life by Drowning*'s seven sections are not lifted, predigested, from Couzyn's previous books. She has reconsidered, rearranged, and renamed. The spells of *House of Changes* and the graces of *Christmas in Africa*, for example, are here united in one section, permitting a balancing of negatives and positives, of evils prevented and joys celebrated. Beginning with childhood and concluding with childbirth, Couzyn takes us through five intermediate stages: the world (its traps and horrors) and the social self; male and female interaction; duplicate selves and duplicity; songs and incantations; journey and connection. Reinforcing the circling sense is Couzyn's strong preference for free verse tercets, which also suggest the myriad trinities and triangles of her poetry — of sea, land, and sky; of nature, art, and artist; of flesh, spirit, and mind; of man, woman, and child; of life, death, and becoming.

The quality of the poetry of *Life by Drowning* is uneven, from the deep beauties of "Christmas in Africa" and the linguistic wit of "Goodbying in Esperanto" or "The Red Hen's Last Will and Testament to the Last Cock on Earth" to the opaqueness of "Fool Song" and the irritatingly cryptic whimsy and mixed metaphors of "Vision." Even within a single piece, the quality may plummet and soar, as in the concluding seventeen-poem sequence, "A Time to be Born." But it is uneven as well in the affirmative sense of being multifaceted, ranging candidly and without fear of internal contradiction through her myriad selves in a kaleidoscopic world. Letting the portrait stand, warts and all, takes courage, and so does the paradox of living by drowning. Couzyn does not seem to have much interest in hedging her bets; the resulting verse is strong and audacious, takes risks, often "wins."

Occasionally the fluctuation in quality strikes one as the consequence of crafting after-the-fact. In "A Time to be Born," for instance, it seems entirely likely (without textual notes to say otherwise) that Couzyn throughout her pregnancy wrote compelling, candid, and

discrete poems about the fears, sensations, mysteries, sisterhood, abstractions and concrete details of her experience. That all of these units lent themselves to a childbirth sequence would have been obvious; so, presumably, was the desirability of a frame. The result is a very weak introduction, entitled "Story," prefacing a remarkable, powerful, nine-month series. "Story," sounding at times like a TV special wherein tadpole becomes capital-S Sperm, resorts to the tired salmon analogy and dawn-of-time cliché to give universal dimension to individual conception. In fairness, this is grand, difficult stuff, already done sparely and beautifully in the Bible, so Couzyn's attempt *is* a game one ... but the result verges on the corny. Compare, then, the really fine accomplishment of the rest of the sequence: the delicacy of September's "Dream," the trance of November's "Earth Residence," the immediacy of January's "Heart Song," the complexity of February's "The Mystery," the touching candour of March's "Preparation" and "The Power," the talismanic rituals of May's "Dance of the Initiates" and "The Travelbag," the enormous impact and artistry of "The Pain" and "Transformation," and the ecstasy of the final "Creation." In the heart of those intensely realized moments and insights, Couzyn is a very honest and exciting poet. It is perhaps in notions of the expectations and exigencies of conscious art, rather than in excesses of inspiration, that she is inclined to founder. On those fairly frequent occasions when heart and art fuse, however, Couzyn is dazzling.

Jeni Couzyn keeps company with Margaret Atwood, Sylvia Plath, and probably the majority of current female poets in her anger toward and savage indictment of the brutalities and stupidities of modern "civilization." She writes effective overt social and sexual commentary in "The Interrogation," "World War II," "Karen Dreaming," "The Needy," and a half dozen other poems, but she does not settle exclusively for the sort of protest poetry that can be dismissed easily with a "Too true and isn't it rotten?" Couzyn forces us to hold our gaze that crucial extra second on such grim vignettes as the details of two children's sexual performance for food during wartime, the poison and pus of a doomed affair, the deadly boredom of zoo animals and agony of laboratory animals, the "stink of decaying semen" on the marriage bed. In "The Babies" she speculates knowingly,

> I suppose you wonder why I wrote this
> poem.
> I expect you'll say it's nasty, *gratuitously*
>
> nasty, summing the matter up.

And Gentle Reader may indeed be appalled by the macabre precision of "Preparation of Human Pie," the nightmare presence of "The Beast," the dwelling on infanticide and disease, on mutilation and castration, on the tortures and tarantula dance of men and women. Such nastiness, far from gratuitous, is necessary because (Couzyn included, women included)

> We're the sons of cowards
> and cowards' daughters anxious to preserve
> our present state of misery intact.

She makes clear, however, that she believes in the power of catharsis, and awaits with confidence the homecoming of the ship, the end of the long journey; *Life by Drowning* concludes deliberately with "a seal, and a promise."

The publication of *Life by Drowning* does three important things: it marks Jeni Couzyn's first appearance in an entirely Canadian edition; it brings together a rich and varied selection of early, recent, and new verse; and it introduces to those previously unfamiliar with her work, especially in eastern

Canada, a poet of remarkable range and power.

LEE THOMPSON

THE ELUSIVE SOURCE TEXT

NICOLE BROSSARD, *These Our Mothers or: The Disintegrating Chapter*. Trans. Barbara Godard, Coach House, n.p.

THE TRANSLATION BY BARBARA GODARD of *L'Amer ou le chapitre effrité*, is an important contribution to that fast growing body of literature in English which enables the English-speaking reader to have access to important works from Quebec.

These Our Mothers achieves one essential goal, to spread the ideas of one of the leading writers and feminist theoreticians in Quebec. In the five chapters of *L'Amer* (a paronomasiac word meaning the mother, the sea, a sea-mark, gall, bitterness, a bitter liqueur, an acid, and *l'A-mer* standing for the castrating mother) described as a "fiction théorique" by Brossard, the writer continues the formal experimentation present in her books written since 1965. In the five "rounds" of the book, the "combat," the writer, in a complex setting of fantasies, symbolic relationships, and stage effects, denounces the relationship between the daughter and the biological mother and "the state of difference" existing between the mother/daughter and the father. As Richard Giguère puts it "Brossard (pro)-pose de nouveaux rapports entre femme et légitimité, entre femme inceste et lesbianisme, entre mère, enfant et société capitaliste, entre mère et patriarcat." Using the basic metaphor of the sensual, sexual body of the text, Nicole Brossard declares text to be a "lesbian text," at the same time "matrix, matter and production," the only "plausible stepping-stone to get out of the womb of her patriarchal mother." The "killing of the womb" is necessarily linked for Nicole Brossard with a deconstructed discourse, text, fiction, ideology. Her "disintegrated chapter" appears then as a sort of genesis for the real Book to come, a book where women become at last the subject of the utterance, a book symbolized by the entwined bodies of the Lesbian mothers, in a sort of asexual future.

Nicole Brossard's writings have always been considered difficult, if not hermetic, and translating *L'Amer* is in itself a formidable task, all the more so as the writer in her polysemic text often blurs the distinction between signifier and signified in a kind of inchoate syntax "pour une lisibilité autre marquée par le frayage des pulsions" (Robert Giroux). But Barbara Godard with her knowledge of the feminist intertext and of Quebec postmodernist writings is translating within a familiar literary tradition. Nevertheless if one accepts the definition of literary translation as an attempt "to render as faithfully as possible the source text's communicative value" and defines a functional translation as a mediation between the source text and the reader of the target text one can't help pondering on the problems and difficulties of such translations as that of *L'Amer*.

Barbara Godard like most translators of "textes de la modernité" opts for literal translation and the difficulties which accompany it. This leads at times to: the addition of words and of "hidden footnotes" or to the deletion of some words, or more often to an obscure paraphrase of an obscure source text. The contorted syntax of *L'Amer* accounts for the translator's difficulty in sometimes comprehending the source text, and this results in the faulty translation of some compound words, some reflexive verbs and prepositions, and in the incorrect use of certain tenses. One striking example is the translation of "fille-mère"

by "daughter-mother" in a context where it obviously refers to the unmarried mother. Conversely the gallic syntax of the source text is often imposed on the syntax of the target text, which makes it more obscure.

The main difficulty, however, seems to lie with the translation of word-play, of paronomasiac language. The translator does not always keep in mind that approximating in the target text the same communicative value as in the source text "implies that all distortions (morphological, semantic, syntactic and structural) are warranted only by corresponding distortions in the source text." One device repeatedly used by Barbara Godard consists of using two or more English words to replace a single polysemous word in the French text, which creates a puzzling ambiguity that only a bilingual reader understands when referring to the source text. For instance "sacrifiant l'autre et même à *l'essence*" becomes "Sacrificing difference and identity for *the essence*, for *gas*." Another example of unsatisfactorily translated polysemy is the translation of *L'Amer* by five different titles which can still not quite cover the semantic richness of the French word. But more serious is the creation of word-play where the French text does not appear to imply it (cf. "*De fait*" translated by "*in actual fact. Defeated*"). On the other hand one regrets that some word-play has been overlooked or not given the importance it required. Although "le corps (gris) é" is accurately translated by the (grey) / (tank) ed body" the fact that grey and white play an important part in the typographic setting of the book has been disregarded in the translation.

To some extent reviewing a translation is a difficult task as translations are judged by people who have no need for them and usually look for the translating "flaw." It still remains that in spite of some inaccuracies *These Our Mothers* is a formidable undertaking done by a translator who had to be at the same time "a linguist, a scholar, a critic and a creative writer."

EVELYNE VOLDENG

NECESSARY SHORTHAND

DOUGLAS LOCHHEAD, *The Panic Field*. Goose Lane/Fiddlehead, $7.95.

TO SPEAK AS LARGELY AS HE CAN, a poet must find his own shorthand. Between Douglas Lochhead's collected poems, *The Full Furnace*, of 1975, and this book, there came in 1980 his *High Marsh Road*, a book I see as crucial to his subsequent development. Writing poems in the form of journal entries seems to have given Lochhead the freedom and control he needed to record his various and varied responses to the Tantramar marshes. That release in turn has allowed him to go back to a war-time diary and rework its materials into the very strong title-sequence of the present volume:

> The prose poems which make up the sequence *The Panic Field* have had a varied history. Some, about half, are expanded and changed versions of entries kept in a terse, pocket-diary style during the years of late 1942, just before I joined the regular army, until I was discharged in 1945. These original entries formed the basis and inspiration of additional ones which were written on and off until about 1982.

Our literature is not particularly rich in the poetry of war, even though some of our best-known contemporary poets were participants. Douglas Lochhead's sequence is a closer, day-by-day recording than any of the others provide. The structure of the poem, which is mirrored in the larger design of the book, is a metaphor for the tempo and quality of

the life it records. The jottings provide at once intimacy and distance, a full range of tones and perspectives. The entries in themselves represent moments of sanity, of the release of imagination and feelings, snatched and secured from an insanely unreal and regimented life. The pressure of that life contains them — formally as well as verbally:

> Hundreds of Canadian soldiers were overtrained and were kept in a state of boredom, frustration, uselessness and sometimes hysteria bordering on panic. I was one of them. We thought we were being prepared for the ultimate panic field without realizing that we were really in it and always had been.

The title-sequence, consisting of fifty-eight entries, occupies well over half the book. Recurring characters and images as well as the narrative line give the poem a unity and urgency of forward movement not felt in the earlier Tantramar sequence. The range of irony from wry to bitter, of feelings from resigned to anxious, of perspectives from the diarist speaking for his "we" to his most private speaking, gives the poem its richness and fullness.

The two further sequences, one of lyrics, "In a Winter Apartment," and one of prose poems, gain authority from the recording voice already established in "The Panic Field." They too have the character of entries, discrete and sometimes fragmentary, sometimes cryptic and private, notations. They too range widely in tones and perspectives. They further support the feeling I have that Lochhead in his *High Marsh Road* poems found for himself that necessary shorthand, the form and voice he is most comfortable with. Looking back on the earlier work, that of *The Full Furnace*, one can see that he has always been a poet compelled to jottings, to getting down the small events of daily living. Now he seems closer to his sources, and from that closeness comes his distinct and appealing markings. I see this book as a real advance for Douglas Lochhead, a poet already known for his quiet integrity, his truth to his own way.

ROBERT GIBBS

FILTERS OF TIME

CHARLES LILLARD, *A Coastal Range*. Sono Nis, $5.95.

ROBERT MACLEAN, *In a Canvas Tent*. Sono Nis, $5.95.

ERIC TRETHEWEY, *Dreaming of Rivers*. Cleveland State Univ. Poetry Center, $5.00.

CHARLES LILLARD'S FOURTH major volume of poetry, *A Coastal Range*, attests to the resonant eloquence of our Northwest Coast poetry. It is a fine example of a regional vision attempting to decipher life's enigmas. These secrets — as yet unsolved, however — are sought with a certain urgency reminiscent of such timeless themes as *tempus fugit* or *carpe diem*. Lillard's richness of language captures extraordinarily well the plenitude of the poet's experiences. One cannot but be sensitive to the ease with which Lillard writes; clearly, poetry is an integral part of his existence, and serves to evoke the joy and sadness of contemporary life.

A Coastal Range chronicles, firstly, the poet's wanderings from Puget Sound to Alaska, and secondly, his spiritual migration from the past to the future. Much like the journeys of Saint-John Perse's "insatiable migrateur," Lillard's quest for truth leads him from social structures — in this case urban life — to the authenticity of nature's raw forces:

> The wind rises like the horn's call at
> Roncevaux
> and under these faltering and shifting
> colours,
> under this pattern of dawn-hawking gulls,
> I am tired and so tired of knowing why.

> Although I have kept few of my
> promises —
> there are three books that bear my name,
> but I have taught, lectured, and it is all a
> game.
> The goal: proportion, order, and harmony,
> ignores
> the landfalls, guts, and churning tides
> uncorking
> astern of the shoal-horn's bleat, the coast
> pilot's caution.

Lillard does not entirely forsake the here and now of his existence:

> That ploughed field is what matters;
> the truth's at our feet
> not out there in the silences.

Rather, his somewhat undefinable yearning born of a need for change is an element which figures prominently in *A Coastal Range*. His is a world in which man aspires to perfection, in which exaltation and solitude are inseparable.

For Lillard, the pleasures of life are those which seem to capture the movement of time:

> Alone vast as the space between two words.
> Alone is a man before the fire, a dog under
> his heels;
> it is Flaubert writing Louise; Cezanne
> watching the light;
> it is time pillaged.

But of all the images evoked in this collection, one of the more captivating is one in which time cannot destroy the epiphany of nature:

> What an island and I have lain in her
> embrace
> and I will again;
> somewhere I will watch an eagle and those
> stars
> closeby as the smokey breath of Tongass,
> the moonlight ebbing on the sand.

It is a transcendent image in which the pure consciousness of the poet foresees beauty yet to be attained. The exaltation and anguish in *A Coastal Range* combine to express a contemplative perception of man's destiny.

In a Canvas Tent, Robert MacLean's fifth collection of poetry, recounts the poet's activities as a British Columbian tree planter. Much like Lillard's pieces, MacLean's poems are landmarks along a spiritual itinerary. They do not attempt a photographic depiction of those natural phenomena to which he was witness, but instead are filters combining images from both past and present. Poetry obviously allows MacLean to express his restrained lyricism, and in this way to acknowledge a metaphysical fatigue which is also present in Lillard's writing: "Tired so tired. Sometimes I find / it hard to generate faith in anything / except pancakes with maple syrup."

The title of this work is drawn from a recurring image suggesting the poet's nomadic nature:

> Tent: template. Planting pines 5
> months each year I turn into an animal
> wary of all enclosures. Sky roof,
> horizon walls, earth resilient floor.
>
> Sometimes I long for a warm cave.
> A fixed bivouac, hot cup of tea
> A structure not to barricade chaos
> but to focus it.

MacLean's wanderlust seems to be the result of a deep-rooted dissatisfaction: "I want to name all the stars animals / flowers birds rocks in order to forget / them, start over again." However much he might wish for a chance to begin anew, the bond to be established with his environment is fragile because of the ravages of time:

> Time compressed. Twilight steeped
> in resin. Pausing on a bridge severed
> at both ends, a name fell apart in my
> hand. Does dark gaze back? Stained-
> glass windows open and close inside
> the earth. Cities shuffle past on
> the horizon brokenhanded beggars.
> I've nothing left to give but crumpled
> burnt pinecones.

Although MacLean does affirm that hope is necessary in order to realize one's aspirations, he proposes a rather ambiguous solution to the frustration he feels within

himself: "Be still. Let rain enter your skull / and scour you empty."

In a Canvas Tent liberates the reader from an urban framework without resorting to a trite appeal for man to return to a nobler and more natural state. While posing serious questions about man's future: "In the distance I hear cities detonate, / the smile frozen on lips sink deep / into steel." MacLean proposes a reassessment of the direction in which modern life continues to evolve.

Eric Trethewey's *Dreaming of Rivers* contains pieces initially published in his chapbook, *In the Traces* (1980), as well as other poems which have appeared in various North American reviews. His language is fluid and simple; through his depiction of rural landscapes, he conjures up images of bygone days drawn from both a personal and an historical perspective.

Although the childhood memories rekindled by Trethewey are personal, one is strongly drawn to sharing his nostalgia:

> Along a faded logging trail
> I hunt in the dusk
> of one more ruined year,
> move warily as into ambush,
> my step light on the corduroy
> as though the logs underfoot are ribs
> of scattered, half-bruised skeletons.
> As I stalk on a grassy trace
> between sloping birches on a ridge,
> my heart bumps when I can see the shed.
> Its sun-bleached tarpaper
> is wind-shredded into wisps
> like an old peasant's hair.

The softness of this image is counterbalanced by one which is more violent and which instills in the reader a sense of foreboding:

> Mornings, I ran in the early light,
> . . . . . .
> And one hushed dawn, eyes trained level
> on the ruts ahead, I turned toward the sun
> slung low above the plough-rippled earth,
> looked up at last when I came upon Christ
> at a crossroads, twelve feet of him
> crucified in stone, rearing up from the furrows
> like a giant stalk of weather-bleached corn.

But it is the present which Trethewey seems to cherish the most, for it affords him the possibility of expressing his desires for the future, his need for immediate and true communication:

> Today, all day, there is something I've wanted
> to tell you — syllables rising to my lips
> as silence — about failure, how it drifts
> up in the flesh unrecognized, as now
> when we're almost home, something stirs
> to float between us across the shadows,
> rising like a breath, almost like a song.

Trethewey impresses with the strength of his honesty; he appeals to the sensitivity of all readers through personal anecdotes which emphasize the necessity of introspection. *Nosce te ipsum* is evidently the poet's credo. Nonetheless, besides depicting the rewards of knowing oneself, *Dreaming of Rivers* suggests the importance of fantasy in a world which has gone awry. At a time when we are confronted by incomprehensible images of nuclear disaster, famine, and social upheaval, poetry has come to temper the rigours which we must all face. The three poets in question communicate a profoundly human perception of existence, for they have realized that in order to benefit from the richness of the future, we must know ourselves and value our past.

KENNETH MEADWELL

DEMYTHOLOGIZING FATHER

GLENN CLEVER, *ed.*, *The Sir Charles G. D. Roberts Symposium*. Univ. of Ottawa, n.p.

THE SYMPOSIUM ON Sir C. G. D. Roberts took place in April 1983. This volume consists of 15 essays, panel discussion, and

bibliography, on just about every genre and style in the Roberts canon. One could hardly expect unity from such a conference. Shortly to appear in print is the volume of proceedings from a slightly earlier conference on Roberts hosted by the Centre for Canadian Studies at Mount Allison University. Two such volumes within a 12-month period must constitute at least a flurry of interest, if not a trend. To what do we owe this? I think as Canada matures as a culture, historical curiosity, interest in our earlier writers and critical re-evaluations are natural components of identity formation. Indeed, if we use individual and familiar developmental stages as an analogue, we can see that as a civilization we have been through infancy dependence, sibling rivalry, oedipal rebellion, adolescent depression, breaking away; now we are into raising our own family, organizing our own place to live, choosing a life-style and a role, and pursuing other adult goals. This is the stage where we re-examine our ancestors and heroes, look at old photographs, read old letters and stories, and try to find out whether we are in fact legitimate descendants of Dad, who may have had a double if not a triple life after all. Roberts, the so-called "father" of Canadian letters, may have more to teach us about ourselves than we earlier thought.

This is the message of Ed Jewinski's essay on post-structuralist implications for Canadian criticism, which is to my mind, while not the most clearly written of the papers, the most interesting. I will take some of the issues that this paper raises as the focus of this review. To begin with Michel Foucault and Wolfgang Iser, and other semioticians who provide the background and framework for Jewinski's essay, it is possible to see that their great contribution to the field of modern criticism is in shifting our perception from content to process. These theoreticians do not always do this consciously, nor have post-structuralists yet digested the implication of what they do for the entire enterprise of literary response (namely, deconstruct the field itself). It is important, however, to see that the shift to process significantly moves this symposium away from interpretation of Roberts' works towards an exploration of how his works are interesting. Only Jewinski consciously points to the methodology of his colleagues. Yet many of these Ottawa papers move, in their reconsideration of the Roberts canon, to a healthy uncertainty, a cautious probing of the dynamics of the mystery of literary composition and reader response. Strangely enough there is a curious lack of critical self-awareness in these other papers. They all seem to be questing for a truth, unaware that the method and provenance of the search determine the result.

That the papers are arranged along traditional lines makes it somewhat more difficult to detect this underlying probing for process, but if you look for it you will see that a demythologizing and a disestablishing of Roberts the "Father-Model" is taking place. In other words a growing uncertainty about the hard outlines of the external object looks like a stage in the coming to terms with the role of the internal, perceiving subject. What emerge are the vague outlines of Roberts the human, male, conflict-ridden, conservative, anglo-saxon authoritarian whose writings are the much more complex production of multiple ambiguities. Roberts becomes through this process more like ourselves. In essay after essay, by Laurel Boone, Fred Cogswell, D. M. R. Bentley, Les McLeod, and others we see a Roberts whose work embodies his own dilemmas. The "Two Rivers" Roberts, an idea of Professor Cogswell's that is turning into a standard metaphor, expands in these papers into a myriad-streamed Roberts. The clergyman's son

becomes a Darwinian naturalist; the Victorian family man may be a rake, restlessly shifting to New York and London unencumbered by wife and offspring; the Wordsworthian accolyte becomes native modernist, immersed in the struggle for an authentic Canadian voice. The extraordinary time it has taken for Canadian criticism to see this human Roberts does indeed say much about our own methodolgy and mind-set. We do not speak ill of the dead, especially of the romantic, poetic dead, especially of the pioneer man of letters, especially of those knighted and most especially of "father." Nevertheless it is surprising that we have so kindly put up with Elsie Pomeroy's biography for so long, or that we have been so unwilling to see or to write of the darker side of the work and therefore of ourselves.

In fact, the emergent, complex, uncertain pattern of work we now choose to look at, as evidenced by these still somewhat conventional essays, is infinitely more human, more exciting, more interesting, more like our own. What strikes me ever more clearly about Roberts' writing is that his true voice and force is found in the animal stories, because it is these stories that permit Roberts an authentic expression of his shadow side, his darker, Lawrentian blood-passion side that could not be acknowledged anywhere else, not in his letters, nor his public image, not in his poetry or his biography. Looked at with our new freedoms we can see Roberts' passionate, almost schizophrenic struggle for self-realization as part of the wonderful unfolding Victorian struggle now visible to us within the disguises concealing and revealing protagonists like Tarzan, the mutineers of the Bounty, The Invisible Man, Jekyll and Hyde, and many in Dickens. Now we begin in Canada to create our own genuine Victorian, late as always we are, but getting there all the same.

This collection of papers moves us then much further into the present in our criticism. It is also a mine of information, a guide to the state of the art in Roberts scholarship. As such it is indispensable to those interested in Roberts' work and Canadian criticism. Professor Glenn Clever is to be congratulated for directing the symposium and producing the results in an intelligible, readable format.

JOSEPH GOLD

POETS' LIVES

SUSAN STROMBERG-STEIN, *Louis Dudek: A Biographical Introduction to his Poetry*. Golden Dog, $8.95.

AL PURDY, *Morning and It's Summer*. Quadrant, $8.95.

THESE BOOKS VARY GREATLY in approach, content, and style. Yet their purpose is common, to create a portrait of each writer "as Man and artist." And to some extent, they invite the reader to the same task: to construct a biography from the parts provided.

In the Prefatory Note to *Louis Dudek*, Stromberg-Stein proposes to relate elements in the life of Dudek to his work, to "discover where and how the poetry intersects the life." She uses two approaches, a chronological account of Dudek's life interspersed with quotations from the poems, and a series of eight interviews with critics, fellow poets, editors, and friends of Dudek. Her most valuable sources for the life are fifteen tape-recorded sessions in which she talks with Dudek about every aspect of his work, Dudek's unpublished "Autobiographical Sketch" (1961; in the Lorne Pierce Collection, Queen's University) and a conversation with Dudek's sister Lilian. One major value of the book is to

make these documents available to Dudek's readers and critics.

The second part records Stromberg-Stein's interviews with poets Leonard Cohen, Ralph Gustafson, F. R. Scott, and Ron Everson, critic/writers Ronald Sutherland and D. G. Jones, and former student/editor Ken Norris. These are arranged in alphabetical order with a brief note on the place of the interviewee in Canadian letters. Together they provide interesting anecdotes and personal reminiscences of Dudek in his roles as poet, editor, teacher, critic, and friend. In the most perceptive and wide-ranging of these, D. G. Jones comments on his first acquaintance with Dudek as a student at McGill and on Dudek's stimulation of Jones' own poetry, on Dudek's role in the journal *CIV/n* and the birth of Contact Press, on his connections to Pound, Williams and contemporary American poets and finally on Dudek's relationship to contemporary Canadian patterns of realism and myth. Jones' final tribute sums up the views of these associates: "It would have been a quite different world without him. Oh yes, he has definitely changed my world."

Stromberg-Stein's premises are convincing: there has been no full-length study of Dudek and such an account is timely while he is still in mid-career. The book as a whole conveys a clear view of Dudek against his background and provides an introduction to his poetry. It makes us aware of a strong network of writers and critics in the 50's, 60's, and 70's, and furnishes a social history of little magazines, small publishing houses, and grass-roots culture in Montreal in these years. I was, however, disappointed. The section on Dudek's life is brief, only 94 pages. The author depends very heavily on long quotations from her sources, especially in early chapters, and these are not clearly set off from the text. While the poems are co-ordinated with events in Dudek's life, the discussion is uneven, at times elementary and at others vague or diffuse, as in repeated references to his "philosophical meaning" or the sentence "the cosmic and aesthetic principles have come together in this poetry." The bibliography of both primary and secondary references is highly useful, especially the record of reviews for individual volumes. One wishes, however, that Stromberg-Stein might have been a little more adventurous or sophisticated with such excellent material.

As we may expect, Al Purdy's memoir *Morning and It's Summer* is highly individual and provocative. A collection of reminiscences in prose and poetry, it takes a nostalgic look at Purdy's youth in Trenton, Ontario in the twenties. The format suggests a photograph album with quality cream paper and portraits in sepia. The cover, in shades of blue and black, shows an unbelievable Purdy at age three, posed against a Victorian horsehair lounge in a little Lord Faunt-

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leroy suit with frilled collars. In this work Purdy invites us to return to the past where "all directions are possible." He asks us "Is this the way it was or is this the way you wanted it to be?" and replies for us, "This is the way it was when nothing moved or changed."

The first part, a series of untitled prose sketches, recreates the days of boyhood, the town of Trenton and its familiar characters. We see the Trent River, the main streets, Front and Dundas, the local bakery, mill, factories and coal sheds, the horse-drawn buggies and Model T's. Purdy vividly recalls the activities of Everyboy: swimming by the railway bridge, fishing for mudcats, stealing magazines from junkyards, or watching movie serials at Weller's Theatre. With the poet we watch the faces around us dissolve into those of the past: "for a moment you think you are living backwards." With Purdy we are both present and detached. He sees himself at six as a stranger in a land of giants, an outsider "trying to get used to being alive."

The poems, entitled "Some of the People," pick up many of these characters of the past described already in prose. Highway 62 leads out of town towards the present; we see the cemetery in summer "evergreen" or watch the poet at the funeral of his mother: "naked / on the needle point of now." Other poems evoke the days of childhood, the colour words of preschool, the friend Jack who becomes "The Boy Accused of Cheating." Purdy mourns the father who died when he was two, the stillborn brother whom he calls the "dead Poet," and Cousin Don who returned from the war with shell-shock and "something lost / the Loss remained with him always." One of the most compassionate portraits is of Joe Barr, the village idiot who roamed the garbage dump and was chased and stoned by the children. Unable to express himself, he is described by Purdy: "the doors of his prison opening / into rooms he couldn't remember / places he couldn't stay." Two poems suggest the impact of his grandfather on the child. The dominating old man with his "260 pounds of scarred slag," undaunted at 90 and "too much for any man to be," haunts the poet with his vitality. Purdy remarks: "the veritable flesh and bone of my Grandfather rises from the dust, flashes in my mind, lives again inside the flesh and bone that is myself." In these poems the tone of elegy is strong, a sense of place lost. As Purdy acknowledges in one poem "What have we to do with childhood? / — no one lives there any more."

Of the two portraits, Purdy's is the more vital, and intense. Both the prose and the poems have memorable passages and moments of brilliance. But to some extent the book seems contrived, designed to fill a space on our shelves of Purdy. The poems, many of them well-known, appear in other collections. For would-be biographers, both this and Susan Stromberg-Stein's study of Dudek are fascinating sources of information on the formation and development of genius. For ordinary readers, however, they demand too much; in a sense we must write our own biographies of these complex poets.

C. MCLAY

POETRY & PAINTING

ANDRE-G. BOURASSA, *Surrealism and Quebec Literature: History of a cultural revolution.* Trans. Mark Czarnecki, Univ. of Toronto, $20.00.

BOURASSA'S DETAILED STUDY of the surrealist movement in Quebec literature had a mixed reception when first published in French in 1977. The author was accused of over-extending the definition of surrealism, and hiding his lack of theoretical method behind a mass of

Richard GIGUÈRE

EXIL, RÉVOLTE ET DISSIDENCE

Étude comparée des poésies québécoise et canadienne (1925-1955)

La première véritable synthèse de l'évolution des poésies québécoise et canadienne pour la période 1925-1955.

Empruntant aux théories du comparatisme littéraire et de la sociologie de la littérature, l'auteur met en lumière les rapports qui existent entre l'histoire socio-politique, économique et culturelle et les textes poétiques. Des interférences apparaissent ainsi très clairement dans les cinq réseaux thématiques privilégiés et démontrent que les événements de la crise, de la guerre et de l'après-guerre ont donné lieu, tant au Québec qu'au Canada anglais, à une poésie marquée par les thèmes de l'exil, de la révolte et de la dissidence.

Une étude qui va au-devant de cet intérêt nouveau au Québec et au Canada pour la culture et la littérature de «l'autre».

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facts. All agreed that the documentation was impressive, and some found in it a much needed literary history tracing sources and influences which are all too often overlooked. Claude Gauvrau, for instance, is shown as a reader of Claudel as well as of Roland Giguère and F-M Lapointe.

Surrealism by its very nature eludes definitions. Bourassa opts for a very broad view of a movement or tendency, rather than a school. This view is so comprehensive as to include Crémazie's macabre fantasies and those elements in Aubert de Gaspé's *L'influence d'un livre* which are more usually described as gothic. But more important chapters are devoted to Gauvrau, Borduas, and a considerable number of recent poets known mostly through Montreal's small publishers.

The study of poetry with painting makes a welcome change from literature and politics. All too often, in approaches to Quebec literature, it is assumed that direct political intentionalism is the only source of interest. Bourassa's book is a timely reminder of the hope, never entirely lost, that literature can be read as more than highbrow nationalism. Not that the arts are viewed as politically innocent; indeed, Bourassa assumes somewhat too easily that artistic revolt is also revolt against established order, particularly against Duplessis. Yet his evidence suggests that "interior" revolt can often have very little direct bearing on public affairs. The role of the artist as revolutionary needs further questioning, and the information collected in this book will be a valuable help. Despite his alleged or real lack of method, Bourassa does view literature in its own context, and in the wider artistic context; it is a welcome corrective to crude intentionalism, backed up by sixty pages of chronological and bibliographical information. Seen in this way, the broad view of an inherent tendency is instructive. Some free play of the imagination has always been present in Quebec writing, even at its most didactic moments, and that freedom has significance.

Surréalisme et littérature québécoise is a challenge to the translator. Mark Czarnecki takes on the task manfully, and there are substantial passages where discreet editing seems to have taken place. The quoted passages present an obvious problem, since so much of this writing depends on consciousness of language. The translator can be very clever, but if the reader does not see the word-play for himself, he is likely to be mystified. One example: "Zygmoid, schizoid (on the tightrope) / (no tremas, hey, you have to depart this life)." In the original, the words were, in effect, published without the *tréma* required in normal spelling. This is shown and adequately explained in the translator's appended notes. Most readers would find it more helpful to have the original quoted material on the same page as Bourassa's text. For there are so many other details to play with: "Plantez un gland, s'il se déchêne" is not adequately rendered by "Plant a gland, if it unchains itself," and Bourassa's comments on the imagery of the oak tree make no sense with this version. Readers of the English version should also know that they do not benefit from the same illustrations as the original, which had colour.

Despite these limitations, the English version should have considerable influence. The documentation, without this volume, is virtually inaccessible. And it builds a solid case for a view of Quebec Literature beyond the easy assumptions which are most current within and especially beyond the French language press.

JACK WARWICK

CONFLICTS UNRESOLVED

BARRY DEMPSTER, *Real Places and Imaginary Men*. Oberon, $12.95.

SHARON DRACHE, *The Mikveh Man and Other Stories*. Aya, $8.00.

BARRY DEMPSTER'S *Real Places and Imaginary Men* is his first collection of stories and gives evidence of a young writer's interest in experimentation in its variety of narrative voices and structures. The unifying theme, however, as suggested in the title, is a familiar one: the reality of place in conflict with the illusion of being.

The first story in the book, "Barry's Bay," is not only the most profound illustration of Dempster's theme of reality and imagination, but also the finest story of the lot in its sensitivity to the mysteries of human longing. The suggestion of memory's ability to transform reality, to evoke a sense of wonder through the heightened perceptions of the double narrator — simultaneously adult and child — is reminiscent of Clark Blaise's Thibidault stories and Margaret Laurence's *A Bird in the House*. There is a slight tendency to give every scene too much of an emotional burden, but otherwise the story has considerable power to elicit sympathy for the narrator's father in his struggle to achieve a sense of inner piece and independence at Barry's Bay that is denied him elsewhere.

After this promising start, however, the collection goes downhill. "The Beginning of Klaus Berber" is about the conflict of independence and adaptability and explores the ability of an old man to give meaning to his life by adopting the mannerisms of characters on TV. He communicates this power to the narrator and his friend Harry, who becomes obsessed with the need to be someone other than himself. Although the situation has a certain plausibility in its evocation of the fantasies of urban dwellers living lives of unfulfilled longing and despair, the conclusion to the story collapses into absurdity with Harry falling to his death while acting the role of The Six Million Dollar Man.

The inability to bring his stories to an appropriate climax seems to me to be Dempster's major failing as a short-story writer. He is adept at conveying nuances of character, and he knows how to create suspense and sustain interest, but having developed a situation, he does not know how to conclude it. This is particularly evident in "The Butterfly Addiction," which deals with the annual appearance of large numbers of monarch butterflies in the small town of Forse. One year the monarchs arrive early and the townspeople are strangely affected by their presence, becoming lethargic, dreamy, almost catatonic, and yet at peace with the natural world. Eventually, the butterflies depart and things return almost to normal. The story is over before we have time to reflect on the meaning of this magical transformation which has left so little evidence of its having taken place. The last paragraph does suggest that the townsfolk still retain some ability to recall the "perfect moment" of their butterfly-induced trance, but this simply confuses interpretation. Has anything meaningful really happened? Dempster can not seem to decide whether he wants us to accept the world of illusion or to reject it. The possibilities remain unexplored.

In "The Man Who Met an Angel," the marvellous is evoked, as the title suggests, through the appearance of an angel in a city park. The man can not sleep for thinking about the angel, but thinking about it eventually allows him to come to terms with the vision. No more problems. No more conflict. This is not the kind of anti-climactic ending that

Clark Blaise has called "subversive," that leads us back into the story. Rather it is the kind that pretends to resolve everything while resolving nothing, the pat answer that precludes further questioning.

Sharon Drache's *The Mikveh Man and Other Stories* is another first collection that deals mainly with life in the Jewish community in Queenstown (i.e., Kingston) and in an old folks' home in Ottawa. Most of the stories are about old people — a 70-year-old rabbi, an 85-year-old carpenter, a married couple incapacitated and near death. Drache clearly sympathizes with her characters, who have suffered in their lives and are suffering now the neglect of the younger generation. Their triumphs are few but all the more important for their infrequency. In "Let's Make Music," a 79-year-old man and a 93-year-old woman stage a concert on drums and triangle, and in "A Kitel" another old woman miraculously rises from her wheelchair and somehow conveys her bedridden husband to a chapel where they lie down together to die beside the Holy Ark. The courage that these characters show, however, is not enough to make the stories memorable. What Drache fails to convey is any sense of motivation; her characters act but do do not know why. If they are to be seen as heroic, it is the less than human heroism of fairy tales that they embody.

Like Barry Dempster, Sharon Drache sets up potential conflicts which are never resolved. In "The Meeting," for example, a Jewish MP and Cabinet Minister rekindles an old romance with a gentile woman he had known in university. Her husband is now confined to a mental hospital and divorce proceedings have begun. Thus, expectations are aroused about the nature of the new relationship that may develop between the old lovers. But the narrative abruptly shifts to wartime Germany to focus on the woman's husband, then five years old. The account of his sufferings under the Nazis is supposed to prepare us for the revelation on the final page that he has located his parents' killers and avenged their deaths. Nothing more is said about the Jewish MP's relationship with his old flame.

"The Scribe" is another story with great potential that is marred by psychological implausibility and an absurdly abrupt ending. The scribe is a young Hasidic artist employed by a wealthy art dealer to create specially-designed copies of the Torah, one of which the dealer attempts to sell to an old friend as a Bar Mitzvah gift for her son David. The woman balks at the price and a year and a half passes before the family returns to the art gallery. In that time, the once pious and unworldly scribe has married the boss's daughter and taken over the gallery. He no longer makes copies of the Torah and seems to have completely abandoned his principles. What happened to the ideals of the young scribe? What turned him away from precepts so deeply held? The author gives us no clues for the reason for this startling metamorphosis.

Both Drache and Dempster, despite their abundant powers of invention, have yet to learn how to get the most out of their material. Our best short-story writers — Blaise, Metcalf, Munro, Gallant, Hood — return again and again to the same voices, the same kinds of characters, places, and situations, not because they have no new ideas, but because they recognize that there is always more to be said about the old ones. Whereas the average writer never exploits the full potential of a situation, the great writer never exhausts it.

MICHAEL DARLING

BLACK COMEDY

GUY VANDERHAEGHE, *My Present Age*. Macmillan, $19.95.

GUY VANDERHAEGHE HAS FOLLOWED his impressive debut as a writer of short stories — *Man Descending* is certainly a worthy winner of the Governor General's Award, with its deadly accurate dialogue, its effective imagery and descriptions, its wit, and its humorously harrowing insight into the feelings of people who have somehow found themselves on the outside looking in, yet in a quaintly twentieth-century bourgeois fashion are so aware of the failings of those who are inside they wouldn't (and couldn't) join them for anything — with an equally impressive debut as a novelist in *My Present Age*.

Some early reviews of *My Present Age*, while acknowledging Vanderhaeghe's continuing power as a writer, suggest an unease with the novel. It is precisely that unease, plus the crafty way he goes about developing it, which convinces me that *My Present Age* isn't simply the apprentice work of a coming writer but a highly successful work of art in itself. For Vanderhaeghe, in choosing to write at even greater length about, and in the narrative voice of, Ed, the feckless protagonist of the final two stories in *Man Descending*, has chosen to attempt one of the most difficult feats in fiction — to make an unsympathetic character sympathetic without ever losing focus on the traits that make him such an unloveable S.O.B. He succeeds; in fact, he succeeds so well he had me laughing out loud one minute and stunned into silent shock the next. Such success is more than reason enough to praise and recommend *My Present Age* to all who care about contemporary fiction.

As Marsha, one of Ed's old "friends," tells him near the end of the novel, Ed is "a fuck-up, and infantile jerk. We've always been embarrassed for you, the way you act." And later she adds this: "Nobody felt comfortable around you, everybody felt you were judging them, even poor Victoria, who was so patiently and pathetically waiting for you to join the human race. Do you have any idea how good the rest of us felt believing we weren't going to end up like the walking dead all around us? Do you? And then this messy shlub, this twenty-two-year-old zombie, would shuffle into the room and piss on our parade." Marsha has Ed pretty well pegged, though he might try to tell us that he never judges people; the point for the reader is that Ed pisses with so much energy and glory that if one is not in the line of fire (and as reader one is not) one can't help but admire the act.

Those who have read *Man Descending* will recall that in the title story and "Sam, Soren, and Ed," Ed and Victoria suffered marital difficulties and breakup, though Ed fought hard to prevent Victoria from getting wholly out of his clutches. Many must have felt, as I did, that Ed's story was far from finished, and wanted to find out what happened next. What is causing unease in some readers is not that *My Present Age* doesn't answer the question but that it pulls no punches, and that although there are still scenes of extreme if also excruciating comedy it is essentially a work of palpable darkness, perhaps even defeat.

Ed is still fighting his ex-friend Benny, the lawyer representing Victoria, and he is still capable of savagely funny anger at people like the radio Hot-line host he calls "the Beast" and the prying old man in the apartment below him. But he has retired from life. When Victoria asks him for lunch, and in the face of his "attack-is-the-best-defence" approach only manages to hint that she has a major problem of her own before disappearing, Ed is hauled out of the safe

harbour where he has been indulging in bittersweet memories of their early marriage and imaginative escape through the adventure novels of his youth. Finally, with the aid of an ex-convict who attends his creative writing class and wants his help in polishing his memoirs, Ed sets out to find Victoria where she has gone to hide in some motel in the city, hoping to offer her some real help.

During his crazy journey around the winter city, Ed encounters various characters from his past and his present. Vanderhaeghe masterfully shows everything from his point of view yet also reveals his failings as an observer. Nevertheless, for all his faults, Ed has an unerring eye and ear for phoniness, and Vanderhaeghe allows that to emerge again and again. Indeed, it is because Ed is so wittily insightful that we put up with him, for he is even capable of seeing himself clearly upon occasion. But he is also obsessed: with a vision of a perfection that never existed except in his mind and which drives him upon his quest but makes him unable to offer Victoria anything she needs when he finally finds her.

Vanderhaeghe has created a sad-sack loser whose wit and intelligence render him somehow worthy of our complicity in his superb failure to measure up to society's demands. As his tale careens from slapstick comedy to unnerving *angst*, Ed holds our attention and our concern.

There are a number of influences one could point to, but Vanderhaeghe has already moved beyond them to discover his own novelistic manner and a language capable of rendering particular voices, such as Ed's, in the context of a contemporary, Canadian, prairie city. Where he will go next, I don't know, but on the evidence of *My Present Age* as much as *Man Descending* he will go far. I for one look forward to reading the maps he will surely send back from his future forays. Meanwhile, *My Present Age* is black comedy at its intimate and subversive best.

DOUGLAS BARBOUR

LITTLE MAGAZINE OF THE AIR

ROBERT WEAVER, ed., *The Anthology Anthology*. Macmillan, $17.95.

ANTHOLOGY, THE CBC PROGRAMME, is thirty years old, and the appearance of a collection of broadcast pieces to celebrate the occasion reminds me of the circumstances of its origin. One evening in 1953 my wife Inge and I were having dinner with Robert Harlow, then a Talks Producer in Vancouver, and we fell to talking of the lack of literary magazines. *Contemporary Verse* had gone out of publication; *Northern Review* was appearing at long intervals as John Sutherland slowly died; *Fiddlehead* was all that remained apart from the *Canadian Forum* and the university quarterlies. Something, we felt, had to be done to provide an outlet for writers, and then my wife said, "Why not a little magazine of the air?" Immediately, it seemed the ideal solution, for in those days before the Canada Council the CBC was the only organization with adequate funds and enough of a commitment to the arts to get such a project working without too much delay.

Harlow passed on the suggestion to Robert Weaver, who accepted it as fitting in with the trend of his own thinking, and who talked the CBC authorities into providing air time and funds. As an acknowledgement of the Woodcock part in the programme's beginning, I was appointed editorial advisor to Anthology at $100 a month, which in those days before inflation was a reassuring addition

to the money I was earning from freelance work; it kept us in food and even paid for a little wine.

This is part of the story of Anthology's origins that seems to have been lost to official memory; certainly it is not mentioned in Robert Weaver's introduction to *The Anthology Anthology.*

The programme was an important innovation; it preceded *Tamarack Review* by two years and *Canadian Literature* by five years, so that it can be regarded as the beginning of the little magazine revival which started in the later 1950's. It also initiated a period, through the 1950's to the mid-1960's, when CBC radio turned to literature, and some ambitious dramatic, documentary, and other literary programmes were being done; the CBC in those days occupied a great deal of writers' time and for many of them provided a large proportion of their incomes.

It is almost two decades since the CBC began to abdicate its responsibilities to the arts, and now, almost every other literary programme having vanished, Anthology has the look of a survivor rather than a pioneer. Lately its age has been beginning to show, with duller programmes and less attention to the quality of readers' voices. This is only natural; magazines of all kinds have their cycles, as Bob Weaver recognized when he chose to terminate *Tamarack Review* rather than handing it on, and perhaps Anthology's time has come.

If it has, *The Anthology Anthology* will serve as a peculiarly appropriate monument, for, whether deliberately or not, the editor and his associates have not chosen the *best* pieces that appeared on the programme so much as the most representative, so that what we have is really a true portrait of a magazine of the air offered — as was inevitable over so long a period — dull and dating pieces as well as its small masterpieces of fiction and verse. Thus we have excellent stories by Matt Cohen, Audrey Thomas, Marian Engel, and fine poems by Al Purdy, Gwen MacEwen, Phyllis Webb. But these are the reliables, and the collection is short on writers who are relatively unknown *and* interesting. Some pieces are irremediably dated, like a conversation between Robert Fulford and Northrop Frye that took place in 1980, and some are shallow, like Morley Callaghan's appreciation of Gabriel García Marquéz. And one reads often with a justified sense of *déjà vu,* for most of the pieces have been published already in books or periodicals, and some are very familiar, like Alice Munro's "The Shining Houses" and the poems from Margaret Atwood's *Journals of Susanna Moodie.* The book is a worthy and modest souvenir of a venture of some importance to Canada's literary history.

GEORGE WOODCOCK

FRANCO-ONTARIENNE/ MANITOBAINE

MICHEL DACHY, *Persévérance.* Editions du Blé, $6.00.

LAURENT GRENIER, *La Page tournée.* Editions de l'Univ. d'Ottawa, $7.95.

ANDRE DUHAIME, *Visions outaouaises / Ottawax.* Editions de l'Univ. d'Ottawa, $8.95.

JEAN MARC DALPE, *Et d'ailleurs.* Editions Prise de Parole, $8.00.

ASSEZ DISPARATES ET PLUTOT déroutants les quelques derniers recueils de poésie parus en 1984 au Manitoba et en Ontario diffèrent par la langue et par le contenu. On y trouve, entre autres, de la poésie traditionnelle écrite dans un style travaillé. C'est le cas de *Persévérence,* premier essai poétique de Michel Dachy. Quant à *La Page tournée* de Laurent Grenier, les thèmes qui y sont développés

rappellent la vision d'un certain romantisme, face à la douleur, la désespérance et la mort. Par contre, il semble que la spontainéité, le réalisme, voire aussi l'humour, soient les caractéristiques dominantes des oeuvres d'André Duhaime et de Jean Marc Dalpé.

Le recueil *Persévérance* se compose de trent-quatre tableaux bien façonnés où Dachy décrit artistement des scènes de la nature: l'air, la terre et l'eau y sont partout présents. Le passage du vent ou de quelques oiseaux prête parfois un peu de mouvement à ces natures mortes; l'unique présence humaine dans ce décor est le regard du poète qui scrute les choses et s'émerveille.

Par la réflexion philosophique, une recherche minutieuse investiguant audelà des apparences, l'auteur rejoint les symbolistes. Un souci évident de la rime, du choix des mots appropriés, voire de l'effet à produire, démontre que le poète prend son art au sérieux. Porte-parole d'une caste sacrée, il recourt volontiers à un "nous" révélateur. Soucieux de l'oeuvre à faire, le poète se sent solidaire de ces "fous de silences," de ces "fous d'espérances," qui versent dans "leurs écrits," leur "âme" et leur "destin." Pour Michel Dachy, le poète est avant tout, cet "homme qui observe, qui raconte." C'est en observateur de la réalité que le poète pose, barricadé derrière la "fenêtre de son coeur." Ainsi s'établit une certaine distanciation entre le poète et son oeuvre.

Il y a évolution dans ce recueil, compte rendu d'un penseur isolé, désireux de communiquer avec le lecteur, puis avec ses confrères poètes et enfin avec la "femme qui viendrait le réveiller." L'attrait de cette muse décrite en termes symboliques se fait plus explicite dans "Chapelle étrange," poème que nous croyons être le meilleur du recueil. L'apprenti poète délaisse la philosophie et la recherche trop intellectuelle d'effets littéraires pour se tourner vers une sorte de femme-pays. Et cette femme, c'est un peu la plaine, que le poète connaît et chante naturellement, spontainément. Surgissent alors des images mythiques, lourdes de significations, parmi lesquelles nous ne retenons que les épousailles cosmiques de la terre et du vent dans cette chapelle étrange qu'est la plaine. Etant donné la richesse images et des rèalités évoquées, la poésie de Michel Dachy se prêterait bien à une analyse symbolique qui mettrait en valeur la profondeur dont une premiêre lecture, nécessairement superficielle, ne peut que donner un avant-goût.

Ecrit dans une langue impeccable, le recueil *La Page tournée* de Laurent Grenier ets d'une densité et d'une profondeur de pensée étonnante. Les quelque soixante-treize poèmes regroupés par thèmes en sept parties forment un tout bien ordonné. Une nette évolution paraît dans ce recueil où l'on passe successivement de la réflexion sur la mort et la douleur à la recherche de la femme idéale. L'auteur aura ensuite recours à l'humour comme procédé littéraire assez puissant pour neutraliser la déception et le désespoir. Par le biais de la création poétique, de la "furie d'écrire," les dilemmes de l'existence trouvent une solution transitoire, puisque l'écriture ne démasque le doute que pour conduire à "un doute plus grand encore." Il ne reste plus au poète qu'un "instinct de poésie."

La sixième partie de recueil nous a semblé plus captivante, plus originale, peut-être parce qu'elle révèle la démarche poétique de Grenier. L'influence d'Anne Hébert y est flagrante, au moins dans "Faucon au poing" et "le Pouvoir de la parole," mais l'auteur indique ses sources et exprime, de façon personnelle, des recherches identiques.

Pour bien goûter la poésie de Laurent Grenier et en saisir la signification profonde, sans doute le lecteur aurait-il avantage à examiner les grands symboles

récurrents, entre autres, certains archétypes comme l'eau, la mer, signifiant le retour à un état primitif de bien-être, univers compensatoire auquel s'ajoutent quelques constellations d'images signifiant l'obstacle à vaincre, l'enfermement ou la chute.

La richesse de *la Page tournée* lui vient en particulier d'une sensibilité exploitée jusqu'à la limite de la désespérance. La page est tournée mais tout n'a pas été dit. Semblable au poisson dans son aquarium, le poète persiste à "creuser le miroir," à chercher des réponses, à poser des questions toutes humaines et vibrantes d'émotions contenues. Tel un Pèlerin, il poursuit sa route avec cette lucidité du chercheur intelligent, assailli par l'incertitude, mais refusant toute panacée imaginaire.

Troisième recueil d'André Duhaime, *Visions outaouaises / Ottawax* contient des textes variés. A peu près tout devient, dans la machine à écrire de Duhaime, objet de réflexion ou de dérision, matière à contemplation ou à jonglerie avec les mots. Très peu de variantes quant aux thèmes privilégiés antérieurement: l'amour, le quotidien et la recherche du sens caché des choses reviennent. Et pourtant, à première vue, le lecteur a l'impression que le concret retient toute l'attention. Les "visions" poétiques de Duhaime valent surtout par leur originalité et leur spontanéité. L'ère de l'instantané, du "prêt-à-porter" marque cette poésie du quotidien, tantôt gris, tantôt lumineux. Même si certains textes semblent médiocres, les finales sont presque toujours bien réussies. Duhaime, qui a publié de très beaux haïkus, est habile dans l'art de condenser en quelques mots, quelques phrases, une pensée originale ou une impression évocatrice. Il lui suffit de nommer les choses pour que le texte prenne vie, que la rêverie s'amorce et se prolonge.

Le professeur de langue qu'est Duhaime s'amuse avec les mots, les phrases, qu'il transforme, déforme, en guise de récréation — de re-création du réel, de transposition d'un vécu ordinaire. Le ton a changé depuis *Peau de fleur*, premier recueil fort sage de ce jeune poète. La recherche de l'effet insolite se manifeste d'abord dans des jeux de mots, des associations fantaisistes, puis en tentative d'imiter la langue parlée: "Mais tsé dé foua ça prend du temps." C'est avec "Quand la cambuse s'emballe / flacatoune" que Duhaime pousse à la limite cette recherche d'une expression réaliste,

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Waterloo, Ontario N2L 3G1

alors qu'il reconstruit les balbutiements d'un poète ivre, semble-t-il, de "flacatoune." Entreprise de renouvellement? Dessein de dénonciation? Instinct de défoulement? Il y a un peu de tout cela dans la poésie de Duhaime.

Les longs textes hybrides (s'agit-il de prose ou de poésie?) qui terminent le recueil ne manquent pas de lyrisme. Comment ne pas se laisser prendre au mystère du "Lac des fées" et de cette étrange "Womena"? Comment ne pas rêver, nous aussi, devant le mannequins des vitrines ou les "crocus" annonciateurs du printemps, qu'ils soient d'Ottawa ou d'ailleurs? La magie de la poésie agit avec efficacité dans ces textes modernes qui rejoignent le lecteur.

Bien que les titres *Gens d'ici* et *Et d'ailleurs* aient l'air de se compléter comme les deux volets d'un diptyque, ces deux recueils de Jean Marc Dalpé se distinguent autant par le contenu que par l'écriture. Le thème de l'appartenance exploité dans *Gens d'ici* et *Les Murs de nos villages* rappelle une certaine poésie québécois. Dalpé continue d'être solidaire du peuple franco-ontarien, mais son écriture se transforme. Le "nous" collectif cède graduellement la place à un "je" plus individualiste. Dans *Et d'ailleurs*, la recherche d'une identité propre semble être l'une des premières préoccupations. A Paris, le poète, souffre d'être perçu comme l'étranger "qui sort d'autres climats / respire d'autres paysages / n'est pas tout à fait à l'aise dans le décor."

En un long monologue, Dalpé note, avec une franchise quasi désarmante, impressions et souvenirs d'un ailleurs correspondant à Sudbury, New York, et Paris. Partout seul, immanquablement attablé devant une bière ou un café, le poète observe la rue, les passants, puis il tente de décrire sa propre vision des choses, ses déceptions et désirs, avec les mots qui lui viennent tout naturellement et s'accordent au décor. La méthode d'écriture varie peu du début à la fin du recueil: d'abord, saisir les pensées et les impressions au moment où elles surgissent dans la conscience, puis les livrer, les exprimer sans fard, sans artifice.

Sudbury paraît d'abord comme un "ville désaccordée." L'insatisfaction, la "solitude collective," le chômage, la misère se manifestent dans ces textes où s'incrit en filigrane l'ombre de l'obsédant "American dream." C'est ici que prend forme le désir de s'enfuir, de partir pour un "ailleurs" de rêve. Hanté par "tous ces ailleurs intérieurs / ces feux du possible," le poète voudrait guérir une "plaie" non identifiée, une "douleur" vague.

New York sera le cadre d'une deuxième expérience de dépaysement. New York: une poésie qui crie, qui hurle, qui crache! Attentif à son monde intérieur et aux messages qui lui viennent de la rue, le poète emprunte cette fois l'idiome américain, son rythme, ses images. Dalpé s'exprime alors en un mélange de "slang" et de franco-ontarien. Fasciné, il répète le refrain: "Listen to the streets man."

A Paris, le lieu privilégié est encore la rune. Cet ailleurs que Dalpé reconstruit deux ans après un bref séjour n'a rien de très réjouissant. A part une brève rencontre le 14 Juillet, le poète est seul et s'ennuie. New York et Paris: deux villes étrangères qui n'ont pas été choisies au hasard, mais dont la signification pour un jeune Franco-Ontarien a des résonnances particulières: l'une représente la prépondérance de la mentalité nord-américaine; l'autre, l'influence de la culture française.

Au retour, le poète est déçu, désabusé. Son projet, "de dire ce monde" de l'ailleurs semble avoir avorté, mais la dualité "ici" et "ailleurs" aura marqué le poète. La brève apparition de la femme aimée vers la fin du recueil est plus réconfortante; plus attachante que ces villes trop rapidement parcourues. Et tout le reste est froidure, cadre vide et absence. *Et*

d'ailleurs marquera-t-il un tournant dans l'oeuvre de Dalpé? Rest à voir comment s'orientera la verve de ce jeune poète, qui parle avec un fort accent de vérité.

BERTILLE BEAULIEU

INSIDE VOLCANO

CHRIS ACKERLEY and LAWRENCE J. CLIPPER, *A Companion to "Under the Volcano."* Univ. of British Columbia Press, $45.00.

UNDER THE VOLCANO is an opaque, highly-wrought encyclopedic novel and from its opening pages Lowry makes his fictional terrain seem brilliantly and flamboyantly real, while simultaneously defamiliarizing it and underscoring its literal *foreignness* by the introduction of numerous Spanish phrases, obscure references, and cryptic allusions. A comprehensively annotated guide has been long overdue, and it must be said at once that Chris Ackerley and Lawrence Clipper have acquitted themselves superbly. Their *Companion* is a treasure-house of riches which makes all previous efforts in this field look decidedly superficial. The authors provide well over 1,500 notes covering some 5,000 specific points of reference or allusion; each note is matched to the relevant page numbers of the Penguin paperback and standard hardback editions.

The researches of Ackerley and Clipper are impressive in scope. They have rummaged dutifully among the odd jumble of often arcane and unreadable books which cluttered Lowry's mental universe; they have scrutinized everything imaginable, from the papers of the State Department to early ordnance survey maps of Wales; they have consulted waiters in Vera Cruz and explored cemeteries in Ontario. The *Companion* covers a diverse range of material, which includes literary, historical and anthropological allusions, foreign words and phrases, drinks, the geography — both real and imagined — of Lowry's Mexico, New York, Los Angeles, Paris, London, and Granada; in short, just about anything and everything that could possibly puzzle or interest the reader about the novel, from the history of dehydrated onion factories in the United States to Mozart quartets. Having myself long been puzzled — among numerous other items — by Lowry's references to *Jull* (286.2) and *Euzkadi* (325.1), I hastened to the appropriate entries in the *Companion* and found them interesting and helpful.

It's significant that this study is entitled a *Companion* to *Under the Volcano* rather than, as was apparently originally intended, a *Guide*. Guides can be cold and formal, whereas companions are, if you are lucky, altogether warmer creatures. Ackerley and Clipper's volume fully lives up to its title and offers not a dry-as-dust pedantic inventory of references but a lively spirited commentary which one suspects would have won Lowry's own delighted approval. Readers curious about *okoolihao* (260.3) will be interested to learn not only this drink's constituents but also that the name "derives from a Hawaiian name meaning 'iron buttocks'." The authors have a mania for detail equal to Lowry's, though at times their pursuit of verisimilitude risks the charge of extravagant irrelevance. Their triumphant discovery that Yvonne's father could not have been American consul to Iquique during the First World War because the consulate there closed for five years on 31 March 1915 does rather seem beside the point. Ackerley and Clipper correct the abundant misprints of the Penguin edition as well as Lowry's misspellings and errors of grammar, though regrettably the *Companion* is not without its own quota of minor errors and printing slips ("Bole-

skine" (178.4) is misspelt; Sherrill Grace wrote a well-known article on Lowry's "expressionist" not "experimental" vision (317.1)).

There is relatively little to quibble with in the *Companion*. The authors might have preferred Scott Fitzgerald's definition of an Oomph girl in "A Patriotic Short" to their own; they make no mention of Freud's analysis of teeth dreams in section six of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, which seems relevant to the emphasis on missing teeth in the sexually suggestive Lee Maitland sequence; they overlook the significance of Lowry's echoing of the inscription on the milestone at the end of the first part of *Jude the Obscure* ("Joffrey" Firmin's initials are the same as the doomed Jude Fawley's, too).

Ackerley and Clipper are to be congratulated for having done their homework among the Lowry manuscripts. It is pleasing to discover, for example, that the Mexican town of "Quintanarooroo" was the novelist's own mischievous invention and that he toyed with the notion of deliberately misspelling the non-fictional "Amecameca." It is also amusing to learn that in an earlier draft the Consul sourly referred to Montezuma as a "glum chocolate-drinking washout."

What the scholarship of the *Companion* underlines is the astonishing and possibly hitherto unrecognized extent to which Lowry's text echoes the words of other texts. The energies of *Under the Volcano* derive in no small way from the sheer multiplicity of genres clashing and overlapping as the narrative shifts abruptly from pastiche and parody to tragic grandeur and then back again into farce. The *Companion* indicates many new lines of approach to the novel, not least the remarkable way in which Lowry appropriated the literature of his childhood and adolescence (Beatrix Potter, F. Anstey, P. C. Wren, Shelley, and works by numerous other writers) and used it with a kind of poignant irony to enrich his darkly comic vision of a man's terrible fall from innocence.

Ackerley and Clipper shrewdly recognize that "*Under the Volcano* is not a novel with one big idea, but a book which is constantly shifting its ground, one which continually evades the reader." Instead of treating the novel as a message in code which can be cracked by unravelling a few isolated myths and allusions (an approach which has bedevilled the work of many previous exegists) they display an acute sensitivity to the interpenetration of Lowry's ambiguity and wit. Many of the "notes" are in themselves small critical essays which genuinely illuminate the workings of Lowry's imagination. Ackerley and Clipper's *Companion* will send readers back to the novel with fresh perceptions and a new sense of the awesome complexity of Lowry's masterpiece.

RONALD BINNS

IMPALPABLE JAMAICA

PHILIP KREINER, *Heartlands*. Oberon, 1984.

THIS IS NOT YOUR USUAL vacation-to-the-Caribbean novel. Philip Kreiner is a serious writer. *Heartlands*, set in a sparse, almost unidentifiable Jamaica, is primarily a novel of interiorization — the recollections of the inner goings-on of two people. One is Vikki, a thirty-five-year-old divorcee who has come to the island to "reclaim her life"; the other is Jimmy, who works on the island (but is also Canadian like Vikki). Jimmy leases Heartlands Great House, but now suddenly finds himself engaging in a series of mind-peregrinations leading to self-doubt and a sense of his own "visibility": he is a minority white in a land populated primarily by descendants of slaves

and rife with rasta talk. From a comfortable and complacent invisibility, Jimmy is now painfully conspicuous in his great home overlooking the peasant village below the hill. Both characters try to work out their ennui in aimless vacationers' fashion. But, in Jimmy's words, Vikki is "like a large moth drawn to the light to die." Throughout the novel it is never really clear if Vikki is seeking, through romance, a lost vitality in her life or not; all that she experiences is a near-rape. Like the other characters, Vikki is not well-defined; she neither engages us through pity nor through admiration, say in the powerful manner of a Judith Hearne.

For despite its serious intent, there is a general insubstantiality to the book as a whole. As one closes it, the characters disappear forever. Maybe this is the very point of the novel: the suggestion that in certain people's lives nothing palpable really happens. No bangs. Merely futile, soft whimpers in totally uncontrived circumstances. Kreiner appears to be satisfied in simply revealing self-alienation, which becomes an end in itself.

Tropical Jamaican texture is virtually missing save for a semblance of it in the dialect used by Jimmy's lover Etta. Kreiner pictures the island as hostile and polarized: people are seen generically as either blandly black with clichéd violent undertones; or wafer white. Regarding the latter, says Kreiner, "The whiteness makes them (on the island) too conscious of their colour." In atmosphere that might have spawned scenes of romance, one finds Jimmy reflecting that security in his life (with Etta) "is more important than love." By contrast Vikki's sense of her own imprisonment derives from her particular search for love and self. But all this lasts only ephemerally; as soon as we turn the pages, the impact disappears.

Interesting as the language is in some instances, it does not achieve the rich embroidery of other Oberon Press finds, in such authors as Susan Kerslake or Margaret Gibson. Neither does the paucity of action compensate for what the style lacks in resonance. No doubt this is the price an author pays for atempting a novel of this sort: in aiming, that is, to depict a life-style of quiet boredom.

CYRIL DABYDEEN

APHORISTIC SOUNDINGS

B. W. POWE, *A Climate Charged*. Mosaic, n.p.

FRANK DAVEY'S "Surviving the Paraphrase" (1976), a provocative discussion of the limitations of thematic criticism and the critical methods of Northrop Frye and his successors, signalled the beginning of a new era in Canadian literary criticism, a period of re-examination and debate about meaning, reading, and literary criticism. Evidence of this change in the literary climate is apparent in the growing number of articles and books proposing new approaches to Canadian literature — Barry Cameron and Michael Dixon's "Mandatory Subversive Manifesto: Canadian Criticism vs. Literary Criticism," Russell Brown's "Critic, Culture, Text: Beyond Thematics," Stan Fogel's "Lost in the Canadian Funhouse," Paul Stuewe's *Clearing the Ground* and Wilfred Cude's *A Due Sense of Differences.* Even prominent thematic critics appear to be reconsidering their approach to our literature. In "Bushed in the Sacred Wood" John Moss refers to Frye as "somewhat of a false prophet" and argues that critics of the early seventies presented "a dislocated perception of our literature." One of the surprising features of B. W. Powe's *A Climate Charged*, a collection of essays which attempt a re-

assessment of contemporary Canadian writing, is the absence of a satisfactory discussion of these developments and the evidence of the new directions they suggest.

The essays in *A Climate Charged* are arranged in three sections, and, although Powe acknowledges that he has not attempted a systematic commentary and has consciously avoided theoretical structures, the essays achieve a unity of tone and reflect a consistent set of critical ideals. Powe argues for a criticism which is polemical and cosmopolitan, a criticism sensitive to language, capable of teaching how to read "with passion and urgency" and expressed in arguments which are "concrete, urgent and humane." His model critic is a man of good sense and good taste concerned with assessing the state of literature and literary criticism in Canada and with identifying writers who have used language to provide "the best strategies for understanding the world." Moral perspectives, value judgements, an interested response to works of literature, and a sense of the close connection between art and life are, for Powe, crucial aspects of the critic's function.

In the opening section of *A Climate Charged* Powe compares aspects of the work of Northrop Frye and Marshall McLuhan. A former student of McLuhan, Powe offers both a warm personal memoir and a defense of McLuhan's approach to literature and ideas. He views McLuhan as an energetic iconoclast, a protean figure always "mobile and ambiguous," "a man of paradox and analogy" with a cosmopolitan sensibility and a flair for epigrams and aphorisms. McLuhan's influence on Powe is apparent throughout *A Climate Charged*, and Powe argues that McLuhan's "spasmodic-paradoxical-polemical" approach frees readers to select an appropriate "evaluative process." Frye, however, is seen as "a dialectical-conceptual thinker who approaches the literary experience through theory." Powe is uncomfortable with Frye's "dispassionate systems" and, in particular, takes issue with Frye's rejection of value judgements and his elimination "of the moral dimension of art." If McLuhan represents "a thinker who used concrete evidence, the word of the world," Frye, according to Powe, "begins with theory, the text in the void."

Part Two of *A Climate Charged* attempts an overview of the intellectual and literary atmosphere of Canada, and the title essay surveys contemporary Canadian literary criticism. Powe's description of the Canadian literary milieu is too generalized and too familiar to be effective, but his appraisals of the critical work of such prominent figures as D. G. Jones, Eli Mandel, Margaret Atwood, Dennis Lee, and George Woodock are interesting, and, although his remarks reflect no coherent theoretical base, they emphasize Powe's dissatisfaction with "efforts to define, categorize, and create structures and themes" into which works of art can be slotted. His judgements of individual critics are frequently astute, candid, and balanced. For example, he praises Woodcock's literate tone and eclecticism, but he questions Woodcock's tendency toward "uncritical enthusiasms." He singles out Dennis Lee's *Savage Fields* and John Moss' *Sex and Violence in the Canadian Novel* as examples of murky, convoluted and dull writing which lacks "the pressure of debate, the drive of dissatisfaction" and "a sense of grit and guidance."

The final section of *A Climate Charged* consists of brief but nonetheless wide-ranging and provocative reconsiderations of several major contemporary writers: Irving Layton, Leonard Cohen, Margaret Laurence, Margaret Atwood, Robertson Davies, and Mordecai Richler. These essays, although inconsistent in the qua-

lity and the degree of insight they offer, are generally well written, and many offer tantalizing opportunities for debate and disagreement. Powe argues that Layton has become trapped by his role as "the raging bull" of Canadian letters and suggests that his prose consists of "nothing more than impudent filibusters and impatient lectures"; however, his lyrics are "the most indispensable of any Canadian poet of his generation." The essay on Leonard Cohen, while superficial in its treatment of complex and enigmatic works such as *Beautiful Losers* and *Death of a Lady's Man*, expresses a genuine sense of regret at what Powe regards as Cohen's increasing solipsism and nihilism as well as "his preference for sentiment, sensation, and confusion over irony, clarity, and thought." Margaret Laurence's fictional world is, in Powe's view, "often dull, dour, repetitive, and clumsily constructed," but he affirms the readability of her work and its "compassionate honesty." Powe regards Robertson Davies as a comic moralist who writes cunning polemical essays in a polished and elegant style, and he describes Mordecai Richler as "an accountant of hypocrisies" with a superb sense of "the nuances of street-talk" and the uses of satire. The harshest and perhaps most controversial remarks in *A Climate Charged* are reserved for Margaret Atwood. While acknowledging her technical polish, Powe complains of the artificiality of her novels and takes aim at her obsession with "how to act" rather than "how to live." Powe goes well beyond the familiar and often timid suggestions of an absence of feeling in Atwood's writing, a quality of cold intellectuality, to argue that "no balance is attained in her books, no tension, no contradiction, no otherness, no love, no recognition of wisdom or will."

Although Powe does not appear to be well-informed about the critical debate associated with these authors, he is capable of careful analysis and detailed argument, and his approach reveals a breadth of reading, a freshness, and a determination to arrive at a clear-sighted evaluation of their achievement. Summary and generalization inevitably limit the effectiveness of these essays, but Powe demonstrates a capacity for intelligent reading and original assessments. At times he relies too heavily on "aphoristic soundings" rather than sustained analysis but, if his conclusions are not always convincing, they are, nevertheless frequently unsettling and thought-provoking.

Although the critical climate Powe disparages has already shown evidence of considerable change, *A Climate Charged* makes a worthwhile contribution to the debate surrounding the reassessment and revitalization of Canadian literary criticism. Powe is capable of astute insights, and his style, which ranges from formal to informal, is engaging. Wit and energy as well as a sense of urgency are prominent features of several of these essays and candour as well as a good-humoured fairness characterizes his judgements. Unencumbered by specific critical systems, Powe provides a timely and promising affirmation of the process of finding new directions for Canadian literary criticism.

DOUG DAYMOND

THE WILDE SIDE

FELIX PAUL GREVE, *Oscar Wilde*. William Hoffer, n.p.

WHEN THE FIRST EDITION of this essay was still in press (in Berlin, with Gose and Tetzlaff, 1903) Felix Paul Greve was tried and imprisoned for fraud. He had only too successfully imitated Wilde's extravagance, dandyism, and penchant for scandal. Many of the comments

Greve makes about Wilde in this essay seem to be a reflection on his own past, or a prophecy about his future. Wilde, at least according to Greve, dropped all his poses on his release from prison: Greve was, however uneasily, to maintain his for life. For example he claimed to Canadian friends that he had met Wilde (*Letters*, p. 38, p. 420); in fact, as far as anyone can prove he did not. He did, however, meet André Gide; the encounter is recorded in the latter's "Portrait d'un allemagne." Gide spent the entire meeting terrified that Greve, just released from prison, would ask him for money, and certain that he was in the presence of a pathological liar. Interestingly, Gide's own 1902 account of Wilde, upon which Greve, in writing his, relied heavily, contains an account of a meeting between Gide and Wilde in Paris, where Wilde, entirely defeated, takes Gide aside and says confusedly, in a low voice "Look ... you've got to know ... I'm absolutely without resources ... " Greve did not ask Gide for money, however, and fought his mountain of debt for five more years before he finally gave up the attempt to survive in Europe, faked suicide, and left for the new world. Any similarity between Wilde and Greve did not extend to what is most important about them now, their writings. Only Grove's first, adolescent book of verse showed anything of Wilde as a literary influence, and Stefan George was in fact a more direct influence than Wilde. As a novelist, Greve/Grove was a naturalist, about as far from a decadent as one can get.

The biographical connections make this book a fascinating artifact: as a work of criticism it is quite defective. Greve was under cruel pressure when he wrote it and it shows. The style is disjointed and little evidence is presented to support its ideas. It did, however, present large chunk's of Gide's essay ("In Memoriam," 1902, from André Gide's *Prétextes*), quite properly acknowledged, to a German audience. And Greve sometimes uses the unanalytical reminiscences of his two major sources, Gide's essay, and a self-promoting memoir by Robert Harborough Sherard, to make a critical or psychological point. Sherard notes that Wilde scorned society yet strove for social success; Greve uses this paradox to reveal more of Wilde's contradictions, to argue that Wilde "felt sin as sin, and yet committed it."

This limited edition is clearly designed for book collectors and scholars. Book collectors will certainly be pleased by Robert Bringhurst's elegant design. Scholars may not find the book's content as pleasing. The translator, Barry Asker, notes correctly that the "essay seems hurriedly written and badly thought out," and says that it was a difficult text to translate, but then, somewhat disingenuously, leaves it to "Grove scholars to determine the quality or significance of Grove's comment on Wilde." Grove scholars will first want to judge the quality of the translation. According to the publisher, the edition used for the translation is in the library of the University of Cologne; no original is known to be in North America. Without the original, of course, the quality of the translation is impossible to judge. The presence of an incorrect genitive in the translator's quotation of a German passage ("die Knappheit des Ausführung" should surely be "die Knappheit d*er* Ausführung"), which he translates differently from Douglas Spettigue, leads only to mild unease. Perhaps it might have been helpful to have printed the German text as well as the translation. But it is useful to have a translation of the essay simply to know what it contains, even if what it contains is not likely to be significant to many. To make it available in Canada without the use of a publication grant is laudable. And it gains added stature as part of a

larger project, by the F. P. Greve Seminar which will, one hopes, be able to gather and translate that part of Grove's work that is presently inaccessible to the scholars and critics most interested in him.

The Greve Seminar is an informal group of those interested in exploring Greve's European connections as well as his Canadian ones. Future projects may include translations of Greve's prefaces to *his* translations of authors such as William Pater and John Ruskin, and an authoritative bibliography. Finally Grove is beginning to get the kind of critical attention he longed for when he said in *It Needs to Be Said*: "In all those countries where literary criticism is a reality, its attitude toward the contemporary author who produces or tries to produce works of literary art gives that author what he need more than anything else . . . it gives him an ideal audience."

MARGERY FEE

HERSELF IN PLACE

ISABEL HUGGAN, *The Elizabeth Stories*. Oberon, $14.95.

ALAN PEARSON, *In a Bright Land*. Golden Dog, $6.95.

EACH OF THESE TWO NOVELS locates a character in a provocative setting and makes that character aware of herself in such a place. In Isabel Huggan's *The Elizabeth Stories*, the local spirit is a mean, peevish thing, belonging to small-town Ontario. In Alan Pearson's *In a Bright Land*, it is voluptuous and indulgent, soothing and teasing the expatriates who enjoy life in a Spanish coastal town.

Like *Lives of Girls and Women*, *The Elizabeth Stories* presents a series of autonomous narrative episodes. Gathered together, these stories acquire momentum and carry the narrator forward to adulthood.

The stories are set in Garten, a town somewhere near Guelph. Although we scarcely know what it looks like, Garten is a powerful setting. Its systems of human association make relationships meagre, and its blunt sanctions on individual behaviour weigh on the storyteller. These systems and sanctions make Garten a coercive regime. The town's greatest power is its capacity to deny and distort passions by exposing them — or threatening to do so. As Elizabeth's friend observes in the last story, "Garten was *full* of people who might tell on you . . . you were never really safe anywhere."

As a little girl, Elizabeth is susceptible to this kind of exposure. She brutalizes a squat, sickly companion, and her fierce deed makes her notorious. Her sexual encounter with another nine-year-old gets town-wide publicity: schoolyard graffiti name and picture the incident, and the boy's family has to leave town. Passions have resounding consequences.

Subsequent humiliations also draw attention to Elizabeth. Rather bulky, and big for her age, she is cast as a boy in Garten's annual ballet recital. On stage, her bulging shape and misery are shown to the whole town: "I am in a nightmare out of which I cannot wake." She tries to shatter the nightmare by declaring herself:

> As we skip forward to the footlights, I can feel it, I can feel the pressure building. The summoning of the dark abyss. The others step back and I lean forward, on the edge of the stage. Into the darkness, driven.
>
> "I'm really a girl," I shout, my voice horribly high and tinny. The noise in the gym lulls and I shout again, as loud as I can, into the startled silence. "I'm really a girl, I'm really a girl!"

But her self-assertion only leads to a more thorough disgrace.

Time goes on and some of the pressure

shifts off Elizabeth. Recrimination is still the liveliest action of those around her, but now she is liable to be punished for others' crimes rather than her own, and finally she is only a witness to the book's last episode of passion and community vengeance.

At the end, Elizabeth has made plans to leave this place that denies dignity and consolation. Nothing in Garten can be cherished. Unlike *Lives and Girls and Women*, which is in many ways this book's fancier elder sister, *The Elizabeth Stories* shuts the door on a dry, damaging epoch, done with it. But the stories are written with such subtle energy that this reader would be glad to hear that Huggan has had to open the door to Garten again — if only to slam it shut once more.

Huggan's fictional Garten is made up of social liaisons — stunted and disabling ones. It has little visual dimension. Pearson's *In a Bright Land* refers to an entirely different aesthetic, embracing visual detail for its own sake. Pearson tirelessly catalogues the sense data that reconstruct Spanish coastal places and expatriate goings-on, and his skill in doing so is formidable.

The narrative's protagonist, Claire (daughter of a British "industrialist," former U.N. translator, beginning poet), is especially receptive to such sense data. She approves of artistic expression that rescues sensation from temporariness and oblivion, and arranges its mementoes to create "syntactic" excitement. "'I like surfaces in general,'" she says. "'They are the best part of life.'" "Depths" are likely to disclose only cliches. So she is prepared to risk the appearance of incoherence that can come about when life or art has no visible goal or argument.

But this stance is more than aesthetic. It is also moral because it offers criteria for conducting one's life, and because it governs Claire's response not just to table-settings and doorways, but also to other human beings. Claire's lover, Jane, is lovable insofar as she fulfils an imagery at once artistic and commercial. Lounging in the sun, she is a "picture"; exciting desire in Claire, she is like a "promotional display" for shoes, or she looks "as bright and fresh as if she'd just stepped, fragrantly, out of the latest issue of Vogue magazine."

Stimulating sensations accumulate to build to heights of eroticism. But these erotic heights, achieved without the contraints of argument or abstraction, seem finally a rather precarious place to take a stand. At first, the rationale seems adequate. "To make one's life a work of art, that was the vital thing," Claire tells herself; "and any work of art for her meant the fusion of pleasure and insight." Yet these two aesthetic dimensions do not readily fuse in the text. "Insight" is often displaced, showing up in stiff, imposing conversation among the characters, or in Claire's "reflections." As for "pleasure" — it can be retrieved from documented "surfaces," but its further potential is unleashed by urges towards a brutal sexuality — aggressive and militaristic.

For the most part, this brutish aggression rears up only in Claire's fantasies. But the shape of the novel challenges the boundaries between private fantasy and public consensus. At first, these challenges seem innocent enough — playful tampering with the reader's expectations and with the novelistic mechanisms by which actualities are verified and distinguished from fantasies. But the narrative's conclusion shows that a reprisal is not harmless, and overturns our notion that fantasy is what does *not* happen. Is erotic sadism a plan rather than a wish? Do the gestures of authoritarian militarism spring not from political ambitions but from fantasies of bloodlust?

Claire, whose consciousness is the means by which these possibilities are

suggested, is sometimes aware of "the Void," and senses that her "minute by minute" way of life is somehow moribund. But she is finally not a very substantial creation. And her author expresses so little scepticism about the banality of her ideas and doings — parties, picnics, gallery openings — that the potential excitement of his theme is overwhelmed by the ennui created by this woman's string of appointments with the picturesque.

Pearson's storyteller is like a conspirator who manipulates wish and actuality to disorient his victim. But this fine intrigue is wasted in a novel which offers as a protagonist a character who seems to belong in a TV mini-series. Unlike *The Elizabeth Stories*, this story makes the consequences of passion minor, despite their high sensation and aparent newsworthiness.

JANET GILTROW

THE GAIETY OF DREAD

LEON ROOKE, *Sing Me No Love Songs I'll Say You No Prayers: Selected Stories.* General, $22.95.

THESE SIXTEEN STORIES have all been published before in magazines or in Rooke's earlier collections, but what of that? It is interesting to read them again in this new arrangement and to see how these particular stories map out the configurations of Rooke's fictional territory. That territory is defined not so much by recognizable character types, though they are his usual misfits who have, as he once remarked, "a kind of kissing cousins odour" clinging to them; nor is it defined by the persistent motifs of death and absence and failure; it is found in the definition of spaces rather than places as Rooke shows us how desperate imaginations get to work on everyday reality, transforming it at least momentarily — something like the Yeatsian "gaiety transfiguring all that dread." What fascinates us are the shifts whereby familiar things are made to look different as his stories give these alternative worlds reality. Though these worlds may well be illusory (practically all the stories have a strong vein of fantasy), while we are inside the story we are caught, forgetting that these inventions are as fragile and vulnerable as the characters who create them.

Rooke's technical dexterity is obvious as he ranges from conventional naturalism in the first story through satire to fantasy, fable, and fragmented postmodernist narratives, ending with a wryly comic revision of English history. It is refreshing to find in such carefully crafted fictions no hint of the usual modernist and postmodernist self-consciousness, no meditation on the necessity of fiction-making for example; instead the narrators' voices are dissolved in the stories they tell. When juxtapositions occur, they do not throw us outside the fictions but register the discomfiture of the narrators at what cannot be easily accommodated within their imagined structures.

Many of the stories are about absence, loss, and death: "Mama Tuddi Done Over" and "The Birth Control King of the Upper Volta" are crucially dependent on deaths, while "Break and Enter," "In the Garden," and "Lady Godiva's Horse" register loss more obliquely, like the wife in "Conversations with Ruth: The Farmer's Tale" who "knows she has lost something she never knew she'd found." Common motifs are treated very differently in different stories, and it is one of the charms of this collection to see the number of variations on a theme which Rooke can play. "Break and Enter" is an odd fragmented story told by the wife of a couple who have squatted in Gore the Critick's house, always in search "of livelihoods that inspire." The woman's mind teeters between delusions

of grandeur and gilt, always on "the line between the fanciful and the true": "Serene. How tranquil here. The grandeur! How I will hate it — hate my husband, myself, this place! — when Gore returns." At the end Gore does return but he never comes back into his house: "We never hear from him" and the couple are faced only with Gore's absence. Nothing makes sense to the woman but sense is made for us, for the last section is headed "Original Sin," and suddenly the allegory of exile from the Garden of Eden shimmers into view. Like *Waiting for Godot* this is another version of spiritual dereliction in a world where God is not dead but absent. "In the Garden" is another Eden story but with a more sinister twist: however tenaciously Rebecca clings to her cheerful illusions, her enchanted garden is destroyed by a vision of that same garden fenced about with barbed wire where an avenging God commands the slaughter of its inhabitants. Rooke's vision is not humanist but religious, a fallen world where evil and corruption flourish as in the black Faustian fable of Mama Tuddi; more often it is a wintry world haunted by memories of loss where even the lamp's illumination is "a foul glow, making us only more aware of the world's solitude. Of my own and hers" in "Conversations with Ruth."

This world is desperately in need of miracles, though these are few and unpredictable; but there are some. In "The Birth Control King of the Upper Volta" Adlai the confirmed fantasist who "lost yesterday" till he remembered that it was the day of his mother's funeral, is vouchsafed his miracle when the landlady's retarded son suddenly speaks:

> I sat on, thinking: So many people in the world depend on you. So many. Even if you're nothing — even if you're no one and you don't know which way to turn or whether turning is a thing you're capable of — even then they do.

The title story ends with a love song after thirty years of marriage: " 'I got hope in my heart so long as I know there's one loving couple left in the world.' Then she smiled sadly." This same sadness is registered in "The History of England, Part Four" which ends with a Hoorah for decency, honour, and love which is denied by history itself.

Rooke's stories are about shabby or despicable people permanently down on their luck. Showing us what is remarkable about such people is one of his great strengths as he marks out the gaps between where they are inside their heads and where they actually are. If Joyce's *Dubliners* showed in its spare way that even mean lives have their moments, then Rooke's often fantastic narratives go much further, showing that mean lives may be effectively obscured much of the time for those living them by their own imaginations — a cheerful thought if it were not for the way that dailiness scrunches up against these invented worlds, threatening their collapse. Of necessity these stories are fragmentary, discontinuous, made of scenarios played out inside rooms and inside heads, for which postmodernist fractured narratives are the appropriate forms.

There is good reason to talk about Rooke's black humour and his nightmarishness, but it is also worth mentioning his lyricism, for like Beckett and Edward Bond he registers those flashes of insight or idealism which glimmer in the messiest of lives. Dereliction may be the prevailing human condition but there are also moments of grace, and Rooke's narratives strive to contain this incongruous mixture. Perhaps there is a clue to his enterprise in his essay called "Voices": "Can the writer work such a double street? Can he have it both ways? Why not?"

CORAL ANN HOWELLS

SKETCHES & JOKES

ALDEN NOWLAN, *Will Ye Let the Mummers In?* Irwin, $8.95.

ROBIN SKELTON, *The Man Who Sang in His Sleep.* Porcupine's Quill, $9.95.

ANY REVIEW OF ALDEN NOWLAN'S last book is bound to be a eulogy — and why not? The twenty-one stories in *Will Ye Let the Mumers In?* were collected and revised by Nowlan himself before his death, and they span nearly the whole of his writing life, from 1960 to 1982. The best of them exhibit the humane vision that Nowlan's readers have come to expect: the patient untangling of complex motives and the compassion that extends to persecutors as well as to their victims.

This book provides a lot of quiet satisfaction but few surprises. Nowlan's stories were continuous with his poems, and we find the familiar rural and small-town characters, alienated from each other and from their own real feelings, yet united in a solid community that resists intrusion. Familiar too is the deliberately flat language and the refusal to allow more than small insights.

In his preface Robert Weaver describes these stories as "a group of sketches." Some of them are too short and too reticent to give more than the most minimal of realizations, but when some of these short sketches are read in conjunction with the longer stories they resonate against them and gain in richness. Like his poems, Nowlan's stories need to be read in groups.

The first and last stories frame the collection. "Fall of a City" is about how to become an artist in Nowlan's society. A boy whose imaginative life has been mocked by an insensitive uncle internalizes his dream and continues it: "He had destroyed his city because he could not destroy his uncle ... But he did not cry again. For something very strange happened to him: he became two persons ... Every night after that, Teddy went back to his Kingdom." The last story, "About Memorials," tells what an artist in this society must become, a monument to other people's vanities and limitations: "Life had given these people so little that it was important to them to believe they were each of them a part — not of me but a person to whom a plaque could be erected. Because I had made this possible, they loved me." Both stories are about acceptance as well as rejection. Teddy recognizes that his uncle can be both loving and insensitive at the same time; the poet in "About Memorials" responds to the love beneath the limitations of his family and native town.

Within this frame three subjects stand out. One is the need for a home and the difficulty of recognizing one when you have found it. The Christmas mummers of the title story appear to treat the academic couple from Ontario with hostility and contempt. Yet, as the leader of the troupe tries to explain, this is their way of showing acceptance. A second subject is the sense of menace, how it grows in isolated communities like villages or hospitals, how sometimes people want to feel menaced because it feeds their sense of self-importance. This theme reaches a comic climax in "Walking on the Ceiling." As Kevin O'Brien, the author's *persona* from the earlier "fictional memoir" totters down the hospital corridor, walking for the first time since his near-fatal operation, he overhears an old and paralysed man voicing fears that he and Kevin might suddenly start a fight: "God, that's a big bastard ... I'd sure as hell hate to tangle with him." A third recurring subject is ways in which people accept death, an appropriate irony for a final collection. All the subjects overlap and interact to give emotional and moral depth to the simplicity of the individual

stories. It is a pity that there will never be any more of them.

Since Robin Skelton has been writing for nearly forty years, it sounds impertinent to welcome him as a new writer. But *The Man Who Sang in His Sleep* contains his first short stories, and they show traits of a writer who is tackling the form for the first time. This is a collection of comic ghost stories. They are all extended jokes, really, each one following the same anecdotal patter from deadpan opening, through elaborate, shaggy-dog details, to final punchline. Some of these jokes are verbal ("The Bride"); most are practical, and like all practical jokes their subject is embarrassment and revenge. All are narrated in the first person, ostensibly by different characters, but the voice is always the same — a storyteller's voice.

This should be enough to indicate that readers who approach these stories from their knowledge of Robin Skelton's poetry will find themselves disoriented. Skelton's poems are confessional, verbally dense, technically various, intensely serious. *The Man Who Sang in His Sleep* is simply a different kind of work: better to look for another approach.

Perhaps the stories in this book have more in common with the collages in Skelton's *House of Dreams* and the occult interests of *Spellcraft* than they do with the author's poems. (The cover photograph of the author as magus is a companion to the one in *House of Dreams.*) Indeed, in "Sarah," the final story, the storyteller's house is transformed into a three-dimensional collage as a whimsical ghost compels him to amass an endless collection of Victorian bric-a-brac. The sense of acting under compulsion, very strong in Skelton's commentary to *House of Dreams*, is an essential feature of these stories, but it always results in a comic release. Even the hapless narrator in "Householder," ambushed by ghosts and imprisoned in a crystal ball, can end his story by saying, "It's a lot easier now that I'm more relaxed." These are clever, playful tales, but some readers may find that ten shaggy-dog stories need to be taken in small doses.

PETER HINCHCLIFFE

ARMAGEDDON

W. P. KINSELLA, *The Thrill of the Grass*. Penguin, $5.95.

IT SEEMED LIKE A GOOD IDEA at the time. I had been asked to review a collection of short stories about baseball or, more accurately, as the back cover blurb announced, about how the game of baseball can be seen as a microcosm of the human condition. So . . . what better time to write such a review than during the playoffs, listening daily to Dons and Als and Howards — especially Howards — hyperbolizing on the mystical perfection of the split-fingered curve and equating Reggie's October miracles with some of Napoleon's and Alexander the Great's better days.

But then an unusual thing happened: the Chicago Cubs made the playoffs, defying all odds and, by doing so, joining together legions of other perpetual losers. But was their success truly that surprising? W. P. Kinsella explains all. In the first story in his collection, "The Last Pennant before Armageddon," an extremely loyal fan strikes a bargain with God: if the Cubs win the pennant, the world will come to an end. And now, as the story predicts, the Cubs had won the first two games, and there were disturbing rumblings in El Salvador and Nicaragua.

Kinsella's *The Thrill of the Grass* includes two types of baseball stories. The first chronicles the tedious, dismal life of the eternal minor-leaguer, trapped in

mediocrity awaiting his big chance, the day when he'll make the "Bigs." Ultimately the stories are not really about baseball, but about rural North America, small towns in Iowa and Alberta. The characters in these stories have a disturbing sameness, misunderstood men trying to sustain their dreams in a world of bitter, unfeeling wives and girl friends, women who don't really understand the game, who don't share the dream. It's a male world; women are seen as invaders. Even when the hero does make it to the "Bigs," the women don't understand. In "Barefoot and Pregnant in Des Moines," for example, the hero, after desperately trying to preserve his relationship with his wife, acknowledges at the end, bitterly, that the story's title describes where women deserve to be.

. . . It's now the last game of the playoffs. It's gone five games, just as Kinsella said it would, and the Cubs are batting in the fourth, safely ahead by three runs. And I'm suddently remembering the words to various "Acts of Contrition," in spite of myself.

Fortunately, one need not judge Kinsella's collection on his "waiting for the Bigs" stories, for the second type of tale he tells is far more engaging: baseball fantasies, a category that includes "The Last Pennant before Armageddon." In one story Kinsella tries to decide whether to trade his life for that of a recently departed Thurman Munson; in another he joins the legendary 1951 Giants as a pinch-hitter and resident literary critic. Magically and wonderfully, the Giants become scholars, far more worried about how to interpret *The Great Gatsby* than about winning the pennant. Bernard Malamud, in fact, is a frequent dugout visitor. Yet another tale chronicles the lives of twins who began playing catch in their mother's womb. But perhaps the most delightful of the stories is the title tale. It takes place during the 1981 baseball strike, when a group of loyal baseball fans patiently re-sod a stadium recently doomed to artificial turf. Piece by piece, they bring in squares of sod and bring back the thrill of the grass. And here, baseball does truly become a microcosm of the human condition, and Kinsella and his gang of true believers find a magnificent way to fight back at all that is plastic and artificial and phoney in this ever-so-convenient age.

"Armageddon's" climax takes place when the Cub manager, who knows of the fateful bargain, must decide whether to take out an obviously tiring pitcher and save the game, thus ending the world. And here comes another, real-life, manager, Jim Frey: Sutcliffe, the Cub pitcher, is clearly tired and the Cubs' three-run lead is in jeopardy. And he's going to leave him in. He knows, thank God!

It's a few hours later now. Sutcliffe gave up the home-run and the Padres are safely ahead. The Cubs return to their proper role as gracious losers. And I return to my review.

I liked the book generally, though I did find it a bit silly and unbelievable at times.

KIERAN KEALY

ESPRIT/EAU-DE-VIE

ANTONINE MAILLET, *Crache à Pic*. Leméac, $14.95.

AS THE DIZZYING GYRATIONS of the weathercock above the world of *Crache à Pic* signify, the wind is unfathomable in its ways. Whirling about, with neither centre nor circumference, ever moving *à l'improviste*, this free-wheeling spirit teaches a strategy for survival to a people deprived of everything but its own soul. Maillet's scripture is a carousal of punning with John 3:8, the Biblical text

suggestive of that strategy: "The wind blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know whence it comes or whither it goes; so it is with every one who is born to the Spirit."

Set in the early 1930's, *Crache à Pic* chronicles a set of interdictions and enacts a way of responding to these. Prohibition and its analogues, the Deportation and the Expulsion from Eden, provide the focal points in Maillet's continued history of an intrepid people's deprivation. *Comment vivre hors du paradis après la chute?* — that is the englobing question. And it is one especially poignant for those with a lively memory of a diaspora. The answer Maillet's fiction seems to proffer is bafflingly simple, a matter of common sense; nourished on the past, feed off present adversity. Such strategic counsel at once governs the life of her protagonist and generates the art which gives that life.

The heroine of the tale is the last in that line of titanic thaumaturges, the Crache à Pic. At 27, the long-legged commander of the schooner *La Vache marine* has taken it for her task to set right the injustices worked by *les grands* on *les petits*. The capitalist/bootlegger Dieudonné, a diminished Acadian Al Capone, is her immediate antagonist. Though an able gamester himself — like Crache à Pic, he has learned "à tirer profit des contrariétés" — Dieudonné is no match for the more cunning defender of the oppressed: "à rusé, rusé et demi." Her daring *coups de théâtre* at sea and on land thwart his every strategem. Disguise counters disguise, counterfeit cancels counterfeit, code baffles code. Goliath is defeated with his own weapons, as it were. "Une joueuse de tours," Crache à Pic figures that imaginative race which uses its inheritance to mystify the ignorant and those not so gifted for improvisation. If a Fredericton civil servant cannot distinguish a Robidoux from a Robichaud, a Comeau from a Cormier, if a parish priest cannot make out the moonshine behind the bricks, if federal agents cannot discriminate between the *Tatamagouche* and the *Mistouche*, the *Madagouiac* and the *Kouchibougouac*, if customs officers cannot tell genuine from false priests or rubbing alcohol from whisky, and if a translator and a judge are set aspin by a *tour de force* of logic and language, so much the better: there is cover and power in mystery and mystification. When entered into with an unflinching faith in the self, in the wondrous powers passed from generation to generation, the game of illusion and reality rewards the skilful player with laughter and continued life. "Seules survécurent les bêtes les plus rusées."

It goes without saying that where inventiveness confers power, the maker and teller of stories is king. And nothing less than the world's (re)creation is the mission of *Crache à Pic*. Even the Land of Cockaigne is possible to the fabulist who fashions in the spirit of Albert the Great (not the teacher of Aquinas here, but the sorcerer of the *Liber de Alchima*). "Un conteur en ce pays est plus qu'un rapporteur de menteries." As Maillet imagines the adventurous life of Crache à Pic, passing from Old Clovis to the narrator's father to the narrator to the reader of *Crache à Pic*, the very distortions or lies attendant on that transmission serve as further confirmation of the imagination's dominion as a life-giving power. Telling lies and rebuilding the world are coincident enterprises.

But there is a dark side to this celebration of shrewd inventiveness or prevarication. "Plus on a faim, plus on tape du pied"; or, as Montaigne once remarked, the more the disorientation, more the writing. As in the Abbey of Thélème, singing, dancing, and storytelling in *Crache à Pic* testify to a crying hunger. Suffering and death may inspire a people

with a love of life, but they remain a reality no wit or fabulation can circumvent. Even storytellers have inborn limitations. There is always the chance, too, that the fox will be outfoxed, that the weaver of tales will be ensnared in her own game. After all, the wind and the fabulist are not one and the same. Crache à Pic, who believes she can remake the world in six days, is so caught in a sudden shift of improvisation that she is powerless to counter or sidestep: Dieudonné's bullet, meant for another (a case of mistaken identity), ends the life of her lover, Vif-Argent. The wind's high-spirited theatrics can sometimes reduce even the wiliest and most self-contained of players to tears.

It takes courage, then, to follow improvisation wherever it may lead. "Se fier à la mer, à son flair et à son intuition" — this is the resolve enacted in and by *Crache à Pic*. Everything is in the playing, in the living in accordance with the faith which that resolve implies. "Trinque!" Maillet calls to her reader. We are exiles, but we are not without some felicity. This wind-swept world is a stage for comedy as well as tragedy, and laughter is humanity's perennial tonic. "Mi-nu-it, chré-tiens . . . C'est l'heu-re so-le . . . so-le . . . hic!" The spirit gives life — and not only within the gates of paradise.

CAMILLE R. LA BOSSIERE

INTERCOMPREHENSIONS

PHILIPPE BARBAUD, *Le choc des patois en Nouvelle-France: essai sur l'histoire de la francisation au Canada.* P.U.Q., n.p.

PATRICK IMBERT, *Roman Québécois contemporain et clichés.* l'Univ. d'Ottawa, n.p.

Le choc des patois en Nouvelle-France présente une étude de la francisation du Canada français susceptible d'intéresser non seulement les linguistes mais aussi tout lecteur curieux du fait français dans l'Amérique du Nord.

La méthodologie phénoménologique dont se sert l'auteur ne confond pas la lecture, grâce à un style précis, claire et souple, mais rend plus intelligibles les liens entre la langue, ou les langues, et la société dont elles font partie intégrale. Car, pour expliquer la francisation au Canada, Barbaud emploie ce qu'il appelle un "modèle comptable," modèle basé sur le relevé des "faits," c'est-à-dire des statistiques. Si l'approche est alors "Scientifique" (Barbaud) et s'appuie sur des traditions plutôt européennes que nord-américaines, cet ouvrage n'est pas pourtant uniquement un livre de spécialiste. Les non-initiés sont aussi capables que tout linguiste, tout spécialiste de n'importe quel aspect de la civilisation de l'Amérique française ou de la colonisation française de l'Amérique, d'y prendre plaisir et même d'apprendre beaucoup sur le développement du français au Canada. Mais cet essai représente aussi une étude approfondie à travers la langue, les patois, c'est-à-dire, à travers la francisation du Canada, de toute une culture sous tous ses aspects sociaux, religieux, culturels, aussi bien que linguistiques. Partant de la statistique Philippe Barbaud discute le besoin de l'intercompréhension qu'avaient ressenti les habitants du Canada, besoin plus immédiat vu la grandeur et l'isolation du pays, distingue entre langue orale et langue écrite ou lue, et en plus souligne la distinction entre les sexes sur le plan linguistique. Cette dernière distinction représente un facteur important et presque totalement négligée dans les études précédantes sur la langue française au Canada. Barbaud arrive enfin à sa thèse sur l'importance de la femme et surtout de la mère au Canada, importance primaire dans la francisation du pays.

Quant aux études précédentes sur le Canada français Philippe Barbaud ne les néglige aucunement. Il en fait des analyses approfondies relevant l'essentiel, le positif dans ces ouvrages non seulement linguistiques mais historiques, démographiques et sociales pour en même temps rejeter l'absurde, l'incompréhensible, les recherches mal faites. Et Barbaud ne manque pas de leur faire une critique assez sevère en constatant que malgré leur contribution ce qui leur manque c'est une vraie théorie de la francisation, théorie qui paraît avoir fait défait jusqu'à présent et c'est ce défaut qu'il a comme but de corriger pour comme il dit "combler un vide étrange."

Avec sa bibliographie importante cet ouvrage offre un outil de recherches essentiel, pour tous ceux qui s'intéressent au faut français au Canada. Il faut néanmoins admettre que nous aurions apprécié un index, surtout vu le grand nombre de faits importants mis à notre disposition.

L'étude de Patrick Imbert malgré son titre un peu décevant même trompeur représente une contribution importante aux études sur le roman moderne. Quoique le lecteur apprenne aussi sur le roman au Québec des trois dernières decénnies et un peu moins sur le roman du Canada français du passé cet ouvrage s'offre comme tout un analyse des tendances romanesques actuels et occidentaux du roman, de son style et de son langage. En plus c'est un analyse structurolinquistique dont se sert l'auteur comme base de sa méthodologie et qui alors se relie à l'ouvrage précédent sur la francisation du Canada.

Imbert constate qu'il existe deux tendances de la culture québécoise: "D'une part la rupture du mot cliché, d'autre part l'amalgme total. Ces deux démarches révèlent une obsession face au normatif et une volonté dynamique de créer de la part d'un individu qui affirme sa liberté face aux discours officiels en rejoignant un univers de la totalisation."

Ce n'est pas portant le roman québécois qui est le sujet du livre mais plutôt de cliché, le stéreotype. L'auteur admet ne pouvoir ni ne vouloir tout dire sur le cliché qui est un sujet trop vaste pour ces quelques 160 pages. Voulant définir ses termes différents, Imbert passe trop de temps sur les définitions, sur l'histoire du cliché, du stéreotype et d'autres concepts littéraires et linguistiques pour que cet ouvrage soit un livre sur le roman québécois. Il faut admettre aussi que, en partie à cause du jargon trop évident dans les premiers chapitres, ce livre n'est pas facilement lisible. Les recherches qu'a faites Imbert sont approfondies et impressionnantes. Se référant aux practiciens de la Nouvelle critique à Barthes, Riffaterre, Kristeva, il n'omet pas non plus les classiques ni les philosophes anciens et modernes, les Américaines tels que Watts et Laing, des écrivains tels que Memmi, Reboul pour aboutir à la philosophie orientale, à celle de Zen, de *Tao Te Ching* et de Mao.

La thèse du livre enfin exprimée l'auteur fait remarquer que la littérature québécoise jusqu'aux années récentes "ne pouvait ... se poser qu'en s'opposant," et continue par dire que la littérature moderne au Québec est alors "contestataire par obligation" même si tous les écrivains du Québec ne sont pas révolutionnaires dans tous les sens du mot. La plupart tendent vers une réorganisation révolutionnaire — réorganisation qui s'exprime par leur emploi du cliché, du stéréotype, du paradoxe, de la grammaire, de la construction et de l'enchaînement même du récit, sans oublier bien sûr le joual. Ils emploient tous ces éléments pour les ridiculiser, pour les rendre "carnavalesques." Se servant de tous ces éléments du passé, de la tradition, ils réagissent contre, ils en créent

des jeux romanesques, jeux de langage et de style et jeux inter-, intra-, et paratextuels. C'est ce jeu qui représente pour Imbert l'élément le plus subversif dans la littérature québécoise, et comme la folie qui revient comme thème important dans cette même littérature, ces jeux permettent de dépasser les stéréotypes de voir au délà des apparences. Même le rôle du lecteur et son narcissisme entrent en jeu dans cet analyse aussi bien que toutes les difficultés comprises dans la recherche d'identité, dans la situation paradoxale individu/société. La conclusion de cette étude c'est que pour les écrivains québécois tels que Ducharme, Beaulieu, Brossard, etc. qui fournissent la majorité des citations dans cet ouvrage, la convention ou les conventions sont négatives et à être rejetées. Ce que cherche l'écrivain québécois c'est plutôt la spontanéité, l'authenticité, un "renouveau de valeurs et d'une écriture qui sont prises dans un système politique économique ou culturel" et c'est vers une philosophie plutôt orientale, une mode de pensée inspirée par la philosophie Zen qui est le contraire du christianisme tel qu'il a été vécu au Québec que se dirigent ces auteurs. Ce qu'ils ne veulent plus c'est le "combat avec l'ordre ancien ni tentative d'imposer un ordre nouveau, mais une transformation de la perception globale de l'homme atteignant à une autre dimension."

Livre alors intéressant quoiqu'un peu difficile de lecture. Important surtout comme étude de philosophie moderne, de la nouvelle écriture et de ces concepts de cliché, de stéréotype, etc. De là à traiter exclusivement du roman québécois comme genre à part qui s'attaque à la tradition sans parler du nouveau roman français ou du roman moderne en général nous semble un peu trop borné. Il n'est vraiment pas possible d'étudier le style et le langage du roman québécois moderne, ce que Patrick Imbert semble vouloir faire, sans le mettre dans le contexte de toute une évolution et une révolution dans la forme du roman occidental.

VIRGINIA HARGER-GRINLING

SENTIMENT & SENSIBILITY

DON BAILEY, *Swim For Your Life.* Oberon, $11.95.

ANN COPELAND, *Earthen Vessels.* Oberon, $11.95.

DON BAILEY'S FIFTH BOOK, *Swim For Your Life*, has eight titled chapters, short stories laid out along a single plot line, which relate the crises in the family life of Wayne Maitland brought on by the death from cancer of his wife Wanda. Writing each chapter so that it can exist as an independent story or be placed as an episode in a series has certain dangers. The information given to make each story independent may become repetitious when the stories are brought together: we are told four times that the protagonist is 42 years old. Details which give point to the stories may by inconsistency jar in the longer narrative: we are first told that the dead wife had been buried, then later Maitland tells a telephone caller that she had been cremated. The middle class teacher of Film Studies, if suffering a mental crisis as a result of her death, should at least remember what he did with her body. Incidentally cremation was the fate of Wanda, wife of Wayne Maitland in the narrative which links five of the eight stories in Bailey's previous book, *Making Up.* But the Maitland of those stories is a decade younger, of a lower class, and more in fear of poverty and the police than of ennui. He had best be treated as a separate figure, sharing only in the generic similarity of all Bailey's protagonists, neither rogue-heroes nor anti-heroes but

men with no sense of public role and little certainty about private value, hag-haunted by memories, closed and wary with the doll-bitch compound called woman yet needing the tactile warmth of one in order to reach his goal of private peace. Setting is usually the submarginal, whether on a farm or in downtown Toronto. Often the stories are told in the first person, as are the last three in *Swim For Your Life*, and always the protagonist is struggling to achieve a sense of self-worth and continuity while threatened by time, memory, and death. The male must shop with care amidst promiscuously available commodities such as sex and alcohol if he is to maintain that ideal consumers' co-operative, the family. *Swim For Your Life* is a little more mellow than its predecessors, the central figure not quite so near the wall, the relationships rather more sentimental. There is Bailey's magpie realism and a writing style which, although powerful when presenting the protagonist's morbid and witty inner dialogues or turbulent flashbacks, in straight narrative reminds one of Maitland's daughter Gloria musing on pigeons: "They did not fly in the fluid way other birds did. They flapped their wings furiously and wobbled into space."

Earthen Vessels is Ann Copeland's third collection of short stories. Her first, *At Peace*, related stories set in a teaching convent. *The Back Room*, her second collection, with the exception of one story about a cold-hearted perfectionist priest, urbanely deals with secular life. The title story is filled with exuberant humour, and in "A Woman's Touch" Copeland is able to illuminate the shape of lives governed by the familial past with the sure touch of Katherine Mansfield in "The Daughters of the Late Colonel." Of the eight stories in *Earthen Vessels*, two are excellent: "Second Spring," and "Will." In "Second Spring" the speaker, a rather bitter woman who has left her teaching order for secular life and marriage, relates the story of Sister David, an intelligent woman who, when seduced by a promiscuous Jesuit, leaves her order and takes an apartment to be available to him. The speaker's tepid lie to her husband, concealing the reception of a letter from her ex-sister, suggests that for both women the late second spring brought little freedom. Like Claire Martin, Ann Copeland can treat the effects of convent life with disillusioned clarity. In "Second Spring" the speaker comments on her response to a sexual advance from the same Jesuit, "a world devoid of taboos loses some possibilities for feeling." The same might be said for Copeland's imaginative energies, that they need institutional confinement to keep from becoming dispersed. Four stories of secular life are rather flat allegories of moral progression or regression. Two stories, about a university extension English class in a prison (unnamed but probably Dorchester) and about Awards' Night at a Catholic girls' school, are lively brief vignettes. But in "Will," a story of a convict given parole to attend a nearby university, the central character does hold the reader's interest, through the gradual revelation that the ravages of conscience and institutional routine have left his inner life too brittle to survive in freedom. Spiritually he is among the dead, so that the discussion of capital punishment occasioned by a prison break which he overhears in a barber shop, and which precipitates his collapse, is finally irrelevant.

Ann Copeland is a writer with a civilized sensibility and a sense of her craft. If the stories in *Earthen Vessels* do not develop in range or technique beyond her previous work, they show a continuity with it and are a pleasure to read.

TOM MIDDLEBRO'

DIFFERENT WORLDS

A Fair Shake: Autobiographical Essays by McGill Women, ed. by Margaret Gillett & Kay Sibbald. Eden Press, $16.95.

THIS IS A PUZZLING BOOK, having no visible *raison d'être* or claim to academic seriousness. It is designed to commemorate the admission of the first women students in 1884; the inevitable comparison with M. C. Bradbrook's *That Infidel Place* (1969), which celebrated the centenary of Girton College, Cambridge, does not favour this volume. Most of the contributors are graduates of McGill, the rest present or former members of its faculty. Inevitably, the writers live in Upper or Lower Canada and tend, except perhaps for the academics, to be prominent only there. The list includes some obvious choices, such as Jessie Boyd-Scriver, one of the first four women admitted to Medicine. Nevertheless, the reader searches the prefatory material in vain for a statement of the principle of selection that might explain some surprising omissions or, for that matter, the inclusion of *two* former directors of Women's Athletics. Instead of any explanation, however, one finds in the introduction such material as the following effusion on the contributors:

> Amid the diversity, we discovered much commonality. Our authors shared characteristics such as love of reading, love of learning, and even — unfashionable though it may be — love of formal schooling. Most of them like travel, most appreciate the great outdoors, some are keen on sports, more than two-thirds are married and almost all of these have children, some have been divorced. Some careers overlapped predictably — Gladys Bean took over from Iveagh Munro as Director of Physical Education and Athletics for Women: others emerged unexpectedly — Isabel Dobell did not really plan to follow Alice Johannsen in the McCord Museum; still others intersected in strange places — both Margaret Gillett and Melek Akben spent some time at the Haile Selassie I University in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, before coming to McGill; and there is at least one case of curious coincidence — Kay Sibbald and Elizabeth Rowlinson were born on the same street in England and both became Associate Deans of Students at McGill.

The defect of this book, in comparison with *That Infidel Place*, is that it is not of interest to the general reader. A few of the essays are genuinely informative and interesting, especially those of Dr. Boyd-Scriver and Dr. Swales, the Emeritus Curator of the Herbarium, for they grew up almost in a different world (bearing in mind Virginia Woolf's assertion that human nature changed at the end of 1910). In the essays of the younger women, the 1950's graduate will find some bits of information about changes in the university. However, most of the essays are frankly self-indulgent, so that if their authors do not have household names, the readers wonder impatiently why the writer thought anyone would care.

Admittedly, self-indulgence is an inherent liability in the autobiographical essay. As the editors themselves observe, a writer "is not quite comfortable about how much to say, how modest to be, how frank." That is generally true of any autobiographical essay. Usually, however, the occasion provides direction and boundaries; the publication of one's book, an appearance on stage, a milestone in one's career will give point to an accompanying autobiography and dictate what it contains. So here, Dr. Scriver knows that readers are interested in what it was like to be born in 1894, to enter the university in 1911, to lean, a "partial B.Sc." student, against the door of the Faculty of Medicine until it opened to admit four women into the second year of the M.D. programme. Other contributors lack that certainty about what will interest the reader.

When one goes to a photographer, one knows the purpose, one has in mind the

recipients of one's portrait. If, however, one is asked to sit because one's face has character, one may well simper self-consciously. This has been the fate of several contributors. Instructed to set down something that would allow "individual voices of this century [to] be heard in the next," they are reduced to simpering.

Presumably, the purpose of this book is to add to the material available to students in women's studies, to expand the amount of female utterance in print. If quantity alone is desired, it may be unfair to cavil at the triviality of this addition to its editors' *curricula vitae*. However, teachers and researchers often complain that their publications in women's studies are undervalued. Unfortunately, women's studies will not gain recognition as a serious academic subject as long as anything in the field can find its way into print.

RUBY NEMSER

AFFECTIONATE LIFE

CLARA THOMAS and JOHN LENNOX, *William Arthur Deacon: A Literary Life*. Univ. of Toronto Press, $24.95.

WHEN WILLIAM ARTHUR DEACON recalled his 1922 move from Dauphin, Manitoba, where he had practised law, to Toronto, where he became literary editor of *Saturday Night*, he did so with a pleased consciousness that he had made Canadian literary history by becoming the nation's "first full-time, professional book reviewer." Professors Thomas and Lennox note that from the beginning of this new career he thought of his literary life as material for the memoirs in which he would sum up his distinctive place, and that by his retirement he had amassed more than 18,000 pieces of correspondence, clippings, records of literary societies, and manuscripts to serve as both mnemonic aid and documentation. Failing health and the sheer volume of the material prevented his realizing this final project; now Clara Thomas and John Lennox have undertaken a more scholarly and biographical version of what he envisoned.

The Deacon of this "Life" is followed through his career as book reviewer and literary editor at *Saturday Night* (to 1928), as syndicated book review columnist, as literary editor of the *Mail and Empire* (1928-1936) and of the new *Globe and Mail* where he stayed until his retirement in 1960. His biographers quote at length from his reviews and correspondence with writers. They also supplement the account of the newspaper career with a series of chapters titled "A Community of Letters" about friendships with writers and his encouragement of them, a chapter on his work for The Canadian Authors' Association, and chapters on his essays for Canadian and American literary journals and on his books.

The strength of this biography is its careful and extensive presentation of information culled from its subject's papers. Deacon emerges from behind all this detail as a man of strong enthusiasms and strong prejudices, both informed by a prophetic and didactic strain which gained strength as he aged, both made acceptable to his readers by a lively wit which unfortunately lost much of its flexibility as he aged. The enthusiasms were for the economic, political, and literary independence of Canada. Nearly everything he wrote, every organization he supported, aimed at gaining Canadian readers for Canadian books: he sought, and gave personal and public support to, Canadian writers; he found publishers for them; he encouraged readers to read and teachers to teach them. The prejudices were against imitation of non-Canadian cultural or economic models,

against academic criticism, against writing which used Canadian detail inaccurately, against "Modernism," beginning with Imagism.

His enthusiasms and his energy were, above all else, *timely*. Embarking on a career not only new to him but new to Canada, he did much to make Canadians take Canadian books and reviewing seriously. His early (and continuing) achievement was the successful promotion of Canadian literature; his own writing now seems ephemeral and only his parodic review of Arthur Stringer's *Empty Hands* still speaks to us. The achievements of his later years — including his work in The Canadian Authors' Association for tax regulations appropriate to writers and for standardization of their contracts, his part in establishing the Governor General's Award for Literature, his encouragement of Gabrielle Roy — are far from negligible. Yet it is by his literary journalism from the 1920's that he really changed the practise and the reception of Canadian book reviewing. The style, the format, the interests, of his columns had been set by the early 30's and remained comparatively static, while his own predilections made him increasingly defensive about much contemporary writing, particularly poetry.

Is such a subject worth the 268 pages of this biography? In the context of a culture in which every rock star, every hockey player, becomes the subject of an adulatory hodgepodge of gossip and advertising hype masquerading as biography, we obviously must be grateful for a legitimate biography such as this one, in which a serious attempt is made to retrieve a significant moment of our literary past. But if, from a more scholarly point of view, we ask whether a *biography* is the best posible use that could be made of the Deacon papers, there is room for some doubt. For *William Arthur Deacon* reads like a biography which has been compelled from its authors by the academic opportunity the sheer volume of the archival material offers. Certainly, detail after detail will be relevant to scholars examining Canada's literary journalism between the Wars, and to those retrieving what we might term the sociology of the Canadian writing scene. But whatever compellingness Deacon has in biography belongs to the first ten or twelve years of his literary life, the period in the 1920's and early 30's during which his initial decisiveness and energy led him to a career new to Canadian letters and during which he shaped a new literary journalism. Beyond those years, the personality offers little revelation or information; the details of the literary life would be as adequately represented in some other form of literary history. For finally it is literary historians, searching out the history of literary journalism, of publishing, of literary awards in Canada, of authors' associations, of reviewing practices, who will use this volume. On the evidence it offers, I suspect that the riches of the Deacon papers demanded a history of Canadian literary journalism much more than they demanded a biography of William Arthur Deacon.

However, Thomas and Lennox have written a biography: a biography drawing on so much archival material is no slight achievement, and it is in terms of the conventions and demands of that most difficult of all genres that we read the results of their research. They have obviously thought about the genre's conventions; whether or not they have come to any conclusions is less apparent. They try to counteract the predictability of chronological organization, for example, by dividing Deacon's career into three phases (the 20's, the 30's, and the 40's to retirement) and each phase into three aspects of his professional life (his reviewing and literary editing, his literary

friendships, his writing in the early years and work for authors' societies in his later life). The decision lets them focus their discussions but it also involves a certain amount of repetition.

Their uncertain attempt to move in a number of directions is summarized in their sub-title: "A Canadian Literary Life." "Canadian" is of course clear enough. But even this limitation can lead to lacunae that keep troubling a reader; when, for example, Deacon goes to New York in 1919 to be "in the very centre of the American literary scene," we find that he returns, after half a paragraph about his health, to Winnipeg, the American literary scene disposed of with the observation that "Though the trip was a fiasco as far as literary ambitions were concerned, his determination to become a writer remained constant and total." We, however, have never been told anything more precise about his ambitions for the New York trip than the reference to the "centre of the American literary scene" would suggest; we do not know whom he tried to meet, whom he did meet and with what response, what enabled him to persist in his determination despite an apparent setback. It may be that the eye resolutely fixed on the "Canadian" is responsible for this sketchiness, but it may be too that a "Literary Life" gets its authors into difficulties, invoking as it does that sub-genre of biography which restricts itself to the professional life of its subject. Professional decisions can seldom be explained by recourse only to professional circumstances and motivations and those of Deacon are no exception. Thomas and Lennox, for example, cite the importance of theosophical beliefs to his conviction that he should abandon law for literary journalism, thereby moving from the professional to the personal, but they do not go deeply enough into the personal (or into theosophy) to tell us why Deacon should have wished to replace Methodism with theosophy or to trace the influence of this doctrine on his writing. Later, hypothesizing that *My Vision of Canada* is understandable in the context of Deacon's theosophical beliefs, the authors draw but do not develop an analogy with the influence of theosophy on Irish nationalism and tell us that a "they" without antecedent believed in Canada as a New Athens exemplifying spiritual perfection. This is the sort of analysis that needs support: who are these "they"? — no such belief, for example, is expressed in the writings of Mme. Blavatsky. Other examples of the professional life's refusal to remain distinct from the personal life encompass decisions Deacon made, the biographers imply, with an eye to his mother, wife, and children: the brevity of their allusions to these figures in the interests of restricting the account to the "literary" makes some of those decisions seem scantily motivated.

From a narrative point of view, perhaps the most satisfying biographies are those in which we can identify with the biographer as well as the subject, in which we see the biographer struggling to come to terms with the subject, to empathize, perhaps even to sympathize with him, then to move through and beyond that emotion to a more objective understanding which embraces it. Professors Thomas and Lennox achieve something of this in a muted way. Their affection for Deacon is frequently in evidence, as is their conviction (and demonstration) of his importance to a phase of Canadian literary life, yet it does not keep them from noting the limitations of his own books and the conservatism of his literary interests; affection occasionally becomes affectionate irony and Deacon's unwilling and ungracious retirement and the senility of his last years, while as charitable a presentation as possible is

granted them, are not glossed over. But there is little of the drama here by which the biographer and, through him, the reader feel the emotions of the subject. We can, for example, identify Deacon's enthusiasms in this account, but little of the excitement, perhaps even the sentiment of power, which surely accompanied and may even have motivated his "discoveries," comes through. Nor is there any of that drama in which the biographer struggles to come to terms with the subject and to shape a coherent and compelling life from the evidence available. Instead we find everywhere the trace of the researchers' index cards, of data unformed into that dynamic coherence that we think of as a "life." Perhaps Deacon himself was not a man sufficiently compelling in the magnitude of his achievement, in the depth or complexity of his character, or in the drama of his life to make a compelling biography; at any rate he does not become so in Thomas' and Lennox's affectionate, but limited, relation to him.

He is made even less compelling by the banalities of their style. The sheer accumulation of data often overwhelms the reader's sense of narrative development. But then there is no narrative development beyond that predictably provided by the passing years; the "Community of Letters" chapters, for example, are largely structured as a list of Deacon's literary acquaintances. Thomas and Lennox also write with an evenness of tone that denies drama to any circumstance and records large and small events with equal blandness. And they cannot recognize clichés even when they are embracing them: "the path to the realization of his ambition seemed a smooth, broad highway"; Zena Cherry could have written the acount of the banquet at which Deacon was installed as president of the Canadian Authors' Association, "a galaxy of the most distinguished authors in the land [the literary social register follows]... mingled with the hundred-odd members who were present"; *Saturday Night* advertising in the 20's (anticipating the slick mag of the 70's?) reflected "the cultural conflicts inherent in the massive life-style changes that were rapidly taking place."

Much in *William Arthur Deacon* will be useful to Canadian literary historians for Thomas and Lennox have done us a service in their extensive quotations from the Deacon papers, and in the information they have provided us about the literary journalism of the period. But their work is notes toward a biography rather than a successful example of the genre; it gives us only research data, supplemented by sketchy accounts of motives and brief literary judgements, unskilfully tacked each to each in a semblance of narrative. *William Arthur Deacon* is seldom touched by the shaping power that makes the great biographies works of art, nor by the best biographers' capacity for subtle discrimination and profound discoveries about their characters, a capacity that can make their subjects as well as their works great.

SHIRLEY NEUMAN

BAD BATCH

ERIC NICOL, *Canadide: A Patriotic Satire.* Macmillan, $16.95.

KENNETH DYBA, *The Long (And Glorious) Weekend of Raymond (And Bingo) Oblongh.* November House, $8.95.

OPENING A NEW BOOK or a new bottle of wine should be attended by anticipation, and ritual, followed by the pleasure of fulfilment. If neither reaches a standard of taste or interest, the consumer presumably has the option of sending them back, to oblivion. Neither of these books deserves the attention of a review. Neither is worth buying, borrowing, or steal-

ing. Or reading. That should make an end on't. Dr. Johnson had the luxury of blunt and honest dismissal, but modern readers demand an explanation for that dismissal. Besides, such statements generally stimulate rather than dampen interest; read on at your leisure for the rationale, and for some judicious quotations.

Opening Eric Nicol's *Canadide* puts off the palate: " 'MAY THE BLUEBIRD OF HAPPINESS NEST IN YOUR PUBIC HAIR,' murmured Mavis . . . she fell asleep. Mavis had come eight times (six confirmed, two probable). That I had satisfied her was evident: her snoring had a rich vibrato that I recognized as plenitude." Nicol's opener won no annual worst opening sentence prize, but it might at least have merited an honourable mention. That "honourable mention" sentence begins the wanderings of Martin Richard [or is it Richard Martin?], "a name both anglophone and francophone," his "single most important qualification for a career in the public service of Canada." From Richard's [or is it Martin's?] being bribed into the Civil Service, the novel follows the muddled and silly path of his special servicing of the bureaucracy and of several women. Eventually tiring of his role in the SS (Special Services) Martin Richard finally pulls out of the Civil Service when he beshits himself in a fortuitous thunderstorm on Vancouver's Wreck Beach while helping Mary plant sand grass to prevent the insidious erosion of the sandstone cliffs: "Fortunately it was a small, integrated turd, and I was able to shake it down my pant leg, into the planting hole, while my companion resumed digging. It was the closest I have ever come to a religious experience." It's bad — cover to cover. Mary and Martin live together from that day forth tending gardens and doing good. This book is meant, seemingly, to be ironic, satiric, and funny. But it is only tired. The satire never comes off; you may lift the lid at your own discretion.

Bad as Nicol's book might be, Kenneth Dyba's *The Long (And Glorious) Weekend of Raymond (And Bingo) Oblongh* is even worse. The technical term for over-fermented wine has to be "putrid," and over-fermenting occurs when the bubbling, swirling, fermenting must breaks down and decomposes into noisome stuff with rising fumes. This book is filthy fantasy. Raymond is a 340-pound mamma's boy who at the age of 44 finally goes downtown on the long Thanksgiving weekend with his 17-year-old dog Bingo in search of adventure and his lost love, Alberta Rose. He discovers a "bizarre carnival of decadent debauchery" — a gracious understatement taken from the blurb on the back cover. Raymond meets Mr. Alice, "a finely-feathered transvestite" who introduces Raymond to the sado-masochistic machinations of the butch, the geek, the bulldog, the egyptian, and the power struggle between the votaries of emasculated Ike Big Balls, owner of the Paradise Gardens nightclub, and his arch-rival, the emasculator, Princess Winter and her Butch Brigade from the Winter Palace. What follows is tormenting mayhem out of the gay-fantastic world of S & M, complete with lurid descriptions of grubby, greedy, engorging, gagging gobbling, topped off with a variety of demented buggeries and butcheries climaxed by the gang-rape of Alberta Rose.

To be fair, Dyba's language has energy, but it is the energy of the open sewer, dropping downhill. Across the back cover of this book are printed three colour-coded words, apparently quoted from other critical reviews: "Erotic . . . " "Disgusting . . . " "Unforgettable . . . " Neither erotic nor unforgettable is critically accurate. Well, one out of three ain't much, even if that one is right-on-dead-

centre. Between the boredom of *Canadide* and the buggery of *Oblongh*, the reader faces consuming a bad batch of Can. Lit. Here lies penury not plenitude.

KRISTOFFER F. PAULSON

SYMPATHETIC MAGIC

FLORENCE VALE, *The Amorous Unicorn*. Porcupine's Quill, $7.95.

PENNY KEMP, *Binding Twine*. Ragweed, $8.95.

ANN FOX CHANDONNET, *Auras, Tendrils: Poems of the North*. Penumbra, $7.95.

MARIANNE BLUGER, *On Nights Like This*. Brick Books, $4.50.

The Amorous Unicorn, by artist Florence Vale, is a children's book for adults. Vale approaches her subject — erotic adult life — with a child's abandon. The book is a grand romp through the life of the senses, full of pollen-laden bees, black butterflies, and sweaty thighs. Limericks abound: "There was a young lady named Flory / who frightened a moose in a quarry." Several pieces have an epigrammatic turn:

> Tragedy
> is
> loving a man
> who could drive Oscar Wilde.

Equally as witty (and erotic) are Vale's pen and ink drawings throughout the collection. In the cover picture, "Amorous Unicorn," a unicorn sports a distinctly phallic horn.

> The unicorn had a headache
> and was seen rustling his horn
> in the oak leaves.
>
> Soft perfume and pink clouds
> floated all around.

It is an orgiastic book, the senses "buffetted by one ecstasy after another," and a book of magical regeneration:

> Golden water from a
> secret well
> swelling in the earliest dawn
> spilling nectar only meant for butterflies
> and lucky me reviving
>
> with the drops.

The Dionysian dimension is delicately tempered by moments of mature sadness, such as in "Leaves Hung Down," an understated lament for a dead child. Vale's poems scorn laboured interpretation; her craft is open, generous, and confident — a gift to the reader.

In 1980, poet Penny Kemp lost custody of her children. *Binding Twine* is her record of that loss: "testimony the judge did not, could not hear." According to her preface, Kemp uses poetry as "a kind of sympathetic magic" to review pain and win "a gift of awareness." This magic, her last strength, sometimes takes the form of incantation, words as witchcraft.

> She asked for my children.
> She asked for their things.
> She asked for the table
> on which sat my typewriter.
>
> She got the children.
> She got their things.
> She got more writing
> than she could have dreamt up.
>
> I kept the table and
> the typewriter.

Wary of "a lurking desire for vengeance, a stridency," Kemp's record of her journey through stages of naïveté, shock, confusion, and hatred transcends vindictiveness. Her simplicity, at its best, is persuasive: an agony not to be denied or ignored. Often the style is prosaic but charged in its banality, as when she naïvely first sends her son to stay with his father:

> hi and goodbye
> and see you around.
>
> At least now his father
> sees him. Isn't that
> what I asked for?

Puns and wordplay gain Kemp a distance

of pained laughter; she hears her children called "unkempt, my name / undone." Admittedly, the self-conscious wordgames are sometimes distracting, but there is power her, power rooted in a desperate faith that

> only thought might last:
> the transfer of a mind
> onto the page. Shadows
> on Hiroshima walls.

And after the grief and desolation, the pages lead to a final affirmation:

> We are jars that love
> has filled emptied
> and fills again.

For the Alaskan poet Ann Fox Chandonnet, spiritual clarity is the reward of metaphorical imagining. In *Auras, Tendrils: Poems of the North*, she strives to break through separations, to see X as Y, thus glimpsing divine unities. Her poems are about critical moments of passing between realities. When we are invited to "sing the seasons," we realize that we are never *in* one season without sliding into the next. Death merges with life as the mummy-wrappings of winter are indistinguishable from the flesh of spring, and bone meal for tulips smells of Dachau. Chandonnet's northern landscape is in the Romantic tradition — an other-than-self we penetrate in order to enter ourselves. Our opposites are as necessary as the white space around a poem: "What touches us most: / the word, the white, the contrast?" Unifying polarities, finding and crossing edges, we "submerge the temporal," "an act of faith and magic." A sacred post in a native village becomes a wonderful, magic link between heaven and earth, while masked dancers wonder if this is "the womb of creation": "Did the stream of sunlight / become a chain of copper arrows . . . ?"

> We grip the mask between our teeth and
> dance,
> try to become other than men,
> try to swallow Raven-spruce-needle,
> become great with spirit.

Auras, Tendrils is dense with details of landscape and native culture, details given sharp-edged purpose by the poet's intense commitment to a vision of radical analogy.

Marianne Bluger's *On Nights Like This* invites us to the "edge":

> Right there at the edge of imagining
> is what happens in the end.
> You know it as you blench, your heart
> knocks
> and the pieces lock
> in the only picture possible.

On the other side of the edge is the unconscious, symbolized most often by the sometimes terrifying night:

> He of yellow jackal eyes
> with snout smeared
> and lips curled.

At other times, night is a plush jewel box pried open with a "ruby flash." In any case, if we hush our chatter, the dark unconscious has a song for us:

> Shh, be quiet now
> let them come out —
> the frightened creatures
> scuttled under the rocks.

We are promised discoveries:

> as with that Greek who marvelled
> at the stars and so doing fell
> into a pond, a night, an end,
> his own especial sea
> weird with reality.

Bluger celebrates a certain sensibility, but her characteristic vehicles — "the night," "the sea," "the wind," "spring," "longing" — carry her close to the clichéd moods of limp, "sensitive" verse. There is a kind of narcotic pleasure in reading these poems with their easy flow of images, but one begins to find something unhealthily passive about that sensibility. Perhaps it is only that after the tough, assertive energies of Vale, Kemp, and

Chandonnet, we can hardly believe a poet who tells us, "It comes for us all / as we wait where we are."

BRUCE PIRIE

POETASTING

STEVEN SMITH, *Ritual Murders,* Turnstone, $6.00.

FRANK DAVEY, *Edward and Patricia.* Coach House, $6.50.

ROGER NASH, *Settlement in a School of Whales.* Fiddlehead, $6.00.

ST. JONN SIMMONS, *Wilderness Images.* Fiddlehead, $6.00.

STEVE MCCAFFERY, *Knowledge Never Knew.* Véhicule, n.p.

LOUIS DUDEK, *Ideas for Poetry.* Véhicule, n.p.

THERE IS MORE TO POETRY than meets the ear, even the mind's ear: some verse must be not only composed and presented but also taken and interpreted orally, transforming the conventional oral-aural relationship of poet and audience into a considerably more sensuous oral-oral relationship. To the sextet of poets and poetic experimenters and theorists here under review, there would seem to be more to poetry that meets the mouth, especially the mind's mouth of ingested verse.

The mouth as a womb-wound symbol of sexuality and violence abounds in Steven Smith's cryptic-elliptic *Ritual Murders,* a narrative poem sequence disguised as a prose narrative of interrelated stories, their narrator a kind of alphabetical serial killer poisoning his reader by feeding him ten vignettes of brutal murder, both real and imagined. The "ritual" element of the murders involves proscribed forms of codified conduct, in particular sadistically methodical rapes, seductions, and other ultraviolent personal violations, all of them climaxing in metaphysical death made physical once again. But the narrator himself is a ritualist, his at once poetically and journalistically spare, detached descriptions of the most horrendous crimes assuming a kind of ceremoniousness in their very effort to outrage. This searing-cering language has an observational detachment seemingly at odds with the participatory violence of the subject matter. "Subway," for instance, concerns a man at a desolate subway station, waiting for a late-night train to take him home to his fifty-sixth birthday celebrations. Without ever leaving his spot on the platform or his maculate imagination, he witnesses three tough young girls who break out into fierce fighting and who, when he intervenes, begin to attack him with equal violence:

> one jumps for his legs. the other pushes at his chest. another throws herself at him. shocked he seems to fall backward forever. he crashes onto the grey tile. then over onto the concrete. his head hits last. stops his voice. he pushes back. tries to free himself from this choke of bodies, hands scratching at him. knees on him. boots digging into his ribs. he kicks out. the subway rumbles in his ears. one falls aside. stands. black leather draws back. flashes as it moves to his face.

In due course this attack turns literally rapacious, the man responding to his assailants by himself seizing the sexual opportunity, their engagement so helplessly ecstatic that only the "crush" of the screaming train can effect their fourfold consummation. That the bystander should simply imagine this violence, rather than committing it, seems inconsequential to Steven Smith, who is intent on documenting our propensity towards sexual violence and violent sexuality that are ultimately murderous. But his photographic descriptions and crude language are at their worst merely pornographic, as if life were a sequence of acts of prostitution and the poet and the readers

mere voyeurs. Seldom has ritual been so unrighteously self-righteous.

Lascivious in another direction, Frank Davey articulates the benign amours of the eponymous Edward and Patricia, comic characters whose romance and marriage provide them with a forum for two decades of sexual expression. Although some of their bedroom antics and acrobatics are farcically amusing, following the characters through thirty-nine variations on the same theme is no more than doing one's conjugal critical duty. Here the I-love-you-so-much-that-I-could-eat-you theme assumes psychosexual associations and casts the reader in a voyeuristic role, taking it all in, following Edward and Patricia from their first date in high school, when "with her back / against the storm door, she would embrace him" and significant moments later he "would sag against the porch rail / & marvel at how the door never opened," to his realization after years of variations-on-a-theme marriage that he has quite simply been seduced, that he has been literally had. His ultimate love note to Patricia, signalling his indefinite departure, is a curt "You ARE a whore" lipstuck on the mirror and punctuated with the appropriate expletive greeting, suggesting the consummation of their sterile relationship and the reward of a kind of autoerotic isolation that each of them deserves.

As we follow Edward and Patricia through their orgastic and orgiastic struggle for synchrony, we recognize many of the sexual clichés of the past two decades and acknowledge Frank Davey's rather pathetic attempt to document the pathos of physical incompatibility and sexual insurrection. But his insistently genital poetic is ultimately crude both in its content and in its methodology and neither graphically nor even pornographically stimulating. By holding the mirror-on-the-ceiling up to nature, Davey offers us merely the burning flesh and blood of consummation and invites us to consume the sexual act in cannibalistic fashion, as he stirs the fleshpots of what amounts to little more than pulp lit. Although these poems might provide readers with a naughty diversion from Davey's more serious and innovative verse and from his role as a literary scholar and critic, they seem to lack aesthetic and mimetic legitimacy, degrading men and women by catching them with their collective pants down and denying the sexual dignity of mankind. That for all their seeming fecundity Edward and Patricia should be unable to conceive a child points to one's hope that their poetic narrative too will die without issue. In celebration of the death of bad taste, one can only pass around the cigars!

In his first published book of verse, Roger Nash takes the metaphor of consumed poetry and transforms it into a metaphor of inhaled poetry, his readers, like the whales of the title poem, revelling in their underwater imagery precisely because they must periodically come up for air (for end-stopped lines, as it were). The delightful irony is that Nash's lines tend to end without punctuation, and thus seem at once to surface and descend, surface and descend; and to go on indefinitely (with no forseeable end and with syntactical unpredictability). The poems are less about whales qua whales than about images of threatened life, as the title poem suggests in the speaker's recognition of whale forms in the geologic protrusions of the Sudbury landscape and hence marine forms on the shore of the prairie sea: "in summer outcrops bask in doldrums / as asleep as ovens as warm as whales the children / hopscotch over their humps talk to them tease them treat / them cruelly as alive." This poem is indicative of the collection in its encouraging the reader to re-create the

world by perceiving original aspects in the natural and human environments.

Thus the poetic discovery of Canada becomes a process of naming in the Adamic sense, involving the inhalation of the spiritual breath and the utterance of the name. In several of the poems this pronounced vision of country assumes a manifold perspective, as in "Eight ways of spending an evening on Whitsun Lake," the octet of haiku reminiscent of the amusing sentences of Wallace Stevens, ranging in mood from the metaphysical "The owl's eye is / a chink in the barn, ajar / for mice to enter"; to the whimsical "Ravens on fence posts / sit as black as telephones, / expecting a call"; to the sentimental "Just warm and alive, / the three of us, you, I, and / the first butterfly." In this respect, whether the line is short and monosyllabic or, as elsewhere, long and polysyllabic, the meanings of all these poems emerge in the act of reading itself, rather than in the process of reflection or analysis, somewhat as the taste of food emerges in the act of chewing and swallowing, rather than in the process of digestion. (Whether this undigested verse is intelectually nourishing is another question entirely.) In his concluding piece, "A poem as a question," Nash develops a metaphor of husbandry as mastication and poetry as husbandry, taking the form of a series of questions on the meaning of growth and decay, concluding: "Does anger have a mouth to eat? / or the dumb man a tongue / to sing himself asleep?" Thus does the poet encourage us to feed on the harvest of poetry and to articulate our whole consciousness.

An even more consistently animal-oriented collection of poems — indeed a kind of bestiary based on a zoological poetic — comes from St. John Simmons, whose wilderness verse has the exotic taste of game that as one eats one can still see running wild. His world is one of man, animal, plant, and stone interconnecting environmentally, with no one element dominating the others. In "An Evening Song," for example, Simmons ponders the dreaming death of a child enfolded by nature, beginning: "Here, the wolf. / There, the lilac. / Between the shadow of the boy / who wouldn't live. / Falls purple as a desert sunset." The following stanzas readjust the elements but do not upset the balance of nature; and the poet seems to compose his verses not only to imitate but also to maintain this balance.

Prominent among the poems is the figure of the child, who appears to represent the poet in the wilderness of language, in awe of his environment but unthreatened by it. The opening poem, "In My Mouth the Young Boy Dances," captures the child-poet relationship and inaugurates Simmons' own treatment of ingested verse, involving the tasting of experience and the perpetuation of experience in the mouth of the singing poet, in particular the child's entry into the world of experience. In "The Children Asked Me to Kill You," for instance, beauty is the murder weapon and the children innocently sound a chime made of their dead mother's bones. Through this kind of unusually graphic imagery Simmons encourages us to recover what in the masterful prose poetry of his preface he calls our "domaine perdu."

The best among this *mélange à six* of books demand the least commentary as well as the highest recommendation, both steve mccaffery and Louis Dudek offering extremely understated reflections on poetry that seem to say more than poetry can say for itself.

McCaffery's reflections take the form of aphorisms and epigrams and assume the format of a journal, each entry comprising at the top of the page a whimsical historical or temporal reference and at

the bottom of the page a terse poetic statement which, although defying interpretation itself, does inspire interpretive reflection and even seems to assign the blank page above with the meanings of the poem it invites through its very emptiness and seeming wastefulness. As the poet himself says: "great poems are read from the bottom up." The emphasis of these poems-at-bottom falls on the *minim* rather than on the *mal* of minimalism, as the book's concluding minimal maxim (appropriately followed by several completely blank pages) suggests with anti-intellectual wisdom: "never read / never write / always continue to learn." The greatest compliment one can pay to McCaffery is to encourage him to follow his own advice by testing *knowledge*'s ignorance and by thinking about all that *thought* thought he did.

Rather than aphoristic or epigrammatic, Louis Dudek's reflections are didactic and prophetic. In some cases Dudek simply gives wise advice, as when he suggests we compile an "encyclopedia of ignorance" or informs the young poet that "It is humility to publish privately, at your own cost"; whereas in other cases he offers more profound speculation, as when he considers the perpetual possibilities of a chess game in relation to the endless free choices of human life or ponders the probabilities of genealogy and concludes: "Everyone you meet is a distant family relation." Each entry is a self-contained idea on ideas, based on Dudek's own poetic concerns and stimulating our own concerns for poetry and for the history of theoretical thought. In his belief that reality is more contemplative even than linguistic, Dudek seems to echo McCaffery's own contention that the silence of the blank page is perhaps the highest poetic expression, representing as it does thought in its purity before the imperfection of oral or verbal expression. Both poets represent the purity of ingested verse in that they pronounce their raw poetic ideas directly and yet have the refinement to keep silence, acknowledging silence as the criterion by which we judge the spoken essence of poetry. Even the critic must observe their silence.

These six collections of poetry and poetic experimentation and theory point to the fine distinctions between mere poetasting and the poetic of ingested verse. If Steven Smith is rather tasteless and Frank Davey somewhat in bad taste, Roger Nash and St. John Simmons are easily acquired tastes, and Steve McCaffery and Louis Dudek could very well be to everyone's taste. But each poet in his own way enunciates the pre-eminent critical distinction of tasting poets themselves through the poetasting of ingested criticism. *Buon appetito!*

P. MATTHEW ST. PIERRE

COVERING KIDS

KEN ROBERTS, *Crazy Ideas*. Groundwood, $5.95.

JACQUELINE NUGENT, *Beyond the Door*. Groundwood, $7.95.

WILLIAM PASNAK, *In the City of the King*. Groundwood, $6.95.

IF THESE THREE BOOKS from Douglas and McIntyre's Groundwood Press were representative of all new book publishing, the adage "you can't judge a book by its cover" would soon be meaningless. The cover illustration on each of these three children's novels gives the reader an honest depiction of both the plot and the flavour of the story within.

Crazy Ideas is an easy, funny, predictable, and delightful tale for young readers who want the open-mouthed, one-dimensional excitement of a Choose-Your-Own-Adventure with the bonus of a real story. Like the story the cover is full of activity and colour: two round-faced

children in hard hats, looking alarmed; a bow-tied mayorish gentleman flying behind a purple machine; a photographer snapping pictures; a house amid destruction. The round-faced children are a brother and sister who live in Skeletown (the streets are named after the bones in the skeleton so the people can learn anatomy). Skeletown is a city whose Mayor has proclaimed that innovation (i.e., crazy ideas) is its most important resource; to graduate from high school, students must invent a scheme never before imagined. Jon has invented a comic book (the fourth most popular in Canada). Christine finally comes up with the best idea yet: a "do-it-yourself demolition company" in which people can, for three dollars, take out their frustrations by smashing windows, taking sledge hammers to walls, and kicking in plaster. All would go well, but naturally, there is one sinister element in town and Christine's demolition plans are demolished.

Ken Roberts is a children's librarian who has no illusions about what Canadian children want to read. This is Gordon Korman for the younger set. But do not scorn — when it is National Book Festival time, Canadian public and school librarians will thank Roberts for his crazy and highly readable idea.

Beyond the Door moves about as far from bright, primary colours and innovative ideas as possible. The cover illustration, in muted beige, blue/grey, and yellows, shows a huge expanse of sand, a dorway, two children, a boat, and the sun. Illustrator Deborah Drew-Brooke has captured perfectly the static greyness of the novel. The story begins like a new version of William Sleator's *House of Stairs*. Two children suddenly find themselves propelled from a burning movie theatre into a world of sand. Eventually they are taken to a "loonie bin" from which no one has ever escaped. Up to that point, the novel has a bit of Sleator's surrealistic tension, but it soon slackens into a lulling journey reminiscent of *The Wizard of Oz*. The two children and their three new-found Ozish friends manage, with a very simple plan and little effort, to escape from the asylum. Their escape sets the pace for the rest of their quest; the fivesome never seem to be in any real danger. Reading the book is like watching a television series and knowing with absolute certainty that the star will always be safe because she must return the following week. By the time the novel is finished, two of the characters have predictably fallen in love, one has died, and the two children return to find that their guardians have met and married. The future is guaranteed to be pure (if tedious) bliss.

The cover illustration for *In the City of the King* matches perfectly the gentle fantasy it depicts and protects. The art, by Ian Wallace, shows the fresh strength of young Elena dancing before the confused King and the sinister Priests. *In the City of the King* is a black versus white, good versus evil fantasy. Young Elena and her older partner Ariel are minstrels. Both entertainers are special: Ariel because he is a member of "the brotherhood" which subtly protects the King from Evil; Elena because she is a member of a secret society called the Daughters of Ismay. The two become embroiled in a mission to save the King from the control of a group of evil Priests. The story, like the cover illustration, moves gently and believably from the young woman's simple role as entertainer to her huge responsibility for keeping the King from the Priests. It isn't Susan Cooper (though the cover blurb does compare it to *The Arabian Nights* and *The Horse and His Boy*), but in Canada, where there is a paucity of good children's fantasy, this one is at the top with Ruth

Nichol's *A Walk Out of the World* and *Marrow of the World.*

A quick reaction to the covers of these three books from Groundwood becomes a summary: one is fun, one is a bore, and one is gentle fantasy. Just a glance, but that should cover the works.

JUDITH WALKER

LIMITS OF FEELING

MICHAEL BULLOCK, *Prisoner of the Rain.* Third Eye, $10.00.

GERRY SHIKATANI, *A Sparrow's Food.* Coach House, n.p.

MARLENE COOKSHAW, *Personal Luggage.* Coach House, n.p.

EVA TIHANYI, *Prophecies: Near the Speed of Light.* Thistledown, $8.95.

JOHN LENT, *Frieze.* Thistledown, $8.95.

THESE FIVE BOOKS, two of them first full-length collections, force some consideration of poetic technique, of the accessibility of poetry to the interested intelligent reader, and of the obvious relationship between the two. In four of these books, the transmission of serious feeling seems to lie largely outside the possibilities of the techniques, and it is far from clear what emotional note is being hit, what our response should be.

Michael Bullock offers us ninety-eight surrealist prose-poems. Obviously surrealism is still alive, at least in Vancouver, and Bullock's track record in this most difficult genre is, of course, impressive. However, there are problems with this book, and for this author it must be judged disappointing. The best surrealism takes us into the subconscious in such a way as to help us emerge from a strange journey seeing things freshly. This does not happen here; there is little or no shock to the comfortable logic of our lives. The images are certainly dreamlike, but soft-centred, gauzy, pallid, even fey, and their impact is minimal. The prose-poems often seem flabby — justifying the right margin does not, in itself, make a good prose-poem, and the same effects could be had by using continuous prose or free-verse. There seems no necessity for the form and not enough appreciation of its difficulties. In particular, there is far too much syntactical repetition (especially in the first lines), and I doubt if many readers will respond deeply to lines like

> Under the covered gaze of hawks the star-filled sky opens to reveal its empty womb. Waving trees beset it on either side and mushrom clouds of fish swim through its inner waters. Houses rise on a foundation of clouds and drift towards the approaching wind.

It all seems so dated, so familiar, so unchallenging. However, I must mention some Monty Python lines (if only there were more like them) which delight the reader, stunned and weary by the sheer weight of often tedious writing: "At the bottom of a well a redheaded toad is wandering / around holding a balloon on a string." And why not? Bullock's admirers will no doubt find this book essential. Others will want more than imaginary toads in imaginary gardens and will probably be waiting for a giant cartoon foot to descend, popping the balloons.

Gerry Shikatani's is a big collection (143 pages) and is finely illustrated by Rosalind Goss. In fact, poem and drawing merge often in interesting ways. Shikatani claims that his work is "action in service to compassion," that he is exploring "such things as speed acceleration, shape, density, line, angle." Poetry is a tenuous thread in "ecological being." Luckily, this sort of bombast is not always noticeable in the poetry itself, the best of which is supple, spare, and suggestive:

> where silence is bitten
> off bit
> by bit / here
> and there

a tree is rooted
or a rock.

Many things here hint at a solid, unusual talent, but much of the collection fails to satisfy fully, fails to communicate. Many of the poems come across as experimental exercises: we progress through the book assailed by handwritten poems, graphs, concrete poems, drawings, and every kind of avant-garde device, but we never find the real voice of the poet here, as he casts around, seduced by experimental gesture. The collection, for all its attempts at gnomic wisdom, leaves me ultimately baffled and a little bored as I search for reference points to which I can connect my own experience. Playing with words, wrenching them around, missing out connectives, dislocating syntax, does not in itself make language into poetry. I hope the poet will continue in the direction pointed to by "Cultivated Earth," "From Snow to Snow," "No Frame," "Cat," "In Umbria." He has real talent, but a book this long does not serve him well at this stage.

Still seeking recognizable and tangible experience, feeling I can respond to, I open Marlene Cookshaw's first collection and find myself once again in a semi-surrealistic world with few referential toe-holds:

Let's say you're almost down the alley
when a man passes you on his way to the
garbage bin
Let's say, too, that your lover constructs
parallel beams
for both him and you to follow. You
keep straying to his
And the man has in his hand a dead
woodpecker

What, really, is this all about? We can, I admit, by working hard enough, tentatively conjecture some symbolic meanings in Cookshaw's work, but why should we have to? Why the bafflement? Why the long sequence of prose-poems, where the pseudo-narrative confuses? Much of this seems like private experience written in semi-private language, and the poet is not communicating enough because she is using techniques of obliqueness to hide behind. She gives away practically nothing while pretending it's a lot. Not all is like that, however — there are some hopeful signs in poems like "Zoological Garden," "Angling," and "Seven Months" that Cookshaw will come to deal more openly with the real world. When she allows us in, we can see a very good poet.

Eva Tihanyi lets us further into her poetry, her world of experience. The blurb gave me chills — "a range of imagery from mythological and romantic to technological and cosmic" — but it's not that bad! Here are real people in real places having real and clearly expressed experiences. Blessed relief. But look a little closer and the "cosmic" comes in, nuzzling at the poet, tempting her to jump too high to find "significance." We have "the primal pull of blood," "the true arcanum," "the primitive pliant consciousness," "God's invisible fingers," "the sky's dream" — over-elevated stuff which is clichéd and pretentious. This shows Tihanyi at her worst, but there are real virtues here as well. When she comes back to earth and writes of people, relationships, laundromats, blueberries, window blinds, her poetry is accessible and strong. This is a promising and interesting book, where we can find shrewd observed significance in the ordinary. When she realizes that ultra-romantic cosmic imagery is softening her work instead of giving it strength, Eve Tihanyi will be a poet to watch:

The only reassurance:
that somewhere in the small movements,
a hand brushing hair off a brow
or flicking lint from a shoulder,
there is a poignant rhythm,
a trifling dance of humanity

John Lent's long, handsome collection

enters and stays in the "dance of humanity." It is the most satisfying of these books, allowing the reader access to many kinds of experience, not afraid to be confessional, full of deep feeling. He gives us fragments of the autobiography of a sensitive and intelligent man, coming to grips with his subjects out of necessity, not out of fashion. We come to know the poet's friends, his journeys, his fears, his hopes, what he has read, what his life is like, and it is all done with a freshness of voice which convinces and persuades. (This voice transcends the irritating habit of leaving spaces between words, even when there is no syntactical justification, and the poems which are too long and indulge in superfluous detail.) It is, above all, a *human* book and one I shall return to for its insights into the swaying conflicts of a life, of happiness suddenly turning sour, of a self-mocking and/or serious exploration of personal struggle.

Edmonton, Toronto, Regina, Nelson, Vernon — the poems are rooted in real places, but these are turned into places of the mind, way-stations of the migrant heart, touchstones in the poet's search for meaning. The search is intensified by the tonal range of the poetry, from the high serious to the most colloquial, blended smoothly and always at the poet's service. The poems here do not lend themselves to short quotation. Suffice to say that this is a very fine collection.

Perhaps the lesson to be learned from these five books is that strong, complex feeling does not require complex surface technique; that power in poetry does not necessarily derive from technical experiment; that the good poet can examine, define, and transcend the everyday and mundane; that mystification, in language or technique, can do nothing but make wider the gap between poet and reader in Canada — those few hundred copies sold, and, often, no wonder.

CHRISTOPHER WISEMAN

MONSTERS WITHIN

SUNITI NAMJOSHI, *From the Bedside Book of Nightmares.* Fiddlehead/Goose Lane, $6.95.

JOHN OUGHTON, *Gearing of Love: Poems and Photographs.* Mosaic, n.p.

ALTHOUGH CANADIAN NOVELISTS have been noticeably engaged of late in social causes (Margaret Laurence and nuclear disarmament, Margaret Atwood and political torture in *Bodily Harm*), Canadian poets are no less committed. The most recent collections by John Oughton and Sunti Namjoshi bear ample testimony to this fact, and reveal, as well, both the challenges and pitfalls of combining poetry and social issues.

Oughton's collection, as its title suggests, is primarily concerned with the clash between the artificial or technological and the natural. The structure of the work highlights this clash; in the first section, "Welcome to Japan," the poet's appreciation of the traditional reverence shown to nature in this ancient civilization ("Take rocks / for text / learn stream's / tongue well") collapses when he is faced with "geisha-land,"

> from whose assembly loins spring
> HONDA
> SONY
> PIONEER
> CANON . . .

This convergence of Eastern and American values reaches a climax at the end of this section, when the poet kisses a crying Japanese woman whose "lips are bittersweet / as berries on a rough, Ontario fence." Back to the land of rough fences — chained and imprisoned nature — we therefore return in Section Two, "In Still Life."

Here, the confrontation of artifice and nature reaches a fever pitch, and the positive motifs in Japanese culture are entirely inverted, as though one were

presented with the negative image of a photograph. The quiet harmonies of "Japanese Music," for instance, wherein art and nature coalesce in the "Refrain of all things that / return: flower, season, wind, tree," are harshly jarred by American discord: "Turn up the Tom Jones / Max! Those waves are loud," shouts one of the American faithful on a pilgrimage to Daytona Beach.

For Oughton, violence is the inevitable outcome of this distortion of the natural. In "Espresso Bar on Harbord Street," the poet half-listens to the violence of a spaghetti western (a palpable instance of artifice, indeed) and half-listens to the verbal abuse going on at the table next to him. More unsettling in Oughton's poems, however, is the association of violence and the feminine. In "Anima Dream," the speaker describes a dream in which he murders and dismembers a woman, telling his *father* later that he "only wanted to see what / made her talk." Thus, we witness the dismembering and destruction of the verbal, creative "woman" in man. Similarly, the poem "Zoology," which describes the hatred that moves two lovers to rip "out each other's stitched-up / stuffing, laying bare the mythic bones," is accompanied by the photograph of a laughing girl, a stuffed leopard draped over her shoulders. The parallel is extremely disconcerting, especially when one considers that the photographic symbol of the ancient Japanese reverence for nature is the male Buddha.

Oughton's use of photography, however, deserves a more searching study, for he has chosen in the photograph the ideal symbol for the merging of nature and the machine. Oughton's own photographic style has been strongly influenced by Edward Weston and Ansel Adams (as his photo for "Cape Travers, P. E. I." reveals). Weston's philosophy of photography (now in sharp disfavour with photographers) is that photography reveals the hidden essence of nature. Weston's photos of sand dunes, like Oughton's photo of rippling water, reveal an order inherent in nature, independent of man. Or, as Oughton himself expresses it, "Who needs a nurtured rose / where even the great silent birds wait / and even the weeds sing?" The greatest travesty occurs when man attempts to harness nature, hence Oughton's final poems on nuclear weapons. "Cruise Missile," a rewriting of Pratt's "The Shark" for the nuclear age, is sadly disappointing; Oughton is better able to visualize the present horrors of American society than this potential disaster. What should be the strongest poem in the collection unfortunately falls into cliché: "it's smarter than your car or stereo." How does one imagine the unimaginable?

Suniti Namjoshi's *From the Bedside Book of Nightmares* provides an implicit response to this, as well as to other questions raised by Oughton's collection. Namjoshi's feminist poems are not blatant "social cause" poems, but witty rewritings of Western mythologies. In her lively imagination, Caliban as well as "Baby Frankenstein" become female figures, leading the reader to muse upon the sexual dynamics of these myths.

In Namjoshi, the female is associated with creativity in a more positive way than in Oughton. In fact, the female is closely allied with nature; Baby Frankenstein dreams that she is a green shrub, uprooting herself and prancing about, much to the disgruntlement of her mother. When slightly older, she becomes a creative liar, telling her brother that he has *green* hair; she is "enchanted" by this heady "power of the lie." Namjoshi significantly links this lying with the creative act itself, by inserting a quotation from Mary Shelley: "The fabrication of life is not a matter that may be under-

taken lightly. It is an experiment fraught with peril."

Thus, the female artist is a defiant one. Namjoshi, like feminist poets Adrienne Rich and Sylvia Plath, is fascinated by the image of the woman as defiant monster. Here, what is monstrous and ferocious in woman should *not* be tamed. Referring to Isabel Archer in James's *Portrait of a Lady*, Namjoshi's "Creature" protests,

> there's no place
> for me in that portrait of hers . . .
> There's something
> obnoxious and cruel about me
> I don't shut up,
> and I am not dead

Which is more unnatural, Namjoshi seems to imply, this creature's ferocity or Isabel's return to Gilbert Osmond?

Namjoshi, too, is concerned with the clash between the natural and the artificial, and like Oughton, she uses the metaphor of the camera to embody this clash in "Snapshots of Caliban." Moreover, her very choice of *The Tempest* is an apt one, since this play, more than almost any other Shakespearean play, juxtaposes nature and European civilization, to the distinct disadvantage of the latter. This Caliban, however, is a female monster, whose natural impulses are smothered by the threatening patriarchal figure of Prospero. Caliban, like Baby Frankenstein, is creative; Miranda both fears and envies her dreams of heaven. At the end of the cycle of poems, even Miranda can accept that "You are part of me," (a line from one of Miranda's poems, which she has earlier crossed out). The final poem, "Prospero," reveals the magician's inability to admit what Miranda has admitted. (Ironically, in Namjoshi's version, Miranda becomes the wise and tolerant one, and Prospero the naif.) "Maiden and monster," he proclaims, "I dare not claim them." In this ironic reversal, Prospero's moving speech, "This thing of darkness I / Acknowledge mine," undergoes a sea-change indeed.

Both Oughton and Namjoshi show themselves adept at organizing and juxtaposing their poems in suggestive, imaginative ways (Namjoshi's mythology is, in kind, a descendant of Jay Macpherson's *The Boatman*). More importantly, both poets, regardless of ideology or approach, agree on one central point: the need to acknowledge our monsters within.

LORRAINE M. YORK

VINTAGE

AL PURDY, *Piling Blood*. McClelland & Stewart, $12.95.

I HAVE NEVER LIKED TO CALL writers "great," since for me "great" is a power adjective; I hold with Lord Acton that "all great men are bad," and I don't think that kind of moral badness goes often with the vocation of writing, though it did with D'Annunzio and perhaps with Ezra Pound. Nor am I happy with the word "major," since that poses a categorization between major and minor writers which is out of keeping with the realities of poetic creation, denying as it does that all excellences are individual and incomparable with others. So how do we find an adjective to describe a poet like Al Purdy, whose largeness of vision and talent so distinguish him from most of his contemporaries, and who is arguably, in terms of craft alone, among the best three or four poets writing in Canada today?

Purdy himself, I feel, would reject any adjective imputing a special status to him, for he is one of the most democratic practitioners of an aristocratic art, and he makes his attitude very clear in a poem addressed to Archilochus, the archaic Greek poet and mercenary soldier, that appears in *Piling Blood*:

He wasn't Homer, he wasn't anybody
famous;
he sang of the people next door;
his language was their language; he died
in battle
(with a brand new shield). Living was
honour
enough for him, with death on every hand.
Archilochus the soldier, he was us.

Three thousand years? I can still hear
that commonsense song of the shield:
a loser who managed to be victorious,
his name is a champagne cry in my blood.

There is no reason to wonder at Purdy's inclination to identify with Archilochus, one of the great originative talents of antiquity and, in his free use of the Ionic vernacular, a predecessor of Purdy's own development of a poetry based on the Canadian vernacular. "Commonsense" is the basis for the work of both poets, but only the basis; they both fly far from that launching pad. And the stance of the "loser who managed to be victorious"; is not that the same as Purdy takes up with such effect in the triptych, "Machines," about his working in a mattress factory?

You could never win
the best to hope for
was not to lose
and $1.50 an hour.

So we witness Purdy, despite his vast and curious autodidactic erudition, singing of the lives of ordinary people and doing it in their language; and that of course is one side of him, the ordinary man who resists all suggestions of being extraordinary. But what makes him in fact extraordinary is not his stance, which many a dull ranting "poet of the people" has taken, from Hugh McDiarmid downward, but his ability to use it, as the real artist can always use myths and modes of any kind, to produce poetry whose technical skills equal his philosophic vision.

This is perhaps an odd comparison that will annoy many purists in English literary studies; I often see Purdy as a kind of Wordsworth *achevé* — a Wordsworth as he *would have liked to have been* rather than as he *was*. For Purdy really does "adopt the very language of men," as Wordsworth merely aspired to do, and he succeeds because he retains the vitality of that language without reducing it to the dullness of Wordsworth's metrically arranged prose. Purdy often sings, and sometimes he argues out his philosophies of existence with comic irreverence in the hearing of his readers, but he is never prosaic, even metrically, and a good case can be presented for regarding him as our most notable philosopher poet in a literature whose versifiers, from Sparshott to Layton, are not backward in presenting philosophic attitudes that range all the way from St. Ambrose to Friedrich Nietzsche. What makes Purdy the most interesting is that (a) he is the most steadily and consistently developing poetic craftsman (with what felicity he used the Chaucerian tag to title his first mature book, *The crafte so long to lerne* — and never ceased learning!), and (b) he is his own philosopher, and in that aspect more like the archaic Greek poet Xenophanes, who defied the ancient gods to fashion his own world view, than he is like most of his own contemporaries.

For Purdy goes far beyond the poems about underpaid work in mattress factories, or about literally piling blood (sacks of it dried), or about the experiences working in the abbatoir which he cannot leave behind him:

there were no poems
to exclude the screams
which boarded the streetcar
and travelled with me
till I reached home
turned on the record player
and faintly
in the last century
heard Beethoven weeping.

Obviously such experiences link with

empathy towards suffering beings that shapes other poems in this book, like the semi-comic narratives of Purdy's encounters with archaic species surviving in the Galapagos, and his more elegiac meditations on exploring the fossils of the Upper Cretaceous period (Xenophanes also was fascinated by fossils) and moving among the remains of earth's largest animals, the dinosaurs. In a poem like "Lost in the Badlands," there is an almost shamanic sense of shedding human identity and merging into the great common past of all animals, of mingling one's very bones with them:

> No wind or sound of voices
> only this non-silence
> a mirage of screaming sound
> or an illusion of silence
> as if every animal that ever lived
> and died was struggling
> trying to get your attention
> and all the calcium carbonate
> in your bones shuffling
> its components uneasily.

There are fairly constant components in all Purdy volumes: the comic poems of henpecked husband or ageing cautious lecher; the historic resonstructions of the Loyalist past. And they are here again, in new forms. So are the autobiographical pieces, which in *Piling Blood* touch on every period of Purdy's life from boyhood to the present, pondering the nature of memory, the way self as well as body changes, and treating the lives of losers, who seem to have inhabited Purdy's life in exceptional numbers, with a deeper compassion, more honest because more bewildered, than in the past. There is one especially moving poem, "My Cousin Don," about a companion of the distant orchards and gardens of childhood whom wartime experiences seemed to destroy:

> I insist there was something, a thing of
> value.
> It survived when death came calling
> for my friend on an Italian battlefield:
> not noble, not heroic, not beautiful —
> It escapes my hammering mind,
> eludes any deliberate seeking,
> and all I can think of
> is apples apples apples . . .

And another — "How it feels to be old" — is obliquely about old men but overtly about old dogs, a boy's dog shot for stealing chickens, another who the day before dying went to the water and tried to swim away:

> At the hour of departure
> there seems to me little
> difference between species
> and that's a good a way
> to leave as any
> (Dylan notwithstanding):
> swim straight outward
> towards a distant shore
> with the dog star overhead
> and music on the waters

But for me the most memorable of these poems are those in which the philosophic ruminations are mingled with a lyrical vision and the elegiac mood is suddenly lightened with a joy in living. Perhaps the best of these poems is the last in *Piling Blood*, "In the Early Cretaceous," where Purdy imagines the first appearance of flowers in the age of the dinosaurs and sees in it the splendour of unrecorded history, the great sweep of time so vast that it becomes incomprehensible in its linking of all the world's processes in vast, inevitable and unrememberable sequence.

> But no one will ever know
> what it was like
> that first time on primordial earth
> when bees went mad with pollen fever
> and seeds flew away from home
> on little drifting white parachutes
> without a word to their parents
> — no one can ever know
> even when someone is given
> the gift of a single rose
> and behind that one rose
> are the ancestors of all roses
> and all flowers and all the springtimes
> for a hundred million years
> of summer and for a moment

in her eyes an echo
of the first tenderness

And yet, as in all good books of verse, it is the whole, the varied continuum, rather than the individual pieces — even the anthology gems — that is important. In *Piling Blood* one is aware, with a feeling that grows from page to page, not only of a general triumph of poetic workmanship, but also of a depth of vision and wisdom that few of Purdy's contemporaries have equalled. Purdy is like one of those apples of vanished varieties from the orchards of our childhoods that ripened late and in their lofts improved in flavour long into the winter. As a poet he ages well.

GEORGE WOODCOCK

**** BOB BEAL and ROD MCLEOD, *Prairie Fire: The 1885 North-West Rebellion.* Hurtig, $19.95. History, which is an art as much as a science, moves through time on two levels. There is a sense in which general historic insights are never superseded, no matter how many new facts may be unearthed, and so we still read Herodotus and Gibbon, Acton and Toynbee, for the grandeur of their visions, though we know that in many ways our detailed knowledge of the pasts they wrote about is greater than theirs. We are getting to the point, in Canadian history, of making this kind of distinction. Much has been published on the North-West Rebellion of 1885, and a great deal of it of high quality, bringing the western Canadian past into luminous focus: e.g., George Stanley's *The Birth of Western Canada* and his *Louis Riel*, Desmond Morton's *The Last War Drums*, Marcel Giraud's *Le Métis canadien*, John Kinsey Howard's *Strange Empire* and, in another direction of insight, Rudy Wiebe's *The Temptations of Big Bear*. These books, and others perhaps, will remain as classics of Western Canadian history. But every year recently new sources have become available — diaries and letters discovered, documents and records released for public examination, so that, though the general aspect of the North-West Rebellion may not have changed, facts and details have emerged that modify it in various ways. This plethora of new information released over the past decade has made *Prairie Fire: The 1885 North-West Rebellion* a much more closely textured work than its predecessors. It does little to change our sense of the shape of events at that time, and though, largely for form's sake, its authors offer a few rather gentlemanly challenges to some of the conclusions of past historians, they rarely win their arguments decisively. It is not as visionary historians with original insights that we welcome them, but rather as competent researchers and writers who have not set out to correct the record, which for the most part they accept, but to make it more complete. *Prairie Fire* is a book all *aficionados* of western history should not merely borrow but buy. It is good popular history, accurate, conscientious and accessible, and probably the last work of its kind on the subject for some years after the 1885 Centennial.

G.W.

Recent reprints include Ralph L. Curry, *The Leacock Medal Treasury* (Lester & Orpen Dennys, $11.95), and (in its 3rd revised form, adding a number of poets born in the 1940's) Ralph Gustafson's *Penguin Book of Canadian Verse* (Penguin, $9.95). Under the title *The Confessions of a Harvard Man* ($30.00; pa. $19.95) Paget Press has republished Harold Stearns' 1935 autobiography *The Secret I Know*, with an appreciative preface by Hugh Ford. Sometime editor of *The Dial*, American expatriate in Paris during the 1920's and 1930's, reporter, panhandler, and literary figure of no small stature, Stearns tells here of his campaign against mediocrity, his quest for independence and judgment, his experiment in bohemian homelessness, and his orderly desire for home. One looks in vain here for mention of Callaghan or Glassco, but one finds instead something of the milieu in which they lived. Stearns writes of his early failure to distinguish a "change in tactics" from a change "in ethics": "I don't comprehend how stubborn and perverse is the heart of man — how we can know the better, yet follow the worse path. I thought that merely to see and know the good and the beautiful and the true also means to embrace them gladly. I was not yet really aware that there was the problem of evil. I was still a child." Now in paperback are *The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature* (Oxford, $24.95), and *The Other Side of Hugh MacLennan*, Elspeth Cameron's selection of MacLennan's civilized essays (Macmillan, $8.95).

W.N.

opinions and notes

F. R. SCOTT 1899-1985

WHETHER ONE KNEW HIM personally or not, F. R. Scott figured as a senior poet and statesman for generations of Canadian writers and readers, a role he was marvellously equipped to play. Our last nineteenth-century poet, first among our early twentieth-century ones, he was also a lawyer, teacher, and political thinker the erudition and intelligence of whose ideas will continue to influence the legal and political systems of Canada for a long time to come. Readers of *Canadian Literature* will be familiar with his many accomplishments, which have been most recently documented in *On F. R. Scott: Essays on His Contributions to Law, Literature, and Politics*, based on the 1981 conference, "The Achievement of F. R. Scott" (which Scott wittily dubbed a "pre-mortem"). He was a giant among men, as the saying has it, but rarely has a saying seemed so appropriate.

Scott towered above most people physically, and also in personality and charm, as well. His immense personal charisma, his unwavering energy and integrity come first to mind when one thinks of him. People recalling Frank Scott think of the person they knew, and only afterwards of the major poet, translator, constitutional lawyer, teacher, political theorist, and founding member of the CCF.

Few readers of Scott's poetry, while it is Scott the poet they know best, would fail to recognize how fully his poems engage the philosophy by which he lived and worked. That they are poems of tension, that they seldom offer clear and simple answers but continually interrogate possibilities, are testament to a mind and spirit which never stopped seeking answers yet knew better than to think any one simple "truth" was *the* answer. *The Collected Poems of F. R. Scott* testifies to the rich and full life of a man who insisted on living, in all his varied careers, the contradictions which his poems refused to pretend weren't there. Classic in form yet often romantic in aspiration, sometimes satirical, sometimes full of transcendental yearning, they seem inevitably Canadian in their reflection of the contradictions of modern Canadian culture. And it is those poems which most fully register the profound moral ambiguities of the twentieth century that will last as Scott's major contribution to our literature.

But all of Scott's various writings, in the many areas of Canadian culture and society to which he contributed so much, will continue to exert their influence. People will remember his work and use it, because its value is clear. But the value of his personal involvement is also clear: he always put himself on the line, and in the literary community alone, his support of magazines and small presses made possible the publication of early work by some of our best writers. Many writers were proud to count him their friend, but he lives in the memories of almost all who ever met him. Indeed, if there is ever an *Oxford Book of Canadian Literary Anecdotes*, the entries under F. R. Scott's name will take up a lot of space. Seldom when writers of any generation from the 1920's to the 1970's meet does a story about F. R. Scott *not* come up. And all the stories testify to the man's charm, graciousness, intelligence, toughness, and wit. Truly, he was, in all his varied careers, a "singular man." The writing remains, and we are grateful for it. The man is gone, and it will be long before we see his like again.

DOUGLAS BARBOUR

TO BEE OR NOT TO BEE

BEES DANCE MOST INTRICATELY, Ann Rosenberg reminds us in *The Bee Book*, when imparting information about far flowers to the hive-bound, the stay-at-comb. If one wishes to reduce Rosenberg's multi-faceted novel to a single metaphor, then this one serves. *The Bee Book* is a brilliantly intricate dance recreating for the reader distant regions of imagination, fanciful stratispheres of invention, into which few bees — or few writers — dare to fly.

Shortlisted for the *Books in Canada* first novel prize in 1982, *The Bee Book* has received good reviews but little notice. The obvious reason for the inattention is that, at first, the book seems awesome — as intimidating as a swarm of bees, as finely structured as a honeycomb. The novel begins, for example, with an epigram:

> Her hair was auburn;
> her face, lively.
> She was the first (in our circle)
> to read Levi-Strauss.[1]

How many literary heroines are characterized by hair, face, and familiarity with structuralism? And once past the introductory comments on Lévi-Strauss — translations of *From Honey to Ashes*, of course — one next confronts a different order of disorder. Linear prose is constantly replaced by diagrams, charts and graphs; witty concretist poetry; arcane line drawings; obscure scientific equations — and that's just in the eleven-page Preface.

Language, too, mixes and merges. The text freely uses (and sometimes abuses in ruthless parody) Spanish, French, German, Italian, Egyptian, Chinese, Korean, Latin, Suazi, and Koutomi, as well as the complex jargon of science, the aphasic language of advancing age, and, continually, the precise and sometimes poignant language of bees. This book is *about* language, communication. After a seduction that takes place largely because of the mercurial nature of words, Rosenberg dichotomizes bee-speak and human discourse: "Spoken language . . . is not nearly as pragmatic as the language of the bees where so many shuffles to the left or the right sends the worker off following the directions of her scout to just the place where the flowers are." In contrast to the bees, Saul Hartig (alias Solomon the Egyptologist) employed more indirectly the provocative powers of the word — chiefly erotically-inspired hieroglyphs scrawled on a placemat in an Italian restaurant — in his campaign to de-flower the smart but naïve protagonist of the novel.

As the play on the words flower/de-flower and the metamorphosis of Saul Hartig into mysterious Solomon both suggest, *The Bee Book* not only redefines the limits of text and expands the boundaries of language, it also constantly breaks language down into its smallest parts and thereby creates an intricate structure of semantic homologies. Every name embodies a constellation of other names and meanings in an often arcane system of puns. Consider, for example, the main character, Habella Cire. Her first name, deriving from Medieval Spanish, suggests that Habella is often had. But her last name, "Cire," is all brightness, bright eye, a fabric made brilliant, appropriately, by an application of wax. (Back to bees again — we are always, in this novel, back to bees.) Habella's roommate, friend, and the editor of Habella's post-human (but not posthumous) memoirs, is Renata Schwenk: "Renata," reborn; "Schwenk," turning, or, in keeping with her function as metaphoric editor of the text, from German *schwenk*, a technical term for a cinemagraphic panning shot. Habella's lab partner, friend, and nonsexual lover (he is a

homosexual and thus, in the punning system of the book, a queen both like and unlike Habella), bears the curious name, "Matthias Harp" — or the wedding of science ("math" is the root) and music. And then there is Habella's husband, Fred Smith. Compared to the others, onomastically and otherwise, Fred is flat indeed.

As the barest summary of the novel's plot indicates, *The Bee Book*, for all its exoticism, is yet another modern tale of unsuccessful marriage. We might chart the action as follows: Girl meets boy; girl marries boy; girl grows sexually frustrated with boy (and, in fairness, the boy isn't too excited by this girl either); girl contemplates affair (a story we've read before); girl, instead, turns her bedroom into a hive; girl flies away. Literally. One day Habella is a housewife, metaphoric Queen Bee, mother of four offspring, and the next day she is gone, literal queen bee, presumably swarming in the treetops, photographs of which (taken from a bee's eye view) constitute the last "utterance" of the novel. Nor should we be surprised by this ending. In Matthias's Preface there are dark hints of Habella's disappearance or demise, including her last letter to Matthias which ends: "I offer you now these lucid words. I will taste a metaphysical passion. I can't live out the similes of the normal wife. Tomorrow, I fly to Africa." And she does. If *The Bee Book* teaches anything, it is that fiction is constrained only by the imagination of its writers and readers, not by restrictive notions of realism.

The line separating metaphor from reality is most elastic in Ann Rosenberg's postmodernist novel. Thus, when Renata earlier comes to visit her friend she is alarmed by Habella's increasing identification with the bees she once studied scientifically: "Habella, you're not a bee!" Renata protests. "No, Renata, I'm becoming a metaphor and that is worse." At the end of the novel, Habella moves from metaphor to metamorphosis — and presumably that is better. At the very least, it is less stifling. From the claustrophobic and ultimately unsatisfying marriage — where communication devolves into an exchange of sarcastic notes left on the fridge door — Habella flies into a lyrical expanse of cloud, space, open sky.

The success of that flight might at first seem in question. Habella's parting missive to her children and husband reads: "I have flown to mate with Apis Africanus." There is an ominous suggestion here of the bees humans refer to as "killer bees." Is this a sign of Habella's embracing of death? insanity? oblivion? I don't think so. Killer bees kill only higher mammals. Habella has prepared for her flight by feasting upon Royal Jelly (obtainable at your local health food store: a diet guaranteed to turn a lowly worker into a queen). She has imbibed nectar (etymologically, "overcoming death" — that is why the gods drank it). If her diet and thus her metamorphosis has been successful, if her flight is construed as literal not metamorphic, then perhaps Habella has indeed become the queen of Apis Africanus — no longer "had" but having.

Rosenberg can claim this optimistic if unrealistic conclusion because the structuralist poetic of the entire novel valorizes continuities between high and low mimetic fictional forms as well as between so-called higher and lower life forms. Like Lévi-Strauss, Rosenberg assumes that basic ideational structures, patterns of meaning, underlie all human societies and inhere in all human statements — from Hopi rituals to Hopkins poems. The crosscultural and crosslinguistic allusions throughout the text affirm continuous structures. But Rosenberg also implies that Lévi-Strauss's universalism is actually quite limited, is,

indeed, rife with "species-ism." Just as Lévi-Strauss documents the various customs and habits of *la pensée sauvage* (misleadingly translated into English as "the savage mind") in order to stress the basic commonality of all humans, so does Rosenberg elaborate upon the rituals of animals — particularly mating behaviour ("kinship") — in order to emphasize the basic commonality of all life forms. Bees are our most often asserted partners in this larger *pensée.* But Rosenberg finds continuities everywhere as in a scene where Habella attempts to seduce one of her husband's employees by recounting to him the various mating rituals of slugs, snails, and woodticks:

> "The Great Grey Slug is eight inches of hermaphroditic charm who insinuates himself through the landscape parting the grasses with a blunt nose, oozing himself along the ground in the slime that is the by-product, the rheumy extension, of self so that it is imposible to decide where this creature's definition lies, just as it is difficult to declare where the fish mucus becomes the water or where the water becomes the fish . . . "
>
> "Go on, go on," murmured the young man (fascinated).

The husband appears on the scene before the seduction is consummated, but the young assistant flees red-faced and panting into the night. Habella has a way with words.

Birds do it, bees do it, Great Grey slugs, snails, and even woodticks do it. "Kinship," in Lévi-Strauss's polite anthropological terms. "The circulation of women," in less circumspect, more androcentric terms. For Lévi-Strauss, this circulation of women becomes the "language" of human society, the phoneme upon which whole systems of rules, habits, customs, and myths can be elaborated. Again, Rosenberg extends the continuity to animals. What Lévi-Strauss limits to a universal anthropology is, in *The Bee Book*, biology. More accurately, it is bee-ology.

The transference from a man-based structure to a bee-based structure also occasions Rosenberg's most important ideological emendation of Lévi-Strauss. If bees become the basis for our structuring mythologies, females cannot be rendered so easily into commodities of cultural exchange. For, of course, it is the queen who provides continuity in the hive, the workers (female) are the queen's labourers. It is the drones (the male bees) who circulate, who flit and pose and vie for the queen's attentions. She selects only one drone as her mate. Immediately after the act, he dies. The metaphors (and structures) must change to accommodate the apiary.

The structuralist significance of bee society is also attested to by the misstructurings of the past. Bees were long viewed in human terms. Thus Renata quotes to Habella a representative passage from Shakespeare that celebrates, in a kind of Renaissance "sociobiology," the "rightness" of a productive society of male bees — a single King, busy workers, actively affirming the human *status quo.* Rosenberg, in contrast, does not simply anthropomorphize the hive. Quite the opposite transference occurs. Habella grows stronger the more she appreciates her bee-ing. Even at the conclusion, when she flies away, she has the strength to do so precisely because she has completed her identification with the queen. After all, seeing is bee-leaving.

Ultimately, *The Bee Book* is a *bildungsroman*, quintessentially a novel of education: how to become a better human being (the puns are inescapable). Each section of the novel is patterned after an apian analogue such as "Learning the Dances," or "The Drone," or "Becoming Queen." As she progresses from menarche to metaphor to metamorphosis, Habella grows more stately,

queenly. But for this evolution to work, she must increasingly surrender human definitions and assent to bee definitions, particularly of her sexuality. Kinship, sexuality, defines the structure of the novel. Habella's first period; the loss of virginity that felt "like a bee sting"; Habella's decision to marry not for love but for procreation, like a queen's mating, all mark the book's time. Reinforcing the counterstructures of human and apian sexuality in the novel is a brilliant pun, hidden within the text yet continually evoked by the underlying metaphors with which the book begins, develops, and ends. The scientific name for bees: order, *hymen-optera*, "membrane wing." The homologies established by that pun are the connecting link between Habella's sexual initiation and her final flight.

One should not, however, think of *The Bee Book* as reductionist. It neither subsumes humans to bees (a hierarchy not confirmed by the book) nor limits life's possibilities to queenly procreation. On the contrary, if there is a true hero-figure in the book it is the bent, haggard, seemingly sexless Miss Kelly, primary teacher in St. Paul's Catholic School, a "tireless worker," in apian terms, "who does not outlive her usefulness." Miss Kelly inspires her youthful charges with an unequalled love of learning and love of self. They grow taller in her presence, flourish under her nurturing affections. In one of the most delightful scenes in the novel (a comic transformation, perhaps, of the infamous moth ball dance in Margaret Atwood's *Lady Oracle*), Miss Kelly encourages Habella to dress in a Queen Bee costume to help illustrate Miss Kelly's lecture on the language of the bees. While the other children stroke her, Habella pushes eggs from a secret place in the abdomen of her costume. In contrast to the shame of sexuality imposed by her parents, here Miss Kelly (the spinster-character ridiculed in much traditional fiction) encourages this natural appreciation of sensuality. She becomes Habella's inspiration both as a scientist and as woman aware of her unique gifts. Similarly, Matthias, the homosexual, is the first man to love Habella and to appreciate her poetic insights. It is Matthias, too, who arranges for the publication of *The Bee Book*, the last and living word of his friend and nonsexual lover. It is also Matthias who delivers the novel's eloquent tribute to the workers who have "no sex life at all that we would recognize" but who might actually lead "more fully *sensual* and satisfactory lives" than "you or I." He concludes his speech on bees:

> "The sexless worker . . . is stroked and nuzzled a thousand times a day, her abdomen rubbed by a dozen workers seeking information and sustenance. She shines in the radiance of the sun as she searches with freedom and ingenuity for the nectar of a million flowers. I bid you do the same."

The Bee Book is an intricate and technically dazzling work. As much as Quebec writers such as Louky Bersianik, Nicole Brossard, Madeleine Gagnon, or Jovette Marchessault, Ann Rosenberg is helping to redefine the boundaries of experimental fiction. Yet Rosenberg's novel, just when it threatens to overpower with its erudition, yields to a tender story of Miss Kelly, an octogenarian now, doubled with arthritis, taking a train to Minnesota to rescue an aged sister from a nursing home. Or we have comical interludes such as the attempted seduction through stories of sexy slugs. Sometimes fuzzy and cute, *The Bee Book*'s satire yet packs a sting. Finally, it is a landmark novel. It is challenging, charming, outrageous, inventive — in short, a honey of a book.

NOTES

[1] Ann Rosenberg, *The Bee Book* (Toronto: Coach House Press, 1981), p. 7.

CATHY N. DAVIDSON

The work of Claude Lévi-Strauss, that giant of contemporary structuralist thought, is rooted in the studies of Franz Boas — the prolific pioneering student of the West Coast tribes. In turn Lévi-Strauss's *The Way of the Masks* has been widely read. These conjunctions may suggest a cultural climate in which semi-popular, lavishly illustrated studies of North-West Indian art and ceremony proliferate. A bubbling stream of books from Douglas & McIntyre certainly supports the demands of a multi-disciplinary, intellectual inquiry which, at the same time, has at its heart the need to restore dignity to the everyday and the primitive — that is to the first or originating cultures. Among current titles the most comprehensive is *The Legacy: Tradition and Innovation in Northwest Coast Indian Art* (Douglas & McIntyre, $15.95), a reprint of the catalogue of a 1980 exhibition at the British Columbia Provincial Museum. Although its photographs are frequently dulled and slightly blurred (in contrast to the crisp reproduction in *The Box of Daylight,* which is something of a companion volume), the essays clearly and simply differentiate the styles of the principal tribes. The book's strongest feature is its showing contemporary Indian art in the context of its tradition. Other works in this unofficial "series" of large-format books are focused on a particular artist, a particular resource, and a particular ceremony. Bill Holm continues his evocative explorations of West Coast art in *Smoky-Top: The Art and Times of Willie Seaweed* (Douglas & McIntyre, $29.95), a catalogue of the work of one of the most productive and celebrated of Kwakiutl carvers. The book constantly reminds us of the structuralist view that any human activity is human thinking. That thought, and therefore civilization and intelligence, is not necessarily written, is given convincing support by Holm's showing how carving and masks take their form from "convoluted and extremely detailed narrative tales" describing the ancestry of each social unit. Seaweed's masks are essential to the dramatization of these tales, to the definition of rank and privilege. Holm makes his own contribution to revealing the complex mythic world by evocatively setting Seaweed's work in the firelight and smoke and sounds of the dance ceremonies, as well as in the labyrinthine environment of sea and forest and naturally carved rock, and in the twentieth-century history of the West Coast tribes. Holm writes more than a catalogue; it is a loving biography of an impressive artist. In his meditation on the setting of Seaweed's art Holm shows the intricate relationship to land and sea in Kwakiutl technology. A still fuller understanding of the relationship lies in Hilary Stewart's study of Seaweed's primary raw material, *Cedar: Tree of Life to the Northwest Coast Indians* (Douglas & McIntyre, $24.95). Again, Indian work in cedar, most obviously the totem poles, but also the thousands of practical items which were made from cedar, is a substitute for the written documentation of the community; Stewart reads that material history with skilful perception. Her unwritten premise is that we comprehend any artefact better if we know how it is made. Thus, her book combines an encyclopedia of cedar, in chapters on the wood, bark, withers, and roots, from whistle to canoe, from towel to fish nets, with meticulous illustrations on how-to-do-it (Stewart has tried, herself, to make many of the things she describes). This book conveys a deep feeling for ecological connections, a recognition that the cedar is a culture and a world in itself, which must include, as Stewart's last chapter shows, the vital *spirit* of the cedar as well. So careful are Stewart's step-by-step instructions that the reader feels like a privileged insider. So too with Ulli Steltzer's photo essay *A Haida Potlatch* (Douglas & McIntyre, $16.95), a record of Robert Davidson's potlatch, November 6 and 7, 1981. Although the photographs are entirely in black and white, and often too dark to show details, the book reveals the stages in preparing and presenting a precious, and often misunderstood, ritual, and the funny human side of ceremonial seriousness. Comments by dozens of the participants increase our understanding of the photographs. Perhaps we are most grateful, here, for the recognition expressed by Dorothy Grant that "tradition . . . is a continuous process," that the potlatch has maintained its ancient roots, and yet can adapt to a school auditorium in Masset, a sign of a culture at once living and reviving. The most eloquently worded evidence of the tradition that is continuous process is the handsome *The Raven Steals the Light* (Douglas & McIntyre, $24.95). Two dedicated artists, Bill Reid and Robert Bringhurst, re-tell nine of the Haida tales of Raven, complemented by Reid's shadowy and haunting pencil drawings. These are, simply, the best versions of Indian tales I have read: they are colloquial yet poetic,, precise yet spilling outside their boundaries, accumulating and then blending into one another. The writers, like Raven, are intelligent yet irreverent. As is fitting in the oral tradition, each story

bubbles with a contemporary twist or context, so that the sundappled creek with which Raven falls in love is "in this century... driven underground by the clear-cut logging of her watershed." In such collisions, we recognize that "the purpose of myths... is not merely to relate experiences, but to lead to significant changes in the structure of things." Bringhurst and Reid share this passion in a truly extraordinary, liberating collection of entertainments.

L.R.

Enthusiasm for the short story in Canada has resulted in a recent burgeoning of anthologies and commentary. Among several collections are such regional and thematic enterprises as *Tales from the Canadian Rockies*, ed. Brian Patton (Hurtig, $19.95) and *More Saskatchewan Gold*, ed. Geoffrey Ursell (Coteau, $4.95). What "Gold" indicates is the enormous vitality of short story *writing* in Saskatchewan — there seem more writers per square mile, and more sheer *enthusiasm* for writing than in any other place in the country. In the 31 stories collected here are mostly "realistic" works, but at the heart is the tall-tale-telling impulse that perhaps explains where the enthusiasm (the *delight* in story) comes from. There is Ken Mitchell's jaunty engagement with exaggeration; and there is Anne Szumigalski's "A Dog Experiences Difficulties in his Search for Self-Knowledge," a proto-existentialist fable of devotion and understanding (with a hint of parody). "Rockies" is a different kind of book, one that gathers snippets of fiction, poetry, and documentary record, finding "story" in adventure and experience as well as in invention and plot: Birney's "David" is here, along with memoirs of mountain guides, grizzlies, backpacks, and cold swims. It's a book for those who love the outdoors. Fred Cogswell's *The Atlantic Anthology* (vol. 1, *Prose*; Ragweed, $12.95) is an excellent classroom selection of 27 writers from Haliburton and Basil King through MacPhail, McSween, MacLennan, and MacLeod to D. A. Richards and Ann Copeland. King's "The Ghost's Story" is a fascinating rediscovery; and amidst the more conventional tales of initiation and loss are the wonderworks of Susan Kerslake and Helen Porter. They need to be known more, and Atlantic writing needs to be more widely recognized across the country for the quality and variety it amply possesses.

Less conventional is *Shoes & Shit* (Aya, $16.00), ed. Geoff Hancock and Rikki Ducornet, an international collection which assembles stories and fragments all having to do with the two title motifs. "Processes," we are asked to imagine them. Also "symbiotic": "footsie" and "poopsie" even. There is whimsy here, some affection, some absurdity, and some dross. Atwood's "Liking Men" perhaps epitomizes the quality of mind and kind of tension that has led the editors on their march: a story about the desire to like men, it takes the narrator on an associational trek from innocent feet to threatening jackboots — it's the connection between love and fear that Atwood repeatedly finds words for, the balance between the sexes so precariously perched on a fulcrum of power. Atwood also appears (with "Polarities") in Rosemary Sullivan's excellent anthology *Stories by Canadian Women* (Oxford, $10.95), as do 28 other writers from Crawford, Wilson, Hébert, and Roy to Gloria Sawai, Joy Kogawa, Louise Maheux-Forcier, and Dionne Brand. The anthology is at once a tribute to forms of ethnic impact on Canadian prose in English and French, an affirmation of the continuous contribution of women to Canadian literature (it usefully reprints S. F. Harrison and S. J. Duncan), and a declaration of concerns female. It is about life and words, action and thought, words in action and the mind alive. One might quarrel with the choice here and there (the Wilson is weak, for one) and one might want other writers represented (Ann Copeland? Helen Porter? Susan Kerslake?). But this is good value.

Some of the finest of recent critical comments on English-Canadian short fiction are to be found in *Ranam* (no. 16, 1983), a review from Strasbourg. Papers from a symposium largely concerned with narrative strategy, the collection looks at Laurence, Hodgins, Munro, Gallant, Wiebe (Coral Ann Howells' article is of special interest), Lowry, Carr, and MacLeod. The primarily French and German critics together discover a surety of technique among Canadian writers: Canadian critics might profitably learn from them. The appearance of this issue — like that of the Canadian poetry issue of *Trends* (5, no. 10; Wilfion Books, 30 p.), the Paisley College of Technology Literary Magazine — is further tangible evidence of the new Canadian cultural presence abroad.

W.N.

Gale's *Contemporary Authors* vol. 12 ($80.00) includes a sketch on Marian Engel (a sketch amply supplemented by the special issue that *Room of One's Own* devoted to her in 1984); *Contemporary Literary Criticism* vol. 28 ($80.00) summarizes Waddington and Hood commentary; and the new *Contemporary Authors Autobiography* series vol. 1 ($70.00) includes a long and valuable entry on (and by) Josef Skvorecky. Oxford has reprinted in paper ($16.95) the useful second (1971) edition of J. E. Cirlot's *A Dictionary of Symbols*. And also from Oxford is the splendid *Concise Science Dictionary* ($24.95), an invaluable *clear* guidebook both for the science-minded and the technologically illiterate layman; every classroom should have one, and every reader of modern writing. *Contemporary Literary Criticism* vols. 27 and 29 (Gale, $80.00 and $82.00) excerpts criticism on R. G. Everson, Timothy Findley, W. P. Kinsella, and Jane Rule, and on Clark Blaise, Michael Ondaatje, Anne Hébert, and Michel Tremblay. *Children's Literature Review* vol. 7 (Gale, $70.00) opens with a survey by Sheila Egoff called "The Same, Only Different: Canadian Children's Literature in a North American Context." Among other recent reference works are Linda Hoad's *Literary Manuscripts at the National Library of Canada* (a short checklist); Gernot U. Gabel's valuable *Canadian Literature: An Index to Theses Accepted by Canadian Universities 1925-1980* (Edition Gemini, DM 36), which (for all its virtues, and it does appear to have been very thorough) nonetheless misses at least Dorothy Livesay's thesis and my own; and John Robert Colombo's well-packed and densely illustrated *Canadian Literary Landmarks* (Hounslow, $35.00; pa. $19.95). Colombo's book is a tourist's glimpse of literary associations — there's a picture of Birney's father's ranch-house in the hills above Erickson, for example, and a quotation from a Wilson story reflecting on the puzzle of Louis Hémon in Chapleau. There are a number of substantive entries, and yet every reader will want *more*. *I* should like to have seen more *specific* B.C. references (perhaps the Joe Fortes monument for Wilson's *Innocent Traveller*); too often the comments flag in generalizations ("A good many writers ... were associated ... to name a handful"). Or in misleading statements (to call "Lulu Island" — a suburb about the area of Vancouver city — "a small island" in the Fraser estuary "that Dorothy Livesay once visited" in order to write *Call My People Home*, is to distort reality a little). But this is an enthusiast's book, full of affection. And it's now possible for the General Reader to walk every inch of this country, it seems, book in hand, finding other books — and writers everywhere — springing to mind.

W.N.

LAST PAGE

Random Notes: (1) When you get to be a famous writer, you can republish your early works, or you die and somebody collects you. Thomas Pynchon's *Slow Learner* (Little, Brown, $18.95) is a book of the first kind, bringing together five early stories; the late Elizabeth Bishop's *The Collected Prose* (Farrar, Strauss, Giroux, n.p.) is of the second sort: Robert Giroux's affectionate anthology of nine essays and eight stories, some edited from manuscript and all marked by Bishop's exacting search for effective image and affective cadence. Pynchon professes embarrassment at his early craftsmanship; devotees may nonetheless find signs here of his later metatextual intellect. Few general readers will find engaging narratives, however — it is an effortful read. Bishop's book, by contrast, is an absorbing adventure in image and memory — memory mostly of Brazil, where Bishop lived, and of the quality of person she met there; and of her Nova Scotia childhood — in the essay "Primer Class" and the extraordinarily moving story "In The Village," which frame the other works. One delightful discovery in between is the memoir of her experience as a marker for a suspect correspondence school of writing. But it is to the Maritime pieces one returns: to the terrifying constant presence of her mother's illness, to the wit and the wordplay that throw this reality into relief, and to the prize and wound of independence the poet calls love.

(2) Next books are sometimes no better than first books. Mark Helprin's *Winter's Tale* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovitch/Academic Press, $19.95) starts off as a marvel, an adventure in the violent imagination of New York: when a master mechanic refuses violence and finds he must flee from the pursuers who turn on him, his horse begins to fly and takes him off to winter and the dreamed-of Eden of the future. But the novel wears itself soon into cops-and-robbers verbosity: the American dream touched by John Wayne, Pegasus, and Han Solo. Graham Jackson's *The Decline of*

Western Hill (University of Queensland, $14.95: pa. $7.95) sets its story in an Australian town the author has relied on before; if there is such a thing as a suburban style, this is it. Shiva Naipaul's *A Hot Country* (Collins, $19.95) is overwritten in another way — burdening a story by trying to elongate it into a novel, Naipaul finds violence in the political life of an invented South American country called Cuyama, and despairs of the emptiness he finds in the political attitudes of ordinary people. They "had been duped," he writes, "out of the knowledge of their condition. That, in the end, was the true oppression." People want, he says, "a new, uncontaminated world of their own making," but in their hearts they lack both the power and the desire to create, so accept slogans instead, to hide their emptiness most of all from themselves.

(3) When you reach 25, you celebrate, and when you reach 3, you stop. There have been a number of quarter-century celebrations recently, those of *Prism international* and *Canadian Literature* among them. In Australia, *Quadrant*, too, is celebrating survival, with a 500-plus page anthology of essays, stories, and poems from the previous two-and-a-half decades called, not provocatively, *Quadrant Twenty-Five Years* (University of Queensland, $22.50). Contributors range from the film director Bruce Beresford to performer Barry Humphries to poets David Malouf and Judith Rodriguez. Surprisingly, the essays in retrospect seem conservative and the stories conventional; but an eye for poetry has over the years proved remarkably fine. And the anthology as a whole is an instructive guide to some of the literary and social interconnections in Australia in our time. Maurice Gee's *Sole Survivor* (Faber & Faber, £7.95, $25.95) is volume three in the trilogy that began with Gee's magnificent *Plumb*. This work follows the Plumb family's futures into a third generation, into the life of Raymond Sole and some 1960's and 70's experiments with drugs, sexual variations, indifferent independence, and political ambition. It's cast as a journalist's memoirs: a reluctant removal of masks that previous characters and novels have put on, and an admission of limits to the family's Protestant heritage. If the novel lacks both *Plumb*'s psychological force and *Meg*'s verbal high intensity, it's an estimable literary conclusion nevertheless, full of mordant discoveries about the observer's involvement in the lives he claims only to see.

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W.H.N.

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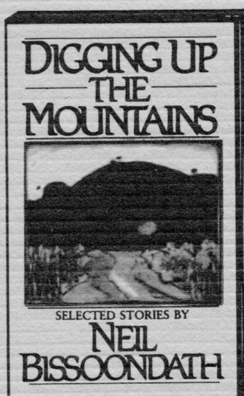

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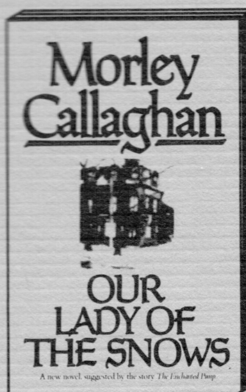

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