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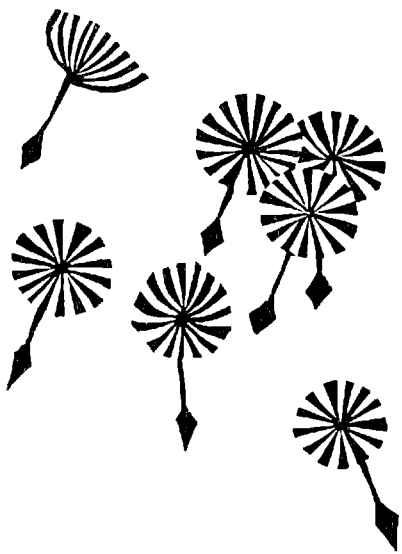

THE TIMES BETWEEN

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EDITOR: W. H. New
ASSOCIATE EDITORS:
H. J. Rosengarten
L. R. Ricou
BUSINESS MANAGER
Beverly Westbrook

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editorial

OFF THE POST

A FRIENDLY EDITOR recently remarked on the annoying prevalence of the slash/solidus/virgule in my writing. Why not, I thought? And then, later, why? One answer, one self-justification, lies in an appeal to the *times*. The post-modern climate is either/or, and both at the same time. Many of us are on this knife-edge in our criticism and our writing, between a nostalgia for the order and sense of the New Criticism in which we were trained, and the lure of creative word-playing in semiotic/deconstructionist methods. We want to be pluralistic, to accept coexisting alternatives, to acknowledge in our *syntax* that we too could be (would like to be thought of as) poets. Syntax reflects politics; pullulating slashes may mean we are trying to learn to live with indecisiveness, or we are retreating from political activity to an apologia for our own confusion. I, for one, am enough caught in the post-modern psychology that I want to argue *for* the solidus, which used to be a long f, and was good currency under Constantine. To abandon it would leave the artist in his too visible maleness: I would rather honour the poet in the jouissance of his/her solecisms.

Beleaguered by the tyranny of exact definition, scholars have run with enthusiasm to the term post-modern. Having resisted for centuries the imprecision of such terms as romanticism and realism, literary critics understandably embrace a term which inherently, absurdly claims to be meaningless. This journal recently published an essay which spoke of "old," "new," and "traditional" post-modernism. In architecture post-modern seems to describe any building with circles cut out of its façade: the streetscape of zeros. In photography, by contrast, post-modernism highlights the use of the vernacular of the snapshot. Jean-François Lyotard defines postmodern (the hyphen disappears) "as incredulity toward metanarratives." The perplexing verbal loop of that definition reminds us how post-modernism has come to describe any element of the self-reflexive anywhere.

Charles Neuman is particularly effective at heading us off at the tautological impasse: "As opposed to the Modernist effect of shocking an audience, the Post-Modernist often seems content to infuriate it by letting everybody off the hook." Whether you're a pragmatist or a theorist, Neuman's *The Post-Modern Aura: The Act of Fiction in an Age of Inflation* (Northwestern University Press) is a

provocative essay, both for its aphoristic energy, and its broadening sense of the social, cultural, political, and especially economic contexts into which author and critic can fit. The book gives us time to think about what we don't often take time to think about — about our own critical biases and how they are fired by TV's "25,000 volts of phosphorescent light per second," or dulled by "special-occasion packaging" of books.

Reading Neuman makes it understandable that Charles Russell can't quite decide, in his *Poets, Prophets, and Revolutionaries: The Literary Avant-Garde from Rimbaud Through Postmodernism* (Oxford University Press), whether the post-modern is *avant-garde* or not. In Russell's more sober and more scrupulously historical assessment, the

> ludic spirit . . . is as double-edged as any aspect of postmodern creation. For some writers, it signals a creative freedom that allows writers to demystify society's codes of meaning and value in order to rip free for their personal use the images and linguistic styles out of which new creations will be made. For others, there is something demonic and restrictive about the forced constraints of game. It suggests that art can be no more than self-reflexive entertainment, and that the anarchic spirit manifest in this belief that the individual can truly achieve a state of creative independence may, in spite of its deconstructive sophistication, belie the degree of our shaping by social codes.

Neuman and Russell are both sceptics about post-modernism. Their scepticism, and the contrasting ludic spirit of improvisation which they both identify with post-modernism, double-edges me toward Canadian literature amidst the technologies of infinite replication. Are we photocopying our way back to a new unswervingly referential Realism? Or is it that in the post-industrial electronic age we can think about form and language only when forms and languages are parodied, when art adopts the superficiality of TV? "Silent stoic forbearance," according to Neuman, "tends to crumble under Post-modern levity"; but in the culture of Mrs. Moodie and Mrs. Bentley can this be a problem, as Neuman seems to conceive it? I wonder if one reason why *The Sacrifice*, *Under the Ribs of Death*, *The Betrayal*, or *Obasan* (fine as each is) seem like warm-ups for the great immigrant/ethnic novel is that they have almost no sense of humour, no sense of their own absurdity? Could Ralph Fasold's examination of *diglossia* — where "two varieties of a language exist side by side throughout the community, with each having a definite role to play" — in *The Sociolinguistics of Society* (Basil Blackwell) explain this limitation? Could Fasold's enquiry into dialects, official languages, *diglossia*, and multilingualism frame an understanding of the way Canada words itself? In post-modernism's climate of intense self-consciousness about language, such questions play on/with our minds.

On the subject of ways of knowing in the face of inadequate linguistic means of expression, Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Uni-

versity of Minnesota Press) has crucial connection to Canada: it is a translation of the French philosopher's report to the Conseil des Universités of the government of Quebec. This book is filled with the elliptical jargon which makes a reader want to take a sabbatical to learn how to read it. Within its density lies an important questioning of *scientific* narrative; Lyotard contemplates the technology of knowledge as product, and its implications for social structures and educational institutions: the challenge of the book's difficult argument seems particularly worth meeting in a nation of telephone-talkers, in a country which, at least according to Robert Kroetsch, missed out on modernism.

The ludic spirit let loose in our presbyterian and jansenist codes has the same appeal that has given post-modernism its strong hold in recent critical discourse. Post-modernism is a logical contradiction: there can be nothing *post*-to-modernism. We are drawn to a term whose meaning does not, as usual, dissolve over time, but which begins without a meaning. Its implicit absence is its appeal. The play of the virgule contains/releases difference and similarity and compounding in the same word/sign. It is making the reading of Canadian literature/criticism a much more exciting place to be. I'm convinced. I'm not so sure.

L.R.

AUTUMN SONG

Geraldine Rubia

when all the world was green and blue
and you were young and clever
you wisely waited for the who
would be your all forever

the dandelion went to seed
the sun kept on blaspheming
bereft you fed the lesser need
said you had just been dreaming

then after all who blazed in sight
so young and wise and clever
and now you lie here in the night
more alone than ever

OUTCAST NO LONGER

B. W. A. Sleigh's "The Outcast Prophet"

Eva Seidner

SET IN THE WILDS of Canada and America, and densely populated by army officers, bandits, escaped slaves, plucky damsels, Yankee adventurers, *coureurs de bois*, howling banshees, demonic strangers and roving tribes of savages, both noble and otherwise, Arthur Sleigh's *The Outcast Prophet* (1847) belongs to that highly eventful mode of popular fiction known as the Romance of the Frontier. And, like the dime novel, costume melodrama, and the other genres of popular fiction, it can reveal to modern readers a good deal about the attitudes and concerns that have shaped our cultural history.

Burrows Willcocks Arthur Sleigh was born in Lower Canada in 1821. In 1846, having bought a lieutenancy in the 77th Foot Regiment of the British army, he was sent back to British North America. While stationed there, first in Halifax and several months later in Quebec, he wrote *The Outcast Prophet*, which was published in London the following year. By 1848 Sleigh had sold his commission and returned to England, where he purchased from an absentee landlord 100,000 acres in Prince Edward Island. In 1850 he took up residence on the island, and in Halifax, whose refinements he much preferred to the conditions in his own townships: he was a well-known figure in Prince Edward Island, becoming eventually a Justice of the Peace and a Lieutenant-Colonel in a local militia unit. His autobiographical account of the land and people he had come to know so well, *Pine Forests and Hacmatack Clearings; or, Travel, Life and Adventure in the British North American Provinces*, was published in London in 1853. After suffering numerous business failures and eventually bankruptcy, he died in Chelsea, England in 1869.[1]

The settings of *The Outcast Prophet* alternate between "garrisons" which provide welcome but precarious shelter and wildernesses which recall those of Richardson's *Wacousta* in their threatening, haunted atmosphere. Sleigh's highly evocative narrative may serve as a paradigm of Canadian romance, displaying many of the themes, images, and attitudes that have come to characterize our literary tradition. Because copies of the book are, unfortunately, scarce, I offer as a preface to my discussion a detailed synopsis of the plot.[2]

The action begins in the winter of 1774 at Fort Ontario, an outpost of Empire "opposite the Thousand Isles . . . on the North Shore of the Lake" bearing that name. This land of "Paradisaical splendour" Sleigh calls "the Far West."[3] Here, beneath a portrait of George III, Major Harding the fort commander, his "kind and affectionate" wife, his "dignified" dark-haired daughter Viola, and his light-hearted, fair-haired niece Honour are engaged in planning a Christmas party. Into the peaceful domestic scene burst the Major's "wild son" Reginald, and his inseparable Yankee companion Job Wisp, newly returned from adventures in the wilds. Reginald, "brave, cool and determined," is a worthy scion of the British race of Empire builders. But to his steadiness of character is added that quality of reckless imagination, that "unconquerable spirit of romance" which distinguishes the Waverley heroes and their numerous progeny. The quality is reinforced by his association with the devoted but undisciplined Wisp, his mentor and Good Companion in the forests. Born in New England, Wisp typifies the white man who embraces the wilderness as a vocation, the adventurer who hears an irresistible urgency and appeal in the call of the wild:

> [Such] characters . . . are men of daring and fearless dispositions, who, in satisfying the unconquerable desire of visiting the scenes of the West, cast away the timidity of civilized life, and become in spirit and soul, as the Indian, ready and expecting adventures of an arduous and perilous nature.

The two frontiersmen soon forsake the warmth of the fort when they learn that a female servant is missing and feared abducted by Indians. Seeking her in a wilderness cabin where they hope she has merely sought refuge from a sudden snowstorm, they are themselves attacked, but manage to rout their savage assailants. As they are completing the task of scalping the fallen Indians (a custom pronounced by Wisp to be "good . . . it does no harm to the dead, and conveys a good moral to the living," the Major appears. He has been alerted to their danger, he claims, by the howl of the Harding banshee. It has for generations forewarned of deaths in the family, and was last heard by the Major when his older son was murdered by Indians. All return (but without the servant, who is not mentioned again) to the safety of the fort.

Some time later, the garrison welcomes Ranoka, who, like Wisp, is a white convert to savagism. He is "a mixture of the Indian and the gentleman" whose "conversation and manner [identify] one, who was not originally destined by education to the wild life he led." Ranoka carries a letter announcing the arrival of Bishop Desjardins and his beautiful niece Amie, who soon arrive. The same evening Amie and Reginald, apparently well-matched in the alacrity with which they act on their emotions, declare their love and determination to be always together. Meanwhile Viola harbours a secret and troubling affection for Ranoka. Christmas is celebrated with feasting, dancing, and singing.

BUT THE COMFORTABLE peace of the garrison community is again disrupted the following day, when they organize a shooting party and venture once more into the woods. During the night they are attacked by a band of Algonquins who abduct Amie. Though Ranoka and Reginald are able to find her by tracking the Indians to their camp, the two men are overpowered in the ensuing skirmish. Amie shows herself to be Reginald's equal in valour by killing an Indian who is about to murder her lover. But it is not until the opportune appearance of Job Wisp that the whites' survival is assured. The Indians are routed (though, perhaps in deference to the lady's presence, not scalped) and the party returns to the relative safety of the fort.

With their third departure from its confines, they embark on a two-year journey into the heart of darkness which is the American wilderness. In compliance with the Major's instructions, Reginald, Wisp, and Ranoka set out to conduct Viola, Amie, and Bishop Desjardins safely to Virginia, where they will finally settle. As the expedition approaches the Bloody Grounds of Ohio, a mysterious stranger confronts the group and identifies himself in messianic tones as the Outcast Prophet:

> I am the Great Spirit, the Outcast Prophet. . . . Names belong only to those who have dealings with the things of this world, my doings are with those above. All know me — the Indian — the wild beasts — the birds of the air — all — all alike dread my form, for they know I am the true Prophet. The storms and lightnings — the wind, and rain — rage at my bidding.

But Ranoka's eye immediately penetrates the outlandish disguise of the imposter, whom he recognizes as "one . . . nearly connected to [him] by blood." In private conversation the Prophet confesses to Ranoka that his "magic" is mere quackery, and he himself a "sham." (A curious touch is his use of ventriloquism as a means of duping his followers. This establishes an unexpected affinity between the Prophet and Brockden Brown's Carwin, surely the first North American in fiction to attempt seduction with the aid of biloquism.)

The Prophet then explains the reasons for his outcast state. Years ago his father, who is "still living somewhere in Canada," humiliated and rejected the youth's Indian wife, forever driving his proud son from the "trammels" of civilization. The death of one Rogers completed his estrangement from white society, and even from his fellow outsider, Ranoka, for although his kinsman had killed Rogers in self-defence, Ranoka thought him guilty of murder. The butchery by the Winnebagos of the outcast's beloved wife completed the chain of events which transformed him into the vagabond Prophet, obsessed with thoughts of "sweet revenge." His restlessness is sharpened continually by a recurring nightmare in which his wife rises up before him, her white garments stained with "purple gore."

Moved by his narrative, Ranoka forgives the Prophet and promises to keep his identity secret. The two are reconciled and the Prophet offers to help the group pass safely through the Bloody Grounds. But such gestures of reconciliation, indicative of harmony and order, will not appear again until the final chapters of the romance. The travellers' unsuspecting descent into the chaos and violence which will dominate their journey begins the following day, with Reginald's injury during a buffalo hunt, and another hunter's death, at the hands of an Indian, during the night.

CHANGES IN THE FORTUNES and identities of those principal characters who have not yet become outsiders are presaged in their acquisition of Indian names, bestowed upon them by a band of friendly Shawnees. There is an especially disturbing hint in Viola's new name, Drooping Lily, whose prophetic quality will be confirmed by her premature death. But seasoned readers of romance will by this time have already guessed the fate of the serious, dark-haired girl who is hopelessly in love with an outsider. She *must* die, for, like Cooper's Cora Munro, she cannot be accommodated by the inevitable marital resolutions of the romance ending.

The party is soon engulfed in no less than three Indian wars, each bloodier than the last. Ranoka, though saved once by the Prophet, is eventually captured by the Tuscaroras, who announce their intention to torture him to death. At this point, Sleigh splits his plot into two streams of narrative, one dealing with the adventures of Reginald (accompanied, as always, by Wisp) and the other with those of the Prophet. This strategy necessitates much rapid shifting of focus and geography, and a heavy reliance on such constructions as "meanwhile, in another part of the country," or "unbeknownst to the Prophet, Reginald. . . ." In the interest of clarity, the two strands will here be summarized separately, although they are interwoven in Sleigh's text.

As they lead their group through the wilderness in search of the captured Ranoka, Reginald and Wisp encounter a troop of American soldiers. The commander, informing the party that the United States and Britain are at war, attempts to arrest them. Amie, Viola, and Desjardins are taken prisoner, but Reginald and Wisp escape. The two join a group of fugitive slaves on a raft and begin to amass a "royalist" army, but all are soon captured and jailed by the Americans. Hearing while in prison that Ranoka has died, the bereaved Reginald faints.

He awakens from his swoon, the romance equivalent of the death that must precede rebirth, into his new identity as an outlaw. With Wisp and the fugitive blacks he escapes to the unwholesome recesses of Dismal Swamp, a Gothic covert

"dismal by name, dismal by nature, and dismal by every past recollection of lawless aggression and midnight murder."[4] There, his transformation complete, Reginald "throw[s] aside the garb of civilization" and assumes his command as "an outlawed chief": "There was [now] stamped upon his countenance, a half melancholy recklessness, which, coupled to the piercing flashes of his eyes, the air of dignity with which he sat, his dress, and the fearsome fellows around, contributed to invest his bearing with wild and daring recklessness."

As "Captain-General," Reginald successfully leads his force of one hundred and eighty fugitives against the Americans, who are attempting to supply "Northern rebels" with guns at Baltimore. A captured officer informs the royalist "General" that Amie and Viola are alive, still the prisoners of the Americans who arrested them. Elated, Reginald plans the girls' rescue.

TWO YEARS HAVE PASSED since the capture of Ranoka and the Prophet's departure from the group of beleaguered Canadians. Like them, the Prophet experiences during that time many hardships and adventures. When his kinsman is abducted, the outcast returns (somewhat surprisingly, considering the bond that has been re-established between the two men) to his tribe and half-breed children at Prairie du Chien. For eighteen months, supposedly guided by the Great Spirit, he leads the Sacs in a war of revenge against the Winnebagos. (His motive, however, is purely personal; the reader recalls that it is the Winnebagos who killed his wife.) One night he is waylaid by a mercenary named Moses Amen, who informs him that a reward is offered for the Prophet's safe return to Canada in order to claim his inheritance. The revelation of his true identity could have come only from Ranoka, for no one else has known the secret of the Prophet's birth and disguise. Confronted with this indisputable proof of his father's death (for Ranoka swore to maintain silence until that event), the Prophet admits that he is none other than Henry Harding, the oldest son and lost heir of the Major at Fort Ontario, and thus the brother of Viola and Reginald. Immediately, he gathers up his children and bids farewell to the tribe that has for twelve years sheltered him and conducted wars at his bidding. His transformation from outcast back to gentleman is as complete as it is abrupt:

> On a sudden he found he was not a detested outcast; but that his memory was yet cherished, and held dear.... When kind words were used, to recal [*sic*] the tortured outcast to his home, the heart of the Prophet relented; the cold bar of passion that had restrained his noble impulses for twelve long years, and had caused the ill-used youth to become a human butcher, now burst asunder, carrying away the resentment which had so long triumphantly reigned within his breast, for he now felt a softening heart, the still and gentle upbraidings of a conscience.

Having set out to rejoin Reginald and his associates, Henry fortuitously meets in the vast wilderness Job Wisp, who conducts him to their camp. The coincidence is the device which enables Sleigh to once again unite his two narrative lines in the reunion of the Canadian brothers, Reginald and Henry Harding. A successful rescue mission effects a further reunion with Amie, Viola, and the Bishop (who dies, however, shortly afterward), and all return "as a family" to Canada. There, at the Harding "château" near Montreal, Reginald and Amie marry, Viola pines away for the love of her fallen hero Ranoka, Job Wisp takes a wife, raises a family and becomes a Member of Parliament, and even the emancipated blacks take up residence in the various outbuildings, "as happy," Sleigh glowingly assures us, "as any nigger can be!"

If the all-too-calculated resolution which Sleigh provides to *The Outcast Prophet* does not seem to justify the foregoing lengthy recitation of the plot, I hope that the following remarks will reward the reader's patience. For, though flawed and difficult to unravel,[5] Sleigh's opus is in many ways a microcosm of Canadian romance, treating three major groups of materials central to Canadian fiction — indigenous settings, aboriginal peoples, and the theme of the outcast — in ways that are broadly representative of our entire tradition.

Before attempting to differentiate between Sleigh's attitudes to Canadian and American settings, it is helpful to consider his approach to the North American continent in general. For him it clearly functions as the "enchanted ground" of romance, a place in which the social and moral codes whereby civilized Europeans govern and protect themselves have negligible authority. In his catalogues of the various components that made up the society of the North American wilderness in the eighteenth century (emigrants, "savages," hunters, soldiers, etc.), Sleigh repeatedly stresses what for him is the central, disturbing reality of life: "the face of affairs was unsettled [with each man] eagerly grasping" whatever he could get.

Sleigh depicts only two spots on the whole vast continent which offer the safety of a familiar, rational culture: Fort Ontario, the setting of the first two episodes of the romance, and Virginia, the goal of his young protagonists' journey. Both represent to the author recreations of England. The fort is presided over by Major Harding, that staunch, uncompromising representative of King George, whose portrait hangs over the Major's "throne." And Virginia, during Sleigh's lifetime, was the place which Mark Twain would ridicule for its wealthy planters' efforts to emulate the manners and sensibilities of Scott's idealized — and therefore counterfeit — British aristocrats. Even in the Virginia of 1775, Sleigh avows, "at the time of which we write, all the grandeur of the old English establishments

was maintained." Except for these two oases, then, the continent is "unsettled." It is, in fact, in turmoil; murderous savages infest the backwoods of Canada, and traitorous rebels wage their bloody War of Independence in America.

Close examination of the patterns informing the two opening episodes, which centre on Fort Ontario, reveals the "garrison mentality" and fear of the forest which pervade nineteenth- and much of twentieth-century Canadian fiction. Within the fort reign the rituals and institutions of British Christian society: the family, the Church, the army. As the story begins, Harding's wife, daughter, and niece are organizing a Christmas party which involves feasting, dancing, and singing — all activities connotative of prosperity, order, and harmony between the sexes; the harmony will soon be exemplified by the budding love of Amie and Reginald. Even Ranoka, the solitary wanderer of the woods, will be persuaded in these surroundings to sing a sentimental ballad of love.

But on this day, presumably December twenty-fifth, Grace, a female servant whose name connotes the event which Christmas celebrates, becomes the victim of savages, the personifications of the wilderness. Reginald and Wisp leave the security of the fort in search of her, thus initiating an adventure which will take a closed, circular shape. They enter the forest; they are attacked in a wilderness cabin, a product of civilization suggesting a miniature garrison but lacking, in the absence of fortifications and armed soldiers, its safety; in the temporary peace which follows their victory over the Indians, they return to Fort Ontario. On the following day a similarly circular route is traced. The hunting party leaves the fort and enters the forest; Amie is abducted, forcing the others even more deeply into the wilds; they penetrate the heart of alien territory, the Algonquin camp; narrowly escaping with their lives, they return to Fort Ontario. Each circular episode ends with a reaffirmation of the stability and order which the garrison symbolizes and which the British intend to bring to all the Canadas.

Their third emergence from the fort, however, takes the protagonists into America. This land, epitomized by the Bloody Grounds through which it must be entered, is doubly wild. Most of its territory is uncivilized, but even those parts where the white man's law prevails have risen up in rebellion against the Empire. The structure of Sleigh's plot reflects the dissolution which America represents, fracturing into separate accounts of the hardships experienced by individual characters. The initial reconciliation of the Prophet and Ranoka produced a group which seemed capable of offering formidable resistance to Indian attack, uniting the skill and bravery of the four experienced woodsmen: Reginald, Wisp, Ranoka, and the Prophet. In addition, the latter two possess the admiration and friendship of a number of Indian tribes who might have provided reinforcements. But their ranks are quickly dispersed. First Ranoka is captured, an event which precipitates the Prophet's departure. Then the women and the Bishop are arrested, leaving Reginald and Wisp to survive as best they can among fugitive slaves

aboard a raft. (Whereas the Indians are portrayed by Sleigh as "men of mighty stature," bloodthirsty and terrible, the "niggers" he clearly considers contemptible and even comical.) Inevitably, the vulnerable community is captured and imprisoned, causing Reginald to plummet to the spiritual bottom of his romance descent, his swoon. He, Wisp, and the blacks then reside for a time in the Gothic purgatory of Dismal Swamp, where Reginald gives rein to his Other, renegade self, the self that will be rejected when he returns to his "real," civilized life as an English aristocrat resident in a Canadian château.

WITH THE RETURN to Canada as a single "family" of all the surviving heroes and heroines, the romance structure once again comes full circle, repeating on a larger scale the shape of the two opening episodes. It is noteworthy that only Honour (again, the name is indicative of British Christian virtues), who has not even taken part in the arduous trek, finally settles in Virginia. She marries Piggot, an honourable (albeit American) officer whom the travelling protagonists have rescued and adopted in order, it seems to the reader, to ensure that he lives to fill the role of her husband. The darkest and most violent episodes in Sleigh's romance occur in America, and it is ultimately Canada which he affirms.

It is, perhaps, this affirmation on the author's part which amounts for the transitory nature of the male protagonists' conversion, despite their acquired Indian names, to the status of outlaws. The Prophet's eager return, already cited, to the lands of his inheritance resembles the breaking of a magic spell, the awakening from an evil nightmare. The murdered Ranoka, revealed to be the bastard son of the Prophet's uncle, can, of course, never return; his illegitimate birth carries with it permanent exclusion. He dies an outsider, the Shadowy and discarded Other Self of the reinstated Henry Harding. The latter's alacrity is also displayed by his brother, Reginald, who unhesitatingly resigns as an outlaw chieftain and becomes a moneyed gentleman and doting husband. Even Job Wisp is effortlessly transformed into a figure of respectability, the patriarch of a large family and an influential Member of Parliament.

Any suggestion of egalitarianism which Wisp's rise to authority might suggest is cancelled by the nature of the domicile in which he and the others finally take up residence. Though situated in Montreal, the Harding château is nevertheless a castle, the structure built to house aristocrats. The word castle itself denotes a hold, a keep, a place where the *status quo* is preserved. In thus optimistically affirming the supremacy of law and order in Canada, Sleigh is certainly unaware of the ironic circumstances in which he complacently leaves his "happy niggers:

occupying outbuildings set apart from the mansion of a white "aristocrat" — just as they must have done in America before escaping to "freedom."

As the land of their forebears has impressed itself on the imaginations of Sleigh's Anglo-Canadian protagonists, so the climate and terrain of their native habitats have affected Canada's aboriginal peoples. The author explicitly contrasts the influence of their respective landscapes on Canada's "Esquimaux" and Indians. "Locked within their icy boundaries," the Esquimaux can entertain only "contracted . . . ideas" and ambitions. But the "luxuriant country" and "unrivaled clime" in which the Indians dwell awaken in them "noble emotions and ambitious projects":

> [The Esquimaux] are a people inferior in every respect, to the European [a people] of whom it may be truly said, they have done neither good for God nor man. . . . [The Indians] are men of gigantic minds, noble and lofty ideas, and distinguished for many attributes that adorn the cultivated and classical European.

Although Sleigh usually portrays Indians as the extensions and embodiments of a nature actively hostile to whites, he also displays toward them an ambivalence similar to that which Northey detects in *Wacousta*.[6] In some instances, nature's gentlemen are far nobler than civilization's. For example, the Shawnees acknowledge their respect for the courage and skill of Ranoka by conferring upon him the status of honorary chief. Their gracious reception and bestowing of complimentary names on Viola, Amie, and Reginald are equally courteous. There is even a certain innocence in the ease with which the Sacs and Foxes are deceived by the Prophet, who boasts to Ranoka that he maintains his authority over them by ventroliquistic "delusions heightened by two or three flashes of lightning accompanied by severe thunder storms." The credulity of Sleigh's Indians reminds the modern reader of the childlike citizens of Twain's Camelot, stupefied by the eclipse which the Connecticut Yankee "creates."

Although the Prophet's magic is as bogus as the Hardings' banshee (or as the spirits in the playful ghost stories of Haliburton's *Old Judge*) there *is* an authentic legacy of Indian superstition and folklore in Canadian fiction. It is epitomized by such unearthly creatures as the metamorphic wabeno and windigo, and documented by, among others, Honoré Beaugrand in *La chasse-galérie* (1900) and William Hume Blake in *Brown Waters* (1915). It is a legacy which persists in the haunted landscapes of Raddall, Atwood, and Joyce Marshall, in Wayland Drew's *The Wabeno Feast* (1973), and in Howard O'Hagan's *Tay John* (1939).

THE SYLVAN GENTILITY often displayed by the Indians in *The Outcast Prophet* is antithetical to the extreme and even unnatural discipline meted out by Major Harding at Fort Ontario. After twelve years, the Prophet

still vividly remembers how his father "struck, with clenched fists, the face of an adored wife! Ah! and also spat — spat there — and with tiger grasp, tore the uniform [Henry Harding] then wore." A further example of unnatural behaviour among whites is provided by Fort Ontario's Captain Murray, who after the Major's death anonymously offers rewards for the Prophet's scalp, and who plots to marry into the Harding fortune. Murray's duplicity and cowardice are unparallelled among Sleigh's "savages," as is the Major's unfeeling adherence to the "letter of the law."

But in Canadian romances, white men who reject the law, however valid their objections to it, have no alternative other than strangerhood. And strangerhood inspires dread. Outlaws crowd the pages of Sleigh's narrative: Ranoka, the Prophet, Reginald, Wisp, Moses Amen, the fugitive slaves, and all the nameless inhabitants of Dismal Swamp. But the author regards their outcast state with the same uneasy ambivalence inspired in him by nature and her agents, the Indians. Absolute freedom — especially the freedom to obey the dictates of one's individual conscience — terrifies the garrison mentality, suggesting not so much emancipation as "savagism," the reversion to irrational, bestial impulses.

Outsiders in American romance usually conform to one of two types: Cooper's Natty Bumppo, in whom are combined the "gifts" of Indian and white society; or Neal's two satanic Logans, in whose lives are blended "brutality, sensuality, colossal hatred, delirium, rape, insanity, murder"[7] — and incest. But no corresponding pair of opposites exists in Canadian romance, whose practitioners seem obsessed by the threat of the outlaw's slide into violence and baseness. Our fictional outcasts are less often liberated individualists than they are criminals or madmen. Their line of descent can be traced from the schizophrenic swindler Henry More Smith in Walter Bates' *The Mysterious Stranger* (1817)[8] through Richardson's demonic Wacousta and Westbrook,[9] to the only recently rehabilitated Louis Riel, frenzied by his visions and voices. There is no equivalent in our tradition to the celebration of rugged individualism which reverberates throughout American fiction. Rather, our literature celebrates the virtues of accommodation, the compromises and even sacrifices of individual selfhood in the interests of the community.

The frequent appearance of the outcast in nineteenth-century fiction was a result of the interest among Victorians in categorization and definition. In *The Savage in Literature*, his study of "representations of 'primitive' society in English fiction," Brian V. Street writes:

> Characters who crossed the racial, national and environmental boundaries were important to the Victorians because they helped define those boundaries.... Victorians were suspicious, not only of biological hybrids but of those 'cultural hybrids' who had inherited one background but tried to adopt another. These

> characters . . . present a dilemma which is central to Victorian conceptions of race and culture and popular writers devote a considerable amount of space to them.[10]

Most of the nineteenth-century romancers who were interested in the theme of the outcast wrote, as Sleigh did, accounts of white strangers who attempt to live among Indians. But the "translation" of an Indian into white society was also a popular subject. One such work is a Canadian variation on the story of Pocahontas, the Indian princess who saved the life of John Smith but married his friend John Rolfe, and who, after being transformed as fully as possible into an English gentlewoman, was presented at the court of Elizabeth I. In Gilbert Parker's *The Translation of a Savage* (1893), Frank Armour, an official of the Hudson's Bay Company, devises what he intends as "an absolute and lasting revenge" for his English fiancée's termination of their engagement and marriage to his rival. In order to "show how low [has] fallen his opinion of women,"[11] Armour marries Lali, the beautiful daughter of Chief Eye-of-the-Moon, and sends her alone to England to live with his titled family. His father's initial reaction to the news of Frank's marriage to an Indian confounds the Victorians' beloved racial categories, and makes even Sleigh appear tolerant: "Good God," exclaims General Armour, "a red nigger!"

Lali's gradual and subtle translation, and the dignity with which she turns Frank's revenge into a proof of her spiritual superiority to him, give to Parker's romance a moral dimension which Sleigh's work clearly lacks. Sleigh's cosy bundling of all his surviving characters, despite their disparate experiences and natures, into the family château constitutes a facile, not to say glib, resolution to his narrative. Although Sleigh does not take up (or even seem aware of) the issue, the reader may wonder how successful will be the translation of Henry Harding's half-breed children, for the sake of whose Chippaway mother the heir went into exile and eventually became the Outcast Prophet. Were a romancer more sensitive than Sleigh to write a sequel to *The Outcast Prophet*, would Iowa and Moonwah Harding seek acceptance among the white aristocrats of Montreal or among the "red" hunters of the forests? And would they find contentment in either society? (Sleigh himself would probably solve the problem by giving these children "Christian" names.)

The theme of education is common to all fictions whose authors profess to know something, in Hawthorne's phrase, of "the truth of the human heart." Arthur Sleigh did not possess the narrative talents of a William Kirby, a Gilbert Parker, or even a John Richardson; nor is his book one of the masterpieces of the romance mode. But in portraying the spiritual transformation of his protagonist Prophet, and in touching the romance's primary mysteries of birth, death, rebirth, and identity, he established a significant place in the tradition of Canadian romance.

NOTES

[1] A biography of B. W. A. Sleigh appears in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography 1861-70*, IX (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1976) pp. 723-24. Also see *The Oxford Companion to Canadian History and Literature* (Toronto: Oxford, 1967), p. 767. An extended entry is forthcoming in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* (Gale/BC Research).

[2] I am indebted for my acquaintance with *The Outcast Prophet* to Professor Richard Landon, Head of Rare Books and Special Collections at the University of Toronto.

[3] B. W. A. Sleigh, *The Outcast Prophet: A Novel* (London, 1847). Further references will be to this edition.

[4] *Ibid.*, III, 21. Compare to the description of Dismal Swamp, with its poisonous snakes, rank vegetation, and all but impenetrable darkness, the epigraph to *Wacousta*:

> Vengeance is still alive; from her dark covert,
> With all her snakes erect upon her crest,
> She stalks in view and fires me with her charms.

Major John Richardson, *Wacousta: A Tale of the Pontiac Conspiracy* (Toronto, 1906), [i].

[5] The details of Sleigh's complicated plot sometimes confuse even the author. Characters are misplaced or left behind in the confusion of Indian attacks, resurfacing chapters later apparently unscathed. In some cases, Sleigh's intention was altered by events or characters themselves. Honour, for example, clearly intended to play the role of the fair heroine (and therefore designated Reginald's "cousin" rather than his sister) is supplanted by Amie Desjardins and bundled off to Virginia in the final few pages. There she is married to "a gallant officer of that region" who seems to have been belatedly introduced into the romance for that express purpose.

Similarly the avowed bond of brotherhood between Ranoka and the Prophet is inexplicably forgotten when Ranoka is captured and his kinsman disappears in order to take up again his mission of revenge against the Winnebagos.

At times the preponderance of chaotic, undigested incident in the romance suggests that Sleigh may have been more interested in describing the geography and peoples of his dark North American continent than in working out the structure and sequence of his plot. Certainly his knowledge of the setting would have been of interest to his contemporary readers.

[6] Margot Northey, *The Haunted Wilderness* (Toronto, 1976). While a substantial part of Northey's argument concerns the "haunted" aspects of Nature as depicted in *Wacousta*, it should be noted that she clarifies the other aspect of Richardson's ambiguous attitude by demonstrating that "nature is not unequivocally evil":

> There is a suggestion that "civilized" rationality [the suppression of nature] is as much to be feared as primitive nature.... One finds a more loathsome, despicable evil in the colonel [de Haldimar], the embodiment of the civilized class, who rules with coolness and strict rationalistic observance of rules.

[7] Cowie, *The Rise of the American Novel* (New York, 1948).

[8] Walter Bates, *Henry More Smith, The Mysterious Stranger: A True Story of the Most Remarkable Prisoner Ever Detained in a Jail in New Brunswick, as Told by Walter Bates, one time Sheriff of King's County* (St. John, N.B., 1910). [Originally published in the United States in 1817 and in England the same year under the title *A Companion to Caribou.*]

While incarcerated, Smith was reported to have made several "impossible" escapes from chains and handcuffs, and to have feigned serious illness by coughing and passing blood. He was also adept at fortune-telling, interpreting "prophetic" dreams, and fashioning remarkably lifelike puppets in the likeness of his wife and children. These dolls, he believed, conversed with and watched over him in his cell. Bates frequently describes the criminal's powers as emanating from the devil.

[9] John Richardson, *Westbrook, the Outlaw; or, the Avenging Wolf: An American Border Tale* (Montreal, 1973). Originally serialized in the *New York Sunday Mercury* from 4 September to 26 October 1851, the novel was discovered by David R. Beasley in 1972. In his preface, Beasley summarizes the subject of the book as follows:

> Richardson, like the contemporary writers of American Renaissance, was concerned with the conflict between the New Romanticism of Jean Jacques Rousseau which believed in the innate goodness of nature, as represented in *Westbrook* by the pure love between Anselmo and Emily, and the innate evil prevalent in the world as represented in the protagonist, Westbrook [v].

[10] Brian V. Street, *The Savage in Literature: Representations of 'Primitive' Society in English Fiction 1858-1920* (London, 1975), p. 111.

[11] Gilbert Parker, *The Translation of a Savage* (New York, 1893), p. 12.

VIVALDI'S FOUR SONNETS

Doug Beardsley

Spring

Primavera, and the birds still sing
With the first pale hint of morning,
Trills and semiquavers in the human
Heart, blood pumping because it's so.

The dark side of our days is held
In the mind's knowing; black-coated
Dawns fill with ash and acid
And we all fade away.

Antonio, this is not the world you know,
Flower-strewn meadows, breath of leaves,
Tambourines between nymphs and shepherds.

In your day there was such sweet thunder;
Barking dogs and goatherds, repeated notes
Soloing to the fair spring sky.

Summer

The torrid heat of an opening theme
Scorches more than pine trees, leaves
Man and beast melted in a pastorale
Not of their making.

Wind whips the waters of your native Venice,
The sounds of nature a contest
Between harmony and what we imagine
May be our fate.

We come alive at the last hour
Of our fear like gnats and flies before
The thunder, our weary limbs rouse to a final try.

All we have feared is justified;
Furious thunder bows the trees, flattens
What remains on our silver plates.

Autumn

What sweet music makes *this* sound?
Troubled, we listen and bring to bear
All the celebration we might muster,
Song & dance of a drinking man's harvest.

Song and dance are done,
All our efforts end in sleep
And the dream is not so neat,
Arpeggios in the autumn air.

At first we see a huntsman
With dogs, horns, and guns
Blowing his prey to invisibility.

Exhausted, terrified, wounded, afraid,
We try to flee this nightmare
But are caught and killed.

Winter

L'inverno. Shivering icily in the freezing
Dark facing a cruel wind.
Even a dead man's rotting teeth chatter.
What else can we do in such a state?

Remain quiet by the fireside? Antonio, how
Do we get indoors and would we wish it if we could?
Outside, the torrents coat the earth,
Making it impossible to advance.

What propels us out moves us
Forward, falling, and again we choose to dance
Boldly on the ice until it breaks.

Nothing more is heard but a lento scratching,
Your death in poverty and, over all the world,
A solo violin in the rush of the wind.

HIS CHILDREN

David Reiter

They refuse to crack for fire
these island flowers whose toes

fill her ditches. To dream him
virgin, she blurs them through mistaken

lenses of his life before her, but
their tendrils persist, their smiles

hardening in the salt air. Only
distance will thin them.

THE PROBLEM OF CRAWFORD'S STYLE

Germaine Warkentin

ISABELLA VALANCY CRAWFORD is from one point of view a figure easily stereotyped. Though he wisely rejected any such pitfall, Northrop Frye nevertheless acknowledged that she was "an intelligent and industrious female songbird of the kind who filled so many anthologies in the last century." But Frye also called her "the most remarkable mythopoeic imagination in Canadian poetry,"[1] and (although he himself has written nothing extended on Crawford) in so doing gave direction to three decades of study which has recaptured from sentimental history one of the strangest and most powerful figures of Canadian literary life. To modernist poets and critics like Louis Dudek, Crawford's work seems "all hollow convention," "counterfeit."[2] But James Reaney, operating within Frye's critical assumptions in a bravura essay of 1959, successfully reconstructed the very sophisticated grammar of images that unifies Crawford's vision, and in so doing opened up her poetry to the serious readership it had long been uneasily felt she deserved.[3]

Yet despite this new audience, the reading of Crawford's poetry has been vulnerable to a charge made by W. J. Keith against critics of Reaney himself: that of not giving sufficient attention to the quality of the poetry.[4] Recently Robert Alan Burns in stressing Crawford's "ambiguity" has attempted to rectify the balance, but only by applying to Crawford a now dated critical paradigm, one which does not succeed in penetrating the sources of her style in the complex of historical and cultural forces within which she worked.[5] Some of these forces have been identified in a preliminary way by Dorothy Livesay, Elizabeth Waterston, John Ower, and Dorothy Farmiloe,[6] and with their help it is possible to evoke the texture of Crawford's cultural experience as reader of Tennyson, Victorian woman, Ontario villager, and working poet in a nineteenth-century city. But apart from recognizing that Crawford had to write for money, and that she both learned from and attempted to escape from Tennyson, not much has been done to isolate and consider the stylistic practices of her work. These practices originate, I contend, in the "conflictedness" which critics of every persuasion have observed in Crawford. In her poetry, however, they lead not to the ambiguities of a proto-modernist poetics, but to the inclusive strengths of a public and socially oriented vision, one which seeks to comprehend in dispassionate equilibrium the strengths and limitations of all her characters.

Crawford's poems, as Roy Daniells writes, "tend to invite two readings — a straightforward and an esoteric — with very different results." Daniells is less troubled by this divergence than some others: of *Malcolm's Katie* he observes, "there are some nice pictures of the struggles and satisfactions of clearing the land and building homes in the wilderness," yet at the same time the poem "has the ability to pull the raw landscape into an interior world of living passion and fulfillment."[7] However, if we turn away from that small masterpiece — a long poem in the manner of Tennyson's domestic idylls which succeeds in challenging the very terms of its models — we are likely to find that raw landscape and interior world are *not* fused by the poem but are severed from each other by an almost baroque improbability in the poet's stance toward her subject matter. It is hard to be just to a passage such as

> From shorn fields the victor comes,
> Rolls his triumph thro' the streets;
> On his chariot's glowing sides
> Sound of shout and laughter beats.[8]

when we are trying at the same time to keep in perspective the fact that the poem from which it comes is called "September in Toronto." The conflict between the visionary intensity and height of style aimed at, and the quite plausible but entirely humble subject — an Ontario town in harvest time — frustrates the reader, and drives the critic to such Churchillian stratagems as A. J. M. Smith's observation that "energy is the most outstanding quality of Miss Crawford's best poems."[9] Yet this conflict suggests that the problem of style in Crawford is at least in part the key to understanding fully what she was attempting in poetry. To answer Keith's challenge, in other words, we need a procedure for understanding why the style of her most convincing poems shows the characteristics it does, and for recognizing when this strong and interesting poet is her own worst enemy.

It is possible to read Crawford with real appreciation when the gap between subject and manner is less obvious than it is in "September in Toronto," for example in *Gisli the Chieftain*, where an austere lexicon and a racing verse form are employed to portray a cosmic landscape of heroic scale:

> A ghost along the Hell Way sped:
> The Hell shoes shod his misty tread;
> A phantom hound beside him sped.
>
> Beneath the spandrels of the Way
> Worlds rolled to night — from night to day;
> In Space's ocean suns were spray.
>
> Grouped worlds, eternal eagles, flew;
> Swift comets fell like noiseless dew;
> Young earths slow budded in the blue.[10]

But about the poems that begin Garvin's 1905 collected edition of her work even James Reaney had reservations; "when I first started to read this section," he writes dryly, "I remember thinking it was going to be a long time before I reached the passages I couldn't forget in *Malcolm's Katie*."[11] Interestingly Crawford's first volume (the only one published in her lifetime) produced a divided response in a Victorian reader, the reviewer of London's *The Spectator*:

> The first poem is written in a dialectic [*sic*] which we commonly associate with the Western States, and tells in a vigorous fashion (though not without a curious, and we should think inappropriate sprinkling of ornate literary English), the story of a stampede of cattle in a pass of the Rocky Mountains. 'Malcolm's Katie' is a love story spoiled in a way by an immoderate use of rhetoric, witness Alfred's speech on pp. 66-7, (such a tirade as surely never was delivered over a camping fire in the woods), but still powerful.[12]

Elizabeth Waterston has justly attributed to the influence of Tennyson's Parnassianism some responsibility for Crawford's taste for the elaborate and rhetorical.[13] But the unease in the *Spectator* notice comes from other sources than an "eighties" reaction against Tennyson's manner. This critic was well aware of the strength of Crawford's poetry and the seriousness of her stance, as this and other statements in the same review show. At the same time there is a reluctance to admit Crawford's chosen situation — Alfred's debate with Max in the forest over the nature of time, chance, and immortality — as *probable*. Crawford has the mythopoeic confidence to enable her to situate a philosophical debate on the pioneer fringe but the critics' failure to understand this has undermined any attempt to consider the actual nature of her poetics. This divided response is representative: over the past century Crawford criticism has shown several tendencies not always productive: either to deplore her vision, or to deplore what is thought to be a disjunction between her poetic manner and that vision, or to assume that an understanding of the vision is sufficient to understand her as a poet. I will argue here that Crawford's mythopoeic confidence and her poetic strategies *are* related, though in a way unexpected for a proto-Symbolist poet, if not for a Canadian of her culture and generation.

DESPITE WHAT I HAVE JUST SAID, we must begin with Crawford's structural strength, and the iron logic of her vision, for these are what persistently urge us to approach her poems with more than their limitations in mind. Crawford resists the stereotype of songbird fiercely: she is not "all moody and glimmery like late romantic Chopin," as Reaney has said, but "tough like Bach."[14] The source of this toughness is the visionary grammar Reaney has described. It begins with "a huge daffodil which contained all reality." The image

of the daffodil, which she seems to have picked up from Tennyson, is made — in an imaginative act which places her securely on a line between Blake and Yeats — to yield an entirely unTennysonian coherence. In the fallen world of experience, the daffodil breaks up into

> tree and lake, eagle and dove, eagle and swan, the queen of heaven looking at herself in a glassy lake, wind and ship, cloud and caged skylark, whip and stampeding herd, good brother and evil brother, paddle and lily bed, smouldering darkness and prickly starlight, aristocratic Spartan and beaten Helot, Isabella Valancy Crawford and King Street, Toronto.[15]

But when these elements are disposed in a narrative — in long poems like *Malcolm's Katie*, *Gisli the Chieftain*, and *Old Spookses' Pass*, or in Crawford's prose fairy tales — they assume romance form, describing as Barbara Godard puts it, a "movement from a state of innocence through an encounter with the fallen world of mortality and evil, a movement which, when assimilated and empowered by human love, allows the hero to be transformed to a higher state of perfection."[16]

Yet the total effect of Crawford's poetry is not to focus us on the moment of reconciliation, important though it is. Though at the level of abstraction Crawford's romance structure is as secure as Spenser's, in the poetry itself she keeps rewriting that romance over and over again. Instead of building a single poem like many romance writers, she enters and re-enters this world of intense oppositions, making palpable for us the restless energy which pours through the pivotal points that link upper and lower, good and evil, day and night. For good or ill — and sometimes it is for ill — her sense of the poet's capacity to control this moment of re-entry through style is what determines the character of much of her poetry.

In the draft which is all we have of the long poem now called *Hugh and Ion*, the painter Ion is depicted as one who

> . . . lov'd the wilds, Athenian-wise, so lov'd
> His little Athens more — his canvas best
> His patient and impatient eyes beheld
> The leprosies of Nature, and her soul
> Of beauty hidden under twisted limbs
> And so his spirit at his canvas stood
> And painted spirit — never burst a vine
> Of Spring beneath his brush, but men beheld
> The grapes of Autumn on it, and foresaw
> The vintages . . .[17]

This Browningesque moment may or may not provide Crawford's credo as an artist. But it does catch her in the act of articulating the artist's divergent worlds as she had experienced them: the wilds, the "little Athens," and the canvas; the vines of Spring, and the grapes of Autumn they foretell. But it also catches Ion's sense of the artist's *task*, and his desire for a controlled, unified and essentially

persuasive effect. Such a sense of the poet's authority is reflected in unexpected ways in Crawford's own art: in an impersonal reserve that finds her refusing the use of the first person except as a dramatic device, in her dialect poetry, where there is a shrewdness beyond the conventions of folk sagacity, in the amused judiciousness she sometimes gives us to appease our desire for irony (Alfred, the quasi-villain of *Malcolm's Katie*, has "the jewels of some virtues set / On his broad brow").

WE CAN SEE a symptomatic detachment and economy in two roughly contemporaneous passages which deserve to be set side by side. The first is from that long poem "in a dialectic which we commonly associate with the Western States," *Old Spookses' Pass*. The aging cowhand who is the speaker there is describing the herd whose eventual stampede calls up a chaos which can only be controlled by divine intervention:

> Ever see'd a herd ringed in at night?
> Wal, it's sort uv cur'us, — the watchin' sky,
> The howl uv coyotes, a great black mass
> With here an' thar the gleam uv an eye
> An' the white uv a horn, an' now an' then
> An old bull liftin' his shaggy head
> With a beller like a broke-up thunder growl,
> An' the summer lightnin', quick an' red,
>
> Twistin' and turnin' amid the stars,
> Silent as snakes at play in the grass.[18]

The second is in *Malcolm's Katie*, published in the same volume:

> Who journey'd where the prairies made a pause
> Saw burnish'd ramparts flaming in the sun,
> With beacon fires, tall on their rustling walls.
> And when the vast, horn'd herds at sunset drew
> Their sullen masses into one black cloud,
> Rolling thund'rous o'er the quick pulsating plain,
> They seem'd to sweep between two fierce red suns
> Which, hunter-wise, shot at their glaring balls
> Keen shafts with scarlet feathers and gold barbs.[19]

In both these examples Crawford picks up a single image — the black herd of animals — and illuminates it with glancing light: the domestic cattle of *Old Spookses' Pass*, flickeringly lit by summer lightning, the buffalo herd in *Malcolm's Katie* like a black cloud more sharply delineated by the sunset red of beacon fires. The Tennysonian artifice of the second passage reaffirms what Waterston has

termed Crawford's "openness to the strongest model of her day,"[20] but the same might be said of the response to dialect poetry in the first passage; in both cases we sense Crawford's awareness of genre, of type, of the value of the model. But what is of real interest is the use to which she puts that awareness: she creates two completely different sets of conditions within which the herd — "raw landscape" to begin with — can become a visionary possibility. In either case, the herd signifies the same thing in her mythopoeic system: unformed chaos. In *Old Spookses' Pass*, it is rendered from the almost domestic point of view of an observer long familiar with the herd and its unstable ways. Yet despite this simplicity and exactitude, everything the old hand tells us intimates the presence of a larger scale as well. In *Malcolm's Katie* the goal is to create openly that effect of heroic grandeur which is required as its valid setting by the "machinery" of Indian legend that parallels the human action of the poem. Crawford has used a single repeated image to enter the world of warring opposites at two different points, and significantly, those two points are defined in terms of a purely verbal space.

"Said the Canoe," Crawford's most brilliant, suggestive, and complex poem, affords an extended example of how her method works. This is a poem in the first person, but employing a dramatized persona, the canoe of the title. Speaking in the voice of a beloved woman who has been put to bed by the hunters who are her "masters twain," the canoe watches in the campfire light as their slaughtered stag is

> Hung on forked boughs with thongs of leather:
> Bound were his stiff, slim feet together,
> His eyes like dead stars cold and drear.
> The wandering firelight drew near
> And laid its wide palm, red and anxious,
> On the sharp splendour of his branches,
> On the white foam grown hard and sere
> On flank and shoulder.
> Death — hard as breast of granite boulder —
> Under his lashes
> Peered thro' his eyes at his life's grey ashes.[21]

The effect of this extraordinary stanza depends, to begin with, on Crawford's exact feeling for the tensions between words: slim and stiff, dead and stars, foam and hard, boulder and lashes, life and ashes. Fundamentally this tension arises from the contrast between the dead animal swinging from its pole and the living fire, "red and anxious," whose light illuminates the scene. Yet all is not contrast; there are in fact three focal points within the stanza. At one extreme is the "raw landscape" of the hunting camp: two men, a deer carcass, the leather thongs, the hooves, the drying foam on shoulder and flank. The other is purely visionary and is represented by the image of death, "hard as breast of granite boulder," peering through the deer's eyes at the grey ashes of the deer's own life. Mediating between

these extremes is the wandering firelight which in an astonishing and tender moment lays its anxious palm on the dead body of the deer.

The detail of the firelight's hand continues the series of purely physical images that is a noticeable motif of the stanza: feet, eyes, palm, flank, shoulder, breast, and then eyes again. But almost all of these are dead; the fire, like the canoe, is alive. Furthermore, it seems to observe, and thus participates in a life beyond the night routine of the camp. It is, as the canoe has already recognized, the "camp-soul," and from its light

> Into the hollow hearts of brakes —
> Yet warm from sides of does and stags
> Passed to the crisp, dark river-flags —
> Sinuous, red as copper-snakes,
> Sharp-headed serpents, made of light,
> Glided and hid themselves in night.

The fire's light and its mediating influence suffuse the whole poem, though in the end we meet with the boundaries of its realm, which are determined by a countervailing presence, that of night. We meet also with the other, imponderable entities that flutter at that boundary line:

> The darkness built its wigwam walls
> Close round the camp, and at its curtain
> Pressed shapes, thin, woven and uncertain
> As white locks of tall waterfalls.

Crawford has presented us not with two poles of existence, on the one hand that of the hunters and on the other that of the death they take so routinely, but with a whole set of nested worlds, each with its degree of vision: the dead stag, the men with their songs "loud of the chase and low of love," the watching canoe, the dreaming hounds, the bat that circles over the flames, the probing fire with its "thin golden nerves of sly light," and at the periphery, the influence of yet another world, perhaps (to come full circle) the one that looks through the dead stag's eyes.

ALL OF THIS COMES ABOUT initially because of Crawford's *awareness* of the extreme boundaries of vision and of the distance between them. In "Said the Canoe" the verbal texture of the poem is constantly creating an arena in which these extremes can meet and comment on each other. Early in the poem Crawford challenges us to accept, on her terms, the kind of control she has chosen to exercise over the creation of that verbal texture. From the "golden nerves of sly light" there rise

> . . . faint zones,
> Half way about each grim bole knit,
> Like a shy child that would bedeck
> With its soft clasp a Brave's red neck,
> Yet sees the rough shield on his breast,
> The awful plumes shake on his crest,
> And, fearful, drops his timid face,
> Nor dares complete the sweet embrace.

The epic simile is taken over from Homer (*Iliad* vi, 392 ff.), and its dignity is startling to a reader expecting something more rhapsodical (or wishing for something less so). But Crawford uses this dignity to tie the poem together in a characteristic way. The literary context so unexpectedly suggested hints that the 74 lines of the poem, though not epic in quantity, will have the cosmic range of epic, from heaven to earth. (It is a gravity of reach which suffuses *Malcolm's Katie* as well, and suggests a formal, public quality behind the superficial prettiness of the idyll which places that poem securely in the context of the settlement epic as Howe, McLachlan, and Kirby were practising it.) In "Said the Canoe" the Indian infant's hesitation is as plausible as the war-garb of its heroic parent, and while the simile — seen as mere device — is obviously directing us to pay attention to the seriousness of the poem, it is at the same time stating the poem's central preoccupation; the tentativeness with which different levels of vision meet, a tentativeness which is still with us at the poem's concluding image of white-locked presences trembling like falling water at the edge of the curtain of night.

This tentativeness is not the result of a Tennysonian sense that (as David Shaw puts it) "the ultimate nature of the world is necessarily hidden from any finite mind."[22] Crawford is creating in this poem a firmly bi-polar structure — light contrasting with dark, life with death — and for her it is the structure by which the world may be *known*. Indeed, the schemata of her vision may be recognized in "Said the Canoe" in as full a form as Yeats' is in "The Second Coming." But two contrasting passages suggest the nature of the poetic difficulty she poses herself in doing so. The hunters sing:

> "O Love! art thou a silver fish,
> Shy of the line and shy of gaffing,
> Which we do follow, fierce, yet laughing,
> Casting at thee the light-winged wish?
> And at the last shall we bring thee up
> From the crystal darkness, under the cup
> Of lily folden
> On broad leaves golden?"

This and the succeeding song "Oh love, art thou a silver deer?" have an ornateness which suits the loftiness of the poem, yet at the same time a witty hint of

dramatic distance in the conscious lushness differentiates them from the impersonal brilliance and controlled *diminuendo* of the campfire picture which follows:

They hung the slaughtered fish like swords
  On saplings slender; like scimitars,
  Bright, and ruddied from new-dead wars,
Blazed in the light the scaly hordes.

They piled up boughs beneath the trees,
  Of cedar web and green fir tassel.
  Low did the pointed pine tops rustle,
The camp-fire blushed to the tender breeze.

The hounds laid dewlaps on the ground
  With needles of pine, sweet, soft and rusty,
  Dreamed of the dead stag stout and lusty;
A bat by the red flames wove its round.

Despite their differences, however, the passages share an important feature: what we might begin by thinking of as their pictorialism. The fish of the second passage are, quite explicitly, "slaughtered." We are aware of their scales, their silver colour, their blazing brightness, details which, however intense, are very exact. When Crawford seeks to intensify an already vivid picture, it is through comparison: the fish are like swords, then like freshly bloodied scimitars. The swords and the scimitars are themselves as exact as other details in the same passage: the slender saplings, the boughs, the pointed pine tops, the sleeping hounds, and the red flames. There is nothing suggestive, nothing allusive, in any of this; the only attempt at metaphoric extension is in "cedar web" and "green fir tassel," both of which seem to be minor decorative effects rather than true metaphors. The hunters' song, by contrast, is elaborately figurative; if "Said the Canoe" has an ironic dimension, it might well be in its implicit circumscribing of that kind of figure in the limits of the song.

This suggests that Crawford has a surprisingly rationalistic concept of poetic diction. Her images arise in that area Daniells calls "landscape," and they do not unfold themselves in the metaphoric gesture we might expect of a mythopoeic poet like, for example, Reaney. Instead her terms are precise, explicit, denotative; however intense the effect she desires, it has to be created syntactically, descriptively, and through comparison, rather than by using the resources of metaphor and allusion. As a result, her methods of creating intensity at the purely verbal level come closer to those of the orator, with his need to persuade, than to the mythmaker, with his network of ever-resonating analogies. It is this gap, the gap between her mythopoeic vision and a poetic method innately, rather than adventitiously, rhetorical, which Crawford must bridge in every poetic decision she makes. She may not have had to make such decisions in isolation; I suspect that Craw-

ford's reading of Thompson's *The Seasons* must have been just as attentive as her reading of Tennyson. Unfortunately, without concrete evidence we cannot say.

In seeking an answer to the problem of stylistic strain in Crawford we might stop here, at that "Parnassianism," were it not that her preference for what might almost be called a neoclassical theory of diction is related very cogently to other poetic strategies we can see in her work: to her alertness to genre, to her masquing use of dramatic persona in preference to the unmediated first person, and to the tense awareness of dramatic situation which we can see even in the orderly composition — it might be called "After the Hunt" — we have been looking at in "Said the Canoe." Crawford's poetic technique at its best, I would argue, exhibits five features which can be expected to support each other in any poem of hers which commands our serious attention. To "read" her adequately we need to watch for her conception of the genre she is using, to accept the paradox of a symbolic poet who avoids the connotative, the ambiguous, the allusive, to recognize the impersonality which issues in her exploitation of dramatic monologue, to detect the presence of mythopoeia at every level of the mimetic, and to respond to her gift for shaping dramatic situations. These are the characteristics of a self-consciously public poet, one whom the inwardness of Romantic poetry has entirely passed by, and they account, I contend, for the seriousness with which she approaches her subject matter, and the essentially public rhetorical stance which she therefore adopts.

The most fully achieved effects in Crawford's poetry are arrived at when all five of the characteristic features of her poetic are operating in consonance. Curiously these five features are precisely what we need to be aware of in her less satisfying poems as well. When Crawford's poetry weakens, it is not from the *absence* of these qualities, but from an almost demonic *inversion* of them. Because she is attentive to genre, it is easy for her to allow the conventions of a poetic kind to overtake the vision of a particular poem, for example in the verse she wrote to celebrate the return of the troops from the second Riel Rebellion, in genteel "album verse" like "The Inspiration of Song," "Life," "Faith, Hope and Charity," "The Poet of the Spring" (one marvellous stanza here, amidst the dross), and even in the piously-admired but in my view completely meretricious "The Camp of Souls." Similarly, if Crawford's diction at its best is direct, explicit, pictorial, unallusive, at its worst it has a disconcerting violence, a lack of tact, and a troubling failure to consider the ear. The impersonal voice can become oppressively oratorical, the mythopoeic vocabulary transform itself into a restricted set of images exploited for their superficial colour, the inherent drama of a situation can be reduced to mere theatre. It is as if a pivot operated within Crawford

herself, like the one on which her visionary universe turns. This creative pivot provides a controlling mechanism by which the diverse elements of her art can be made to cohere; when they are all in balance and answering to each other the integrating vision and the world of "landscape" are brought into a distinctive and Crawfordesque rapport, and the campfire scene claims its place as an arena for serious verse. When they are out of balance Crawford diminishes into a mere imitator of Tennyson like "Owen Meredith" or Sir Lewis Morris, and to a minor niche among minor poets.

The meeting within Crawford of her own opposites — song-bird and visionary — cannot have been easy, particularly in view of the fact that she excelled not at the brief and marketable Romantic lyric but in the fuller scale of the nineteenth-century verse-narrative. What that collision was like we can only gauge indirectly; she left some manuscripts when she died so suddenly in the King Street boarding house, but nothing more personal. It is clear, however, that she sought an audience assiduously. The genres of polite verse were important to her, of course, for she and her mother lived on the money she made by selling poems to the *Globe* and the *Telegram*, but so was a serious readership. She sought out Susie Harrison ("Seranus") at *The Week*, and received an interested response.[23] She reached outward for patronage and recognition in a larger literary milieu: copies of *"Old Spookses' Pass," "Malcolm's Katie," and Other Poems* (1884) went not only to the London reviewers (who treated her very fairly) but to former Governor-General Lord Dufferin in India. Tennyson, to whom she is indebted for much in *Malcolm's Katie* is reported to have read with interest the copy of *Old Spookses' Pass* she sent him.[24] Crawford's sense of her social role as a poet, in other words, was one with the public stance of her poetic method; her actions all suggest that despite her intensely personal vision, she did not think of poetry as in any way a hermetic craft. For Crawford the mythopoeic mode, like Max in *Malcolm's Katie*, is "social-soul'd." If we must read her poems "... with the eyes close shaded with the hand, / As at some glory terrible and pure,"[25] it is because she seems to have been less interested in the increasing privatization of symbolic modes in her age than in impersonally, compassionately focussing the perilous equilibrium of her art on the radical dividedness of man himself.

NOTES

[1] Northrop Frye, *The Bush Garden: Essays on the Canadian Imagination* (Toronto: Anansi, 1971), pp. 147-48.

[2] Louis Dudek, "Crawford's Achievement," in *The Crawford Symposium*, ed. Frank M. Tierney (Ottawa: Univ. of Ottawa Press, 1979), pp. 123-25; see especially the response by Elizabeth Waterston.

[3] James Reaney, "Isabella Valancy Crawford," in *Our Living Tradition*, ed. Robert L. McDougall, Second and Third Series (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, in association with Carlton University [1959]), pp. 268-88.

[4] W. J. Keith, "James Reaney, 'Scrutumnus,' and the Critics: An Individual Response," *Canadian Poetry* No. 6 (Spring/Summer 1980), pp. 25-34.

[5] Robert Alan Burns, "Crawford and Gounod: Ambiguity and Irony in *Malcolm's Katie*," *Canadian Poetry* No. 15 (Fall/Winter 1984), pp. 1-30.

[6] Dorothy Livesay, "Tennyson's Daughter or Wilderness Child: the Factual and the Literary Background of Isabella Valancy Crawford," *Journal of Canadian Fiction* 2, No. 3 (1973), pp. 161-67; Elizabeth Waterston, "Crawford, Tennyson, and the Domestic Idyll," in *The Crawford Symposium*, pp. 61-77; John Ower, "Isabella Valancy Crawford and 'The Fleshly School of Poetry'," *Studies in Scottish Literature* 13 (1978), pp. 275-81; Dorothy Farmiloe, *Isabella Valancy Crawford: The Life and the Legends* (Ottawa: Tecumseh Press, 1983). See also Catherine Sheldrick Ross, "Isabella Valancy Crawford's 'Gisli the Chieftain'," *Canadian Poetry* No. 2 (Spring/Summer 1978), pp. 28-37, and the interesting suggestions made about Crawford's reading by Burns, note 5 above. D. M. R. Bentley's review of *The Crawford Symposium* ("Letters in Canada," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 49, Summer 1980, pp. 453-55), issues a general call for a cultural approach to Crawford's aesthetics.

[7] Roy Daniells, "Crawford, Carman, and D. C. Scott," in *Literary History of Canada: Canadian Literature in English*, ed. Carl F. Klinck *et al.*, 2nd edition (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1976), p. 424.

[8] Isabella Valancy Crawford, *Collected Poems*, ed. J. W. Garvin (1905; rpr. Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1972), p. 150. (Hereafter referred to as "Garvin".) On the limitations of Garvin's text see S. R. MacGillivray, "Garvin, Crawford, and the Editorial Problem," in *The Crawford Symposium*, pp. 97-106, and Mary F. Martin, "The Short Life of Isabella Valancy Crawford," *Dalhousie Review* 52, 1972, pp. 390-400.

[9] A. J. M. Smith, ed., *The Book of Canadian Poetry* (Chicago: The Univ. of Chicago Press, 1943), p. 129.

[10] Garvin, p. 184.

[11] James Reaney, "Introduction" to Garvin, p. xix.

[12] Quoted by Reaney, "Introduction" to Garvin, p. xxii.

[13] Waterston, "Crawford, Tennyson, and the Domestic Idyll," in *The Crawford Symposium*, pp. 61-77.

[14] Reaney, "Introduction" to Garvin, p. xx.

[15] Reaney, "Introduction" to Garvin, p. xxxi.

[16] Barbara Godard, "Crawford's Fairy Tales," *Studies in Canadian Literature* 4 (1979), pp. 109-35.

[17] Isabella Valancy Crawford, *Hugh and Ion*, ed. Glenn Clever (Ottawa: Borealis Press, 1977), p. 19.

[18] Garvin, p. 267.

[19] Isabella Valancy Crawford, *Malcolm's Katie*, ed. David Sinclair, in his *Nineteenth-Century Narrative Poems*, New Canadian Library (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1972), p. 163.

[20] Waterston, "Crawford, Tennyson, and the Domestic Idyll," p. 66.

[21] Garvin, p. 68. All further references to "Said the Canoe" are to this text.

[22] W. David Shaw, *Tennyson's Style* (Ithaca and London: Cornell Univ. Press, 1976), p. 290.

[23] Katherine Hale, *Isabella Valancy Crawford*, p. 10.

[24] E. J. Hathaway, writing in 1895 in *The Canadian Magazine*, said "Lord Tennyson, the Poet Laureate, wrote, congratulating her on her work, making special mention of this particular piece [*Old Spookses' Pass*]." The passage is quoted by Dorothy Livesay, "Tennyson's Daughter or Wilderness Child," p. 161.

[25] Garvin, p. 247.

SKATING AMONG THE GRAVES

Geraldine Rubia

I pass a cemetery
on my way to work
and see perhaps myself
skating among the graves
impossibly fleet
one foot in the air
shouting "Hello down there
thanks for the lovely rink"

I am thinking of leaving
my body to Science
if I can watch
as they slice my brain
decipher my innards
and disentangle the knots

"So that was the cause
of her Rues and Awes"
"Here is the root
of the Hems and Haws"
"Well I'll be damned
a Silver Sliver
this side of Sanity"

When I was I
I danced a Spree
took off my clothes
and threw them away
freeing my flesh
to friendly
featherings of the air

In this mirror or that
The Wrath of God
or Universal Vamp
at this angle or that
adorable golden globes
or piteous sacs
nonetheless breasts
lamented at twenty
now tenderly owned

The Bridegroom values
willing clay
over alabaster
closing his eyes
to know the more
not see the less
if he were here
but only the bloodless air
fingers my friendless skin

beyond caresses
swooping and whooping
among the graves
flawlessly fleet
both feet in the air
calling "Hello
Hello out there
come skate on my lovely rink"

The Science Centre
Chief of Staff
not knowing The Half
Of It blinks
"Amazing simply Amazing"

MRS. MOODIE'S BELOVED PARTNER

Carole Gerson

MOST READERS WHO DEPEND solely on one of the currently available editions of *Roughing It in the Bush* for information about Susanna Moodie will readily concur with Margaret Atwood's description of John Wedderburn Dunbar Moodie as his wife's "shadowy husband"[1] and with Carol Shield's characterization of him as "a negative personality."[2] Accustomed to distrusting first-person narrators, sceptical post-modern critics attempt to read between the lines of the Coles or New Canadian Library versions of Susanna's story to interpret some of the gaps in her narrative as intentional concealment of her "husband's bungling."[3] To avoid acknowledging that the man she married has turned out to be "inept," a "stricken deer,"[4] Susanna appears to concentrate on portraying a flute-playing gentleman, his "mind richly stored with literary allusions,"[5] who becomes the unfortunate dupe of his less scrupulous social inferiors only because his nobility of character prevents him from foreseeing their designs.

However, as Michael Peterman has reminded us,[6] the texts by which we usually make the acqquitance of the Moodies are deficient. When we turn to the most complete version of *Roughing It*, the second edition of 1852, it becomes evident that the haziness of Susanna's treatment of the economic details of her family's life was not deliberately evasive. Rather, in literature as in life she left that department to her husband. J. W. Dunbar Moodie originally contributed three chapters to his wife's book which were excised from the 1871 edition and all versions of that text now in print. The object of the first two of his chapters was "to afford a connecting link between my wife's sketches, and to account for some circumstances connected with our situation, which otherwise would be unintelligible to the reader."[7]

In explaining precisely how he committed his three major errors — moving from his cleared Cobourg farm to join Susanna's brother and sister in the bush, selling his commission which would have provided him with a steady annual income of about £100, and investing in steamboat stock which eventually proved worthless — Dunbar presents himself as the victim of both the machinations of others and his own poor judgement. On the one hand, he tries to absolve himself of responsibility for his misadventures:

> After all this long probation in the backwoods of Canada, I find myself brought back in circumstances nearly to the point from whence I started, and am compelled to admit that *had I only followed my own unassisted judgment,* when I arrived with my wife and child in Canada, and quietly settled down on the cleared farm I had purchased, in a well settled neighbourhood, and with the aid of the means I then possessed, I should now in all probability have been in easy if not in affluent circumstances.[8]

With the aid of experience and hindsight, he can now attribute his reverses to inconsistent instructions from the British war office and the manipulative practices of land jobbers, and hint at the family pressures which may have "assisted" his judgement. On the other hand, he quite honestly admits to his infection by the fever of speculation:

> It is always somewhat humbling to our self-love to be compelled to confess what may be considered an error of judgment, but my desire to guard future settlers against similar mistakes overpowers my reluctance to own that I fell into the common error of many of my countrymen, of purchasing wild land, on speculation, with a very inadequate capital.[9]

This "common error" was compounded by his too-hasty compliance with a later rescinded "intimation from the war-office" which "appeared in all the newspapers calling on half-pay officers either to sell their commissions or to hold themselves in readiness to join some regiment."[10] Not only did Dunbar quickly dispose of his commission, but he entrusted the sale and the subsequent investment of the proceeds to a speculator of rather doubtful honesty. And he freely acknowledges that he was easily persuaded to join the Traills and Stricklands in the Douro bush because he preferred the company of "gentlemen of liberal education" and a "labouring class . . . fresh from the old country[11] to the "rude and demoralized American farmers"[12] who had been his neighbours at Cobourg. Hence he ruefully warns prospective immigrants that ". . . no amount of natural sagacity or prudence, founded on experience in other countries, will be an effectual safeguard against deception and erroneous conclusions."[13]

For it must be remembered that Mr. Moodie did indeed come to Canada equipped with significant "experience in other countries." In 1814, at the age of sixteen, he had been stationed in Holland with the 21st Fusiliers, and his emigration to British North America had been preceded by a decade in British South Africa; these two adventures presumably contributed to his wife's confidence in his ability to succeed as a pioneer in the New World. Hence to enjoy a full understanding of both the book and personality of Mrs. Moodie it is necessary to see her in relation to her "beloved partner"[14] who, long before Susanna ventured into autobiographical writing, had provided her with two examples: his account of his adventures as a youthful soldier in his . . . *narrative of the campaign of 1814*

in Holland (1831)[15] and his description of his experiences as a settler in *Ten Years in South Africa* (1835).

In 1830 SUSANNA STRICKLAND met J. W. Dunbar Moodie in London, at the home of the poet Thomas Pringle. Pringle had himself failed in his venture to settle at the Cape, where he had had some acquaintance with the three Moodie brothers,[16] and where his zeal for liberty of the press had run afoul of the authoritarian structure of the colonial administration. Now he was combining his literary and his humanitarian interests by editing *Friendship's Offering* (to which Susanna contributed several poems) and working as Secretary of the Anti-Slavery Society. Susanna lived for a time in Pringle's household, writing poetry and anti-slavery tracts, her penchant for self-dramatization already evident in the description of her conversion to the abolitionist movement contained in her introduction to *Negro Slavery Described By A Negro: Being the Narrative of Ashton Warner, A Native of St. Vincent's* . . . (1831).[17]

Susanna and Dunbar had much in common. In their late twenties and early thirties respectively, both were mature, independent adults and both saw themselves as heirs of genteel families whose fortunes had declined due to their fathers' or forefathers' honourable behaviour in a dishonourable world. Both expected to be treated with appropriate deference by their social inferiors, but as liberals with faith in the "inherent benevolence of mankind"[18] both were vehemently opposed to slavery, an institution they viewed to be as detrimental to the moral well-being of the slave-owner as it was to the physical well-being of the slave. Both were aspiring authors and 1831, the year of their marriage, saw the publication of Susanna's *Enthusiasm and Other Poems* and of Dunbar's military narrative.

At this time, Dunbar was also at work on his book on South Africa, which was completed shortly before his embarkation for Canada in June 1832 but not published until nearly three years later. Dunbar later attributed to this manuscript the responsibility for his decision to "try Canada"[19] rather than return to the Cape. One of its more colourful episodes describes its author's narrow escape from being trampled to death by an elephant — an episode with sufficient appeal to the sedentary Pringle for him to include it in two separate publications of his own,[20] but which distressed Susanna who, in her husband's words,

> had imbibed an invincible dislike to that colony. . . . The wild animals were her terror, and she fancied that every wood and thicket was peopled with elephants, lions, and tigers, and that it would be utterly impossible to take a walk without treading on dangerous snakes in the grass.

"Unfortunately," he added rather dryly, "she had my own book on South Africa

to quote triumphantly in confirmation of her vague notions of danger. . . ."[21] Dunbar was unsuccessful in his argument that

> travellers and book-makers, like cooks, have to collect high-flavoured dishes to please the palates of their patrons. So it was with my South African adventures; I threw myself in the way of danger from the love of strong excitement, and I collected all my adventures together, and related them in pure simplicity, without very particularly informing the reader over what space of time or place my narrative extended, or telling him that I could easily have kept out of harm's way had I felt so inclined.[22]

It is therefore particularly interesting to note that when the time came for Susanna to record her own adventures as a settler she resorted to a similar process of selection to highlight her themes, such as downplaying the proximity of her brother and sister and their families in order to stress her own sense of isolation in the Douro bush.[23]

I would not argue that Dunbar's now forgotten *Ten Years in South Africa* served as a direct model for his wife's justly more famous *Roughing It in the Bush*, but the books contain a number of interesting similarities. Susanna was by far the better writer, with a greater talent for reproducing dialect and dialogue, developing incidents and characters, and shaping chapters into self-contained narrative units. However, there is no doubt that Susanna was well acquainted with her husband's book (which "was sufficiently popular to yield the author £64 13s. by April 1841,"[24] although it was never reprinted), and that he, as co-editor of *The Victoria Magazine* and participator in *Roughing It*, was privy to much of her literary activity.

DUNBAR'S ATTRACTION to South Africa seems to have increased in retrospect, under the influence of his misadventures in Canada. In 1852, he declared that "when I left South Africa it was with the intention of returning to that colony,"[25] and in 1866, three years before his death, he described "going to Canada instead of returning to South Africa" as "my *first* mistake."[26] However, earlier remarks which appear toward the end of *Ten Years in South Africa* indicate that in 1829 he had been quite happy to leave the Cape:

> I found, notwithstanding all my exertions, that I was not likely to be able to settle comfortably for life, or to have the means of providing for a family, according to my first expectations, . . . and I therefore determined to wait an opportunity of returning to Europe and trying my fortune in some other situation.[27]

Dunbar's experiences in South Africa proved prophetic of his trials in Canada, for in each colony he made two unsuccessful attempts to establish himself on the land as a gentleman farmer. In 1816, the near-bankruptcy of Melsetter, the

Moodie family's traditional estate in the Orkney Islands, prompted Dunbar's eldest brother, Benjamin, to hatch an emigration scheme to transport impoverished Scottish labourers to the Cape of Good Hope, which had recently been ceded to the British by the Dutch. Benjamin's vision of himself "re-ensconced on a mighty estate, as the Colonial counterpart of the lairds of Melsetter, surrounded by his retainers"[28] foundered on the unco-operativeness of the colonial administration, the intransigence of his men, and his own ignorance of South Africa. In 1819 he was joined by his younger brothers, Donald and Dunbar. The three applied for land grants in the new town of Fredericksburg, a military settlement being established in the Neutral Territory of the Eastern Province as a buffer against the Kaffirs. After several years it became clear that because of personal quarrels among the men and administrative bungling Fredericksburg was, in Dunbar's words, "doomed to be sacrificed between the conflicting views of two governors."[29] His subsequent losses, "which had been principally occasioned by relying too much on the good faith of the government,"[30] did not, however, cure him of the trust in authority which would contribute to some of his Canadian mishaps. Nor did he adopt the motto "Fools build and wise men buy,"[31] which ultimately proved Benjamin's salvation. After extricating himself from the debts incurred by his ill-fated colonizing venture, the eldest Moodie eventually prospered from the wool trade partly because he retained Groot Vader Bosch, an established farm in a long-settled area. Donald embarked on an even more illustrious career when he married into a prominent Cape family and received a series of administrative appointments, later becoming Colonial Secretary of Natal and Speaker of the Natal Legislative Assembly. It is tempting to infer that the sense of bitterness and betrayal pervading Dunbar's final account of his life, in the Introduction to *Scenes and Adventures, As a Soldier and Settler, During Half a Century* (1866), arose in part from his knowledge that his two brothers who remained in South Africa had achieved the degree of physical comfort and social standing he had striven for in Canada in vain. But in the 1820's Dunbar was young and restless, lacking the anchor of a wife and family to give him a firm commitment to South Africa. Following the dissolution of Fredericksburg he spent more than three years working a substantial grant of very attractive, fertile land near the mouth of the Bushman's River. While he continued to enjoy the wild sports of the country, a combination of loneliness, ill health, and impatience at the slow progress of his material fortunes finally sent him back to England in search of "some other situation."

LIKE *Roughing It in the Bush, Ten Years in South Africa* opens with a humorous shipboard anecdote and closes with unexpected abrupt-

ness. Its narrative structure is similarly diffuse, intertwining personal experiences and observations with addresses to the reader, pieces of factual information, descriptions of the landscape, snippets of social analysis, and sketches of local customs and "original" characters. Susanna chose a more interesting narrative strategy by dramatizing the process of her gradual acclimatization to her new environment (learning to milk cows, bake bread, and outsmart the Yankees); Dunbar adopted the more reliable but duller persona of the man of experience, already cognizant of basic factual matters such as the farming methods most suitable to various areas of the Cape. Both, however, wrote with absolute confidence in the validity of their observations; Susanna's epigraph, "I sketch from Nature, and the picture's true," was preceded by her husband's claim to present "a true notion of the habits and mode of life of a colonist in the southern extremity of Africa."[32] His sincere belief in his own objectivity appears in his claim to both "give my own impressions without disguise on every topic on which I write"[33] and to "avoid all reflections of a personal nature,"[34] thereby "leaving the reader to form such conclusions from the facts I mention as may suit his own particular mode of thinking."[35] Like Susanna, he assumes the stance of a seasoned settler addressing prospective emigrants, whom he warns not to trust "the narratives of travellers which, unfortunately, in nine cases out of ten, are lamentably deficient in that kind of information which is of most vital importance to the settler."[36]

Dunbar's desire to include vital information regarding the terrain, agriculture, wildlife, and potential economic development of the new land frequently gives *Ten Years* the flavour of a settlers' handbook, rather like a masculine, South African precursor to *The Female Emigrant's Guide, and Hints on Canadian Housekeeping* (1859) later written by his sister-in-law, Catharine Parr Traill. Of greater interest to the Canadian reader is his book's social analysis, where we can see the extent to which the interests, attitudes, and actual experiences of the two Moodies coincided.

Like his wife, Dunbar presents himself as a tolerant person of taste and education who takes umbrage only when confronted with violations of manners and morality which cannot fail to offend all equally refined persons of a similar liberal caste. Readers of *Roughing It* will remember how Susanna justifies her practice of not eating with her servants by declaring the matter to be a difference of education, not birth. She then demonstrates her good will by defending the humanity of Mr. Mollineux, the black man, and in the next chapter she mentions that the Indians are invited to her table. However, the subjective nature of her interest in the Indians is reflected in her habit of grouping all aboriginal Canadians under the single title "Indian," without specifying or differentiating actual tribes. This practice is not unlike Dunbar's use of the names "Kaffir" (which he spells "Kaffre") and "Hottentot." Both originated as slur-words (the former meaning

"infidel" in Arabic, the latter meaning "stutterer" in Dutch [OED]) and today both are terms of derogation. Nonetheless, like most of his English-speaking contemporaries, Dunbar accepted and used these names simply as generic designations for the people now more properly identified as Xhosa and Khoikhoi respectively. (To avoid confusion, the Moodies' terms will be retained for the remainder of this essay.)

As well-intentioned as his wife, Dunbar goes out of his way to compliment a Jew,[37] and during his account of his visit to the Kaffirs (Xhosa) he sets up a contrast between the dour Presbyterianism of his travelling companion, Mr. S—, and his own open-mindedness. While Dunbar sees the Kaffirs as "among the happiest of the human race," Mr. S. "frequently assumed a serious and saddening expression when he considered that these honest and kind-hearted people could be happy without any knowledge of the original sinfulness of their nature and of the only way by which they might hope to escape eternal punishment hereafter."[38] On their journey, the two men witness a portion of a Kaffir initiation ceremony which in Dunbar's eyes constitutes a "mirthful scene" of children "teasing and taunting" the strangely clad initiates, accompanied by women "beating their drums, clapping their hands, laughing, singing, and yelling." True to character, Mr. S. "assumed a melancholy expression; and he lamented the ignorance and degraded condition of the Kaffres, whose extravagant and careless mirth seemed only to increase his sadness." Dunbar, however, briefly (if condescendingly) identifies with the native scene: ". . . I felt a secret inclination to make myself a Kaffre, and share in the general hilarity around me, in which I could see nothing but innocent enjoyment."[39]

Dunbar was sufficiently impressed by the intellectual and physical attributes of the Kaffirs to declare them "a very superior race of barbarians — I cannot call them savages . . ."[40] He could, though, apply the term to the Hottentots (Khoikhoi), and his inclination to imbue the savage with some elements of nobility appears in his generalization that "The savage is habitually sincere and unsuspicious — benevolent, and complaisant in his demeanor. His vices are those of violence under powerful excitement, not of depravity of heart. If he is cruel to his enemies, he is actuated by revenge unrestrained by discipline or laws."[41] With the Hottentots, therefore, he is prepared to appreciate their generosity and honesty, their childlike manner of living "but for the present moment,"[42] and their natural ear for music. Susanna was to praise similar qualities in the Canadian Indians, but while she romantically dubs the Indians "Nature's gentlemen"[43] and broods elegiacally on the "mysterious destiny [that] involves and hangs over them, pressing them back into the wilderness, and slowly and surely sweeping them from the earth,"[44] Dunbar invests little personal emotion in the aborigines of South Africa. He describes the Hottentots as a people with fewer virtues than vices ("disgusting"

and "indolent" are two frequent epithets) as a result of their oppression by the Dutch. And despite his interest in the indigenous qualities of the Kaffirs and his distress at the activities of sectarian missionaries among them, he looks forward to their conversion to civilization and Christianity with no apprehension that such changes might spell the end of the very features he admires.

Both Dunbar and Susanna, however, reserve their greatest disapproval for uncivilized whites. The Cape Dutch in Dunbar's narrative occupy a position similar to that of the unruly lower classes (British and Yankee) in Susanna's: both groups are castigated for their lack of manners, disinterest in education, and hypocritical dishonesty. Dunbar's discovery that the Boers are "even less refined than the Hottentots"[45] anticipates his wife's unfavourable comparison of the recently disembarked immigrants at Grosse Isle to the more gentlemanly Indians. As a teen-aged soldier Dunbar had enjoyed the company and care of the European Dutch, including a lively flirtation with a young widow, but he finds the Cape Dutch at times less than human. From their customs at funerals he infers an "indifference to death"[46] and from their marital and extra-marital behaviour he infers a similar incapacity to love. His account of the Boer admiration of " 'Sem-migheid,' or cunning" could scarcely have failed to alert the real-life Susanna to the borrowing of the Yankees, a practice which bears a surprising resemblance to the "friendly requests" inflicted upon the Moodie brothers by their neighbours at Groot Vaders Bosch:

> We had many amusing instances of the petty cunning of the Dutch at Groot Vaders Bosch. Scarcely a day passed but some slave or Hottentot brought an epistle to my brother from one of the neighbouring "frows" or "boers," accompanied by some present of wild flowers, or, perhaps, half a dozen of eggs; in return for which they humbly requested him to send some article by the bearer, which they well knew was five or six times the value of their "present," as they called it. . . . When they were successful in this advantageous interchange of friendship, they never failed to renew their applications as soon as an opportunity occurred.[47]

Both Moodies treat unacceptable behaviour on the part of fellow whites with a combination of humour, disdain, and alarm. Each perceives the threat of social upheaval occasioned by the colonizing process — a threat more immediate than the possibility of hostilities from the now-subdued natives. Susanna's genuine distress at the spectacle of "insubordination and misrule"[48] at Grosse Isle is scarcely modified by her later explanation that in the old world the lower orders and the servant class are kept in check by a system of "unnatural restraint."[49] When she describes their disorderly conduct as "the natural result of a sudden emancipation from former restraint"[50] she echoes her husband's phrasing but not his sentiments. Dunbar concluded his discussion of the misbehaviour of his brother's indentured servants with the declaration that "Nothing is more danger-ous to the character of men than sudden changes from a state of artificial restraint

to entire liberty of action,"[51] but Susanna reveals that "With all their insolent airs of independence, I must confess that I prefer the Canadian to the European servant."[52] A similar contrast between her impetuous romanticism and his cooler (and often duller) moderation appears in their attitudes towards the abolition of slavery. While Susanna passionately declared herself in favour of "*early and total abolition*" as "the only practical remedy for this moral and political gangrene,"[53] Dunbar's first-hand knowledge of the complexity of a slave society led him to propose a system of gradual emancipation which would ease the slave into the valid economic role of tenant farmer.

As a narrative, *Ten Years* contains far less of the thematic density created by *Roughing It*'s almost novelistic profusion of secondary characters and incidents. Her sequence of maladjusted Englishmen — Tom Wilson, Brian the Still-Hunter, Captain N, and Mr. Malcolm — can be seen as oblique (and at times inadvertent) reflections of the Moodies themselves, and a projection of the dangers awaiting those who allow the wilderness to loosen their grip on the manners and values of civilization. Less an artist than his wife, Dunbar presents only one such "singular character":[54] Colin Mackenzie, a precursor of Tom Wilson in his improvidence and simplicity. To this young fellow officer at Fredericksburg Dunbar gives the affection of a "brother,"[55] sharing with him an interest in books, hunting, and good society. However, Mackenzie's willingness to endanger his health, his pocket, and occasionally his life graphically illustrates the pitfalls awaiting the man who (like Dunbar on occasion) has a propensity to act with more courage than judgement.

DUNBAR HOPED TO FOLLOW *Ten Years* with a similar book on Canada. In November 1834, he wrote to the publisher Richard Bentley, who then had the South African manuscript under consideration, offering

> to give a plain unaffected narrative of the progress and proceedings of a settler in this colony whether he settled in the cleared and improved parts of the country or went into the back woods. I have tried both of these kinds of settlement myself — hitherto successfully — and can therefore form a tolerable estimate of their respective advantages and disadvantages.[56]

Nothing came of this proposal, however, and Dunbar's major literary activities in Canada appear to have been limited to his contributions to *The Victoria Magazine*, *The Literary Garland*, and *Roughing It in the Bush*, and his *Scenes and Adventures, As a Soldier and Settler, During Half A Century*. Published by subscription, his last book is a collection of previously printed pieces, assembled by a tired, ailing elderly gentleman in an attempt to "procure some support for my wife and myself in our old age."[57] The Introduction is a catalogue of the virtues

and sufferings of himself and his family, and a justification of the practices which in 1863 led to his reluctant resignation from his position as Sheriff of Hastings County. In her detailed investigation into the Moodies' Belleville years in *Gentle Pioneers*, Audrey Y. Morris upholds Dunbar's declaration that he had acted in good faith and was the victim of his political enemies, noting that

> John W. Dunbar Moodie's particular contribution to his adopted land was to be the standards he set in the behaviour of a public servant. His career was not entirely without blemish, but it sparkled in contrast with the usual standards of behaviour. And he did have some small influence in raising those standards.[58]

Posthumous praise and an impoverished old age[59] — not quite the reward envisaged by "the poet, the author, the musician, the man of books, of refined taste and gentlemanly habits"[60] who partnered Susanna Moodie across the Atlantic.

NOTES

[1] Margaret Atwood, *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* (Toronto: Oxford, 1970), p. 13.

[2] Carol Shields, *Small Ceremonies* (Toronto: Totem, 1978), p. 122.

[3] Marian Fowler, *The Embroidered Tent* (Toronto: Anansi, 1982), p. 110.

[4] Fowler, p. 122.

[5] Fowler, p. 95.

[6] Michael A. Peterman, "Susanna Moodie," in *Canadian Writers And Their Works*, Fiction Series, vol. 1, ed. Robert Lecker, Jack David, and Ellen Quigley (Toronto: ECW Press, 1983), p. 83.

[7] Susanna Moodie, *Roughing It in the Bush; or, Life in Canada*, 2 vols. (London: Bentley, 1852), I, 241.

[8] *Roughing It*, I, 241. My emphasis.

[9] *Roughing It*, I, 280.

[10] *Roughing It*, I, 288-89.

[11] *Roughing It*, I, 286.

[12] *Roughing It*, I, 282.

[13] *Roughing It*, I, 240.

[14] *Roughing It*, II, 121.

[15] First published in the *United Service Journal*, the piece was then issued in book form in the second volume of *Memoirs of the late war: comprising the personal narrative of Captain Cooke . . . the history of the campaign of 1809 in Portugal, by the Earl of Munster; and a narrative of the campaign of 1814 in Holland, by Lieut. W. D. Moodie* (2 v., London, 1831). It was again reprinted in Moodie's *Scenes and Adventures, As a Soldier and Settler, During Half a Century* (Montreal: Lovell, 1866).

[16] "B. Moodie" was a founding member of Pringle's Literary and Scientific Society, formed in 1824. See Thomas Pringle, *Narrative of a Residence in South Africa* (1834; rpt. Cape Town: Struik, 1966), pp. 191-93.

[17] See Carl Ballstadt, "Susanna Moodie: Early Humanitarian Works," *Canadian Notes and Queries*, 8 (November 1971), pp. 9-10.

[18] Lieut. J. W. D. Moodie, *Ten Years in South Africa: Including A Particular Description of the Wild Sports of That Country*, 2 vols. (London: Bentley, 1835), I, 24.

[19] *Roughing It*, I, 244.

[20] Pringle's interest in Moodie's account led to its inclusion in *The Menageries. Quadrupeds, Described and Drawn from Living Subjects*, vol. 2. The Library of Entertaining Knowledge (London: Knight, 1831), pp. 138-42. He also quoted it in his *Narrative of a Residence in South Africa*, pp. 121-24. Moodie selected the same piece for one of his first appearances in print in Canada in *The Cobourg Star*, 17 October and 24 October, 1832. (I thank Michael Peterman for the last reference.)

[21] *Roughing It*, I, 243. Susanna's fear of animals as an adult contrasts with Catharine's memory of her as a child, when she was "a great admirer of frogs and toads" and played with lizards. See Catharine Parr Traill, "A slight sketch of the early life of Mrs. Moodie (MG 29, D 81, vol. 6, pp. 9878-91, Public Archives of Canada) for more details concerning Susanna's youth and courtship.

[22] *Roughing It*, I, 244.

[23] Other examples of her deliberate shaping of her text to suit her presumed audience may be discovered by comparing the preliminary versions of the eight chapters first published in *The Victoria Magazine* and *The Literary Garland* with the versions that later appeared in *Roughing It in the Bush*. See Michael Peterman, "Susanna Moodie," pp. 84-88.

[24] Carl P. Ballstadt, "Moodie, John Wedderburn Dunbar," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, IX.

[25] *Roughing It*, I, 243.

[26] J. W. Dunbar Moodie, *Scenes and Adventures, As A Soldier And Settler, During Half a Century* (Montreal: Lovell, 1866), p. ix.

[27] *Ten Years*, II, 302.

[28] Edmund H. Burrows, *The Moodies of Melsetter* (Cape Town: Balkema, 1954), p. 56.

[29] *Ten Years*, II, 103.

[30] *Ten Years*, II, 115.

[31] Burrows, p. 83.

[32] *Ten Years*, I, v.

[33] *Ten years*, I, 35.

[34] *Ten Years*, II, 311.

[35] *Ten Years*, I, 35.

[36] *Ten Years*, I, 2.

[37] *Ten Years*, II, 309.

[38] *Ten Years*, II, 265.

[39] *Ten Years*, II, 277-78.

[40] *Ten Years*, II, 245.

[41] *Ten Years*, I, 173.

[42] *Ten Years*, I, 341.

[43] *Roughing It*, I, 11.

[44] *Roughing It*, II, 51.

[45] *Ten Years,* I, 169-70.

[46] *Ten Years,* I, 158.

[47] *Ten Years,* I, 147-49.

[48] *Roughing It,* I, 12.

[49] *Roughing It,* I, 213.

[50] *Roughing It,* I, 217.

[51] *Ten Years,* I, 54.

[52] *Roughing It,* I, 217.

[53] *Negro Slavery Described by a Negro: Being the Narrative of Ashton Warner, a Native of St. Vincent's* (London: Maunder, 1831), pp. 95-96.

[54] *Ten Years,* I, 108.

[55] *Ten Years,* I, 112.

[56] J. W. D. Moodie, Letter to Richard Bentley, 9 November 1834, Richard Bentley Collection, British Library. See Michael Peterman, "Susanna Moodie," p. 82.

[57] *Scenes and Adventures,* p. xv. Susanna later stated that her husband "realized about six hundred dollars" from the book. Susanna Moodie to Allen Ransome, 26 December 1868, Glyde Papers; Microfilm reel A1182, Public Archives of Canada.

[58] Audrey Y. Morris, *Gentle Pioneers. Five Nineteenth-Century Canadians* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1968), p. 173.

[59] Copies of letters recently acquired on microfilm by the Public Archives of Canada reveal that the poverty of the Moodies' final years was exacerbated by yet another error in judgement. After Dunbar's resignation, the Moodies gave their estate of $2,000 to their eldest son "on the condition that he was to give us a home during the rest of our lives." This son, Dunbar, bought a farm in Delaware, "thinking that Father wd. prefer removing to the States to remaining in Canada goaded by the recollection of intolerable wrong but his wife, a proud selfish West Indian, treated us so unkindly that after everything was prepared for our journey we both concluded that it was the best and wisest course to remain behind and work for our own living." Consequently the elderly couple was left with only $200 and "our own mental resources." Susanna Moodie to Allen Ransome, 26 December 1868, Glyde Papers; microfilm reel A1182, Public Archives of Canada.

[60] *Roughing It,* I, 210.

EULOGY FOR H. MACKAY

J. D. Carpenter

Herb knew his apples.
I wanted to buy his farm
and sat all an afternoon
in his pink and green kitchen
as he spoke of spartans

and spies. He no more wanted
to sell the land he and Hilda
had farmed forty years
than he wanted his son
to bully him into town.

But he went:
he had dumped
his and Hilda's pills
into a mason jar
and these old lovers
were cross-medicating
like crazy; he had trouble
escaping the bath and
wouldn't bathe; and
the woman who came twice a week
said the meat Herb was cooking
was bad. So I suppose
the son had reason.

Herb sold to Lawyer Shortill
in town. He would have sold
to me, but his son wanted more.
Now, Lawyer Shortill has his hobby farm
and the son has the money.

We visited Herb and Hilda
at the Home. "I don't like
the meals," he told me, "and I
don't like our room."
At home their view
was all of Athol Bay;
here they watched TV.
As we left he held my arm.
"My favourite is the McIntosh,"
he said. "I once thought nothing
of driving to Salem
or Green Point
for a good McIntosh."

His last day of life
Herb drove his ancient
Chrysler downtown
and dinged the pump
at Osler's Texaco.

Osler threatened
lawsuit, and Herb
beat it back
to the home.
He phoned Lawyer Shortill
and Shortill said not to pay.
It was a humid day
— Hilda was outside for air.
When she returned
Herb was still
in the chair
by the phone, but
she'd missed her chance
to console him, to tell him,
"That Osler's a fool."

They buried Herb at Cherry Valley.
His son wore a powder blue
leisure suit and purple-
tinted glasses to the funeral.
Hilda sat at graveside,
her old eyes blinking.
The minister patted her hand,
sprinkled sand on the coffin.
But his eulogy was guesswork,
just another day of the dead.
Herb really loved his apples,
and apples was never said.

THE "CANADIAN BOOKMAN" AND LITERARY NATIONALISM

James Mulvihill

BUY CANADIAN GOODS is the phrase which most readily comes to mind whenever the *Canadian Bookman* is mentioned. Which is not often, for while its backfiles cover two decades from 1919 to 1939 — no mean run for a literary magazine in this country, even today — the *Bookman* is invariably held up as a particularly aberrant example of Canadian literary nationalism between the wars, and then dismissed. Desmond Pacey's has been the authoritative account. In the *Literary History of Canada*, Pacey characterizes this periodical as "the organ of the new spirit of uncritical self-confidence and 'boosterism'," a judgement clearly echoed by Wynne Francis, in the *Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature*, who associates the *Bookman* with a "noisy boosterism that favoured quantity over quality and patriotism over literary worth."[1] Indeed, a tendency to view the period of the *Bookman*'s run as one of conflict and polarization has had the distorting effect of placing this and other journals of the time in either of two opposing camps, which might be termed the "uncritical" and the "critical." As early as 1922 E. K. Broadus, writing in *Canadian Forum*, observed that "it is customary in the West, and perhaps in a measure in the East, to group mankind in two and only two classes — the boosters and the knockers. If you are not a booster, you are a knocker — and a knocker is the most unhallowed thing on God's earth."

Of course, Broadus presented a rather weighted view of the situation, speaking as he did from one of these seemingly opposing camps. His thesis in "Criticism — or Puffery?" was that without rigorous standards there could be no Canadian literature of note and, he found, there were no rigorous critical standards at present: "Generally the idea seems to prevail that literary criticism, or at least printed comment on Canadian books, must be a boost" (October 1922). Broadus did not name names but he might well have been thinking of the *Canadian Bookman*. Pacey remarks that "to the editors of this magazine, a Canadian book was *ipso facto* a good book,"[2] and it must be admitted that even a cursory survey of the *Bookman*'s files will yield evidence of such an attitude. If this journal's founding purpose, "to cause two books to be read where one was skimmed before," is exemplary enough, the qualifier, "and those two to be better books and

more Canadian books than was the one" (January 1919), does carry a strong suggestion of the "boost." A more commercial note is sounded in pieces like "Canadian Book Trade's Golden Era: 'Just Around the Corner, if Booksellers do their Part'" (April 1922).

If the editors of the *Bookman* did indeed believe a "Golden Era" to be just around the corner, they were not alone. The immediate post-war period, which saw the founding of the *Bookman* and of several other Canadian journals, such as *Canadian Forum* (1920-), *Canadian Historical Review* (1920-), and the *Dalhousie Review* (1921-), was one of confident anticipation. It marked, according to an editorial opening the *Bookman*'s first number, "a new era in the history of mankind, and, very particularly, in the history of Canada" (January 1919). Largely because of its efforts in the War, Canada saw itself as having come of age as a nation in the eyes of the world, while at home unprecedented economic expansion was proceeding apace. Was it not then a relatively simple matter of historical necessity that Canada should also come into its own in other, more rarefied, spheres? The editors of *Canadian Forum* thought so:

> Too often our convictions are borrowed from London, Paris, or New York. Real independence is not the product of tariffs and treaties. It is a spiritual thing. No country has reached its full stature, which makes its goods at home but not its faith and its philosophy.
>
> 'The Canadian Forum' had its origin in a desire to secure a freer and more informed discussion of public questions and, behind the strife of parties, to trace and value those developments of art and letters which are distinctly Canadian. (October 1920)

"Distinctly Canadian" — the *Bookman* strove to express just such a quality of mind as this: "A new output of ideas by Canadians themselves, and a new belief in those ideas as being probably the best expression of Canadian requirements" (January 1919). From the start, the *Bookman* took a narrow focus. It was almost exclusively interested in literature, and that from a more restricted, more "Canadian," slant than was the *Forum*. Essentially apolitical in any overt sense, it remained so even when literature became more preoccupied with politics during the 1930's. And yet, it failed to take note of such trends — its relative neglect of "modernist" writing is a case in point — it did so with the consciousness of a broader historical purpose. Talk of "Canadian Literature and the National Ideal," to quote the title of a lead article by Lorne Pierce (September 1925), sounds grandiose today. Indeed, it seemed so at the time to many of the *Forum*'s contributors and even to certain of the *Bookman*'s own contributors. Nevertheless, as Leon Surette has recently observed, topocentrism — the notion that the literature of a nation is ultimately an expression of its collective genius, its national spirit — has traditionally characterized Canadian literary criticism.[3] This ten-

dency, if not by any means original with the *Canadian Bookman*, might still be said to be connate with it.

In 1919, Canada stood at a watershed in its history. Although the realization of the nation's potential lay in the future, the seeds were in the past and present, and the temptation to discern historical pattern in all of this was irresistible and natural. In the *Bookman* article just cited, Pierce enumerated the high points in this pattern "from 1776 to the dawning of self-consciousness in 1812, to the days of constitutional 'growing pains' in 1837 to the age of majority in 1867, to the crowning hour of our full adulthood in 1914, to this very hour of self-supporting, self-conscious, independent nationhood" (September 1925). Similar historical rationalizations run throughout the files of the *Bookman*. In October 1922, Hugh S. Eayrs announced a "Renaissance in Canadian Life" stimulated by the War, while in another number the same year John Murray Gibbon compared this post-war renaissance to that in the U.S. following the Civil and Spanish American wars (November 1922). In "Canadian Poets of the Great War," W. D. Lighthall presented the Enlightenment historical thesis that "a period of intense national exaltation is usually followed by a period of intense literary activity" and concluded that "this is our Homeric Age" (April 1919). At any rate, it was in the midst of "this very hour" that the newly established journal found itself. Clearly its editors believed themselves equal to the circumstance. "The appearance of the Canadian Bookman at the very dawn of this new era is not a mere coincidence," stated the opening editorial. "The Canadian Bookman is itself one of the phenomena of the new era" (January 1919).

THE *Canadian Bookman* BEGAN publishing in 1919, under the general editorship of B. K. Sandwell, as "A Quarterly devoted to Literature, the Library and the Printed Book." As its subtitle suggests, the *Bookman* was a very specific kind of journal. It was not a university quarterly, like *Dalhousie Review* or *Queen's Quarterly*, or a journal of opinion in the manner of *Canadian Forum*. Certainly it was not a modernist organ like the short-lived *Canadian Mercury* (1928-29). In fact, it was a Bookman and, conceived to provide "a forum for the discussion of all bookish matters" (January 1919), it had affinities with the American and English Bookmen.[4] As its editors realized, however, the *Canadian Bookman* could not take for granted the extensive "bookish" readership enjoyed by its companion journals. From the start, it viewed its role as to an extent that of preceptor, not so much addressing a substantial "bookwise" audience as aspiring to one. A restricted coterie appeal was not what the *Bookman*'s editors desired. Their aim, rather, was a much more broadly based book culture

such as they associated with older countries like England, Scotland and — with ever present qualification — the United States. In essence, the *Bookman* set out to encourage "not only the recognizing and supporting of literature made in Canada, but of literature in general, and the place of the book in the life of a people" (November 1923).

Still, this was a "Canadian" Bookman. An editorial in the January 1922 number, "Tilling a Narrow Field," admitted to such an exclusive emphasis, but made no apologies. The role of the *Bookman*, it stated, was that of a Canadian supplement to those journals treating "general literature": "The *Canadian Bookman* is something more, and something less, than a *Bookman* which happens to be edited in Canada. The adjective is not the result of geographical accident (January 1922). Nevertheless, it has frequently been claimed that the *Bookman* was all too conscious of geography in its critical judgements, and, moreover, that the "Made in Canada" label often disguised inferior wares. Writing in *Canadian Forum*, A. J. M. Smith characterized the "Canada conscious" strain in certain books and journals as a "mixture of blind optimism and materialistic patriotism, a kind of my-mother-drunk-or-sober complex that operates most efficiently in the world of affairs and finds its ideal action summarized in the slogan 'Buy Made in Canada Goods'" (April 1928). Like Smith, Douglas Bush did not explicitly name the *Canadian Bookman* in his well-known debunking of literary nationalism, "Making Literature Hum" (*Canadian Forum*, December 1926), although an observation of Bush's at one point in this essay, that "one learns on all sides that Canada is taking its permanent seat in the literary league of nations," could well refer to such a statement made the previous year in the *Bookman* by Lorne Pierce (September 1925). It is also tempting to speculate whether Bush had a particular journal in mind when he alluded to Dickens's *Martin Chuzzlewit* in an analogy between the Canadian literary scene and the New York of Jefferson Brick with its *Watertoast Gazette!*

Both Smith and Bush had as their immediate target the Canadian Authors Association and to some extent the *Bookman* was simply caught in the cross-fire. But far from being a mere innocent by-stander, it *was*, however briefly, an official organ of the CAA — for the period 1921-23 — and as such certainly reflected the CAA's aims and opinions.[5] The view that in forming such an affiliation the *Bookman* betrayed its critical function as a literary journal is a legitimate one, even if it fails to take much else into account. Having originally dedicated itself to serving the common interests of the book community at large, this journal now seemed to align itself exclusively with one of these interests. A lead article in the June 1921 issue attempted to downplay suggestions of a shift in allegiance, while at the same time betraying that a shift had occurred: "With this number, the *Canadian Bookman*, which has already made itself in its two years of existence a

sort of unofficial organ of the literary community, becomes the official organ of the makers of literature, organized in the form of the Canadian Authors Association." The sly modulation here from "literary community" to "makers of literature" was not lost on the sceptics, and almost immediately *Canadian Forum* set itself up in opposition to the CAA and, by implication, to the *Bookman*. What the *Forum* opposed was not so much the idea of a writers union — in fact, it praised the Association's "vigorous and timely stand on the question of copyright" (December 1921) — but the programme of literary propaganda to which the Association seemed increasingly committed and which found its most disturbing (to the *Forum*) manifestation in "Canadian Authors Week." Henceforth, the lines were drawn — on this issue, at any rate.

THE *Forum*'S STRICTURES on "Canadian Authors Week" make for entertaining reading. Of this "orgy of mutual congratulation," as he called it, Barker Fairley sarcastically allowed that "of course, certain results have been achieved":

> The problem of Christmas presents has been somewhat lightened. More than that, we now know by heart the names of all the Canadian authors and run over the list in bed at night before dropping off to sleep, with the result that we awake next morning purged of pity and fear, and see things more clearly than we did a few days ago. Our verdict must be that the Canadian Authors Association has made a shockingly bad start from which it will take a long time to recover. (December 1921)

And indeed, five years later Douglas Bush would still note this annual celebration, complaining that "every year one hopes to hear the last of our windy tributes to our Shakespeares and Miltons, and every year the Hallelujah Chorus seems to grow in volume and confidence" (December 1926). What "Canadian Authors Week" suggested more than anything else to its critics was the sales pitch, the "boost," which led many to question both the allegiances and the aims of the CAA. Such a "violent method of publicity" — for so "Authors Week" seemed to the *Forum* — ran the danger of compromising Canadian literature and criticism alike. Barker Fairley, founding editor of the *Forum,* had been an early member of the Association and favoured its original role in protecting the rights of authors. It was the CAA's "new role," as exemplified in its sponsoring of "Authors Week," to which Fairley and others objected, pointing out that "criticism under the wing of the publisher never reads the same as criticism that is morally independent." "We all recognize the several rights of publisher, author, and critic," Fairley argued, "but we are apprehensive when we see them indiscriminately mingled, as they appear to be in the Authors Association" (December 1921).

How justified were these charges? The editors of the *Bookman* must have been

stung by the implication that they were somehow in the pockets of the publishers. They had originally intended to direct the Bookman at a readership which comprehended these various interests — the reader, the author, the publisher, the critic. But if in its first year the *Bookman* had complained that publishers and booksellers "are merely commercialists" (October 1919), now it featured a complete "Trade Section." Such articles appeared as "Individualize Your Window Display" and "Not High-Brow, But How They do Sell!", a piece on the superior selling points of books on teacup reading and dream interpretation. Long reviews became fewer, to be replaced by short book-notices, while publisher's ads, formerly occupying a few pages on the front and back pages, became more numerous and were now interspersed throughout the journal. Had, then, various interests been "indiscriminately mingled" to the detriment of the *Bookman*'s credibility?

B. K. Sandwell was among those who responded to this criticism, and his defence of the CAA and its methods was, by extension, also a defence of the Association's official organ. Replying to Fairley's point that sales of books alone mean nothing if there is no "enlightened interest" behind them, Sandwell argued in a letter to the *Forum* that "enlightened interest must be preceded by attention," no easy matter in an age preoccupied with the phonograph and moving pictures. With this initial aim realized, however, and the Canadian public made aware of their native literature, perhaps then "enlightened interest" would be possible. "But we begin by trying to arrest its attention," insisted Sandwell. "With the help of a vigorous criticism (in which the *Canadian Forum* will bear a hand), the rest will follow" (December 1921). This is exactly the position which Sandwell would take in a number of *Bookman* editorials throughout 1922. In these pieces he walked a fine line, trying to balance the commercial with the artistic consideration, all the while denying charges of "boosting." He was successful only in part. It seems rather a simplification to claim, as Sandwell did, that Canadian literature is made when a Canadian with two dollars goes into a bookstore and buys a Canadian book (December 1921). Even insisting that it be a "good" Canadian book still begged the question. Sandwell was most convincing when he was at his most pragmatic. For example, estimating that sales of Canadian books accounted for less than one per cent of the business of Canadian bookstores, he asked what was the harm in attempts to raise that figure to three per cent (October 1922). An editorial opening the January 1922 number underscored the Forum's uncompromising stand by conceding that "economic factors will not produce literature just as they will not produce life; but economic factors can stifle literature which ought to be produced, just as they can and often do destroy life."

The nagging problem of critical standards still remained, however. In a May 1922 editorial, perhaps exasperated by the *Forum*'s continuing assault, Sandwell flatly stated that "the Association is not an academy, and has neither the power

nor the facilities nor the desire to pass judgement on the literary merits of any Canadian writer." It is a moot point whether the official journal of an organization like the CAA could reflect objective standards of criticism (although no one seems to have suggested that the *Forum* was in any way compromised by its editorial affiliations with the CCF and the League for Social Reconstruction during the 1930's). Perhaps the safest route was to adopt a stance like that of the *Canadian Mercury*: "We have no affiliation whatsoever: we owe no allegiance to the Canadian Authors Association, the Canadian Manufacturers Association, the Young Communist League of Canada, the I.O.D.E., the Y.M.C.A., the U.F. of A. or the C.P.R." (December 1928). In any case, by the end of 1922 the *Bookman's* official connection with the CAA ceased and Sandwell resigned his editorship.

The *Bookman* was affiliated with the Authors Association for barely two years and yet during that time it had come close to abnegating its professed role as a "Canadian critical magazine." Under the new editorship of Findley Weaver, it would continue to carry CAA news, and there was still a discernible "trade" slant, but the addition of Merrill Dennison, T. G. Marquis and J. E. Middleton as contributing editors helped to expand the journal's focus somewhat. It now became "A Monthly Devoted to Literature and the Creative Arts." Probably because of the influence of Dennison — an early contributor to the *Forum* — it began to feature articles on Canadian theatre and the Group of Seven. Canadian literature, however, remained its main preoccupation.

So CONVENIENT HAVE commentators found the booster/knocker dichotomy in characterizing Canadian literary journalism between the Wars that they have overlooked the healthy interchange of ideas and contributors which went on among journals presumably poles apart in their editorial styles. Writing in the *Bookman* during the early 1930's, for example, Marcus Adeney felt that there were still a few Canadian periodicals "in which creative and critical fires still burn brightly — periodicals that live by the warm human interest of contributors and readers alike, and serve no sterilized organization" (February 1932). As one of the founding contributors to the brash, young *Canadian Mercury*, Adeney could hardly be accused of being a Maple Leafer. That journal was dedicated to "the emancipation of Canadian literature from the state of amiable mediocrity and insipidity in which it now languishes," allying itself "with all those whose literary schooling has survived the Confederation" (December 1928). The *Canadian Bookman* numbered a few such survivors among its contributors.

Adeney, for one, was no easier on his native literature in the *Bookman* than

he was in the *Mercury*. He contributed to the former throughout the late 1920's, during the remarkable 1928-29 period when the *Mercury* was publishing, and well into the 1930's, and his articles were always provocative. In "The Future of Canadian Literature," for example, while allowing that the development of a national literature depends on economic and cultural factors as well as on a vigorous criticism, he was trenchant on the subject of "any sort of Canada First movement": "To buy a Canadian book because it is Canadian would be almost as serious an offence as refusing to buy it for the same reason" (November 1928). Adeney located the Canadian psyche in a kind of cultural no man's land, somewhere between the old world and the new. Lacking roots and a background, he said, Canadians were trying to create artificially a "cultural oversoul," trying to find a "spiritual unity" where none actually existed (March 1930). So much for the New Era? As Adeney observed in a highly favourable review of Frederick Philip Grove's *It Needs to be Said*, "You can't tell people what they want to hear, and at the same time save your own immortal soul" (February 1930). Yet he did not reject the idea of a national literature so much as he did the myopia of literary nationalism. In "The National Consciousness Idea," he criticized the notion that "consciousness" means "consensus," and argued for a national consciousness conceived of in terms which allowed for conflict (May 1929). The subsequent correspondence elicited by this article might be said to have confirmed Adeney in his thesis, for the letters were copious and represented every shade of opinion. Grove was one of those who agreed with Adeney, remarking that "it takes many strains of thought to make a nation" (July 1929).

Like others of Eliot's generation, Adeney spoke from a cosmopolitan and urban point of view. Although in his criticisms of Canadian culture he spoke of the wilderness "in our great cities no less than in the far north" (February 1930), he posited a largely urban-based culture. A vital Canadian literature would depend "upon the sort of critical atmosphere we are able to create in the larger cities," he claimed, not "upon undiscriminating local appreciation (November 1928). A corollary of this was the call for more realism in literature, as against the prevailing "romantic" school. In "The Coming Canadian Novel (July 1919), John Murray Gibbon complained of "an unreported city life" in Canadian fiction: "The Canadian novel has hitherto rarely strayed beyond the life of the pioneer, the farmer or the small town dweller. There has been no memorable picture in fiction of either Montreal or Toronto, for instance, although Montreal has a population almost as large as Boston, and Toronto is no mean city." If the Canadian novel was to reflect contemporary Canadian life truly, Gibbon argued, then it must deal with the industrial unrest" of the age, which was to be found in the city, not in the hinterlands. Similarly, Lionel Stevenson noted some recent atten-

tion to "city life" in Canadian poetry, but concluded that as yet such elements were secondary to "themes of nature and mysticism," betraying what he called "the new world perspective" (February 1928).

There were lapses, of course, and in the *Bookman* files one will run across instances like "A Peter Pan of Literature" by N. de Bertrand Lugrin. This writer decried current English fiction's "monotonous partiality for heroines of the demi-monde" and called for "a Peter Pan, a Peter Pan of Literature who will restore to us our lost faith" (April 1926). "Bolshevism in Modern Poetry" (April 1925) by Crawford Irving was a reactionary piece equating *vers libre* with political subversion, while Mrs. Glynn Ward's "A Plea for Purity" (March 1924) exposed the "foetid breath of decadence" in the writings of Sherwood Anderson and D. H. Lawrence. Nevertheless, such instances were offset in the *Bookman* by balanced, critical discussion. As a matter of fact, "A Plea for Purity" was answered by Francis Dickie's "A Plea for Tolerance" (May 1924), while in the July 1920 number W. H. Clawson had defended the realists from "current charges of sordid realism." If A. J. M. Smith stated in the *Forum* that "Sensibility is no longer enough, intelligence is also required. Even in Canada" (April 1928), *Bookman* contributors like Thomas O'Hagan were equally aware of this fact, observing: "While there is an ardency in the air we are wanting in a literary standard, as we are wanting in canons of taste" (June 1927). If Douglas Bush asked "Do Canadian authors ever read anything?" and criticized the "lack of intellectual grip" displayed by these authors (*Forum*, December 1926), Raymond Knister, in the *Bookman,* urged Canadian short-story writers to learn their art "by reading ... the masters of the form" (August 1923).

It is doubtful whether "standards of criticism" by themselves have ever produced a literature, but clearly such standards would play their part and the *Bookman* was as persistent in its call for them as either the *Forum* or the *Mercury*. "If we do not achieve in the next forty or fifty years all that we should achieve in letters it will not be for lack of creative ability," stated John Elson, "but because we do not set up high enough standards ... Wholesome criticism will save us" (January 1929). The *Bookman*'s tolerant spirit, its emphasis on "wholesome" or constructive criticism, need not suggest an uncritical attitude. As Merrill Dennison observed in a lead article in the January 1923 number, the "complacent finality" displayed by those who damned Canadian literature utterly was as destructive of critical standards as undue complacency in the opposite direction. The *Bookman*'s contribution to Canadian criticism lay finally in its appreciation of what one of its writers aptly termed "the value of sheer fecundity": "To reach your harvest you must first have the shoots of spring. From the quality of the shoots you can judge already your prospects for the grain. When they are vigorous and abundant, you can be reasonably sure of what you will finally reap" (January 1924).

THE *Bookman* HAD NEVER been an especially profitable concern; in the main, it had survived on reader subscriptions rather than on advertising revenue. Whereas it had begun as a large quarto numbering an average of eighty to ninety pages per issue, it had eventually shrunk to a meagre octavo with some issues numbering less than ten pages. By the mid 1930's a typical number might consist of little more than a lead article followed by sundry short book notices and perhaps some ads ("Send your MSS. to the Mother Country"). In 1937, frequency became irregular and several numbers simply failed to appear. Clearly the *Bookman* was in trouble. Then, in the spring of 1938, a renovated *Canadian Bookman* appeared under a new management, directed "exclusively to the book reader" (April/May 1938).

In many way the new *Bookman* was now closer to its original founding premise than at any time since the CAA episode, pursuing entirely "bookish" interests. "All contents will be related to books," it announced, "particularly through book reviews — of books to every taste, for every age; books reviewed by people who enjoy reading; books available in Canada, interpreted by Canadian experience" (April/May 1938). Books available in Canada, but not necessarily by Canadian authors: the *Bookman* now disclaimed any "mission to form the reader's taste" and it professed a much tempered nationalism. Nevertheless, it still viewed its role as supplemental to Canadian letters:

> This magazine, *The Canadian Bookman*, believes itself a valuable supporter of Canadian literature by the encouragement, through practical service, that it aims to give reading in Canada. The *Bookman* is published in Canada, without inconsistency although it is somewhat similar to the London and New York Times *Literary Supplements*, the *Saturday Review of Literature*, and other publications available here, because we believe the reader in Canada will enjoy having the book world brought closer home to him through news stories of books and interpretations by Canadians.

"The failure of subscriptions to arrive," it noted however, "may prove wrong even this modest conception of a Canadian literary magazine" (June/July 1938).

Modest the conception may have been, but the new *Bookman* boasted some impressive editorial personnel and contributors. Lorne Pierce was president of the company which had been formed to take over the running of the journal, while Howe Martyn, a frequent contributor to *Canadian Forum*, became its editor. The Advisory Board included Sir Charles G. D. Roberts, Mazo de la Roche, and Duncan Campbell Scott among others. Reviews and articles appeared by Kathleen Coburn, Northrop Frye, and Carl Klinck, as well as by E. J. Pratt, Leo Kennedy (late of the *Canadian Mercury*), and Dorothy Livesay. The *Bookman* had always featured poetry, much of it of poor quality, although some early verse

by Pratt, "Sea Variations," had appeared in it as early as 1922. It continued to publish poetry, now by Kennedy, Livesay, and others, but for the first time it now featured short stories as well, including one by Frederick Philip Grove, "The Platinum Watch," and stories by Katherine Hale and Dorothy Livesay. Ink-drawings by the *Forum's* Thoreau MacDonald also appeared in its pages. The format was simple and uncluttered, with attractive *sans serif* headings, and it ran to an average of sixty pages per issue. Consisting mainly of reviews, with verse and short fiction interspersed throughout, it eschewed the hard-sell, whether of the commercial kind or the nationalistic. Altogether, the new *Bookman* offered what it had said it would, "efficient, practical, unpretentious service to the Canadian book reader" (April/May 1938).

This surprising efflorescence notwithstanding, the *Bookman*'s run was soon to come to an end. An open letter to subscribers in the final number (October/November 1939) announced that the *Bookman* was closing the books and locking the door. In their bid to raise circulation, the new managers had sent copies of the journal to selected lists. Out of a thousand mailed to authors and learned societies, they received ten subscriptions. Out of three thousand sent to book clubs, no more than a dozen subscriptions resulted. And so on. "We have learned a lot," stated the editors. "We know now that there are not enough people genuinely interested in literature and the creative arts in Canada to support a magazine, even so inexpensive as *The Canadian Bookman*" (October/November 1939). It was a bitter and untypically gloomy valedictory for the *Bookman*. Perhaps a farewell notice which appeared the following year in *Queen's Quarterly* more aptly summed up the character and achievements of this journal: "For twenty-two years its issues have offered a library of native literary criticism, a running record of artistic and literary events in Canada of major importance, a portrait gallery of artists and men of letters found nowhere else in our Dominion, an expanding anthology of poetry and *belles lettres*" (Spring 1940). A Canadian Bookman.

NOTES

[1] "The Writer and his Public (1920-1960)," *Literary History of Canada*, ed. Carl Klinck, 2nd ed. (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1976), II, 5; "Literary Magazines," *The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature*, ed. William Toye (Toronto: Oxford Univ. Press, 1983), p. 458. For good accounts of literary periodicals in this period, besides those given above, see: F. W. Watt, "Climate of Unrest: Periodicals in the Twenties and Thirties," *Canadian Literature*, No. 12 (Spring 1962), 15-27; Sandra Djwa, "The *Canadian Forum*: Literary Catalyst," *Studies in Canadian Literature*, 1 (Winter 1976), 7-25; Kathryn Chittick, " 'Making Literature Hum': Canadian Literary Journalism in the Twenties," *Studies in Canadian Literature*, 6 (1981), 274-85.

[2] "The Writer and his Public," II, 5.

[3] "Here is Us: The Topocentrism of Canadian Literary Criticism," *Canadian Poetry*, No. 10 (Spring/Summer 1982), 44-57.

[4] Possibly because of its nationalistic preoccupations, the *Bookman* seems to have avoided identifying itself too explicitly with its two counterparts (although the July 1926 number carries an ad offering subscriptions to both the American and Canadian Bookmen for the price of one). Nevertheless, a comparison of the features regularly carried in its pages to those carried in the English and American Bookmen reveals an unmistakable family likeness.

[5] The scant attention the *Bookman* has received from commentators largely focuses on this two year affiliation: for example, Chittick's account, cited above, and John Lennox's in "New Era: B. K. Sandwell and the Canadian Authors Association," *English Studies in Canada*, 7 (Spring 1981), 93-103.

CHANGING PLACE

Elizabeth Allen

more and more
i want to re-design the prairie
put in the ocean
just over the rise

take the white frost jungles
obscuring window panes
in winter turn them
into green ferns

paint people
in the doorways of all
the empty homesteads

the prairie is too often silent
and i am alone
a rabbit crouching
in an open field

keeping still
knowing the smallest movement
the twitch of an ear
kills

FRANK OLIVER CALL, EASTERN TOWNSHIPS POETRY, AND THE MODERNIST MOVEMENT

Avrum Malus, Diane Allard, Maria van Sundert

THE EASTERN TOWNSHIPS are situated in southern Québec and are bounded on the south by the American border, the states of Vermont, New Hampshire and Maine, on the east by the Chaudière river, on the west by the Richelieu river, and on the north by the seigneurial lands lying south of the St. Lawrence river. Some twenty or so years after the American Declaration of Independence, an estimated ten thousand United Empire Loyalists received permission to settle in this area. They were then followed by English, Scottish, Irish, and French pioneer families. Thus, the population was predominantly English speaking, but in less than one hundred years, that is, from the middle of the nineteenth century to the middle of the twentieth century, francophones were to become eighty-five per cent of the total population in the Eastern Townships.

In spite of the change in linguistic balance, English culture flourished in the Eastern Townships in the first three decades of the twentieth century; Frank Oliver Call, poet, painter, professor, was at the centre of much of the literary activity in the area. He wrote an introduction to a book-length narrative poem, *Winnowaia* (1935), by one of the poets of the region, Minnie Hallowell Bowen, and he wrote a foreword to one of his volumes of poetry, *Acanthus and Wild Grape* (1920), outlining his position vis-à-vis the awakening interest in free verse expressed by poets of the first decades of the twentieth century. Given the content of his foreword and the nature of some of his poems, Call may be seen as one of the precursors or initiators of the Modernist Movement in English Canadian poetry

Frank Oliver Call and Louise Morey Bowman, another poet of the region who published imagist poems in free verse, are cited in the literary histories of Canada, though the mention is brief and limited. Contemporary reviewers take account of the way in which Call and Bowman are in the avant-garde of significant change in poetry. Amy Lowell and Harriet Monroe call attention to the Modernism of Bowman's verse; contemporary reviewers of Call's work — an anonymous reviewer in *Canadian Bookman* (1920) and E. E. Boothroyd in *The Mitre*

(1920) — analyze the split between the traditionalism of his verse and the interest he took in the phenomena of Imagism and free-versism.

In the late 1950's, two Canadian literary historians, R. E. Rashley and Munro Beattie, situate Call in their analysis of the evolution of poetry in Canada. Rashley focuses on Call's response to nature:

> A little sequence of sonnets in F. O. Call's *Blue Homespun* indicates most clearly the change of direction. From "The Sugar-Makers," (*sic*) through "Trees in Autumn," to "Curtains" one passes from nature as spirit through nature as spectacle to nature as an intrusion between the poet and humanity.[1]

An aspect of Call's Modernism may be seen in the speaker's alienation in the poem "Curtains"; he cannot survive long with the images of nature etched on his curtain; he needs to strip his windows "clean and bare / of birds and flowers" in order to "see the human crowd outside."[2] Beattie wrote that Call's free verse differs from conventional poetry, but concluded that the newness of Call's poetry is only a matter of surface appearance; his poems are "dull, their ideas dim, their versification flabby. Not one of them grows, with that exciting momentum of a real poem, into a whole in the mind of the reader."[3] Beattie's estimate of Bowman's significance in the evolution of modern poetry is, on the other hand, positive and favourable. In his judgement, Bowman showed "a more authentic feeling for free verse."[4] than other early modernists like Call, W. W. E. Ross, and Raymond Knister. Louis Dudek and Michael Gnarowski in *The Making of Modern Poetry in Canada* allow a special space for Call's contribution; they reprint his foreword to *Acanthus and Wild Grape* under the rubric "The Precursors (1910-1925)," which also includes Arthur Stringer's foreword to *Open Waters* and John Murray Gibbon's "Rhymes With and Without Reason."

In the late 1920's, Ralph Gustafson and Neil Tracy were students at Bishop's University where Professor Call introduced them to English literature. He had already published four of his five volumes of poetry and was deeply interested in modern verse. He and Louise Morey Bowman, apart from the books they published, were also publishing in literary periodicals; Call in *University Magazine*, *Canadian Magazine*, *Westminster*, and *Canada West*, and Bowman in *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse* (Chicago), *The Dial*, *The Canadian Mercury*, and *Canadian Bookman*. As a consequence of an acquaintanceship between Bowman and Amy Lowell, the latter visited the Eastern Townships. Both Lowell's and Harriet Monroe's excitement about the newness of Bowman's poetry is conveyed in excerpts from their reviews of her work on the dust cover of *Dream Tapestries* (1924). It was not until Gustafson went to Oxford that he received his first meaningful exposure to modernists like Hopkins, Pound, and Eliot. His first book of poetry, *The Golden Chalice* (1935), is highly stylized in the manner of Keats

and Shakespeare. Wendy Keitner writes of Gustafson: "Although he was in contact with F. O. Call, a stylistic innovator and early Canadian advocate of free verse, Gustafson remained oblivious of the student-led literary rebellion being fomented a hundred miles away in Montreal at McGill University by Frank Scott and A. J. M. Smith."[5] He was, however, encouraged in the writing of poetry by Call and F. G. Scott, who was also a professor at Bishop's. Gustafson in his reminiscences about Call does remember Call's lectures on modern poetry: "During my first year I learned that Tennyson was not the only one who wrote poetry, but that Vachel Lindsay did [too] . . ."[6] Gustafson recalls poetry readings that took place at the time involving Call, Bowman, and Tracy, and asserts in his reminiscences about the literary milieu of the Townships that "the English literary heritage in the Eastern Townships is long and vast."[7] More than thirty books of poetry were published in the period 1917-44.

LOUIS DANTIN, THE CRITIC chiefly responsible for bringing Nelligan's poetry to the attention of the public, was also the first Québécois scholar to pay particular attention to the literary activity in French in the Townships. He published an essay titled "Le mouvement littéraire dans les Cantons de l'Est" (1930) in which he gives serious attention to the Alfred DesRochers group of writers (Jovette Bernier, Eva Sénécal, Myriel Gendreau and others), writers who were affiliated with or who worked for *La Tribune*, a Townships daily newspaper and publishing house. DesRochers, now regarded as one of the major voices in French-Québec poetry, exerted considerable influence upon the *La Tribune* poets and also upon Neil Tracy, urging the poets of the region to eschew Modernism and the trappings of free verse: "I was, as I am still, a dyed-in-the-wool fervent (*sic*) of scanned lines."[8] He is esteemed today for his craftsmanship and as a defender of traditional verse. His work was relatively well-known in the 1930's when his books received literary prizes; in the years following early recognition, he published little. The mid-sixties marked a revival of interest in his work that coincided with the new nationalism accompanying the first stirrings of The Quiet Revolution. Louis O'Neil establishes that thirty books of poetry were published in the 1920's and 1930's by French poets of the Townships.[9]

On the English side, three of the four major contemporary voices in the poetry of the Eastern Townships are those of native Townshippers; Call, Gustafson, and John Glassco (D. G. Jones is a latecomer, though he has lived in North Hatley for over twenty years). Call was born in West Brome, Québec, in 1878, the grandson of a Vermont blacksmith, the son of one of the owners of the woolen mill at Call's Mills. He was educated in the Townships (Stanstead College, Bishop's, B.A.

1905, M.A. 1908) and did post-graduate studies at McGill, the Université de Paris and the University of Marburg. Call taught in the Eastern Townships, in Frelighsburg and Stanstead, and at Bishop's College School before becoming Professor of Modern Languages at Bishop's University (1908-45). Call never married. He lived his retirement years in Knowlton, a few miles from Call's Mills, and died there in 1956 at seventy-eight years of age.

Call won the Québec Literary Competition Award for *Blue Homespun* in 1924; three of the six prize winners that year were Eastern Townships poets: Call, Bowman, and R. Stanley Weir, the original translator of "O Canada" into English. Call received a bronze medal from "l'Alliance française" (1938), was a member of the "Institut historique et héraldique de France" and was a "Chevalier de l'Ordre latin" (1940). He was president of the "Eastern Townships Art Association" (1942-43), and a member of the advisory council on awards for *Canadian Poetry Magazine* (1936-45). Also, he was one of the vice-presidents of the National Executive Committee of "The Canadian Authors' Association" (1945). As a painter, Call took part in group exhibitions held in Montreal and New York; most of his paintings are still-life depictions of flowers. His own flower garden on the Bishop's campus occupied the site of the present day library. For many years before the construction of the library, Bishop's annual convocation was held in Call's garden when peonies were in full bloom.

An inveterate traveller, Call made frequent trips to Europe, particularly to Belgium, Germany, and France. Much of his writing is influenced by his European experience. He also travelled widely in his home province; *Blue Homespun* is an outgrowth of his walking tours in Québec. Photographs of Call and accounts given by family, friends and former students show him to have been a man of sensual aspect, an aesthete of pale complexion, light blue eyes, and sandy hair, who wore grey suits and walked shoulders held back, arms dangling, hands sometimes swaying behind his back. The nicknames "Esther" and "Mother" were given to him by his students, some of whom he employed as chauffeurs for "Bluebird," the name he gave to the automobile he owned but never drove. A former neighbour in Knowlton recalls her first image of Professor Call — he was sitting in his living room in an armchair beside the fireplace, a book in his hand, a rose in a vase next to him.

Call's personal library and some of his papers are in the possession of his nephew in Knowlton. In Call's personally inscribed copy of Charles G. D. Roberts' *Poems, New Complete Edition* (1907), Roberts wrote, in the margin of the Table of Contents, beside the poem "Manila Bay": "I think that this is one of the worst ballads ever written." Call notes in the margins of the same book: "Dr. Roberts tells me that these are three of his favorites" — "The Night Sky," "In the Wide Awe and Wisdom of the Night" and "O Solitary of the Austere Sky." Some of

Call's correspondence with Gustafson is extant, as is a handwritten list Call drew up which he titled "Literature of the Eastern Townships," naming a few dozen writers whose work was published in the years 1910-30 (Bowman, Bowen, Des-Rochers, F. G. Scott, Florence Randall Livesay, and others). Among Call's papers, and in his library, are unpublished poems by Bowman as well as copies of her books personally inscribed to him. Call's and Bowman's alliance seems to have been quite strong.

Call's poetic output consists of five volumes of poetry published in Toronto and London, England; approximately three dozen poems appear in Canadian and American literary magazines. He also wrote three books of prose: *The Spell of French Canada* (1926), *The Spell of Acadia* (1930), and *Marguerite Bourgeoys* (1930). He wrote his first book, *In a Belgian Garden* (1917), about the contrast between the world he knew before the advent of World War I and a world scarred by the ravages of the war. *Acanthus and Wild Grape* marked his entry into the *vers libre*/Imagism arena; the first part of the book is written in set forms while the second part, "Wild Grape," is in free verse. It is the only one of his five books in which the sonnet is not the principal mode of expression. His third book, *Simples and Other Poems* (1923), contains a handful of poems republished in *Blue Homespun* (1924). The latter is a volume of sketches in sonnet form of rural life in French-Québec. Call's poems do not resemble William Henry Drummond's parodies of habitant life, nor are they as rich and complex as A. M. Klein's depiction of rural Québec; they are straightforward portraits of the habitant's daily life. Call did not publish another book of poetry for twenty years until *Sonnets for Youth* (1944).

There is a schism in all of Call's books, a juxtaposition of old and new realities. On the one hand, Call is a poet drunk with gods, the Christian deity and the legendary gods of Greek, Japanese and Chinese mythology. On the other hand, the speaker in a poem Call published in 1920 says: "old gods are dead."[10] The immediate realities, the war, and the industrialization of the modern state leave Call's speaker deeply alienated. Call says of the modern epoch: "A monstrous brood is born, / Black, strong, beautiful."[11] He visted Belgium before and during World War I and was stunned by the desecration wrought upon its gardens. Call compares the ravaged gardens of 1917 Belgium with the idyllic gardens he had visited just a few years before. This theme dominates his first volume of poetry. In "A Chinese Poet," published in a later volume, he imagines Li Fu in his garden writing poetry. The speaker bridges the gap of time by reading the poetry of Li Fu in a garden of his own: "To-day, / In a walled garden half a world away,/ And in another tongue, I read his scroll."[12] The Belgian garden no longer exists, but the words on the Chinese poet's scroll are left unaltered by time.

THE DEATH AND DESTRUCTION generated by World War I, and the dehumanizing consequences of industrialization engender in Call a sense of human mortality and impending doom. In art and architecture, he discovers quality and meaning; artifacts and mythologies bring to life a past he is capable of relating to; they signify for him a world of continuing life, of enduring beauty and unending pleasure. There are poems in which, for an instant or a day, as a result of experience in nature or contact with a loved one, the speaker feels elation. However, the general picture from the early books is of a man whose world has gone to pieces and lost meaning because of world war, a man who has no illusions about modern industrial developments. Why, Call asks the modern poet,

> will you sing of railways,
> Of Iron and Steel and Coal,
> And the din of the smoky cities?
> For these will not feed my soul.[13]

His work is dominated by a sense of loss: death in wartime, death in nature, death as an omnipresent force which is depicted mostly through metonymic images emanating from the natural world. Death is a "dark wing" hovering overhead. His preoccupation with death is accompanied by an obsession with growing old. Thrilled by the sounds of "The Old School Bell," Call nostalgically yearns for the innocence and freedom of youth. He would make Faust's pact with Mephistopheles if he could be released from the grasp of "Time's relentless fingers."[14] The quest for immortality in Call is a search for truth and beauty, an embrace between beauty and timelessness. His poetry reveals a yearning for the past; old world remnants are the epitome of beauty unaltered by the passage of time. He imagines what an old world object might say, think, or do if it were addressing itself to the notion of immortality; he empathizes with the object and infuses life into it. In the following haiku, Call blends past and present to create an image of timelessness:

> Darkness.
> Shadows in my soul.
> The vision of your face.
> Dawn and music.[15]

At the turn of the century in Canada a handful of poets in different regions began to show the signs of twentieth-century Modernism in their style and subject-matter; Imagism and free-versism are new concepts to be contended with in poetry. Among the precursors of the Modernist Movement is Frank Oliver Call. His work did not meet the fate that befell other early Canadian modernists like W. W. E. Ross, R. G. Everson, and Raymond Knister; their early modern verse

did not appear until thirty years after the poems were first presented for publication in book form, whereas Call published *Acanthus and Wild Grape* in 1920. In his foreword to the book Call outlines the schizophrenia some poets of his generation experienced; he wrote traditional verse — he also experimented with the forms of free verse practised by free verse imagists. He divided his book into two parts, the "Acanthus" section, written in traditional verse forms, and the "Wild Grape" section, a collection of free verse. The idea for this division came to him, he explains, upon looking at a picture of Corinthian architecture. His attention was caught by an old column virtually in ruins. At the foot of the column, he saw carved acanthus leaves and noticed wild grape running and twisting around the fallen acanthus. The image figured forth for him the situation of the poet in the first two decades of the twentieth century. In his foreword Call wrote:

> The modern poet has joined the great army of seekers after freedom, that is, he refuses to observe the old conventions in regard to his subjects and his method of treating them. He refuses to be bound by the old restrictions of rhyme and metre, and goes far afield in search of material on which to work. The boldest of the new school would throw overboard all the old forms and write only in free verse, rhythmic prose or whatever he may wish to call it. The conservative, on the other hand, clings stubbornly to the old conventions, and will have nothing to do with vers libre or anything that savours of it.[16]

The following poem is modern both in style and in subject-matter:

THE FOUNDRY

Two monsters,
Iron and Coal,
Sleep in the darkness.
A poisonous scarlet breath blows over them,
And they awake hissing and writhing,
And spew forth blood-red vomit
In streams like fiery serpents.
Then from the reeking pools
A monstrous brood is born,
Black, strong, beautiful.
But we turn away our tired eyes,
And try to find the sky above the smoke-clouds.[17]

The rhythm of the poem is generated not by metrical structure but by a straightforward alignment of images. Call is not a full-fledged modernist; the last lines of "The Foundry" take the reader back to a more conventional mode of perceiving experience. His fellow Eastern Townships poet, Louise Bowman, who published books of free verse in the early 1920's, wrote poems that were more purely imagistic than Call's, even though she is not a poet of the same stature.

Bowman's poem, "City Child's Easter," is the best example in the work of the

two poets of the influence of Amy Lowell's Imagism. The images carry the weight of the poem virtually without comment:

CITY CHILD'S EASTER

FRAGRANCE
Of Hot Cross Buns:
Pots of white lilies: sunshine: magic eggs:
New skipping-ropes — but old old winds
Of Faith[18]

Harriet Monroe, in reviewing Bowman's "modern and individual imagination," states that "such faults as she might be accused of are not Victorian reminders."[19] There is in the poetry of Call and Bowman a foreshadowing of Modernism in Canadian verse.

THE PERIOD IN WHICH Frank Oliver Call's first books of poetry appear is a transition period in the history of Canadian poetry; the Confederation poets publish their most important work in the late nineteenth century, and the voices of the first modernists, Smith, Scott, and Klein, do not begin to be heard until the middle of the third decade of the twentieth century. No major works by twentieth-century poets emerged in the period 1900-25 with the exception of E. J. Pratt's *Newfoundland Verse* (1923). Poets like Ross, Knister, and Call, while they are regarded as minor poets, are in fact of particular significance because of the role they played as transitional figures, poets whose work reflects the changing scene in Canadian poetry as it evolves from the Confederation period to the Modern period. Call published five books of poetry in his lifetime, a serious body of work. Though he experimented with free-versism and Imagism, his later work shows he was most comfortable writing in traditional forms. An example of Call at his best, writing sonnets, is the poem "White Hyacinth"; the strength of the poem lies in the speaker's powerful retelling of the Hyacinthus story:

WHITE HYACINTH

We put the dog-eared lesson-book away,
Pondering the classic story. Pale and dead
Before our eyes young Hyacinthus lay
Upon the Spartan shore. From stains of red
Beside the blue Aegean, star on star,
White hyacinths sprang up to greet the dawn,
Each leaf a cry of pain, re-echoing far
A voice that mourned for beauty past and gone.
You paused a moment as you left the room,

Bending a slender form above a bowl
Of white and blue where hyacinths were abloom.
Once more the far Aegean seemed to roll
On flower-clad shores, but brought no cry of pain,
For Hyachinthus breathed in life again.[20]

The classic story comes alive at two levels, the past and the present; the speaker and the youth beside him become Apollo and Hyacinthus brought to life in the present. Call catches the reader by surprise with the strength, suppleness, and simplicity of the lines: "You paused a moment as you left the room / Bending a slender form above a bowl." At its worst, Call's work is more predictable, loaded with adjectives, and characterized by overzealousness on the part of the speaker who urges the reader to love that which he loves.

Call's poetry was anthologized by Bliss Carman and Lorne Pierce in *Our Canadian Literature: Representative Verse English and French* (1922), by John W. Garvin in *Canadian Poets* (1926), and also by Ralph Gustafson in his *Anthology of Canadian Poetry* (1942). Modern anthologies do not include Call's work. The period in which he wrote and published four of his five books of poetry (1915-25) is neglected. Anthologies and literary histories give full attention to Lampman's and Carman's late nineteenth-century poetry; modern Canadian poetry begins with Smith, Scott, and Klein. Call's importance, apart from his merit as a poet, is as a transitional figure. His work is representative of an in-between period; his poetry, both traditional writing and experiments in Imagism and free-versism, is an integral part of the history of poetry in Canada.

NOTES

The authors wish to thank the F.C.A.C. (Fonds pour l'aide et le soutien à la recherche, Gouvernement du Québec) for financial support of their research.

[1] R. E. Rashley, *Poetry in Canada: The First Three Steps* (Toronto: Ryerson, 1958), p. 106.

[2] Frank Oliver Call, *Blue Homespun* (Toronto: Ryerson, 1924), p. 41.

[3] A. Munro Beattie, "The Advent of Modernism in Canadian Poetry in English 1912-1940," Diss. Columbia 1957, p. 146.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 158.

[5] Wendy Keitner, *Ralph Gustafson* (Boston: Twayne, 1979), p. 21.

[6] Ralph Gustafson, "Some Literary Reminiscences of the Eastern Townships," *Ellipse*, No. 25/26 (1980), p. 149.

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 147.

[8] Neil Tracy, *The Rain It Raineth*, introd. Alfred DesRochers (Sherbrooke: La Tribune, 1938), n. pag.

[9] This figure was taken from Joseph Bonenfant's account of the writers of the time based on Louis O'Neil's estimate. Joseph Bonenfant, "Le mouvement littéraire des Cantons de l'Est," *Revue d'histoire littéraire du Québec et du Canada français* (Montréal: Bellarmin, 1982), p. 35.

[10] Frank Oliver Call, *Acanthus and Wild Grape* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1920), p. 18.

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 63.

[12] *Blue Homespun*, p. 43.

[13] *Acanthus and Wild Grape*, p. 42.

[14] Frank Oliver Call, *In a Belgian Garden* (London: Erskine MacDonald, 1917), p. 31.

[15] *Acanthus and Wild Grape*, p. 76.

[16] *Ibid.*, p. 10.

[17] *Ibid.*, p. 63.

[18] Louise Morey Bowman, *Dream Tapestries* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1924), p. 61.

[19] *Ibid.*, n. pag.

[20] Frank Oliver Call, *Sonnets for Youth* (Toronto: Ryerson, 1944), p. 2.

SIGNS

Lloyd Abbey

When you came in for routine surgery
a poster in the hall read: "Coping
With Cancer. Monday Meeting. Eight PM."
The impossible word was a placebo. Every
time we looked we smiled at your anxiety
at "routine hysterectomy:" "At least
you don't have *that*!" "Cancer" being to us
like "nuclear holocaust" or "genocide":
a thing that only lives in flesh — in books:
abstracted paragraphs; a half-life in the
mind. But now they've told us: "cancer." And
the poster seems quite changed; the words are flesh.
Each time I scan them I see other signs
behind. The words say: "Coping With Nuclear War,
Coping With Work Camps, Coping With Hunger." And, as we
calculate your odds for death or life,
we use those other signs as ballasts: "What uplifting
thoughts," I say, as you half-way smile, "At least
not *that*." The words are hanging in the hallway.

DAVID WILLSON'S "IMPRESSIONS OF THE MIND" AND "LETTERS TO THE JEWS"

Thomas M. F. Gerry

> Love hath no beginning nor ever will have an end. Love is the revealed will of God, and the saviour of nations. Love is the conquering sword of God, the peace-maker of the world, the blessed of God. She bears his own image, and is forever. She ariseth in the east as the light of day. She is the bride of man, and the bridegroom of the soul. She binds together, and none can part those whom she hath joined together. She hath connected limb to limb, and joint to joint, since ever her name was known to the human mind. She is ever in the presence of God. She conceals her mind from those that disbelieve her name, till sorrow shall enable them to embrace her hand with a smile. She is the queen of the Deity; as male and female, she is one with God.[1]

READING THESE WORDS of David Willson's, written and published in Upper Canada in 1835, one may be surprised, and perhaps mystified, but certainly one must acknowledge the presence of an intriguingly unique voice from a Canadian pioneer settlement. Willson was a prolific writer of religious prose, poems, and hymns, whose works create a new dimension in our understanding of the early life and literature of Canada. Overshadowed in history by his friends William Lyon Mackenzie and Robert Baldwin, and actively ignored, even scorned, by church and state officers since John Strachan, Egerton Ryerson, and Stephen Grellet, Willson's endeavours, including the lovely Temple of Peace at Sharon, Ontario, and his musical achievements, are beginning to receive their rightful recognition. To focus on two of Willson's books from 1835, the middle of his long career, is a good way to discover several of the important features of his writing and of his contribution to Canadian letters.

David Willson was born on 7 June 1778 in Dutchess County of New York State, near Poughkeepsie, of "poor but pious Presbyterian parents," as Willson describes them.[2] He worked as a sailor, a farmer, and a carpenter, having received little formal education. In the 1790s he married Phebe Titus, a member of the Society of Friends (Quakers) until 1794, when she was disowned by the local

meeting at Nine Partners, New York, for associating with a non-Quaker. The Willsons, with their two children, emigrated to Upper Canada in 1801, buying land near Newmarket, in the vicinity of the Quaker settlement begun a year earlier by Timothy Rogers. In 1805 David Willson joined the Society of Friends. He was very active on committees and as an office-holder, and most important, he learned from his study of the founders of Quakerism the fundamentals of his thinking about religion. By 1812, however, theological differences between the Quakers and Willson caused an upheaval during which about twenty members of the Yonge Street Meeting were disowned by the Society of Friends. These cast-offs agreed with Willson's views strongly enough to break with their religious affiliation, and became the original Children of Peace. In spite of Willson's attempts throughout his life to reconcile with the Quakers, the split never healed, and the Children of Peace grew into a thriving independent community numbering about four hundred by the 1830's. The buildings of the Children of Peace, their band, choirs and music school, their festivals, and their egalitarian social arrangements that included schools for boys and girls and co-operative marketing and banking, all inspired by David Willson's visions and nurtured by his hymns, sermons and books, were sources of fascination to the people of the time, as one may appreciate by reading contemporary newspapers and travellers' accounts. After Willson's death on 19 January 1866, the Children of Peace gradually declined, both because of the loss of Willson's guiding energies and because of the shifting economic circumstances of the late nineteenth century that stymied villages like Sharon while fostering larger centres like Newmarket and Toronto. Since 1917 the York Pioneer and Historical Society has maintained the surviving buildings of the Children of Peace as a museum that houses the most extensive collection of Willson's manuscripts and publications. Since 1981, the one-hundred-and-fiftieth anniversary of the Temple's opening, the York Pioneers have sponsored highly successful concerts each summer, featuring David Willson's works and other music of nineteenth-century Canada.

The Impressions of the Mind: To Which Are Added Some Remarks on Church and State Discipline, and The Acting Principles of Life (1835) is Willson's outstanding work because it brings together many of the themes, concepts and images that he had developed and would continue to explore. The Children of Peace sold the book to visitors to the Temple, and it was widely circulated, copies even now being held by many libraries in Canada and the United States.

Impressions was published in Toronto by J. H. Lawrence and, as its complete title indicates, it is in three parts. The entries in all three parts are individually dated: *The Impressions of the Mind* begins 9 October 1832, and ends on 29 January 1835; *A Friend to Britain* begins 1 December 1834, and ends 28 January 1835; and *The Acting Principles of Life* begins 20 February 1835, and ends

16 March 1835. Willson's dating of his writings is likely an indication that some pieces may have been used as sermons and hymns; also, the dates demonstrate the principle Willson always maintained: "I never repeat one communication twice over, nor sing one old hymn in worship: bread from heaven is our lot — descending mercies." His gratitude for God's blessings on the Children of Peace in their wilderness home is the source of Willson's association of the ancient Israelites fed on manna by God during their wanderings in the desert after the Egyptian captivity (Exod. 16. 35), with the group in Upper Canada. For order and form in his book Willson relies on the day-to-day revelations themselves, rather than imposing an external systematization. Nevertheless, a pattern does emerge as one reads *Impressions*. In his prophetic way, Willson indicates the form of the book in a description of the mind:

> The mind hath as many parts in it as there are in the creation, and the centre of it we wish to find. My small history will end there; there will my pen and thoughts be stayed; . . . there I shall find the Lord if he is ever known of me, there I shall see the saints at rest; there I shall hear the last song that ever shall be sung, and the solemn harp of everlasting praise.

The predominant shape Willson signifies is the circle, of which he intends to find the centre. His method operates to include the multiplicity of creation. Willson's symbolism is entirely in keeping with traditional usage, as the entry on the "Centre" in J. E. Cirlot's *A Dictionary of Symbols* makes clear:

> To leave the circumference for the centre is equivalent to moving from the exterior to the interior, from form to contemplation, from multiplicity to unity, from space to spacelessness, from time to timelessness. In all symbols expressive of the mystic Centre, the intention is to reveal to Man the meaning of the primordial 'paradisal state' and to teach him to identify himself with the supreme principle of the universe.[3]

Not only in *Impressions* did Willson enact the symbolism of the centre, but also in the architecture of the Children of Peace's remarkable Temple: it is surmounted by a golden sphere on which is engraved the word "Peace." Willson's reference to the staying of his pen and thoughts when he reaches the centre means that communication will be direct, unmediated even by words, a state identical to the one reached at the end of the Book of Revelation.

On the same page of *Impressions* from which the foregoing excerpt on the centre is taken, Willson goes on to say: "I would reach the centre of my soul and see every propensity of the mind at rest with God, and this is *with me a world to come*." The implication of this sentence is the key to understanding *Impressions*. Willson invites the reader to identify imaginatively with the central point of view towards which the "impressions of the mind" Willson records centripetally tend. The name for the central point of view is "Peace," in Willson's terms, the name he applied to the utopian community he inspired.

THE IMAGES WILLSON employs to express his sense of the quest he pursues usually suggest a centripetal structure. On 4 December 1834, for example, he writes:

> The sanctuary of the Lord is in the midst of all things. The nearer my heart is to God my Saviour, the more I can see of his wondrous works; the more passive is my mind, the more sensible of impression. The nearer I am to the centre of all things, the more subject to command. The more I am simple and ignorant by nature, the more ready I am to obey. The centre of a compass is the stand to see every point of the globe.

From this passage one may discern just how clearly Willson understands the mystical quest for the symbolical centre, and how precisely he chooses his images. Similarly to many mystics, Willson quite consciously adopts the stance of an unlettered original. In addition to their posture of obedience, the details of Willson's works make it clear that he participates integrally in the tradition of Christian mysticism.

Willson learned his ways of thinking about religion, the chief topic of his writing, as well as his characteristic style as a mystic, from the Quakers. In the 1790's and early 1800's, when Willson was learning about Quakerism, the founder of the Society of Friends, George Fox (1624-91) had been dead for little more than a century, and his reputation and writings were still a major inspiration and guide to the Quaker way of life. Fox's *Journal* was widely circulated among Friends at the turn of the nineteenth century, as were the books of Friends contemporary with Fox, such as William Penn's *No Cross No Crown*, a formulation of a political system based on Quaker principles and applied in Pennsylvania, and Robert Barclay's *An Apology for the True Christian Divinity as the Same is Held Forth, and Preached by the People Called in Scorn, Quakers*. Both Penn and Barclay were close friends of Fox and followed his precepts in their works. David Willson was familiar with these primary sources of Quakerism, as his work and Quaker records indicate.

Permeating the writings of George Fox is the zest of the German mystic, Jacob Boehme (1575-1624), whose theosophy is the bridge that connects the Puritan spirit that survived in Europe, the conviction of God's accessibility to the individual, with the genesis of George Fox's attempts in seventeenth-century England to reform the established Protestant, Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches. Much has been written concerning the relation between Boehme and Fox, but since Boehme's formative influence on Quakerism is precisely the strain of Quakerism that would affect David Willson so crucially, a brief summary of the key concepts shared by Boehme and Fox will help to establish Willson's writings in their correct theological context.[4]

Both Boehme and Fox objected to the dogmatic and legalistic elements in the established churches of their times. In harmony with his predecessors, Willson criticized the rigid doctrinal and judgmental aspects of contemporary Quakerism, eventually, in 1812, turning to his own inner light for divine revelation concerning the true Christian life. And, as Fox had turned to Boehme, so Willson turned to Fox for his model. The inner light, according to all three writers, is God's Holy Spirit. From this certainty arises their distinctive apprehension of the world as at once physical and spiritual, a view that animates the three writers' imagery and morality.

In contemplating the living God within himself, Boehme had to take into account the evil in his world, in the forms of war and a corrupt Church. He concluded that in the primary root of existence — in the Deity itself — evil is the deepest element. Boehme named the dark principle the "Unground" (*Ungrund*). Like a great will, the Unground, the necessary chaos, dialectically geneates light and love. The Unground is the original nothingness that calls forth something. It is the antithesis of all life, the darkness in which fire appears. Redemption from evil, then, is one part of the creative process on the divine and material planes simultaneously. Regeneration, in Boehme's understanding, is accomplished through three stages: repentance, prayer, and faith, becoming one with the will of God, or, as George Fox terms this final stage, "walking in the Light." The Holy Spirit is experientially known and salvation, available to living human beings, is a state like Adam's before the Fall, except that the redeemed state is eternal because of Christ. David Willson learned these and other concepts from his association with Quakerism. Throughout his career the influence of Fox, and from him, Boehme, appears, not only as ideas and mode of expression, but as fundamental tenets informing all of Willson's activities.

"Wisdom's Ways," the entry for 28 May 1833 in Willson's *Impressions*, presents a cluster of images based on the circle and intended to fuse spiritual and physical realities:

> Wisdom's ways are as many paths leading to a fountain of living water, where the weary drink and are at rest. They are as gates to a hidden treasure which when the soul findeth she seeks no more. They are as pillars that never move in a storm. The fountain never dries, neither is the treasure exhausted; she has no end. Few find the gates of wisdom; haste leads us by the port, and except we return we miss the appointed way forever. The things of God or the workmanship of his hands delight the mind at the first appearance, and like as many children gathering flowers, we run after them.

In his *Journal* for 1648, George Fox describes a visionary elevation he experienced, using terms that could plausibly be the seed for Willson's more palpable impression of "Wisdom's Ways":

> And the Lord showed me that such as were faithful to him in the power and light of Christ should come up into that state in which Adam was before he fell in which the admirable works of the creation, and the virtues thereof, may be known, through the openings of that divine Word of wisdom and power by which they were made. Great things did the Lord lead me into, and wonderful depths were opened unto me, beyond what can by words be declared; but as people come into subjection to the spirit of God, and grow up in the image and power of the Almighty, they may receive the Word of wisdom, that opens all things, and come to know the hidden unity in the Eternal Being.[5]

By comparing this famous passage from Fox with Willson's writing, one may also perceive the stylistic influence of the earlier writer. Willson's syntax and grammatical archaisms are deliberate attempts to maintain the Quaker ethos of simplicity and plainness, as well as to partake of the traditional mystics' independence of human knowledge. Willson opens *Impressions* with his revealing "Observations to the Reader:"

> The want of literary qualifications will be seen by every observing reader in the following pages. I have not set out to please the learned, nor supplicate the great. My object in the publication of these few broken hints to the world, hath been to improve the small measure given, that, in the end, I may lay down my head in peace with God. I have drawn the following lines from the mind; ... It will be observed that I am in favour of ancient simplicity and plainness of speech. The want of education and literary skill has made my sentences but few on various subjects, and left the cause naked that I have taken in hand. Perhaps the learned may clothe the same sentiments with a more pleasing language, and the Truth may live.

Willson's disclaimer may be applicable at times to his grammar, but in other aspects of his writings the "want of education" is actually his conscious participation in the conventions of mystical writing.

ALTHOUGH UNTIL RECENTLY the Natural Sciences Library at the University of Western Ontario held a copy of *Impressions*, cerebral anatomy is a topic remote from Willson's concerns in his book. The title, *The Impressions of the Mind*, is a formulation of an expression often employed by Quakers and others contemporary with Willson. In his *Journal*, Timothy Rogers, for instance, uses the phrase, "a hevy impression of mind." Quaker minute books often note that "the minds of Friends were deeply impressed" by some subject. In Willson's sermons and the writings of other Children of Peace the usage is also common. In *Impressions* Willson devotes a good deal of attention to the meaning of "mind." Adopting a technique many thinkers and writers exploit, Willson meditates on the contents of a cliché — "impressions of the mind." Generally, Willson formulates

his insights into impressions of the mind as metaphors, the literary realization of the relation between physical and spiritual dimensions.

Willson explores the relation between God and the human being in the entry for 2 February 1833, "The Life of a Redeemer in the Mind": "God possesses the hearts of those that love him; if he hath redeemed us from vain and transitory enjoyments he possesses the whole mind, and this is altogether the pillars of the man, and the principles of action." The image of pillars relates to a simile later in the same section: "Thou assumest the mind to thyself O God, as thine house or tabernacle here below; . . . thou hast made it for thine own dwelling, this is where thou showest thyself to man, it is all thine." Not content with translating his sense of God's relation to man into literary terms, Willson also built a Temple whose central section is supported by sixteen pillars that are named after the apostles and Faith, Hope, Charity, and Love.

Continuing with Willson's images devoted to spatial aspects of the mind, one finds an unusual conception of the mind's location in "What Is Life?" (19 February 1833). He writes:

> The person is but a waymark to the mind, and the mind as a distant city or far country to those who do not seek to find the prize, or travel industriously to come to a sense of the man . . . A man's mind is as a wilderness; he knoweth not what it will produce until it is cultivated and improved . . .
>
> It is the mind that holds a communication with spirits, and commits to the man intelligence from God . . . The mind or spirit of the man never *was* created, but is spirit, and was and is with God always, either in the far distant and measured regions of his judgments, or compassed about by the bounds of his favours in which there is no wrong.

Both in the thorough interpenetration of the physical and the spiritual dimensions and in the powerful sense of the ineffable they convey, Willson's writings are remarkably similar to Jacob Boehme's and George Fox's works.

Another spatial image Willson often uses emphasizes the centripetal tendency, noted earlier as the characteristic mode of *Impressions*:

> The mind is a part of God's spirit, given to this human frame, and as the streamlets and rivers never rest short of the bosom of the sea — where the whole family of springs and rivers unite; so the travelling mind cannot rest short of the bosom of God. A man's mind is ever from home till he returns to the father or fountain of spirits, and this is the place of his appointed rest.

Once the person chooses to live in the mind, a transformation occurs. Willson explains the change by using an analogy that is reminiscent of his own immigration to Upper Canada:

> If a country affords an encouraging history, we will some times haste to remove there to better our condition of life, why not speak of the fertility of the mind, and induce some wandering souls that are seeking for a residence of rest, to leave

> this world and its common course, and inherit the mind, improve it as a new country, and enter into rest, enjoy the fruit of our labour and be at peace; for this is where God hath ordained praise, and where he will satisfy the soul in itself, for a man is a kingdom of his own and he needeth not be as an alien in a far country, and a servant of men.

Willson's poetic imagination teems in this passage with layers of meaning. The "wandering souls" are not only the Children of Peace, but the individual mind. The community at Sharon, Upper Canada, is not only a new country, but the world of the mind where the Children of Peace have entered into rest, and are at peace. As with the Sabbath, the day of rest on which to offer praise to God, so Willson intends the entire life of his community to be a creative offering to the Deity. In their music, building, farming and literary activities, the Children of Peace performed what Willson envisions as the true human role in creation: the praise of their God.

On the level where "a man is a kingdom of his own," Willson offers another description that conjoins divine and human elements. In Chapter Two (7 June 1833, Willson's fifty-fifth birthday), he writes:

> Eyes and ears are but the organs of the mind, of themselves they can do nothing. It is the mind that employs them to hear and speak, they are as servants sent abroad to bring some intelligence to the mind. The mind is not small, otherwise as a vessel it would become full. But not a little seeing and hearing fills the mind, and now we have an evidence of its almost unbounded extent, it will contain a history of all nations, kingdoms and countries, language and science. It will not contain a deity only by parts, but there is nothing created so extensive as the mind and as it is unknown, uncomprehended, and to us unbounded, we are almost or quite forced to believe it is a *limb of the deity*, and came out from God, and is our intelligencer from heaven above and hell below.

The phrase, "*limb of the deity*," reinforces an association that often intrudes when one is reading Willson: the writings of William Blake, the mystical poet and illustrator contemporary with Willson. One of the many instances where Blake expresses an insight identical to Willson's appears in the notes to his engravings of *The Laocoon*:

> The Eternal Body of Man is The Imagination, that is,
>
> God himself
The Divine Body } Jesus: we are his Members.
>
> It manifests itself in his Works of Art (In Eternity All is Vision).[6]

Willson's mention of the eyes and ears is also very close to Blake's understanding of the senses expressed in *A Vision of the Last Judgment*:

> I assert for My Self that I do not behold the outward Creation & that to me it is hindrance & not Action; it is as the Dirt upon my feet, No part of Me. 'What,' it will be Question'd, 'When the Sun rises, do you not see a round disk of fire somewhat like a Guinea?' O no, no, I see an Innumerable company of the Heavenly host crying 'Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty.' I question not my Corporeal or Vegetative Eye any more than I would Question a Window concerning a Sight. I look thro' it & not with it.

Perhaps it is the effect of their contacts with Jacob Boehme, in Willson's case through the writings of George Fox, that accounts for the deep affinities between Blake and Willson.

TURNING AWAY FROM the life of the senses to the eternal life of the mind has consequences, in Willson's view, that ultimately vindicate this orientation and enrich the spirit, although public indifference and isolation from society may be the price, as it was for both Blake and Willson. Willson asserts in *Impressions*:

> As I serve not the princes and nobles of my age, they frown upon my appearance, — as I pay no tribute to the priest, he stands a distance from my necessities, — as I find fault with governments and counsellors, I share none of the public gold, — and as I cannot walk in consort with my brethren, I am chastised by them for error: and hasten my steps to meet the grave. Every time I fall, I am the stronger. Every turn adds experience to the mind. Every frown increases my faith; for by these heart-known lessons I am taught more and more to distrust the world.
>
> The drop of water tasteth sweet,
> We in the thirsty desert find,
> And every fall directs our feet,
> And every crumb assists the mind.

To Willson, the sensory world's whole purpose, in fact, is to cause suffering in order to effect a radical change of mind. On 1 November 1834, he writes:

> All things that are are right, and not any thing hath been removed from its place since the worlds began. Providence is every where and overseeth all things . . . We generate evil, because our minds are so to do; and if we did not, we would not know ourselves to be the weaker or lesser part of experience; but sin bringeth in or introduces the superiority of a judge to abase a sinning mind. The Lord loveth sinners as the husband the field, from which he receiveth wealth, honour and glory from the workmanship of his hand; so doth the Deity from the heart of a sinner. The forgiving of sins by the Deity, extolls and promotes the noblest praise of God.

In "The Dispensations of God to the World" (17 December 1834), Willson elaborates on this statement of the significance of evil, relating evil to baptism:

> through past experience I am confident — and that without doubting, that if I suffer tribulation without sin, the hand of God doeth it, and it is only to reveal

> to my soul the greater measures of his will — enlarge the mind by baptism, and bring that to light tomorrow, which is today unrevealed — as wisdom under deep waters, he only changes our diet to delight our taste, increase our love, and multiply our praise. How can the miser increase his joy? No way but by doing one thing over; but the children of God ever hath new bread from heaven.

Willson's conception of the mind as a "*limb of the deity*" inspires his views on important matters besides the proper spheres of concentration in life and the role of evil. Creation itself, signifying both the world and the activity — meanings which Willson conflates — is another fascinating example. Through interpreting the Biblical account of God's work, he reveals his own insights about creation. In "The World's Evidence for a Deity" (2 November 1834), he writes:

> The creation proves his spiritual existence. It was by the creation and sublime evidences that Moses came to the knowledge of God; he was no man's servant in his handwriting, but his history in many passages is evidently the productions of the mind. That Moses ever saw the worlds created by the light of the sun I believe not, but that he saw the world and the things thereof come to light in himself, and he wrote of them as they arose . . . Where did Moses contain his skill of revelation before his handwriting? In the mind without doubting. Then all he knew was contained in the mind.

Willson's sense of the metaphorical nature of scripture, and of sensory life itself, includes an element of the necessity of the particular spiritual/physical relationship he describes. He makes the necessity explicit in a compelling image:

> All the springs and streams worship the sea, because they are the greater fountain of living waters. So all our mind and abilities worship the mind of a Deity, the element of our creation. Who can keep the living stream from the sea? neither king nor councils. Who can keep my soul from God? None.

The key word that unifies Willson's image is "worship," used both in connection with the streams and the mind. Praise is the human being's way to find God, the most vital activity of human life. Praise is the direction for all human creativity, appropriate to the sabbath or day of rest. Willson's insistence on the necessity for worship, then, is premised on his belief in the present perfectibility of human beings. As with Boehme and the early Quakers, his emphasis on human perfectibility led him to believe less in the dogma derived from scripture than in the truth of ongoing revelation. Willson says:

> The Lord continues to reveal . . . He that seeth the creation rising in his mind according to its religious and temporal usefulness, saw as Moses saw, he owns the operations of God's Spirit on his mind, and one thing after another is brought to light in him.

Willson's frequent references to the Old Testament give rise to the question of his view of Christ. He states in "The Son of God is Sent to the Lost Sheep of the House of Israel" (6 December 1834):

> It is requisite to know Moses before Christ. Christ hath said, if ye had known Moses ye would have known me: but the wise and prudent of his day did not know either of them . . .
>
> The shadow pursued to its origin, leadeth us to the substance; so the person of the Son invites us to come to God, the original of all good, and the father of that which by Moses came into the world. Those that know not Moses, know not God, for Moses was of God, a true servant sent into the world to redeem Israel from bonds . . . A living mind cannot be reconciled to a dead and speculative system . . . The Lord loveth the man that cannot help himself; his heart is an open door for the reception of the Lord; he will take the stranger in — he will give him drink when he is thirsty, food when he is hungry — he will clothe the naked and feed the fatherless — he will visit the sick, and those in prison, for the soul of Christ is there suffering for our sins, that is not to say he is not reconciled with God in heaven; for the father was well pleased with him when he was groaning for our sins. Till we relieve the afflicted, the Son of God will not be at rest with us.

In summary, Willson holds that because the world generally still fails to live according to Christ's commandments, the Christian age has not yet fully dawned.

This fact, much lamented by Willson in his writings, forces him to adopt as a corollary that the Children of Peace in Upper Canada were experiencing what the Children of Israel experienced according to the Bible. In this identification is the source of his profound interest in and sympathy for the Jews. In *A Friend to Britain*, bound with *Impressions*, he addresses the British people in the context of his eternal vision. Knowing the basis of his understanding, the reader may sympathize; most British recipients of Willson's admonitions would probably have taken them differently. He opens his remarks with an analysis of British Christianity's history:

> The children of Israel have almost fulfilled a dear atonement for the blood of the prophets, and the Messiah; but you are living in pomp and splendour, while the blood of martyrs is crying at your gates. I am a kind of an original character, and look back to the Ancient of days for light. Why should I prefer you before the Jews? The hands of the Christians are stained with blood; not only war but the murder of their brethren, who gave up their lives for conscience sake. If Israel had to answer dearly for this crime, (the Deity is not changeable in his mind,) you must answer for yours. Your spiritual courts issued these mandates: first killed your brethren and then went and preached the gospel to the poor, and took their bread and garments for revealing the will of God unto them.

In spite of the apparent finality of this condemnation, in his next address Willson modulates to a friendlier tone:

> Britain is my hope, for there I shall see the salvation of God. I love the king as my father, for he will receive grace, and be at peace with his people. Britain is the star of nations; the sun will rise and shine upon her as morning rays on the western hills. Britain will become as a saviour to the world; as the mother of nations, she

> will receive of God, and crown her offspring with peace. She has conquered her deepest foes, the clergy.

The catalyst on earth for the fulfilment of Willson's millennial hopes for Britain is Israel. He writes:

> Hear a word from a friend, ye inhabitants of the isles. What God hath ordained and appointed will come to pass. He hath appointed Israel, the Jews, to be his people, and it will be so. God is their Saviour; to this end were they made, and their means is salvation to all the world. The globe hath but one centre, nor Israel, but one Saviour. The personal Son of God hath appeared, but the solemn effect is yet to come; for though we say we have believed, (that are Christians,) we have not practised; such a faith is dead, and renders our situation but little better than the Jews.

Probably it is because of the Reform Bill of 1832 that Willson is so optimistic about Britain's role in establishing true Christian practice on earth. He goes on to say:

> Reform has begun in Britain as in Abraham, and will spread through the whole earth . . . Britain is restoring the poor to their right, and pleading for a free circulation of just principles, and the preaching of the Gospel on the principles it began in Israel and in Judah.

Although his prophecies may sound disconnected from reality, Willson clearly intended his words in a practical sense.

In 1835, THE SAME year that *Impressions* was published, Willson also published *Letters to the Jews.* The twelve epistles in this brief volume of seventy-one pages are dated from 28 June 1835 to 11 July 1835. In communicating directly with the Jews, he was attempting to hasten the restoration of this people, an event that, as indicated in *A Friend to Britain*, in turn would bring about the redemption of Britain and the entire world. In the first letter Willson states his position — not an uncommon one at the time — very clearly:

> Joshua was of the dispensation of Moses, and Christ of the Prophets, for he prophesised of that which should be hereafter. He, Jesus, was a true prophet, and the New Testament ought to be received by you, as a book of prophets or prophecies of things that will come to pass, for the words of this prophecy, the New Testament relates unto us, that another dispensation shall come upon the world, and this dispensation is, the salvation of the Jews, the chosen of the Lord.[7]

As he connects Biblical times with the historical present and future, so Willson is careful to show two distinct meanings of Israel. He observes that "The Lord is not a respecter of bloods, but of souls that are within us, and goes on in the third letter to specify precisely his concept of Jewishness:

> Now, I believe, *in spirit* I must become the Jew; as to blood, that is impossible ... The sooner I am a Jew in spirit it is the better for my soul, because I then become heir with them in the things that God hath given, and speak with them as a brother about the things of God ... Israel of old will soon be had in remembrance, and the name of Abram come to light, and David be seen in Israel, Jacob's sure defence. Therefore as David could not be overcome, his sword shall never depart from the house of the Lord.

This is one of the many instances in his writings where the coincidence of the Bible's King David and David Willson's names bears a large amount of significance for Willson's self-conception. The similarity of Children of Peace and Children of Israel, noted above in connection with their shared wilderness trials, is another aspect of this same phenomenon. In essence, Willson is attempting to liberate himself from time and perceive the world in an eternal perspective. His technique is congruent with the circle imagery's purposes in *Impressions*. In the eighth letter he presents the following description of himself:

> My spirit is from a far and distant hill. *It is older than Israel*, and was before Moses was born into the world; because the Lord God of Jacob and of Israel, giveth me that which hath not been revealed. I neither ask alms nor break bread with the churches that are; I am not depending on the hills nor cities, but a daily supplicant to my God, that hath upheld my spirit in the wilderness. Almost the desert of the world is my abode, and I confer not with flesh and blood about the things of God.

Willson evidently intends these unflattering remarks about Upper Canada to augment the image of himself as a prophet on the order of Moses or King David.

Willson's double vision of the Jews as a favoured race and as a spiritual state — an identification he most fully explores in *Letters to the Jews* — is also an important feature of *Impressions*. His role as "David," the shepherd, giant-killer, king, and psalmist, is part of the larger conflation of the Children of Israel and the Children of Peace and to express the redemptive experiences of the Children of Peace in the Upper Canadian wilderness, he normally uses terms that were originally applied to the Children of Israel in the Bible. The first consequence of this method is to reinforce the sense of circularity and of overlapping in time. In a passage that recounts the historical events during the split from the Society of Friends by the Children of Peace, the interweaving of Old Testament myth is striking:

> I am myself one of the wandering kind from society, for the Judges found me unworthy of communion, and like my father out of Paradise — I was put away — the gates were closed against me, fast and strong ... I soon found a spring of living water, and fresh pastures to my soul. I now enjoy a little field in the wilderness with a few brethren of the lost number like myself: here we have been since the year 1811, building houses to the Lord — introducing ancient praise into the assemblies of his people. Our little field enlarges (as David hath said of the

> abounding mercies of his God) — our springs fall not, neither do our pastures pass away, and from my lonesome tent I set out this morning to reveal the Son of God to the world.

In describing most vividly the apocalyptic mission of Christ, Willson again overlaps present and past times to create an eternal perspective, giving rise to an image of struggle:

> Christ was and is the means, God the Saviour of us all. The means could not do farther than the Father was with him; he overcame the world in spirit, but the world overcame him in person, and he fled from the house of Jacob and the tents of Israel. He did not only ascend in person, but in spirit also, and revealed himself to but few afterwards ... Here Satan first began his reign and here it will end. God will tabernacle with man, and there will be God and man again, no serpent or mediator between, it is near at an end, when Satan is where he began ... Between God and man is Satan's place, and Christ came from heaven to abolish his name from between man and his Maker, that every soul should have knowledge of his builder and maker, who is God, and his word or Christ the means and maker of us all.

This conception of the struggle between opposing forces is very similar to Boehme's theory of the generation of nature as a dialectical product of struggle. In Willson's imagery, Satan, the serpent that brought about the centrifugal flight into time and space, gives way to Christ, the redeemer who draws all into the centre in an eternal, rhythmic process. To Willson, this salvation is not an abstract notion, but a reality that is available to human beings here and now in the eternal present, as both Boehme and George Fox also believed. Willson says: "Till the day cometh that *the universal love of nations and societies* is preached from the pulpit *the love of neighbours as ourselves*, and practised, there will be *peace in no nation under the sun*." Willson addresses the final section of *Impressions*, "The United Colonies of North America" (29 January 1835), to the Americans. Completing the circle, at the end of his work he returns to contemplate his birthplace. To the Quakers, his spiritual origin, he also returns in the last section of *Impressions*, noting the fulfilment of the prophecy he had made in 1816 in his *Testimony to the Quakers*, that the Society of Friends would "one day *rend apart in a visible manner*."[8] He also restates his view that their fundamental error is in assuming the judgement seat over their brethren. Answering a final question about the various political and religious divisions in the world, Willson provides a centripetal image that summarizes the form and meaning of *Impressions* as a whole:

> Can one good Lord Jesus Christ be the author of this abounding contention there is on earth about heaven and hell, God and the devil? I think not. He communicates one understanding to all men because he is the Prince of Peace, but a diversity of gifts from one body or spirit; but these accord and at last centre into one, the bosom of Christ Jesus the Saviour and Redeemer of the world.

The third section of *Impressions* is *The Acting Principles of Life*, the entries of which are dated, following the dates of *A Friend to Britain. The Acting Principles*, Willson trusts, will "encourage virtue and suppress vice." Uniquely among his works, *The Acting Principles* contains no poems interspersed among the prose passages, but the prose itself is poetic — cadenced like the Psalms, and, also similarly to the Psalms, Willson's prose employs parallelism. *The Acting Principles* is a poetic restatement of the concepts underlying *Impressions* and *A Friend to Britain*. Willson arranges his subjects in contrasting pairs. This organization is consistent with his vision of life as a whole: he imagines the world micro- and macrocosmically, as a rhythmic dilating and centring process. The subject that follows "Love," the opening chapter of *The Acting Principles* (from which the excerpt at the beginning of this essay is taken), for instance, is "Sorrow." In his apostrophe to "Life" (6 March 1835), Willson lucidly depicts his impression of the rhythmic process at the heart of existence:

> Life, thou art the ways of man, and the child of God. God hath clothed thee with his own dwelling. He hath placed a crown on thy head and thrown it down to earth. In thy name he hath built great cities, and consumed them with fire. He hath caused thee to flee to the mountain and hide in the by places of the rocks, to shun his name. He hath pursued thee with the sword, and caused thee to fall in the battle. He clothed thee with a garment by the morning light, and before the setting sun cast thy covering into the grave. He has made thee mourn with the mother, and rejoice with the princes in one day.

Perhaps the most beautiful of the apostrophes that make up *The Acting Principles* is the one addressed to "Light" (25 March 1835). Writing on this subject, one of the central images of the Quaker religion, Willson attains visionary heights of poetic inspiration. For him, light is the coalescence of the diverse themes he treats throughout *Impressions*. In "Light" he reaches the eternal perspective he seeks:

> Light, thou art the covering of the world, the presence of the highest. By thee man was made, and a sun placed within his breast to give light to the inner man. Thou art without and within the soul; by thee the earth is discovered, and heaven, to the mind. By thee the plant arose from the bosom of the earth, and is clothed with many colours. Thou art the name of the Deity with us; the bitter and the sweet grow up before thee, and unnumbered virtues are extracted from the ground ... Thou art connected with life as the husband with the bride, and life and light are one in all things.
>
> Wisdom is the light of life, and with her she walketh always. Who hath seen wisdom without thee, or life without direction? Hope is implanted in thy breast, and faith is the proceeds of light, and bringeth life into action, and the whole work of God appeareth visible to the eye in thee. Thou art in the eye, and in the sun and skies; and when life departeth from the body light is absent also, and the eye is closed in the dark.

The Boehmist sense of opposition generating existence and emphasis on the role of wisdom (Boehme's "Sophia") are strong in Willson's apostrophe.

The final pair of antithetical themes he treats in *The Acting Principles* are "Mercy and Charity" and "Judgment" (16 March 1835). This opposition synthesizes into the subject that is supremely important to Willson: his relationship with his God. The closing paragraph of "Judgment," in fact of the entire book, epitomizes the relationship in images suggestive of the centripetal tendencies so often felt in his work:

> Judgment and mercy are as twins of the Almighty: by the one he doth trouble for our sins, and by the other abate the consuming flame. These are united by his convincing and converting power, by which he will redeem all the inhabitants of the earth into the presence of one God; and the children of this world shall be as the children of one father: and heaven and God, and saints and angels, dwell here on earth with them forever. All shall be convinced and converted in the flesh: the mind is the habitation of spirits, heaven and hell is in it, and here guilt consumes the sinful soul; it is where the dead shall live, and the sinner be converted and redeemed from all woes, and his soul as the living stream seeking the bosom of the sea, flow to his creator God, and live with him forever and enjoy those promised worlds that are to come, which is a conversion of the soul.

Willson's understanding of the Apocalypse carries tremendous strength of conviction and shines throughout his many books, hymns, sermons, and tracts. During his life he inspired a large number of people, the Children of Peace, to live "as the children of one father." Though it led him sometimes to eccentric positions, his faith guided him to communicate a vision of renewal in Upper Canada which in many respects is still valid. After his death in 1866, however, the energy of the Children of Peace rapidly diminished and generally people have ignored Willson's writings. The reason is not simply that his style is archaic and his ideas esoteric, because one may trace ways of understanding his works. I think that the most difficult aspect of his writings is the challenge they present to the reader to wade into "the living stream seeking the bosom of the sea" which Willson himself so wholeheartedly entered.

NOTES

[1] David Willson, *The Impressions of the Mind* ... (Toronto: J. H. Lawrence, 1835), p. 317. Subsequent references to this work from this edition.

[2] David Willson, *A Collection of Items of the Life of David Willson, from the Year 1801-1852* ... (Newmarket: G. S. Porter, 1852), p. 14.

[3] J. E. Cirlot, *A Dictionary of Symbols*, trans. Jack Sage (New York: Philosophical Library, 1962), p. 39.

[4] Among the writers who detect Boehmist influences in Fox are: Rufus M. Jones, *Spiritual Reformers in the 16th and 17th Centuries* (London: Macmillan, 1928), p. 220; Stephen Hobhouse, *William Law and Eighteenth-Century Quakerism*

(New York: Macmillan, 1928), p. 246; Caroline Spurgeon, "William Law and the Mystics," in *The Cambridge History of English Literature*, eds. A. W. Ward and A. R. Waller (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1912), IX, 307; and William C. Braithwaite, *The Beginnings of Quakerism* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1912), pp. 38-42.

[5] George Fox, *The Journal of George Fox* (1694), ed. J. L. Nickalls (London: Religious Society of Friends, 1975), pp. 27-28.

[6] William Blake, *Complete Writings*, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1969), p. 776.

[7] David Willson, *Letters to the Jews* (Toronto: W. J. Coates, 1835), p. 7. Subsequent references to this work from this edition.

[8] David Willson, *Testimony to the People Called Quakers* (N.p.: privately printed for the Children of Peace, 1816), p. 5. The only known copy of this work is in the Quaker Collection of Haverford College where I recently found it uncatalogued on a shelf beside Willson's other books.

FIVE PIECES FROM "SMOKING MIRROR"

Brian Henderson

The Gathering Release

These are the *nemontemi*, the blank days, during which nothing accomplishes itself. No fires burn, all pots are broken. No one speaks. Even politics and war cease. Nothing may ever begin again.

Out of this blankness, I am sailing over a city of corpses, a hand moves, I hear a scream. They are killing everyone. In the square of the Holy City huge animals glinting men ride trample everywhere. People are dismembered, children are dismembered. I see myself barely standing, awash in blood, wings crashing over my head. All time is being unmeasured.

Back on my roof just as everyone is coming up to theirs, the hawk folds its wings, and I suddenly welcome how calm nothing can be. The city is dark and we all are looking in the dawn-direction. The Pleiades begin to shoot over the lake. Piercing wrists, wincing, I fling blood into the night, black, silver, red. On the mountain the flame leaps and everyone in the city is cheering. It is a river coursing down the mountain, heading toward each of our hearths. Almost unpredictably the world, for another moment, has begun again.

Atl Tlachinoli

It is mid-day. You will not believe the heat which calcinates the air. Everywhere is one white flash. Suddenly as we walk, over to the left on the edge of vision, a falcon springs out of the stone of the temple, is released from its grasp, or flung like a hearth flame upward at the new year. Love too, jumps from us over and over again — the green cry of the bird and of the wood licks us, only to collapse back into us, ash and stone. We're always assuming we have arrived somewhere, that something always concealed from us has been uncovered, or that because we can say something finally about certain things that have always perfectly evaded us, that these things have come to an end, at last, or unfortunately, that we can start freed, newly. The way a stone sacrifices itself for the falcon it imagines, or wood for its blossom of fire. What then, about the calendar of day and night, eagle and tiger, the blossoming war of the heart? We give to know, and it demands everything of us, and still remains unknown, giving us something else instead.

What conceals, intensifies what it conceals — you and I, for instance. We are a libation of ourselves toward it. We are the fuel of something we ourselves burn. And the stone with the hawk in its heart is always preparing to release it.

Let the day open its crashing arms of light, the sign of movement fill the bowl of the heart. We give to be.

Border Crossing

What breaks the surface of this well — a smoking mirror like a threshold — is lost, given. What's human is discarded and sinks down into the watery heart of the earth, where gleaming ceases and nothing can be called different from any other. Past this passage, this root of memory, vein risen from below, everything is so totally absorbed in what it is not that everything, every offering — gold, or jade, or quetzal plumes — returns somehow, surprisingly almost completed, shining in the mind, knowing something we can only guess. It returns, and what was broken, crushed, or torn asunder is healed in a recall that forgets itself. Petals of snow fall into this well in the mountains of the *Zapoteca.* When I am standing here and looking, I too am absorbed into the liquid thought of the earth. Recalled, I am already and always falling, offered, into that dark clarity that shines, as if from above.

Heart-Making

Tlalticpac is the smoking mirror, the Place of Herons. The smoking mirror is a sleeping stone, our lake, *Meztliapan* — Lake of the Moon — slate blue, heron blue, misted, filled with spectral shiftings that withhold themselves in the blind bud of water, until, out of which, struck by a rain of blood — the red and the yellow nectar the sparrowhawk gleaned from the sky water serpent — the cactus of bright spiked fruit, the city, flashes through *Chalchiuitlicue*'s skirt of currents like a sudden dawn burning the night. Punitive. Beautiful. Birth of *Movement*. 13 Reed, and hollow as a bone flute. The void of the heart of things that clarifies, informs, and gives, that releases us into the shell-coloured dawns of the earth, and must always be fed because it is an outpouring, outpours, outpours. To become capable of its gift, *quallotl*, is the celebration of blood which throws a trace like a plume of pollen, the story of the squadrons of stars. Wherever we must go, we will go singing then, following what we lead, carrying what we do not carry, into the blue heaven and the green, the gold heaven and the black, the red place of *Ometeotl*, goddess-god of the Nearing Far. Only now have you begun to converse with your heart, and live in the most difficult place. Look: your god is coming to you over the Hill of Stars.

Arrows of The Night Sun

I am wearing the black suit of soot. I am made from *teonanacatl* narcotic fungus, tobacco, scorpions, poisonous snakes, juice of the night sun. My face is a blaze of gold. Here, these three black stripes like horizons. I look into your heart with my spy glass as the door, at the threshold — it is the female house, She Who Shines With Her Heart. I look into that place. I look there. It is a drum, the Place of Making, *Tamoanchan*. Metal gongs and drums of tortoise shell, the red and the blue conches roar, the paper banners fly with colour. The braying priests, *ixiptli* of us, when they don our regalia, wave our flayed femurs. Listen, listen: the larval dead are listening. Hear them listening. They are a blue cloud of iridescent butterflies. Can we believe we are here? Can you let yourself believe that, standing among the yellow cocoa flowers, the black zapote fruit? Only because of them, Lord, only because of them, these convulsions of meaning.

Aztec Glossary

ATL TLACHINOLI Flowering War. Ceremonial wars arranged between cities for the gathering of sacrificial victims. It must be remembered that to be a sacrifice was one of the highest honours that could be accorded in Mexican society. The imagery that seems so strikingly paradoxical in this phrase is linked to the matrix of heart, flower, blood, and sun. One axis — sun, heart, earth — can still be seen in the emblem of Mexico today which celebrates the founding of *Tenochtitlan*: the eagle fluttering on the nopal cactus with the serpent in its beak.

CHALCHIHUITLICUE (Chal-chee-wheet-li-kwa). She of the Jade Skirt. Water goddess; *Tlaloc*'s consort.

IXIPTLI (Eesh-ip-tli). The doubles of the gods. This doubling, or incarnation occurred at ceremonial moments when people donned the divine regalia. It was no mere imitation. An ixiptla was a god.

METZLIAPAN (Metz-lee-a-pan). Lake Texcoco.

MOVEMENT (13 Reed). From the calendar. Movement is the name given to our epoch, the fifth and the last. All others have been destroyed by cataclysm. 13 Reed is a day associated with *Quetzalcoatl* upon which he was said to have vanished in the east, and thus suggests his predicted apocalyptic return.

NEMONTEMI. The nothing days at calendar's end that were "left over," were not part of the calculations. During them nothing could be done but wait for time to begin again. Very unlucky.

OMETEOTL. Lord of Duality, creator, both female and male.

QUALLOTL (Kwal-lotl). An adjectectival meaning "good," "as it should be," "appropriate." Its etymology is particularly instructive: "the quality of all that is eatable"; hence, "capable of giving of itself."

TAMOANCHAN (Tam-o-an-chan). Place of creation, where *Quetzalcoatl* brought human bones to life with blood from his penis.

TEONANACATL (Tay-o-na-na-catl). The Divine Mushroom; peyote.

TLALTICPAC. The earth.

ZAPOTECA. The Zapotecs were a Mexican tribe living in the Western Sierras.

SIGNATURES OF TIME

Alistair MacLeod & his Short Stories

Colin Nicholson

Short stories by Alistair MacLeod have been translated into Russian and into French. One, "In the Fall," has been made into an award-winning film; two have been dramatized. "The Boat" and "The Lost Salt Gift of Blood" were selected for and appeared in *The Best American Short Stories*, making him the only Canadian to have been recognized twice in this way. In the first instance, and in the company of work by Bernard Malamud, Isaac Bashevis Singer, and Sylvia Plath, "The Boat" was judged one of the best twenty short stories published in North America in 1969. Several other tales by MacLeod have either been selected for the roll of honour, or listed as distinctive in *The Year Book of the American Short Story*. On its publication in 1976, his collection *The Lost Salt Gift of Blood*,[1] received outstanding reviews entirely characterized by the welcoming enthusiasm, recorded on the book's cover, of Joyce Carol Oates: "These are moving, powerful and beautifully crafted stories by one of North America's most promising writers." Or, in the words of Hugh MacLennan, "This may well be the best pure writing ever to appear in Canadian fiction."

ALISTAIR MACLEOD's characters and contexts are miners and their families, fishermen or farmers and their communities. His are, in the proper sense of the word, elemental fictions.* The driving wind that blows through the pages of "In The Fall" both strains and secures a family under economic and emotional duress. Coalmines in "The Vastness of the Dark" play a comparable role for the eighteen-year-old narrator, imprisoning him but also lending him a strength of which he is at the time of telling only dimly aware: a history of mining disasters in the region of his upbringing both confining him yet paradoxically giving him definition. "This grimy Cape Breton coal-mining town whose prisoner I have been for all of my life," is not something

* This paper incorporates an interview conducted with MacLeod during his year at Edinburgh University's Centre of Canadian Studies on the writer-exchange scheme jointly funded by the Scottish Arts Council and the Canada Council. MacLeod's replies are signalled thus, [AM], and are *italicized*.

easily shaken off. But the remembered words of his grandfather lend an urgency to the boy's desire to set himself free from a history which fascinates and repels him simultaneously: "once you start it takes a hold of you, once you drink underground water, you will always come back to drink some more. The water gets into your blood. It is in all of our blood. We have been working in the mines here since 1873." As these twin and rival themes of entrapment and escape, enclosure and release mutate through the volume, the language registers a history of hardship and of endurance. In the words of the itinerant miner desperately searching for work, whose comment ends "The Vastness of the Dark," "it seems to bust your balls and it's bound to break your heart."

Or this, as the boy remembers his first working day underground; "and there was scarcely thirty-six inches of headroom where we sprawled, my father shovelling over his shoulder like the machine he had almost become while I tried to do what I was told and to be unafraid of the roof coming in or of the rats that brushed my face, or of the water that numbed my legs, my stomach, and my testicles or of the fact that at times I could not breathe because the powder-heavy air was so foul and had been breathed before." Both the boy and his mother are terrified when the drunken father and husband badly gashes his hand: "and we had prayed then, he included, that no tendons were damaged, and that no infection would set in because it was the only good hand that he had, and all of us rode upon it as perilous passengers on an unpredictably violent sea."

MacLeod himself worked as a miner and as a logger to pay his way through university, and inclusion of biographical and family experience gives graphic indelibility to his depictions: [AM] *"My father and his five brothers all worked in the mines at one time or another, and every one of them was mutilated — lost one eye, lost a hand, had their bones calcified. And this makes a real difference, I think. It comes, I guess, with being born in a certain place, what you see around you, what your fears and your loves are."*

Born in Saskatchewan, Alistair MacLeod grew up in the coal-mining area of Alberta, moving when he was ten years old to the farming communities of Cape Breton. [AM] *"My ancestors left Scotland for Canada in 1791. They left from the Isle of Eigg and went to Nova Scotia on a ship under the command of somebody called Colonel Fraser. They've been in Nova Scotia ever since."*

Almost two hundred years later, Gaelic songs, Scottish history, Highland allusions and Scots-Canadian place names like Truro, Glenholme, New Glasgow — all of these are woven into the fabric of his writing. A question which the dying schoolteacher who narrates "The Road to Rankin's Point" asks himself springs naturally to mind: "what is the significance of ancestral islands long left and never seen?"

The answer is direct:

[AM] *My parents were both from a place in Canada called Inverness County — named that for the obvious reason. When people from Scotland went over there, they went to a large extent in family groups from individual islands, like Eigg, and intermarried, and carried with them the whole body of whatever it is that people carry with them — folklore, emotional weight. Because it was all open to them, they settled pretty much where they wanted to. Cape Breton Island and Nova Scotia remained rural for a long time, and fairly isolated. And because there was no-one else to integrate with, they stayed very much to themselves almost for six generations. So that if you look at my ancestry and my wife's ancestry, there's no-one who's not from the Highlands and Islands of Scotland. All of our ancestors bear those names: MacLeod, Maclellan, Macdonald, Rankin, Beaton, Walker, MacIsaac, Gillis, MacDonnell, Campbell, Macpherson, MacLennan. In 1985, this is still who we are. And that is why there is this felt affinity on the part of those who emigrated for those who remain. When you think that this is good you say that people were stable for several generations: when you think of it in negative terms, you could say that they were static. Although my wife has adequate Gaelic, we are really the first generation where the breakdown of that culture is beginning to occur.*

It is a breakdown which will return to haunt the writing in a number of ways.

But it is all the more notable, in the light of that clear enunciation of historical awareness, that as a collection, *The Lost Salt Gift of Blood*, is characterized by a narrative predilection almost exclusively dedicated to the present tense.

[AM] *In that mode you can be tremendously intense. I just like that. I think that individuals are very interested in telling their own stories, and to adapt this persona is very effective in just riveting the listener. I do think of Coleridge's ancient mariner who, having been ordered by the wedding guest to release him — 'eftsoons his hand dropt he' — fixes him with his glittering eye and just tells his story. I think, too, of David Copperfield's opening, "I Am Born," and think how basic, and arresting, that is.*

Closely focused upon the experiential now of the narrator and the reader, these stories also achieve a similar kind of immediacy and intensity for the recollection of emotions from the past in a troubled, untranquil present. Moreover, by presenting this recall in a style of lyric elaboration, MacLeod's narratives conjure both the bright surfaces of life and their implicit emotional undertow, bringing them into what William Carlos Williams once called "that eternal moment in which we alone live." It is in the sculpting of the emotional infrastructure of any given situation that MacLeod's talent shines, so that his lyricism "celebrates the poetic self despite every denial."[2] And his narrators are, all of them, poetic selves. While the verbal unspooling of first-person narration counteracts a relative paucity of dialogue, the cross-weaving of time past with time present signifies the ubiquitous presence of history in his writing, as

narrating memory speaks. Thus, an account of a middle class family going back to working class origins in a mining community, simply called "The Return," opens with "It is an evening during the summer that I am ten years old and I am on a train with my parents as it rushes towards the end of Eastern Nova Scotia." After exploring that moment in an earlier and a later direction, a re-entry is subsequently effected — "And now it is later" — after which the present moevs forward in the narrating memory: "It is morning now and I awake to the argument of the English sparrows outside my window and the fingers of the sun upon the floor." (Argument defines the relationship, on this visit, between the child-narrator's mother and father, and between them and his grandparents: and identity and relationships are very much prefigured in imagery associated with the human hand.)

On the two occasions in the volume where the more traditional past tense is used as the vehicle for fictionalized recall, in "The Golden Gift of Grey," and "The Boat," other techniques are used to persuade the reader of the enriching if troubling immediacy for the narrator of what is being narrated. Indeed, from its opening utterance, "The Boat" may be accurately described as a technical meditation upon remembered events and imaginings as the past folds in on the present: "There are times even now, when I awake at four o'clock in the morning with the terrible fear that I have overslept," thereafter unobtrusive iterations mark the affective passing of time, as the process of memory inscribes its intricate divagations. "And I know then that that day will go by as have all the days of the past ten years, for the call and the voices and the shapes and the boat were not really there in the early morning's darkness and I have all kinds of comforting reality to prove it." Meanwhile, rhythms of acute discomfort are registered. Or, to slightly different effect, "I say this now as if I knew it all then," and later, "I say this again as if it happened all at once and as if all of my sisters were of identical ages . . . and again, it was of course not that way at all." The narrative consciousness in these stories repeatedly demonstrates its ability to enter their constructed worlds at will, at any point, and from that chosen present range backwards or forwards in time.

In the process, "The Boat" reflects post-modernistically upon its own procedures, so that when we read an instance of apparently more straightforward recall we encounter, rather, an image which encodes the fictive strategy both of this story and of the collection as a whole:

> The floor of the boat was permeated with the same odour and in its constancy I was not aware of any change. In the harbour we made our little circle and returned.

The image is a paradigm of a mode of writing where circling and returning constancy and change and sameness and difference are central to its concerns. For what strikes the reader all the more tellingly for being implicit, is the narra-

tor's prior, and the reader's subsequent awareness of a change so profound that it jeopardizes any sense of constancy either might otherwise enjoy. It is an image which reinforces our own subliminal involvement in the circlings and returns of the past into the present and the present upon the past, and which illuminates MacLeod's narrative technique everywhere else as much as it advances narrative event in this story. And in common with stylistic procedures widely adopted in this volume, the shaping agency of personal, familial, and community history is felt along the pulse of practically every sentence in "The Boat," as an emergent consciousness is adumbrated: "I first became conscious . . ."; "My earliest recollection of my mother . . ."; "I learned first. . . ." It is, then, appropriately typical of MacLeod's method that the past lights up memory's retina with the shock of first cognition: "My earliest recollection of my father is a view from the floor of gigantic rubber boots and then of being suddenly elevated and having my face pressed against the stubble of his cheek, and of how it tasted of salt and of how he smelled of salt from his red-soled rubber boots to the shaggy whiteness of his hair." The past is recalled with a sensuous immediacy as if present, while the story's final image subsequently enshrouds this earlier remembering.

"The Boat" begins in the present tense, and maintains this mode for a page and a half before reverting to the conventional mode of recall. For the reader, this too structures a contextual immediacy of recurrent nightmarish intrusions of the past into the present which technically glides as easily into that past. It is, then, a semantically functional technique, offering the reader a kind of analogous exposure to the process whereby, for the narrating self, the past actively shapes his present. The reading present slips into a narrative past just as the narrator's past exfoliates, always already shaping the self he now is. In this way a textual web of two-way entrapment is created. The narrator gives this voice. "I say this now with a sense of wonder at my own stupidity in thinking I was somehow free." In "The Boat," as throughout the volume, both time and experience appear to be duplicitous, possessing the quality of being double in action, and, then, of double-dealing, almost deceiving the characters, being understood by them in two ways at different times; time passing openly and secretively at the same time.

[AM] *I was interested* [in The Boat] *in the idea of choice, of the price we all have to pay for the choices that we make; in the idea that sometimes people choose to do things that they don't want to do at all, somewhat like the father in that story. This is a man who is caught up in a kind of hereditary pattern, where people fish, and the only son inherits the father's boat — that kind of life. But what I was getting at with the father was that here was a person who maybe didn't want to do that at all, but who is just caught up in this inherited life. Throughout this story, nobody ever thinks of him as ever having a side to him that yearns for something*

else. They just see him as doing what everyone else does. Which he does. I was interested, towards the end of the story, in the son who is an ambiguous kind of person — can do things well at school as well as handle the boat. It never enters the boy's mind, until his father becomes sick, or something like that, that maybe he has to choose between this or that. And then he realizes that his father has made this choice before. So when I was writing the story, I realized that there were several things I had to do: I've got to make the father old, because if he was a thirty-eight, or even a forty-eight year old man with a son who doesn't want to fish with him, then I've got a very different kind of situation on my hands. But what you've got here is a man who is fifty-six when he fathers this child, and his wife is maybe around forty-two. Six daughters before — none of whom marry local people and the mother is left alone — and this is the only son. The mother is thinking of future security and the father is thinking of other things. So that by the time the son has to make these decisions, what he's got for a father is someone who is around seventy-three. Very different indeed from a father who is thirty or forty. You've got a grandfather for a father.

Within this family configuration, only the briefest of gestures towards a specifically colonial history — "the houses and their people . . . were the result of Ireland's discontent and Scotland's Highland Clearances, and America's War of Independence. Impulsive emotional Catholic Celts who could not bear to live with England and shrewd determined Protestant Puritans who, in the years after 1776, could not bear to live without" — helps to contextualize deeper significations for both a loveless marriage and a mother's attitudes to the relative merits of literature and work. So it seems inevitable that one of the ways this literature works is to make, of a father singing "the laments and the wild and haunting Gaelic war songs of those spattered Highland ancestors he had never seen," a historical epiphany by modulating past tense into fluid continuous present: "and when his voice ceased, the savage melancholy of three hundred years seemed to hang over the peaceful harbour . . . and the men leaning in the doorways of their shanties . . . and the women looking to the sea from their open windows with their children in their arms." Conversely, the light but firm embedding of the narrative in an interfusing past and present enables extensions from concrete immediacy out towards timelessness: as when the boy remembers evenings spent with his mother, knitting lobster-trap headings "the twine was as always very sharp and harsh, and blisters formed upon our thumbs and little paths of blood snaked quietly down between our fingers while the seals that had drifted down from distant Labrador wept and moaned like human children on the ice-floes of the Gulf."

Finally, "The Boat" returns us to the now with which it opened, playing a fugue in memory of the dead father whose presence is everywhere felt. The syntax moves from "is" to "was" to "had been," to repetition: "but neither is it easy to know that your father was found . . . at the base of the rock-strewn

cliffs where he had been hurled and slammed so many many times," and then from "was" to an image whose haunting and continuous immediacy first triggered the narrative act of memorial homage. "There was not much left of my father, physically, as he lay there with the brass chains on his wrist and the seaweed in his hair." It is the word "physically" which provides the clue. The father who exists no more, exists all the time in the boy's mind.

[AM] *All the time. I think what I was trying to deal with there was, as the father makes the choice, and so may always be haunted by that choice, you know, haunted by "the road not taken," so the son has made the opposite choice, and the haunting passes to him. Still his mother and all these people who stay there wonder when he's coming back. And of course he's never coming back physically in a permanent sense.*

Narrative strategy floats the possibility that the father has committed suicide in order to free the son.

[AM] *Nobody knows, not even the son. All that the son knows is that when this fishing season is over then it's really over. But as it turns out, it's as if they get through the last season and there isn't any more father; like it's on the last day and the weather is now too bad to continue. The boy looks around, and there's more finished than he thought! Remember that when the boy had said that he would stay and fish with him as long as his father was alive, the father had said I hope you remember what you say. So, when the father's no longer there, one way of looking at it is that the son has been freed. When you're dealing with the possibility of suicide, hindsight becomes very different. Cryptic remarks assume strange significance, and nobody really knows what they mean. So, after the old man is washed overboard, and the son looks back on all this, he is left to puzzle out what the old man really meant. But what does happen is that the son goes away, and does not pursue that career as a fisherman; then the mother just thinks of it as disloyalty. And with that final image comes the recognition that you're never free of anything.*

As the boy remembers it, his dead father was once described by a party of visiting tourists as "Our Ernest Hemingway," and it may not be entirely accidental that Alistair MacLeod's writing opposes itself to one central attribute of the American's style. In common with many of the protagonists in Hemingway's short stories, in "The Snow of Kilimanjaro," a fear of contemplation, or indeed of any recuperation by thought, combines with a celebration of sensuous immediacy to construct a fictive terrain of recrimination and failure. The immediacy of the senses displaces conceptual thought, and the narrative of the dying writer Harry is characterized throughout by a devotion to the "now" of lived experience, even as his life has been characterized by a squandering of that experience. Harry himself recognizes the betrayal implied in selling "vitality in one form or another"[3] in his writing. As he acknowledges elsewhere, "you kept from thinking and it was all marvellous." Only in his moment of dying is Harry able to substitute a sense of duration for the effects of intensity, with the word

"then" displacing the word "now" in his terminal experience of consciousness. In marked difference, by playing upon the ambiguity of the different adverbial forms of "then" in "The Boat," MacLeod registers the emphasis of immediacy in its lexical dance with "now," but makes of it a process and a style which renders *both* words durable. The Canadian's "now" is a deepened, meditative, historical experience.

In contrast with Hemingway's preferred American usage,[4] the "now" in which MacLeod's first-person narrators tell their stories is one of ruminative awareness, one that is densely historical, resonant with the history of a local community. And exploring an immediate present both backwards and forwards in time is, as we have seen, a narrative technique he favours. So to think of him as a kind of fictional historian of the "now," begins to seem natural.

[AM] *I think of myself as coming from a particular place and a particular time. I do not think of myself as anything like an "instant" North American, not sure of his mother's maiden name. The idea of the melting pot, much encouraged in America, has not been encouraged in Canada; you know, the idea that people come from Scotland or Norway or wherever, and that once they're dipped in North American waters, they forget all their history and become instant American. The cliché is that you think of America as the melting pot and of Canada as a mosaic, composed of individual areas — here are the Scots, and here are the Irish names. Here are the French-Canadians; here the Ukrainians, the Icelanders, and they're spread out like that across the country. I think of it as inhabiting a single room within a larger house; inhabiting both.*

Of course, then there is the feeling that regional writing somehow is not good enough, but my own answer to this is that most of the world's great literature begins in the regional; all literature has to begin someplace. So if you look at Emily Bronte, Thomas Hardy, Charles Dickens — though that's the big city — it's still a regional world. Jane Austen is regional. A phrase much used by Flannery O'Connor is that she comes from "some place." She talks in her letters about going to conferences or whatever, meeting other writers and then saying "it seems that this afternoon I met a lot of people who were not from any place. I am from some place." A phrase that I have made use of to suggest one of the effects that this kind of writing might carry to the very different regions of a new country like Canada, is one that I borrowed from Bob Kroetsch, "the fiction makes us real." It's an issue that arises naturally with the idea, for example, of a Maritime literature; there's a current notion that this kind of writing gives people a confidence in themselves, that they can see themselves out there in the literature.

And the idea of a Canadian literature that is somehow nationally cohesive?

[AM] *Well, there's certainly a yearning on the part of some people for "the great Canadian novel." You know, some idealized novel covering everyone from St. John's to Victoria, which is 4,000 miles! The country is just too big for that. Too diverse. There are lots of people who have theories about this, of course, and Margaret Atwood has a long explanation of her view of the literary Canadian as victim.*[5] *And there is at least some justification for that idea. It's a harsher country*

than the United States: there's nowhere *in Canada where you couldn't freeze to death in February. The country, too, is a lot younger, and I think that even today a lot more people are employed in basic extractive industries than they are in the United States: they're logging and they're mining and they're fishing — the States is more of an industrial territory. And I think that one of the things that happens if you're engaged in using your body in your daily work, is that you have more to lose; you do lose your hand, lose a limb. It's more physical.*

Yet even in the nineteenth century in the United States, when there was a whole country to be taken, to be worked, the image is not of the pioneer as victim?

[AM] *No, it's more that of the conqueror . . .*

But that's not a 'Canadian' phenomenon. Why is that?

[AM] *Well . . . It may have something to do with the people who went there, a lot of British people who still looked back to Britain, whereas in the United States they hardly seem to look back at all. Certainly in Canada, I think, there's a stronger family connection. Canada seems to be composed of an entirely different set of attitudes. It's a different perception of history.*

What, then, was his reaction to the association of the lyricism in his own writing with the Celtic origins which his stories frequently recall?

[AM] *People are always suggesting this to me, and I've come to agree. But I do think that a lot of the language I use, a lot of the images I use, and a lot of the perceptions that I have are, how shall I say this, things that have been around me for a very long time; that language is almost given to a person, and what I try to do is to articulate that language. I read my things aloud to myself, to hear how they sound, and if they work aurally, I find that persuasive. I've heard my stories read on the radio and I'm always pleased that they do work in the mouths of others. But the kinds of things I deal with, I've been talking about to my uncles and my grandparents and everyone else for years, I suppose.*

Alongside the informing lyricism, there is also in MacLeod's writing an abiding note of loss and of regret, with the Scottish allusions seeming to operate like a kind of choric threnody. So there is, co-existing with his lyrical celebration of living, a pervasive sense of sadness, as if the style itself were keening.

[AM] *Well, I'm not sure, but there may be among those people a kind of sadness that they brought with them, the sadness of which we still hear. I don't know how long we can be saddled with Culloden, or with The Clearances, but while some obviously couldn't care less, perhaps meditative, thoughtful people brought that kind of sadness with them.*

It is a remark which brings into focus a feeling generated by reading MacLeod's work, that one of the things he is doing is memorializing an immigrant culture from the Highlands and Islands at a time when its historical purchase in Nova Scotia begins to slip: both memorializing and, since he is writing in English, enacting that moment of slippage.

[AM] *Perhaps. Perhaps. But I don't think of it that way; people do things emotionally without always being aware that they're doing them. I do know that I found myself growing up in a household where a lot of people spoke Gaelic, and not paying much attention to it; and you discover that you pick up a lot more than you realize.*

Yet MacLeod's earlier remark about belonging to the first generation in which the old Gaelic culture is beginning to break down suggests that there are further ways in which he is involved in a kind of historical elegizing, playing a pibroch in his own behalf, perhaps, as well as for the purposes and places of his characters. In its invocation of a phase of irreversible transition, his writing is reminiscent of some of Thomas Hardy's concerns, and the tone of regret which suffuses these stories, amounting almost to a characteristic sense of foreboding, might best be intimated through a story not included in *The Lost Salt Gift of Blood*. "The Closing Down of Summer"[6] deals with a gang of miners who roam around the world following work and who are at the peak of their powers, but is narrated by the gang-leader whose intimations of his own forthcoming death suffuses the texture of the writing. As he reveals how itinerant mining ruined his own marriage much as it damaged that of his parents, time passing becomes time future in particularly ironic ways — "perhaps we are but becoming our previous generation" — and he wonders whether, in a rapidly transforming world of work, "we have perhaps gone back to the Gaelic songs because they are so constant and unchanging and speak to us as the privately familiar."

[AM] *One of the things I was interested in when writing that story, was the problem of the intelligent, reflective, inarticulate person, someone who thinks a lot. He has been away from his family for so long that he hardly knows them; and his closest friends are those he works with. I think of these men as athletes — but without fans. They're laying their bodies on the line, but with no-one to see them! And as they become more handicapped — deafened or whatever — they revert to the Gaelic which they can also use in the lip-reading conditions underground. In my own life, as my grand-parents became older, my grandfather became deaf; and they became almost Gaelic speakers again. He could "hear" Gaelic better than he could English. This was in them anyway, and I think they just had some kind of prelapsarian return. So I think that this happens to these men in the shaft, when they're in Africa or wherever, they just speak Gaelic to each other.*

I was also interested, with the Gaelic singing, in the idea of whether art ever makes converts, or whether it just speaks to the converted all the time. That miner, looking at the Zulus dancing and wondering about what it might mean. He realizes that no matter how long he watches them, he will understand very little. And these undercurrents lead to the reflection that when he sings his Gaelic songs, and looks out at the audience, he does not know them, and they understand very little of what he is singing. They see him as he sees the Zulus. So the miners stop singing professionally. Then, with that Medieval lyric he had read during his short time as a university student, it stayed with him, and his daughter reads it as a student. He

has changed so much, and his daughter has changed so much, but this little statement about man becoming clay — which he misquotes, changing it to suit himself, though he doesn't know that — continues. He had no way of knowing that it would stay with him. Now he wonders whether he, too, will soon be clad in clay.

Throughout "The Closing Down of Summer," the narrator's brooding intimations of mortality seem to owe as much to the alienating effect of a single year at university as they do to art's longevity. Certainly one of the constancies running through many of these tales, playing like a patina over their surfaces but also mining their structures with a calculated uncertainty, is a web of literary allusions which functions in paradoxical ways, at some point involving, whether consciously or not, the author's own literary intervention. For the narrator of the title story, "The Lost Salt Gift of Blood," self-conscious comparison to a literary figure ("like a foolish Lockwood I approach the window although I hear no voice. There is no Catherine who cries to be let in"), or reference to Yeats's *Cuchulain* or to Arnold's *Sohrab and Rustum* serve not to buttress his confidence but to mark his separation. All of these references are concerned with trying to get the lost person back, and thus they enforce a sense of his isolation. Perhaps, outsider that he is, this is why the word "within" holds such fascination for him. It does, anyway, soon become clear that in the world of these stories, education, and particularly a literary education is very much a two-edged sword, serving to alienate characters from their origins even as it releases them from the more gruelling demands of necessary labour. From Dickens to Hemingway, from Hopkins to Dostoievsky, "book-learning" is both envied and feared, cherished and despised as simultaneously a salvation and a curse.

It is a problematic which gathers to a focus in the closing story in the volume, "The Road to Rankin's Point," where a schoolteacher returns to his grandmother's farm to die at the age of twenty-six, the same age at which his grandfather had died (though, as with "The Boat," whether suicidally or not is left uncertain). Whatever wisdom he has acquired seems to be of little use to him now, and the biblical three score years and ten which separates him from his grandmother — the term of a natural life — only reminds him of what he can never enjoy. Paradoxically, then, in Alistair MacLeod's loving inscription the people and places of *The Lost Salt Gift of Blood* find a refuge and a permanence which life and history seem destined to deny them, while the dying schoolteacher muses in a way which provides a fitting epigraph for the collection as a whole and for the reader's encounter with it. "The hopes and fears of my past and present intertwine. Sometimes when seeing the end of our present our past looms ever larger because it is all we have or think we know. I feel myself falling into the past now, hoping to have more and more past as I have less and less future."

NOTES

[1] Alistair MacLeod, *The Lost Salt Gift of Blood* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1976). All references are to the 1983 *New Canadian Library* reprint.

[2] The formulation is from Harold Bloom, "The Breaking of Form" in *Deconstruction and Criticism* (London: RKP, 1979), p. 17.

[3] Ernest Hemingway, "The Snows of Kilimanjaro," in *The First Forty-Nine Stories* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1944), pp. 58-83.

[4] See Tony Tanner, *The Reign of Wonder* (Cambridge: CUP, 1965), p. 233 ff.

[5] Margaret Atwood, *Survival: a Thematic guide to Canadian Literature* (Toronto: House of Anansi, 1972).

[6] Alistair MacLeod, "The Closing Down of Summer," *The Fiddlehead* (Fall 1976), pp. 16-32.

BERTHELOT'S RIVER

Maureen Chill

The cries are Berthelot's: the first one up,
the first one in the river. It is so early,
the woods still dissonant in their dreaming
unsheath their colours, rhythmic as oriental carpets,
dogs' tongues, Véronique in her orange dress
as her hips bump barbarous through fiddlehead fern.
She is the second one.

Testing the curent with her toe, she gasps.
There are splashes, laughter; then others come,
chatter along the banks, pee in bushes,
dangle their long legs dangerously in the rapids.
And Berthelot, putting his ear to the water,
can hear the ebb and flow of languages:
human fish; in the interstices
the dialect of gods.

Observing a fisherman wade toward seclusion,
Berthelot emerges, his body brazen as a tulip,
his voice crass, teasing. " 'Ey m'sieur," he shouts
confident of an audience, "don't fish there!
Nobody holds the river up on that side!"

THE KITCHEN

127 Gower St., St. John's, February 21, 1985

Des Walsh

At the time of this writing
he is thirty years old.
An emotional legend,
he wanders between moments
and studies hard, the brutal exchange
of night and day.
He fights with the habit of one plant
that struggles with its freedom
while pressing its veined green life
to the kitchen window.
The hot water boiler leak
continues to journey across the floor
with no sense of direction or style.
Will there be purpose for the water,
life for the ivy . . .
leaving him time to explore her letters
in an attempt to decipher their union?
Why would she have turned around
and with her sensuous stinging crow black eyes
cripple an already wounded child?
These are the things that need assessment and approval.
These are the things that need appropriate action.
The coming season is finding a way into his heart
and he plans for another summer of love and savagery.
Once again he will be spiritually reckless
and remove the armour from his soul
letting her do with him
what any other season has done.
He knows the danger in this,
yet he will love her
until one of them cries out
and they must face again, the slaughtering.

KREISEL'S BROKEN GLOBES

Neil Besner

ONE OF THE FEW "TRADITIONS" in North American fiction — by definition, by necessity — is the constellation of tensions between Old and New World conceptions of culture and character, history and memory, landscape and worldview, language and voice. The most important turn-of-the-century writer in this tradition is Henry James; more recently and closer to home, Mavis Gallant has been especially alert to North American misapprehensions of Europe and Europeans in the postwar period. Of course postwar literature — again, by definition — has also been forced to engage the agonies of postwar memory, violently superimposed on the longer tradition. The holocaust in particular has seared the literary imagination, has burned not only bodies, but also words, leaving the language tasting like ashes in writers' mouths: I think in this context of novelists like Elie Wiesel, or the Israeli writer Aharon Appelfeld (*Badenheim 1939, The Age of Wonders*), or of critics like George Steiner. In Canadian writing, I think of Henry Kreisel. Kreisel brings an adopted language and a doubled vision to Canadian fiction and criticism. His imagination is at once pulled back to, and appalled at the breakup of Europe; it is also an immigrant's imagination, inspiring a voice to speak out of necessity in a new language, one that refers both ways across the Atlantic.

Kreisel's forced exile from Europe was bound up from the beginning with his chosen exile from his home language. His family fled from Austria and the Anschluss to England in 1938; from there, Kreisel was interned as an "enemy alien" first on the Isle of Man and then in Canadian camps in New Brunswick.[1] Looking to Conrad as a "patron saint," Kreisel decided in the camps to write in English, to relegate his native German to second-language status.[2] But he did not make the decision to adopt English unaware of the vital, primal links between language and identity. He did not go as far — perhaps he recognized that a writer could not — as other refugees in the camps who, Kreisel remembers,

> had been emotionally and physically so bruised by the Hitler experience that they wanted to shed the language which he spoke, and which they felt he had corrupted. . . . They would thus forcibly suppress part of their innermost selves, and cast it off with the language of their mothers, the language of their childhood memories. It was the expression of a rage so furious, of a despair so profound that they were willing to tear out the very roots of their psychic being, to obliterate the

> very core of consciousness of which language is the prime instrument. As if one could create a new identity for oneself by denying and destroying the old. Here I learned at once, and in a very practical way, how closely linked identity is to language, how intertwined are the emotional and psychological centres with the language in which that personality expresses itself.[3]

In choosing to write in English, Kreisel recognized that he risked losing his native intimacy with his past, a loss of language and so of experience, a displacement which would have offset any gains realized by adopting a new (if not an innocent) language. The choice he made, as well as the consciousness with which he made it, reflect in the painfully doubled vision informing all of his writing. Kreisel's work recurringly suggests a powerful impulse to reconstruct as well as to project, to return to and interrogate European experience as well as to articulate the new identity of an adopted language.

The strength of this double pull also helps to explain the second and most important Canadian influence on Kreisel's work, A. M. Klein. Conrad first, Klein later: first, the greatest example in English literature of a writer's adoption of the language; then a Canadian (but also an "ethnic") writer to show Kreisel the possibilities of preserving ethnicity, which always exerts a strong pull pastwards, while at the same time writing in a new language.

READING KREISEL'S WORK in this context, it becomes clear that *The Rich Man* is his earliest depiction of the immigrant's New World nostalgic impulse to return, in language as much as in vision, to a European world imagined whole, before its second modern breakup. In Jacob Grossman Kreisel presents an immigrant whose memories of Europe, of Vienna, have been made over by New World distortions and mystifications. The most obvious of these delusions is that stately but carefree Vienna Jacob imagines as the homeground of the Blue Danube Waltz. Grossman wants to return to his family as a New World success, a prodigal decked out in a white alpaca suit. Of course the Vienna to which he returns is neither the Vienna of the Blue Danube nor the promised land prefigured in the first song Jacob hears on the radio as he wakes up in Toronto at the opening of the novel — Swing Low, Sweet Chariot. Kreisel's treatment of Jacob's self-deception and delusion is unambiguously ironic but also compassionate, and his evocation of the Viennese (and European) atmosphere of the late 1930's creates a palpable sense of the approaching conflagration. On this level, *The Rich Man* is a solid accomplishment, deserving more than the scant attention it has received; but read in the context of Kreisel's whole body of work, *The Rich Man* takes on added significance as his earliest exploration of how loss of language is related to loss of identity.

As Kreisel has always been very much aware, a major problem for ethnic writers is how to transcribe, transmit, or translate their native languages. The problem becomes most acute with dialogue, and *The Rich Man*, like all of Kreisel's work, is particularly dependent on dialogue. Should the writer translate word for word? The results will be stilted at best. Render in colloquial English, attempting a rough equivalence of tone? The risk of losing the flavour of the original utterance remains. Leave dialogue in the original language? (Kreisel does this sparingly, and then usually follows with a translation from the Yiddish or German.) The work would become inaccessible to the very readers it was directed at. In his first novel, Kreisel's solution was to render Yiddish dialogue in English — to return, as closely as possible, to Jacob's native tongue, to render its nuances as accurately as possible in English. In *The Rich Man*, Yiddish dialogue is closely bound up with Jacob's intimacy with his family in Vienna. It is a spoken and a sensuous language, bringing life and warmth to the novel's scenes of reunion, which are most often focused on meals at Jacob's mother's table. It is the language of return, the complement of the language of projected dispersion which also runs through the heart of the novel — the confusing, misapprehended, menacing and veiled language which announces the impending breakup.[4]

Jacob's return to Yiddish is the articulation of the novel's pull pastwards towards an imagined coherence in memory — part of the consistent double-pull in Kreisel's work. In Yiddish, Jacob feels comfortable, expansive, articulate, at home. On the way from the train station in Vienna to his mother's apartment, Jacob "revel[s] in the fact that he could speak his own language again." This is the most intimate of the senses in which Jacob returns, and also the locus of the novel's success as a rendition of warmly imagined, carefully transcribed dialogue. Within the family, dialogue resounds with Yiddish intonations — with the cautionary, wry and resigned tones of a self-conscious minority — intonations conserved and rendered as English. So Manya, Jacob's eldest sister, passes judgement on what she sees as Jacob's perilous sea voyage; in her speech, Kreisel brings out the grain of Yiddish *as* English, both syntactically and atmospherically:

> "Don't laugh, don't laugh," Manya protested. "It is dangerous to go on the water. Now I can tell you because Yankel is here with us and nothing happened. But all last week I was praying that nothing should happen to him, and that he should come here safe. Always I remember the Titanic. Such a big ship. And did all the bigness help her? Go fight with icebergs."

If this were the whole story — if this kind of language were the novel's only strength — then *The Rich Man* would have been a tender documentary rendition of Yiddish as English. But everywhere, beginning in the family and radiating outwards in the conversations Jacob had in the streets, in his brother-in-law

Albert's bookshop, with his brother-in-law Reuben in the steambaths, Jacob's return to the home language is double-edged, because the many idioms and dialects he hears cut towards fragmentation in the present as well as towards coherence in the past. Even as Jacob revels in the warmth and coherence of his return to a whole, sophisticated linguistic world — to a language sufficiently flexible and nuanced to allow for the wry rhythms of Manya's voice — this world begins to break: Shaendl's husband Albert begins to describe the political climate and the events leading up to Dolfuss' murder, looking out to the world beyond the immediate celebratory scene of reunion at the dinner table. Jacob begins to realize that this is a different, a foreign account; he "notice[s] the quality of his language" as Albert talks. Principally through Albert and his friend Koch, a journalist turned clown to escape the authorities, Kreisel introduces the wider historical perspective on Vienna just before the Anschluss. At the same time, Kreisel uses Albert and Shaendl's children, Herman and Bernhardt, to draw Jacob towards the novel's central image of a safe return to the sanctuary of childhood — the children's secret cave. Inevitably, given the novel's pattern of broken returns, of disrupted retreats to refuges imagined as coherent, as whole, the children's cave is invaded by a trio of anti-Semitic toughs, thus confronting Jacob with the immediate threat of violence and persecution precisely at the novel's ostensible centre of refuge.

In *The Rich Man*, the interplay of idiom and dialect, of linguistic gesture and nuance, is the chief method of presenting Jacob's impulse to return to a whole world and its inevitable corollary — his departure towards a broken one. It is appropriate, therefore, that Jacob's final, tellingly ambiguous gesture should be linguistic. As Jacob flees Vienna, he takes up a painting he had bought on shipboard from Tassigny, a French artist. The painting, "L'Enterpreneur," depicts an Orwellian demagogue blaring hollow New World promises from a megaphone head. It has accrued symbolic force throughout the novel, appearing in Jacob's dreams, posed ironically above his father's portrait in his mother's living room, referring variously to Hitlerian propaganda and to Big Brother, as well as to Jacob's own hollow rhetoric of New World success. Now Jacob looks for the last time at the picture, thinking of his sister Shaendl, whom he has been unable to help because he really has no money after all, and of Albert, who has been senselessly killed in an accident, and of Koch, the existentialist philosopher-clown:

> "Noo?" he said in bitter exasperation, glaring at the picture. And in final despair, "Noo?"
>
> A tremor went through his body, and then quickly, and with a sharp twist of his hand, he flung the torn painting out of the window into the darkness of the night.

Early in the novel, the narrator explains how virtuously Jacob can play on this most expressive of Yiddish expressions:

> The word *Noo* was the richest and most expressive in his vocabulary. He could play with this little word like a virtuoso. He could thunder it in a loud bass, and he could whisper it softly, drawing it out gently. He could pronounce it sharply, almost threateningly, like a stab, and he could speak it lightly and playfully, modulating his sing-song, his voice wavering and trembling until it died away like the closing notes of a sad aria. In the mouth of Jacob Grossman this little sound was capable of expressing the profoundest emotions and the most delicate shades of meaning.

Now readers are left to interpret Jacob's closing utterance. Dismayed self-recognition? Ironic self-deprecation? An angry, uncomprehending recognition of the painting's statement? A baffled question flung out at the painting and then at the night? Jacob's last word is not transparent, not a virtuoso's final rhetorical flourish, a demonstration of finely tuned eloquence. It is opaque, clouded; reflexively, it interrogates itself and Jacob as much as Tassigny's painting. It is the final and most significant failure of Yiddish, the home language, to account for Jacob's breaking world, to name it, to render a precise shade of feeling, to refer articulately to internal or external realities. Jacob does not know any longer — in the hollowed-out world suggested in Tassigny's painting, as both victim of and witness to the pre-war atmosphere, with his picture-postcard image of Vienna torn up — what he feels, where he belongs, who he is, what language he speaks. His home language fails him: "Noo?" becomes a cipher, flung out in desperation at the inchoate European world he is fleeing just as it is about to break up, to fragment time for Old and New World alike.

Kreisel denies Jacob the fulfilment of his naive but understandable desire to return to a whole world, a world fully articulated in language and so in experience, a fully explicable world. The warmth and pull of a home language are powerfully imagined, powerfully rendered, and powerfully smashed. Jacob's compulsion to return is greeted by history's powerful projections; the return imagined in *The Rich Man* is the most innocent, least ambiguous, and therefore the most ironic of Kreisel's looks pastward. Most innocent and least ambiguous, in that Jacob's return approaches an allegorical statement, teaching a transparent lesson about New World delusions of the Old World's stability. Most ironic, because the narrator is sure about what so confuses Jacob in this novel: a return on Jacob's terms, in Jacob's language, is impossible.

JACOB'S LAST WORD, interrogating world, speaker, and language itself, anticipates the suffusion of Mark Lerner's world in ambiguity in

The Betrayal. Jacob's longing for an immediate and sensuous return to Old World coherence through a home language modulates in *The Betrayal* into Mark Lerner's reluctant, carefully distanced, radically ambiguous return, through an explicitly *literary* home language, to the questions posed in Theodore Stappler's story about betrayal and responsibility in the postwar moral desert that Kreisel creates.[5] Kreisel has remarked that in *The Rich Man* he "tried to relate the Canadian experience to the European experience by taking an immigrant back to Europe and thus gaining a double view"; in *The Betrayal,* he "brought a European to this country and particularly to Edmonton."[6] This second, more ambitious recreation of a broken globe, this return in the opposite direction, asks more radical and more difficult questions than those of *The Rich Man,* questions which are charged with more complex issues. To address these issues, Kreisel adapts his use of language and his perspective on landscape. First, the language of *The Betrayal* signifies most importantly through its reference to a common Western *literary* universe; second, the Canada which was a mere point of departure for Jacob has now become at once the local and particular Western Canadian landscape, *and* the vehicle for a complex structure of meanings, all entangled under the frozen winter landscape that Mark Lerner broods over from his Edmonton apartment.

After reading *The Betrayal,* it comes as no surprise to learn that Kreisel wrote his Ph.D. thesis in 1954 on alienation in modern literature: the language of *The Betrayal* is *the* home language of alienation in the West. Its two most important voices map both a landscape and a narrative structure: Eliot's Waste-land idiom of alienation, which is transformed into the idiom of a postwar moral desert, provides the narrative ground or baseline, gaining in intensity and desolation from its spatial projection onto the Canadian West in midwinter and from its temporal projection onto the postwar period. In this landscape, which is also Stappler's and becomes Lerner's shared psychic landscape, Kreisel has adapted Conrad's confessional narrative structure to accommodate Stappler's telling of his story to Mark Lerner, and Lerner's retelling of Stappler's story to *his* audience. Echoing between these major voices are fragments from Yeats, Auden, Wordsworth, Shakespeare, and Dante; and the one weakness of *The Betrayal* is that these secondary echoes form too self-conscious a literary back-drop, the air becoming too thick with voices, quotations, allusions. But the generally successful effect of these literary resonances is to allegorize character and landscape and so to extend the novel's range of reference, to make Kreisel's adopted language allude more powerfully to what has by this time become an inherited vision. With *The Betrayal,* Kreisel brings the modern European imagination, grappling with its historical nightmares, its anxieties and its sense of permanent dislocation, to the Canadian West, to Canadian consciousness. He

relinquishes the careful ironic control he exercised over Jacob's return, letting Mark Lerner tell the story in order to bring out the uneasy moral ambiguities that narrators must suffer in trying to discern what, in less disturbed pre-Prufrockian universes, was more confidently assumed to be the truth about men's actions and responsibilities. And Lerner's last words — "It is strange" — speak directly to the troubling ambiguity, for a Canadian auditor, of Stappler's European tale. Lerner is not quite ready to engage postwar history in person, to live with it and in it, any more than Stappler can fully engage the questions at the heart of the novel. Who has betrayed whom? Is Held's betrayal of Stappler of a different order than Stappler's betrayal of his mother? Is Lerner guilty of betraying Stappler by not giving him a fully responsive and responsible hearing? Does Stappler finally betray himself — betray the hope of ever coming to terms with his actions — by retreating to the pure and glacial North which figures as the landscape most innocent of history, most distant from Eliot's hollow men or Conrad's secret sharers? Kreisel has said that he sees Stappler's final action as an evasion, an "exotical romantic escape";[7] it is certainly Lerner who occupies the reader at the end of the novel, because he, like the reader, is left with Stappler's strange story. It *is* strange, the sense of postwar history incarnate which Lerner must deal with through Stappler's story; and the novel's title, on several levels, suggest that Canada's stance (like Lerner's) toward postwar history is neither so straightforward nor so disinterested as her "honest broker" public posture would indicate.

The Betrayal EXTENDS THE reach of Kreisel's adopted language Westward, bringing the postwar European imagination to fitful life in Mark Lerner's troubled narration. In *The Betrayal*, Kreisel's prairie is frozen, stilled, a-historical: in these respects the Western Canadian landscape of *The Betrayal* develops from the landscape Kreisel has already mapped out in "The Prairie: A State of Mind," by extending the metaphysics of the prairie both inward and outward — inward into the tangled roots of Lerner's suppressed emotional landscape (figured most vividly in the Carr painting in his apartment), outward toward the encounter with the troubling European consciousness Stappler brings with him to the Canadian West.[8] Kreisel's essay is finally most suggestive in its anticipation of his own fiction's propensities — even if in his essay Kreisel also conceives a framework within which to study writers like Grove, Ostenso, or Ross, to approach figures like Abe Spalding, Caleb Gare, or the Bentleys.

The intersections between Kreisel's fiction, criticism, and experience are clearest, in fact, in the connections between his best-known essay and his finest short story, "The Broken Globe." It is worth recalling that Kreisel opens the essay with a recollection of the story's genesis in a letter to the *Edmonton Journal* that so fascinated Kreisel that he carried it around in his wallet for years. The letter-writer insisted in the geography of the flat world he saw with his own eyes as he looked out onto the prairie: this obdurate amalgam of empiricism and Old World faith in a still, pre-scientific world and worldview animates the giant "lord of the land" who broods over his geophysicist son's apostasy in Kreisel's story. The letter which compelled Kreisel to write the story asserts a monolithic faith. The farmer is as unmoveable as his flat prairie, and yet he "almost meets," is almost reconciled to his son, from whom the narrator, another of Kreisel's "objective" academics, brings greetings. The opposing worldviews in this story separate father and son, religion and science, faith and reason; and yet it has been the disposition of Kreisel's imagination to envision both broken worldviews *and* their always possible, always necessary reunification. That is why so much of Kreisel's fiction depends upon the figure of the mediator — the narrator of "The Broken Globe," the history professor of *The Betrayal*, the history student of "Two Sisters in Geneva."

When Kreisel collected his eight short stories under one cover in 1981, he called the book *The Almost Meeting*. The title story is the only new story in the book; it is also Kreisel's oldest story, acknowledging the shape of his own imagination's development in Canada, an imagination through which old and new worlds always meet and always just fail to meet. That the story should be a warm tribute to A. M. Klein, Kreisel's Canadian/Old World mentor, is only fitting. As Kreisel has remarked more than once, it was Klein who showed him how to lay claim to both halves of the immigrant's experience. Kreisel has laid this claim over the last forty years. His fiction as much as his criticism claims two worlds, speaks two languages, and imagines the double-pull of two worldviews across a broken globe. Commenting on one of George Faludy's poems, Kreisel describes the conflict in it between father and son, a struggle which "becomes finally a conflict between two opposing worldviews."[9] In Faludy's poem, the conflict is between the father exulting in the material, demonstrable triumphs of science, the son dreaming of the ethereal, insubstantial triumphs of poetry. Neither can surrender his vision, but the son, a "conjurer," still makes poems summoning up the father's "frayed being." Kreisel's fictional worlds, like their all too real historical counterparts, cannot surrender their geographies, their histories or their voices, but he imagines them speaking together for a time.

NOTES

[1] See Kreisel's account of this period in his life in his "Diary of an Internment," *White Pelican*, 4, No. 3 (Summer 1974), 4-35.

[2] Kreisel discusses this decision both in his introduction to "Diary of an Internment" and in his essay "The 'Ethnic' Writer in Canada," *NeWest Review*, 5, No. 3 (November 1979), 7, 16, and 5, No. 4 (December 1979), 7, 14.

[3] "The 'Ethnic' Writer in Canada," Part 1, pp. 7, 16.

[4] Michael Greenstein discusses this aspect of language in *The Rich Man* in his essay "The Language of the Holocaust in *The Rich Man*," *Etudes Canadiennes*, No. 4 (1978), pp. 85-96. Greenstein also discusses the holocaust in Kreisel's second novel in "Perspectives on the Holocaust in Henry Kreisel's *The Betrayal*," *Essays in Canadian Writing*, No. 23 (Spring 1982), pp. 97-106.

[5] Sidney Warhaft's introduction to the New Canadian Library edition of *The Betrayal* (1971) provides the fullest and most sensitive analysis of the novel.

[6] See Felix Cherniavsky, "Certain Worldly Experiences: An Interview with Henry Kreisel," *The Sphinx*, 2, No. 3 (Winter 1977), 15.

[7] "Certain Worldly Experiences," p. 20.

[8] Robert Lecker discusses the connections between "The Prairie: A State of Mind" and Kreisel's novels in "States of Mind: Henry Kreisel's Novels," *Canadian Literature*, No. 77 (Summer 1978), pp. 82-93.

[9] "The Humanism of Faludy," *Canadian Forum*, 58, No. 687 (March 1979), 27.

INVENTION OF THE WORLD

Linda Rogers

Did we invent
ourselves, some leather
wounds, all corners, the double
jointed boxes of mouth, where shadows
gossip in incandescent
tongues, the babble of prayer,
or are we victims
tied to the forehead of God,
absorbing magic
incantations, the naked
voices of angel holocausts.

books in review

THEIR EMPIRE

R. COLE HARRIS & ELIZABETH PHILLIPS, eds., *Letters from Windermere, 1912-1914*. UBC Press, $28.95.

BRITISH COLUMBIA IS particularly fortunate in having more than its share of pioneer literature written by participants and eye-witnesses. In the early years the area attracted a host of literate travellers and settlers, most of them of British origin, and they have left us impressions of what it was like to first see the country, to put down roots in what was for them an unimaginable wilderness. The small satisfactions and everyday joys of setting up a household in an unknown and sometimes hostile land have perhaps never been more vividly detailed than in *Letters from Windermere, 1912-1914*.

Daisy Phillips, the writer of this series of letters (with a few added by her husband, Jack), is chiefly concerned with the minutiae of living. She does not analyze, there are no lengthy character portraits, the letters are not written with an eye to a larger audience, as in the writings of Susanna Moodie. In fact, it is not in Daisy's nature to ask fundamental questions; she is intent rather on coping with the creation of a new home and environment that comes as close as possible to duplicating the English one she left behind.

It is not until the end of the short stay of Daisy and Jack Phillips in Canada that they begin to comprehend the difficulties inherent in the "Columbia Valley Irrigated Fruit Lands" scheme that brought them to Windermere. As in the orchard venture of Walhachin, as in the tragic luring of the Overlanders to the goldfields in Barkerville, the Windermere scheme promised riches that were not forthcoming, in this case abundant orchards on fertile fields and winding country roads set in the midst of scenic mountain grandeur. The brochures superimposed pictures of English cottages and Okanagan orchards (whose apples were already winning prizes at English fairs) against the Windermere mountains. (This form of dubious advertising was to continue well into the century; my own grandparents in the 1920's in the Scottish Hebrides were wooed by pictures of Okanagan fruit trees against a sunny lake, though the railroad scheme that sponsored the advertising had destined them for the northern prairies.)

The Columbia scheme was put forward in 1911 by Robert Randolph Bruce, a land promoter and former CPR land agent. Noting the success of the Okanagan Valley orchards and the emergence of the apple orchards of Walhachin near the Thompson River, Bruce decided the Windermere Valley in the East Kootenays (land he purchased from the CPR) could be subdivided into apple orchards; his hope was that if settlers of the right sort were attracted, a community would be built on the bench land of Lake Windermere that might soon rival the famed Okanagan.

Unfortunately, the Windermere Valley was not the Okanagan; the winters at 3,200 feet elevation were too severe and the growing season too short for apple production. All this was unknown to Daisy and Jack Phillips, who, newly married, saw in the brochures an opportunity to make a home, acquire large lands of a size that in England could only be the hallmark of the upper classes, and engage in a profitable enterprise.

The Phillips could not have been less prepared for their Windermere sojourn. Daisy, the daughter of a newspaper pub-

lisher, had lived all her life until her marriage at thirty-five in the sheltered confines of Windsor, attended by servants and part of a privileged and rather inbred middle-class environment. Jack's experience had been wider, if lonelier. The son of a shipping family whose mother had died when he was a boy and whose father had dissipated most of the family money, Jack spent his life as a career soldier, taking part in the Boer war, living in Uganda, Sudan, and Gibraltar. He was essentially homeless, and when he married Daisy (at thirty-seven) and found the pamphlets offering the splendid opportunities in the East Kootenays, he determined to create a real home in an area that promised, in the words of the pamphlet, "orchards, sports, homes."

It sounded idyllic. For about £1,000 a man could acquire land, build a house, establish an orchard, and become a sportsman in the midst of a most compatible community (all the people, the pamphlet subtly suggested, would be similar to the Phillips, middle-class with the right tastes and prejudices). And indeed, the adventure at the beginning seemed to fulfil the promises; the area, Daisy noted at first glance, is in "a most lovely spot, with snow-peaked mountains on each side of us and the air . . . dry and clear." Living at first in a tent, the homesteading was an outing in the woods, a healthy, vigorous holiday. "I really think you would not know me," says Daisy delightedly. All is "glorious."

Jack's immediate concern is to build a small wooden bungalow fashioned after the colonial cottages in India, which upon completion they named "Heston" after his family estate. In some ways the completion of the house, though a source of joy, was also a source of frustration for Daisy. The outdoor adventure was over and the real work was to begin — the creation of a truly middle-class English home, a replica of what she had known. It was the beginning of a continuous struggle, for the way of life she envisioned depended upon help, upon servants, and in Canada, unlike most of the other "colonies," cheap native help was not available. Daisy, who had no experience in housekeeping (the first of numerous requests in her letters home is for advice on how to wash a handkerchief), was required not only to maintain a household, but to do so without servants, and in the most primitive conditions, without gas or electricity, without running water, without the availability of "quality" goods. When she finally does import help, the situation is far from ideal; the house is too small, there is no way to distance servants as one could in a large English home.

Daisy's letters, chiefly to her mother and sister, are a curious blend of requests and reassurances. The requests are for English china, clothing, silver, books, pictures, even string (Canadian string, like most things Canadian, is inferior). The reassurances are that she is "doing very well indeed . . . You would be proud of me." But always the standard is British. The very rigidity of Daisy's task, the uncompromising desire to remain English, means a constant vigilance to "keep up the standards." After working at menial and exhausting jobs throughout the day Daisy and Jack change for dinner; Daisy sets the table with good china and silver. A continuous class consciousness admits some acceptable foreigners (the Italian count, the Germans with good connections); at the bottom of her list are the Chinese and the native "Red Indians," whom she is surprised and disappointed to see without their war paint. Her attitude toward Canadians is ambiguous. They are for the most part "without taste" and "too like the Americans"; what she most admires about them is their apparent ability to do things without servants.

Yet in spite of the narrow-mindedness of her views, the book is a joy to read; Daisy remains cheerful, optimistic, and the letters are witty, inventive; her observations, though not acute, are vivid and the writing lively. The book is a precious glimpse of a social life now vanished, of the pre-World War I assumption of stable order, on the brink of change. The inflexible Phillips, dedicated to transplanting their own mores to this remote part of "their Empire," in fact become servants to the new environment. They are absorbed and manipulated and ultimately changed by the land, and Daisy, who declares in her letters that though the scenery is grand it is not "dear, fair England" and "my heart will always belong to England," was to remember her Windermere life as the pinnacle of her life.

And that is partly because the Canadian experiment ended abruptly. Jack, an army man, knew he would have to go when the war was declared; they lived out the last months awaiting the call. They were to return to England, he was to die in the war, and though Daisy corresponded with friends from the area, she was never to return. In one of the many ironies that abound in the Phillips' story, the country that Daisy decribed as "chiefly a land for men and a very hard one for women" was to remain forever after bathed in a nostalgic glow.

This valuable book is the product of a fortunate combination of editors: R. Cole Harris of the University of British Columbia and Elizabeth Phillips, the daughter of Jack and Daisy. The footnoting is thorough but not overbearing, and the thirteen-page introduction explains just enough of the background to make the letters come to life: "they were camped in a place they did not know, that required skills they did not have and that was climatically unsuited to the crop they were trying to grow." Yet these settlers logged in the wilderness, rather than carving something out of it, and until the European war intervened, did make an English home. In the end it is not clear if the Phillips were really victims of a fraudulent promotion or if their inflexibility, their stubborn adherence to their own culture, permitted a victory.

FLORENCE MCNEIL

LICENSED BUFFOON

JUDITH SKELTON GRANT, ed., *Robertson Davies: The Well-Tempered Critic: One Man's View of Theatre and Letters in Canada.* McClelland & Stewart, $18.95.

"PERSONALLY I FOUND [the pieces] much more entertaining in collected form than as newspaper articles, which is by no means the usual response to collected essays. When we meet him in a book, the Churl emerges as a more varied and engaging character than he does in short pieces." Davies' comments on Lex Shrag's *Mortgage Manor*, in a review of work by three writers whom he identifies as fellow "licensed buffoons," also apply to *The Well-Tempered Critic.* While there is no controlling persona as such, as in the Samuel Marchbanks collections (although Marchbanks does put in a number of appearances), Davies emerges as a more varied, complex, and sometimes perversely contradictory critic than he would were one to encounter many of the contributing essays in isolation. Often the individual pieces are extremely brief, apparently superficial (without the support provided by the larger context), and decidedly eccentric. But through the accumulation of individual essays the reader gets a sense of this licensed and learned buffoon's conscientious development of his honourable role, and of the critical mind which animates the mask.

Part One of the book is a collection of twenty-four articles on theatre, reviews of particular productions, polemical outbursts, and irreverent if serious diatribes on Canadian society's attitude to Canadian theatre. In Part Two, forty-three book reviews, overviews of individual authors, ponderings on the state of Canadian poetry, and another scattering of serio-comic nose-tweakings give a sampling of Davies' opinion of the state of Canadian letters over the same four decades, the early 1940's to the late 1970's.

The theatrical section ranges from an appreciation of music hall (including a characteristic digression on the inherent comicality of the aspidistra) published in the *Peterborough Examiner* in 1940 to "Touring Fare in Canada 1920-35," a richly anecdotal recollection of boyhood theatre-going delivered to the conference on "Theatrical Touring and Founding in North America" held at the University of Toronto in 1979. The early pieces include a number of the inimitable Samuel Marchbanks items, including my favourites, the exchanges between Marchbanks and would-be Canadian playwright, Apollo Fishorn: Marchbanks' pointed demonstration begins with the established theatrical principle that stage structure influences dramatic structure and proceeds to the probable dramatic influence of the typical Canadian "theatre" of the day, "a school hall, smelling of chalk and kids, and decorated in the Early Concrete style. The stage is a small, raised room at one end." The lesson is funny, and probably profoundly true. Davies' comically acerbic didacticism (diametrically opposed to comedy as sugar-coating on a truthful but bitter pill) enlivens the entire collection.

I question the inclusion of "A Dialogue on the State of Theatre in Canada," an exchange between Lovewit and Trueman in the seventeenth-century manner, which Davies submitted to the Massey Commission in 1951; the piece is simply too long for its context, interrupting the flow which makes the book more than simply a grab-bag of witty observations. The movement from comment to comment, and through the years, is an important element within the collection, and dwelling too long at any point in the journey interferes with the reader's perception of the "rhythms and patterns" which the editor identifies in her introduction.

Davies' clarity is especially evident in the sequence of pieces on the Stratford Festival. The editor asserts that Davies is a much gentler critic than Nathan Cohen, and suggests that this might be a deficiency. Certainly, in the early reviews, we are aware of Davies as champion of a cause; it is not that he ignores flaws in productions, but he does pass over them lightly. However, as the years pass, as Stratford establishes its own standards and a tradition which can be employed as a measure, Davies' reviews become progressively more exacting. The ensemble of the 1967 *Richard III* is to "the cast of fifteen years ago [in the inaugural Stratford production] what a fine symphony orchestra is to a town brass band." A long-range perspective is being established. Davies' dismissal of Michael Langham's 1967 touring production of Gogol's *The Government Inspector* is as efficiently and ruthlessly devastating as anything to be found in Canadian dramatic criticism. Remember, too, that Davies' double vision as a practitioner/critic engenders a different and often enriching perspective; with unusual frequency he sees and comments on the manifestations in the public event of decisions made in rehearsal, for good or ill, and we are aware of Davies' understanding of the process leading to production, of ways in which the process itself is an

integral part of the culminating production.

I consider the theatrical section the more important, simply because Davies commented on theatre in Canada at a time when few were doing so, and even fewer with any depth of understanding or clarity of vision. There is no comparable gap in the consideration of Canadian letters, although Davies does bring to that consideration, through his frequent recourse to the role of "licensed buffoon," what he calls a "light-hearted scholarship" all too rare in Canadian criticism. While he is almost always serious, he is seldom solemn, to use his own distinction. Often the tone is celebratory; while his reviews of *As For Me and My House*, *Barometer Rising*, or *The Book of Small* add little now to our understanding of the works themselves, Davies' infectious joy of discovery gives an emotional reality to important moments in Canadian literary history. Often the book at hand is merely an excuse for discourse on a favourite subject (the Canadian character, the nature of humour, the danger of losing Canadian artists), an extended joke, or a sly confidence trick — by revealing the train of thought inspired in him by the book, Davies lures his reader back to the book itself where, he evidently hopes, the reader will make his or her own discoveries. In this respect, Davies was an engaging if argumentative literary companion and a challenging guide to readers of the *Peterborough Examiner*, *Saturday Night*, the *New York Times Book Review*, and the *Toronto Star*. The value of this section of the book is that Davies' services in these roles are again made available to the scholar and to the Intelligent General Reader (another favourite Davies topic), and if we do not see Davies entirely whole, the present collection gives us a much fuller sense of who our intriguing companion and guide is.

CHRIS JOHNSON

THE GLASSCO MAZE

FRASER SUTHERLAND, *John Glassco: An Essay and Bibliography*. ECW, $8.95.

FRASER SUTHERLAND accurately describes his study of John Glassco as an "introductory essay." As a short essay, only thirty-six pages in all, it cannot be expected to do full justice to its very complex subject. In accordance with his modest aim, Sutherland chooses to conduct the reader on a brisk guided tour of Glassco's entire career, beginning with biography and influences, and going on to six categories of works (autobiography, lyric poetry, the "epic-macaronic" poem *Montreal*, pornography, non-pornographic fiction, translation). This survey method bears a strong resemblance to the procedure used in the *Canadian Writers and their Work* series undertaken by Sutherland's publisher, ECW Press. Appropriate as it may be in other cases, such an approach seems ill-adapted to a writer as varied and enigmatic as Glassco, since it tends to accentuate fragmentation rather than underlying unity.

Sutherland's essay is, however, not without its strengths. The biographical opening is gracefully written and contains some interesting, little-known information; its tactful sympathy for Glassco is attractive. The section on Glassco's affinities with other anglophone Quebec writers is appropriate and well-judged, if necessarily brief. The emphasis on Glassco as a theorist (about poetry, about pornography, about translation) gives the essay added depth, and should stimulate further critical study. The relatively extended section on poetry gives Sutherland room to comment perceptively on both psychological implications and characteristic symbolism. Throughout the essay, Sutherland takes Glassco seriously, but also is alert to his subject's teasing, whimsical side.

It is regrettable that Sutherland's account of Glassco's major work, *Memoirs of Montparnasse*, is not of the same calibre as other sections of his essay. He has examined the manuscript sufficiently to ascertain that "*Memoirs* was chiefly written in the 1960's," but he declines to probe the implications of this remarkable situation. Sutherland says that "when Glassco states that he had 'changed very little,' he is not cheating." But Glassco changed or invented virtually everything — the purported date of composition, the purported circumstances of composition, many of the incidents and most of the dialogue. Sutherland seems to take the view that a critic need only give *Memoirs* new generic labels: a "novel of education" and "non-fictional novel" (whatever the latter term means in this context). The reasons for Glassco's conscious distortions of reality must surely be sought in the mazes of his personality rather than in what Sutherland blandly calls "necessary artistic strategy." The need for careful reflection in dealing with Glassco's testimony is inadvertently revealed when Sutherland quotes as evidence of Glassco's youthful opinions passages that are clearly the product of his self-dramatizations of the 1960's.

Sutherland acknowledges in a concluding paragraph that Glassco "was determined to walk his own pace. We have not yet come to terms with the way he walks." This is an honourable admission of uncertainty, and in the space granted him, Sutherland cannot be severely blamed for leaving much in darkness. Yet Glassco's work, with its distinctive fusion of the confessional and the imitative, needs for its illumination the kind of synthesizing imagination Sutherland only occasionally displays. If poetry, autobiography, and pornography had not been consigned to separate, sealed compartments, more insight might well have been achieved.

Attached to Sutherland's essay is a bibliography which bears the earmarks of another ECW enterprise, the *Annotated Bibliography of Canada's Major Authors*. Here it is not the framework but the timing of publication that does Sutherland a disservice. His industrious and aptly summarized catalogue of reviews and essays seems to justify his own conclusion that "intelligent appraisal of so versatile a writer is sparse." The bibliography, ending with the date of Glassco's death (29 January 1981), does not, however, touch upon the considerable advance made in Glassco studies since that point. Though Sutherland's bibliographical work is useful, particularly in its detailed account of Glassco's papers, it is unfortunate that such significant items as the articles by Lauber and Edel in *Canadian Literature*, the entire issue devoted to Glassco by *Canadian Poetry* and the thesis on *Memoirs* by Philip Kokotailo are not recorded. If, as seems likely, the bibliography is destined for a re-issue, its value would be greatly enhanced by thorough up-dating.

Sutherland's concluding injunction that "the entrancing aura of the man should not obscure the works he has left us" makes a curious juxtaposition with Glassco's own apology for his inability to create "any character that is not some aspect of [myself]." In the serious study of Glassco's work, which Sutherland among others has initiated, the continuing challenge will be the need to find suitable means of relating Glassco's elusive but endlessly fascinating personality to the tantalizing art that was his chosen mask.

THOMAS E. TAUSKY

ART AS HAMMER

THE JOHN GRIERSON PROJECT (McGill University), *John Grierson and the NFB*. ECW Press, $8.95.

IN THE END WAS THE WORD. As Canada's National Film Board suffocates or is metamorphosed into oblivion, John Grierson's most secure monument may well prove to be his word for the creative treatment of actuality, "documentary." Coined for a film (Robert Flaherty's 1926 *Moana*), the term has since grown to embrace developments in the novel, poetry, drama, and the visual arts. Indeed, like Kierkegaard's "irony," it is an artistic genre that can be taken as a world-view and lifestyle. For Grierson, mere actuality was to be treated creatively not just in film but in the livelier arts of politics and proselytizing.

Grierson is remembered as a firebrand, a messianic pulpiteer and shameless propagandist. Aptly enough, not only were both his parents teachers in Scotland but his family included a long line of lighthouse keepers. The emblem was not wasted. Grierson took the mass media to be a missionary's weapon, not just an industry or even an art. So he wrote things that rang out: "Art is not a mirror, it's a hammer." Film was a revolutionary's dream.

Not surprisingly, Grierson left behind a horde of acolytes with one common denominator: John Grierson was the greatest (or most exciting, or most humbling, or most influential) person they ever met. Louis Applebaum's testimony is typical: "I attribute my whole life to John Grierson." He met people indelibly. So it is natural, almost instinctive, that he should be not just remembered but memorialized. This book collects the essays and reminiscences of some of the notables that Grierson stamped, who converged upon McGill in 1981 for a colloquium to open the Grierson Project. As a revolutionary traditionalist, Grierson would relish the irony: a colloquium for the media prophet is preserved in a paperback book!

As one must expect from a record of discussions, the book is heavy with anecdotal reminiscences. Thus Basil Wright informs us that his own appendix remains in the Winnipeg Hospital Museum "because it was the biggest one they'd ever seen." Even more engaging is the smattering of dates and chit-chat that the contributors recall from the meetings with the master. But the book provides enough meaty exceptions to justify not just dutiful purchase but its happy reading. For example, Eleanor Beattie does a characteristically shrewd and sensitive analysis of *The Brave Don't Cry*. Her reading of this early British fictional film has much to say about the evolution of the best — the true — Canadian fiction films out of the documentary tradition. James Beveridge details the conditions in society and industry propitious to Grierson's ascent. Colin Low modestly dramatizes his dialectic with Grierson over the Challenge for Change program. Grierson's erstwhile biographer, Forsyth Hardy, provides the book's major scoop: an appetizing excerpt from Grierson's unfinished book, *Eyes of Democracy*.

However, this book's merit lies less in its content than in its fervour. The book is nothing less than vital for reminding us of Grierson's passionate vision for Canada. As political and economic illusions of "reality" threaten to erode away Canada's national imagination and identity, Grierson's every phrase and vision are bracing. Ultimately, this homage to John Grierson is a homage to the Canadian voice and vision that are under assault across the land. As homages go, then, this one is especially timely. It raises the dead to arouse the living.

Grierson would not blush at these tributes. Rather, he would appreciate their pointed political purpose. The creative treatment of obsequies, he might say.

MAURICE YACOWAR

FIGHTING MAGAZINES

KEN NORRIS, *The Little Magazine in Canada 1925-80*. ECW, $16.00.

KEN NORRIS'S APPROACH to the "little magazine" is not that of the librarian or bibliographer. He takes a stand on the battleground of the politics of poetry in Canada, and directs attention only to those periodicals that have fought in the cause of "Modernism" over the past half-century. The country is divided between those who really care about little magazines in that sense, and those who don't. Those who don't include most book buyers and ordinary readers, and the vast majority of scholars, critics, and students. Those who do, however, may very well include (at one time or another) every Canadian poet who has seen himself or herself as an original creative artist.

For the true believers, this unequal polarization is to be expected and even welcomed. Only a naive outsider imagines that these little magazines begin small and hope to become big. Judged by the ideals of big magazines (readership, advertising revenues, respectability, longevity), this sort of little magazine is committed to failure. Louis Dudek, one of Norris's mentors, long ago proclaimed the enmity between the little magazines and "the popular press, the advertising economy, and all those pressures which would reduce the individual to stark conformity as producer-consumer of a mechanized super-state." The romance of the Modernist little magazine is captured by another of its legendary heroes, Raymond Souster, in his "Self-Portrait from the Year 1952":

> Turning the crank of a mimeograph
> In a basement cellar to produce the typical
> "Little magazine" perhaps fifty will read,
> Twenty remember (and with luck) five will
> learn from.

Technology has, of course, irrevocably altered the historical trappings of this portrait, but its spirit lives on.

Norris himself clearly cares about Modernist Canadian little magazines and believes in their importance. He celebrates the richness and vitality of their past from the 1920's to the 1980's, and confidently predicts their future. He has no alternative, because for him the country's literary well-being depends on them: "The cumulative result of all these publications is that there now exists a healthy environment for poetry in Canada," and it is they who will go on providing the "testing-ground and proving-ground for subsequent generations of literary experimenters and innovators."

Norris's role as enthusiastic advocate has advantages and disadvantages. On the good side is his success in extracting and charting a living tradition from the fragmentary archives of ephemeral publications, and the scholarship that has explored them to date. There is a line stretching from *The McGill Fortnightly Review* in the 1920's, through other "landmark publications" such as *The Canadian Mercury, Preview, First Statement, Alphabet,* and *Tish,* and into the 1970's when the same spirit which fired these little magazines manifested itself (following the example of Contact Press) in the burgeoning of "grass-roots regional presses" devoted to "local literary activity and continuing literary experimentation," but now in the form of book publication: Breakwater, Turnstone, Blackfish, Vehicule, Black Moss, and a myriad of others. He is able to document convincingly the fundamental ideology that

makes the tradition coherent, from the simple recognition (in Robert Creeley's words) that the "fact that pioneering work is being done limits the possibility of readership and recognition," to the full-hearted embrace of the romantic doctrine of perpetual revolution: "Once a literary style is adopted by larger magazines, Creeley argues, the act of definition has ceased and the reign of taste has begun. The pioneering little magazine that attempts to define a new local art is opposed to any principle of fame operating at that time." Clearly, fame must be seen not as the spur, but as the harness.

The chief disadvantage of Norris's advocacy stems directly from his chosen perspective. When he trumpets his conclusion that "the ultimate aim of the little magazine is literary revolution, a call to a new order," he fails to acknowledge that it is his selectivity that has made the statement possible. Only the magazines that promote a "shared aesthetic" interest him, and not those that "operate on eclectic principles," not the "quality literary review," certainly not academic publications: "Most magazines coming out of the universities are of minor interest, not involved with the true revolutionary spirit of the fighting little magazine." The emphasis on the fight reminds us that many of the battles tend to be internecine, between revolutionaries, and that some of the war cries may seem less stirring away from the field: "I can't see how any of us can ever write anything major without at least a year on Ezra."

More important, some degree of historical distortion results from the selective emphasis on "poetry politics." The 1930's was a time for radical questioning of the value and purpose of literature itself (an Earle Birney could consider postponing poetry until after the work of revolution). Since little magazines of the type Norris admires didn't exist, his solution is simply to drop from his account the passionate Great Depression politics of poets like Kennedy, Klein and Livesay, of communist little magazines like *Masses*, and to assert, quite erroneously, that "It would take the outbreak of World War Two to move a whole generation in the direction of real social concern."

More generally, the assumptions of this brief, lively history leave the reader still unable to assess the real importance of the little magazines. Is it true that the health of Canadian poetry benefits more when a poet reads and writes for, say, the two issues of Montreal's *Booster and Blaster* than for a "quality literary review" like *Tamarack*, or even a mid-sized general journal like *The Canadian Forum*, which has published a huge share of Canadian poets since the 1920's? Are Ken Norris's little magazines closer to the growing edge of Canadian literature than to its lunatic fringe? Are they the driving energy of its ground swell or the froth which it throws up in its triumphal surging? Their readership (this study offers no statistics) may show us how little they mean to the mass of readers. We need to know more than Norris tells us about what they mean to creative writers.

F. W. WATT

SEPARATE SPACE

BETSY STRUTHERS, *Censored Letters*. Mosaic, n.p.

FRANK DAVEY, *Margaret Atwood: A Feminist Poetics*. Talonbooks, n.p.

COMPARING WORKS OF TWO different genres, poetry and literary criticism, poses certain interpretive problems. The poems are intensely personal; the criticism, didactic and public. Nonetheless,

these books quite remarkably elucidate each other.

Struthers' poems are told from the perspective of a woman, reminiscent of Penelope, who waits through the years of World War One for the return of her soldier-husband. Written as if they were letters (or diary entries, not meant for others' eyes), the poems describe what it means to feel excluded from a history defined and controlled by male activity. In this collection, that activity centres on war. Left behind, in a community of women, the poet struggles to establish an identity that will make real her own space and time, marked by seasonal changes that, because of the earth's persistent struggle to reproduce, exaggerate ironically war's overwhelming destructiveness. Throughout, the language remains simple, although suggestions of hidden, suppressed stories complicate the poems' meanings. The open messages are poignant and moving; the hidden letters terrifying. By condensing historical moment and personal time, Struthers has given resonance to the woman's voice.

Frank Davey's critical study of Atwood attempts an overview of her work through a feminist poetics. Beginning with a short "unneeded" biography, Davey goes on to describe what he considers the major theme of the poetry, conflicts between male and female space. The most important of these, he contends, is linguistic. He argues that Atwood demonstrates, both thematically and structurally, that women, unlike men, ideally use language that is not primarily discursive — poetic language: "The clear implication of the poem ["Mushrooms," from *True Stories*] is that the poet is metaphorically female, that the act of poetry is a giving birth, that the 'mouth' of poetry is not the male oracular head of bardic recitation or of Judaic prophecy but the vagina and its wordless speakings."

However, Atwood also writes essays, novels, short stories, and criticism. Suggesting that she is therefore caught in the "difficult theoretical framework" posed by the contradictions between "masculine" and "feminine" language, Davey begins his discussion of the novels — *The Edible Woman*, *Surfacing*, *Lady Oracle*, *Bodily Harm* — by asserting that "in view of the argument of Atwood's poetry that *pattern* is a humanistic 'male' second-order imposition on experience, it is curious that four of Atwood's five novels appear to be written in a traditional narrative pattern." In fact, they are comedies, whose characters, like Shakespeare's, are led from alienation, through a healing descent, to reborn wholeness. To Davey, such a pattern is problematically restrictive, at least in terms of a feminist poetics. Unlike critics such as Annis Pratt, Barbara Rigney, and Catherine McClay, who use "masculine" patterns in their archetypal approach to Atwood's writing, Davey favours a Freudian theory that he believes to be diametrically opposed to Jungian analysis. Although one may question his opposition between "archetypal pattern" and "human causation," the contention makes easier his further suggestion that Atwood's novels undercut the patterns they suggest by privileging "gestures rather than articulations in language."

Apart from causing him some difficulty in dealing fully with the dominating irony of the novels — an irony that, it seems to me, thoroughly characterizes Atwood's writing — Davey's insistence on the division between "feminine" and "masculine" language creates problems with *Life Before Man*, a novel that many readers have found unsatisfactory. Since he cannot group it with the comic novels, for one reason because it is not as obviously patterned, he gives it a separate chapter, defending this rather unbalanced focus by insisting on its more ob-

vious links with Atwood's poetic interest in metamorphosis. Davey uses this novel as a bridging work, a prose demonstration of "masculinity" and "femininity." As metaphors, these concepts do not, he argues, mean man and woman. Thus, in *Life Before Man*, Elizabeth represents the masculine principle, Chris the feminine.

The rest of the book is devoted to an Atwood vocabulary, to a discussion of the short stories, and to a chapter on Atwood's frequently attacked critical work, *Survival*. The vocabulary chosen for elucidation — technological skin, mirrors, the gothic, refugees and tourists, underground mazes, metamorphosis, signposts/totems — is connected by its thematic emphasis on feminine undergrounds that survive in spite of masculine efforts to control and bind them. With this vocabulary, Davey continues his analysis of Atwood's short stories, claiming them to be successful prose pieces because they have the "iconic potential of poetry." The critical work, *Survival*, most certainly does not. Not only does it belie feminine language by dealing with problems in naming and categorizing, but it commits the unpardonable sin of doing so in masculine terms. Although Davey agrees that the work elucidates Atwood's own writing, and serves as a popularizer of Canadian literature to non-academic audiences, he makes clear that in style and content it quite egregiously contradicts his definition of feminist poetics. As he states in the Epilogue (where he includes an interesting reading of Atwood's children's story, "The Festival of Missed Crass"), he has "reservations about the didactic tone that characterizes much of Atwood's writing, its overt sense of deliberate patterning and organization that often seems inimical to her endorsement of irrational energies."

I have described in some detail Davey's book, partially to demonstrate the connections between men's and women's perspectives, in spite of Davey's insistence that masculinity and femininity are to be understood only metaphorically. Both present images of surfacing, connecting these with the unconscious. The female poet announces: "I dive again, rise to float / blind and content as drifting wood." Both emphasize alternative times and spaces. Furthermore, numerous parallels exist between Struthers' poems and Atwood's work. As so many of Atwood's poems, the *Censored Letters* are addressed by a woman to a male lover. Both writers devote attention to ecology, using war as their ultimate example of the rape of both land and female body. And, as the title of this collection of poetry announces, language — its subversions, its holes, its gaps — is a central topic; "What use to explain or describe when words make pictures / only the better to blind us?" Finally, a strong, narrative sense situates both writers within a long tradition of women: "A chain of women stands"; or, "In the company of sisters, I face / the cold night down."

The poetry, in other words, speaks directly to a number of the problems that Davey undertakes to elucidate in Atwood's work, the major one being the tension between masculinity and femininity that informs both language and structure. Nonetheless, certain difficulties arise in Davey's Freudian definitions. The most striking is their circularity. Masculinity and femininity are defined in conventional ways (femininity, not surprisingly, means "close to nature"; masculinity means control, and so on), and Atwood's work is then fit into these established categories. As a result, Davey has considerable difficulty dealing with the didactic Atwood — that is, the Atwood who lapses from a feminine sub-

language to the discursive forms of masculine argument. Yet Atwood is a profoundly ironic writer whose relationship with that "primitive realm" to which women have, according to much feminist theory, retained access seems to me quite problematic. Feminists have attempted to broaden the symbolic associations of women's experience by demonstrating, often metaphorically, feminine process and liquidity, and have described women's need to break boundaries because of their difficulty in using phallocentric languages. However, many of us are uneasy with rigid sexual divisions, particularly as they apply to language. Atwood herself repeatedly attempts their union, for example in *Murder In the Dark*, where the speaker assures us that "you're waiting for the word, the one that will finally be right. A compound, the generation of life, mud and light."

In spite of his insistent dichotomies (and gender always becomes involved in the superficially metamorphic meanings of masculinity and femininity), Davey emphasizes, quite rightly, the increasingly political stance taken by the various personae of Atwood's writing. I think it also important that he singles out, as the overriding theme of the analysis, problems of space. In a patriarchal world, women are constantly concerned about limitations and about the nature of control. So, too, Struthers intricately delineates women's knowledge of controlled times and spaces: "this is history / men go to war / and women wait." The poems should be read, savoured, thought about, gone back to. In an age of increasing violence, they maintain a movingly humane perspective. Although they talk about a world where there is "space between words / holes at the end of lines / sentences cut and butchered," they demonstrate a world where the "goddesses and the gods /made sense." Davey's study of Atwood deserves careful attention, particularly his sensitive, illuminating readings of the poetry. It is true that the feminist poetics defined and illustrated will spark considerable controversy, mainly because of its quite limiting application to the prose works. But at a time when some of the most interesting literary criticism is feminist, such controversy seems to me to be all to the good.

LORNA IRVINE

NOT CRICKET

RICHARD B. WRIGHT, *Tourists*. Macmillan, n.p.

Tourists, RICHARD B. WRIGHT'S seventh published work of fiction, is a first-person reminiscence of a character called Philip Bannister who has murdered his Australian wife, Joan, and an American couple called Corky and Ted Hacker during a Mexican holiday. It is not a successful novel, and not a work of art. Drink, drugs, and group sex are the immediate precipitants of the "hero's" action, but behind these his wife's infidelities, his consequent loss of face at the private school where he teaches, and beyond this his father's madness would seem to be the deeper reasons for his turning to murder. Bannister is presented as a stiff and conventional man driven mad by his wife's nymphomania and the antics of the improbable American couple they meet on vacation. The above outline gives a sufficient sense of the mandatory orgies that the book inevitably describes, all narrated with a cynical black humour. The whole is a nasty concoction which is impossible to take seriously.

Here, for example, is the description of Bannister's wife Joan:

> I'm quite certain she figured prominently in the fantasies of the most priapic onanists in the school. It was not that she was beautiful; she had missed beauty by a fair mar-

> gin. Her features were mostly irregular. Her teeth, for instance, were too large and slightly bucked. Her braying laughter suggested coarseness. But she was a large, handsome woman of forty years with a lively intelligent eye for the passing scene. And I think that what made her desirable was the air of merry lewdness she exuded. Behind her expensive clothes and affected English, Joan was really an Elizabethan tavern wench. Her powerful sensuality had once captured my heart and glands.

A series of onanistic fantasies itself, the book seems to be conceived in the "glands" rather than the "heart." Unfortunately, this passage is representative in its coarse externality. If woman is degraded here, the male characters do not fare much better. In fact, their conversation is often interchangeable. "But let us not tarry on such a disagreeable theme!" says Ted Hacker sounding like Philip Bannister, while Bannister's "the both of them" sounds like Hacker. This is slack characterization at its worst.

There are besides a number of typographical errors, and one give-away error of fact. Bannister is supposed to be a cricket enthusiast who in prison asks "Shall I ever again experience the thrill of seeing one of our batsmen cut to square leg four?" A four to square leg can be swept or possibly hooked but it cannot be cut. Such a minor error in detail is symptomatic of the deeper problems with the novel as a whole.

JOHN FERNS

DIDACTIC POET

DOROTHY LIVESAY, *Feeling the Worlds*. Fiddlehead/Goose Lane, $7.95.

DOROTHY LIVESAY'S *Feeling the Worlds* seems to have been published mainly on the strength of her reputation. For this, we cannot blame the publisher. Livesay has a following and a distinguished place on our shelves. Rather we should be sorry that the poet has lost patience, has risked her reputation to get a book in print before it could be filled with strong verse. The first half of *Feeling the Worlds* simply isn't close to her best.

The first section of four, "Family Tree: A Suite," is an exercise in defining childhood — a reasonable premise for poetry, but one which produces little good verse here. Too many of the individual poems are dominated by sentimental content, by word and sound-play for its own sake ("Aunt Helen"), by unfortunate rhymes:

> So who was I
> to belie? . . .
> I'm going now. Goodbye.

This section ends, however, with one of the book's best poems, "Euthanasia," sound and sense co-operating to an extent reminiscent of Livesay at her best, though the ending seems predictable and a little flat.

The second section, "Voices of Women," is also reminiscent of earlier Livesay, but mainly in its didacticism. Her calls for women to "stand up / and be counted" ("Two Lives") have endeared her to many whose interest in poetry is largely political, but clichés and preaching will not satisfy the reader who requires heightened language and precise evocation. Two poems in this section, "Towards A Love Poem" and "Arms And The Woman," are of interest for their information about the poet as lesbian eroticist, but neither carries the weight of poetry. Section two of *Feeling the Worlds* contains no finished poems.

Section three, "The Found Poems," is better, its self-irony more forceful than the self-conscious insistence of didactic statement. "Salute to Monty Python," which opens this section, is reprinted from *Ice Age* but most welcome here:

> 5 old ladies . . .
> trans-generationists

who take on
the motorcycle gang
the hold-up guy
kidnappers and hi-jackers
and simply bomb the town
with the power of their ten arms

Its control and richly comic vision achieve a persuasiveness which, though unequalled in the rest of the section, is definitely reflected in poems such as "Fable: The Bare Necessities," "Bread and Circuses," and part IV of "The Panic Syndrome."

The fourth section, "Nature Studies," opens with the heavily didactic "Poetry Is Like Bread" (which might provoke applause from the already-converted), and then proceeds to repeat the mistakes made in sections one to three: cliché, underdeveloped ideas, predictable observations, banal content. On the whole, however, "Nature Studies" is the most satisfying section of the book. When her rhythms are controlled and her eye accurate — as in "Finches," "Housekeeper," "September Equinox," and one or two other poems — Livesay reminds us of earlier strengths.

Some readers subscribe to the view that half a dozen good poems justify the existence of a book. Livesay's latest, in those terms, has its reason for being; but remembering her earlier strength makes it hard not to criticize *Feeling the Worlds.*

RON MILES

TEACHING DREAMS

RICHARD PLANT, *The Penguin Book of Modern Canadian Drama.* Vol. I. Penguin, $14.95.

RICHARD PERKYNS, *Major Plays of the Canadian Theatre 1934-1984.* Irwin, $24.95.

JERRY WASSERMAN, *Modern Canadian Plays.* Talonbooks, $14.95.

TEACHERS OF CANADIAN DRAMA can raise a cheer and breathe a sigh of relief — three of each. It is now possible to teach a course without struggling endlessly with the bookstore over an order for texts of a dozen or more single plays, and without bankrupting students. Although anthologies have existed before — one-act plays, prairie plays, west coast or Factory Lab or "lost" plays — none has provided the representative sampling most teachers want. These three anthologies not only provide such a sampling, but also give the teacher distinctly different options.

The usual style when reviewing an anthology is to praise the items in the book that one likes and to carp about favourites that have been omitted, on the assumption that everyone shares or should share one's taste. Seldom defensible, such a procedure is most pointless when dealing with plays, where the criteria for selection are even more variable than for other forms of literature. Should one choose plays that have demonstrably succeeded on stage, or plays that one thinks should have succeeded? Should one resurrect neglected plays? Represent the different kinds of plays this country has produced? Look for literary excellence? For cultural history or significance? For regional scope?

Wasserman's anthology tilts towards performance: he presents only plays that have had "a major effect on Canadian theatre." Plant's selection emphasizes geographical distribution and a broad but coherent thematic range. Perkyns's book reaches back to the 1930's to present "the total Canadian ethos." The teacher may choose.

The apparatus differs in the three books as well. Plant's book has the least — a general introduction and a very brief biographical and production-history note for each author and title. The introduction, following a pleasantly reminiscent preface by Herbert Whittaker, puts the plays into their historical and thematic context, usefully supplementing the in-

dividual notes. Perkyns's anthology has the most apparatus — an introduction, a substantial biographical note and a four-page critical essay for each play, a brief production note for each, a few footnotes, and sixteen pages of general and individual bibliography. The introduction provides a very broad, perhaps too broad, overview of Canadian drama, French and English, from its beginnings to the present day. The biographies contain much useful information. The essays, almost entirely laudatory, explore many aspects of the plays. I find questionable, however, Perkyns's frequent reliance for his interpretations on the playwrights' own analyses of their intentions. The bibliography, listing both primary and secondary sources, does a good job of covering the territory.

The apparatus in Wasserman's book is middle-sized, including the same items as Perkyns's, but, for the most part, more briefly. The introduction focuses on the history of Canadian plays in Canadian theatres since Centennial year, in keeping with his selection of successfully performed plays, and concludes with some interesting ideas about what is "Canadian" in these plays. The biographical notes, though shorter than Perkyns's, are sometimes more pertinent; for example, it is more revealing to be told that John Herbert was wrongly convicted of having "sexually propositioned" a street gang than to be told he was beaten up "as a 'sissy,' " as Perkyns has it. Wasserman's critical comments are as pointed and succinct as his biographies, and his bibliography, on somewhat different principles from Perkyns's, is ample and useful.

The teacher choosing a text might want nothing between the covers that would influence his students' reading or provide "answers," and so would choose Plant's book. Or, especially for an advanced course, a teacher might want a full range of fact, opinion, and references at his and his students' fingertips. Or something in between.

Probably because of the quantity of apparatus, Perkyns's book costs ten dollars more than the other two. Plant's is the most cheaply produced, with an annoying absence of running heads that makes it impossible to find one's way around in the book. Wasserman's, the same price as Plant's, is a more attractive and convenient volume, and, with its middle-sized but efficient apparatus, the best value for money.

All such considerations aside, the plays are the things. Each book contains twelve, and there is only a little overlapping. Although 22 authors appear, and 31 plays, the three editors have only one choice in common: Herbert's *Fortune and Men's Eyes*. They all have a Pollock (*Walsh* in Wasserman, *Generations* in Perkyns, *Blood Relations* in Plant) a Reaney (*The Donnelleys* Part 2 in Wasserman and Part 3 in Plant, *The Canadian Brothers* in Perkyns), and a French (*Of the Fields, Lately* in Perkyns and Plant, *Jitters* in Wasserman). Freeman's *Creeps* appears twice (Wasserman and Plant), as does Coulter's *Riel* (Perkyns and Plant). For Ryga, Wasserman gives us *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* and Plant gives us *Indian*; for Cook, Wasserman has *Jacob's Wake* and Perkyns has *The Head, Guts, and Soundbone Dance*; for Walker, Wasserman has *Zastrozzi* and Plant has *The Art of War*; for Ringwood, Perkyns has *Drum Song* and Plant has *Garage Sale*. No other titles or authors are duplicated.

Wasserman also offers Salutin and Theatre Passe Muraille's *1837* (the only collective creation in the three anthologies), Fennario's *Balconville*, Ritter's *Automatic Pilot*, and Gray and Peterson's *Billy Bishop*. Plant has Fruet's *Wedding in White*, Hollingsworth's *Ever Loving*, and Stratton's *Rexy!* (Plant's

anthology is labelled Volume One, so perhaps collective creations and other missing kinds of plays are planned for the next volume.) Perkyns has Voaden's *Hill-Land*, Davies's *At My Heart's Core*, Bolt's *Buffalo Jump*, Ravel's *The Dispossessed*, and Gélinas's *Bousille and the Just* (the only Quebec play in the three books).

Which raises the ever-present question of Canada's two cultures. Plant is concerned only with English-Canadian plays, at least for Volume One. Wasserman regrets the absence of Tremblay from his book, explaining that Tremblay is reluctant to be anthologized. Perkyns offers a play that is not only good but that was written by the first Quebec dramatist to bridge the two solitudes, as Chris Johnson says. If the teacher too wants to build a bridge, he will choose Perkyns's book or add texts to supplement Plant's or Wasserman's.

The appearance of these anthologies raises a further question about the establishment — perhaps the premature establishment, in a relatively young discipline — of a sacred canon. From these three collections, it looks as if Herbert's *Fortune and Men's Eyes*, both play and author, have achieved full sainthood; as if Pollock, Reaney, and French are the Blessed; as if Freeman, Ryga, Coulter, Cook, Walker, and Ringwood have made it as far as Venerable. Yet the whole idea of literary canonicity is currently under severe critical attack and is particularly problematic for drama, where the theatre and the study can yield such different judgements on the same play. Fortunately, these three editors make clear the grounds of their selection so that the reader is forewarned about the kind of canon being offered — though Perkyns's claim to represent "the total Canadian ethos" has a disturbingly final ring to it. Fortunately too, these three editors differ not only from each other but also from the theatrical and academic panel that chose lists of plays for the *Globe and Mail* early in 1985, plays that they believed had been unjustly neglected and should be produced again — lists which themselves differ radically from one panelist to the next. So perhaps we are in no real danger yet of settling on a fixed list of sacred texts. After all, an English teacher has been defined as "a person who thinks otherwise," which seems to describe a theatre person too.

Wasserman's anthology comes closest to my own sacred canon, so I'll use it next time. But on some points I think otherwise. Of the plays he offers, I wouldn't dream of teaching . . . and I'll certainly have to add. . . . But having a good anthology to start with is cause for cheering.

ANN MESSENGER

REVIVALISTS & LOYALISTS

G. A. RAWLYK, *Ravished by the Spirit: Religious Revivals, Baptists, and Henry Alline.* McGill-Queen's, $6.95.

JOAN MAGEE, *Loyalist Mosaic: A Multi-Ethnic Heritage.* Dundurn, $14.95.

THE HISTORY OF THE BAPTIST movement in New England and the Maritimes is dominated by the passionate charismatic figure of Henry Alline, the mystical Nova Scotia revivalist, whose bicentennial was marked in 1983. Professor Rawlyk has written an elegant work of scholarship, which succeeds in capturing even the interest of those of us with no religious enthusiasms whatsoever, for this is the stuff of intellectual history: what men believed and thought in the evangelical ethos of New England, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick. He deplores

the neglect of Alline's remarkable spiritual biography, *The Life and Journal*, a revealing reflection of that ethos.

This genuine mystic was born in New England in 1748 and moved with his parents to Falmouth, Nova Scotia, in 1760; he experienced an intense spiritual crisis and trauma when he was only twenty-seven in 1775. His "New Birth" conversion was shaped by the unbearable pressure he felt "to commit himself one way or the other during the early months of the American Revolutionary struggle." Rawlyk stresses the cultural osmosis and "seamless" spiritual hegemony of New England and the Maritimes which cut across American and Canadian rivalries. Alline initiated "the Great Awakening of Nova Scotia" which enabled both the "Yankee" and "English" elements to emancipate themselves from the corrupting influence of both New and Old England. He forged an ideological unity on out-settlement Nova Scotians, giving them a sense of unique personal destiny as "a people on whom God has set his everlasting love."

Alline's "New Light" message was anti-intellectual, anti-traditionalist, creedless, emotional, and liberating. The iconoclastic nature of New Light exhortation was pregnant with sexual imagery involving "ravishing of the soul." The author suggests such sexual and spiritual imagery was blended to produce "a powerful explosive mixture." My own view is that the mystical dynamic Alline was able to overcome the flesh-spirit dichotomy at the apogee of his leadership, in the deep emotional response he was able to elicit from his followers. While there is some dispute whether he rejected Calvinism *entirely*, as the author claims, his sect did trigger the "New Light Stir" in Northern New England from 1799 to 1781, a revival movement which brought forth contending Free Will and Calvinist Baptists.

The arrival in Nova Scotia after the Revolution of some twenty thousand Loyalists changed the colony, posing an economic and demographic threat and engendering an emotional/spiritual response within many Nova Scotians as they tried to cope with the resulting tension: the Second Great Awakening in the 1790's was the result. The author lays himself open to serious criticism, however, in calling for an intense religious revival by linking the past with the problems of Baptists in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick today: this seems to move beyond the legitimate role of the historian.

Benjamin Sulte claimed that history avenged the abuses of the past, but it has hardly done so in the case of the forty thousand Loyalists forced to flee as "losers in a bitter civil war," which produced more emigrées than did the French Revolution. Some Canadians see the ethnic diversity of Canada as inimical to the Loyalist tradition, yet Joan Magee makes the novel and refreshing assertion that the ethnic diversity of the Loyalists was the precursor of our multicultural society of today. She disputes the "myth" that the Loyalists were "British to the core" and deplores the fact that generations of Canadian and American students have been nurtured upon it.

Both the author and Charles J. Humber who contributes the Foreword, argue that far from being mainly aristocratic English "blue-blood," the Loyalists were as diverse ethnoculturally as they were in religion, occupation and economic status. They included at least nine thousand Acadians, Dutch, Poles, Germans, Swedes, Alsatians, Lorraines, Huguenots, Flemish, Highlanders, Irish, Welsh, Jews, Blacks (slave and free), and native Indians. The common link holding varied groups of different language and culture together was loyalty to the crown. This is an interesting little book with no pre-

tensions to scholarship; it is marred by lack of a conclusion and an inadequate index. Biographical portraits of representatives of the ethnic groups are offered, but affirmation alone is not sufficiently convincing; what is needed is hard statistical evidence as to exact origins, perhaps from the extensive records of the Loyalist Claims Commission.

CLIFFORD G. HOLLAND

OISEAU TOMBE

GABRIELLE ROY, *La détresse et l'enchantement.* Boréal Express, $19.95.

THIS FIRST AND, UNFORTUNATELY, only instalment of Gabrielle Roy's posthumously published autobiography, takes us from the novelist's childhood and young adulthood in the Canadian West through the adventure and discovery of her trip to France and England to her return to Canada. The first part, "le Bal chez le gouverneur," centres on Roy's life in Manitoba. We accompany her on her shopping excursions to Winnipeg, experience with her the appendectomy she had at the age of twelve, share her visits to her uncle's farm, learn about her scholastic achievements, and live through her teacher-training and practice-teaching. The incident that gives this part of the volume its title is the lieutenant-governor's ball to which Gabrielle's parents are invited. They dress for the event and go, yet never enter the house, looking in on the proceedings from the outside — perhaps the ultimate expression of their status as outsiders.

The second part, "Un Oiseau tombé sur le seuil," begins in the autumn of 1937 when the author first discovers Paris. The title is a metaphor for the budding author's arrival in France. Her encounters with Parisian life, and in particular with the Parisian temperament, will touch a responsive chord in anyone who has ever lived in the City of Lights, however briefly. It is here that Gabrielle Roy learns a great deal about life, love and herself, but she leaves Europe and returns home at the end of the volume still not completely certain about her future. All she does know is that she cannot return to Manitoba, but must instead make a life for herself as a writer and in a French-speaking environment.

This autobiography is not an objective narrative. It is an intuitive, subjective series of reflections on privileged moments of the author's life. The reader may be surprised to discover the extent to which three isues preoccupy Roy — poverty, death, and language. The author dwells at length on the poverty that so obsessed the family and shaped its habits and attitudes. Theirs was a difficult lot financially, especially after her father lost his government job settling immigrants. One comes to appreciate the sacrifices the author made in order to become a writer rather than remain in relative comfort and security as a teacher. The guilt that accompanies her giving up her teaching post and leaving her impoverished mother comes into sharper focus, and Gérard Bessette's assertion that guilt fuels her writing is given additional credibility.

Her father's illness and death are described in detail. Her relationship with her father was not nearly as close as the one with her mother, and his death showed her that she had missed an opportunity to know and understand him. She shows her father as a good man victimized by politicians. He lost his job, one he loved and performed with a sense of mission, because of political manoevring. He never recovered from the shock and the bitterness. Gabrielle Roy's passionate advocacy of social justice must have been born in part from that incident and the events that ensued.

The author's descriptions of life for Francophones in predominantly English Manitoba are filled with words such as "humiliation," "étranger," "inférieur," "dépaysement," and "honte." She talks about the "malheur d'être Canadien français" and the many subterfuges practised by teachers and pupils to maintain French learning in the school system. There was a conspiracy among French-Canadian teachers and students to promote teaching in French even though it was not officially allowed. It becomes painfully clear that Gabrielle Roy had to leave Manitoba in order to live fully in French and to develop as a mature and independent writer.

The poverty her family was subjected to, the death of her father, and the constant reminder that culturally and linguistically she was not an equal, caused an already sensitive person to reflect deeply on the issues of personal fulfilment and social justice. The most interesting aspect of this autobiography is that all previous critics will find confirmation for the readings which they have proposed. It is the reader's book as much as the writer's. B.-Z. Shek's focus on social issues finds justification in these pages. Gérard Bessette's psychocritical approach can be appreciated all the more. Réjean Robidoux's Proustian reading takes on new life. The complexity of the fiction is reflected in the autobiography.

The title summarizes both this book and Gabrielle Roy's world view. There is certainly a great deal of distress — mental and physical anguish and suffering — expressed here, but there is also delight and rapture. The balance of the two elements is the key to the world of Gabrielle Roy. Albert LeGrand called her "l'être partagé" in 1965, and François Ricard took up the point later, noting that her work represented an attempt to reconcile "la quête de l'idéal et la reconnaissance du réel." The power of her writing resides in its capacity to convey both anguish and delight simultaneously. One never has the feeling of unbridled joy untinged by guilt or doubt, but, conversely, there is never sadness without hope. The real and the ideal found concrete shape in the works of Gabrielle Roy in a unique and poignant fashion and do so again in her autobiography.

Life is presented as a delicate balance of gains and losses, of dreams and disillusionment, of past and present, of people and nature, of "détresse" and "enchantement." People always appear to be on the brink — in danger of losing their language or their culture, their money or their identity. A threat of some kind constantly hovers over them. The writer's task seems to be to preserve the equilibrium, to give tangible presence to those precious moments and events in danger of being lost. Reading this autobiography creates deep regret that the author did not live to write the intended final part.

P. G. SOCKEN

MYTHIC MOUNTIES

KEITH WALDEN, *Visions of Order: The Canadian Mounties in Symbol and Myth*. Butterworth, n.p.

KEITH WALDEN SETS OUT to derive from a plethora of popular writings in English what he calls a "myth" of the Mounted Police and to draw from that myth certain inferences about western culture. Obviously Walden has done an enormous amount of research. Only someone who has tried to read through the general run of old Mountie tales will fully appreciate the enormity of his task. His notes and bibliography alone make a significant contribution to scholarship. The bibliography is, however, "selected"

and far from comprehensive. It would also have been of more use to future scholars if Walden had distinguished fiction from non-fiction, and both from general background readings such as Butler's *The Great Lone Land.*

Walden also advances an original and often convincing argument about the significance of the romantic image of the Mountie. It was, he says, very much a product of its time, generated less by the actual achievements of the force than by psychic needs of the reading public, brought on by the uncertainties of the late Victorian era. "As comprehensive authority disappeared, western society longed that some universal standard of truth and morality could be found. It was yearning, more than anything else, that produced the symbol of the Mounted Policeman." The symbol was well designed to provide reassurance about two painful conditions of the time: "the crisis of authority" and "the problem of the individual in mass society." The Mountie, after all, managed to submit to authority without sacrificing his individuality, and in his more idealized states suggested sources of human authority to replace a shaken faith in God.

The image of the Mountie created by this public yearning, Walden says, can be viewed in mythic terms because it was the product of "the social construction of reality, which is always mythic" and is a variant of the hero archetype found in myth. Thus the history of the force, in the hands of romancers and historians alike, was cast in a universal heroic mould. Walden illustrates this tendency by drawing a detailed and often ingenious analogy between accounts of the Mounties' trek West and the quest pattern Joseph Campbell charts in *The Hero With a Thousand Faces.* In both fiction and non-fiction Walden discerns the same inter-related themes: order, boundary and progress, and the greatest of these is order. "Order made the boundary significant, and distinguished Canada from the violence and anarchy of both American and Communist civilization. Order was the necessary condition for any truly beneficial change, the foundation of existence and the key to the future."

If looking at the Mountie in historical contexts draws Walden's attention to what is common among British, American, and Canadian portrayals, looking at how the Mountie is deployed geographically brings out differences. British writers, who placed the Mountie on the remote fringes of empire, stressed the concept of duty; American writers, who placed the Mountie in a trackless wilderness, often the Arctic, stressed the tension between law and justice; Canadian writers, visualizing the Mountie on a frontier that was being civilized, stressed the concept of order. "In most Canadian police novels the primacy of order was never questioned and the legitimacy or the limits of the law and government were rarely explored. Order, law, and justice were assumed to be synonymous."

In a brief conclusion, Walden returns to his initial explanation of the Mountie's popularity as part of broader developments in western culture. Uncertainty inclines people to fall back on those archetypal or primal patterns articulated in myth; popular culture functions to connect the archetypal and the contemporary. "Many people responded to the Mountie because he seemed to be part, not only of their present but of an eternity which touched all humankind."

Walden's research is impressive and his argument coherent, but the understanding he generates is finally unsatisfying because he blurs several distinctions vital to any clear understanding of the cultural significance of the Mountie "myth." He refuses, for example, to distinguish between fiction and non-fiction, and may offer quotations from an annual

report to parliament and from a character in a romance as equivalent evidence. Both, he says, were shaped by the same mythic patterns. Granting that there is some truth in this, we nonetheless need some clear idea of what kinds of shaping have taken place if we are to assess the cultural forces at work. Walden rarely compares the romantic image with evidence from the most reliable historical accounts. Instead, he adopts a tone of unfocused irony about the image of the Mountie, a tone induced by obviously extravagant praise distanced by qualifiers such as "it was asserted," "supposedly," and "it was felt." Apparently the tradition he describes should be questioned, but in what respect? The reader's uncertainty about how to interpret this irony is deepened by the discovery that sometimes, as with the Mounties' role in the Klondike, Walden evidently accepts the romantic picture as essentially accurate.

"Myth" is generally recognized as one of the most dangerously elusive terms in any discussion of literature. Walden tries to avoid confusion by adopting a rudimentary definition: myth comprises "those frameworks that people impose on reality." The need for some more precise distinctions is evident when Walden begins drawing indiscriminately on such disparate sources as reminiscences, authorized histories, works of literature, commercial potboilers, and movies. They may all help to generate a myth, but some might be described more aptly as contributing to legends, public fictions, commercial manipulation, or vulgar error.

Walden also blurs his own distinctions between images of the Mountie emerging from the slightly different cultures of Britain, the United States, and Canada. In particular he seems to be hampered by an inadequate grasp of western American history and to have difficulty recognizing when his Mountie myth has become entangled in the frontier myth which dominates so much of American popular culture. He concludes that differences between national views of the Mountie were "minor." In so doing, Walden seems to abandon one important phase of his investigation: the search for what is nationally peculiar about this archetypal national hero.

Visions of Order is the most ambitious study of the Mountie image yet published. It should become the standard starting point for cultural and literary studies of the Mounted Police because it opens a field in which there is clearly much work to be done.

DICK HARRISON

TRIVIALITY & MAGIC

RICHARD N. COE, *When the Grass was Taller: Autobiography and the Experience of Childhood.* Yale Univ. Press, $25.00.

IN THIS LIMPID and energetically eclectic generic study, Richard Coe defines a literary form, labelled awkwardly the Childhood, which might be simply summarized as an autobiography which stops at the end of its author's childhood. Neither diary, nor memoir, nor novel, the Childhood is best defined in two motifs that animate the book: triviality and magic. The Childhood treasures the trivial: "For the self, it is sufficient that a triviality should be *felt* to be significant; for literature, it is essential that a triviality should be *perceived* to be significant." Unlike the novel, the Childhood must adopt the first attitude:

> The *authentic* narrative of childhood must necessarily contain an element of utterly irredeemable triviality, because this, more than anything else, constituted the lived experience of the child. On the other hand, a childhood which consists of nothing but trivialities is a trivial childhood. There must be a meaning, even in un-meaning. This is the fundamental paradox of the genre.

Basing his study on some six hundred examples, Coe traces the evolution of the genre (essentially a phenomenon of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries) thoroughly and with an informative sense of cultural history. Yet, in sensitive *rapprochement* with his subject, he does not over-intellectualize and rationalize the genre into immobility. Invariably a profound, inarticulate sense of identity with the small things of the world roots itself in the centre of the childhood — magic must be admitted. Speaking of Eugène Ionesco's *Journal en miettes*, Coe notes that the French countryside about Ionesco's childhood village was not necessarily especially beautiful, but it is "rendered luminous by the absence of any awareness of time or mortality. It was not merely a state of physical security or psychological well-being, but a purely 'magical,' mysterious, even mystic glimpse of a world wholly other, wholly surprising."

At the same time, Coe claims that nostalgia, and sentimentality is extremely rare in the childhood. Testing a generalization so startling makes the reading of this book an intellectual adventure. So, too, with many more specific observations, such as the fusion of childhood with contemporary ecological concerns ("it is a fact that there *was* once more grass and less concrete"), the lack of attention to toys in the Childhood, and the discovery that first love is almost always accompanied by greyness and absence of colour. Similarly, Coe's outline of the five crucial discoveries which shape the narrative of the childhood include not only the predictable evil, sex, love, and death, but, surprisingly, theatre.

Which makes me think of Alice Munro, or Ernest Buckler, or James Reaney, or . . . Ordinarily, reviewing a new generic study in *Canadian Literature*, I would turn to speculation about where such structures might shape an understanding of Canadian examples. But in this case, the hypotheses are seldom necessary, since the book is remarkable for its continuous references to varied Canadian examples in English and French, in company with examples from Britain, the United States, Australia, New Zealand, Germany, Russia, and Africa.

A review is likely to become tedious when it turns to long lists. But since this book may not be widely reviewed in Canada, I include a list of the Canadian titles discussed or mentioned as a sort of bibliographical reference: Patricia Blondal's *A Candle to Light the Sun*, Robert de Roquebrune's *Testament de mon enfance*, Robert Thomas Allen's *When Toronto Was for Kids*, Antonine Maillet's *On a mangé la dune*, L. M. Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables*, Pierre Vallière's *Nègres blancs d'Amérique*, Claude Jasmin's *La petite patrie*, Fredelle Bruser Maynard's *Raisins and Almonds*, Gabrielle Roy's *La petite poule d'eau*, Helen Dodge's *My Childhood in the Canadian Wilderness*, Anne Hébert's "Le Torrent," Emily Carr's *Book of Small*, Joy Kogawa's *Obasan*, Melinda McCracken's *Memories are Made of This*, Claire Martin's *Dans un gant du fer*, Mordecai Richler's *The Street*, Louis-Honoré Fréchette's *Mémoirs intimes*, Laura Goodman Salverson's *Confessions of an Immigrant's Daughter*, Harry J. Boyle's *Memories of Catholic Boyhood*, and Dorothy Livesay's *A Winnipeg Childhood*.

This index does point to the book's occasional drift toward lists, a tendency reinforced by an inclination to weak expletives, and an absence of sustained analysis of formal and verbal techniques peculiar to particular works. But this reservation is another way of saying I would like another book after this. As it stands, as a description of a hitherto undefined genre, the work is splendid, both

in range and precision, and will surely provoke these other books in its wake.

LAURIE RICOU

COLD WAR

SYLVIA FRASER, *Berlin Solstice*. McClelland & Stewart, $18.95.

THE PUBLICATION OF *Berlin Solstice* marks a major step forward for Sylvia Fraser. Although her first novel *Pandora* (1973) brilliantly depicted a child's inner life, the three novels following — *The Candy Factory*, *A Casual Affair*, and *The Emperor's Virgin* — became progressively "thinner," drawing on slick "best-seller" elements. With *Berlin Solstice*, however, Fraser establishes a reputation as a historical novelist, creating a brilliant inside account of the rise and fall of the Third Reich, one which develops both psychological and historical reasons for Germany's fall into barbarism. Indeed her use of form to create historical understanding counterpoints much of the recent theoretical debate on the writing of history (a useful collection of essays on the subject is *The Writing of History*, ed. Canary and Kozicki, Univ. of Wisconsin Press).

For her setting, Fraser travels over much of Germany, including Bavaria, the home of National Socialism, and even ventures to Czechoslovakia for a chilling account of the assassination of Reinhard Heydrich. As the title indicates, however, most of the novel takes place in the old capital, Berlin, during Germany's winter solstice, the period from the 1920's to the end of World War Two. So frequently do her characters traverse the city from east to west and back again that by the novel's end the reader feels he knows Berlin almost as well as his own city. Painstaking accumulation of detail does more than supply a geographical location: the well-known Berlin names — Hardenberg Strasse, the Zoo, the Tiergarten, Cafe des Westens — present a grid on which the actual events of the Third Reich can be firmly grounded.

Particularization of detail also allows Fraser to flesh out convincingly some of the more famous figures from the Nazi party. Since the novel focuses on actors and drama, Goebbels, the Minister of Art and Propaganda, appears often. The Reich's second-in-command, Goering, has a brief walk-on part, dressed in his green forester's garb. At several points, the Fuhrer himself strides to centre stage: first at one of his early charismatic meetings; then in his decisive attack on the Sturmabteilung and Ernst Röhm; again at his mountain hideaway, Berchtesgaden, where he would slide suddenly from charming host to demagogue; and finally shortly before his suicide in the Chancellery bunker, while above ground the Red Army reduces Berlin to rubble. Of all the leaders in the Nazi high command, Fraser devotes her most extended portrait to the "Blonde Beast," Reinhard Heydrich, the leading architect of the Nazi "Final Solution" for the Jews. She shows his development from the son of a Dresden music teacher to the Head of the Reich Main Security Office. While never denying Heydrich's cold, cruel side, she draws so close to his personal life, allowing his character to shine forth from behind his own eyes, that for long moments we are even led to sympathize with him.

The idea of "sympathizing" with such a monster must seem anathema to many, of course, but Fraser grasps an essential point in the art of history: to gain an understanding of how one of the world's great civilizations fell into barbarism, we need to be able to imagine the aspirations of the criminals and to comprehend the intersection of their private and

public lives. To this end she develops a narrative stance which employs indirect quotation so extensively that the reader remains continually within the psyche of her characters. Consequently the fictional world presents a repeated echo of the characters' thoughts and rationalizations, Fraser wisely declining to intervene with editorializing comment.

Yet as Georg Lukacs observed, the historical novelist obtains his greatest success in interpreting history, not with major historical figures, but with his own fictional creations who, while highly individualized, can also represent classes and trends. For this purpose Fraser presents a number of fictional characters who illuminate the pressures at work on the German population, two of the most successful being Ilse Schmidt and her husband Kurt. A simple country girl from the south, Ilse is ideal for showing the attractions of National Socialism to the "Volk." As the Head Nurse in the *Lebensborn* clinic in Mullhorig, Ilse throws herself into the job of finding "biological mates" for unmarried German women, and then provides loving care to the babies produced by this mating. Under Fraser's skilful hand we watch this idealistic and compassionate young woman struggle to retain her belief in the Lebensborn's ideal of race even as she confronts moral dilemmas in the program. The first opposition comes from her Roman Catholic parents who object to the enterprise on religious grounds. Yet their abstract considerations mean nothing compared to what she faces when the doctors inform her that Aryan philosophy demands the death of all deformed Lebensborn children. So deeply is Ilse involved with the Lebensborn ideal and so loving is her personality, that for several years she does not even recognize her own son's mental slowness, or that her husband will not be promoted until his family is "purified." In the character of Ilse, Fraser depicts the powerful attraction of the National Socialist ideals of purity and perfection, and how these conflict with compassion and love, weakening the very fibre of both individual and political well-being.

A similar sort of clash between idealism and practice appears in Ilse's husband Kurt, only here with much more far-reaching consequences, since Kurt's loyalty as an SS officer eventually wins him the trust of his superiors for one of their most difficult and secret tasks — eliminating the mentally ill, the Jews, and other "subhumans." Step by step we watch Kurt travel deeper and deeper into the mire of Nazi practice, all the while attempting to hold pure his oath of loyalty to the Fuhrer. Unlike Ilse, who manages to keep heart and head apart, Kurt finally faces himself, recognizing the extent to which his many compromises undermined his idealism, turning it into greed for self-gain.

While Fraser undoubtedly gives a superb account of the attractions and consequences of Nazi ideology, she proves not nearly so successful in portraying the other side, the Resistance. Her two principal resistance figures, Count Wolfgang von Friedrich and Carmel Kohl, are not convincingly drawn, and since their stories form a large part of the novel's centre, the novel contains a serious flaw. Yet the flaw reveals an interesting aspect of Fraser's historical conception and narrative point of view. For her resistance Fraser chooses people from the theatrical community. In the early parts of the novel both the Count and Carmel vacillate between accepting and rejecting the Nazi ideology. Fraser's intention is to show how the artistic world, with its emphasis on different roles and its mirroring of what lies outside, allows the individual to remain uncommitted to any particular doctrine. In Fraser's

handling, the characters appear almost whimsical, with no central core of moral being. Thus, when they both decide to oppose the Nazis, the decision appears unmotivated and arbitrary. Fraser was obviously aware that this leap creates problems because she gives Carmel and the Count a winter love scene in the Harz mountains. But this becomes little more than a cheap scene from a *Liebesroman* and does little to advance either the plot or our understanding of the characters.

That a resistance, however small, developed in Germany is well documented, and although Fraser mentions in an endnote that she did not base her fictional characters on real people, the stories of historical resistance fighters were available to her. For the Count it seems likely that she drew in some small part on von Stauffenberg, the principal conspirator in the assassination attempt on Hitler on 20 July 1944. Carmel may well have been modelled on Zarah Leander, a famous singer and actress. Yet in a society in which Hitler could boast that there was no crime atrocious enough to cause the people to rebel, a portrait of resistance will require substantial psychological underpinnings of the sort that may well not be commensurate with Fraser's omniscient narrative.

Fraser's difficulties in presenting credible resistance figures assumes an even more interesting dimension in the last chapters when she repeatedly uses the term "bourgeois" to describe the degeneration of the Nazi ideal of purity into a fascination with self and the accumulation of wealth. In fact she ends the novel on a darkly cynical but powerful note when Colonel Kurt Schmidt, the typical Nazi, remains with Hitler in his Bunker until his suicide, and then buys his way out of Russian-held Berlin to escape into the bombed Underground on his way to freedom in the West. While Fraser offers no hint as to his eventual success, the novel leaves the impression that our own "bourgeois" society continues to harbour his spirit, even to create it anew. The winter solstice, the cold war, remains.

R. B. HATCH

EMPTY LIVES

L. R. WRIGHT, *Among Friends*. Doubleday, $19.95.

PETER GAULT, *Goldenrod*. Elephant Press, $5.95.

THE JACKET BLURB of *Among Friends* tells us that the novel "explores the delicate — and intricate — human emotions of three women who, without having expected to, find themselves totally alone in life. . . . How they are ultimately able to break through solitude and reach out to one another is the striking, haunting story of *Among Friends*." Well, sort of. The novel, the third by L. R. Wright (her first, *Neighbours*, won the fourth annual "Search - for - a - New - Alberta - Novelist" Award), tells the stories in succession of Leona, Emily, and Marion over a single winter; they each live alone in Calgary.

Leona and Marion worked together on the Calgary *Star* until Marion resigned to buy a house and become a freelance writer; Emily worked as a secretary for a neighbourhood paper until she was fired in a cost-cutting move — she is Marion's aunt and Leona's neighbour. Leona is sent to cover a fire and discovers that a four-year-old boy, playing with matches in his locked room — locked because his mother was having a tryst downstairs — has burned to death. She changes jobs on the paper, and her heart begins to beat furiously from time to time, which scares her, so Leona goes to a doctor who tells her she's ok; she is, apparently, because we then move on to

Emily's story, which mainly involves her losing her job and not telling anyone she did, at least not for a while; Marion rents out rooms to boarders, her mother dies, she has good sex with one of her boarders, and he leaves town for Vancouver. Before he does, he comforts Marion because her dog, Spot — who is huge — enthusiastically jumped on Emily, knocking her down Marion's basement stairs, putting Emily — who is old — in hospital; meanwhile, Leona asks for and receives a leave of absence from the paper, but she'll be back.

Among Friends details — excruciatingly — the chance vagaries of being, of just existing day-to-day. (Fiction is necessarily an art of selection, since we spend so much time sleeping, eating, washing, and taking out the garbage.) But Wright catalogues her characters' lives to very little purpose for, although her prose is quite competent, at times even graceful, and her eye for detail excellent, her story, as a story, simply begins and ends — it goes nowhere. Despite its polish, Wright never makes us care, she never never makes us understand. These characters — and they are ever characters, never people — do not so much "break through solitude" and communicate (or share, or understand, or touch, or something): they exist side-by-side, each caught up in the misery of being. We get detailed descriptions of each woman's thoughts and feelings, how each spends her time and what she worries about, but Wright never achieves an insight. She moves into the neighbourhood of an insight with Leona's decision to request a leave of absence but, even there, we are not much surer about Leona's motives than when her heart beats like mad and scares her. Thus *Among Friends* is well-intentioned, well-written, and certainly earnest, but, like its characters' lives, it is ultimately empty.

But if Wright's novel is empty, Gault's is vacuous. *Goldenrod* is raunchy, self-indulgent, and adolescent, offering us the first-person inanities of one Ken Harrison, a self-proclaimed oversexed "hunk" whose narcissism is awe-inspiring. He graduates from high school in Toronto, where he is the star of a local B hockey team and self-proclaimed class Adonis; then he goes to the University of Bracebridge where, although his sexual indulgences decline for a time, his intellectual self-indulgences multiply geometrically. Yet *only he* is able to present his English professor — from whom he is taking "Women in Literature" — with her *very first* orgasm when they couple on her office floor, books raining on their heads, earnest students waiting outside the locked door. The book abounds with puerile clichés such as this, and its title, *Goldenrod*, is a boorish, adolescent joke. Gault offers a repellent, sexist view of women in his (I presume) attempt at a 1980's *The Catcher in the Rye* and, though the novel is not without vitality, his attempt fails dismally. *Goldenrod* is a hackneyed piece of drivel; it makes you feel sorry for trees.

ROBERT THACKER

LE VERTIGE

MARIE-CLAIRE BLAIS, *Anna's World*. Sheila Fischman, trans., Lester & Orpen Dennys, $9.95.

Anna's World IS A TRANSLATION of *Visions d'Anna ou Le Vertige* (1982). The subtitle, which has not been included in Sheila Fischman's translation of the title, does succinctly signpost the nature of Anna's world: Anna along with other young rebels in the novel, has a horrific view of a world teetering on the edge of self-destruction, peopled with repressive societies which institutionalize

cruelty and oppression. All around them these characters see the signs of madness and destruction behind the façade of bourgeois civilities. The writer attempts to create within the reader a sense of this metaphysical vertigo experienced by the young protagonists. In the case of Anna and Michelle, the narratives are also influenced by the drug trips each takes to escape reality. There is a rambling, yet obsessive quality to these narratives, and the reader is occasionally jarred into sharing the horrifying perspective of Anna's premonitions of a nuclear holocaust, or into understanding her perception of all societies as repugnant instruments of torture and death.

Part of the vertigo of the novel is purely stylistic. The narration is almost always presented from the perspective of a character's mind as he or she reflects on the past or the present. In those scenes which take place in the present, the speech, actions, and even thoughts of the characters are seen through the mind of one of the participating characters; there is no dialogue as such, just reported speech within the mind of the perceiving character, who reacts in thought only to the heard or remembered speech of the other characters. The text of the novel is broken occasionally by the start of a new, unnumbered section or chapter, usually indicating a change in scene or character. Frequently, however, the narrative voice switches from one character's mind to the mind of another in mid-sentence, to establish unexpected connections between characters who would otherwise remain locked in their own mental and social worlds.

The depiction of the family in modern North American society is one of the most fascinating, and terrifying aspects of the novel. Just as she succeeded in *Une saison dans la vie d'Emmanuel* in evoking a whole society through the creation of the stultifying rural family of Jean Le Maigre, Blais in *Anna's World* evokes modern society through the characters in Anna's family. The word "family" is here used loosely, for Anna has lived as a young drifter, then as a drug pusher, and she feels a family bond with Tommy and Manon, and the large number of disinherited young who live in a rebellious drug sub-culture and survive by scavenging like packs of stray dogs. The novel begins just after Anna has come back to her "real" family, however ambiguous and impermanent this return may be. The last line of the novel suggests strongly that Anna's mother, Raymonde, is mistaken when she says to herself "I think this time she's come back."

The conflict which is evident everywhere in the people around her reinforces the ambiguity of the return of Anna. Her family is really a network of friends and relations, made complex by shifting relationships, separations, and divorce. Almost all the characters are involved in a generational conflict, which is usually heightened by their professional life. Guislaine, the doctor, who frequently deals with deaths from drug overdoses at the hospital, cannot deal with Michelle's drug addiction, nor with Liliane's homosexuality; Raymonde's professional life is spent building more jails and proposing harsher measures to deal with young female offenders, while her daughter Anna becomes a drifter and drug dealer increasingly outside the law; Peter, the former hippy, repudiates Anna precisely for those values and styles he once affected himself; Paul, the sociologist, can understand neither his own children, nor his mother, and both older and younger generations feel unloved; his mother laments the loss of the old values, and the destruction of innocence which she sees all around her, while her son remains blind to reality. Even Rita, the chance acquaintance of Alexandre, is

in conflict with her elder son, who reminds her too much of her husband, whom she has just left.

The world of Anna, then, is a decadent western bourgeois society. Although the characters do tend to be stereotypes of this society, the novel creates a sense of horror and waste by depicting the void which exists between the characters, between the aspirations of middle-class complacent parents for their children, and the empty despair of the young for the possibility of any future at all. Despite the predominant gloom, however, Blais presents one vision of possible redemption in Liliane, who dreams of saving others by the strength of her love and her art. More convincing, perhaps, is the image of the writer, seen in Alexandre, and in Anna, who models herself on him: the only subject for the novelist today is the threatened extinction of the species, and the writer must have the courage to portray the acts of rebellion by individuals in the face of the approaching "wave of collective suicide." Sheila Fischman's translation catches the tone of the original, with only a few obtrusive phrases ("Music School" for "Ecole de Musique" seems slightly awkward; surely "Conservatory" would be better). Ironically, the North American flavour which is created by the use of English terms and phrases in the original French text is a nuance which disappears in English translation.

D. W. RUSSELL

MACARONICS

GERALD THOMAS, *Les deux traditions: Le conte populaire chez les Franco-Terreneuviens.* Bellarmin, n.p.

DURING THE LONG cold winter evenings on the Port-au-Port peninsula on the southwestern coast of Newfoundland, people meet regularly for a typical "veillée" to listen to folktales. So it was in this isolated French community of Newfoundland from the time of its first settlements in the early nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century when modern technology, in the form of new roads and electricity (television), and the installation of an American military base nearby, put an end to the isolation and to a special way of life. Changes in this fishing community's traditional life seemed to signal the beginning of the end of a rich tradition. In fact, most people must have thought it dead by the mid-1960's, given the realities of assimilation in the Newfoundland context, a province with a ninety-nine percent anglophone population. But buoyed by the new visibility given French through the Bilingualism and Biculturalism Commission, and the resulting repercussions on the French minorities outside Quebec, the Franco-Newfoundland community demonstrated an uncanny resilience in its survival; in fact, it had maintained continuity with its rich past.

Gerald Thomas's book looks at a particular aspect of this past and present: the two traditions referred to in the title define the two types of folktale narrative, or story-telling. The first type, the *private* one ("privée ou familiale") refers to that tradition where folktales are narrated often by a family member in an informal and intimate setting; the other, the *public* one, relates to a larger meeting of people who have gathered in someone's house to hear the specialist, the "conteur professionnel" who is reputed in the community for his artistry. The major difference between the two is not in content but in form: the public "conteur" will pay close attention to detail, he will respect all traditional narrating devices, his discourse will be accompanied by a corresponding demeanour (voice, facial, body effects), and of

course, he will have a much richer repertoire.

Thomas' book is a gold mine in many ways. First, it is an affirmation of these people's existence through the vitality of this folktale tradition: the author's sources for both traditions are very much alive and well and living today in Newfoundland. Second, he attempts to unravel from the texts themselves and from the performance and style of the "conteurs," what he terms the narrative aesthetics of the Franco-Newfoundlanders throughout their history. Third, he relates all the information gathered to international criteria of folktale identification and classification (e.g., Stith Thompson's *Motif-Index of Folk Literature*, 1955-58).

The second half of the book deals specifically with the folktales. Thomas situates each narration in its live context, then provides a verbatim transcription of the text as narrated, and concludes each one with a "commentary and notes." Themes and motifs are identified and classified according to established criteria recognized by both folklorists and ethnologists. He also analyses the tale's most unique characteristics, as well as comments on the conteur's style and performance. In short, this is a most enriching contribution to the scientific study of folktales as well as a revealing insight into the humanity that transmits the tradition live.

Favouring the contextual approach, Thomas recreates, in his first part (the "origins and evolution of the Franco-Newfoundland community"), the socio-historical background in which the tradition was emplanted and evolved. The reader comes to appreciate, in this voyage through time and space, the role of this folktale tradition in the very survival of that French community, and its strength and adaptability. The "conteurs'" use of the macaronic discourse (the bilingual narration) is a measure of this community's adaptability to the realities of its extreme minority situation, but it is also a measure of its desire and will to survive. A great French tradition is transmitted more often than not . . . in English! It is possibly the Franco-Newfoundlanders most profound originality.

Gerald Thomas's book is a must for anyone interested in anything related to culture, customs, traditions, and folklore, and especially so in the Canadian perspective. The author also provides implicitly, through his own experience on the Port-au-Port peninsula, a method of inquiry that can be applied to other groups whose traditions are similarly dormant. This book's only drawback may be the difficulty a reader who does not have a relatively good command of the Canadian macaronic discourse will encounter in comprehending the transcriptions.

PAUL DUBE

FIRST PERSON

GERTRUDE STORY, *It Never Pays To Laugh Too Much*. Thistledown, $9.95.

KENT THOMPSON, *A Local Hanging and other stories*. Goose Lane, $8.95.

HERE IS YOUR BASIC passage of heightened verbal intensity from Gertrude Story's *It Never Pays To Laugh Too Much*:

> The three white kittens were three white round snowballs and the blue porridge bowl was a round blue sky. It had no business in [*sic*] the floor of the calf pen. The milk inside it was as white as a kitten or a vanilla ice cream cone at the Chinaman's in town, or like a cloud. The three white kittens were lapping a white kitten ice cream cone cloud. They were lapping it with soft pink tiny tongues, lap-lap-lap-lap-lap.

Why Story stopped at five laps is unclear; the voice itself chirps on relent-

lessly for twelve stories and 139 pages, never wavering in its sentimental simplicity. It belongs to Alvena Schroeder, a girl growing up in a German-Canadian community (not Mennonite, for once) in rural Saskatchewan immediately before and during the Second World War. According to the jacket copy, the book is meant "to disclose the dramatic emergence of the young Alvena into womanhood," apparently a reference to the fact that, in the last story, she experiences her first menstrual period. But on any level other than the physiological, Alvena remains a child throughout, and Story can not resist going for the cheap laughs that her protagonist's denseness makes possible:

> Sometimes Louie Hoffer and Hedy Uhrich kissed a whole lot in the cloakroom too. And then pretty soon Hedy Uhrich quit school and went on holidays to her auntie in Arnprior, way down in Ontario, and she never came back for a long time, I guess she was having too good a time.

Nudge, nudge. Wink, wink.

Why has Gertrude Story chosen to do this? She has the material for a much stronger book. The more interesting stories would have been much better if Alvena had not been the narrator. For example, in "But First You Ought To Ask The Bride," a hired girl is made pregnant by a farmer about to go off to war, and a grimly businesslike marriage is contracted. Told in the third person or by an adult, this story might have been devastatingly effective. But Alvena's obtrusive cuteness trivializes the pain that she does not have to experience.

I have a disquieting suspicion that this is precisely what Gertrude Story intended. If you wish to spray the aerosol of nostalgia over a world forty years past, why not deliver it all through the perceptions of a happy and secure child? Many of Story's Saskatchewan readers from backgrounds similar to Alvena's will no doubt feel a warm glow as they read this book, and that's what literary art is all about, isn't it?

Kent Thompson's territory is contemporary New Brunswick. He has little in common with Gertrude Story other than an interest in first-person narration, and it would be easy to spend the balance of this review praising him for what he has accomplished in that line. But that would be beside the point.

A Local Hanging collects sixteen of his stories, eight of them having to do with characters from his novel *Shacking Up* (1979). Thirteen have first-person narrators, and although three of these move in the direction of parable, the other ten give us protagonists with firm roots in contemporary society and culture. In most of these, Thompson's aim seems to have been to give voice to ordinary people — unsophisticated but reasonably articulate men and women trying to make sense of life with only the most rudimentary intellectual and moral equipment. In this worthy project, Thompson has been successful. The voices sound authentic. Sometimes we are meant to laugh as we listen, but the laughter never obliterates our sense of kinship with them. However, documentary zeal is never enough. Thompson has in these stories relied completely on the intrinsic value of his raw material, deliberately refusing to provide the sort of aesthetic consolation offered by (for example) the dense poetic texture of Alice Munro's prose or the classic spareness of Norman Levine's. Instead, each Thompson character has his or her usually clunky say, and that's it. There are a lot of sentences like "So anyway we stopped at McDonald's for a sackful of hamburgers and stuff before we went out to the cottage."

But some of the best stories in *A Local Hanging* are different. "The Keynote" is a witty four-page third person précis of

Shacking Up, rendered with Raymond Carver-like economy and attention to detail; none of the characters could have told the story this well. "A Blunt Affair," also in the third person, is a chronicle of the half-hearted courtship of a widow and widower in their sixties, permeated by an elegiac sadness that would have been absent had one of the characters narrated it. In "Green Things," there is a first-person voice, but it belongs to a middle-aging civil servant whose levels of awareness, sensitivity, and self-expression are much higher than those of Thompson's norm. The nameless protagonist struggles — as many of Thompson's characters do — to come to terms with a life that seems subject to an immutable law of diminishing returns. He finds no solution to his problems, but Thompson does allow him this sort of eloquence:

> It is a lovely autumn morning: the maple trees are red and golden; oh, life has such colours before it slips away. Is dying perhaps beautiful? But what I want is the solidity of green things. I even consider buying squash although I do not like squash at all: just to have it: green and solid and yellow inside, meat of vegetable life.

I hope that Thompson's next collection will contain fewer Big Macs and more solid green.

LAWRENCE MATHEWS

INTO THE WOODS

DENYS CHABOT, *Moon Country*. David Lobdell, trans. Oberon, $14.95.

GEORGE MCWHIRTER, *Paula Lake*. Oberon, $12.95.

A LA RECHERCHE DU RECIT perdu? No; the postmodern age (devoted to multiplicity) is not nostalgic for a lost form of narrative by which to represent itself. There are but four types of hero: epic's king, romance's knight, melodrama's agent and satire's fool, and each has a unique dedication to The City. Two parodic novels address this crisis in the narrative's legitimizing function, and postmodernism's reaction to modernism's arrogant assumption of the supremacy of the individual subject.

While Chabot's romance and McWhirter's melodrama relate the evolution of the hero, the former assigns the various roles to different characters and the latter develops the four stages through the persona of Andrew Hutcheson, primarily an agent playing mediator in a world of pawns. In *Moon Country*, characters are appropriate but Quixotic representations: Louis-Joseph Pérusse, an aging king, his granddaughter Catherine (a tarnished damsel in distress), two old crones and a knight errant, a compulsive questor jousting futilely with the formlessness and the shifting values of egalitarian, post-industrial, consumer society. The knight is much like a reader who is unaware of postmodern traps such as those built into most of the elements of fiction in these two novels. As *Moon Country* moves from parody through satire to pastiche, the Quest — the hero's *raison d'être* — becomes irrelevant; the desperate author's only recourse is to entertain. And Chabot dazzles with the brilliance of his language and his comedic ingenuity. A Suibhneian levitationist, a trickster, he becomes the protagonist of his own novel, reinventing the past, and himself as king, knight, and fool's mate until at last "exhausted" he goes "into the woods," assuming, as it were, the mantle of an agent who will continue mankind's follies in perpetuity.

This absurd postmodern deconstruction is hilarious. Nature retaliates against centuries of Culture-over-Nature and reasserts itself through hurricane and flood. The accoutrements of Culture

tumble into the deluge: a statue of St. George and the Dragon (Romance) makes a perilous and undignified journey down the newly created river, formerly the main street of a small town. Naturalism, begun by Flaubert, father of modernism, follows: "an old cock with a plucked tail on a dung heap." A mannequin, suggests the nude that Manet (art's *père du modernisme*) superimposed upon Nature and which one hundred years later Rauschenberg, accenting the complete heterogeneity of the age, "reinvents" in the (Velázquez/Rubens) *Venus* series. The mannequin, consumerism's plaster saint, swirls in and out of windows of inundated shops in a surrealistic/dadaistic nightmare where fishes swim among the treetops. The poststructuralist position is obvious: not only is the individual subject a thing of the past, it never existed. It is a philosophical and cultural hoax.

McWhirter, conversely, characterizes "Hutch" in detail providing psychological insights into the motivations of a kidnapper (a reversal of *Murder on the Orient Express*). However, the character of his girlfriend, Paula Lake, is merely suggested by symbolism. She is associated not only with the superficiality of The City (Vancouver, Tokyo) but also with "country" values which she has rejected — she is Paula (an ironic Lady of the) Lake. That she is portrayed through Hutch's biased point of view (he uses her brilliantly lacquered toenail as a theodolite to measure the borders of her queendom) is effective in providing an open ending. Readers with narrative expectations will be pleased that one of Paula's charges from Tokyo, eight-year-old Goto Naoyuki, overthrows his abductor despite the implications of this purposely implausible denouement. Postfeminists might see a happy ending in Paula's crying. But endings (as in *Moon*) might well be beginnings. The reader must dig among the ruins to reconstruct Paula's crime.

Paula's stereotypical role derives from *Le morte d'Arthur*, where females are: if passive (good), virgins to be ravished or rescued; if active (bad), whores or old crones, harbingers of Evil and Death — *mea culpa*. Malory's vision (like Hutch's) is jaundiced: both misogynists commit acts of violence against Woman. The fifteenth-century writer was a rapist who wrote his romance while in prison. Postmodernism has at least permitted a retelling of the myth; one example is M. Z. Bradley's *The Mists of Avalon* (1982).

In *Paula Lake*, dualism and complicity are foreshadowed in the all-encompassing, all-important first line: "A year ago was the last time she lay down in judgement under him." Paula, like Catherine, abandons her traditional role at the first hint of gold only to become one of the questors. Paula has usurped the king/knight's parts — Hutch, his pith helmet a crown/casque, was both king and knight on his lifeguard's elevated chair (throne/steed) on Vancouver's Second Beach. She adopts City values: she is amusingly a female chauvinist who values Hutch as a sex object and who falls "into a snore" whenever he wants to discuss his plans. However, both ladies, though liberated, are mere pawns in The City's endless game.

The agent's flaw is his badge (Holmes' cocaine addiction, Poirot's vanity, Marlowe's bandaged eye). Hutch's flaw is his emotional immaturity which leads him to believe in the Open City of Jamesian melodrama; as an act of petty revenge he takes Nao to a Merlinesque retreat (Paula Lake) where he trains him, as if preparing him for guerrilla warfare. The Open City concept of Conrad's melodramatic novels, however, is the rule. The City, the paradigm for order, ironically has become the Questing Beast that

will ultimately devour itself, and for the knight and the agent, overt and covert defenders of its laws, the return to Nature is imperative but impossible. Hutch, like Chabot's nameless narrator-knight, is merely a Thersitesean fool; paradoxically, they too are pawns.

McWhirter's poststructural melodrama is timely in light of the current popularity of the mystery (*The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, 1985, admits the detective story for the first time). Both his *Paula Lake* and Chabot's *Moon Country*, winner of the Governor General's award for fiction in 1982, are highly entertaining and intellectually stimulating. Each novel questions the validity of narrative's outmoded conventions, the necessary failure of art and the aesthetic, and the direction of the anti-aesthetic and its effect upon the human condition.

MARJORIE BODY

FIRST FICTIONS

KEN LEDBETTER, *Too Many Blackbirds*. Stoddart, $17.95.

SONIA BIRCH-JONES, *A First Class Funeral*. Oolichan, $8.95.

ARMIN WIEBE, *The Salvation of Yasch Siemens*. Turnstone, $7.95.

WAYNE TEFS, *Figures on a Wharf*. Turnstone, $8.95.

EACH OF THESE FOUR VOLUMES is its author's first book-length publication. While the first two seem destined for a quick trip to the remainder bins, the second two have already received considerable acclaim, and signal the arrival of important new writers. I am clearly the wrong person to review *Too Many Blackbirds*, because, although the cover blurb assures me that this novel "is more fun than picnics on a Sunday or cool water in hottest July," I find it merely repulsive and pointless. In the first chapter, an omniscent narrator explains how, forty-six years earlier, a stranger, Morgan Ballard, arrived with his wife and young daughter in a small Missouri town. After the wife died mysteriously — apparently decapitated — Ballard then married the banker's retarded daughter, who also died mysteriously, her lower body covered with teeth marks. (One of the locals later explains, "They was marks right up her legs, some of 'em newer lookin' than the others, and her ass half gone.") After Ballard's third wife was burned alive in her outhouse, Ballard and his daughter also died when their house suddenly caught fire. The novel's remaining sixteen chapters retell these events from the viewpoints of sixteen different townspeople, each one trying to explain what happened from his or her limited perspective.

One of the novel's countless problems is that many of the narrators are what the first one calls "riffraff" — rural, working class people whom Ledbetter has speak in a primitive hillbilly dialect that no one could find interesting. (Imagine L'il Abner with a lobotomy.) Second, a major motif in the novel is excrement, often associated with some form of sexuality, as when the charming Elvin Hawkins remembers having intercourse with a pig. The crudity is combined with absurdly pretentious literary allusions, which seem intended to imply that an obviously educated and tormented man like Ballard cannot hope to be understood by clods who "don't know the difference between vomit and bowel movement." Ballard's own pronouncements, however, read like Rod McKuen rejects: "I can never *understand* parsnips," Ballard writes in what the novel calls a "poem," "but I *know* them." Food for thought, indeed.

After finishing *Too Many Blackbirds*, I was at first relieved to turn to Sonia Birch-Jones' *A First Class Funeral*, a collection of ten inter-connected short stories. In these, the blurb explains, "the author has created a fictional world out of her childhood and adolescent years in Wales." The young narrator/protagonist of these quiet, understated stories describes her life as a series of melancholy revelations. A homely only child, little Sarah learns of her uncle's lechery, her grandfather's fear of death, her father's infidelity, and her mother's indifference. A strong undercurrent of self-pity runs throughout this collection, for Sarah repeatedly reminds us — many more times than are necessary — of her ugliness and loneliness: "But my mother didn't care what I looked like. I guess I was so ugly she had given up on me." There is no reason why such a character could not be made intriguing, but Sarah's flat, colourless monotone does not generate much interest. "On each side of the stove were two little stools," she explains in a typical passage. "They were just right for me. That was my favourite spot. It was so cozy." I was surprised to learn in the sixth story that the stories are set in the 1930's, because very little in them evokes a particular time or place. The author has not created "a fictional world," but has simply translated memories into anecdotes in a workmanlike fashion.

The Salvation of Yasch Siemens provides a striking contrast to *A First Class Funeral*, for Armin Wiebe is able to bring a people and their community vividly, wildly to life. Set in the mythical Mennonite village of Gutenthal in southern Manitoba, the novel covers twenty years in the life of Yasch Siemens, "a dow-nix mustard boar" born "on the wrong side of the double dike," and a man struggling to escape the marginal existence of a hired hand. In the first chapter, Yasch is "almost only sixteen" and madly, passionately, devotedly, hopelessly in love with Fleeda Shreeda. "We have so many things to talk about," Yasch marvels, "because we weed beets on the same field." Alas, the siren of the beet fields eludes Yasch, and when, six years later, he also loses the equally voluptuous Sadie Nickel to "that snuddernose Pug Peters," he turns for comfort to Oata Needarp, Nobah Naze's two-hundred-pound daughter. Oata may disapprove of Yasch's drinking — "The last thing I need around here is a zoop zack!" — but her kind heart and Evening in Schanzenfeld perfume are enticements impossible to resist.

Through the earthy, yet sensitive Yasch, Wiebe tells his story in the dialect of his region, a delightful combination of English and Low German, the latter a version of the standard German of the Mennonites. Wiebe's epigraph, from Josef Skvorecky's essay "Red Music," sets the tone: "My God, how we adored this buggering up of our lovely language for we felt that all languages were lifeless if not buggered up a little." The key words here are "adored" and "lovely"; Wiebe obviously loves words and even more, loves playing with them to recreate the voice of his people. Yasch's description of his courtship with Oata is typical:

> Oata slid off from the hood to the fender and crept into the cab, onto the plyboard. The springs twanged as I glutzed at her. Her one brown eye and one blue eye glutzed right back at me and she said, "Well, zippa your fly shut an' let's go!"

And go they do, all the way to exotic Winnipeg, where Yasch sees women in skirts so short that "you see the leg almost to the seat of knowledge." But even greater wonders await Yasch in Eaton's Grill Room, where he and Oata order their first filet mignon. "How do you want it done?" the waitress asks, and

Yasch, ever urbane, replies, "Cooked." *The Salvation of Yasch Siemens* is a treat, and its author seems on his way to becoming "a real spitz poop" in Canadian letters.

Wayne Tefs' *Figures on a Wharf* is also set in Manitoba, but is very different from Wiebe's novel in both intention and effect. Forcefully and eloquently, Tefs dramatizes how a love affair between a university professor and a student results in the destruction of the professor's family. One might assume that not much more could be done with this by now clichéd scenario; however, Tefs has a shrewd understanding of the dynamics of family relationships and an elegiac style appropriate for lamenting their disintegration. Michael, the professor, falls in love with Mary, a married woman not much younger than he. Tormented by desire and guilt, the lovers meet secretly, their times together "snatched from families and friends and as quickly stuffed away in dark corners." Tefs is especially adept at portraying the deceit necessarily involved in such an affair: "Lies told in haste rebounding, magnifying, multiplying, transforming conjugal simplicity into soapopera confusion. Phones quickly placed back in receivers, plastic warm with passion and guilt." Michael is content to let the situation drift "to the point where something happens," but when his wife, Patricia, inevitably learns of his betrayal, she follows him to the scene of the lovers' trysts, and in an intensely powerful scene, confronts him with the hurt he has inflicted: "She has never appeared so hideous before — or so broken. And the realization wrenches deep inside him as he sees what he has done to her."

It must be said that Tefs' editor has not served him well, for the novel often strains for effect in its attempt to emphasize the tragedy of the family's breakup. Numerous allusions to F. Scott Fitzgerald, including an explicit comparison between Gatsby and Michael, indicate that Tefs had Fitzgerald in mind while writing the novel. Certainly, a young writer could have worse influences, but Tefs is not yet the equal of his mentor. In one passage Tefs writes, "Thoughts of Mary crossed and recrossed [Michael's] mind like stars falling from the sky with apocalyptic intent," and in another, "Death was still here, [Patricia] thought, but about to slip on his raincoat and slide into the wings." The reference to the apocalypse is clearly excessive, while the image of death in a raincoat is right out of Monty Python. Tefs is much better at describing his characters interacting with each other than he is in revealing their innermost thoughts. The relationships between Michael and his son, Michael and Patricia, and Michael and Mary are very well handled. *Figures on a Wharf* is a very moving novel which a more astute editor would have made even better.

PETER KLOVAN

GOOD PRACTICES

The Malahat Review: A Special Issue on John Metcalf. Univ. of Victoria, n.p.

SETTING ASIDE THE DEEP, obvious, and nefarious ideological and psychoanalytic implications of the "special issue" of literary magazines devoted to living "authors" (in which, *il va sans dire*, the lumpen intelligentsia reifies and consumes the totemic father as a way of repressing the truth of actual contemporary real social and psychic process) the issue of *The Malahat Review* for, on, and by John Metcalf is a very fine read. To write fiction very well and to be appreciated by one's colleagues as both a person and a writer is a fine and fortu-

nate fate, in this time and place one of the finest, and there is and ought to be general agreement that Metcalf deserves it. (I here accept the personal testimonies at face value. I do not know Metcalf and had heard nothing of his personal qualities until I read this issue.)

At the centre of the volume is a very good story by Metcalf which portrays a contemporary Canadian writer's decision to do one more reading for a literary group in the sticks. This could be nasty, an occasion for mockery of the literary efforts of those neither talented nor in the swing, or pompous, an opportunity to intone in the sometime unfortunate manner of our cultural nursemaids about the value of, well, Culture. Metcalf actually manages to do a bit of both. There is some genial satire and a plug for poesy, but what holds these in happy suspension is Metcalf's portrayal of the writer's need for an audience. *That* is what drives Forde to take the Canada Council's few bucks, and to endure the wackiness and discomfort of the jaunt, and our hero has the integrity to realize that to condescend to one's audience is to act in bad faith. He doesn't (despite being quite aware of the temptations), and he and we (I speak old-fangledly) are better for it. Metcalf has the mimetic gift, the power to make us imagine his characters without question, and here he uses it to noble ends. "Travelling Northward" is worth the price of admission, and is one of Metcalf's best performances.

Metcalf also contributes some "Notes Towards an Essay on Tony Calzetta" 's paintings. As I have never (knowingly) seen a Calzetta it is hard to assess Metcalf's descriptions and judgements. Moreover, if there is a more difficult thing to do well than give the feel and sense of visual art in words I don't know what it is. John Berger's short pieces in *The Moment of Cubism* and a few reviews by John Updike are the only successful efforts I recall out of hundreds I have read. Nevertheless, Metcalf's notes seem informative and closely in touch with the artist's aims:

> *Because* the 'pictures' are presented to us as papers or slides within a larger context we are doubly reminded of their artificiality. We are reminded that we are looking at a painting of a painting, as it were. This distances us and prevents us from looking at the 'seascapes' with our traditional viewing baggage; our awareness that someone is playing games with us tempers our response to the sweetness of the scenes. In essence we are being invited to enjoy a celebration of stylization.

My criticism of this is that Metcalf has no distance from the artist's intention. What I see in the reproductions is what might have been a witty and sweet (Metcalf's word seems right) imitation of schoolkid art by a talented grown-up who stylizes in order to distinguish his work from theirs. But the exigencies of the market (and the Artbank) demand something portentous — thus "paintings about paintings," which has been a passé cliché for some time. Both Calzetta and Metcalf are, I think, befuddled by the social context of current art, in which there is no place for openly minor yet serious work, which is what I think Calzetta's pictures might have been had he not felt obliged to make them heavy with post-modernism. ("Ugly painting," the new realism, is a failing effort to defy these pressures.)

Perhaps the most surprising thing about this volume is that it contains two fine critical essays, a genre I try to avoid reading for the simple reason that the writing is usually so poor and the ideas whacky. Not so in the essays by Connie Rooke and George Woodcock. Rooke's essay is exemplary explication. It is lucid, gracefully written, and scrupulous in reading the work through a plausible construal of the writer's aims. It did for me what I most like in such essays.

First, it confirmed my general sense of the thing. I can no longer stand essays that tell me that all readers (and writers!) since Adam have been idiots and dupes, and hadn't a clue what they were really about. Second, it showed me things that I had not seen (out of normal readerly laziness), and finally it raised questions about the work (and Metcalf's work generally). While Rooke did not intend the last effect, she made clear to me a problem that I have with some of Metcalf's tales, a problem that is taken up by Woodcock in his essay on *General Ludd*.

The ambiguity that Woodcock names in the title of his essay is not one of the rich Empsonian types, but what might better be called a confusion in Metcalf's vision. "The major ambiguity of *General Ludd* lies in the fact that, while Metcalf presents Jim Wells as an absurd and risible character because of the ways in which he puts his ideas into action and detaches them from his poetic function, he is not out of sympathy with those ideas." The novel uses Wells as a critical consciousness, makes him into a figure of comic excess, and treats him as a pathetic case of self-delusion. He is a writer fallen on uncreative times who soothes his wounded self by bad-mouthing others. I don't think that one can have it all these ways. This confusion has the same root as Metcalf's strength. In "The Estuary," "The Lady Who Sold Furniture," and *General Ludd* (each of which gets an essay here), we are faced with a character difficult to assess because in his or her madness or criminality there is (supposed to be) some justification. The *locus classicus modernus* for this sort of figure is Gulley Jimson in *The Horse's Mouth*, and I am not sure that Carey manages the problem any better. The dilemma is this. You want to write a story as if morality had died — you are a good modern. You thus write sympathetically of an "immoral" person. But in fact you still hold moral beliefs and no matter how sympathetic you make the "immoralist" by giving him the right ideas and bad-mouthing civilization, his badness remains bad. What are we to make of Gully's murder of Sarah, Jim Wells's violence and thievery, and Jeanne's habit of stealing her employer's furniture? No effort on the part of the writer can subdue the moral response — no moral scepticism, no notions of victimization and no ideas about the decadence of civilization. These simply won't wash as excuses for what these writers still believe is immoral. (There would be no dilemma if they didn't.) Older writers did not face our moral uncertainty. They took the immorality for granted, made the monstrousness open (e.g., the Macbeths), and proceded with their portrayal of a character engrossed in evil. But that is no longer true to our consciousness and Metcalf's fictions reflect our dilemma.

For all the value of this "special issue" I must return to my opening theme. Is it good practice to have volumes like this one? First of all, the testimonials confuse person and author, a confusion that has bedevilled criticism since the romantics. Furthermore, literary log-rolling is given an open forum. What evils lurk in the shadows of this sunny volume I shall never know. But perhaps Metcalf's own practice may give us a clue. If we were to imagine a Metcalfian account of the making of such a volume it would include not only the inevitably sordid, but also the love of good writing and the concern for its place in the world that animates such endeavours. It is merely fortunate that to all appearances the latter managed to dominate this time. I am not sanguine about the general idea.

ROGER SEAMON

MULBERRY BUSH

A Meeting of Streams: South Asian Canadian Literature, ed. M. G. Vassanji. TSAR Publications, $5.95.

The Toronto South Asian Review, ed. M. G. Vassanji. $5.00 per copy.

BHARATI MUKHERJEE, *Darkness*. Penguin, $6.95.

MOSAIC OR MELTING POT — only recently the discussion seemed to have been satisfactorily ended. The United States was a relentlessly homogenizing culture that set out to destroy the natural cultural differences between immigrants, and to turn them all into bland and indistinguishable milkfed Americans. We — good Canadians who had learned from two centuries of bicultural experience and from recent mistakes with sharply distinct minorities like the Doukhobors — had now become benevolently mosaic-oriented. We encouraged immigrants to retain their traditions, to keep up their languages, to foster their cultures, to hold ethnic festivals. To show that the dream of assimilating minorities was ended, we institutionalized the whole issue by creating yet another bureaucratic barony, a Ministry of Multiculturalism replete with funds to encourage folkfests and to fund publications by minority language groups, such as one of the books I am now reviewing, *A Meeting of Streams*. This collection of essays on South Asian (mainly Indian and Pakistani with some mention of Sri Lankan and Bangladeshi) writing received a grant from the Ministry, and four of its eleven contributors wrote their essays while carrying out a survey funded by the Ministry.

In general, the contributors to *A Meeting of Streams* seem to be all for the multiculturalist approach. In a long essay entitled "Ganga in the Assiniboine: Prospects for Indo-Canadian Literature," Uma Parameswaran looks forward eagerly to the time when "multiculturalism" will be complete:

> In the last ten years there has been a gradual shift in the idea of Canadian nationhood; the concept of assimilation as an ideal is giving way to the concept of multiculturalism. John Marlyn's Sandor Hunyadi fantasizing about his "real" father being an English lord has given way to Michael Ondaatje discovering his Sri Lankan origins and Fred Wah making contact with his Chinese ancestry. Canada has been multicultural for over a century but only now is there a move to take cognizance of this. We might justifiably look forward to a time when this multiculturalism is accepted and even celebrated. But it will be a slow process.
>
> Even as recently as 1970, the key word was *assimilation*. George Woodcock, in his study of Mordecai Richler, said:
>
> > It might be a metaphorical exaggeration to describe Canada as a land of invisible ghettoes, but certainly it is, both historically and geographically, a country of minorities that have never achieved assimilation.
>
> However, once we accept that assimilation is not necessarily an achievement or a laudable goal, and that pockets of distinctive language groups are not ghetto settlements but centres of living and equal cultures, we would have multiculturalism instead of the old system of *host* and *immigrant* distinctions that sociologists unfortunately tend to perpetuate through their use of such terms as *host culture* for the white Anglo-Saxon culture that happens to be somewhat older than other immigrant cultures of Canada.

I am not entirely happy about the way Uma Parameswaran has distorted my views by selective quotation. If she had read my little book on Richler at all thoroughly, or if she had ventured on another book I wrote at the same period, *The Doukhobors*, she would have realized that my use of the word "achieved" in connection with "assimilation" was deliberately ironical, and that I have always resisted cultural assimilation and those features of Canadian society that have favoured the majority as against the minority cultures.

But such complaints apart, I accept Parameswaran's essay as an honestly optimistic view of the ideal which she calls "multiculturalism" but which I would still prefer, avoiding officially sanctioned titles, to call a mosaic of cultures. I too would like to see the happy development she envisages, though I believe that by enshrining what should be a natural social development in a Ministry and giving it political overtones (which led many minorities to vote almost *en bloc* for the Liberals because they had founded and originally funded the programme) is perhaps the surest way to destroy the real flowering of a multitude of cultures. Let us not forget that the very government of Pierre Trudeau, which seemed so solicitous of the cultures of minorities, was also politically the most fiercely centralist administration we have had in Canada this century.

In fact, I am beginning to encounter among immigrant intellectuals vocal discontent with multiculturalism as an aim, and with Canada as a place for non-Caucasians to live full lives as artists. An Iranian friend, a film-maker who is now a Canadian citizen, when he visited me the other day came out with a bitter denunciation of the whole multicultural programme. He felt that as it has been devised it was a kind of perpetual ghettoization, since it aimed to preserve minority cultures in a kind of sentimental amber (the folk costumes and the painted eggs) and in this way to prevent them from growing in themselves as old cultures responding to a new environment and also from growing naturally into the new cultures to which the immigrants had come. He, of course, was practising an especially cosmopolitan art, that of cinema, which experience has shown cannot live by Canada alone, but it seemed to me that what he said applied to writing as well.

And indeed, despite the multicultural ideal which it seems the ostensible aim of *A Meeting of Streams* to sustain, it looked as though the contributors were celebrating Indian-Canadian writing at the price of a considerable degree of assimilation. The critical concepts and the critical clichés are surprisingly close to those one finds in any issue of *Canadian Literature*, and in fact several of the writers in *A Meeting of Streams* are also contributors to this journal. Some of them are practising poets or fiction writers who have brought their memories, their ways of perceiving and much of their imagery with them from the India or the Caribbean or the Africa of their childhood. But their critical approaches they have learned in Canadian universities, and except that in some ways they are perhaps a little more radical, they deal with literature much as Canadian academic critics do; even the anti-colonialism they often prominently exhibit is not really out of place, for it is only a few years since we also were stirred by the passions of nationalism. The lack of original critical stances makes *A Meeting of Streams* duller reading than one had hoped, except for the two pieces that are not concerned with writing in English, Nuzrat Yar Khan's piece on "Urdu Language and Literature in Canada," and Surjeet Kalsey's on "Canadian Punjabi Literature," which tackle the vernacular poets on their own terms and show us authentic continuations of South Asian traditions. Perhaps that is why the *Toronto South Asian Review*, the collection's parent publication, which contains a good deal of poetry and fiction, does not have the same air of having been dhobied through the faculty school as its offshoot, *Meeting of Streams*.

Bharati Mukherjee gives the whole matter of assimilation and multiculturalism a different twist in the introduction

to her book of stories, *Darkness*. It is a bitter little piece of writing, and how much of it comes from the writer's temperament and how much from experience one must leave the reader to judge. She tells how in Canada she thought of herself as an "expatriate" because she saw "immigrants" to Canada as "lost souls, put upon and pathetic." She says that "the country is hostile to its citizens who had been born in hot, moist continents like Asia; that the country proudly boasts of its opposition to the whole concept of cultural assimilation," and she even accuses "the nation," by which she presumably means the government, of "officially" inciting its citizens to "react against" the "visible minority."

Even I, a bitter hater of governments, find this going a bit far. I have never come across anything in Canada since the days of Mayor Houde that might at the greatest stretch of the imagination be interpreted as "official incitement" to racial hatred; indeed, that would be political suicide for any party, given the number of constituencies where the Asian vote could swing an election.

What has actually happened is something more banal, as we have been told most evil is, but no less disturbing: the turning of a blind eye on occasion to the prejudices of individuals in official positions, usually minor ones. This is morally just as bad as "official incitement," and more difficult to track down. But we should aim our accusations accurately if they are not to be laughed away.

Bharati Mukherjee's really important accusation is that "the country proudly boasts its opposition to the whole concept of cultural assimilation." By this she is presumably, like my Iranian friend, expressing her opposition to multiculturalism and by implication embracing the very objective of assimilation that Uma Parameswaran and most of her fellow contributors to *A Meeting of Streams* wish to avoid. This impression is reinforced by her feeling, on departing to the United States, of moving "away from the aloofness of expatriation, to the exuberance of immigration." Clearly she immersed herself with relief and gladness in the great melting pot, which many of us have not found so welcoming.

This sense of a will to sink into an alien culture, as distinct from remaining a member of a self-conscious minority in a more pluralist society like Canada inspired many of the stories that are collected in *Darkness*. In all but one, the central, experiencing character is of Indian or other South Asian origin, and the basic problems are those of making contact, and of learning the right behavioural signs that will transform one from a "not quite" into a member of that bland and prosperous American society whose inhabitants Mukherjee presents with a strange mixture of envy and contempt.

The agonies of the "not quites" are sometimes terrible, yet they are not without hope, and this is essentially the difference between the stories Mukherjee writes about America and those she writes about Canada. "Tamburlane," tells of a fatal encounter between Asian illegals and Canadian police and immigration officers, is the most terrible story in the book, and the best, because it arouses the most genuine passion. Its anger marks it off from most of the other stories with their social knowingness and their bittersweet ironic tone. It is not accidental that Mukherjee has won major journalism awards (Canadian ones, be it noted by those who take overliterally her accounts of being rejected here) for her stories; they are in fact very good magazine fiction, provocative in tone but not experimental enough to be difficult reading, and — with two or three exceptions — not wiry enough to stand up well to collection. It is surpris-

ing she has not yet appeared in the *New Yorker*. But she will, I am sure, and there she may find the great good American place for which she longs. Personally, I think it is a pity she is lost to Canada; stories like "Tamburlane" are full of threats and promises, and the conflict of Canada might have brought them out more formidably than the content of American acceptance.

GEORGE WOODCOCK

THEIR OWN TONGUE

DAPHNE MARLATT, *Touch to My Tongue*. Longspoon, $7.00.

BETSY WARLAND, *Open Is Broken*. Longspoon, $7.00.

CHARLES NOBLE, *Banff/Breaking*. Longspoon, $7.00.

PENNY KEMP, *Animus*. Caitlin, $6.50.

EACH OF THESE BOOKS provides a consideration of sexuality; they are not unintegrated collections of love poems but structured books that make definite statements about the place of sexuality in the whole of an individual's life.

Charles Noble's *Banff/Breaking* surveys in the title sequence a number of sexual relationships as it highlights the lives of men and women who frequent Banff's bars and restaurants. The sequence that opens the book — "Coming West, Soon" — focuses on one of those relationships, chronicling an emptiness untouched by fulfilled desire. Noble is not technically innovative, but in his vignettes he etches out characters whose aimless, hard-drinking lives are realized through the details of conversations, conventionalized in their repetition:

> He sits in the restaurant after midnight,
> drinks beer,
> is a driller on the oil rigs
> tells how his dog he loved got shot by some
> hunter back in "civilization,"
> on leave
> .....
> how they bathed in pools full of crocodiles
> shooed away in the water by the Latin
> Americans,
> like chasing steers,
> how in the bars they go to
> men kill at the wrong look

Noble's strength in *Banff/Breaking* lies in this metonymic layering of specific types that eventually creates a montage of a small western town flooded with tourists, writers, and musicians, surrounded by natural beauty but bereft of purpose and dignity:

> in Banff it breaks down,
> they hunger for knowledge that makes sense,
> drink and don't eat.

Only when Noble begins to generalize about his subjects do we become aware of his evaluative distance and its accompanying safety. This maintenance of an observer's judgemental perspective can be debilitating, because it often leaves the poet and reader able only to see the surfaces of experience, not what lies behind the recurring stories and pick-up sex. Before we accept too readily Noble's picture of a superficial, eviscerated western society, we would do well to remember Robert Kroetsch's injunction about the duplicitous nature of pub life:

> The True Drinker knows that to enter in through those doors, off the street of a small town, is to enter a place where time is suspended. In the sacred place of the beer parlour, we are allowed to change identities — in our laughter, in our silence, in the stories we tell, in what we remember from the past.

In contrast to the deadening relationships in Noble's book, Betsy Warland's *Open Is Broken* deals with the intensely personal aspects of a rewarding affair. The title sequence traces the chronology of a lesbian relationship, while the single

poems that precede it elaborate specific events and emotions. Although Warland works in this book with a short lyrical form that depends too much on staccato juxtaposition of images and word derivations, the emotional immediacy she gives them breaks many of the poems free from these technical constraints:

> i am finding
> fulfillment a lovely landscape
> few dare travel
>
> finding
> when i had expected to speak most
> eloquently
> i am quiet
>
> find i fathom the moon's exquisite silence.

Even here, in this relatively unencumbered passage, one wishes that Warland had pursued a single metaphor and that she had forgone the lower case "i"; nevertheless the courage of her openness makes Warland a poet to watch.

The title sequence of Daphne Marlatt's *Touch to My Tongue* is bloodsister to Warland's *Open Is Broken* (indeed, Warland's title comes from a poem in Marlatt's volume). The remainder of Marlatt's book is an essay, "Musing with Mothertongue," that objectifies in political and theoretical terms the personal and artistic difficulties a poet writing a sequence such as "Touch to My Tongue" encounters. Of the books under review here, Marlatt's is by far the best and, even in what Marlatt terms "essaying" as opposed to her actual poetry, it is the seductive rhythm of her language that sways us much more than any logical argumentation. Together Warland's and Marlatt's books move us not just up close to but inside an intense love affair. This proximity may make some readers uncomfortable, but it is appropriate to these poets' efforts to show us a relationship in which an individual discovers not the "other" — the usual focus writers take when dealing with intimacy — but through another, the "self," mirrored as it is in a same-sex relationship.

Indeed, *Touch to My Tongue* and *Open Is Broken* depict a closeness of partners that is without parallel in the heterosexuality of the two other volumes. Like *Banff/Breaking*, Kemp's *Animus* provides us with no possibility of intimacy with the "other." The most fulfilling "relationship" in the two books is that depicted in *Animus*, which carries us through a failed male-female affair into an encounter with Jungian "other," the animus — the element within the self that we tend to identify with the opposite sex. Kemp's sequence examines the need to internalize the animus/anima, in poems that look first at the problems of projecting one's animus on another person, a task doomed to failure, and then move to the discovery of the internal sexual opposite.

Kemp, who is chiefly a sound poet, is not well served by print presentation (her publisher informs us that this book is also available on cassette), because what is interesting in performance often seems repetitive on the page. The quality of incantation, which is important to Kemp's kind of poetry, depends a great deal upon entrapping and restricting the listener for a period of time. Usually to put such poetry into a print format is to transform it into a kind of concrete poetry, with design replacing the shades of vocalization — but something is lost in such translation. In particular, what is often missing is the poet's ability to hold the reader for the duration of a sequence. Concrete poems usually depend on immediate response, on an instant that rivets the way a painting might. Some of the poems in Kemp's sequence rely less on concrete effects, but they also seem deprived of vocal nuance and, on the page, become a nearly mechanical run of word associations, plays, and puns.

Behind the overt sexuality in these

volumes is another unifying feature: the struggle to find a language adequate to a way of life left unarticulated by traditional forms and vocabularies. This feeling of being disenfranchised by language and unaccounted for in history, or in the contemporary world, is certainly not new in Canadian writing, nor is it limited to writers dealing with sexual concerns. Present in the earliest literary works in Canada, it has been given its best-known articulations by Dennis Lee and Robert Kroetsch, both of whom first saw the lack of an adequate, or even truthful, language as inherent in the Canadian condition, and both of whom later came to express their needs for authentic language in at least partly erotic terms.

Although all the poets considered in this review touch on the need for a new language, Warland and Marlatt are the most articulate. Warland, in her introduction to *Open Is Broken*, alerts her readers that her poems are about language, "my language — broke open. my tongue freed. to mark exceedingly," and Marlatt notes in her essay that she shares with the French theorist, Julia Kristeva, a concern with utterance and its power to "initiate thought by a process of association." According to Marlatt, the female writer's task lies in discovering her own tongue (a term that is both sexually and politically charged in Marlatt). For Marlatt this means:

> risking nonsense, chaotic language leafings, unspeakable breaches of usage, intuitive leaps. Inside language she leaps for joy, shoving out the walls of taboo and propriety, kicking syntax, discovering life in old roots.
>
> language thus speaking (i.e., inhabited) relates us, takes us back to where we are, as it relates us to the world in a living body of verbal relations. articulation: seeing the connections . . . putting the living body of language together means putting the world together, the world we live in: an act of composition, an act of birthing us, uttered and outered there in it.

This forming of the unarticulated self on the armature of a reactive, nourishing language and this gestating of an inherent language within the unmapped self is not only the passionate task of women, but of Canadians in general, and indeed of all groups that feel themselves unaccounted for.

A third feature that ties these books together is that, if judged by older standards, most of them would not be called poetry. Marlatt's *Touch to My Tongue* is written entirely in "prose." Kemp's *Animus* also employs prose in its design, while its use of repetition makes it more of a graphic work than a poetic one. Warland's *Open Is Broken* and Noble's *Banff/Breaking* seem to be composed of "poems," but they do not follow traditional notions about rhythm or scansion.

The reason these books do not seem "poetic" is closely tied to their writers' attempts to "own" a language. The importance in contemporary poetry of creating or finding "a language" cannot be underestimated. It has changed the very nature both of poetry and prose. Traditionally the markers of poetry and prose were, respectively, the line and the sentence. The sentence was the more obviously definable unit. Governed by an actor and an action, and often expressing a result, it was the logical describer of experience and event. Line on the other hand was harder to pin down. Several lines could function as a sentence, but the notion of a line worked against the progression of the sentence, breaking down chronology and replacing it with relationships that focused on language itself, not the event it described; on "meaning," not experience.

Writers who seek to capture both experience and meaning in the way Marlatt does in "Coming to You" —

> through traffic, honking and off-course, direction veering, presently up your street, car slam, soon enough on my feet, eager

and hesitant, peering with the rush of coming to you, late, through hydrangeas nodding out with season's age.

— often prefer to forgo the impact of line-breaks for the force of experience that comes with syntactic progression. Similarly prose writers today often give up linear logic to focus upon the meaning within the language they employ.

Language deals with the underpinnings of culture — the assumptions that influence perception itself. Experience is concerned with the myriad specifics that are the actualities of living. If we are moving away from genres that rigidly separate one from another, we may be progressing towards a resolving of the dilemmas of modernism, towards a writing that unites both our internal and external selves, towards an erotics of literature (not just of language) that unites both the self and the other.

DONNA BENNETT

SIGH WITHIN

JEAN HILLABOLD & THELMA POIRIER, *Double Visions*. Coteau Books, $6.00.

ERROL MACDONALD, *Cavalier in a Roundhead School*. Véhicule, $5.95.

ANNE MCLEAN, *A Nun's Diary*. Véhicule, $5.95.

ERROL MACDONALD'S *Cavalier in a Roundhead School* lives up to the promise of its title in offering a range of imagery and precise forms that is winningly elegant, proudly artful. The poems fall into two main divisions: many celebrate, somewhat wistfully, foreign places and a life, it seems, lived for love; others recount and register, for a former Maritimer, the nuances of life in Montreal. There are formally succinct hymns to the beauty and freedom of adolescents whose attractions confound an aging nostalgia:

Once I had a simple faith
but then began to carry the weight
of my body too, a weight that came
to stay and do what it must do.
A lewd thing to be young and well-made,
non é vero, bronzy thighs?

Many of the poems read as if freshly translated from the Greek anthology; some of them — a series in fact — are built on the Attic foundations of two-line units. "The History of Art" is a lyric celebration to infatuation with the body which in its adolescence reveals godhead, and "Halifax" is a movingly gentle love poem which wafts from and explores the complexities of a cup of tea.

Throughout the book, striking images fix themselves in the reader's mind, none more appropriately than those in the sad, profound homage to "Cavafy in Alexandria":

Time after time in this ancient city
he took it in mind to love one of their gods
yet remained on the outskirts of the
intention.
When he walked through the shadowy
medina
all the shops closed their doors in his face.
He had to push his way in just to get
a little food for his heart.

The freshness of perception in "a melon falling off a ledge / where it's been ripening the sigh within," or the passion of the poem which closes with "my shirt will fall beside you / and the sky will flood our skin with colour" make this a collection to return to.

Double Visions is a fine start to the series honouring Andrew Suknaski, and sets a high standard for those to follow. Two poets here share the book, each with her own particular strengths. Thelma Poirier's *Sunday Twice* section is stark and suggestive. The first poems take on the voices of native women, recounting the natural and political histories of the prairies. "My name is Toniya Wakanwin" is the most striking of these compressed narratives. Its conclusion re-

veals Poirier's method of finely condensing fact and emotion into ambiguously memorable understatement:

inside the smoky wigwam
sweetgrass purified my thighs
I sewed moccasins
for a lover

moccasins wear out
lovers die

now I sew beads on rosaries
crosses on pale leather

Later parts, "Reunion" and "a year to learn," are autobiographical pieces which connect to past family histories and recount a time spent as a teacher in an isolated prairie settlement. Here, the poems convey a near madness attendant upon solitude in the coldly beautiful but extreme and fearful place. In one such poem, passion and paranoia combine to reveal a situation not unlike the high Gothic of a Polanski film:

footsteps bound across the drifts
then the rapid pounding shakes the door
silence while she studies
the soft silhouette in falling snow
the masked face of a young raccoon
the black beard and the black hair
flowing like like long tangled mane

Jean Hillabold's *Bloodlines*, the other half of *Double Visions*, are by contrast extrovert and extravagant in their joyous metaphor-making and storytelling. "Poems for my daughter" rival the Nigerian traditions of naming and narrative which Hillabold evokes through her delight in describing "The Act of Birth" to her daughter. A tendency to unmediated confessional is checked by the formal constraints of sonneteering and the wonder tale. "Baby Girl" is a heartfelt expression of her typical style and content:

Like mine, a cleft between your thighs,
The earthy gate of heaven.
You can take life in and push it out.

Like mine, your eyes will see
The condescending smile.
You will have to fight.

Like me, you can look at a woman-child,
Portrait of the artist,
And swallow your heart.

Double Visions is a very worthy book introducing as it does two strong new voices to Canadian poetry.

Anne McLean's *A Nun's Diary* is the strangest, least conventional, yet most appealing, and strongest book of the three. The first and title section comprises forty-five intensely wrought prose meditations, boasts, curses, invocations, and epigrammatic sketches which narrate the story of creation, devotion and obsession, and perversion within the genre of a village horror story (with the castle of secrets here a convent). The nun-protagonist is, of course, a modern woman who brooks no nonsense and thus deflates God's antics with her common sense and practical wisdom:

History weighs heavily on God these days. Sometimes bloodstains appear on his hands, and he has difficulty breathing. Wherever he looks, he sees Himself. He is the prisoner of his own omnipresence.

The second part, "Fleur de Lys Fleur de Nuit," follows another obsessional love, of the hero and his moll, culminating in the terse couplets of an untitled last poem which encapsulates much of the book's concern:

Oh is that you there
Mister Lighter Than Air

Twirling those guns
On the hooks of your thumbs

Are you the guy
That dropped from the sky

Come back to save
The dead from their grave

CRAIG TAPPING

ENCLOSURES

SHEILA WATSON, ed., *The Collected Poems of Miriam Mandel.* Longspoon, $10.00.

BRIAN BRETT, *Smoke Without Exit.* Sono Nis, $5.95.

RUSSELL THORNTON, *The Hewed Out Light.* Borealis, $7.95.

THESE THREE WESTERN POETS speak from an isolated space; whether from Mandel's asylum where she cannot bear to speak to the other inmates and God cannot speak to her, from Brett's landscape where railways go nowhere, or from Thornton's basement room shared only by rats. The alienation of the characters is set in a sterile environment, its arteries severed from either social realism or political themes. The lyrics that arise from this emptiness are sung in despondency.

In *Collected Poems* Sheila Watson includes the three sequences Miriam Mandel published between the time she began writing in 1966 and her death in 1982, two unpublished sequences, and a number of unpublished poems. The first sequence, *Lions at her Face* (1973: Governor General's award), begins in fascinated terror: she wears "scars" from the lover (who has rejected her) like "torn flags." "There is a secret joy in the whiplash of insanity," which intermittently assailed her until her death. Alternating with this "secret joy" is a longing for "its totality or death." When the melodramatic tone disappears, the sequence takes on intensity and comes to a climax:

> Lord of Lords
> God of Gods
> have you given me
> this miraculous pause . . .
>
> no lions in dreams
> no terrified screams.

But from such affirmation of creativity, the sequence veers toward despair in the final poem: the "inside lions / are again winning," before struggling toward the willed affirmation to refrain from using the "tranquilizer gun."

The sequence of poems published under the title, *Station 14*, refers to her room in the mental hospital and also to the last station of the Cross, where Christ is laid in the sepulchre. "At Station 14" reaches a new balance of competing moods, when she bows her head and seeks forgiveness. The poem points away from herself as she determines to "seek / the hammer, the nails / the cross of the / outside world." Then the counter movement, back to the "shuddering fall" takes over — and the tone reverts to the melodramatic — "a raven's wing crosses her grey and frightened face." The "Where Have You Been?" sequence introduces a welcome tone of almost sardonic humour. From Torquay, England where Mandel was vacationing, she wrote, "I have consistently done two things: washed my clothing and begun a new affair each week." Then, the tone gives away to despair: "Let's pull / a Sylvia Plath / tonight." The sequence reaches a climax of competing intensities in the "Hallelujah Poem": "Let us praise the Lord / for / the life he has endowed us . . . I thank you / at least 23 hours of 24." The previously unpublished sections in this collection add nothing new; rather than add to her work they detract, for they dissipate the impact.

Brian Brett sees not merely a few individuals as mad, but the whole of society, "pounded into the brain mess . . . stuck . . . by the huge injection of saacharine and sleep / that lives in the air waves." Anatomical terms create space and make it felt: "the hunchbacked horizon / a knuckle stabbing against the sky." Although he finds "miracles in the eye . . . marvels in the living finger," man is essentially relegated to the status of crab or fossil. Brett frequently overloads his

space with references to legends from the Japanese, to the native Indians, and to images from his own past when he worked with his father peddling vegetables to the Indians on the reservations. These mean something to him privately but appear to the uninitiated reader as clutter.

The atmosphere of death, darkness, and "no exit" hangs over the entire collection, and culminates in the final poem, "A Savage People Dressed In Skins." The poem refers to a Japanese legend, the *Hogen Monogatori.* Brett fuses the violence of the wars of the Monogatori with the madness and violence of Western society today. His poem suggests that the Japanese sensibility was able to create style and beauty out of the mass destruction of the Hogen crises. He prophesies a terrible conflagration that will take place in today's society: "retribution / was made in the amputation of our tongues / was made in the shrivelling of our organs / was made in the gasoline nightmare of certain men that we feared." The final image is of anarchy. After the envisoned conflagration, is a new beginning made? No. "We stood there, smoking cigarettes." The "we" suggests a community of artists which has been partly responsible for the conflagration; they are exposed at last, yet they do something meaningless. The effect is not so much to make us feel the sensation of life, as to prompt fears of our annihilation. Few readers, in my opinion, will go to the edge of the skin for such an experience.

The central figure of Russell Thornton's collection of lyrics, *The Hewed Out Light,* is separation: the child from the parent, the lover from the loved one, the signifier from the signified. The drive of his writing is an attempt to overcome such separation. The parent/child relationship is primary in this collection. Thornton seeks to reach himself and the "other" through the poems' many exits and entrances. He addresses his father, remembering a traumatic incident when he was eight years of age: "I can barely see the telephone / ripped out of the wall / or hear my mother / as you smash her against the fireplace." He concludes the poem to his mother with: "I am screaming out for you, but / you will never hear me."

The terms of the parent-child relationship extend to other personal contacts. In Part Three the "other" is the woman, the loved one. Love is expressed by the most diverse images, ranging from that of classical poetry, dancing to the sound of the "double flute," to romantic "bells" and to the contemporary explicitness of "he opens the far ends of her loins with his thrusts." In "January Nightfall" the significance lies again in the parent-child relationship: "The sun traveled down to the underworld . . . the queendom of the moon, the cold sky mother." But in Part Five the possible connections become more elusive: "reeling seagulls" are the "ghost of children / who (like himself) lived alone." Having failed to establish a love relationship, Thornton is left "to become a tuning fork for the stars."

DOROTHY ANNE MACDONALD

LA SIGNIFIANCE

ROBERT G. GIRARDIN, *L'Oeil de Palomar.* L'Hexagone, $9.95.

J. R. LEVEILLE, *L'Incomparable.* Editions du Blé, Collection Rouge, $10.00.

PAUL SAVOIE, *A la façon d'un charpentier.* Editions du Blé, $20.00.

MICHEL VALLIERES, *Comme un simple voyageur.* Prise de Parole, $5.95.

DIRE QUE LA POESIE est un moyen éminemment personnel de s'exprimer est carrément un lieu commun. Ce qui attire dans toute littérature, et surtout dans la

poésie, c'est la dialectique qui s'etablit entre auteur et lecteur, la présence d'un mouvement qui entraîne ce dernier vers une expérience originelle. La voix de l'oeuvre est la seule qui soit susceptible d'inciter le lecteur à entamer ce processus que l'on appelle "lecture." Cette voix, qui dévoile les points de communication, ne peut évidemment en révéler au lecteur qu'en mesure de ses propres découvertes; un ouvrage qui ne parle ni de l'homme ni de son rapport au monde reste, à mon sens, un ouvrage imparfait. Seule la richesse inhérente de l'oeuvre -- lexique, style ou spécificité esthétique — rend possible la traduction d'une expérience originelle, l'un des éléments déterminants de la création littéraire. Il est à regretter que certains des écrivains suivants ne semblent pas s'apercevoir que le fait littéraire n'est pas un phénomène isolé, mais plutôt une expérience partagée.

Contenant certains textes tirés de *Peinture sur verbe* (1976) et publiés sous une forme remaniée, *L'Oeil de Palomar* évoque la tentative chez Girardin de mettre en relief les mystères silencieux de l'existence. Observer le monde ambiant tout en le commentant d'un style lapidaire: voilà en gros la tâche que se donne le poète. Aussi *L'Oeil de Palomar* exprime-t-il de par son indication titrologique le désir de percevoir l'existence tout autrement que d'habitude. Le titre de l'ouvrage fait allusion de toute évidence au mont Palomar en Californie au point culminant duquel on peut étudier les corps célestes. Si la loupe grossissante du poète s'avère le moyen à travers lequel on s'approprie le réel, il n'en reste pas moins que l'objet observé est loin de revêtir la forme d'un astre.

En effet, Girardin se penche le plus souvent sur le côté lugubre de l'existence, lequel il communique sous forme de poème, de poème en prose ou encore d'aphorisme: "L'enfant goudronné ne jouant plus dans / son carré d'asphalte." L'homme est donc condamnée à la misère, et la nature pour son compte n'échappe pas non plus au ton violemment mélancolique du poète: "Fétide par nature, l'eau du marécage exhala jusqu'à la dernière cellule la puanteur du noyé."

L'Oeil de Palomar laisse entrevoir en fin de compte une noirceur indéfinissable; le pessimisme dans lequel Girardin se complaît par indulgence fait tôt de décevoir le lecteur. Après avoir lu l'oeuvre, l'on n'est trop conscient qu "[a]ucun intermède n'arrête l'usure du temps qui grignote nos cellules comme la rouille son clou." *L'Oeil de Palomar* manque de clarté, et au lieu de mettre en relief un message qui soit clairement décelable, s'égare par le biais d'une complaisance excessive.

A l'instar de Plutarque ou d'Ovide, J. R. Léveillé fait l'éloge de Sappho dans *L'Incomparable*. Mélange de poésie et de prose, ouvrage bien singulier, *L'Incomparable* fait résonner la voix d'un littéraire qui se livre à un monologue méditatif sur la femme poète en question. S'inspirant de la méthode de Ponge et de l'émotion de Baudelaire, comme il l'avoue, Léveillé évoque la figure de la poétesse ainsi que celle de la courtisane.

A travers l'oeuvre fragmentaire de Sappho, Léveillé tente de recréer le milieu tant physique que spirituel d'Erèse, petite ville éolienne de l'Egée et lieu de naissance de Sappho. Ainsi, le lecteur apprend, à titre d'example,:

> ... Sourcils. Dessinés avec du noir de fumée. Paupières peintes avec du khôl ou une dissolution d'antimoine qu'on pouvait trouver à Lesbos. Cils. Noircis, et fixés avec du blanc d'oeuf mêlé de gomme ou de mastic.

L'écrivain va jusqu'à dresser une liste telle:

> LEGUMES: artichauts, asperges, bettes, cardons, carottes, choux, citrouilles, concombres, cresson, fèves, laitue, lentilles, na-

> ...vets, oignons crus, bouillis ou frits, orties, poireaux, pois, radis. Champignons et truffes. Ail!

Point n'est besoin de signaler le peu de signifiance que possèdent ces éléments de cosmétologie et de nomenclature légumière. Mais de tous les détails vexants, ceux qui irritent le plus, ce sont les maints calembours sans valeur littéraire et, par conséquent, vides d'intérêt tels: "APPENDICEctomie" (*sic*) ou "V(I)E-RGE" (*sic*) pour désigner deux parties de l'ouvrage, ou encore, en parlant de Sappho, "C'est ma muse / ça m'amuse / ça m'use," pour n'en citer que quelques-uns. *L'Incomparable* n'est pas cependant entièrement sans mérite, mais pour savoir l'apprécier à sa juste valeur, il faudrait rendre un culte personnel à Sappho aussi farouchement que son auteur.

A la façon d'un charpentier de Paul Savoie raconte à travers nouvelles, extraits de journal intime et poèmes la quête d'une vie stable qui réponde aux besoins de l'être humain isolé. Face à l'incertitude de la vie, Savoie n'est que trop conscient que seule la présence de l'autre puisse adoucir l'angoisse qu'il ressent.

En somme, Savoie tente de construire son propre monde clos et réconfortant, un monde qui soit à la portée du couple légèrement idéalisé mais non sans une certaine vulnérabilité pourtant: "Nos yeux seront bus / dans la coupe ovale / de mains surimposées." Le ton extrêmement personnel des textes fait tôt d'indiquer l'insatisfaction profonde que lui inspire la vie tout comme l'écriture:

> Tous ces mois pour arriver à la conclusion que ça ne va nulle part. Un gros tas de mots sans allure qui s'amusent à vous faire fendre en quatre pour eux et ils donnent moins que des miettes en retour.

De toutes les vicissitudes de l'existence, le temporel — tant prisé et redouté à la fois — rappelle à Savoie l'impuissance de l'homme.

Malgré la mélancolie qui émane de son oeuvre, celle-ci communique la nécessité de ne jamais cesser d'espérer: "Deux êtres tenteront d'exister à l'intérieur d'un seul et aucun des deux ne pourra se passer de l'autre." *A la façon d'un charpentier* témoigne d'une sensibilité restreinte suggérée à l'aide d'un langage précis et évocateur.

Recueil très court de poésie et de prose, *Comme un simple voyageur* — premier ouvrage de Michel Vallières — embrasse la constance du vécu à travers l'impuissance de la parole. D'un ton spontané qui frôle la franchise naïve qui se trouve chez l'adolescent, Vallières se présente comme celui en quête d'une vérité qui deviendra amour et ouverture au monde. Prêt à relever le défi, le poète fait part de son apprentissage de l'écriture et de sa recherche de l'amour: deux processus qui l'amènent à franchir le seuil de la maturité en vue de se mieux connaître:

> Je cherche à même ce qui nous ressemble ou ce qu'on saurait nous dire de commun des mots simples justes et vrais pour vous toucher et parler d'amour. Ouvrir ce que je tiens fermé!

Tout bien considéré, *Comme un simple voyageur* retrace le cheminement incertain de l'écrivain, et évoque ainsi un itinéraire spirituel qui mène à une renaissance, car "l'amour ne cesse de nous réinventer."

KENNETH MEADWELL

IN ITALICS

ROBIN MATHEWS, *Blood Ties and Other Stories*. Steel Rail, $8.95.

IT'S HARD TO PLACE Robin Mathews. He's the black fly (not gadfly — too pastoral) of Canadian letters. We all know what he thinks; he's been on about it

for years now, and is there anyone, left, centre or right, who actually agrees with his views on the national question? He is obsessed. It's annoying, but it's also what makes him interesting, as a thinker and as a writer.

I don't agree with him, but I like him because he cares about something beyond the febrile politics of the average Canadian university English department. His writing is passionate, and I'll forgive a lot for that rarity. But then just when I'm warming up to a story he will start bending it in some moralistic, self-righteous way to suit his ideological position. Even when the position has nothing to do with nationalist politics, I am suspicious, I feel he's trying to get me to think in a certain way. His attitude towards homosexuals, for example, seems ambiguous. So I get infuriated all over again. I guess I react to his work with the same ambivalence with which he deals with Americans. He purports to despise them but he can't leave them alone.

There's a difference between a writer's vision (be it Marxist, Maoist, or Swedenborgian), his Grand Plan, and the flogging of ideological horses. Mathews goes back and forth. He really does have a vision of Canada, a passionate ideal country that he is sometimes trying to write into existence (that's when the writing is good); and he also has this obsession which is not expansive but narrow and damages his prose.

He is hard on his characters sometimes. There are bad guys (Americans and "cringing colonials" — I confess I have always been grateful to him for coining that phrase) and good guys (modest, self-contained "Canadians," so unlike the persona Mathews projects of himself). But then he produces a story ("His Own Son") which turns and turns and turns around a moral, political, spiritual problem, the question of what it means to be a father, biological or otherwise. There is great emotional complexity in this story, and a striving in the very production of the sentences, it seems, to understand hard questions. Mathews is very good at creating men and male emotions. "A Novel about Mexico" is about the protagonist's boyhood friend who becomes wealthy and successful in Hollywood, and the narrator is so honest about his own jealousy. In "Strawberry Fields," the most delicately written piece, he really writes a man falling in love, a loner, a postal worker, who has an affair with a married woman.

So I am drawn to the obvious conclusion — Mathews writes well only when he leaves his politics out of it. After all, "Kingsmere" is the weakest story, about an American professor who tells his (modest, self-contained but quietly angry "Canadian") students:

> Kingsmere is a dump . . . a two-bit little dump. It's a symbol of the whole goddamned country. You people haven't got a shred of self-respect . . . You people got no pride.

Oh come *on*! No one talks like that. But this tidy (and conveniently liberal) way of categorizing the phenomenon of Robin Mathews doesn't quite pan out. "The Achiever," a bitter and sharply drawn portrait of Trudeau, is the most tendentious piece in the book, and it's one of the best — a tightly written and accurate piece of satirical writing. It rings true, it evokes a time — the declaration of the War Measures Act — and how it felt to be involved politically then.

Actually, Mathews has an impressive formal range. He writes a piece of political surrealism ("You'll Like It When It's Finished"), an apocalyptic story about one man's nuclear despair, and a realistic story about a picket line. He takes risks, with form and subject matter. And his daring, like his passion, makes me forgive a host of minor sins. The last

story of the book is written as a sequel to *The Tin Flute* — hard to say whether it's presumptuous or courageous. Same characters, same story, even some of the same symbol and image patterns, but brought up to date. Florentine and Emmanuel have been married 25 years now, they are meeting at Ogilvy's, as is their custom for lunch on Thursday, and a man there is playing the bagpipes. Emmanuel tells Florentine that he knew all along that Michel (now working for the post office and headed for a career as a trade unionist, negotiating against his own father) is Jean Levesque's son.

> "Why did you tell me? Why did you tell me now? "To put your mind at rest," he said, and his eyes filled with the old look, as if she made him wonder at being alive, as if he couldn't believe his good fortune being with her.

The story ends:

> . . . the piper came behind them . . . marked time behind them, and then as they climbed the stairs he followed, still playing . . . as if he was piping Florentine and Emmanuel out of the store, as if fate somehow determines there are times when very ordinary people should be treated as heroes, as if fate knows that in ordinary hearts there is often great courage and inexpressible love.

Again, the same mixed response. Gabrielle Roy's prose created the heroism of ordinary people, because that was what she saw. Mathews version is more self-conscious; he puts it in italics. But the feeling comes through the rhythms, which are well handled. It is courageous to write like this, and I'm looking forward to more of Mathews' prose.

ROBIN BELITSKY ENDRES

YANG/YIN DANCING

H. R. PERCY, *Painted Ladies*. Lester & Orpen Dennys, $17.95.

THERE IS NO HIGHER (and probably no triter) compliment you can pay a novelist than to say he brings his characters to life. In *Painted Ladies*, H. R. Percy brings Emile Logan so fully to life that though we know from the first page he is on the brink of death, by the last page it is almost unbearable to think that the writer who brought him to us is now going to exercise his power to take him away. Logan is a major painter (whom I fully expect to see written up in the next history of Canadian art), and the novel is a sort of kaleidoscopic deathbed discourse on his life and works, narrated in the third person but drifting eerily between Logan as object and Logan as subject while his mind (now that his hand and paintbrush are stilled) goes on doing what an artist's mind always goes on doing: moving with the flow, and at the same time isolating individual moments for contemplation.

Logan fixes on one hypnagogic image for his life that is worth quoting at length:

> His life-train lies still, unmoving. He knows now that it has never moved. One end of it is in the tunnel, where he has not yet summoned the will to go. But the rest of it he can take in entire. He can wander along it at will, peering in windows, opening and closing doors, ignoring the thunderous noise of pain. The windows are his pictures, and he realizes that it is not a train at all, but a gallery. And there are no doors. You have to enter the pictures. You float before them and if you are in a state of grace they accept you in, absorb you, pass you through to the other side where you are yourself painting the picture and you have again the heady sensation that time is moving, moving so fast that you are almost afraid to jump off.

As intimations of immortality go, this is

not unconvincing. Life as motion becomes life as station becomes life as motion, and so life pulses on forever. If the life is creative. The animating principle is work, though it must be said that in this novel Emile Logan labours just as purposefully in bed as he does at the easel. Indeed, this is a large part of the book's point. It matters just as much that you make love as that you make art, and it matters even more that you somehow manage to see that the two amount to the same thing. The man who would not die makes of his love an art, and of his art a labour of love.

Painted Ladies is the most life-affirming novel I have read in years, and the main reason is that Percy keeps his yang and his yin dancing in such perfect balance. He knows about the humiliating, egotistical side of love and art. Logan's father was a tattoo artist who engraved his cruel designs permanently upon his family's flesh. And as the book's title suggests, its ladies (and its gentlemen, too) are not above knowing what price the market will pay for their virtue. But at least they sell their wares to each other, and in the end it is not a cash but a barter economy where almost everyone seems to come out ahead.

Another encouraging thing is that Percy accomplished this fine book in his sixties, after a late apprenticeship as a writer and only two previous works of fiction. His other novel, *Flotsam*, gave him a chance to work out his hostility toward the life-denying forces of ambition and rectitude (his painted ladies make their bargains by *giving* love, while the women in *Flotsam* make theirs by withholding it), but the hero sails away from his problems at the end and the book has a bitter taste. In *Painted Ladies*, Logan was once asked what he painted for. "Good Christ, woman, I don't do it *for* anything. Art is not *for*. Art *is*." *Flotsam* always seemed to be *for* something, but *Painted Ladies* just *is*. It is powerfully and beautifully written, very funny, very sad, more than adequately stocked with ideas, and I know of no book that has done such magnificent justice to the sacred and profane properties of human hair. With *Painted Ladies* Bill Percy has joined the ranks of the immortals of Can Lit, whether Can Lit knows it yet or not.

GRAHAM DOWDEN

FAMILY STORIES

TED ALLAN, *Don't You Know Anybody Else?* McClelland & Stewart, $12.95.

LEO HEAPS, *A Boy Called Nam*. Macmillan, $14.95.

DONN KUSHNER, *Uncle Jacob's Ghost Story*. Macmillan, $14.95.

THESE ARE ALL STORIES about families, about the tentacles of influence that slyly enwrap our lives. They are also, ostensibly, children's stories — either as reminiscences of childhood or as tales spotlighting child characters. Because two are laboured re-tellings and the third is a series of masterful portraits coloured by sexual nuance, none fits very easily in the grand grab bag of children's literature. Such a claim does not mean simply that Allan's "family stories" cannot be defined in terms of the pastoral innocence of Kenneth Grahame, that Kushner's "ghost story" does not vibrate at the allegorical intensity of George MacDonald, nor that Heaps' "true story of how one little boy came to Canada" is not a survivor tale in the stoutly Canadian tradition of MacDonald Oxley; it does mean, however, that because of a variety of defects in Kushner's and Heaps' work, and of the adult perceptions that inform Allan's vignettes, their stories are not entirely, strictly, or even advisedly for children.

Criticism of defects in Donn Kushner might sound unduly severe; a Professor of Microbiology at the University of Ottawa, Kushner won the Canadian Library Association Book of the Year for Children Award in 1980 for *The Violin-Maker's Gift*, a legend acclaimed for its "delicate wonderment" and "fast-paced" action. His most recent venture is a regrettable falling-off, a clumsily told yet predictable tale with a meandering plot and raconteurs who admit to getting "away from the story," "waxing rhetorical," and "explaining [themselves] badly." During a lengthy afternoon visit Paul's grandfather regales the lad with the story of his mysteriously disgraced Great-Uncle Jacob. The narrative flits from a Polish *shtettel* to Broadway. Grandfather's friend, Mr. Eisbein, puts in his oar as a second narrator, substantiating the account of Jacob's setting up a newsstand on Times Square and of the immigrant's re-union with his theatre-loving friends, Esther and Simon (who had died in an epidemic in Niekapowiski but who now live inside mannequins stolen from Macy's). Although the story is rich with a bizarre sort of aesthetic potential, Kushner's writing is too clotted, too addicted to street names, geographical locations and the plots of early twentieth-century theatricals. It is, finally, too self-conscious inasmuch as Paul, who struggled to forget the incident for most of his adolescence, ends up studying molecular biology and coming to some ponderous conclusions about "how molecules were fitted into the membrane," just as the recurring trio of Jacob, Esther, and Simon fit into this story. A slightly facetious pedantry often takes over, as when the reader learns ("if you don't know") that Gounod's "*Ave Maria*" goes "remarkably well" with "Old Black Joe" and that Paul's research — "not to be technical — concerned the role of protein molecules in cell membranes." With the introduction of the theatrical agent and all-round *deus ex machina*, Mr. Spangler, derived, according to Eisbein the etymologist, from the Yiddish *Shternen Shpringen* ("star-jumper"), Kushner's story becomes preposterous and its ending foreseeable. In a reflective and, alas, revealing moment he makes this admission about the *zaida's* story: "Its details, and how it was told, have piled up so that his head scarcely has room for them." The dust-jacket painting, Chagall's *The Three Candles*, charms the reader into opening this book; what lies between the covers, unfortunately, is the exact antithesis of the artist's elegant dream.

If inadequate control of narrative design is the major drawback in *Uncle Jacob's Ghost Story*, the biggest problem with Leo Heaps' *A Boy Called Nam* is its reliance on trite formulae to describe the journey of a ten-year-old Vietnamese from Quang to the Vancouver airport. When the parents choose the eldest of their seven children, Nam and his sister Ling, for the boat trip "to the new land far to the east, where [they] will have a fresh chance in life," Heaps relates matter-of-factly that the young hero was "deeply pained" yet "strangely excited." The same prosaic forthrightness characterizes his handling of the sun-baked, reeking *Ho Chi Minh*, the typhoon, the pirate raid, the shipwreck and its lone survivor, the welcome by the Jesuits of Macao, the poverty of the Maria Theresa school and the factory jobs awaiting its orphan graduates: "toiling twelve hours a day for a pittance, barely enough to keep body and soul together." In this Portuguese outpost — a hybrid of resort and slum — the author, who was organizing a relief team for refugees, meets Nam and arranges for the boy's passage to Canada. Heaps has been a soldier, historian, and playwright; although in his Foreword Kenneth Bagnell, chronicler of

the fate of Barnardo children on Canadian farms, asserts that this book's "place in the literature of Canadian childhood . . . is assured," I am less sanguine, wishing that Heaps were more of a writer and speculator than an uncontroversial and, ultimately, uncompelling reporter of facts.

The most enjoyable and accomplished of these books is Ted Allan's wryly comic *Don't You Know Anybody Else?* These seventeen stories about his growing up in Montreal and establishing himself as a writer make any answer to the title's question or wisecrack unnecessary. A wonderfully diverse collection of moods, voices, and people, these "family stories" close around the reader with a mordant vice-grip, as the son dreams of killing his father ("One for the Little Boy"), as the divide between manic father and successful but self-doubting son becomes greater ("The Moon to Play With"), as the author recounts his own collapse ("Testament of a Maniac"), and as he pays one of his last visits to his institutionalized sister ("What Am I Doing Christmas?"). Allan's first-person narration compels and sustains the reader's sympathy.

Two riveting scenes of bungled paternal discipline, in "The Beating" and later in "One for the Little Boy," manifest a deep and abiding hostility between father and son. The mother, by contrast, is drawn with warmth and compassion. She is the star of one of the best stories in the collection, "Looking for Bessie," which first appeared in *The New Yorker* in 1944; she discovers that her son has typed up an account of her frantic trudge around Manhattan in search of a friend whose address and surname she could not recall exactly:

> "Why did you write it down?"
> "It's a funny story," I said.
> "All right, but why did you write it down? It's just what we did yesterday!"
> "I'll send it to a magazine and perhaps they'll buy it." I said.
> "Buy it?" She stared at me. "They pay money for such things?"
> I nodded.
> "If that's the case," she said, "sit down and I'll tell you what I did the day before yesterday."

An award-winning screenwriter, Allan is always aware of his audience, sometimes even winking at them; in the midst of a diary entry he observes, "I think I'm getting all this down rather well, don't you?" Aside from some quibbles about his calculated art, I am very grateful indeed that Allan is as good as he is at putting all this down.

PATRICIA DEMERS

SIGNPOSTS

MARGARET CLARKE, *The Cutting Season.* NeWest, $7.95.

THE CANADIAN LITERARY SCENE is distinguished by the many talented women who have courageously written about women and their problems in a male-oriented society. Margaret Laurence, Audrey Thomas, Jane Rule, and Margaret Atwood, have explored the depths of the female psyche and created richly nuanced women characters. Margaret Clarke, whose *The Cutting Season* was declared "Winner of the Search-For-A-New-Manitoba-Novelist Competition" in 1984, also writes about women: about Joanne, a widow of 48, and her daughter Maureen, 24, and their struggle to live their own lives in a society of fixed sex roles.

Of the two, Joanne faces the harder struggle as even her daughter begins with restrictive ideas about how a mother and widow should behave. The story of the mother-daughter relationship is central, with its growing understanding culminating in devoted friendship, but the

author also finds opportunity to discuss problems of women's emancipation: the right to live alone, to decide in case of abortion, to bring up one's child alone. She also offers convincing insights into the psychology of women, and into less gender-specific taboo subjects, such as grief and dying.

The story begins when Joanne — against the will of her children — decides to give up her protected life in Winnipeg in order to settle for the winter in the very isolated family cottage on a Northwestern Ontario lake. She has not yet recovered from the death of her beloved husband on whom she was dependent in every way. She experiences the conflicting and guilt-ridden feelings of a strong yearning for her dead husband, mixed with an equally strong hatred of him for having died. She begins to prepare the cottage for the siege of a Canadian winter. Much to her surprise she finds out that she is a practical woman, she soon handles a chain saw with expertise.

Joanne has not settled in Paradise, however. The author plants ominous signposts and Joanne has disturbing and frightening dreams. The "lonely" widow attracts attention, and innocently she accepts the help of two men: Joe Satavich, a crude and sinister handyman and operator of the local snowplough that Joanne depends on, and the mysterious Ben Cairns. Maureen's opinion of the two is quite clear: "Mother, — How can you take up with those bastards."

Maureen, however, has her own problems. She is pregnant and wants an abortion because she fears that having a baby by Stephen — whom she is not in love with but nevertheless is at times sexually dependent on — will deprive her of her hard-won freedom. She is financially independent as a highly-qualified nurse-counsellor in a hospital ward for dying patients. When Maureen eventually chooses to have her child, she also decides to move in with her mother to await the birth. Intuitively she is attracted by Joanne's strength and independence.

On the day of Maureen's arrival at the cottage Joanne gets beaten by Ben Cairns. He has been very attentive for some time and acts impulsively, it seems, when she rejects his approaches. Irrespective of textual warnings the incident is not convincing. Nor is the following acceleration towards a violent and gory climax where mother and daughter defend themselves successfully in the cottage against intruding Satavich and Cairns. Maureen is struck down by the recoil of the hunting rifle that she has bought for exactly this kind of purpose. The shot misses and Joanne puts the intruders to flight with her chain saw. The two men drive into a rock face and conveniently die in the ensuing blaze. With impressive calm Joanne removes blood, broken glass, and other traces so that the Mounties, when they come questioning, are convinced that mother and daughter have in no way been involved in the accident. Maureen is in labour by now and the mother-daughter relationship reaches a new level of intimacy when Joanne, isolated by a blizzard, acts as midwife helping to bring Diana into the world. In an epilogue we meet Joanne and Maureen in happy surroundings in Winnipeg. Joanne is self-confident and resourceful, like a "country woman." During the summer she has taken courses in engine repairs and now, passing herself off as a man, she gets a job as a winter caretaker up north.

The novel cannot have been given the Manitoba award for the story it tells. It seems manufactured, and flawed by the violent climax and the subsequent rush toward a happy ending. The violent initiation scene with its element of self-imposed justice has moral implications that jar against the human decency the

novel otherwise promotes. Margaret Clarke is worth reading, however, for the convincing way she translates intimate and highly personal moments into fine prose. Not only her honest rendering of female sexual life, but also her brave and successful treatment of the psychology of grief and of dying make her a promising writer.

JORN CARLSEN

STORIED EFFECTS

NEGOVAN RAJIC, *The Master of Strappado.* David Lobdell trans., Oberon, $14.95.

HUGH HOOD & PETER O'BRIEN, eds., *Fatal Recurrences: New Fiction in English from Montréal.* Véhicule, $7.95.

MARTIN AVERY, *Northern Comfort.* Oberon, $11.95.

POE INSISTS ALWAYS UPON the primacy of Effect in the construction of a story; Rajic's art, his apprentice, enchantingly delivers. To David Lobdell English readers owe much thanks for his adroit translation of *Propos d'un vieux radoteur.* The story from which the collection takes its title gambles with the reader's attention in its almost obsessive creation of Effect:

> The more I struck, the greater my rage became. Each blow caused the entire building to shudder. The rodents fell in heaps. To the strident cries of the rats were added the snapping sounds of their bones, as the echo of each blow returned like the whack of a woodcutter's axe from the forest. Gobs of cold, sticky blood splashed over me.

The narrator, the master of a mysteriously timeless, feudalistic manor, ingeniously attempts to stave off not only the nocturnal incursions of hordes of apparently conscious rats, but also the subliminal, unspoken hatred and pillaging of the local peasants who work their "Benefactor's" land. Rajic's attentiveness to one Effect captivates the reader in the imaginary insanity. At the same time, while avoiding Poe's "heresy of didacticism," the artist loads his tale with damning political irony: the Master of Strappado is our bureaucratic overlord as well. The final story, "Three Dreams," is the most technically complex of the collection. The omniscient third-person narration is exactly right for achieving the sublime effect of a dreamer's self-observation. The configurations are unending in this story, fascinating in releasing the reader into the extraordinary.

Fatal Recurrences presents samples of the prose of twelve contemporary writers. In comparison with such an impressively finished collection as Rajic's, this volume leaves the reader wishing for more to test his first impressions. Originally an issue of *Rubicon* magazine, *Fatal Recurrences* gave rise to a newspaper and radio controversy about the appropriateness and significance of the subtitle's phrase, "from Montréal." In spite of Hood's introductory observation that "The city is deployed in the stories as a precondition — an underpinning — for action or mood or both, not as so many miles of streets or piles of brick or stone," early reviewers lamented the absence of references to Montréal in seven of the stories. The *Gazette*'s reviewer even established an opposition between *Matrix*, a little magazine from Lennoxville that publishes "authors of the left wing," realist writers who "set out to capture some of the feel of Montréal" and who "manage to be socially relevant," and what he labels the "*Rubicon-Recurrences* school," which, according to the reviewer, is "hostile to the uninitiated and unlettered savages who lurk in the world outside the glow of its lamps of learning."

Possibly because it does not fit into the polarities of the mass media's black or white mind-set, a third more interesting angle, has been ignored. "Car Wrecks

and Bleeding Hearts," an excerpt from Gail Scott's novel, *Heroine*, conveys emphatically a "sense of writing from a different space than that described in the introduction," as Scott says in a dissenting note. According to Scott we need: "new forms, new syntax, new cities, even, where we can live, speak, as whole, integral women." The title, "Car Wrecks and Bleeding Hearts," specifies two typical constituents of late twentieth-century melodrama, the theme of Scott's excerpt. On one level the narrator meditates on the relation between stereotyped perceptions and individual experiences. At the same time, the meditation concerns the author's intentions in plotting her story:

> The trick is to tell a story . . . keeping things in the same time register . . . I go with you to Europe . . . there our love starts . . . subsequently I get involved in heavy politics. Then we're the attractive left-wing couple returning home from abroad. Clothes perfectly cut yet appropriately dressed down: high boots, purple blouse, short leather skirt. The comrades are anti-couple. But in the Bistro they can't get over how good I look . . . I'm wondering: "Do I look good because your arms keep me from bleeding all over the place in search of love? Like I was before."

In rapid succession the melodramatic images, expressions, attitudes, surface, then are undercut in an ongoing enlargement of consciousness, the dramatization of what Scott calls "our emergence from centuries of oppressive patriarchal culture."

While Scott's fiction generates a new world the other writers in *Fatal Recurrences* are for the most part content to work within inherited norms; their successes are of a different order. In "Première Arabesque" Robyn Sarah presents a child's experience with the intense sparseness characteristic of Alice Munro, a writer whose methods also come to mind in connection with Anne McLean's "Snakebite." "Stephanotis," by Edward O. Phillips, evokes Mavis Gallant; Howard Roiter's "Only Sam Knows" suggests Mordecai Richler; and Nigel Thomas's "At the Market" ressembles Margaret Laurence's African stories. For such a dynamically kaleidoscopic selection Miriam Packer's sportive metaphysics in the volume's final piece, "The Condition," provide a pleasing termination. Packer, a playwright, novelist, critic, and teacher, brilliantly and humorously plays with the structural and thematic implications of a cross-eyed narrator's vision. The story is set in an eye-doctor's office:

> So I'm cross-eyed really, but I get it straight. It's a strange geometric phenomenon.
>
> Even now, while the doctor's looking right into my eyes with a little white light, I'm looking straight ahead as I'm supposed to, but I'm watching his scent and I'm looking at the peculiar makings of the word: cross-eyed. The mean kids at school used to call it "cock-eyed," and that's such a really accurate version, it occurs to me, and so kind when you think of it. I'm cock-eyed, for sure, and I'm proud of it . . . 'cause as he's assessing my eyes, right this very minute, what I'm doing when you come right down to it, is eyeing his cock. Not that I'm looking at it; I can't, I have to look straight ahead while he looks in with the little white light. But I'm considering it nevertheless . . . not simply blankly that, but his phallic soul, his basic thrust, the intricate arrangement of vulnerable skin and muscle and human fibre beneath the protective tweed.

"The Condition" ends in a last crossing of eyes ("I"s), as the narrator contemplates her father's vision, his "free-associating as always with delightful wisdom," a description that admirably suits Packer's story itself.

Northern Comfort is a collection of four of Martin Avery's stories. The ultimate failure of each of these stories is the failure to establish a viable narrative authority. "Western Dissidents," for example, depicts features of Norman

Bethune's hometown ("Bethune"/Gravenhurst), including the "largest distributing centre for Communist propaganda in all of North America," a dump for radioactive waste, and a local band called the "Nuclear Police." The band eventually decides to take direct action "to get to this reactionary generation that's coming up now." The leader, Buddy Useless, goes on a concert tour of Eastern bloc countries, ending up in a Mordavian prison for being a hooligan. The twin back-up singers, still in Canada, hijack a truckload of atomic waste to bargain for the release of Buddy Useless. In spite of its use of serious issues, this thin plot is no more than an excuse to tell silly jokes.

THOMAS GERRY

DRAMATIC IRONY

HUGH HOOD, *The Scenic Art*. Stoddart, n.p.

THE FIFTH VOLUME in Hugh Hood's series, The New Age, deserves to be examined on its own, not simply as a link in an evolving verbal chain. Nor should Hood's novel be treated only as a period piece made for those interested in Hart House and University of Toronto betwen 1948 and 1952, and the opening of Stratford in 1953. Not that these subjects lack interest, but *The Scenic Art* accomplishes more than topical curiosity, although it may sometimes suffer from the faults it criticizes.

Hood skilfully uses a three-part structure. The first part represents the opening of Stratford and memories of Hart House and Toronto, the second Canadian and British theatre of the late 1950's and early 1960's; the third the Dominion Drama Festival of 1967 in an imaginary town in eastern Ontario. Two important events in the cultural history of Canada — the founding of Stratford and the Centennial — frame the novel. For unity, Hood employs the same narrator, Matthew Goderich, throughout, and attempts to creat a fugue from the lives of the major characters, who know one another and are effectively developed from youth to middle-age. Part Two provides a perspective from England, where the narrator is not part of the action, and much of Part Three returns to the deliberations of Part One.

With structural and dramatic irony Hood binds his narrative. Adam Sinclair, a central character, judges more harshly than the adjudicator he once criticized, but whereas in 1951 Adam defended Racine without knowing French, in 1967 he savages Molière without knowing French. Matthew is often as pompous and as lacking in self-criticism as Adam is. Although in Part One the narrator learns that he is no actor and admires theatrical talent, he comes to undervalue the theatre while pontificating on it. For Matthew, the Canadian audiences of 1967 are the same as those of 1951. This limitation reflects as much on the narrator's lack of growth as it does on a stultifying Canadian culture. Even though readers should not confuse the author and the narrator, Hood, like Matthew, compares and criticizes the arts throughout, doing so through the construction and characters. So when the narrator, after complaining that theatre holds no value for Canadians, says, "I have no idea where the reading of books stands in this order," readers might ask about their relation to the author. If, as Matthew says, the theatre is not at the root of the Canadian heart or mind, a novel that uses it as a central metaphor for the experience of an epoch in Canada can only analyse Canadian culture through contraries or negation.

Readers have to decide whether the limitations of the characters also limit Hood's art. A novel of ideas, common

elsewhere, is too rare in Canadian literature, so that Hood's work is refreshing. Hood and his dramatis personae examine ideas such as Canadian identity; Jaques' "All the world's a stage"; the relationship of music, sex, politics, parody, and painting to drama; the influence of Shakespeare and England on Canadians; the challenge of homosexuality to heterosexuality. The narrator is unaware that his opinions, some of which the author develops at near-essay length, could be as "stupefyingly boring and pretentious" as the professorial talk of *entrechât* and *pas de deux* Matthew so loathes. Just as the narrator laments Shaw's *Man and Superman* for being full of worn ideas and dated issues, *The Scenic Art* may soon appear weary and old-fashioned. Like other art that emphasizes ideas, this novel must offer a form and style that outlasts its fashionable concepts.

Perhaps more than the metafictional play, humour keeps the novel from buckling under its own weight. Yet fiction as criticism is a large part of this novel, even of its structure. Near the end, Hood shows the convergence of the critical opinions of Matthew and Adam as a preparation for Adam's declaration of love in a harangue that is almost a realignment of Molly Bloom's monologue. The most overt humour occurs in excerpts and descriptions of *Bed Sitters* and *Out By Midnight*, but perhaps Adam, appearing before an audience, is a Lord of Misrule, playing Falstaff, saying what only a fool can, venting Hood's desire in art. Readers must decide whether they consider Adam's long, critical ramblings humorous or banalities of a character going through a public nervous breakdown. Their decision will help determine the success of *The Scenic Art*. Bernard Shaw would have cared whether he liked it or not.

JONATHAN HART

PERSONAL LIVES

MARK ANTHONY JARMAN, *Dancing Nightly in the Tavern*. Porcépic, $9.95.

ANNE MARRIOTT, *A Long Way to Oregon*. Mosaic, n.p.

JERRY WEXLER, *The Bequest and Other Stories*. Véhicule, $6.95.

THESE THREE BOOKS of short stories present characters whose lives could well be those of many people living in Canada today. Mark Anthony Jarman's *Dancing Nightly in the Tavern* is a savage, rather repetitive book, chronicling the degraded lives of those marginally employed transients who frequent taverns, and drive unlicensed cars in need of repair. All the stories are about men and women who lead aimless, meaningless lives. "Cowboys, Inc." describes the trip Jankovitch, Ironchild, and Virginia take through Montana in an ancient Volvo. Their journey is characterized by heavy drinking, frequent sex, incessant profantity, and a perverse stream-of-consciousness detailing the significance in Jankovitch's mind of the whole experience. At the end of the story Virginia dies in a car accident, but Jankovitch simply leaves her in the Volvo. The only Canadian aspect of these stories is the fact that several are set in Edmonton; "Wintering Partners" tells how two characters named Trask and Twila use a bottle of Southern Comfort to help them tolerate a bleak Edmonton winter.

Dancing Nightly in the Tavern is written largely in the present tense, using short words, abrupt phrases, and the truncated reflections that are perhaps appropriate to the limited imaginations of the characters: "I could knee this punk, sink fist after aching fist into his monied bridgework, but I lack ambition. I let him drop." I, for one, do not identify with such characters, though I

suppose there are other readers who will; but few of these potentially sympathetic readers will ever buy a book of short stories, or perhaps read anything other than a newspaper. Jarman's portraits may be accurate, but his characters lack the capacity for self-knowledge that makes fiction interesting, and his own lack of distance from his material is a serious drawback.

Jerry Wexler's *The Bequest* is a collection that is rich in self-analysis and self-knowledge, a book whose characters often understand their faults and analyze them in an intelligent way. The set of characters is somewhat different, for most are middle-class citizens of Montreal, and are certainly more sophisticated and articulate than Jarman's characters. Wexler's interest is in the small tragedies and successes of these people, and the stories have a sensitivity, a delicacy of tone, a tactful touch of humour that seems appropriate to the personal events with which he is concerned. "The Bequest," perhaps the most fully realized story in this collection, describes the narrator's relationship with his landlady, Mrs. Feldhammer, who leaves him an apartment building in her will. One observes the narrator's growth from an original frustration with Mrs. Feldhammer to a final understanding that she has almost "adopted" him; as a consequence, he begins to understand the sort of person she was.

"Two Year's Absence" describes a visit that Bill, an itinerant labourer, makes to his parents after being away for two years. Though his parents do not really understand him, Bill tries to convey the significance of his experiences to them. In a passage recalling Hemingway's Nick Adams stories, Wexler describes Bill's departure after his visit:

> The street was still quiet when he stepped into the cab of his truck. The morning light had not completely obliterated the dull grey of dawn. It was a good time to leave. He looked forward to being on the highway. He knew that the road had a way of swallowing up disappointment, even sadness. For the past two years it had been his best friend. He knew, all too dearly, that it still was.

The sentences are simple, repetitive, and yet delicate, and they imply a real understanding of Bill's emotions as he leaves. Wexler is able to present the uneasy, yet improbably warm relationship between Bill and his parents, a relationship that can only be sustained, ironically, by Bill's setting out on the road again.

Anne Marriott's *A Long Way to Oregon* is a successful collection of stories about people from varied social groups. In her case, the range is wider, from the semi-literate Everard of "A Long Way to Oregon" to the boarding-school narrator of "Mrs. Absalom." Often, the stories deal with human tragedies and psychological renewal, as in "The Death of the Cat," where a woman comes to a new sense of her own individuality and potential after her cat dies:

> The colour of the new grass, the buds bursting open on the trees, the depth and blueness of the sky, the heat of the sun, all were increased and intensified by her pain. And suddenly she realized: the cat was dead. She was alive. Had been coming to life without knowing it.

There is a lyrical, almost metaphysical quality in many of these stories. "It's Alright, Mr. Khan" explores the feelings of a woman whose heart condition has caused her admission to hospital. She is able to reflect on the deaths of other patients, especially on that of Mr. Khan, who dies in the same room. Another story, "On a Sunday Afternoon," reminds us of Henry James' "The Turn of the Screw," for it is actually a ghost story. A family out for an afternoon is tormented by a group of almost identical children, and finally one child in the family, Linda, apparently influenced by

"primitive forces," leaves her family to join the group. Marriott's ability to use symbolic language to suggest psychological intricacies is well illustrated in "Mrs. Absalom." Just as the decayed garden in *Great Expectations* represents Miss Havisham's broken dreams, so Mrs. Absalom's garden implies the disintegration of her once creative personality: "I plunged down the back steps into the vast tangle of garden, a wilderness of leaf and stem; huge juicy weeds, carrots run to tops like ornamental shrubs. Even the wasps feeding on the broken pears under the giant, rheumatic trees looked larger than usual." The surrealistic landscape is an apt evocation of Mrs. Absalom's increasingly confused state of mind. These three collections are all worth reading, but Wexler and Marriott have an eye for the contradictions of the human situation, which provides a depth lacking in Jarman.

RODERICK W. HARVEY

TRANSFORMATIONS

RICHARD LEMM, *A Difficult Faith*. Pottersfield, $7.95.

HENRY BEISSEL, *Season of Blood: A Suite of Poems*. Mosaic, $7.95.

JEAN YVES COLLETTE, *The Death of André Breton*. Ray Chamberlain trans., Guernica Editions, n.p.

FEELINGS CAN CHANGE the world — "a damaged heart could twist / one's vision into hate" — and the most important feeling is love, the "difficult faith." "Now that I love you / . . . Lilacs appear on the six o'clock news." Love, the linking of what one man is with what one is not, is essentially an act of metaphor, and, early in Richard Lemm's book, metaphors flow easily, as in the poem called "A Few Transformations":

> Your body is a firelit cave
> with a clear pool, world's first water.
> . . . . . .
> And my body a forest cathedral,
> serpent roots rippling the ground.
> . . . . . .
> Your body an arched cathedral,
> stained glass mysteries within.

The speaker remembers how wizards, "trapped in a tyrant's tower / changed themselves into falcons," and discovers the freedom of his own metamorphosis:

> I am evolving
> fins in notorious places, new
> eyes all over my body . . .
> Mud-man, this morning, only
> now do I feel bones growing.

In "Part One," Lemm's metaphors link humans with nature; in "Part Two," he forges bonds through time, linking self with earlier selves. The tree and window of childhood become the imaginative food of fantasy, and he recalls a glass of water that became a sacrament shared with his dying grandmother. These memory pieces are simple, direct, and dignified, free of the complexity of metaphor that sometimes burdens the earlier poems.

"Guide to the Perplexed," the third section of Lemm's book, was a runner-up in the 1983 CBC Literary Competition. Here the speaker assumes various personae — a pacifist, a Palestinian, an Israeli soldier — as a deliberately moral act, an effort to find transformations and metaphors that cross the lines of strife and create understanding. In a violent, beleaguered century, the poet, "governed by the cult of words," wants words to transform him both into a nighthawk over torn cities and into a whippoorwill singing back to his familial past. The final words of this intense and moral book are an affirmation of the possibilities for contact — contact through words and imagination and metaphor:

Let us learn each other's words
for love and water.
We have the same tears.
Inside us flocks of birds
nest together.
At last, after all these years,
I share everything,
everywhere is the holy land.

Henry Beissel's *Season of Blood* begins with an ironic warning to "beware" a spring that we cannot escape. Beissel's "spring" is defiant and passionate, a bloody renewal of life and awareness. Where Richard Lemm's vision is fluidly metaphorical, Henry Beissel's is more schematically paradoxical. We must recognize the "perpetual holocaust of creation," the "paths of renewal" marked by trails of blood. It may be that spring is "the honeymoon of earth and sun," but the same sun is a "nuclear furnace" burning itself into extinction.

Beissel challenges us to "take sides / with the season," a challenge that is in part political. Images of the Canadian spring are spliced with scenes of brutality in Latin America: "what happens / in El Salvador happens here in our hearts." Hollywood movies may splash "fake blood" across a "fake world," but

Life is not a movie
except for minds
that move in darkness.
Winter belongs to them
but spring is ours.

Beissel's poetry is often specific in its observations and muscular in its rhythms:

The beaver wakes in his timbered winter
fortress
as the creek cracks into shards of ice with
the
fury of gunshots, and shakes a flock of
crows
like black fruit from the branches of an ash.
Dark caw
wheels of fate spinning in the winds of a
new season.

When he retreats from such specifics, Beissel lapses into embarrassingly sententious epigrams: "Fools fall into the trap of their own gullibility"; "Oh if / the stars could cry the heavens / would turn into a salt sea!" Only sometimes does he recognize his own clichés: "It's all been / said before: money is / power is war is death."

Aside from such simplistic lapses, this "suite" of poems is a vital paean to consciousness. In a world of Exocet missiles and fighter planes, the green Maypole rises, and the music holding the May dance together is awakened memory. Those who are awake recognize the universe as a "brutal wasteland," an "infinite round of catastrophes," but may find a point of balance betwen annihilation and ignorance.

A little closer
to the sun
the light turns black,
a little farther away
the night goes blind.

Like Richard Lemm, Henry Beissel ultimately finds hope in the fact of human consciousness:

All that is
gentle and free
grows in the gardens
of our eyes.

Jean Yves Collette's *The Death of André Breton* (translated from French by Ray Chamberlain) has been classified as "prose," but its short, dense paragraphs — one per page — demand the kind of attention normally paid to poetry. This is not "easy" reading; whereas Lemm's stance is metaphorical and Beissel's paradoxical, Collette's resembles nothing so much as analytic cubism. A "plot" dimly emerges, but individual paragraphs are as discontinuous as the planes of a cubist painting.

This style grows from a conviction that inner experience is not easily made public. Documents or conversations that purport to convey truth seem either tri-

vial or false because of the "entire incompressibility of ideas":

> Newspaper (headline): "Mysterious document sheds light on the death of writer Breton." Police make statements but what do they say? Faked document written by the author (of the crime) the writer (himself) concealing his reasons in the haughtiness of death.

A throat cut in the street is "soon filed away" in official documentation: "Informal images learned in the pages of newspapers. Banalities!"

Made desperate by these stifling banalities, Collette's Breton — a fictionalized version of the French surrealist writer — must destroy in order to create. A knifeblade is a phallus, and sex equals murder equals writing: "Ah! To kill, to kill. Ah! To sweat over a few miserable pages. . . . What sweet pleasures the flesh procures." The effort "to reach life's deepest reaches having previously felt to shatter the customary form" leads to surrealism; it also leads to immersion in physical details — the "sounds of metal in the flesh" and a feverish sexual relationship, a "month full of touching." Because Breton is a writer, he cannot stay forever submerged in the physical immediacy of living; he must turn experience into words. "The horrible and the marvellous" must become "exact, readable, content." Even as he makes love, Breton knows that this "conversation of organs" is "future text." He proceeds to the inevitable murder of experience — the literal murder of his lover, followed by the writer's version of the event. *The Death of André Breton* is a challenging text. Elliptical, severe, and obsessive, it demands several rereadings. Ultimately, it is worth the effort; it is a rigorous, engaging exploration of the paradoxes of text and experience.

BRUCE PIRIE

SMALL VOICE OF THE GRASS

GLEN SORESTAD, *Hold the Rain in Your Hands: Poems New and Selected.* Coteau Books, $8.95.

THERE IS A KIND OF POETRY that projects no pretensions on the part of its creator (who, one feels, would be most embarrassed if anyone tried to push him into a Laytonish bardic role), yet which we read with a quiet and effortless satisfaction precisely because of its lack of intellectual complexity, its simplicity of form, its clarity of tone. Such poetry is not in any way disingenuous, for one has the feeling that, like a peasant, its writer does not find cunning amiss, and makes the most of his modest virtues, often with a great deal of unspectacular artifice. Yet the laconic quietness remains, the smallness of voice like the wind in prairie grass.

A poet of this kind is Glen Sorestad. He has been writing and publishing for quite a number of years now; the first of his booklets of verse, *Windsong*, appeared in 1975. In *Hold the Rain in Your Hands*, his sixth, he has reached the point of feeling established enough to write a "New and Selected," including — in the manner of Birney and Purdy — poems culled from this decade of publication. He is one of the circle of verse-writers who appeared in the hitherto unpoetic prairies during the 1970's. The landscape of Saskatchewan often inspires his poems; he has been active in promoting and publishing western poets, helping to found Thistledown Press, and publishing this latest book with another western rural-based venture, Coteau Books, issued by the Thunder Creek Co-op, a collective created to bring out prairie writers who find it hard to appear with established Toronto houses. In national terms Glen Sorestad may seem

peripheral; he is not mentioned in the *Oxford Companion*; he does not appear in Atwood's *New Oxford Book of Canadian Verse*. But he has a name in his own region, and what he produces is regional writing near its best.

The more interesting prairie writers do not imitate each other consciously, even when they seem most alike, but they have some things in common, and one is that they may have solved the problem in response to which T. E. Hulme created Imagism so long ago, when he first "felt the necessity or inevitableness of verse . . . in the desire to reproduce the peculiar quality of feeling which is induced by the flat spaces and wide horizons of the virgin prairie of western Canada." In a sense, though he never wrote verse *about* the prairie, and in fact hardly any verse at all, Hulme was the true precursor of the prairie poetry that began to emerge more than half a century later, and it is not therefore inappropriate that the clearly observed image has become so important in the work of these writers of the plains, as it is in that of Sorestad, whether in accounts of happenings or in haiku-like statements about things seen:

Against the fade of light
the spruce line
the lake with dark.

Spectral birch slink
into boreal night
and spruce reach
their ragged arms
to bring down the light.

Sorestad is essentially an episodic — rather than a narrative — poet, dealing with small incidents, gentle epiphanies that are handled in simple forms and clear direct imagery and make their point (there is always a point) with a very muted emphasis. They are poems of statement rather than suggestion. Sorestad does something, Sorestad sees something, and out of the way he tells us about it emerges a kind of extension of meaning, a modest generalization about existence. Take, as an example short enough to be quoted in its entirety, "Beside the Nursing Home":

This withered man
has ridden his wheelchair
so long now
there is no longer
envy in his glance,
no expression
as the slim young legs
pass him by.

The statement is simple; there are no tortuosities of language or of thought. The poem is all observation with no emotion expressed, and yet the unspoken meaning is there, outside what is said.

That is of course what the Imagists did, and it is no accident that Sorestad dedicates one of his poems to that latter day Imagist, Raymond Souster, for he really tries to give us the plain-speaking poet's view of life on the prairie that Souster has given us of life in Toronto. There is the same commitment to the humble and ordinary, the same effort to find significance in the actions of common men. A whole section of the book is really a kind of pub crawl in verse, taking us from one decrepit prairie hotel to the next — there are at least fourteen of them — and drawing out of these beer parlour scenes and personalities a moving sense of life behind the times. There is nothing in *Hold the Rain in Your Hands* that will send shudders of excitement down anyone's spine, but as an example of clear poetry of statement — a type that has been too little regarded — it is honest and workmanlike.

GEORGE WOODCOCK

RE/DECONSTRUCTION

STEPHEN SCOBIE, *bpNichol: What History Teaches*. Talonbooks, n.p.

STEVE MCCAFFERY, *PANOPTICON*, blew-ointment, $8.95.

STEPHEN SCOBIE BASES HIS examination of bpNichol's work on the premise that Nichol stands at a crossroad between Humanism, Modernism, Deconstructionism, and Poststructuralism. Such a study could lapse into an incomprehensible collage of technical terms and jargon, but Scobie approaches these subjects with a clear mind and is able to convey the history and approaches of these schools in readily accessible language. Throughout the book, he draws on a wide range of visual and literary artists and critics, such as Cézanne, Picasso, and Gertrude Stein; Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Julia Kristeva, Jacques Lacan, and Harold Osbourne; Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, and William Carlos Williams; Homer, Virgil, and Dante; and Milton, Blake, and Wordsworth. Clearly, he knows the theories well and is able to use these figures effectively to elucidate his points.

Some of the clarity is generated by dividing the book into five sections: one, a semi-biographical introduction to the diversity of Nichol's work and to the theories functioning within it, the others, chapters on visual poetry, sound poetry, Poststructuralist fiction, and *The Martyrology*. As Scobie admits, in many places these divisions overlap, indeed, are integral to Nichol's theory of multiplicity in language and form. But the distinctions enable Scobie to outline the history and the theories behind each aspect of Nichol's work. Each of the last four chapters begins theoretically and then moves into specific analysis of the texts in question.

To say that Scobie's analyses of both the theory and the texts are well developed, is not to say that the book is without lacunae. Nichol has long called himself a Modern Romantic and, although Scobie discusses the application of six "stages in the history of the long poem" in *The Martyrology*, he fails to provide much of a link for the creation of personal mythologies and the Romantic tradition. Further, Scobie establishes Nichol's ability, as a result of his Humanist and Deconstructive practices, to let language work through him, rather than to master language. I would argue, rather, that this ability comes from Romantic and Deconstructive tendencies. Nichol's work contains little Humanism at all. The Humanists, as led by Irving Babbitt, would see the self as highest master, which is clearly contradictory to Nichol's intent. Perhaps some of this confusion arises because, unlike the newer terms of Deconstructionism and Poststructuralism, Scobie fails to define his use of "humanism."

Scobie's earliest sources for Nichol's fragmented language and visual poetry are the Deconstructionists. Yet Nichol began writing in this manner in the 1960's when Eastern philosophies, such as that of Heraclitus, Zen, and Tao, were strong cultural influences. Scobie cites *The Martyrology*'s lines "imp art i always wanted to attain / a dance among the little ones" as evidence of "impartiality" in the Deconstructive "surrender [of] the role of the 'I' as the determining centre of writing," and later as evidence of Nichol's formal follow-through on the "structural implications of 'fluid definition.' " Given more of the text of Book 4 ("The whole / flows thru / into the universe / absolute & open / poem of / perfect movement / containment of / the flux"), the lines seem more immediately connected with Eastern philosophy and, perhaps, had he followed Stein's use of repetition when he refers to "St. Ein,"

Scobie might have seen the connection (which I discussed in *rune*, Spring 1980) to more recent Western quantum physics.

Scobie's discussion of the Oedipal complex in *Journal* (1978), with its Derridean fear of "phallogocentrism," or logical language imposed by the authority figure, does not go quite far enough in pointing out the connection to Stein. "To say that it is 'influenced by' Gertrude Stein is to do less than justice to the extent to which Nichol has here absorbed Stein into the patterns of his personal style." Scobie identifies the mother as the Oedipal "mother (the m/other) whom they [father and son] both desire" and notes that the images of sexual trauma "carry also the overtones of a politics of *writing*." But nowhere does he point to a connection between the desire for Stein (or the desire for a lost saint of language) and the mother in the text, which seems to be made explicit, in *Journal* by the style of writing: "yes its painful mommy yes i miss you & no i can never have you really."

These are, however, all minor points given the scope, detail, and scholarly approach throughout the book. Representative texts for the different forms Nichol uses in each of the four categories are chosen with care, placed in a literary context, and analyzed perceptively. It is also refreshing to see Scobie use the word "her," rather than "him," throughout his text as a generic pronoun for "the reader." This practice of alternating "him" and "her," although keeping consistently to one form throughout one text, is one way of revising a language which has traditionally omitted women. It also fits well with Scobie's emphasis on multiplicity in language.

Steve McCaffery's *PANOPTICON* moves more clearly into the field of Deconstruction and Poststructuralism, with its removed and impartial writer. The continual references to "the mark," including a chapter and a book within the book by this title, alert us immediately to the Derridean implications in this murder. A "panopticon" is a circular prison where each cell can be seen by the guard who sits in the middle. This becomes a metaphor for language. McCaffery uses a variety of techniques to deconstruct the "death," the stasis, in definition, to shatter the links between signifier and signified so that language can be freed to "*an ultimate effect of her hand that holds the written core of wrist coordinate with sound and sign assuring her body of an infinite horizon.*" The book is not so much about murder, as about "*the killing of a death already perpetrated.*"

Much of the book concerns desire, which, for McCaffery, is also the emotive place from which language comes. The desire here is to read "a fictive threshold, an exergual space outside her own sphere of existence but within the compass of an authentic reader's eyes." The living text should exist in the fluid space between the writer and the reader. McCaffery's text cannot be read as a continuous, self-contained narrative. A number of different plots, different versions of the same plots, and criticism are mixed together. Visually distinctive frames also allow for simultaneous and nonsequential reading. Similarly, five different book titles, a play, a film, a film about a book about a film and a book (and other permutations of this) also appear scattered throughout the text as variations on the same narrative. Within these sections, McCaffery uses shifting pronouns, contradiction, repetition, nonsequiturs, intertextuality (alluding to bpNichol, Jacques Derrida, and others), neologisms, and nonsense to short-circuit logical connections. The book itself appears as a design for a book that is yet to be published. We see the

graph paper used for layout, the plates marked, but not inserted, no title page, and the design for the title on the cover. Given this, one wonders if it was intentional to have two chapters reversed in the original layout and then corrected with sheets pasted over the original type. The object as well as the contents are still in process; the book is not a definitive form.

Still, the book *is* published, and these items *are* what appear. McCaffery does not undermine the meanings made by a reader's response, but undermines definitive meaning. The illogical form creates the deconstruction. Should the reader get too lost in the clutter and scatter of words, McCaffery reminds us: "MEMORIZATION OF THE PHRASE 'WE ARE HENCE IN THE REALM OF STRICTLY NARRATIVE BEINGS HOWEVER MUCH A MARK SHARES WITH LANGUAGE ITS CONTRADICTORY STRUCTURE." Note, too, that there is no closing quotation mark in the text, emphasizing the movement away from closure.

McCaffery has long been writing criticism and poetry. This first book of fiction shows many of the traits he has developed in the other forms (especially in the sound poems, where narrative and criticism often ellide), and a continuing search for open forms. In *PANOPTICON*, there is a brief, recurring narrative frame about a woman bathing; but the real narrative lies in the problem of deconstructing this enclosing frame.

ELLEN QUIGLEY

**** RONALD REES, *Land of Earth and Sky: Landscape Painting of Western Canada.* Western Producer, $29.95. In the late nineteenth-century a promotion-minded CPR supported many trips to the North West by the artist-reporters (or "specials") of the illustrated press. In the iconography of the Canadian prairie the work of these specials is crucial, both in perpetuating and encouraging the still lively genre of the documentary sketch, and in the resonant irony of their work: the specials were recording an Indian and Métis culture on the edge of extinction at the very moment they themselves were about to disappear, supplanted by the portable camera. This latter connection is one of the many shrewd parallels Ronald Rees draws in this essay, a geographer's view of prairie painting framed by a history of a developing (and disappearing) culture. Rees has a talent for the economical, sensitive observation: on the military background of prairie art, on the Pre-Raphaelite influence on Hind, on F. B. Schell's attraction to Mennonite settlements because they suggested European organization. Rees makes frequent use of literary references, but the popular, coffee-table format of the book means his sixty-page essay is frustratingly undocumented, and many of his sources for ideas and quotations would be very difficult to trace. The other noticeable limitation of the book is the absence of cross-references between the essay and the (just-adequate) colour reproductions of some eighty paintings which form the second half of the book. But this is an extremely valuable book for students of prairie regional culture, for those interested generally in the visual arts in Canada, and for anyone in love with the prairie. *Earth and Sky* tells the fascinating story of a search for an "aesthetic based on scarcity" more fully than ever before.

L.R.

** JOAN MURRAY, *The Best of the Group of Seven.* Hurtig, $19.95. My daughter, age 12, is convinced Lawren Harris is the best (of the Group of Seven). Hugh Hood, or at least Matthew Goderich, thinks Harris is the worst. Joan Murray is not sure, seeing some connection between "the profound, deathly calm" of Harris' *Salem Bland*, the Group's work in general, and the Canadian audience which stands staring at these canvases in Canadian museums. But if Harris is meaningful cultural archetype, he is also "capable of the greatest vulgarity . . . (penal mountains and vaginal clouds)." The remark suggests the best part of this book — the glimpses of a feminist reassessment of the Group's significance: "It was essentially a grown-up boy's club. The boyish atmosphere extended to the kind of paintings the Group produced. They are full of a boy's story search for a site." By contrast, the paintings are poorly reproduced in a cramped format, and the comments on each painting are too frequently uninformative or sentimentally banal. L.R.

opinions and notes

ANDREW MACPHAIL: A HOLISTIC APPROACH

IN JANUARY 1911, at the peak of his writing career and a few months before an accident which destroyed most of the sight in his left eye, Andrew Macphail, Canadian physician, editor, and writer, devoted a brief editorial article in the first issue of the *Canadian Medical Association Journal* to "Style in Medical Writing." An accomplished stylist, Macphail began by asserting that "all important scientific observations have been recorded with a singular fitness of words," and declared that "a man who is intelligent enough to be a surgeon is also intelligent enough to write down what he wants to say in simple, accurate terms."[1] These maxims constituted more than a demand that an experienced editor was making upon his potential contributors. They were also a statement of Macphail's refusal to recognize rigid boundaries between the different spheres in which he operated. In neither art nor science would he as editor accept sloppy expression; if the ideas were clear, they could be stated precisely.

But Macphail's view of the unity of knowledge went beyond the matter of writing style. He believed passionately in the interconnectedness of all things and in the necessity for the observer, reporter, or writer to see things as a whole. For this reason, in common with many other imperially-minded Canadian intellectuals of his time, he deplored Canadian provincialism and self-interestedness in political life. Macphail insisted upon the need to understand Canadian issues in the context of the Empire and, beyond that, in the universal terms of town and country, industry and agriculture, and so on.[2] His writing, and especially his editorial ventures, were to be a means of bringing Canadians together, elevating cultural standards, and expressing what he liked to describe as "correct thought." In several books and scores of articles Macphail spoke out in favour of an imperially-minded national sentiment[3] and a traditional, stable agrarian way of life — by which he meant a form of farming much closer to the ideal of subsistence than to the single-crop, market-oriented agriculture of the rapidly developing prairie West.

As an editor Macphail established two national journals and seriously considered starting up a third, all within a five-year period. In 1907 he took over the moribund semi-annual *McGill University Magazine* and converted it into a quarterly, *The University Magazine*. It rapidly assumed a central place in English-Canadian intellectual life and set a standard of excellence, while reaching a circulation of nearly 6,000, a figure which no comparable Canadian quarterly has matched to this day.[4] Four years later Macphail brought to fruition the proposal for a national periodical organ of the Canadian Medical Association. The notion had been floating around annual meetings of the organization for many years, and Macphail facilitated the project by submerging a local monthly, the *Montreal Medical Journal*, of which he was editor, in the new venture, the *Canadian Medical Association Journal*. The new periodical, also a monthly, rapidly became a success under his careful editorial guidance.[5] Late in 1910 the governor general of Canada, the 4th Earl Grey, brought to Macphail's attention a journal issued by the New Zealand government for use by children in the

common schools. Macphail responded to the governor general's hint by proposing a Canadian publication which would appear ten times a year, and which would be distributed to every school child in Canada. It would include articles in both French and English and would be controlled by an editorial board appointed by the provinces. The board would choose an editor, and Macphail intimated that he would be available for the position. The purpose would be to interest Canadian children in their country through the agency of a publication "expressing correct opinions in clear tones."[6] Macphail went to the extent of obtaining estimates of the costs from the publisher who handled the business affairs of his other two journals, but the project appears to have progressed no further.

Despite its abortive nature, this school journal undertaking was additional evidence of Macphail's concern to disseminate "correct opinions" as widely as possible. It is noteworthy that he did not subscribe to the notion that unity would be promoted through boosterism and the denial of differences. As a native Prince Edward Islander with a strong continuing connection with the Island, a province in drastic decline while the dominion as a whole grew and apparently prospered as never before, he believed that only after the redress of injustices could a real basis for national unity be established.[7] Readable, intelligent, and candid writing was a means to this end, just as it was a vehicle of good scientific reporting. Neither in his medical nor his literary editing did he shun controversy. In 1913-14 the Toronto Academy of Medicine expressed more than once its continuing displeasure with his criticism of what he believed to be its arbitrary membership policies; Macphail refused to recant and the relevant committee of the Canadian Medical Association declined to accept his resignation.[8] In the sphere of social commentary, his stridently anti-feminist, anti-female suffragist writings provoked the Montreal Local Council of Women in 1914 to send a strongly worded protest to the editorial board of *The University Magazine*. The board took no action against Macphail, and at least one member, James Mavor of the University of Toronto, sent the protesters a sharp response.[9]

In this paper I argue that the best way to understand Macphail is to use his own holistic approach. This is particularly useful for comprehending the interaction between the literary and scientific spheres of his life.[10] To focus this interconnection more closely, I shall show that Macphail's medical career, and particularly his medical writings, must be seen in relationship to the whole of his life's work, if his objectives and significance are to be fully appreciated. In other words, Macphail was not simply a man with an extraordinarily broad range of independent achievements, but one who is best understood *as an integrated whole*. Further, his medical training may well have played a crucial part in the development of his overall perspective.

To establish the appropriate context for interpreting Macphail, it is necessary to review briefly his literary career. Beginning in 1905, at age 41, he published more than ten books. These included an historical novel, a collection of poetry on the theme of sorrow, a study of the Bible in Scotland, the official history of the Canadian Army Medical Services in World War I, a semi-autobigraphy, the first translation of the classic novel *Maria Chapdelaine* from French to English, a collection of John McCrae's verse entitled in *Flanders Fields and Other Poems*, a lengthy drama, and four collections of essays. It is noteworthy that only one of these books, the official history, dealt with medicine. The four volumes

of essays covered an amazing variety of subjects: literary criticism, theology, feminism, modern education, military and diplomatic history, relations between Canada and Great Britain, the evils of American civilization, and Lawrence of Arabia. Indeed the essay was Macphail's favourite medium, for it displayed to good advantage his vivid perception, dry humour, and economy of style. Many of his essays appeared first in *The University Magazine*, which, excepting the war years, he edited from 1907 to 1920. This was also his period of greatest recognition — especially just before World War I. Although nominally conducted by a committee, the periodical was in fact under Macphail's firm control. His close friend Stephen Leacock, who was on the first editorial committee of *The University Magazine*, later recalled that "Like all competent men who can do a job and who know it, he had no use for co-operation."[11]

Macphail was not only a man of thought and letters, but a man of action. This is evident in his social criticism. He believed that it was the duty of university men to "tell the truth,"[12] as he put it, about all current topics. He realized that the Canada of his era was changing from being a predominantly rural and agricultural society to an urban and industrial one. He opposed this trend for a variety of reasons: the tendency of the family to disintegrate in an urban environment, the tensions between the social classes in the cities, the luring of youth from the country to the town, and so on. He could not be detached in the face of these trends. According to Leacock, Macphail harboured "a deep-seated feeling that the real virtue of a nation is bred in the country, that the city is an unnatural product."[13] Further, he was not content to lament passively the decline of the older order, for he believed in the necessity of mixing theory and practice — a cast of mind he may have acquired partially as a result of his medical education. He realized that if farming were to survive as a way of life, it would have to be made into a viable occupation once again. He and his brother Alexander, a professor of engineering at Queen's University, spent each summer in Prince Edward Island. There they extolled the benefits of scientific agriculture and new crops, developed new strains of potatoes, founded the local seed potato industry, and demonstrated how scientific methods could dramatically increase yields. Encouraged by their success in potatoes, they went on to pioneer the cultivation of tobacco on the Island. The two brothers became widely known in their native province. Alexander was elected to the Legislative Assembly and Andrew continued to be mentioned as a possible independent candidate for the House of Commons in Ottawa.

Perhaps the most striking example of Macphail's willingness to practice what he preached came in 1914 with the outbreak of World War I. Like most English-speaking Canadians, he wholeheartedly supported the war from the beginning, and he urged that all able-bodied men enlist. He went beyond that. In his 50th year and almost blind in one eye, he volunteered to go to the Front. Despite his age, his eyesight, and the fact that he had never worn a uniform, he refused to be denied when his offer to enlist was rejected. He appealed directly to the prime minister, and in 1915 went to France as a medical officer. He spent 20 months at the Front, 14 of them with a field ambulance, before accepting a transfer to headquarters in London early in 1917. It was about that time that he was first approached, through his close friend Rudyard Kipling, about writing the official history of the Medical Services.

The war years represented a tempo-

rary return of medicine to a predominant role in Macphail's life. The years immediately following the death of his wife in 1902 had marked a major turning point in the relative importance of his different careers. Although he devoted considerable time and care to medical teaching and journalism, his more literary interests came to be the central focus of his activity. This fact is evident even when one examines his medical writings. They were distinguished by a concern for aesthetic and humanistic considerations, and a desire to relate medical history to wider themes in human history as a whole. The best example of the sort of perspective Macphail could bring to bear on current medical topics is "American Methods in Medical Education," a piece he published in 1927.

Canadian hospitals and medical schools had been subjected in the years following 1910 to periodic inspection and grading by a number of American medical bodies. Macphail took as his theme the distortions and rigidities introduced into Canadian curricula in order to make them conform to standard American practices. He had no doubt that there had been a need for improvement of medical education in the United States (after all, they had cut themselves off from the mainstream of civilization in 1776). But the remedy being exported to Canada reflected dominant American mores. "The American method in surgery is an application of the American method in business — uniformity, a single standard, mass production. The desired end is 'efficiency.'" Macphail did not quarrel with the goal but believed that "This mechanical method would be, and now is, fatal to us. In the end it will prove fatal to surgery in the United States as well." He contended that

> Under this inhuman system a new kind of physician and a new kind of surgeon have been developed. The physician studies only a part of the patient; the patient is to him nothing more than a series of microscopic slides or chemical solutions. The surgeon knows the patient merely as an arrangement of typewritten cards. He sees him for the first time unconscious on the table, when he comes like a masked executioner to complete the sentence of the judge.[14]

Macphail wrote that this mechanical approach, operating through "inspectors of our hospitals . . . [who] have never taught, never operated, never come into living contact with the sick,"[15] was supplanting a Canadian tradition which had always had the benefit of nourishment from Europe. Macphail was able to argue that not only was the change harmful from his traditionalist point of view, but that, given their own standards of judgement, it was absurd for American professional bodies to impose their procedures on Canadian medicine. In 1910 the initial survey of North American schools had placed McGill and Toronto in the first rank. "Our medical teaching and practice, English and French," he wrote, "is, and has been for a hundred years, equal to the best in the world. We never descended to the degradation of issuing diplomas for money. Those who desired such were compelled to go to the United States."[16] He pleaded that American medical institutions confine their supervision within their national boundaries.

Macphail delivered "American Methods in Medical Education" to the Congress of the American College of Surgeons on 29 October 1926. His opposition came less from his audience than from the editors of the *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, to whom he submitted the address for publication. A. D. Blackader, who had succeeded him as editor, and C. F. Martin, McGill's dean of medicine, feared offending their American readers. Correspondence and discussion between Macphail, Blackader, Mar-

tin, and others associated with the journal extended from early November to March. Finally the editorial board offered to sponsor publication of the address as a pamphlet, believing "it would not be wise to have some of its statements published officially in the association journal. Its clever satire might not appeal favorably to some of our confrères in the U.S.A."[17] Macphail declined, and his war-time friend, Sir Dawson Williams, editor of the *British Medical Journal*, published it in his periodical, although he too felt contrary pressure from colleagues. Once the article finally appeared in September 1927, Macphail received a remarkable volume of congratulatory mail, largely from Canadians. The chief justice of the Supreme Court of Prince Edward Island, an old classmate from the early 1880's, wrote that "Your reasoning applies with equal force to our whole system of education which is being debased by the application of American business standards."[18]

As already noted, Macphail was no stranger to controversy, either within or without the medical profession. Indeed the *Official History of . . . The Medical Services* was one of the most hotly-debated books in Canada in the 1920's. Macphail had been commissioned to write the book on 7 October 1921. His qualifications were obvious: besides being a distinguished man of letters and holding the history of medicine chair in Canada's leading medical faculty, he had had extensive experience at the Front. He spent some 200 working days on the project over the next year, and the manuscript generated sufficient controversy at official levels that publication was held up for almost three years, even though he consented to several deletions. Macphail made no secret of his interest in writing succeeding volumes, but he was not invited to do so. Perhaps because of the nature of his book — in his own words, "something less than eulogy"[19] — the only subsequent volume to appear was delayed until 1938, on the eve of Canada's next European war.

In addition to being a descriptive account of his subject, Macphail's *Official History . . .* was a passionate defence, presented with his customary eloquence. "The Canadian medical service never failed; it was never embarrassed from any inherent cause, either when it operated in reliance upon itself alone or in those larger operations where it necessarily depended upon the co-operation of the British service."[20] He was quite definite in stating that of all branches of the Canadian army, the medical corps was the best-prepared for mobilization. Whatever "embarrassment" occurred arose out of confusion on the part of the minister of militia, Sam Hughes, as to the proper relations between civil and military authorities. "To provide the forces is a civil act," wrote Macphail, "to train and employ those forces to the proper end is the military business." Hughes' propensity for precipitate and ill-directed action "brought the Canadian medical service and the army itself to the brink of disaster; and wrenched the Canadian constitution so severely that it has not yet recovered from the strain."[21] Macphail believed that the medical services had been held responsible in the public mind for mismanagement not of their own making, and he proposed to set the record straight. The book was also notable for its strong emphasis upon the need for operational unity among all branches of the army, its testimonial to the sexual purity of the soldiers compared with civilians, and its unsympathetic attitude to the psychological maladies grouped under the term "shell shock."

Response to the *Official History . . .* was seldom half-hearted or neutral. Some

reviewers extolled it as a model of its kind, setting a high standard for the remainder of the series, which was to have run to eight volumes. Others strenuously objected to Macphail's strong opinions and the way he approached his subject. The definitive modern study of the role played by the Canadian Medical Services in World War I has yet to appear, but in a recent essay on "Historical writing in English," Professor J. M. Bumsted describes Macphail's *Official History* as "a classic analysis of the non-combative aspects of modern war."[22] Whatever the final verdict may be on this volume, there can be no doubt that it was characteristic of Macphail in at least two respects: it illustrated his unwillingness to back away from controversial topics, and it revealed his desire to treat medical themes in a broad context. The latter tendency was further demonstrated in such articles as "The Burden of the Stuarts." By examining the medical evidence concerning the early Stuart kings of England, his article purportedly explained much of their irascibility by reference to a number of painful and uncomfortable illnesses which would have been enough to try the tempers of saints.[23]

Thus Macphail treated medical history as one aspect of a broader history. In keeping with his spirit, I would suggest that we consider *his* medical career in the wider context of his life. He made some pertinent general comments about such matters in an article entitled "The Dominion and the Spirit," which he published in 1908. He was writing about the work of Canadians, and he took as an example the growing of wheat:

> It is of some importance that we [Canadians] should make wheat to grow. The thing which is of more importance is that we should have a right reason for undertaking that labour, and a right spirit in the doing of it. The man who makes two blades of wheat to grow where only one grew before, for the mere purpose of providing unnecessary food, is working with the spirit and motive of a servant — of a slave even. The slave works because he is compelled to; the artist because he loves to; the fool does unnecessary work because he is a fool. Each of us is part slave, part artist, and part fool. The wise man is he who strives to be all three in due proportion, and succeeds in being not too much of any one. But the tragedy of our life lies in this: that the man who was designed for an artist is by compulsion so often a slave . . .
>
> Work, then, in itself is neither good nor bad. . . . This "work for work's sake" is entirely modern; and our civilization is the only one which has ever established itself upon that principle. To the Greek mind it was incredible that a free man should labour, even for his own support. That was the business of the slave. The citizen had other occupation, in considering how he could make the best of his life. His business was to think how he should govern himself, how he might attain to a fulness of life.
>
> It is not the modern view that a man should occupy himself with his life. With all our talk about freedom, we have only succeeded in enslaving ourselves. We have created for ourselves a huge treadmill; and, if we do not keep pace, we fall beneath its wheels. Our inventions have only added to the perplexities of life. We have created artificial necessities, and consume our lives in ministering to them.[24]

Andrew Macphail had spent many years working very hard as a medical student and as a practicing physician. When he had reached a position of financial security, he decided to confine his activities to what he genuinely enjoyed doing: teaching, writing, and editing. Most of his time, especially before 1914, was occupied with writing on current topics in a reflective way. These years were a period of almost unlimited optimism in Canada. After a long depression in the late nineteenth century, Canada at last seemed to be coming into her own, to be a "success." Industrialization was accelerating, cities were growing, and the West was being settled by immigrants from many countries. Macphail, like many other intellectuals of the day,

believed that the level of Canadian intellectual and political life was not keeping pace with the country's material progress. *The University Magazine* was his highly successful attempt to create a forum for a more elevated calibre of public discussion. One of the other besetting sins of Canada was parochialism — the tendency to take as one's focus of loyalty the immediate area rather than the nation as a whole. At one point Macphail had proposed to get at the root of this by establishing a monthly school journal, a plan which did not become reality. In spite of its failure, the proposal illustrated Macphail's concern for the creation of a common Canadian consciousness, and for bringing together Canadians to discuss among themselves Canadian topics. He was also deeply involved with Leacock and other intellectuals in a temporarily successful attempt to form a syndicate of Canadian writers to provide the periodicals and newspapers of Canada with Canadian material.[25] The creation of the *Canadian Medical Association Journal* should be seen in a similar light: in part, a product of Macphail's desire to promote national feeling and to bring together for common ends Canadians of diverse backgrounds. The *Canadian Medical Association Journal* would, he hoped, help to establish a common sentiment on matters of common interest to the Canadian medical profession.

Finally, it is relevant to note that Macphail was the most striking Canadian example of what has been called the "man of letters." The man of letters is distinguished from other members of the intelligentsia by his versatility, by his lack of an exclusive specialization; he tends to cover the ground of all the specialists.[26] In the twentieth century he represents a dying breed, particularly in the highly differentiated and specialized world of North America. More than any other Canadian, Macphail resisted this system, for he wrote in an informed way on almost everything from aesthetics to science. In the field of his greatest distinction, social criticism, he articulated a remarkably comprehensive and well-integrated world-view, and in this respect, his medical training had probably exerted a decisive influence. With its emphasis upon seeing the patient as an interrelated whole — so eloquently reaffirmed in his "American Methods in Medical Education" — it would reinforce any tendency to conceptualize society in holistic terms, rather than as the sum of discrete phenomena.

Sir Andrew Macphail was an outstanding Canadian in several spheres, only one of which was medicine. I have argued that to understand the thrust of his medical activities, especially his editing, one must fit them into the broad outlines of his life as a whole; and that much of his distinctiveness as a thinker can be traced to the influence of his medical training and experience.

NOTES

1 Andrew Macphail, "Style in Medical Writing," *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, 1 (January 1911), 70, 72.

2 See Ian Ross Robertson, "Sir Andrew Macphail as a Social Critic" (Ph.D. thesis, Univ. of Toronto, 1974).

3 See Carl Berger, *The Sense of Power: Studies in the Ideas of Canadian Imperialism, 1867-1914* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1970).

4 See Ian Ross Robertson, "*University Magazine, The* (1907-20)," in William Toye, ed., *The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature* (Toronto: Oxford Univ. Press, 1983), 810.

5 See Public Archives of Canada (hereafter, PAC), Canadian Medical Association Minute Book Annual Meetings 1896-1907, 70-71 (entry for 1 September 1899), 93-94 (entry for 14 September 1900), 137 (entry for 17 September 1902), 162 (entry for 25 August 1903), 239 (entry for 24 August 1905), 251-52 (entry for 20 August 1906),

265 (stapled-in material, n.d. [probably 1906] and 26 February 1907); PAC, Canadian Medical Association Minute Book General Meetings 1907-1925, 1-2 (entry for 11 September 1907), 9-10 (entry for 12 September 1907), 42, 45-46 (entry for 13 September 1907), 49 (entry for 9 June 1908), 54 (entry for 11 June 1908), 72-74 (entry for 25 August 1909); and PAC, Canadian Medical Association Minutes Executive Council 1908 to 1927, 113-16 (entry for 8 July 1914).

[6] University of Durham, Department of Palaeography and Diplomatic (hereafter, UD), 4th Earl Grey Papers, Macphail to Grey, 8 January 1911.

[7] See Dalhousie University Archives (hereafter, DUA), Archibald MacMechan Papers, Macphail to MacMechan, 11 December 1907.

[8] See PAC, Canadian Medical Association Minutes Executive Council 1908 to 1927, 113-16 (entry for 8 July 1914).

[9] See Macphail Papers, private possession, Grace Ritchie-England and Anna Scrimger Lyman to Editorial Committee of *The University Magazine*, 20 March 1914; and Mavor to "Mesdames" [Ritchie-England and Lyman], 28 March 1914.

[10] See S. E. D. Shortt, "Essayist, Editor, & Physician: The Career of Sir Andrew Macphail, 1864-1938," *Canadian Literature*, no. 96 (Spring 1983), 49-58. Despite Shortt's combination of qualifications (Ph.D. in intellectual history and M.D.), the article is strangely uninformative on precisely this interaction. It explains neither the distinctive qualities evident in Macphail's diverse activities nor how each sphere affected the other, amounting, rather, to a simple listing.

[11] Stephen Leacock, "Andrew Macphail," *Queen's Quarterly*, 45 (Winter 1938), 450.

[12] Macphail Papers, Andrew Macphail, untitled address at Canadian Society of Authors dinner, Toronto, 26 January 1907.

[13] Leacock, "Andrew Macphail," *Queen's Quarterly*, 45 (Winter 1938), 452.

[14] Andrew Macphail, "American Methods in Medical Education," *British Medical Journal*, 3 September 1927, 376. This seminal article does not appear in Shortt's 52-item "Selected Bibliography of Works by Sir Andrew Macphail," in "Essayist, Editor, & Physician: The Career of Sir Andrew Macphail, 1864-1938," *Canadian Literature*, no. 96 (Spring 1938), 57-58.

[15] Macphail, "American Methods in Medical Education," *British Medical Journal*, 3 September 1927, 375.

[16] *Ibid.*, 376.

[17] Macphail Papers, Blackader to Macphail, 3 March 1927.

[18] *Ibid.*, John A. Mathieson to Macphail, 22 October 1927.

[19] DUA, MacMechan Papers, Macphail to MacMechan, 4 October 1923.

[20] Andrew Macphail, *Official History of the Canadian Forces in the Great War, 1914-1919: The Medical Services* (Ottawa: F. A. Acland, Printer to the King's Most Excellent Majesty, 1925), 6.

[21] *Ibid.*, 1.

[22] J. M. Bumsted, "Historical writing in English," in Toye, ed., *The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature*, 353.

[23] Andrew Macphail, "The Burden of the Stuarts," *Quarterly Review*, 254 (April 1930), 218-29.

[24] Andrew Macphail, "The Dominion and the Spirit," *The University Magazine*, 7 (February 1908), 10-11.

[25] See Andrew Macphail, "What Is the News," *Saturday Night*, 18 June 1910; UD, Grey Papers, Macphail to Grey, 18 August 1911; DUA, MacMechan Papers, Macphail to MacMechan, 25 November, 1, 12, 26 December 1911, 17 January, 7 February, 1 March 1912.

[26] See John Gross, *The Rise and Fall of the Man of Letters: Aspects of English Literary Life Since 1800* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969).

IAN ROSS ROBERTSON

LEACOCK'S DEBT TO DAUDET

CRITICS OF STEPHEN LEACOCK'S writings have long recognized the influence of Charles Dickens and Mark Twain on Leacock's humour.[1] Twain was second in Leacock's esteem only to Dickens, and to Dickens Leacock applied such titles as "the Master," "the Great Master," and "*The Unforgotten Master.*"[2] Obviously

Leacock suffered no Bloomian "anxiety of influence." Although it is always unwise to distinguish aspects of influence too severely, it can yet be seen (or speculated) that Leacock would have learned something from Twain about how to enliven his narratives with their oral quality,[3] and that he learned much from Dickens about the difficult art of literary caricature. Leacock was also characteristically generous in his praise of such lesser influences and talents as O. Henry.[4] Washington Irving's *Sketchbook* (1820), with its concluding "L'Envoy" (1848), portions of which book Leacock anthologized, offers one possible formal predecessor to Leacock's own *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town.*[5] Leacock's literary debts were readily acknowledged by the writer and have begun to be documented by his critics, yet no one, to my knowledge, has remarked the influence of Alphonse Daudet, the nineteenth-century French writer. Daudet is, however, a close third behind Dickens and Twain as an influence on the oral quality and ironic style of, and the technique of caricature and ambivalent narrative stance in much of Leacock's writings. More specifically, Daudet's "Tartarin books" offer much in the manner of model for *Sunshine Sketches.* And Leacock's observations of Daudet's *Tartarin of Tarascon* and *Tartarin on the Alps* suggest a probable answer to the perennial Canadian critical riddle concerning Leacock's attitude toward Mariposa.

Jean-Pierre Richard could as well be writing of *Sunshine Sketches* when he observes of *Tartarin*, "if one can manage to forget the predominantly comic element and constant gentleness of the narrative, one is impressed by the sadness of the tale and by the pessimism of its conclusion."[6] And Daudet could as well have applied to the Mariposans the following definition of the "*Tarasconnade*": "The Southerner does not deceive but is self-deceived. He does not always tell the cold-drawn truth, but he believes he does. His falsehood is not any such thing, but a kind of mental mirage."

There are many noteworthy similarities and parallels between Daudet's Tartarin books and Leacock's *Sunshine Sketches*, but for the sake of brevity I direct the reader only to one striking similarity and one apparent syntactical borrowing. The departure scene which opens "The Marine Excursion of the Knights of Pythias"[7] bears a strong resemblance to the opening of chapter thirteen, "The Departure," in *Tartarin.* When the train carrying a weary Tartarin home from his mock-heroic adventures arrives in Tarascon, two words are shouted — " 'Tarascon! Tarascon!' "; when the narrator of "L'Envoi: The Train to Mariposa" and his silent travelling companion arrive in imagination back in Mariposa, two words are shouted " 'MARIPOSA! MARIPOSA!' " As striking as are the numerous parallels between the two works — the many similar mock-heroic metaphors, the comparable "set pieces" — there are yet more compelling reasons for recognizing the influence of *Tartarin* on the *Sketches*, not the least of which (only remarked here) is the similarity between what I would call a "Maripocentric" manner of thought — everything considered in relation to Mariposa — and what Daudet terms the "*Tarasconnade.*"

Leacock greatly admired Daudet's Tartarin books. (It may even be that Daudet's Christian name suggested the name for Josh Smith's "French Chief," Alphonse.) In his biography of Dickens, Leacock pays Daudet his highest compliment, observing that Tartarin "is Daudet's own, absolutely and triumphantly, but he is also a Dickens character, fit to sit beside the best of them." In his 1937 study of humour, *Humour and Humanity*, Leacock appraises Daudet's

Midi, and the appraisal can effortlessly be read as a description of the Mariposans of "The Whirlwind Campaign in Mariposa":

> The Tartarin people live on delusions of greatness; on the least pretext they send delegations of congratulations, read addresses to one another, hold celebrations, fire off guns, and set up floral arches of welcome. . . . There is a contrast between the luxuriant beauty of their home, and the fact that they refuse to keep still in it. This riot of the mind, this exuberant fancy, this victory over truth finds its summation in Tartarin.[8]

"This victory over truth," over the narrowly factual, Gradgrindian (or liberally individualistic) truth, also finds its summation in Mariposa — the community that Leacock, the humanist and tory, imagined when he was commissioned to write something specifically Canadian.

The primary purpose of this note has been simply to suggest the hitherto unacknowledged influence of Alphonse Daudet on Leacock, particularly the similarities between *Sunshine Sketches* and Daudet's Tartarin books. As the final quotation above may suggest, though, this note serves the secondary purpose of revealing Leacock's attitude toward his own creation, Mariposa. As with his studies of Dickens and Twain, Leacock's observations of Daudet's fiction are most valuable for what they reveal about Leacock.

Leacock's attitude toward the Mariposans — or, more recently, the narrative stance of his narrator in the *Sketches* — has been an issue (perhaps *the* issue) of contention among Leacock's critics since the *Sketches* were first published serially in the *Montreal Star* from 17 February 1912 to 22 June 1912. In short, the critical tempest has revolved around the deadly tense centre of gentle irony versus biting satire, with Desmond Pacey having first given currency to the view of Leacock as gentle ironist and Robertson Davies having infamously reduced the *Sketches* to biting satire.[9] But the tenor of Leacock's frequent praise of Daudet suggests that Mariposa may indeed have been intended to embody Leacock's humanist ideal of tory community; however ironically the town is praised, however fallible the Mariposans appear, Mariposa and its residents constitute a community that is characterized by interdependence and mutuality. Such a view of Mariposa resists the simple formulae that have failed to equate Mariposa only with either its author's gently ironic or his harshly satiric impulses (the Horatian versus the Juvenalian in Leacock). Leacock's debt to Daudet, conveyed again in the following view of Daudet's *Midi*, suggests that Leacock's critics have not been as sophisticated in dealing with their subjects' best humorous fiction as was Leacock in dealing with Daudet's. Perhaps we are best advised to consider the Mariposans in this reflected light:

> Reduced to a simple formula, as it often is, Daudet's picture of the "midi" is made to read that in Southern France all the people lie and exaggerate and bluff. That isn't it at all. Like all formulas it perverts truth by condensation. What Daudet meant was that in the South they live in a super-world, like children playing games: a world where they can believe anything they want to believe, and where emphasis lies not on actuality but on appearance: not on whether a thing is or is not so (a matter of no consequence), but on how it sounds.

NOTES

[1] Leacock wrote critical biographies of both Dickens and Twain: *Charles Dickens: His Life and Work* (1933; rpt. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1934), and *Mark Twain* ([London]: Peter Davies, 1932).

[2] "Fiction and Reality," in *Essays and Literary Studies* (London: John Lane, 1916), pp. 170-72, 164 respectively.

[3] For a note on how the *Sketches* began as spoken stories, see B. K. Sandwell, "Leacock Recalled: How the 'Sketches' Started," *Saturday Night*, August 1952, p. 7.

[4] See "The Amazing Genius of O. Henry," in *Essays and Literary Studies*, pp. 191-217.

[5] See *The Greatest Pages of American Humour* (New York: Sun Dial, 1936). I am grateful to Tracy Ware for drawing my attention to Irving's *Sketchbook*.

[6] *Tartarin of Tarascon* (1872), in *Tartarin of Tarascon and Tartarin on the Alps*, trans. and introd. Jean-Pierre Richard (London: Everyman-Dent, 1961), p. vi.

[7] *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town* (Toronto: Bell & Cockburn; London: John Lane, 1912), pp. 63-64.

[8] *Humour and Humanity* (London: Thornton Butterworth, 1937), p. 152.

[9] See Desmond Pacey, "Leacock as a Satirist," *Queen's Quarterly*, 58 (Summer 1951), 208-19, and Robertson Davies, "Stephen Leacock," in *Our Living Tradition*, First Series, ed. Claude T. Bissell (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1957), pp. 128-49.

GERALD LYNCH

IMITATIO INANITATIS

Literary Madness and the Canadian Short Story

PLOT IN THE SHORT STORY may lead the reader's mind to an illumination of intelligibility, but sometimes it works to shatter the reader's comforting teleological expectations with evidence of irredeemable pointless waste. "I am not fond of expecting catastrophes," wrote the Reverend Sidney Smith, "but there are cracks in the world." The cracks in the design must be undetermined, gratuitous; the imaginatively corrigible does not disorientate, nor strip the reader's mind of all save bewildered compassion. The unwanted death of a character of felt value may arouse this response, but the effect can only be partial, not the what but only the when. Better is madness, for it attacks the existence-justifying mechanism, reason, itself.

One can draw a chart of decreasing intensity from complete madness (raging, sulking, or oscillating between the two) to temporary possession (as lengthy as Don Quixote's, who recovered to die, as brief as a nightmare) to the everyday irrationalities of sexual desire. The frontiers are not fixed, the charts keep changing. Unlike physical illness, the consequence of the intrusion of an alien organism from without, madness flowers from the soil within — the same soil that nourishes much of what we treasure, including the arts. Can anyone conceive of Lord Euclid reading fiction?

Madness is both malleable and intractable: malleable, in that the content, like a hall of distorting mirrors, bears some relationships to the ideals, beliefs, conventions, and institutions of the society within which it appears; intractable, in that it always does appear. Because of its problematic nature, the social conventions by which it is defined and understood are both strong and shifting. So, too, are the conventions of literary narrative available to the writer who would deal with the topic.

It might appear that the writer of realistic short stories, having replaced the sequential happenings of narrative with the illusions of causality required by plot, is at a disadvantage when madness, in essence undetermined, is the theme. I mean of course the genuine theme, not a device for initiating or resolving a puzzle or crime. But writers have considered the risk worth taking, for no other topic reveals so bleakly the unalterable sadness of human lives.

I shall approach the subject of literary madness by looking at two short stories which have little in common other than the theme, for they treat the subject with quite different literary conventions: T. C. Haliburton's "The Witch Of Inky Dell" and Margaret Laurence's "Horses of the Night."

"The Witch Of Inky Dell" was published in *The Old Judge: or Life in a Colony*, 1849.[1] *The Old Judge* is a collection of framed short stories recorded by an unnamed English visitor to Nova Scotia. Stories of earlier days, including "The Witch Of Inky Dell," have been related to him by a retired judge, Mr. Justice Sandford; contemporary stories came in the company of the judge's nephew, Lawyer Barclay, who accompanied him on his travels in the province. The collection contains sketches and short stories of a wide variety of types — social satire, domestic comedy, sentiment, and adventure — not all successful. "The Witch Of Inky Dell" uses the conventions of the gothic story, conventions with which the tough-minded Haliburton was often not at ease: several other stories are costume gothic, using gothic trimmings but providing adequate natural explanations for the seemingly irrational occurrences. The type takes its name from the subtitle of Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1765), and was from the beginning somewhat exotic, stilted, and theatrical, these elements providing the aesthetic distancing necessary for the treatment of madness, incest, sadism, murder — that cluster of human attributes and actions thought of as beyond reason's pale. Haliburton in "The Witch Of Inky Dell" was treating a subject he felt justified the use of the gothic, with its moral ambiguities: the state of mind of an American loyalist who had served the king in Tarleton's cavalry during the American revolutionary war and then settled in Nova Scotia. Walter Tygart, known as "Watt the Tiger," has a nature akin to that of his former military commandant, Lieutenant-Colonel Banastre Tarleton. Tarleton served in both the northern and southern campaigns, and published a record of the latter, *A History of The Campaigns Of 1780 and 1781, In The Southern Provinces of North America* (London, 1787).[2] As the *History* reflects Tarleton's temperament, it is worth examining. On Earl Cornwallis's policy of moderation after the capture of Charlestown, Tarleton comments, "This moderation produced not the intended effect: It did not reconcile the enemies, but it discouraged the friends." Tarleton's own attitude to the king's enemies comes out in his description of imposing exemplary punishment on the rebellious natives about sixty miles northwest of Charlestown.

> With the assistance of Major Hanger, who was lately appointed to the cavalry, thirty dragoons and forty mounted militia were assembled: With this force Lieutenant-colonel Tarleton crossed the Santee at Lenew's ferry on the 6th of August: He moved from thence to the Black river, which he passed, in order to punish the inhabitants in that quarter for their late breach of paroles and perfidious revolt. A necessary service was concealed under this disagreeable exertion of authority: The vicinity of the rivers Santee and Wateree, and of all the Charles-town communications with the royal army, rendered it highly proper to strike terror into the inhabitants of that district. This point of duty being effected, . . .

Lieutenant-Colonel Tarleton was a brave, cruel man, regarded by his American opponents as a war criminal. His career does raise the question, how much evil is one permitted to do in the service of a good cause? In the case of Captain Walter Tygart of Tarleton's Legion, guilt was the trigger for his obsession. The human agent for his punishment was Mrs. Nelly Edwards, the witch of Inky Dell. "Edwards" was an appropriate name, recalling the memory of the New England Calvinist divine Jonathan Edwards, whose preachings of terror at Northampton in 1734-35 prefigured the Great Awakening inspired by John Wesley's colleague George Whitefield.

Since the disappearance of her hus-

band, Mrs. Nelly Edwards has been known as, and traded upon her reputation as a witch in the credulous community of Cumberland. Walter Tygart's fantasy is an intensification of but not unrelated to the superstitions of his society.

The main part of "The Witch Of Inky Dell" is set at the Cornwallis Arms on an afternoon of early June 1790. There has been a thunderstorm, and the drinkers of the Loyalist club can see smoke from the direction of Inky Dell. Walter Tygart arrives with the news that the witch has been burned to death, then relates his story to explain his three years' life in seclusion under suspicion of being mentally deranged. As he is the only witness to his tale, the reader can assume that its substance is the subjective world of Tygart's hallucinations.

According to Walter Tygart, on three successive occasions, meeting Mother Edwards at night after an evening's drinking, he was transformed into a black horse and ridden by her across the Tantramar marshes to a witches' congress at Fort Lawrence. In each of the three confrontations Tygart's behaviour was increasingly frantic and cruel. On the first, on horseback, he attempted to ride her down but Old Tarleton reared, throwing him off. The reader desiring a medical explanation for Tygart's delusions can assume concussion. On the second, on foot and armed with a club, he threatened to murder her. On the third, carrying a brace of pistols, he shot at her while being taunted — "your hand is out; it's some time now since you killed women and children, and besides, it's dark." Guilt for past cruelties has triggered Tygart's obsession, which takes the form of symbolic recapitulation and retribution. The cavalryman is now a horse, hag-ridden. The destination of the witch's ride, Fort Lawrence, built to oppose Britain's enemies in an earlier war (with the French, at Fort Beausejour), gives the regression a historical dimension. The latent sexual element, Tygart's ambivalent attitude to women, becomes overt at the end of his third ride with the witch turning herself into a beautiful girl when offering herself to him as wife, and his own assuming female attire to reach home after being left naked in the swamp where young colts were drowned. And finally, Tygart's lack of self-knowledge comes out in the scene when, in the presence of the witch as a simultaneously desirable woman and forbidden hag, his mind is turned to buried treasure, the quest for which will take him to his death.

"The Witch Of Inky Dell" is a successful short story because Haliburton, in taking as subject the guilt-haunted loyalist Walter Tygart, is aided by the gothic conventions, the morally ambiguous hero and the use of the irrational. Even the convention of distancing in time works to the final effect — "Poor Watt, the tiger, is long since dead" — for judgement is suspended to leave only pity at what Haliburton finds more inexplicable than witches, the dark dell in the mind of man.

Margaret Laurence's short story "Horses of the Night" is one of the eight Vanessa Macleod stories of *A Bird in the House*, 1970.[3] The story gains from the conventional bildungsroman context, for Vanessa learns in the process of growing up of the terrible gaps between human aspirations and the nature of things, and her unbalanced cousin Chris functions somewhat as the holy fool, his comments on the brutality of existence explicitly voicing a theme echoed elsewhere in the collection. But the story can make its statement on its own, and is worth close analysis for its treatment of madness.

Chris is introduced as he impinges on the consciousness of Vanessa Macleod, a sympathetic figure with whom the reader

can identify. Our sympathy is important: several writers, such as Margaret Atwood in "Polarities"[4] and Margaret Gibson Gilboord in "Considering Her Condition,"[5] have introduced emotionally disturbed characters as they impinge on normal characters whose "sanity" is so appalling that on the rebound the reader identifies with the mad figure. This, like dealing directly with disordered consciousness, creates technical difficulties for the writer working within realist conventions not found in Margaret Laurence's technique of offering a trusted consciousness to register madness.

Vanessa first meets her distant cousin when she is six and he is fifteen. Learning of his existence when told he is coming from the north to live at her grandfather's house and attend high school, Vanessa responds imaginatively by placing him in a "legendary winter country"; when he arrives and is criticized by her grandfather, she identifies with him as fellow-victim. Yet even at this age (the point of view is retrospective first person) she perceives that he responds to the verbal attack by absenting himself. At the time the perception is less important than the fellow-feeling, reinforced by his always treating her as an equal.

During his high school years Chris would sometimes baby-sit the young girl, and on these occasions they would create a collaborative fantasy of his home in Shallow Creek. A cabin made of living trees, and two riding horses (Duchess and Firefly) typify the benevolent; dinosaur tracks and bones from the mud of an ancient lake, the sinister.

Chris had hoped to become a civil engineer and build bridges, but during the Depression none of his relations had the money to send him to university so after graduation from high school he became a travelling salesman, always hopeful the new merchandise would sell. Finally he is forced to return to the overcrowded submarginal family farm, where Vanessa visits him and, camping out with him, hears his judgement on the starry heavens: they give evidence either of a pointless infinity of existence, or of having been created by an evil God. Chris's alienation and projection — the cosmos mirrors the reality he knows and has retreated from — is instinctively apprehended by Vanessa. She is not surprised that the apparent escape history provides when war breaks out fails him, and he is transferred from the army to the provincial mental hospital.

Vanessa acts as a bridge character to hold Chris within our orbit of sympathy and understanding not only by her affection for him, but also because we see in her traits that link her, and us, to him. Like Chris, she rejects drab reality in favour of fantasy and, when under pressure (such as the death of her father) she retreats to inner solitude. Sanity is not a state of being, it is a dynamic, a variety of responses to a multivocal reality. Chris could hear only one note, the metronome of monotonous horror. If insanity can be labelled a mood gone absolute, the reader can comprehend the absolute because he shares Vanessa's moods.

Chris's mind breaks contact with even the reality of his own body because reality is unbearable. If one looks for causes, they are numerous: the death of his father while he was young, childhood poverty, disappointed ambition, depression, war. All are necessary, but neither individually nor collectively are they sufficient to explain. Instead of explanation we are given a poetic image, for imagination can comprehend what reason cannot understand. Vanessa notes,

> some words came into my head, a single line from a poem I had once heard. I knew it referred to a lover who did not want the morning to come, but to me it had another meaning, a different relevance.
>
> Slowly, slowly, horses of the night —

The line first appeared in Ovid's *Amores*, I, 13, a poem in which the lover appeals to the sunrise to delay that he may lie longer in his love's soft arms, "lente currite, noctis equi." It took on more sombre overtones in the modified form Christopher Marlowe gave it in the closing scene of *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus*:

> O lente, lente currite, noctis equi!
> The stars move still, time runs, the clock will strike,
> The devil will come, and Faustus must be damm'd.

The adverb which Marlowe repeated for his pentameter line is in Vanessa's line, and helps us identify Chris's flaw. He has attained forbidden knowledge, and in his madness he has become an intrinsic symbol of the brutal pointlessness of reality.

Both Haliburton's "The Witch Of Inky Dell" and Laurence's "Horses of the Night" are successful literary treatments, within the narrative conventions chosen, of the theme of madness. In both the final effect is compassion and an unsettling awareness of the unintelligible on the frontiers of reason.

NOTES

1 T. C. Haliburton, *The Old Judge: or Life in a Colony*. London: Colburn, 1849; rpr. Ottawa: The Tecumseh Press, 1978.

2 Lieutenant-Colonel Banastre Tarleton, *A History Of The Campaigns of 1780 and 1781, In The Southern Provinces Of North America*. London: Cadell, 1787; rpr. New York Times and Arno Press, 1968.

3 Margaret Laurence, *A Bird in the House*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1970.

4 Margaret Atwood, *Dancing Girls and Other Stories*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1977.

5 Margaret Gibson Gilboord, *The Butterfly Ward*. Ottawa: Oberon Press, 1976.

TOM MIDDLEBRO'

JACQUES FERRON (1921-1985)

THE VAGABOND STORYTELLER in Jacques Ferron's short story, "Martine," is a kind of *grand seigneur*, who wanders the length and breadth of his land, giving it a little more substance, a little more style. Each night he conjures up for his listeners a world which is not the real world, but which nevertheless gives meaning to the one darkness has swallowed up. And when he and his kind cease their wanderings, the land, deprived of their tales and their art, falls into confusion once more. Jacques Ferron himself was just such a *grand seigneur*. A teller of tales, an impeccable stylist, a thinker of profound and subtle insights, he conferred on Quebec and its people, and on every individual or collective destiny he turned his attention to, a new consistency, a new life, and on every region of the human mind he chose to explore, new definition and new light. Great minds give coherence where there might otherwise have been none. With Ferron's passing the world has not fallen into confusion, but of those who knew him few could claim to have been unchanged by his presence, and all mourn deeply the loss of the wise, witty, humane and humble doctor who until recently moved among them. As for Quebec, it has been quick to acknowledge the void left by one of its best-loved, most influential literary figures, who, in the words of Réginald Martel, was until his premature death "the greatest of [our] living writers."

Outside of Quebec the greatness of the writer has tended to be obscured by the reputation of the political figure. In English Canada Ferron has been hailed as one of the major spokesmen of Quebec nationalism. He is remembered as a separatist, a one-time candidate for the

R.I.N., and as a humorist whose taste for the absurd and fondness for practical jokes led him to found the Rhinoceros Party. His role as mediator in the 1970 F.L.Q. crisis has also been stressed, and with few exceptions, media coverage has concentrated on dramatic and eye-catching details, which important though they are, should nevertheless be seen in a broader context. For in Ferron's life actions, convictions and writings are bound inextricably together and form one complex but movingly consistent whole. Jacques Ferron the political figure is as inseparable from Ferron the writer as he is from the medical physician. Ferron the doctor sought not only to heal bodies but to redeem lives, and the same compassion and profound concern for human dignity that distinguished his practice also inspired his political attitudes and informed his writing. Many of Ferron's characters are simple, humble folk or social outcasts — beggars, prisoners, tramps, the mentally deranged — individuals robbed of a dignity which he sets about restoring to them. And, similarly, his conviction that Quebec should be allowed to realize its goal of independence sprang from a desire to restore collective dignity where it had been lost.

Of his politics Ferron once said that they were incidental to his involvement as a writer, a secondary activity, a necessary consequence of the act of writing, and he pondered their intrusion into his work. He had come, in fact, to politics through literature, discovering, like so many Québécois writers of his generation, the precariousness of the language that was his medium and of the collectivity that constituted his readership. He came to envisage his writing as a means of bringing his troubled and uncertain country to some kind of certainty. Hence the overt polemics of a great deal of his work. But politics was for Ferron a burden. *La politique, hélas!* . . . Convinced that a writer had a very special role to play in the shaping of a collective consciousness, he dreamed, nevertheless, of being able to one day write in peace, without thought for Quebec, taking his country for granted as writers can in "normal countries." But that peace was not to be. The certainty he dreamed of was not achieved in his lifetime, and in recent years he had come to view his task as sadly incomplete and the destiny of his literary work as bound up inevitably with the destiny of his "unfinished" country. His was, he felt, in the final analysis, an unfulfilled work, whose ambitions for itself would only be realized in the writing of some future generation.

Politics, then, are inseparable from Ferron's writing, indeed intrinsic to it, a vital, if reluctant preoccupation, but not the most important feature of a literary work of quite remarkable breadth and range. Ferron has given us some of the most exquisite prose ever to be written in the French language, pages that ripple and sparkle with a delightful humour, as well as lyrical texts on birth and death, childhood and memory, that are among the most moving I have read. He has given us sensitive insights into the nature of insanity and passages of painful questioning on the relationship of the self to others, of the writing self to the whole man, or the subtle interactions between art and life. These latter considerations preoccupied him more and more of late, and his most recent work bears witness to the existence of interdepedent, now compatible, now warring selves, as well as to the growing weariness that characterized his last decade, a weariness harder to bear than death, because it had to be lived daily, whereas death did not.

Death, so often foreshadowed in his work, foretold even, with startling accuracy, death which he looked on as a friend, as life's final achievement, and which, in spite of everyone and every-

thing, he came in the end to desire, that death nevertheless took us all by surprise. Foreseen, dreaded — for his health was not good — and still totally unexpected when it came, it has left us bereft of a great mind and a very great man. Jacques Ferron's whole existence illuminated every life it touched. A light has gone out, but for all who knew him there remains a powerful afterglow, and we can rejoice in the one lasting manifestation of that existence, the more than thirty books — stories, novels, essays, plays — that constitute the literary testimony of the man. These books will live on, subject, of course, to the vagaries of literary after-life. They will be read and re-read, discovered and re-discovered. They are the beacons, great and small, that will sustain the afterglow.

BETTY BEDNARSKI

LAST PAGE

A stack of novels and stories has recently come this way, from Ivan Southall's intelligently written *A City Out of Sight* (Irwin, $12.95), an adventure story for older children, to Helen Garner's *The Children's Bach* (McPhee Gribble, n.p.), a cool analysis of domestic tensions in suburban Australia. For Garner's family-under-stress, music is a means of escape into meaning; for the author, it's a paradigm of form — "handfuls of notes," she calls arpeggios — and a means of orchestrating the stubborn isolations of each family member.

Among other Australian works are Barbara Hanrahan's *Annie Magdalene* (Academic, $8.75), a crisply crafted "autobiography" of an "obscure" woman's life, and new books by David Malouf, Christopher Koch, and Roger McDonald. After their earlier works (*An Imaginary Life*, *The Year of Living Dangerously*, and *1915*), these new ones disappoint. Malouf's *Antipodes* (Academic, $26.50) brings together thirteen stories, of dimly troubled adolescence and persistently troubled age; every sentence shows a writer conscious of shape and image, the poetics of cadence and detail — indeed, the stories all close in ringing eloquence — but that's the problem: a question of *voice*, unadapted to the particulars of each separate narrative. McDonald's *Slipstream* (Univ. of Queensland, $17.95) is biographical in form, the story-life of a famous aviator, but it struggles to keep its balance between realism and conventionality. Koch's *The Doubleman* (Academic, $19.95) is more appealing in conception than in execution: the story of a rock/folk group, caught by the influence/presence/spell of a music teacher from the group's childhood, the novel tells of the competing personalities and inevitable disintegration of the group. More captivatingly, it enquires into the attraction of fable, fantasy, and other-self shadows. The trouble with the book is that the fabulous abyss and the chasm of popular culture quarrel with rather than corraborate each other. Perhaps there's a deliberate attempt here to juxtapose competing forms, but the reason for doing so (the false fullness of contemporary life? the vanity of human wishes? the illusion of truth in shape alone?) is not, finally, clear.

The Tenth Man (Lester & Orpen Dennys, $14.95) is a different kind of book in intention. It is Graham Greene's "lost" novel from his MGM days in the 1940's, printed here for the first time, together with two other "ideas for filmscripts" from Greene's trunk of scrappets and bits. The novel is a typical G. Greene-B. Moore morality fable in the loose guise of a thriller; it tells of prisoners-of-war who draw lots to escape death, of a landed rich man who is chosen, and of a poor man who takes the other's place in exchange for the riches, which he wills to his sister. The novel questions the honour of such a choice, and follows the subsequent action — and the masks, both honourable and otherwise — that affect the later lives of the now-rich sister and the now-poor (but ennobled, ennobled!) rich man. It might make a good film. What lifts it as a book above its own conventions of contrast and reversal is Greene's consummate skill with the English sentence. It *reads* well. And so it entertains.

Lovers of Frank Tuohy will find in *Collected Stories* (Macmillan, $22.95) a reprint of his three earlier volumes. "Detachment" is perhaps the best work to describe these observations of social intercourse. But it affects the style, and makes everything observed seem faintly distant. A sentence like this from "The License" — "Adolescence still made Peter's voice thrum like a slack guitar string" — just doesn't convince; it's slack itself, a sign that the *intellectual* urge to invent is working overtime.

Lydia Wevers, in the fourth series of *New Zealand Short Stories* (Oxford, $13.95), has brought together 27 contemporary stories, emphasizing the variety of current practice. There are some fine writers here: the comic Yvonne du Fresne, the political Joy Cowley, the adept Vincent O'Sullivan and Keri Hulme and C. K. Stead, whose "A New Zealand Elegy" is a more brutal, effective account of adolescence abruptly ending than is anything in Tuohy or Malouf. *Some Other Country*, ed. Marion McLeod and Bill Manhire (Allen & Unwin, $24.95, pa. $12.95) is another welcome anthology; 22 stories that are New Zealand's "best," from Mansfield's "At the Bay" (1922) onwards. Among them are striking parables by Frank Sargeson and Maurice Duggan, an illusory fabular reality by Janet Frame, and Keri Hulme's moving, discordant, stylistically masterful "Hooks and Feelers." Fourteen of the writers here are also in Wever's book, emphasizing the contemporaneity of the New Zealand tradition, the currency of skill. One of these writers is Owen Marshall, who is a welcome find. His *The Day Hemingway Died and other stories* has coincidentally appeared (John McIndoe, $13.50); the 24 stories here record what Marshall calls a "divided" world — a world split (often inside individuals) between what seems logical and what happens anyway. There is a story of a boy mustering his resistance to petty torment, only to have the resistance made meaningless by the accidental death of the tormentor; stories of ineffective ministers and less effective lovers; the title, which probes the domestic desperations that come to mean more to a student of Hemingway than does the suicide of the man. I think my favourite story is "The Paper Parcel," a joyful memoir of a fancy dress school dance, done up in mock dismay. The narrator, telling of his dreams of Napoleon and piratical heroism, watches his classmates turn up as Captain Marvel and Bo Peep; but *his* mother makes *him* dress up "originally," as a parcel, with stickers plastered all over the brown paper: "This Side Up." "Fragile." One of them says "Handle with Care" and slips, in the heat of dancing, below his belt. He flees in humiliation, but only so far, declaring his resistance to the past, still dreaming of his Josephine. "Next time it would be different," he can see: — a truth the stories variously acknowledge, with understanding and affection, a truth that lasts until the next time, and the next dismay, and the time after that.

W.N.

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W.N.

contributors

Betty BEDNARSKI teaches at Dalhousie, Tom MIDDLEBRO' at Carleton, Graham LYNCH at the University of Ottawa, Roderick HARVEY at Medicine Hat College, Graham DOWDEN at Fraser Valley College, Kenneth MEADWELL at the University of Winnipeg, Marjorie BODY at the University of Calgary and Laurence MATHEWS at Memorial. Doug BEARDSLEY lives in Victoria, David REITER in Kamloops, Geraldine RUBIA in Mount Pearl, Nfld., and J. D. CARPENTER, Brian HENDERSON, Maureen CHILL, Clifford G. HOLLAND, Donna BENNETT, Robin ENDRES, Bruce PIRIE, and Ellen QUIGLEY in Toronto; Eva SEIDNER, Germaine WARKENTIN, Frank WATT, and Ian Ross ROBERTSON are at the University of Toronto, Ann MESSENGER at Simon Fraser, James MULVIHILL, Thomas GERRY, Dick HARRISON, Paul DUBE, Peter KLOVAN, Patricia DEMERS, Paula HART at the University of Alberta, and Avrum MALUS, Diane ALLARD, and Maria VAN SUNDERT at the Université de Sherbrooke. Carole GERSON, Lloyd ABBEY, George WOODCOCK, and Dorothy Anne MACDONALD live in Vancouver, Des WALSH in St. John's, Elizabeth ALLEN in Lemburg, Sask., Linda ROGERS in Chemainus, B.C., and Florence McNEIL in Delta, B.C.; Paul SOCKEN and D. W. RUSSELL teach at the University of Waterloo, Ron MILES at Cariboo College, Neil BESNER at Mount Royal College, Jørn CARLSEN at the University of Aarhus, Denmark, Colin NICHOLSON at the University of Edinburgh, Lorna IRVINE at George Mason University, and Robert THACKER at St. Laurence University; Ron HATCH, Craig TAPPING, and Roger SEAMON are at U.B.C., Chris JOHNSON at the University of Manitoba, Thomas TAUSKY at the University of Western Ontario, John FERNS at McMaster and Maurice YACOWAR at Brock.