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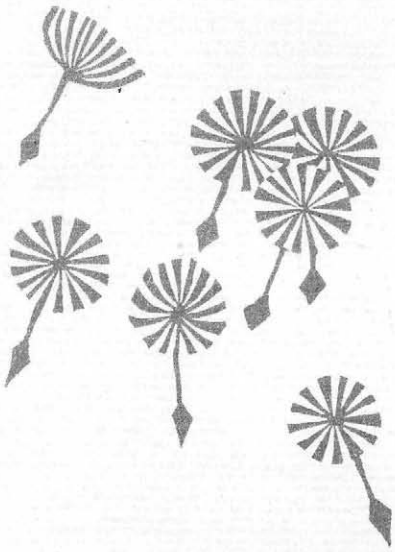

POPULAR CULTURE

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editorial

ALPHABET SOUP

SOME THINGS this country makes of itself:

A for Bryan Adams, who took alouettes under his wing, so to speak, and gave Canadian music a beat and a conscience;

B for the endemic Bank ads, which star everybody (Bonhommes Carnaval and Sept-heures may be booked for next season, or negotiating a contract);

C for Coyote the trickster, in all his forms; and other icons of measurement: cups, both Stanley and Grey; the Chautauqua and Charlebois; Calendar art; Louis Cyr, the strongest man alive; and "Snap Crackle Pop" (a line making Leo Kennedy possibly the most widely quoted Canadian poet ever, including the creator of Sam McGee);

D for Direct Mail Advertising (I'm partial to one magazine that reached me recently, promising "Werewolves, Death Stars, Lobster Biologists, A. J. Casson, Inuit shamans, Farley Mowat . . . and You" — most just print my name in computer type and suggest I *may* already be a millionaire);

E for the West Edmonton Mall: the more said about it, the bigger it gets (like Pinocchio's nose? They grow tales as tall in Olds and Grande Prairie as in Harbour Grace and Dildo — anyway, what ever happened to Eaton's catalogue?);

F for Frum, the Forum, the Farm Broadcast, *My Fur Lady*, and *Fraggle Rock*: the voices of airwave and screen — Les Plouffe, Fundy's fiddles — and the facsimile voices of Rich Little;

G for Green Gables and the Great White North, gauges of cultural change, perhaps;

H for Hailey, Hollywood South, and all those actors-in-exile (Alexis, Raymond, Leslie, Mary P.), who fill cocktail chatter with claims to Canadian notoriety; also for *Hockey Night in Canada* (notoriety at home); and for

"Any Hallowe'en Handouts," that decorous phrase of my childhood, before "Trick or Treat" came along with its militant dualism;

I for Imports, of course: the finite number allowed each football team, and the indeterminate number the Incomparable Atuk stopped at the Border by merchandising Canadian junk instead;

J for *Jacob Two-Two*, Don Messer's *Jubilee*, and all those other testaments to endurance and longevity; Jackrabbit Johannsen, Jack-Armstrong-the-All-American-Boy, who turned out (like Superman) to be Canadian-born;

K for Klondike Days (live action from the past) and W.L.M.K. (same thing);

L for Lacrosse (the national game that no-one plays), for Laura Secord (the national heroine that everyone thinks invented chocolate), Little Theatre (the national pastime that no-one's willing to pay to see), and Letters to the Editor (the national pastime);

Mc for McMarketing (*see*: Imports);

M for Memorabilia (Mounties, maples, Massey-Fergusons, Old Montreal);

N for "Necessary," as in "Conscription if necessary, but not necessarily . . . ," and other phrases that fall from political lips *chez nous* with Niagara's nicety ("Fuddle Duddle," "Sacred Trust," "The 20th Century belongs . . . ," "*Vive* . . . ");

O for Oscar Peterson, motif and improvisations; out — and about;

P for Pyrogies, Pierre, and Gilbert Parker, three of several halves to a peculiarly Canadian equation;

Q for Harlequins, and the vicariousness of their passive quests for passion;

R for the Rockies (perennial bestsellers); for Richard Rohmer, who makes bestsellerism sell; and for Royal Commissions, by which we perennially sell solutions;

S for Screech, Scrod, Selye's Stress; and *Seeing Things*, which managed to turn the Group of Seven into the villains of a murder-mystery, and named a smalltown Ontario librarian "Emily Carr";

T for Tea and Takeouts at the CN Tower, that centre of Cuisine Canada: a menu of fiddleheads and tandoori chicken, won ton and wild rice, arctic char and alligator pie (a little reminder that nursery rhymes are food for thought), and the flaky pastry of Madame Benoit;

U for Usque, forgotten between the seas in *A mari usque ad mare* — a word

I've long suspected had an intertextual appeal to those usquebaugh-toting forefathers Sir John A. and his cronies;

V for Victoria Day — and Victoria, for that matter: both testaments in their way to the power of history to shape leisure time, and to the power of leisure-brokers to reshape the image of history;

W for Weather (Wendigo and friend: "mon pays, ce n'est pas un pays, c'est l'hiver");

X for Calixa Lavallée, who put the O in Canada;

Y for Ypres, a solemn reminder midst all this irony that history involves shared memories, often recorded in the place names of desperate moments — Châteauguay, Batoche, Vimy, Dieppe — and that those who acquire a new nation acquire a cultural history along with it, even if sometimes it has to be learned before it can be shared: still, poppies blow in Flanders Fields;

Z for Mazo de la Roche, who made Jalna; for Gzowski, who made This Country in the Morning lively to be awake in, and still keeps it on Side; and for the Zipper: proof positive of the teeth in Canadian inventiveness.

What's the point in such a list? Nothing much. Just to say that Entertainment strives sometimes to be no more than that, and nothing less. Which means quality comes in different forms, and deserves to be recognized in all of them. And that some entertainments come to be shared. When this happens, a vocabulary of images and allusions, metaphors and catch-phrases, builds into the common word-stock of a whole culture. Literature makes use of it; people hear it, even when not listening for it; tone matters, and is understood. As the thriller writer Anthony Hyde declaimed, in a recent *Saturday Night*:

> If I write a novel set on the far side of the moon, it will still be a Canadian novel. I cannot write anything other than a Canadian novel. I was born and brought up in the shadow of the bloody Peace Tower, I've lived here all my life. I watch Barbara Frum every night — if that doesn't get stamped onto my fiction somehow, it's the country's fault, not mine.

There it is, eh? The very air of recognition. The little things that stir into an alphabet of understanding.

W.N.

A FINE ROMANCE, MY DEAR, THIS IS

Audrey Thomas

"Does the man in this book have hawklike features?"

"Aquiline. He has aquiline features. And dark hair, as usual."

"Same thing," Alice said. "A fancy name for hawk-like. What colour are his eyes?"

"He's blind. He wears dark glasses all the time."

"He's *blind*? They're never handicapped. He won't stay blind, you wait and see. That's just to get Nurse Prue to Ceylon."

Intertidal Life

IT'S PROBABLY NOT the "done thing" to quote from oneself but I began reading Harlequins at about the same time I started on the second draft of *Intertidal Life*. The store at the government wharf at North Galiano has a free library of books discarded by weekenders and summer people and, as one might suspect, most of these books fall into the category of popular fiction, books by Richard Ludlum, Harold Robbins, Arthur Hailey, mysteries, romances. I had never read a romance until I went to Galiano. My mother and the women I baby-sat for when I was a teen-ager read the *Ladies Home Journal*, the *Women's Home Companion*, *Redbook*, and the serials in *The Saturday Evening Post*. If they had romantic fantasies they kept them well hidden and frankly I think they were much more inclined to fantasize about post-war kitchens and RCA Home Entertainment Centres. I read the Bobbsey Twins, Nancy Drew, Charles Dickens and later, in plain wrappers, books like *God's Little Acre* and *The Chinese Room*. I had plenty of romantic daydreams but I didn't read romances. So I picked up a couple of Harlequins from the store, more out of curiosity than anything else and my daughter and I read them out loud to one another. The first two were Nurse books — *Nurse Sally's Last Chance* and *Nurse Prue Goes to Ceylon* and they were pretty much as I expected. The girls were pretty without being beautiful (the rival girls, the scheming connivers were the beautiful ones); they had, however, vulnerable mouths and lovely eyes and were decent girls, nice girls, who, in the end, won through to their hearts' desire (a man with hawk-like features

and an income of £5,000 a year — or I should say the 1950's equivalent of Mr. Darcy's income). These books seemed innocent enough, silly, but innocent and the sexual awakening of these girls (we finished those two and went back for more, and more) was described in such flowery language, often using images from nature — fires, floods, acts of god, clouds, rainbows, etc., etc. — that it was great fun reading bits out loud.

> Something within her seemed to melt, to deliquesce,[1] a sensation like vertigo seized her; she felt as if she were adrift in a strange, multi-coloured cloud, frightened and yet filled with delight. (*Next Stop Gretna*, Harlequin 1970)
>
> Oh Symond, please, it's more than enough. I only want what you want, and it's been that way for some time. (*The Black Knight*, Harlequin, 1977)
>
> This was madness, Diana thought wildly and fought with all her strength. Then somehow she was free. She swallowed convulsively.
>
> "But how can you behave like this when you are going to marry Felicena?" The tears fell.
>
> He frowned. "Who says so?"
>
> "Everyone knows."
>
> "Except me." (*A Kiss in a Gondola*, Harlequin, 1969)
>
> Debby looked very young and very vulnerable lying in the warmed bed with the elevated feet and the protective cradle around her. She was on plasma and saline, and according to Kevin's notes on her chart was on oxygen inhalation and morphine injections. (*Nurse Deborah*, Harlequin, 1970; Perhaps this one should have been re-named *High as a Kite*?)

So, these girls started out with careers, usually but not always in the bud stage, they were perky and smart, often fought with the hero — usually only verbally in the early stages — experienced strange unfamiliar sensations whenever the hero was around, symptoms similar to a heavy attack of "flu" but which they came to recognize, after many setbacks and much anguish as love love love. Often, as in the case of Nurse Deborah, they suffered an accident, nothing *disfiguring* you understand, and, through approaching unconsciousness — or the haze of oxygen inhalation with morphine injections — they heard the hero cry out "Darling!"

They meet, give up their careers, marry the hero and presumably live happily ever after. For whatever the setbacks (and Harlequin romances are real comedies of errors, everything from mistaking the brilliant, wealthy architect for an ordinary worker on a building site to mistaking the heroine for a boy) the Harlequin Girl, like the mythical Mountie, always got her man. This is one of the dogmas of Harlequin Romance — there is *always* a happy ending. The settings of these books were usually exotic, Greece, Italy, and Spain being really popular — but nothing east of Athens unless the hero is a caucasian working in Saudi Arabia or

Africa, in other words, as the English would say (and these books originated in England) "no wogs." Scotland was also considered exotic, Holland was, and is, *very* popular, and hospitals were exotic as well. (Mainly because of all those handsome, unattached surgeons running around or, rather, striding through corridors, their white coats flying behind them.)

We read them and we laughed, tried to see who could find the worst image (I won with "she melted against him like butter on a hot biscuit") but spent most of our reading time on the "good stuff," the stuff that would excite a child's imagination and enlarge her love of language: *The Wind in the Willows*, *Alice in Wonderland*, C. S. Lewis, Tolkein, the Beatrix Potter books, Edward Lear.

The old romances were touted as "heartwarming" and they were so obviously silly that I couldn't see that they were doing us, either of us, any harm. It did bother me that the heroine, if she wasn't a nurse, worked always as a secretary or an assistant of some kind; she was never an executive, she was never actually *in charge* of anything, or nothing larger than a hospital ward. The hero, whether doctor, lawyer (never Indian Chief), architect, or artist was definitely in charge of his life; he was successful. If he had to work for a living he had worked hard and had arrived.

The heroes and heroines, whatever their names (and an entire essay could be written on the names of romance characters. Henry James would love it. How do you like Jason Carver, for a famous artist? Almost as good as Caspar Goodwood, wouldn't you say?) always played the same roles. Like Holiday Inns (whose motto is "we never surprise you") or McDonald's hamburgers, they were absolutely predictable. They are like the cheapest panty hose which declare on the package, "one size fits all." In a recent guideline for the writing of a Harlequin Romance ("our original and longest-running romance line") the editors say:

> The plot should not be grounded in harsh realities — Romance readers want to be uplifted, not depressed — but at the same time should make the reader (and "the reader" is always female) feel that such a love is possible if not probable. (Why the "but"? They seem to imply that love is more probable when grounded in harsh realities. Probably just a slip of the word processor.)

SO THE READER KNEW, when she went into the drugstore or supermarket or second-hand bookstore that if she bought a Harlequin Romance she was guaranteed a "good read" with a happy ending. And because of this an interesting psychological phenomenon took place. *The reader knew more than the heroine.* The heroine might be out on a sheep ranch in New Zealand or in a fabulous villa on a Greek island but she was crying her eyes out because she

thought the hero didn't love her. The heroine was extremely confused, about her own feelings and the feelings of the hero. She sorts out her own long before she ever understands that the hero is in love with her. The hero, who is recognizable to the reader the minute he steps on stage, *is* in love with the heroine, and the reader, curled up in bed or in an easy chair, knows that all the rudeness, hostility, and patronizing remarks are just a cover for the growing awareness of his own vulnerability where the heroine is concerned. ("'I was a swine,' he admitted apologetically.") The hero — his remarks, his general attitude — makes the heroine feel young, foolish, inadequate, and very very vulnerable on her part. ("vulnerable" is a very common word in these romances, as is melting, even when disguised as "deliquesce." All the heroines eventually deliquesce.) The reader, who knows the ending, feels superior to the heroine even if the reader is sitting in a shabby chair in a room she doesn't like married to a man who is neither a prince nor charming. At least *she* knows where she stands!

One might mention at this point that we do expect, when buying or borrowing a detective novel, that the book will have a pre-ordained, "positive," if not exactly happy, ending — the murderer will be found out, justice will triumph. And if we like murder mysteries we probably have a favourite writer — Naigo Marsh, Dorothy Sayers, Simenon, Nicholas Freeling, Agatha Christie — and even a favourite detective. I can't think of anyone who would be ashamed to admit to reading detective stories or even adventure or intrigue. These books are read by both men and women and, I would guess, men and women from all walks of life. Yet who among our acquaintances (and it would have to be a woman, males simply don't read Harlequins) would admit to reading Harlequin Romance, or even some of the newer, presumably more modern, more "realistic" lines — Harlequin Presents, Harlequin Temptation, Harlequin Intrigue (a kind of "detective" story), Harlequin American Intrigue. Who would write her name on the inside of the book under the statement: "This Harlequin Romance belongs in the personal library of . . . N. . . ."? Yet there are millions of women who do, 20 million Harlequin readers in the U.S. alone, and, in our country, Harlequins account for 28 per cent of all paperbacks sold![2] Harlequins are translated into twelve languages and sold in 98 countries. That's a lot of women; that's a lot of books. As Bob Dylan would say, "Somethin's Happening Here." But why? Asking why is becoming almost as popular as reading the things. And not only asking why but asking the question I began to ask myself, as Harlequin introduced its new lines and the action became more violent as well as more explicitly sexual (but never *described* too explicitly of course. He touches her "moist femininity"; she feels his "force" pressed against her) — are these books doing actual harm?

In her interesting examination of the Harlequin industry, *Love's $weet Return* (which was originally written as a Ph.D. thesis I believe) Margaret Ann Jensen seems at first to take the position that the criticism of romance fiction is unfair

and sexist "based as it is on acceptance of males and their fantasies as the measure of worth." This may or may not be so — it's certainly something to think about. Is criticism of romances just one more example of the general put-down of literature written by women (and 99 per cent of Harlequins are written by women)? If so, the criticism, that they are "Trash," doesn't seem to inhibit all these millions of women who snap up Harlequins every month, as soon as they appear on the shelves, or sooner if they belong to the Harlequin Reader Service — "take these four books and Tote Bag FREE" — and I assume that they do this quite openly, don't hide them in bottom drawers beneath the underwear or sweaters, as men often do with pornography; I assume they don't rush home and wrap them in brown paper. I doubt if they see the reading of romance fiction as an act of defiance on their part ("you can call this trash but I'll read it anyway"); I doubt if husbands feel threatened if they see their wives looking at them over the top of *Dear Conquistador* or *A Kiss in a Gondola.* I doubt if Harlequins have ever been named in divorce suits and yet some women, what Jensen calls "heavy" users, read as many as sixty books of popular fiction (romance readers read all kinds of popular fiction) a *month.* They are addicts. Most of these women are full-time housewives/mothers, women in the labour force, elderly women who don't get out much. Reading these books is what Jensen calls a "removal activity." This is an activity which "allows one to be physically present but mentally absent" and is "one of the few luxuries that women can afford to give themselves." (They come as low as 25¢ at the Sally Ann and I am sure there are other places, like the store on Galiano, where they are traded or given away for free. Jensen tells us that McDonald's gave them as a gift one Mother's Day and they have been known to turn up in boxes of laundry soap or sanitary napkins.)

If a housewife/mother sits down to watch television when anybody else is home the chances are pretty good that she won't be able to watch the program of her choice. If she buys something sweet and self-indulgent (jelly do-nuts, a box of *Turtles*) she'd better eat it sitting on a bench in the park. But supposing she has something that *she* wants and nobody else wants? Why then she's home free. Her husband isn't interested in Harlequins nor are her children (and anyway teen-aged girls now have their own romance lines to choose from, *Wildfire* "for girls 12 to 15 years old," *Sweet Dreams* and *First Love* "for 11-16 year old girls," and several others. This is like giving young girls root-beer flavoured chapstick. They'll get addicted to having something on their lips and be buying lipstick at $4.50 before you know it). Traditionally men have always been able to "get away" physically. Work took them away during the week and their leisure activities either had to be done away from home (golf, fishing, "pub night") or were dangerous ("don't touch Daddy's table saw!"). And even when families were all for mother having a "room of her own" it rarely worked out that way (unless it were a sewing room or laundry room). Read Doris Lessing's

"To Room 19" to see to what terrible extremes a woman will go to have privacy and peace; read Alice Munro's "The Office." So women have to "make walls," to do, as one Harlequin ad puts it, their "disappearing act." I don't think romance readers care one bit that the situations are repetitive or even, all claims to the contrary with the new lines, that they have very little to do with real life. They hold something in their hands that is not only cheap (and therefore a forgiveable personal indulgence on mother's part) but easily recognizable by the rest of the family as non-threatening. I know that satisfied readers do write in to the Harlequin company ("Thank you for bringing romance back to me. J. W., Tehachape, Calif." "Harlequins are magic carpets . . . away from pain and depression . . . away to other people and other countries one might never know otherwise, H.R., Akron, Ohio") and give an assortment of reasons why they are so satisfied. But underneath it all they know that they can sit down, put their feet up, keep an eye on the kids or the oven, and indulge in something that is uniquely theirs, something safe, yet fun, something they like which doesn't have to be shared.

SO ARE THEY HARMLESS or maybe even *helpful* to women? (I'm not talking about the women who *write* them. As Jensen points out, the successful Harlequin writers, "anathema of feminists," make as much as corporate executives and are doing what they like doing at the same time.) I no longer think they are harmless. I think, in fact, they are more and more approaching pornography, if they have not already arrived. If by pornography I mean stories containing sex and violence then the new Harlequins are full of it. They are ostensibly "new compelling stories of passionate romance for today's women." But when I started looking at the newer ones — and I think the change started in the mid-1970's — I was appalled at the element of fear and violence, if not actual violence, that occurs. In *Duel of Desire* (1979) by Charlotte Lamb (!), the heroine, Deborah, who was left an orphan when her parents died in a fire and she was found crying in the garden in her pram, is a high-profile well-paid, executive assistant to Alex St. James, a music-industry executive. The plot is the usual far-fetched nonsense. Suffice it to say that Alex and Deborah (who gradually discovers, to her horror, that she loves this arrogant womanizer) ends up having to spend several days in an upstairs bedroom of Alex's mother's French farmhouse. Mama has left because of a flood threat which becomes a reality after Alex and Deborah arrive. Alex at one point kisses Deborah so hard he bites through the skin on the inside of her mouth, he pulls her hair, he shouts "you lying little bitch," says "damn you" several times, scares her by his violent behaviour and yet she agrees to marry him — because she has fallen in love with

him! Later on he explains that it was her seeming coldness towards him that "drove" him to such behaviour. Also, at the end, when he suggests that now she's his wife she'll have to find another job and she doesn't see it, he frowns. "Damn you, my wife isn't working, especially in the same office as myself." And he uses, as an excuse, the rationalization, "How the hell would I get any work done." Kiss (passionately) and fade out. This is really old wine in new bottles. The language is coarser and hero and heroine go to bed at least once (*de rigueur* now in the more spicy lines, Harlequin Presents and Harlequin Temptation as well as Harlequin Intrigue) but *he* is always in the power position, seems in fact to be ruder, cruder, and nastier than ever. Jensen says "concern about economic security, loneliness, powerlessness and sexual violence against women pervades romances" but then you get the inevitable happy ending.

I have read perhaps two dozen of the "modern" romances and they scare me. The happy ending simply doesn't make up for all the fear. Jensen says "the romances we get are a product of literary history, contemporary social changes, and the corporate drive for profitability." It's that last bit we should pay attention to. Harlequins were slipping financially so they "modernized" the plots a little, followed current trends in T.V. and film, and now their sales are up again. Harlequin's heroines are older but not necessarily wiser. They still melt under the aggressive sexuality of the hero. They may have wonderful careers but they give them up at the drop of a panty. I have *yet* to read one when the heroine is going to continue to work after marriage. The hero, who wants her at any price, may say she can work but she, on her own (ha ha), has decided she's fed up with the lonely life at the top. She is, in short, a R.E.A.L. woman again.

I don't know how one can stop all this. It worries me that millions of women are buying the violence and abuse, the *humiliation*, along with the happy ending. He didn't really mean it; I drove him to it anyway. I'm still thinking about all this and have no real conclusion. There's a lot of anger against women right now, perhaps more than there has ever been (who gets beaten up or verbally abused when a man loses his job! It's often "women and children first," not the boss). *Women* are writing these books for other women to read. You've come a long way baby, sure you have. A long way down. These aren't really "light reading" any more and the messages coming through are very disturbing. I have no answers at the minute, only questions. Why are women exploiting other women in this way and what's to be done about it all?

NOTES

[1] In the old Harlequins you got a lot of this sort of language; one didn't "mow the lawn" for instance, one "trimmed the verdant sward." Or the gardener did; the gardener trimmed the verdant sward. This isn't the world of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*; Harlequin heroes were, until very recently, rich, rich, rich. Was that, to

the Harlequin reader, the moral equivalent of my mother looking at the ads for Kelvinators and Wallace Sterling?

[2] These figures and many of the quotations (identified as such) are from Margaret Ann Jensen, *Love's Sweet Return: The Harlequin Story* (Toronto: The Women's Press, 1984).

AT THE OCEAN'S VERGE AGAIN

Ralph Gustafson

Everyone on the beach carries the seeds of
immortality,
Everyone. It is more than provision for singular
thanksgiving,
The mortal derivations are of extravagant
proportion:
Pitched footballs, frisbees caught
underleg,
High kites, all for joyfulness
like churchbells;
And something for something else: chewinggum
transistors,
Incorporated squattage and abandoned
beercans.
Tolerance is the lowest virtue
of goodness.
(*Helpless Jesus loves them, this*
I guess.)
I concentrate on a green and orange
spread
Umbrella and the fat girl emerged
from the ocean,
Her dowsed horse downside up,
the arriving
Wave coming waterworthy jump
and scream.

THE UNICORN

David Day

1

It was man's solitude
that made the unicorn white
Once it was a stallion
But it became pale and magical
with wanting
Grew that long, elegant horn

But you must know
It was not nets and arrows
that destroyed it
It was the end of desire

When the warmth of the maiden's voice
filled the forest darkness
The unicorn was drawn

Slowly, painfully, it came
to the virgin
beneath the broad-leafed tree

Rested the long, slender head
upon that maid's lap

And there at her caress
Unicorn became a heavy mist
Pale beyond possibility
A breath of wind caught it

The unicorn vanished

2

As a child, I heard the tale
I suppose I knew even then
that some men were born unicorns

For some — for me
I knew women were fatal

So let me warn you now
Should we meet
in a narrow street
on a still night

I want no pretence
of innocence from you

You see, I will not
be trapped

I will not be fooled by your youth
Dressed in some graceful childish party dress
Filled with all that calculated
sudden school-girl surprise

You see, I intend to survive
And despite our encounter

The unicorn will go free
Remain immaculate. Pure

3

And you? What of you?

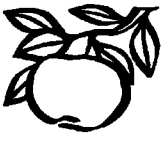
Oh sad. How sad
Such a pretty girl, they will say
Then turn about once
and walk away

And that is all. That is all
I thank you one, I thank you all

By my just hand
By the white shaft
Of the horn-handled knife

You will fall. And fall
And fall

A pity my little princess
You will never reach
the ball



HOUSEBOUND

John Barton

It isn't virtue that makes him
wash the dishes piled
high by others round the pantry sink;

God knows, he'd rather climb
toward some peak in the Coastal Range,
muscles hardening against granite and the fear

of falling, his protection failing,
the utter gravity
of the chasm he dreams he must risk

snapping the fickle ropes that tethered
unexpectedly to this world.
Instead, through a small

pane of glass he scavenged,
fitted during a free
moment into the chained front door,

he eyes the mountains crystallizing
through mist shining across the inlet,
the dish rag his left hand clenches

drooling soapily on the mat.
Crooked in his arm, his colicky infant squints,
whimpers, and pulls his whiskers,

her discomfort drawing him back down the passage
until the half-light
of a midwinter kitchen appears

to soothe her;
the rice porridge whose secret he's perfected
belches in its happy pan.

The hours calve little transformation;
the days seem to eddy past.
Who knows what form of man will one day slip

through the hands determining this household,
a coiled rope
hanging in his gentle grasp?

TALL TALES IN THE FICTION OF W. O. MITCHELL

O. S. Mitchell

THROUGHOUT HIS LIFE W. O. Mitchell has been influenced in various ways by the tall tale tradition of the west. As a child in Weyburn, Saskatchewan, he recalls listening to the tall tales of his Grandmother and his Uncle Jim.[1] During the Depression he worked as a farm hand and door-to-door salesman of magazines, insurance, and encyclopedias. He was fascinated by the tall talk and tales of the working men and drifters. By the 1940's he was consciously collecting material for his writing from the people of the small western communities he lived in, particularly Castor and New Dayton (where he was principal of the schools) and High River. At brandings and rodeos, on fishing and hunting trips, in the towns' beer parlours and shops, and on his daily visits to the post office he worked what he calls his "trap line." The High River post office was particularly productive for it was a community gathering place that drew people from all the social and professional strata of the town. He spent a few hours of most week days in the room lined with little hinged aluminum boxes or outside on the heavy fossil-studded limestone steps discussing the current local topics, listening to gossip, and trading stories. Here he caught much of his raw material (dialect, "salty" expressions, character traits, and incidents) for his weekly radio episodes of *Jake and the Kid*.[2]

The tall tales and talk of the Saskatchewan prairies and Alberta foothills became an important element in his writing, and, in the mid-1960's, he began to develop what has become his second career, professional tall-tale teller. In a way he was reviving not only the oral tradition of tall tales but also a family tradition. His grandfather and father were both known in their days as elocutionists.[3] His mother hoped he would carry on this tradition and, when he was 13, she sent him to an elocution school where he first began to learn the tricks of this trade.[4] As well as reading from his Jake stories and novels he developed what might be called "reminiscential tall-tales" — stories growing in part out of childhood memories but embellished and exaggerated into humorous tales (such as "Melvin Arbuckle: Great Canadian" in which four boys, attempting to build an underground fort, blow up half of Melvin's backyard trapping his grandfather in the

backhouse).[5] In the past two decades he has given hundreds of readings, or, more accurately, performances, across Canada and more recently in Europe and the United States. His *Jake and the Kid* radio series gave him a reputation as western Canada's "local humorist" (a label which he loathes because he feels it dismisses the universal and serious intent of his work) and this reputation has been bolstered by his performances on radio, television, and the reading circuit (universities, schools, clubs, professional association meetings, and conferences). As a performer he has become very much like one of the first characters he created, Jake Trumper the "creative liar."

The tall-tale influence on Mitchell, then, has gone full circle. This oral tradition fascinated him as a child and became a main ingredient in his written work and now many of these literary tales are drawn on for his performances. But his tales and performances are not simply "local humour"; underlying his use of the tall tale in *Jake and the Kid*, *Who Has Seen the Wind*, and *The Vanishing Point* are some very serious intentions.

THE JAKE AND THE KID stories first started to appear in the early 1940's in *Maclean's*. His second published work, "You Gotta Teeter"[6] was followed by about fifteen more stories (in *Maclean's* and the old New York *Liberty*) which formed the genesis of the CBC radio series, *Jake and the Kid*. This series began in June 1950 and ran for six years. In all, Mitchell wrote some 200 Jake scripts. In 1961 Macmillan of Canada published *Jake and the Kid*, a collection of 13 of the stories published by *Maclean's* and *Liberty*.

The important role played by the tall tale tradition in the Jake stories is indicated by Peter Francis's (the first CBC producer of the Jake series) repeated requests for tall tales: "I hope there will be always a tall story in each script" and, "Don't forget to give Jake frequent tall stories — we always get good comments on them."[7] Some of the tall tale characteristics which surface in these stories include a first-person narrative frame (the Kid narrates the tales of Jake's heroic exploits), use of the vernacular and dialect juxtaposed with civilized or sophisticated language (particularly Jake's to that of female characters and various urban and eastern greenhorns), language shot through with earthy images and curse, mixture of realistic detail and surrealistic exaggeration, lying battles and boasting contests (particularly between Jake and Old Man Gatenby), and the tall tale hero-teller, a giant character who claims to have accomplished extraordinary feats. Jake, for example, invented hay wire, invented the buffalo jumping pound thereby saving Chief Weasel Tail's band from starvation, "made Chief Poundmaker give in at Cut Knife Crick,"[8] was a close friend of Wilf (Sir Wilfrid Laurier) and "drunk Catawba wine with Sir John A," "made Looie

Riel say uncle three times — once in English, once in Cree and the third time in French," and, as a rainmaker ("Sheet-lightnin' Trumper"), made it rain so hard out Manyberries way in o' four that it ruined the crops and he had to quit the rainmaking business.

Many of the Jake stories are "literary" tall tales and aspire to be much more than a collection of simple tall tales based on an oral tradition. Through these stories Mitchell explores and humorously satirizes a small prairie community, a community which becomes a microcosm of the Canadian and world communities. These stories also dramatize and explore the process of the Kid's moral and imaginative education, a process in which Jake and his tall tales play key roles. One of Jake's rivals in this process is Miss Henchbaw, the Kid's school teacher. The Kid is caught between the reason-fact-history approach of Miss Henchbaw and Jake's imagination-lie-tall-tale approach. Miss Henchbaw sees Jake as a historical liar and tells the kid that the history books do not mention Jake and that Riel and Poundmaker "were way before Jake's time." The Kid dismisses this — "All Miss Henchbaw knows came out of a book. Jake, he really knows." When Jake describes how he invented the jumping pound the Kid says, "Jake . . . that's real hist'ry. That's hist'ry!" This conflict between fact and fiction culminates in the last story of *Jake and the Kid*, "The Golden Jubilee Citizen." The Kid has written an essay nominating Jake for the Golden Jubilee Citizen of Crocus. In it he details Jake's tall tale exploits arguing that Jake is "the man that built the country." Miss Henchbaw does not agree with the Kid's nomination, arguing, "we cannot stand for impertinence with our province's history." She returns the Kid's essay and tells him that truth "must not be adulterated," that his essay "is not truth. . . . Louis Riel did not have dangling from his vest chain a rabbit's-foot watch fob! . . . Nor did General Middleton wear a bobcat fur vest throughout his Eighteen Eighty-five campaign."

However, an edited version of the Kid's essay, containing added factual material about the role of the hired men in Saskatchewan's history, appears in the town newspaper. The Kid's nomination has been successful and tribute is paid to Jake Trumper "without whom there could have been no fifty years of history, no Province of Saskatchewan." Through Jake's exaggerated tall tales the Kid discovered a truth, the giant role of the hired man in Saskatchewan history. And, ironically, Miss Henchbaw has also been educated through these tales, for the Kid's essay, though it at first annoyed her puritan and rational approach, opened her eyes to Jake's and the hired man's true stature. It is Miss Henchbaw who rewrote the Kid's essay, a *fact* which enlightens both Jake and the Kid. Thus the pedagogical approaches of the Kid's two teachers are paradoxically resolved. And this paradoxical relationship between fact and fiction is fundamental to Mitchell's aesthetic strategy: the writer's fictive illusion is made up of bits of true autobiographical and factual detail but the whole thing is a lie, a lie which invites

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ERNIE CARLISLE
'CANADIAN NATIONALIST'

NOT THAT HE HAD MUCH CHOICE... AFTER THE BOYS IN OTTAWA TOOK OVER ERNIE'S GAS STATION, SOME CLEVER TYPE PUT HIS NAME ON A MAILING LIST. BETWEEN LUBE-JOBS, HE FOUND HIMSELF GLANCING AT THE COLLECTED POEMS OF KNOWLTON NASH!! THEN HE STARTED TO TUNE HIS OLD 'PHILCO' TO C.R.T.C. RECOMMENDED PROGRAMMING, NEVER MIND DROPPING THE OCCASIONAL ROBERTSON DAVIES QUOTATION!

BUT MOST FOLKS AROUND 'GLADYARD, N.B.' AREN'T TOO WORRIED. THEY FIGURE, COME SEPTEMBER, ERNIE WILL BE BACK AT HIS PERCH IN 'THE SWORD + SWALLOW' TAVERN, SUCKING BACK THE IMPORTED 'CARLSBERG', LAYING HIS USUAL ODDS ON THE N.F.L. AFTER ALL, HE NEVER DID CANCEL HIS 'PENTHOUSE' SUBSCRIPTION.

the creative-partner reader to explore various fundamental and universal truths of human existence.[9]

"The Liar Hunter" is a self-reflexive or meta-tall tale. That is, while it is an entertaining story that uses tall-tales, it simultaneously explores the nature, strategy, and rationale of tall story telling. Mr. Godfrey is an anthropologist from the East visiting Crocus to court Old Man Gatenby's daughter, Molly, and to do some field research. He is a folklorist and explains to Jake and the Kid that he is searching for the art of the common people, their tall tales and ballads which "express the life of the Old West." But Jake and Old Man Gatenby misunderstand Godfrey when he bluntly tells them, "I'm looking for liars" and various conflicts arise. Jake and Gate do not appreciate being called liars and each time they begin a tall tale Mr. Godfrey takes out his note pad and pencil effectively smothering their tales. Molly strongly disapproves of her father's tales, which she considers lies, and tension develops in her relationship with Godfrey. He is trying to get Gate to "lie" and she is trying to break him of this embarrassing (to her) habit. The story has two tall-tale climaxes. In the first Jake finally "cuts loose," in spite of Godfrey's pad and pencil and Molly's disapproval, with a tall tale:

> That was the night Mr. Godfrey said something about how hot it had been down East that summer.
>
> "Hot here too," Jake said. For a minute he worked on his teeth with a sharpened matchstick and then he said. "Take thuh second week in July — tar paper on thuh roof of thuh chicken house — she all bubbled up."
>
> "Did it really?" said Mr. Godfrey. On the chair beside him was Molly, sitting straight up like she expected something to happen, and she wanted to be ready to take off quick. Old Gate he'd hardly said anything since they came, just stared at the gas lamp in the centre of the kitchen table.
>
> "Bubbled right up," Jake said. "Noon of thuh second day, wispy sorta smoke was coming off of her."
>
> "That a fact?"
>
> Jake gave a little start like he'd stuck himself with the point of the matchstick. "Why — certain'y," he said.

At this point Godfrey makes a move for his notepad to start taking notes. Molly reproves him but Jake continues:

> " — a hawin' an' a cawin' jist as I come out," Jake was saying. "That there tar paper on thuh hen house roof was so sticky thuh dumb fool crow had got himself stuck up in it. Real comical he was — liftin' one foot an' then thuh other. Course she was kinda tragical too — that there tar was hot. Musta bin kinda painful. . . . Inside of 10 minnits," Jake went on, "a whole flocka crows was circlin' over, the way they will when they hear another in trouble, an' buhfore I knew it thuh whole roof was stuck up with crows somethin' fearful."
>
> "Herbert!" Mr. Godfrey had his notebook out and was opening it on his knee. He didn't pay any attention to Molly and the funny look she had on her face.

"Aflutterin' an' ahollerin', with their wings aslapping — our hen house sort of liftin' an' then settlin' back agin. I headed fer thuh woodpile."

"What for, Jake?" I said.

"Axe — wasn't gonna let that hen house go without a fight. I chopped thuh roof loose from thuh uprights an' away she went. Cleared thuh peak of thuh barn an' headed south."

Molly was standing up and she was looking down at Mr. Godfrey writing away like anything. Her face looked kind of white to me. "It's about time we were going," she said real soft.

"But we've just come!" Mr. Godfrey said. "This is the sort of thing I — "

"Folklore!" Molly said it like a cuss word.

Molly creates a scene refusing to listen to Godfrey and accusing Jake of being "the biggest . . . two handed . . . clod busting liar" she has ever known. Apparently she has not completely erased what she considers to be her father's uncivilized influence and in unguarded moments of anger she resorts to his earthy language! Like Miss Henchbaw she sees these tales as "senseless and — immoral" and is ashamed of her father's story-telling habit. She and Miss Henchbaw, in their approach to truth, are descendants of Plato and feel that artist-liars should be outlawed from the republic of Crocus, Saskatchewan!

But Molly, like Miss Henchbaw, comes to learn the value of these lies. Godfrey, stoically accepting his failure in the hunt of love and folklore, is about to leave Crocus but has one last opportunity to make his case to Molly. His statement justifying what he does and the role of the story teller is also a thinly disguised statement of Mitchell's conception of the role of the artist. He uses artifice as a tool to explore, make sense of, and cope with the human dilemma of being alive:

"What I do is important. Important as history is important. . . . Not the history of great and famous men . . . but of the lumberjacks and section men, hotelkeepers and teachers and ranchers and farmers. The people that really count. . . . Their history isn't to be found in records or books. . . . Their history is in the stories they tell — their tall tales. . . . And I can tell you why they lie. . . . This is a hard country, I don't have to tell you that. There are — drouth, blizzards, loneliness. A man's a pretty small thing out on all this prairie. He is at the mercy of the elements. . . . These men lie about the things that hurt them most. Their yarns are about the winters and how cold they are the summers and how dry they are. In this country you get the deepest snow, the worst dust storms, the biggest hailstones. . . . Rust and dust and hail and sawfly and cutworm and drouth are terrible things, but not half as frightening if they are made ridiculous. If a man can laugh at them he's won half the battle. When he exaggerates things he isn't lying really; it's a defense, the defense of exaggeration. He can either do that or squeal. . . . People in this country aren't squealers."

Godfrey and Molly are reconciled, but their courtship has one more major obstacle — Gate. Molly's father now intensely dislikes Godfrey. He believes Godfrey looks on him as a liar (in a pejorative sense), and he has had to suppress an

enormous amount of tall-tale telling energy resulting in a case of badly frayed nerves ("My nerves — plum onstrung — hangin' lose as thuh fringe on a Indian jacket."). But Jake resolves this conflict by teaching Godfrey how to tell a tall tale (just as he taught the Kid how to orate in "You Gotta Teeter"). Jake arranges to have Gate and Molly over for a visit and helps Godfrey begin his tall tale as follows:

> "This district had them [grasshoppers] terribly, I understand," Mr. Godfrey said. "Of course they weren't so big, were they?"
>
> "Big!" Jake said. "One of 'em lit on thuh airport at Broomhead an' a RAF fella run 100 gallons a gas intuh him afore he reelized — "
>
> "Albin!" Mr. Godfrey said — "Albin Hobblemeyer, they called that grasshopper. I have him in my files. Three years ago he — "
>
> "Is that a fact?" Jake said.

Mr. Godfrey then continues with an elaborate tall tale about Albin, a giant grasshopper, who laid an egg "about the size of the average chicken house." Mr. Godfrey, the liar hunter, is transformed into a master liar and his tall tale about Albin wins over Gate, paving the way for his successful courtship of Molly. According to Jake, Albin also fell in love. In the last scene of "The Liar Hunter" the Kid asks Jake what became of Albin:

> "There," Jake said, "is thuh tragical part of it. Albin, he fell in love."
>
> "Fell in love!"
>
> "Yep. He was settin' in this here Dooley's back 40 one day an' he looked up an' seen one a them there four-engine bombers they're flyin' tuh Roosia. She was love at first sight. He took off, an' thuh last folks seen was two little black specks disappearin' tuh thuh North. Han' me that there manure fork will yuh, Kid?"[10]

In "The Liar Hunter," THEN, MITCHELL explores the proposition that to exaggerate imaginatively, but knowingly (to shovel manure), may be an effective strategy for survival in hostile environments. In an interview with Donald Cameron, Mitchell theorizes on the relationship between tall-tale exaggeration and danger:

> One time I had a clever insight — which isn't the true sort of insight — but particularly thinking of the number of tall stories that eventually clustered around the winter of '06 and '07, it occurred to me that the reason that the humour — the *life* humour, not the accepted literary humour, but the humour coinage that you'd run across in the beer parlour or the blacksmith shop, or in front of the post office, or sitting on a corral fence, the impromptu humour — it suddenly occurred to me how much of this exaggerated tall-tale telling involved dangerous things, like an extremely bad winter, or pests, grasshoppers, sawfly, or drought, how dry it got.[11]

Other critics of the tall-tale tradition have also noted this. Constance Rourke, for example, says, "It was the wilderness with its impenetrable depths, the wild storms of the West, the great rivers, the strange new wonders of every side, that produced the content of the stories — those natural elements that had brought terror and suffering to earlier pioneers and still belonged to the farther, unknown West, but now were apprehended with an insurgent comic rebound and a consciousness of power."[12] But perhaps Mitchell's and his characters' impulse to exaggerate imaginatively, to indulge in tall tales, finds its genesis not only in the specific dangers of a hostile environment but also in what Henry Kreisel calls the "sheer physical fact of the prairie," the impact of a vast open space on the human consciousness.[13] He suggests that the prairie environment produces two states of mind:

> I set the image of the giant in the landscape over against the more familiar one of man pitted against a vast and frequently hostile natural environment that tends to dwarf him, at the mercy of what Grove calls, in *Settlers of the Marsh*, "a dumb shifting of the forces." Man, the giant-conqueror, and man, the insignificant dwarf always threatened by defeat, form the two polarities of the state of mind produced by the sheer physical fact of the prairie.[14]

Wallace Stegner, in *Wolf Willow*, beautifully states this paradoxical impact of prairie on man:

> Desolate? Forbidding? There was never a country that in its good moments was more beautiful. Even in drouth or dust storm or blizzard it is the reverse of monotonous, once you have submitted to it with all the senses. You don't get out of the wind, but learn to lean and squint against it. You don't escape sky and sun, but wear them in your eyeballs and on your back. You become acutely aware of yourself. The world is very large, the sky even larger, and you are very small. But also the world is flat, empty, nearly abstract, and in its flatness you are a challenging upright thing, as sudden as an exclamation mark, as enigmatic as a question mark.
>
> It is a country to breed mystic people, egocentric people, perhaps poetic people. But not humble ones. At noon the total sun pours down on your single head; at sunrise or sunset you throw a shadow a hundred yards long. It was not prairie dwellers who invented the indifferent universe or impotent man. Puny you may feel there, and vulnerable, but not unnoticed. This is a land to mark the sparrow's fall.[15]

I would suggest, then, that the paradoxical impact of the physical fact of the prairie — man as dwarf and man as giant — naturally manifests itself in the impulse to exaggerate, in tall tales and tall talk.[16] Prairie man is a solipsistically defiant child who tells big lies about himself. Man compensates for his littleness in a vast and hostile space through creative exaggeration, but that response is partially suggested by the fact that you *can* throw a giant shadow, that you *are*

the only vertical thing for hundreds of miles, that as you move your horizon moves and you are the *centre* of a vast circle.

In *Who Has Seen the Wind* the "sheer physical fact" of prairie is an almost overpowering presence for some of the characters, and we don't have to look far for the defence of exaggeration strategy. In chapter two Uncle Sean, a farmer who has been struggling for years with drought, rust, hail, and grasshoppers, tells young Brian the story of the little man on the prairie:

> He looked down at the boy upon his knee. "Did you see the little man while you were on the prairie?"
>
> "No," said Brian. "I saw a boy but he wasn't little. Tell about the little man, Uncle Sean."
>
> "Saw him just the day before yesterday," said the uncle, laying his pipe upon the table. "Monday it was. He popped out of a gopher hole in my south forty. I'd just climbed down from the rod weeder to untangle her, and there he was, standing in front of a Roosian thistle — wearin' two-inch overhawls and with a rabbit's-foot fob to his watch. 'God bless this fine summer fallow and us two that's on it,' he sez, 'an' good mornin'.'
>
> "Well, I don't make a hobby out of talkin' to little men standin' about as high as a sprig of pigweed and picking their teeth with the fine hair off a crocus near by. I stood there without sayin' a word for a minute, then I sez, 'Good mornin'. You're a stranger around here, are you?'
>
> " 'Oh, no,' he sez. 'I come to the districk in 'eighty-five — after they hung Looie Riel for startin' that rebellion.'
>
> " 'Not much here then,' I sez.
>
> " 'No town at all,' he sez. 'Just the river an' little green frogs hoppin' up an' down on the banks. The town came later.'
>
> " 'By the way it jumps on its *r*'s, yer voice sounds familiar,' I sez. . . . 'You wouldn't be a County Down little man, would you?'
>
> " 'I am,' he sez.
>
> "Well, we talked an' it turned out he come over third-class — spent some time in Ontario, then come West to the end of the steel — the C.P.R. wasn't finished in them days. From there he come on a three-gaited sorrel grasshopper that went lame in the Moose Mountain country. He turned him loose an' come the rest of the way on foot.
>
> " 'What the hell made you pick this country?' I asked him.
>
> " 'I liked the look of her in them days,' he sez.
>
> " 'Look at her now,' I sez.
>
> " 'You look,' sez he, 'she gives me the heartburn!' An' with that he — "[17]

When Brian's father interrupts this tall tale Sean switches into one of his many evangelistic denunciations against the farmers, "stubble-jumpin' sonsa hunyacks," who only care about "goddam little red tractors an' . . . goddam yella-wheeled cars an' trips to Washington an' Oregon an' California." They do not know or care about the land and their cropping methods are exacerbating the dire effects of the drought:

> " 'jist look at her — creased an' pocked an' cracked — no grass to hold the topsoil down! That's what happens when you crop her out an' away fer the winter — then back agin in the spring to scratch at her agin — on agin off agin an' away agin! You wanta travel an' so does she! I seen her travelin' on a first-class ticket by air — she's bin to the Coast with you — a thousand million sections of her — black cloudsa dust blacker than all yer greedy souls — lifted up an' travelin' — travelin' clear to Jesus!' "

Uncle Sean's tall tales and language of curse are ways of coping with adverse and frustrating conditions, are a defiant assertion of his significance and power and enable him to continue to attempt to survive and control his environment. Uncle Sean is clearly one of those prairie existentialists admired by Mr. Godfrey — he is not a "spealer."

Brian's grandmother and mother try to protect Brian from Sean's beer parlour manner and language. But the relationship between Brian and his Uncle is similar to that between the Kid and Jake. Sean plays a key role in the education of Brian's moral and imaginative identity (which later culminates in Brian's desire to become a "dirt doctor" and continue Sean's crusade to turn the desert prairie into a garden). His growth is in part fertilized by Sean's tall tales, "big" language and evangelistic crusade to farm "with . . . hearts an' brains." At the end of Sean's diatribe against the farmers, Brian's grandmother orders Brian out of the room but he moves slowly, "half-dazed and hypnotized by the spell of his uncle's words."[18]

In the first few chapters young Brian wrestles with the abstract concept of God. He visits the Church to talk with God but receives only unsatisfactory answers from the minister's wife. He later visits the minister, Mr. Hislop, who tries to satisfy Brian's curiosity about God. In chapter four, obviously influenced by his uncle's tale about the little man on the prairie, he fabricates a tall tale about God in his first attempt to come to grips with the elusive sense of a divine force. This sequence depicting Brian's creation of God who is *his* friend and who will give him power over those who thwart his desires, may be read as a recapitulation in miniature of the process by which man creates his religions:[19]

> The man standing in the center of the light colors, decided Brian, was about as high as a person's knee, his own knee. He wore a hat like Uncle Sean's, uncreased just as it had come from the store shelf — a blue gumdrop hat. He wore white rubber boots, and He held a very small, very white lamb in His arms. Brian said: —
>
> "I am pleased to meet you."
>
> The man wiggled the black string that hung down from his glasses. "You are welcome," He said. "I am God. I am Mr. R.W. God, B.V.D. You call me R.W."
>
> "I knew you were. What did you leave heaven for?"
>
> "I am going to get after Artie Sherry for you," God said. "And I will get after your grandmother too."

Brian's imaginative creation of God (a conglomeration of his immediate experience of other people in his world — God belches like his grandmother, rides a vacuum cleaner like his mother's and recites like his father) is an attempt to understand the unknown and to control a confusing world that continually outrages his naturally solipsistic outlook. As a four-year-old child he instinctively assumes that he is at the centre of the world and in control of it. When this instinctive assumption is not borne out by the facts of existence, he resorts to a tall tale. Through his tall tale of a little man (smaller than himself) who is a giant God with omnipotent powers, this little boy creates a world in which he is in complete control. Through imaginative exaggeration of realistic details Brian begins to establish his identity and power as a limited human in a world that, he progressively learns, is in fact the giant man killer. But this little "Jack" is already developing the strategy of imaginative exaggeration to begin coping with those giants.

The Ben fabricates a tall tale about his son for similar reasons. He, like every one else in the community, cannot understand his son, the Young Ben. As Digby notes, the Young Ben and Brian are mature beyond their years.[20] The Young Ben is the converse of Sean's little man on the prairie — he is a *big* boy who, Brian believes, *owns* the prairie.[21] The Ben tells how his son was "borned growed-up":

> "Thuh Ol' Lady she come tuh me . . . an' she sez, 'Ben,' she sez, 'yuh better go git Doc. I ain't feelin' none too good. The pains is comin' on real frequent now.' So I go out to ketch Dolly, an' her not havin' thuh harness ontuh her sence thuh fall buhfore, I chase her clear down thuh other enda thuh goddam pasture witha panna goddam oats behin' my goddam back. After 'bout a hour I come back tuh thuh house fer tuh git my goddam hat. There is thuh Ol' Lady a-settin' ona goddam applebox a-peelin' some goddam puhtatuhs intuh thuh goddam slop-pail. 'Where's my goddam hat?' I sez. 'Yuh don't need her,' she sez. 'The kid's already bin borned.' 'Whut is it?' I sez, an' she sez, 'A boy — han me that there pot offa thuh table.' I asked where was he at. 'After he finished separatin' thuh cream,' she sez, 'he went out fer tuh chop me some kendlin' fer thuh stove.' Thuh goddam kid was borned growed-up."

Apart from the humour, Mitchell uses this tale to accomplish two things. First, it echoes the theme of the wise or mature child who is intuitively in touch with the Divine. Second, it again demonstrates man's instinctive use of the defence of exaggeration when faced with the mysterious or inexplicable.

One of the significant teachers in Brian's education is his grandmother and again the tall tale figures prominently in their relationship. Although Brian initially sees his grandmother as a bossy ogre figure who thwarts his desires, by the time he is eleven they have become very close. In the last few weeks of her life she realizes she is dying and is almost overcome with a sense of the futility of life:

She wondered why she had been. A girl, a woman, and now an old woman. She did not find it frightening; just senseless. She sneezed twice. She got up from her rocker. She went to bed.

She'd make the boy his hockey stockings.

Brian frequently visits her and as she knits the stockings she tells him reminiscing tall tales. She tells Brian how her husband, Grandfather John, stared down a bobcat, how the bobcat stole a tin of John's chewing tobacco, and how he had trailed it "by following the tobacco juice trail the cat had spit upon the snow." She tells Brian about the coyote that Little Johnny Whiskeyjack trained to "howl tenor" and how Telesphor Toutant had his eye put out by a bear cub and for the rest of his life "used a purple Saskatoon berry for a glass eye." Not only is Brian's grandmother passing on an oral family tradition to her grandson here, she is also using the defence of exaggeration to confront defiantly but with dignity her imminent death. And she dies knitting, asserting her significance through action in spite of the limit of mortality. Like Daddy Sherry in *The Kite*, she continues to hold vigorously onto the "thread" of life, never giving up and refusing "to settle for less."[22]

The knitting image is connected to both Hislop's and Sean's attempts to find meaning, to *untangle* the basic Gordian-knot questions of existence. Sean tells Brian that he met the little man on the prairie when he climbed down to untangle the rod weeder. And Hislop, following his attempts to explain the nature of God to the four-year-old Brian, supposes, "Something had been proved" and bends "down to extricate a piece of twine that had wound itself up in one of the mower wheels." Brian's Grandmother is also trying to untangle Gordian knots, but she is knitting together, creating a kind of immortality through generations (the reminiscing tall tales she tells Brian), and asserting to the end her own existential identity through whatever action she is capable of. The human solidarity she creates through stories and action are her answers to mortality and that overpowering sense of meaninglessness which inevitably confronts us.[23]

For Uncle Sean, Brian, the Ben, and Brian's grandmother the tall tale becomes a strategy to cope with and survive the unknown and the physical facts of a hostile environment and mortality. Through tall tales and the examples of his uncle and grandmother Brian learns how to be. We learn from his mother that Brian plans to go to university to become a "dirt doctor" so that he can help heal the drought-ridden land. Lying, imaginative exaggeration, is essentially an existential act of defiance against limits and in Brian's case this strategy leads to an active and creative life in spite of its limits. Man is simultaneously a dwarf and a giant — the physical facts of existence dwarf him but through creative imagination and action he gives himself giant proportions which in turn enable him to live an effective life.

IN AN UNPUBLISHED NOVEL called "Roses Are Difficult Here," Mitchell creates a character who is a sociologist doing a study of a small Alberta town. He is quite clearly critical of this Eastern academic with her simplistic and reductive impressions and judgements about the ranchers, farmers, and townspeople. The following passage is part of her study in which she attacks the tall-tale humour of these people:

> [they] preserve the traditional attitude towards outlanders who may be more sophisticated than they, refraining from the direct question. "I guess," crops up frequently in conversation; they "Are afraid that"; they fall back on the shrug, the wry grimace, the shake or nod of a head, which cannot be entered into the spoken record against them later. Great store is set by the humorous retort which is an easy avoidance of a responsible answer.
>
> There is a crudity and coarseness to the quality of the humour — not wit at all in the higher sense — exaggeration rather, the tall tale, the ludicrous lie.[24]

This eastern sociologist sees the tall tale and the humour of exaggeration as simply evasive. And she is half right. The defence of exaggeration is a double-edged tool and may become a debilitating escape from the realities of man's external and internal landscapes rather than a means to effective action and true insight into the self and human relations. In "The Liar Hunter" Godfrey says that if a man can laugh at terrible things by exaggerating them in tall-tale lies, "he's won half the battle." But this is only *half* the battle and the lie can only help man prepare himself to confront the various giants that limit his existence. Sometimes man is overwhelmed by the harsh realities of life and he retreats into a fantasy-lie evading truly creative or useful action. Mitchell explores the destructive potential of the defence of exaggeration in *Who Has Seen the Wind*, *Back to Beulah*, and *The Vanishing Point*.

Saint Sammy in *Who Has Seen the Wind* is a prairie derelict, a farmer who was so frequently rusted, grasshoppered, saw-flyed and droughted out that he became "crazy as a cut calf." He becomes a prairie hermit living in a piano box, collecting matchboxes and underwear labels and looking after a wild herd of Clyde horses for the Lord. He is "Jehovah's Hired Man" and is living in an Old Testament fantasy in recoil from his harsh experiences as a farmer. Uncle Sean's description of him as a "cut [castrated] calf" is apt; he has been emasculated in that he is incapable of effectively confronting prairie farm life. Saint Sammy has regressed and is an adult version of Brian playing with R. W. God and, just as Brian asked his imaginary playmate God to punish Arty, Saint Sammy calls on his Old Testament God to punish Bent Candy. Although in this case the tall tale fantasy comes true (a storm ruins Bent Candy's crops and levels his new barn) and the reader is pulling for Saint Sammy, the true prairie prophet, the *real*

hired man of the Lord, is Uncle Sean. It is Uncle Sean's imaginative but practical schemes of "farming with hearts an' brains" that will eventually be fulfilled. His ideas to irrigate, to mix farm and cover crop will actually bear fruit and turn the desert prairie into a garden.

In his play *Back to Beulah*[25] Mitchell explores how the use of imaginative fabrications to explain and to cope with the various enigmas and limitations of existence can backfire. Betty, Harriet, and Agnes are three psychiatric patients who have been released from the Beulah Mental Institute and are living in a "half-way-house." They are still under the care of Dr. Margaret Anders who checks up on them regularly. Dr. Anders' theory is that some patients reach a point where they must be removed from the safe cocoon world of Beulah and placed in an environment where they can begin to learn to cope with the exigencies of everyday life. By the end of the play it is clear that Harriet and Betty are ready to live again in the real world but Agnes will have to go back to Beulah. Agnes has both nymphomaniac and kleptomaniac tendences. Among other things she steals a small baby doll and a crib and the three women make a Christmas creche. The baby doll becomes the centre of an elaborate fantasy for the three women, particularly for Agnes. We learn that when Agnes was a teen-ager she had a child who was put up for adoption and that while under anaesthetic during the birth the doctor had sterilized her. Her nymphomania and kleptomania are thus particularly resonant. For Agnes the line between fantasy and reality is finally erased: the doll *is* real. Harriet and Betty, on the other hand, simply play along with Agnes's fantasy. Harriet in particular knows what is real and what is not real. In the end Agnes's fantasy about the baby becomes a destructive trap for her because she attempts to live the lie as a substitute for actuality. When Harriet destroys the doll (she smashes it and throws it into the furnace), Agnes falls apart and is reduced to an inarticulate, wailing infant.[26]

In *The Vanishing Point* Carlyle Sinclair, like Saint Sammy in *Wind* and Agnes in *Beulah*, is in retreat from the harsh realities of existence and in order to cope he frequently resorts to ludicrous tall-tale fantasies and childhood memory trips. Early in the novel he muses on this habit:

> How did he justify — explain anyway — his long self-indulgence in fantasy? . . . The habit had grown and strengthened through later years when he had shared manic moments of silliness with Mate. . . . Perhaps that was why he fantasized — at first it had been some sort of day-dreaming escape for him whenever pressure or abrasion had become too much for him. Escape from outer lunacy. But he always played fair when he took these inner trips. They were not comforting ones really. The journeys always began in actuality, with the itinerary already set out for him, the destination determined ahead of time. He must be some sort of artist, a very private one performing only for another part of himself, that stepped back and away to share the illusion and to applaud. And laugh — oh yes, that was it!

> Always to laugh! Why not? Life made so many comic promises that the destination simply had to be funny.[27]

Carlyle has been teaching on the Paradise Valley Indian reserve for almost nine years. In part he has been hibernating from the terrible emotional and psychological experience of losing his wife and child. His child was still-born and following its birth his wife went into severe depression and wasted away in a mental institute. He has also been damaged by a puritan and materialistic culture (represented in particular by Aunt Pearl, Old Kacky, and Fyfe) which programmes its young to distrust the spontaneous and irrational whims of the emotions and imagination. So, he has been living on a reserve in more ways than one. He has been holding himself "in reserve" and has avoided forming any deep or solid emotional attachments. He blinds himself to his real feelings for Victoria. He has taught her since she was a child, and tries to keep their relationship that of parent to child and teacher to student when in fact it has been developing into something else (just as the paternalistic attitude of the whites towards the Indians should have developed into something else). When the realities of the outside world (mainly identified with the city and Victoria's disappearance) begin to infringe on Carlyle's Peter Pan existence, he resorts to tall-tale fantasies.

Carlyle's fantasy and memory trips are a necessary strategy in his coming to wholeness, in his confronting himself and his world and seeing these as they really are. But in the first part of the novel it is clear that these fantasies could become destructively evasive. Carlyle is himself aware that these fantasies could form an imprisoning and destructive cocoon-womb. On one level his still-born child (caused by a calcified placenta),[28] and his wife's mental breakdown, are images of what could be Carlyle's destination. But the next few weeks in Carlyle's life prove to be the culmination of a spiritual and emotional rebirth from nine years of hibernation, from nine years of living his "life . . . carefully [in] low key." The novel opens with Carlyle awakening to the sound of drumming ruffed grouse on an early spring morning. With the exhilarating awareness that "the alienating stun of winter" has been reprieved by spring, "*young* Grizzly Sinclair" embarks on a crucial stage in his life which ends in self-discovery and the salvaging of what is left of the wreck of his life.

Early in the novel Carlyle is confronted by two manifestations of a materialistic civilization which he sees as characteristic of that civilization's spiritual, moral, and aesthetic malaise. The first occurs when he stops for gas at Luton's and sees the lawn ornaments; the second occurs when he is in a department store in the city. Both times Carlyle recoils into wild tall-tale fantasies.[29] Mitchell uses these interior flights on two levels. First, their surrealistic exaggerations are a *reductio ad absurdum* of a diseased western culture. Second, they dramatize Carlyle's perilous equipoise between fantasy retreat and existential confrontation. When he

discovers that Victoria is missing and has failed to meet his expectations, he is ready to give up on life.[30] In the last part of the novel, when he searches the city streets for Victoria (his "little girl lost"), his tendency to take flight into interior fantasy and memory disappears. When he finds her and she tells him that she is pregnant he is shattered. He retreats to a bar and begins to remember how he and Mate practised magic tricks of disappearance (which are in a way visual tall tales) but immediately catches himself: " — oh, for God's sake, Sinclair, pay attention to yourself — the one that's now hurting you!" Carlyle himself refuses to "vanish" into evasive fantasy here and his ability to confront pain rather than evade it leads to his final reconciliation with Victoria. He has been a "little boy lost," lost partly as a result of a destructive culture, but he is found and made whole again by his "little girl lost."[31] Partly through the defence of exaggeration Carlyle heals the destructive effects of a puritan culture, comes out of hibernation and embarks on what promises to be an active and creative life.

WHEN BRIAN IMAGINATIVELY creates his companion R. W. God, he runs into some trouble with the adult world. He is playing with God who, like his Grandmother, has a gas attack "necessitating a particularly large belch." His mother overhears the belch, which Brian acts out on R.W.'s behalf, and she scolds him. Brian responds that he did not do anything and when he insists that R.W. did it she admonishes him ("Don't tell stories, Son") and sends him to his room. His father speaks to him that evening about telling fibs and, after listening to Brian's description of R.W., tries to straighten Brian out about what is real and what is not: "It's not the thing for little boys to think that God's a — a gentleman who rides vacuum cleaners. It's not right.... It's sort of silly, isn't it?... You don't really talk to Him, do you?" The answer in Brian's eyes is that "it was not silly, that he did see Him, that he did talk to Him." His father says, "We'll just forget about Him. Say your prayers and go to sleep."[32] Brian says his prayers and finishes: " 'Amen,' said Brian fervently, 'R.W.'."

Brian does see and talk to God in what is for him a very real sense. The world created in dream and fantasy by young children has a compelling reality for them because they have not yet developed the rational ability to distinguish easily between the imagined and the actual. For the four-year-old Brian, Uncle Sean's little man on the prairie is as actual as Artie or his Grandmother. Part of the maturing process involves a development of the ability to distinguish quickly and sharply between what is real and what is imagined, between the external world of fact and the internal worlds of thought, fantasy, and dream. The line between what is real and what is not is blurred (if not erased) for Saint Sammy in *Who*

Has Seen the Wind and for Agnes in *Back to Beulah*. They are no longer able to confront the harsh realities of existence and have regressed to child-like states taking refuge in their fantasy worlds. And Carlyle in *The Vanishing Point* is dangerously close to emotionally, psychologically, and physically "vanishing" to a reserve. Sammy is a prairie hermit living in a piano box and Carlyle jokingly refers to himself as a "thirty-six-year-old adolescent, the Paradise Valley hermit." Carlyle, however, succeeds in using his imaginative fantasy journeys to survive and cope with the actual world, to attain insights into the nature of his culture, the Indian culture, and himself and through these insights to begin again an active and creative life.

We nourish our children's imaginations with tales, with creative lies. But they must develop the mechanism which clearly sees the distinction between these exaggerated fantasies and life. Jake knows that his tale about Albin is a fantastic exaggeration and he indicates this to the Kid when he asks for the manure fork. If the individual fails in making this distinction, simply believes rather than inducing a *willing* suspension of disbelief, the defence of exaggeration becomes destructively evasive. We must learn to develop that tacit understanding, which exists between the tale teller and the listener, that a story is being told. But we are aware that the story is not a lie or fib in a pejorative sense, that it is a strategy we use to survive and confront our existence creatively and with meaning. There are some dangerous areas in human experience which, if looked at directly, may immobilize and destroy us. We can look at them at first only with our peripheral vision, or to borrow a phrase from Emily Dickinson, we must look at and "tell the truth aslant." It is a fact that we are limited and mortal beings subject to a variety of internal and external dangers. Mitchell dramatizes and explores how the defence of exaggeration may help us to deal effectively with these limitations and in spite of them live creative and meaningful lives.

NOTES

[1] See Donald Cameron's interview, "W. O. Mitchell: Sea Caves and Creative Partners" in *Conversations with Canadian Novelists — 2* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1973), p. 50.

[2] See Mitchell's article "My Home Town: High River," *Star Weekly* (September 22, 1962), pp. 1-4.

[3] Many of the pieces my father used in his readings (plus notices, programmes, and newspaper reviews) are in the O. S. Mitchell scrapbook, Box 1, W. O. Mitchell Papers, Special Collections, University of Calgary Library. Interestingly, his repetoire included a piece called "Riding a Bronco" (reprinted from the *Arizona Graphic*) which is a version of a story used by Mark Twain in his readings. See *Mark Twain Tonight! An Actor's Portrait*, selected, edited and adapted by Hal Holbrook (New York: Ives Washburn, 1959), pp. 137-38.

[4] One of his best loved pieces, "The Day I Spoke for Mr. Lincoln," is in part based on his memories of Mrs. Wilkinson's School of Dance, Drama, Music, and Elocu-

tion in St. Petersburg, Florida. When he reads this piece he does an imitation of "Billy" Mitchell reciting "The Fool" with dramatic facial and hand gestures. Other pieces he recalls learning at this school were "The Bald Headed Man and the Boy and the Fly" and dialect pieces such as "Giuseppe Goes to the Baseball Game" and "A Negro's Prayer."

[5] Other "reminiscential tall tales" include "The Day I Spoke for Mr. Lincoln," "The Day I Sold Lingerie in a Prairie Whore House," "Take One Giant Step," and "How to Quit and Win." These pieces were among six taped for class room and resource use by ACCESS in 1970 and have been used by CBC on various programmes beginning in 1962.

[6] August 6, 1942. In this tale Jake teaches the kid how to "orate."

[7] Mitchell/Francis correspondence, Box 7, W. O. Mitchell Papers.

[8] *Jake and the Kid* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1961), p. 3.

[9] See David O'Rourke's "An Interview with W. O. Mitchell," *Essays on Canadian Writing*, 20 (Winter 1980-81), p. 152.

[10] Mitchell also uses this tall tale of a giant grasshopper in "The Liar's Chorus" in his musical comedy, *Wild Rose*:

> Wellllllllll.....
> I'm a free lopin', lie ropin',
> Stubble jumpin', lie pumpin',
> High heelin', lie dealin'
> Son of a bitch that's got the itch
> To lie — to lie — to lie and lie!
>
> I knew this grasshopper name of Eli;
> Barefoot he stood near forty foot high.
> He siphoned up our water tanks
> And roarin' wind from his sprung shanks
> Licked all our topsoil off the ground
> For a hundred an' ninety miles around.
> Three long weeks he wandered loose;
> Covered our school with tobacco juice.
> Took off into the foothills air
> And left our district for God knows where.

[11] "W. O. Mitchell: Sea Caves and Creative Partners," p. 50.

[12] *American Humor* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1931), p. 49.

[13] See Stephen Leacock's comment in *The Greatest Pages of American Humour* (New York: Sundial Press, 1936): "Above all the new West, spacious and unlimited, ran easily to big talk and tall stories" (p. 70).

[14] "The Prairie: A State of Mind," in *Contexts of Canadian Criticism*, ed. Eli Mandel (Chicago and London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1971), p. 256.

[15] *Wolf Willow* (New York: Viking Press, 1966), p. 8.

[16] See also Godfrey's comment in "The Liar Hunter": "The smallness of man — the prairies bring it to one with — such impact" (p. 91); and the Kid's image of man on the prairie as a "Fly on a platter" (p. 100).

[17] *Who Has Seen the Wind* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1947), pp. 16-17.

[18] Ironically, a few years later Brian will use his Uncle's language of curse *against* Uncle Sean and his hired man to prevent the killing of a runt piglet (see pp. 223-25).

[19] See Freud's *Civilization and its Discontents*, ed. and trans. James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton, 1962): "The origin of the religious attitude can be traced back in clear outlines as far as the feeling of infantile helplessness" (p. 19). Freud dismisses "what the common man understands by his religion" as "patently infantile . . . [and] foreign to reality" (p. 21) but says that both religion and art are necessary "palliative measures" in dealing with the harsh realities of life (p. 22). However, he says that "the mild narcosis induced in us by art can do no more than bring about a transient withdrawal from the pressure of vital needs" (p. 28) and that religion cannot help us in the fundamental "struggle between Eros and Death. . . . And it is this battle of the giants that our nurse-maids try to appease with their lullaby about Heaven" (p. 69). Mitchell, however, is an unrepentant romantic in his belief in the efficacy of the imagination and its creations. For him art, and religion, are not simply escapist illusions or manifestations of neuroses.

[20] "That was it — the look upon Brian's face — the same expression that had puzzled him on the Young Ben's: maturity in spite of the formlessness of childish features, wisdom without years. 'Intimations of Immortality,' he thought" (p. 297).

[21] See pp. 59-60 where Brian tries to explain to his father why the prairie belongs to the Young Ben.

[22] W. O. Mitchell, *The Kite* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1962), p. 210.

[23] Brian also experiences a profound sense of meaninglessness when he spends a night on the prairie alone: "He was filled now with a feeling of nakedness and vulnerability that terrified him. As the wind mounted in intensity, so too the feeling of defenselessness rose in him. It was as though he listened to the drearing wind and in the spread darkness of the prairie night was being drained of his very self. He was trying to hold together something within himself, that the wind demanded and was relentlessly leaching from him. His fingers were aching with the cold; he slid his hands between his thighs for warmth" (p. 236). Compare this scene to that in *The Vanishing Point* where Old Kacky straps Carlyle and Carlyle is terrified by the feeling that he is being "vanished" (p. 322). Carlyle thrusts his hands between his legs to mitigate the stinging pain and fantasizes how Old Kacky's oatmeal smell would betray him to coyotes, a tiger or boa constrictors: "Yes! Behind the flat head — just like a sack of coal struggling in the boa constrictor's neck!" (p. 321). The child recoils into fantasies in which his tormentor is destroyed.

[24] Manuscripts in Boxes 28 and 29, W. O. Mitchell Papers, pp. 227-28.

[25] *Back to Beulah* was first presented as a television play (CBC, March 21, 1974). It was then performed on stage by the Theatre Calgary company in Calgary and at the Tarragon Theatre in Toronto in 1976. A revised version of the play is in *Dramatic W. O. Mitchell* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1982).

[26] The stage direction reads, "Agnes screams hysterically and crumples to the floor. The screams subside to sobbing, that changes into the baby's crying that we've heard all along" (*Dramatic W. O. Mitchell*, p. 94). The original television play and stage play end with Dr. Anders, Harriet, and Betty taking Agnes back to Beulah. The revised version of the stage play ends with Harriet, Betty, and Agnes taking Dr. Anders back to Beulah.

[27] *The Vanishing Point* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1973), pp. 58-59. Carlyle is a little like Billy Pilgrim in *Slaughter House Five* who, to protect himself from the

horrible memories of the bombing of Dresden and the wasteland of modern middle-class, materialistic America, resorts to narcissistic fantasy "tripping," living less and less in the actual world until he imprisons himself in his sci-fi fantasy world of Tralfamadore.

[28] Images which suggest nourishment or protection turned destructive appear throughout the novel and their implications apply just as much to Carlyle as to the Indian and white cultures. See for example Fyfe's orchids which, because they are in a greenhouse and their roots are enclosed in pots, are in "danger of root rot always" (pp. 84-85). Dr. Sanders warns Carlyle about listless ducks and draws an analogy between them and the reserve Indians: " 'Warm water — exposed and rotting vegetation — botulism — they get weaker and weaker till they can't take off any more. And that's what you've joined, teacher — the reserve-system slough — tepid with paternal help — the more you do for them the more you sap their strength' " (p. 183).

[29] See also his fantasies about Fyfe and his orchids (p. 86) and about the Caribou crossings for pipelines (pp. 98-99).

[30] It is interesting to note that in the first version of this novel, *The Alien*, Carlyle takes the ultimate escape route and commits suicide. *The Alien* was submitted for publication in the early 1950's but retracted; a condensed version of part three of *The Alien* was published in *MacLean's* in 9 instalments beginning September 15, 1953 and ending January 15, 1954.

[31] Mitchell uses the same irony that Blake uses in "Little Girl Lost" and "Little Girl Found" (*Songs of Experience*) — it is the parent/guardians who are really lost and in finding their little girl they themselves are found.

[32] There is a lovely irony running through this exchange. One of the propositions the novel explores is Wordsworth's treatment of Plato's theories of pre-existence and reminiscence in the "Intimations Ode": the child is in close communication with the Divine because his soul, which pre-existed with the Divine, enters this world "trailing clouds of glory." The child thus experiences a vestigial sense or "feeling" of the Divine but as he matures in this material world he soon *forgets* his Divine roots. See Brian's conversation with Digby towards the end of the novel where he says, "I don't get the feeling any more" and Digby, thinking of Wordsworth, says, "Perhaps . . . you've grown up" (p. 296).

from EXCERPTS FROM THE REAL WORLD

Robert Kroetsch

24/4/85

You live an unsigned life. Like the ashtray I bought in Edinburgh (the castle, the castle), you remind me of where I once was. Kitschy-kitschy-coo, love. And I don't even smoke. Do I?

25/4/85

Hammer Happy, the King of Babylon, sells used cars on the Pembina strip, right there in Winnipeg. Even here, now, today, this afternoon in the Yorkshire Dales, I locate my pain in the descending lines of a prairie coulee. Your heart breaks me.

26/4/85

Everything recurs (more or less). Consider, for instance, spring. Or transmission problems.

28/4/85

And so she tracked you down. You, the Shyster King of Babble On, she, with her friend Pontiac, the old chief disguised as a red coupe with mags on the rear and a four-barreled carburetor. The three of you making it, together. Kinky.

30/4/85

"Stay gentle passenger & reade A sentence sent thee from ye dead." This I found on a church wall, in York. It was composed in 1611, anticipating, apparently, the invention of the horseless carriage. It was signed only by the year of its composition.

2/5/85

I go through the secondhand bookstores of Amsterdam, looking for a single remaining copy of my first book, the book I never wrote. It was a study of the silence of cucumbers.

3/5/85

Trying to prove that Western Canada is inscribed in Hammer Happy's six-month warranty, I watch for magpies (dancing) in the tulip fields. I try to snare gophers with a fishing line, here, below sea level.

5/5/85

Rijksmuseum. "Wild man on a unicorn with a bird. Engraving, c. 1450. From the large deck of playing cards." Self portrait with still life. Consider, for instance, the stealth of the cucumber.

6/5/85

I want to explain why I mailed you that team of horses for your birthday. I know you have nowhere to keep them. Except in your mother's garage.

8/6/85

There, outside the restaurant, near the tram stop, chalked on a small blackboard: TOMAATEN EN KOMKOMMER. Every clue is, surely, a clue. *Broodje*, I tell myself, clutching at straws, must be sandwich. Bread, as a root word, bulbously.

9/5/85

Desire, like a prairie duck, its tail feathers in the air, feeds below the surface. As Hammer Happy would have it: poet, consider shock absorbers. They are not ashamed to repeat themselves. Relax, and you'll kitsch yourself laughing.

11/5/85

And yet I felt a certain twinge of disappointment when we were told the plane was about to crash. I had intended to invest in RRSPS.

14/5/85

STASIS. Bus stop. The Greeks have a knack for starring. The unsigned hole in the universe. Not to mention the street vendors, their carts, at this time of year, heaped with strawberries. Passengers.

25/5/85

Here on Koukounaries Beach, Skiathos, I undress. The wind makes of each of your nipples a cork, of my mouth a bottle that begs a signature.

27/5/85

Tsougria (Thistle) Island is presently (since The War, I'm told) uninhabited. I squat naked beside the stone slabs of the abandoned olive-crushing floor. I grunt and then sigh. Ah, life, I think, watching the butterflies and the lizards. I tear in half the kleenex snitched from your beach bag. These are the economies of islands.

30/5/85

Slices of fresh cucumber, with just a drop of vinegar, a drab of salt. Pass me that ashtray. Let place do the signing for us. Close the door and let me in.

SODALITY

Erin Mouré

Growing up in a city of Americans, Calgary,
we knew people close to the President lived on our street,
& deferred to this, his likeness,
the laugh & crinkliness of his eyes
laughing.
Jack and *Bobby* playing football on the White House lawn
on television before one was shot, & then the other, the other,
& we walked past the houses of Americans
with our heads bowed, more & more deferent.
Like the President our Americans were Catholic,
& we too went to the High Mass more readily
to see their mouths open, singing, taking up
a whole row.
I joined the Sodality of Mary.
I joined the Sodality of Mary on Saturday afternoons
& we spoke of our deference to Mary
not Americans, & it didn't mean as much,
& I watched the movies of girls & horses
on the hung bedsheet in front of the altar,
& went home, past the house of Americans.
As if every American knew their President.
As if every American owned a part of the space shot, no matter
how far away they were.
After the President was shot, there were the moon rockets.
We walked past the Quinn's house & felt their pride.
We could hear the rockets, & the President from their home state
whose voice was a rocket, & sons of Americans
carried rockets on their uniforms into rainy trees
to keep the menace from encroaching.
In a city of Americans, what happened to
American sons.

In a city of Americans where the girls felt against our blouses
the cloth badge of the Sodality of Mary.
We took the thin biscuit of Communion.
In the lush trees, people were running.
The sound of Americans was so close to them.
The sound of Americans was our deference, each of us, our badges
pressed on our thin chests, homing device for moon rockets,
touch-stones for the blessing of parachutes,
our heads bowed, passing in front of their home.

NON-VIOLENCE

Susan Andrews

we spend another lunch time talking
about bank robbers and police
and if and why they shoot people
again I contemplate
removing my brother the mountie
from the stairwell
when you hold up
your used kleenex in your sweaty hand
and tell me you can help
the police I ask how
wondering where I went wrong
and tell me that you can put the kleenex
into the police typewriter
and typewrite it until it's
smooth and turns into
a poem oh I say

DETECTIVE FICTION

Letter to a Student studying English 666

Eric Wright

DEAR MISS GROBY:

Thank you for your letter asking me for some help with your term paper. I am not sure I can do much for you because I'm afraid I haven't studied the subject in a formal way, and I have practised it only intuitively, feeling my way as I go. Still, I have been asked most of your questions before so I have worked out a few responses, and even in the areas where I have no competence at all perhaps my answers will help you to "limit your topic," as they say in first year. From the range of your questions, I suspect you are still casting about for a subject, let alone narrowing it down to term paper size. But that's your problem. Here goes, then.

Why do I write detective stories?

This is really two questions. The first one is why I write at all. Orwell's answer will do here. First, then, egoism. I want to be known for doing something well. I want my enemies to see me in print. I would have preferred to write great lyric poetry, but it never came so I settled for the detective story. Self-satisfaction is another reason, although this comes largely through the sentence and the paragraph. This is what Orwell calls "aesthetic enthusiasm." As far as I can tell, Orwell's two other reasons, "historical impulse" and "political purpose," play no part in my writing.

Certainly not for money. I have held off from writing novels until I am adequately provided for. I had a greater need to satisfy first: born poor, I am now middle-class, and in the eyes of my relatives extremely successful. But having taken care of my relatives, I am now getting my own back on the rest of the world who snubbed me in childhood (I'm still working off Orwell's essay). I want to emphasize this point; because detective stories are called popular or commercial fiction it is usually assumed that they are written to make money, but in my experience the impulses behind them are the same ones which prompt all writers. This is not to say that money is irrelevant. It is an important index of success, and if there is enough of it I could fly Concorde instead of Wardair. But,

to repeat, like a number of people I know, including some very successful writers in other fields, I have turned to the detective story for fame and aesthetic satisfaction.

The second half of your question concerns why I choose to write detective stories, instead of, say, historical romances. Do I hear a note of wonder, perhaps even judgement, in this question? Writers of detective stories are very sensitive on this point. We are always being condescended to by literary fools who think that detective stories should not be confused with real writing, that they are word-processed by formula on a machine called a hack. Last year one of these people was on a jury to decide the best first novel of the year, and confronted with David Glover's *Precious*, complained that she did not know how to read it. But these people are making a virtue out of ignorance. They don't read detective stories because they have been aware from birth that they are not worth the attention of serious persons. The best reply to them is Jane Austen's in *Northanger Abbey*, made at a time when the novel itself had to be defended against prigs.

I write detective stories because I read them, have always read them, and think the best of them superior to much mainstream fiction. I think that all writers imitate what they admire that they judge is within their scope. I do not write detective stories in my spare time. My hobby is verse. I began writing them by accident. Having written a number of unpublished novels, I was advised by a friendly agent to teach myself something about plotting. It seemed likely that a detective story would be a useful exercise in this regard, so I wrote one. I had wanted to for many years, but thought it might be too difficult, more difficult than a *bildungsroman*, say. Now, I think I came to the detective story at the right time, when I had learned enough about writing from my earlier attempts at more conventional novels.

How do I plan a story?

I begin with the plot, the mystery, if you like, and once I am satisfied that I have a sufficiently strong peg to hang a story on, I begin. The mystery or puzzle, I must confess, is the least of my interests, and one or two reviewers for whom this element is paramount have pointed out the weakness of my plots. So be it. I am always glad to get the solution out of the way, to my satisfaction, at least, so that I can get on with the real writing. But much as I find the construction of the mystery difficult and boring, I have learned not to neglect it. On one occasion I proceeded without a decent mystery, fooling myself that what I had would do, and the result was a disaster that had to be restarted from scratch. But what I have learned from constructing plots is how liberating they are once you have constructed them. When you know exactly how the story ends, it frees you to get on with your work. I expect this is true of all fiction.

Next I need a setting I am very familiar with — Toronto, England, Winnipeg — somewhere I have lived long enough so that I don't have to do any research. It should not surprise anyone that my first murder took place at a Learned Societies' Conference, and the investigation was largely conducted in a Toronto college.

Finally, what interests me most is the story, which in its most limited sense means the killer's motives, but in its widest sense includes the life and times of the chief characters and even a theme. (Is there a hint here of Orwell's "political purpose"?) My first book was about middle-aged men, the victim and the detective. In the second book I got interested in the values of some old men. The third book was a holiday book, a divertissement, and right now I'm trying to write a book about lonely women. The sequence, then, is plot, setting, story, but it is the story that matters to me.

Have you tried other forms of fiction?

Yes, I have, and I will again. In my files I have a novel about a young man with an unfortunate childhood, and another about the adventures of a legally-landed immigrant, both of which I think I have abandoned. I have two others which I haven't abandoned, but I don't want to talk about them. I have written some short stories — nice, old-fashioned stories with a twist at the end, and some verse.

Which writers do you admire? Who has influenced you?

I have put these two questions together because they come to the same thing if, as I assume, you mean crime writers. When I sat down to write my first crime story, my heroes were Nicolas Freeling, Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö, Reginald Hill and Van de Wetering. Since then I have discovered Patrick McGinley and K. C. Constanini. I doubt if you will find the influence of any of these writers in my stories, but that's your problem. What you *will* find, if you read carefully enough, are some other kinds of influences, not on my stories but on my sentences and paragraphs. I start each day with the ambition of not writing an uninteresting sentence, and when my prose gets soggy I turn to one of several writers for a refresher course in rhythm. These writers are Patrick Campbell, Evelyn Waugh, James Thurber, and Graham Greene, especially the first three pages of *The Human Factor*, from all of whom I can quote from memory. That should tell you something.

But I think you want to know who I do not admire, not so? This is more difficult because the list is very large, and includes most of the practitioners of crime writing, simply because I have not read them. Since I began writing I have been constantly embarrassed by readers who know far more than I do about the

genre, and want to know if I share their taste. Invariably they enthuse about people I have never read. But I am dodging. Who do I not admire that I *have* read? Agatha Christie, for one. With that admission I should add — and all other writers whose chief attraction is the intricacy of the puzzle. I don't care who did it, and if that is the only attraction, then I read ten pages and turn, with the mildest curiosity, to the last three. I don't care who did it in the writers I like, either. I am happy to let the author have his surprise, only asking that he entertain me along the way. What I read for is story, character, and a distinctive voice, just what I read other kinds of fiction for. The test is, can I re-read it? I don't read thrillers, except *Dirty Story* by Eric Ambler. Finally I don't read hard-boiled private-eye stories including *The Maltese Falcon*. At this point you are entitled to observe that I may be in the wrong business, but I am just trying to be straight with you. To say I do not admire these people means only that they lie outside my interests; none of them arouses in me the desire to imitate them, or read any more. The only books I can think of that I admire enormously without wanting to write them are the "witty caper" novels, such as, particularly, *Metzger's Dog* and *Any Four Women Could Rob the Bank of Italy*.

How would you classify your books in critical terms?

Again, this is your job, not mine, but I have wondered about this, and I'll tell you what I think. In reading the academic criticism of the genre I have come across, I have found very little that has been helpful to me in understanding what I am doing. The Freudian criticism is so reductive as to be useless, except to students of psychology, and of the rest, only what is called archetypal criticism have I found to correspond to my own instincts, perhaps because as a student of literature, I stopped reading critical theory after I got through the first essay in the *Anatomy of Criticism*, when I had what I needed. So, using Frye's terms, it seems to me that crime fiction is of three kinds. The first is the romance, which includes all private eye fiction in which the hero is superior to the reader. Robert Parker is perhaps the outstanding crime romance writer practising today. The second kind is low mimetic, or comedy, in which the hero is like us, there is a world in disorder which is corrected by a revelation at the end of the action, and the ending is happy. (I suppose that in the rare crime story where the hero fails to restore order, you get Frye's "irony," but I haven't got a grip on that term yet. The term "naturalism" still makes more sense to me.) Apart from being low mimetic in genre, these stories also lend themselves to humour. This is what I think I am doing — writing low mimetic fiction with some funny bits in it. The third form is melodrama, which is what I would call the thriller. Frye calls melodrama "comedy without the humour" and he would lump all detective fiction under the heading, but he is wrong about this.

What is the difference between detective fiction and mainstream fiction?

This is your most interesting question and I'm still working on it. Some would say there is no difference, and cite *Crime and Punishment* and *Oedipus Rex* as detective stories. But I can't go along with that. I think the answer must lie in the arrangement of the parts of the plot. A detective story stands or falls by the proper arrangement of parts. That is what makes it "play" as actors say. Detective stories go backwards; novels may go forwards. Or try this: at the end of a detective story the reader is surprised; at the end of a novel it is the author who has been surprised. I'm not much help, here, so if you come across a better answer I would be glad if you would let me know.

Would you comment on the current scene in Canada?

No, sorry. I am on good terms with many of the crime writers in this country, so you couldn't trust what I said. Try Robert Weaver's article in the *Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature* which, though published a year earlier, supercedes the article in *The Canadian Encyclopedia*. But if you are tempted to sum up Canadian crime fiction in your essay, be sure to read first the enormously sensible letter by Peter Robinson in *Books in Canada* (May 1985). It is a bit soon for any talk of assessment.

One last word. When I published my first book, a colleague observed that writing detective fiction is really an old man's game. Her comment hurt at first and I cancelled my reservation at Club Med, but now I think there is meat for you to ponder. How many people of your age write detective stories? Thrillers, yes, but the kind of stuff I write perhaps requires the author to be of mature years, if not actually mature. It may be, too, that the novel really is dead, and the detective story is its epilogue, a last place for us old men to practise an old-fashioned genre.

Good luck with your essay.

PRODUCT OF TURKEY

Wm. B. Robertson

Figs are not attractive fruit
to my Canadian children
unfamiliar fruit they need
explanation before eating

my little girl knows
what fruit should look like
and dislikes figs already
facing their strangeness
their potential for a mess

not like oranges, pears,
and bananas,
figs are ugly,
she makes them ugly with her
mind, her face wrinkling like familiar
apples left to dry into
witches' faces
and without tasting she demands
to know who
brought them here and
where they came from

as her brother wipes sweet
stickiness from his lips and
prepares for cereal
she distrusts me and worse
is reserved for those innocents
who unwittingly took
another familiar, her golden
Thanksgiving bird,
just to name their far-off land.

VICTORIA

D. G. Jones

is a marionette
show of elderly people and
youths in

rhythmic collision

gulls fly
all over the set

and

the government
sails by in
Rattenbury's light-

ship al-
ways

oh

surrounded by
deep water and strong
currents, it

is no passing show

anchored
by kites, and small planes
announcing

pizza in the sky

and solid in-
vestments

oh

removed
from the difficult coast
of America, domed

and pedestrian with
gardens, with
walk-on clouds, it — oh

Punch

and Judy are
at it a-
gain

ARTHRITIS

Leona Gom

pipes bang in the basement,
the water lurches around the joints.
every morning the house takes longer
to warm up, the insulation is just
wearing out. in the corners again
are small puddles of sawdust,
I pretend it is only ordinary dirt.

there are noises in the walls driving
the cat crazy, he attacks
the flowers on the wallpaper, I
know how he feels, imagine
small grey things chewing.
in one room the lights hum and flicker,
the sockets are corroded but
it goes deeper than that, I can't
plug anything in without a shock,
a spark jumping into my knuckles.
one day I will get tired
of putting in fuses, feeding
some new pills down the brittle drains,
propping up and taping together.
I will have to hire someone
to come in, but know already
he will sigh at what he diagnoses
behind the gyproc, will say too much
damage has been done, it isn't
a matter of oiling a few hinges,
why don't I just
move out?

and why not? I may
own the building but
something else is living here, something
hungry, it won't listen to
advice about ecology, how
we are all in this together.
it wants to move up into management,
hire outside the union, open
branch plants in the suburbs.
I am only a clause in the contract
it has learned it can ignore.
yes, I think on days like this,
why not sell out, why not
just move, it doesn't
matter where.

BOYS IN THE BOX

Pop Culture and Critics in Canada

Geoff Pevere

OVER THE PAST FIVE YEARS, something peculiar and unprecedented has happened to the popular status of that former paragon of tweedy academicism, the critic of the arts: they've become sexy. (*Saturday Night Live* recently ran a mock-preview of a new high-tension action series, replete with car chases and emotional bulldozing, called *Critic*.) Once confined to the distant towers of serious study or banished to the back pages of newspapers and magazines, cultural pundits of late have acquired a celebrity and level of professional credibility frequently equal to or sometimes greater than the subject of their scrutiny (when, for example, *New York Times* music critic Robert Palmer writes on an obscure rock and roll garage band like the Replacements you can safely bet it's the critic, and not what's criticized, that's snagging readers). Furthermore, in the manner of rock videos or the pod creatures from *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, cultural wags are everywhere. Whether it's magazines, radio, TV, or the windiest corner of a cocktail soirée, the critics are there, quipping the light fantastic and generally (to quote *Miami Vice*) in your face.

It is not difficult to imagine the day when critics will be every bit as marketable as what they comment upon. Already Roger Ebert, the hamburger-shaped, bespectacled movie critic of the *Chicago Sun-Times*, and the co-host (with the *Tribune*'s hot dog-shaped Gene Siskel) of TV's popular *At the Movies*, is a publisher of books and a syndicated radio commentator. When Warren Beatty was introduced to Ebert and Siskel at the Toronto Festival of Festival's tribute to the actor, Beatty quipped, "You guys are just as famous as I am. Maybe I should be interviewing you." The mind needn't make any acrobatic leaps of imagination to conceive of the possibility of foam-filled Roger Ebert stuffed toys, Roger Ebert lobby candy, or even a line of Jay Scott designer leatherwear.

The why and how of this peculiar elevation of the cultural commentator in the past decade is arguable. Whether it's attributed to a rising postmodernist sense of mass culture consciousness, or merely interpreted as the latest inevitable step in the electronic age's certain march towards the culture of media-veneration hearkened in different epochs by Orwell, McLuhan, and Warhol, is finally less important than coming to terms with what this cult of the critic-as-celebrity means, what its effects are on the way popular culture is consumed and interpreted, and what it says about the state of pop culture discourse and analysis in general today — and what, if anything, all this has to do with cultural activity and study in Canada.

But that's another essay in itself. For the present purposes the mere fact of critic celebrity is itself significant, particularly for what it suggests about the state of popular culture in the postmodernist age: this celebritization of the cultural pundit is the mass acknowledgement of the legitimacy of the practice (if not the theory) of discussing popular culture, an acknowledgement that bourgeois culture, with its conceptions of quality, uniqueness, and acquired taste is not capable of. Certainly this myopic insistence on culture as something serious preserves at least an impression of a healthy social order stratified according to taste, education, and manners: a social order that has actually been steadily crumbling since the advent of industrialization — and has been nearly reduced to rubble in the electronic age, when all culture is accessible to anyone thanks to the socially equalizing fact of affordable media. Yet this socialized (and institutionalized) snobbism has served to retard the practice of popular culture analysis to the point where technology and its effects have so far outstripped our understanding of them, we're like the chattering man-apes scampering around the mysterious and omnipotent black monolith in *2001: A Space Odyssey*. The difference is that popular culture and the media of its transmission were not sent to us from some superior, god-like intelligence in a distant galaxy — these myriad message systems strafing our sensibilities are monoliths of our own making.

Furthermore, these distinctions between levels of culture, and the qualitative modes of evaluation which reify them, cannot exist in the same way the media of their transmission are capable of transmitting *all* cultural products (or at least a figurative representation of them: you've still got to be there to experience the tactile nature of sculpture) in identical modes of discourse — TV can show a *representation* of anything. It's that deathless question of form and content again: if TV, for example, is viewed chiefly as a content medium, one can confidently — if naively — assert that distinctions between greater and poorer forms of culture do exist in such choices as *Masterpiece Theatre* or *Punky Brewster*. But to assert that would be to ignore one of the few genuinely profound and penetrating theoretical insights of the entire study of electronic-age culture:

that the medium of articulation does determine what is (and can be) articulated, that context does determine content, that the medium *is* the message.

The implications of this conception for the traditional and now-institutionalized distinctions between high and low culture, or art and commerce, or universal value and disposable trash, are profoundly disruptive (which possibly explains the virtual banishment of such thinking for so long from those fine arts sanctuaries called universities): it means that such distinctions are, in fact, purely academic after all, for, if they cannot apply to fixed and objective properties of cultural artifacts — which become unfixed when transmitted by other media — the distinctions exist only in the language used to make them. Art in the post-electronic age is not an unassailable set of attributes attached to a concrete set of objects, it exists only in forms of discourse applied to certain (increasingly arbitrary) objects. Art is in the mouth of the beholder.

This is not to suggest that words have no effect or existence outside their articulation; on the contrary, what we have here is the good old-fashioned, healthy, give-and-take and tug-of-war of a dialectic: the terms we use to identify and distinguish art *do* affect our perceptions and attitudes towards those objects we deem artful. Therefore, it is quite likely and entirely reasonable that we *will* distinguish between *Masterpiece Theatre* and *Punky Brewster* according to their respective "artistic" merits or intentions, and disregard the identicality of their medium, and the standards of evaluation are likely to apply to elements of the programmes that have little or nothing to do with the medium itself. They will be "content" standards such as literariness, plausibility, acting proficiency, thematic depth, and social import.

THUS, THERE ARE definite, if malleable, standards for distinguishing both popular from more specialized forms of culture, and more from less popular forms of popular culture. Popular culture, which has developed out of oral and folk traditions, generally is comprised of those forms of cultural discourse that appeal to the widest possible audiences and which require the least amount of skill or orientation to be appreciated and apprehended — anybody with hearing can understand, if not appreciate, the appeal of Michael Jackson's "Beat It," but it takes a particular level of aural literacy to get down with John Cage. Reaching and appealing to the broadest possible audience is not only a characteristic of popular culture, it is, in an advanced capitalist society, an end in itself. Pop culture is part of the economic (and — we'll get to this later — ideological) apparatus of capitalism and, as such, exists to make a profit. As western industrial capitalism developed in such a way that leisure time and disposable income created a vast and untapped source of undirected and unspent income,

popular culture filled the economic vacuum both as a way for workers to occupy leisure hours and as a consumable object paid for with surplus income. As various forms of pop culture achieved a level of economic viability and profitability, it became necessary to create a demand for these forms in order to reproduce themselves. As the demand grew, so did the volume. This mutually-replenishing scenario is identical today, only technology and audience size has changed. Popular culture exists to reproduce itself, and it does this by maintaining a constant demand for its products.

This brings us to one of the most elementary and essential distinctions between popular and more specialized forms of culture: for the latter, profitability and reproductability may be factors (although exclusivity is more highly valued in many fine arts), but not *raisons d'être* (which is why *Masterpiece Theatre* is less likely to be interrupted by commercials than by appeals for donations). Popular culture forms exist principally as profit-making mechanisms, businesses as capitalist apparatuses designed to keep those dollars on the move.

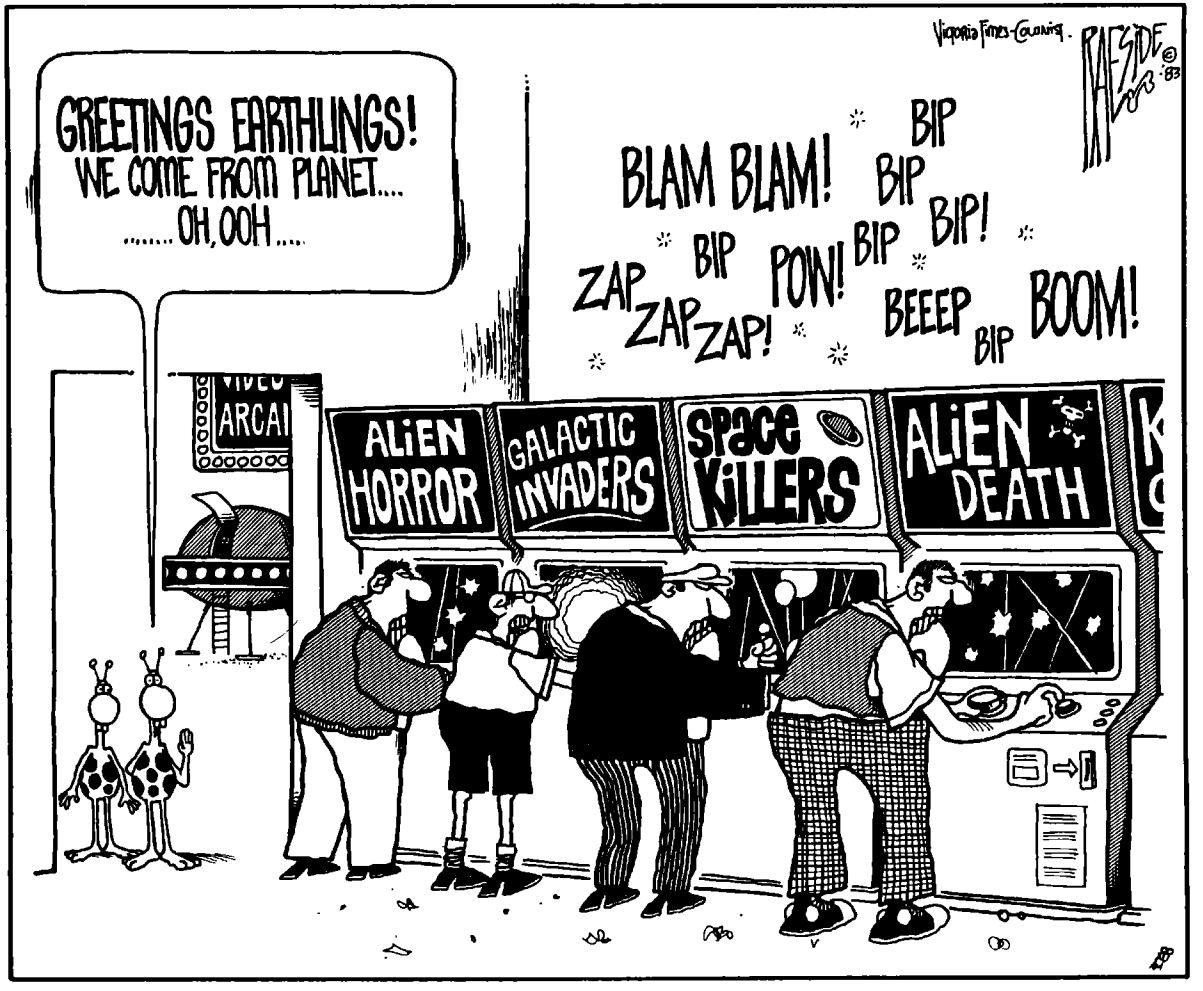
This economic function has profound implications for the social, political, and ideological nature of popular culture (which, after all, are systems of discourse as well as snares for dollars): it determines the nature and range of possible messages to be transmitted by monitoring what it is possible to express in pop culture terms (and still be popular) and how it is to be expressed. Politically, this means that, by virtue of its function as a capital-gathering apparatus within capitalism, which depends upon the greatest possible demand created by reaching and sustaining the broadest possible number of consumers, pop is reactionary. The vast majority of pop culture systems must reify rather than challenge things-as-they-are in order to ensure their own reproduction. Producing idealized images of how-sweet-it-is is the ideological function of pop-culture. It keeps us happy here and now, and it keeps us coming back for more. Pop cannot agitate and profit, it must reassure, reconcile, and reaffirm. It must comfort. This is why most pop culture systems are genres, comprised of finitely variable, easily identifiable and (this is important) eminently reproducible patterns and elements arranged in predictable and thus satisfying (and saleable) ways. We continue to consume pop culture not because of the possibility of challenge or change it may present but, on the contrary, because of the certainty of satisfaction. To a great extent, therefore, status quo support is virtually embedded in the very form and function of pop culture systems.*

* The predictability factor was recently illustrated with unusual candidness by the poster for Sylvester Stallone's *Rocky IV*, which shows the boxer aloft the shoulders of his coach and trainer, wrapped in the stars and stripes and roaring in victory. The ending is given away by the poster because it's the certainty of the outcome, and the satisfaction of patterns established in the other *Rockys*, that will sell the film, and not the possibility of something new.

Other, marginal forms of culture may exist to oppose and confront things as they are, to thwart our expectations, challenge our assumptions, scramble our sensibilities, and create new ways of seeing, hearing, or understanding. But not pop, and that is another distinction between it and, if you insist, art.

It is also one of the most urgent justifications for the serious study of pop culture, its form and its effects. As pop culture is a profoundly effective mechanism through which dominant ideology is preserved, reproduced, and naturalized, any effective and comprehensive strategy of social criticism must confront it. But this confrontation need not be restricted to a bemoaning of the sorry and sentimental state of pop culture as it is, nor to the cooking up of alternative aesthetic strategies — both are just as likely to result in yet another retreat to the falsely progressive shelter of high culture as they are to result in any effective strategy for change or understanding. (Both also assume that pop culture systems are monolithic and unalterable, which they aren't.) No, to effectively address pop culture means to deal with it as-it-is, in all its glitzy, superficial, and sentiment-soaked glory. Once its modes of operation have been studied, it is also possible to see where interventions in the ostensibly monolithic apparatuses are possible. Popular culture's principal strategy of status quo reification is the reconciliation of tensions and contradictions. Things which threaten order are destroyed, things which do not conform to prevailing standards of normality and propriety are banished or rehabilitated (or nuked). What is thus played out endlessly in pop culture is a process of society justifying and protecting itself with the systematic and automatic striking out at that which does not conform, whether that's Indians, errant mothers, gays, or crooked politicians. The key to the intervention in this apparently spook-proofed apparatus is found in the strategic and structured paradox in popular culture posed by the ceaseless nature of the apparatus's work itself: pop culture's job is never done because the contradictions it deals with can never completely be reconciled. They can be dealt with symbolically, they can be ideologically reinforced as negative or evil, but they cannot be eradicated. These contradictions thus represent the points where the seams of an apparently seamless system of ideological hegemony are not only made visible, but, by the mere fact of their persistent presence, are *straining*.*

* The proliferation of movies dealing with the rehabilitation or punishment of women for abandoning their traditional roles is a typical if somewhat overdetermined example of the manner in which pop culture attempts to neutralize social contradictions by resolving them. Postfeminist Hollywood has recovered from the blow dealt to its primary patriarchal propaganda platform, the family, with a body of movies, from *Kramer vs. Kramer* to *One Magic Christmas*, that punish women — and particularly mothers — for getting independent.


GREETINGS EARTHLINGS!
WE COME FROM PLANET....
.....OH, OOH.....
BLAM BLAM!
BIP
BIP
BIP
BIP!
ZAP ZAP ZAP!
PON!
BEEEP
BIP
BOOM!
ALIEN HORROR
GALACTIC INVADERS
SPACE KILLERS
ALIEN DEATH
FAR SIDE

TO ANALYZE POP CULTURE in terms of this perennial battle between the status quo and those forces which threaten its hegemony is to come to terms not only with what our society feels it must remove, reform, or conquer to maintain itself, but to begin to intervene upon the reifying function of pop culture systems which depend upon the it's-only-a-movie appearance of innocuous transparency to function. Once you've seen *Rambo*'s big gun for what it is, his touted patriotic "heroism" seems similarly inflated. Reading pop culture texts can be a way of addressing critically the social context which produces and employs them. All pop culture texts, from Prince videos to *The A-Team* to Stephen King books, are political, in that they transmit ideological messages (and attempt to reconcile potentially explosive contradictions) that can be identified, exposed, and challenged. In this regard, pop culture not only deserves to be taken seriously, it *must* be.

To speak of pop culture in a Canadian context is, to a certain extent, to speak in mutually exclusive terms, for there are few forms of Canadian culture that can unsmirkingly be called popular. Not that pop culture isn't popular in Canada, *Canadian* pop culture isn't. The largest consumer of American pop culture outside of the U.S. is Canada. The implications of this situation for producers, consumers, and critics of popular culture in Canada, to state the obvious, are profound and have — or should have — been addressed elsewhere, but a few observations can be stressed within the contours of this argument. The unchallenged flow, volume, and availability of American pop culture, be it in the form of radio, records, magazines, books, movies, television, cable, or videocassette, has probably produced a peculiar and peculiarly Canadian strain of cultural schizophrenia. By constantly subjecting ourselves to myriad, and virtually unavoidable forms of American pop culture, Canadians must exist in a kind of collective subconscious limbo created by the gap that exists between idealized representations and actual conditions. *With* but not *of* America, Canadians consume American pop forms, but derive even less satisfaction than even the leave-'em-hungry nature of most consumable culture customarily provides. American pop culture can only serve to tease Canadians with the simultaneous reminder of their similarity to and their difference from Canadians.* This sense of looking in on but not partaking of the big party that is America reproducing itself for Americans has, to a certain extent, defined the Canadian collective consciousness: we are a

* *English* Canadians in particular. The language difference and minority status of Quebeckers has ensured the consistent production for and demand for French culture, popular and otherwise. But this doesn't mean that Quebec is immune to cultural schizophrenia: statistically, the rate of consumption of American pop culture appears to be growing there too. More slowly, perhaps, but just as certainly.

nation of outsiders, window shoppers at the American Pop Culture Shoppe, and this exiled status has permeated our own cultural forms, from the virtual institutionalization of our much-vaunted, objectively detached "documentary tradition" and the thematic preoccupation with surviving *outdoors* in our literature, to the miserable tradition of pogey-collecting losers in Canadian fictional films and the ironic postmodern detachment of a Canadian TV comedy like *SCTV*. This sense of cultural vagrancy is further entrenched by the limbo created in the gap between what we want and cannot have and what we've got and don't want. Eternal browsers at the American pop culture smorgasbord, most Canadians remain voluntary abstainers from their native cultural cuisine (if cultural anorexia is possible, it's thriving here). Not only are we more comfortable with American culture, — and nowhere is this more evident than with mainstream reviewers for whom American pop culture is the standard against which to measure everything else — it is not unlikely that Canadian pop culture will seem to Canadians foreign, second rate, and downright Amateur Hour by comparison.† It will seem an acute reminder of our lack of ability, maturity, and confidence and it will embarrass us the way we were embarrassed by a kid brother's tears in front of older friends in the schoolyard: Oh god, how can I be related to *that*?

THIS LACK OF a sustained process of cultural self-representation not only has resulted in a nation of pseudo-Americans and a national identity that is virtually defined by its lack of positive identifying characteristics, but also has played a significantly determining role in the nature and function of cultural analysis and criticism in Canada, which tends to be defensive in tone (we're just as good as they are) and negative in methodology (but we're different). Thus, identity-stalking has practically become a defining condition of cultural criticism in Canada. The case of Canadian film criticism over the past two decades is a particularly illuminating case in point, for not only does it illustrate this process of negative defence as critical practice, it's a particularly pure example of the academic institutionalization of Canadian cultural self-denigration.

For the most part the practice of Canadian film criticism (that is, the criticism of Canadian film; which in turn implies a level of analytical rigour and seriousness to be distinguished from casual pay-or-stay-away mainstream reviewing) is a

† Last year, I taught an introductory film studies course at Carleton University. For the "national cinema" section of the course, I chose Canadian films. In a year that included Bergman and Godard, and a number of Hollywood thrillers, the home-grown movies struck the students as just as strange and "foreign" as anything else in the course.

recent phenomenon, and its relative degree of academic legitimization has corresponded to the gradual growth of film studies departments in Canadian universities since the late 1960's. The parallel determinants to the development of Canadian film criticism were: identity (specifically, its absence), which meant a search for cinematic trends and characteristics that might demonstrably be defined as "Canadian" (which frequently meant merely "not American"); and the auteurist mode of criticism inherited from the French *Cahiers du cinema* group of the late 1950's and popularized in North America during the 1960's. Itself a mode of criticism appropriated from the study of literature, auteurist critical practice placed the director as the source of creative responsibility in the cinematic process, and sought to distinguish greater from the lesser "authors" by providing evidence of a strong creative sensibility in the sustained manifestation of such literary qualities as theme, symbol, and consistent moral world-view. Worthy auteurs were those who demonstrated a distinctive style and sensibility over a body of works. The potential Canadian auteur was thus doubly handicapped: not only did he have to come up with the thematic and stylistic goods, the goods also had to be, somehow, *Canadian*.

In providing a legitimization strategy for Canadian cinema in the face of almost total indifference, this auteurist approach was invaluable at the time, even if it didn't turn up too many auteurs. (The biggest problem — and most illuminating, for what it reveals about cultural activity in general in Canada — wasn't finding the directors, it was following them up: few were able to keep working long enough to build up a canon sufficiently worthy of auteurist attention.) Consequently, those few filmmakers who did measure up to auteurist standards were leapt on like food scraps in a dog pound, and were frequently subjected to an orgy of praise and analysis that so outstripped their actual achievement (or even output), that reading the stuff made one feel that old playground humiliation setting in again: Oh god, is it necessary to *canonize* these guys?

At the conceptual core of auteurism lies a certain romantic notion of artistry, uniqueness, and individualism — all essential tools in the care and keeping of safe distances between high and low forms of culture. The application of the auteurist mode in the Canadian context also imported these parasitical qualitative assumptions lock, stock, and quill pen, with the result that judgements based on distinction, uniqueness, and artistic merit (blended with the sole local variant, Canadianness) were applied to a cinema that is, by nature, diverse, sporadic, regional, and low budget. Thus, a mode of critical analysis born of, and designed to address forms of cinematic activity — like those in the U.S. and France — so productive artists had to be tracked in order not to go unnoticed, was deployed in a country where a highly productive year rarely saw more than twenty feature films made. It was like using a chainsaw to trim hedges.

Not only was the method ill-suited to the reality of film production in Canada (which was thus condemned to failure *a priori* by a set of standards irrelevant to the local situation), but also it perpetuated a high culture bias that effectively prevented the serious cultural analysis of all but an absurdly small percentage of films produced in Canada. Those few areas of film production which have enjoyed a relative degree of sustained activity, such as animation, TV drama, and mock-Hollywood cheapies (movies with titles like *Death Ship* and *Terror Train* which, let's face it, have comprised the bulk of English-Canadian production for the last ten years), were left largely ignored and undiscussed, since they were not admissible as worthy of analysis according to the restrictive qualitative standards of auteurism. Back to the schoolyard, kids.

CANADA'S POP CULTURE, such as it is, has thus suffered from a crippling indifference on two fronts: a non-audience which prefers the schizoid satisfaction provided by American products, and the cultural analysts, who have abandoned it (as leprous and unworthy) in favour of the pursuit of a phantom called Great Canadian Art.

Unused and yet still abandoned: that is largely the fate of a national culture for whom popular is less an apt adjective than a terminological legacy. Lest this scenario seem so bleak as to summon those playground blues again, I have saved for these ruminations a silver lining, a ray of hope, a beacon of potential cultural and intellectual redemption in Canada that holds within its luminosity a possible key to a prosperous pop-culture future. Lo, I have seen this future and its name is — Corey Hart.

Yes, disbeliever, Corey Hart. Well not Corey specifically, but what Corey represents in pop culture status and impact in Canada. Corey is one of a number of Canadian pop music stars who are riding a crest of international notoriety virtually unprecedented in the hobbling history of Canadian pop culture. (Bryan Adams, the Springsteen of Scarborough, last summer sold out seven consecutive performances at New York's Madison Square Gardens.) Not coincidentally the rise of this group of Canadian pop musicians corresponds to the ascent to popular prominence of the latest alternative television medium, rock video. With its four-minute mini-movie format, in which pop performers either perform songs or appear in condensed dramatic scenarios illustrating the song (or both), rock video has introduced a vehicle for the production of pure celebrity that, particularly when seen in its 24-hour non-stop cable format (called Much Music in Canada), puts Canadian performers and their pop culture vehicles on equal footing and status with the world's best known rock and rollers. Rock video has democratized pop culture production and consumption to such an extent that it

is not outrageous to imagine that this might be the medium through which that pernicious old schoolyard sensibility might be beaten and blown away. Rock video programming makes no sheepish apologies for its Canadian content, nor does it make overdetermined efforts to justify Canadian performers, nor does it ghettoize Canadians or their videos in segregated or specialized programmes (it is probably the only specialty programming format that would happily meet Canadian content regulations without being legislated to do so). Bryan is stuck right in there between Mick and Tina, and made to hold his own. And, judging by record and concert ticket sales here and abroad, the kid's doing okay. On Much Music, Canadian pop culture is presented and consumed as equal in quality to everybody else's.

This is not to suggest that rock video is itself a medium of profundity and cultural responsibility, if such qualifications can be fairly applied to pop culture production. Depending on who you're reading or what video you're watching, it's either the most debased and regressive forum for sexist and reactionary fantasy-pandering since *Hustler* magazine or a veritable frontier of unmined artistic and technological potential — it's testimony to the medium's richness that it's both and more. What matters is that it's a form of Canadian pop culture that's honest-to-god *popular*. Not that popularity in itself is a virtue — after all, Sylvester Stallone movies are popular — but the ramifications of popularity for cultural self-image are profound: this could represent not only the first group of Canadian performers who are not handicapped from the starting gate by an assumption of innate cultural inferiority, but, more significantly, the mutually interdependent rise to popular prominence of Canadian performers and Canadian rock video suggests the existence of an audience that is similarly unhindered by the self-loathing that has defined Canadian cultural composition, production, and criticism since Norman Jewison and Paul Anka pulled stakes and hightailed it for L.A.

Not that Corey Hart can lead us out of the darkness of our conditioned inferiority to that proud pinnacle of cultural confidence all by his pouty, diminutive self. Rock video may be the necessary proof that, given the proper circumstances and attitude, Canadian culture can thrive, compete, and succeed without any apologies for its Canadian pedigree, but it is not likely to lift the veil of indoctrinated indifference and inferiority from all levels of cultural activity across this vast and chilly land. More likely, it will be denigrated and sneered upon (as it already has been) by those keepers of the flickering cultural flame for whom popular is an epithet and marginality is proof of integrity.

Essentially, the critical matter for Canadian popular culture is a matter of criticism. Even though rock video and its immaculately coiffed stars are likely to continue to thrive and gain popular ground despite the near-total absence of any serious analytical and critical response, this popularity will remain useless to

Canadian cultural, intellectual, and political development unless it is addressed, studied, and interpreted. As long as Canadian cultural criticism and its practitioners continue to wait, like some breed of polar ostrich with its head hunkered into a snowbank, for Canadian culture to rise to a set of standards that bear practically no relevance to the brass tacks and under-siege reality of cultural production and consumption in Canada, nothing will be gained but a frozen noggin. Besides, Roger Ebert didn't become a star with a six figure salary by holding out for art.

CONGRATULATIONS

Martin Kevan

I

In the provincial centre
Laughing with American power
Office workers teem through glass doors
To walk the icy boulevards
Where skin freezes mask-tight
And hoary cars thump past
On chains.

Rolled like a sausage
Under a manager's arm
A newspaper hotly advertises
Air-frames, baby clothes, cognac, dogs and eggs.
Anniversary photographs of ice stalagmites
Covering 'Liberty Ships'
Headed for Murmansk,
Are squeezed beneath
A beauty from Jamaica
On page three.

"The President's got the Ruskies
By their geriatric balls,"
Murmurs the manager,
Mist steaming from his mouth.

"Laser shooting satellites
Exploding nuclear weapons
Up in space
Are ours.
What need have I to fear?"

2

At ten hundred hours,
The vice-president of marketing
Calls the manager
Whirring up the stringy elevator shaft
To dangle him in the jet-stream cold
That blows around the tower
Of business acumen.

"Sales are down," he's told.
"We have no choice;
Your salary is eating profits."

HOW TO BE YOUR OWN BUTCHER

David McFadden

The theme of all great art: it's nice to be alive, and no matter how great your suffering the earth will wait forever to take your flesh and bones. So it's nice to be alive and well-fed too and to be able to spend the entire day in the public library. I'm one of the lucky ones. How can I be neurotic? Of course it's the lucky ones who are neurotic, not the ones who are working on blast furnaces, in dark wobbly coal mines, or worse watching their kids starve. But just to spend the day sitting around the library, watching people, reading aimlessly but fruitfully drifting, looking at the photographic exhibits, the display from the Spanish embassy. A waterbed salesman in a business suit is reading A Practical Guide for the Beginning Farmer and there is a sign reading HOW TO BE, the sign's on a shelf containing all the titles that start with the words how to be: How to Be an Inventor, How to Be a Complete Clown, How to Be a Disc

Jockey, How to Be a Father, How to Be a Fix-it Genius Using Seven Simple Tools, How to Be a Friend People Want to Be Friends With, How to Be a Movie Star. . . . The waterbed salesman stood up and walked over as I picked up a book entitled How to Be Your Own Butcher and I laughed and turned to him blindly and said, "Looks like this book is for the ultimate masochist!" And he looked horrified and turned and walked away and only then did I notice he had a steel hook for a right hand.

"Commercial, but listenable," commented Max Ferguson on the radio this morning, after playing a record by Switzerland's most famous yodeller, there were quite a few interesting stories in the paper this morning, and when I think about it I think I know quite a lot about how to be, frankly. To write openly and without artifice is a magnificent gesture born of lovely desperation. As Anna Akhmatova put it as her friends were dying in the streets or at the front, "One hope the poorer, I'll be one song the richer." Have no theories to hide behind, I tell myself, no dramatic stage for your petty little ego, avoid suffering only by becoming supremely conscious of the nature of suffering and let yourself be overwhelmed by it, and above all let yourself sail alone on the ocean of insanity known as the poetic life. Before coming into the library I saw a man bicycling along with a cigar in his mouth, a large portable radio blaring away on his crossbar, and a large coloured picture of Jesus pasted to the radio. He had all his limbs.

LES TELEROMANS

Une phénomène Québécois

Solange Chaput-Rolland

DEPUIS TROIS ANS, je suis plongée dans l'écriture télévisuelle. En collaboration avec Michèle Bazin, présidente et directrice générale de Québécor, une des plus importantes maisons de publications au Québec, je rédige un téléroman: "Monsieur le Ministre." La toile de fond est tissée à même les démarches des femmes et des hommes engagés en politique active, dans un pays irréel, qui ressemble cependant au Québec. Nous avons choisi délibérément de ne pas situer l'action de "Monsieur le Ministre" dans les villes de Québec ou d'Ottawa parce qu'au moment où toutes deux nous nous sommes lancées dans cette aventure dramatique, nous venions de vivre, chacune à des niveaux différents, la défaite électorale de 1981. Michèle Bazin était alors attachée de presse de Claude Ryan, chef du Parti Libéral du Québec, et je venais de perdre mes élections dans le comté de Prévost, élections qui reconduisirent M. René Lévesque au pouvoir. Si nous avions localisé l'action de "Monsieur le Ministre" dans l'un ou l'autre des capitales, nous aurions sûrement été accusées de nous livrer à une propagande fédéraliste (Ottawa), ou souverainiste (Québec). Nous avons toutefois modelé nos intrigues politiques sur notre système parlementaire pour la simple raison que nous connaissons fort mal les autres. En moins de six mois, nous avons été cherchées un large public de plus d'un million de téléspectateurs francophones, répartis dans toutes les provinces qui diffusent les émissions du réseau français de la Société Radio-Canada. J'ai découvert avec étonnement, j'en conviens, l'engouement des Québécois et des francophones canadiens pour les célèbres téléromans des auteurs québécois.

Nos téléromans ne ressemblent en rien aux soaps américains ni aux séries telles que Dallas ou Dynastie; ils sont typiquement du Québec autant par les scénarios que par la langue et la familiarité des téléspectateurs avec nos personnages et leurs démarches télévisuelles. Les plus célèbres ont atteint de très larges auditoires dès le début de l'ère télévisuelle. "Les Belles Histoires des Pays d'en Haut" de Claude Henri Grignon, "Les Plouffes" de Roger Lemelin, "Le Survenant" de Germaine Guévremont, sont demeurés des modèles du genre. Ils sont perçus comme les classiques des téléromans. Ils étaient tournés vers le passé. Plus près

de nous, "Le Temps d'une Paix" de Pierre Gauvreau, "Terre Humaine" de Mia Ridez et "Le Parc des Braves" de Fernand Dansereau, sont également tournés vers un passé mais plus récent. Quand un peuple n'est jamais certain de son avenir, il se raccroche aux histoires de son passé. Notre devise nationale le dit clairement: *Je me souviens*. Plusieurs de nos téléromans se souviennent avec poésie, verve et imagination, des premiers colons, des anciens, des aînés de tous ceux qui ont donné à notre société sa couleur, sa saveur et sa teneur.

La langue de nos personnages télévisuels ressemble et colle à celle que nous parlons tous les jours, et qui n'est du joual ni un vulgaire sabir. Elle est aussi différente de celle des Français de France, que l'anglais de Toronto ou de Vancouver l'est de la langue de Londres. Finalement, les téléromans plaisent aux Québécois parce que nous sommes un peuple de tradition orale, parce que nous aimons entendre de belles et grandes histoires, et parce que nous n'avons pas encore fini de nous découvrir, de nous rassembler, de nous regarder évoluer. Dans ce sens, nos téléromans sont, à la façon dont Stendhal parlait du roman: "un miroir que nous promenons de chaque côté de la rue. . . "

"Monsieur le Ministre," un téléroman dont la toile de fond est politique, plaît à ce secteur de notre population qui s'intéresse au déroulement des activités gouvernementales du Québec et aussi à ceux aiment le jeu des comédiens recrutés parmi les plus talentueux de notre milieu artistique. Le succès de notre téléroman repose en grande partie sur ceux et celles qui incarnent nos personnages avec un réalisme et une autorité qui les rend familiers à ceux qui regardent les épisodes de "Monsieur le Ministre," diffusés tous les mardis soir à 20 heures.

Il fut amusant et parfois irritant pour Michèle Bazin et moi de constater que dès les premiers épisodes, le public s'amusait à mettre des noms sur nos personnages, et cherchait à savoir qui se cachait sous les caractères des ministres, députés, chef de l'Opposition, conseillers, chefs de cabinet, attachés de presse, etc. Nous avons toutes deux pris un soin jaloux de nous éloigner des sentiers battus de la politique provinciale et fédérale pour décrire des situations inusitées. Mais forcément, parce que le téléromans s'inspire de notre politique contemporaine sans toutefois impliquer les partis politiques réels, il s'apparente à une réalité sociale incarnée par nos personnages. Inventer un caractère aussi fort en couleur que notre premier ministre télévisuel joué à la perfection par Michel Dumont, créer de toute pièce un ministre des Finances que Roger Lebel a imposé à l'attention des téléspectateurs avec une autorité surprenante, invitent nécessairement aux comparaisons. Nous n'y avons pas échappé. Mais ni l'une ni l'autre ne sommes femmes et auteurs à régler nos comptes avec qui que ce soit parmi les parterres politiques du sein desquels nous comptons des amis dans tous les partis. Nous n'avons pas voulu imiter les faits et gestes de nos députés et ministres. Nous nous sommes, au contraire, efforcées d'inventer des types d'hommes et de femmes oeuvrant dans un pays fictif. Nous savions d'instinct que si nous nous amusions à

caricaturer ceux qui défendent les intérêts des contribuables au sein de la Chambre de Communes ou des Assemblées Législatives des provinces, nous allions susciter la critique et nous mériter le mépris du public. Notre téléroman s'inscrit donc dans une tradition télévisuelle bien établie au Québec. Rares ont été cependant les téléromans du Québec diffusés en anglais au Canada.

Seuls à mon avis, les "Plouffes" le furent, et cette admirable série fut fort bien accueillie dans l'ensemble du pays. Je suis déçue et je le reconnais, que la CBC-TV n'ait pas cru bon de traduire "Monsieur le Ministre." Etant typique de nos moeurs et de notre style politique, je persiste à croire que cette série, jouée par nos meilleurs comédiens, aurait ajouté une pierre à la tour de fraternité qui commence enfin à s'élever entre l'Ouest et l'Est, entre le Québec et les autres provinces.

Mais au Canada, les célèbres "deux solitudes" se retrouvent intactes au sein des réseaux français et anglais de Radio-Canada qui continuent à s'ignorer tandis que nos compatriotes cherchent à se mieux connaître. Nous aurions tous intérêts à tirer profit de ces sources de créativité. Nous avons tort de croire que plus nous ignorons ce qui se passe dans nos régions, comme au sein des différentes sociétés du Canada, nous renforcissons les identités de chacune. Les téléromans sont des sources de renseignements, des preuves vivantes et fort intéressantes de ce qui se vit, se décrit, se pense dans la partie française du Canada. Ils sont indispensables à qui veut comprendre la démarche des Québécois, et si nous du Québec connaissions mieux les réactions de quelques personnages fictifs du Canada anglais, nous découvririons peut-être un peu plus de joie à habiter un pays qui offre une aussi abondante source de richesses à ses ressortissants. De bien grands mots pour des téléromans? Non. Des mots qui recouvrent des réalités. Que furent en somme les extraordinaires continuités télévisuelles telles que "Upstairs Downstairs," "The Forsythe Saga," "Brideshead Revisited" pour l'Angleterre. Des *soaps* comme "The Young and The Restless," des séries comme "Dallas" et "Dynastie," sinon le miroir des réalités présentes ou passées, des britanniques et des américains. Les téléromans du Québec sont tissés à même les fils qui cousent ensemble tous les éléments de notre société qui sans cesse se renouvelle, s'enrichit, se murit. Il faut les regarder pour apprendre comment nous, Québécois francophones, nous nous regardons vivre et réagir pour nous mieux comprendre.

A TROPIC OF BOOKSHELVES

Barry Dempster

In a bookstore on Yonge Street
I read about a man who
claims books are a holiday.
Sight-sailing on a breezy bay,
the sun like a magnifying glass.
Or, at night, a candle flame,
pages stuck to fingerprints,
a braille of yielding wax.

Travelling on, mid-way
to mountains now, the grey
peaks of paragraphs
tumbling down the winter days.
One phase and I am locked
inside a speeding car.
Ever-racing, rock to burning
beach, the flipping thumb, each
page a sudden drift of smoke.

Book to book, a weather change,
the world icing up.
Frosted voyage,
windows thick and blind.
I will see it all until
I've seen it twice, alive and
dying, back to back, and then
another life, the globe encircled
in a stream of clouds, like
a man tied tight with rope.

Again, again, a book
claims books are trips, a tour
to the very bone of
island thoughts, of river stones.
A straight-lined page is like a
bridge, footsteps in every breath.
The sound of reading, the sound of
someone walking in the distance.
Travel companions and followers;
the act of sight, a fact of
no-one ever being alone.

Good for the man who lives
season to season, like
books standing side by side.
Better the imagination
than the man.
Day to day, the sky is blank,
blue like ice, blue like flame.
A book claims blood
in strokes of vein.
Anything can be described
and set in motion.

Travelling on, there, almost
gone from sight, I read of
a jungle, still, nothing
stirred, until "tremble," the
word, is placed after leaves.
The jungle tumbles out,
a headlock, down, in shock
I sink in quicksand to my
knees, heart racing, mesmerized,
a blur of burning eyes.
A tropic of bookshelves.
Breeze of leaf to leaf.
Fingertips like candle flames.
The world moves, a startled
holiday, men cracking
open to the spine.

THE RUNNERS

Tom Wayman

As I strolled the seawall
in the rain, clouds low
above the inlet,
three men jogged past me with such an effortless stride
I suddenly took up their pace
behind them. I don't think they
were much younger than me
or older, but they stepped easily
through the downpour,

large-bodied, talking in a friendly manner
to each other. They didn't seem to mind
me joining them, called back
greetings, and a few questions
about the weather
as we pounded along skirting puddles
and dodging umbrellaed walkers
on the path. I knew I was in no shape
for this, but remembered people's opinions
that mine are runner's legs, and continued
yet saved my breath rather than
speak with the others.
I had no idea
where we were running to,
they with their wide shoulders
and confident stride
but I felt no matter what obstacles
or quest we faced
if anyone could win
it was men like these.
Or maybe we were running for nothing,
splashing through the afternoon rain
only to run. And soon I
was too busy keeping my body with them
to care about where we were going.

PSALM 151

Ralph Gustafson

The cultivation of everything is assured,
Bach can be switched to the computer,
Plugged in.

In a time of synthesized successes
Software refreshes my soul
Close clusters

My ears, duplication
Duplicates, punk
Is my haven.

THE REAL MR. CANADA

Lorna Irvine

EARLY IN JULY OF 1985, Pierre Berton staged a game of "To Tell the Truth" at an apparently typical press party. The mystery guests were three women in masks; the panelists, Canadian historian William Kilbourn, Dinah Christie, and Berton himself. The object of the game was to discover which of the three women was Lisa Kroniuk, the author of *Masquerade: Fifteen Variations On A Theme of Sexual Fantasy.* The novel bears on the back cover a description of the author: "Lisa Kroniuk emigrated to Canada several years ago and now lives in the West. A single mother, she has one daughter, Lara. This is her second novel; an earlier work was published in Eastern Europe, on the theme of sexual ambiguity. She writes: 'I am myself part of the masquerade'."[1]

When the "To Tell the Truth" game arrived at its famous question, "Will the real Lisa Kroniuk please stand up?", to people's astonishment, Pierre Berton rose. He, it turns out, is the novel's author. He had kept his secret well. Jack McClelland, *Masquerade*'s publisher as well as Berton's long-time publisher, friend, and business partner, claims to have been kept in the dark during the two years of the project's maturing. So does Janet Berton, the author's wife. Berton described the experience for Sandy Naiman of *The Toronto Sun*: " 'I got the idea during a period of jet lag in London. . . . It had never occurred to me to write a novel. I'm not a novelist. But I got the idea of a bordello that ran fantasies and I started fiddling with it when I was on vacation in the Caribbean'."[2] The book received little attention. For Pierre Berton, author of thirty books (other than *Masquerade*), three-time winner of the Governor General's Award for Non-Fiction, possessor of ten honorary degrees and fifteen other awards, an author who has topped the Canadian best-sellers list with books like *The Comfortable Pew*, and *The Smug Minority*, a well-known television personality, the man who has made the Yukon famous and who has, some think single-handedly, created Canadian history, writing an ignored novel about sexual fantasies is an unusual experience.

Considering his prolific publishing record, is it appropriate to begin a discussion of Pierre Berton's work with an apparent aberration like *Masquerade*? His publishers and his agent insist that the book is completely different from anything Berton has written heretofore. However, apart from the fact that it is listed as a novel, and Berton is essentially a writer of non-fiction, *Masquerade* is a most revealing piece of writing, tying in neatly with what is perhaps Berton's most significant popular role: the establishing, elucidating, and developing of a specifically Canadian approach to the confidence game tradition that so dominates the folklore and culture of the United States. This is not a popular argument to make. Canadians have long prided themselves on their superiority to American selling techniques, and among anglophones at least, the stereotypical British dislike of self-promotion — indeed of any kind of promotion at all — has encouraged the belief in Canadian reserve. This fiction has among other misconceptions worked against the accepting of any specifically Canadian popular culture; the tendency has been, until very recently, to denounce all forms of popular or mass manipulative culture as American.

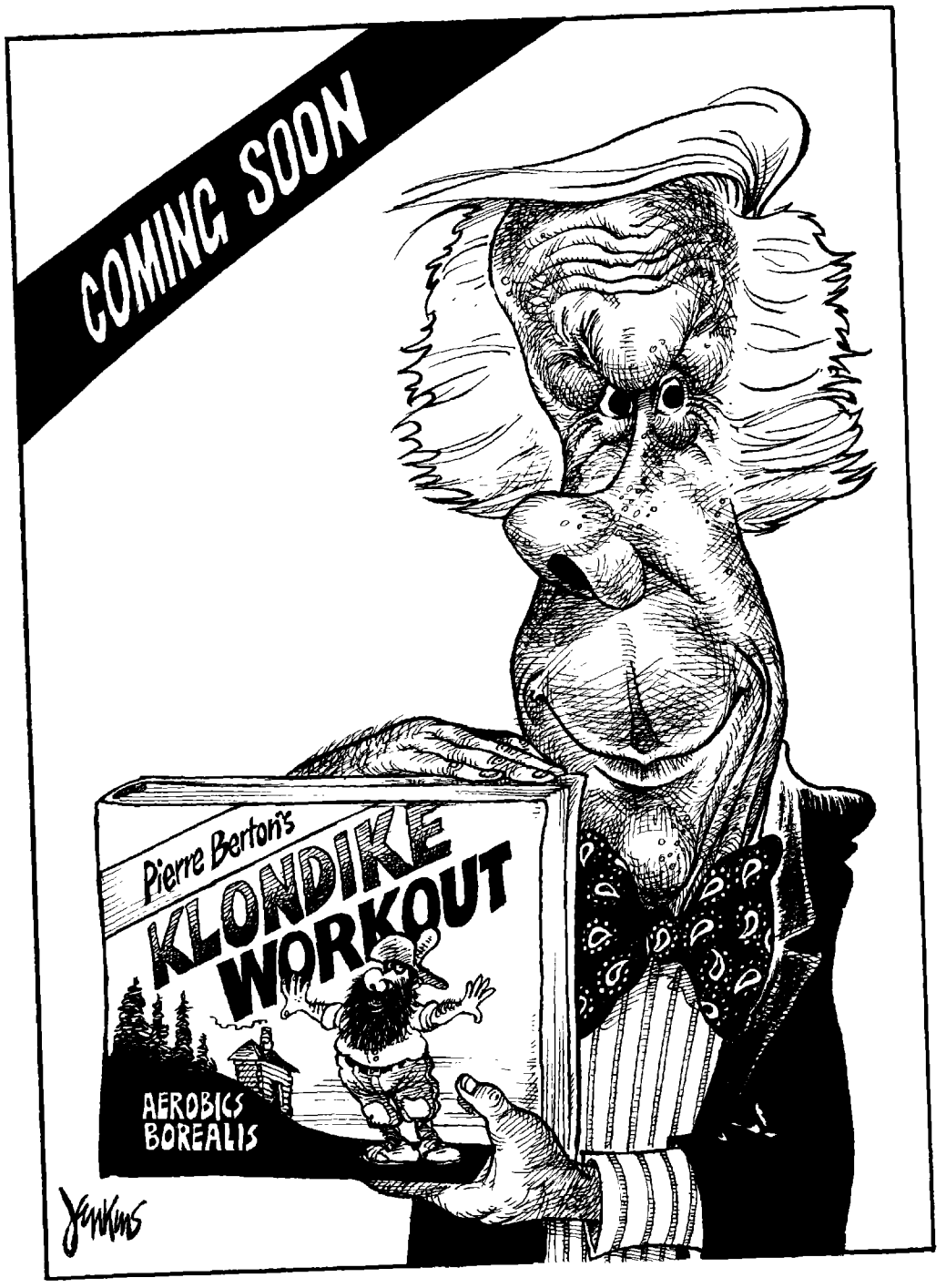
To suggest that the thoroughly Canadian Pierre Berton has developed, in content, but more important, in his style of writing and the method of selling, a pattern that can be connected with cultural conning, implies that Canada has its own game mentality, and that erasing it by calling it American is inaccurate. Nonetheless, such erasure has a long history. Thomas Haliburton's Sam Slick was a Yankee; about him, Robert McDougall writes: "Sam's democratic brashness, his 'calculatin' shrewdness, his colossal assurance and resourcefulness in argument, his readiness with homespun comments, with anecdotes and tall tales — all these traits were already connected with popular conceptions of the Yankee character."[3] Susanna Moodie employs the stereotype: "No thin, weasel-faced Yankee was he, looking as if he had lived upon 'cute ideas and speculations all his life,"[4] while her sister, Catherine Parr Traill, comments disparagingly on "annoying Yankee manners."[5] The disease "spreading up from the south"[6] that creeps through Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing* is none other than American commercialism. Denial and projection seem, then, conventionally to characterize Canadian approaches to the low art of selling.

Obviously, *Masquerade* is a con, and as such, tells us something about Pierre Berton's own use of the tradition of tricksters and gamesmen. The title is the first hint that trickery is occurring. Indeed, the fantasies stress, one after the other, the counterfeiting of fiction. They are not particularly erotic. The connecting link is a business operation, a bordello, run by a "Momma" who has been financially, and imaginatively, backed by a Magician who might come from the work of Robertson Davies. The business is designed to cater to people's sexual fantasies while keeping, as one of the concluding stories states, "within the bounds of good taste," within the normal, rather than the abnormal, one is tempted to say, the

Canadian rather than the American. To carry out the fantasies are Erika, the perennial schoolgirl, Candace, the nurse, beautiful male Julio, loved by men, Lara, the Bitch of Berlin, Raven, whose specialty is necrophilia, Andrea, the jungle girl, the three nuns, Flame, Lola and Bibi, Alix, the schoolmarm, and finally Turk, the simple-minded truck driver who has to be locked into his truck to keep him from wandering off. With this cast, Berton creates fifteen fantasies that begin and end with the same client, Marcus, who, we are told in the first fantasy, "*was* in a rut. He longed to get away, perhaps to some South Sea island where the wind was warm and the women willing. He longed for an adventure — any adventure — even if it meant flirting with death."

ALTHOUGH I AM not interested in describing the specific fantasies, I want to investigate several of Berton's themes, his narrative technique and, what I think is of most interest, his role as a representative of Canada, a role only obliquely realized in *Masquerade*. Several of the stories of *Masquerade*, like many individual stories in *Klondike*, *The National Dream*, *The Last Spike*, *The Invasion of Canada*, *Flames Across the Border* and, *The Promised Land*, focus on and demonstrate, not just trickery or illusion (the whole book does that), but the setting up of actual confidence games. In "Momma's Reverie," Momma describes the game: "In a seduction, or a confidence game (is there really any difference? Momma asks herself), both players take on roles, the seduced as well as the seducer, the mark as well as the trickster. Bolstered by the flattery of one, the other sees herself with new eyes, gains confidence, falls in love with the image that has been constructed for her." It is a theme that has earlier received Berton's attention. In a book published in the 1960's, *The Big Sell* — a collection of his newspaper columns — Berton discusses classic confidence games: "Any student of the classic confidence games must be struck by the several parallels they present with some modern big-sell techniques. The confidence man sells nothing but himself, of course, while the salesman peddles more tangible merchandise; but the psychological techniques each employs are remarkably similar." Con artists, as Berton is well aware, need to be masters of detail. A friend of his, an accomplished con artist, tells Berton that con artists expend the most energy establishing the credibility of a story. Apart from the fact that trickery inevitably connects with any writer's job — to create illusion — an author who attracts a mass audience has necessarily developed particularly sophisticated selling techniques. As Berton said in one interview (apparently in reference to all his books): "I wouldn't be writing this stuff if there weren't the market for it."[7]

Anecdotes dominate the selling techniques of good confidence men, anecdotes that frequently debunk or make accessible characters and events in fact quite


COMING SOON
Pierre Berton's
KLONDIKE WORKOUT
AERO BICS BOREALIS
Jenkins

distant. This aspect of Berton's work leads a reviewer of *The Promised Land* to state: "there's an overemphasis on scandal and corruption, and not enough about farming the land, getting the crop to market, early frost, loneliness. One might have hoped for a little less debunking."[8] This reviewer is asking for factual, rather than anecdotal, material. But Berton has made his name precisely by telling tall tales, by creating vivid, if unworthy, characters, by reporting, in various guises and from different perspectives, all the ways in which Canadians have manipulated themselves into the present. Melville's confidence man has Canadian brothers.

The psychology of conning fascinates Berton. In *Klondike*, he investigates people who, in the role of either yeggs or con artists, are consumed by greed. At its height, the gold rush disproved any Horatio Alger myth of success (that is, hard work as superior to luck). People aimed to get rich as quickly as possible. Incredible devices were invented — and sold. Dawson's entertainments, Berton tells us, were established to "extract as much gold as possible from the audience." People worked under false names; some fortunes were exhausted in a few weeks; others were made overnight. Soapy Smith, the dictator of Skagway, built up a career from nothing; he was a "man of considerable imagination and dry humour" who contrived to appear on the side of law and order but who, in fact, made his fortune from taking money away from others. And he had the down-home personality of an effective confidence man; people liked him. The whole of *Klondike* elaborates on stories about this kind of person. Indeed, the book itself, perhaps an example of what it is about, continues to make its author considerable money.

Klondike concentrates on the gold rush, a particularly symbolic example of greed. But from different perspectives, each of the other three books of the tetralogy (*The National Dream*, *The Last Spike*, and *The Promised Land*) reveals the author's interest in bargaining, if not in downright cheating among the principal makers of Canada's past. *The National Dream* elucidates, with anecdotal delight, proliferating land deals, alcoholic but immensely personable Prime Ministers, and a public growing fat on materialistic fantasies, while *The Last Spike* illustrates in detail a short-sighted but greedy Canadian west. No longer interested in growing crops, when land can be marketed much more profitably, Canadians are shown cheating the Indians, while the company stores develop increasingly fast methods of making a buck. *The Promised Land*, published last year, concentrates its whole attention, as its title announces, on land: not solid earth, the kind farmers plough, but ephemeral fantasies.

In *The Confidence Man in American Literature*, a fascinating psychological and cultural analysis of the meaning of conning in American

life, Gary Lindberg argues that, at least in the settling of the American West, "Nation building . . . turns out to be a massive game of confidence."[9] He continues: "in speculation, as in confidence games more generally, all belongings and winnings became mere parts of the game. The reality was drained out of domestic life, material objects and labor."[10] This phenomenon is precisely what Berton investigates in *The Promised Land*. In the Prologue, he tells us that "This is a book about dreams and illusions, escape and survival, triumph and despair," and goes on to describe various searches for utopia in the continuous flow of people from the old world to the new, all too easily promised, land.

Newspapers became major agents in the game of selling people land and populating the west (and Berton, a newspaperman himself, understands newspaper games). Suppression of information was customary, as it inevitably is in any kind of manipulation. The nightmares of journeys in extremely cold weather were hushed up; for example, attempts were made to ban the publication of Manitoba's winter temperatures. Berton makes clear too that self-interest was the motivating force behind settlement: the word "ethnic" was not in use in the nineteenth century; "there were no discussions about 'roots,' no talk of 'multiculturalism,' little pandering to national cultures, and certainly no reference to a Canadian mosaic." According to Berton, assimilation was the key word. Indeed, many of the Europeans who peopled the west of Canada were themselves in the grip of dreams that all too often were formed because of trickery. The Doukhobors followed a peculiarly destructive path, and evangelical groups from Scotland were sold on Canada by preachers — themselves masters of the art of conning — like the Rev. Issac Barr:

> Barr, Barr, wily old Barr
> He'll do you as much as he can.
> You bet he will collar
> Your very last dollar
> In the valley of Sask-atchewan.

Great Britain continued to advertise Canada as the land of opportunity, while in fact using Canada as a dumping ground for her own undesirables.

The politics of the west frequently exacerbated (or perhaps reflected) the problem; politicians like Clifford Sifton, Minister of the Interior under Prime Minister Laurier, a character of apparent fascination to Berton, who makes him the central character of *The Promised Land*, demonstrate the connections between political corruption and confidence trickery. Sifton, like any manipulator, wanted to get rich, and used political power to do so. In a review of this book, William French extends the example: "Sifton's methods of attracting settlers provide a forceful examination of modern marketing techniques. He was selling an idea — the idea that the Canadian West was the promised land, that free homesteads and hard work would bring undreamed-of material success."[11]

An example from more recent history is Berton's less well-known book about the Dionne quintuplets, *The Dionne Years*. The book is certainly cultural history and points to the use made of the Quints in the battle between the French and the English. But Berton's real interest is in the ways successful marketing techniques can move an unknown product (the backwoods, northern Ontario Dionne family) into the international limelight. Again, too, Berton spends considerable time elucidating the psychology of the doctor who delivered the quints and who made himself a substantial fortune as a result. Although initially an apparently simple country doctor, he became adept at selling his personality and, of course, his story. What emerges from the book, too, is what begins to seem standard Canadian response to marketing: while complaining about "cheap American publicity," and attempting a neutral Canadian stance, the Canadians involved with Quintland were raking in fortunes, by selling the Quints' pictures to advertising firms, tourists, and other Canadians — hardly a neutral undertaking.

Many such examples occur in Berton's books. Nonetheless, the confidence mentality plays an ambivalent role in the Canadian consciousness. The economically powerful United States makes Canada's differences about money particularly problematic. Economic metaphors are frequently used (Canadians sell out to the United States; Americans buy Canadians). Enraged by American economic dominance, Canadian nationalist Robin Mathews lashes out at susceptible Canadians: "Colonies are places that are *done* to rather than doing or doing to. . . . The people are under perpetual pressure to adopt the beliefs and ideology of the powerful country that manipulates them."[12] Mathews later claims: "The human product of the liberal ideology is the Robber Baron of free enterprise and the cop-out hippie/yippie of the so-called 'counter-culture.' . . . It teaches the Canadian to scorn history, to reject communal values."[13] One can certainly detect a long history of British snobbery here. But in a somewhat less hysterical way, a good number of Canadians want to believe that Canada is a less gullible, less outrageously vulgar, less materialistic, less self-advertising country than the United States. Berton is no exception. He seems, then, an interesting example of the ambivalence that permeates Canada's effort to differentiate itself from American business. He is interested in the confidence mentality, in the selling of his own books as well as in their content and style; he emphasizes anecdotes and tall tales, uses the present tense, which makes the reader participate more fully in the action, and loudly sells ideas.

But Berton also openly castigates American techniques. In *Why We Act Like Canadians*, a book structured as a dialogue between Berton and Uncle Sam, he describes Canadians as virtually immune to manipulation of the confidence kind. Institutions like the Hudson's Bay Company he paints as paternal protectors rather than exploiters of the population, and argues that Canadians have always been more interested in public good than in private property. Important extensions of

these ideas occur in *Hollywood's Canada*, where Berton casts the Americans as manipulators and con artists, translating Canadian characters such as the Royal Canadian Mounted Policeman, the French Canadian, the Metis, the Canadian Indian into items saleable to an American public. According to Berton, it "didn't occur to Hollywood and it didn't occur to Canadian audiences either, that the Canadian concept of order imposed from above clashed with the American idea of rough frontier justice." In the American Preface to *Flames Across the Border,* Berton hammers away at the same differences ("America's heritage is revolutionary; Canada's is colonial"), and summarizes the differences in national qualities: "American ebullience, Canadian reserve. The Americans went wild over minor triumphs, the Canadians remained phlegmatic over major ones." Like many other Canadians, Berton insists on dividing Americans and Canadians specifically in terms of their ability to promote themselves and others.

BERTON IS FASCINATED by slick talking and by selling, and associates characteristics related to confidence trickery with Canadian development. Rhetorically, he uses confidence tricks that have worked to make him one of the best-selling writers in Canada. He understands the psychology of his largely Canadian audiences, who enjoy both the anecdotal (his work seems more oral than literary) style and the quantity of factual information he offers. As one Canadian to whom I recently spoke said: "Nobody would know anything about Canadian history if Berton were not around to popularize it." The assumptions he makes are various; he does not always assume his audience's gullibility — he is in fact a much more committed Canadian than that — but he is in the business of selling ideas and, often, of persuading others to change their minds. In a book like *Why We Act Like Canadians*, he adopts the voice of a manipulator, addressing a naive audience, in this case, a pretended American one (the book in fact is meant for the educating of a Canadian audience; Americans find it most offensive). He frequently assumes a helpful, comradely persona, employing considerable repetition and assiduously establishing his own honesty. *The Wild Frontier* begins inclusively: "We are all the creatures of the wilderness, the children of frontiers"; the author's Note at the end of *Klondike* announces that "My whole life has been conditioned by the Klondike"; all of *Drifting Home* is an establishing of familial and cultural roots, and, in an epigraph to the first chapter of the cookbook he co-edited with his wife (*The Centennial Food Guide*), he assures the reader that "The male editor of this book unconditionally guarantees this soup. In twenty years of marriage he has drunk bathtubfuls of it."

Berton consistently plays as well, on the human desire for variety, shifting his persona as he shifts his game strategies. His dramatic shift into the role of a

female Polish novelist draws particular attention to this facility. But his performance ranges over an extremely wide area, from the children's story, *The World of Og* (based on episodes and characters in his own family); to the cookbook; to numerous, snappy newspaper columns (collected in *Just Add Water and Stir, Fast, Fast, Fast Relief*, and *Adventures of a Columnist*); to the promotion of tourism (for example, *The New City: A Prejudiced View of Toronto, Drifting Home*); to exposés of public corruption or hypocrisy (*The Big Sell, My War With the Twentieth Century, The Comfortable Pew, The Smug Minority*); to popular Canadian histories (the western tetralogy, the books on the War of 1812); and to commentaries on popular culture (*The Dionne Years, The Cool Crazy Committed World of the Sixties, Hollywood's Canada*). Part of the appeal of these books is nostalgic: they encourage Canadian longings for past glories and, what is more important, satisfy some of these desires with historical and cultural information and dramatic anecdotes. The popular style that Berton uses — parabolic, anecdotal, a traditional selling style — simplifies the oblique lessons of history and gives narrative coherence to disparate facts. The popular histories particularly elicit our confidence.

On the other hand, Berton's ambivalence about the merchant mentality persists. Like other Canadians, he attempts to project the more unpleasant effects of mercantile persuasion on to the Americans. This inclination is, I believe, characteristically Canadian and, while reflected in the artifacts of Canada's popular culture, is most noticeable in their reception. In Berton's work, the Canadian confidence game simultaneously demonstrates and repels trickery, while Canada and various Canadians appear confusingly as both active and passive, as both persuaders and gulls, as both perpetrators and victims. This ambivalent stance is peculiarly paralyzing, at least when one is talking about Canadian popular culture. Yet, like the United States, Canada's is a new world culture. Gary Lindberg believes that confidence games tell us something about the psychology of societies newly forming and in flux. He argues that repeated moving has

> made many Americans restless, unstable, thirsty for novelty. It has loosened family and community bonds and has encouraged people to dwell imaginatively in the future. Institutions that depend on stable residence, like primogeniture and apprenticeship, have lost their power, and personal facility has been given a correspondingly wider field. In social relations this ceaseless movement has weakened the familiar patterns of identification. Instead of relying on family background, class habits, inherited manners, many Americans have had to confront each other as mere claimants.[14]

Canadians cannot avoid these phenomena.

At the same time, Canada, at least hypothetically, seems particularly sensitive to communal demands, quite likely for geographical and economic reasons. The themes Berton most emphasizes in Canadian development (the importance of

authority in Canada and the preference for arbitration over revolution), are themes that create tension between individual and group undertakings. Berton seems torn between the two. His own family matters to him; and he is certainly concerned about his country. According to most analysts of it, the confidence tradition in American culture emphasizes distinctive individualism. In certain ways, Berton delineates for Canada a more group-oriented conning, games that pertain to broad segments of Canadian culture.

He also undertakes to give Canada a frontier past that seems to contradict Canadian denials about its existence: he shows, in books like *The Mysterious North*, *Klondike*, and *The Wild Frontier*, how Canadians, like other people, are attracted to the mystery and danger of frontiers where they can test their courage. This largely masculine undertaking — Berton does describe women on the frontier, but mostly he is concerned with male adventure — often, as Lindberg also demonstrates,[15] goes hand in hand with confidence trickery, with the susceptibilities of changing cultures. Yet here too, Berton's ambivalence persists. Although he seems to be constructing a less passive, rough and tumble, carousing, bad-boy image of Canada — some Canadian historians stereotypically reflect Canada in female metaphors — he also preserves Canada's difference from the United States in passive-active dichotomies. In *Why We Act Like Canadians* he writes: "We were never a community of rebels, escaping from the clutches of a foreign monarch. . . . Basking in the security and paternalism that our constitutional phraseology suggests, we sought gradually and through a minimum of bloodshed to achieve our own form of independence." Berton's ambivalence does not, of course, lessen the significance of frontier conning. In fact, the paternalistic, authoritarian culture that Berton posits as Canada's seems particularly amenable to manipulation. As soon as someone establishes authority, victims appear to play the game. Even the dislike of physical violence that accompanies particular kinds of authoritarianism encourages the mental rather than physical struggles characteristic of confidence games.

Finally, ambivalent Canadian attitudes to rigid class systems give further room for confidence trickery. Confidence men seem classless, eliminating cultural differences by conning rich and poor alike. Furthermore, like many Canadians, the confidence man is not interested in abrupt or radical changes in society. Lindberg emphasizes that he "does not provide an outlet for unruliness, nor does he disrupt the social bounds. He is a culturally representative figure, not a marginal one, and his message is that the boundaries are already fluid, that there is ample space between his society's official rules and its actual tolerances."[16] Berton operates on just such fluid boundaries.

In his literary study of confidence men, John Blair argues that the confidence man "serves as figure for the writer whose artistic medium must manipulate pretenses and falsehoods even in order to probe the nature of the true and false

in the larger world."[17] Thus we return to *Masquerade*. Broadly interpreted, Blair's observation is no doubt true. But it is not just that Berton is a writer. It is that he is predominantly interested in masquerades, in the playing of roles, in trickery. As Momma says: "in life costume is everything. Costume is a two-way mirror. It casts a reflection. The role player sees his image staring back at him in the eyes of others, and the role becomes the reality." Furthermore, Berton is a remarkably popular writer; his manipulation of his material and of his audience allows him to play games, as well as to instruct. He reminds Canadians of their materialism, of their willingness to be manipulators as well as victims. Survival may, as Atwood claims, be a significant Canadian theme. But Canadian victims, at least according to Berton, are amply balanced by persuaders who know what the game is, and how to play it. These too, he insists, are Canadians.

NOTES

[1] I refer to the following books by Pierre Berton. Except where noted, I have used McClelland & Stewart publications: *The Mysterious North*, 1956; *Klondike*, 1958; *Just Add Water and Stir*, 1959; *The New City: A Prejudiced View of Toronto*, 1961; *Fast, Fast, Fast Relief*, 1962; *The Big Sell* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1963); *My War With the Twentieth Century* (New York: Doubleday, 1965); *The Comfortable Pew* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1965); *The Cool, Crazy, Committed World of the Sixties*, 1966; *Adventures of a Columnist*, 1966; *The Centennial Food Guide* (with Janet Berton), 1966; *The Smug Minority* (New York: Doubleday, 1969); *The National Dream*, 1970; *The Last Spike*, 1971; *Drifting Home*, 1973; *Hollywood's Canada*, 1975; *The Dionne Years* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977); *The Wild Frontier*, 1978; *Flames Across the Border* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1981); *Why We Act Like Canadians*, 1982; *The Secret World of Og*, rpt. 1983; *The Promised Land*, 1984; *Masquerade*, 1985 (pseud. Lisa Kroniuk).

[2] Sandy Naiman, "Sexy Berton Tells All," *Toronto Sun*, 12 July 1985, p. 16.

[3] Thomas Haliburton, *The Clockmaker* (1871; rpt. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1958), p. x.

[4] Susanna Moodie, *Roughing It In the Bush* (1852; rpt. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1962), p. 92.

[5] Catharine Parr Traill, *The Backwoods of Canada* (1836; rpt. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1966), p. 99.

[6] Margaret Atwood, *Surfacing* (New York: Popular Library, 1972), p. 9.

[7] Judith Timson, "The Berton Years," *Maclean's*, 5 March 1979, p. 46.

[8] Stephen Weatherbe, "Pierre Berton's Wild West Show," *Alberta Report*, 17 September 1984, p. 45.

[9] Gary Lindberg, *The Confidence Man in American Literature* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1982), p. 116.

[10] Lindberg, p. 119.

[11] William French, "Affection For History," *Toronto Globe and Mail*, 8 September 1984.

[12] Robin Mathews, *Canadian Literature* (Toronto: Steel Rail, 1978), p. 1.

[13] Mathews, p. 191.

[14] Lindberg, p. 5.

[15] Lindberg writes: "The confidence man not only revealed and acted upon the opportunities created by migration in the emergent American society; he also played to its prevailing promissory tone" (p. 6).

[16] Lindberg, pp. 8-9.

[17] John Blair, *The Confidence Man in Modern Fiction* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1979), pp. 11-12.

AIR CANADA OWLS

Glen Sorestad

The boreal owl,
aegolius funereus,
was also known as
phillip-pile-tshish
or water dripping owl
at least by Indians
whose legends recount
how the Creator
diminished
this owl's great size
and voice
because its vanity
grew too much
to bear.

All this my Air Canada
connoisseur menu card
explains
about the cover painting:
this owl
whose eyes
now fix on me
from the conifers.

This vain sage
beckons me now to
turn the page
and choose
between
a turkey cutlet parmigiana
and
a rainbow trout amandine
served
in inimitable airline style
elbow to elbow
with fellow diners
belted to seats
hurtling through darkness.

My companion connoisseurs
of Air Canada 157
as the same prelude
to turkey or trout
must meet
the shrewd stare
of this boreal owl
that demands a choice.
Somewhere over Thunder Bay
I choose the trout
and imagine
my friend
also in flight
but to another destination.

Is he aboard
Air Canada?
On a supper flight?
Stared at
by a boreal owl?
Perhaps
he has discovered
asio otus,
long-eared owl,
who bids him
choose between
swiss steak
and
filet of sole meuniere?

HERMAN®

SAY, THAT REMINDS ME OF ANOTHER STORY

Joan Finnigan

CHILDREN ALWAYS DWELL amongst giants. And I, perhaps, more than some others; on my grandfather's farm in Pontiac County, Quebec, those uncles, cousins, hired men in wintertime wearing huge furry coats, in summertime those thunderous boots, all of which made them seem even bigger than they really were; and at home in Ottawa, my father, a metaphoric giant, "The Shawville Express," playing with the Ottawa Senators and the Toronto Maple Leafs and, "on the road," eating, drinking, living with the legends, King Clancy, Howie Morenz, Ace Bailey, Frank Ahearne.

The antennae of my subconscious must have absorbed my valley relatives' stories of the lumbering giants, Joseph Montferrand, Mountain Jack Thomson, J. R. Booth, E. B. Eddy. And certainly there must have been a storing of the accompanying colourful lumbering lingo. My grandfather Horner, himself a giant and known even in the "Ottawee" papers as the Strongman of Radford, enriched us with unforgettable phrases like, "Boysaboys! That's angleways fernenst the tamarack tree!" My mother, too, had a racy and often unrepeatable vocabulary full of imagery like "She wouldn't give you so much as a collie would you lick!" (referring to a stingy person) and, "You're going to end up on Le Breton Flats if you don't watch out!" (referring to the kind of libertine spending which would eventually force one to live amongst the E. B. Eddy workers in their wooden tinder-boxes on Le Breton Flats, a district in Ottawa wiped out by the anticepticity of the Greber Plan). I was then, and still am, exposed to my father's tall tales. For all of my young life, yea, even unto this day there has been a constant ongoing addition to the repertoire of G. A. Howard, Master of Spoonerism, from Shawville, Quebec.

For instance, just last week an addition from Norris Brough of Ottawa, formerly of Shawville: Back in the 1920's A. G. Brough, Dougal McCredie, G. A. Howard, and various other lads used to hunt at Lake Dumont, fifty miles or so northeast of Shawville. Of course, there were numerous stops on the way up to quench a growing thirst, at Ladysmith, Otter Lake, Bend in the River, John Cowan's Spring. At one point the old Ford had to be parked and left

because the last three miles in could only be concluded on foot. At this point, G.A. opened the car trunk to get his liquor out and then discovered he had forgotten his gun. They were beyond the end of the Pontiac Telephone Line, so they went to the nearest fire ranger and got him to key into the Pontiac system. G. A. Howard's son Dean answered the phone, but the line was very fuzzy.

"Dean, Dean, it's G. A. Howard."

"Yes, Father."

"I left my gun. I want you to bring up my gun."

"Bring up your what?"

"Gun. Gun." G.A. yelled.

But still Dean couldn't make out the message. So in exasperation G.A. yelled out, "Gun. Gun. G for Jesus, U for Europe, N for pneumonia."

Very often in life great decisions are made after a mysterious coalescing of conscious, subconscious, maybe even preconscious factors. I cannot remember exactly when it was I resolved to do the oral history of the Ottawa Valley.[1] But I do know that I held this resolve in my subconscious for a number of years and that this resolve was often brought to the surface by people saying to me, "Joan, you must tape the old-timers before they are all gone." There was a further converging of factors; the empty-nest syndrome driving me towards people, the gift from printmakers Saul Field and Jean Townsend, of a landmark book, a 1981 edition of Yeats' *Celtic Twilight* (with prints by Townsend), a taste of interviewing for an NFB film and for the CBC Anthology programme on the Valley, "There's No Good Times Left-None at all" (I knew now I could do it), a tentative search for the story lost in the oral tradition of the famous riverman and tallyman, Mountain Jack Thomson of Portage-du-Fort.

Still, in the usual human way, I was putting it all off until one August eight years ago my son and I were photographing along the Opeongo Line, the famous settlement line running from the Ottawa River at Farrell's Landing back towards Opeongo Lake in Algonquin Park. There, at the crossroads going up into Newfoundout, we stopped to talk to Allan Davidson, a fifth generation old-timer still living on his ancestral farm in the loghouse his grandparents built from the first trees on the first farm along that first settlement line. It hit me then that if I didn't start on my taping of the old-timers it would be too late, and, in particular, too late for the lumbering saga. I reversed a lease on a place in Toronto, bought a Sony "workhorse" tape-recorder and set out on an "incredible journey."

After I had done my first fat tapes with shantyman Carl Bailey, who died shortly afterwards on two bottles of gin in a Renfrew nursing home; with Winnie Inderwick, the Grand High Lady of Perth who knew Ottawa only in a derogatory way as Slabtown; with old John King, who still lived even then in the stopping-place his ancestors had kept on the road to the lumbercamps above Pembroke; with Frank Finnigan Senior and Junior retelling their stories of Harry

McLean, the eccentric construction genius known as "Mister X," the man who used to throw thousands of dollars out of hotel windows and into the wind — after I had done those first exciting tapes I felt it was time to begin to look for a publisher who might, if I were lucky, put up some advance money for the continuation of the heavy expenses of oral history, for car, gas, bed, breakfast, typing, transcribing. In Toronto, the so-called "centre of the publishing universe," I contacted an influential friend of mine, Elsa Franklyn, Valley-born and Valley-raised, who sent me off to a senior editor in a major publishing firm. On the telephone I began, "My name is Joan Finnigan MacKenzie and I am calling to talk to you about a manuscript of mine on the Ottawa Valley." There was a snort at the other end of the line, and then the voice said, "The Ottawa Valley! Where the hell is that?"

MY ANGER AND OUTRAGE probably fuelled me for the next eight years of work in the oral history of the Valley. In the process I have innovated a new technique in oral history whereby individual story-tellers are examined in depth. The result is that some of these larger-than-life people (Carl Jennings of Sheenboro, W. T. James of Carleton Place, Tex Naves of Pembroke, Phoebe McCord of Shawville, Vi Dooling of Douglas) are distilled and delineated like characters in a short story. This works two ways: the characters become so real to readers that they often say to me, "I really want to go and meet this guy!"; and I get to know these characters so well and care for them so much that their illnesses, removal to the old folks' place, and deaths reverberate through me.

Taddy Haggerty of Brudenell along the Opeongo Line is one of those Valley characters whose legend began to sift into me, at first almost incidentally, as I was taping in his area around Brudenell, Killaloe, Eganville. Just as people often asked me, "Say, did you ever hear about the he-lady (or she-man) Philomene Bergeron?" or "Has anybody ever told you about Maggie Roach and her cure for cancer — if it was on the outside?" so they would often declare, "and now I'll tell you a story about Taddy Haggerty of the Opeongo Line." And gradually through such incidents I began to realize I was on the trail of another Irish wit, like Dinny O'Brien of the Burnt Lands of Huntley, whose lines had lived long past his leave-taking from this earth. Even today in the old Quinn Hotel in Killaloe, the old-timers sometimes amuse themselves, given the right mood and the right day, by retelling their repertoire of Taddy Haggerty stories. Like these:

"One year back in the 1880's there was a terrible potato famine along the Opeongo Line. And after the bad crops were in in the fall the lads were sitting in

the Quinn Hotel at Killaloe having a quart or two, and talking over the bad situation.

" 'Yes, siree,' said Taddy, 'when you have a good year with a good crop of potatoes when you put them on to boil you can hear them saying to each other, "move over, move over." But this year was the worse I've seen on the Opeongo Line.'

" 'Tell us, Taddy,' said the lads, 'How bad was it this year really?'

" 'Well, I'll tell ye,' said Taddy. 'In this year's crop of potatoes there was some the size of marbles. And then there were some the size of peas. And THEN THERE WERE THE REALLY SMALL ONES!' "

As the pioneer bill of fare, the potato has inspired many great stories in the Valley, stories with wonderful sociological overtones. One of the greatest of these has led to the metaphor "Soup-Eater." It seems that back in the 1840's the Potato Famine Roman Catholic Irish got off the boats at Quebec City so HUNGRY that, when the Protestant converters on the docks came up to them and said, "A bowl of soup if ye'll turn," some of them did.

I CONSIDER ORAL HISTORY to be the important colourful theatre, the human interest additive, the sociological underlay of academic history. My 300 tapes are multi-purpose, multi-layered, and used in multi-disciplinary ways by academics, linguists, genealogists, other writers, researchers, playwrights, song-writers — and plagiarists. Beyond the humour of the Soup-Eaters story is a historical vignette which tells us about: the importance of the potato in terms of survival, the terrible conditions of the immigrants on the boats, the transplantation of the old wars between the Orangemen and the Roman Catholics.

Over the past three years of my incredible journey I have collected Taddy Haggerty stories from a number of people along the Opeongo Line, the Sheridans, the Jessops, the Heinemans, the Walthers, Rev. John Hass of Eganville and Rev. Tom May of Vinton. This one was phoned in to the open-line programme conducted by Lowell Green on CFMO radio Ottawa. Beyond the humour, beyond the transmigration of souls during the Depression is that great parochialism born of a time when you only knew people as far as your horse could travel.

"It was during the hard times in the Twenties that Taddy Haggerty's son, Tom, left home to go to the States to look for work. Then one day Taddy was in the old Quinn Hotel in Killaloe having a quart or two and he heard in the bar that this other fellow was going over to the States to find work. So Teddy went up to him and said, 'Aha, I hear you're going to the States?' And the lad said, 'Yes. I have to find work there.' And Taddy said, 'You'll see my son Tommy over there.' And the lad said, 'Well, yes, if I find him I'll see him.'

"So the lad went over to the States and he couldn't find any work over there and, after a while, he came back to the Opeongo Line. He was in at the old Quinn Hotel in Killaloe having a quart or two when Taddy came in.

" 'Aha,' said Taddy. 'You went to the States?'

" 'Yes,' said the lad, 'I've been to the States.'

" 'Then you saw my Tommy?' asked Taddy.

" 'No, I'm sorry,' the lad said, 'I didn't see Tommy.'

" 'Then by japers,' swore Taddy, 'You damn well weren't in the States!' "

The Ottawa Valley is distinguished from all other regions of Canada by its geography, language, legend, folklore, architecture, Irish imprint, and "frozen economics." Even if you removed all of these distinctive factors, still the lumbering saga (1811 to 1911) would give the valley its unique regional identity, set it apart from all other "Tight Little Islands" in the country. Just as the Men who Went Down to the Sea gave Newfoundland its special qualities, so the Men Who Went into the Bush gave to the Valley its own inimitable character.

In its wake the lumbering era in the Valley left an architectural heritage of lumbermen's mills, mill sites, shanties, lumber baron's castles as well as a cultural heritage of lumbering story, song, folktale, legend. From the lumbering days, when strength was the primary virtue and "recreational violence" the favourite form of entertainment, emerge those astounding strongmen and giants, Wild Bill Ferguson of Calabogie, Bunker Joe Helferty from Barry's Bay, Cockeye George McNee of Arnprior and Timiskaming, Gentleman Paddy Dillon, King of the Madawaska, Joseph Montferrand from Montreal, Le Prad from Témiscamingue, The Seven Brothers of Pembroke, the Terrors of the Ottawa River. Here from the tapes are some stories illuminating the lumbering saga:

"John Thomson of Calumet Island, father of the famous Mountain Jack Thomson, was for many years slide-master at Mountain Chute on the Ottawa. Big John Horner, of Radford, another renowned strongman, was a friend of Thomson's and a well-off farmer who also worked in the wintertime for timber baron Gillies taking teams and men with supplies into the lumbercamps on the Rouge. One time Thomson and Horner went together to Buckingham, Quebec, on lumbering business. Buckingham was the centre of the McLaren dynasty's lumbering operations and, because of this, the hotel in town was notches above the ordinary and boasted many fine amenities, some of which Big John Horner, at least, was not accustomed to. Well, anyhow, Thomson and Horner went off to bed in separate rooms, that in itself in those days of double-decker bunks, a demonstration of unholy luxury. When they met next morning very early in the dining-room, Thomson said to Horner, 'Well, John, how did you sleep last night?'

" 'Pretty good,' said Big John slowly, choosing his words carefully. 'But it's the first time I ever slept between two white tablecloths.' "

And this one from Phoebe McCord, the great political "warmer-upper" from Shawville.

"An old shantyman of very few words was working for Gillies up near Petawawa on the ice-roads. Timber Baron Colonel John Gillies, along with his foreman, Big Jim McCord of Shawville, came along to examine the work the shantyman was doing on the ice-roads. The shantyman of few words was a chickadee — that's the man who takes the horse manure off the ice-roads to keep them clear for the sleigh-runners, and he's called that because there's nothing chickadees like better than fresh horse manure — well, anyhow, Colonel John Gillies and Big Jim McCord were looking at the condition of the ice-road near this shantyman of few words. This shantyman was also highly contemptuous of any authority and he was chewing tobacco — they all did it. So he spit a great big rotten spit on the ice-road right at the feet of timber baron Gillies and his foreman. Of course, it splattered and splashed —

" 'That's horrible!' Gillies exclaimed. 'I'd just as soon chew horse-manure!'

"And the old shantyman of few words chewed a few more chews on his tobacco and drawled out, 'Wal, Colonel, I suppose it's just whatever a man gets used to — ' "

DINNY O'BRIEN of the Burnt Lands of Huntley is another one of those great Irish wits in the Valley whose stories live on after him. I have collected his stories from lawyers and judges who litigated for him in his innumerable court cases and from neighbours who remember him coming home in the dark, singing drunk.

"Now Dinny O'Brien of the Burnt Lands of Huntley was an Ichabod-Crane-like Irishman who always wore black, and a black felt hat which had turned green with age. He was addicted to alcohol and had, over the years, drunk away almost everything he owned. One day he was in the dentist's chair in Almonte. The dentist was peering way down Dinny's throat.

" 'Say, doc,' said Dinny, 'Do you see anything down there?'

" 'Well, no, Mr. O'Brien — ,' faltered the dentist.

" 'Well, you damn well should!' Dinny snapped. 'There's three good farms down there!' "

Dinny O'Brien has been dead these forty years but Carl Jennings of Sheenboro, one of the many Irish enclaves in Western Quebec, at the age of eighty-four has become a legend-in-his-lifetime. Carl is, as McLean's Gina Mallett described him, "a wit, a sage, a master of imagery." He is also a creator of original one-liners and pithy querps.

"She was a nice quiet girl. You could put your hand on her anywhere."

"He was the kind of a man who was too heavy for light work and too light for heavy work. So he did nothing."

Of a lady of easy reputation in his community: "Sure, she had given most of it away before she found out she could sell it."

Of a former lover: "Sure, I used to love to put a teat in each ear and hear her go off."

"They always used to ask Lloyd Gavan of Chapeau how far he went in school and Lloyd always used to answer, 'Oh, only as far as the blackboard'."

Up until this winter Carl's kitchen was the only one left in the Valley to my knowledge where the old-timers, story-tellers, image-makers, yarners, and liars still gathered to tell their tales, recite their verses, sing their songs.

> And some of the verses I recited
> I memorized from my grandmother,
> and some of the stories
> I told you were true,
> and some of the songs I sang
> I made up myself.

Out of Carl's kitchen over the past five years have come the expected Tall Tales and humour of exaggeration stories, as well as the raunchy, racy, irreverent stories to do with sex and death, the original repartee and teasing, the terrible black humour, the wonderful stories arising indigenously out of the real character or the real event, or the combination of both. And just when I think he has come to the end of his Well of Story, he presents an addition to his repertoire.

"One time long ago in the lumbering days this old shantyman from Chapeau was crossing the ice at the junction of the Pickanock and the Ottawa Rivers. He was crossing over with a favourite horse and sleigh when the ice cracked and the water opened. He rescued himself but his horse and sleigh disappeared into the cold depths. The following spring, curious about what might be left around the scene of the accident, he returned to the junction of the Pickanock and the Ottawa, and looked down into the clear fresh waters. At first he saw only his reflection. But then to his amazement he beheld below the biggest fish he had ever seen in his life, swimming along through the waters complete in a horse's harness, collar, hames, with the reins trailing out behind him. And for years and years afterwards the American tourists all came to see that fish."

CHARLOTTE WHITTON, first Lady Mayor of Ottawa, and Harry McLean, the construction genius from Merrickville, are two of the legendary Valley figures whose stories have not yet been told. From Lloyd Francis, who sat with her on City Council, and from broadcaster Hal Anthony and

Lowell Green, who covered her mayoralty for Ottawa newspapers, I have collected a repertoire. Many of the stories are unadorned slapstick, almost burlesque. But she did have a quick wit preserved in stories like these:

During one of her terms of office as Mayor of Ottawa Charlotte Whitton was entertaining the Lord Mayor of London at a very formal banquet at the Chateau Laurier. She was all dressed up in a black dinner gown with a corsage of red roses on her shoulder. Replete in all his splendid chains of office, the Mayor of London was naturally seated beside her at the dinner table. Attempting to make conversation with a somewhat enigmatic lady, he decided to gallantly try a bit of flattery to break the ice. So he turned towards her and whispered in her ear, "Miss Whitton, if I lean over and smell your roses, do you blush?" Charlotte looked at him a moment in surprise and then snapped back, "If I pull your chain, do you flush?"

And then there is another often-repeated story in which the inimitable Miss Whitton was one-upmanshipped. Again the setting was a large Civic reception. Amongst the guests was Ovila Dionne, father of the famous Dionne quintuplets, who had just been born and had made the Dionne family famous overnight. Charlotte went up to Mr. Dionne and said, "I guess you don't realize who I am. I'm the Mayor of Ottawa." But evidently Mr. Dionne had already learned to do fast footwork in the spotlight. "I guess you don't realize who I am," he retorted. "I'm the Cock of the North."

The late Harry McLean is another outstanding Canadian achiever whose stories I have been collecting for some time. After he had built his railways and made his millions, McLean retired to his favourite town, Merrickville, Ontario. In the far north, he had been a leader of men, an innovator in construction methods, a contractor working to deadlines which meant thousands of dollars in bonuses. But, in his retirement in backwater Ontario, he had a hard time maintaining his profile as superman. One of my favourite McLean stories, told by the then Chief of Police in Merrickville, demonstrates this:

"Oh, I remember something he used to do occasionally come winter to prove he was a man. And at his age, too! [McLean would then be in his seventies.] He'd go out and dig a big hole in the snow in the middle of winter and he'd strip down naked and he'd sleep in there with just a candle all night. He had married his second wife by that time and she'd be on the phone to me all night long saying, 'Oh, he's going to die in there! He's going to freeze to death in there!' And I'd say, 'Ah, never mind. He'll come out. He always comes out.' And sure enough, around eight o'clock in the morning, he'd come back out of his hole in the snow with his bottle in his hand, still stark naked."

With hindsight, looking back and trying to assess my goals and motivations in my work in oral history in the Valley, I see that I had a strong need to move the stories from the oral to the written tradition, and thus preserve the history, the

legends, the folktales, the fakelore, the folk-verses and songs of my Valley. In a manner of speaking, I did not want my people to die. I wanted to be part of the process of raising into conscious awareness in Canada the unique regional entity called the Ottawa Valley, all 750 miles of it, all twenty-six river tributaries of it. I wanted to preserve the language, very often poetic, for the Valley is passing into what might well be called its own "Celtic Twilight."

Eight years, 280,000 miles, 300 tapes later I find I have learned the value of story-telling as a way of people getting close, coming together in bonds of roots, history, laughter, and doing it despite a technological world which every day hastens isolation. We have only creativity and imagination left with which to make our stand; and creativity and imagination are reinforced in oral history, both for teller and listener.

People often ask me if the story-tellers are all dead or dying off now. I sense a renaissance, a resurgence amongst the young, and I have actually taped younger people carrying on a story-telling tradition from their forebears. From one of them just the other day I collected this Tall Tale about Ned Finnigan of Shawville, dead these many years but still recognized as a great story-teller. It is the story of the Cat With Nine Lives.

"Ned Finnigan was a great carpenter and he built our house in Shawville. I was a boy of only about ten or eleven and he used to use me to help him hold a board or carry a tool for him. I did this gladly for he was a great story-teller and I remember this one. Now Ned had this cat which was a nuisance to everybody, always doing the wrong things in the wrong places, and he decided that he had to get rid of it. So he loaded a potato sack with stones, and the cat, and took it all down to the creek, and drowned the cat. Would you believe it? When he got home, there was the cat sitting by the fire, shaking all the water out of its fur! He did the same thing again only with more stones, but still the cat came back. So Ned got outside advice; he tried poison, shooting, trapping — but still the cat came back. Finally an old lad told him that with a cat like that there was only one thing to do. Cut off its head. There was no other way. So finally in desperation he took the cat out to the far woods and chopped off its head. But, you know, when he got home to his fireside, there was the goddam cat sitting with its head in its mouth!"

NOTES

[1] My books on the Ottawa Valley include: *Giants of Canada's Ottawa Valley* (Burnstown, Ont.: General Store Publishing, 1981); *Some of the Stories I Told You Were True* (Ottawa: Deneau, 1981); *Look! The Land is Growing Giants* (Montreal: Tundra Books, 1983); *Laughing All the Way Home* (Ottawa: Deneau, 1984); *Legacies, Legends and Lies* (Ottawa: Deneau, 1985).

REMEMBRANCE DAY, 1983

Wm. B. Robertson

It's Remembrance Day, Dad,
and I remember you
were in the war
and they don't even call a holiday
here anymore
no kids off school
no break in the business week

and me, I don't know where I stand

I get into arguments
all the time
but they run down from known
men's names to platitudes
of freedom, obligation, and
I have to reach for the names again

Syd, an artilleryman,
straining to shift the guns at Caen,
his back stabbing him now as he turns
off his hearing aid
closing out the conversation
about Alistair walking a tightrope of pain
with a bottle for balance.
And the quick easy ones:
Donald strafed on a boat
in the North Atlantic,
Cousin Bill over France.

It used to be so easy
this remembering
paraded through the cold streets
of Cumberland, B.C. my
trumpet frozen in my hands

now the official word goes
I can do it on my own;
still I'll roll the names over
calling up half my goddamned background,
raising these men up again.

ONE DAY

Ken Norris

One day the truth hits you
like a warm breeze: we will only
ever know islands, for we cannot help
but be them. We don't have to insist
they are beautiful; there are the photographs,
there are dreams that cling to their peaks like clouds.
We must learn to love our circumstance,
do everything we can
to sidestep destiny. Waves
are breaking against the reef, hearts
are breaking and gods are being born again.

Guam

For Better or For Worse

by Lynn Johnston

CANADIAN MAGAZINES

Robin W. Winks

TWENTY OR THIRTY YEARS ago one of the great glories of North America was its magazines. One didn't realize this, of course, until travelling in Europe, or perhaps going off to college there, for North Americans took their magazines very much for granted. Europeans, one was told — usually by other Europeans — read books, so they did not need magazines; North Americans had a more limited attention span, were interested in the ephemeral and fashionable, had more money to spend on throwaway publications. So they read magazines. North American popular publications were glossier, fatter, had more pictures, were a good bit more vulgar than their European counterparts, and many of the specialized North American publications had no counterparts at all: no *Dog Breeders' Monthly*, no *Vargas* and *Petty Girls*, no *Popular Mechanics*, much less a magazine devoted solely to model airplanes.

The Europeans were only partly right, of course. There were European magazines for specialized audiences, but language barriers limited those audiences; there were plenty of pin-up magazines and, perhaps, there was more near-pornography than in North America; if one got outside the circles of Oxbridge and the Sorbonne one discovered that people didn't appear to read all that many more books once they were out from under the expectations of their schools. Still, the basic judgement was accurate: North American magazines were handsomer, better edited, more *fun*: they played a greater role in North American lives than magazines could ever do in Europe. Who, in the United States, would be without their *Saturday Evening Post*, their *Colliers*, their *Life*, or even *The National Geographic*? Canadians read these too.

The North American mania for magazines showed a distinct class bias — after all, that is part of the meaning of "popular culture" — though it was irredeemably middle class, while the better European publications were for an upper middle class of the well educated. In North America, if you wanted to break into print, you had a wide range of opportunities, from the pulps (many a good writer started out in *Black Mask*) to the serializations in *Redbook*, to a shot at the

big time in the *Satevepost*; in England there were a few staid journals with almost unchanging covers, still trying to live on the reputation of Dickens and Doyle. If you wanted to learn about North America, you read its magazines.

This was thirty or so years ago. Today European magazines are just as glossy, and the internationalization of language, in particular English, has created hundreds of mass market publications that can be found anywhere in Western Europe. The United States has replaced France and Italy as the pornography capital of the world; its magazines are far less well edited than before, and advertisements take up ever-growing space. And yet, a visit to any large newsstand should convince the casual browser that in sheer quantity and diversity, North American magazines still outgun all the others.

Those North American magazines remain solidly middle-class in the bulk of their content. Most read rather as though they had been edited by the researchers who prepare the American Automobile Association travel guides, those gazeteers that pick out especially notable places to visit by awarding a star, and invariably favour the nearest wax museum with that star. North American magazines are weighty with personality; even people who have no personality are treated as though they might. Articles are growing shorter, type larger, as the editors judge attention spans to be limited more and more by the tiny window of opportunity that occurs on television between one ad and another, that window to be used for just a little bit of actual programming. Viewers with the greater attention spans, perhaps the more intelligent viewers, watch more and more football on television because there are fewer interruptions, even allowing for the obligatory commercial breaks. In the first ten magazines I picked up this week, the average story ran to three pages, or about six minutes of reading (I'm a slow reader). What could better reflect popular culture? Perhaps the Europeans really were right those thirty years ago.

Canadian magazines are North American, of course, and they reflect the same access to technology, the same middle-class values, the same dental waiting room retention rates as magazines produced in the United States. As first glance they are simply North American. At second glance too, since the jobbers want to rack them in the same way: a stack of forty different Canadian magazines may be piled one on top of another, each to precisely the same measurement, with forty American kin. Pacts on interchangeable parts appear to have reached the printed word.

On third glance some differences begin to be seen by the addictive reader. The differences are small (with one exception), perhaps not all that important, but very real. The parts, the physical objects, may be interchangeable, but the content is not entirely so. Of course some Canadian magazines intend to look precisely like an American publication and to read like one too; still, there are obviously plenty that don't.

IN PURSUIT OF THE DIFFERENCES I tried a simple comparison: the editors of *Canadian Literature* went along one early Summer day to a representative newsstand in Vancouver and bought for me one copy of every Canadian publication on sale there. There were thirty-two titles. I went along a month or so later — no exact sociological study, this — to a representative newsstand in New Haven, Connecticut, and bought one copy of every American publication there. There were (not counting the porno magazines in shrink wrappers) 147 titles. Since the United States has ten times the population of Canada, but apparently only five times the number of publications (perhaps I shouldn't have left those shrink-wrapped titles out), Canadians are obviously twice as literate on a per capita basis. Of course this comparison may be skewed a bit by putting West Coast (where they read less?) against East Coast, or by the month's separation in purchases, or maybe *Can Lit* sent someone along who was too short to get the magazines down off the top shelf. Still, I don't really want to read more than thirty-two magazines from cover to cover anyway. (Naturally I was already quite familiar with the 147 from the States.)

Any Canada watcher is already familiar with a good bit of Canadian publication. Off and on I have subscribed to any number of Canadian magazines, hoping to find the three or four that would, if read faithfully, "keep me up" with Canadian affairs. Every subscription has lapsed after two or three years, in favour of a pre-tuned and never moved short wave radio that brings in Montreal, nine or ten scholarly journals, and one newspaper. In reflecting on why I had dropped my various subscriptions, to *Saturday Night*, to *Maclean's*, to the Canadian Edition of *Time* (well, actually, it dropped me), to the *Atlantic Advocate* (does it still exist? if so, Vancouver doesn't know it), to *This Magazine*, even to *Books in Canada*, I suddenly realized that none of them had told me enough about Canada. The reason for this, I think, is that they were trying too hard: to understand any society, one must understand other societies. He who only his own country knows, knows not his own country.

Having put that bit of piety behind me, I settled down to enjoy my creative drift through thirty-two of Canada's best. First, one becomes aware of the dog that didn't bark in the night. Amongst these thirty-two publications there was not one *Playboy*, *Playgirl*, *Hustler* type. Of course, these magazines enter Canada freely, and perhaps there is no special Canadian need: Canadian bodies presumably look very like American bodies. Nor were there any self-consciously semi-intellectual magazines, no *Harper's* (which now appears to consist of interviews, snippets from other places, and colloquia, so that virtually no editing is needed; a money-saver that) or *Atlantic*. There was only one magazine on *Athletics*, not ten, and it looked remarkably like *Runner*, clearly not edited for the people

hungry for the weekly scores from Texas high school football. There was nothing on wine, though surely somewhere there lurks a *Canadian Wine*? Best of all, there was no *People*, no nit-wit and trivia magazine for the thirty-second heavyweight. But of course there are not many beaches, and relatively few strap-hangers, in Canada. In short, some of the elements that make the American magazine scene so lively — raw sex, intellectual pretense, insanely competitive athletics, snob appeal consumerism, gossip — seemed to be lacking. One can condemn all that rubbish as much as one wants, and feel superior to it, but you can't beat it for life — or sales.

Second, there was the Cerberus that simply wouldn't stop barking all night long. Of the thirty-two magazines, four were in French and one was bilingual (hardly representative of French Canada, but our sample is from Vancouver, remember). The French-language magazines were pretty good, and for a moment there I thought I just might subscribe to *L'actualité*, which told me quite a lot I didn't know and rather supposed I ought to know, until I realized that the most informative piece was the cover story on Gorbachev. I am probably not the person to judge *Madame au foyer*, though I was happy to discover there a tidy article on vin canadien, especially when I learned that a $9 bottle of Chardonnay Canadian Estate was as good as a $17 bottle of Pouilly-Fuissé.

Of course these two dogs had something to say that was important, though not very original. Canadians do get a great deal of their culture from the United States. I am an ardent defender of the separateness of Canadian culture, not alone because I have a vested interest in its identity, since I teach about it, but also because I think Canadians have, in a number of important ways, a rather better life than Americans have and I hope they keep it that way. I am also a staunch advocate of bilingualism, since I believe that continued Canadian survival as a separate political entity depends on the presence of a substantial non-English speaking population. Having said all that, I find in myself little patience for those who would "improve" Canadian tastes by not allowing them to buy what they patently want to buy: the schlock of American popular culture. I'm inclined to think that if people buy junk, the people who buy it are at least as much at fault (if there be fault) as the people who sell it. That said, it strikes me that *Playboy*, *The Bible on the Head of a Pin*, and *People* are, in fact, profoundly Canadian publications too.

Nor should one expect Canadian publications to sell so well, make such profits, thus be able to pay top dollar for the most "in" writers of the moment, in the manner of *Rolling Stone*, *The New Yorker*, or *Newsweek*. Magazines from the United States sell in Canada, after all, and probably ought, while Canadian magazines ought to sell in the United States, and almost certainly don't. Combine that obvious fact of economics with a Canadian population one tenth that of the United States, and fragment that tenth further into two, perhaps several, language

communities — my "important exception" — and even the best edited, most fashionable, slickest, and quickest Canadian magazine cannot hope to sell a twentieth as many copies as its look-alike across the border.

So WITH CANADIAN MAGAZINES one thinks small, and at times one thinks imitatively. *New Maritimes*, begun in 1981, is a 16-page tabloid-style monthly (actually, ten times a year) which looks like any small-circulation alternative press product. (The issue in hand, with an excellent article on the Black United Front, which is part of my academic turf, was quite lively; I wish I could have seen the issue that surely must have appeared on Tuna.) *Shades of Rolling Stone* told me far more than I could digest about someone I had never heard of named Gary Glitter, which says more about me than anything else; the truth is, I can relate to *Rolling Stone*, which also worries about the CIA and lets Jan Morris write whenever she wants to. But then, Leonard Cohen was in *Shades* too, and that's real Can lit, though being a Cohen fan of a sort, I thought *People* could have done it better. Head-to-head confrontation isn't the wisest form of flattery. We'll get back to the question of imitation.

There are, in these thirty-two, also some magazines that do not exist in the United States. One is *Campus Canada*. To be sure, there are several mass magazines for the audience interested in education in America, but there are none that cover the ground precisely like this one. Styled "The Magazine for University and College Students," this bi-monthly is a good bit more serious than magazines intended for the same audience in the States, without ever taking on the guild-air of *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. To a university teacher, the magazine seems to contain very little about ideas, study, even (surprisingly) collegiate sports, but then study is simply that to most students, not a form of pleasure and therefore not something to write about. *Campus Canada* is full of what one would expect: concern about jobs, interest in hobbies that appeal to the young and moderately affluent, travel, reviews of books on education in the broad sense. The content is distinctly Canadian, which is fine, and yet one feels that one is learning about something generic — educational institutions, if not education itself — as well. Perhaps the relative interchangeability of Canadian and U.S. university life, or the international nature of youth culture, provides the editors with a natural blend of the Canadian and the comparative that makes for the best kind of contribution to popular culture in Canada, but at least those editors have had the good sense to lead from strength and not simply hope that a combination of nationalism and obvious imitation of a cross-border periodical will come up a winner.

Campus Canada is representative in another way: it is very new. The copy in hand was the fourth issue of the second volume; seven other magazines in the stack were within the first three years of their launching, which means that we can't count on them yet, and that they most likely aren't into the black and can't testify as to what makes money in Canadian publishing. About the same age, *Goodwin's* is one of those very serious examples of the popular culture that serves up thousand-word stories under titles like "Quebec Youth Protest Plight of Poor" that don't get us beyond a moderately close reading of a few newspapers. The longest article in our sample issue was by the editor, a look at professional fund-raising for social issues groups in Canada, and it is interesting though not interesting enough. *Goodwin's* nicely shows the other side of the mirror in Canadian popular culture: the facts, names, places are Canadian, but nothing that is unique to Canada is learned by the reader, and nothing (other than a ritual observation that compares Brian Mulroney to Ronald Reagan) is sufficiently comparative to provide a sudden shock of recognition even on so obviously a contrasting subject as social welfare.

Another remarkable Canadian publishing phenomenon is the provincial news and business magazine. There most likely is something called *New York Business*, though it isn't to be found at any newsstand in a neighbouring state, and if it does exist, it is probably an "insider's" by-subscription-only journal. I'll take anyone's bet that there isn't a weekly news magazine, made to look just like *Time*, called *Montana Report*. But there is an *Alberta Report*, it is weekly, and it's pretty good. Canadian culture expresses itself in regions — another cliché which got that way by being true — and somehow Canadian popular culture comes through better at the provincial than the national level. The sample issue seemed to me to hit its Canadian target just about right. The cover story, on sexual child abuse in Alberta, covered the provincial scene in depth, provided some comparative perspective on other provinces and other countries, and didn't fall into the trap of implying that, bad as things might be in Canada, they're worse across the border. *Playboy* even makes it, with a wry piece on Wayne Gretzky's interview in the April 1985 issue of the magazine, and one learns quite a bit about Canada from the remark of the mother of one young Gretzky fan that the hockey star has "sacrificed his respect, integrity and credibility on the altar of human degradation."

Alberta Business isn't as interesting, though it is a reasonable facsimile of *Business Week* narrowed down. It supports the thesis that popular culture — and what is more popular these days than business? — is best viewed through regional or even local lenses, for when it sticks to Alberta it's lively enough, and certainly informative, and when it dips into the national scene it doesn't have anything to say one can't learn from the *Financial Post*. What it does show, by example, is why magazines on specific cities and provinces in Canada have taken off in the

same way locality magazines in the States have boomed. There is a kind of geographic declension in such magazines: from *WestWorld* (travel, mostly abroad, and a gourmet section, mostly Chinese, but all for western Canadians) through *Western Living* (Morocco and Buenos Aires, but a good bit of western Canada too, a kind of cross between *Sunset* and *Desert* magazines, those California success stories), to *Toronto Life*, *Calgary*, and *Vancouver*. The formula is almost exactly that of *New York* magazine, allowing for small regional variations, with emphasis on consuming well, going to the right restaurants, visiting the right homes, and having a racy story or two to talk about with one's friends. Some of the best journalism in the United States is showing up in these magazines, so why shouldn't the same be true in Canada?

In Canada, more than in the States, these local magazines appear to fill the function of *Parade* and other purveyors of appealing trivia. Here is just half of one sentence in one paragraph of a fairly long article in a recent issue of *Calgary*:

> SOS doesn't mean anything (it's just a simple three dots, three dashes, three dots), Hoagy Carmichael didn't write the lyrics to *Stardust* (Mitchell Parish did), still water doesn't run deep . . . it is still, Alexander Graham Bell didn't invent the telephone (Phillip Reis did), tomahawks were invented by the settlers and not the heathen Indians, because the latter did not indulge in ironmaking, Harry S Truman had no middle name (and the initial doesn't even have a period behind it,) . . .

This sort of thing goes a very long way, but then Calgary *is* a long way. But "indulge"?

THERE IS LITTLE POINT in comparing type with type much further. Canada has its "women's magazines," and magazines for those who knit, and for those who ride, and for those who like to take the snowmobile out and make a bit of noise. So does the United States. One will not find the tap root of Canadian popular culture in some mano-a-mano confrontation between *Toronto Life* and *New York*, since the overpowering common denominator of urban life tends to blot out the differences. Where one must look is to the self-conscious guardians at the gates.

Here Canadian popular culture is served reasonably well. An attentive outsider can get a good sense of what is bothering Canadians as Canadians by reading *Canadian Forum* or *Dimension* or *This Magazine* or even *Briarpatch*, "Saskatchewan's independent newsmagazine." To take the last first, *Briarpatch* offers a spiky, rather solemn, sometimes angry view of the world as seen from Regina.

The material is timely and often, even when on a subject widely covered in virtually every country in the West (destabilization in Mozambique, for example), just oblique enough to be different, and thus, presumably, Canadian. Like many such magazines, *Briarpatch* appears to think that "the interests" are out to get us, forgetting that we are all members of interest groups (that's the way democracy works: environmentalists, and I am happy to be one, even "environmental extremists," are interest groups), and so it shuts out as many potential readers as it brings in. This probably assures a no-growth subscription rate but survival through the efforts of the believers.

The other mildly intellectual mass magazines — though "mass" is probably a misnomer here — are rather more restrained, if generally from a left perspective. They take the *Spectator* as their model and might be unhappy to be compared to *The New Leader*, or *Nation*, or certainly — these days — *The New Republic*. The fact that the glossies, the trendy architecture and good food magazines, are bent upon following their U.S. counterparts, and thus contributing to that creeping continentalism that all who would protect Canada from American sleaze so fear, is a statement about mass life in Canada, just as the fact that the Canadian magazines of opinion take their form from British models continues to play out the old dichotomy so frequently remarked on by J. Bartlett Brebner, Donald Creighton, and others, though in their time more from the right than the left.

Even these magazines have fallen for "the new journalism," that device — usually said to be American — which reduces most observations to personality sketches. Does one have a profound point to make? Put it in the mouth of an old codger, a jogger around the reservoir, an Inuit who cannot read but can follow the message of blood in the snow. Canada doesn't need a *People* magazine: if Canadians care about what happens to Prince, they can buy *People* for themselves, and if it's Brian Mulroney, Robertson Davies, Wayne Gretzky, or Peter Gault they want to get inside, their own magazines will provide all the personality bits necessary. Truth is, the old codger in Barkerville is neither more nor less interesting than the Cajun in Thibodaux, the Nez Perce at Orifino, or the oysterman off Tangier Island, but they are Canadian, and that makes all the difference.

Of the magazines of opinion sold off the racks in the newsstands — which omits *Queen's Quarterly*, the *Dalhousie Review*, and any number of good greying journals of opinion which, by being quarterlies, really have little to do with the original meaning of "journal" — the one that most expresses a steady sense of separate Canadian identity without coming out all goosebumps about it is the *Canadian Forum*. The *Forum* calls itself "An Independent Journal of Opinion and the Arts," and that's about right. In the sample issue, the *Forum* was a bit upset, and properly so, at least on its evidence, over acid rain, labour, the decline of public broadcasting, or Canada's diplomatic representation abroad, and these

are good issues for the Canadian purpose, which is my purpose. There are distinctly Canadian things to be said on all four subjects, and all four subjects have a universality which both illumines the distinctiveness of the Canadian statement and makes that statement useful, applicable, to a larger problem. Of course, Canadian publications have no necessary responsibility to the larger problem, but if they want to be heard outside Canada, they will have to take up that responsibility. The best do, so that the voice from the attic becomes another expression of a broadly North American popular culture, more independent, separable, distinctive than, say, the regional voice of the upper South and less distinctive than the voice from South Africa. Surely that is a good thing, and Canada's magazines are representative of that good thing: not, truly, a separate identity so much as a distinct identity.

The internationally minded, those who think of themselves as intellectuals — and it is interesting that one may call oneself an "intellectual" in Canada and get away with it, while in the States anyone who used the term in self-nomination would be thought either utterly pompous or a member of the so-called new conservatives, that group that appears never to have read a line of Edmund Burke — often condescend toward truly local newspapers. Those are the papers that put all the foreign news after page 12, run eight pages of sports, two pages of comics, and four pages of wedding and obituary notices, and lead off with a story on the local sewer assessment. To the historian, these are very good newspapers, doing what a newspaper is supposed to do: tell the local population about what it wants most to know, leaving the heady matters of Russian-American summitry to the New York *Times* and the *Globe & Mail*. In a sense the best of the Canadian magazines serve for Canadian popular culture the same function: if Canadians want to know about Rocky IV, that is their right, perhaps even to some small extent their choice, and if they want to know about Elspeth Cameron, they will have *Books in Canada* to turn to. This is not condescending, it's life.

A student of popular culture, if Canadian, would no doubt read these thirty-two magazines differently. A reporter would find a way to comment on all of them, from *Owl* (for children) to *Chatelaine* (which, no surprise, takes its model from France, with a hint of *Family Circle* thrown in). A professor of literature would surely deplore the many split infinitives one encounters in these pages, the student of political science the general lack of rigorous analysis of how things really work. The historian, however, has only three questions to ask of any documents, any artifacts: are they interesting? Are they significant? Are they true?

Some of these magazines are interesting. Some of them are significant. All of them are true, in the sense that they truly tell us something about culture in Canada. And, significantly, those dogs in the night tell us even more. Most of all, however, is the obvious fact of the initial statistic: at a news agent in Vancouver,

one found only four French magazines (and one bilingual up-scale publication, *enroute*, published in Toronto for Air Canada). Last week, in Montreal, I found thirty-nine magazines from Quebec and one from Vancouver; I did not find *Alberta Report*. And yesterday, at the largest dealer in foreign magazines and newspapers in New York, there were two Canadian magazines. That is significant, and true, and very, very interesting.

TRAILS IN HIS HEAD

Dennis Cooley

the old man
in boots that creak
his hurt breath in the air
theres always a chance
short of breath hearing it

that old man on the radio
looking for his son
he went to hunt rabbits
& didn't come back
five years & he looks
every day *scrunchh unnchh*
every day through the forest at Beausejour
he walks across the snow over &
over & *I don't find nothing*
his eyes lost in the frost

his voice sounds old
in the cracks in the air
it is pinched off somewhere
like a creek in winter

he knew every side road within five miles
he couldn't have got lost

his head aches
like birch when they fur
& burst with frost

the old man looking
crunnch crunchh
in parka & heavy boots that creak
his hurt breath in the air
there's always a chance

trails freezing up
in his head where rabbits & snow
shoes go where his sons face goes &
wakes his feet walking & walking
across pages of snow

his son's face five years
whiting out his eyes bewildered
in blizzards of air
his eyes lost in the frost
his thots ripped
on the bright snow
bleeding
bright on snow

SOCIOLOGY

Libby Scheier

There can be useful byproducts of an economic depression. When money loses value, sometimes values gain value. But for every newly poor person who gets in touch with the gods for the first time, ten people become muggers and five of these rapists while they're at it. For every newly poor person who gives away belongings to someone poorer, ten people become street hustlers dealing in dope or flesh or confidence games. For every newly poor person who tries to organize the block to march on city hall, ten people stay under the sheets all day. For every newly poor person who develops a heart of gold, the hearts of ten others turn rotten from envy, greed and bitterness. For every newly poor angel, ten devils. But last night I dreamt that good has ten times the power of evil.

WHAT'S GOOD FOR GENERAL MOTORS

Dennis Cooley

some of them are cars
people climb (casually) into & out of
the bodies (usually) idling drip blue blood & breathe gas

some of them sag & bulge
with the fatness of age their parts jut
through skins acned with salt

or look sleepily out
through dirty head lights
eyes tired as guppies in mud

some are so bored with their latest
incarnations they hardly bother to sit
in the seats & feel them

covered & perfumed as 50's virgins
or turn the radio
on tune in to some western

station woofing & tweeting with love
some dont even bother to toot
the horn or race

the motor not even to flash
the lights like flesh in cheap
strip joints before

they just droop
away drop off like sleepy men of war
or McGavin's dough all over the parking lots

lots leave litters of dead
bodies like tombstones
to mark their passing

CHANTER EST UN PAYS

Bruno Roy

> Je hais une chanson qui vous fait penser que vous êtes né pour perdre. — WOODY GUTHRIE

L'ESPACE DE LEUR ÉCLOSION, les chansonniers sont devenus les représentants "nationaux" de la chanson contemporaine et québécoise. Robert Charlebois lui-même, à l'époque des Boîtes à chansons, se percevait comme un poète-troubadour. Parce qu'à leur début, ils alimentaient une thématique axée sur une réalité plus rurale, plus campagnarde qu'urbaine, on les a appelés les "chansonniers du révolu." Et Gilles Vigneault avait rétorqué: "Il n'y a de révolu que ce dont on ne témoigne plus."[1] Ce qui fait la force de la chanson québécoise, des années 60 à nos jours, c'est d'être enraciné, donc de donner un sens de continuité à l'expérience collective qui s'y rattachait, et qui s'y rattache toujours. Et si l'évolution culturelle a permis la valorisation du texte (la chanson poétique) puis la valorisation de la musique (l'influence anglaise et américaine), c'est que cette évolution, d'une part, s'associait à l'éveil collectif d'une nouvelle conscience nationale et que, d'autre part, elle participait aux courants musicaux qui ont fait accéder la chanson québécoise à la modernité.

Or, c'est la chanson plus sociale qui a d'abord intéressé les chercheurs puisque cette chanson jouait un rôle de "définiteur de la national" semblable à celui de la chanson folklorique ou patriotique. D'une certaine façon, c'est au fenil de la chanson traditionnelle que s'est éveillée la chanson québécoise. Celle-ci, comme toutes les autres formes d'expression artistique, s'axera sur notre spécificité culturelle. A ses débuts, notre chanson était le premier temps d'une histoire moderne de notre société qui se dégageait de l'emprise de la terre.

Le peuple, ainsi que le pense Maxime Gorki, n'est pas seulement la force créatrice des valeurs matérielles, mais aussi la source intarissable des valeurs spirituelles. Le peuple est à l'origine de sa culture. Tout reste significatif, même ce qu'ont fait La Bolduc et le Soldat Lebrun. La première ne remettait pas en cause le système politique en place, tenant plutôt une manière de chronique sociale. Son patriotisme rendait hommage à la race canadienne française alors que ses principales chansons intervenaient dans les débat de l'époque (les années 30). Quant au Soldat Lebrun, ses chansons furent exactement un antidote à

l'angoisse de la deuxième guerre mondiale, reprenant à son compte certains symboles du chant patriotique tel le St-Laurent, par exemple. Ses chansons resteront quand même éloignées de la propagande nationale. Après 1945, l'effritement du monolithisme idéologique fera apparaître des pratiques culturelles qui conduiront à l'éclosion d'une chanson d'expression canadienne-française: Fernand Robidoux, Jacques Normand, Raymond Lévesque, Félix Leclerc, Pierre Pétel, Jacques Blanchet, Lucille Dumont, et Monique Leyrac.

Idéologiquement, son domaine fit apparaître des pratiques symboliques qui, au plan de l'imaginaire social, ont servi d'expression à l'âme collective dont on avait, à travers la chanson patriotique par exemple, célébré ou les vertus ou les victoires jamais définitivement acquises. Car en la folklorisant, notre chanson s'est-elle épuisée? Peut-on penser en même temps qu'elle a renouvellé la conscience collective, qu'elle est devenue une valeur refuge comme l'ont été les valeurs traditionnelles? Dans le contexte de la révolution tranquille, la chanson québécoise participait à un éveil, culturel certes, mais tout aussi politique. "Un éveil qui n'était pas aussi flamboyant que les chansons qu'il a suscité" devait commenter plus tard Gilles Vigneault.[2]

L'importance de la chanson des années 60 réside dans l'aptitude à dire de toute une jeunesse qui cessait de se percevoir comme canadien-français et qui s'affirmait de plus en plus comme Québécois. "On était des voix, expliquait Gilles Vigneault, mais ce sont leurs mains qui ont tout changé."[3] Devenue québécoise, la chanson fait désormais partie intégrante du discours d'affirmation définissant notre "être national." La chanson poétique, puis politique, fut un dépassement de la culture traditionnelle puisqu'elle fut un engagement directement lié à une nouvelle conscience collective, génératrice d'une autre "visée." Et c'est ce qui donne suite à cette "autre visée" qui est politique. Car ce qu'a réalisé la chanson québécoise, c'est la mise en veilleuse du fatalisme et de la soumission des vaincus. D'une culture ethnique, nous passions à une culture nationale, donc majoritaire.

C'est au "Grand Six-pieds" (1960), chanson de Claude Gauthier, qui revient l'honneur d'avoir éveillé un "soupçon de conscience nationale." Pour certains, cette chanson aurait été le premier témoin de la montée du nationalisme:

Je suis de nationalité canadienne-française
et ces billots j'les ai coupés
à la sueur de mes deux pieds
dans la terre glaise
et voulez-vous pas m'embêter
avec vos mesures à l'anglaise

Un Québécois comme y en a plus
un grand six-pieds poilu en plus
fier de son âme

Puis Raymond Lévesque, avec sa chanson "Bozo-les-culottes" (1964), va déceler la nature exacte de l'exploitation. Sa pensée, comme celle de bien des chansonniers, relèvera de la problématique décolonisatrice. Ce que leurs chansons, essentiellement, vont démontrer, c'est que la conscience de l'oppression rend l'oppression davantage insoutenable. Cette idée sous-tend toute la thématique de l'aliénation coloniale. Cette conscience collective sur la notion de pays va donc s'élaborer en même temps que le processus de décolonisation:

Un jour quelqu'un lui avait dit
Qu'on l'exploitait dans son pays
Bozo les culottes
Qu'les Anglais avaient les bonnes places
Et qu'ils lui riaient en pleine face
Bozo les culottes
(...)
Mais depuis que tu t'es fâché
Dans le pays ça bien changé
Bozo les culottes

La dimension d'analyse politique se trouve, et cela particulièrement depuis octobre 1970, dans le thème de l'étranger. Ce motif est repris sous toutes ses facettes: l'autre, c'est l'Anglais, l'autre, c'est le voleur de pays. Combien de chansons de Félix Leclerc se révoltent contre l'étranger: "Race de monde," "My neighbour is rich," "L'encan," "Chant d'un patriote," "Le tout de l'île." Ici, la présence anglaise détermine un paradoxe qui est aussi l'expression juste du drame fondamental et permanent de la collectivité québécoise: habiter un pays qui ne lui appartient pas. Depuis "L'Alouette en colère" (F. Leclerc), depuis "Y diront rien" (C. Dubois), depuis "Lettre de Ti-cul Lachance " (G. Vigneault, 1973), tels des rebelles, les chansonniers racontent le Québec se dépossédant; ils décrivent un Québec pillé, un Québec vendu. Car le pays qu'on vend à l'étranger, c'est une trahison nationale: les chansons ne parlent que de cette constante dépossession:

Tu penses que j'm'en aperçois pas
Quand tu mets ta pancarte
A vendre, à vendre, avec en bas
Indiqué sur les cartes
Si vous aimez mon Labrador
Ajoutez-y donc ma Côte Nord
Le bois y est hors d'âge
Quand tu descends nous voir dans l'bas
On sait qui c'qui paye ton voyage
Tu penses qu'on s'en aperçois pas

Depuis 1960, la pensée des chansonniers apparaît comme un genre neuf de conscience sociale. L'on ne doit pas s'étonner que la chanson québécoise soit aussi

au rendez-vous de la lutte politique, qui trouve son appui dans la "politique prophétique" des chansonniers. Par cette expression, la journaliste Evelyn Dumas entendait par là une politique qui propose pour l'avenir des changements radicaux et qui accepte le risque qu'il faille beaucoup de temps pour les amener. Car le lent travail des nouvelles consciences contribue à miner de l'intérieur les anciennes idéologies. La dissémination des anciens contenus accélère le processus de renouvellement des consciences. Ce mouvement s'accorde aux courants multiples dont les formes sont nouvelles, mais qui, au départ, restent insaisissables. Depuis le mouvement chansonnier, depuis le spectacle de l'Ostidcho, depuis les groupes québécois, dans la chanson québécoise, il ne s'est rien passé d'autre que ce mouvement de dissémination de l'ancienne identité canadienne. Cesser de vivre en pseudonyme — par exemple, "Le Grand six-pieds" de Claude Gauthier:

> Je suis de nationalité canadienne-française (1960)
> Je suis de nationalité québécoise-française (1965)
> Je suis de nationalité québécoise (1970)

ou, "Les Patriotes" (1965) de Claude Léveillée:

> Portez très haut votre drapeau
> Nous n'en avons pas nous n'en avons guère
> Alors portez très haut vos oripeaux
> Ceux que vous aurez payé au prix d'une guerre

(*fin corrigée en 1971*:

> Portez très haut votre drapeau
> Nous n'en avons pas nous n'en avons guère
> Alors portez très haut votre pays
> Celui que nous sommes en train de refaire)

L'enseignement des chansonniers nous convie à ne plus penser en termes de "communauté ethnique," mais en termes d' "Etat Nation." Car le nationalisme ethnique est insuffisant puisqu'il force à développer une identité de minoritaire. La chanson québécoise, en s'affirmant telle, tient le discours de la majorité.

BIEN DES CHANSONS ont naturellement une connotation politique et historique indéniable. La plus célèbre, "Mon pays" de Gilles Vigneault, a une dimension politique réelle. Jamais, au Québec, a-t-on chanté son pays avec autant d'assurance, avec autant d'envol. Pour la première fois de son histoire, le Québec est chanté en "DO majeur." Tout compte fait, la révolution culturelle serait, elle aussi, politique. René Lévesque reconnaissait que "la chanson prise de conscience s'est finalement avérée plus efficace, chez nous, que les manifestes poétiques des gars qui ont cédé à la tentation de faire des couplets

pour des hymnes nouveaux."[4] L'attitude politique peut-elle être réduite à l'idéologie ou au discours culturel? Ou encore, ce mouvement d'affirmation des Québécois doit-il absolument déboucher sur la politique? "Notre révolte," avait dit Vigneault, "est économique en surface et culturelle en profondeur."[5]

Sans trop le formuler, les chansons nous précisent ceci: la révolution au Québec sera forcément nationale. Car ce que les chansonniers ont expérimenté, à leurs débuts plus particulièrement, c'est de ne pouvoir éviter le creuset social, même s'ils ne se concevaient pas comme un outil de la révolution ou comme un instrument révolutionnaire puisqu'ils n'avaient pas de prétentions idéologiques. Il n'y avait pas chez eux d'articulation théorique soutenue, et encore moins une théorie de la décolonisation québécoise dont les perspectives sont la lutte des classes et la décolonisation, ce que l'écrivain Paul Chamberland appelait un socialisme décolonisateur.

Pourtant "Bozo-les-culottes" ou "Réjean Pesant" de Paul Piché soutiennent cette même idée de Pierre Vadeboncoeur: "Les travailleurs ne peuvent se désolidariser de la nation." Question nationale et question sociale sont intrinsèquement liées. Toute la chanson québécoise a introduit la pesanteur de la culture dans la lutte du quotidien qui, ultimement, conduit aux luttes de classes:

> Messieurs les importants
> J'veux pas vous déranger
> Mais pourriez-vous r'garder dans rue?
> J'vas vous montrer des gens
> Vous les connaissez pas
> Pourtant vous êtes assis dessus
> "Les Pleins" (Paul Piché, 1982)

Nombre de chansons tentent de faire voir et de faire comprendre les rapports sociaux de domination. Combien ont fait le procès de la naïveté des Québécois qui se sont laissés dominer? Les chansons nous font comprendre que l'oppression nationale amène la dépendance politique et économique. Dans sa préface au *Portrait du colonisé*, Jean-Paul Sartre écrit que "c'est le colonialisme qui crée le patriotisme des colonies."[6] Le patriotisme porte en lui la destruction du système colonial. Avant de nous parler d'une libération nationale, la chanson nous a donc parlé d'une tentative de libération coloniale. L'une conduit à l'autre. Le pays intérieur de "Il me reste un pays" (1973) de Gilles Vigneault procède de cette double libération:

> Il me reste un pays à te dire
> Il me reste un pays à semer
>
> Il me reste un pays à prédire
> Il me reste un pays à nommer
>
> Il me reste un pays à connaître
> Il te reste un pays à donner

Il nous reste un pays à surprendre
Il nous reste un pays à manger

Il nous reste un pays à comprendre
Il nous reste un pays à changer

Nos chansons se réclamment donc à la fois d'un pays et d'une identité singulière. Les chansonniers n'ont cessé de nous parler de notre homogénéité ethnique, c'est-à-dire de cette conscience que nous avons de former un groupe humain distinct, et de l'occupation de notre territoire. Les chansonniers, dont on a dit qu'ils étaient des philosophes sans théorie, ont proposé une vision du monde inséparable d'une appartenance à la réalité québécoise.

Si les chansonniers ont manifesté leur adhésion au courant idéologique du Parti québécois, par exemple, c'est qu'ils ont cru à la solution politique. Leur adhésion fut entière: "Si j'avais un nom, ce serait Québec" nous dit Félix Leclerc. Nous pensons que l'option souverainiste choisie par la plupart de nos chansonniers à marqué l'acuité de leur rôle en tant que pressentant l'avenir du Québec. Ils ont dit OUI au pays après avoir dit OUI à notre identité:

Bien sûr j'ai pas fini d'apprendre
Quinze ans c'est bien jeune je sais
Mais c'est assez vieux pour comprendre
Ce que veut dire liberté
On n'a jamais vu dans l'histoire
Un peuple choisir d'effacer
Son propre nom de sa mémoire
Se mettre lui-même au passé
"Tu vas voter" (Sylvain Lelièvre, 1980)

En fait, les chansonniers ont empêché que se tiennent deux discours sur un même pays: "Mon non est québécois." Les résulats du référendum de mai 1980 ont bien montré les ambiguités de l'affirmation de soi. Une situation coloniale n'est jamais claire. Pour reprendre encore Memmi, relevant le défi de l'exclusion, le colonisé s'accepte comme séparé et différent, mais son originalité est celle délimitée, définie par le colonisateur, ici, Ottawa. Adhérant à "Mon non est québécois," les supporteurs du NON ont continué à souscrire à la mystification colonisatrice. Or, "le refus du colonisé ne peut qu'être absolu, c'est-à-dire non seulement révolté, mais dépassement de la révolte, c'est-à-dire révolution."[7]

Comme le chante Raoul Duguay, "le pays, c'est ce qui nous noue," pas ce qui nous divise. Dans la chanson québécoise, s'opposent deux entités nationales: les Canadiens et les Québécois. Ces deux entités recouvrent deux langues, deux cultures, deux territoires. Tout l'effort des chansonniers aura été de faire, puis de maintenir cette distinction. Le thème récurrent, le premier pourrait-on dire de notre chanson, c'est le rejet du colonialisme historique, dont le corollaire, par

opposition, est la reconnaissance du pays. "Mon pays ce n'est pas un pays c'est l'envers / D'un pays qui n'était ni pays ni patrie."

Au Québec, parce qu'il marque sa différence, le créateur agit comme si son pays était indépendant. Lorsqu'il écrit ou chante, il le rend tel. Tel est le sens du mot créer: rendre possible. Le chansonnier incarne une variété d'hommes et de femmes à l'image même de tous les possibles du pays qu'ils plaident depuis toujours. Notre chanson a provoqué le sens de notre évolution collective. Parce que chez le veilleur, la critique est ouverte. Et le projet politique, ici, consiste à réduire l'écart entre l'identité québécoise et la société québécoise.

Ainsi, lors de la grande marche du Québec du 17 avril 1982 pour protester contre le rapatriement de la constitution, des comédiens, dont Gilles Pelletier, ont repris des textes de Félix Leclerc, de Gilles Vigneault et de nombreux autres chansonniers, afin, justement, d'illustrer ce que représentent toujours leurs chansons: LE QUEBEC NE PEUT ETRE TRAITE AUTREMENT QUE COMME PAYS. C'est exactement en ce sens, et nous lui donnons raison, que le poète Gaston Miron nous dit de ne pas faire dévier notre revendication politique sur le plan culturel. La conscience du pays s'élargit et débouche sur le problème politique. Pour Miron, l'identité politique du Québec, c'est la souveraineté totale. L'une n'est-elle pas condition de l'autre? En reconnaissant les ambiguités de leur pays dont a témoigné le NON au référendum de mai 1980, les chansonniers maintiennent à vif une conscience, non seulement historique, mais aussi politique. Nous sommes tous, il est vrai, du mai 1980, mais nous sommes aussi tout autant du 15 novembre 1976. "Je suis d'octobre et d'espérance" chante toujours Claude Gauthier.

IL FAUDRA DONC SORTIR de l'espace ambigu dans lequel nous a maintenu le thème même du pays pour embrasser l'homme entier, c-est-à-dire l'homme et la femme actuels avec leur histoire, l'humanité avec son avenir. Tout compte fait, la chanson moderne n'est pas éloignée du rêve de la communauté idéale: celui de l'adaptation du vieux mythe de la cité future où tous les maux sont résolus:

De mon grand pays solitaire
Je crie avant que de me taire
A tous les hommes de la terre
Ma maison c'est votre maison
Entre mes quatre murs de glace
Je mets mon temps et mon espace
A préparer le feu la place
Pour les humains de l'horizon
Et les humains sont de ma race
"Mon pays" (G. Vigneault, 1964)

On aura constaté que dans cette chanson, qui a presque servi d'hymne national aux Québécois, le mot Québec ne s'y trouve pas. Gilles Vigneault lui-même explique qu'il n'a jamais voulu arrêter ce pays à quelque frontière que ce fût. Mettre la conscience à vif en décapant l'histoire, mais aussi amener cette conscience à maturité. "Mon cri doit devenir jam session," dira Raoul Duguay, "pour déjammer la conscience québécoise . . . mais le plus grand pays de l'homme," poursuit-il, "c'est l'homme lui-même et que c'est dans cette direction-là qu'il faut faire notre souveraineté."[8] Son nationalisme, tout comme celui de Vigneault, amène les gens à une prise de conscience philosophique: ce dont ils parlent constamment, c'est du "pays intérieur."

Provisoirement, donc, la majorité des chansonniers se sont joints au Parti québécois. C'est depuis vingt ans, cependant, qui'ils appartiennent au mouvement nationaliste. Ils ont contesté la forme classique de l'injustice nationale (la plus évidente et la plus facile à ressentir), celle qui — est-ce un hasard? — prend la forme d'une amputation de territoires, d'une assimilation linguistique, d'un noyautage d'une culture, nommément la culture québécoise. Les chansonniers ont combattu le processus idéologique, c'est-à-dire cette infiltration lente de la pensée dont la fonction, au lieu de susciter un questionnement, fixe des réponses ("peu importe la question, votez non," par exemple) en voilant le champ des possibles.

En fait, à tout le moins pour le Québec, le rôle à venir de la chanson ne sera plus de provoquer une catharsis, mais d'arracher des décisions dans le plus lucide questionnement. Et toute invitation au changement qu'elle fera, sera un espoir de la gauche. Sans illusions cependant, nous rappelle le chansonnier Sylvain Lelièvre:

> On peut suivre l'histoire de la chanson et constater que, en général, la chanson précède légèrement les grands mouvements politiques du pays. Elle est une sorte de sismographe de la réalité québécoise. On peut observer que, juste avant le référendum de 1980, il y a eu comme un silence de la chanson québécoise, suivi du résultat que l'on sait. . . . A partir de 1978, il n'y a plus d'artistes ou même de groupes marquants qui dominent la réalité de la chanson d'ici. Il y a une sorte d'éclipse de notre chanson depuis 1979, qui correspond tout à fait à la parenthèse politique que l'on connaît.[9]

Cette parenthèse politique a connu un soubresaut par la mise au rancart de l'option souverainiste par le Parti québécois lui-même. Pour Vigneault, cependant "ce mouvement qui secoue le P.Q., c'est nettement mieux que la stagnation qui prévalait depuis longtemps."[10] S'il importe aux chansonniers de savoir si le peuple accédera à l'existence nationale sur le plan politique, il reste qu'ils ne peuvent plus rien tant que la volonté politique n'aura pas été exprimée clairement. En ce sens, ils sont réduits à une tâche de répétition qui, devant les adversaires de l'indépendance, est forcément nécessaire au regard des mécanismes de la peur

dont ces derniers se servent. Car sans cette conviction que nous sommes libres, comment pourrions-nous riposter à nos adversaires?

L'histoire du mouvement indépendantiste au Québec, croient certains sociologues, est inséparable de l'histoire de la chanson québécoise. Depuis 1960, la chanson au Québec fut un mouvement à vocation idéologique. Cette vocation perd de son impact dans la mesure où la culture n'est plus l'unique force collective. Bien que nous ayons produit une chanson originale et diversifiée permettant du même coup notre décolonisation culturelle, il faudra avoir en tête le décallage entre notre affirmation culturelle et le reconnaissance du territoire réel.

Depuis la chanson folklorique jusqu'à la chanson moderne de contestation de tous les pays, l'histoire des peuples est répétitive. Notre chanson aussi, sans doute. Pourquoi chanter? Parce qu'il y a tant à faire. Le sens de la lutte va toujours dans le sens d'un certain avenir politique. Sans compter que la culture d'un groupe sera toujours sa façon personnelle d'accéder à la liberté. Et s'il est vrai que la chanson vit de récréations, il est aussi vrai que tout ce qu'elle a permis de rupture créatrice s'inscrit dans la continuité.

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BASEBALL AND THE CANADIAN IMAGINATION

George Bowering

WHEN I WAS A STUDENT at the University of British Columbia I got involved in all the arts I could, and for that reason I had a crush on myself, hero of the green room, the newsroom, the muse room, the art gallery, the concert hall, and especially the caf. In the caf you could sit at the special arty-farty table up front, half a scrawled poem in front of you, a mickey of cheap brandy weighing down your benny pocket, cigarette butts spilling over the edge of the gummy ashtray, and impress the newcomers, if you and your friends permitted them a chair. Realizing that there were other aesthetes there, I needed something to mark myself apart from even them. So I would sit with the sports pages in front of me.

"Afgh," I would mumble, "Drysdale pitches a two-hitter, and *still* he loses."

They rose to the bait, the actresses, poets, columnists, dancers. They would always pull sour faces and ask me what the hell a poet was doing looking at the baseball scores. I expected them to be naive because they were only college students after all. I had been out in the world, an air force station in Manitoba, mainly.

Baseball is poetry, you coddled future-dilletantes, I would think behind my serene or more likely goofy smile. I had what I wanted, a kind of uniqueness inside the uniqueness. But I also knew that a great number of the writers I admired shared with me a lifelong interest in baseball. You wrote about it once in a while, as William Carlos Williams did, or you wrote about it all the time, as Grantland Rice did. You also read the scores and knew something late at night as you remembered them. I rather believed that if some raglan-clad semi-Brit campus poet did not know anything about baseball, did not like it, in fact, he probably didn't know that much about poetry, either.

Things haven't changed much. Even though the fashion-conscious are leaping on baseball and baseball books in recent years, I still get lots of writers and especially reviewers tut-tutting me for mentioning baseball in everything I write, whether it is a novel about eighteenth-century mariners or a "translation" of Rilke.

I have finished another historical novel recently. It will be published early in

1987, ninety-eight years after the actions it depicts. It has baseball in it. Let me tell you why.

The setting for the novel is the Thompson Valley in 1889 and 1890. While doing my research, one's favourite part of writing a novel, I found that a Kamloops team, fortified with some American players, won the British Columbia baseball tournament in 1889. Even though the villain of the novel is an American who shot a French-Canadian ranch hand near Kamloops, I resisted temptation. Then I found out that New Year's Day of 1890 was preternaturally warm and that the Kamloops team played the CPR team in a game that day, and that the game had to be suspended in the fifth inning because of an eclipse of the sun! What was I supposed to do? Refuse a gift from a muse who has been watching over me since my teen-age days when I reported the doings of the Kamloops baseball team for newspapers in the South Okanagan?

In any case, I don't really feel that I have to defend the appearance of baseball in my poems and fiction. As everyone knows, I have been overly-influenced by American writers, and many of my favourite American writers — Fielding Dawson, Joel Oppenheimer, Tom Clark, Jonathan Williams, Jack Spicer — pepper their writings with references to the diamond game. Even the writers I don't particularly like but always read — Philip Roth, Bernard Malamud, etc. — find that they have to pay attention to the great American game, too.

Well, I have always thought that it was the great Canadian game, too. That reflects, in all likelihood, the fact that I was brought up in a part of Canada that was not cold enough for hockey, and too poor for football, games that were popular, I heard from immigrants, on the prairies. Some of my friends got baseball scholarships to U.S. colleges, a few signed minor league baseball contracts, and one left-hander who used to strike me out with a terrifying curve ball went 3-0 against the Yankees after being brought up by Boston late one season while I was toiling in Manitoba, where the people I knew were already sharpening their skates.

So I am not patient with a certain kind of letter I have seen in various newspapers during the recent hullabaloo about the Toronto Blue Jays, the letter from some unknowledgeable malcontent, probably an ex-Brit, who complains about our press leading the excitement about an "imported" Yankee game. Maybe he is the same guy who spent the 1970's trying to keep American poets out of the country. I would direct him to a lovely picture book entitled *Cheering for the Home Team* by William Humber (1983).

Humber points out that in Southern Ontario they were playing baseball a year before the legendary Abner Doubleday was supposed to have invented it down farther south. That was a century and a half ago. It did not take it long to get into the hands of Canadian writers. Humber quotes Nellie McClung, writing about a game in 1882, from *Clearing in the West* (1936):

> The seats from off the wagons were set around the place where the baseball game was played. The ball was a homemade yarn ball, and the bat a barrel stave, sharpened at one end, but it was a lovely game, and everyone got runs.

Humber also quotes this, from Ralph Connor's *The Sky Pilot* (1899):

> He evidently regarded the exchange of the profession of baseball for the study of theology as a serious error in judgement, and in this opinion every inning of the game confirmed him.

Several years ago I went through all the Canadian poetry books I could find at home and at the UBC library, collecting poems about baseball by Canadian and other poets, including the Cuban and Japanese ones I had found. There were enough to fill a thick volume, and I thought of trying to interest a publisher in such a thing. A. J. M. Smith told me I should call the book *Cobb Would Have Caught It*, apparently a piece of doggerel he had long favoured. I don't remember the name of its author, probably American, but I wish I did. Even the baseball poems by Canadians would make a nice hefty and representative anthology.

THE FIRST CANADIAN POET to have any appreciable influence on my own work was Raymond Souster, who has published many fine poems (and some light hitters) about the game. We have even seen pictures of Souster in baseball garb (check the last issue of *Combustion*, a special issue of its successor, *Is*, edited and published by Victor Coleman, a well-known basketball fan). Most of Souster's recent books have baseball titles — *Change Up, Extra Innings*, etc. — an acknowledgement of his sky-pilot-like regret that he switched lineups.

One of my favourite Souster poems has always been a joyful fancy from the 1950's called "The Opener":

> From where I was sitting
> it looked like an easy double-play.
>
> But at that precise moment
> a sloppy looking freighter
> slipped through the Western Gap
> with a clothesline of washing
> half the length of her deck,
>
> and the runner going into second
> took one look at the ship
> and yelled: "Hey, look, they got
> my old lady's black pants
> flying at the masthead."

And when all the infield
turned around to get a gape,
he made second, stole third,
and scored standing up
the winning run in what otherwise
was one of the cleanest-played openers
in a Toronto ball-park.

Souster has always looked for moments of irrational delight that will ease one's necessary observation of normal mortality. He knows that for baseball aficionados opening day is not only the proof of the end of winter (and should thus be made a Canadian national holiday), but a defiance of the end of things.

George Stanley, a poet who lives in northern British Columbia, and whose poetic is much different from Souster's, understands that defiance. In his book entitled *Opening Day* (1983), the title poem ends this way, saying of "every fist, mouth, mother / and mother-to-be down the first base line":

& I knew they triumphed

not over me, not over my, mine

mind

not over mind

but over darkness, iso-
lation, as the staring
of windows, the eyes of cars
& streetcars

& most of all the Victorians,
crouched in jealous rows on the hills

tall dark rooms we had stayed in
too long

now out in the sun!

Of course not only opening day, but any game at all is surcease from grim reality. But baseball is not all escape; it is not all fantasy or marvel. Dwight Gardiner, a poet from the prairies, who moved first to Montreal and then to Vancouver, in search of minor league ball, has in his latest book, *The New York Book of the Dead & Other Poems* (1984), a serial poem called "Double Header," which, among other things, flicks a note at the condition nearly any fan can glimpse in his own condition:

Max Venables'
single
first news
from Phoenix

the pathetic leagues
the almost got close
enough leagues.

But in baseball we can say what we have learned not to say in our lives: wait till next year! Now in the last innings of the nineteen hundreds we have come to realize that there is not much time left for the twentieth century to belong to Canada.

Baseball, however, is not life, except for a few hundred substitute players in the majors and minors. Baseball is postmodernism. It is just about all signifier, very little signified, at least in a metaphorical sense. We know that football is referential as can be — to war, to business, to sex life, to the years filled more and more with injuries and failing health.

In Canada, most of the poets are baseball fans. Even some of the women poets are playing softball and writing baseball poems. Judith Fitzgerald is already at least a chapbook ahead of Marianne Moore. The only two football fans I know among the Canadian poets are Eli Mandel and John Newlove. A moment's reflection will remind you that they are both from Saskatchewan, the province most often associated with novels of grim naturalism.

In Canada, a lot of the poets are also ball players. If the poets were to play a game against the fiction writers, they would win 10-3. In Montreal in the early days of the Expos I played on a team called the York Street Tigers, and we played a double-header every Saturday against the Domtar All-Stars. The All-Stars used to beat us two games out of three, but I think that was because we had so many fiction writers in key positions. On return to Vancouver I joined the Granville Grange Zephyrs (Zeds, it said on our headbands), one of the founding teams of the famous Kosmik League. We were very successful, made up as we were entirely of poets and painters. Now I play for the Bad Backs, an amazingly successful team with poets as its majority. We clean up on the opposition, formed of teams whose rosters are filled with newspaper reporters and booksellers.

CANADA'S BASEBALL-LOVING fiction writers are more famous than its poets, at least for loving baseball. But it has been my experience that they are not as good at playing the great Canadian game, by which I mean, in this context, fastball. In the *Crow Journals* (1980), Robert Kroetsch records this observation, Saturday, July 10, 1976, Qu'Appelle Valley, Saskatchewan:

> Hugh Hood here to teach prose writing. He knows by heart all the statistics about baseball and quotes them without provocation. He comes equipped with seven

pairs of expensive sneakers, colors various, many sweat suits and baseball caps and a couple of gloves. We went out to play ball. He can't catch or throw or hit. The novelist as amateur. He'll probably write a great sports novel.

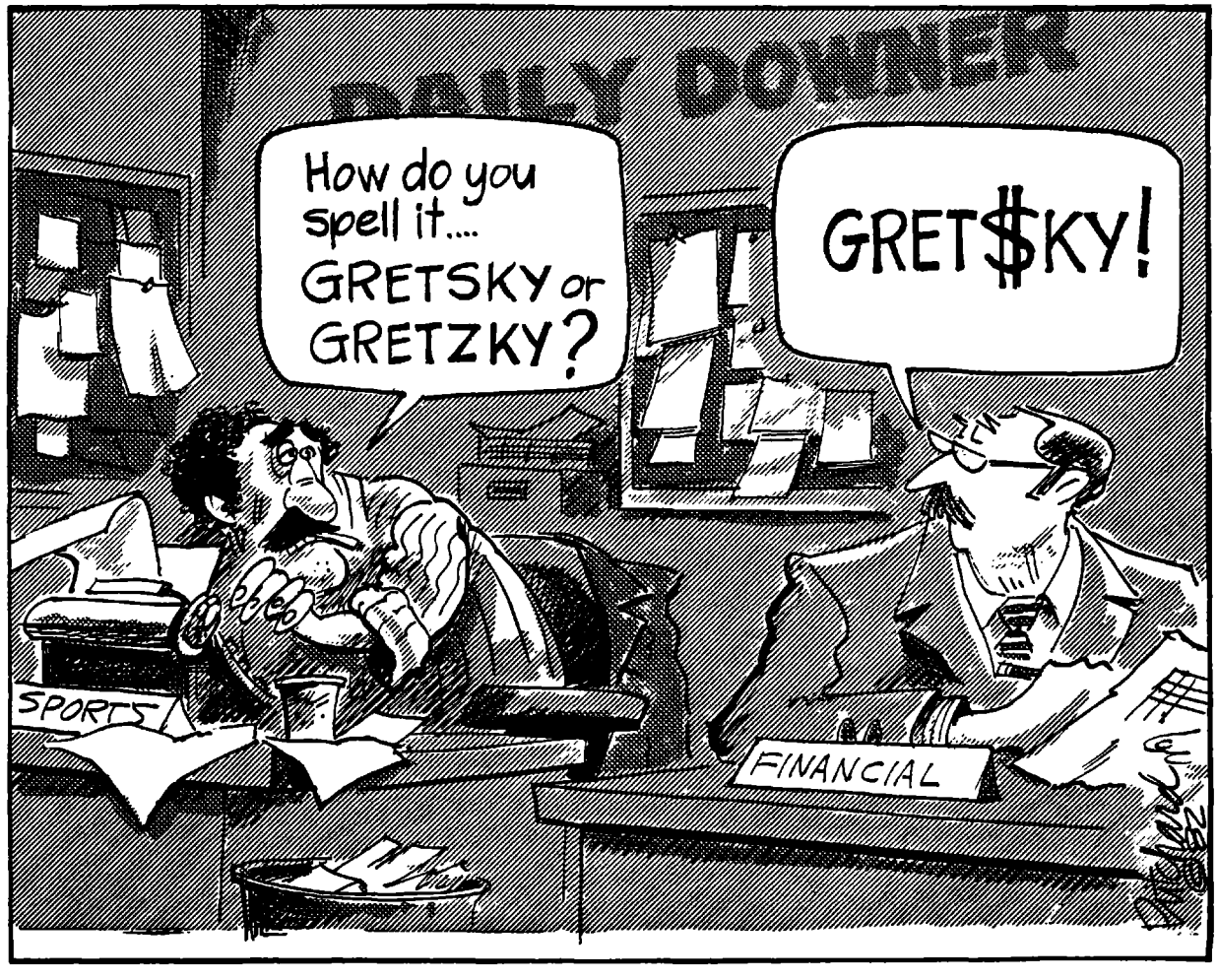
In Montreal, we gave a three-game tryout to Clark Blaise, another writer who can quote baseball statistics at the drop of a popup. We put him at first where a guy who cannot run will do the least harm, but we found out that he could not hit the curve ball. Or the fastball. Or the slowball. When W. P. Kinsella, prize-winning author of *Shoeless Joe* and other baseball fictions, announced that he was moving from Calgary to the west coast, we extended him an invitation to come to our beloved Section 9 for the AAA games at Nat Bailey Stadium, and to the sandlot for a tryout. We have not seen him in either place. Well, we know that he goes to big league parks on his summer rambles, but we wonder what his excuse is for not coming to a Bad Backs practise. Of course Kinsella is also famous for his stories about Indians; and we do not expect him to be good at being an Indian, at least not when we find out that he is not.

Of all the Canadian fiction writers I know, the ablest ball player I have seen is Hanford Woods, and his best-known fiction is a novella that won the Fels Award for the best novella in an American little magazine that year. It has since been published with another long piece of fiction in a book, but its title is *The Drubbing of Nesterenko*. That's right — a hockey story.

A few years ago I edited a book of fiction about sports for Oberon Press, though, and was delighted to find out that Canadian novelists and short story writers seem more interested in baseball than in hockey. Every fall and winter the department store book shops are filled with new hockey books, but they are almost always written by newspaper hacks. Baseball attracts the novelists. Blaise has covered the game for *TV Guide* and other slicks, and so has Kinsella. Mordecai Richler has written with his characteristic high low humour about baseball in and outside his novels.

With few exceptions football does not animate the imaginations of our novelists or poets. Only the reporters try to make the CFL into some kind of national mucilage, and tout the Grey Cup weekend as a national holiday. That says, I think, something about football. Let the Americans have football, says the poet. Canada has not been in a shooting war for over thirty years.

HUGH HOOD HAS WRITTEN two non-fiction books about hockey, and a novel about politics that uses touch football as a motif. He has written more stories with reference to sports than any other Canadian fiction writer, even Morley Callaghan. But in recent years he has referred to baseball more than to any other athletic and aesthetic play. One marvellous story tells of


DAILY DOWNER
How do you spell it.... GRETSKY or GRETZKY?
GRET$KY!
SPORTS
FINANCIAL

old Jarry Park fans taking their portable radios there rather than attend the game at the Big Owe, until there are bigger crowds at the phantom game than at the corporeal one. Another relates the dream fiction of a middle-aged man who goes to a major league training camp as a walk-on, and enjoys one magical season as a premier pitcher. In his most recent collection of short stories, *August Nights* (1985), the opening story tells of a woman who listens to Expos games on the radio as she follows the adventures of wild birds around and in her summer place, and the title story relates the giddy activities of a couple of female Expos groupies. That first story, "The Small Birds," has a nice moment that offers a kind of theological, anti-utilitarian defence of baseball. Some swallows have nested under the porch, and by mid-July the miraculous young have grown so large that they are in danger of crowding one or another out of the nest:

> On Saturday, 19 July, she was lurking near the nest, thinking she might anticipate some infant attempt at flight, catch the creature if the attempt should go badly. She might retrieve some squeaking Icarus before he hit rock, a basket catch like those the outfielders kept making in National League play as described in the summer-long sequence of Expo broadcasts going on in the swallows' sky. In a bird's mind, the account of the game would seem like the voice of God, superior to the visible order, coming from elsewhere. Something given, a part of pure life.

Those readers familiar with Hood's cycle of novels know that he is interested in the details of earthly life, but that his vision is spiritual, that he sees Wordsworthian spots in time as epiphanic. Referential meaning is converted by a special energy of attention into pure radiated meaning, regard into love. Even when Hood pokes nimble fun at his own religious and literary belief, he means that a most mundane event can hold the news of redemption and grace. It is no wonder (though it is for wonder that he is there) that Hood will be in the grandstand, looking for a perfect game.

Kinsella, too, is after wonder when he looks at baseball, and like Hood, he has an optimistic view of the world. But while Hood is after vision, Kinsella is after magic, the sort of thing Malamud wanted in *The Natural*; and no wonder — Kinsella came up to the majors from the Iowa Workshop. One of Kinsella's stories bears a remarkable likeness to Hood's story about the radio fans in old Jarry Park. In Kinsella's story, "The Thrill of the Grass," the fans take advantage of a baseball strike to sneak into a stadium night after night, gradually replacing the artificial turf with real grass.

Kinsella does tell nifty and dreamy stories about baseball players and especially pure-hearted fans. But one aspect of his prose does not really suit the game. Kinsella loves similes, the easiest of tropes. He seldom lets a thing or event go by without inventing a lush simile. Baseball, though, is not like anything. Similes would work admirably with football.

BASEBALL IS NOT LIKE anything. But it does seem to be various things for writers. For many writers, as for many fans, it is a stadium for the play of memory. Clark Blaise, at the heart of the North American tradition, has always been interested in telling stories about (his) childhood and youth. Nostalgia, and what in lesser places is called trivia, pervade his fictions. What could be more useful, and in view of his upbringing, more natural than a first-person recollection of boyhood fascination with baseball statistics or the (temporary) home team? Here is Richard Durgin, the epistolary narrator of Blaise's *Lusts* (1983):

> The first time Pittsburgh became entirely mine was when I walked out of the house one summer Saturday and pieced together the various transfers and streetcar routes that would drop me at the Forbes Field parking lot. I was eight. Bliss, when you're eight, is sitting in the bleachers and pitting your knowledge against the beer-swollen platitudes of laid-off steelworkers. The sweetest words in the world come from some hunky downing his Iron City and nodding, "Think so, kid? Yeah, maybe yer right."

Of course he is right. I mean in saying that those are the sweetest words in the world.

(By the way, have you noticed how often the quotations I have made mention Saturday? Do you remember how you felt about Saturday when you were a schoolboy or schoolgirl?)

One of my favourite short stories is a piece called "Losers," by Brian Fawcett, who is also the catcher for the Bad Backs. Fawcett made his reputation as a poet, but in the past four years he has published three books of fiction. I have noticed that since he became a fiction writer his playing skills have diminished. "Losers" is a story about the earlier days of the Kosmik League, and treats the relationships between that (dis)organization and the rest of the Revolution as it altered consciousnesses in the early 1970's. In the Kosmik League it was considered politically incorrect to give way to ambition or to steal against a lefty. Fawcett's story relates the difficulties of a former Little Leaguer who still wants to knock over the second baseman, but who has become socially educated enough to despise aggressive competition.

In the first year the narrator's team has fun, and occasionally a little stylish victory. But

> The next season, unfortunately, the team began to win. For me and a few others, it signalled that The Revolution was over, and that our side had lost. Our baseball skills had grown, which meant that we were all now *good* sandlot ball players, and that if we were willing to go to work for the telephone company or something like that, we could be playing Senior B softball. It got to some of us.

Some of us baseball fans have wondered for a long time how we can admire someone like Ted Williams, who flew U.S. Marine Corps fighters in Korea, and probably voted for Barry Goldwater and Ronald Reagan. But we do admire Ted Williams. He was the Ezra Pound of baseball, an epic maker who would not wear a necktie. In "Losers," Fawcett's narrator says:

> But The Revolution was in trouble too, and it was in trouble with baseball for the same reasons it was in trouble with a lot of fairly basic laws of behavioural physics. For one thing, if people practice anything, they'll get better at it — unless, of course, they get bored with it, or become afraid of it, and quit. Skill has its own unique set of demands, one of which is that it breeds ambition.

The trouble with The Revolution is that it thought baseball was like something, or about something. Since the Kosmik League has gone and been replaced by a bunch of older guys who like to play ball with each other, the softball has got to be more fun, and there is no more competition to see who can be more revolutionary. Not on the field, anyway.

There are still those who think that baseball is a "slow" game because players do not bash one another. To them, I suppose, "survival" is still the main theme in the Canadian character. There are still those who think that we will be polluting the Canadian imagination by playing and following the game usually associated with the Imperialistic Power to the south of us. There are probably still those who think that an interest in baseball is frivolous and therefore not in keeping with an essentially puritanical Canadian ethos. One thinks of the scorn directed Lester Pearson's way when it was reported that he watched the World Series in his office when he might have been meeting with his cabinet members. In that instance, Pearson, a one-time ballplayer with skills resembling those of Raymond Souster, was probably receiving the tut-tutting of both puritans and chauvinists (if they are two distinct groups).

But it would be hard to find anyone more recognizably Canadian than Lester Pearson or Raymond Souster. It should not surprise anyone to look into the trunk of a Canadian writer's car and see a ball and a bat, a glove and some turf shoes, perhaps some elastic knee bandages and *Cheering for the Home Team.*

THE FOLKLORE OF "OLD FOOLISHNESS"

Newfoundland Media Legends

Peter Narvaez

THE TECHNOLOGICAL MEDIA which transmit popular culture have often been viewed by folklorists and other students of culture as "destroyers of folklore."[1] Folklore, however, is a dynamic component of culture which functions adaptively in situations of rapid cultural change; such adaptiveness is especially reflected in the generation of folkloric forms which make critical comments about new situations. For more than a century, rapidly developing technological media have been modifying the sensory experiences of the populations of Newfoundland and Labrador. The adaptive function of folklore will be illustrated in this discussion through an analysis of a cluster of media legends which reveal adjustments to new media technologies.

Mass Media and Popular Culture as Destroyers of Folklore

The study of contemporary folklore encompasses a vast array of old *and* modern expressive behaviours, texts, and contexts. Although the "media as destroyers" idea is not universally entertained, it is an important notion, which merits more than peripheral consideration. The destroyers argument is a deterministic value judgement whose tenets are: folklore is basically good; when popular culture, an inferior expressive form, and the technological media of its transmission are introduced into given cultural scenes, they either supplant or unfairly compete with folklore. It follows implicitly from such an argument that the responsibility of the folklorist is to save, nurture, and maintain folklore before it is entirely destroyed by pernicious forces. Dismissing these views by simply assigning them to the "devolutionary premise" in folklore theory, the idea that "the universe of folklore is running down," hardly addresses the real concerns of the destroyers argument.[2] In 1954 Canadian folklorist Edith Fowke, in her introduction to *The Folk Songs of Canada*, expressed these concerns with nationalistic pride:

> Today the radio, movies, and television have largely displaced folk songs as a means of entertainment, and there is danger that the songs which our forefathers preserved through many generations of loneliness and hardship will die out. If they do, our country will be the poorer, for the old songs are vibrant with life, and many of them have a haunting beauty. It is our hope that this book may help a greater number of Canadians to know and love their native folk songs.[3]

Sixteen years later, in his study of Paul E. Hall, a Newfoundland songmaker, folklorist John F. Szwed articulated a similar "limited cultural space" interpretation:

> It is not an accident that song makers such as Paul Hall have disappeared at the time when mass media have made their inroads into the life of all peoples of the world; cultural space is limited, and under the power and prestige of the new media, the local voices of creativity have less and less meaning. . . . There is a desperate importance in saving and understanding the processes of creativity, wherever they may be found.[4]

The Cooking-Stove and Folklore

It is undoubtedly true that technological media change can spell the demise of certain kinds of traditional artistic communication in small groups.[5] Thus, James Moreira has reported that in the latter half of the nineteenth century the advent of "labour saving devices, such as halyard winches and small deck capstans" contributed to the decline of the sea shanty, a form of traditional naval work-song.[6] However, new technologies may not *only* eliminate folklore. The shift from kitchen fireplace to cooking-stove in nineteenth-century Newfoundland is a complex case-in-point. The cooking-stove may have extinguished folkloric custom; it also altered and transformed traditional living patterns. Yet in affecting these patterns, a continuity of expressive behaviours was maintained. Folklore was still in evidence, albeit in considerable variation. Consider the 1934 diary account of Mrs. E. J. Froude as she reflects on the tradition of the Yule Log as it was practised in a community on Random Sound in 1870:

> The Yule, commonly called the birch junk, was selected to last for the twelve days [of Christmas]. It was after a long search found in the woods where the biggest firs and birches grew and hauled home in such a spirit of triumph. It was then cut in three feet or thereabouts to fit the space on the hearth at the base of the chimney, which was first cleaned of soot by two men pulling up and down on a rope suspended in the flue with bristly spruce tops tied in the centre. The man on the roof pulled up and the man on the hearth pulled down. Before doing so, the hams and black pudding, big home made sausages, had to be removed.[7]

Obviously Yule Log festivities in this Newfoundland outport, as in Great Britain and Europe, involved family and friends in a complex significant series of traditional behaviours.[8] At another point in her diary Mrs. Froude not only cites the technological innovation which caused the decline of this custom, but she also

alludes to other dimensions of social and cultural impact that accompanied the acceptance of this change:

> . . . sixty-four years ago [1870] the first stove began to come into use in the outport. Before this it was all open fireplaces and grates. These times much wood was required for the open fireplaces. The stove was at first regarded with disfavour by many people in spite of the fact that one-third of the wood made the kitchen warmer and more comfortable. The old people liked to see the whole fire blazing up the open chimney . . . When my father went to St. John's he was to bring the stove. . . . All longed to see the stove when to our dismay father came, but no stove. I remember him say the stove wasn't landed when he left and we had to wait another year for the stove and when it came such a quantity of cooking utensils, everything, boilers, kettles, saucepans, etc., to suit the purpose. The Victory and the Waterloo looked nice when polished but *they did not show the fire*. They ["the old people"] soon got over the prejudice and came around to cut and haul home the wood.[9]

Many significant points are raised by this account: the change from the open fireplace to the free-standing cookstove met with resistance from elderly members of the community; the seniors objected to the loss of visual focus; younger members of the community viewed their criticism as a "prejudice." Given the practical advantages of the cook-stove, the acceptance of this device seems reasonable enough. In order to recognize the position of the elderly on this issue, however, it must be understood that heating mechanisms are important media of communication, which as Marshall McLuhan perceived, "shape and rearrange the patterns of human association and community."[10] Like a television, the flickering colours of an open hearth can supply a dynamic, mesmerizing, visual centre to a room. The fireplace also appeals to the tactile and olfactory senses. Not only did the elderly lament the loss of sensory and social experiences associated with the hearth, but also they wondered what the social and cultural meanings of the Yule Log could be once it was cut down to the size of the Waterloo's iron firebox. Clearly, after the advent of the iron stove, the symbolic, iconic significance of the Yule Log could only be sustained if both a cooking-stove and an ornamental fireplace with a large hearth were in evidence, a luxury far beyond the practical necessities of working-class life.

Mrs. Froude's account reveals that another point of generational resistance must have concerned the new kitchen technology which had to be mastered ("such a quantity of utensils . . . to suit the purpose"). These new methods, like the microwave oven of today, affected the taste, texture, and appearance of prepared foods; they opened up new possibilities, but the core of the traditional repertoire could remain the same.

In addition, obvious spatial changes accompanied the movement of the heating source away from the chimney; Shane O'Dea has noted that many Newfoundland homes used to have "settle fireplaces," fireplaces with a bench or

benches within. He observes that with the acceptance of the stove, the settle endured, but that new roles and territoriality were assumed:

> The settle, which once sat in the fireplace, now moved out to one of the walls where the man could take his rest while keeping an eye on his fish, his children, or his neighbours through the window beside him. In fact the settle, by this change, seems to have become predominantly a male preserve — the place where he slept after coming in from fishing and to which he retired in old age.[11]

Time Bias / Space Bias

The adoption of the cooking-stove in Newfoundland exemplifies how changing technology can supplant, alter, or transform folkloric forms. But folklorists concerned about the destroyers issue do not cite winches and stoves as the prime foes of folklore — mass media are the bogeys. One useful approach to interpreting realistically the impact of mass media on Newfoundland folklore is to understand their shared "bias," a concept which Harold Innis developed to describe the ways in which modes of communication function as shaping forces which affect our perceptions of space and time, and to compare this disposition with the bias of sensory media, the media most often associated with the transmission of folklore.[12] One might then examine contemporary folklore to see if these biases are in evidence, and if they are, scrutinize the extent to which these shaping pressures are influencing the "dynamics of folklore."[13] Cultural views of space and time are particularly relevant for an understanding of folklore because folklorists identify the subjects of their inquiries (oral folklore, customs, material culture) in terms of space (face-to-face, *small* group contexts) and time (*traditional* usage, *customary* example, *repeatable* forms).

Innis was primarily concerned with historic societies which exhibited "oral tradition" and he viewed oral communication as exhibiting a "time bias."[14] Memorizing conceptualized culture through speech involves arduous labour and *great amounts of time.* Mnemonic devices are vital not only for purposes of storage, but also for accuracy, since oral communication tends to vary content at short distances. Thus, as folklorists have shown, in an oral society verbal redundancy, formulaic structures, and rhyme are all strategies for the learning, accumulation, and maintenance of culture.[15] Because of the time involved in learning, change is slow, and when recognized, is suspect; the elder members of society are revered for their vast amount of practical, and relevant wisdom. The past is conceived as similar to the present, and to the future. The past, the present, and the future are viewed holistically. *Time is continuous* in an oral culture. Conversely, Innis maintained that the spatially slow-moving, high distortion tendencies of spoken language foster a contractionist worldview which is geographically limited by "known places." It is a world in which *space is discontinuous.*[16]

Despite the historical presence of writing and print, the "orality" of culture in Newfoundland and Labrador has often been stressed. Many folkloristic and social science studies in this century have interpreted the average, small coastal "outport" community as approximating the model of what Robert Redfield called a "folk society," an oral-aural, "nonliterate" community which among other characteristics is spatially "small" and "isolated," and where, "behavior is traditional."[17] The remarkable amount of oral folklore, particularly folksong, that has been collected in Newfoundland during this period supports the view of the vitality of "nonliterate," oral traditions in Newfoundland outport cultures.[18] This expressive data reveals continuity in time through multi-generational memorized content (ancient British ballads, ballads from British broadside tradition, international folktales), an appreciation of local history (native historical ballads, place name legends), and the maintenance of traditional verbal skills (narration, recitation, rhyming, singing, satirical and other songmaking). Traditional suspicions of the outside world as symbolized by strangers,"[19] as well as the humorous criticisms of dialect usage made by residents of one outport toward the inhabitants of a nearby community, reflected a sense of discontinuous space. With regard to the latter phenomenon, an archival survey of humour and misunderstanding in the province has prompted James G. Calder to conclude:

> both history and relative community isolation gave rise to significant dialect variations. The archive [MUNFLA] contains more than one report of a classic cultural conflict between neighbouring communities based on dialect differences. It appears that such language differences often led the people of adjacent villages to consider one another "stupid," presumably due to the inevitable misunderstandings that would arise.[20]

In contrast to disjunctive space, time was viewed as continuous. Thus, the practical importance of the past as communicated in the cumulative oral knowledge of the elderly used to be unquestioned. In his folk biography, *The Little Nord Easter*, Victor Butler states that his knowledge of the history of his home community, Harbour Buffet, stemmed from his early sense of tradition-directedness: "I, at the age of ten years, being of a sort of inquisitive nature, learned from my father and other aged men everything possible pertaining to the history of those early years."[21]

In contrast to these tendencies of continuous time and discontinuous space, however, the last one hundred and ten years have also witnessed a series of new *spatially biased* media technologies which have steadily contributed to the development of an expansionist worldview.[22] A historical document such as Mrs. Froude's 1934 diary reveals the ambivalence which accompanied the rapid adoption of new technologies for transport and verbal communication, an ambivalence that reflects an altered perception of time and space, and the development of a sense of greater *spatial continuity*. While she lauds the fact

that her parents and earlier generations "had none of the modern inventions then to distract them — no radios, no gramophones, no daily telegraph bulletins, no railways, no weekly bay steamers to bring the news and the passengers to create gossip and political talk," she laments the death of two young men from exposure in years past because "at that time, there were no telegraph lines and very few light houses and communications and intercourse was very slow and it then *took days to accomplish what is now done in hours.*"[23] Similarly, the not-so-fictional memoir of Claire Mowat cites the introduction of telephones in a Newfoundland outport as a time when "the new technology cancelled the old rules." Especially irksome to the Mowats were the new expansive habits of fishermen who had been "getting up at daybreak and going about their business for hundreds of years," but who now had no qualms about electronically invading the private homes of persons on their party lines as they called up fishermen friends during "pre-dawn hours."[24]

By 1985, the spatially continuous conceptions of younger generations of Newfoundlanders are not basically any different from those of any of their North American contemporaries who share a world of roads, cars, jet transport, telephones, computers, and electronic media of all kinds. We all know, see, and hear what is happening in Vancouver, Ethiopia, and Jerusalem. While the spatial bias of modern technological media fosters expansionist involvement, however, it also encourages immersion in the present, and *discontinuity in time.*[25] A "now," "space age" generation dismisses the past as irrelevant and is "future-oriented" to the extent that it is anxious and fantasizes about the unknowns that lie ahead.[26]

Short Forms

One aesthetic consequence of the physical and psychic motion of spatially biased media is the tendency of "present-mindedness" to favour rapid-fire, quick, short, graspable genres like the gesture, the proverb, the superstition, the joke, photocopy lore, and the contemporary legend.[27] Some old Newfoundland ballads may be moribund, therefore, not only because of their historicity and their depictions of the past, but also because they are considered *too long.* Gordon S. A. Cox has described the audience response to an "elderly" man singing a lengthy ballad at a social function in New Harbour several years ago:

> About half way through this lengthy ballad the audience started to become restless, the lights of the hall were turned on and off, there were catcalls and jers, and as a result the singer was unable to complete his song.[28]

Cox further notes that one participant remarked, "it's a hell of a length of a song."[29] Content tailored to the spatial bias of electronic media, such as soap operas and shorter popular songs, has influenced this changing aesthetic. Gerald

Thomas has reported that some Francophone folklore narrators from the Port-au-Port Peninsula of Newfoundland, who are also soap opera fans, have come to dislike lengthy traditional stories because of their repetitive structure, and because they are "difficult" to remember. These narrators "referred to . . . soap operas as *contes*, the very word used to describe folktales."[30] Similarly, John F. Szwed quotes singer-songmaker Paul E. Hall's "limited psychological space" rationale for his acceptance of shorter songs:

> You know, I think them old people had a lot on their minds remembering all of those long songs . . . They had an awful lot on their minds . . . I think that was why so many of them people used to become "mental" [mentally ill].[31]

Media Lore / Media Legends

Hall's reference to "old people" as being "mental" is telling, for elderly persons may be used to symbolize the past, and what better way to reject the past, and therefore to express a sense of temporal discontinuity, than to depict the occupants of those bygone days as acting "foolish," incorrigible, and incapable?[32] The bulk of the narratives which will be presented here do just that. As a form of *media lore* these texts are communicative units in which technological media occur as significant elements of content.[33] As media *legends*, these narratives recount events which, from the narrator's point of view, are believed to have actually occurred. All of these legends have been collected from Newfoundland and Labrador students, friends, and colleagues, ages seventeen through fifty-five, who heard them from others, and thus they represent events which have intrigued young to middle-aged residents of the province. The informants, save one, all hail from small communities. Most of the texts were transcribed from memory by the informants themselves; others have been collected by the author through note-taking. While the reader may initially view these legends as being of little consequence, the fact that this body of oral narrative has fascinated my informants to the extent that they have maintained its oral circulation is not without significance, for values and attitudes are reinforced by this process. W. F. H. Nicolaisen has correctly observed that legends are "narrative transactions shared by teller and listener in the folk-cultural register, in response to certain behavioural stimuli and to certain negotiated motivations and interests."[34] These stories are critical folk commentaries about the impact of new media forms. In a milieu of rapid cultural change they function adaptively for believing narrators and audiences alike.

From the narrator's point of view, the intentions of this group of short legends are surprise and laughter. The protagonist of each of these "humorous" legends is a "fool" in the folk narrative sense because he is the butt or dupe of a circumstance which he does not fully comprehend; nor does he understand the meaning of his own response to that circumstance. Folktale scholar Stith Thompson

described the fool as engaging in "inappropriate and absurd actions" because of misunderstandings such as mistaking the identity of objects, ascribing human characteristics to non-human entities, and being literal-minded.[35] One of Thompson's international examples of the numbskull jest involves a "modern invention," and qualifies as media lore:

> The fool's son, who is living in a distant city, writes his father requesting a pair of boots. A rascal persuades him that he can save time by sending them by telegraph. The father leaves them hanging on a telegraph pole, but they come into the hands of the trickster rather than the son.[36]

Another jest hinging on procedural misconceptions was collected in Indiana by Herbert Halpert in 1943 as part of the "little moron" joke cycle: "The little moron was waiting for a 'phone call and couldn't wait any longer; so he took the receiver off the hook and left a note."[37]

Jokes are fictional communicative units; however, legends are not. Since the narrator of legend believes his story, and in performance attempts to use rhetorical strategies to convince listeners of the veracity of his account, the identity of the fool protagonist in a legend has more serious social implications than in a joke. The fictional "little moron" is an abstract figure who cannot be socially identified, but the following media legends allegedly refer to real people and actual circumstances. They are classified here according to the protagonist's response to a given situation involving a technological medium.

ANTAGONISM AND VIOLENCE TOWARD THE MEDIUM[38]

Legend #1

When the first radios came to Fortune Bay, some people didn't quite understand them. The housewife finally got her set in operation and when she turned it on the announcer was calling a fight — Joe Louis. She listened and when it was over she went out in the porch, took an axe in her hand and beat the radio to pieces. She exclaimed, "That's the last fight in this house!"

Legend #2

This story was told to me by my father. One night Dad and Pop [grandfather] and all the family were gathered around about to watch TV for the first time. They were all so excited! They were going to watch hockey. When the game came on everybody was so interested that their team would score that they would all scream and shout, and when the other team would score they would boo. All of a sudden the referee made an awful call against Pop's team which later cost them the game. Pop jumped up and kicked the TV, screaming and shouting at the referee. "That's it for this shit box!," Pop exclaimed. "We got to get another one," he said, "I don't like the referee on this one."

Legend #3

Well when television first came to Carbonear in the fifties the men and the boys on Friday nights would go over to the house of the merchant who sold them and they'd watch wrestling. The place would be blocked and there were wrestlers like Whipper Billy Watson and Little Beaver. Anyway, one night this guy, who sold the TVs, got so involved in one of the matches that he kicked his foot through the picture tube![39]

Legend #4

There was an old man in Long Harbour who was a bit senile and had never seen a television before. So he was getting set to go hunting and he went over next door where they had just gotten a new television. The woman turned on the television and there was a picture of a live moose. Upon seeing this the old man got so excited that he cocked his gun, took aim, and shot the television!

Legend #5

When the TV was first brought out to the Cape Shore, there was one man watching it one evening when a flock of ducks were shown on a wilderness program. Right away, the man grabbed his shotgun and blew up the TV set trying to kill the ducks!

Legend #6

George is an elderly man living in ..... who is sort of a comic within the town and through some incident that occurred on a rabbit-snaring expedition, he was nicknamed "Rabbit." He would become incensed when called by this nickname in person, as some of the young fellows in Roddickton can attest. George purchased a television one year, at about the time when they first appeared, and he was quite happy with it. One Saturday evening he was sitting in front of his new TV watching Bugs Bunny. An episode which featured Elmer Fudd was in progress in which Elmer, as usual, was "twacking the wabbit to its hole." Approaching the hole, Elmer peered in and said "I'm going to get you wabbit!" Elmer's face and eyes seemed to be pointing directly at George, or so he thought, and with that he jumped up, proceeded to his wood box in the porch, picked up his axe, came back in and pounded the living transistors [*sic*] out of his new TV!

IMPROPER USE AND MAINTENANCE OF THE MEDIUM

Legend #7

In the town of St. Brides at this time there was no such thing as electricity. In Pt. Verde, however, they did have electricity. There was one house in Pt. Verde that had a boarder from St. Brides. The woman who owned the house said to the boarder before going to bed, "make sure you put out the light." The woman went to bed but about two hours later woke up to the sound of someone blowing at something. She got up and went over to the boarder's room. He was standing on a chair trying to blow the light bulb out![40]

Legend #8

An old lady from Knights Cove was on a party line with another family. This family couldn't get their phone to work because the old lady's phone was busy all the time. Someone told this family that the old lady had gone away for awhile and this made the family curious, so they got in contact with the old lady and she sent them a key to her house. When they went into the house, they found the receiver and the rest of the phone, each carefully wrapped up in a cloth towel. When the family finally asked the old lady what the idea of it was, she said, "I didn't want the phone to freeze up while I was away!"

LITERAL RESPONSE TERMINATES COMMUNICATION

Legend #9

A Newfoundlander living in Boston bought her old mother a telephone so that she could call her. One day the phone rang and the operator said, "long distance from Boston." The old lady replied, "that it is," and hung up!

Legend #10

There was a young woman working in Labrador City who got her parents a phone so that she could call them and keep in touch. One day she called and her father, who was an older man, answered. So she asked him if she could speak to her Mom. Her father said, "I'll get her," and so he did, but he had to walk a half-mile to where she worked at the hospital! I don't think she waited!

AUDIO-VISUAL CAPABILITY ATTRIBUTED TO AUDIO MEDIUM

Legend #11

A friend of mine from Gander told me about an old lady in Stock Cove who just got a phone installed. One day the phone rang and the old lady ran out to the bathroom saying, "George answer that will you, 'cause I haven't got my hair combed."

PRIVATE PROGRAMMABILITY ATTRIBUTED TO PUBLIC PROGRAMMING MEDIUM

Legend #12

One of my friends has an Aunt from Grand le Pierre who was listening to the radio one day while her husband was in the backyard chopping wood. As she was listening, a song came on that she knew her husband liked, so she decided to turn the radio off until her husband was finished chopping wood so that he could enjoy the song!

Legend #13

There were lots of stories about this woman in the community who did some crazy things that were really funny. One thing was that she used to listen to the radio and whenever she heard a good song she'd turn it off right away so that when her husband would come back from the woods he could hear it too!

Legend # 14

A friend of mine told me that there were some friends of her parents from out around the bay who came over to watch TV for the first time. And when they got tired they said "good night" and the set was turned off. The next day they came over to the house again and they thought that they could watch the end of the show that they had been watching the night before just by turning the set back on!

BIDIRECTIONAL CAPABILITY ATTRIBUTED TO UNIDIRECTIONAL MEDIUM[41]

Legend # 15

There was this old man in Branch who couldn't believe the invention of the radio. He would sit down every night and listen to it by himself when he first bought one. Back then, when the announcer was signing off he would always say, "Goodnight." This old bachelor would also say "goodnight!"

Legend # 16

An old man was watching TV when it first came out, and Don Jamieson was on. After he was through talking, Jamieson waved goodbye and the old man waved back saying, "Look, he knows me already!"

Legend # 17

There was some old folks who purchased a new TV when they first came out. Before they'd turn the set on, they would dress up in their Sunday best because they thought the people on the TV could see *them*. More than that, they wouldn't say a word while the set was on because they thought that the people on the TV could hear them too.

RETURN OR EXCHANGE OF AN ALIEN MEDIUM

Legend # 18

A woman purchased a radio. When she turned it on, the program was in French. The next morning she promptly returned the radio, demanded that the merchant return her money, and gently reminded him that she spoke English and not French!

Legend # 19

A man from Hearts Content purchased an "R.C.A." radio and he turned it on just after he got it and heard music on it like it was in church. He took it back to the store and told them he didn't want an "R.C." (Roman Catholic) radio!

Legend # 20

While visiting the French island of St. Pierre, a friend of my father's decided to buy his first radio. After returning to his hotel room, he tried out the radio. Being on a French island he was only able to pick up French stations. Not understand-

ing this, he was sure that he had been given a "French" radio. He then attempted to exchange this "French" radio for an "English" radio!

MEDIUM UNDERSTOOD AS HUMAN VIVARIUM[42]

Legend #21

My uncle told me that there was an old guy who came over once and had never seen a TV and he watched it for hours and never said anything. Finally, he said, "Jesus, I can't understand how they do it without me seein' 'em get in!"

Legend #22

In the first years of television, a young man from Point Verde bought a new television. Now his mother, who was sitting in the living room at the time when the TV was brought in, decided to turn it on. When she did, Don Jamieson, who was running in an election at the time, was on the screen. The woman became completely bewildered for she couldn't understand how a big man like Don Jamieson could fit inside the set.

Temporal Discontinuity

By pointing out the "foolish" actions of others, both narrators and agreeing audiences assume their own superiority and sophistication. The tacit assumption of those who circulate these stories is that, unlike the fools depicted, but like the observer-persona in some of the narratives, they are young and adaptable to new technologies; they understand the operation of the technological media in question; and they possess the skills for their proper use. In contrast to the Newfoundland "townie-bayman" joke cycle, a group of jests which pits the city slicker against the country bumpkin, *both* the fool protagonists and the observer-persona of these legends, with one exception, are from outport communities, the loci of the actions.[43] The majority of these legends, then, are intragroup outport expressions which make a case against the past, and reveal temporal discontinuity through their portrayal of incapable and disoriented elderly persons. An ancillary sentiment for narratives which do not allude to the age of the main character may be that *anyone* who cannot deal with the media in question is mentally deficient, behind the times, or "old-fashioned." The proverb "there's no fool like an old fool" certainly captures the nature of the surprise contained in these stories — in someone from whom we would *traditionally* expect wisdom, we perceive irrelevance and incompetence. It is important to qualify these remarks, however, by noting that in their folk semantics none of my informants would refer to the elderly protagonists of the foregoing media legends as "fools." Rather, informants describe the inappropriate behaviour of these persons as "acting foolish," a phrase which implies more of a temporary lapse of decorum than a permanent disability.

Spatial Continuity

However qualified, the incompetence of the aged in most of these legends is striking because it is *spatial* incompetence. The sophisticated observer, narrator, listener understands the new technologies as *media* which provide spatial continuity, that is, as sensory extensions into new spaces. In contrast, the elderly actors in these stories view these mechanisms as *self-contained, non-media.* Thus one individual, thinking of a flame, does not understand that the extinguishing mechanism for a light bulb is physically separate from the light itself. Other protagonists mistakingly personify inanimate media and physically abuse them (#1 through #6), or reject them for being French or Roman Catholic. Some characters erroneously assume that as self-contained worlds these machines may be privately programmed (#13 through #15). Similarly, the reverent and anxious responses of the oldsters in legends #9 and #10 imply that they are reacting to their telephones as magical, personified talking objects rather than as means for long distance communication. The idea reflected in the last two narratives (#21, #22), that the visible actors on a television screen are in fact *within* the television chassis, may indicate that the classifications of "bidirectional capability" is incorrect, since that category assumes some spatial understanding. Whatever the particular case, it is generally clear that through many of these media legends "outport sophisticates" criticize elders for their traditional sense of discontinuous space, an orientation derived from a past world of orality and physical isolation.

The Wise "Old Skipper"

Some contemporary middle-class Newfoundland writers, artists, performers, and educators, who either assume a "neo-nationalistic" posture or simply appreciate the distinctive cultural identity of the province in face of North American homogeneity, advance a contrasting image of the elderly in oral narrative — the revered and sagacious man of the sea, the "old skipper."[44] Such skippers were popularized by well-known Newfoundland humorist Ted Russell in his series of fictional monologues entitled, "The Chronicles of Uncle Mose" which were aired on CBC radio, St. John's, as part of the "Fishermen's Broadcast" between 1953 and 1962. Note the positive portrayal of "Grampa Walcott" in the following excerpt from "New Fashioned Things" as he analyzes a baseball radio broadcast with an awareness of cultural conflict, comparative knowledge, and *continuous time*:

> "Of course," said Grampa [Walcott], "tis not only in Newfoundland we carry on with this nonsense about old fashions and new fashions. Why," said he, "only last week I turned on the radio and there I heard a crowd playin' rounders, and another bawlin' at 'em. Now," said Grampa, "when we played rounders 70 years

ago, we soon had a crowd bawlin' at us — drivin' us home to bring water, or cut splits, or bale out the punt. But this crowd on the radio instead of bawlin' at this fellows to stop it and go and do some work, were bawlin' at 'em to keep playin'. Eggin' 'em on! Of course," he said, "like everything else, they had a new-fashioned name for it. They don't call it rounders any more."[45]

In "retirement," Canon George H. Earle is a sometime actor on CBC television adaptations of "Uncle Mose" stories, "Tales from Pigeon Inlet," and he has a reputation as being one of the most popular after-dinner speakers in the province today. His humorous monologues often depict the subtle sagacity of a "skipper" figure. In the following story, which is one that "they really like," the "old-timer" pokes fun at radio content through a play on words based on traditional usage and local meanings. Although he may have a discontinuous sense of space, the skipper's traditional knowledge within the space that he knows gives him powerful tools to mock external affairs:

My brother Fred, he took the radio out on this isolated island off Fogo. This is in the early forties, during the war, and they got used to the radio and could differentiate between news and adverts. But by and by they put on "Romeo and Juliet," when Laurence Olivier and Vivian Leigh came to New York and this was broadcast. And an announcer said that Laurence Olivier and Vivian Leigh had just entered the "stage." This old timer was rocking back and forth on his rocking chair and not saying much. Anyway, the thing worked up and Romeo was telling Juliet that he loved her and it looked like twas a bit of passion there, one thing and another. And this old feller says, "Fred, if he keeps this up much longer, next thing he's gonna have she up on the splittin' table!"[46]

My last example of the wise old skipper image is virtually "state of the art" media lore, since it describes an incident involving a videocassette recorder, a relatively new medium. This narrative was collected from Tony Williamson, an educator who tells fascinating stories about the many years he worked with Memorial University of Newfoundland Extension Services in Labrador. Old Uncle John may be the victim of spatial disorientation, but his useful knowledge outweighs the disability, and it is he who puts the sophisticated observer off-balance:

We had made some video tapes as part of our [MUN Extension Services] development work on the southern coast of Labrador. We did the shooting in the summer of '69 and then in the winter and the following summer I brought these videos around for our meetings and to show them to people. And I went to a place called Seal Island where there are only about six families. If they had ever seen moving pictures they were certainly never any of anyone they knew. And never on video. So we set up our own generator and we were in a twineloft and everybody was sitting around and old Uncle John sat leaning on his knees just a foot in front of the TV set. And the first tape I put on was put on for fun, just to break the ice, called "Uncle Saul Curl Telling Stories." The stories were about caribou hunting and dancing all night and walking home over the hills after the

dance. Saul Curl was an old friend of John's, he lived several communities further along the coast, and John kept talking to Saul on the TV screen, as though the two of them were sitting together in the room there, saying "Yes Saul!" and "Right Saul!" commenting out loud all the way through Saul's stories. And then at the end of his stories, Saul picks up his accordion and I said [on the videotape], "Give us some music Saul." And Saul says, "Well now, what'll I play?" And Uncle John says to the TV, "Give us the 'Devil's Dance' Uncle Saul!" And Uncle Saul says, "I think I'll play the 'Devil's Dance'." I just about fell over backwards![47]

Although these final three narratives represent popular entertainment and personal experience rather than legend, all the narrative forms presented in this discussion continue to be significant in Newfoundland and Labrador today, for they reflect two conflicting atitudes about the spatial and temporal basis of sensory and technological media. One attitude champions spatially biased technological media in mockery of an incompetent "old fool"; the other favours time-biased sensory media in affirmation of the wisdom of the "old skipper." That the media legends pivot on humour might lead one to examine comparatively the temporal and spatial structure of other regional and national folkloric forms with a similar dialectic of stereotypes, such as the townie-bayman joke cycle, or the "Newfie" joke.[48] Perhaps a pattern such as this would emerge:

TECHNOLOGICAL MEDIA (space bias)	SENSORY MEDIA (time bias)
MODERN (temporal discontinuity)	OLD-FASHIONED (temporal continuity)
mainlander → townie → outport sophisticate	old fool← bayman ← Newfoundlander

Although it is beyond the purview of this discussion to delve into folk and popular regional stereotypes, I sense that a super-symmetry may be at work here. The jokelore of Canada may represent the Newfoundlander as a technologically backward, old-fashioned fool who is perpetually behind the times, just as the townie portrays the bayman, just as the outport sophisticate portrays the old fool. Although the whole question of folklore and media technology is exceedingly complex, it is approachable. Changing media technologies can destroy certain kinds of folklore, but they may also alter, transform, and generate new expressive forms which comment critically on the ways that such new technologies are influencing our conceptions of space and time, forms such as the media legends of Newfoundland — a folklore which expresses the anxieties of the young in a world of constant flux, a folklore of "old foolishness."

NOTES

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[1] Donald Allport Bird, "A Theory for Folklore in Mass Media: Traditional Patterns in Mass Media," *Southern Folklore Quarterly*, 40 (1976), 287-89. Two articles which assess the influence of mass media on Newfoundland folklore are: Philip Hiscock, "The Mass Media in the Folk Culture of Newfoundland: A Survey of the Material in the MUN Folklore and Language Archive," *Culture and Tradition*, 8 (1984), 20-38; Michael Taft, "The Itinerant Movie-Man and His Impact on the Folk Culture of the Outports of Newfoundland" in his *Travelling the Outports: Two Studies in Newfoundland Itinerant Culture* (St. John's: Memorial Univ. of Newfoundland, Department of Folklore, 1981), pp. 29-39.

[2] Alan Dundes, "The Devolutionary Premise in Folklore Theory," *Journal of the Folklore Institute*, 3, no. 3 (1966), 226-49.

[3] Edith Fowke and Richard Johnston, *Folk Songs of Canada* (Waterloo: Waterloo Music, 1954), p. 12.

[4] John F. Szwed, "Paul E. Hall: A Newfoundland Song-Maker and His Community of Song" in Henry Glassie, Edward D. Ives, and John F. Szwed, *Folksongs and Their Makers* (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green Univ. Popular Press, 1970), p. 167.

[5] The phrase "artistic communication in small groups" is the definition of folklore coined by Dan Ben-Amos, "Toward a Definition of Folklore in Context," *Journal of American Folklore*, 84 (1971), 3-15.

[6] James Henry Moreira, "The Songs of the Shantymen: Composition and Performance in a Nineteenth Century Tradition" (unpublished Master's thesis, Department of Folklore, Memorial Univ. of Newfoundland, 1984), pp. 148-49.

[7] E. J. Froude, "Day Book; Resident of Random Sound, 1930s," (Maritime History Group Archive, Memorial Univ. of Newfoundland), Accession B-5-10, entry April 16, 1934.

[8] Christina Hole, *A Dictionary of British Folk Customs* (London: Paladin, 1978), pp. 333-36.

[9] Froude. My emphasis.

[10] Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: Signet, 1964), p. 121.

[11] Shane O'Dea, "The Development of Cooking and Heating Technology in the Newfoundland House," *Material History Bulletin*, 15 (1982), 17.

[12] See Harold Adams Innis, *Empire and Communications* (1950; rpt. Toronto: Univ. of Toronto, 1972) and *The Bias of Communication* (1951; rpt. Toronto: Univ. of Toronto, 1973). Two illuminating interpretive essays contrasting the media ideas of Innis and McLuhan are: James W. Carey, "Harold Adams Innis and Marshall McLuhan" in Raymond Rosenthal, ed., *McLuhan: Pro and Con* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1969) and Daniel J. Czitrom, "Metahistory, Mythology, and the Media: The American Thought of Harold Innis and Marshall McLuhan," in his *Media and the American Mind* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1982). On folklore and sensory media see Paul S. Smith, "Tradition — A Perspective. Part II, Transmission," *Lore and Language*, 2, no. 3 (1975), 5-14.

[13] See Barre Toelken, *The Dynamics of Folklore* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1979), pp. 49-91.

[14] Innis, *Empire*, pp. 53-84. The time-binding qualities of the spoken word are also discussed by Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy* (London: Methuen, 1982), pp. 31-77.

[15] For example see Albert B. Lord, *The Singer of Tales* (New York: Atheneum, 1965); Roger D. Abrahams, *Deep Down in the Jungle: Negro Narrative Folklore from the Streets of Philadelphia* (Chicago: Aldine, 1970); David Buchan, *The Ballad and the Folk* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972).

[16] Innis, *Empire*, pp. 7-11.

[17] Robert Redfield, "The Folk Society," *American Journal of Sociology*, 52 (1947), 293-308. See references to this model in: George Casey, Neil V. Rosenberg, and Wilfred Wareham, "Repertoire Categorization and Performer-Audience Relationships: Some Newfoundland Folksong Examples," *Ethnomusicology*, 16 (1972), 397-403; John Szwed, *Private Cultures and Public Imagery: Interpersonal Relations in a Newfoundland Peasant Society*, Newfoundland Social and Economic Studies No. 2 (St. John's: Memorial Univ. of Newfoundland, Institute of Social and Economic Research, 1966).

[18] See the bibliographies of the articles under "Folklore" in *Encyclopedia of Newfoundland*, vol. 2, Joseph R. Smallwood, ed. (St. John's: Newfoundland Book Publishers, 1984), pp. 243-71.

[19] James C. Faris, *Cat Harbour: A Newfoundland Fishing Settlement*, Newfoundland Social and Economic Studies No. 3 (St. John's: Memorial Univ. of Newfoundland, Institute of Social and Economic Research, 1972), p. 101.

[20] James G. Calder, "Humour and Misunderstanding in Newfoundland Culture," *Culture and Tradition*, 4 (1979), p. 50.

[21] Victor Butler, *The Little Nord Easter: Reminiscences of a Placentia Bayman*, Wilfred Wareham, ed., Memorial Univ. of Newfoundland Folklore and Language Publications, Community Series No. 1 (St. John's: Memorial Univ. of Newfoundland, 1975), p. 50.

[22] See J. T. Meaney "Communication in Newfoundland," in *The Book of Newfoundland*, vol. 1, J. R. Smallwood, ed. (1937; rpt. St. John's: Newfoundland Book Publishers, 1968), pp. 328-38.

[23] Froude. My emphasis.

[24] Claire Mowat, *The Outport People* (Toronto: Seal, 1984), p. 119.

[25] See Carey's interpolation of Innis, pp. 297-99.

[26] See Alan Dundes, "Thinking Ahead: A Folkloristic Reflection of the Future Orientation in American Worldview" in his *Interpreting Folklore* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1980), pp. 69-85.

[27] On photocopy lore see Alan Dundes and Carl R. Pagter, *Work Hard and You Shall Be Rewarded: Urban Folklore from the Paperwork Empire* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1978). A good sampling of contemporary legend scholarship is Paul Smith, ed., *Perspectives on Contemporary Legend*. CECTAL Conference Papers Series No. 4. (Sheffield: Univ. of Sheffield, Centre for English Cultural Tradition and Language, 1984).

[28] Gordon S. A. Cox, *Folk Music in a Newfoundland Outport*, Canadian Centre for Folk Cultural Studies, Mercury Series, Paper No. 32 (Ottawa: National Museum of Man, 1980), p. 66.

[29] *Ibid.*

[30] Gerald Thomas, "Other Worlds: Folktale and Soap Opera in Newfoundland's French Tradition," in Kenneth S. Goldstein and Neil V. Rosenberg, eds., *Folklore Studies in Honour of Herbert Halpert: A Festschrift* (St. John's: Memorial Univ. of Newfoundland, 1980), p. 343.

[31] Szwed, "Hall," p. 167.

[32] See Calder's remarks on the rejection of "old people" in Newfoundland folk narratives, p. 57. On "foolish" see G. M. Story, W. J. Kirwin, and J. D. A. Widdowson, *Dictionary of Newfoundland English* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto, 1982), p. 196.

[33] I have defined "media lore" in my article "Joseph R. Smallwood, 'The Barrelman': The Broadcaster as Folklorist," *Canadian Folklore canadien*, 5, nos. 1-2 (1983), 60-78.

[34] W. F. H. Nicolaisen, "Legends as Narrative Response," in Paul Smith, *Perspectives*, p. 177.

[35] Stith Thompson, *The Folktale* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1946), pp. 190-96.

[36] *Ibid.*, p. 192. This narrative is Type 1710 *Boots Sent by Telegraph* in Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson, *The Types of the Folktale: A Classification and Bibliography* (Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 1961). Newfoundland variants include: H. J. Reader, *Newfoundland Wit, Humor and Folklore: A Book of Newfoundland Stories Compiled by the Author After Fifty Years of Experience With Newfoundland Business Life* (Corner Brook: H. J. Reader, 1967), p. 42; MUNFLA, Ms. 76-99/pp. 24-25.

[37] Herbert Halpert, "More About the Little Moron," *Hoosier Folklore Bulletin*, 2, no. 2 (1943), 50. This narrative is motif J1935(a) in Ernest W. Baughman, *Type and Motif-Index of the Folktales of England and North America* (The Hague: Mouton and Co., 1966).

[38] Newfoundland humourist and narrative collector Al Clouston has published a story which fits this category; see *We Rant and We Roar* (St. John's: the author, 1980), p. 25.

[39] New technological media are status symbols and the destruction of a television by a merchant-owner might well be interpreted as being a classic case of what economist Thorstein Veblen called "conspicuous waste." For recollections of the importance of radio purchase in Newfoundland see Aubrey M. Tizzard, *On Sloping Ground: Reminiscences of Outport Life in Notre Dame Bay, Newfoundland*, Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore and Language Publications, Community Studies No. 2 (St. John's: Memorial Univ. of Newfoundland, 1979), pp. 337-39.

[40] Also MUNFLA, Folklore Survey Card (unnumbered), 80-265.

[41] Also MUNFLA, Tape, 69-25/C573.

[42] Also MUNFLA, Q 68-470/ pp. 3-4.

[43] On the "townie-bayman" conflict see Martin Laba, " 'The Bayman Food Market is in the Townie Dump': Identity and the Townie Newfoundlander," *Culture and Tradition*, 3 (1978), 7-16.

[44] For Newfoundland cultural neo-nationalism see James Overton, "Towards a Critical Analysis of Neo-Nationalism in Newfoundland," in Robert J. Brym and

R. James Sacouman, eds., *Underdevelopment and Social Movements in Canada* (Toronto: New Hogtown, 1979), pp. 229-30. See the citations for "skipper" in Story, *et al.*, pp. 487-88.

[45] Ted Russell, *Stories From Uncle Mose (The Best of Ted Russell, No. 2)*, selected and edited by Elizabeth Russell Miller (St. John's: Harry Cuff, 1984), p. 51.

[46] Story, *et al.* define "stage" as "an elevated platform on the shore with working tables, sheds, etc, where fish are landed and processed for salting and drying, and fishing gear and supplies are stored," p. 525. They define "splitting table" as "table in a fishing stage where cod or salmon are processed before salting and drying," p. 525. This narrative was collected by the author 10 October 1985.

[47] The name of the protagonist in this narrative has been changed. Collected 14 October 1985, Office of International Programmes, Memorial University of Newfoundland.

[48] On "Newfie jokes" see Gerald Thomas, "Newfie Jokes," in *Folklore of Canada*, Edith Fowke, ed. (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1976), pp. 142-53.

THE MAN

Libby Scheier

Jacob's been calling himself a man all day.
I admit he's evoking my hostility!
I the man, he says, and I throw out the garbage
(at McDonald's for dinner).
I realize I want to shout at him,
women can throw out garbage too.
What on earth is wrong with me?
And where in god's name did he get the idea
that only men throw out the garbage?
I make a mental note to inquire at the day care.

books in review

ELECTRONIC ADDITION

ANDREW H. MALCOLM, *The Canadians*. Fitzhenry & Whiteside, $24.95.

ANDREW H. MALCOLM is an American journalist who joined the New York *Times* immediately after graduation from Northwestern University and since then has worked continuously on that newspaper in positions of widening responsibility. In 1978 he opened the *Times* bureau in Toronto and remained there until 1982. His book, *The Canadians*, is both a distillation and an expansion of the hundreds of stories he wrote or projected during these years.

Malcolm is an accomplished journalist. He pursues facts with passion and delight. He loads every rift with statistics. In the middle of a vivid description of Newfoundland, he will remind us that the province is closer to Liverpool than to Toronto; into a historical survey of Manitoba he will insert the information that the name of the province is a combination of Sioux and Assiniboine words meaning "prairie water." To some extent he seems to approve the theory that truth can emerge from an accumulation of facts and quotations, that, like the computer, the journalist can get the right answer by electronic addition.

But Malcolm is not always content with facts. *The Canadians* is also a deeply personal book, a voyage of discovery into the writer's past, to some extent an autobiography. Both Malcolm's father and mother were Canadians, who had gone to the United States during the desperate 1930's; and in early visits to the Canadian home of his grandparents, young Malcolm rediscovered his Canadian heritage. This is the burden of the final chapter called "My Canada," and this chapter is written with an imaginative glow closer to the novelist than to the journalist.

The heritage that he rediscovered and to which he still clings is a fusion of nostalgia, the glamour of the remote and the persistence of fundamental human virtues. It has its roots in frontier society — in the frontier that his Scottish grandfather knew during the late nineteenth century when he homesteaded in Manitoba. For Malcolm that frontier still remains in the Yukon and the Northwest Territories, and much of his most colourful and vigorous writing is about his own discovery of the far north. "The most memorable Canadian" that he knows is an illiterate trapper in the north, Napoleon Snowbird Martin, who is preternaturally wise in the ways of the land. Others of the same company are a judge and a mountie who patrol vast, sparsely inhabited areas in the northern parts of the prairie provinces, an adventurer who runs the hotel on Baffin Island, and a missionary who has devoted his life to translating the Bible into the language of an obscure Indian tribe. Even his description of his grandparents' home in the countryside near Toronto has a curious frontier quality. It has the virtues of simplicity and compassion, and an atmosphere that is quaintly Victorian.

But the personal and romantic elements of the novelist and autobiographer are subordinate to the factual and statistical approach of the journalist. The emphasis of the book is on the economy, and the chapter on that subject takes up almost one third of the book — an interminable chapter of one hundred and fifty pages. A good deal of this is contemporary business reporting in the manner of Peter Newman, who is frequently and admiringly mentioned. Malcolm believes, along with many young

Canadian historians, that power belongs in the board rooms of large corporations and not in the Prime Minister's office or the committee rooms on Parliament hill.

Malcolm's easy familiarity with recent Canadian business activity is reinforced by a historical perspective, in which two generalizations predominate. The first is the familiar one of the segmentation of Canada. The book begins with impressive accounts of the regionalism decreed by a fierce and intractable geography. Whereas the United States is a river flowing steadily and ever more powerfully to some distant goal, Canada is a series of ponds, some stagnant, some bursting with life, but all condemned to hopeless isolation. Insofar as they have external relations, these are with American regions to the immediate south, and not with sister regions in Canada. This separateness is encouraged and emphasized by the current infatuation with multi-culturalism, by which new immigrants have been given the status of privileged visitors who are urged to follow their traditional ways.

Against this pull of regionalism the national will is powerless. In a key passage Malcolm writes: "so there is a provincial political system representing narrow provincial needs and priorities. And there is a federal political system with its different focus. The two levels' leaders meet in occasional summits, and they routinely argue over money — how much is the federals' share of rising health insurance costs, for example. But there is not the constant interplay of local and national ideas and perspectives that there is all along the interconnected political career ladder in the American system, even with all its own faults."

From strong regionalism and a weak national drive comes the great Canadian malaise — a desperate search for a recognized identity that always eludes the search, a deep-seated consciousness of failure, a pessimism about the future, and a worship of and (at the same time) a righteous contempt for American energy and self-confidence.

There is much in this analysis that is accurate and illuminating. But I would suggest two *caveats*. He overemphasizes regional conflict. His four years in Canada were an unusually bitter period of internal conflict. He was here during Clark's brief government, then during the return of Trudeau with a policy of tough nationalism, which stimulated bitter opposition. It was a period when regional passions were at their highest, inflamed by Trudeau's cool, national approach towards the nature of the Canadian state.

My second *caveat* is more serious. Malcolm does not recognize the persistent strength of Canadian national ideas. For instance, he sees the pattern of Canadian immigration through the years reinforcing Canadian regionalism. There was, he points out, no continuous movement westward, as there was in the United States, but a series of discrete movements, each with its own characteristics. He is right in his observation that there was no continuous surge of Western movement. But he ignores the movement of a homogeneous group from the Maritimes and Ontario to the West — a group that played a disproportionately important role in establishing social and cultural priorities. In general, this group brought to the west ideas and attitudes derived partly from loyalist sentiments, partly from a devout protestantism. They believed in the power of education in union with sound moral principles. They were likely to establish a church or a literary society before a saloon (although the saloon came in good time), and they had a passion for education. One of the most remarkable facts about western development was the celerity with which universities were founded. The bill creat-

ing the University of Manitoba was passed in 1877, seven years after the province was formed. British Columbia took similar action in 1890. Alberta and Saskatchewan were even more prompt. These two provinces were created in 1905, carved out of the Northwest Territories. In 1906 Alberta passed a university act; in 1907 it had a president, H. M. Tory (a Maritimer), who was to be a dominant figure in Canadian higher education for the next four decades. Saskatchewan followed in identical sequence, one year behind at each stage. It too chose a president, W. C. Murray (also a Maritimer), who was to give strong leadership both to his own university and to Canadian higher education. An austere frontier society thus coexisted with an advanced educational establishment, and it was the latter that created the significant national associations. Malcolm's book has nothing about universities, although he clearly relied on academics for direction and advice.

Malcolm finds few national symbols to which Canadians can respond. He echoes Goldwin Smith's rough jibe about the national capital; "Ottawa is a subarctic lumber village converted by royal mandate into a political cockpit." Ottawa, says Malcolm, "remains a cold, old canal town" — a casual rejection of the city's magnificent site and of its role as a meeting place of French and English cultures. Sir John A. Macdonald is dismissed as "a door Scot and alcoholic." I assume he has not read (or has not been impressed by) Donald Creighton's great biography, in which Macdonald is portrayed as an artist who could assimilate opposites — cool and logical, yet emotionally attached to the past and sensitive to symbols; pragmatic and astute, yet devoted to certain fixed ideas; witty and eloquent, but disdainful of the elaborate rhetoric of his American contemporaries.

Despite Malcolm's thesis of fragmentation and national weakness, he now sees Canada emerging in the financial world as a formidable power, indeed a "voracious tiger." The voracious tiger ranges most widely in the jungle of the United States. The chapter on the economy begins with two paragraphs in which Malcolm describes how an average American family could be subtly but powerfully Canadianized, working in a skyscraper built by Canadians, driving a car built in Canada, watching TV programmes on a cable system owned by Canadians, and even reading a Canadian novel purchased in a book store owned by Canadians. This massive Canadian imperialism is the theme in Malcolm's book that has aroused most interest and comment. It depends, as Malcolm himself points out, on strong national intervention on, for instance, the federal restrictions on Canadian banking, so that the twelve authorized Canadian banks are giants compared to their fifteen thousand American, state-anchored counterparts. He might have made a similar point with respect to the recent efflorescence of Canadian culture, which he deals with casually in a name-dropping footnote to his chapter on "The People." For the last three decades the Canada Council has supplanted the CBC as a national cultural agent and symbol (Malcolm mentions the Canada Council only once, and then obliquely, although it preceded the analogous American body and was, in part, a model for it).

The fragmentation Malcolm emphasizes has, then, been accompanied by a strong national drive. This nationalism exists side by side with an anti-nationalism, which takes the form of the self-deprecation that Malcolm repeatedly emphasizes. But that self-deprecation is becoming, especially in our literature, a mature irony. As Marshall McLuhan has argued, this muted nationalism encourages objectivity and disinterestedness. We

are, says McLuhan, a border-line country, but the deepest insights often emerge at the border-line between countries and ideas.

When Edmund Wilson wrote a book about Canadian literature that was enthusiastic but perversely personal, the Canadian response was largely negative. It was an unworthy response to the first serious book on our literature by a major American critic. Andrew Malcolm is not a major critic (nor would he see himself as such), but he has written a thoughtful and diverting book. His judicious praise of Canadian life arises from a blending of affection and knowledge.

CLAUDE BISSELL

QUEBEC POP

Le phénomène IXE-13. Les Presses de l'Université Laval, n.p.

Les Aires de la Chanson Québécoise. Triptyque, n.p.

TO THE EXTENT that such a feat is possible, the secret adventures of Jean Thibault, alias agent IXE-13, "l'as des espions canadiens," through 934 weekly episodes from 1947 to 1966 in the pages of Editions Police-Journal are the product of one man's labour. Pierre Daignault, alias Pierre Sauriol, is not remembered as the creator of IXE-13 but as the host and musical star of Radio Canada's folkloric "Soirées de Chez Nous" and as the actor who played "Le Père Ovide" in the series "Les Belles Histoires des Pays d'En Haut." As a writer, his dime novels appeared beside the forgotten science fiction of Yves Thériault and benefitted from the typesetting and proofreading skills of an adolescent Michel Tremblay. When the Duplessis era finally gave way to the quiet revolution, the bizarre sexual and spying adventures of IXE-13 faded into obscurity. Canada's Québécois defender against Nazism and communism remains forgotten by musicologists contributing to *Les Aires de la Chanson Québécoise*, if not to fans of "La Bolduc," who does surface in the latter book. These two essay collections complement each other as post-structuralist studies of previously ignored "cooked" material, addressing larger debates via local culture.

Le Phénomène IXE-13 is the result of many years' work by a team of researchers at Laval; it includes factual, feminist, formalist, Freudian, and broad ideological studies of text and context, augmented by references to earlier statistical studies of the phenomenon. Inevitably each contributor only examines a fragment of the IXE-13 canon, a practice for which I can only be thankful after struggling to digest Vincent Nadeau and Michel René's excellent but exhaustive biography in the guise of the "Histoire d'une littérature industrielle." Everyone compensates by clearly if dryly delimiting their methodology; it is unfortunate that one must sometimes revert to turgid prose in order to move from the margins to the centre of the culture and the current critical wilderness.

Daignault quit his clerical job for acting and writing shortly after marrying Rita Lamontagne in 1947, and the most interesting contributions are by the feminists, even if they manage to skirt the biographical fallacy. Louise Milot's "La Défaite des femmes" and Claude-Marie Gagnon's "La Structure psychoanalytique," respectively adapting Lévi-Strauss and Hélène Deutsch among others, supplement Guy Bouchard's analysis of "Les Structures du récit d'espionage," indebted to Propp and to Eco on Mickey Spillane. The presence/absence of the spy Gisèle as the focus of a second narrative programme, that of the love interest intertwined with the original narrative programme of espionage, occasions a

study in Lacanian criticism and incidentally explains much about Aquin's *Prochain Episode*, mentioned by none but clearly hovering on the horizon.

IXE-13's mission, dictated by Col. Smiley, the father-superior ostensibly embodying national security but actually symbolizing the hero's sublimated homosexual anxieties, involves one of several scenarios relating to the opponent or male adversary: acting/preventing the enemy spy from acting; acquisition/destruction of someone or something; capture/escape. His female partner, necessarily wife rather than mistress in pre-1960 Quebec, both helps and hinders the accomplishment of his mission — good spies love none or many, but not one. Gisèle functions as spy or wife but not both: the hero must marry, and yet marriage transforms her from ally to lovely enemy. When Gisèle suggests that IXE-13 leave the Service to become an "agent libre," the submerged Freudian conflict with Smiley arises to throw into question the identity of Jean/IXE-13.

A thousand or so episodes, ranging from World War I through the cold war to early star wars, encompassing the death of his son and his return to the Service, allow for ample investigation and counter-investigation of the adolescent male ego as it evolved alongside modern Quebec society. Perhaps unreasonably (interviews are alluded to), I found myself wishing for information about Rita's role as I read Denis St.-Jacques' insightful closing contribution on "L'Ideologie dans le Texte" — Daignault was probably more willing to confess that he obtained his stories from *Plotto* than from his wife.

Les Aires de La Chanson Québécoise is more of a grab-bag collection, reflecting the strength and weaknesses of work-in-progress by people writing independently. Jacques Julien on the typology of popular song, and Robert Giroux on the Western and the counter-culture lyric as the two poles of Quebec music, characterize the book's general aim: to bridge the gap between classical music and the traditional folk song as the exclusive focus of musicologists and folklorists in Quebec. Buried within this larger aim eloquently defended by Jean-Jacques Schira's essay on the need for sound archives, and a title that I suspect is directed at a recalcitrant body of orthodox scholars, are two important essays which articulate new responses to Saussure.

Robert Giroux's second essay, "Le Dépôt sonore, trois fragments d'un livre à venir," alone would justify the publication of this book, exploring the "sujet musicant" and the "sujet non-musicant" in relation to the "sujet parlant," and marrying scholarly methods to personal experiences. Everyone within a society is a speaking subject; few are musical subjects — as with poetry, the McLuhanesque passive majority define via feedback the common denominator. Whereas technology accelerates the evolution of music as system, language evolves relatively slowly, simply because it functions as a given manipulated by all in an indefinite series of unique combinations. Musically speaking, Québécois youth can be compared to second-generation immigrants who lose the mother tongue in their eagerness to assimilate but who retain a nostalgic command of folk music, *i.e.*, of dance and of "empty words." Empty words do not equal music without meaning, and the same adolescent's emotional identification with the youth culture of American rock, also expressed viscerally through a language barrier, is an equally significant focus for identity as well as leisure. Giroux frames his contribution with a humorous yet strangely moving confession of his fixation on Elvis Presley and of a taping episode which resulted in a powerful sexual

encounter for the "unsuspecting" musicologist. Referring to many things, he concludes wryly if not paradoxically: "Encore un texte d'inachevé."

Jacques Julien's essay "Le Maniérisme vocal ou la voix porteuse," studying the significant and self-conscious parody of a Charlebois or the insistence of a "bad" voice such as that of a Tom Waits, opposes these to the fetishism of voice in the institution of opera, arguing for improvisation and a direct interaction between the author/performer and his audience. Equally compelling and knowledgeable in music history and voice theory, it joins Giroux's essay in spirit if not in style. Renée-Berthe Drapeau's essay, less theoretically rigorous but historically and bibliographically sound, seems to summarize the unevenness of this nonetheless valuable collection in its survey of "yé-yé" or televised hit-parade translations of top ten American tunes prior to the emergence of native composer-performers in 1975. Her lists of short-lived combos on the music show "Jeunnesse d'aujourd'hui" triggered an aural memory of my childhood in the 1960's, a mental sound archive (The Classels!) which I had forgotten I possessed. At their best, each of these important books strikes a balance between Barthes and life.

MICHELE LACOMBE

TWO DIMENSIONS

A. K. DEWDNEY, *The Planiverse*. McClelland & Stewart, $12.95.

The Planiverse IS A lot of fun. At the very least it is an entertaining combination of science fiction and two-dimensional physics. At most it is a thought-provoking essay on creativity and the line between physics and metaphysics. *The Planiverse* opens in the computer lab of a university that one can not help but assume is the University of Western Ontario. A computer simulation into a two-dimensional world is absorbing the writer, a professor of computer science, and his brightest students. The project is growing, semester after semester, getting more sophisticated and more fantastical. Suddenly, something totally unexpected happens. Something that, from a computer science point of view is impossible. A strange character appears on the screen. Communicating with the students by means of their printer, he tells them that his name is Yendred, and that he is about to begin a quest for a deeper meaning, for the Presence.

Yendred's quest takes the reader through the universe of Arde, and shows him everything from two-dimensional travel, through two-dimensional sport, to two-dimensional romance. The ideas of how this all might work are mind-stretching. The students and their professor are at first astounded and fascinated, then, eventually obsessed. They try to remain detached from Yendred and his search, but their capacity to see the "third dimension," invisible to Yendred, gives them God-like powers in his universe. They feel a moral responsibility to help Yendred, and at the same time, a moral responsibility not to interfere. Meanwhile, outside pressures have caused the fictional professor Dewdney and his students to conceal what is going on in the computer science lab. If word got out, they fear they would be the laughing stock of the university — and their larger world. As Yendred gets closer and closer to finding the Presence, the observers are under increasing pressure from the chairman of the department, and the president of the university, to discontinue their communications with the world they have discovered. The students' project has run away with them, and no one is sure how it will end.

The real Professor Dewdney, a professor of theorectical computer science, no doubt has plenty of experience in intellectual projects which get out of hand. Following in a tradition which included Edwin Abbott's *Flatland* (1884), Charles Hinton's *An episode in Flatland* (1907), and Dionys Burger's *Sphereland* (1965), he wrote, in 1979, a monograph compiling speculations and theories about two-dimensional physics, and in 1980 produced a revision. In the summer of 1980 *Scientific American* published an article about two-dimensional physics, written around Dewdney's monograph. The article aroused intense interest in the scientific community. Two thousand people ordered the monograph. There were also articles in the popular press, in Canada and in the U.S. A story in *Newsweek* gave Dewdney more fame than one usually expects from mathematical speculations, for the two-dimensional world had caught the public's imagination. A further work, *A Symposium on Two-Dimensional Science and Technology*, received submissions from people in all the traditional scientific disciplines, as well as from computer scientists, engineers and humanists in countries around the world. Their contributions are used throughout the book, to create the varied and ingenious world inhabited by Yendred. Many of the two-dimensional objects are illustrated — after all, two-dimensional objects truly lend themselves to line drawings — others are carefully and simply described. An appendix goes more deeply into subjects not covered in the narrative. Although I had trouble suspending my disbelief when I seriously tried to image a two-dimensional being deciphering an object while looking at its edge — which would be, after all, simply a line with no width whatsoever — there is no doubt that the exercise of creating and thinking through the two-dimensional world has proved stimulating and productive to the minds of scientists, engineers, and everybody who likes puzzles.

For me, though, there was something in *Planiverse* even more enjoyable than scientific speculation. As someone who is both a writer of fiction, and the manager of a computer software company, I found a particular pleasure in reading the story of a creative work which takes on a life of its own, beyond the minds of its makers. All of those who deal in the mysterious arts of fiction and computer programming know too well that point after which, when all the variables are in place, and the rules of the "world" we are creating are set, by a most marvellous alchemy, our world begins creating itself, beyond our ability to extrapolate. We cannot always guess where it will all come out, and we feel as if there may be no words at all to stop the action of this strange and marvellous sorcerer's broom. When this happens, as part of creative work, it is quite wonderful. And in a small way, that quiet and very special joy permeates *The Planiverse* and gives it a delight beyond its mind-stretching scientific excursions.

ELLEN GODFREY

WORDS PROCESSING

Alchemist 9. Richard M. O'Donnell, ed., P.O. Box 123, LaSalle, Quebec, n.p.

THIS ISSUE OF *The Alchemist* (3, no. 1) is issued as a computer floppy disk for the Apple II series. The submissions are texts prepared through Basic language programming and they explore the concrete-graphic nature of textual generation on a video display terminal. The video screen is necessary to experience the full impact of the magazine, since most of the material uses moving gra-

phics to either enhance the text or as a main ingredient in it.

The 5¼" floppy disk is double-sided and comes packaged in a distinct computer-disk card envelope. There are no printed instructions with the disk, but it loads directly into an Apple II plus or Apple IIe. It is menu-driven and after the disk is booted (loaded into the disk drive) the magazine opens with a minute of impressive moving graphics, which, I suspect, were designed by Carol Day, who has a similar presentation on side 2 called "Koala-Ty Art." After this opening display the reader is given the choice of publication information or a main menu.

Richard O'Donnell is an Ohio writer and the guest editor for this particular computerized issue of the magazine. After choosing his "Electronic Creative Writing" from the main menu, you are given another menu of selections. O'Donnell provides an entertaining overview of the kinds of things to expect from this issue. He shows how a "writer can do a variety of things to engage his readers. He may choose the speed at which to present material or allow the reader to scan the page at his own pace. He may have words, letters, or phrases appearing anywhere on the screen, have them print over words already written, or even have them flying in all directions." A couple of O'Donnell's pieces offer the reader a choice of reading speed and participatory graphics. "Cubicles of Glass" uses the sequential movement of text on the screen to play with the left-to-right expectation of the reading eye. The text moves around the screen in all directions delighting the mind with unusual plays. O'Donnell raises the question of how palatable a longer electronic text might be and in a selection from a longer story he shows how the computer can be used to engage the reader's attention by highlighting text in different ways.

I wasn't able to view "Dated Poems" by C. Orlock because of a "glitch" in the program. The text offers rhymes according to the reader's birthday, but for some reason none of the dates I supplied were acceptable. "31-It" by Michael Karl (Ritchie), programmed by Richard O'Donnell, "consists of stanzas meant to be read at random, reshuffled, and then read again. There are over 6,400,000,000,000,000,000 possible variations." The content itself is slightly interesting and, like other chance combinations, the element of surprise is important. Here's stanza four:

> It is like the story of the boy on the train
> who had lost his voice so nobody ever knew
> who he was
> He would follow its tracks to the depths of
> its lair
> as if that were the secret way home
> His breath frosted over
> on the glass calling your name
> and the dark flew out like snow
> over the orchard

bp Nichol's "First Screening" has also been published by Underwhich Editions on a floppy disk. The only other way of publishing these poems would be as movie or video, since each of the five pieces here relies on the movement of letters and words. "Off Screen Roamance," for example, is simply the words "Fred" and "Ginger" dancing together and apart in various symmetries over the screen. I found myself smiling as I witnessed Nichol's humour at work within the parameters of the logic of a computer. Each of Nichol's pieces is delightfully surprising because he doesn't obviously repeat technique. He explores image, meaning, implied sound, shape, and movement in a different manner each time. "After the Storm" has words and letters scrambling haphazardly over the screen until the following little poem emerges:

THIS
IS
THE
SENTENCE
THAT
THE
WIND
BLEW
HERE

The word "WIND" comes swirling across the page like a wind and the word "BLEW" puffs away like the cheeks in some hidden picture of the north wind. One of the choices on the bpNichol menu is for a continuous showing; if your computer and screen aren't doing anything better they could be providing "background" poems for the otherwise workaday mind.

Though a disk magazine has some drawbacks (it is difficult to browse, and demands specific hardware) this particular issue of *The Alchemist* must be applauded for its exploration of the medium. As I have said, there is no other way, except by movie or video, that this electronic issue could be published. The writing is not directed at a print copy artifact. What must also be appreciated here is the large amount of time required to programme texts of this kind. It's nicer to see play and invention hard at work in a fuller extension of what could really be meant by word processing.

FRED WAH

INNER NECESSITY

THE SCREAM: First Draft, the third annual group show. Ouroboros, $15.00.

IN HIS "INTRODUCTION" to *Concerning the Spiritual in Art (Über das Geistige in der Kunst)*, Kandinsky warned that "each period of culture produces an art of its own which cannot be repeated." Seeing this as a fundamental truth, Kandinsky went on to distinguish two kinds of resemblance between a contemporary and an earlier work of art: the first is like a "stillborn child," a mere copy that achieves "similarity of form," but lacks "soul" or "real significance"; the second type of resemblance, however, is much more worthwhile because it springs from a genuine parallel between then and now. "Among the forms of art," he writes,

> there is another kind of external similarity which is founded on a fundamental necessity. When there is, as sometimes happens, a similarity of inner direction in an entire moral and spiritual milieu, a similarity of ideals, at first closely pursued but later lost to sight, a similarity of 'inner mood' between one period and another, the logical consequence will be a revival of the external forms which served to express those insights in the earlier age.

Today, in all the arts, I detect "a revival" of forms, images, and themes which were used by expressionists to communicate urgent insights during the early years of this century (1905-25). Edvard Munch was seen, even then, as a father of Expressionism, and his famous lithograph was heralded (quickly in Germany) as a hieroglyph of the times. Today, ninety years later, some artists are returning to Munch and the German expressionists and finding in them the inspiration for what is rapidly becoming known as neo-Expressionism.

The internationally best-known example of this phenomenon is the German painter Georg Baselitz, whose painting, "Edvard's Kopf" (1983), is a highly self-conscious evocation of Munch's 1893 painting "The Scream" ("Geschrei"). Baselitz's Edvard is upside down, while on his right side, right way up, floats a second, severed head. (Baselitz's 1983 sketch of the same title bears a more detailed resemblance to Munch's 1985 lithograph.) Baselitz achieves at least two things in this work: he forces us to experience anew the terror that Munch portrayed — a terror that seems harder

and harder to feel in an increasingly terrifying world — and (as if remembering Kandinsky's warning) he parodies his own "revival of the external forms" by inverting and doubling Munch's dramatic image. At the same time as he manoeuvres us into a startled response of alarm, even dread, he comments ironically on his strategy and our recognition of it. Moreover, in this work, as in the work of the more powerful neo-expressionists here and abroad (painters like Vicki Marshall, Vancouver; Walter Dahn, Cologne; Helmut Middendorf, Berlin; Julian Schnabel, New York), the artist is making the important point that there is a deep inner similarity between the beginning of this century and now, and that, therefore, the expressionist's forms and vocabulary are once again relevant. Such artists, using deliberate resemblances with Expressionism — the stress on subjective emotion, the distortion of form and language, the political awareness and outrage — certainly do not produce "stillborn" art.

If this preamble seems irrelevant, or too "heavy" in a review of a slight volume, then I had better explain why I feel the context is necessary. *THE SCREAM* is a startling work. I am not certain how far it succeeds in its apparent aims. But this much is true. It forced me to think, react, wonder, about what it was (certainly it is not Canadian *literature*) and, hence, about where it belonged in relation to contemporary art. Because of its flamboyant echoing of Munch, and its other expressionist qualities, it forced me to ponder the larger questions of influence, inspiration, and repetition raised by Kandinsky and to question the recent criticisms of neo-Expressionism.

Although it contains literature, in the usual sense, *THE SCREAM* is many other things — graphics, music score, photography, poetry, biography, credits, cartoons, "documents," meditation, history, self-help manual, and manifesto. The book deconstructs the usual notion of text to create a new type of multimedia textuality. You can read its poetry (by Susan McMaster, Nan Cormier, and Colin Morton), contemplate its visual images (by Claude Dupuis and Carol English), perform its music (by David Parsons and Andrew McClure) or simply play with its pages. If you flip backward from page 96 and watch the lower left-hand corner, you will see two dozen sperm approach the wall of an egg, one enter the magic circle, only to exit on the other side — conception? miscarriage? suicide? — and disappear, alone, off the bottom of page 44. Or, flip forward from page 5 with your eye on the bottom right corner of the right page and you will see a black spot on a TV screen grow, fill the box/screen, explode, mushroom, fall-out, and fade away into white on a blurred horizon. This screen, by the way, is labelled — with the words in sequence, so you must flip quickly, smoothly to get the message — "a first draft book." There are other intertextual games, like the duplication of Munch's "Geschrei" at the end, where it is called "The Yawn," but the dominant impression of the text is one of deliberate visual fragmentation and heteroglossia, where the insistent black on white figure/ground of the page reduces (elevates?) all markings, whether photograph, musical notation or word, to the same semiotic status and where the individual voices of the "collaborators" (*not* contributors) enter the collaborative "hearing" of the reader/performer.

But despite the fact that *THE SCREAM* is fun, it has a serious, self-proclaimed message. First Draft (the group) explains that "it is not a scream of defeat that this book records. In 1984, to scream is to affirm there is still life here. It is not a mere protest against the

official insanity, it is a step toward overcoming it." More specifically, *THE SCREAM* addresses the "co-opting of nuclear stress," the culpability of bureaucrats, the vulnerability of the young and sensitive whose only escape from victimization is suicide. "WHY SCREAM?" a voice asks: "Wake up / Look around / If you need help / Dial-a-Prayer." Furthermore, as the group's self-explanation suggests, *THE SCREAM* wants to be an affirmation of life and creativity. In Cormier's words, "First Draft is like being a child again . . . The group brings with it an energy that obliges me to explore my creativity."

Laudable as these goals may be, and however sincerely invoked, it is at the juncture of intention and accomplishment that I hesitate. Too often the result falls short of the expectation, the images are corny, the juxtapositions crude or affected, the biographies too familiar, the poetry trite, or simply bad. ("To admit the lure of manmaiden coiled / of surrender to your entropic eyes" makes me want to scream.) Although it is difficult to comment on (take the music, for example) because the entire group, multimedia enterprise, rather like a play, loses a great deal when it cannot be experienced live, I will venture two evaluations of the text as a catalogue, a programme, for a performance. First, there is no truly accomplished, fresh poetry here; the best, to my ear, is Morton's "Migrations," which is a simple elegiac narrative (not an expressionistic *tour de force*) that seems out of place amidst the visual dynamics. Second, there is no visual work that can stand comparison with Munch's lithograph; the best, to my eye, are "The Flapjack" and a drawing by nine-year-old Vincent Bonin which recalls the expressionists' love of so-called "primitive" art. I am happiest with the text as iconoclastic parody, as rambunctious good spirits, as meta-text because the textual gymnastics seem inconsistent with the declared serious purpose and because the talents of the group do not rise to the horror of its apocalyptic vision.

Artistic ability notwithstanding, the challenge faced by First Draft is that faced by many members of the avant-garde in the 1980's. Believing with Claude Dupuis that "the entire history of art is a storehouse of retrievables," many contemporary artists retrieve (Kandinsky's word was "revive," and there is an important difference) expressionist methods and images. Some of them, perhaps emulating *Die Brücke* or *Der blaue Reiter,* work in interdisciplinary groups like First Draft, or on group shows and collaborative enterprises such as the ecclesiastical expressionist paintings in St. Gerard-Magella church in Larouche, Quebec executed by three young Quebec painters. In many ways, *THE SCREAM* bears close comparison with a work by the Cologne group Mulheimer Freiheit, *The Second Bombing* (1983), which also combines narrative, biography, drawings, reproductions, and photographs (of a devastated 1945 Cologne) in a text — part send-up, part manifesto — that catalogues their 1983-84 show while it gestures towards moral and political issues. What is true of *The Second Bombing* is true of *THE SCREAM.* In order to respond to the pressures of history, nuclear threat, alienation, violence, and social injustice in an indifferent or numbed world, these neo-expressionists are retrieving forms and attempting to revivify them with personal insights, anger, or rebellion at a time when the issues are too complex and global to be framed by individual, or group, response. What is lacking in much neo-expressionist work that I have seen or read is the urgency and power to move, the sort of power that still strikes me in a Schmidt-Rottluff woodcut, a Barlach sculpture, or a Kaiser play. As

John Bentley Mays put it, in a review of the exhibit of German Expressionist Prints in the McMaster University Collection: "The difference between then and now is in the quality of defiance, compassion and vigilance."

And yet... although neo-expressionists court comparisons with their forerunners, it is, perhaps, a mistake to look for the same urgency and idealism in their art. Perhaps by doing so the critic, not the artist, falls victim to the desire for Kandinsky's first type of similarity. Perhaps by looking for the reassurance of the comparatively confident Expressionism of the past, we reveal our own failures. Certainly I believe it wrong to say, as Robert Hughes did in "Upending the New German Chic" in *Time* (1982), that the expressionist revival stands for nothing more than the artist's ability "to multiply saleable relics" of the self.

What encourages me about *THE SCREAM*, and neo-Expressionism generally, is not its label, its promotion, or even its revival of an earlier art. What is valuable is its energy, audacity, promise. This art is meant to be paradoxical, parodic, and ironically self-reflective; that is why it turns upside down or screams. To read First Draft's *SCREAM* at all is to be forced to re-think expectations about genre, decorum, artistic influence, and moral parameters of art — all old questions, of course, but ones of perennial value, especially in Canada where art pundits can confidently dismiss neo-Expressionism as insincere because, unlike the Germans, Canadians have no past and no present cause for anxiety! *THE SCREAM* may not be great art, but neither is it "stillborn" retrieval. As an example of 1980's neo-Expressionism, it casts an ironic eye on itself and us when, in a gesture parallel with Baselitz, and utterly unlike Munch, the "collaborators" remind us that after *THE SCREAM* "what you make of the ensuing silence is up to you."

SHERRILL GRACE

THREE MOVEMENTS

JOAN MURRAY, ed. *Daffodils in Winter. The Life and Letters of Pegi Nicol MacLeod, 1904-1949.* Penumbra Press, n.p.

"OWNING A WORK by Pegi Nicol is like smelling daffodils in mid-winter" (Graham McInnes). Letters reveal their creator as few other genres can do. The personality, and something deeper, lurks in and between the lines. The letters of Pegi Nicol MacLeod show us a vital, warm, and exuberant spirit who became a mature artist, yet always remained a child.

This carefully edited volume consists of a short biography, plates of fifty-eight paintings in black and white reproductions, photographs, notes, and a lengthy bibliography. It forms a solid introduction to the life, the letters, and the art of a painter who deserves to be better known. MacLeod was a small-town girl, born Margaret Kathleen Nichol in Listowel, Ontario. She grew up in Ottawa where she blossomed as something of an exotic in the staid, civil service city. Her bohemian spirit evoked her mother's hostility, and Pegi left home at nineteen for Montreal. In a solid, forty-page Introduction, Murray traces the life through Montreal, Toronto, New York and Fredericton, to the early death from cancer in 1949. Pegi studied first at the Ottawa Art School under Franklin Brownell, then at Montreal's Ecole des beaux-arts with Edwin Holgate. Friends and fellow students included Prudence Heward, Lillian Freeman and Marion Scott. In Montreal in the 1920's, Pegi was part of a lively circle of intellectuals and artists which included the Scotts (Frank and

Marian), Wilder Penfield, Eugene Forsey, David Lewis, André Bieler, and King Gordon. Pegi and King were lovers in the early 1930's before she met (and eventually married) Norman MacLeod. MacLeod was an engineer and a radical leftist, a macho man with little regard for art. Pegi tried to enter his world, but he never embraced hers.

The paintings, even in small black and white reproductions, form a better introduction to the artist than do the letters. Three self-portraits (1925-35) show a gamin face with a wistful, rather haunting expression and enormous eyes. Men found her fascinating. Some women considered her ugly. Her face, like her paintings, has the beauty of animation, an exuberance and vitality which is echoed in the writing style. Nicol is an action painter, a realist who reflected the life she saw around her, yet transformed it with her imagination and vision. The titles of her paintings reflect her subjects and her scope: *Ottawa Street Scene, Tapisserie des Vaches, Chinatown Toronto, Suburban Sunday, New York Tenement, School Garden Ottawa, Streets of New York, CWAC Beauty Parlour, Pigeons, Slum Children, Jane Reading.*

Jane was Nicol's daughter and only child, a source of wonder to the artist. The marriage was stormy, with long separations and a chronic shortage of funds. The cost of painting supplies alone, as Murray notes, must have been high. In 1938 Nicol writes to Eric Brown, Director of the National Gallery, to thank him for introducing the Masseys to her work. They became her first patrons: "I would be glad if you would accept to the Masseys for me, I put such a heavy hand on any deal. I could scarcely sleep when your letter arrived and kept spending the money all night long, on paints and canvas and Jane. When morning came I had a pile of toys a mile high and roll after roll of canvas, all hand-prepared."

Murray compares the charm of the letters to the way Nicol entered a room, "ebulliently, with an appealing, unstudied freshness." Certainly the writing is fresh — sometimes trivial, but nearly always charming. In 1941 Nicol writes to a friend in Fredericton, a city she has just left to return to New York:

> I still feel awfully full and haunted by N.B. . . . This is the German Section, a contrast to the village — prosperous, domestic, an orgy of shops, restaurants, lots of sausage & beer and faces older than Methuseleh, early German paintings, Memling, Cranach, old, old, old. After Canada where children are just bland healthy lumps, these over-civilized crones of seven are amusing. So instead of a sort of fairy tale existence, potterys, universities, in and out of Smith's Shops, I'm a hausfrau again. Can't say I mind.

The letters catch Nicol's moods, from joy and high spirits to loneliness and depression. "The sky is a hostile post card blue and I feel rather depressed," she wrote to the Scotts in 1932. They also express her love of language. Of her writing in general, Frank Scott said that it "wove through its grammar like a stem through stones." Nicol was a poet and essayist as well as a painter. She described her work as "a search for essential beauty within reality."

Murray's critical and biographical Introduction has its own charm. The language is lively and very readable. Her assessment of Nicol's achievement is both sympathetic and shrewd. *Daffodils in Winter* is balanced, thorough, and rarely dull.

PATRICIA MORLEY

CHAFE AND JAR

RICHARD JONES, ed., *Poetry and Politics: An Anthology of Essays*. Macmillan, $14.95.

DAVID MCFADDEN, *The Art of Darkness*. McClelland & Stewart, $12.95.

RAYMOND SOUSTER, *Jubilee of Death: The Raid on Dieppe*. Oberon, $12.95.

PABLO NERUDA ONCE WARNED that young poets should never begin their careers by attempting to write political poetry. "Political poetry is more deeply emotional than any other except love poetry," he explained. "You must have traversed the whole of poetry before you become a political poet." Even in North American society, where political poetry seems suspect and less highly valued than in South or Central America, poets have sensed the wisdom of Neruda's rule. Speaking of the early 1960's, Adrienne Rich observed that "I think I began at this point to feel that politics was not something 'out there' but something 'in here' and of the essence of my condition." Why, then, do many readers and critics have so much difficulty conceiving of a poetry whose energizing spirit may be both personal and political?

Richard Jones' anthology, *Poetry and Politics*, from which I drew my opening quotations, seeks answers to this and other questions which are no less vital to the cause of political poetry. Are literature and language inherently political? American poet Carolyn Forché, like George Orwell before her, would respond with a resounding "yes." Where does the poet's primary duty lie? With the language, as T. S. Eliot claimed in his 1943 address "The Social Function of Poetry"? Or with the people, as committed poets Neruda and Forché insist? Finally, does poetry ever make a difference in the public sphere? Auden felt that poetry had lost whatever power to influence society that it held in ancient Greece — and yet he is one of the foremost practioners of political poetry in our century. Stanley Kunitz cautions us not to "deceive ourselves: a poet isn't going to change the world with even the most powerful of his poems." Nevertheless, the founding principle of *Poetry and Politics* is the belief in social change; the anthology is partly based on the "Poets Against the End of the World" reading which took place on 26 May 1982 in New York, with participants such as Denise Levertov, Robert Bly, Etheridge Knight and — ironically — Stanley Kunitz.

Such debates are not at all foreign to our own poetry, in spite of our unfortunate reputation as the moderate, "beautiful Canadians" (to borrow Margaret Atwood's phrase from *Bodily Harm*). In the 1930's, modernist poets began to question their rigorous aestheticism in the light of political reality (Auden's development finds a corresponding Canadian version in that of Dorothy Livesay). This conflict between aestheticism and political consciousness raged in Canada into the 1940's, in the passionate debates between the *Preview* and *First Statement* poets, and it is still simmering today. Atwood, for instance, writes political poetry which is both acerbic and moving (see her poem for Carolyn Forché, "Notes Toward a Poem That Can Never Be Written" in *True Stories*), yet most of us remain uncomfortable — as poets, teachers, critics, readers — with political poetry. Why?

Two recent collections of Canadian poetry, Raymond Souster's *Jubilee of Death* and David McFadden's *The Art of Darkness*, provide some answers, for neither collection reveals a mastery of the political poem. Souster's collection is the more overtly political of the two; it retells the story of the siege of Dieppe from the perspective of various participants. "Retells" is a key word, for the collec-

tion reads less as a series of poems than as one long prose redaction. Therein lies the problem: how can one make vital, absorbing poetry out of the minute details of the movements of battalions?

Another element of Souster's collection which renders it less effective as political writing is his choice of speakers. For the most part, they are high-ranking commanding officers in the Canadian and British armies, arguing back and forth across history about whose fault Dieppe was, and who was following whose orders and how willingly. Although such bickering illustrates Souster's point that war is often a confused mess indeed, it does not engage the reader for long periods of time, nor does it say a great deal about the individuals caught in the verbal and military crossfire. Souster attempts to redress this balance between individual and collective experience — a crucial factor in political writing — by opening the collection with a private's thoughts on viewing Dieppe forty years later and closing it with the poet's view of a shell-shocked Dieppe survivor (the most touching moment in the collection). Yet these framing devices, promising though they are, cannot sustain the rest of the collection, and seem (ironically) at war with it.

David McFadden turns his attention to a contemporary dilemma in *The Art of Darkness* (a collection whose title punningly evokes perhaps the most famous of political tales). Like Neruda, Rich, and Conrad, McFadden seems to grasp the important dichotomy between "inner" and "outer" politics. "At first," he claims, "I thought it [the title] referred to some kind of Conradian Africa within, but now I see it refers to our current global dilemma."

Like Souster, McFadden experiments with political "framing" poems; in the opening and closing poems, "Night of Endless Radiance" and "Country of the Open Heart," he takes up the challenge of writing about the unthinkable: a nuclear holocaust. Although critics have often deplored the lack of poetry written about the bomb, I tend to agree with Denise Levertov's analysis of the effect of imminent global destruction on poetic creation: "Sometimes I wonder how we can write at all, under that shadow. Sometimes I wonder how we can write about anything else." In McFadden's response to the subject, one senses both uneasiness and urgency. His evocation of a world gone mad with savagery can at times be frighteningly sombre:

> poetry
> a process for stabbing the heart with
> heart-felt lines
> of icy darkness, poetry the art of darkness,
> and tiny people swim for the furthest
> shore . . .
> . . . each frantic swimmer and entire
> universe
> hoping not to die . . .

At the same time, however, one senses McFadden's cynical attitude toward the enterprise of creating political poetry. In both these poems, he experiments with chance composition; a flip of the coin determines the number of lines and "everything that is in the air goes into the poem." In "Country of the Open Heart" especially, this kitchen-sink approach reduces both the political and aesthetic impact of the poem. In fact, the last line of the collection is a sardonic swipe: "You need another line here. That'll do." In a poem dealing with global chaos, such nonchalance unfortunately undercuts the real issue — the real heart of darkness. I do not mean to suggest that the poet must be entirely sure of his or her affiliations and priorities, for stirring political poetry has been created out of the tension between action and contemplation within the poet. As Atwood writes, "Each time I hit a key / on my electric typewriter, / speaking of peaceful trees / another village explodes."

A second aspect of McFadden's collection which concerns me is the lack of integration of his "art of darkness" with the shorter lyrics which display the macabre humour and wit familiar to readers of his earlier work. In "How I'd Like to Die," McFadden gives us an outrageous and blackly comic list of possible means of death which recalls the early Ondaatje: "I'd like to be swallowed alive by a giant anaconda." The last line, however, completely and awkwardly shatters the tone of the poem: "I would not like to die in a nuclear holocaust." Bombing the reader seems a relatively ineffectual way of promoting disarmament.

In the final analysis, neither McFadden nor Souster creates in his poetry the impact that a reading of Carolyn Forché's account of her experiences in El Salvador (in Jones' anthology) does, or that Timothy Findley's tale of global destruction, *Not Wanted on the Voyage*, does. But lest we despairingly assume that the current global madness may only be captured in expository prose or fiction, I offer the following lines from Robert Lowell's "Fall 1961" as a moving argument to the contrary:

> All autumn, the chafe and jar
> of nuclear war;
> we have talked our extinction to death.
> I swim like a minnow
> behind my studio window . . .
> Our end drifts nearer . . .

LORRAINE M. YORK

DISPLACEMENT

RICHARD APPIGNANESI, *Italia Perversa: Part One: Stalin's Orphans.* Montreal Book Centre, $19.95.

THIS AMBITIOUS AND dense novel opens in Montreal at the funeral of the oddest Canadian "franco-anglified" immigrant to appear in our literature to date: Pierre Orson a.k.a. Piero Orsini a.k.a. Piero Ossafraghi — child musical prodigy and Stalinist Quebec revolutionary, with a vision of international terrorism called "Destroying America." Everyone in this novel partakes of the immigrant's linguistic and referential displacement, for everyone has many names: Piero's wife, Madeleine (a.k.a. Madlena) Castigny de Nichel, is nicknamed by her father Mamselle Dirty — a name that sticks! The novel's theme of the immigrant as orphan begins to take on a firmly Oedipal structure as Piero is portrayed as the one who had to find — and destroy — his roots, be they ideological (his Swiss tutor) or familial.

In the second section, "Vienna," we actually meet Piero, alive but ailing, in the city of Freud. Not surprisingly, the former prodigy and Stalinist terrorist is now revealed as a psychiatric researcher and neuro-physiologist on some sort of mysterious quest. He even turns out to be directly related to the subject of one of the cases in Freud's *Psychopathology of Everyday Life*. Aside from this, the novel stresses that neither Piero nor Madlena has any idea why they are in Vienna. The implied search for the roots of his paternal past, clearly linked to Oedipal guilt, will probably lead Piero to Zagreb in the promised sequel to this novel. But in this one, his involvement with a bizarre cabal offers but few hints as to the meaning and function of its mysticism, politics, dramatic productions, and possible sexual victimization. One suspects that some point is being made about the body/spirit relationship and about the relation of the past to the present, but this is only a suspicion.

The problem is that there is too much mystery for this reader. Piero the prodigy manages to be unconvincing in his bored but relentless searching; the mysteries are without purpose (so far); entire episodes

and stories told are without clear relevance to plot, theme, or characterization. Perhaps the next volume will clarify some of these points, but is that enough? The implied parallelism between the fate of Quebec and of the Jews in the last war requires a little more explanation to avoid accusations of overdoing a common victimization. The novel is also burdened by ponderous pronouncements like "What is confession, but a pun the soul transforms into truth?" In short, this is a learned and, given the material, a potentially fascinating novel, but much of that material feels undigested. Much is left up in the air. I know that a sequel is coming, but this novel does not stand on its own with any force. I find myself hoping that Richard Appignanesi, author of the wonderfully witty and clear *Freud for Beginners*, will bring to the next volume of *Italia Perversa* the clarity and incisiveness of his previous work.

LINDA HUTCHEON

CULTURAL ALTERNATIVES?

MEREDITH CAREY, *Different Drummers: A Study of Cultural Alternatives in Fiction.* Scarecrow, $20.00.

NEIL BISSOONDATH, *Digging Up the Mountains.* Macmillan, $16.95.

AUSTIN CLARKE, *When Women Rule.* McClelland & Stewart, $12.95.

CAREY'S CRITICAL STUDY purports to examine the cultural alternatives offered the reader by fiction devoted to the lives of people "who don't fit in." Her system would probably classify the short story collections by Trinidadian-born Bissoondath and Barbadian-born Clarke, both Canadian residents who write of dislocated immigrants in Canada, under her chapter title "Ethnic Alternatives" — if it could be stretched beyond her limited focus on English and American novels written by women.

But Carey's approach would provide very little guidance for understanding the different dynamics of these collections. Her book is a simple-minded thesis-style survey about the theme of "living differently" in a host of books that have puzzled standard criticism. Her initial premise is convincing: "It is inevitable that the major reputations go to works which arouse 'the usual feelings,' since traditional literary history embraces the 'usual' values and enforces them under the banner of versimilitude. We cannot expect traditional literary historians to describe a novel of social alternatives when traditional criticism does not recognise that such a novel exists." But it turns out that Carey is not interested in social or cultural alternatives either, but only in the same old celebration of bourgeois individualism — extended to women who her study claims are the true individualists. Carey's theme enables her to ignore the exigencies of time and place. She describes fiction written over a 300-year span by nineteen women novelists to argue that all these novels describe people who are "free to be unusual."

Freedom is a much more complex and fragile state in the two story collections. Bissoondath and Clarke more often describe people who are condemned to be unusual, men and women trapped by forces beyond their control into acting out dramas they would rather have no part of. *Digging Up the Mountains* is the more impressive collection. These are finely crafted, haunting stories that seldom strike a false note. *When Women Rule*, on the other hand, shows Clarke far from his best. But both collections share an overpowering ambience of helplessness.

When Women Rule would more properly be titled "When Money Rules."

Clarke's inappropriate title shows the confusion of values that mars these stories. Women rule in none of them, but to men insecure about their manhood in a new northern setting, their women appear to rule because they remind the men of how little control they have over their own lives. In each of these stories, Clarke's men feel their manhood threatened through lack of ownership (of houses, cars, or women) and lash out at the nearest targets — usually women — in self-destructive despair. The melodramatic endings — a murder and two fires — show how all this frustration leads to violence, but also reinforce the reader's feeling that Clarke is not really in control of his material. In a defiance of logic, his narratives, as well as his characters, equate the authority of the grandmother in the Caribbean home with the authority of the law, the job and the school in Canada. A real hatred for women sweeps through these pages, yet the capitalist bureaucracy that dehumanizes all his characters would seem to be the chief object of his criticism.

Digging up the Mountains shows no such confusion. Whereas most of Clarke's stories share the perspectives of the "down and outs" — the unsuccessful gamblers and drunkards who live in cheap boarding houses and collect bottles for cash — Bissoondath's stories maintain a middle class perspective, from which Clarke's characters are seen to be an undifferentiated, threatening mob. As the book's blurb promises, Bissoondath "brings vividly to life the human side of the stories we read every day in the newspapers." But this is only partially true, and only partially a virtue. Like his more famous uncle, V. S. Naipaul, Bissoondath writes of "the human side" of the capitalist threatened by labour unrest or an insurrection of the unemployed, small enclaves of carefully preserved security invaded by the insecurity surging up from the slums. In "The Revolutionary" this bias becomes offensive, with its Reaganite implication that anyone seeking any kind of change must be a dangerous fool, but in the title story, and in "There are a Lot of Ways to Die," "In the Kingdom of the Golden Dust," and "Counting the Wind," his touch is faultless. These are brilliantly moving stories, rivalling the best of Naipaul. And unlike Clarke's his women are sensitively drawn. "Dancing" and particularly "The Cage" provide memorable insight into the ways gender further complicates lives already torn between alternative cultural traditions.

Neil Bissoondath is an important new writer and *Digging Up the Mountains* probably one of the most accomplished Canadian publications of the year, yet its excellence remains marred for me by a quality I can hardly identify. Like Naipaul, Bissoondath writes of the Third World and particularly of his own island Trinidad, for a foreign audience, carefully incorporating explanations of all local references into his text. There is nothing wrong with this, of course. It may even be valuable in facilitating cross-cultural communication. But here it seems to go along with the author's assumption of authority more generally. Neil Bissoondath writes with authority. His kind of writing makes it very easy for the reader to enjoy his stories and never to miss what has been excluded. All foreign elements — different cultures and revolutionary violence — are "explained" by being brought within the authorial value system — a system characterized, as the blurb explains, by "a remarkably mature understanding and a stout refusal to take sides."

But Bissoondath does take sides. By narrating his stories from the perspectives of characters who perceive revolutionary violence as mindless outbreaks and who see themselves as helpless vic-

tims of events beyond their control, he reinforces conventional beliefs in the separation of our public from our private lives. Like Carey and Clarke, Bissoondath writes within the framework of a liberal humanism that assumes that individualism, even in countries where poverty is endemic, is the most important human value. Clarke and Bissoondath cannot share Carey's naive American optimism about marching to "different drummers." Their emphasis falls on how thoroughly our hands are tied by cultural, political, and economic imperatives. But in their own ways, each of these texts reinforces traditional assumptions about human beings and the only ways they can live together in society. These stories provide many insights into what it means to be human in the latter part of the twentieth century. But despite the promise of Carey's subtitle, and the apparent variety of subject and setting in Clarke and Bissoondath, there are no *cultural* alternatives here.

DIANA BRYDON

IN DISTRESS

BRIAN FAWCETT, *Capital Tales.* Talonbooks, $8.95.

NORA KEELING, *chasing her own tail.* Oberon, $11.95.

THREE IMPULSES DRIVE the nineteen stories in Brian Fawcett's *Capital Tales.* The first and most powerfully realized is a desire to present the arbitrary violence, the flat grimness, the dull domestic despair of small-town life in B.C., or in the bush, or working on mega-projects up North. The second, less successfully achieved, is the need to expound the depredations of capitalism and consumerism as these forces have operated historically and have now laid waste the Western world. The third and most self-indulgent impulse is to pronounce on the art of fiction as practised by Brian Fawcett in his (quite real and believable) struggles to become a writer in this, the most benighted of all the ages of man. Labouring under the often incompatible strains of these impulses, some of the stories threaten to fly apart; others bog down in admonitions to the reader to pay attention to what and how and why they mean what they might; and only a handful succeed in breathing beneath the weight of Fawcett's theses on the connections — pronounced upon more often than made manifest — between fiction, history, and life.

The best of the stories is "The Ghost," which explores the seemingly violent and chaotic life of a character driven by whims and generally disruptive social behaviour. Counterpointing the Ghost's antics are his first cousin Roger's rational efforts to preserve a stable family and a stable worldview. The story's implications extend beyond its small-town ambience when the Ghost returns sobered from Vietnam, preoccupied with building in Roger's backyard weird mechanical contraptions which might explain or enact the workings of an unbalanced world. In a suggestive reversal, the Ghost and his contraption survive a closing spate of internecine violence that destroys Roger, his parents, and the Ghost's parents. The Ghost marries Roger's wife and perfects his contraption, which the narrator envisions as "enormous blossoms in a garden that had been made as utterly coherent and connected as it was pointless and crazy."

Too many of these stories are marred by Fawcett's compulsion to lecture his readers, to instruct their reading. All of the stories are told at least in part from the first-person point of view. Consider, for example, the following excerpt from "The Franz Kafka Memorial Room," a story which draws a compassionate por-

trait of the "Doctor," a character who might be a charlatan, an artist, a saint, or all three. After toying with a number of answers to readers' imagined questions about the Memorial Room, the narrator demurs:

> I can't give you the correct answers to those questions. No authority exists that can, and I'm convinced that such a condition of uncertainty is now the true one for me to be in as the writer of the story and for you as the reader.
>
> But this is depressing theoretical stuff, you might be saying to yourself, and why lay it on me here, in what is supposed to be an occasion for fiction. I mean, what is this? A lecture or something?
>
> It's no lecture. I'm trying to tell my story correctly, and I want to set you up to think carefully about what happens to stories when nothing in the world is going anywhere. What is *supposed* to happen in a story? What does narrative involve?

I can imagine a reader answering, "Why not let *me* decide what I'm going to think carefully about when I read? *You* decide what is going to happen, what narrative involves. You write the story; I'll read it."

The seven stories in Nora Keeling's *chasing her own tail* impress first with their meticulously crafted sentences. Keeling's vocabulary is as incisive as it is precise, and her language conveys moods with economy and real power. Her stories' major focus — which is so unremitting as to become unnervingly monochromatic — is on the intensely ordered isolation of older women as they create and then endure the routines of their days, husbands either dead, banished, or simply absent, children gone, cats and dogs providing a strand of connection to the natural, vital, but eminently dangerous world beyond the women's terribly lucid self-awareness. Men's appearances in these women's lives have their own grim routine: sex is usually mechanical and perfunctory, and men's dealings with women in general are disruptive, intrusive, presumptuous, self-absorbed. The five most powerful stories in the book — the title story, "agathe," "george's eyes & the red ball," "big herb," and "mine," isolate women's figures in sharp, stark, chilling portraits, usually drawn from the inside; typical in its language, tone, and mood is this opening meditation of Katie's, the woman at the centre of "george's eyes & the red ball":

> I do not like to go out even though at times I must. There is just too much space out there and I might even get lost in it. I do not like to invite acquaintances to my house for tea: they might overstay their welcome. But I do not like to be alone, especially in the evening, because I like to have someone with whom to share the setting of the sun, a phenomenon that I go upstairs to my bedroom to observe every evening that there is one. It is not a small thing. I could even consider it to be my favourite hobby.

The two remaining stories, "the little axe" and "berthilde's holiday," deal with the trials in the relationships of two younger couples. They are less successful stories, perhaps because Keeling has not found the language through which to render these characters' inner lives as acutely as she has done with her more isolated and solitary figures. But Keeling demonstrates convincingly in this book her remarkable talent for evoking both the pathos and the pathology of loneliness.

NEIL BESNER

METIS HEART

BEATRICE CULLETON, *April Raintree*. Pemmican, $9.95.

BEATRICE CULLETON, *Spirit of the White Bison*. Pemmican, $6.95.

PERHAPS THE MOST pernicious and destructive weapon the colonializers and imperialists had was the policy of "Tabula Rasa." Existing indigenous culture was at best ignored, at worst actively destroyed. The children of the "conquered" were educated to believe their foremothers and forefathers were ignorant savages and that everything good happened only because of the dominant and dominating ideology. In Canada children were physically removed from their families and put in residential schools where they were given the most minimal of educations. Oh, they were taught their catechism, but grew up knowing there was no chance for them to be priests, nuns, ministers, teachers, or anything other than the most poorly paid of manual labourers. The residential schools were abominations; child abuse was common, punishments often verged on the very borders of insane, and children were forced to do much of the janitorial and custodial work. The food was even worse than that served in British boarding schools, even though the administrators of these schools could present receipts from dairies, butchers, and bakeries "proving" they had bought the finest quality. Perhaps they did, but of all the friends I have who attended residential school, nobody ever remembers getting any of this fine food.

One of my dear friends, so close for so long we call each other "cousin," made the mistake of speaking her native language. After all, she was only five and had no idea what was going on! All she knew was she had been bodily carried from her weeping mother, put in a float plane with a dozen or so other kids, and flown to a residential school. She asked what was happening. She asked where she was. She was overheard and taken to the office of the principal where she was sternly warned, in a language she did not understand, then taken back into the hallway and left. More confused than ever, she repeated her question. And was again overheard. Again taken into the office and this time she was yelled at and her hand slapped. She had never been hit in her life, and still had no idea what was happening. Back in the hall, weeping, she again asked other, older kids what was going on, where she was, why people were being so mean.

This time she got taken to the gym and was made to kneel across a broom stick until hours later her legs were numb and she was unable to stand or walk. This terrified little girl grew up to become a woman who remembers practically nothing of her years in "rezzy." Her adult life has been hell. She laughs and says that alongside the night on the broom stick, anything is easy. "I'm not here for a long time, anyway," she tells me, "I'm just here for a good time." And she drinks. Heavily. Often.

The residential schools are gone, for the most part. What we have, instead, are foster homes. Every year or so another native kid finds a way to end the hell that is supposed to be "life." Last year a young boy hanged himself and the country recoiled with shock, a lot of small-l liberals loudly demanded "somebody" should do "something," and most of Canadian society claimed to be unaware things like that could happen.

Native groups have long insisted communication, publication and education are loaded against them. They have also insisted the truth can't be fully or properly told unless native writers are given publication and distribution WITHOUT being edited to death by Anglo academics

who are part of and thus support the dominant ideology.

Beatrice Culleton is a Métis. She missed "rezzy" but experienced foster homes. Pemmican Publishers have not imposed an academic editor on either *The Search For April Raintree* or the revised *April Raintree*. The result is a book that comes from the heart and from the guts, a book full of gentleness, love, trust, and hope, a book full of anger at the blind stupidity of the past, a book full of pain because of the precious lives wasted and lost as a result of bigotry and abuse.

Academics will have much to criticize. The structure is flawed, the writing uneven, there are grammatical errors, and much of the dialogue is preachy and polemic. It is the work of an apprenticing writer, it is the work of a person who has much to learn of her chosen craft. The improvement in writing skill from *In Search of April Raintree* to the revised *April Raintree* shows that this writer is more than willing to pay her dues and improve her skills.

The story is incredible and has the same stark and unapologetic honesty as Maria Campbell's excellent autobiography *Halfbreed*. Beatrice Culleton has not wasted her time writing this book, and you won't waste your time reading it, and re-reading it. This is what we've all been claiming we have been working to find and perfect, this is the voice of our country, this is part of that Canadian Identity we all claim to cherish. This is a book that dares us to think, to consider our past ignorance and move to take responsibility for our personal and national inaction. "Those who will not take responsibility for and learn from the mistakes of the past are doomed to repeat them."

We are a culture which places little value on the lives of our children; we pay lip service to ideals while ignoring reality. This book is a result of that dishonesty, and should be required reading for everyone who will ever, in any way, deal with the education and well-being of children. I suppose it is too much to hope that the schools of social work and departments of education will use this book as a text, but even if the administrators prefer to ignore it, those who are in teaching positions should recommend it to their students. Beatrice Culleton's two older sisters, raised in foster homes, committed suicide. Beatrice has written a fine book.

Spirit of The White Bison is a children's story which outlines, through the eyes of and in the lifetime of one buffalo, the decimation caused when, for political reasons, the great herds were annihilated. At a time when the B.C. government is paying wildlife biologists to ride around in helicopters shooting wolves from the air, at a time when acid rain is killing our lakes and pesticide and herbicide overuse is rampant, at a time when both the Atlantic and Pacific coast fishing fleets are in serious trouble and our fish stocks are seriously endangered, this book challenges us to examine our past and rethink our future.

Are we to sit complacent and stupid while everything follows the buffalo? Will we unthinkingly accept the idea the professional foresters can be trusted with the last of the trees in the country? Will we wait to see if Meares Island can survive the logging companies, will we do and say nothing while poison is sprayed on our food, or will we wake up before the nightmare has moved on to its own illogical and insane conclusion.

Little children will be quite upset by this book; older children will probably see more clearly than adults what our choices must be. Again, there are flaws in the structure and grammar; but as someone once said, there will always be room in the world for someone with a good story.

Beatrice Culleton is a writer who obviously has many good stories. I wait with anticipation for her next work. The shelves are full of beautifully crafted pieces of highly educated and trained writing done by people who don't have anything at all to say. It is a relief and a personal vindication to find two books so full of honesty, commitment, and love.

ANNE CAMERON

CONTE & MEMOIR

DAVID WATMOUGH, *Fury*. Oberon, $12.95.

JACQUES FERRON, *Selected Tales of Jacques Ferron*, trans. Betty Bednarski. Anansi, $9.95.

THESE TWO COLLECTIONS insist on very diverse responses from the reader. Watmough's characters are mostly British, Ferron's mostly Québecois. Ferron's stories are variations on the traditional *contes* of rural Québec, and many therefore have a broad element of fantasy. Watmough's stories are realistic, close at times to documentary naturalism, so they often read like personal memoirs. Watmough's strongest regional attachments are Cornish; his is an old world identity. Ferron's regional identity is split between urban and rural Québec, but is unmistakably new world. And while Ferron usually looks out upon the world and tries to explain it, Watmough seems just as eager to explain himself to himself and us.

Perhaps I should have said Watmough's *narrator* explains himself, but in *Fury* one is never aware of the significant differences between David Bryant and his creator, David Watmough, if there are any. Here is how the book begins. Note how Davey documents his territory.

> The Mile-End Road is a broad thoroughfare running due east out of the City of London, from Aldgate toward Stratford-atte-Bow. Its foundations knew the feet of the Roman Legions and in the late nineteen-thirties its sidewalks were familiar with mine. In 1937, when I first attended the venerable institution known as The Coopers' Company School (founded 1535), that road seemed far wider to my eleven-year-old legs than it does now to my middle-aged ones. And the fears it evoked were of a dimension I am rarely subjected to nowadays in the calm of Western Canada.

And here is how the story "The Bicycle Boy" ends. Note once more how he documents the place. "We phoned Blake's Taxi Service from that bright red phone booth close by Tretawn, which Mr. Yeo farmed, and George Blake came in twenty minutes, put the bikes in the trunk and drove us home." Blake's taxi service, the phone booth, where Mr. Yeo farmed, and George Blake himself: these are signposts of Davey's memory, not symbols, not material introduced earlier in the story so that Watmough could dramatize it or in some way exploit it. We see these items here, virtually for the first time. In a similar way, Grove photographed and catalogued much of his experience (also as an immigrant) in the West.

Some of Ferron's stories also have the feel of the personal memoir, "The Lady from Ferme-Neuve," for instance, and several pieces in which the narrator, like Ferron, was a physician. But when Ferron restricts himself to realistic reportage, he automatically restricts the range of his imagination and often, thereby, his powers of invention. Watmough is the realist, Ferron the fabulist.

By far the best book is Ferron's *Selected Tales*, not simply because this is a selection of some of his best work, but because the tales themselves bespeak a rich imagination. Rich and bizarre. In "Mélie and the Bull," for example, we have a bull calf who wants to be a poet. He is the sole delight of his mistress Mélie, wife of a habitant. Instead of

pursuing his poetic calling, however, our bull becomes a lawyer. But Mélie summons him back to the farm and his true vocation, and he returns, every ounce a bull, full of libido and poetry. In the novelette "The Dead Cow in the Canyon," a much less ambiguous bull falls in love with a dead cow. Spurned by her ghost, driven mad by his yearnings, he gores his present mistress Eglantine, and her baby is born. These bulls are variations on old myths, but they bear Ferron's absurdist signature. They look forward to the amorous bulls of Hodgins and Kroetsch in works such as *The Invention of the World* and *What the Crow Said* almost two decades later.

Magic realism, flowering as it did among the writers of South America in mid-century, has not been the healthiest transplant up here, but to Ferron, this mode seemed almost second nature, and he latched on to this vision of things well before the English-Canadian writers of the 1970's began to benefit from the lessons of Borges, Marquez, and their colleagues. Ferron seems to have inherited his brand of magic realism from absurdists like Ionesco.

I must admit I wrestled my way through both collections, but again for very different reasons. Watmough's book was badly edited and proofed. During one dialogue his narrator switches tense at least four times. During another, one of his characters, whom we are to take very seriously, lapses time after time into embarrassing stage Irish ("Oi — Oi I musn't go too far. 'Twould be a terrible price Oi'd be payin' if they was to foind out."). The prose is sometimes sloppy: "The truth *was* it *was* a girl's bike and I wonder if you can imagine how that made me feel *as* I pedalled the inert lump of rusty metal, with its chromium parts flaking, *as* I pantingly strove to keep up with Fred . . . and Sandy . . . *as* they sped down . . . (italics mine)." The prose is sometimes laboured:

> I nodded. But my curt acceptance concealed a quite ridiculous spurt of well-being. It was Jimmy's easy recognition of my profound unsettling wrought by that place and his taking over of the social helm. The way he instinctively belied his juniority and took the weight of responsibility from me as delicious as the time, a year or so earlier, when a waitress in a candlelit restaurant in Montana had asked me for an ID before she would serve us wine.

Sometimes the combination of old world forms and new world content grinds like the remittance man prose we used to read over here at the turn of the century:

> For some ten minutes we endeavoured to chat. Even taciturn Fred lifted himself sufficiently from his Indian silence to proffer the odd monosyllable in answer to a question. Simon thawed out to the extent of ribbing Jimmy about his carpet-pissing puppy while the latter, when not summoning a riposte to the taunts of his White friend, busied himself in indicating to me the possible sites where violence might erupt at any moment.

These annoyances of style, which sometimes sound condescending, could have been eliminated by a sharp-eyed and perhaps tyrannical editor, the kind most serious prose writers need.

Because Watmough does have talent. It shows most clearly in the fast-paced adventures. "Incident in the Forest," for example, is the story of Davey's pursuit of a rapist. Since the story is seen through the eyes of the older Davey recalling the younger one (and his friend Danny), the rapist himself never quite takes on a human dimension. He is a hideous pervert, there as a scapegoat for the boys' own righteous, repressed sexuality. He is the bogeyman who must be stoned. Davey and Danny do not hesitate to cast the first stone: "When the heavy lump of clay, thrown by Danny, hit the bastard in the back, the pleasurable spurt I felt was well-nigh sexual." The

rapist is flayed by the boys, and his victim (Mrs. Bulmer) is secretly avenged.

One reads this story with lurid interest. It is mean, unrepentant, fast-paced, unmeditated, and atavistic. One also reads "Fury" and certain parts of "Dark Murmurs from Burns Lake" with some of that lurid interest. Davey's blood-crazed ferret (whom he names Fury) and Big Nancy of Burns Lake hold the same fascination for Watmough. They are the violence at the heart of his lonely universe, though in the Canadian story ("Dark Murmurs"), the violence is more pervasively disturbing. In it, Davey compares the squalor he knew in Cornwall to that of Burns Lake:

> No, the difference here was that violence was a pastime! Here, Indian and Caucasian raged against each other in an unholy antidote to boredom. Violence and hatred, I perceived, sitting there listening to the rise and fall of voices, sensing the crackle of tension at table after table, was something this arid population was deliberately inducing through its wanton consumption of alcohol.

I mentioned that I also struggled through Ferron's book. This has nothing to do with Watmough's biggest problem in *Fury*, the overload of unexploited details which tyrannize imagination. But I struggled for several reasons. First, in the shortest of the narratives, his characters are often only constructs; it is difficult to empathize with a construct. Also, Bednarski's prose fails to carry with it the myriad nuances of Québec life embedded in Ferron's prose — not because she is an incomplete translator, but because she is an anglophone. In English, for instance, Cadieu, according to his father, is a "good-fer nothin'." In French he's a "vaurien." In English, Mélie's beloved bull is "Littl'un." In French, he is her "petit." For me, good-fer nothins and littl'uns invoke images of the American West. These words tend to extract Cadieu and the bull from their rural Québec context. Some of the *contes* turn into essays and the prose becomes so allusive that Bednarski must footnote its more esoteric references (which she does sparingly and admirably). Or less often, Ferron's concerns narrow into his own very particular constituency (Québec in transition), which (let's admit) is not mine. But sometimes I struggled because Ferron's mind is frustratingly and (upon re-reading) admirably complex on the subject of modern civilization.

Some of my frustrations can be explained, perhaps, by a look at the Martine series, "Martine" and "Martine Continued." The first I liked. It is a twelve-part account of the sordid life of a girl who is a victim of rural innocence and urban slums, a tomboy who clings to an insecure boy-princess named Jeannot. It is sad, compelling, sordid, and compassionate. The story moves forward with great economy in a series of vignettes, and with no explanations or moralizing about the squalid condition to which Martine's family has succumbed. "Martine Continued" is a poem for voices, and it tries to explain Martine's dilemma with parables, poetic meditations, and philosophizing. Sometimes the prose is beautiful, the parables well turned, though the various voices are disconcertingly similar. I am not sure Martine needs to be explained to us or to be turned into an exemplum, nor can I get away from the feeling that a sound story in Part I has degenerated into a chorus of tragic warbles in Part II. No story, only writing.

In the best of these *contes*, the confusion is deliberate, rich, the chaos justified, the re-reading full of rewards. "Chronicle of Anse Saint-Roch" provides a typical example. It is the story of how two Gaspé fishermen, Sules Campion Thomette Gingras, settle down and marry two daughters of an English minister. With questionable motives, one of them

murders the girls' father. The mother has already died of the plague. A third daughter is gang-raped, becomes pregnant, loses her child and her sanity, and is sent to a convent. Here is how the story and the book end:

> This chronicle records facts that may appear unseemly, but life itself is not always seemly. What counts is that in the end events all fall into place, and around the wild, forsaken bay, little by little, the gentle customs of the old country triumph over pagan fear, softening the cries of the birds that pass in the gusts of wind that sweep down off the land.

This final statement is true, within the terms of the story. It is also false, because simplistic; it belies the chaos set in motion perpetually by Ferron's people.

I read somewhere that certain tales are sublative forms. Myths, for instance, sublate the truth they embody. As Hegel uses the term (from the German verb *aufheben*), myths sublate by both destroying and preserving a certain truth. The myth bodies forth the contradictions in a story without completely negating or reconciling them. I think that in Ferron's work, this sublative element comes into play. His many philosophical assertions crackle with irony, and we must argue with his assertions while at the same time accepting them as the only kind of truth in the *pays incertain.*

DAVID CARPENTER

HEMINGWAYESQUE

S. L. SPARLING, *The Glass Mountain.* Doubleday, $17.95.

I ENJOYED THIS stylish little romance, despite my misgivings that the characters are woefully sketchy. In her first novel-length book, S. L. Sparling has identified a world that I had not been aware of prior to reading this well-mannered tale. Chloe Delaney is a concert pianist who aspires to star billing. Her career, however, depends on her availability as the replacement when the name-act cancels but, under the umbrella of a manager who is also one of her lovers, Chloe is making a name for herself.

Sparling, it would seem, knows the world she writes about. She documents Chloe's environment — from the kind of art adorning her rooms to the fashions she wears and the food she wants on her table. The narrative is economical, yet rich in specified tastes and surroundings. Sparling tells Chloe's story in a discontinuous narrative which presents pictures — stills — of her characters at selected moments. Chloe's family is at the centre of the narrative. The cast includes a Hemingwayesque grandmother with her past of loves betrayed and chased, a homosexual cousin who turns out to be Chloe's brother, a 1960's piano teacher with his hair down, and solidly placed, monied parents who adopted Chloe and are out of synch with her artistic predilections. Of the bunch, only Chloe is an original. Sparling follows her through music summer camps and subsequent love relationships, but her narrative style never compensates for gaps in the chronological growth of the character. These gaps are a major failing in the book since, while we can see Chloe in her world, we never really get to know her.

The narrative frames the story inside a psychiatric clinic. Chloe has admitted herself for treatment after Cosimo, the most important male figure in her life, dies. She only learned that Cosimo was, in fact, her brother while he was on his death bed. She has grown up admiring him and believing herself adopted into the Delaney family, with Cosimo nothing more than a cousin. Sparling holds back the precise relationships between the characters — although hints abound — until late in the book juggling the time

periods by means of flashbacks. The revelations are more or less surprising when they occur, but the narrative does not pull into focus the dramatic sequences of the narrative. For one thing, almost everything of interest happens outside as it were, and is related in dialogue between the characters. Even potentially poignant deaths are related by recollection. Chloe's emotional difficulties, for all Sparling's intelligent understanding, do not create much action. For instance the author spends far too much time building up a failed sexual assault at a summer camp, forgetting altogether to show how the relationship between Chloe and a male student at the camp came about.

So it is that Sparling fails to capitalize on her most successful achievement: Chloe Delany. We see what Chloe has done, but we do not get a coherent sense of why. As for Sparling's male characters — Chloe has only one female relationship for some reason — they are without exception abysmally flat. The men in this book are drawn from long-accepted stereotypes. Chloe tells the man she lives with: "Men think they're being so magnanimous, 'allowing' their women to work. Even when I was living with you it was your work that was serious. As far as you were concerned, my involvement with the piano was quasi-diversion . . . It was almost easier living with Laurence. He only expected me to be decorative." This type of declaration was topical and expected from women writers a decade ago. Today the role difficulties impairing mutual self-expression by husband and wife, male and female egos have been accepted as behavioral norms. Sparling doesn't add anything to our understanding of the difficuties two people have in working out co-operative relationships.

Sparling's characterization of Chloe through much of the book is as a passive woman who mirrors the ambition of the men moulding her. It is difficult to imagine Chloe having the capacity to speak as she does late in the book. We do not know why she is inhibited when it comes to dealing with her own aspirations. We can only speculate that it has something to do with her upbringing, but there is too little detail to point to any specific cause. If anything, Sparling has been too economical in omitting the logical connections. I found myself wanting to know more about Chloe Delaney. And that can only mean there is a lot more Sparling should have told me.

ROBERT S. DIOTTE

WOMEN'S VOICES

FRANKIE FINN, *Out On The Plain.* Ragweed Press, $7.95.

SUSAN KERSLAKE, *Penumbra.* Aya Press, $9.00.

THESE WORKS FLUCTUATE between realistic description and surreal images; both use several of the core myths of *Genesis*; both show women being "islanded" in various ways; and both use light/dark imagery to demonstrate extreme mental states. The narrator of each novel is a woman. Yet they are very different works. Finn's book balances literary theory, diary-commentary, and brief passages of narrative. Kerslake's is a novel in which the story wanders in and out of the narrator's consciousness, altering its focus through a series of dream images.

As a work of feminist theory, *Out on the Plain* consciously establishes political issues, particularly as these issues influence creative writing. Some of the devices used are quite contrived. The narrator, who is also the author, imagines herself in conflict with two male academics, allegorically named Mr.

Smith-god, the distinguished professor who is constantly telling the narrator how a novel should be written, and Mr. Jones, "the eager and youthful intellectual type with the very pointed nose, pointed fingers and a fondness of points in general," who does his best to prevent the female writer from choosing words freely. In spite of these two types of male academic, Finn's words do get put down on the page; the characters are vital and the author manages to develop a distinctive voice.

The book begins with an introduction establishing some of the text's central issues. The major theme of the book is rebirth (attempted rebirth is also a theme in Kerslake's); it is a theme that characterizes much contemporary women's fiction. Finn, a British citizen who studied in Canada, finds that the most important current Canadian writers are women. And she fully embraces feminism: "Feminism is the route I take because it affects my life so deeply that, in fact, I have no choice." She discusses the importance of voice in fiction, stresses her use of the lyric mode, approves of women's emphasis on domestic imagery (especially with symbolic overtones), and points out that she has "invested a great deal in the reader/writer relationship." Finn's return to a partially oral tradition is noticeable throughout the text, where the author allows her projected reader to interfere with the development of stories, with the description of characters, and even with the words used. Finn's attention to the reader allows her to make use of what she insists is "the active, creative potential of reading." Most important, Finn stresses that, as a feminist, she wants to get away from rigid genre boundaries, and from closed texts: "I wished to adopt a listening attitude, listening rather than imposing, open rather than closed."

The story that follows this introduction demonstrates in a sometimes didactic manner the points made. The author assumes her reader to be another woman who, like herself, is in semi-darkness, although connected to the old woman whose stories comfortably encircle all the other stories told. Again and again, the characters find themselves out on a plain where direction is unclear and where each seems as disconnected from narrative as from the concrete articles of everyday life. Allegorically, this plain is the blank page of the book on which each character, as well as history itself, is being recreated. Such remaking infuriates the men who enter the text to give the writer instructions that would help her to write a proper story — that is, a male one.

The images used are female images, and are seen from female perspectives: a black cat sinuously winds its way through the various tales; the Garden of Eden's serpent becomes a positive figure, and a feminine one; the sea is maternal. Female subjects dominate the content: abortion, nurturing, housecleaning, relationships between mothers and daughters, and female friendships. Rather than being connected by conventional narrative development, the women are "connected only by threads of sound," emphasized by the occasional introduction of poetry into the prose passages. The book is also visual; reflections impress the doublings that occur, and the author emphasizes the ways words mirror events.

It is no easy matter to write such an obviously contrived book. Yet in spite of its flaws — a tendency to repeat prosaically what has already been demonstrated imaginatively; a sometimes forced wit —the book is peculiarly disarming. For example, just as the reader is becoming most exasperated with the allegory, the author allows her into the text so that she can voice the criticisms: " 'I'm

not going to read anymore of this!' she says. 'And if I were you, I wouldn't bother to write anymore, either! It's so incredibly precious and one-sided. All the faults you ascribe to Mr. Smith-god and Mr. Jones you commit yourself.' " The author's capacity to laugh at her own pomposity, to make fun of "all this intensity, this bond between women, this hysterical swooping among the stars" is refreshing, although, as she admits, the artifice of entering the narrative can become "precious." The book's self-consciousness, while making it probably less appealing to general audiences, makes it wonderfully suited to courses on feminist theory.

Penumbra, Kerslake's second novel (she has also published a collection of short stories, *The Book of Fears*), maps a different kind of terrain. In an essay on *Middlewatch* (published in 1976 and now out of print), Keith Maillard defines the novel as magic realism, using Geoff Hancock's description: "Magic realists place their extraordinary feats and mysterious characters in an ordinary place, and the magic occurs from the sparks generated between the possibilities of language and the limitations of physical nature." *Penumbra* also places extraordinary feats and mysterious characters in an ordinary place. It is told by a young woman just emerging from childhood, who lives on the Maritime island of Lune with her father, mother and younger brother. An asylum dominates the island's mental and physical terrain, so that madness interferes with narrative line, causing abrupt shifts from chronological, outer event, to disconnected, dream-like inner event. The island's name and the novel's title emphasize the haze, madness, and other-worldliness that make fact and fantasy often indistinguishable. Also, throughout, recollections of other stories interject themselves, most notably Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and Melville's *Moby Dick*.

Space dominates the organization of the story and the characters are often perceived as locales. The narrator's father begins as "a safe place," her mother as solid and dependable. The lunatics on the island seem insubstantial; Hebel, the madman who brings about the father's imprisonment, is named after the Hebrew Abel, meaning air. Caught between substantial objects — her parents and her brother — and the insubstantial mad people of the asylum, the narrator struggles to find her own space; a young sailor, either actual or imaginary, helps her find that space. Often, she longs to escape from the confines of the island, but when she visits the outside world, she imagines the island as vast and timeless, the place of dreams that are, finally, the only freedom available. The narrator understands that because the lunatics cannot dream, they have "lost the paths of escape."

Gender issues arise throughout, although never in a didactic way. The narrator differentiates her mother and father, her brother and herself. Her mother is religious, social, and trapped; her story that, along with the father's story of his early life, Hebel's story, and Marcy's story, make up the narrative, demonstrates despair. The mother's tears become a leitmotif of the narrative. And the narrator's dreams differ from her brother's. Like the lover about whom she fantasizes, the young brother desires the sea, the life of the whaler. He dislikes "magic interfering." These men need to leave behind women as they leave behind dry land.

The novel tells of a daughter's love for her father. Unlike the sailors, the lunatics, or the farmers, the father seems singled out from the usual man; profoundly nurturing, he has a peculiar sensitivity to borderline people that de-

termines his choice of career as keeper of the island asylum. The narrator relies on him. As the novel progresses and she becomes conscious of her femininity, she understands her mother better. But the story is really an explanation written to a father whom she has lost. He has helped the mad Hebel kill himself, and has consequently been incarcerated. *Penumbra* is, then, a daughter's effort to "talk" to her father, words "squeezed out of darkness."

This is a moving, if occasionally too consciously obscure, novel, written with considerable sensitivity. The balance between the real and the dream-like is maintained successfully throughout so that the language and imagery are poetic rather than prosodic. Unlike *Out On the Plain*, with its often comic vision, its shifts of genre, and its theoretical underpinnings, *Penumbra* assumes a tragic perspective that condenses the mad and the sane on an island of dreams. Thus, in spite of a number of thematic similarities, and their self-consciousness about women's, as opposed to men's, lives, the two works present quite different visions of the imagination. Finn is concerned only with the female imagination; Kerslake with a much more general aesthetics. Kerslake's is the more moving book. Yet *Out on the Plain* deserves serious attention, not least because it simultaneously annotates and demonstrates, with considerable wit, a variety of problems important to the current gender revolution.

LORNA IRVINE

INITIATIONS

LESLEY CHOYCE, *Billy Botzweiler's Last Dance and Other Stories*. blewointmentpress, $7.95.

HUGH COOK, *Cracked Wheat and Other Stories*. Mosaic Press, $7.95.

LESLEY CHOYCE'S *Billy Botzweiler's Last Dance* is both a unified and an uneven collection. The setting plays a unifying role, although it is not particularly foregrounded: the stories seem to be set in or around Halifax. Then, too, all the eight stories (including the three which are not written from a first-person point of view) focus on male protagonists confronted with problems attending youth and early adulthood. The texts seem to be arranged according to the presumed age of the protagonist. So readers will feel they are following a particular type of character from his appearance in the context of a male peer group of rough youngsters and in the father/son relationship in the first story, through his unsettling initiation into sex with an older, married woman, his experiences of drugs and drinking, of jealousy and unrequited attraction to stories showing the protagonists against the background of their work and in their problematic relationships to their lovers or wives. The book builds an atmosphere of increasing weariness and frustration.

Other preoccupations of Choyce's characters include band music and cars, quarrelling and fighting, courage contests and bragging contests. Such topics, as well as the attitudes and conflicts Choyce deals with, are well-known, perhaps too well-known. They will appeal more to the younger than to the more sophisticated reader. Several of the stories use an adolescent voice (not necessarily those stories which deal with adolescents). The weakest of the pieces include the title story, "Local Heroes," and

"Prying Loose." Other stories, too, will disappoint a demanding reader.

Let me concentrate on stylistic matters here. Repeatedly the writing is not quite successful: the diction tends towards overexplicitness, and hyperbole ("Carl is one hundred percent opposed to airing dirty laundry in front of friends"; "she polishes hers off with lightning speed"); the humour is often strained ("Vincent gives himself three and a half years before the top of his head looks like a TV commercial for floor wax"). Where the humorous touch involves a particular approach to life and to people, the adolescent voice sounds again ("We all started doing terrible in school and our social standing improved dramatically"; "Chuck is loaded and in good form"; "Vince has surveyed the mental real estate of half the unhitched under thirty female population of Halifax and found a lot of empty lots, vacant floor space and not much hope" — would such language be used about "unhitched under thirty" males?). The metaphors and similes are occasionally far-fetched or overly drastic ("It's damn cold in there what with Davd [*sic*, for "Dave"] opening and closing the door all the time and a frigging blizzard boiling like a sonofabitch"; "a door opens and an arctic seventy-degree derailed freight train of air crashes into the chamber"); the writing can be sloppy ("on a wet, spongy, dismal spring day"); clichés abound ("My father would have a heart attack if he had to buy me new goggles again"). Even the partly unimaginative titles of the stories match this style ("Major Repairs," "Local Heroes," "Dancing the Night Away," "Family Protection"). Finally, some of the characters and narrators seem to delight in scatological terms, which crop up in all sorts of expected and unexpected contexts, not only as a means of characterization but, more often, merely as a catchy stance. One would hope for a language less clichéed, more varied, more subtle, more *interesting*. Such undifferentiated writing may have the virtue of suiting the characters, but then some of Choyce's characters hardly seem to deserve closer study.

But there are stories and passages in the book where the author's talent becomes apparent. The best story is "The Paper Route." It has depth, the characters are successfully drawn, style and voice contribute to the reading experience. No other story in the collection reaches this sustained quality. In stories like "Major Repairs," "Breakage," and "Family Protection" we see Choyce's talent for plot construction and for effective endings. Over large parts of such stories his writing can be energetic, graceful, funny, even moving. Then the metaphors tend to work, and the humour does not leave a bad aftertaste. Choyce is at his best when he presents characters who can do without raffish antics, and when he steers away from the adolescent voice.

The title of Hugh Cook's *Cracked Wheat and Other Stories* gives the impression that this is a series of tales set in the prairies. The cover shows a field of wheat and the emblem of a wheat sheaf precedes each of the ten stories. But only one of the stories ("First Snow") has a prairie setting; the others are set in Victoria ("Cracked Wheat"), Vancouver, the Fraser Valley, and on Lake Erie. What holds the stories together is not setting, but the voice of the implied author — whether the stories are told in the first person or in the third person. This voice is evenly balanced and reserved, yet effective, and contributes much towards the success of most of these stories. Another unifying element is that all the stories include characters of a Dutch-Canadian background (Hugh Cook's family came to Canada when he

was seven). The protagonists have immigrated more or less recently; some of the protagonists know Holland mainly from the stories told by parents and grandparents.

Two of the four stories with an immigration theme belong to the less successful tales in the collection: "Exodus" and "White Rabbit." In these, Cook relies too much on the basic immigration theme to carry significance. The action of the stories is too obvious and rather thin; the characters and their portrayal are partly in black and white, and thus of minimal interest. In "First Snow" the plot turns on the — mechanically rendered — question of why a particular member of a Dutch congregation in Alberta has not turned up for church one Sunday; the denouement consists of the information that Tjepkema simply mixed up Sunday and Monday.

But the title story is a fine story, and five others are skilfully done. In these Cook shows himself adept at characterization and plot construction (the endings and the subtle preparations for them are effective). In "Easter Lily," the only story in the collection not previously printed, Cook experiments successfully with a multiple point of view, one of them that of a mentally retarded young man who is instigated to violence through the silly behaviour of vain girls (the female sex altogether does not fare very well in Cook's collection). "Pisces" includes an experience reminiscent of *Surfacing*; "Clown" impresses through its haunting characters and the clever device of its ending. "Cracked Wheat" (in some ways similar to Choyce's "The Paper Route," but with significantly different behaviour on the part of the young males) is a moving story about a student in a conflict between his strongly religious, moralistic background and the human requirements of everyday life often at odds with rigid principles; characteristically for this collection, religion and morals seem to keep the upper hand, even if rather primly and at times ridiculously. All in all, Cook presents some fine stories. But in order to really get through to them don't start the collection with "Exodus" — start it with the title story.

REINGARD M. NISCHIK

PSYCHOLOGICAL DRAMA

FREDERICK CANDELARIA, *Poems New and Selected*. Goose Lane Editions, $7.95.

JOHN STEFFLER, *The Grey Islands*. McClelland & Stewart, $9.95.

FREDERICK CANDELARIA is a likeable poet; the personality reflected in his writing is bright and engaging. His carefully-aimed work is modest in scope. The intellectual balance that enables Candelaria to maintain a wry distance must derive at least partially from his early training for the priesthood, a training he abandoned firmly, as we learn in many of the poems:

> and Christ
> for all his mercy
> is dead
>
> the Lords
> of life
> are ghosts

Candelaria uses Latin phrases from the Mass in many places. His strong interest in wordplay and insidious rhyme ironically remind one of the work of the great Catholic poet Gerard Manley Hopkins. In Hopkins' case the turning to formal questions, the experimentation with assonance and "sprung rhythm" came from the religious faith that answered for him many of the questions that provided rich ground for other writers. In Candelaria's case the faith clearly is not there and you begin to suspect other limitations. In fact, despite the occasionally close paral-

lels with Hopkins, "each wave slowly surely unravels / in its rolling the unsteady rocky earth." Candelaria's work seems incomplete. Not that we expect solutions; poetry would hardly require that. But ambiguity can be worth delving into, and the rewards of such explorations — let alone the attempt — are in short supply here. Even when they do surface, the very ambiguities themselves seem closed off, lacking even that sense of wonder which is central to the explosive affirmations of Hopkins.

The question of the poet's lost faith is an important one. You would expect that any writer who entered into and then abandoned religious training would find in the experience a gold mine of self-revelation. And indeed Candelaria returns to the experience again and again, not only in the present volume but to an even greater degree in previous books, such as *Liturgies* in 1975. But he seems to have trouble coming to grips with it:

I left the altar of God
ruins of Rome
haunted by whispers
holy words
that fell like lead
between the pews of my mind
where
I prayed
before tabernacle doors
submitting
for seasons to silence
until my tongue
and the hinges broke
revealing the void

a tear lost there
has no echo

Whose tear? It is as if Candelaria has been so bruised that he has withdrawn completely into the world of the intellect. He gives us finished products of this withdrawal, skirting around the living process where the real interest lies. Even this poem gives more insight than most of the "religion" poems. Everything is frozen into stasis, and Candelaria approaches the living soul like a mapmaker or landscape painter.

The same problems occur in the rest of the work. Details are undifferentiated, the author's centre of interest obscure. Being likeable is not enough, it seems. It can even make things worse. Where Candelaria has trouble getting us interested, John Steffler is at his best. *The Grey Islands* is a piece of genius, a psychological drama in poetry and prose which tells the story of a Toronto man's retreat on deserted islands off Newfoundland's east coast. The islands really exist, and Steffler's effective description makes it clear — at least to this armchair traveller — that he has actually been there, although I doubt he has exposed himself to the gruelling isolation that his narrator dares. The main reason for the book's success is Steffler's dazzling ability to interweave imagination and reality, to people the empty physical space of the islands with the narrator's fertile imagination in what really amounts to a dramatic novel.

Steffler's balance and control are extraordinary. This is a tightrope act, where any of the elements could easily have gone out of control. There are the poems themselves, which are carefully wrought in simple and effective language. So simple is the language that it is doubtful whether any of the poems could survive on their own, and not simply because they are parts of a story. Steffler has written them carefully enough that they do not ruin the flow by taking too much upon themselves. At the same time they are more than narrative:

on the line
where three of the world's walls meet
where the sky is deaf and the water
the land come crashing in rubble
the sandpiper
on legs no thicker than stems of grass

skitters after the surf
leaping aside when a breaker falls,
nervous
but perfectly focussed into his work
soundlessly
weightlessly darting his needle beak
quick and busy

as though the rest of the world
did not exist

Stories crop up frequently. These are "genuine" stories, such as any visitor might expect to hear, and Steffler is so good at capturing the flavour of the local speech and the hardships of the tellers' lives that it is hard to believe the stories are entirely invented. Even when the narrator's imagination starts to play a larger part in the tales, the voice remains the same and the line between imagination and reality is subtly but effectively blurred, especially in the recountings of "madman" Carm Denny, the islands' last inhabitant, removed to a mainland asylum before the narrator's arrival.

Steffler explores the relationship between, and reciprocal influence of, physical space and human psyche. The narrator initially thinks Carm Denny is still on the island:

> *A madman is living alone out there.* The one inhabitant left. Holding out in the ruined town. Holding the whole island in his head. Thinking it into reality, every stick, every bird. And god knows what else.

Through the stories told by the locals Steffler introduces the existence of ghosts of some of the original islanders. Ghosts are perfect embodiments of man as nature and nature as man, neither wholly one nor the other. The expectation of supernatural encounters imparts a wonderful tension which Steffler handles skilfully, letting us expect but deferring payment. Near the end of the book the narrator moves into Denny's abandoned cabin, cranking the tension up another few turns:

> I decided to move into Carm's cabin yesterday . . . It's like standing inside the head of someone who knows the place.

Steffler handles his material like a prose writer, shunning wordplay in favour of a straightforward relating of detail. Some may find the language of the poems unremarkable in itself (you certainly can not say that about the stories) but Steffler knows what he is about, taking aim and writing with absolute discipline to attain that aim. For all his care and discipline, and despite the admittedly restricted use of language, Steffler has charted in *The Grey Islands* a rich, elaborate personal odyssey. Watch for him in the future.

ANDREW BROOKS

ECLECTICISM

JAN FIGURSKI, *The Stevensdaughter Poems.* Third Eye, $6.00.

JIM SMITH, *One Hundred Most Frightening Things.* blewointment, n.p.

ROBERT EADY, *The Blame Business.* Ouroboros, $6.95.

MICHAEL BULLOCK, *The Man With Flowers Through His Hands.* Melmoth/Third Eye, $7.50.

JOE DAVID BELLAMY, ed., *American Poetry Observed.* Univ. Illinois Press, n.p.

ONE VALUABLE DEVELOPMENT in recent Canadian poetry is the long sequence dealing with a real or invented character — *The Piaf Poems, Lampman's Kate; The Journals of Susanna Moodie* is perhaps the archetype. Jan Figurski's typically named book, *The Stevensdaughter Poems,* deals with a fictional Polish immigrant, Stephany, who suffers through World War II and a displaced persons' camp before coming to Canada. While the book contains some good poems, it is too thin in development to be satisfying. Figurski is trying to recapture some of the possibilities of narrative and characterization that poetry abdicated to prose

earlier in this century, but he does not go far enough. We learn a little about the life of an immigrant in rural Canada, but this is the country that produced Traill and Moodie — we expect more. The break-up of Stephany's marriage is described sketchily, so that a fine dramatic opportunity is lost, along with the chance to say more about the alienation of the character at the end of the book. The style is generally flat, with occasional metaphors to enliven the brief lines. The lives of immigrants, especially DP's (the term is almost extinct) would make a good subject for a more documentary approach. Figurski's narrow focus on the personal reduces his subject to a skeletal case history.

Jim Smith's *One Hundred Most Frightening Things* contains some gimmicky list poems, like the title piece. More interesting are his two sequences that deal with real people. "Mayakovsky: The Philistine Reefs" is the best. Smith has thought hard about Mayakovsky and his contemporary relevance. Mayakovsky is a superb poet to learn from. He manages to combine a winning manner — exuberant, highly personal — with the Futurist interest in machinery, progress, and technical experiment. Futurism is one of the schools of modernism that the English-speaking literary world has not assimilated. Symbolism, Laforguian irony, surrealism, these have been fruitful, but the English and American moderns had no enthusiasm for the Futurist vision. Smith is fascinated with Mayakovsky's conception of language and art as modes of production, and he explores this view metaphorically, describing the page as a sky in which poems are built like skyscrapers. He also ponders the industrial misuses of language in the contemporary world. The playful side of Mayakovsky is echoed in a letter to the dead poet — to which Mayakovsky replies. Less interesting than the Mayakovsky poems is "Bommi," a set of reflections on the memoirs of the German terrorist, Michael "Bommi" Baumann. Baumann and his friends found themselves carrying out operations with the encouragement and assistance of a police provocateur, and their methods contradicted their aims. Smith's sequence never really goes beyond the materials in his source: the reader might as well go directly to Baumann. But the Mayakovsky poems have some original comments on life in Canada and some insights into the place of language in society. Smith's political and philosophical concerns give his poetry an unusual perspective. If he can steer a course between political jargon, which weakens some of his poems, and a whimsical style (he is as arch and self-conscious as Gregory Corso at times), he will add something refreshing to Canadian poetry.

Robert Eady's *The Blame Business*, is also politically concerned. But he provides more indignation than analysis, except in the Swiftian satire of the title poem. He is commendably against war and damage to the environment. His book is dedicated to the Polish poet Zbigniew Herbert, an impressive model. Herbert's poems have a mythic resonance similar to Kafka's and a ferocious irony that reflects the pressure of the appalling history of Eastern Europe. Eady's prose poems do not have the same impact. They tend to be surreal in a predictable way. There are bizarre cause-and-effect relations and concepts like "Jobs" can become living beings. Here is "Fear of Science":

> The doctor's IQ tests smell of ether and convulsions. A saw and mallet are produced from assorted carpenter's tools.
>
> A thousand miles away an afternoon sunrise turns an iron tower to a mirage. Soldiers' boots crack the desert that has turned to glass.

The poem is, of course, discussing nu-

clear testing, though the role of the IQ test is not clear. An excessive didacticism mars some of the poems. Eady's "Moose Restoration" is less effective than W. S. Merwin's "Unchopping a Tree," a prose poem that uses the same device: ecological waste is satirized by giving elaborate instructions for restoring what has been irreparably lost. But Eady draws out his moral much more than Merwin does. Sometimes Eady reflects another direction in the prose poem tradition, a loving attention to detail that I find more convincing than the use of surrealism. Poems like "McIntosh Apples" and "The Florida Orange" are sharp and evocative at the same time. Eady's skill with words is impressive.

Michael Bullock's *The Man With Flowers Through His Hands*, a collection of fables in prose poem form, also suffers from predictable surrealist techniques, especially bizarre transformations. A plough turns into a ship, a detached hand goes searching for another hand, a cushion flies through the night looking for a chair, a man with burning hair turns to powder when he is doused (never fear: he comes back to life). There is something arbitrary here. These poems are meant to be vehicles for the imagination but they resemble National Film Board animated shorts. Many of the fables are about the act of writing, others convey a vague metaphysical anxiety. The cumulative effect is numbing rather than quickening, in spite of Bullock's excellent prose style.

These books show what Dennis Lee would call the eclecticism of recent Canadian poetry. Writers draw freely on European surrealism, Russian Futurism, Canadian social history, accounts of terrorism. There is no dominant *ism*, school or leading figure. We have some trends but no strong movements. Joe David Bellamy's excellent collection of interviews with twenty-six leading American poets, *American Poetry Observed*, shows that the situation is not unique to Canada. There were two strong movements in American poetry since 1960, "confessional" poetry and surrealism. The confessional approach has been absorbed into the mainstream. Surrealism was beginning to bore some writers in the 1970's, judging from several of the interviews. Donald Justice was complaining about vague mysticism and cloying inwardness in the surreal school back in 1975. I was surprised to read condemnations of "light verse surrealism" in Robert Bly — the man is disowning his progeny. And Marvin Bell objects to the "frivolous associationalism" of much American surreal verse. The finest surreal writing aims at profound revelations about the unconscious or the nature of reality. Too easily the surreal method can turn into a mannerism.

Bellamy has gathered his interviews from many sources. The quality is high, though not generally up to the classics of the genre (and it has become a genre) published in *Paris Review* and *New York Quarterly*. Canadian writing would benefit if a literary magazine were to undertake a series of first-rate, craft-centred interviews. Good interviews are conducted of course, but too many are gossipy or reveal little preparation by the interviewer and subject.

BERT ALMON

CHINESE JARS

GARY GEDDES, *The Terracotta Army*. Oberon, $17.95.

PATRICK LANE, *A Linen Crow, A Caftan Magpie*. Thistledown, $8.95.

A CONTINUING INFLUENCE on western art and poetry for more than a century has been that of the orient, particularly the painters, craftsmen and poets of China and Japan. Poets especially have envied orientals their calligraphy, the visual power of the written characters, which allows a poem to be a picture. Inherent also in the written language is a tendency toward minimalism and a reliance on picture-making. The oriental poem is likely to be non-linear, and to force on the reader abrupt connections, which can turn out to be profoundly imagined. Oriental art links with the classicism of our own tradition, with restraint, with a mystery contained in order, with the understated or non-stated which is nevertheless expressed in elegance of line, in purity of diction, in the moving firmness that Eliot celebrated: "a Chinese jar still/moves perpetually in its stillness."

Eliot's line realizes the reaching toward perfection it celebrates, a reaching in this case toward pure poetry. Patrick Lane and Gary Geddes in these two excellent and different books are reaching in that direction. The books have in common an acknowledged easternness. *The Terracota Army* takes its primary matter from the life-size pottery figures made for the first emperor of China, which were uncovered in 1974 and later encountered by the poet himself. In *A Linen Crow, A Caftan Magpie*, Patrick Lane, who also visited China, describes the particular form he has created as "a composite of the haiku and ghazal, a resemblance and nothing more, perhaps more oriental than accidental." To be less tentative than he is in that statement would require a knowledge of himself and his art that no twentieth-century artist who has behind him a number of traditions as well as countless individual influences can have. But the tendency is there in both books, toward a purity in poetry.

What is pure poetry? The question is like asking Jack Spratt "what is pure bacon?" Poetry is language. Language is physical and metaphysical, opaque and transparent, static and dynamic, discrete and continuous. So how can something made of language aspire toward purity? It can through guises. There is the guise of transparency — the poet says, "Look, I'm telling you straight." There is the guise of opacity — the poet says, "Look, I'm not *telling* you anything." There is *pure* poetry, poetry stripped (as far as it can be) of music and metaphor. The purity lies not in the manner or the matter, both of which will often rise from generic roots — lyric, dramatic, narrative or meditative — but in the impulse toward fullness of realization, completeness, poetry that of its kind is to be nothing but itself.

In *The Terracota Army*, we have the lean of poetry. The form is dramatic, consisting of twenty-five monologues spoken by various originals named according to their function or rank in the state and its army. The monologues themselves are not dramatic in Browning's sense, nor are they, strictly speaking, dramatic soliloquies. I would call them choral pieces, overheard perhaps but carefully rehearsed in their speakers' minds and spoken (for the most part) from the periphery of the drama. The speakers are not strongly individualized by voice. All speak a measured, restrained, formal language, each piece commenting on the general situation — the state, the emperor and his policies — and on the particular occasion — Bi the potter's carrying out of the emperor's commission. The speakers enliven their

choral observations with remembered incidents and quotations. Discipline, the discipline of imperial power and the discipline of the craftsman, is evident in the fact that each representative is given nine unrhymed couplets in which to speak. There is no room for rhetorical flourishes, for tropes, for sweet music. The tones are dry and resigned, often ironic, sometimes disturbed or angry, sometimes cynical, but not allowed to depart markedly from the rule of careful understatement. These speakers are guarded.

Which is not to say that there is no individualizing of the voices. In letting each have his say as representative and individual, the poet allows each his own perspective, preoccupations, and perceptions, which necessarily order and colour his speaking. Personalities do emerge — forthright, cunning, naive — in the varied tones and rhythms. But individualizing these choral voices is not the poems' main work. The individualizing that does occur is of the central figure, Bi the maker, who speaks within some of the monologues, but has no piece of his own. His pottery is the stage for the empire-wide drama:

> It was not so much the gossip that
> attracted me
> to Bi's pottery though there was plenty of
> that:
>
> news of the latest atrocities against the
> people,
> rights and property abolished, heads of
> children
>
> staring vacantly from terraces, dismembered
> corpses
> turning slowly in the current along the
> north bank
>
> of the Wei. Rather it was a sort of clearing
> house,
> a confessional, where our greatest fears
> were exorcised
>
> piecemeal through the barter of objective
> detail.

The polarity that creates the dramatic tension is between the potter and the emperor, who is also portrayed throughout the monologues, but who too joins the chorus in disguise to speak the final piece. The polarity shows everywhere as that between brutality and rigidity grounded in fear and failed idealism and the subversive power of an imagination fully realized in craft. The protean Bi with his cynicism, pragmatism, shifting moods, impatience with fools and charlatans, his earthiness, his insight into the human tragedy he is part of, emerges as stronger than the emperor, who himself acknowledges:

> I joined the potter in his rest.
> I broke his ranks but could not break his
> will.

The universality of the poem and its issues comes not from any effort to allegorize but from staying close to the imagined voices conjured by the terracota army itself. As do Eliot's lines in a Chinese-jar, this poem realizes in its own measures, its own craftiness and purity, the kind of art it celebrates. The book with its fine paper and its setting of each monologue on its own sheet facing its calligraphic title (done by Shuai Lizhi) is appropriately handsome.

Patrick Lane's *A Linen Crow, a Caftan Magpie* suggests in its title, as Geddes' title does, artifice, the imagined and the imagination as having primacy over the literal-actual. It also suggests more arbitrary and radical departures from mimesis or mirroring. To call what's inside its covers, by way of completing a symmetry, the fat of poetry would be to falsify. Lane's lyrical meditations are in their way as lean as Geddes' monologues. Each of the forty consists of four unrhymed couplets set on its own sheet faced and surrounded with white space, which enhances the sense of apartness, of austere withdrawal from the mundane.

But there is no austerity in the assured freedom of a mature maker that Patrick Lane asserts in these poems, or more rightly, this poem. The structure of each part is gnomic, consisting in its eight lines of thirteen, fourteen or more discrete sentences. These sentences or bits of sentences play together and apart, linking on the page and in the mind, but often appearing to be more broken than whole. As each meditation takes its form, so does the whole sequence, the poem, each short, discrete interval finding or forging a place in a continuum. The illusion is that of a mind withdrawn, suspended, in which are allowed to form thoughts, half-thoughts, images, feelings, that go and come at their own will.

To say what the poem says is impossible, except by quotation. But to say that there is no logic, no real continuity in the physical sequence, is to miss the craftiness of the maker and the discipline of his meditation. The poems are about existence — about death, about love, about art. The seasonal images are predominantly those of late fall-early winter with here and there in the later lyrics intimations of spring. The mood is sombre looking toward old age and death. The effort expressed in the poetry as craft and in the poet's persona is to find a way, which is essentially to find a line, a form. The making of a line through discrete and contradictory sensations, ideas, feelings, is at once the process and subject of the poem:

> The line is doubtful. The meaning is clear.
> Endure.
> We remember a boy in wind, a bell in an
> open field.
>
> Full Moon. I love you, your rising and
> your falling.
> The cedar wax-wings are drunk. Frost on
> the berries.
>
> Give of your grace. The sun forgives.
> I am afraid of nothing. Blow wind. The
> bell is lonely.
>
> The new world. The anvil. Water in deep
> well.
> Between your hips the only parasite is me.

These books exemplify a maturity that leads to daring, a testing of the means. Both stretch toward purity, but neither really dispenses with the means of the other. If Patrick Lane's meditations represent pure music and metaphor and gnomic wisdom, Gary Geddes' monologues are themselves a large metaphor, and his lean, disciplined line is after its kind as musical as Patrick Lane's.

ROBERT GIBBS

HAÏKUS ET LETTRES

DOROTHY HAYWARD & ANDRE DUHAIME, eds., *Haïku: Anthologie canadienne / Canadian Anthology*. Editions Asticou, $17.95.

LISE GAUVIN, *Lettres d'une autre*. L'Hexagone / Le Castor astral, n.p.

ON SAVAIT QUE la pratique du haïku s'était répandue chez les auteurs canadiens-anglais, suffisamment pour que paraisse en 1979 *Canadian Haiku Anthology*, de George Swede. Deux ans plus tard, Gerry Shikatani et David Aylward recueillaient dans *paper doors* les haïkus et autres textes de poètes canadiens-japonais. Dans ce sillage, *Haïku: Anthologie canadienne / Canadian Anthology* vient à point nommé en ce qu'elle adjoint aux productions des deux groupes linguistiques précédents les haïkus d'auteurs francophones. Le grand mérite de ce dernier ouvrage tient à ce qu'il réunit des haïkistes de ces trois groupes et inaugure des échanges dans la conscience d'une appartenance commune à un mode d'écriture.

D'autres éléments du travail qui a été fourni sont tout aussi louables. D'abord, d'avoir recueilli pour la première fois des haïkus d'auteurs francophones dans un même volume. Ensuite, d'avoir présenté,

en plus des haïkus déjà parus en anthologie ou en recueils, un grand nombre de textes jusqu'alors dispersés dans des revues spécialisées ou inédits. Enfin, d'avoir donné une édition bilingue, chaque texte étant suivi de sa traduction française ou anglaise, les deux versions accompagnant les textes en japonais, eux-mêmes dans l'original idéographique et en translittération. L'éventail des auteurs est fort large: 43 anglophones, 11 francophones, et 11 canadiens-japonais. Deux historiques fournissent une introduction opportune à l'évolution du haïku en anglais en Amérique du Nord et du haïku en français (France et Québec). Les notes bio-bibliographiques sur chacun des auteurs ainsi qu'une bibliographie d'ouvrages de base sur le sujet guideront les lecteurs dont l'intérêt aura été éveillé par cette anthologie.

La grande variété du contenu donne un aperçu des formes multiples et concurrentes que prend le haïku contemporain, du modèle japonais traditionnel à son adaptation en 17 syllabes, du vers unique aux expériences typographiques-visuelles. Sous cette diversité formelle demeurent ces constantes qui font du genre ce qu'il est: la condensation extrême de l'expression et la juxtaposition de perceptions et d'impressions — coïncidences ou conjonctions que saisit une sensibilité attentive à l'unicité de l'instant.

La plus grande liberté étant acquise, il semble difficile d'établir les paramètres de ce qui se donne néammoins pour un genre particulier, et les définitions qu'on peut lire du haïku ne cernent au mieux qu'une partie du champ de la pratique réelle qui en est faite. Dans le cas d'une anthologie, laquelle produit nécessairement un effet de consécration, il semblerait utile d'expliciter les critères qui ont permis de regrouper l'ensemble des textes sous une même étiquette. L'absence de tels critères n'est pas sans laisser le lecteur à sa perplexité devant certains textes dont seule la briéveté semble les rattacher au genre. C'est ainsi qu'il faut peut-étre imputer au souci de préserver quelque équilibre entre les groupes linguistiques représentés la présence de courts poèmes en français dont les rapports avec l'esprit et le mode d'écriture du haïku sont pour le moins ténus, sinon inexistants. Par ailleurs, à vouloir trop inclure, la marge entre l'enthousiasme et la complaisance est aisément franchie et l'on voit mal ce qui a pu valoir à des platitudes du genre "Cunt smell / in my waking beard," qui étaient jusqu'alors inédites, de ne pas l'être restées, à moins que liberté et laxisme ne soient devenus syonymes. Fort heureusement, la qualité de la majorité des textes fait oublier de telles faiblesses.

Les traductions sont très acceptables, parfois ingénieuses et poétiques. On remarque cependant, dans la version française des haïkus en anglais, outre certains calques et impropriétés, une tendance un peu trop prononcée à l'ellipse qui donne à la simple juxtaposition syntaxique un caractère répétitif et fait perdre aux images intiales leur dynamisme (en particulier, l'effacement des particules anglaises à valeur cinétique, qui gagneraient souvent à étre traduites par des formes verbales, lesquelles semblent avoir été proscrites). Quant aux traductions du japonais, elles donnent parfois lieu à de curieux écarts entre les versions anglaise et française, ainsi de ce haïku de Nishimara: "Sur le sol gelé / hoquets / du boyau du camion d'huile," alors que la version anglaise se lit "The earth around me / frozen / the oil hose / breathing," cette dernière différant elle aussi de celle qui était donnée dans *paper doors*: "... breathing in / while hose pumps / breathe out / the smell of oil."

Au-delà de ces menues bizarreries, cette anthologie demeure une étape qui

se devait d'exister et qui mènera certainement à des rencontres plus diverses et plus riches entre haïkistes ainsi qu'avec un public qu'elle contribue considérablement à informer et à conquérir.

Treize lettres qu'envoie entre l'été 1982 et l'été 1984 une jeune Persane établie à Montréal à une amie demeurée au pays natal et dans lesquelles elle fait part de ses réflexions au gré des expériences, des lectures et de l'actualité, telle est l'armature des *Lettres d'une autre* de Lise Gauvin. Le procédé hérité de "l'illustre prédécesseur" n'y est d'ailleurs qu'un prétexte commode au service de l'essai et, sous le voile de Roxane, étudiante de maîtrise en lettres québécoises, les traits du professeur de littérature qu'est l'auteur se devinent trop aisément.

Le profit que permet d'escompter le procédé est celui du jeu du regard dédoublé et de la distance à un soi à la fois individuel et collectif, mais encore ce jeu ne saurait-il être qu'au prix d'un effort. Or, si le truchement d'un personnage aussi proche de sa condition propre permet à Gauvin de s'octroyer d'entrée de jeu un poids d'authenticité, il lui fait perdre certaines des possibilités de cet effort de distanciation par rapport à soi. Cette perte n'est nulle part plus visible que dans le style, lequel a tous les tics de ce micro-sociolecte par quoi s'identifient, au sein du discours universitaire et intellectuel, ceux qui se rattachent aux études françaises et québécoises. Style des séminaires, des congrés, des articles, qui, à l'extérieur de l'enceinte professionnele où il sert de tenue de rigueur, prend par trop l'apparence d'un plastron empesé. Ces pages qui se lisent comme autant de catalogues de lectures, agrémentés pour chaque auteur d'une caractérisation qui a toute la résonnance du creux, n'en sont que l'exemple extrême. Ceci dit, le livre n'est pas sans qualités: les observations sur l'attitude des Québécois(es) envers eux-mêmes sont nuancées, évitent l'écueil des généralisations, et débouchent sur une sorte de métacritique de cette autocritique permanente, ambivalente et multiforme par quoi se caractérise aux yeux de "l'autre" et mal-être québécois, d'autant plus manifeste qu'il tente de se masquer, en cette période de l'après-référendum. L'exaspération pointe, provoquée, plus encore que par les mythes entretenus sur le Québec et le sort vers lequel se dirigent les francophones au Canada, par ce qui est perçu comme une démission de la part des Québécois, voire comme une complicité. Exaspération aussi devant les refuges de la lassitude et du dénigrement de soi, et devant les mots d'ordre d'une modernité intellectuelle qui se fige. Ce sont d'abord les clichés et les stéréotypes que véhiculent les Québécois eux-mêmes qui sont dénoncés, les facilités de ce qu'il convient de penser et de dire selon les modes du moment, et ceci pour entretenir l'immobilisme et la fausse sécurité dans le sentiment d'un progrès acquis qui dispense d'aller plus loin ou plus profond. Il en va ainsi de la condition féminine tout autant que du linguistique, du culturel et du politique, bien que ce soit quand même chez les femmes, celles qui écrivent du moins, que l'étrangère perçoit une énergie, un renouvellement continu, un refus du lieu commun.

Néammoins, si cette critique est d'intention salutaire (*Qui bene amat . . .*), il est plus douteux qu'elle permette d'échapper à cela même qu'elle dénonce: l'auto-critique au second degré ne conduit pas nécessairement à une libération et l'on sent parfois la prescience d'un cercle vicieux. Par ailleurs, s'il est toujours honorable de vouloir pourfendre mythes et lieux communs — et surtout ceux qui sévissent en milieu se disant intellectuel — on risque de ne crever que des baudruches qui s'étaient déjà d'elles-mêmes plus qu'à demi dégonflées. L'humour en cette arène demeure l'arme de

choix, mais en l'occurence, celle-ci manquait à la panoplie.

MICHEL PARMENTIER

MAGIC MAESTRO

VICTOR COWIE & VICTOR DAVIES, *The Magic Trumpet*. Turnstone, n.p.

IT IS HEARTENING to see the publication of *The Magic Trumpet* (a 1969, three-scene musical comedy for children, ages 4-11), not only because it is a *good* children's play but also because it is a *children's* play. So few publishers are willing to risk publishing plays for children. This play, though first produced in 1969, was not published until 1984. Yet Children's Theatre in Canada and elsewhere is dependent on some form of play publication and distribution. Turnstone Press is, therefore, to be congratulated for its unique and courageous decision to publish children's plays.

The Magic Trumpet, first presented by the Manitoba Theatre Centre, contains those elements which, if artistically combined, should result in a successful children's drama: humour, suspense, spontaneity, audience participation, fear, delight, music, song, emphasis on the imagination, and colourful characters whose names bespeak their oustanding characteristics. In the Introduction, the playwrights point out that they want the musical comedy to be entertaining, but they also want children to understand the theme as a "quest to achieve a just and happy world." The dramatists are directing their attention to adults as well. So often adults dampen children's spirits by belittling the highly imaginative games children invent. Victor Cowie, playwright, and Victor Davies, composer, are attempting not only to present a stimulating play for children, but also to suggest to adults that they try to retain those childlike qualities of wonder and delight so inextricably a part of childhood but often lost to the world of adults. In so doing they will be better able to understand the powers of the imagination upon which children draw for their entertainment.

The plot of *The Magic Trumpet* is simple and easy for children to follow. The play opens with Mayor Mumble's announcement that school is closing and the summer holidays have begun. Mrs. Mean is incensed because of the noise the children will make while playing. She threatens to force the Mayor to open school again. At this point, Magic Maestro, a circus magician, appears and entices the children, all but Simon Small, into the forbidden forest where, with their consent, he changes them into circus animals. Given a steady diet of water and hay, they soon long for regular food again. Meanwhile Simon Small finds them and learns that to turn them back into children again he must find the Talhuiq Tree who has the Magic Trumpet. Eventually, after some amusing incidents, Simon finds and blows the Trumpet with the help of the audience, and sets the children free. The play ends happily for everyone.

Throughout *The Magic Trumpet* the music and lyrics are delightfully appropriate to the story. The characters, plot, and music all blend into a harmonious whole, making *The Magic Trumpet* a musical comedy to be enjoyed by all. The play can be mounted with a minimum of sets and costumes. A complete musical score is available from Lily Pad Productions, 102 Lyall Avenue, Toronto.

GERALDINE ANTHONY

THREE PLAYS

DENIS SALTER, ed., *New Canadian Drama 3*. Borealis.

THE *New Canadian Drama* series, under the General Editorship of Neil Carson, has made available, within the past five years, several contemporary plays by seasoned writers, as well as the occasional play by a newcomer on the scene. This volume is the most ambitious thus far in that all three playwrights are newcomers to Canadian theatre. Their first plays have been produced within the past few years. Salter remarks that the common ground for selection was the fact that all three writers are "in the early stages of their very promising careers," and the plays selected "are linked by a number of shared themes, subjects and aesthetic preoccupations."

It is left for the reviewer to assess the quality of the plays chosen and hence the judgement of the editor who selected them. Are these plays of sufficient merit to deserve publication? Would the playwrights be better served if these plays had been left to mature with time, to undergo further productions, to be submitted to more critical appraisals, and to be reworked until the final product is as near to perfection as the playwright can achieve? All too many Canadian plays are given uncritical publications, clogging the market with an embarrassing array of mediocrity. Dramatists who eventually reach a measure of success in their work, will, no doubt, be uncomfortable about the publication of their early work.

The three plays in this volume are Frank Moher's "Down for the Weekend," Kelly-Jean Rebar's "Checkin' Out," and Gordon Pengilly's "Swipe." "Down for the Weekend" received its première performance in 1980 at Northern Light Theatre in Edmonton and was first published by Playwrights Canada in 1981. Frank Moher remarks in an Author's Note: "I have made a number of revisions of that text for this anthology edition." "Checkin'Out" was first produced by Northern Light in 1981, and then by the Great Canadian Theatre Company, Ottawa, in 1983. A note on p. 49 tells us again that this is an "extensively revised edition." "Swipe" was given its professional première by NDWT Theatre Company at Toronto Free Theatre in 1981 after being workshopped at the Banff School Playwrights Colony, and presented with an award and production by the amateur Walterdale Theatre group in Edmonton.

"Down for the Weekend" is a traditional, realistic slice-of-life about the men who work in Fort McMurray's oil fields. The dialogue is sharp and naturalistic. Flint, Dirk, and the Kid are returning from work by bus, with their fellow workers, for a weekend in Edmonton. The action revolves around the relationship between young Flint, his wife Debbie, and her old Ukrainian grandfather Gido. The values of the old world — happiness achieved by steady, hard work on the family farm which is handed down from one generation to the next — are contrasted with the new, superficial, get-rich-quick, and move-on attitudes of the younger generation. Flint and Gido are polar opposites, symbolized by the so-called treasure hidden on Gido's property. Flint is obsessed with the idea that the treasure is money — the key to his happiness. Gido knows that the treasure is merely a bag of seed symbolizing the real treasure — the land. Debbie is the pawn between the two. Will she capitulate to Flint and go off with him to Vancouver on another useless spree looking for easy money, or will she accept the real values of her grandfather and continue the family farm heritage? Moher has a talent for creating local colour — the Ukrainian's simplicity, the

oil worker's vitality, the drifter's superficiality. He paints a lively picture of the contemporary Edmonton scene. Moher's characters, although not as rich nor as developed as one would like, are sufficiently well-rounded to become individuals in the theatregoer's imagination. The contrast in setting between the cheap, highrise apartment, and the settled old farmhouse is also sharply defined. Scene Three depicts the casino and the Wheel of Fortune, where Flint and Dirk lose their hard-earned salaries. Here, the audience is treated to the lively ambience of the contemporary gambling scene. Another contemporary scene of false glamour is the Drive-In Movie where starship enters the black hole while Dirk watches *Emanuelle* out the back window with the soundtrack off. Moher has a sharp sense of satire. Dirk and Flint's lives are like the meaningless scenes on the screen.

"Down for the Weekend" is well named as the main character is on a fast-moving slide that promises no return. The play ends as it began with Flint, Dirk, and the Kid. They are singing "Alberta Bound" and the final trite remark is Dirk's as he regards his Macdonalds Quarter Pounder and reflects on becoming part of history when the Macdonalds sign changes from thirty-four to thirty-five billion sold. A nice touch to a play contrasting the real with the superficial! The "sense of history" at the end harks back to the beginning when Flint explains coin collecting to Dirk as giving one "a sense of history." The only history they share is the monotony of the oil worker's life.

The second play in this anthology is Kelly-Jean Rebar's "Checkin' Out." Another facet of Canadian life is depicted here — the check-out counter girl in a store in Southern Alberta. With a typical prairie town as setting, Rebar attempts, like Moher, to reproduce a slice of life, but with far less success. The characters in "Checkin' Out" are one-dimensional; the dialogue is artificial and erratic, apparently conceived for the sake of dialect alone; the confrontations are illogical, boring and anti-climactic. What Rebar is attempting to do is certainly worthy of the effort, but she obviously lacks the experience to put it all together in one coherent, artistic unit. "Checkin' Out" is a play about one young woman's attempt to find herself and to establish a meaningful career and life. Both she and her husband marry too young and for the wrong reasons — a fact which we discover only at the end of the play, when we find it logically impossible to accept. Bob, the town's most popular hockey player, is offered a hockey scholarship to University; Lindsay is the girl accepted for University because of her grades. Instead of going to university, they marry and remain without education or careers — she as a store clerk, he, as a small town hockey player. Within a year they separate. The play bumbles along until Lindsay goes to Edmonton with seventeen-year-old Donny to open her own boutique. Bob eventually goes in search of her and finds her living with Donny. There follows a deplorable confrontation — deplorable because the playwright has not yet learned the art of confrontation. The dialogue does not lead naturally and in a well-balanced way to a climax. The reader is irritated and bored by the clumsy construction of this confrontation and by the climaxes and anti-climaxes. Fortunately, for both characters and reader, the play ends shortly thereafter.

Here is an example of a play which should not be published until the playwright has gained far more experience in writing. Indeed the play needs to be completely revised. It would appear that the playwright may have been in the process of learning how to write regional dialect. Indeed the regional dialect

throughout the play is so obvious that the reader is overwhelmed by it and loses track of character and plot development. Rebar creates very poor English for the character Lindsay, throughout the play, "I run my pannyhose, I never had no time to put my make-up on." "I were goin' in for bein' a English teacher." Unaccountably Lindsay steps out of character by using such words and expressions as: "conflict," "discreet," "indecision," "mass hysteria," "remotely," "I'm not amused," "unexpected trepidation." "Checkin' Out" is, in short, a mediocre play, failing in its use of character, plot, and dialogue. No doubt Kelly-Jean Rebar has talent, and is, as Denis Salter points out "in the early stages of [a] very promising career," but it would seem too early yet to publish her work.

"Swipe" is a delightful fantasy whose characters are reminiscent of, among others, Gulley Jimson and Sarah Monday in Joyce Cary's *The Horse's Mouth*, and the American riverboat characters in Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* and *Life on the Mississippi*. In "Swipe," the colourful folk characters are a Canadian's contribution to this genre. Worm, Duke, and Guppy, a bag lady and two tramps, chant in verse and speak in prose of Clancy Dougal, their hero and erstwhile companion, the captain of thieves, who went to the moon some fifteen years ago, promising to "return with revelation and inspired blueprints to gather his brotherly crew." Clancy promised transcendence and these remaining tramps are looking for just that. Now Peck Woodstick, the captain of tramps, has prophesied Clancy's homecoming. The tramps have always dutifully brought their stolen booty to Peck but have failed to see Peck swipe anything. The art of river robbery belonged undeniably to Clancy. Hence, "the screws of their discontent" are put on Peck. They talk in cosmic terms. Worm says: "If we don't transcend soon we're gonna be all washed up fer sackin' the Universe!" Peck promises to go to his cave-in-rock to try to connect with Clancy. In actual fact Peck is fooling the gang. When Clancy, fifteen years earlier, tried to take over Peck's gang, Peck murdered him and spread the story that Clancy had transcended this planet for the moon. Now Peck must make good his prophecy that Clancy will return. Peck turns to his faithful young Rooster: "He's got redhair like a shootin' star, flyin' feet like the wind, sticky fingers like a atomic glue."

Into this folk plot walks Becky, a young lost tourist — someone from the outer world. She encounters Rooster who remarks "Ev'rybuddy gets lost around here." Meanwhile Peck has concocted a story that Clancy is returning. "Hope is feelin' and feelin' is believin' and believin's gonna bring Clancy outa the cosmos with moonbeams on the brim of his hat and all the secrets of the universe in his sack."

Gordon Peugilly has created in "Swipe" a delightful fantasy, complete with colourful folk characters, poetic dialogue, rich imagery, a fascinating plot, and an old riverboat setting in a lush lagoon. The seedy old tramps offer some significant comments along the way, such as Peck's remark: "If yuh open up a can of worms, the on'y way to get 'em back in is to use a bigger can." Or Twinker's statement: "The truth come quickest when simply told." "Swipe" is a play deserving production and publication.

The volume is clearly printed with only a few errors. The cover design and general appearance of the book is satisfactory. The idea of selecting plays from one geographical area is a boon to researchers of regional drama. The editor's introduction is stimulating and perceptive especially in its comments on the imagination.

GERALDINE ANTHONY

FIRST STAGE

SUSAN STONE-BLACKBURN, *Robertson Davies, Playwright.* Univ. of British Columbia, n.p.

THE UNIVERSITY OF British Columbia Press continues to demonstrate a commendable interest in Canadian drama. The present volume follows Renate Usmiani's survey of the alternative theatre, and appropriately enough begins an examination of what the "second stage" was reacting against. If there is a playwright in the country with some claim to having helped create our "first stage," Robertson Davies is that dramatist.

Davies is probably the closest we have to a "Dean" of Canadian letters, a position he has deservedly won by dint of an astonishingly varied career. Older readers remember him as a kind of "Fleet Street intellectual," a literary Jack-of-all-trades who could turn his pen with equal skill to essays or journalism, and serve as editor, teacher, or academic administrator. Younger readers know him as the author of the Deptford trilogy and one of our most skilful novelists. Stone-Blackburn's focus on the plays reminds us that Davies' first love was the theatre.

The book is arranged chronologically and begins with Davies' youthful fascination with the visiting British companies that toured Ontario with productions of Shakespeare, Goldsmith, and such nineteenth-century melodramas as *The Count of Monte Cristo.* It deals with his Oxford years, his contact with scholars such as Neville Coghill, directors such as Tyrone Guthrie, and his own experiences as actor at the Old Vic. It describes his early unsuccessful attempts to write for the West End, and his triumphant achievements in the amateur and professional theatre in Canada in the 1950's. Perhaps the most valuable part of the book is Stone-Blackburn's analysis of Davies' interest in the ideas of Jung as they began to inform his work in the late 1950's. Her analyses of *General Confession* and *Question Time* seem especially thorough, drawing as they do on a knowledge of Davies' wide reading and of his exploration of the same ideas in the novels.

But it is exactly here, where Stone-Blackburn's techniques of literary analysis are brought to bear so impressively, that I am most conscious of the limitations of her study. The essentially thematic approach adopted throughout leads the author to an insoluble dilemma — if she is right, then Canadian directors, actors, critics, and audiences must be wrong. For the paradox of Robertson Davies the playwright is that while he is one of the most erudite, cultivated, and graceful authors to have written for the stage in this country, he has had practically no lasting effect on the development of our drama. Therefore to discuss *General Confession* as a "masterpiece," although the work has never been performed and has been consistently turned down by theatrical managements, is to exhibit a peculiar kind of critical bravado.

Indeed, *Robertson Davies, Playwright* illustrates vividly the malaise affecting much published discussion of Canadian drama. The academics who do most of the criticizing and assessing of plays are woefully out of touch with the artists responsible for producing and performing them. Scholars like to get their information from books, and Canadian actors and directors (unlike their British counterparts) rarely express themselves in print. Stone-Blackburn is to be commended for interviewing a large number of performers involved in the production of Davies' plays. But the comments of these performers have been filtered through an essentially literary sensibility. There is no discussion in the book of the technical problems presented by the plays. What are the characters like to

act? How do audiences respond to them? Why is it that when Canadian drama and theatre began to develop more quickly in the 1970's Davies suddenly seemed old-fashioned?

It is not always a disadvantage for a playwright to be at odds with the current critical assumptions. In this century Chekhov, Pirandello, Ionesco, and Beckett (to name only four) radically reshaped the drama of their day by the power of their vision. Davies' failure to convert Canadian actors, directors, and audiences to his opinion of what a play should be is one of the significant and puzzling facts of our dramatic history. I have my own ideas why he failed. I am sure that members of the theatre community have theirs. The question is of great interest. But it is one that the present book scarcely raises and certainly does not answer.

NEIL CARSON

COMIC GHOSTS

ROBERTSON DAVIES, *High Spirits*. Penguin, $6.95.

WHAT DO QUEEN Victoria, William Lyon Mackenzie King, Sir John A. Macdonald, Albert Einstein, and Bishop John Strachan have in common with Little Lord Fauntleroy and a failed Ph.D. student? *High Spirits* tells how the ghosts of these — and many more — appeared to Robertson Davies at Massey College during his eighteen years as Master there. Each year from 1963 until 1981, Davies contributed a ghost story to the entertainment at the college's Christmas party, and *High Spirits* is a collection of these stories. Davies' affection for the supernatural should come as no surprise to any reader of his last four novels, also written during his years at Massey. He takes his ghost stories seriously, not as literal truth but as psychic truth. However, his stories are designed for amusement, and he achieves a light-hearted ghost story with a delightful parody of the traditional serious style.

In the first story, "Revelation from a Smoky Fire," Davies' study is occupied by the tenth Master of Massey College, who thinks Davies is the ghost. By 2063, the first Master is recalled with difficulty only as someone who left the office under a cloud after a very short term. The second story, "The Ghost Who Vanished by Degrees," is wonderfully appropriate for the original audience and obviously another sample of psychic truth. The ghost of a graduate student who had committed suicide after failing his Ph.D. oral thirty years earlier appears to insist on re-examination. He produces a thesis that is in Davies' field but on a subject so obscure that Davies knows next to nothing about it. Davies bluffs his way through the exam, magnanimously awards the ghost a pass, and then finds, to his horror, that the ghost has prepared theses in every field from fine arts to physics and demands that Davies examine him in them all. Davies fakes his way through the lot, deflating the dignity of academe as he goes. Two others among the best stories, "Dickens Digested" and "The Cat that Went to Trinity" (both published in *One Half of Robertson Davies*, Macmillan, 1977) also feature students. One charges Dickens with vampirism, with living off graduate students. The encouragement Davies offers a languid student, "I was certain that if once Dickens thoroughly took hold of him, he would become absorbed in his subject," is comically, horribly, literally realized. The other is a parody of *Frankenstein* in which a student named Victor Frank Einstein undertakes the creation of an ideal College Cat.

"Dickens Digested" fits another pattern, dubbed "ectoplasmic elitism" by Davies, in which ghosts of famous figures

appear, often to mark some appropriate occasion. In 1979, Davies' story featured both Einstein on the centenary of his birth and Little Lord Fauntleroy in The Year of the Child. In 1967 the centenary of Confederation evoked the spirit of Sir John A. Macdonald, and the University of Toronto's sesquicentennial in 1977 raised the ghosts of King George VI and Bishop John Strachan to quarrel over who made the more significant contribution to the birth of the University. Davies characteristically gives the victory to King George, championing The Pleasure Principle, over Bishop Strachan's stodgy Work Ethic.

The Davies enthusiast will enjoy the substantial amount of self-revelation and self-parody in Davies' stories, which are in this respect similar to the earlier Marchbanks diaries with the Marchbanks *persona* eliminated. "Oh, don't be so pompous," the wife of the University President reproves him, and he is similarly punctured by many another dignitary, living and dead. The Davies scholar will find a couple of interesting connections with Davies' novels. The 1969 story "Refuge of Insulted Saints," in which a multitude of saints seek refuge at Massey, is clearly related to Dunstan Ramsay's fascination with odd saints in *Fifth Business*, and the 1978 story, "The Xerox in The Lost Room," contains a sketch for John Parlabane of *The Rebel Angels*.

Most interesting of all is the aspect of psychic truth in the stories. As the first reveals Davies' trepidations about what history will make of his showing as first Master of Massey College, the last shows his attempt to cope with his reluctance to step down. The whole is in keeping with his lifelong emphasis on psychic balance; the stories minister to this need in himself and his audience. The frequent appearance of ghosts at Massey College he claims is easily attributable to the fact that it is "a Temple of Reason." "There is in Nature a need for balance, a compensating principle which demands in our case that where there is too much rationality there should be occasional outbreaks of irrationality." Not just Massey, but Canada, Davies claims, "needs ghosts, as a dietary supplement, a vitamin taken to stave off that most dreadful of modern ailments, The Rational Rickets." The supernatural and the comic blend with the elite and the erudite to produce *High Spirits*.

SUSAN STONE-BLACKBURN

*** MARIA LEACH, ed., *Funk & Wagnall's Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology, and Legend*. Fitzhenry & Whiteside, $43.95. This paperback reprint of the 1972 edition is welcome, despite the drawbacks of date (there has been much formal analysis of folklore in recent years that does not get acknowledged here). Like comparable dictionaries this work provides rudimentary identifications of names and titles and terminology — everything from "Selene" to "The Princess and the Pea" and "reductio ad absurdum." The net is wide. Curiously, absences occur where one would expect solid information: coyote and manitou are there, but I looked in vain for D'Sonoqua and for Damelahamid, for example — indeed West Coast Indian culture is ill served in detail. But one strength of the work is the recurring series of general essays on themes, forms, and social contexts of mythology in different societies. Eugenie Voegelin on North American Indian Mythology provides a wide-ranging overview, of the sort that could lead readers along productive comparative paths — if only the dictionary supported the general with a wider range of specifics.

W.N.

MAVIS GALLANT IN THE NEW YORKER EVERY SO OFTEN IS ALL THE CANADIAN CULTURE I CAN STAND

opinions and notes

POPULAR CULTURE IN CANADA

ISSAC BICKERSTAFF, *Mariposa Forever*. Stoddart, $9.95.

VAL CLERY, *Ghost Stories of Canada*. Hounslow, $9.95.

DIANA COOPER-CLARK, *Designs of Darkness: Interviews With Detective Novelists*. Bowling Green State Univ. Popular Press, $9.95.

MARION CROOK, *The Gulf Island Connection*. Crook Publishing, $9.95.

BILL GUEST, *Canadian Fiddlers*. Lancelot Press, $7.95.

DAVID GURR, *An American Spy Story*. McClelland & Stewart, $18.95.

DON HARRON, *Debunk's Illustrated Guide to the Canadian Establishment*. Macmillan, $19.95.

JEAN HOWARTH, *Treasure Island*. Penguin, $6.95.

KENNETH HUDSON, *The Language of the Teenage Revolution*. Macmillan, £15.00.

MARGARET ANN JENSEN, *Love's Sweet Return: The Harlequin Story*. Women's Educational Press, $9.95.

BILL MCNEIL, *Voice of the Pioneer*. Vol. 2. Macmillan, n.p.

VLADIMIR PROPP, *Theory and History of Folklore*. Univ. of Minnesota Press, $19.50.

JOHN REEVES, *Murder Before Matins*. Doubleday, $14.95.

JOHN REEVES, *Murder With Muskets*. Doubleday, $17.95.

JOHN SEWELL, *Police*. James Lorimer, $6.95.

EDWARD STARKINS, *Who Killed Janet Smith?* Macmillan, $24.95.

TED WOOD, *Murder on Ice*. Charles Scribner's, $18.95.

IT IS VERY TEMPTING at this point to consider my work done. Popular culture is such a theoretical morass that it often seems "your guess is as good as mine" is about the best assessment of boundaries one can hope for. In this case, I have been asked by the editors to write a piece on popular culture. To aid in my endeavours they have sent a variety of books to consider. Since they are the ones who want the article and they are the ones who sent me the books, the books themselves define popular culture in the views of the editors. *Ipso facto*, the list of books is my article.

But *ipso facto*, being Latin, is not popular culture (at least not our popular culture, although it might be that of ancient Rome [or it might be part of our popular culture if it is misused — as my Latin usually is . . . you see my problem]). And in any case, the editors probably will not regard my casual bit of bibliography as what they had in mind. So to continue where Charlie's Angels would fear to tread . . .

I presume I was offered this assignment because of an article of mine which was published in *Canadian Literature*, No. 104. There I presented a means of dividing culture into four classifications: folk, popular, mass, and elite. Folklorists state that folk culture is artistic communication in small groups. This definition, however, includes many things which the majority of us would think far from "folk." Common usage would further narrow the definition to pre-industrial material handed down through tradition. Mass culture is a much simpler matter: that purveyed primarily through the mass media. Elite culture is quite difficult to define but we all know what it is. Phrases such as "serious music," "serious literature," and "high art" provide some of the boundaries.

Within this frame, popular culture slips in at the edge. My suggestion is that the term is most useful if it represents the small group reflection of mass culture. Thus, the local rock group doing imitations of the Rolling Stones is not mass culture, neither is it folk culture. I doubt that any of you thinks it is elite

culture, no matter what kind of Stoneophile you might be. It is thus popular culture.

But now the confusion. What is the *essential* difference between that and a local string quartet which performs compositions written by the cellist? And what is the essential difference between that and the folk musician performing some Child ballad? Of course, the latter represents the old favourite of anonymous song transmitted through oral tradition. But was the first performer of the song thus not a part of folk culture? And what happens with all this material when someone records it and puts it on the radio? Is this really a transformation from popular/elite/folk to mass, through what could be seen as just a means of preservation?

As Alan Fotheringham would say, "Has the good Doctor Foth misfused the obfuscation?" Ah, thank God, you say. At last he has reached a concrete, Canadian, example. But is it popular culture? In light of my definition above, certainly not. But what if I come down from my high taxonomic cloud and accept another aspect of common usage, and employ popular culture and mass culture as synonyms? *Macleans* might seem a mass market periodical but is it — in the sense of *People* or better still *The National Enquirer* or *Teenbeat*? Fotheringham clearly has some intellectual pretensions. Does this deny his column's right to be called popular culture? In this day and age when educator after educator complains that "People don't read!" can anything in print be popular culture?

Let's stop there. I presume I have now convinced you of my basic premise: definitions are of value only as stimuli for discussion. Even more than such old favourites as "What is poetry?", the question "What is popular culture?" is unanswerable. None of you would claim that the artifact now in your hands, an issue of *Canadian Literature*, is popular culture. But a "normal" university quarterly would be unlikely to publish anything as unstructured and unscholarly as the piece you are now reading. If I may be allowed a short, slightly scholarly, break to comment on my own style, there is a pseudo-orality about the dashes, parentheses, and underlining which reflects much popular culture in print. Harron's highly contrived Charlie Farquharson dialect is an extreme example.

Thus could we say that *CanLit* (may I call it that?) is *more* popular culture than many other periodicals? We then get into the realm where a term such as popular culture really functions, in comparisons. Such a shift is necessary here, if only because none of the texts provided to me for this review really seems to be popular culture, either in the sense of my definition above, or in the broader grouping which includes mass culture. None of these books is likely to have the same interest in that context as a song by Michael Jackson or an episode of *Dynasty*.

You notice that I choose two American examples. If, for the purposes of discussion, we accept mass culture as popular culture, we must see it as generally American. Hugh Garner once lamented the passing of low-brow Canadian magazines. I can't recall the exact statement but a reasonable paraphrase would be: "I learned to write by writing junk for such magazines. And many people learned to read by reading that junk. It was junk but it was our junk, Canadian junk." Today very little in popular culture has a Canadian stamp. If you wandered into a bar in Montana you would have difficulty convincing your drinking mates of some quintessential maple-leaf-ness in Donald Sutherland, Margot Kidder, Neil Young, or Bryan Adams. When Canadian becomes

popular culture, *voilà*, no more Canadian.

So there is a very important sense in which we are *not* discusing popular culture here, except, perhaps, a very elite end of it. This is generally true of detective stories and mysteries in any case. The curling lip and raised eyebrow which used to be seen at any suggestion that the works of Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett have literary merit are now mere memories of a Leavisite past. Even those who haven't quite reached the true popcult reverse snobbery of "The Semiotics of Daffy Duck: a Discourse Analysis" know that it is far more embarrassing in intellectual gatherings to forget Nero Wolfe than to look blank at the mention of the other Nero — you know, the guy with the violin.

You would be hard-pressed to find anyone who has heard of John Reeves as a novelist who would dismiss his work disdainfully as "popular culture." Or, peace to my editor, many who would call it popular culture at all, in its delightful erudition about monastic life or grand opera. Some ten years ago I heard Reeves give a talk in his guise of CBC radio producer. In the question and answer period following he described television as "radio for morons." That is not the voice of popular culture.

But could CBC radio itself be popular culture? Which would make Reeves' first mystery, *Murder by Microphone*, a bit closer to our ostensible subject matter. I have a sense that the recent revamping of CBC radio is an attempt to become such. It seems as if someone "up there" thinks that a devotion to what I would call the vacuous middle-brow might steal an audience from the middle-of-the-road stations (missing the obvious pun that MOR is less). Good luck. Some years ago I did some commentary for a national arts show on CBC radio. The producer's desire was that I be tremendously witty on the worst aspects of primetime TV (anything which suggested a lower IQ than *The Dukes of Hazzard*). I am quite willing to admit that I failed and was axed. But more important was the producer's comment that what she had really wanted was "Good material for listeners to use at cocktail parties."

Which is perhaps the essence of my discussion here. And my Daffy Duck reference above. To sound as high-minded as you can about the lowest thing you can find. Folklorists have a name for this. They call it "folkloristics," the scholarly practise of analyzing folklore. The Propp volume which was included in my package is a classic in the field. If there is a concept of "popularistics" I haven't heard of it. There should be something, if only because Bowling Green University has devoted so much of that debased medium of print on paper to its practice. It is interesting how they have worded the title of their publication arm, as used in the Cooper-Clark volume. Because it isn't a very "popular" press, in the sense of Bantam or even of say General in Canada. But as a publisher of "popularistics" it can call itself popular.

Bowling Green has also attempted to convince us, in contradiction of my observation above, that there is a "*Canadian* Popular Culture." I suppose so, in dribs and drabs, such as "Timber Tom" on the Canadian Howdy Doody or anything to do with Margaret Trudeau, as she once was called. Bill Guest's volume could be better seen as an example of the culture of local publishing — and the absurd nonsequiturs which the non-editing sometimes leads to — but it is of some interest to me in neglecting all but one Newfoundland fiddler, including many who have commercial recordings available. I suspect regional griping is an important part of Canadian popular culture.

Don Harron sometimes seems to be

trying to grab as large a part of Canadian popular culture as possible, particularly in his guise as Charlie Farquharson. Harron's constant punning, once more on display in *Debunk's*, could provide an interesting analysis for someone with a desire to assess his intended audience, and how "popular," in the sense of being for "the masses," the Farquharson *oeuvre* is. What readers are required by "You take that Raw Bare Burns hoo was in Reamy Leveckyou's first cabinet"? How do they compare to those needed for the less sophisticated but more age-specific pun Charlie twirled in an earlier work: "All them Hindoos in them Deana Durbins"? Issac Bickerstaff performs in a somewhat similar vein. Still, any book which only succeeds if the reader has read another book, in this case Leacock's *Sunshine Sketches*, seems truly to be stretching the limits of popular culture, no matter what the definition.

My favourites among this package are the Reeves novels but I have already said they don't count. After them, I am drawn to one of the examples of popularistics, Margaret Ann Jensen on Harlequins. Perhaps a bit diffuse and lacking in the theoretical scope of recent studies in both feminism and popular culture, the book still provides a very interesting analysis of all aspects of the Harlequin chain from society to author to publisher to seller to reader and back to society. At one point she states,

> Although most academics reject popular culture, a few scholars enthusiastically study movies, comic books and roller coasters. Perhaps in reaction to the condemnation such topics usually receive, these scholars uncritically embrace their subjects.

I am suitably chastened. But then again I was already warned a few years ago. I received in the mail a number of Harlequin covers as advertisements so I put them on my office door at the university. One of my students hesitantly asked me why. I replied, merrily, because I thought they were funny. She said that she and her friends had assumed that I must write them.

I don't feel compelled to remark individually on most of the other books. Bill McNeil's collection is an absolute delight, as was the first volume, as has been the radio series, but I would feel more comfortable placing it in the oral history bin or, as a folklorist might suggest, in the category of personal experience narratives. Another popularistics volume, the Hudson, is primarily interesting as an artifact. The one British book here, it seems a rather lightweight example of what sociolinguistics can do, but I am fascinated by its list price, $60.00 Canadian. For 137 pages. Can elite culture survive?

The impossibility of making global statements about culture or mass culture should in no sense deny their importance as fields of study. This is very much how we live. When mainlanders ask me what it is like to live in Newfoundland, I say I drive my Toyota, buy groceries at Dominion, hardware at Canadian Tire, and underwear at Sears. In between that I watch CBC television (CTV when I'm slumming [The Sports Network when I'm visiting a rich friend with Pay-TV]) and take my daughter to her Suzuki violin lessons.

Extra-national uniformity is a bit more limited but similar. I can find no reasonable way of convincing my six-year-old Newfoundlander of the incongruity when she sings along with Bruce Springsteen's "Born in the USA." I consider myself an ardent nationalist but, as Garner lamented, when dealing with mass culture in general, as opposed to elite culture or regional examples of mass or popular culture such as a local character or event, the battle against the Americans is not only unwinnable but unbeginnable. As

far as the greatest part of mass culture is concerned, and especially rock music, she *was* born in the USA.

A number of people have written about the popular culture of the middle ages and some others have replied in opposition. The latter claim that we just don't know enough about the period to describe its popular culture, no matter how often we peruse arcane records or how much new archaeological data is uncovered. The same could be said of so-called primitive peoples, although a new branch of study called ethnohistory is doing what it can to reconstruct an overall portrait of their lives. See any of Bruce Trigger's brilliant books on North American native peoples.

So we must retain and consider. I pity those museum curators who are in charge of areas with names such as "Popular Ephemera." *You* try to collect plastic shopping bags with advertising on them. But can you realize how important such items are in understanding how our own primitive culture works?

Sadly, there is not much in these books which is relevant to this importance. The popularistics books (I hope I have not coined another bit of jargon — that is *not* what popular culture needs) are useful, particularly Jensen. McNeil's book is valuable, but more for the popular culture of an earlier age than for today. None of these books will compete with Tom Wolfe's *Kandy-Colored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby*. If you understand just the title, you *know* the 1960's, in Canada as well as in the States. Or with an Australian example, *Hit & Ms*, by Kathy Lette. In the first piece in this collection of newspaper columns, she describes the latest game for women at Sydney cocktail parties, "Spot the Hetero." If we forget the nuances of that little phrase, its comments on feminism, gender orientation, parties, slang — and newspapers, we will forget the 1980's. Let's not.

TERRY GOLDIE

MICHEL BEAULIEU 1941-1985

MICHEL BEALIEU EST MORT en juillet 1985, en plein été, d'une crise cardiaque. Son dernier livre, avec sa couverture bleu sombre et son titre, *Kaléidoscope* (Le Noroît, 1984), prend alors une signification inattendue, une épaisseur que je ne lui aurait peut-être pas accordée à première lecture. Ce qui est moins connu, c'est le sous-titre qu'il a choisi à son (dernier) recueil, un sous-title digne de rendre compte non seulement de ces soixante-quatre textes ici réunis mais aussi de l'ensemble de sa production littéraire: "Les aléas du corps grave."

Ce recueil parle d'écriture, d'amour et de villes quasi-imaginaires dans lesquelles le lecteur est convié à un soliloque bavard sur la quotidienneté, sur le monde rêvé à l'échelle des faits et gestes familiers, non pas cette ville de la quincaillerie moderniste ou rockeuse à la mode, mais plutôt ces lieux où vagabonde la rêverie, ces lieux où l'on s'abandonne aux souvenirs plus ou moins insignifiants des va-et-vient d'une poète doux, sensible, rarement seul et un peu fatigué de constater encore et toujours l'inconsistance du temps qui passe, la minceur des relations amoureuses, la petitesse des passions, la sévérité du jour qui tombe:

> et tu le dis
> qu'elle te suivrait au bout
> du monde si seulement tu
> le lui demandais tu regardes
> au loin les arbres bruissent
> de l'autre côté du terrain
> de stationnement les mots
> dans les deux cas d'une langue
> abominée vous échappent
> brèves rafales où les doigts
> suppléent à la bouche bientôt

remplie d'un baiser
la fenêtre capte le bruit

Dans ce recueil, *Kaléidoscope*, la mort semble avoir été prévue. Avant le silence, il a fallu rappeler les principaux titres du même auteur et inclure une courte biographie. On y apprend qu'il est né à Montréal en 1941, qu'il s'est occupé très activement du *Quartier latin*, journal bihebdomadaire des étudiants de l'Université de Montréal, que la bibliothèque familiale était bien fournie en poésie, tant française que québécoise, qu'il va fonder les éditions Estérel dès 1965, là où vont paraître les premiers titres de Victor-Lévy Beaulieu, Nicole Brossard, et Raoul Duguay (donc de futurs écrivains qui feront leur marque au Québec et qui déja ne font pas école, ce contre quoi Michel Beaulieu s'est toujours défendu, cet esprit de chapelle ou de ghetto) ; on sait également qu'il va quitter le comité de rédaction de *La barre du jour* pour fonder, en 1967, avec quatre autres confrères dissidents, l'éphémère revue *Quoi*, puis, aprés quelques années consacrées à l'édition et au journalisme (à *Perspectives*, au *Devoir*, au *Jour*), il participe à la fondation de la revue *Jeu* en 1975, réussit à faire radiodiffuser une quinzaine de pièces dramatiques à Radio-Canada et à faire monter son unique pièce de théâtre au Quat'Sous en 1976: *Jeudi soir en pleine face*, co-produite avec l'équipe du Théâtre de la Manufacture. Enfin, à partir de là, son travail constant d'écriture poétique se voit doubler de celui de la traduction, de la critique littéraire et de lecteur (à la revue *Estuaire*). Michel Beaulieu s'est également mérité beaucoup d'honneur: ses poèmes ont été traduits en plusieurs langues et lui ont valu de nombreux prix: *Variables* lui a valu le prix de la revue *Etudes françaises* en 1973, *Desseins* celui du *Journal de Montréal* en 1981, et celui du Gouverneur général avec *Visages* en 1982.

Les lecteurs de poésie viennent de perdre un excellent écrivain. Sa voix m'a toujours paru un peu éteinte, dans le sens qu'elle n'est pas de celle des grands ténors de la littérature ni de ceux qui bousculent. Eteinte, cette voix n'en est pas moins porteuse, efficace, porteuse de promesses sans cesse poursuivies:

tu vois à l'oeil que le poème
n'entrera pas en son entier
dans le cadre indifférent
à tant de ratures

C'est ainsi que l'écriture se manifeste à chaque virage de la rêverie, chaque fois que l'occasion d'écrire se présente. C'est parfois un peu agaçant mais le rythme est maintenu, la passion toujours prête à s'inscrire, mais toujours tenue à distance. D'ailleurs, le "tu" est de rigueur dans tout le recueil, un "tu" qui n'est autre que le sujet même du soliloque qui se met à distance, qui se réfléchit, qui se mire dans mille et un détails d'un réel diffracté. Il arrive que le "tu" soit un interlocuteur autre que lui-même, féminin le plus souvent, ce qui permet des libertés et des fuites, des ricochets d'impressions.

Une voix éteinte: elle joue sur le mode mineur, tiraillée entre le découpage métrique (quoique libre) et le respect de la syntaxe (jusqu'à la soumission pure et simple), porteuse aussi d'une imagerie très peu audacieuse, mais efficace dans ce respect même du mode, du ton, susceptible de maintenir une ambiance, une attention "grave" et distante aux paysages qui s'y trouvent évoqués.

ROBERT GIROUX

MARIAN ENGEL 1933-1985

THOUGH THE DEATH of Marian Engel, on 16 February 1985, after a long struggle with cancer, was not totally unexpected,

it was felt in the literary community like a sudden withdrawal of current, a dimming of lights. This consciousness of the loss of a distinct vitality is still with us. Marian did not go gently. There was no folding up of tents here, but rather the feisty determination to be taken, if at all, in midsentence, to leave her voice still ringing. She has left those of us who knew her and respected her work with a continuing regret for a life too early, a unique voice too soon interrupted.

Born in Toronto in 1933, Marian Passmore was raised in various towns in Ontario, where her father worked as a high school teacher. She managed to take every course in English Lit. which McMaster University offered and still emerge with a degree in French and German, in 1955. At McGill University she completed a thesis on Canadian Literature under the guidance of Hugh McLennan, and received her M.A. in 1957. Subsequently, she taught at Acadia University, Montana State University at Missoula, and The Study School in Montreal. In 1961 she attended the University of Aix-Marseille at Aix en Provence, on a Rotary Scholarship. For a period she taught in private schools in England, and worked as a Financial Translator.

In 1962 she married Howard Engel, with whom she travelled to Nicosia, Cyprus, where she taught at the St. John's School. On their return to Canada Marian eventually gave birth to twins, Charlotte and William, and settled in to the hectic life of a mother and housewife who is also a socially conscious and political human being, as well as, beyond all this, but permeating all, a constantly working writer. She explored genres, writing in the third floor attic of the house on Brunswick, often able to find time to work only at night. Once — viscisitudes of motherhood — she described to me the night when she looked up from her work and saw outside the attic window, hanging from the roof, little son William grinning in at her.

In those early years she wrote plays, radio documentaries, journalism, children's stories, and finally found her preferred forms in the novel and short story, though she could still turn her hand, in needy times, and produce craftswomanly prose in whatever form required. In 1968 she published *No Clouds of Glory* (since re-issued as *Sarah Bastard's Notebook*), in 1970 *The Honeyman Festival*, *Monodromos* (since re-issued as *One Way Street*) in 1973, and *Inside the Easter Egg* in 1975. These early works are striking particularly for the crisp elegance of their prose and the surprising depths which she could suggest beneath the apparently ordinary surfaces of the heroines who carried the burden of her stories.

At this period Marion Engel was playing a key role in the organization of The Writers Union of Canada and became its first Chairperson. She spearheaded the still continuing battle for writers to receive compensation for library use of their works. A staunch member of the NDP she was active in civic politics and on the City of Toronto Library Board. Separated from her husband, she was finally divorced in 1977.

The 1976 publication of the brilliant novel *Bear* won her at last the serious attention she deserved. This fable of mythic proportions, realistically dressed for maximum viability in the Canadian cultural climate, brought her a certain amount of notoriety as well as the Governor General's Award for Fiction in 1976. Daring in conception, masterful in stylistic control, perfect in pitch, it established the mature craft found in her next two novels, *The Glassy Sea* (1978) and *Lunatic Villas* (1981). The former is a serious examination of female isolation and spiritual need, and the latter a kind of unbuttoned "Tempest"-like mature comedy of a large hearted and slightly

fuddle-headed collector of stray children who lives on a street in Toronto where palpable, if zany, people conduct their lives with a sense of magic and possibility always hovering and sometimes even descending to illuminate their days with small, bearable miracles. The variety of these two works hints at the worlds which Marian Engel might yet have created for us.

The last time I saw Marian, in her home some four days before her final trip to the hospital, she said to me suddenly just as I had risen to leave, "You know I've figured out why I haven't been able to finish my novel. I'm afraid that when I finish it I'll die." And then very quickly, with a mischievous grin, "So I've begun to make notes for my new novel."

I was so grateful that she'd given me something to be enthusiastically encouraging about that I left with the conviction that the gambit could even work. There was so much vitality here that she might indeed be able to pull that novel from the teeth of the ultimate brute. And then why not another? It was the cocky line of an indomitable lady, but Death had not the imagination to play Sultan to her Scheherazade. And we are the losers.

ADELE WISEMAN

PERSONAL COMPUTERS & PERSONAL PROGRAMS

THE ADVENT OF the personal computer has created two quite distinct opportunities for the people who buy them. The first opportunity is symbolized, in effect, by a large software industry that produces a myriad of computer games, learning programs, word-processing programs, and so on. The second opportunity is symbolized by the personal computer itself sitting fresh and new on one's desk.

An issue of personal freedom arises in the context of this heady market, an issue that is rarely (if ever) aired in newspapers, magazines, or journals. It is, moreover, an invisible issue because people, especially new consumers of home computer hardware and software, are most hynotized by what might be called the hardware/software mystique: if the average consumer is unable singlehandedly to produce hardware as sophisticated as a modern computer, then he or she must be equally inept in the production of software. The attitude is slightly overstated but it results in a condition of creative bondage that can only be called software slavery. To make matters worse, there is little incentive to write programs of one's own when seemingly every conceivable program for home computers has already been written. This is very far from the truth, especially when personal computers are viewed as vehicles of personal expression. It is probably overly optimistic to suggest that an era of personal programs is about to succeed the era of personal computers. For one thing it is hardly in the interest of the home computer software industry to encourage consumers to write their own programs. Given the by now traditional interdependence of the hardware and software sectors, one cannot expect salvation from the producers of hardware either. Finally, learning to write programs is not an easy task.

Two years of experience as the author of *Scientific American*'s (apparently popular) Computer Recreations column has brought the existence of software slaves to my attention. Every time I described a programming project that produced spectacular visual results or spurred fascinating intellectual quests, there were letters from hundreds of readers asking

where they might get a copy of the program described. Would I be kind enough to send them one? Did I know of a company that distributed the program? To all my answer was a firm "No." This sounds harsh, perhaps, but I was acting out of pedagogical instincts; they would learn only by doing. They would do, of course, only when they learned how easy it was to write the programs I was suggesting. But how to break out of this vicious circle? As an experiment I wrote a special column in the April 1985 issue of *Scientific American* entitled "Five Easy Pieces." The article featured five easy programming projects. The first was so easy that a person of average intelligence could have written it within an hour or two of picking up a BASIC manual. The mail from that column has so far totalled approximately 3000 pieces (all of which had to be answered), more than twice the amount produced by any column before or since. The great majority of letters concerned the first easy piece: I had asked readers to write a program that simulated the firing of a cannon at random into a round pond occupying the middle of a square field. After taking a thousand shots, they were to count the number of splashes, so to speak, and divide the sum by 250. The result would be an estimate of *pi*, the famous transcendental number expressing the ratio of a circle's circumference to its diameter.

Naturally, the program was described not only in these colourful terms but in terms of the few commands that would be needed actually to write it. I do not know how many of the readers responding had just written their first program but, judging from the almost pathetically pleased tone of their letters, I think a great many of them must have.

Sherry Turkle, in her book *The Second Self*, outlines the steps by which children acquaint themselves with computers. The mystery of the machine is followed by mastery over it. In the process, the child's world view and self-image are reflected in the computer through the manner of interaction with it. There are "hard masters" who revel in the sense of control over the machine and "soft masters" who are led to explore the machine's potential by moving from one satisfying experience to the next. Among adults one finds similar tendencies. Historically, it was the hard masters who set the personal computer revolution in motion during the 1970's by making computers out of kits and then writing various systems programs that expanded the capabilities of their machines. This school continues to dominate the many computer magazines still in print; one sees endless ads for new hardware, technical reviews, articles that describe new ways to store files, communicate with other computers, compile programs, and so on. All of this represents a turning inward of the computer upon itself with seemingly no awareness of the vast world of ideas open for exploration. An apt analogy involves the youth of the 1950's who so enjoyed tinkering with his roadster that he never took it for a drive. Countless potential soft masters have been turned away from their birthright by the casual perusal of such magazines at the newstand. Frightening. Complex.

This article is not only about personal programs but soft masters. The world of the hard master is very limited compared to the universe of ideas and issues that can be explored with a personal computer. For each model currently on the market there are friendly, companionable programming manuals (often not the ones supplied by the manufacturer) that offer instruction and advice on a variety of levels. Unfortunately, there seem to be very few books that supply worthy projects for future soft masters.

We await their coming, books that initiate personal explorations in word manipulation, planetary motion, drawing faces that change expression, simulating predator-prey ecologies, composing sixteenth century counterpoint, tracing the intricate shape of simple formulas, testing technical strategies in the stock market, analysing writing style, generating story plots, playing go-moku, operating an ant-colony, . . . (The list is apparently endless. My article-generating program continued for two more pages before I realized that it might never stop.)

A. K. DEWDNEY

*** JACK KAPICA, ed., *Shocked and Appalled: a Century of Letters to the Globe and Mail*. Lester & Orpen Dennys, $19.95. Americans write their Congressman when they're shocked and appalled; Canadians write the Editor of their local paper. I'm fond of a letter that appeared recently in the *Sun*, from someone who justified the postal rate increase on the grounds of its being a storage fee. There are letters that sting, letters that amuse, sensible letters, and letters that explain everything by referring to the approximate shape of the earth. This collection of addresses to the *Globe & Mail* (from the 1880's to the 1980's) turns into quite a miscellany. The letters concern Riel and rebirth, declare that "There is not a Canadian literature because there is no Canada," and attack the poetics of a verse tribute to Sir John A.; they offer sketches of Egypt, correct spelling, complain that "obey" has been dropped from marriage vows, object to the idea that the peony should replace the maple as a national emblem, and offer a whole series of suggestions for the National Bird: junco, goose, sparrow, owl, stork, chickadee, robin, jay, dove, grouse, hawk . . . (and beaver?). J. E. H. MacDonald writes on painting, Merrill Denison writes on the wilderness, Stephen Leacock writes about the CBC's general manager, Norman Levine about hidden censorship, Hugh MacLennan on separatism and American annexation, Murray Schafer on loons and the national soundscape. There are letters from David Helwig and Pierre Berton, Eugene Forsey and Hugh Hood — and by a host of other people. The book is an engaging glimpse of the issues that really get people going; it contains many of the real voices of Canadian culture, and (like the "Letters" columns of the local paper) it is a delight to read.

W.N.

**** JEFFREY SIMPSON & GED MARTIN, *The Canadian Guide to Britain*, vol. 1. Macmillan, $24.95. The title is slightly misleading: Wales is included (Scotland will be the subject of vol. 2). But the substance of entries in this directory of Canadian connections with England is fascinating. There are brief comments on Lowry and Leacock, Carleton and Murray, Frobisher, Francis Dickens, and scores of others — but the most engaging moments are the unexpected ones: the recipe for Snail Tea, a medicinal concoction Mrs. Wolfe brewed up for her sickly son, James; or the college song for a Borstal school that sent boys to Canada ("Australia and Canada thrill with our fame, / And the kangaroo leaps at the sound of our name . . . "). This is pop history for the inquisitive traveller, well-researched (if incomplete), and ably told.

W.N.

A set of reference works particularly valuable to literary historians and aficionados of the book trade is the group of Gale works devoted to commentary on literary journals. *The Literary Journal in America to 1900* ($62.00), *The English Literary Journal to 1900* ($62.00), and *English Literary Journals, 1900-1950* ($60.00) combine discursive reflections on periodical history with specific data (concerning dates and editors) about listed journals, and with annotated bibliographic listings that bear on each journal. Journals such as *Scribner's* and the *North American Review* are listed — periodicals that attracted a number of nineteenth-century writers; the bibliography amply aids research into this (often ephemeral) territory.

W.N.

*** *Fingerprints*. Irwin, $12.95. A collection of tales by the Crime Writers of Canada, this anthology offers a generally sprightly collection of mysteries, thriller, political intriques, and tough romances. Most impressive are the two Iron Curtain stories — riddled with ironies both structural and political — by Anna Sandor and Josef Skvorecky. The one other standout — for its chiselled prose, its artful control of time — is the story by Sandra Woodruff.

W.N.

** BERNARD GUNN, *The Timetables of History*. General, $25.95. This book is an extended version of those "time-lines" that always appear in a survey-of-English-literature text. Under a set of columns (labelled Literature and Theatre, History and Politics, Religion and Philosophy, Science and Technology, Visual Arts and Music, and Daily Life), it lists events and publications, setting out, over 700 pages, who did what concurrently — from 5000 B.C. to A.D. 1978. It's a wonderful idea, and it's a handy resource book for anyone who can't remember offhand the names of Bach's contemporaries in science and literature, or who wants to trace changes in human attitude and experience. The volume is international — by which I mean it does refer to Asian history, but the focus is European and culture does come off as something of a Western invention. When you probe a bit more, other unstated biases appear. "Science" in the twentieth century, for example, is constituted primarily of people who won Nobel prizes — prizes frequently awarded for a lifetime's research — which means that for recent decades the new "discoveries" of any particular year are not noted at all. Similarly, History and Literature in the twentieth century are primarily American; we find out the date and title of a book by Dwight Eisenhower, for example, and there's lots of data on Chris Evert, the Dallas Cowboys, and other worthies of contemporary culture. But while literature crosses the Atlantic, it has difficulty with other borders. Patrick White appears twice, yet only *after* he won the Nobel Committee's endorsement. And nowhere is there any mention of a Canadian writer — no Lowry, no Frye, no McLuhan, let alone Atwood and Hébert. The bias is even more deep-seated. To look up the entries covering the War of 1812 is to find that the Americans won the battles at York and New Orleans. No mention of the fact that Canadians defeated the Americans at the battles of Queenston Heights and Châteauguay. "Chrysler's Farm" appears, but not "Crysler's," as it should be. This is not revisionist history; it's just history blind to the fact that the use of the word "world" in a phrase like "World Series" is an American usage, and that it only *means* "world" to an American mind. For everyone else, there are different perspectives.

W.N.

** CLAIRE HOY, *Bill Davis: A Biography*. Methuen. It may be that as people politicians are not radically different from others, but their biographies are certainly in a class of their own. With writers and artists, for instance, where the process of creation is often ongoing until death, it is debatable whether an effective biography is possible until the life is ended and enough time had passed for the subject's repute to settle like an old house into its final shape. Books like Elspeth Cameron's life of Hugh MacLennan inevitably have a tentative feeling, since there is no knowing what the subject will do to change or expand our final view of him. With politicians it is different, since their lives are dependent on the tides of political fortune; they are interesting when they are in power. But who thinks of them again when they retire into private life? How often, for example, does one give a thought now to Pierre Trudeau? And for this reason a biography of a politician before his death is entirely appropriate, and it is best of all either when he is at the height of his power (as was the case with Trudeau when Richard Gwyn wrote *The Northern Magus*) or when he is just on the point of departure, which prompted Claire Hoy to write his biography of Bill Davis. *Bill Davis* conveys admirably the kind of inspired ordinariness which often makes the most successful politician. Intellectually, Bill Davis is no great shakes, but he is shrewd, pragmatic, and he has never let principles get in the way of gathering votes. His long rule proved that one does not have to be a philosopher — king or not — to hold on to power, and holding on to power, despite all pretences to the contrary, is the politician's main objective. As a picture of a man, *Bill Davis* is not very interesting, because successful politicians automatically submerge whatever real selves they have behind their public masks, but as a study of political manipulation, which is what really interests one in the former master of the Big Blue Machine, it is a knowing and interesting book.

G.W.

LAST PAGE

ENTERTAINMENTS: I like the *Fraggle Rock Calendar* (CBC Enterprises, $7.95) for Bruce McNally's splendid illustrations, but the texts of Fraggle readers (*The Radish Day Jubilee* and others) pale beside the speed of the programmes themselves: the stories need the visual accompaniment, and sound, to be of any more than passing interest.

The books of cartoons by two of the most successful of current Canadian cartoonists — Jim Unger and Lynn Johnston (both published by Andrews & McNeel) — are marvellous precisely because they manage so shrewdly to marry visual nuance with cultural observation. Unger's *Herman, you were a much stronger man on our FIRST honeymoon* is more astringent than Johnston's *It Must Be Nice to Be Little*. Unger relies on the exaggeration and bureaucratic denseness, Johnston on the normative nature of domestic chaos; between them they lay open a good many of the foibles of contemporary life. Unger portrays a man with a bow tie on his head, looking like rabbit ears; an Official Person says to him, "We've had to remove your brain for a couple of days, so just try to relax." Art criticism comes in for its own, too. An Unger character looks at a Roman bust and says, "Was he as short as that in real life?" Johnston's character is less phlegmatic, but no more in control: "I don't care what you saw at the art gallery," she says, "— from now on you make your snowmen with their clothes *on*." I also like Trevor Hutching's cartoons in *Funny Things, Computers* (Lorimer, $6.95): Merlin the magician discovered using a home computer, a dog barking at electronic mail. But the line between funny and schlock is sometimes too thin, and Hugh Brewster and John Forbes' *The Complete Hoser's Handbook* (Prentice-Hall, $8.95) crosses it: "The Shrine Monument to Maria Chapdestick in Kakatoque, Quebec" is a Nudge joke that never got out of the "Wouldn't it be funny if?" stage . . . the answer is no.

W.N.

REPRINT SEASON is recurrently upon us: everything from Terry Sturm's admirably edited *Portable Christopher Brennan* (Univ. of Queensland, $25.00; pa. $14.95) and André Siegfried's *Democracy in New Zealand* (Victoria Univ. Press, $16.50NZ, with notes by David Hamer) to Joy Cowley's striking novel *The Growing Season* (Oxford, $10.95) and Bill Scott's *The Penguin Book of Australian Humorous Verse* ($9.95). Scott assembles a motley stew of bush songs and contemporary parodies — "The Ballad of Bloodthirsty Bessie" is here, along with a version of Horace on Bondi Beach, C. J. Dennis's "The Australbloodyaise," and a Bruce Dawe Beatitude that opens "Blessed are the files marked ACTION in the INWARD tray. . . . " Sturm delves bravely into the work of a poet more widely admired in Australia than outside it, but manages to give Brennan a more interesting face than usual by selecting instructive passages from his letters and reviews to accompany the lines of verse. Siegfried, the French political analyst who also visited Canada at the turn of the century, turns a hopeful but shrewd eye on social structure and social behaviour in the British Dominions, and his comments are still relevant today.

Reprints, selections, autobiographies, obituaries: so often the eye is cast back over time to retrieve person and history, and to sustain the person and the present. M. H. Holcroft's *The Way of a Writer* (Cape Catley, $19.95) is a rather woodenly told set of personal recollections (*then, then*: meetings and partings); Graham Greene's *Getting to Know the General* (Lester & Orpen Dennys, $16.95), by contrast, lives up to its subtitle ("The *Story* of an Involvement"). It is a memoir of a political and personal drama, a dramatic account of Greene's encounter with Panama in the 1970's and with its leader, Omar Torrijos Herrera; it is at once a tribute to a friendship and a testament to the intricacies of power and connection in Central America.

Vincent O'Sullivan's play *Shuriken* (Victoria Univ. Press, $7.50) looks back at World War II, and at the Japanese military code, in order to examine the issue of culture conflict, to consider how public expectations as well as overt structures influence misunderstanding. Lauris Edmond's *Selected Poems* (Oxford, $14.95) traces the poet's "exact and judicious magic" of imaginative creation; most characteristically, Edmonds responds in tranquility to observed scene, remembered event. *The Remembering of the Elements* (Wai-te-Ata, $6.75) is more personal still — the last poems of the late Judith Lonie, the whole collection struggles with images of framing (being "put in the picture") and of disintegration; among them is a chilling four-line verse called "Loneliness": "Mother's looking pale and thin: / God put baby brother in the rubbish tin. / Daddy says nothing but his eyes are grim / / I'm the only one didn't want him." Even in memory there is separation.

Many works of biography and criticism are acts of memory, too, from Kristin Brady's competent attempt to come to terms with *The Short Stories of Thomas Hardy* (Macmillan, $20.85), resurrecting a world-view from the pages of Hardy's Tales, to Bill Pearson's Macmillan-Brown Lectures, *Rifled Sanctuaries* (Univ. of Auckland, $11.45), a splendid account of early Western literary responses to the Pacific Islands: Pearson lays bare the

views of the Utopianists, the Evangelical aspirers, and the erotic novelists who made of Polynesia a militant playground for prurient domination, Jan Morris's *Journeys* (Oxford, $15.95) collects essays on Miami, Australia, and a dozen other places, demonstrating by the liveliness of phrasing, the pertinence of detail, the personality of connection, just why she is one of the finest travel writers today. Clement Semmler writes an extended biography of the life and times of Australia's "Robert Service," A. B. Paterson, in *The Banjo of the Bush* (Univ. of Queensland, $25.00); Geoffrey Dutton, in *Snow on the Saltbush* (Penguin, $9.95) — a book that Canadian literary people ought to read and absorb — reflects on the significance of literary experience to the character of Australian culture: "life and times" for Dutton refers not only to politics and persons, but also to the quarrels and coincidences that connect popular presumptions with academic pursuits. Dutton reflects on the roles of editors, quarterlies, the popular press, little magazines, school readers, patrons, bookshops, and all. It's a remarkable achievement.

Shamsul Islam's *Chronicles of the Raj* (Gage, £15.00) is a brief account of Forster and Masters and others who observed the decline of the Imperial Notion. A. W. Baker's *Death Is A Good Solution* (Univ. of Queensland, $37.50) surveys the field of convict literature, and is particularly valuable for its appendices, schematically coding various elements in factual and fictional British criminal biographies from the 1790's to the 1860's. And Janet Davidson's well illustrated *The Prehistory of New Zealand* (Longman Paul, $39.95) is an act of scholarly memory, using geological and archaeological evidence to present what is currently known about Maori life and culture before the arrival of Europeans. There is data here on origins, language, settlement, lineage, conflict, disease, cultivation, and design, all articulated with cool clarity. Like the indigenous peoples of Canada, the Maori were a people with a substantive history, about which Davidson writes both with cause and with interest.

As we have noted before, Virago Press has been admirably championing another kind of historical redress, by reprinting and reassessing literary works by women. One of the most recent reprints is that engaging work of fashionable whimsy from the 1890's, *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*, by Elizabeth von Arnim, the Countess Russell, cousin of Katherine Mansfield — but as the reprint makes clear, some of what appears to be Contrived Attitude in the book is a covert cry against the rituals of domesticity. Such works become, then, not merely texts made newly available, nor are they solely valuable for their documentary sociology; they are also challenges to critical methodology, and to the very presumptions we bring to the conventions of reading. The ongoing rediscovery of Robin Hyde (Iris Wilkinson) in New Zealand is served by a press comparable to Virago in its commitment, The New Women's Press of Auckland, which has just released *Dragon Rampant*, Hyde's observant 1939 account of her travels in China during the Sino-Japanese war. As her editor, Linda Hardy, notes, the book can be read for its reportorial coverage, but also for its implicit account of a woman in search of the freedom to move unencumbered by irrelevant preconceptions. Hyde's *Selected Poems*, ed. Lydia Wevers (Oxford, $16.95), gathers a body of poetry long unavailable and worth reconsideration; familiar images of Persephone-in-winter are here, together with a trained diction: "I am sorry I planted the memory tree / In the cool of the garden shade. / . . . / I would be more than a ghost / To your memory yet. . . ." Most present in the volume, however, is the author's own voice, wrestling with images of cage and tide, doors and rain, struggling to articulate the real nature of defeat in words that declare fragmented but active resistance. A third book, *A Home in This World*, is an autobiographical account of the early 1930's, published for the first time (Longman Paul, $19.95). It tells of the depression that dogged Hyde's life, and of the conformist pressures that invaded and shaped her world even while she claimed freedom; a volunteer mental patient at the beginning of the decade, Hyde fled from "treatment" to the "home" her title speaks of. It is a place of accommodation but not exactly of peace; her metaphors speak of belonging and of intrusion, together. "Words are daggers." And what she values, finally, she locks away.

There's one more kind of memory; it's the sort represented by the Festschrift and The Celebratory Issue. In 1985, *Poetry Australia* turned 21. For many of those years the preserve of Grace Perry (poet, doctor, individualist, rural dynamo, literary renegade), the journal has been home to talent of many different poetic persuasions, and to poets from anyplace as well as from Australia. In her openness to talent, to the commands of poetic voice rather than to the dictates of received

convention, Grace Perry helped transform modern Australian poetry, freeing it from its conservative diction and giving it space to swing its idioms in. It's been a commitment for Perry as a woman of science as well as a poet of passion: "Can you *feel* it?" has always been coupled with "Does it make any *sense*?" Sometimes she turned an issue of the journal over to a whole book, a single writer — most recently in No. 99 (John Millett's splendid *Come down Cunderdang*, a broken poetic sequence in which the world of the country racetrack becomes the arena for cultural history), and No. 97 (*A Face in Your Hands*, a book of lyrics by Craig Powell, long a resident of Canada). Issue No. 100 is a miscellany of tributes and poems, a small cross-section of contemporary Australian verse, from patriarch A. D. Hope to the established, the unknown, and the young. We wish the journal more contributors, more subscribers, and a long life.

THERE ARE LITERARY MYTHS of many kinds. One is that, if you are an able and visible writer like Roald Dahl, you will necessarily be a good anthologist: unhappily *Roald Dahl's Book of Ghost Stories* (Cape, $17.95) is boring. It's a collection of coincidence-stories, with no ghosts of consequence and no chills of expectation. There is more chill, in fact, in the fantastic realities of Ninotchka Rosca's *The Monsoon Collection* (Univ. Queensland, $16.50); in nine linked stories, Rosca — a Philippine writer now "travelling" — writes sometimes awkwardly of bizarre changes in people's daily routines (a monsoon causes a worm invasion, a postal clerk becomes a bomber), but she is clipped and effective in her intervening vignettes of political rebellion and political repression.

Politics is another source of myths. *The Oxford Illustrated History of Britain*, ed. K. O. Morgan ($29.95), indicates how some of them develop. The book (only adequately illustrated, with various prints — of Roman tiles, Beatles posters) is a collection of ten separately-authored chronological chapters. What emerges is a two-tiered story: a myth of evolution and benevolent Empire (in which, incidentally, scarce mention is given to Canada either as a possession or as a political construction), and a chronicle of religion and law, which is shown really to be a chronicle of occupation and ownership, mainly of land. Yet the importance of the conflict between these two is never addressed. V. S. Pritchett's *The Oxford Book of Short Stories* ($31.50), a decent but slightly lopsided collection, claims to include writings from the Commonwealth as well as from England and America, and moreover, to include those stories that contribute to "the art" rather than depict "the native scene." But the editorial judgement is compromised by a taste apparently shaped before 1940: "modern" Commonwealth writers turn out to be a Callaghan and Narayan, and are present (quite respectably, but misleadingly) in the company of Saki and William Trevor. A reference book like *Commonwealth Literature* (Gage, $13.50) — a biobibliocritical guide to some 132 writers — shows how the Eurocentric bias unconsciously extends to commentary as well. The book is disappointingly out-of-date in entries (Robert Service is in, Munro and Gallant are out; there is no Gee, no Rushdie) but it is even more so in attitude: the aim is *corrective* and *centralist* — to show "how many writers there are *out there*." Modern writers, meanwhile, are shaping centres and perspectives of their own.

American-centred works run their own risks. Twayne's *The American Short Story 1945-1980 A Critical History*, ed. Gordon Weaver, is a fragmentary tripartite attempt to name names and encapsulate literary quality, but can succeed in little more. There is a kind of desperation about its lists and its speed, but even that serves a purpose. The book led me (happily) to the work of Russell Banks and the recent stories of Paul Bowles, and though many other leads proved barren, that does not nullify its function. The bibliography, however, has special quirks. It omits Clark Blaise and Jane Rule under its list of American Story-writers of the period (Fine, you say); but it does list Leon Rooke, Mavis Gallant, and Alice Munro — the last of these (bibliographers be warned) for a book called *The Beggar Mind*. Joseph and Johanna Jones' well-intentioned books *Australian Fiction* and *New Zealand Fiction* (both from Twayne) also suffer from the survey impulse: fastening on descriptive themes, they organize the fiction accordingly and leave out too much detail. Similar constraints affect other Twayne books — Dorothy Blair's *Senegalese Literature* (a serious treatment of a limited body of work), Catherine B. Stevenson's *Victorian Women Travel Writers in Africa* (from Mary Kingsley to Lady Barker: Stevenson's comments range from notes to extended analyses, in an uneven attempt to solve by relative allocations of space the problem of significance that surveys create), John Weigel's *Patrick White* (simply a reader's guide to plot struc-

tures), and Robert Wren's *J. P. Clark* (most interesting as an American's reaction to Clark's *America, Their America*). Stephen Gray's *Douglas Blackburn* shows what happens in a good Twayne book: it is a reinvestigation of the world of a writer who fabricated his own biographical data (cf. Grove), and a solid survey of the romances, operettas, pamphlets, columns, history, reviews, socialist causes, secret service work, and the satiric Sarel Erasmus trilogy, all of which shaped and expressed Blackburn's career. Gray thus rescues Blackburn from obscurity of several kinds, literary and political; more importantly, he writes extremely well. Crisp and clear, he makes literature sound interesting. As it sometimes is.

Political myths, moreover, often take on visual images, acquire populist form, affect both literature and criticism. "We have a fiction that we live by," writes Vincent O'Sullivan in *The Rose Ballroom and other poems* (John McIndoe, $7.95); "it is the river . . ." — "At every window, fiction / Love at each door." For the satiric New Zealand playwright Greg McFee, the image is less flattering; his society's infatuation with rugby and the rhetoric of hero-worship is summed up in his antiheroic title: *Foreskin's Lament* (Price Milburn, $5.50). The play itself — direct, comic, pathetic, male — unfortunately does not travel well.

Laurie Hergenhan's *Unnatural Lives* (Univ. of Queensland, $19.95) probes a parallel Australian image. He less traces the running theme of convicts in Australian literature (Tucker to White), however, than he effectively probes the literary implications of the *idea*, the *cultural fact*. By contrast, John Docker's *In a Critical Condition* (Penguin, $9.95) takes on the power structure, fastening on critical method. Self-defensive in stance (perhaps too much so), the book constitutes a plea for "whole" criticism, by means of an attack on what Docker claims to be critical hegemonies: a Leavisite and then a similarly exclusive poststructuralist bias which permeates the Australian academy. Canadian critics might reflect on its provocative remarks.

Directly anthropological, Claude Lévi-Strauss in *The Naked Man* (Harper, $12.50, a paperback translation of the 1971 French version), comments on North American Indian cultures, again seeking images of organization. He classifies myths, rituals, and social structures according to what he determines are the binary distinctions of human life at large. But one wonders also within context how exclusive the observations are, wonders at the degree to which binary expectations encode the subsequent analysis before it even takes place. Douglas Gifford's *Warriors Gods and Spirits from Central and South American Mythology* (Douglas & McIntyre, $15.95) is a book of yet another kind, a book of tales aimed at an adolescent market (John Sibbick's illustrations range from awkward drawings to imaginative — animistic? — designs of figures in nature), one which implictly challenges conventional Eurocentrism. One extraordinary Inca tale (Christian, we are advised, but the label is deceptive) shows the embroidery of a mixed culture: it tells of a woman with a snake sister, who aids her to ward off the devil husband who was about to carry her off. It is a tale with various overtones. But the stated moral is perhaps unexpected: Never marry a stranger.

In yet another context, the myths of role and relationship affect the subject and structure of fiction itself. The ten 1940's stories of the Maori writer Jacqueline Sturm, collected as *The House of the Talking Cat* (Brick Row, $6.50), seem rather dated now. But the best reads somewhat like a Joyce Marshall story. Called "Jerusalem, Jerusalem," it tells of a young woman's discovery of a previous generation's difficult choices about sex, love, and satisfaction. Such choice is a recurrent subject. Catherine Helen Spence's *Handfasted*, for example (Penguin, $7.95), though a much earlier book, seems oddly more up to date than Sturm's. An Australian novel submitted to a literary contest in 1879, it was rejected at the time for its immorality, and was not published until now. Reading it is an education in both fashion and social bias. The "immorality" ostensibly was to be found in the practice referred to in the title — "handfasting" is explained as a "trial marriage" of a year and a day — but in retrospect one gets the feeling that the novel was deemed even less acceptable in 1879 because the practice of handfasting *in the story* was the prerogative of *women* to demand. The story tells of a young Australian who travels abroad and discovers a lost Scots colony somewhere southeast of San Francisco. Having lost the Bible and the habit and art of reading and writing, the members of the colony acquire (instead) the skills of humanity and egalitarian government. The young man is attracted to the virtues of such a life and to a young woman in the colony. Handfasting follows. But one of the paradoxes of the book involves its ultimate surrender: of vision, to convention. Spence

finally permits the young man to exercise authority; the woman resists, but at last she gives in — to marriage.

In more recent Australian novels there is something of the same preoccupation. The central character of Barbara Hanrahan's *Kewpie Doll* (Chatto & Windus/Hogarth, £7.95; pa. £3.95) — not an advance on her earlier work — claims to want "instant *now*," to be able to cope with plastic civilization. But the novels show her seeking most to remember her mother — and to find her *father* — and to locate in family a freedom from her terrible and somehow stupefying naive isolation. Thea Astley's *An Item from the Late News* (Univ. of Queensland) uses a more sophisticated style to tell of the sexual violence and male myths of a small town, of an atypical male whose pacifism and passivity make him the townsmen's victim, and in whose murder the female narrator plays her part. Afterwards she grieves, and the novel indicates conventional social role-modelling, but as with Hanrahan and Spence, it also closes declaring (if not exactly asserting) some form of dependence on the male. Glen Tomasetti's *Man of Letters* (Penguin, $6.95), by contrast, is an ironic, articulate, satiric portrait of a university philosopher and writer who fancies he understands women. But he puts down the innuendo and anecdote beloved of the popular culture only to ask for a new form of Galatea. Tomasetti nicely balances his disconcertment (when women are enraged with him) with his apparent need to have his ego stroked. Reality engenders myth in this world; and vice-versa. Following on her first book (*Thoroughly Decent People*), this one shows Tomasetti to be a writer worth watching for again.

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