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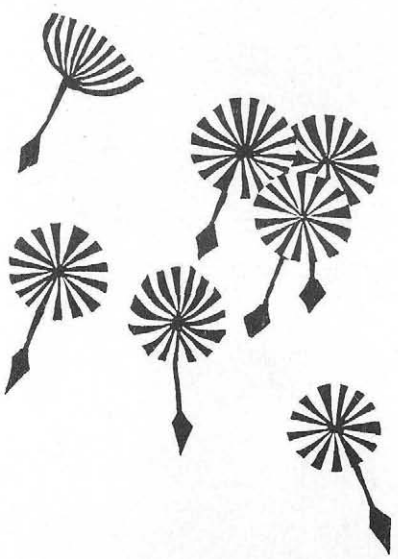

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contents

Editorial: Rear View 2

ARTICLES

FRANK DAVEY
Alternate Stories: The Short Fiction of Audrey Thomas and Margaret Atwood 5

MARY-ANN STOUCK
Structure in Ethel Wilson's *The Innocent Traveller* 17

ERIKA GOTTLIEB
The Riddle of Concentric Worlds in *Obasan* 34

BARBARA GODARD
Tales Within Tales: Margaret Atwood's Folk Narratives 57

EVA-MARIE KRÖLLER
Literary Versions of Emily Carr 87

POEMS

BY ANNE SWANNELL (4, 84), DAVE MARGOSHES (15, 99), TONY COSIER (31, 32), LINDA ROGERS (33, 56), C. SIMRIL (54), DERK WYNAND (55), MICHAEL DENNIS (86), MICHAEL BRIAN OLIVER (99), JOHN V. HICKS (100)

BOOKS IN REVIEW

BY GEORGE WOODCOCK (101), DAVID STAINES (103, 117), ARNOLD E. DAVIDSON (105), JOYCE MARSHALL (107), PATRICIA MERIVALE (108), SHERIE POSESORSKI (110), SUSAN GINGELL (111), RALPH SARKONAK (113), ERIC THOMPSON (115), CHARLES R. STEELE (119, 128), P. MATTHEW ST. PIERRE (121), BRUCE WHITEMAN (124), TERRY WHALEN (126), JEAN-PIERRE DURIX (130), GERALD NOONAN (132), GUY LECOMTE (134), GEORGE MCWHIRTER (135), RICHARD PAUL KNOWLES (137), A. A. DEN OTTER (139), DAVID C. JONES (140), JACK F. STEWART (142), LAURA GROENING (145), KARL JIRGENS (147), ROD ANDERSON (148)

OPINIONS & NOTES

JOHN HULCOOP
Webb's "Water and Light" 151

MARGARET BELCHER
Les Fous de Bassan / In the Shadow of the Wind 159

A. R. CHADWICK & VIRGINIA HARGER-GRINLING
Anne Hébert: Métamorphoses Lutétiennes 165

DAVID ANIDO
Canadian Studies in Italy 170

editorial

REAR VIEW

I WAS SURPRISED TO HEAR George Plimpton commenting recently on the lack of response which is an inevitable condition of the writer's existence. Surely not George Plimpton, with his many masks, his enormous sales, his superbowl subject matter? But there he was, on CBC Radio, reflecting ruefully that authors almost never *see* people reading their books, and seldom *hear* from readers. I turned back with new energy to the forty or fifty titles which seem permanently mounded on *Canadian Literature*'s review desk. If Plimpton feels lonely, what then of the Canadian poet whose second book might sell 500 copies over three years? Somebody should be seen reading that book. Somebody should be heard talking back.

When Bill New invited me to join *Canadian Literature* he asked me to take principal responsibility for reviews, and to think about solutions for the problem of too many books and too little space. I began to flirt with the idea of radically cutting back our reviewing — to feature five or six major reviews in each issue. But within a few months two comments changed my mind. One reader wrote that he always began reading *Canadian Literature* at the back and worked forward (which doesn't say much for the number of readers who might get to the Editorial). Another reader told me she sensed the journal might become exclusively a review journal — a development she would have warmly approved (but one which we are not considering). And of course there was George Plimpton. And the need to talk back. There is a definite place, I thought, for a journal that still *tries* to cover the field, to review every significant work which appears. And for a journal which at the same time emphasizes the *re* in review, that encourages the contemplative review, a putting aside and picking up again, a reflection rather than a summary, a discovering of contexts rather than an instant impression. Reading backwards could be an imitation of the reviewer's turning around to look again. As in a Japanese garden, the perspective going back the way you have just come is entirely different.

But to define "the field" and to define "significant" is the trick, and the impossibility. The problems are familiar to those of us who are teachers as well as stu-

dents, editors as well as the edited, readers as well as writers. Often accidents decide what is reviewed: missed deadlines, unanswered mail, changed addresses, and more surprisingly, the fact that repeatedly requested review copies may never arrive. Such definition by accident has its appeal, but I still would like the authors to be able to hear the talkback.

But while learning to live with accidents, I have found some objectives, and, thus, some ways of defining, have become clearer. Paradoxically, we are trying to solve the problem of too many books in too little space by expanding rather than contracting. We are necessarily having to ask for more package reviews, for reviews which discuss more than one title. Often, particularly in the case of slim volumes of poetry, we send a half-dozen or more books together and ask the reviewer to pick three or four which most deserve attention. This strategy sacrifices comprehensiveness, but it does eliminate many notices that might be uniformly negative — discouraging to writers, and of little interest to readers. More important, we hope by this method to have the decision as to which books should be reviewed made after a careful and attentive reading, rather than after the hurried sampling to which an editor is often forced between a lecture on *Major Barbara* and the office wine and cheese party.

We have become more selective in the way we review, or notice, anthologies and reprinted material. But we have tried to keep pace with translations, from an increasing number of source languages. We are particularly interested in reviewing more titles where the expansion encourages a break with the predictable. We *did* send two books of Vancouver stories to the same reviewer. But we often resist the most obvious combinations — we would happily combine a book of stories about Vancouver with a book of poems about Cape Breton, or with a book on the theory of short fiction, or with a cultural history of changing social patterns in twentieth-century Canada. We are making an extra effort to link works of Canadian literature with studies of other literatures which have no overt connection with Canada. Our hope is to avoid *dirigisme* and still encourage reader and reviewer to discover and invent new contexts for the reading of Canadian literature.

Francess Halpenny's recent examination of Canadian publications in public libraries found that hardly any use university quarterlies such as this for selection. Their approach is, in part, understandable. The delays of quarterly publication, and the *re*viewing which we encourage, mean that *Canadian Literature* is not quite the place to find out what books have just appeared — or what book to buy Uncle Steve for his birthday. But this is a journal in which to speculate about a new surround for a Canadian book. And the Reviews section is also a place to relax intelligently, to risk a hypothesis without having to "on-the-other-hand" it out of existence. Authors often tell us we are the only, or one of the very few journals to review their titles. Our reviewers repeatedly show us the surprising rightness of putting together two books whose connection we could only remotely

intuit. Such discovery is the core of the craft of fine reviewing, and the pleasure of *Canadian Literature*'s rear view, of walking and reading back the way we have just come.

L.R.

THE WRONG QUESTION

Anne Swannell

On the telephone one Sunday,
trying to re-establish contact
after fifteen years, you said
So what have you been doing
with your life?

If you had asked
what I did today
I'd have said
I walked on the beach at Ross Bay
while girl's jeans size ten
swung soapy circles
round boy's jeans size twelve
in the Fairfield Plaza laundromat.
I'd have said the three of us
had pancakes for lunch
and then I took the kids
to Esquimalt to skate
while I went to hear P. K. Page
read at Open Space.

But you did not ask that question
and so I only said
not much

ALTERNATE STORIES

The Short Fiction of Audrey Thomas and Margaret Atwood

Frank Davey

> She knew now that almost certainly, whenever she saw a street musician, either he was blind or lame or leprous or there was a terribly deformed creature, just out of sight, on behalf of whom he was playing his music.[1]

SHORT STORIES HAVE often focused on a character's discovery of a second perspective on experience, as in Mansfield's "The Garden Party" or Joyce's "The Dead," or in Alice Munro's collection *Lives of Girls and Women* in which Del Jordan discovers Garnet French's narrow view of family life, or her mother's vision of herself as "Princess Ida." Often the discovery of such alternate perspectives has marked moments of traumatic insight or dramatic growth for the character, and has — like Del's discovery of Bobby Sheriff's banality — constituted a pivotal or terminal element in the story. In Munro's fiction, as recent criticism by Helen Hoy, Lorraine McMullen, and others[2] has suggested, these moments participate in oxymoronic figures and imply the paradoxical existence of multiple and conflicting "realities" — the train companion who is both a clergyman and a molester, the high school teacher who is both an extrovert and a suicide.

In the short fiction of Audrey Thomas and Margaret Atwood, there are other kinds of alternate stories, secret scripts which characters have written one for another, stories inherited from mythology and literature that become superimposed on characters' lives, stories concealed within symbolic objects, as well as stories the characters have written to rationalize their lives. These "other" stories are contained within the apparent story, becoming ironic participants in it, qualifying it, interrogating it, sometimes working against it. In Atwood the separation between the various "stories" of the characters contributes to the detached tone of many of her fictions and to special uses of language and symbol. In Thomas the presence of multiple "stories" is reflected in disjunctive narratives in which brief "stories" are abruptly contained within or juxtaposed to other "stories."

Most of the fictions of Thomas' first two collections are visibly constructed of variant scripts. In some a second script is implicit in the first, as in "One is One and All Alone" in which the young wife of a British official in Africa enacts a self-assured self to mask pervasive feelings of fear and ineptitude. When she loses a filling from a tooth, this fabricated self, like the tooth, crumbles, exposing the "raw nerves" of her irrational fears. In "A Monday Dream at Alameda Park" a married couple have created the story that they are "very liberated, very liberal" — a story which partly collapses when the husband finds himself drawn into group sex with another couple. In other fictions the alternative scripts are embedded in the first. In "Omo" the embedded diary of one character disqualifies the perceptions of the story's narrator. In "The Albatross" one character, Herman, has composed for himself a life-story of romantic World War II adventure, a story unconnected to his current hope to succeed as a life-insurance salesman. Thomas' text is in turn composed, among other things, of Herman's narrative, the sound track of an insurance company sales film, and another character's parody of Herman's stories. In "Three Women and Two Men" the main text is repeatedly interrupted by the characters' private fictions. "They must have needed to die. It must have been their karma," Peter says of the victims of a mass-murder. Of her husband's careless driving Margaret says "I think he drives that way because he's small. It makes him feel powerful."

> It is easier to conjure up a fairy tale ... than to put one's finger on the pulse of truth. In the tale it is all so easy. I, the princess, and he, the prince. We meet and of a sudden fall in love. There are dragons, of course, and wicked dukes and many other dangers; but these can all be banished, crushed or conquered. We mount the milk-white steed, ride off into the silver dawn. No sequel; nothing sordid. When the storytellers say 'The end' they mean it. Never the names of Cinderella's children.

LIKE THE NARRATOR of "A Winter's Tale," most of Thomas' characters find it easier to "conjure up" a false story than to accept "the pulse of truth." As here, the false story is usually fabricated of familiar materials. "Loving is letting go," writes Peter in "Three Women and Two Men." The bulk of these materials are those of romance, especially the fairy tale and Shakespearean comedy. The reference points include Shakespeare's *A Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest* ("A Winter's Tale," "Xanadu," and "Omo"), folk tales like Cinderella ("A Winter's Tale," "Crossing the Rubicon"), Andersen's "The Snow Queen" ("Elephants to Ride Upon"), *The Nibelungenlied* ("Aquarius"), the tales collected by the brothers Grimm ("Rapunzel," "Natural History"), and John Donne's love poems ("Aquarius," "A Monday Dream at Alameda Park," "The More Little Mummy in the World").

In *Ten Green Bottles* and *Ladies & Escorts* men and women seem equally vulnerable to the roles demanded by these inherited fictions, and greet these roles with varying amounts of insight. Unlike the female mental patients of "Salon des Refusés" who unquestioningly prefer their delusions of wealth and love to the facts of their actual conditions, the young woman of "A Winter's Tale" can see that her life is but a poor imitation of romantic fantasy. In "Elephants to Ride Upon" a young man who feels forced back together, after several months separation, with a young woman he has made pregnant, projects onto her and himself stereotypically evil roles — "an ice maiden, the snow queen."

> He remembered how in the old romances the beautiful maiden turns into a hag if the wrong questions are asked, if the right answers are not given. He stood now, defeated, horrified to discover that he hated her — not only for what she had become, but for what he had become: a false knight, an imposter.

But his discovery that her coldness has been caused mostly by her fear of his family and by her concern for him eventually dissipates his fantasy. The male point of view character of "Aquarius," however, has no sense that, by having variously cast his wife Erica as Brunhilde to his Siegfried, as a vampire who "renewed herself with his passion," as "the very essence of female," as the "barefoot wife" of the romantic artist, he has cheated himself out of ever discovering who this Erica may actually be.

The major change between these collections and the subsequent one, *Real Mothers*, is that in the latter these inherited romantic stories appear most often as stories which women have allowed men to impose upon them. Men are seldom — like the young man of "Elephants to Ride Upon" or the husband of "Aquarius" — presented as being impoverished by such stories, but rather as receiving advantage from them. In "Galatea" and "Out in the Midday Sun" both female protagonists feel as if they have been co-opted into a script written by their husbands. In "Galatea" the woman is a painter who has stopped painting "large canvases full of brutal colours" because these "disturb" her husband, and has "gone back to watercolours" of "decorative" subjects which he finds "less disturbing." Her husband, a womanizing writer, links himself with inherited romance when he defines greatness as "one of those magic pitchers in a fairytale — you pour it out and it is still full to the top." Thomas' title, "Galatea," which invokes the inherited story of the sea-nymph who was bullied by the cyclops Polyphemos, whose lover Acis was pinned by Polyphemos beneath a rock, and who saved Acis by transforming him into a river, casts ironic light on both the narrator and her marriage. The narrator is abused by nothing but her own passivity; the French river she walks beside has never been her lover; the watercolours she paints mark not an historic affinity with sea and water but merely her own weakness.

In "Out in the Midday Sun" the woman is a beginning writer who has married a successful scholar. His script for her is that of the traditional helpmate — "he is

the kind of man," she says, "who will love you only so long as you walk a few steps behind. Only so long as you arrange the dinners and airline tickets. . . . " She has secretly written her own book (that is, written her own story) which has been accepted by a major publisher; her success will unwrite the script he has mentally composed for her. "As soon as she told him," she tells us, as she narrates a peripatetic outer story (that contains in effect both his script and her new book) "he would leave her." In "Timbuktu" Thomas presents the wife of an American B'hai convert who has naively brought her and their children to Africa to work as missionaries. Again the woman has been entangled in her husband's script. Here the script reaches to the inherited story of the Bible, its implicit definition of "motherhood," its patriarchal god, its self-presumed authority. Rona, the point-of view character of "Timbuktu," has her own narrative of uneasy role-playing in her husband's story, a narrative which at this moment contains not only the B'hai wife's story but the Biblical story both women inherit.

> 'She'll do what God wants her to,' Janet said. 'It's out of our hands.'
>
> Rona found this aphorism, coming from the mouth of a child, almost obscene. On the bedside table by the sick child was a jug of water and a book, *Baha'u'llah and the New Era.* She leafed through it . . . There was an almost Germanic profusion of capital letters: 'He, His, Servant of the Blessed Perfection, Declaration, Supreme Singleness, the Most Great Peace.' But . . . the basic tenets of the faith were harmless, indeed inarguable 'motherhood issues', one might say. B'hai. How exotic it sounded! Like *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam.* But also, sheep-like. Baa-Baa-Baa. . . . There were a lot of old-fashioned Biblical endings on the verbs: 'enacteth, enforceth, sitteth, cometh, shineth.'

Rona's own situation is that she has married her husband Philip out of fascination with his "stories about Gibraltar, Malta, Morocco, the Ivory Coast, and Senegal . . . she had married Africa, not Philip." Now she is travelling to another story external to herself — the legendary Timbuktu — and finding herself occasionally needing a man to protect her. "She should be wandering around the streets by herself, finding some little place that caught her fancy, not going to a meal that had been ordered in advance by someone else."

A MEAL "ordered," in all three senses of the word, in advance by someone else — such are the stories accepted by most of the men and women of Thomas' first two collections and by most of the women of the third. Almost each story contains not only smaller stories but the explicit words "story" or "fairy tale." "That story was one of her best ones" ("Aquarius"); "As he told his new tale, our steward's hands would clench with excitement" ("Joseph and his Brother"); "Marie-Anne felt as if someone had been telling her a continuous fairy story" ("Real Mothers"); "Old wives' tales came back to her" ("Natural

History"); "She felt like one of those queens in the fairy tales" ("Déjeuner sur l'herbe"); "she doesn't look back. In my story, that is" ("Crossing the Rubicon"). A typical Thomas story is a story about characters who have so many inherited stories that they have no single authentic story. That is, it is a story about not having a story. The contained stories — the petty lies the characters tell about themselves, the scripts they accept from their spouses or from traditional mythology or literature — demolish the container.

In "Two in the Bush" a young woman, bored with her marriage, hitches a ride with another young married woman from Ghana to the Ivory Coast, expecting sexual adventure, meeting people who are implicit stories of gunrunner, freedom-fighter, shady banker, corrupt soldier, romantic lover, but returns having had no sexual adventure, no "miracle," no story. "I know nothing about Africa, nothing," she concludes, and for *Africa* we read *romance*, *story*. At its closing, the story is implicitly about a story which didn't happen, a gunrunner who doesn't run guns, a lover who missed his tryst. "Crossing the Rubicon" contains various stories — the narrator's story of a love affair with a married man, of being attracted as a girl by abusive boys, the stories told by the mottoes on Valentine candy ("Be my Sugar Daddy," "You're a Slick Chick"), the story told and untold by the motto on a button — ("Cinderella married for money"), the story of Liza Minnelli and Michael York in *Cabaret* — but ends with the woman still unable to not "look back" at her married lover, unable to refuse the inherited story.

In "Déjeuner sur l'Herbe," two ex-lovers pretend (one story) to be brother and sister while travelling in Europe. The woman's "latest lover" has told her she is "too insipid" (two stories). Her husband has told her that she " 'leaned on him' too much" (three stories). " 'I have had this pain,' she told the imaginary doctor, 'all my life' " (four stories or perhaps five). In London she reads warning signs about unattended parcels: "DON'T TOUCH. DON'T GET INVOLVED" — a sixth story. She is "content, for the most part, merely to go wherever he suggested" — another story. In a Parisian garden, "slender metal chairs" have been "left in groups which seemed . . . to tell stories." At a restaurant, she asks her lover, "Do we have to play out roles that other people impose on us?" She reads a French phrase book, each phrase a story. In a French cemetery while picnicking they encounter a distraught and incoherent woman with a kitten, who returns past them without it, her hands covered with dirt. Her companion says that he believes the woman said "that the kitten was sick. That she killed it."

"Are you *sure*?"
"No, I'm not sure. But there really is nothing that we can do."
. . . . . .
But she was already running down the path. "I'm going to find that kitten. You made it up, about what the woman said!"
. . . . . .

"And what if you do?" he called after her. "What then?"

What indeed. What would happen if any Thomas character found his or her authentic story?

IN MARGARET ATWOOD'S short stories there is a similarly recurrent separation between culturally "received" stories and other potentially more authentic stories available to the characters. Whereas in Thomas' fiction these received stories seem unconsciously adopted by the characters, who may become aware of them in the course of the story, in Atwood's they tend to be consciously followed. As in Thomas, the major source of these inherited stories is romance, but specifically gothic romance — from the gothic fairy tale, as in the title story of *Bluebeard's Egg*,[8] to the graveyard and dungeon melodramas invoked by "The Grave of the Famous Poet" and "Hair Jewellery." Atwood also — following the example of Mary Shelley — repeatedly links the gothic story to yet another story — that of technological hubris. Both the gothic and the technological story are narrow, simplistic, and offer to Atwood's usually unsure characters reassuring predictabilities. In "Under Glass" the female narrator's gothic imagination leads her both to see her diffident lover as an "enemy soldier" and to withdraw psychologically into the silent "nowhere" of a greenhouse. In "Polarities" Louise defends herself against her fears by constructing a geometrical "electromagnetic" theory for the psychic structure of Edmonton. In "Hair Jewellery" a woman who first uses gothic necrophilia — imagining her lover to cough "like Roderick Usher" and to be "doomed and restless as Dracula" — as an escape story to avoid the responsibilities of authentic relationship later uses the banality of a regular job, a two-storey colonial house, a "salon haircut," a "supportive" husband to identical purpose.

Throughout Atwood's fictions the main characters are inarticulate about their personal stories, unable to express their fears to one another — as the married couple in "The Resplendent Quetzal," unable to signal their hopes except through metaphorical acts such as Louise's electromagnetic map in "Polarities." Characters grope for speech. Will, in "Spring Song of the Frogs," keeps finding he "doesn't know what to say" to the various women he encounters — that is, he doesn't know what story to tell. Joel, in "Uglypuss," can only speak in clichés — "a golden oldie, a mansion that's seen better days," he describes his rooming house, and ironically describes his own speech. Yvonne, in "The Sunrise," is so desperate for language that she writes jokes and pleasantries on filing cards so she will not lack words or stories in conversation.

Such characters seem afflicted by what Atwood in another story, "Loulou; or, the Domestic life of the Language," humorously terms a language gap when

the title character's poet-friends become obsessed with an apparent disparity between her mundane name and the "earth mother" role they see her filling.

> "What gap?" Loulou asked suspiciously. She knew her upper front teeth were a little wide apart and had been self-conscious about it when she was younger. "The gap between the word and the thing signified," Phil said. His hand was on her breast and he'd given an absent-minded squeeze, as if to illustrate what he meant. They were in bed at the time. Mostly Loulou doesn't like talking in bed. But she's not that fond of talking at other times, either.

The stories which characters like Loulou wish to tell often have no words and are somehow separate from the world where poets talk in bed, or where friends conduct dinner-conversation from sets of file-cards.

The unarticulated stories of these characters, in fact, have an "alternate" wordless language of symbol and aphoristic gesture. This language reveals itself in objects, like the hurricane wreckage at the end of "Hurricane Hazel" or the crystalline forms that Alma grows in "The Salt Garden." In "The Resplendent Quetzal" both husband and wife carry unspoken stories — Edward of explosive, passionate action, Sarah of bitter grief over their stillborn child — (which is in turn an unspoken story of its parents' frozen passions). Both conceal these stories, Edward under an obsession with bird-watching, Sarah under a precisely conventional code of behaviour. Atwood's text reveals their secret stories primarily through symbols — the Mayan sacrificial well at Chichen Itza, which is not the civilized "wishing well" Sarah had expected, but a large, earthy, and suggestively vaginal hole; the plaster Christ-child Sarah steals from a crèche that decorates their hotel and hurls into the well; the magical Mayan bird Edward seeks with his metal binoculars. He doesn't find it, and Sarah — she "smoothed her skirt once more . . . then collected her purse and collapsible umbrella" — after her lapse into passion resumes her usual practicality. The hidden stories here briefly declare themselves, but the received, cliché stories of bourgeois life retain, for Edward and Sarah at least, greater power.

The later story "Scarlet Ibis" makes a similar contrast between the mechanical life of a bourgeois couple and the hidden story which a tropical object — birds on an island preserve — can bring to consciousness. Christine's response to these birds emphasizes their "otherness" — "on the other side of the fence was another world, not real but at the same time more real than the one on this side, the men and women in their flimsy clothes and aging bodies. . . ." The ibis is to her a symbol almost outside of comprehension, beyond her powers of language. In "Bluebeard's Egg" the story of the wizard's egg that Sally encounters at her writing class is similarly mysterious to her. The story troubles her but she cannot intellectualize how it might apply to her own life; in the concluding lines of the story the egg remains for her an unintegrated image "glowing softly" in their imagination "as though there's something red and hot inside it."

This inarticulate and unintellectualizable level of meaning requires an extraordinarily large amount of symbolism. The alternate story is nearly always implicit, iconic, and only marginally understood by the characters — a fainting spell ("The Salt Garden"), a cosmic dream ("The Sin Eaters"), a compelling sunrise ("The Sunrise"), a depressing tone in the croaking of "Spring Song of the Frogs," an exhilaratingly red bird ("Scarlet Ibis"). Denotative language in an Atwood fiction is the preserve of the gothic wizard, the scientist, or of characters who attempt to rationalize or trivialize the symbols that trouble them. This is the language of the official story. Both official and iconic languages are apparent at the conclusion of "Unearthing Suite," when the narrator's mother and father discover a fisher's droppings on the roof of their cabin.

> For my father, this dropping is an interesting biological phenomenon. He has noted it and filed it, along with all the other scraps of fascinating data he notes and files.
>
> For my mother however, this is something else. For her this dropping — this hand-long, two-fingers thick, black, hairy dropping — not to put too fine a point on it, this deposit of animal shit — is a miraculous token, a sign of divine grace; as if their mundane, familiar, much-patched but at times still-leaking roof has been visited and made momentarily radiant by an unknown but by no means minor god.

The father views the event as knowable, but for the mother it is an "other" story, "miraculous" beyond explanation, "unknown."

Repeatedly in Atwood's recent fictions characters defend themselves against such iconic events by trivializing their emotional responses to them, turning away from the event much like Sarah in "The Resplendent Quetzal" turns away from the Mayan well and toward her collapsible umbrella. The title character of "Significant Moments in the Life of My Mother" deals with each major symbolic event of her life in cliché language. " 'I remember the time we almost died,' says my mother. Many of her stories begin this way." In "Scarlet Ibis," after witnessing birds which evoke for her "the gardens of mediaeval paintings," Christine jovially describes them to friends "as a form of entertainment, like the Grand Canyon: something that really ought to be seen, if you liked birds, and if you should happen to be in that part of the world." In "Bluebeard's Egg" Sally succumbs to a similar trivializing when she describes her night school course in writing.

> She was . . . intending to belittle the course, just slightly. She always did this with her night courses, so Ed wouldn't get the idea there was anything in her life that was even remotely as important as he.

The real "other" story is that Sally cares deeply about that part of herself that seeks to define itself through these courses. The trivialized version is merely the official story, created for her husband's benefit.

The juxtaposition of these two kinds of narrative creates recurrently surreal effects. Many of the characters, particularly the women, live psychologically in

the hidden story while functioning physically in the official story. They dream and think in the language of symbols but they speak in cliché. They trivialize their inner lives in order to live a life of conventional fiction. Almost all of Atwood's couples remain strangers to each other because of this failure to declare the hidden story. Edward in "The Resplendent Quetzal" keeps secret his passionate fantasies and his unhappiness with Sarah's controlled behaviour! Sarah conceals her profound grief at the loss of their child beneath a pretense of control and self-righteousness. When Sarah momentarily loses her composure, however, and weeps beside the well, he is afraid. " 'This isn't like you,' Edward said, pleadingly." Despite his unhappiness, he prefers the official story.

THIS ISN'T LIKE YOU. The official story impoverishes the language of its users, not only restricting it to factual observation and cliché, but limiting its tone. It also limits the tone of those who are aware of hidden stories, like the narrators of "Under Glass," "The Grave of the Famous Poet," and "Hair Jewellery," by making them feel disconnected from the lives of others. Their narratives have a flat, passive tone that echoes their beliefs that they are forever witnesses to events rather than participants in them. The ineffectuality of characters like Sally in "Bluebeard's Egg" is in part a property of their hidden stories, stories that are unacknowledged, marginalized, trivialized even by the people who dream them.

Ladies & Escorts, *Real Mothers*, *Dancing Girls*, *Bluebeard's Egg* — all these Thomas and Atwood titles are paradigmatic, denoting received "official" stories, scripts that their characters have been asked to enter. In Atwood's story "Bluebeard's Egg," the fable of the wizard's egg assigns to each of three sisters a three-part story — an egg to protect, a room not to enter, a death by dismemberment should they fail the first two parts. The three sisters' story, like that of Sally who is told the story, like that of Edward and Sarah in "The Resplendent Quetzal," of Will in "Spring Song of the Frogs," of the mother in "Significant Moments in the Life of My Mother," or of many of Thomas' characters, is the story of having embraced no authentic story. *Ladies & Escorts* contains stories of ladies without escorts, with titular escorts, with unwanted escorts — all are qualified not only by the source assumption of the old beer parlour sign, "ladies and escorts" but by the women's private derivative fictions about themselves and an escort. The dance of Atwood's *Dancing Girls* is a similar ever-present qualifier, an inherited script of social behaviour. The title generically links as social performer a housewife, a young lady poet, a botanist, a journalist, a Blake scholar. The inheritances implicit in these titles, like the inherited stories contained generally in the fictions of these two authors, are oppressive. Perhaps most important for us to consider, a

major part of the western literary heritage — particularly the romance mode with its roots in Greek mythology and the Bible, its pervasive presence in myth and fairy tale, its huge presence in medieval and Renaissance literature, especially in Shakespeare — is marked in these books as destructive to authentic story. The romance is presented as an unyielding, unitary, and patriarchal inheritance that leads the passive character, male or female, ultimately to no story.

By implication, the romance, and all the other unitary forms that Northrop Frye tells us descend by displacement from it — the heroic, the comic, the tragic, the pastoral, the realistic novel, the ironic novel, the realistic short story — are discredited by Thomas' and Atwood's short fiction as literary models. The archetypal story Frye finds behind these, the Biblical one of a quest to re-enter the lost garden, is a "male" story — in its centralized theme, its Freudian symbolism, its Aristotelian structure. Disjunctive structure and multiplicity of story are used by Thomas and Atwood not to affirm through irony the Biblical story, as they are, for example, by Eliot in *The Waste Land*, but to suggest counter-structures. There may be other gardens, their fictions say, than the one lost by Adam or re-invented by Bluebeard; there may be unnamed, inarticulate, unchosen, or uninherited gardens; there may even be alternatives to garden. All these possibilities promise further alternatives to familiar story.

NOTES

[1] Audrey Thomas, "The More Little Mummy in the World," *Ladies & Escorts* (Ottawa: Oberon Press, 1977), p. 138. Subsequent quotations from Thomas' work are from this book, and from *Ten Green Bottles* (Ottawa: Oberon Press, 1977 [1967]), and *Real Mothers* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1981).

[2] See Hallvard Dahlie, "The Fiction of Alice Munro," *Ploughshares* 4 (Summer 1978), pp. 56-71; Helen Hoy, " 'Dull, Simple, Amazing, and Unfathomable': Paradox and Double Vision in Alice Munro's Fiction," *Studies in Canadian Literature*, 5 (Spring 1980), pp. 100-15; Lorraine McMullen, " 'Shameless, Marvellous, Shattering Absurdity': the Humour of Paradox in Alice Munro," in Louis J. MacKendrick, ed., *Probable Fictions: Alice Munro's Narrative Acts* (Downsview, Ont.: ECW Press, 1983), pp. 144-62; and Gerald Noonan, "The Structure of Style in Alice Munro's Fiction," in MacKendrick, pp. 163-80.

[3] Margaret Atwood, *Bluebeard's Egg* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1983). Subsequent quotations from Atwood's work are from this book and the collection *Dancing Girls* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1977).

WHITE FRUIT

Dave Margoshes

for Judy on her 50th birthday

We are the children
our parents warned us against,
breaking hearts of mothers
who can only be ourselves:
taking wrong sustenance,
neglecting posture and sleep,
not living as truly
as they might have liked us to.

Even the sense of family
our mother knew has crumbled,
bonds of trust like mushroom heads
crushed by buffeting winds:
you have yours, our sister hers,
I mine — as much distance and time
between us as the sticky web
separating stars:
we call on expected intervals,
write when we think to,
make pilgrimages like stunned arabs
in bethlehem for nieces' sake,
giving them glimpses of communities
both larger and smaller than the ones
they could fashion on their own.

How unlike her own brothers and sisters
we are: our mother's people
scattered, as we did, then drew together
like fingers in a closing fist,
mushrooms pushing their brave heads
into the cold air prematurely,
taking close comfort
in their neighbors' gills,
umbrellas against the unexpected elements.
Still, they made her cry when the time came,
weighing her down with silver chains,
fairy rings of celebration,
mouths filled with glittering teeth

biting through smiles, drawing blood,
and here am I now,
repeating the ritual
with reminders from a distance,
nothing learned from personal history.

The day hangs like a pivot, a hinge
to time's own door, and as you pass through
memory turns in my mind like a bright coin,
the way she cried out,
tears like silver on her flushed cheeks,
not merely tears, but pain,
and my own confusion:
was it *they* she cried, the way
they'd deserted her with their closeness,
or herself, the line she'd tried to draw,
the adage she'd left for us?
And will we, in blind love,
make you cry, reminding you
of time slipping past, stars
winking out in the heartless sky?

Their love took the form
of pieces of silver, strung together
like stars, links on a chain.
Ours is white fruit, fragile as ancient paper
but filled with pungent juice —
stalks firm in love's vague mycelium,
spanning distance, time, generation,
drawing us together even in silence,
baring its teeth at the indifference of stars.

STRUCTURE IN ETHEL WILSON'S "THE INNOCENT TRAVELLER"

Mary-Ann Stouck

IN THE FOURTEENTH chapter of Ethel Wilson's novel *The Innocent Traveller*, its central character, Topaz Edgeworth, prepares to take a stand on an issue of some importance.[1] Mrs. Hamilton Coffin is about to be blackballed from the Minerva Club (a literary society) on the grounds that she has been seen "swimming in the arms of a black man" (Joe Fortes, legendary swimming teacher of Vancouver's English Bay). Topaz, who has witnessed Mrs. Coffin's in fact irreproachable dip in the sea, prepares with some agitation to defend the principles of freedom. She rises to her feet and draws a breath. The reader draws breath in anticipation also; apparently the novel's heroine will at last expose the rigid conventions and commitment to propriety of the society depicted in the novel for what they too often are: a false front for prejudiced and petty minds, and an unwarranted restriction on human independence. But after Topaz has counted to ten, she does not launch into a denunciation of racial prejudice or an exposition of the principles of Christian charity. Instead she responds with a speech which indeed defends Mrs. Coffin's character, but which also mollifies the perpetrator of the objection, "the pudding-faced lady," who joins in the applause that welcomes Mrs. Coffin into the club. The momentary fissure in the fabric of society has been bridged; all are happy and convinced that their world is a good world. Topaz then reads aloud Sir Walter Raleigh's poem, "Even such is time." The poem is quoted in full as an expression of Christian faith which, by analogy, elevates Topaz's speech to one of the small but meaningful acts of charity often celebrated in Wilson's fiction. But the poem also expresses Time's relentless destruction of humanity's passing preoccupations: "Our youth, our joys, our all we have." Thus it directs us to a sense of the trivial nature of the whole event. Racial prejudice here is treated on the circumscribed level of the personal and incidental: Topaz's speech will not ruffle the complacent feathers of Vancouver society even if it does ensure that Mrs. Coffin will not be unfairly ostracized. Raleigh's poem is about the triumphant liberation of the spirit from the contingencies of place and time; its effect here lies in the contrast it provides to the stultifying attitudes and limitations of this society.

This incident in the novel is typical, I believe, because it exemplifies the larger problem faced by its readers: the history of the irrepressible Topaz, unmarried, without profession, sheltered and cared for by her large family for a hundred years, enjoyable as it all is to read about, may leave us with an overwhelming sense of its insignificance.[2] Indeed, Wilson deliberately creates and reinforces our sense of triviality of Topaz's life: she is compared to a water-glider, an insect that skims along the surface of the water, "unaware of the dreadful deeps below"; she is "like a warbling unimportant bird" with a "funny little flute voice"; "She inscribes no significant design. Just small bright dots of colour, sparkling dots of life"; when she is dead, "there is no mark of her . . . no more than the dimpling of the water caused by the wind."[13] The significance of Topaz's life is not even that it is typical, for she is a "character," an *enfant terrible* whose outrageous behaviour is described with mingled affection, admiration, and exasperation, and it would be difficult to find a universal pattern in a life so fortunately sheltered as hers. Nevertheless, the novel does achieve a significance that transcends Topaz's life. By various strategies, both structural and thematic, Wilson continually makes us aware of a broader context of meaning for human affairs.

This context consists only in part of the dichotomy between the secure, loving shelter that Topaz finds in her family — the comfortable rituals of the well-to-do Victorian middle class — and the terrible pitfalls that life and time have organized, willy nilly, for the Edgeworths and their descendents. These "nebulous agents of causality"[4] do indeed provide a powerful ironic subtext for the book. In the opening chapter, for example, the Edgeworth family sits repectably around the dinner table listening to the wise words of that archetypal Victorian, Matthew Arnold, all the time unsuspicious of the shocking fates in store for them. We, however, are made aware of them by the startling authorial interjections that dislocate us in time and place from the putative observer, the banished Topaz, "innocent as a poached egg," underneath the table: Joe, "gentle and frail, destined for early death"; "happy, horsey Blakey" bound eventually for Australia to found a patriarchy; Mary, "Out she went to India, poor Mary, to marry a missionary . . . [She] soon bore two little spinsters in the heat and died." These episodes-to-be in the family chronicle are made the more disturbing by the strong sense of order and propriety that pervades the scene. Most shocking of all is the casual disposal of Mother, with all her maternal solidity, for death is seen as the ultimate affront to social order: "Within Mother the last and fatal babe moved and moved." Her anxiety not to cause a disturbance in the orderly household ("I feel it will be tonight, and Joseph will be greatly disturbed," she thinks) becomes an ironic comment on events: he will be more disturbed than she anticipates. Thus here, and throughout the book, the personal world of Topaz is placed in the broad context of treacherous cosmic influences. The effect is to broaden the novel's significance, but not that of Topaz. Rather, the triviality of her con-

cerns is emphasized by the ironic viewpoint so characteristic of Ethel Wilson's writing.[5]

Successful as this irony is, there is another less obvious area that Wilson explores in the book, and that is the precarious balance between the benefits offered to Topaz by the highly conventional society in which she lives, on the one hand, and the limitations it places upon her on the other. This society, whose nucleus and emblem is the Victorian family, is at once supportive and restrictive: both aspects are consistently realized in the novel.[6] Topaz, having "attained her undesired majority and independence at the age of fifty," with the death of Father and the Stepmother, "felt her weakness," and this momentary dislocation is not remedied until Annie offers her a home and another stepmother: "Rachel slid by nature and unaware into the Stepmother's place." Topaz's dependence on her family is complete and unregretted. At the same time, the Family, particularly as represented by the Stepmother and, later on, by Rachel and by Topaz's brother John, is the great enforcer of convention, of "proper" behaviour, and this insistence is made to seem stiflingly restrictive, if often amusingly so.[7] Topaz as a child may not mention the new plumbing to Mr. Matthew Arnold; later she may not climb the Eiffel Tower in a high wind that blows up her skirts, or speak to a Frenchman outside her hotel room, or lie on the floor of the Sistine chapel the better to view the ceiling; still later she is scolded for going into the smoking car of a train, planning a letter to *The Times*, kneeling for family prayers on an easy-chair instead of on the floor. Her world is full of petty restrictions; indeed, the proprieties of behaviour are frequently the subject of conversations and arguments, as when Topaz and her brother John with "his passion for correct behaviour" argue on the way to her interview with the Queen at Buckingham Palace: "I do wish, Topaz . . . that you would try to control yourself, and — er, *conform* a little," he says. Here, as elsewhere, Topaz comes out on top, but her spirited forays against Victorian convention are not simply humorous. They are the means by which Ethel Wilson can explore the values and limitations of a society that depends upon well-defined human relationships and a strong sense of propriety for its existence, or in broader terms, the benefits of being an involved, responsible member of human society as opposed to the restrictions such a role places upon the freedom of the individual to act in significant ways.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE NOVEL is episodic and therefore open-ended: the hundred years of Topaz's life could accommodate as many events as the author wished to include. As Desmond Pacey has pointed out, the chapters are frequently self-contained and could stand independently as short stories — two were in fact published as short stories before the novel appeared.[8] Yet the

Wilson papers in the University of British Columbia Library contain several episodes in the life of Topaz that might have been included in the novel but were not. Was Wilson concerned only about lengthiness? Even without them, readers may find the book too long. Particularly in the last half there are chapters that add little new to our understanding of Topaz (e.g., "Christmas Eve," "Rather Close in the Sitting Room," "The Thirties"). These seem to be merely pastiches of minor incidents, while others concentrate confusingly on secondary characters — Rose, for instance, or, earlier, Mrs. Porter. One must ask what, if any, formal principles governed the choice of episode in the book.

At first it appears that Wilson had in mind an adaptation of classical epic. She gives Topaz a gentlewoman's version of a classical education ("... I've read the *Odyssey* and *Iliad* more than once, not in the original, you understand"), and we know that she herself was well-read in the classics.[9] Echoes of the *Odyssey* are found in chapter 5 in connection with Emily Porter, and also perhaps in the opening of chapter 17 ("The Innumerable Laughter") which suggests the Nausicaa episode. The theme of the book itself has epic potential. It describes the origins of one of Vancouver's founding families, the Malkins, and tells how they like other immigrants came from the old world to establish in the new the spiritual, economic, and social values that they lived by. There are conscious epic suggestions in the book: Annie's grandson reflects on the Edgeworth descendents ("There are forty of us — why, there must be over fifty of us now! — Canadians, up and down the country"), and the journey to Canada especially is reminiscent of epic. But in the end these suggestions are never realized. "Down came the forests. Chop. Chop. Chop." describes the building of Vancouver, and the Edgeworth ladies all write to their English relations, "You should see Stanley Park." Nor does the journey result in the start of a new life. Though this chapter (11) seems to be structurally important (at 32 pages it is the longest in the book; the next longest has only 18 pages and the average length is ten), it does not mark any thematic change. The life the Edgeworths establish for themselves in Vancouver is much the same as the one they enjoyed in Ware: it is still dominated by Family, propriety, and religion. Topaz continues to go to book-club meetings, to buy inessential items, to make minor forays against convention and to be sheltered by her family. The intimations of a new freedom are never fulfilled. On the journey, Rachel, through whose eyes it is partially seen, says to Topaz, " 'I'm so glad I came to this country, I can't tell you ... It's my kind of country and I never want to go back home again. There's something ...' Rachel wanted the simple word 'free,' although no word could express her all-pervading release of spirit —." Rachel's difficulty in finding the simple word is symbolic, because in fact her life continues to be governed by familial duties and a strict sense of social convention.

Any epic expectations that may be aroused are thus frustrated by the ironic viewpoint, by deliberate trivializations of theme, and by a form which eludes strict

classification. This form does not however function as the artistic correlative of the free-wheeling life of the book's main character. The anecdotal quality of the episodes is deceiving, for theirs is a closed structure that reflects primarily confinement. Each episode is carefully devised to reinforce the idea of a society which is the antithesis of epic: secure, ordered, and above all resistant to change. Typically, a chapter begins by establishing a setting and evoking the form of behaviour that is required or expected in it. Then someone, usually Topaz but occasionally another character, acts in a way that is seen to be inappropriate in terms of the setting. Finally and most importantly, the situation is resolved in such a way as to restore the original *status quo*, for no matter how much it shocks her relations, Topaz's behaviour is never allowed to challenge seriously the essential foundations of her world.

The conventional setting most often established at the outset of a chapter is that of the well-ordered family life. Thus the mealtime setting of the opening chapter is disrupted by Topaz's speaking out of turn; this setting is repeated in chapter 3, "Mr. and Mrs. Porter," where again Father rebukes her for talking too much. In chapter 8, "Recurring Pleasures," Topaz's escapades in Europe which flout the conventions of proper behaviour are set first in the context of daily life at home in Ware; a similar preamble in "Nuts and Figs" sets the scene for Grandfather Edgeworth's startling marriage proposals (this time he, not Topaz, is the one to flout convention). The journey to Canada begins with a brief description of the family life Annie, Rachel, and Topaz each leaves behind and ends by re-establishing it in Canada: as their train draws into the station in Vancouver, " 'Oh, Rachel, I see the Boys!' cried the Grandmother"; this is followed by extracts from their letters home to family and friends. In Canada, the main setting is still the Family, though this time it is Rachel's family. "Christmas Eve" begins with the rituals of the little household in the "pepperpot house" under Rachel's control where, after her brief secret excursion with Rose, she returns to her role as rebuker of Topaz, comfort of Annie. "Rather Close in the Sitting Room" and "Saturday Morning" both begin with descriptions of the ritual of family life. Later on, Rose's reduced family provides a similar setting as in "Aunty Spends the Day" and "Gusto." The expectations of good manners and consideration for others are all established by placing the central event — sometimes events — in such a context. In fact, often propriety is the explicit theme of the initial setting, as in "Mother, Mother" which opens with a discussion of propriety at the funeral: "Decorum, decorum, sorrow and decorum."

Where the family domain is not the setting, something equally conventional is provided. "I Have a Father in the Promised Land" is set in the rituals of churchgoing: ordinary restrained demeanour is disrupted by a new preacher and the over-sincerity of the young Rose, who responds emotionally to his evangelical appeal. "Down at English Bay" begins with a peacefully conventional description

of a summer day at the beach, where the swimmers are shrouded neck to ankle in decent serge cloth; "The Thirties" sets the scene in the wonderfully stultified rotunda of Victoria's Empress Hotel, where visitors "follow the movement of the waiters with glazed eyes" until Topaz, "spoiling for commotion," provides a diversion. Each chapter provides us at the outset with a context which establishes the norms and rituals of a strict code of behaviour.

The central action or actions of each episode involve the flouting or rejection of these expected norms. Because the person responsible for it is not always Topaz, the theme of unconventionality as much as the character of Topaz provides the novel's unity. Topaz's older sister Mary is the subject of the third chapter; she reverses all the family's expectations of her "predestined uneventful course as her stepmother's helper" and goes to India to marry a missionary who has proposed to her during one of the ritualized processions home from chapel. In the fifth chapter, which seems to be an unconnected digression into the early history of Topaz's boarding-school teacher, the central action is the abandonment of Mrs. Porter by her husband, an action so shocking in terms of the social conventions that Father and the Stepmother refuse to explain it to Topaz at all. Subsequently Father himself, as Grandfather Edgeworth, defies the conventions of society which rule against remarriage for nonagenarians and proposes in turn to the formidable Mrs. Grimwade and to her sister. Mrs. Grimwade immediately considers the proposal in terms of propriety: "you don't realize that you're over ninety and I'm eighty-seven and we'd be the laughing-stock of our families or at least upset them very much." In "Family Prayer" it is Yow, the disreputable Chinese cook, who provides the central incident: he flouts morality and shocks the family by going off to China "for the purpose of having a baby." Rose, it is suggested, will also be something of a disturbance to convention.[10] In "Rather Close in the Sitting Room" she provides the central perspective as she reads a torrid novel in secret and observes the unbearably proper (to her) behaviour of her aunt and grandmother, and in "Saturday Morning" she evades Rachel's control by adopting a fashionable hairstyle and striking out with friends of her own choosing, of whom the Family does not wholly approve. Thus chapters in the book which appear to be extraneous departures from the affairs of Topaz in fact follow a consistent structural pattern.

The great disrupter of propriety is of course Topaz. Her commotions however are more notable for their multiplicity than for their significance. She speaks out of turn (often); she goes to Europe and has an audience with the Pope, to the horror of her Methodist family; she invades the gentlemen's smoking compartment on a train; she buys a bicycle that she cannot ride but wheels around Vancouver on "outings" for twenty years; she invites strangers to the sacred family At Home; upsets Rachel's company dinner for Dr. Carboys; calls to naked men swimming in the sea; proposes to advertise a family reunion in *The Times*; and

finally, in old age, loses her knickers on a public street. These or incidents like them form the central episode (or one of several such episodes) of the chapters in which she is the chief character, and her lesser infringements (particularly verbal) are included in chapters where she is not featured, such as her letters home, with its memorable account of the slap delivered to Eliza Pinder, which is included in the chapter on Mrs. Porter.

But the minor nature of her actions suggests that for all her apparent unconventionality, Topaz is allowed only to flirt with the borders of convention, never really to contravene them. To be fair, there are moments in her life when she presses hardest against those barriers, and when she reminds the reader of Wilson's other, independent heroines. In "The Voice" the surprising action at the centre of the episode is Topaz's lie to Rachel in reporting Annie's last words. She does not tell Rachel that Annie asked for reassurance of her — Rachel's — happiness, because "Rachel would feel her life (which was all that she had) invaded and deprived by Aunty." Significantly, the greatest gift that Topaz can give to Rachel is seen here to be one of privacy; it is the acknowledgement that the inner life is the only refuge from the demands of society. Nevertheless, though the lie runs counter to propriety, it actually preserves family ties, just as the many lies told by Lilly in *The Equations of Love* preserve the security of her daughter Eleanor. The moment when a younger Topaz, disappointed in love, stands in her bedroom and curses Mr. Sandbach, is another case in point; it suggests an independence of mind worthy of Maggie Vardoe.

In the end, though, these larger incidents, like the smaller ones, are absorbed within the bounds of conventional behaviour, and the same is true of all the infringements described in the book. The third movement of each episode, after the establishment of a conventional framework and the ensuing disturbance to propriety by Topaz or one of the minor characters, is the re-establishment of the original *status quo*, that is, the confirmation of a harmonious, loving set of human relationships dependent on decent, conventional behaviour for its survival. This is true even of the most significant actions in Topaz's life. Her lie to Rachel preserves the mother-daughter relationship in which she stands with regard to Rachel, even though she is her elder and her aunt. Had she told Rachel the truth, it would have ruptured the conventions of their relationship by making Topaz an intimate to Rachel's private, non-motherly life. The truth might also have made Topaz Rachel's equal, rather than leaving her as the child who is scolded for letting the fire go out as soon as Rachel enters the room, and in this lies our sense that very often the resolution of Topaz's unconventional action is ambiguous. As in the Minerva Club episode, her action here preserves a well-defined relationship that has been threatened, but at the cost of advancing that relationship to a new and perhaps ultimately more rewarding plane. Even in the case of Mr. Sandbach, Topaz's magnificent cursing is not allowed to stand; she retracts it later when she

recalls having met him years afterwards: "And as we talked I thought, 'How could I curse him? How could I be so wicked, and how could he make me suffer so?' It was all washed away. . . ." In her mind and in the reader's the original significance of the affair is rendered trivial.

The other great event of Topaz's life, her private audience with the Queen, confirms the pattern. In the first place, recognition by the monarchy is a supremely conventional form of achievement. Topaz's audience is set within the context of her brother John's stuffy complaints about her unconventional appearance and behaviour, but his is shown to be merely a narrow view of propriety. The Queen herself demonstrates truly good manners by putting Topaz at ease, but there is no lack of ceremony in the interview. Topaz is escorted down a long hall to the room where the Queen stands in jewelled regalia; she is politely reminded when her half-hour is over, and is given the standard signed photograph. The nature of the audience and Topaz's real concern to behave properly confirm that her usual behaviour is only nominally disruptive since it can so easily conform to convention. Wilson asserts through Topaz only that a narrow sense of propriety is wrong; a humanitarian form of it, despite its restrictiveness, is essential to society's survival. At the end of the chapter the quarrel between John and Topaz is likewise resolved. "John was really very good," Topaz concludes.

According to this conservative view, infractions against convention, though they may seem to be nominal, are potentially dangerous to the close-knit fabric of society, and Wilson makes use of a variety of characters and devices to restore harmony when it is on the brink of failure. This is the special function of Topaz's sister Annie, who is frequently seen keeping chaos at bay. When the child Topaz is carried away by excitement at wearing black for Mother's funeral and forgets the sad reason for it, Annie is the one who comforts her in the face of Aunt Chalk's outrage; she re-establishes family bonds by giving Topaz a home when she is orphaned at age fifty; she is invariably the peacemaker in Topaz's conflicts with Rachel, the imposer of propriety. "Well, shall we have a little game of dominoes?" she suggests in the bristly atmosphere at the end of "Rather Close in the Sitting Room," and the tensions of family life are resolved when they all consent. Even the delinquent Yow conforms to proper behaviour under the influence of Annie, and attends the ritual family prayers.

Other characters also function conventionally to mend the tears in the social fabric. Mrs. Porter establishes a thoroughly proper school for young ladies as a way of reintegrating herself and her daughter in society after her abandonment by Mr. Porter; Father condones the audience of John and Topaz with the Pope in the face of the Stepmother's outrage; nephews and grand-nephews arrive to re-establish family security at the end of "A Buried Life," when Topaz has been regretting her curse of Mr. Sandbach. Topaz herself is frequently the instrument of restoring harmony in the latter part of the novel. She smooths over Rose's

emotional outburst in "I Have a Father" with a kindly joke; in "Saturday Morning" she sides with convention "just for the fun of it" by mildly criticizing Rose, but also shows she can keep up with the times by laughing at two small boys singing "twenty-three skidoo"; and she smooths the injured feelings of Miss Umplethwaite after the untimely descent of her knickers: "Miss Umplethwaite begins to smile again and to regard the whole thing as simply a bit of a Do."

THE IMPORTANCE TO THE novel of a dominant tone of social harmony, which is disrupted by various characters but never seriously broken, is illustrated by examining the material that at one time Wilson may have considered including in the book but that she eventually rejected.[11] All four of these stories have to do with Topaz, but certain traits make them distinct from the stories in *The Innocent Traveller*. Two of them do not conform to the established structural pattern. "Lay Your Commands Upon Her, Joseph" (*WP* 6/21) is a rambling tale in which Topaz, aged ninety-four, recalls the early death of her sister Hannah from consumption, the standard illness of the age. Hannah leaves a quite proper, sentimental bequest to a young man, which Topaz delivers, and Topaz refuses to be dosed with stout by the Stepmother. There is no central contravention of propriety; the incident is anecdotal in the most general sense. A second story, "The Very Ferocious Man" (*WP* 6/37), tells of a farm labourer who shoots a serving girl for refusing his advances. In this case the infraction is the problem: it is extreme and melodramatic, and in its horrific violence it exceeds the type of infringement against convention that forms the basis of the other chapters in the book.

The remaining two incidents would be out of place in *The Innocent Traveller* for a different reason. Both "Fountains in Italy, 1872" (*WP* 6/15, 6/16, 1/10) and "A Ripple on the Ocean of Time" (*WP* 6/30) contain extremely unflattering portraits of the conventional John, and end on unresolved notes of discord between him and Topaz. In the book as it stands his conventionality is amusing rather than intensely dislikeable, but this is not true of these two incidents. In the first, he and Topaz are travelling by train through Italy. The train stops and the Italians get out and urinate in public, to Topaz's great interest. John is outraged by her behaviour, and Topaz thinks, "John looks quite ghastly! Like a fine-looking corpse. How easily he gets upset! And how he does spit. He is really very silly." Nowhere in the book does the feeling between brother and sister descend to such cold dislike. In two of the versions of this incident (*WP* 6/15 and 6/16) there is no harmonious resolution at the end. John furiously announces that he will never travel with Topaz again, protesting that she is "either naive, insensible, or depraved." In the book the conclusion of the European trip is quite

different: Topaz and John are united in both having dared to attend a papal audience, and both are gently forgiven by father. Similarly, in "A Ripple in the Ocean of Time" John is disagreeably characterized by his snobbish English accent (he calls his wife Annie "Annay"). He makes a long speech on the disgusting colonial manners of Topaz, Rachel, and "Ethill" (i.e., Rose), of which the complaint to Topaz in "Apotheosis" is a much shorter and milder version, devoid of the affected accent. Later in the unincluded incident he loses Topaz in the crowd at Gladstone's funeral and goes home without her; she avers that she *never* really forgave him.

The omission of these incidents argues both the importance of the structural pattern I have described and the careful balance Wilson creates in the novel between the demands of propriety and the need for individual freedom. Certainly the reader has a positive sense of the actions which maintain harmony in the small world of the Hastings family, of the love and charity that motivates them, and of the mutual security they provide. On the other hand one cannot ignore signs of ambiguity about such a rigid code of behaviour, particularly as it is dictated by the Stepmother, Rachel, and John. The very repetitiveness of the structural pattern (twenty-eight chapters in all, many of them embodying more than one contravention and resolution) reinforces the sense of inflexibility: all behaviour has the same result (harmonization within the rules); there is never any great change, either for better or for worse. Actions too extreme to be incorporated in the system are simply ruled out.

This is particularly evident on the few occasions in the book when behaviour does go irretrievably beyond the pale. The results are ominous. When Mary astounds convention by going off to India to marry a missionary, she promptly dies in childbirth and is buried "with violent and shocking haste." Even here a reconciliation is attempted: the daughters, Tilly and Sassy, are incorporated into Topaz's larger family of mail correspondents. Admittedly, death also occurs in the natural course of events, but the fact that on at least one other occasion it is made to seem the result of going beyond conventional limits (when Grandfather Edgeworth in his nineties proposes to the amazed little Miss Sarah Raphael and she promptly goes home and dies), makes it appear that Wilson surreptitiously links uncalled-for behaviour with old age, illness, war, and accidents as causes of death. All are disastrous because they sever family and social relationships. The same inference is made when Annie dies. "The house with the pepper-pot tower was 'broken up'," and Yow, whose ties to conventional society have always been tenuous, now engages in a life of petty crime (crime being another cause of social disintegration) and becomes an outcast. He steals a bride's trousseau to give to a white lady-friend, is discovered and goes to prison. "He would never have done anything like this if he had still been with Grandmother." His white lady-friend must now form "other connections" — that is, build for herself a new social

context, and we see her doing just this as the heroine of *Lilly's Story*. War, as a potential cause of death, reinforces the need for strong family ties while at the same time making Rose feel their confining quality: ". . . here was war, violent and not to be denied, taking away her husband and jouncing her out of her delightful new existence, back into the *too cosy* seclusion of the house with the pepper-pot." Interestingly, she has nightmares not about her husband's safety, but to do with the curtailment of her life: " 'Something . . . is unreal about this . . . I have had nightmares'." Sometimes death is too terrible for the novelist even to write about. The untimely death of Rachel, upon whom the family depends, is "too tragical to contemplate" and is brushed aside with what may seem to the reader to be indecent haste. Thus death as the great divider is linked to family and social disintegration, and more subtly, to other behaviour that threatens social ties. Social propriety is necessary to keep the threat of chaos at bay; thus death can be too terrible even to talk about.

Topaz's forays against convention are only flirtations with the rules because the social fabric is too fragile and too necessary to sustain direct attack.[12] Furthermore, all the characters prefer to withdraw rather than to cause, or witness, a "scene" which might mean changing an established relationship or revising conventional ideas. The Stepmother withdraws to bed and weeps rather than confront a new, violent image of Topaz, one that can call down a curse on Mr. Sandbach; Topaz flees back into the cottage on Benbow Island after her abortive attempt to sleep out on the verandah rather than confront her own fears and begin to understand herself; Rose withdraws from the sitting-room company of her aunts and grandmother, thinking rebellious thoughts but unwilling to state them directly; Rachel threatens to leave home if Topaz's behaviour passes the limits of control. The repeated use of withdrawal and harmonizing strategies conveys the image of a society too fragile to sustain radical actions.

THE NOVEL ABOUNDS in images of containment which reinforce this theme by signifying the need for control. Rachel's milk jelly is a prime example: Wilson tells us "it typified this innocent household. It was fresh, clean, sweet, tart, economical . . . Also it had been poured into a mould and had set. Also it was controlled by Aunt Rachel." Topaz's life is compared to travelling on a canal, another image which suggests control: "This canal had been soundly constructed by her progenitors, and was administered by those now in charge." Topaz wheels her bicycle "whose organs were laced into a kind of flat corset" because if she rides it, she will go out of control. Much of the action takes place in circumscribed settings: in the dining-room, or an enclosed garden, or by the fire at Elder House; in the tiny self-contained railway carriage of the train across

Canada; inside the "pepper pot" house (itself an image of containment); and finally in the bedroom of Topaz's apartment where she dies. The outside is used to suggest a different vision of life, one of broad horizons and daring actions. Mrs. Porter contemplates the waves crashing on the beach when she makes her brave decision to be self-supporting; the vast, challenging northern landscape of Canada is contrasted with the limited landscape seen by Topaz, Rachel, and Annie as they sit in their train carriage; elemental nature (significantly described by Topaz as "hellish") defeats her when she tries to sleep outside at Benbow Island. These settings serve to remind us of the narrower horizons in which the action normally takes place; they liberate us momentarily from the world of rigid convention.

Wilson's ambiguous response to the society she depicts is precisely and movingly captured in the chapter third from the end of the book, "Sea-Gulls in the City." Here the continuity provided by repetition of the basic structural pattern is fractured by a chapter which simply describes the habits of sea-gulls in and around Vancouver. During the day they fly inland and settle in the small park opposite Rose's house. Wilson makes their symbolism clear. They are independent of human cause and effect ("there is some secret reason why they come"), divorced from the implacable causation which at the beginning of the chapter, we are told, will result in the second world war, that ultimate severing of human relationships. They are indifferent to human feeling ("sea-gulls . . . have no regard for anybody else"). They are indifferent even to food, and also to the harassment of Rose's dogs, who chase them ("the big white birds do not seem to notice the frenzied dogs"). They are, in fact, entirely free of all the responsibilities, needs, and desires of human beings who are inevitably committed to family life and its equivalent, life in the larger family of mankind.

The author's ambiguous feelings about freedom and dependency are presented through Rose, her fictional persona, as she looks out of the window at the sea-gulls:

> "If I were not a person," she thinks, looking through the streaming window-pane at the devilishly indifferent gulls walking in the rain, "I should like to be a dog in a nice family, or else I should like to be a sea-gull." A dog looks at his own people and his heart is full of love for them . . . The big white sea-gull has no heart of love. He is beautiful, strong, calculating, and rapacious. He does not love his own kind or humankind. He barely tolerates them. This carnal and lawless bird is slave to nothing but his own insatiable appetite. But just the same, there is something about a sea-gull.

Rose's dilemma is precisely that she is neither dog, happy in dependency, nor sea-gull, free of all ties; she is a human being with the desires of both.[13] No choice is made by her or by the author. They remain poised between the need for love and security — here seen metaphorically as shelter from the rain — and the need for freedom and independence. But the sea-gulls undeniably suggest a welcome feeling of liberation. As Rose walks down Granville Street she hears the gulls' cries

"like the call of the muezzin in the minaret at the end of the crowded Galata Bridge," and "her thoughts fly away" to "Land's End, the gusty Channel, the sun on the striped awnings at Ostend." Topaz, as the novel's minor-key freedom fighter, is connected also with the gulls, but only with a tame one: he sits on her window-sill and eats the crusts she pushes out to him. "He has a fine life, but he is too earnest," comments the author. Only at Topaz's death does this "small, warbling bird" achieve the freedom of the gulls. After her funeral, Wilson writes:

> The sea-gulls were flying westwards in their ordained evening flight, in twos, threes, and companies, high overhead on account of the wind; but neither Rose nor Georgia noticed, because they were each preoccupied. The customary westward flight of the seagulls over the sea, through the evening sky, was, however, as always, a curious and ravishing sight.

The quotation from Donne's Eighteenth Devotion which follows repeats the theme of the transcendence of this life in language similar to that of Raleigh's poem "Even such is time."

Through the novel's structure and imagery Wilson both celebrates and deplores the conformity necessary for free spirits like Topaz if they are to survive economically and emotionally. Harmonious, close family living seems to demand the sacrifice of an imaginative, adventurous approach to life for fear of the fall into deep waters which might result from real risk-taking. To view the novel in this way is not to deny that actions of worth take place in it, but it is to become painfully aware of the other areas of human experience that must be excluded. Heterosexual relationships — except for those between relatives — are scarcely present. The pepper-pot house consists entirely of women, with the exception of the cook, Yow. Such relationships as exist are either comfortably familial, as with Father and the Stepmother (referred to only by their family roles); or, if truly sexual, disastrous, as with the case of Mr. and Mrs. Porter (she finds his sexual advances repellent), or Mary and Edward, or Topaz and Mr. Sandbach; or else they are simply omitted, as with Rose and her husband Charles, whose courtship and relationship, though presumably romantic and occurring well within the timespan of the novel, are never described. No serious disagreements or lasting animosities are allowed to exist among the major characters: Rachel's intermittent irritation with Topaz is expressed to us through the omniscient narrator, but to Topaz only in the form of mild nagging ("Oh, Anty, *will* you be quiet . . ."), and is balanced by genuine affection. We are told that people have jobs, but we do not see them at work, with the concomitant tensions and problems. The Hastings sons must have careers, but we do not know what they are. Grandfather Edgeworth manufactures teapots admired by Queen Victoria, and John is a person of importance, but certainly for the women, the business of the home is their only concern. When Topaz aspires to the executive positions of her many clubs, she quickly finds decision-making oppressive and resigns as soon as possible. What people want,

and receive, from each other in the book is comfort, shelter, and support, not excitement or stimulation. The rich variety of scene, incident, and character in the novel gives the illusion of a rich and full world until we consider the large areas of human experience that are excluded from it, and the conformity of all action to a predictable and circumscribed pattern. Ethel Wilson's considerable achievement, in this complex and stylistically accomplished book, is the use of structure and imagery to promote a constant awareness of the limitations of Topaz's world, as well as its delights.

NOTES

[1] All references to the novel in this essay are to Ethel Wilson, *The Innocent Traveller*, New Canadian Library 170 (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1982). The book was first published by Macmillan in 1949.

[2] Most of the reviews which appeared when *The Innocent Traveller* was first published praised it, but some concluded that the central character was indeed trivial to the point of boredom. See for example the comments by Mark Cohen (*Canadian Forum*), Wilhelmina Gordon (*Echoes*), and the reviewer for *The Times Literary Supplement* all quoted by Bonnie Martyn McComb in "Ethel Wilson: A Bibliography, 1919-1977, Part III," in *The West Coast Review*, 14, No. 3 (1980), pp. 60, 61.

[3] Irene Howard, "Shockable and Unshockable Methodists in *The Innocent Traveller*," *Essays on Canadian Writing*, 23 (1982), pp. 107-34, gives evidence that the process of trivialization was a more deliberate and radical one in the writing of the book than might at first be apparent. Eliza Edge, from whom the character of Topaz was drawn, was in fact a complex person — certainly no innocent — whose membership on boards, committees, and councils was continuous and involved work of a serious nature. Wilson trivializes this by presenting it as a short-lived and infelicitous excursion into responsibility on the part of Topaz (Howard, pp. 116, 125). Likewise the basis of the Minerva Club incident was a notorious scandal which ended up in the Vancouver courts as a libel case. Eliza Edge was involved in it in an official capacity and her position on the question of tolerance seems to have been more ambiguous than Wilson makes it in the novel (Howard, pp. 126-27).

[4] Blanche Gelfant, "The Hidden Mines in Ethel Wilson's Landscape (or An American Cat among Canadian Falcons)," *The Ethel Wilson Symposium 1981* (University of Ottawa Press, 1982), p. 122; also published in *Canadian Literature*, 93 (1982), pp. 4-23. This essay contains some excellent insights into the character of Topaz and her restrictive environment.

[5] W. H. New, "The Irony of Order: Ethel Wilson's *The Innocent Traveller*," *Critique: Studies in Modern Fiction*, 10 (1968), pp. 22-30, examines the ironic presentation of the themes of innocence, independence, and order in relation to time; the essay is reprinted in William H. New, *Articulating West: Essays on Purpose and Form in Modern Canadian Literature* (Toronto: New Press, 1972), pp. 83-94.

[6] Gelfant, p. 123.

[7] Howard, pp. 118-19, argues that this dual perception of family had its origins in Wilson's own experience. Both sides of her family were strict Methodists, but

whereas her father's relations were "unshockable" and adventurous, her mother's family was extremely conventional in outlook. Orphaned at an early age, Ethel Wilson was raised mostly by the latter, and while the security and love they offered were warmly appreciated, the restrictions on her behaviour as she grew older were also keenly felt. Howard wonders if this polarity influenced her writing generally (p. 107). Wilson's own comments on writing indicate that she was conscious of it. In "A Cat Among the Falcons: Reflections on the Writer's Craft," *Canadian Literature*, 2 (1959), pp. 10-19, she is concerned with the relationship between writing as a private independent pursuit in which the writer creates and lives an adventurous inner life, and writing as something which must be judged according to the conventions and expectations of the public and the literary critics.

[8] Desmond Pacey, *Ethel Wilson* (New York: Twayne, 1967), p. 93.

[9] Christopher Armitage, "Ethel Wilson's English Schooling and its Echoes in her Fiction," *The Ethel Wilson Symposium 1981*, p. 24, finds in the description of Topaz's school-days echoes of the classical education Wilson received at Trinity Hall School in Southport, England, which she attended from 1902 to 1906.

[10] Rose and Yow share a sense of disreputable camaraderie, as Howard points out (p. 124).

[11] University of British Columbia, The Library, Special Collections Division, the Ethel Wilson Papers, cited as *WP*, followed by box and folder numbers.

[12] "For all that Topaz is extroverted and uninhibited by ordinary social conventions, it is those conventions which allow her to exist." W. H. New, "The Genius of Place and Time: the Fiction of Ethel Wilson," *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 3 (1968), p. 42; reprinted in *Articulating West*, pp. 68-82.

[13] The affinities of Rose as a character are with Wilson's independent heroines (e.g., Lilly Waller, Maggie Vardoe, Ellen Cuppy): like them she longs for freedom while also needing to establish strong connections with the human community. However, these yearnings remain largely undeveloped in the novel since Rose is not its central character. For a discussion of character in Ethel Wilson's novels see Paul Comeau, "Ethel Wilson's Characters," *Studies in Canadian Literature*, 6 (1981), 24-38.

THE MOUNTAINS (1882)

Tony Cosier

Packed more tightly than the Alleghenies
Strange as Chimborazo
Blunt enough and earthy for the pallet smudge
Like something wondrous never seen before
He thought he had them there
To narrow to his canvas frame
And make his name forever.

But they conjured with the hoodoo
Jerked his belly
Gnatted, took his blood
Soured his sleep with a cougar print.
They treed and bogged him into circles.
They funneled down the canyon
Mists that tamed their shoulders close enough to touch
Then spangled with a weasel's breath
Into the fierce green rivery yonder.

He tried to tie the mountains down
With a wigwam and a humbling hunter's beard
Like a northwest Winslow Homer
Fleshing out his foreground
Knowing he would miss.
A dream piece did not work.
Nor a pastoral.
Under his slicker in the drizzle
Choked and blind with smoke
He thought of better places.

Better the day
At Kicking Horse
Mounted on the catcher of a locomotive
He gulped the walloping air
Scanned the cedar line
Straight down the valley twenty miles
Flapped his hat to the glacier
And whooped at a mountain goat.

THE NOVELIST DRAWS THE LINE

Tony Cosier

He had maintained for years he would give up
Before his ageing left him lustreless
And there was nothing more to think about
With zest enough to fill the thousand hours
It always took to flesh a novel out.

He waited until he had his house alone
With only the photographs to take him back.
He settled it with his axe that day, heaved head
And handle one last time into the stump.
Snugged the latch to the gatepost formally.
Inside the house, he covered his keys with a shroud;
Packed them off to an unfamiliar room.
He relished freedoms he had never known.
To pry a piece of pottery from the earth
And flip it back to soil again. To hear
A smattering of a tale and leave it a smattering.
To catch in the lane the sneer of a wild young man
And let him pass without a second thought.
He settled his rocker right at the rim of the porch.
Pushed a foot toward a barrel. Sucked on his pipe.
Looked to the sky for the first high bird bound seaward.

DREAM GALLIARD

Linda Rogers

Sleeping cats in the throne room
dream of mice in high-heeled shoes,
the ruby shoes,
the blood-filled shoes of surrogates,
women with musical tails,
who dance on five fingers
with princes in laughing silk
in boots with gifted tongues
licking mice in high-heeled shoes
on dangerous floors,
albino mice in the dreams of cats,
mice who bleed in shoes bred specially for the dance
that feeds the victim mice
to princes with gifted tongues.

THE RIDDLE OF CONCENTRIC WORLDS IN "OBASAN"

Erika Gottlieb

JOY KOGAWA'S *Obasan* is an extremely quiet, slow moving book that yields its secret of exceptional power and intensity only gradually. It takes time to pick up the rich reverberations beneath the calm, controlled narrative voice, as we become aware that in returning to her past, the narrator, Naomi, undertakes a spiritual journey; she is urged by an inner need to find answers to a series of compelling questions: Is there a meaning to the persecution and suffering endured by the Japanese Canadians during and after World War II? Can the victim overcome the paralyzing effect of personal hurt and humiliation? Can a human being ever come to terms with the experience of evil on the psychological, the political, the universal level?

The novel sets up these multi-dimensional questions as puzzles arranged in a concentric pattern — container hidden within container within container — creating a sense of mystery and tension. The deliberate visibility of the concentric structure compels the reader to search for a central meaning at the core of the multi-layered texture of Naomi's narrative. To enter the psychological, political, and universal dimensions of Naomi's dilemma, the novel provides three openings, three distinct, yet interrelated landscapes. It is the first and shortest opening, the motto of the book, which introduces the widest, the universal dimension.

> To him that overcometh
> will I give to eat
> of the hidden manna
> and will give him
> a white stone
> and in the stone
> a new name written . . .[1]

A quotation from the Book of Revelation, the motto introduces the cosmic-mythical symbols of renewal the narrator is in search of. Only by overcoming the trial of being lost in the desert of fear and hatred, only by overcoming the terrors of the Apocalypse, will one be led to the Tree of Life, to the hidden manna of spiritual nourishment.

The second opening is another piece of preliminary material, a description of the narrator's soul as a wasteland.

There is a silence that cannot speak.

There is a silence that will not speak.

Beneath the grass the speaking dreams and beneath the dreams is a sensate sea. The speech that frees comes from the amniotic deep. To attend its voice, I can hear it say, is to embrace its absence. But I fail the task. The word is stone. I admit it.

I hate the stillness. I hate the stone. I hate the sealed vault with its cold icon. I hate staring into the night, the questions thinning into space. The sky swallowing the echoes.

Unless the stone bursts with telling, unless the seed flowers with speech, there is in my life no living word. The sound I hear is only sound. White sound. Words, when they fall, are pock marks on the earth. They are hailstones seeking an underground stream.

If I could follow the stream down and down to the hidden voice, would I come at last to the freeing word? I ask the night sky but the silence is steadfast. There is no reply.

The stillness of the landscape is the stillness of hopelessness, despair, the dead stillness of stone. To "overcome" her personal trial, Naomi must see the stone of death turn into the "white stone" with the "new name" on it. Before this could happen, however, she should trace the "hidden voice" to the "underground stream." The union between the stone and the living waters will produce the magic of life, and the seed shall flower with speech.

Not before the cosmic and internal landscapes reveal these symbolic-emotional signposts are we ready to enter the "real" Canadian landscape in the first chapter (the third opening). Here it becomes quickly apparent that elements of the two symbolic landscapes — stone, underground stream, seeds, flowers, and trees — will also figure in the realistic presentation of this specific scene carefully identified in time and space. Thus the natural setting in the first chapter is more than background: it represents the stillness and the tension in the cosmos and in the soul:

9.05 p.m. August 9, 1972.

The coulee is so still right now that if a match were to be lit, the flame would not waver. The tall grasses stand without quivering, the tops flow this way and that. The whole dark sky is bright with stars and only the new moon moves . . .

The human characters in this landscape are Naomi, our Nisei, second generation Japanese Canadian narrator, and her old Uncle Isamu who have been making an annual pilgrimage to this site every August for the past eighteen years. In the first of many flashbacks the narrator returns to August 1954, the time of their first visit, and we begin to recognize the first sign of a mystery, and within it an intricate puzzle: Uncle's determination to observe this ritual is equal to his desire to keep its reason a secret. Here the question Naomi had been consumed by all her life takes a fairly simple form: "Why do we come here every year?" she asks. Not until the end of the novel will she find the answer.

Each of the opening landscapes contains a riddle: in the first, the hidden manna; in the second, the hidden voice; in the third, the hidden reason for the pilgrimages. To triumph over the stillness of death, we must find what is hidden, kept in secret. Adding to this suspense is our recognition that the relationship between the three landscapes is itself a riddle: each contains and is contained within the other. In this conundrum of container within container within container, the author also offers us a key to approach the puzzle at the heart of Naomi's quest for liberation and renewal. There will be only one solution to the three riddles, three questions. As if by magic, it will be the same answer that will resolve Naomi's dilemma in its personal, political, and universal dimensions.

There is suspense as we become immersed in *Obasan*'s allegorical language. A consistent nature symbolism emerges that challenges us to ask: What is the precise connection between the evocative language of the landscape and the unfolding of the human drama? The narrative framework will help answer the question: When in the second chapter Naomi learns about Uncle's death, she returns to comfort her Aunt Obasan and to prepare for the funeral. The rest of the novel takes shape as a mourner's meditation during a wake,[2] a framework well suited to the novel's central metaphor of spiritual journey and its traditional nature symbolism. Waiting for Uncle's funeral, Naomi recollects her memories about all the dead in her past. Obasan and Uncle had been the mainstay of Naomi's traumatic childhood, since both she and her brother had been torn from their parents during the times of racist discrimination against Japanese Canadians between 1942 and 1951. By the end of her meditation about her family's tragic history, Naomi achieves a clarity and perception that comes from "emotion recollected in tranquillity" and she is finally allowed to hear the secret that had been withheld from her. With Obasan's permission, the Anglican clergyman, Sensei, who arrived to conduct the funeral, decides to read aloud the mysterious Japanese document, a letter on blue rice paper that had been in Obasan's possession for the past eighteen years. From the letter Naomi learns about her mother's suffering and death in Japan as a result of the atomic bomb dropped on Nagasaki. She finally understands the reason for the pilgrimages; Uncle observed the ritual to honour Mother's memory, although in respect of her wishes, he had to keep her death and its circumstances a secret from the children. In the last chapter, which deals with the morning after this revelation, Naomi reaches the end of her wake and her meditative journey back in time. She returns to the coulee, the site of her pilgrimage, and the previously dead landscape comes alive for her in the light of a new knowledge, a new understanding.

For the landscape to come alive, the dead stone had to turn into the "white stone"; the tree to bear fruit, the seed to flower, the stone had to join with the living waters. The final scene in the novel celebrates the breath of new life as the harmonious dance uniting trees, flowers, white stone, and water:

> Above the trees, the moon is pure white stone. The reflection is rippling in the river, water and stone dancing. Their joining together is the breath of life. It is a quiet ballet, soundless as breath.

The first and last chapters, then, are symmetrical like book ends. In the first chapter a question is asked, a puzzle set up. In the last chapter the question is answered, the puzzle resolved. In the first chapter the narrator embarks on her quest through the landscape: "Like the grass, I search the earth and the sky with a thin but persistent thirst." She thirsts for an answer for the unexplained, mysterious aspects of her childhood, the disappearing of her mother, the deportation of her people from British Columbia, the breaking-up of families, the confiscation of their property, the waves of war hysteria turned against the "treacherous yellow peril" of Japanese Canadians. Only through articulating the pain of the past will she find hope for liberation, healing, and renewal for herself and her people. In her search of the "freeing word," Naomi must overcome thirty years of paralyzing silence, hurt, humiliation; as a character in, and the narraor of the story, she must break the "stillness of the stone."

The Journey through Silence: Plot and Characterization

Obasan is a book about silence. The narrator is an extraordinarily quiet child whose relatives often wonder if she is in fact not mute. But this muteness is a deliberate withdrawal into silence. It is a child's resentful response to a world which has wounded her anonymously, impersonally, inexplicably. The most poignant contribution of this highly poetic book is the experience in which the little girl, who in the course of the novel has grown into a lonely and unhappy adult, is compelled to transform the silence of shame, hurt, and abandonment into words. Alerted by the symbolic landscapes, we witness an almost breathless quality as the narrative unfolds; silence on the verge of turning into sound. Silence speaks many tongues in this novel. For Obasan, silence is the language of service to the family, the language of her prayers. Uncle's silence is that of old Japanese Canadians who feel that the injustice and discrimination of a whole decade should be kept quiet. "In the world there is no better place . . . There is food. There is medicine. There is pension money. Gratitude. Gratitude."

Within the family is a conflict between the long oriental tradition of silence dictated by modesty, moderation, and stoicism, and Aunt Emily's "Western" compulsion to speak up and bring justice.[3] An active member of committees organizing inquests, petitions and conferences to combat discrimination, Aunt Emily is strident, angry, and dynamic. It is Aunt Emily who urges Naomi not to forget: "You are your history . . . If you cut it off, you're an amputee. Denial is gangrene." Her diagnosis is correct. For years Naomi's nightmares have been images of mutilation and death, and as she keeps going back and forth between

her school in Cecil and Uncle's house in Granton, she is unable to go ahead in her own world, unable to stay with the old people in theirs.

Yet, Naomi is reluctant to take on the burden of commitment, and Aunt Emily's package of documents, diaries, and newspaper clippings lies abandoned and forgotten for years. Only when Obasan hands it to her before Uncle's funeral is Naomi finally compelled to read and respond to Aunt Emily's factual, angry, accusing testament. Naomi's response is distinctly different. She speaks in the first person singular; she describes only memories, a young child's experiences, set in the present. In spite of the strong political commitment that will, albeit reluctantly, emerge from the book, Naomi's narrative is both a child's recollection and the recollection of childhood. What she recaptures is the genuine feeling of childhood: unable to see what the next step may bring, unable to understand the causal connection between events, she is genuinely groping.

Tactile and auditory images are predominant. Visual images are sketchy, like line drawings, mere background to the far richer, more modulated sense of touch and sound. We learn for example that Naomi's mother was "yasashi," had a quality of softness, but this refers more to her inner being than to any quality we could visualize. Remarkably, the characters are almost faceless. The simplicity of their portrayal and lack of individual detail is reminiscent of folk and fairytales. We meet characters in their roles as grandfather, grandmother, uncle, aunt, teacher, clergyman, only to recognize that they all share one quality: the silent dignity of self-respect and duty towards the community. Regardless of how close they may be to the narrator, the characters are generalized, often allegorical. Even Obasan is more of an attitude, a presence:

> Squatting here with the putty knife in her hand, she is every old woman in every hamlet in the world . . . Everywhere the old woman stands as the true and rightful owner of the earth. She is the bearer of keys to unknown doorways and to a network of astonishing tunnels. She is the possessor of life's infinite personal details.

This method of distant, linear, and external characterization allows the author to develop a collective portraiture of human dignity in the face of aggression, of a tradition based on the profound regard for the vulnerabilities of the old, the young, and on mutual respect.

The scarcity of closeups, the lack of individual detail also allows for another effect. By the end of the novel Obasan emerges as every old woman who owns the earth: she becomes larger than life, holding the secret to mysteries, "the bearer of keys to unknown doorways." Another character who achieves such an allegorical presence is Naomi's mother. In the beginning she exists only as a photograph, associated with a colourful quilt, the tender music of nursery rhymes. Even at the end when we learn about her tragic fate in Nagasaki — the dramatic and symbolic centre of the book — we still have no individual portrait of her. Mother's role, or rather her absence, is nevertheless crucial in Naomi's characterization.

After the paradise of childhood in which they are one, Mother suddenly leaves. It turns out to be their final separation; Naomi does not cry, but she does not smile or speak either.

The "rift" of separation and alienation remains unhealed even in the later years of relative peace and contentment. Twenty odd years after the traumatic experiences of her childhood, Naomi is a middle-aged, single, and rather frustrated schoolteacher, still blocked and benumbed by the experience. Doubtful about her own sexuality and ethnic identity, she is not attracted or attractive to the opposite sex, and in her own estimation she has "the social graces of a common housefly." She admits that "None of my friends today are Japanese Canadians"; yet she also feels resentment and suspicion of white Canadians. As a result of her dilemma, she withdraws into silence. What she says about her pupils describes her as well: "It is the children who say nothing who are in real trouble, more than the ones who complain."

Weaving the Web of Silence: Language and Metaphor

Since the entire book is a document of silence turning into sound, we become intensely aware of the burden carried by language in this invocation of the consciousness of a silent people. To say that Joy Kogawa has a language of her own is not sufficient. Many good poets or writers do achieve that. But in Naomi's narration one often has the feeling that the writer is virtually reinventing language. Unmistakably, the style is the result of extensive linguistic experimentation, presenting us with the special flavour of Japanese Canadian speech patterns and their underlying sensibilities.[4] The writer translates Japanese expressions, often including the Japanese turn of thought. Occasionally she mixes English words with Japanese: "Nothing changes me, I say."

Yet none of these devices can explain the suggestive cadences of the dialogue, for example, when Uncle is looking at the thirty-six-year-old Naomi: "Too young . . . Still too young." There are a lot of passive constructions: we cannot see, we cannot know the source of action. What is visible is only the subject acted upon. "Too much old man," he says and totters back . . . "Mo ikutsu? What is your age now?" And when the old people refuse to give answers to Naomi's repeated questions, their evasions sound like age old proverbs — "Everyone some day dies," or "Still young, too young. Some day." — that have to be decoded, solved like a riddle to get to the true meaning. The truncated sentences have their own slow movement: "Burredo. Try. Good." Some sentences consist of nouns without verbs, or only of adjectives: "Now old," Obasan reports. "Everything old." Yet, in the hands of the skilful narrator-recorder this elliptical, barren language reminds the reader of the poetic quality of child's language, or of Shelley's definition of the language of the poet-Maker: it is vitally metaphorical.

The descriptions have a concrete, literal, imagistic quality. Yet, the poet-writer's strategies are also quite consistent in guiding our response to the world she presents. First she would carefully describe the natural phenomenon, creating an image in its "sensuous particularity." Then she proceeds to make further use of this image just created by relating it to the human world. By this method she assumes a fairly extensive control over our response. To look at one example: after Uncle's death, Obasan and Naomi go up to the attic to look for some old family documents, and they see a spider's web:

> As she pushes a box aside, she stretches the corner of a spider's web, exquisitely symmetrical, balanced between the box and the magazines. A round black blot, large as a cat's eye, suddenly sprouts legs and ambles across the web. Shaking it . . . I recoil, jerking my arm up, sending the beam of light over the ceiling and a whole cloudy scene of carnage. Ugh! What a sight! A graveyard and feasting ground combined . . . But we're trapped, Obasan and I, by our memories of the dead — all our dead — those who refuse to bury themselves. Like threads of old spider webs, still sticky and hovering, the past waits for us to submit, or depart. When I least expect it, a memory comes skittering out of the dark, spinning and netting the air, ready to snap me up and ensnare me in old and complex puzzles.

By now the conceit — the extended metaphor of man ensnared by the past as the poor insect is ensnared by the imperceptibly fast formation of the spider web — is taking shape in front of our eyes. It is an association the writer is testing out in its various aspects, but an association built on an image she had first created for us to see and touch — an earned association. And by weaving the metaphor with us, she also engages us in the puzzle, the central puzzle in Naomi's life:

> Just a glimpse of a worn-out patchwork of quilt and the old question comes thudding out of the night again like a giant moth. Why did my mother not return? After all these years, I find myself wondering, but with the dullness of expecting no response. "Please tell me about Mother," I would say as a child to Obasan. I was consumed by the question. Devoured alive.

The literal, down-to-earth associations behind the "complex puzzles" make it truly exciting that the narrator is "devoured alive." There is an imperceptible, sinister, extremely able spider working somewhere in the cosmos to set up these intriguing puzzles, and together with the narrator we are compelled to seek answers. "But Obasan gave me no answers. I did not have, I have never had, the key to the vault of her thoughts. Even now, I have no idea what urgency prompts her to explore this attic at midnight."

This, simply in terms of the naturalistic action, would be a very quiet, and not necessarily tense scene. And yet, in spite of the naturalistic quality of the everyday event, we become aware of a deeper, underlying significance, the tension of a barely named, yet fundamental anxiety: Is life meaningless, will death devour us as the spider's web devours its captives?

> I notice these days, from time to time, how the present disappears in her mind. The past hungers for her. Feasts on her. And when its feasting is complete? She will dance and dangle in the dark, like small insect bones, a fearful calligraphy — a dry reminder that once there was life flitting in the weather.

Death, old age, mutability — these are traditional themes for meditation, particularly appropriate within the framework of a wake for the dead. But here these traditional themes suddenly become vital in the context of the mourner's life. They become the centre of concern, of anxiety. The dancing and dangling of the small insect bones in the dark is a particularly painful definition of the cruelty and meaninglessness of life as seen through the eyes of a victim. Both the excitement of being "devoured alive" and of the past "feasting" on the old woman in death hint at the horror of existence with an intensity much stronger than that of any explicit explanation.

Kogawa's style is characterized by a controlled, concrete, non-subjective quality. The development of a theme begins with the keen impartial observation of natural phenomena as if observed by the objective gaze of a microscopic eye. No subjective, certainly no sentimental elements enter into the description; the voice is cold, almost clinical. Then, unexpectedly, this extremely concrete, specific image turns up, still in full closeup, to offer an analogy for the description of human motivation: suddenly it becomes internalized and humanized, yet loses none of its power through the process of generalization or abstraction. And as the insect caught in the spider's web is transformed to take on the characteristics of a human being, horror is seen in closeup through unflinching, open eyes. One of the most disturbing images in the book relates to Naomi's nightmare in which the Grand Inquisitor pries open her eyes. How different is this from traditional (Western or romantic) associations of evil with darkness. In this novel we are confronted with the mystery of evil in its most everyday manifestations and in forcibly full daylight.

The First Circle: The Puzzle in its Political Dimensions

On the political level the mystery of evil assumes the form of the following questions. Who is responsible? How can all this evil be explained? Why did all this have to happen to us, Japanese Canadians? Will it happen again to any minority in Canada? "Write the vision and make it plain [on tables]." It is ironic that the piece of paper with these words of the Old Testament prophet fell out of the documents Aunt Emily has prepared for Naomi. Moving as those documents are, it is through the silent Naomi's personal recollections that we ultimately get the impression of having heard the word of the prophet, the seer.

Aunt Emily's prose is expository: the voice is strident, angry, polemical. She feels that "the war was just an excuse for the racism that was already there," and looking around she sees "Racism ... the Nazis ... everywhere." She registers

shock and astonishment that Canada could have fallen into the trap: "Germany. That country is openly totalitarian. But Canada is supposed to be a democracy," and she cries out against "undemocratic racial antagonism — which is exactly what our democratic country is supposed to be fighting against." In writing to her sister, Naomi's mother, she also points out the bitter irony in the Japanese immigrants' situation: "We're the enemy. And what about you there? Have they arrested you because you are Canadian?" She is indignant, "What this country did to us, it did to itself." There is no doubt that her determination to bring justice often verges on the heroic:

> Out loud I said: "Why not leave the dead to bury the dead?" "Dead?" she asked. "I am not dead. You're not dead, Who's dead?" "But you can't fight a whole country." I said. "We are the country" she answered.

Yet, in spite of this passion and commitment worthy of the Old Testament prophet, Naomi finds that Aunt Emily's words "are not made flesh," and she sighs in frustration: "All my prayers disappear into space."

Aunt Emily's documents cannot help Naomi come to terms with her own bitterness and frustration: "Greed, selfishness and hatred remain as constant as the human condition, do they not? . . . Is there evidence for optimism?" Unlike Aunt Emily, Naomi feels that "time has solved few mysteries. War and rumours of war, racial hatreds and fears are with us still." As a result, she is slightly contemptuous of those who still "dance to the multicultural piper's tune." Her scepticism of the dream of a multicultural Canadian identity is dispelled only indirectly, and only in instances when she turns her attention to the Canadian landscape.

> 1942
> We are leaving the BC coast — rain, cloud, mist — an air overladen with weeping . . . We are going down to the middle of the earth . . . carried along by the momentum of the expulsion into the waiting wilderness . . . we are the man in the Gospel of John, born into the world for the sake of light. We are sent . . . to the sending that we may bring sight.

It is only in this sudden double exposure between the landscape and the people that she finds a ray of hope. In this perspective the human ordeal may assume Biblical significance, as the Japanese Canadians become the eyes for the Canadian community as a whole. Through their suffering they "bring sight," making sure that no minority is treated with injustice in the future.

Again and again it is less through the people than through the landscape that she approaches the troubled question of her Canadian identity.

> Where do any of us come from in this cold country? Oh, Canada. Whether it is admitted or not, we come from you, we come from you. From the same soil, from the cemeteries full of skeletons with wild roses in their grinning teeth. We come from our untold tales that wait for their telling. We come from Canada, this land that is like every land, filled with the wise, the fearful, the compassionate, the corrupt.

It is more from Naomi's internal, private grief than from Aunt Emily's public statements that we understand the puzzle of political evil. Canada fell victim to the hysteria — fear, greed, the need for a scapegoat — it was fighting against. And it is through Naomi's private vision at the end that we approach the resolution of this political dilemma. When in the last scene it becomes clear to Naomi that this is the land where she wants to lay her dead ones to rest, she is no longer haunted by the "cemeteries full of skeletons with wild roses in their grinning teeth": In her new vision the entire landscape of "Uncle's spot" is permeated with the "sweet and faint" perfume of "the wild roses and the tiny wildflowers that grow along the trickling stream." The flowers of the Canadian soil are joining in the ritual of "water and stone dancing" — the Japanese ritual of the graceful dignified funerary flower dance finally becomes a ritual of acceptance and reconciliation.[5]

The Second Circle: The Puzzle in its Personal-Psychological Dimension

In her quest for enlightenment and spiritual liberation the narrator is aware that "Beneath the grass [is] the speaking dream and beneath the dream is the sensate sea." To reach the currents of the "living word," she has to reach down to the "underground stream," plumb the depth of memories, associations, dreams, the depth of the subconscious. Her dreams — each followed by her own interpretation and explication — play a significant role in delineating her journey in search of articulation and self-understanding: ultimately psychological liberation. The first dream demonstrates how easily and gracefully the author moves not only between the various timeplanes, but also between the naturalistic and the symbolic dimensions in the novel:

> Early in the still grey morning I can hear Obasan emptying her chamber pot in the toilet. I wait until she returns to her bed before I drift off again. Haze. Cloud. Again the descent.

On its surface the dream is ominous, but at this point not yet openly horrible. The dreamer sees a man and a woman in a landscape: "with a sickle she is harvesting the forest debris, gathering the branches into piles." He is a "British martinet. It is evident that he is in command. With his pruner's shears he is cutting the trees." At first the scene seems to be describing merely the endlessness of physical labour, obviously a memory from the work in Alberta in the late 1940's, the memory of weeding beets: "It is hard . . . with my hoe . . . and on the end of the long long row and the next and the next . . . weeding and weeding and weeding." And as the dream figures join in the dehumanizing, soundless labour "like an orchestra of fog," Naomi is once more reminded of her feeling that the whole family had turned into automatons: "We work together all day. At night we eat and sleep. We hardly talk any more."

Of course the personal recollection is merely the raw material of the dream which will yield its proper meaning only in the context of the dreamer's entire inscape. On the political level, the interpretation is fairly obvious: the man is a British martinet, indifferent to the destruction and the suffering he causes. He is in uniform and ready to kill, to obey orders unquestioningly. But beyond the political interpretation, the sickle and the endless movement should also alert us to another analogy, to the figure "with sharp sickle . . . [who was] gathering the vine of the earth, and cast it into the great vinepress of the wrath of God . . . and blood came out . . . " (Rev. 14. 14-20). The strange beast accompanying him — lion or dog or lion dog — is also familiar from the context: the landscape is that of the Book of Revelation, the vision preceding that of the Apocalypse. But the dream also adds its own interpretations to the archetypal manifestation of destruction: in Naomi's eyes evil becomes the result of an inhuman, mechanical obedience. The apocalyptic figure, the personification of destruction, is a martinet; his beast is a robot with a plastic mouth, and the woman is held together by metallic hinges — they manifest the destructiveness of evil as part of our unfeeling, indifferent, machine-like civilization.

At this point the dream scenery changes and the dreamer catches a glance of Uncle making a ceremonial bow: he has a rose with an endless stem in his mouth, acting out part of a ritual for the dead. The dreamer also catches sight of a figure behind him, but before she could discern the identity of this figure, it disappears and Naomi wakes up. To solve the personal-psychological dimensions of her puzzle Naomi should overcome the recurring threats of violation and be able to complete the peaceful, dignified measures of the funerary flower dance. Accordingly, the second nightmare picks up on both motives. To begin with, there is the threat again: soldiers in uniform, sickles turned into bayonets, paralyzing fear and nausea. The narrator has this dream after, and as it were in conjunction with, a painful recollection of a traumatic sexual experience as a five-year-old in Vancouver before the war:

> His name is Old Man Gower. He lives next door. I can see his house beyond the peach tree from my bedroom window. His belly is large and soft. His hair is thin and brown and the top of his head is a shiny skin cap. When he lifts me up in his arms, I do not wish him to lift me up but I do not know what is it to struggle. Every time he carries me away, he tells me I must not tell my mother. He asks me questions as he holds me but I do not answer.

Through their juxtaposition in the narrative, there is no doubt that this long-buried accident from early childhood — the experience of violation — is closely related to the recurring nightmare:

> Two weeks ago, the day of our first staff meeting at Cecil Consolidated, there was that dream again. The dream had a new and terrible ending. In earlier versions there was flight, terror and pursuit. The only way to be saved from harm was to

> become seductive. In this latest dream, three beautiful oriental woman lay naked in the muddy road, flat on their backs, their faces turned to the sky. They were lying straight as coffins, spaced several feet apart. They were lying perpendicular to the road like railway ties. Several soldiers stood or shuffled in front of them in the foreground. It appeared they were guarding these women who were probably prisoners captured from a nearby village. The woman closeby made a simpering coy gesture with her hands. She touched her hair and wiggled her body slightly — seductively. An almost inaudible whimper or sob was drowned in her chest. She was trying to use the only weapon she had — her desirability. She lay on the edge of nausea, stretched between hatred and lust. The soldiers could not be won. Dread and a deathly loathing cut through the women.

The dream acts out the mutually corrupting relationship between victim and victimizer. The victim would like to win over the aggressor, to seduce him. The process is humiliating and self-destructive. The aggressor has a sadistic enjoyment of power — he has the bayonet, the uniform, while the victims are defenceless and naked. In the very process the victims experience the nausea of shame and self-loathing — the denial of their own humanity. This self-loathing is becoming a sense of paralysis, the inability to move.

The metaphor of rape and the victim's ensuing shame and paralysis works also on the level of the political allegory. In Naomi's dreams the sexual aggressors are always white soldiers in uniform. And when we come to young Stephen's response to the persecution of the Japanese Canadians, we realize that rape is used as metaphor for any kind of violation or victimization:

> One day Stephen comes home from school, his glasses broken, black tear stains on his face.
>
> "What happened?" I whisper as Stephen comes up the stairs.
>
> He does not answer me. Is he ashamed, as I was in Old Man Gower's bathroom? Should I go away?

Although Stephen's experience does not display the sexual overtones of Naomi's nightmare, he also undergoes the typical symptoms of shame, paralysis, and self-loathing. As a child he develops a limp, has to wear a cast, and walk on crutches. As for his self-loathing, it is demonstrated by his lifelong difficulty in accepting his ethnic, family background. Although he feels guilty about it, he is ill at ease with Uncle and Obasan and painfully avoids their company.

Yet, violation for Naomi has consequences even more serious than for Stephen. In the course of her recollections she describes herself as suffering from a wound: "In my dreams a small child sits with a wound on her knees. The wound on her knees is on the back of her skull, large and moist. A double wound." The wound on the knee alludes to the sexual wound, to an incident with Old Man Gower: "One does not resist adults. But I know this is unnecessary for my knee. He is only pretending to fix my scratch." Just as important is the wound on the "back of her skull," the wound that comes from the victim's internalization of guilt of

violation, the unhealing "seepage" of guilt and shame in her consciousness — the wound that Naomi shares with the rest of her people, possibly with most victims of violation.

This is not the first time that the nightmare has acted out her traumatic experience with Old Man Gower: the nightmare is a recurring one. At this time, however, Naomi reaches a new stage of understanding when she asks: "Does Old Man Gower still walk through the hedges between our houses in Vancouver, in Slocan, in Cecil?" Through this comment she acknowledges that she has been under the spell of, indeed haunted by this trauma throughout her childhood (Vancouver), her adolescence (Slocan), and her adult years (Cecil). The pain of the memory and the recurring nightmares indicate to the adult Naomi that she is still paralyzed by the same shame, helplessness, and self-loathing, feelings she has to overcome before she can finally liberate herself from the past.

The child Naomi's experience in Old Man Gower's hands is traumatic because it disrupts her naural childhood existence, her oneness with Mother:

> I am clinging to my mother's leg, a flesh shaft that grows from the ground, a tree trunk of which I am the offshoot — a young branch attached by right of flesh and blood. Where she is rooted, I am rooted. If she walks, I will walk. Her blood is whispering through my veins. The shaft of her leg is the shaft of my body and I am her thoughts.
>
> "Don't tell your mother", he whispers into my ear . . . Where in the darkness has my mother gone?"

Naomi describes her sense of loss and alienation in terms of a tormented landscape:

> But here in Mr. Gower's hands I become other — a parasite on her body, no longer of her mind . . . If I tell my mother about Mr. Gower, the alarm will send a tremor through our bodies and I will be torn from her. But the secret has already separated us. His hands are frightening and pleasureable. In the centre of my body is a rift . . . In my childhood dream the mountain yawns apart as the chasm spreads. My mother is on one side of the rift. I am on the other. We cannot reach each other. My legs are being sawn in half.

This rift, the chasm of separation, is a recurring motif in the book, especially since the incident with Mr. Gower was followed closely by the actual separation from Mother. "It is around this time that Mother disappears. I hardly dare to think, let alone ask why she has to leave." Naomi feels torn, amputated by her sexual experience. Tormented by guilt, she feels that her abandonment by Mother must be punishment for her unmentionable offence, her fall from innocence. Only at the end of the novel, when she receives the message of Mother's love, will she experience the healing of the rift in her cosmos. She understands then that it was not her guilt that brought about Mother's departure. Her Mother had to leave and stay away out of love. As a result, it becomes clear to the adult Naomi that

she could not have been guilty, and, what is just as important, that she was always loved, that she can be loved, that she is lovable.

Of course nobody could convey this message to Naomi until she becomes ready to receive it, and it is the third dream that takes her to the final point in her journey, to understanding and receptivity. This final dream is that of the Grand Inquisitor, and once more it is a dream which begins with a vision of the threat of violation: "Always I dream of soldiers eager for murder, their weapons ready. We die again and again. In my dreams we are never safe enough." Yet, the dream also carries on the interrupted flower ceremony from the first dream, and by now the figure who then disappeared is ready to reveal herself to the dreamer:

> Mother stood in the centre. In her mouth she held a knotted string stem, like the twine and string of Obasan's ball which she keeps in the pantry. From the stem hung a red rose, red as a heart.

At this point, however, the dream reaches a different stage. Nevertheless, because of the peculiar patterns of dream-logic, both stages will prove instrumental in pointing the dreamer toward her resolution:

> Was it then that the nightmare began? The skin of the air became closer and denser, a formless hair vest. Up from the valley there rose a dark cloud — a great cape. It was the Grand Inquisitor descending over us, the top of his head a shiny skin cap. With his large hands he was prying open my mother's lips, prying open my eyes. I fell and cried out.

In Dostoyevski's story the Grand Inquisitor is sitting in judgement over Christ, prying, tormenting him with questions. In her dream Naomi has a vision of Mother's face torn and her own eyes being pried open. Interpreting this dream, she makes a sudden discovery about herself: "How the Grand Inquisitor gnaws at my bones," she cries out. She now comes to the realization that by her ceaseless questioning and prying she has been guilty of taking on the role of the Grand Inquisitor, of making judgement over her dead Mother. She makes a decision to give up her determined search, to have faith in Mother's love and to accept its silence. Only when willing to "admit" this silence, will it open itself to her. Paradoxically, Naomi cannot receive the message she so eagerly has searched for until she learns to give up the search; until she learns to affirm the mystery that her Mother's love had been all pervasive although it had been silent.

Only after she has her last dream and suceeds in finding its interpretation will Naomi receive the detailed description of her mother's martyrdom and the long awaited proof of her silent love. The book culminates in Chapter 37 which describes Mother's horrible ordeal in Nagasaki, a vision that has been prepared by numerous allusions and Biblical images throughout. In the light of this vision all the accumulated puzzles of Naomi's life receive their solution, albeit a solution in the light of a tragic illumination:

> In the dark Slocan night, the bright light flares in my dreaming. I hear the screams and feel the mountain breaking. Your long black hair falls and falls into the chasm. My legs are sawn in half. The skin on your face bubbles like lava and melts from your bones. Mother, I see your face. Do not turn aside.

In the light of the Nagasaki conflagration, all the disasters in the life of the Japanese Canadian family pale in comparison. Yet, the disasters that befell Naomi and her family in Canada also had anticipated this disaster. In the same way all of Naomi's nightmares are pale in comparison to this ultimate nightmare vision of cosmic proportions — the total annihilation of the world as a result of the overpowering forces of evil — yet her dreams also anticipate, foreshadow this vision of the Last Judgement, the end of the world.

The Third Circle: The Puzzle in its Cosmic Dimension

Once she is allowed to hear the content of the letter on the blue rice paper, Naomi's internal drama reaches its climax of recognition and reversal: she is able to understand the puzzle of the past and reach a resolution for a new life in the future. Offering a resolution to all of her previous puzzles, the climactic scene also puts Naomi's experience in a new perspective and opens up the cosmic, universal dimensions of the novel. What is it in this letter that allows Naomi to come to terms with her past, her sense of abandonment and separation? The letter describes Nasane, the beautiful Japanese woman rushing through the living hell of Nagasaki during the radiation, trying to protect her cousin's little daughter — a child who, we hear, also happens to bear a striking resemblance to Naomi. Harking back to the allegorical methods of communal portrait, it is quite likely that Naomi recognizes herself both in the child and in the mother at the moment. More important, it becomes clear that in spite of Mother's unspeakable suffering, she is still able to care for her cousin's child, and think of her own children. Not allowing Naomi and Stephen to know about her illness and her death, she wants to spare them of her own agony, putting considerations of their welfare before her own need for them, even in the most harrowing moments of her anguish.

Although Mother is a human figure in the family drama, through the author's allegorical methods of characterization and through the sensitive handling of the religious symbols, in her death she emerges as a witness, a martyr, the representative of the sacred. Reaffirming her bond with her Mother allows Naomi to understand the legacy of an absolute, even transcendental love in the cosmos, which gives new vitality to the deadly, desiccated landscape of her soul. The power of the mother's posthumous message is enormous. Before receiving this message Naomi sees herself rootless, wounded, amputated. Looking at her mother's faded photograph, she also sees her image as lifeless, distant, indifferent.

> The tree is a dead tree in the middle of the prairies. I sit on its roots still as a stone.

> In my dreams a small child sits with a wound ... a double wound. The child is forever unable to speak. I apply the thick bandage but nothing can soak up the seepage. I beg that the woundedness may be healed and that the limbs may learn to dance. But you stay in the black and white photograph, smiling your yasashi smile.

Obsessed by her "double wound" Naomi withdraws into the hurt silence of woundedness. Benumbed, paralyzed by the past, she is unable to rejoice, to join in the celebratory dance of life.

Although the letter on the blue rice paper conveys a shocking, devastating message, it also brings about a healing change in Naomi: "The letters today are skeletons. Bones only. But the earth still stirs with dormant blooms. Love flows through the roots of the trees by our graves." Recognizing that the "living waters" nurture the roots of the trees at the graves allows Naomi to see that the flow of love has power to overcome death: now she is getting ready to join the dance of life by completing the funerary dance she had been preoccupied with in the previous dreams. Having heard the mother's message, Naomi has also come to accept her separation from her in the flesh and to understand oneness with her spiritually. As a result, the numbness of "woundedness" is over: the formerly "dead tree" has come alive, and so has the black and white photograph from her childhood. Addressing her mother with the fervour of a religious hymn, Naomi celebrates the power of regenerative love in her cosmos:

> You stand on the streetcorner in Vancouver in a straight silky dress and a light black coat ... Your leg is a tree trunk and I am branch and butterfly. I am joined to your limbs by the right of birth; child of your flesh, leaf of your bough ...

Experiencing the flow of love over the roots leads her to another affirmation: the organic unity or oneness of life. It is the affirmation of the oneness between the roots, the trunk, the bough, and the branches which allows the formerly dead tree to come alive. It has overcome the stonelike silence of paralysis and woundedness, ready to respond to the "new word" in the formerly dead landscape. But what is the significance of the "new word" in this context? Several direct quotations and numerous allusions to the Bible have prepared us to see the conflagration of Nagasaki as the doomsday vision of the Apocalypse, the destruction of the world by the powers of evil. But according to the Biblical scenario, this vision of the Apocalypse is precedent to the vision of a New Heaven and a New Earth. Does the "new word" sought by the narrator point toward a transcendental reality on the cosmic level? And in terms of the political conundrum, after their years of wandering in the desert of hatred, are the Nisei going to find the "hidden manna," or the fulfilment of their promised land in a multicultural Canadian democracy? Relating the same question to the personal psychological dimensions, is Naomi being "reborn" to a new life emotionally, sexually, spiritually?

In spite of the rich and consistent texture of the Biblical imagery, the plot does not fulfil our expectation of the vision of a "New Heaven and New Earth." Or rather, the last stage of this drama is not translated into human action. Once Naomi has achieved her illumination, she simply returns to the natural landscape where we had first met her, back to the coulee in Southern Alberta. The exclusive focus on the natural landscape in this most dramatic moment should draw our attention to some of the unique characteristics of Joy Kogawa's universe. In spite of the indebtedness to the Judaeo-Christian framework and the profusion of Biblical allusions, her world reveals profound connections with a fundamentally nature-centred, pantheistic tradition. The Buddhist tradition emphasizes the continuity between the dead and the living by affirming that death is also part of the nature cycle. Hence the finding of the physical location of the grave around the descendant's home in the community is a significant step in the ritual.[6] There can be no new life, no creativity in the family until the repose of the dead has been assured, and the mourner cannot liberate himself from the "death taboo" before laying the dead in the earth with the proper ceremony to accompany this act.[7] Therefore, the final scene in the novel in which Naomi affirms the location of the symbolic gravesite, the spot Uncle had chosen for the annual ritual to commemorate Mother's death, offers resolution to her own rootlessness and homelessness. As a matter of fact, this spot inevitably becomes the emotional, spiritual centre for Naomi's quest, and therefore the appropriate setting for its resolution.

Coincidence of Buddhist and Christian symbols in the quest often present the effect of superimposition or double exposure. Although the "new name" on the tablet and the vitality of the living waters that feed the Tree of Life have their particular consistency significant in the Biblical drama of Apocalypse and resurrection, the same images also have their consistency in the Buddhist tradition. Here the Tree of Life becomes the family tree, and the concept of resurrection evokes Naomi's affirmation of renewal through the nature cycle, that is, through the continuity between ancestor and mourner in the family line: "Father, Mother, my relatives, my ancestors, we have come to the forest tonight . . . we have turned and returned to your arms as you turn to earth and form the forest floor." As the wake for her dead becomes enriched by allusions to the Buddhist and the Biblical tradition, the images of tablets, water, stone, flower and fruit assume their multidimensional significance. The consistency of these archetypal symbols expresses beliefs shared by various ethnic and religious groups, as if to demonstrate that elusive ideal of multiculturalism that may offer the narrator hope for the political future. Harmony between these different contexts within the same narrative framework is also appropriate to Naomi's final resolution. Mixing the ashes of her dead with the Canadian soil allows her to claim Canada as not only her political, but also her spiritual home.

Yet, in spite of the consistency of a spiritual, even a mystical sensibility, the

resolution in the landscape suggests that for the narrator resurrection and renewal are part of a human drama that has to be acted out exclusively in the here and now. In this soil, containing the bones of buffaloes, Indians, and early Canadian settlers Naomi has to lay her dead ones to "rest in [their] world of stone." It is here, in the coulee of Southern Alberta that she had to find the "living word" leading to a flowering, a fruition, a harmonious dance in her spiritual landscape.

Structure — Resolution of the Puzzles

There is no doubt that Kogawa's description of Naomi's spiritual journey comes alive through natural symbols, and that without these symbols we would be at a loss for the significance of the human drama. In terms of this drama, Aunt Emily's testament was the dead stone, containing a record of bitterness and anger against injustice. Mother's message from the past is the vital insight which allows Naomi to come alive emotionally, to accept the transcendental reality of love which flows through the roots at the very gravesides. Once she received this message, the seed will flower with speech, and Naomi's own testament will become the "white stone" with the "new name," the "living word." Ultimately, it is the message of love, which breaking the several seals of Aunt Emily's documents, will "overcome" the conflagration of the Apocalypse.[8] Once Naomi is able to "admit" this message in the innermost circle, the personal-psychological landscape, the currents of the vital emotion will inevitably overflow and bring to life the landscape in the second and third circles, that is, in the political and cosmic dimensions. The combination of the narrative devices — the three openings, the riddle in each, the interpenetration of the three landscapes, the task imposed on the reader to puzzle out nuances in the natural landscape as they become key elements in the human drama — results in a sophisticated game of hide and go seek, established at the start and resolved only at the end of the novel.

The author's mastery of her craft is also demonstrated by the fact that all these dimensions of the puzzle are held together by the unity of a circular, indeed a concentric structure. The reader is often reminded of the narrator's own image of the intricate weaving of the spider's web, as characters shuttle back and forth between the various locations and the various time planes. Starting in August 1972, we move back to August 1954 (Chapter 1). Then, we go back and forth between August and September 1972 (that is, between the narrator's last visit and Uncle's death). We also take several journeys in time between 1933 and 1941, then between 1941 and 1951, as we follow the various stages in the tribulations of the Japanese Canadian family on its journey from Vancouver to Slocan and Southern Alberta. Then, just before the climactic scene in Chapter 37, we take a big leap; from the present in 1972 we move back to 1954, the arrival of the letter on the blue rice paper with the tragic news. From here we go even

further, back to the climactic scene in the novel, to Nagasaki in 1945. It is from this final and most significant leap in time and space that we have to return once more to the present, September 1972, the day of Uncle's funeral. We have come full circle.

Yet, side by side with these jumps back and forth in time, there is also narrative progress in a chronological, linear sequence. Advancing through the various stages in Naomi's life, we get closer and closer to its central mystery. Once this mystery has been revealed, however, the tight-knit spider's web might just as well dissolve. Her new understanding allows Naomi to extricate herself from the snare of her history. Central to the new message from the depth of the past is the revelation that at the hub of the wheel, at the centre of the web there is a force other than the meaningless destructiveness of evil.

In addition to and complementary to the spider's web is the ball of twine and string Obasan had collected from bits and pieces saved over the years. Powerful in her silence, Obasan is indeed in charge of "life's infinite details," as if the ball of string accumulated over the years would have somehow absorbed the wisdom and experience of those years themselves. As Naomi had anticipated, both the centerpiece and the end of the string — both the central secret and the key to its unravelling in the appropriate moment — have been in Obasan's hands all along. Struggling to overcome Obasan's silence, yet also inspired by its depth, Naomi has grappled with her task faithfully, unravelling her yarn in all its intricate patterns, yet also in full control of the tight-knit unity of its concentric, globe-within-globe-within-globe structure. And although it has taken Naomi less than three days between Uncle's death and the gathering of the family for the funeral to accomplish her elaborate journey back and forth in time, within this interval she succeeded in solving a lifetime of accumulated puzzles. She has also made the silence speak: *Obasan* is a testimony to that hard-won miracle of creativity which alone has the power to turn silence into sound.

NOTES

[1] Joy Kogawa, *Obasan* (1981; rpr. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983). All references to the novel are from this edition.

[2] It is also significant for the framework of the narrative that all of Naomi's recollections (that is, the whole novel, except for the "Prelude" of the first chapter) take place in the interval between Uncle's death and funeral, and in the ancient Buddhist tradition this "interval between the encoffinment and the funeral is the most important period of the watching by the dead [a period now] generally passed in silence." See "Death and Disposal of the Dead (Japanese)," *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* (New York: Scribner, 1913), iv, p. 487.

That Naomi's grappling with her accumulated silence takes place in the framework of a wake opens up another interesting dimension of her struggle: her trial is to take a journey through silence, in silence, ultimately to liberate herself from silence.

[3] According to Michiko Lambertson, "In the absence of her mother Naomi uses Obasan and Aunt Emily as windows on the female adult world." I also feel, however, that the contrast between Obasan and Aunt Emily goes beyond the narrator's attitude to the female world; insights from this contrast are fundamental to her definition of her own identity in terms of Oriental and Western cultural, political, and psychological attitudes. See Michiko Lambertson, "*Obasan*," *Canadian Woman Studies*, 4 (Winter 1982) p. 94.

[4] It has been observed, for example, that "the syntax of her characters expresses fatalism." See Edith Milton, "Unnecessary Precautions," *The New York Times Book Review*, 15 September, 1982, p. 8.

[5] Naomi's recurring references to the flower dance with the single long-stemmed rose should also alert us to a significant aspect of the ancient Buddhist ceremony in which "a single branch of Shikimi" or a single flower with a long stem is offered before the coffin when the preparation for the funeral is complete. The interrupted ceremony of the flower dance referred to in the dreams and in other parts of the novel is completed in the last chapter in the "wordless ballet" between "water and stone dancing," involving the "seed which flowers with speech" and the "wild roses and the tiny wildflowers that grow along the trickling stream." Seeing the landscape come alive, also means that Naomi herself may be able to join in the ceremonial dance and assume the potential for spiritual renewal for herself, for her people, and for all the survivors of war and persecution. See *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, p. 487.

[6] When Naomi returns to Uncle's spot at the end, she is indeed old enough to understand the meaning of those annual visits. Harking back to the tradition of commemorating all the dead of the family at the same time, we may also assume that in the future she will include Uncle in her annual obsequies. See *Japanese Religion: A Survey* (Tokyo: Kadausha International for the Agency for Cultural Affairs, 1972) pp. 123, 134, 135.

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 135.

[8] Although the context is undoubtedly Christian, several aspects of the sequence and a great deal of the spirit of Naomi's ritual of mourning are reminiscent of ancient Japanese tradition. There is no doubt that in the Biblical context of the universal drama "the white stone with the new name" anticipates the apocalypse followed by resurrection. Yet, at the same time, the tablet with the "new name" may also allude to ancient Buddhist or Japanese folk tradition in which it refers to the ritual drama in the family. In death the deceased receives a new name and will pass on his or her spirit to a newborn member of the family. To carry this reference even further, "in some Buddhist families there is a large family ihai [a wooden tablet] in which the names of all the members are inscribed . . . some Buddhist sects . . . speak about two kinds of posthumous names . . . [and] the second one is a kind of new name 'which no man knoweth saving the one that receiveth it.' " *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, p. 486.

HIROSHIMA STOPWATCH

C. Simril

Hiroshima 3:02
Death's tourists
do not sleep

Hiroshima 3:02
The night rains/
drowned light

Hiroshima 3:02
From newspaper
floor they stare

Hiroshima 3:02
A young girl smiles
with no eyes

Hiroshima 3:02
Old woman sleeping
mouth open/cries

Hiroshima 3:02
Enter rich lady
and sunglasses

Hiroshima 3:02
A large white man
carries crutches

Hiroshima 3:03
Train jolts
escape from time

Hiroshima 3:03
Fibrous white stairs
soft radiant glow

HEAT WAVE

Derk Wynand

The air rises by all evidence
and in waves into the very
stratosphere, soon tailing
the fastest of jets.

Left behind, heavier,
the beached urbanites split,
horizontally,
the thin no less than the fat.
They dance left
and right, left and right

and exert no visible effort
in the visible heat, but dance,
only dance,
not of their own will.
Oh, they are *danced*
and prettier, yes, far more
beautiful, though poets,
also stricken by the sun
and danced by it,
sensitive to the feelings
of men split by the air
— poets will hardly say it.

The dogs without friends refuse
to blink their eyes
free of the nearly stationary
flies gathered into the heat
around them.

The dogs, the dogs, the dogs
without friends keep floating
on air, the flies bobbing with them.

The crest stays with us. What
kind of wave this
that washes everything
off its feet and does not
itself vanish?

Only the children can answer,
certain as always, and shouting
their small, hard-earned truths,
as if they had mastered the language
to do so. They float off into a distance
the wave renders less
and less certain.

And the women swim after them, heroic
or foolish — who can blame us for thinking
them suddenly pregnant again, intent
on nothing but the future
(as though the wars really existed.)

Without dogs, children or women,
without friends or intentions, we men
do not fight the currents, content
with the hope our bodies
will never be found.

WOMAN OF THE DUNES

Linda Rogers

I have something to say, she said,
sweeping the sand,
her ballad swelling in dust,
the hair, skin, fingernails
candlewax and confetti
composted on the garden walk.
Sand hisses in her broom.

TALES WITHIN TALES

Margaret Atwood's Folk Narratives

Barbara Godard

WE ALL LIVE BY storytelling: it is the way we make sense of our lives.[1] In making up stories about ourselves and others, we give shape to these lives and meaning to the world about us. In personal acts of narrative imagination, people tell themselves and each other the truths, half-truths, lies, and fantasies by which we all live. Sometimes, such freely anecdotal storytelling accumulates local history and becomes public chronicle. Then there are the stories of art, the "high literature" we study, with its genres ranging from the *märchen* to the epic and the novel. Margaret Atwood has been an avid student of literary history, and in her poetry and fiction has included allusions and quotations from its many genres, and repeated some examples of them in condensed form. For like that of many modern writers, Atwood's fiction is self-reflexive. Aware of its position as latecomer, Atwood's writing reflects on the models that have influenced it, seeking through antithesis or completion to clear a place for itself within an ongoing literary tradition. Not surprisingly then, Frank Davey has used the title "Alternate Stories,"[2] to comment on Atwood's radical suspicion of narrative art, her attempt to create a *tabula rasa* by overtly criticizing the distorting lies of fiction. "Alter-*native*" fiction would be a more appropriate title, I suggest, for describing Atwood's meditations on the liar's paradox in which her narratives are grounded. It also underlines more clearly the issue of origins, of the grounds for an aesthetic, which is one of her major fictional themes. More specifically, too, it highlights the question of a native literature, one of the participants in the battle of the books waged in her fiction, which features varying types of embedded tales within tales.

My essay has two starting points. One is my reading of Atwood's *Bluebeard's Egg*, which marks a shift in her narrative technique. David McFadden's comment about the book sums up my reaction to it:

> I'm, still under the spell of Margaret Atwood's new book from McClelland and Stewart, *Bluebeard's Egg*. . . . The book is a big breakthrough for Atwood both artistically and in terms of basic human understanding.[3]

The deepening of "human understanding" in the book, it seems to me, is directly related to the "breakthrough" in technique, indeed, is created by the artist's powers of illusion. This is the result of a change in the relationship between embedded

and frame stories within the narratives. To approach this issue will take us to my second source, the folk narrative tradition of anglophone Canada.

My understanding of this tradition is shaped by Carole Carpenter who has underlined the issue of hegemony, the problematic relationship between ethnicity and folklore, in Canadian folklore studies.[4] High literary culture is culture as imposition, culture as power, for the anglophone "majority" of Canada refuses to acknowledge the existence of its folklore. Folklore is the culture of the "other," something which serves as a rallying point for those without economic power. It is associated with the preservation of an archaic past, a threatened regional existence or an ethnic language. Regionalism and ethnicity orient folklore scholarship, the more powerful and richer regions or cultural groups encouraging study on hierarchical lines downward. The folk culture of Quebec has been intensively studied, as has that of Newfoundland, which boasts Canada's only English-language folklore department at Memorial University. Collection of folk narrative and poetry in Canada has focussed on "olden times," on the establishment of a fixed written text, with senior citizens as informants and research focused on isolated or backward regions such as Cape Breton, the Ottawa Valley, or among immigrants such as the Norwegians in Alberta, or among the indigenous population of Indians and Inuit. As yet, few studies centre on folk literature as a way in which all people make sense of their human experiences. Nor do they start with the local, the here and now, especially not when they originate in the centre of anglophone Canada. The novelty of *Bluebeard's Egg*, I would suggest, is to undertake this serious analysis, even as it promotes to high culture some of the forms of oral narrative — anecdotes, local legends, natural narratives — currently alive in Toronto. That this marks a shift in Atwood's fictional technique and in the type of folk narrative embedded in her fictions, and ultimately in the relationship between embedded story and framing story. I shall demonstrate with reference to *Surfacing* and *Lady Oracle*, which incorporate, respectively, the narratives of the Indian and the Québécois and the written *märchen* of European tradition.

Before examining these in detail, I should like briefly to explore oral narrative forms in Canadian literature and to situate Atwood's work within this activity through her comments on folklore in literature. Discussion of the oral tradition in Canada is linked to the evolution of a Canadian discourse. In *Empire and Communication*, Harold Innis sketched a theory about the relationships between social power and corresponding cultural forms. Writing codified vast spatial expanses, though it ultimately fossilized into a ponderous system. In contrast, the tradition of oral discussion engendered by a philosophical tradition of dialogue, was creatively dynamic in the intellectual sphere. A number of Canadian novelists have continued this discussion of imperialism by structuring their work around similar concerns: the implications of oral and written communication, social power, and ideological manipulation.

Attempts to create a national literature in Canada have developed on this interface of metropolis and hinterland, of written and oral literary models, a most frequent literary device being the "Battle of the Books" which pits high European cultural models against the oral narratives of North American experience, as in the work of Robert Kroetsch or of Antonine Maillet, where the Odyssey and Don Quixote are repeated in the vernacular. In their writing folklore breaches the walls and facilitates the entry of the speech or dialects of North American peoples into the high literary tradition, affirming the vitality of the primitive against convention, or experience against form, of process making sense against the repetition of ready-made code.[5] Naming one's own experience is subversive if one writes from the periphery: the task becomes the exploration of the landscape that is language itself in order to free the imagination from imposed structures. Haunted by the rich anglophone tradition that is their heritage, Canadian writers have asserted the right to an existing language whose use has been restricted to speech and oral narrative tradition. In the nineteenth century discussion about the foundation of national literatures centred on the creation of languages that would incorporate features of existing native languages. "Founders of a 'distinctive literature,' [will not be produced] unless they write in Anglo-Ojibway, and educate a nation to look upon Nana-bo-John as a Launcelot or a Guy of Warwick."[6] Political independence is not sufficient to bring about this national literature. As Crémazie writes:

> we shall not be any the less simple literary colonists. . . . if we spoke Iroquois or Huron, our literature would live. I repeat, if we spoke Huron or Iroquois, the works of our writers would attract the attention of the Old World. That virile and vigorous language, born in the forests of America would have that crude poetry which delights the foreigner.[7]

A new wave of interest in the folk tradition as foundation for an indigenous literature flowered during the nationalist movement of the 1960's and 1970's. This renewed interest is also a consequence of new literary values which favour the introduction of popular culture into noble art forms. Moreover, as "post-modern" writers have turned away from the spatialized forms of modernism, they have sought engagement with historical change and with literature as performance, a prominent feature of oral literature. Through legend and oral history, folklore is its engagement with the past. Often called "fakelore" by folklore scholars,[8] this new wave of literary folklore is still dependent on the traditions of the native people which it appropriates and colonizes in asserting its own difference from imperialist discourse. It adopts the discourse of the most visible "other," the "native," in order to establish its own distance from a homogenizing centre. By being aboriginal it aims to be original.

While some contemporary Canadian writers such as Margaret Laurence, Robert Kroetsch, and Antonine Maillet have relied on the narrative models of their *own*

oral traditions — the Celtic hero tales, the tall tale or the liar's tale of Alberta, and the giants' tale of Acadia — many more writers have grounded their subversion in the narratives and practices of the native peoples. The figure we encounter most frequently, whether in the fiction of Sheila Watson, Robert Kroetsch, or Jack Hodgins, is that of Coyote, the trickster cultural hero, the shape-shifter, master of illusion. His presence highlights the problematic situation of the writer/illusionist whose ability to cast spells is dependent on the audience's participation in the enchantment. Where Coyote is at work, we are invited to participate in literature as performance. Here the stage as barrier between author/reader dissolves in a communicative event in which all are equally involved in the negotiation of meaning. Oral practices of narration make structural changes in written work, advancing a post-modernist aesthetic of process over a modernist one of stasis.

I HAVE BRIEFLY SKETCHED in this background so that Atwood's place in the evolving tradition will be clearer. That she is conscious of such a lineage is evident in her talk at Harvard University entitled "Canadian Monsters: Some Aspects of the Supernatural in Canadian Fiction." A description of the use of folklore in literature, this essay explores a tradition of "magic people," especially the "Monster as Other." Here we read "the wendigo story in *Brown Waters* is short and simple as the folktale material from which it obviously derives," and later, "In the first third of [*Tay John*], which is written in the form of a folktale or legend." With her comments on Sheila Watson's *The Double Hook*, Atwood establishes links with the other contemporary writers I have mentioned, even as she distances herself from them by treating Coyote as metaphor for landscape, as aesthetic product, rather than as master illusionist, a stand-in for the author and the process of production:

> The wendigo and Coyote are both landscape-and-nature creatures, nature in both cases being understood to include super-nature. Neither is human; both can act on human beings, but cannot be acted upon. They are both simply *there*, as supernatural forces in the environment and as embodiments of that environment which must be reckoned with. They are objects rather than subjects, the "Other" against which the human characters measure themselves.[9]

Here Atwood reveals the way the elements of the oral traditions of the native people function for her as the "Other," something which she experiences from outside, and appropriates. Her language betrays the hierarchical nature of her relationship with this alternate culture, as it establishes her at the centre looking down on the oral traditions of those who are more marginal or peripheral than she is. It is against these assumptions that we shall measure the changes which occur in Atwood's use of folk tales, keeping in mind that this model she has used

for establishing difference — self/other, presence/absence — is preeminently one that leads to identity and the obliteration of real difference.

Before turning to Atwood's tales within tales, we should briefly explore the options open to her within a broad stream of self-reflexive narrative. Such specular fiction, as Lucien Dällenbach terms it,[10] involves a process of fiction doubling back on itself, mirroring itself, and offering a metaphor of its own origins. Through a "mise en abyme" or embedding, the fiction may mirror the statement, the complete fiction, or the code or genre which governs its construction, or the process of enunciation. The doubling may be simple or complex, ranging from the relating of one story model or the quotation or resumé of a single story, to the never-ending story where narrative is embedded within narrative in a recursive paradigm which, like the proverbial chinese-box conundrum, opens to infinity.[11] Within these variables, the writer may proceed by reduction through containment or by an elaboration of the paradigm of reference. This in turn may operate on the principles of either contrast or analogy, though the former will always involve some relationship of analogy in order to establish grounds for comparison in parallel, related, or coincidental likenesses which may contain other great differences. The resemblances between frame and embedded stories may occur in the setting, the characters, the narrators, or in the repetition of textual expressions. Again the text may be integrated into its new context in a single presentation, or in sections alternating with the frame story. What results from all these techniques of repetition is that the text enters into dialogue with itself and represents the apparatus of its own interpretation, the activities of both reading and writing being reproduced on the level of the story, the narrated and the quoted worlds. In her various works, Atwood uses a wide range of these specular techniques, ranging from the evocation of the generic code of the yellow press in *True Stories* to the quotation of the sacred lore of the goddess in the snake poems of *Interlunar*. Indeed, doubling has always been a feature of her work, from her first book, *Double Persephone*. However, the fiction I wish to examine in detail, fiction that embeds folk narratives, establishes a loose typology of self-reflective strategies, from *Surfacing* which doubles the statement, through *Lady Oracle* which multiplies and refracts the generic code, to *Bluebeard's Egg* where the mimesis is of the process of enunciation, of production.[12]

Surfacing is Atwood's most eloquent exploration of the problem of colonialism and of the necessity to escape from the distortions and constrictions of the ruling American way of life and of an inherited language in order to reach authenticity and psychic survival. Here she recognizes the contours of our entrapment and the double bind in making sense of daily life within them. This book develops along a basic Atwood theme of conflict between form and life, dramatized in terms of imitation. Lacking originality, false forms — linguistic alienation and fakelore — distort experience. What is being imitated is the artistic experience of another culture, one that is dominant economically. This basic story of expropriation and

obliteration is repeated on two levels: Anglo-Canadians imitate and are overwhelmed by the forms of American culture; the Québécois are corrupted by the Anglo-Canadians who expropriate this culture of the other in order to forge their own authenticity. As the biting irony of the gap between original and appropriated meanings, between embedded tale and frame tale reveals, such an activity rebounds on the expropriator, vitiating the search for authenticity.

Identity is implicit language. As the narrator of *Surfacing* observes: "a language is everything you do."[13] Yet the billboards she reads on the Quebec highway, with their confused signs, reveal the power of the advertising slogan of the Anglo-Canadians, themselves colonized by the Americans, to disrupt a language and a culture:

> VOTEZ GODET, VOTEZ OBRIEN ... THE SALADA, BLUE MOON COTTAGES ½ MILE, QUEBEC LIBRE, FUCK YOU, BUVEZ COCA-COLA GLACE, JESUS SAVES.

In the random juxtapositions all around her, she sees the religion, tradition, and even language of Quebec violated by "American" values of material progress and ecological destruction. Popular culture is obliterated by culture for the massses imposed from without. In the village, the gas station is decorated with stuffed moose, one waving an American flag. The Quebec of her childhood, when her mother and Madame Paul could exchange only phatic signals — "Il fait beau," "ow are you" — devoid of any message, an empty communicative exchange which left the two cultures and languages impervious to each other, has vanished. To the narrator's great dismay, the main agents of occupation are not Americans but anglophone Canadians, who are roaring through the tranquil waters scaring away all the fish. The ultimate facade stripped away on this voyage to the mythic north is the illusion that Canadian culture has been more respectful of the other. Without the barriers of a different language, Canadians have been assimilated to the "American way of life" and are, in turn, colonizing Quebec. As the narrator says: "If you look like them and talk like them and think like them you are them. . . ."

At the heart of the narrator's discovery of her complicity in the takeover of Quebec is her recognition that she really knows nothing about Quebec. And this is where the embedded folk tales are vital, for it is through her puzzling over the meaning of such tales, that the narrator raises the question of originality as a goal in art, all the while underlining Atwood's own practice of explicit appropriation or parody, when it becomes clear to the reader that this embedded tale, interpreted by the narratee, forecasts the outcome of her own story she is narrating for us, of which it is the refracting mirror.[14] For the narrator is involved in a project to translate Quebec culture for an anglophone audience who will make sense of their own nationalism by appropriating Quebec popular culture, perceived as a genuine literature of the soil, to replace the folklore lacking in Anglo-Canadian society. This appropriation has a venerable tradition, dating back to the end of the

nineteenth century when Quebec culture provided the model for a national culture, just as the Quebecers' name for themselves, "Canadiens," was adopted by the British North Americans to name themselves. In raising the old saw about translation as treason Atwood underlines the fundamental duplicity of all language, the gap between sign and object it designates, but more specifically, the twisting of language through its commodification in the marketplace. This is more than a "dialect problem," as the narrator identifies her poor translations. It is an ideological one first, and then a formal one. As the narrator points out, her main motivation for her work is money. She is a commercial artist who will illustrate anything she is given to do, from a Department of Manpower employment manual — the "young people" in her drawings "with lobotomized grins" — to the translation of *Quebec Folk Tales* she is currently working on. "It isn't my territory, but I need the money," she says.

Working on the illustrations is a disturbing process and raises more questions than solutions. Just as these embedded tales are interpretive puzzles for the narrator who is the narratee (fictional reader) on the first level of story, so too are they conundrums for us readers, tests in our knowledge of Quebec culture. The representation of the process of enunciation in the embedded story thus performs a meta-fictional function. For the stories are not at all what she has expected to read. They are "märchen," "like German fairy tales, except for the absence of red-hot iron slippers and nail-studded casks." Why is unclear, because so many hands have been involved in the preparation and transmission of the tales:

> I wonder if this mercy descends from the original tellers, from the translators or from the publisher: probably it's Mr. Perceval the publisher, he's a cautious man, he shies away from anything he calls "disturbing." We had an argument about that: he said one of my drawings was too frightening and I said children liked being frightened. "It isn't the children who buy the books," he said, "it's their parents." So I compromised: now I compromise before I take the work in, it saves time . . .

The desire to sell triumphs over all integrity and leads to bowdlerization, an extreme violation in a literary world which places the question of originality above all. But distortion is inevitable whenever there is repetition of the story. While the narrator has decided that Mr. Perceval's mercantile interests are the most likely corrupting source in the line of transmission of the story, she has given us a long chain of doublings, any of which, from varying original versions to translations of them, might be responsible for the distortion. Any doubling, as reader becomes writer and frames the story from a new perspective, introduces divergences and undecidability.

This is especially true of the narrator's art work for the book which diverges radically from the reading of *Quebec Folk Tales*, the meta- or second story, she offers through her questions. The drawings are anything but original, as she makes

clear, for she repeats the stylized drawings, hence clichés — "a princess, emaciated fashion-model torso and infantile face" — she has used as illustrations for *Favourite Fairy Tales*. These, in turn, are modelled on advertising images of fashionable women, mass-produced images created explicitly for adults. No Quebec local colour here. Indeed, just the opposite, for it is the reader's perception on the level of the first story that colours this interpretation. As she is doing the drawing, the narrator remembers the imitation that defined nationalist symbols in public school. Bliss Carman's famous line, "God planted a Scarlet Maple Tree," was "printed thirty-five times, strung out along the top of the blackboard, each page with a preserved maple leaf glued to it, ironed between sheeets of waxed paper." Nationalism is a commodity for a culture-starved Anglo-Canadian audience. Clearly the narrator learned her art of imitation early before she began imitating for the international market. Cultural imperialism, through the international marketplace, encourages the production of "fakelore," Atwood suggests through this representation of reading/writing, in the metaphor viewing/drawing.

BUT IN REWORKING this material, Atwood's own writing becomes an art of parody, displaced into drawings rather than narrative forms, working ironically within a Canadian tradition of exalting French-Canadian peasant popular culture with its "joie-de-vivre."[15] The narrator explicitly alludes to this long tradition of anglophone versions of Quebec folklore in the title of the tale she is attemtping to illustrate, "The Tale of the Golden Phoenix," which is that of a collection by Marius Barbeau, translated into English by Michael Hornyansky.[16] Through the image drawn to illustrate the story, Atwood reinforces the point about the ways in which commercial considerations have led to the exploitation of mythic material. Through her own explicit appropriation of it, she defamiliarizes our response to it, and exposes the unconscious motivations of her narrator. The princess is looking up at a bird rising from the flames, "wings outspread like a heraldic emblem or a fire insurance trade-mark." The economic considerations of publishing force the artist to choose yellow instead of red for the bird, further compromising the artistic vision or the symbolic meaning. The artist reacts to this limitation of her creative freedom on a subconscious level. Her hand betrays her: the princess "looks stupefied" rather than filled with wonder. A second attempt depicts her "cross-eyed," and with "one breast bigger than the other." Life revolts against the plastic perfection of the advertising image.

These initial struggles with the image lead to questions about the ideological construction of the Quebec tales, in what proves to be the narrator's first step on a quest to get in touch with her own emotions, to free herself from the forms of "Americanization," or commodification:

> I skim the story again for a different episode, but no pictures form. It's hard to believe that anyone here, even the grandmothers, ever knew these stories: this isn't a country of princesses, The Fountain of Youth and The Castle of the Seven Splendours don't belong here. They must have told stories about something as they sat around the kitchen range at night: bewitched dogs and malevolent trees perhaps, and the magic powers of rival political candidates, whose effigies in straw they burned during elections.

The superreader might detect in these last lines allusions to Jacques Ferron's "Le chien gris," and "Mélie et le boeuf," in his *Contes*. But the narratee is not as well read nor is she knowledgeable about her world; she is forced to admit: "the truth is that I don't know what the villagers thought or talked about."

Nonetheless, there is some truth to her previous assertion. Though all collections of Quebec folk narrative contain examples of the "märchen" which the narrator rejects as inauthentic, these seem to be stories brought from Europe, imposed culture, rather than popular culture, making sense of daily life. Tales that were naturalized in Quebec, localized as legends, incorporated into the distinctions between the sacred and the profane made in that province, and revoked in innumerable novels since, are tales of bewitchment, especially those concerned with diabolic pacts. Quite rightly, the narrator speculates: "There should be a *loup-garou*." Perhaps Mr. Perceval did take it out, because it was too strong a story. Certainly, it did not fit into his value system, based on marketing comfort. The narrator is determined to put it in. The third rejected picture of the princess, shown here with "moons and fish and a wolf with bristling hackles and a snarl" as the narrator doodles, "adding fangs and a moustache" to the princess, points clearly to the narrator's ultimate metamorphosis when she turns into a furry creature running wild in the woods, the fish-foetus in her belly, conceived with the moon over her left shoulder. The embedded story thus projects forward in the frame narrative, outlining its plot evolution for the attentive reader. The narrator refers specifically to the traditional Quebec version of the story, where the metamorphosis into werewolf occurs in punishment for missing seven Easter communions. Maybe that's why, she speculates, the locals have stopped looking for her father. He never went to mass at all and is one of "*les maudits anglais*, the damned English." This is a term of opprobrium hurled at the politically and economically dominant English-Canadians by the Québécois, and thus relates to an ideological struggle. In Atwood's novel it is taken literally; the English have no sense of the sacred. After this forecast provided by the embedded narrative, it comes as no surprise to the reader when, in the concluding moments of the text, the narrator sees her father in the woods in the form of a wolf: "it gazes at me for a time with its yellow eyes, wolf's eyes, depthless but lambent as the eyes of animals seen at night in the car headlights. Reflectors." A double metamorphosis has occurred: both have become *loup-garous*.

This moment of vision is followed by a meditation on shape-shifting which is explicitly linked to the shamanic visions of the native people, concretely imaged in the petroglyphs, sought by father then daughter. These visual signs introduce a new thread of embedded narratives, through allusion this time. For the signs are not reproduced for us in *Surfacing*, and they are only briefly described. Here too is elaborated a world view of process, in which art consists of the living being changed into idea, then image, finally spirit, and so back to life again:

> From the lake a fish jumps
> an idea of a fish jumps
> A fish jumps, carved wooden fish with dots painted on the sides, no antlered fish thing drawn on cliffstone, protecting spirit. It hangs in the air suspended, flesh turned to icon, he has changed again, returned to the water. How many shapes can he take.

Spirit is the animating force that metamorphoses life into art and vice-versa. Coyote the culture hero is at work again, tricking us with his ambiguous views. Atwood's use of native shamanic stories and rituals has been well documented recently,[17] so I shall not go into more detail here. In this context it should be noted that she makes the same use of them as of the traditional material from Quebec — both the Quebec folk tales, and the mythic journey to the north country, founding myth of Quebec nationalism which she has also appropriated for *Surfacing*'s canoe quest into the wilderness."[18] In both cases, the narrator is an outsider with incomplete knowledge of the traditions and no understanding of or belief in their spiritual values. She summarizes them or refers cryptically to them. The frame narrative mimetically develops them in updated form. Divorced from sacred ritual, the tales are meaningless in their new context, *vendus* to the damned English.

It is this divorce between original and reproduction that opens up the meta-fictional paradox in *Surfacing*, which becomes an example of the liar's paradox. Although effected by a simple process of doubling, embedded story becoming a displaced version in the frame narrative, the result is anything but simple, as the commentary interpreting the embedded tale, with its enumeration of differences and gaps, makes clear. For even while the narrator of the frame story reveals her lack of understanding of the sacred, and so ironically distances herself from these embedded tales, which we come to understand she has appropriated and distorted, and so has lied to us, the frame narrative is constructed on the plots of these traditions of the "Other" and draws on the spiritual transformation implied in them to achieve narrative closure. The transformational potential of this narrative quest remains a moot point. Atwood's attack on the practices of cultural appropriation which she herself has engaged in, dramatized in the bowdlerization of the *Quebec Folk Tales* by the enterprising Mr. Perceval (is he the hero of the grail quest, and thus mentor of the questing narrator?) in the narrative *mise en abyme*, effectively

undercuts the grounds of the frame narrative. As readers, we are both given this experience of the other, and soundly berated for such appropriation in our quest for vicarious understanding.

In *Lady Oracle* we find similar self-reflecting mirrors. Here, too, the emphasis is on their distorting and refracting characteristics. The process of embedding is not a simple question of doubling, however, in which the statement or product is repeated. The embedded tales are scattered throughout the text rather than being presented in a single block. Moreover, their contents are summarized and told rather than being mimetically reproduced, as was the case in *Surfacing*. So too, the emphasis again is on the difference between Joan's story and the conventional tale. In the infinite spiral of narrative within narrative, a veritable never-ending story, the generic code of fairy tale and popular romance itself is doubled. Through this process of explicit appropriation, the romance form is defamiliarized for us, its instructions to the reader made clear to us, so that we can free ourselves from its call to identify ourselves with it. A more extended analysis of *Lady Oracle* would be more detailed. I shall be brief, however, to allow for more commentary on the less familiar *Bluebeard's Egg*.

Bluebeard is at the heart of the narrative labyrinth of *Lady Oracle*, playing Pluto to Joan's Persephone. As in *Surfacing*, the embedded tales are "märchen," in this case the classical European fairy tales which have come to us in this time and country in the form of a fixed and static literary text, rather than as living oral performance. In this, they resemble the Quebec literary tales and Indian pictographs of *Surfacing*. They too are foreign to the experience of Anglo-Canadians, as the narrator of *Surfacing* remarks when she considers the alternatives to her fake princesses. Parents could buy British stories of "humanoid bears and talking pigs" (read A. A. Milne), or American "Protestant choo-choo trains who make the grade and become successful" (read *The Little Engine that Could* and *Tootle*). We could certainly read Joan Delacourt's costume gothics in light of such a thesis of cultural imperialism. Atwood's parody of Harlequin romances is thinly veiled. Moreover, it is Joan's Polish count, her "goose who laid the golden egg," as the allusions to fairy tales in the novel make clear, who starts Joan writing — in England. In this miraculous development of her career, Joan becomes Cinderella, metamorphizing from ugly mothball to beautiful butterfly. However, a reading of *Lady Oracle* in light of *The Cinderella Complex*[19] opens up another ideological struggle in the drama of explicit appropriation, in feminists' call for freedom from the restricting plots of these fairy tales, in order to reshape the scripts of women's lives.

Atwood's subversive strategy is one of refraction. She plays with notions of

distorting mirrors, convex and concave, "funhouse-mirror reflection,"[20] foregrounding here the central issue of the novel, that all reflections are distortions, all mimetic representations lies. But the refractions and travesties of mirrors and art furnish the material for the novel which contains them. For the narrative itself is *mise en abyme* in this specular novel whose protagonist is a writer of gothic fictions and oracular poetry: it is an eternal braid of narrative within narrative. In fact, there is no "life" outside the web of narrative. This tension between form and content, between the desire to escape lies and the knowledge that there is no singular truth, is not the least of the multiplicities offered to us in Atwood's book, a model of paradox, which plays with our desire for binary structures, but, ultimately, asserts the absence of boundaries that would create dualities. The book opens up as the boundaries between different codes of writing — following different generic strands, nurse books, costume gothics, fairy tale allusions, poetry, female gothic-twist and blur. So, too, do those between frame narrative of Joan's many metamorphoses and embedded tales. Joan's life is increasingly taken over by those of her fictional creations when she, as Felicia, moves into the labyrinth. Ultimately, there are no boundaries, only perpetual metamorphoses, for Atwood is intrigued by the point at which one thing becomes another.

Lady Oracle's frame plot is clearly based on those metamorphoses characteristic of the embedded fairy tales whose plots this narrative calls into question. While Joan has spent her life "hoping for magic transformations," she undergoes a reverse metamorphosis from butterfly back to the poison that will kill it. This pattern of inversion makes *Lady Oracle* a travesty of fairy tales. The direction of Atwood's critique of the plots of fairy tales is one taken by many feminists recently. They argue that the familiar stories, *Sleeping Beauty*, *Cinderella*, and *Snow White*, assign conventionally passive roles to women. Overt commercials for marriage, they inform a woman that all that matters is her appearance, an image in the mirror. In all other aspects it is preferable she be dead, for the prince chooses a girl in a coffin, and it is only by accident that the apple jolts out. Death and marriage go hand in hand, as *Lady Oracle* makes clear to us. The only way out of such closure, which male texts, the classic texts of childhood, offer women, is to resist the final transformation, to refuse an ending.

Atwood's parodic quotation of the fairy tale material in this novel, like her imitation of the Quebec folk tales in *Surfacing*, is marked by a disdainful, rather than a reverential impulse. Whether tale or anti-tale, however, the ending is death.

Joan as narratee attempts to project herself into the plots of the stories she reads. Romantic fantasies of metamorphosis nourish her imagination. Dreaming always of growing wings and taking flight into a better existence, as Psyche was carried off by Cupid, Joan continually casts herself in the roles of fairy tales, experiencing repeatedly that initial inversion to moth-ball, moving always towards death, not

happiness. *Snow White* with its double face in the mirror, maiden and hag, thin girl and Fat Lady, functions as an intertext of *Lady Oracle*. So too does *Cinderella*: for Joan casts herself disparagingly as "Cinderella's ugly sister," for whom the metamorphosis can never occur. In Bluebeard's castle, she would be "one of the two stupid sisters who open the forbidden door and are shocked by the murdered wives, not the third, clever one who keeps to the essentials," tells lies, and saves herself. With reference to Andersen's Little Mermaid, Joan is "doing fairly well by comparison to Andersen's Little Mermaid: "Neither of them had been able to please the handsome prince: both of them had died," though ironically she undergoes a *fake* death. As narrator of the story we are reading, however, Joan criticizes these plots implicitly by following another line. Joan is conscious of the fact that completion of the fairy tale plots would find her in the grave. Equating marriage to death, Joan, like Scheherezade, tells stories to save her life. As soon as the men of her fairy tale world propose marriage, Joan undergoes another Houdini escape, reappearing in a new identity.

In *Lady Oracle* there is thus a distinction between Joan's activities in the quoted world and the narrated world, between the activities of reading and those of writing, the former seen as a form of enslavement to death while the latter brings life through renewed power. Storytelling literally does support her life. She spins out Costume Gothics based on fairy tale plots to fill other women's empty lives, by giving them something to dream about. For in her role as author, Joan is cast in a different role in the fairy tale plot, as "fairy godmother" with "the power to turn them from pumpkins to pure gold." Her pen is a magic wand. Though as reader, Joan strives to resist the authority of plots, as writer she is only too happy to repeat the same form over and over again, for the power it gives her. She exploits the naïveté and desire for projection of her readers in another series of embedded stories, those she writes developed more fully as *mimesis* than the narrated accounts of her reading. Even here she continues to resist the happy endings of tales, the consolations of art, for she fights against the temptation to closure they offer. She changes identities in a continuous effort to avoid the grave, in a process that extends story within story *ad infinitum*, like the face seen in the triple mirror. One of the secrets the mirror contains is that the tale's apparent closure is a paradox. *Lady Oracle* is a ghost story told by a revenant from the other world. Life and death, mobility and closure, coexist within it.

WHILE ATWOOD'S *Surfacing* fits into the pattern of Canadian monster stories as a Wendigo story, it is text and not performance, and thus stands outside the post-modern storytelling of contemporary Coyote's. With *Lady Oracle*, the emphasis on perceptual process, new versions and revisions, based on context, not fixed text, Atwood moves closer to this second mode of storytelling.

The clues to her eventual shift from the texts of art and the written word to the texts of life and of speech, are suggested in another intertextual design within *Lady Oracle*, the story of Demeter and Kore. Phyllis Chesler has suggested that the rigid dualities of beautiful maiden and wicked stepmother of the fairy tales are debased forms of this ancient women's story celebrating fertility and creativity.[21] Atwood emphasizes the labyrinth in *Lady Oracle*, which was the sacred entry into the sanctum of the divine Earth Mother. This hidden story offering the possibility of alternative readings of the tales based on a female culture is what effectively subverts the male-dominant plot of fairy tales.

In both *Lady Oracle* and *Surfacing*, the reader confronts self-cancelling structures which make no sense except as a "circle game." For both posit a tension between authoritatively imposed form (imperialist or patriarchal discourse) and life experience, uncoded, wild. In *Surfacing*, the frame narrative follows the plots of the folk tales which are contested by the narrative because they have been appropriated by an outsider and divorced from context. Creating other art forms does nothing to change this; in fact it compounds the situation even more by creating distortions in transmission between versions. A way out of the circle and a real metamorphosis is effected through the re-enactment of ritual and a movement from story to action. The narrator becomes the goddess, mates with the horned god, and gives birth to a new type of creature. Similarly, in *Lady Oracle*, the appropriation of a patriarchal tradition which has rewritten the scripts of women's stories, then oppressed women's lives by forcing them to conform to the new plots, is subverted and countered by the re-emergence of the lost stories and the re-enactment of their sacred rituals. Indeed, the whole novel celebrates giving birth to the creative self, as the tradition of the female gothic is extended, though with anxiety still at the monstrous birth likely to occur. The narratives eventually kick free from imposed conventions when the old stories of the goddess are unearthed. The connection with *Bluebeard's Egg* is made both through this focus on digging through the archive — the title of the final story in the collection is "Unearthing Suite" — and through the emphasis on process. For in *Bluebeard's Egg*, Atwood mirrors the process of production, the instance of enunciation, as she works on embedded oral narratives and local legends, whose meaning is vested in the sacred lares and penates, the gods of family and hearth.[22] The transition is evident in the intervening works, as Linda Hutcheon makes clear:

> Like the later novel *Bodily Harm*, *Life Before Man* is, on the surface, a move away from this overt mode of self-reflectiveness. The creative power of the imagination is still a theme, but the context is that of life, not art. The distance between the aesthetic and the moral dimensions *decreases*. Lesje's learned but child-like fantasy world both compensates for and offers an escape from life, but it is a world that is left behind at the end of the novel, as life and real creativity — in the form of her as yet unborn child — assert themselves.[23]

TRANSFORMATION IS also evident in the collection in the title which alludes directly to the bluebeard motif in *Lady Oracle*, with a difference that makes all the sense — egg. Placed in the centre of the collection, "Bluebeard's Egg" radiates its concerns throughout the collection. It is a story about reading and writing, about the hermeneutic puzzle that is narrative, constructed like *Lady Oracle* as a recursive paradigm, a Chinese-box narrative. The narrator of the frame story, Sally, is editor of the newsmagazine of a company. Currently she is taking a night course to keep herself occupied while her heart-surgeon husband, Ed, is busy in the evening. It is a course that emphasizes learning through doing, and so Sally is both reading "Forms of Narrative," and writing them. After having worked its way through epic and ballad forms, the class has come to folk tales and the "Oral Tradition." Atwood's title story mimetically represents the narrative processes of this collection of stories. In the fictional world, Sally as reader is decoding various versions of the Bluebeard story from the quoted world, to recode them in the modern day version which is to be her class exercise. While this latter has not yet been written on paper, one draft of it has been narrated orally, as Sally composes fictions of life, stories about her enigmatic husband attempting to construct his life in a meaningful way, for her friend Marylyn, the narratee. In Sally's narrated world she is evaluating her relationship with Ed, the heart surgeon, who has had two previous wives about whom she knows little.

Atwood's text plays two embedded versions of the Bluebeard story against each other. There is the Grimm version which is summarized in total in the story as it is being read aloud and listened to. Lines are quoted directly from Grimm's text.[24] However, there is also the version of Perrault hovering in the text. For Sally may well be the less enterprising wife victim to the vampires, her boss and Ed. Sally reconstructs the first story, which again splits into two versions, depending on whose point of view is foregrounded. In the version Sally is constructing, Ed is the egg. In the frame narrative, however, on the mimetic level, it is the other version that dominates, with Ed as the murderous husband whose secret is behind the keyhole. Life against death. As reader, interpreting the embedded fairy tale, Sally puzzles over the ambiguity of the egg as symbol, relating to virginity in its unbloodied state, or dirty and provocation for murder. Such contraries are held within the egg as fertility symbol, or "something the earth hatched out of." This primordial egg of the beginning, alchemistic vessel of renewal and ancient symbol of the goddess, centres this title narrative, and indeed all the stories enfolded within the book, within the shadow of its implications of division, as growth and process. It is an egg of transformations, as Sally suggests in the frame narrative, where she is wondering about "the puzzle . . . Ed," and how to interpret him, how to represent him — the central puzzle of narrative. "In her inner world is Ed, like a doll within a Russian wooden doll, and in Ed is Ed's inner world, which she

can't get at" except through fiction. Her story covers that gap, the absence which is Ed's story, present though in the frame narrative. That it too might be told, is the ultimate element of the narrative. For it introduces the possibility of another story, that of the phoenix, when Sally views the bloodied egg not as a symbol of death, but as one of rebirth, red glowing from within as the egg prepares to hatch new life and adds a never-ending story. As in *Lady Oracle*, one story leads to another, but the process is now seen as a movement of completion and extension, rather than the perpetuation of solipsism. For Sally is able to move from the fictions of life to the texts of art only when she is capable of perceiving the story of the other, of the egg.

Images of growth and process dominate the texts in this book, especially, "Unearthing Suite," that introduces this fundamental metaphor, through which Atwood presents the organic life, valued above the fixity of art. As the final story, it avoids closure, for this is a story, like the egg, which celebrates the triumph of beginnings over ends. The narrator of the story, who in Atwood's habitual self-reflective fashion is also narratee and author of embedded stories, begins all her childhood stories with The End, as she tells us. She begins this one about her parents in the same way, beginning with a description of their telling her about their plans for their death, when they want to be cremated and given back to the earth. Around this threatened ending, she orchestrates various disconnected memories and anecdotes of family history that reveal the parents' enormous vitality. Her father, were he to contemplate the end of the world, would "continue to cultivate his garden . . . the proper activity [of mankind] is digging." Her mother, at seventy-three, nimbly climbs onto the roof for its annual, ritual sweeping, and comes back down with the dropping of a fisher, rare in that part of the country, and greeted as a miracle. The story woven by the daughter from the family narrative provides the next episode, the "suite," in this ongoing process, implying a form of eternal life.

This is a book about origins, about the origins of storytelling and the storytelling of origins, both family and narrative genealogy. Atwood is aware here that the creation of narrative is an ongoing process in life, as in art. Indeed, there are few barriers between them. "[Her] own house is divided in two: a room full of paper, constantly in flux, where process, organicism, and fermentation rule and dustballs breed; and another room, formal in design, rigid in content. . . ." While in the other books we have examined, this formal design imposed by books has dominated, and stories have come to us as written narrative, distant from and distortion of life, in *Bluebeard's Egg* life and art are interchangeable parts of a whole. For there are narratives of life, just as there are narratives of art. Life itself can be organized into formal patterns, as the narrative makes clear. The parents arrange themselves to tell the daughter the story of the purchase of the funeral urns, framing their words so as to give them more than ordinary meaning: "They

both have an air of suppressed excitement, like children waiting for a grown-up friend to open a present they have wrapped, which will contain a joke." The wrapping metaphor, with its implications of recursive paradigms, further contributes to this framing of an occasion. This family interchange is similar to the concluding one, when the parents are again seated with the daughter, their shared knowledge about their discovery again being something the narrator as reader/listener of the embedded tale must puzzle out: "They both regard me, heads a little on one side, eyes shining with the glee of playing this ancient game, the game of riddles, scarcely able to contain the right answer." These oral storytelling contexts, which provide the material for the written narrative we are reading, are presented mimetically, rather than summarily told. The matter of high art comes from these family exchanges.

Just as art flows from life, so too life may imitate art. The young children walking through the woods reenact a folklore motif, "potentially lost." Their reading has shaped their lives. They are also retracing the steps of Indians, discovering trees that have been blazes. ". . . like most history," as the narrator comments, "this may or may not be true." Whereas the embedded narratives in the earlier books served to underline the moral implications of distortion through fictionalizing, those in "Unearthing Suite" point up the fact that history and story are processes. "Nothing goes on forever," comments the narrator. Just as the parents may one day be resurrected from their ashes scattered on the soil, so too there is only story, continually revised from a new perspective. An embedded narrative, anecdote recounted by a neighbour which the narrator retells to her mother, is a case in point:

> One of their neighbours recently took me to task about her.
> "Your poor mother," she said. "Married to your father."
> "What?" I said.
> "I see her dragging her groceries back from the supermarket," she said. (True enough, my mother does this. She has a little cart with which she whizzes along the sidewalk, hair whisping out from her head, scarf streaming, exhausting anyone foolhardy enough to make the trip with her, by that I mean myself.) "Your father won't even drive her."
> When I told her this story, my mother laughed.
> My father said the unfortunate woman obviously didn't know that there was more to him than met the eye.

The potential for many versions of the same story to coexist is introduced by representing the listener's reactions as well as the story.

IN THE FIRST STORY of the collection, "Significant Moments in the Life of My Mother," the narrative chain is initiated by the stories the

mother tells and the narrator rewrites. These are stories about the active woman who had her vitality repressed as a girl and escaped into her unconventional marriage, "rescued from a fate worse than death." The mother is characterized by adjectives, "quick," "a blur," involved in activities like skiing and flying. As a girl, however, her life is more precisely delineated by the imposed order of art, as "a Japanese Haiku: a limited form, rigid in its perimeters, within which an astonishing freedom was possible." It is with this paradox of freedom in constraint that the narrator is working. The rigid boundaries between art and life, between form and process are blurred here. So too are the limits between creative process and created artifact. For we are always arranging and interpreting experience to come to terms with it. As the narrator comes to realize, there are narrative forms in life which coexist with or precede those of art:

> I used to think that my mother, in her earlier days, led a life of sustained hilarity and hair-raising adventure. (That was before I realized that she never put in the long stretches of time that must have made up much of her life: the stories were just the punctuation.)

Here Atwood's use of parentheses makes us aware of the perceptual process of revision. More fully then, than in her earlier narratives, Atwood runs frame into embedded narrative, narrative distance decreasing so that the text becomes an alternation of the narrator's words and the character's. These two roles are interchangeable, as embedded and frame stories intersect. What is mirrored is the instance of production. The focus is no longer on imitating, but on the past reading activity of listening followed by creative rewriting. By focusing more clearly on the performative contexts and the act of telling/listening, Atwood has moved her narratives in new directions.

Moreover, the stories have the sound of oral narrative, relying heavily on dialogue. Teller and listener interact in the performative context, negotiating meaning conjointly through shared material, as in the traditional oral event. As the narrator says in "Unearthing Suite," "not all of these things are in the same place at the same time. This is a collective memory." Collective is the keyword to describe the merging of stories, of teller and listener/writer's stories, which is most evident in "Significant Moments in the Life of My Mother," a life story of a mother rewritten by her daughter. The two voices merge in this communal narration. Sometimes one voice interrupts another's sentence: "When they were young — this can cover almost anything these days, but I put it as seven or eight — my mother and her sister had a tree house . . ." The listener evaluates and amplifies the mother's narration, interpolating her own remarks. Here the two voices remain separate, because the pronouns separate mother and daughter, teller and writer. At other times the pronoun "I" refers alternately to both in a shared experience. This occurs in the haircutting anecdote, when the mother, in direct discourse explaining how she had her hair bobbed in defiance of her father, says: "So I

went out straight away and had it all chopped off." The story is developed mimetically, the mother, "who is a good mimic" imitating the sounds of the dentist's drill "Rrrrr! Rrrrr! Rrrrr! Phtt . . ." while her daughter comments on the effectiveness of the storytelling technique. In indirect discourse then, this daughter writes an interpolated story of how her own long hair was cut off, because her father could not manage to comb it. He too was upset about the hair loss, says the mother in conclusion, "with an air of collusion." Through the shared experience and the common reactions of men to women's hair, the two intertwined stories create a complicity between teller and audience. This is how family unity is constructed, through the ritual repetition of such moments that bind members into a common pattern. The effect of such storytelling is radically different from the isolation and misperception effected by the reading of imported tales in both *Surfacing* and *Lady Oracle*. Stories no longer are a source of alienation, but a means to identity and community.

As the title suggests, "Significant Moments . . ." is a disjointed collection of anecdotes about the mother's life, offering an encyclopedia of storytelling forms. We are given an inventory of storytelling contexts in which the mother performs, and the impact of her performance is continually evaluated by the listening daughter, who reports to us on the reception of the story as well as on its delivery. One series of performances occurs in the boarding house she lived in when at Normal School, where they had to make their own fun and made "family theatre." This leads to a story about an unfortunate adventure to kidnap the family cat for one of the performances. It peed on the mother's skirt, created an embarrassing incident. Most of the stories are comedies, like the theatre, entertainment for a small privileged audience, who are brought closer together through this shared event. As the narrator informs us, her mother is quiet, listening when part of a large group, but this is how she gathers material for new stories. She selects her stories for specific audiences:

> There are some stories which my mother does not tell when there are men present: never at dinner, never at parties. She tells them to women only, usually in the kitchen, when they or we are helping with the dishes or shelling peas, or taking the tops and tails off the string beans, or husking corn. She tells them in a lowered voice, without moving her hands around in the air, and they contain no sound effects. These are the stories of romantic betrayals, unwanted pregnancies, illnesses of various horrible kinds, marital infidelities, mental breakdowns, tragic suicides, unpleasant lingering deaths. They are not rich in detail or embroidered with incident: they are stark and factual. The women, their own hands moving among the dirty dishes or the husks of vegetables, nod solemnly.

Opposed to these are stories for general consumption:

> When she tells them, my mother's face turns to rubber. She takes all the parts, adds the sound effects, waves her hands around in the air. Her eyes gleam, sometimes a

> little wickedly, for although my mother is sweet and old and a lady, she avoids being a sweet old lady. When people are in danger of mistaking her for one, she flings in something from left field; she refuses to be taken for granted.

Pointedly, the narrator makes clear that there are many facets to her mother's storytelling. It is impossible to pin her down, to fix her in a single representation, a single role, when she is in constant flux. The collage effect of Atwood's text recreates this for the readers. Here the title of Michael Ondaatje's family narrative which blurs the boundaries between fiction and autobiography becomes an appropriate epigraph: "Running in the family."

"Life is like art," the daughter quotes her mother. One story especially illustrates this interpenetration of stories from both realms, an anecdote related by the mother that also involves the daughter, present at the event, but unaware of what was happening. Her only knowledge of this episode of her life is the story her mother tells her.

> "We were going down a steep hill," my mother continues, "when a hay wagon pulled out right across the road, at the bottom. Your father put on the brakes, but nothing happened. The brakes were gone! I thought our last moment had come. Luckily the hay wagon continued across the road, and we shot past it, missing it by at least a foot. My heart was in my mouth," says my mother.
>
> I didn't know until afterwards what had really happened. I was in the back seat, making bagpipe music, oblivious. The scenery was the same as it always was on car trips: My parents' heads, seen from behind, sticking up above the front seat. My father had his hat on, the one he wore to keep things from falling off the trees into his hair. My mother's hand was placed lightly on the back of his neck.

Clearly, it is the fiction that makes us real. Large parts of the narrator's life are constructed for her in her mother's fictions, just as all she knows about her mother is conveyed through these stories. What is significant here is the complicity of audience in the telling. As the framing narrative makes clear, these stories about the family's survival are told in order to maintain family feeling and to create a common history. They must be told to create, to perpetuate the family, "otherwise the entire family, individually or collectively, would be dead as doornails." Collectively, teller and listeners share the emotions of the experience, remembered, represented in the teller's words, sufficient "to produce adrenalin, serve to reinforce our sense of gratitude." Through such family narratives, we construct our sense of community.

RATHER THAN ATTACK the false representations which are constructed through tales, as she has done in her earlier works through the ironic contrast between embedded and frame narratives, in *Bluebeard's Egg* Atwood minimizes the distance between the levels in order to focus on the processes of

construction, the constant fictionalizing we engage in as human beings. Experiences happen to us, but we underline them, question them or solidify them into sign by repeating them in anecdotes and stories. They help us make sense of the chaos of our lives, give them pattern and create community. As the daughter remembers the story of her mother's life, ordering the mother's anecdotes she plays in her mother's mythology. As she writes:

> We both knew whose idea this was. For my mother, the proper construction to be put on this event is that my brother was a hell-raiser and I was his shadow, "easily influenced," as my mother puts it. "You were just putty in his hands."
>
> "Of course, I had to punish you both equally," she says. Of course. I smile a forgiving smile. The real truth is that I was sneakier than my brother, and got caught less often.

"Proper construction to be put on this event," indeed! As this passage points out, we are continually interpreting, and these interpretations change as our perspective in place and time varies. From the mother's perspective there is one interpretation, from the daughter's another. This story plays on the divergence of perspective, even as it enfolds them both by including such acts of interpretation and revision on the mimetic level, as well as on that of the enunciation. Initial unity is created with the daughter through the mother's communication of her interpretation of the action. But this is later disrupted by the emergence of alternate perspectives. Increasingly the mother's anecdotes of optimism and energy give way to the memories of her morbid daughter. Talking gives way to writing, but there is a matrilineal bond between them. For the daughter's narrative grows naturally out of the mother's. The gap between them is covered by the daughter's written narrative that lovingly retraces the storytelling events, as graph, deferred always from that event, but generated by it.

For the daughter too has begun as a storyteller, her propensity emerging early in life, according to her mother's version of the story of these early years. The relevant anecdote involves an episode at a government tea party in Ottawa, where the daughter took a cookie, sat in the corner and told the doughy rabbit a story. In a juxtaposed segment, when she is older — showing how autobiographical time is superseded by narrative time as we move from story to text levels — the daughter in turn becomes aware that in her stories, the mother is always cast in the role of mother. In fact, as an anecdote near the end of the story reveals, the mother has a private inner life, unknown to the daughter, in which she dreams of being an archaeologist. Writing emphasizes the distant future, from which the narrator will return as "time-traveller from distant space," speaking a language the mother has never heard before. This is the evolutionary process of family narrative. But on the frame level of the story, where the mother's process of fictionalizing, her "mythology," and the daughter's involvement as listener, interpreter, is the represented material, it is the closeness of mother and daughter which is con-

veyed, both participating in these stories my mother told me, the *mise en abyme* of the text we are reading.

At the heart of the difference in the two levels of narrative which intermingle with each other is "a difference between symbolism and anecdote," as the narrator phrases it. "Listening to my mother, I sometimes remember this." The family narratives of this first story rely heavily on anecdote. As such they are the most common form of oral narrative in our society. Indeed, among these embedded anecdotes, is a type of natural narrative which has been much studied by speech act theorists such as William Labov and Mary Louise Pratt. This is "the time I almost died narrative." The mother uses almost the same words "I remember the time we almost died," to introduce the anecdote about the close accident with the hay wagon. Like fictive discourse, natural narratives operate through a network of assumptions, of appropriate conditions. In drawing on those conditions, indeed in explicitly cataloguing the assumptions of natural narrative in the stories of *Bluebeard's Egg*, Atwood is inviting us as readers to use our knowledge of everyday fictions in order to make sense of the book. We are much less conscious of these conditions which we learned in early childhood than we are of the literary conventions acquired in school. Consequently, our engagement with the stories occurs on a more instinctive level, creating that illusion of greater human understanding constructed by this book.

This is the illusion of orality Atwood creates. The format of the literary stories is that of a collection of minimal narratives in each of which past experience is recapitulated by matching a verbal sequence of clauses to the verbal sequence of events that have occurred. The narrative sequence evolves through abstract, orientation, complicating action, evaluation, resolution, to coda.[25] In the mother's narrative of near death, this form is reproduced with several significant twists. The emphasis on the recollected nature of the experience is reinforced through a summary given by the narrator of the many near death experiences, of which this typical one is being retold. Even though the retelling itself emphasizes the actual dramatization of the event, this form of generalization moves us from anecdote towards symbol. The event comes to "represent" the mother's character, not to enact it dramatically. Also, the coda is summarized by the daughter in the frame story instead of mimetically enacted by the mother in embedded story. Both these changes illustrate the constant interpenetration of the two narrative levels in this story, even as they show how written narratives are elaborations of oral narratives.

"Hurricane Hazel," the second story in this collection, demonstrates this intersection in another way by showing how anecdote becomes symbol. A symbolic reading of the story is prepared by the final words of the first story where it was feared that the girl would return from a distant land, "bearing news of a great disaster." In Toronto folklore, Hurricane Hazel was a once-in-a-lifetime disaster, told over and over again. A form of local legend, it is as common a type of oral

narrative as the family historical anecdotes we have just been discussing, as shown in a recent class assignment in collecting oral narratives. Asked to collect oral history, most student researchers found people keen to talk about the Depression or the Second World War. A significant number of respondents, however, dealt with the relationship to nature, especially to nature out of control. Four or five students collected narratives about Hurricane Hazel which emphasized the surprise element in the event. They focus on details such as pictures of dead animals and destroyed cars and describe the co-operation to help those in difficulty. Atwood's version of this event is very similar to one of the accounts collected by students. Both focus on the perspective of the observer or observers, safe in their houses and unaware of the full extent of the disaster at its height. Both live close to major rivers in Toronto, the Don flowing under Pottery Road which is described in Atwood's version, and the Humber near Long Branch in the other version. The following day they are able to walk out and witness the damaged house and to hear stories of lives lost in the raging flood. Both contrast the wisdom and security of those who have been forewarned, with the improvidence and threat of danger to others.[26] In fact, this is the major point in Atwood's anecdote, the one she uses to make Hurricane Hazel into a symbol. As the narrator informs us, this is the first of a series of "atmospherically super-charged break ups" with men she has, and so becomes a typical incident used as a generalization revealing character. It is also the narrator's prudence in staying in that stops her from experiencing the fate of Maggie Tulliver in the *Mill on the Floss*, a book she has been reading at school that year along with *Wuthering Heights*. It is her resistance as reader to plots that has allowed her to grow up to become an author, instead of succumbing to an early death in the throws of nature's violence.

In writing her story, Atwood has exploited the popular nature of such oral anecdotes, by placing Hurricane Hazel in a tradition of oral anecdotes of survival against the forbidding forces of nature. Near the beginning of her narrative, when the family takes up residence in their primitive summer cabin, the narrator summarizes the tales about besting the elements that her father tells them on his return from the north:

> All the time we were going around mealtimes and what we would eat at them, he was flying in bush planes into valleys with sides so steep the pilot had to cut the engine to get down into them, or trudging over portages past great rocky outcrops, or almost upsetting in rapids. For two weeks he was trapped by a forest fire which encircled him on all sides, and was saved only by torrential rains, during which he sat in his tent and toasted his extra socks at the fire, like weiners, to get them dry. These were the kinds of stories we heard after he came back.

The father is the hero in these embedded tales of encounters with nature, as he proves once more against Hurricane Hazel. But these stories of the father save the daughter too. Insisting that "anybody who goes out on a night like this must be

crazy," she quotes her father's words to her boyfriend Buddy, in reply to his demand that she prove her love for him, by going out as promised the night of the storm. This marks the end of the relationship, and begins the behavioural pattern the hurricane comes to symbolize. Through the repetition of her father's words and the imitation of his heroic stories, the daughter casts herself as hero in the frame text. A new story emerges now, one which plays on the equation of strong women and natural disaster, for the girl wreaks havoc in Buddy's life. The sexist implications of this narrative are underlined by both the naming power of the father in the story and the names given such natural disasters in our society. A frequent feminist attack these days makes us aware that the hurricane might well be named Henry.

In terms of its technique, through its use of embedded anecdotes and legends, this text relates oral narratives that have the power to create or undo community. Thus it is linked to the framing first and last texts in this collection. On its mimetic level, however, it is linked to the title story. As in "Bluebeard's Egg," we read about the relationship of a seemingly super-intelligent woman ("I even knew what a Zygote was," she says) and her plodding boyfriend, Buddy. She is learning Greek from her brother, while Buddy speaks in monosyllables and writes love letters in clichés like "that's the way the cookie crumbles." The text we read is her reminiscence, an episode in her life history, that enfolds oral anecdotes. On this level it is about the differing linguistic capacities of men and women, about the ways in which they construct fictions to explain each other, fictions in which they place themselves as heroes of the action. This becomes clear in the final paragraphs when we hear that Trish, in switching allegiances from the narrator to Buddy, has begun telling stories "about how I'd lived in a cowshed all summer." The story differs according to the narrator's role in the events it relates. "Hurricane Hazel" shows how repetition creates a pattern which becomes personal mythology and then symbol. Over the years, after a series of emotional ruptures coincident with upheavals in nature, the narrator comes to see herself as a hurricane. Presented in terms of natural imagery, the process is thus *constructed* to seem both inevitable and natural.

That her representation of the process of construction of these symbols, rather than of the final product, has led Atwood to see them as less rigid and threatening than they appeared in her early fictions is borne out by the final story, one which in its attempt to delineate the differences between father, mother, and child, bears marked resemblances to Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*. Father is characterized by his love of projects, mother by their completion and the unremitting activity to ensure this. Unlike Woolf's, Atwood's text leaves us without a seamless

web of prose. The embedding of anecdotes reveals how these personalities construct each other and are being constructed by the narrator. Her construction of them is evident in her use of the dock, as central focus for a series of perspectives conveyed during her contemplation of darkness. She finds the dock "fit subject for meditation." Her father sees the dock as something he built that needs repairs, while her mother sees the dock as a place from which to launch canoes. The dock does not emerge as a symbol dominating the flow of anecdotes, but rather as the brief pause in the flow of remembered incidents, when it is no longer process but product that is being represented. It is a moment when the relative perspectives coalesce. In this, the dock is similar to the sunrise of the title of the penultimate story in the collection, which is described as "an effect of light caused by the positions of two astronomical bodies in relation to each other." From the vaster fictions of scientific relativity, the dock is but a small "accident of language," in the flux of experience. In *Bluebeard's Egg*, Atwood has reached this broader fiction which enfolds several layers of embedded narratives within it. From this cosmic perspective all stories are relative, none having any special claims to status as truth, all being equally valid and good, as long as they build community.

Inevitably, I too have constructed a pattern on this experience of reading Atwood's book, for there are many texts in this collection I have not mentioned. I have taken an approach that is "framed" by the implied author in her positioning of the texts and in the title of the book, her means of directing our reading. Moreover, the focus on the act of enunciation, the attention given to the processes of reading/listening and creative transposition of the material into writing within the texts, has instructed me to rewrite the story from my own perspective. The oral anecdote is important within these frame stories in representing such processes of active making sense of our world. But it is also the inclusion of the anecdotes on the narrated level that reproduces for readers the experience of the narrator when we all become listeners of the same stories.

The pleasure I have in reading Atwood's book stems from the stimulation of my memory of listening to the stories of my childhood, told now from a slightly different perspective. In my family too, there is a story about "the time I almost died," when the brakes of the car failed on the way down a hill. This is told in conjunction with the events of my birth. My mother relates a story of losing her unmentionables, picking them up from the pavement and putting them into the pocket of her best suit. Until reading *Bluebeard's Egg*, I had thought these stories which had shaped my sense of self to be unique to my family treasury of narrative. Now I learn that they are part of the experience of a broader human community, and that our family is not so different as we might have thought. My complicity with the narrator is confirmed through the perspectives we share when we retell the events of 15 October 1954, the night of Hurricane Hazel. In encouraging such complicity between the implied author and reader, Atwood has moved away

from her earlier narratives in which she used the folk narratives of other cultures to invite our critical distance from the unfolding narrative. In privileging oral anecdotes of local experience over written narratives from other cultures, Atwood favours the richness and variety of experience over the exercise of controlling limits and boundaries.

NOTES

[1] This paper was read at the annual meeting of the Popular Culture Association Toronto, 1 April 1984.

[2] Frank Davey's paper was read at Association of Canadian and Quebec Literatures, Guelph, 5 June 1984.

[3] David McFadden, "Writer's Block: The Life of a Writer in Residence in a Nuclear Age," *Quill & Quire*, January 1984, p. 24.

[4] Carole Carpenter, *Many Voices: A Study of Folklore Activities in Canada and Their Role in Canadian Culture*. Canadian Centre for Folk Culture Studies. Paper No. 26. Mercury Series (Ottawa: National Museum of Man, 1979) and lectures given at York University. See also my article "Oral Literature in English," *The Canadian Encyclopedia* (Edmonton: Hurtig, 1985), pp. 1331-32.

[5] For detailed analyses of these works see "The Oral Tradition and Contemporary Fiction," *Essays on Canadian Writing*, nos. 7/8 (Summer 1978), pp. 46-62, and "The Tale of a Narrative: Antonine Maillet's *Don l'Orignal*," *Atlantis* 5, no. 1 (Fall 1979), pp. 51-69.

[6] Barry Dane (John Logan), "National Literature," *The Week* 1884, quoted in Carl Ballstadt, ed., *The Search for English-Canadian Literature* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1975), p. 117.

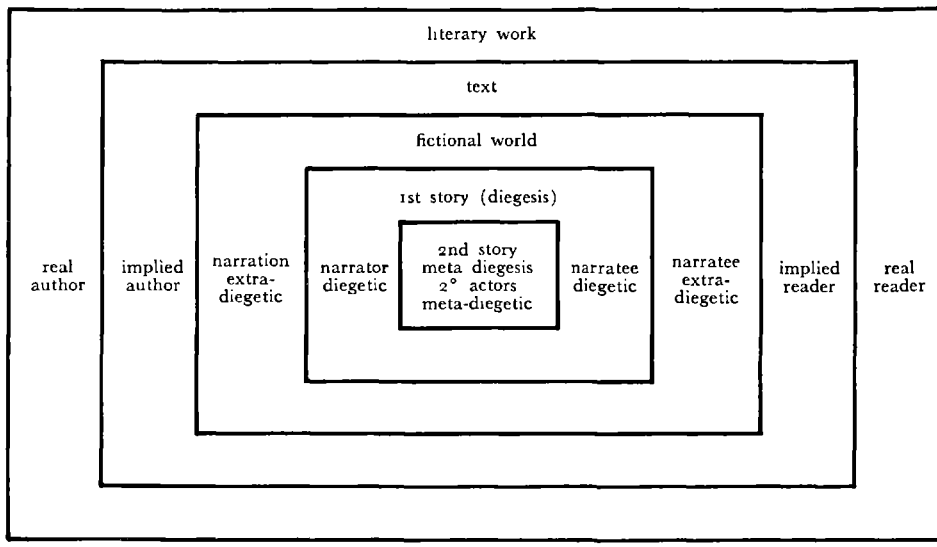
[7] Octave Crémazie, from a letter of 29 January 1867 in his *Oeuvres complètes* (Montreal, 1882), p. 40. My translation.

[8] This is a term of Richard Dobson. It has been applied to Laurence's *The Diviners* by Laurel Doucette in a paper read at the meetings of the Canadian Folklore Society, Halifax, May 1981.

[9] Margaret Atwood, "Canadian Monsters: Some Aspects of the Supernatural in Canadian Fiction," in *The Canadian Imagination*, David Staines, ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), pp. 102-04.

[10] Lucien Dällenbach, *Le récit spéculaire: Essai sur la mise en abyme* (Paris: Seuil, 1977).

[11] My analysis of embedded narratives follows Jaap Lintvelt, "Modèle discursive du récit encadré: rhétorique et idéologie and les *Illustres Français* de Robert Challe," *Poetique* 41 (1980), pp. 352-65. My translation.



[12] Here I am following the lead of Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan in *Narrative Fictions Contemporary Poetics* (London: Methuen, 1983) p. 3, in her translation of Gérard Genette's "histoire," "récit" and "narrative": "Story designates the narrated events, abstracted from their disposition in the text . . . , together with the participants in these events. Whereas 'story' is a succession of events, 'text' is a spoken or written discourse that undertakes their telling. . . . The act or process of production is the third aspect — narration." Story has the same meaning as *diegesis* which is defined by a maximum of the information in contrast to *mimesis* which has the opposite relationship. Gérard Genette. *Narrative Discourse.* Jane E. Lewin, trans. (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1980), p. 166.

[13] Margaret Atwood, *Surfacing* (Toronto: Paperjacks, 1973), p. 129. All further references to this novel from this edition.

[14] This is an example of *prolepsis* as outlined by Genette, p. 40.

[15] Marius Barbeau, and Michael Hornyansky, *The Golden Phoenix and Other Canadian Fairy Tales* (Toronto: Oxford, 1958).

[16] For development of this tradition, see Carole Gerson's article, "Margaret Atwood and Quebec: A Footnote on *Surfacing*," *Studies in Canadian Literature,* 1 no. 1 (Winter 1976), pp. 115-19.

[17] Marie-Françoise Guédon, "Surfacing: Amerindian Themes and Shamanism," in *Margaret Atwood: Language, Text and System.*" Sherrill Grace and Lorraine Weir, eds. (Vancouver: Univ. of British Columbia Press, 1983), pp. 91-111.

[18] I have studied the canoe quest motif in *Surfacing* in more detail elsewhere, "Paddling Our Own Canoe: Women and Words." For the most complete development of this myth in Quebec literature, see Jack Warwick's *The Long Journey* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1970). At the time when she was writing *Surfacing,* Atwood was teaching a course on Canadian/Quebec literature with Jack Warwick at York University.

[19] Colette Dowling, *The Cinderella Complex* (New York: Pocket Books, 1982). This book describes women's learned anticipation of magical metamorphoses to solve

life problems. For more detail, see my essay "My (M)Other, My Self: Strategies for Subversion in Atwood and Hébert," *Essays on Canadian Writing*, 26 (1983), p. 13-44.

[20] Margaret Atwood, *Lady Oracle* (Toronto: Seal Books, 1977), p. 251. All further references are to this edition.

[21] Phyllis Chesler, *Women and Madness* (New York: Doubleday, 1972), p. 265.

[22] Margaret Atwood, *Bluebeard's Egg* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1983). All further references are to this edition.

[23] Linda Hutcheon, "From Poetic to Narrative Structures: The Novels of Margaret Atwood" in *Margaret Atwood: Language, Text and System*, p. 21.

[24] "Fitcher's Bird," in *The Complete Grimm's Fairy Tales*, New York: Pantheon, 1944, pp. 216-20. Lines Atwood quotes directly from this tale include: " 'Preserve this egg for me, and carry it about with you everywhere; for a great misfortune [will] follow from its loss' " (p. 157). " 'Since you have gone into the room against my will," he said,' you shall go back into it against your own' " (p. 157). " 'You have [passed] the test", he said (to the third sister.) 'You shall be my bride.' [...] The wizard no longer had any power over her, and had to do whatever she (asked)" (p. 158).

[25] Mary Louise Pratt, *Toward a Speech Act Theory of Literary Discourse* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1977), p. 45.

[26] Carol Davies, "Hurricane Hazel in Retrospect," Paper submitted to Douglas Freake, Humanities 1200, York University, 4 November 1983.

POETRY READING IN A (DIVIDED) CONFERENCE ROOM

Anne Swannell

You want to open
and reveal the pearl you've cloistered
in your papery shell,
its edges curved and rippled
from the washing of this water,
from your own being in these words,
the salty flesh that is you
in this laminated world you've made:
the irritation
the revolving of the particle

the coating of it
the luminous striations;
all round and shiny and iridescent,
waiting to be exposed
when the knife tears into you.

But it's hard being a poet under tubular florescent suns,
with the light bouncing off chrome, and white tile floors,
with nothing but a thin green vinyl wall
between you and those who are Taking Off Pounds Sensibly,
who clap each chocolate bar refused,
each ounce of flesh not manifest,
not created from bread or potatoes or banana cream pie.

And it's hard when the wall, the undulating wave,
is thin enough to plunge through
yet translucent as mud,
and you're not sure
if their group is clapping or yours,
if it's for you — your words, or them — their willpower.
You take a deep breath and you pitch your voice
so it will reach the green wave but not penetrate,
cuz you don't want to add to their troubles,
add anything they don't want,
or get confused, or them confused.

You've known you would be shucked some day
in the bright chrome light
where florescent suns spin
in rows above your head,
and the clapping keeps happening beyond the next wave
and the sea keeps sucking, keeps shining,
and the waves
don't carry you away.

WHY I WEAR THE SOCKS I DO

Michael Dennis

for jana

i have decided to come clean
and explain

why i usually wear
two different colored socks

it is because i have lost
half my wardrobe

because
it is the latest in fashion

because my ankles
don't think in stereo

because
my shoes don't get along

because i like
to clash with the sidewalk

because i like to see color
when i walk by windows

because it drives
my mother-in-law nuts

because i can always
set my best foot forward

because when i put my foot in my mouth
i have a choice of flavours

because i wanted
to write this poem

LITERARY VERSIONS OF EMILY CARR

Eva-Marie Kröller

SEVERAL YEARS AGO, the Unitarian Church of Vancouver invited me to participate in its Third Annual Dorothy Pascal Festival of the Arts in a weekend of activities entitled "The Creativity of Emily Carr Explored." Following Doris Shadbolt's Saturday evening lecture on Carr's work, the Sunday morning service was to include a reading of "White Currants" from *The Book of Small* and a dialogue based upon *Hundreds and Thousands*. Vaughan Williams' rendering of Walt Whitman's "Dost Thou Now, Oh Soul" and a flute improvisation inspired by the readings were to form part of the musical interludes.

In preparation for our first rehearsal, Joy Coghill (who was then researching a play on Emily Carr) had asked me to select excerpts from *Hundreds and Thousands* suitable for our dialogue. I pondered the word 'suitable.' To me it meant above all 'appropriate for a church service.' And to a Lutheran brought up in a Roman-Catholic convent school, that suggested '*very* serious bits.' So I selected passages describing Carr's spiritual struggles, shunning concrete evocations of her daily life, most particularly humorous ones. Joy was not wholly impressed, complaining that I had reduced the artist to a religious mystic and producing, *impromptu*, an alternative selection of journal entries, many of them showing Carr torn — often half-comically so — between a strong desire for creative solitude and an equally emphatic need for human companionship. Our script, as it was finally completed, became a compromise between Coghill's view and mine. Yet it remained a partial picture, as we found out from members of the congregation after the reading: they too had had a concept of Emily Carr ('the outrageous woman artist,' 'the Walt Whitman disciple,' 'the cantankerous landlady,' 'the lover of animals') and, while they had liked our presentation, they underlined that it was — if by necessity — incomplete. After all, the Emily Carr of *Hundreds and Thousands* was a much more introverted, contemplative person than the active, often belligerent heroine of *Growing Pains* and *The House of All-Sorts* had been.[1]

As each one of us had tried to capture, from a different angle, the 'essence' of Emily Carr, so have a number of Canadian writers, composers, and choreographers. In their work, interpretations of Emily Carr range from ambitious attempts at covering all facets of her existence to brief, condensed evocations. Like our own presentation, each one of these is significantly shaped by the occasion for

which it was produced and by the tradition informing its author's work. In the following discussion of drama, poetry, fiction, music, and dance dealing with Emily Carr — a discussion which does not pretend to be exhaustive — I wish to trace a development leading from naturalist, anecdotal approaches to increasingly metaphorical ones, a process not necessarily identical with the chronological publication or performance of these works. In writing this essay, I do not propose to join the ever-increasing controversy over Carr's "true" personality;[2] instead I wish to explore her as a *literary* phenomenon.[3]

The most biographically oriented version of Carr's life is Don Harron/Norman Campbell's musical *The Wonder of It All*, originally planned — like *Anne of Green Gables*, a previous product of the Harron/Campbell team — for performance at the Charlottetown Festival, but then broadcast as a 1971 CBC television special and revived for performance in Victoria's Newcombe Auditorium in 1980 and 1981.[4] Initially, a fifty-six-year-old Emily was to open the play, a lonely landlady preoccupied with her lodgers, menagerie, and the occasional bothersome visitor. Flashbacks about her childhood and years in San Francisco, England, and in Indian villages were to follow, until the frame closed, once again in 1927, with the keeper of the House of All-Sorts discovered by Marius Barbeau and departing on her way to the East to meet the Group of Seven. In concentrating on these episodes, Harron focused on the 'action'-filled sequences in Carr's life: her spontaneous, unconventional behaviour as a child in Victoria, her naiveté as a young woman in wicked San Francisco, her sympathy with Indian culture in Ucluelet and Kitwancool, are all translated into briskly moving scenes accentuated by song and dance sequences. Many of these are comical through exaggeration of dress, mannerisms, and accents. Even Carr's long months in an English sanatorium are contained in a fast-paced scene with bird-feeding, a song, and a photo-taking session as highlights. Through its various productions, *The Wonder of It All* increasingly stressed the Indian component. In keeping with political developments and with the location of the 1980 and 1981 productions, great pains were taken to include carefully researched and authentically performed songs and rituals. In the 1981 production it is no longer Emily who opens the play, but Jimmy Tanook, in conversation with Marius Barbeau and a missionary. In contrast to the missionary's ethnocentrism, Barbeau acknowledges the wisdom of Jimmy's people, pointedly asking for the *privilege* of learning from him. The rewrites for the third production strengthen Indian material throughout, even suggest that topical allusions be made to contemporary problems such as the exploitation of salmon resources through the white man. Although some of this material is taken from Carr's books, the language of *The Wonder of It All* is for the most part colloquial; quotations from *Growing Pains* and others of her books were in fact even more reduced in the 1980 and 1981 productions than in the initial version, thus eliminating most literariness from the text.

In choosing to restrict himself to the period from approximately 1876 to 1927, Harron obviously complied with the demands of his genre; the following years, although the most productive in Carr's career as an artist, were too quiet in external action to be translatable into an entertaining musical. Yet a previous play about Emily Carr had made an attempt to transpose her solitude into dramatic terms, and that play too had been performed in Victoria. Herman Voaden's "Emily Carr: A Stage Biography with Pictures" interprets Carr's life as the tragic existence of an artist nailed to the cross both of her own creativity and of society's conventions.[5] As a young man, Voaden had been much impressed by the Group of Seven and Housser's *A Canadian Art Movement* and had initiated a contest for plays based upon Canadian paintings later published in *Six Canadian Plays* (1930).[6] In "Emily Carr," he transforms the painter into the "artista dolorosa,"[7] the artist as Christ-figure emulated by early German Expressionism, the movement which appears to have shaped most of his work.[8]

Although Voaden's Emily Carr does not assert herself quite as vehemently as for instance the hero of Hanns Johst's *Der Einsame: Ein Menschenuntergang* (1917), the course and quality of her existence do suggest the life stations of a *Künstlerroman* rather than those of a *Bildungsroman*.[9] That is to say, Carr determinedly rejects her sisters' and her lover's conventional expectations and chooses art, but also guilt and sorrow instead; as a result, her life resembles the Romantics' circuitous journey in search of perfection, not the upward unilinear progression toward a distinct goal typical of the apprenticeship novel. Moreover, her concept of life echoes Walt Whitman's, a strong influence on both the Expressionists and on the historical Emily Carr; *Growing Pains* concludes with a quotation from Whitman's work suggesting that physiological death may mean spiritual rebirth: "We but level this lift to pass and continue beyond."[10]

THE THREE ACTS of "Emily Carr" — covering her life from 1886 shortly before she left Victoria for San Francisco, to the celebration of her seventieth birthday in 1941 — are held together by leitmotifs enhancing the emotional and intermittent, rather than intellectual and cohesive, development of the play. The most important among these is the storm, a metaphor inspired by Carr's own descripion of her birth ("I was born during a mid-December snowstorm; the north wind howled and bit") and of gales in St. Yves Bay; counterbalancing the dynamic, spiralling motion of the storm are leitmotifs evoking tranquility and contentment, the lily-field and the white currants, in passages drawn from *The Book of Small* and *Growing Pains* respectively.

Voaden intended to depict the interpenetration of life and art not only in the "plot" of his play, but also in its presentation. Illustrating Lawren Harris' dictum

that "Life is creative and Art, creative Art is Life,"[11] Voaden planned to give equal attention to words, pictures (projected as slides), and music (accentuating the lily-field sequences) in a demonstration of his "symphonic expressionism."[12] In order to prevent the audience from assuming a hierarchy of the arts and from interpreting the pictures as subservient to the dialogue or vice versa, Voaden suggested that Brechtian alienation effects be introduced, that is, that the slides be projected out of synchronization with the dialogue and stage action.

Similarly distorted, from a naturalist point of view, is the psychology of the play's characters. Expressionist drama dismisses the characteristics of conventional individuality — looks, speech, name — as the paraphernalia of a burgher jealously guarding his ego from blending compassionately with humanity. The artist in particular is called upon to transcend "the personal . . . Personality is merely the locale of the endless struggle, the scene of the wax and wane of forces far greater than itself."[13] According to the production notes for "Emily Carr," Voaden considered a non-realist approach de-emphasizing Carr's individuality as a human being and stressing the universality of her situation instead. Thus, actors were to double up for roles, acting and props were to be simplified and formalized, the stage was to use platforms rather than naturalist backdrops. The dialogue is stylized, often emphatically emotional. Spoken by Emily in conversation with a fellow-painter, the following passage from *Growing Pains*, describing dawn in Ucluelet, appears almost verbatim in Act 1, Scene 2: ". . . the square of window . . . clared to luminous greys, folding away mystery upon mystery. Out there tree boles . . . streaked the unfathomable forest like gigantic rain streaks pouring; the surge of growth from the forest's floor boiled up to meet it."[14] Changes for the dramatic text (insertion of a comma after "folding away" and repetition of "pouring") enhance even the literariness of the passage with its uses of ellipsis, alliteration, choice of an active verb in conjunction with an inanimate object. For most of the play, Carr seems to be reciting an exalted monologue rather than interacting with the other characters.[15] Often, they appear to be reflections of her Ego, conflicting forces in her own mind, *not* independent human beings. Carr's writing style and her painting resemble each other in the sparsity of syntax and brushwork, in her insistence on alliteration/parallelism and on the density of colour, in her preference for ellipsis and for simplification of form.[16] Carr's written language, often transposed almost unchanged into the dialogue of Voaden's play, thus enhances the interdependence between Carr's life and work as well as tightening the connection with Expressionist drama and its often radical re-definition of syntax and semantics.

Voaden's anti-naturalist approach in "Emily Carr" was, however, never realized on stage. When the play was first performed in Kingston, Ontario in 1960, a critic commended it for its authenticity and described it as dealing with "A distinguished and colorful Canadian, bristling with eccentricities which were not

affectations but by-products, or better, perhaps, symbols of a strongly individualistic personality in association with unusual gifts."[17] The emphasis is on Carr as an eccentric individual with painterly talents, not as a universal artist; the reviewer praises the "nicely disposed padding," a measure suggesting — naturalistically — Emily's advancing years, but finds himself confused by lighting techniques and the projection of slides. The actress portraying Emily Carr refused to speak over music; thus, the use of the lily-theme had to be reduced as well. No objections were raised against the heightened language of the play, partly because the quotations from *Growing Pains* and others of Carr's books made "this Canadian play . . . vigorously honest," partly, perhaps, because the critic interpreted and accepted the dialogue as "melodramatic." In depicting Emily Carr as a universal artist of Expressionist dimensions, Voaden had not taken into account (nor could he have) the extraordinary popularity Carr was to assume as a national and provincial symbol following the 1967 and 1971 Centennials,[18] a popularity depending for general appeal on anecdotes about her eccentric behaviour — her menagerie, her outlandish clothes, her unpredictable manners. Whereas Voaden could still suggest in 1960 that an epic narrator be introduced to familiarize, in a prologue, the audience (especially an Ontario audience), with the story of Emily Carr, no such measure was necessary when the play was revived in Victoria, B.C. in 1966. Following conversations between Peter Mannering, the director; Margaret Martin, the actress who was to portray Emily Carr in this and two other productions (*The Wonder of It All* and Nancy Ryley's 1975 films *Growing Pains* and *Little Old Lady on the Edge of Nowhere*); and Flora Burns,[19] changes were made in Voaden's script transforming Carr from a crucified artist with few personal idiosyncrasies into a character with distinctive speech habits and historically accurate costume: forty costume changes were necessary for the 1966 production. Voaden's poetic liberties with the chronology of Carr's life were eliminated, the dialogue was reduced, its literariness muted. A scene depicting Carr as a cantankerous landlady (to re-appear verbatim in Mannering's staging of *The Wonder of It All*) was added to counterbalance the melodramatic elements of the play. In his production-notes, Mannering stressed the dream-character of "Emily Carr," possibly to authenticate any remaining exaltation in conception and style. But for the most part, Carr had become a historical character and the play, realist.[20]

POETRY — COMPLETE without realization on stage — does not enter into potential competition with naturalism. Thus Florence McNeil's *Emily* (1975),[21] a cycle of poems with many parallels to Voaden's interpretation of Carr's life, has been more successful than its dramatic counterpart. *Emily* consists

of forty-six poems each presented through the voice of the painter. The first poem, "Awards," describing a moment late in her life when "someone in ermine has sent me an award," opens a frame to be closed by the last piece, "1945," spoken by a dying Emily Carr. Enclosed by this frame are poems dated 1871 to 1945, sketching the stages of the artist's development. McNeil's repeated insistence on dates ("History Lesson 1879," "1944") and on place-names ("Watercolours: San Francisco," "London I," "London II," "Vancouver") suggests that the collection is concerned with the historical Emily Carr, an impression enhanced by the use of archival materials (the photographs described in "Family Picnic" and "Rain") and allusions to her books ("Prayers" and many other poems). Yet even looking at the list of titles in McNeil's collection one may suspect that she is not only concerned with a poetic duplication of biographical and autobiographical material: several titles are repeated ("London I" and "London II"; "France I" and "France II"; "Totem I" and "Totem II"), a procedure suggesting that, like Voaden, she may be interested in patterns of reprise, variation, circularity in addition to a unilinear "life-plot"; Frank Davey has observed similar patterns in numerous other Canadian long poems concerned with autobiography such as Norris's *Autokinesis*, McKinnon's *The Intervals*, Bowering's *Autobiology*, Kroetsch's *Field Notes*, and others.[22] A closer analysis of the individual poems in *Emily* reveals that, indeed, these two concepts of life (plot and circularity) are not parallel but contrapuntally opposed.

Like Voaden's, McNeil's version of Emily Carr implies that "historical life" is only one layer of existence and a gratuitous one at that. In "Dear——," the painter writes to an insistent lover: "[I] am neither yours/nor (sadly) mine"; many years later she re-reads a letter of his on a rainy day, finally putting it away "realizing I pry / into a forty year old passion / meant for / some other self." Enclosed by "Dear——" and "Rain" are poems sketching stations in Carr's development toward a universal self; poems with identical titles often evoke moments of halting, trying again, and of final epiphany. Especially striking is this process in "Totem I" and "Totem II," two pieces separated by another, "Sundays"; in the first poem, her pastels begin to dissatisfy her; out of the genteel colours and shapes leans "a totem pole / penetrating the recreated sky" and she admits to feeling insecurity, perhaps even anguish: "it weighs uncertain on my memory." "Sundays" describes growing restlessness and determination. The tentative "I am allowed to imagine" in "Totem I" is transformed into "I want / like Alice to go through / the glass." The breakthrough occurs in "Totems II," when she abandons "the placid inner harbour" and declares in a poem imitating the lean shape of a totempole: "I have shut in / the confinable / thrown the ceremonies into stark relief / a dual reality." In return for her breakthrough, however, she loses her own self: "in retaliation my own [reality] has disappeared."

McNeil's collection — like Voaden's play — traces Carr's development through

leitmotifs. Concentrating on metaphors linking history and myth, intellect and spirituality, physiological decay and organic rebirth, McNeil's Emily Carr speaks of towns/houses/maps; of pictures/frames/sculptures; of bodies/limbs, and in doing so, echoes much of Jack Hodgins' metaphorical appreciation of Emily Carr in *The Invention of the World*.[23] "History Lesson 1879" sketches a picture of Victoria as "squarely British" and as endowed with the "respectable framework of the English village," a tidiness besieged and invaded by "miners running through the town / to reach the Fraser." Their randomness dissolves "the map until it was putty"; as a result "Victoria's solidity has unusual cracks / which ooze in embarrassing directions." Emily's father, an apparently stiff Victorian in high collar, occasionally betrays a love for luxuriant disorderliness in spite of himself: "his boots are golden with mud / his eyes glint in the sun" and "when he walked to church / on Sunday / [he] let his eyes play over the warm / mossy landscape / until his collar / nearly snapped." During her growth as an artist, Emily learns to think of her body as losing its distinct outlines, and metamorphosing into its natural environment: "... in this cool captivity / liquid life / surges through me / my feet sink and spring / in this moist enclosure." She even refers to an exhibition of her work in the East as "this odd structure my body / my skyscape / has stretched across Canada," thus speaking of her work as an extension, atomization even, of her self.

The shape, texture and angle of the totem-poles in her paintings assault and unsettle the viewer; they lean out of their frames luring him into crossing the threshold between madness and reason. Here, McNeil's Emily Carr strongly resembles Margaret Atwood's Susanna Moodie in *The Journals*;[24] the final poem, "1945," denies the truth of mirror- (read: naturalist —) images much like Atwood's "Daguerrotype taken in Old Age," and describes Carr's old face as a corrugated, cratered surface evoking Susanna Moodie's devastated features:

> I have declared war on mirrors
> there is a deep gash where a mouth once was
> my hands that hold skin like a sense of duty
> cannot push off death.

Also like Atwood's Susanna Moodie, McNeil's Carr often speaks with a flat, matter-of-fact voice (a typical feature of the "nonromantic, low-mimetic" approach of the Canadian long poem),[25] contrasting sharply with the literariness of Herman Voaden's Carr, but also with the occasional lyrical outbursts in McNeil's own book. Carr's major artistic and spiritual epiphanies toward the middle of the book are accentuated by incantatory language and experiments in concrete poetry: "there is no implied division between the actual and the real; the actual is the real; the phenomenal is the noumenal and can explode ... with magic."[26]

Only two of McNeil's poems allude to sexual love in Emily Carr's life, and both are emphatically vague and anonymous ("Dear——" and "Rain"). Yet in other poems, Carr's yearning toward union with nature in her work is clearly erotic, even suggestive of the *unio mystica* in metaphysical poetry.[27] Her growing defiance of Victorian value systems and surfaces is also a rejection of patriarchal power ("I will not be a face for your wall / I will not lie immobile in your cart / my feet pointing helplessly towards captivity"); at the same time, however, her defiance is — as we have seen — an acknowledgement of her father's passion for life, a passion much distinguished by the mannerism of patriarchial authority. McNeil's interpretation of Carr's sexuality differs sharply from Voaden's; despite Carr's family resemblance with Expressionist artists and their demands for an ecstatic, non-bourgeois existence, Voaden describes her life as tragic, and her art as a *faute de mieux*. Carr's suitor Martyn is present during much of the stage action and was even intended, as I mentioned earlier, to act as an epic narrator; even considering that Martyn may be interpreted as an aspect of Carr's own mind, I submit that it would be difficult to imagine that a similar role be granted to the frail and devoted women in Johst's *Der Einsame*.

UNLIKE *The Wonder of It All* and McNeil's poems, Voaden's play places little emphasis on Carr's encounters with Indian culture, hence does not explore, as *Emily* does, her growth away from conventional love into a pantheist form of eroticism. Interestingly, a ballet, commissioned for performance during 1975, the International Women's Year, avoids all reference to Carr's struggle against the patriarchal figures in her life but strongly alludes to her explorations of Indian cosmology as rites of passage toward creativity and selfhood.[28] Choreographed by Anna Wyman, with music scored for synthesizer, guitar, piano, drums, percussion, and voice by Ann Mortifee, *Klee Wyck: A Ballet for Emily* was first performed in the old Vancouver Art Gallery, with slides of Carr's work projected onto two side walls and onto a transparent screen erected between audience and stage.[29] Props and costumes suggested resemblances with both Indian and Carr's own art without attempting to imitate either; thus, the performing area contained a tent-like structure serving as a teepee or as the triangular vortex at the centre of Carr's "Grey" and other paintings. The costumes were designed in earthy colours occasionally patterned in ritualist motifs. No attempt was made to establish a plot; like Voaden and McNeil, Anna Wyman relied on leitmotifs to create "a series of seemingly unrelated scenes and sequences" nevertheless held together by recurrent movements, "a slow passing of the flat hand down before the face, for instance; a high and forceful thrust of the right leg with the foot flexed."[30] An earlier piece of music, Harry Freedman's *Klee Wyck*

(1971), also concentrates on Carr's involvement with Indian culture, but unlike Mortifee's music, it does attempt to imitate painting in programmatic music. Freedman, whose original ambition had been to become a painter, composed a suite in 1957-58 entitled *Images* in which he tried to translate into music the style of Lawren Harris's "Blue Mountain," Kuzuo Nakamura's "Structure at Dusk" and Riopelle's "Landscape."[31] Similarly, his *Klee Wyck*, commissioned for the B.C. Centennial Celebrations, was written to evoke a composite impression of Carr's style; Freedman chose the image of the totem-pole and of British Columbia mountains as an organizing principle and composed a leitmotif soaring from the very low to very high notes. Nootka and Kwakiutl songs and tom-tom rhythms punctuate the piece.[32]

Poems about Emily Carr — like dance and music — avoid anecdotal material about her life. Instead, each chooses a central idea often summarizing her existence by collapsing personal life, work, and landscape into one. The brevity of an individual poem — as compared to the loosely structured, exploratory character of McNeil's long poem — lends itself to simplified, highly compressed images of Carr's life; indeed, her presence resembles the brooding, oval shapes in her own paintings: "She sits, autumn falling at her feet — old season, old feet . . . / She sits, her face of no end speaking / into dust, her face of slow inflection / about to become sign . . ."[33] In often incantatory language (most apparent perhaps in Kathleen C. Moore's "Your eloquent silence stuns / And honours us / The big blue raven praises you / Klee Wyck / O, Laughing One!"),[34] poets invoke Emily Carr as a prophetess who inscribed her landscape with the language of her art, a language as close to the origin of creation as the letter A, or a blind man's braille,[35] but always as monumental as biblical myth. Wilfred Watson speaks of her as "Jonah in the green belly of the whale / . . . / imprisoned and appalled by the belly's wall / Yet inscribing and scoring the uprush / Sink vault and arch of that monstrous cathedral,"[35] while John Barton reads the forest in Carr's "Forest, British Columbia" as "trees finding / a way into where I can see, / the forest like myself a fragment / of God, once unnamed, / now a leviathan sudenly gentle, / suddenly waking." In Charles Lillard's "Scorned as Timber"[36] she becomes a teacher with an impact independent of her lifetime, a kind of female Orpheus who has been to the underworld and returned with cryptic messages.[37] Lillard prefaces his poem "Emily Carr, 1871-1945," but the dates are as ironical as in Carr's story "IPOO": "At your death we thought you old / We were wrong. Time was short / And you were bent; / The weight of what might be said, We thought age. / Today we are the oldest ones here." Similarly, Susan Musgrave's "Skookumchuk"[38] juxtaposes the poet's own tentative, groping existence with Emily Carr's courage: "I guess it's in my blood / to want to be like Emily Carr / . . . / She paints / the unexposed skin / the masks behind /loss . . ." and Dorothy Livesay's "The Three Emily's"[39] suggests that Carr's loneliness like

Emily Brontë's and Emily Dickinson's — was the pass to creative liberty: "Their kingdom was the sky."

Thus, Emily Carr is a model for other Canadian artists in many different ways and her existence a touchstone for their own achievement. But exploring literary and artistic interpretations of Emily Carr not only documents the formation of a national / provincial symbol, comparable in impact only to Susanna Moodie, Louis Riel and — in Québec — Emile Nelligan. It is also an exemplary model for the appropriateneses of audience analysis and *Rezeptionsgeschichte* and for the richness of generic and interdisciplinary studies in Canadian literature. Earlier in this paper I said that I was not interested in joining the debate over the "true" Emily Carr. Yet I wish to qualify this statement now. Literary (and musical) interpretations of Emily Carr are not only an alternative, but a complementary version of her life. Metaphor — the substitution of one idea for another — releases Carr from the restrictions of chronology and biographical fact, reconciles her with her father, and captures her own conviction that her life fulfilled itself on a spiritual, not a biological level.

NOTES

[1] In 1980, the CBC broadcast an abbreviated version of *Hundreds and Thousands* on its program *Booktime*. Even the few changes made here (reduction of repetition, etc.) changed Carr's voice considerably: it was made to sound more purposeful, determined, and rational than it had been in the original journal.

[2] Cf. especially the reviews of Maria Tippett, *Emily Carr: A Biography* (Toronto: Oxford, 1979), such as Francess Halpenny's in *Canadian Historical Review*, 62 (1981), 92-94 and many others.

[3] This essay is an expansion of a previous article of mine, "Resurrections: Susanna Moodie, Catharine Parr Traill, and Emily Carr in Contemporary Canadian Literature," in Cathy N. Davidson, ed., *Canada's Women Writers*, special issue of *Journal of Popular Culture*, 15 (Winter 1981), 39-46.

[4] My thanks to Maureen Milgram for providing me with a script containing re-writes for 1980 and 1981 productions. I do not have permission to quote from the script.

[5] I have consulted typewritten copies of the play at the National Library of Canada and at the Provincial Archives of B.C. The latter contains Peter Mannering's production notes on the 1966 performance. I do not have permission to quote from Voaden's play. Other attempts at capturing Emily Carr on stage include the following: Sharon Pollock collaborated with Joan Orenstein and Marjorie Whitelaw on a National Arts Centre production. The project was abandoned. So was Sheldon Rosen's play for the Vancouver Arts Club Theatre (announced for the 1980-81 season). Joy Coghill and John Murrell have been preparing a play for the Vancouver East Cultural Centre for several years now.

[6] Cf. Geraldine Anthony, ed., *Stage Voices* (Toronto: Doubleday, 1978), p. 35.

[7] Cf. Walter H. Sokel, *The Writer in Extremis: Expressionism in Twentieth-Century German Literature* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1959), particularly his chapter on "poeta dolorosa." In a reaction against *Gründerzeit* ideals for success in a man's lifetime — a financially secure and progressively rewarding career, a sublimation of

instinctual desires into a stable family-life, and an unwavering belief in social structure — Expressionism postulated the birth of a Nietzschean *Ubermensch*, with special Dionysian powers and privileges granted to the artist. Thus, Hanns Johst's *Der Einsame: Ein Menschenuntergang* (1917) depicts its hero — the nineteenth-century German dramatist Christian Dietrich Grabbe, a tortured, unrecognized author — as battling against his friends and foes alike. His family and friends would like to see him (and themselves) conventionally content; his foes interrupt his inspiration by insensitively demanding to be paid for services rendered. Grabbe retaliates with intense self-pity and callousness: he exploits his old mother and deflowers his best friend's fiancée.

[8] Cf. Anthony, and Sherrill E. Grace, "A Northern Quality: Herman Voaden's Canadian Expressionism," *Canadian Drama*, 8 (1982) 1-14.

[9] Laurie Ricou has come to similar conclusions in his analysis of *The Book of Small*. My thanks to Prof. Ricou for letting me read his as yet unpublished ms. and for offering much helpful advice on my essay.

[10] Emily Carr, *Growing Pains* (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin, 1966), p. 281. Also cf. Reinhold Grimm, Henry J. Schmidt, "Foreign Influences on German Expressionist Poetry," in Ulrich Weissstein, ed., *Expressionism as an International Literary Phenomenon* (Paris: Didier, 1973), p. 74f.

[11] *Growing Pains*, p. 257.

[12] Cf. Chad Evans, "Herman Voaden and the Symphonic Theatre," *The Canadian Theatre Review*, No. 5 (Winter 1975), pp. 37-43.

[13] *Growing Pains*, p. 258.

[14] *Ibid.*, p. 78.

[15] Cf. Walter H. Sokel, "Dialogführung und Dialog im expressionistischen Drama: Ein Beitrag zur Bestimmung des Begriffs 'expressionistisch' im deutschen Drama," in Wolfgang Paulsen, ed., *Aspekte des Expressionismus* (Heidelberg: Stiehm, 1968), pp. 59-84.

[16] Cf. Danièle Pitavy, " 'Deeper into the forest': écriture et peinture dans *Klee Wyck*," *Recherches anglaises et américaines*, 16 (1983), pp. 81-93. Cf. also K. P. Stich's fine "Painters' Words: Personal Narratives of Emily Carr and William Kurelek," *Essays on Canadian Writing*, 29 (Summer 1984), pp. 152-74.

[17] Rose MacDonald, review of Voaden's "Emily Carr," *The Telegram*, Monday, 6 August 1960, p. 26.

[18] A bibliography prepared for inclusion (but not published) in Doris Shadbolt's *The Art of Emily Carr* lists 33 items plus 9 exhibition catalogues for the 1970's (as compared to 14 items plus 6 catalogues for the 1960's). My thanks to Doris Shadbolt for letting me see this bibliography.

[19] My thanks to Margaret Martin for lending me the taped conversation of 28 September 1966.

[20] Particularly interesting are the assessments of members of the audience who knew Emily Carr. Cf. for instance letters to the editor in the *Victorian Daily Colonist* of 7 November 1972, following the television broadcast of *The Wonder of It All*: "I am old enough to know that a family in Victorian days was not that collection of smart alecks . . . The loud-mouthed crudity of the CBC thing is hard to bear. As art it is restless and distasteful. It sickens, for it gainsays experience. It is immoral, for it is a lie." Also cf. *The Times* of 27 October 1966 and *The Colonist* of 27 October 1966 for reviews of Voaden's play.

[21] Florence McNeil, *Emily* (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin, 1975).

[22] Cf. Frank Davey, "The Language of the Contemporary Canadian Long Poem," in *Surviving the Paraphrase* (Winnipeg: Turnstone, 1983), pp. 183-93.

[23] I have refrained from discussing Hodgins' use of Emily Carr because I would be duplicating Robert Lecker's analysis in "Haunted by a Glut of Ghosts: Jack Hodgins' *The Invention of the World*," *Essays on Canadian Writing*, No. 20 (Winter 1980-81), pp. 86-105.

[24] I find myself in agreement with Gary Geddes in his review of *Emily* in *The Globe and Mail* of 13 December 1975.

[25] Cf. Frank Davey, p. 188.

[26] *Ibid.*, p. 189.

[27] Cf. Geddes.

[28] Cf. Catherine Sheldrick Ross, "Female Rites of Passage in *Klee Wyck*, *Surfacing* and *The Diviners*," *Atlantis*, 4 (1978), 87-94.

[29] My thanks to the Anna Wyman Dance Theatre for providing me with photographs and information, and to Keith Christie for showing me his CBC film of the ballet.

[30] Cf. Max Wyman's review of the ballet in the *Vancouver Sun* of 24 July 1975.

[31] My thanks to Wolfgang Gerson and the Canadian Music Centre for useful information. Another piece of music dedicated to Emily Carr is Jean Coulthard's "Canada Mosaic" (1974), especially its third movement entitled "D'Sonoqua."

[32] Cf. programme notes for the 1971 performance, Emily Carr file, Fine Arts Library, U.B.C.

[33] E. D. Blodgett, "Totem for Emily Carr," *Arché/Elegies* (Edmonton: Longspoon Press, 1983), p. 49.

[34] Kathleen C. Moore, "Klee Wyck (For Emily Carr)," in *Athanor*, 1 (December 1980), p. 54.

[35] See Blodgett, and John Barton, "Five Poems on Emily Carr Paintings," *Queen's Quarterly*, 90 (Autumn 1983), 756-59. Also, John Barton, "Cedar (a painting by Emily Carr)," *Canadian Forum*, 64 (May 1984), p. 33.

[36] Wilfred Watson, "Emily Carr," in *Friday's Child* (London: Faber, 1955), p. 55.

[37] Cf. Eli Mandel, "The New Phrenology: Developments in Contemporary Canadian Writing," *The Literary Half-Yearly*, 24 (July 1983), 100-15.

[38] Susan Musgrave, "Skookumchuk," in *The Impstone* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1976), pp. 94-95.

[39] Dorothy Livesay, "The Three Emily's," in *Collected Poems: The Two Seasons* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1982), p. 202.

NITOBE GARDEN

Michael Brian Oliver

I sit,
The lovers keep on circling.

The water lily
Blushes.

The pond ripples,
Bigger than tsunami here.

In the middle,
Upside-down fir trees.

Above them,
A drifting scarlet leaf — when?

Black koi,
Orange-and-white koi;
But when I stand,
The golden one arrives.

TREES

Dave Margoshes

would you believe me
if i told you trees
were the lords of the earth,
that poplars not men
were created in god's image,
that oaks were princes
waiting for kisses
to be born again —

would you believe me
if i told you all this
while peeling the stem
from a leaf, dissecting
the delicate veins
through which air is made,
chipping away at hardwood hearts
where ring after ring
leave their mark, telling all —

this is the terrible truth
revealed at last:
we, dumb brutes,
are shadows, straw men
destined for duty
beyond our ken,
damned to lower reaches,
our puny arms lost
beneath prayer piercing sky.

SCHEMATIC

John V. Hicks

Figure on ridge.
Binoculars.
Nothing there.
Still on ridge.
Another try.
No.
And a third
failure.

I was right,
then.
Distance discloses
you;
you can't be brought
up close.

books in review

O, SUSANNA!

CARL BALLSTADT, ELIZABETH HOPKINS, & MICHAEL PETERMAN, eds., *Susanna Moodie: Letters of a Lifetime*. Univ. of Toronto, $29.95.

IN THE DAYS before writers began keeping copies of their correspondence for profitable sale to national and university archives, the preservation of their letters was a much more chancy matter than it is today. If a writer became famous, his friends were likely to hold on to his letters, and reasonably complete collections of his correspondence could be built up, at least for the period after which his autograph became worth seeking. A few writers with a sense of their own lasting value — Wyndham Lewis was one of them — anticipated posterity and took advantage of the invention of the typewriter carbon to establish an archive even before it was demanded. But often, when a writer remained obscure during his lifetime, and then for some reason acquired a posthumous celebrity, the establishment of anything near a complete or even representative correspondence became difficult.

This difficulty has faced the three editors of *Susanna Moodie: Letters of a Lifetime*, whose title — with its hint of comprehensiveness — is misleading, since there are considerable periods, notably the pioneer years after the Moodies arrived in Canada, for which there is little surviving correspondence; anyone picking up this volume in the hope of getting first impressions of the experiences related in *Roughing It in the Bush* will be disappointed. The correspondence, in fact, is less valuable for what it tells us about the facts of Moodie's life, of which we are already reasonably aware, than for its projection of a personality changing under the stress of experience, and for its presentation of a writer's material preoccupations in a society so indifferent — and sometimes so hostile — to literature as pioneer Canada.

Like all of us, of course, Susanna remained the same even as she changed. In later years she would remember her English youth, and think of herself as "the wild Suffolk girl," given to passions and enthusiasms and sudden conversions, and compare that younger self, as she once did writing to a friend of her girlhood, with the women in her sixties:

> I have 19 living grand children and 5 in heaven. Oh you would not recognize the Susy Strickland of old, in the stout, careworn matron, but my heart is still young.

And indeed, it was, for Susanna Moodie never quite lost, even when she had ceased her industrious production of mainly forgotten writings, her delight in the visible world and her curiosity about the world beyond, which led her into some odd investigations of spiritualism. We see her in 1864. She had retained her sense of proportion, her power of self-observation and self-mockery, as is evident in a letter she wrote to her sister Catherine Parr Traill about a local writing nonentity who had at last decided that he was a "literary fossil":

> I could not help laughing at the, '*literary fossil*,' for I really feel, that I am growing one myself and often say, I am beginning to petrify. Ideas will no longer come. I seek, but do not find. Solomon said truly – There is a time, for all things under the sun. There is a time to write and a time to refrain from writing, I feel that the latter season has come for me.

Susanna is obviously partly laughing at herself, as she did often in old age, for in the very next sentence she starts grumbling about the meagre rates the *British American Magazine* is offering:

obviously she is still much in the business of writing.

The Susanna Moodie who emerges from these letters is, indeed, considerably different from the semi-fictional and somewhat self-important person who appears in *Roughing It in the Bush* and different again from the unhappily Victorian persons Margaret Atwood created to inhabit *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*. In some ways she retained throughout her life the youthful simplicity, almost naiveté, of the "wild Suffolk girl," and this partly explains why she could be so hurt and scandalized when people behaved selfishly or without principle. Her own loyalties were intense, towards her husband — the even more naif Dunbar Moodie — whom she supported through the disasters of Upper Canadian pioneering and public life, but also to her children and friends; one of the most delightful letters in the whole collection is to Allen Ransome, a friend of Suffolk days who had pleased her by establishing contact again after thirty-five years.

Susanna's public attitudes were as generous as her private ones, and the feeling of English snobbery that at times emanates from *Roughing It* and occasionally crops up in the letters, as when she reacts with horror to the idea of meeting Moodie's "natural" brother, is countered by her sturdy defence of the reform cause, which she combined rather Gladstonianly with a strict faith in Christianity as a revealed religion, and her staunch support for anti-slavery campaigns. One ends the book regarding Susanna Moodie, the human being, with a mixture of admiration for her worthiness and durability, compassion for the misfortunes she and Moodie endured — self-created though some of them were, and a touch of incredulity, for Susanna seems to have relished the opportunity to complain and at times to have exaggerated the gravity of her situation; after complaining greatly during her last years about poverty, she left on her death an estate worth $4,700, a considerable sum in Canada of 1885.

One striking feature of Susanna's letters, in comparison with those of most modern literati, is the lack of communication with other writers, except for sister Catharine. Writers in Canada until the last years of the nineteenth century were few and literally far between, and often they seemed ignorant of each others' existence, perhaps because they so often published abroad rather than at home. Apart from a single note thanking Charles Sangster for a copy of one of his books, there are no letters to or even mentions of Canadian writers whom we now regard as Moodie's important contemporaries, such as Isabella Valancy Crawford, Charles Heavysege, James de Mille, and Rosanna Leprohon. Certainly Susanna had no sense of being — as we now see her — part of an emergent Canadian literary tradition. Her criteria of writing remained Victorian English, and her public was largely in Britain and the United States where her books, as distinct from her shorter pieces, were mostly published. She believed herself hated in Canada because of *Roughing It,* and when she said "home" she meant the England to which she never returned. Yet the content of her works makes her inalienably Canadian in a way only later generations can perceive.

One ends this book with no doubt that to live as a writer was Susanna's chosen role; she remarked at her marriage: "My blue stockings, since I become a wife, have turned so pale that I think they will soon be quite white, or at least only tinged with a hue of London smoke," but they blued up again amazingly quickly as writing became a means of supplementing a precarious family income. Her correspondence in fact derives

its main and most constant interest from this attachment to literature. In the second letter, written when she was not yet 24, she was already writing about her links with the English magazine, *La Belle Assemblée*. Some of her longest and most interesting letters, ranging over personal as well as literary matters, were written to her English publisher Richard Bentley, with whom a real friendship as well as a writer-publisher relationship developed. And as late as 1871, when she was 68, and finding it physically uncomfortable to write, she was still making plans, if not for new works, at least for revised editions of old ones. There are whole stretches of her life in which her letters are dominated by laments about the poor earnings of literature and importunities to publishers and editors. To a practising writer her anxieties and her complaints seem understandable and familiar; judging from the correspondence of authors, I have often thought they are more united in their financial problems than in anything else. In Susanna's case it was certainly the aspect of her occupation that she most discussed; during her working life she indulges in surprisingly little discussion of writing itself, its formal problems, what it should be or do; her attitude seems to have been mainly that of the workmanlike journeywoman. Yet in later years, when she had actually ceased to write, she began to discuss the works of her contemporaries as she read them, and to offer some shrewd and intelligent comments.

For all its gaps, *Susanna Moodie: Letters of a Lifetime,* adds notably to our knowledge of a writer who stands uneasily but firmly in our tradition, and to our understanding of the isolation and obscurity in which early Canadian writers worked in comparison with their successors today.

GEORGE WOODCOCK

HOME WORD

MARGARET ATWOOD, *Bluebeard's Egg*. McClelland & Stewart, $18.95.

"IT'S THE WORD *home* that echoes in the air here for Joel now, plaintively, in a minor key. Home isn't a place . . . it's a feeling. Maybe that's what's the matter with it . . . For him, when he was growing up, home was the absence of a thing that should have been there. Going home was going into nothingness. He'd rather be out." Joel is the protagonist of "Uglypuss," one of twelve stories in *Bluebeard's Egg*, Margaret Atwood's second collection of short fiction, and his homelessness is central to an understanding of his plight and the plight of many of the men and women who populate Atwood's fictional universe. In her first collection of short fiction, *Dancing Girls* (1977), Atwood presented a gallery of characters searching for meaning, either consciously or unconsciously, in the seeming meaninglessness of contemporary life. For those who found *Dancing Girls* impressive, *Bluebeard's Egg* will be no disappointment, for once again Atwood brings her poetic talents, her acute clarity of perception, and her sardonic humour to an examination of the foibles and follies of modern life.

What distinguishes the second collection is the deeper pain and anxiety of the characters. Joel is a political activist; his most meaningful relationship is with Uglypuss, his cat. "Loulou" centres on a potter and the menagerie of people who live with and cling to her. Joseph, a psychiatrist, has a myriad of relationships, not only with his three wives but also with a bevy of adoring and devoted patients. Yet the abundance of relationships or involvements often masks the absence of any true or lasting relationship and the consequent absence of meaning

in the lives of rootless and homeless individuals. To escape from the self in the mirror, that constant reminder of the joyless life a character leads, Atwood's protagonists flee to personal relationships for fulfilment, rarely realizing that one can relate to others only when one can relate to oneself. Married couples in *Bluebeard's Egg* do not love each other; rarely do they even make love. Extramarital affairs, by no means uncommon, prove as unsatisfying as the marriages being avoided. As one affair nears its end, the heroine is perplexed: "She's become used to thinking that in a relationship like theirs everything is given and nothing is demanded, but perhaps it's the other way around. Nothing is given. Nothing is even *a given*."

People become traumatized by the meaningless existences they confront. For one heroine, fear pervades her world. " 'Sally, Sally,' he says, and everything proceeds as usual; except for the dread that seeps into things, the most ordinary things, such as rearranging the chairs and changing the burnt-out lightbulbs. But what is it she's afraid of? She has what they call everything." Her dread is the prospect of looking in the mirror, confronting the self, and living for a moment without hypocrisy. *Bluebeard's Egg* appropriately opens and closes with first-person narratives about a daughter and her parents. In the opening story, "Significant Moments in the Life of My Mother," the narrator sees clearly the difference between her childhood and her present adult life. "Life was more joyful and innocent then, and at the same time permeated with guilt and terror, or at least the occasions for them, on the most daily level. It was like the Japanese haiku: a limited form, rigid in its perimeters, within which an astonishing freedom was possible."

In the closing story, "Unearthing Suite," the narrator remembers her childhood and her parents. The past has a lesson: "Nothing goes on forever. Sooner or later I will have to renounce my motionlessness, give up those habits of reverie, speculation, and lethargy by which I currently subsist. I will have to come to grips with the real world, which is composed, I know, not of words but of drainpipes, holes in the ground, furiously multiplying weeds, hunks of granite, stacks of more or less heavy matter which must be moved from one point to the other, usually uphill. How do I handle it? Only time, which does not by any means tell everything, will tell."

Atwood's men and women find themselves bored by their lives. But they seldom realize that they must not resign themselves to their existence; in so doing, they accept and embrace their fate. Victims they are, but victims only of their own lethargy. Accepting the fact of her psychiatrist's death, one heroine wisely concludes: "There are thousands of stars, thousands of moons, and as I reach out for one they begin to shine." To reach is not to resign, and reaching out is the saving activity. The opening and closing stories remind the reader of the importance of family and roots, not as an escape from reality, but as an entrance into self-examination and self-understanding. But the perspective of the adult narrator is the product of quiet reflection and honest searching, active engagements of the self that are all too rare in Atwood's fiction. *Bluebeard's Egg* is not a happy portrait of modern life. The stories abound with examples of false happiness, temporary felicities that usually end in rejection and pain. With her usual care and an increasing compassion, Atwood examines the lives of modern men and women adrift without direction or hope, struggling to evade or deny the loneliness that cripples them.

DAVID STAINES

ASSESSING ATWOOD

JEROME H. ROSENBERG, *Margaret Atwood*. Twayne, $15.95.

THE TYPICAL TWAYNE format — a brief biographical overview, a title-by-title march through the particular *oeuvre*, and a final summation of the author's place in literature and history — often results in little more than three perspectives in search of a unity, and invites what well might be termed the typical Twayne review. Another scholar explores the gaps in the first's endeavour and quibbles about how it does not all add up to quite the same figure that the second would posit. Thus "omissions" in the biography, "misreadings" in the critical interpretations, and "misestimations" of the subject's place or importance all become crucial considerations, as if Twayne studies were written for specialists in the field and not for general readers only glancingly acquainted with the author at hand.

One chief virtue of Jerome H. Rosenberg's *Margaret Atwood* is that the critic keeps his primary audience firmly in mind, a virtue that this reviewer will try to keep in mind too. A second major virtue is that he presents for that general audience a persuasive portrait of the artist as artist and does so by effectively departing from the Twayne recipe. To start with, biography as an avenue of explanation is eschewed. The biographical content of the volume consists of little more than a prefatory chronology (one standard Twayne feature still in place) along with dates and contexts for the individual works discussed. As Rosenberg observes in the first sentence of his Preface, he has "taken to heart an admonition [Atwood] awarded me in an April 1976 letter: an author's life, she wrote, is 'best handled after the writer is dead.' " The critic accordingly refuses to postulate any definitive shape for a still unfolding career (a dubious enterprise even with the fixed career of the safely dead). It is Atwood's "writing, and not her life" that is "central to the study."

The writing is explored not in a mechanical book-by-book mode, but under three generic headings. The first three chapters centre on the poetry and trace out the development of Atwood's poetic concerns, devices, and voice; then one long chapter charts in comparable fashion her fictional accomplishment; and a penultimate chapter more briefly disposes of *Survival* and its attendant controversy along with the other nonfiction prose. In each of these sections the focus is on successive individual works. Rosenberg draws some connections and he tends to consider poems or fictions in the order in which they were written but he does not try to impose any larger order or design. *Survival*, for example, is considered only after the poetry and fiction lest "commentary be dictated by the narrow thematic niches that *Survival* carves for itself," and this despite the fact that Atwood thought those niches large enough to accommodate most of Canada's literature. For the most part, commentary throughout the study is dictated by the artistic challenges posed by the particular work being discussed, and for the most part that commentary is perceptive and persuasive.

Throughout the study, too, the author is effectively placed even as her poetry and fiction are discussed. Rosenberg notes Atwood's debt to Frye, Macpherson, and other Canadian figures but also attempts to situate her work in a larger English literary context. To that end, extensive comparisons pervade the book from beginning ("like Oscar Wilde's fantastic picture of Dorian Gray") to end (as in *Heart of Darkness*"). These comparisons are neither strained nor patronizing, but

are presented simply as other touchstones through which Atwood's accomplishments can be partly gauged; consequently the final chapter does not have to tell us that we have been assessing a major writer, for that larger claim is integral to the whole study and is part of its success.

But still a few criticisms must be raised or what is a review for? And for me the most disappointing feature in Rosenberg's volume is his reluctance to push his criticism quite far enough. In the chapter on the poetry, especially, we frequently encounter explications which suggest that the critic's operating assumption is to propound more fully and clearly what is partial, provisional, ambiguous, and/or contradictory in the text. The result is not so much thematic criticism but propositional criticism, and the poem is seen more as philosophical or artistic theorem than as verbal artifact and words at play. Except, in fact, for the judicious and extensive quotations from the individual poems themselves, the crucial element of verbal play in Atwood's poetry is largely lost. Consider, for example the discussion early in the volume on "The City Planners":

> There is "no shouting here, or / shatter of glass"; yet "certain things" reveal "the future cracks in the plaster / when the houses, capsized, will slide / obliquely into the clay seas, gradual as glaciers / that right now nobody notices."
>
> It is not so much our building cities (or imprisoning our emotions, or holding firm to commonplace reality, or taking photographs) to which Atwood objects; rather, it is our forgetting what we are building them against. Atwood's balance is exquisite, her philosophic position elusive. We must build our cities to protect ourselves from elemental nature, yet if we build them too well we will delude ourselves and fail to notice their inevitable disintegration; we must handle our passions carefully to stave off our own violent and unpredictable natures, yet if we control them too well we will lead sterile lives.

This is all well and good so far as it goes (and it goes rather farther than my lengthy quotation), but it does not go much beyond translating into rhetoric what the poem has already better said. Overlooked in that translation are such features of the original as the delicious ambiguity of "certain things" (some things? sure things?) and "the future cracks" ("future" as adjective or noun? "cracks" as noun or verb?) or the hardening of the figures from the capsized house to that most irresistible of tropes, "gradual as glaciers," to give us a rule of disorder distinctly more implacable than the order earlier embodied in "the houses in pedantic rows" with which the poem began. Admittedly, Rosenberg's discussion is often shrewdly attuned to the structural intricacies of the poetry, but it also too often slips into much paraphrastic overkill as I have quoted.

Or, to complain more briefly, the novels are treated in summary fashion — good summaries, but still summaries. And a similar reductive tendency is obvious in the not totally serious suggestion that *The Edible Woman* is a case study of Marian's anorexia nervosa, *Surfacing* of the unnamed (naturally) narrator's amnesia, and *Lady Oracle* of Joan's multiple personality disorder. Nor is it likely that "the complete and true Joan Delacourt Foster will emerge" once the reporter to whom she has told her story has written it up. We have already encountered too many Joans and too many of Joan's stories to believe completely in a final but for the present deferred version of either. I would also observe that although the book does contain a brief "Selected Bibliography," Rosenberg, in much of his own scholarship, does not adequately acknowledge much of the Atwood scholarship now available.

The final chapter, as noted, need not seek to place Atwood in all literature. But it does partly place her in the burgeoning and often disputatious Canadian

literary scene of the 1970's. In so placing her, Rosenberg dwells mostly on the disputes. They make for a good story, a story not particularly flattering to Atwood but even less so to those (mostly, it must be admitted, male) who have hysterically objected to her status as "Queen Bee" (their term, not hers). Thus Scott Symons, for example, as quoted by Rosenberg, can mutter darkly about "a young editor [who] criticized Atwood in print and found his career badly damaged," as if the dictates of calculated careerism did not run in just the opposite direction. Indeed, one of the less edifying spectacles in recent Canadian criticism is the way in which those who would scarcely say 'boo' to Robertson Davies can still prove their hardy independence by resisting "the tyranny of the two Margarets" and engaging in a little Atwood-bashing. Consider, in this context, the strained and largely gratuitous attack on Atwood in B. W. Powe's recent *A Climate Charged*.

But that would be another review entirely. Suffice to say, for this review, that Rosenberg's study does precisely what it sets out to do, and if it is not "must reading" for the academic teaching an Atwood text, it is still exactly right for that common figure, the student especially intrigued by the Atwood text he or she has just read.

ARNOLD E. DAVIDSON

ENIGMATIC GABRIELLE

M. G. HESSE, *Gabrielle Roy par elle-même*, trans. Michelle Tisseyre. Stanké, n.p.

I APPROACHED this book with expectations that turned out to be false. The title (in English roughly *Gabrielle Roy by herself*) suggests — or at any rate suggested to me — that M. G. Hesse, the author, would present, through judicious selections from the work, a portrait of the enigmatic and almost unknown Roy herself, and new insights into the books. As a long-time friend, former translator, and frequent reader and rereader of the books, I was curious to see how this might be done. But the attempt has not been made. Instead we are offered a curious volume — part memorial, part criticism and explanation of the books.

The various tributes—by Jack McClelland and Alain Stanké, her English and French language publishers, by Alan Brown, her last translator, and by a number of others, many of whom knew her only slightly at the end of her life and in a few cases, not at all, are almost all reverent to the point of breathlessness, which I suppose is natural enough, since the book was put together very shortly after her death. Granted that Gabrielle Roy was not easy to know since she avoided publicity on principle and lived apart and in secrecy insofar as she could. Still I found in these tributes few traces of the humour, the freshness of response, and the quality that I can only call childlike, which must have been as apparent to others as they were to me. I was reminded of her comment after a particularly hushed tribute during her lifetime; it had made her feel "very old," she said, "and covered in lichen." I think her reaction to many of these memorial statements would have been much the same.

As for the body of the book, Hesse's contribution to the criticism of the novels and volumes of linked short stories Gabrielle Roy has left us (which incidentally and somewhat curiously was written first in English and translated into French by Michelle Tisseyre), I found it on the whole disappointing. It is true that Roy is a hard writer to categorize, not philosophical or ideological, certainly not experimental. She seemed, in fact, determined to slip out of all the slots we tried to find for her. With *Bonheur d'occasion* she appeared to be estab-

lishing herself as a social critic. (And what an "occasion" that was — the bursting of that book upon our horizon shortly after the war. What a boost it was to all of us young writers to realize that it was possible — she had proved it — to write of our own experience, our own milieu, in our own way.) Her next publication, *Where Nests the Waterhen*, which we all awaited with excitement, was about as dissimilar as it could be — one of her most tender and gentle glances back into her Manitoba past. Then with *The Cashier* she returned to the life of humble people in an urban setting.

For her examination Hesse has grouped the books by their subject matter — the urban novels, the semi-autobiographical sketches and so on. She tells what they are about and quotes from reviews, particularly those of the time (though she has omitted some of the more horrendous ones published in French midway in her career, a period when she was rather despised by many younger Québec writers, who considered that she had failed them.) In her concluding chapter she indicates some of Roy's themes — her sense of life as a circle, returning finally to the past, her belief that the writer's vocation is too peremptory to be a gift and is in many ways a curse.

This is a good study for anyone who is just beginning to read Gabrielle Roy's work and would like to know more about it, but it fails to give what I would call the final (or even *a* final) word. Perhaps there will never be a final word. The books will be with us for a long time to be looked at again and again. Perhaps Gabrielle will remain what she has always been — a writer in many ways unique in our literature, possessing rare and special gifts of compassion and insight and marvellous technical skill, who went her own way as she found it. Independent of fashion and trends.

JOYCE MARSHALL

AUTOPORTRAITS

FERNAND OUELLETTE, *Lucie ou un midi en novembre*. Boréal Express, n.p.

SUZANNE JACOB, *Laura Laur*. Editions du Seuil, fr. 65.

Laura Laur AND *Lucie ou un midi en novembre* are two recent novels which centre upon the absent or inexpressible mystery of the idealized eponymous female protagonist. As might be expected, the male consciousnesses which surround and endeavour to explicate her are more sharply figured than she is; even when Lucie, in a rather tentative attempt at antiphonality, is allowed to speak in the voice of her own journal, it is one that is barely distinguishable from the dominant male narrative voice. This narrator is the sort of sensitive hero of the male mid-life crisis so familiar in the contemporary novel, who, faced with his own mortality, seeks survival through his relationships with women, who of course in turn let him down, either by being fallibly human or merely by being mortal: both Lucie and Laura die (young, on a winter morning, and rather arbitrarily, despite much murky foreshadowing), leaving their lovers (Laura is at the centre of a whole circle of them) in the metaphysical and emotional lurch.

Ouellette's narrator, Paul, sensitive, intellectual, married, "d'un certain age," meditates throughout on the problems of suffering and evil, on the inevitable oppositions between political and emotional commitments, with an aesthetically Christian underpinning of reflection, inimical, as too much thinking out loud tends to be, to the novel form. It takes a compellingly *interesting* (albeit weak, as these heroes always are), even if emotionally crippled, *interestingly* weak or crippled, hero to make such a fiction work, a hero like those in books by Archambault or Gilbert La Rocque.

Ouellette's is an honest work, albeit not a particularly compelling one, while *Laura* lacks even these 'masculine' ingredients of serious reflection upon the outside world. Yet apart from this, how much difference does the sex of the author make to these two thematically and structurally similar stories of fascinating women doomed to die young? Surprisingly little, I think. Both authors seem to feel, with Edgar Allan Poe, that the early death of a beautiful woman is the one true subject of poetry, and their narrators, like Poe's, likewise discover that, as Paul puts it, "Je ne savais parler que de moi, qu'il n'y avait que l'autoportrait qui me fascinait." "S'il voulait parler d'elle il devrait parler de lui-même," says Suzanne Jacob of Gilles, her very similar middle-aged protagonist. While Jacob is the more "novelistic" of the two, preferring to show or suggest rather than tell — there are real subtleties of plotting mistily visible through the minor surface events — Ouellette is the more reflective, as well as, with Paul's repeated allusions to Bach cantatas or to the poems of Valéry serving as refrains, and the *mises en abyme* of Paul's lengthy dreams and of Lucie's art works, the more self-consciously literary. The woman at the centre of each story is mysterious (Laura "n'habitait nulle part"), quirkly (Laura "ne vivait pas á la même cadence que les autres"), charming, life-affirming, ("A mesure que tu vis avec elle [Laura], t'es . . . en vie"), despite an obsession with, even a yearning for, her own early death (her death was "son oeuvre d'art ultime," says Paul of Lucie, while Laura "ne parle rien que de sa mort"). In several respects both heroines resemble Christa Wolf's heroine, Christa T., who likewise resists all attempts to capture her mercurial reality in the net of the work of art, who is likewise only revealed to us in the needs and responses of others ("Ils n'ont besoin de personne et tout le monde semble avoir besoin d'eux") ; their possessions, like their personalities, are similarly scattered among their perceivers, though neither text is as seriously self-referential an artist-parable as Christa Wolf's. Lucie's hatred of suffering takes on (like Christa T.'s) a political slant through her obsession with her dead lover, Michel, who, like an inverted Orpheus, drags her down to death with him.

Indeed, Ouellette's novel harks back repeatedly to the French tradition of the meditative, confessional *conte*; it reminds us of Gide, in its minor characters at times tediously representative of philosophical positions, or of Benjamin Constant, in its elegiac entrapment in a sexual relationship whose end leaves the narrator in the grip of a freedom which is very much like death: "Je m'accrochais à mon paysage intérieur, tout tendu entre le vide et le dérisoire . . . J'appelle la mort. J'appelle Lucie. Qui pourrais-je appeler? Qui m'écoute?" The book ends on that note, but the penultimate note is of a bracing Christian vision, sneakier, because less bleak, than Adolphe's existential emptiness and acceptance of an inexorable guilt: "Fallait-il qu'elle meure pour que je voie cette lumière?" Well, yes. Novelistically at least, it *is* necessary, and perhaps the difference is one of degree rather than kind between this Christian, genteelly visionary version of a man's liberation through the death of a woman and the highbrow pornographic patterns of, say, Aquin, Godbout, or Beaulieu, neatly and memorably skewered in Lori Saint-Martin's epigrammatic formulation, "La libération de l'homme est sans prix et la libération, la vie même, de la femme, sans valeur."

The reader is clearly meant to put together the four fragmented and not wholly consistent masculine points of view on Laura to 'catch' her character

as some sort of whole, and, perhaps less importantly, to work out the shadow plot of child-death or abortion which so obsesses both her brothers. A Benjy-like feeble-minded yet heroically devoted younger brother, a savagely possessive, moralistically Catholic elder brother ("Laura est née pour la purification de mon âme et je suis né pour racheter la sienne"), the middle-aged married lover (Gilles), and a live-in working-class lover (or husband?) a little too adorably cute, in the Québec fictional way, all fail individually to establish the truth about her, all encounter each other through various "accidents" of the plot, are all thinking their separate thoughts about her as she lies, near yet inaccessible (as she has always been), dying in the next room. A suicide, as a result of all these various pressures and demands? Or dead, like Lucie, of a more tangibly material cold? Reader, it's up to you.

PATRICIA MERIVALE

WANTING TOO MUCH

MARIE-CLAIRE BLAIS, *The Day Is Dark* and *Three Travellers*. Penguin, $6.95.

Baker's Dozen: Stories By Women, ed. Fictive Collective. Women's Press, $7.95.

IN THE FICTION of Marie-Claire Blais, the destructive powers of love are equal to those of hate. To sustain Blais' concept of all consuming, all possessing "Hiroshima Mon Amour" style love requires the abnegation of all life outside of the love relationship. That feverish feeding off each other inevitably ends in burn out or blow out. Blais associates the lurid intensity of that kind of love with adolescence; for only then can we love, as she believes, with the possessive intensity that comes from having no developed life outside of the love life. But the tentacles of adult responsibilities gradually separate the couples — those who have survived blow out. Blais explores the vagaries of adolescent love in two recent novellas published as part of the Penguin Short Fiction Series.

The Day Is Dark focuses on the birth and burnout of love in several adolescent couples. The novel opens with a group of adolescents playing together in a garden, and experiencing the tentative stirrings of sexual love. They pair off and the plot follows the loves that cannot last. A major portion of the novella is narrated by a young girl named Yance whose existence consists of endless contemplation of her love for her husband Joshua. As she impotently watches him retreat from her into the horizon of adulthood, she decides to end the relationship rather than to remain together sharing a continually diminishing love. Another couple, Raphael and Marie-Christine remain together — their adult love a hideous parody of what they once had shared together.

Blais' prose is so hypnotic and seductive that the experience of reading the novella is akin to the erotic daze experienced by the couples. However, when we complete the novella, we awake from the daze to question Blais' reasoning. One character explains his love as "the madness of all children born without an age to live in. . . . For us, there is nothing but the blind present, blind love, thoughtless pleasure." To make adolescent love a political statement in this way seems ludicrous, considering that it is an archetype with a long literary history. *Three Travellers*, the second novella, delineates the slow swirling hypnoticism of "adolescent love" as it binds and ultimately destroys three adults. While Miguel, a playwright, obsessively contemplates his wife Montserrat, she in turn is obsessed by Johann, a pianist. As in the first novella, Blais' poetic prose approximates the headiness of love.

In contrast, the vagaries of adult love are a predominant concern in *Baker's Dozen*, thirteen short stories selected by the Fictive Collective, a socialist feminist press. In the introduction to the collection, Judi Coburn asserts that the stories were selected to define the "contours of the feminist world.... We looked for strong stories that had as subjects women engaged in creating new world, both in the imagination and in reality." Although Coburn acknowledges the collective's concern that the stories not appear ideologically presumptive and its awareness that a feminist consciousness does not guarantee a good story, there are a number of stories that never transcend ideology. "Strike" by Greta Hofmann Nemiroff, and "What If A Black Woman Decides . . ?" by Makeda Silvera never go beyond the level of consciousness raising. The women in these stories are not characterized so much as placed in situations where their choices are predictable and their consciousness correctly banal. The ideological and fictive simplicity of those stories is, however, counterbalanced by several stories that present emotionally complex characters and situations.

Taking the staple plot of popular women's fiction — a wife deserted by her husband for a younger woman — Katherine Govier, in "Thief," creates a story of grim irony and psychological fissions. In "Thief," Margaret copes with the loss of her husband by retreating into a minimal, celibate life. She finally succumbs to her friend's urgings that she have an affair. But her choice is not fortitutous. James, the man she selects, is united to her by his spousal desertion, and, when they get to bed, by mutual lack of desire. Inevitably, Margaret is drawn to a married man and disgusted by becoming a "husband thief." In Debra Martens' story, "The Waterfight," a teen-age girl relates the ritual highschool waterfight between a group of teen-age girls and boys. In her creation of that narrative voice, Martens captures the pugnacious, aggressive voice that teen-age girls adopt towards boys as a form of self defence. The narrator relates how her best friend Bobby, who is teased for being too smart and too undeveloped, gives the object of her unrequited love, James, a comic come-uppance for his humiliation of her. In "Loss" by Sharon Riis, Rosa, an actress from Calgary, visits two old friends, Howard and Kathe in Berlin. The flippant and guarded levity of their conversations cannot drown out the insistent buzz of *angst* from Howard and Kathe's "happy" marriage. Kathe finally reproaches Rosa for disturbing their complacency by always "wanting too much" from life. The strongest stories in *Baker's Dozen* reach beyond complacency: they emphasize the necessity of wanting too much.

SHERIE POSESORSKI

WOMEN'S BONDS

CAROLINE HEATH, ed., *Double Bond: an anthology of prairie women's fiction.* Fifth House, $9.95.

THE TITLE OF Caroline Heath's anthology of prairie women's fiction invites the reader to search for a pair of bonds in the stories. The subtitle suggests that one bond is to place — the prairie; the second is that of women to other people, this collection highlighting the relationships of women to fathers, mothers, grandfathers, daughters, husbands, lovers, and other women. Though many of the collection's women narrators and central characters (men in these roles are rare) are caught in undesirable relationships or situations, Heath chooses a title that by its closeness in sound to 'double bind' evokes that possibility of meaning, yet emphasizes the positive.

The Nova Scotian setting of the first story in the collection, Joan Clark's "God's Country," makes it clear that the stories need not be set on the prairies to qualify for inclusion, but place is powerfully evoked and vital to the narrative in several of the stories. Cases in point are Merna Summer's "Threshing Time" (a flat title but a compelling story of a man pushed to violence because he is powerless to prevent, among other things, his potential employer from pawing his young daughter), Sandra Birdsell's "Falling in Love" (I found the setting the most convincing aspect of this story), and Lois Simmie's "The Night Watchman" (any one who has ever been in Saskatoon when the pelicans are stopping over at the weir on the South Saskatchewan will find the gratifying pleasure of recognition of place and event in this finely crafted story). Western Canada, in both its rural and urban aspects, is vividly recorded in the stories of this anthology, so that it could clearly be used in the context of the study of regional literature.

The primary purposes of the book, however, are to showcase female talent and to explore female relationships. Both purposes make it suitable for courses in women's literature or women's studies classes. As a sampling of prairie women writers' work the anthology offers evidence of the great diversity of styles and forms which the writers are employing. At one end of the spectrum are the conventional but by no means stale narratives and presentations of character in Edna Alford's "Companionship" and Gertrude Story's "Das Engelein Kommt." Alford writes convincingly of a nurse's fierce admiration for an old woman dying in a nursing home, while Story creates an extraordinarily persuasive yet unusual first-person narrator to tell the painful tale of a girl child's trying to win the approval of a father who only has eyes for a boy child. Occupying middle ground are stories like Beverley Harris' "The Soma Building," whose story within a story is decidedly more engaging than the framing narrative, and Eunice Sharfe's disturbingly fantastical, even surreal, "In the Clearing." At the other end of the spectrum are the experimental forms of stories by Diane Schoemperlen, Carol Shields, and Gloria Sawai. Schoemperlen's "Life Sentences" is a witty parody of soap-opera plots and the scriptible style. In Shields' final vignette in an apparently unconnected series, a novelist has her typescript returned for revision because she has relied on fate, circumstance, and accident to link the incidents in her novel; Shields' own resistance to relating patently unconnected miracles in her own story is thus justified in the fiction itself. Sawai's "3 poems = 1 story/ 3 P = 1S / $\frac{p = s}{3}$" is the most radically experimental piece in the book, and though her three "poems" do not make a very satisfactory equation with "story" for me, as a statement about form and the writer's desire for precision, the piece has interest.

The binds and bonds of women in relationships as varied as these stories' styles and forms provides the subject matter for all but one of the stories. The obvious sensitivity and intelligence of this selection seems to reflect Heath's own commitment to it: as the publisher of Fifth House as well as the editor of the anthology her bond to the book is a double one.

SUSAN GINGELL

LUNAR LANDSCAPE

JOSEPH RUDEL-TESSIER, *Roquelune*. Boréal Express, n.p.

RUDEL-TESSIER'S FICTIONALIZED AUTOBIOGRAPHY tells the story of a young French-Canadian boy growing up during World War I and the 1920's. Set in "Holle" (Hull), Ottawa (that forbidden paradise on the other side of the river), and "Roquelune" (Rockland, Ontario), the narrative gives us the archetypical recollections of a seventy-year-old man looking back to his childhood and youth. The usual tags and shifters of autobiographical discourse (e.g., "later I was to learn . . .") abound in a book about one man's "vraie patrie charnelle." Although the book is labelled a novel, Rudel-Tessier takes pains to articulate his particular problem with the *genre*: he is fully aware that his "novel" reads like a first book ("Je suis en train de faire la sorte de livre qu'on écrit quand on écrit un premier livre comme s'il devait être le dernier"). Given his self-confessed inability to create three-dimensional fictional characters, he must fall back on that old standby resorted to by Montaigne and Proust, i.e., write of himself. The result is not an unhappy one, less because of the author's "sincerity," than because of the wide-ranging nature of the narratives: we are introduced to both adolescent sadism and the late Monsignor Charbonneau.

After the narrator himself, the principal character is the mother figure. While one feels a certain sympathy on Joseph's part for this baby-making machine whose sole ambition in life was to beget a future bishop, the reader will remember her more as a Barthesian mythology of the French-Canadian Mother of the period. Ashamed of the family's modest means, she seems to spend her entire life working — she intensely dislikes "effeminate" men who help their wives with the housework — and fearing. She is afraid of Blacks, fire, sacrilege, and frost-bitten ears, not to mention unwanted pregnancies and her husband's rare but intense anger. In Joseph's eyes, she remains forever beautiful, but already old at age 32, always "une pauvre honteuse." Her name, not given, was Legion. The father removes himself from the responsibilities of child rearing, loses arguments with his wife and appears only briefly on the scene. Somewhat more human and more humane than the mother, the father's biggest part seems to be the annual New Year's Day blessing of the children when for one brief moment he is forced, by circumstance and tradition, to assume the role of a French-Canadian *pater familias* of seigneurial proportions.

As a couple, the parents hide not only their sexuality but also their sin-ful bodies: for years the young Joseph is tormented by such a troubling question as "why do parents never wash in public?" If the father's role is one of parental abdication, the mother too must frequently remove herself from the scene, for a pregnant women is neither heard nor seen in Roquelune, even in church. As for the sometimes not so desired baby, it is supposed to have been *bought* from the Indians. The mother's lying-in is attributed to the beating she is assumed to have received at the hands of the *Sauvages*, unhappy with the always poor payment the whites come up with for the new arrival! Interestingly, although the not so naive Joseph soon learns that this is all hogwash, tradition dictates that he continue to subscribe to the superstition. As for the mother, duty requires at least twelve children and one can well imagine her relief when an obliging uncle points out she may count a still birth among the obligatory number of pregnancies.

If North American males have a dual

image of women, now saints now whores, Joseph meets Eros — and Thanatos — in the person of a saintly whore. In one of the most realistic (even naturalistic) passages in the book, Rudel-Tessier writes of the fear of death embedded in one of his first sexual experiences. Wrought with tuberculosis and venereal disease, Violette, the girl in question, voluntarily refuses her services to Joseph, to Joseph her friend and her would-be favourite:

> «T'as toujours été gentil avec moi!»
> Puis elle fut prise d'une quinte de toux et se rejeta en arrière, tomba à la renverse sur ses jambes, se tordit pour se mettre sur le ventre, puis à quatre pattes pour s'éloigner de moi, le corps toujours affreusement secoué par la toux.

Marked by her cough as though by a letter, Violette symbolizes the place reserved for the sick sinner in the society of Roquelune — an unmarked grave waits to receive her in the final embrace of death for one so literally fallen from provincial grace.

Joseph's *apprentissage* of life and bodies also includes the body politic. His early readings of minor Catholic writers of the period make him a fervent monarchist and he dreams of a new New France ruled by the pretender to the French throne. This fairy-tale romance with royalty extends to the king's representative, Lord Byng: "Le gouverneur général, c'était un vice-roi, et un vice-roi c'est presque un roi!" In a hilarious description of the G.G.'s visit to Roquelune, English and French perceptions of reality are played out against each other in a series of *quid pro quos* reminiscent of a Feydeau farce. Joseph mistakes the dashing young aide-de-camp in red for the great man himself, while the latter — old and drab in civvies — is taken by Joseph and his friends for some minor functionary whose duty it is to speak for the man who speaks for the descendant of the late great Queen. As for the Franco-Ontarians, they demonstrate their loyalty by singing of one of their own heroes of yore. The Governor General, however, wonders why they are singing a hymn in praise of the mighty Dollar(d)! In a more serious vein, Rudel-Tessier does not mince words on the subject of French Canada's flirtation with the idea of fascism: he attributes pro-Salazar and pro-Franco sentiments to the anglophobia of the period, a feeling which he does not share for he describes himself, both then and now, as a "séparatiste anglophile."

History is in fact present throughout the entire book, like some old friend whom no one pays too much attention to any more but who nevertheless incarnates a very real, living link to the past of the family, here the family of French Canada as a whole. Joseph meets a centenarian who lived at the time of the Rebellion of 1837-38 and his family had personal connections with the mythic hero himself, Papineau. The priest still enjoys a feudal-like hold on the village. However, the greatest historic(al) moment is narrated in the mock heroic mode and consists of a "family reunion" of the descendents of one of the fellow travellers of Maisonneuve. Convinced they have been cheated out of their rightful ownership of a large part of downtown Montreal, this oddball assembly of malcontents takes on a Rabelaisian air:

> nous avons traversé la foule des derniers arrivants: des femmes énormes, des viragos à moustaches, des paralytiques soutenus par des béquilles, de simples boiteux, des vieux à la bave à la bouche, un hydrocéphale, jeune celui-là, un adolescent affecté d'un tremblement de la tête.

The collective monster is metaphorical here: it is properly French Canada itself whose sickly body must die its slow but sure death before the Québec and the Québécois of the 1960's (and 1970's) can be born. Rudel-Tessier has provided

us with a lively portrait of what it was like to grow up in the sunset years of two great empires — one French(-Canadian), one British. If at times, his narrative makes the *fabula* seem as strange and as uncanny as anything out of our world, it is surely because today the monster is (almost) dead and can only appear to us as foreign as a lunar landscape.

RALPH SARKONAK

RETURN OF LES PLOUFFE

ROGER LEMELIN, *The Crime of Ovide Plouffe*, trans. Alan Brown. McClelland & Stewart, $4.95.

FOR A TIME IN the 1950's the most popular show on both the Radio Canada and CBC television networks — aside from Hockey Night in Canada — was The Plouffe Family. In writing the French and English scripts of the show, Roger Lemelin drew loosely on the incidents of his 1948 best-selling novel, and, aided by the talents of his remarkable, bilingual cast, he softened considerably the book's satire of wife Joséphine, husband Théophile, daughter Cécile, and sons Napoléon, Ovide and Guillaume. Then, in 1982, thirty-four years after *Les Plouffe* first appeared, Lemelin saw fit to publish a sequel, *Le crime d'Ovide Plouffe*, now available in a lively English translation by Alan Brown.

Why did Lemelin wait so long to follow up his original success? Perhaps the critical and box-office appeal of the 1981, faithful-to-the-novel film of *Les Plouffe* was part of his motive. A related event, too, might have been the equally astonishing success in the early 1980's of the television series about the political fortunes of Maurice "Le Chef" Duplessis. In the post-referendum climate of the time Quebecers probably were delighted to take a breather from the awful melodrama of the federalist-separatist debate to return, in imagination, to the relatively simpler pre-Quiet Revolution era. Yet, whether attempting to appeal to nostalgia or not, Lemelin has written a tale which is every bit as entertaining — and as pertinent as social history — as the first Plouffe story.

Before reviewing the sequel in detail, however, it seems well to dispel the misleading impression of the blurb on the paperback cover of this translation, which states that *The Crime of Ovide Plouffe* is "the long-awaited fourth instalment in the captivating Plouffe family saga." Long-awaited, perhaps, but in fact, of Lemelin's four published novels about life in Lower Town, Quebec City, only the two I have been discussing are about that family. One common element besides setting in the four works is, of course, the recurring character, Denis Boucher, developed in Lemelin's first book, *Au pied de la pente douce* (1944). Denis re-appears as a friend of Ovide in *Les Plouffe*, as a friend of Pierre Boisjoly in *Pierre le magnifique* (1952), and once more as a friend of Ovide in the latest work. Clearly Denis' role as an ambitious *concitoyen* and as an observer of life in the *quartier* serves the author's purpose: he is a frame-character by which the reader is better able to measure the various strengths and weaknesses of the family members as a whole.

For, as much as the sequel is concerned with Ovide's personal and business misadventures, it celebrates, as did *Les Plouffe*, the virtues and vices of family life. There are numerous instances of this theme in the novel. In a large sense, the little family is a microcosm of their little *nation*: "This land, immense and intractable, this brutal climate, this pitiless, great river — the French Canadians had tamed and civilized these

challenges of Nature, just as the Plouffes were trying now with fierce determination to force the hand of destiny." Their "determination" to stick together at all costs is expressed in a homelier way by Guillaume: " 'The Plouffes, you know, it's like a chain. Every link counts. If one breaks the whole chain goes to hell. And that's the end of a great family, our family, the Plouffes!' " But these virtues, of solidarity and caring, have been vitiated to some degree by the failure of the children to mature fully. The blame rests largely on their parents, especially on Mama Plouffe — Joséphine — who, amiable tyrant as she may be, keeps as tight a rein on her brood as does Father Folbèche on the parish or Maurice Duplessis on the province. All this was evident in the first novel, which followed the family's history from the summer of 1938 through to the end of the Second World War. In the sequel, which focuses on the year 1948-49, the situation hasn't changed much. Although Napoléon and Guillaume have freed themselves from the direct influence of their mother in the prosperous postwar years, they remain adolescents at heart. Cécile still lives at home, a disappointed, miserly old maid. Only Ovide, his mother's pride and the acknowledged intellectual of the family, seems independent enough to outgrow the close confines of Lower Town existence. But it's not to be.

Ovide's "crime," finally, is his innocence about the duplicitous ways of the world which, ironically, less intelligent people than he know about only too well. His marriage to Rita Toulouse, the former Sweet Caporal girl, is already foundering before he links himself to Pacifique Berthet in the fatal watch-selling partnership which leads to Rita's death and Ovide's condemnation as a mass-murderer. His sexual naiveté is never more apparent than when he pursues what he perceives to be a harmless friendship with the lovely Frenchwoman, Marie Jourdan, and thus further ensnares himself and her in Berthet's Machiavellian scheme. Obviously, Ovide has neither a head for business nor is he worldly enough to handle his marital problems. Moreover, his lack of maturity is also shown in his incapacity to resolve his personal vocation, whether to become a monk or to be the spokesman for a new, enlightened secularism in Quebec.

In developing Ovide, Lemelin achieves, in large measure, something that had eluded him in his previous books: the creation of a rounded character. Several references in the story to Stendhal make it apparent readers should think of Ovide as a modern Julien Sorel, at odds with himself and the bourgeois civilization he perforce must live in. More directly, Lemelin's adroit use of historical personages — Duplessis, and his enemies Jean Marchand, Pierre Trudeau, *et al.* — as well as the explosive political repercussions brought about by the strike at Asbestos in 1949, intensify his portrayal of Ovide's faulty idealism. Finally, by cleverly using techniques of the *roman policier* to bring his plot to its climax and resolution, Lemelin underlines his hero's haplessness. Fortunately for him and his family, Berthet's guilt is exposed in the last pages and Ovid is saved from the gallows.

Alan Brown's translation succeeds in capturing the myriad, and ambivalent, traits of Lemelin's style. As author who is sometimes naturalistic and at other times comic in approach, Lemelin both undermines, and causes us to laugh with, his Plouffes. Hence the reader is confused as he seeks to gauge the dominant tone of the writing. Perhaps, though, the difficulty is more apparent than real; fundamentally, Lemelin's outlook, like Gabrielle Roy's and Hugh MacLennan's, is liberal and humane. In an age of experimental, post-modernist fiction, *The*

Crime of Ovide Plouffe is an excellent example of old-fashioned storytelling. It is the kind of book which recalls a time, scarcely four decades ago, when the Canadian novel was evolving as a unique medium for expressing the complex texture of everyday life, in this place, in the twentieth century.

ERIC THOMPSON

SELECTION

R. G. EVERSON, *Everson at Eighty: Poems by R. G. Everson.* Oberon, $19.95/9.95.

RAYMOND KNISTER, *Windfalls for Cider: The Poems of Raymond Knister.* Black Moss, $9.95.

ANDREW SUKNASKI, *The Land They Gave Away: New and Selected Poems.* NeWest, $14.95.

GEORGE WOODCOCK, *Collected Poems.* Sono Nis, $14.95.

SOMETIMES A COLLECTION OF selected poems represents a momentary pause when poets invite their readers to reflect on a period or a dimension of their careers. Sometimes the book represents a diligent editor's attempt to delineate and define a poet's achievement. In unfortunate cases, the book can become an editor's distortion or simplication of a poetic achievement.

Everson at Eighty is Al Purdy's celebration of R. G. Everson's eightieth birthday. In the introduction, a personal reminiscence of Purdy's friendship with Everson as well as a brief biographical commentary on Everson, Purdy notes that editors of collections share a common tendency: "The editor blatting about his latest phony enthusiasm; the blurb-writer blurbering." Purdy himself falls victim to this propensity, heralding Everson as "unique . . . among the very few excellent poets writing in Canada . . . he is singular and he is original, a poet of high excellence." When the introduction moves from the pseudo-critical to the biographical, the friendship between Purdy and Everson has a more appropriate place. *Everson at Eighty* suffers not from its editor's enthusiasm as much as from his absence as an editor. The book should be a retrospective on a career, providing the reader with the occasion to understand, assess, and appreciate a poetic career. But the selected poems have no organization. Beautifully produced, the volume assigns no dates to individual poems, no indication of the time or place of their publication. As a consequence, the reader, unless thoroughly acquainted with Everson's career, must struggle — with the aid of earlier volumes — to ascertain the old and the new, the early and the recent.

This twelfth volume of Everson's verse confirms his reputation as a gentle recorder of the geographical and human landscape. In "Report for Northrop Frye," the poet declares: "We bring our own light to a dark place. / Crowbar, sledgehammer, pick / pound Labrador granite. / We make sounds from Arctic silence, / Life is here and now — we bring it. / We bring men's laughter and good sense." His poetry is not unlike the world beyond the asylum: "You don't look from the window — beyond is too far." Everson does not take his reader beyond or beneath, preferring to render the surface with care. In his more recent verse — and this dimension is scarcely present here — he shows discomfort with the contemporary world. *Everson at Eighty* is a reminder that Everson is not an original poet of high excellence but a gentle soul with a gift for delineating pictures in musical verse.

The purpose of *Windfalls for Cider*, the editor Joy Kuropatwa notes, "is to make available more of Knister's poetry, and not to provide a definitive edition." As James Reaney notes in his preface, "So here then, at last, Black Moss Press has brought together almost a *Collected*

Poems! Well, it's still too soon for that, evidently, but instead what you hold in your hand is the most Knister yet selected between two covers."

During his short life, Knister published poetry in magazines but not in book form. *Windfalls for Cider* draws its title from Knister's own papers, where tables of contents exist for collections of poetry titled "Windfalls for Cider" and "Grass Paintings." Knister is one of Canada's first modern poets, and this volume should prompt readers and critics alike to consider his position in the development of Canadian poetry. His reputation as a novelist and short story writer has been more fully examined than have his achievements as a poet. A friend of Charles G. D. Roberts and Duncan Campbell Scott, he wrote poetry that often recalled scenes and subject-matter of the poets of the Confederation, yet he rewrote their verse bringing distinctly Canadian subjects into the world of modern verse. His interesting long narrative poems recall Scott, the later Archibald Lampman, and American contemporaries such as Robert Frost.

"There are special considerations attending the assembling of a *Collected Poems* which are different from those applying to the preparation of an ordinary collection of poems," George Woodcock announces in the introduction to his *Collected Poems*. "In the latter case the poet is — or should be — picking what he thinks to be the best poems he has written over a certain period, and however he may arrange his selected pieces, his criterion of choice will always in some way be excellence. But the *Collected Poems*, when prepared by the author himself, is in some way nearer to an autobiography than it is to an ordinary collection of verse, since now the poet is not concerned with showing his best work so much as with showing the work that adequately represents his creative career, and in the process he must reveal his weaknesses as well as his strengths." Woodcock has chosen to edit his own *Collected Poems*. Eschewing the assistance and the additional voice of an editor, he has followed an unusual and original pattern of selecting and dividing his poetry into ten specific categories, each category becoming a chronologically arranged sequence of poems. Having arranged his poems, Woodcock adds a rough date for each one: "Where possible, it is approximately the year in which the poem was written; where that is not possible, it is the date of the periodical or volume in which it first appeared."

Collected Poems is a poetic autobiography revealing Woodcock's multi-faceted career as writer and critic, theorist and anarchist, Canadian and cosmopolitan. Future scholars will have to assess Woodcock the poet in the perspective of his broad career, and *Collected Poems*, as Woodcock himself intends, is the main work for that purpose.

Andrew Suknaski is a unique and original poet; it is indicative of Stephen Scobie's careful introduction to *The Land They Gave Away* that such phrases of praise do not appear. Suknaski, Scobie notes, is "an important poetic voice in Western Canada." The introduction, brief but telling, comments well on some of the strengths and weaknesses of Suknaski's poetry. The selection itself is excellent. Three early visual poems precede generous selections from *Wood Mountain Poems* (1976), *The Ghosts Call You Poor* (1978), and *In the Name of Narid* (1981). The new poems continue Suknaski's preoccupation with his region and its people. Like his early work, they combine acute perception, humane compassion, and vivid phraseology. Suknaski remains a chronicler, even a mythmaker, yet he is unique in his ability to include himself with transparent ease in the

world he presents. He is not a historian or, perhaps, even a chronicler, for he manages to see and record without distancing himself from his subjects. His most recent verse is more experimental, more preoccupied with the limitations and possibilities of concrete poetry. The collection, Scobie declares, "is provisional, an indication of Suknaski's ongoing concerns as a poet rather than a definitive statement of an achieved position." He adds a further function for a selected volume: "not only to introduce new readers to the range of the poet's work, but also to afford the poet himself a vantage point from which he may see more clearly where he has been, and where he has still to go."

All four volumes of poetry begin with an explicit statement, either by the editor or the poet himself, of the purpose of the volume. Such collections invite the reader to pause and to assess. Books of selected poetry are moments or interludes when reflection is necessary and perspective should be possible.

DAVID STAINES

NIGHT AND DAY

ROO BORSON, *A Sad Device*. Quadrant, n.p.

LEWIS HORNE, *The Seventh Day*. Thistledown, n.p.

PETER STEVENS, *Revenge of the Mistresses*. Black Moss, n.p.

RUSSELL THORNTON, *Frame of Darkness*. Athanor, $3.50.

IN THREE OF THE FOUR books of poetry under review here the dominating realities are violence and pain. These are propounded in their most directly personal terms by Russell Thornton's *Frame of Darkness*, whose title and simple black covers accurately proclaim the atmosphere of the verse within. In Thornton's thirty-three relatively brief poems, the violence is persistent, if various. The reader is severally assaulted with instances of natural decay and death, with suicide, wife-beating, child-beating, adolescent violence, perverse sexuality, lost love, past love, voyeurism, imprisonment, painful nostalgia — and above all, and throughout all, with self-pity. The vision of these poems is undoubtedly generated and circumscribed by an image of domestic violence which continues to frustrate the speaker's life, but the poems unfortunately insist upon talking about all this emotional, psychological pain instead of embodying it. Self-pity produces at best pathos, at worst irritation. There are too many sentiments of the "with you, I am cold and alone" nature. The instances of more felicitous phrasing, such as "a certain calmness/as in a quiet death," are too few.

Revenge of the Mistresses is Peter Stevens' eighth book, and exhibits the competent control which we can fairly demand from an experienced writer. Stevens' suite of fifteen (exclusive of Prologue and Epilogue) relatively brief poems also focusses on emotional pain and violence but at a greater distance and, consequently, in a more impersonal and more precise fashion than Thornton's collection. Stevens addresses the corruscating complexities of sexual power, masculine imperialism, and feminine subversiveness by translating and transforming photographic portraits from Helmut Newton's notorious collection *White Women* (1976) into meditations on erotic violence and pain. As his title suggests, Stevens claims for women release from and revenge for their continuing conventional sexual exploitation. Through a rather narrowly concentrated but effective vocabulary of images of light (especially the sun) and reflection (especially mirror images and motifs), Stevens carries his multiple female persons from imprisonment and the role of sacrificial victim:

. . . I thought the cell was large.
But lying there I recognize this rich
and glossy skin I wear merging with
a slaughtered animal.

through the first stages of self-assertion:

But this time I will not be willed.
I will do it by myself. That way
I will not drown when the miracle fails.

to visions of the male's destruction: "you cannot see him, only thin hints / of cloth — my body has obliterated him."

But in all of this there is no release from violence; revenge merely replaces one victim with another. Stevens consequently leaves himself open to a charge of cynicism or to the accusation that his is yet another conventional masculine definition of sexual relationship. Certainly, whatever his poems superficially proclaim or pretend, his vision is ultimately not hopeful.

And neither, understandably (especially in view of such apparently well-intentioned failures as that of Stevens), is Roo Borson's. Many of the thirty-five poems which comprise *A Sad Device* explicitly address the subject of male-female relationships, and discover nothing there to diminish the sense of impending apocalypse which dominates the book. Borson's violence is muted and more insidious, her pain quiet, unrelieved, inescapable, and more profound than that of Thornton or of Stevens. Hers is a world where the wind can be chillingly compared to "the way a man sometimes / throws his wife against a wall," and where violence is such a pervasive feature of women's lives that it becomes "the access / to easy violence that excites them." It is a world, however, where sexual violence is symptomatic of a universal absence of understanding and communication. "I don't think there's anything / I quite understand," Borson laments in "A Red Taste," and in "Light In the Pine Grove" she declares:

. . . All of us
are so strange with one another
that you and I can barely speak.
All I can do is give little hints
that you won't be able to trust.

Not only are we insecure with one another. Borson repeatedly articulates the insecurity of man's very existence. People present, she remarks, "the face of a herd / bound for extinction." For all our claims to racial primacy "At every moment / there are a million creatures / that have never heard of us." History provides no reassurance: "History we make up to go to sleep by"; and in any case, "History is beginning to demand / an end to the story."

In such company Lewis Horne seems almost facilely and anachronistically hopeful. His thirty-nine poems, arranged, like Borson's, in four sections, contain many affirmative celebrations of flowery nature, pleasant domesticity, and affectionate family life. There is often as well, however, an awareness of how tenuous and fragile, perhaps even illusory, these graces and blessings are. Horne's persona can still be infected by childhood fears ("After Putting My 14-Year-Old Daughter on the Train to Toronto"), and apprehensive about the "decomposition of the past" represented in the disorder of a "Moving Day." More tellingly, he can find thought itself to be threatening, capable perhaps only at best of enabling us to move "through a momentary/myth that we make up. We know/apostleship is pretense." "Still-/, the poem continues, warm with sun, our flesh assumes," and *The Seventh Day* generally assumes the efficacy of a transcendent solar warmth. Horne's optimism produces clear and effective poems, an achievement for any first book of poems, but contemporary audiences are likely to find the vision too easily sustained.

CHARLES R. STEELE

A VERSE TO VERSE

HELEN HAWLEY, *Grasshopper*. Turnstone, $6.95.

ANDREW WREGGITT, *Man at Stellaco River*. Thistledown, $8.95.

DEBORAH EIBEL, *Streets Too Narrow for Parades*. Sono Nis, $6.95.

WILLIAM CALLAGHAN JR., *The Individual Heart*. Quarry, $6.95.

ALASTAIR MACDONALD, *Towards the Mystery*. Harry Cuff, $7.95.

ALLAN BROWN, *The Almond Tree*. Quarry, $5.95.

IF FARMERS ARE NOT AVERSE to living the virtually poetic metaphor of a-row-to-hoe, then should not poets, who work the land of letters and make the alphabet flourish, be willing to live the literally pastoral metaphor of a-verse-to-verse? Even the etymological link between our own *verse* and the Latin *versus* (meaning "turning," as in "the turning of the ploughing the furrows of language. And when we consider the great vast of the Canadian environment (rendering practically barren the traditional dichotomy of town and country), we realize that just as our farmers will always have one more row to hoe, so will our poets perpetually have one more verse to verse, in both cases the line on which they are presently working and (more dynamically) the line that through the very act of eluding them, promises to complete their respective fields. Collectively, Canadian poets are not satisfied with ploughing merely a morgen: their concern is more with ploughing a wereld, with exploring all three of the world's horizons in all their elusiveness-illusiveness-allusiveness. Individually, however, Canadian poets are somewhat less exploratory, preferring the familiarities of their rural, urban, mythological, emotional, psychological, and existential domains (to name just a few) to the complex of perplexities making up the human environment itself. If the collective of poets inspires the exclamation "how does your garden grow!", the individual poets themselves tend to provoke the query "how does your garden grow?" (suggesting the doubt inherent in personal curiosity). The selection of Canadian verse under review is both conveniently collective and unco-operatively individual, suggesting that we do indeed have a lush garden filled with a variety of growth, but that poetic ploughing involves not just turning over the soil in preparation for new growth but also turning under old growth in preparation for next season. So much of this poetry is thematically unoriginal struggling to be technically innovative that its authors would seem to be cultivating their gardens in ways of which they are not fully aware.

In *Grasshopper* Helen Hawley offers a simple and spare poetic sequence on the mystical union of vertical man and horizontal place, in particular in the forms of the infinitesimal grasshopper and the endless Canadian Prairies, each as adaptable and as constant as the other. By personifying the grasshopper, Howley seems to be suggesting that prairie people should surrender some of their physical verticality and moralistic uprightness in order to embrace less the horizon which they envision than the horizontal plane on which they stand or fall. Accepting the metaphor of hugging the earth is a means of negating the destructiveness of urban life imposing itself on the prairie and the self-destructive aspirations that human beings impose upon themselves. Rather than as an invincible pest to farmers, Hawley casts the grasshopper as "Earthstepper," thereby emphasizing its kind of erect horizontality and its human associations, as well as its mythical proportions. Nevertheless, grasshopper-man can render the prairie literally and symbolically barren: "West desecrated / Grasshopper roams / the several deaths

of those dear at home shunt / Grasshopper away." Throughout the book this sort of short line hopping around the page interacts typographically with long, syllabically static lines, conjuring up the interplay of angular grasshopper and regular landscape, of transience and permanence, agitation and stillness, point, line and plane. But these quiet architectonics do little to bring Hawley's rather sentimentally impressionistic verse into satisfactory focus, leaving it to undulate somewhat too much like the landscape itself: "I wanted to stand in long grass / watch it flow from my centred feet out / in all directions." The verse that Helen Hawley has still to verse will demonstrate a greater poetic orientation and control, one feels, and a greater sense of geographic and human correspondence. Her current verse, however, leaves us seeking our bearings in grainy seas, with neither the entomological nor the etymological comforts of home.

The anthropologic-geologic metaphor that Andrew Wreggitt pursues in *Man at Stellaco River* has less to do with person-in-place than with person-as-place, less with human geography than with a geography of man. In the title poem, for example, the image is simply one of a man fishing (and of a woman awaiting his return), but the metaphor arising out of the literal image has to do with man merging with his environment, the one becoming the other, the other the one: "Fish and man / the wire holds them across the rush of water / Centuries pass over the man's arms / the crooked jaw of the fish / Nothing changes / They are tilted by the foaming river / pierced by each other." Here the poetic line is empirically cold and clean, phlegmatically detached and observational, as rigid as the line that turns a fish and a man into a fisher king or a fisher of men. So fundamental is Wreggitt's person-as-place metaphor, however, that it seems to have lost its very figuration, to have become a sort of a-man-is-a-man-is-a-man non-metaphor presenting life in the act of living rather than the once-removed of life as it is. At its worst, the poetry is merely descriptive, as in the collection's concluding piece, "Fishing," in which "A mother and son / stand by a river in autumn" . . . "The woman takes her turn with the rod" . . . "The son sits on a rock" and "Slowly, they begin / to fill the vast morning." Although the picture itself is lucid and beautiful in its lucidity, the word-picture falls flat in the conspicuousness of absent modifiers, similes, and imagery, as if a mere succession of acts and their attendant statements is aesthetically sufficient unto itself (and not simply the stuff of prosaic interminableness). When Wreggit does attempt conventional figures of speech, the results are somewhat unimaginative, as is evident in the simile "His feet dangle like plumb lines" and the metaphor "She flails her arms, the flesh ripples / a beached whale wrestling the earth." Otherwise, Wreggitt's verse is impressive where acute descriptions seem to take the place of conventional imagery. His narrative mode of address succeeds in unifying the collection and is vocally effective in his historical poems, actually allowing the poet to find his most ardent persona. In this regard the sequence of six poems entitled "Daniel Harmon: A Geography" is the highlight of the entire volume, pointing to the sort of verse that Andrew Wreggitt should pursue in subsequent books: poetic geography of historical man, man in time who finds his place in poetry and thus becomes that place.

In *Streets Too Narrow for Parades* Deborah Eibel cultivates an already cultivated and cultivating place: the cosmopolitan city that even in its back streets and in its lingering domesticity contains something of the cosmos. The poet's preference for the ephemeral vision, for

short lines and foreshortened ideas, for passing beauty and surpassing detail, suggests her awareness of the essential intricacy and preciosity of life and her belief that human purpose is to be discovered in *petits riens* even more readily than in so-called profundity. Her poems themselves are too narrow for parades, but accomplished in simplicity and understatement: they quietly, imperceptibly, subtly find places in the cities they themselves contain. The narrow street is not just a motif running throughout the collection, its associations shifting with each appearance, but also a fairly static symbol of a place at once of exile and of exhilaration, to which "slow learners" are banished but where they discover not the meaning of life but the much more comforting fact that life does indeed have meaning. Upon this realization, life becomes a choice between "noisy boulevards" and "streets too narrow for parades" and a decision to walk both roads while preferring one and remaining attracted to the other, as Eibel points out in the title poem:

> If boulevards are good —
> Parades come often —
> Then why do historians run away
> From noisy boulevards
> And move into boardinghouses
> On streets too narrow for parades?
>
> When marchers appear from nowhere
> In an age of great ideas,
> Historians are afraid —
> What if the next parade
> Should stop suddenly,
> Right in front of them,
> And not go on?

The poet redefines our concepts of learning disabilities and bystreets, pointing out in the course of her own parade of poems that the life process of learning is indeed lifelong (and hence painfully slow) and that no one truly living can pretend to possess historicity. Life is a series of choices of life's little ways. If the message seems a little simplistic, it is also a reminder that life's truths are so simple as to be easily overlooked. The beauty of these poetic reflections on passing beauty is also easy to pass over, principally because it is incomplete (although not flawed): these poems demand to be meditated upon, and it is the act of intense reflection on what can pass away and what can be passed over that draws beauty to its completion. In this respect the reader participates in the versing of verse, imagining between the lines and forming images on the poetic horizon.

The posthumous verse of William Callaghan Jr. (1947-1974) exists on only the most theoretical of horizons, partly because it is so very promising, but mainly because its promises can never be fulfilled. Comprising both short stories and poems, *The Individual Heart* is a study in understatement, the fiction touching on straight-faced grotesque and allegory and the verse on oriental simplicity and idiosyncratic inversion and inventiveness. The poetry in particular has its moments of startling brilliance, as in the rather hideous figure "the day's warmth was dying / like a / strangling mistress / under our thumbs" and in the mystic description of beluga whales "scanning the / spinning sky / with tiny subterranean / eyes / that fused the easy wings / of screaming sea-birds / to the mind." Although occasionally Callaghan's poems beg us to spot significance in emptiness (not just in hollow writing but especially in the vacancy of a literary life which would be much too easy to romanticize), they do stand on their own in response to life and as unsuspecting utterances of a living poet. Simply by having found its way into print, this verse has versed itself.

A collection in which poetic unevenness is somewhat less excusable, *Towards the Mystery* is characterized at its best by academic clarity and scrupulous diction and at its worst by unidiomatic

expression and awkward (even dialectally awkward) syntax. Alastair Macdonald is syllabically and metrically insistent, almost in a sophomoric manner: "Dun, black, and reddish-brown / the cows and grown calves stand, / their shadows' deepening wells / dark navy on the green, / in field by clumps of trees, / to be in morning sun / or where the shade at noon / will later give them ease." The poet's tendency to drop his articles is somewhat less than expedient and his images are too often bovine in more than reference. Although this volume contains several competent poems, it reminds us that mere competence is not enough.

Venturing beyond the mysterious and into the esoteric and even the occult, Allan Brown simultaneously contemplates and climbs *The Almond Tree* in his attempt to give poetic expression to the concept of pseudo-consciousness after death and in anticipation of rebirth (according to the principles of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*). Even though his approach to his unusual subject-matter is extremely idiosyncratic, Brown manages to produce some amazingly accessible poetry, ranging from the soberly philosophical "Darkness is not the absence / of vision, rather / the absence of things seen" to the linguistically flexible "The mavis / bones of that morning filled / with heft and having, / ambiguous as spit / in the sunlight, dry and wet" to the following little gem, which has no doubt set Hopkins and Thomas spinning:

> So candle me, selvings, here
> a yawn again, go widder —
> skins-ye, bold old father
> grunting a who gain, or
> you was it? pinked
> the through and rosy
> one stood dancering proud
> in hid that mutteral
> garden of the heaped-now
> dustlings and near to done.

That the poet has succeeded in sustaining this long poem both thematically and technically is attributable as much to his mystic insight as to his versatility and experimental audacity, his consideration of an ineffable state of existence-non-existence-existence seeming to be credible within the context of his poetic. Here the poetry itself mediates between the versed and the yet to be versed.

P. MATTHEW ST. PIERRE

NEWFOUND LANDS

TOM MARSHALL, *Dance of the Particles*. Quarry, $6.95.

CLAIRE HARRIS, *Translation Into Fiction*. Goose Lane Editions, $6.95.

ALLAN BROWN, *Winter Journey*. Quarry, $6.95.

THE FIRST SECTION of Tom Marshall's new book of poems is entitled "Marshall's Lives," and consists of 23 domestic poems (domestic in the larger sense) written over the last ten years or so. There are poems about family, about friends, about Kingston, and about bits and pieces of contemporary history through which Marshall has lived or which he has observed from a distance. Most, in other words, have as subjects the typical concerns of the lyric poet, here the lyric poet in middle age. The tone is serious and subdued, for Marshall's middle years include not only the deaths of friends (Pat Lowther and George Whalley) but the larger distresses of the nuclear age, the whole viewed as "Degrees and Visibilities of Hell." Marshall seems often to be speaking despite himself — to be making confidences that he is perhaps uncertain of — and the resulting voice is clipped, pared down, often spoken in sentence fragments. Though not all equally successful — some end too abruptly and occasionally Marshall's good ear lets him down — these poems have an honesty and depth

of feeling that raises them above a simple "sick longing for dissolution" ("For Pat Lowther") into the genuine "larger harmony / in disharmony [of art]" ("Prime Ministers (and the circles in which they move)").

The title poem (in 21 parts) makes up the second section. Its title leads one to expect a Lucretian meditation, and to some extent "Dance of the Particles" is just that, beginning as it does with the materialist assumption that the world is merely matter in motion. The cosmos lacks transcendence, and "One's destiny," as Marshall says in Part Three, is "to be / at the edge of a minor galaxy." But far from being despairing or resigned, Marshall goes on to focus on what he calls, with a touch of irony perhaps, "an atomic joy":

> to live in a world
> so intricately beautiful
>
> even one drunk and reeling
> from its own continuing fiery death

The dominant thrust of this long poem is "the rage to prevail" that survives not by forcing an imaginary order on the world, but by centring on the body and the moment:

> The "New World" is
> new for each
> person incarnate in it.
>
> (Eluard wrote: "there is
> another world but it is
> in this one."
>
> The world itself
> (each moment) is a
> newfound land.

"Dance of the Particles" seems to be one of Tom Marshall's finest poems. Its title comes from his poem for Pat Lowther, and out of the darkness of that attempted reconciliation he forges an uncompromising and deeply moving vision of being in the world.

I find Claire Harris' work somewhat troublesome, both in its subject-matter and its formal approach. *Translation Into Fiction* is a dark book. Even the prose poems, which are in general more open and gently reflective than the poems properly speaking, often have an undercurrent of foreboding or grief. The feeling of the collection as a whole is best suggested by a line from "April," one of a group of prose poems bearing the general title "After the Chinese": "We move on we move gingerly grieving despite ourselves." Much of the work is based on memory, and Harris's memory is haunted by images of death, of dark events, of a vast uncertainty regarding most human activity. Some of those images have become almost commonplace in Canadian poetry (the mad women of the Plaza de Mayo, for example, or the nuclear arms race), and they are therefore not easy to invoke with originality. When Harris brings in the second example, she writes that "today we spend / ourselves / in the pure research / of mega death / the planet destroyed / if necessary / for the supremacy / of an economic / theory," and this, however true, is hardly poetry. Her writing about the situation in Argentina is more convincing because it makes its point by using an incident whose effect is much more horrible than any generalizing statement about inhumanity could ever be.

While there is no doubting Claire Harris's depth of feeling and the range of her interests, it seems to me that *Translation Into Fiction* suffers from a poetics that is too narrow and undeveloped. The prose poems, where such concerns as line and sound are less essential, are more successful. The visual as well as metrical impact of the following lines add little to their emotional content, if indeed they do not detract from it:

In some lucid awful
instant
I chose
to ignore my momentous
murmuring woman's room
My child
is out there
stares blackly out of screens
in a pornography
of poverty
those who owned
the words
shaped this . . .

This is Claire Harris's first book, however; whatever shortcomings *Translation Into Fiction* displays, it is to be hoped that with greater experience and technical proficiency her work will improve and deepen.

Allan Brown's work is of another order entirely, an order which is sometimes forced, frequently archaic, and (to this reader at least) rarely convincing. *Winter Journey* comes armed with a perceptive preface by W. J. Barnes and a roily, allusive afterword by the author that ranges over a vast aesthetic terrain populated by everyone from the writer of *Genesis* to Horace, Thomas Aquinas, Milton, and Theodore Roethke. Brown's masters provide an obvious clue to his own poetic concerns, and his remark that "Finding a form and recognizing a subject mark only the beginning of the work. Then comes the writing itself, the waiting (listening carefully), the filling in" places him solidly in a now largely abandoned (if not discredited) tradition where the processual approach of a Pound or a Williams (to say nothing of their postmodernist successors) has no place. Barnes speaks of Brown's poetry as "strategically dislocated," and that suggests (if I read it correctly) a consonance between his formal conservatism and some larger aesthetic, intellectual or emotional project. Perhaps, but when the strategy leads to such impertinent metaphorical legerdemain as the following, I for one find it easy to resist being interested:

de profundis clamavi
ad te: until

the upward striving blind quest
of the hooded pilgrim is
achieved, is consummated
finally in firmly your
coign of vantage;

in his mouth a coal of fire,
dissolving in heavenly
dew: but I am recusant;
my flaccid god lies unpropped
by any cross

because I have finally
come to the soft place of pain
and the bells have stopped ringing.
Oh, I wouldn't deny that
it was hard on

me to leave you, . . .

This is from the longish title-poem (with its hat tipped, I take it, to Wilhelm Müller and the sublime songs which Schubert made of his poems), and the quotation does not by a long way exhaust the cleverness of which Brown is capable. But nothing, finally, can rescue *Winter Journey* from the burden of unreadability which its *style suranné* imposes.

BRUCE WHITEMAN

BOATMEN

STEPHEN SCOBIE, *Expecting Rain.* Oolichan, $7.95.

DOUG FETHERLING, *Variorum: New Poems and Old, 1965-1985,* Houslow Press, $5.95.

STEPHEN SCOBIE'S *Expecting Rain* is a selection of "new poems" which "celebrates the permanence of art in our lives," according to its jacket blurb. Some of the pieces are about other writers (Leonard Cohen, Miriam Mandel, Guillaume Apollinaire, and Gertrude Stein); others are about painters (Cranach, Cezanne, Monet, Picasso); some

are letter-poems to cultivated friends; and one half of the volume is taken up by a "poetic journal for May, 1983." The journal is entitled "Rambling Sign," is a tribute to the Paris artistic community, is thick with explanatory footnotes, and embodies perhaps Scobie's central attention as a poet — the difficulty of finding meaning in the postmodernist labyrinth of language where all knowledge is relative.

While Scobie in his best poems manages a kind of standard humanist sensitivity, the majority of his work is cloistered in its privacy and allusiveness, and certainly self-conscious in its activity as poetry about poetry and art. The "Rambling Sign" section of *Expecting Rain* is interesting as an exploration of the fragility of language, its ultimate inability to speak absolute truths; but there is something primarily decorative about the awareness of *écriture, différance* and writerly foregrounding in this journal. Scobie is intelligently aware of the literary theories of Derrida, Barthes, Lacan, and Kristeva; and he has carefully applied their aphorisms to the work of bp Nichol (in *bp Nichol: What History Teaches*). When such fashionable material enters his own imaginative writing — as in his concern about writing as "hollow language / proclaiming its own lack of presence / round writing's absent centre" — the result is the sensation that we are attending a linguistics and teleology lecture rather than experiencing the victories over language of those who have something memorable to say.

Significantly, Scobie manages a nice celebratory groundtone in some of his poems, even if such a bias is a bit damaged by stock and shopworn lines ("The years / can rob us of nothing but time," and "We have outlasted governments," and "I look down / to the ebb and flow of the element / as cool and distant as a cat"). In interesting ways he is a belated Romantic — he seems strongly influenced, tonally, by Apollinaire, Hopkins, and Dylan Thomas — and a sense of happiness is the cumulative effect of his volume; for all of its self-reflexivity, *Expecting Rain* asserts a meaning and dignity to life and art, and seems intent on viewing itself as a "fragment I have shored against my ruin." If *Expecting Rain* too often reads like the rambling fragments of a poet who is just talking shop to himself and his friends, there is a good possibility that Scobie himself views the volume as little more than a "journal," a notebook that is intended as prefatory to more readable significant work.

These last two adjectives can be applied to Doug Fetherling's *Variorum: New Poems and Old, 1965-1985* to praise his authority of voice, his figurative expressiveness (he is a master of the simile), his control over plain syntax, and the essential humanity of his subject matter. Over the past two decades Fetherling has earned his voice as sad commentator on victim, loser, anomie — a being uprooted from nature and, in the Canadian context, separated from living traditions of culture and anything like a warm dream of organic settlement. His groundtone is that of the "still, sad music of humanity" (as Wordsworth conceived it) and he writes in the honoured tradition of alertness to human fragility and transience which such poets as England's Philip Larkin and Canada's Raymond Souster have revitalized in the post-war period.

Fetherling is a creatively bitter writer, one whose rebellion matures through profound compassion. He shares with Larkin and Souster a seasoned awareness of individual suffering: "This is the way it is and / it's no one's fault we hope." He is unafraid of the candid line and a low-key wit and humour widens his tonal range. Fetherling is a pessimist who

has developed his melancholy and has stayed awake to the possibility of meaning ("yet sometimes when you least / expect it / the truth shows through / like a dubious sunrise") in spite of dismay.

While many of Fetherling's poems are the record of his own existential bruises, in some instances he moves past subjective discontent in response to the disheartened realities of others. *Variorum* is elegaic witness to the pains of the submerged population ("the cult of the junkie / the cult of the loser / the cult of the saint"). *Variorum* records the spiritual wastage of human time and its sense of history is intimately tied to a hunger for existential and social harmony. Images of beauty and images of defeat are juxtaposed continually, and Fetherling seldom loses sight of his dreams of organic community. His vision is humanist to the core.

Fetherling sustains one of the most important traditional roles of the poet: that of a "true voice of human feeling" in the midst of a culture which is given over to mindless progress and to a cleverness or sophistication which is finally irrelevant. When he gives lyric voice to Andrew Heron, a lost hero of Canadian history, he simultaneously describes the contours and the value of his own imagination: "Let me be remembered / as a boatman / who measured time from one / shore to another." This poet reminds us of the brevity and the seriousness of this journey, and he focusses for us the kinds of experience that are worth taking with us.

TERRY WHALEN

HOME OF REALITY

DAVID HELWIG, *A Sound Like Laughter*. Stoddart, $15.95.

PAUL QUARRINGTON, *Home Game*. Doubleday, $17.95.

GEORGE SZANTO, *Not Working*. Macmillan, $16.95.

THE TENSION between the realistic and the non-realistic in fiction, an ancient and perhaps inescapable tension, presents itself in greatly varied guises in these three novels.

George Szanto seems neither to have intended nor to have recognized the non-realistic elements of his first novel, *Not Working*. In this story of an ex-policeman from San Diego county who reluctantly moves with his teacher-wife and two daughters to a small town in Wyoming, and who there becomes inexorably involved in a criminal investigation, there are numerous motifs of social realist potential. Joe Levy takes an extended leave from his position in California because he has difficulty dealing with his killing of a young robber, a problem of important psycho-social proportions in itself but one which is quickly dissipated by Szanto's eagerness to introduce other issues. The relationship of Joe and Helly Levy, marital and pre-marital, is made to bear the weight of the issues of sexual promiscuity, pre-marital pregnancy, adoption, abortion, inter-faith marriage, casual adultery, the parenting of a recently post-pubescent but still virginal teen-age daughter, and house-husbanding — all important contemporary social concerns, but all developed superficially, if at all. And all focused through a relationship in which one of the partners has only a shadowy presence. Although this is a novel whose stage is crowded with characters, only two enjoy anything like real presence and even these are diminished by the multitudinous insubstantiality of the others. Consequently, the social issues

which they meant to articulate, ranging from racism and environmental exploitation to organized crime and corporate immorality, are never sufficiently embodied. These potential realities too remain finally unrealized. *Not Working* provides the reader with much that interests but little that satisfies, either as social commentary or as fiction.

David Helwig's *A Sound Like Laughter*, the third of his Kingston novels, is much more successful. Helwig acknowledges and uses to advantage the tension between the realistic and the non-realistic.He makes the presence of the absurd in the mundane a centrally formative principle of his novel and his vision. He also makes the absurd a commonplace extension of a commonplace world, beginning with the marvellously humorous and simultaneously banal yet surrealistic perspective of the drunken Michael Remmnant, ex-junk pedlar, ex-antique dealer, ex-divorce co-respondent, ex-con, soon-to-be burglar and dope-runner, and "aspiring writer." Remmnant is one of the novel's three principal characters and centres of consciousness. Despite his comic name and behaviour, Remmnant's frustration with and resentment at an unaccommodating society is made to seem real enough. So too are the frustrations and resentments of his other two major characters, Marianne Jones and Anne Clarkson, though both are also, like Michael Remmnant (and like Ernest Arnold, the most important of the novel's secondary characters) essentially comic figures. Helwig is ultimately less sympathetic to Marianne, whose successful efforts to entrap Ernest into marriage by wresting university tenure for him are later betrayed by her own romantic restlessness. Helwig's intricate interweaving of loss and gain so that loss provokes gain and gain transmutes into loss is most evident in Marianne's story, but has consequences as well for Remmnant and Anne. The affair of these two sometimes threatens to descend to the merely sordid but is persistently redeemed by an often surrealistic humour which also prevents Marianne's story from succumbing to the lurking clutches of pathos. Helwig's careful manipulation of the fictively real and not-real gives *A Sound Like Laughter* a cogency which enhances its realist concerns with professional, vocational, personal, and emotional security, with male-female relationships, and with human desire.

In Paul Quarrington's baseball fantasy *Home Game*, his second surrealistic novel, reality is at best a bench-player who only occasionally takes the field, but whose presence is necessary, indeed indispensable, to the game's successful completion. Quarrington assembles a company of semi- (not quasi-) historical human freaks to undertake a baseball contest against a team of accomplished semi-professional players (and semi-historical too — the Hutterite House of Jonah is loosely based upon a legendary Jewish team). The freaks' team is composed of: Janus, the two-headed, five-legged dog, the argumentative and aggressive two-foot-four Major Mite, the promiscuous Siamese twins Violet and Daisy Hisslop, the lonely, bearded Madame Tanya, the diminutive Zap, Wild Man from Borneo (and Brooklyn), the viridescent and voyeuristic Alligator Man, the haunted gentle giant Davey Goliat(h), the aging Strong Man Angus McCallister (also known as The Cape Breton Giant and clearly based upon that historical personage), the versifying Hippopotamus Boy, Robert Merrill (recognizable to viewers of the movie *The Elephant Man*), and finally, Dr. Sinister, painter, composer, novelist, philologist, etymologist, ambidextrous prestidigitator who wants to be a magician. This fantastical, yet naturalistic group is cheered on by the immobile Stella, 800 pounds of feminine wisdom and attractiveness, and

is led by the rubbery, lachrymose Nathaniel "Goldenlegs" (Crybaby) Isbister, former self-destructive baseball hero, and former death-haunted (boxing ring, the Hindenburg) radio announcer. This improbable aggregation confronts the equally improbable House of Jonah led by the self-righteous, bigoted Tekel Ambrose, "arguably the best baseball player in the world" (a judgement also applied to Nathaniel). The game is located in Michigan's Upper Peninsula in November 1938, and the stakes are that the losing team will leave town. Most of this lengthy, sometimes too diffuse narrative is devoted to preparations for the game and to the action-by-action detail of the game itself. The temptation to give all of this a straightforward allegorical reading is substantial, but is prevented by the author's subversive humour, his ironic exaggeration of pathos, and his intrusion into the scene of an even-more-improbable (than the players themselves) "grandfather" to the "author," who serves as umpire and would-be con-man, and who argumentatively directs the story's narration. The narrative act itself is thereby brought into question; the tension between the realistic and the non-realistic is in *Home Game* no longer an element *within* the fiction, but a condition of the very process of story-telling. Quarrington's novel is an epical *jeu d'esprit* where the game of fiction is the home of reality.

CHARLES R. STEELE

SWEET AND SOUR

MATT COHEN, *Café Le Dog*. Penguin, $6.95.
JOAN FERN SHAW, *Raspberry Vinegar*. Oberon, n.p.

MATT COHEN certainly sets the stage carefully for this collection of stories full of failed idealists; the position of the critic is provocatively delimited in such a way that the trick almost appears as an unavowed plea for love: "It was a hot summer night, and through the open window of his study the author could hear cats howling like a chorus of flatulent critics waiting for his next mistake." This passage from "An Introduction By The Author," a piece of Fowlesian virtuosity which opens the book, is completed by a remark in the title story when the hero, a failed poet, associates with a ninth-rate journalist to review his book written in English, translated into French, then published by his Parisian uncle (a producer of pornographic literature). The work arouses the attention of the Canadian government, which duly encourages a small Toronto firm to bring it out in Canada, thus opening up the possibility for the author to be offered "a lecture tour of the Canadian West." The "Author" goes on in the same deceivingly light mood when he talks of the novel, which is "like one of those boring old-fashioned marriages, but a short story is a one night stand . . ." All these pirouettes must not conceal the more essential value of Matt Cohen's art: sometimes self-indulgent, especially in his campus adultery stories such as "Golden Whore of the Heartland," the author proves very moving in his gallery of anti-heroes.

In "A Love for the Absolute," which could be an alternative title for the collection, he traces with much sensitivity the strange identification between two brothers who, when they were children, promised to look always for the other wherever he may be. The first one's death of an overdose leads the second to drive north in the snow and seek in the freezing forest for the missing half. In "The Sins of Tomas Benares," the old Jewish doctor who has retired to leave his surgery to his son suddenly has to reopen his practice when the son, Abraham, is run over by a car. Tomas'

patriarchal figure takes mythic dimensions when he defies time in his desire to match his ancestors' longevity. The climax of the story is his seventy-fourth "birthday present" when, after some years of failing sexual power, he suddenly wakes up to find the beautiful Bella, Abraham's widow, in his bed. The strangely disturbing incestuous scene is masterfully treated. Matt Cohen's depiction of ecstatic moments is a reassertion of life's powers; but he is equally careful to underline delicately the aftermath of failed hopes and the complicity between two lovers which survives treason or parting. In "At the Empress Hotel," a "maestro" who earns his living playing for almost non-existent spectators has "fallen in love" with a superannuated film star. Through pathetic dreams of greatness and moments of painful awareness, the story unfolds like a "stage play which even the actors could hardly have believed, there were more silences than words." "Café Le Dog" follows in the same vein with a self-declared mediocre poet who lives in Paris with Marie, an alcoholic retired kept woman who, because she is a failure of a sort, understands him without any need for intellectual reasoning. She has learned English through reading Henry James and writes the protagonist's letters to his mother, a patient in a Montreal mental home whose life centres on her son's imaginary reports of his Parisian success.

This collection bears the stamp of Matt Cohen's usual self-destructive irony which, at best, becomes a strange form of tenderness. The traumas of Jewish exile and homelessness remain an important theme. But, above all, the characters play at pretending that their dreams can be superimposed for ever on reality. Matt Cohen handles this mixture of seriousness and irony so convincingly that the reader can only hope for many more "one night stands" of this quality.

Joan Fern Shaw's first book-length collection of stories is a little gem of a different kind. Like the illustration on the front cover, this volume is expressionistic in mood. The reader follows the different episodes of the life of a little girl who moves across the country following the transfers of her alcoholic airforceman father. Her mother too lets herself be destroyed by drink when her husband is there. The heroine grows up learning to look after herself and taking for granted the violence and horror of everyday life at home. Though basically a town-girl, she learns about the country from her grandmother and from her aunt May who first introduces her to raspberry vinegar, this drink with a sweet and sour flavour "like life." Disobeying her mother's orders, she befriends a curious array of people, from the ragman to the queer old sisters who collect hair pinched off the backs of corpses' heads at the mortuary. She saves a despairing shopkeeper's wife who was about to commit suicide in the lake after her husband's failed attempt at making money selling amaryllis. Strangely enough the bulbs returned by the customers because they had failed to flower suddenly come into bloom after the poor man's death, a measure of destiny's grotesque quirks. The heroine discovers the human side of the "People Upstairs," a group of prostitutes who have rented the flat above and look after the heroine and her mother when they get sick. She enjoys very brief moments of complicity with her father who, outside his drunken bouts, appreciates his daughter's literary talents. But drink and a botched up life soon lead her parents to self-destruction.

This collection could become melodramatic without Joan Fern Shaw's marvellous ability to arouse emotions with minimal effects. Her short sentences work upon the reader with their uncompromising harsh colours, their breathlessness

and carefully restrained passion. Though all the stories are closely interrelated, their separateness adds to the extraordinary rhythm of the volume. To find equivalents for the quality of this first book, one has to think of such parallels as Alice Munro. Joan Fern Shaw's mastery of style enables her to express most convincingly the tremendous tension and yet tenderness which characterize the atmosphere of *Raspberry Vinegar.*

JEAN-PIERRE DURIX

GENIUS FOR AMBIGUITY

ALBERT & THERESA MORITZ, *Leacock: A Biography.* Stoddart, $26.95.

BECAUSE HE WAS SUCCESSFUL as both humorist *and* economist, Stephen Leacock has twice-over, one might allege, a natural genius for ambiguity. It's not to be marvelled at, then, that ambiguousness has been a consistent quality in the work of his critics and biographers. The Moritz biography of Canada's perhaps first doubly-famous writer (he lectured around the Empire in each of his disciplines, as economist in 1907, humorist in 1921; his *Elements of Political Science* (1906) was his best-selling book) understandably recapitulates more than it resolves the complexity of Leacock the man.

The authors attempt, it would seem, to absorb all previous works and to suggest a broader and later perspective for some salient Leacock characteristics and episodes. The re-provision of accepted data combines occasionally with fresh insight to give the Leacockian enigma a new gloss. Unfortunately, the author's theses are not presented as cleanly or cogently as they might be, being too often separate, fragmented, or hedged round with stray or competing opinion. Though the book is not entirely a triumph, a conscientious reader may, nonetheless, from threads of insight, historical reminders, and personal inferences spin new, or refurbished, skeins of thought. Here, for example, are some of my own conscientious spinnings.

Leacock took up the new science of political economy and the art of humour for the same reason that he abandoned his training and teaching in classical languages; the first two would give him, as the third would not, the opportunity of having an immediate effect for good within society at large. His "social criticism as a professor and his social satire as a humorist" were not at odds. Moreover, Leacock's lack of ability with algebra — he never did pass it at Upper Canada College — and, perforce, his distaste for the data-logged analyses of the social-scientist economist have roots, as does his humour, in his concern for the reality and the primacy of the individual. "Leacock's fundamentally nontechnical views of all that is apprehended in economics, political science and sociology can be clearly read in *Arcadian Adventures with the Idle Rich.*"

He believed "social change must spring from personal change of heart" not "change of political system." Yet, the Moritzes say he had no "faith that the individual can be converted and society thereby improved." If true, it's a paradox (perhaps an enlightening one) that he did keep trying — and with considerable success. In the 1930's (his own 60's) he was writing economic and social welfare treatises for the Canadian government and still offering wry reflections on the human condition for a bemused citizenry the world over. That paradox of his focus upon, and non-faith in the individual may account for the less lovable Leacock. His ongoing careers notwithstanding, Leacock might well have

agreed with the observation made by Graham Greene that, ultimately, the author like the priest can never know success. And that in turn helps explain Leacock's lifelong faith in (or felt need for) the stabilizing force-for-good of the British Empire — if not of the power and the glory (he preferred *not* to live in England).

In the wake of his imperialism, "unfortunately" as the Moritzes say, float his racism, his elitism, and his sexism. He wanted to keep the Empire white, the universities for the most advanced, and the major professions for males. In general. And yet . . . and yet, among many anomalies, he recommended a woman student for graduate studies in Political Economy at his Chicago alma mater (in 1915), had a sister with an M.D., and paid for a niece's university education. It seems to me quite possible, and maybe even fair, to think of Leacock's philosophic baggage as something he carried through life the way he did his liquor-flask; he always, his niece reported, insisted that it be packed first for all his trips. Yet no one ever saw him drunk or disorderly, and he was never known to slur a lecture at McGill, at home, or abroad. The Moritzes suggest that Leacock's championing of the booze option emancipated him from the influence of his father who was under the influence incorrigibly. By brandishing, and controlling the booze, Stephen somehow repatriated his family's social standing and stability.

On more academic matters, the less lovable aspects of this volume include 'invisible' endnotes whereby, for example, one discovers only by retroactive scanning in the back of the book, under "PG" and the catch(?) phrase, "a former student tells," that the former student with the anecdote on page 195 was in fact Eugene Forsey. (Later, in a less significant instance, Forsey's name *is* supplied in the text.) And surely major sources for quotations from reviews might as well be given in the text, as under "PG" and fragmented-phrase in the appendix. The index is limited to proper names and book titles. Also, the bibliography does not include any of the major non-literature references. The prose, especially in the beginning, has a kind of pluralistic ideology whereby the contending notions put forth in a long sentence, paragraph, or chapter will ride off, Leacockian, in all directions, to conclude with momentary grace without a final decision. And then, suddenly, later, there's one element carrying on the discussion, dominating, as if it had won the election.

A more positive, and intriguing, minor note concerns Leacock's sleeping habits; he slept out in an unheated porch through the Montreal winter, which, as the Moritzes point out, puts him together (metaphorically speaking, vou understand) with Nellie McClung who similarly braved the prairie winters, and with Hugh MacLennan in his backyard tent year-round in Halifax. (Survival may be more of a theme in CanLit than we thought.)

Other fresh material is the research by the staff at the Leacock Memorial Home establishing the literal, or nominal, basis of the characters in *Sunshine Sketches*: Jim Smith, hotelier (for Josh), Jefferson Short, Leacock's barber (for Jefferson Thorpe), Horace Bingham, Orillia undertaker (for Golgotha Gingham, undertaker).

The Moritzes' extensive account of Leacock's family environment "the summer kingdom of [his mother] Agnes' children and their children") helps dilute the criticism that he wrote too much for money and republished what might better perish. The authors and various circumstances (his dwarfed son, the depression, his summer getaway at Brewery

Bay) suggest that, anti-materialist though he was, he required the money for others as well as for his own best self. A bright point in the narrative comes when, on one of Leacock's trips to the States to give an important speech, a U.S. customs officer threatens to confiscate the ubiquitous liquor-flask. Leacock wires his waiting hosts: "No hooch; no spooch." Perhaps a parallel of that is the best way to account for all of Leacock's human faults, his contradictions, and his period, albeit still unacceptable, prejudice. 'No sins; no grins.' Without the complexity of the man, we would not have his works.

GERALD NOONAN

AIMER BUGNET

JEAN PAPEN, *Georges Bugnet — Homme de Lettres canadien.* Les Editions des Plaines, $11.95.

LE LIVRE DE JEAN PAPEN était attendu, et il arrive en un temps favorable. En effet, l'année académique 1984-85 avait déjà été marqué par la parution de deux volumes de Georges Bugnet: le *Journal* tenu par Bugnet de 1954 à 1971, annoté par George Wurocher et Odette Tamer-Salloum (Edition de la Faculté Saint-Jean-Université d'Alberta) et le roman *La Forêt*, le principal roman de Georges Bugnet (Editions des Plaines). Une étude méthodique de l'ensemble de l'oeuvre était donc nécessaire: c'est l'objet de l'ouvrage de Jean Papen.

En fait, l'essentiel de ce livre était écrit depuis longtemps déjà. Le lundi 30 octobre 1967, Bugnet notait dans son Journal: "Reçu la thèse de l'abbé Jean Papen. Très bonne." Quelques mois plus tard, en 1968, le Conseil de la Vie Française en Amérique décernait le prix Champlain à l'auteur du livre "Georges Bugnet, homme de lettres canadien." C'est ce livre, thèse de 1967 remanié, que les éditions des Plaines diffusent enfin aujourd'hui.

Georges Bugnet, légitimement soucieux d'être connu comme grand écrivain et de laisser son nom à la postérité, avait compris l'importance que pourrait revêtir l'entreprise de Jean Papen, et l'avait non seulement encouragée mais aidée efficacement lors de longs entretiens plusieurs fois mentionnés dans son journal. Le 15 novembre 1967, deux semaines après avoir reçu la thèse dactylographiée, Georges Bugnet notait simplement dans son journal: "Envoyé errata à l'abbé Papen." Quels étaient ces errata? Nous avons pu les connaître exactement en consultant les notes écrites de la main de Georges Bugnet sur son exemplaire de la thèse. Or, en comparant les passages primitifs ainsi annotés avec le texte définitif qui vient d'être publié par les Editions des Plaines, nous constatons d'étranges négligences de la part de Jean Papen. Pourquoi n'avoir pas saisi l'occasion de cette publication pour apporter la plus grande attention aux corrections suggérées par Bugnet lui-même? Quelques exemples suffiront pour faire apparaître cette insuffisance de rigueur. A la page 26, Jean Papen indique qu'en 1904 Georges Bugnet donait des leçons de latin à l'un des frères de Julia (sa future épouse) "et ainsi se gagnait quelques sous." Mais Georges Bugnet conteste, et écrit en marge (p. 19 du manuscrit): "ces leçons étaient gratuites. L'argent venait en travaillant au Journal "Le Bien Public" en qualité d'assistant rédacteur." Détail sans importance, certes, mais rigueur historique oblige. Et pourquoi n'avoir pas corrigé (p. 18) l'erreur signalée par Bugnet concernant Soeur Marie Thérèse de Gonzague? Bugnet avait noté (p. 6 manuscrit): "Mal renseigné. Elle est morte au grand Carmel de l'Incarnation, à Clamart, où elle avait été prieure" . . . Parfois, les annotations de Georges Bugnet signalent des

chiffres ou des dates contestées (Exemples pp. 197-98, manuscrit pp. 320-22) ; parfois ce sont des inexactitudes du vocabulaire qui sont signalées en marge: "indien," plutôt que "sauvage" (p. 83), "supérieures" plutôt que "parfaites" (p. 39), "graines" au lieu de "plantes" (p. 38), etc. Parfois encore, ce sont de simples fautes de dactylographie: "ombrelle" mis pour "ombelle" (p. 67), "convenait" pour "souvenait" (p. 211), "inspira" pour "inspirera" (p. 175). Il est surprenant que ces fautes aient été conservées dans le volume définitif, alors que Bugnet lui-même avait pris la peine de les relever. Bref, pour une étude de cette importance, le lecteur attendait plus de rigueur et de précision, et l'on reste persuadé que si Jean Papen avait disposé du temps nécessaire, il eût fait tous ces remaniements qui s'imposaient. Sans doute même eût-il corrigé d'autres "coquilles" comme "étoiler" mis pour "étioler" (p. 160), "irruption volcanique" (p. 53), ou Baudelaire écrit "Beaudelaire" avec une inquiétante constance (pp. 40, 116).

Jean Papen a pris soin de composer son livre selon une organisation simple, en chapitres brefs, tous construits sur le même modèle, étudiant les oeuvres de Georges Bugnet l'une après l'autre, dans leur succession chronologique. Cette structure manque sans doute d'originalité et de variété, mais elle a le mérite de faciliter la lecture, et de conférer à ce livre la valeur d'une introduction claire à l'oeuvre entière de Georges Bugnet.

Les jugements portés dans chaque chaitre sur l'oeuvre de Bugnet manifestent sans doute de la part de Jean Papen une compréhension et une sympathie de bon aloi, et l'on ne saurait refuser à l'auteur le droit d'adhérer aux idées qu'il analyse, de s'exprimer souvent sur un ton personnel et de laisser percer le prêtre sous le chercheur. Il reste néanmoins que l'objectivité scientifique habituellement attendue dans une étude de ce genre s'accommode assez mal d'a priori idéologiques, et que plus d'un lecteur pourrait être gêné par de fréquents glissements qui mènent des jugements de réalité aux jugements de valeur.

Jean Papen connaît bien Georges Bugnet et sa documentation est abondante. L'utilisation de textes littéraires comme documents historiques demande toutefois de la prudence, car s'il est vrai que la charge autobiographique est grande dans les écrits de Bugnet (notamment dans le roman *La Forêt* et la pièce *La Défaite*), on ne saurait sous-estimer les transformations que l'écriture romanesque fait subir aux données historiques.

Quoi qu'il en soit, le livre de Jean Papen reste une réussite car il garde un mérite essentiel: il fait aimer Bugnet et donne au lecteur le désir de connaître son oeuvre. Mais une étude critique approfondie et rigoureuse sur Bugnet reste à faire.

GUY LECOMTE

TESTING LIMITS

West of Fiction, ed. Leah Flater, Aritha Van Herk, Rudy Wiebe. NeWest, $19.95/$10.95.

BEVERLY HARRIS, GLORIA SAWAI, FRED STENSON, *Three Times Five* (3 x 5) — Short Stories. NeWest, $6.95.

West of Fiction SUGGESTS a pioneer volume of fiction that will take us farther to the western edge of the world than we have ever been before. We might expect to be plunged into the magically real and surreal worlds of the West Coast groups, but from the opening story it is clear that the anthology is not out to promote an overt vision of the West, or a particular group of writers who embody an extreme, aesthetic or otherwise. This is the west of fiction as witnessed from the prairie. A lot of space is covered, but methodically, in a solid omnibus edi-

tion. The stories included are varied, and good representatives of their type: the well-made short story, the science fiction story, and the sports story all fit comfortably on board. An excellent fictional charabanc. If I have any criticism of the planning of the anthology, it is that the book is too big and has too many stories. This will be a deterrent to anyone who wants to plough through in order to pick up that cross-sectioned idea of what is going on in fiction out west. But it is invaluable to instructors and particularly high-school students and teachers who want to find interesting stories for launching students in the direction of particular authors, known and unknown.

Valgardson's story, "Saturday Climbing," is well-known as a tight, tense account of a single father and his daughter climbing, the daughter outdistancing the father on the cliff-face, and going to that dangerous edge of growing up and away from him — a good teen-age thought-provoker. There is a neat piece ("Teeth") by Fred Stenson on a pro-hockey player — lazy, jaded, and handsome — who loses his first tooth to the ice after facing off with himself. Claire Alford has a science fiction tale that takes place entirely in the air, among a race of bird people. The major action occurs when a young bird-person dives to save another in the forbidden, unlivable denser layers of air closer to the planet's surface. Her plunge takes the flight into danger zones, where the young person of the air learns how deep she and her species can go. My brief summary of these few stories suggests some thematic links; in each case the stories deal with the testing of limits. In this sense the collected stories might be said to border on the far out, the great rim wall of the western world.

3 x 5 introduces two new writers (Beverly Harris and Gloria Sawai) and one who has already gained some national attention in *Saturday Night* and *Chatelaine*. Fred Stenson's "Arlene" also won an Author's Award for Best Magazine Fiction. Beverly Harris is drawn to people who withdraw, especially men who take to their beds. A husband, a brother-in-law and a father conduct their lives from a mattress. Hugh, the brother-in-law in "The Day They Set Out" sees his bed as "an unsinkable old houseboat." Why they do so is not clear, nor do we see clearly why the women go on looking after these men. They brood on this hard reclusiveness like geese on delph eggs. The mother of Gilbert (that husband stranded abed) struggles along with her egg-like hump on her back, ministering to her son, hoping that she has made things nice enough for him to concede to having lunch with his wife. Only one story comes close to accounting for these mournful, but well-attended-to burials in bed or self-isolations. This is "Queenie," a story about a girl who takes to a disused glass kiosk in a university parking lot. Friends visit, her fiancee seeks her out for an explanation and to impress his love and devotion. But even she turns her glaring solitariness in the kiosk into a question: "Why did he want such a shiny, hard-surfaced thing, that belonged to no-one, that no one could ever touch?"

Gloria Sawai can make us see exactly why and how a kid could kick a kitten into a ditch, to perish in the snow after her mother would not accept it into the house. Struggling and freezing along the road, across the railroad tracks toward the Ukrainian side of town, she turns on the cat she has befriended. All this takes place in "Mother's Day." Mother, on the prairie, is undoubtedly cold reality — the breath of which is enough to make us all take to our beds. But Gloria Sawai can also be fey and familiar, dowdy and drowsy on an early morning sun-deck and shot through with infinite distances. She

can cope with the antipodes of vision there, on the big wide spacey places. In "The day I sat with Jesus on the sundeck and the wind came up and blew my kimono open and he saw my breasts," the title almost reveals all. But there is more to it than Jesus getting a look-see at the shape of things: he gives her a view from his perspective too — the infinite one. She watches him grow from a speck in the distance into a man who tramps up to share a sip of wine with her. Then, for one moment on the deck he lets her feel everything from the outside, from the vastness when all the simple recognizability of the day disintegrates around, then whooshes back into the cup in her hand. This casual sod-tramping drifter of a Jesus is also the whirlwind. Gloria is definitely a writer to watch in the west of fiction.

Fred Stenson's "Teeth" appeared in *West of Fiction.* He is good with that talking-to-you narrative voice. His first persons are familiar in the fewest words possible. Stenson is a storyteller who can take on the voices of all kinds of folks — a boy who falls in love with an Indian girl, Arlene, in his graduation year; a middle-aged woman groping in the dark, getting to the bottom of things in "The Zeus Cave" while a German gentleman gives a commentary on the histoical features frozen on the walls, enlightening things for her and the unofficial guide, who is as in the dark as she is. In short his projection can cover that squeaky, appealing beginning-of-his life teen-age voice, or one stuck in the middle, many decibels darker, down a staircase into a cave in Greece, where the lady escapes the consequential yet again. His stories are all excellent. They don't turn you upside down and inside out like Gloria Sawai's, but they will move readers to share an experience as if it were their own. He is the best first person narrator in a group of storytellers who prefer to tell you cozy and close about the cold and irreconcilable distances in the heart.

GEORGE MCWHIRTER

CONTEMPORARY THEATRE

ANTON WAGNER, ed., *Contemporary Canadian Theatre: New World Visions.* Simon & Pierre, $29.95.

Contemporary Canadian Theatre is a timely but disappointing collection. A descriptive assessment of the state of the art of theatre in Canada is welcome, and one is grateful to the Canadian Theatre Critics Association for its initiative in arranging for this book of essays on the topic. The volume was assembled for distribution at the Twenty-first World Congress of the International Theatre Institute, held in Montreal and Toronto 1st to 8th June 1985. The association was looking, according to Anton Wagner, who edited the volume, for "a detailed assessment of theatre, playwriting, opera and dance in Canada since the Second World War." "Such a comprehensive examination of the unprecedented growth of the performing arts in this country," according to Wagner, "would also provide an opportunity for Canadian theatre artists to take pride in the accomplishments of their profession, as well as recognize past achievements and present challenges."

The topics covered in essays by thirty-four contributors include government cultural policy, drama in the theatre, television and radio drama, drama in education, theatre for young audiences, native ritual drama, multicultural and community drama, dance and musical theatre, as well as professional concerns, training, directing, design, and criticism.

Not surprisingly, the volume suffers from its attempt to be comprehensive. Its

contributors frequently resort to breathless lists of names and companies, with what little analysis there is limited to the occasional propitious adjective. The trend is particularly apparent in the collection's central section on "Theatre and Drama Across Canada," and in essays by contributors who have written extensively on their subjects in the past and whose essays suffer here from the pressures of compression, as well as from the fact that they have little new to say.

The collection's first stated goal of detailed examination and assessment, moreover, frequently gives ground before the second and more celebratory objective. In fact the overt attempt to sell the product often reveals the weaknesses of our drama *criticism* as effectively as it extols the strengths of the drama and theatre itself. In spite of several good individual contributors, the general impression of the collection is of a directionless mélange of critical voices crying in the wilderness, an impression not weakened by some curious editorial choices. Anton Wagner has proven himself in the past — most notably in his outstanding *Canada's Lost Plays* series and his bibliographical work — to be an excellent critic and editor, who has done more for Canadian drama and theatre criticism than all but a very few scholars. But perhaps because of the June first deadline for the ITI congress — the book was in my hands on 31 May 1985, and yet it makes reference to events in April of the same year — it fails to come together as a unified or strongly edited collection. Why, for example, should the too-short chapter on directing in Quebec, astutely written by a director, academic, and critic (Diane Cotnoir), be followed by an essay on directing in English Canada written by the theatre critic for a daily paper? Why should an actor write about acting and a designer about design, while a journalist covers directing and academics analyse playwrighting? Scholar Hélène Beauchamp provides a useful and thoroughly documented essay on "Children's Theatre in Quebec," after which playwright Dennis Foon offers a slim, personal ramble on "Theatre for Young Audiences in English Canada." Clearly the editor needed to provide more direction about the *kind* of contribution he was looking for, and to work harder shaping the collection into a coherent whole.

The whole, however, is less than some of its parts: there are individual essays which, taken on their own as overviews of their subjects, are quite good. Howard Fink and Mary Jane Miller provide useful surveys of radio and television drama in English Canada, complemented by Solange Lévesque on the same subject in Quebec; Mark Czarnecki offers a thoughtful historical analysis of the regional theatre system; Jack Gray gives a timely assessment of government cultural policy as it relates to the performing arts; Michel Vaïs is as informative on Quebec theatre as Jean-Marc Larrue is on its criticism; and Brian Arnott describes a good and representative sampling of performing arts buildings in Canada.

In drawing attention to the "annoying disparity of purpose, placement and style" of these buildings, in fact, Arnott points implicitly to a breadth and range of activity and style that for all its scope *Contemporary Canadian Theatre* somehow fails to address. The book works best, as in the section on the electronic media, when it is focused according to style and genre rather than region. Perhaps if Wagner had tried to represent different kinds of theatre rather than different parts of the country he could have avoided repetitious emphasis on the mainstream and on parallel developments in different places, while leaving more space for analyses of types of theatre that receive scarcely a nod in the collection as it stands. There is virtually no discussion

of cabaret or café theatre, of social action theatre, of women's theatre, or indeed of any alternative or avant-garde theatre, outside of a brief essay by Renate Usmiani, one oddly placed in the book's opening section of "The Government and Cultural Expression." The organization, then, like the tone of many of the contributions, wrongly suggests an evolution in Canadian theatre towards some impending mainstream. Usmiani suggests that alternate theatre was a phenomenon of the 1960's and 1970's alone; Brian Arnott is openly condescending towards the "fashion" of the 1970's that favoured small, neutral playing spaces; and Richard Courtney's contribution to a book on contemporary theatre is an anthropological essay on native ritual drama as antecedent that virtually ignores the active native theatre of today.

Contemporary Canadian Theatre, then, is a beginning, a gathering and disseminating of information that will provide the starting point for many an undergraduate essay. Meanwhile, we are still awaiting a collection that will begin to place Canadian drama in useful social, theoretical, and critical contexts, and that will treat the plays and players with the serious analysis that they clearly deserve. Our drama and theatre came of age some time ago; it's time our criticism caught up.

RICHARD PAUL KNOWLES

GALT IN GUELPH

ELIZABETH WATERSTON, ed., *John Galt: Reappraisals*. Univ. of Guelph, $10.00.

IN 1984, A NUMBER of scholars gathered at the University of Guelph to celebrate John Galt, a major Scottish author whose literary career is virtually unknown in Canada. The conference site was fitting because Galt, as the chief officer for a large British-owned land venture, the Canada Company, founded the city of Guelph in 1827. While the conferees were concerned primarily with Galt as writer, his significance in Canadian history surfaced repeatedly. In fact, all Galt's writings provide valuable insight into the thoughts and perceptions of a central actor in some of the central social processes of the nineteenth century.

In the concluding address, Ian Gordon argued convincingly that Galt rigidly separated his two careers. As writer, he was rural and loved the Scottish dialect; as businessman, he was urbane and spoke English. Nevertheless, his disillusionment in Canada may have sparked the five political novels he wrote, covering the entire spectrum of contemporary political thought and serving as models for future political fiction writers. Nick Whistler, in his analysis of Galt's autobiography, agreed that the author attempted to separate his literary endeavours from his business enterprises, but he stressed that many of Galt's ideas became prominent threads in his novels. Galt throughout his work, for example, skilfully wove the theme, that selfishness is one of the raw materials of human energy. Erik Frykman, whose discussion emphasized Galt's two new world novels, *Bogle Corbet* and *Lawrie Todd*, demonstrated how Galt interjected his own feelings into those two novels. Frustrated in his Canadian endeavour, Galt questioned the successful and esteemed Lawrie Todd while he injected a note of sadness and resignation into Bogle Corbet's adventures in North America.

The most explicit exposition of Galt's historical role was Gilbert Stelter's essay on the founding of Guelph. Here, the ideals of novelist and the activities of businessmen are intertwined. Towns, Galt believed, were effective agents of social policy and territorial expansion. The city is virtuous and its founders

heroic. Galt's novel *Bogle Corbet* assumed that the first step in any settlement process is to plant a village in the unfriendly, mysterious forest. A firm believer in careful planning, Galt drew a unique design for Guelph based on the renaissance ideal of major streets converging on a central point. Elizabeth Waterston amplified Stelter's theme by developing the concept of the struggle of urban civilization against nature. *Bogle Corbet*'s fictional account of town-building is autobiographical, she asserted, and illustrates Galt's admiration of town life. The founder of Guelph, Waterston added, laid the foundation of a Canadian literary genre, the novel about small town life.

Most of the speakers, but especially Ian Campbell, mentioned that order and regulation are prominent themes in Galt's writings. *Bogle Corbet*, according to Campbell, is obsessively concerned with change and decay; it shows that accidents of weather and season, the perils of human self-interest impinge upon decisions and long term plans. Frontier settlement succeeded against the odds rather than with them. Galt's men of the new world are adventurous pioneers, whose courage and native wit permit them in a small way to initiate large changes.

The conferees also agreed that one of Galt's strengths as a novelist was his preoccupation with everyday life. As Martin Bowman contended, and Campbell reiterated, Bogle Corbet is an ordinary individual whose achievements are limited by time and circumstances. Bowman goes on to argue that *Bogle Corbet* is an important work because it successfully integrates the sentimental romance convention into a story which is the antithesos of that mode. Bogle is not a sentimental hero but a little man who emigrates without any grandiose romantic schemes of discovery but rather as an escape from a dull, uninteresting life.

As a bonus, two scholars discussed other aspects of Galt's career. Keith M. Costain illustrated how *The Ayrshire Legatees* is an excellent example of an epistolary novel, while H. B. de Groot covered the narrative perspective in Galt's *The Last of the Lairds*. By moving the narrator from one linguistic level to another, Galt permitted him to step alternately in and outside society, to be involved in it and to criticize it. De Groot also argued that Galt employed a novel approach by making the narrator a minor character whose changing social attitudes became central to the novel. Fortunately, Elizabeth Waterston collected and published the papers presented at the Galt conference. Taken together they form a valuable commentary on a minor character in Canadian history, who like so many of his fictional characters, had a profound effect upon his society.

A. A. DEN OTTER

FRONTIER LIVES

HUGH A. DEMPSEY, *Big Bear: The End of Freedom*. Douglas & McIntyre, $24.95.

JEAN S. MCGILL, *Edmund Morris: Frontier Artist*. Dundurn, $9.95.

Big Bear is the story of the Cree Indian Chief, born in 1825, who presided over the demise of his people following the theft of the Iron Stone by Methodist missionaries in 1865. Dedicated to Old Man Buffalo, the stone was sacred to the Indians, the protector of the bison, and of themselves. With its disappearance, medicine men presaged pestilence, war, and starvation — the precise fate of the natives in the next generation. Written with Dempsey's clear simplicity and understanding of the Indians, the book focuses on the disintegrating leadership of Big

Bear in this great tribulation. It is a tragic tale of misunderstanding and miscommunication.

Indeed, there is such a measure of these ingredients that this reader at least is tempted to see Big Bear less favourably than Dempsey intends. One cannot read this book without a profound sense of frustration. Big Bear was a mystic protected by the powerful bear spirit, but afflicted by numerous, neutralizing, sapping sprites, a man with much to say but who arrived too late to help negotiate the plains treaty affecting his people, a man with legitimate grievances but who was mistranslated and misconstrued. Big Bear was the political chief who wished above all that his counsel would be heeded in wartime (when power inhered in the war chief); he wanted to confront Ottawa but did not have the slightest idea of what Ottawa was or how to approach it.

Big Bear seemed to go through his entire life with mercury in retrograde. Near the end, he sat in prison for a crime he tried more to avoid than abet, a tragic figure who may as well have been talking to the moon and it to him, a chief who may never have realized his own degree of responsibility for the cloud of miscommunication surrounding him and his adversaries.

Edmund Morris, the frontier artist, was only tangentially linked to Big Bear. He painted the chief from a photograph. It was Edmund's father, Alexander, who knew Big Bear as the famous hold-out from Treaty Six. Perhaps naturally McGill depicts Alexander positively, and Edmund believed that the friendliness of the natives toward him when he was painting chiefs in the settlement period of the West came from the profound respect they held for his father. This respect had been reciprocated, and the imprisonment of Poundmaker during the Riel Rebellion had greatly distressed Alexander. Dempsey is noncommital about the elder Morris, though he does stress that Alexander, like everyone else, misunderstood Big Bear, despite the fact that the Indian had made it clear that he would not sign the treaty until after he had spoken to his people and the other headmen. Where Dempsey and McGill differ, though it is but a small matter for the latter, concerns their interpretation of Big Bear. McGill perpetuates the old view of Big Bear as a troublemaker — clearly unfairly, given Dempsey's analysis.

Basically the Morris biography is less satisfying than Dempsey's study. It is less personalized, less probing, less textured by the nuances of the period in which it is set, less influenced by sights, sounds, feelings. The treatment is colder, more detached, more heavily laden with blocked quotations needing editing. Morris' personality is not deeply etched, and his inner thoughts are rarely drawn to the surface. At book's end, after a short life, he remains elusive, with hints of great unhappiness, even suicide — but the tragedy is not drawn out.

Morris studied art in New York and Paris, the latter under Jean-Paul Laurens and Benjamin Constant. Beginning as a landscape painter, he set up a studio in Toronto in 1899. In 1907 he was commissioned by Ontario Premier James Whitney to go west and paint the remaining chiefs who had signed the earlier treaties. In the process, he began to champion the natives who had been further beleaguered by white speculators and government men seeking to pry loose portions of their reserves.

The focus on Morris' Indian portraiture is certainly well taken, but one wonders if the artist ever captured the phenomenal growth of the Canadian West in the settlement period in which virtually his whole life work occurred. Certainly to others, though not perhaps to Indians, this was what was really

happening — and it would have been surprising if Morris did not feel the spirit of the times. Unhappily, this matter never emerges in the book, and is one strong example of the author's uneasiness with the historical context of her subject's life. McGill's work does serve the important purpose of introducing to a larger audience a significant Canadian artist. There are eight outstanding colour plates of Morris' work as well as several black and white copies — and these can be nicely squared against McGill's inclusion of the artistic criticism of the period.

DAVID C. JONES

FALL OF THE FALLS

ELIZABETH MCKINSEY, *Niagara Falls: Icon of the American Sublime*. Cambridge Univ. Press, $34.50.

THIS LAVISHLY ILLUSTRATED study is built on careful and exhaustive research. Touching on the concept of the sublime from Longinus through Addison and Burke to Thomas Weiskel, McKinsey clearly marshals her evidence for the rise and fall of Niagara as icon of the sublime, and shows how the fluctuating image of the Falls is an index of cultural change. Through the eighteenth century and first few decades of the nineteenth, the natural splendour of Niagara beggars description: many observers declare themselves specchless, while others become diffuse. McKinsey distinguishes between *panoramic* and *monumental* paintings of the Falls, the former horizontal and expanding to 360°, the latter vertical and from below. The wide-angled spatiality of the panoramic is related to the "space-feeling" of the frontier; the dizzying perspective of the monumental to gothic architecture and romantic imagination. In Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey" a *passionate* response flows naturally into a *meditative*, for the sublime (as Weiskel has shown) is a psychological process that moves through several stages. Sublime scenes like Niagara elevate the mind by encouraging it to overflow its normal boundaries. The Falls has apocalyptic overtones for religious visits, who often made Biblical allusions to the Flood and the Rainbow (formed by sunlight in the spray). Ingenious efforts were made to reconcile the geology of erosion with Biblical myths about the age of the Earth. With the staggering disclosures of Sir Charles Lyell, however, there emerges a "geological sublime." Niagara now makes its impact on the temporal, as well as the spatial, imagination.

Divinity and patriotism go hand in hand in the making of the American Sublime. Wild landscape — and especially Niagara — become the focus of the new American literature and art. The grandeur of the landscape is taken to prefigure the grandeur of the nation. For American observers of the Falls, nationalistic fervour becomes inseparable from godliness. Indeed, the Wordsworthian "God of Nature" is transmuted into the God of "American destiny." Some Americans even looked askance on the Canadian Fall, which, "if not more majestic, is certainly more massive," and whose "mighty wall of waters" made William Dean Howells "almost as green as themselves" with envy. According to one zealous preacher, Niagara and America were too great to be bestowed upon Adam; God had preserved them for his new Chosen People. Unlike the frozen, static Alps, Niagara was in constant motion and could be taken as a symbol of perpetual progress and expansion.

The early nineteenth century, according to McKinsey, had a dualistic response to Niagara: in its sublime aspect it was an "ungovernable" force but in its pic-

turesque dimension, it was "an improvable resource." It appealed to pragmatic instincts as well as to the sense of religious awe. Apocalyptic powers of Deity were seen in the thunderous energy of the Falls — but they could also conjure up images of hell and of Satan's fall into chaos. The sublime uproar was too much for some literary visitor, who longed instead for a smooth pastoral stream. But the very nature of the Sublime, as defined by Kant, is to exceed normative responses. The expansion of soul that comes with the sublime involves a sense of destructive as well as creative power — man is released from the constraints of his ego by conceiving of an energy that vastly exceed his own human will and consciousness. Whereas the Picturesque is nature in malleable form, the Sublime is a raw force spanning opposites. The very ambiguity of the Sublime — its capacity to arouse a pleasing confusion of feelings — is its essence. This "tonic" experience depends on a fruitful tension of opposites. McKinsey here points to a historical paradox: "As men and women came more and more to deny and control the dark side of Niagara, they ironically unleashed the negative aspect of their relation to nature in exploitation and conquest. The result would be to undermine the sublime and to ruin the Falls." Dionysus is sacrificed to Apollo, with consequent loss of imaginative power.

As we enter the era of the "technological sublime," Niagara is upstaged by such man-made wonders as the Erie Canal (opened 1825). Now feats of engineering alone seem truly sublime: a bridge across the rapids is a "miracle," an absurdly phallic tower on the edge of the abyss "almost super-human." Consumerism turns the Falls into a motif for wallpaper or daguerrotypes. Hucksterism hits the Falls, one of the grossest spectacles being the planned sinking of the schooner *Michigan*, loaded with circus animals. Stunt-men, like Sam Patch who "immortalised himself" by jumping over the Falls, use them as a stage-set. Thus the Falls become "an object not of awe but of curiosity," their sublimity turned into spectacle, and their energy harnessed for industry.

With the sublimity of Niagara reduced to cliché, the response grows shallow and sentimental. The laurel wreath of vapidity must be awarded to Harris Bickford, who writes:

> Tremendous, stupendous, romatic, gigantic,
> Gynmastic, fantastic, elastic, and plastic,
> It splashes and crashes . . .

— only to lapse into utter bathos. Pious allegorists emphasized the Providential guidance and control of the cataract, while writers of both sexes associated its "feminine" qualities with aesthetic responses repressed in Men of Iron. It was no longer possible to experience the Falls as early travellers had done: preconceptions got in the way. The sense of melancholy that afflicted so many Victorian visitors probably derived from a failure of great expectations. Some writers sought humorous relief in the incongruity of all that grandeur and petty personal concerns. But humour and sentiment alike stem from a loss of sublimity, destroyed by pressures of commercialization.

By the 1840's Niagara had become the site of a Honeymoon Craze. Behind the romanticizing lay some half-conscious symbolism, which culminated in a Freudian "fantasy that Niagara might be poured into the crater of Vesuvius to create a colossal boiling cauldron." (There is nothing oblique, however, in the Hollywood posters of *Niagara*, which show sex-goddess Marilyn Monroe sprawled in its gushing waters.) Early symbolism of the Falls had been predominantly male, their "potent outpouring representing God's creative power (always male) or a sublime inspiration that calls forth one's most manly re-

sponses. . . ." Water, however, is a female symbol, and in many paintings waterfalls are associated with the Great Mother and with fertility. Ultimately these bisexual associations were domesticated in "a union of male and female," of spontaneous passion and God's will, so that the Falls become an emblem of marriage.

The quality of colour reproduction is very high, catching the luminosity or transparency of water in the paintings. A particularly fine example is Thomas Cole's *Niagara Falls* (1830), with its brilliant colour contrasts and illusion of circularity. Cole himself defined the sublime elements of the scene as "immensity," "everlasting duration," and "uncontrollable power" — a conjunction of space, time, and force that compels awe and reverence. The semiotics of the image appear in its iconicity — viewers read into it their own interpretations, so that the signified undergoes endless transformations. McKinsey deals equally well with psychocultural projections and with the aesthetics of the image. Painting Niagara became a *rite de passage* for American artists, many of whom sought to cast a romantic light over the scene by showing it in moonlight or winter. Ruskin had declared that painting water is " 'like trying to paint a soul' ": Frederic Church took up the challenge so well that Ruskin himself was fooled by a rainbow in Church's *Niagara Falls* (1857), mistaking the painted spectrum for "light shining through a nearby window." This panoramic painting even withstands the binocular test, which simply makes distant "splotches" spring to life as trees or houses. Illusionism reaches new heights here, surpassing photographic realism. In eliminating foreground, Church plunges the viewer into the midst of the torrent. This example of sublime iconography has been called "an American Genesis," and the spectator's sensations likened to those of "a new Noah." Subsequently "the sublime [is eclipsed] as a motive force in American culture."

The Railroad Suspension Bridge (1855) marks the beginning of the end for Niagara - the - sublime. Roebling's engineering feat is "an icon of the technological sublime" that attempts to outdo nature. Later the Falls were to be harnessed for hydroelectric power (1895-96). At the level of personal daring, they were conquered by the tightrope-walker, Blondin, who gave a command performance for the Prince of Wales (1860); then came "the barrel craze," which culminated in 1901, when Anna E. Taylor successfully plunged over Horseshoe Fall. The decline of the Sublime is marked by Mark Twain's spoof, "The First Authentic Mention of Niagara Falls: Extracts from Adam's Diary," in which the creation of Niagara Park "marks the Fall of the Falls."

In the late nineteenth century, artists were still drawn to the Falls but not to their sublimity. Of George Inness' impressionist *Niagara Falls* (1893), McKinsey observes: "The counterpoint of the soft technique, seemingly more suitable for pastoral pictures, and the industrial subject matter creates at best a mood of nostalgia laced with irony." With William Morris Hunt, impressionism "[dissolves] form into color and texture." But Church's sublime realism, where water looks like water and not like curtains of paint, remains the high-water mark of Niagara art (at least for McKinsey).

An engraving of 1873, *Niagara Seen with Different Eyes*, plays on the notion that the Falls represent all things to all men or women. Having read this book, one might be inclined to agree. But behind the farrago of views lies the profound ambiguity of the Falls, as a stimulus to the imagination of American and Canadians alike, and as a symbol of primordial powers invested in their lands

and nations. And herein lies the international significance of this study. Niagara has recently become the focus for satire on true-blue U.S. values. Michel Butor, for instance, has carried out a deconstruction of its legendary associations in his anti-novel, *Niagara*. With the exploitation of Niagara by tourism and industry, icons of the sublime have had to be found further westward — in the Mississippi, the Grand Canyon, Yosemite — or in the last frontiers of space explorations. And countless Americans, as McKinsey might have added, headed north of the border to seek the awesome terrain which would expand the imagination of the pent-up city dweller.

After the American Civil War, there was a loss of faith in "mind expanding" experiences: the natural sublime yielded progressively to its moral and technological counterparts. Naturalism, in the works of Norris, London, and Crane, was antagonistic to spiritual transports. Sublimity is consequently rare in twentieth-century American literature and tends (as in Faulkner's "The Bear") to take the form of a "requiem" for primitive nature. It might, conversely, be argued (as Atwood implies in *Survival*) that the unassimilable land continues to dominate the Canadian literary imagination — if only as negative space. But if the positive sublime has moved off, or been conjured out of existence, the longing for self-sublimation remains. For the sublime, as McKinsey concludes, is "a necessary fiction." It is a projection of spiritual energy that overflows the boundaries of the known.

JACK F. STEWART

GUSTAFSON'S ORDER

RALPH GUSTAFSON, *At The Ocean's Verge*. Black Swan, $20.00.

A Literary Friendship: The Correspondence of Ralph Gustafson and W. W. E. Ross, ed. Bruce Whiteman. ECW, $14.00.

THE NAME RALPH GUSTAFSON calls to mind the image of a man toiling at the thankless task of producing unwanted anthologies of unread poetry for an indifferent reading public. Happily, his labours have not been in vain. Gustafson's faith and perseverance eventually succeeded in finding an audience for Canadian poetry and establishing its legitimacy as a source of pride and a subject for serious study. The quality of his *Pelican Anthology of Canadian Poetry*, first published in 1942, has been recently acknowledged by Penguin's reissuing of a fourth, revised edition of the book as *The Penguin Book of Canadian Verse*. Fittingly, the latest edition of Gustafson's selected poems, *At the Ocean's Verge*, coincides not only with this reissue but also with the publication of another cultural document (one which provides some of the history of the anthologies), the letters he exchanged with W. W. E. Ross.

A Literary Friendship, with an interesting introduction and useful notes by Bruce Whiteman, presents the sixty-four letters that Gustafson and Ross exchanged between 1940 and 1964. The letters begin by providing a vivid portrait of the 1940's, a memorable decade for Canadian poetry, one in which modernism became central to the development of our poetry. As the letters go on, the poets become more comfortable with one another, revealing the personalities of two under-regarded figures in our literary history. We catch glimpses of the unstable world of Canadian publishing as periodicals come and go; we hear undertones of discontent as E. K. Brown's

championing of E. J. Pratt is questioned, and we experience the glee that Ross and Gustafson must have felt as Layton and Dudek quarrelled with the establishment critics in an unseemly and vocal manner. As Ross rejects much Canadian poetry for being "soggy, derivative and dead-heavy," and as Gustafson fights to publish his various anthologies in order to find both an audience and an income for his fellow poets, what comes across is a picture of two articulate men devoted to the well-being of good poetry in Canada.

In spite of the valuable contributions Gustafson has made as an editor and critic, however, it is primarily as a poet that he deserves to be considered. *At the Ocean's Verge* is a slim, elegant volume of poetry, whose aesthetic appeal is a tribute to a poet who has always rightly suspected that he has been undervalued by his contemporaries. The reader concerned that a new selected poems by Gustafson, appearing so soon after the publication of *The Moment is All: Selected Poems 1944-83*, will be an exercise in duplication need not worry. Of the 142 poems in this volume, only about a third were represented in the earlier book. *At the Ocean's Verge* (an American publication whose aim is in part to introduce Gustafson to a larger audience in the United States) presents a different Gustafson than the one we find in the Canadian edition of his selected poems.

In his preface to *At the Ocean's Verge*, John Walsh writes:

> Gustafson's poetry is humanist: it explores human existence, from the concrete depths to the open and uncertain heights. Pain and ecstasy are interwoven in the fabric of these poems; bitterness, humor, irony and sensual joy are not alien to them, nor are the "complex simplicity" of sense experience and the humble fact of love. Rooted in *eros*, Gustafson's vision extends outward, octopus-like, to grapple with the world. As Confucius put it: first, order in oneself; then outward order follows.

This is a reasonably accurate, if somewhat floridly abstract description of the poems included in the volume; it signals that the Gustafson represented in *At the Ocean's Verge* is not the Gustafson of, for example, *Theme and Variation for Sounding Brass*, the poet's interesting experiment in committed political poetry. The book is not represented at all in Walsh's selection. The few political poems that Walsh has included have undergone slight (but perhaps for this volume not insignificant) changes: "Moscow Circus" has become simply "Circus," and "Basque Lover: Spain 1937" has become "Basque Lover" with the dateline moved from the title to the bottom of the page. Furthermore, only four of the "Canadian" poems from *Rocky Mountain Poems* have been included, a fact which should come as no surprise given that the editor has seen fit to warn the reader that even when Gustafson locates his poems in the Canadian provinces he manages to avoid being provincial. The exploration of human existence that interests Walsh restricts his selection for the most part to poems concerned with a transcultural, ahistorical understanding of humankind. Although Gustafson's poetry as a whole is wider in its range than Walsh's selection suggests, a large quantity of his best verse does concentrate on providing access to generalized, universal states of experience. As Gustafson says in his own introduction to the book (excerpted, by the way, from an article first published in *Canadian Literature*), "the saving grace is poetry," by which he means, "If one defines poetry as the enlightenment of fact, the worth of experience, the attainment of sensibility, the establishment of compassion — in any of the ways in contradiction to the disharmony, the structural collapse, the pollution of right ritual, the violence and disgrace of our times — then poetry is the saving grace."

The poems represented here are fine examples of the work of an urbane and cultured poet. They are also, in a positive sense, poems for an elite readership. Back in 1945, E. K. Brown warned that Gustafson's poems were "difficult," and these are among his most difficult. Nonetheless, the poems in *At the Ocean's Verge* repay the effort they demand of their reader. Gustafson told Ross that he feared "chiselled lyricism [was] incapable of sprouting in Cnd. soil" (25 January 1945). Ross reassured his friend that his poems were admirably lyrical. At their best, these poems are not only lyrical, but they also possess a fascinatingly epigrammatic quality that is intellectually persuasive. It is good to see Gustafson's reputation securing a place in the world of poetry, and it is a pleasure to find him represented in two such attractive books.

LAURA GROENING

SLIGHT OF HAND

DENNIS COOLEY, *Bloody Jack*. Turnstone, $13.50.

Bloody Jack IS MORE than a satiric long poem dealing with the Canadian blackguard John Krafchenko. It is a self-conscious quest for a form that denies structural convention while affirming the exuberance of life. Cooley's narrator identifies some of the problems associated with his dialectic. One can break with conventional form and enter into a word-play that ignores life, or one can write about life and its exquisite sensibilities while employing a more traditional literary vehicle. The two seem irreconcilable. Or, so Cooley's narrator would have us believe.

Within the book, Cooley identifies these two approaches as rising alternately out of the oral tradition or a tendency toward stylistic innovation. What underlies this opposition between traditional and innovative approaches is a partially successful attempt to evolve a voice that uses both backgrounds in a mutually complementary manner. There is a chorus of recurring voices in this book: the voice of the hero Krafchenko both alive and from beyond the grave; the female voices of his various lovers; the male voices of his antagonists; an unidentified third-person omniscient narrator who speaks through lyric poetry; a narrative voice that articulates the fragmentation of time and space through stylistically unconventional verse; a self-conscious narrative voice that functions as a veil for Cooley's observations on the text; and invented antagonists who seem to lie outside of the text in the form of imagined reviewers, critics, or historical figures.

In a larger sense, this book is a thesis dealing with the shape of language itself. *Bloody Jack* displays the various stages of Ciceronian oratory (although these are not presented in the traditional order): the exordium, in which Cooley ingratiates the audience; the narratio in which he self-consciously outlines the quest for form; the divisio in which Cooley supplies us with his approach to the quest; the confirmatio in which a narcissistic narrator extols his own approach to writing; the confutio in which the narrator de-fuses possible reproofs; and the peroratio or open-ended "appendix" as it is called in this book.

Cooley's structural innovations range from traditional rhyming verse as in "pennys song," to concrete or shaped poems much as "the end of the line," to open or fragmented verse such as "so glad." He also uses common contemporary verse forms but then introduces conceptual contradictions as in "i see them sawing" or "you are there." Other poems, such as "with glad gonads grinning," rely on the anglo-saxon devices of caesura

and kenning, as seen in Earle Birney's "Anglo-Saxon Street." Generally the verse is rich in personification, alliteration, and assonance, and laden with provoking and radical tropes. Cooley is as concerned with arresting associations, as he is with the sound of the language. The narrator's quest for a satisfactory form of expression is ironic, insofar as there is no acceptable resolution offered at the end. Like his hero, who is a pro-wrestler, the author seems to be wrestling language itself. *Bloody Jack* questions one's perception of reality.

Language here is associated with sexuality and death. The narcissistic narrator would have us believe that we are voyeurs to a masturbatory exploration of the pleasures of the textual body. Yet somehow, there is the sense of a forced self-consciousness, the text as female, and the author/narrator as male trying to enter. The problem may lie in the fact that part of the joy in sex and language comes from the seduction, the foreplay, not the forced entry; "ready to chew her out maybe I shld of bin more genital." This is screwing the text without love or climax. We are deliberately confronted with excuses, hackneyed folk wisdoms, sway-backed clichés, and painful puns. Too often, these have a tired, beer-room familiarity. Nonetheless Cooley sometimes succeeds in marrying the two worlds of innovative form and sensitive substance. He owes as much to colloquial-voiced writers such as Purdy or Kearns or Suknaski as to critics such as Kroetsch or Derrida or Foucault. The poems "i wanna talk to you" and "once in a blue moon" are good instances of a happy combination of style and subject. Ironically, Cooley finds greater success and freer expression in more traditional lyric poetry that finds its way into the book.

Cooley's prosaic style is inevitably oratorical, right-branching, and paratactic. There are a minimum of tropes and schemes of construction. There is a high incidence of anaphora and seriation aimed at instructing the audience rather than persuading it. The prose style is in high contrast to the poetry, which displays far greater structural innovation. On the other hand, the prose is deconstructive in nature. It de-centres and undermines the surface meaning of the text through self-reflective commentary, and in this way it is generally more radical than the poetry.

Cooley is more concerned with a celebration of process, than with a drive towards an end. He would have us applaud discontinuity and chaos over obvious unity. We are confronted with a theory of interruption and imperfection put into practice. He leaves us with an absence of closure or telos. The book ends with an inconclusive statement that puns on the word appendix. We are reminded that if the medium is the message, then the message has to do with a breakdown of the traditional boundaries between artist, art, and audience. Cooley self-consciously depicts a fragmentation of the time-space discontinuum. In the end he dis-credits his own narrative voice by proving that it is occasionally possible to express the exquisite sensibilities of life within an innovative form.

KARL JIRGENS

RIDDLES & PASSIONS

RICHARD OUTRAM, *Man in Love*. Porcupine's Quill, $7.95.

SHARON BERG, *The Body Labyrinth*. Coach House, $7.50.

RHONDA BATCHELOR, *Bearings*. Brick, $6.00.

THREE POETS TALK of love: one in riddles, one in anger, one in sadness. Readers of Toronto poet Richard Outram will be used to his witty rhyming couplets and tercets, erudite quatrains, Donne-like son-

nets. New readers will have to struggle to pierce through his elevated language and archaic forms. The struggle is less rewarding than in his earlier three collections. A few of the poems are gently evocative, but less moving than his earlier "Bearded Lady" or "Sarah." Many flash with Outram's impressive Popian wit:

> Cuckolds, husbanding their pain,
> Swear they will not care again,
> Once the paramour is slain.

But few have the Jay Macpherson aptness of his earlier "Landlubber Answered" or "Love Letter."

His conceits continue to engage us — most successfully in the flame/water paradox of "Present." Yet some lines are embarrassingly weak: "As yet, I only knew, I knew, / Although I knew it through and through." Others are simply 'clapped-out' archaisms: "Bewildered, rapt and beholden O / Burnish darkness inwards. . . ." And one must plough through a flood of emerald waves and blood incarnadine, whereunder one is enjoined to rejoice, cleave, utter, beget, suffice, or succumb. Most successful, and coincidentally without metre, is "Elephant Folio," a clever updating of fable. "Riddles for Old Cameron" is a pun-laden piece of after-dinner wit. "Gravity" combines the same cleverness with a rare hint of passion. One must take his title's assertion on faith when reading lines like "Cleave, Love: although / this mute truce we know / of Heaven must be so." Outram's sincerity is masked by erudition and traditional symbolism. It is difficult to sense the promised emotion through the fine sift of his latest riddles.

A more impassioned and contemporary voice is that of Peterborough poet Sharon Berg. *The Body Labyrinth*, her second collection, reveals her confident mastery of verbal pyrotechnics. Her images give pleasurable surprise: the rosy faces and white fruit of apples becoming the husband's red face and "fists balled knuckle-white"; the trading down (or up?) of the marriage car for the divorce buggy; the evocative "I hear my heart, a long way off, / ringing like a bright red bell."

Where her earlier volume celebrated love, this one strikes out with aggressive anger at "the slavish husband," "the little man with the big / fiddle, squealing piggy with his corkscrew, / the satisfied grunt." It is a tough anger, "clenched like a fist," yet occasionally tinged with a touching fragility:

> Take me back
> as I was
> mother, father.
> Take me back as I am,
> fallen out of the marriage bed,
> the bad dream.

Usually unrelenting (one may wonder how one sex has the monopoly on sin), Berg has moments of compassion. And few of us will stay dry-eyed when that compassion expands to include ex-husband, daughter, two sons, and perhaps us all:

> The girl will be fine, but I pray
> for the boys. God bless them,
> my sailor. God watch them over.

Berg ranges confidently from the brilliant anger of "The Coat of Many Colours" and "Dancing with the Boar," the quieter anguish of "Magnetic Tides" and "Absolutions," the fresh wit of "Polarities" and "Women Teaches Cat Concentration," to the beautiful compassion of "1 Blue / 1 Pink / 1 in Clover." New for her is the witty but powerful surrealism of the section "Personal Myths." When God asks Toad about eternity, Toad replies chillingly, "Father . . . I have that one /either way." Berg's poetry is exciting; the growth between her two volumes, impressive. There is no doubt where she is going. May one hope that the celebratory voice of "Ovens" and other earlier poems will also find room there?

Less verbally flamboyant is Rhonda Batchelor in *Bearings*, her first collection of poetry. Hers is the voice of the solitary individual getting her bearings, but also bearing life, mastering "the art of bearing the dreamer's pillow," and bearing (in the case of a miscarriage) the loss of "what was barely found." Her poems have a tone of gentle sadness, coupled with acceptance, not self-pity. The men in her poems are mostly insensitive, unsympathetic. As rain clouds the car windows, she comments:

> You spy the tears change gears
> Ask what's wrong
>
> There's nothing to see I want to say
> But it's so obvious

Yet her sadness is never bitter or accusing — merely observing. And, as with Berg, there is the occasional moment of touching compassion for the ex-lover: "you in a phonebooth / on your birthday."

West-coast maritime images become a useful metaphor for Batchelor's solitude. Drawn to the sea, yet unsatisfied, she waits, out of her element, "my hands cold fins / in my pockets." But "the sea is patient" — it will claim her in the end. Yet solitude need not be forlorn. Hers is an attitude of unaggressive independence: "I could be wrong, but I'm not afraid to be alone." And the images of loneliness are leavened by a gentle and sometimes biting wit: "you can't stay / I say / meaning one thing / I can't stay / he says / meaning another."

Batchelor handles her language with precision. Her words fall with a skilful cadence, like "the quiet that follows / a car passing by." Her imagery, while restrained, is apt. Most successful are the subtle images of "Huron Carol," the nostalgic mysticism of "Pegasus," the muted pain of "Coming To," the wry wit of "You don't love him or," and the self-awareness of "Love at the End of the Decade." Batchelor is a wise, if not overpowering, voice and it grows on one. Gentleness is worth a lot. Her poetry repays the reader's time — and the poet's.

ROD ANDERSON

** DAVID BERCUSON & DOUGLAS WERTHEIMER, *A Trust Betrayed: The Keegstra Affair*. Doubleday, $19.95. Writers, I think, are troubled in multiple ways by the Keegstra affair, which arouses for them a whole complex of issues, so that their first reaction is to fight shy of the whole messy situation. It offends one's image of a democratic society in the late twentieth century that such bigotry should flourish; it shakes one's confidence in our institutions that a Keegstra should have been allowed for so long to impress his falsehoods with the power of misdirected sincerity on the minds of children. Most of the many books and articles appearing on Keegstra have been sensational, and in the process have spread his views unnecessarily, but David Bercuson and Douglas Wertheimer, a historian and a journalist working together, present a more serious study of social responsibilities in *A Trust Betrayed*, and show that if Keegstra was guilty of sins of commission, others were guilty of sins of omission in ignoring for many years what he had been practising. The other issue, apart from public responsibility, is that of free speech, and this Bercuson and Wertheimer hardly touch. Must one cling to the old Voltairean stance of defending to the death one's enemy's right to express his views, however repugnant? It is difficult for a writer, whose calling depends on the power to write freely, to do otherwise. And so this writer, while approving Keegstra's dismissal as a teacher because of a clear breach of trust, finds it less easy to endorse his prosecution and trial. He had been removed out of harm's way by his dismissal; he had been punished by losing his ability to teach; he could have been left to rot in obscurity. The long expensive process, with its high publicity for his noxious doctrines, seemed excessive, particularly as it involved the invocation of a highly controversial censorship law that in the hands of irresponsible rulers might easily be turned against very different people from Keegstra.

G.W.

opinions and notes

WEBB'S "WATER AND LIGHT"

WHERE DO POEMS COME FROM?[1]

Phyllis Webb's *Water and Light* (1984) was at least five years in the making, a fact entirely characteristic of this master of musical phrase and meticulous image: "I play by ear. And the eye."[2] The verse-form Webb works with in *Water and Light*, subtitled "Ghazals and Anti Ghazals," owes something (not much, technically speaking) to the lyric usually associated with Persian literature (its apperance is also common in Urdu, Arabic, Turkish, and Pashto literatures). The first public manifestation of the Middle Eastern drift in Webb's poetic and political attentions can be dated by referring to a villanelle written five years ago (16 January 1979) entitled "The King of Kings has left the Peacock Throne."[3] However, as I've suggested elsewhere, Webb's adaptation of the old Persian lyric to suit her new poetic needs represents a solution (almost certainly temporary) to a complex problem which first made itself felt much longer than five years ago.[4]

In 1962, Webb envisioned "a book composed of long lines determined by larger narrative and historical concerns,"[5] to be called *The Kropotkin Poems*. Her 1962 volume, *The Sea Is Also A Garden*, ends with the following lines:

> . . . I want to die
> writing Haiku
> or, better,
> long lines, clean and syllabic as knotted bamboo. Yes!

Naked Poems (1965) fulfils the first part of the poet's desire. Cross-pollenating haiku with Sapphic lyric, Webb provides herself with a verse form in which to articulate a definitively female view of sibling rivalry and sex (with another woman). In "a new alphabet," she spells out some of the initial statements in her own sexual politics and sexual poetics:

> I hear the waves
> hounding the window:
> lord, they are the root waves
> of the poem's meter
> the waves of the
> root poem's sex.

"Poems of failure" are all that the poet managed towards her larger narrative in long lines:

> One
> more day run round and the "good masterpiece of work"
> does not come. I scribble. I approach some distant dream.
> I wait for moonlight reflecting on the night sea. I can
> wait. We shall see.[6]

The reason this project was never completed is, in my opinion, closely related to Webb's eventual discovery and subsequent adaptation of the ghazal. In the late 1960's, while she struggled to endow "sweet old Prince / Kropotkin" with long-lined life, the feminist revolution entered a new phase of consciousness-raising.[7] Gradually, Webb came to identify the long line in English poetry with men and aggression: "It comes from assurance (or hysteria), high tide, full moon, open mouth, big-mouthed Whitman, yawp, yawp, & Ginsberg—howling. Male."[8]

Uneasy with the tacit assumptions that underpin an essentially male poetics, Webb sought not exactly to reject but to transform the long line, bringing it from the soap-box and pulpit (on or in which Whitman, Ginsberg, and Dylan Thomas often seem to be standing) down to the kitchen tables at which women write.[9]

The struggle to effect this transformation is most obvious in *Wilson's Bowl*: in the transformation of "The Kropotkin Poems" into "Poems of Failure," and in other poems, prose-poems and paragraphs which "proceed before the amorous invisible, governed by need and the form of its persuasions"[10] The "amorous invisible" might be thought to look ahead to the "amatory" ghazal, with its "clandestone" order; certainly, the easy mixing of line-lengths in her ghazals — "The pull, this way and that, ultimately into the pull / of the pen across the page" — proves the success of Webb's struggle to transform: she can now extend her lines "across the page" without resorting to oratorical yawp and without falling under the spell of a voice that imposes itself aggressively, forcing the reader to read on and on.

As she came close to completing the manuscript of *Wilson's Bowl*, in December 1979, Webb sent some of the poems — "all that male obsessed stuff": presumably the poem in "Portraits," and possibly some in the section called "Crimes" — to her friend Helen Sonthoff because she "wanted a woman's and a feminist's reaction" to them.[12] The following month, she was reading *On Lies, Secrets and Silence, Selected Prose, 1966-78* by Adrianne Rich[13] whose views enabled Webb to clarify and so further her own feminism, and whose poetry (in *The Dream of a Common Language, Poems 1974-77*, 1978) influenced the outcome of Webb's search for new verse forms (paralleling Virginia Woolf's search for "a woman's sentence")[14] and new ways to handle the verse or line. In her important essay "On the Line," she confesses:

> I once complained about Adrienne Rich's line breaks, but when I read *The Dream of a Common Language*, I felt shame, shame, ashamed, that I had ever been so petty, knowing that, like Marie Curie, your wounds, Adrienne, and your power come from the same source.[15]

Adrienne Rich is also one of the poets who contribute "translations" or adaptations to the *Ghazals of Ghalib: Versions from the Urdu*, the volume from which Webb takes her epigraphs (one couplet per section) for the five sections of *Water and Light*, the five couplets constituting, as Webb has pointed out, the first ghazal in the book.

Significantly, in view of the impact made on her by Rich's prose, as well as the fact that she was trying to free herself from the long poetic line, Webb's first publication after *Wilson's Bowl* was *Talking*, a selection of prose essays and reviews written between 1960 and 1981. In "Up the Ladder: Notes on the Creative Process," she asks, "Where do poems come from?" No definitive answer is offered. Poems, we are told, " 'come about' in roundabout ways"[16]; and, in what may be a fortuitous illustration of her own assertion, Webb includes in this essay three poems (two unpublished elsewhere) which help the reader to understand where the poems in *Water and Light* came from, and why they came in the form they did. A "Field Guide to Snow Crystals" and "Messages" (written 30 October to 16 November 1980) are both theory-poems. Of the first, she says: "The poem is about snow crystals, but it is also about the Field theory of poetry and so may not be quite as innocent as it appears."[17] The light it sheds on the origins of Webb's ghazals is less direct than what emanates from "Messages"; but it does reveal that, during this important transitional period, the poet was engaged in theorizing about her art. Maybe her academic context — she was Writer in Residence at the University of Alberta in Edmonton from September 1980 to April 1981 — encouraged her to do so.

Much more importantly, "Messages" transforms poetics into politics, social

and sexual. The female Egyptian cat who figures the poem's unity, is "A piece of politics. A creature of state." She "prances" irreverently "down the ramp of the poem": "Halfway down the ramp her high ears turn against / the task of the poem toward allurements / of stock-market and monopoly":[18] a man's profession in a world monopolized by men engaged in capitalist modes of production which have disadvantaged women. The lines in this poem vary greatly in length, stretching out across the page as long as fifteen syllables, contracted to as few as two. The tension apparent in contrasting line-lengths derives from a social-sexual conflict ironically concealed in the circumstances that triggered the poem.[19] A young woman seeking Webb's professional advice about a novel told Webb to write a poem about the Egyptian cat pictured in a postcard above Webb's desk. A few days earlier, Webb had lunched with Ted Blodgett to discuss his poetry, including a poem called "Chat." In listening to the poet talk about his work, she was more passive and submissive than either the male poet or the female novelist. Webb was caught between the self-imposed blindness of herself as a woman of the older generation and the "agate eyes" of the "young psychic," between male and female modes of encoding messages, between poet and prose-writer. The problem is, in the poem's metaphor of poem as pyramid,

> How to get out of the poem without a scratch?
> Each cast of the line seductive and minimal.
> The ramp of the poem folding against
> the power of the cat.
> Possible use: to hold the bones of little ones
> who cannot speak for themselves. . . .
> Possible worth: treasure beyond speech
> out of the old tomb, out of the mind's sarcophagus.[20]

The poet's quandary is how, without getting hurt in the process, "to get out of the poem . . . the old tomb" which the poem handed down through the male poetic line has become: an inscribed stone coffin in which the female poet's dead mind is buried.

Webb, an established fifty-three-year-old poet in 1980, was challenged by a younger woman to avail herself of "the power of the cat" *against* which the "ramp of the poem" is folding. A fine example of Webb's meticulous imagery, "the ramp of the poem" is, like the poem's epigraph, "confidential": that is, both bold, full of confidence and reticent, containing secret *messages*. Substantively, *ramp* means "a slope or inclined plane connecting two different levels," and the ramp of this poem connects the open and published with the concealed or invisible; the male, monopolizing, inclined to ramp, "to storm or rage," to yawp like Whitman, and the female who, by male tradition, is inclined to defer, to hide, to lock herself away. But, " '*Cats play to cats* [*men*] *cannot see*' ": communicating secretly, "there is an understanding between us" — younger and older women. There is also a conflict, not only between sexes and generations, but also between meanings. In telling the older woman what to write, the younger reveals just enough of herself to suggest another definition for the word *ramp*: "a bold, vulgar, ill-behaved woman."

"The King of Kings has left the Peacock throne" (the third poem in her "Notes on the Creative Process" that helps us understand where the ghazals in *Water and Light* come from) alerts us to Webb's interest in Iran and the revolution that began there in January of 1979.[21] The ironic socio-sexual implications of that political revolution are implicit in the second poem in the final section of *Water and Light*:

> Oh You who keep disappearing
> behind a black cloud like a woman

behind her veil, how do you feel
shut off like that from the perfect

obedience of your worshippers?

Even more obvious and ominous are the two final couplets of the first, self-reflexive ghazal in the book:

Four or five couplets trying to dance
into Persia. Who dances in Persia now?

A magic carpet, a prayer mat, red
A knocked off head of somebody on her
broken knees.

In Iran, when it was still Persia, and the King of Kings still occupied the Peacock throne, lived Mizra Asadullah Beg Khan, better known as Ghalib and second only to Hafiz as a writer of ghazals. Though not exactly Webb's Muse, Ghalib is perhaps what Woolf has called a "continuing presence"[22] in *Water and Light*. Only at the very end of the book is the older, male poet's presence deconstructed and dismissed. Not without a measure of reluctance in her poetic feet, and of sadness and resignation in her voice, Webb refuses Ghalib's " 'poetry ... of what was, / what could have been possible,' " offering instead the poetry of a woman's voice speaking *from* and *about* "the land of / only what is."[23]

A permanent resident and renowned citizen in her chosen land, Webb rejects "the subject of the traditional Ghazal [which] was love, the Beloved representing not a particular woman but an idealized and universal image of love." My ghazals, she states in her Preface to *Sunday Water: Thirteen Anti Ghazals*, "tend toward the particular, the local, the dialectical and private."[24] "I fly from the wide-open mouth of the seraphim": "The universe opens. I close." Seated at the kitchen table, "Around me, little creakings / of the house," she writes her morning poems vulnerable to, compelled and yet interrupted by the local, private and particular.

Mrs. Olsson at 91 is slim and sprightly.
She still swims in the clamshell bay.

Around the corner. Robin hangs out big
sheets
to hide her new added on kitchen from the
building inspector.

and

My morning poem destroyed by the good
neighbour policy.
Mrs. Olsson, organic gardener, lectures me
on the good life.

Like Austen's Mrs. Weston, and like Austen herself, Webb zeroes in on those "matters on which the daily happiness of private life depends," giving us " 'all the minute particulars, which only woman's language can make interesting.' "[25]

But, while she indisputably endorses Woolf's belief that both in life and in art the values of a woman are not the values of a man,"[26] Webb is never single-minded, complacent, or romantic in her feminism. Always compassionate on the subject of women, she is also self-mocking, critical, and sometimes even satirical in writing about her own sex. For example, "The Birds" section of *Water and Light* aviarizes flamingo, "varied thrush" and "orchard oriole," peacock, crow and canary; but "the birds / whose warning cries strike just beyond the window" turn out to be "My dear ladies, birds of a feather," who hatch with "astounding patience"

miniatures
of your own birdiness held in suspension.

Chirp, chirp and trill. Yes, as the acid
rain falls on your Easter feathers you

puff up. Ladies, ladies, how you confound
me

with your embroidered eyes, your faithful
smiles

Your dear familiar songs.

The bitter but controlled anger deferred by sweetly social and poetic "rules of decorum" in the poem "Quian: Modesty: Respectful, humble, yielding, retiring" (ironically, the last poem in the section

called "Frivolities" is directly related to the quandary projected in "Messages," the ultimate political consequences of failing to escape from which are imaged as "A knocked off head of somebody on her broken knees."

Sometimes underlying, sometimes overwhelming the public, political context of Webb's feminism is the private and localized context of family politics: "My family is the circumstance I cannot dance with." In the larger context, Webb speaks as woman; in the smaller, as a daughter and sister, reacting like her cats

> restless, hungry
> in view of winter, in view of cold
>
> Cold as the curse of mere matter, *Mère*
> matter, the subject family, the repeated
>
> word

In June 1981, Webb wrote that she saw

> the whole woman thing from a global and historic perspective similar to the class analysis of Marx and Engels, not a personal one particularly (hence I do not see my mother as anything more than a victim of the system who would have me carry on the tradition of victimization and its ulterior routes to power).[27]

Five months later, in an unpublished poem entitled "Blood Relations," she was less global, more local, circumscribed by "Bloody pools of / Daughter. / Sister."[28]

What's important here is to understand and appreciate how the family subject and the panoply of feminist issues (social, sexual, economic, artistic, political) get transformed by the poet into the text and texture of the ghazals and anti ghazals she has been working on since the Fall of 1981. Idealized and universalized love between the poet and his female Beloved, subject of the traditional ghazal, is particularized *and* politicized, becomes the poet's love for her own sex ("the good neighbour policy" which disrupts the poetic process), the poet's relationship with mother and brother, the poet's love of visual images and the sound of words. The lyric form —

> A lozenge of dream
> sticks on my tongue
>
> Soulange, Stonehenge
> sugar-mite, maple —
>
> a candy poem

— is compelled to accommodate dialectical material (particularized *and* politicized), to dramatize vision (the "I Daniel" section is a dramatic monologue or, more accurately, a dramatic lyric in the tradition of Browning's "James Lee's Wife"),[29] to carry crypto-narratives (the writing of the first "thirteen Anti Ghazals," for example), to allow the poet vox when she wants to play frivolously in the shallows of sound poetry, to rewrite history and so generate a new secrecy, and to indict/lament "the whole culture leaning. . . ." Introduced to the ghazal by a man (the sender of the "card / with a white peacock spreading its tail") who presumably directed her attention to John Thompson's *Stilt Jack*, Webb performs a feminist act of liberation, freeing the form from a male history and a male monopoly in practice. What she does with it reminds me, as Webb so often reminds me, of Woolf who discerned in Byron's *Don Juan* something — "the springy random haphazard galloping nature of its method" — which she wanted, took and made her own: "an elastic shape which will hold whatever you choose to put in it."[30]

ALL KINDS OF MUSICK

Between 1714 and 1717, George Handel wrote music to accompany a royal procession on the Thames — water music — and in 1749, music to accompany a fireworks display — light music. Preoccupied like all impressionists with light, particularly light on water, Georges Seurat painted "Un Dimanche Après-

Midi à L'Île de la Grand Jatte" between 1884 and 1886. In 1984, also the year of Webb's *Water and Light*, Stephen Sondheim, musician and lyricist, created *Sunday in the Park with George*, a musical and visual celebration of water and light inspired by Seurat's painting.[31] The point of this not so strange coincidence of artistic events is two-fold. One, the title of Webb's new volume singles out a perennial and quintessential concern of all art — music, painting, poetry, music-drama (recall *Das Rheingold*: "Von der Wassertiefe / wonnigem Stern, / der hehr die Wogen durchhellt"), architecture (recall Arthur Erickson's Filberg house). Two, Webb, who has always been responsive to and appreciative of the visual as well as the verbal arts,[32] chooses to work in her new volume with a verse-form very closely tied to music. *Water* (which we often hear) *and Light* (which we see) is a volume (high and low) filled, like Prospero's island, with "all kinds of musick."[33]

In addition to the songs, shrieks and screams of twenty-one different kinds of bird, *Water and Light* is loud with the vocabulary of music: *dance, bells, notes, balalaika, singing, tuned lyre, 'EE' sounds, perfectly musical, mellifluous, singer, sings, stringy instrument, songs, ear, Angelus, gong, sackbut, cornet, flute, psaltery, harp, dulcimer, play, tune performed, mantra, swings, humming.* Parsifal vocalizes, Vivaldi's *Concerto for Three Violins* sounds "strangely, / ... in the falling dusk," a tentative allusion to *Othello* in Milano invokes, however faintly, Verdi's penultimate opera, ancient instruments and silver bird song crowd the apparatus in "I Daniel," and even Heidegger is heard to have "notes of music / in his name": e,d,e,g,g,e. Much more significant, however, is Webb's choice of the musical ghazal as verse-form.[34] Compelled to choose three Persian poems by Ghalib for an anthology, Annemarie Schimmel says she would have no problem with her first choice: "without any hesitation I would choose the ghazal with the rhyme-word *be-rags*, 'dance.'"[35] No surprise, then, that Krishna and Shiva should be called upon to dance in the poem which prefaces *Water and Light*, or that dancing should figure so prominently in the first poem in the book:

> My family is the circumstance I cannot dance with
> At Banff I danced in black, so crazy, the young man insisting.
>
> Four or five couplets trying to dance
> into Persia. Who dances in Persia now?

Though dancing does not necessarily involve a couple (of human beings), music and movement must always be coupled in the dance, a fact projected in the couplet that characterizes the ghazal. In the classical ghazal (two kinds exist: the *musalsal,* linked or coherent, and the more common *ghair musalsal*, unlinked or unchained), the first couplet is rhymed and the end-rhyme (*radif*) is repeated in the second line of each subsequent couplet (*sh'er*): aa, ba, ca, da, ea, etc. Every line (*misra*) can be measured into subdivisions or feet (*ruku*), each of which, when written in Urdu, has five or seven letters. Each line contains four *ruku*, eight of which make up a measure or characteristic rhythm (*behr*). This information helps to explain why L. C. Randhir insists that the measure within which each ghazal is composed is as intricate as any of the forms and rhythms of classical Indian music.[36] It also justifies my remarking earlier that, while Webb's new verse-form owes something to the ghazal, it is "not much, technically speaking."

Webb revealed the true nature of her debt to Ghalib (via John Thompson) at a recent poetry reading at the University of British Columbia (25 September 1985)

by declaring that her anti ghazals (a more accurate designation than ghazals) are "disobedient to the inherent conventionality of the form," adding that she had "a profound desire to be disobedient in [her] very conventional life." Her adoption/adaptation of the form is, as argued earlier, an act of liberation: a liberation of self-as-woman from male socio-sexual, political, and poetic conventions. In her hands, the *ghair musalsal*, of which each *sh'er* is autonomous, unlinked to any other *sh'er* (except in terms of *radif* and *ruku*, a convention Webb, like Thompson, also rejects) assumes symbolic significance. As "I learnt more about Ghazals, I saw I was actually defying some of the traditional rules, constraints, and pleasures, laid down so long ago."[37] Her autonomy as woman-poet, her growing need to disconnect from a male-dominated tradition, and her profound desire to be disobedient (as well as her interest in music) all find expression in the ghazal. The symbolism is only intensified by her rejection of rhyme and a regular or identifiable metre. Her interest in and use of music is equally significant since the music of the ghazal is rhapsodic (rhapsode/rhapsody: "a literary work consisting of *disconnected* pieces"). Webb's new-found power (political/poetic) is that of the rhapsodist, one who rhapsodizes: "to relate disconnectedly." This wonderful oxymoron characterizes exactly the poet's art in *Water and Light* in which we (unlike Gabriel) hear "the tune performed." Music *is* the art of the Muse, and Webb's Muse is not Ghalib ("your lines are becoming maudlin"; hers never do) but Bastet, Egyptian goddess of joy and pleasure, divine cat-woman (that "piece of politics . . . creature of state") who "loved music and the dance":[38] "She moves toward me through an aura *composed* / of a *new light* and the golden dust of Ptolemy."[39]

Though she prances/dances, her warning is clear: the "price of gold slumps" (a male monopoly collapses), "war cracks at the border."[40] Though she moves in a world of *Water and Light*, "*the violence of the world is all around me*"; living "now and in the past," the visionary has his/her vision but "It was only politics, wars and rumours."[41] "Everywhere the killings go on," compelling the poet to establish, during the three-year period preceding the publication of this new volume, a chapter of Amnesty International on that island of *water and light*. Sensing that "*a strange time, like a shadow, has fallen upon us*," "the whole culture leaning"[42] and "the grand dark attending," the cat (Bastet in Egypt, Mottyl in Findley's revisioned Old Testament) is nevertheless "still here // tilting in this stranded ark / blind *and* seeing in the dark." (My emphasis.) Down the ramp of these anti ghazals, she leads the reader, modulating from one tonality to another, "*from grieving, and . . . the sound of grief*" to "Frivolities" and the Zen laughter footnoted by Webb in her very first volume. But whereas the humour of the early books is always peripheral, only occasional, in *Water and Light* it is consistent and integral. The same words are the sounds of "flagrant musick" and of "grief": "the seriousness / and playfulness of that." As the "man from Iraq" who belongs in the *audience* explains: when you apply for a job, "you begin by quoting poetry / and when you flirt you quote poetry // and when you marry poetry is all around you" (enisling you in water and light):

> And when you die at the executioner's hands
> (he did not say this though most of his family
>
> was murdered) do you also quote poems, Amin?
> Oh Allah why not.

Would that the critic, transformed into Mulberry tree or Catalpa, could "say, simply, Phyllis."

NOTES

[1] Phyllis Webb, *Talking* (Montreal: Quadrant Editions, 1982), p. 51.

[2] *Talking*, pp. 69, 70.

[3] *Talking*, p. 57.

[4] " 'Bird song in the apparatus': Webb's New Selected Poems," *Essays on Canadian Writing* 30 (Winter 1984-85), pp. 359-69, specifically pp. 364-65.

[5] Sharon Thesen, "Introduction" to Phyllis Webb's *The Vision Tree: Selected Poems* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1982), p. 13.

[6] *Wilson's Bowl* (Toronto: Coach House, 1980), p. 21. "The Kropotkin Poems," within which this poem appears, are dated "1967."

[7] Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* was published in 1963, so was Simon de Beauvoir's *Force of Circumstance* (English version, 1965). Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch*, Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* and Emma Goldman's *The Traffic in Women and other Essays on Feminism* all appeared in 1970.

[8] *Talking*, p. 68.

[9] *Water and Light/Ghazals and Anti Ghazals* (Toronto: Coach House, 1984), p. 12.

[10] *Wilson's Bowl*, p. 38.

[11] *Water and Light*, p. 18.

[12] In a letter to John Hulcoop, 6 January 1980.

[13] In a letter to John Hulcoop, 23 January 1980. Webb herself refers to *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (1977) as the most influential of Rich's books.

[14] Virginia Woolf, in a review of Dorothy Richardson's *Revolving Lights* (19 May 1923), reprinted in *Contemporary Writers* (London: Hogarth, 1965), p. 124. See also *A Room of One's Own* (1928; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963), p. 77; "Women and Fiction" (1929; rpt. in *Granite and Rainbow* (London: Hogarth, 1958), p. 81.

[15] *Talking*, p. 71.

[16] *Talking*, p. 51.

[17] *Talking*, p. 62.

[18] *Talking*, p. 63.

[19] *Talking*, p. 61.

[20] *Talking*, p. 64.

[21] *Talking*, p. 56.

[22] *A Room of One's Own* 112.

[23] *Water and Light*, pp. 60-61. "from the land of / only what is": these are, significantly, the words the poet chose to inscribe in a copy of *Water and Light* given to the author of this article.

[24] (Lantzville, B.C.: Island Writing Series, 1982) n. pag. In this "Preface," Webb takes her lead from and quotes Aifaz Ahmad, editor of *Ghazals of Ghalib: Versions from Urdu* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1971). Ahmad also says that the "movement of Urdu is always *away* from concreteness" (xv).

[25] Jane Austen, *Emma* (first published 1815), vol. 1, ch. 14 and vol. 3, ch. 18.

[26] Virginia Woolf, "Women and Fiction," in *Granite and Rainbow* 81.

[27] In a letter to John Hulcoop, 23 June 1981.

[28] Typescript enclosed in a letter to John Hulcoop, 23 November 1981.

[29] "James Lee's Wife," a sequence of nine dramatic lyrics, is the first poem in Browning's 1864 volume, *Dramatis Personae*. The tenth poem in the first section of *Water and Light* contains obvious allusions to "Andrea del Sarto": "The forward memory / of hand beyond the grasp. / / Not grasping, not at all. *Reaching* is different."

[30] *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Anne Olivier Bell (London: Hogarth, 1977) vol. 1, 1915-1919, p. 181. The "Scripts of Talks for CBC Radio 1955-1964" (in Box 2 of the Phyllis Webb manuscripts formerly at the University of Saskatchewan but now in the Public Archives of Canada in Ottawa) contains a script on Woolf and *A Writer's Diary* (1954).

[31] Note that the third scene of Sondheim's play is entitled "Colour and Light," a phrase which not only recurs many times but which also parallels exactly *Water and Light*. Musically or rhythmically speaking, both phrases consist of a trochee followed by an iamb; the sound of the last six phonemes in both phrases is identical. See also one of Webb's most important early poems (published in *Trio*, 1954), "The Colour of the Light."

[32] See the penultimate paragraph of " 'Bird Song in the apparatus,' " pp. 368-69; see also my Introduction to *Selected Poems*,

1954-1965 (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 2nd printing 1972), pp. 39-42.

[33] *Water and Light*, p. 35. Allusions to music and specifically musical vocabulary are scarce in Webb's early volumes. "Double Entendre," in *Even Your Right Eye* (1956), refers us to Strauss' opera *Der Rosenkavalier*; a cat becomes "a brief lyric / of singing fur" in *The Sea Is Also A Garden* (1962), which contains a piece of modern baroque entitled "A Pang Cantata." Though close to being sound poems themselves, *Naked Poems* are without explicit musical reference and obviously musical vocabulary. *Wilson's Bowl* (1980) presents a "*Duende* / Dark Song" and a voice (Lilo Berliner's?) that says "I beat my wings / . . . against great songs / of little earth" (63, 69); but not until "Edmonton Centre, Sept. 23/80" in *The Vision Tree* 1982) does music really flood Webb's poetry. Its advent, in "Edmonton Centre," is aurally impressive. The word "Music," capitalized, appears four times; also *key, keys, bassist, playing, Edmonton Symphony, fiddling, vibes, final number, Maureen Forrester*, and *Trout Quintet*. Having arrived, like the compact disc, music is suddenly everywhere in Webb's poetry. Retrospectively, I understand a statement the poet made in response to my initial reading of "I Daniel": "I kept worrying about whether or not you understand the reference to the music" (Letter to John Hulcoop, 28 June 1983).

[34] A large number of books have been written, many of them fairly recent, on the ghazal, in general, and Ghalib's ghazals, in particular. Of those I consulted, apart from the *Ghazals of Ghalib*, edited by Aijaz Ahmad and already referred to, L. C. Randhir's *Ghazal: The Beauty Eternal* (New Delhi: Milind Publications, 1982) provided me with the most detailed characterization of the form, and Annemarie Schimmel's *A Dance of Sparks: Imagery of Fire in Ghalib's Poetry* (New Delhi: Vikas, 1979), the most interesting introduction to Ghalib's exemplification and exploitation of the form.

[35] *A Dance of Sparks*, p. 20. Schimmel entitles one chapter of her study "Ghalib's Dancing-Poem."

[36] This brief enumeration of some technical aspects of the ghazal derives from L. C. Randhir's *Ghazal: The Beauty Eternal*, pp. 9-13.

[37] Webb, Preface to *Sunday Water/Thirteen Anti Ghazals*.

[38] *New Larousse Encyclopaedia of Mythology*, trans. by Richard Aldington and Delano Ames (London: Hamlyn, 1966), pp. 36-37.

[39] *Talking*, p. 63. My emphasis.

[40] *Talking*, p. 64.

[41] The last phrase is from Matt. 26:6: "wars and the rumours of wars." Webb herself has identified Daniel with Timothy Findley whose novels, most obviously *The Wars* and *Famous Last Words*, are rife with "wars and the rumours of wars."

[42] A final parallel between Woolf and Webb begs for further attention here. Webb's dream-like vision "of the Leaning Tower of Pisa" tilts us towards Woolf's late and very important essay "The Leaning Tower" (in *The Moment and Other Essays* [London: Hogarth, pp. 105-25]).

JOHN HULCOOP

LES FOUS DE BASSAN / IN THE SHADOW OF THE WIND

CHOOSING A TITLE for the translation of a novel into another language can be very difficult. A direct translation of the original title may be judged inappropriate, and even when an apparently happy alternative is found, it may have a thematic import subtly different from the original. This is certainly the case in Sheila Fischman's English translation of Anne Hébert's novel, *Les Fous de Bassan*,[1] to which the title *In the Shadow of the Wind*[2] has been given. On first impression, Fischman's English title may seem more attractive than the French since it has a poetic resonance in keeping with Anne Hébert's lyrical style. It also avoids the use of the word "gannet" which is the literal translation of *fou de Bassan*. "A horrible word," the translator is reported to have protested, "I can't call it The Gannets."[3] In the search for

a substitute, a phrase was taken from a passage late in the novel where Olivia's female ancestors speak to her "in the shadow of the wind." Three times in Olivia's recollection of the scene this phrase recurs, as insistent as the wind "that swirls all around the house" and makes Griffin Creek ring with the voices of patient women speaking out of their long past of female experience. Theirs are cautionary voices warning against the evil that threatens Olivia's young womanhood. Understood in this context, the title *In the Shadow of the Wind* announces one of the narrative threads in the story of the "calamity of Griffin Creek." Yet the English phrasing does not in itself evoke the mysterious world of threatening violence suggested by the French expression "dans l'ombre et le vent" that it purports to translate.

The use of the phrase "in the shadow of the wind" as title may also be intended to point to the role of the wind in directing the events of the narrative. The Reverend Nicholas Jones, and later Stevens Brown, insist upon the importance of the continuous presence of the wind. Early in the telling of his version of events, the minister enjoins the reader:

> Throughout this story you must never lose sight of the wind, of the presence of the wind, its keen voice in our ears, its salty breath on our lips. No act is performed by man or woman in this land that is not accompanied by the wind. Hair, dresses, shirts, trousers clatter in the wind, upon bare bodies. The sea's breath enters our clothing, uncovers our salt-glazed breasts. Our porous souls are pierced straight through. The wind here has only blown too hard and *what took place was possible only because of the wind, the maddening, intoxicating wind.*

and at the end of the novel, Stevens reiterates,

> Throughout this story, I've told you already, you must never lose sight of the wind.[4]

In reference to the role of the wind in the work of Anne Hébert, Denis Bouchard makes the suggestion, "Le vent est-il un des clés de l'érotisme?"[5] And indeed, in two of the most powerfully erotic scenes of *Les Fous de Bassan*, the principal character, Stevens, identifies himself passionately with the fury of the wind. In the wild three-day storm that brings the fateful summer of 1936 to an end, Stevens remains outdoors throughout, revelling in the violence of the storm and trying to bring his cousins Nora and Olivia under the spell of its untamed force. On the night of 31 August, when the girls are murdered, Stevens is again on the shore, living out the fury of the storm, but this time the storm is the storm within him created by the wild forces of his passion, in stark and terrible contrast to the external tranquillity of the calm, moonlit night. The theme of erotic passion is certainly there, embodied in the fury of wind and sea, but this is not adequately conveyed by the title phrase *In the Shadow of the Wind.* For all its poetic overtones, the title of the English translation is strangely devoid of literal meaning, and the metaphor — if there is one — is not of Hébert's making.

The French title *Les Fous de Bassan*, on the other hand, although it strikes the reader at first as baldly prosaic, gradually takes on imaginative and symbolic meaning. The gannets which have been dropped from the English title are of essential importance to the novel. Indeed, the term *fou de Bassan* operates on two levels, each more complex than might at first be supposed. Taken first quite literally as the name of the bird species, the *fou de Bassan* is of central significance in the novel. The history, and particularly the natural history, of the gannet colonies in the St. Lawrence provide the raw material from which are created its images, symbols, and themes. Because these birds have been known to residents of the St. Lawrence

since the Gulf was first visited by explorers, and have been familiar to every generation inhabiting Griffin Creek since the first Loyalist settlers arrived in 1782, they constitute an ancestral experience, a kind of racial memory, that makes the gannet a mythic bird. Every child, including Stevens Brown, has grown up with gannets and the sea birds that usually associate with them, especially the many species of gulls, in huge mixed avian communities. The gannet is the most singular and striking feature of the avifauna of the Gulf, and in the novel it is therefore also symbolically representative of all wild birds of the sea.

The gannet, *Sula bassanus* (Linnaeus), is known in Canada chiefly because of the much-publicized nesting colony on Bonaventure Island, but there are also colonies on Anticosti and the Bird Rocks in the Magdalen Islands and on the islands off Newfoundland and New Brunswick.[6] Nests are placed on the ledges of cliffs or on the flat top of coastal islands above the cliffs, where the concentrations of birds may be very large. The gannet colonies of the Gulf of St. Lawrence were first described by Jacques Cartier on his voyage to Canada in 1534:

> Icelles isles aussi plaines de ouaiseaux que ung pré de herbe, qui heirent au dedans d'icelles isles, dont la plus grande [Bird Rock] estoit plaine de *Margaulx* qui sont blancs et plus grans que ouays; Et en l'autre y en avoit paroillement en une quantité d'elle. . . . Nous nommames icelles isles, isles de Margaulx.[7]

When Audubon visited Bird Rock three centuries later, and saw the top of the rock, he "thought it covered with snow to the depth of several feet," so dense was the concentration of gannets. "The air above for a hundred yards, and for some distance around the whole rock," he continued, "was filled with gannets on the wing, which, from our position, made it appear as if a heavy fall of snow was directly above us."[8] A similar comparison of the concentration of gannets to a heavy fall of snow is made several times by Anne Hébert in her novel.

Gannets arrive in the spring and remain in the Gulf during the breeding season; thus they enter into that conscious awareness of the environment that sensitizes the residents of a little village like Griffin Creek, the fictional community which Anne Hébert has called into being from the country of her memories.[9] Stevens in later years compares the unoccupied houses of the old village to the abandoned nests of gannets, and the old minister musing in his arm chair pictures the gannets as he has seen them all his life, coming to feed with the first light of dawn:

> The red globe of the sun climbs to the horizon amid the screeching of sea birds. In snowy bands the gannets leave their nest on the summit of the cliff, plunge vertically into the sea, pointed at beak and tail like knives, send up sprays of foam.

The minister's swift evocation of gannets feeding is as accurate as an ornithologist's account. His capsule phrase "pointed at beak and tail like knives" creates the same silhouette that W. E. Godfrey, author of *The Birds of Canada*, calls up by his reference to the characteristic "pointed at both ends look" of the gannet,[10] and Godfrey's description of the bird's dive substantiates the accuracy of the minister's observations:

> Gannets secure their fish food by diving from heights up to 100 feet in the air. When a fish is sighted, the bird checks its speed momentarily, half closes its wings, and drops head-first like an arrow, vertically or on a slight plane. As it hits the water it sends the spray high into the air. A flock of living Gannets is a fascinating sight.[11]

In the last scenes of the novel when Stevens, in his hallucinations, is harassed by the great white sea birds that dive at

his heart, he has the same visual picture of the gannet's plunge:

> The gannet suddenly reduces its speed, half-closes its wings, drops head first, like an arrow, vertically. Doesn't close its wings till it touches the water, sending a shower of foam into the air. I've gazed so often at this splendid bird . . .

Anne Hébert's familiarity with the sea birds of the Gulf of St. Lawrence in the Quebec of her childhood inspires these descriptions, as her "Note to the Reader" affirms. Furthermore, she has the kind of visual imagination that pictures birds in their characteristic habitat and behaviour, whether it be a hooded falcon on the falconer's wrist or a gannet diving for fish. However, her observations of the gannets are obviously also supported by meticulous research into the natural history of the species. Stevens' description of the gannet's dive, particularly in the French text of *Les Fous de Bassan*, echoes the passage from Godfrey as translated in the French edition of his *Birds of Canada* and suggests that the latter is the source of the literary text.[12] The referential function of the ornithological text assures scientific authenticity at the same time that the poet-novelist is renewing her language and drawing her symbols from nature.[13]

The most imaginative and powerful description of the sea birds, a description in which the gannet is physically and figuratively dominant, is that of Stevens' idiot brother Percival, who is recalling a scene on the shore where his cousins disappeared:

> I run on the shore. My shoes full of sand. Sit down to empty them. Level with the waves. See the foam rise. Burst. White sprays. Shattered. White mist in the sky. *Birds come out of the sea white with foam.* Take flight in the gray sky. *September.* Feathers white with foam. *Gray feathers. Yellow strands of gannets.* Birds of the white foam. Born on the foam-white sea. *Their piercing cries* born of the waves. *Their tough beaks bore into the waves,* then emerge from the water. Mad birds shatter their watery shell. To be born anew. Filling the sky with heart-rending shrieks. Whirl about my head. Burst my ears. My shoes empty now. Still I sit on the wet sand. Thinking hard about my cousins Nora and Olivia, who are lost. And what if my grandmother, one fine morning. While everyone slept in the houses. Had taken them both out to sea. To lose them. Drown them like kittens? The high sea on the horizon. Its deep belly of water and sand. Its well-kept secrets. Live fish, dead beasts, drifting skeletons of boats, black waterweeds . . . Ah! I have no more breath. A long-drawn out sound. Rest my head on my knees. Weep into the wind. Deafened by the cry of the birds. *They'll go away in squawking flocks.* Soon. *To Florida.* My brother Stevens with them. My brother Stevens only passing through here, with us, the people of Griffin Creek. Just for the summer. Like the squawking birds (my italics.)

Out of Percival's untutored mind come images of the sea and the sea birds as imaginative as those in W. B. Yeats' "The White Birds": "Were we only white birds my beloved, buoyed out on the foam of the sea." Yet these fragmentary impressions are in reality authentic perceptions of bird behaviour, and the whole passage is a demonstration of the way in which the creative imagination works. Percival's perception of "yellow strands of gannets" comes from the visual effect of the wash of yellow ochre over the head and neck of the adult gannet with its otherwise shining white plumage. But the birds do not attain adult plumage until they are several years old; as first-year immatures they are a dark greyish brown (like man yof the gulls), hence the "gray feathers" among the "feathers white with foam."

The physical character of the gannet's bill, which Percival describes as boring into the waves, is considered by ornithologists an essential diagnostic feature; in the novel, it assumes particular importance when the birds attack Stevens

in the mythical Promethean scene at the end of the narrative.[14] Fischman's translation "tough beaks" conveys the character of the bill somewhat less effectively than Hébert's "becs durs," since *dur* means hard and harsh as well as tough, and thus gives the bill the capacity to break open the ceiling of Stevens' room in the birds' attack on him. Gannets leave their breeding grounds in the fall, moving down the coast as far as Florida,[15] to which Percival's brother Stevens will also migrate. It is September, and both Stevens and the birds will soon be gone, following the migration pattern plotted by ornithologists.[16] In the context of Hébert's highly lyrical work, these authenticated details give additional force to the concrete symbol of the gannet that is central to the novel and gives it its original French title.

Most insistent in Percival's evocation of the sea birds is his reference to their piercing cries; they fill the sky with a clamour of sound that is heart-rending and ear-shattering. Anyone who has visited a nesting colony of sea birds knows that inescapable clamour. The noise of the sea birds that deafens Percival is an amalgam of many voices, of which the gannets are the symbolic core. These cries are also central to the hallucinatory images that assault Stevens' distraught mind in the final scenes of the novel. Hospitalized with other shell-shocked victims of the war, his "own peculiar horror" has little to do with the war; it is his personal past that unhinges Stevens. In the images of that past are mingled "apparitions of fire and sword, *great cries of water birds*, screaming girls raped by the light of fires, the sound of galloping tides." (my italics.)

The powerful image of the gannet is capable, on its own, of triggering the whole story of Stevens' past; "it takes just one overly precise image and the rest follow . . ." At the same time, the gannets pursuing Stevens take on the function of the Furies of classical mythology; like the legendary hero Orestes, Stevens is their deranged victim. In the English translation of the novel the allusive richness of this mythical role is considerably diminished by the necessity of using the English word "gannet" to replace the French *fou de Bassan*. The English word does no more than designate, literally, a species of sea birds, while the French term *fou de Bassan* (commonly shortened to *fou* in popular usage) has another dimension of meaning essential to the signification of the novel. *Fou* (the same word as "fool") also means fool, madman, or lunatic. The double connotation of the deceptively simple French title enhances the value of the symbol of the *fou de Bassan* in effecting the internal coherence of the novel. The inherent difficulty of rendering this term adequately by an English equivalent is a significant loss to the novel in the English translation. The key word *fou* and the theme of madness are first introduced by the Reverend Nicholas Jones when he applies the epithet *fou* to the Atkins twins who keep house for him, and claims it to be a family weakness:

> They're mad [*folles*], those girls. Not total idiots like their brother Percival, nor evil like their other brother, Stevens, but crazy [*folles*] all the same . . . The girls are haunted. It runs in the family.

Presented as a malediction, referred to by Stevens as "the evil power that's been set loose in the house since the very beginning of time," whose very roots his father had seemed to be constantly trying to extirpate from the child's body by conscientious beatings, this "heredity" is at the same time genetic and social, the product of the repressed psyche of a family and a whole community. Stevens, the pivotal character of the novel, is undermined by a subconscious guilt associated with sexuality; his neurosis ren-

ders him, like many of the male characters of Hébert's novels, incapable of normal sexual experience. He confesses to his American friend, as he comes to understand himself at the end of the novel, that he has never loved anyone, "not even you, old Mick, perhaps Percival, that other self of mine." Stevens, whose suppressed eroticism surfaces in acts of cruelty, belongs to the group of Hébertian characters for whom Elisabeth speaks in *Kamouraska*: "Nous sommes possédés."[17] It is in this sense that the word *fou* becomes a thematic key word in the novel, and in this sense also that Stevens applies it to himself when he exults in the fury of the storm:

> I took it into my head to live out the storm to the very end, as fully as possible, at the heart of its epicentre, like the madman that I am [*semblable à un fou que je suis*], finding sensual pleasure in the fury of the sea . . . [in] the rain and the spindrift . . . I find the expression of my innermost violence, my most secret life.

Stevens' idiot brother Percival is also a victim of the repressive social code represented in the community of Griffin Creek by the rigorous but hypocritical Calvinism of its pastor. If we regard the author of *Les Fous de Bassan* as an artist in the Jungian sense, revealing the subconscious myths of a society, Percival can be taken as an allegorical figure representing the repressed psyche of the Quebec of the years before the Quiet Revolution. But Percival's madness is of a quality quite different from Stevens — his is rather the folly of innocent simple-mindedness and devotion. He, who has seen more than anyone else of what transpired on the beach, becomes a kind of commentator on the action of the novel, communicating to the reader impressions of events that he refuses to reveal to others, out of loyalty to Stevens. In Percival's perception of the gannets emerging from the sea in the passage we quoted earlier, the physical reality of the birds and the metaphysical theme of madness are fused: "*Oiseaux fous crevant leur coquille d'eau.*" I quote this in French because the phrase cannot be rendered adequately in English, for the *oiseaux fous* are the gannets (*fous*) of the French title and, at the same time, the "mad birds" of Fischman's translation. No single English equivalent does justice to the double connotation of the original French expression.

The use of the *fous de Bassan* as the title of Anne Hébert's novel, and as the image that becomes the organizing principle of its cohesive structure, testifies again to the importance of birds as symbols in her work. It is clear that the *fou de Bassan* in this novel is as central to the signification of the work as the falcon in her richly allusive poem "Le Tombeau des rois." Hébert's precise and rigorous use of the image that gives the French novel its title, and her sensitivity to its imaginative overtones of symbolic meaning, recall the remarks in Northrop Frye's introduction to the dialogue between Anne Hébert and the late Frank Scott on the translation of "Le Tombeau des rois," in which Frye reminds us of the distinction made by Gerard Manley Hopkins between the explicit meaning of a work and the meaning given by "the progression of images and metaphors."[18]

The title of Fischman's translation uses a different image and a different metaphor, and thereby points the novel in a different direction. Yet the English title *In the Shadow of the Wind*, unlike the precise French title with its richness of connotation, only vaguely indicates what this direction will be. All it really does is to suggest some tenuous thematic connection with the wind. But with the wind in what role — as destroyer, or preserver? Thoughtful reflection does not illuminate its function, or prepare us for the violence of the narrative. We discover in the

English title only an aborted metaphor, for surely "in the shadow of the wind" there can be no threatening violence!

NOTES

[1] Paris: Seuil, 1982.

[2] Toronto: Stoddart, 1983.

[3] Alberto Manguel, "Le mot juste," *Saturday Night*, July 1983, p. 53.

[4] Italics mine. The French wording of the minister's phrase *à cause du vent qui entête et rend fou* (*Fous*, p. 26) uses the word *fou* which becomes a key word in the novel.

[5] Denis Bouchard, *Une Lecture d'Anne Hébert* (Montréal: Hurtubise, 1977), p. 66.

[6] American Ornithologists' Union, *Check-list of North American Birds*, 6th ed. (Lawrence, Kansas: Allen Press, 1983), p. 35.

[7] *Relation originale du voyage de Jacques Cartier au Canada en 1534*. Documents inédits sur Jacques Cartier et le Canada (nouvelle série) publiés par H. Michelant et A. Ramé (Paris: Librairie Tross, 1867).

[8] Journal entry of 14 June 1833, cited in A. C. Bent, *Life Histoiries of North American Petrels and Pelicans and Their Allies*, U.S. National Museum Bulletin 121 (New York: Dover, 1964. First published by the U.S. Government Printing Office, 1922), p. 217.

[9] In her "Note to the Reader," Hébert explains:

> All my recollections of the north shore and the south shore of the St. Lawrence River, and of the Gulf and the islands, have been blended together and turned over to my imagination, where they have become a single place called Griffin Creek, located between Cap Sec and Cap Sauvagine. A fictional place between the city of Quebec and the Atlantic Ocean, the site of a story that bears no relation to any actual event that might have occurred.

[10] W. E. Godfrey, *The Birds of Canada*, National Museum of Canada Bulletin 203, Biology Series 773 (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1966), p. 30.

[11] Godfrey, p. 31.

[12] Compare the French text of the novel, p. 238,

> Le fou de Bassan modère soudain sa vitesse, ferme à moitié ses ailes, se laisse tomber, tête première, comme une flèche, à la verticale. Ne ferme ses ailes qu'au moment de toucher l'eau, faisant gicler dans l'air un nuage d'écume.

with the corresponding text from Godfrey's *Les Oiseaux du Canada* (1967), p. 38,

> Lorsqu'un poisson est en vue, l'oiseau modère sa vitesse momentanément, ferme à moitié ses ailes et se laisse tomber tête première comme une flèche, à la verticale ou sur un plan légèrement incline. Il ne ferme les ailes qu'au moment de toucher l'eau, faisant gicler dans l'air un nuage d'écume.

[13] Cf. Pierre Pagé, *Anne Hébert* (Ottawa: Fides, 1965), p. 9: "La nature, voilà l'âme de toute sa poésie, et sans cesse ni lassitude, elle y renouvelle son langage et y puise ses symboles."

[14] Readers and critics alike have been struck by Hébert's imaginative use of myth in this novel. In "Bible, Mythes et Fous de Bassan," published in *Canadian Literature*, 104 (Spring 1985), pp. 178-82, Antoine Sirois alludes to the importance of the reference to the myth of Prometheus. The gannets play a role analogous to the eagle as an instrument of divine punishment.

[15] *Check-list of North American Birds*, p. 35.

[16] Bent, p. 229, records the following dates of early arrival for fall birds moving down the coast: Massachusetts, Essex County, 28 August; Rhode Island, 10 September; Black Island, 4 October; New York, Montauk Point, 5 October.

[17] Anne Hébert, *Kamouraska* (Paris: Seuil, 1970), p. 158.

[18] Anne Hébert and Frank Scott, *Dialogue sur la traduction* (Montréal: Editions HMH, 1970), pp. 12-13.

MARGARET BELCHER

ANNE HÉBERT: MÉTAMORPHOSES LUTÉTIENNES

De l'innocence de l'enfant à la décadence de l'adulte, de la nuit froide au jour doré de soleil, de la Nouvelle France à une France lourde du poids de sa propre histoire, l'envergure de l'oeuvre

d'Anne Hébert s'étend entre des pôles géographiques, esthétiques et métaphysiques. Femme-poète, fille et cousine de poètes, Anne Hébert offre en exemple un trajet spirituel qui fait parallèle non seulement avec celui de ses compatriotes québécois, mais aussi avec celui de ses contemporains de partout. Dans ses romans, à l'intérieur du moi sélectif, privé, se trouve alors le moi collectif, celui du Québec, peuple et pays. Mais, en plus, de son premier roman *Les Chambres de bois* jusqu'à son plus récent *Les Fous de Bassan*, Anne Hébert ne cesse de chercher à presenter à ses lecteurs le miroir d'un chemin propre à tous.

La recherche d'une identité est un thème tant soit peu banal au vingtième siècle où tout un chacun explique son angoisse existentielle ou son mal de tête par la perte de son identité, par une crise de personnalité. Pourtant, chez Anne Hébert cette recherche ne se limite pas à une quête cognitive où la conscience, souveraine dans sa solitude, son isolement même d'un monde étranger et aliénant, confronte un monde absurde. Tandis qu'un Sartre ou un Camus (exception faite de *La Chute*) s'efforce de persuader au lecteur que son être glisse sur un gouffre sans fond tout en présentant des personnages bien assis dans leur réalité quotidienne, Anne Hébert fait douter de cette réalité en questionnant jusqu'à nos moyens de connaître ce monde qui nous entoure, et cela même depuis son premier roman. Car, pour tous ses héros et héroïnes il est question surtout de leur parler. Rechercher l'être du personnage équivaut rechercher une langue propre à refléter non seulement le mois, mais surtout le mode dynamique d'être au monde. C'est une quête donc qui vise et l'être individuel et le groupe social pour lequel l'identité collective est problématique.

Avant les années soixante-dix, le Québec se considérait une île francophone entourée d'un océan anglophone; pour les Québécois, l'Acadie et les autres communautés de la francophone au Canada existaient à peine. La langue québécoise, longtemps source de fierté à cause de la pureté de ses formes linguistiques, mais source d'humilité aussi par une comparaison obligatoire avec la métropole, se trouvait submergée par les vagues d'une culture anglophone. Anne Hébert suit donc le chemin difficile qui part des années précédant la Révolution Tranquille au Québec et qui se voit résolue avec la fin des années soixante-dix dans un Paris souterrain et décadent, lieu qui offre au lecteur une richesse fantastique qui répond aux besoins d'approfondir tout être, toute culture. Et pour traduire cette nouvelle richesse il a fallu inventer la langue.

Dans sa vie privée, Anne Hébert fait preuve de l'attitude ambivalente de l'écrivain québécois devant la question de la langue maternelle. C'est une situation qui n'est pas l'apanage du Québécois; elle se présente à tout écrivain qui naît dans une région où l'on ne parle pas la langue standard. Tout écrivain dit "régionaliste" ou "de terroir" doit faire face au choix entre la langue maternelle, apprise comme moyen de communication immédiate et mode d'être non-réflexive, et la langue médiatisée par la société comme le moyen de communication privilégié, accepté et même imposé par le groupe dominant. Ainsi au Québec le groupe d'écrivains qui s'associait au "refus global" avait tendance à se servir du "joual" comme moyen d'expression, langue close qui refuse entrée à ceux qui essaient de l'apprendre et langue qui exprime le mieux l'état de colonisation refusé. D'autres écrivains, pourtant, acceptent de modifier leur parler pour trouver une forme acceptable à une plus large francophonie pour enrichir la langue à ses racines mêmes. Néanmoins cette synthèse de langues ne résout pas les tensions qui continuent à se faire sentir chez les écri-

vains francophones du Canada.

De son père, qui était employé dans le gouvernement provincial du Québec et poète à ses heures, Anne Hébert a reçu le goût d'une langue soignée, sinon cartésienne. En plus, à partir de 1954 et dès son premier séjour en France, elle a été tiraillée entre son pays d'origine et son pays d'élection, à tel point qu'elle fait la navette entre le Québec et la France entre 1955 et la date de la mort de sa mère, passant un an en chaque lieu. Comme manifestent plusieurs exemples dans la littérature québécois, tel le *Salut Galarneau!* de Jacques Godbout ou le *Tit-Coq* de Gratien Gélinas, le prestige de la culture française, et surtout de sa capitale Paris, exerce une attraction considérable sur l'écrivain francophone. Lieu d'une promesse de libération de la dominance anglophone subie dans le pays natal, mais lieu symbolique aussi de rejet, Paris offre aux Français de l'Amérique du Nord toutes les variations souhaitables pour un rite de passage.

Catherine aussi, l'héroïne des *Chambres de bois*, quitte son pays féerique — "C'était au pays de Catherine, une ville de hauts fourneaux flambant sur le ciel, jour et nuit, comme de noirs palais de l'Apocalypse" — pour retrouver le pays de son oncle. Là, par une journée de pluie et de brouillard, elle se perd avec ses soeurs dans la campagne où elle fait la connaissance de Michel, son futur époux, et de sa soeur à lui, Lia. Cette scène, mi-rêve et mi-perception brouillée, ne se laisse pas saisir, refuse ses coordonnées topographiques et meme diégétiques pour laisser le lecteur aux prises d'un vertige. Catherine pourtant a l'air de ne pas s'inquiéter; il n'est pas encore question de son être. Après son mariage, cependant, ce pays de brume cède la place à la fumée et au noir de l'appartement de Michel à Paris. D'abord Catherine découvre dans son mariage à Michel l'occasion de se libérer du pays d'origine, et par là du destin d'un passé historique imposé par sa naissance, celui des mythes et des racontars de sa tante, son père et son oncle. Catherine dans son nouvel état civil cherche à se créer son propre histoire — celle de la vraie femme traditionnelle qui fait les emplettes, prépare les repas, et ainsi de suite. Mais Michel, sous sa guise de seigneur (et par là, issu du ventre de la France historique) lui impose une identité de femme noble. Dans une scène importante, Michel commence à raconter la vie de Catherine telle qu'il se la figure. L'élan vers la libération du terroir se voit donc enlisé dans une nouvelle subjugation où c'est le poids d'une culture à la fois familière et étrangère qui courbe les contours d'une identité qui émerge:

> Toi, Catherine? Tu écoutes ma musique et tu l'aimes; tu la fais chanter plus fort, car ta petite vie est si bien jointe à celle de ma maison et de mon jardin qu'elle presse sur mon coeur et le convoque sans répit.

Telle le larve du papillon qui se prépare dans le cocon, Catherine est "mise à mûrir en des chambres fermées." La jeune fille inculte qui, avec ses soeurs, aimait courir pieds nus au grand soleil d'été, doit maintenant se faire aux "fêtes nocturnes de la fièvre et l'angoisse." Surtout cette nouvelle subjugation s'opère à travers l'imposition d'une langue autre qui prend la forme ici de la musique de Michel, mais qui ailleurs se présente dans les poèmes que Catherine doit apprendre.

Donc cours les premiers passages des *Chambres de bois* les images de la pureté et de la liberté enfantine cèdent la place à celles d'une décadence malsaine, irrespirable. Prisonnière de son mari, Catherine sombre vers une existence figée d'où sont exclus les conforts physiques de la chaleur et de la nourriture et ceux, non moins importants pour la santé psychologique, de la securité et de l'amour. Paris, qui semblait objet de désir non-

réalisé pour la jeune Catherine, reste en arrière-plan; c'est une force qui se laisse presentir mais qui ne se montre directement que par moments. Les deux impulsions d'attraction et de répulsion que Paris exerce sur Catherine se concrétisent dans les personnages de Michel, jeune seigneur et de Lia sa soeur. Enfermée dans l'appartement à Paris avec cet étrange couple frère et soeur, Catherine n'a trouvé dans ce retour aux origines seigneuriales et françaises que corruption, décadence et inceste. En plus, prisonnière du passé, et meme plus prisonnière à Paris qu'au Québec, Catherine n'a pu arriver à la communication salutaire avec l'autre ni à se trouver une langue où elle puisse s'installer. Cet échec de Catherine se marque par le départ vers la mer, deuxième quête d'une origine maternelle. Et pour de bon, elle trouve l'image maternelle dans la servante des seigneurs, Aline, qui surveille l'éclosion de Catherine en papillon. Cette nouvelle mère sait alimenter l'être de Catherine, lui fournissant l'amour qui a fait défaut dans l'existence de l'héroïne hébertienne.

Une fois la servante morte, Catherine se sèvre de ces liens maternels qui l'ont tenue en état de dépendence. La relation maître-esclave, seigneur-serf est rompue pour laisser place à la nouvelle indépendence d'une Catherine qui n'est pas encore sûre d'elle-même, mais qui sait tenir à distance la vie de Michel et de Lia. Dès son retour a Paris, Catherine rend visite à leur appartement:

> Tout de suite, Catherine vit des choses tombées, des choses perdues, des choses salies, des choses sans maître. Et soudain comme parfois on isole un motif dans un dessin abstrait et compliqué, elle reconnut, à travers le fouillis de la pièce, leur ordre à eux.

Et transformée par son amour pour Bruno, le jeune homme dont elle a fait connaissance pendant son séjour au bord de la mer, et par son indépendence psychologique, voilà Catherine mue en Schéhérazade "conteuse qui radote durant les longues veillées," qui sait à la fin citer contre Michel une phrase tirée d'un des poèmes qu'elle devait apprendre. Libérée de son passé avec Michel et de tout le poids d'une histoire seigneuriale, et ayant reussi l'evasion salutaire, Catherine saura maintenant répondre à la générosité de Bruno avec sa "seule joie d'être avec lui, parmi les choses vivantes." Ainsi au devenir historique s'oppose le goût de l'instant, aux images figées d'un moi préparé une culture aliénante s'oppose la liberté de se créer selon les désirs de l'imagination.

A travers les métamorphoses de Catherine le lecteur sait voir les thèmes du rapport ambivalent entre la protagoniste et la culture française. Dans les chambres de bois de l'appartement de Michel se trouvent et la matière brute des forêts Québec et la patine d'une culture française. Au sortir de son enfance, alors, Catherine a à choisir entre s'insérer dans une structure chronologique et cognitive où la révérence envers le passé est de rigueur, ou vivre dans un *hic et nunc* qui n'a que faire du passé ni de l'avenir mais où prime la joie. Le statut de Paris dans cette oeuvre est assez clair: rangé du côté de Michel, de l'ancien régime et de la bienséance, Paris exerce sur la jeune héroïne des *Chambres de bois* une force maléfique qui essaie de détruire l'élan vers la joie, et la jouissance du présent.

Expression alors de besoin de liberté, de se libérer d'un présent sans vraie identité et d'un passé d'opprimé et opprimant même transporté à l'étranger, *Les Chambres de bois* semble symboliser toute tentative d'évasion dans les oeuvres d'Anne Hébert. Lors de sa parution ce livre était néanmoins exemplaire parce que, oeuvre de lumière, la résolution du roman offrait au lecteur l'espoir d'un avenir, mais un avenir *ailleurs*. La noirceur, le déses-

poir et aliénation des contes tels que *Le Torrent* et de la poésie hébertienne, thèmes qu'on trouve aussi chez d'autres écrivains québécois à cette époque, révèlent plutot l'échec de tout essai de libération. Mais l'échec n'est pas tout à fait absent des *Chambres de bois* non plus. Malgré le fait que Catherine réussit à s'evader et à se trouver ailleurs dans ces pays ensoleillés et avec cet étranger Bruno, ce n'est qu'au prix d'un départ et de la non-patrie de l'exil. Ce lieu postif de lumière et d'amour se contraste avec le chez-soi, aussi bien qu'avec le chez-ses-ancêtres, Paris, qui n'est que des bois sombres, un tombeau des ancêtres isolant comme les bois des domaines de ses seigneurs ancêtraux et qui n'offre que le même isolement individuel et culturel.

Si pourtant dans *Les Chambres de bois* le voyage à Paris finit par être un échec qui reflète surtout celui du personnage principal à s'évader de ses chambres de bois, dans *Héloise* (1980) Paris se transforme par un voyage vertical de la surface aux profondeurs, voyage qui symbolise l'approfondissement de l'être et de tout être. Cette opposition entre passé et présent, entre dialectique et extase, s'accentue dans *Héloise*, conte poétique plutot que roman et qui se situe encore une fois à Paris. Mais, après une intervalle de vingt-cinq ans, les données de la situation ne sont plus les mêmes. Maintenant installée définitivement à Paris, Anne Hébert se préoccupe moins des problèmes posés par une adolescence québécoise en plein développement pour faire face à la problématique de l'imagination aux prises avec l'existence moderne. De la douce Catherine à travers la violence refoulée d'Elizabeth dans *Kamouraska*, et la méchante soeur Julie des *Enfants du sabbat*, héritière d'un passé démoniaque, il semble plutot d'évidence même que la femme protagoniste d'*Héloise* serait vampire, vrai être fantastique. Hantant les couloirs du métropolitain, et n'en sortant que la nuit, Héloise et son compagnon Birotteau cherchent leurs victimes parmi les habitants de Paris, société à deux faces. Dans *Héloise* alors, et au contraire des *Chambres de bois*, Paris n'est plus à abandonner mais plutot à decouvrir. Derrière le masque du moderne se révèle un ancien système de valeurs où regnent la décadence et le mal, mais aussi la volupté du rêve.

Pour l'écrivain qui veut être à la page (et peu nombreux sont des écrivains tel Stendhal qui sont contents de se laisser lire par les générations suivantes) Paris offre le dernier cri du monde moderne. L'acier inoxydable, le verre, la plastique, les couleurs vifs, toute la materialité du monde moderne refuse le passé — toute souillure disparaît avec un coup de torchon — et ne laisse pressentir l'avenir. Et pourtant, cette emphase sur le présent qui semblait l'idéal même recherché à la fin des *Chambres de bois* se révèle dans *Héloise* être le cercueil de l'imagination, car aucune sortie n'est possible vers un ailleurs. Pour Christine, jeune femme et coryphée à l'Opéra, le lieu nu de l'appartement moderne laisse libre voie à son imagination à elle, celle d'une jeune fille à la page. En rêve elle dispose les meubles, coud les rideaux, invente des tissus et des couleurs; c'est à eux d'habiter le studio, de lui donner vie. Mais pour Christine il est clair qu'il n'est pas question de son être. Bien installée dans un contexte familiale, elle n'a pas à douter de la validité de son existence; c'est donc à partir d'une base sûre qu'elle pourra s'aventurer dans le rêve, rêve sans profondeur et qui reste solidement ancré dans une réalité banale.

Mais Bernard, mari de Christine et jeune poète qui fait son droit, recule devant l'éblouissante blancheur des murs de l'appartement choisi par sa femme:

> Tout glisse ice. Il n'y a prise sur rien. Tout a été raboté, lissé, émaillé. La nudité originelle. Les limbes. Le néant.

Et ce poète réfléchit:

> Pas l'ombre d'un signe. Jamais je ne pourrai travailler ici. La page blanche reprise par quatre murs et un plafond bas. Vertige. Le temps n'est pas encore commencé dans ces lieux. C'est d'avant les infusoires et le plancton. D'avant la création du monde.

Ni écrire ni faire l'amour. La modernité crue est l'image même de la mort stérile pour Bernard. Conte le prêt-à-porter et le banal de la vie moderne, Héloise offre l'unique, une plénitude qui met en relief l'absence et le vide du quotidien. Et Héloise, femme-vampire, mine l'existence de Bernard. Représentante d'une ancienne société, elle offre à Bernard beaucoup plus que n'offre la réalité superficielle du monde occidental moderne; elle séduit par la volupté de l'abyme, du gouffre et de l'absolu; elle présente la tentation de se dépasser, et de refuser ainsi le banal. "L'absolue vérité ... se cache au fond là où aucun mensonge ni pitié peuvent subsister."

A Bernard poète, qui veut s'installer dans le temps, Héloise donne l'occasion de se baigner dans un devenir. Orphelin de père et surtout de mère, Bernard, comme l'était aussi Catherine, est désancré, ayant perdu ses origines. Il ne saura donc comme Christine se hasarder dans un présent illimité. Pour lui, la présence d'Héloise révèle d'abord la tentation de se réunir à la mère. Ainsi c'est pour se retrouver que Bernard prend l'appartement meublé à l'ancienne. A un present avec Christine dans une ville moderne s'oppose un ailleurs avec Héloise où se passe pour Bernard sa vraie vie.

Alors se présente le paradoxe d'un Paris ancien — le monde des antiquités, les édifices, huit cents ans d'histoire présents à portée de la main — et d'un Paris moderne — le Centre Beaubourg, ses drugstores. Au depaysé et au déraciné de nos jours, Paris/Héloise offre un nouveau pays, celui de la connaissance de la mort. Lieu de tourment intérieur et de division profonde de l'être, Paris saigne l'imagination nourrissante à blanc tout en offrant les tentations d'un banquet à n'en plus finir.

A. R. CHADWICK
V. HARGER-GRINLING

CANADIAN STUDIES IN ITALY

> I had caught the sense
> of life with high auroras, and the flow
> of wide, majestic spaces.
>
> E. J. PRATT

THE "NEW WORLD NORTHERN," as Ralph Gustafson calls it, is an expansive wilderness where we can catch a "sense / of life with high auroras." It is not surprising that foreign scholars and creative writers with international perspectives should become interested in the history, literature, social sciences, and technologies which testify to this "sense of life."

Italy is the Mecca of western culture, and Canada, a stage for new beginnings. But cultural and academic diplomacy have not yet received their deserved priority among the foreign policy objectives of Canada's materialistic democracy. Systems, trade, and management are the buzz words of our workplace culture, while literature, history, and the social sciences are relegated to government-subsidized monasteries — our universities, museums, and libraries. It may be hoped that, as monasticism nurtured the mysteries and humanism of Christianity during the "Dark Ages," so the hidden investment in the arts and scholarship will smoulder until our leaders realize that the imagination is as important as performance indicators and bottom lines.

Italian culture flows in the Canadian bloodstream; one twenty-fifth of Canadians trace their heritage to places like

Friuli, Sicily, Calabria, Abruzzo, Veneto, Rome, Florence, and Milan. Canadian Confederation preceded the Italian Risorgimento of 1870 by three years, making our unity as states a modern concern of mutual significance. We have been close friends and allies for all but three years in over a century. Italian culture built on Greek humanism, gave birth to Constantinople, and then saw a cultural Renaissance unsurpassed before or since. Canada sees Italy's ancient roots as a vital part of its eclectic culture, while Italy sees Canada as a world where new achievements are possible.

Italian is Canada's third living European language, and English and French are Italy's second and third. Colonialism has played no part in this development. The common bonds of communication have grown as the post-war North Atlantic world concentrates on collective goals and co-operation. Canadian Studies in Italy are part of this growing communication. They have attracted some of the finest Italian historians, humanists, and social scientists. On the Canadian side assistance has come from the Department of External Affairs, the Canadian Embassy in Rome, the Canada Council, and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. On the Italian side help has been given by the Ministero degli affari Esteri, the Ministero dei Beni Culturali e Ambientali, and the Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche. But no financial assistance could supersede the investment of human and financial resources by those Italian universities whose faculty attract an increasing number of students to Canadian Studies — the Universities of Milan, Genoa, Turin, Bologna, Padua, Venice, Pisa, Rome, Bari, and Messina among them. Senior professors in these universities have taken leading roles in fostering Canadian Studies, and a younger generation of Italian scholars promises significant future development. The community combines several disciplines, men and women, anglophone and francophone, and different sides of the political spectrum — an important dimension given the complex politics of the Italian Republic.

In the introduction of a collection of his poetry published in Italian, *In Un'Eta di Ghiaccio*, Irving Layton gives a passionate reason for his interest in Italy:

> Italy, twenty years ago, enabled me to walk into European history with insouciance and curiosity. It opened its gracious doors to an experience in time that I had never had before and could not have. It gave me its unique memory of the past and began an accumulation of memories from which I could make a bonfire for my imagination. For more than twenty years I have been an arsonist, each time starting a new fire from ancient leaves to warm the soul.

Layton adds that his personal respect and friendship for the illustrator of the book, Ettore De Conciliis, is based on the common notion that "we both believe that art, rather than the frenzy of politics, supermarkets, highways and hydrogen bombs can save mankind from repeating its diabolical mistakes." It is surely significant that a Canadian poet, with a very personal understanding of one holocaust, should call on the wisdom of Italy's inspiration in art to try to prevent another. This is a pure example of the essence of "cultural diplomacy" — civilized people, articulating truth through art on the greatest issues of the day, political, economic, and strategic. It forcefully undermines the bureaucratic bleat that cultural exchanges are either too costly or not cost-effective; unless the political powers that be cannot face the fact that Pandora's cultural box is full of haunting metaphors, epic visions, and human fables that might not fit the neat context of pre-conceived policies and plans. Yet the Canadian Mediterranean Institute, which harbours the Canadian Academic Centre in Italy (and Institutes in Athens and

Cairo), fights for its life to obtain sufficient funds for survival. The work of the Institute has so far greatly surpassed in significance its limited funding from official sources. The Institute represents Canada's official and intellectual interest in Italy, Greece, and Egypt and its existence is necessary to assure Mediterranean countries of Canada's cultural and scholarly investment in part of our heritage.

Here I should ask the devil's advocate's question — why should scarce public resources be spent on the interest of Italian scholars in Canadian Studies, and on that of Canadian scholars in Italian studies? The answer lies in the past, present, and future of Canada. Italian explorers (Vespucci, Columbus, and Cabot) left the Mediterranean through the Pillars of Hercules as the Turks threatened Constantinople and the Venetian Empire weakened. These explorers navigated Atlantic waters to North America, and handed Indo-European culture to the new world. Today this culture is but one aspect of Canadian reality, as other vital cultures from Chinese to Arabic place permanent roots in Canada. As these cultural ingredients percolate with the autochthonous Inuit and Indian (the original Asians) it would seem that Arnold Toynbee's theories of cyclical cultural development can be taken seriously. Canada, like the United States, is a land bridge between Europe and Asia, not a disappointing barrier to the Spice Islands. Marco Polo and Sinbad might have taken another way to Asia, but Canada's hope for a democracy built on a myriad of cultures is already proving to be an alternate route.

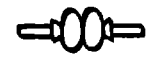
A study commissioned by Environment Canada, sponsored by the Canadian Association for the Club of Rome, concluded its search for new directions in human development by finding that

> The new concept is most likely to emerge from a society that has sufficient resource security to devote time and money to rethinking development; that has a self-interest in seeing increased economic stability and reduced tension in the world; that does not have the ideological obsessions of the superpowers; that has a tradition of scholarship, innovation, pragmatism; that is respected and not threatening to most nations of the world; and that has a fundamental concern for the well-being of future generations. While many nations fit several of these criteria, few if any are better suited than Canada.

In this hopeful context, Canadian Studies can be viewed as an essential part of the diverse but closely connected cultural fabric of the western world to which Italy has contributed, and is contributing so much. And Canada's contribution will change as the mosaic of the Canadian population changes our international outlook in years to come. Cultural diplomacy cannot be quantified or evaluated by a numbers game, or by short-term gains. Until such time as the engineers of foreign policy can expand their vision, and judge the abstract as well as the concrete, Canadian Studies in Italy will remain, not a brilliant example of wise official judgement, but a modestly funded enterprise of significance and quality. There is no doubt, however, that something enormously exciting has happened in the field since the late seventies, and the momentum grows. Canadian Studies have become, in Italy, and in other major countries, the signature of Canada for the world.

DAVID ANIDO*

* David Anido, a former cultural attaché to the Canadian Embassy, Rome, wrote these comments for our Italian-Canadian issue, No. 106. We apologize for the oversight which prevented their appearance there.



ON THE VERGE

*** P. B. WAITE, *The Man from Halifax: Sir John Thompson, Prime Minister*. Univ. of Toronto, $37.50. Sir John Thompson has always seemed a natural nonentity, the sort of Victorian figure into whom Lytton Strachey might have sunk his teeth if he had thought him worth so much attention. One of the four Tory leaders who in quick succession filled the gap of less than six years between Macdonald's death and Laurier's accession to the prime ministership, he has perhaps earned most attention from having died at the lunch table in Windsor Castle on a visit to an unamused Queen Victoria; in some circles it was thought to be an act of high colonial bad taste. I doubt if anyone but P. B. Waite has thought that Thompson might be worth a biography. Yet here is a massive work, almost five hundred pages long, which convinces one that Thompson was a man of genuine talents (perhaps better as a lawyer than a minister) and, for a successful politician, a person of unexpected modesty and decency. Waite writes with an obvious partiality for his subject, but does not dilute his ink with whitewash, and in the end one feels inclined to say of Thompson, as Orwell said of the subject of one of his essays, that "regarded simply as a politician and compared with the other leading political figures of our time, how clean a smell he has managed to leave behind!" Thompson was not an important man in our history — not even as important as Meighen or Borden. He did not have the charisma of either Macdonald or Laurier, and perhaps he was fortunate to be in power too brief a time for political trouble to build up around him. To make a minor figure seem large enough to merit our attention requires rather special biographical skills. Waite displays them, balancing the man in his natural Nova Scotian setting against the leader by accident, and enriching the background when interest in the life begins to flag. I started the book expecting to be bored by the presentation of yet another irredeemable mediocrity. I read on and ended with as much respect as an unpolitical man can have for a politician, but perhaps with most respect for his biographer.

G.W.

** GEORGE MELNYK, *The Search for Community: From Utopia to a Co-operative Society*. Black Rose Books, $14.95. George Melnyk is a well-known Western regionalist who formerly ran the NeWest Institute in Edmonton. He has also nurtured a long term interest in the co-operative movement; in *The Search for Community* the two interests come together in an attempt to find a solution to the particular ills from which the provinces of the West now suffer. The state has failed to deal with the central problem of unemployment, and the strained condition of social services shows the essential inadequacy of the welfare state in providing the security it promises. At the same time, the natural mutual aid structures of society have been allowed to atrophy thanks to state paternalism. The only solution, Melnyk suggests, is renewal from within, and the best means, he concludes after a lengthy historical study of various forms of co-operation and their relative efficacy, is a new form of "social co-operation," which would bring together consumer and producer co-ops, housing co-ops and credit unions, and add a further dimension of social service, so that the people — united in mutual aid — would provide for themselves what the state can no longer guarantee. It is a well argued case; the only problem remaining is where the initiative will emerge to put it into practice. *The Search for Community*, at this point, could become either the manifesto for an important new movement of the kind that emerges every now and again in the prairies, or yet another utopian tract.

G.W.

LAST PAGE

AMONG RECENT paperback reprints are several from Stanké, including Louky Bersianik's *L'Euguélionne* and Michel Tremblay's *Contes pour buveurs attardés*. Each volume in this series, Québec 10/10 (which now includes over 70 titles, most at $5.95), ends with a brief dossier in which, for example, Jacques Poulin mentions that the idea for using a young boy as narrator in *Jimmy* came from reading *The Catcher in the Rye*, and Roch Carrier describes the connections between his *Le jardin des délices* and the painting by Jérôme Bosch, "où la folie humaine danse avec la sagesse." Eight brightly packaged children's novels recently appeared in the series Jeunesse-Romans from Québec/Amérique: Normand Desjardins' *Cher monsieur l'aviateur* created from a film script of the same title, speculates

that Saint-Exupéry's "Petit Prince" may have had a Québécois origin, while Pierre Guénette's *Pas d'hiver! quelle misére!* follows a journey by flying carpet in search of a lost winter. Four titles launch new paperback series of *romans — jeunesse* from Editions La Courte Echelle including Marie Decary's *Amour, réglisse et chocolat* in which Rose Néon, when filled with chocolat, is able to drift fantastic imaginary voyages to distant planets. Also reprinted for the nine- to thirteen-year-old reader is Cameron Langford's 1971 animal story *The Winter of the Fisher* (Macmillan, $6.95) which, despite its frequently pretentious language, is rich in information and lore about a relatively rare and mysterious animal.

For those high school research papers on Canadian history (I was shocked to discover recently that neither of my own high schoolers knew who Montcalm was), Dundurn press continues to provide clear, well-illustrated, studies. J. Patrick Wohler's *Charles de Salaberry* ($9.95), uncovers the fascinating story of this soldier who at Chateauguay in 1813 defeated an American force of 7,000 with an army of 300 (a pleasure, too, to see an appendix on Salaberry in literature). In *Between France and New France: Life Aboard the Tall Sailing Ships* (n.p.) Gilles Proulx fills in details of the size of hammocks, and the weight of a hard-tack biscuit, to convey a claustrophobic sense of the eighteenth-century shipboard social microcosm. Again extensive appendices provide many statistics and literary contexts. Proulx' book is generously illustrated, often in colour, but visually it cannot approach what is a superb document in seventeenth-century Canadian iconography, François-Marc Gagnon's *Jacques Cartier et la decouverte du Nouveau Monde* (Musée du Québec, n.p.). This guide, and much more, to what must have been an excellent anniversary exhibition, pictures the exotic animals and wild animals who wandered the idealized maps of this *nada*.

As discussions of cultural free trade surface once again in Canadian political life, Francess G. Halpenny's *Canadian Collections in Public Libraries* (Book and Periodical Development Council, $50.00) brings copious, infuriating, and perplexing statistics. It sounds an alarm about access to materials which the conventions of the judicious report cannot quite mask. The survey does not describe individual collections but gives a statistical profile of Canadian libraries: we find that, tested against a 4,600-item master list, Ontario libraries hold 98% of Gage's titles, but libraries in the Atlantic hold only 61% of Gage's titles; fifteen of fifteen representative libraries of all sizes held Joy Kogawa's *Obasan*, but only five of fifteen had *The Almost Meeting*, Henry Kreisel's collected short stories. Meanwhile several reference works have appeared to help us dig out the Canadian poetry in those libraries. *Index to Canadian Poetry in English* (Reference Press, $30.00) and *Canadian Poetry in Selected English-Language Anthologies: An Index and Guide* (Dalhousie Univ. Libraries, $21.50) are both Canadian versions of *Granger's Index to Poetry*. The former, lavishly printed by Coach House, is easier on the eye and includes a helpful subject index, but it indexes a rather unpredictable and random collection of regional and children's anthologies, whereas Margery Fee's *Canadian Poetry* keeps much closer to the mainline teaching anthologies (and the misprinted running head "authours" is delightfully possessive). The two books need to be used together. Other useful finding aids are *American Periodical Verse: 1983* (Scarecrow Press, $US 37.50), which indexes many Canadian small mags as well, and Hoffman's *Index to Poetry: European and Latin American Poetry in Anthologies* (Scarecrow, $US 47.50) whose title obscures the fact that it lists Octave Crémazie, Rina Lasnier, and many other poets from Québec writing in French. Of more general use is the annual ""Bibliographie de la critique," published in *Revue d'histoire littéraire du Québec et du Canada français* (Univ. d'Ottawa); the bibliography in No. 8, for example, includes not only listings by author and genre, but also for important special topics such as "Théorie de la littérature," "La langue," "Enseignement et littérature," and "Mouvements, écoles, sociétés." *Canadian Poetry Index to Criticisms (1970-1979) / Poésie Canadienne Index de critiques (1970-1979)* (Canadian Library Association) is a helpful consolidation of sources, giving access to articles and reviews in collections of essays, and in periodicals (including, I am pleased to note, many published outside of Canada).

Recent volumes of the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* contain economical essays of interest to readers of *Canadian Literature*. *British Novelists 1660-1800* (Gale, $170.00) finds Frans De Bruyn distinguishing the pattern and form of Frances Brooke's novels from the eighteenth-century sentimentalists — especially Mary Davys — with whom she is here surrounded. In *Poets of Great Britain*

UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA MEDAL FOR CANADIAN BIOGRAPHY

1985

Three individual biographies are singled out this year for special mention: P. B. Waite's *The Man from Halifax*, a sensitive account of one of Canada's least-known and most intellectual prime ministers, Sir John Thompson; Charles Humphries' "*Honest Enough to Be Bold*," a stylish investigation of the public life of Sir James Pliny Whitney, the premier who established Ontario's substantial presence in modern Canada; and Jack Chambers' *Milestones*, a detailed, 2-volume account of the jazz musician Miles Davis.

The 1985 Medal is, however, something of a departure, in that it honours not only an individual volume but also an entire series: *The Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, published by the University of Toronto Press. The winner is its editor, Francess Halpenny. Like its predecessors, volume 8 (1851-1860) of the *DCB* contains striking, fresh, original accounts of a range of individual Canadian lives: authors, teachers, politicians, businessmen, trading-post wives, a midwife, a sorcerer, a spy. There is new information here about the persons who shaped Canada and new information about the kind of Canada they shaped. The books are a splendid resource for historians both professional and amateur, with interests in the public culture and in the daily concerns of ordinary lives. Nine of the planned twelve volumes, to cover the period up to 1900, are now complete and in print. Estimable as this accomplishment is, one nevertheless wants more. The members of the judging panel hope that the series will soon be extended to take account of those Canadians whose lives and whose culture extended into the 20th century.

W.N.

and Ireland Since 1960 (Gale) George Johnston writes on Gael Turnbull, whose first book, *Trio*, was shared with Phyllis Webb and Eli Mandel, and whose other Canadian connections include friendship with Raymond Souster and chapbooks of translations of French-Canadian poets. *Contemporary Literary Criticism Yearbook 1984* (Gale, $US 88.00) contains its familiar entertaining, but ephemeral digests of reviews: Canadian subjects are David Donnell's *Settlements*, Leon Rooke's *Shakespeare's Dog* (on the occasion of their receiving Governor General's Awards), and Matthew J. Bruccoli's biography, *Ross Macdonald*. More local literary archaeology is found in *Guide to the Literary Heritage of Waterloo and Wellington Counties From 1830 to the Mid-20th Century* (Wilfrid Laurier Univ.) an annotated bibliography supplemented by indexes of places, titles, genres, and year of publication; a catalogue of local colour, this handbook gives John Galt, W. W. Campbell, John McCrae, and Archibald MacMechan a variety of regional contexts. All these books draw heavily on computer-aided retrieval and several exist because of it. If you prefer to do your bibliographical tracing via modem you might begin with *On-line Bibliographic Databases: A Directory and Sourcebook* (Aslib/Gale) which outlines subject fields, access charges, and available documentation for each database, and reproduces a representative printout for each.

A third category of helpful resources comes to us from international sources. *Kanada — Sammlungen in der Bundesrepublik und Westberlin* (Gesellschaft für Kanada-Studien), the proceedings of a conference held in 1984, outlines the resources for Canadian studies available in Germany. Among the nine articles in *Zur Literatur und Kultur Kanadas* (Erlangen: Palm & Enke, DM28) are essays on Pratt, Richler, and Aquin (in German), on the writing of Canadian history, and on the Indian in Canadian fiction (in English). Also from Germany is Reingard M. Nischik's *Short Short Stories* (Paderborn: Schöningh, DM 7,80), a classroom anthology which includes six Canadian stories by Sutherland, Bowering, Reaney, Nowlan, and Levine among its 22 stories from four countries; an accompanying teacher's manual (DM 36) contains extensive analyses and notes in English. The *North Dakota Quarterly*'s Summer 1984 issue was devoted to Canada: side by side with essays on Laurence, Munro, Ostenso, or Audrey Thomas, are some discussions of less familiar topics, such as Paul Koroscil's account of the Portuguese community in the Okanagan, and Douglas Nord's reflections of the images of Canada "projected by Canadian tourism advertising in the United States." The proceedings of a 1984 British seminar in Canadian literature are published as *Re-visions of Canadian Literature* (Univ. of Leeds); eight of the nine papers are by critics from the U.K. I found David Richards' short piece comparing Sir Walter Scott and John Richardson particularly stimulating for its sense of intellectual backgrounds, and Coral Ann Howells' "Revisions of Prairie Indian History in Rudy Wiebe's *The Temptations of Big Bear* and *My Lovely Enemy*" satisfying for its joining of Wiebe's most celebrated novel with his least liked.

L.R.

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