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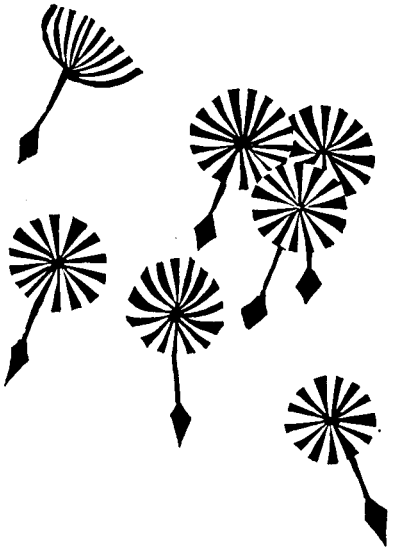

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editorial

DIALOGUE

FROM A CONTINUING CORRESPONDENCE between Lorraine Weir and Laurie Ricou:

Dear Lorraine,

Your recent note — especially your comments on *Canadian Literature*'s support of "Canadian Realists," and its allegiance to the "ordinary reader" make me start with awareness of our differing perceptions. I recall George Woodcock urging me, more than ten years ago, to write on someone other than Margaret Atwood and Margaret Laurence. I assume he gave the same advice to many other potential contributors. No doubt the editors' collective decisions over 27 years have established a certain identity, but it does not look to me like support of any one kind of writing. From within the office, a relative newcomer notices a continual effort to have the new writer join the established writer, to have the novice critic join the experienced critic, to have a new approach side by side with a familiar one.

As for the "ordinary reader," there are, of course, degrees of such. I recognize that a university magazine, with a circulation of 2,000, is not likely to be read by too many people clinging to the overhead strap on the Bloor line. But I have discovered that *Canadian Literature* is the one journal on our subject in my son's high school. We have to think of that library, and of the 200 copies which we send to countries where neither English nor French is the first language. To do that, I try to keep in mind a potential audience of the brightest, most interested of my first-year students. That's an audience — for both writers and academics — that's worth talking to.

Sincerely,
Laurie

Dear Laurie,

I'm not surprised that your son's high school library subscribes to *Can.Lit.*; the social context of the school — one of Vancouver's few, thoroughly respectable high schools, located in an upper-middle-to-upper-class area of the city, the school's one-time librarian a graduate of U.B.C. with an M.A. in English, special

interest: Canadian literature — makes the subscription virtually inevitable and the journal's unabashed allegiance to what I will call 'Kerrisdale values' part of my argument. As John O'Neill has summarized those values, "clarity is next to godliness," clear language being, above all, "accessible" to those whose tender sensibilities would be offended by anything which made them feel less than already well-informed and in control of their world. The fact that a journal which was founded precisely to counter such assumptions now tacitly assumes them should, I think, be an occasion for vigorous self-examination.

You refer to the constraints imposed by the journal's economic circumstances — the need to retain subscriptions, including the two hundred in countries where Canada's two official languages do not constitute the norm. This raises a number of interesting points not the least of which is your implicit assumption that *Can. Lit.* must keep its language simple and its arguments grounded in Aristotelian rhetorical conventions for fear that those readers whose first language isn't English may toss out anything else. Like your understanding of the ideal reader as a bright, interested college freshman, this image of the non-native speaker of English seems to me to be, on the one hand, patronizing and, on the other, economically simplistic. Given the enormous circulation of the many journals all over the world which are to varying degrees open to the use of technical language and the study of texts which are unlikely candidates for membership in Leavis' "Great Tradition," I find it difficult to understand *Can.Lit.*'s editorial stance purely in terms of economics. An economic stance is, in any case, a political stance and it is specifically with the consequences of *Can.Lit.*'s ideological commitments that I am most concerned. Perhaps I would be less so were there other journals of Canadian literature which were actively pursuing very different programs and offering those of us who work in the area a clear choice of other options. While there are certainly those who *say* that they are following a different, more "theory"-oriented course, I don't see a substantial difference in their products. Name-dropping and the incorporation of clichés from the various *Coles Notes* handbooks of literary theory surely is no improvement at all. Better not to dabble in theory (like *Can.Lit.*, among others) or to theorize honestly but without a home-base (like the Tessera collective).

To those who do have the luxury of a home-base, the challenge seems to me to be obvious. Neither Leavis nor Orwell (nor, for that matter, Matthew Arnold) is adequate any longer to the task of dealing competently with the complexities of contemporary theoretical and literary debate. Adherence to Kerrisdale values and neo-Artistotelian essay conventions render the writer singularly unfitted to the task of thinking about contemporary writing in Canada or anywhere else. Whether we are working with the texts of Nicole Brossard or b.p. nichol, of Jovette Marchessault or Wilfred Watson, of Margaret Atwood or Timothy Findley, of Daphne Marlatt or Alice Munro, the challenge is to move

beyond platitude and convention and, by thinking with and through texts which seek to subvert the norms of Kerrisdale, to respond in a writing worth hearing, worth thinking.

To deconstruct the assumptions of a culture is, as these writers as well as theorists from Freud and Marx to Derrida and Irigaray have told us, to deconstruct the language of that culture. *Can.Lit.* may look in the opposite direction but it cannot halt that massive process of rethinking the languaging world. In the meantime, *Can.Lit.* and Canadian journals of similar ideological persuasion are effectively suppressing the very response which they should be fostering. After all, the freshman year is only the beginning. What of the reader who has become literate in theory by the end of his or her senior year? And what of the graduate students who, well-informed about their discipline as it is in the 1980's, enter Canadian studies to find that they must spend the rest of their lives presenting freshman introductions?

Yours,
Lorraine

Dear Lorraine,

"As I walk past the hedges of Kerrisdale all I see / is a translation of the open." My hedges and my Kerrisdale also have something in them of Rilke opened through Bowering. And if I understand anything about theory (I suppose, somehow all learning begins with dabbling, but I take it, we're both thinking especially of semiotics and deconstructionism) it is that texts are radically indeterminate. Perhaps neither Kerrisdale (that text) nor this journal is so monolithic nor so closed nor so committed to the great tradition as you want to believe. I know that clear and accessible language does not always leave this reader very close to godliness nor feeling in control. Libby Scheier's poems can be as challenging to Kerrisdale norms as Daphne Marlatt's — and more likely to offend the complacent. Speaking of which, take your own letter: it's clear, and I've been thinking queasily about my unspoken ideological commitments ever since I read it.

But rather than bleat defensively about a dozen other points where I was offended, let me say, most importantly, that this morning I was writing about Daphne Marlatt and reading Phyllis Webb. And yes, I agree: to read *through* those texts we do need different models and theoretical frameworks, and different conventions of the essay (and editorial?). Certainly a new terminology will enable us to recognize or understand the hitherto misunderstood and invisible.

Canadian Literature is making efforts to respond to the challenges you make (on behalf, I know, of many other readers and non-readers). I want to encour-

age the response you claim we are repressing. *Canadian Literature* is a university journal, but it is not, I hope, exclusively an academic's journal or a single discipline's journal. We invite our readers and contributors to teach us how to read across the boundaries of disciplines, and of the disciplines within disciplines. We intend to keep ourselves open to the many things Canadian literature is, and to the ways in which it can be translated.

Sincerely,
Laurie

Dear Laurie,

Polemical clarity is one thing, and theorizing often quite another. You refer to what I "want to believe" but I think I'll avoid *that* hermeneutic circle and simply invite you to reread *Can.Lit.*'s editorials of, say, the past six years. Seldom directly concerned with the other materials printed in a given issue, each editorial is a soap-box opportunity, the item of commerce typically a "home truth," a safe smug cliché about the Evils of Technology (#101) or the Decline of Literacy in the Modern World (#87) or the Great Quest for Canadian Literature/Identity, etc. replete with critics or navigators charting the hitherto unexplored Vast Continent (#100). And so on as the present exchange takes on the character of another Epic Quest, this time evidently an extension of the Quest for the Perfect Theory. There isn't *one*, of course, and — in any case — no one speaks outside of some theory/ideological stance/critical lexicon. As the cliché goes, language is never "innocent" or "transparent."

What I'm arguing for is support by *Can.Lit.* of self-conscious, intellectually challenging use of whatever theory a writer chooses to use in application to whatever primary text/s, provided that the result is a thorough-going, intelligent essay, however demanding the requirements of a given theory may be in terms of jargon, syntax, philosophical and linguistic assumptions, and so on. I'm arguing, in other words, for *Can.Lit.* at least to approach the standards of *PMLA* as it is now, and eventually to consider that at least one essay every two issues which reached the standard of, say, *New Literary History*, or *The Georgia Review* or *Poetics Today* would profoundly enrich the journal. Such a change would also make possible the publication of essays on Canadian subjects which, because of their Canadian focus, are rejected outside Canada and, because of their theoretical focus, are rejected inside Anglo-Canada.

The models I've listed are all academic journals intended for a specialist audience of one kind or another. Which raises what seems to me to be *Can.Lit.*'s problem of split identity: on the one hand, a magazine for anyone interested in Canadian culture; on the other, an academic journal funded by a university and

publishing essays almost exclusively by academics. But there's no lack of magazines of the first sort in Canada today; what we need is for the journal to have the courage of its academic convictions, set aside its colonial past, and get on with the job of attending to the task of literary criticism as presently, and diversely, constituted in the profession. For every high school library that doesn't subscribe to *NLH* there must be a dozen academics who do!

Yours,
Lorraine

Dear Lorraine,

No, I think the split or multiple identity is what is needed. Now, especially, when we recognize that "there isn't *one*," that Canadian literature, and theory, are plural.

I leave aside my disagreements with your reading of our Editorials, to endorse your argument for enriching the journal with essays which apply theoretical approaches to Canadian subjects. I hope our readers and potential contributors will find a sense of the many spaces available for them in the interstices of our exchange. Thanks for the challenge.

Sincerely,
Laurie

HOW TO BE YOUR OWN BUTCHER

David McFadden

The theme of all great art: it's nice to be alive, and no matter how great your suffering the earth will wait forever to take your flesh and bones. So it's nice to be alive and well-fed too and to be able to spend the entire day in the public library. I'm one of the lucky ones. How can I be neurotic? Of course it's the lucky ones who are neurotic, not the ones who are working on blast furnaces, in dark wobbly coal mines, or worse watching their kids starve. But just to spend the day sitting around the library, watching people, reading aimlessly but fruitfully, drifting, looking at the photographic exhibits, the display from the Spanish embassy. A waterbed salesman in a business suit is reading A Practical Guide for the Beginning Farmer and there is a sign reading HOW TO BE, the sign's on a shelf containing all the titles that start with the words how to be: How to Be an Inventor, How to Be a Complete Clown, How to Be a Disc Jockey, How to Be a Father, How to Be a Fix-it Genius Using Seven Simple Tools, How to Be a Friend People Want to Be Friends With, How to Be a Movie Star. . . . The waterbed salesman stood up and walked over as I picked up a book entitled How to Be Your Own Butcher and I laughed and turned to him blindly and said, "Looks like this book is for the ultimate masochist!" And he looked horrified and turned and walked away and only then did I notice he had a steel hook for a right hand.

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

Canadian Literature apologizes to David McFadden for the inadvertent error which distorted his poem "How to Be Your Own Butcher" in No. 108. The poem is reprinted in this issue in its proper format.

HOWARD O'HAGAN'S "TAY JOHN": MAKING NEW WORLD MYTH

Margery Fee

SITTING IN THE ROCKIES in the fall of 1913, Rupert Brooke reflected on the differences between the Old World and the New: "Look as long as you like upon a cataract of the New World, you shall not see a white arm in the foam. A godless place. And the dead do not return."[1] His conclusion that the New World was defective in its lack of an indigenous mythology was a critical commonplace at least a century old.[2] Because a foundation of oral literature — myth, legend, epic, and folktale — has been regarded since the early nineteenth century as essential to a great national literature, anxiety about Canada's lack of such a foundation has been recurrent, as recently as in George Grant's *Technology and Empire* (1969):

> When we go into the Rockies we may have the sense that the gods are there. But if so, they cannot manifest themselves to us as ours. They are the gods of another race, and we cannot know them because of what we are, and what we did. There can be nothing immemorial for us except the environment as object.[3]

Like Grant, Howard O'Hagan sensed a "presence"[4] in the mountains. He has, however, written a novel deriving its impact from the consistent refusal of the divine to manifest itself, a novel in which revelation is invariably suspect. The failure of revelation that causes Grant, a Platonist and a Christian, such regret, inspires O'Hagan to produce an anti-Platonist and agnostic text which, paradoxically, is filled with mythic power.[5]

The passage in O'Hagan's *Tay John* that most clearly begs to be considered as the author's own manifesto on the relation of myth and reality is this description of the nature of story by the novel's main narrator, Jackie Denham:

> [Tay John's] story, such as it is, like himself, would have existed independently of me. Every story — the rough-edged chronicle of a personal destiny — having its source in a past we cannot see, and its reverberations in a future still unlived — man, the child of darkness, walking for a few short moments in unaccustomed light — every story only waits, like a mountain in an untravelled land, for someone to come close, to gaze upon its contours, lay a name on it and relate it to the known world. Indeed, to tell a story is to leave most of it untold. You mine it, as

> you take ore from the mountain. You carry the compass around it. You dig down — and when you have finished, the story remains, something beyond your touch, resistant to your siege; unfathomable, like the heart of the mountain. You have the feeling that you have not reached the story itself, but have merely assaulted the surrounding solitude.[6]

Tay John's story is his life, which has the same "presence," plenitude, and reality as a mountain. Thus Denham's version of it is of necessity incomplete, since "what [reality] is no one ever knows in a world of make-believe." Even to tell the story is a violent reduction of it, a kind of warfare ("siege"), and a kind of assault. The analogy made in this passage to mining is carried further in the novel: Tay John, on his initiation fast, goes up a river valley, where he discovers some heavy, glittering, black, bitter sand, which he brings back as proof that he did not lie about where he went. Later, white men discover it to be gold ore, and their subsequent intrusion on the territory of the Shuswap reduces that tribe to a starving, diseased remnant. Thus, even though Denham is "refining" Tay John's story into gold, the refining process is reductive and violent. The "essence," the "pure" element is inadequate.

O'Hagan inverts the values of light and dark throughout the novel: the dark sand is, as ore, more valuable than the processed gold. The unknowable, labelled variously *shadow*, *mystery*, *reality*, is what makes the light valuable. Thus any story, if it is to be of value, must constantly allow the unknown upon which it is built to intrude. The story must reveal itself as a facile explanation for the inexplicable:

> For your backwoodsman is a thorough gossip. . . . He pays for a meal, for a night's lodging, with a tale. His social function is to hand on what he has heard, with the twist his fancy has been able to add. . . . What he has not seen he deduces, and what he cannot understand he explains.

In making the point that no story is complete, O'Hagan undermines to varying degrees several dominant and interconnected Western ideologies: idealism, Christianity, patriarchy, class, and capitalism. In fact, O'Hagan's text, in its self-consciousness about the fictive quality of *all* versions of reality, elicits the label "post-modernist" despite its 1939 publication date. O'Hagan's replacement of divine authority in the making of myth, indeed his replacement of even a human author by a collective "intertextuality" connects him to post-structuralism. His definition of story in terms of material, historical, and ideological constraints rather than in terms of individual artistry can be connected to Marxist criticism. But O'Hagan's epistemological concern is not obtrusive. Rather he works at the level of myth, dismantling the famous "stories" used to shore up these ideologies. *Myth* is used here loosely, as O'Hagan appears to use it, to include a wide variety of conventional patterns: native myth and local legend; literary genres, modes, and archetypes; popular stereotypes; and even intellectual categories. All are or

have been accepted widely and uncritically as true, and used as valid ways of viewing the world.[7]

Although particular myths can be revealed as instruments commonly used more to oppress than to liberate, they can only be dismantled, never destroyed — at least not without destroying Western culture itself. O'Hagan therefore rigs up a new myth out of the pieces of the old ones, revealing in the process how it's done. His "enemy" in this novel, then, is not myth, but the belief in one complete immutable myth: the Truth. It is impossible to think or talk without believing in something, starting from somewhere, standing on some taken-for-granted ground. But in *Tay John* those who refuse to shift ground, or to feel the ground shifting under their feet, are defeated, while those who wonder and doubt survive. Since realism panders to the reader's desire to think the world can be comprehended, O'Hagan wages war on this mode in particular, forcing his readers out of its illusory "real" world, making them consider interpretations other than the "commonsense" ones. The world he moves them into is filled with the elements of myth, but, unlike the Old World myth, immutable, authoritarian, timeless, and universal, his New World myth is rather a paradigm of myth, revealing how myth is created to suit a particular need in a particular time and place. In the middle section of the novel, narrated by Denham, O'Hagan undermines various Western ideologies. In the "frame," he shows how a borrowed indigenous myth can be adapted to immigrant needs in a way that will distinguish Canadian novels from others.

One of O'Hagan's short stories, simple, even slightly sentimental, outlines the process of myth-making that is articulated in much more detail in *Tay John*. In "The White Horse" Nick Durban, the hero, discusses the problem of naming the local pass with his friend Olaf: "Olaf had said that in the Old Country all such places had names, but he did not see how in these foothills, a pass, especially a low, gentle pass, that had no name, would acquire one."[8] If one takes naming as analogous to myth-making, this story encapsulates the problem of finding myth in a new country. How does one consciously create something that has to have existed as Olaf says, "longer than anyone could remember"? The assumption that an immemorial native mythology rather than an invented or borrowed one is essential to a great national literature excludes colonies populated by immigrants from literary greatness, a quality reserved for the Imperial centres. But Nick proves to himself that naming is possible in a new world.

When he finds that his beloved old pack-horse, Bedford, has wandered off and frozen to death, he considers putting a notice in the newspaper. Finally he makes a sign describing Bedford and offering a reward for his return, and puts it up beside the trail through the pass. After a while, Olaf takes the sign down and replaces it with one that says "Bedford Pass." Pleased, Nick looks forward to the time when the sign will rot, and Bedford and his story will be forgotten. Then

Bedford, transformed from horse into name, will "endure so long as men climbed rivers to their source and spoke into the wind the pass's name they travelled."[9] Names and myths have an origin, explicit and human. Once the original "sign" has rotted, however, they survive only if they have a use, usually an exploitative one. And they gain authority precisely because they are detached from their human origins. "Because it has always been so," or "because the gods say so" is far more difficult to dispute than "because I say so." The naming in "The White Horse" seems perfectly innocent, even touching, but of course it is part of the conquest of the west of Canada by the white man. In *Tay John* the violence of the conquest is made clear: "Out on the prairies the white man's breath had blasted the Indian and the buffalo from the grass lands, now his plough turned the grass under." Jackie Denham compares naming to rape, and, through his role as a surveyor, shows how naming is related to the exploitation of what was formerly virgin and "unnamed country."

O'HAGAN, WHILE CLEARLY he agrees with the belief that myth is essential to great literature, would deny myth its ultimate authority, its divine origin. That myth is not divinely fixed means people have the freedom to think and imagine for themselves. Therefore O'Hagan's myth has a popular origin, being formed in the main by indigenous oral genres: myth, legend, tall tales, gossip, rumour, and hearsay. He dismantles the old myths, including the old critical myths, to produce a transitory synthesis of old, adapted, and invented myth that takes possession of a new literary territory. This territory is not the Alberta/British Columbia mountain region which provides his setting, but an intellectual territory formerly excluded from literature, the "colonial."

O'Hagan begins the process of rewriting myth in *Tay John* by importing a version of Judaeo-Christianity and a version of Platonic idealism into the traditional beliefs of the Shusway tribe into which Tay John is born. Unlike the historical Shuswap,[10] Tay John's Shuswap believe in a promised land and in a fair-haired messianic leader. They also, in a paraphrase of Plato's "Allegory of the Cave" (*Republic*, Book 7) believe "that the world was made of things they could not touch or see, as they knew that behind the basket their hands made was the shape of the perfect basket. . . . Each man sought the shadow beyond his work." Plato's ideal basket is ironically named "shadow" in O'Hagan's passage, for in *Tay John* the ideal remains inaccessible, unknowable, and possibly non-existent. In Plato's cave the chained prisoners can only see shadows and hear echoes, but when led from the cave (although at first blinded and deafened) they are able to perceive "reality": the Truth. In *Tay John*, revelation is not so revered, as indicated by Jackie Denham's description of the limitations of his own

perceptions: "Of what was around me I caught only flashes here and there — as in a thunderstorm when briefly under the lightning the countryside is revealed, trees standing, a glimpse of a river still flowing, a horse on a hillside, tail sucked between his legs." What produces powerful art in *Tay John* is not the revelation of truth (a wish-fulfilling delusion) but the communication of these flashes of light as flashes: as incomplete, mysterious, and transitory. Those who claim to know most completely are the most seriously deluded. That the Shuswap get half way to their Promised Land, and their messianic leader, *Tay John*, lives among them for a while before deserting them, is a symbolic comment on the undogmatic nature of their beliefs.

The desire for truth, even the conviction that one has found it, may seem harmless enough. The desire for it, however, leads to credulity, and the conviction of it to what Denham calls "the callous incapacity to doubt." Worse, the convinced are tempted to impose the authority of their "truth" on others. The arrogance of conviction is embodied in the Rorty brothers. Red Rorty comes to convert the Shuswap to evangelical Protestantism:

> "Only those who believe . . . will be saved. All the rest will be destroyed. . . . " He threw his voice up against the rock cliffs beyond them, and it stayed there and murmured till they heard him speaking to them from above and behind, while they beheld him standing, his mouth moving and his shadow upon the ground before them.

Clearly he speaks in the cave, his back to the light. He seduces the married Hanni, and the women of the tribe crucify him. His youngest brother, a Roman Catholic priest, similarly tries to impose his beliefs on others, lecturing Ardith/Aeriola about her immoral life while burning with lust for her. In order to strengthen himself against temptation, he seeks a revelation, "a light, so awful, so stupendous, never before seen by man, that standing before it my shadow will make a trough in the ground behind me." Attempting an imitation of Christ, he ties himself naked to a tree, becomes trapped, and dies of exposure.

These, then, are the religious mythologies. The modern secular ones reveal an equal arrogance in the figure of Dobble, a capitalist entrepreneur who attempts an imitation of the divine in building his "small new world," his resort, in the mountains. Like the Shuswap and the Rortys he believes in the unseen, and lives in the future implied by his belief in Progress: "Illusions were more real to him than the dark pine-trees which gave logs for his buildings." Finally, however, the work is abandoned, there are rumours of bankruptcy, and Dobble leaves "barely a trace behind him." The aspiration to divinity fails in each case; the more serious the aspiration, the more horrible the failure.

Although the whole novel can justifiably be labelled "mythic" in tone, content, and structure, the first part is, as Michael Ondaatje puts it, raw myth point blank.[11] Entitled "Legend," it is narrated by an omniscient and oracular voice

that distinguishes itself from the human in the first sentence: "The time of this in its beginning, in men's time, is 1880 in the summer, and its place is the Athabaska valley." Authority is derived for this section from the authenticity of O'Hagan's sources for much of the first part of Tay John's story, the Tsimshian myth "The Dead Woman's Son," which he uses with little revision, and the legend of Tête Jaune, which named Tête Jaune Cache and Yellowhead Pass.[12]

In the Tsimshian myth a pregnant woman dies; her grief-stricken husband sleeps on her grave until winter comes. In spring when he returns he finds playing on her grave a little boy, whom he captures and takes to the wise men. In their hands the boy shrivels almost to nothing, but they restore him. He is not happy, and cries and refuses to eat, so the villagers call in a wise woman, who says: "What he wants is only a little thing. He craves for the full free life of man, not the half-life he enjoyed in the grave."[13] In the original myth, the boy is cured of his unhappiness by a ritual ablution, but in O'Hagan's variant the boy continues his quest, only partially satisfied by the wise woman's gift of a human shadow.

His people regard Tay John as a god, because of his yellow hair (interpolation in the myth that O'Hagan derived from the legend of Tête Jaune). But he has no divine aspirations, unlike his putative father and uncle. He brings back from his initiation fast "only what another man might see . . . and less than another man might hear," and admits that he feared to go further. Later he leads the people on their trek to the promised land, but expresses no opinion about it. All the initiatives come from others. When the tribe refuses him a woman, he leaves. He walks out on myth, only to find himself the hero of Jackie Denham's epic romance.

"Jackie's Tale" begins when Jackie, surveying for the railroad, takes a Sunday walk up a creek. Tay John appears on the other side of it. A female grizzly bear attacks him, and he kills her with a knife. On one side of the creek is the event; on the other side is the tale-teller. More important than either man, perhaps, is the creek:

> It wasn't wide. Twice as wide as a man, standing, might jump, perhaps, but deep and swift. Boiling. There were rapids. That creek — it was white. It was jagged. It had teeth in it. I felt it would cut me in two.

The creek prevents Denham from helping Tay John, and its roar prevents them from communicating. It, in its various guises, is the distance between reality and what human beings make of it. Those who try to cross it, to participate in the mystery of reality, subject themselves or others to violence, as do all human beings who aspire to "divine" knowledge. Jackie does take his experience as a revelation, describing Tay John's departure as if it were the departure of god.

> He vanished, as though he were leaving one form of existence for another. For a

> moment or two I saw his yellow head, a gleam of light being carried away through the timber. He had come down from the high country to do his job, and having done it, left.

Jackie feels compelled to tell his tale: "It was a faith — a gospel to be spread, that tale, and he was its only apostle." His audience's reaction to the tale is mixed: "Men winked over it, smiled at it, yet listened to its measured voice, attentions caught, imaginations cradled in a web of words." In fact, the narrator describes the story as a tall tale that Jackie "stretch[es] ... the length of Edmonton."

THE TALL TALE, if it has a didactic purpose at all, teaches the inexperienced and naive not to believe everything they hear. An old-timer, relying on his experience and age to add authority to his words, regales a greenhorn or two with a story that "really happened," either to him or to a close friend or relative. As the story proceeds, it becomes more and more incredible, until the listeners begin to realize that they have been taken in, and must reluctantly give up their belief in sidehill gougers, or in winters so cold that people's words freeze.[14] The tall tale refuses listeners the ease of the familiar, and moves them into that peculiar territory between true belief and total scepticism, an unsettling zone where anything seems possible and nothing certain. This zone finds its geographical equivalent in the mountain country that Denham calls "the country of illusion" where "men saw themselves cast in strange shapes by their shadows flung upon untutored ground."

O'Hagan moves his readers into this territory repeatedly. Jackie's Tale, for example, is a narrative filled with elements of epic romance, regarded by its teller as gospel truth, while described by the narrator who introduces Jackie (probably a member of Denham's audience) as a tall, and therefore untrue, tale. The genre tension here makes interpretation a complex task. The movement from one literary mode to another, the violation of conventional expectations, occurs throughout the novel, showing how each genre and mode reveals a different, incomplete "reality." Tay John refuses the role of god proper to the "myth" of part one. When Denham sees him, he imposes the conventions of epic romance on him: Tay John is not a man, but "Man," victorious over the powers of darkness. He is a "bronze and golden statue" with shining hair, who faces the dark bear and wins. Tay John, however, despite the fixity of Denham's image of him as a statue, will not stay put. He moves from myth, to epic romance, to realism; escapes irony by moving into comedy, and finally moves into myth again. But this myth is a peculiarly transitory myth, held in tension with all the major literary modes at once.

When Denham first encounters Tay John, Denham says that Tay John has "something of the abstract about him — as though he were a symbol of some sort or other." This is an understatement: Tay John is almost all symbol. One of the many things he stands for is the literary protagonist. He becomes a character unsuccessfully trying to avoid an author, rather than in search of one. The next time Denham sees Tay John, the former god/hero appears shorter; his hair, once "a flame . . . to light the hopes of his people" now leaves its "dark stain of oil" on his collar, one of his hands is missing, and his horse has begun to age. Realism has set in. But he is guiding the beautiful Ardith Aeriola, who wants him to take her, alone, over the mountains. Tay John has had trouble with beautiful white women before, and resists. Dobble, near whose resort Aeriola is camping, has fallen for her, and offers Tay John a job, hoping to keep her nearby. Like everyone else, he sees Tay John in literary terms: "Tay John will be a good choice to greet tourists at the train because he is "a man of the country — the sort of thing they've read about." Denham's response is that first Dobble will have to capture Tay John, then "stuff and frame him."

Dobble, who is given to taking "a realistic view," is the kind of American George Grant has warned Canadians against becoming. Dobble sees the mystery of Father Rorty's death only in terms of publicity, is filled with a myopic belief in progress, blind to the beauty of the inexplicable, and aware of the environment only as object. The murderous reduction of this attitude explains Tay John's move from god to wooden Indian and from myth to irony, at this lowest point in his career, as well as the parallel fate of the native people in the face of twentieth-century technology. O'Hagan's opinion of the fate of literature in the hands of the "scientific objectivity" proclaimed by naturalism and realism is clearly negative. O'Hagan, however, does not want to move back to belief. When Dobble tries to hire Denham to "take charge" of Yellowhead Lake, the resort, Denham refuses, commenting "I was no god of waters." He, like Tay John, wants to avoid becoming either a materialist's lackey or a divine being; he too wants the full free life of a man.

Tay John succeeds in avoiding capture by Dobble. Instead he defends Aeriola's honour against Dobble, and, by getting the girl, moves into comedy. It is a comedy constrained somewhat by Denham's initial insistence on regarding the move as a defeat. For Denham, thinking in the epic mode, "woman [is] the death of heroes and the destruction of heroes' work." His description of Tay John's "capitulation" is an odd combination of battlefield and erotic St. Valentine's imagery:

> Through the canvas wall of [Aeriola's] tent a lantern hung from the ridge pole, pulsed and glowed, a heart beat in the darkness. I lifted the door flap. Inside one of the beds spilled a flood of crimson blankets. On its edge Tay John sat, head hanging between his knees. From his brow great drops of blood dripped to the

> floor, staining it in sudden, separate splotches as if through the white-pine boards at his feet rosebuds burst and bloomed.

Since he is a screen on to which each observer projects his interpretation, Tay John has a look which remains "enigmatic as a bird's, with no expression [Denham] could catch." Of course this doesn't stop Denham from interpreting what has happened to his own satisfaction.

The last report of Tay John comes from a trapper, Blackie, who meets Tay John dragging Ardith Aeriola's body on a toboggan. Tay John and the trapper part in a blizzard, and the next day Blackie trails Tay John as far as he can: "He had the feeling, he said, looking down at the tracks, that Tay John hadn't gone over the pass at all. He had just walked down, the toboggan behind him, under the snow and into the ground." The simple conclusion that Tay John has probably frozen to death is not easily permitted by the text, which provides powerful alternatives. The most "realistic" conclusion has to compete with strong interference from other literary modes. First, the mythic ending balances and echoes the mythic beginning: Tay John is supposedly born out of the earth of his pregnant mother's grave. It seems logical that a semi-autochthonous culture hero would return to the earth like this. Further, an earlier report of the couple suggested that Ardith was pregnant at the time of her death, like Tay John's mother Hanni. This hint of a possible return of the hero, of a cycle, is mythically irresistible. Denham's comment that woman is the death of heroes is made prophetic, and Aeriola's body, dragged on the toboggan behind Tay John, becomes the shadow the divine child cried for at the beginning.[15] Then, O'Hagan resorts to the grotesque to disrupt the tragic sense of an ending implied by Tay John's "heroic" role, and the pathos implied by the conclusion's extended allusion to Duncan Campbell Scott's sentimental poem "On the Way to the Mission."[16] Unlike the corpse of the dead Montagnais woman of Scott's poem, whose features are "as sweet as they were in life," Blackie reports that Aeriola had one eye open and one closed: "It was like she winked at me." Unlike many mythic couples, Tay John and Ardith are not long separated by death, but disappear together. The ending's hint of a "marriage," and its hint of a resurrection or cycle, seem comic. No one simple emotion, mode, or interpretation is allowed to prevail.

By the end of the novel, its repetition has escalated beyond the point that can be called mythic, to the point Ondaatje calls incestuous.[17] The last six pages of Tay John encapsulate and echo the whole work, giving the vertiginous effect of infinite regression that matches the ending's promise of a return of myth in each generation. Blackie is, like Denham, a

mountain man fond of telling stories. The setting is the strange "unnamed country" that provides the setting for the novel's most mysterious incidents. Blackie's encounter with Tay John takes place in a howling blizzard which, in a familiar way, confuses the senses. Tay John appears to Blackie like "something spawned by the mists striving to take form before mortal eyes," and this echoes the magic boy's resurrection/creation by the medicine men: "for three days the wise men sang and shook rattles and blew on the wisps of yellow hair that at times were so few and thin that they thought they had been deceived and saw nothing and had nothing between them." Not only does this passage allude to four other passages in the book but it also parallels a scene in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* where Marlow confronts Kurtz, who has crawled away from the ship; "He rose, unsteady, pale, indistinct, like a vapour exhaled by the earth, and swayed slightly, misty and silent."[18] Echoes and allusions like this fill the novel as echoes resound in caves, with an effect similar to the effect created by setting one genre or mode against another. The reader must constantly reconsider.

This has not been the only reference to Conrad. To examine the narrative of parts two and three is immediately to recognize its similarity to those of Conrad's "Marlow" fictions.[19] Denham is, like Marlow in *Heart of Darkness*, telling the story to a group of friends; in the course of his account of his first meeting with Dobble, he remarks that it was in "this very bar" and complains that none of his audience of cronies had been present to help him out: "one of you might have been there, you know, to give me a hand." Kenneth Bruffee, in his *Elegiac Romance: Cultural Change and Loss of the Hero in Modern Fiction* argues persuasively that in novels like *Heart of Darkness* and *Lord Jim* Conrad invented a fictional sub-genre, which Bruffee calls "elegiac romance." The sub-genre includes such novels as F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, Thomas Mann's *Doctor Faustus*, and Vladimir Nabokov's *Pale Fire*. Bruffee states: "The *necessary conditions* for elegiac romance fiction are the narrator's prolonged hero worship of his friend, and his friend's death before the narrator begins to tell the tale."[20] *Tay John* meets both of these necessary conditions. Tay John is dead before the story, at least that part of the story narrated by Jackie, begins. (The "Legend" section and Blackie's conclusion are a "frame" around the "elegiac romance" middle.) Denham regards Tay John as a hero through most of the novel. And there are many other minor resemblances between *Tay John* and the novels examined by Bruffee. But however fruitfully Bruffee's model may be applied to *Tay John*, it does differ from the "standard" elegiac romance in several important ways. These differences result from O'Hagan's attempt to re-make not only Old World mythology, but also Old World literary genres, to suit the New World. He is engaged in a process that Robert Kroetsch has argued is characteristic of recent Canadian fiction. The Old World inheres in the language of the New; and Canada has a further difficulty with American influ-

ences. How does a Canadian novel differ from an English or an American one? Kroetsch says that "In recent Canadian fiction the major writers resolve the paradox — the painful tension of appearance [of being English or American] and authenticity — by the radical process of demythologizing the systems that threaten to define them. Or, more comprehensively, they uninvent the world."[21] Denham, like the typical narrator of Bruffee's elegiac romance "undermines the influence of the failed institutions he carries within him."[22] He, "confronted by a complexly rooted resistance to change in himself, and by a surrounding cultural, social and political milieu undergoing profound, irresistible changes... sets out to create something new, a self adaptable to the new needs of a new world, a self that can live wihout heroes."[23] Although Denham knows the landscape "better than he knew the lines of the wide calloused palm of his hand," he has more trouble mapping his intellectual structures on to a resistant society. He, like Bruffee's narrators, has a "European mind"[24] and spends the novel overcoming a kind of culture shock that overcomes even the "Canadian-born" who confront a wilderness armed (the expression itself is telling) only with a European education. Denham must learn to change the European attitude that sees nature (and the associated women, native people and indeed, reality itself) as objects to be mastered by male heroes. Generally, in elegiac romance, the hero's death is announced early in the narrative, as its inspiration. Thus the story takes a "contrapuntal" form, combining the narrator's recollection of events with his reflections on them.[25] *Tay John*, however, leaves the story of the disappearance of Tay John and Ardith Aeriola to the novel's end. Denham, unlike the elegiac romance narrator, nowhere singles out the death as his inspiration, comments on its effect on him, or states his desire to memorialize his hero. Nowhere does he explicitly contrast his feelings at the time of a particular event with a later reinterpretation. A partial explanation for this divergence from the form is that Tay John's death *as a hero* for Denham occurs before Tay John's actual death. During Denham's last encounter with Tay John, Dobble's men attack Tay John. Of the fury of the workers, Denham says: "That fury would pull him down, change his shape, make him one with those who fought against him. He stood alone, above them.... They didn't get him down." Here, clearly, Denham still sees Tay John as exceptional and heroic. Later, at Aeriola's tent, however, it is as if she and Denham struggled for possession of the hero: "It was as though his thick shoulders between us were in dispute." She wins. Woman is the death of heroes. Denham backs away and leaves early the next morning. In Jasper, although he hears rumours of trouble at Lucerne, he says his "interest was not sufficient to hold me in the small mountain town" and he proceeds to Edmonton, where he rather predictably goes on a binge.

Significantly, what Denham had found most heroic in Tay John during the encounter at the creek was his appearance (projected, it seems safe to say, by

Denham) of certainty: "At least he had no doubts — this other man. No doubt about himself." Later Denham remarks: "He did the one thing, the only thing he could have done, and did it well." Although theoretically, Denham promotes doubt: "when we doubt we begin to learn," at the time he encounters Tay John he longs for certainty. He wants clear heroes, clear enemies, and clear-cut victories. He had wanted to kill a bear himself: he had "sometimes dreamed of — of meeting a bear one day close up, hand to hand so to speak, and doing it in. An epic battle: man against the wilderness." Although he cannot participate directly in the battle between Tay John and the bear he does so vicariously, calling out "Yellowhead," "Yellowhead," and explaining "I had to give him a name so that I could help him — morally, you know. I had to align him with the human race." He quickly attributes evil qualities to the bear, calling the fight a "struggle against the powers of darkness," and a victory for mankind. His formulation of the story is a parallel victory, produced after he finds his way back to camp through darkness "black as the inside of a bear."

Tay John's version of events is never given, but it seems clear that his version and Denham's would probably differ as radically as do their cultures. In Denham's culture, the killing of big game is a proof of male prowess, and of man's domination over nature. Tay John, however, appears to fight the bear because he is cornered by her, just as she appears to attack him because of her nearby cubs and because she too feels trapped. After he kills her he cuts her head off and places it in a tree, according to a native custom recounted in the novel, in order to show respect for her spirit.[26] However he may have seen the fight, it would certainly not have been as a struggle against the powers of darkness, since the bear is his "guardian spirit." Denham's projection clearly takes a literary form (he describes the event as "like a play being put on for my benefit") as well as fulfilling a psychological or moral need. His "gospel" contains all the elements needed to reveal it as a wish-fulfilment fantasy and a literary construct, as indeed, does O'Hagan's novel at a more sophisticated level.

IN THE ELEGIAC ROMANCE, the narrator often comes to terms with the weaknesses in himself that led him to worship another — another who may indeed have been mainly his own creation. Denham, during his last appearance in the novel, is talking to Inspector Wiggins, who wonders why Aeriola was attracted to "a half-breed fellow with yellow hair." Denham replies: "Perhaps as good a man as she's met," and then later comments, "Tay John, her guide, was at her side, a man no better or worse than the others, but different." Interestingly, he has not only accepted that Tay John belongs to common humanity (being as good as, but not, as a hero must be, better than other men), but also

defends a union he had previously disliked. Yet he never comments on how his own viewpoint has shifted.

Nor is it clear that Denham ever comes to comprehend entirely that opposites, light and dark, life and death, male and female, could have a co-operative as well as an antagonistic relationship. Perhaps this explains why the narrative is handed over to the suggestively named Blackie, who is, incidentally, fascinated by "hybrid creatures." Certainly Blackie's narrative resolves some of the problems posed by Denham's vision of a polarized and antagonistic world. Another explanation for the shift in narrators, so close to the novel's end as to have been seen as a weakness by Ondaatje,[27] is again to make the reader aware that all narration is incomplete, and that stories exist independently of their authors. Certainly the shift from the omniscient narrator of "Legend" to Jackie's far less unified narrative, to Blackie's short and inconclusive account, parallels the novel's move from certainty to doubt. The headings of part 2, "Hearsay" and part 3, "Evidence without a Finding" also parallel this movement.

This is not to say that O'Hagan turns to radical irony. He wants us to believe in doubt, to make myths while understanding that they are of necessity inadequate, and will be replaced by the versions of others. Thus there are passages in Denham's account which echo the oracular voice of the first part, which are intended to promote O'Hagan's world view.[28] These passages usually reveal a rift between Denham's theoretical understanding of the transitoriness and incompleteness of human understanding, and his emotional desire to see his heroic version of Tay John's story as truth. Yet Denham's acceptance that Tay John has a life outside Denham's version of it is not the final focus of the story. Blackie's tale is separate from the main narrative because it is O'Hagan's myth, the myth that is to replace the myths of gods and heroes, however temporarily. Myth does not die. The heroic myth may be replaced by Dobble's "publicity" and turned to selling goods instead of imposing a hierarchical authority, it may become implicit, rather than explicit, but it does not ever disappear. O'Hagan wants to show readers how myth is made, and how it rules us, even though we make it, and to argue that if we are going to be ruled by myths we should make them as liberating and beneficial in their effects as possible. Thus, this is a New World myth, egalitarian, popular, practical, peaceful, agnostic. In that it rejects both Dobble's American and materialistic realism, and Denham's Anglo-Irish and aristocratic romance, it is also specifically Canadian.

So far the underside of myth, its failures, its reductive violence, have been stressed. Myth's power comes, however, as much from its capacity to direct and assuage human desires, and from its beauty, as from its effectiveness in controlling and exploiting. O'Hagan sets up a loose series of analogies to try to convey the simultaneous pleasure and pain (or Beauty and violence, as Father Rorty explains it of myth-making.) Its violence is like economic exploitation, like territorial

conquest, like the Crucifixion, like rape. Its beauty is like striking gold, like reaching the Promised Land, like Divine Revelation, like orgasm. Not all of these analogies are given equal emphasis: the two that receive the most development are the religious and the sexual.

The resolution of opposites found in the conclusion takes the form of a "marriage" and concludes the battle of the sexes that forms much of the action of the novel.[29] Woman's allure is closely associated with the unknown, assaulted constantly by men eager for revelation. Thus sexual assaults parallel other assaults on the ideal. Denham comments on the river valley where he first encountered Tay John: "A new mountain valley leads a man on like that — like a woman he has never touched." Here is virgin territory, and the consummation of the relationship, the violation, comes in language: "It is physically exhausting to look on unnamed country. A name is the magic to keep it within the horizons. Put a name to it, put it on a map, and you've got it." Here is O'Hagan, staking out his intellectual territory with a new myth, here is the surveyor, mapping the landscape in order to exploit it, here is Denham calling "Yellowhead." But the finality of the "you've got it" is quickly undermined.[30] The unique ideal, seen, touched, possessed, turns to common stereotype:

> His common experience tells him it [the mountain valley] will be much like the others he knows — a canyon to go through, a meadowland or two, some forest, and its head up against a mountain or trickling from a grimy glacier. Yet he still goes up it hoping vaguely for some revelation.

The orgasm of "revelation" becomes post-coital guilt; "grime" sullies the ideal, much as Tay John's longing fingers smudged the kitschy pin-up in McLeod's cabin. (The "kitschiness" of the pin-up is O'Hagan's comment on the ideal as a reduction of reality.) The rise and fall of desire and disillusionment form a vicious circle. Only recognition of its unproductive nature can lead to escape, and that escape can only be into a new myth, which will ultimately itself prove unsatisfactory.

The tension between ideal and stereotype, two sides of the same debased coin, comes forward again and again. For example, the greenhorn Mountie Porter is sent out to bring Tay John to a hearing. He sees Tay John as the stereotypical "mad trapper" of adventure novels: "Here was the chance for him to do the kind of thing he had read about — like a story in *Chums*, chasing a half-breed hunter through the mountains." For Porter, the coin flips quickly; on his return, he "implied that, as a result of his two days on the trail with Tay John, life for him had taken an entirely new turn. The hidden was now revealed." This farcical repetition of various more serious, if equally suspect, encounters with the unknown, undercuts them all.

Women are more obviously stereotyped or idealized in the novel than men. Dobble compares Ardith to the stars until she rejects him; then he calls her "a

railroader's tart." For Denham, naturally, she is Woman. Mounted Police Inspector Wiggins compares her to a "piece of bad meat," while his Sergeant Flaherty, a married man almost impervious to her beauty, describes her in quite homely and domestic terms. Virgin, whore, wife, or wise old woman: these are the roles available. Yet, despite the firm narrative focus on their cleavages, both Julia Alderson and Ardith Aeriola are shown to be wiser than the men around them. Julia asks ultimate, unanswerable questions. When she and Tay John go off hunting, she is described as "a brown-headed girl searching for something she had lost." When she returns, her face resembles "the face of an old woman in repose" in contrast to her husband's which "was like the head collared with canvas at a country fair at which the customers shy wooden balls." She at least is on a quest to answer an important question, whatever one makes of her accusation that Tay John "impose[d] himself" on her, and her later retraction of it.[31] Father Rorty says that Ardith is "a more spiritual woman than I a man. . . . "

The battle of the sexes is graphically represented. Just as each encounter between the story-teller and the story is seen as analogous to a violent male-female encounter, so the novel can be seen as a series of such encounters. For Tay John, encounters with Shwat, with the female grizzly, with Timberlake's mare, with Julia Alderson, with Ardith Aeriola, all end in violence. The women feel violated, the grizzly is killed, and the mare lost in a river. Tay John is beaten, clawed, cuts off his own hand, and is hauled before a police inquiry. The violence and mutilation indicate the inevitable violence done to reality by language, but also the violence done to human beings by myth. The violence is generally aimed at those who are commonly equated, like Indians, and women, with nature rather than culture.

The nature-culture battle is reflected in what happens to the Rorty brothers. Their sky god is at war with a shadowy earth mother of mystery, sensuality, and darkness, what D. G. Jones calls in his account of the novel, the "Dionysian world of women."[32] Red Rorty is crucified by women because of his violation of a sexual taboo. Father Rorty dies fleeing Aeriola, seeking a divine revelation to protect him from a human one. Significantly, the tree on which he is found is a type called locally a "school-marm tree." That both men die with their feet well off the ground is emphasized. Neither one can deal with women; each flees into a misguided search for "truth." Tay John, however, emerges from the feminine earth, and when he descends into it, he takes Ardith, a woman, with him.

Part of Tay John's quest for the full free life of a man appears to have been a quest for a woman. Red Rorty's sexual crime, Father Rorty's celibacy, the Shuswap's refusal to let Tay John marry are all symptoms of a fear and misunderstanding of women — a misunderstanding that Denham and even Tay John appear to share. When Tay John tries to move into the white world, his first major desire is for Timberlake's mare, which he wins only at the cost of a

hand. She runs away, and Tay John trails her, finally losing her while swimming across a river. When he reappears, guiding the Aldersons, he is riding a gelding. And the white way of life that the Aldersons represent would ultimately geld him, as Dobble's parallel attempt to "stuff and frame" him makes clear. Dobble's pathetic aphrodisiac, the "Aphrodine Girdle" carries the theme of sterility and impotence further. Neither the rigid taboo-bound world of the religious, nor the white world of progress is a fertile ground: not for Tay John, not for writers, and not, O'Hagan implies, for human beings.

MALE AND FEMALE MEET and complement each other, however, in the characters of Tay John and Ardith Aeriola. This is emphasized by O'Hagan's descriptions of them: her hair is dark, his fair, but they share a peculiar line on their brows. They share an attitude to the conventional, too:

> Each of them . . . in manners distinct, stalked the boundaries of society without ever fully entering. They had that in common. They had in common, too, the obedience to impulse, seizing the precarious promise of the moment as a trout will seize a fly, opposed to the rest of us whose security is the measure of our denials.

Ardith has been made into a "kept woman"; she owes her apparent freedom and wealth to "the Canadian man of railways." She, like Dobble, tries to control Tay John by hiring him. He resists, and makes no attempt to possess her. Finally they flee together, their relationship uncontaminated by the mutual violence that marks most encounters in the novel. The freedom they attain is tenuous, however, possible only beyond the borders of "civilization."

Despite the fragility of their freedom, and its brevity, they create a new myth. At the centre of it is not the shining male figure, combatting, as Tay John fought the nursing she-bear, a "monster" symbolic of feminine mystery, fecundity, and threat, but a fertile couple, with what Inspector Wiggins describes as "a working arrangement." And if the mythic cycle follows the pattern set by Tay John's own birth, the hero/ine of the new myth that will be resurrected by those who seek one will be the child of Ardith Aeriola and Tay John, a mixture of her obscure Central European past, and his Irish-Indian heritage: a new Canadian. Myth, therefore, in O'Hagan's creation, is not immemorial, immutable, and universal, but flexible, time-bound, and appropriate to its setting.

Of course, given the novel's theoretical assumptions, the myth undermines itself. Myth is collective, as Denham emphasizes in noting that he is not the "author" of Tay John's story, which exists "independently," mainly in the local bars. An individual writer can produce a mythic story, but, strictly speaking, only a group can make it into myth. The extent to which O'Hagan's myth seems

"ahead of its time" is the extent to which it remains outside of myth proper. That Tay John and Ardith Aeriola can survive only at the edges of society, and of a rough, frontier society at that, is an indication of how far O'Hagan's myth was from the society he worked in as a writer. In elevating the illicit relationship of a "half-breed" and a Central European "whore," O'Hagan elevates two who would inevitably be the centre of racist, sexist, and moralist discrimination in Canada, even today.

He is also flouting the dogmas of "Imperial" criticism in creating a colonial myth. Denham trails behind him into virgin territory the whole European literary heritage, the dreadful burden of the colonial writer. Yet it proves fruitful. He supplies from local materials those things identified as lacking by critics like Rupert Brooke. Indigenous popular genres — myth, legend, the tall tale, gossip, rumour, and hearsay — form the text, which buries its references to "high" culture in allusions and echoes that are not essential for its comprehension. And O'Hagan single-handedly moves an indigenous myth through all the genres considered essential for a "proper" literary history: myth, epic, romance, tragedy, comedy, the novel.[33] He not only turns from "high" to "low" cultural forms, but he produces an egalitarian myth: Tay John is "as good as" other men at the novel's end, although Denham, an aristocrat of sorts, as an Anglo-Irish remittance man, must come to terms with this egalitarianism gradually.

Despite these "victories" over old ideologies, the survival of the myth is problematic. After all, the defeat of Dobble is temporary. He was only forty years ahead of his time and the capitalist "development" of the region that pushed Tay John out of context after context would proceed inexorably, its reductive vision transforming the environment to object. Tay John and Ardith are pushed, not only to the fringes of space, but to the most "precarious" point in time: the present moment. Here Terry Eagleton's comments on the relationship of Catherine and Heathcliff in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* seem applicable:

> Their love remains an unhistorical essence which fails to enter into concrete existence and can do so, ironically, only in death. . . . Catherine and Heathcliff's love then is pushed to the periphery by society itself, projected into myth.[34]

Similarly, given social forces, neither Tay John nor Ardith Aeriola can enter history, despite the power of the mythic resolution their love represents. And O'Hagan's myth is inevitably marked by the forces he attempts to combat. The identification of women in the novel with everything that is not conventionally "male" leaves the woman outside, and out of power. The men represent the subject, culture, reason, while women are primarily objects and bodies, associated with the mysterious "reality" that men must try to possess and comprehend. This representation can be defended as a reflection of the social relations of the period. But even the idealized freedom that O'Hagan's final myth presents is problematic.

Ardith is "freed" only to become part of another male myth, where she does the cooking, and depends on Tay John for survival. And economic forces still impose themselves in this remote, barely touched wilderness. Even Tay John's ability to live off the land is legislated, since Sergeant Flaherty could have arrested him for hunting out of season. Denham can produce his satiric account of Dobble, free of the usual fears and restraints, precisely because he is economically "free." He not only has the self-assurance of his birth, but also its economic power, in the form of quarterly remittances that lift him, if only temporarily, out of the power of the local economy and its employer-employee relationships. It is easy for him to regard Tay John as a noble savage, because, unlike the guides and cooks and trappers of the novel, he is not in direct competition with Tay John for a living. Clearly, the full free life of a man or a woman is an unrealizable ideal: Denham comments that "Freedom, for most of us, brief, evading precise definition, is only the right to seek a further bondage."

Certainly Tay John dies bound, not free: bound to mortality and humanity. His love for Aeriola kills him, as her love for him, her pregnancy, has presumably killed her. And so O'Hagan himself is forced into bondage. But his is the bondage of the escape artist, of a mental traveller who moves from place to place, adapting himself to his context, who continues to seek and wonder, accepting that he speaks "in the country of illusion":

> Then we cry, we of the West, we Westerners, we who have come here to sit below the mountains — for your Westerner is not only the man born here, blind, unknowing, dropped by his mother upon the ground, but also one who came with his eyes open, passing other lands upon the way — Give us new earth we cry; new places, that we may see our shadows shaped in forms that man has never seen before.

For O'Hagan, the future is not simply determined by the past. In the precarious present, the moment of action, of "promise," clarity of vision can create a new and perhaps less oppressive myth.

NOTES

An earlier version of this paper was delivered at the Association for Canadian and Quebec Literatures meeting, Guelph, Ontario, in June 1984. I thank Dan MacLulich for his helpful comments on that paper, and Nelson Smith and Susan Gingell for theirs on a later version.

[1] Rupert Brooke, *Letters from America* (New York: Charles Scribners' Sons, 1917), p. 156.

[2] See *The Search for English-Canadian Literature*, ed. & intro. Carl Ballstadt (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1975), pp. xxxii-xxxv.

[3] I found this extremely apposite quotation from George Grant, *Technology and Empire* (Toronto: Anansi, 1969, p. 17)in Leslie Monkman's discussion of *Tay John* in his *A Native Heritage* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1981), p. 44; perhaps this lament is partly a reaction to Grant's paternal grandfather's prosaic

account, in *Ocean to Ocean*, 1873, of the Sanford Fleming Expedition's crossing of the Tête Jaune Pass in 1872.

[4] Rev. of Howard O'Hagan's *The School-Marm Tree*, *Quill & Quire* 44, No. 6 (1978), p. 36.

[5] Leslie Armour and Elizabeth Trott, "George Grant," in *The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature* (Toronto: Oxford, 1983), p. 317.

[6] Howard O'Hagan, *Tay John* (1939; rpt.: Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1974), pp. 166-67; all further references are to this edition.

[7] Adrian Cunningham, in his "Myth, Ideology and Levi-Strauss: The Problem of the Genesis Story in the Nineteenth Century," in *The Story of Myth: Six Studies*, ed. Adrian Cunningham (London: Sheed & Ward, 1973), 132-76, outlines the problems of definition surrounding the terms *myth* and *ideology*; see also Jorge Larrain, *The Concept of Ideology* (London: Hutchinson, 1979), pp. 130-71.

[8] Howard O'Hagan, "The White Horse," in *The Woman Who Got on at Jasper Station and Other Stories* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1977), p. 56.

[9] O'Hagan, "White Horse," p. 65; Derrida's comments on the connection between proper names and violence in *De la grammatologie* (Paris: Minuit, 1967), pp. 164-68 inform this section.

[10] For information on Shuswap customs, and religion, see James B. Brow, *Shuswap of Canada* (New Haven, Conn.: Human Relations Area File, 1972) and James Teit, *The Shuswap*, 1909 (rpt. ed. New York: AMS Press, 1975), the latter an account of journeys made between 1887 and 1904. Ralph Maud's *A Guide to B.C. Indian Myth and Legend: A Short History of Myth-Collecting and a Survey of Published Texts* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1982) is a useful bibliographical guide.

[11] Michael Ondaatje, "Howard O'Hagan and 'The Rough-Edged Chronicle'" in *The Canadian Novel in the Twentieth Century*, ed. George Woodcock (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1975), pp. 276-77.

[12] O'Hagan acknowledges his discovery of the Tsimshian myth in Diamond Jenness' *The Indians of Canada* (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1932), pp. 197-99; the Tête Jaune legend is fully discussed in John Grierson MacGregor's *Overland by the Yellowhead* (Saskatoon: Western Producer, 1974), p. 1, 26-27 and following. Tête Jaune, according to MacGregor, an Iroquois, Pierre Hatsinaton, who moved west with the fur trade, was said to have "discovered" the Yellowhead Pass in 1823, and was finally murdered by local natives. Although O'Hagan's version of the legend seems to be an adaptation, I have no idea which of the several versions of this legend he knew.

[13] Jenness, p. 199.

[14] I am grateful to Michael Taft, editor of *Tall Tales of British Columbia* (Victoria, B.C.: Provincial Archives of British Columbia, 1983), for my information on tall tales. Sidehill gougers are animals that have evolved lopsided so as to be able to run around mountains more easily.

[15] Ondaatje, p. 279.

[16] D. G. Jones, *Butterfly on Rock* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1970), p. 50.

[17] Ondaatje, p. 278.

[18] Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, ed. Robert Kimbrough (New York: Norton, 1971), p. 66.

[19] Ondaatje, p. 277; see also Gary Geddes, "The Writer that CanLit Forgot," *Saturday Night*, November 1977, p. 86.

[20] Kenneth Bruffee, *Elegiac Romance: Cultural Change and Loss of the Hero in Modern Fiction* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1983), p. 51.

[21] Robert Kroetsch, "Unhiding the Hidden: Recent Canadian Fiction," in *Canadian Novelists and the Novel*, ed. Douglas Daymond and Leslie Monkman, (Ottawa: Borealis, 1981), p. 239.

[22] Bruffee, p. 66.

[23] Bruffee, p. 66.

[24] Bruffee, p. 66.

[25] Bruffee, p. 51.

[26] See *Tay John*, p. 31; according to Brow, "the [totem or guardian] spirits only brought good to their owners" (p. 133). According to Teit, "Respect was shown to animals to please them and to ensure good luck in the chase. When a bear was killed the hunter sang the grizzly or black bear song, as the case might be and prayed. . . . Before the hunter returned to camp he painted his face all black with charcoal. . . . Then the people knew he had killed a bear. He himself never told, for the bear would be angry if he boasted. . . . Skulls of all bears killed were raised on the tops of tall poles" (p. 602).

[27] Ondaatje, p. 283.

[28] Ondaatje, p. 279.

[29] This point deserves more attention than I can give it here. In a sense the whole novel is a repetition of the same violent incident, worked out at various metaphorical levels. Story-telling is to rape is to economic exploitation is to exploration and naming is to. . . .

[30] As Denham points out, "Possession is a great surrender" (p. 113). For more on metaphor in a new world see Annette Kolodny's "Honing a Habitable Landscape: Women's Images for the New World Frontiers" in *Women and Language in Literature and Society*, ed. Sally McConnell-Ginet, and others (New York: Praeger, 1980), pp. 188-204. Women did not use the metaphor of rape to describe their encounter with the new world.

[31] Susan Gingell pointed out to me that there is a parallel between Julia Alderson and Adela Quested of E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* (1924). Both women seem to have been so overwhelmed by the impact of a foreign culture, landscape, and male "guide" that they can articulate it only in terms of sexual violation.

[32] Jones, p. 71.

[33] References to this order are common in early Canadian criticism; see, for example, Sara Jeannette Duncan "Saunterings," *The Week*, 3 (30 Sept. 1886), p. 107. In 1916, Alfred Baker, in his Presidential Address to the Royal Society of Canada, "Canada's Intellectual Status and Intellectual Needs," comments regretfully "We are scarcely ingenuous enough to write Sagas. . . ." *Proceedings and Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada*, 3rd ser. 10 (1916), app. A, p. LXIV. The "correct" pattern, of course, was the Old World one.

[34] Terry Eagleton, *Myths of Power: A Marxist Study of the Brontës* (London: Macmillan, 1975), p. 109.

WORDS I

J. S. Porter

How you write is how you breathe
In, out, breath, words

Words dwell within, indwelling
They spell us; they breathe us

Some words burn; others freeze
English has no sex, but it has smell

The old words always come back —
Mother, God, friends

Do words have shadows?
Yes.

The Devil is smart
He hides in bad words
Words you cannot see
Words you cannot feel

If a word makes you shiver
or laugh or wince or sick
it's not a bad word

Foggy words, numbing words, empty words
These are Devil words
Word as lullabye, as ether

There are no neuter words
All words are of Man or of Woman

Only a sexless language could create a Machine

In French life is a woman you woo
In English it's an it
Endlessly measurable, quantifiable, computable
Ize is the verb; ization is the noun

Words have echo, aftertaste
Auras, aromas, haloes and tails
Roots, stems and blossoms

They leave a scent in the air
And a stench on the ground

Some words cut; others bleed
For a living sentence you need dead words

The forgiving word, the believing word
The healing word, the saving word
These are God's words

God and the Devil are end words in our lifesong

Words make you live more
Or die more

THE OWL

Allan Safarik

People think the owl wise
because he looks remarkably similar
to the house cat, who is no dummy
and because he is endowed
with all the tools of the judge

In truth the Chinese call owl
the cat bird and though he eats
the same little mammals as cat
and has sharp feline ears
he is not very bright

But don't pity the owl
when the song birds find him
roosting in the daytime
the invective and hatred he endures
would make a wiser creature paranoid

Not the owl, his reversal is
swooping in pillow dark madness
No time for pleas or emotion
he sentences each rodent impartially
with his legal beak, judicial talons

SILENCING THE WORD IN HOWARD O'HAGAN'S "TAY JOHN"

Arnold E. Davidson

THE LANGUAGE OF LEGEND

As the naming of its three parts ("Legend," "Hearsay," "Evidence — without a finding") well might suggest, Howard O'Hagan's *Tay John* does not provide any definitive conclusion but trails off into uncertainty and indeterminacy. Mere hearsay succeeds and subverts the legend of the protagonist with which the book begins, while such evidence as is set forth in the last section — and throughout the entire work — conduces to no final finding. Words, in short, do not lead to any truths in or of the novel, and the text marks out a space of misnaming and misunderstanding. It is this space that Jack Denham, O'Hagan's Irish Canadian version of Joseph Conrad's Captain Marlow, would occupy with his "Tale," his "gospel" of Tay John.[1]

Even that protagonist's name posits the yawning disjunction between the word and its referent around which the novel is structured. "Tay John" is, of course, a mispronunciation of "Tête Jaune" — the French designation for the blonde Indian as voiced by men who do not speak French. Yet the name Denham originally gives to the same character is the English "Yellow Head," and the protagonist's previous Indian name was "Kumkleseem," which can also be translated as "Yellow Head." One name subsumes and replaces another by differently saying the same thing, and thereby attests to the arbitrary nature of names as well as to the transitory nature of identity, for the original Kumkleseem who first enters the white man's world is not synonymous with the final Tay John who at last takes himself out of it. "Tay John" differs, too, from "Tête Jaune," and the change in spelling even more than any change in pronunciation serves to obscure the French origin of the name, to make it more a purely conventional appellation instead of a partly descriptive one. Conjoining the comfortably familiar "John" with the vaguely esoteric "Tay," "Tay John" becomes simply another version of "Indian Joe" (meaning not quite a regular Joe but on the right track), and as such it voices more the programme of those who employ the name than the being of him to whom it is applied. Again, naming is misnaming, and even the most seemingly obvious descriptive designation is strangely deflected as it travels from one tongue to another.

Lest these opening postulations seem too strained for a work written in the 1930's — a time when Western Canada was supposedly first finding in fiction its

realistic voice, not its metafictional voicelessness — let us turn now to the first section of the novel to examine in some detail just how capably O'Hagan compromises the very story he constructs by telling it in terms of a much larger legend, the most unquestionably accepted legend or story in the western world. Essentially, I argue, the numerous "gospel" references in the novel are no accident, and one narration that strangely takes us from a miraculous birth to an equally miraculous death necessarily invokes the prototype of all such narrations, the (at least by common Christian consent) greatest story ever told. Yet O'Hagan's tale of a failed messiah who cannot save his people or the woman he loves or, finally, even himself persistently counters the larger story with which it is framed. For example, in contrast to "In the beginning was the Word," we have, in *Tay John*, three (incongruous trilogies pervade the novel) emblematic endings in silence — a "skull" with a "stone . . . still between its jaws"; a corpse, its lips sealed with frozen froth; a pregnant woman, dead, her open "mouth . . . chock-full of snow."[2] It is that first stone, however, that speaks most clearly of Tay John's case, for the stone, marking the end of Tay John's beginning, effectively sets forth the silence and death out of which this character is born.

The stone ends a story, a story that begins with a man whose "voice overtopped all . . . others" and his conversion experience. Red Rorty, crude, drunk, and loud, down from the mountains to sell his furs and carouse away the proceeds in an 1880 Edmonton as elemental as the man himself, is on his way to the whorehouse when he is stopped by the sound of singing from a nearby church. Soon he is loudly proclaiming the tenets of this church — "That whosoever believeth on Him shall not perish but shall have everlasting life" — and presently, as drunk on religion as he ever was on whiskey, he kills his horses, burns all of his other material possessions, and sets out, like Saul of Tarsus, for a different life. He will go among the Indians.

The Shuswap, whose myths tell of a "leader with yellow hair who [will] come to take them back over the mountains to a land full of game, fish . . . and berries," take Rorty in but soon decide that he is a forerunner of their promised messiah and not the man himself. Rorty tells them, loudly, of another who will "come again one day to be a leader of mankind," to save those who believe and to afflict those who do not. This differing as to deferred leaders lasts until Rorty lapses into his old ways. He sees a young wife shredding cedar bark by rubbing it on her thigh, which, "bare, and oiled with the cedar, shone in the sunlight." That night he seizes her. "She did not resist. His troubled flesh found ease." But even if she did consent, her people did not. Next day the other Indian women beat Rorty, drive him into the forest, seize him and tie him kneeling to a tree. The parodic Paul who became a parodic John the Baptist now becomes a parodic Saint Sebastian, a grotesque martyr to a crude lapse from a crude faith. Children shoot arrows into his stomach. The women set fire to his hair and then to the

tree to which he is tied. The last words that he might have spoken are stopped by a stone jammed into his mouth. Sometime later the young wife dies and still later a baby is born from her grave. The baby, of course, is Tay John.

I have briefly summarized the chief legend in "Legend," the story of Red Rorty's end and Tay John's beginning, because that dual account especially exemplifies the two dialectics implicit in this novel. As Rorty's failed missionary career illustrates, the structure of his whole conclusion is governed by the faltering opposition of sex and salvation on the one hand and sound and silence on the other. Furthermore, these dialectics both work at cross purpose and are intertwined with each other. Thus the roisterer of the mountains who for sheer delight "hurled his voice" until it "rolled from one rock wall to another" stands silent in the town, caught on his way to the whorehouse by the hymns emanating from a "new" and "different" church. Turning from his originally intended mission, Rorty soon sings the loudest in the choir, and after listening, in a setting vaguely homoerotic, to the whispered counsel of the unkempt minister, the "echoes" of Rorty's affirmation of belief "rolled in the emptied church louder than they ever had in the mountains." Rorty then decides to take that new belief back to the mountains and to be, in a new and different way, a voice in the wilderness. His model is "Saul of Tarsus, afterwards called Paul, who left one path of life for another; who went out into the world, among strange people, and preached The Way, and became a great man whose words were remembered." Forfeiting sex for salvation might prepare him, he imagines, to voice the living word, and that word, surviving the silence of death, might allow a kind of continuing existence even on earth — which was ostensibly the function of sex.

His tenuous programme hardly works out as planned even though the dialectic of his categories remains just as confused as ever. Indeed, Rorty's sermon to the Indians — "the people said that no man had spoken with such a great voice before" — is soon followed by his silent seizing of Hanni, the young wife. And that act is followed by his demise and a consequent re-evaluation of his earlier words. Three days after Rorty's apocalyptic death by fire, the Indian women return to the still smoldering scene:

> They found the skull, fallen to the ground and caught in the black twisted roots of a tree. The stone was still between its jaws. Yaada took a stick and pointed.
>
> "See!" she said, "he was a great liar, and the word has choked him!"

As the pervasive Biblical typology of Rorty's silent dying attests, the word is the Word and the Word is stone.

Although itself compromised in the Indian setting, Christian myth still serves to undermine the Indian myth that, in this novel, comes after it, not before. To start with, there is the definite confusion embodied in Rorty's mission into the wilderness. As both prophet and precursor, just what does he promise to the

Indians? Signifying, to them, the coming of their messiah, he speaks, to them, of the coming of his. So Rorty as a sign equally asserts two contradictory meanings, one firmly embedded in one mythology and one in the other, and either reading of that sign founders on what it necessarily leaves out.

Unless, of course, the two different promised leaders turn out to be one and the same — a possibility that the Indians also early consider. But, whether either, neither, or both readings of Rorty are valid, the result for Tay John is still the same. He is born bearing an impossible burden — a supplement of deferred hopes that from the very beginning deprive his life of human possibility by imparting to it a surplus of mythic meaning. Through an odd conjoining of Christian and Platonic thought, the Shuswap define their leader and their need:

> Their faith was the substance of things hoped for, the shadow of what they could not yet discern. They believed that the world was made of things they could not touch nor see, as they knew that behind the basket their hands made was the shape of the perfect basket which once made would endure for ever and beyond the time when its semblance was broken and worn thin by use.

Kumkleseem cannot be merely Kumkleseem; he must also be the man behind his name, the perfect essence and not the particular individual. No wonder sustained ceremonies of rebirth and renaming are required to keep him in the world at all.

That the paradigms for the father will be somewhat different for the son is early indicated by the way in which the boy, born from the grave, "walked in the sunlight as other children, but alone with no shadow to follow him and protect him." He is a presence marked by an absence and still marked even when that telling absence is undone. Although the child is united with his shadow through the agency of a wise old woman, the union is not secure. The first faint shadow flees when it is early stepped on, so the reforged bond is never tested. "The people were careful not to tread upon his shadow nor to touch it, fearful that it would leave him," and he them. Consequently, only "when the sun was gone and his shadow had left him for the night . . . could [Kumkleseem] come close to his people." The natural division of day and night, of light and dark, modulates the inverse unnatural division between this prospective leader and his people who await his future mission.

That division is magnified by the vision journey whereby Kumkleseem would determine "the shape and the colour of the life before him and . . . the spirit that would guide him." This same ordeal ostensibly also proves Kumkleseem's readiness to become the promised leader whom the Shuswap have long anticipated, and thus parallel's Christ's trial in the wilderness. Yet there is, from the first, a shadow over the venture. Kumkleseem travels into a dark valley dangerous to man. The danger is of supernatural separation from others and loss of human status: "Men feared that one night . . . ["the spirit of that valley"] would come down upon them in their sleep and leave them with a coyote's howl for a voice

and only a coyote's claws for hands, and each man would be for ever a stranger to his neighbour."[3] For Kumkleseem, already markedly apart from others, the darkness of this valley especially threatens to undo that other more natural darkness only in which he can "come close to his people."

Kumkleseem returns from the ordeal with two signs of his journey, his account of the animals he encountered and the actual gold dust he found at the head of the dark river. The Indians read only the first sign and read only the possible significance of the last animal that watched over the youth's watch, a grizzly bear. "The bear-spirit will be your guardian spirit. His strength will be your strength, and his cunning yours. . . . He will pull back the cape from his face so that you may see him, and he will talk to you with a man's voice." That reading at least promises them the possibility of a great leader. But a better reading would be based on the second sign. Indeed, the *gold* dust from the *head* of the dark river names the protagonist and grounds that name (all three of them, in fact) in absence and separation, which soon follow with the arrival of other whites on the scene. Three prospectors (the wise men from the East) can immediately discern at least one paramount meaning in the glittering dust Kumkleseem discovered and promise him a modest reward if he will lead them to it. He thereby acquires a rifle, powder and bullets, a new red coat, a new name that no one can properly pronounce, and a growing taste for white ways. "His rifle was his own, and no man could touch it." With such new ownership, as opposed to the old communal ways of the Shuswap, Tay John can now hunt more for furs to be privately traded than for food to be communally shared.

It is at this point that the division and duplicity that already characterize Kumkleseem/Tay John subsume also his anticipated mission as messianic Indian leader and do so especially in terms of the crucial paradigm of presence/absence, which is simply the sound/silence of his predecessor-prophet-father translated into another medium. The Indians await their future (chronologically elsewhere) leader in the person of Tay John, who is now mostly geographically elsewhere, and hope thereby to be rejoined to their past (another chronological and geographic elsewhere). Elsewhere, Tay John is learning the white man's ways, which are more and more copied by the other Indians too. "Days came when the young men, following Tay John, failed to hunt meat and hides for the village" but hunt instead for trading furs and thus for rifles and "red scarves and sashes." Their successful hunting in this new fashion soon reduces them all to general starvation and a crisis of expectancy as they wait "for a sign from Kumkleseem" to "go whither his finger pointed." But of course they are already well on their way. Their leader is conducting them into their future which, in the white man's world, not the Indians', will be both chronologically and geographically elsewhere or, more accurately, nowhere.

The final severance of Tay John from the Indians is precipitated, however, by

the other dichotomy (sex *vs.* salvation), which also passes in somewhat altered form from father to son. The latter does at last briefly take on the role of leader, but even then he refuses to be the leader whom the Indians expected: "The woman of Tay John is the people. He is the leader of the people and is married to their sorrows." Tay John would subvert such definition and mission by seizing a woman already promised to another man of the tribe. The resultant crisis is resolved not by execution but by exile, after which the Indians tell each other tales of the missing man being away on a particularly arduous hunt, and perpetually prepare for his imminent return. For example, they make him, with the advent of winter, "a new house," and "each day they brought fresh boughs, laid them there for his bed, and made a fire against his coming." But only occasionally at night can they sometimes believe they hear him near, "and in the morning no one would speak of what had happened during the night."

"All that winter smoke rose from the new house built for Tay John. At night an owl perched by it and hooted." Ending thus, "Legend" attests that the end of legend, for the Indians, is an enduring absence made bearable by the most tenuous hints of presence and by the hope, sustained through holding fast his story, that the king might come again. Legend is, then, the perpetual deferral of things hoped for as marked by the telling of that hope. Or by not telling it; with the sign necessarily here and its significance ever elsewhere, the story can sound even in the hoot of a night owl.

Neither does legend (nor Tay John either) fare any better in the white world. Deferral and disappearance, carried over now from Indian story to white, continue to govern the text of the novel and to undermine the larger text on which it is modelled. Consider, for example, the crucifixion of Father Rorty who played at imitating Christ to find only the imitation real.[4] Such contraverting of Christian story with its promise of teleological finality continues to the end of *Tay John*. Thus Christ, who in a transcendent sense walked out of death to save all men, is countered by Tay John, who — just as transcendently — once out, walks back in again and does so to save no one. This protagonist's final passing and the end of the novel — "He had just walked down, the toboggan behind him, under the snow and into the ground" — is presided over, it will be remembered, by the burden he takes with him. And Ardith Aeriola, pregnant and dead, tied to the toboggan, her open mouth "chock-full of snow," enunciates one final devastating parody of the promised last word frozen in time. From beginning to end, then, *Tay John* turns on Biblical parallels but it employs those parallels to undo the model on which it is based. With such erasure of the original Book, *Tay John* is finally grounded in nothing. The result is a work that denies transcendence; that translates "In the beginning was the Word" into the opposing dictum "In the end was silence" and then translates that ending into a new beginning.

STORY AS HEARSAY

The narrative mode of "Legend" is an ironically aloof omniscience so distanced from the action it describes that it can give us a bird's-eye-view of not only the Rocky Mountain setting of the novel but also of man set in the peaks and valleys of his whole history — recorded and unrecorded. "The time of this in its beginning, in men's time, is 1880 in the summer, and its place is the Athabaska valley, near its head in the mountains, and along the other waters falling into it, and beyond them a bit, over the Yellowhead Pass to the westward, where the Fraser, rising in a lake, flows through wilderness and canyon down to the Pacific." In this beginning there are two parallel double perspectives. The opening panorama portraying the "place" of the novel is set in a still larger panorama of "wilderness and canyon" beyond and beyond that the broad Pacific; and so too is "men's time" set in the larger perspective of what we might term "Legend's" time and beyond that timelessness.

Yet the two times of the novel — chronological, historical, on the one hand; and, on the other, timeless legend verging towards timelessness — also stand in opposition to one another. For example, the metaphoric "Word," the Bible as the timeless book transcending time, is subverted and silenced in the here and now of 1880 Alberta by a real stone; moreover, with that stone, Red Rorty's mission to eternity ends in stasis and parodic death. Nor does Indian legend, Indian theology, fare any better in the present human time in which that legend unfolds. The Indians await their promised leader who will guide them to an earthly heaven but they await him in a land already transgressed by fur traders and prospectors and soon to be penetrated by the railroads too. In a very real sense, the whites, in history, seeking their lost Eden in the New World, are busily destroying all possibilities of paradise through the very rigour of their search. There will be no other place left, for them or for the Indians. Tay John, then, is deprived of his mission before it can be begun. Not kingdom but exile must be his fate, and exile into a world of other exiles seeking (like Red Rorty or Jack Denham or Alf Dobble) some kingdom in the mountains.

Just as legend's time with its attendant timeless hope is undone, for the Indians, by the intrusion of white history, so, too, is it undone by the intrusion of Indian history, which is now white history writ small. When the Indians, in the exigencies of an exploited present, still pin their "faith" and "hope" on Tay John, they wait for him to "speak with a great voice" and to resolve thereby their suffering and their doubt. Yet "a great voice," it must be remembered, has previously spoken, so the promise of the mythic future is already the fact of the actual past, and that fact calls the anticipated future not into being but into question. The Shuswap have already had their leader and he failed them, or, at best, he presaged the subsequent leader who will also fail them. The Indians drop from

sight; Tay John falls from transcendent destiny into a crude quotidian; the story declines from legend to hearsay.

That final declension might, at first, seem to represent a narrative gain. Since timelessness is denied by time and omniscience serves mostly to negate the promise of story, it well might be that the only authentic speaking possible in the novel is the human voice with all its limitations. And "Hearsay," combining (by meaning) "rumour" and (by etymology) "repetition," insists on both the humanity and the limitations of the voices whereby the rest of the text is rendered. Again, however, the novel is built around structuring polarities which are themselves structured to collapse.

To start with, the paramount speaking voice in "Hearsay" regularly aspires to transcendence. The text denies truth. Nevertheless, Jack Denham, the capable narrator of the middle section, implicitly insists on the higher truth of all that he says and does so by positing the "magic" of naming.[5] "For a country where no man has stepped before is new in the real sense of the word, as though it had just been made, and when you turn your back upon it you feel that it may drop back again into the dusk that gave it being. It is only your vision that holds it in the known and created world. . . . [But] a name is the magic to keep it within the horizons. Put a name to it, put it on a map, and you've got it." The world called into being by the ordering word constitutes a great image of authority. Yet the authority that Denham claims for his own naming, his own tales, he denies to those of others:

> For your backwoodsman is a thorough gossip. . . . He pays for a meal, for a night's lodging, with a tale. His social function is to hand on what he has heard, with the twist his fancy has been able to add. . . . What he has not seen he deduces, and what he cannot understand he explains.

And those others, and the novel, deny Denham the authority that he denies them: "He might meet a friend at the street corner and follow him to his destination, talking, *stretching his story the length of Edmonton.* It became known as 'Jackie's Tale.' It was a faith — *a gospel to be spread*, that tale, and he was its only apostle" (emphasis added). Faith, hitherto, has not fared well in the novel. Nor are we reassured as to the absolute truth of the rendering when we note that the whole gospel according to Denham is a tale he tells in a bar.

It might also be noted that Denham's extended defense for the truth-in-magic of naming is refuted by the very occasion that prompted it, his excursion into "country where no man has stepped before." This excursion first brings Denham into the presence of Tay John — on the other side of the river that Denham was exploring to its source and over which Denham himself had earlier crossed. The narrator is not therefore envisioning the naming of his own new world but the renaming of Tay John's old one; he is not an Adam taking his first green inventory of Eden but a latter-day Columbus still deaf to the Indians' words and blind

to the Indians' map, the Indians' claims on the country. He will name the land; he will name Yellow Head too; such naming is also an unnaming and it is a dispossessing as much as it is a possessing. But more to the point, by Denham's own logic, the true first name that endows possession precedes any voicing of later and necessarily inauthentic names. And with authenticating origins deferred ever further into the past, does not any story become dubious repetition, mostly rumour, mere hearsay?

Denham's practice of naming, as opposed to his logic, is itself named in the novel, which is to say that the processes and programme prompting "Jackie's Tale" are themselves embedded in his often repeated account. That embedding is especially seen in his description of his first crucial encounter with Tay John just across the raging mountain stream and of Tay John's immediately subsequent encounter with the bear. For Denham had "dreamed of — of [he haltingly early admits] meeting a bear one day close up, hand to hand so to speak, and doing it in. An epic battle: man against the wilderness. And now I saw the battle taking form," he continues, "but another man was in *my* place" (emphasis added). His story, he would have it, is at least in part the story of his dispossession, a tale of how "only the width of a mountain stream kept him from the adventure of his life." So, deferring from the first the critical question of just whose adventure, whose text, it really was, he slowly works out ["It took me a long time to find the words"] his narration of Tay John's victory over the bear. That account of how a man armed only with a knife killed an "immense" grizzly concludes by emphasizing the symbolic rebirth of the victor from the beast just killed: "Then the mass quivered. It heaved. A man's head appeared beside it, bloody, muddied, as though he were just being born, as though he were climbing out of the ground. Certainly man had been created anew before my eyes. Like birth itself it was a struggle against the powers of darkness and Man had won." That last general "Man," however, begins to give the game away. The rebirth here imaged is not just Tay John's, for the Indian soon "vanished, as though he were leaving one form of existence for another." The protagonist can exit from the scene because the narrator has entered more fully into it, reborn into his own tale by visioning a recreated image of himself. "He [Tay John] had won. *We* [he and I] had won" (emphasis in the original). Denham will participate in the triumph by his telling of it and thus he will reconfiscate his adventure, his victory. He, most of all, might be converted by his gospel, which demonstrates that his sustained enterprise of recounting is not an exercise in authentic being but in pretended becoming.[6]

Yet the paradigms of sound/silence and presence/absence come into play for the narrator, too, particularly since Denham, we are told (just before the voice of omniscience hands the novel over to this narrator), has his own personal story but declines to tell it: "His name was Jack Denham, but he was known generally as Jackie — a man whose pride was in his past, of which he seldom spoke, but

over which loomed the shadow of a great white house in the north of Ireland. . . . From that past, and because of it, he received four times a year a remittance." The remittance man is here because he grandly failed there; he is marked by the absence of his former higher status, which is his shadow. Not to sound that absence, Denham substitutes one story for another, and the hero of a New World tale replaces the failure of an Old World one.

The replacement, however, more and more proves the failure. Although Denham can share in the victory over the bear through the narrative subterfuge of casting himself as Tay John or Tay John as a version of himself, that doubling is undone by another doubling. Balancing, contrasting to, and cancelling out Denham's first episode in his celebration of Tay John's exploits is the final episode, the account of Tay John's victory over Dobble and all his men and of the victor's subsequent flight into the mountains with Ardith Aeriola. Denham, who is himself clearly drawn to the woman, must once more tell of another who is in his place, but now there is no reward in vicariously sharing that other's triumph. The story he tells thus takes on the same contours as the one he does not tell, as in each he ends up a marginal man. Out of place in his first story, he is displaced from the second one, too, and, in consequence, increasingly disassociates himself from its telling. As we near the end of *Tay John*, Denham first interposes Inspector Wiggins and Sergeant Flaherty between himself and his account. Then he abdicates entirely. At its conclusion the narration is no longer "Jackie's Tale" but has been handed over to Blackie.[7] Repetition circling back upon itself must sooner or later circumscribe its own emptiness, and Denham, capable narrator that he is, is left finally fictionally bankrupt, without even a tale to tell.

EVIDENCE, FINDINGS, AND FINAL SENTENCES

The title of Part III, "Evidence — without a finding," turning as it does on a legal trope, gives rise to a crucial question. Just who or what is it that is on trial and on what grounds is judgement deferred? The most likely candidate for sentencing is, of course, Tay John. After all, he gives his name to the novel, and throughout that novel he regularly both invites and evades some final summation that might deem him a hero (in the Indian context or the white) or a renegade (again in the Indian context or the white). Yet what we might term the transcript of this protagonist's extended but inconclusive trial itself constitutes evidence for still another transgression that is not prosecuted in the novel. As previously noted, the account of Tay John's life is confiscated to become "Jackie's Tale," which could well lay Denham open to charges of narrative theft and narrative meddling. Furthermore, in the final section of the novel, the faith of Father Rorty, the enterprise of Alf Dobble, and the virtue of Ardith Aeriola are all at issue and in doubt.

The issues and the doubts are further confused and confounded by the way in which they mix and merge throughout the novel as one inconclusive trial verges into another. Indeed, Part II ends, it will be remembered, with Tay John's one official encounter with the law, his quasi-summons ["request, only request mind you, that he come down here"] to answer an imputed charge of rape. That encounter, however, lurches toward inconclusion instead of proceeding to any official finding and then is followed by Part III, still more "Evidence — without a finding." But since Part I and Part II, "Legend" and "Hearsay," are themselves prototypes of Part III and emphasize by their very nature the missing authenticity that they each also imply, it is not surprising that the clearest inconclusive trial comes before the longest and concluding section of the novel that is ostensibly grounded — or at least named — in just such a trial.

That trial merits attention, first, because it does embody in miniature the narrative strategy of the whole novel — a promise of at last getting at the truth but a promise that is denied in the practice of attempting to do so. The trial, however, is also noteworthy because it constitutes a test of Tay John's response to an immediately previous and more tenuous test of authenticity, his answer to the proto-existential question that Julia Alderson, the young American wife of an older Englishman, poses on the last night of the Alderson's hunting expedition into the Rockies:

> "Suppose," she said, lifting her head of auburn hair, "suppose that for each of us, to-night was his last night but one, and that to-morrow you could do anything you wanted to do, be anywhere you liked, what company you desired, what food, anything yours for the asking — for that one day, your last — what would you do?"

The simplistic and hedonistic responses of the cook and the wrangler are in contrast to their subverbal responses, the slow blush of the one, the "hard" stare of the other that "bored" into Julia. For each man, that second response also voices the obvious bad faith of what he actually said. But Tay John's answer, when he is pressed to give one, is all of one piece:

> Tay John . . . looked across the fire towards her, seeming not to look at her so much as to include her in a general survey of his surroundings. . . .
>
> Then he looked more closely at Julia. He considered. His glance passed on, over her into the tree tops, into the great wide heavens of the northern night.
>
> "I guess, I go hunting," he said.
>
> "You would only do what you are doing now?" Julia was unbelieving.
>
> "Of course . . . " (final ellipsis in the original)

As Michael Ondaatje has rightly emphasized, "Tay John himself says hardly more than two sentences in the whole book," and thus "his life, in the midst of all the words, is wordless."[8] That largely wordless life lends weight to the few words that this protagonist does utter. Moreover, as Denham, a man of words,

once aptly observes: "Those with few words must know how to use them." Finally, there are the clear existential implications of Tay John's response.[9] It is therefore tempting to find in that response the novel's kernel of true being-in-action, the one character who acts in good faith, the single redeeming authentic voice. Such temptation, however, cannot be simply indulged, for the next day Tay John does not go hunting; he goes guiding instead, and there is a crucial difference. As the protagonist's missing left hand amply testifies, new desires have entered into his life and those desires sever him from his former self. In short, he is in service when Julia poses her question, which is precisely why it can be put to him. And his answer is his fiction that he is not; thus the "of course" trailing off into ellipsis and the ellipsis into absence, as Tay John leaves the campfire but not the camp.

The precise manner of Tay John's being or not being in service is also the issue of the aborted inquiry that follows the last day of the Aldersons' hunting trip which was itself the "to-morrow" of Julia's question. Arthur Alderson turns his ankle and returns early to camp, leaving Tay John with Julia to complete the hunt. By nightfall the two have not returned. The next morning Tay John's permanent departure (he has taken his horses and his bedroll) can be read in the newly fallen snow. As the other men are preparing to follow that trail, Julia rides into camp to proclaim privately to her husband, but loudly, for all to hear, "Arthur, Arthur, don't you understand? — Are you blind? — he — he — imposed himself upon me." Yet the indirect terms with which she asserts the alleged assault and her inconsistencies in bearing and behaviour along with the contradictory metaphors of concealment and exposure through which the whole scene is described and the refusal of those metaphors to stay fixed all suggest a crucial question. Did Tay John's "imposing himself upon her," when the servant was at last alone for the night with the lady, represent a break from the conventions of "servitude" or from the conventions of "a night alone with the lady"? That question is given further point when we note that Mrs. Alderson cannot bring herself to say at all during the official hearing what she earlier said for all to hear in the camp. So the charge, which was never officially laid, is just as unofficially dropped, and Tay John, in not so much a departure but another characteristic disappearing, strides away from the inquiry and rides out of the action, "merging with the curtain of snow, becoming less a man than a movement."

The question of what might have happened between the two of them on the mountain that night is never resolved. Julia will not testify as an official witness, and neither will Tay John. Such irresolution invites the complicity of the reader just as it elicits the suppositions (a further invitation to readerly complicity) of the other characters:

> "I figured she was sore and maybe frightened at being left alone while Tay John went for the horses. Or maybe she wanted to impress her husband. I don't know nothing about it — but that's the way I figured it out." "Maybe," he suggested on a more private occasion, "she wanted it all along — still then why would she talk about it? And why would Tay John pull out the way he did?"

"Charlie's opinion" is symptomatic. What they are all doing is contriving a fiction of Tay John which is also their own fiction. Thus the horse wrangler's "opinion . . . [was] perhaps based upon bitter personal experience." Yet the horse wrangler can at least later voice his fiction, whereas the fiction of Julia Alderson well may be so complex and contradictory as to be beyond all hope of telling. Furthermore, not only do such peripheral fictions stand in for the missing facts, but the more central fictions (Julia's and/or Tay John's version of what "actually" happened) are also missing from the text. Indeed, every aspect of the legal proceeding is undone into unlikely fiction. For example, Porter, the young Mountie fresh from England, who goes out to bring in the culprit, departs in terms of one story — "like . . . in *Chums*, chasing a half-breed hunter through the mountains" — and comes back in terms of another just as dubious. Tay John is now the finest fellow Porter ever met; he has changed his (Porter's) life "entirely"; has shown him how to decipher the mountains; "the hidden was now revealed." And what is revealed is how he, Porter, vested in Redcoat authority, still reads only his own self-gratifying fiction but reads it as a full rendering of what is going on around him.

In the light of such pervasive fiction, any trial must be exactly that, a trying, a provisional telling; it might conclude with a judgement (a rendering of decision) but never with a verdict (a voicing of truth). On the largest level, then, the contradiction of the trial carries over to the contradiction of Part III and to the contradiction of the entire novel. The split is in the word, the story; the word as Word and the word as word; the story as truth and the story as tale. More specifically, the point to the legal trope of the title of Part III is the continuing disjunction in "Evidence — without a finding" between the first promising term and the missing final one. On the one hand, we have legend as evidence, hearsay as evidence, trace as evidence, provisional verbal construct as evidence. On the other, we are denied gospel, authority, transcendence, the final enduring word.

So speech, in this novel, never reaches the status it aspires to, and such speech, transmuted into text, perpetually questions its own voice and validity. The result is a novel forged mostly out of silence and ever on the verge of slipping back into silence, a novel that presents the life and legend of Tay John in order to explore the much larger absence that surrounds its protagonist's brief and sporadic presence in his story. In this sense, the most representative sign of Tay John is the one he finally writes, the one that Blackie, deciphering the last disappearing trace of Tay John's disappearance, reads not on any page but in the blank snow-

covered landscape itself: "Blackie stared at the tracks in front of him, very faint now, a slight trough in the snow, no more. Always deeper and deeper into the snow."

Yet that last word written in the snow, the text of the protagonist's return to the ground from which he came, is not the last word of the novel after all. To start with, Tay John's descent into the earth to join in death a pregnant woman (his mistress/his mother) too obviously returns us to the novel's beginning and the possibility of having it all to recount all over again. The reader might also note the calculated similarities between Jackie and Blackie — in name and in function. The one perpetually repeats his "gospel" of Tay John's life. The other is left to mull over and to tell over (with obvious religious implications too, for Blackie is twice equated with a prophet) the mystery of Tay John's disappearance into absence and silence.

The contradiction at the heart of the story is not therefore resolved; it is instead endlessly extended. The word sounds only as it emerges from silence; silence is known only by the word that names it and/or intrudes upon it; the text that sounds its own limitations must break off into silence and must do so over and over again. This pervasive resonance is best summed up in the novel by Denham's parable of men and mountains; names and story and silence:

> Every story — the rough-edged chronicle of a personal destiny — having its source in a past we cannot see, and its reverberations in a future still unlived — man, the child of darkness, walking for a few short moments in unaccustomed light — every story only waits, like a mountain in an untravelled land, for someone to come close, to gaze upon its contours, lay a name upon it, and relate it to the known world. Indeed, to tell a story is to leave most of it untold. . . . You have the feeling that you have not reached the story itself, but have merely assaulted the surrounding solitude.

Mountains here are paradigmatic and so is Tay John as a kind of ultimate mountain man. Not even Tay John can escape his names and his story. Not even those names and that story can hold him in the world.

NOTES

[1] Both Michael Ondaatje, in "O'Hagan's Rough-Edged Chronicle," *Canadian Literature*, No. 61 (1974), p. 25, and Gary Geddes, in "The writer that CanLit forgot," *Saturday Night*, November 1977, p. 86, note O'Hagan's indebtedness to Conrad.

[2] Howard O'Hagan, *Tay John* (1939; rpt. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1974). Subsequent references are to this edition.

[3] Tay John's continuing isolation as an adult and the hook that he wears in place of his lost left hand both suggest that there were some grounds for these fears.

[4] Although Father Rorty — Catholic, slight, timorous, whispering — is an inversion of his brother, he follows the same paradigm to a similar parodic demise.

[5] For a fuller discussion of naming in the novel see my "Being and Definition in Howard O'Hagan's *Tay John*," forthcoming in *Etudes Canadiennes.*

[6] Denham himself even intimates at one point and in a different context that his dealings with Tay John were at least in part "frantic efforts of evasion."

[7] Blackie's entrance into the novel need not be seen as the "irritating" flaw that Ondaatje suggests but as Jackie's final separation — marked from the beginning by the mountain stream — from Tay John and his tale.

[8] Ondaatje, pp. 29, 31.

[9] Again it should be noted that the novel was written in the 1930's, well before signs of existential honesty had become fictional clichés.

CANADIAN LINES

Eugene Dubnov

For Rachel Eaves

I

I dreamt of a country of snows which was a continuation
Of another snow-bound country, and in that dream
I was experiencing the same agitation
As I walked across the unending immaculate whiteness.
I strode and strode, and the snow creaked; now and then
I fell into drifts; the blizzard
Would suddenly start and die down;
I attempted to search out the pathways to reach
The aim the quicker — and in the white
Dust of the night
The Bering Straits grew closer.

II

The squareness of boundaries, the maple leaf,
Lakes everywhere and vast taiga in white —
And even if these words seem out of turn,
Still both main local languages are quite

Not that which we require for vibrant singing,
When fir-trees agonise the nights with sound
And in this Arctic blizzard's hour the stones,
Black and severe and pressing to the ground

Are yearning for the rumblings of the voice —
Such as will make the snowy fibres flare
Into a savage storm: here stones consume
The mad expenditure of breath in air.

III

Upon the sky-blue crust are shadows, shadows,
And a man in black already starts to chisel
Steps in a looming crystalline icy mountain;
Lifting our gaze, we see a potter's fire
On the great mountain-top: a kiln is waiting
Where the lips burn and the breath congeals.

IV

Valleys, mountains, the royalty of forests,
The amplitude of waters; tunny-fish
Here are hauled with effort onto decks;
Corn is transported to the elevators
And cattle grazed at ranches; timber floated;
Ice shattered by ice-breakers; from the foot
Of the Rocky Mountains prairies stretch beyond
The glance's reach; according to their business,
Ships sail to ports, both large and small; the Pole
Is not far off; around it all the waters
Are bound in ice the whole year through; here oil
And gas are piped along those pipes which not
By prisoners' labour have been built, and much
Is made here paper (almost half the world's
Prolific press upon it lies, and speaks
The very truth, and perorates the half-truth).

V

Form's solution, colour-wrought; the potter
Is fashioning an unglazed pot; the stone,
The earth and the fluidity of clays;
And I remained here for a time alone

To face your vase where the quill is like a leaf
And shaft is like a stem which lay a claim
On me: before myself I stand as pure
In the birth-right of clay earth and flame.

July 1985
Wallingford-on-Thames

Translated from Russian by the author and C. Newman

CRITIC AND PUBLISHER

Another Chapter in E. K. Brown's Correspondence

Laura Groening

"IT DIDN'T MATTER A DAMN." With those brusque words Professor James Cappon ended abruptly an impromptu quotation from THE BALLAD OF BLASPHEMOUS BILL by Robert Service as a sample of Canadian literature to date when he lectured to his senior class at Queen's University in the spring of 1912. A young man sitting before him had been greatly impressed by his earlier reading and interpretation of English, European and American poetry, and asked him in all eagerness if there was not a Canadian writer to put beside Whitman and Ibsen and the rest, someone "calculated to our own meridian." The professor grinned, and after a pause began to quote Service, stopping deliberately where he did as if to indicate that what there was of Canadian writing was of no serious consequence in an Honours Course in English. The young man later described the reply as "silly and inept," as indeed it was, but for him and for the succession of Canadian authors and poets since that time, it was an historic and creative word, for it sent Lorne Pierce out of that classroom with a fixed and somewhat angry resolve to learn all that there was to know about Canadian literature and to gather around him for the sake of the record every original piece that he could obtain.

Lorne Pierce: A Profile, by C. H. Dickinson

THE QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY Archives holds over two hundred letters exchanged between E. K. Brown and Lorne Pierce in the years 1942 to 1951.[1] The letters are central cultural documents for a number of reasons, but they are particularly revealing about the state of publishing in Canada during a period of transition, as Canadian literature moved cautiously into the modern age. The letters also provide an unusually detailed portrait of how a book actually gets produced.

In the early years of the correspondence, Brown was putting the final touches on a collection of Archibald Lampman's new poems that he and Duncan Campbell Scott were editing (*At the Long Sault and Other New Poems*, 1943), and he was preparing the manuscript for a book of his own (*On Canadian Poetry*,

1943). *On Canadian Poetry* opens with an analysis of the history of the Canadian literary tradition. As Brown sees it, our literature has been beset by a series of problems, psychological and social, all of which indicate that the history of our literature is ultimately the economic story of the "perils of publishing": a small, scattered, colonial-minded, frontier-ridden audience that often will not read at all and that certainly will not read Canadian; publishers who will probably perish if they invest any capital in publishing Canadian books; writers who cannot get their work published, and, even if they could, would not be able to live off the paltry sums the books would garner.

These economic forces which militate against a flourishing literature are really only one part of the problem a Canadian writer faced. A far less tangible but equally powerful force confronted E. K. Brown, as his correspondence with Lorne Pierce makes clear, and that was the power of the conservative attitudes that had become the defensive part of the resistance to the material problems Brown had identified in *On Canadian Poetry*. Brown told Pierce that in *On Canadian Poetry* he was trying to do no less than redirect the Canadian poetical tradition. Pierce, it would appear, agreed with Brown's estimation of the role his book would play in the world of Canadian letters, but he did not wholeheartedly share Brown's enthusiasm for the expected outcome of its publication: "[T]o issue a book like this from our House and obviously with our editorial approval is bound to strain a number of my own personal friendships," worried the man who had generously introduced Elsie Pomeroy's adulatory biography of Sir Charles G. D. Roberts, a book Brown could not even bring himself to read. Pierce also feared that Brown was too hasty to condemn, especially in the chapter in which he surveyed the reasons for the failure of the Canadian literary tradition to flourish and strongly criticized the role of the Canadian publisher. The publisher was not alone in his guilt, Pierce argued, presenting Brown with an impassioned plea for understanding:

> But one must distinguish between publisher and jobber; we have only two or three publishers who make any attempt to explore the literary soil of Canada, who have any Canadian policy at all. These have been doing whatever work there was, in the face of the vast indifference of the universities, their unbelievable languor, and often intellectual sabotage. Could you have had a nation sufficiently integrated spiritually, if there had been no other voices except the smart new ones, to face the last two wars? The youngsters wanted to be cosmopolitan before they could spell their own name. These were the people who would show the world the way by disarming and embracing the milky way. They laughed at the empire and flirted with the States. The Commonwealth was morally bankrupt and confederation was about to collapse. Most of the writing done in Canada for a generation has been done in that atmosphere. (April 21, 1943)

Pierce liked to see his role as book editor for Ryerson as exciting and important on both a personal and a symbolic level. He constantly referred to Ryerson

as The Mother Publishing House of Canada (capital T, capital M, capital P, capital H), and saw himself as being "called" to his duty as shaper of Ryerson's influence. He told the story of working with Dr. Fallis, the man who, as General Manager, had changed the name of the trade section of the Methodist Publishing Company from William Briggs to Ryerson. Fallis, Pierce explained in *An Editor's Creed*, "would swing round in his chair, spread wide his arms, and ask, 'If you *owned* this place, what would you do?' " Well, Pierce, said, "What would I do? Obviously I had to do something." Pierce decided back then, in the 1920's, that he needed a "working creed," and, he said, "I would need to stick to it in all weathers, otherwise I should made a sad mess of the House as well as of my own life."[2] The description that Pierce then went on to develop of his working creed is filled with messianic fervour. An institution is "a reservoir that holds the accumulated wisdom and experience of the men of imagination and daring and dedication who founded it and through the long years directed it. This gives a Publishing House a sense of history, of tradition, of destiny, and it is this that shapes and colours and motivates everything that the House does." The publisher himself, Pierce said, "should be as imaginative and daring as he possibly can. Profits may not always show in the balance sheets, but in the long run they will show in the maturing culture of his country, in the creative forces that are shaping its destiny."

Pierce, however, was not always the idealist or he would not have remained Ryerson's book editor for forty years. Should Ryerson fail, of course, Pierce's dreams of a strong literary tradition would fail too, or, as Pierce put it in *On Publishers and Publishing* (1951), the ideal publisher must also be a business man "in order that he can make both ends meet — or meet his end."[3] What we have in Pierce is a man torn between his idealist calling and crass salesmanship. Duncan Campbell Scott's letters to E. K. Brown concentrate on Pierce the salesman. Scott was disconcerted to find Lorne Pierce selling *At the Long Sault* as "THE LITERARY DISCOVERY OF THE YEAR." He shuddered with embarrassment when Pierce selected favourable quotations from *On Canadian Poetry* about Scott's *verse* as endorsements for his *short stories*. Scott understood the problems Pierce faced when he decided to publish a book like *In the Village of Viger*, but his pride could not stand the kind of boosterism that Pierce had learned to employ. Even knowing Pierce was pushing a book that would not sell, and even knowing that Pierce had chosen to publish the book although it could only incur a loss, Scott still muttered in humiliation that it served Pierce right if he lost money on the book. When Scott spoke of Pierce to Brown, he tended to do so in capital letters and italics. "KEEP COPIES OF ALL YOUR LETTERS" to Pierce, he warned Brown.[4] Pierce got results; he published books that no-one else would touch, but he alienated many (including those who benefited) in the process.

Pierce's letters to Brown reveal a different kind of man than the one we find in

his own monographs or in Duncan Campbell Scott's letters. Pierce's letters to Brown suggest a man who was deeply committed to publishing and genuinely confused as to how he should handle publishing in a new era. More importantly, though, Pierce emerges as having reconciled his difficulties through a delightful sense of self-mocking irony, an irony that makes him seem far warmer and more reasonable than his somewhat disgruntled stable of writers would have had us believe. Having seen himself (quite rightly) as a hero of Canadian culture since 1920, Pierce found it difficult to accept the dismissal of his writers, his values, and his achievements that the modernists brought to the literary scene in Canada. A. J. M. Smith deplored the deification of the Poets of the Confederation; F. R. Scott satirized the long-time-supporters of the Canadian Authors' Association; Ralph Gustafson published an inexpensive anthology with Penguin that necessarily made use of the poetry that men like Pierce had published at a loss throughout long years of national neglect.[5] But, even as these men tried to sift through our literature in search of work that lived up to their modernist criteria, Lorne Pierce, threatened and disappointed by the challenge presented to his life's work, sought to incorporate the iconclasts onto Ryerson's list. Pierce may have been a conservative power at the head of Canada's publishing empire, but he knew an important movement when he saw one. Having accepted the inevitable conflict between the demands of a pure, idealistic calling and the commercial foundation necessary to its vitality, he now sought to reconcile his entrenched views on art with his conviction that he must always be a force of positive encouragement in Canadian literature.

IT WAS AT THIS MOMENT of transitional crisis in the life of Ryerson Press that E. K. Brown appeared on the scene. Brown, a former graduate of the University of Toronto and the Sorbonne, was teaching English in the United States. Brown called himself "a middle-stander" (July 5, 1943), and so he was. If Pierce was a conservative preserver of tradition, and if the modernists were forgers of a brave new world, Brown was a bridge between the two worlds, a conservative who had absorbed the modernist strain, a critic who, while he did not trumpet the innovations of Eliot and Pound, nonetheless did speak comfortably of an Arnold-Eliot tradition. While retaining many of Pierce's values, Brown also shared the modernist distress at the state of our literary tradition. He wrote *On Canadian Poetry* to redirect the tradition, but, in actively wanting Ryerson as his publisher, Brown was acknowledging Pierce's crucial role in seeing to it that a tradition existed to be redirected. Brown's position was somewhat anomalous. At a time when many Canadian writers were still not being taken seriously by Canadian publishers, Brown had found in Pierce one of the few publishers

dedicated to Canadian letters. It was precisely because of Pierce's long interest in Canadian literature that Brown wanted him to publish *On Canadian Poetry*. At the same time, however, *On Canadian Poetry* would necessarily be critical of many of the writers whose careers Pierce had encouraged.

On Canadian Poetry, however, is no radical rejection of the nineteenth century. Rather, the book shores up the values of Pierce's generation in a way that makes them more acceptable to the modernists. Clearly, the letters reveal, Pierce knew that he had found in Brown a solid and dependable literary critic who would not be too quick to destroy what Pierce still celebrated. The Pomeroy biography of Sir Charles G. D. Roberts is a case in point. Pierce introduced the book, saying Roberts "sounded the Canadian note so consistently, in so many important ways, and for so long a time, that he became by universal consent the leading voice of the new Dominion." Roberts, he said, "occupies by right the highest place among all those who have served Canada by their pen."[6] When Brown omitted the biography from the bibliography of *On Canadian Poetry*, Pierce tentatively suggested that it should be added. Brown pointed out that he had not read the book, so Pierce arranged for him to be sent a copy and wrote: "In reading the Introduction you will understand my plea for a more extensive treatment of Roberts in your book. At the same time it may convince you finally and for all time that I went off the deep end years ago" (June 18, 1943). Two days later, Brown responded graciously that he had made room for the Pomeroy biography. In an exchange of letters with D. C. Scott, however, Brown was less polite. Four months earlier he had already dismissed the book, telling Scott: "I doubt that I shall order the book on Sir Charles. It sounds like our national criticism at its worst."[7] Scott agreed with Brown, although, typically, he focused his reservations on Pierce who, he said, "has been one of the chief offenders and I dread to read his contribution to this biography."[8] Brown's immediate decision to include the biography, no matter what it was like, is indicative of a reaction the opposite of Scott's. The bibliographical entry was not important to Brown; what was important was Pierce's high regard for tradition. Throughout the early part of the correspondence, Brown had expressed worry and guilt about his inability to discuss Roberts as a major poet. He shared Pierce's belief in the importance of Roberts as a symbol. By including the biography (of which Roberts was apparently extraordinarily proud), he was salving his own conscience and simultaneously pleasing Pierce. The problem for both Brown and Pierce is clear. Roberts founded Canadian literature. He is the enabling vantage point from which we look back to the nineteenth century and forwards into the twentieth. Pierce's tribute to Roberts, which hardly merited Scott's dread anyhow, was the work of a man who had laboured to cultivate what Roberts had planted. Now Brown wanted to weed the garden, and he and Pierce could not agree on who the weeds were.

The letters devoted to *On Canadian Poetry* operate on several levels, all of them determined by this context. Pierce was to some extent a legitimate power-figure in Brown's life; not just his publisher, but also his busy editor and self-appointed conscience. He would speak in one line, for example, of there being more to Pickthall than Brown would admit and in another he would urge Brown to leave the United States and come home to Canada where he obviously belonged (no date given; between August 9 and August 15, 1944). The letters establish that Pierce played as active a role as he could in shaping the final copy of the manuscript. We see Brown carefully sifting through the suggestions, salvaging here, discarding there, as he attempted to find a balance between his own desire to destroy the second rate and his natural inclination to treat Pierce with tact and respect. Essentially (and not surprisingly), Brown elected to follow Pierce's suggestions on minor points and to retain his own primary ideas on major points. But, if Pierce's eventual effect on *On Canadian Poetry* was comparatively insignificant given his periodic attempts at wholesale revision, his suggestions and responses were always stimulating.

Most importantly, Pierce disagreed with the emphasis Brown accorded the powers of colonialism and Puritanism to stunt the growth of a national literature. As book editor of the Methodist publishing house, the publishing house most directly responsible for encouraging new Canadian talent, Pierce was prepared to argue at some length against the so-called negative influence of our Puritan heritage. "I have read your manuscript two or three times," he told Brown. "Before coming down this morning I went over a few notes I made and decided to type them out on my own machine" (April 21, 1943). This pleasant enough greeting about a few notes turns out to be Pierce's introduction to a three-page, single-spaced peroration on what is wrong with *On Canadian Poetry*. Responding to Brown's analysis of the economic and cultural hardships that our writers had to endure, Pierce asserted that "it has never been colonialism that has beaten us; it has been the mental and spiritual habits of a kept woman." He went on to explain:

> We have looked to London for our protection, to Washington for the arm of Uncle Sam to guard us in the Western Hemisphere and subsidize us, but otherwise hands off. We expected both without commensurate sacrifices. The result is that our statesmen are the cheapest on earth, and the business of organizing for war almost too much to expect from a nation so stupid and callous. I think we have unloaded too much upon the colonial bogey and upon Puritanism; the real defect has been elsewhere, an invalidism, a toryism fortified by Liberal, Conservative and French elements, that makes for a parochialism too narrow to measure.

It is difficult to see Pierce's invalidism as differing substantially from Brown's colonialism. Pierce was, in some ways, harder on the country than Brown ever was. He refused to accept that our cultural problems can all be blamed on the

historical moment, preferring to locate the threat in the individual, rather than the social system that conditions the individual. Similarly, when he turned his attention to Puritanism, Pierce deflected attention away from the system — Puritanism — towards the individual artist who could overcome the system:

> [Puritanism] never tried to produce a work that shocked perhaps, but we have had excellent examples of art that has shocked no end of people; the paintings of John Russell who packs the galleries with country yokels; Grove's "Settlers of the Marsh" that cost him his job, the verse of Tom MacInnes, and so on. I doubt whether it is correct to say that the battle must be joined against Puritanism, unless we state what part of P'm. . . . Puritanism does not disbelieve in the importance of art. It may be a dwindling force, and that may be so much the worse. What art will need will be some other centre, some synthesizing core of values. Our critics suggest nothing except a hunger for experience and candour. In the States you have had the New Englanders, the South, Middle West and Hollywood; here something similar will develop. Each will have its own ethos. You can't have a cosmic art, and both Canada and the States are empires. There is no British Empire novelist; it is all too vast. We will have to be content with a Prairie dramatist or a Quebec wood-carver etc. (April 21, 1943)

Brown's reply carefully steered Pierce's attention away from the major issues raised in the letter. Choosing not to point out that Pierce's reservations do more to confirm than to challenge Chapter One of *On Canadian Poetry*, Brown talked about his goals for the book. He asserted the necessity of universal over national standards of excellence. He reminded Pierce that Roberts and Carman had won and had failed to hold the attention of an international audience. And he expressed a belief that lay at the foundation of all his criticism: "Perhaps my men aren't as good as I think them," he told Pierce, "but it will take time to find that out, and we may as well start the new discussion going" (July 5, 1943). There must be critical debate, as far as Brown was concerned, and critical debate had not existed in Canada for a long time. "Incidentally," Brown added near the end of the letter in a mildly humorous attempt to contain Pierce's dissatisfaction, "the book is likely to sell better because of the challenge it gives, isn't it?" When, a year later, the second edition of *On Canadian Poetry* provoked an almost identical, three and a half paged, single-spaced response from Pierce, Brown reaffirmed his position in a more serious tone:

> I know you have always liked [Chapter Three] best and I note that you have no suggestions for change. I assume you like the additions to the Lampman selection, and am very glad of this. May I say that whatever the defects of Ch. 1, it is this chapter which has done most to attract comment and I assume readers for the work. I had this in mind in writing it. If because of it, we win readers, and in the long run readers for Scott and Lampman, then I hope you will like the first chapter as much as I do! (August 15, 1944)

The first chapter, which is Brown's analysis of the conditions that have restricted

the growth of our literature, is the chapter that provoked Pierce's discussion (as Brown said he hoped it would provoke discussion everywhere). Chapter Three, which concentrates on the individual artists Lampman, D. C. Scott, and Pratt, and does so through a sensitive exploration of what Brown terms "the poetic personality," is the chapter that, in spite of the fact that it elevates Scott and Lampman above Carman and Roberts, Pierce liked.

THERE IS AN ADEPT mingling of critical debate and personal concerns throughout the letters which reveals how Pierce managed to be a successful publisher of Canadiana for forty years and how Brown became a department chairman when he was only thirty years old. Neither man was short on political acumen. One of Pierce's main worries was, as I have said, understandably over the short shrift he felt Brown had given Sir Charles G. D. Roberts. Brown, who had several times urged Pierce to get *On Canadian Poetry* out before the appearance of A. J. M. Smith's *The Book of Canadian Poetry*, took the opportunity to call Pierce's attention to the fact that "Smith is, as you know, a great deal less sympathetic to all three [poets of the Confederation] than I am, and not more sympathetic to Roberts and Carman. I think that I can perhaps serve as a sort of middle 'stander' between Smith and the usual Canadian critical attitudes" (July 5, 1943).

Pierce's concern over what Brown was doing to Roberts' reputation derived as much from fear of personal repercussions as it did from critical disagreement. Brown repeatedly asked for suggestions as to how he might expand his section on Roberts, apologizing because, although he had "gone over" his Roberts section, he had emerged "without a sense of something to be added" (June 23, 1943). At this point, perhaps suspecting Pierce's dilemma, he wrote, "Criticism is a dangerous trade. I am glad that I am strictly a non-joiner, and have fewer friendships and associates to lose than most who ply the trade in Canada." In his next letter, Brown proposed to add "a short passage" on Roberts and added, "I am waiting to know if these is any concrete suggestion you can send on, so that I could consider a longer addition to the pages on Roberts" (June 26, 1943). Brown's repeated requests for advice finally elicited the following response from his divided editor: "I don't agree with some of your judgments but like Voltaire I would defend your right to speak your mind" (July 2, 1943). Pierce went on to label Brown's attitude "begrudging," to criticize the "tone" of his expressions of disapproval, and to caution that Brown "borders on the ironical." "In cold print," he told Brown, "it lacks your disarming pleasantness." One rereads with some surprise in light of Pierce's opinion the mild and polite language which characterizes *On Canadian Poetry*, and one might recall how Brown, in a letter

to D. C. Scott,[9] was angrily determined to challenge W. Collin's unfavourable review of both *On Canadian Poetry* and *At the Long Sault*. The passage in response to Collin appears in the second edition of Brown's book and does not even mention Collin by name.[10]

Pierce's criticism of Brown's book might suggest the revolutionary nature of the criticism in *On Canadian Poetry*, but, like his references to "shocking art," they really tell one more about how easy it was to disturb the Canadian literary status quo. Brown wrote back to Pierce, "I am sorry that you cannot give me any 'leads' which would complete my account of [Roberts]."

Although Brown's passages on Roberts stand, Pierce somehow managed to have the last word. His final reply to Brown put him in a morally superior position, the power of which would not have escaped Brown. Pierce wrote:

> I think that perhaps I come much closer to you in your judgment of Roberts and Carman than you suspect. I do not wish to give you any leads in the matter at all. Perhaps this might be said. It is difficult at this time to realize the importance of successful writers in Canada back in the 80s and 90s. It is difficult to value the impetus these men gave to a self-conscious movement in the arts and letters in Canada. This was the intention of Roberts and Carman, the Toronto Art League and others, and I believe they succeeded. That is the main purpose in my Introduction to Pomeroy's Life of Roberts. He stood first in a good many things and if we have arts and letters at all it is due to a great many named and nameless craftsmen. Cameron, Crawford and a host of others are unknown in Canada, let alone abroad, and yet they did fertilize the soil. They were consciously and continually Canadian when it cost a lot to exist at all. I think that in any appraisal of these people we could make that generous gesture first, acknowledging that they succeeded in one major thing they attempted to do, that is to be Canadian above all and before all else. From that we can go on and cover the fair-ground fence with their hides. (July 9, 1943)[11]

This was Pierce at his best: sympathetic to the historical context of even his most treasured writers, but equally determined to allow no personal reservations to stand in the way of what he considered to be an important new step about to be taken in our literary history.

Pierce was a critic whose personality had been forged in a climate which was quite hostile to culture, and, consequently, in spite of the way he wrote about Ryerson in his own monographs, he was really far less idealistic and more acerbic than Brown. Always master of the pithy statement, Pierce wrote to Brown concerning their plan to bring out an anthology of the one hundred best Canadian poets:

> I am glad to know that you are making some progress with the hundred best. Our business office will tell you, perhaps, that I have been responsible for the publication of the hundred worst. They are not amused, much less impressed with Canadian poetry. Governor-General's Awards mean nothing to them. (May 26, 1948)

In another letter, Pierce wrote, "You tell me there is a chance of certain kinds of printing being done with scented ink. That will be interesting, but the Canadian bookseller, I think, requires choloroform [*sic*]" (January 29, 1948). Responding to Lampman's theory about the "Byronic touch in Cameron's genius," Pierce suggested that the origin of this so-called Byronic touch was entirely fanciful. "No Canadian writer," he stated, "has ever bled for anything. We may have starved a few, but there is a difference" (October 16, 1944). When Brown took a plan to the CBC to honour the fiftieth anniversary of Lampman's death and emerged from the experience "disgusted, nauseated" (January 29, 1949), Pierce wrote back:

> There is little I can add to your comment on the C.B.C. I have given hours to them, entertained them at luncheon, and tried to make them see the light, but up to the moment I have made no progress. They are hopeless. By the time you have worked up through various levels of the Civil Service and approached the throne, you are confronted with a ghost. Moreover the assent [*sic*] has been so long, that by the time you arrive, you too, are a phantom. It is all unreal. (February 3, 1949)

The letters range freely as the critic and the publisher discuss the first and second editions of *On Canadian Poetry*, the possibility of Ryerson's bringing out a Canadian imprint of Brown's *Matthew Arnold: A Study in Conflict*, and the physical problems of publishing during the war. Pierce asked for and received copies of articles that Brown was writing. He was particularly delighted when Brown sent him a copy of "Mackenzie King of Canada."[12] Brown warned, "Please remember that it was written in wartime, and it is intended to make the case for WLMK. Of course I believe fully everything that I have stated or implied, but there are other things less favorable that I also believe and that I did not think this was the time to say" (June 12, 1944). Duncan Campbell Scott, for one, had marvelled at how Brown's portrait of Mackenzie King had apparently pleased everyone — everyone except King that is.[13] Apparently the Liberals were strutting and the Conservatives were crowing. Pierce was no exception. He loved the article, going so far as to say, "I am very grateful to you for your kindness in sending me a copy of your article on W. L. M. K., the great humanist, my favourite author" (June 22, 1944). Finally, Pierce and Brown began work on an edition of the selected poems of Duncan Campbell Scott.

THE STORY OF RYERSON'S publication of the *Selected Poems of Duncan Campbell Scott* is a strong tribute to the loyalty Brown felt towards The Mother Publishing House of Canada. From the time of Scott's death, Pierce had been urging Brown to undertake a biography of the poet. Brown, who

was dying from a brain cancer (although Pierce did not appear to have known that) and who was already committed to a biography of Willa Cather (who, like Scott, had recently died), suggested as an alternate project a selection of Scott's poems to which he would append a long, partially-biographical introduction. Pierce was delighted with the project, in spite of the fact that Scott was dead, Mrs. Scott (Elyse Aylen) had moved to India, and McClelland & Stewart held copyright to the poems.

Although Brown could just as easily have prepared the *Selected Scott* for McClelland & Stewart, he was determined that the book would appear under Ryerson's imprint. "I have put the case for Ryerson very strongly and at length [to Mrs. Scott], and have covered the matter of permissions from Mc and S," Brown assured Frank Flemington, Pierce's editor (October 12, 1949). Brown did not explain his preference for Ryerson, but the course of the correspondence suggests that in some ways Pierce had passed the torch to Brown and that Brown was prepared to receive it. When the two men had begun work on *On Canadian Poetry* seven years earlier, they had shared a somewhat uneasy relationship — how uneasy is made particularly clear by the D. C. Scott-E. K. Brown letters. Brown, however, had been delighted with the final results of both *On Canadian Poetry* and *At the Long Sault*, and, in the years between their initial encounter and 1949, Pierce had turned to Brown more than once for editorial advice. In fact, in 1944 D. C. Scott had told Brown that Pierce "is aware that he has a strong man in you on the Editorial and Critical side and is anxious to get full advantage of it."[14]

Brown had read Souster's poetry for Pierce and had suggested that it be restricted to a chapbook because, he explained, "Souster is not quite formed enough either as a sensibility or a craftsman for publication in a *book*" (October 24, 1943). He had read and endorsed for Pierce Dorothy Livesay's *Night and Day*. He had vetoed the proposed anthology of Preview writers, the disappearance of which is discussed in the Gustafson-Ross letters.[15] He did not, he told Pierce,

> have much confidence in the critical intelligence (or intelligences) behind the selection. Some of the poems are very good, others very bad, and all that is common in them in general is a certain slant in technique. A good anthologist would be able to discriminate between the happy and the unhappy uses of this technique. (January 20, 1945)

And, of course, as a poetry judge for the Governor General's Awards, he was in some ways constantly evaluating Ryerson's poets simply because so many of the new poets were being published by Ryerson. Now, Pierce's confidence that he had found a modernist critic sympathetic to his own world view culminated in the *Selected Poems of Duncan Campbell Scott*. "Once upon a time we had all these men [from the group of the 1860's]," he lamented to Brown, "and then we

threw them away. I have spent almost thirty years getting them back. Scott would fill the last gap" (May 26, 1949).

The case for Ryerson, however, seemed futile, for McClelland & Stewart refused to abandon their copyright to Scott's most recent poems and Mrs. Scott refused to allow the publication of a selection which included only poetry published before *The Circle of Affection*. Thus, Mrs. Scott was busy preparing a selection of the poems and Brown was busy writing an introduction, all for a rival publishing house, when a most unexpected turn of events occurred. Brown wrote to Pierce in amazement:

> You will be interested to know that I had a letter last week from the junior McClelland which was very surprising. He says that the firm has surrendered all its rights since it was unwilling that Mrs. Scott should have any control over the choice of selections if that were entrusted to me. He says further that he had not felt it necessary to consult me because he was sure that I would not care to proceed if she had that power. The strange thing is that I never implied to him that this was so. (October 31, 1949)

The way was cleared for Ryerson and the collection was underway, with Brown collaborating quite happily with Mrs. Scott. After several delays as Pierce and Brown attempted to check with Mrs. Scott at each stage of production — "Mrs. Scott is about to enter for a trial period the Shri Aurobindo Ashram, which I take to be an institution of piety and meditation in the eastern manner," Brown wrote at one point (December 24, 1950) — the book was essentially completed, just days before Brown's death. "The book is just off press and into the bindery," Pierce wrote on April 13, 1951. His next letter, ten days later, was a horrified telegram to Mrs. Brown, "I AM SHOCKED AND GRIEVED AT THE NEWS. IS THERE ANYTHING THAT I CAN DO?" (April 23, 1951).

On Canadian Poetry, as we all know, is a crucial book in our literary history. At a time when traditionalists were quite rightly weary of the general indifference of most of the country to a national literature and when modernists were quite rightly sick of the uncritical attempt of the rest of the country to proclaim all our literature excellent, Brown took the time to survey our poetry from a perspective at once judgemental and unafraid to praise. There is, however, a subtext to *On Canadian Poetry* that the contemporary reader is unlikely to pick up — a dialogue between traditional literary values and innovative modernist values. What the Pierce-Brown letters provide is a way of amplifying that subtext so that the dialogue can be heard. These letters are characteristic of a general atmosphere of conflict in Canada at the time of publication of *On Canadian Poetry*. When we read Brown's little book now, the tone sounds very mild and we take most of the pronouncements for granted. But in 1943, traditionalists did not relegate Roberts to the position of minor poet with primarily symbolic importance and modernists

did not consider Pratt one of the three best poets in Canadian literary history (not to mention Lampman and Scott, Brown's other "masters").

Today we are finally seeing the publication of documents crucial to the history of modernism in Canada — the Gustafson-Ross letters, the Ross letters to A. J. M. Smith. If the recollections of the modernists about the nature of the establishment against which they rebelled are important, so also is the other side of the story. Part of that story lies buried in the Queen's University Archives and it is ripe for resurrection.

NOTES

[1] The Public Archives of Canada (Ottawa) hold an additional eighteen letters in the E. K. Brown Papers. All quotations in this paper are, unless otherwise indicated, from the Lorne Pierce Papers at Queen's.

[2] *An Editor's Creed* (Toronto: Ryerson, 1960), p. 1.

[3] *On Publishers and Publishing* (Toronto: Ryerson, 1951), p. 9.

[4] *The Poet and the Critic*, ed. and intro. Robert L. McDougall (Ottawa: Carleton Univ. Press, 1983), p. 61.

[5] Letter from Lorne Pierce to Ralph Gustafson, quoted by Bruce Whiteman, Introduction, *A Literary Friendship: The Correspondence of Ralph Gustafson and W. W. E. Ross* (Toronto: ECW Press, 1984), n.p.

[6] *Sir Charles G. D. Roberts: A Biography* (Toronto: Ryerson, 1943), p. xxiv.

[7] *The Poet and the Critic*, p. 53.

[8] *The Poet and the Critic*, p. 54.

[9] *The Poet and the Critic*, p. 96.

[10] *On Canadian Poetry* (1944; rpt. Ottawa: Tecumseh Press, 1973), p. 108.

[11] This letter is in the E. K. Brown Papers at the Public Archives of Canada.

[12] "Mackenzie King of Canada," *Harper's Magazine*, 186 (1943), 192-200.

[13] *The Poet and the Critic*, p. 49.

[14] *The Poet and the Critic*, p. 121.

[15] *A Literary Friendship*.

IN TRANSLATION

Frank Watt

My words were never
exactly the same
as your words
even though we meant to agree.

Your words were
never the same as mine
even when the tune was the same.

Yours was a different language
strange to my charmed ears
even when you spoke the words
of my native tongue precisely
in accents so pleasing
they fell like seeds
from a warm green island far away
drifting in the wind
serenely settling as though
mine was never a barren continent
of ice and silence.

Our words were not the same
even if we never quarreled
even when we rushed to say
the thing we most needed to hear.
I looked in your face
for meaning as you spoke
I saw you take the sense
of my words and understood
you understood them
in my way translated them
to a third language
which we alone could speak.

Words are never the same
voyaging across an ocean
calling over a border
carrying hidden cargoes
from different ages scents
of foreign lands echoes
of alien pasts.
Words were secret codes
that kept us apart
that drew us together
messages rehearsed memorized
remembered in special ways
long after the sender forgot them.

Words like yours
I never heard before
even the simplest words
I thought I knew by heart
like hello
I love you and
goodbye.

GAIL POLLOCK

Gary Geddes

This is a love-poem, not a catalogue.
I'm standing in the kitchen
of your old house, where birds

and small animals have built
their nests in the peeling wallpaper
and sawdust insulation.

There's a rusty cream separator
balancing still on rotten floorboards
and a blue polkadot handkerchief

that someone conjured rabbits from.
A *Canadian Schools Atlas*, too,
with places we never saw

going mouldy under previous names.
Jars of Pond's Cream, Watkin's liniment
and, remember, Buckley's Stainless Rub?

I gather these objects, or rather,
the words for them and go back east
where I will put them all to work

to conjure up a past for both of us,
the separators, and those who ache
for other freedoms. I wouldn't know you

on the street, after thirty-five years,
but I know the legends of your house:
my mother's brother stopped breathing here

as the membrane closed over his throat;
two old workhorses died instantly
from a single bolt of lightning in the yard.

And I know the first flush of sex
that made me look at you a second time
between the stooks at harvest.

I skim the past for things I can love:
the old names, the certain boundaries.
This poem is what we have in common.

FICTION, HISTORIOGRAPHY, AND MYTH

Jacques Godbout's "Les Têtes à Papineau" and Rudy Wiebe's "The Scorched-Wood People"

Marie Vautier

JACQUES GODBOUT AND RUDY WIEBE address the basic question of the nature of literary and historical reality in *Les têtes à Papineau* and *The Scorched-Wood People*. Both texts explode the concept of a "commonly experienced, objectively existing world of history" by their narrator's comments upon — and challenge to — the very notion of past reality.[1] The textual recreation of important historical events permits the narrators to develop the concepts of narratorial control, historical instability, and the fictional mythologizing of the past. Louis O. Mink argues that a certain malaise in the writing of history today originates in a largely unexamined conflict between an implicit presupposition we hold and a contrary explicit belief. Our presupposition is a "vision du monde" shaped by Universal History, a concept which has "disappeared from the discourse of ideas" but which still influences our treatment of history. Universal History posits that the past is to be discovered, not constructed. Difficulties arise, however, in our contradictory belief that "the formal structure of a narrative is constructed rather than discovered."

According to the common sense of our age, history and fiction are distinct: history claims to be a "true representation" of "past actuality," whereas fiction does not. Mink argues that the concept of Universal History, although dismantled by Romanticism, has not been completely rejected: we still assume that there is only *one* past. This past, however, is not an untold story of "what actually happened" which the historian discovers. *We* determine the significance of the past; it can be made intelligible only as the subject of stories we tell. Narrative history and narrative fiction therefore move closer together. Yet, as Mink notes: "If the distinction were to disappear, fiction and history would both collapse back into myth and be indistinguishable from it as from each other. And though myth serves as both fiction and history for those who have not learned to discriminate, we cannot forget what we have learned."[2]

This concern that fiction and history might collapse back into myth is my central subject. In a literary work which has as its referent an historical event, one asks: "where does history stop and fiction start in this text? Is there — can there be — a demarcation line between the two?" Linda Hutcheon has coined the term "historiographic metafiction" to describe such work, which raises not only the question of the verifiability of the historical events recounted in the text, but also the question of the writing of history as a creative act of the imagination, parallel to the writing of fiction.[3] Northrop Frye underlines the problem presented by historiography because of its relation to the construction of narrative:

> We may raise the question in passing whether it is really possible to write history diachronically, except in special forms like that of Pepy's *Diary*. It seems more probable that every historian has to stand outside the history he is recording and take a synchronic view of it. The implication is that a history is at once 'true' and 'untrue' because these statements are being selected and arranged in a form that is no longer purely sequential. 'Myth' is often vulgarly used to mean a false statement, or mirage of ideology: this is because every narrative conveys to a reader both the assertion that this event happened and that it could not have happened in precisely that way and in that identical context.[4]

Many postmodernist texts examine the relationship of truth to narrative. Godbout and Wiebe's novels, however, illustrate particularly well current ontological questionings of history, fiction and myth. In Wiebe's work, an omnipresent, first-person narrator, the Métis poet and song-writer Pierre Falcon, recounts the life of Louis Riel and the rise and fall of his New Nation. Godbout's novel is a political allegory which comments upon the state of affairs in Quebec at the moment of the 1980 referendum on sovereignty-association. Bicephalic Charles and François Papineau are the main characters and the first-person plural narrators of the text. Unlike Riel and Falcon, they are *not* historically authentic personages. Indeed, they are rather improbable creatures: Charles and François are the names of two heads joined at the neck and sharing a single body. Like Siamese twins with independent minds, emotions, and discourses, they live an increasingly frustrating life, bound together physically and yet partial to different aspirations. The political implications of their complicated existence are foregrounded throughout the text.

Godbout, in a recent interview, said that "Toute entreprise d'écriture est une entreprise pour masquer, transformer, transmuer les choses, et non pas pour les dire comme elles sont . . . [Ecrire, c'est] briser la chronologie, briser la représentation."[5] Writing for Godbout, then, is an act of transformation which is not based on historical chronology or direct representation. Even the exterior presentation of his text as artifact overtly thematizes its metafictional and historiographic concerns. On the back cover, Charles-François Papineau is presented to the perspective reader as a "real live person," complete with definite birthdate

(1955), birthplace (Montreal) and age (25). The effect of reality which this blurb asserts is greatly strengthened by an initial reference to the celebrated Dionne quintuplets; it then leads on, without the slightest change in tone, to the existence of Charles-François, "le seul enfant à deux têtes qui ait survécu si longtemps."[6] This phraseology implies that there have been other two-headed children, as there have been other sets of quintuplets. Instead of touting the *novel* as being worth its price, the entire publicity blurb, written by Godbout, emphasizes verisimilitude, the *life* of "les têtes": "Leur vie est un roman plein de contradictions et de surprises."

The title of the reproduction on the front cover, "Le disque rouge à la poursuite de l'alouette," indicates the political slant of this allegory, the alouette being the traditional mythological symbol of things French-Canadian. Political overtones are also indicated by the play on words in the title. "Papineau" recalls Louis-Joseph Papineau, the leader of the "Patriotes" who fled to the United States after the failure of the 1837 rebellions. Godbout also plays with the standard expression "Faut pas se prendre pour la tête à Papineau!" — loosely translated as "Don't think you're more intelligent than you really are!" As Alain Piette has recently pointed out, the historical Papineau has undergone a process of mythification which makes of him a crystallized heroic figure of the past. Godbout's title, however, totally subverts the raw material he started out with: the cliché concerning Papineau. The use of the plural form centres the reader's attention on the collectivity rather than on the individual Papineau. And the negative form has disappeared — are we then to think that the collectivity *is* intelligent?[7]

The chapter headings are unusual in that they use the ordinal and not the cardinal number system: "premièrement, deuxièmement." The adverbial form is used until the last chapter, which is entitled "enfin." Such a denomination recalls the "étapisme" project, whereby the Parti québécois hoped that by proceeding by stages (étapes) they would render the referendum vote less traumatic. The epigraph ("Chaque enfant recommence à zéro l'histoire de l'humanité") is an indication that in this text a certain importance will be allotted to history, and to individual and collective destinies.[8] The exterior presentation of the work, then, strongly suggests that its main characters, bizarre and fabulous as they may be, have a historical reality, that they occupy a given time and place. The presentation also indicates that the text will discuss the historical, political, and mythological discourses of Quebec.

RUDY WIEBE SHARES GODBOUT'S view of writing as an act of transformation; the outer presentations of his novels also address questions of historical verisimilitude and metafictionality. Wiebe has stated that the research

he did for *The Temptations of Big Bear* enabled him to write *The Scorched-Wood People* at a faster pace, as he had already acquired a knowledge of the historical background of the period.[9] This shared research is significant because of the prefatory address in *Big Bear*:

> No name of any person, place or thing, insofar as names are still discoverable, in this novel has been invented. Despite that, and despite the historicity of dates and events, all characters in this *meditation upon the past* are the products of a *particular imagination*; their resemblance and relation, therefore, to living or once living persons is to be resisted.[10]

This passage indicates Wiebe's attitude to story-telling, or, more appropriately, to story-making. Facts, for Wiebe, are the raw material from which he shapes his story. In an interview with Eli Mandel, he sets out his ideas on the relationship of fact to fiction:

> Well, you need the facts so you can make something out of them. To discover facts or to discover details of geography are things that are done . . . But, then, when it's done, it's finished with. The act is in the past. The fact is always in the past, but a fiction is what you make of it. And you have to have a certain amount of facts to make a fiction out of them. Something that will last.[11]

Wiebe's concern for the longevity of his fictional productions may stem from his desire to give their history back to the people. As does Godbout, Wiebe heaps scorn upon inadequate education systems that neglect to inform people of their historical particularity:

> For in forcing me to discover the past of my place on my own as an adult, my public school inadvertently roused an anger in me . . . *All* people have history. The stories we tell of our past are by no means merely words: they are meaning and life to us as *people*, as a *particular* people; the stories are there, and if we do not know of them we are simply, like animals, memory ignorant, and the less are we people.[12]

The double concern for making stories and for using words to give meaning to a particular people is linguistically underlined by Wiebe's choice of title. This "meditation" upon the Métis insists upon their collective individuality: they are the scorched-wood *people* — a translation of the original French name for the Métis, "les bois-brûlés." The linguistic issue and the potentially political issue are thus stressed on the title-page.

The epigraph printed under the title reads:

> And who has made this song?
> Who else but good Pierre Falcon.
> He made the song, and it was sung
> To mark the victory we had won;
> He made this song that very day
> So sing the glory of the Bois-brûlés.[13]

Although no source is given, this epigraph is in fact modelled on the last stanza of a song composed by the historical Pierre Falcon. It is interesting to compare the original French text to the English translation, and to then compare the latter to Wiebe's epigraph:

> Qui en a composé la chanson
> Pierre Falcon, poète du canton.
> Elle a été faite et composée
> Sur la victoire que nous avons gagnée.
> Elle a été faite et composée
> Chantons la gloire de tous les Bois-Brûlés.
>
> And who composed this little song?
> Why, the people's poet, Pierre Falcon.
> And why did he write this little lay?
> To sing of the victory we won this day.
> That's why he wrote this little lay,
> To sing of the glory of the Bois-Brulés.[14]

The belittling expressions "this *little* song" and "this *little* lay" are conspicuously absent from Wiebe's epigraph. Falcon, the fictional narrator, is telling the story of his people by means of this text, and his story is anything but minor! The words "the people's poet" have also been eliminated; this, however, may be because of the proximity of the word "people" in the title. The verbs "composed," "write" and "wrote" of the translation have all been replaced by the verb "made." It is most interesting to note this systematic elimination of all verbs having to do with the act of writing in this epigraph to a metafictional text! This insistence on "making" as opposed to "writing" seems to stress the autonomous existence and power of the text. Its narrator, in retelling the known story, is making a new reality and not just recording the past. The infinitive "to sing" of the translation has been transformed into an imperative "So sing the glory," in Wiebe's epigraph. As in the original French text, the hearer (reader) is being urged to participate. This song, the written text, has the power to shape our perception of the way things were. Although — perhaps because — it is the product of a particular imagination, it can mediate between us and the past.

Wiebe's novel is divided into four parts, each with its subtitle and epigraph. The epigraph to Part One is a "quotation" from Riel: "If . . . the Canadian Government wanted to avoid the fact that I was a being at all, the whole world knows that it is not so; they cannot avoid me." This statement spells out a justification for the text's existence: although a fictional construct, it is going to underline the "reality" of Riel — readers of this work are *not* to ignore him!

The exterior "wrappings" of the two texts, then, are far from being incidental to their subject-matter. The presentation of Wiebe's novel tends to insist upon the fictionality of his work, even though much of the raw material he uses to create

his fiction exists in a historical dimension. Written documents, such as letters, memoirs and trial records, inspire the epigraphs and considerable parts of the text. The exterior of Godbout's novel, which presents a world of quasi-fabulous creatures and happenings, insists upon historical verisimilitude. The titles of both works are textual transformations of what was a linguistic entity with an historical referent. Wiebe's title, being a translation, is indicative of the nature of his text; it will be a mediation between different modes of being. Godbout's front page subverts a fixed linguistic expression and reproduces a mythological symbol, both of which have long been part of the average Quebecker's mythological heritage. His text, as we shall see, is not a mediation between different groups but an internal discussion within a closed system. The outer presentations of both texts do not respect Mink's wish that we maintain the distinction between history and fiction. There is even a hint of their collapsing backwards into myth, in the use of a mythological figure in Godbout's title and in the implication that Wiebe's text will in fact be Falcon's poetic mythification of the glorious deeds of the Bois-brulés.

While commenting upon two important historical and political events, the narrators of both novels are working *within* a given mythological system and *working out* a new mythological system. The act of myth-making is central to their texts: they self-consciously blend fiction and history to create or recreate myth. The textual flaunting of historical allusions and ahistorical illusions, however, goes one step further: the narrators present *themselves*, as well as their texts, as a mixture of fictional elements and historical personnages. In this way, they challenge the reality of their own existence. At the same time, however, they stress the importance of their narratorial role and the seriousness of their textual productions. As a result, the historical and fictional worlds of the novels are inextricably bound together.

The historical Pierre Falcon died in 1876, but the fictional Pierre Falcon is not bound by time or space as we know them. He is both in his fictional world and not in it. At one point, as participant, he is singing his "silly, ironic, ribald songs"; at another, as distanced observer, he is commenting upon the life of the twentieth-century Métis. Falcon openly breaks with the objective or "neutral" narrator convention. The articulation of his society and its leader is his poetic function and the "raison d'être" of this text:

> During my lifetime I was given many songs, and I have often prayed to the Good Father . . . I have prayed, give me to make this song of Riel. You gave me so many songs . . . Give me this song too . . . I prayed for that for some years, and that song of Riel was not given me until I lay on my deathbed.

Although Falcon was not given the song he prayed for during his lifetime, he is able to concretize the Métis' "greatest vision" from his dwelling-place after death. The repetition of the pronoun "this" indicates that the text we are study-

ing *is* Falcon's song of Riel: with these written words, he is expressing and giving permanence to a vision held by his Métis society. He is also conscious of the fact that his articulation of the way things were is a strain on credibility. "Quoting" Riel directly, he says: "I must leave Riel's words to stand in all their unmemorable bareness: their unearthly power will have to be seen in the effect they had . . . And most of all, I suppose, in their impossibility."

Falcon is primarily concerned with explicating the Métis' "vision du monde" to those outside the Métis' universe. If I consider the world of the Métis to be a closed circle, then Falcon's role as narrator may be illustrated by placing him on the circular line. As Métis, he can move within the circle; as narrator-with-a-mission, he can reach outside the circle by means of this written text and explain the Métis to the non-Métis. His repeated efforts to explain the religious cosmological concepts of the Métis underline the fact that he is addressing himself to the non-initiated, as Métis do not need to explain their commonly-held "vision du monde" to each other. Near the end of the novel, while discussing the political and religious crises of his people, Falcon sends a message to the reader about this text:

> The word and understanding is very near you: you need no revelation from beyond the grave; as our Jesus said when he was on earth, if you will not believe what is already discernible on earth, then neither will you believe that which comes extraordinarily from beyond.

Falcon, the narrator of this text, and the singing poet of the Métis, is "from beyond the grave" but his words are, indeed, "near" us. His words invite us to understand what should have been discernible on earth: this text solicits our recreation of an historical past.

In *Les Têtes à Papineau*, Charles and François pose a particular narratorial problem: *who* is doing the narrating? The first word of the text, "Nous," indicates that this diary will be a harmonious co-production, as does the following passage: "Donc cet ouvrage ne se prétend pas une biographie officielle. Il s'agit tout simplement du *journal* de notre évolution . . . Et c'est pourquoi nous l'assumerons . . . au nom des deux têtes. C'est un récit bigraphique."

However, as early as the fifth paragraph of the novel, the "nous" breaks down into third-person narration. Although the "nous" remains the main narratorial voice, this break-down occurs frequently; as a result, the heads are perceived as being different persons. Piette has suggested that the "nous" does not designate only the "personnages-narrateurs," but also "toute la collectivité québécoise." The name "Charles François" strongly evokes "canadien-français." François

represents the traditional group which looks nostalgically towards the past; Charles is oriented towards the future.[15] Godbout here demonstrates his awareness of the changing socio-economic scene: Charles is the embodiment of the typical Quebec businessman — the "P.D.G." of the "P.M.E." — whose existence is still largely ignored outside Quebec.

The narrator's statements and attitude imply that their coexistence is rooted in reality, but even their father, who is partly responsible for their creation, underlines the improbability of their existence; should he write "le nouveau-né" or "les nouveau-nés"? Constant reference to the worlds of make-believe suggests that the heads may be fictional products. Their birth is presented as the opening night of a play; their lives are qualified as a continual "freak show" and they themselves determine their entire existence to be superficial: "Nous savions planer à la surface des idées, des gens et des choses. . . . Spirituels et superficiels." They do not even trust their father's version of their conception, as he has a reporter's temperament: that is to say, he has a tendency to produce new realities. The creation of new or alternative realities is a recurrent theme in this work.

The heads discuss their relationship as co-authors in the fourth chapter. Charles proposes that each write his separate version of the adventure; otherwise, the reader will never know who they truly are. It is eventually decided that the primary function of the text is to communicate their evolution to each other. If the world of the text is again a closed circle, then the narratorial role of the heads may be illustrated by placing them within the circular line. Readers may observe the inside communication from outside the circle by reading this text, but the purpose of this "récit bi-graphique" is basically an explanation of themselves to themselves. On the political level, the implication is that, at this critical moment of their history, Quebeckers have to discuss the referendum among themselves. This text is an internal discourse.

Before the operation (which will destroy their individuality, but "normalize" them), the heads are placed in quarantine and hooked up to a computer. Their internal communication can continue, as they each have access to a keyboard. But as the surgeon Northridge has programmed the computer to distinguish between single and plural pronouns ("moi" — "nous"), all their sentences do not show up on the two screens. Metafictionally, of course, this episode underlines Charles-François' existence as a linguistic construct. According to François, the operation is already in progress, as their written discourse has been divided. This text becomes progressively more difficult to write, as the number of interferences increases. Each head has to approve of the text; their failure to agree on the written word can bring their narration to a halt: "Les discours se croisent, se bousculent, s'entrechoquent." Their knowledge that neither will write the final chapter of the journal contributes to the slowing down of their production. Perhaps the final letter is the only possible solution to the impasse that was described

at the beginning of the diary: "Nous sommes, pour ainsi dire, idéologiquement séparés. C'est pourquoi ce livre ne peut être un effort de raccordement. Une médiation." If we stay within the limits of the narrators' text, the journal will not be published, as it remains an incomplete document.[16]

The narrators, while aware of the reader outside the closed circle of their text, do not facilitate her/his comprehension of their discourse. They only introduce themselves after five pages of text. They can, and do, keep parts of their communication from the reader: "(Nous avons convenu de ne pas transcrire ici le jeu de mots qui vient de traverser l'esprit de François . . .)." Their concern about the operation is disguised behind a façade of light-hearted humour. A passage near the end of the novel, however, echoes Falcon's message to the reader about understanding the text:

> Mais les gens croyaient que [Charles] blaguait. Les gens s'imaginent *toujours* que nous blaguons. Parce que nous avons deux têtes, parce que nous utilisons deux discours; ils croient que nous jouons avec les mots pour des effets de langue. Comment pourraient-ils prendre un monstre au sérieux? Quand sauront-ils que nous disons *toujours* la vérite? Quand il sera trop tard . . . ?

Is this not an invitation — if not a plea — to take the narrators seriously? Are we not being told that this text, while playful and therefore regarded as escapist, is, in fact, extremely responsible in socio-cultural terms?[17] The constant fluctuation between playfulness and seriousness in *Les têtes* is comparable to Pierre Falcon's passage through different time-frames coupled with his personal style of recounting past events. Both narrators deliberately focus on the process of story-telling *and* on the fact that they are subverting the reality of their own narratorial existence. The reader is openly reminded that both the narrators and their texts have a provisional existence. In these works, historical and literary instability reigns.

FALCON'S CONSCIOUSNESS of his text as a fictional construct is illustrated by the intermingling of "song" and "[written] word." The Métis poet's *songs* articulated the power of his people, but in this novel his singing voice has become a written text. With this textual product Falcon does what Riel had hoped to do with his writings, that is to say, he gives a voice to the Métis people. Falcon, however, is wary of written words. For Riel, "the words [wrote] themselves," and he used them "to give his unwritten people a place on paper before the frozen earth closed them away one by one and no one would hear them. . . . " But for Falcon, these words of Riel are "words to be used against him, for every written word called to judgement." Falcon had wanted to shape the Métis' vision into song while still on earth, as words, for him, are frustratingly insufficient when compared to song. By constantly playing off "voice" and "song" against "words"

and "paper" Falcon foregrounds his awareness of the limitations of the written word. He would rather that we heard his song, as he is not at all sure of his control over potentially dangerous written words: "The letter was lying there, and letters are dangerous. . . . The words crouch black on pale paper, unchangeable and deadly." The irony, of course, is that Falcon's song comes to us and lives on as a written, black-on-white text. The strong use of black/white/grey imagery throughout the novel insists upon this irony. Falcon here expresses a frustration common to many metafictional writers: written words are fixed, rigid, and limited in their ability to communicate fully to the reader. By contrasting "song" with "written word" and by using imagery which recalls the act of writing, Falcon underlines his knowledge of the limitations of the textual product. By means of the written word — and in spite of it — he transmits his dissatisfaction with writing while admitting to his need of it in order to communicate the story of his people.

The difficulty of translation insists upon this text as a construct. The Métis, as we know, spoke French: this text makes us read, in English, about their inability to speak English. This point is driven home by Michel Dumas' incomprehension when he and other Métis eavesdrop upon Colonel Wolseley's plans to attack them: " 'What's that English,' Michel whispered, 'what?'." The problem of translation is related to one of the major themes of the novel: the conflict produced when different linguistic and religious groups with different worldviews come into contact with one another. Falcon's awkward use of the English language underlines, on a linguistic level, the frustrations he experiences in his efforts to explicate the Métis' "vision du monde." For instance, his account of the "hunter's court" which judges Thomas Scott points out that he is killed, not for political reasons, but because of the effect his blasphemy had on the Métis. Linguistic and cultural incomprehension is evident in the following passage, where Falcon, long afterwards, tries to explain the event to an English-Canadian:

> 'It is the cursing,' [Goulet] said . . . 'The few French words aren't so bad, but to understand English, it's so . . . at home I soak my head in cold water, in snow, but the blasphemy . . . '
>
> 'Shoot a man for telling you to go to hell!' MacLead burst out.
>
> 'If you really know . . . ' but how do you explain the eternal annihilation of your soul to someone who doesn't want to know he has one?

By foregrounding the problems of translation, the text thematizes Falcon's struggles to "translate" the history of his people. Contrary to traditional historiographic practice, this text does not seek to deny or to efface the narratorial voice: the reader is made aware that this song is *Falcon's* particular meditation upon the past.

Les têtes à Papineau is also an extended metafictional construct; here, much emphasis is placed on the distortion of reality. The reader is made aware of the

narrators' predilection for the construction of alternative worlds. Speaking of Charles, François says: "il aime lui aussi inventer des univers inconnus." The heads acknowledge that they can — and do — change their own perception of things: "Nous adaptions notre discours à la sauce littéraire ou politique suivant les lieux." Many characters are creative transformers of reality: performers, actors, writers, journalists, and computer programmers. Even the computer is a manipulator of characters, and this makes of it a producer of an alternative reality.

Patricia Waugh has noted that "the question of the ontological status of fictional characters is ultimately inseparable from that of the question of the referentiality of fictional language." In metafictional works proper names are often flaunted to focus attention on the fact that the objects named exist in a world which is entirely a verbal construct. The names used in this novel point out that "what is referred to has been created . . . through a 'naming' process."[18] Characters change names in order to present another image of themselves. Dippydou, the "rock western" singer, is "de son vrai nom Colette Tremblay." In this allegorical novel, the names can also have political meaning. For instance, the heads' grandmother, Britty, symbolizes the ailing British empire, and "la race des Papineau" represents Quebec.

As is the case with Pierre Falcon, the narrators overtly thematize their awareness of the act of writing by including other texts within their own: letters-to-the-editor, their father's newspaper articles, selections of their biography and the texts transcribed on their computer terminals. Again, intertextual production is stressed by numerous references to producers of literary texts: Kafka, Rimbaud, Cendrars, Eluard, Prévert. This text also foregrounds its existence as a fictional product by insisting on its linguistic condition. For instance, the repetition of the last word of a sentence provokes a break in the rhythm and forces the reader to become aware of the game of writing. The same effect is produced when the narrators interrupt their discourse to underline the effect of a sound: "embryonnaire, an-bri-yo-nère." The playful exchange of consonants in the following sentence not only arouses an awareness of word-games but also pokes fun at nationalistic values: " 'C'est tout de même ainsi,' répondit François, 'que nous avons conservé nos traditions, notre langue, notre foi, nos chansons et nos chromosomes. Chrysostome!'." This work, then, flaunts its conditions of textuality; its narrators make us aware of the fictional construction of their text and of the textual creation of alternative worlds.

Les têtes à Papineau is an allegorical comment upon an historical event and upon the socio-political evolution of Quebec which has led it to this important moment. The narrators, by constantly playing off the "historical" world against alternative worlds, confuse our perception of all worlds. They suggest "that history itself is a multiplicity of 'alternative worlds,' as fictional as, but other than,

the [world of the novel]." The heads do this by using various narrative techniques, such as the insertion of "real historical events [and] personages" into a fictional context.[19] For instance, reference is made to the Shah of Iran, Duplessis, and the Dionne quintuplets and to events such as the Battle of the Plains of Abraham and the New York City black-out. At times, distince between the worlds is reduced to a minimum: the centrefold of the 1956 *Almanach du Peuple* is said to portray, on the left-hand side, the Dionne quintuplets in the arms of their father, and on the right, Charles-François in the arms of Alain-Auguste!

The heads also perform linguistic operations on well-known historical quotations, thereby reinforcing the idea of history as a construct. Henri Bourassa's axiom "la langue est gardienne de la foi" is altered by the narrators' verbal play. Northridge's mother, a French-Canadian postulant from St-Boniface, becomes pregnant to protest against the disappearance of her race. Her baby is adopted by an Anglo-Catholic family in Winnipeg, and the head's ironic, political comment is "Déjà, au Manitoba, la foi n'était plus gardienne de la langue!"

The heads' narration of their own evolution also underlines the fact that history is a construct. Theirs is not presented as a chronological sequence, but as a continual alternation between past and present. Personal significance is frequently given to historical dates, such as the beginning of the quiet revolution. For the heads, writing this text is no different from constructing their history: this text *is* their history and they are a grammatical construction within it! When Charles stops the narration to read over what has been recorded so far, the construction of this history — and by extension, any history — is foregrounded. The final chapter of their history remains unwritten; like us, they exist in the present and reconstruct the past from fragments; the future is out of their control. At the end of the novel, they seem to lose control over their own existence: they are told they belong to the public, to the nation and to science. By linking their history to that of the collectivity throughout the text, the heads stress that history itself is a "personal reconstruction" and, perhaps, "the ultimate fiction we are all living."[20]

In *The Scorched-Wood People*, Falcon also flaunts his text as an historical construct. He occasionally interrupts his own narrative to refer to the historiographic act: "I know of no historian who has commented on this to say the least strange legal distinction that men who shot and killed Canadian soldiers only *intended* to wage war while Riel . . . had actually waged war." Commentaries of this sort point out Falcon's knowledge of other historical interpretations of the Riel rebellions. They also stress that his Métis "vision du monde" differs from the traditional view of history. As with the translation technique, the use of Falcon as a biased narrator underlines the idea that the true story of the

past is necessarily a construct. Different "true stories" are made by different narrators. The presentation of the end of the story in the first paragraph of the novel subverts the traditional historiographic process, which tends to explain events in chronological order leading to a climactic ending. The frequent use of flash-forwards has the same effect. By not giving the sources for the documents he uses, by treating them as just another aid in the story-telling process, Falcon both disorients the reader's perception of objective historiography and makes her/him aware that the past is being constructed. Perhaps this song of Falcon's, this text we are reading, is just as authentic a document as those it has incorporated into itself!

Falcon denigrates the mythological system of the average Canadian. In this book, John A. MacDonald is a scheming hypocrite and the Mounties hardly ever get their man! And though Falcon says he cannot sing of the "machinations of eastern politicians" the following passage certainly retells events in a non-traditional way:

> . . . no Opposition would now dare vote against the last gigantic loan which could complete the financing of the Canadian Pacific Railway for the massive benefit of Canada from Sea to Sea and, quite incidentally, for the benefit of CPR shareholders. Riel had created the catastrophe, an outbreak worthy for Conservative purposes of elevation to rebellion, as the Prime Minister would explain carefully to the Governor General as soon as the fighting was over.

While ridiculing the "great figures" of Canadian history, Falcon also indicates that he is self-consciously constructing an alternative historical world. His demolition of the myths of MacDonald, Cartier and the Mounties creates a vacuum which permits a new historical and mythological perspective. Blending fiction and history, Falcon sets up a mythological system which centres on Louis Riel.

Northrop Frye, discussing myth as the matrix of literature, posits that "literature seems to begin in a corpus of stories." Some of these stories are classified as folk tales; others take root in a specific society and "begin to exist in time." The stories of this second group become mythical stories: they are similar to "other stories all over the world," but they "contain traditional names and specific affinities to religion and legendary history that establish them within a single society." According to Frye, myth differs from history in that it is not bound to a sequence of events but is a "presentation of human history in a participating form." I would argue that Pierre Falcon's main concern as a narrator is to reshape the history of Louis Riel: this "song" is a place where the mythical story of Riel and his New Nation is being retold. Falcon's repeated efforts to explain the Métis' cosmology underline his desire to have his listener/reader participate in this recreation of history, this production of myth. With his "song," the narrator attempts to overturn the historical process which condemns Riel as a moccasin-clad madman. Falcon bases the development of the myth of the Métis

upon what Frye calls the decisive "Biblical mythology" of our tradition. He does this by constantly drawing parallels between the Métis and the Israelites, and between Riel and Jesus Christ.[21]

Paradoxically, setting up Riel as a god-fiugre depends upon the dismantling of the system already in place, the system of the organized Church. Claiming that Rome has fallen, Riel tells his people that God has called to him with these words: "Hear me! My son, why do you fight against me? Have I not called you, Louis David Riel? To the great mission of the Métis people? Rise! Call your people to that mission with which I will bless the earth!" Strong Biblical imagery dominates this novel. For instance, Falcon refers to the central issue of translation while using the Book of Daniel as an intertext: "but now Riel was speaking a phrase in English, a phrase in French as if he read his terrifying words burned into the log wall." The twelve members of the Exovedate proclaim Riel to be a "prophet in the service of Jesus Christ," but the archetypal imagery of the novel suggests that he *is* Jesus Christ. Falcon insists upon his "beginningless and endless immortality." Riel moves out of time and out of body into his vision-world. Two passages in particular convey the Riel/Christ metaphor: the baptism of the Methodist Will Jackson as Henry Joseph Jaxon, new son of the New Nation, and the scene of the sacramental meal. Riel asks God's blessing on the "bannock" (unleavened bread) and milk which he and his men eat after they have made a "religious decision"; the men feel that this is "beyond comprehension, revelation!" Riel is both priest and god in this ceremony of the New Nation. The re-shaping of sacraments — doing now what Christ did then — gives a mythic dimension to Riel's actions; it annihilates the difference between Christ's time and his time. In the same way, Falcon's "song" of Riel's passage through time gives a mythic dimension to his story, by annihilating the distinction between the historical past and the present of this text.

Falcon uses cyclical structure and imagery to underline this annihilation of time. That Riel's life on earth was just a part of the cyclical pattern of events is summed up in Gabriel's statement: "You think like a white . . . You can't help it, that's okay, but you think Riel is finished? He said a hundred years is just a spoke in the wheel of eternity. We'll remember. A hundred years and whites still won't know what to do with him." After the death sentence has been passed on him, Riel begins to comprehend; his mission, he says, is to bring about practical results, "and even if it takes two hundred years to achieve it, what does that matter? God's time is not ours." Riel must hang to be a saint; in dying he gives life to the story of his people. The cyclical structure of the novel ties this Christ-like sacrifice to eternity. Falcon produces a "revolutionary view of history" by portraying Riel as a god whose "action [leads] to reconciliation."[22] The Métis, who have known one hundred years of solitude since Riel's death, are not eternally condemned to it. The last sentence of *The Scorched-Wood People* holds out hope: "O God I

pray again, let not our people be confounded. Give them that faith again." By blending fiction and history, Wiebe has ensured that the myth of the Métis and their leader will remain present and alive in the reader's meditation upon the past.

In *Les têtes*, CHARLES and François also self-consciously display their *making* of history. They too place strong emphasis on mythologies and on the making of myth. By flaunting classical and other mythological allusions, they underline the metafictional aspect of their text. Against these various mythological backdrops, the heads narcissistically concentrate on their own role as myth-makers. This mixture of mythologies informs and deforms their history and ours. It reminds us that we all create our own mythologies, by seeking to historicize our existence in space and time. The heads insist upon their uniqueness and the fact that they are at the centre of the universe; "Les Têtes à Papineau" (capital "T"!) excel at everything, arriving first in their studies, their work and their social life. The entire world is aware of their celebrated existence: Marie-Lalonde's computer programme is a "merveilleux scrap-book électronique" which records the rise of their reputation.

Their apprehension of the unknown, however, provokes a return to "insécurité infantile." In an effort to dissipate their fear of the operation and of the future, the narrators turn to the mythological past in search of ontological stability. Their playful efforts to insert themselves into the various mythological systems foreground their insecurity. As in Wiebe's work, Christian mythology is frequently used as an intertext. The narrators set up parallels between their life and the life of Jesus Christ. Their birth, for instance, is a mystery and a miracle, and the final meeting of the family is described as a Last Supper. The importance accorded to the American West also indicates the narrators' explorations of alternative mythological systems.

Quebec folk traditions serve as a major intertextual tool. By inserting fragments of Quebec folk songs into their discourse, and by constantly altering well-known historical and political slogans, the heads create a tension between the fabulous world of two-headed beings and the "real" world, the one with an historical setting. This technique brings alternative worlds into contact. It also underlines the fact that this text is reserved to those who have the same socio-historical world-view as the one referred to by all these textual games. One example of this play with myth-making and mythology is the use made of the derogatory term "frog." Charles and François repeatedly use the frog image as a political metaphor, which permits them to comment upon the uniqueness of their situation and upon their internal disagreement. By incorporating a pejorative term normally

used by anglophones, the heads are readjusting their own mythology, re-situating themselves as myth-makers and assuming the controlling power over their own mythological system. The blurring of boundaries between the various worlds in this novel allows the narrators to confuse our perceptions of myth, mythology, history, fiction and reality, and to call for a new way of looking at the world.

Mink's concern about fiction and history collapsing back into myth is, therefore, addressed by the narrators of both *The Scorched-Wood People* and *Les têtes à Papineau*. In Wiebe's novel, Pierre Falcon uses the act of storytelling as a means of mythologizing history. He openly strives to set up a new mythological system which will ensure the continual presence of Louis Riel and of his New Nation in today's world. In Godbout, the narrators' interests lie more in manipulating myth so as to blur the boundaries between historical events and fictional elements. The "brouillage" created by the narrators' mixture of fiction and reality, myth and history, forces the reader continually to readjust to shifting worlds. This play results in a tension which provokes questions about the reality of the world outside the text. By overtly displaying themselves and their texts as metafictional and historical constructs, the narrators of both novels foreground the concept that past reality is a construct and ultimately point to the fictional mythologizing of our history.

Northrop Frye writes:

> Literature is conscious mythology; as society develops, its mythical stories become structural principles of storytelling... In a fully mature literary tradition the writer enters into a structure of traditional stories and images. He often has the feeling, and says so, that he is not actively shaping his material at all, but is rather a place where a verbal structure is taking its own shape.[23]

I would argue that in the two "verbal structures" examined in this paper, a process of mythologizing is indeed taking place. I would further argue that because of their metafictionality these two mythologizing "verbal structures" are linked to the world outside the text: they provoke readers to question their conceptions of "history" and "fiction." Precisely because of their auto-referentiality and their particular use of historical referents, both *Les têtes à Papineau* and *The Scorched-Wood People* foreground Edward Said's idea that: "Texts are worldly... they are part of the social world, human life, and of course, the historical moments in which they are located and interpreted."[24] Although Mink sees the blurring of fiction and history as a step backwards in the learning process, these two historiographic metafictions illustrate that this process can indeed be a new way of knowing, a new way of mediating upon the past.

NOTES

[1] Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction: the Theory and Practice of Self-conscious Fiction* (London and New York: Methuen, 1984), p. 6.

[2] Louis O. Mink, "Narrative Form as a Cognitive Instrument," in *The Writing of History: Literary Form and Historical Understanding*, ed. Robert H. Canary and Henry Kozicki (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1978), pp. 129-49.

[3] Linda Hutcheon, "A Poetics of Postmodernism?" *Diacritics: A Review of Contemporary Criticism*, 13 (Winter 1983), 40-42.

[4] Northrop Frye, "Myth as the Matrix of Literature," *The Georgia Review*, 38 (Fall 1984), p. 473. According to Frye, one *can* step outside one's history and view it objectively and synchronically. This is contrary to Michel Foucault's idea, as expressed by Linda Hutcheon: "We can never describe our own archive, our own discursive history, because we speak from within it." See Linda Hutcheon, "Canadian Historiographic Metafiction," *Essays on Canadian Writing*, 30 (Winter 1984-85), 232.

[5] "Jacques Godbout et la transformation de la réalité, une entrevue de Donald Smith," *Lettres québécoises*, 25 (printemps 1982), 54.

[6] Jacques Godbout, *Les têtes à Papineau* (Paris: Les Editions du Seuil, 1981). Further references are to this edition.

[7] Alain Piette, "Les langues à Papineau: comment le texte national se fait littérature," *Voix et Images*, 9 (printemps 1984), 123.

[8] This epigraph is not listed in any dictionary of quotations. Is this "A.D.N." "l'acide désoxyribonucléique" discovered by J. Watson and K. Crick, which concerns the relationship between chromosomes, genes, and hereditary malformations? Is Godbout metafictionally displaying his tendencies to incorporate scientific and political isues into his fiction?

[9] Brian Bergman, "Rudy Wiebe: Storymaker of the Prairies," in *A Voice in the Land: Essays by and about Rudy Wiebe*, ed. W. J. Keith (Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1981), p. 166.

[10] Rudy Wiebe, *The Temptations of Big Bear* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1973). The emphasis is mine. This passage is found only in the hard-cover edition; I thank Carla Visser for bringing it to my attention.

[11] Eli Mandel and Rudy Wiebe, "Where the Voice Comes From," in *Voice*, ed. W. J. Keith, p. 152.

[12] Rudy Wiebe, "On the Trail of Big Bear," in *Voice*, ed. W. J. Keith, p. 134.

[13] Rudy Wiebe, *The Scorched-Wood People* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1977). Further references are to this edition.

[14] Brian Davis, ed., *The Poetry of the Canadian People 1720-1920*, vol. 1 (Toronto: N.C. Press, 1976), pp. 246-47.

[15] Piette, and Patricia Smart, ["L'espace de nos fictions: quelques réflexions sur nos deux cultures," *Voix et Images*, 10.1 (automne 1984)] associate this double name with the English-French conflict. Both Piette and Smart conclude that the heads are, in Smart's words "plutôt les côtés 'canadien' et 'français' de la psyché québécoise . . . "

[16] This text, which comes to an end without "finishing," recalls the final pages of Hubert Aquin's *Prochain épisode* (Ottawa: Le Cercle du livre de France, 1965).

[17] See Waugh, p. 78.

[18] See Waugh, pp. 93-94.

[19] See Waugh, pp. 104-05.

[20] *Ibid.*, p. 107.

[21] Frye, *Myth*, pp. 469-74.

[22] *Ibid.*, p. 474.

[23] Northrop Frye, "Conclusion" to *Literary History of Canada: Canadian Literature in English*, gen. ed. Carl F. Klinck (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1965), p. 233.

[24] Edward W. Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1983), p. 4.

THE APPRENTICESHIP

Gary Geddes

Once, as a boy, I peered
into the moist abyss of the well
and saw my face a small dot
in a circle of light no larger
than my mother's hand-mirror.
I tried, having no wings, words,
letting them penetrate, by degrees,
the receiving ground, this
holiest of holies, and my voice
deepened as they fell.

I learned to prime the pump
in summer, or melt the ice
with applications of warmth
in dead of winter,
to gather the necessary darkness up
into my bucket and, galvanized,
stagger from the dank well,
drunken, brimming.

NARRATIVE DEVELOPMENT IN THE CANADIAN HISTORICAL NOVEL

Ronald Hatch

"HISTORY . . . IS A nightmare from which I am trying to awake," exclaims Stephen Daedalus in *Ulysses*, voicing a widespread concern that man, trapped inside history, has lost his deeper or primal identity.[1] The metaphor of entrapment in history's tunnel or labyrinth finds graphic expression as early as 1788 when James Hutton described his reactions to the geological strata present in the Salisbury crags outside Edinburgh. "We find no vestige of a beginning — no prospect of an end," he said, with a feeling of both awe and anxiety.[2] Hutton's new awareness of the dimensions of time calls into question a belief fundamental to the Christian religion: that man is part of a special creation with a definite beginning and end. While the abandonment of this belief in a special creation obviously has critical consequences for theology, it also raises serious problems about the grounds for any system of values. As Nietzsche remarks, once history becomes man's ultimate horizon then all values are relativized; they become mere products of man's will to impose form on chaos.[3]

Although the model of cause and effect rapidly replaced the idea of a special creation — with various metaphors such as mutation, class warfare, and even hydraulics being introduced to replace God's will — the crucial problem of value remains unsolved. How can a ground of value be found or introduced in a world dominated by history? Hegel's notion of a "life-idea" immanent in nature and moving ever upwards towards perfection received much acclaim in the early nineteenth century, and has since been reworked in a multitude of forms. Yet increasingly it has become apparent that the Hegelian "solution" of a final goal offers a hollow transformation of the religious attitude without any grounding. By making history something of value itself, all movement forwards, any process of transformation, becomes an end in itself, the result being that everything, even the individual, gains value only through what it can become, not through what it is.[4]

In Canada itself, as is the case with most of the "new world" countries, responses to history are often formulated at least in part on the experience implicit in being a new-world country, a phenomenon which lends itself (not without some irony) to a historic explanation. During the early European settle-

ment of North America, explorers, visitors, and settlers emphasized the "newness" of the country. Writers conceived of the new land as golden, believing it could supply a new source of values to replace the old world's outworn texts of history. Yet the "gold" of the new world was not always metaphorical; the land was valued also because its "newness" permitted exploitation, allowed the immigrants to apply ideas of change and progress without the traditional checks of the old world. North America gave unfettered scope to those developing social forces which could transform its *tabula rasa* into a new book of history. Consequently, much Canadian thinking about history stumbles on a contradiction: the land holds value both for its virginity and as the locus for the transformation of culture into nature.

Throughout the nineteenth century, many Canadian literary works express these contradictory attitudes towards history. In poetry, Isabella Valancy Crawford's *Malcolm's Katie* celebrates both the settler's axe which hews down the forests and the forests themselves, outside of history, and is therefore able to provide a mythopoeic grounding for the expansionist ideology of the axe.[5] Not unexpectedly, the genre which most extensively explores the contradictory attitudes towards history is the novel, and in particular the historical novel. William Kirby's *The Golden Dog* (1877), set in New France, presents a good early example of the paradigm. The character Philibert mediates through his trading company of the Golden Dog the opposite poles of the idyllic landed relationship between *habitant* and aristocrat.[6] Kirby suggests that France itself was to blame for the loss of this balance between the land and commerce, and hints that the English empire with its "noble-minded" commerce will fare better. Yet Kirby's novel, despite its success with both English and French readers, hardly qualifies as serious historical fictional explanation: he exaggerates his characterization and incorporates eccentric moralistic explanations in place of genuine historical determinants.

Not until after World War I does a tradition of genuine historical fiction begin to emerge in Canada, fiction which presents individuals caught up in the mesh of history but looking to build a humane and indigenous order grounded on something more substantial than the expansionist drive to uniformity and mastery. That Canada's authentic historical fiction emerges after 1918 should come as no surprise: with the Great War, the ensuing Depression and the terrifying powers unleased during World War II, Canadian authors not only felt the changes at work in the making of their history and culture, but saw the need to free the country of its colonial identity. Not only in Canadian literature, but in Commonwealth literature as a whole, this stage of development often sees writers turning to the land or the nation itself as a source of values to free the individual from the forces of history.[7]

For the novelists of this period after World War I, it seems clear that historical

verisimilitude can be gained only by abandoning the romance forms and offering an extended exploration of the conventions of realism. While these conventions give novelists like Martha Ostenso, Frederick Philip Grove, and Hugh MacLennan a superb vehicle for conveying an air of historical authenticity, they also postulate a historical past which, existing in its own right, follows its own laws. A novelist wishing to depict history within this framework begins by penetrating the mysteries of what appears as an objective past, and then replicates its patterns in his historical explanations. The past is viewed as an objective totality which offers the implicit possibility of exhaustive explanation. As a necessary corollary, the future becomes thought of as a great invisible book of history waiting to be written. The individual in all his subjectivity is left standing between an objective past and future which threaten to overwhelm him by their inexorable, autonomous forces. As Lukacs points out in *The Historical Novel*, the realist tradition portrays historical forces combining with individual actions to gain a determined end, a conjunction which means that history becomes imbued with an element of necessity.[8] For Lukacs, the historical novelist should offer a sense of the forces transmitted through the individual so that the reader experiences the manner in which the past necessarily becomes the present.[9]

While it remains possible to introduce various methods of rebellion against the necessity implicit in the historicism of realist conventions, by the 1960's it was becoming apparent to historical novelists that different narrative techniques were required to reorient the individual to history. Much of the impetus for a new sense of narrative derives from non-European novelists, in particular the so-called "magic realists," such as Jorge Luis Borges, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, and Carlos Fuentes.[10] Many writers of the "third world" seek non-linear modes of narrative in large part because their sense of history does not develop within a linear notion of timely "progress." For many such countries, the conventional western sense of history as a world drive towards what Hegel thought of as a "universal and homogeneous state" seems invalid.[11] In fact, recent historians credit the new fiction writers for leading the way in developing new historiographical methods.[12] Significantly, historians themselves show increasing dissatisfaction with many of the assumptions of historical narrative, Hayden White taking a leading position with his discussions of the role of value hidden in the narrative mode.[13] Some theoreticians, concerned to free history from all connection to verifiably known past events, seem willing even to entertain the idea that history always contains an element of subjective arbitrariness.[14]

For recent Canadian historical novelists carrying on the search for narrative styles that would free them from the implicit determinism of realism, the sense of an arbitrary history holds little appeal. Instead, they look for different ways of presenting the past which leave intact a sense of a comprehensible movement forward in time, for narrative forms which force the reader to encounter that

movement as he becomes aware of the elements of narration and interpretation in all explanations of the past.

To understand the Canadian historical novel's development away from strict realism, the most promising starting point is Hugh MacLennan's first published novel *Barometer Rising* (1941), a work which accepts realist postulates only to rebel against them. Set in the Maritimes during World War I, *Barometer Rising* portrays the catastrophic Halifax explosion of 1917.[15] From the outset, the novel declares history itself as one of its central concerns, the story unrolling chronologically, inevitably, the chapters headed by "o'clocks" ticking towards the explosion which flattens Halifax and its old social order: a classic exposition of man's condition within the temporal scheme of history. The reader must follow many different narrative lines, many different life histories, all of which intertwine within the governing envelope of a temporality largely invisible to the characters.

Most important, by using clock time as his narrative schema, MacLennan creates a mechanistic backdrop against which individuals and institutions emerge in a world of regularity without meaning, suggestive of the breakdown of values caused by the carnage of the war. The novel's atmosphere proves equally bleak and existentially void, resembling the worlds of those Hemingway characters who exist in moments of time unconnected to a community or some larger whole. Significantly, the novel opens with an unnamed man wandering through Halifax searching for an unnamed goal, musing that he inhabits a universe devoid of meaning. To be unnamed is to have no beginning, no genealogy, no history. In the beginning was the word, the name. As it turns out, the unnamed lost his name in Europe's war, where life seemed composed "of nothing but chance," and all meaning leaked away: "One chance must lead to another with no binding link." Such statements are borne out in the course of the novel as the large historical forces at work, symbolized by the two ships on their collision course, destroy Halifax.

In the beginning, MacLennan offers what appears to be a solution to the problem of value when Neil (the unnamed) discovers that Canada itself offers him a new vision. Europe he pronounces dead, but Canada, a *new* country, promises possibilities radically different from those of the Old Country. As Neil says: "Merely to have been born on the western side of the ocean gave a man something for which the traditions of the Old World could never compensate." Certainly MacLennan is historically accurate about this sentiment; many Canadian soldiers returning from World War I felt that Canada offered them a new beginning, one which could take a radically different direction from that of Europe.[16]

Yet such a visionary glorification of Canada smacks of simple nationalism. Had MacLennan seriously believed that Canada's "newness" alone offered an answer to the European impasse, then *Barometer Rising* would belong with historical romances like *The Golden Dog*. In fact, MacLennan imbues his novel with a strong dose of "realpolitik": he shows, mostly through Neil, that throughout Canada's short history it remained a colonial appendage which Great Britain used as a convenience. In wartime, Halifax assumes importance to England because of its harbour; in peacetime, the city lies forgotten, valueless. Thus *Barometer Rising* attempts through Neil to waken Canada from its long colonial slumber to its own individual destiny, for only then will Neil and others like him gain a future.

MacLennan depicts this somewhat abstract battle for new national goals through the highly personal struggle that Neil wages against Geoffrey Wain, his old commanding officer. Wain accused Neil of treason on the battlefields of Europe. We learn, however, that Neil was unable to carry out Wain's order because Wain was an incompetent officer who remained so far in the rear of the battle that he gave contradictory orders. The more we see of Wain, the more it becomes obvious that he, not Neil, deserves to be called traitor. Wain represents the Canadian colonial who cannot believe in Canada's worth; for him, everything of importance happens elsewhere, and he longs for the opportunity to live in a truly important setting. Indeed, he wants the war, the slaughter, to continue until he gains a staff posting overseas so that, at war's end, he will possess enough power to help govern the world-wide military industrial complex he sees developing.

Wain's belief in this kind of centralist government composed of businessmen and military leaders stems from his deep-seated belief that nothing local or regional possesses value beyond its potential for exploitation. Taken to its extreme, this attitude leads to the belief that only one centre of power can and should exist, an idea which obviously helped produce fascism. Indeed, Wain's role in the war shows the degree to which later fascist forces were already at work in the early part of the century. During a discussion of the novel some years later, MacLennan himself referred to Wain as a fascist.[17] On the other side, Neil's nationalism, his feeling of *pro patria*, defends the individual and the new countries against a pan-national tendency to centralize all power in military-industrial structures which subsume all governments and all individuals. Neil stands for the efficacy of pluralistic individual action against Wain's identification with a monolithic force of history.

Although MacLennan portrays Canadian nationalism during and after World War I as a positive force which can possibly overcome centralist ideologies of the European stamp, he also sees that new economic forces in the structure of capitalism may undermine even the best intentioned of nationalist policies. In short,

MacLennan recognizes the paradox of the "new": the impossibility of retaining the Eden-like qualities of the new land while allowing its commercial transformation. As the forces of industrial capitalism grow stronger, the unsullied land must suffer despoliation; as the new land loses its innocence, it no longer remains the main focus but becomes itself textualized, written on and across by its technological transformation. At numerous points MacLennan indicates that the rapid pace of commercial development forces the people of Cape Breton to change entirely their way of life. For example, Alec MacKenzie remembers the days when boats were built by hand, by shipbuilders with an innate sense for what made a boat beautiful, sea-worthy and a pleasure to sail. Neil himself learned his love of ships and developed his flair for shipbuilding by working alongside his Cape Breton relatives. All that changes with new methods, and the old shipbuilders become a part of the past. The effect of these changes on the values of the people is well represented by Geoffrey Wain's secretary: she comes from Cape Breton but is "kept" by Wain and sells her body like any other marketable object.

Even more disastrous than the changes on the face of the new land are the changes which take place in man's thinking. The mind becomes colonized, fragmented, a perfect instrument for mirroring the world of fragmented values. To portray this change, MacLennan introduces another narrative line which follows the character of Angus Murray. Angus finds this new way of thinking everywhere in Halifax. For example, as a crowd of Haligonians watch the *Olympic* set sail for England packed with Canadian soldiers, Angus's friend Smith, an engineer, discusses the ship entirely in engineering terms, forgetting about the men on board and the role they must soon play in the war. Angus realizes that this brand of professionalism, specialization, defines modernism. The individual loses his ability to judge the whole, evaluating everything only with professional expertise. Especially appalling to Angus is that such people combine decency and ability with an almost overwhelming ignorance of the larger picture:

> The unbelievable and blind stupidity of this man, coupled with his unquestioned ability and decency, seemed to Murray terrifying. His attitude toward the war was that of a well-brought-up and precocious child playing with a set of meccano. The only difference between Smith in war and Smith in peace was that now he had unlimited funds at his disposal.

The Frankfurt School of social philosophers calls such habits of thought the "instrumentalization" of reason: use defines everything.[18] The conception of a larger moral picture disappears, and with it go the values implicit in life linked to a community.

Such a critique of positivism holds, naturally enough, the potential for sentimentality and a bathetic nostalgia for a preindustrial society. MacLennan avoids such simplifications by taking care to show that technological progress, even as it

opens possibilities for change in the social structure, does not solve the problems of value and well-being. For example, greater educational opportunities allow women to enter the professions, and Penny Wain, Geoffrey's daughter, becomes a marine architect. Yet Penny remains unhappy in her new situation, and while she enjoys her new-found independence and mobility, MacLennan suggests that she cannot find satisfaction in the job itself. She wants to design beautiful, seaworthy ships, but most forego such ideals to design ships, not for the comfort of the men but their practicality for war. She knows that her ship will wallow in the high seas and that the men will be seasick much of the time. Thus, even as the new technology gives her personal independence, it shackles her to its blind movements.

MacLennan's vision, however, never focuses for long on the purely negative. While the novel's form constructs a universe dominated by dark historical forces, MacLennan refuses to give any particular character a hegemonic narrative line, and consequently all his major characters — Neil, Angus, Wain, Penny — continue to offer plausible responses. For example, after the explosion which transforms Geoffrey Wain's house from a hostile fortress into a hospital, both Angus and Neil experience a moment when they see Canada poised between the old and the new. Both recognize that it might play the role of mediator between the United States and England, nation-states representing technology and tradition. Yet Angus, sceptical as ever, cannot bring himself to believe in an idea which exists only as a theory unrelated to his own lived experience. Neil, however, makes the leap of faith, and identifies "himself with the still-hidden forces which were doomed to shape humanity as certainly as the tiny states of Europe had shaped the past." Existentially, Neil's decision attracts Penny, offering the novel what appears to be a classic comedic solution in the formation of a new family. Yet in a manner reminiscent of Shakespeare's comedies, the happy ending cannot cancel entirely the effects of scepticism and doubt. Moreover, Neil's reference to "hidden forces" which are "doomed" to shape mankind does not bode well for the future, something of which MacLennan, writing the novel at the beginning of World War II, must have been aware. In the end, the novel presents the image of a family bravely stepping forward to attempt a new future, yet MacLennan, trained as he is as a classicist, appears to hold only the slenderest hope that mankind can prevail against the dark forces of historical destiny.

THE SENSE OF THE individual trapped and virtually destroyed by the forces of history reaches its furthest limit in Frederick Philip Grove's prairie novels. Grove portrays the development of the west from the time of the first immigrants in their sod houses to a period some time in the future

when technology assumes control of history. His early novels portray a heroic confrontation with the land which ends tragically because of the processes of change inherent in social evolution. In *The Master of the Mill* (1944), Grove extends his earlier ideas, exploring the implications of Canada's transformation from an agricultural country of small farmers and businessmen into one ruled through technology by a small elite.[19] As a symbol for the technological forces which wholly subdue human logic, Grove imagines a gigantic grain mill, capable of producing enough grain for the entire world.

Although Grove researched the milling industry extensively as background for his novel, *The Master of the Mill* does not pretend to be a "realistic" historical account of Canada. Grove writes about the effects of technology on mankind everywhere, stripping away many Canadian details to emphasize the abstract logic governing technology. Nonetheless, because Grove does not describe the past becoming the present, but the future, the novel proves effective as "expressive history." In effect, *The Master of the Mill* works as a dystopian novel, envisioning the futuristic effects of technology on mankind.

The novel gains much of its effect from Grove's combining two types of fiction, the symbolic and the psychological. At the opening we enter the mind of Sam Clark, the mill's designer, following his thoughts as he tries desperately in the last days of his life to understand how he lost control of the mill. In effect, we discern the extraordinary complexity of an individual's mind as he attempts to understand the inadequacy of liberal ideals of compassion and virtue in dealing with the logic of mechanization. Sam's failure to control the mill, his inability even to understand it, makes the mill stand out all the more boldly as a force destined to make man even punier. Moreover, at about the halfway point of the novel, Grove allows the narrative to escape its autobiographical envelope by turning to other characters, in particular Sam's son Edmund. Edmund demonstrates the belief that the individual can escape the ineffectuality of the liberal compromise only by understanding the forces at work in society and by putting himself at their head. Just as Neil at the end of *Barometer Rising* identifies with the underground historical force, so Edmund becomes the spokesman for technology, but a spokesman unsoftened by humane values.

The strength with which Edmund speaks for the raw power of technological exploitation indicates that Grove felt that technology posed a real threat to liberal democracy. Indeed, he throws up the two new systems of the day — communism and fascism — as examples of ideologies expressing the same goals as technology. Yet Grove no more than MacLennan wants to endorse an ideology of change. At the point when Edmund creates a strike to make way for the mill's full automation, he dies by a bullet which comes mysteriously out of the night. Edmund's death, Grove suggests, "looked like an anticlimax." Occuring at the moment of complete industrialization, it illustrates the death inherent for man-

kind in such an undertaking, as well as the absurdity of any one person identifying himself and his destiny with the forces of history. His death also shows the impossibility of predicting the future with any sense of certainty, and points out that the more one rationalizes the world, the less remains for the individual.

The novel's ending, then, as in so many utopian and dystopian novels, refuses to provide the reader with a solution to the problems posed by technology, and Grove comes close to implying that no solutions may exist. Miss Dolittle, for example, suggests that it will be easy enough to "do nothing," to allow the mill to run of its own accord, the profits going into a fund for the unemployed (a "solution" accepted by many present-day politicians). Yet this option, she adds, will soon lead to the end of our civilization, since life without desire will smother the wish to live. After a brief period of barbarism, man could then begin the process of industrialization all over again. Yet Grove suddenly departs from the conventions of realism to propose something entirely new when Miss Dolittle affirms that she has come to "place a great confidence in the capacity of the collective human mind," that some unforeseen solution will be found. At first sight, this response seems hollow, a confused and simplistic groping for answers. How, one asks, can the "collective human mind" alter the path prescribed by the logic of technology?

While Miss Dolittle's resolution may be unsatisfactory, it points to an aspect of the novel's complex structure which, trapped by realist conventions, Grove has been unable to develop — the human forces. Besides portraying the relentless historical development of the mill, *The Master of the Mill* reveals recurring patterns in the lives of the people involved. Each person involved with the mill repeats the same patterns as those before him, and Grove clearly wants the reader to recognize the extent to which blind human will co-operates inadvertently with the forces of history to create the forms of civilization. Moreover, Grove's conclusion itself offers a new set of events; he leaves us, not with a single male narrator wrestling with the past, but a trinity of women discussing the future. The novel thus implies that man (or woman) must learn to approach time both synchronically and diachronically: we must do no less than change our sense of time as history. For Grove, however, the linear projection of history proves so much stronger than his synchronic sense that he remains incapable of rendering the latter with any credibility.

To break the grip of time as an external force manipulating characters clearly requires a rethinking of the way in which narrative form structures man's sense of history. Rudy Wiebe's work with narrative puts him at the forefront of today's historical novelists. Wiebe's early novels offer only tenta-

tive experiments in adjusting the narrative focus to the interpretation of history, but the publication of *The Temptations of Big Bear* in 1973 is a turning point in his work, for here Wiebe eschews any sense of the past as knowable from a single point of view. By bombarding the reader with many different viewpoints about the expansion of the west during the 1870's and 1880's, he forces the reader to acknowledge contradictions about his sense of history even as it unfolds. Wiebe, of course, never attempts to deny the whiteman's success in defeating the Indians, but he makes us aware that their "progress" was wrought at the expense of other values, other peoples. In so doing he presents another angle on history which makes us re-evaluate our own perspective by appreciating that Indians could never understand the importance of change for its own sake.[20]

The Indian has long been a popular figure for Canadian writers, but Wiebe is among the first to take the Indian's religion as a potential alternative to the whiteman's desire to assert his mastery of the land. The primary contrast lies not between technology and agriculture, as MacLennan and Grove sometimes suggest, but between a rationality which defines value as "use-value," and a mode of knowledge based in an attitude of reverence which sees all things as partaking of an original source of being. In his portrait of the meeting of the Indians with the whiteman, Wiebe brings out the great profundity of the Indian's view of the world. Here we see a people still "resting" in themselves, whose freedom from western instrumentalization provides an alternative to the notion of time as history.

Again Lukacs' theory about the structure of the historical novel proves instructive in highlighting certain presuppositions about the way history develops. Lukacs argues that the greatness of a realist novelist like Sir Walter Scott lies in his portrayal of the present (the present of the early nineteenth century) arising out of the pre-present, the Scotland of the eighteenth century. Lukacs applauds Scott in *Waverley* for portraying how the Scottish clan system, its feudalism, breaks down as a result of its own social weakness and eventually becomes part of the English commercial empire. Lukacs presupposes an objective historical force which leads inexorably from one level of culture to another, the development coming through a dialectic but always assuming a movement from "low to high."[21] In *The Temptations of Big Bear*, however, Wiebe establishes that the Indian culture, richly sensuous and culturally sophisticated in its human relationships, did not lead into the white man's in any necessary historical evolution. Indian culture was not "low" culture. The settlers and the police simply imposed their culture, their views of "progress" on the Indians.

Although conventional history has largely ignored or invalidated Indian culture, Wiebe restores the Indian perspective, ending the novel, not as an analytic historian of factuality, but inside the mind of Big Bear as he lies dying in the prison hospital. There is no sadness in death, since Big Bear dies dreaming of his

return to his place of birth in the Sand Hills. At the moment of his death, he imagines himself turning to rock. Wiebe's graphic description here leads many readers to misread the passage and believe that Big Bear actually returns to his birthplace. Yet the symbol of "rock" in Indian mythology does not connote return and rebirth, but immortality. Wiebe here performs what George Grant calls "remembering" or restoring to validity an earlier archaic version of time.[22] Wiebe calls to his readers to remember "the people" who continue from generation to generation as part of the land — not merely as conquerors or alienated consumers of that land. In other words, the novel's ending creates a visionary frame which establishes the permanence of life and denies the conventional narrative sense of endless repetition, thus bypassing Lukacs' sense of the inevitable in history.

While Wiebe firmly grounds his religious impulse in the realism of his many narrators, his sense of "eternity" poses a danger: to escape the loss of the sacred in everyday life, he is tempted always to push man back towards an original Eden. This attitude appears most markedly in his short story "The Naming of Albert Johnson," which retells the story of the Yukon's "mad trapper."[23] Here Wiebe finds that if he wants to elicit the story's meaning or epiphany, he must tell the story backwards. To tell the story forwards, in the conventional manner, entails ending with the trapper's death, and that conclusion, the death, explains nothing. By beginning with the trapper's death at the hands of the North West Mounted Police, Wiebe arrives at the beginning point which causes all the problems — the naming of the man. The police suspect the man of stealing from Indian trap lines, and although they know virtually nothing about him, arrive at his cabin and call to him by the name of Albert Johnson, assuming that to be his name. But we never know who this man is/was. He lived alone in the vastness of the north; the violence began in his "naming." The trail of violence develops out of a refusal to let the man live alone, unnamed. The forces of law and order demand that he respond to a name which twists his original authenticity into unnatural shapes. Carried to its logical extreme, Wiebe's interpretation entails a sense of authenticity which exists free of the constraints of language in a world of nature admitting no art or artifice. This, however, returns us to an Enlightenment view of man in which the individual begins as a monad, an authentic being, a difficult idea for most people today when man appears trailing not only clouds of nature, but clouds of culture.

If RUDY WIEBE SHOWS where in the past to find values which counter the western sense of history and its emphasis on transformation, Mavis Gallant shows in her fiction how a different view of history can be applied to the

contemporary situation. Mavis Gallant has lived in Europe for many years, and her fiction often deals with expatriates, with their need to escape from a crippling conception of time, and all the cultural norms it drags in its wake. The difficult task in such fiction is the creation of a narrative line which gives credit to the twentieth-century sense of historical forces operating in nature and yet shows that history forms but one aspect of cultural identity. Once achieved, such a narrative line allows the individual at least partial freedom from history.

The Pegnitz Junction (1973) confronts the problem directly by employing a train as its central metaphor, the symbolic engine of technology dragging the helpless citizens in its wake.[24] The central character Christine represents a sort of modern-day version of Bunyan's Christiana on a journey. Returning from a holiday in Paris with her lover Herbert and his young son, little Bert, she desperately searches for new directions to her life; mostly she finds herself wondering whether she should marry Herbert and become the conventional mother to his son. She must choose while trapped aboard a train which seems virtually out of control as it winds its erratic course across Germany, continually rerouted because of fires and other dangers.

For the passengers, the train seems to be moving forward into an ever bleaker future. Gallant not only develops here the contemporary sense of life becoming ever more threatened by erratic acts of violence, but shows that society treats its citizens as passive passengers on a journey directed by magisterial political leaders. Germany of course experienced this vast gap between the leaders and the people during the Third Reich, but even France in the post-war years showed an alarming tendency towards dictatorial government. Indeed, de Gaulle actually used the term "passengers" in a broadcast of 5th February 1961, to describe the people of France.[25] Yet even as Gallant employs the convention of a journey into the future she offers a new twist, and it becomes apparent that the train travels not into the future, but the past, and that Christine, in the present, replicates past experiences.

The effect of the journey on both Christine and the reader proves disorienting, enough so that many people complain about the novella's seeming lack of form. Yet Gallant includes a supra-abundance of formal elements, especially in her presentation of well-known material from Germany's literary tradition, works such as Wilhelm Busch's "Julchen Knopf" and Kafka's *Castle*, as present-day events. Normally content to look *back* with the laudable intention of learning from the past, we are shocked to realize the extent to which the past continues to immerse the present, the extent to which our present-day observations arrive encoded in yesterday's narratives. Gallant achieves here what Grove had striven for in *The Master of the Mill* — the conjunction of a linear narrative line with repeating patterns in social and individual life. Consequently, Gallant's surreal voyage through Germany's cultural and political landscape captures brilliantly the sense of the individual riding a vast historical force over which he appears to

possess no control, while at the same time showing that the lack of control occurs because the individual allows these past patterns of thought to determine his *Lebensanchauung*, his concept of himself in history.

The crucial change in *The Pegnitz Junction* occurs when Christine breaks with the past, ceases to be a passenger, and moves into the present. When the train finally reaches Pegnitz Junction and everyone disembarks to wait for another train to take them the last leg of the journey home, Christine finds herself separated from Herbert and alone with the little boy. Suddenly a whistle blows. Although no one knows what will happen, the other travellers around Christine and little Bert respond like condemned refugees, and a mass exodus occurs. As Neil Besner points out, the scene in the "grey and wintry-looking freightyards" strongly resembles the many filmed versions of the arrivals at Auschwitz: "Lights blazed, voices bawled in dialect, a dog barked."[26] Christine's journey reproduces in modern form the train journeys taken by condemned refugees to the camps in the Third Reich. The same combination of historical force, dictatorial leadership and individual passivity prevails. Yet even as little Bert starts to answer the whistle's summons, Christine restrains him from following the herd. Left alone together, the pair might easily have become a symbol of deprivation, heroic sacrifice, but that is not Gallant's intention, for it would reproduce all too closely the cult of sacrifice prevailing in the Third Reich. Throughout the novella, little Bert has begged Christine to tell him a story; now as silence falls on their departing fellow passengers, she takes up the challenge and attempts a story.

Since so much of the novella has stressed the way information on the train "streamed" at Christine, her new role as storyteller is crucial. No longer a passive passenger on history's voyage into the future, she becomes the artist who creates new forms of expression. Before beginning, however, she looks into a book she has been carrying, Bonhoeffer's *Ethics*. As the most famous example of individual rebellion in the Hitler period, Bonhoeffer would seem to offer Christine inspiration in her present moment of need. Certainly he has often been quoted in this inspirational way. Yet Christine immediately rejects Bonhoeffer's language of universal and metaphysical concepts. While they may have helped Bonhoeffer in the past, such abstractions do not belong to the kind of language that Christine needs, for they are in a sense ossified, part and parcel of past ideological clashes too often repeated.

Gallant could easily have fallen into the trap here of turning Christine into a kind of transcendental philosopher in the image of Schelling, with theories about the way language itself recreates the world. On the contrary, Gallant portrays Christine telling little Bert a "true" story which she has heard her father tell about people he had known. In so doing, Gallant chooses to stress not the power of language to create an alternative world, but the manner in which Christine breaks out of the sterility and isolation of her mind by giving herself to the child

in the act of narrating the word. Moreover, the story itself offers nothing of a sublime, otherworldly nature, and seems almost childish, involving as it does five brothers, all of whom are called Georg. Herbert scoffed at the story earlier, claiming that it would be impossible to tell the brothers apart, but as Christine begins the story by naming the different brothers, no confusion ensues because she pronounces each "Georg" in a different dialect. Again the emphasis falls not on conveying an abstract idea, but on the way language communicates once it is voiced in the act of speaking to someone. Hard-core "realists" like Herbert condemn the story because they believe it does not make sense for five brothers all to have the same name, yet as Christine begins the story the single name "Georg" becomes "the Goysh, the Yursh, the Shorsh. . . ." Here the word gains life through other words, bringing something new into being. Earlier Christine and the other passengers on the train relived the experience of the past, everything "new" in the present being mere repetition of past patterns. While such an experience seems to doom man to eternal repetition, Christine's story affirms that a single name can also be transformed through the active use of language into new and entirely separate realities.

The Pegnitz Junction concludes with no ending, but a beginning — the beginning of Christine's story. By defying the usual laws of narrative, Gallant extricates herself from MacLennan's realist dilemma. Unlike Neil, Christine does not move forward into the future under the cloud of historical necessity. By refusing to continue the journey, she creates a rift in time. Not only does she absent herself from the surface nihilism implicit in the continuous streaming of random information, but in so doing, she escapes as well from the journey to death which is the hidden destination of history's nihilistic surface. In fact, her story to little Bert enters history as the word always does, as an apocalyptic event. In her story of the brothers, one does not become three, but five, suggesting the possibility of a conception of mankind in which all men are seen as having the same name, the same essence, This is not to say that Christine and little Bert can remain within the story forever. Eventually they will have to do something, and that something will take them out of the world of the story and into history. Yet with this emphasis upon storytelling, history no longer seems something which exists over and against the individual, but something which he helps to create through narrative patterns.

BOTH WIEBE'S AND GALLANT'S narrative art demonstrate the importance that culture plays in developing our sense of history, a lesson which Timothy Findley develops in *The Wars* (1977) and *Famous Last Words* (1981). *The Wars* proves particularly telling in the way it forces the reader to view with

suspicion historical documents about World War I, and to engage, instead, in the actual making of history by witnessing the story of Robert Ross as he undergoes the experience of war.[27] *The Wars* does not ask the reader to observe history but to confront it. Continually the reader finds himself straining to hear Robert's voice, to see his picture, and thus to arrive at an understanding of the war which stems from experience and not someone else's narrative. Of course, the sense of authenticity gained from reading *The Wars* results in large part from Findley's technique, and is illusion, but the novel forces the reader to realize that history does not exist as something given. Just as history books are products of human industry and imagination, the past itself takes form through human invention and intervention, arranged in narrative form. No invisible book exists with the so-called "true facts." Consequently the past is something shaped in the present and in continual need of reshaping.

Moreover, as Tolstoy reminds us in *War and Peace*, the historical novel allows the reader to see that the connections between events in the world never really stop at any precise point.[28] Where the historian normally attempts to give explanations, to supply points along lines of cause and effect which leave an illusion of completion, the historical novelist continually widens the sense of connection until there seems no end. Something which first appears to be purely individual or economic or religious turns out to be part of a larger structure. Findley, for example, compels us to see the many different connections between private and public life — love becomes war and war turns to love — as well as those between human and animal life. At the beginning it looks as though Robert Ross may learn everything necessary to become a good officer and earn a commendation. Yet as we observe Robert with fellow soldiers, friends, family, lovers, and helpless animals, it becomes clear that he can become a good officer only by throwing in his lot with those who blindly follow history's "orders." Robert's position under Captain Leather contains obvious similarities to that of Neil with Wain in *Barometer Rising*. Findley's narrative mode, however, allows him to develop a sense of history unfolding in time and still show that an individual can refuse to follow the "forces of history" through the power of his moral judgement. Forced to choose between his commanding officer and a herd of horses in danger of being shelled to death, he shoots the officer and aligns himself with the horses. Because Findley juxtaposes different scraps of information, different reports, he sharpens the reader's awareness of the role of the individual in any chain of command, and teaches him to appreciate the complexity of Robert's action, to see that he acted compassionately and caringly. And at the same time, even heroically. After this, the reader must admit that Findley creates a character who embraces the traditionally opposed masculine and feminine virtues, thereby linking private, domestic virtues with public action.

Robert's plausibility derives in large part from Findley's inclusion of a re-

searcher-writer who actively combines the disconnected scraps of historical information into a whole, a technique which pushes even further Gallant's emphasis on the role of storytelling in the creation of history. Just as Robert must bridge a gap, a rift, moving from a passive participant in the war to one actively engaged in it, so the reader must also bridge a gap and actively put together the pieces of the novel to create a new picture of World War I. Findley's novel shows the extent to which narrative, once it deconstructs history to reveal the central point that description and interpretation always go hand in hand, can bring what is purported to be an objectively existing world of history within the sphere of human action. Since no "event" can exist outside some interpretative schema, the individual must recognize such interpretations for what they are, and not give himself over to supposedly objective forces. Such "forces," as Findley shows, always involve someone else's interpretation of the past as it becomes the present.

Even the idea of Canada's "newness" takes on a different dimension in Findley's reworking of realist conventions. While Robert's innocence and naturalness reflect his background in a nation largely unsullied by history, Findley does not attempt to posit such an origin as a means of escaping history. On the contrary, Findley shows that Robert's moral-existential being is grounded in relations with all living beings. Consequently, nature does not precede, but includes man. This means, however, that man cannot stand outside the natural world and exploit it as something completely separate. Time and again in *The Wars* the reader watches as characters leave the world of history to merge with the elements, earth, water, fire, and air. Yet Findley also resists the temptation to offer "life" or "being" as some sort of quasi-mystical force. Always the need remains for conscious deliberation, for an understanding of the values which guard and guide the world of nature. As a result, the novel foregrounds the uneasy relationship between nature and moral awareness in its historical dimension. For Findley the relationship between the two must always remain problematic, bridged only occasionally in rare moments of insight and action, moments which the artist can reproduce, not by transcribing events "realistically," but by creating narrative techniques through which the "new" enters history. At such moments the text does not merely convey information about people in the past, but unites us with them. Not surprisingly, this transformation of the object into subject has the effect of calling the reader to the same kind of involvement in his own time.

For a complete genealogy of the Canadian historical novel , it would be necessary to mention many other novelists. Leonard Cohen's *Beautiful Losers*, while not historical fiction in the ordinary sense, offers a meditation on the meaning of history to the twentieth century, and leads the reader to rethink the implications of narrative form. Similarly, Joy Kogawa's recent novel *Obasan* offers a portrait of the Japanese Canadians interned during World War II, showing how such policies maim and cripple individuals. Yet Kogawa's sense of individual release

from that historical maiming develops along unusual lines, with the individual refusing to rebel against the past, recognizing the need to enter ever deeper into time. As well, George Bowering's *Burning Water* — with its portrait of the two Georges, George Bowering and George Vancouver — directs us to reflect on the way in which every historian becomes a part of his creation. Although not a historical novelist in the ordinary sense of the term, Robert Kroetsch must obviously be included as a novelist developing innovative ways to evoke the past and its relation to the present.

These attempts by novelists to remain faithful to the subjective experiences of man-in-history have placed such great demands on language that the distinction between prose and poetry often breaks down. In Canada, of course, the long documentary poem has enjoyed great popularity, and now many writers are adapting it to express their increasingly complex view of history. For example, in 1984 Lionel Kearns' *Convergences* described the various convergences of his own life and the eighteenth-century meeting at Nootka between Captain Cook and the British Columbia Indians. In the same year Raymond Souster's *Jubilee of Death* retold the story of the invasion of Dieppe from many different narrative points of view. Historical drama, it is perhaps needless to remark, forms a large and impressive genre in its own right.

The concern with new approaches to history does not stop with the "creative" writers. Many of Canada's most distinguished critics have developed new ways of thinking about history. Northrop Frye, George Grant, Harold Innos, and Marshall McLuhan all develop structures of interpretation which reject the notion of history as something objectively given, unfolding of its own accord in time.[29] History comes to be seen, not as an event or a series of events which one experiences, and perhaps masters, but as language which speaks to us anew in the present.

NOTES

[1] James Joyce, *Ulysses* (1922; rpt. London: Bodley Head, 1960), p. 42.

[2] James Hutton, "Theory of the Earth; or an Investigation of the Laws observable in the Composition, Dissolution and Restoration of Land upon the Globe," in *Royal Society of Edinburgh, Transactions*, I (1788), 304.

[3] See Friedrich Nietzsche, "The Use and Disadvantage of History," in *Thoughts out of Season* (1874; rpt. New York: Gordon Press, 1974).

[4] George Grant, *Time as History* (Toronto: CBC Publications, 1969), p. 19.

[5] Isabella Valancy Crawford, *Collected Poems* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1972), pp. 193-236. Similar oppositions can be found in Oliver Goldsmith's long poem *The Rising Village* and Thomas Chandler Haliburton's sketches of Sam Slick.

[6] For Kirby's *The Golden Dog* it is essential to use the first edition of 1877, since most later editions are seriously bowdlerized.

[7] Yasmine Gooneratne, *Diverse Inheritance: A Personal Perspective on Common-*

wealth Literature (Adelaide: Centre for Research in the New Literatures in English, 1980), p. 3.

[8] Georg Lukacs, *The Historical Novel*, trans. by Hannah and Stanley Mitchell (Markham, Ont.: Penguin, 1981), pp. 64-65.

[9] Lukacs, p. 357.

[10] Geoffrey Hancock discusses the significance of the term in his introduction to the anthology *Magic Realism* (Toronto: Aya Press, 1980), pp. 7-15.

[11] Quoted from George Grant, *Technology and Empire* (Toronto: House of Anansi, 1969), p. 86.

[12] Lionel Gossman, "History and Literature," in *The Writing of History*, ed. Robert H. Canary and Henry Kozicki (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1978), p. 37.

[13] Hayden White, "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality," *Critical Inquiry* (Autumn 1980), 18.

[14] See Roger Seamon's discussion of the question in "Narrative Practice and the Theoretical Distinction between History and Fiction," in *Genre*, 16 (Fall 1983), 197-218.

[15] Hugh MacLennan, *Barometer Rising* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1969). All quotations are from this edition. Even in his latest novel, *Voices in Time* (1980), which takes place in the future, MacLennan continues to employ a deterministic sense of history.

[16] Sandra Djwa " 'A New Soil and a Sharp Sun': the Landscape of a Modern Canadian Poetry," in *Modernist Studies*, 2, no. 2 (1977), 4.

[17] Elspeth Cameron quotes MacLennan in her *Hugh MacLennan: A Writer's Life* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1981), p. 139.

[18] See in particular Max Horkheimer's *Critique of Instrumental Reason*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell *et al.* (New York: Seabury Press, 1974).

[19] Frederick Philip Grove, *The Master of the Mill* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1961). All quotations are from this edition.

[20] Rudy Wiebe, *The Temptations of Big Bear* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1973).

[21] Lukacs, p. 208.

[22] George Grant, *Time as History*, p. 49.

[23] Rudy Wiebe, "The Naming of Albert Johnson," in *The Angel of the Tar Sands and Other Stories* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1982), pp. 88-99.

[24] Mavis Gallant, *The Pegnitz Junction* (New York: Random House, 1973).

[25] Dorothy Pickles, *The Fifth French Republic*, 3rd ed. (London: Methuen, 1968), p. 184.

[26] Neil Besner, "Mavis Gallant's Short Fiction: History and Memory in the Light of Imagination" (Ph.D., Univ. of British Columbia, 1983), pp. 167-68.

[27] Timothy Findley, *The Wars* (Markham, Ont.: Penguin, 1975).

[28] Leo Tolstoy, *War and Peace* (III, i) trans. R. Edmunds (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1957), vol. 2, p. 974.

[29] For the idealistic tendency in Canadian culture, see Leslie Armour, *The Idea of Canada* (Ottawa: Steel Rail, 1981).

SECRETARY

Ron Miles

organized she was one
heck of an organized

always knew what you wanted
done before you knew you wanted

had the fastest fingers strongest
grip on things she
knew how to use machines
and when
to make a personal
contact

organized I'll say
that about her
and that about her
hung
all of the tiny
but important parts
of the whole
business

top level decisions

middle management

skills supervision

data processing
(in and put)
put out

new economic thrusts

Open Door Policy

organization she was
the glorious organization I was
mad about her
till I found out about her
filing system

THE COLOURS OF WAR

Matt Cohen's Ironic Parable

Lawrence Mathews

EDGAR Z. FRIEDENBERG, in his controversial study of the Canadian political psyche, *Deference to Authority: The Case of Canada*, attempts to document the claim that "the Canadian system affords" an "enormous potential for oppression."[1] His most prominent example is Prime Minister Trudeau's invocation of the War Measures Act during the October Crisis of 1970. He also argues that this sort of issue is rarely dealt with in the arts in English Canada, whose "inability . . . to express itself adequately on the relationship of man to authority" stems from the fact that "The habit of deference is too ingrained in Canada."[2] Friedenberg's discussion of the arts is necessarily brief and incomplete, but it raises some interesting questions for students of literature. Can our writers be as intimidated as he claims? Or is he simply wrong in suggesting that their silence on this issue is a bad sign?

Three years before *Deference to Authority* appeared, Matt Cohen published *The Colours of War*, a novel which I think is the first serious attempt in our fiction to explore the political pathology that Friedenberg describes. Cohen's narrator, Theodore Beam, witnesses "the Canadian system" in action at the moment when its "enormous potential for oppression" has finally begun to realize itself on a large scale. Beam is faced with a series of crucial choices, all of which in some way involve his sense of self in relation to the political reality which most Canadians, according to Friedenberg, prefer to ignore whenever possible. Perhaps the fact that a Canadian has written such a book can be used in refutation of what Friedenberg has to say about the timidity of English Canadian artists.

But the book's critical reception supports Friedenberg's theory about the general unwillingness of Canadians to recognize the political implications of any given situation. The reviewers seemed not to grasp what Cohen was doing; as a result, *The Colours of War* seems to have passed into critical oblivion. David Jackel typifies the response of reviewers when he virtually ignores the issue of the nature and accuracy of the novel's political statement in order to concentrate on purely aesthetic matters. Matt Cohen, he concludes, "is not yet sufficiently in control of his art."[3] Five years later Jon Kertzer, in his brief overview of Cohen's work, calls *The Colours of War* "good in parts but weak as a whole"; as if to clinch the case, he reports that "Cohen has admitted dissatisfaction" with it.[4]

(Cohen's dissatisfaction may well have been caused by the uncomprehending critical reaction.)

George Woodcock is alone in defending the novel, arguing that it should be read as a parable, specifically as a contemporary version of *Candide*.[5] But not even Woodcock comments directly on the book's relation to specific Canadian political events, or on the possibility that it has something to say about specifically Canadian attitudes. Friedenberg's study suggests another context for interpreting the novel: as almost the only serious English Canadian work of literature to have been inspired by the October Crisis, our counterpart to *Les Ordres*, the Québecois film about the arbitrary arrest and imprisonment of hundreds of people at that time. As such, it deserves more careful attention than it has yet been given.

I will begin with a minor but significant example of carelessness. All three of the critics just quoted assert that *The Colours of War* is set in the "near future," but a cursory glance at the novel's chronology reveals that this could not be so. Jacob Beam, the narrator's father, is fifty-six at the time of its action,[6] yet he has fought in the Spanish Civil War; surely he could not have been born much after 1920. Further, there is evidence that Theodore Beam was born during the Second World War; an excerpt from a wartime letter from Jacob to his wife asks if the child has been born yet — and Theodore is an only child. Theodore turns twenty-seven near the beginning of the book, a fact which makes it possible that the year is 1970 itself. The birthday is in October. Cohen could hardly be more explicit. *The Colours of War* is not a vision of a hypothetical near future, but rather of an alternate recent past. But the critics, as if subject to Friedenberg's theories about the Canadian mentality, have decided to put as much distance as possible between themselves and the questions Cohen is raising. Cohen's implicit statement — "This is what we're really like" — is thereby softened into "This is what, in the worst possible case, we might *become*." What if, Cohen seems to be asking, the October Crisis were not unique to Quebec? What if the whole country were somehow implicated? What might have happened, and what would it have revealed about us as a people?

Early in the novel, Theodore tells us about his life in Vancouver, and about the strange "war" being carried on across North America:

> But this war was supposed to be different. There were no sides and no armies, or so the papers said. Just illegal underground groups that had been collecting weapons and now seemed to be systematically wrecking whatever was left of the cities in the South. Every day it seemed there were new declarations of emergencies and martial law. Not exactly a new war: things being the same as always but carried one step further.

It is as though the Weather Underground were far more powerful than it ever actually became. In Canada, there are food shortages, and social strife involving unions, farmers, and the armed forces. Theodore is apolitical but uneasy. After

his apartment has been ransacked by a pair of Kafkaesque police detectives looking for drugs, he decides to return to his hometown, Salem, Ontario. Most of the novel describes his journey by train, during which he becomes involved with a nebulous revolutionary cadre using the train to distribute weapons to its confederates in various places across the country. This group is led by Christopher Perestrello, a mysterious Che Guevara-like figure whose ambition is to unite "the people" against the forces of the government. On the train, Beam falls in love with a woman named Lise, who is a true believer in Perestrello's cause. After a time, he is himself almost converted. When the train reaches North Bay, the revolutionaries are attacked by government forces. Although Perestrello is killed, Theodore and Lise escape to Salem, where Theodore is reunited with his parents after ten years' estrangement. But the political crisis has by this point penetrated even to a backwater like Salem, and government troops occupy the town. At one point Theodore kills a soldier who is attempting to murder his father. By the end of the novel, Theodore and Lise have abandoned the cause of revolution and committed themselves to living near Salem. The government has evidently stamped out all overt resistance, but the larger political issues have not been resolved.

George Woodcock interprets the novel's action in this way:

> Theodore must be seen as a kind of latter-day Candide, set to wander as an innocent through the man-made jungles of the present, and to find that all the promises of the future are illusory in comparison with the rediscovery of roots and of Matt Cohen's wry equivalent of Voltaire's cultivation of one's garden.[7]

But this account is too kind to Theodore, whose understanding of his own experience is extremely limited, a fact pointed out by Jackel; it is not so much a matter of Theodore's innocence as of his lack of intelligence. He is, Jackel says, "someone only intermittently capable of understanding the issues involved and seldom able to describe these issues effectively when he does understand them."[8] But Jackel regards these shortcomings of Theodore as constituting a major *aesthetic* flaw. He does not consider the possibility that Cohen has deliberately made Beam "an inadequately-equipped narrator"[9] because Beam's inadequacies contribute something essential to the novel's meaning.

Cultivating one's garden is truly a quixotic enterprise if your garden may at any moment be overrun by armed soldiers demanding to see your identity card; but this is Theodore Beam's position at the end of *The Colours of War*. To suggest that Cohen endorses Theodore's gesture is to imply that he shares the naivete that his own novel effectively satirizes. At one point, Lise says that " 'History catches up to people,' " to which Theodore responds, " 'Bullshit'." In saying this, he is affirming one of the most deeply cherished of Canadian myths: that we have somehow been exempt from the responsibility of making history, and that

we can continue to opt out without paying a price. Al Purdy's poem about the October Crisis, "The Peaceable Kingdom," makes precisely this point:

> we join
> the mainstream of history
> with detention camps and the smell of blood
> and valid reasons for writing great novels
> in the future the past closing around
> and leaving us where I never wanted to be
> in a different country from the one
> where I grew up[10]

Purdy laments the loss of political innocence that the October Crisis implies. Cohen's point is that political innocence dies a lot harder than Purdy suspects, although the two would agree that it is a luxury we can no longer afford.

How is it that Theodore Beam, a representative Canadian, can so complacently reject the notion that history affects individuals? This question has an answer complex enough that it takes most of the book to deliver, but its kernel is to be found in his retrospective account of his situation at the beginning of the novel:

> I didn't know myself very well then: I hadn't learned to see myself in other people, or how to betray, or to kill, or even to love. I only felt vague stirrings beneath the surface, a half-knowledge that the policeman's careless gesture had tapped me into life again.

And of course by the end of the novel Theodore has learned to see himself in his father, has betrayed the revolutionaries, has killed his father's assailant, has come to love Lise. *The Colours of War* provides ample evidence that Theodore has come to "know himself" (simplistically) in terms of the individualism implied by the quoted passage. That is to say, he *does* the things that he has not previously done, but there is no indication that he understands what has happened to him. He can quote Nietzsche, but he has no consistent philosophical position to help him interpret and evaluate his experience. As a result, he is at the mercy of his instincts, which are right only some of the time. And his education and environment have done nothing to prepare him to "know himself" as a political being; his instinct is to deny, insofar as circumstances permit, that his world *has* a political dimension. At the end of the novel, he and Lise are living in an abandoned church, a retreat from Salem, even as Salem itself was once a retreat from the outside world. Reality is to be defined exclusively in terms of self-realization, and allegiance to those individuals who happen to become important to oneself. Allegiance to principle or to community are notions equally foreign to Theodore.

But he is permitted to retain his illusion of freedom. In the world of the novel, the government does not demand the loyalty of the hearts of the people; it requires only that they act obediently. Government and the individual engage in

a tacit conspiracy to deny that the life of the individual *has* any significant political element. Theodore, through his contact with the revolutionaries, is drawn away from this position, but has returned to it by the end of the book. Cohen, I think, suggests that we imitate Theodore at our peril.

At the beginning of the novel, Theodore's life is virtually defined by absence of commitment. He has no plans, no goals — "At this strange time in my life," he tells us, "it seemed as if past and present hardly existed." Like many of his generation, he has drifted to the West Coast. His outlook is epitomized by his fantasy about a hedonistic equivalent to Black Holes: "Soft Holes: places in the universe where stars have disappeared into ecstasy and anyone that comes into them has a billion-year orgasm." It is not particularly remarkable that Theodore should indulge in such day-dreams, but there is nothing in his imagination to counterbalance it. It is as though the Soft Hole provides the archetype for the kind of life he seeks outside his fantasies as well. Consistently he denies significance to experience that is not subjective and not set apart from the world of quotidian reality. We can see this pattern in his interaction with the three other important characters in the novel, Perestrello, Lise, and his father, Jacob.

Perestrello, whose goal is to *transform* the world of quotidian reality, is not a particularly attractive figure for Theodore. At only one point does he feel any sympathy for the revolutionary cause — when a farmer at a meeting in Regina throws in his lot with it. The farmer reminds Theodore of those he has known in Salem, and the joining of forces, he reports, "moved something in me." But this sense of solidarity is undercut almost immediately when he learns that the only dissident farmer at the meeting has been murdered: "I felt some part of me had died."

Apart from this one moment, Theodore withholds emotional commitment from the revolutionary cause. He is undoubtedly right to do so, for Cohen's irony is directed not only at Theodore but also at Perestrello and what he represents. Perestrello is an embodiment of the sentimental radicalism of the Sixties, so popular among Beam's generation. The vague rhetoric about "a people's government" is enough to enlist the support of dupes like Lise. (Lise is, significantly, an American; it is easier for her than for Theodore to have faith in Perestrello's revolutionary aspirations.) Her allegiance to him is unquestioning and, despite her intelligence, entirely stupid, her main article of faith being that " 'Perestrello cares about people. He believes in them'."

But Theodore's rejection of Perestrello is ironic because it too is based on intuition rather than ratiocination. Theodore cannot articulate the grounds for

his rejection, although his unconscious can deliver the message clearly enough. His intuitions about Perestrello are quite different from Lise's. Born in Spain, Perestrello grew up in Latin America. His reading of history is profoundly un-Canadian, not because he is a Marxist (his politics are never clearly defined) but because of his theoretical (as opposed to *de facto*) emphasis on "pure force" as the basis of political reality and because of the utopian idealism that underlies his vision:

> "I still have hope," Perestrello said. "Somewhere inside us there's a place that has never been touched and is still innocent, waiting to be discovered. When we've suffered, when the violence is over and the false governments have fallen, when we're simple men and women again, standing on the face of the earth, there'll be something we can reach for, something noble inside us."

Theodore is right to be suspicious of the notion that innocence can be restored by force, but it is only through his unconscious that he can express the ideological congruence of Perestrello and the government. An entire chapter is devoted to a description of a dream in which Theodore is being interrogated and tortured by Felipa (Perestrello's sinister wife) and by the two Vancouver detectives who invade his apartment in the first chapter. At some level, Theodore knows that the "pure force" of each side is equivalent in its amorality, the only difference being that one side has power and the other does not. In his waking life, he tries to be apolitical — " 'I hate politics'," he says when Lise raises the issue for the first time — and constantly tries to reassure himself that the cataclysmic events unfolding around him are not real:

> Despite Lise's wound, the boxcars full of weapons, the radio in Perestrello's compartment blasting out news of war and revolution, some part of me still believed that the old order would continue, that peace and comfort would reassert themselves like a small town shrugging off a scandal, and that when we got off the train the world would be cured, safe again: familiar and untouched.

Finally, however, events force Beam to make a conscious decision based on the knowledge that what is happening is real. When the train is attacked by soldiers in northern Ontario, he acts decisively to prevent Lise from joining the battle: "Finally knowing what had to be saved — and what had to be betrayed." But it is only in the heat of this moment that Theodore realizes what he is going to do. He does not attempt to explain, either during or after, what causes him to put Lise and his relationship with her above the interests of the revolution. Again Cohen's irony cuts both ways. On the one hand, Theodore is right not to be taken in by Perestrello, as Lise is; Perestrello's strategy is to mystify his disciples, to remain a leader whose ideas and methods are not subject to rational scrutiny, just as the government — remote, monolithic, impregnable — is perceived only through its lies and its acts of violence. On the other hand, Theodore is not articulate about *why* Perestrello is not worth supporting. He tells Lise that the

revolutionaries are outnumbered, so it would be foolish to fight. But that avoids the larger issue. What he is choosing to do is to put the demands of "personal" reality above those of the "political" dimension, which at once seems more dangerous and less real to him. (In the same way most Canadians at the time of the October Crisis were content to allow the government arbitrary powers in order to remove the threat that political reality might impinge upon their lives; they wanted to continue cultivating their gardens.) Theodore is not seriously interested in social justice — he wishes to pursue the Soft Hole and its more respectable equivalents: romantic love, family, peace in a rural community. If pure force must rule, he would prefer to forget about this fact.

The affirmation that he is making in choosing Lise is an affirmation of romantic love. Like the movie heroes to whom Theodore sometimes ironically compares himself — "In the movies there is always the romantic moment. Bathed in broad sunlight the hero lies on the roof, preferably with a revolver in each hand, and fights off the villains" — he risks his own life to prevent Lise from risking hers. (She threatens him with her weapon.) Yet the novel also satirizes romantic love. Theodore's relationship with Lise is a cliché, one of the "great romantic escapes" he discusses with her in their first conversation, but he also has a sense that there is a "gap" between them that, as the action progresses, "seemed to be growing wider." The attraction between them is often described in language redolent of the escapism of the Soft Hole: as they plan their journey to Salem, he feels "a strange sense of recognition, as if we had been sitting here always, planning how to survive, as if our previous lives had been unreal and could now be forgotten." When they make love for the first time, "We *were* the edge of the world, poised on the edge of the world, waiting to fall off." Later on, "Lise and I seemed to enter an oasis of perfection: sex." The language of these passages and others like them suggests that perhaps the Soft Hole is real, *is* the place of innocence that Perestrello has talked about.

But the lovers cannot remain in this world forever because it excludes too much. In Lise's case, it excludes her attachment to Perestrello's cause. But at times Theodore too feels "divided," one part of himself committed to the relationship while the other part remains "skeptical." His feelings become more complicated: "they were growing in two opposite directions — love and detachment." By the end of the novel, the emphasis is no longer on the mutually-experienced "oasis of perfection" but on Theodore and Lise as two solitudes and their relationship as compromise:

> And she moved away from me again, as if her words could only tell me that in her mind lived her own private thoughts, with their own private lives; and though they might cross with me now and again, their direction would always remain unknown to me.

In accepting this development, Theodore is, without recognizing it, taking on the

reductive pattern of life in Salem, specifically the life his father has lived there. The place of innocence is to be neither the brave new world envisaged by Perestrello, nor the realm of sexual ecstasy briefly occupied by the lovers, but rather (apparently) in what Woodcock calls "the rediscovery of roots" in the countryside near Salem.[11]

Salem, for Theodore, is epitomized by Jacob Beam — and here, too, Cohen refuses to present an ideal which can be taken seriously as an alternative to political involvement. In his young manhood, Jacob fought the good fight, proving himself in the wars against Franco and Hitler. But in Salem, his life has been characterized by withdrawal, as Theodore recognizes: "he retreated with his letters and diaries into a small town that closed its eyes to the present, let alone the future"; unlike Icarus, Jacob "always stayed close to the ground and far from the ocean — and advised others to do the same." Nor is his life in Salem a matter of achieving ethical perfection, as he is regularly unfaithful to his wife and gradually becomes an alcoholic. As for politics, he advocates the view that " 'If everyone ignored each other the world would be a safer place'." The passivity of the Jacob Beams of the country (all the more remarkable in that Beam publishes the local newspaper) has a clear — if unstated — relation to the increasing control of individual lives by the government. And Theodore, in retreating as his father has, is giving evidence that he has learned the lesson all too well. The individual has no part in any polity that transcends the level of the village. Salem seems "a town set apart from the rest of the world." In the best of all possible worlds, perhaps this separateness would not be an illusion. But the novel shows that to ignore political evil in the world as it is, is to risk being consumed by it.

Again the failure seems to be one of philosophy, of understanding. Neither Jacob nor Theodore is lacking in courage. Jacob defies a soldier who demands to see his identity card. Theodore risks his life to kill the soldier who is about to murder Jacob. But it is certain that this sort of *ad hoc* resistance will never be enough. Neither father nor son can connect his capacity for courageous action to a notion of political identity that will give their acts significance at a level beyond that of self-realization (or what Theodore would call "knowing oneself"). Jacob does recognize that this war, unlike those that he fought in as a young man, involves "fighting against yourself," but this seems to be the limit of his insight. In place of a mature understanding of political reality, he offers this sentimental vagueness, not generically different from Lise's belief that Perestrello "cares about people": " 'Even the worst disasters can't destroy what is good in us. And no matter what happens there will be some people, ordinary people like you and I, trying to survive, trying to love'." The events of the novel provide no support for this belief. The individuals who "survive" do so with their freedom radically

curtailed, and they live in fear that the government may extend its power over their lives even further.

Given the Jewishness of the Beams, it is remarkable that neither comments on the parallel with Nazi Germany. Theodore makes one (entirely flippant) reference to Hitler, and Jacob says nothing. The blindness to history implied by their failure to make this connection indicates the power of their desire to stay in a world of false innocence, in which history is to be ignored or obliterated, and there is no danger of its "catching up to" the individual. The overriding fact at the end of the novel is not that "ordinary people" like Theodore and Jacob have survived, but that Salem is clearly no longer "a town set apart from the rest of the world."

AND THIS IS THE major irony of *The Colours of War.* Theodore can ruminate with some complacency about how he has come to "know himself" as the state moves farther and farther into totalitarianism. (The introduction of compulsory identity cards towards the novel's end is an index of this.) No matter what happens, Cohen seems to be saying, individual Canadians will go on cultivating their personal gardens.

How could they reasonably expect anything more? True, Canadian history has sometimes presented the promise of some sort of social and political redemption. For example, here is Theodore's description of Regina, at the time when it looks as though Perestrello may be able to forge an allegiance with the farmers and unions:

> . . . Regina, in addition to being the wheat capital of the West, had once been known as a centre of socialism; that Canada's own socialist party and labour movement had focussed here in the midst of the Great Depression and composed a manifesto declaring all men equal. Property Evil. The Dawn of A New Age.

But the promise always reveals itself to be a mirage. Later in the same passage, we are made to recall the darker side of Regina's Depression history, as Theodore describes the faces of the people at the meeting:

> . . . as if the memory of the police riding through the streets and breaking up strike lines lived in each one's imagination, recurring over and over again, every second of their lives, like a huge rock that forever shapes a river.

Throughout Canadian history — later there is a gratuitous reference to the Métis — state power has crushed revolutionary energy. The prime minister's televised speech seems a parody of Pierre Trudeau's at the time of the War Measures Act — " 'We intend to act quickly and ruthlessly to preserve our social order'." (Al Purdy in "The Peaceable Kingdom" quotes Trudeau: " 'All I can say is go on and bleed / it's more important to keep law and order. . . . ' "[12]) Instead of

simply throwing the offenders in jail, Cohen's nameless prime minister announces a televised trial, " 'so you may see for yourself the guilt of these despicable culprits'." Later we learn that one of the farmers from the Regina meeting — the one, in fact, whose commitment to Perestrello so impressed Theodore — has sold out to the government. The potential for "A New Age" has again been destroyed. In its place, there is a government which has restricted freedom to an unprecedented extent, in a country becoming increasingly militarized.

In the book's last sentence, Theodore announces that he and Lise will "go on living here," but under conditions not much different from the ones Friedenberg takes to be characteristic of those obtaining between government and governed in this country:

> The practical message, and quite possibly the one the government means to convey, is: "The Government of Canada *is* the law; and don't think that because the law protects us from you, it also protects you from us. If you think you were taught that in school, you surely must have forgotten what school was really like."[13]

Theodore apparently subscribes to the naive faith of his father in the decency of ordinary people. He addresses the book to a generalized "you," a fellow citizen: "We already know each other. We've caught flashes of each other in a thousand movies. . . . " The explicit burden of his message is that it is a triumph for him to have survived and to have come to "know himself." But the ironic sub-text is that the notion of citizenship is irrelevant: political activity is intrinsically quixotic, and the best one can do is make personal commitments and ignore the possibility of constructive collective action. The Soft Hole of the personal life can allow us to forget that we have a political identity. The hard fact of government power indicates that, if we know what's good for us, we will. Again, Friedenberg makes a pertinent generalization that illuminates Cohen's text. Speaking of the differences between Canadians and Americans, he says:

> The differences are sometimes subtle and occasionally gross, but they are observable in most areas of human activity whose results are likely to be affected strongly by their participants' conviction — or lack of it — that spontaneous action by themselves or others is likely to get them somewhere.[14]

Theodore Beam has internalized the subliminal message that his society has been sending him since birth: revolution, or even significant political reform, is impossible to achieve; it is best to pretend that human beings are not political animals.

Cohen's irony is dark indeed, and *The Colours of War* could be used as evidence to corroborate Friedenberg's theories. Although Theodore Beam is forced to make choices that the protagonists of most Canadian novels can avoid, his decisions involve the sort of wrong-headedness that Friedenberg laments at length in *Deference to Authority*. But perhaps there is consolation in the fact that Cohen

has broken the silence about the issue of "the relationship of man to authority." The novel's appearance may be a sign that Anglophone Canada is developing the critical consciousness that Friedenberg was unable to find reflected in the work of its artists.

NOTES

[1] Edgar Z. Friedenberg, *Deference to Authority: The Case of Canada* (White Plains, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1980), p. 160.

[2] Friedenberg, pp. 28-29.

[3] David Jackel, "An Abridged *War and Peace*," *Canadian Forum* (December-January 1977-78), p. 41.

[4] Jon Kertzer, "Matt Cohen" in Jeffrey M. Heath, ed. *Profiles in Canadian Literature 4* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1982), p. 129.

[5] George Woodcock, "Armies Moving in the Night: The Fiction of Matt Cohen" in his *The World of Canadian Writing* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1980), p. 146.

[6] *The Colours of War* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1977), p. 108. All other quotations from this edition.

[7] Woodcock, p. 146.

[8] Jackel, p. 41.

[9] Jackel, p. 41.

[10] Al Purdy, *Sex & Death* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1973), pp. 105-06.

[11] Woodcock, p. 146.

[12] Purdy, p. 103.

[13] Friedenberg, p. 61.

[14] Friedenberg, pp. 19-20.

MAY DAY

Allan Safarik

this month passes its time
on earth, a love poem
of tiny unfurling grape leaves

summer flowers untouched by rain
grinning pyromaniacs
are the pride of the earth

books in review

RE-INVENTING THE WHEEL

Towards a Canadian Literature: Essays, Editorials, and Manifestos, ed. Douglas M. Daymond & Leslie G. Monkman. Vol. 1, Tecumseh, $15.95.

WHEN WILL THE TERM "Colonial" become a *period* instead of a *condition*? This is a question I regularly ask myself as I trace with my students the shapes of discourse in English-Canadian literature, from their first manifestations in the seventeenth century to the beginning of the twentieth. My point of departure is the English Renaissance, a period in which (wearing a different hat) I also do research. My point of arrival is always *The Imperialist*, in which Sara Jeannette Duncan described a community in the generation after the garrison has departed, forging its verbal universe in existential independence yet deeply implicated in the ordinary historical relations of a twentieth-century nation. Duncan's novel ruthlessly acknowledged that the Colonial period had come to an end. In this she was — indeed, remains — ahead of her time. But this is difficult to explain to students who are still mumbling over the stale *topos* of whether a book is "Canadian" or not, when they might with greater profit be addressing themselves to the interesting history of the *topos* itself. The problem, as we all know, begins in our pathetically limited access to the materials from which a more energetic synthesis might be constructed. The real history of Canadian criticism is for the most part buried in unread and unindexed newspapers and magazines.

In this anthology Douglas Daymond and Leslie Monkman have made a valuable attempt to remedy that problem by assembling what is to my knowledge the most comprehensive selection yet attempted of writings about literature in English in Canada. Volume I, reviewed here, draws on early editorials, prospectuses of various sorts, prefaces, at least two public speeches, and essays short and long. The inclusion of debate about the drama is especially valuable. The editors reprint material already familiar (Chisholme, Dewart, McGee, Stevenson) but the number and variety of their selections from other writers means that these few well-known texts are informatively situated within the framework of contemporary debate surrounding their topics. A good example is the problematic period between Lampman and Pratt, when the search for a usable tradition was very difficult. To read the critics and essayists of this period — Gordon Waldron, B. K. Sandwell, John Murray Gibbon — is to see honest and committed men grappling with nearly intractable problems in the analysis of culture.

Sandwell perhaps is the most symptomatic. In a concerned defence of Canada's need for a native stage he confidently states an interpretation of Canadian culture very familiar to us (whether we assent to it or not) :

> We are not Americans, in spite of the fact that we live in North America. We are not, as the Americans are, upon this continent for the purpose of carrying out certain vast experiments, of testing certain far-reaching theories concerning man, property, and the State. The Americans decided to abandon all the traditions of the Old World as being outworn and useless: many of us Canadians (I speak in a hereditary sense) are here because we did not believe in these experiments, and because we did not want to abandon the traditions of the Old World; and all of us accept the best of those traditions, the social and economic traditions developed in the British Isles, as being amply good enough for the conduct of affairs in our particular section of this

> continent. The American mind looks on American life as an inventor looks on a new machine, which he has just completed, and the workings of which he finds absorbingly interesting; he is quite sure that if he doesn't like the way it runs he can fix it up. The Canadian mind does not conceive of Canadian life as a thing absolutely apart, quite new and different; but rather as a part of the natural development of the human race, as a section of Life in general. Conceived in that way, it is much too big and automatic a thing to be tinkered with.

But then he goes on to describe the popular American plays which currently dominate the "road" system into which Canadian theatres are integrated; they deal with

> trusts and civic "rings" and new "fake" religions and the tariff and the income tax and the Supreme Court and the Senate. The popular Canadian play does not exist, but I cannot imagine any Canadian wanting to put the Cement Company or the Manufacturers' Association or a Montreal alderman or the Winnipeg segregation district or the Farmers Bank into a play; we are interested in all these subjects, but not in that way, not as subjects of art.

Sandwell's solution is economic as well as cultural: entrepreneurial Canadians should try to ensure that Canadian and American rights to new English plays are sold separately so they may acquire and profit from a drama more congenial to their taste. But he has to admit that there is a divide even between England and Canada which it is not easy to bridge: "One reason for the enormous success of 'The Passing of the Third Floor Back' in Canada . . . was the fact that it dealt with people who were not socially superior to everybody in the audience."

Sandwell's dilemma (which is also exemplified in a number of other pieces in the collection) prods us to ask, what discourse *have* we in fact privileged as adequate to the experience of our community? To answer this question we have to read not only the selections Daymond and Monkman have so usefully put before us, but to question (usefully too, I hope) both their principles of selection and their periodization. First, in arranging the excerpts by source more often than by author, they draw our attention less to the *oeuvre* of a given critic than to the institutional framework within which discourse was analysed. This is a valuable step away from post-Romantic infatuation with the individual author (though there are certainly individuals here I would like to learn more about, for example George Stewart and James Douglas). But when the institution is our focus, we immediately have to ask what else was being published in *The Canadian Monthly and National Review* in 1875, or in *The Canadian Magazine* in 1930, and why? We can go even further, broadening our concept of the arts of language to embrace the way discourse is explicitly or implicitly discussed and analysed in other kinds of work not explored here: the trial record, the autobiographical narrative with its story-telling conventions, the rhetoric text, the composition book, the government document. In this new analytical perspective even the familiar genre of the formal essay might take on fresh implications; for an example see W. L. Morton's fine essay (*Mosaic*, Spring 1970) "On Seeing an Unliterary Landscape," which is an important document of Canadian criticism, though I think no one has ever anthologized it.

Second is the problem of periodization. This anthology is firmly divided into periods: "Colonial Beginnings," "The New Dominion," "Modern Transitions." I began this review by wishing for a periodization which would give us the analytical neutrality achieved at so much cost by my American colleagues who study the period up to and including Franklin. Daymond and Monkman achieve the same results by refusing to argue their periodization; sensibly there

are no prefatory essays to prod us sheeplike on the road to yet another Whiggish consensus. The selections thus speak for themselves, and what they say is anything but Whiggish: the history of Canadian criticism is re-invented in every generation in order to state yet once more a severely limited repertoire of culturally satisfying rhetorical commonplaces. These *topoi* are richly exemplified everywhere in this book: "there is as yet no Canadian literature," "at last we have a Canadian literature," "Canadian literature is ignored at home," "What is a Canadian book?," "Canadian culture can have no traditions" (this is the "absence of ghosts" *topos*). Anyone who doubts this should read *strictly as a rhetorical structure* Frank Davey's "Surviving the Paraphrase" (anthologized in Volume II), and then compare it, using the same techniques, with A. J. M. Smith's "Wanted: Canadian Criticism," included here. We seem to have spent a depressing amount of time since 1752 re-inventing the wheel. If as Sandwell contended we are a non-revolutionary community, we ought to be examining the conditions for creative work which are inherent in such a stable concept of discourse. Indeed, perhaps we ought to be asking whether that is the concept of discourse we have, or merely act as if we have.

This is a fertile and challenging anthology, though a self-destructive one perhaps, since its implications will inevitably lead us to second-guess the editors' method as I have impenitently done here. Three complaints, however, are worth making now. The first is that my copy is already falling apart, its pages dispersed like the leaves of the Sybil as a result of poor binding. Second: if it was right not to include prefaces in each section, it was definitely wrong not to include annotation beyond the limits of the very limited headnotes. Is the James Douglas who published that very interesting essay in *The Canadian Monthly and National Review* the James Douglas in my *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*? Neither the DCB nor the editors of this volume are telling. Finally, why in heaven's name is there so little western material in this book? Late excerpts from F. P. Grove and Earle Birney are not enough, and I hope some critic familiar with the empire of letters west of London, Ontario will lose no time in striking back with an anti-anthology.

GERMAINE WARKENTIN

VALUES & EVALUATION

W. J. KEITH, *Canadian Literature in English*. Longman, $17.40.

PROFESSOR KEITH'S history of Canadian Literature in English is an important contribution to the discussion of its subject. It is a relatively compact, but comprehensive, introductory historical survey. This convenient and readable guide, with its Select Bibliography of bibliographies and major critical studies, its especially good bibliographical guides to about 128 major writers, and a salutary chronology of literary, cultural and political events, will be useful to students concerned to get a feeling for the subject and its apparatus.

The chronology illustrates the point that the author makes, briefly, in his opening and closing remarks: that literature functions within a set of sociocultural experiences and values. The point is, perhaps, made too obliquely and is elided in (and by) much of what intervenes, but it is essential to Keith's argument that there *is* a Canadian literary tradition, a set of continuities not only thematic but formal in which successive Canadian writers participate. He shows,

for instance, how Jack Hodgins or Farley Mowat share assumptions about literature and the world with Davies and Hood or Leacock, Grey Owl, Seton, Roberts, and even Moodie: bloodlines for the mavericks. It is an important undertaking, and in Canadian criticism, a fairly radical one, to attempt to put it all together, to see the literature as a whole, not as a mosaic of fragments connected only by thematic determinism.

But this book has a determinism of its own. Keith evidently believes, with the Emperor Augustus, that a national literature must have a masterpiece and that a national masterpiece must be an epic. So the values he finds in early Canadian prose, "humorous didacticism, an ironic view of small communities, non-fiction on the verge of fiction, the genial rhythms of a personal voice" are promises of the epic to come. Leacock is seen as the culmination of this Nineteenth Century tendency and E. J. Pratt as its fulfilment; Rudy Wiebe is thus the star of his first line in the modern period and Jack Hodgins the centre of his second line. More useful than his quest for an epic that will take the literature into the big league is his careful insistence on the importance of voice, "the control of voice that expresses a peculiarly Canadian sensibility," a 'technical' problem to which he draws attention in most of the writers he discusses. It is, he shows, part of the Canadian tradition, an impulse to find the appropriate stance (or voice) in a world in which it is all too easy to be misunderstood or mistaken for someone else.

Keith's own tone and style disclose a stance that is articulated *in* the language rather than by it. "The control of voice" is representative. Keith talks of Pratt's love of words bringing him "to dominate them," the same Pratt who

> celebrated the individual hero, the strong man endowed with determination, physical strength, and the all important vision, yet realised that he could only operate within a social context or a like-minded group. The leader depends upon the led, but Pratt never forgot that the led depend upon a leader. In the history of Canadian poetry, Pratt himself was a leader, and he dominates through sheer bulk, variety, and energy of his words.

The domination of language is one with the language of domination. And one can't help but notice how frequently Keith uses "dominate" in a laudatory way. It is part of his anxious quest for order, and part of a vocabulary that includes "command," "discipline," "control," "mastery," and "unity." Layton, then, is "a dominant force"; Reaney "dominates the group" of mythopoeic poets; Oliver Goldsmith fails because "he was unable to dominate words"; even "Tiger" Dunlop is a "dominant or at least dominating figure." Women writers, however, never dominate although Margaret Atwood is the "dominating personality" in contemporary verse — in which Al Purdy "is the important technical innovator." Livesay is "a distinct presence"; Atwood and Laurence are "accomplished" and Laurence "occupies a crucial transitional position." Klein fails to dominate because he cannot unify "the fatal split."

That fatal split (not surprising, since it is a common post-colonial phenomenon) disturbs Keith's sense of order and the related assumptions about the value of control, unity, and harmony. He draws atention, usefully I think, to such manifestations as "two almost irreconcilable Birneys," and the "no man's land between fiction and non-fiction" and "the unsatisfactory no man's land between verse and prose." The military language is part of the urge to order.

But for all his distaste for these post-colonial dualities, Keith is an inveterate dualist. The crude/fine distinction displaces the "true distinction . . . between

bad and good writing"; technique is disarmingly separate from content; Canadian significance is something that can be "inserted"; Frye is praised for being able to "distinguish the universal wood from the local trees." And that gives a clue to a curious change in Keith's critical vocabulary. About half-way through the book, as we get into the contemporary period, "dominate" gives way to "transcend." And there is, it seems, much to transcend: political attitudes, "sex" (meaning femaleness), feminism, 'black' writing, the local, the national, and the Canadian. Hood's world, "although intrinsically Canadian, . . . appears refreshingly different," and "if the average Canadian is tongue-tied and inarticulate, then he has no place in [Davies'] novels." What was in the past a literary problem requiring an appropriate voice now calls out for transcendence.

Anyone familiar with Professor Keith's work will be familiar with the value that he places on evaluation but the values that inform that evaluation are unformulated. After reading his enthusiasm for Ralph Connor's "pugnacious Christianity" and his disappointment in Alice Munro's "committedly secular viewpoint" we become aware of values in which we are expected to acquiesce, without being given the opportunity to see them first. The search for epic qualities is another unspoken assumption that informs what is included and how it is described. And finally, we want to know about the terms upon which the ranks have been closed. Those qualities of "early Canadian prose" quoted above might have been applied to find a position for Marian Engel to occupy; the discussion of the "world of wonders," or of the non-Canadian settings might have drafted Dave Godfrey; and Jane Rule, Joy Kogawa, Audrey Thomas are missing too. A small company, but a significant one. When there's room for Philip Child, Charles Harrison, and Colin McDougall one is entitled to ask why.

ALAN LAWSON

FLAWED TEXTS & LITERARY CRITICS

HERSHEL PARKER, *Flawed Texts and Verbal Icons: Literary Authority in American Fiction.* Northwestern Univ. Press, $19.95.

FRANCES BROOKE, *The History of Emily Montague*, ed. and introd. Mary Jane Edwards. Carleton Univ. Press, cl. $24.95, pa. $5.95.

YOU MAY ASK what Hershel Parker's study of textual problems in American fiction has to do with Mary Jane Edwards' new edition of "the first Canadian novel." There are several answers. Parker reminds us of the need for rigorously-edited texts; Edwards supplies an example. Parker persuasively argues that many "classic" American novels were seriously flawed in the forms in which they were first published and from which they have been subsequently reprinted and edited; Edwards' edition will not greatly alter the way we read *The History of Emily Montague*, but things may be different with the other editions in The Centre for Editing Early Canadian Texts series, of which Edwards is General Editor. Parker is most valuable for his emphases on the "momentous consequences" of theory and the limitations of New Criticism; *The History of Emily Montague* provides a striking instance of the dangers of opposing theory in the name of pragmatic "common sense." In Letter 152, William Fermor denies that Europeans are guilty for introducing alcohol to the Indians: "we have indeed given them the means of intoxication . . . but he must be indeed fond of praising them, who makes a virtue of their having been sober, when water was the only

liquor with which they were acquainted." Fermor concludes that "all systems make against, instead of leading to, the discovery of truth." Finally, *The History of Emily Montague* shows that, from the beginning, the influences on Canadian literature have come from outside Canada — in this case primarily from Pope's metaphysics and Richardson's epistolary novel form. And since Canadian critics have always read our literature in terms of critical assumptions formed elsewhere, there is no reason why we should not learn from Parker. The issues that he raises are relevant to the interpretation as well as to the editing of Canadian texts.

In *Flawed Texts and Verbal Icons*, Parker argues his case against the editorial theories of W. W. Greg and Fredson Bowers, among others. Greg's ideas are said to suffer from "his dogmatic prescription that the editor's duty was to incorporate any subsequent authorial readings into the early copy-text." Parker accepts neither this prescription nor the assumption on which it is based: "that an author retains, as long as he lives, complete authority over his text." He is more vehement in his attack on Bowers, whom he accuses of violating "some of Greg's soundest principles" and of "producing many quite literally nonsensical texts by editing them rigidly according to Greg's notions of incorporating authorial revisions, however misguided those revisions might have been." Parker's discussion of Bowers is enlivened by his account of their public feud over the editing of Stephen Crane; his chapter on Crane is probably the best in the book. Parker's own position is that revision does not necessarily mean improvement; he holds that such authors as Fitzgerald, Faulkner, and Mailer "maimed" their novels by revising them, and that Crane's texts were "maimed" by the heavy-handed editor, Ripley Hitchcock. His two "laws" are worth quoting in full:

> There's a law in textual scholarship — waste your time on trivialities and you'll miss some of the most significant evidence and its implications. There's another law — no editorial formula, even one as appealing as Greg's, can substitute for the expertise which comes only from years of conscientious (and preferably loving) biographical and critical study of the author whom one presumes to edit.

Throughout his book, Parker demonstrates the importance of his subject by pointing out the traps that lie waiting for the unwary critic. He twice describes the notorious blunder of F. R. Leavis, who "quoted the late James as an example of stylistic maturity while thinking he was quoting early James." He ridicules the New Critical admiration for Henry James' revisions, finding that many of these studies read like "a take-home assignment" from F. O. Matthiessen. He is particularly scornful of those critics who admire the "unity" of such flawed works as Twains *Pudd'nhead Wilson*: "There is almost nothing so bad that you can't get one critic to praise it and another to praise the first one for having praised it." And here we can understand why the dust-jacket of Parker's book bears the commendation of Stanley Fish: despite the uneasiness with post-structuralism evident throughout the last chapter, Parker's research has taught him that "unity" may be a critical construction, not an artistic criterion.

That Frances Brooke's *The History of Emily Montague* is a "flawed text" is well known to Edwards: in her introduction she cites Brooke's own judgements that she "ruind [*sic*] the work" by lengthening it, and that it has "too little variety of story for the length of it." Few readers have disagreed. But since Brooke left no manuscript, and since she did not authorize any revisions, Edwards had no choice but to use the original 1769 Dodsley

edition as her copy-text. The emendations that Edwards makes are almost all minor. I would suggest that two more should be made: Letters 89 and 197 are obviously dated incorrectly; the proper dates are March 16 and October 10, respectively. Furthermore, Rivers' reference (in Letter 215) to "ladies of the *salamandrine* order" might have been noted as another allusion to Pope (to the machinery in *The Rape of the Lock*). All in all, however, Edwards has done her editing well, and her edition is reasonably priced and free of typographical errors. She has thereby fulfilled some of the demands made by Bruce Harkness and cited approvingly by Parker: "Could we not as critics pay more attention to Bibliography and we as Bibliographers to criticism?" At the risk of sounding presumptuous, I think that Edwards could have done more. If she had paid more attention to the criticism of *The History of Emily Montague*, and made more of an attempt to respond to it, her introduction would be that much more valuable. As it is, the introduction is too biographical, especially when almost all of the information here is given more fully in Lorraine McMullen's recent *An Odd Attempt in a Woman: The Literary Life of Frances Brooke*. For unknown reasons, there is no mention of McMullen in the introduction. McMullen is only cited in notes 88 and 102, the former of which implicitly and unfairly accuses her of ignoring "incontrovertible evidence" that Brooke did not write *All's Right at Last*. McMullen is aware of this evidence, but she interprets it differently. Would it not have been better for Edwards to state the biographical information briefly, while pointing the reader to McMullen's book for the full story? Then Edwards could have used the space made available to make a contribution to the criticism of *The History of Emily Montague*, a contribution that would be especially valuable for using the evidence newly assembled in the notes to this edition. Most readers were aware of Brooke's allusions to Pope, but few could have known that they were so extensive. And there are some provocative allusions to *Paradise Lost* unearthed by Edwards. If she had commented more fully on these and other matters, she could have simultaneously called attention to the value of *The History of Emily Montague* and of The Centre for Editing Early Canadian Texts.

TRACY WARE

METTRE EN LUMIERE

RICHARD GIGUERE, *Exil, révolte et dissidence: étude comparée des poètes québécoise et canadienne (1925-1955)*. PUL, $16.00.

RENE DIONNE, éd., *Le Québécois et sa littérature*. Naaman, n.p.

PIERRE CANTIN, *Jacques Ferron polygraphe: essai de bibliographie suivi d'une chronologie*. Bellarmin, $30.00.

THESE BOOKS represent, respectively, three specific concerns in contemporary Québec literary criticism: establishing an inventory of comparable themes in Québec and English-Canadian literature, describing Québec's identity in relation to other francophone literatures, and cataloguing Québec's literary *corpus* in its entirety.

During the last four years or so, Québec periodicals have shown a remarkable interest in English-Canadian works, with *Protée*, *Spirales*, *Nuit blanche*, and *Voix et images* publishing special issues on the subject, and Radio-Canada presenting a series of broadcasts on "Poètes québécois de langue anglaise" in 1982/83. Giguère understands his book, the revised version of his 1978 thesis, as a response to and expansion of that current interest. Using the methods of comparative literature and of sociology, he sets out to "mettre en lumière les rapports qui existent entre

l'histoire socio-politique, économique et culturelle et les textes poétiques." His study complements Clement Moisan's *Poésie des frontières* (1979), also a comparative study, which concerns itself mainly with the writing of the 1950's and 1960's. Giguère isolates the following thematic areas: social and radical poetry of the 1930's, the philosophical and metaphysical poetry between the wars, the myth of the land ("le Nord, L'Amérique et les Grands Espaces"), erotic poetry, and poetry of "dissidence," that is, responses to wartime and post-war social and political problems. The poets studied within these categories are Anderson, Dudek, Kennedy, Klein, Layton, Livesay, Page, Pratt, F. R. Scott, Smith on the one hand, and Choquette, Des Rochers, Saint-Denys Garneau, Roland Giguère, Grandbois, Hébert, Ménault, Hertel, Lapointe, Narrache, Routier, and Vézina on the other. Giguère's book is informative, clearly written, and a good first introduction to comparative studies in the poetry of the two main Canadian literatures. It does, however, also clearly have its limitations: purely thematic, it often seems *démodé*. More even than in the study of fiction, an analysis of poetry neglecting its formal characteristics is inadequate, especially so since Giguère has chosen to cover a period distinguished by rich experimentation in prosody. Moreover, because Giguère does not discuss poetry *qua* poetry, even his thematic results appear incomplete. He speaks of the absence of political interest among Québec poets, especially women, of the 1930's and 1940's and concludes: "Une Dorothy Livesay est impensable au Québec car les Médje Vézina, Simone Routier ou Anne Hébert ignorent tout de la dimension socio-politique du Quebec." But Gabrielle Roy did publish a socio-political *novel* in 1945, the acclaimed *Bonheur d'occasion*: why was fiction able to do what poetry apparently could not? As Giguère's angle is comparatist and sociological, some exploration of women's situation in general and of women poets in particular might have been pertinent.

While Giguère's book attempts a *rapprochement* between the Québécois and the English, *Le Québécois et sa littérature* — although written for the most part (except for Gabrielle Poulin's contribution) in an admirably objective tone and in clear prose — firmly relegates the English to their traditional, hostile position. Concluding a section on the rise of nationalism in Lower Canada between 1812 and 1840, René Dionne writes: "Le Canadien français a pris conscience de ses droits et de sa force collective en même temps que de la mauvaise foi et des visées profoundes du groupe anglophone assimilateur tout aussi forcené que rusé." Nor does Dionne's book ally itself with France, the unreliable parent, but with the francophone literatures of Africa, Lebanon, Belgium, Luxemburg, New Caledonia, and Switzerland: *Le Québécois et sa littérature* forms part of a series published by the Agence de Coopération Culturelle et Technique in Paris in order to familiarize francophone minorities with one another's culture. Dionne's book contains sections on the beginnings of French-Canadian literature, on the traditional genres of fiction, poetry, and drama, but also on the essay and literary criticism, oral literature, the chanson, the language spoken in Québec, the cinema, the cartoon. Moreover, it presents lists of "Classiques de la littérature québécoise" arranged by date (till 1978 approximately) and two thorough indexes, all presented in 460 compact pages. Among the contributors are such well established scholars as Léopold Le Blanc, John E. Hare, Roger Le Moine, Rêjean Robidoux, Jacques Michon, Gabrielle Poulin, David M. Hayne, Paul Wyczynski, André G. Bourassa, Laurent Mailhot, and others. Because of its wide-

flung approach (embracing both "high" and popular culture) and its scholarly astuteness, the book is a delight to read and consult, and may well become one of the most widely-used reference books on Québec literature. As the book clearly speaks about Québec only, a similar volume discussing Canada's other French-Canadian communities would be most helpful.

Pierre Cantin contributed an essay on cartoons to Dionne's book; he is also the author of an impressive, 558-page bibliographical work on Jacques Ferron, its richness a timely testament to a life admirable and bewildering in its diversity. As René Dionne points out in an excellent introduction, only two other authors, Emile Nelligan and Gilles Vigneault, have been given similar attention in bibliographies compiled by Paul Wyczynski and Marc Gagné in 1977. Collecting Ferron's literary publications as well as his journalism and polemical writing, Cantin's book will become indispensable to anyone exploring Ferron's work, which so far has not been exhaustively appreciated for its extraordinary impact on contemporary Québec literature *and* for its unusual (if mostly critical) absorption of English-Canadian culture.

E.-M. KRÖLLER

REASSESSING

ROBERT LECKER, JACK DAVID, ELLEN QUIGLEY, eds., *Canadian Writers and Their Works, Fiction Series, Volume Six* [Davies, Garner, Richler, Wilson, Wiseman]; *Volume Seven* [Blaise, Hood, Metcalf, Munro, Watson]. ECW, $40.00.

ECW PRESS has now published six of a projected twenty volumes in its *Canadian Writers and Their Works* series, three in poetry and three in fiction. While this review must concentrate on the two recent fiction volumes, it may legitimately do so within the context of all the books that have appeared to date. We are now in a position to see what the series is doing, and how the editorial guidelines recommended in the interests of a recognizable uniformity are working out in practice.

Each contributor is invited to produce short sections on "Biography," "Tradition and Milieu," and "Critical Overview and Context" before a longer section devoted to discussion of the individual writer's works. By and large, I think, the scheme is working out well. "Biography" is limited to the necessary basics but provides sufficient relevant information. "Tradition and Milieu" requires critics to root their subjects in Canadian literary and social history and so discourages the notion that each writer blooms in a hermetically sealed vacuum. "Critical Overview and Context" is used by the better commentators for a more considered assessment of enlightening critical approaches that either have been or might be applied to the *oeuvre* in question. But it has also led to some uneven entries; too many contributors content themselves with book-by-book accounts of reviewers' opinions in newspapers and magazines, and this can lead all too easily to the resurrection of long forgotten critical ineptitudes that we would willingly let die. With this minor exception, however, these headings have worked well to provide succinct background introductions to the more central process of discussion and evaluation of the individual works.

This series seems to me to be of considerable importance in the present state of Canadian literary studies. It encourages a process of standing back and reassessing that is surely much needed. Here the "Critical Overview and Context" sections are particularly crucial since they can lead to a reconsideration of previous assumptions and can also

free the writer to pursue his own approaches without unduly narrowing the discussion. Moreover, the process is assisted by the editors' bright idea of inviting George Woodcock to contribute introductory essays to each volume. No better choice could have been made. Woodcock consistently offers a mature, stimulating, authoritatively sensible meditation on the critiques in question that succinctly creates order out of what is sometimes an understandably disparate gathering of critical views. When necessary, he will even state, quietly but firmly, the other side of the case, as when he believes that a writer has neglected aspects of general importance. Occasionally, indeed, Woodcock's two-page assessments prove more satisfying than the longer discussions entrusted to less experienced writers; invariably, they provide a continuing reassessment that should enliven anyone's appreciation of the literature under scrutiny.

Turning now to the two particular volumes for review, I believe that I can detect a new and welcome preparedness to evaluate, to face up to weaknesses in major authors without fear that such criticisms will prove fatal to the subject. John Mills's discussion of Robertson Davies is a convenient case in point. He sums up with the following statement:

> Davies's faults are prolixity, compositional sloppiness, sententiousness, and, very often, intellectual and emotional shallowness. His great virtues are energy, wit, an essentially comic vision, *sprezzatura*, a willingness to take risks in the presentation of psychoanalytic theories to substructure his fiction, and a seriousness that has nothing to do with solemnity.

The virtues are praised frequently enough; the faults, if they are faults, are rarely discussed. I dissent from some of his judgements, just as I disagree with Mills's idiosyncratic attempt to exalt the Salterton novels at the expense of the Deptford trilogy. But this questioning of conventional acceptance is healthy; the dangers of excessive adulation and literary complacency are very real. Mills has thrown down the gauntlet, and it will be incumbent on later critics, if they can, to answer the challenge. This is an essay worth pondering, and worth disagreeing with. It is valuable as criticism on these terms.

Kerry McSweeney's study of Mordecai Richler is similarly challenging. He argues that Richler's later work, notably *St. Urbain's Horseman* and *Joshua Then and Now*, has been overrated, and that Richler, for all his talents, has never fully realized his unquestioned gifts. Here I am in agreement — it is refreshing, because unusual, to see a critic arguing that Jake Hersh "is treated with too much indulgence" — but the essay will annoy many. Again, McSweeney should further a profounder critical awareness by offering this assessment, and, if Richler critics are provoked into a convincing response, so much the better.

Another example of mature, pioneering criticism is Barry Cameron's careful and perceptive discusion of Clark Blaise. Here the problem is not that of putting a discriminating brake on too easy eulogies in the past, but demonstrating the subtlety of an artist in mid-career who, though given token praise often enough, has not (with the exception of Robert Lecker's study in *On the Line*, not available when Cameron wrote his essay) been subjected to concentrated and detailed scrutiny. Cameron provides an informed and skilful *reading* of Blaise's early works, instructing us by example in the complex process of bringing the right criteria to bear on an immensely talented if elusive writer.

I must mention the other contributions more briefly. Paul Stuewe offers a study of Hugh Garner that immediately takes its place as the only really competent

assessment of Garner's work as a whole. (Whether Garner deserves the implication of major status that representation in this series presumes for him is another matter.) Beverley Mitchell presents a survey of Ethel Wilson without adding anything very startling or original, though she includes numerous valuable comments by Wilson on her own work derived from an unpublished manuscript. Michael Greenstein describes Adèle Wiseman's work accurately enough, but has comparatively little to say in terms of literary-critical assessment and doesn't persuade me that Wiseman's work is ultimately very important. Keith Garebian contributes a sensible introduction to Hugh Hood which combines information and interpretation, but says little or nothing that he has not already said in his Twayne study of Hood. Douglas Rollins on John Metcalf is comparable to Cameron on Blaise: he performs a valuable service by offering an extensive and accessible account of a comparatively neglected contemporary. Hallvard Dahlie can be recommended to students of Alice Munro as a good place to start preliminary secondary reading, though he was upstaged to some extent by Louis K. MacKendrick's editing of the exciting critical symposium, *Probable Fictions*. Finally, Stephen Scobie has some thoughtful and impassioned statements to make about Sheila Watson's importance to modern writing in Canada ("Speaking for myself, both as a writer and a critic, it is the Sheila Watson generation that I belong to"). He writes intelligently about Watson's modernism, and comments valuably on approaches to *The Double Hook*.

In general, then, I welcome these two volumes and the series to which they belong. I must end, however, with a plea to the editors: if individual essays are held up before going to press, as several of these must have been, cannot their

writers have the opportunity of bringing them up to date? Save for (not invariable) listings in bibliographies, there is no discussion in these volumes of Davies's *The Rebel Angels* (1981), Blaise's *Lusts* (1983), Hood's *The Scenic Art* (1984), Metcalf's *Kicking Against the Pricks* (1982), Munro's *The Moons of Jupiter* (1982), or the critical volumes *On the Line* (1982) and *Probable Fictions* (1983) already mentioned. The contributors are clearly not to blame, and I am sure that both editors and publishers are beset by many problems. We all know that between submission and publication can fall a frustratingly long shadow, but it is in the interests of all that these critiques are as up to date as possible when they appear. This is just one suggestion for improvement that, if attended to, would make a good series even better.

W. J. KEITH

HÉBERT'S ANTITHESES

MAURICE EMOND, *La Femme à la fenêtre: L'univers symbolique d'Anne Hébert dans* Les Chambres de bois, Kamouraska, Les Enfants du sabbat. Presses de l'Univ. Laval, $20.00.

LUCILLE ROY, *Entre la lumière et l'ombre: L'univers poétique d'Anne Hébert.* Naaman, $20.00.

THE WORK OF ANNE HEBERT treads a precarious line between the melodramatic and the epico-biblical. The primordial elements: earth, water, fire, life, death, light, darkness join forces with men and women in a ritual of attraction and destruction. Initiation to life and death and cyclical repetition of the mystery of creation intertwine in an imaginary world where archetypes, myths, symbols acquire renewed forms, dimensions, and undergo distortions. Virtually all literary critics of Anne Hébert have commented on her highly symbolic world, its meaning, its reasons, the implicit ideology; few, however, have traced its anthropological roots.

Both Maurice Emond in *La Femme à la fenêtre* and Lucille Roy in *Entre la lumière et l'ombre* have taken up the challenge to unravel the symbolic network in the fiction of Anne Hébert. Lucille Roy has dealt with both the prose and the poetry, Maurice Emond with the three novels: *Les Chambres de bois, Kamouraska,* and *Les Enfants du sabbat.* Both studies are indebted to the "critique des profondeurs" of Jean-Pierre Richard, Gaston Bachelard, Gilbert Durand. Both reach conclusions dealing with the obsessive cosmography (figures and sememes) of the work of the author, although neither one refers to the work of Charles Mauron on obsessive metaphors. This is mainly because both studies are more concerned with the universal anthropological implications and patterns rather than with socio-psychological implications.

The conclusions reached by the two critics are somewhat similar: the fictional world of Anne Hébert is antithetical: thoughts, feelings, images are in constant antinomic relation. The analysis of light and darkness, water and fire in all their possible permutations, both at the symbolic and at the narrative levels, leads to a common goal: the illustration of the single-mindedness and constancy of the author's creative imagination. Unlike other similar thematic analyses by R. Giguère (1973) and P. Châtillon (1969) (to mention two), who show chronological evolution in the treatment of the key symbols and themes (from darkness to light), these two studies, without in any way contradicting the previous analyses, are not concerned with illustrating such a progression. What they endeavour to describe is not linear development but the fluctuations between opposing attractions. The two studies differ somewhat,

however, in the description of the collocation of these oppositions.

Lucille Roy's thesis is that each extreme generates its opposite to assure movement and change. Thus she prefers to talk about the dialectic of opposition rather than the dualism of the author. Her book is organized in three parts: the first deals with light and the themes connected: day and the fountain; the second part deals with darkness: the shadows, the woods, the fall, night, death, the abyss; the third part develops the central thesis: the interconnectedness of the two oppositions.

In the first two parts the analysis demonstrates that the theme of light at its deepest level becomes darkness and inversely that the metamorphosis functions also for darkness. The third part of the book deals with the fluctuations between the two opposing poles. Fire is the element that best shows the merging of the two forces. A more detailed analysis of *Le Torrent* and the two novels *Kamouraska* and *Les Fous de Bassan* demonstrates this fusion. The last chapter of the book studies *Héloïse* in the perspective of the dialectic of light and darkness. This short novel is, of course, the best proof of the interdependence of the simultaneous attractions of the living and the dead, light and darkness, day and night, the earth and the underworld.

Lucille Roy's study is judicious and thorough. She has chosen to analyse exhaustively each concrete element of fictional organization to support her description. The enumeration of examples seems thus at times somewhat repetitive, even monotonous, and it distracts from the conclusions which, I feel, could have been developed further. In short, there is a slight disproportion between the quantity of supporting evidence and the brevity of the conclusions. On the whole, however, the study is rigorous, well-founded, and pertinent. The author is one of the first critics of Anne Hébert to delineate the subtleties of antithesis.

Maurice Emond's book is also organized in three major parts, from the general study of the mechanisms of the symbolic world of Anne Hébert, specifically the ramifications of the opposition black/white, night/day, to the description of the dialectic of water/fire as a logic of opposition, of confrontation, but also of union, of resolution. The third part is more specific and deals with the poetics of sight; the observer is both witness and judge. This part is perhaps the most original: the complex network of themes stemming from the eyes, sight, windows, mirrors, is described and analysed. The originality of Maurice Emond's study derives from his postulation of some hypotheses regarding the creative vision of Anne Hébert: poetic vision becomes sight and a way of action, a method for capturing the world. Literary creation becomes thus a way of life, an ethic. In the case of Anne Hébert it is probably the most accurate observation that could be made.

The concluding chapter of the book is a good synthesis which succeeds in explaining how the manichean oppositions in Anne Hébert's work are a myth-creating device where characters are greater-than-life and belong to a fantastic world in which good, evil, love, pity, compassion, have no place. The force of the revolt of these characters is beyond the realm of the human. The least convincing parts of this book are the first and second, in which every step of the analysis is backed by the theories of Gilbert Durand, Gaston Bachelard, and Mircea Eliade. It is as if the intention of Anne Hébert's work were to illustrate how successfully she followed anthropological and mythical models.

If a common shortcoming were to be noted with both books, it is that neither critic has been able to account for the

humour in Anne Hébert. Never is the dialectic opposition seen in the context of a tension-creating device at the heart of which is jocularity: a feast of intertextuality rich in literary and pictorial associations. Just to pick one example: Maurice Emond quotes at length from *Les Enfants du sabbat* a passage describing one of the erotic fantasies of the Abbé Flageole, who sees the object of his desire in a whirlwind of ruffled petticoats disappearing in a winged flutter through the steeple, the nun's foot dangling for an instant before him and then disappearing completely out of his reach. In this section Emond is dealing with the themes of fall and elevation; he thus proceeds to wonder: "Is the Abbé the victim of an illusion or are we witnessing a true ascension, a 'magic flight,' one normally attributed to sorcerers, shamans and other specialists of extasis?" There follows then, to support this line of questioning, a learned passage from M. Eliade explaining how the shaman is capable of such a flight as a form of death and resuscitation to transcend his human condition.

It seems to me that when the oppositions are set forth even with the slightest irony in a joyful spirit, they require such a high degree of complicity with the reader that, in fact, they almost negate the opposition, or at least the antinomy is levelled. Neither study takes into account these jocular oppositions. And even when one considers some of the more serious ones, as the question of the innocence and guilt of Stevens in *Les Fous de Bassan* or the description of the apartment in the opening chapter of *Héloïse*, the levelling, even the negating action of oppositions, seems evident.

Both studies have extensive bibliographies. Items not mentioned in one book are to be found in the other. The most useful section is the careful inventory of the scattered works of Anne Hébert: poems, scripts, short stories, radio pieces, and interviews.

Both books contribute to the analysis of oppositions in Hébert's work. The next interesting chapter in the developing criticism of Hébert should probably analyse her use of sentence structures to verify the premises of studies such as these two.

GRAZIA MERLER

LE TANGO & LA MENACE

MARIE LABERGE, *Deux tangos pour toute une vie*. VLB éditeur, n.p.

YOLANDE VILLEMAIRE, *La constellation du cygne*. Editions de la pleine lune, n.p.

"UNE PIECE SUR LA PASSION. A chaque fois que je termine une pièce et que quelqu'un me demande de qui je parle, je crois que je pourrai dire: d'amour, sans jamais mentir. Parce que, pour moi, cette obsession est liée à la vie, à la puissance de l'être humain, à sa justification profonde," écrit Marie Laberge sur la page de couverture de sa pièce. C'est au fond poussée par cette exigence intérieure que Suzanne, mariée depuis six ans, s'aperçoit qu'elle et son mari, ne s'aiment pas assez, ou n'osent aborder de front leur inaptitude à sa satisfaire l'un et l'autre, résultat de quelque insatisfaction plus profonde encore. Lors d'un congé occasionné par sa dépression nerveuse elle essaie, en vain, de tirer au clair cette situation devant un mari qui se dérobe.

La passion se révèle à Suzanne sous les traits de Gilles, un collègue de son mari, sur le point de partir à Winnipeg. Sous le coup de la révélation de son nouveau sentiment elle interroge sa mère, venue lui rendre visite, pour connaître son père, sa grand-mère maintenant disparus, ses relations avec ses enfants, pour

savoir si elle a connu quelque chose, qui aurait l'intensité, la plénitude de sa passion à elle. C'est en vain qu'elle fouille dans la vie de cette femme résignée, qui n'aura connu comme moment fort qu'une scène de son enfance avec sa mère, et qui ne cesse de répéter qu'il ne faut pas trop exiger de la vie. Denise Gagnon note:

> Ses pièces fouillent au plus secret de nous, elles sont lucides, courageuses dans leur recherche de vérité, surtout celle que nous refusons de voir parce qu'elle fait trop mal. Elle ne craint pas de montrer notre fragilité, notre dureté aussi, comme si nous avons peur de vivre, de crainte d'en mourir.

Suzanne choisira sagement le devoir, parce que sa mère lui a inculpé sa peur de la vie. Elle restera pour porter l'enfant d'un homme qui a besoin d'elle. Avec une grande économie de moyens et de personnages, des fleurs, un air de tango, Marie Laberge a su suggérer le passage de la passion, dans une existence rangée, faite de grisaille sans joie, dans laquelle la passion ne sera plus qu'un air musical exécuté par un jouet mécanique.

On connait Yolande Villemaire comme l'une des écritures les plus inventives de la nouvelle génération de jeunes écrivain(e)s. Pourtant, dans *La Constellation du cygne,* ce qui frappe, c'est le caractère classique de sa prose, une prose décantée, au lyrisme brûlant, dans un récit organisé en six chapitres; les quatre premiers portent chacun un nom propre, aboutissant à un "Auschwitz" et une "Constellation de cygne" finals.

"Dans la Parie occupé de 1940, Celia Rosenberg rencontre la passion sous les traits d'un officier allemand. L'érotisme lumineux qui baigne leur amour leur fait oublier la machine de mort nazi," nous dit la couverture. Avec un art consommé de grande prêtresse (l'héroïne est en l'occurrence une prostituée), Yoland Villemaire nous fait assister en voyeur, aux exploits de ce couple, dans un chapitre d'ouverture flamboyant de sensualité et de poésie, un chapitre qui est un véritable feu d'artifices.

Ce qui est absent dans la pièce de Marie Laberge, ce qui manque en creux dans l'existence de Suzanne, est vécue lucidement chez Yolande Villemaire: la passion, la passion physique pour l'interdit, c'est à dire, d'une juive pour un nazi, en ces années 1940. C'est peut-être dans "La vie en prose" qu'on peut trouver des traces de cette passion. Nous y trouvons ces lignes, pleines d'une souffrance contenue: "Pourquoi est-ce que je sens, depuis ton premier regard, il y a une éternité, qu'on est là depuis le début des temps, à chacune des extrémités d'un pont qui nous éloigne au lieu de nous rapprocher: dix ans de ma vie à ne jamais perdre ton nom, ni ton ombre de vue, bien que je sache que dans notre incarnation, on ne verra peut-être jamais notre réunion." Et ceci: "Je ne renoncerai jamais à te rencontrer, un jour sur ce pont. Sur cet étage, ou dans un autre. Dante, qui sait que le hasard n'est qu'un effet de perspective," a dit ceci: "avec moi, jusqu'aux sphères célestes/lève les yeux, lecteur, et fixe un point/où sont entrecoisés deux mouvements contraires." Et quelle peut être deux mouvements plus contraires que la trajectoire d'un officier nazi et d'une juive en 1940?

Yolande Villemaire explique la force de leur passion par leur Karma, leurs vies antérieures, au cours des réunions cabbalistiques à Paris, autour de la personne de Gabrielle Levy, dans une atmosphère qui recrée le Paris de la guerre. Et c'est également au cours de ces réunions qu'elle rencontrera, sans d'abord le reconnaître, le Polonais Piotr Jalski, qui lui révèlera une autre face de l'amour, l'amour cosmique qui la propulsera jusqu'aux étoiles et qui rendre l'épisode d'Auschwitz l'équivalent d'un rêve.

Les réincarnations sont citées pêle-mêle, sans qu'on comprenne pourquoi, et

c'est la partie la moins convaincante. On passe de Jacques Caur à Rose-Mélanie Boulanger au Canada. Il paraît que dans un prochain livre, *Yvelle Swanson*, Yolande nous expliquera le pourquoi de ces réincarnations, sur le plan individuel et collectif. Yolande Villemaire a dit, dans le dernier numéro de *Lettres québécoises*, qu'elle a écrit une autobiographie pour se libérer et qu'elle l'a située sous l'épisode nazie parce que cette situation revient à l'actualité avec la menace nucléaire.

T. VUONG-RIDDICK

PRAIRIE PERFORMANCES

JOYCE DOOLITTLE, ed., *Eight Plays for Young People*. NeWest, $17.95/8.95.

PLAYWRITING FOR YOUNG people in Canada has come a long way in twenty years. It has progressed from imitating British or American models, or patronizing its audiences, to crafting fine works of real significance. Dedicated regional theatre companies have encouraged writers to experiment and develop the skills and insights needed for young audiences. Production and budget limitations have forced writers to treat small casts, portability and brevity as creative challenges. Yet many good scripts are staged only once and are unavailable in print. The public, theatre companies, and teachers in one part of Canada are often unaware of the exciting work being done in another.

One solution is the publication in an accessible and attractive form of more of the best plays. Playwrights Canada has been responsible for most of the publication to date, often in single editions. These lack introductions, notes, or photographs, and are an expensive way to obtain and compare a group of plays. Existing anthologies do not represent the best or most current plays.

Joyce Doolittle has compiled an anthology of eight plays in the series "Prairie Performances." They vary in age suitability, genre, and style, and exhibit a wide range of technique and subject matter. While all are by prairie playwrights, they would be enjoyed by readers or audiences across the country. An informative introduction gives the background, points out thematic correspondences, and notes special features of each play. There are biographical notes on each playwright and a short section of suggestions for teaching. A photograph accompanies each play, helping readers to visualize productions.

Brian Paisley's *Tikta'liktak*, the story of a young Inuit stranded on an ice floe, combines the realities of Arctic existence with the mythic theme of ordeal and survival. The use of masks and giant puppets both overcomes the need to double actors, and conveys grandeur and a poetic vision. Stylized sound effects are similarly striking. The young hunter grows in skill, courage, and understanding of his relationship to the environment. The ending, a product of his conscious determination to live, is positive without being sentimental or contrived. One wishes only for help with pronunciation of the Inuit words.

Cornelius Dragon, by Jan Truss, examines the pressures on adolescents to conform, through the frustrations of the unappreciated, misunderstood, and outcast Cornelius. It becomes a parable about running away from one's identity and problems. Some scenes, like the rejection at a school dance, are dramatic and memorable. There are innovative production techniques: balloons populate the dance; wind chimes act as a barometer for Cornelius' emotions. However, the second half of the play lacks develop-

ment. The happy ending is abrupt and too easy; character and credibility yield to a simplistic message. The play, which has been performed only in workshop, is promising but not yet polished to production level. *More of a Family*, by Alf Silver, is another story about leaving home. The heroine, Amy, a likeable tomboy, believes her single-parent family is not a "normal environment" and goes in search of one. In a succession of sensitive and humorous vignettes the play explores the meaning of normality and the definition of a family. Its combination of engaging, tightly written character portrayals and realistic but amusing dialogue makes this a relevant and delightful piece for young audiences.

The Other Side of the Pole, a team production by Marney Heatley, Stephen Heatley, and Edward Connell, is a full length family musical. This whimsical story combines elves, Santa, magic, and a child's desire to celebrate Christmas with well integrated ideas about discrimination and the true Christmas spirit. Willy is retarded, misjudged, and unwanted even by his mother, yet he is shown to be a valuable member of society. Although the songs are difficult to appreciate without the music, the play potentially has all the ingredients for lively holiday entertainment. Rick McNair's *Dr. Barnardo's Pioneers* dramatizes emigration of orphans from England to Canada in the early 1900's. McNair uses to advantage the story theatre technique of narrators enacting the incident they describe. Actors play many roles, creating a collage of the tribulations and joys experienced by the young immigrants. This play movingly presents the human component of a little-known part of our history without boring a young audience, its economical framing narration enticing us naturally into the lives of two elderly pioneers.

The Day Jake Made Her Rain, by W. O. Mitchell, is a Canadian classic, a dramatization of a "Jake and the Kid" story. It is delightful to observe a master storyteller combine so many qualities into one short piece, so apparently effortlessly: vivid characterization, sly humour, the familiar loner/child relationship and the tall tale. The dramatization is rich yet economical; the insights into human nature are cleverly disguised as pure entertainment for all ages. Rex Deverell's *Melody Meets the Bag Lady* completes a trilogy about three friends, Melody, Sarah, and Ivan. Different in personality, but all likeable and well-intentioned, they attempt to reform a bag lady and learn vital lessons about responsible action and the value of individuality. The bag lady presents problems. Is it realistic to portray her as simply a carefree non-conformist? Is the presented alternative, a dull, ultra-conservative lifestyle, too extreme and simplified? This play follows a literary tradition in which outsiders teach tolerance and understanding, but it ignores the real suffering of such women in our society. However, it could generate useful discussion.

Aimed at an older audience, *Vandal*, by William Horrocks, raises controversial issues involving high school vandalism. The play's four teen-agers are bored, aggressive, and frustrated, competing with each other through anti-social acts. The efforts of a newcomer to join the group culminate in a chilling rampage of senseless destruction. The play graphically depicts the resentment that smoulders within many teen-agers, conveying their feelings of powerlessness and domination by authority figures through the lyrics "played" on a ghetto blaster. Concurrently the horror and futility of vandalism as a solution are demonstrated. The characters are effective transmitters of a disturbing message; the play is powerful rather than enjoyable, and provides excellent material for discussion.

This collection of plays exploring issues and values important to our society is well presented and introduced; it demonstrates the variety and maturity of current Canadian plays for young people. One hopes that other regions will have their plays showcased in this manner before too long.

MARY MULHOLLAND

RADIO ACTIVE

Words on Waves: Selected Radio Plays of Earle Birney. Quarry Press/CBC Enterprises, $22.95.

BETTY LAMBERT, *Three Radio Plays.* West Coast Review, $3.50.

DURING THE EARLY YEARS of the BBC, Compton Mackenzie predicted that the advent of radio would offer opportunities for imaginative writing unsurpassed since the days of Homer. If, after half a century of radio drama, Homer sits secure on his perch, such expectations can still evoke for us the exuberance that attended the birth of the theatre's first "unseen" and "unseeing" audience. Something of this excitement is caught in Howard Fink's prefatory essay to *Words on Waves*, a selection of eight radio plays composed by Earle Birney for the CBC during the 1940's and 1950's: *Court-Martial* (1946), *Beowulf* (1950), *The Griffin & The Minor Canon* (1950), *The Third Shepherds' Play* (1950), *Gawain & The Green Knight* (1951), *The Damnation of Vancouver* (1952), *The Duel* (1952), and *Piers Plowman* (1957). With the exception of *The Damnation of Vancouver* — published under an expurgated title in 1952 — none of these works has appeared in print before. In his introduction Fink manages a spirited defence of their status as "vital documents," presenting a mini-history of the CBC radio drama while considering the relationship of Birney's work in that mode to his later non-dramatic poetry. A bibliography and finding list provides valuable information about first performances, and Birney himself contributes a brief but characteristically witty "*apologia* for ever trying to be a playwright."

In preserving specimens from what we are now encouraged to call "Canada's Golden Age of Radio" the volume performs a real service. Yet, as Fink reminds us, these pieces have an interest that goes beyond the merely historical. If not all are vintage Birney, each has a claim upon our attention in documenting the mastery of a genre by one of Canada's major poets. Birney's four medieval adaptations reveal the author's search for an effective radio voice. In *Beowulf*, the earliest in the group, a muscular translation from the Old English is marred by the intrusion of a thane-thumping interlocutor long on Saxon jollity. The colloquial prose of its successor, the unproduced *Third Shepherds' Play*, shoots too short to catch the tonal complexities of its Wakefield model. Yet Birney draws upon both, redeploys, and after a brief Tennysonian detour, produces the free rendering of fourteenth-century alliterative verse that serves him so well in *Piers Plowman* and the Long Will episode in *The Damnation of Vancouver*. The same might be said of the poet's experiments with "radio shape" as he proceeds from straightforward narrative — with voices assigned Thespis-like for direct quotation — to the highly theatrical rethinking of form and meaning that marks both *Piers* and *Gawain*. When Birney's Green Knight parts company with his medieval original to invoke a mythic kinship with the turning year, or an impatient Piers tears Truth's pardon and scatters it to the winds, we have entered a world that their author has made uniquely his own.

That the two original plays in the collection are court-room dramas should

not surprise us. Birney's characters are invariably more comfortable proclaiming than discussing, and in the absence of a scop or narrator seem best able to do so within the rituals of a trial or public hearing. *Court-Martial*, written in collaboration with Mavor Moore, might be dismissed as a negligible apprentice work, were it not for its attempt to broaden the charges against its accused into a comprehensive indictment of society at large. The Defence Council's crucial summation is a clumsy piece of dramaturgy, as is the Defendant's demand that we listeners retire to consider *our* verdict. Yet the effects intended point the way to the more ambitious and polished *Damnation of Vancouver*, in which a display of linguistic wizardry is held in check by the format of a public hearing. For readers who know only the 1957 stage version of the latter play, the original radio text holds some pleasant surprises. Not only are its vocal fades better able than blackouts and exit doors to direct attention to the work's poetic texture, but shielded from prying eyes Birney's figures seem less guarded in their verbal posturing. Mrs. Anyone, the play's "mere living housewife," can hate as well as love, and Chief Sk'-wath-kw'-tlath-kyoot lament the fate of his assimilated descendants. Captain Vancouver is allowed to read in the "unterrified" eyes of the Siwash an ignorance of European ways, while the contemptible P. S. Legion scores at least a temporary triumph when he is permitted to raise the prickly topic of inter-tribal warfare. If we may say of Birney, as has been said of David Jones, that "though he wrote for the listening reader he was not a dramatist . . . [but] a poet who spoke," then the radio text of this, his longest verse work, preserves his accent at its most authentic.

In sharp contrast the late Betty Lambert was a playwright to her fingertips. And the three radio dramas issued together in a special number of *The West Coast Review* — *Grasshopper Hill* (1979), *Falconer's Island* (1966), and *The Best Room in the House* (1959) — suggest something of the loss the Canadian theatre has suffered by her untimely death. Lambert is not afraid to let her characters talk to (or past) one another. Nor does she hesitate to dispense with narrative entirely when creating worlds whose meanings lie in considered pauses and informative silences. Both *The Best Room in the House* and *Falconer's Island* deck out their mythic subjects in "low-mimetic" weeds, exploiting (often wittily) radio's ability to tell more than one story at a time. Each displays a confident management of the medium's shorthand, particularly evident in the sound cues and off stage voices of the earlier piece. But it is in the prize-winning *Grasshopper Hill* that the author's vision and technique are most seamlessly joined. Creating for the occasion "Susan" — a complex narrator/participant with three voices — Lambert constructs in the form of an unconventional love story an indictment of Canadian self-righteousness. Susan's discussions with Gustav Guthke take full advantage of the ease with which radio can make rapid leaps in time and space, enabling the lovers to relive their separate pasts and mutual present while commenting upon both from the safe haven of the future. Nor is Lambert above indulging in bilingual puns (*J'accuse*/Jack Hughes) to effect such transitions. Indeed the whole work is so ingeniously cut for the ear that it would be difficult to envision an adaptation for stage or television performance. Perhaps this is the ultimate tribute that can be paid to a radio play.

Malcolm Page and the editors of *The West Coast Review* are to be commended for making the Lambert scripts available at such a reasonable price. One wonders whether Birney's plays might have

reached a wider public had The Quarry Press/CBC Enterprises been willing to forego eight full-page illustrations of ancient radio parts.

JOEL H. KAPLAN

GOOD INTENTIONS

CHARLES SANGSTER, *The St. Lawrence and the Saguenay and Other Poems*, Rev., ed. Frank M. Tierney. Tecumseh, $29.95.

WE CANADIANS have the habit of killing off our literary parents. The parsimony and carelessness resulting from this attitude have ensured that responsibly edited Canadian texts can be counted on the fingers of one hand. The publication of the complete poems of Charles Sangster, perhaps our only real Confederation poet, in an edition whose texts are authoritative and in which many poems appear in print for the first time, should increase this number. Regrettably, it does not.

Frank Tierney undertook an important task in 1975 when he decided to publish the Sangster manuscripts held by McGill University. Charles Sangster had published *The St. Lawrence and the Saguenay and Other Poems* in 1856 and *Hesperus and Other Poems and Lyrics* in 1860, winning critical praise in Canada and abroad. He was rewarded with a job in the Post Office in Ottawa, a job that taxed his physical and emotional strength so severely that he apparently gave up writing poetry. However, the McGill manuscripts show instead that Sangster completely revised "The St. Lawrence and the Saguenay," that he wrote enough poems for two more slim volumes, and that, with W. D. Lighthall's encouragement, he spent the last five years of his life editing and polishing a final version of his complete oeuvre. Lighthall never published this material, but Tierney has now published it all: *Norland Echoes and Other Poems* (Tecumseh, 1976); *The Angel Guest and Other Poems and Lyrics* (Tecumseh, 1977); Sangster's revised version of *Hesperus and Other Poems and Lyrics* (Tecumseh, 1979); and finally *The St. Lawrence and the Saguenay and Other Poems* (1984).

The poetry of Charles Sangster is certainly a treasure of Canadian literature, and the texts of the first three volumes in the series are adequate. Because the poems were published only once before, if at all, there are few variant readings, and the variants are recorded appropriately. But the many typos call the reliability of the texts into question; clearly the books were not carefully proofread. The annotations are eccentric. References to mythology are invariably, lengthily, and repetitively explained, and words such as "flagon" are defined, whereas the obscure references are left to the resourcefulness of the reader. (Who was the Walter Munro of "Walter Munro"? the C.J.B. of "C.J.B. 1841-1867"? the Colin of "Colin"?) The introductions to *Norland Echoes* and *The Angel Guest* are brief and general. *Hesperus*, presenting more difficult editorial problems, has a fuller introduction and a helpful chronology of Sangster's life, which should have been included in the earlier books, since it shows that the first footnote in *The Angel Guest* is incorrect.

The introduction to the last volume of the series, *The St. Lawrence and the Saguenay and Other Poems*, is much longer and appears to be more thorough than the introductions to the other three volumes. However, the editorial principles are vaguely stated and dependent on the editor's taste, and the introduction as a whole is characterized by repetition, sophomoric criticism, lack of organization, and poor grammar. Textually, *The St. Lawrence and the Saguenay* is the

most complex of the four volumes. Sangster published revised sections of the title poem only six years after the first publication, and he published more revised stanzas in 1866 and 1879. Sangster's letters to Lighthall indicate that, by 1888, the poem had grown to twice its original 110 stanzas, but a complete manuscript of the revised poem has never been found. Tierney resolves this dilemma by taking the 1856 version as his copytext and interpolating the 29 extra stanzas found in the publications of 1862, 1866, and 1879. This strategy produces an oddly distorted poem, and the annotations only compound confusion. The beauty and power of "The St. Lawrence and the Saguenay" is almost smothered by these notes. Instead of confining his opinions to the introduction, Tierney interjects and argues for his interpretation of the poem line by line and stanza by stanza. He tells the history of places along the St. Lawrence and the Saguenay rivers which are not even mentioned in the text. Some notes are wrong as well as otiose: the phrase "piny flambeaux," for instance, inspires a discussion of the fact that "piny" and "piney" are both correct spellings and also a descriptive history of the European flambeau, when stanza XXXII is plainly about Indians attracting fish to their canoes at night with pine torches. One imagines student helpers annotating each "hard word" without regard for the literal meaning of the poem and without reading one another's work. The accumulated nonsense cannot be overlooked if one is interested in Sangster's text, because all of the textual, explanatory, and interpretive material is in 293 consecutively-numbered endnotes.

The other poems in the volume suffer similar treatment. They are interpreted relentlessly and naively, Sangster's textual changes are judged for good or ill, and the explanatory annotations are capricious. On the positive side, the textual choices seem reasonable, and poems that Sangster planned to leave out of his revised volume, original versions of drastically revised poems, and four poems that Sangster sent to Lighthall but did not include in either the 1856 volume or his revision all appear in appendices.

In spite of the infelicities in this four-volume series, Tierney and his funding agencies, the Canada Council and the Ontario Arts Council, might have added to our cultural resources by making Sangster's beautiful and important poetry accessible. Unfortunately, in my experience, distribution itself is a problem. Tecumseh's unreliable service has alienated book dealers, and the press now seems to sell books mainly through erratically-distributed catalogues. But, to be fair, Tierney intended to provide Canadian readers with a critical edition of the virtually lost works of an excellent poet, and he has published a useable text. Apparently he worked on this project alone or with inexperienced helpers. There is no Canadian text society, and no guidelines exist for editing Canadian texts; thus Tierney also worked without a consistent source of scholarly editorial advice. Tierney is so devoted to the publishing of Canadian literature that he is a principal in Tecumseh Press. Therefore, as well as being textual editor, annotator, and introducer of the Sangster volumes, he may also have had to act as their designer, production editor, copy-editor, proofreader, and business manager. No one could do all of these jobs at once and do them well.

LAUREL BOONE

ARBITRARY MAGIC

JOHN PASS, *an arbitrary dictionary*. Coach House, n.p.

BRONWEN WALLACE, *Common Magic*. Oberon, $9.95.

JOHN BEMROSE, *Imagining Horses*. Black Moss, $6.95.

JAMES REANEY, *Imprecations: The Art of Swearing*. Black Moss, $5.95.

ONE OF THE TRUISMS about post-colonial writing is its concern with re-writing history. As Albert Wendt, the Samoan novelist has remarked, "A society is what it remembers . . . writers are the custodians and creators of an authentic cultural memory." As a result, certain patterns and imagery are bound to recur: maps, geographies, genealogies, ancestor sagas proliferate; in a more personal context there is often an abiding interest in childhood and memory — the wellsprings of the poet's own history, location, and self. Within these structures the poet might explore and test the limitations of those tyrannical definitions which have historically delimited that poet's self and society. Each of these four books, in one way or another (and with varying degrees of success), broaches these related spatial and temporal patterns.

John Pass's *an arbitrary dictionary* is an absolute delight. A rare delight. Here is a collection which plays in full exuberance with the ambiguities, fluidity, and variations of language. With wit, confidence, and vigour Pass revels in rearranging our perceptions and understandings of words, experiences. It is difficult, in fact, to find the right superlative to describe the technical and intellectual brilliance of this controlled whimsy. Pass is never self-indulgent or corny; his "play" is always meticulous, exact, crystal-clear. He has given us a collection of poetical meditations on a variety of subjects *and* on the language with which he examines the possibilities of those subjects. He is not a punster; but he is a verbal magician, continually transforming the textures and meanings (not to mention the spellings) of our most common daily commodities: words.

The book is divided into two sections. The first constitutes the dictionary itself, a collection of randomly chosen words which are then "elucidated" in a particularly idiosyncratic way. Pass explains in the Afterword: "(My method was to close my eyes, open the Concise Oxford and put down a finger.) I felt at first my obligation to be a complete definition of the proferred word in a personal context . . . Quickly I came to allow myself a more oblique 'take' on many of them: an errant, mischievous (possibly revolutionary) push against their authority, or tyranny." In this first section the revolution is an anarchic delight. The poems reward continual re-reading and one is left to perform a series of multiple "takes" of one's own; consider an extract from "Franciscan":

> I, whose canticles
> are faint praise
>
> hymns to self legion
> good works inconsequential
>
> for a few stale girl-guide cookies
> thrown to jays? The challenge
>
> of a word, a name, millennium
> of orthodoxy you took up
> in flurries of new light
>
> a drama of outward action
> and we can blame no history
> of systems, superstitions
>
> for our habitual lethargy
> of spirit, mummeries
> of brotherhood.

The extract works superbly: there is always the sense of one man observing himself observing, exploring the ambiguity of both the action and the object, drawing unseen connections (like the Franciscan-brown of girl-guide uniforms), resisting the tyranny of words, definitions.

The second section of the book, entitled "Baby Shouts Dao," is strangely compelling and unusually successful. Children, like boredom, are risky topics for poetical evocation; too often poets can fall prey to their own topic, the result of which is an infantilization of child, writer, and poem. Pass never dwindles into this play-pen. He has introspection without egocentricity, sensitivity without goo, love without cuteness. In the process of looking at and writing about his own sons, Pass gives us the opportunity to look and read and think about childhood, adulthood, ourselves. The section continues with the same control of language and expression; reading it is a liberation. So if you can afford only one book of poetry this year, buy this one.

Common Magic, by Bronwen Wallace, is an interesting but somewhat less exhilarating collection of poems. A number of convenient (but dissatisfying) labels come to mind: feminist, political, introspective, sensitive, homely (in the good sense). None of these quite captures the essence of these finely wrought reflections. Wallace is a true "custodian and creator" of memory; she here traces the patterns and meanings emerging from childhood towards their manifestations in the present of the adult narrator. And that narrator is one tough, uncompromising poet who can watch, think, write, and effortlessly effect an immediate readerly empathy.

The writing/reading of these poems is a process of location. The poems evolve around various geographical places, spaces within which the poet shares her own exercises in self-definition (or lack thereof). Kingston, Ontario (at first glance, a pretty meagre spot for a metaphor) here becomes a tremendously evocative image of the "prison town," the invisible cell within which women and men live out their twentieth-century lives. There are poems about birth, children, childhood, love, divorce, sexual violence, despair; and in each case Wallace carefully controls her presentation of human response. At her best she shares with Pass an extraordinary sensitivity to the tyranny of words (and of their bureaucratic users). And in this sense *Common Magic* is *about* the effect of naming and the moral/political imperative to react against it. As such we have a fascination with the world as text, society as an imposed narrative which these poems seek to unwrite:

> What went on up there
> was a story in a foreign language.
>
> Pieces of it drifted into town,
> like scraps of paper, catching
> on the neat white fences
> in the shaded streets.
>
> Them and us.

This pattern of re-writing (or unwriting) a read narrative surfaces throughout the book; Wallace's narrator emerges as the inventor-historian, always interpreting and re-interpreting these imposed "stories in a foreign language."

This collection is a thorough celebration of resistance and endurance. Amidst the pain and oppression of woman Wallace can still integrate a recurrent metaphor of birth, life, and personal growth. Sure, there are the occasional lapses (a collapse into a flat or plain word); but in general, *Common Magic* is a fine, brave reminder of the possibilities of female courage in the face of male intrusion and belittlement.

John Bemrose's *Imagining Horses* is an equally sincere, but conservative collection of poems. Like Wallace, he traces a personal history through the ages of childhood, adolescence, and questioning adulthood. And like both Pass and Wallace, Bemrose is unflinching in his desire to come to terms with the unintelligible, the bewildering lack of coherence in a

world of nuclear weaponry, industrialization, and multi-corporate monstrosities. Throughout these poems there is the unifying pastoral impulse: the underlying contrast of a complex inhuman urban society and the beckoning attractions of a simpler time and place — the world of children, dogs, trees, and fields. Bemrose avoids the implicit threat of a naive romanticism; Nature is not a landscape of easeful *otium*, but is here ultimately ambiguous. Children commit suicide, dogs eat goose-turds, terror accompanies refuge, power underlies the silence of the woodlands. Within these contexts Bemrose does achieve some startling effects, most notably in those poems, such as "Nightmare," where he stops describing and begins analyzing.

But for all Bemrose's intelligent "sincerity" (and this must be acknowledged and given due praise), the poems do falter, slip into stale and formulaic verbiage.

> And now we sit, untalking
> in our chairs, having been swallowed
> by homes and children, the prisoners
> of a biological happiness.
>
> .....
>
> Stars! Thousands of them
> roiled in the sky's encompassing blue.

The problem is not so much that these phrases are in themselves clichés, hangovers of Shelley on a bad day. The problem is that they are allowed to remain in poems which otherwise would be lyrical, sensitive meditations by a skilled craftsman. I want to make this clear: *Imagining Horses* is potentially a first-rate book. The title poem itself is a haunting, clear-eyed rendition of childhood, a poem which should set the tone for much of what will follow. But the collection needs pruning; there is dead wood here, a needless clutter obscuring "the clean passionate strokes [of the] poet."

Finally we are left with *Imprecations: The Art of Swearing*. The chapbook is seven and one-half pages long. It has four woodcuts (one child reading, one man declaiming, and two jesters bowing) and, as the narrator announces, "I have set myself to try my hand at cursing." There are time shifts — between the narrator's obviously unhappy, broken-home childhood and the present (which he curses in a deluge of allusion to myth, literary figures, and Judith Donnely). And, of course, there are the curses: the book(let) lumbers along from "arse" to "piss willie." Ho-hum.

GARY BOIRE

AN EYE SPEAKING

DOUGLAS BARBOUR, *visible visions: selected poems*. NeWest, $6.95.

DOUGLAS BARBOUR HAS BEEN publishing poetry for nearly fifteen years. He has moved across the country during this time, and across an array of poetic techniques. Both movements are evident in his first *Selected Poems*, carefully edited and introduced by Smaro Kamboureli and Robert Kroetsch. Born in Winnipeg, Barbour attended universities in Quebec, Nova Scotia, and Ontario. Now he teaches at the University of Alberta in Edmonton and spends his summers in Vancouver. The diversity of his geographical experiences and the westering movement become subject and style of his writing.

Visible visions contains selections from Barbour's seven previous volumes of poetry and from a book he co-authored with Stephen Scobie, as well as some new poems. It is conventional in a review considering a poet's selected or collected works to dwell on the development and growth of the artist. Barbour *has* grown and matured as a poet, but it is also interesting here to note the consistencies

and coherence of his work. His development is more a deepening of concerns evident from the start, rather than a breaking of new ground with each successive publication. The influences on Barbour have shifted over the years from the traditional to the more innovative, from Whitman through the American Black Mountain Group, to contemporary Canadian poets such as bp Nichol and Phyllis Webb: but the concerns with language and sound, minimalism and silence, the breath line, and keeping the form open are apparent throughout.

As the title suggests, *visible visions* presents the act of seeing, the placement of the observing eye/I in a landscape. For Barbour vision becomes a phenomenological act. He recreates his seeing for us on the page, making it "visible": "the eye / speaking," as one poem states. The white ground of the poet's page also reflects the white expanse of the winter prairie. For both, "silence creates / a necessary frame." Writing the landscape and finding expressions suitable to this task, Barbour creates a poetry of place resonant with the actuality he lives, both the land and the attempt.

The prairies have long been a location fruitful for authors. Fiction writers early turned the region into words (Grove, Stringer, Ostenso, McCourt, Ross, *et al.*). More recently poets have been tackling the problem of how to write poetry out of the prairies (Newlove, Mandel, Kroetsch, Suknaski, Cooley, Uher, Marty, Friesen, Zieroth: the list goes on). Barbour is not of the prairie school which uses the vernacular and retells the tall tales of pub and farm kitchen. His writing is more responsive to the geography itself — the boundaryless landscape which requires the imposition of order through words. Close attention to the how of the ordering is a particular strength of Barbour's poems. He is more akin to Eli Mandel than to Robert Kroetsch, although he shares with both a writing about writing, a kind of "metapoetry." Barbour is accepting of his prairie locality, questioning of the poetic means of interpretation. His language is direct and simple; his lines, uneven and fluid; his images, vibrant and repetitive. He captures a prairie spring:

> paling into insignificance beside
> the ocean perhaps
> because it is not a movement
> but a situation never
> the less it shifts
> silently
> through the seasons
>
> its changes pertinent to
> the always lovingly amazed eye.
>
> I drove to the edge this day
> eye said yes

Images repeated throughout *visible visions* are stillness, whiteness, silence, snow-covered landscapes — the space, the unspoken.

> say only this, say only the hope
> the urge expressed
> in the movement outwards the
> sweeping gesture of construction;
> and isnt this enough . . .
> to whisper
> across this frozen country
> certain possible words.

How to say, even in a whisper, the "possible words" is a major concern of Barbour's. Language, landscape, and love are his triple subject in both lyrics and long poems. The best are delicate and erotic love poems, longer-lined poems of place and writing, and a final series which Barbour calls "breath ghazals." If the influence of Webb and the Black Mountain poets is evident in these last poems, then the influence that is most consistently evident throughout the book is that of Barbour's grandfather — a painter whom Barbour never met, but whom he clearly knows well through his art. The grandfather was a painter in a landscape, searching for the means to

translate what is seen. So too the grandson, but through poetic translations. Both are pioneers in their own ways. As the grandfather literally came to the landscape anew, so Barbour re-creates in his confrontation with/seeing of the landscape the act anew — for the first time a "vision of." For both, "the occasion requires / integrity, clarity of vision." For both, there is immediacy. "Our past is too close, it / remains unseen," Barbour says, and writes the now of the prairies and the now of his own perceptions, the absences becoming both visual and inspirational. Barbour addresses all this in his first collection, *Land Fall* (1971), and his second, *A Poem As Long As The Highway* (1971), clearly searching for forms appropriate to his experience.

For Barbour's grandfather, the prairie crossing was by train; while for Barbour, it is by the highway. These westering experiences need to be transformed into art. One type of poem, like the highway, stretches out endlessly: "would have to be crafted, structures / to cross vast territories." The building of both is a slow process. But the upheaval and destruction of laying the road on the land is not the way of poetry:

> Yet the road
> like the poem progresses,
> through particular landscapes
> to a certain truth
>
> and the senses are kept
> honest.
> . . . each new curve
> moves us further on
> both poem and high
> way, taking
> us out of
> ourselves
>
> into what passes.

This may be a good description for Barbour of the creative act; it is also a good description for the reader of the interpretive act.

The selections here from Barbour's third book of poetry, *White* (1972), concentrate on the endlessness of the snowy landscape of a Canadian winter. White is the colour which captures all the "colours in a single spectrum," and it is the possibilities which fascinate Barbour: "the gathering / of all the possibilities of / eye (begin)" (again a visual image). The whiteness of the landscape is also reflected in the blank page confronting the poet, waiting to be filled, as he "choose[s] to see it." Barbour's choice of seeing is perhaps the strongest, certainly the most vital, in his 1976 poetic struggle with his ancestor, "visions of my grandfather." Here he again engages the subject/influence of his earliest poems and discovers the suitable form: a long poem in twelve parts with a "postscript." The necessary map is here provided, not by highway or train track grids, but by the grandfather's paintings on Barbour's wall — maps of the grandfather's seeing of the landscape. And in this poem, more even than in any of the others, the repetition of "see," "seen," "unseen," "saw" creates a choric reminder of the visual significances: "his art / of seeing," "a calling forth," "the eye / speaking," "of eye / for aye." Here, with a doubling of the senses, the visual speaks.

Barbour matches his and his grandfather's common sights — their perceptions of the same prairie caught in painting and poem. The pictures on the wall "speak" to Barbour, providing the stories left untold by the fireside. He writes his poems from his home in Edmonton. His grandfather painted from his home in Winnipeg. Both observe the prairies in their art. Barbour came to it from Eastern Canada; his grandfather, from Scotland. Both travel(led) to the West Coast for respite, yet are/were impelled by the prairie landscape: "your great love for the land shines / thru you / knew it i know & i do it i look at it too with new eyes because of you." These two men

never met in the flesh, only through their art. Barbour was born two years after his grandfather's death, but he tells us, "my poems have seen your country." (Note the verb.) This poem eloquently describes the difficult necessity of Barbour's art, ultimately and appropriately going beyond his grandfather's vision with its lightness, into the darkness of his own poetic creativity.

But there is lightness in Barbour as well, which is demonstrated by the selections from his next two books: two sound poems from *Shore Lines* (1979) and several of the "homolinguistic translations" Barbour did with Stephen Scobie in *The Pirates of Pen's Chance* (1981). The latter are translations (English into English) of well-known poems, creating a comic effect. The selections from these books are clever but not powerful, statements more of thought than feeling, skilled rather than inspired.

Of the new poems, some are disappointing while others are captivating. For instance, the series of "touch" poems is beautifully sensual, while the selections titled " 'Earth song / body song" are rather proscriptive about the poetic use of breath. Barbour preaches here; whereas in other poems, such as the twelve "breath ghazals," he practises:

BREATH GHAZAL NUMBER 2

among the many leaves
surround me listen

phtt phtt phtt
tlip tlip tlip so

softly & apart look
only grey clouds slightly

cross the sun phtt
tlip you listen

rain drums soft
on leaves spaces apart

The vision Barbour makes visible for us in his first collection of selected poems is a precise one. He locates himself clearly and writes his existence. His position as a poet on the Canadian prairies places him within a growing group of like individuals. Similarly, his concern with form and process is shared by many of our best writers today. Even his solutions, long poems and ghazals, are consistent with the discoveries of other Canadian poets. Still, his particular choices of seeing and saying, the vision with which he fills the white pages, are original. Like his choices of influence: on the one hand, common to other poets (the writings of those already established), and on the other hand, uniquely his own (the art of his grandfather), Barbour's poetry is a blend of current poetic wisdom and individual poetic voice.

ANN MUNTON

SPICE & SENTIMENT

ROBERT PRIEST, *The Man Who Broke Out Of The Letter X*. Coach House, $6.95.

ROD WILLMOT, *The Ribs of Dragonfly*. Black Moss, $9.95.

GREGORY M. COOK, *Love In Flight*. Ragweed, $9.95.

IN HIS BEST POEMS, Robert Priest conveys an understanding of the sincere absurdity and bizarre honesty of the world. His poems are spicy, sexy, and bursting with maniacal fervour: "In the Next War" advocates pelting the Kremlin with "minute rice and mashed potatoes" rather than bombs; in "Blue Pyramids" Priest proposes building "pyramids on Yonge Street" as a way of ending unemployment in Toronto; and in "Ink" we get a twist on the Genesis story, for we are told that "In the beginning there is a huge cannister of ink" which we then follow into its "blue abandon" and "curlicued adventures."

Priest has been applauded for his provocative, high-speed poetry, and in his

previous books, *The Visible Man* and *Sadness of Spacemen*, there are traces of surrealism, silliness, and extraterrestrial intelligence. In *The Man Who Broke Out Of The Letter X* there is a similar meandering frenzy. There are several strange, distorted fables: "The Escaped Cock" and "The Pig Who Discovered Happiness"; some pretty sensuous seduction poems: "How to Pray to a Woman" and "More!"; and several poems in which "romance" is presented without soppiness or sentimentality, a rare achievement:

> You say Sky
> and all along my edges
> I am red waiting for you
> my eyes full of sunrise
>
> You say Sea
> and immediately
> I hear the pounding
> from the source
> the part of me that would be foam

Some of the poems are snappy, but little else — such as the "Starved People" series. And the political poems, such as "Human Weather Report (a teletype)," are too hit-and-miss to be effective or interesting. It is when Priest allows the ludicrous and idiosyncratic to bubble up to the surface that the poems work best.

Rod Willmot states that *The Ribs of Dragonfly* could be considered "a novella with haiku." The book is in fact composed of three contiguous sections: a series of Preludes, a collection of prose "chapters," and one hundred or so haiku. I have most problems with the haiku, despite Willmot's reputation as one of Canada's best-known practitioners of the form. At three to a page they ask to be read quickly, as though they are loosely connected poetic *utterances*, yet they attempt a sort of Canadian pseudo-Japanese peacefulness that never really works. By now, anyone writing haiku in this country must confront Michael Ondaatje's claim in *The Long Poem Anthology* that "Canada . . . is really not the country for the haiku." The haiku in *The Ribs of Dragonfly* unfortunately only prove Ondaatje's point: they are laden with vague sensual sentiment, and every other one wants to say something *profound* about "light" or "shadow" or "dawn" or "nightlight."

The Preludes are curious commentaries on the intricate arguments that compose a relationship. They are told in an objective tone and are neither particularly bad nor particularly good:

> *All problems solved. Sometimes all you have to do is throw a tantrum, or rather, fall to pieces one piece at a time, or argue, cry, tantrum, be contrite, then fall to pieces if you have to. But it works.*

The prose sections are the most interesting and *poetic* moments of the book, perhaps because they are neither vague like the haiku, nor objectively self-conscious like the Preludes. They are rich in associations from the natural world, and certainly carry what otherwise tends to be an overly ponderous book:

> This evening in the gold and copper haze a heron comes to perch heraldic on the duck-blind. As I gaze through the binoculars, with the last sun burning in the windows of a farmhouse high on the opposite shore, he squawks, shits majestically, and takes his leave, trundling low toward the river.

Of these three books, Gregory M. Cook's *Love In Flight* is the most disappointing. This is unfortunate — and perhaps inevitable — since the book is the most ambitious of the three. In the Preface, Cook discusses the impetus behind the book: his desire to visit the grave of his father, who was a member of The Black Watch (Royal Highland Regiment) of Canada, was killed at the age of twenty-five, and buried in Holland:

> I knew that I must visit my father's grave. The trip was one I intended since I was a teenager. I knew, too, that my pilgrimage

> would be as much a search for the spirit of my father and his reasons for fighting in Europe as an exploration of why I left the farm where his parents always assured me there would be a place for me.

The longer poems, such as "Pinocchio Presides: A Fable for our Time" and "Stranger," attempt to embrace family, history, war, death, a hope for peace, and the interwoven struggle among these seemingly contradictory things. There are interesting moments in these longer pieces, but nothing to hold their disparate images together. The voice in the shorter poems is one of anger, resistance, inquisitiveness, and helplessness, sometimes able to break into pure, and therefore resonant, knowledge: "Like privateers my dead fathers / are in me forever" ("The Honour"); "Your death freed me as much as Holland / I am building your house one word at a time" ("Your Father").

In one of Cook's other books, *Love En Route*, the voice of the poems often restricts the reader because of its cold objectivity. In *Love In Flight* the reader is perhaps given too much — as though the material has been gathered but not yet distilled. The quotes from Seamus Heaney, Robert Graves, and Yehuda Amichai distract attention from Cook's own words, and the use of photographs serves a documentary need but not a poetic one. The reader's sympathies are requested, but not yet earned.

PETER O'BRIEN

VOYAGERIES

VICTOR-LEVY BEAULIEU, *Monsieur Melville*. 3 vols., Ray Chamberlain, trans. Coach House, $8.95 each vol.

IN HER IMPRESSIVELY researched and often magisterially argued study *The Wacousta Syndrome* (1985), Gaile McGregor points out, in both English-Canadian and Québec literature, the lack of "mesocosmic" works, that is, "the novel of public life, of social forces, of political intrigue on the grand scale — the panoramic or epic form." In contrast to political developments, Québec fiction — according to McGregor — tends to generalize public issues into universal ones, so that they become too "diffuse" to capture in realist prose. The result, she concludes, "is not to politicize but simply withdraw," as do Roch Carrier's characters in *La guerre, yes sir! Floralie, où est-tu?*, and *Il est par là, le soleil.*

Although I will agree with McGregor that contemporary Québec fiction indeed largely shuns purely realist prose, I do not accept her analysis. Since the publication of Jacques Ferron's *Le Ciel de Québec* in 1969, several novelists — some of them referred to as "neo-realists" — have undertaken works of epic proportions, evoking the tradition of Vergil, Dante, Balzac, Hugo, Melville, Joyce, and Márquez: Michel Tremblay's *Chroniques du Plateau Mont-Royal*, Antonine Maillet's *Pélagie-la-Charrette* and *Cent Ans dans les bois*, Roch Carrier's *De L'Amour dans la ferraille*, and Victor-Lévy Beaulieu's gargantuan cycles *La Vraie Saga des Beauchemin* and *Voyageries*. All of these are based on a dialectic interplay between public and private sphere, history and myths. Ferron and others critically explore the ideological premises of all of these and establish a sophisticated basis for eventual action: both Ferron and Tremblay reject what they perceive to be the escapist psychologism of *La Relève* and its authors, and Tremblay challenges the defeatism of an otherwise admired *Bonheur d'occasion*.

As McGregor's conclusions appear to be based on works widely available in English translation (Roy, Blais, Carrier), the publication (following the earlier appearance of Tremblay's and Maillet's work in English) of Ferron's *Le Ciel de Québec* as *The Penniless Redeemer* (de-

layed by 15 years) is especially welcome; so is the translation of *Monsieur Melville*, composed — often in hommage to *Le Ciel de Québec* — by Ferron's most fervent disciple, Victor-Lévy Beaulieu.

Monsieur Melville (1978), a trilogy, is arguably the finest among the volumes constituting the *Voyageries*, and has earned Beaulieu the respect of critics who were previously inclined to dismiss his work as diffuse, immature, and pretentious. Although some of Beaulieu's earlier works have also been translated, none has attracted as much attention and acclaim as *Monsieur Melville*, a "lecture-fiction" exploring Melville's life and work as well as Abel Beauchemin's, Beaulieu's alter ego. Beaulieu has been called a neo-Romantic, and indeed his book subscribes to the Romantics' concept of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, combining biography, autobiography, scholarly essay, drama, allegory, fantasy, with a special place reserved for poetry. *Monsieur Melville* strives to be part of "the total book, one which begins with you and makes you the centre of the world, the prime mover setting all else in motion, achieving globality and inscribing it on searing pages studded with the black beauty of reflection." Beaulieu's style could best be described as lyrical effusion; one of the interesting effects of Ray Chamberlain's fine translation has been to tighten diction and syntax and to project, as a result, a much more rational, self-controlled narratorial persona than does the original. Compare, for instance, the following two passages: "Comment par les mots arriver à la meilleure part de soi-même, à ce qu'on pressent au fond de soi, c'est-à-dire cette beauté qui doit vous être exclusive, que personne d'autre que vous ne saurait produire, ce qui constitue à proprement parler l'ultime justification de sa vie (mais sans doute bien davantage)? Et quelle description, et en quelle inscription, et de quels mots faire venir tout cela?" and "How to arrive through words at the best part of yourself, at what you sense deep down? At that beauty that is exclusively yours, that no one but you knows how to create? Rightly speaking, it's your whole life's justification — and much more besides, surely. How to describe, or inscribe it? With what words to call it forth?" The incantatory quality produced by Beaulieu's long series of searching qualifications is absorbed into a more varied, briskly moving sentence structure.

Some elements of the original illustrations, an esential part of a discourse exploring the mystery of mimesis, have also disappeared. In the edition from VLB éditeur readers are gradually led through a series of black pages into the narrative as if they were crossing the threshold into a camera obscura, not to underline that brilliantly life-like pictures will be conjured up there, but to signal that this work too "ne pouvait jamais être qu'un seuil, un possible et, sans doute aussi, un détour." Many of the pictures reproduced loom out of black frames, as they might emerge from the narrator's subconscious; they too have been eliminated in the Coach House edition. Gone also is the small black whale in the upper right hand corner of all of the volumes in *Voyageries*, possibly an allusion to *Mardi*, where a successful hunt is indicated by filling up, in black, the silhouette of a whale in the ship's log. As a result, in the English version the pictures appear less integrated, assuming the more or less subservient function of traditional book illustrations. But Coach House is to be commended for retaining the pictures at all and for producing three volumes which, although not duplicating the sophistication of the original, are still very handsome books indeed.

Monsieur Melville is carried along by such genuine passion for its subject — a

welcome departure from the blasé bloodlessness of much post-modernism — that one can almost ignore Beaulieu's obligatory flights into sexism, which were much more offensive in earlier volumes like *Race de monde*. But, for the record, there is some of his usual nonsense in *Monsieur Melville* too, when he declares that "All writing reflects passivity, your feminine side. You don't fecundate words: they themselves are both swarming seed and the thing met. Words which violate you and possess you, creating themselves traitorously in your image and likeness." Still, as in Cortázar's *Rayuela*, where the sophisticated reader is endowed with masculine and the consumerist reader with feminine qualities, Beaulieu's total vision in *Monsieur Melville* is strong enough to soften, if not completely annihilate, his own foolish stereotypes.

E.-M. KRÖLLER

INLAND RULE

JANE RULE, *Inland Passage and Other Stories*. Lester & Orpen Dennys, $12.95.

THE CLOSING SENTENCE of "Dulce," the first of twenty-one stories collected in *Inland Passage*, reads for me as one of the finest endings in contemporary short fiction. Extravagant praise? Consider: through its softly chanting cadences, its voice quietly mournful, it seems to sing from some sweet but remote region of the heart:

> My real companions, in my imagination, are my counterparts throughout history and the world who, whatever names they are given, are women very like myself, who holds the shell of a poem to her ear and hears the mighty sea at a safe and sorrowing distance.

Dulce's voice haunts the rhythms of Rule's sentences with a beautiful melancholy; the art of her storytelling lies in its consistent but almost imperceptible widening and deepening from its opening lines, with their wry, disarming frankness:

> I was not perfectly born, as Samuel Butler prescribed, wrapped in bank notes, but I was orphaned at twenty-one without other relatives to turn to and with no material need of them. I was, in a way everyone else envied, free of emotional and financial obligations.

From this modest beginning, Dulce unfolds the story of her chaste infatuation with another orphan, Wilson C. Wilson, who makes her his muse and becomes her mentor in his progress towards international recognition as a poet. Dulce is finally left behind in their native Vancouver to endure the sexual ministerings of Oscar, a passionate sculptor whose wife grants him Saturday nights out in return for daytime domestic stability. From childhood, Dulce has been struck by the seemingly frantic, gratuitous violence of the energy released in the performance of art and now (at least with Oscar) of sex; her father, otherwise a "quiet and pensive man," had frightened her when he played his violin, which seemed "to contain an electrical charge which flung [her] father's body around helplessly the moment he laid hands on it." Now Dulce, in retreat from Oscar, discovers and then suffers her deep love for Lee, a poet who survives her suicide attempt to become one of Canada's best-known lesbian writers. In her carefully poised removal from the violence of immediate experience, Dulce becomes a symbol for artists across Western Canada, alternately "muse, witch, preying lesbian . . . devouring mother, whore, Diana, spirit of Vancouver, daughter of the tides." Put crudely, Dulce is burned by life, warmed by art; her final confession, which closes off her coolly passionate contemplation of her pasage towards disengagement, also opens out into a quiet, assured revelation.

Aside from "Dulce," there are several remarkable stories in Rule's collection — and several weaknesses as well. For all its obvious riches, *Inland Passage* is also, perhaps inevitably, an uneven book. The stories which deal with middle-class families — for example, the five stories about Harry, his wife Anna, and their children Joey and Sally — are warm and engaging vignettes, but they do not measure up to the power of "Dulce" or of the several other stories which deal with the trials and the joys of women's love — for other women ("His nor Hers," "The Real World," "Slogans," "Inland Passage") or for men ("A Matter of Numbers" is the finest of these). "One Can of Soup at a Time" is a funny four-and-a-half page send-up of a young couple's ongoing, dialectical declarations of interdependence, but not very much more; "Blessed Are the Dead," which deftly lets the air out of Martin, a smug UBC academic too satisfied with the death of a notorious womanizer, swindler, and former companion, does not compare favourably with any of the stories which focus more particularly on women's interior voices and interior lives — stories like "The End of Summer," in which Judith Thornburn fights toward recognition and redefinition of her isolation in exclusively male territory. And perhaps because Rule's female characters are so very sharply realized, some of her male figures suffer in comparison. Too many of them are too-predictable assemblies of attitudes or simply disembodied megaphones, like the captain of the cruise ship in the powerful title story. I recognize that tracing the silhouettes of sometimes silly, sometimes more menacing male postures is a vital part of Rule's purpose. But her fuller portraits of Roger in "The Investment Years," of Frank in "A Matter of Numbers," or of Canchek in "The End of Summer" show to better effect just how keenly Rule understands not only how women conceive of men, but also how men imagine themselves.

Finally, there are Rule's endings. Rule has the courage, the imaginative vigour, and also — unfashionably — the kind of morality which calls for explicitly "closed" endings. Her endings typically suggest either a character's fuller, more hopeful recognition of a state of mind, or the emergence of a brighter worldview. These qualities are admirable; but I was occasionally brought up short by endings which, labouring under these several imperatives, seemed forced, contrived, overdetermined, as if they *had* to stand as statements charged with meaning. Perhaps this uncomfortable earnestness is the price Rule pays for daring to suggest so openly that fiction is essentially moral. If so, the cost is small.

I register these reservations for the record. I paused after reading "Dulce," wondering whether the entire collection could possibly be as good. Over the next week or so, I discovered that it isn't, that it couldn't be. The stories in *Inland Passage* are always at the very least engaging, because their characters live amidst their vulnerabilities with a matter-of-fact frankness which Rule creates through the quiet triumph of her control over tone. And several of these stories transcend engagement to transform, by delicate but enduring degree, the way we imagine the world. The publishers "International Fiction List" and Rule's readers have once again been more than well served.

NEIL BESNER

LOVE OBJECTS

SUSAN CHARLOTTE HALEY, *A Nest of Singing Birds*. NeWest, $7.95.

LEON WHITESON, *Fool*. Mosaic, $8.95.

LEON WHITESON's *Fool* and Susan Charlotte Haley's *A Nest of Singing Birds* are both about love and redemption — which

seems a very profound similarity. Yet their ways of explaining the connection between love and rescue could hardly be more different. Whiteson's theories are exotic, arrayed in brilliant plummage. Haley's are home-grown, and clothed in a serviceable way.

A Nest of Singing Birds, Haley's first novel, is "realistic," not only because it reports with biting accuracy the doings of a western Canadian Arts Faculty, but also because its style and structure camouflage so thoroughly the mechanics of narration that the reader can glide through the story with scarcely a thought for all the modern concerns about the epistemology of fiction. This is not to say, of course, that Haley's story is any more "real" than other contemporary fiction, but that Haley's approach to story-telling is traditional, and therefore very comfortable.

The novel indulges in little verbal flair or spectacle. But this is quite in keeping with what the writer has to say about teaching "in a little western city at the provincial university": put on too much of a show and you might draw attention to yourself. There is a lot of skilfully composed dialogue in *A Nest of Singing Birds*, and Haley accomplishes the transition from dialogue to narration with only slight changes in register, for her diction is unpretentious and nearly conversational.

It is more than easy-going diction, however, that makes this book effortless reading. The information we need to understand the context of events is disclosed punctually, never postponed, never smuggled in through elliptical gaps. We always know all we need to know about Anna, a "limited-term" philosophy instructor, and her colleagues. Moreover, the novel's narrative structure is firmly pinned to the academic calendar: faculty meetings and parties, 8:30 classes, examinations and term papers. No tricky narrative manoeuvres to get March mixed up with October.

And then, into this standard calendar, Haley introduces a love story: Anna and the chairman of the English Department fall in love. Their affair takes a conventional route, passing all the landmarks that readers of pulp romance would recognize: tentative encounters; orthodox resistance; infatuation cloaked in discretion; major obstacles; removal of major obstacles; union. In its account of love, the novel's "realism" is based on its conventionality. Although we know things happen this way in books, we don't know for sure that they happen this way in life.

But we do know that Haley's portrait of the academic world is life-like. And it is very funny. The Arts Faculty is under External Review, and this provokes the heroine's colleagues into every characteristic posture professors can assume when exposed to scrutiny. Jealous and self-defensive, they accuse one another as they look for ways of justifying themselves. They have their work cut out for them, for the External Reviewer's report on the Philosophy Department is not altogether glowing: " 'There seem to be two main complaints against us,' " says one member of the Department after reading the report. " 'Our research record is lousy and we can't teach.' "

As a temporary appointee, the heroine is in on Departmental goings-on, but not deeply involved in them. Her detachment (and the author's own, for Haley herself was a sessional teacher) makes this Faculty of Arts look typical and nervously listless at the same time, stagnant under what seems to be the baleful influence of tenure. Yet just when we are thinking that Anna might be better off away from this nearly exhausted way of life, she gets a second chance to enlist: at the end of April she is redeemed, and her contract is renewed. Now she can

stay in the same town as her lover. The two patterns in the book — the sharp insights into academic life and the fuzzy images of romance — are knit together in this resolution where the limited-term sessional is reborn with a fresh contract and renewed love affair. (Anna's author, however, evidently lost her faith in the sessional cycle: now Susan Haley runs a charter airline in Fort Norman.)

Although Leon Whiteson's *Fool* is a love story, too, ending in not one but five weddings, it is not conventional in the way *A Nest of Singing Birds* is. Indeed, at first it seems thoroughly unconventional: it is obscene, violent, and disgusting at the same time as it is full of philanthropic good will. Yet, in another sense, it is very conventional in that it rummages through the whole inventory of traditions associated with literary fools and comedies.

Fool himself is missing from the beginning of the tale and missing from the end as well. At the start he is anticipated by the members of his makeshift court. They seek him, remember him, imagine him. When he does show up, however, he is a mysterious hero with no-fixed-identity, a hoax. He is a con-man and a cheat, but he is also inventive and helpful. He is everything and nothing, a caricature of what he sees and intuits. And he possesses a monumental penis, which is, of course, important to the love story — or stories. Although everyone's attention is focused on Fool, Fool is actually a servant of others' wishes, for his antics dramatize their ideas of themselves, which are mainly erotic ideas.

Fool is surrogate suitor. Although each of the members of his court — a succulent widow, a heady playgirl, a journalist, some street kids — fanatically desires him, he woos them and their urgent fantasies only as a means of matchmaking. Finally they all get together with someone else, their readiness for marriage prepared by Fool's selfless versatility. There is one exception to this rule, or misrule: Fool himself marries an elderly opera singer dying of cancer. Bedecked as bride and queen, the aged soprano is already a cadaver after the momentous consummation of the marriage, and she is interred smiling. Fool's nuptials are a sign of how much this is a love story, despite or because of its rash reversals of what counts as a love object.

At first, the story seems too erratic and pleasantly garbled in its display of values for the reader to count on any coherent explanations about what is going on. But then Fool's inventions and disguises begin to reveal their pattern, and, soon after, the characters themselves begin to articulate the theory behind all this moral uproar. So *Fool* turns out to be not such a riddle after all: it presents just enough of the "confusion" that Fool believes leads to wisdom. Fool's fleshly passion is promiscuous, but so is his compassion for flesh and spirit alike, and when he perishes at the judgement he has devised for himself, we remember the finally confusing fact that the most radical sympathy is completed by sacrifice.

At first, too, Whiteson's style seems precariously laden, his descriptions and images ready to topple with top-heaviness. But once the logic of Fool's career reveals itself, Whiteson's narrative methods are appropriate and satisfying, for Fool's world is shifty and surprising, and it therefore calls for the provocative detail with which Whiteson is so generous. Moreover, the network of puns which reiterates the novel's message is as playful and sincere as Fool himself. And Whiteson's work as an architect and architectural writer no doubt contributes to the rich sense of place we get from his presentation of London and its interiors.

A main device of *Fool* is the toucan — a vivid tropical bird that becomes an agent of the fierce consequences of Fool's

embracing compassion. Toucan's habitat is as opulent as he, and a far cry from the world of the dun warblers in Haley's Nest of Singing Birds.

JANET GILTROW

MURKY IMAGE

BRIAN L. FLACK, *With a Sudden and Terrible Clarity*. Black Moss, $12.95.

THIS IS A DEPRESSING BOOK. Its subject is the consciousness of a neurotic character who has spent most of his formative years in a group home. But that subject need not be depressing, as Walter Tevis demonstrated in *The Queen's Gambit*. The problem lies in the nature of the character's consciousness, and in the author's means of communicating it to the reader. Although there are a few vividly described scenes in the book, most of it is analytical, not in the Jamesian mode but in a hyperbolic straining after vividness which is interlarded with a constant reliance on cliché. Since the author uses the third person convention, it is possible that he intends both hyperbole and cliché to represent the unfortunate mind set of his protagonist, Andrew Taylor. But even if one grants that intention, the effect is still stifling.

The author's favourite device is to have Taylor react to a remark or a sight with exaggerated fear, anger, withdrawal or fragmentation of thought, and then to remember some incident in his past. Intrinsically interesting as some of these incidents might be, all are wrapped in a muffled verbiage of past perfect tenses, summary, and commentary, usually with a minimum of described action. Here, for instance, is Taylor's memory of the burial of his father and his return from that memory:

> A murky image of a graveyard, his brother and sister oddly absent, a clutch of uncles and aunts, grandparents, hangers on — milling and pushing, festering sores on the loss his mother could not accept... He came back to himself, shaking, spitting buried memories that slid away from him, that spread silently into the thick air, irretrievable. His aloneness flexed muscled arms and crushed his spirit.

The personification of aloneness is merely strained; but to describe milling relatives as "festering sores" is not only trite, it is incoherent.

The flashbacks take Taylor through the "brutalization" of the group home, through university, past a couple of male friends, into a couple of affairs, and finally into a job and a marriage with a frigid wife. The destructiveness of their relationship is often convincing, but its point is unclear, as is the point of the novel itself. Are we to pity this self-pitying character as he pulls away from life?

The last scene in which Taylor reaches out to another person is his phone call to a boyhood friend, Derek. In the typically protracted soul-searching that leads up to the call, Taylor contrasts the poor preparation for adulthood of Derek's stable home environment with the good preparation for adulthood of his own depersonalized childhood. Derek

> had never had to contend with a force prepared to limit him and, accordingly, there was nothing he had been moved to hate or love intensely, nothing that he valued, not even his own life. His emotional amplitude was non-existent; he possessed no resiliency. He was suffering, Andrew had decided before long, from a malady wherein the personality becomes a stranger to itself because it is never called upon to justify itself among those who are set down as peers. Derek had no conflicts in his life, no impetus to strive for recognition.... His own life had been lived within a framework that was almost the reverse. He had had to fight for everything he had and was.... It was the one time he had silently acknowledged the system that had housed him for being so contrary to everything he had known before being enveloped by it. Had it

> not been so cold and uncaring, so opposed to individuality, then he too might have evolved into Derek . . . a lost and confused wanderer. He thought frustration, anger and abuse a better alternative. At least he could generate a reaction to the world around him.

In fact, Andrew Taylor has spent most of the novel protecting himself from supposed outer attacks and not responding. Despite a scene in which he strikes his wife, I take his belief that he reacts "to the world around him," sometimes with "abuse," to be false consciousness. Whether the author is aware of this contradiction is another question. His handling of Taylor's consciousness is so inept it is difficult to be sure or to care. His muffled prose in this passage reaches a kind of apotheosis in "his emotional amplitude was non-existent" an abstract clause without any psychological or sensory resonance.

Eight pages after this passage, during his phone conversation with Derek, Taylor comes to the following realization, "He wondered how he could have turned Derek Ayling into some phenomenal being that he was not and had never pretended to be. He had crafted an image of this man fit only for a god or saviour." Such an idealization obviously contradicts the earlier awareness of Derek's self-alienation. If the author is aware of it, he does nothing with it. The dominant impression I carry away is that the author joins the character in the latter's intense and protracted suffering and self pity. It is not an edifying experience.

I can't help wondering why the author has chosen to have three women powerfully attracted at different times to a man who sees himself as unattractive, and convincingly presents himself so. My own sense is that these female figures are too compliant, too loving, too perfect to be anything but the author's fantasies. Perhaps they are intended as another example of the protagonist's inability to see people clearly. That might account for his sending each out of his life, but not for their reported actions and words. I take the character's perceptions and the author's presentation of them both as involving bad faith. The book is thus unrelieved by comedy, satire, or even old fashioned pathos — although it does offer one redeeming vice (the description of a homosexual rape). Despite Flack's presumed commitment to "the humanistic aspects of writing," his novel lacks the human insight (not to mention the fine writing) which elevates Louise Ehrlich's evocation of the lives of an oppressed social group in *Love Medicine*. It even lacks the compensations of another recent novel about depression and bad faith, Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*. Her subject is relieved by the interest of a futuristic repressive society and the narrator's metafictional acknowledgement of the difficulty of carrying on a story of such depersonalizing conditions. Atwood offers the reader conventional humanistic literary hooks (what will happen to a number of characters). In contrast, I did not get many pages into *With a Sudden and Terrible Clarity* before realizing, in Flack's words, "with a dismal clarity what lay ahead."

E. B. GOSE

CHANGING THE STORY

MORLEY CALLAGHAN, *Our Lady of the Snows*. Macmillan, $19.95.

CALLAGHAN'S NOVELLA *The Enchanted Pimp* (1978) ended with the death of Ilona Tomory, "the gentle, golden whore," and these words (now, it seems, oddly prophetic): "He had no intention of forgetting Ilona Tomory . . . he felt he couldn't afford to forget her." In *Our*

Lady of the Snows, Ilona lives again, and so does her admirer and would-be saviour Edmund J. ("Da Boot") Dubuque, the club-footed pimp who had no intention of forgetting. As the narrator of the novel disarmingly observes, "It was as if those who had seen her at work . . . had to keep changing the story a little, changing it till they got it in the right shape."

Callaghan is discreet even in his indiscretion here, the supremely confident professional who lets his audience see a glimpse of what goes on in the workshop, as if to reassure us that there is no faking it, just a sincere attempt to tell a story and to get it in the right shape. And he has: *Our Lady of the Snows* has the thick, populated atmosphere of an authentic big-city story, and seems to grow out of that busy life. Obviously, suburban morality and fastidiousness are going to be gutted here; but so is the new feminist orthodoxy. In this moral twilight the reader cannot simply dismiss Dubuque the pimp as a despicable crook, but neither is he a saint in disguise, nor even that occasionally acceptable middle option, the lovable rogue. Early in the story we see him viciously punishing a renegade girl who has the effrontery to try to operate independently; once a woman is on his list, she had better not decide she can do without him. He evidently relishes the power he wields, which is indisputable. On the other hand, he is not a callous exploiter of innocent womanhood. Prostitution is a business, and Dubuque helps his women, from a purely business point of view. He carries a business card and describes his line of work — with some justification — as "Conventions" and "Consumer services." He is useful to the women, since without his referrals they would certainly have to turn to a less wealthy and much more dangerous clientele.

More than this, however, Dubuque has imagination, and cannot bear to see the beautiful, distant, self-possessed Ilona Tomory being wasted on the very mixed clientele she picks up at the Bradley Lounge. Her aristocratic air of being born for better things, and of reserving the right to pick and choose her clients, not only enrages the other prostitutes, but also puts her in danger from the men. Dubuque sees in Ilona a business opportunity, of course, but also a maiden in distress, and a class act that needs a more discriminating audience. "Those guys hate you," he warns her. In her fur coat she represents exactly what they can not possess, even while they are possessing her. "I see you beaten up and dead somewhere, and outside it's snowing hard." This grimly persuasive argument leads to a remarkable moment of recognition between the enchanted pimp and the gentle whore: "you're pretty good, Mr. Dubuque. Who wouldn't rather go off with you and get rich than be killed? My God, you are good." One consummate professional recognizes another.

For Edmund J. Dubuque is an illusionist, a faker, just as Ilona Tomory is. Both specialize in sensing what their clientele needs and giving it to them, at a price of course, though Ilona will often go with a man who is an obvious loser because it amuses her to make a "lonely nobody" feel like a "somebody." There is a point where something can be so well faked that it is no longer a fake; it is not merely indistinguishable from the real thing, it is the real thing. This, and not the moral conundrum of the pimp-prostitute relationship, is Callaghan's real reason for bringing Ilona Tomory back to life, I suspect. In *Such Is My Beloved*, Callaghan long ago excoriated the morality that dehumanizes the prostitute by treating her as either an irresponsible social parasite, or a pitiable victim of social injustice. Anyone who wants to

read into *Our Lady of the Snows* the moral and theological preoccupations of the 1930's — or more accurately, the preoccupations some critics have found in the work Callaghan did in the 1930's — will surely find them here. There is even a character who will supply a "theological" interpretation ready-made: Gil Gilhooley, the bartender and aspiring writer who appears to see in Ilona a mystical presence, a selfless tenderness that for him is a manifestation of divine grace. Ilona herself at one point is encouraged to see her gifts in this light, when a lover tells her that, with her, "it was sacramental."

Gilhooley demonstrably sees only one aspect of Ilona's nature, however, and the lover who treats bedding her as a religious experience turns out to want her only as a stepping-stone, a means of grace (like the priest, perhaps, in *Such Is My Beloved*). Ilona, knowing the artistry that goes into her act, flatly refuses the doubtful honour of being treated as a Madonna, a pathway to the divine. "I told him I had my own dreams," she says later; "I told him I was a woman with a life quite apart from his . . . I wouldn't go on being the goddamned object that set off his sexual fantasies." Ilona does not embody any metaphysical reality, as far as I can see, nor does she appear to redeem or permanently reform any of the more or less corrupt individuals with whom she comes in contact. Occasionally, she is the means by which her admirers learn a kind of love, but in Callaghan's Toronto, the "evidence of God's pervasive presence," as Brandon Conron has said of his earlier novels, is "mighty tenuous." Or, at least, one can never be sure it is not faked, the line between real and faked being difficult to distinguish, especially when the whore-virgin-saint grows tired of being adored for what she symbolizes and speaks in the tones of watered-down 1970's feminism.

The transmutation of a long short story into a 200-page novel has allowed Callaghan to show more sides of Ilona's character, and to show her impact on more people, from the judge whose wife is confined to a wheelchair to the self-absorbed Hungarian exile, Robert. Yet Callaghan has not solved the real problem the story poses: what is the appropriate fate for Ilona Tomory? In *The Enchanted Pimp*, her career as a night-club entertainer wrecked before it has begun, she returns to prostitution, and ends up, as Dubuque foretold, knifed in the back by one of her resentful clients. For many reasons, an unsatisfactory ending. Some readers may feel justified in asking themselves whether the earlier version of the story does not embody that very hatred of women Dubuque saw in Ilona's clients, if the only convincing fate that can be dealt to the "gentle whore" is a knife in the back, in a scene that is more than a little voyeuristic. Here, Ilona survives, but her manner of survival does not convince one that Callaghan has sounded out his character fully enough. As soon as she leaves Bradley's, she becomes oddly insubstantial; suitably enough, perhaps, her fate is reported to Gil, the writer-bartender, by an unlikely visitor from another world, as if, once she leaves the trade, she is no longer Ilona Tomory but a fantasy girl in a glossy "lifestyle magazine." We are not shown what cravings or "dreams" her new life satisfies, what accommodation she has reached with life. Perhaps that is a necessary self-limitation on Callaghan's part, refusing to tell more about a character than he would claim to know, but it leaves the reader distinctly disappointed, as if after plumbing the depths of city life Ilona has settled for mere glamour, the debased currency our society has traditionally offered to women in

place of real power. What is it women do desire in men? The ending of *Our Lady of the Snows* offers only a glossier question-mark in place of an answer.

ANTHONY JOHN HARDING

BOUND

JANETTE TURNER HOSPITAL, *Borderline*. McClelland & Stewart, $19.95.

Borderline IS A BOOK about the boundaries between fiction and reality, as well as about the boundaries between person and person, good and evil, the past and the present. Janette Turner Hospital has moved from the largely realistic fiction of her first two books to a technique where each segment is realistic, but possibly untrue. Both *The Ivory Swing* and *The Tiger in the Tiger Pit* deal with fantasies, but contain them firmly: although people may act on their fantasies, the reader at least knows much of the time what is "real" within the fictional world. In *Borderline*, the narrator, Jean-Marc Seymour, is a piano-tuner who opposes his own craft of creating harmony "one note at a time" to that of his painter father, "the Old Volcano, who thinks that his paintings are the borders of reality." The father is recreating all the main characters of the story in vibrant acrylic colour, while the son is (re)creating them in words, each trying to capture (or create) the other, each measured against a circular creation fable of Borges. The other characters are not artists, but try to create an acceptable life for themselves, hallucinating, or rescripting sections of the past.

We are never sure whether the woman variously known as La Magdalena (because her face resembles Perugino's painting) or La Salvadora or "La Desconocida, the unknown or unknowable one," is really Dolores Marquez, or whether she is being pursued by agents of the Right or the Left. We have her picture (Perugino), but we learn nothing of her mind and little of her activities before her rebirth out of a frozen steer in whose carcass she was trying to cross from the U.S. into Canada. Smuggled across the border by Felicity and Gus, she is laid, almost unconscious, on a bed in Felicity's cottage, from which she has disappeared by the time Felicity returns with a priest. She is variously reported stabbed to death, employed, desperate for a picture of her children. But if La Desconocida remains unknown, the other characters come vividly alive, through artistic imagination in themselves and in their depiction by Jean-Marc. Augustine ("Gus") Kelly, the womanizing, whiskey-drinking insurance salesman, imagines the Customs booth as a confessional. He is returning from a sales conference which denounced "negative thinking . . . Gus knew he was addicted. This came from being Catholic and Canadian . . . "

Felicity, who spent her first ten years as a "missionary waif" in Kerala, and saw her father disappear out to sea in a snake boat with native fishermen whose cataracts he wished to remove, now manages an art gallery and drives a Datsun painted lapis lazuli. She is very attractive to men, and has been (with frequent intermissions) model and lover to the Old Volcano since she was eighteen: his paintings obsessively repeat her "lopsided eyes." Like Juliet in *The Ivory Swing*, Felicity likes "life in the fast lane"; like Elizabeth in *The Tiger in the Tiger Pit*, she dreams of reconciling father and son ("On the subject of fathers, she's a hopeless romantic"). Unlike both of them, she has never accepted the responsibilities of marriage and family. Fifteen years before the pres-

ent action, comforting Jean-Marc's fear of being abandoned by his father (Felicity then eighteen, Jean-Marc ten — her own age when abandoned), she gave her formula for self-comfort:

> That particular fear's easy to handle. You just say to yourself, 'I *am* all alone and I don't mind. I like it that way.' You see, Jean-Marc, the truth is that *everyone* is alone, and all the people who matter to you are going to leave you sooner or later. You expect it, so it doesn't bother you.

Even Felicity, however, does not know how to deal with the fear of bodily harm.

Throughout the book, references to literature and art help the characters to structure themselves and their relation to the mid-1980's. Questioned by two men, who claim to be from the FBI, about some clippings from newspapers:

> "It's part of a collection," Felicity said. "It belongs with Magritte and Escher and some stories by Borges . . . It's my immunization program. I mean, the desire to understand is itself absurd, isn't it?"

Despite the absurdity, Jean-Marc and his father are trying to assimilate in art (art contained and created by Hospital) the meaning of "*los desaparacidos*, the disappeared ones." *Borderline*, no neat "slice of life," is rather a gobbet of *lanx satura*, a marvellous success as fiction, as *actualité*, as exemplum of "fragments . . . shored against [our] ruins."

PATRICIA KÖSTER

DEUX GENERATIONS

DENISE BOMBARDIER, *Une enfance à l'eau bénite*. Editions du Seuil, n.p.

FRANCOIS GRAVEL, *La note de passage*. Editions du Boréal Express, n.p.

LE HASARD DES compte-rendus de lecture m'amène à rapprocher deux livres québécois qui, dépeignant tous deux le portrait d'une jeunesse, illustrent de façon frappante le gouffre qui sépare la génération née dans les années quarante et celle des années soixante, née après la Révolution tranquille. Denise Bombardier, l'auteure de la biographie romancée, *Une Enfance à l'eau bénite*, pourrait être la mère de Paul, le héros de *La note de passage*. Entre leurs deux jeunesses, le milieu, les idées, les valeurs ont été bouleversés. Paradoxalement, alors que Denise Bombardier raconte une enfance passée dans l'atmosphère étouffante des dernières années du règne de Duplessis, son personnage déborde de vitalité. Par contre, Paul, à qui la génération de Bombardier croyait avoir ouvert toutes les portes du savoir, de la liberté de pensée et donc de l'épanouissement personnel, est tristement blasé et désabusé.

Denise Bombardier, l'animatrice de l'émission littéraire bien connue de la télévision, nous raconte une éducation passée à l'ombre de la toute puissante Eglise catholique romaine sous la férule des religieuses. Petite fille de sept ans (âge de la première communion) au début du roman, elle termine ses études secondaires à la fin du récit. Le milieu qu'elle évoque nous est déjà bien connu par les romans de Marie-Claire Blais ou de Roch Carrier, ou encore par l'autobiographie de Claire Martin. Dans toutes ces oeuvres, on trouve de ces enfants à la fois rebelles et crédules dont l'imagination s'enflamme aux récits de la bible et dont la sensualité s'excite de l'interdit du péché. Enfants profondément marqués par l'idéologie dominante mais chez qui, semble-t-il, la censure et les contraintes ne font au contraire qu'aviver la joie de vivre, affermir le caractère et surtout provoquer une insatiable curiosité et soif d'apprendre. Enfants étrangement lucides aussi, qui comme la "petite Denise," prennent conscience de la contradiction entre le discours des prêtres et des religieuses qui proclament la supériorité des Canadiens français et la réalité écono-

mique et sociale de la domination anglaise.

Même si l'image de ce Québec révolu est bien connue, elle vaut bien qu'on l'évoque encore une fois quand elle met en scène un personnage aussi attachant. La vitalité de la protagoniste fait de cette éducation après tout assez banale une véritable aventure. Le moindre des personnages a du relief. Le tableau est brossé avec des traits rapides et vigoureux dans un style net et incisif qui transforme chaque incident en une aventure palpitante. Ainsi ce moment de la communion solennelle où l'héroine se rend compte que les gestes rituels n'ont pas été observés: "Soudain, je m'aperçois que le fils de l'instituteur n'a pas mis la main sur l'évangile, la seule chose qu'il ait à faire. Je ne peux pas m'arrêter de parler en plein milieu de l'acte de consécration, je ne vais pas non plus lui faire un geste de la main gauche car je risque de mettre le feu à ma robe. Je termine donc la prière, convaincue que nous avons raté la cérémonie." Denise Bombardier a le sens du drame!

Le récit s'arrête à la veille de l'émancipation de l'héroine quand celle-ci a appris à ne plus avoir honte de son corps et quand, libération ultime, elle refuse d'aller à la messe. Elle manifeste ainsi pour la première fois sa solidarité avec un père à la fois admiré et détesté, une des figures les plus intéressantes et les plus originales du livre. Etrange personnage que cet homme solitaire et insensible qui terrorise ses enfants et oblige sa famille à vivre dans une pauvreté humiliante. Cependant, ce père manifeste la même soif insatiable de connaissances que sa fille et une lucidité implacable vis-à-vis de la docilité de ses contemporains "culbécois" soumis à l'Eglise et aux Anglais. Il a le mordant, la dimension d'ombre et de tragique qu'on trouve chez certains personnages de M. Tremblay. Son intérêt réside aussi dans le double éclairage de sa présentation: incompréhension apeurée de l'enfant que torture la honte d'avoir un père incroyant et admiration mal cachée de la narratrice pour cet homme tellement en avance sur son temps.

Avec à peine trente ans d'intervalle, on pourrait se croire transporté sur une autre planète en commençant la lecture de *La note de passage*: tous les mythes, tous les interdits, toutes les hantises qui peuplaient l'univers de Bombardier ont disparu. La censure du savoir à été levée comme celle de la sexualité. Marx a remplacé Jésus. L'imaginaire se peuple des visions évoquées par la drogue. Et pourtant, Paul, à qui tout est permis, a perdu toute vitalité. Il ne s'intéresse que mollement à ses cours et méprise ses professeurs. Ses indignations même sonnent faux: "Souvent je pense que la seule solution, ce serait de les tuer, toute la gang, tous ceux qui ont plus de quarante ans, on efface tout et on recommence."

Alors qu'*Une enfance à l'eau bénite* ne racontait après tout qu'une enfance assez banale mais haute en couleurs à cause de la personnalité vibrante et de la sensibilité intense de la petite fille qui la vivait, *La note de passage* nous entraîne dans des aventures extraordinaires vécues par des personnages falots. Grâce à l'effet miraculeux de certains champignons hallucinatoires, nous échappons, en compagnie de Paul, à la platitude des cours de sociologie pour rencontrer Marx (mais seulement son cadavre réanimé), Lénine et même Hoxi Xoxa, président (maintenant défunt) de l'Albanie. Dans une veine décidément macabre, on voit aussi le tombeau des Rolling Stones et les fantômes des Beatles. Pendant ces rêves "psychodéliques," on se promène en Russie, en Albanie, dans les brouillards de Londres, en compagnie de notre personnage toujours aussi désabusé. Il s'agit sans doute d'une satire qui se veut méchante, mais rate souvent son coup,

du nouveau panthéon de la nouvelle génération québécoise.

Comme si tout le côté fantastique ne suffisait pas, l'auteur corse son récit d'une sordide histoire de vengeance contre le Prof. qui a emprunté la petite amie de Paul, le narrateur. Vengeance réussie puisqu'à la fin, tout rentre dans l'ordre. La petite amie revient. Paul reçoit "les notes de passage" qui lui permettront de continuer ces études qu'il poursuit avec si peu d'enthousiasme. S'agit-il d'un roman initiatique? Le rite de passage a-t-il été accompli? Le personnage de Paul ne retient pas assez l'attention pour que la question mérite réponse.

Il est peut-être injuste de reprocher à un auteur la médiocrité de ses personnages. Nul doute que *La note de passage* ne se veuille un réquisitoire contre l'époque au même titre que l'autobiographie de Denise Bombardier. Est-ce la faute de Gravel s'il n'a plus que des moulins à vent à pourfendre?

JACQUELINE VISWANATHAN

BLUE STREAKS

BRUCE MEYER & BRIAN O'RIORDAN, *In Their Words: Interviews with Fourteen Canadian Writers*. Anansi, $12.95.

BRIAN MOORE, *Black Robe*. McClelland & Stewart, $20.95.

I ENJOY THE PUBLISHED works of many of the writers interviewed in *In Their Words*, those of Layton, Leonard Cohen, Mandel, Moore, Souster, Purdy, and some others. But in this book of interviews all the writers are, with but two exceptions, alternately irritating and boring: I would not have read past the first few interviews had I not agreed to review the book. Interviewers Bruce Meyer and Brian O'Riordan are masters of the *non sequitur* and the missed opportunity. (I will not tediously substantiate the charges, or the others I could lay.) Anansi should not be encouraging otherwise serious writers and critics to embarrass themselves publically. The subjects of the interviews should look to their works, for I suspect that other readers also find it difficult, after reading such interviews, to approach the subjects' serious work with unsullied faith in the writers' intelligence. For example, I will find it a slippery proposition to receive "The Birth of Tragedy" on its own terms after encountering for what seems the millionth time Layton's baying: "[Cohen] claims I kicked open the door for him, which I did for a whole generation"; and I was tempted to bury Cohen's *Death of a Lady's Man* without afterthought upon reading the following: "I think Irving Layton once described my mind as 'unblemished by a single idea'." (Wasn't that Eliot on James?) And why have the interviewers not edited out the following elliptical distress call from the interchange with Dorothy Livesay:

> *Livesay:* . . . no, no, not a bowling alley . . . what do they call it . . . a place where they have long poles and push a ball around . . .
>
> *Interviewers:* You mean a pool hall?
>
> *Livesay:* Yes! (Laughter.)

We got Trouble.

Only the interviews with Raymond Souster and Eli Mandel are worth reading. Souster emerges as an authentic, eccentric humanist; remarkably, he does so despite the shortness of his interview and questions such as, "Childhood is a very important time for a writer. What stands out in yours?" The interview with Mandel is worthwhile for what he says about the Holocaust's being used sensationally in literature and for his Bloomian reflections on writing. Also, Mandel's interview is of a more satisfying length — given the fact that fourteen writers are interviewed in 184 pages. But I am not suggesting that *In Their Words*

would have been improved had Meyer and O'Riordan given us more of fewer. Those who enjoy interviews with Canadian literary figures are better served by Graeme Gibson's and Donald Cameron's volumes of interviews. Those who turn to *In Their Words* will be disappointed. They may even be left with a rewarding pastime irredeemably cheapened.

Meyer and O'Riordan's interview with Brian Moore is as perfunctory and discontinuous as any of the others. But in turning to Moore's latest novel, *Black Robe*, I will quote a couple of his remarks to the interviewers because those remarks are recent and because they help to show that *Black Robe* is both an extension of and a departure from Moore's earlier work. It is an extension of explorations begun in earlier novels because it is concerned with a test of religious faith. It is a departure because its protagonist is a seventeenth-century Jesuit missionary in Canada, a man who cannot be labelled one of Moore's "ordinary people"; and it is a departure formalistically, being a historical romance of the kind written by Nathaniel Hawthorne.

Seemingly incongruous with its form, *Black Robe* is written in a pared-down style that Moore believes complements the self-sustaining power of suspenseful narratives. (This faith in narrative and concern with the appropriate style first emerged in *The Great Victorian Collection*, 1975.) Moore observed to Meyer and O'Riordan that an overriding interest in narrative "forces you to write more leanly — in a direct, clear, clean way. My style has been evolving towards a more plain style." What such a style gains in narrative and poetic force it risks (in the hands even of such post-Hemingway adepts as Norman Levine and Moore) in verisimilitude and atmosphere; and with Moore we are talking of a writer who, as this quotation attests, values story. In Moore's recent novels, *Cold Heaven* (1983) and *The Temptations of Eileen Hughes* (1981), this plain style gains much and loses little. In *Black Robe* the writing is often flat, attenuated to dissipation, seemingly beaten in revision to too airy a thinness. For my taste, Brian Moore writes most splendidly when he imaginatively embeds his talents in the consciousness of his isolated protagonists and goes off in a white heat of defensive, offensive, and hopeful words, giving us characters such as Judith Hearne, Ginger Coffey, Brendan Tierney, Mary Dunne, and James Mangan. Surely a verbal dynamo can drive a narrative as well as does a plain style. Whatever, Moore has chosen the way of stylistic austerity, and an austere novel is what he has given us in *Black Robe*.

The narrative of *Black Robe* is the journey towards the Jesuit mission in Huronia (before the massacre there in 1640) of Father Laforgue, his young Norman assistant Daniel, and their Algonquin Indian guides, who abandon Laforgue and Daniel. The priest and young man are later rejoined by Daniel's alluring Indian lover and her family. But only Laforgue is credible as a character; and the details of the journey upriver convey the impression not of a voyage into the heart of darkness but of a glide down a Hollywood backlot. Nonetheless, nothing that Moore has written is without a centre of rich reward. And *Black Robe* rises to such levels of writing in its sustained positing of radical oppositions. The overarching opposition is that of civilization vs. nature, which opposition the novel expresses particularly in terms of European Christian vs. New World Savage. The European Christians are the original French Catholic explorers/exploiters of the area that became Quebec and Ontario. The New World Savages are Algonquins, Iroquois, and Hurons. Viewed thus, Moore can indeed be seen

to have written a Canadian version not of *The Heart of Darkness* but of Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*: the ancestral past and the tension of the spirit and the flesh are *Black Robe*'s true subject. (Moore's use of forest scenes especially brings Hawthorne to mind; I am not suggesting an indebtedness, though, but a remarkable, and I hope illuminating, similarity — in form, style, and intent.)

As deconstruction has reminded us, most binary oppositions are illusions that mask ideological prejudice. We are also that which we exclude from our self-definitions and thereby oppose ourselves to. *Black Robe* shows the ways in which European Christians such as Daniel, tempted by lust and love, easily become the opposite to that with which they had identified themselves. *Black Robe*'s oft-mentioned scene of cannibalism, where a young boy is parboiled and eaten in front of his father and sister, nicely illustrates this concept of the elusiveness of radical distinctions. Although the Savages are shown to eat their victims ritualistically for a complexity of reasons, one of those reasons is to possess the threatening qualities of a valiant foe. At the risk of trivializing fundamental distinctions — the actual as opposed to the symbolic, for instance — and a myriad of all-important details, it is yet worth noting that one of Father Laforgue's sacred trusts is the Eucharist — the body and blood of Christ that is ritualistically eaten at the anti-climax of the central Catholic mystery. Thus do Cannibalism and Communion help to erase what had appeared to be one of *Black Robe*'s blackest lines of demarcation between Savage and Christian.

The Indians in *Black Robe* curse a blue streak (or "like nuns," as we used to say) in good Anglo-Saxon. Since other reviewers have made much both for and against the linguistic suitability of the device, I will add only that I think it works well. In any case, few readers who were raised Catholic will regret the purile thrill when the Savage asks the weeping Priest who had been lost in the forest, "What is wrong with you, you silly prick?"

GERALD LYNCH

BARS IN BUFFALO

DAVID DONNELL, *The Blue Ontario Hemingway Boat Race*. Coach House, $8.50.

IN 1923 ERNEST HEMINGWAY returned to Toronto. He had worked at the *Star* in 1920 and then been their European correspondent. Paris from 1920 to 1923 had been exciting and Hemingway did not relish the idea of coming back, but he needed the money. He did not enjoy the months in Toronto and left after four; he later spoke with distaste of his time there.

A minor episode in literary history — not on your life. It has fallen to David Donnell in two incisive and imaginative short books to demonstrate the absolutely crucial part that this short stay played in the life of the greatest yet humblest of twentieth-century writers. In *Hemingway in Toronto* Donnell argued the case for the significance of this episode. His combination of impeccable scholarship and flawless reasoning demonstrated once and for all that the Hemingway "sentence" was not only made in Canada but was an expression of the force field of Canadian consciousness. This was recognized by Gertrude herself who, despite her advancing years and the ravages that time has taken, took time out from lunch with Matisse and wrote a wonderful Preface for our great Canadian scholar. This non-fiction work is now available in the geo-hagiographical section of the Hemingway shelf, which includes works on Hem in Africa, Paris, Key West and

on an overnight stay in Tonawanda, Pennsylvania, in which the author makes the ridiculous claim that Hemingway slept there. It is now well known, of couse, that Hem never slept. Which more or less explains *The Old Man & The Sea.*

Now Donnell has gone and done it again. In *The Blue Ontario Hemingway Boat Race* he has entered Hemingway's mind and presents, in 23 short chapters (which he calls "stories" in a cunning allusion to his subject's own method), the thought process, the movement of feelings and ideas that led to the transformation that his earlier book argued for from "outside." We are witness to the very moments when Hemingway formulated the ideas which made him rich and famous (before the television series hosted by Robin Leach revealed how magnificent the rich and famous really are). One had to "get a clear fix which was detached, in a way, but contained the emotion of the experience. Something which went deeper and stayed with the reader longer because it was simpler and more objective and more exact." It is great to be right there at the moment when a great writer hits upon the great idea that made him great.

Hemingway's thoughts about anything are worth most people's thoughts about nothing, and I can only pick and choose. Here is one of my favourites. "Germany was Germany and they had some good slopes but it was better to go skiing in Austria. There were parts of Austria which were very similar to parts of Italy. Europe was very different from America because it was much older and they didn't have as many lakes or great farms or endless highways; they had been fighting each other over national boundaries, this king and that king, and doing so without the clarity of new land, for centuries. But the hotels in Austria were good and the people were friendly." The magnificent banality, the homely pretentiousness, the subdued arrogance and the perfect vapidity of this is hard to beat. Donnell also reveals the inner logic of the Hemingway *man*ner (no pun intended). First, Hemingway often mentions artists and writers. This shows us that he is widely read and aware of all that has happened in European culture. But he never goes on too long or too deep which shows that he is not full of bullshit like writers like Kant and Mann. And his love for the outdoors and killing animals shows that he is not a sissy like . . . well I won't mention any names.

The climax of the book is magnificent. Taking off from a Hemingway report on a Japanese earthquake (Donnell does not mention this but my relentless scholarship has unearthed this fact [damn those wonderful puns, I can't help it]) Donnell imagines that a great quake has separated Toronto from Canada and sent it across Lake Ontario heading for Buffalo. Donnell uses this episode to reveal the essential spirit of Ernest (if I may be permitted this little intimacy). Most people of course would over-react to such an event, but not Hem. "Buffalo, he thought, this is incredible, we're going to Buffalo. The idea didn't displease him. There were bars in Buffalo, not like the hotel beverage rooms, Ladies & Gents, in Toronto, but real emporia." It is by such indirection that Donnell-Hemingway expresses the depthless shallows of one of the great adolescent American minds. Perhaps the greatest.

ROGER SEAMON

POLITICAL FRYE

DAVID COOK, *Northrop Frye: A Vision of the New World.* New World Perspectives (distributed by Oxford), $7.95.

DAVID COOK'S LITTLE BOOK, *Northrop Frye: A Vision of the New World,* is the third of a series of short monographs

published as a sideshow to Arthur Kroker's *Canadian Journal of Political Science*. The first, by Kroker himself, was a study of an already familiar Canadian preoccupation, as its title (*Technology and the Canadian Mind*) suggested; it dealt with Harold Innis, Marshall McLuhan, and George Grant, rather justly assessing their true importance by giving each a third of a long essay.

The next two volumes have each been devoted to an individual. Michael Weinstein, preceded by a massive introduction by Michael Dorland and Arthur Kroker, writes somewhat impenetrably, in *Culture Critique*, on Fernand Dumont, who is ignored by *The Canadian Encyclopaedia* and little known among the anglophone Canadian intelligentsia,, but here is hailed as "Québec's premier philosopher of culture." Reading between Weinstein's rather congested lines, overhearing rather than hearing him, I gain the impression of Dumont as a stern and sensible thinker of the kind most needed in Québec today, honest enough to acknowledge the failure of the first wave of *independantisme*, and willing to admit that intellectuals and artists have betrayed themselves through their reliance on the state to perform the great revolution in relationships they all desired.

Given the auspices of an academic journal of political thought under which this series appears, it is not surprising that the political element is stressed in all its volumes, and not inappropriate, since, for all his pietistic Anglicanism, George Grant has been as political a Tory as Bishop Strachan a century ago, McLuhan assiduously worked on a new politics of communication, and, however critical Dumont may be of Québecois writers who put their wavering faith in Lévesque, he cannot escape from the fact that in a situation like that of French Canada during the Quiet Revolution and afterwards a writer could no more evade being political than he could in Britain during the 1930's. *Northrop Frye: A Vision of the New World* is in accordance with the other volume, for at the very beginning David Cook remarks that: "The concern here will be with Frye as a social critic, and, in particular, with Frye's defence of liberalism and his critique of technology."

Like Cook, I have never taken Frye really seriously as a literary critic. His actual criticism, if by that term one means writing emerging from immediate and living contact with literature, was restricted to the reviews which over a few years he wrote for the Letters in Canada feature of the *University of Toronto Quarterly*. In *Anatomy of Criticism* he appears principally as an apologist for a mythopoeic view of the function of literature and as a brilliant architect of classificatory structures within which works of literature can be categorized and related, but taxonomy is not criticism, and it is significant that almost all the writers Frye mentions in this masterpiece of analytical structure were already dead; only in such a condition could they be arranged, like butterflies carefully pinned and spread out, in their proper places in relation to Frye's great scheme. As Cook remarks: "Frye has read and commented upon virtually every major writer. The usual fate is that they become grist for his mill used solely to define the mythological structure of the human mind."

I have never forgotten the occasion when Frye visited me at a house which had a splendid view of the ranges and peaks overlooking Burrard Inlet and Indian Arm, a view I showed him with a certain pride in having something special to offer my guest. We had no sooner gone out on to the deck and spied those grand ridges already acquiring their evening amethystine glow than Frye turned and walked back into the house:

"Those mountains make my blood run cold," he said as he went past me.

In this honest horror — for I am sure it was no mere gesture — Frye showed not only his fear of the grand in nature — and by implication his longing for the ordered Edenic Garden which Cook sees as one of the leitmotifs of his writing — but also a distrust for the visionary factor that mountains so eloquently image forth. In was, as Cook points out, the visionary in Blake that Frye distrusted, so that *Fearful Symmetry* became at least as much a work of denial as it was of affirmation. And beyond that distrust of the visionary, one senses an unease with the basic elements of literature, the plain word, the visualizing image, that makes Frye's criticism unsure as soon as current works by living authors are under consideration. The fact is, of course, that Frye himself is an eloquent rather than an evocative writer; he has none of the sheer literary grace of the great writer-critics like Coleridge and Arnold, like Baudelaire and Sainte-Beuve, like Eliot and Orwell and Edmund Wilson. Outside the academic world, whose honours hang from his belt like scalps, he would have gained little success as a practicing critic. It has always struck me that, as well as the pragmatism of a taxonomist, there was also a certain confession of critical deafness in Frye's famous dismissal of evaluative criticism in the first of his Conclusions to the *Literary History of Canada.*

What Cook argues rather convincingly is that the great importance Frye assigns to the role of literary critic is in fact a screen for a quite different role. Talking of *The Return of Eden,* he remarks that "the role of the literary critic had just received divine sanction as the observer and cataloguer of the various forms created in the interaction between God and humanity. The political dimension of this role will be described later." And a little farther on, discussing the Great Code, he argues that "the role of the literary critic is a mask that Frye puts on while he is really engaged in the more fundamental question of how one understands the experiences one has of the world."

Frye undoubtedly makes more sense as a cultural philosopher than he does as a literary critic. His "Conclusions" to the *Literary History* do not tell us all that much about the books Canadians write, but they are fine studies in social attitudes as they become transformed into literature and in the external circumstances that influence writers (hence by implication disproving his own Wildean arguments that literature is born only of literature). *The Great Code* is valuable as a study of the ways in which the typology and symbolism of the Bible have been transmitted to modern literature, but it also joins Frye's other works in presenting a moral view whose social extension I think Cook is justified in arguing leads toward the political.

Cook defines Frye's political stance as "liberal," and so, in the sense that Frye is an heir to Milton's tradition of dissenting radicalism and can so be distinguished from Marxists and Grantian Tories, it undoubtedly is. Frye has defined himself as culturally a decentralist but politically a centralist, yet it seems to me — and I think it seems so to Cook — that his Spenglerian support of culture, which is a localized manifestation, as against civilization, which is a universal and homogenized phenomenon, makes his political centralism dubious. His cult of the educated imagination predisposes him to the leisure society, and so, as Cook perceives, his attitude to technological advance, unlike that of the Grantians, is benevolent. Men may become cultured if their economic anxieties are removed.

All this — which Cook has done little more than adumbrate in his brief work

— seems to me to make good sense of Frye. Too taxonomically generalizing to be a good literary critic in the Arnold-Baudelaire-Wilson league, he is a fine cultural philosopher, and, in the sense of Herbert Read's "politics of the unpolitical" one of our more interesting quasi-political thinkers.

GEORGE WOODCOCK

PALIMPSESTS & PATAPHYSICS

SHEILA WATSON, *Five Stories*. Coach House, $7.50.

KARL JIRGENS, *Strappado*. Coach House, $7.95.

IN THIS WORLD of chaos, flux, and vicissitude there is little in which one can safely believe. Even the maxim of not being able to judge a book by its cover does not always hold, for the back covers of Sheila Watson's *Five Stories* and Karl Jirgens' *Strappado* both offer fair reflections of the books' contents. The former quotes Jan Marta: "These stories testify to the flexibility of Watson's use of poetic structures in her prose fiction; they provide a contrast which highlights the linguistic richness of prose poetry"; the latter asserts that "Karl Jirgens captures the absurd and comic unpredictability of contemporary North America. Experience is always on the verge of going out of control . . . ostensibly ordinary events [are interrupted], making the real become surreal." (The editions, incidentally, are by Coach House, and as one has come to expect from this press, beautifully crafted.)

Marta's comment, however, was written in 1980, about Watson's *Four Stories*; *Five Stories* is simply a reissue of the earlier work with the addition of a two and a half page story at the end, though the book offers no hint of this fact. Moreover, the first four stories were also originally published some years ago, two of them even antedating Watson's *The Double Hook* (1959). The point of this bibliographic note is not so much to reveal the extent to which the material has been recycled, as to avoid the errors which may attend misplacing a work in a temporal context, either literary or critical.

With a nod to Borges' Menard, then, one can conclude that Watson's stories are emphatically not the latest in post-modern fashions. They are, however, fundamental departures from the codes and conventions of the more or less "realistic" short story. Defeating the reader's expectations of genre, her stories are a good deal less interesting for *what* they mean than for *how*. In place of conventional settings, the stories are poised between myth and dreamscape; "meaning" via plot and character yields to "meaning" via symbol and image, suggestion and resonance: the escape from what William Gass calls "protective language" is nearly complete. Similarly her structures abandon those of conventional prose narrative, becoming poetic, allegorical, mythic.

Mythic references are thus points of departure, not arrival: structures to be used, upon which further structures can be superimposed. The first four stories take their mythic structure loosely from the Theban plays of Sophocles; that of the last resonates strongly with *The Double Hook*: "Here Coyote, the primitive one, the god-baiter and trouble-maker, the thirster after power, the vainglorious, might have walked since the dawn of creation — for Coyote had walked early on the first day." Watson's meaning (here and elsewhere) seems to be that underlying culture, like literature, is myth — and that fragmentation and destruction, both individual and col-

lective, attend the demythologizing of culture.

The "double hook" in these stories impales and yokes both myth and human experience, but the hook in the latter is not barbed: "reality" too easily slips off, and swims away into the waters of riddle and enigma. And while there is a good deal of intensity, of urgency, even, and occasional flashes of dry wit, the cumulative effect is a flatness of tone. Lacking a direct link with the world of experience, the words align themselves in seemingly unvarying cadences, which dull rather than sharpen the reader's perceptions. The stories constitute, to use Baudelaire's phrase, "*une forêt de symboles*" — a "*forêt*" in which the reader becomes too easily lost; as one reviewer complained of *Four Stories*, they "aren't very readable."

Far more engaging is Karl Jirgens' collection, *Strappado*. Prefacing the text is an acutely self-conscious "Pre-Text": "*there is neither end nor beginning, the text is simultaneously conceived and annihilated. Alpha becomes Omega . . . the snake biting its own tail*"; it continues, "The elements are always the same. A man, sitting in front of a typewriter . . . The blank page, and the audience, a thousand-eyed Argus . . . Both are simultaneously imagined and real. Both are reading, and both are read. A textual incarnation. . . . A thousand hands simultaneously turn the page." From this self-conscious postmodernist limbo, transfixed between writing and reading, being and non-being, the stories plunge toward an all-too-banal and mundane reality. But the controlling metaphor is strappado: in each story the free-fall is pulled up sharply, leaving the reader dangling.

Within this structural principle is another: each of these linked stories is loosely keyed to an element from the periodic table. The "benzine ring" is the "serpent with tail in its mouth. The closed molecular system." In the same way, the stories become a closed linguistic system, a verbal ring of experience — with the suggestion that vague threats lie just beyond the circle of even the most benign of activities. "Later, I got back to my typewriter in the kitchen and after a while I looked out the window and saw two Arabs charging up the street in twin white Eldorado convertibles yelling and waving their rifles over their heads." A typewriter and Pride of Arabia coffee serve as icons of this quotidian reality that invariably threatens to de-stabilize into images of violence and death, into the surreal: a poem comes alive, and convinces the writer's girlfriend to run off with him to South America where he (it) will fight as a revolutionary.

For the most part the tensions of such narrative structures work effectively; superfluous comments to the effect "I was at the end of my rope" seem an artificial alignment of story with controlling principle, and rather forced. Nonetheless, one surmises that Watson's palimpsests of the Theban plays will be seen as somewhat farther removed from the mainstream of modern fiction than Jirgens' explorations of (to quote the cover) " 'pataphysics,' the imaginary science of the completely impossible."

DAVID INGHAM

FABULOUS KEYS

MARIAN ENGEL, *The Tattooed Woman*. Penguin, $6.95.

CAROL SHIELDS, *Various Miracles*. Stoddart, $9.95.

SHORT STORIES: a collection of little keys which chime pleasingly and open nothing? master keys to the universe? chronicles to pay the bills? Both Carol Shields, in her first collection of short stories, and Marian Engel, in her last, raise these

possibilities. Most stories in both *The Tattooed Woman* and *Various Miracles* have been published elsewhere individually, yet gathered together they make new patterns, new texts, and allow us some sense of a larger canvas for these two writers.

In the Introduction to her valedictory collection of stories Marian Engel quite characteristically demythologizes the writing of short fiction. Despite her sense of the "super-reality" which lurks alongside and within everyday life, Engel will have us remember the labour of writing, the fact that it is often a bread and butter issue. For her, short fiction began as "practical exercises in earning necessities, chronicles to pay the bills"; the short story can feed a family today, the novel won't produce income for another year. It is a craft dependent not only on the author's imagination but also on skill and opportunity, and these are fostered by the resources of a healthy literary culture: by editors like Robert Weaver, programmes like CBC "Anthology," journals such as *Saturday Night*, by the Writer's Union which meant so much to Engel.

Both Engel and Shields are established as novel writers and, in thinking about what shorter forms of fiction enable the writer to do, it is as well to follow Engel and think about the practicalities. For women writers in particular, writing during what Plath called "the still blue hour" before the baby's cry, shorter forms of fiction may be particularly appropriate. And gender and discourse may relate in other ways. In both *Various Miracles* and *The Tattooed Woman* the discontinuous and diverse nature of a collation of stories written over a period of time, their resistance of completion and order, is appropriate to their recurring subject: the life of women "of a certain age," no longer "wildly attractive," not able to be represented in terms of convention or stereotype.

The title story of Engel's collection is emblematic. We know the woman's "vital statistics" — forty-two, married half her life, her son has left home, her husband has a lover who is a younger version of herself, "tight, white, hairless." We are told none of the things which personalize her; she remains nameless. Yet this is how it should be in a culture where "tight, white, hairless" rules, where woman's body is the currency of value which in middle age degenerates through time, illness, surgery. Engel's woman reclaims her body herself, by carving her flesh with arabesques and figures: "I am carved like an old shaman, I am an artifact of an old culture, my body is a pictograph from prehistory . . . but I have resisted. I am Somebody." In Ontario, of course, this marks her as an aged and demented woman rather than an old and wise one; in western and urban culture the woman is unable to redefine herself. The story concludes ironically when the woman's doctor comments that the markings will make "a very striking tan" — after all, what else can she attain to if not a conventionally attractive body? Her gesture of resistance is absorbed, there are no terms available for such a woman to be somebody.

Other stories take up the theme with a lighter note. For example "The Last Wife," like "The Tattooed Woman," goes back to "old primitive things" and is able to renew herself by introducing a flaw into "the last happy family." Other women — Madame Hortensia, Bernard Orge — are able to disrupt and disguise by assuming another personality. Such strategies to break the "old moulds" are celebrated, for although Engel's middle-aged females are threatened by death, cancer, ageing, and divorce, what is to be feared most of all is boredom, a half life.

These stories are fabulous in the fullest

sense. Characters flip into what Engel calls "super-reality" by dreaming under a blossoming tree, escaping back to childhood vision, punching a brother out cold. Each of these transform the prison of the middle-aged body, launching into a new life by shedding the old carapace: "Woman with grey middle-aged silk bottom sits hatching outside Royal Bank surrounded by heliotrope." These stories are celebratory and marvellous and, with few exceptions, work together. Even the few which are less successful, such as "Feet" and "Banana Flies," leave us with a gem or two: "Something's happening: I am a bird in the shape of a banana peel, going far, but not to the terminus."

Carold Shields' stories also tend to focus on an "uneasy age" for women, a time when "original sensation" is rare and to be cherished. Neither Engel nor Shields are interested in "traditional narrative" or "reality." Both court what Engel calls "that element of everyday life where the surreal shows itself . . . and people have extraordinary conversations because they have confused clam and lamb soup." This is the kind of transformation which is the thread of *Various Miracles*. So, in "Flitting Behaviour" the story ends with a "descending order of coherence" through language play: "The locked door of the room" is heard by one character as "The wok cringes in the womb," by another as "The sock is out of tune" and finally, in a tenuous resolution, it becomes "The mock orange is in bloom." Process of synchronization, when characters say the same thing at the same time on different continents, when one voices the thoughts of another, when text and story prefigure an event, or when four passengers on a bus in Cincinnati each happen to be reading the same book, all produce the effect of the surreal erupting into the everyday, a celebration of strangeness and irrationality, keeping logic at bay. Most of the twenty-one stories collected in *Various Miracles* present some form of play between language and reality, between the world of the text and the world it seeks to represent. At times this tends to become repetitious and a little too ingenious: one is inclined to read the story looking for the trick in a rather mechanistic way.

Shields takes as her epigraph Emily Dickinson's advice to the woman writer: "Tell all the truth but tell it slant." This seems to suggest that somewhere there will be a centre in the text, albeit encoded and cryptic, which will hold some meaning outside of discourse. Yet the stories themselves often refuse this, as "Scenes" makes clear. The character, Frances, notes that the scenes in her life rarely point to anything but themselves, they "can't be traded in or shaped into instruments to prise open the meaning of the universe" and yet they are what life is made of, one moment fitting against the next "like English paving-stones." So the "truth" these stories convey is ironic; they tend to undermine the pretensions of Literature to come to terms with the "fond" of human experience (as the child in "Sailors lost at Sea" so disarmingly puts it). Shields mocks the notion that behind each story is a deep cave of meaning we can choose to enter. In the title story of the collection the keystone page of Camilla's novel blows away down College Street, the one fragment which pulls her whole novel together and gives it logic. The text which is left represents nothing but itself, it refuses to be the key to the universe which, in the terms of *Various Miracles*, is how it should be.

Both *The Tattooed Woman* and *Various Miracles* focus on the everyday, and present happiness as something chancy and unreliable. Yet the stories in each are about transformations rather than endurance, they celebrate not stoicism but renewal. To return to the tattooed

woman again: it is not imprecise diction, carelessness, or romanticism that leads Engel to describe the markings on the woman's body as tattoos rather than scars. Tattoos project a message which is chosen, deliberate, the obverse of the silent, martyred bearing of scars. It is the transformation of scar into tattoo, of passivity into action, of logic and reason into strangeness and coincidence that Engel and Shields celebrate in these stories. To enjoy them, be prepared to enter an area where the skin of logic is pulled back, and anything can happen. That is, be prepared to play.

GILLIAN WHITLOCK

DARKNESS

JOAN E. O'DONOVAN, *George Grant and the Twilight of Justice*. University of Toronto Press, $12.00.

GEORGE GRANT'S CAREER has been devoted, as he writes in *Time as History* (1969) to enabling us "to understand our understanding of ourselves." Joan E. O'Donovan's detailed study *George Grant and the Twilight of Justice* seeks both to understand and to go beyond Grant's understanding of our understanding of ourselves. If this description seems more than a little regressive, that is in part because Grant's public writing and speaking since *Philosophy in the Mass Age* (1959) has posed a single question: how can man (a term that he persists in using even in 1986) "live with courage in the world" given the "terrifying darkness" that has fallen on modern justice?

Grant is a synthetic rather than an original thinker, as O' Donovan readily admits. Most of what he has to say is borrowed from his reading of European metaphysics (Kant, Hegel) and modern *Existenzphilosophie* (Heidegger and, especially, Nietzsche) on the one hand, and from the political philosophy of Leo Strauss and Jacques Ellul. From the last two he derives his definition of the essence of liberal ideology: the belief in progress through the application of technique. According to Grant, contractual liberalism arose out of the uneasy conjuncture of Greek rationality and biblical Christianity. The Protestant conception of history as *Geschichte* — a progressive process encompassing past, present, and future — views reason as an instrument in the pursuit of mastery over human and non-human nature. But that striving culminates in the modern catastrophe which Nietzsche alone had the courage to recognize. In *Time as History*, Grant puts in a few words the problem which Nietzsche bequeathed us:

> According to Nietzsche in the light of the historical sense men have to give up belief not only in the transcendent ground of permanence (God is dead), but also in the moral valuations which accompanied the former, particularly the idea that our existing has its crowning purpose in rationality.

And further,

> We make ourselves as we go along. This is what Nietzsche means when he says that we are at the end of the era of rational man. We must live in the knowledge that our purposes are simply creations of human will and not ingrained in the nature of things. But what a burden falls upon the will when the horizons of definition are gone. This is the burden that Nietzsche sees the historical sense imposing on man. On the one hand, we cannot deny history and retreat into a destroyed past. On the other hand, how can we overcome the blighting effect of living without horizons?

Robbed of the power to believe in any transcendent values, condemned to endless becoming, yet unable to love the destiny to which he has been ineluctably led by his own dynamic willing, modern man finds himself surrounded by darkness in an era when, as Grant writes in *English-Speaking Justice* (1977) "obli-

vion of eternity" has become his "self-definition."

That is a destiny which Grant is unwilling to admit: "I do not understand how anybody could love fate, unless within the details of our fates there could appear, however rarely, intimations that they are illumined; intimations that is, of perfection (call it if you will God) in which our desires for good find their rest and their fulfillment" (*Time as History*). Thus Grant invokes the ontological argument, wanting, as Nietzsche says of Kant, to have it both ways. His final gesture in the face of the alarming questions he raises in attempting to think the whole of modern destiny is a retreat into silence: "In the darkness one should not return as if the discoveries of modern science had not taken place; nor should one give up the question of what it means to say that justice is what we are fitted for; and yet who has been able to think the two together? For those of us who are lucky enough to know that we have been told that justice is what we are fitted for, this is not a practical darkness, but simply a theoretical one" (*English-Speaking Justice*).

In the concluding chapter of *George Grant and the Twilight of Justice*, Joan O'Donovan asserts that Grant is "content with 'refusing' Nietzsche rather than refuting him; and therein lies Grant's nobility, in his refusal of Nietzsche." This sentence points at once to the inadequacy of Grant's philosophical stance and to the weakness of O'Donovan's study. Oracular and ponderous in style, endlessly repetitive in his elaboration of a single theme, George Grant has nonetheless spoken to Canadians with a voice of compelling resonance. As Nietzsche suggests, the language of the past is always oracular — intelligible only to those 'builders of the future who know the present.' Out of his deep roots in the conservative and Loyalist tradition, Grant has aroused in his readers a sense of what it means to "love one's own." Again in Nietzsche's words, he demonstrates that "history is necessary to the man of conservative and reverent nature who looks back to the origins of his existence with love and trust.... 'Here one could live,' he says, 'as one can live here now — and will go on living; for we are a tough folk, and will not be uprooted in the night.' " Even those who, like Eli Mandel, are embarrassed by Grant's retreat into the sanctified realm of revelation acknowledge that he has opened the "intolerable question": how is it possible to live as if time were history? Yet in tracing and retracing the theme addressed in all of Grant's work, O'Donovan does not once refer to Dennis Lee or Eli Mandel. Her discussion of Grant's "patriotic beginnings," his understanding of history, and what she terms the "Dissolution of the Liberal Synthesis: Grant's Rejection of 'History' " is careful and comprehensive, if uncritical, as is her examination of Grant's debt to Leo Strauss. Her treatment of the influence of Jacques Ellul, whose book *The Technological Society* was "a major event in Grant's understanding of our world" (J. Badertscher, *George Grant in Process*, 1978) is less than satisfactory. O'Donovan gives two pages to Grant's encounter with Marxism, while noting that "Grant takes up Marxism as the most significant philosophical representation of the modern historical self-consciousness." There is no reference, in her index, to Marcuse (whose "sentimentalized Marxism" Grant derides) or to Freud, and Sartre is dismissed in a footnote. Most disappointing is O'Donovan's failure to explore the problematic nature of Grant's response to Nietzsche. Nietzsche, O'Donovan writes, "can embrace the modern 'oblivion' as preparing the ground for a still nobler vision only because he believes that men are 'beyond good and evil.' The

light in the darkness for both Nietzsche and Heidegger is the conviction that ' "Man is the as yet undetermined animal" ' (*TH*, 34); that he may yet enter into a fuller creativity and freedom out of his own immanent potentialities. Grant, of course, stands outside of this hope for the future." The easy "of course" with which O'Donovan passes over Grant's 'refusal' exposes her to the charge that *George Grant and the Twilight of Justice* is an apology rather than a genuine attempt at critical analysis. Indeed, in the Preface to her study, O'Donovan writes, "This book is both the means and the fruit of my *intellectual conversion* from the liberalism in which I was educated" (italics mine). As a convert, however, O'Donovan is not restrained by the humility which prevents Grant from plunging into theological disputation. The final chapter of *George Grant and the Twilight of Justice* is filled with references to "Christ's eschatological judgement," "scriptural truth," the "supra-historical grasp of the supra-historical truth" given in Plato and the Gospels, and "the presence of the truth in the presence of the crucified and resurrected Christ." In her conclusion, O'Donovan displays every symptom of Nietzsche's "bad conscience" without any sign of having read Nietzsche.

Grant's silence is deeply troubling to readers who have been moved by his hope that human beings may at some moment "be opened to the whole in their loving and thinking, even as its complete intelligibility eludes them." Grant adds, "remembering only occasionally can pass over into thinking and loving what is good. It is for the great thinkers and the saints to do more." In attempting to cross the boundary which Grant has drawn for himself, O'Donovan does an injustice to her subject. One is unhappily reminded of the office performed for Cibber in *The Dunciad*:

> The Goddess then, o'er his anointed head,
> With mystic words, the sacred Opium shed.
> And lo! her bird (a monster of a fowl,
> Something betwixt a Heideggre and Owl)
> Perch'd on his crown. (ll. 287-91)

But Grant is not dull. If in all his writing and speaking the same theme is tirelessly repeated, often in the same formulations, in urging us to what Heidegger calls "*das andenkende Denken*" — a "thinking that recalls" — Grant has had a liberating effect on those who have been attentive to his thought. As William Christian expresses it, he is "offering us a challenge to think together the achievements of modern science and of classical philosophy" (*George Grant in Process*). In so doing, he has stimulated us as Canadians to "think that we have become" — to understand ourselves and the place we occupy within the American empire, and he offers us, despite his evasiveness, at least some glimmer of hope for the future.

The destiny of modern man — the consequence of his unlimited will to mastery — is rapidly overtaking him, as Nietzsche predicted it must. The words from the *Bhagavad Gita* quoted by Robert Oppenheimer as he witnesed the explosion of the first atomic bomb at Los Alamos in 1944 spring to mind: "I am become death, the destroyer of worlds." At such a moment, anyone who claims, as O'Donovan does, to possess certain knowledge about the future is only rendering the darkness more dense. It has been George Grant's role, in contrast, to make that darkness visible without pretending to dispel it. Therein lies his nobility.

HILDA L. THOMAS

A MAP OF CHASMS

ARTHUR KROKER, *Technology and the Canadian Mind, Innis/McLuhan/Grant.* New World Perspectives, $8.95.

ARTHUR KROKER BELIEVES that the most creative confluences of social thought in Canada have been stimulated by the tension between technology and tradition. George Grant represents the pull of tradition, Marshall McLuhan the attractions of technological humanism, and Harold Innis a complex balance which Kroker calls "technological realism."

His brief book (129 pages and notes) is clearly intended as a map and he focuses sharply what may well be the Canadian dilemma. One needs to remember, however, that even good maps can mislead: without the mountains, B.C. looks much like Alberta or, if one just attends to sizes and shapes, the Albany River valley may resemble the cradles of human civilization.

So with Kroker's book. It is true that Innis, McLuhan, and Grant are all, if you will, "philosophers of technology." But they do not mean the same thing by "technology," and, though they are all confronting the same phenomenon (as all maps are confronting the same world), they do not see it alike. In *English-Speaking Justice*, for instance, Grant seems to blame technology on Immanuel Kant who turned "knowing" into a kind of "making." Grant is worried about our separation from an original nature, given by God. What we usually think of as technology — the interposition of some physical contrivance between ourselves and our aims — is more nearly what Innis has in mind and Innis is concerned with the ways in which these contrivances reshape space and time, concentrate power, and so change the feasibility of various aims. McLuhan was chiefly concerned with the ways in which perceptions and messages are changed by technology.

Kroker writes as though "technology" has a substantial unity of meaning and so he somewhat blurs the possibility that each of these thinkers gave the right answer within his chosen perspective. Grant may be justly pessimistic about recovering a lost naturalness just because what we are now willing to count as knowledge always has an element of creativity about it. (If one reverts to Grant's position, one may soon want to drive the poets from the city.) Innis may have been right in thinking that a certain kind of technology concentrates both information and power in a way which situates a country like Canada on the margins of civilization and makes our existence a continuous struggle requiring the constant creation of counter cultures.

But Kroker does force us to realize that Canadian culture has always had to struggle to bridge a chasm. He rightly situates the chasm, I think, between cultural structures whose origins are in "the past of European culture" and their current manifestations which must face "the future of the New World." But he does not situate "the past" and "the future" of which he speaks. Canada was settled by people who in one way or another missed the enlightenment of the seventeenth and especially the eighteenth century. The French were here before Descartes was even placed on the Index. The Scots came largely from the highlands, the Irish either from Scots-dominated communities or, again, from a society which had remained with older ways of thought. The United Empire Loyalists (who did not, despite Kroker, include the very Scottish Grants!) rejected the American form of the new outlook. Later, we brought waves of immigrants from eastern Europe. Only after World War II did we get *very* many immigrants from the Europe transformed

by the enlightenment. Kroker is quite right to focus on technology in some sense or other. The technology which created our tensions — either in Grant's or in Innis's sense — came from the world on the other side of this divide, a world new in time rather than in space. Because it reconstituted human societies — organizing people in large groups, dividing families as work called from distant places, and (as Grant would insist) creating new desires — it created a clash in Canada.

But this technology is not the one McLuhan is talking about. McLuhan (who, as Kroker reminds us, maintained his Catholic sense of community) hoped that the new technology of *communications* would bring us together again and make us recognize the human race, however fearful he was it might just as easily swallow us. Equally, however, the world of plastics and electronics which has replaced the coal-and-steel era may very well enable people to divide again into smaller groups and so permit some restoration of the older culture. But, in these terms, one must be careful to distinguish almost item by item within technology. The railway, which so fascinated Innis, linked people together, filling in the space along the way. If Moose Jaw could become a hiding place for Al Capone (and perhaps some of his treasure) then Moose Jaw was a live part of the world which extended out from Chicago. Moose Jaw was the end of the Soo Line, but it was also on the C.P.R. and so had ties to Toronto and Vancouver. The airplane, by contrast, moves people over the less populated spaces and Moose Jaw no longer lives in the minds of Chicago gangsters. That may be as well, but the airplanes now fly over and VIA Rail limps along leaving Moose Jaw a little forlorn. A strategy for dealing with technology needs to cherish all the distinctions (Innis lavished great care on each of his special inquiries), but they tend to fade away on Kroker's map.

All this, of course, is only to say that Kroker's book forces us to ask many more questions than it answers — as, after all, any map must. As a first guide to this complex terrain it is very valuable. It is mostly crisp and clear. Now and then (as on p. 63) Kroker lapses into the locutions beloved of social scientists and philosophers. ("McLuhan's technological humanism was at the forward edge of a fundamental 'paradigm shift' in human consciousness.") Do shifts have edges? Is it human consciousness which is "shifting"? Can paradigms shift for themselves or only be replaced? Perhaps this mysterious sentence is meant to tell us only that Kroker has heard of Thomas Kuhn and the theory of paradigms in science, and perhaps of the neo-Wittgensteinians as well. Modern academia requires that one drop the odd code-word; but, to be fair, Kroker is quite sparing of them.

Hopefully, there is *not* a "Canadian mind," and Aristotle and the Arab philosophers were at least right in thinking that we all share the same agent intellect, but everyone interested in Canadian thought ought to read this book — and get busy trying to disentangle the questions and puzzles it poses.

LESLIE ARMOUR

opinions and notes

FORUM ON SKVORECKY REVIEWED

LITERARY MIRRORS

> History has destroyed Central Europe. The great Central European novel has enthroned history.
>
> MILAN KUNDERA

> An emigré writer is not an anomaly in our century (and since Ovid and Dante he probably never was). Yet only those survive emigration who left with baggage that is large enough to accommodate the whole world, and who do not attempt to throw everything away (including childhood and style) in the vain hope that they will be able to grasp the world anew.
>
> A. J. LIEHM

> An artist must be a reactionary. He has to stand out against the tenor of the age and not go flopping along; he must offer some little opposition.
>
> EVELYN WAUGH
> *(quoted by Skvorecky)*

> But isn't verbalization of what remains unexpressed precisely one of the fundamental responsibilities of a writer?
>
> A character in *The Engineer of Human Souls*

THE NOVEL THAT RECEIVED the Governor General's Award for literature in 1984 is anything but a typical Canadian novel. The name of its author is not easy to pronounce for anyone born between St. John's, Newfoundland and Vancouver Island. Its title, at first sight and to unsuspecting eyes, seems a puzzling balancing act between technological pragmatism (the Engineer) and a sesne of metaphysics (human souls). On second, and more informed thought, however, the title turns out to be a quotation from Stalin used in a spirit which the reader (I assume a reader who is politically underinformed, or shall we say, unburdened) will only begin to grasp as he turns the pages of this most unusual of Canadian books.

Is it then a Canadian book at all, we might ask. Indeed it is, and the judges for the Governor General's Award showed wisdom and foresight in their choice. However, it seems that there are some who do not share this view. In addition to a large number of favourable reviews, there are some which vary from patronizing coolness to downright anger (strangely enough the latter are by Canadian authors). The question now is, what has this comic, tragic, ironic, and learned book with its many intertwined stories, Rabelaisian humour, aphoristic wisdom, colourful illustrations of political events, and, above all, its challenging literary components, done to raise some readers' hearts and other readers' tempers?

Should we turn to a folksey adage about the eye of the beholder? Or perhaps to a contemporary philosopher of literature, Michel Foucault, who writes that "the principle of interpretation is nothing but the interpreter himself"? Regarded in the common spirit emanating from these two very different formulations, one might say that, broadly speaking, North American reviews of *The Engineer of Human Souls* — British reviews have a rather different tenor — seem to fall into four groups, which I propose to label light-heartedly "kindred spirits," "professionals," "culturists," and "ideologists."

A good example of the first group is the eminent Polish critic and Shakespeare scholar, Jan Kott, who in the *New Republic* (27 August 1984) stresses the epistolary aspects of *The Engineer*: numerous letters of the narrator's friends which are scattered throughout the text. Kott sketches several of these biographies

with the deep understanding that comes from having experienced a similar fate. The Professor of English, on the other hand, who reviews *The Engineer* in *The Progressive* (March 1985) clearly shows that the text inspires him professionally. Dwelling on "layers of the narrative" and the "variety of distancing devices" he obviously considers them the most appealing aspects of the novel. Michael Heim's review in *The Nation* (4-11 August 1984) reveals another kind of professionalism. As the successful translator of Milan Kundera's best-selling novels, Michael Heim understandably has another strong interest — the way meanings are transmitted from one language and culture to another. No wonder, therefore, that he particularly stresses the ease with which Skvorecky moves between Central Europe and Canada (an ease which is alien to Kundera who, though equally intent on bridging cultures, works with very different linguistic tools). Michael Heim finds that the Czech and the Canadian worlds are so deftly combined in Skvorecky's novel that it "demonstrates emblematically, as it were, the value of emigration." John Enright, who discusses *The Engineer* in the *New York Review* (27 September 1984), seems to belong to the third group — the "culturists." He also follows Skvorecky's own recipe for approaching literature: a very thorough reading. This reviewer, to say the least, catches the remarkable cultural echoes which reveal the inner life of the work. Sam Solecki's review in the *Canadian Forum* (August/September 1984), though clearly more aware of political angles, should be listed with my "culturists" because he fully realizes that the author of *The Engineer* is, above all, a realist who reflects social and cultural assumptions in his fictional characters, thus performing the exceedingly difficult artistic function of expressing the general in the particular.

Now what about the "ideologists"? When I read the title of Terry Goldie's review "Political Judgments" (*Canadian Literature*, Spring 1985) I reacted with joyous anticipation. Finally, I thought, there is someone who will take on the many political aspects of the novel, discuss, for example, the pressure of political ideologies reflected in the characters, trace the way the subtext reflects and weighs whole clusters of general assumptions, revealing them as dangerous half-truths. I wondered how the reviewer would handle the challenge some of Skvorecky's arguments would present to John Stuart Mill's cherished ideas on freedom, or how he might interpret the implications about democracy's loss of faith in itself. I expected this review to do that which other reviews, for personal, professional, or literary reasons had not done.

I was naive. For the review spoke about "racism," "anti-feminism," and referred to, hold your hats, "a failure of humanity in the book." Why, one might ask, would a reviewer not delight in the wealth of his magnificent tool, the English language, and use the crude, and overexerted bludgeon of a cliché? If Skvorecky's characters are "known by the language they speak," as George Steiner says in another connection, so, to remind you of my initial point, are the reviewers. And, I am afraid, the "ideological" reviewers most of all. Their "linguistic system," if you wish to speak with the literary theorists, clearly reveals its drastic limitations. That hurts. Particularly because they are Canadian reviewers.

Among the alleged victims of Skvorecky's various anti-attitudes is the leftist Arab student Hakim in the professor-narrator's literature seminar. If Hakim, as Terry Goldie claims, reveals the author's bias, why does the latter provide him with the brightest intellect in class? Why does he call him "a young man

suffering from intellectual hunger, and the university establishment, grown hyperthropic with freedom, can only offer him alternatives, not answers"? "Anti-Arab"? I prefer to believe that the reviewer made up his mind before he finished the book, rather than suspect him of taking Montaigne-like musing for hateful parochialism.

Another point much stressed by "ideological" criticism is Skvorecky's alleged "sexism." Claude Corbeil, for example (*Globe and Mail*, 19 July 1984), is too angry to notice that the professor/student seduction scene (Ms. Corbeil dwells on this topic for a full third of her review) is purposely couched in the vocabulary of the plastic values of contemporary Western society. A veritable feast (or a set trap?) for a semiotician-interpreter, the scene takes place in a parked Cadillac, and, while appropriately carried away by the heat of passion, the girl "reaches blindly for something on the dashboard and with the precision of a concert pianist she presses one of an array of buttons" . . . whereupon "the wide back of the front seat begins slowly, quietly to recline." How different, in comparison, the language — or, if we like, the principles of semiotics — of the narrator's first love experience thirty-five years earlier in Bohemia when Nadia's various petticoats and woollen socks (needed for a long, uphill trek back to her village) did not fall to the ground from his parents' living room couch, because Nadia, shy and awkward, kept them on. It seems clear that Skvorecky has set up two contrasting love-stories with all the accessories of the social and emotional context. To speak here of anti-feminism is to miss the whole point.

So, in the final analysis, what kind of a novel is *The Engineer of Human Souls*? For reasons that should be obvious by now, this critic will avoid the term "objectivity," but she hopes to be able to lay claim to rationality. Four aspects must again suffice for a discussion which is bound to be utterly superficial in view of the overwhelming wealth of the novel. Again, I propose to name my categories: first, the novel's discursive length, its "talkativeness"; second, the shadows of many miniature novels concealed in it, in other words, the novel's "diversity"; third, its complex systems of language, its "instruments"; fourth, its intrinsic relation to Western literature, its "literary mirrors."

The "talkativeness": the sense of irritation regarding the length of Skvorecky's novel is shared by several reviewers. It is indeed a long book. But perhaps we should look beyond the 571 pages in the figurative sense of the word. We might realize that we are faced here with a deep and essential trait of the Central European mind. The Good Soldier Svejk, for example, habitually stifles his Austrian military interrogators with so much unwanted information that they let him off, just to get rid of him. Josef K. in Kafka's *The Trial* keeps up throughout the novel an intensive search for an authority to whom he could exactly and fully explain his innocence. His search for judgement is, at the same time, a search for a listener (who, we know, he never finds). The Czech writer Jiri Grusa's novel *The Questionnaire* (1982) is a 278-page long response to a standard questionnaire related to a job application. Refusing to provide standard answers, the narrator embarks on a motley search of his origin, his family, friends, loves, his nation and the nature of life. For those who mention Milan Kundera as a writer who is also Czech but turns out much shorter novels, I would say that Kundera models his texts consciously on the French who, with notable exceptions, find it bad form to go beyond, say, 200 pages. Moreover, what about two Central European (Austrian) master-

pieces like Musil's *Man Without Qualities* and Broch's *The Sleepwalkers*? One is over a thousand, the other 761 pages long.

Milan Kundera said in an interview that the modern world's upheavals take place in miniature form in that small area at the heart of Europe. Could it then be that the immediate pressure of historical events, the constant seesaw of political powers has created an urgent need for the writers from that part of the world to contemplate this and discursively tell about it and its effect on human lives? "To have lived is not enough for them," says Beckett's occasionally very wise Vladimir in *Waiting for Godot*, and his fellow tramp echoes him: "They have to talk about it." And is it not apparent that the international literary scene is becoming increasingly enriched by voices from there? Could this also be the basis of the obvious resentment of Canadian reviewers who do not wish to know about these stories because they refuse to realize (for I cannot believe that intelligent persons, as they surely are, would be blind to the general implications of Skvorecky's textual feat) that the stories are also about themselves? Could one speculate that such an attitude — *bona fide*, to be sure — makes them render a disservice to Canadian literature by refusing to walk through the doors to the world at large which such a work throws open, but rather locking these doors with the padlocks of stereotyped ideas?

The "diversity": most critics have commented on the way the novel moves through time and space. Despite appearances, and a typical initial irritation (as in Jan Koff's review) about the "overwrought narrative sophistication," this is less of an obstacle to reading enjoyment that it might have geen a couple of generations ago. Our media-oriented generation is used to being whisked from the Philippines to Morocco, or from Moscow to Delhi between the first and second bites of their morning toasts. Skvorecky takes advantage of this newly-won nimbleness of our minds. He takes the reader from a small town in Nazi-time Bohemia to the Toronto of the 1970's; from Israel during the aftermath of the Twelve Day War to the plains of Australia; from Stalinist Prague to Upper State New York in the 1970's; from a Czech munitions factory during World War II where weapons were forcibly fashioned to be used against the Allied Forces, to a Canadian university classroom where the children of those against whom the weapons were used, discuss the pros and cons of the Vietnam War. Initially breathless, the reader soon begins to realize that the author leads him with a sure and calm hand, and controls the strands of the various lives which meet, intertwine and separate again.

The various life stories bobbing in and out of the text — each could provide material for another novel — emerge partly from the narrator's reminiscences and partly from the letters he receives. There is, for example, the gallant Prema Skocdopole, who forms underground resistance groups against any totalitarian régime he happens to live under — Nazi, Communist, or whatever. At one point the clandestine group is caught (which régime was it now? It matters little to the young man who does not want to be told what to think). Prema escapes and embarks in a picaresque journey which leads over various European transit camps, New Guinea oil-refineries, Australian farmlands, and a disastrous trip back to Prague. Having survived all kinds of political hurricanes, Prema dies in a real hurricane in Australia. His is a story, unique and yet average, extending into the world we know in Canada from the troubled centre of Europe where

Kafka's ghost smiles mysteriously over the dark roofs of an ancient town.

Ancient towns and ancient cultures: Rebecca Silbernaglova, the narrator's friend from highschool, belongs to both. Her life story, shared in part by many new citizens of the New World, shimmers through the pages of *The Engineer of Human Souls*. By 1945 Rebecca is a survivor of two concentration camps, by the early 1950's she is a textile plant worker whose husband has been arrested because he is a Zionist. By 1967 she lives contentedly with her family in an Israeli kibbutz, hoping that "the peace would last ten years at least." By 1974 she regrets her survival because both her son and daughter-in-law have been killed in a terrorist attack. End of correspondence.

The "instruments": apart from their intrinsic value as reflection on our generation's tossed and pushed, uprooted and free-wheeling lives, the epistolary aspect of *The Engineer* is a fascinating study of language, semantics, the tenuous relationship between word and thought. As another critic refers to the Czech original: Skvorecky "uncovers for the reader . . . levels and thin layers of national consciousness and subconsciousness" (A. J. Liehm, *Listy*, February 1979). It is in the language that Skvorecky's originality as a contemporary writer is at its most condensed. What we find in this text (apart from the "Czech" aspect mentioned above) is a staggering display of language as a powerful tyrant, a concealed moulder of thought, a merciless judge of reason, and a decisive judge of unreason. Very few examples of Skvorecky's (and his translator's) linguistic prowess must suffice. Let the first one be amusing. The emigrants (those "traitorous emigrants," as the author calls them, instilling in the reader the sense that one can be a traitor in a very complex way) who meet in the Czech club in Toronto, speak a hilarious and at times quite undigestible potpourri of snappy North American TV-English supplied with endearing, contemptuous, melancholy or angry Slavonic endings. The translator's talents and resourcefulness are put to a hard test here. What Paul Wilson has done — and he was lucky to have the author close by to be consulted — is recreate a sort of individualized *lingua franca canadiensis* which does not exist in print, though colourful versions of it can be heard daily in the streets of Canadian cities.

Or there is the language of Loyza, the baker, whose weak lungs got him a recreational bout in a spa during the Nazi period because the heavy work in the Messerschmidt factory in 1940 turned out to be too much for him. Writing to the narrator from one of those "recreational actions for the workers" for which the Nazis were as famous as the Communist authorities later on, Loyza felt such gratitude for four meals a day (after all, a war was on!) that he volunteered to go to the "Reich" in order to work steady night shift in a bakery to help the war effort. His boss in the bakery reasures him when the air-raid sirens sound too often: "the Reich has a secret vengeance weapon," Loyza reports to the narrator, "to pey the Pluto Crats back for kiling inocent women and children . . . and after the war there is going to be a new Europe." The difference between the terse Nazi expressions he has picked up and uses (though atrociously misspelt) in dead earnest — as he does the surprisingly similar Communist jargon a decade later — reflects the confusion of a whole generation of simple souls, the hapless and innocent pawns of political systems.

"Literary mirrors": it is the novel's integration with literature which has almost been bypassed in Canadian reviews, though one calls it "tedious" (Alan

Twigg). Should one wonder whether the literary component would have received more attention if the narrator had taught some William Kirby or Morley Callaghan? But, perish the thought, for (a) Smiricky, the narrator, is after all a professor of American literature and (b) the average brand of Canadian nationalism would certainly not seek to imitate totalitarian thought by rejecting "classical" works of literature for quasi-political reasons.

Each chapter has a patron saint at its gate: Poe, Hawthorne, Twain, Crane, Fitzgerald, Conrad, Lovecraft. But these saints do not remain at the gates, or in the chapter titles. They walk the pages, slip attitudes into the characters, lighten or darken the narrator's psyche and with it the text. Their prophecies, their magnificent characterizations, their insights into the human spirit, echo throughout the relevant chapters and shape their essential nature. This indeed is literature taken seriously, de-academized, dethroned perhaps, used and integrated into a realistic novel. The interpretations the narrator arrives at when discussing the novels with his students — who score interesting points and are certainly not as dim-witted as reviewers claim Skvorecky portrays them — are surprisingly fresh and alive with a commonsense originality. For example, the narrator finds that *Heart of Darkness* is a novel about "people who are drawn to violence by what is best in them." When discussing Fitzgerald's *Tender is the Night*, he leads his students to think about the fact that man lives "not by bread alone but mostly by bread"; or to put it in the appropriate way for students who think in terms of quantification as a result of their Sociology classes, that "the statistical majority struggles only for more bread; the statistical minority struggles too, for more non-bread"; and moreover, that such statements, whether put in Biblical or contemporary behaviouralist language, hold true for any society. Crane's *Red Badge of Courage* leads the class from a discussion of whether or not it is an anti-war novel to the precarious distinction between "wars that are just" and "wars that are unjust." When Professor Smiricky quotes the Communist classics in this connection, he sows consternation. Would his students, and his readers, feel more at ease, if he had disclosed Bertrand Russell as the source for the quotation rather than Josef Stalin? At any rate, in these classes and in this novel literature becomes something of vital importance which, in an age of much physical but little intellectual exhilaration, carries a deep humanistic message.

A word on the translation: if the nature of language itself is such an important component in Skvorecky's text, if the characters' speech reflects its very meaning, how can it be rendered in another language, indeed in a language alien to some of the original language's intrinsic features? How can the translator create a new structure which would gather inevitably new linguistic implications under one organizing principle, whether literary theorists call it "epistème" with Derrida, the relationship between "enonciateur" and "enoncé" with Roland Barthes, or whether they believe with René Girard that we manipulate metaphors and are in turn manipulated by them. Paul Wilson, the translator of *The Engineer*, has achieved this, and his feat would deserve an essay in itself. Reviewers of the novel have noticed this despite the fact that to most of them the original is inaccessible. The translation has been called everything from "graceful" to "miraculous." I would say that this is an instance where a translator becomes a creative writer in his own right.

The book's riches do not yield their full value on one or even two readings.

It is one of those works which call the reader back and and take on new meanings at every new encounter. Moreover, it can be approached with Freud, Barthes, Montaigne, or even Marx in one's pocket, each of which will yield entirely different fruits of interpretation. Unobtrusively the text contains a philosophy of art, a philosophy of literature, as well as a philosophy of politics and a philosophy of living.

Perhaps it is too long and casts its nets too widely. It seems too chatty at times, delighting in spinning out an incident which makes the reader, eager to push on, linger against his wish, forced to follow a minute description or a lengthy dialogue. Interestingly enough, such instances are inevitably funny, no matter what dangers may be lurking in the background. In tragic moments Skvorecky uses few words, relentlessly closes a paragraph or a section, and makes the reader move on to another aspect of his teeming world. A move of this sort cuts short any built-up emotion on the part of the reader because it requires the intellectual effort of recalling the situation left off twenty pages earlier. In this sense the novel works in Heine's words, like "living, which constantly detracts us from life."

There is no question that the book is a challenge to the reader's responsiveness in every sense of the word. Like a multicoloured, yet transparent globe, the modern world is rotated before our eyes, and the calm voice of the narrator evenly weighs the comic and tragic aspects of its life: the values and illusions, the fortitude and blunders of its people. That this novel — truly an international work but also in a deep sense a work of Canadian literature — is a major landmark on the Canadian cultural scene will best be proved by future readers who will plumb its depth and explore its riches long after the comments of literary critics, including my own, will be forgotten.

MARKETA GOETZ-STANKIEWICZ

A JUDGMENT OF POLITICAL JUDGMENTS

IT IS NOT CUSTOMARY for a novelist to answer his reviewers, and I have never done so. In Canada, because I didn't think it proper and because most reviewers have been kind to me; in Czechoslovakia because I could not talk back. My labels there were curiously near-identical with those Terry Goldie put on me, in his review of *The Engineer of Human Souls*, and with such labels you are not permitted to defend yourself, neither in Czechoslovakia nor in Cuba, nor in the German Democratic Republic, and you soon won't be in Nicaragua. But Terry Goldie accuses me of some pretty awful things: of racism, of being a cold-warrior, a right-winger, an anti-feminist, anti-communist, anti-unionist, in short, everything under the sun except an anti-nazist. One can hardly stay silent vis-à-vis such accusations.

I must confess I do not enjoy having to write this article. I have been through this rigmarole so often that I am tired of having to repeat the same old things, self-evident to anyone without ideological blinders. Terry Goldie probably has no way of knowing — though, why not? there are many excellent books available in English on literary debates in the Soviet camp — that all the concepts that he evinces in his review have been endlessly debated and debated again in the East and finally exposed as — if I may — piffle. Discarded, that is, by good writers, not by the political commissars.

The gist of the trouble is that ideology,

in literature, does not challenge the writer to describe the world as he sees it, as most others see it, therefore as it very probably is, but as the ideologist thinks it should or should not be. This basic fallacy takes on various pseudo-scholarly forms. Thousands upon thousands of pages have been written, in the East, about the profound questions of the typical and the stereotypical, the essential and the accidental, the characteristic, the progressive, the reactionary, etc. For all practical purposes all such concepts end up as sticks used by the ideologists to beat the naughty dog-of-a-writer with. In Western literary criticism the thing happens only marginally and the critic, as yet, cannot give orders to censors and commands to the police.

But let me be specific. One of the antis of which I stand accused is anti-feminism. Terry Goldie demonstrates it in the treatment of four female characters in my novel. He writes for instance: "The fragile tubercular flower, Nadia, does nothing to offend her role as Camille." Since this is a reprimand I have to conclude that I committed the error of describing Nadia as she was; I should have made her assume a different role, or else choose another female character; one that would display more feminist awareness. Unfortunately, Nadia is based on reality and, unfortunately perhaps, in 1944, in the Czech mountain villages in northeastern Bohemia, there were no feminists. I certainly did not meet any, unless Terry Goldie is willing to admit that both major female protagonists, Irena and Marie, disclose some pretty independent features. But Nadia was a working-class girl from the mountains and there was a bad war on which usually changes one's priorities, especially if your father is in a concentration camp as Nadia's was. She loves her rather inept student boy friend, and she has been brought up in the tradition of love as complete abandonment. She would and could not have understood what I assume is the contemporary North American feminist ideal of man-woman relationship: "Though I miss him, I don't pine for him when we're apart, nor pine for solitude when we're together. Greater tribute hath no woman." That is how Amanda Cross's Professor Kate Fansler sees her marriage in an ideological tract that poses for a detective story, *Death in a Tenured Position.* Nadia is also mortally ill and that, too, changes priorities. She would not and could not understand Judith Fetterley who, in what I suppose is one of Women's Studies literary bibles, *Feminist Approach to American Fiction*, chastizes Hemingway's Catherine Barkley for trying too hard to please her man. That man does not, like Kate Fansler's husband, have a well-paid, jet-set job: he is a soldier who, from the nightmarish love-making in Milan, has to return to the front the morning after. In life situations like that one rarely behaves with proper ideological purity.

But how is Nadia actually portrayed in the novel? Is she shown to be a fool? Sneered at? Ridiculed, even if in the subtlest of ways? If I may defend my own creation, I think she is not. She, for instance, is the only person among so many men in the factory who refuses to sign the petition protesting the killing of *General der SS* Reinhard Heydrich, even though, admittedly, she uses a clever ruse rather than standing up and letting herself be shot. While Danny is half-dead with fear she never once wavers in her, admittedly, simple courage. Can this be construed as an anti-feminist portrait? And mind you: I did not endow Nadia with good qualities because I wanted to flatter women. The girl I modelled Nadia on was like that. I am not an ideological novelist, I am a photographic realist. I am not against feminism; I am against its ideological orthodoxy. I believe it needs

heretics, and I'll talk about heretics later in this article.

The first fallacy, then, of an ideological critic is that he asks the writer not to recreate reality but to create ideals, or to criticize reality if it does not comply with the ideal. In his fervour, he often practices the common sin of interpretative criticism, namely he excludes from consideration everything that does not fit the over-all picture he wants to paint. This, for instance, is the case of Veronika. According to Terry Goldie she "is dynamic but never more than a ball of anti-communist energy." "Anti-communist" here clearly assumes pejorative overtones. Joe McCarthy was anti-communist. But Veronika has some pretty good reasons for her anti-communism. Her family was badly treated by the communists. Her artistic career was destroyed by them. Her country was damaged by the misrule and the military adventures of the communists. Veronika's reasons, therefore, are different from those of Joe McCarthy. If that is not acknowledged, Veronika is grossly misinterpreted.

Another objection: a student in the novel is a poor speller. She happens to be Chinese. Poor spelling, I guess, is part of the Chinese stereotype. Therefore, the author is anti-Chinese. Another student speaks with an accent that the foreign professor cannot understand. She is Indian. Mispronunciation of English, I guess, is part of the Indian stereotype. Therefore the author is anti-Indian. Yet another student has no understanding for the intricacies of high literature. He is Italian. An inability to understand literature, I guess, is part of the Italian stereotype. Therefore the author is anti-Italian. And yet another student is under the spell of a vicious ideology. He happens to be Arab. A tendency towards vicious ideologies, I guess, is part of the Arab stereotype. Therefore the author is anti-Arab.

Taken all together, the author is a racist.

That the professor likes the Chinese girl — without lusting for her — to the extent of actually advising her to secure some help so that he can pass her, is of no importance. That everybody in the class, including the professor — and what does that say about Canadians? — behaves respectfully to the Indian girl, knowing that immigrants have their problems, is not important. That the Italian student is intelligent and shrewd, will make a first-class lawyer and become the joy of his working-class father's declining years, is not important. That of all these episodic figures only the Arab student is a major character and the professor spends endless hours trying, as inoffensively as he can, to convince the militant youngster that he sympathizes with his cause but is afraid his methods will not serve it well, is not important.

Terry Goldie judges all these figures by applying to them the notion of the "representative stereotype," with properly pejorative accents; all other interpretations are "piffle." Well, I am not at all sure that stereotypes in literature are totally reprehensible, or even that you can do entirely without them. As Terry Goldie certainly knows there are major characters, the "heroes," and there are episodic figures; the former, to use the well-known terminology of E. M. Forster, tend to be "round," the latter "flat." Full-scale character studies, and sketches. Portraits and caricatures. Or, as the admirable clear-sighted Evelyn Waugh put it, there are the "protagonists," and there is the "furniture." You simply cannot give the same dimensions to flat characters as you can to round ones. If I had written a novel about the Chinese girl, her poor spelling would not be among her prominent characteristics: for the simple reason also that the narrator

would not be meeting her only in the classroom.

The Chinese girl is by far not the only poor speller in the class, nor is the Italian boy the only one who will never become a Northrop Frye. In fact, several reviewers, including Terry Goldie, opined that the kids in the professor's class are singularly inept, and some seem to have taken it as being slanderous of young Canadians. Mostly, of course, they were gentlemen and did not say so in so many words as Terry Goldie did. But are the kids so inept? They are a lively bunch of youngsters who apparently are taking the professor's course for their mandatory credit. None of them obviously aspire to become English specialists. They mostly do parrot undigested scholarship or the popular slogans of the day but if the professor takes the trouble of doing more than routine work in the class, they listen with attention, if not with eagerness. Some — Wendy for instance — are downright original and come up with highly intelligent though, perhaps, not scholarly comments. These comments show insight. Many would be able to produce a well-argued oral if they were as strongly motivated as Irene, for her specific reasons, is. But their real interest is elsewhere. Some will go to law school, some will take their degree in business administration or in science. Some will play the trombone. Some will go to school for a couple of years and then drop out, to travel, to marry, to do something else. They are simply not a class of English specialists.

Terry Goldie considers these scenes to be a proof of my anti-Canadian attitudes. They promised me New York, and gave me Toronto. Well, I was promised trouble by the Russians, and offered Toronto by the Canadians. I have never regretted accepting that offer. I don't believe that anyone who reads my evocations of this city and the landscape that surrounds it will think that I feel bitter because I don't live in Buffalo. If I may use a slightly WASPish phrase, such accusations are in bad taste.

Some other reprimands: to prove my being anti-anything that "smells of leftism" Terry Goldie evokes the episode of Camstarve, but again commits the sin of not taking into consideration what does not fit into his portrait of the artist as an inhuman monster. Danny is not against Camstarve's sending money to Africa. He is against Camstarve, a purportedly Christian organization, choosing to support the communists among the Angolan guerrillas: the ones who invited the Cubans who, with their major, Soviet-supplied war technology, overrode the country and subjected the majority of the population to foreign supervision and domestic dictatorship. I am certainly against this. Maybe Terry Goldie sees nothing wrong in Camstarve's support of the Cuban intervention. Couldn't I, in that case, suspect him of thinking that the majority of Angolans are inferior primitives who need a foreign colonizer to show them how to run their own things? Does he, perhaps, label this invasion "brotherly help" as the late Mr. Brezhnev labelled his invasion of my old country? That, to me, was a clear indication that the Russians thought the Czechs to be inferior. Nothing new, really. So did Marx and Engels. Read their post-1848 articles where they recommend the liquidation not only of reactionary classes but also of "reactionary nations": in plain language, a genocide smelling strongly of a "final solution." Stalin later put the recommendation into practice when he removed the Krymean Tatars from their ancestral homes. The present ruler of Abyssinia follows that recommendation, and — in a milder way, because Uncle Sam is dangerously near — the Sandinistas are try-

ing something similar with the Miskito Indians.

But I won't accuse Terry Goldie of such thinking. He may just suffer from that universal malaise of the Western leftist which Kingsley Amis calls "selective indignation." It is a profoundly ideological disease. Not a political stance based on the experience of political realities.

As I mentioned at the beginning, one of Danny's antis is not listed: his anti-nazism. As a selectively indignant person, Terry Goldie may find it difficult to believe that an anti-communist can also be an anti-fascist. Nathanael West (whom nobody, I hope, suspects of right-wing tendencies) had an opposite dilemma. Once he told J. S. Perelman: "The problem as to why against fascism and why not against communism disturbs my sleep." Hundreds of millions of the inhabitants of this Earth know by now that West's problem was, indeed, not a pseudoproblem. That some Westerners still don't know it is the outcome of their historical good fortune. It does not give them the right to denigrate those who were less fortunate, who therefore know and are not silent about their knowledge. But my famous colleague and compatriot was obviously right when he warned me once in Paris: "You can acquire the reputation of being anti-Soviet, but you must not acquire the reputation of being anti-communist."

Terry Goldie has doubts about Danny's interpretation of *Heart of Darkness*. Well, the interpretation is not speculative at all. It is based on the realities of Conrad's life and on a knowledge of his opinions. In the novel it is presented as such things have to be if they are not to stick out of the novelistic texture. But if he is interested he should read my essay "Why the Harlequin?" (*Cross Currents*, 3 [1984], pp. 259-64) where I treat the subject in all seriousness.

What I am going to say next exposes me to the danger of being called smug, condescending towards those who have not had my life experience. I am not smug. But can anyone expect me to forget, to suppress, to ignore, or to keep silent about what I know and they don't? I don't know a great many things about Canada but I would not dream of accusing those who enlighten me of smugness.

Terry Goldie uses terms like "right-wing" and "dated American individualism." "Right-wing" connotes "bad," and so does "American individualism." "Right-wingers," according to him, are "ardently pro-Israel," therefore — because language is a strange thing — the Israeli cause cannot be good if right-wingers support it. Also: they support Israel *because* they are right-wingers.

Well, Danny happened to be an eye witness of the holocaust. He did not become pro-Jewish because he is a "right-winger." He became a "right-winger" because he saw what the German National Socialist Workers' Party did to the Jews. The Jews included Rebecca, another female conveniently left out from the list of my anti-feminist portrayals of girls. Why?

And as for the Arabs? I imagine you don't have to be right-wing to resent not the cause but the methods used to achieve it, which lead repeatedly to wild, barbaric actions, hijackings, internecine wars, senseless bloodshed presented as something "healthy" for the people; to pre-adolescent boys being sent to the front in a senseless, unending medieval war. The horrors accumulate, and in the end you willy nilly have to doubt even the cause. All this is precisely the subject of the professor's discussions with Hakim. Perhaps I was too indirect, too subtle. Too afraid not to write a political tract but a novel.

"Is Mr. Brezhnev right-wing or left-wing?" may be a stale joke by now. But

is he? To us who have come out of the cold, terms like right-wing and left-wing make no sense any longer. I can see that to people who have always lived in the West they still retain some value. But even then they are deceptive, they simplify, even falsify reality. I would reserve the term "right-wing" to fascists, to nazis; those whom Western "leftists" nowadays call "rightists" I would call conservative. And I would not hesitate much to include the communists among the right-wingers. The true left wing, to me, are those who — whether their political affiliation is conservative, liberal, or NDP — realize that totalitarianism is not a way to achieve the ancient "left-wing" goal: social justice. That totalitarianism — "right" or "left" — is capable of realizing only the social justice of the barracks at best, and that of the extermination camp at worst.

This is where the "dated American individualism" comes in. Terry Goldie may not realize it but it is this "dated" individualism, perhaps American, but also very Czech, Russian, Black African, Cuban, or Chinese, that makes life in the collectivistic empires, fascist or communist, bearable at all. Graham Greene once wrote me, commenting on his novel *Monsignor Quijote*, that it is the heretic who embodies the true spirit of a movement. The communist who befriends the priest, the priest who becomes the friend of the communist. And the heretic tends to be an individual: the lonely charred corpse at the stake. Imagine that everybody in a communist state behaved according to the rules — that everybody moved around in a state of permanent enthusiasm, permanent reporting on the flaws of other comrades, etc. Pretty soon, everybody would go mad. Fortunately, there is always someone who circumvents the rules, does not report, and throws the denunciation into the waste-paper basket. He or she may publicly demand that, for instance, all class enemies be expelled from schools of higher education, and then invent ingenious arguments why not to expel a certain particular student, as my old headmistress at the Minerva School for Social Workers in Horice did so expertly. (See my novel *Miracle en Bohême*, available in Canada in French from Gallimard.) Such people are full of the individualism which Terry Goldie thinks is outdated. They individually save individual human beings from the consequences of the activities of the collectivists.

What I really cannot understand is how Terry Goldie can accuse me of "perpetuating injustice and inequality in the world." I am doing no such thing. All I do is try, in my ineffective individual voice, to warn people that pursuing justice and equality in certain ways may easily lead to greater injustice and greater inequality than this continent has known in over a century. Which is not a speculative theory but something that can be easily proven to those who are able to put aside ideological blinders.

I can see from his article that Terry Goldie is not one of those dogmatics who, if they don't like one thing, cannot enjoy anything else in a novel. He says some good things about my writing. Therefore I am not irritated but rather sad that he should have misinterpreted my book so grossly.

JOSEF SKVORECKY

TERRY GOLDIE REPLIES:

In spite of Professor Skvorecky's interesting observations I stand by my comments in the original review.

CANADIAN WRITERS & AMERICAN LITTLE MAGAZINES IN THE 1890'S

IN JUNE OF 1894, Bliss Carman wrote from Cambridge, Massachusetts to bring an American friend up to date on his literary activities. His main item of news was the impending publication of his collaboration with Richard Hovey, *Songs from Vagabondia*, but in passing he mentioned his latest venture into magazine editing, an avocation that had kept him solvent since his migration to the States in 1890. "The *Chap Book* still lives," he reassured his correspondent with rather half-hearted enthusiasm; and, at the end of the letter: "The *Chap Book* takes up a lot of time and is of doubtful profit."[1] The object of Carman's dubious commitment was one of the earliest specimens of a type of periodical that was shortly to become a literary fad in the United States: the so-called "little magazines," also dubbed "chap-books," "bibelots," "ephemerals," and known occasionally by less complimentary epithets such as "dinky" or "freak" magazines. About 30 x 18 cm in size, consisting of approximately thirty pages per issue of literature and literary commentary, and printed on heavy, uncut paper, the *Chap-Book* resembled an octavo book rather than a typical periodical of the nineteenth century. Decorated with woodcuts and elaborate designs, it was intended to evoke in appearance as well as in title the slim volumes of the Renaissance and eighteenth century which introduced many great English literary works to discriminating readers. The first issue of the bi-monthly *Chap-Book* was dated 15 May 1894. Within a year, there were at least twelve imitations on newsstands and in bookstores across the United States; over the next ten years, about two hundred such periodicals appeared, most of them lasting only a few months, or a year or two.[2]

From the beginning, there was a noteworthy Canadian involvement in this literary phenomenon. The *Chap-Book* was the creation of two American undergraduates at Harvard, Herbert S. Stone and H. I. Kimball; Stone was the son of a Chicago newspaper publisher and he and Kimball had on-campus literary and journalistic experience, but recognizing their limitations they called in professional help in the person of Bliss Carman. Two years before, Carman had resigned from the editorial office of the New York magazine the *Independent*, determined to live "by the pen alone."[3] But finding himself in need of supplementing his meagre freelance income, and young enough at thirty-three to be infected by the enthusiasm of the two Harvard men, he agreed to give the project his temporary assistance. One contemporary commentator gave Carman all the credit for creating a new literary medium: "It was really the happy thought of Bliss Carman . . . to adapt the individual pamphlet to the uses of a little periodical budget of literature," wrote Walter Blackburn Harte in 1896.[4] Although Carman himself never inflated his role in the creation of the *Chap-Book*, it is likely that he gave the neophyte publishers a degree of direction that made the editorial focus of the periodical distinctly his own. Certainly he made sure that the contributors would include a substantial representation of his countrymen. Before he finished his brief tenure of a few months as editor, he had introduced to the pages of the magazine work by Charles G. D. Roberts, Gilbert Parker, and Archibald Lampman. These three writers plus Carman continued as regular contributors through-

out most of the four-year life of the *Chap-Book;* occasional contributors included Roberts' younger brothers Theodore and William, Francis Sherman, and Ethelwyn Wetherald.[5]

As the little magazine fad flourished across the United States, other Canadian writers committed themselves to it. The English-born Walter Blackburn Harte, who had begun his literary career in Montreal in the 1880's, was the editor of two short-lived specimens, the *Fly Leaf* (Boston, 1895) and the *Lotus* (Kansas City, 1895-96). The *Fly Leaf* was written almost entirely by Harte himself with the help of a few American friends, but in the *Lotus* he included work by Ethelwyn Wetherald, Bliss Carman, and Charles G. D. Roberts. The *Philistine* of East Aurora, New York, published poems by Carman and Roberts; work by or about Canadian writers also appeared in *Time and the Hour* (Boston, 1896-97), the *Bauble* (Washington, D.C., 1895-97), and the *Ishmaelite* (Indianapolis, 1896-99).

The idea of publishing similar magazines in Canada seems not to have occurred to significant numbers of people. The *Tarot*, featuring rather amateurish efforts by obscure local contributors, appeared for two issues in Toronto in 1896; and Theodore Goodridge Roberts edited the *Kit-Bag* for two issues, also concentrating on local writers, in Fredericton in 1902. But public indifference, prohibitive costs, and perhaps the perennial ambition of Canadian writers to reach an international readership, combined to impel most would-be contributors toward the American little magazines.

Many of the American specimens of this genre were faddish and ephemeral, and were often produced by undergraduates, local literary societies, or individual eccentrics. But there was also a lot of serious writing in such magazines. Some of these periodicals might, in fact, be considered as important for both American and Canadian literature as the better known little magazines of the 1920's. Like Harriet Monroe's *Poetry*, T. S. Eliot's *Criterion*, or the *McGill Fortnightly Review*, the *Chap-Book* and similar productions of the 1890's provided outlets for writers of experimental and avant-garde work, or simply for writers who were seeking alternatives to the rather conservative mass circulation magazines such as the *Atlantic Monthly* or *Harper's*.[6]

The *Chap-Book* is the most frequently mentioned, by both contemporaries and historians of the movement, as the first of the American little magazines, and is sometimes described as an imitation of the British *Yellow Book*. In fact, the *Yellow Book* appeared too immediately prior to the *Chap-Book* for the Americans to have been significantly influenced by it: the first isue of the *Yellow Book* appeared on 15 April 1894; the first *Chap-Book* was dated 15 May. It is much more accurate to say that both periodicals were the products of forces that were common to the European and North American cultural milieux. In any case, the *Chap-Book* was not the first of such periodicals in the United States. The earliest attempts at alternative literary outlets for the newer generation of writers in the 1890's were the *Mahogany Tree* and the *Knight Errant*, both published in Boston in 1892. Neither was actually a "little magazine," for they were the standard quarto size of many traditional periodicals; but their quality paper, typography, and graphics, as well as the literary crosscurrents of much of the writing in them, place them in the tradition of the chapbook or pamphlet periodicals to follow.

Both the *Mahogany Tree* and the *Knight Errant* expired in less than a year, but in their few issues various young writers were able to try out their

notions of literary experimentation. The *Knight Errant* had two Canadian contributions: Bliss Carman's "The White Cauldron: A Tale of the North and the Winter" was a pseudo-transcendentalist meditation on nature and the imagination, and Walter Blackburn Harte's "A Rhapsody on Music" was an informal piece of personal appreciation.

The *Knight Errant* was an expensively made and rather exclusive production, and the recollection of its quick failure may have made Carman rather cautious about the *Chap-Book*. Without compromising the publishers' devotion to modern experimental art, he opened the *Chap-Book* to a variety of literary genres and writing styles, in the work of established members of the older generation, as well as younger unknowns, and including generous representation from various regions of the United States, and from Canada and Britain. In its varied contents can be found such matter as the regional realism of Hamlin Garland, the psychological anatomism of Henry James (*What Maisie Knew* was serialized in the *Chap-Book*), as well as the humour of Max Beerbohm, the romanticism of Robert Louis Stevenson, and the early lyricism of W. B. Yeats. The magazine was, in short, an anthology of English-language writing of the late nineteenth century.

There was, however, one specialty of the *Chap-Book* that deserves special notice. According to the French literary historian René Taupin, writing in 1929,

> L'année 1895 est celle où l'Amérique s'est le plus intéressée aux écrivains français. . . . C'est à partir de cette année-la qu'on va voir paraître une foule de petites revues révolutionnaires imitées des revues symbolistes françaises. . . .
>
> La première et la plus importante de ces revues fut le *Chap Book*. . . . Parmi les collaborateurs se trouva représenté presque tout le groupe des «symbolistes» américains: Richard Hovey, Bliss Carman, C. G. D. Roberts, Archibald Lampman, Duncan Campbell Scott et Gilbert Parker.[7]

Taupin can be forgiven for not knowing (or caring) that five of his six "American" symbolists were Canadians. What is really provocative is his contention that these writers represented almost the "whole group" of American symbolists in the 1890's, and that their work reflected elements, whether through influence or analogue, of the writings of Verlaine, Rimbaud, Mallarmé, and their successors and imitators. Bliss Carman was certainly familiar with, and favourably impressed by, modern French literary developments: his poem on Paul Verlaine, "To P.V.," appeared in the *Chap-Book* for 1 October 1896, and poems by Verlaine and Mallarmé, in original and translation, were published in the magazine during the period of Carman's connection with it.

According to Taupin, the main features of the work of the *Chap-Book* poets that recall French symbolism are the attempts to create impressions of spontaneity and technical freedom, the use of simple or primitive rhythms such as ballad metre with occasional gropings toward free verse, and the exaltation of poetic technique over moral assertions.[8] Some of these criteria can be at least roughly applied to Charles G. D. Roberts' "The Unsleeping," which occupied the first page of the first issue of the *Chap-Book*, and thereby seemed to stand as a literary hallmark for the whole periodical:

> I soothe to unimagined sleep
> The sunless bases of the deep;
> And then I stir the aching tide
> That gropes in its reluctant side.
>
> I heave aloft the smoking hill;
> To silent peace its throes I still.
> But ever at its heart of fire
> I lurk, an unassuaged desire.
>
> I wrap me in the sightless germ
> An instant or an endless term;
> And still its atoms are my care,
> Dispersed in ashes or in air.

I hush the comets one by one
To sleep for ages in the sun.
The sun resumes before my face
His circuit of the shores of space.

The mount, the star, the germ, the deep,
They all shall wake, they all shall sleep.
Time, like a flurry of wild rain,
Shall drift across the darkened pane.

Space, in the dim predestined hour,
Shall crumble like a ruined tower.
I only, with unfaltering eye,
Shall watch the dreams of God go by!

There is certainly an attempt here to expound Verlaine's ideal of "la musique avant toute chose," technically in Roberts' relentless rhythm and rhyme, and thematically in his characterization of the poetic sensibility musing solipsistically over the evolutionary rhythms of the cosmos. But this kind of aphoristic or oracular doggerell recalls the poetry of Ralph Waldo Emerson more than that of the French symbolists. The ruined tower of the last stanza is possibly an echo of the *tour aboli* image in Gerard de Nerval's famous visionary poem, "El Desdichado." But Roberts falls far short of Nerval's surrealism; and there is not the finely sculpted evocation of the object of contemplation that there is in the best French symbolist poetry.

Similar reservations are applicable to Carman's "The Prayer in the Rose Garden" (*Chap-Book*, 1 June 1894), Gilbert Parker's "There is an Orchard" (1 November 1894), and Lampman's "Inter Vias" (15 January 1895), to mention only a few more works typical of the Canadian contributions to the periodical. The influences (or analogies) from French symbolism are very vague and tentative, and at times probably only coincidental. Their real source in the poetry of Carman, Roberts, and especially Lampman, is likely to be the work of the godfather of French symbolism, Edgar Allan Poe. Still, the redolence of symbolist elements suggest that the Canadians were at least venturing in the direction of modern experimentation. The *Chap-Book* and other little magazines offered them the opportunity to take steps in these directions, which they might otherwise have avoided in the more traditional publishing outlets.

Canadian contributors to the *Chap-Book* and other little magazines found themselves involved in other current literary developments and controversies of the 1890's besides those associated with French symbolism. As a scrutiny of the *Chap-Book* and similar publications reveals, the last decade of the nineteenth century was a time of much debate over new artistic movements and the labels applied to these movements. "Symbolism," "decadence," "aestheticism," "fin-de-siècle," and many other labels were being constantly bandied about, as creative writers and critics sought to define succinctly the art of the era, or, as often, to ridicule their antagonists, as well as occasionally to poke fun at themselves. As a prominent spokesman for the new literary age, Bliss Carman was frequently at the centre of the controversies over nomenclature and definition. In the summer of 1896, a San Francisco book dealer included a portrait of Carman in an exhibition of the "decadent" movement in modern literature, and the news prompted one little magazine to comment

> Mr. Carman's poetry is about as "decadent" as a hillside pasture in New Hampshire, and in much the same way: both are a simple-hearted return to nature.... Mr. Carman's verse deals with nature and the human heart, and never, one may say, with the mere curiosity and intricacy of external things which are essential to decadent literature.[9]

In the same magazine, a little later in the same year, however, a correspondent took Carman and the "new school" of poets to task for their "torturing com-

plexities," "vague symbolism," and the elevation of the intellect over the emotions.[10]

Differences of description and definition, disagreements over literary quality, and squabbles involving subtle parody and satire as well as crude mud-slinging, were pervasive features of the little magazines of the 1890's. The *Chap-Book* was less than a year old when the *Clack Book* emerged out of Lansing, Michigan, as a self-proclaimed "burlesque on the popular little magazines of the day." The most successful burlesque of the new literary movement was Gelett Burgess's *Lark* (1895-96), of San Francisco, which introduced the "purple cow" to the world, and parodied the Francophile craze and other Bohemian and aesthetic fads. The *Bauble* (1895-97), of Washington, D.C., was more personal, if less subtle in its ridicule. One of its early issues featured "A Lyric of Grief," by "Cliss Barman," a take-off on Carman's "Little Lyrics of Joy" published in the *Chap-Book*:

> Over the yard and through the back gate
> I saw a red cabbage go down the waste pail —
> Purple as skies when the moon is late,
> The stay of the poor, — twin brother to kale.
>
> The alley cat meowed it, down from the fence,
> The yellow dog howled it, up from the yard;
> And all of their moaning was — "lost — lost! from hence — "
> And all of their grieving was — "O! It is hard!"[11]

The *Thistle*, of New Rochelle, New York, was more direct in its insults against Carman and his cohorts: "Bliss Carman wears his hair as if he had selected 'The Man With the Hoe' for his barber." "Bliss Carman contends that a poet ought to be capable of manual labor. I have often thought Bliss would look better sweeping the streets than trying to sweep the whole country." And in an unsigned review of Carman's *Last Lyrics of Sappho*:

> This effort to restore the lost lyrics of Sappho, while it shows an unparalleled solicitude for the lovers of literature, it also puts by comparison, in ambitious venture, the cow that jumped over the moon into the class of ordinary leapers! It is interesting to wonder whether Mr. Carman undertook this task of his own motion, or whether it did not originate in the fertile fancy of Mr. Charles Goodness Dear Roberts, who writes interestingly in the first issue of *The Reader* concerning it.[12]

But the most indefatigable antagonist of Carman and his *Chap-Book* associates was an iconoclastic editor, publisher, and essayist named Elbert Hubbard. A self-styled disciple of William Morris and the craft revival, Hubbard controlled a small printing, publishing, and design establishment in the village of East Aurora, near Buffalo, New York. His principal effort was a little magazine called the *Philistine*, an irreverent and often ill-written production, devoted to shameless self-aggrandisement, criticism of all forms of cultural elitism, and appeals to the no-nonsense attitudes of a hypothetical common reader. It is a comment on Hubbard's shrewdness, as well as on American reading tastes, that the *Philistine* was the longest-lived of the nineties little magazines, lasting until Hubbard's death in 1915.

Hubbard's attack on the literary circle of the "Chip-Munk" (as he called the *Chap-Book*) got under way in the first issue of the *Philistine* with the allegation that Carman's lyric, "Lord of the Vasty Tent of Heaven," was plagiarized from Francis Bourdillon's popular poem, "The Night Has a Thousand Eyes." From there, he went on to obvious jokes about Charles G. D. Roberts' name, and complaints about "Duncan Campbell Scott's yawps." But Carman was his most frequent target. In response to the announcement of a new book of poems by

Pauline Johnson, Hubbard commented: "The Canadian school is coming on, but I always thought that Bliss Carman was the bright particular chrysanthemum of that cult." One frequent complaint was Carman's obscurity: "In the magazines . . . he has printed verses that were well worth preserving as some of the best of the decade. In the great mass, however, which he has published, there have been lines which nobody on earth could understand." "It is time Bliss Carman came from Behind the Arras and told us about it." Another complaint — perhaps more justifiable — was the unabashed backscratching of the Canadians: "I am glad to know on the authority of Mr. Charles G. D. Roberts that Bliss Carman's is 'the most distinctive and authentic lyric utterance given in America at the century's end.' The discovery is recorded in the 'Criterion,' which also puts Mr. Roberts on a pedestal in his turn."[13]

Carman and Roberts seem not to have been perturbed by Hubbard's insults, for they never publicly responded to them. The occasional crudity of the *Philistine* may be more a reflection of Hubbard's lack of taste than his maliciousness, for in spite of his repeated jibes, he published serious poems by both Carman and Roberts: Roberts' "Carpe Diem" appeared in October 1896, and Carman's "In Philistia" in February 1897.

But by 1897, the initial enthusiasm of the little magazine editors and contributors was noticeably waning, and irresponsible amateurs like Hubbard were dominating the genre. In January of that year, the *Chap-Book* changed both its format and its content to complete the gradual transition from iconoclastic alternative publication to just another popular magazine. In October of 1897, Walter Blackburn Harte proclaimed the end of the "chap-book movement" in America. "This remarkable literary revolution, which broke in the winter of 1895-6 [with the appearance of the *Chap-Book*] is now, in 1897, about played out — dying."[14]

Harte's announcement was, perhaps, a bit premature. A few serious little magazines continued to emerge (and disappear) over the next few years, Harte himself editing and writing for three or four of them, until his untimely death in 1899. Indeed, Harte made his statement in one of the best of the alternative periodicals, the tabloid-sized *Criterion*, which had just begun a distinguished career as an outlet and publicist for experimental literature and drama, and which included Bliss Carman and Charles G. D. Roberts as well as Harte as members of the founding association and as regular contributors. But the numbers of serious publications steadily dwindled; and the writers who might have used them to pursue literary experimentation or revolutionary aesthetic doctrine drifted back to the popular conventions of the mass circulation media. "The market place is serene enough today to laugh at the whole invasion," Harte continued gloomily in his *Criterion* article. "But the revolt — it was only *that*, and not a real revolution — lasted long enough, at least, to give the old fogies, who hold the key of the gate to the Author's Heaven, a little shock."[15]

Most of the Canadians who joined the little magazine "revolt" did so because of the appeal of novelty, or because the magazines seemed related to the Bohemian lifestyles to which writers like Carman and Roberts were attracted, or because in some cases Canadian writers were happy to get American publication of any kind. These magazines offered opportunities for literary experimentation that were not available from the mass circulation periodicals, even though the experimentation of most of the Canadian contributors was rather tentative and derivative, limited to a cautious

adaptation of the techniques of French symbolism, or to rather broad parody and satire. Another important attraction of these magazines for Canadians was the opportunity to avoid the stereotypes of local colour and provincialism often imposed on Canadian writing by Americans. Tired of being known as the poets of the northern woods or of Acadian legends, Canadian writers eagerly participated in the varieties of aestheticism and art-for-art's sake notions of creativity favoured by little magazine editors and readers. But as Walter Blackburn Harte suggested, the little magazines of the nineties did not pursue their opportunities boldly enough to bring about more than a temporary disturbance of current literary conservatism. It remained for a later generation of writers and another series of little magazines to produce the revolution of modernism. But at least, as Harte noted, the nineties periodicals revealed a sense of "anticipation . . . among the younger men, that the literary and social atmosphere will change."[16] Too often, the Canadian writers of the 1890's are thought of as looking backward toward romanticism and early Victorianism. Their involvement with the American little magazines emphasizes that their view was also directed forward, toward experimentation and change.

NOTES

[1] Bliss Carman to Henrietta Russel Hovey, 4 June 1894, letter 98 of *Letters of Bliss Carman*, ed. H. Pearson Gundy (Kingston: McGill-Queen's Univ. Press, 1981), 67.

[2] The only comprehensive bibliography of the American little magazines of the 1890's is Frederick Winthrop Faxon, "Ephemeral Bibelots," *Bulletin of Bibliography* 3 (1903-04): 72-74, 92, 106-07, 125-26. The best historical surveys of the phenomenon are Claude Bragdon, "The Purple Cow Period: the 'Dinkey Magazines' That Caught the Spirit of the 'Nineties," *Bookman* [New York] 69 (1929): 475-78; and Lawrence Heyl, "Little Magazines," *Princeton University Library Chronicle* 2 (1940): 21-26.

[3] Carman to Annie Prat, 1 Nov. 1892, Letter 64 of *Letters of Bliss Carman*, 48.

[4] Walter Blackburn Harte, "Bubble and Squeak," *Lotus* 3:2 (1896): 59. Most of my quotations from little magazines are taken from specimens in the rare book collections of New York Public Library and Princeton University.

[5] These were all the Canadian contributors to the *Chap-Book* over its four-year life, but many of these writers appeared several times in the magazine. For a complete list of Canadian contributions, see the index to the *Chap-Book* in Wendy Clauson Schlereth, *The Chap-Book: A Journal of American Intellectual Life in the 1890s* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research, 1982).

[6] I have discussed in more detail the experience of Canadian writers with the American mass circulation periodicals in "Canadian Writers and American Magazines," *Canadian Poetry: Studies/Documents/Reviews* 5 (1979): 73-82.

[7] René Taupin, *L'Influence de symbolisme français sur la poésie américaine* (1929; Genève: Slatkine, 1975), 33.

[8] Taupin, 49-50.

[9] "Here in Boston," *Time and the Hour*, 11 July 1896: 6.

[10] Edmund Whipple, "Mere Bubble and Squeak," *Time and the Hour*, 24 Oct. 1896: 8.

[11] *Bauble* 1:2 (1895): 17.

[12] *Thistle* 1:1 (1902): 6; 1:7 (1902): 1; 1:10 (1902): 2.

[13] The various comments on the Canadians appeared in the *Philistine* as follows: the accusation of plagiarism, 1:1 (June 1895): 21; Roberts' name, and Scott's poetry, 1:3 (Aug. 1895): 103; 1:4 (Sept. 1895): 134; Carman as chrysanthemum 2:1 (Dec. 1895): 39; Carman's obscurity, 1:5 (Oct. 1895): 157 and 2:3 (Feb. 1896): 104; mutual admiration of Carman and Roberts, 6:1 (1898): 124.

[14] Harte, "The Chap-Book Movement in America," *Criterion*, 23 Oct. 1897: 17.

[15] Harte, "The Chap-Book Movement," 17.

[16] Harte, 17.

JAMES DOYLE

TOTAL VISION

"BHARATI MUKHERJEE . . . HAS sounded a new note in self-orientation by claiming that she is a North American novelist," said Meenakshi Mukherjee at the Fourth Triennial Conference of ACLALS held in New Delhi in January 1977. "Yet her two novels so far have obsessively excavated the consciousness of her transplanted protagonists — the Indian who returns after a long stay abroad in one, and the Indian who has gone to live in North America in the other. It will be interesting to keep track of how she chooses to match her talent and her resources hereafter."[1]

Bharati Mukherjee's third volume of fiction is finally out, a decade after the second novel: *The Tiger's Daughter* was published by Houghton Mifflin in 1972 and *Wife* by Houghton Mifflin in 1975, both about to be reissued by Penguin. And yes, it is different from the first two. It is not just that it is a volume of short stories: with *Darkness*, Bharati Mukherjee comes to terms with North America.[2] Stating that many of these stories were written in a three-month burst of energy in the spring of 1984 in Atlanta, Georgia while she was writer-in-residence at Emory University, she says:

> Until Atlanta — and it could have been anywhere in America — I had thought of myself, in spite of a white husband and two assimilated sons, as an expatriate. In my fiction, and in my Canadian experience, "immigrants" were lost souls, put upon and pathetic. Expatriates, on the other hand, knew all too well who and what they were, and what foul fate had befallen them. Like V. S. Naipaul, in whom I imagined a model, I tried to explore state-of-the-art expatriation. Like Naipaul, I used a mordant and self-protective irony in describing my characters' pain. Irony promised both detachment from, and superiority over, those well-bred post-colonials much like myself, adrift in the new world, wondering if they would ever belong.
>
> If you have to wonder, if you keep looking for signs, if you wait — surrendering little bits of a reluctant self every year, clutching the souvenirs of an ever-retreating past — you'll never belong, anywhere.

The recognition of the change of status and commitment did not come immediately. After leaving the Writers' Workshop in Iowa City, where she met and married Clark Blaise, she went to Canada, ironically becoming a Canadian citizen before her husband: the waiting period for Commonwealth citizens, which she was as an Indian, was shorter than for American citizens, which he was as somebody born in the U.S. though of Canadian parents. Living in Canada from 1966-1980, she discovered "that the country is hostile to its citizens who had been born in hot, moist continents like Asia; that the country proudly boasts of its opposition to the whole concept of cultural assimilation." But she rejected the temptation of clinging to Indian culture, packaging and selling it:

> "All that formality of may-I-come? or hope-we're-not-disturbing-you is for Westerners," the immigrants joke among themselves. She has heard it once already this afternoon from Mrs. Thapar. "We may have minted a bit of money in this country, but that doesn't mean we've let ourselves become Americans. You can see we've remained one hundred percent simple and *deshi* in our customs."

Instead, she recognized a new relationship to Indians:

> I have joined imaginative forces with an anonymous, driven, underclass of semi-assimilated Indians with sentimental attachments to a distant homeland but no real desire for permanent return . . . instead of seeing my Indianness as a fragile identity to be preserved against obliteration (or worse, a 'visible' disfigurement to be hidden), I see it now as a set of fluid identities to be celebrated. Indianness is now a metaphor, a particular way of partially comprehending the world.

So while she says she has become a

North American writer, it is a writer of *the other America*, the America ignored by the so-called mainstream: the America that embraces all the peoples of the world both because America is involved with the whole world and because the whole world is in America. Her cast of characters includes immigrant Indians, white Americans, Vietnamese, Italian Americans, white Canadians, immigrant Lebanese, non-white Canadians, Americanized Indian children, American children born of one white American and one Indian parent, etc. The Indians include Sikhs, Bengalis, Goans, Bangladeshis, Gujaratis, and so on. Among the white Americans, there are New York professionals, workers, busboys, Iowa farmers, John Deere engineers, radicals. . . . The Canadians include white women bureaucrats, pop stars, academics, and the Mounted Police. These characters interact with one another. Precisely because her canvas is wide, her stories are short. Through short stories, she is able to take on the world and to provide multiple perspectives.

"Tamurlane" is first person narration by a male illegal Indian who works as a waiter in a Toronto restaurant and who sleeps three other Indian "illegals" in his apartment. The environment has changed his old prejudices:

> He had the crafty eyes of a Sindhi, but his graying hair was dyed reddish so he could have been a Muslim. I've been too long here; there was a time when I could tell them all apart, not just Hindu and Muslim, but where, what caste and what they were hiding. Now all I care about is legal or illegal? This man has called himself Muslim, a Ugandan, a victim of Idi Amin.

They are raided by the Mounties. Gupta, the chef, who could only move rigidly with crutches since he had been thrown by racists onto the Toronto subway tracks — hence "Tamurlane," which means "Timur the Lame" — did not respond quickly enough. In reply to a Mountie's rudeness, he suddenly chops the Mountie's outstretched arm. "The Mountie and Gupta fell simultaneously and now Gupta was reaching into his back pocket while the screaming Mountie rolled on one side. / Gupta managed to sit straight. He held his Canadian passport in front of his face. That way he never saw the drawn gun, nor did he try to dodge the single bullet." The sudden violent end works on two levels. Within the story, we see a transference of rage: the Mountie does not realize that his prejudice against Indians will trigger off the suppressed desire for revenge on the part of Gupta, a Canadian citizen. Gupta was unaware he had this desire: one of the men, trying to persuade the men to leave for New York, says of him, "Like a true Gandhian, he forgave them." The other level is that of shock to the reader. It is difficult for the reader not to wince. There is no catharsis at the end of the story.

Yet Mukherjee provides balance to an unbalanced situation: "Isolated Incidents" has a white Canadian woman protagonist in her late twenties who works for the Human Rights Office. Ann is going to have lunch with her old friend Poppy, now "Peppi Paluka," who has made it as a sexy pop star while Ann has gone nowhere with her writing. She is looking forward to the lunch, to connection with exciting faraway places and the world of make-believe, but nothing comes of it and she has to go to lunch at a "Colonel Sanders spot." There she is harassed by Mr. Hernandez, who had come earlier to see her with his sister's immigration problems and refuses to accept her explanation that she only deals with Human Rights issues. The restaurant represents her diminished dreams. Mr. Hernandez, ironically, accuses her of insensitivity: "You people cannot feel." She shouts back: "nothing is fair! . . . You think I have it good?" And so, "Her

voice sagged with grief." We see the immigrant mythifying the callousness of the white Canadian, not seeing her problems as an individual. The violence here is of another order: Ann is leading a life of quiet desperation, and the story ends with her walking back to her office. The complaints within the story of discrimination against Indians and other immigrants are balanced by Ann's problems as an individual and as a worker of limited power within a bureaucracy.

At other times, Mukherjee achieves balance by referring to characters or things from one story in another. "Nostalgia" tells the story of Dr. Manny Patel, a psychiatric resident at a hospital in Queens, married to a white American woman while "Saints" is the story of his son after Dr. Manny and his wife have separated. In both stories, the protagonists are actually trying to come to terms with their complex inheritance and to have roots: not "fixed" roots but the feeling of belonging by integration of the diverse experiences, myths, psychic needs and relationships. In "Nostalgia," Dr. Manny is sexually attracted to an Indian girl working in the grocery store. He takes her out to dinner at an Indian restaurant with the aim of sleeping with her. He succeeds: but he was set up by the Indian maitre d' who wants an official letter to send the Immigration office to keep his sister's child with him or he will ruin Dr. Manny by accusing him of raping an underage girl. At the end, Dr. Manny behaves like one of his schizophrenic patients: he uses his own excrement to paint "whore" on the mirror of the rented room. (He thus returns what he had got at the restaurant.)

Dr. Manny is the kind of successful Indian that Naipaul would treat acidly for "America had been very good to him, no question." And indeed, there is a touch of Naipaulian irony in the way Mukherjee says, "He was grateful that there were so many helpless, mentally disabled people (crazies, his wife called them) in New York state, and that they afforded him and Dr Chuong and even the Jamaican nurse a nice living." Through Dr. Manny, Mukherjee is able to make Naipaulian comments on the contradictions not only of a successful Indian professional in America but also of America:

> He had chosen to settle in the U.S. He was not one for nostalgia; he was not an expatriate but a patriot. His wife, Camille, who had grown up in Camden, New Jersey, did not share his enthusiasm for America, and had made fun of him when he voted for President Reagan. Camille was not a hypocrite; she was a predictable paradox. She could cut him down for wanting to move to a three-hundred-thousand-dollar house with an atrium in the dining hall, and for blowing sixty-two thousand on a red Porsche, while she boycotted South African wines and non-union lettuce. She spent guiltless money at Balducci's and on fitness equipment. So he enjoyed his house, his car, so what? He wanted things.

But it was not lust that drew Dr. Manny to the Indian girl wearing a Police T-shirt, for whom he "for the first time in thirteen years felt the papercut-sharp pain of desire." She reminded him of a goddess: "Padma. Lotus. The goddess had come to him as a flower." This is what the crude Padma does not realize: she does not see the goddess in herself. So while giving in to his hunger for something that actually has an Indian spiritual basis, Manny is exploited by fellow Indians. We cannot imagine Naipaul making us feel sympathetic to Dr. Manny in the way Mukherjee has done.

The son tells his own story in "Saints." Shawn Patel is American and moves about with a multiracial American group. His parents have separated and he is upset that his mother is being exploited by an American man who, unknown to her, has had sexual relations with a Yugoslav woman. (There is a touch of Freud

here.) He does not understand his father, who sends him gifts. One of these is a parcel of two books, an art book, "reproductions of paintings that Dad loves," and a "thin book with bad binding put out by a religious printing house in Madras. The little book is about a Hindu saint who had visions. Dad has sent me a book about visions." Shawn is trying to work out his whole life. He and Tran make obscene phone-calls. Then he goes out to look into the house of an Indian family whose name he picked out at random from the phone book, Batliwalla. Looking through the window, he sees a "dwarfkid": "He rocks he shouts, he bumps his head. I can't hear the words, but I want to reach out to a fellow saint." The reader realizes he sees a kid trapped in a bottle: the name Batliwalla, he knows, comes from the time the family sold bottles. Shawn also sees himself as trapped in a bottle. When he gets back home, his mother is screaming at her boyfriend, Wayne, to get out. Seeing Shawn, she gasps, "My god, what have you done to your face, poor baby":

> Her fingers scrape at the muck on my face, the cheek-blush lipstick, eyeshadow. Her bruised mouth is on my hair. I can feel her warm, wet sobs, but I don't hurt. I am in a trance in the middle of a November night. I can't hurt for me, for Dad, I can't hurt for anyone in the world. I feel so strong, so much a potentate in battle-dress.
>
> How wondrous to be a visionary. If I were to touch someone now, I'd be touching god.

Mukherjee's story is like the "saint" stories by J. D. Salinger: note the bottle imagery of "Visions" and the fact that among Salinger's major characters are Franny and Zooey *Glass*. Explaining Salinger's adolescents, G. S. Amur quotes Keats's preface to *Endymion*:

> The imagination of a boy is healthy, and the mature imagination of a man is healthy; but there is a space of life between in which the soul is in ferment, the character undecided, the way of life uncertain, the ambition thick-sighted; thence proceed mawkishness and all the thousand bitters.[3]

But there is a difference between Salinger's adolescents and Mukherjee's: because Mukherjee's have a more complex inheritance, the search is not to preserve innocence but to find wholeness. As such, even a man may also be less than mature. The attraction to sainthood, to a violation of the norms of social behaviour, is an indication of this search, although superficially we would consider the character to be strange or even a pervert. Shawn knows his mother would have been happier to have a daughter so he takes on the feminine side of himself, even using make-up. As an American, born in America, he makes the Vietnamese boat-person, Tran, feel at home, understanding the violence he has been through and not wanting, unlike the teacher, to censor that violence.

"The Imaginary Assassin" also has a young male narrator attracted to saints, a Sikh born in Yuba City, California in 1960. While other American kids "had their rock stars to make life bearable," he had his mythic stories of family members. And "Why did I harbor a secret fascination with a different kind of immigrant, Sirhan B. Sirhan? Can madmen, tuned in to God, derail our ordinary destinies?" He talks to his Grandfather, who claims to have killed Gandhi, although someone else was caught for the murder. The Grandfather explains why he wanted to kill Gandhi — because of the brutalization of the Sikhs, particularly of the women, and of others during Partition:

> liberty became a sad and bloody gift to us Hindus and Sikhs who lived in the bit of land that His Majesty King George gave away to the Muslims. The Muslims snatched, torched, spoiled. It is the way of human nature; I am not blaming Muslims. But Gandhi, the spiritual leader, what did

> he understand about evil and sin? A man with his head in the clouds does not see the shit pile at his feet . . .
>
> Gandhi had hurt our women. The man who could sleep between virgins and feel no throb of virility had despoiled the women of our country. Gandhi was the enemy of women. And so Gandhi, the Mahatma, the Great Soul, became my enemy."

The story explains the psychology of Sikhs while letting us see the other side of the sainthood of Gandhi (and of the portrait of Gandhi in the block-busting movie): the price others pay such that "Gandhi the celibate was the biggest rapist in history." Is the story true? Yes, as a work of the imagination — note the "imaginary" of the title — and of what is real to the psyche. The end connects up with the "real world": a slender, modern houseguest is picked up by the Yuba City police because they say "he'd killed another Sikh in Toronto, Canada. I don't know how, or why, or when."

Sainthood and violence lie very close together, the stories suggest. The saint can be an oppressor of the people and a murderer. Sainthood can be the cause of and justification for violence. On the other hand, as we have seen, certain types of "violence" are committed by people we can call secular saints — people whose actions make survival and growth possible for themselves and for others.

"Visitors" is a reworking of the novel *Wife*, a clue to the fact that each story is meant to have the effect in shorthand of a novel. Like *Wife*, the story deals with the undermining in America of the myths and illusions about marriage with which an Indian woman is brought up. In both the novel and the story, a man comes to the house on the East Coast while the husband is out at work; in both cases the wife's mind begins to snap because the romantic notions of wifehood combined with the Indian elite's idea of the U.S. as paradise do not fit the reality. The protagonist's mind is captured by a "language" of imprisonment. But in the novel, the male is a white American who becomes her lover; in the story, it is a young Indian who has problems coming to terms with America who wants to become her lover but it is unlikely that they have had sexual relations. At the end, in *Wife*, the protagonist kills her husband, while the story ends as follows: "Why then is she moved by an irresistible force to steal out of his bed in the haven of his expensive condominium, and run off into the alien American night where only shame and disaster can await her?" In the novel, the wife kills the *Indian* husband: in the story, what is released is the longing to embrace alien, dangerous America.

Another woman who has difficulty breaking free is the protagonist of "The World According to Hsü." An Indian married to a Canadian, she is actually of mixed origin, her father being Indian and her mother Czech. Breaking out is as difficult as breaking in:

> She claimed to be happy enough in Montreal, less perturbed by the impersonal revenges of Quebec politicians than personal attacks by Toronto racists. In Montreal she was merely "English," a grim joke on generations of British segregationists. It was thought charming that her French was just slightly short of fluent. In Toronto, she was not Canadian, not even Indian. She was something called, after the imported idiom of London, a Paki. And for Pakis, Toronto was hell.

Her husband, Graeme, will never understand the problems of being a "half" or of belonging to the Third World: he will take slides and prepare lectures for friends in which he puts things into a pattern of his own making. It is no surprise that on the island they have chosen to holiday on off the coast of Africa just as a coup is taking place, "No matter where she lived, she would never feel so at home again."

"Hindus" is a first-person narrative by an Indian woman, Leela, a high-caste Brahmin Bengali married to a white Canadian. "I haven't been home in ages," she tells a Lebanese. "I am an American citizen." Later, we discover she and her husband Derek have separated. When the Maharaja, an old family friend, turns up in the publishing house she is now working for, and does not understand the reference by the boss to Edgar Bergen, Leela talks to him in Hindi. A fellow-worker says, "I had no idea you spoke Hindu . . . I keep forgetting that you haven't lived here always." She thinks:

> I was about to correct her silly mistake — I'd learned from Derek to be easily incensed over ignorant confusions between Hindi and Hindu — but then I thought, why bother? Maybe she's right. That slight undetectable error, call it an accent, isn't part of language at all. I speak Hindu. No matter what language I speak it will come out slightly foreign, no matter how perfectly I mouth it. There's a whole world of us now, speaking Hindu.

So Leela has accepted her place in a world in which nobody anymore fits exactly.

Not that there are no stories of sophisticated and travelled Indian wives coping with the world successfully, using language to control that world. One such story is "The Lady from Lucknow." The narrator decides to have an Affair with a white man, in America — and she gets caught in bed by his wife. She decides not to hide, not to be the submissive Asian woman and to face the anger of the American wife. But there is a worse kind of humiliation: the wife is sarcastic but will not lose her temper. Whereas the affair had begun as a gesture of defiance against Indian customs — to have an affair with someone she finds attractive — she sees it end in an old colonial way:

> I had thought myself provocative and fascinating. What had begun as an adventure had become shabby and complex. I was just another involvement of a white man in a pokey little outpost, something that "men do" and then come to their senses while the *memsahibs* drink gin and tonic and tan their faces. I didn't merit a stab wound through the heart.

The story ends with a whimper. She is denied the cathartic violence she seeks.

The title of the volume echoes Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, drawing our attention to violence at the heart of human affairs. "The Father" is a successful Indian businessman in Detroit who discovers that his very Americanized daughter, in her late twenties, is pregnant. He is pleased to think he is modern enough to come to terms with it and tries to persuade his wife to accept it. But when he discovers there is no father, that his daughter wanted to be an unmarried mother because no man was fit enough, his mind snaps: he beats her up and has to be restrained by his wife. This act of violence may be too sudden for the reader to take — I feel there has not been enough of a building-up and a letting-down. But then the violence is the key to a tapestry-like painting needing to be deciphered. Mukherjee herself provides us with clues. In "Saints," "Wayne holds Mom's head against dusty glass, *behind which an emperor in Moghul battledress is leading his army out of the capital*" (my emphasis). The last story in the volume is a description of the painting. The five-page work describes the Begum's wife: "In her capacious chamber the Begum waits, perhaps for death from the serving-girl, for ravishing, or merely the curtain of fire from the setting sun." We see the European adventurer, the Portuguese priests who have religious paintings for him: "They want to trick the emperor into kissing Christ, who on each huge somber canvas is a white, healthy baby. The giant figures

seem to him simple and innocuous, not complicated and infuriating like the Hindu icons hidden in the hills." The painting is about the violence of history, feudal oppression, patriarchal oppression, colonialist adventurers, European efforts to get a foothold on the wealthy East. We should not, then, be surprised at the violence at Bangladesh nearly 400 years later.

The volume opens with "Angela." Angela says, "Orrin and I are in Delia's hospital room." Delia is in a coma after hitting an ice patch while driving. The apparently casual details are well arranged to reveal the world through Angela's consciousness. The horror of what Angela has gone through emerges almost by chance:

> When Delia gets out, they'll fly to Nicaragua and work on a farm side by side with Sandinistas. Orrin is an idealist.
>
> I believe in miracles, not chivalry.
>
> Grace makes my life spin. How else does a girl left for dead in Dakha get to the Brandon's farmhouse in Van Buren County?
>
> When I was six, soldiers with bayonets cut off my nipples. "They left you poor babies for dead," Sister Stella at the orphanage would tell me, the way I might tell Ramona bedtime stories. "They left you for dead, but the Lord saved you. Now it's your turn to do Him credit."

Delia is the one who had asked for a sister from Bangladesh, the nurse, Mrs. Grimlund, tells Angela. She had said she had everything so she wanted a sister who had nothing.

The doctor, Dr. Menezies, a Goan from India, wants to marry Angela. "Only a doctor would love this body," she thinks, harking back to the day she was brutalized: "Leeches, I can feel leeches gorging on the blood of my breasts." We see the strength of Dr. Menezies' professionalism (he knows Delia will not recover); the blindness of the Indian professional to the other faces of America (his tone-deafness reveals his deafness to American overtones and undertones); the financial problems of farmers in the mid-west; the horrors of Vietnam; the strength of middle-America; the Americanization of two Asian girls, Bangladeshi and Vietnamese; the problems of Americans as human beings. While America was involved in Vietnam, some problems are solved by the other America.

At the end of "Courtly Vision," we realize that the painting is hanging on a wall in an art gallery somewhere in the U.S., perhaps in New York City, waiting to be bought for a mere $750. Within "Courtly Vision," there is a further clue to Bharati Mukherjee's writing:

> *Give me total vision*, commands the emperor. His voice hisses above the hoarse calls of the camels. *You, Basawan, who can paint my Begum on a grain of rice, see what you can do with the infinite vistas the size of my opened hand. Hide nothing from me, my co-wanderer. Tell me how my new capital will fail, will turn to dust and these marbled terraces be home to jackals and infidels. Tell me who to fear and who to kill but tell it to me in a way that makes me smile. Transport me through dense fort walls and stone grilles and into the hearts of men.*

This is what the literary artist has done: she has penetrated below the surface, found the reality, and told the truth on several grains of rice. The leader wanted to be told the truth, even the bad news. But Bharati Mukherjee does not only focus on the bad news. She also celebrates life, the creative possibilities contained within people, the ability to give up fixed worlds, to break out of cages and relate to a complex, multicultural world. The painting is a two-dimensional cage. The writer-artist frees the people from two-dimensionalism, the writer-artist sees the meaning and the potential. Even her novels were complex explorations without any of the protective, distancing cynicism of Naipaul. The attrac-

tion of Naipaul to Bharati Mukherjee the writer in the early days was not his cynicism but that he provided a literary model different from that of, say, Jane Austen: he showed that it was possible to create a fictional world about one's village far from the colonial metropolitan centre, that the chaos of a once-colonized people was a worthy subject for fiction. Her novels are sympathetic attempts to break the barriers of restrictive culture and class. The first novel has a protagonist who returns to India and there confronts not only the radical movements of Bengal but also the other America, as represented by a humorous, Black Power American visitor. Bharati Mukherjee's world as a writer has changed but the new world was always there within the old.

NOTES

[1] Meenakshi Mukherjee, "Inside the Outsider," *Awakened Conscience: Studies in Commonwealth Literature*, New Delhi: Sterling, 1978, p. 87. Meenakshi Mukherjee is no relation to Bharati Mukherjee.

[2] Bharati Mukherjee, *Darkness* (Markham, Ont.: Penguin, 1985).

[3] G. A. Amur, *A Critical Spectrum* (Aurangabad: Parimal Prakashan, 1975), p. 41.

PETER NAZARETH

A MAN OF CANADA, 1635

IN A RECENT ISSUE of *Canadian Literature* Marion Fraser has suggested that John Dennis' *Liberty Asserted* (1704) might have "the uncertain distinction of being the first representation on the English stage of the North American Indian."[1] As far as the commercial theatre goes this may well be the case, although Philip Massinger makes much of Indian disguises in his 1632 comedy *The City Madam*.[2] In the private theatricals of the Caroline court, however, we can find a stage Canadian who antedates the natives of Dennis by some three quarters of a century. The occasion is the production by Inigo Jones of *Florimène*, the third of the pastoral dramas prepared under the auspices of Queen Henrietta Maria.[3] Acted in French by the Queen's women before a royal audience at Whitehall on 21 December 1635, this anonymous entertainment traces a tangle of Arcadian love confusions so complex that the goddess Diana must finally be summoned to assure its conclusion of "mutual affections, and ful contentments." To celebrate the event poet Aurelian Townshend appended to the play a series of grotesque ante-masques composed in English. It is in the first of these that we meet our early Canadian who in a single stanza proclaims his kinship with the emblematic "woodwose" of royal and civic pageantry:

> The first that enters is A Man of Canada.
> *From Canada, both rough, and rude,*
> *Come I; with bare and nimble feet;*
> *Those Amazonian Maides to greet,*
> *Which Conquer'd them that us subdu'd:*
> *Love is so Just,*
> *Our Victors must*
> *Were Chaines, as heavy as ours bee:*
> *Fetters of Gold, make no man free.*[4]

The antic concludes with the arrival of two Egyptians, three Pantaloons, four Spaniards and a Pigmy, each of whom offers a like-minded tribute to the "Amazonians" whose idyll has now subdued the erstwhile conquerors of North America.

No one, of course, would claim for such stuff even the limited seriousness of Dennis' tragedy. But it is well to be reminded that before Canada made its appearance upon the English stage as the home of the eighteenth-century's noble savage, it seemed a reasonable abode for the anarchic wild man of the Renaissance imagination.

NOTES

[1] "Canada on the English Stage, 1704," *Canadian Literature* 85 (Summer 1980): 176-79.

[2] Massinger's sham Indians — a London merchant, a lord's son, and a country gentleman — actually draw upon Captain John Smith's *Description of Virginia and Proceedings of the Colonie* (1612) to bolster their impersonations. See *The City Madam*, ed. Rudolph Kirk (London, 1934), n. to V.i.2-4. Smith's volume, coincidentally, contains the earliest reference to "Canada" cited by the OED.

[3] *Florimène* survives only in the English summary licensed by Sir Henry Herbert on 14 December 1635 and published by Thomas Walkley that same month; Townshend's *Ante-Masques* were separately printed. Both are reproduced in Stephen Orgel's "*Florimène* and the Ante-Masques," *Renaissance Drama* NS 4 (1971): 135-53. Designs for the staging of *Florimène*, but not Townshend's ante-masques, appear in Stephen Orgel and Roy Strong's *Inigo Jones: the Theatre of the Stuart Court* (London, 1973) II: 631-59.

[4] Orgel, 149-50.

JOEL H. KAPLAN

THE CANADIAN ENCYCLOPEDIA

ENCYCLOPEDIAS PLAY a strange role in the lives of their readers. The sellers of the American Britannica put generations of poor people in debt so that their children could use the encyclopedia as an instrument of social mobility. After being gassed in World War I, Ford Maddox Ford and his character in *Parade's End*, Christopher Tietgens, used the British Britannica when they had lost their memories — the author and the fictional bureaucrat restored their general knowledge with the thirty-three volumes, including supplements. Those of us who teach or study know about the naive students who copy out encyclopedia articles and submit them as original essays. And the eighteenth-century French *Encyclopedie* became an instrument in two revolutions, first, the Enlightenment, and second, the political one of '89. In Vancouver, an agent of the Evelyn Wood speedreading school used *The Canadian Encyclopedia* as a place to demonstrate his extraordinary capacity to zoom-read the two thousand pages.

In short, in their contents and in their use encyclopedias can be trivial and/or momentous. The great ones like the French or British ones become enduring monuments of, not, perhaps, unaging intellect, but of culture, learning, and something more which the Enlightenment sought, a utopian vision of totality. That heritage, of course, an element of modern thinking, has become a target for the current mood of radical scepticism in social and literary thought. The deconstructionists look back to the *Encyclopedie* as an over-reaching, a primitive structuralism which helped to maintain an ancient logocentrism. The totalization of French Enlightenment understanding, and self-understanding, lead not only to the Revolution and modern freedoms, but also to the *levée en masse* and modern total war and rapacious nationalism.

The English *Britannica* presents a more conservative version of Enlightenment. The lengthy *objective* accounts of classical mythology, Biblical scholarship, and primitive culture, are all inside an alphabetical randomness. The places of the world are entered, described, and quantified until one senses that the new enlightenment is a world on which the sun never sets, an encyclopedia recording the whole thing in imperial and intellectual splendour. That splendour, however, is not Roman. In addition to the grand and the beautiful, it includes the banal, the coarse — admittedly in

strange proportions. The ten-page double columned article on "Manures and Manuring" is four times the size of the one on "Sex." Amusing as they are the proportions, the shape of that encyclopedia rests on firm motivating foundations. The world is to be seen clearly as the British domain — the clarity remains recorded there and that is the beauty of the English mind. It can contain the whole world in clear prose.

The editors of *The Canadian Encyclopedia* organized their work differently. That document pre-figures no revolution and no Enlightenment. The assembling of information is different than the French way as well. It is alphabetical like the English one. There is no logocentrism here. The French scheme was not alphabetical — it was built on another order of rationality carefully planned ahead by its editors. The importance of this is that the French *Encyclopedie* was to be read as well as consulted. This Canadian is designed to be consulted and I can testify that to try to read it all is a mind-numbing experience. I tried. Weeks and months of ploughing through alphabet land is like working in a government records office. One learns from the experience that the life of an ordinary user remains a paradise beyond the good and evil of a reviewer's drudgery. Years of reading the eleventh edition *Britannica* may not improve the wit of a reader, but it will help the mind of the reader to grow. *The Canadian Encyclopedia* used properly, as a consultative instrument, affects the reader in an entirely different way.

Our Encyclopedia, neither Enlightenment revolutionary nor imperial intellectual, is a parochial construction. It is obvious that its editors and its authors saw this publishing occasion as an opportunity to describe and express Canadian consciousness. They have done so in a way which fascinates because it shows us how Canadians as a collective mentality think, and how they understand their own being. There are, for example, no entries on manures and manuring, and sex appears not as positivist biology as it does in *Britannica*, but in two entries, "Sexual abuse of children" and "Sexual transmission of disease." There are, to be sure, shown in the index, other entries which discuss these subjects. If you are curious about manure in Canada look at "Animal agriculture" and "Biomass energy." The rhetorical difference between *Britannica* and *The Canadian Encyclopedia* exposes a great deal about Canadian mentality. These volumes are not prissy, but they do speak and organize information within the frames of bureaucratic language. By and large things and actions are understood as elements of institutions or problems for systems (e.g., economy, law, or society, etc.).

The language of the bureau even affects the rhetoric of the biographies. There are thousands of biographies the majority of which are terse recognitions of this or that person's functional existence, a native leader, a bicycle racer, a poet, etc. Longer biographies are attached to those whose accomplishments or functional importance are larger. Earle Birney's entry is longer than Roy Daniells', but both entries are somewhat dull with lists of book and administrative titles figuring prominently. Daniells was a lively and witty intelligence. Birney still is and in addition he is still a gadfly. Milton Acorn's entry is more interesting. It tells the story of how he did not receive the Governor General's Award and about the award his friends created for him. What is interesting about the contrasts here is that Acorn's "People's Award" is a function of his politics (left), but Birney — whose politics include union organizing, left parties, and conflict with the American authorities — are all sup-

pressed in his entry. I am not trying to suggest a willful expurgation of the Birney life. Something else is going on here.

The Canadian mind in these volumes and in other collective cultural enterprises has as a prominent feature a suppressed passion. Note that I do not say "repressed," an unconscious mental quality. This is a conscious suppression which bursts out erratically, sometimes uselessly and bitterly, and other times in effective, exciting creations. It has been said about the beauty of English women actresses that they have one common quality, the aura of suppressed passion. The aura of the Canadian mind has the same quality. The beauty of the Canadian mind, when it appears, frequently rises from this suppressed passion.

This virtue of the Canadian mind obviously has vices interwoven in it. Suppression can lead to repression; the hidden secrets of Canadian life can warp the civility of calm detached discourse. Calm in the face of the repressed can turn into self-satisfaction, self-righteousness, and worst of all a crippling ignorance of actualities. If, for example, the account of our new constitution is dispassionate despite the furore it caused in Canadian life, that is all right because the furore is coolly described as well. Here we have passion understood. It is no "river of fire" (William Morris's phrase to describe English social protest), but it is a deep underground stream of passion about the civic order.

In too many entries that stream is hidden entirely. Where, however, it is revealed, the quiet rhetoric strengthens the statement. Even the pugnacious Robin Mathews is tamed and made part of the restrained voice which dominates the overall tone of this work. His account of the politics in literature gives a clear sense of wrongs and resistances without the *ressentiment* that often appears in his work. He uses a litany of fact to expose the artists' difficult position in Canada. Kenneth McNaught's account of "Violence, political" shows this historian straining to preserve a sense of the harmony in the face of a subject which does involve a complex of harmony and disharmony. The "peaceable kingdom" which is Canada has been less involved in the John Wayne brutal scenarios of war and wild west than the U.S.A. Canada does have, however, a "torturous and little-examined history of collective violence. . . ." Racial conflicts, union struggles, corporate fiefdoms, Quebec, Métis, and Indian nationalisms were locations for violence greater than our southern neighbour's. "Peace, order, and good government" has had its price.

McNaught's entry is a good one because it is expressive, useful, thorough, and accurate. There are other entries which have an additional virtue: they are part of an ongoing debate. David P. Ross's discussion, "Poverty," has some of the tone of Swift's "Modest Proposal" when Ross presents the arguments on the various sides concerning the meaning of the word poverty. The language of social science, Swift was, perhaps, the first to realize, has that special power to mask and nauseate at the same time. Ross's focus through balanced debate and vague fact unsettles a reader. Gradually what emerges from the debate makes the reader feel queasy because more than a quarter of the nation is living badly, very badly.

Inside the Encyclopedia there is debate as well. J. W. Mohr's discussion of "Crime" differs from Art Blue's discussion, "Native People, Social Conditions." Mohr sees crime as a social creation in which the parliament, the police, the courts, the lawyers define people into crime. In this view, the large percentage of natives in prison get there because the institutions define the offences that result

from native alcoholism in a different way than they do the behaviour from white alcoholism. The police, the judges, Indian Affairs create a large population of native convicts by seeing natives as criminals. Blue ignores the differential sentence of native offenders (white alcohol-related offences are often overlooked by law enforcement agencies). He locates the source of Indian criminality inside the native communities. Blue understands that brutal economic development takes place in and around native communities. But he, differing with Mohr, sees the weak native institutions as the source of difficulty for natives — he makes this analysis despite the fact that whites live in the same economic environment.

Mohr and Blue are probably both right. Native institutions are weak because the Canadian governments deny the native peoples sovereignty over their own lives. Mohr's argument, however, comes from a source which has some importance to our understanding of this Encyclopedia and the mentality within it. His is a Foucauldian analysis of social institutions whereas Blue's is the older functionalism of mid-century sociology. In short this is an argument between literary hermeneutics and social science. Mohr's style of insight comes from semiotics, structuralism, cross-disciplinary connections, and extensive reading. His mode of thought is a significant but not dominant part of the Canadian intellectual tradition. Innis, McLuhan, and even Frye are part of this tradition but they are specially licensed figures here as is Mohr. That is why he is able to say that in the main, socio-economic causes do not create native problems in Canada. Those problems are the creation of Canadian institutions. Foucault challenges Western culture in the same way as Mohr challenges Canada. Neither allow the moral agents, the citizens, to escape responsibility for the condition of the nation by blaming the deterministic forces at play in the land.

The contributions of J. W. Mohr, David P. Ross, Robin Mathews, and Kenneth McNaught, are representative of the best in the encyclopedia. That the encyclopedia is uneven in quality is a surprise to no one. All encyclopedias are, and this one for all that, is a good one. The achievement here is that the finest work comes from debate as well as from the responsible tone which governs the whole performance. The weaknesses, however, come from the limits of form set by the editors and the practical limitations of the size of the volumes. This publishing enterprise appears to be a success. The market has absorbed an expensive creation; the sponsors and the consumers can feel pleased about what they have purchased. In three million carefully chosen words you can get a largish whole view of Canada.

When we turn to the treatment of the arts, though, it is clear that the volumes become largely works of record. Painting, sculpture, and architecture fare better than do the written arts because the photos, particularly the colour plates, are so good. There is not an easy parallel presentation available for poetry, drama, and the novel. But the arts entries receive worse treatment than say, the fuller entries on social policy. The authors of the arts entries, because of the constraints of space, strove to record important figures and movements. When they construct another edition, the publishers and the governments and the corporations need to open up more space, so that the sounds and conflicts of Canadian aesthetic culture can be heard.

Also, then, ethnic cultures might be given more space. It is true that here they have more elaborate presentation than in most other works of record thus far. (I have in mind for comparison some of the provincial histories which ignored

immigrants of colour and treated natives as predators in the snow.) In those entries the drama of their conflicts external and internal is sometimes lost. The account of the Canadian Jewish community, for example, paints a picture of a religious group centred on the various synagogues. Joseph Kage sees them in the same situation as other ethnic groups. The solidarity of the community is threatened by the secularizing character of Canadian society. Kage's analysis has some force. In Canada, Jews, more than their United States compeers, join congregations and strengthen their community with religious ties. One of the interesting things, however, about Jews is the extraordinary continuing identification of secular Jews with the community. This is probably true of other ethnic groups in Canada who lose their religious bonds in the common culture. They do not melt in — on the contrary they join into the culture of their groups in strange ways. Mordecai Richler writes satiric novels about his community. And Joy Kogawa, in a recent visit to Vancouver, spoke of her separation from Japanese culture and then invited her father to play a traditional flute solo to close her talk.

All too often the debates in the ethnic communities get submerged. Civility, love halt the conflict. In personal relations that is a good; in the Encyclopedia the covering over of the debates is part of its inclination toward an unrealistic civility. In the midst of this limitation the Encyclopedia does open the ground of its most important achievement. It does express the concensus of civic society in Canada that prevailed until recently. As evidence for this we can note that native culture receives extensive and intelligent coverage disproportionate to the numbers of native people in Canada. Some have said that this coverage, and the sympathetic attention given to women, the poor, minorities, the disabled, prisoners (and the slighter coverage given to the wealthy and to industrial empires) reflects the left orientation of the publisher and the academic contributors. This, I believe, is to misconstrue the Canadian consensus. In Canada, social democracy is the consensus. In the United States the debate between the parties is over the rightness of the welfare state. There, the question is whether or not the underdog should be helped by society. Here the debate is over how the underdog should be helped — or at least that was the debate until the recent rightward shift. But even now the political right in Canada grows mainly out of the conservative tradition which thinks about social issues as this Encyclopedia does. They are matters of public concern which we must know about in an objective, temperate way. Of this all the strongest political groupings of Canada agree.

Will these volumes achieve their goal — to act as a work which helps form a common consciousness for the nation? If such a consciousness is formed will it be a good thing? For a long time, in Canada, nationalism has been treated with caution and scepticism. The nationalisms, near and far, have often been unhappy creations in the twentieth century. This Encyclopedia, with its small "totality," has little by way of dangerous information. It is not racist, for instance. But it is not yet formidable enough to be opposed by the young. Its view of a totality, Canada, needs growth, refinement, and elaboration. The national self-consciousness will probably grow. A *Canadian Encyclopedia* which gives more attention to the world, to industry, and to the arts will help that growth. This is a good start. I wish it many more editions.

FRED STOCKHOLDER

ON THE VERGE

*** NORMAN BUCHIGNANI & DOREEN M. INDRA, with RAM SRIVASTIVA, *Continuous Journey: A Social History of South Asians in Canada.* McClelland & Stewart, $12.95. *Continuous Journey* is one of a new series, *Generations: A History of Canada's Peoples,* which is being published with the support of the office of the Secretary of State. Each takes a Canadian ethnic group, traces its history in Canada, describes its characteristics, records its experience in entering into Canadian society. The peoples included in *Continuous Journey* are the former inhabitants of British India and Ceylon, which now constitute the four countries of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka. (Burma, once part of British India, is not included, perhaps because so few Burmese have settled in Canada.) Their history in Canada began with the arrival of the first Sikhs in British Columbia early in the present century, and for decades South Asians in Canada (commonly called either Hindus or East Indians) were people from the Punjab, mostly Sikhs and mostly maintaining a precarious foothold in British Columbia. It was only after World War II that other people of South Asian ancestry arrived, some from the Indian sub-continent, but many from foreign lands to which they had originally migrated and which in the post-war world they found inhospitable, notably Uganda and other East African countries, and Guyana. The result has been an extraordinary replication in Canada, which has now 300,000 South Asians in its population, of the great variety of cultures and languages, of religions and social attitudes, that makes the Indian sub-continent such a fascinating region to visit. Now that the early difficulties are over and racial prejudices are slowly withering, the real problem — very clearly delineated and sensibly discussed in this excellent history — is how far this extraordinary network of transplanted cultures can survive in the hospitable but alien Canadian climate. Sturdily, one hopes; precariously, one fears.

G.W.

** BRUCE HUTCHISON, *The Unfinished Country.* Douglas & McIntyre, n.p. Old men make wills and old writers are inclined to produce testaments that in some way sum up the experience and wisdom of a life. *The Unfinished Country,* which Bruce Hutchison — at 84 — maintains will be his last book, is such a testament. It is a strange rambling book whose wanderings, as Hutchison remembers a long life of political journalism, lead one into fascinating corners of the Canadian past. Hutchison claims to be politically unattached, and there is a curious and rather refreshing lack of systematic ideology in his approach. For him, politics is a matter of personality, and he is very good at showing how each era in Canadian government was in fact given its special tone by the characters of the currently dominant political leaders. Hutchison has a curiously antique slant of mind; he drops often into an orotund Augustan kind of prose, and when he does mention or quote writers, he almost always invokes eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British figures like Burke and Burns, Dickens and Carlyle, Macaulay and Lord Acton. He professes a great love for Canada, and at times grows rather grandiloquently eloquent about the beauty of its landscapes, yet it is a strange thing that he never mentions the writers and painters who have provided the most eloquent images of Canada's place and people: novelists like Hugh MacLennan and Margaret Laurence, poets like Dorothy Livesay and Earle Birney, painters like Alex Colville and Emily Carr, might never have existed, so completely he ignores them in this nostalgic and rather pessimistic parting address to his beloved country. One feels his sincerity; one wonders at his deafness to the tones of his nation's artistic creativity, which is the real ichor of its existence.

G.W.

**** SIDNEY THOMSON FISHER, *The Merchant-Millers of the Humber Valley: A Study of the Early Economy of Canada.* NC Press, $16.95. Those of the nineteenth-century mills that still survive in Ontario are monuments to a pioneer economy in which the saw mill and the grist mill played key roles, both in providing two essential materials for a growing economy, sawn lumber and flour, and also in forming the nucleus around which settlements gathered and became centres of small scale commerce for country districts. It has been said that men begin to escape from poverty when their land provides not merely subsistence but also a surplus. By channeling and processing that surplus the mills played a vital role in the transformation of an early Upper Canadian economy based mainly on subsistence farming into a transitional economy in which farmers worked also for the surplus that would give them cash to improve their standard of living; from this point it was a natural progression to the cash farming which ap-

peared in the latter half of the nineteenth century, and which would be the principal kind of farming practiced on the prairies, when milling developed on so large a scale that the small local watermills were made obsolete. But before they went out of operation, these mills provided the first markets for surplus grain as well as the places where grain for home use could be ground. By showing how in a limited geographical area like the Humber Valley the mills played their crucial role of economic transformation, Sidney Thomson Fisher performs a useful task of microcosmic history.

G.W.

*** *The Rebellion of 1837 in Upper Canada*, Colin Read & Ronald J. Staggs, eds., Oxford Univ. Press, $18.95. *Canadian Political Thought*, H. D. Forbes, ed., Oxford Univ. Press. $12.95. These are two useful compilations for those whose interests spill over from the literary to the historical. *The Rebellion of 1837 in Upper Canada* presents what is undoubtedly the best collection to date of contemporary documents regarding the circumstances and course of the rebellion and its various consequences. It is prefaced by an excellent long introduction giving fresh views of the classes and localities that supported the rebellion and those that remained loyalist; it will be useful background material for anyone studying the literature of Upper Canada. *Canadian Political Thought* gathers important documents — essays, speeches, manifestos, fragments of books — illustrating the development of various strands of political thought in Canada from 1799 to the present. The editor confesses to a "national" bias; this means that outside Quebec, which he regards as in its own way "national," he neglects the regional elements that have been so important to Canadian politics, so that there is nothing to enlighten the reader seeking to learn about, say, Social Credit or prairie populism, about the One Big Union or the political aims of the Métis insurrections of 1870 and 1885 (though the Upper Canada rebels of 1837 are represented by lengthy passages of Mackenzie and Papineau). Canada west of Thunder Bay is present, indeed, only as the birthplace of the CCF, regarded as a national movement.

G.W.

*** *The New Peoples: Being and Becoming Métis in North America*, ed. Jacqueline Peterson and Jennifer S. H. Brown. Univ. of Manitoba Press, $25.00. This collection of essays on Métis origins begins with a preface by Marcel Giraud, author of the classic social history of Canada's French-speaking people of mixed blood, *Le métis canadien*, and the essays by various hands that follow, continue, and supplement Giraud's work by demonstrating two important historical facts: that the division between the Métis of French ancestry and the mixed blood or "half-breed" of British ancestry was not in fact so sharp and clear on the Red River and elsewhere in the west as has been assumed in the past, and that while the Métis acquired on the Red River the self-consciousness which led them eventually to think of themselves as a "nation," their origins are to be traced as much in areas of earlier trading like the Great Lakes region as in the prairie and the northern parkland with which we now mainly associate this people and its briefly flowering culture. Wisely, the authors of these essays have followed Giraud's example by avoiding extended discussion of the two Métis insurrections, which have been sufficiently recorded and discussed by the political and military historians. Anyone concerned with either the history of the west as a whole or with that of its native and partly native peoples will find a great array of interesting and useful facts in this volume. Lacking a strongly defined thematic structure, it is most valuable as a rich source of data.

G.W.

LAST PAGE

Julian Barnes' wonderfully funny novel *Flaubert's Parrot* (Academic Press, $24.95) tells of an Englishman's therapeutic quest to find out more about the life of Gustave Flaubert. He spends some weeks tracking down places the author stayed, places he went, things he possessed (the parrot among them) — and hazards interpolations of his behaviour. The trouble is, fact eludes him. There are many parrots, stuffed and mounted, lodged in a variety of museums and all claimed as Flaubert's own. Which is the right one? After a while the answer is beside the point, and the novel embarks on its own set of wry asides and mock solemnities. (Faced with many parrots, the narrator writes to the editor of the Michelin guide and a number of academics, warning "of the dangerous tendency of this species to posthumous parthenogenesis.") The story also turns into a reflexive guide to the nature of realism and the forms of the modern novel.

Recounting episodes of biographical history, the narrator matches these as best he can to episodes represented somewhat differently in Flaubert's journal: what happened to the weather, what happened to the man, what happened to the dog — but "what happened to the truth is not recorded." What then can fiction do? It can try to avoid being controlled by critics for one thing: "Let me tell you why I hate critics. Not for the normal reasons: that they're failed creators (they usually aren't; they may be failed critics, but that's another matter); or that they're by nature carping, jealous and vain (they usually aren't; if anything, they might better be accused of over-generosity, or upgrading the second-rate so that their own fine discriminations thereby appear the rarer). No, the reason . . . is that they write sentences like this. . . ." (an example follows, complaining of Flaubert's seeming *factual* inconsistencies). Suppose reality changes, the novel asks; what then? Don't inconsistencies become "realistic"?

On the other hand, novelists can also confuse fiction with the world they live in and so mistake their own role: "Novelists who think their writing an instrument of politics seem to me to degrade writing and foolishly exalt politics. No, I'm not saying they should be forbidden from having political opinions or from making political statements. It is just that they should call that part of their work journalism. The writer who imagines that the novel is the most effective way of taking part in politics is usually a bad novelist, and a bad journalist, and a bad politician."

In the midst of his quest the narrator therefore calls for moratoria (of differing lengths of time, for different offences) on some conventional fictional strategies. Among them:

(1) no more novels in which isolated people "revert to the 'natural condition' of man,"

(2) no more novels of incest, "not even ones in very bad taste,"

(3) no more in abbatoirs,

(4) a 20-year ban on Oxbridge books and a 10-year ban on other university fiction,

(5) a quota on South American settings "to curb the spread of package-tour baroque and heavy irony,"

(6) no more carnal connections between people and animals, and no more carnal connections in the shower, both for aesthetic and for medical reasons.

You get the idea. This is a book having fun with the way we see things. There are alphabet games, academic categories of classification and analysis, dutiful histories, and carefully crafted unconscious revelations. This is a book about language and the game we play with truth. In a Natural History Museum at the end of the book, the narrator visits the bird vault, discovering row upon row of parrots. Is Flaubert's one of them, he wonders? Perhaps.

W.N.

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W.N.

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